

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS



Photo by Rev. Sunshine Wolfe, 2015

Newsletter of the
**First
Unitarian Church**

Alton, Illinois
www.firstuualton.org



Rev. Sunshine J. Wolfe, Pastor

December 2015

Sunday Worship Services at 10:15 a.m.
Saturday Vesper Service at 4 p.m.

Each weeks' Saturday Vesper service is a Soulful Sundown service with meditation, silence, readings, and singing.

DECEMBER THEME: Hope

December 5th – 13th: Worship Services are held at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday and 10:15 a.m. on Sunday. Each service covers the same topic. Saturday is a Soulful Sundown service with meditation, silence, readings, and singing. Sunday is an intergenerational service with more ritual, movement, a sermon, readings, and music.

December 5 Vespers

December 6 Hopefully Speaking

With Rev. Sunshine J. Wolfe

Worship Associate: Sabrina Trupia

What is hope? We will explore the necessity for and struggle with hope in our lives.

December 12 Vespers

December 13 Hope without God

With Rev. Sunshine J. Wolfe

Worship Associate: Mary Johnson

What does it mean to be in the “season of hope” when that hope does not involve a next life or notion of God? What does Humanism and Atheism have to teach us about the hope natural to the world and the human experience.

December 19th – January 3rd: We will have one Worship Service each week at 10:15 a.m. We will return to our regular schedule January 9th.

December 20 Would You Like to Hold the Baby? With Rev. Sunshine J. Wolfe, Ron Glossop, and friends

This Christmas Pageant celebrates the gift of babies in our lives and the hope that new life brings to each of us. We will need many volunteers from the pews and hope everyone who can will attend.

December 21 at 7:00 pm - Return Again: A Winter Solstice Service - with Rev. Wolfe Worship Associate: Joy Hoeft

December 24 at 9:00 pm - Wonder-Lit Night: A Christmas Eve Vespers Service - with Rev. Wolfe Worship Associate: Dee Evans

December 27 - Ringing in the New - with the Worship Associate Team

The Worship Associate Team will explore the theme of hope through a ritual of letting go. What must we let go of to allow hope for the possible to fill our spirits?

ADULT RELIGIOUS ENRICHMENT (ARE)

Inspire Programs:

December 6 - 11:30 am

Intergenerational: Decorating the Church

In combination with our monthly potluck, we will be decorating the church. From longtime décor to new items we create, this will be an opportunity to celebrate the holiday season.

December 13 - 11:30 am UUANI Conversation

Rev. Bill Sasso will provide an introduction to the work of the Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois and then facilitate a conversation to receive feedback on areas of interest in our congregation around social justice.

~

December 13 - 9:15 am in the Emerson Room

Issues of free will, good & evil, Heaven & Hell, and the ineffability of God are addressed in Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman's popular 1990 book *Good Omens*. Its tongue-in-cheek story begins with the arrival of the Antichrist as a new-born baby. The Earth's is imminent. Aziraphale, agent from Heaven, and Crowley, agent from Hell, don't want that! They both prefer living on Earth, for it is a more interesting place.

Ginger McCall will lead the discussion. Come to find out some of the "Revelations."

~

Dec 20 & 27 - 11:30 am "The Seekers" will meet in Emerson Place.

Pastor Wolfe Vacation Schedule

Pastor Wolfe will be on vacation from December 25th until January 7th. As always, Pastor Wolfe is available in the event of emergencies.

December Monthly Theme: Hope

This month our theme is *Hope*. Here are some resources to help ground our exploration.

Adult:

Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities by Rebecca Solnit
Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future by Margaret J. Wheatley

Youth:

A Thousand Never Evers by Shana Burg (novel)

Children:

On That Day - A Book of Hope for Children by Andrea Patel
Hope is a Ferris Wheel by Robin Herera

Race in Film: Dear White People

**Friday, December 11th at
7:00 pm**



Each month, we will have a movie or documentary that involves race and racial experience with a discussion to follow. This month we view the award winning movie Dear White People. This comedy follows the lives of four black students navigating a predominantly white college.



