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Located off the south frontage road (West Beltline Hwy Rd.) near the Seminole Hwy exit.



# PRAIRIE FIRE

"As the prairie stretches out until it becomes one with the sky, let us reach out to touch and be one with the natural world and with one another." (from Bond of Union)

**March 5, 2004**

*Prairie Fire is the semi-monthly newsletter of Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. The two most recent issues may be seen at [www.prairie.madison.uua.org](http://www.prairie.madison.uua.org)*

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Editor: Dan Proud, prairieu@execpc.com; (608) 661-0776

## PRAIRIE CALENDAR

### Sunday, March 7

- ☞ 10:00 a.m. "Reconstructing Eden: Hope for the Iraqi Marshland," presented by Richard Beilfuss.
- ☞ 11:45 a.m. Book Club at Prairie discusses *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides.

### Sunday, March 14

- 9:00 a.m. Choir rehearsal
- ☞ 10:00 a.m. "Strengthening the United Nations: Firsthand Stories from Prairie Members"
- ☞ 11:45 a.m. Potluck meal and special parish meeting on building sites.

### Sunday, March 21

- 9:00 a.m. Choir rehearsal
- ☞ 10:00 a.m. "Is My World Threatened by Islam?" presented by Bob Lawrence.
- ☞ 12:00 noon. Lunch and Annual Prairie Auction

### Monday, March 22

- 6:00 p.m. WOW program at Prairie.

### Saturday, March 27

- 7:00 p.m. Intergenerational play reading, at the home of Paula Pachciarz and Carl Wacker, of Lynda Barry's *The Good Times Are Killing Me*.

☞ = Details follow in this issue.

**Next Prairie Fire deadline: March 21**

## DETAILS OF UPCOMING EVENTS

### Sunday, March 7

The program, "Reconstructing Eden: Hope for the Iraqi Marshland," is presented by Richard Beilfuss. Saddam Hussein drained over 90% of the ancient Mesopotamian marshlands in southern Iraq. He dammed rivers, dug canals, poisoned the water, and destroyed the 5,000-year-old cultural heritage of the Ma'dam people, killing them or driving them into exile. The impact on migratory birds, endemic species, and fisheries in the Persian Gulf is severe and may take years to evaluate.

Madisonian Richard Beilfuss, a specialist in wetland ecosystems restoration, serves on an international team studying ways to resurrect this fertile marshland that may have been the historical Eden. Dr. Beilfuss is Africa Program Director and a water hydrologist with the International Crane Foundation. He has worked as advisor or field researcher on restoration projects in Africa, Asia and North America. He holds UW-Madison degrees in land resources (wetland ecology), civil and environmental engineering (hydrology), and water resources management, and is an honorary fellow of the Institute of Environmental Studies.

The Iraq Foundation and the United Nations Environment Programme are among organizations supporting marshland restoration. To read more about this upbeat, positive project in Iraq, go to [www.iraqfoundation.org/projects/edenagain](http://www.iraqfoundation.org/projects/edenagain)

## **OUR SOCIETY**

### **PARISH MEETING RESOLUTION**

As was announced in the last Prairie Fire issue, a special parish meeting will be held on March 14 after the Sunday service and potluck.

The Board has approved the following resolution as a basis for discussion at the meeting. Read two opposing opinions on the insert for background. Amendments or substitute resolutions germane to the topic of relocating Prairie's meetinghouse will be in order, but should if at all possible be circulated in written form in advance of the meeting. Any other business for discussion should have been submitted to the Secretary by February 29.

The resolution:

WHEREAS, Prairie has engaged in a four-year process of considering options for growth, including the adoption of a resolution outlining a five-year growth plan on April 24, 2003; and

WHEREAS, during this process the Fitchburg Center has emerged as a feasible site to which Prairie can relocate; and

WHEREAS, a specific plan is needed in order to raise funds for relocation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Board, or such other person(s) or committee(s) as the Board may designate, shall negotiate a tentative agreement for the construction of a new meeting house at Fitchburg Center, and, with the assistance of a building/planning consultant, shall choose an architect for the design and construction of a new meeting house at Fitchburg Center; and that
2. The Board may authorize the expenditure of such monies from the Growth Fund as may be needed for the development of a building program and a preliminary architectural design for a new meeting house at Fitchburg Center; and that
3. The Board shall present the tentative agreement, and the preliminary design for a new meeting house, for consideration by the congregation at a general or special parish meeting no later than November 30, 2004; and that
4. Nothing in this resolution shall preclude consideration of any other site.

