



the MESSENGERbell

January 2022

COVID UPDATE ON CHURCH PROGRAMMING

In the past week, COVID infection numbers across the country have far surpassed any prior levels. This reality has been reflected in the church's staff as well as others who work in the building. Including the Nursery School, roughly a third of the people employed by the church are currently COVID positive or their spouse is COVID positive. It is our fervent hope and prayer that all of them will quickly and fully recover from their illness.

Because of the large number of staff illnesses, it is not possible for the church to continue full operations. In particular, indoor worship services require a great deal of staff support and are not currently possible. So for the time being, we will hold Sunday morning services on YouTube, which the ministers and music staff will prerecord. Dolores Register's memorial service has been relocated. It will still be held this Saturday at noon, but will be hosted at the Nineteenth Century Club.

In addition, we are not able to open the building outside of daytime business hours—and if you need to come by the church during the day, we ask that you please call ahead to make sure our administrative staff is available. Any team meetings or other church programming that was scheduled to be held in the building will now be held on Zoom. If you need help setting up a Zoom meeting, please reach out to Heather Vanderberg.

In truth, this turn of events is very humbling. I had been quite proud of the precautions our community had taken. I had felt that the relatively low number of illnesses in our community showed that we had done a good job. And I suppose that is still true. However, in the past few weeks, I have lost count of the number of members who have fallen ill with COVID. I make phone calls now every day to check in on people, and the number grows day to day. As I said, it is humbling.

If you or anyone in your household becomes ill, please do let me know. We want to know about one another's trials and difficulties. We want to hold one another in prayer. We want to pray for each other by name, as we continue to pray that this wave of infections should spare us and our neighbors the worst ravages of the past years.

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; meet some new First United members, page 3; news from our Children's and Youth Ministry Teams, page 4; opportunities to participate in our Community of Care, page 5 & 6.



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 January 9 will be virtual on the First United YouTube channel. We will share information for the remaining Sundays via the Eblast and on Facebook.

January 9	John Edgerton
January 16	John Edgerton
January 23	Alicia Reese
January 30	Lydia Mulkey



How does Evangelical Christianity's alignment with right-wing politics impact mainline Protestantism, and what are the implications? Join Dr. Rhys Williams, professor of sociology at Loyola University-Chicago whose research has focused on the intersection of politics, religion and social movements in American culture, for two discussion sessions.

Given our current COVID situation, we expect that this program will run virtually. Watch the Eblast for more information and a Zoom link.

Peace Corner 2022

The people of Afghanistan are in severe crisis. 3.5 million people are facing starvation after years of drought and international aid reductions. Let's pray and act.

We Pray for Afghanistan's People Today

CRADLE SONG 11.11.11.11 ("Away in a Manger")

We pray for Afghanistan's people today:
for those who are fleeing — who know they can't stay,
for those who face terror by day and by night,
for those who can't leave and whose dreams can't take flight.

We pray for the people who fear what's in store,
for dreamers and poets who grieve a closed door.
for those who are hiding so no one will see
the people they are — or who they hope to be.

We pray for girls facing a world they don't know,
who still long to read and to learn and to grow.
We pray for young women who live with the fear
their bodies, their voices, may soon disappear.

We pray for young children whose first lullabies
were bombs and explosions and wounded ones' cries—
and for those who served there, who see how it ends,

Continued on page 5.



Have you noticed the worship livestream on the monitor in the lounge? We're exploring how we can use technology to support those who need to make a shift in how they worship with us, for any reason. Whether the sanctuary is feeling just a little too crowded for you or you'd just like the opportunity to move around a bit, we want you to continue to be a part of worship at First United! We do ask that you continue to wear your mask and be mindful of distance while you are worshipping via the lounge livestream. Lounge livestream will be available when we are worshipping in-person. This is a trial run for now. If the livestream proves to be useful to our community, we will make it a regular part of our Sunday morning service.

Welcome New Members

We have welcomed several new members to our First United Family since the summer. Please make a point to welcome them as you see them.

