Winter/Spring 2025 Programs at First U

There are many ways to connect and deepen at church this winter and spring.
Programs with an asterisk ✳ at the left have a Zoom option or may be entirely virtual.
Registration forms are linked in this guide, which you can find online at:
https://firstuniversalistchurch.org/spiritual-growth
(or use your phone's camera to scan the code at right).

FULL COMMUNITY CONNECTION POINTS

Monthly Wednesday Community Dinners

February 12, March 12, April 9, May 14; Dinner 6-6:45; Breakout Groups 7-8:15 p.m.
RSVP REQUESTED
Swing by church for a delicious home-cooked meal. After dinner, choose a drop-in breakout group to connect with others and learn about opportunities to get involved at church this season. All are welcome and there is no charge. Childcare will be available for younger kids (ages 6 months-Grade 3), and breakout groups will be available for older kids, teens, and adults. Menu available on our website, a week in advance. We always offer vegan, vegetarian, gluten free, nut free and kid-friendly options. All church events are alcohol-free.

There are new and recurring breakout groups offered each month. Recurring breakout groups include:

- **How Do I Talk to My Kids About**: For parents and caregivers of Kindergarteners-6th graders looking for resources and support to have important (but sometimes intimidating!) conversations with their kids about developmental topics such as gender and sexuality, puberty, consent and body boundaries, and where babies come from. These groups are led by trained OWL (Our Whole Lives) facilitators who are community members here at First Universalist. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to participate in this group whether or not they have children currently participating in OWL. OWL Program Coordinator Claire Tralle: claire@firstuniv.org.
- **Parenting as a Spiritual Practice:** For parents and caregivers and includes time for checking in, reflection on a reading or poem, and time for participants to share what's resonating for them at the intersection of spirituality (broadly defined) and parenting. Parents and caregivers of kids of all ages are welcome. Each session is led by an experienced First Universalist parent and community member.
- **Senior High Youth Group (grades 10-12):** *See Children, Youth & Families section for details*
- **Junior High Youth Group (grades 7-9):** *See Children, Youth & Families section for details*
- **Older kids games (grades 4-6):** Adult-supervised tabletop games in the Social Hall after dinner
- **Childcare (6 mos-3rd grade)**

Pancake Breakfast for Trans and Gender Expansive Folx

Saturday February 15; Breakfast 9:30-10:30 a.m., Short program 10:00, Breakouts 10:30-11:15, Closing 11:15-11:30.
Register Here
Join us at a pancake breakfast open to individuals and families with trans and gender expansive identities. This is an opportunity to see how large and varied our community is. Imagine a room filled with transgender and gender expansive adults, youth, and children. We build community by being together. You may even make some new connections! We will eat, have a short program, and then create breakout groups. This breakfast is open to transgender and gender expansive kids, youth, and adults, and to cisgender allies who are parents and siblings of trans and gender expansive children and youth. Otherwise, cisgender folks are not invited to the breakfast. However, they can be allies by spreading the word about the breakfast to trans and gender expansive loved ones in their lives and encouraging them to come! Please spread the invitation widely: church membership is not required for attendance.

Sex Ed Weekend

Transforming Hearts zoom workshop Saturday, Feb. 22; 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Gather to debrief and connect at First U on Feb. 23, 1-2 p.m. after Sex Ed Sunday worship
The highly recommended *Transforming Hearts Collective* and Zr. Alex Kapitan is offering a hybrid workshop to expand your understanding of what it means to be trans and nonbinary, learn how to tell fact from fiction, and find out how to help create safety for trans people and their families in this moment. No matter who you are or how much or how little you know about gender diversity, this interactive and informative workshop will expand your mind, open your heart, and give all of us the tools we need to deepen our welcome and care for people of all genders in our community. This training is a great opportunity for lay leaders, RE volunteers, members, and church committees alike.
Please Register in two places:
1. Register here for the zoom link to the hybrid workshop, held locally in Madison, WI
2. Register here to let us know you'll be there in person on Sunday, Feb. 23 at church to connect about what we learned.

