



the MESSENGERbell

May 2022

ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE

Beloved of First United,

From the very first conversations I had with First United, church leadership was clear about a need for a capital campaign. The reason for that is vision. Every church, every college, every non-profit must always be at the work of casting an inspiring and bold vision for the future. For First United, that looks like a from-the-ground-up process where the voices of our members are heard loud and clear. The dreams and aspirations of the members of this church will provide us the vision we need.

I am excited to say that we are engaged in that visioning work in earnest now. We are looking at so much more than retiring the margin loan. This is about discerning God's call for where we should be going as a church, and what it will take to support the journey.

This month, Church Council, the Deacons, and every church team will be participating in visioning sessions. From Finance to Fellowship, Newcomers to Faith in Action, the elected lay-leaders of the congregation will be deeply engaged in visioning work in the month of May.

But we aren't going to stop there! In the coming months, every single member, visitor, and friend of the church will be invited to be part of this vision-casting process as well. Watch this space, and when the invitation comes to be part of these visioning sessions, I hope that you will enthusiastically participate.

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: summer worship highlights, page 2; the Moderator's Report, page 3; "Loving with Books" kicks off, page 4; Children's Ministry and Youth news, page 5, Dinner & a Movie, page 6.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Preaching Schedule for April

May 8	John Edgerton
May 15	Lydia Mulkey
May 22	John Edgerton
May 29	John Edgerton

We have returned fully to in-person worship and programs. 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](#)



Chapel Prayer will continue to meet during the month of May whenever worship is in person. We will break for the summer June 5 through September 4.

Summer Worship—Services at 11 a.m. This Summer.

Please note that we will NOT have summer worship hours this year. Worship will continue at 11 a.m. throughout the summer.



With Appreciation from the Alsaad Family

We received this lovely note from Nadia Al Saimary thanking First United for continued support of her family:

Hello members of First United Church,

I want to express my thanks and heartfelt appreciation for your standing with me at the recent tragic death of my sister and her family. You have been there for me and my family, both in our grieving and in our joy. My sister was everything to me. She gave me advice and guidance and taught me many things about life. I lost her and feel emptiness in my life. I miss hearing her voice and her laughter, but I know she is in the best place for her.

I want to thank all those at First United who shared my sadness and pain and stood with me in prayer. I appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Thank you very much!
Nadia Al Saimary (Alsaad)



From the Council Moderator

Greetings on behalf of your Council, with a brief recap of our April meeting.

Devotion: Marteki Reed offered the evening's devotion. Traditionally, the second Sunday of Easter focuses on the disciple Thomas, who is known as "Doubting Thomas." For all that we call him doubting today, Thomas was also the only disciple with enough courage to venture out into a scary world with threatening figures when the other disciples were paralyzed into inaction by fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD). Marteki encouraged us to be more like Thomas, to be more willing to venture out, to not give in to paralyzing FUD, and to continue to use our power as disciples of Christ to do good in the world.

Lenten Theme: Rev. Edgerton provided an overview and timeline of the media and public reactions to the Lenten Theme "Fasting from Whiteness" as well as outreach efforts by the Church to explain the theme's message and intent. Rev. Edgerton explained that the decision to hold the Palm Sunday service only on-line, while unfortunate, was deemed the safest course of action in light of threats that had not yet been fully investigated by the Oak Park Police Department. The pastoral staff, Council members, and other leaders will gather in the coming weeks to reflect on the experience and discern implications and lessons for the Church's anti-racism activity.

Vision for the Future: Council members received additional feedback from teams on the preliminary vision framework developed around four pillars of Church life: the church experience, the community of care, the Church's engagement and impact in the wider community, and financial sustainability and organizational support. Representatives of Latz & Company reported on their planning for facilitated team discussions in May that are designed to solicit further feedback and action items for each of the four pillars.

Finance Report: Susan Macaulay, Chair of the Finance Team, reported that as of the end of the Church's third fiscal quarter, revenues continue to lag behind projected receipts by approximately \$92,000, half of which represents a shortfall in pledge receipts, and the other half representing anticipated building use and other payments. Susan noted that as we enter the fourth quarter, it is expected that pledge receipts will improve

with reminders that the period for 2022 pledge payments ends June 30, not December.

Annual Stewardship Campaign: Marcia Ashton, Chair of the Stewardship Team, gave an interim report on the results of the Overflowing Blessings Stewardship Campaign. As of mid-April, the church has received pledges totaling \$522k from 126 households. The team will be following up with the approximate 56 households who previously pledged but have not yet made a pledge this year, and is developing a strategy porting to encourage further pledging. The campaign's end date is May 31.

See you on **Sunday, May 22**, for the post-worship congregational meeting to elect new Elders, Deacons, and Nominating Team members!

Sallie Smylie, Moderator

Overflowing Blessings: Every Kernel Counts

During this year's stewardship season, we leaned into popcorn as a metaphor about how you can start with small gifts that explode into overflowing, abundant blessings through our work here at First United. And we have been so grateful to watch those gifts come in to support our many ministries. Our popper is filling up with kernels of blessing potential. Currently, 33% of First United households have pledged a gift (of any size) to support our Church during the 2022-23 fiscal year. One third of a cup of kernels makes a nice batch of popcorn.

But, if 69 more households make a pledge this year, we will have 50% of First United households pledging. Have you seen how much more popcorn you get from a half of a cup of kernels? It's quite a bit! To those who have already given, thank you so much for your support of First United. To those who have not, please consider making a pledge to help us reach our goal of 50% household participation in this year's stewardship season. Every pledge, no matter the size, helps First United do the work to bless our members, our community, and our world.