The Prairie Book Club will meet after the Sunday service to discuss *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about 3 generations of a Greek-American family. Read the last issue of *Prairie Fire* for more details.

### **Sunday, March 14**

This program, "Strengthening the United Nations: Firsthand Stories from Prairie Members," will feature personal accounts of involvement in the United Nations by Prairie UU members.

Pat Cautley, assisted by Randy Converse, discusses her long-time support of the United Nations and presents her views on strengthening it. Pat's UN fundraising efforts include selling UNICEF cards at Prairie and marketing UN items at Global Express.

Warren Hagstrom presents highlights from the career of his graduate advisee Pratima Kale, who later headed the Southeast Asia division of UNICEF. In that role, Kale saved the lives of countless starving children in the Philippines after the sugar cane industry collapsed. Kale received an honorary doctorate from the UW-Madison for her humanitarian work.

Bob Reuschlein, President of Citizens for Global Solutions, outlines that organization's proposals for improving the UN. Citizens for Global Solutions combines the former World Federalist Association and the Campaign for UN Reform. It is dedicated to the reform and strengthening of international institutions such as the UN and the International Criminal Court.

### **Sunday, March 21**

In "Is My World Threatened by Islam?", Bob Lawrence will explain how Islam as a mainstream religion fits well into the Judeo-Christian family of religions. Islam is not inherently more or less violent, more or less tolerant, nor more or less conservative than the other Abrahamic monotheisms. Bob will compare Biblical and Qur'anic teachings and practice, adding some insights from history.

## ANNUAL PRAIRIE SERVICE AUCTION MARCH 21

The Auction is a great way to connect with Prairie members in a different and fun way and support Prairie at the same time. Share a special talent and learn more about other PUU members.

Once again, Orange Schroeder will dazzle us with her auctioneering skills. The auction will start right after the service on March 21 and will last until 1:30. A lunch will be provided at a reasonable price and child care will be provided. Volunteers for help with the lunch or auction will not be turned down!

Start thinking about an irresistible service that YOU can offer! In past years, the services have included home baked pies and breads; soups; guided nature and photography walks, theme dinners for 6-8 people; bonfires; help with computers, taxes or will preparations; weekends at a farm or camp; child care; art work pieces such as stained glass, pottery or stationery; and help with home tasks such as raking, errands and cleaning for people. Have fun and be original.

Call or email your service ideas to Kathy Converse (238-1856 or [conversekrtn@msn.com](mailto:conversekrtn@msn.com)) or Aileen Nettleton (238-6053) or [aanett@execpc.com](mailto:aanett@execpc.com)).  
*Kathy Converse*

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

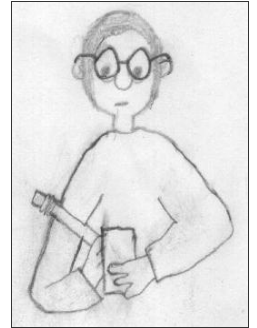
### CLASSROOM NEWS

Kristi Sprague-Klepzig will be teaching the younger class March 7th and 14th. They have been painting flowerpots and they will be planting jade and aloe vera plants. She is also teaching them about the spring equinox. The junior and high school classes have started planning a mural to hang in the front of the meeting hall. Brian Kuzdas is getting interested teens signed up for an area "Con-ival" being organized by Arthur Thexton at James Reeb UU. This will be a weekend event for all the Unitarian youth groups in the area.

