



the MESSENGERbell

March 2021

A SLOW THAWING

As I look out my window writing this, there are still icicles clinging to the gutters of my house. The backyard is still a maze of footpaths cut into a three-foot base layer of snow. In many ways, it still looks like deep, deep winter. But I can feel in my bones that something has shifted. The light in the afternoons is broader and more hospitable. The warmth in the air feels somehow more steady and secure. Yes, it is still winter. But we're on our way up.

The parallel to this is, of course, where we as a society stand with COVID. Things are still very dangerous. The death toll in this country is truly staggering, measurable and conceivable only by adding together the death totals of multiple world wars. All within a year. It is enough to freeze the soul. Yet there are signs of a slow thawing in this area, too. So many members of this church have been vaccinated already, a fact for which I am truly grateful. The Nursery School teachers and the Food Pantry staff have also been vaccinated. I can feel in my bones that something has shifted.

Yes, things are still very hard. We are still under tight restrictions. But it is beginning to feel possible to imagine what things will be like on the other side of this. It is beginning to feel possible to dream about what might be next.

As the icicles out my window shrink drop by drop, I can feel things beginning to turn.

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: Learn more about job openings and volunteer opportunities on page 3; Submit your recipe for our Chili Cook-Off Cookbook on page 4; Consider how you can dive more deeply into the life of First United on page 5; Check out this month's "Dinner and a Movie" selection on page 6.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Worshipping Virtually Sundays at 11 a.m.

[**CLICK TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE**](#)

March 7 John Edgerton
Communion Sunday

March 14 Alicia Reese
Daylight Savings Time Starts

March 21 John Edgerton

March 28 John Edgerton
Palm Sunday



Don't forget to set your clocks forward one hour before going to bed on March 13 . . .



Chat Tutorial

Are you having trouble accessing the live chat during YouTube Sunday worship on your tablet or mobile device?

Check out these tutorials for assistance:

- [Click here](#) for mobile devices.
- [Click here](#) for iPads and tablets.

Council Moderator's Report

Greetings from your Church Council! Here are some highlights from our February meeting.

I am very pleased to announce that Marteki Reed was elected Vice-Moderator of the Council. Marteki has been an involved member of our Church, serving in leadership roles on various teams, and she quickly became an active member of Council since her election last year. We look forward to her service as an officer and member of Council Leadership.

The Council also elected and welcomed another new officer – Justin Lewis, as the Church's new Treasurer. Justin has served on the Finance and Stewardship teams, and also has been actively involved with FUSH. We appreciate Justin's willingness to serve the Church in the capacity of Treasurer!

As we welcomed Justin, we also extended our heartfelt gratitude to Doug Sorensen for his faithful service for six years as the Church's Treasurer. Among other contributions, Doug advocated for an outside audit of the Church's finances, which has resulted in improved policies and procedures. Thank you, Doug!

Bob Giles, chair of the Finance Team, reported a shortfall in pledged giving that has grown over the past several months. Council Leadership has informed the congregation of this shortfall and encourages members to review and keep their pledges up-to-date. The Finance Team will consider other steps to address the shortfall.

An appraisal will soon be conducted of the Church

(continued on page 3)

building and personal property – including the Casavant organ and stained glass windows – to assess appropriate insurance coverage. Thank you to Finance Team member Ken Wylie for his leadership to spearhead the effort to locate a firm with sufficient expertise to appraise the unique features of our Church assets.

We approved formation of the Gebhard Family Building Fund, formed by allocation of \$60,000 in the Paul and Angeline Gebhard Memorial Fund. Its purpose is to provide funds for major projects (i.e., additions, improvements, modifications or renovations to the church building, grounds, equipment or facilities) that are intended (1) to enable the church to continue, improve, or expand its missions and ministries or (2) to enhance the worship or fellowship experiences available at the church. We again extend our thanks to Gene Armstrong for his initiative and commitment to ensuring the good stewardship of the Gebhard gift.

We renewed the contract of financial consultant Maureen Wheeler through July 31, 2021. At the conclusion of this contract, we anticipate needing only periodic oversight of the Church's financial transactions and recordkeeping going forward. We are grateful to Maureen for her years as our financial consultant, helping prepare for the external audit of the Church's books, serving as an interim financial administrator, and the many other accounting services she has provided.

