

THE FLAME

March 2015



**The Monthly Newsletter of
First Unitarian Church of
Omaha**

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Events in March

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Board meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month and are open to all members.

THE FLAME

Deadlines are the 15th of each month. Word limit: 200.

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Partner Church - Janet West

Religious Education - Sheri Conner

Religious Services - Megan Gustafson

Women's Alliance - Nellie Chenoweth

Young Adult Group - Maria Wallace

YRUU - Ben Wallace & Shawne Coonfare

Pictured to the right is the Foodies Group's popular Persian Dinner which was held on Feb. 7. (Photo by Scott Kemper)



Sunday Services this month

March 1—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“Religion and Violence”

Rev. Frank Rivas

Why are religion and violence so often connected? How do we address such violence?

The choir will sing a special anthem titled "Gabriel's Oboe" this Sunday at the 11:15am service. Featured with the choir will be Greg Clinton, second chair cellist with the Omaha Symphony, and our own Caitlin Seguin, oboist.

March 8—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“Love Costs All We Are”

Rev. Frank Rivas

A sermon originally intended for Valentine's Day, but delayed because of the snow storm. The title is taken from a Maya Angelou poem: “love costs all we are/and will ever be.” That the title includes the word “cost” on the Sunday we begin our pledge campaign is serendipitous.

March 15—Two services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“Ordinary Sermon”

Rev. Frank Rivas

Understanding spirituality not as something ethereal, but rather as a perspective on ordinary life.

March 22—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

Rev. Royal Bush

Please join me as we explore pain, broken hearts, and unresolved grief.

March 29—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

A Light in the Darkness

Supporting one another as a beloved community through the good times and bad. A participative worship experience facilitated by your Worship Arts Team.

All-Church Stewardship Kickoff Brunch

Join us Sunday, March 8 in the Common Room from 10am to 11:30am.

All are invited to our catered brunch as we kick off this year's Stewardship Campaign. We look forward to seeing you at the brunch! See page 5 for more information.

Rev. Elations

Monthly Column from our Minister, Rev. Frank Rivas

So much is happening. Attendance and excitement are high on Sunday mornings and at all-church dinners—Oktoberfest, the Persian dinner, and the chili cook-off. Even more is happening just beneath the surface. A new website is about to make its debut, and we will soon stream our services. Teams are exploring options for improved sound and possible video in the sanctuary, a summer program for children, and a sister church relationship that would help us make a difference in our community.

With so much going on, we need to remember why we're here. We gather together because we believe that we are better together than we are separately. Better at discernment, better at seeing and responding to the world's needs, better at raising our kids, better at caring for one another, better at embracing life.

So if you're not a member, let me invite you to join us. Take all the time you need to recognize this as your church community, and when you're ready, give me a call or send an email. Membership transforms your relationship. Suddenly you're not only a consumer, but also an owner; suddenly you find yourself using "my" and "church" in the same sentence.

Brown Bag Lunch with Rev. Frank

All are invited to join Rev. Frank for a "bring your own brown bag lunch" in the Common Room. No RSVP necessary.

Here are the dates for March:

- Thursday, March 5 at noon.
- Saturday, March 14 at 11:30am.
- Thursday, March 19 at noon.
- Saturday, March 28 at 11:30am.

Women's Alliance

Anyone who self-identifies as a woman is invited to attend the gathering on Monday, March 9. Socializing and beverages start at 6:30pm with dinner following at 7pm.

Our program will feature Ali from Big Muddy Urban Farm. She will be presenting on the trials and tribulations of turning empty neighborhood lots into small working farms.

Big Muddy Urban Farm was founded in December of 2011 and is a collectively run urban farm providing local and diverse fruits, vegetables, and herbs as well as sharing skills and resources within the community. You can access more information about this organization via their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/BigMuddyUrbanFarm.

We ask for \$12 which goes to the cost of dinner, the Merritt Education Fund, and the Partner Church scholarship. If this will be your first time attending a WA get-together, please be our guest.

Dinner for March's Alliance gathering will include corned beef and cabbage (m) and vegetable strudel (v). When you RSVP, please include which entrée you prefer. Desserts will be provided by Abby Borgmann and Donna Neff.

You can RSVP by emailing wa@firstuomaha.org, calling Janet West at 402-553-3162 or via First Unitarian's Facebook event page.

All-Church Stewardship Events

Our **All-Church Stewardship Kickoff Brunch** will happen on Sunday, March 8 from 10am to 11:30am in the Common Room and will feature a catered buffet including egg casserole with cheese, hash brown casserole, bacon, sausage, fruit and pastries. Vegan pancakes will be available.

Then join us on Saturday, March 28 at 5pm in the Common Room for our **All-Church Potluck Soup Dinner**. A variety of soups will be provided by the Stewardship Committee. Vegetarian/vegan selections will be available. Please bring a salad, bread, dessert, beverage, or wine to share. Please reserve childcare by contacting Jan at dre@firstuomaha.org.

