

THE FLAME

April 2015



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

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Events in April

Meet Our Leaders

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Mary Bort, Abby Cape, Nadine

Keith, Joe Schaaf, Dave Olson,

Kim Callaghan

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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Omaha Together One Community - Kim Dunovan & Laurie Gift

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



Photographer: Kathi Oliver

Sunday Services this month

April 5—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“Some Things Matter”

Rev. Frank Rivas

This Easter I roll out a simpler—and more challenging—theology.

April 12—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“The Architecture of Time”

Rev. Frank Rivas

The importance of Sabbath, a day of rest.

April 19—Two services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“Why Can’t We All Just Get Along?”

Rev. Frank Rivas

When officers were acquitted of beating Rodney King in 1992, riots ensued. King’s response still haunts.

April 26—Two Services at 9:30am and 11:15am

“May Day Celebration”

Join members of the Spirit Circle and Worship Arts Team in a celebration of this Neo-Pagan festival of growth and light.

Spring Celebration

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!

Rev. Elations

Monthly Column from our Minister, Rev. Frank Rivas

This is big! Jan and I are planning a family retreat on Labor Day weekend. Specifically, we will be gathering between 10am and noon on Saturday, September 5, at the Swanson Lodge of the Carol Joy Holling Camp, close to Mahoney State Park. We will share games, hikes, meals, and worship. In addition, adult activities will include spiritual practices like sitting meditation and yoga (children also welcome); children's activities will include spiritual practices like walking meditation and art projects (adults also welcome). Four meals (Saturday lunch and dinner; Sunday breakfast and lunch) as well as snacks are included in the price. Family can leave immediately after lunch on Sunday, or enjoy the camp for another couple of hours before returning home.

Actual cost depends on how many people share a room; for a family of four, the cost for the entire weekend would be \$89 per person (kids 5 or under free). But we don't want any family to stay away because of the price. If you would like to join us, but simply can't afford it, we'll arrange a scholarship.



Postscript on Brown Bag Lunches

The lunches we shared were one of the great successes of this year. Thanks to all who participated. Then I reached to include those for whom weekday lunches are difficult, and scheduling became a nightmare. For the month of April we will return to the classic version, every Thursday at noon in the Common Room. Please join us.

The goals are simple:

- To have fun together.
- To know one another more deeply, both as individuals and as families.
- To deepen and to share our spiritual lives.
- To build stronger ties within the church community.

Please join us!

Fill out the form below, place it in an envelope and return it to the church office.

Frank

Registration form for Church Family Retreat

Saturday, Sept. 5 to Sunday, Sept. 6 overnight at the Swanson Lodge of the Carol Joy Holling Camp.

Name: _____ Phone number: _____

Email address: _____ Please list the names of those in your party:

___ 1 person attending: \$138

___ 2 people attending: \$111/person

___ 3 people attending: \$99/person

___ 4 people attending: \$89/person

___ 5 or more people attending: \$78/person

\$ _____ Total

(Please note: kids 5 and under are free)

If you need financial assistance please let us know how much so we can make sure you are able to attend.

Make your check payable to First Unitarian Church. Payments and RSVPs are due by Friday, August 21. Space reservations are first come, first served.

Women's Alliance

Women, and those who identify as women, are invited to attend the gathering on Monday, April 13. Socializing and beverages start at 6:30 with dinner following at 7pm.

Our program will feature Lisa from HETRA (Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy) with a 30-minute presentation about the organization.

HETRA's mission is to improve the quality of life both physically and emotionally of adults and children with disabilities through equine assisted activities. HETRA offers services in Therapeutic Riding, Hippotherapy, Equine Services for Heroes, Therapeutic Carriage Driving, Summer Camps, and Miniature Horse Camps. You can learn more about HETRA by visiting their website at www.hetra.org or on Facebook.

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 April's Alliance will be from Mangia Italiana. Desserts will be provided by Abby Borgmann and Ellen Shurson.