The Temperly Family

The Temperly Family includes Todd, Chris, Kainoa (4), and Grace (2). They moved to Oak Park three years ago from Hawaii. Todd and Chris were both raised in the Midwest and are happy to be back.



Todd is a General Manager for Hilton Hotels and Chris is a stay-at-home dad. As a family they enjoy trips to Brookfield Zoo, movie nights and outdoor activities. They joined First United in September and are happy to be a part of our amazing church community.

The Ricordati-Klusken Family

David, Christina, and their four boys, Hank (6), Teddy (4), Joe (2), and Patrick (7mo) live in River Forest. They have been a part of the First United Nursery School since 2017 and Christina currently serves as the FUNS board chair. When not chasing after her four little ones, Christina works on public policy for an education nonprofit. David works as a regional team leader for an energy services company. They love showing their boys different parts of the country and supporting them in their various activities (swimming, gymnastics, soccer, and more!). Christina is an avid sports fan while David loves to work on his classic car collection. They both grew up in the western suburbs and met in 2009 while attending the University of Chicago.

From the Newcomers Team!

Did you know that we have welcomed six families to First United DURING COVID? Since the beginning of COVID First United has added 19 new members (11 adults, 8 children) to our ranks. What a joy!

Would you like to be part of that joy? Are you looking for a way to engage with people at First United? Do you enjoy watching our church grow with new members? Do you like to help others learn about our church and our faith? Do you just like meeting new people?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, the Newcomers Team is for you. We are a small but mighty group who meet, greet, educate, and extravagantly welcome potential new members to First United Church. Our goals are to orient people to the church, help the congregation learn more about the potential new members and their passions, and begin to create a small community within the larger church body from which people branch out and make First United their own.

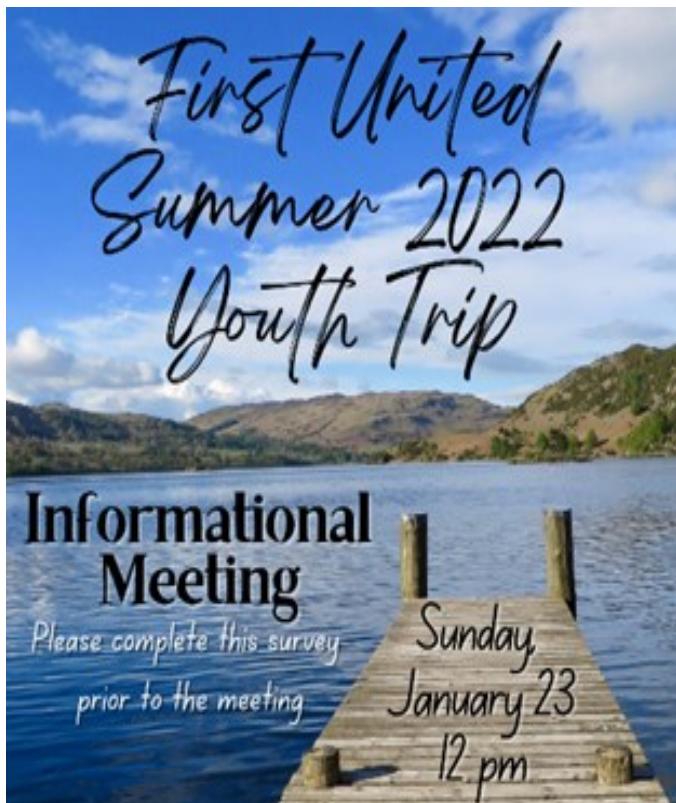
We meet on the second Tuesday of every month from 7 to 8 p.m. to plan reach-outs to newcomers and to plan our four-part, triannual series that leads our newcomers into membership. We have made successful modifications through COVID and had our first in-person tour of the church in October. As we plan for continued in-person worship, we hope to expand our team to welcome even more newcomers! You don't have to be a long-time member, but you do need a willingness to greet folks and make them feel welcome. Contact Teri Omert (tomert@comcast.net) for more information about the Newcomers Team.