Book Club

Our next meeting is Monday, March 23 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge. Please email Dave Richardson for more information at d Richardson@westside66.org.

Spring Forward!

It's that time! Time to set your clocks forward one hour. Do this before you go to bed on Saturday, March 7, so you aren't late to church.

UU & You

Wednesday, March 18 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

Visitors, newcomers, and the just-curious are cordially invited to this introduction to Unitarian Universalism class. UU&You classes provide an introduction to Unitarian Universalism and our church along with an opportunity to share our religious journeys in a theologically diverse "safe" place. Conversation will include some history of Unitarian Universalism and our church, what the church does, how it functions, and opportunities and paths. RSVPs or questions may be addressed to uuclass@firstuomaha.org or call class facilitator Jaime Alexander at 402-657-9386.

Spirit Circle

Sunday, March 1 at 6pm in the Common Room

This meeting will be about spiritual cleansing and purification. Spring cleaning for the soul! We would be delighted to have you join us! Gather at 6pm, ritual to begin promptly at 7pm. Please bring a potluck dish to share. Questions? Contact Kate Godfrey: coachkate@cox.net.

Stewardship Campaign 2015/2016 *by The Stewardship Committee*

Here at The First Unitarian Church, the positive momentum we have been experiencing keeps rolling on! As we continue to grow our programs, maintain our traditions and attract new members, it is important to continue to plan based on a realistic estimate of our church's operating budget.

The Stewardship Campaign is the means by which we raise the largest source of income for our church. It is normally a process accompanied by lots of traditional "hoopla." This year we are attempting to conduct this effort in a low-key, low-cost, simplified manner. We will begin by inviting members, friends, and interested visitors to a kickoff brunch on March 8 and end with a potluck soup supper on the last Saturday in March. The emphasis is on fun, fellowship, and financial support of our church. We hope everyone will participate in celebrating AND pledging. See page 5 for details.

Our Finance Team has told us our expenses for the year beginning May 1, 2015 will increase by 3.6%. In order to maintain or increase our programs as well as our beautiful building and support outside programs of interest to our congregation, please consider increasing your pledge similarly this year if possible so we can all continue to enjoy what this wonderful church adds to each of our lives.

We need to look to the future and what we want for this church.

Pledging, like volunteering and involvement, is part of what it means to be a member. With your help, this will be another record pledge year and a banner year for our church.

Stewardship Campaign *by Jack Round, church president-elect*

Several years ago, I served on a ministerial search committee with some of the talented members of our congregation. One of the committee's duties took us to Kansas City, and I drove back to Omaha with Alan Vovolka, also a member of the committee. On the way back, Alan and I talked in depth about our church, and we came to this conclusion: we felt a strong, confident, thriving First Unitarian Church of Omaha would be an important part of addressing challenges which might come to Omaha and the surrounding community in the near future. That is, we are in a unique place to provide leadership on a great many issues.

We felt (and feel) our church provides a place that supports people who are capable of understanding and adapting to the changing world, proactively suggesting ideas and actions, and influencing (or attempting to influence) the world for the better. Personally, I feel our church is at its best when it provides opportunities, encouragement, and focus for our extremely talented membership to express their passions and share their many gifts. We achieve this with an amazing team of volunteers. And we have a very generous congregation that has been able and willing to fund the annual budget and capital needs of our church. Your time and generosity are both greatly appreciated.

For the upcoming year, please consider pledging an amount which will help us provide even more opportunities for members to express their talents and act on their passions and for First Unitarian—and the community—to thrive.

Finance Matters *by Walt Jesteadt, treasurer*

Our church is healthier financially than it has been in years. We have moved from large end-of-year deficits to small end-of-year surpluses and have begun replenishing our savings accounts. A successful stewardship campaign is essential if this trend is to continue because pledged contributions make up about 80% of our budget. Our total pledges last year were more than 15% above the year before and most members and friends have been able to honor those pledges. To meet our commitments for the coming year without assuming use of a large surplus from this year (or some other accounting trick), our proposed budget includes a pledge goal of \$250,000. That is only 3.6% higher than we achieved last year, but it will require increases greater than 3.6% from many of us because not everyone will be able to increase their pledge. More than half the effort in our stewardship campaign goes into calling those who do not pledge during the month of March. Please pledge generously without waiting for the phone call.

One way to keep up with your pledge throughout the year is to arrange a monthly transfer from your bank account to ours. For those who have difficulty making such arrangements, we can do it for you. Just fill out a simple one-time form, available from the church office, authorizing us to make the arrangements. We use a service called Vanco. We currently receive 18% of our pledge contributions through Vanco. If you are currently using Vanco, we will be in touch via email regarding plans for your pledge during the coming year.

Supporting the Church Mission *by Louise Jeffrey, church president*

At about this point in the last church year, Tony Host wrote a piece for *The Flame* discussing what Unitarian Universalism and our church in particular mean to him. Having spent the better part of the last two months in Australia, far away from the Nebraska winter, helping with family projects, I have had time to reflect on the same subject.

