



the  
**MESSENGERbell**  
September 2021

## DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

They say that practice makes perfect. If that's true, then we all must be getting pretty good at dealing with changes. Our whole country has been sent reeling by a fierce resurgence of COVID-19. So far, we here in Oak Park have been spared the worst outcomes that are occurring in other parts of the country. Some have more safety than others, or at least it feels that way. But this pandemic has taught me that we are all deeply connected to one another. Allowing anyone to remain vulnerable undermines any seeming safety we might experience. Call it solidarity by necessity.

In hearing from members, those who have expressed the most concern to me are adults who are medically vulnerable and parents of young children. Others feel quite safe, all things considered. Our congregation is a bit like our country as a whole in that way. Some have more safety than others, or at least it feels that way. But again, this pandemic is a teacher. We in the church are all deeply connected to one another. The vulnerability of some undermines the safety of all.

So here we are again looking at a fall full of uncertainties, a church year when we will be figuring it out as we go along. But that's not the big story, at least not to me. Inside this Messenger Bell you'll see what I think is the big story. And that is that our church is doing so much wonderful ministry. We are finding new ways to serve our neighbors, reimagining engagement across the whole span of life, casting our eyes to dream of what a next chapter of First United might look like, caring for one another in times of trial. In short, we are still the church, even in the face of it all.

Rev. John Edgerton, Lead Pastor



*moving from*

WORDS TO WITNESS IN OUR  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

*moving from*

INDIVIDUALISM TO INTIMATE  
FELLOWSHIP IN OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE  
CHURCH COMMUNITY.

*moving from*

CHARITY TO CHANGING  
STRUCTURES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH THE WORLD.

A few highlights from this month's Messenger Bell: get ready for the return of House to Home, page 2; lots of youth news as we gear up for the new program year, page 4; meet two of our new deacons, page 5; learn about the prayer shawl ministry, page 6.



FIRST  
UNITED  
CHURCH OF  
OAK PARK

## Worshipping Sundays at 11 a.m.

[CLICK TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)

September 5 Communion Sunday YouTube Worship at 11 a.m.	Ally Vertigan
September 12 Outdoor Worship 9 a.m. YouTube Worship 11 a.m.	John Edgerton
September 19 Outdoor Worship 9 a.m. YouTube Worship 11 a.m.	Alicia Reese
September 26 Fourth Sunday Offering Outdoor Worship 9 a.m. YouTube Worship 11 a.m.	TBD
October 3 World Communion Sunday Outdoor Worship 9 a.m. YouTube Worship 11 a.m.	TBD

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## “Weather Permitting” Outdoor Worship starting Sept. 12

Those of us who tried to attend outdoor worship on August 29 learned just how inhospitable weather can be! For all outdoor services, we will do our best to make a decision about whether or not to proceed with worship as early as possible (and, ideally, before 5 p.m. on the day before worship). Any last-minute cancellations will be posted to our Facebook page. We are also looking at ways that our Realm system can help us notify folks of any cancellations. Please stay tuned for more information about Realm and worship!

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## House to Home Kits Return for 2021

With the church opening for outdoor, in-person worship in September, the Housing Justice Team (a sub-team of Faith in Action) will be back to encourage your participation as we kick off the church's **8<sup>th</sup> Annual House to Home Kit Project on Sunday, September 19**. And you know what that means – team members will be asking you to join us as we collect **new\*** supplies and household items to help Housing Forward furnish apartments for families who are transitioning from living on the streets or in shelters to their own apartments. We don't want the joy and relief of these families finally finding housing after weeks or months or even years of constantly having to seek a place to sleep to be overshadowed by not having anything to make their new housing into a real home.

This is where YOU come in. **Sign up online (see below for link) or in our makeshift outdoor “lounge” Sunday, September 19, September 26 or October 3**, to donate items from toilet paper and alarm clocks to bedding, pots and pans, TVs, vacuum cleaners, and microwaves. Our goal is to furnish five apartments.

