

THE

FLAME

March 2014



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

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Meet Our Leaders

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THE FLAME

Deadlines are the 15th of each month. Send your submissions to

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

Special thanks goes to the Flame mailing team. They come in and fold and mail The Flame each month! Thank you, Anne Massoud, Evelyn Whitehill, Shelton Hendricks, Howard Bolton, and Sara Perkins.

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Caring - Douglas Lee-Regier

Chalice Guild - Kay Lynn Goldner

Community Meals - Dana Meister/Diane Withem

Covenant Groups - Julia Thompson,

Fellowship - Judith Wright/Nadine Keith

Finance - Walt Jesteadt

Fundraising - Donna Neff/Kathi Oliver

Governance - Alex Nather

House and Grounds - Dave Rosser

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Office - Carolyn McNamara

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Partner Church - Janet West

Religious Education - Sheri Conner/Donna Neff

Religious Services - Megan Gustafson

Women's Alliance - Mary Bort

Young Adult Group - Maria Wallace

Youth Group - Ben Wallace/Shawne Coonfare



Join us at 9:30am and 11:15am on Sundays!

March 2

Ordinary Time

Rev. Frank Rivas

The sacred is not somewhere out there, but right here, in that stack of dirty dishes, waiting under the melting snow, and on the blank computer screens that we are trying to fill with words.

March 9

Can Bad Things Happen for Good Reasons?

Maria Wallace

Whether due to divine guidance or pure chance, certain events prevent others from taking place. When something awful happens, could it have prevented something even worse? Should we be grateful? In some cases, we know this to be true. In others...perhaps we should wonder.

March 16

Psalms

Rev. Frank Rivas

If you have trouble with God language, I can only imagine the trouble you'll have with the ethnocentrism, the rigid hierarchy, and the unabashed belief that God will help us smite our enemies. The psalms are not easy texts for religious liberals, but to ignore them is to squander a rich heritage.

March 23—One service at 10:30am followed by a brunch in the Common Room

Pledge Sunday: A Celebration of Our Community

Rev. Frank Rivas

We gather as an entire community—children, youth, and adults—to celebrate the community that we envision, create, and support together.

March 30

Rev. Sheila Mee will speak on interconnectedness.

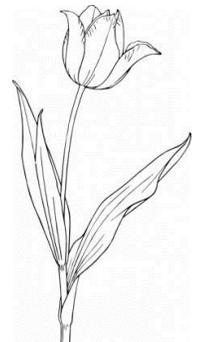
All Church Brunch

Sunday, March 23 after the one service at 10:30am

RSVP to

stewardship@firstuuomaha.org

Please join us as we celebrate the end of our annual pledge campaign. You are invited to the intergenerational service on Sunday, March 23 and then the brunch following the service in the Common Room. We will have egg casserole with cheese, potato casserole, bacon and fruit. See page 15 for information about pledging.



Rev. Elations

Monthly Column from our Minister, Rev. Frank Rivas

March is pledge month. If you're like me, you might just skip this column, close the newsletter, and take the month off. I get it.

There is, however, another way of looking at it. Pledge month is our chance to affirm and support a community that means so much to us. A community that cares for one another, a community that raises our children and youth to think critically about religion and ethics, a community that reaches out through our involvement with Community Meals, OTOC, and our sister church. A community that reaches across differences in theology and life circumstances, a community that relies on no bishop, but rather discerns its own direction, a community that affirms that within each human being is something sacred.

It is an honor to belong to such a community and to support it as we are able. So I'm beginning to think of March as a celebration of what we create together. I love the austerity of our sanctuary, but during March, thanks to Jan Wilson and Eddith Buis, we will add joyful color. On March 23, Pledge Sunday, we will have one celebratory service, then walk downstairs to enjoy a brunch together.

Throughout our celebration, we will recognize that there is still much to do, that we are still learning to hear one another's voices, that we are still finding our voice in the broader community, that none of our spiritual odysseys is complete. But right now we are here, in this moment, with one another, and it is good.

Blessings and love,
Frank

UU & You

Sunday, March 16

Unitarian Universalism and You classes provide an introduction to Unitarian Universalism and our church, along with an opportunity to share our religious journeys. Visitors, newcomers, and the just curious are cordially invited. The class will convene in the Whitney Young Room 15 minutes after the ending of the 11:15am service. That usually works out to be about a 12:30pm starting time. A light lunch will be served to bolster the always interesting conversation. The class lasts about an hour and 30 minutes so ending time will be about 2pm, although those interested in a brief tour of the church may be a little later. If you need child care please let us know by the Friday before. RSVP or questions can be addressed to uuclass@firstuuomaha.org or call Jaime Alexander 402-657-9386.