*Jeanie Trigg*

### Exclusive: From the Desk of Our Roving Reporters

[This is part of a series of interviews focusing on people involved with our Religious Education program.  
*Drawing by Toby Wacker.*]



### PAULA PACHCIARZ

Paula Pachciarz has been a member of Prairie since 1990.

At that time she and her husband Carl moved to Madison from Illinois. Their daughters, Judy, now 16, and Toby, now 13, attend the R.E. program, and Paula has been a teacher several times. The thing Paula likes best about R.E. at Prairie is how the classes lead students to use their intelligence and develop their own ideas of right and wrong. Paula's favorite Prairie activity is the Annual Retreat.

She is very much involved in social causes, including programs for the homeless and rights for all. Outside of Prairie, Paula enjoys theater, poetry, yoga, and outdoor activities.

*Robin Proud*



*Photo by Dan Proud*

**LETTERS**

**DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ART EXHIBIT**

Greetings,

Enclosed is a flyer inviting you and members of your congregation to participate in the District Assembly Art Exhibit of Friday, April 23 from 5:30-7:30 p.m., and/or to reserve a table to sell items of interest to UUs, or to advertise a social action project your congregation is involved in, or to promote a service your congregation or committee provides.

Please complete the attached application and send it to Clare Lynd-Porter at [clarelyndporter@hotmail.com](mailto:clarelyndporter@hotmail.com).

Looking forward to an exciting weekend,  
*Carol J. Hosmer*

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**CALL TO VENDORS AND ARTISTS!!**

**This year's District Assembly will host a new event!**

**From 5:30 to 7:30 on Friday, April 23, we will hold an Art Exhibit. We are looking for UU Artists to come share their talents with us.**

**Also available will be a special area for Vendors of all shapes and sizes.**

**Do you have jewelry to sell? A social action project to advertise? A service to promote?**

**Cost of exhibiting your art, vending your wares, or promoting your cause is \$30.**

**Please send inquiries and proposals by March 5<sup>th</sup> to Clare Lynd-Porter, [clarelyndporter@hotmail.com](mailto:clarelyndporter@hotmail.com)**

**(Committee reserves the right to refuse artwork or exhibits based on appropriateness for intergenerational audience.)**

**MEMBERSHIP**

**GREETER TRAINING A SUCCESS**

Thanks to all who stayed after the February 29 service for greeter training. It was fun and informative, and especially effective because of the great participation of the Prairie members in attendance!  
*Dan Proud*

**OUR NEW PRAIRIE DIRECTORY**

The new membership directory is ready to pick up at Prairie!

**Changes:**  
Anne Urbanski  
[anne@urbanski.ws](mailto:anne@urbanski.ws)

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**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Artistic Medium** \_\_\_\_\_

**Vending Focus** \_\_\_\_\_

**Description of Piece(s) to Be Entered** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS**

### **CMWD ANNUAL AND UUA GENERAL ASSEMBLIES AND CALL FOR DELEGATES**

I encourage all to consider attending these assemblies. They offer a chance to share community with UUs, learn, enhance your religious, ethical or spiritual life or social activism, and have fun. And as a Delegate, participate in decision-making for our District and Denomination.

### **CMwD Annual Assembly April 23-25, Lisle, IL**

This Central Midwest District Annual Assembly's theme is "Walking Our Talk: Our Proud Heritage and Present Challenge," with keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler. Further information available the second week of March.

### **General Assembly June 24-28, Long Beach, CA**

Featured programs: Immigrants, the New Civil Rights Movement, This is What Democracy Looks Like, Creating a Progressive Pro-Family Agenda, Responsible Consumption, Signature Project (celebrating the interconnectedness through the arts). Reason: Why Liberals Will Win the Battle for America. Holly Near, entertainer and activist, will give the Ware Lecture.

**Request for Delegates:** Looking for individuals who have knowledge of our Prairie congregation and are willing to vote at the Business Meeting or Plenary sessions, and for GA to share information with Prairie UU Society. Selection will be based on Denominational Affairs Committee policy. I encourage people who have not experienced the Assemblies to apply. Prairie provides registration fees and for GA some money for expenses. For consideration as a Delegate or information about the Assemblies, please contact me at 273-3195 or [schraufnancye@hotmail.com](mailto:schraufnancye@hotmail.com) by March 28.

