



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." (Bond of Union)

December 16, 2005

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

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PRAIRIE CALENDAR

Sunday, December 18

9:00 a.m. Choir rehearsal

*10:00 a.m. Symbol Tree intergenerational service, presented by Erin Bosch

Wednesday, December 21

6:30 p.m. Midweek Meal@ Prairie

Friday, December 23

*6:00 p.m. HumanLight Humanist celebration at First Unitarian Society. Potluck and program.

Sunday, December 25

*6:00 p.m. Intergenerational vesper service of carols and readings, led by Maggie Siegfried and Mike Briggs

Wednesday, December 28

6:30 p.m. Midweek Meal@ Prairie

Sunday, January 1

*10:00 a.m. Intergenerational New Year's Day program, led by the Prairie youth

Wednesday, January 4

6:30 p.m. Midweek Meal@ Prairie

Sunday, January 8

9:00 a.m. Choir rehearsal

*10:00 a.m. "Evangelical Christian Casserole," presented by Steve Vorass

*11:45 a.m. Book Club lunch and discussion of *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama

Wednesday, January 18

7:30 p.m. Prairie Board meeting, at Prairie

Thursday, January 19

*6:30 p.m. Spanish Speakers potluck and talk at Dave and Marcia Johnson's house, 313 Glenway

Sunday, January 22 to Sunday, January 29

*Prairie IHN volunteers work at Midvale Lutheran

Tuesday, January 24

*2:00 p.m. Prairie Elders meet at Oakwood West

(* = Details follow in this issue.)

DETAILS OF COMING PROGRAMS

Sunday, December 18

Our traditional Symbol Tree intergenerational service begins with the RE students in a candlelight Santa Lucia procession. After a story and some singing, we have the symbol tree ceremony. You are invited to bring a symbol of some noteworthy event from your life in the past year, to say a few words about it, and then place your symbol on the tree.

Poems, other short readings, or quotations with a more universal quality are also welcome. Please bring cookies or other finger foods to share after the service.

NEXT PRAIRIE FIRE DEADLINE: SUNDAY, JAN. 1

Sunday, December 25

A very special Christmas Vesper service will be held at Prairie at 6 p.m. on Christmas night. The intergenerational service will be woven with lovely elements of singing, readings and candlelight to celebrate the day and the season. Maggie Siegfried and Mike Briggs will provide the music selections. Participants are encouraged to bring fruit and desserts for sharing after the service.

Sunday, January 1

Our talented Prairie youth will lead an intergenerational service, topic not yet announced. The extraordinary zest, creativity, and enthusiasm of the youth will captivate our minds and rejuvenate our spirits, as they have in past such programs.

Sunday, January 8

Steve Vorass will present "Evangelical Christian Casserole", talking about Evangelical history and the role of narrative (story) in the faith of Evangelicals. This is the first in a two-part series on Evangelical Christianity.

OUR SOCIETY

HOLIDAY NEWSLETTERS

If you write a holiday newsletter for friends and family, we invite you to share it with Prairie members by putting a copy in the decorated folder on the back table of the meeting room.



HUMANLIGHT HUMANIST HOLIDAY

Fellow freethinkers now have their own December holiday, called HumanLight! Join the festive HumanLight celebration, co-sponsored by Prairie's Humanist Union and the Doubters Group of First Unitarian Society (FUS). It will be held for the first time at FUS in the Lower Meeting House on December 23 at 6 p.m., starting with a potluck and followed by a fun program including Humanist-friendly songs.

See <http://humanist.madisonwi.us/events.htm> for details. Space is limited, so RSVP quickly via the Web form provided, via e-mail to humanist@madisonwi.us, or by telephone to Barb or Bob Park.

THE VIEW FROM MY BRANCH



When I was a child, the best memories about Christmas had to do with being a member of a family who did things together. I loved the traditions. My sisters and I would rush downstairs and get stockings from Santa. We always came back up and opened the stockings on our beds, without our parents. I now realize that was a way for them to get a little more shut-eye. But, then it was a fun kid-only event which my sisters and I loved to do.

We had to eat breakfast before we opened presents. We always had Mother's famous coffee cake. We had to keep our lists and write down who had given us what—a pain in the neck. But, it was also a kind of fun thing to complain about every year. The tree was always in the same place. Our friends the Mintons always came for Christmas Eve dinner. We always had ham at 1:00 p.m. on Christmas Day.