You can RSVP by: emailing wa@firstuuomaha.org, calling Janet West at 402-553-3162 or Kathi Oliver at 402-214-2718 or via First Unitarian's Facebook event page. Please let us know if you would like meat or veggie.

We look forward to seeing everyone on April 13th!

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 12 years old, please contact Jan Wilson at dre@firstuuomaha.org.

Questions about the event can be addressed to Nadine at nckeith1@cox.net or to Marcia at mkleise@cox.net. See you at the dance!

Book Club

Our next meeting is Monday, April 27 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge. Our discussion will be on **The Making of Buddhist Modernism** by David L. McMahan. Please email Dave Richardson for more information at drichardson@westside66.org.

UU & You

Wednesday, April 22 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@firstuuomaha.org or call class facilitator Jaime Alexander at 402-657-9386.

Young Adult Game Night

Join the "young adults" for their game night on Friday, April 17 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.

Note from Church President *by Louise Jeffrey*

This month's letter is one that is very happy for me to write. As the result of the unanimous vote at the March meeting, the Board of Trustees is pleased to recommend to the congregation that we call Rev. Frank Rivas as our minister. This recommendation will be voted on by the congregation as a whole at the annual meeting of First Unitarian Church, on May 17. All members and friends of the congregation are strongly encouraged to participate. Balloting will be secret, of course, but I hope that in true Unitarian fashion, we have a free and open discussion of this very important issue before the vote.

The church bylaws outline the rules: In order to vote at this year's meeting you must have been a church member by February 17, 2015 (90 days prior to the meeting) and have a recorded financial contribution to the church during the year immediately preceding the meeting. Even if you do not meet the requirements to vote, you can still attend and speak at the meeting.

Over the last months, many of you have raised this issue with me, and I am sure that you are happy to hear this news! There will be other issues on the agenda, too, most notably the annual budget. Although not as "sexy" a topic as calling a minister, this is an important issue for setting the direction of the church over the next year. Have a voice in setting our priorities and let others know what is important to you.

And a very big thank you to all of you who have taken the time to speak with me about your concerns and wants. Every one of us counts!

Forward,
Louise Jeffrey

Annual Meeting — May 17

The 146th annual congregational meeting of First Unitarian Church of Omaha will take place at the Church on Sunday, May 17 at 12pm. Eligible voting members* of the church will adopt an operating budget for the 2015-16 church year and elect a President-elect, members of the Board of Trustees, a Trustee of the Trust Fund, and Nominating Committee members; hear select reports from church leaders; and reveal our Unitarian of the Year!

Childcare will be provided and your Board of Trustees will host coffee hour following the 10:30am service and provide snacks and drinks to help tide you over during the meeting.

We encourage all members to attend this important church event.

*Individuals are eligible to vote who have been members of the church for at least three months and have made a financial contribution in their name to the church between April 17, 2014 and April 17, 2015.

—Board of Trustees

Adult Education at First Unitarian

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 the church office (admin@firstuomaha.org).

Exploring Humanistic Perspectives in Literature with Ron Knapp

Tuesday, April 28 at 7pm in the Common Room

Drawing from a variety of literary sources—prose and poetry—this session will focus on the earth as a very special or sacred place. This program, in cooperation with OMAHA (Omaha Metro Area Humanist Association) is presented in an informal, coffee house type of atmosphere. Open to the public. Come and have a good time with literature!

Flint Discussion Forum

The next Flint Discussion Forum will be held on Tuesday, April 21 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.



Advice on Diaries *by Jan Wilson, Director of Religious Education*

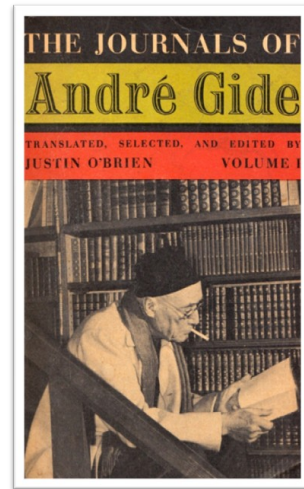
I enjoy the many great articles on a website called *Brain Pickings*. Though I have never kept a diary, I was interested in the importance of such a practice according to the author, Maria Popova. Here is what she wrote:

“A diary is useful during conscious, intentional, and painful spiritual evolutions. Then you want to know where you stand... An intimate diary is interesting especially when it records the awakening of ideas.” Maria Popova in *Brain Pickings* states. Nobel prize winning author, Andre Gide, she notes, reaped the creative and spiritual benefits of journaling.

