

First Unitarian  
Universalist  
Church of  
Wichita

Founded 1887

In Touch is the  
newsletter of the First  
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Association

**First UU Mission  
Statement: We are  
“A welcoming  
community with  
diverse beliefs  
united for positive  
change.”**

# In Touch

February 2024

## President's Letter Growing Concerns - Ned Lakin

Last month I wrote about some concerns regarding the efforts being made to change the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association and steps we are taking in our Adult Religious Exploration class to gather information for ourselves. We want to understand the issues before deciding whether or not to support these proposed changes.

Our initial reading of the suggested Bylaws changes has made us feel rather negative about them. We have drafted a letter, which we want to send to other UU churches and fellowships in the UUA's Mid-America Region to learn if others are feeling similarly about them.

The changes were supported by a large majority of delegates at the General Assembly in 2023, and the UUA is planning a final vote on them at the General Assembly in June of this year.

Although time is getting short, I encourage you all to learn about these issues. There are two issues that seem to be the most contentious. The first is a formal focus on anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism vs. UU congregations and individuals choosing their own areas of social action. The second is the elimination of the Seven Principles – and the sources that undergird them – and officially changing our churches and fellowships to social-justice organizations vs. recognizing the Seven Principles and the supporting sources as the religious “core” of UUism and liberal religion.

I encourage you to invest time into learning about the pros and cons of these changes. You might get a deeper understanding about your personal UU beliefs in the process!

For more information, contact Charles Merrifield at (316) 371-3960, [chasmerrifield@gmail.com](mailto:chasmerrifield@gmail.com); Kathryn Vernon at (316) 210-2731, [kath.vernon@gmail.com](mailto:kath.vernon@gmail.com); Donna Morris at (316) 573-9101, [dmorris10@cox.net](mailto:dmorris10@cox.net); or myself, Ned Lakin, at (316) 214-0968, [nedlak@msn.com](mailto:nedlak@msn.com).

## From the Worship Committee

- Annie Welsbacher

The theme for February is Justice and Equity. We also note Black History Month and welcome satiric singer-songwriter Tom Neilson back to the pulpit for a third appearance.

On February 4, Melanie Jenney presents “*Universal-ish*,” by Lóre Stevens, who notes that although UUs affirm that every person has worth and dignity, “we side with those who are oppressed, to work for change until we are all free.”

On February 11, Debbie Wadman presents Rev. Joan Javier-Duval’s “*Reparations and Beloved Community*.” She quotes Ta-Nehisi Coates, who says “What I’m talking about is more than a handout, a payoff, hush money, or a reluctant bribe” but is “a national reckoning that would lead to spiritual renewal.” Anna Jenney shares a story for all ages.

On February 18, Tom Neilson presents (and performs the prior evening) in another entertaining journey through music, activism, and humor.

On February 25, Rev. Joe Mohr is back in the pulpit.

## A’ho: the Greeting of Mutual Regard

-Kent Rowe

Note: This is another in a series exploring salutations that close our services.

The Native American term “a’ho” has a commonly accepted meaning of “greetings,” “thank you,” “I understand” and a general acknowledgement of mutual regard. There is no single Native American spoken language. Only sign language is shared among nations.

A’ho can be akin to “amen” – which is not exclusive to prayer endings. (For example, amen in Cherokee is “mitakuye oyasin.”) Widely used in the Native American Church, a’ho entails spiritual and ceremonial contexts, although it can be interpreted slightly differently amongst tribes and clans.

A’ho is of a Kiowa origin meaning “thank you” that spread to pan-Indian pow wows and ceremonies. Thus, it is regarded as a “loan” word to other tribal followings. Furthermore, this term and others like it are not “anglicized” and thereby molded into Christian cultural appropriation.

A’ho is simply a sound signifying affirmation of a situation of reciprocal positive connotation.

References: Historian Geoffrey Sea, Chief Udaladi (Markanthony Ramsey), Choctaw. Itsabizhilm Moody, Native rights activist, and Carmen Kotting, weaver.

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## Tom Neilson Returns in February

-Vivien Minshull-Ford

Tom Neilson will perform in concert at 7 pm on Saturday, February 17, and at the pulpit at 11 am on Sunday, February 18. This will be Tom's third appearance at First UU.

