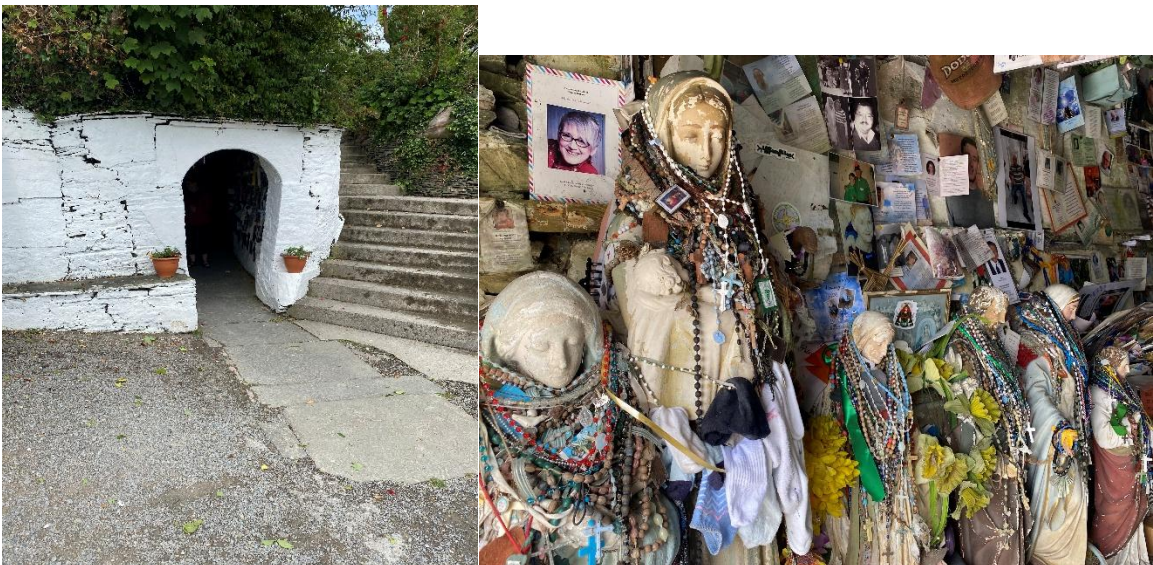


## December 2024/January 2025 President's Report

I am writing this on Valentine's Day. The day started out quite sunny but now it has turned gray, and the air is cold. In typical southern Illinois fashion, the winter has seen big weather swings with temperatures in the single digits one week then up into the 60s the next week. We've had bright sunny days followed by ice and snow. The week ahead looks to follow this pattern with cold snowy weather soon followed by much warmer temperatures. And of course, the flu seems to be going around. Both Laura and I have had to deal with it like so many in our Congregation.

So, it's February—the shortest month with just 28 days. February 1 marks the halfway point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, the midpoint of winter, the time when the ancient Celts celebrated Imbolc, one of the four major "fire" festivals or quarter days. In the Celtic tradition, Imbolc marks the beginning of spring. In Ireland, February 1 is St. Brigid's Day. St. Brigid is the patroness saint of Ireland, one of its three national saints along with St. Patrick and St. Columba.

When we visited Ireland this past summer, we searched out various "holy wells." These wells are natural springs that were sacred to the Celts and in turn, with the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, became associated with saints retaining their special significance as places of both physical and spiritual healing. One of the wells we visited was St. Brigid's Well in County Clare, near Liscannor. This spring, enclosed in a stone grotto, is one of the most ancient of Ireland's holy wells. It is visited throughout the year, and especially on February 1, by people seeking comfort and solace. They often leave behind photos, rosaries, prayers, pieces of cloth and other mementos. It is a remarkable sacred place with deep roots in the history and traditions of Ireland.



This reminds me of the importance of our traditions and rituals, like the Water Service in September, the Flower Communion in May, our hymns such as “Spirit of Life” and our symbols such as the UU flaming chalice and our own CUF logo. All of these elements bind us together with each other, as well as with those who have gone before us and those who will follow us into a living spiritual community.

### **Events and Recognition:**

With the holidays, December was, as usual, a very busy month at CUF. And then, as it turned out, 2025 began with a very active January as well. Read on for notable details.