David Kuipers

David has lived in Oak Park with his wife, Sirimas "Benz" Amatayakul, and children, Grant Kuipers (11) and Collin Kuipers (8) since 2018. They really love Oak Park and appreciate their neighbors and the community overall. Both children attend Beye Elementary and especially enjoy reading, outdoor activities and music. David is originally from Michigan and his wife is from Thailand. They lived in Thailand from 2009 to 2015. David is a CPA and works for a real estate company in the north loop. Sirimas is an artist and works from her studio in their home. In his spare time David likes reading, walking, running, biking or doing some other outdoor activity.



News from Children's and Youth Ministries



Join us on Sunday, January 23, after worship for an informational meeting for parents about the FUSH 2022 summer work camp. We are not sure yet whether we will meet in person or on-line, so watch the Eblasts and Alicia's weekly emails as we get closer to the date. To assist with our planning, please take a moment to fill out this [preliminary survey](#).



Church School Update

Due to a surge in COVID cases in the wider community and within the First United community, Church School will move to Zoom for the next three weeks. Join us for connection, faith formation, and fun at 9:45 a.m. on January 9, 16, and 23. Use [this link](#) to join.

As a reminder, there is no Church School on the last Sunday of the month. We hope and pray for an end to this surge so that we can see you again in person in February.



Our Community of Care

90 + Birthday Celebration

Last month we celebrated our members who are 90+ years old with a card and a small gift. Here are the members and their birthdays again if you would like to send your own Happy Birthday messages!

Walter Ziegenhals – December 30

Hortense Lindsey – January 5

Herta Lisic – March 18

Betty Gehring – April 20

Marilyn Heinrichs – May 23

Marjorie Fallon – June 3

Elizabeth Rielly – June 18

Marion Davis – July 17

Barbara Ballinger – July 21

Anna Sadowski – August 4



Prayer Shawl Ministry

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:

- January 10
- January 24
- February 14
- February 28

Follow this link to join us:

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



It's a new year! Maybe you are looking for something new to try, for a new way to connect with our church family. FCS is a wonderful opportunity to do just that. It is an open and informal gathering that meets for just one hour, and you are welcome to pop in for as much or as little of that time as you would like or your schedule allows. We hope to see you there!

Here is the link we use every week <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83006056785>

Peace Corner continued from page 2.

who ponder their service, who grieve for lost friends.

We weep for the places where war leads to war.
We pray for your hand there to heal and restore!
Bless all who seek justice and peace as your way.
We pray for Afghanistan's people today.

Tune: William James Kirkpatrick, 1895

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Action steps to help the people of Afghanistan:

- Pray for the people of Afghanistan.
- Act: Tell Congress to urge the Administration to expedite and expand access for Afghan refugees. Use this link: <https://tinyurl.com/26dd7r2e>.
- Welcome Afghans who immigrate here.
- Address hunger through humanitarian aid organizations whose aid goes directly to the Afghan people: [World Food Program](#), [UNICEF](#), and [the FAO](#).

The Prayers of God's People

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

For the wider world:

- All those suffering as a result of COVID and its variants
- The survivors of devastating disasters
- An end to gun violence and violence of all kinds

For those in our midst:

- The Register family as they mourn the death and celebrate the life of Dolores
- Ted and Joanne Despotes
- Al Parchem following knee replacement surgery
- All who have COVID or have loved ones with COVID

With gratitude:

- Our Christmas celebrations
- A new year

Join the Deacons for ...

Chapel Prayer By Zoom

Sundays, following worship.

Due to the current COVID situation, we are returning to 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. The Deacons will listen to your story and pray with or for you.

The Deacons are always holding their care groups and our entire church family in their prayers, but are always looking for ways to connect with and provide care for our community. We look forward to welcoming you into the chapel! Come as you are.

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



CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

December 7	A Deeper Joy	Alicia Reese
December 28	In Between	John Edgerton

Like so many other things, our Evotional schedule has been disrupted by the current COVID surge as we have balanced the need to get you updated information on COVID impacts as they arise with an eye towards not inundating your inboxes with emails. For this reason, we occasionally need to preempt the publication of our weekly Evotional. We are very much looking forward to a time when we no longer have to make this choice and are able to bring you Evotionals on a regular weekly basis.



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