One of his most lucid and luminous such meditations deals with the paradox of sincerity, the difference between being and appearing, and the monumental question of what it really means to be oneself. The week after his 20th birthday, the same day he laid out his rules of moral conduct, young Gide writes:

Whenever I get ready again to write really sincere notes in this notebook, I shall have to undertake such a disentangling in my cluttered brain that, to stir up all that dust, I am waiting for a series of vast empty hours, a long cold, a convalescence, during which my constantly reawakened curiosities will lie at rest; during which my sole care will be to rediscover myself.

Journaling, I believe, is a practice that teaches us better than any other the elusive art of solitude—how to be present with our own selves, bear witness to our experience, and fully inhabit our inner lives. As a dedicated diarist myself, I’ve always had an irresistible fascination with the diaries of artists, writers, scientists, and other celebrated minds—those direct glimpses of their inner lives and creative struggles. But, surely, luminaries don’t put pen to paper for the sake of quenching posterity’s curiosity—at least as interesting as the contents of those notable diaries is the question of why their keepers keep them.”



“A diary is useful during conscious, intentional, and painful spiritual evolutions. Then you want to know where you stand... An intimate diary is interesting especially when it records the awakening of ideas.”

For information about Sunday School, our summer camp for kids and what we are learning, please [click here](#).

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, April 16 at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge. Rae Barry will be the facilitator for the chapter on Trust from our book, *Soul to Soul*. There is a covenant statement which needs to be signed before attending our group. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Harriet Major by emailing hmajor323@cox.net or calling 402-391-0248.

Share the Plate—Community Meals

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 Community Meals. Please see below for more information and see page 14.

Community Meals — April 4

Our next date is Saturday, April 4--the Saturday before Easter. We hope to put a "spring" in our neighbors' steps with our spring celebration menu! Our menu will be: ham, cheesy potatoes, green beans, desserts. We will need help with set-up, cooking, dessert making, serving, and cleanup. Please sign up by going here: <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0c4fa4af2fab9-community> or call/email Diane Withem: dianewithem@gmail.com, 402-679-8916. We look forward to working with you to serve the needs of our neighbors. For more information about the meals, see page 14.

Ministry Team Meeting

On the first Saturday of every even-numbered month, our ministry team leaders and interested members and friends gather to discuss projects ranging from the creation of our new church website to the formation of the Hospitality Teams. These meetings are open to anyone who is interested in the church's progress and work. Our next meeting is Saturday, April 4 at 2pm in the Common Room. Can't attend meetings but still want to know what is happening behind the scenes at First Unitarian? Sign up for our monthly team leader newsletter entitled *Voluntary Servitude*. This e-newsletter features articles and updates from team leaders and information from the UUA and the MidAmerican Region. Contact the office at admin@firstuomaha.org to receive these emails.

CommUUnity Night

Friday, April 3 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, or 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!

Spirit Circle

Sunday, April 5 in the Common Room

We will be holding a seven-candle purification ritual to celebrate the arrival of spring and end of winter. Social hour is at 6pm and the ritual is at 7pm followed by a potluck.

Gala Eve of Art and Music

Saturday, April 25 at 7pm

Connect Gallery, 3901 Leavenworth, Omaha

Not to be missed! Seats are still available for this elegant Heart & Hand Auction soiree of art, music, beverages, and delicious hors d'oeuvres. A group of our UU artists has rented the Connect Gallery for one evening to share their favorite art and that of other artists with you, while the talented Steve Raybine provides music for your listening pleasure! Original sculptures created for last spring's Stewardship Campaign (the famous Painted Sticks), this year's Campaign (the Metamorphosing Layers), along with the selected art of church artists will be auctioned off to the highest bidders. Host artists include Jan Wilson, Frank Rivas, Eddith Buis, Marie Sedlacek, Steve Raybine, & Jen McEvoy. Auction of Stewardship pieces benefits the church. Auction of artist pieces is divided equally between artist and First Unitarian Church. Come have fun and acquire art for your bedside table, to hang in the entry hall or over the dining table, to hang on the wall or anyplace that your house needs art. Price to attend: \$25/person (goes to the church).



