

December 2019

# The Flame



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

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## Church Services

**Sunday, December 1 at 10:30am**

**“That Transcending Mystery & Wonder”**

**Rev. Cyndi Simpson from Second Unitarian Church.**

Mystery and Wonder are the first listed authoritative sources of our living Unitarian Universalist faith. What are they for us? How do they inspire us? And how do they relate to our monthly worship theme of AWE?

*This service is part of a three-way pulpit exchange with First and Second Unitarian Churches of Omaha and the Unitarian Church in Lincoln.*

**Sunday, December 8 at 10:30am**

**“Stranger Share Our Fire Service”**

Celebrate the warmth of the season in this all-ages service focused on the joy of giving. Bring to this worship service your donations for:

**YES (Youth Emergency Services):** Warm clothing items, earbuds, hair accessories, gift cards to fast food restaurants and to Target, and monetary donations. Gifts can be unwrapped.

**First Lutheran Food Pantry:** non-perishable food items.

**First U Neighborhood Care:** \$10 gift cards to nearby gas stations, \$10 gift cards to fast food places nearby like Taco Bell, Runza, McDonalds, \$10 gift cards to nearby grocery stores like Hyvee, bus passes (we usually purchases the 10-rides bus pass with transfer).

We encourage you to involve family members of all ages in selecting gifts for these recipients! We will have a processional of gifts during the service.

**Sunday, December 15 at 10:30am**

**Searching for Asherah: Reclaiming the Divine Feminine**

**Rev. Michelle LaGrave**

The Hebrew scriptures tell stories of the Ancient Israelites worshiping Asherah, the wife of God, as the Queen of Heaven. Few are familiar with these stories today. How were these stories lost? What might we gain spiritually from reclaiming them today?

**Sunday, December 22 at 10:30am**

This service will be presented by CUUPS (Covenant of UU Pagans) and more information will be shared in the enews.

**Sunday, December 29 at 10:30am**

**“What Did You Learn?”**

**Kabin Thomas**

As the year draws to a close, it's a good time to reflect on the past twelve months and look toward what the future year may bring. Kabin will share his greatest lessons learned in 2019 and invite members of the congregation to do the same. They'll also note how these lessons will help them (and all of us) on the journey into the new year.

## Special Holiday Service

**Christmas Eve Service: Lessons and Carols**

**Tuesday, Dec. 24 at 7pm**

This will be a traditional Christmas Eve service filled with music, singing, and candlelight. The Choir and the Early Morning Risers will perform.

After the service, please join us in the Common Room for cookies and conversation. The nursery will be closed to give our helpers time with their families. Everyone is welcome in the Sanctuary.

## Church Parking

Parking is directly west of the church in the surface parking lot or on the street. **We want to save the surface lot for those who need to park closer.** You may park in the Midtown Crossing Parking Garage to the west of the church lot. The entrance to the parking garage is on Farnam Street. Have your ticket validated downstairs in the Common Room for free parking— with validation you receive FREE PARKING for the ENTIRE day. Questions? Email the church office at [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org). See more info at our website here: [www.firstuomaha.org/directions](http://www.firstuomaha.org/directions).

## Windshield Decals for Church Lot

In an effort to save our church parking for members, visitors, volunteers, and staff, the Ministry Team Council created a windshield decal (see the image below) last fall. Decals were given to church members and friends. The decals are small (3in. x 3in.) and can be placed in the front windshield in the top left or right-hand corner. Midtown Crossing shoppers and employees have been parking in the church lot—that causes problems, especially on Sunday mornings and during private wedding ceremonies. Our lot is small and each space is important so we can be welcoming to our visitors. If you still need a decal, you can pick one up this Sunday— there's a small basket filled with decals (along with a sign explaining what they are) next to the parking validation machine in the Common Room.



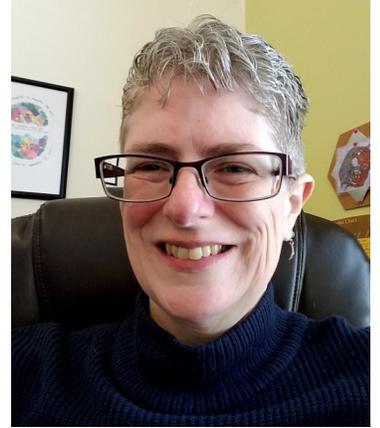
## Ministerial Musings from the Interim Minister

By Rev. Michelle LaGrave

This past August, I did a “Question Box Sermon” in which members, friends, and visitors were asked to submit questions they would like to ask me/the minister. I did my best to answer several of them during the service, but the pile of question cards remains quite large, so I am using this space to answer a few more. Here goes!

### Do you have any thoughts on the recent UUA controversy regarding “The Gadfly Papers”?

Yes, I have many thoughts. For those of you who may not be aware of to what this question refers, “The Gadfly Papers” is a book that was distributed at General Assembly by the minister of the Spokane congregation. It has sparked some controversy, especially among those who are resistant to doing the work of dismantling racism and other forms of oppression within the UUA.



When we do the work of antiracism and anti-oppression, we frequently talk about the difference between intention and impact. A defining characteristic of white fragility is that we frequently divert attention from the impact of our words and behaviors to what we believe to be the innocent intention (or lack of any intention at all) behind our words and behaviors. An analogy I’ve frequently heard used is that of accidentally stepping on someone else’s foot. When we accidentally step on someone else’s foot, we *should* apologize and focus on attending to the injury and making sure the person, and their foot, are okay. In the white fragility analogy what we do instead is ignore the injury and the person who has been hurt and instead yell at the top of our voices that “we didn’t *mean* to do it.”

But this isn’t even the case with “The Gadfly Papers.” It’s worse than that. Todd Elkoff is not screaming at the top of his voice that “he didn’t *mean* to do it.” In fact, he did mean to do it. He tells us that, right in the title, where he refers to himself as a gadfly. Definition: He tells us that, right in the table of contents, where he calls for Unitarian Universalism to be split into two. Todd Elkoff’s intention was neither innocent nor beneficent. He isn’t saying he’s sorry and he is steadfastly refusing to listen to those who are trying to express their hurt. In the analogy above, Elkoff is driving a Mack truck through a crowded street, running over the feet of many people, not only refusing to stop and check on their injuries but also laughing at the fact that they were injured and dared to complain about it. Over the past several months, many people have called for Elkoff to stop the truck, get out, and talk about what’s going on. He has steadfastly refused to do so.

If you would like to hear more about “The Gadfly Papers,” you can listen to this sermon by the Rev. Sarah Skochko who does an excellent job of deconstructing several of the problems inherent in the publication and how they relate to a widespread culture of white supremacy. [Click here to watch the sermon.](#)

## Hey, What’s The Ministerial Search Committee Up To Now?

There are many steps to take in the search for a settled minister. Thanks to everyone who completed the survey and attended cottage meetings and focus groups. Thanks to church staff and leaders who took time to respond to our questions, and to Rev. Michelle for her exceptional guidance and support. See information about the survey results on pages 14-15.

We used all of the information we gathered to complete First Unitarian’s Congregational Record, a deep dive into church history, culture, staff, finances, religious education, facilities, demographics and most importantly, what the congregation is looking for in our next settled minister. There are 33 congregations in search this year for a settled minister and each one will complete their own Congregational Record. Ministerial candidates take the month of December to review those Congregational Records and in early January, the Search Committee will learn the names of prospective candidates who are interested in an initial interview to learn more about our congregation. January is going to be very exciting! We’ll keep you posted!

## A Church for All-Ages is a Church for the Ages

By Christina Strong, Lifespan Director of Religious Education

“When worship services are designed to meet their needs, children can experience ritual, expand their faith development, connect with their peers, and understand the intimacy necessary to learn spiritual techniques... Welcoming children into the primary worship service invites children into the heart of a congregation.”