The satiric singer-songwriter brings us music and wit built on a lifetime of subversive activism. Although Tom Neilson was born on a dairy farm in upstate New York, his song 18 Cows is actually about an act of civil disobedience in Gaza. The 18 Cows collection relates the survival stories of communities in US streets and in Syria, acting on conscience, to break unjust laws. Many other evocative titles cover a range of musical styles and tunes from humorous to reflective. Tom studied voice at SUNY Cortland in the '60s, during which time he was also an antiwar organizer. He traveled widely as a performer and activist to countries in Latin America and North Africa (getting arrested multiple times as a spy) and in the U.S.

His antiwar organizing in the 1960s, his 1970s work in public health in Senegal, and his diplomatic work in the late 1980s with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front are but a few of his colorful life experiences. His doctoral dissertation, based on political responses to his work with the United Nations in Somalia, Nicaragua, and elsewhere, examined U.S. political and economic hegemony in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere.

Saturday's concert is \$20 or pay-what-you-can. To learn more about Tom's life and to listen to his music, visit [tomneilsonmusic.com](http://tomneilsonmusic.com).



## Eclectic Readers

-Anne Bailey

The book chosen for our February discussion is "Bread Givers" by Anzia Yezierska.

This masterwork of American immigrant literature is set in the 1920s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and tells the story of Sara Smolinsky, the daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, who rebels against her father's rigid conception of Jewish womanhood.

We will gather on February 16, beginning at 11:30 am for a brown-bag lunch followed at noon by a discussion. Copies of this book, borrowed from the Wichita Public Library, will be available at the Church. Please speak to Anne Bailey or Anita Culp.

## First UU Pagan Circle

- Anne Bailey

The Pagan Circle will meet on Saturday, March 23, from 6 to 9 pm for the celebration of the spring equinox, or Ostara. The word Ostara comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess name, Eostre, who represented spring and new beginnings. The celebration of spring is present in many ancient customs across all cultures.

Participants will enjoy a potluck meal at 6 before the ritual, which will begin at 7. Please bring a dish to share; paper plates will be used to cut down on cleanup chores. Or if preferred, just come at 7 for the ritual.

Questions? Call Anne Bailey (316-650-4905), Linda Jordan (316-512-6652), or Donna Morris (316-573-9101).

## First UU Film Group: February showing

-John Findling

On Monday, February 26, at 1 pm, the UU Film Group will present *Dune: Part One*, a visually spectacular science-fiction film based on Frank Herbert's 1965 novel of the same name. We are showing *Dune: Part One* at this time, because the sequel, *Dune: Part Two* is scheduled for release March 1. Many of you may have seen the first part of the epic film when it was released in 2021, but you may need to refresh your memory of it to appreciate the second part of the film. (Note that it is about two-and-a-half hours long, so plan accordingly.)

*Dune: Part One* was directed by Denis Villeneuve (as is part two). It is set in the distant future, and the plot is based upon a war between the Atreides clan and the desolate planet Arakis. It was an artistic and commercial success, winning six Oscars (out of 10 nominations) and grossing just over \$400 million worldwide. Critics have called it the most important sci-fi film of the 21st century (at least so far). Please join us for the show; maybe we can even find some UU values sprinkled throughout the plot.



## Bags of Blessings

-Marcia Ellsworth

As in past years, First UU is joining Partners For Wichita and about 40 other community groups to provide Bags of Blessings: gallon bags filled with travel-sized personal items given to those most in need. If you would like to participate in this project, bring individual items or all of the items in a gallon bag to our collection bin in the church Gathering Space. Items are due by Sunday, February 18. Our Social Action team will then deliver the bin to Partners for Wichita on February 23.

In 2020, more than 1,200 Bags of Blessings filled with more than a dozen personal care items, plus many boxes of extra items, were collected from participating groups. The blessings were then delivered to more than 35 helping places throughout the area.

Requested items include soap (bar or liquid), lotion, razor, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, comb, chapstick/lip balm, washcloth, Kleenex, emery board or clippers, toothpaste, toothbrush, shaving cream, bandaids (3), white socks (1pair). Extra donations not in bags such as feminine hygiene items and ethnic-preference items are also welcome.

See the flyer for more info.  
Together we make a difference!



## Valentine's Tea Party

Join the gaiety at First UU's Valentine's Tea Party, Saturday, February 10, from 3 to 5 p.m. Bring your best friend, family, date, spouse, neighbor, or yourself to enjoy a delicious variety of delicacies including sandwiches, cakes, cookies, pastries, and scones. Tea and coffee will be served at charming tables set with our favorite cups and dishes. Jensen Lee and his guitar will provide the musical vibe. Adventurous sorts may wear hats and gloves.