When I first crossed the threshold of First Unitarian Church less than a decade ago, one of the most meaningful phrases I heard was "deeds, not creeds." This is what I wanted to be a part of! Unchurched for 35 years, I had been involved in community service and volunteer work whenever possible, but it had always been as an individual. Never had I felt a part of something larger than myself with like-minded people around me; people who believed in empowering others without implying that one was a better person if one believed in some particular god or gods. No direct or subtle messages that what is really important is an afterlife. Instead, I was with people who believed we are all connected and that we ought to do for each other in the here and now. For me, this connection with others is the whole point and what we all share. It underlies all that we do and it is the commonality that draws us all together. And this is what keeps me supporting our congregational mission. My hope is that you too will continue to support this mission with your labor, your love and your financial support.

Forward!!

Louise Jeffrey

A Note from RE *by Jan Wilson, Director of Religious Education*

Our RE program is enjoying a period of optimism and vigorous participation. On one hand it amazes me that families take time from the busy work week to do yet another task—attending church. On the other hand, the community and loving acceptance children find here is surely the reinvigoration so necessary for being content in the world. The basis of challenging thinking and accepting differences in opinions is so inherent in every part of RE.

Currently, we are learning about some of the most significant teachings in the New Testament. Understanding these from a Unitarian perspective has been a supreme challenge. Since every challenge is an opportunity, it is with great curiosity that I read the most liberal of interpretations of these texts.

How can we know what Jesus really meant? How can we guess which lines have been added or deleted to push someone's agenda? We know that these teachings were very threatening to the power structures of Jesus' time and every power structure since. As Unitarians we have every reason to believe that we have both the capacity and the responsibility to question everything.

After the dust of big questioning has settled, what are the truths? We have learned that all people, regardless of power, wealth, national origin, occupation, capabilities, have an equal right to human dignity. We have learned that connectedness requires active participation with communities.

My hope is that many more of our congregation will have an opportunity to actively participate with our children and youth. Every contribution is valued and appreciated.

Jan Wilson, DRE

Religious Education

Sunday School starts at 10:30am and last until 11:30am.

Sunday School Rooms:

K-2nd grades: RE Office/Classroom

3rd-5th grades: Robert Weston Room (Middle Classroom upstairs)

6th-8th grades: Whitney Young Classroom (Downstairs Classroom)

9th-12th grades: Merritt Lounge

After Sunday School ends at 11:30am, children will all gather in the middle upstairs classroom for snack time (a kid-version of coffee hour). Then at 11:45am they will gather in the Whitney Young Room for community time.

The community time schedule is:

1st Sunday of the month: Movie & Popcorn

2nd Sunday of the month: Choir

3rd Sunday of the month: Art

4th Sunday of the movie: Choir

Community Time ends at 12:30pm.

At the 9:30am service children can either go to community time or sit in the service with their parents.

The RE Council will meet on Sunday, March 29 in Jan's office after the second service.

Discussions, Forums and Classes at First U

Flint Discussion Forum

The next Flint Discussion Forum will be held on Tuesday, March 17 at 7pm in the Common Room. More information will be announced later in the enews. These forums are designed to offer a platform for in-depth presentation of information and dialog on topics ranging from ethics & morals to arts & religion. The name “Flint” refers to the rock that is used to create a spark. Each program will run 90 minutes. Attendees wishing to bring their own dinner are welcome to join others at 6pm to share conversation. All are invited. Coffee and water will be available. Questions about the program can be directed to: forum@firstuomaha.org or Nathan Kramer, (402) 884-8916.



Adult RE Class in March

SCIENCE, SCIENTISTS AND RELIGION — Class led by Rev. Ron Knapp

Thursdays at 7pm in the month of March in the Common Room.

First class is Thursday, March 5.

In 2007, ABC news reported on a major study seeking to understand the religious beliefs of the most eminent scientists at 21 top-rated American universities. Thirty-one percent said they did not believe in God, another thirty-one percent said that they did not know if there is a god and that there was no way to find out, and only 9.7 percent said they had "no doubt in God's existence." This appears to be a mirror image—the opposite—of what the general population in America believes. In this workshop we will discuss the relationship between science and religion and what scientists believe about God and religion and why.

Prospectus for Adult RE Class: The History of First Unitarian Church of Omaha

This class will be run by Dave Richardson and will focus on the events and people who have helped shape our beloved community. It will meet on three Thursday evenings in the Common Room in April and May (4/23, 4/30 and 5/14). This course will follow a presentation/discussion format. Each of the three meetings will be devoted to a 50-year portion of our 150 years of existence, beginning with our founding in 1869. In the process we will look at some photos and artifacts from our archives.