Covenant Groups Forming This Spring

We are currently inviting new members and leaders to participate in Covenant Groups this spring. A Covenant Group is a form of small-group ministry with the purpose of nurturing relationships amongst members of the church, while encouraging members to explore their beliefs. A Covenant Group is a great place for you if you are new to the church, are seeking closer relationships with members of the church, or want the opportunity to explore your beliefs. It is open to church members and non-members. Groups will meet 1-2 times per month at a time convenient to their members. If you would like to know more about the topics covered in Covenant Groups, take a look at *Heart-to-Heart* by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins, available on Amazon.com. For more information, or if you would like to sign-up for a group, you can speak with Julia Thompson or Ben Wallace, or email Julia Thompson at covenantgrp@firstuomaha.org.

*Pictured to the right:
Chili Cook-Off on
February 1—
Photo: Bob Hess*



Spirit Circle

**Sunday, March 2 at 6pm —
gathering in the Common Room**

The ritual begins at 7pm. Our potluck happens before at 6pm. We will be focusing on ceremonial pagan paths.

Storytelling & Music with Kabin & Mary

Prepare to be entertained by a master entertainer! Kabin Thomas, a professional musician and actor, a former music professor, will provide an evening featuring his informative, humorous, thought-provoking stories about music, life and love. He'll perform beautiful music on his tuba. You've never heard anything like it! Mary Bort will join Kabin for a couple of pieces (she'll sing, he'll play tuba—yes, it's possible to combine the two and create enjoyable music!) and share a funny story, too. Kabin and Mary will provide pizza and bottled water, soda, boxed wine. Guests are asked to bring a side dish, snack or dessert as potluck; they're welcome to bring other beverages.

Fixed price: \$15 per seat

Date/Time: Saturday, March 22

Where: First Unitarian Church

Dinner at 6pm; show at 7pm

Reserve tickets at Coffee Hour or contact Kathi at

kathryn.lewis.kl@gmail.com

(This is a church fundraising event that was first offered at the Heart & Hand Auction in October.)

Planning Begins—Stewardship Campaign

by Tony Host, Board President

Really good things are happening in our community. In order for this to continue, we need to be able to plan. Planning can only be done if we have an idea of what our potential income will be for the operating budget. **The Stewardship Campaign is by far the largest source of income for our church.** Our goal of \$230,000 accounts for 76% of the proposed church budget for the year beginning May 1, 2014. This percent is unchanged from 2013. Pledges, large and small, are the foundation of maintaining and operating our building and compensating our staff. The daily cost of church operation within this year’s proposed budget is \$831.01, or \$34.63 per hour. Please consider increasing the amount of your planned pledge to cover more hours of church operation for the year.

This is the third UU church I have belonged to, and in all of them, leadership was uncomfortable talking about money. Walt Jesteadt, our Finance Council team leader, has done an analysis of 52 other UU churches to see how our costs and income compared. The analysis showed that our proposed budget of \$303,320 is typical for churches our size. The UUA says that healthy congregations receive 80 to 90 percent of their operating budgets from pledges. Our pledges and non-pledge contributions are 79.95% of the operating budget. Bottom line, our true cost per member is \$1,025 (about \$20 per week). Not all can pledge this. Many can and many can do more. UUA’s suggested fair-share giving guide follows. Please take a few minutes to look at what an appropriate level of giving to the church would be for you. For us to sustain and grow, we need to be visionary. Every member should pledge. It’s part of what it means to be a member. Volunteering is also critical to what we do. But in order to plan on how we will pay our obligations, we need to have an idea of what our income will be. The Board is committed to presenting a balanced budget at our Annual Meeting May 18th. Continuing the progress we are making can only be done with your support.

