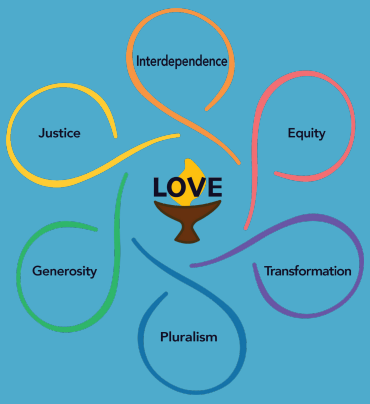
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita

Founded 1887

In Touch is the newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita and is published monthly.



Member of the Unitarian Universalist Association

First UU Mission Statement: "A welcoming community with diverse beliefs united for positive change."

In Touch

May 2025

President's Letter

Major Movement in May

—Corey Swertfager

The First UU community has a lot going on in May! Unless otherwise noted, the following events will be held at the church.

May 1-3, 9 a.m.-5p.m. (closes at 1p.m Saturday): Rummage Sale. Our biggest fundraiser of the year is great fun — and takes many hands. If you haven't signed up to help yet, contact Marcia Ellsworth or Vivien Minshull-Ford. Check out the fab flier in this issue.

May 8, 6 p.m.: Justice Together Nehemiah Assembly, WSU Hughes Metroplex. Join justice seekers from throughout Sedgwick County's broader faith community as we present well-researched, community-driven proposals addressing homelessness and affordable housing to local officials at the assembly! We need a big crowd to show our officials that we mean business. Contact me for free tickets.

May 17, 1 p.m.: Billie Knighton 90th Birthday Celebration and Mortgage Payoff Fundraising Event. For decades, Billie has been active at First UU and in local social action groups. It is a joy to see her each Sunday, her eyes twinkling with justice. This ever-generous soul has requested that in lieu of gifts, she'd like folks to help pay off the mortgage. We set up a donation page in her honor: tinyurl.com/FirstUUMortgage. To learn more about Billie and her party, see this issue's article by her daughter, Andrea Knighton.

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The deadline for In Touch *and for the monthly calendar is the third Wednesday of each month.*

Please send submissions to awelsbacher@gmail.com.

From the Worship Committee

—Anne Welsbacher

The theme for May is Imagination.

On May 4, Melanie Jenney presents "Sheer Holy Boldness: *Star Wars*, the Feminist Ethic of Risk, and UU Communities" by Rev. Sara Smalley, the minister at the UU Fellowship in Northfield, Minnesota. Rev. Smalley presented this sermon on the Sunday following the November 2024 presidential election, and it makes bold predictions about what she describes in it as 2025 harboring "the return of the Jedi." May the Fourth be with you for our May 4 service. Trevor Stewart performs on the Chapman stick.

On , May 11, Debbie Wadman presents "The World Our Hearts Know is Possible" Rev. Heather Concannon, the minister at Theodore Parker Church in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. In her sermon, Concannon points to the strong tradition in our Unitarian Universalist faith of "working for a better world, a world of more justice and equity, where all are able to thrive," and notes that "one of the sacred tools we must draw on is the tool of imagination." Faith, she says, means "living with a foot in two worlds: The world as it is and the world that our hearts know is possible." As with every second Sunday, Anna Jenney will read a Story for All Ages, and Seth Girton plays cello.

On May 18, Joe Mohr presents "The Space Beyond," a sermon exploring imagination as a spiritual practice. He'll ask us to reflect on how envisioning a world beyond our own experiences invites deeper empathy, broader inclusion, and boundless possibility. Rooted in our Unitarian Universalist values, this message challenges us to dream boldly and to create a more expansive and compassionate future. Ish Farid performs special vocal music.

On May 25, Joe Mohr presents "True Freedom," a sermon exploring the mind as a space of limitless creativity and resilience, inspired by Constance Wu's words, "what you create internally is something that no one can take away from you. It is something you have an infinite supply of," Mohr will reflect on how nurturing our inner world fosters inclusion, strength, and hope. Rooted in Unitarian Universalist values, this message invites us to embrace the boundless freedom within ourselves. Harrison Steel performs on guitar.

Billie Knighton is 90!
Come Party on May 17

Longtime First UU Church of Wichita member and social activist Billie Knighton just turned 90! To celebrate this milestone and her contributions to our community, a special joint birthday celebration and fundraising event for the church has been scheduled for May 17.

