

JANUARY 2026



THE CHANTICLEER

The First Unitarian Society
of Milwaukee

nurture. engage. inspire.



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Monthly Theme

*What does it mean
to be a people*

**Practicing
Resistance**



Inside News

by the *Chanticleer* Editors

Happy New Year!

Come refresh your heart as we begin 2026 with our First Church community! Here are some highlights for the start of the new year:

Come together to celebrate the completion of our Forge Our Future Endowment Campaign on January 11.

Check out the Mystery Friends pen-pal program.

Participate in developing our new goals for the congregation with the Board of Trustees.

Our theme this month is “Practicing Resistance.” Don’t miss the non-violent resistance training on January 17.

So long for now...

This is my last *Chanticleer* as I retire from being your director of administration for 27 years. First Church is a wonderful community to have worked for, and been a part of. I’ll hold you in my heart as I take my required absence from church. And I look forward to seeing everyone again next Christmas Eve when I return as a regular member of the church.

Please embrace Manni, as you did me, as your new director of administration. I’ve gotten to know him as we’ve been training together. He is very talented and capable with lots of experience, as well as a wonderful person. You’ll enjoy working with him.

With gratitude & joy,
Jean

Jean Johnson, former Director of Administration



Share the Plate January 2026

by Lynde Uihlein,
Share the Plate Team Member

Street Angels is a leading provider of street outreach services made possible through the generous support of the community. A diverse team builds lasting relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness, offering resources, hope, and a pathway to stability. They believe in a two-pronged approach to combating homelessness: addressing urgent needs, like hunger, through direct service and basic supplies, and connecting individuals with resources to break the cycle of homelessness.

In Milwaukee, there is no shelter a person or family can walk into and seek refuge. There is a process to accessing shelter and unfortunately shelter space is rarely available for most due to capacity issues. Street Angels is there to fill in the gaps and provide access to basic human needs, an advocate, and a little bit of hope. By providing essential services and empowering those in need, they aim to create a future without homelessness. Learn more at streetangelsmke.org

Donations are the lifeblood of everything they do.

[Donate to this STP Partner](#)



Words on the Wind

by Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Our January theme is “Practicing Resistance,” which we’ve had arguably too much opportunity to do lately.

We will have another opportunity to practice on January 17, the Saturday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King weekend, when our congregation will join with other Milwaukee congregations to learn the strategy and tactics of non-violent civil disobedience. We align ourselves with the long tradition of faith communities raising moral voices for justice and not complying with injustice, weaving our power with our neighbors of faith in Milwaukee.

Resistance is also spiritual practice. You might be resisting the slide into despair, or resisting the spiritual harm caused by systems of oppression. While there are times we must accept realities we cannot change (the choices our loved ones make, for instance), we can still engage our spiritual muscle to resist falling into despair.

Joy is itself a powerful act of resistance, and there is much to be joyful about this month. We will celebrate our dear Jean Johnson at her retirement recognition on January 18, and celebrate the close of most Forge Our Future pledges with cake in coffee hour on January 11. We will also begin the visioning process for the next 7 years of First Church ministry with our Board of Trustees’ Ends Process!

In joyful resistance, Jennifer
Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom, Senior Minister

All in the Family

Life is hard sometimes. We experience sickness, job loss, broken hearts, and broken bodies. We want to support you through those difficult times.

We send our care and comfort to Lisa Koneazny, who had a minor stroke during coffee hour on December 7. Lisa is well and has no lasting effects from the stroke, but we wrap both her and Pete in our care for the emotional toll.

We send our comfort and encouragement to George Bledsoe, in his continued care for his mother as her health declines.

We hold the Jen, Meighan, Jasper and Skylar, the Murray Bentz family in our hearts as Meighan continues her treatments to heal from cancer.



Kimberlee's Contemplations

by Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson



The holiday season is still echoing all around us, and I find myself reflecting on the complicated relationship so many of us hold this time of year.

The ancient stories we return to have been reshaped across generations, adapted by communities, governments, and religions to meet the needs of their moment. Yet perhaps their magic is in how they continue to resonate with us. Each year, if we approach them with openness, another layer of meaning reveals something new, something needed, something waiting for this moment in our lives.

Our theme this month is Practicing Resistance, and the nativity story which continues until Epiphany on January 6th is a powerful message of resistance. This year, I am drawn to the story of the Magi: the scholars, seekers, and spiritual travelers who dared to follow a star into an unfamiliar place. Their courage to pursue wisdom and truth beyond the boundaries of what was known or safe feels deeply resonant right now.