There are two specific favorite presents I will never forget. My cowgirl Dale Evans outfit with silver six-shooters was my all-time favorite. My second favorite was the Chemistry set I got one year. It made me feel like someone thought I was smart enough to handle science stuff. It really lifted my self-esteem. I played with it for months afterwards, cooking up all kinds of chemical concoctions. Unfortunately, I never really caught on to how they taught science back then. I dropped out of science classes after sophomore year. But, the main job of self-enhanced self-esteem was accomplished the year I got that gift.

As rosy a picture as these memories may paint, the truth was that we were a family with many serious problems. But, somehow, over the years those things got worked out. Difficult times have been distilled to compost. I remember the good memories much more.

However you mark this time of year, consider that the small things matter. You never know what effect your acts of kindness and fun will have on another, even in difficult times. Enjoy yourselves and revel in the probability that your love of another, from a Dale Evans outfit to a special coffee cake, will lodge in someone's heart. Oh, and remember to let someone else's gift lodge in yours, as well.

The Rev. Jody Whelden, Consulting Minister

BOOK CLUB SELECTION FOR JANUARY

On Sunday, Jan. 8, the Prairie Book club will discuss *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama, the junior U.S. Senator from Illinois. This personal memoir starts when, Obama, son of a white American mother and black African father, learns of his father's death in an accident. He traces both his mother's and father's ancestry and comes to terms with it. Barack Obama graduated from Harvard Law School in 1991, where he served as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review*. He has worked as a community organizer, civil rights attorney, and law professor. 408 pages.

Mary Mullen

SPANISH SPEAKERS TO MEET JANUARY 19

The Prairie Spanish Speakers group will bring the potluck and conversation to the winter home of Dave and Marcia Johnson, 313 Glenway. The gathering on Thursday, January 19, will start at 6:30 p.m. Call for directions: 441-0532.

PRAIRIE ELDERS REPORT

Prairie Elders will meet Tuesday, January 24, 2006, at 2:00 p.m. Topic: friends who have been especially important in our lives. There is no December meeting.

At our November meeting, fifteen of us shared heartwarming stories of thankfulness. George Calden also gave a moving recollection of Pat Cautley's service on Martin Luther King. King was assassinated a few days before the scheduled service.

Doleta Chapru

INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK WEEK JANUARY 22-29

Prairie next assists Midvale Lutheran in hosting homeless families the fourth week in January. This crucial service organized by the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) depends on the many volunteers who provide food and support. New volunteers from Prairie are welcome, and children also have the opportunity to participate. Please contact Paula Pachciarz to volunteer or for more information.

This story is from this month's IHN e-bulletin:

Did you know that transportation is a major problem for IHN families in housing? Families without reliable cars must rely on the bus system and work within the limitations of routes and schedules. This means that they cannot apply for any jobs not on a bus line, or accept late-night work schedules. It means that they must find day care accessible by bus, and often that they will spend hours on the bus between home, day care and work. It can also mean lack of access to other opportunities and resources. Our families will be among those who will be very much negatively impacted if Madison Metro cuts routes and/or raises fares.

After several months of searching for a job, Katie, a single mom in the Second Chance Apartment Project, was hired at a company on the far east side of Madison, on a bus line. Katie and her baby daughter live on the west side of town. After getting hired, Katie and her case manager started the difficult task of locating a childcare provider that had openings and that she could get to. After days of looking, a childcare provider was located four blocks down the street. The bus does not run that way in the mornings, so Carrie has to walk her daughter down the street and drop her off each morning by 6:00 a.m. Then, Katie has a two-hour bus trip across town to get to work and the same trip after work to get home and to pick up her daughter. Although this routine is exhausting, it is worth it to Katie to have independence and income. If this bus route were cut, Katie would lose her job and would have to start all over.

MEDITATION GROUP FORMING

Have you always wanted to try meditation, but didn't know how to do it? Would you like an opportunity to reduce your stress in the middle of the week? Would you like to get together with like-minded UU's from other churches? Here's your chance.

Our minister (Jody Whelden) and members of Prairie UU Society are interested in starting a meditation group in January. We plan to meditate on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. at Prairie. The meditation group will meet the half hour before our mid-week potluck. If you are interested, contact Judy Skog at 273-4813 or jaskog (at) tds.net.

DESIGN NEEDS FOR A NEW BUILDING

Twenty or more Prairie members and friends met with BWZ Architects on Sunday, December 4, to learn their design suggestions for a new Prairie building. Thank you to all who provided input about what should be in our design!

Using all the input people provided, the Building/Fundraising Committee prepared a revised set of design needs for the building. These will be the basis for continued work with BWZ in preparing a design.

