

## **Unitarian Church of Underwood January, 2012 Newsletter**

The Unitarian Church of Underwood is a welcoming community of diverse people who gather to reflect, to find refuge, spiritual renewal and intellectual growth; to improve our understanding of the world; to build bridges towards peace and understanding; and to improve lives and opportunities across our communities.

### **Coming Up In January**

#### **Sunday Morning Services Begin at 10:30**

January 1 – Bob Worner

January 8 – Joanie Ellison – Many Cultures, Many Foods – Reflections on Pelican Rapids Diversity

January 15 – David Minge

January 22 – To Be Announced

January 29 – Rev. Bradley Skogen – Instrumental Grieving

#### **Sunday Morning Meetings**

January 1 – Adult RE will not meet until January 8

January 8, 9:15 – Adult RE

January 15, 9:15 – Writing as Spiritual Practice

January 22, 9:30 – Marriage Amendment Committee – everyone is welcome to attend

### **Speaker Profile:**

On January 29, 2012, our speaker will be Rev. Bradley Skogen, Chaplaincy Services Director for Lake Region Healthcare in Fergus Falls. His topic is “Instrumental Grieving”, with insights from the work of Kenneth Doka, Terry Martin, and others, about diversity in grieving “styles”.

Chaplain Skogen is a native and high school graduate of Detroit Lakes. He earned his B.A. at Luther College in Decorah, IA, and his M.Div. at Luther College in St. Paul.

He is married to Laura, a Mental Health Professional at LSS of MN, Fergus Falls. They are the parents of daughters Berit and Sorine, and reside in Fergus Falls.

### **Quarterly Board/Congregational Meeting**

On **Sunday, January 22, 2012**, the board meeting with the congregation will be held after church. It's a **potluck** so bring your favorite dish to share. This is an important meeting as the board will be seeking input from the congregation for planning our budget and finances.

All board meetings are open to members, and are usually held the third Wednesday evening of the month. For the past couple of years, the board has held one meeting a quarter after the Sunday service to improve communication with our members. Many valuable ideas have emerged from these meetings as we seek to find a common vision. These meetings present regular opportunities to be involved with the board for planning the way forward. In addition, the **Annual Meeting** is held in April and allows for the motions from the membership, election of the board and voting on other church business.

***Pease mark your calendars!***

### **Speakers Committee**

The Speakers Committee invites you to suggest speakers for the Sunday Morning service. If you know of someone you would like to hear or if you would like to volunteer, please fill out a suggestion sheet or let JoAnn or Betsy know.

The committee encourages members of the congregation to volunteer and will provide a coach upon request. Or, perhaps your group would like to make a joint presentation. We attempt to provide excellent Sunday speakers and appreciate your comments and assistance. Members of the committee are: Betsy Wells, Ron Roller, Sandra Barnhouse, Ron Graham, John Minge, and JoAnn Larson.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

We love our volunteers. The committees always welcome volunteers to participate in a wide variety of ways. Here are two specific volunteer opportunities:

**MEDIA TEAM:** We need a couple of people who would be willing to work with PEG Access. This is an organization in Fergus to which we belong that offers a variety of technologies to benefit our church – the use of a PowerPoint projector, for example. There are many services available that would probably be of benefit to us if we only knew what they were and were trained to use them! PEG Access does the training. Step up, anybody? Contact JoAnn Larson.

**GREEN TEAM:** The “Green Committee” is seeking additional members. This group is looking at ways that we can be greener as individuals, as a church and as a community. They have some pretty wonderful ideas and are a dedicated group. They would like to explore whether our church could be part of the “Green Sanctuary” movement in the UUA. Their next meeting is scheduled for the second Sunday in March before church at 9:30 am. Contact JoAnn or Alisha Piekarski.

**PROJECT COMMITTEE:** Have you an interest in the community outreach activities of our church? The primary responsibility of The Project Committee currently is to review and approve Empowerment Grant applications. The Committee works with the board to develop and maintain the application process and policies for Empowerment Grants projects. The amount of grant money available is determined by the Project Committee together with the board and church treasurer. The Committee is seeking additional volunteers to participate in reviewing and approving the grant applications of the current grant cycle which ended December 15. Grants applications will be reviewed and awarded in January. Please contact Ron Roller, Wally Warhol or Stephanie Sanderson.

## **Thanks to our Volunteers!**

If you didn't see the RE Children's Program on December 17, too bad for you. You missed something special. What a wonderful thing it was to experience children in our church service! The children gave us a look at winter holidays around the world through costume and song. As you would imagine, a lot of time and planning went into this event. Thanks RE kids for your enthusiastic performance! Thank you, Betsy Wells, Haley Honeman, Mary Anderson and Katrina Wass for creating and directing this event. Special thanks to Mary Anderson for providing the holiday décor in our fellowship room and for providing most of the kids for the program! Your dedication in creating a Children's RE Program has benefitted not only these great kids, but has warmed up the hearts of our whole fellowship.

## **Member Profile**

**Betsy Wells** is a familiar face to anyone who has walked through our doors. You'll find Betsy in the kitchen organizing Sunday schedules for kitchen and treats. She works together with Mary Anderson to provide an RE experience for children. She serves on the board of directors and is chairperson of the Program Committee which includes the Speaker, Music, RE, and Congregational Support subcommittees. Isn't that pretty much everything?