We will also discuss how our church history reflects the changes that took place in the Unitarian movement in general, particularly the westward movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We will continue this focus by following the events which gave direction to Unitarianism in the 20th century such as the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 and the merger with the Universalists in 1961 and how our church responded to these changes. We will also discuss the upcoming sesquicentennial of our founding and the centennial of our building in 2018-19, and how we might celebrate our church's heritage. To sign up for the class please call (402-345-3039) or email (admin@firstuomaha.org) the church office.

The Women's Religious Studies Group

The Women's Religious Studies group is discussing the book *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* by Victor J. Stenger. We meet at the church from 1-2:30 pm most Thursdays. Questions? Contact Rae Barry at 402-422-1404 or raeb1@hotmail.com.

The Women's Religious Study Covenant Group

The Women's Religious Studies Covenant Group will meet on Thursday, March 19 at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge. Neva Cozine will be the facilitator for the chapter on Spiritual Experiences in our book, *Soul to Soul*. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Harriet Major at 402-391-0248 or hmajor323@cox.net. We have a covenant statement which needs to be signed before attending our group.

Share the Plate—OTOC

Each month one-half of the loose currency collected in the offering plate is donated to a local cause that advances important principles of Unitarianism.

This month we share the plate with OTOC (Omaha Together One Community), a local interfaith organization of which First Unitarian is a member. We encourage you to learn more about OTOC by visiting their website www.otoc.org.

Membership Forum with Lori Emison Clair

Saturday, March 7 at 12pm in the Common Room

Anyone interested in membership issues including retaining members or expanding membership in our church is invited to attend this forum. Please bring your own lunch.

Lori Emison Clair, the Director of Congregational Life at the First Unitarian Church in Des Moines, will give a presentation at 12:30pm designed to give us some new direction and creative ideas to consider our future at First Unitarian.



Our successful Hospitality Team effort was a result of a workshop she gave that Bill Ross attended. Their website and some of their materials have been inspirations for our Membership Team. We will have a discussion with her about what we can do here after her presentation. She will spend several hours with our Membership Team following the larger forum. Please let me know if you have some ideas about what you would like to see her cover. Our Membership Team will be very actively working with her. We are very, very pleased to have her and hope you can attend.

Jacqueline Anderegg, Chair
Membership Team

Spirit Circle

Sunday, March 1 at 6pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

Holland Lecture with Angela Davis

Wednesday, March 4 at the Holland Performing Arts Center

See page 13 for more information.

Brown Bag Lunch with the Rev.

Thursdays, March 5 and March 19 at noon in the Common Room

See page 4 for details.

Adult RE Class: Science, Scientists and Religions; Led by Ron Knapp (4-week class)

Begins Thursday, March 5 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 9 for information.

OTOC Environmental Team Monthly Meeting

Thursday, March 5 at 7pm in the Whitney Young Room

For more details see page 16.

CommUnity Night

Friday, March 6 at 5:30pm in the Common Room.

See page 13 for details.

Membership Forum

Saturday, March 7 at 12pm in the Common Room

See page 10 for more information.

All-Church Stewardship Kickoff Brunch

Sunday, March 8 from 10am to 11:30am in the Common Room.

See page 5 for details.

Women's Alliance

Monday, March 9 at 6:30pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

Board Meeting

Tuesday, March 10 at 7pm in the Common Room

Church Events

Brown Bag Lunch with the Rev.

Saturdays, March 14 and March 28 at 11:30am in the Common Room

See page 4 for details.

Flame Deadline

Submit your newsletter articles to admin@firstuuomaha.org by March 15 at noon.

Flint Discussion Forum

Tuesday, March 17 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 9 for details.

UU & You Class

Wednesday, March 18 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 5 for details.

Women's Religious Studies Covenant Group

Thursday, March 19 at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 10 for details.

Young Adult Night

Friday, March 20 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 13 for details.

Book Club

Monday, March 23 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 5 for more information.

YRUU Overnight

Friday, March 27

All-Church Potluck Soup Dinner

Saturday, March 28 at 5pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

RE Council Meeting

Sunday, March 29 at 12:30pm in Jan's office



Recurring...

Women's Religious Studies Group

Meets most Thursdays at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 10 for information.

Bridge Group

Meets the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month after the second service in the Whitney Young Room or in the corner of the Common Room.

Choir Rehearsal

Meets every Wednesday evening at 7pm in the Sanctuary. Note: the first week in March we meet on Tuesday because of the Holland Lecture.

YRUU

Meets every Wednesday at 7pm in the Common Room.

Looking ahead...

Spring Celebration: Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 5

See page 15 for details.

Night Club Evening

Friday, April 10

See page 13 for more information.

Our Transylvanian Partners

Part II — A Helping Hand From Omaha

by Dave Richardson

In the last installment we talked about the history, ancient and recent, of Transylvania, the Hungarian-speaking region of Romania. This piece will focus mainly on what our church has done to help our fellow Unitarians in Firtosmartonos and the future of this partnership.