*Nancy Schraufnagel*

### **Office Hours for the Prairie Office Administrator**

Mondays 7-9 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.-12 noon

### **UUSC HOLIDAY CARDS CONTEST 2004**

We urge creative UUs of all ages who are passionate about human rights and social justice to submit a design for a new Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) card for the 2004 holiday season.

The winning card designers' names and congregations will be printed on their cards, which will be purchased and shared by UUs nationwide.

Submissions deadline: **April 15, 2004**. For submission guidelines, see [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org).

Mail submissions to: UUSC Holiday Card Contest, 130 Prospect Street, Cambridge, MA 02139-1845

E-mail submissions to: [volunteerservices@uusc.org](mailto:volunteerservices@uusc.org)  
*Rachel M. Binderman*

*Associate for Member Development, UUSC*

## **OTHER NEWS**

### **FULL MOON CIRCLE**

The full moon circle meets monthly on the Moonday (Monday) closest to the full moon to celebrate our lives as women and our connections with the cycles of nature. Sometimes we chant or dance, drum or tell stories, read poetry or create crafts that express our experiences, but we always create ceremony of some sort. We have found that ritual is a left-brain activity which creates real change in our lives. So come to the Full Moon Circle and empower yourself!

Our next gathering is Monday March 8th (also International Women's Day) at 7:30 at First Unitarian Society (900 University Bay Drive). For more info or to receive email reminders of our rituals, contact Nancy Vedder-Shults at 231-3362.

### **Shaarei Shamayim Calendar**

Tues. 3:45-6:15 p.m. & Sat. 8:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.

Prairie Liaison: Celeste Robins 249-5933

[CelestialR@charter.net](mailto:CelestialR@charter.net)

# UUSC E-MAIL BULLETIN

*The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee: advancing human rights and social justice in the United States and throughout the world.*

## Action alert: Urge Senate to strengthen welfare reform in reauthorization bill

Now is the time to call or visit your senators in support of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the nation's primary cash assistance program for low-income families with children. The U.S. Senate is likely to vote soon on the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone (PRIDE) Act. This is the Senate Finance Committee's effort to reauthorize TANF. The PRIDE bill reflects some of the nongovernmental organization and faith-based religious communities' principles for TANF reauthorization but falls short in other areas.

For more about how to contact your senators and urge them to support amendments to the PRIDE bill on the Senate floor, visit [www.uusc.org/news/alert021804.html](http://www.uusc.org/news/alert021804.html)

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## UUSC plans workcamps for 2004

Join us for one of the several workcamps planned for the upcoming months. This year, workcamps include a teen workcamp on Native American issues to be held in Tacoma, Wash., during the summer. UUSC will also hold several workcamps as part of the Defending Democracy program for members and supporters who wish to learn about ways to become involved in the 2004 elections. For the 2004 workcamp schedule and other details, visit

<http://www.uusc.org/news/wcsched2004.html>

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## Action alert: Support democracy and human rights in Morelos, Mexico

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and our partner organizations, Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center and the Independent Commission of Human Rights of Morelos (CIDHM), are concerned that excessive force has been used against the people of Tlalnepantla, Morelos, Mexico following unjust electoral procedures and their subsequent declaration of themselves as an autonomous municipality before the Mexican state.

For more about how you can express your concern about repeated human rights abuses in Morelos, visit <http://www.uusc.org/news/alert020504.html>

For more about UUSC program partner, CIDHM, and a recent conference for indigenous youth, visit <http://www.uusc.org/info/article022704.html>

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## People's movements show strength at World Social Forum in India

People's organizations worldwide joined together at the fourth World Social Forum to further strengthen their struggles in stopping anti-people and pro-market economic reforms. UUSC partners that attended the forum in Mumbai, India, in January, are working to ensure that WSF remains a platform for bringing people's movements together to consolidate their struggles for justice and further strengthen their relationships with each other.