The Council was advised of the status of a search for the successor to Operations Manager Amanda Swanson, who resigned earlier this year. The search team – composed of Christ Damon, John Edgerton, Bob Giles, Megan Lewis, Carl Nauert, Dan Pietrini, and Sallie Smylie – interviewed the staff and other stakeholders about their needs for operational support, and as a result of that research, prepared a job description for a Church Office Administrator. The position is announced elsewhere in this Messenger Bell and has been posted on the Church's website and various other job posting platforms. The congregation is invited and encouraged to spread the word and advise John Edgerton of potential candidates.

Finally, thank you to Megan Lewis for her Council devotion inspiring each of us to do our part to heal the divisions that tear at our nation and communities.

Sallie Smylie,
Moderator

Church Office Administrator Job Opening

We have an opening on our staff for a full-time Church Office Administrator and are asking the congregation to help us find candidates. Areas of responsibility for this position include office management, facilities management, elements of financial management, and operational support of the staff and congregation. Additional information can be found by [clicking here for the job description](#).

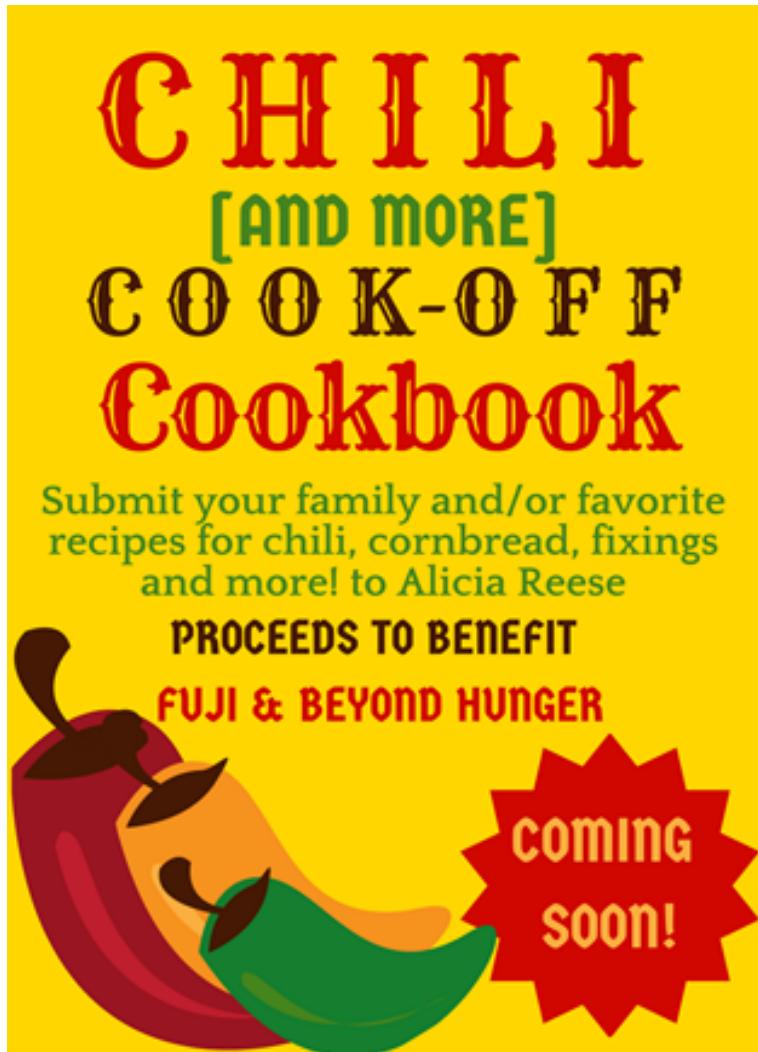
We have made our two denominations aware of this opening and have posted it on OPRF Mom Mail and several online jobs boards. If you are aware of any potential candidates, please share the position guide with them and/or let John Edgerton know of these candidates by email (jedgerton@firstunitedoakpark.com). As a reminder to the congregation, the Church's hiring policy precludes us hiring any member of the church for a position requiring more than five hours of work per week.

Thank you for any assistance, and please keep First United in your prayers for a successful outcome of this search!

Volunteer Opportunity: Contact Information Updates

In preparation for migration to a new church database, we are updating our current database to ensure that we have the most accurate information possible. As part of the process, we will be reaching out to our First United membership with a request that you update your personal information in Memberlink, and are assembling a small team of volunteers to assist with our outreach effort.

