



The Circuit Writer

December 2021

December Services

Sunday, December 5th | 10:30AM **"Making Good Time"**

Richard Olson, guest speaker

We live in a culture that values time in terms of accomplishments. We've all heard these expressions: 'time is money', 'there aren't enough hours in a day', and 'we shouldn't waste time'. How do you value time?

Annual Congregational Meeting, December 5th, at 11:45AM. All church members are encouraged to attend and vote. [Meeting packet is here.](#)

Sunday, December 12th | 10:30AM

the Reverend Brian Mason, preaching

Sunday, December 19th | 10:30AM: **Christmas Pageant**

Join us for a unique take on the traditional Christmas Pageant, a rich and favored service at UU Wausau for more than 100 years. With performances by the children and youth of the congregation and help from the audience, accompanied by the heartwarming music of the season (more information on page 5!).

Tuesday, December 21st | 7:00PM **Winter Solstice Service**

led by the Religious Services Committee

Again this year we will observe the northern hemisphere's longest night of the year by celebrating the passage from darkness to light with readings, songs, drumming, letting go, quiet meditation, and candles. All are welcome to join in this special intergenerational seasonal service which honors our earth centered traditions that celebrate the sacred circle of life.

Friday, December 24th | 7:00PM **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

the Reverend Brian Mason, preaching

You are invited to celebrate the season with a traditional service of lessons, carols, and candlelight. Open to anyone who is seeking light in the darkness – come and be part of this special time of music and joy.

Sunday, December 26th | 10:30AM

the Reverend Brian Mason, preaching

RE Sundays

Elementary RE: Zoom Meetup, Sunday, December 5 @ 9am. This month we'll be exploring the theme "Opening to Joy". *No RE Dec. 12, 19 or 26, so children can attend our annual holiday services with their families.*



From A Window on Grant—December 2021

As I write this letter with an eye towards 2021's end, I can't help reminiscing on the year we'll soon bid farewell as I turn my attention to 2022 and beyond. Rather than be personal in this space I want to talk about the church and by "church" I mean our church—UU Wausau—and church generally.

In [November's newsletter](#) to UU congregations, the Rev. David Pyle, MidAmerica's Regional Lead, wrote this: "I would like to invite congregational leaders and members to have some compassion and show some support for your Religious Professionals, not just the professional ministers but all of your church staff, who have been through ten years of church adaptation in the last two years, and have somehow made it work, but at an emotional, spiritual, and professional cost that is felt but difficult to name."

Two equally important things I want to expand on, one quickly, the other at length. First, UU Wausau is blessed with a capable team of professionals. I've worked closely with the staff these last two years especially and have seen how taxing it is to wear multiple hats, constantly do risk assessments, and show up—week in, week out—ready and prepared to serve a community of spiritual seekers. Dänika, Jes, and Margaret deserve a big shout out for all they do. I'm grateful to work with them.

Secondly, I want to draw attention to Mr. Pyle's point where he says there's been "ten years of church adaptation in the last two years." I'll put that another way: *the ten years religious professionals thought they had to think about the church of the future was stolen by coronavirus; the time to think about how we'll do church in the future is now.*

Before expanding on the second point, I want to briefly reminisce about one thing: Worship. This year I heard more than ever before how important ritual and tradition are for many (if not most) in the congregation. UUs for various reasons

wrestle with tradition's importance, but I don't think it's very productive. After all, King's Chapel in Boston, one of America's oldest churches (and a Unitarian one to boot!), has been worshipping the same way, with only minor changes, since 1686. The archives at UU Wausau show that it worshiped—by and large—the same way from 1870 until about 2000. Five years ago, I altered services to better express our faith's history and heritage, which moved us closer to what had been done in UU Wausau's worship services for the first 130 years. As the saying goes: *if it ain't broke, don't fix it.*

Now I want to turn your attention to 2022 and beyond. Why? Because the way we "do" church is changing (has been for decades, really) and I'd rather us drive that process than be a passenger. Some of the areas likely in need of adaptation are how we accomplish essential church-work like faith formation, teaching, coordinating volunteers, preserving our posture of openness towards people in the community, operations and administration, and governance. Here's why: Church membership in the U.S. is trending downwards. (Note: many non-profits, not just churches, are reporting similar declines.) Mainline churches—which I lump UU into—are really starting to feel the decline's pinch. I see an awareness of that in Mr. Pyle's invitation too.