- 2 story: because of small footprint, ecological concerns
- round/octagonal areas preferred (rather than long corridors)
- one meeting/fellowship room, upstairs (capacity 175-200), with lobby about 1/3 the size of main meeting room
- meeting room floor sprung wood (for dancing)
- deck to north of meeting room if possible landscaping to keep amphitheater to north of building if possible
- lobby have room for brochure rack, notices/chairs/ cry space, size about 1/3 of main meeting room
- generous, convenient storage room for tables and chairs from meeting room
- kitchen opens to lobby (for coffee) possibly only commercial in 2nd phase (depending on funds)
- sound booth not forgotten (but may be obsolete— will check)
- RE and DRE downstairs, with (large) classrooms clustered around an open play space, at edge of which is a wetbar behind a counter
- radiant heating in floor, both floors?, at least lower level
- sinks at least in classrooms for younger children
- a handicapped toilet on each floor
- no walkway from road to bike path right beside building
- must be auto access to lower level as well as upper
- suggest stairwell/elevator be on south of building (do not need windows)
- lots of storage up and down (closets in each classroom)
- one outside exit downstairs, not from each classroom; also mechanicals/janitor space
- main entrance on upper level, but possibly doors out to patio south of meeting room
- space for minister and 2-3 work stations upstairs, minister office possibly downstairs
- library/choir/meeting room, preferably upstairs
- retain possibility for future expansion
- architects to negotiate with Fitchburg for permission to put some parking slots on city triangle, with path down to bikepath and sign (Prairie to maintain, in return for use)
- Emphasize: green, green, green!

Norma Briggs and Ken Skog

LAND PURCHASE DETAILS

As noted in a recent Prairie Fire, Prairie purchased 1.6 acres of land for a new building adjacent to Eagle School in Fitchburg Center on Friday, September 16, 2005. The cost was \$304,000. Here is a breakdown on how the purchase was financed.

Long-term loans	\$173,000
Short-term loans	\$ 20,000
Increase the mortgage on	
our current building	\$ 68,000
<u>Prairie certificates of deposit</u>	<u>\$ 43,000</u>
Total	\$304,000

There were 12 parties (Prairie members) that provided the long-term loans and 2 of those parties also provided the short-term loans. The short-term loans were provided with the understanding that Prairie would endeavor to pay them back in a few months. The mortgage was increased to provide part of the payment, but our payment per month was kept below our previous monthly payment by increasing the repayment period.

The Board is looking at two ways to pay back the short-term loans. First, the Board encourages people to consider if they would provide a long-term loan to help pay for a part of the short-term loan amount – join the 12 parties that have provided a long-term loan. The long-term loans will pay 3% per year for two years and 5% per year thereafter. We are asking people to hold the loan for at least two years.

If you are willing to provide such a loan, please contact Mike Briggs. If we get a number of long-term loans, that will decrease (or eliminate!) the need for the second way to pay back the short-term loans. The Second way is to use some of the line of credit we can get from the bank that holds our mortgage. We will limit the amount taken from the line of credit so our total monthly payments for the mortgage and funds from the line of credit do not exceed our previous monthly mortgage payment.

Ken Skog, Chair, Long Range Planning Committee

GUEST AT YOUR TABLE BEGINS

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee program, A Guest at Your Table, makes possible UUSC's work fighting for human rights and social justice. Please give generously at the Prairie drive this month and next. Pick up a GAYT box!

MEMBERSHIP

Please welcome our new member:

Kelly Radford

504 Melody Lane, Verona, WI
845-3523

Updates:

Dave and Marcia Johnson

313 Glenway, Madison, WI
441-0532

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

DOES IT SEEM HARD TO GET ALONG?

We sure had a lot of snow recently! At our last YoUUth Circle, almost everyone said that was a real joy ... only a few shovelers had concerns. It was fun to repeat our litany that we are the light of the world. I liked our talk about "The World as a Village" book and learned about how the world's people are different. It helped me think about how hard it is to have peace on earth.

I have two sad stories to share, both from UU friends. One is about some kids who are being kidded and taunted at their school. Some classmates are trying to scare them into being the same religion as them, saying how bad Hell is and how important it is to be Saved. Especially as Christmas get close, the UU kids are harassed and ridiculed. Their family wants the school to help stop these insults and has asked their UU church to give some ideas for good responses.

