



the MESSENGERbell

February 2022

OVERFLOWING BLESSINGS

During the month of February, the church is holding our annual Stewardship Campaign. Our theme this year is Overflowing Blessings. We draw this theme from the beauty of Psalm 23, “you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.” All month we will hear from members of the church who will share about times in their lives when the goodness of life left them full to the brim with joy. At the end of the month, we will invite members and friends of the congregation to let the church know what you plan to give in the coming year.

“But wait,” you might be thinking, “didn’t we just finish our pledge campaign?” I felt that way, too, until I pulled out my calendar and realized that once again the strange effect of COVID time had caught me. I call it the time-accordion—that unsettling feeling of not being able to remember if something happened six weeks ago or six months ago. Our fiscal year ends in June, which is just a few months away. So, as odd as it feels, it is time once again to ask you about your plans for giving to the church.

Don’t worry, we’ll be mailing you plenty of materials, and you’ll hear plenty about our theme in worship. We’ll have a lot of wonderful stories to share, beautiful worship together, and some surprises along the way to delight and bring a smile to your face. It is my deep hope that we will soon be able to safely gather together in person during our third COVID winter together. We’ve come such a very long way and been through so much. And I do not forget, not for one minute, that it is because of the support and love of our members for this church that we have been able to do all of this.

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: January Adult Education information, page 2; an introduction to our 2022-23 Annual Gift Campaign, page 3; a reparations initiative in the Peace Corner page 4; the Women's Retreat is a go, page 5.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Sunday Worship at 11 a.m.

With the current COVID surge, our worship plans are somewhat in flux. Worship on February 6 will be virtual on the First United YouTube channel. We will share information for the remaining Sundays via the Eblast and on Facebook.

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)

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|--------------------------------|---------------|
| February 6 Communion Sunday | John Edgerton |
| February 13 | John Edgerton |
| February 20 | Alicia Reese |
| February 27 | John Edgerton |

Overflowing Blessings: First United's 2022-23 Annual Gift Campaign

As we look outdoors the landscape seems stuck in a season of dormancy. These are not normal times. We are obsessed by a pandemic that rises, moderates, falls, and rises again. Where do God's blessings fit in now?

Even though we often feel stuck, the days continue to click by. We celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas, baked cookies, paid bills, watched our favorite teams win (and lose) games, attended Zoom meetings, and changed our plans over and over again. Fortunately, as people in community, we are blessed by trusting that new life will come in due time.

As we enter our Stewardship season, Psalm 23 offers comfort and hope:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...He restores my soul...my cup overflows."

First United remains a fountain of blessings during these challenging days. Our pastors anchor our faith with uplifting worship sometimes in person, often streaming, occasionally gathering on our church labyrinth. Special services shower blessings with baptism and provide comfort with memorial services. Music fills our souls. Children and youth are nurtured to know God's love in their lives.

It is time for us to count our blessings and confirm our financial support for 2022-23 church operations. Generosity will look different for each household. Every gift counts. Letters of invitation and Pledge Cards will be mailed this week. Count your blessings. Make a generous annual gift to assure the strength of First United Church in the coming year.

Yours in Christ,
Stewardship Team

Reading the Bible in the 21st Century

with Dr. Nancy Lee, Professor of Religious Studies at Elmhurst University

**Join us on Zoom
February 6, 13, and 20
from 9:45-10:45 a.m.**



Join Adult Ed in February for a program that will lead us beyond the traditional Bible study to guide us in a discussion about how we might read and understand the Bible in our current times. This three-part series, led by Dr. Nancy Lee, Distinguished Niebuhr Chair in the Department of Religious Studies at Elmhurst University, begins with a session that will challenge what you think you know about the Bible. Watch the weekly Thursday Eblast for the Zoom link and additional information about upcoming sessions.



From the Council Moderator

The Church Council had a full agenda for its January meeting. Here are the highlights:

Devotion: Susan Pierson led our devotion in the month named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. She reminded us of Jesus' instructions to the disciples, not to be anxious and not to worry for tomorrow, and encouraged us to look ahead with anticipation as we discern God's call and vision for our church.

Capital Campaign Planning Task Force: Rick Ashton, Chair of the Capital Campaign Planning Task Force, reported on the next steps for consideration of a capital campaign, which include the Council's visioning work (more on that below) and the Latz team's development of a timeline for engaging congregational members in this work.

Annual Stewardship Campaign: Marcia Ashton, Chair of the Stewardship Team, reported on plans for the Church's annual stewardship campaign, set to kick off on February 6. Among other things, campaign materials will illustrate the importance of the annual stewardship drive to enable the Church to fulfill its ministries.

