

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS



*Newsletter of the
First
Unitarian Church
Alton, Illinois*

www.firstuualton.org



Rev. Khleber Van Zandt, Minister

December 2013

Worship Services Two Services – 9:30 am & 11:00 am

**December 1, 2013 – Thanksgiving Weekend
"Hinduism"**

**Anand Bhattacharyya
(Mr. Bhattacharyya is the father of
Mike Acharya, of our congregation.)**

*(Church Potluck Lunch – 12:15.)
(Sanctuary decorating for the Holidays.)*

**December 8, 2013
"The Tree Downtown"
Rev. Khleber Van Zandt**

In the middle of downtown, Santa Claus arrives, the giant tree is lit, and a prayer is said over the festivities. What can it mean to celebrate quasi-religious holidays in the town square amidst all the sectarian squabbling among neighbors?

**December 15, 2013 – Solstice Celebration
– an intergenerational worship service –
"We've Got the Power"**

Rev. Khleber Van Zandt
We honor the winter solstice in song and story, celebrating our dip into the rich darkness as well as the journey back into the light.

**December 22, 2013
"The Time Is Near"**

Rev. Khleber Van Zandt

The season of Advent comes down to this: waiting for the "fullness of time" and the accompanying birth to arrive. As always in the spiritual realm, it's not here quite yet. But also as always, the time is near.

**December 24, 2013 - Christmas Eve
– 7:30 in the evening –
– an intergenerational worship service –
"A Game of Christmastime"**

Rev. Khleber Van Zandt

In a traditional candlelight service, we'll hear modern stories of holidays gone by, read from ancient texts about myth and mystery, and celebrate hope together on a very special night.

**December 29, 2013
"Making Room in the Backpack"
Rev. Khleber Van Zandt**

The old year is leaving and many of us have things we need to let go of before the new year arrives. Today we'll ritually remove the unhelpful stuff we're still carrying around so we can travel into the future feeling lighter.

**Adult Religious Education (ARE)
Sessions at 9:30 & 11 am
Nursery childcare available**

9:30 am

December 1 – Tracey Howe-Koch – The Bible

It has been said that "the Bible is the least-read bestseller." This month we take a broader view of Bible Study and reflect on why (or why not) we need it in our lives. Is it a book of transformation, education, or irritation? Let's discuss!

December 8 – Dr. Ronald Glossop – Philosophy

Our fourth class on "Issues in Philosophy" will mark a shift in subject from what is true to what is good. What is the greatest good for a human being? Possibilities to be discussed include having pleasure and avoiding pain, following one's duty to God or to humanity, accepting without complaint whatever comes, realizing one's potentialities, having knowledge and understanding, being a virtuous person, and being the kind of person with whom others like to associate.

Peg Flach – Dutiful Daughters and Sons (DDS)

Dutiful Daughters and Sons is a support/sharing/venting group open to anyone who is struggling with the many issues involved in care-taking or advocating for an elderly parent. We will meet in Khleber's office at 9:30 am. If you have any questions, contact Peg Flach.

**December 15 – Michelle Bryant Barbeau –
Meditation**

December 22 – Jerry Johnson – UU History

During this month's session, our UU history video will finish covering the establishment of Unitarian churches in U.S. We will view the contributions of early notable Unitarians, such as William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker. For more information about the video presentation, visit

http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/290764.shtml?utm_source=n.

December 29 – The Jar of Questions:

The jar of questions helps us to learn more about ourselves and each other. Join us!

11:00 am

December – All Sundays

Cheryle Tucker, Coordinator - "Expect Life!"

Based on a reading by Elizabeth Tarbox, we will explore living in the present, miracles, and the interconnectedness of joy and sorrow.

A First Glance



As each episode of the TV series *Downton Abbey* begins, the opening credits roll while we watch the downstairs staff preparing the massive upstairs rooms for the upper-class residents' day: dusting the fixtures, creasing the linens, polishing the silver, adjusting the table settings just so.

Underneath all the activity, the *Downton Abbey* theme song plays. The composer of that theme song named it "Preparation."

That's what this time of year feels like to me - a time of preparation as we scurry around in service to the holidays: readying our houses, readying our hearts, readying our lives, for *something*.

Outside, the weather turns colder, the leaves pile up and become frozen together in the morning frost. The winter wind begins to blow through before the blood has had a chance to thicken.