This year, we are offering an option to shop online and ship direct to the church. Here's what you need to do:

1. Click on this [Sign Up Genius](#) and select the item or items that you would like to donate.
2. Or skip Sign Up Genius and sign up on one of the posters in the outdoor “lounge.”
3. Use the comments line to tell us whether you plan to ship your items or drop them off at the church.
4. Use this address to ship donations: House to Home Project c/o First United Church of Oak

**housing  
FORWARD**  
ending homelessness

Park, 848 Lake Street, Oak Park, IL 60301. Please make sure to include "House to Home Project" on the shipping address so we can quickly and easily identify packages for this project.

5. Or drop off your items at the church before October 10. If the church is closed, please ring the bell at Beyond Hunger, lower level off the parking lot, and leave your package – marked House to Home – with them. Please avoid Wednesday afternoons between 3:30 and 5:30 during Beyond Hunger distribution.

We ask that all items be **new\*** and dropped off or shipped in time to be delivered **by October 10**.

Whatever shopping or delivery methods you choose, **please be sure to sign up online via [Sign Up Genius](#) or in the lounge** so that we know what you are purchasing, how it will be delivered and what is still available for others to donate.

If you have questions, can't make [Sign Up Genius](#) work, or just need to talk to someone about all of this, you can contact Ann Tanner (847-977-5932 or [awtanner@gmail.com](mailto:awtanner@gmail.com)).

Please join us as we live into our vision of moving from Words to Witness by helping provide the comforts of home to persons formerly without homes who at long last have a place to call their own. They, Housing Forward, and the church are deeply grateful for your generosity!

\*This year, Housing Forward requests that **all donated items be new**, not just bedding items as in the past.

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## Thank You from the Stewardship Team

Embracing the theme of Growing Our Generosity, the people of First United have faithfully responded to the call for pledges of financial support for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. Despite the uncertainties and distractions of our troubled world, many members have risen to the occasion. We give thanks to God and to God's people for your steadfast generosity.

The 2021-2022 Stewardship campaign officially concluded on June 30 with an increased number of new pledging households along with a higher level of continuing member pledges. This generous response resulted in a significantly-increased pledged dollar amount for the upcoming

year. A final tally will be confirmed in October. This growth, especially in these challenging times, is a very positive sign. It allows us to build a healthy present and to begin planning a bright future. As we find our way forward, re-gathering and re-focusing ourselves in an ever-changing world, we will be sustained by a faithful, generous foundation.

We feel greatly blessed to serve as First United's Stewardship Team. We extend deep gratitude for the leadership and support of Lead Pastor John Edgerton, Church Office Administrator Heather Vanderberg, and Financial Administrator Shirley Kyle. Thanks be to God!



**Stewardship Team:** Marcia Ashton (chair), Jackie Eckholm, Bob Haisman, Deb Morris, Kelly Pollock **Council Liaison:** Naa Marteki Reed

At left: A gorgeous sunflower grown from a porch drop seed packet!

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## Peacemakers Honored by Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

Time to celebrate! The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Barstow-Driver annual award event will be held virtually on **September 1, 2021 at 8 p.m. EDT/5 p.m. PDT**. First United Church vocalists are providing music for this event. Register to attend by [clicking here](#).

The award for "excellence in nonviolent direct action in retirement" honors two dedicated peacemaking activists, [Doug and Cheryl Hunt](#), members of First Presbyterian Church in Stockton, CA. They are retired teachers who have been working as accompaniment volunteers, advocates for gun violence prevention and going fossil free, and building relationships promoting God's Kingdom of love, peace, and justice for decades.

For most of their lives, Cheryl and Doug Hunt have been peacemakers. From individually serving in the [Peace Corps](#), to long involvement in the Columbia [Accompaniment Program](#), and participating in the [Preventing Gun Violence Working Group](#), they embody what it means to seek and participate in peace. They credit Presbyterian Women for introducing them to peace and justice opportunities within the PC(USA).

Read all about Doug and Cheryl in [this excellent article](#) on the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship website.



