

Metro East Unitarian Universalist Congregation Focus January 2025



*Newsletter of the
Metro East Unitarian
Universalist Congregation*



Masonic Lodge, Glen Carbon IL

Location: *Masonic Lodge – 90 Kriege Farm Road, Glen Carbon IL 62034*

Welcome! We hope to see you in person this month at our meeting place in Glen Carbon.

For those at home, the worship service will be live streamed each Sunday at 10:00 a.m. on YouTube (or click Virtual Services) on the church's homepage at <https://www.firstuualton.org>.

A “coffee hour” follows every service. Religious Education for PreK – Youth, and care for younger children is provided each Sunday.



January 5 @ 10 a.m.

Speaker: Robyn Berkley

Title: “Burning Bowl Fire Communion”

Summary: A ritual to bid farewell to the old year, and to release it. In a ceremony of the burning bowl, people are invited to write down words, or a phrase, to sum up what they wish to release before entering the new year. They then come forward to burn that piece of paper.

**RE classes – PreK, elementary, and youth.
Childcare for children younger than PreK.**

January 12 @ 10 a.m.

Speaker: Marlene Bricker

Title: “I Love Myself the Way I Am!”

Summary: I have a workshop on the same topic.

Bio: Bachelor of Science in elementary education; Master of Education, Guidance and Counseling. I owned an art business for over 20 years. I’ve been on a spiritual quest for over 30 years – Religious Science, Unity, Kabbalah. I was the spiritual director at a Unity Center for 5 years. My favorite intro is by Emerson: “Who you are speaks so loudly I cannot hear a word you are saying.”

**RE classes – PreK, elementary, and youth.
Childcare for children younger than PreK.**

January 19 @ 10 a.m.

Speaker: Lynn Murphy

Title: “Honoring the Dream: A Commemorative to Dr. Martin Luther King.”

Summary: In these uncertain times, it is good for us to come together in community to support one another. Dr. King spoke of beloved community. So, let us join together in the spirit of beloved community. We will celebrate the legacy of Dr.

King through songs and readings, lifting our hearts in hope and peace.

Bio: Lynn has been a member of Eliot Unitarian Chapel in Kirkwood, MO since the 1980's. During her years there, she has been a board member, a religious education teacher, a leader of children's worship, co-chair of the Welcoming Congregation Forum, worship leader for women's retreats and summer services, choir member, and a drum circle leader.

She currently leads an Earth-Based Spirituality covenant group and in the past also started and led a lgbt+ covenant group. She has coordinated the four UU churches marching in the St. Louis Pridefest. She has also led and co-led the Pride service at First Unitarian Church in the Central West End for several years. She also led the meditation group.

**RE classes – PreK, elementary, and youth.
Childcare for children younger than PreK.**

January 26 @ 10 a.m.

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Claudia Hall

Title: *"State of the Church & Midyear Congregational Meeting"*

Summary: Join us for an inspirational look at the amazing things we have planned for 2025 and a chance to give input on where you want us to focus our ministry efforts for the rest of the church year.

**RE classes – PreK, elementary, and youth.
Childcare for children younger than PreK.**

POTLUCK LUNCH – Please bring something to share.



Rev. Claudia's Letter

WELCOME EDEN JOHNSON!

I hope this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the holidays with loved ones. If you look around the church you will see that things are

jumping! We have lots of folks coming as visitors and joining as new members, and between this fantastic growth and some extra health challenges on my end, the Board has decided to hire someone to assist with all the in-person events and groups we have going on (and the even more we will have once we get a building of our own!)

This is an exciting time in the life of our church, and I hope that you will join me in welcoming Eden Johnson as he/they gets adjusted to this role and we all work to integrate new folks into our church. I'm going to answer a few quick questions here, but you can always email me other questions and we will have more time for discussion at the mid-year meeting as well.

- **Why are we hiring a new person?** So we can have an in-person staff member for events, pastoral care, etc., given Claudia's disabilities.
- **Is Eden a minister?** They are working on it. They have finished seminary and are going through the process, but as you may remember from Rev. Dee and Rev. Sabrina, it can take years! So for now, Claudia is the minister and Eden is their assistant, together they are a team providing ministry to MEUUC.
- **If Claudia has such health problems, why didn't we just hire a different minister?** There is a shortage of ministers in the UUA right now, since a lot of them retired during the pandemic. As a result, most will not move for less than a full time position, leaving us to look for alternatives as we can't afford full time yet. Also, the Board really wanted the continuity of having a minister who has been with us in one way or another since 2020 stay with us through getting land, building a building, and moving. Once we are settled in the new building, we will all reassess the situation and decide as a congregation what our ministry needs are and what will best serve us moving forward.
- **How much is this going to cost us?** At the moment, nothing extra. A generous donor is covering the difference in salary for at least this fiscal year.
- **So when I have a problem, who do I call?** Either of us! As a ministry team we work together to make sure that your needs are being met, and that includes making sure that your communications get routed to whoever is doing

the thing. In fact, we will shortly have team emails, so you just send one email and get all of us! So stay tuned for that.