This pinch has been felt for a while. But it started causing pain in March after Gallup confirmed what everyone feared: data showing *major* declines in religious affiliation nationwide. (Full report here: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>) The fear had to do with the fact that almost no one thought religious affiliation in the U.S. would dip below 50% anytime soon. Spoiler alert: we're already at 47% and dropping. Fast. As members of an American church, it's important to think about this. I'm not saying this to spark fear and anxiety. I'm saying this because there's a chance

From A Window on Grant

(and that chance seems to be looking more like a reality) that UU Wausau will look differently in the future than it has in the past.

I want to draw your attention to Jeffrey Jones's words. Dr. Jones is Gallup's senior editor who oversees research and analysis. Here's how he ends the report I have in mind:

The U.S. remains a religious nation, with more than seven in 10 affiliating with some type of organized religion. However, far fewer, now less than half, have a formal membership with a specific house of worship. While it is possible that part of the decline seen in 2020 was temporary and related to the coronavirus pandemic, continued decline in future decades seems inevitable, given the much lower levels of religiosity and church membership among younger versus older generations of adults.

Churches are only as strong as their membership and are dependent on their members for financial support and service to keep operating. Because it is unlikely that people who do not have a religious preference will become church members, the challenge for church leaders is to encourage those who do affiliate with a specific faith to become formal, and active, church members.

If Dr. Jones is right, then part of what he's telling us is this: *focus on the people you have, not the people you want*. Of course, we should stay committed to people who for various reasons can't physically be at church. But the key word is "can't." Hoping for hordes of new people or

scrounging around trying to lure back the people who've left is likely an exercise in futility—it also sends a bizarre message to the people who are with us if we constantly lament all the people we wish were in the room. Therefore, much of our efforts should go to the people in our midst, with special emphasis on education, health, and spiritual growth; and alongside that, empowerment of the people who want to partner with the church's minister and staff to do the necessary work. (Key word: *partner*.) There's a churchy word for ministerial partnership and leadership and it's "discipleship." Disciples are followers of a teacher, philosophy, or religion. We're all disciples of Unitarian Universalism already. What I'd like to do is add depth and complexity to that identity.

I'll be honest, I don't want the emotional, spiritual, and professional costs paid for by church's staff and committed volunteers that Mr. Pyle talks about to have been in vain. Thankfully, with enough grit and vision, it doesn't have to be.

In the months ahead, I want us to focus on empowering the people in our midst who want to share in the areas of congregational leadership that are needed: teachers, preachers, community caregivers, and worship leaders. (I plan to offer a class called "Voices" that will provide space for people who want to tell their spiritual journeys. The goal is twofold: to nurture spiritual growth and relationships while studying the ancient art of sermon writing. The sermon, if participants choose, will be shared with the congregation in worship - I'd love to see more members sharing from the pulpit!)

Members who choose not to invest in the congregation and make time to be part of the community on Sundays and special events probably shouldn't have access to the pulpit or leadership roles or seats on the board. That's a viewpoint found in our church's foundational documents that I think we should do our best to return to (it's a vision of leadership common in churches like ours with congregational polity). I think the founders

From A Window on Grant

were on to something there (and other places, too). As the current president of the UUA likes to say, “Unitarian Universalism doesn’t need lukewarm practitioners.” The Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, like UU Wausau’s founders, seem to be on to something there.

I also think it’s important for us to continue having a positive impact on people in our community—refugees, people with housing and food insecurity, and those struggling with addiction and sobriety are some of the loudest voices I hear when I watch the evening news. We should keep listening to the voices in our midst that are calling out. If we ignore them, for whatever reason, are we really doing what we profess or just paying lip service?

Another area I want to reengage is with UUs worldwide. I want UU Wausau to do what we’ve historically done and restart a partner church program. There are currently 10 UU churches throughout India, Hungary, the Philippines, and Transylvania actively seeking partnerships with churches in the U.S. I want us to experience firsthand just how powerful our faith can be. And sometimes to do that, we must get out of our usual contexts to see just what a gift we have in Unitarian Universalism.

Our faith has no boundaries. Our faith changes lives. It grows souls. It heals minds. It sets people’s hearts on fire with love. It gives us a chance to encounter the Holy in our lives and in our shared life as a congregation. If we practice it, this faith will form and transform. I’d summarize all that I’ve written like this: be grateful for our church, its staff and lay leaders, and let’s deepen our engagement with the gift of our chosen faith.