Epiphany marks the moment these three seekers arrive after a long journey, and encounter a new life, a child, a symbol of peace to lead the world forward. Their ancient pilgrimage is dangerous, uncertain, and fueled by persistent hope for the next generation. This speaks clearly to me in this moment, reminding me that resistance is risky, long, and rooted in the belief that something better is possible, even when the path ahead is not yet clear.

Sami Awad, Co-Director of Nonviolence International calls the Magi the “Nonviolent Heroes of the Nativity Story.” He states: “Their journey, actions, and choices provide us with a profound model of nonviolent resistance and solidarity. Reflecting on their role in light of my own journey of nonviolent activism, I see the Magi as embodying two critical principles of the work we must do in the face of tyranny and injustice: seeking truth through courageous acts of solidarity and engagement and refusing to cooperate with systems of oppression. In their journey, the Magi demonstrated what I see as the essence of nonviolent activism: a willingness to cross boundaries, confront danger, and stand in solidarity with those who are oppressed.”

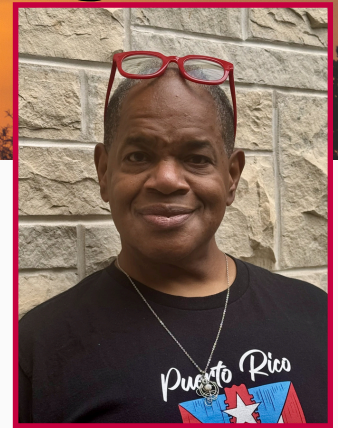
This month, on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King weekend, we have a remarkable opportunity to prepare ourselves to be non-violent activists of our time. On Saturday, January 17th, we will come together to learn the strategy of non-violent civil disobedience with faith communities of Milwaukee.

Our journey echoes that ancient story of the wise ones, who carry the hope of the holidays forward into the new year. We practice resistance by defending human rights, justice, and democracy. This is our Unitarian Universalist faith in action, grounded in our values, and strengthened by community we seek to create a better way.

May we be seekers of wisdom, listening and for what courage, compassion, and truth might be asking of us today.

Curiosities & Musings

by Rev. Chris Long



Practicing Resistance

These early days of 2026 are here. How are you today? How were your holidays/HOLYDays over the last many weeks? I start of this month's Curiosities and Musings in this way, as I believe that in order to continue to build upon our spiritual, religious muscles for the times we find ourselves in with this month's Soul Matters theme of "Practicing Resistance", it may be useful to do "personal check-ins" with ourselves, with our family, family of choice and those we are building more of the Beloved Community with as often and as sustainably as possible.

What has it meant to and for you to "resist" now or across your lifetime? From the times in our lives when the choices before us have been simple, such as choosing to have your favorite dessert, an extra helping or two, or not. To more deeply personal choices when you feel the identities you work to embody are being excluded from important decisions that will or do impact your life, or those you love. How does or might building upon your practices of resistance be of use, especially for the geo-political horrors of the current times we are in.

As important, as Unitarian Universalists, or those seeking to be in "community" with us, how might we be willing to share our current, or hoped for practices of resistance as a way to live more

sustainably in our personal lives, as a religious community and throughout our lives here in Milwaukee and beyond? What within our current values of justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence and generosity: all centered in love, may be useful in this ever-evolving, sacred endeavor?

Let's discuss...

Welcome to 2026!

Sincerely and in deeper Unitarian Universalist faith,

Rev. Chris Long

Acting Assistant Minister

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Choose Your Own Adventure

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

Debra Klepp, Worship Associate

Alissa Rhode, Lead Music Director

[Click for info about this service](#)

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Resistance and Surrender Dance

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Alissa Rhode, Lead Music Director

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

Austin Baldwin, Worship Associate

[Click for info about this service](#)

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Resistance Recipes

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday

Tristan Strelitzer, Choral Director, and the Chancel Choir

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson, Minister of Faith Formation

Alecia Altstaetter, Worship Associate

[Click for info about this service](#)

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Small But Mighty

Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson

Jessie Diliberti, Worship Associate

Alissa Rhode, Lead Music Director

[Click for info about this service](#)

Sunday Services at 9:00 & 11:00 a.m.

Celebrate Completion of the Forge Our Future Campaign

by Jean Johnson
Director of Administration



Sunday, January 11

Let's come together to celebrate the success of our endowment campaign Forge Our Future!

With a goal of \$3 million, the campaign kick-off was in fall of 2022. Because of your generous spirit, we succeeded in securing pledges for \$2.8 million. Now, three years later, as the campaign pledge fulfillment phase comes to a close, you've fulfilled \$2.6 million of your pledges!