You may recall that this ancient region has suffered from the effects of war, oppression and political instability. After both World Wars in the 20th century this region was shuffled between Hungary and Romania, depending on the will of the larger European countries. The political disruptions after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the assassination of Nicolae Ceausescu left Transylvania again in uncertainty. In the aftermath of Ceausescu's death, the UUA formed the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council (UUPCC). Under the guidance of UUA President Bill Schulz (later President of *Amnesty International*), churches in the US were paired with Transylvanian parishes. First Unitarian of Omaha and The First Unitarian Church of Corvallis, Ore. were assigned to Firtosmartonos.

The first mission to Firtosmartonos was undertaken by church members, Mike and Mary Jo Stoll in 1991. This was a perilous journey fraught with uncertainty and no small amount of danger. The intrepid couple had to smuggle funds for the church through the various checkpoints and suspicious customs agents. You will recall that in 1991, Romania, a former Soviet satellite, was like most of Eastern Europe in

a state of chaos and instability as the Soviet Union disintegrated.

In 1993, a group of eight church members led by our Minister Emeritus Ron Knapp made the trip. Ron recalled the adventures of this group in his autobiography, *Moments in A Life; A Memoir*. He noted that in Firtosmartonos, a town of approximately 300 people, there were two cars and one telephone at the time. The generosity and hospitality of the minister and parishioners made up in part for the lack of amenities. His reminiscences included a recital of local dances, songs and poetry performed by the youngsters.

The Omaha folks had each brought two suitcases: one for their personal belongings and one containing items to be given as gifts to the villagers. The minister of the local church suggested that instead of giving the items as charitable gifts they should be auctioned off. This proved to be an interesting "cross-cultural" experience. Ron also recalls that numerous children's toys were among the items. The children had never seen balloons before. One can only imagine the joy of a child playing with a balloon for the first time. Ron had been asked to conduct a service on a high holy day that coincided with the harvest season. With the assistance of an interpreter, he fulfilled those duties, including serving communion. The group also traveled to the town of Kalaszvar, that was the seat of the Unitarian Bishop of Transylvania.

Every few years a group makes the

trek to Transylvania. Janet West is the chairperson of our Partner Church Team and she has organized these trips. The largest contingent was a group of 12 who went in 2005. The most recent excursion was in 2014.

Janet notes that we continue to support our partner church in several ways. We donate funds for their operational expenses as well as providing scholarships for children of the congregation to attend, as boarders, the Unitarian High School located in another town in the region. The idea of a denominational high school, especially a Unitarian one which receives government support, may be quite foreign to Americans.

Each year our church raises funds to support our partnership. Janet fears that the many constraints on our finances and the competition for fundraising has resulted in the loss of support, financial and otherwise for this program. One need only recall the Sixth Principle of our faith "The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all" to be reminded of the importance of this project.



CommUUnity Night

Friday, March 6 at 5:30pm in the Common Room

If you haven't participated before, CommUUnity Nights are a fun, laid-back all-church event. We gather together for a potluck of side items (the main dish will be provided by RE), and we don't worry about who is bringing what; we may get KFC chicken nuggets, sushi, and guacamole, but we'll have fun. We eat together as a group and then just chill. Kids are free to roam and play. We will give the teens the Merritt Lounge as a fortress of solitude against the chaos of family life. The adults chill, talk, play games, and just enjoy each other's company.

If you can't bring anything or you are feeling too rushed to grab or make something last minute, COME ANYWAY! There is always plenty of food and what we really want is YOUU!

Young Adult Game Night

Join the "young adults" for their game night on Friday, March 20 at 7pm in the Common Room. Bring a game or a snack to share with others. Please RSVP on the Facebook event page or by emailing youngadults@firstuuomaha.org.

Night Club Evening *By Marcia Leise*

Ready for an adults-only social evening of fun? The Fellowship Team is sponsoring a Night Club Evening in the Common Room at First Unitarian Church on Friday, April 10 from 7pm-9pm.

Various types of music will be played for dancing enjoyment, including swing, Latin, and much more. Both line-dancing and partner dancing venues will be offered. All line dances will be taught at the event before we dance them, so no experience is needed. Please bring your choice of beverage to enjoy during the evening, as well as a snack to share. To arrange for childcare at the event for children through twelve years old, please contact Jan Wilson at dre@firstuuomaha.org.

Questions about the event can be addressed to Nadine at nkeith1@cox.net or to Marcia at mkleise@cox.net. See you at the dance!

The Next Holland Lecture Wednesday, March 4 at the Holland Performing Arts Center

Topic: Prison Reform: Real or Imagined with Angela Davis

All the tickets have been claimed for this event. Thank you to everyone who called and reserved your seats.

WHAT IS HOPE IN ACTION?

Our church believes in community, and that is what Hope in Action, a sub-team of the Caring Team, is all about. Any one of us might need assistance, and we want to make it easier for you to ask for support and easier for you to offer support when others are in need.



WHO IS SERVED?