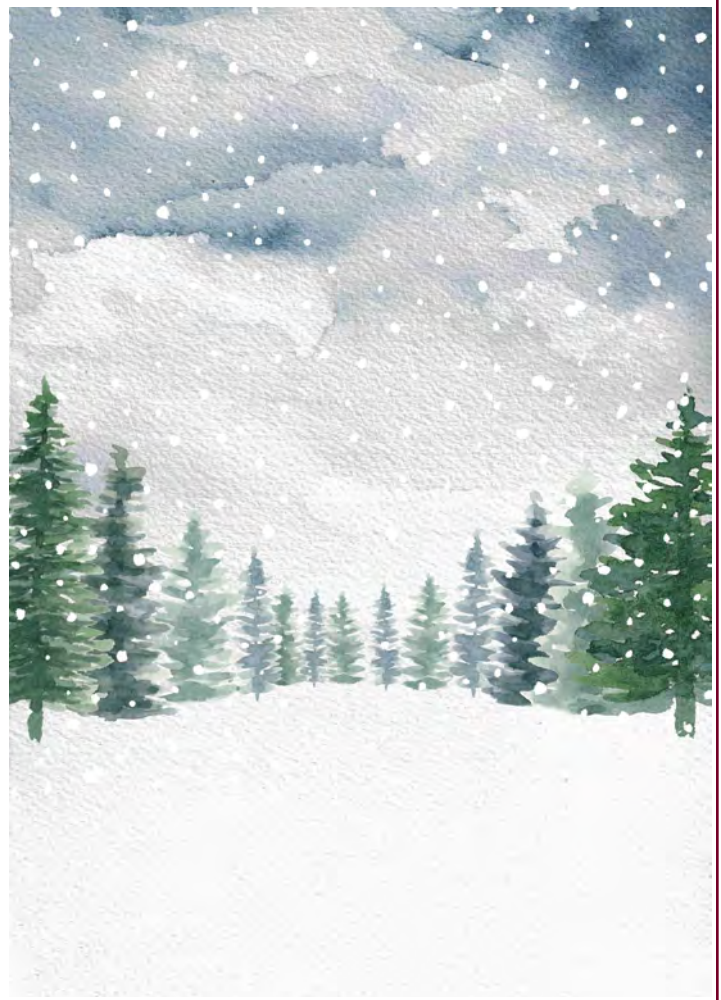
UU Wausau is a gift we’ve been entrusted with. All those thousands of names in the church’s membership book are the people who left us this gift—they are your spiritual siblings. . Don’t forget that. In gifting us our church they trusted that we’d give it the care it deserves. Thankfully, the congregation we need is already in our midst. Just look

around on Sunday if you need a reminder of who might be a part of our church’s future. It’s you if you want it to be.

Delaying tough conversations about the church’s future is a luxury we no longer have. The pandemic stole from us the time we had to procrastinate. If we don’t want to end up a footnote in Gal-lup’s next report, we have to start thinking about our future now.

See you at church,

Brian



REflections

This month's Soul Matters theme is "Opening to Joy," which seems so very fitting for this December in particular. One of the hardest parts of the pandemic has been having to constantly re-imagine how we can be in the world and all the ways we've had to adapt everything we do, especially those beloved traditions that could not happen safely. While Zoom enabled congregations to stay connected through the holidays last year, and we were able to create beautiful and meaningful ways to celebrate together, it wasn't the same. Rather, it was the best we could do with no good choices. This year, while we still aren't back to "normal" and have to be thoughtful about the ways we gather, we do have choices. And I am so glad that one of them is to have our annual Christmas Pageant, in person!

Now, if we had known each other a bit longer, you would probably find that statement shocking. I make it no secret that there is no love lost between pageants and me. It comes at a time of year with so many other events, parties, special services, and family obligations, and there are always glitches – like the costumes going missing or the star getting sick the night before on Christmas cookies and having to find a last-minute replacement. AND, and this is a big and, it always turns out wonderfully. Some of my favorite church memories are of our Christmas pageants. The tableaux of wonderful volunteers of all ages. The touchstone to holidays past. The joyful energy that fills the congregation as we tell, sing, and build together a story about love, hope, light, and welcome.

