

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS

Newsletter of the
**First
Unitarian Church**
Alton, Illinois

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PO Box 494 62002 (mail)

Office phone: 618-462-2462

<https://www.firstuualton.org/>

Congregation established 1836.



Original Alton Unitarian Church
(photo from 1880s)
Dedicated October 1855



Present Alton Unitarian Church
(photo from 1909 postcard)
Dedicated October 1905

October 2021

There will be NO INPERSON SUNDAY SERVICES in the sanctuary until further notice. See possible exceptions in the list of October services. Generally, only those directly involved in putting on the service (i.e., the speaker, worship associate, pianist, and the tech team) will be in the building. Services will stream at 10 a.m. on YouTube at the church's homepage or <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSx-6KMgYdgv1zktuaPUTIQ>

The Zoom Coffee Hour follows almost immediately after the service (no matter whether the service lasts 30 minutes or an hour).

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88505584363?fbclid=IwAR0hRmxfn2ZSIo-U98VWOvq9-uXvxlkhIPC7nTK7YqfGa_u6v6ilbcknr5g

Passcode: 641343

FROM ROBYN: *I want you to know that I am as disappointed as all of you that the delta variant levels have prohibited us from continuing to worship in the sanctuary together. The Board feels this as well and we want you to now we feel the sadness of not being connected with you all in community. With that in mind we are going to try and experiment with outdoor services in October and November. If you care to join us on the property, weather permitting, we'd love to have you join us on-site for worship on the dates listed on the next page. Bring a chair and warm clothing, just in case. If the weather looks like it will be rainy, we'll let you all know Saturday afternoon through an email blast as well as via UU Friends.*

There are three articles on the following pages from Robyn Berkley regarding the church and its future. Some of you may have already received online the Update on the Stay and Go discussion, but Robin has also submitted the transcript of her presentation to the Alton City Council. Although these articles are fairly long, please read them to gain a better understanding what is happening regarding our church.



**WORSHIP
SERVICES FOR
OCTOBER**

October 3 – 10 a.m. (live stream)

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Claudia Hall

Title: “*The Jewish Festival of Sukkot and its Connection to the Hebrew Goddess.*”

Worship Associate: Robyn Berkley

October 10 – 10 a.m. (Outdoors at church, weather permitting)

Speaker: Sayer Johnson

Title: “*Grief and Pandemics: How to Find Comfort and Community in Impossible Times*”

Worship Associate: TBA

October 17 – 10 a.m. (Outdoors at church, weather permitting)

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Claudia Hall

Title: “*The Interdependent Web: our lives are in each other’s hands. A reflection on Medical Care in a Time of Pandemic*”

Worship Associate: Tracey Howe-Koch

October 24 – 10 a.m. (Outdoors at church, weather permitting)

Speaker: Robyn Berkley

Title: “*The Book of G’Kar: How Babylon 5 Inspired Me to Become a Unitarian Universalist.*”

October 31 – 10 a.m. (Outdoors at church, weather permitting)

Speaker: Jerry Johnson

Title: TBA

Worship Associate: Mary Johnson

Worship Associates Needed

If you think you might be interested in serving as a Worship Associate, please contact [Robyn Berkley](#) to get more information about the responsibilities involved.

THE PRESIDENT’S COLUMN



Greetings Friends,

The weather is getting cooler, and we are slowly moving into Autumn. I love summer but Autumn also holds a special place in my heart. The temperatures are more pleasant, humidity is abated, harvests are coming in, and you can feel the change in the air!

We are beginning the work to find a Minister for our congregation. We are taking care of the paperwork and will keep you posted when the search will begin. Mary Johnson, Pat Moore, and Carol McGrew are taking responsibility for the preparation. If anyone would like to be involved in the search process, let us know! We'd love to have you on board.