Financial Updates: Susan Macaulay, Chair of the Finance Team, reported on the state of the Church's finances at the halfway point in the fiscal year. Expenses are running higher than anticipated, in part due to non-budgeted expenditures, but the larger concern is on the revenue side. Pledged income is as expected, but there is a shortfall in other categories of giving, in particular, a shortfall of approximately \$44,000 in non-pledged giving. Actions have been identified to help us understand and address this shortfall in revenue.

Vision for the Future: Council members described their visions of the ideal worship experience and community of care at First United. This continues work the council began in November when members imagined ways to increase the Church's impact in the wider community and to strengthen its finances. The Council will engage with the Latz team to lead similar "visioning" discussions with members of teams and the congregation.

Update on Church Operations and Worship Planning: Rev. Edgerton reported that COVID has significantly impacted our members, the administrative staff, and the FUNS community, with many becoming sick following the Christmas and New Year holidays. This has resulted in a return to online worship and Church School as well as reduced programming in the building. Amy Cardin is carefully managing programming and communications to continue safe operations at the nursery school.

Finally, we extend our congratulations to Rev. Edgerton on his nomination to serve as the president of the Community of Congregations. We are grateful to see our church's role in the community continue to be strengthened through John's participation and leadership.

Sallie Smylie, Moderator

Meet Melissa Lurio



Melissa Lurio joined the staff of First United as our afternoon Administrative Assistant in January. A longtime resident of Oak Park, Melissa comes to us after many years of volunteer experience in Oak Park and Chicago churches. She sings in several choirs, and organizes and directs the music ministry at a French-language church group in Chicago. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, cooking, and cycling.

Melissa is working with us from 2-5 each afternoon, joining Shirley and Heather in completing the many tasks it takes to keep First United smoothly. If you give a call to the church in the afternoon and happen to speak with Melissa, please introduce yourself.

First United Pledge Registrar Kelly Pollock Is Here to Help With Your Pledge Questions

Dear Members and Friends of First United,

I am writing today as the new Pledge Registrar of First United. This role was approved by Council last year and is designed to be a liaison to congregants who have questions about their pledges or gifts to the Church.

In this new role, I might be contacting you about a pledge or a gift that you have made to the Church. Please be assured that I am committed to maintaining confidentiality at all times and the only people with access to this information will be myself and Shirley Kyle, Financial Administrator.

I know many of you, but in case we haven't met, here is a brief introduction. My family and I joined First United in the fall of 2007. Since then, I have served the Church in many ways - from the Children's Ministry Committee to Moderator of Church Council. You might know my husband Rick who served as the Chair of the Pastor Nominating Committee that called John Edgerton in 2019. Or my two children, Evan and Leah, who are both in high school and have grown up attending First United.

Please feel free to contact me with questions or concerns at pledgeregistrar@firstunitedoakpark.com. I look forward to working together to bring life to the vision of First United.

Blessings,
Kelly Pollock
Pledge Registrar

Peace Corner: Reparations—An Act of Peacemaking

Reparations, active steps taken to redress the harm of systemic racism experienced by African Americans, are important for us to consider as an act of peacemaking. Faith in Action is discussing why and how First United might implement some form of reparations. The team recognizes that, over centuries, institutions and policies have discriminated against Black people, blocking their access to housing, bank loans, employment, education, equitable health care, and justice in policing and in the courts. These structural practices created profound disparity that, in turn, constricted the financial growth and stability of generations of families. Racial justice work acknowledges this truth and asks for a response. As Christians we are called to “turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14). We are called to seek racial justice and to work to repair the harm of systemic racism.

First United is not alone in considering what reparations might look like for a church congregation. One church, the United Parish of Brookline, Massachusetts, is paying “royalties” for spirituals originally composed by African people enslaved in America that the congregation uses in worship at the church. The church acknowledges that the enslaved people who created the songs were never rewarded for their work. Whenever the church sings such a spiritual, it collects an offering to support the development of Black musicians. Their offering goes to a nonprofit youth music program, and in this way they are “helping to carry on the legacy of this music. . . .

Continued on page 5.

FUJI & FUSH





Housing Justice Volunteer Opportunity

Housing Forward is in need of volunteers to support their important work in ending homelessness. Join their volunteer team and use your skills, talents, and expertise to improve the lives of our neighbors experiencing housing crisis.