VISITORS AND NEWCOMERS/NEW-ISH

A Place to Start

1st and 3rd Sundays, and Community Dinner Breakout Option on 2nd Wednesdays each month ***No RSVP Necessary***
Are you new or new-ish to First Universalist and wondering where to begin? Here's "A Place to Start!" Whether you're simply curious or are considering making this your spiritual home, in this casual, 45-minute class, you'll learn some of the basics of Unitarian Universalism, as well as how to get connected to what you're seeking here at church. Meet at the front of the sanctuary immediately after the service on a first or third Sunday, or join the breakout group at monthly Community Dinners. *Facilitated by First U members.*

Newcomers Circle

Wednesdays, April 30-May 2; 6:30-8 p.m.; Register Here
Newcomers Circles create a rich, supportive environment in which to share and grapple with our emerging UU values, theology, identity, and sense of belonging. This 4-session gathering is a caring and structured group to dig deeper into Unitarian Universalism and further connection at church. This Circle is intended for members and non-members alike who are discerning if and/or how they will commit to and continue their spiritual journey at First U as Unitarian Universalists. Please plan to attend at least three of the four sessions. The first session is required for group cohesion and trust building. Newcomers Circle is not a replacement or prerequisite for the Membership Class- they are complimentary curriculums that may be done in any order. *Facilitated by Jeanne Guignon and Ralph Wyman*

Membership Class at First Universalist

2 sessions, both required: Sundays, March 16 & 23; Lunch 12:45 p.m., Class 1-3 p.m. in person at church. New Member ritual in worship April 6. Register here
The purpose of this class is for participants to get clear on what they personally are committing to as church members, and what a mutual, reciprocal church community commits to them in return. Participants reflect and have conversations about what active, sustainable church membership at First Universalist might look like for them. *Facilitated by Membership Coordinator Liz Farmer and Board Members.*

FAITHFUL ACTION

Twin Cities UUs for Justice in The Middle East

Second Sundays: Feb. 9, March 9, April 13, May 11; 1-2 p.m. at church
Sign up for TCUUJME Communications
TCUUJME provides a space for all to come together and hold one another in the sorrow of witnessing the genocide in Palestine. We share hopes, thoughts, and actions for pursuing our shared values in service of justice, compassion, and collective liberation. We hope to be an open, affirming, and helpful space. Our group thus far has been a place to share opportunities to engage ourselves with a wide range of activities, such as direct actions and protests, opportunities for personal growth and learning, and cultural events. We're excited to continue growing our group and all are welcome. *Facilitated by Robin MacKenzie-Taris and Scott Smith.*

First U Environmental Justice Monthly Gathering

Third Sundays: Feb. 16, March 16, May 18; light lunch 12:30 p.m., discussion 12:45-2 p.m., Room 209

Sign up for EJ Team Communications



All are welcome to join fellow First U congregants and friends to discuss and explore personal and communal steps we can take to help address climate change. The format will be open and all will be encouraged to contribute. As environmental issues emerge in the coming months, topics and actions will be collected and advertised in advance of monthly meeting. RSVP to receive updates via email prior to the monthly gathering.

Environmental One-On-One Conversations for Congregants

March 9, 12:30-2 p.m. | Register Here

All members and frequent visitors to First Universalist Church are invited to participate in a tutorial presentation and practice one-on-one conversations on shared environmental goals and strategies for the church. Members of the Environmental Justice Team and allied groups will show how one-on-one conversations will help our congregation members clarify what they know or feel about the Climate Crisis. These conversations will help form "Stories of Us" and "Stories of Now" about our climate—vital ingredients for concerted climate action by First U.

Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity Builds

Two more builds scheduled: Saturday, March 1 and March 29. 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Maplewood, MN



Register Here through Habitat and reach out to David Harrison to let him know you registered. Be part of history as Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity embarks on its largest project ever—the redevelopment of the former Hillcrest Golf Course in St. Paul's East Side! This transformative project will create 147 mid-density affordable housing units, prioritizing community connectivity, housing access, and outdoor amenities. Volunteers must register electronically and complete an online waiver before participating. Remember to wear sturdy shoes, bring a refillable water bottle, and dress warm! Let's work together to support this vibrant and diverse community! Please reach out to David Harrison with any questions: rdavid.harrisonjr@gmail.com

