

Newsletter

January 2024

Unitarian Universalist Church in Surprise

Pastor: Karen Richter

Minister Emeritus: Rev. Dr. Walt F. Wieder

Minister Emeritus: Rev. Terry Sims

President: Sherry Robinson



Newsletter Co-Editors: Gus & Juliet Gustavson

julietgus@msn.com



KAREN'S CORNER

Beginning the New Year with Grace & Intention



About this time last year, I noticed my friends sharing a word they had chosen for 2023.

Hope – Intention – Purpose – Joy – Love - Connection

Do you have this practice? While I'm not sure I want to commit to a single word for a whole year, I like this approach better than a more standard new year's resolution. I often give a suspicious sideways glance at resolutions. They seem to be a way for us to motivate ourselves by feeling bad. You are not an endless improvement project, something to be shaped and prodded. You are good: worthy of love and care, just as you are in this moment.

Not after you de-clutter. . . Not after you lose weight. . . Not after you get your finances figured out. . . Not after you mend fences with your family. . . Not after you Get Out the Vote or work for peace. . . even though all of these are real and necessary.

All practices can be used in unhealthy ways, of course. For now, I'm leaning into the appeal of a Word of the Year, and you're invited to join me. We'll be talking about LOVE in January 2024, beginning with our Annual Meeting on January 7. Love can be your Word of the Year! For all of us, *love is the context, the setting, the background radiation* of whatever Word of the Year we might choose.

If you are choosing a 2024 Word of the Year, you're invited to share it on January 7 to help us set a hopeful, future-oriented tone for our Annual Meeting. I got some ideas at this website:

300+ Word Of The Year Ideas For 2024 (With Meanings For Each) (thegoalchaser.com) [link: <https://thegoalchaser.com/word-of-the-year/>]

In what spirit do we choose to enter 2024? How will we greet this fresh new year? Whatever we choose, we move into 2024 in community.

With joy,

Your Pastor, Karen Richter

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



The time has come, and it is difficult to believe that we have been together for four years and what 4 years! We thought, or at least I did, that my first year would be a continuation of what had gone on in prior years. And instead – as you all remember - we held our first Board Meetings in February and March and then on March 20th, the world went crazy, and we closed down in frightening circumstances and an unknown future.

Four years later – here we are, and I could list all that has been done; however, you can look around and see what you have all accomplished. I am so proud of this congregation in its commitment and its support of the staff and the board. and to each other. We have not finished what needs to be done to once again be an active participant in the community, but we have a good start and a terrific set of new and returning Board Members to guide our steps along with an enthusiastic and supportive spiritual leader and an active congregation of members and friends.

I think most of you are aware Steve and I are moving back to the Northwest – Portland, Oregon to be exact. I come from the West Coast, and it holds a special place in my heart, which is why we are returning. I came here with full intentions of being an active UU; however, I never imagined I would be this active. I have an academic background, and I am comfortable working with people and solving puzzles (which most issues become, if not political). You know my politics, and I hope you understand my strong belief in the community to which we belong. My entrance into UUism came later in life and through unusual circumstances (the death of a beloved pet). And I also came from a part of the Northwest that is known for being “different.” I hope I was not too different because being allowed to be your President has taught me how to be a better UU and a better guide/leader. Our Board members and our Committee/Team leaders have been awesome, but you knew that. There are not words enough to express my gratitude and appreciation to each and every one of them for their work for our community.

I see a bright and active future for UUCS, providing sustenance and support for members, friends, and community. I know you will continue to take care of each other and yourselves. I will miss the work we have done together and treasure what we have accomplished. I could try to say thank you to each person who has been here for me these past 4 years, however that list would fill the newsletter. I cannot think of a single time when someone in our community refused to come when called or help when asked. You are indeed not only a welcoming community but also a caring community.

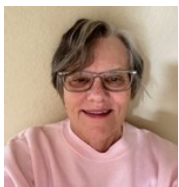
I will not say more because there is so much more. I will say that it has been an honor and a privilege to have been in this position and to have worked with such a dedicated group of board and committee people, as well as with a loyal and committed congregation. Our work has been difficult, but we are also seeing the rewards. We have welcomed members of a former UU congregation and hopefully made them feel they were welcome and that this could be their worship home. We again have a full staff with the addition of a new Music Director joining our Family Ministry Director, our Office Administrator, and our new Pastor. I will miss not being here to see the congregation continue to grow - as I know it will.

Thank you for the pleasure of serving and working with you in continuing to build a strong and active community and in keeping us together despite our year of isolation. I am moving on to the last chapter of my life, and I can truthfully say these last four years have been some of the most challenging, and the most rewarding of my entire life.

You all gave that to me, and I will always be thankful for the opportunity of being a member of this growing and vibrant UU community.

In faith, friendship, and gratitude I remain your strongest supporter!

Sherry Robinson



MUSIC NOTES



Maggi Mahan—Acting Director

Happy New Year and Happy New Music Director!