So, as you explore this month's Soul Matters theme, I hope you'll consider joining your fellow UU Wausau friends and me in opening to joy by signing up to be one of our pageant players. This year's pageant is on Sunday, December 19, and we have parts for all, even pageant grinchers like me! We're looking for people of all ages to play Mary, Joseph, angels, manger

animals, Wise People, shepherds, sheep, and a special star - and most are non-speaking parts. If you prefer more of a behind-the-scenes role, we will also need two "stage managers" to help our players get into costume and set in their places. We'll have one dress rehearsal the week of the pageant but will coordinate a time that works best for most. To sign up to be part of our pageant or if you have questions, email Jessica, jessica@uuwausau.org.

In community,

Jes Zimmer

Try out Soul Matters in December

Have you been interested in joining a Soul Matters group, but before committing to the group, wanted to know more about the program or wanted to try it out? We'll be offering drop-in sessions of Soul Matters in December so you can do just that. We'll have two sessions each month to choose from - one on Zoom in the evening or one in-person during the daytime. Participants will be sent the packet of materials in advance along with details about the session (you don't need to attend both sessions though).

The dates are:

Thursday, December 16 @10am-12pm, in-person at UU Wausau

Thursday, December 16 @ 7-9pm, Zoom

To sign up for a drop-in Soul Matters session(s), email Jessica, jessica@uuwausau.org, no later than Dec. 9 to ensure you have enough time to review materials.

RE and Youth Events!

Youth Group Events

Youth Group—Volunteering Monk Gardens' Luminary Walk, December 3 @ 4:30-8pm. The youth group (youth in grades 7+) will be helping with Monk Garden's Luminary Walk on Friday, December 3. We'll meet at Monk Gardens at 4:30 to set up the luminaries; during the event, we'll help tend the fire and hot cocoa; and at 7:30 pm, we'll help with cleaning up the luminaries. We'll also have dinner, smores by the fire, and check out the walk as a group. We'd love it if everyone could be there for all, but with the timing on a Friday, we understand that may not work with everyone's schedule. So youth are welcome to come for what they can. Send RSVPs and questions to Jessica - jessica@uuwausau.org.

Holiday Party, December 19 @4-6pm. Youth are invited to come celebrate the Winter Holidays with fun, games, and food.

Antiracism Storytime

Tuesdays @7:00pm. The Anti-racism Storytime is a weekly, evening storytime to provide a shared context around themes of Anti-racism for kids and families to use as a starting point and fodder for their own conversations. This year the storytime will have the option for families to attend in-person (limited #) or to attend on Zoom. *No storytime on December 28.*



Family Nailed It - Holiday Edition!

Join us Friday, December 17, at 7:00pm! If you have not seen Nailed It! on Netflix, it is a cooking challenge show where amateur chefs try to re-create professionally made pastries. Usually ending in hilarious results, and we'll be hosting our own holiday edition in December. Families can join over Zoom or in-person. For families joining from Zoom, we will deliver supplies in advance. To ensure we have enough supplies on hand, RSVP required: <https://bit.ly/UUWausauNailedIt>

UU Winter Retreat Returns!

We are once again invited to Schwartz Lodge at Camp Manitowish for our traditional Winter Retreat, from January 21-23, 2022!

Due to the communal layout and meal-sharing at the lodge, participants will be asked to show proof of vaccination for those age-eligible for the vaccine.

Each family unit gets their own room and 12 rooms are available. Each family/group will partner up to provide one of the meals for the group.

Cross country skiing, snowshoeing, sledding, rock wall climbing available onsite and ice skating available within a 5 minute drive. Games, great food, great company, wonderful memories!

Lodge fees generally run \$15 per night for children and \$45 per night for adults, depending upon final attendance count. Please contact Sally & Steve Schmidt at sallyschmidt213@gmail.com



Perfect stocking stuffers & holiday gifts!

Fair Trade Coffee & Chocolate!

Coffee - \$10

Chocolate bars - \$4

Cocoa mix - \$7

Chocolate minis - 4/\$1

Proceeds go to the Ari Schmidt
Troublemaker Fund



From the Board Table

Almost exactly a year ago, I volunteered to write the Board's monthly article for the Circuit Writer. And so, it seemed important to me that as we come to the end of 2021, as well as to the end of my term as Board member, that we collectively pause for reflection on what has been an incredibly momentous year.