Cluster Tutoring will restart in late September with in-person tutoring three nights a week. Tutoring will be held from 6:30-8 p.m. at the following venues: Mondays at Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church, 744 Fair Oaks Ave.; Tuesdays at the Circle Urban Ministries Building at 118 N. Central Ave. in Chicago; and Thursdays at First United. An orientation for new tutors will be at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 16, at First United. Tutoring itself starts the week of Sept. 27. Masks must be worn, and all safety protocols must be followed.



## FUJI and FUSH Registration

We are gearing up for the program year for our junior high and high school youth groups!

Due to the recent rising numbers of COVID cases, we will begin the year with caution. Meaning our safety protocols will remain in effect, and we will plan to host our gatherings outside.

If you are interested in learning more about our Junior High (FUJI) or High School (FUSH) youth groups, please mark your calendar for orientation on Wednesday, September 8 and RSVP with one of the following links:

- FUJI at 7 pm - [FUJI Parent Orientation RSVP](#)
- FUSH at 8 pm - [FUSH Parent Orientation RSVP](#)

We plan to be at the church with a Zoom setup. The Zoom link will be sent out to all those who RSVP. And if necessary, we will host the entire orientation via Zoom.

Please follow this link to register your child or children for FUJI or FUSH. You will need to register each child individually: [FUCOP Youth Group Registration](#)

We are looking for more advisors for our youth groups! Advisors are crucial to these programs. The relationships formed with the kids are invaluable. An adequate number of adult advisors is also necessary to host any overnight events like retreats or lock-ins. If you have

ever considered or are willing to consider being a youth advisor, please reach out to Alicia Reese.

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## Calling All Youth! Grades 7-12

You are invited to an evening of fun and fellowship! Sunday, September 12, from 6-8 p.m. on the church lawn (weather permitting).

All youth in grades 7-12 are welcome! We would love to see you after so long away from one another. We hope this will be an opportunity for connection, a reunion, a celebration! Please follow [this link](#) to RSVP so we know how many people to expect! We hope to see you there. Contact Alicia Reese with any questions.



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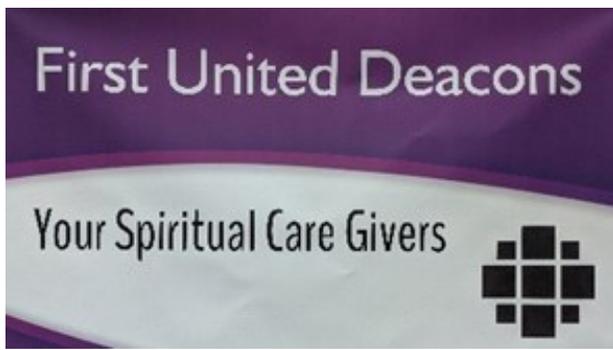
## Quest

We are excited for our confirmation program to be back in action this year, but we know there will be the need to continually navigate or pivot plans in the face of this ever-changing pandemic. Therefore, we will practice grace, flexibility, and patience together!

We plan to meet approximately every other week, mostly in person, with some Zoom opportunities. The requirements of Quest will be altered or adapted as necessary. But no matter what, we will ask questions, engage in discussions, watch videos, and do some reading about a myriad of topics. We take this opportunity to explore faith, religion, and being a Christian.

Each Questor will be paired with a Friend in Faith, too! If you are interested in being a Friend in Faith – please reach out to Art Spooner or Alicia Reese.





## Prayer with the Deacons

The Deacons are in a time of discernment of the best way to offer care and support to our church family, especially in the midst of continual changes due to the pandemic. The Board of Deacons will be discussing if chapel prayer is a ministry that meets the needs of our community and if so, how to make it most visible and available to folks!

Please know that the Deacons are always holding the community of First United in prayer and are eager to hear from you with anything that may be on your heart or mind. You do not walk this journey alone!

We hope you will reach out to your Deacon. If you need help figuring out who your Deacon is, please contact Alicia Reese.

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## Meet the Deacons

This month, we are delighted to introduce you to two more new First United Deacons.