In Faith,
Tony

Suggested Fair-Share Giving Guide

Adjusted Annual Income	Supporter The church is a significant part of my life and promotes my spiritual growth.			Sustainer The church is central to my identity, and I am committed to sustaining our programs.			Visionary I am committed to both the present and future growth of my church.			Full Tithe I designate 10% of my income to the church as a way to live out my spiritual principles		
	Suggested % of Income	Monthly Payment	Annual Payment	Suggested % of Income	Monthly Payment	Annual Payment	Suggested % of Income	Monthly Payment	Annual Payment	Suggested % of Income	Monthly Payment	Annual Payment
\$10,000	2%	\$16	\$200	3%	\$25	\$300	5%	\$42	\$500	10%	\$83	\$1,000
\$25,000	2%	\$42	\$500	3%	\$63	\$750	5%	\$104	\$1,250	10%	\$208	\$2,500
\$50,000	3%	\$125	\$1,500	4%	\$167	\$2,000	5%	\$208	\$2,500	10%	\$417	\$5,000
\$75,000	3%	\$188	\$2,250	4.5%	\$281	\$3,375	6%	\$375	\$4,500	10%	\$625	\$7,500
\$100,000	3.5%	\$292	\$3,500	5%	\$417	\$5,000	6.5%	\$542	\$6,500	10%	\$833	\$10,000
\$150,000	3.5%	\$438	\$5,250	5%	\$625	\$7,500	6.5%	\$813	\$9,750	10%	\$1,250	\$15,000
\$200,000	4%	\$667	\$8,000	5.5%	\$917	\$11,000	7%	\$1,167	\$14,000	10%	\$1,667	\$20,000
\$300,000	5%	\$1,250	\$15,000	6%	\$1,500	\$18,000	8%	\$2,000	\$24,000	10%	\$2,500	\$30,000
\$400,000	6%	\$2,000	\$24,000	7%	\$2,333	\$28,000	8.5%	\$2,833	\$34,000	10%	\$3,333	\$40,000
\$500,000	7%	\$2,917	\$35,000	8%	\$3,333	\$40,000	9%	\$3,750	\$45,000	10%	\$4,167	\$50,000

Kids' Summer Art/Music Camp

June 2-6

Monday-Friday, 9am to 4pm

Sign up by emailing:

uusummercamp@firstuomaha.org



Age Group:

Kindergarten—6th grades

We invite your child to participate in a summer art/music exploration with some of our artist members and friends. Sign-up is free, but space is limited to 20 campers.

Daily Schedule

9:00-9:15 Chalice Opening
9:15-10:00 Art, Part 1
10:00-10:15 Snack Break
10:15-11:30 Art, Part 2
11:30-12:30 Lunch, Games
12:30-1:15 Music, Part 1
1:15-2:00 Snack Break
2:00-2:45 Music, Part 2
2:45-3:30 Director's Choice
3:30-4:00 Chalice Closing

Creativity is at the
heart of our
humanity.

As we explore our religious center, it is good to nurture the creativity inside. Children, in exploring their artistic side, grow in community, self discovery, and joy.



Religious Education by Jan Wilson, Director of R.E.

YRUU

(Young Religious Unitarian Universalists)



We could not be more pleased with the caliber of our YRUU youth. They participated with the Early Morning Risers in a musical collaboration that topped off their overnight fellowship. These are exceptional teenagers, and I am so proud of them.



OWL

(Our Whole Lives)

Our UU groundbreaking sexuality program, OWL, is being offered this year. We have an unprecedented 20-plus group in attendance every Monday night.

Young people are encouraged to ask questions in an open and safe space with skilled, trained leaders. Mutual respect, compassion, and consideration are stressed in this inclusive program.

UUs have very low rates of teen pregnancy. We believe that being open and informed about these important issues is key. We want our youth to bring their concerns into the light of true acceptance and awareness of emotions.



Adult Religious Education

Adult R.E. for March will continue to consist of discussions concerning the book, *The World's Religions* by Huston Smith and the accompanying workbook, *Exploring The World's Religions* by Irving Alan Sparks. The book is available through various sources (e.g. Amazon, Half-Price Books, etc.) and we will be using the 50th anniversary edition (other editions are acceptable but if you are buying your book, please get this edition). A discussion schedule will be as follows:

March 6—Part V & VI
Confucianism & Taoism

March 13—Part VII & VIII
Islam & Judaism

March 20—Part IX
Christianity

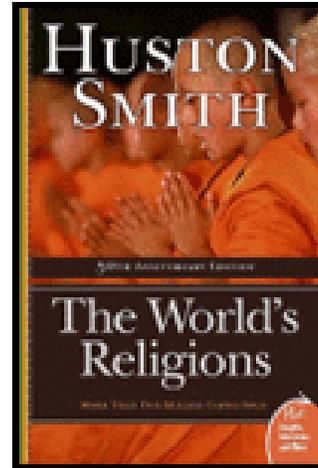
March 27—Part X
The Primal Religions & A Final
Examination

A.R.E. will start at 6pm with a brown bag lunch and fellowship. Discussion about the book and workbook will be from 7pm to 9pm. Please RSVP to Crystal DiGiorgi at adultre@firstuomaha.org.