Sacred Sites Tour

Sunday, May 4, 12:30 - 3:30 p.m. | Register Here

We have 30 spots for adults to join our 7th grade Neighboring Faiths youth on a modified Sacred Sites Tour. The group will meet at First Universalist at 12:30 p.m. and return around 3:30 p.m. and carpool to and from the starting site. The tour is led by Jim Bear Jacobs. *First Universalist connection facilitated by Allison Connelly-Vetter and Bee Harrison.*

PASTORAL & COMMUNITY CARE

✳ Winter/Spring Grief group (online)

Jan. 5, 19, Feb. 2, 16, March 2, 16, April 6, 20 (April 20 is Easter), May 4, 18; 4-5:30 p.m. on zoom

Register to receive zoom link

The Grief Group meets first and third Sundays on Zoom. It is a gathering for those who are grappling with the web of feelings associated with the loss of a loved one. A group of souls who share, listen and care. A community interested in exploring new life invitations. Come as you are, when you feel moved to attend. (This is a drop-in group). We will be here for you. *Facilitated by Mark Caswell, church member and Ministerial Aspirant. Summer will be lay-led if the group continues to meet.*

✳ Caregivers Support Group

Second Sundays: Feb. 9, March 9, April 13, May 11; 1:00 - 2:30 pm on zoom

Register Here

Caring for a family member who needs special care is a demanding and often unseen or unacknowledged role. Whether you're caring for an aging parent, or a loved one with a chronic health condition, join the Caregivers group for mutual support, connection, and community building. When we gather, we'll light a chalice, have time for introductions, and share a reading, then move into deeper sharing, support, and reflection. *Facilitated by Rev. Laura Smidzik through March and Rev. Arif Mamdani in April and May.*

✳ People Who Live Alone Group

Thursdays, Feb. 6, 27, March 13; 7-8:30 p.m. hybrid in person and on zoom | Register Here

Part of building beloved community is creating enduring connections. This short-term small group will provide an opportunity for people who live alone to come together, get to know one another, and share about their lives during this time of great churning. We will meet in person but will also make zoom participation possible if needed. *Facilitated by Rev. Laura Smidzik, contract minister for pastoral care.*

Trans, Non-binary and Gender Expansive Community and Support Group

Will meet once/month based on participant availability. Contact Kaden Colton for information.

A source of emotional, physical, and spiritual support for trans, non-binary and gender expansive adults who are members and friends of First Universalist or folks moving to the Twin Cities area. The group will facilitate support, resources, and community building. *Facilitated by Kaden Colton, a member of First Universalist and a seminarian pursuing chaplaincy. Contact Kaden at kaden.e.colton@gmail.com to express interest and for more information.*

ARTS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICE GATHERINGS

First Universalist Choir

Most Thursdays, 7-9 p.m. Choir Interest Form | Choir Web Page

At First U, we're weaving a narrative of unity, justice, and collective empowerment through the medium of music, fostering a beloved community that champions radical inclusion and shared leadership. We extend this invitation to all, our dedication to an environment where everyone, from seasoned singers to first-time choir members, can flourish.

✳ Qigong for Liberation

Thursdays starting January 2; 4:00 - 4:45 p.m. on zoom | Register Here

Gather on Zoom for the winter to practice the beautiful and healing moving meditation of Spring Forest Qigong created by Master Chunyi Lin. This can be a liberating practice for the mind, body and spirit. Movements are gentle and accessible and can be done standing, sitting, or lying down. *Facilitated by Denise Konen.*

✳ Tuesday Meditation Group

Tuesdays, ongoing; 8:45-10:15 a.m. on zoom

You are invited to meditate with our lay-led practice group. We meditate every Tuesday and people come when they can. None of us are experts. Our practices come out of our own experiences, and we share inspiration from many sources. We rotate facilitators and share what we are learning with each other. No registration required. Email Martha Easter-Wells ewellsm@gmail.com for Zoom details.

