

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS



Photo by Rev. Sunshine Wolfe, 2015

Newsletter of the

First Unitarian Church

Alton, Illinois

www.firstuualton.org



Rev. Dawn Fortune

Sunday Worship 10:00 A.M. The Theme for March is Miracles

March 5th 10:00 A.M.

First Sunday Luncheon!

Rev. Dawn

Worship Associate: Joy Hoeft

March 12th 10:00 A.M.

(Daylight Savings Time Begins)

Robyn Berkley

Worship Associate: Robin Crane

March 19th 10:00 A.M.

Michelle Bryant-Barbeau "Turn Toward the Sun"

Worship Associate: Robin Crane

March 26th 10:00 A.M

Rev. Dawn Fortune

Worship Associate: Robert Kokenyesi

The Seekers

Every Sunday, 11:15 in the Emerson Room, We'll engage in a more in-depth discussion of that day's sermon and the monthly topic. Everyone is welcome to join in. It's a great way to get to know your fellow congregants and to get a deeper understanding of the lessons we are learning.



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**)



From the Interim Minister



Greetings, Gentle People,

It is mid-February. The days are beginning to lengthen, we are mere weeks from Mardi Gras and the Lenten season of the Christian calendar. This is a time of anticipation, waiting, and hope. Spring will surely arrive (eventually.) It always has, after all.

As we watch the calendar and peruse seed catalogues, I am mindful that our time together is more than half gone. Your ministerial search committee is engaged in its process, and I am engaged in the search process as well. I have had several video conference interviews and will be visiting two different congregations during the search season. This means I'll be away a couple times in the coming months, making my already part-time schedule even more scant. I am working hard to make sure neither Emerson Chapel nor Alton UU bears the brunt of my travel schedule, but unfortunately, both will feel my absence.

The worship team is making sure that all Sundays will provide rich spiritual worship experiences, and I will be keeping you in my heart while I am on the road. Springtime in Southern Illinois is very different from the spring times of my youth. Growing up in New England, winter stretched into March, and sometimes April. I remember attending Easter mass as a child during a fierce blizzard. March and April were what we called in Maine "mud season," meaning everything from gravel roads to lawns to athletic fields were a squishy, sloppy mess. We had strict order to remove our footwear as soon as we got into the house, lest we track mud and dirt everywhere. The palette of nature was gray and brown for weeks while the snow and ice slowly melted and the first crocuses braved the chill to push skyward.

Here, that shoulder season between winter and summer seems to be significantly shorter. Winter has been cold, yes, but it doesn't seem to last as long, and it certainly does not deliver as much snow. Already I am seeing people begin to rake their yards in preparation for spring gardening and landscaping adventures.

As spring approaches, so does the conclusion of our church year. It seems absurd to consider the end so many weeks in advance, but history has taught me that the weeks fly by during this time of year. Worship is scheduled through the end of June, search schedules are taking shape, and I am beginning to look around at my collection of books and tools and wonder again how I'll manage to move them to a new location over the summer.

Our theme for March is "Miracles." Aside from college basketball metaphors, we can be intentional about seeing miracles. A miracle need not be the apparition of a religious icon in your breakfast cereal. A miracle can be a moment of peace in a hectic day. A miracle can be the presence of loved ones around us. When we think of how chaotic our world can be, it is an act of self-care to appreciate the blessings – the miracles, small or large – that happen in our lives.

Peace,
Rev. Dawn

Ministerial Search Committee Update

Thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts and hopes with us at our Fireside Chats. Your input is greatly appreciated as we search for our new Minister. If you were unable to attend a Fireside Chat, please feel free to reach out to any of the Committee members. Our "ad" is officially up and running at the UUA website. Hopefully we will attract some interest soon. Until then, please send up positive energy, prayers, good thought, etc. for the right person to come our way! ~Tracey Howe-Koch, MSC Chair



Mission and Vision Workshop

Dear Fellow members,

On Sunday March the 19th following our weekly service, we would like to invite everyone in the congregation to join us for a discussion on practical ways we can carry out our church's **mission and vision**. We would like this event to serve as a brainstorming session for the congregation to share ideas on what "Inward Seeking/Outward Reaching" means to us as a church. What are we passionate about? Which events would you like your fellow UU's to attend? Bring any and all ideas for how Standing on the side of Love can reflect our shared beliefs. Although we may be a small congregation, we have a lot to offer the communities in which we live so let's talk.

Sincerely,
Michael Schmidt and Dee Evans



From the Prez

Wow! Seems like Christmas was a week ago. It's now March and we can look forward to spring. It could be that time slipped by because I

caught the crud (that's the joking diagnosis my doctor gave it) and slept the time away for almost two months. Not being at church made me realize how much I missed everyone. I admit that I thought of the children first. I didn't want them to get the crud. I really missed seeing their faces. I missed seeing how they can grow and change in just a couple of weeks. I'll admit it. I missed all the adults too. I missed touching base with everyone.