Encore Presentation of The Nature of Existence

Tuesday, March 4, 11am to 1pm in the
Common Room

Bring your lunch and enjoy this amazing movie! This film by Roger Nygard explores the hard questions about life and existence.



The Women's Religious Studies Group

We are discussing *Zealot: The Life & Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. This book is written in historical context. We meet every Thursday in the Merritt Lounge from 1pm to 2:30pm.

Our Covenant Group meets in the Merritt Lounge from 1pm to 2:30pm every third Thursday of the month. This group is open to everyone. Anyone wishing to join, please contact Harriet Major at hmajor323@cox.net for information.



Welcome the Stranger Among You

Greetings from the Commonwealth of Virginia! As I write this I'm about half-way through my time here at the Joint Forces Staff College. When traveling I like to visit local congregations to see what great things our fellow UUs are doing. Unitarian Church of Norfolk is just ten minutes from campus (shorter than my drive from Papillion!) and reminds me a lot of our church.

The first week I visited I was warmly welcomed and chatted with several members. I could tell there was a real sense of community and optimism about the future. It reminded me of our church and I felt I had found a refuge in a strange land. The next week, though, not one person spoke with me and I haven't been back the last two Sundays. I'll give the good people of Norfolk another chance (even though the 10:30 start is waaaay too late for this early morning riser), but I'll be happy to get back home.

We're doing a lot of things right at First U of Omaha and we can be proud of that! This recent experience reminds me just how important it is to make sure our visitors feel welcome and invited back. This church is ours but we must not keep it to ourselves. Why? Because we know that ours is a life-saving faith and it would be wrong to shut the door behind us.

Blessings to all,
Stephen Meister

Women's Alliance –March 10

Women from First and Second Unitarian churches are invited to attend the Women's Alliance (WA) monthly get-together on Monday, March 10.

The evening will begin with socializing and beverages at 6:30 p.m., dinner at 7pm and a program at 8pm. We ask for \$12 which goes to the cost of dinner and our education fund. If this will be your first time attending a WA get-together, please let us know and be our guest.

Please RSVP to Janet West no later than Friday, March 7 at jmasonwest77@yahoo.com or 402-553-3162. We need your RSVP in order to make arrangements for the meal. Please indicate if you want a vegetarian entrée.

We hope to see you on March 10!

Share the Plate

Our Share the Plate Recipient this month is OTOC (Omaha Together One Community), a local interfaith organization of which First Unitarian Church is a founding member. We encourage you to learn more about OTOC by visiting their website www.otoc.org.

Church Events in March

Art Reception

Sunday, March 2, 12:30-2pm

We will celebrate the art of long ago and beloved UU Rachel Jones. The art pieces in this display will be lent by church members and the Bemis Park Neighborhood. All are invited to attend.

Spirit Circle

Sunday, March 2 at 6pm in the Common Room

See page 5 for details.

Encore Presentation of The Nature of Existence

Tuesday, March 4 at 11am in the Common Room.

See page 9 for more information.

Adult Religious Education

Thursday evenings in the Common Room at 7pm.

Optional brown bag dinner at 6pm. Go to page 9 for details.

CommUUnity Night

Friday, March 7 at 5:30pm in the Common Room

This family-friendly event is a potluck with the main dish provided by RE. Enjoy a relaxed atmosphere.

Women's Alliance

Monday, March 10 at 6:30pm in the Common Room

All women invited to this event. See page 10 for more information.

UU & You Class

Sunday, March 16 at 12:45pm in the Whitney Young Room

Visitors and the just curious are invited to attend. See page 4 for more information.

Young Adult Game Night

Friday, March 21 at 7pm in the Common Room

Join the young adults for our monthly game night. If you identify your-

self as a young adult, then you can attend. Questions? Contact youngadults@firstuuomaha.org.

All-Church Stewardship Brunch

Sunday, March 23 at 11:30am in the Common Room following the one service.

RE Council Meeting

Sunday, March 30 at 12:45pm in Jan's office.

Everyone interested in church religious education is invited to attend. A light lunch will be served.

Book Club

Monday, March 31 at 7pm in the Merritt Lounge

We will discuss *Capitalism Hits the Fan* by Richard Wolff—the Holland Lecture Speaker for April 16

Recurring

Women's Religious Studies Group

Meets every Thursday at 1pm in the Merritt Lounge

We are discussing Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth by Reza Aslan. Come join us!

YRUU

Meets every Wednesday in the Common Room at 7pm.

UU teens are welcome to join us. Contact omahayruu@gmail.com for more information.