### Linda Sandman

The daughter of a UCC pastor, Linda grew up in UCC churches and joined First United in 1982 right after graduating from college. One of her favorite memories here is when Rev. Bobbi Hargleroad brought communion to her in the hospital right after she delivered Richie, her first child.



Linda and Rich Wheelock, her husband, live in south Oak Park. Her sons, Rich and Daniel, are grown and live out of state, but Linda and Rich are kept on their toes by Roxy, their small rescue dog. Linda works as a licensed clinical social worker, with over 30 years of experience working with people with disabilities.

Linda tells us that it's a challenge to not make God too small. With all of the big challenges in the world that seem all-consuming, it can be hard to trust that God has time to care for us, too. She is looking forward to learning more about ways to serve the First United community as a Deacon.

### Patti Warren

Patti and her family first moved to Oak Park on August 16, 1977 (the day Elvis died!). They found their way to First United the following summer. Since then, Patti has enjoyed working with the Nursery School and the FUNS board, children's Sunday School and chapel time. Patti is also a dedicated member of our handbell choir since 1980.



Patti's children, Sara, Jay, Rachel, and Mason are grown, with Sara living in Maryland and the other three living locally. These days, Patti spends time helping her family by watching her granddaughters, Sloan and Willow who bring so much joy.

Struggling with the hatred and selfishness in the world today, Patti hopes that God's love and caring spirit will shine through her so that she can help make a difference where it matters, as a Deacon at First United and in the wider world.

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## Dinner & a Movie

Dinner and a Movie is back (although Covid continues to keep us from enjoying the dinner portion). Join us in the lounge at 7 p.m. on September 10 for a showing of "The Farewell." After learning that her family's matriarch, Nai Nai, has been given mere weeks to live, Chinese-born, U.S.-raised Billi returns to Changchun to find that her family has decided to keep the news from Nai Nai. While the family gathers under the joyful guise of an expedited wedding, Billi rediscovers the country she left as a child, and she is forever changed by her grandmother's wondrous spirit. Please RSVP by [clicking here](#). Masks and social distancing will be required for the duration of the movie.





# The Prayers of God's People

**We lift up the prayers that have been shared in worship.**

**For the wider world:**

- All those suffering or dying from COVID
- Rising COVID numbers
- The people of Afghanistan
- People suffering as a result of Hurricane Ida
- The people of Haiti navigating the aftermath of a deadly earthquake
- All children, youth, and college students returning to school

**For those in our midst:**

- Bob Downs recovering from surgery
- Jane Barker and family mourning the death of her father
- Lydia Mulkey and family mourning the death of her uncle
- Bobbie Kmiec and family mourning the sudden death of a nephew
- Sara Stevenson and Mark Breen mourning both of their 15-year-old feline family members, Chloe and Simba.
- The family of Nell Lurraín
- Martha Sorensen
- Continued prayers for Evan Saliny. Thankful he will be at Mayo Clinic this month

**For the joys in our lives:**

- The birth of Oscar Gene Golovchuk
- The program year starting up! That it may be healthy, safe, and wonderful
- Beautiful weather that enables us to spend time with friends and family outside
- Getting to catch up on some missed celebrations from the past year and a half – birthdays, weddings, etc.
- Official, long-awaited transition to Realm

## Prayer Shawl Ministry

All those who knit or crochet, no matter your level of experience, are welcome to join us on the second and fourth Monday of each month by Zoom! Our time together is one of fellowship and caring, and we just happen to knit or crochet at the same time!

The shawls we make are distributed to those in need of extra care and comfort. We have brought shawls to those who mourn the death of a loved one, who are fighting a terminal illness, who may be struggling for another reason, and we have also gifted them as baby blankets to newborns in our community at times.

Follow this link to join us:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85035296628>

Please reach out to Alicia Reese if you have any questions or if you know someone who would benefit from the loving care of receiving a prayer shawl!



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## CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

August 4	It's Not Too Late	Alicia Reese
August 17	Reading the Map	Lydia Mulkey
August 31	You Are Not a Commodity	Lydia Mulkey



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OF OAK PARK**

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