

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS



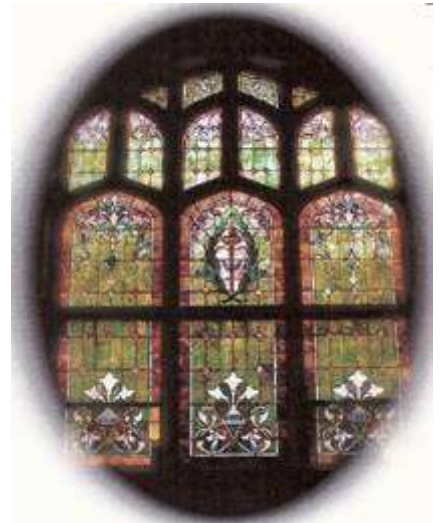
Congregation established 1836

Newsletter of the First Unitarian Church

Alton, Illinois
110 East 3rd St. (location)
PO Box 494 62002 (mail)

Office phone: 618-462-2462
<https://www.firstuualton.org/>

April 2021



Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m.
April 2021 Theme: "GRACE"

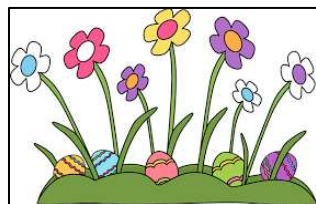
The services from April 4 through April 18 will premier on our church's YouTube site at 10:00 a.m.
Click on the YouTube icon in the upper right corner of the church's website.

The service on April 25 will be on the following YouTube site <https://youtu.be/HvNIIMCjDk4> at 10 a.m.
For a promo preview of this service go to <https://youtu.be/Ai3g3GbgDvc> at any time.

Due to technical issues, sometimes the services do not upload exactly at 10 a.m.
Check for a message on UU Friends Facebook page regarding the start of any service.

Our live Zoom "Coffee and Conversation" time follows at 11:00 a.m. at the Zoom link below.
<https://siue.zoom.us/j/726948775> (that's a j not an i) - PASSWORD: 551868

April 4, 2021
at 10:00 a.m. - EASTER
Speaker: Robyn Berkley



April 11, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Joy Hoelt

Sermon Title: "Unitarianism in 17th – 18th
century England and its arrival in America"

This is the second seven in what will be a once-a-month series entitled "Unitarian and Universalist History and the People who Influenced our Faith."

April 18th at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Cathy Daus

Sermon Title: "The Spirituality of Sustainability"

April 25th at 10:00 a.m.

UU Justice Revival - Taking a Collective Breath

Sunday, April 25th at 10 a.m.

Click here on April 25th to join us via YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/HvNIIMCjDk4>

Twenty-five Unitarian Universalist congregations in IL, the UU Advocacy network and UU Prison ministries are gathering to take a collective breath. As spring waits on the horizon, can we breathe? We can breathe as vaccines become available. We can breathe as we once again gather together. We can breathe into a new administration, breaths of accountability, breaths of attention. We have work to do to create a just world where everyone can find their breath. It is time to breathe. Let us take a collective breath together.

You can see a Promo Video now at:

<https://youtu.be/Ai3g3GbgDvc>

If people need help with doing their worship service videos, please get in touch with [Alex J. Hoeft](#). He would like to have the videos at least by the Friday before your service.

Robyn's Report

Greetings all. As we approach Spring and the end of our church calendar year, our hearts and minds turn to discussions of stewardship. This year we are taking a slightly different approach to stewardship. We are broadening our definition with the goal of engaging more folks in the work of the church.

While stewardship does mean money and donations, we also need your talent and time. Time ... talent ... treasure! We need your time and talents to help get the church and its grounds ready for our return to face-to-face services. We need volunteers to help serve in the Presidential rotation with me.

We need people willing to help with projects. We need people to engage with the programs we are developing to get our congregation ready for some hard decisions ahead of us. We need all of you to engage and support this special place. Look for news in the next few weeks about how YOU can best support our church. If you cannot support with financial means, please consider pledging volunteer hours in key areas to help us thrive and grow!