Contact auction@firstuuomaha.org to reserve your spot today!

CommUUnity Night

Friday, April 3 at 5:30pm in the Common Room.

See page 10 for details.

Community Meals

Saturday, April 4, offsite

See pages 9 and 14 for more information.

Ministry Team Meeting

Saturday, April 4 at 2pm in the Common Room

See page 9 for details.

Spring Celebration

Sunday, April 5

See page 12 for more information.

Spirit Circle

Sunday, April 5 at 6pm in the Common Room

See page 10 for details.

Night Club Evening

Friday, April 10

See page 5 for more information.

Women's Alliance

Monday, April 13 at 6:30pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

Board Meeting

Tuesday, April 14 at 7pm in the Common Room

Brown Bag Lunch with the Rev.
Thursdays at noon in the Common Room

See page 4 for details.

Flame Deadline

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

Women's Religious Studies Covenant Group

Thursday, April 16 at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 9 for details.

Young Adult Night

Friday, April 17 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

Church Events

Flint Discussion Forum

Tuesday, April 21 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 7 for details.

UU & You Class

Wednesday, April 22 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 5 for details.

Adult RE History Class

Begins Thursday, April 23 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 7 for details.

Gala Eve of Art and Music

Saturday, April 25 offsite at Connect Gallery. See page 10 for details.

RE Council Meeting

Sunday, April 26 at 12:30pm in Jan's office

Book Club

Monday, April 27 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 5 for more information.

Exploring Humanistic Perspectives in Literature

Tuesday, April 28 at 7pm in the Common Room

See page 7 for information.



Pictured above: the Early Morning Risers at the 9:30am service. Photographer: Kathi Oliver

Recurring...

Women's Religious Studies Group

Meets most Thursdays at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge

See page 9 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.

YRUU

Meets every Wednesday at 7pm in the Common Room.

Looking ahead...

All Church Work Day

Saturday, May 2

See page 17 for information.

Choir and EMR Concert

Sunday, May 17 at 10:30am (one service only begins this Sunday)

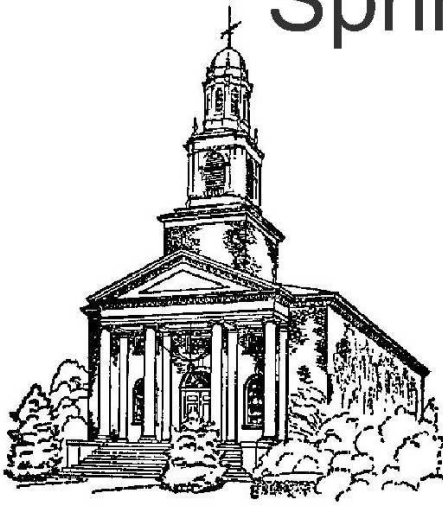
See page 13 for details.

Annual Meeting

Sunday, May 17 at noon in the Common Room

See page 6 for details.

Spring Family Celebration



Kids Carnival on Sunday, April 5

School children will attend the 9:30 service for recognition of our dedicated Religious Education teachers and volunteers. They won't want to miss a certain long eared visitor.

Toddlers: 9:30 -10:30 egg hunt and carnival
School age: 9:30 service and presentations
10:30-11:30 egg hunt and carnival

Religious Education Team
First Unitarian Church of Omaha

Can you volunteer for this event?
email Jan Wilson
dre@firstuuomaha.org



Summer Schedule to Begin

Starting Sunday, May 17, we begin our summer schedule with only one service at 10:30am followed by a coffee hour down in the Common Room.