Church members, friends, regular attendees and their spouses are eligible for assistance from Hope in Action.

WHO CAN HELP?

Everyone! Hope in Action is an opportunity for everyone in our church community to support each other by sharing knowledge, skills and resources.

Hope In Action will use church communications, including the Enews, to let our church community know when help is needed to respond to a request for support. And we will report back to the church community about how we were able to respond. All communication will be done in a manner that maintains the degree of confidentiality requested by the person seeking assistance.

WHAT SUPPORT CAN BE EXPECTED?

Hope in Action is there when people are dealing with a medical problem, need transportation or help around the house, can use assistance with referrals to social service agencies or just need someone to talk to about the ups and downs of life. Our response will vary depending on the type of support that is needed in our church community and what resources we have available.

Although Hope in Action is not able to respond to emergencies, short-term financial assistance may be available for lodging, food, clothing, medication, transportation and utilities. Financial disbursements are not made directly to the person making the request for assistance.

HOW TO ASK FOR SUPPORT

Requests for assistance must be made directly by the person needing help. Hope in Action does not respond to any anonymous or third-party requests for assistance.

Here are the ways you can ask for support from Hope in Action. You may send an email to hopeinaction@firsttuomaha.org or use the Hope in Action link on the church website. You may call the church office and press ext. 105 to leave a telephone message for Hope in Action. Or, you may simply complete a Caring Card located in the church pews and place it in the designated box in the church foyer.

WHO DECIDES WHAT SUPPORT WILL BE OFFERED?

Hope in Action will use a team approach, so at least three members of Hope in Action must participate in determining the nature of the response.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY MEALS?

Community Meals is an outreach to people in need in our church's neighborhood.

Every Saturday members of various "First" churches and others take turns providing a hot meal and groceries to those in need at First Baptist Church (our neighbor just one block east of our church). First Unitarian Church has been part of this effort for several years.

Four times a year our church "caters" and serves the meal and distributes the groceries provided by Trader Joe's beginning between 10 and 11am (based on the meal preparation time needed) and ending at 1pm. There are First Unitarian Church members who work at the site on a weekly basis and additional help is always welcome.

Getting involved can be as simple as providing a pan of brownies or working in the serving line. Want to help? Call or email Diane Withem, 402-679-8916, dianewithem@gmail.com.

Spring Celebration: Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 5 will be Spring Celebration Day at First Unitarian. Children will attend our 9:30am service for intergenerational music and messages. Our outstanding Religious Education teachers will be recognized for their contributions at this service.

Nursery games and an age-appropriate egg hunt for toddlers is scheduled for 9:30am while parents and older children are in the church service. At 10:30am children from kindergarten on up will participate in our traditional egg hunt. This will be followed by carnival-type games on the east lawn.

We hope to see you at our spring celebration where families and children are at the heart of the festivities.

Outside Opportunity at Second Unitarian Church

Second Unitarian Church will be hosting a free showing of the film, “Inequality for All” on Sunday, March 1 at Second Unitarian Church (3012 S 119th St, Omaha, NE). The movie will begin promptly at 5 p.m. and a short intermission will occur when the pizza (free) arrives. Please bring non-alcoholic beverages, side dishes, salads, or desserts as you are moved to do so. Also bring your voices and thinking caps—there will be discussion following this 90-minute documentary. This event is free and open to the public, so please invite anyone and everyone. See: <http://inequalityforall.com>.

Parking Garage Info at First Unitarian

If you are able to park in the MidTown Crossing Garage to the west of our parking lot, it would leave our small parking lot for visitors and those who need to park closer to the building.

Here’s the drill: Use any entrance to get in. Punch the button and take the ticket. Use only one exit to get out—on Farnam St. (north-side, middle-level, only one with an attendant.) Give him/her your ticket. 3 hours are free. If you’re at church more than 3 hours, run your ticket through the machine that is downstairs in the Common Room for free parking or pay \$1/hour. Thank you for your help! Note: Please do NOT move the machine. If you have any questions or concerns, contact the church office at admin@firstuuomaha.org.

Special thanks to Dean for securing the ticket-validating machine in the Common Room.



Web Team Update *by Linda Parker*

Technical progress on the new First Unitarian Church web site is progressing. You will soon see a new design, improved typography, and a revised navigation system. An announcement will appear in the weekly enews when the site goes live. The URL for the new site will be the same as the current one.

The next phase of the project will include training for the WordPress interface. Ministry teams who wish to do so will have the ability to add content to their respective pages. Look for future announcements about the training sessions.

Over the past two years several people have made valuable contributions to the Web Team. We give special thanks to Bill Ross, Shawna Foster, Catharine Dixon, Troy Jensen, Nathan Kramer, Kandelyn Scott, Scott Kemper, and A. J. Satterfield.