Inside, too, it can be a difficult time, with too much going on, too much to do, too many people relying on us, too much stuff in limbo, too many things waiting to happen.

With all the stress and strain, the holidays can feel more like a period of mourning than a time of celebration. What was it again we were supposed to learn from all this tumult and mess?

Oh, yes, now I remember: patience, that quality of character I've been praying for most of my adult life. And, I should say with barely contained frustration, rarely receiving.

It occurs to me: if I haven't received the gift of patience for Christmas before now, maybe I've overrated it. Maybe it's something I don't really need. Maybe instead of praying for patience, I should just grab hold of the holidays like a child. Getting excited about everything. No patience expected, no patience required. Without sophistication, without picking apart the myths and the mysteries to see whether or not they're rational and reasonable enough to be believed.

Okay. That settles it - I'll offer up a different holiday prayer this year, one that skips over all that stuff about patience and simply asks for help living in the moment, giving my *self* up and accepting the multitude of gifts that come unbidden, reveling in all that's going on within and without me, feeling both the joy and the anxiety, and being thankful for it all.

There'll be time to pray for patience again after the holidays. Maybe as a New Year's resolution ...

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays to you and yours,

Khleber



4th Saturday Lunch & Personal Care Items for those in need

December 28 – 11:30 am

Information about what will be needed for this month's 4th Saturday Lunch will be available at church, via email from the Church Office, on UU Friends, and on the First Unitarian Church of Alton's facebook page.

Our distribution of personal care items has become very popular – as many of these needed items cannot be purchased through the government's "Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program" (SNAP - formerly known as food stamps).

If you can contribute any of the following items, your donation would be very welcome. Toilet paper – feminine hygiene products – shampoo – laundry detergent – bleach – baby wipes – diapers/pull-ups – AfroAmerican hair products – cleaning supplies – toothpaste - soap.

It is better to contribute 5 of 10 of the same item rather than one or two of each.

Your Church Board July 2013 – June 2014

President	Kelly Crone-Willis
President Elect	Sabrina Trupia
Past President	Cheryle Tucker
Secretary	Sandy Shaner
Treasurer	Michelle Bryant-Barbeau
Trustee	Lee Suarez
Trustee	Paul Fischer
Youth Rep.	Vacant

To contact Rev. Khleber Van Zandt
Email: kvanzandt@uuma.org
Cell Phone: 314-223-0551

A course in Esperanto

At 12:30 pm Sunday, December 8, the third meeting of the Esperanto class will take place in Emerson Place. This course is led by Dr. Ronald Glossop.



Questions? Contact Ron at rglossop@mindspring.com.

Building and Grounds News



For the next three months, Jim McKeever will serve as the Building Co-Chair. If there is anything you see that needs attention in the building, please contact Jim.

James McKeever

mckeeverjim@sbcglobal.net.

The workday in November resulted in new ceiling tiles being put up in the Wuerker Room to cover the hole made by the raccoon several months ago; the mold-laden ceiling cut out of the Wuerker Room closet; the Wuerker Room closet neatened up; and other building concerns addressed.

If you notice something around the church grounds that needs attention or repair, please contact our Grounds Co-Chair, **Bob Larson** at larsonlaw@gmail.com

Church Potluck Lunch & Tree Decorating DECEMBER 1st Following the 2nd service.



Plan to stay following the service on December 1st to share in our monthly potluck lunch. Note that from now on the lunch will be held on the **first Sunday** of each month.

We will also be decorating the sanctuary for the Holidays. Please plan to stay a little while and help trim the tree.



Worship Team Associates

Monday, December 2

7 to 8:30 pm

Have you wanted to share in bringing new perspectives to Sunday morning worship? Would you would enjoy a deeper study of what happens (emotionally, spiritually, intellectually) during worship, and how to make those experiences more meaningful to yourself and the congregation?

If so, please plan to attend the “Worship Team” meeting.

The theme for December’s meeting is “brokenness.”

Contact: Khelber Van Zandt kvanzandt@uuma.org

Save the Date!

UU Family Winter Gathering

December 20 – 6 pm

Sayer Johnson is organizing a “UU Family Winter Gathering.” This will include a soup supper, conversation, fellowship, gaming for the kids, and is planned as an “intentional” time to be together.

Details will be coming soon.



