

Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society
Sunday, September 3, 2000

Experiencing Prairie: Reflecting on What Brought Us Here and What Keeps Us Here

Prelude - Ruth Calden (2 minutes)

Welcome - President Erin Bosch (30 seconds)

Chalice Lighting and Minute of Meditation: Mary Mullen (4 minutes including meditation)

Today our service deals with a subject that is often uncomfortable for Unitarians, telling others about our religion and our church and asking them to give us a try. I'm a fan of Garrison Keillor and his *Prairie Home Companion*. For the chalice lighting I would like to read two humorous excerpts from his work that have to do with spreading the message of Unitarian Universalism. Then I'll leave you to meditate for a minute afterward on the relevance of these words for those of us who are considering being "missionaries for UUism."

I am lighting the chalice to our efforts to bring others to experience the joy and support we have experienced at Prairie, to our common sense in how to bring up the subject to others, and to the sense of humor we Unitarian Universalists value in our religion.

The first reading is from the book **Lake Wobegon Days**. It recounts how the first white settlers came to Lake Wobegon.

- The first white folk known to have spent time in the Wobegon area were Unitarian missionaries from Boston, led by Prudence Alcott, a distant and wealthy relative of the famous Alcotts of Concord. ... On June 14, 1850, at two-forty P.M., .. she had a vision of a man in hairy clothing who told her to go west and convert the Indians to Christianity by the means of interpretive dance. ... [In her journal she wrote] "Having witnessed an Algonquin Rain Dance at the Lyceum... , the Expressive Beauty of their Spirits convinced me that the worship of the Supreme Being in our English Language is dry, tasteless, & insufficient to the present Need, & then... it was shown to me that All is One under Heaven, All are Children of God & I must preach to our savage Brethren, using the language of Dance."

The second shorter reading comes from a November 1997 *Prairie Home Companion* performance of the radio drama **Lives of the Cowboys**. Lefty, who has just escaped from the courthouse where he was charged with cattle-rustling is impersonating a Unitarian minister to an old lady and her grandson at the house where he is trying to hide out from the law.

- I was a Unitarian cowboy missionary, little Sunflower. I was trying to bring the message of humanism to the wild west, you see----I'd go around to saloons and stand up and tell these gamblers and desperadoes that there is an overriding spirit of beauty and goodness in the world...
- In the end Lefty and his buddy Dusty steal the real Unitarian minister's car. Dusty says, "You going to steal his car?" And Lefty says:

It's a Unitarian car, Dusty. Unitarians believe in the basic goodness of man. So we're not stealing it --- we're merely demonstrating interdependence.

Song - "Gathered Here," p. 389 of hymnbook, as a round - Mary Mullen and helpers (4 minutes)

Joys & Concerns - (5 minutes)

The Service - presented by Erin Bosch and Mary Mullen

Why we are doing this topic - Mary Mullen (1 minute)

- We are making a big push for new members and will be sending out an advertisement with 8000 newspapers soon. We also want you to be excited enough about Prairie to personally invite people to try us out, and we want to attract and keep people who visit. We all have a part to play in this.
- We need a “critical mass” of children. Some young families are thinking of leaving because we don’t have enough children.
- Many members are older and we need younger people who haven’t been shouldering the organizational burden for decades to take up the slack.
- We are concerned that some people have dropped out.
- We need the talents, the renewal, and the excitement that comes with new and more people.

Agenda of the Service - Mary (less than 1 minute)

I just want to mention the parts of the service so that you know what to expect. First, Erin and I would each like to tell our personal story of how and why we first came to Prairie, what brought us to continue attending and become members. Secondly, in recognition of how difficult it may be to talk to others about our church, we have asked several people to do skits about inviting a co-worker or a neighbor to Prairie. Next, Erin and I will give a few of our thoughts on how enthusiasm is generated for new members. Then after a song, it will be your turn. We will ask you to partner up with one other person to tell your story of how you were first attracted to Prairie and what kept and keeps you coming. Then we’ll ask you all to share your ideas about what we should do to be most welcoming to people who come to visit us.

Joining Prairie - Personal stories (3 minutes for Erin, 3-5 minutes for Mary)

- Erin - the people, program for kids
- Mary - personal contact (a buddy), feeling wanted and appreciated, being able to contribute

Skits

- Telling a co-worker about Prairie (3 minutes)
- Inviting a new neighbor (3 minutes)

Thoughts on how enthusiasm is generated for new members (5 minutes for Erin, 3 minutes for Mary)

- Erin - activities that all attend, old & new; share chairs with kids, making “openings” in our lives for people who come to Prairie
- Erin & Gerald - Monday daytime friends
- Dean & Robin - jogging partners
- older women’s swimming group
- Mary - lay ministries all in one with outside speakers, making new people feel needed, friendliness, volunteers to help contact visitors

Song - “I Love to Tell the Story,” p. 109, **Prairie Song Book** (3 minutes)

Pair story-telling - Pairs next to each other tell about what brought them to and keeps them nourished at Prairie. (8 minutes)

Open discussion about how to be most welcoming to new people who attend. (10 minutes)

Offertory

Introduction of Visitors (2 minutes)

Announcements (5 minutes)

Song - "Long Time Friends," p. 104, **Prairie Song Book** (3 minutes)

Closing Words (30 seconds)

The closing words refer to "Living Our Principles" that is printed on the back of today's program. Everyone of us is a religious educator about Unitarian Universalism. Every time we come to church we role model for each other how to be religious and how to be a Unitarian Universalist. We each help make Prairie a place others like. Give yourself the recognition you deserve by looking at the checklist of actions today or during the week and checking off what you have done that support the Seven UU Principles.

NOTES ON TIME: If we follow this schedule, we should finish general discussion right at 11:00, leaving 15 minutes for winding down. Unknown times are Joys & Concerns which I've pegged at 5 minutes, Pair Story-Telling which might actually take a little less time than 8 minutes unless it takes too long to get people started. At the end, we don't know exactly how much time will be used for introduction of visitors (2 minutes?) and announcements (5 minutes?).

[Electronic copy of the above provided by Mary Mullen on 2/28/21 is believed to have been a draft copy for a program originally planned for Aug. 13, 2000. That date at the top was changed to Sept. 3, 2000, the date on the cassette tape made of the program.]