Cost is \$15 per adult and \$5 for children 10 and under; wine and liqueurs will be available for purchase. Doors close at 5 pm. This is a fund raiser with all proceeds from this fundraiser go to support our church. Once again, the Spice Merchant will donate teas and urns in addition to a raffle prize. Reservations are suggested but not required; call Marcia Ellsworth at 316-208-3083.

# February 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
(Z) - Meeting via Zoom (+Z) - Meeting In-Person and via Zoom firstuu.net/events				1	2	3
4 9:45a Adult Rel Ed (+Z) 11aa Children's Rel Ed 11a Worship Service (+Z) 12:15p First Sunday Lunch	5 6:30p Zen Friends (+Z)	6 4p Worship Committee (Z) 7p UU Craft Group (Z)	7	8 12p Fridays for the Future 6:30p Sierra Club	9 10a Caring Committee 3p Valentine Tea	10
11 9:45a Adult Rel Ed (+Z) 11aa Children's Rel Ed 11a Worship Service (+Z)	12 6p Vegan Potluck 6:30p Zen Friends (+Z)	13 10:30a Renaissance Food Pantry	14 7p Leadership Council (Z)	15	16 11:30a Eclectic Readers	17 9:30a Gardening Group 7p Tom Neilson Concert
18 9:45a Adult Rel Ed (+Z) 11aa Children's Rel Ed 11a Worship Service (+Z) 12:15p Mid-Year Cong Mig	19 6:30p Zen Friends (+Z)	20 11a UU Friends Lunch	21 6p Board of Trustees (+Z) 7p Newsletter deadline	22	23 1p Justice Ministry Network Meeting 6p Global Learning Center	24
25 9:45a Adult Rel Ed (+Z) 11aa Children's Rel Ed 11a Worship Service (+Z) 12:15p Music Committee	26 1p First UU Film Group 6:30p Zen Friends (+Z)	27 10:30a Renaissance Food Pantry	28 7p Tech Committee	29		

The Caring Committee is the arm of the church that responds to events in the lives of the congregants.

We acknowledge birthdays and other special celebrations with cards and kudos. In times of sorrow we acknowledge and seek to bear witness to the pain. Volunteers associated with Caring Committee can, at times, provide transportation to medical appointments, church services, and other church associated events. Light meals and light housekeeping can be provided as needed due to illness, bereavement, or other. Reasonable requests for assistance will be accepted and support provided always, contingent on available people power.

## Ripples from the Caring Committee

Our hearts are remembering and aching for the numerous family, friends, and loved ones we lost in this past year. Letting go is incredibly painful. Please feel our love as you continue to mourn.

There is no need to be alone and isolated. Come into the fold; we care about you.

The Caring Committee maintains a small emergency fund used to provide cash assistance to church members in need. In addition, a person in need may occasionally show up at our front door. For them, we usually provide a Dillons gift card. If you are able to donate cash or card, it will be distributed as needed. The Caring Committee is a good steward of your donation. Thank you in advance.

Watch for updates in the weekly e-newsletter Update, the UU email listserv, and Sunday service bulletins – including monthly reminders of UU Friends lunch bunch. Lunch turnouts have been great, and the food and fellowship most enjoyable. We meet the third Tuesday of the month.

The church is fortunate to have in our service Rev. Joe Mohr, who is available to church members for confidential counseling at no cost. With recent losses, illnesses, and everyday stressors, you may find that you need Rev. Mohr's services more than ever. Please reach out. We care about you. Contact Joe directly to schedule at (580) 729-0781.

If you can help with occasional transportation to medical appointments for congregants, or if you are in need of medical transportation yourself, contact Jana Rambo at (316) 686-4215

Donate to the committee's emergency fund through the church office at (316) 684-3481.

We as the Caring Committee are interested in the joys and sorrows members wish to include in this newsletter. Please contact me at (316) 765-3352.

What touches one of us touches us all.

## Tidbits from the Board

January 17, 2024

-Ned Lakin

### Justice Ministry Network Meeting

-Corey Swertfager

In November, nearly 500 people from more than 30 different faith communities across Sedgwick County assembled to form Justice Together. A couple dozen of those folks were from First UU's Justice Ministry Network.