Volunteers will be asked to contact a group of First United members by email to provide them with instructions to log-in and update their information and then follow up with those contacts as needed. While it is preferred that volunteers are comfortable using MemberLink, we will provide the instructions and any support and guidance you need. Deep expertise is not required! Contact Carl Nauert (chnauert@gmail.com) for more information or to volunteer.



Help us bring this cookbook to life! The annual chili cook-off is always a fun congregation and community-wide event. Our inability to put it on this year due to the pandemic has sparked the idea to create a cookbook instead, which we hope will also be a beautiful reflection of our church family.

We would love to share with one another our delicious recipes for chili, cornbread, and whatever your favorite toppings and sides are. Based on the contestants we have had in years past, the sections of the cookbook can include:

- Traditional Chili
- Vegetarian Chili
- Unique Chili
- Cornbread
- Sides
- Toppings
- Desserts

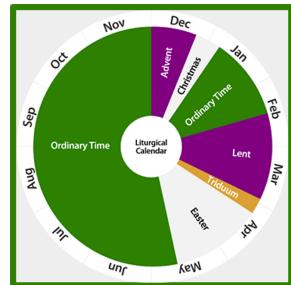
It would be awesome if you included a picture of your completed dish, too!

Once the cookbooks are assembled, we will make them available in pdf or hardcopy for a suggested donation. The proceeds will be split between our FU-JI youth group and Beyond Hunger.

Please complete this [Recipe Submission Form](#) to have your recipe included in the cookbook! And please contact Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com) with any questions you may have.

Spring 2021 Packet Is Here!

Here's your chance to enjoy the next activity packet that was distributed to the youth in FUJI and FUSH. Explore Pi Day, bake up some Irish Soda Bread, take a Lenten Journey, and play some Easter Bingo! Get your copy of the Spring 2021 packet by [clicking here!](#)



March 7 Youth Board & Self Care

March 14 Fellowship
Pi Day!

March 21 Exploration

March 28 Off for Spring Break

April 4 Off for Easter

Church Teams: A Fun and Surprising Way to Learn and Serve

Art Spooner, Chair of the Nominating Team, shares his perspective on serving on Church Teams:

What three words would you choose to describe “joining a church committee”?

The three words I chose are “surprising,” “learning,” and “fun.”

Every church meeting I attend, there’s something **surprising**. I’m surprised by a new way of reaching out to people in our local community, or people around the world. I’m surprised by putting ideas together that don’t seem to be related: one from column A and one from column B. I’m surprised by an update about something happening that I didn’t know about. I’m surprised by other people’s joys and concerns that I needed to know about in some way.

What do I **learn** at church meetings? I learn that, in spite of COVID, families are resilient places of hope. I re-learn that, when it comes to church work, one person plus one person is more powerful and effective than two people working as individuals. I learn again how to cope when things don’t go exactly according to the original plan. And I learn that, even in the midst of ugly politics, a pandemic, and continuing injustice, other people are finding focus and energy and hope.

What’s **fun** about church meetings? It’s fun to get to know other people, especially people I feel like I should know better. It’s fun to laugh together, about life’s unbelievable experiences, or sometimes just a gentle chuckle at the “same old, same old” experiences of life. It’s fun to recognize that, even though I thought a situation was hopeless, other people have been able to keep on truckin’. It’s fun to make a plan and to see the results at the next meeting, or to see the improvements over a period of a few months, or sometimes even to see results after years without progress.

On the First United Nominating Team, we hope that changing the name from “committee” to “team” will help us all think more about collaboration and partnership. This spring, the Nominating Team is carefully thinking about all the resources in our congregation, and how we might put those resources together to

better build up the Kingdom in Oak Park and around the world. We hope that each member of our community will also think about their skills and experiences, and how they might help.

Please take a few moments to discern where you see yourself in our life together, and think and pray about those you know and how they might connect. [Click here](#) to nominate yourself and/or those you know to serve First United as a member of a team or in an elected capacity. Contact Art Spooner (sandaspooner@comcast.net) if you have any questions.

March Peace Corner: Be a Witness for Peace.