To learn more about the World Social Forum, visit <http://www.uusc.org/info/article022604.html>

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## Justice Sunday 2004: Let Justice Flow

On Justice Sunday, March 28, 2004, thousands of UUs nationwide will act collectively to advance human rights. As more and more UU congregations together reaffirm their commitment to justice, equality and compassion, our chances of ending abuse and achieving justice on the local, national and global levels grow stronger.

For more information on how your congregation can take action for social justice on Justice Sunday, visit <http://www.uusc.org/info/memcelinfo.html>

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## UUSC holiday cards on sale

Take advantage of our holiday card sale to stock up on cards for next year. Due to consignment returns, there is now a limited quantity of last year's cards available for purchase at a special price. For more information, visit <http://www.uusc.org/info/holiday2003.html>

It is also not too late to participate in the 2004 Holiday Card Contest. All ages are invited to submit designs. For more information and guidelines, visit <http://www.uusc.org/info/holidaycardcontest2004.html>

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To find out more about UUSC membership or to make a donation online, by phone or by postal mail, visit: <http://www.uusc.org/info/support.html>

<b>Prairie Web Sites</b>
Prairie UU: <a href="http://my.execpc.com/~prairie/">http://my.execpc.com/~prairie/</a>
PrairieNews Group: <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/praienews/">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/praienews/</a>
PrairieViews Group: <a href="http://groups.yahoo.com/group/prairieviews/">http://groups.yahoo.com/group/prairieviews/</a>
Social Action: <a href="http://socialaction.homestead.com">http://socialaction.homestead.com</a>

# VOTE FOR THE FITCHBURG SITE

*Larry Nahlik*

## **A Short History Lesson**

On March 14, Prairie UU faces an historic opportunity, a choice between a revitalized community and stagnation. We have worked for four years to identify our needs and desires as a congregation. In April 2000, at the Spring Parish Meeting, the Religious Education Committee reported low enrollment, and requested that Prairie begin to study ways to grow to ensure a viable RE program. We identified another problem with our small size and current demographics: burnout of our volunteers. It became apparent that Prairie must grow in order to survive.

Since then, we have tried a variety of small fixes to recruit and retain members. In September 2000, we paid to distribute 8,500 inserts in the Madison newspapers. We started consistently greeting newcomers in the foyer.

In the summer of 2001, we surveyed RE parents, and found there was a high degree of agreement that class size is too small and the space is cramped and unattractive.

We held a growth workshop that August at which we identified Prairie's core values. We calculated that, in order to have 59 children enrolled (39 attending regularly), we would need 236 adult members to achieve a 4:1 ratio of adults to children, or 177 adults for a 3:1 ratio.

Fast forward to the Spring of 2003. At the April 27 Parish meeting, we approved a resolution that commits us to three things:

1. Move within five years to another building that will provide more and better space to meet our growth needs, because it is not feasible to meet those needs in Prairie's present building.
2. These principles should guide Prairie in its search for another building. The building should:
  - Accommodate a congregation large enough to support an adequate and stable RE program;
  - Include a main meeting space to accommodate not more than 400 people;
  - Be accessible to people of all abilities;
  - Be located within the designated urban service area of Madison or an adjoining city;
  - Be as energy-efficient as possible; and
  - Provide attractive space for cultural and community events.
3. Any construction or remodeling of a new Prairie building should employ green techniques and materials so far as is feasible, and should not require the construction of a parking lot serving only Prairie's needs.

So, what's the point of the "History Lesson?" Simply that this has been a painstaking process involving years of our time. There have been few surprises. There was at one time consensus that our goal was to grow to 200+ adult members in order to have a viable RE program. It's a worthy, forward-looking goal that seems to be forgotten frequently.

## **More Recently**

Following the April resolution, the Long Range Planning Committee conducted a site search with valuable (and free) assistance from Barbara Chatterton, a professional realtor. The site search examined ten properties. Only one was found suitable. The LRPC rejected the other nine for reasons of space, condition, location, and the fact that some of the properties weren't for sale. But the site search did more than evaluate ten sites. The site search gauged the marketplace for suitable lots in the area.

