

## August/September 2024 President's Report

It's October and as I write this the temperature outside is 34F—the first chilly morning of fall. It is a beautiful time of the year in southern Illinois as the trees begin to change color going from summer green to the reds, yellows, and oranges of autumn.

Trees amaze and inspire me. Seeing a huge old oak standing alone in a field, I can sense its long-lived spirit and natural wisdom. I experienced this feeling recently when Laura and I traveled to Washington state in early September to visit our son Rob and his wife Nicole. While we were there, we hiked a short trail at Teal Slough in the Willapa Hills north of the Columbia River near the coast. This trail winds its way past several stunning 1000-year-old western red cedars. What incredible ancient trees!



I have a wonderful small book entitled simply “Trees” It is an anthology of writings and paintings by Hermann Hesse, the Swiss-German Nobel prize winning author. In the book's first essay he writes the following:

Trees for me have always been the most compelling preachers. I worship and adore them when they live in families and tribes, in forests and groves--and even more when they stand alone. They are like solitary people. Not hermits who've stolen away from society out of some weakness, but great lonely people like Beethoven or Nietzsche. The world rustles in their uppermost branches, their roots rest in the infinite, but they do not lose themselves in either, they work with all the strength of their lives toward just one thing: fulfilling their own law that

lives within them, shaping their own form, becoming their own selves. Nothing is more sacred, nothing more exemplary, than a strong and beautiful tree.

Perhaps today would be a good day to walk outside and enjoy the beautiful trees of autumn in southern Illinois.

### **Events and Recognition:**

While things slow down at CUF during the summer as the fall and the new church year approach in August and September, there is more happening at the Fellowship each week. Here are just a few items of note.

- A major event held every other year at CUF is the **Social Action Yard Sale**. The sale proceeds fund the activities of CUF's Social Action Team, and with recent budgeting changes the Green Team, the Reproductive Justice Group, and the LGBTQ+ Welcoming Congregation Team. This year's sale was held on August 7-9. Led by Laura Basanta, a host of volunteers made this year's sale a great success raising just over \$3150. Thanks to Laura and all the volunteers for their hard work and dedication. And thanks to everyone who donated items for the sale.
- This summer's **RE "One Room School House"** program offered unique weekly activities for CUF youth every Sunday. For example, on August 11, Elana Floyd Kennett and Pat York used rhythm and harmony to explore sounds in nature and culture with instruments, singing and dancing. Jan Eisenhard introduced CUF kids to yoga and meditation on August 18. Thanks so much to Rhonda Kosmicki, chair of the RE Committee, the Committee members and to all those who volunteered to present a session.
- CUF's **Reproductive Justice Group** (RJG) hosted a discussion of *A Spark of Light* by Jodi Picoult on August 12. This novel tells the stories of a group of people when a man enters an abortion center in Mississippi and begins shooting. The shooting develops into a hostage situation. While *A Spark of Light* is a novel, it deals with real and possible scenarios women face as reproductive rights are systematically being stripped by our courts.
- CUF hosted a **Celebration of Life** for beloved CUF member **Nillofur Zobairi** on August 18. Nillofur's family invited the Fellowship community to join in remembering this very special person. As Nillofur loved bright colors, all were encouraged to wear them in her memory. Attendees also brought flowers that the family planned to place at her grave marker. A reception followed the service.

- Throughout the summer, the **Strategic Planning Committee** chaired by Mariam Link-Mullison has continued its work on our **2025-29 Strategic Plan—“Creating our Future”** in preparation for the Plan’s adoption at a Special Congregational Meeting on October 13. In addition to collecting responses from committees and teams to various plan drafts, the Committee held Listening Circles at CUF and on Zoom with the final Circle on Sunday, August 25.

- On September 3, Bill Sasso and Laura Basanta presented a **GRACE Mini-Workshop** on Zoom. The workshop was designed to explore more fully the GRACE -- Grounded, Relational, Accountable, Capacity-building, Effective -- organizing model shared as part of the August 25 Sunday service.

- Our annual **Ingathering Weekend**, on September 6-8, marked the beginning of a new church year at CUF. The weekend started on Friday evening with a well-attended **Family Cookout** on the CUF patio. In addition to hotdogs, veggie alternatives, lemonade, tea, s'mores fixings provided by CUF, people brought side dishes, snacks, and desserts to share. There were games to play and music to enjoy on a beautiful early fall evening. The bubble machine was a great hit with the kids.

On Saturday morning the **Green Team** organized a **“sprucing up”** of the Fellowship grounds. A lot of work was done all around our building by the energetic volunteers. After the work was done, folks gathered for a potluck lunch and to watch the documentary "Down to Earth."

Finally, as discussed in more detail below, the weekend concluded with the **Ingathering Sunday Service** and our annual **Water Communion Ceremony**.

- Middle and High School youth and their parents came together with new **Youth Group leaders Eric Terrell and Jamie Biggs** at noon on Sunday, September 15 to share their ideas/goals for **Youth Group** sessions and activities at CUF this year. There were lots of ideas shared about how to enhance and grow COF’s RE program.

- CUF’s Social Action Focus this year is “VoteLove – Embodying Our Commitment to Democratic Process.” Beginning with the first Carbondale Brown Bag concert on May 1 through the end of July members of **CUF’s VoteLove/Voter Empowerment Campaign** trained as deputy registrars, staffed voter registration/information tables at the Wednesday noon time concerts in Carbondale. Then, from August 3 to October 5, the CUF VoteLove Team set up at the Saturday morning Carbondale Farmer's Market. As a result of the Team’s efforts, 33 voters were registered and more than 200 others were provided with information about registration, early and mail-in voting options, as well as sample ballots. And, by our

presence at these events, we reminded many people that the election is coming, and that their votes are important.