It’s March and the Illinois spring legislative session has begun! Legislation is introduced by its sponsor, assigned to a committee in the House or the Senate, and the committee decides whether it will be passed out of committee for consideration for a vote.

In our work for peace to end gun violence, it is critical to support “gun-sense” legislation while opposing legislation that allows unsafe gun practice while these bills are under consideration by the committee. Witness slips are a key way to show support and opposition to bills while those bills are debated and voted upon within committee.

A witness slip is an online tool that allows a person to submit their position on a particular bill. Committees may review the number of witness slips submitted that are supporting or opposing a bill to gauge the strength of community support for or opposition to the bill. In our work on gun violence prevention, witness slips are key to our ability to move a good bill out of committee so that it can be voted upon in the House or the Senate.

This spring we will have the opportunity to provide witness slips on “Block Illegal Ownership,” aka BIO bill, HB 3245 and SB 568, a bill requiring fingerprint background checks for every gun purchase in Illinois. The bill addresses loopholes that allow violent people to have guns.

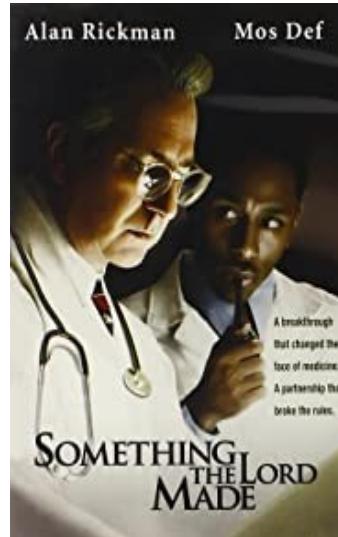
Soon, we will be requesting witness slips. Please consider making a witness for peace by completing a Witness Slip. Contact Lois at lois@thiessenlove.com to add your name to be notified, and to learn “how to.” In the meantime, check out [Illinois Witness Slip FAQ](#) on the Illinois ACLU website to learn more about witness slips.

FELLOWSHIP & COMMUNITY OF CARE

Dinner & a Movie—March 12

Join Ron Haas for dinner and a screening via Zoom of "Something the Lord Made." Our screening will begin at 6 p.m. Email Ron Haas (haas.inchicago@comcast.net) or call at (708) 415-0688) to be included in the Zoom invitation.

This Emmy-winning HBO film based on a true story follows white surgeon Alfred Blalock (Alan Rickman) and his black assistant, Vivien Thomas (Mos Def), who teamed up in the 1940s to develop a procedure to save children suffering from a heart defect. But Thomas's status as a second-class citizen prevented him from getting recognition, as Blalock took all the credit. Their relationship, while close, was complicated by the social realities of the time.



Don't miss the opportunity to spend thirty minutes on a Zoom "Getting-to-Know-You" call, meeting the Makuebos, our asylum-seeking family from Angola. When you sign up you can request to meet one or both of the parents, or, if you like, you and your children can spend some time meeting their whole family. There will be a translator on the Zoom ready to help if needed. The Makuebos are really enjoying meeting all the people who have made their move to Oak Park possible. Don't let this pandemic keep you from reaching out personally to greet them! Your Zoom awaits! [Click here](#) to sign up.

Cookie Committee - calling all bakers!

Before the pandemic, when a memorial service was held at First United, we had a wonderful group of folks who would come together to bake and provide a lovely reception following the service.



Our current situation doesn't allow us to gather for such occasions. This means we are not only grieving the death of loved ones, but are prevented from participating in the rituals that help us through the grieving process and are distanced from our community that wants to care for us.

Therefore, we are looking for anyone who would be willing to join the Cookie Committee. Our mission will be to provide a homemade baked good to those who have had a loved one die, in the hope that they might feel the love and care their church family has for them in the midst of their grief.

To add your name to the Cookie Committee roster or if you have any questions, please contact Alicia Reese.

Baking and Receiving Communion Bread!

We are fortunate to have some avid bread-bakers in our church family. We would like to help connect those who love to make their own communion bread with those who would appreciate some freshly baked bread for communion. Please contact Alicia Reese if you fall into one of these categories! Based on interest and responses received we will coordinate communion bread for folks as best we can.



Keeping Connected: Monthly Mailing



We are aware that there is a cohort of folks in our church family who have not been able to participate as fully in the life of our church in the midst of a pandemic and all of the ways that it has caused us to adapt to predominantly virtual settings.