Want a downtown lot adjacent to the UW campus? Then you can put down \$950,000 for the former Schmidt's Auto lot on Park Street. The former Dental Health building on Wingra Drive goes for \$550,000, before renovations, with no green space. After a dose of reality like that, \$154,000 for a lot next to some actual prairie in Fitchburg Center looks pretty reasonable. We can drag our feet for a few more years, but the fact of the market won't change. Redeveloped land in the city will be three to six times more expensive, before renovation or building costs.

More recently, we have seen presentations from representatives of the City of Madison and Fitchburg Center. The Madison city planner, Archie Nicolette, told us about plans restricted to Madison with no properties currently for sale. The areas he

described that are on the developing fringes of Madison are similar to the Fitchburg site, but without the environmental enhancements already in place at Fitchburg Center.

Bill Dalrymple of Fitchburg Center told us about an ideal location for sale not far from Prairie's current location. It's in the same ZIP code. The area is surrounded by neighborhoods of young families (see Census data, below), nature areas, bike and pedestrian trails. It meets all of the criteria we listed in the resolution above, AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL! It's infill in an area that will be built-upon sometime soon. The sellers are willing to work with us to ensure a building of grace and beauty (in fact, they insist upon it), and within a reasonable cost.

### **The Long View**

Something that hasn't been emphasized enough in our debates is our vision for fifty years out. Few of us will be around then, but we can leave a gift for future generations. The area we're considering will be fully developed by then. Because we will have a role in governing the area, we can influence its direction, and ensure that it reflects our values. We will have given the gift of an architectural landmark, and a focal point for progressive religious thought.

### **Fitchburg is Like Us**

Politically, Fitchburg is a mirror of Dane County. For example, in the 2002 gubernatorial election, Fitchburg voted 54.40% Democratic, 29.31% Republican, 4.22% Green and 12.08% Libertarian. The vote throughout Dane County was 56.71% Democratic, 24.42% Republican, 5.73% Green and 13.13% Libertarian.

Another example: In the Fall 2002 election, in the contest for U.S. Congress, Ron Greer, the well-known homophobic theocrat, lost to Tammy Baldwin with just under 30% of the vote. In the spring of 2003, Greer lost his race for Fitchburg Alder for the district including Fitchburg Center, by just under 30% of the vote, within half a percentage point of his loss the previous Fall.

Remember our commitment to growth by attracting families? Here's an interesting bit of data from the 2000 Census:

#### Fitchburg

Family households (families)	58.4
With own children under 18 years	31.3

#### Madison

Family households (families)	47.7
With own children under 18 years	22.1

If we want to attract families, won't we be more likely to succeed where there are more families? The census figures above, by the way, do not include UW residence halls or other group facilities; they're not considered to be households.

### **On Race**

Some argue against the Fitchburg site on the basis of racial diversity. Shown below is an extract of U.S. Census data for 2000:

#### Fitchburg

White	82.2
Black or African-American	8.6

#### Madison

White	84.0
Black or African-American	5.8

Fitchburg remains the only Wisconsin city ever to elect a black mayor, Frances Huntley-Cooper.

Regarding economic diversity, Fitchburg compares favorably: 13.9% of Madison families had income less than \$25,000 in 1999, vs. 13.1% in Fitchburg. (U.S. Census)

My last word on this point is that nationally, UUs are well-educated and middle class. Speaking as someone in his 17<sup>th</sup> year of an inter-racial, inter-cultural marriage, I would be glad to see us more racially and economically mixed, but we haven't done it close to Allied Drive, and I haven't heard anyone commit to the changes in our program that would be needed to make such a change reality. It would be no small chore.



## **The False Dichotomy: Madison vs. Other**

Some in our congregation ask us to choose between a site in Madison or not. This is a false choice. We made a decision last year to limit our site search to the urbanized area of our metropolitan area. That was a compromise, to ensure that we would not take land from agricultural production or from natural areas. This was an agreement by our congregation, approved by vote, on what's acceptable as a location.