2015 Preserve Our Building Fund Drive Report *by Jaime Alexander*

Results from the January 2015 Preserve Our Building Fund Drive again reflect our congregation's continued commitment to this cause of having a fund for a future significant need of our sanctuary or building. By the second week in February our contributions have totaled over \$7,700. The POB account balance is now over \$51,000! Once again you have been generous. A sincere "Thank you" from POB Drive co-chairs Louise Jeffrey and Jaime Alexander goes to all who contributed to the 2015 Preserve Our Building Fund Drive.

OTOC Announcement

by Laurie Gift

The 2015 legislative session has begun. There are many bills being introduced on energy and food policy. If you would like to receive an email announcement when the bill will be heard in committee, then please send me your email and I will add you to my "Bill Action Alert." Be sure to include in your request to me that you are from First Unitarian Church as I receive many emails each day. That way, I will be sure to add you to my group list.

Thanks in advance for being willing to help ensure that the correct legislation gets passed. Laurie Gift, OTOC Environmental Action Team Chairperson, 2thegifts@cox.net, 402-334-1917 (home/cell/text).

Environmental Action Team

Are you concerned about climate change? Do you want to learn what can be done locally to help mitigate it?

Then, come to OTOC's Environmental Action Team monthly meeting. The mission of OTOC is to influence policy at the city and state level. Our team is working with state legislators asking them to support the below legislation items that are occurring in the 2015 legislative session.

—Senator Ken Haar has introduced a bill to develop a state energy plan.

—Senator Burke Harr has introduced legislation that would provide grant money to assist low-income people in improving the efficiency of their homes.

If you want to learn more, then you are welcome to attend our next monthly meeting. We are always looking for new people who want to take part in democracy. It is exciting and empowering to have the opportunity to express your voice to our political leaders, especially at the local level, where it truly makes a difference. Our team was part of the effort that helped influence OPPD to commit to 33% renewables for the next twenty years and to stop burning coal at the North Omaha plant. This was a big deal and it was exciting and empowering for our team to be a part of it. I hope you come and check us out.

Our next monthly meeting will be held on Thursday, March 5 at 7pm in the Whitney Young Room. Chairperson: Laurie Gift. Questions? Contact her at 402-334-1917 or 2thegifts@cox.net.

The Women's Alliance Education Fund

The Women's Alliance Scholarship Fund Committee has been revamped for the 2014/2015 season and every season hereafter. In previous years the Women's Alliance would allocate funds for a scholarship for an individual from First or Second Unitarian wanting to continue his/her education with the transition from high school to college. The WA has decided to broaden this fund, rename it, and incorporate criteria to attain funding for personal development. The name of the scholarship fund has changed to the Merritt Educational Fund. This fund's purpose is to broaden personal development directly related to church functions. Some examples can include (but are not limited to): help with costs to attend General Assembly, Leadership School or Mid-America District meetings; broadening talent (musical, religious education, technical school, etc); or help with costs for a college course to further one's education for career advancement. These are just examples. The WA team requires some criteria to apply for this educational fund.

1. The recipient must be a First Unitarian contributing member or friend of the church
2. Funding must be used for continuing education or for church-related activities
3. An application must be submitted with the following information: what direction you are headed in and what the funds are for. Applications can be picked up by emailing Women's Alliance at wa@firstuuomaha.org.

The History of Women's Alliance

Part Three

"We warm ourselves at fires we did not light.
We drink from wells we did not dig."

-Rev. Peter Balala

1932	1937	[-----1950's-----]			2000	2006	2015
1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	2000	2005	2015
1933			1967		2004	2013	2014

1932-bought new stoves for the kitchen
 1933-bought new dishes for the church ~~Sidenote~~-time to buy new dishes again
 1937-evening WA established for working professionals
 1950's- sponsored a nursery and classes for new moms Also bought new kitchen for the church
 1967- evening WA ~~disbanded~~
 2000-WA reestablished by Audrey ~~Exyer~~ and Ruth ~~Nicklin~~
 2004-bought new folding chairs for the common room
 2006-started scholarship for ~~Eirtosmartonos~~ church
 2013-restoration of the quilt
 2014 - paid for 5 seats at holiday dinner
 2015 - helped sponsor the Persian Dinner culinary foodies group

Save the Date! All-Church Work Day: Saturday, May 2nd

Hours are 8am to 1pm. Volunteers are needed for this special event. No matter what your talents, we can use your help to beautify the church. Tasks include vacuuming pew cushions, replacing nursery ceiling tiles, cleaning walls, and helping with the garden. Questions? Contact the [church office](#) or Dave at 402-541-4393.



DO YOU SHOP ON AMAZON??

Visit www.firstuomaha.org and click the **AMAZON** logo at the bottom of the page
OR

Visit www.smile.amazon.com and support First Unitarian Church with **EVERY** purchase you make!!

Update the **CHARITY** information to *FIRST UNITARIAN OF OMAHA*.



First Unitarian receives 4-12% of **EVERY** qualifying purchase. For more information, email scrip@firstuomaha.org or visit with Kathi Oliver or Donna Neff during coffee hour.