*Alton
Community
Christmas*

Our Community Christmas collection is on! The United Way is collecting new winter clothing items for all ages, new toys for all ages, diapers, personal care items, coats, socks, etc. The collection ends on Thursday Dec. 12 so please bring items for the Collection Box by Sunday, December 8. We have been a partner in this effort for many years, keep it going!

Interest Groups

ANNA DS – WOMEN’S ALLIANCE

The Anna D's will meet at Castelli's Moonlight Restaurant at 3400 Fosterburg Rd. on **Thursday, December 5** at **11:30 am**. MaryLu McManus is hosting. Her email is mlmcmanus@charter.net.

Please let her know by the end of the day Monday, December 2 if you are planning to attend. All women of the church are invited.

At the last Anna Ds meeting, members donated money in memory of Ruth Shaw. Those funds will be given to the 4th Saturday Lunch fund. The 4th Saturday Lunch was one of the several church projects that Ruth supported financially.

Fifty-Plus (50+) Forum
First **SATURDAY** of every month
December 7, 2013
10:30 am to noon at church



We invite anyone who is over 50 or even getting near that milestone to join us. We have a lot in common: long work lives, preparation for or entry into retirement, a vast array of interests ... and we love sharing all of it.



December 12
11:30 am

The Men’s lunch bunch meets the second Thursday of each month. Join us on **Thursday, December 12** at 11:30 am at the Best Buffet at 615 Wesley, Drive in Wood River, IL.

Coordinator: Jim Moore patjimmoore@charter.net. All men in our church are invited.

RENEGADE WOMEN - TOPICAL DISCUSSIONS

1 pm to 3 pm every 3rd Saturday.

DECEMBER 21

For information for the topic of this month’s discussion, contact Dee Evans, zorn227@fastmail.fm

Donations to the Alton Crisis Food Center

The Crisis Food Center, down the street from the church, is always in need of donations of food items. The Center is in need of canned green beans, corn and other vegetables; tuna; canned meat; peanut butter; boxes of mac 'n cheese; and basic food staples.



Please bring non-perishable food items and put them in the collection container in the RE Foyer.

Currently we are working in tandem with the Food Center for the distribution of personal care items. They are bringing all the personal care items donated to the Food Center up to us for our monthly personal care item distribution during our 4th Saturday Lunch.

Please support the Food Center.

Thank You.

Book Discussion Group

Members of the Alton Area Cluster, an interfaith social justice group, **WILL NOT MEET IN DECEMBER.** The next meeting will be at our church on **THURSDAY, JANUARY 16** from 4 to 5:30 pm to finish our study of "*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*" by discussing Steps 8 through 12. If this sounds interesting to you, please plan to join us. Everyone is welcome. Questions – contact Mary Johnson.



Amal Kambal joined

the church recently. Please introduce yourself and make her feel welcome. Her contact information is given in the November 4 issue of the Church Directory.

Lay Caring Ministry

Below is the list of members of the Caring Ministries Team.

Marcia Custer is the Coordinator. You may always contact a Team member in time of illness, loss, crisis, or other need. Keep this list of contact people available in case you or your family is in need of pastoral support.

Kathryn Chapman paintedgoatfarm@yahoo.com

Marcia Custer mcuster@siue.edu

Claudia Harju dachsandcats@gmail.com

Char McAllister charlenemcallister613@hotmail.com

Kathleen McKeever mckeeperjim@sbcglobal.net

Catherine Nofles cnofles@gmail.com

Ethel Potts ethel.h.potts@gmail.com

Donna Young donnae47@gmail.com

Khleber Van Zandt 314-223-0551
kvanzandt@uuma.org

The Caring Ministries Committee is ready to welcome several more members! If you are interested in engaging in conversations with other church friends and getting to know them on a deeper level, please consider joining our group! Please contact Marcia Custer at mcuster@siue.edu for more information.

SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING OF CHURCH MEMBERS

Sunday, December 15

following the 2nd service

The agenda will include a proposal as requested at the May annual meeting to amend the Endowment Fund section of the Bylaws. The following is the proposed language:

In the event that the Board deems it necessary to withdraw funds from the Endowment Fund over and above the spendable income formula, it will provide the congregation with an explanation of the need for such a withdrawal thirty days prior to the meeting as part of the notice of a regular or special congregational meeting. Such a special fund withdrawal, as proposed by the Board and/or revised at the congregational meeting, requires a motion to that effect approved by a 2/3 majority of those members present and voting.

A PDF copy of the complete Bylaws with this proposal incorporated was sent by email. Copies will also be available at church.