We are also working on the stay or go plans for the congregation. By now, if you receive emails, you should have gotten an email from Mary last week about our status to date. As well, that message has been included in this newsletter along with the message I gave to the City Council about the new Rotary Park adjacent to our church building. We are moving along and gathering as much info as we can to share with all of you! If you have anything to add or to share, we welcome your voice.

Lastly, a gentle reminder that if you have pledged, please continue to send in your pledges either via Givelify, PayPal, or via check. We appreciate all you can give to keep us afloat!

Love and Light, Robyn

UPDATE FROM THE "STAY OR GO" TASK FORCE



Greetings all ... I wanted to give you periodic updates from the Stay or Go Task Force. The goal is to emphasize transparency every step of the way so we can all make an informed decision about what to do with our building.

Some of this information we have already discussed through the town hall meetings that occurred right before the pandemic. Some of this information is new. We are considering past discussions and research done along with new research and opportunities as they present themselves to the congregation. There are major considerations to be made, and the values and priorities of the church must be put front and center in any discussion we have about our building. Accessibility is the highest priority as we need to ensure our church members with mobility issues can access the building. Ensuring we care for all members and their health needs has been front and center of our Covid policy and the same is true for our Stay or Go decision. Even if we can make the building accessible, however, the sustainability of the congregation is a concern as we navigate an aging population, and challenges growing the church during a worldwide pandemic. Even if we want to stay here, we may not be able to afford to do so. As such, our goal is to provide the research and realistic budget considerations so we can make an informed decision at our next annual congregational meeting in 2022. Periodic updates including a larger presentation will be given at our mid-term meeting in January, with the hopes of being closer to a decision by our June 2022 meeting. Recognize that this is an emotional decision for all involved and kindness and consideration should be our guiding principle as we work through these issues.

1) The task force has broken the options down into three separate items: a) stay in the building if needs can be met and we can afford it, b) sell the building and purchase a new building, and c) sell the building and space share with another congregation. These options are not new as this was established when we began the process 2 years ago. But we wanted to make these options clear, so we are all on the same page.

2) Stay options ... in order to stay, there are several things that must be taken into consideration. First, the building has to be accessible from the outside in, AND it needs to be accessible indoors enabling those with mobility challenges options to get to the basement if need be. Second, there are many repairs that need to be done in the building if we are to stay, not least of which are: fix windows in 4th Saturday distribution room and

at RE entrance, remediate the asbestos tiles and carpeting, fix the leaks along the rear of the building by digging down to the foundation, and address better air circulation in our old building. Needless to say, these options are VERY VERY expensive, and we are collecting estimates of what it will cost to fix these items so we can present them to the congregation. Parking is another concern ... some of which is addressed in #3 below but the congregation may deem these fixes insufficient. This we can address collectively when the time is right.

3) Accessibility - as many of you know, the City of Alton is donating the park land to the east of our building to help build a park that will be managed by the Rotary Club of Alton. We have been in constant discussion with the City Council, and I made a presentation at the City Council in the beginning of September about how this will impact our congregation. Our concerns were 3-fold ... parking ... accessibility ... conflicting events. After speaking extensively with Brian Campbell our Alderman for Ward 1, I can share the following information. All the curb space on Easton Street between Marquette High and the Park and our church are available for us to park there. Even if the curb is painted yellow, it was done so to avoid having people park there when we have church services and/or events. This is the best we can secure for accessible parking for our congregants given the geographic constraints. As well, Brian Campbell, Ray Strebel (Ward 3), and Carolyn McAfee (Ward 2) have assured me they will make sure the Rotary coordinates with our church as events are planned so we are aware of any conflicts and can plan accordingly. Lastly, Brian has shared they will be looking at securing TIF funds to build an accessible ramp from the corner of 3rd and Easton, along the wall (the river side of the park location) to connect with our eastern stairwell (which will disappear with the ramp installation) and sidewalk into our building at no cost to the church. There is already an accessible curb cut at that corner and this will enable people with mobility issues to be able to be dropped off and walk or wheel chair up an easy ramp with no stairs onto the church property. There is NOTHING they can do about the cobblestone ... because of its historic nature, the cobblestone will remain. Previous efforts to remove cobblestone throughout Alton was met with resistance so it is unlikely requests of that nature will be met positively. The task force has discussed ways to help those with mobility issues navigate the distance between the curb and the building entrance through the Wuerker Room. One option we are floating includes a mobility usher who can either push a wheelchair or navigate an electric cart to ferry people in and out of the building.