-Michelle Richards, Religious Educator & author of *Come into the Circle*



Following the Religious Educators conference in November, I attended a Worship Renaissance Module, a three-day workshop about worship planning for religious educators. We had the opportunity to practice planning several types of services, such as children's chapel, youth-led, adults-only, and multigenerational. As a lifespan DRE, I have particular interest in services that are engaging and meaningful for participants of all ages. Michelle and I have been planning two upcoming multigenerational services, which are for me both a continuity of traditions my family has enjoyed at my home congregation in Lincoln, and an experiment as I try new things as a religious professional. Both of these services have an at-home component before we come together in celebration at the worship service.

### Stranger Share Our Fire Service (Sunday, December 8)

Please join us for an all-ages service which celebrates the spirit of giving during the holiday season as a ritual that connects us to our larger community. This service has been an annual December tradition at the Unitarian Church of Lincoln for decades, and has been my family's favorite multigenerational service, so I'm excited to share it with you! This year we have chosen to give to YES (Youth Emergency Services), First Lutheran Food Pantry, and First U Neighborhood Care (see the weekly e-mail news for a list of suggested gifts). If you have children or youth in your family, I encourage you to involve them in shopping for the gifts! My children have always enjoyed that part as much as the service itself, and it gives them a sense of connection to the gifts they are giving. During a service filled with joyful music, adults and children will join together in a procession of gifts for each of the three organizations we have chosen. Nursery care will be offered during this service, but parents of preschoolers and older toddlers may wish to have them join them for the gift giving!

### Mystery Friends Program

**Sign up on Sundays, December 8-29. Letter-exchange January 12-February 2. Breakfast & worship service on Sunday, February 9**

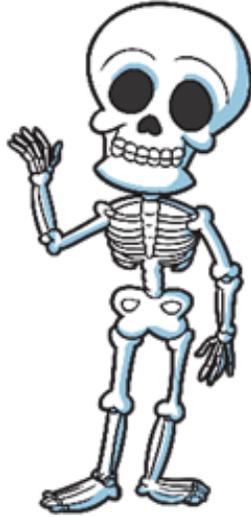
Mystery Friends is a pen pal program intended to create connections in our community between children/youth and adults who may not already know each other well. Please sign up to participate at the Mystery Friends table during Coffee Hour on Sundays, December 8—December 29. On January 5th, secret code names will be assigned, and on the next four Sundays Mystery Friends will exchange letters with clues and other interesting information about themselves. The program will culminate with a breakfast before service on February 9, when Mystery Friends will be revealed! Mystery Friends are invited to sit together at the breakfast and during the February 9th worship service, which will be a celebration of multigenerational friendships.

Questions? Email: [dre@firstuomaha.org](mailto:dre@firstuomaha.org).

*Note:* On November 1st, First Unitarian Church was informed that our Lifespan Director of Religious Education Christina Strong was accepted into the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program. This is a wonderful accomplishment. We wanted to share the letter with you. See the letter on pages 12 and 13.

## 2019 Heart and Hand Auction News!!

The auction on October 25 was a fun party and successful fundraiser, with income of \$12,000 (when auction bills are paid). The auction tri-chairs, Katrina Schmidt, Kathi Oliver, and Sara Switzer (with the behind-the-scenes help of Donna Neff and Walt Jesteadt), send a heartfelt *thank you* to all the generous donors and buyers!



**Thanks to our generous donors, buyers, and our hard-working volunteers!** A special thanks to Kate Wiig, our auction MC and auctioneer, for a fun evening! A special thanks to all of the volunteers who helped setup, distributed food, helped in the nursery, and helped clean up! We appreciated all of the help.

### Guest Seats for Auction events

Some of you had big hearts and purchased extra “guest” seats for auction events. Thank you! Please invite your guests yourself, or contact the Auction Team to distribute them. Same with questions about whether guest seats are available for particular events.

There are many events in January and February with seats still available to purchase. Check out the auction calendar at [www.firstuomaha.org/handh](http://www.firstuomaha.org/handh) for these event listings. Email [auction@firstuomaha.org](mailto:auction@firstuomaha.org) if you are interested in purchasing a seat, if available.

### Auction Bills and Follow-Up

Auction bills and summaries to donors were send out via email the week after the auction. This doesn't always work, so contact us if you didn't receive yours. **Please pay auction bills as soon as possible.** To set up a series of payments, just let us know. There will be regular follow-up to help assure all these wonderful events and items purchased are enjoyed. For any auction-related issues or questions, please email [auction@firstuomaha.org](mailto:auction@firstuomaha.org) or call Katrina (402-916-9741).

The Auction Team will be following up all year to help assure all the events and items purchased are enjoyed. Questions? Contact [auction@firstuomaha.org](mailto:auction@firstuomaha.org) or call Katrina (402-916-9741) or Kathi (402-214-2718).

**Again-on behalf of the FUNdraising Team and our church—THANK YOU to all who participated in the 2019 Heart & Hand Auction!**

## Church Events

### Book Medley—New Group

*Saturday, Nov. 30 at 10:30am in the Merritt Lounge.* Read any good books lately? If so, come share your literary adventures with other bibliophiles. Please RSVP by email to [miriam.aviva@cox.net](mailto:miriam.aviva@cox.net).

### Omaha Polyamory Discussion Group

*Sunday, Dec. 1 at 6:30pm in the Common Room.* We invite any who embrace and support ethical non-monogamy-based loving relationships. We strive to offer a safe place to meet and discuss topics and issues we face as polyamorous individuals and families. This group will meet the 1st Sunday of each month through April.

### WAYS TO HELP:

#### Holiday Decorating

*Monday, Dec. 2 at 9am at the church.* See page 9 more details.

#### People's Film Festival

*Monday, Dec. 2 at 7pm in the Common Room.* We will watch *Farther Than the Eye Can See*, an intimate look inside one of the most successful Mount Everest expeditions ever. The 75-minute award-winning film captures the emotion, humor and drama of the historic ascent as well as other remarkable 'firsts.'

#### Compassionate Communication Group—takes a break in December

This group will NOT meet on Dec. 3. On Dec. 17, we'll have an offsite celebration at a local fun venue. If interested, please contact Suzanne: [nvcsuz@gmail.com](mailto:nvcsuz@gmail.com) for details.

#### WAYS TO HELP: Holiday Card Party for Black & Pink

*Wednesday, Dec. 4 at 5pm in the Common Room.* Our goal is to prepare 100 holiday cards to be sent to people inside the prison system. See page 8 for more information.

#### CommUnity Night

*Friday, Dec. 6 at 5:30pm in the Common Room.* All are welcome to this casual potluck. If you don't have time to pick up something to bring, that's okay. All we want is you. Childcare is provided.

### Women's Alliance

*Monday, Dec. 9 in the Common Room with socializing, beverages, appetizers and desserts at 6:30pm.* Our annual "white elephant" gift exchange will be at 7pm. All who identify as women are invited to attend. Please bring an appetizer or dessert and a wrapped gift. Re-gifting is strongly encouraged. We ask for a good-will donation of \$15 which goes into the Alliance's Scholarship Education Fund. (First time attenders will be guests of the Alliance.) Please RSVP by Dec. 6 by emailing [wa@firsttuomaha.org](mailto:wa@firsttuomaha.org) or via our [Facebook event page](#).

### The 3F Book Bonanza Group

*Wednesday, Dec. 11 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge.* We will discuss *Saving Fish from Drowning* by Amy Tan. Questions? Please contact Sheri Conner at [ksvortex@msn.com](mailto:ksvortex@msn.com).