This newsletter article is being written in December and is my last entry in the role of Acting Music Director. When you read it, Luke Stikeleather will be our Music Director. Luke responded to a search announcement posted by our UUCS Music Committee, chaired by Mary Anne Poggenburg. He was interviewed by Mary Anne, Patricia Balfour, Amelia Davis, Barry Linden, Sylvia Manalis, and Jim Gaunt. A practice with the choir created an opportunity for mutual assessment. After accepting our offer, Luke attended the December 3, 2023, service where he introduced himself and accompanied our hymns. Feedback received from those in attendance that morning was ecstatic.

So, we welcome Luke. He is currently a graduate student in violin performance at ASU. While attending UNC-Greensboro, he was the Music Director at UU Greensboro in North Carolina. He is a pianist and violinist, delightfully amiable, enthusiastic, and supremely qualified for the position. His first official Sunday will be January 7, 2024.

"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything." Plato



Stewardship – "A Communion of Hearts, Souls and Goals"

Why Your Pledges Are Essential: How We Use Your Pledged Donations.

The 2024 Pledge Drive, which ended a few weeks ago, did not reach the expected goal of \$225,000, and currently we have received significantly less than in 2023. The pledged donations are the greatest source of income in our Operating Fund. They pay salaries for staff, expenses to keep the building functioning, and other obligations (see below). We have been getting questions about why we need to have so much money, one of the most common is: "we own our building, and we have no debt, so why does it cost so much to run the church?" and hearing comments like - "we like to give for special things like painting the church or

replacing the carpeting."

The answers to these questions are important and providing them may lead to your being more comfortable asking more questions. There are two different aspects to address: ongoing support for the operation of UUCS and how we address our building being 25 years old. As with any building there are systems and equipment that need repair and/or replacement. We are fortunate that a group of original donors who paid for the building we enjoy also established an endowment fund. Interest from this fund may contribute to the Operating Fund, as long as the principle is maintained as set by the Board. Economic conditions have a major influence on maintaining that principle. A reduction in the principle decreases our use of the earnings until the principle is at the base level.

Those at the Annual General Meeting in January 2023 approved the budget for 2023 of \$290,630. I am amazed that it takes so little to support the day-to-day activities and responsibilities of UUCS. When you receive your Annual Meeting Packet for the January 7, 2024, meeting, there will be a proposed budget document for you to review in which income and expenses will be listed line-by-line.

Not surprisingly, the majority of our funds go to salary and benefits for our staff; without staff we have no programs and without programs we have no church. Our salaries and benefits are fair and our staff far outwork what they get paid. Some money goes to support UUCS committees. The remaining funds are used for ongoing expenses that cannot be avoided: building and liability insurance, Home Owners Association (HOA) annual fee, accounting services, scheduled service on the HVAC system (2-3 times a year), utilities, cleaning services, telephone, supplies, fire inspection, water & sewer, trash removal, landscaping, repairs and maintenance, food and beverages and lastly dues to UUA national.

Under repairs and maintenance, this year the two original water heaters and a drinking fountain stopped working unexpectedly. These repairs were covered by funds from our "savings account" - the Operating Reserve Fund, which has cash on hand to cover unexpected maintenance. The replacement of the original carpeting and the irrigation system were on the maintenance schedule and fortunately were funded by a legacy donation. Our 25-year-old HVAC system and the solar system are both near or beyond their life span. We have replaced 2 HVAC units in the last 2 years, and the others are scheduled to be replaced over the next four years. We are setting funds aside for these now; however, we do not have exact numbers, and we do not always know when we will need them.

Some of the expenses may seem unnecessary, however, this congregation has demonstrated over the years that we do not spend money foolishly. Many of the extras you see around the church – are bought by members, such as banners, table covers and décor, flowers, and more. We so appreciate when that happens, but we should not expect it.

We ask for your pledge in order to be able to maintain the place in which we meet and to provide the programs and services we appreciate. We would like to do more. To do this, we need your talent, your time, and your treasure. That means when there are fundraisers, we need to charge to cover our costs and to save for the next special event. We raised \$13,000 this year through fundraising activities and events. Almost all of the costs for these activities were covered by individual members, leaving the revenue for the Congregation's expenses.

Thank you for what you give no matter how much or how little. It is well spent for all of us. If you have other questions about our budgeting process, please ask them. We do not know what you do not know and would be happy to share.

Janet Jeffrey/Steve Calkins - Stewardship
Sherry Robinson – Board President
Karen Richter—UUCS Pastor

MONTHLY BOOK REPORT

John Benfield—Librarian

Butterflies are gathering in the UU library! For the next few weeks the butterflies will be attracting library visitors to each of our topical sections.



This is your UU Surprise librarian John Benfield. We are always looking to add to our library, so if you have a book to donate, be sure there are no markings on its pages. Thank you!

Beginning this month our butterflies have landed around our section of books 289.1 to 289.133, "Unitarian Universalism". For my January book report I have chosen **"The Almost Church"**, 2004 by Michael Durall; And **"Pagan and Earth-Centered Voices in Unitarian Universalism"**, 2017, edited by Kishpaugh and Ranck.