Membership Counts *By Jackie Anderegg, Membership Team Leader*

Yes, it does. Currently our official membership is 215. We have about 49 active, pledging friends who are people who contribute financially and in other ways, but are not official members. We also have about 54 frequent visitors who are people who have visited our church 8 times or more. So, if the church looks full and energized, we are! Our Membership Team is making sure we contact each of our frequent visitors personally and would welcome your help. Frequent visitors can be identified because they have white name tags with an obvious blue line at the bottom of their name tag. We have some major ideas in the mix, so stay tuned, tune in, tune up, and let us know your ideas! We will keep you informed of our new plans!

Cowperson Chili Cook-Off *By Carolyn McNamara*

This year's Annual Cowperson Chili Cook-Off did not disappoint. The Common Room was jammed with all sorts of western-lookin' folks who were interested in some serious chili tastin' and eatin'. Toe-tappin' music was provided by the Daves (Olson and Rosser). Marshal Kabin Thomas got things started by explaining the rules of votin' for the best chili in both the vegetarian and carnivore categories. Although we had fewer chilis to choose from this year, it was still a tough decision to make. Here's how things turned out.

Cook-Off winners in the carnivore category were:

- 1st place: Tie between Kate Wiig with her "Carnivores" chili and Dan Sullivan's "Chili Verde Stylin'"
- 2nd place: Ron Withem's "Cooks Illustrated" recipe
- 3rd place: Newcomer Colin Hatcher's "Carolina Four Bean Chili"

Best vegetarian chili awards went to:

- 1st place: Marie Sedlacek's "Mayocoba Cha Cha Chili"
- 2nd place: Jen McEvoy and her "Thai Curry" recipe
- 3rd place: Douglas Lee Regier's "Masala" chili

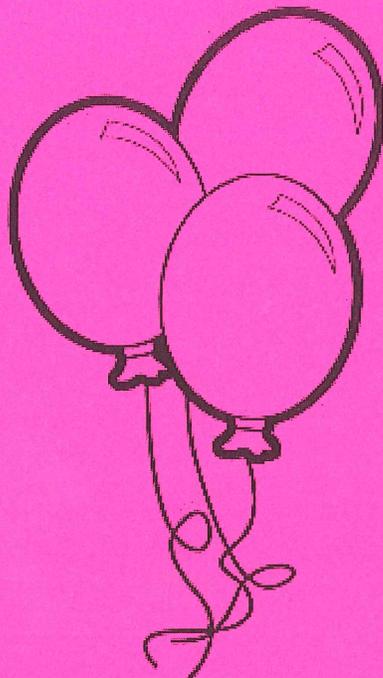


In addition to votin' for chili, folks were asked to choose their favorite cowboy and cowgirl costumes. Well, that was a little easier. The prize for "best cowgirl" went to Dee Otte whose "Little House on the Prairie" dress, apron and bonnet were sewn with her very own hands. The "best cowboy costume" was awarded to good lookin' John "the Kid" Hruska.

Thanks to all who made this year's shindig a success: Cook-Off Committee members Nadine Keith, Judith Wright, Nellie Chenoweth (a/k/a Chief Chili Wrangler); bartenders Dean Christensen and John Hruska; cashiers Walt Jesteadt and John Wagner; helpers Dean Christensen, Steve Rice, Roger Nicholaisen, Lois Norris, Kathi Oliver, Donna Neff, Julie Jons and Carolyn McNamara; chili wranglers Geoff Chenoweth, Roman Noriega, Larry Goeser and Scott Kemper (who also served as chief photographer); and the many folks who made chili, baked cornbread or stepped in to help with set up and clean up.

Y'all come back again next year. We'll be waitin' for ya.

*Join us for two fun events
as we celebrate us!*



**All Church Stewardship Kickoff
Brunch**

Sunday, March 8th

10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

A catered buffet including egg casserole
with cheese, hash brown casserole, bacon,
sausage, fruit and pastries.

Vegan pancakes will also be available.

AND

All Church Potluck Soup Dinner

Saturday, March 28th

5:00 p.m. in the Common Room

A variety of soups will be provided by the
Stewardship Committee and friends.

Vegetarian/vegan selections will be available.

Please bring a salad, bread, dessert, beverage or
wine to share.

Childcare will be provided.

Please make reservations by contacting Jan
at dre@firstuomaha.org or 402-345-3039 ext. 103

Hosted by First Unitarian Church & the Stewardship Committee

All-Church Events in March — Join us!

Sunday, March 8 — All-Church Stewardship Kickoff Brunch

10am to 11:30am in the Common Room

Catered buffet including egg casserole, vegan pancakes and more!

Saturday, March 28 — All-Church Potluck Soup Dinner

5pm in the Common Room

A variety of soups will be provided. Please bring something to share.

For details on these events, please see page 5 in this newsletter.

**First Unitarian Church of Omaha
3114 Harney St.
Omaha, NE 68131**