4) Go options - We reached out to a woman called the Church Lady who specializes in buying and selling church real estate in the STL area. She does not work in the metro east and recommended someone in our area. We are in discussion with them about a fair market price for our building. There are concerns, of course, that the building may not sell. The three alderpersons I spoke with strongly suggested that Simmons would be interested in purchasing the building if we want to sell. It is in a prime location, as compared to other church buildings in upper Alton with less desirable locations. While we need a solid estimate for the building, I feel confident if the congregation decides to sell, we are unlikely to encounter a major issue selling the building if that is what we want. Of course, nothing is certain until the pen hits the paper, so this still remains an issue of concern.

5) Building Sharing - We are in contact with two congregations in the metro east about potential building sharing. One is St. John United Church of Christ in Wood River. I contacted them this summer right before my father died but have not been able to follow up given my schedule. Now that this has my full attention, I will reach out again and set up a meeting. The other property is St. Paul United Church of Christ in Edwardsville/Glen Carbon on Bluff Road heading into the SIUE campus. Making the decision to share a building is not to be taken lightly. There are cultural and logistical issues that have to be considered as well as distance considerations for members of our church. Once we have begun information discussions with both locations, we will continue to do research about the pros and cons of an arrangement like this. The churches in Belleville that share space will be contacted so we can explore what we should be thinking about as we consider this as an option.

6) Buying our Own Building - always an option but it can be costly. We know we don't want a store front as a church or church in a strip mall. As well, we have to consider distance from our current building and what impact this will have on church members and the distance they have to drive. Nothing has been explored on this point right now as our primary focus has been on exhausting all we can do to make our building accessible and repaired in a way that keeps maintenance costs managed. It remains an option we will continue to explore in the months to come once we have expenses for maintaining the building established.

Overall, we have a lot ahead of us as a congregation. No decision will be perfect ... we may gain some people and we may lose some people given our decision choices, but our goal is to first and foremost honor our UU values in making a decision that is best for our congregation,

and second, ensure that our church can continue to thrive and grow for the foreseeable future. Many of us love our current building, but the challenges we face are costly and we need to be realistic about what we can afford financially, and what we need for us to thrive. Please keep an open mind as we continue these updates. As always, we welcome your voice and encourage you to share your ideas with the Board and the task force members!

Cheers ... Robyn

**STATEMENT BY ROBIN TO THE ALTON
CITY COUNCIL – September 7, 2021**



To the Mayor of Alton and Members of the City Council: My name is Dr. Robyn Berkley, and I am here as the President of the First Unitarian Church of Alton, located across the street from City Hall and adjacent to the proposed Rotary Park.

The First Unitarian Church of Alton would like to make a statement about the park as it pertains to our Church. For many years prior to this proposal for the Rotary Park, the Church leased the land from the city and, apropos to the many questions asked during committee yesterday, maintained it on behalf of the city for decades. We cut the grass, planted flowers, managed the weeds in the sidewalk, and kept the area up. For years the church had held private hopes that we could utilize the park to make our church more accessible and expand the parking options in the area. We were told the charter on the land held by the city made that impossible. As well, unfortunately, despite being told we could lease the property in perpetuity, that lease was cancelled without discussion with us in advance and the trees and flowers we maintained for decades were cut down and we were told we no longer had the rights to use that land. As well, we were promised handicapped parking but that did not materialize either. While there is a handicapped drop off zone, that is still problematic for the many congregants we have who need closer access for drop off and pick up to our church.