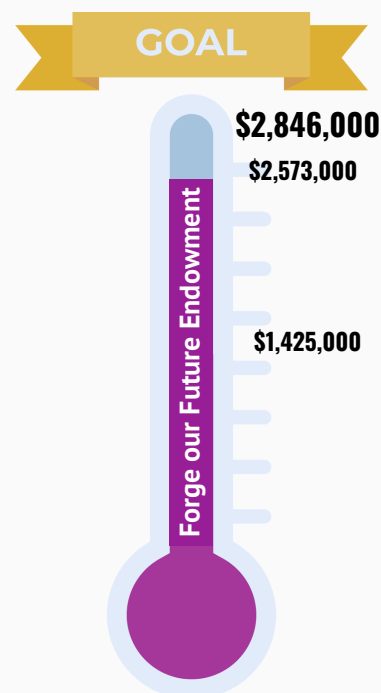
As a reminder, Forge Our Future is our congregation's initiative to create a principal-protected endowment intended for long-term investment. Our annual pledges are our primary source of income to support essential church operations. Creating a principal-protected endowment enables us to diversify and increase our revenue streams to close the gap between annual operating income and annual operating expenses. This fiscal year, the church has begun to receive modest distributions to support its operating budget.

The endowment will also help fund expanded ministries and community connections. We have been dreaming for a long time of becoming a more

multicultural, multiracial church that is a growing beacon of progressive values and an even more active collaborator for justice in the community.

If you haven't pledged or contributed to the endowment, it's never too late. Learn more by contacting the endowment team at this [LINK](#). Make a contribution [HERE](#).

So let's come together at Sunday services on January 11, 2026, to celebrate our enormous accomplishment which helps stabilize the church's operating income. And of course, during social hour after each service, there will be cake!



Sign Up for Mystery Friends

by Rev. Kimberlee Tomczak Carlson
Minister of Faith Formation

There's nothing like getting a real letter! We are thrilled to offer the annual Mystery Friends program, with signups open now! During Mystery Friends, children and youth ages 5 and up are matched with adults in the church community as pen pals. Once you sign up, Faith Formation staff will pair you with a friend, and you will exchange short letters and notes each week for a month. We will offer letter templates with questions and prompts to help you get started.

On Sunday, March 15th, we will celebrate with a party allowing friends to meet "face to face" and have some in-person fun!

Any adult members and friends of First Church may participate— you don't need to have a child in the Faith Formation program. Adults will go through a simple and secure background check to ensure Mystery Friends is safe and fun for everyone!

To join Mystery Friends, [Sign up here!](#) or email Fiona.Higgins@uumilwaukee.org

Gratitude for Givers!

We are grateful to everyone who took a Holiday Giving Tree tag and provided a gift for those in need. It was a joy to deliver the presents to NAMI! Mary Madden, executive director, shared with us that most of these gifts would be delivered to folks who often wouldn't get a gift or be able to leave their home. Thanks everyone for creating some joy this holiday season for those in need!
<https://namisoutheastwi.org/>



Non-Violent Resistance Training for People of Faith

Join us for a training designed for people of faith to learn strategies and tactics of non-violent resistance to authoritarianism.

Together, we will explore the role of congregations, run through possible scenarios, and practice physical non-violence techniques through role play.

This session builds on earlier trainings about defining and defending “red lines”—such as declaring martial law or canceling a midterm election—that would require immediate, mass, coordinated opposition.

We welcome all who want to defend democracy through disciplined non-violence as an expression of faith. Clergy are especially encouraged to attend, with time set aside for a clergy caucus.

HOSTED BY MICAH & FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH VOCES DE LA FRONTERA

JANUARY 17, 2026
1-4PM *Childcare Available*

**FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY
1342 ASTOR STREET
MILWAUKEE, WI**



New Ends for a New Beginning

by Deborah Conta
Board of Trustees

First Church is beginning the process of revising the Ends that guide the direction of our work, both within the church and in the community beyond. This is an exciting process and one that needs the participation of all First Church members. The current eight Ends are posted and described on the First Church homepage under the heading “**What we Believe.**”

The current Ends were drawn up in 2017 during a time that now seems far away and long ago—a pre-pandemic time when we did not imagine this country and the world would be under such pressure from growing authoritarianism, unchecked environmental damage, a deepening sense of economic inequality, the demonization of immigrants and the many other crises we did not fully foresee and cannot ignore. Religious institutions have changed as well, and many people now identify as non-religious or non-spiritual.