From the Editor

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Newsletter Deadline is on the 15 of each month. Send info. to Dorothy Wilson djjcw@sbcglobal.net and to Becky Green at church church@firstuualton.org

Healing Hope

It can be difficult, at times, to have hope for the future. With the bombings in Beirut and Paris, environmental disasters, racial violence, and the many things that plague our world, it is hard to have hope. With the daily struggles of living, making ends meet, navigating our children's complicated lives, and living with illness and death, it is hard to have hope. Yet, most humans being are able to plow through with hope for the future - and not without good reason.

Our media - whether it is news or books or movies or TV - keep us focused on the difficult things - because it sells. Yet, even then we turn our attention not to those things that make us feel good, but those complicated messy things that hold us to the good things and bad things living side by side that at the end of the day are worth our time and our presence. When we are able to hold these two things in our hearts, there hope can abound.

In their book, [A House of Hope](#), Revs. Drs. John Buehrens and Rebecca Parker talk about the importance of liberal theology to be a place of hope in a world of struggle. They state that metaphor is an important tool to help us imagine the future and that the metaphor of a "theological house" allows us to frame "frames that give our dreams shape and meaning." Understanding our liberal religion as the foundation that helps us find a home for our dreams - our hopes and visions - can guide us through the difficult time and lift up the wonderful times - particularly when they live side by side.

Unitarian Universalism says "yes to life." We say yes to community, to connection, to accountability, and to integrity. We say yes to making meaning and to letting each of us have our own unique definitions. We say yes to listening to the wisdom of Christianity, Humanism, Islam, Hinduism, and much more all in the same breath. In our theological house lives many lives and much diversity. Yet we lay it on the foundation of the generations before us. We live in it with the people in our lives today. We maintain it for the hope of generations to come.

This holiday season, I invite you to consider who or what or where has given you hope -

particularly in the face of tragedy or struggle. Perhaps it is the snow or the rain. Perhaps it is a loved one who died long ago. Perhaps it is a child in your life who reminds you of the possible. Hope reminds us that there is more than just now-in-this-moment. Hope calls us to a vision beyond our own individual lives. Hope lights our lives in possibility and wonderment.

There is an internet meme that says, "Remember that you are the product of the love of thousands." You are the product of the hope of thousands. Every generation has been met with struggles that left them wondering if there was a future. Live in this moment remembering all that you are connected to and all that is to come. Holding on to the love for the possible allows us to stay open to the possible gifts for the future. It reminds us that, yes, there is environmental destruction AND there is a teenager who invented a way to get all of the plastic out of the oceans. There is war and terrorism AND in Beirut and Paris thousands have given up their homes and their resources to care for their neighbor. There is illness AND there is the love of family, friends, doctors, nurses, and so many others to walk with us if we let them. There is struggle AND there are communities of connection with a will to reshape the world.

In this season of hope, as the days grow shorter and the world around us colder, may we remember that the spring will come. May we remember that we have this church and one another. May we bring warmth to those who despair. May we offer possibility in the face of uncertainty. May we be the vision of hope for the future.

Blessings on the journey,
Pastor Sunshine

Congregational Covenant

Approved May 17, 2015



To strengthen and nurture with love, compassion and respect, we covenant to:

Honor and make space for our diversity, respect our volunteers, leaders and staff by supporting balance in their lives and in their personal and professional pursuits;

Encourage each member to develop a personal spiritual practice that cultivates honesty and acceptance;

Remembering our humanness we acknowledge our imperfection and extend forgiveness to ourselves and others;

Engage within our own and larger community with integrity, by taking responsibility for our actions, facilitating right relationships, and living into the Journey.

(The acronym for our Covenant is [HERE](#))

Alton Area Cluster Book Club



The Alton Area Cluster Book Club will not meet in December but will meet on Thursday January 14th to continue the study of *“Ferguson & Faith: Sparking Leadership & Awakening Community.”* One

need not have read the book to attend as we will be reading it together at the meetings.

Church Potluck Lunch December 6th @ 11:30 am

Our monthly fellowship potluck lunches are held on the 1st Sunday. Everyone is invited to bring a dish to share & stay to help clean up.