Maybe that missing everyone made me realize how precious our group is and what this congregation means to me. Maybe that is why when I was crunching numbers for our upcoming budget and started to look for things to cut in next year's budget, I completely changed my thinking. This church is us, we the people, the congregation. I refuse to sell the congregation short. No, I am not going to cut having a nursery staff--our families need that. No, I am not going to cut a pianist--singing together brings us together. No, I am not going to say go out and cut the grass because I have so many allergies, I'd be asking you do to something I am unwilling to do. So, we will keep our lawn service. As I went down each budget item, I realized that we needed every line item to keep us the community we are. We have no fluff in the budget that we could eliminate and keep us as we are. It is this group that I missed so much while I was sick that I want to keep together.

There is something else I learned while I was sick. It is not just that I like the people of our congregation. They called willing to care for me--bring food, go grocery shopping, or get me to a doctor. But they offered more. I was very irritable and crabby. Then someone from church would call and my whole demeanor would change. Instead of remaining irritable and crabby, I realized that there were people out there who cared and they were from my church. I went from crabby to grateful. Grateful that I have people who care. Grateful that they are the kind of people who can help you go from crabby and irritable to grateful. By who they are, the people of our congregation help me to be a better person. They remind of the spiritual path I am on and support me in it. There is nowhere else that I know of that I could find people like our congregation.

I learned something else when I was sick. I used to get so angry when people would say we were a special church. I

felt as if that was putting down all the other great Unitarian churches.

But we are special. I don't remember any other church I attended that I really missed the people so much if I were gone a while. I don't remember another church where people reached out and nourished me both physically with food and spiritually. I don't remember another church that I felt as if something were missing from my life if I didn't go to the service on Sunday. This is not putting other churches down. It is simply a statement of who we are. We are special.

I hope when we have our workshop this month on how to carry out our mission, you come and help define that and give us an action plan: a plan that takes into consideration that we are a small congregation, but also a special church.

With great respect,
Dee

Community Lenten Services



Once again our church is participating in the Alton Community Wednesday Lenten Services organized by Church Women United. Note below that the last service in this Lenten season will be on Friday, April 13. All the worship services begin at 12:00 noon followed by a lunch at 12:30 put on by the host church. The cost for the lunch is \$5.00 per person, and a free-will offering is also taken to be divided between the Oasis Women's Shelter and the Crisis Food Center.

The host church keeps the \$5.00 per person fee to use as it sees fit – usually to pay for the food provided for the luncheon.

On Wednesday, April 5, at noon, the Rev. David Goins, pastor of Morningstar Missionary Baptist Church, will be preaching at our church. We will be responsible for doing a soup, sandwich, and dessert lunch for perhaps 50 people. Volunteers will be needed for a variety of tasks.

On Good Friday, April 14, at noon, Rev. Dawn will be preaching at the Greater St. James Baptist Church, 2016 Belle St. in Alton. Dawn would probably like to see some familiar faces in the audience.

Summary of Board Meeting February 16,



Web Site: Paul Hebert has been researching servers who host church web sites. The one he thought had the most potential is called In-Motion Hosting. It may offer more security and have a way to use password protection for private member information (like our directory). Since we have just paid for two more years of our current server iPower, we need to see if we can get a refund before changing servers. Paul and Debby Lovell will continue to research our options.

Ministerial Search: Our ad is up on the website where ministers search for part-time positions. Rev. Dawn thinks that we need to increase our salary offer to meet UUA recommendations if we want to get offers. Right now there are way more churches seeking than there are ministers in search, so we need to make ourselves more attractive. Also, they feel that asking for two Sundays every month in the pulpit may not be practical. Dee and Debby will work with the committee to improve our offer. The search committee has been having fireside chats to get your input about what you want from a minister, and it's important that you go for a chat if you want to have a say.

Incorporation: Robin Crane has been spending a lot of time researching our incorporation. She has found old documents that may prove we were incorporated as long ago as 1949, and should be grandfathered in from current requirements. So far the county has not been able to locate our papers in their records, and they did not even have us listed on their record of churches in Madison County (even though we've been here over 175 years now). Robin will continue her investigations at the court house.

Stewardship: Mike Schmidt and his team will be launching the pledge campaign in April. Be prepared to make a promise to show how much this community means to you by making a pledge. Think about what you can afford (hurts a little but you can do it). Be prepared to make a commitment to sustain and grow the mission of the church.