Labyrinth on the Full Moon

Feb. 12 Community Dinner Breakout, March 13, April 12, May 13; drop in from 5-7 p.m. in the Social Hall

Labyrinth Web Page

A labyrinth is a tool for meditation. It is a single winding path that can be walked or traced with a finger, from the outer edge in a circuitous pattern to the center. Labyrinths are used world-wide as a way to quiet the mind, calm anxieties, recover balance in life, enhance creativity, and encourage meditation, insight, self-reflection and stress reduction. Please join us! Folks will be on hand to assist, teach, and guide you. *Facilitated by member Kate Guin.*

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Religious Education

Our programs for Children, Youth, and Families run from Sept. 15, 2024 - May 11, 2025 | Register your family
All families—new and returning, with babies through high schoolers—must register each church year.

Visit the Families section on our website for detailed information about programming, and to view the most current calender of events. Please reach out to Allison, Director of Children, Youth, & Family Ministries, with questions or for more information at allison [at] firstuniv.org.

Community Dinners are a primary connection point for our Children, Youth, & Families programs. See the Community Dinners information above, under *Full Community Connection Points,* and plan to attend these monthly gatherings, where there are breakout sessions for all ages.
RSVP for Community Dinners Here

Pancake Breakfast for Trans and Gender Expansive Folx

Saturday February 15; Breakfast 9:30-10:30 a.m., Short program 10:00, Breakouts 10:30-11:15, Closing 11:15-11:30
Register Here
Join us at a pancake breakfast open to individuals and families with trans and gender expansive identities. This is an opportunity to see how large and varied our community is. Imagine a room filled with transgender and gender expansive adults, youth, and children. We build community by being together. You may even make some new connections! We will eat, have a short program, and then create breakout groups. This breakfast is open to transgender and gender expansive kids, youth, and adults, and to cisgender allies who are parents and siblings of trans and gender expansive children and youth. Otherwise, cisgender folks are not invited to the breakfast. However, they can be allies by spreading the word about the breakfast to trans and gender expansive loved ones in their lives and encouraging them to come! Please spread the invitation widely: church membership is not required for attendance.

Youth Groups

Register Here

Junior High Youth Group: Grades 7-9
Youth in grades 7-9 are invited to join our Junior High Youth Group, which meets once a month from 7-8:15 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month after Community Dinners. Junior High Youth Group is led by trained adult volunteers Dallas Rising, Dylan Bijnagte, David Leppik,and Michael Merriam, and supported by Allison Connelly-Vetter. These gatherings include time for checking in, playing games, learning new skills, service projects, fun activities, and exploring the big questions of life, all while deepening relationships with peers. There is no membership requirement or Sunday morning attendance requirement. Bring a friend or a neighbor—all are welcome!

Senior High Youth Group: Grades 10-12
Senior High Youth Group this year is led by volunteer Advisors Jane Jordan, Maria Heath, Ragnar Stefansson, and Cameron Smither. All staff and volunteers are trained and excited to spend time with these youth! Please review the information below and encourage your youth to join us!

- Second Wednesday Youth Group: Join us for our free, monthly, all-congregation Community Dinners from 6-7 p.m. and then gather with us afterwards from 7-8:15 p.m. for our new monthly Senior High Youth Group. These gatherings include time for checking in, playing games, learning new skills, fun activities, service projects, and exploring the big questions of life, all while deepening relationships with peers. There is no membership requirement or Sunday morning attendance requirement. Bring a friend or a neighbor - all are welcome!
- Sunday Morning Bagels & RBT: Join us from 10:30-11:15 a.m. most Sundays (except the 3rd Sunday of each month October-May) in a casual environment for bagels and checking in with each other by sharing the Roses, Buds, and Thorns (RBTs) from our weeks. On the 3rd Sunday of every month – our Ritual Sundays – join us at 10:30 a.m. for bagels and attend the 11 a.m. worship service together.

- "Third Space" Gatherings: These gatherings will be scheduled on a month-to-month basis and will be planned by the Youth Leadership Team based on feedback and input from the Senior High Youth Group. These will be times for socialization, play, and fun.

To stay in touch with the happenings of our Senior High Youth Group please email Allison at allison@firstuniv.org .

Saturday Sprouts

Saturdays once per month, 10 a.m. to noon: January 26, February 22, March, 22, and April 19 in the Social Hall & Other Spaces

No RSVP necessary

Saturday Sprouts is a monthly opportunity for families to socialize, worship, play, and offer and receive peer support. We start with snacks and time to get to know each other before moving into family worship, followed by playtime for kids and a peer sharing group for parents and caregivers. We close by sharing gratitudes and singing together.