For those without access to a computer, functioning with unreliable internet, or for those who simply don't have an email address, it is nearly impossible to know what is going on in the life of our church, as they cannot worship with us online, check the church website or our Facebook page, or receive the weekly Evotionals or Eblasts.

We want to be as connected as we can to all members of our church family! So, we have worked out a plan to mail a packet to these folks who don't much use these technologies. Each month, they will receive printed copies of the most recent Messenger Bell as well as several Evotionals and sermons. The first packet went out just a few weeks ago.

If you know of someone who would appreciate receiving this mailing, please contact Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com).

FCS: Fostering Connection & Support Drop-In

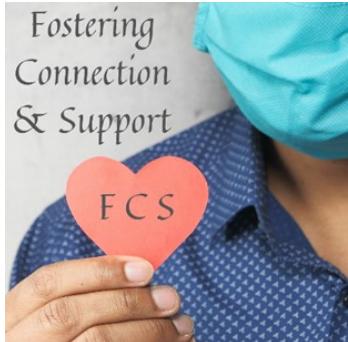
Come as you are. Come as you are able. No long term-commitment, no RSVP required!

We all are craving opportunities for connection and support. Many are experiencing Zoom fatigue, but that may be, at least in part, because of the required commitment to or nature of the time spent on Zoom: meetings that are too long, where you have to be "on" and presentable, poised, where the topic is boring or just doesn't pertain to you.

It is possible to create a meaningful relationship over Zoom, having never met in person, and to foster deeper connections on this platform. This has been the experience of some of our very own deacons! And they want to offer you these opportunities as well.

We hope FCS will be a time and space for folks to talk about what's going on in their lives – what has been difficult and what has been good. You will see that you are not alone! And that we can be a source of comfort and support for one another. You don't have to commit to coming every week, you don't have to RSVP, just drop in! We would love to see you and welcome you just as you are.

Please join us on **Wednesdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.** by following this [LINK](#)



The Prayer Shawl Ministry

In the last month Prayer Shawl Ministry delivered 3 prayer shawls to members who are grieving or struggling and are currently sanitizing more so they are ready for distribution. If you know someone who could benefit from this gift of a warm hug from their church family, please email Alicia Reese.

Join us on the second and fourth Mondays of the month from 10-11 a.m. to knit or crochet. Our time together also includes fellowship and self-care. Email Alicia Reese for more information and to join.



Deacons: Your Spiritual Caregivers

If you are experiencing a situation for which you could use some prayer and/or support, please reach out to your deacon. If you don't know who your deacon is, please contact [Alicia Reese](#).

Virtual Chapel for Prayer with Deacons

On Sundays, about 10 minutes after worship has ended, two deacons will be available for 30 minutes in Zoom for a more private time of prayer for those in need. They can pray with or for you, offer you a virtual blessing, and be a listening ear. Follow this [link](#) to join them.



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

For the wider world:

- Those in positions to make decisions during this difficult time
- For the manufacturing and distribution of the vaccine
- All those who are COVID+ and fighting for their lives
- All the caregivers, healthcare workers, essential workers, grocery store workers, and delivery employees
- Those living in isolation
- Anyone struggling with depression, anxiety, or other mental illness

For those in our midst:

- The Bergstraesser family as they mourn the death and celebrate the life of Carole
- Karla Hayter's dad, who is 96 and in hospice
- Lois Merrill's brother-in-law, who has lymph node cancer

For the joys in our lives:

- More among us have received the COVID vaccine
- Our time of worship together

CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

February 2	Time Accordion	Alicia Reese
February 9	Starstruck	John Edgerton
February 16	'Tis Winter Now; The Fallen Snow	Lydia Mulkey
February 23	What Not to Say	John Edgerton

pastoral STAFF

John Edgerton, Lead Pastor
jedgerton@firstunitedoakpark.com

Lydia Mulkey, Associate Pastor of Education
lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com

Alicia Reese, Pastoral Associate of Youth and Congregational Care
areese@firstunitedoakpark.com

submissions

to www.firstunitedoakpark.com/eventbuilder by the 15th



**FIRST UNITED CHURCH
OF OAK PARK**
848 Lake Street Oak Park, IL 60301
www.firstunitedoakpark.com
office@firstunitedoakpark.com