In lieu of gifts, Billie is asking for donations towards the church's mortgage. And for her, a call for video clips has been sent out. The clips will be compiled and revealed to Billie at the celebration. Let's create a great turn-out from the church for Billie!

Use the QR code or link below to access First UU's Facebook Event page for:

1) Details on how to participate in Billie's group video gift,
2) Billie's Mortgage Payoff link, and
3) to RSVP so enough birthday cake is made to go around!

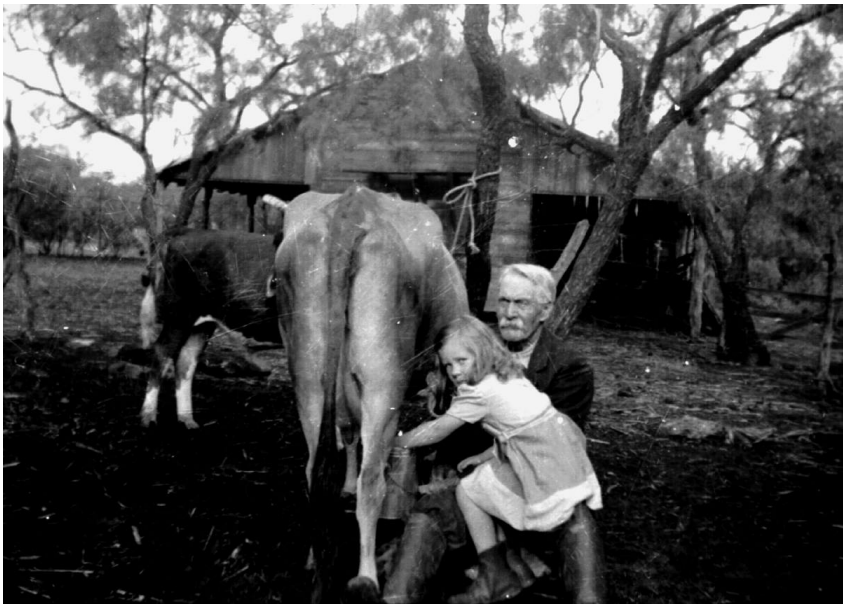
https://tinyurl.com/Billie90

You may also call the church office to RSVP at 316-684-3481. Don't delay: Video clips must be sent by May 4!

As Billie so fondly likes to share, she was born in 1935, the year Social Security was passed. She recalls her grandfather Andrew Lewis (1875–1951) sharing how he'd tried to lessen elderly hardships through selling private insurance prior to this momentous societal change.

Billie's parents were educators who valued history, politics, and community involvement. Billie vividly remembers her family gathering around their large "cathedral" radio in the living room for Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats. Afterwards, she and grandpa Lewis would spend hours discussing FDR's policies and later the developments of World War II.

In 1968, Billie's husband, Yale R. Davis Jr., was killed in action in Vietnam. From that time forward, many came to know Billie through her dedication to causes and issues that promised to make our world a better, more peaceful place. Today, Billie's caring of others shines on.



Five-year-old Billie helping great Uncle Jasper Lewis milk the cows—back when local food systems fed the U.S.!

The Caring Committee responds to events in the lives of the congregants. We acknowledge birthdays and special celebrations with cards and kudos. In times of sorrow, we bear witness to the pain. Light meals and light housekeeping can be provided as needed due to illness or bereavement. Reasonable requests for assistance will be provided, always contingent on available people power.

Music
—Jana Rambo

The Music Committee continues to bring a variety of music to our services. Our new drumming circle met for the second time in April, and our numbers have grown; in addition, more people have expressed interest.

If you are interested in playing or singing for a service, or know someone who would be, please let us know. If you are interested in joining the Music Committee, please contact me at jayrobo@aol.com. We meet via Zoom at 4 p.m. the fourth Wednesday of the month.

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Ripples from the Caring Committee
—Magda Garrett

With warmer weather, earlier sunrises, and longer evenings, take it outside. Walking, gardening, or just sitting in the sunshine is great fuel for the spirit.

Tap into the body's happy hormones.

1. Dopamine: Listen to upbeat music.
2. Serotonin: Meditation.
3. Oxytocin: Pet an animal.
4. Endorphins: Eat chocolate.

Remember to look after you.