OWL (Our Whole Lives) Class

Every Monday at 6:30pm

For more information, contact Jan Wilson at dre@firstuuomaha.org.



At our Sister Church Potluck on January 27—we had great attendance!

Choir Rehearsal

Meets every Wednesday in the sanctuary at 7pm.

Reminder:

Before you go to bed Saturday, March 8 make sure you set your clock ahead one hour. It's time to "spring" forward.

Looking ahead...

Holland Lecture on Wednesday, April 16 at the Holland Performing Center. See page 13 for details.

Like Father, Like Son (Part 1 of 2) *By Dave Richardson*

There is a plaque in the sanctuary foyer which reads:

Alan McDonald
Architect and loyal member
of this church
1891-1947

This plaque is testimony to the important role Alan McDonald played for our church, but his story goes far beyond our walls. He and his father John McDonald changed the face of our city. This month's installment will look at Alan's father and his contributions.

The elder McDonald, who was known to everyone as "Jack," was a Canadian-born man of Scottish heritage. He came to Omaha quite by accident in 1884. After college he set out on a trip to the west to "make his fortune" as the old expression went. He had only intended a brief stopover in Omaha, but he liked what he saw when he got off the train and decided this was the place.

Local historian, Joan Fogarty, has written a book titled *Building Omaha; The Architectural Legacy of John and Alan McDonald* which provides some interesting historical background. In 1890 John married Miss Martha Tibbits whose family had come to Nebraska in a covered wagon a few years earlier. She was a true pioneer woman who was fond of guns. Ms. Fogarty notes that family legend has it that they made an informal prenuptial pact in which Martha agreed to give up her guns if John would give up drinking. It is believed their long and happy marriage lasted much longer than

the terms of the "pre-nup."

John befriended George Joslyn, and their spouses Martha and Sarah also become fast friends. Although there is no record of the two men having joined the church, their generosity is evident in their financial support. The two women, on the other hand, were very active members. They both served on committees and their names appear regularly in church records.

By the turn of the century John McDonald and Thomas Kimball were the two most prominent architects in the region. Jack's achievements included The Nebraska Building, the centerpiece of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition, and The First Baptist Church (the site of our shared Community Meals Program) as well as numerous beautiful homes in the Field Club and Gold Coast areas. Jack used many influences in his designs—Victorian, American Arts and Crafts, Colonial Revival, Italianate, Gothic Revival as well as the emerging "Prairie School" designs of fellow Unitarian Frank Lloyd Wright. His close friendship with the Joslyns was certainly one of the reasons he was chosen to design and build the Joslyn Castle (which the Joslyns called Lynhurst.) This building was the crown jewel of Omaha's residential structures and remains so today. John's relationship with George was both social and commercial. They were informally known to be "drinking and poker companions," pre-nuptial pact notwithstanding.

The McDonald's only child, Alan, was raised as a Unitarian, attending Sunday School at the old church on 17th and Cass. As the plaque indicates, he remained a "loyal member" his entire life. His greatest contribution to the church and one of the most important to the city is the design and construction of our current church. In our next installment of this two-part series we will look more closely at the tremendous contributions he made to our church and his community.

Pictured below: John McDonald and Sarah Joslyn at the construction site of the Joslyn Memorial.



Dr. Richard D. Wolff
*Capitalism in Crisis: How
Lopsided Wealth Distribution
Threatens Our Democracy*



SAVE THE DATE: Wednesday, April 16th / 7:30pm

For hundreds of years, capitalism has encouraged innovation, achievement, and the building of a rich country by allowing each individual enormous freedom. But in the last 40 years, its inexorable push for higher corporate profits has resulted in economic volatility, higher unemployment and an increasingly lopsided distribution of wealth and power. Is capitalism still meeting the needs of the majority of the population or the minority? Has it outlived its usefulness? Is it necessary to choose between capitalism and democracy? Join Dr. Wolff for a stimulating and provocative discussion about whether capitalism can be saved and, if so, how.

Dr. Richard Wolff, Emeritus Professor at the University of Massachusetts, is an outspoken expert on the subject of the American economic classes. He is currently a Visiting Professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University, New York City. His books include *Capitalism Hits the Fan: The Global Economic Meltdown and What to Do About It* and *Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism*.

FREE tickets for this reserved seating event will be available March 16 at Ticket Omaha. Please put this lecture on your calendar and on the calendar of your friends! The highly regarded Holland Lecture Series is now in its 10th year of presenting internationally recognized, thought-provoking speakers. To help you introduce friends and neighbors to the series, each caller may request up to six free tickets for the lecture and free reception that follows.