Ministerial Search Committee
Latest News

Greetings!! Big news! We have SENT the final draft of the highly informational Congregational Record (CR) and ministerial search website to our Ministerial Settlement Representative, Rev. Emmy Lou Belcher!! This is such a huge step! Emmy Lou will review the CR and return it with any revision suggestions she feels would enhance the document. It will then be forwarded to Rev. Keith Kron from the UUA Transitions Office. The CR will be unveiled mid-December for prospective ministerial candidates! You will also be able to access it by getting the password from any of the MSC. This was a challenging document to update from our last search, and we're very pleased with the end results. It was a group effort; however most of the credit truly belongs to Robyn Berkley for many hours of data input and revisions. Thanks for the hard work, Robyn!!!

The search website will be available for perusal in January! It is password protected as well, so you'll need to get that information from any member of the MSC if you'd like to look at this lovely introduction to our special place. It starts off with beautiful welcoming letters from our Board President, Debby Lovell, our interim minister, Rev. Sunshine Wolf, and one from me as well. It contains videos, pictures of the church and local sites, has the survey and CR included, as well as a fabulous assortment of info about First UU of Alton.

Speaking of the survey, those of you who have (current) emails listed with us should have received an email with the survey attached. If you would like a hard copy of the document, there are several copies on the newcomer desk or you may contact Becky Green, our administrative manager. The survey is comprised of very interesting statistics about our special place, since 60 members and friends participated in filling it out. Thank you all so very much for the perspectives you shared as it sincerely assists the MSC in finding our next settled minister. And thank you to Kelly Crone-Willis for making the survey user friendly, and then Robyn Berkley for making the data more understandable.

Please remember that we will not be able to divulge names, locations, or personal information about the ministerial candidates when we have them and we are obliged to maintain this confidentiality. However, we are more than happy to discuss all procedural matters with members of our congregation. Please contact any of us on the search committee if you have questions!

Warm regards,
Nance Conniff, MSC Chair

Update on Children's RE

The Nursery continues to need volunteers to help during Worship Service and then afterwards for Religious Education. Please contact Kayci for more information.

The kids in Spirit Play continue to enjoy listening to stories and associated play.

Elementary age kids continue to learn about UU principles and life skills by listening to Dr. Seuss stories and activities. If you are interested in reading, contact Ed Navarre.

Youth Group met in October and began planning their social service projects as well as a birthday party for Ben in December.

The first Sunday of the month, which is also Potluck Sunday, will be an "Intergenerational RE Sunday", led by Sunshine and Joy.

Last month, we had a Social Service Project to show the 7 St. Louis churches that were burned that we supported them and cared. Adults and children signed, and provided thoughts and prayers. They were then sent to each church.

Keep the Date
SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING OF
CHURCH MEMBERS
Sunday, January 24th,
following the service.

Thank you

to those who contributed money to purchase new valances for the Kate Wuerker Room windows. \$175 was donated. Full length curtains have been purchased at Home Goods and will be cut down and the pieces made into valances by Nance Conniff. Some money was left over and will be used for further décor enhancements.

Mission and Vision Statement



Work continues on the mission and vision statements. Members of the congregation met in October for a day-long workshop to discuss what the church wants to be known for in our community and the wider world, and where the congregation wants to be in five or more years. A writing team took the working documents and synthesized draft statements, as follows, which were presented after service November 15.

Mission draft:

Outward Reaching Inward Seeking.
We are creating and nurturing an intentional community that values social justice, acceptance and the embodiment of UU principles. Let us question together.

Vision draft:

Social Justice: We are a beacon for social justice work in Alton and beyond.

Inclusivity: We are a welcoming home for a diverse community who find their identity in shared UU principles.

Education: We are spiritual learners at all ages and provide space for growth.

Celebration: We recognize and celebrate our world.

Communication: We communicate our mission and activities well in a variety of formats.

If you weren't able to make that presentation, please let us know your thoughts! Contact KayciLueker (kcintheam@gmail.com) with any questions, suggestions or general comments. You may also join in two more fireside chats on December 6 and 20. The writing team will continue to hone these messages and finalized statements will be voted on at our semi-annual meeting, January 24. Let's further our agenda of love and justice by creating easily shared statements of our truth!