Consider joining caring committee. Meetings are the second Saturday of the month, 10 am in the church library.

The monthly UU Friends lunch bunch day is the third Thursday at 11:30 a.m. Watch for updates about this and other events in the weekly e-newsletter, the UU email listserv, and Sunday service bulletins. On occasion the noon lunch time might be adjusted; we will let congregants know ahead of time.

Joe Mohr, at (580) 729-0781, offers free, confidential counseling for church members. To give to or get help with occasional medical or church-related transportation, contact Jana Rambo at (316) 686-4215. The committee maintains a small emergency fund. Consider donating through the church office at (316) 684-3481. We are interested in joys and sorrows members wish to include in this newsletter. Please contact me, Magda Garrett, at (316) 765-3352.

What touches one of us touches us all.

First UU Pagan Circle

—Anne Bailey

Our Beltane celebration will be Saturday, May 10, from 5:00 to 7:00 PM. Yes, it will be nine days after the official May 1 holiday, but better late than never. Beltane is the festival marking the beginning of summer. It is traditionally held midway between the spring equinox and summer solstice, so we are still in that window.

We will enjoy a potluck meal beginning at 5:00 PM before the ritual, which will begin at 6:00 PM. Please bring a dish to share; we will use paper plates to cut down on the cleanup chores.

Our June meeting will be on Saturday, the 21st to celebrate Litha or the summer solstice.

Feel free to call Anne Bailey at (316) 650-4905), Linda Jordan at (316) 512-6652, or Donna Morris at (316) 573-9101 if you have questions about this gathering.

From the Children's RE Director

—Anna Jenney

Attendance in our Religious Exploration program has been strong and consistent this spring! It's been such a joy to welcome both familiar faces and new friends into our space. If you have young ones in your life ages 5–12, now is a great time to join us—we'd love to have them be part of our Sunday fun and learning.

In April, we explored the many ways joy shows up in our lives—through laughter, connection, nature, and movement. We also celebrated beautiful holidays that come with springtime. Our theme for May will be Imagination, and we can't wait to see where our creativity takes us!

We're seek volunteers to lead our Religious Exploration program during July and August. Volunteers will teach a one-hour lesson on a topic of their choice. This is a beloved time in our program—an opportunity to share meaningful, obscure, or even delightfully strange interests with curious young minds. Past summer lessons have included music, friendship bracelets, terrarium making, and gardening. You can expect a group of anywhere from one to six children, ages 4–12, who are ready to learn and have fun.

If you'd like to volunteer but aren't sure what topic to teach, we do have ready-to-go lesson plans. We especially love when volunteers bring something personal or aligned with their own skills and passions. We need teachers If you're interested, please reach out to me, our Religious Exploration Director, at anna.jenney@gmail.com to pick a Sunday that works for you.

One more exciting update: On May 4, we'll be planting in Betty's Place, our music-themed garden and outdoor play area. This lesson may run a little longer than usual, and we'd love help from anyone who wants to join us after the service to get plants in the ground. Our Sunday Lunch is May 11 this month, so getting outdoors and enjoying the garden is a great post-service alternative.

Thank you for supporting this vibrant program—it means the world to our young people and to our community.

UU Film Group
—John Findling

On Friday, May 23, at 6:30 p.m., we will show *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, released in 2006, directed by Larry Charles, and starring Sacha Baron Cohen. It's one of the funniest films I have ever seen, but others might find tasteless or offensive.

Cohen plays Borat, a journalist from Kazakhstan sent by his government to America to film a documentary about the U.S. so that his country can raise its own cultural standards. He experiences encounters with a wide variety of Americans as he tries to understand their culture. He also develops a crush on Pamela Anderson (played by herself) and decides to find and marry her.

The film received a favorable 90 percent Rotten Tomatoes rating despite the sexist, antisemitic, and politically incorrect qualities of Borat and the prejudices and odd habits of the American people he encounters. Fundamentally, the film is an unrelenting satire of both the U.S. and Kazakhstan told through an often gross level of humor seldom if ever seen in mainstream theatre releases.

The film is a brief 102 minutes, so we encourage a post-viewing discussion. Consider such questions as the appropriateness of the humor, the satirical points it makes about the U.S. and Kazakhstan, the character of Borat, and other comedies it might be compared with. We hope to see you there: bring snacks if you like.