### Book Launch & Coffeehouse Presented by AHA

*Thursday, Dec. 12 at 7pm in the Common Room.* The Agnostic, Humanist, Atheist Group (AHA) invites you to this event where Ron Knapp, Minister Emeritus, will introduce this new book, "ONENESS! Thoughts on a Humanistic Theology of Everything." Kyle Knapp will entertain and Dave Rosser will sing "Out of the Stars." Refreshments will be served. And, of course, you will have an opportunity to buy the new book. Go here for the Facebook event page: [www.facebook.com/events/440474473278561/](http://www.facebook.com/events/440474473278561/)

### Holiday Dinner

*Saturday, Dec. 14 with social hour at 5:30pm and dinner at 6:30pm.* The dinner will be catered by Attitude on Food. The reservation form is on page 10. RSVPs are required by Friday, Dec. 6 to the church office.

### The Flame Newsletter Deadline

*December 15 at noon.* Email: [admin@firsttuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firsttuomaha.org).

### Leadership Talk Back

*Sunday, Dec. 15 at 11:30am in the Common Room.* The MTC (Ministry Team Council) and the Church Board want to hear from you. Have

questions? Suggestions? Please join your church leaders!

### People's Film Festival

*Monday, Dec. 16 at 7pm in the Common Room.* We will watch *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey & Star-Talk* featuring Neil deGrasse Tyson, a marvelous astrophysicist who really loves his field, and you can see this in the way he narrates the series.

### Women's Religious Studies Covenant Group

*Thursday, Dec. 19 at 1pm in the lounge.* This group meets the 3rd Thursday of each month. Our book is *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, and Getting Old* by Parker J Palmer. We welcome all self-identified women. If you're interested, please contact Rae: [raeb1@hotmail.com](mailto:raeb1@hotmail.com).

### Rite of Ages: CUUPS (Covenant of UU Pagans)

*Sunday, Dec. 22 at 6:30pm in the Common Room.* At the dawn of the third cycle in the 21st Century, as we enter the next galactic age of Aquarius, come join us for a sacred ritual of reflection led by Mark Tipton, as we cast our elemental stones of intention into the rivers of time. We'll start at 6:30pm with a potluck after. Go here to the Facebook event for more info: [www.facebook.com/events/2478238949164906/](http://www.facebook.com/events/2478238949164906/).

### Christmas Eve Service: Lessons and Carols

*Tuesday, Dec. 24 at 7pm* This will be a traditional Christmas Eve service filled with music, singing, and candlelight. The Choir and the Early Morning Risers will perform. After the service, please join us in the Common Room for cookies and conversation. The nursery will be closed to give our helpers time with their families. Everyone is welcome in the Sanctuary.

### Book Club

*This group does not meet in December.*

More events on next page...

## Church Events

### Recurring Events

#### **Women's Religious Studies Group**

*This group meets every Thursday, except for the 3rd week of the month at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge. Our book is *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart D. Ehrman. If you're interested, please contact Linda Parker at [lparkerlib@gmail.com](mailto:lparkerlib@gmail.com). No meeting on 12/26.*

#### **Dharma Chautauqua**

*Every Thursday, 6pm to 7:30pm, in the Whitney Young Classroom. More info can be found online: [dharmachautauqua.drycreekhost.net/](http://dharmachautauqua.drycreekhost.net/).*

#### **Bridge Group**

*Meets the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month in the Conference Room at 11:30am. If you're a complete novice, join us to learn how to play this age-old game. It will boost your memory and your deductive reasoning skills. If you've played before, come for some entertainment and time at the game table. Questions? Contact Scott at [scott.kemper@gmail.com](mailto:scott.kemper@gmail.com).*

#### **YRUU (Youth Group)**

*Meets every Wednesday at 7pm in the Common Room from September to May. For more information, contact [DRE@firstuomaha.org](mailto:DRE@firstuomaha.org). No meetings on 12/25 and 1/1.*

#### **Choir Rehearsals**

*Every Wednesday at 7pm in the Sanctuary from September to May. For more info, email: [choirdirector@firstuomaha.org](mailto:choirdirector@firstuomaha.org). No rehearsals on 12/25 and 1/1.*

#### **Soul Matters Small Groups**

Various meeting dates. See here: [www.firstuomaha.org/soulmatters](http://www.firstuomaha.org/soulmatters).

#### **AHA Listening Circle**

*Meets the 3rd Sunday of the month at 11:45am in the Merritt Lounge. In this group we will deepen our understanding of our personal Atheist, Humanist, and Agnostic values through readings, listening and discussion which will help to enhance the Unitarian Universalist experience for those who attend. Please contact [AHA@firstuomaha.org](mailto:AHA@firstuomaha.org) with questions.*

### Upcoming Events

#### **Mid-Year Congregational Meeting**

*Sunday, Jan. 19, 2020 at 10:30am—in place of the service. See page 17.*

#### **Chili Cook-Off—Save the date!**

*Saturday, Jan. 25, 2020 at 5:30pm. See page 11.*

### Don't Miss Out!

See all the ways you can help and get involved at church on pages 8 and 9.

See upcoming Sister Church events on page 9.

## Inclement Weather Cancellations

In the event of bad weather and church service or a church event is cancelled, the church office will email everyone on our enews list, update the church webpage, and post on the church Facebook page. The church will also alert the local news stations about the cancellation.



## SHARE THE PLATE

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. Our Share the Plate recipient for December is **Youth Emergency Services (YES)**. YES serves homeless and at-risk youth by providing critically-needed resources that empower them to become self-sufficient.

Each night, hundreds of youth in the Omaha metro are homeless. Many of these youth have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused, making it unsafe for them to return home.

Many others are facing health, mental health, and substance abuse issues beyond their control. Without proper support and guidance, these vulnerable adolescents cannot succeed independently, and will likely fall into the cycle of homelessness as adults.

Youth Emergency Services (YES) exists to help these youth turn their lives around.

### BY THE NUMBERS:

-An estimated 1.6 million youth are homeless each year in the United States

-Nearly 50% of homeless youth have been physically or sexually abused

-1 in 4 youth have traded sex for means of survival such as shelter, food, or clothing

To learn more about YES, please go to: [www.yesomaha.org](http://www.yesomaha.org).

## CHANGE FOR CHANGE

Each week generous people put change in the collection plate. This change goes to the Sunday School kids who decide what to do with the money. In the past they have helped Community Meals and International Bridges for Justice. The kids are now donating this change to the **Neighborhood Ministry Team**, which purchases bus tickets and food cards and gives out blessing bags to people who come to the church door from our area. Your change makes a difference! Thank you for your generosity!

## SHARE THE PLATE SELECTIONS FOR 2020

Every fall, the Ministry Team Council selects the Share the Plate Recipients for the coming year. On October 10th, the MTC reviewed the applications and made the selections below. Note: this list was updated at the November MTC meeting. If you would like to nominate an organization for 2021, please [click here](#) for the form or contact the office.

### 2020 Share the Plate

January: Mind & Soul Radio, 101.3\*

February: Black and Pink

March: YES Meals

April: Black and Pink

May: PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

June: NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

July: Urban League of Nebraska: Whitney Young Academy\*

August: Siena/Francis Homeless Shelter

September: Planned Parenthood

October: Food Not Bombs

November: Partner Church

December: YES (Youth Emergency Services)

\* designates a new recipient

## Ways You Can Get Involved

### **Holiday Decorating**

*Monday, Dec. 2 at 9am at church.* Come help the Chalice Guild decorate the church for the holidays. Be part of the team of elves! Interested? Contact Kay Lynn at [klgoldner@cox.net](mailto:klgoldner@cox.net).

### **Black & Pink Holiday Card Party**

*Wednesday, Dec. 4, 5-8pm in the Common Room.* Our goal is to prepare 100 holiday cards to be sent to people inside the prison system. As you can imagine, the holiday season can be a really rough time for folks inside prison. Whatever holidays you may or may not celebrate this time of year, our incarcerated members are often denied the ability to celebrate their traditions in the ways they choose, whether their desire be to celebrate the returning of light for Solstice, the miracle of Hanukkah, the birth story of Jesus, the tradition of Kwanzaa and New Year's Day, or something else. All too often our members do not have

family and friends to reach out to them with cards or visits, making this time particularly isolating.