Choir & Early Morning Risers Concert

Sunday, May 17 at 10:30am

The First Unitarian Choir led by Bob McMeen and the Early Morning Risers, accompanied by Stan Harper, will present the annual choir service. A wide variety of music will be performed including favorites from this year's services. Please plan to attend and enjoy your wonderful choir and EMR.



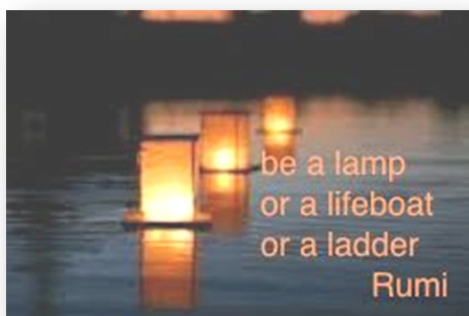
*Photographer:
Maria Wallace*



*Photographer:
Scott Kemper*

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@firstuuomaha.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. The next time First Unitarian will be charge of the lunch is Saturday, April 4. Can you help? Please go this link:

<http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0c4fa4af2fab9-community>

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

See page 17 for more information.

Pledge Campaign Update

Sunday, March 8 saw the official kickoff of the 2015/16 Pledge Campaign featuring a delicious, free catered brunch from Hy-Vee. Thank you to all of you who have already contributed to our current campaign! As of March 23, we are pleased to announce we have pledges totaling \$169,401. As of this date we have received 63 pledge units. A pledge unit represents a person, couple, or family that pledges together.

Last year our theme was to tend our dreams and watch them bloom. After one of the most successful pledge drives in memory, we come back to you, asking for your help to keep this trend going. Your new, continued, or increased pledge allows us to continue to grow and provide exciting, meaningful programs and opportunities. Your pledge commitment to the church is an affirmation of your support. We recognize not all people can pledge at the same level, and we are happy to see people involved at all levels! It is the commitment that is of greatest importance. For those of you who are able, please consider increasing your level of support. Together, we will make this the most successful campaign ever! Pledge forms are available in the pews or by contacting the church office (admin@firstuuomaha.org).

We hope everyone enjoyed the brunch Sunday, March 8. We know the Stewardship Team did. We look forward to celebrating the close of the campaign with all of you on Saturday, March 28 when the Board and Stewardship Committee sponsor a “Potluck Soup Supper” beginning at 5pm. Soup and bread will be provided. Bring a side dish or desert to share!

Thanks,
Stewardship Committee

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.



Witches and Druids and Wiccans, OH MY!

By Dave Richardson

Unitarian Universalism has historically been a denomination that welcomes a wide spectrum of liberal religious thinking. Most of the forebears of our religion came out of the Judeo-Christian tradition; however, in the latter part of the 20th century many UUs and their congregations began to examine and practice elements of other faith traditions, and many of these traditions pre-dated the Abrahamic religions. Such is the case with Paganism. For the last 20 years the First Unitarian Church of Omaha has counted among its many programs a pagan group. For several years the group was called OCUUPS (Omaha Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans). It has gone through several iterations and alterations since its formation, but it remains a presence to this day. In a recent survey of our membership fully 20% identified as pagan or earth-centered in their religious orientation.

One of the “kick-starters” for the Pagan presence was a class conducted here at First Unitarian titled “Cakes for the Queen of Heaven” conducted by Doug Lee-Regier. The course is a “woman-honoring” adult RE curriculum developed by UU Rev. Shirley Ranck, consisting of two interactive workshop series.

By the early 90s the UUA had already formed the national CUUPS organization which was “dedicated to networking Pagan-identified

Unitarian Universalists, educating people about Paganism, promoting interfaith dialogue, developing Pagan liturgies and theologies, and supporting Pagan-identified UU religious professionals.”