Summary of Board Meetings Oct. 27 and Nov. 12

The Board is continuing work on a church Policy Handbook. Sandy Shaner is preparing the documents for Board approval. In October, policies on direct assistance, Board liability, and undertaking of new projects were approved. The policies on building use and service animals are in process.

The Search Committee is continuing its work. Our packet will be sent to the UUA Transitions Team for approval in December. It should be available to prospective candidates by mid-December. The Congregational Survey results have been made available to all members. A Chili Supper was held, with invitations sent to those who have not been at church, with the hope of getting them to have a chance to participate. A Negotiating Team of Kelly Crone-Willis, Pat Moore, and Gerry Gilman has been appointed by the Board to write a contract to be offered to a ministerial choice. They will use the UUA-suggested document as a guideline.

Rev. Wolfe reminded us that he cannot interfere with the search process, but can serve only in a pastoral counsel. Ghe says that some work is still needed on the RE program. Ghe also has concern that all members do not really know the history of our church, so he will be doing some work on teaching that in some future sermons. Ghe is making \$300 from gher discretionary fund available for behavior training of service dogs. All UU's from Edwardsville have been invited to a meeting on December 11.

A policy on service animals is being prepared. As a church we do not have to abide by the ADA policy of Illinois, but we do want to be welcoming, so we will use that as a guideline for our policy.

The sign above the door on the Alby Street side still needs to be changed, as it still has Rev. Van Zandt's name.

A policy on building use is also in process. Color Concepts has been chosen as the contractor for the painting of the sanctuary. That work can proceed after repairs to the flats roofs of the steeples has been completed.

A Right Relations team is being formed to write a policy of how to proceed when a member is out of covenant.

We still need to find chairs for the Canvas and Racial Justice committees.

Our banners have been placed on the towers thanks to Kelly and Kelvin Crone-Willis. (They were blown down by strong wind after this meeting, but will be replaced ASAP.)

Our congregation has received an award plaque from the Mid America UUA region for our work on racial justice.

An interest in sending some members to Leadership School was expressed. Since it has been cut from the budget, we would need to seek other funding.

We would like to become more involved in the United Nations UU Organization and the UU Service Committee.

The 4th Saturday lunch program needs more volunteers to proceed into January.

The annual Congregational Meeting has been scheduled for January 24, after church.

The next Board meeting will be December 10 at 7:00 pm. Any member may attend Board meetings.

Pat Moore, Board Secretary

INTEREST GROUPS:

Anna Ds – Women’s Alliance **December 3rd, 11:30 am**

At our most recent meeting (hosted by Ginger McCall at the lovely Meridien Village dining room) we decided to revise our winter plans a bit. Instead of going on hiatus during December, January and February, we decided we'd set a time (still 1st Thursday at 11:30) and place and an open call to anyone who can/wants to come. That way, if the weather/driving conditions are good, you may want to come out and spend some time and, if it's not, we don't have to worry about cancelling (how bad is it throughout the area, when to cancel, etc.)



We decided on Best Buffet in Wood River on the hill across from Wal-Mart as the place; the formal address is 615 Wesley Drive and the phone number is 618-258-1888. So let's hope for good weather on those days so we can get together and check in on what's happening. There's no need to RSVP. If the weather is good, I'll see you there. If the weather's bad, there's always the next month.

Free For All (formerly 50 Plus) **Nov. 7th, 10:30 a.m.**

This group is on a winter hiatus for the months of December, January and February. On March 5th, we'll again take up the DVD series on UU history “**Long Strange Trip: A Journey Through Two Thousand Years of Unitarian History**”

Men’s Monthly Lunch **December 10, 11:30 a.m.**



The men’s lunch bunch - (Retired old Men Eating Out) - meets on the second Thursday of each month. Join us at the Best Buffet at 615 Wesley Dr. in Wood River. All men in

our church are invited (retired or working, old, or not). For further information contact Paul Herbert pphebert@mail.com.