Wow! What a Church

By Elaine Wells, recipient of the Prairie Star District's Adult Social Justice Award

Because I'm a techno-dinosaur, I had not read *The Flame* online, but when someone handed me a good old-fashioned paper copy, it was inspiring to see how so many of you are contributing to this congregation. Then Jan Wilson invited me to write an article. Wow! My big chance to tell you some thoughts that have been keeping me awake at night.

For months Rev. Frank has been encouraging us to build the "beloved community" within our walls, AND to extend our love to the larger community; to promote our own spiritual growth, AND to work for social justice. We are a wonderful family, and I'd love to help us make the world a better place in 2014. With so many ways to approach social justice and environmental sustainability, I hope our upcoming "Church Assessment" survey will reveal what issues YOU care most about and which actions YOU want to take.

Whatever route we choose, I believe we'll make the biggest and best impact when we work with effective, like-minded organizations such as OTOC, our sister church, Sierra Club and the local coalition of 7 environmental groups, RESULTS, the Empowerment Network, and the 11 organizations that recently sponsored the viewing and discussion of Robert Reich's documentary "Inequality for All." Whether your main concerns are climate change, poverty, racial inequities, education, mental health, how our tax money is used...PLEASE email me at mmwells1@cox.net, call, or talk to me at coffee hour, and let's rock the world!

Hospitality Teams *By Bill Ross*

Our church has been considering hospitality teams since last summer and the trial run of the concept has begun. The Trial Run Team was responsible for coffee, greeting, and welcoming (e.g. ambassadors) on February 2. The team will also be responsible for March 2 and April 6. Look for their green ribbons.

The UU churches who have adopted hospitality teams have done so because they believe that it is an easier and more enjoyable way for their members to share the tasks of Sunday hospitality. Rather than working alone on a single task, church members serve regularly with their fellow team members to manage several tasks. The core idea is that everyone who is able will join a hospitality team and take a regular turn along with their teammates.

If the trial run proves to be effective, most of us will be asked to participate in a hospitality team. Some will not be able and others will have Sunday duties that preclude their participation. But if the rest of us, step up and share our welcoming tasks, the load should be both light and enjoyable.

Part of the trial run process is to figure out what support and procedures the teams will need, how often teams will serve, how teams are organized, and how members are enrolled. If you are interested, you can follow the process by taking a regular look at the [team website](#).



Website Team *By Bill Ross*

The Website Team is finishing our initial investigation report which will be posted to our [team website](#) soon. Our original plan called for a period of organization and investigation ending with a report to the Board and the Ministry Team Council at the end of February. The next phase is to decide what to do with what we have learned. We expect this period to involve a series of iterative discussions that will help us all attempt to match our web presence priorities to our overall church priorities.

We probably haven't touched base with every component of the church operating staff and volunteer components as yet, but we have made a good effort to do so. Spending time with the individual Ministry Teams has been very interesting and educational for us.

Along the way, we identified some inexpensive changes that we think will improve the usability of our website. You will probably notice some of those appearing from time to time. We also hope that individual Ministry Teams will review their web pages and suggest changes to the Webteam.

Lastly, we have been informed that our spider logo may be too scary for continued church work. Thus, we introduce a more amiable arachnid.



