



the MESSENGERbell

January 2023

MAKING A PLAN

Planning was one of the toughest losses of the pandemic for me. If you ask my long-time friends, they'll tell you that I've always been the sort of person who breaks down a project into its component parts. I like to understand the whole, then weigh and understand the inner workings of a plan. The pandemic, however, took any and all plans that I had made and threw them out the window. It was disconcerting!

One of the only kinds of planning that I did, in fact, hold onto was my financial pledge to the church. I made a plan to give generously to the church, even though I could not see and understand what the future would hold. I made that plan precisely *because* I could not see and understand what the future would hold. Although a great many things could (and did!) shift underneath me, what stayed the same was my love and commitment to the church, the central place that faith would play in my life. I laid out my plan for giving to the church that made a commitment around which I could plan other parts of my life.

You'll see more of this in the weeks to come. The theme for the church's Stewardship drive this year is simple: love. And it is the simple act of love for God and love for one another that will make our church strong in this year to come. We are, thankfully, no longer in the chaos and upheaval of the early pandemic. We can look ahead into the year and even beyond to see where we are going as a congregation. What that will all look like is yet to be decided, but so long as we place love at the center, it will still be our church.

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: monthly worship information, page 2; Love FIRST. FIRST United. Stewardship Campaign, page 3; upcoming adult education programs, page 4; youth news, page 5; visitation ministry forming, page 6; information on new prison pen pals program, page 7.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Preaching in January

January 8	John Edgerton
Epiphany; Communion	
January 15	John Edgerton
January 22	Craig Howard, Executive Presbyter of the Chicago Presbytery
January 29	John Edgerton

All services are at 11 a.m. on Sundays unless otherwise noted. Worship is also livestreamed and the videos remain on the YouTube channel so that you may view them at a later time even if you can't be with us on Sunday.

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)

Lydia Back on Sabbatical for the Month of January

“Sabbaticals are a must
for healthy pastors and healthy congregations.”

The following excerpts are taken from a 2020 Presbyterian Mission article <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pt-0320-sabbaticals/>:

The word “sabbatical” has its roots in the biblical concept of Sabbath — a rest.

Sabbatical is “planned time of intensive enhancement for ministry and mission.” Different from a vacation, it is meant to be an opportunity for the pastor to strategically disengage from normal tasks so that mission and ministry might be viewed from a new perspective.

Sabbaticals are not a costly luxury, but an affordable must for the health and vibrancy of ministry.

“We tell our churches and our pastors that the sabbatical is good for so many reasons, including that it teaches both the pastor and the congregation that the congregation can survive without the pastor,” said the Rev. Dr. Jan Edmiston.

The Rev. Dr. John McFayden, executive vice president and chief of church engagement for the Board of Pensions, says he cannot stress enough the importance of sabbaticals. He says they enable pastors to get away from the demands of their responsibilities for a long enough time for the pastors to reflect on their ministry.

A pastor's sabbatical is a growing time for the congregation as well, an opportunity for the congregation to wrestle with such questions as: Who are we? Where are we going? Where does God want us to go?

These are questions that both pastors and congregations should ask during a sabbatical time. Hopefully, pastors will be able to use the time to reevaluate their own pastoral identity — what God might be calling that pastor, in that context, to do next — and that congregations will do so as well.

“It is a time to step away, to look at where we have been and where we might be going,” Edmiston said. “It is something that everyone needs, but especially when you are in a vocation where you depend on God speaking to you. It is a time to listen to what might be being said.”

Ways to Serve in Worship

Looking for a way to expand your worship experience? There are so many ways to serve in worship! Adults and youth can serve as ushers/greeters, volunteer liturgists, and members of our Sanctuary Choir, while our children are welcome to serve as acolytes.

- Sign up to serve as a volunteer liturgist [here](#).
- Sign up to serve as an acolyte [here](#).
- For more information about ushers, contact John (jedgerton@firstunited.com)
- For more information about singing with the Sanctuary Choir, contact Bill (bill@firstunitedoakpark.com).



Love FIRST. UNITED Love.: 2023-24 Stewardship Cam- paign Launches January 15

Today we honor First United's heritage as we stand on the shoulders of members who built this church more than 100 years ago. Now, with God's blessing and your generous support, we will carry forward the mission of our church into the next chapter.