- **Still have more questions?** Email me at dr.claudia.hall@gmail.com and I will answer any question you have.

I leave you with this blessing: **May 2025 bring us closer together as a community filled with love, hope, and justice. May the fire of our faith warm us in cold times, and may we share that warmth with all who need it, even as we ourselves adapt to change here in our community and in the larger world. Amen and blessed be.**

Pastor Claudia is on leave from Jan. 3 to 19, but in an emergency she can be reached by email at dr.claudia.hall@gmail.com

The Bible for Liberals returns!

Class will meet from 6:30 - 8 p.m. Central time on Zoom, on Jan 21 and 28.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83999230532?pwd=UuU2PgC5lYw2AYya6sZMOepDVsnbd.1>

In January we are studying how the Bible was interpreted by Jews and Christians from just after the Exile until the Enlightenment.

Classes will meet from 6:30-8 p.m. Central time on Zoom, on the 3rd and 4th Tuesdays of the month in Jan, Feb, March, April, and May. You can choose to attend only certain months if you prefer, as each topic is mostly independent, although they all do integrate with each other.



SNOW DAYS

Since we have folks coming from various parts of our area, please check the roads on your route to church to decide if you can safely drive on them.

In addition, in case of inclement weather (snow, ice, etc.) check your email (and UU Friends) before

coming to church on Sunday morning as the Board will make a decision by 8:00 a.m. about having virtual rather than in-person services.

FROM NANCEE MAGILSON

THANK YOU for your Donations to Oasis.

Members and friends of MEUUC donated \$600 this holiday season in support of a mother and her two children sponsored by the Oasis Women's Center in Alton.

Contributing to an Oasis family at Christmas was a tradition at the First Unitarian Church in Alton and we're happy that the tradition has continued at MEUUC.

Short and sweet Sunday needs: 3-5 Volunteers

Please let [Peg Flach](#) know which volunteer opportunity you'll choose and the January date you'll do it.

9:30 One Sign-in Volunteer

- Sit at the sign-in table and greet folks, direct any new visitors to Visitor Greeter

9:30 One Visitor Greeter

- Be available to show any new folks around, make introductions.

9:30 One + Congregational Host: coffee, snacks, signs

- *Before service:* turn coffee machine and power strip on & let it preheat for 20 minutes. Put out signs, set out treats using our environmentally-friendly paper supplies stored under the tables. Add water to make 2 regular, 1 decaf coffee.
- *After service:* bring in signs, clean up the coffee area, turn off coffee machine/power strip. Put trash out, our trash bags are under the tables.

8:45 Two to set up/tear down sanctuary (when needed)

Masons' Calendar as of December 27, 2024

More things might be added to their calendar as January progresses. The current calendar indicates that the Masons will be meeting on Thursday, January 2 and Wednesday, January 8.

THIS MEANS that we will need to:

Tear Down on Sunday, December 29.

Set Up on Sunday, January 5 and also Tear Down after that service.

Set Up on Sunday, January 12.

Additional Sundays for tearing down / setting up will be announced if the Masons' calendar changes.



Steps to Becoming a Member of the MEUUC Congregation

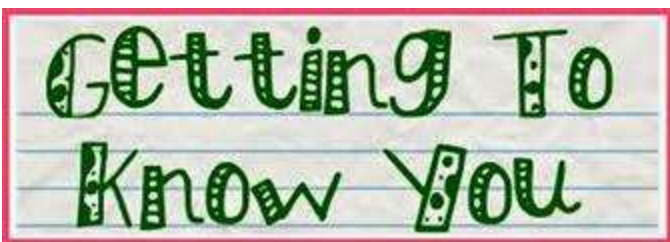
If you are interested in becoming a member of this congregation, please speak with Rev. Claudia

about the path to membership.

New Member Class Dates

January 27 at 6:30 p.m. on Zoom. Email Pastor Claudia for the link. dr.claudia.hall@gmail.com

This class is for anyone who wants to attend. It is geared to new members, or people wondering about joining. But it's good for anyone who wants to meet folks and learn about us.