With the renovation of the park, we would like to express our concern about the accessibility and parking in the area for the church, the park, and the surrounding area. The bottom line is we need the park and our church to be more accessible than it is now, not just the same long path through what may later be an active venue. If handicapped access to our church is limited to only times that the park is not in use and only through something similar to the path that currently exists, then many elderly and differently abled people will struggle to get to our building. With the parking as it is now, those same people will have a hard time utilizing the park as well. Between the cobble stones, crumbling walls, and the long distance between a reasonably flat sidewalk and our church entrance, the current situation is untenable for us and for our aging congregation. I can personally attest to the challenges of navigating that long sidewalk. When I had a total knee replacement, the pathway was exhaustingly long and difficult to navigate on crutches. If I were elderly and could only walk small distances, that pathway exceeds what can and should be expected of those who are differently abled.

Whether an elderly grandparent wants to see their great grandchild perform something in the park from their drama or band class at Marquette High School or see their grandchild get married in our church, they need to be able to get to there and have a place to park. The city needs to ensure that the needs of these people are met in any renovation that they approve. Parking on Easton need to be expanded and reworked allowing people to park close enough to the park and our building. We understand the legal and financial difficulty of official ADA handicapped spaces in this location so what we are proposing are spaces that may be used by anyone but recommended for those who are less able.

As for accessibility to our building and the park, one thing that would help would be a few grass parking spaces just over the sidewalk, or well-designed street parking in the front portion of the park that can be accessed from Easton, another would be a path from the corner of Easton and 3rd street that leads to the sidewalk beside our church.

The First Unitarian Church of Alton has been in this community for over 185 years. We have been an important part of this community, serving those less fortunate and providing a spiritual home for many for almost two centuries. Unfortunately, without better

general parking as well as handicapped parking spaces... without a more tenable, accessible way to access the church building... we feel like our back is against the wall and we are being forced to make a decision that breaks the heart of our congregation but will be necessary for us to survive and thrive, especially with our aging population. It was already hurtful to us as a congregation to have our long-term lease with the city cancelled unceremoniously. Without better parking and more accessibility, we will have to look elsewhere to move our church...perhaps out of Alton permanently. Then comes the challenge of selling our building or facing the possibility of leaving it vacant and the impact that will have on the city and the park itself.

We are asking the City Council to please consider our needs and the greater needs of the area as they review this proposal. We need reasonable access to our church that enables someone to get to our building without having to navigate old cobble stones and walking long distances. We need more than a handicapped drop off... we need real parking spaces... we need a plan for how to navigate the needs of the church, and especially when those needs are in direct conflict with plans for the park use. If there is a band playing while we have church services on a Sunday, this is a problem. If there are conflicting events on a Saturday night for example, a wedding, this impacts all involved due to noise and parking concerns. People don't walk to their neighborhood church any more... our congregants on average drive 20 minutes to get here from all over North County, STL, as well as the Metro East. So, while the park sounds lovely and bucolic, there are other issues the plans are creating due to limited parking, and accessibility issues. We are willing to work with people but thus far we have felt unheard. Yes, we've had meetings but meeting with people and being heard are two different things. If you value us as a part of your community, we need your help to keep access to our building viable.

Thank you for your time.

Note: Tom Cochran, a member of our church, also made a comment from the floor regarding accessibility.

Social Gatherings



Anna Ds on Thursday, October 7

The Anna Ds Women's Alliance will meet at [Bakers & Hale](#), 7120 Montclaire Ave,

Godfrey IL at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, October 7.

RSVP to [Sandy Shaner](#) by email or by phone by Monday, October 4.

Men's Group Lunch Meeting Thursday, October 14



The men's group will be meeting for lunch at 11:30 a.m. somewhere.