The Kitchen Klub – a group of people who want to change the kitchen cleanup culture – are inviting everyone to participate in our new program called “**Wash, Dry, Put Away.**” If you have a meeting or gathering at church that involves food or drink, we encourage you to make sure that the dishes used are washed, dried, and put away – not left in the meeting room, or in the sink to be washed later by someone else, or left drying on the drain rack to be put away by someone else. This effort on the part of everyone using the church facilities will keep the kitchen neater, and provide an equitable way to get cleanup tasks done.



Small Group Ministries

Goals of Small Group Ministry are to develop a growing network of small groups that:

1. Draw us into mutual ministry
2. Strengthen our congregation
3. Deepen our understanding of Unitarian-Universalist principles and values
4. Continuously develop lay leadership
5. Challenge us to action and spiritual growth
6. Express our principles and values in the community
7. Help members identify their own calling and expression of lay ministry

The members of the small groups have decided to continue through the winter, but only once per month, rather than every other week. Both groups would welcome new members.

Jennifer Timpe’s group will now meet one Sunday per month, at 11:30 a.m. with the following date to be determined at each meeting. They will not meet in December.

Sandy Shaner’s group is meeting the 2nd Wednesday of each month, at 5:30 p.m.

December's 4th Saturday Lunch

December 26th

11:00 am



This year, 4th Saturday lunch will fall on Saturday, December 26th, 2015, the day after Christmas. As such, we know people are busy with family and other personal obligations during the holiday season and we anticipate being rather shorthanded. We were fortunate to receive a gift of Ham Shanks from a donation made to First Presbyterian Church. I will be preparing a meal using those Ham Shanks but we will be in desperate need of volunteers to help serve that day, and money to buy the remaining items for the meal. We will make Ham and Beans as well as scalloped potatoes and a salad for our luncheon that day. If we can get donations of Christmas cookies (please make an extra dozen and donate to the luncheon please) or even pies (apple or pumpkin) that would help us with dessert options. We will need volunteers around 10am to help us set up, and servers to help with lunch, which begins promptly at 11:30am. We will also need help getting the personal care items distributed to our guests. If anyone has ideas for gifts for our guests who are children (candy or treat boxes), all ideas/donations are graciously accepted! We'd like to make the lunch as festive as possible given the season!

On average, it costs us about \$100/month to feed our 4th Saturday guests and your past generosity is gratefully acknowledged. If you are able to make a donation to the 4th Saturday Lunch Fund for the December meal, or Food Ministries generally, please send a check with Food Ministries written on it so Becky can deposit it and credit it to the appropriate account.

We also welcome ideas for where to get outside funds donated to our Food Ministries fund. If you know of an organization willing to make donations to worthy causes, please contact me (robynberkley@yahoo.com) and let me know how we can go about soliciting a donation for support. A sign up list for volunteers and dessert items will be made available at church and will be posted on UU Friends Facebook site.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP 2015 - 2016

Board of Trustees

Board President - Debby Lovell

President-Elect - Dee Evans

Past President - Sabrina Trupia

Treasurer - Lisa Strangeman

Secretary - Pat Moore

At-Large - Paul Fischer

At-Large - Paul Hebert

Committee/Team Leads

Pastoral Care - Marcia Custer

Transitions Committee

Marcia Custer

Sayer Johnson

Sarah Lazarz

Social Events - Sayer Johnson

Interfaith and U.U. - TBA

Religious Education Council

Chair - Joy Hoeft

Nursery - Kayci Combs Lueker

Pre-K/Elementary - Ed Navarre

Youth - Juliette Crone-Willis

Adult - TBA

Administrative - TBA

Search Committee 2015-16

Nancy Conniff (co-chair)

Ruth Maskow (co-chair)

Robyn Berkley

Kelly Crone-Willis

Phil Embree

Mary Johnson

Layne Simpson

Stewardship Committee

Building and Grounds - Robyn Stranquist

Canvass - TBA

Endowment Fund - Kelly Crone- Willis

Finance - Matt Koch

Membership - Mary Weber

Sunday Support Ministries - TBA

Worship Associates

Dee Evans

Joy Hoeft

Yomi Kinder

Mary Johnson

Sabrina Trupia