One event that I think deserves special note is that as the month began on December 1, CUF welcomed five new members. Congratulations to Johanna Haas, Gypsy Obermiller, Colleen Ryterski, Jessica Sturges and Eric Terrell, who signed the membership book on December 1.

- For many years, under the leadership of **Jerry Molumby**, CUF has regularly been the site for local blood drives. Once again, on Friday, December 6, CUF hosted a drive. Thanks to Jerry for spearheading this event and to all who gave blood.
- On Sunday, December 8, the 19<sup>th</sup> annual **Southern Illinois Alternative Gift Fair** sponsored by CUF’s **Social Action Team** was held at the Carbondale Civic Center. This event offers shoppers the opportunity to find "gifts that matter" and support area non-profit organizations. CUF had a table with Equal Exchange items as well as a fun photo booth for attendees. Many of CUF's Social Action recipient groups participated in the Fair. The Fair also got airtime on KFVS-TV, Channel 12. See <https://www.kfvs12.com/2024/12/02/southern-illinois-alternative-gift-fair-set-dec-8/> Thanks to **Jess Jobe** and CUF’s Social Action Team for making the Fair again a great success for our community.
- Over the last several years, a fun holiday tradition has been the December **Kids Party and Parents Night Out**. This year’s party was held on Friday, December 14. CUF volunteers, organized by **Miriam Link=Mullison** offered a fun evening of activities including supper and the ever-popular Children’s Christmas Shop where they shopped for gifts for family members for a dollar or less. Other activities include crafts, games and more, including a “Glow Stick Dance Party.” While the kids had fun at CUF, their parents got to enjoy an evening together during the busy holiday season Thanks to Miriam and all who helped make this a great evening for kids and parents alike.

- After the Yule Service on December 22 CUF held its annual "**Strike the Harp & Join the Chorus**" - **All Ages Carol Sing!** CUF folks gathered together to sing their favorite holiday carols. The group then traveled to Liberty Estates and Prairie Living at Chautauqua to serenade our CUF beloveds there. All enjoyed the singing as well as cocoa and cookies.
- On Saturday evening, December 21, as part of the Stage Company Second Stage Reader's Theater Series, CUF hosted a free staged reading of "For Lease Navidad," a Christmas comedy for adults that explores what happens when Santa can't get into a New York apartment. The play was written and directed by Ramsey Uhter, with CUF member **Gypsy Obermiller** as assistant director.
- The Religious Education (RE) Program for CUF children and youth continues to grow under the leadership of RE Coordinator **Rhonda Kosmicki** and the members of the RE Committee, **Jamie Biggs, Eric Terrell, Brandy Carr, and Ashley Herd**. For example, on January 19, the Green Team joined with the RE Committee to help CUF kids explore how to care for birds and animals during the cold winter months. They made pinecone birdfeeders to bring home. They also continue to think about the theme of Story by sharing stories of winter and exploring life without modern conveniences. You can learn more about the RE program by contacting Rhonda Kosmicki, RE Coordinator, at 618-559-2457, or [rlpk63@hotmail.com](mailto:rlpk63@hotmail.com).
- Starting January 21, CUF **Pastoral Friends** is leading an 8-session small group discussion of **We Heal Together: Rituals and Practices for Building Community and Connection** by Michelle Cassandra Johnson. The group meets every other Tuesday at 5 PM at CUF in Room 6.
- A big January event at CUF was our **Beach Party Trivia Night & Chili Supper** on Saturday, January 25. This fundraising event began at 6pm with a Chili Supper in the CUF Commons. Then, at 7:00pm the Trivia Contest started. In addition to the trivia contest, the evening included a dessert and mead auction, a "guess how many" challenge, and an interesting contest where people were asked if pairs of famous people had been alive at the same time or not. The evening was great fun—and raised (after expenses) \$1,919 for CUF! With this second successful trivia night, we are considering making this an annual event.