As the date draws closer a decision will be made as to where, and the usual participants

notified. If you have questions, or want to get on the Men's Group notification email list, contact [Paul Hebert](#) or [Nick Pendergrass](#).

The next Church Newsletter deadline is October 25. Send news items to [Mary Johnson](#).

4th Saturday Personal Care Distribution



Thanks to Nathan Brown, Mona Hebert, and Jerry Johnson for their help in September's

Personal Care Distribution for those in need. Twenty adults (and 4 children) came by for products. Laundry detergent, bleach, and body wash were the most requested products. In addition, everyone got a bag with toilet paper, masks, and hand sanitizer.

We plan to have the next distribution on October 23. Volunteers as well as financial and product contributions to support the church's community outreach program are welcomed.

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.

Church Board

On 9/28/21 the motion was made by Robyn and approved via an email vote from the Board members, to hire a surveyor to determine the dividing line between our church property and the park property. Having this survey done was suggested by Lucy Bouton.

In other church business, at its regular meeting on September 20, it was announced that our endowment fund is now at \$219,417.

Our total income to date from pledges and other sources is \$29,852, with expenses at \$10,161. A pledge statement will be sent out to each of the 25 pledging units to let them know how much they pledged and how much they owe.

Due to Covid concerns, we are not planning to host the Troy Taylor Haunted History tours this year.

For now, we will continue to have hybrid services with only those involved in the service in the building, with the possibility of having services outdoors in October so others can attend.

The next Board meeting will be on Monday, October 11, beginning at 6:15 p.m. on zoom. If you have anything you wish to have the Board discuss, please get in touch with [Robyn Berkley](#).

Below is a link from the UUA with guidance to churches regarding reopening.

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/delta-guidance>

JOB AD: Religious Education Coordinator

The First Unitarian Church of Alton, Illinois is actively seeking a part-time Religious Education Coordinator familiar with both virtual and in-person teaching. This individual will be responsible for implementing a curriculum plan for a single-classroom, multi-aged program with the class being offered two Sundays each month.

Currently this is a 20-hour-per-month position at \$17.00 per hour. The expectation is that the individual in this position would have approximately 5 hours of direct student contact per month, with the remaining hours devoted to planning, training, and program development.

Candidates must be knowledgeable about Unitarian Universalism and/or have experience teaching either in religious education or in a K-12 setting. Preference will be given to candidates who are Unitarian Universalists. Candidates must be able to pass a background check.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. The position will begin upon hire for a start no earlier than October 2021.

Please send your resume and cover letter describing your qualifications and why you are interested in this position to jobs@firstuualton.org.

An Opportunity for Alton Members and friends to Participate in Online Adult Learning Classes and Covenant Groups – Info from Mary Johnson

Jerry and I recently had the opportunity to visit with Steven and Kathleen Mead in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Steven was the DRE in Alton from 2009 – 2013. He is currently the Program Director at the Unitarian Universalist Santa Fe Church.

He has offered our church members and friends the opportunity to be part of live online programs offered at the Santa Fe Church.

<https://www.uusantafe.org/>

You may take advantage of these offerings by clicking on the links below.

Adult Learning Classes and Groups (Mountain Time is one hour later than Central time).

You are invited to participate in any or all of the online adult learning classes and groups. Found here

- <https://www.uusantafe.org/adult-learning-classes.html> (For instance the UU Blessing Path has folks participating from Toronto and Montana)
- <https://www.uusantafe.org/adult-learning-groups.html>

Steven has also offered to create an Alton Small Group (Covenant Group) and provide monthly *Soul Matters* Small group packets for this group's use – two weeks prior to the next month's theme.

If having an Alton Covenant Group is of interest to you, please find others in the church who want to do this and contact Steven at dre@uusantafe.org or call him at phone number: 505-982-9674 ext. 112. Office hours: 1-3 pm Sun-Wed



One of the gardens at the UU Santa Fe church.