YOUNG ADULTS (20s and 30s)



Young Adults are folks in their 20s and 30s in varying social/cultural life stages. We are in school, job-searching, and working, single, married, partnered and dating, with kids and without, newly moved to the area and longtime residents. We gather about twice a month at church and in the community for structured and unstructured conversation, spiritual practice, and activities. To get on the contact list for Young Adults, email Liz Farmer: liz@firstuniv.org.

Deepening Ties Among Young Adults

Sundays: Feb. 23, March 16, April 27, May 18; 12:30-2 p.m. at church

Register Here

Young Adults (a group intentionally loosely defined as anyone in their 20s or 30s) are one of the most diverse groups at First U. We come from all over, with rich but often unspoken experiences and histories shaping who we are and why we connect through the church. It feels like the right time to get to know each on a more meaningful level, but it's difficult to really get to know someone without more time... so we want to carve out the time! We're looking for a group of young adults who'd be interested in coming together once a month from Feb-May with the singular goal of getting to know each other beyond just the pleasantries and commonalities; We have some ideas to get a conversation started but hope you'll have ideas of your own for what would make it meaningful for all :) *Facilitated by members Cameron Smither and Clare Roarty.*

Second Sundays Lunch at Gigi's

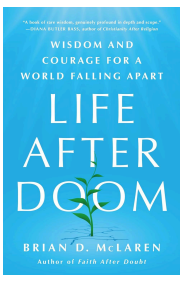
Feb. 9, March 9, April 13, May 11; 12:15 p.m.

Young Adults informally gather in the Social Hall after the second service to travel to nearby Gigi's Cafe for lunch and casual conversation.

SMALL GROUPS, BOOK GROUPS & CLASSES FOR ADULTS

✳ *Life After Doom*: Creation, Crisis, and Caring Community

Meets as determined by participants, first week of February - mid May | Register Here



This is a come-as-you-are-able conversation based on Brian McLaren's book Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for A World Falling Apart. The group began in Fall and newcomers are welcome. Continuing in care for one another as we experience the many facets of an ongoing global metacrisis, we will focus on holding one another in care while centering on the 7th principle: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." Opportunities to meet online and in-person will be arranged, and we will nurture relationships of mutual aid together with the more-than-human beloved community. *Hosted by Gary Hoover, Environmental Justice Team*

Speculative Fiction and Faith, with Rev. Jen

March 12; 7-8:15 p.m. Drop-In Breakout Group after Community Dinner

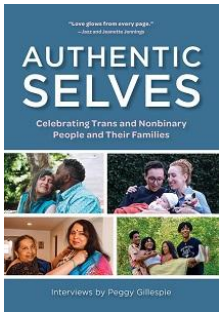
Rev. Jen writes: join me for this Community Dinner break-out session conversation. I'll share the reading list from my recent collegial study group, as well as quotes and ideas we can engage together, including:

- how speculative fiction, especially eco-queer narratives, offers insights into the creation and sustenance of beloved communities,
- the ways can the themes of environmental justice, queer identity, and speculative futures can inform our understanding and practice of community building,
- an exploration of how eco-queer speculative stories challenge and expand our notions of justice, equity, and compassion within the context of beloved community.

Authentic Selves Book Group (UU Common Read)

4 sessions in April/May; Register to express interest and be contacted about exact dates, TBD.

Register Here

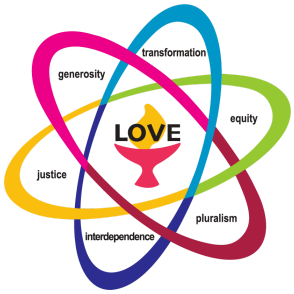


People of all gender identities are invited to read the UU Common Read *Authentic Selves,* a sweeping compilation of life stories and portraits of trans and nonbinary people, as well as their partners, parents, children, siblings, and chosen family members. Through interviews and photo portraits, the subjects of *Authentic Selves* invite readers into their real lives--their revelations, challenges, joys, and networks of support. This mixed-gender book group will invite participants to tell their *own* stories and form a deeper understanding of how *their* gender identity has shaped their lives. More than an introduction to gender identity, with Love at the center, the sessions will encourage participants to better know and love themselves and others. Copies of the book are available for purchase widely online and at InSpirit. Contact liz@firstuniv.org if you'd like the church to purchase a copy of the book for you. *Facilitated by members Troi Ferguson and Claire Tralle.*

