



**Prairie Lakes
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship**

315 Eureka Street, Ripon, WI 54971

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SPECIAL HOLIDAY EDITION!

This edition highlights the Festivals of Light Event



The annual FESTIVALS OF LIGHT event was held on December 17

Presentations of 8 winter celebrations: Las Posadas, Diwali, Hanukkah,
St. Lucia's Day, Bodhi Day, Kwanzaa, Winter Solstice & Christmas

***May the Spirit of this Holiday Season
Bring you Hope, Peace & Love***

A Message from the Festivals of Light Co-Coordinator - Tanya Schwartz Roeper



For the past 7 years I have had the privilege of co-coordinating the Festivals of Light event at Prairie Lakes. Each year members and friends of Prairie Lakes present 8 festivals/holidays observed by Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Pagans, Jewish people & African Americans.

This event not only includes presentations, but also multiple musical numbers, costume prep, roles for the kids, sanctuary decorating, potluck prep, and more! It's an event that requires the participation of numerous people with an array of superpowers.

During the years I have been co-coordinator, I have worked side by side with PLUUF member Jill Stiemsma. Not only does she lead a presentation, she's also a talented piano player and vocalist and coordinates the music for this event. When she told me she was going to be out of the country and unable to attend the Festivals of Light event, I wasn't sure what to do.

I've been a member of Prairie Lakes for almost 23 years. One of the things I have learned is that you never know who's going to walk through the doors of Prairie Lakes on a Sunday morning. To make a long story short, a few months ago Sherman Leatherberry walked through those doors and occasionally attended the Prairie Lakes Sunday services, thereafter. During one of his visits I discovered that he was a retired high school music director. I invited him to take on the role of music director for our Festivals of Light event. Not only did he enthusiastically agree to take on the role, he invited a couple of his talented musician friends and worked with four musically talented members of Prairie Lakes. Sherman even incorporated a drumming session into the program for the kids. Thank you Sherman!

A heartfelt thank you to our musicians, presenters, sanctuary decorators, audience members and to ALL who made this a truly memorable holiday event.



Festivals of Light 2023 Musicians: Nicole & Brad Roost, Linda DeCramer (vocalists); Connie & John Benson (piano); Laird DeCramer & Jill Henning (vocalists); Sherman Leatherberry (music director extraordinaire!)

Festivals of Light: The 8 Presentations

Las Posadas originated in Mexico and was presented by Judy Morgan. The song “Pray Give Us Lodging” was performed by Nicole as the Innkeeper & Brad as Joseph. Brad was accompanied by an angel (Vivi), Mary (Lilly) and a shepherd (McKinley).

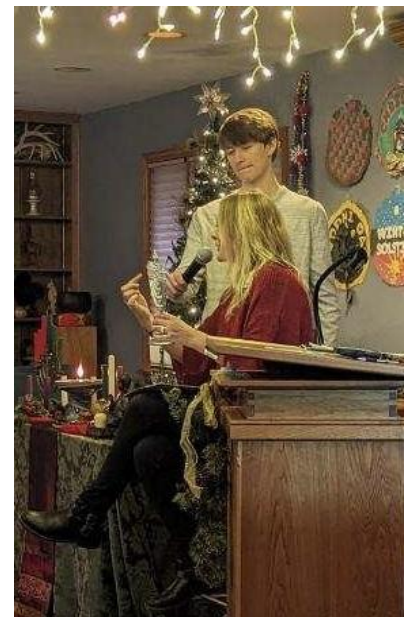
Photo 2: Procession with the star pinata led by Torrin & Holland.



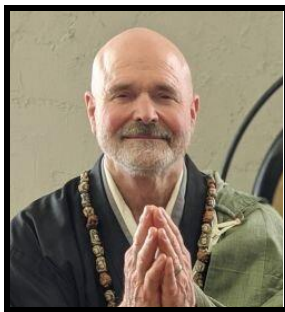
Diwali is a Hindu holiday spiritually signifying the victory of light over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. Back in 2020 during COVID we hired a professional videographer to record individual presentations. Jill Stiemsma’s presentation of Diwali was exceptional! With Jill out of the country and unable to attend this event, we thought presenting this holiday via video was the perfect plan. Jill was on the big screen less than a minute before we lost our internet connection. 😭
(Editor’s note: Almost every year Jill travels to El Salvador from January to March to teach English. This year, she departed on December 1st to not only teach English, but assist with elections. We missed you, Jill, and looking forward to your return in March!)

Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem. My son Oliver and I have had the privilege of presenting this holiday year after year at the Festivals of Light event. My father was Jewish and although my mom was Christian, my dad continued to observe certain Jewish holidays and Hanukkah was one of them.

After the presentation a traditional Hanukkah song, “Hanerot Halalu” was sung by Sherman Leatherberry, Laird & Linda DeCramer & Jill Henning.



St. Lucia's Day is a melding of the winter solstice and a Christian martyr and is celebrated in Sweden, Norway, and the Swedish-speaking areas of Finland and observed around the world. Like Jill's videotaped presentation of Diwali, Judy Harris's taped version of St. Lucia's day was exceptional. Without the internet, though, we were unable to show the video so a script that Judy Harris created a few years ago was read instead. Aya dressed up as St. Lucia while Holland, Jamison & Quinton played the role of the Star Kids. They handed out homemade shortbread cookies to everyone in attendance.



Bodhi Day is a Buddhist holiday commemorating the day Buddha experienced enlightenment. Prairie Lakes is so fortunate to have Taiso Hannya Byran Bartow Abbot of Hollow Bones Zen present this holiday and lead a meditation at this event each year.

Kwanzaa is a celebration of family, community and African American culture. This year the kids of Prairie Lakes presented this holiday celebration. The candles were lit one by one while the kids read the 7 principles and values that each candle represented. After the presentation the kids were treated to a special drumming session led by music coordinator Sherman Leatherberry.



Winter Solstice celebrates an astronomical phenomenon marking the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Winter Solstice was presented by long time PLUUF member Ellen Mueller and included the lighting of the Yule Log candles. Thank you, Ellen! After the presentation John Benson played "Prelude in C major" by J.S. Bach.

Christmas

Christmas is the annual Christian holiday celebrating Christ's birth. Liz Buchanan-Beegle shared a Polish Christian Wafer tradition in which a wafer is passed around and individuals break off a small piece. During the process individuals share good wishes for each other. The tradition dates back hundreds of years: Back when bread was scarce, exchanging it with neighbors was a gesture of goodwill.

Becky Feyen led part II of the Christmas presentation by explaining the meaning of the Advent Wreath and lighting the candles. She also read from the message of St. James. The Christmas presentations concluded with a quartet of Sherman Leatherberry, Laird & Linda DeCramer & Jill Henning singing "I Saw a Star" by Jay Althouse.



Other Highlights

A Story For All Ages was a new addition to our event this year. Megan Morris read, "Bright Winter Night" By Alli Brydon



Congratulations!

Katherine Severson and Christopher Stoye were married in the PLUUF sanctuary on December 16. They celebrated their first day of marriage at the Festivals of Light event and lit the chalice while Pat Dobrinska read the Chalice Lighting words.



Conclusion

The event concluded with John Benson on piano and the congregation singing "Let There Be Peace on Earth." Connie Ghinazzi read the *Extinguishing the Chalice* words and everyone was treated to a potluck that included lots of sweet treats.

Youth Group Holiday Party!

Thank you to Liz Buchanan-Beegle for coordinating the Youth Group Holiday Party on December 19. Children gathered together for a movie, cookie decorating, craft activity and pizza!



Coming up:

Worship Service Sunday, December 24, 10:00 AM



Please join us for a **Spiral Walk** with Robyn Davis-Bartow and fresh made **Cinnamon Rolls** with Liz Buchanan-Beegle. During the Spiral Walk, we celebrate the turning point in the year when the days become their shortest and the night its longest, and we look for the

light which comes from within. In the center of the spiral, a single candle is lit. Each participant walks the spiral alone to the center of the spiral, where they light their own candle to place along the spiral.