With your support someone on the inside will experience a moment of joy, connection and kindness, while telling prison staff that people on the outside are watching. This is why First Unitarian is hosting a card party to support Black and Pink's Holiday Card Drive.

Warm beverages will be provided. Attendees are encouraged to bring a holiday treat to share if they would like. Treats are optional and not required for attendance. If you are unable to attend, but would still like to support the event, you can donate holiday cards by dropping them off at the church office prior to December 4.

[Click here for the Facebook event.](#)

If you have questions please contact Ben Wallace at 402-680-6226 or [bmwallace@gmail.com](mailto:bmwallace@gmail.com).

### **YES Teens on First Unitarian's Holiday "MITTEN TREE" Shopping List**

This year, our church will collect donations that will benefit the teens served by Youth Emergency Services (YES) in the month of December. Starting Sunday, December 8, place your donations of new hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, socks and underwear in the "Gift Boxes" located in the church foyer. Like last year, we will not have the usual mitten tree in the Sanctuary. Instead, we will have beautifully decorated gift boxes to accept your donations in the foyer. YES serves homeless and at-risk youth by meeting their immediate needs for food, clothing, safety and shelter and providing a support system to help them get back on their feet. First Unitarian already has a strong connection to this nonprofit in our neighborhood. Each month Kim Callaghan and a team of volunteers prepare a meal for YES. In December we're also collecting gifts for YES. See next page for details.

*More opportunities on next page.*

## MORE Ways You Can Get Involved

### **Donations for YES!**

**This holiday season we will collect holiday gifts for teenagers.** Some ideas: ear buds, hair accessories, gift cards to fast food restaurants and to Target. YES hosts an annual holiday party for its youth. We've placed a small tree on display in the Common Room with paper ornaments with suggestions for gifts. No gift will be large and most are for either gender. You don't even have to wrap it! Let's make the kids' holiday shine bright! Gifts will be collected during the service on Sunday, Dec. 8. Want to help with YES events in the future? Need more details about the angel gift tree? Please Kim Callaghan at email: [kjcallaghan@hotmail.com](mailto:kjcallaghan@hotmail.com).

### **Mystery Friends Program**

Sign up every Sunday in December during Coffee Hour. Mystery Friends is a pen pal program intended to create connections in our community between children/youth and adults who may not already know each other well. See page 4 for more information!

### **Hospitality Subs**

Can you spare some time on a Sunday morning to assist a hospitality team in welcoming visitors, distributing the order of service, collecting the offering or cleaning the kitchen? Yes, we have hospitality teams for that purpose but sometimes a team may be short a member or two leaving them struggling to keep up. We are putting together a list of people a team can call on as a possible substitute when they are short a team member. *The more substitutes, the less often you may be called, and you can specify which job you are most comfortable doing.* If you are already a member of a hospitality team, please also consider joining the list of substitutes. Please consider joining the list of substitutes by emailing Carolyn McNamara at [caylamc@cox.net](mailto:caylamc@cox.net) or text her at 402-709-3192.

## **Outside Opportunities**

### **Sister Church Events**

We're working to reconnect with our Omaha Sister Church, Clair Memorial United Methodist Church. **These events below will take place at Clair Memorial Church. The address is 5544 Ames Ave., Omaha, NE 68104.**

**First Friday Fish Fry:** Happens the 1st Friday of each month. Times: 11am to 2pm and 4-7pm. Cost: \$12 donation includes fried catfish, homemade lemon cake and your choice of sides.

For more information, call Brenda at 402-571-5234.

### **Thanksgiving Day Service at 10am on 11/28**

**Monthly Food Pantry:** Happens the 3rd Saturday of each month from 10am to 2pm. December date: 12/21

**Christmas program** on Sunday, Dec. 15 at 10am during the service.

Contact the Clair Memorial Church office with any questions about these events: 402-451-8322.

### **OTOC (Omaha Together One Community)**

Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) teaches people to become effective leaders, explore their legitimate interests, do solid research, engage in sometimes tough, but always respectful public discourse, hold elected officials accountable and create positive change through collective action. Through the practice of these skills, people build relationships of trust and, by acting collaboratively, become part of solving their own problems rather than expecting someone else to take care of them.

For more information about OTOC, please visit:

[www.otoc.org](http://www.otoc.org).

## Annual Holiday Dinner

**Saturday, December 14 in the Common Room**

**Social Hour at 5:30pm; Dinner at 6:30pm**

A fabulous, delectable menu prepared by Attitude of Food  
(vegetarian & vegan selections included)

Cost is \$22.00 per person which includes the tip for the servers and clean-up so that our faithful volunteers can take a much needed break and enjoy the evening.

Please make reservations with your check to First Unitarian to arrive in the office by **Friday, December 6.**

Put your check and this form in the offering plate or mail both to the church office. Your check is your reservation.

Please circle what you are able to bring:

**Appetizer      Dessert**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please make your childcare reservation when you RSVP for the dinner.  
Pizza and all the fixings will be provided.

Yes, I will need childcare \_\_\_\_

# of children \_\_\_\_ ages \_\_\_\_\_

*We want everyone to be able to come and celebrate. If confidential financial assistance would make it possible for you to attend, please contact Rev. Michelle LaGrave at [minister@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:minister@firstuuomaha.org) or 402-345-3039 ext. 102.*

## Chili Cook-Off 2020 —Saturday, January 25 at 6pm

**Eat Chili With All the Fixins! Free cornbread & soft drinks! Cash bar!**

**Tickets: \$6/person Children under 10 FREE \$12/family maximum**

Childcare provided, but please make a reservation so we know how many kiddos we have to wrangle. Many folks come dressed up as cowboys and cowgirls or as cows and horses—use your imagination.

Enter Your Chili into the Competition! “Lasso” your recipe & start cookin’!

Please bring your chili in a heated dish/crockpot along with a ladle to serve. (Please keep additional condiments to a minimum.) Arrive at 5:30pm to register your chili.

Enter the NAME of the chili at check-in. Do NOT include the name of the chef!

Bringing chili for the contest? Your admission is free!

**Go here to RSVP online: [www.firstuomaha.org/chili-cook-off](http://www.firstuomaha.org/chili-cook-off)**

Or fill out the form below and mail it to the church office.

### RSVP Form for Chili Cook-Off 2020

Let us know how many folks will attend please! You can pay at the door!

Tickets: \$6/person Children under 10 FREE \$12/family maximum.

Bring chili and get in free!

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you bringing chili? \_\_\_\_\_

How many people over the age of 6 will attend with you?  
\_\_\_\_\_

If you need childcare for kids under the age of 6, let us know their ages and names please:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can you help clean up, set up, or both? Let us know!  
\_\_\_\_\_

On November 1st, First Unitarian Church was informed that our Lifespan Director of Religious Education Christina Strong was accepted into the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program. This is a wonderful accomplishment. We wanted to share the letter with you. See below:

November 1, 2019

Dear First Unitarian Church of Omaha,

I am pleased to inform you that your congregation's religious educator, Christina Strong, has been accepted into the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program. Christina is seeking status in the program as a Credentialed Religious Educator – Credentialed Level. She plans to finish the program in April 2022.



The Religious Education Credentialing Program seeks to strengthen Unitarian Universalist religious education and multigenerational ministries in the congregation and the wider Association. We believe that this goal is achieved in large part through the development and professionalization of religious educators. The Religious Education Credentialing Program helps nurture the call to religious education as a profession, provides a comprehensive path for up-to-date professional development, and articulates and upholds professional standards and guidelines.