Love and light...Robyn Berkley
(President of the Board)

Among Our Church Family

Please keep **Carol McGrew** and **Jim Moore** in your thoughts and prayers. Both have had to go back into hospitals for additional care and treatment.

Best wishes to **Marcia Custer** who has moved into Cedarhurst Assisted Living facility in Edwardsville.

The memorial paver for long-time church member **Gerry Gilman** has been purchased and will soon be installed at the entrance to the Visitor Center at the Watershed Nature Center in Edwardsville.

There will be a Memorial Service on the church grounds on Sunday afternoon/evening May 16th to celebrate the life of **Sharona Johnson**. More details will come out closer to that day. A eulogy for Sharona, written by Robyn Berkley, is on the next page and was given as the opening of the Sunday service on March 7th.

IN MEMORY OF SHARONA JOHNSON

Good morning everyone. I wanted to open today's service by formally sharing with you the announcement of Sharona Johnson's death [on March 1]. For those of you who did not have the great fortune of knowing Sharona, she was a member of this congregation for longer than I've been here, and I've been here 11 years. She and her family have been an important part of this community for years. I thought I would get dressed up and try to make this announcement as light and airy as I could, but I decided this face of grief has to be the authentic expression of how I feel right now. We don't know many of the details but there will be people here to help us to share and let us know some of the answers to some questions we may have...how we can support the Johnsons, how we can be there for them in this moment of deep pain and grief. But we are going to do the best we can and I'm here not only as a friend but as the President of this congregation, to let everyone know that I am feeling this pain. And I know we are all feeling this pain together at the loss of this really powerful, wonderful, amazing individual. Let me give you a little bit of background and a little bit of thought about Sharona and her family and why they are so important to me and to this congregation.

Her husband, Sayer, has been a long-time member of this congregation as well, and he served in the Presidential rotation a number of years ago. Sharona led our caring committee, and she was very actively involved in having a very clear program of making sure that we reach out to people and that we give the support and care that they need in their time of trouble. All their children came through our OWL program and were active members of our RE program.

The Johnsons helped rebuild homes in New Orleans and in East St. Louis...they fed the disadvantaged with us on 4th Saturday lunches and provided personal care items to people who needed them...celebrated Mardi Gras and Día de los Muertos by our side...and were always looking for ways to put the church community first.

Campfest existed for years because the Mighty Johnsons believed we could find community, next to nature, overlooking the Illinois River in Grafton IL. And those memories for this congregation for those who were able to participate were powerful. That camping ministry was really wonderful for those years in which we were able to do that.

Although Sharona did not attend the church in the most recent year or so, largely because she was struggling deeply with a pain none of us can ever imagine. She was still loved and respected and her presence was missed. Or maybe you can imagine her pain...I can't speak to that...but I know that what she was feeling and experiencing was beyond my comprehension. I do know that her pain was vast and deep to the point where she felt that it was an insurmountable chasm, and she could no longer straddle the painful edges of that chasm and pain and fell into that pit of despair and decided there was no return. And that greatly saddens me that she experienced that pain so deeply and there was nothing we could do to help her.

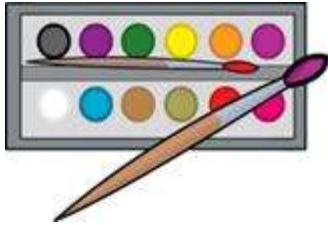
I have tried to come up with words to describe Sharona and what she meant to me and to many of us. The one word that comes up time and time again was FIERCE...she loved and lived fiercely and challenged all of us to do the same. She provided me with guidance how to be a better momma...she always had my kids' best interests at heart and always reached out to me to have conversations about this. She had compassion for so many...pushed all of us to be the best we can be because she just KNEW we had it in us! She lived large and loud and proud, loved large and loud and proud...loved her babies...loved her larger queer community...loved her church community. This church became a better place because of her and the Mighty Johnsons and they are at the center of a friendship circle that I will forever be grateful I am a part of. I can't imagine my life without them...without this church...and without the foundation of love they have shown me and so many others.