The other story is from a RE teacher about a family who moved and was joining a new UU congregation. The kids weren't sure if the other kids in their RE class liked them, but they were excited to bring their Grandma to a Holiday Party at Church. Sadly, some of the church kids were making fun of the new kids, calling them weird and strange. More sadly, the Grandma was sitting at the same table and heard the insults. When she said who she was, the kids didn't seem to know how to respond, only one apologized. The family is now deciding what to do; however, the Grandma said it really hurt her to hear

those things. She is worried that the other kids will be mean to her kids and others again.

In both those stories, the key seems to be that people should try more to accept and respect others, at least we should not be so fast to say negative things about each other. Why is it so hard for some people to accept others' beliefs, behaviors or attitudes? What gives us the right to say and do hurtful thing? Is it so hard to get along?

Please share with us - the RE Committee, teachers and DRE - ideas, joys or concerns that your family has about Prairie RE. We need your input and we request your caring support. Is there an activity or lesson that you can share with the Prairie kids, maybe during one of our YoUUth Circles?

Thank you. See you in church.

Bob Radford, Director of Religious Education

PRAIRIE WEB SITES

Society Home Page: prairie.madison.uua.org

News Group: groups.yahoo.com/group/prairienews/

Views Group: groups.yahoo.com/group/prairieviews/

Social Action: socialaction.madisonwi.us

Humanist Union: <http://humanist.madisonwi.us>

Long Range Planning: www.execpc.com/~prairieu/planning (no space)

UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALIST NEWS

NOMINATE ACTIVISTS FOR THE SOCIAL JUSTICE BENNETT AWARD

Applications for the UU Social Justice Bennett Award are due March 1. Let the award committee know what you are most proud of your congregation for in your social justice efforts. The winning congregation will receive a \$500 cash prize at a plenary session at General Assembly, coverage in *UU World*, *Interconnections*, www.uua.org, and in *SAC-News*.

Runners-up will receive coverage as well for their best practices.

Congregations having engaged in internal anti-racism and anti-oppression work that translated into authentic partnerships for dismantling racism and oppression in their communities are especially encouraged to apply. Go to www.uua.org/awards/bennett.html for more information about how to apply and to read about past years' recipients, including the 2004 award-winning Berrien UU Fellowship in St. Joseph, Michigan.

JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS NEWS

Unitarian Universalists have been at the forefront of some important political issues involving oppression this past week that require that people of faith speak out.

On December 12 the UUA opposed a Supreme Court nomination for the first time in our history based on a thorough review of Judge Alito's judicial record and his insensitivities to civil rights and civil liberties.

On December 14 UU clergy were arrested for "kneeling in" against the immoral budget. UU clergy and leaders gathered with 200 other leaders of faith, and 115 people including three UU ministers, were arrested in an act of civil disobedience for a moral budget.

Congregations are signing up to host Living Wage Sunday Services and events on Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend (January 14-16) as part of the LET JUSTICE ROLL Living Wage Campaign and UU Justice Sunday (March 26) to raise the minimum wage (which has not been raised in eight years!).

UUA President Bill Sinkford is featured (along with Al Gore and others!) on the Stop Global Warming Home Page.

Keep on witnessing, speaking truth, taking risks, staying strong. (And send us your nominations for outstanding congregational and individual work for anti-oppressive social justice.)

In faith and love, Susan

Unitarian Universalist Association Opposes Alito Confirmation as Threat to Civil Liberties

On December 12, the Unitarian Universalist Association announced its opposition to the confirmation of Samuel Alito to the U.S. Supreme Court. The UUA's opposition is based on concerns over civil liberties, including religious liberty, the right to privacy, and due process.

The UUA has never before opposed the confirmation of a nominee to the Supreme Court. In a statement issued to over 1000 congregations that make up the Association, the UUA's Washington Office for Advocacy Director Rob Keithan said:

"The decision to take a position on a judicial nominee is not one the UUA takes up lightly. The nomination of Judge Samuel Alito Jr. is significantly different from that of Chief Justice John Roberts or Harriet Miers, in that he has an extensive judicial record that clearly reveals his judicial philosophy on a wide range of issues. After extensive research, Unitarian Universalist Association staff agreed that Judge Alito's rulings revealed a pattern of views that were outside the mainstream and hostile to established precedent favoring civil liberties."

UU Ministers Arrested for Civil Disobedience in support of "A Moral Budget"

Nearly two hundred religious leaders and people of faith, including a contingent of Unitarian Universalists, gathered in front of the Cannon House Office building in frigid temperatures on December 14 to bear witness in the struggle for economic justice with the message that "budgets are moral documents." The gathering, which resulted in the arrest of 115 people, was prompted as Congress prepares to take up the White House's current budget draft for 2006, offering tax cuts primarily to those earning \$200,000 per year or more, and which will be financed by slashing services for the poor. In addition to the acts of civil disobedience, leaders of the gathering urged participants to make 'surprise' visits to Congress. Seventy similar vigils were held in 34 states.