We love worshipping God, as we celebrate our faith through scripture, sermon, sermons, prayers, songs and sacrament.

We love hearing the Good News of the Gospel as we join with others to lead the way to a just and peaceful world.

We love nurturing the faith of children, youth and adults as we shape Christian character and conduct.

We love caring for each other as a congregation sharing our hopes and joys, our doubts and sorrows.

We love supporting our neighbors near and far as we generously use our hands, voices, and abundant gifts to serve those in need.

Your LOVE FIRST pledge is your indication of how much financial support you plan to give to the 2023-2024 church budget. Every gift matters and every gift is used wisely to fund our dedication to increase the love of God and neighbor.

Your pledge for the coming year is an important spiritual decision as you reflect on God's gifts to you and your gratitude for these gifts. Each year the church creates an operating budget based on the income expected from all pledges. This is the basis for our planning and ministry growth to carry out God's purpose for our ministry in our community and beyond.

Watch upcoming eblasts and your mail for more information on how to pledge. With your generosity, First United Church will move forward in the coming year to support our ministries of LOVE and service.



Love FIRST.
UNITED Love.

Supporting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

As we move into the Epiphany season, we imagine Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus as refugees living in Egypt after fleeing their beloved home country due to threats of persecution. Today, we imagine the thousands of families around the world, braving perilous journeys to escape war-ravaged conditions, extreme poverty, and threats of violence in their beloved home countries.

Thank you to all who gave during our December special offering which went to mission partner NESSL. Below are some Chicago-based refugee/asylum-seekers support organizations where you can offer your time, household item donations, or financial support:

CRNL: Chicago Religious Leaders Network on Latin America: Public policy advocacy, Immigrants' Emergency Fund. <https://crln.org/welcome-to-our-immigration-program-area/>

Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights: Children who arrive in the U.S. unaccompanied face a daunting maze of physical, emotional, language, and legal challenges. As they have no representation in immigration court, the Young Center provides critical Child Advocates to work for the child's safety and family reunification. <http://www.theyoungcenter.org>

Refugee Community Connection: Amazing all-volunteer Chicago-based organization on Facebook facilitating household & clothing donations to immigrant families.

Borderless Magazine: Reports on issues impacting immigrants in Chicago. 99% of the articles are written by immigrants or children of immigrants—most recently by families from Venezuela who were bused up from Texas. Donations help to amplify their voices! <https://borderlessmag.org/>

Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants: Supports family stabilization through access to healthcare, education, food, and legal services. <https://www.icirr.org/>

Muslim Women Resource Center: Social services, ESL, health care, job skills for immigrant and refugee Muslim women and their families). <http://www.mwrcnfp.org/>

A New, But Recognizable, Year in Adult Education

Adult Education for 2023 will expand to support our members' broad interests, from the contemporary to the eternal.

A new dimension will be a lay-led Bible discussion group at 9:45 a.m. each Sunday in the conference room off the lounge (glass-walled and just east of the library). This is a resurrection of a similar group that thrived for many years in the past.

Meanwhile, our traditional programs, with presentations by academic, civic, and religious thinkers on contemporary and biblical topics, will continue at 9:45 a.m. each Sunday in Centennial Hall. On many Sundays, it may be difficult for you to decide among two offerings!

- **January 8: Bible Discussion Group** (first meeting -- to be continued every Sunday)
- **January 15: Learning Edge (nee, Cluster Tutoring): Tutoring in which Mentors Learn as Much as the Students.** (Kara Kalnitz, Exec. Dir.)
- **January 22: The Safe-T Act: The Shattering of the Handcuffs of Bail** (Kareem Butler, Chicago Appleseed Center for Fair Courts)
- **January 29: Progressive Christianity: What's Different about the Political Efforts of Church Liberals?** (Dr. Rhys Williams, Loyola)
- **February 5: Progressive Christianity: Legal and Cultural Shifts Turn 1st Amendment into Shield for Bigotry** (Dr. Rhys Williams, Loyola)

February Peace Corner: What Child by Uneq'ka 2006

For this month's Peace Corner, the Faith in Action Team shares the lyrics to a powerful song by Uneq'ka that was performed at the fall Peace Vigil.

What child is this we lay to rest
On ghetto streets where there's nothing left?
Are we to blame for this sacrifice?
So many of our children pay the price

Who's child is this whose been shot down
Where are the parents?
Why ain't the police around?