Membership
—Anne Bailey

Our Inquirer's class is offered several times throughout the year for people interested in learning more about Unitarians, Universalists, and the history of the Wichita church. Our most recent class was slated for Saturday, April 26.

The next class will be offered sometime this summer. Please speak to Anne Bailey or Anita Culp at church on Sunday or call the church office at (316) 684-3481 to let us know you are interested in attending the class.

In addition to offering the Inquirer's Class, 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 be a part of our committee. Please talk to Anne Bailey or LaRilla Combs about getting on the schedule to be a greeter.

April Anniversaries
—Anita Culp

These members joined First UU Church during the month of May (with years of membership given). We celebrate your membership and look forward to your continuing participation in our church life. Ellen Oberle (23), Lara Pollock (23), Debbie Wadman (16), Dan DeMott (16), Magda Garrett (14), Masud Chand (10), Doug Wilson (9), Ed McCormack (7), Celestra Snyder (7), Michele Buschman (2), Donna Morris (2), and Jon Ramirez (2).

First Sunday Lunch: "First" Means "Second" in May

Heads up! Because this year's Rummage Sale takes place May 1-3, First Sunday lunch will be held May 11. Celebrate the end of another successful fundraiser with the Mexican cuisine of a Cinco de Mayo Celebration. (Or should we say undécimo de mayo?)

Who is This?

—Annie Welsbacher

Adapted from an essay by Patrick Merlin

Sophia Lyon Fahs, born in 1876 to missionaries in China, revolutionized religious education, eventually breathing new life into the struggling mid-20th century UU denomination. Fahs dreamed of being a missionary, bringing the Christian gospel to the unsaved slaves of false religions. But in 1901, as she planned to attend the new University of Chicago, she was warned against that "hotbed of unsound doctrine and radical intellectualism."

Luckily for UUs nationwide, those warnings proved prescient, exposing Fahs to educational progressives like John Dewey and, later, those at the Columbia University Teacher's College. The death knell to her old ways were her own children who, she realized, had independent minds that could rationally explore the world. She came to believe that instead of Bible verses, vivid, detailed stories about real people would be more effective with young kids. She wrote books, articles, curriculum guides, and worship materials, stretching further into the natural sciences, the religions of "primitive" peoples, and world religions, seeking ways for kids to connect with life experiences: birth and death, the sun and stars.

Unitarian education leaders had followed Fahs's work since her 1928 article "How Childish Should a Child's Religion Be." In 1930, she led a Unitarian religious education conference, and in 1937 she became Editor of Children's Materials for the American Unitarian Association, completely remaking the Beacon religious education curricula.

Unitarianism had been dwindling, but largely on the strength of Fahs's new RE program, young families flocked to the congregations, and new congregations and fellowships sprang up throughout the U.S. Fahs retired at age 88 and died in 1978 at the age of 101.

Eclectic Book Group

—Anne Bailey

The selection for May is your choice of any book by Joseph Conrad. Conrad was a Polish-born novelist and story writer. He is regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language and – though he did not speak English fluently until his 20s (and always with a strong foreign accent) – became a master prose stylist who brought a non-English sensibility into English literature. He wrote novels and stories, many in nautical settings, that depicted crises of human individuality in the midst of what he saw as an indifferent, inscrutable, and amoral world. The group read his Heart of Darkness in 2012; now we encourage you to explore his other works, although feel free to read it if you choose.

The Wichita public library has more than two dozen books by and about him (some of them multiple copies of the same title) — and, of course, many of his books are available in new and used bookstores.

Anyone is welcome to join our discussions. We meet on the third Friday, which this month is May 16. We gather at noon to enjoy brown bag lunches followed at 12:30 pm with a discussion of the book. Come at noon or at 12:30 for the discussion.

First Unitarian Universalist Church

RUMMAGE SALE!!!

Clothes, furniture,
plants & flowers,
art, holiday items,
sports equipment,
antiques, tools,
estate items,
tchotchkes,
jewelry, purses,
baked goods,
vintage items,
linens, dishes,
housewares,
toys & kid stuff,
books!

May 1 - 3, 2025 ~ 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

No early birds!
(Closes 1 p.m. on 5/3

First UU, 7202 E. 21st. St., Wichita, KS

Psst... everyone knows churches have the BEST stuff!!!