



the MESSENGERbell

August 2022

THE VALUE OF A LIFE

Beloved of First United,

What is one life worth? In a society that can place a dollar value on almost anything, this is a question that has no answer. It has no answer the same way that there is no answer to the question How much is the Statue of Liberty worth? It's priceless, it's irreplaceable, it's unique—just like a human life. In my own understanding of scripture, this same truth is revealed in the bible. There is a section of the law that carefully lays out rules for financial damages. I must pay this amount for damaging my neighbor's crops, that amount for harming their livestock. But if I harm my neighbor, then I cannot pay that back with money. Recompense must be "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life."

This notion—often thought of as divine approval for revenge—makes a subtle point. It may be possible to count the cost of crops in cash. But human life cannot be valued that way. There is no ratio between human life and money. The children of the living God are of endless worth. I am by no means a scholar of Islam. But I think this passage in the Quran points to the same essential truth, "whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity. One human life is of infinite worth, incalculably precious, irreplaceable.

I think back to the past year and there has been so much loss of life and violence. In the past handful of weeks, two people shot to death within a mile of each other. I know that issues of violence are complicated and solving the problems of violence is no simple matter. But as a matter of faith, there is a certain simplicity that comes from knowing the truth that human life is precious beyond counting. As people of faith, we must never allow ourselves to become inured to such things, must never allow ourselves to become accustomed to such tragedies. God will never despise a broken heart, the Psalms tell us. So in searching for ways to peace, we can begin with our broken hearts

Lead Pastor John Edgerton



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: vision focus groups now forming, page 2; 2022-23 Church School information, page 3; congratulations to our FUSH seniors, page 4; news from Faith in Action, page 5; last call for Family Camp, page 6.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Preaching Schedule for June

August 7	Lydia Mulkey
August 14	Alicia Reese
August 21 Outdoor Worship	John Edgerton
August 28	Lydia Mulkey
September 4	John Edgerton

All services are at 11 a.m. on Sundays unless otherwise noted. Worship will also be streamed on YouTube. The worship recordings also remain on the YouTube channel so that you may view them at a later time.

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)

Seeking Volunteer Liturgists

Serving as a volunteer liturgist is an opportunity to live into our vision of the worship experience here at First United. You may be asked to lead the Call to Worship or the Prayer for Wholeness or to read scripture or other liturgical pieces. We will reach out to you the Wednesday before worship with more details about your readings. Sign up to serve as a volunteer liturgist by [clicking here](#).



Sign Up to Be an Acolyte

In our worship services, children are invited to assist in worship by lighting the candles each week. Children will meet a member of the Children's Ministry Team at the back of the sanctuary who will give them a stole (a piece of fabric to wear over their shoulders) and a lighting wand. Younger children can walk down the aisle with an adult's help. [Click here](#) to sign up to serve as an acolyte.

Join the First United Choir

The First United Choir returns! We've turned the corner from being the most dangerous thing you could have done during the pandemic to now being the most joyous way of putting that all behind us. Won't you consider being part of our friendly group? We rehearse on Wednesday nights 7-8:30 p.m. and meet at 10 a.m. on Sunday mornings to get ready for the service.

Be someone who contributes to the worship experience in a meaningful way. Be someone who makes great music with some great people. Be someone who has a spiffy robe and a great view of the congregation. *Be a choir member!* Email Bill Chin (bill@firstunitedoakpark.com) to find out more.



Focus Groups Forming Now

As many of you know, First United has been planning for our future through a comprehensive vision development initiative. We are excited to have reached a critical juncture in this work, and are now looking to engage the broader congregation for their review and input.

To do this, we will be hosting a series of focus groups this summer and fall where congregation members will have a chance to provide feedback on the emerging priorities and initiatives that have been recommended to achieve our vision.

Our first round of Focus Groups will be held via Zoom on the following dates:

- Tuesday, August 23 from 6:30-8 p.m.
- Thursday, August 25 from 11:30 a.m.- 1 p.m.
- Wednesday, August 31 from 6:30-8 p.m.

To date, our vision work has been advanced by Council with input from various church teams via a Vision to Action Process. For Focus Groups, we are particularly interested in hearing directly from young parents and those passionate about building a congregation of care and powerful worship experience at First United.

