

April-June 2025 President's Report

It's a warm summery July morning as I write this report—my last of the church year. You'll note that, while recently my reports are bimonthly, this report covers three months of activities and information about our Fellowship. The summer has been busy, and I've just fallen behind—so this is my effort to catch up.

It has been a typical southern Illinois July with muggy hot days and regular afternoon thunderstorms. Gardens are filled with flowers, butterflies, and bees. The Saturday morning Farmer's Market in Carbondale, where we always see CUF friends, offers all sorts of the summer's best fruits and vegetables. We are approaching the midpoint between the Summer Solstice and the Autumnal Equinox, called "Lammas Day" by the Celts on August 1. This begins the time to welcome the first harvests of the season.



July is the beginning of my fourth year as CUF's Board President. This past year has seen a lot of change and growth at CUF. We've added new members, improved our building with solar panels, and added a new family/gender neutral restroom. We have adopted and begun to act on a new Strategic Plan. And, as of June 30, we've said goodbye, after 11 years, to our minister Rev. Sarah Richards as she moves away with her husband Mike Ryan. More about this below.

The year ahead will be challenging, but also exciting. It will be a chance for us to work together once again as a lay-led congregation and be creative. I am confident that we will continue to grow as a "a vibrant, diverse, loving community which fosters freedom of thought, spiritual growth, social justice and ethical living for all."

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Events and Recognition:

Lots happened at the Fellowship during the spring. I'll set out some of the many highlights here.

- On Saturday, April 12, the **Green Team** and the **Facility Maintenance Team** joined together with CUF members to do some work inside and outside our building. This included cleaning the windows, inside and outside, focusing on the Commons, the Sanctuary, the main entrance and the RE windows. Part of the work also included applying yellow highlighter lines on the outside of the windows to mitigate bird strikes on CUF's windows. The birds see the yellow and are deterred away from the windows while we do not see the yellow lines. While one crew worked inside, another group worked outside cutting up and hauling away tree limb debris left from our winter ice and wind storms. Thanks to everyone who helped out. Working together was fun!!
- In time for Earth Day 2025, on April 18 several CUF members gathered at CUF to install the interpretive sign for our prairie area. Thanks to Benieta Powell, Elana Floyd- Kennett, and Miriam Link-Mullison for preparing the sign and to Charles Ruffner, Jeff Kellogg, Bill Kline, Gene Basanta, Benieta Powell and Laura Basanta for getting the sign erected. It looks great!



- CUF has long been a strong supporter of local events and activities surrounding Earth Day. This year, among the congregation's activities, we hosted **"A Vision for the Planet" – A Multimedia Concert for Earth Day** on Saturday, April 19. Mixing powerful songs and striking projected images, **Jim Scott** took the audience on journey to celebrate and motivate our efforts to sustain life on our beautiful, amazing, and fragile planetary home, the Earth. Thanks to Jim for a great event, as well as to all at CUF who helped organize and promote the concert—and to all who attended.
- Another special Earth Day event at CUF was our **second Spring Eco-Fair** on Saturday afternoon April 26. First held in 2023, this year's Eco Fair included an array of hands-on activities like guided walks

through our prairie, Mason Bee house making, and a cool interactive demonstration of water run-off and its environmental impact. Information tables were staffed by representatives from various local groups including the Audubon Society, Faith in Place, Free Again Wildlife Rehabilitation, Green Earth, Inc., Jackson County Recycling, Sierra Club, Straight Up Solar, Ozark Koala Ecosystems and more! . The event also included a presentation by **Wade Halva** of Faith in Place and **Beau Henson**, "Environmental Progress, Energy and Upcoming Illinois Legislation: The State of the State in a 60 Minute Blitz." It was a grand afternoon. Thanks to all who made it such a success!!