UU Central Midwest District Women & Religion

Winter WomanSpirit 2014

Wisdom for the Journey: A Weekend with Sue Monk Kidd

"Ms. Kidd is one of the foremost explorers of the feminine divine and spiritual creativity for women. Her fiction works dance on the edges of magical realism as she celebrates the connection between writing, creativity, and soul; and her non-fiction writings have provided a map for women seeking to expand and reclaim their own spiritual power."

Date: February 7 – 9, 2014

Where: DuPage UU Congregation, Naperville, IL

Registration fee: \$175

To register online go to <https://www.regonline.com>

Hotel: Hilton Lisle in Lisle IL (hotel accommodations **not** included in the registration fee).

For hotel reservations call 1-880-552-2599 or to reserve online go to www.hiltonlisenaperville.com and proceed to the reservations tab. The group code for the WomenSpirit weekend is CCMW



December Birthdays

Most people enjoy getting a card, email, or phone call on their birthday. Below is

the list we have of church members and friends celebrating birthdays this month. If you do not think the church office has your birthday on file, please contact Becky Green at church@firstuualton.org and give her that information.

12/05 Benjamin Hoeft, (11)

12/05 Cody Wucher

12/06 Melody Hardman

12/07 Mary Weber

12/16 Linda Van Zandt

12/18 Layne Simpson

12/23 Wendy Moore Hershey

12/23 Marty Moore Johnson

12/28 Sara Schulz

12/31 Eric Johnson



Chalica!

Chalica is a weeklong celebration of our Unitarian Universalist Principles. The holiday first emerged in 2005 out of a wish to have a holiday organized around Unitarian Universalist values. Chalica begins on the first Monday in December and lasts seven days. Each day, a chalice is lit and the day is spent reflecting on the meaning of that day's principle and doing a good deed that honors that principle. Not all Unitarian Universalists celebrate Chalica, but it has a growing following. There is a Chalica Facebook page, blog, and many Chalica-themed videos on YouTube.

<http://www.uua.org/worship/holidays/174566.shtml>



December RE Program News & Notes

December Schedule

Date	Grades Pre-K-6 th	Youth Group
Dec 1	Begin in sanctuary; finish in classroom	Meets
Dec 8	Begin in sanctuary; finish in classroom	Meets
Dec. 15	Intergenerational Yule Service; children remain in the sanctuary for the duration of the service	Does not meet
Dec. 22	Intergenerational Christmas Service; children remain in the sanctuary for the duration of the service	Does not meet
Dec. 29	Dreidel in the Emerson Room	Does not meet

Social Action December Opportunities

Guest at Your Table 2013

The RE Program will join with the congregation and other UU congregations from around the country in the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee’s *Guest at Your Table* program.

For more than thirty years, the Guest at Your Table tradition has helped UUs build lasting connections for UU principles and support the movement for universal human rights. It is a simple and meaningful way to incorporate “faith in action” into your life.

Beginning in late November, participants make daily contributions to Guest at Your Table, as if sharing a meal with special guests. We will collect the boxes in December or January; all contributions go to support the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee in their vital work. UUSC advances human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing resources to challenge oppressive policies.

Oasis Women’s Center—Adopt a Family

The RE Program leads the church in sponsoring the Oasis Women’s Center. The Center provides housing for women and children that are victims of domestic violence. We will sponsor one family this year. That means five total items per family member with a value of less than \$30 for each item. When we get specific information about our family and what they really need we will post a sign-up board in the Kate Wuerker fellowship hall.

Alton Community Christmas Collection

In support of our wider church community, the RE program will contribute to the Alton Community Christmas program, which provides Christmas to families in our region through the donations and charitable giving of churches, businesses, and individuals. Fourteen local agencies have been chosen by the program’s sponsors – the United Way and the Alton Telegraph – to receive the toys and clothes we donate. There will be a contribution box in the Kate Wuerker Room so please bring in your donations to church.

So, what to do? Take your children shopping, have them pick out a few items for this program, and put them “in the box” at church. Requested items include: toys, new coats, new socks, blankets, stocking caps, gloves, and mittens; also diapers and personal care items. This is a wonderful way for children and adults to share the bounty of their lives with needy Alton families.

Juliette Crone-Willis
 Acting Religious Education Coordinator
jrcronewillis@gmail.com
 314-482-5239 (cell)