Beginning with **"Pagan & Earth-Centered Voices"**, 289.1 HIL, a chapter title "A Journey of Service" struck me deeply with, "I have always thought that religion or spiritual practices unexpressed in the world through ac-

tion and service felt empty". Revealed within these pages are the depths and reaches that UU Pagan members are currently expressing within their community congregations. This book contains 23 essays by current Unitarian Universalist Pagans.

"A prophetic call to visionary souls within Unitarian Universalism," **"The Almost Church"**, redefining Unitarian Universalism for a new era" 289.133 DUR will no doubt inspire you as it has me. After reading this book I feel I gleaned such UU wisdom that my confidence in my decision to join this Unitarian Universalism congregation swelled.



The Questers Committee welcomes the new year with a new member. Sharon Moore joins us, bringing a wealth of education experiences and ideas for new offerings, some of which she will be leading.

We also welcome 2024 with 3 January offerings, all of which are open to those who are part of our faith community and those who are not. You are always free to invite a friend to join you.

Maybe this book study would be just what you are looking for. If so, join Paige Rappleye for 4 Saturday sessions, starting January 6, 10:00-12:00pm, where you will dive into **"ZEALOT: THE LIFE & TIMES OF JESUS OF NAZARETH"**. The author, Reza Aslan, brings a provocative perspective to this subject, which should guarantee both reflection and robust conversation.

BEFRIENDING OUR PRINCIPLES (6 Sessions, starting January 7)—You have two options for joining Pastor Karen Richter—Sunday morning from 9:00-10:00am in Karen's office or Tuesday evenings at 5:00pm on Zoom. Participants will share and explore how our UU 7 Principles show up in our lives and work, both individually and as a faith community.

WHAT IS DEMENTIA ANYWAY? w/ a presenter from Hospice of the Valley—1 session, January 10, 10:00-11:30am. If this isn't something you want to understand better just for yourself, it is surely something that is affecting a family member, colleague or friend with whom you are communicating. The presenter will address the 7 stages of dementia and include what we can do that is helpful or not.

Visit the Questers table on Sunday mornings or go to the Questers page (<https://uusurpriseaz.org/questers/offerings>) on the UUCS website for full details.



FAMILY MINISTRY

Lisa Lawrence—Director



The month of December was positively filled with magic around here! I hope you were able to feel a few sprinkles of it, whether from the cookie exchange and holiday potluck, hearing the music of our wonderful choir or from watching Hershel vanquish all of those pesky little goblins.



If you didn't make it to the cookie exchange, you may want to go ahead and add it to your brand new calendar for next December, as the cookie table was a thing of beauty. And I'm so glad that the village of Ostropol can once more celebrate Hanukkah in all of its splendor. Here's to the light conquering darkness!

Starting back the first Sunday in January, we return to our regular programming. Preschool and elementary classes will continue with "The Gifts of Our Faith" Soul Matters curriculum, and 6th and Up class will return to "The Fifth Dimension". The next O.W.L. workshop will be held on Sunday, January 21st. I'm also hoping to arrange a neighboring faiths opportunity for our families in the early part of the new year. More on that to come.

As always, to find out more about our Family Ministry Program, please visit the Family Facebook page at: [UUC Surprise Family Page](#).



Partnership

HomeBase Surprise, the shelter and transitional living community for forty homeless 18-24-year-olds, is hoping to have their kitchen ready this month. When the kitchen has passed inspection, members of our congregation probably will be helping out. Specific plans are still tentative. As soon as we hear, we'll let everyone know. Thanks to all those who contributed items for hygiene kits, dry cereal, and pillows to HomeBase in 2023.

Come new friends! Come old friends!



Circle Suppers are a great way to get to know one another in a social

setting. These potluck dinners are held in member homes with 8 or fewer people attending each dinner. You can sign up in the Social Hall for a dinner the weekend of January 26, 27 or 28. We hope to see you there. If you have questions, contact Susie Cole 406-600-8857 or Claudia Yeager Smith 480-387-1973.



WE ARE HERE

TO BE OF ASSISTANCE!

LAY PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE

The purpose of the Lay Pastoral Care Committee (LPCC) is to cherish and care for all members of our church community by offering support to people in need and being a resource for referrals. We maintain contact with those unable to come to church due to illness or disability. Requests for help come to the LPCC in a variety of ways, i.e. church office, Membership Committee, concerned family members, and self-requested. The Lay Pastoral Care Committee maintains close contact with the minister regarding people in need.

If you would like help, please call 623-826-3365.

Unitarian Universalist Church in Surprise NEWSLETTER

17540 N. Avenue of the Arts

Surprise, AZ 85378

Ph: 623-875-2550

Email: admin@uusurpriseaz.org

January Worship Theme **Making Our Home w/ Love: Building our capacity for loving** **over the long haul**



Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m.
In-Person and Livestream



January 7

Pastor Karen Richter

January 14

Pastor Karen Richter

January 21

Pastor Karen Richter

January 28

David Moore—Religious Naturalism