A year ago we were in a state of flux. We had no idea. No idea what the coming church year would bring. We had no idea that we would spend much of the year conducting business and services via this thing called Zoom and that our choir would be paused for much of the year. And when we did resume services, we would all be wearing masks. We had no idea that we would not be grasping the hands of friends at the end of worship in our beautiful sanctuary. We had no idea that we would even understand the notion of "A Pod" let alone be a part of one. We were poised on the brink of a new year. A new year filled with hope and promise and, after January 6, a new year filled with bumps and missteps. A new year

filled with oops and let's try that again. But we managed. We carried on. We did what needed to be done for the good of the whole and, I believe, we are stronger for it.

It is important to know that your Board of Trustees, together with our dedicated staff, is working hard to rise to the challenges that 2022 will hold. This, too, will be a year of practicing flexibility and forgiveness. A year of learning and letting go. A year of creativity and ingenuity. We are a group of kind and dedicated individuals. This church has survived 151 years of ebbs and flows. We will go on, and together we will be stronger and wiser.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve this church that is such an important part of our north central Wisconsin community.

In gratitude,

Joyce Reynolds Kurth



Dear Santa,

All I want
for Christmas
is my 2 front teeth.

Oh, yeah...

And for all my UU
friends to turn in a
2022 Pledge Form.

We have 69 pledges out of 114 back **as of now...**

We're more than halfway to our 2022 Stewardship Drive goal.
(Approximately \$180,000 pledged so far.)

Please [download](#) / complete your 2022 Pledge Form today.

We can't plan & do all the cool stuff we do
at First UU Wausau without YOU!

— Your 2022 Stewardship Committee

Holiday Wishes from the Environmental Action Group

The EAG is a new working group within First UU Wausau that gathers to bring special projects to fruition. This December, we are compiling the holiday list of green books. We are planning to launch a small project in the first months of the new year. Springtime should find us setting up a message board for members of our fellowship to share information about climate and environmental action. We hope to invite a guest speaker to give a public lecture in the fall.

If you want to learn more about us or join our endeavors, please contact Chris Young at chyjkit@gmail.com.

Following the sixth source of our UU faith, we share an Apache blessing for you and your loved ones in this sacred season.

may the sun bring you energy by day,
may the moon softly restore you by night,
may the rain wash your worries away,
may the breeze blow new strength into your being,
may you walk gently through the world and
know its beauty all the days of your life.



Community Focus Collection—December 2021

KATS (Keep Area Teens Safe) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) youth shelter care facility serving runaway and homeless youth as a bridge to services for kids in unstable situations in Marathon County. They provide safe and secure housing, meals, case management including connection to mentorship and academic support, and other community services for youth in central Wisconsin. Their focus is youth ages 12 – 17.

This month's CFC will be on Sunday, December 19th. If you're not in church on that Sunday, you can still show your support by sending your check to UU Wausau, marked for the specific organization in the memo line; or give online via our [secure giving form here](#), and select "Community Focus Collection" from the drop-down menu. *Our November CFC raised nearly \$350 for Wisconsin Judicare. Thank you for your generosity!*

Recap of Refugee Resettlement Lunch and Learn

For those of you who were unable to attend, what follows is a brief summary of the information shared at the meeting held after the church service on November 14, 2021.

After an introduction by Brian and with support of our church board an overview of the refugee resettlement process was given by Roxann Bornemann. The Ethiopian Community Development Council was recently approved to establish a site here in Wausau. This is one of 18 sites in the United States. Together with the local organization, New Beginnings, they will provide oversight and support to organizations who wish to assist in the process of resettling refugees in Wausau. Support can range from being an educated community member to donating funds and goods as well as entering into an arrangement with ECDC to co-sponsor a family.

Joyce Schneider shared and has a wealth of detailed options available to our congregation in how we can volunteer and assist. Information will be shared regularly both in the atrium, emails, the yellow pages and using on-line/social media church communication sources. Please [contact Joyce](#) with your questions.

The process of co-sponsorship involves doing a group self-study - using a Planning Worksheet provided by ECDC. It helps to determine if a group is ready and has the necessary resources to provide services to a family over the course of approximately a year. Attached to this document is the Planning Worksheet that everyone received at the meeting and a few facts on ECDC. If we were to decide we were ready then an application would be completed and sent on to our local ECDC agency in Wausau.

Joyce discussed the areas of services that all groups are required to provide to a family in various categories including housing, transportation, health, education, cultural development, and jobs/finance. People can sign up for an area of their interest with Joyce.