Minister's Report: Rev. Dawn's time with us is growing short. Feb 19 was their last sermon until April 16 and 30. They will be attending conferences, candidating for their next position, or preaching at Emerson. We will not have any more joint board meetings or the April joint picnic with the Emerson congregation. Their last Sunday in the

pulpit will be June 4. Some folks have asked for the oral "Joys and Concerns" to be returned to the Sunday worship service, but Rev. Dawn suggests we come up with some other way to help folks feel connected. Rev. Dawn also suggests that we should make an all-out effort to support ministry and hiring of a DRE, as these are the most essential elements for growth.

Treasurer's Report: All accounts of the church are now at Liberty Bank, and all US Bank accounts are closed. Dee is going to see if we can set up direct deposit for member's pledge donations. Robin has worked out an updated report of how we are doing, and now thinks we will end the year only about \$1500 short of our budgeted amount. This is mainly due to people who did not pay their pledges. The budgets are based on what is pledged, so it's important to pledge what you can afford.

Mission Vision Workshop: Mike and Dee will be facilitating a workshop for all church members after church on March 19. This will be a chance to give your ideas about what you think we should be doing as a church to further our Mission.

Miller's Mutual Building: The building has been sold to Simmons Insurance. Dee is thinking about what we can do to welcome them and become good neighbors.

T-Shirts: Lisa is working on getting a newly designed T-shirt that members can wear for work projects, demonstrations, parades, etc., so that we can stand out as First Unitarian Alton. It's been quite a while since we had our own T-shirt design. Lisa will have shirts for sale when she gets them.

UU Assemblies: Ask Dee or Rev. Dawn if you are interested in more information about attending the Midwest District Assembly in Oakbrook, IL in April or the UU General Assembly in New Orleans this summer.

The next Board Meeting is March 16 at 7:00 pm. Anyone is welcome to attend. Contact President Dee Evans ahead of time if you have business you would like added to the agenda.

Submitted by Pat Moore, Board Secretary



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

Religious Education for Children and Youth News

This is the Spring Semester for Children & Youth RE. We are continuing with the UU SuperHeroes Bible People as well as adding some sessions from the UU Famous People for Elementary.

The Youth Group will be continuing with the Popcorn Theology curriculum where we will be watching excerpts from movies such as Fields of Dreams, Oh God!, Little Buddha, Spiderman, Life of PI, Jesus Christ Superstar, Evan Almighty, Jurassic Park, and Gandhi. Each movie is associated with a life theme where afterwards lively discussion questions as well as associated activities promote thinking and expressing their values, views, and how our UU faith fits in to our life. There is also lots of laughter, popcorn and soda.

We are still very much in need of volunteers to be teachers and just second person in the room. Please see Jennifer Lewis or Joy Hoeft. Due to the lack of getting enough volunteers, the committee has decided not to have RE every Sunday. We encourage the children and Youth Group to attend church these Sundays when there are no classes.

Dates of when we **will not have RE:**

Mar 5, Apr 2 and April 16- Easter- should attend service. We'll have an Easter Egg Hunt after church also.

If you have any questions or comments about RE, please contact Joy Hoeft, kjabhoeft@gmail.com.



**Nursery services
are available for
children under 4
years of age.**

Baby and Child Dedication – June 4

As part of the Sunday service on June 4, Rev. Dawn will be dedicating babies and children. If you have a child you would like to have dedicated on that day, please contact Rev. Dawn – revdawnfortune@gmail.com or 314-399-1023.

Blessings

A Bit of History Whatever Happened to the Kiosk?



Some of you may remember the very large, 3 sided kiosk commissioned in the 1990s by the church Board to be used as a moveable bulletin board. It was designed and built by Gary Vondrasek, largely from recycled woodwork of the 1915-25 era. It was in use in the Wuerker Room for 20+ years until more space was needed

for additional seating in the Wuerker Room, and the kiosk was then moved to Emerson Place. Eventually, the kiosk was taken apart and repurposed as individual bulletin boards in the minister's study.

Gary's invention triangular drawer with minimal hardware



Did you know?

- Grace Madison who recently died was a major mover in establishing and maintaining our Endowment Fund?
- In February the Anna D's authorized a \$100 contribution to the Endowment Fund in memory of Grace?
- That anyone can make a personal contribution to the Endowment Fund at any time and in memory of anyone, just by putting a check (with Endowment Fund noted on the memo line) in the weekly collection?

Now you do!