To qualify for achievement of the Credentialed Religious Educator – Credentialed Level status, a candidate:

- submits documentation of practical training (90 hours);
- completes a reading list and writes annotations that relate their reading to their professional context;
- crafts three statements that demonstrate the ability to articulate an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural commitment; attention to their spiritual and self-care well-being, and a reflection on their professional role;
- completes a self-assessment;
- solicits recommendations from three persons familiar with the participant's professional achievement;
- creates a portfolio that reflects learning and professional accomplishment in 9 competency areas deemed critical for excellence in religious education leadership at the Credentialed

On November 1st, First Unitarian Church was informed that our Lifespan Director of Religious Education Christina Strong was accepted into the UUA Religious Education Credentialing Program. This is a wonderful accomplishment. We wanted to share the letter with you. Continued from previous page:

Level. These competency areas include: administration and volunteer management, right relations and professional ethics (including safe congregations), systems and conflict, UU foundations, and worship, among others. Lenses for anti-racism, anti-oppressive and multiculturalism must also be articulated, along with a sense for how technology factors into their work as a religious educator; and

- successfully interviews before the Religious Education Credentialing Committee in the spring of their final year.

In each competency area, Christina's portfolio will demonstrate her proficiency through an overview statement of her knowledge and skill; documentation of and reflection on relevant academic courses, trainings, independent studies, and leadership experiences in and beyond the congregation; and samples of her work.

Each credentialing candidate establishes a relationship with a mentor through the LREDA Mentoring Program and meets (in person or at a distance) approximately monthly with the mentor while in the Religious Education Credentialing Program. At the Credentialed level, the Religious Education Credentialing Committee awards credentialed status after successfully interviewing the candidate in person. To achieve and retain their program status, all candidates and credentialed religious educators must adhere to the rules and policies established by the RECC.

We hope that you will support and celebrate Christina as she undertakes this significant achievement, and that your congregation will be further enriched by her leadership.

In Service to Our Faith,



**Rev. Sarah Gettie McNeill (she/her) | Professional Development Programs Manager**

Phone (617) 948-4687 | [sgmcneill@uua.org](mailto:sgmcneill@uua.org)



## Congregational Survey: What Did We Learn?

Our 2019 congregational survey was based on the UUA's template. Several of the open response questions were replaced with a check box format, and a few questions from other survey sources were added by the committee. Respondents were offered links to the Google Form, and paper copies were made available. In addition, one Sunday, laptops were available at church for members without computer access. Though typical Sunday attendance this time of year (August-September) averages about 90, 120 members and friends of the congregation responded. The Search Committee met and discussed the survey responses shortly after completion.

### Who Answered?

Out of the 120 responses, about 64% were over the age of fifty. While most identify as white, three persons identified as Latinx, two as Native American/Alaskan Native, and three as multiracial. (This question allowed for multiple answers.) About 18% consider themselves a part of a multiracial family. Our congregation is (self identified) 65% female, 35% male, with one individual identifying as Genderfluid/Genderqueer, one as transgender, four as Two-Spirit, and four as Agender/Gender Androgenous. (Check all that apply.) We are a 5% Queer, 3% Gay, 1% Lesbian, 5% Pansexual, 12% Bisexual, 5% Asexual, and 80% Heterosexual congregation. (Multiple answers allowed.) Three-quarters of our congregation is in some type of committed relationship(s), with half of spouse/partners attending regularly. Eighty-four percent of us have a degree (bachelor's and above). A further 17% have post-high school education. Almost all of us travel less than half an hour to get to church. Two-thirds of us have belonged to the church for more than ten years, while about 60% have been UU's for at least a decade. Just over ten percent of us were raised as UU's or attended as youth. Over 90% rate their spiritual life three and above on a five-point scale.

### Engagement

As expected, there is a high level of participation in Sunday services, including volunteer activities such as welcoming/greeting, musical performance, and acting as Worship Associates. Sunday Service, Volunteering, Social Justice and Small/Affinity Groups drew the most responses among activities that help us live a dynamic UU life, stretch & grow, experience transcendence and feel most UU. Interestingly, 15% didn't respond to the question about where you experience transcendence. More than 50% of the respondents volunteered in the past year. Furthermore, greater than 50% participated in some small group or affinity group.

Of note: Our team didn't include the Young Adult Group everywhere it would have been appropriate, despite the fact that two of our members belong! Though some respondents may have treated it as a small group ministry, we feel we may have lost some important input. As a congregation constantly fighting the aging process, this may indicate an area for attention.

### Welcoming/Community

Three-quarters of respondents felt a strong feeling of warmth, friendliness and supportiveness in the congregation. Fewer (about half) feel the congregation is a source of support when they need it. Of the newer folks, 2/3 feel very welcome. Over half claim to have taken steps to integrate new members. About half agree that we are welcoming to marginalized communities; 12% feel we are very unwelcoming. UU Beliefs, celebrating common values and community brought us to First U and keeps us coming back. The perception of whether our congregation is open to change was divided 1/3, 1/3, 1/3. (During our discussion with Rev. Michelle, she conveyed that leadership has been very open to change during the interim ministry.) Almost half agree that the congregation focuses on the strong preference of some individuals.

### Programming

In addition to the data listed above (Engagement), respondents expressed the following:

-14% are unhappy with the children, youth, family RE.

-38% are unhappy with Adult RE.

(Note: We have just hired a new DRE, and have increased the position to ¾ time.)

While respondents reported having nearly fifty children at home at least part-time, parents identified the number of participating children as only nineteen.

**(more survey results continue on next page)**

(continued from previous page—survey results)

## Financial

As for work, 45% of us work full-time and 16% part-time. Of the other non-working respondents, about 33% are retired. We have a large span of income. Ten percent of our congregation lives below the poverty line, with another 7% living just above that. The median average income in the state of Nebraska is just over \$50,000. Roughly a third of our congregation lives on or below that line. Earning between 50-75K are 17% of our population, with the same number of those earning between 75-100K. The remaining third earn over a hundred thousand a year.

Over half agree that they have concerns about the congregation's financial sustainability, though 62% have increased giving within the last two years.

Five percent of our respondents donate over \$10,000 a year, six percent between 5 and 10K, 11% between 3 and 5K, 27% between 1-3K, and 17% donate from \$600-999. Eleven percent donate between 300 and 600 dollars. Twelve percent of respondents pledge less than three hundred dollars, and 13% pledge nothing. (Survey included friends of the church and frequent guests).

## Congregational Self-Image

On a scale of one to five, less than a quarter of respondents strongly consider this congregation open to change, though around 30% feel our structure is flexible enough to allow new ideas to be implemented. Half of respondents felt strongly that our congregation focuses on mission and the greater good. Thirty percent answered neutrally to this question. When asked whether our mission and ministry continue to adapt to changing conditions, most respondents chose neutrally on a one to five scale. Roughly 18% feel that some voices in our congregation are given more weight than others, even though only 12% reported a low level of trust in congregational leadership. Over 85% feel neutral or positive in our leaders' abilities in leading change in a non-anxious way. As far as staying in community during difficult times, only about a quarter felt strongly that we do well here. Half considered our acceptance of diverse theological viewpoints positive, and over a quarter answered neutrally. This left a final 25% of the congregation feeling we do not accept all theologies.

## Ministry

By far, the top two functions we want in our minister are "fostering a sense of fellowship and community within the church" (62%) and "presenting stimulating and challenging Sunday services" (70%), followed by "caring for and counseling individuals" (31%).

In general, changes to the building, music program, or moving toward theism are considered contentious. Welcome changes include more social justice work, more healing around past conflict, and fostering new leaders.

As to whether a person disagreeing with the minister would approach them directly, thirty-seven percent answered that they would. Fourteen percent would communicate with either the Right Relations Committee, the Minister's Advisory Committee, or the Board. About 15% would simply keep their opinions to themselves, while another 15% would discuss the issue with their friends.

When asked why a minister should consider First Unitarian of Omaha as a new home, words such as 'good,' 'people,' 'grow,' 'committed,' 'caring,' and 'potential' were frequently used.

## KIOS—Thank you!

### 2019 KIOS Bundled Donations

This year, KIOS bundled contributions totaled \$2,590 for which First Unitarian Church will be acknowledged as underwriter many times in 2020.