But that's not all. She is a paraprofessional with the 6<sup>th</sup> graders at Kennedy Secondary School in Fergus Falls, having worked now for the school for almost 20 years. She finds it so rewarding because she gets to be with kids all the time, works with a great staff, and is learning every day.

She and her husband Doug have three children – George and Robin (30), and Jeff (26). George is living near Zurich, Switzerland; Robin is in Portland; and Jeff is in Fairbanks. They have been part of this congregation since Jeff was 3 years old. The kids went through RE, with Betsy involved in RE with them. You'll have to ask Betsy about the great things her kids are involved in. It would take pages of newsletter space.

Betsy plays base in a musical group, the Tickwood Stringband, with Doug, Ron Roller and Katy Olson. Doug plays banjo, and they enjoy the old-time Appalachia tunes, having an interest in basic roots music. She finds it really fun to play. The group plays for dances, festivals and just for fun.

Betsy is an enthusiast of all things out-of-doors. She loves to bike, canoe, ice skate, ski, garden, swim and hike. She's been pretty pleased that the ice has been really great for skating on a large wetland by her home. She loves to grow veggies and does lots of freezing and drying of them in the fall. She belongs to a book club, but finds that she does most of her reading on an airplane and got some read-time when she flew to Switzerland in December to see her son.

How in the world can we possibly thank you, Betsy, for all the things you do to make our organization run? You have our undying appreciation. Thank you for finding the time in your very busy, fruitful life to bring your gifts to us, too.

### **Facility Improvements**

Our sanctuary has some amazing qualities. The acoustics are phenomenal for musicians and singers, as the sound wraps around the ceiling and walls. But it's not so great for people with hearing issues.

A few years ago, the board approved the acquisition of personal hearing amplifiers, and a couple of units were tried. It was concluded that what we needed were personal amplifiers that run through our loud speaker system. However, about 2 years ago, additional speakers were added to the front of the church, and one speaker was removed from the back. That seemed to have helped sound transmission considerably. It should also be noted that there is a lapel microphone available which would alleviate some of the difficulties with speakers moving away from the microphone which makes hearing difficult at times.

The board feels it was time to review with our membership again whether there are still conditions in the acoustics of the sanctuary that create discomfort or interfere with the participation of anyone with hearing difficulties. This issue will be discussed at the January 22 board/congregational meeting. Bring your ideas, or contact Dave McRoberts, Facility Committee chairperson.

### **Habitat for Humanity House dedication**

On December 17, 2011 Habitat for Humanity dedicated a house to the Keith Stempfley family in Underwood Minnesota. Our church contributed money and labor to the project. David Wass, Mary Worner, Bob Worner and Wally Warhol participated in the labor.

David Wass, Susan Groff and Wally Warhol were at the dedication along with about 45 or so others from the other churches involved.

The house was beautiful inside with wood decor, special kitchen cabinets, and energy saving features.

### **Thoughts about our Church – Ron Graham, U Group Facilitator**

Tonight is Christmas evening and I am sitting by the fire listening to Christmas Carols on MPR. It is a gentle evening and I have been feasting on warm thoughts concerning our Church. I see so many encouraging things happening. The U groups have come into being and with them a good number of us have experienced others in a deeper and more open way. I have

appreciated more of our members speaking at the Sunday services, leading committees and the board, working with the children, providing social events in their homes, visiting each other, providing music, art, etc. In a time when Unitarian Universalists are not growing, our congregation has been increasing in size and activity.

Growing is something that is always encouraged by national church leaders. Some congregations labor under the idea they must reach out and grow or else many will unnecessarily go to hell. Some congregations have large and expensive facilities and staff that require growth to maintain.

But, we Unitarians, a mere 0.03% of the population nationally and almost certainly less than that locally, don't have those motivators. If we attempt to reach out to others it is simply because we want them to know there is an alternative. We offer spirituality without any required belief. We offer stimulating discussions and Sunday morning speakers without insisting on agreement. We offer a group involved in doing good for the community and the world without any guilt pushed on those who don't participate.

But here is the rub – just because of who we are becoming, we are growing and that means change. The little group that met once a month is gone. The congregation that took most of the summer off is no more. The ways of communicating and making decisions that worked for a few are being revised so they will work for this larger group. The process of change can be frustrating. But I am not discouraged because I know the board and others are working on new ways of interacting in our larger congregation, and this includes the development of U Groups.

We are bucking a national trend – we are not declining, we are growing! And we still want the intimacy of the small, familiar group that used to be. Small congregations that begin to grow often create uncomfortable atmospheres which keep them small. Will we welcome the growth and change that is occurring? Fortunately, the board and several dedicated volunteers are making it possible to have the intimacy of the small group *and* a larger and more vibrant congregation. U groups provide the smallness most of us need. Everyone that is a part of one knows the rules – there are no outsiders. I am pleased that more opportunities for U groups will be provided in the coming year. Ten is the maximum number that can be in a U group so they will always provide the advantages of “small” even as the congregation increases in size.

### **Poetry Corner**

We invite you to submit your original poetry for future newsletters. If you have a piece that you would be willing to share, we would love to hear from you. Please contact Ellen Eastby or Stephanie Sanderson.