CHURCH LEADERSHIP 2016 - 2017

Board of Trustees

Board President- Dee Evans
President-Elect- Michael Schmidt
Past President- Debby Lovell
Treasurer- Lisa Strangeman
Secretary- Pat Moore
At-Large- Robin Crane
At-Large- Paul Hebert

Committee/Team Leads

Transitions Committee - TBA
Social Events- Vacant
Interfaith and U.U.- Vacant

Pastoral Associates

Marcia Custer
Sandra Shaner

Religious Education Council

Chair-Joy Hoeft

Stewardship Committee

Building- Kelly Crone-Willis
Grounds- Robyn Stranquist
Canvass 2017- TBA
Endowment Fund- Kelly Crone-Willis
Finance- Matt Koch
Membership- Mary Weber
Sunday Support Ministries- TBA

Worship Associates

Mary Johnson
Robin Crane
Kayci Combs-Lueker
Joy Hoeft
Robert Kokenyesi
Dorothy Wilson

First Sunday Pot Luck Luncheon

Sunday, March 5th, 11:15
Come, enjoy good food and
fellowship with your UU
church community!



All are welcome!

Sincere Sympathy



To our former minister
Reverend Khleber Van Zandt
- his father died on Feb. 4th

And to Kelly Crone-Willis – his mother, Connie
Crone, died on Saturday 1/28/17.

Sympathy is also extended to
Paula LaFond and her family at
the death of her uncle, Gene
Ingram, on February 8, 2017.
Paula would sometimes bring
Uncle Gene to activities at the
church so several of us got to know him. Dr. Larry
LaFond officiated at the funeral service on February
11.



A Thank You Note

We have received a “Thank You” from the Oasis
Women’s Center for our support of a family at
Christmas. Through the support of individuals,
churches and community organizations, more than
165 women and children enjoyed a happy Christmas
in a safe environment. The “thank you”s from some
of the mothers and children will be posted on the
Social Justice Bulletin board at church.

Is It Your Turn to Do the Dishes?

No more than 30 minutes of your
time is required to clean up the
kitchen after a potluck lunch or
coffee hour. Please be sure you’re
doing your fair share of keeping our church home clean
and comfortable. Remember to always “wash, dry, and
put away.”



**Non-perishable foods items are always
needed to contribute to the Alton Crisis
Food Pantry. It’s important to help
our neighbors get the food they need.**

INTEREST GROUPS:

Fellow Book Lovers! Wednesday, March 1st, 6:30 to 7:30



Join us in the Wuerker Room for a lively discussion of "The Tribe" by Sebastian Junger <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/books/review/sebastian-jungers-tribe.html>

If you are interested, please contact Nancy or Phil Embree.



Anna Ds – Women’s Alliance, March 3rd, 11:30 a.m.

Our winter schedule is in effect, meaning we have a "come as you are", gathering at 11:30 at Best Buffet in Wood River on the hill across from Wood River Wal-Mart; the formal address is 615 Wesley Drive and the phone number is 618-258-1888. They are always open, we don't need a reservation and won't disappoint anyone if 2 or 12 arrive. If the weather is good, please come and join us. If the weather turns sour or is predicted to do so, stay safe and warm at home. If you can make, please remember to bring canned food for the food pantry!

If you have questions or information you'd like circulated to the group, just let Sandy know.

Men’s Monthly Lunch March 16th, 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 more information email Paul Herbert pphebert@mail.com



Healing Energy Meditation March 13th and March 27th 6:30 p.m. by the Fireplace

Powerful guided mediations, words of wisdom, beautiful music, laughter, chanting, sharing, exploring the many paths to connect with the Light and to experience and Bless the Interdependent Web of Life. We bring no answers, only open minds and questing hearts. Please join us.

Alton Area Cluster Book Group

The Alton Area Cluster Book Group continues its reading of "Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race" by Debby Irving. The Group meets the 3rd Thursday of each month from 3 to 5 p.m. at the church. You do not



need to have read the book or have your own copy of the book as we read the book aloud, passing copies around, and stopping often to discuss a point or topic. The next gathering will be on **March 16th**. If you are interested in attending, or getting on the group email list, contact Mary Johnson. mejohanson@mindspring.com

4th Saturday Personal Care Item Distribution Saturday, March 25th, 11 A.M



Thanks to all who helped with our February personal care item distribution. Fifty-eight adults and 6 elementary school age children plus some babies came through our doors at

January's personal care distribution day. Besides having coffee, cocoa, and cookies available, we gave out 22 bottles of laundry detergent (all we had) and could have given out twice that much. We gave out over 120 rolls of toilet paper, plus toothpaste, soap, shampoo, deodorant – all those things that most of us take for granted that we'll always have at our fingertips. The March newsletter will come out too soon to give a count of February's distribution, but it will probably run about the same.

We are very grateful to those who have contributed, especially to the man who last week brought in over 25 bottles of detergent to help us get through February. Basic personal care items are always needed, plus "specialty" items like laundry detergent, baby wipes, shaving cream, African American hair products and liquid dish washing detergent. There is a bin at the bottom of the stairs for you to put your donations for March or find someone to carry them down for you. The Dollar Tree stores are a great place to purchase items needed for this community service activity of the church.

**Items Needed for March event
will be announced at a later date**