One of the volunteer opportunities is serving a shift at Housing Forward's Interim Housing residential program, located at 211 N. Oak Park Avenue (formerly the Write Inn). Volunteers check residents in and out of the facility and assist with meal service. We recently volunteered for a Saturday evening shift and appreciated the opportunity to welcome and get to know some of the residents.

For more information please contact Cherrell Jackson, Volunteer & Community Outreach Manager (708.338.1724X201, cjackson@housingforward.org) You can also see volunteer opportunities at or check out the opportunities on the [Housing Forward website](https://www.housingforward.org).



The Women's Retreat team is thrilled to confirm that we will hold a retreat this year! With on-going COVID restrictions in place at the Siena Retreat Center in Racine, this year we will capture the spirit and camaraderie of past retreats by holding a local weekend retreat (with no overnight stay). We are asking that all attendees be fully vaccinated and boosted, and we will be monitoring the local Covid-19 situation and considering any changes to be sure we keep everyone safe.

As in years past, our retreat includes women, trans feminine, and non-binary people over 18 from both First United Church of Oak Park and Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. We hope you'll join us for a weekend of inspiration, friendship, prayer, fun, good food, and self-care.

Watch your email for lots more information about sessions, activities, and registration in the weeks ahead.

Please contact Jane Barker or Martina Reese, our First United Co-chairs, if you have any questions.

Peace Corner continued from page 4.

in some ways repaying the individuals who created this music because you're supporting their descendants." See [this article](#) for more information.

We hope to explore and discuss possible ways First United might engage in the peace work of reparations. For additional information on reparations, you may consider reading ["A Christian Call for Reparations."](#)

Lois Thiessen Love and Tara Dull
Faith in Action

Our Community of Care



This group is a mix of knitters and crocheters, from beginners to experts, who make items that we gift to those in our church community as a reminder that they are loved and cared for by their church family.

We meet on the second and fourth Mondays of the month from 10-11 a.m. Here are our upcoming meetings and our recurring Zoom link:

- February 14
- February 28
- March 14

Follow this link to join us:

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



Join FCS whenever you would like for support and conversation. Use this Zoom link to drop in <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83006056785>

Dinner and a Movie, February 11

As area COVID numbers continue to improve, it looks like we are a go for this month's Dinner and a Movie!

Manchester by the Sea: While working as a handyman in Boston, taciturn loner Lee Chandler gets word that his brother Joe has died of a coronary. After returning to the siblings' hometown, Lee receives another shock: He's been named legal guardian of Joe's 16-year-old son.

At this time, we are still unable to gather for the dinner portion, and we ask that you wear a mask for the duration of the movie. But we are so glad to be able to gather again. The movie will start at 7:00 p.m. in the lounge. Call Liz Swan to sign up. 708-567-3490.





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

For the wider world:

- Those suffering from COVID or loved ones with COVID
- Those working amidst staff shortages, getting burned out, and risking their health and well-being
- An end to racism, injustice, violence
- For children and youth continuing to struggle in school, with social situations, and their mental health
- Those who are again feeling isolated, lonely, sad

For those in our midst:

- Sher & Art Spooner as Sher undergoes treatment for non-Hodgkins lymphoma
- Karla Hayter following the death of her father
- Bruce Matson dealing with complications from surgery
- For all those who were COVID+ that they are fully recovered
- Ruth Ashman's sister Millie, mourning the death of her husband Tom.

With gratitude:

- For vaccines and boosters
- Sunny, albeit cold days



Until we can safely gather in person, we will continue with our Zoom format of chapel prayer for the time being. Following worship on Sundays you will find a deacon or two in the Zoom chapel, ready to greet you for a more personal time of prayer where you can share what is on your heart or mind.

Please use [this link](#) to join the chapel.

Anti-Racism Workshops with CARE

The Chicago Presbytery's [Commission on Anti-Racism and Equity \(CARE\)](#) wants your support to intentionally and continuously assisting the Presbytery to root out and dismantle the evils of racism and white supremacy in our structures.

Our own Alicia Reese is one of the co-facilitators of CARE's Introduction to Systemic Racism workshops. The workshops emphasize the biblical and theological foundations for anti-racism and equity and provide a common language and understanding of systemic racism and white supremacy.

There are three upcoming opportunities:

- February 19, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
- March 19, 9 a.m.-4p.m.
- May 21 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

For more information and registration details, contact Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com).

CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

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|------------|----------------------|---------------|
| January 5 | Unsettled | Alicia Reese |
| January 11 | Lest We Burst | John Edgerton |
| January 19 | Why So Serious? | Lydia Mulkey |
| January 25 | Revealed by Contrast | John Edgerton |



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OF OAK PARK**

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