The efforts of so many people made the Beach Part Trivia Night such a success. I fear I may leave someone out--but here goes:

The planning team of Dan and Elisa Hummer (who put together and ran the trivia contest), Nan Sorrels, Martha Shum, Rob Gallegly (our MC extraordinaire), Sarah Richards, and Laura Basanta. The chili cooks Alex Waller, Kathy O'Laughlin, Rob Gallegly, and Laura Basanta. The Hospitality Team of Benieta

Powell and Joyce Sheperd along with Jerry Molumby. All those who donated desserts and prizes –Laura Basanta, Jess Jobe, Sarah Richards, Jodi Ruffner, Roy Sumner and Al Babbitt. Bill Sasso who served as our check-in coordinator and money manager. All those who helped clean up—including washing bowls when we ran out during the chili supper. I also want to thank the local business that donated gift certificates for the evening including Larry’s House of Cakes, Confluence Books, Taste Bud’s Snacks, Tequila’s Mexican Restaurant, and Quatro’s Pizza.

Thanks to all these people—and to everyone who attended!

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The service theme for December was “The Practice of Presence.” In January, the theme was “The Practice of Story.” Attendance both in person and on Zoom continues to be good even in the sometimes cold and stormy winter weather.

- Our seasonal celebration began on Sunday **December 22** with our **Happy Yule!** Service. CUF folks young and old came together to celebrate and explore the magic and mystery of Yule traditions, the Winter Solstice and the turning of the Wheel of the Year with music, readings, and the Yule log. The service included music from the CUF choir as well as a bell choir that included kids from RE.
- On Christmas Eve CUF celebrated Christmas with candlelight, carols, and story at our annual family-friendly evening service. Music was provided by Ginivra Herr (cello), Joe Palermo (guitar), and Stephanie Reece (vocal).
- We closed out 2024 and welcomed 2025 with our annual “**Burning Bowl**” **Fire Service** on Sunday, December 29. In this unique multigenerational service, we say farewell to the old year and welcome the new year with the fire ceremony. In doing so we burn our outdated habits and thoughts and enter into a new year full of promise and gratitude. The service included music by Pat York.
- Our January Sunday services were all built around the “Story” theme. The services included long-time UU and new CUF member Eric Terrell reflecting on “The Stories We Leave Behind.”

**December and January Services and Attendance:**

December

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
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Dec 1	45	5	8
Dec.8	49	7	5
Dec. 15	47	13	11
Dec. 22	67	12	12
Dec. 29	30	4	8

January

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
Jan. 12	48	7	22
Jan. 19	41	9	15
Jan. 26	58	16	20

**Upcoming Events**

Spring is arriving and with it many events at CUF that should be marked on your calendars. Here are a few to note down. And, as always, be sure to check the weekly CUF Bulletin for information about everything happening at the Fellowship.

- Each March CUF holds its **Generosity Campaign** inviting members and friends to renew their financial commitment to CUF for the coming fiscal year. The theme of our *Generosity Campaign* this year is **“Giving Love. Love Giving.”**



Pledging offers us an opportunity to think about, affirm, and renew our commitment to our Fellowship and to one another. Look for information about the campaign in your email and in the Commons at CUF.

- On Tuesday April 1 at 7 PM CUF will host **Dennis Stroughmatt** presenting **French Creoles of The Illinois Country: Fiddle Jigs, Creole Folktales and Haunting Ballads**. Through story and song, including a

performance of local French “fiddling” on violin and sing-a-longs, the audience will learn how the Illinois French serves as a time capsule for their cousins to the north and south—those in Canada and Louisiana. This event is co-presented by the Illinois Humanities [Road Scholars Speakers Bureau](#). It is free and open to the public.

- April is “Earth Month.” As part of CUF’s celebration, on Saturday afternoon, **April 19, Rev. Jim Scott** will present his musical show, **One Year to Save the Earth** at CUF. Through songs and beautiful projected images, this concert takes the audience from celebration to grieving, protest, learning, and a positive vision for the planet. This performance is open to the public with a suggested donation of \$10 per adult.
- Another Earth Month event at CUF will be our **Eco Fair** on **Saturday** afternoon, **April 26**. Like CUF’s successful 2023 Eco Fair, this year’s event will include presentations about current local and state-wide environmental initiatives and opportunities by **Wade Halva**, Southern Illinois Outreach Senior Coordinator for Faith in Place and CUF member **Beau Henson**, representatives from local environmental organizations and vendors, family-friendly activities, and music.