The group discussed what they saw as the church's strengths and weaknesses in sponsoring a family. The group had consensus that as a congregation we have the financial backing, education and medical based members as well as a history of experience working with previous resettlement and ability to be both flexible and think out of the box when it came to problem solving. It was the interest of the group to pursue the assessment so that a decision could be made about applying for co-sponsorship.

The next meeting to review the Planning Worksheet is scheduled for Sunday, December 5th, immediately after the Annual Meeting. A decision will be made based on the group's assessment of the resources we have.

Lunch will be served!

The Seven Principles of UU Congregations

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience.

As Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove explains, “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities.”

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;

3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

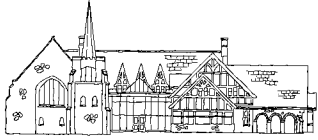
7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

-from www.uua.org

December 2021



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
	Women's AA 6PM	Qi Gong 6:30PM Anti-racism Family Storytime 7:00PM	Knitting 10AM The New Yorker Noon Swoon 12pm Adult Choir 6:30pm	Tai Chi 6:30PM		Buddhist Meditation Group 4:00PM
5 9AM: RE on Zoom 10:30AM: "Making Good Time" Richard Olson, guest preacher 11:45AM: Annual Meeting	6 Women's AA 6PM	7 Qi Gong 6:30PM Anti-racism Family Storytime 7:00PM	8 Knitting 10AM The New Yorker Noon Swoon 12pm Adult Choir 6:30pm	9 Social Justice 6:00PM on Zoom Tai Chi 6:30PM	10	11 Buddhist Meditation Group 4:00PM
12 10:30AM: Sunday Worship led by the Rev. Brian Mason No RE Classes Deck the halls with us after the service!	13 Women's AA 6PM	14 Qi Gong 6:30PM Anti-racism Family Storytime 7:00PM	15 Knitting 10AM The New Yorker Noon Swoon 12pm Adult Choir 6:30pm	16 Tai Chi 6:30PM	17 Family Nailed It! Holiday Edi- tion 7:00PM	18 Buddhist Meditation Group 4:00PM
19 10:30AM: Christmas Pageant! Service led by the Rev. Brian Mason No RE Classes CFC Sunday: KATS	20 Women's AA 6PM	21 Winter Solstice Service 7:00PM Anti-racism Family Storytime 7:00PM	22 Knitting 10AM The New Yorker Noon Swoon 12pm Adult Choir 6:30pm	23	24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 7:00PM	25
26 10:30AM: Sunday Worship led by the Reverend Brian Mason No RE Classes	27 Church Office Closed Women's AA 6PM	28 Church Office Closed	29 Knitting 10AM The New Yorker Noon Swoon 12pm Church Office Closed	30 Church Office Closed	31	1 Buddhist Meditation Group 4:00PM



First Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau
504 Grant Street
Wausau, Wisconsin 54403



The Circuit Writer - December 2021

Newsletter of the First Universalist Unitarian Church of Wausau

Inside this Issue:

December Services & Events	1
From a Window on Grant	2
Reflections	5
RE and Youth Events	6
UU Winter Retreat	7
Fair Trade Coffee & Chocolate	7
Deck the Halls!	8
From the Board Table	8
Stewardship	9
Environmental Action Group	10
Community Focus Collections	10
Lunch & Learn Recap	11
Seven Principles	12
Calendar	13

Office hours: Monday-Thursday, 9AM-2PM

Please contact us to set up an appointment.

Church phone: (715) 842-3697 | www.uuwausau.org

Board of Trustees:

Sheryl Hemp, President	wishemp@aol.com
Joyce Kurth, Vice President	joyce.kurth@gmail.com
Randy Jefferson, Treasurer	rpj1115@yahoo.com
Dawn Ashenbrenner	dawn1969@yahoo.com
Kara Hall	kara.h.hall@gmail.com
Karen Monarski	krmon12@gmail.com
Brian Stezenski-Williams	BS-W@outlook.com
Josh Wright	joshuawright888@gmail.com

Minister/Staff:

Brian Mason, Minister	brian@uuwausau.org
Jessica Zimmer, Dir. of RE	jessica@uuwausau.org
Dänika Kozlovich, Congregational Admin.	danika@uuwausau.org
Margaret Jerz, Music Director	margaretjerz1@gmail.com