Sharona loved Blue Boat Home so we will play that song for her today...please sing it out loud and proud, and as loud as she would have done because she would sing that song at the top of her lungs and she would love every minute of it. While that song is playing, I have chosen a few photos that capture her energy and her essence. I see these pictures of her, and I think of her. My favorite is one with her holding Sallie Oldt's hand (we lost Sallie a number of years ago to cancer) when we were camping one year at Pere Marquette. So, take this moment to take a deep breath, to think of Sharona, to think of the Mighty Johnsons and how we can support them the best that we can. Please enjoy and sing one last song for Sharona...Blue Boat Home.



The Men's Group will be gathering on Zoom at 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 8th. If you are not on the Group email list, contact [Nick Pendergrass](#) to be added to his list to get the Zoom meeting link and passcode.

Children's News



Watercolor Class for Kids

The RE Children's Coordinator from Emerson Unitarian Chapel, John Blair, has invited our children / youth to participate in a free Zoom watercolor class on Saturday, April 17th from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

He writes: For the event, all that is needed are watercolors, 11" x 15" watercolor paper, and brushes along, with water in a cup for the brushes. If supplies are an issue, children may use crayons and/or colored pencils.

Let me know if anyone is interested, I will send the Zoom link. Feel free to ask any questions.

[John Blair](#)

Thanks to **Hedda Kirk and family**, the Children's Gathering Room in the back of the sanctuary has been thoroughly cleaned and restocked with activity supplies.



**Newsletter Contributions
Deadline April 26th
To Mary Johnson
mejohanson@mindspring.com**

Church Board

The Board will have its regular monthly meeting via Zoom on Tuesday, April 13th from 6 to 8 p.m. If there is an item you would like the Board to address, please contact [Robyn Berkley](#).

The position of President-Elect for this coming church year is open. If you are interested in learning more about this position, please contact Robyn.

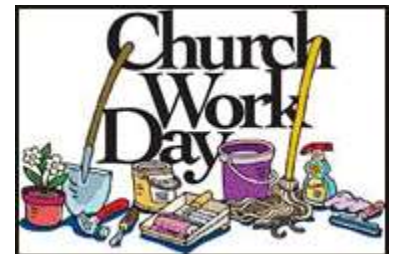
Happiness is a New Baby



Kathleen and Steven Mead (former DRE at Alton) are sharing the good news of the arrival of their granddaughter, Elizabeth, in February. Her parents are Robin and Shannon Mead. Kathleen says Elizabeth has her father's dimples and is a very good baby.

Stewardship Workday – April 10th 9:00 a.m. to 2 p.m.

As the time draws closer when we will be able once again to meet in person, there is ongoing building and grounds work that needs doing.



Thanks to those who came for the workday in March, and those who came at various times during the month to repair, clean, and do other tasks.

The workday on April 10 will focus on yard work and painting (benches, exterior doors, interior windowsills). Paint and brushes will be supplied.

If you plan on doing yard/garden work, please bring your own tools if you have them.

If you plan to come to this workday, RSVP to [Mary Johnson](#).

4th Saturday Personal Care Distribution



After a hiatus for over a year, we hope to restart up the personal care distribution program on April 24.

Initially it will be different from previous years. Volunteers and attendees will be required to wear masks – we have masks to give out to those needing them. We will not have a hospitality room with snacks and beverages, and those coming for products will not be entering the building. Social distancing will be required.

However, to have all this happen we need at least 4 volunteers from the church who have completed their vaccination regimen.

Details about the new distribution process are still being worked out but updates and reminders will be posted in UU Friends. If you have questions, want to volunteer, or have ideas about how to proceed with the distribution process, contact [Mary Johnson](#).

Financial Donations to the Church

You can now make a financial donation to the church through PayPal. The blue logo icon is in the upper right-hand corner of the church's homepage <http://www.firstuualton.org/>.