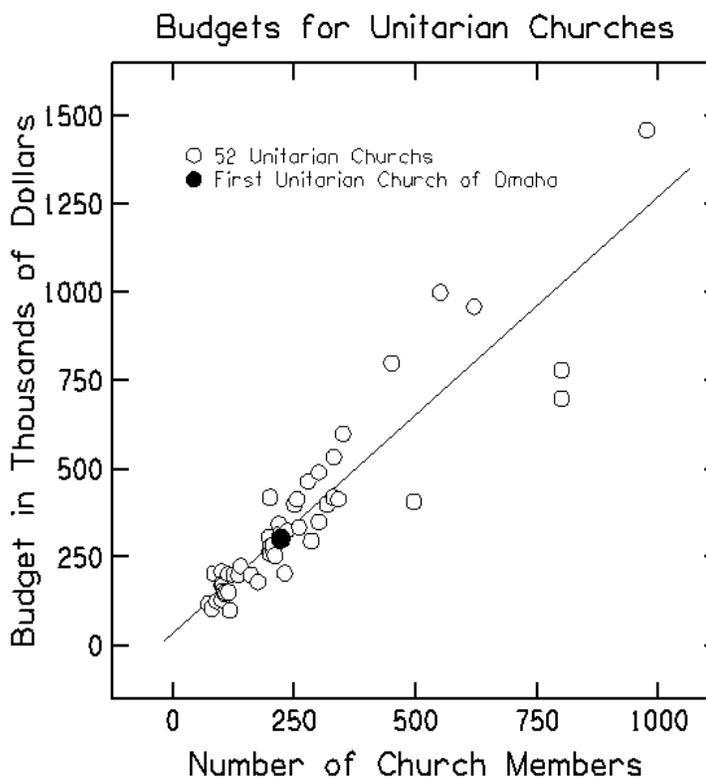
Finance Matters *by Walt Jesteadt*

Our proposed budget for the church year starting May 1, 2014 is \$303,320, an increase of 6% from our current budget. Two factors that have caused costs to go up are an important increase in the religious education program and an unavoidable increase in the cost of our insurance. Everything in our budget always seems important or unavoidable, so what should it cost to run a church like ours? The best answer we can get is to look at other churches. Few are exactly our size, so I looked at 52 Unitarian churches of different sizes and made the graph below. Budgets go up as membership goes up. That is not too surprising, but I was not sure it would be a straight line. There is not much variability among the small to mid-size churches and the dark point in the middle is us, assuming 222 members and a budget of \$303,320. I expected to find that our budget was high for a church our size, but clearly it is not. I will skip the mathematics of the prediction line, but it says that on average, church budgets go up by about \$1,200 per additional member. The UUA says that churches typically obtain 80 to 90% of their total budgets from pledges. Our budget assumes 76% from pledges. The rest comes from fundraising, renting our facilities, investment income, and renting our parking lot during the week. Most churches have the first two sources. Fewer have investment income and fewer still make \$8,820 a year by renting their unused parking spaces. In summary, our proposed budget is a little below average for Unitarian churches our size and the percentage of the budget that we ask for in pledges is below average as well. Please remember this as we strive to reach our year's pledge goal.

Pledge Campaign Update

The kick-off for this year's pledge campaign will be Sunday, March 2. The campaign will continue through the month of March until Sunday, March 23 when its end will be celebrated with an all-church brunch in the Common Room.

As we celebrate this past church year of exciting development, we now turn our attention to growing our dreams. Your pledge allows us to plan for the year ahead—to tend our dreams and watch them bloom. Please consider making this commitment for the first time or increasing your pledge from past years. With your help, all things are possible. See page 3 more information about our all-church brunch.



Partner Church Update

This report is based upon two letters from Rev. Katalin and First Unitarian Church's financial statements on the Partner Church Fund.

Katalin and Boti are expecting a baby in August. Matte is five years old and Katalin and Boti have been trying to give Matte a brother or sister for three years. As you can imagine, everyone is thrilled.

Thanks to the generosity of the members and friends of First Unitarian Church, currently, the Partner Church Fund has a balance of \$2,171.30—which is great because the church has pledged \$330 quarterly payments in January, April, July, and October of 2014 (the same each year). The quarterly payments are to maintain the parsonage and the church building. Last year, most of the money was used to do maintenance on the church building. This year, Katalin plans to remodel the bathroom by improving the water supply and replacing the sink. Also, our church usually sends \$1,200 to help the village teenagers pay for high school and college expenses.

This spring Rev. Katalin is organizing a women's conference and a summer camp for the village children and the children in the surrounding villages. Rev. Katalin is in the process of writing and submitting grant proposals to fund these two projects.

It is likely that Janet West will be visiting Rev. Katalin, her husband, Boti, their son, Matte, the new baby, and all of the villagers next fall. The estimated cost is \$2,500. None of the

Partner Church funds are used to pay the travel expenses of members and friends of First Unitarian Church.

For more information, email Janet at jmasonwest77@yahoo.com.



Pictured above: Rev. Kati, Boti and Matte

Information:

First Unitarian Church of Omaha has a Partner Church in Transylvania, Romania. We help the church by sending funds quarterly for the building and the minister. For the first time, the minister of our Partner Church, Rev. Kati, came to visit Omaha in October. Many Omaha members have visited the Partner Church in years past. Janet West is the Partner Church Team Leader. Interested in joining the team? Contact Janet West.

Scrip Cards

What is scrip?

It is a simple way for First Unitarian to earn money without taking extra money out of your pocket.

What ways can YOU support First UU?