Susan Leslie
Director for Congregational Advocacy and Witness
Unitarian Universalist Association

OTHER NEWS

ADVENT RETREATS AT SAINT BENEDICT

Saint Benedict Center in Middleton offers the following retreats in December. Visit www.sbcenter.org or call 831-9304 for details.

- Welcoming God: A 24-hour Advent retreat for women and men, **December 9-10**. Take time for silence, listening to that still small voice, prayer, and group sharing.
- Vigil for the New Year: A family-friendly alternative on **December 31**. Spend New Year's Eve in a gathering of prayer, sharing, reflection, and other joyful activities.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES PROTESTS PROPOSED 2006 BUDGET

On December 14, denominational heads and other religious leaders gathered in Washington to denounce the fiscal year 2006 federal budget, with some comparing congressional representatives who support it to the evil biblical King Herod.

The leaders braved cold temperatures to protest the budget that cuts billions from programs that help the poor. Congress is to vote on the budget this week.

The demonstration was organized by the evangelical Christian group Call to Renewal. It ended with more than 110 protesters being arrested when they knelt in prayer in the Cannon House Office Building to decry a budget they believe is immoral.

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America, called the budget "a moral disgrace" and called on Congress to defeat it.

The Rev. John H. Thomas (President of the UCC) said, "More than the candlelight services we attend or the carols we sing, this federal budget will reveal whether we and our leaders are like the Magi coming to adore the child or like Herod who, whether through intent or indifference, allows the innocents to be slaughtered."

The proposed budget would cut more than \$50 billion in social programs that help the poor while giving tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. Religious leaders have been protesting the proposed budget since it was first introduced by President Bush in January.

The Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar (General Secretary of the NCC) said that proposed budget "is immoral, unjust and it hurts the very people it should be helping.... Since January we have been writing and calling, pleading and begging you to defeat this budget that bestows tax cuts to the wealthiest among us while ruthlessly debilitating programs that help those most in need."

[Excerpted from the National Council of Churches USA Web site, www.councilofchurches.org]

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, PASS IT ON

This holiday season, the American Red Cross asks you to pass on the gift of life by giving blood. Blood supply levels sometimes drop by as much as 40 percent in December as people are busy getting ready for the holidays.

While donors can give blood when it is convenient, hospital patients need blood transfusions for surgery or procedures. It only takes an hour to help save someone's life.

To make an appointment or find out more about donating blood, visit www.givelife.org or call 1-800-GIVE-LIF.

THE MEANING OF YULE

From the Wikipedia

Yule was the winter solstice celebration of Germanic pagans, and is also one of the eight solar holidays, or sabbats, of Neopaganism.

"Yule" and "Yuletide" are also archaic terms for Christmas, sometimes invoked in songs to provide atmosphere. People unfamiliar with ancient pagan traditions will not distinguish between Yule and Christmas.

Yule celebrations at the winter solstice predate Christianity, though there are few accounts of how Yule was actually celebrated, beyond the fact that it was a time for feasting. It is known to have included the sacrifice of a pig for the god Freyr, a tradition which survives in the Scandinavian Christmas ham. 'Yule-Joy', with dancing, continued through the Middle Ages in Iceland, but was frowned upon in Europe when the Reformation arrived.

(continued)

The confraternities of artisans of the 9th century, which developed into the medieval guilds, were denounced by Catholic clergy for their "conjurations" when they swore to support one another in coming adversity and in business ventures. The occasions were annual banquets on December 26, the

feast day of the pagan god Jul, when it was possible to couple with the spirits of the dead and with demons that returned to the surface of the earth... Many clerics denounced these conjurations as being not only a threat to public order, but also, more serious in their eyes, satanic and immoral. (Michel Rouche)

Many of the symbols associated with the modern holiday of Christmas, such as the burning of the Yule log, the eating of ham, the hanging of boughs, holly, mistletoe, etc., are apparently derived from traditional northern European Yule celebrations. When the first missionaries began converting the Germanic peoples to Christianity, they found it easier to simply provide a Christian reinterpretation for popular feasts such as Yule and allow the celebrations themselves to go on largely unchanged, rather than trying to suppress them. The Scandinavian tradition of slaughtering a pig at Christmas, and not in the autumn, is probably the most salient evidence for this.