City limits have nothing to do with this argument. We get no particular benefits from locating within one city or another, thanks to the separation of church and state. I find it curious that those who most resent Madison's failure to annex Fitchburg 20-some years ago now tell us that it's too remote. Hmm, close enough to annex, but too far to build a church in. Presumably, the recently paved cornfields along Nesbitt Road are acceptable, now that Madison has sprawled all the way to Verona, just as far south of Highway PD as the Fitchburg site, as that area has the imprimatur and rubber stamp of Madison's politicians and lawyers.

On environmental issues, what matters is that we're all in this together; we all live in the same environment. Nature doesn't recognize city limits; the wind blows, and water flows across these man-made boundaries. It doesn't matter whether a piece of land has this label on it or that one. With few exceptions, the policies of our city governments are prudent and environmentally friendly. Fitchburg has grown cautiously, and worked hard to preserve its natural areas. As Dane County's population has grown to almost half a million, it is unreasonable to expect that a nearby area such as Fitchburg would remain rural and undeveloped. There's a community there, and it will be well served by a Unitarian-Universalist church.

The discussions we've been having say little about compromise. We have some members whose dedication to Social Action is inspiring, but who insist that it can only be done downtown, or near the UW, or only along South Park Street, or in our current location. We have some members who feel that moving to Fitchburg is environmental heresy (though they're unable to provide any fact-based analysis). We have those who argue that we must be on a bus line or in a "neighborhood" or close to retail. How might we accomplish all of those great things in a beautiful location not far from our current building? Will participation in the Interfaith Hospitality Network be impossible if we move to Fitchburg? Certainly not. Will we harm the environment by building in an existing development outside Madison? Not if you with environmental sense and sensibilities contribute your creativity and knowledge. Will our disabled members be unable to attend if there's no bus service on Sundays? Not if we organize carpools and take care of one another, as we currently do for our elderly members.

The process by which we have come to this decision was conducted by your fellow congregants. This is the choice we make by joining a lay-led society. Intelligent, caring people—your fellow members—worked to discover our needs and core values, and have proposed a site that is very much in keeping with those values. I appeal to your spirit of generosity to make possible a new UU church in a place where it will be welcomed with open arms. A "Yes" vote on March 14 will enable us to move toward a solution to the issues we have studied for four years. We don't need more years of delay when a very desirable site is so close. I urge you to vote for the resolution to move forward with the Fitchburg site, and work for an expanded and revitalized Prairie UU Society.

## **GROWTH MOVES: A VOTE AGAINST**

*Molly Plunkett*

This is my first attempt at an opinion piece—ever. Please bear with me if I ramble.

First, I do not favor any step toward building at the Fitchburg City Center. Although the resolution states that we will continue to look at other possibilities while working on a design for the Fitchburg site, that simply will not happen. There is only so much time, energy, and money to put to use in a small congregation. A vote by this congregation to work with an architect to design a building for a particular site, i.e., Fitchburg, is a commitment.

### **IF WE BUILD, THEY WILL COME....**

Can we afford to build now? No. We currently have 95 members. We have approximately 47 “pledging units.” For 2004 the average pledge is in the range of \$1000 per “unit”. In reality, some members contribute even more and some members contribute much less. Many members are already making large contributions. Our current annual income, assuming pledges are fully honored, is under \$50,000. We owe approximately \$50,000 on our present building. Based on current income, UUA will only lend us \$250,000 because our mortgage can be no more than 25%, or for us, \$12,500, of income. We can sell our present building. Estimates have ranged from \$200,000 to \$300,000 for a selling price. At most we may have \$500,000 to spend, without any fundraising. With that amount of money we could not build anything significantly larger than what we have, depending on the cost of land and depending on construction costs, which are estimated at \$120–\$130 per square foot. That leaves no money for use if we reconsider hiring a minister or other professional staff on even a part-time basis.