To the uninitiated, Paganism is a much misunderstood term. It is generally polytheistic, earth-centered and often takes its roots from ancient earth-based groups such as Wiccan, Druid and Goddess groups. Many local practicing Wiccans found a “safe place” in OCUUPS and a welcoming atmosphere at First Unitarian. The group sponsored many educational and social activities including a yearly “Witches Ball” which was open to all. Many church members enjoyed these elaborate and fun-filled affairs which raised significant amounts of money for the church and its programs including the Preserve Our Building Fund.

Several regular Sunday services were conducted by the OCUUPS group which also helped many non-Pagans to gain further understanding and appreciation of our Pagan programs. The eight major Pagan holidays were often celebrated in the evenings at church with rituals appropriate to these ancient holidays.

Pagans have also held many church leadership spots including members of the Board of Trustees and a recent past president (Kate Godfrey).

Of late, the Pagan presence has been revisioning their role in the church. OCUUPS is no longer operating under that title, but has gone through several identities. The

current group is called “The Spirit Circle” and meets on the first Sunday of the month.

The presence of this group enriches the experience of this church in many ways. It provides an inviting place for those who identify with Paganism and it has give non-pagans a deeper understanding of this ancient faith tradition. If we didn’t know before we now know that witches are people, who like all of us are seeking growth and transformation, who also send out peaceful energy through healing prayers and good wishes.

Do You Love Community Meals?

As you may know, this interfaith project is in its seventh year of service to the Park Avenue neighborhood, although many of our guests come to enjoy lunch with us from much further afield. It has taken some time for us to evolve a team of neighborhood volunteers who come most Saturdays; some of them attend participating churches and some do not, but they are all part of the neighborhood. These volunteers, who have varying levels of ability, are a core part of the program. They unload, sort, and distribute the Trader Joe's pantry every week. They set up the dining room before the meal and clean it up afterward. They fill in the gaps when the church group cooking any week needs some extra hands to help out.

Another core part of the program is the leadership of the team every week. The "point" people act as resources to the church groups. They supervise and assist at all tasks and see that every volunteer has meaningful work to do. They are "first in, last out" and ultimately responsible for the way the facility is left at the end of the day. Whenever a situation calls for an immediate decision, including a weather-related cancellation of the meal, it is the point person who makes that call. At present, there are three of us who rotate that job. Two of us have been doing this since the inception of the project and the other has been at it for more than four years. It is time for us to develop new leadership so that we can continue into the future. We know that there are others who share our passion for this project and can commit to this job at least one time per month (needed for consistency) when they are in town. Is this you?

Basic job requirements include having both email and a telephone, and willingness with regard to decision-making. Point persons must be willing to work with volunteers who vary in their abilities. Hours are 9am until 2pm (at the latest). On the job training is available for as long as necessary until folks feel completely comfortable with the task. Even after new point people feel very well-oriented to the job, consultation is still available every week from volunteers who are there consistently.

Would you like to explore this opportunity to see if it is right for you? If so, contact Louise Jeffrey (louisekjeffrey@hotmail.com) or Kay Lynn Goldner (klgoldner@cox.net). See page 14 for more information about the Community Meals program. Thank you!

All Church Work Day

Saturday, May 2

8am to 1pm

Pizza at 1pm in the Common Room

Volunteers are needed for this special event. Help us spruce up, clean up and organize the church and its grounds. No matter what your talents, we can use your help to beautify our church!

Special tasks:

Organize the furnace room, clean walls, organize "the cave," spruce up the garden, make glass windows shimmer, polish wooden furniture, help with deep-cleaning, and invigorate the sanctuary.

Questions? Contact Dave Rosser at 402-541-4393 or call the church office.

New Member News

By Ellen Shurson

We welcome our newest new member, Laura Stefana Cruz, who joined on March 8. Laura says that Yvonne Price invited her to our church three years ago, and she returned because she felt welcome here at First U and that she could be herself without judgment.

She decided to join because she wants to become more involved and meet more people. She said, "It is the only place I have felt like I can truly be myself since I moved to Omaha."

Laura is a stay-at-home mom, married to Marc Cruz, and they have a 5-year-old son named Corbin and a 17-year-old exchange student from Spain named Kamala. Laura is originally from northern Virginia, just outside of D.C. Laura and Marc moved to the area when he was stationed here six years ago.