Thank you to these members and friends who have been so generous in their support:

Jaime Alexander, Eddith Buis, Kim & Brian Callaghan, Sheri Conner, Sharon Conlon, Beth Conover, Tim & Deb Duggan, Kim Dunovan & Jerre Tritsch, Bruce & Kate Godfrey, Larry Goesser, John & KayLynn Goldner, Mary Green, Linda Hess, John & Linda Hruska, Debbie Hunsberger, Mark Hutchins & Malia Hansen, Suzanne King, Anne & Ron Knapp, Donna Neff & Walt Jesteadt, Douglas Lee Regier, Harriet Major, Michael & Deb McAttee, Carolyn McNamara & John Wagner, Christina & Roman Noriega, Lois Norris, Bob Perrin, Peg Pidgeon, Carol Ramsey, Dave Richardson, Jessie & Ben Stallings, Pat Will, Diane & Ron Withem

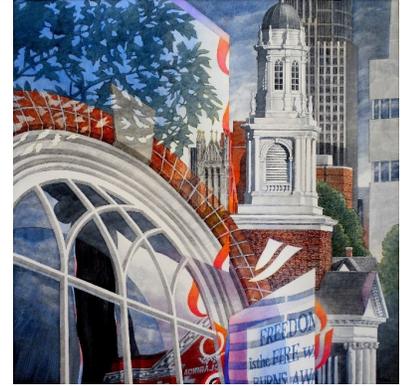
## Have You Read *Pillars & Dreams* Yet? (A History of the First Unitarian Church of Omaha)

By Jackie Anderegg

This is a book written and organized by Dave Richardson with able assistance by Ellen Shurson, Linda Parker and Carolyn McNamara. It is extraordinary. Based on years of archiving by Marie Helms and Dave Nicklin and others, Dave Richardson has breathed life into the history of our First Unitarian Church. With the incredible painting of our church by Allan Tubach on the cover, Dave has done the spirit of this church justice. The book is precise, readable, sensitive, and in my opinion, inspiring. With the elegantly appointed photography and spot on acknowledgments of the people that have made this church strong, Dave has defined what this church has meant in Omaha.

I think he also defines why we are here now. This is a resource for new member classes or interested visitors and for the rest of us to be more informed about what we have and what we need to protect. Dave gives credit to the well diggers before us and has dug a deeper well for all of us. I am rarely inspired. I think I am inspiration weary, (or maybe just old), but this book is great. Everyone who loves this church should own this book.

To purchase your copy of the book, please contact the church office. Email: [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org).  
Phone: 402-345-3039 ext. 101. Cost is \$25/copy.



## What's in a Name Tag?

By Carrie Helmberger, Membership Coordinator

Have you ever wondered, “Why do we wear these name tags and why are there so many different versions of them?”

Let me shed a little light on these burning questions for you.

- We wear nametags, because let's be honest, a lot of times we see people week after week and we don't always remember their names. A nametag helps take a way a little of the pressure, making it easier to do that whole face-with-name recognition thing.
- Black plastic nametags (with pin backs) belong to our members who have been a part of the church the longest.
- Blue metallic nametags (with magnetic backs) belong to our long-term members who just wanted a pretty blue name tag, to our more recent members, those who have just joined, or those of us who have lost our original name tag and needed a replacement\*
- Visitors who fill out the yellow information sheet are greeted at their second visit with a white, paper nametag because members want to get to know them and make them feel welcomed. We want them to feel as if they belong because they do!
- After a visitor has been with us for a while (8 or more visits), they will see that their plain white nametag now has a pretty blue stripe. This indicates that they are further interested in what our church has to offer. The blue stripe mirrors the blue cup at coffee hour, indicating the visitor feels safe enough at First Unitarian to stick around. It also means the visitors have been attending service long enough that their faces will be familiar to our members. We call these folks “frequent visitors.”

\*By the way, church members can fill out a nametag request form, and with a \$12 fee you too can have a blue magnetic nametag of your own! Please email me at [coordinator@firstuomaha.org](mailto:coordinator@firstuomaha.org) if you are interested. Not a member, but want to join? Email me!

## NOTICE OF THE MID-YEAR CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

**Save the Date: Sunday, January 19, 2020**

Dear Church Member,

The Board of Trustees would like to invite you to our mid-year Congregational Meeting scheduled for Sunday, January 19, 2020 at 10:30am. This meeting will take the place of the Sunday service.

The purpose of the mid-year meeting is to bring forth new business that the Board, the Ministry Team Council (MTC), and other leadership is working on. We seek your input and welcome discussion.

We will also solicit next year's leadership slate (which will be voted on at our annual meeting—scheduled for Sunday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>). We hope the mid-year meeting will become an annual event.

The board will provide light snacks. We encourage your participation.

Thank you,

First Unitarian Church of Omaha Board of Trustees

### Automatic Contributions—Electronic Funds Transfer

Did you know that you can have your contributions to the church made automatically? Electronic fund transfer will allow you to designate the amount of the money to be transferred biweekly or monthly from your bank account to the church's account. Your bank statement will provide an itemized list of the transactions. The contribution statement you receive from the church periodically will show each contribution as well. It's easy to start automatic contributions! You only need to complete and sign a form and then return it to the church office along with a voided check.

Please contact the church office for the form or [just click here](#). You can start the process any time. After that your contributions will be automatic. They will continue until you notify us to stop. Thank you for your generosity!

Questions? Contact our treasurer, Walt Jesteadt. Email: [treasurer@firstuomaha.org](mailto:treasurer@firstuomaha.org).

## Email Scam Alert!

Many of our church members have received scam emails that appear to be from Rev. Michelle. If you start a conversation with this person, eventually the person asks you to purchase gift cards and to send the codes on the back of the cards via email.

### THE CHURCH STAFF AND MINISTER WILL NEVER ASK FOR YOU TO GIVE THEM CREDIT CARD OR GIFT CARD INFORMATION.

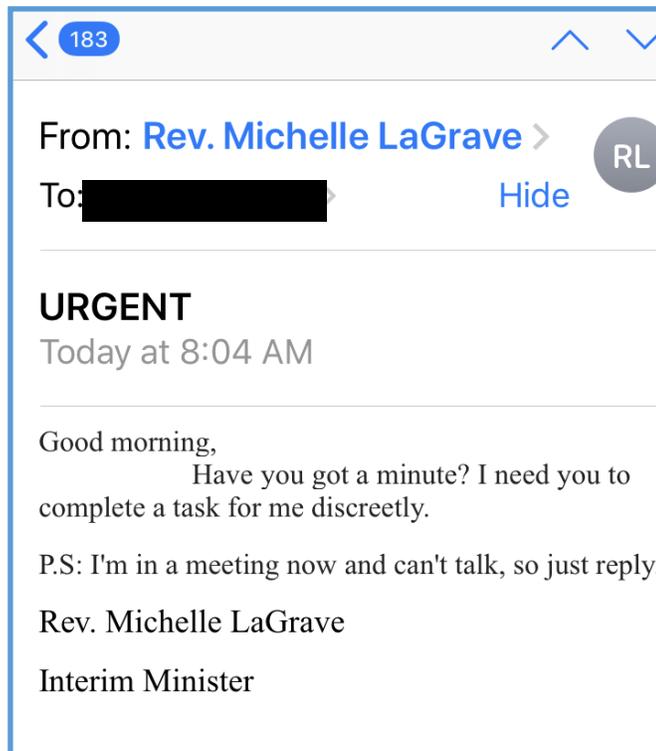
The UUA urges church staff and members to be cautious about email scams. Please know that the church staff and the minister will never email you to ask for credit card information or for you to purchase gift cards. These scammers create an email address that *looks like* it belongs to the minister or the church, but it doesn't. If you're not sure, don't respond to the email. **When in doubt, call and speak to the person directly!**

Several UU congregations have reported that their members are receiving scam emails that are requesting gift card donations for a charitable cause. At least one person has lost money to these scams. Religious groups and congregations are becoming easy targets for these types of scams. The UUA recommends that congregations inform their members about this scam. The UUA has seen an increase in "phishing" attempts of all kinds. Phishing is a form of "social engineering," whereby a hacker with bad intentions sends an email (or text or phone call) pretending to be someone the recipient trusts and asks the recipient to take an action which can have adverse effects. Sometimes, they request money. Other times, they invite the recipient to click a link or open an attachment that can trigger malicious code.