- Once again this year the **planters on CUF's patio** are filled with beautiful flowers for the congregation to enjoy thanks to members of the Green Team including **Joni Bailey, Susan Lutton, Astrid Norman, Laura Basanta, Gene Basanta, and Benieta Powell**. And, not only does this group plant the flowers but they keep them watered and looking good throughout the summer. Be sure to thank our Green Team for their efforts.

- On Tuesday April 22 CUF folks joined with others in the Carbondale community for a **Taste of Faith Potluck** at the **Carbondale Muslim Center**. The **Carbondale Interfaith Council** once again organized this family-friendly potluck bringing together our friends and neighbors from diverse faith communities for a shared meal and conversation.

- After our service on Sunday May 4 we joined together to dedicate two important additions to our building—our solar panels and our family-friendly gender neutral restroom. These additions further evidence our commitment to our mission and values. We are thankful to all those who worked so hard to bring these projects to completion and for the financial gifts to our Fellowship from Bill Rose and Lois Hayward that made them possible.

- CUF's **LGBTQIA+ Welcoming Congregation** and **Social Action Teams** hosted a three-part **Responding to the Anti-Trans Movement Course** during May, with the first session on May 6. The course was developed by the Transforming Hearts Collective. See <https://www.transformingheartscollective.org/>. Rainbow Cafe supported the series by providing snacks for attendees. Each segment of series was informative and impactful. Thanks to all those who put this series together.

- People are what makes CUF go. There are a couple of people who have recently stepped up at the Fellowship. **Jennifer Mandaville** has volunteered to coordinate the **Caring and Sharing Team**, and has taken on the responsibilities of **Building Use Manager**. Also, with all the new families coming to CUF, our

RE Coordinator Rhonda Kosmicki needed extra help. So, longtime RE volunteer **Joyce Shepherd** was hired as **Assistant RE Coordinator**. Thanks to both Jennifer and Joyce for all they do.

- On May 21, CUF members joined others from throughout Illinois to visit the State Capitol on **Environmental Advocacy Day**. Led by **Wade Halva** from Faith in Place, we met with legislators including **State Senator Terri Bryant** and **State Representative Paul Jacobs** to support passage of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition Platform, which includes legislation that accelerates climate and equity goals in the transportation, buildings, and power sectors. After our meetings, we joined a rally on the steps of the Capitol Building. This year two CUF youths, Max Brant and Leiden Van Bendegom traveled with us to Springfield to be a part of advocacy in action.

- Long-time CUF member **Stan Aydt** died on May 13, in Glen Carbon, Illinois. His Celebration of Life Service was held at CUF on Sunday, June 15. Here is a link to Stan's obituary:

<https://www.barrywilsonfuneralhome.com/obituary/stanley-aydt> .

- This spring, the **Green Team** and **Hospitality Team** decided it was time to rid CUF of the plastic tablecloths we have and replace them with durable cloths for our potlucks and parties! So now we have several colorful blue and yellow fabric table cloths. CUF folks were invited to donate to cover the costs for the new tablecloths—and as a result all of them were paid for with donations. Thanks to all who gave! We are a generous congregation!

- As discussed below, at the May 18 Congregational Meeting we selected "**Deep Listening Across Differences**" as our 2026 Social Action Focus. To get things started with this interesting focus, two opportunities for brainstorming about activities and approaches to support this theme were held, one on May 28 on Zoom and the other on June 1 in person at CUF after the service. People gathered to share ideas and begin planning events, activities and opportunities to engage around "Deep Listening".

- On Sunday, June 8, CUF's **Committee on Shared Ministry** hosted a year-end gathering for committee and team leaders and members. Led by **Miriam Link-Mullison** and **Linda Linsin** the meeting focused on leadership training, including recruitment, succession-planning, and goal setting for committees and teams. Additionally, leaders were thanked for all their work throughout the year.