Laura says she loves reading, hiking and learning. She is very passionate about gaining knowledge, and to accomplish this she takes free online courses through Coursera.

She said, "I am really passionate about music even though I can't even play an instrument. I collect vinyl records and anything with an owl on it."

When you get a chance, say hello to Laura and her family and welcome them to our church family.



"WHAT? You shop AMAZON and don't support First Unitarian?"

It's easy!!!

Visit www.firstuuomaha.org and click the **AMAZON** logo

OR

Visit www.smile.amazon.com, update the **CHARITY** information to **FIRST UNITARIAN OF OMAHA**

Support First Unitarian Church with **EVERY** purchase you make!!

Since January 1, 2014, Amazon has donated \$757.66 to First Unitarian

Outside Opportunity—Climate Walk

The Creighton University Center for Social Justice (an OTOC solidarity member) is cordially inviting First Unitarian Church of Omaha to participate in their Climate Walk. Please come out and support a fellow OTOC member along with showing your support for climate change awareness.

Date: Wednesday, April 22nd (Earth Day)

Place: Creighton University campus on the Kiewit Lawn

Time: 3pm social hour, free snacks and music; 4 - 5:30pm walk begins on the Kiewit Lawn and will proceed along Dodge Street. Hosted by Creighton University Center for Social Justice Sustainability Advocacy Team, an OTOC solidarity member.

Outside Opportunity—OTOC Annual Fundraiser

Come and support OTOC's Annual Community Fundraiser on Saturday, April 25, 6–9:30pm at Hot Shops Art Center with appetizers, cash bar, live music and a silent auction. The money raised at the OTOC fundraiser is used to support OTOC's efforts in the Omaha metro community. Paul Serrato, jazz composer and pianist, will be playing. Paul had a successful career in New York City as a jazz musician. He also taught English as a Second Language for the New York City Schools. He has produced many CDs and moved back to his hometown, Omaha, a couple of years ago. He is a graduate of Creighton Prep High School and is teaching ESL at Metro Community College.

A Church Member Note

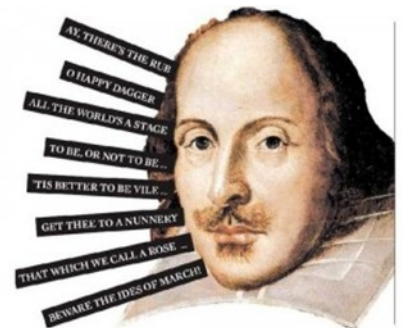
Most of you remember Pat Allender who was our choir accompanist for many years. She sent in this note and asked that it be shared in the church newsletter:

I have received so many good wishes and notes of encouragement from members of First Unitarian Church. This is to say "thank you" to everyone. You have brought me many hours of smiles.

*Fondly,
Pat Allender*

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

Volunteers (Sirrahs, Mistresses, and Cousins) are needed for this year's Shakespeare on the Green's production of Othello on June 27, 2015. Duties include handing out flyers, talking with guests, passing out surveys, and collecting donations. Methinks this year will be just as fun as last year!! There are a few perks for signing up which will be shared at a later day.



Please go to: <http://vols.pt/BHo4HR> to sign up to be a volunteer or visit the [First Unitarian Facebook page](#) (under events) for a direct link. More details will be posted at a later date.

We whose names are here subscribed associate ourselves together as a Religious Society for mutual helpfulness in right living and for the advancement of sound morals and pure religion in the community: and we hereby pledge ourselves to bear our part in the common cause and to care for the welfare and influence of the Society of which by this act we become members. Basing our union upon this expressed moral and religious purpose rather than upon any dogmatic statement of belief, and emphasizing the religion of character and daily life above all creedal confessions, we invite to our membership all who are seriously drawn to us in our spirit and aims and who desire to have with us their Church Home under the Articles of Incorporation.

— Bond of Union, August 22, 1869

First Unitarian Church of Omaha
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