A good rule of thumb with emails you're not expecting is to: (1) reach out to the sender through another channel (call, text, visit website) and (2) **not** click on a link (or send money, gift cards, etc.) without clarifying from the trusted source directly.

The UUA magazine, *UU World*, published an informative article about email scams recently, go here to read the article: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/church-gift-card-scam?fbclid=IwAR34FXw59kzwuZMNBxqJJpKBzB53mjCjTsc-1-lrnCe99zXLFhDvuEai1uQ>

Below is an image of a scam email that one of our church members received:



#### Ways to tell this a scam email:

1. The person tells you NOT to call. Only email. Scammers claim they "can't talk now."
2. Click on the name in the "from" field. Check the email address that comes up with the real email address you already have. Anyone can list their name as "Rev. Michelle" or "Church Office."
3. The scammer is asking for you to be discrete. Ministers and church staff would call you directly if there was something confidential going on.
4. The email starts with: "Good Morning" or "Hi" — not addressing you by name.
5. Generally, the grammar in these scam emails is off. The syntax will be odd or there will be spelling mistakes and/or odd spacing.

## Re-membering—What being a member means to me

By Kim Callaghan

I joined about five and a half years ago.

When we first walked in to this church, the feeling of welcoming and warmth was nearly palpable. I didn't feel like a visitor, though we were. It felt like we'd come home. Brian had been raised Catholic, and I really hadn't been raised with a religion at all. First Unitarian gave us a place for community and a sense of belonging.

*Note: The Membership Team asked church members to share briefly what church membership means to them. As these stories come in, we will share them in the monthly newsletter. Interested in sharing what membership means to you? Please email Carrie, Membership Coordinator, at [coordinator@firstuomaha.org](mailto:coordinator@firstuomaha.org).*



The UUA General Assembly early bird registration is now open. Go here for more info: [www.uua.org/ga/registration](http://www.uua.org/ga/registration)



Save the date for the MidAmerica Regional Assembly. Registration opens January 2020. Go here for more info: [www.uua.org/midamerica/ra](http://www.uua.org/midamerica/ra)

## Leader Information: How Do I Get Something Approved at Church?

Our church has new leaders and members which is great! We want to be sure you have the information you need.

**Did you know that: New church teams, church activities, church events and church budget requests go through the Ministry Team Council (MTC) for approval?**

The MTC meets once a month at church and currently your MTC members are Amy Lucas, Sarah Monaghan, Sharon Piehler (president-elect) and Rev. Michelle. The MTC is the day-to-day operating team of the church.

**Have a new church team or event or budget request?**

Go here for the forms: [www.firstuomaha.org/forms](http://www.firstuomaha.org/forms) (Yes, you can fill out the form on the website!)

The online finished form will be sent to the church office. If you decide to complete the form offline, you will need to mail or email the form to the church office.

Once your form is received, you will be contacted by the church office to verify it was received.

You may be asked to respond to questions via email or you may be asked to attend the next MTC meeting.

**Direct Links to forms on church website:**

Building Reservation Form link: [www.firstuomaha.org/reservation](http://www.firstuomaha.org/reservation)

New Team/Event Form link: [www.firstuomaha.org/newteamform](http://www.firstuomaha.org/newteamform)

New Budget Request Form link: [www.firstuomaha.org/budgetform](http://www.firstuomaha.org/budgetform)

If you have any questions about the forms, the approval process, or the MTC, please email the church office at [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org).

## In Case You Missed It: Smoke-Free Campus

The Board of Trustees voted at the October Board meeting to make the First Unitarian Church of Omaha a smoke-and vape-free campus. This includes the grounds and the building. This policy went into effect on November 1st. The Board would like to thank all of you who gave your feedback during the decision-making process. They appreciate your taking the time to talk with them and comment on the proposed change over the last couple of months. This decision will align First Unitarian with the UUA's suggested smoke-free policies. Thank you for helping to make First Unitarian a smoke-and vape-free campus.

## A Reflection on Family Love

By Donna Tubach Davis

Every year when the holiday season arrives I think of my roots and a powerful kind of love that occurred at a Christmas past.

I was lucky and blessed to grow up in a loving family. Our income was very limited and for Christmas my brothers and I would usually get no more than three presents, one of them always being an orange. When I was about nine, I had gone to town with my father. It was a few days before Christmas and I knew all of our gifts had been purchased. We were in the small town drugstore and in a glass case I saw the most beautiful watch I had ever seen—a Cinderella watch! I said to my father, “Daddy, I know it is too late for this Christmas, but for next year I would like that watch.”

On Christmas morning, much to my utter delight, under the Christmas tree, was the beautiful Cinderella watch. I still have it.

When I see all the violence in this world, I always wonder if those involved had ever received that kind of powerful love.

## *The Flame*, Church Newsletter, to End Publication in 2020

By Catharine Dixon, Church Administrator

**We have news!** The MTC decided at its November meeting that January 2020 will be the last issue of the *Flame*, the monthly newsletter of our church. All information about upcoming church events will be shared on the website, the enews, the printed Sunday announcements, and the Facebook page. This decision was a long-time coming because readership of the monthly newsletter has decreased. We send out the enews and *The Flame* to 720 people—a large email list! Of that email list, only 36-38 people actually click on the PDF link to read the newsletter each month. As we tracked the number of readers and talked with church leaders and members, we found that most congregants were not reading the newsletter—instead information was shared and read in the enews, at church on Sunday, on our church Facebook page, or on our church website.

The MTC, the minister, and I realized I am spending a lot of my time on something that is not widely read. Given the fast paced life of the church nowadays, often corrections and updates have to be shared in the enews because info in *The Flame* was already outdated or wrong. Leaders and organizers had a hard time meeting the deadline for the monthly newsletter. This caused stress for the office and the volunteers and the leaders.

### **There's exciting news about this change!**

Now the plan is to create a quarterly magazine. The goal of this new publication is CONNECTION and COMMUNITY. The publication will be handed out to new visitors and members and will showcase why First Unitarian is a great place to be. The MTC and the Office Team imagine a publication with interesting and personal articles, reflections, meditations—even poems and recipes. We want to grab people's attention! The goal is to move away from upcoming event information (that is shared elsewhere), and feature members sharing why they are members of this church, what keeps them coming back to the church, and what they are passionate about. That's where YOU come in. Do you have an idea for a name for this quarterly publication? Would you like to write an article or share something else in this quarterly magazine? Please contact the church office at [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org) with ideas, suggestions, etc. Our projected publication date is April 2020. More information about this new publication will be shared next month in the last issue of the monthly *Flame*.

Note: *The Candle*, the leaders emailed newsletter, will continue its monthly publication schedule. If you would like to be added to that email list, please email [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org).

**Interim Minister**

Rev. Michelle LaGrave  
[minister@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:minister@firstuuomaha.org)

**Lifespan Director  
of Religious Education**

Christina Strong  
[dre@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:dre@firstuuomaha.org)

**Membership Coordinator**

Carrie Helmberger  
[coordinator@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:coordinator@firstuuomaha.org)

**Church Administrator**

Catharine Dixon  
[admin@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuuomaha.org)

**Sanctuary Singers Director**

William Miller  
[choirdirector@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:choirdirector@firstuuomaha.org)

**Organist**

Pat Will

**Sanctuary Singers Accompanist**

J. Gawf

**EMR Director**

Stan Harper

**Minister Emeriti**

Ronald Knapp  
 Frank Rivas

**Affiliated Community Minister**

Rev. Dr. Sarah Voss

**Nursery Coordinator**

Andrea Laudi  
[childcare@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:childcare@firstuuomaha.org)

**Custodian**

Bobby Medrano

**THE FLAME**

Deadlines are the 15th of each month. Word limit: 200.  
 Send submissions to  
[admin@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuuomaha.org).