We invite you to attend a two-hour small discussion group, led by a church facilitator, to consider our congregational future and how we can care for our members and the community during these challenging times. These group discussions will begin in mid-January and run through mid-February. Sessions will be held during the day and at night

and will be offered in-person and on Zoom. Using data from these discussions, the Board will present a final report to the congregation at the annual meeting in May.

Sign up below or look for future announcement how to involve your input for the new ends vision.

Small Group Session Dates

SIGN UP HERE

January 15, 4:00: p.m. (Thursday)
January 18, 12:30 p.m. (Sunday)
January 21 1:00 p.m. (Wednesday)
January 24, 10:00 a.m. (Saturday)
January 25, 12:30 p.m. (Sunday)
January 26, 6:00 p.m. (Monday)
January 28, 2:00 p.m. (Wed. on Zoom)
January 29 5:00 p.m. (Thursday)
January 31, 2:00 p.m. (Saturday)
February 1, 12:30 p.m. (Sunday)
February 3, 10:00 a.m. (Tuesday)
February 5, 6:00 p.m. (Thur. Zoom)
February 8, 12:30 p.m. (Sunday)
February 11, 5:00 p.m. (Wednesday)

Splinters from the Board

by Deborah Conta

Member of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees met with consultant Rev. Roger Bertschausen at the November 18 meeting to discuss the next steps in the Ends Revision process. Beginning in January, members of the Board and a group of volunteer congregant facilitators will meet with First Church members to envision a new set of Ends to articulate the congregation's direction for the next five to seven years. Training of facilitators and Board observers will be held on January 10 with small group discussions to follow at various times in January and February.

Using the input from these group discussions, the Ends Task Force will shape a new set of Ends and present a final document to the congregation at the annual meeting in May 2026.

The Nominating Committee is beginning the search for candidates to replace three Board members who will retire at the end of this church year. Completing their years of service are Stacy Koenen, Stacey Thieme and Dana Brooks.

Rev. Jennifer and an organizer from MICAH led a training on resisting authoritarianism in early November, attracting a large group.

Acknowledging additional interest, Rev. Jennifer led an equally well-attended, sobering and inspirational training program at First Church on November 23.

The Youth Group met with Board Member Elizabeth Hayes on November 2 to learn more about Board responsibilities and to enhance the relationship between both groups.

EJM Indoor Walk and Roll Urban Ecology Center

by Jacki Zandi

Earth Justice Ministry member

All are invited to join us on Saturday, January 10th from 10:30-noon at the Urban Ecology Center of Washington Park located at 1859 N. 40th Street, Milwaukee for the EJM monthly Walk and Roll. This event is designed to just Walk and Roll from the parking lot to the building where we will retreat inside for winter reflections and to play games. We've never done this before. Each of our monthly Walk and Rolls are unique depending on the season, weather, location and participants. Bring a favorite game, your friends and family and be part of the experience! Paula Anderson and Jacki Zandi are your hosts.

JANUARY EVENTS



Buddhist Study Group

Wednesday, January 7 & 21, 6:30 pm
At Church

Join us as we meet to share our thoughts and interpretations of Buddhist teachings and ideas. Then we meditate as a group for a short while and have fellowship. Contact is Mark Miller at gatheringwaterssangha@gmail.com.

Book Discussion Group

Sunday, January 11, online
[Join Us Online Here](#)

Join us as we discuss January's read, *Being Jewish after the Destruction of Gaza. A Reckoning* by Peter Beinart. Contact Eileen Teska at eileenteska@gmail.com.

Chancel Choir

January 8, 15, 22 & 29, 7:00 -8:30 pm
At Church

Sing with us on Thursdays as we prepare to perform for Sunday services. Open to all singers high school age and up (no previous experience or audition required). Contact Tristan Strelitzer at tristan.strelitzer@uumilwaukee.org to join.

The Chronologically Gifted Potluck

January 25, 12:00 pm at Church

The Shawl Ministry Group

Sunday, January 4 at 12:00 pm
At Church

The shawl ministry group plans to meet after the second church service on Dec. 7 in the Common Room. Hoping to see you soon, Juliet Hills.

Poetry Contemplation

Every Wednesday, 9:00 am
[Join Us Online Here](#)

Join us online as we listen, respond, and rest with the words of selected poets. Come listen for what resonates and illuminates. Members, guests, and visitors are welcome to join this open, weekly, drop-in practice.

Being UU, Being Male

January 4 , 12:30 - 2:00 pm At Church

This is a group that is open space for dialogue, connection, reflection, and community on the first Sunday of each month. Contact Michael Pointer Mace for more information.