- Also on June 8, CUF's **Pollinator/Prairie Garden** was part of the first Carbondale **Bee & Butterfly Friendly Yard & Garden Tour** organized by **Keep Carbondale Beautiful**. It gave us a great opportunity to show off our prairie. See <https://www.carbondaletimes.com/20250707/news/keep-carbondale-beautiful-hosts-bee-and-butterfly-friendly-yard-and-garden-tour/>

● CUF members **Mikayla Cain** and **Randy Grider** welcomed CUF friends in the Commons to celebrate their newlywed status on Saturday June 28. Light refreshments and photos from their Hawaiian honeymoon were enjoyed by everyone.

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Congregational Meeting on May 18

The Fellowship’s annual Congregational Business Meeting was held after the service on Sunday, May 18. The meeting agenda included an array of items, so it was structured as a two-part meeting. Initially, the first hour of the meeting, which began shortly after 11 am, focused on several amendments to CUF’s Bylaws as well as revisions to a couple of the Fellowship’s policies. The Bylaw amendments, which were passed, involved Art. III.5. and membership termination, Art. VII.10. dealing with the Treasurer position, and Art. VIII.4. regarding the Finance Committee. The policy changes included a new Disruptive Behavior Policy and a new RE Program Safety Policy.

After this portion of the meeting, we broke for lunch and then, at 12:30, resumed the meeting for the usual annual meeting agenda items, including adopting our FY26 budget. Additionally, Joni Bailey and Jeletta Brant were selected as new Board of Trustees members replacing outgoing members Jan Eisenhard and Amy Weber. Jeletta Brant was elected to serve as the Board Secretary. The Social Action Team proposed that “Deep Listening – Our Journey Toward More Effective Social Action” serve as the Fellowship’s social justice focus from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026. This initiative is designed to guide us in cultivating essential listening and communication skills to bridge divides, deepen compassion, and take more impactful, values driven action in the world. This proposal was adopted. Minutes for the meeting can be found at the Member page of CUF’s website.

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April, May and June Services and Attendance:

Monthly service themes included in April “The Practice of Joy,” in May “The Practice of Imagination” and in June “Endings and Beginnings.” Attendance at our spring Sunday services was very strong with many attending either in person or online.

April

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
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Apr 6	64	7	11
Apr 13	61	19	9
Apr 20	50	--	11
Apr 27	46	4	7
<u>May</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
<u>Date</u>			
May 4	58	7	11
May 11	42	8	1
May 18	59	12	7
May 25	45	--	9
<u>June</u>			
<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults in Person</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Zoom</u>
June 1	60	9	8
June 8	45	--	--
June 15*	--	--	--
June 22	54	--	8
June 29**	99	12	8

*Interfaith Pride Service at First Christian. No service at CUF. **Rev. Sarah's last service as our minister

During the spring, our Sunday services included an array of topics, with thoughtful readings, fine music, and interesting messages. Among the services several stand out.

- On Sunday, May 11, guest minister **Rev. Martin Woulfe**, of Abraham Lincoln UU Congregation in Springfield presented the message, "The Challenge of Change." As he noted, change is often uncomfortable — whether it occurs on a personal or institutional level, but few things stand still. And with change come new possibilities. His insights and thoughts were welcomed.

- High school graduation is an important life transition for the individual student, their family, and our congregation. CUF's annual **Graduation Sunday Service** was held on Sunday, May 18. In this celebratory service we recognized our graduating seniors, **Brenden Gallegly** and **Mia Hunt**, and heard their reflections as CUF youths and their future plans.
- Our annual multigenerational **Flower Communion** service was held on June 1. In this service that traditionally closes the church year, we celebrated those CUF people and experiences that have sustained us over the past year including our many volunteers. With the flowers brought by attendees to the service, we created a bouquet of blessings for all of those folks and moments. Music was provided by the CUF Choir accompanied by Elana Floyd-Kennett.
- The service on May 25 was entitled **Practicing Imagination Together**. In this interactive service, we create art and poetry together, with materials for mandalas, drawings and collages, and with simple poetry prompts. A great service celebrating creative imagination and energy.