The VoteLove Team also staffed a voter empowerment table in the Commons after the service on September 29. Finally, Team members and others at CUF joined in writing and mailing over 500 “get out the vote” postcards to voters in Georgia, Texas, and other states.

- On Sunday, September 22 CUF’s **Green Team** hosted a watch party for the keynote session of the **2024 Faith in Place Annual Environment and Spirituality (AES) Summit**, themed "Grounded & Engaged." The summit, formerly known as the Green Team Summit, explored the intersection of spirituality, the environment, and social justice. The keynote session on September 22, featured Lama Rod Owens, a renowned author and Buddhist teacher who discussed how spiritual practices can support self-discovery, liberation, and environmental care. CUF has hosted the annual watch party for the last several years. Thanks to the Green Team for again hosting this event.

**August and September Services and Attendance:**

The service theme for August was “The Gift of Compassion.” For September the theme was “The Practice of Invitation.” Our Sunday services continue to be well attended both in person and on Zoom.

August

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
Aug. 4	39	--	10
Aug. 11	43	9	10
Aug. 18	49	6	8
Aug. 25	46	3	8

September

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
Sept. 1	41	9	6
Sept. 8	50	11	9
Sept. 15	40	18	8

Sept. 22	56	15	5
Sept. 29	52	16	6

CUF's Sunday services during August and September explored in a range of ways our monthly themes with thoughtful readings, excellent music, and interesting messages. Among the services several stand out.

- The services in August focused on the theme of “compassion.” With this theme in mind, the services were built around the hymn, “Filled with Love and Kindness.” As explained by Bob Patrick of the UU Congregation of Gwinnett outside of Atlanta, “This song . . . is a sung expression of the Buddhist prayer known as the *metta sutta*. *Metta* means loving kindness, and the prayer is an expression, a visualization, and an openness to loving kindness toward ourselves, toward another, and toward all. In other words, it is a prayer for loving kindness to be the experience of all beings.”
- As mentioned earlier, we held our annual **Ingathering Sunday Service** on September 8. In this service we celebrate the beginning of the church year with joyous ritual and song. Part of this service was the **Water Communion Ceremony** symbolizing the coming together of all congregation members into our UU faith community. In this ceremony families and individuals bring a small amount of water from a meaningful source from the summer (for example: kitchen tap, backyard bird bath, vacation spot) which is poured into a community bowl. As they pour their water into the communal bowl, people share its source and meaning for them. The CUF Choir directed by Michael Thompson provided the music.

### Upcoming Events

As we approach November and the holiday season, several events are coming up that should be marked on your calendars. Here are a few to note down. Also, be sure to check the weekly CUF Bulletin for information about everything happening at the Fellowship.

- On Friday evening October 25 at 6:30 pm join **CUF's Welcoming Congregation Committee** for a film screening of "The Death and Life of Martha P. Johnson" in recognition of **LGBTQ History Month**. Thanks to our friends at Rainbow Café, light refreshments, including goodies from Cristaudo's, will be available. Also, you are welcome to bring their own dinner to this free event.
- On Saturday October 26 at 7 pm CUF will host “**Singing Bird and the Importance of Native American Women in Illinois History.**” This will be a special evening with Kim Sigafus McIver! Dressed in her native

regalia, Kim gives a history of Natives in Illinois with a focus on Native women, or what was considered “The Hidden Half.” Kim will bring the audience into these women’s day-to-day lives, including courting, marriage, and child-rearing. She will also talk about their role in their husbands’ lives, and how those lives affected the history of Illinois. The audience will be able to pick up and view items used in daily life, learn Native language and music, and get the chance to play the drum in this interactive experience.

- On Wednesday November 6, CUF will hold a special **Post-Election Vespers** service, in person and on Zoom at 7 pm. All are welcome to gather in community for a time to calm our minds and bodies with music, reflection, and sharing. Rev. Sarah will serve as Facilitator, Curt Wilson will provide music.

- **CUF’s Holiday Art and Craft Sale** will be November 10 in the Commons right after the service until 1:00. With over 10 artists contributing a wide array of goods including jewelry, cards, stitchery, gifts galore and some sweet treats, this is a great way to start (or finish) your holiday gift buying--and support CUF!!

- The **CUF Art Colony** will begin to meet again at CUF starting in November 2024! The plan for November and December is to meet on the 2nd Saturday of each month from 9 am until noon with a discussion of participants' artwork to close out each session. Starting in January, the Art Colony will meet on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month from 9 am until noon. For more information, or if you have questions, please contact Terry Elliott at [elliott3443@gmail.com](mailto:elliott3443@gmail.com) or Kitty Juul at [kmjuul@yahoo.com](mailto:kmjuul@yahoo.com).

- The **Reproductive Justice Group** is planning another book reading and discussion on Tuesday, November 19 at 5:30 pm, in RE 6 at CUF. The book to be discussed is *Fighting Mad: Resisting the End of Roe v. Wade* by Krystale E. Littlejohn and Rickie Solinger. This book explores what "reproductive justice" means and what it looks like to fight for it. For more info: contact Linda Linsin [lindalinsin@gmail.com](mailto:lindalinsin@gmail.com).