1. Purchase gift cards for your regular shopping habits or gift giving needs. Over 100 to choose from available for immediate purchase or special order. We receive 2%-14% from every gift card purchased.
2. Purchase Baker's and Kwik Shop scrip cards. We receive 5% back from every purchase. Cards are available in \$10 and \$50 denominations.
3. Purchase an Amazon gift card, in \$25 increments, and use the Amazon link on our website to purchase your items you normally purchase from Amazon. Use the gift card instead of your debit or credit card and help out twice!!



Where can I purchase Scrip cards?

The FUNdraising team currently sells scrip cards at both coffee hours. Look for the trifold board!

How much have we earned?

To date, ScripPro has helped FUNdraising earn \$248.75 just from gift card purchases since November 2013!!

Volunteers wanted!

We are in need of a few volunteers to help sell scrip when Kathi Oliver and Donna Neff are not available. If interested, please see the scrip table during coffee hours.

Thank you to all that have already purchased and has made this new endeavor a success!!

YRUU Wants Your Stuff

Are you gearing up spring cleaning? Please save your donation items and books for the YRUU! The youth are planning a garage sale and book sale on May 3, and would appreciate any and all donated items. Proceeds will assist greatly in funding a YRUU trip to Colorado where they will commune with nature and participate in a social action project. More details to follow regarding dates for item drop-off.

Questions? Please contact omahayruu@gmail.com which reaches both leaders, Ben Wallace and Shawne Coonfare.

New Member: Deanna Meyler

by Carolyn McNamara

When **Deanna Meyler** moved to Omaha three years ago, she visited First Unitarian with the hope that she would find and build a supportive community. She enjoyed the services and the friendly people but it was the choir that made her stay. When she was asked to lead last summer's Board retreat, that positive experience made her realize she wanted to support the church in a bigger way. She became a member in September 2013. In addition to singing with the choir, she has performed with the Early Morning Risers, joined the Young Adults, taught a Soulful Thursday class, and is part of the Membership Team.

Deanna (Dē nă) was born and raised in Texas. She is the Partner in Charge of Strategic Planning and Smartargeting at Bozell, a public relations and advertising agency, where she does market research. She shares her home with husband Jim Stimpson, Director of the Center for Health Policy at UNMC, and with two fur babies: Ices, her very old and best feline friend, and Shiva, her little canine companion. She is active in the community, having twice organized TEDx events in Omaha (a nonprofit organization devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading), and she has worked with Rebuilding Together Omaha, improving the homes and lives of low income homeowners.

Deanna is an introvert who is concerned about rescue animals, the environment, and social justice. She enjoys travel, reading and exercise and writes two blogs: twedsee.wordpress.com, and aneverydayvegan.wordpress.com where she shares her excitement for veganism. She is passionate about music and has been lucky enough to have sung in Carnegie Hall, in St. Peter's Basilica, and with a folk/alternative band.

Please welcome Deanna to membership.



New Member: Sheri Conner

by Carolyn McNamara

Growing up, **Sheri Conner** always felt like an oddity in her very conservative family. She spent a year visiting the First Unitarian website before cautiously attending one service and then another. She was astonished to find it to be a place of acceptance. After attending for three years, she felt she could have more of an impact as a member and joined on January 19.

Sheri was born in Wichita, Kansas, but her father's work with the Army and Air Force Exchange Service took them all over the world. She credits her travels, especially to Germany and Belgium, with affecting her current world view. Sheri and husband Scott came to Omaha 24 years ago when they both served in the Air Force as weather forecasters. After retiring from the military, they stayed in Omaha to raise their two sons and two daughters, and now have six grandchildren. Four years ago, Sheri and Scott adopted their grandson Seth, age seven. They both feel that First Unitarian is a wonderful place for him to grow while being exposed to various world views and religions.

Scott now works in management for the U. S. Postal Service while Sheri became a weather observer at Eppley Airfield. Although she returned to school and earned a second degree in education (her first degree was in German and atmospheric science), she finds that working in weather is her comfort zone. But she has put her education degree to good use working with the Religious Education Council, teaching and building a preschool religious education program. In her free time, Sheri volunteers at Seth's school, enjoys reading and writing, and some occasional knitting or sewing. But she says bringing Seth to church has been the highlight of the last few years.

Please welcome Sheri to membership.



A Thought from the Pastoral Advisory Team

It seems to us, your PAT members, that many people may not understand they can approach PAT members for virtually any church concern and that we will direct their concerns to the right place and support them if needed. Your PAT members are Joe Schaaf, Susan Thomas, Jaime Alexander, Alan Vovolka. Of course Rev. Frank continues to encourage direct conversations.

**First Unitarian Church of Omaha
3114 Harney St.
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