Whose child is this who decided to take a life?
Is he misguided,
Or is he dying only inside?

Bang, bang, pop, pop
Another baby shot.
And it won't stop
Until they hear the cries of the ghetto
'til we hear the cries of the ghetto

I'm on my knees praying now
not one more child shall be shot down?
I know we've got to take responsibility,
'cuz If our babies are shooting and dying,
It's on you and me

And know we've got a problem
Grownups take control
Stop passing the blame
Before we lose another soul

What'cha think you got when there ain't no jobs
When daddy's dead and gone
making life real hard
and Momma's hustlin' trying to make ends meet
and she gets a little high 'cuz of the pain of defeat

I can't hold you on my shoulders,
But I still will try
give you my heart and help
Don't want to see you die

Baby, here's my shoulder
You can lean on me
I know you're mad because your family lives in poverty
I know you're mad because you've been harassed by the police
And some of you hustlin' 'cuz you ain't got no food to eat

I know, I've been there, hustle hard
I understand the pain
Single mother in a hood
Yes, I've seen it rain

It takes a village to raise a child
But it ain't been maintained
And I'll take the blame

We've gotta take the blame
We've gotta take the blame
And do better...

Friends in Faith

Thank you to all those serving as a Friend in Faith to our Questors this year!

- Don Sibley (William Faust)
- Priscilla Sibley (Claire Garnett)
- Mark Breen (Locklin Bell)
- Sara Stevenson (Sara Issel)
- Kregg Raducha (AJ Enyia)
- Rich Wheelock (Will Garnett)
- Caitlin Zinsser (Nyah von Fischer)
- Laurie Jolicoeur (Annie Barnes)

We are also excited that each of these FIFs will join us in Quest for a session sometime this year! Their participation is just one new way we are hoping to enhance this experience and further foster these relationships for Questors and their Friend in Faith.



FUJI & FUSH

Upcoming Schedule
1/8 Fellowship + dinner
1/15 FUJI & FUSH
Fri. 1/20 FUSH Retreat
1/22 FUJI (no FUSH)
1/29 OFF-Parent/Advisor Potluck!

2023

FUSH
First United Senior High
2023 Winter Retreat
Friday, January 20
to
Sunday, January 22
\$175 per youth
Register by 1/6/2023

Tournament of Church Champions



FAIR OAKS

vs.

FIRST UNITED



Young Adult Edition

Round 3: Wednesday, January 11, 2023
TRIVIA NIGHT
First United, 7 pm

Round 4: Friday, February 3, 2023
BOWLING
Circle Lanes, 7 pm

The next two events in our “Fairly United Tournament of Church Champions” competition with Fair Oaks Presbyterian are coming up. If you are in your 20’s or 30’s (or close enough!) this is for you!

There is a trophy, but the main goal is fun, fellowship, and friendly competition.

We hope you will join us! If you are interested in participating, contact Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com) to make sure you receive the informational emails about these events!

Upcoming Quest Sessions
~2023~
Jan. 8 #7 "Discipleship"
Jan. 22 #8 "Holy Spirit"
Feb. 5 #9 "Prayer"
9:30-10:45 am

Visitation Ministry

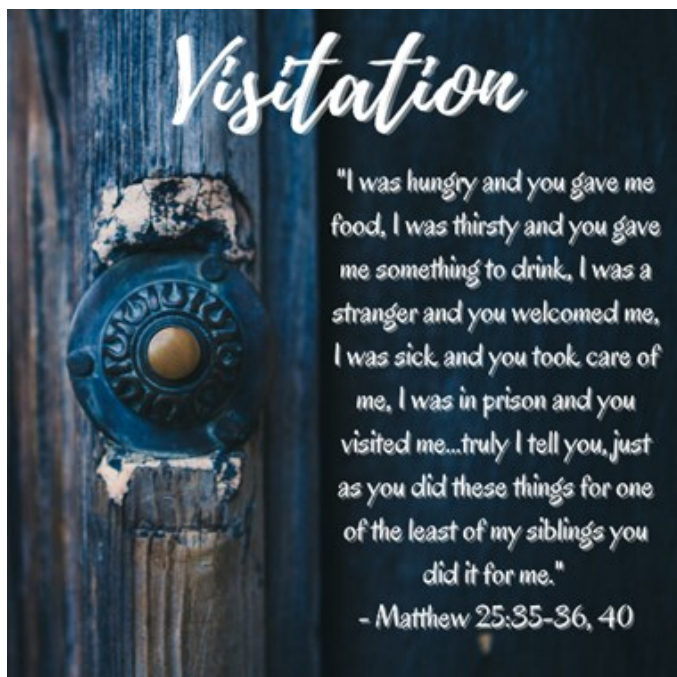
Are you called to be a part of Visitation Ministry?