Sunday Morning Forum

10:00 AM IN-PERSON & ON YOUTUBE



JANUARY 4

Milwaukee Food Saver Challenge Benefits the Environment, Society, and Economy

Andi Sciacca, Environmental Sustainability Program Coordinator City of Milwaukee Environmental Collaboration Office and Project Lead of the FEED MKE Coalition

The Food Saver Challenge builds bridges between local chefs, food businesses, and food waste initiatives, ensuring surplus ingredients are repurposed for distribution to those in need. Collaboration with Milwaukee's vibrant independent restaurant community and organizations like the Wisconsin Restaurant Association brings skilled culinary professionals into the fight against food insecurity while providing support for their bottom line.

JANUARY 11

The 8th Fire and the Natural World

Marin "Mark" Denning, Adjunct Lecturer, UW-Milwaukee Continuing Education

Many people have heard and read about Native American speakers addressing the ideals of seven generations and gifts. These have come to us in various forms of representations. While no one speaker can claim to know the diversity of expression across the country of every single Native American nation, they can represent their own experience. Marin "Mark" Denning is an enrolled Oneida Nation member and will be speaking from his experiences as both a long time resident of Milwaukee, and belonging too and learning from our Native populations in Wisconsin. The presentation will be talking about the philosophy that informed the Milwaukee County "Rights of Nature" movement and passage. In addition, Milwaukee has seen the return of Sturgeon to its waterways, and we will talk about the Sturgeon Protectors as well as the Milwaukee Rivers clean up efforts. All of these themes will be folded into the expectations of what is called, the Eighth Fire and what we all can expect to do to shape our shared future.





Sunday Morning Forum

10:00 AM IN-PERSON & ON YOUTUBE



JANUARY 18

Turning the Tide on Plastics

Leah Holloway, Program Manager

The overabundance of plastics is harming human and environmental health and becoming an increasingly large driver of climate change. We'll talk about the problem with plastics, why collective action is critical, and what we all can do to help shift the tide for a healthier future.

JANUARY 25

Pillars of Democracy: Art, Civic Power, and Community Collaboration

Niki Johnson, Artist

Pillars of Democracy is a four-part mixed media portrait series created by artist Niki Johnson with contributions from Milwaukee artists and nearly seventy community volunteers. Built from repurposed materials from Shepard Fairey's 2020 mural Voting Rights Are Human Rights and informed by suffrage-era design, the series reframes Liberty, Justice, Freedom, and Forward as first-time voters in Wisconsin. This talk explores how art, activism, and community building intersect to tell a new story of civic participation—one grounded in place, collective action, and the ongoing effort to build a more just and inclusive democracy.



Staff Directory

SENIOR MINISTER

Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom
jennifer.nordstrom@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 201

ACTING ASSISTANT MINISTER

Rev. Chris Long
revchris.long@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 202

MINISTER OF FAITH FORMATION

Rev. Kimberlee Carlson
kimberlee.carlson@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 204

MINISTER EMERITA

Rev. Dena McPhetres

MINISTER EMERITUS

Rev. Andrew C. Kennedy, D.Min.

DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION

Manni Marquez
manni.marquez@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 203

OFFICE MANAGER

Shari Wright
shari.wright@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 207

RE & MEMBERSHIP ASSISTANT

Fiona Higgins
fiona.higgins@uumilwaukee.org ext. 210

FACILITIES MANAGER

Ken Liddell
ken.liddell@uumilwaukee.org, ext 206

FACILITIES ASSISTANT

Jim Spice
jim.spice@uumilwaukee.org, ext. 215

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN

Vinnie Hack

LEAD MUSIC DIRECTOR

Alissa Rhode
alissa.rhode@uumilwaukee.org

CHORAL DIRECTOR

Tristan Strelitzer
tristan.strelitzer@uumilwaukee.org

COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

Teresa Drews
teresa.drews@uumilwaukee.org

Staff members have varying hours.
Please contact them directly to set up an appointment.

Board of Trustees Officers

President.....Mark Chambers
Vice President...Ryan Pawlowski
Secretary.....Kathy Donius
TreasurerMark Bishop

Members

Dana Brooks
Deborah Conta
Elizabeth Hayes
Stacy Koenen
Stacey Thieme
Andrew Whitver

How to Reach Us

414.273.5257

first.church.office@uumilwaukee.org

1342 N. Astor St. Milwaukee, WI 53202



uumilwaukee.org

Follow Us



Church Building Hours

Sundays: 8:00 am - 2:30 pm
Saturdays: 10:00 am - 2:30 pm
Monday - Wednesdays: 5:00 - 8:30 pm

If you are attending a scheduled group, ring the bell. If you need access to the building at other times, please make an appointment at first.church.office@uumilwaukee.org.

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