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Notice of Special Congregational Meeting

Next week, August 14, after worship, the Council has called a Special Congregational Meeting for the purpose of voting to approve an updated job description and terms of call that will make Alicia Reese's position at First United an ordainable one, pending her successful examination by the Presbytery of Chicago at their September assembly meeting. We will meet in the Sanctuary and begin promptly when we have achieved a quorum. You can access a copy of the updated job description by clicking [here](#). The proposed draft terms of call are available by clicking [here](#).

Online Opportunity to Participate in Fasting From Whiteness Debrief

Over the last few months, we as a congregation have explored the impact of our Fasting from Whiteness Lenten theme. There have been two different in-person discussion sessions about what we learned about ourselves, our church, and our community (the world at large). Not everyone was able to make the congregation-wide session, and some have requested a non in-person format to share their learnings and feedback.

Council has agreed to provide a way for folks to explore this impact through a survey that asks the same questions that were explored during the in-person sessions. In addition, after feedback from the congregation we have added a question at what comes next: how we could take on more active anti-racism work in our church life, should we take on more active work etc.

Take the online survey [here](#).



Church School Is Coming Soon!

We are so excited for a great year of Church School ahead! Our theme this year is Created to Create. We know we are made in the image of the Great Creator to be imaginative, inventive, and expressive. We'll explore that in the coming year as we work to fulfill our vision that calls on us to be a progressive children's ministry that supports children of all ages and abilities, guiding their faith development, welcoming their questions and doubts, telling them the stories of the Bible, and teaching them that they have a responsibility to all God's people.



New this year: If your child was registered for Church School last year, they will automatically be promoted to the next class. All you need to do is log into your Realm account and make sure that your child's profile is complete and up to date. Please make sure to update things like any new allergies, updates to your photo permissions, or if your child will skip or repeat a grade. If there is any additional information you would like to share about your child's social, emotional, and spiritual care needs, contact Lydia (lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com).

If your child was not registered for Church School last year:

1. Make sure you have an account in Realm and that it is up to date. If you need to set up a Realm account, email office@firstunitedoakpark.com.
2. Please complete [this form](#) letting us know you would like us to place your child in a church school class.



Gather a team of up to six players, come up with a team name and join Housing Forward on Thursday, August 18 at FitzGerald's (6615 Roosevelt Road) for the 12th Annual Trivia Compete to Defeat Homelessness Night! [Click here](#) to register your team

It's a Blessing Bonanza

During August 21st Outdoor Worship, we invite you to bring your backpacks for a backpack blessing. And bring your pets for a pet blessing. And then bless and welcome the most recent new First United Members. Our blessings will surely overflow at this joyful celebration!



Congratulations Seniors!

Time always flies when we look back at our wonderful young people, but COVID really had a way of upending things for this group, so much so that we don't have any good current pictures of this wonderful group of graduating seniors. Enjoy a quick trip down memory lane as we congratulate the First United Class of 2022 (aka the Quest class of 2019) and wish them all the happiness as they embark on their next adventures!



Back row: Cole Shamhart, Noah Schrodt, Emerson Porter, Wes Krissinger
Front row: Evan Pollock, Grace Kopka, Olivia Lonergan, Caroline Lever, Samantha Duwe, Hayden Swader



Samantha Duwe, Caroline Lever, Olivia Lonergan, Kaitlyn Spillane, Amaya Wright, Hayden Swader, Cole Shamhart, Ben Nisbet, Emerson Porter

Final Summer Youth Group Events 2022

AUGUST

- **Friday, 8/5 - Fellowship:**
 - Yard Games & Bonfire!
 - 7:00 - 9:00 pm. @ church
- **Monday, 8/8 - Fellowship:**
 - Six Flags Great America
 - 11:00 am - 4:00 pm/TBD
- **Wednesday, 8/17 - Fellowship:**
 - Ice Cream!
 - 3:30-5:00 pm @ Oberweis



Quest Confirmation 2023

If you or your child are an incoming freshman and are interested in participating in our confirmation program starting in September, please let us know!

Our confirmation program is all about EXPLORATION and EXPERIENCE. Together we *explore* topics, questions, and our doubts related to matters of faith, religion, and being a Christian in the world today. Quest is also about *experiencing* what it means to live a Christian life, out in the world and within the context of a church.

We hope you will join us! Contact Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com) to sign up or for more information.

Focus Groups continued from page 2.

We are also planning additional focus groups specifically designed for youth and our Nursery School Partners. There will also be further opportunities to participate in the fall and winter seasons.