The purpose of a Visitation Ministry is to assist pastoral staff in carrying out assigned tasks related to pastoral care, specifically, visiting members in times of illness, hospitalization, or other crises to provide care and support.

Due to the pandemic, we moved away from regular visitation, but we would like to bring it back in an intentional way that provides those who would like to visit other members with the tools and support needed to feel comfortable and confident doing these visits, as well as coordinating our efforts so that those who are visited know what to expect and don't fall through the cracks.

We—the congregation, community, and members of First United—are a community of care, always striving to be more caring of and toward one another. Visitation Ministry is a wonderful way to do just that and you don't have to be a deacon or join a team! All you need is a desire to connect with people who need connection.

Please contact Alicia Reese if you are interested in becoming a visitor and/or if you are aware of folks who would enjoy being visited regularly. There will be more information to come regarding preparation for this role and how this will be structured moving forward in the new year! Areese@firstunitedoakpark.com



Dinner and a Movie, January 13

Friday, January 13: The Janes: In the spring of 1972, police raided an apartment on the South Side of Chicago. Seven women were arrested and charged. The accused were part of a clandestine network. Using code names, blindfolds, and safe houses to protect their identities and their work, they built an underground service for women seeking safe, affordable, illegal abortions. They called themselves Jane. Facing off against the mafia, the church, and the state, the Janes exhibited unparalleled bravery and compassion for those most in need. Dinner at 6 p.m. (\$5 donation); movie at 6:30 (free). Call Liz Swan (708) 567-3490 to RSVP.



Zoom Links for Recurring Virtual Groups

Fostering Connection and Support

FCS meets weekly on Zoom for a time of informal connection and support. This is a drop-in group. Come when you'd like. Stay as long as you can. Here's the link to join whenever you are able: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88937766305>

Prayer Shawl Ministry

Prayer Shawl Ministry meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month from 10-11 a.m. Please join us if you are able. If the day and time do not work for you, please reach out to Alicia Reese (areese@firstunitedoakpark.com). Use this link to join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85035296628>





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

For the wider world:

- Those most vulnerable this time of year, without enough food or sufficient shelter
- The victims and loved ones of the Club Q tragedy
- Peace in Ukraine
- Peace in Israel/Palestine
- All those negatively impacted by climate change disasters

For those in our midst:

- The Smylie Family, mourning the death of Sallie's brother
- The life of Barbara Ballinger
- The Haisman family, mourning the death of Janet's sister-in-law, Gracie.
- Mariel Stitzel's brother, David.
- Jerry Sebesta
- All those recovering from COVID

For the joys in our lives:

- **New Members!** Ann Zinsser, Elaine Labuz, Cait Joycesmith
- Vicky Lekovish and Jim Wisuri have a new grandbaby, Marshall Lee.
- Prime Time soup luncheon
- All those who have volunteered as lay liturgists in the last month! (Marteki Reed, Joanne Despotos, Susan Macaulay, the Scaletta family, the Auch family)

Prison Pen Pals Program

Would you like to write to a prisoner incarcerated in Illinois? Communicating with a prisoner just twice monthly can provide comfort and lend support. To learn more, join us in the chapel at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, January 31, where the leader of Unity Temple's Prison Pen Pals program will explain how you can participate and help add meaning to a prisoner's life.



RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

Dec. 20	Moving In Closer	Tara Dull
Dec. 27	Far Astray	John Edgerton
Jan. 3	Is It Too Late for a Change of Venue?	John Edgerton



Thanks to our musicians from the December caroling event presented by Adult Ed!



**FIRST UNITED CHURCH
OF OAK PARK**

848 Lake Street Oak Park, IL 60301
www.firstunitedoakpark.com
office@firstunitedoakpark.com