To help us get better acquainted with each other we will be including autobiographies from new members. Here is **Brian Semmler's** autobiography.

I'm Brian Semmler and I've been married for 38 years to Joyce Semmler. We are blessed with 3 children, Alicia, Colleen, and Shawn and 3 grandchildren from our girls' families. We enjoy spending time with their families. We watch these grandkids one day a week, which feels like the sweet spot. We know them well while still preserving some of our energies. I worked for 40 years as an engineer in the Metro East area before retiring a few years ago. Some of the satisfying projects were cooperative team efforts with solid designs that continue to perform year after year and nudge us in a greener direction.

I was raised in Homewood, Illinois (a south suburb of Chicago) and after High School, moved to Champaign to pursue a Mechanical Engineering degree at U of I.

I really enjoy golfing and sang in a choir for several years. I continue to be curious with no end to learning opportunities. Joyce and I love to travel when we can and are attracted by our National Parks and their beauty.

In the last couple of years, I had the chance to visit my mother's UU Church outside Chicago. The services were thought provoking, and I got to meet my mother's like-minded friends. With increasing frustrations with our traditional church in Edwardsville I started to follow the story of the Alton UU church online. The group was discussing the move, followed by the first services as the MEUUC. I felt for the courage and conviction of this small group and came to the January 2024 Open House.

I joined the church in March and have enjoyed getting to know our members. At my old church I always felt like I was one of the most liberal members. At MEUUC I've solved that problem, and it feels right. Now Mary Weber and I are putting some energy into a UU Community Care effort.

**Men's Lunch
Group -
Thursday,
January 9
11:30 a.m.**



Location

information to be sent out by email.

If you're not on the men's lunch email list, contact [Paul Hebert](#) or call him at 314-702-3453 (c).



**Anna Ds Women's
Alliance
Luncheon
Thursday, January 9,
11:30 a.m.
Castelli's Restaurant at
255**

3400 Fosterburg Rd., Alton

<https://www.castellis255.com/>

At the December meeting we decided to switch our January date to the second Thursday 1/9/25 rather than the normal first Thursday which falls so close to New Year's Day.

We also trusted our past experience and agreed to meet at Chapala Mexican Grill on College Avenue in Alton, **BUT** several of us had lunch there last week and found that the quality of the food had declined dramatically. Given that most recent experience, I really don't want you to expect one restaurant experience and find it's not what you get. So, with your agreement, I've arranged for us to lunch on that date at Castelli's in Alton. In speaking with others in this area, Castelli's has retained its reputation for quality food and service, not least the fried chicken specialty and its Italian bread.

In other business, we agreed to contribute \$50 from the Anna Ds' treasury to Oasis, and Patty Moore will make it happen. (This is separate from any contributions anyone has personally made to Oasis through MEUCC or individually.)

And a reminder: keep an eye on the weather and your emails as we get closer to our planned winter lunch dates because we'll cancel if it is, or promises to become, unsafe to travel unnecessarily.

As always, I'd appreciate your initial response when you receive this, and I'll confirm with the full list closer to the date. Until we meet, here's hoping for a safe and happy holiday season for all of us. RSVP to [Sandy Shaner](#).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A report from Jennifer

It's been a great year in the children's religious education program!

The youth have spent time discussing the purpose of religion, as well as some foundational wisdom from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous religions, and Judaism. The elementary class has met "friends" from around the world who worship in many different ways. They have learned about ancient religions like Mayan, Egyptian, and Celtic. They have also met Sikh, Wiccan, and Indigenous American friends and learned the ways they worship. We have spent time comparing our own UU faith with theirs, and found many similarities! The classes combined once a month to celebrate our UU Covenant Values, personified by our very own JETPIG characters! In these cooperative lessons, we have learned about equity, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity.

We will be celebrating our holiday party on January 29th as a combined group. We will be discussing the ten different worldwide holidays that are celebrated in the month of December. We are asking our kids to wonder why so many holidays happen this month!

In the next semester, our elementary kids will continue to meet new friends from different religions, to learn about how they worship. In our youth class, we will continue to have great discussions, asking hard questions and wondering about ourselves and our world.

Working with UU kids is incredibly rewarding. Our kids are smart, creative, and curious. If you are interested in joining our amazing team of educators, please contact [Jennifer Lewis](#) after service or by email.

CHURCH CONTACTS
2024-2025 church year

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SOME OF THESE CONTACT LINKS WILL BE CHANGED OVER THE UPCOMING MONTHS

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