At that gathering, attendees chose homelessness and mental health as issues to research and take direct action on. In May, we will hold public officials accountable to implement solutions at a massive Nehemiah Action Assembly. To make the officials really take notice, we need to get 2,000-plus people to attend the assembly.

On Saturday, February 24, at 1 pm, the entire First UU Justice Ministry Network will meet at First UU to select people to invite to the assembly. We will also learn about the research that is happening. Contact Corey Swertfager, 316-209-5177, [bikercorey@gmail.com](mailto:bikercorey@gmail.com).

1. The Board welcomed new member Miika Thorn (they, them). Miika replaces Andrew Davis, who resigned in October, so he could concentrate on next year's Stewardship Campaign. Miika joined the Church in 2019 and is thrilled to be "giving back" to this Church, which has come to be very important in their life. Please join the Board in welcoming Miika to this position in the leadership of our Congregation.
2. We are currently going through our Annual Certification process with the national Unitarian-Universalist Association. The UUA requires a number of reports on the various aspects of our Congregation's life, including financial, program, and outreach efforts. Certification is necessary in order to remain in the Association, send delegates to the UUA's General Assembly, and take advantage of programs and ideas that improve our operations.
3. The Board was informed about several proposed changes to the UUA's Bylaws, which have generated concerns about the direction of our denomination in the future. The Adult RE class is discussing these changes and trying to organize an information-sharing arrangement with churches in our Midwest Region to increase awareness of the proposed changes and their implications.
4. We talked about revitalizing the James Reeb Fund Memorial activities around the issues of civil rights – both to highlight Rev. Reeb's death as a martyr for the cause of civil rights and to provide a modest financial award periodically for local non-profits engaged in community building.
5. Please remember the Mid-Year Congregational Meeting following the church service on Sunday, February 18, 2024!



## Membership Committee

### February Anniversaries

- Anita Culp

These members joined First UU Church during the month of February (with years of membership given). We celebrate your membership and look forward to your continuing participation in our church life. Marsha Diggs (27), Mike Diggs (26), Michelle Yipe (16), Caroni Lombard (15), Clyde Rob Williams (14), Rolando Gomez (10), Ned Lakin (8), Holger Meyer (8), Holly Terrill (8), Joe Lozano (7), Lynn Kientz (6), Mitch Kientz (6), and Danielle Ramirez (4).

New Member Dinners Are Back. Longtime church member Nancy Milner has offered to host dinners at her home for our community newcomers. It has been several years since these dinners have been conducted. In the past, the custom was to invite four new people and four familiar faces. Watch for an invitation, probably sometime in March, if you are one of the lucky ones.

Inquirer's Class. If you are interested in joining this congregation or learning about Unitarian Universalism, there will probably be an Inquirer's Class in February or March on a Saturday at the church. You may sign up for the class and will receive details on the specific time and date.

Participants usually meet at 10 am to learn about the history of the Wichita Church and UU history, take a break for lunch and then watch a video, learn what it means to be a member, and take a tour of the building in the afternoon. Please call the Church office at 316-685-3481 if you are interested in joining the class. Or call Anne Bailey at 316-650-4905 if you have questions.

Greeters. The Membership Committee is responsible for seeing that there are people to greet visitors each Sunday morning. We are always looking for new people to perform this vital function and to be a part of our committee. Please talk to Anne Bailey or LaRilla Combs about getting on the schedule to be a greeter.

The Membership Committee is an important part of the First UU's ministry. The purpose of this committee is to promote and develop the growth of church membership and to strengthen and sustain current membership.

First Unitarian  
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## Welcome to Our New Pianist

-Marcia Ellsworth

We are pleased to welcome Ismail “Ish” Farid as our new pianist. Ish (as in “yellow-ish) has more than 30 years of performance experience and has taught for more than 15 years. He was an orchestra director in Kansas Public Schools and Executive Director of the Southwestern College Youth Symphony. Ish visited our church recently as an accompanist for Sarah Jane Naillon and liked the atmosphere and people. Please take a few minutes after the service to welcome him.

We are sad to see Josh Saxe resign as our pianist due to his full schedule, including a book-writing project. We have enjoyed listening to him play. He fully throws himself into his music and performs beautifully – even with his toddler son sitting on his shoulders. Thank you, Josh, for sharing your music with us over the past year, and thank you in advance for filling in as pianist as needed. Good luck writing your book!