You may also donate using Givelify. Click on the large green square on the church's homepage.



Or mail your check to the church at PO 494; Alton, IL 62002.

A Note from Rev. Dr. Claudia Hall

I am part of an interfaith group (Women of Faith) that hosts a conference every year, and this year it is both on Zoom and free to attend for anyone. We ask that this not be shared on public Facebook groups, etc. but please do put this in the Newsletter and I hope some folks from First Alton can attend.

This year's topic is on *Dispelling Stereotypes* and we have speakers from Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Baha'i and Native American faith groups.

Topic: Women of Faith: Annual Conference 2021
"Dispelling Stereotypes Through Better Understanding"

Time: Thursday, April 8, 2021 10:00 a.m. to 12:00
Central Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82083856304?pwd=MGVYeDd5Q004xb2hKL015YldHRjdZdz09>

Meeting ID: 820 8385 6304

Passcode: contact Rev. Dr. Hall

If you have questions, please contact Claudia at dr.claudia.hall@gmail.com

Meditation

Whether the universe is composed of an infinite number of blind atoms or one all-seeing nature, two things are clear: first, I am a part of the universe governed by nature; and second, I am related in some way to the other parts like myself... Because I am related to the other parts like myself, I will not seek my own advantage at their expense, but I will study to know what is in our common good and bend every effort to advance that good and dissuade others from acting against it. If I am successful in this, my life is bound to flow smoothly, as one would expect for the dutiful citizen who is always looking out for others.

Marcus Aurelius, 121 – 180

**CHURCH LEADERSHIP as of April 2021
2020 - 2021**

Board Members

President: Robyn Berkley

robynberkley@yahoo.com

Secretary: Mary Johnson

mejohanson@mindspring.com

Treasurer: Nathan Brown

nathan.brown0621@outlook.com

Member at Large: Aiden Crist arexboi@gmail.com

Member at Large: Alex Hoeft

alex.j.hoeft@gmail.com

Member at Large: Carol McGrew

carol_mcgrew@yahoo.com

Member at Large: Pat Moore

patjimmoore@charter.net

President Elect: To be Determined.

**An Anna Ds Recipe
Pearlie's Secret Chocolate Sauce**

Back in the 50s and 60s the Anna Ds Women's Alliance made all sorts of canned goods to sell in benefit of the church. There was one "secret" recipe that was never shared outside a few Anna D members. They didn't want the recipe to get out because folks would then make it themselves, and not buy from the Anna Ds.

Later, after Dot Hull, the woman who held the recipe, passed on, and the Anna Ds no longer did canning, this chocolate sauce recipe was found and distributed to those interested.

A few years ago, Marcia Custer and Mary Johnson toiled in the church kitchen over pans of boiling water (sterilizing jars) and vats of melting chocolate to make 70+ jars of the sauce to distribute to those making financial pledge to the church during the annual stewardship drive.

The recipe yields no more than 5 cups and there is no preservative in it, so the sauce should be used up relatively quickly.

Ingredients

1 cup butter

8 oz. Baker's unsweetened chocolate

5 cups sugar

2 12-oz. cans Pet or Carnation evaporated milk

2 tsp. pure vanilla

Melt 1 cup butter and 8 oz. Baker's unsweetened chocolate

Slowly stir in 5 cups of sugar and 2 cans of evaporated milk

Add 2 tsp. vanilla

Cook until the right consistency [I guess you must figure out that yourself]

Pour into sterilized jars.

A Newsletter Suggestion from Mary Weber

Mary W. wrote: "I was thinking you could start asking folks to let us know via the newsletter what they were doing to get through the quarantine. I thought about this after I got an email from Sandy Shaner. She's been quilting but also volunteered to edit a friend's autobiography. There's a back story behind this, too. So, I started getting curious about what everyone else had done – might be some interesting quarantine stories out there."

So, do you have a story to share about what's getting you through this time of masks and social distancing? If so, send it to Mary Johnson in time for the next newsletter.