- On Sunday, June 15, CUF folks joined with members of six other welcoming congregations in the area at the **First Christian Church** in Carbondale for the annual **Interfaith Pride Service** celebrating LGBTQ+ inclusion. Also participating in the service were members of the Church of the Good Shepherd (UCC), First Christian Church (DOC), First Presbyterian Church, First United Methodist Church, and St. Peter's Church (UCC). Gypsy Obermiller and the Interfaith Pride Choir, directed by Michael Thompson, provided the music for this joyous service.

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RE Program Continues to Grow

With the leadership of RE Coordinator **Rhonda Kosmicki** and RE Assistant **Joyce Shepherd**, our Religious Education Program grew steadily throughout the spring. Using a multi-age format, the RE Program encourages interaction and learning between different age groups. A good example is the June

22 program, **All About Bats!** Lead by new CUF member **Leah Leonard**, CUF young people learned all about Mexican Free-Tailed Bats and then made a bat puppet to take home. Then, after the service, there was a picnic for RE Families and Rev. Sarah to say good-bye to each other. **Kenny Leonard** served as chief grill master, cooking hotdogs to go along with all the other great food people brought.

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Saying Farewell to Rev. Sarah

Throughout the spring months, the Fellowship prepared for the departure of our Minister, Rev. Sarah Richards as of June 30, the end of the church year. After 11 years of dedicated service to CUF, Sarah and her husband Mike Ryan decided to move to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Mike's boyhood home. We all will miss her and focused these last several weeks on ensuring a "good" good-bye and a positive transition.

Sarah hosted a series of "Listening Circles" for members and friends offering an opportunity for conversation, recollections, and well wishes before her departure. At the same time the Board and Ministerial Search Team (Daniel Hummer, Linda Linsin, Kathy O'Laughlin, Roy Sumner, and Alex Waller) began the process of searching for a new minister. Several open conversations were held for members who wished to know more about the process of the ministerial search, as well as to offer input to the team

As of this writing, we have not found a new minister and are now in a "gap" period before we find a minister. Unitarian Universalists have a long tradition of lay-led congregations and, in fact, for the first 40 years CUF was lay-led. With our strong, experienced lay leaders and a membership dedicated to this Fellowship and to our mission and values, we are confident CUF will continue to grow and thrive.

Sarah's final service at CUF was held on Sunday, June 29 with nearly 100 attendees. It was an emotional time as we honored all that we've learned, and all the love shared during Sarah's time at CUF. We marked the end of her time with us with a special ritual of release and blessing. We also celebrated beginnings with the New Member Recognition ceremony. Music was provided by **Curt Wilson** and **Elana Floyd-Kennett**, who composed and played a special organ fanfare for Sarah. The service closed with the surprise presentation of a colorful quilt made by **Judy Groskind** showing the CUF logo at the center surrounded by the signatures of over 125 CUF members and friends. After the service we joined together for a farewell party in the Commons with special decorations and a cake made by **Laura Basanta** and lots of good food from CUF members.

Upcoming Events

As summer passes and fall approaches, there are events at CUF that need to be on your calendars. Here are a few to note down. And of course, check the weekly CUF Bulletin for information about everything happening at the Fellowship.

- The Congregation's new year will kick-off with our annual **In Gathering Weekend, Friday, September 5 to Sunday, September 7**. While planning is just underway, we will begin, like last year, with a family Picnic/Cookout outdoors at CUF on Friday evening. On Sunday morning, September 7, we will have our Ingathering Service with Water Communion.
- CUF will again be a Watch Party host site for the 2025 **Faith in Place Environment and Spirituality Summit** keynote presentation by Robin Wall Kimmerer, the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. The keynote session will be on **September 30 at 6:30 PM**. To register go to <https://aes-summit.org/>
- CUF's **Annual Congregational Retreat** will be at **Touch of Nature Camp I** on **Saturday, October 4**. Program details to be announced and will include guided hikes, a shared meal, sing-along and more.