Editor/Designer: Cat Dixon

Proofers:  
 Brian Callaghan, Gary Emenitove,  
 Scott Kemper, Lois Norris

Flame Mailing Team:

Kim Callaghan, Lois Norris,  
 Linda Hruska

# Meet Our Leaders

**Board Members**

Joe Schaaf (President), Sharon Piehler (President-Elect), Catherine Plumlee (Secretary), Sarah Copeland, Harold Cruz-Sanchez, Peg Pidgeon, Bill Tull, Donna Tubach Davis  
 Email: [board@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:board@firstuuomaha.org)

**Trustees of the Capital Trust**

Daniel Byrd (2020), Bob Hess (2021), Christopher Schmidt (2022)

**Ministry Team Council**

Amy Lucas, Sarah Monaghan, Sharon Piehler, Rev. Michelle LaGrave  
 Email: [mtc@firstuuomaha.org](mailto:mtc@firstuuomaha.org)

**Nominating Committee:** Nellie Chenoweth, Kate Godfrey, Mike McAtee, Carolyn McNamara, Kathi Oliver

**Right Relations Committee:** Della Bynum, Carol Cronin, Deb McAtee, Sarah Voss

**Transition Team:** Kathy Alexander, Skip Ciulla, Carol Cronin, Kay Lynn Goldner, John Hruska, Marcia Leise

**Ministerial Search Committee:** Diana Byrd, Kim Dunovan, Jessica Eman, Kate Godfrey, Mark Loscutoff, Lita Magisana, Dave Richardson, Klyde Warren

**Ministry Teams and Team Leaders**

AHA—Sheri Conner  
 Archives/Library—Linda Parker  
 Auction Team-- Kathi Oliver, Katrina Schmidt, & Sara Switzer  
 Baby Welcoming Team—Katrina Schmidt, & Sara Switzer  
 Black Lives Matter—Rene Harper  
 Caring—Louise Jeffrey  
 Chalice Guild—Kay Lynn Goldner  
 CUUPS—Steve Switzer  
 Early Morning Risers—Mary Kay Peters & Lloyd Olson  
 Fellowship Team—Nadine Keith & Nellie Chenoweth  
 Finance Team—Walt Jesteadt  
 Garden—Sharon Conlon  
 Governance—Peg Pidgeon, Ben Wallace, Maria Wallace  
 Fundraising Team—Donna Neff  
 Hospitality Teams—Carolyn McNamara  
 House and Grounds Team—open  
 Listening Circles—Katrina Schmidt  
 Membership Team—Mike McAtee  
 Midtown Helping Hands—open  
 Office Team—Carolyn McNamara  
 Omaha Together One Community—Laurie Gift  
 Partner Church Team—Dave Olson  
 Recycling Coordinator—Roman Noriega  
 Right Relations—Nadine Keith  
 Social Justice Coordinator—Sharon Conlon  
 Soul Matters—Michael McAtee  
 Stewardship Team—Mary Kay Peters & Mike McAtee  
 Wayside Pulpit—Kim Dunovan  
 Women's Alliance—Catherine Plumlee  
 Worship Arts Team—Mary Thomas  
 Young Adult Group—open  
 YRUU—Taylor Eman & Ben Stallings

**First Unitarian Church of Omaha**

[www.firstuuomaha.org](http://www.firstuuomaha.org)

402-345-3039

## Church Events

### Book Medley

Saturday, Nov. 30 at 10:30am in the Merritt Lounge. See page 6.

### Omaha Polyamory Discussion Group

Sunday, Dec. 1 at 6:30pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

### WAYS TO HELP:

#### Holiday Decorating

Monday, Dec. 2 at 9am in the whole church. See page 9.

#### People's Film Festival

Monday, Dec. 2 at 7pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

#### Compassionate Communication Group

This group will take a break from its regular schedule. See page 6.

#### WAYS TO HELP: Holiday Card Party for Black & Pink

Wednesday, Dec. 4 at 5pm in the Common Room. See page 8.

#### MTC Meeting

Thursday, Dec. 5 at 6pm in the Merritt Lounge.

#### CommUnity Night

Friday, Dec. 6 at 5:30pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

#### WAYS TO HELP: Special Service Stranger Share Our Fire

Sunday, Dec. 8 at 10:30am See page 2 for details about how you can help.

#### Women's Alliance

Monday, Dec. 9 at 6:30pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

#### Board Meeting

Tuesday, Dec. 10 at 6pm in the Common Room.

#### The 3F Book Bonanza Group

Wednesday, Dec. 11 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge. See page 6.

#### Book Launch & Coffee House Presented by AHA

Thursday, Dec. 12 at 7pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

#### Holiday Dinner—RSVP Required

Saturday, Dec. 14 with social hour at 5:30pm and dinner at 6:30pm. The reservation form is on page 10.

### Leadership Talk Back

Sunday, Dec. 15 at 11:30am in the Common Room. See page 6.

### The Flame Newsletter Deadline

December 15th at noon. Send articles to the church office: [admin@firstuomaha.org](mailto:admin@firstuomaha.org).

### People's Film Festival

Monday, Dec. 16 at 7pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

### Women's Religious Studies Covenant Group

Thursday, Dec. 19 at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge. See page 6.

### Private Wedding

Saturday, Dec. 21 at 3pm.

### CUUPS: Rite of Ages

Sunday, Dec. 22 at 6:30pm in the Common Room. See page 6.

### Christmas Eve Service

Tuesday, Dec. 24 at 7pm. See page 2.

### Church Office Closed for Holidays

Monday, Dec. 23—Monday, Jan. 6

### Private Wedding

Tuesday, Dec. 31 at 5pm.

### Ways to Help & Get Involved

List of opportunities on pages 8 and 9.

### Sister Church & OTOC Events

Upcoming list of events on page 9.

### Recurring Events...

#### Bridge Group

Meets the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. See page 7.

#### AHA Listening Circle

Meets the 3rd Sunday of the month. See page 7.

#### YRUU (Youth Group) Meetings

Wednesdays at 7pm in the Common Room. September to May. See page 7.

### Choir Rehearsals

Wednesdays at 7pm in the Sanctuary. See page 7.

### Women's Religious Studies Group

Meets most Thursdays at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge. See page 7.

### Dharma Chautauqua

Every Thursday, 6pm to 7:30pm in the Whitney Young Classroom. See page 7.

### Soul Matters Small Groups

Various meeting dates. See page 17. See here: [www.firstuomaha.org/soulmatters](http://www.firstuomaha.org/soulmatters)

### Future Events...

### Mid-Year Congregational Meeting

Sunday, Jan. 19, 2020 at 10:30am—in place of the service. See page 17.

### Chili Cook-Off—Save the date!

Saturday, Jan. 25, 2020 at 5:30pm. See page 11 for RSVP information.

### Social Media & First U

Find our public Facebook page here:

[www.facebook.com/firstuomaha/](https://www.facebook.com/firstuomaha/)

Find us on Twitter here:

[@FirstUUOmaha](https://twitter.com/FirstUUOmaha)

Be sure to like the church and follow us!

**Christmas Eve Service  
Lessons and Carols  
Tuesday, December 24th at 7pm**

This will be a traditional Christmas Eve service filled with music, singing, and candlelight. The Choir and the Early Morning Risers will perform. Please join us for this special service.



First Unitarian Church of Omaha  
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