✳ Wisdom from The Circle: Our UU Values

Sundays, March 2, 9, 16, 23; 12:30 - 2 PST / 2:30 - 4 CT on Zoom [Please note time zones for the two congregations]

Register Here



Join this unique exploration of our new UU values. This four-session Zoom workshop is a collaboration between First Universalist Church of Minneapolis and Palomar Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (Vista, CA). Folks from both congregations are invited to sign up. Plan to attend at least three of the four sessions, in which we will learn and practice a circle process that invites deep listening and connection. The first session will be a welcome, an introduction to the circle process, and a circle conversation on the UU Value of *Love*. The following three sessions will cover two different UU Values at each gathering. *Facilitated by Rev. Ashley Harness (First U), Rev. Shelly Thompson (Palomar), and Rachel Rott (First U Staff and Palomar congregant)*

Adult OWL - for all adults 18+

Thursdays, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3, 10, 17, 24; 7-9 p.m. | Register Here

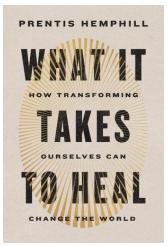
Adult OWL (Our Whole Lives) is for anyone over the age of 18. Adult OWL explores sexuality issues for adults of all ages, using values, communication skills, and spirituality. We build understanding of healthy sexual relationships, affirm diversity. and help participants accept and affirm their own sexuality throughout their lives. OWL (Our Whole Lives) is a holistic sexuality education program that models and fosters caring, compassion, respect, and justice. It balances knowledge-building with exploration of attitudes, values, and feelings about one's own and others' sexuality. This program is comprehensive and progressive, addressing sexuality with candor, sensitivity, and respect for adults' wisdom and life experience. *Facilitated by Kirk Cozine and Claire Tralle.*

Cultivating Joy & Happiness

Saturdays, April 5, 12, 19, 26, May 3; 12:30-1:30 p.m. in person at church | Register Here

Through science-backed information, experiential wisdom, and community connection, this class will help us to find more joy and introduce practices to elevate our capacity for happiness. We will help each other be more open to joy, more resilient in difficult times, enjoy what is Good, and make happiness easier to experience in the long term. Participants are encouraged to attend all sessions**.** *Facilitated by members Nikki Townsend and Alison Kemlitz.*

What it Takes to Heal Book Study



Sundays, April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th - 1-2:30pm | Register Here

In a world on fire, how do we keep growing and healing ourselves, our communities, and our country? Join us to read the work of Prentis Hemphill, *What it Takes to Heal: How Transforming Ourselves Can Change the World*. Hemphill is a Black, Queer therapist, somatics teacher and facilitator, political organizer, and writer whose wisdom has become sacred text in our pulpit and can help shape our lives today. *Facilitated by Rev. Ashley Harness and Katherine Herrell*

SENIORS

Improv for Elders

Wednesdays; 10:30-noon, ongoing, in person at church | Register Here

Improvisation is not only a fun activity, with lots of laughter and joy and connection with others. It is also a resilience-building activity, and a spiritual practice. Participants say that the class makes them more aware of the ways they can open to more joy and spontaneity outside of class as well as within. *Facilitated by Rev. Meg Riley.*

✳ Daytime Connections

Organized and hosted by the Daytime Connections Planning Team

9:45 a.m. coffee, 10-noon program, Noon lunch, in person in the Social Hall and on Zoom

Daytime Connections empowers older adults to live intentional, joyful, purposeful and spiritually fulfilled lives, by building a vibrant community and providing engaging programing that promotes conscious aging and fosters personal and spiritual growth. ***Register for each gathering below:***

- **Feb. 20: Councilmember Andrea Jenkins**
- **Mar. 20: Travel for Seniors**
- **Apr. 17: Understanding Death Doulas**
- **May 15: TBD**

Registration Requested by the Monday prior. (Suggested donation for catered lunch is $0-20 as you are able. Attendees are also welcome to bring their own lunch.)