Most of the discussion of the cost of a new building has been in the range of 1 million dollars or more. That leaves a huge (half million or more) amount to be raised. We cannot simply buy the Fitchburg land and hold it until we have more money. If Fitchburg accepts our design, the purchase agreement for the condominium lot will specify that we must begin construction within a period of time, likely no more than two years.

### **WE ARE NOT READY**

I think we all agree that Prairie needs to grow. We need to continue to attract new members just to maintain, since we do lose members. We want to have more kids in the religious education program. An August 2001 survey of parents with kids in RE indicated that most were dissatisfied with the low number of kids involved. At that time there were 21 kids regularly (defined as once a month) attending. A goal of 7–10 kids per group, with 3 kids in the same grade, was identified. However, the need for same age RE classmates seemed to be most important to families with older children. Even with same grade classmates in RE, any given child may not like the same age kids. My personal experience is that sustaining the interest and involvement of middle school and high school kids in church-related activities is very tricky. Reportedly, parents who have not returned to Prairie commented about the space. Therefore we have focused on a lack of or unattractive RE space as a reason for failure to grow. Mold has been described as a problem in the basement but I am told that the Building and Grounds committee has tested for mold and not found a problem.

But growth is not the simple result of having more or differently configured space or differently located space. In August 2001 we identified core Prairie values: (1) religious education that nurtures children and community; (2) an environment that fosters spirituality, reflection, action; and (3) stimulating and diverse Sunday programs. We have not systematically evaluated those values in terms of how to grow. How big? Urban or suburban? Politically and socially active. Would different programs draw people to our building? These variables have been thrown about in recent exchanges on Prairie Views. Do we need some form of ministerial support?

Dori Davenport from the Chicago UU office conducted a growth workshop for several area congregations last November. She remarked that congregations that grow beyond a certain size have at least part-time ministerial involvement. We have begun, but not fully engaged in the kind of process that leads to planned growth.

### **GROW FIRST**

I favor expanding our space when we are ready and actually need more space. Although we have 95 members of record, on the average Sunday, between 30 and 40 people attend. Only half the chairs set up in the meeting room are occupied. We have room to grow here. If we experience a remarkable infusion of new members, we could add a second service. We could improve our present space. Let’s think and get professional advice about making the building more attractive, color, light in the basement...maybe more visibility.

Expansion of this building should be reconsidered. Expansion of this building was ruled out based on opinions that expansion would only accommodate 50 additional people and that onsite parking would be required. However, the City of Madison planner who spoke to us last month indicated that parking is not necessarily an issue. A congregation of 150 might be just fine.

I left First UU because of the constant focus on attracting new members and then dealing with the resultant problems. It has been projected that we need to have a congregation of 240 members to generate an RE population of 60 kids. We need to have 60 kids enrolled to assure attendance of 40 kids on the average Sunday. I don't know that the congregation has ever voted or had a meaningful discussion on size. Assumptions have been presented to us as agreed upon facts. These assumptions should be examined.

Some say we cannot grow where we are. But Prairie has grown. Peter, Jed, and I joined about two years ago. I am aware of other new families. Not many, maybe, but we are a congregation that does not automatically appeal to a wide cross-section of people to begin with. Some say such growth is due to efforts of the wonderfully dedicated committee members and the extraordinary work of our Presidents. Some may say that the effort is too great for an organization dependent almost totally on volunteers. I don't know that the failure to grow as we want is due to location. It may be as much due to lack of a minister.

### **THERE WILL BE OTHER CHOICES**

Fitchburg is not the only option. If and when we must move, I personally would like to consider being part of redevelopment of a central Madison area. That fits my image of Prairie as an activist church. However, there are redevelopment projects in the works on the near East side of Madison and off Rimrock Road, which are mixed retail/office developments, like the Fitchburg plan. Both developers were interested in talking more about having a church be part of the mix. There will be much development on the far west side of Madison

If we move, identifying location should be part of the planning process.

Finally, I believe churches should make a commitment to the vitality of Madison in the same way I believe strongly in keeping my kids in public schools. I believe that churches like individuals by their presence help a city remain vital and healthy. That value is more important to me than cheap land. Thanks for bearing with me.