This work is being conducted as part of our ongoing Campaign Planning process, facilitated by our partners at Latz & Company. Participation is limited, so please RSVP by registering for one of the meeting dates below:

Tue Aug 23 from 6:30-8 p.m.:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcrf-qprjooG91Lu614eKUROV-TEUTVO2an>

Thu Aug 25 from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEIfuGpqzMpH9PY4vjCw9p0Ye9JQCUtRME1>

Wed Aug 31 from 6:30-8 p.m.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEIcuCvrDMiE91c66-PSfNeQIWH4KAudeEs>

If you have any questions, please contact Johnny Figel at jfigel@latzandco.com

Faith In Action in 2022-23

At our most recent meeting, we assessed the previous year and revisited goals moving forward. As Faith In Action aspires to take action following the example of Jesus Christ, we reflect on his ministry. Jesus focused his time and teachings on modeling the beloved community – extending care and resources to all people, particularly those who are suffering, marginalized, or denied equity. Jesus focused his time and teachings on our well-being and wholeness, both emotionally and physically. We hear Jesus beckoning, over and over again, to “feed my sheep.”

It is our fervent hope that the “action” work at First United is a reflection of that call as we build partner relationships, volunteer time, and financially contribute to organizations striving toward justice and peace. We hope to make a difference in areas such as housing, food security, racial equity, immigration, environmental justice, reducing gun violence, disaster response, and peace and justice in the Middle East. First United, through endowment contributions and your Fourth Sunday offerings, support a wide range of organizations including:

Beyond Hunger

Prevail

Housing Forward

New Moms

Cluster Tutoring/Learning Edge

The Boulevard

Inclusive Collective

Interfaith Green Network

One Earth Film Festival

Faith In Place

Gun Safety Consortium

United Power for Action and Justice

NESSL: National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

Seraj Library - Palestine

Chicago Religious Leadership Network

Faith In Action invites you to engage in opportunities and partnerships - we share information through eblasts and the Messenger Bell. Check out our bulletin board in the coffee lounge. We look forward to serving, learning, and growing alongside you.

-Tara Dull and Pauline Coffman, Faith In Action co-chairs

Peace Corner: Guns to Gardens

Join the discussion and learn more about this program after worship August 7. We'll gather in the library for snacks and discussion from 12:15 to 12:45 p.m.

Guns to Gardens is an initiative to live out our faith by turning tools of violence into objects of peace. The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (PPF) encourages congregations to host Guns to Garden events. People who have guns they no longer want are invited to bring their guns, for an event similar to a gun buy back, but the guns will be transformed into garden tools, and other peaceful objects. On June 11, 2022, 1000 guns were dismantled by a coalition that includes the PPF!

What does it take to do this amazing work? A congregation committed to saving lives – with a team of folks willing to organize and make it happen! Our congregation is committed to working for peace and saving lives. For us to do this work, we'd like to share with you some our current plans. We'd love for you feel energized by the opportunity to turn “swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.”



The Prayers of God's People

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

For the wider world:

- An end to gun violence
- An end to systemic injustice of all kinds
- All of those who have been and will be negatively impacted by SCOTUS overturning Roe v. Wade
- For peace in Ukraine
- For all the victims of recent gun violence & their loved ones
- All those sick with COVID

For those in our midst:

- Jerry Sebesta (is improving!)
- Sher Watts Spooner
- A friend, Morry, hospitalized with bladder cancer
- Traveling mercies to everyone coming and going, in and out of town.
- All those preparing to return to school in a few short weeks

For the joys in our lives:

- Summer Vacations
- Enjoying the last days of summer
- Burkland Family Wedding
- Miller/Gehring Family Wedding

Last Call for Family Camp 2022

First United will go to Tower Hill for Family Camp August 11 through August 14 for a weekend of camping, swimming, and camaraderie. Cost this year is based in once again based on participation. You can sign up at any time, even at the last minute.



Contact Cathy Cerniglia at cgcernig@comcast.net or 708-337-1990 with questions or for more information.

Prayer Shawl Ministry

We continue to meet over the summer on the 2nd and 4th Mondays from 10-11 am.



As we get closer to the program year, we will reassess our meeting day and time. Please join us if you are able and if the day and time do not work for you, let me know!

Our recurring Zoom link:

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

FCS: Summer Break

Fostering Connection & Support will be on hiatus for the summer. Keep an eye out for when we plan to start back up and we hope you will pop in!

CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

July 5 Prayer for America Alicia Reese

July 12 Not Today, Vampires John Edgerton

July 19 Just a Speck Floating on a Small Rock Lydia Mulkey

July 26 Comfort and Peace Alicia Reese



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