Make your pledge today using [this card](#) or online via Realm. Thank you!



Alert: Free Stuff

... to do. The Nominating Team invited you to think about how you might join in the work, mission, and governance of our church. If you are interested in getting involved, there are immediate critical needs for volunteers. This month we are highlighting the following three:

1. Communications - This team seeks to tell the church's story inside and outside the church and assist other church committees in ways to do so. Any experience with Social Media or Web sites would be a plus but anyone is welcome.
2. Finance - This team works with each other team to create the budget (and recommend revisions based on trends in expenses and pledges), create the stewardship program, and monitor endowment investments and draws. Any experience with finance or accounting would be a plus but anyone is welcome.
3. Worship, Music and Arts- This team serves at the intersection of the congregation and the staff to promote and sustain vital worship at First United. Are you creative, talented in music or the arts, have great ideas about worship services?

If any of these opportunities are of interest to you, please send your name and best contact information (phone number and/or email, plus time of day) to office@firstunitedoakpark.com.

A member from the Nominating Team will contact you to discuss your interests and determine the next steps. Thank you and God bless from the Nominating Team.

Loving with Books: New Moms & New Babies

Join us as we launch Loving with Books, Housing Justice's new initiative to benefit long-time neighbor (5 blocks away!) and mission partner New Moms. New Moms takes a book to its participating moms and babies on each client visit. To keep them well-supplied with board books appropriate for babies 0 – 3, New Moms has launched a book drive to have and maintain a collection of 1500 books for this purpose.

Our goal for **Loving with Books** is to purchase 100 books to donate to New Moms' book drive. Books range in price from \$8-15. We are excited to be in con-

versation with New Moms about what books they want to offer as gifts at this precious time in a mom and baby's life together. Lots of cool conversations are thoughtfully guiding the way this project is unfolding.



An inspiring part of this project is the opportunity to build new partnerships. AfriWare Books, a Black, woman-owned bookstore by Nzingah Nommo in Maywood is collaborating with New Moms and First United to select empowering board books with inclusive stories, inspiring messages, and diverse artwork.

Sponsor one or more board books for new moms to read to their babies while cuddling and learning to love books together. Here's how:

- In person in the lounge on May 8 or 15: View a table display of empowering board books and sponsor by donating as much as you can (check or cash) to support the purchase of as many books as you are able. As a fun add-on, please also add the title of your favorite childhood book to First United's first "Favorite Childhood Books" list in the Lounge and watch the titles emerge over time.
- Electronically through May 22: [click here](#) and select "FIA—New Moms: Loving with Books" make your donation
- Coming Soon: a landing page from AfriWare books that will allow you to purchase books directly. Watch upcoming eblasts for more information.

Our Sunday school children will also participate by discussing this project and collecting money in their classes throughout May. On May 22 they will have a "book shopping and reading" experience during the Church School hour, choosing books to read before we give them to New Moms.

Books and kids – ours and those of the new moms. What could be better?!

Questions? Contact Deb Stracco (708-638-9190), Laurie Jolicoeur (708-822-0265), or Ann Armstrong (708-657-4484).

Congratulations to the Quest Class of 2020

On Sunday, April 24, after two years of waiting, we finally celebrated the confirmation of our Quest Class of 2020! Unfortunately, not all confirmands were able to be in attendance, but it was a truly wonderful worship service and celebration of an amazing group of young adults, who chose to claim the church and answer the call to be disciples. I am so proud of them and grateful to have had this opportunity for them to lead worship!

Congratulations to the Quest Class of 2020!

Sebastian Alonso*
Maddie Carter*
Sam Chapman-Rienstra
Joe Guevara
Ava Issel
Gwendolyn Keyes
Lucas Kult-Banout

Henry Metric
Paloma Pareja*
Lillie Porter
Caroline Raducha
Mitch Reading*
Thomas Reading*

*Were not present on 4/24



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.





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

For the wider world:

- The people of Ukraine, those with loved ones suffering in Ukraine
- An end to gun violence
- All those suffering because of COVID -19

For those in our midst:

- Cindy Palombi
- Julie Nauert
- Beth Dickerson and her sister who is battling pancreatic cancer
- Sher Watts Spooner
- All those who have been COVID+ recently: the Sibleys, the Dulls, Debbie Prieser, Keith Liesse, and more

For the joys in our lives:

- The Quest Class of 2020! Finally getting to celebrate them as a whole community, in person
- Congratulations to Henry Metric on your baptism
- All those who helped make Holy Week happen! All our Mandy Thursday/Tenebrae leaders, bakers, servers, hosts, set-up and clean-up crews and more
- Getting to celebrate Easter in our sanctuary
- New members, Dale & Carol Porfilio
- Herta Lisic turned 100 years old in April!

Fostering Connection & Support

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



Dinner & A Movie

Join us in the lounge on May 13 for a showing of "Nomadland." In the rural Nevada town she calls home, Fern packs her van and sets off on the road. Exploring life outside conventional society as a modern-day nomad, Fern soon discovers a resilience and resourcefulness that present her with experiences unlike any she's known before. Along the way in this story of hope, she meets other nomads who become mentors in her life amidst the vast, sometimes breathtaking landscape of the American West. Dinner at 6:00 (\$5 donation); Movie at 6:30 (free). Call Liz Swan, 708-567-3490 to RSVP.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

Meets on the second and fourth Mondays of the month from 10-11 a.m. Zoom link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85035296628>

If you know someone who could use or would appreciate a prayer shawl. Please contact Alicia Reese areese@firstunitedoakpark.com.

CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

April 5	So Are You Ready?	Alicia Reese
April 20	Meaningful Moments	Lydia Mulkey
April 26	It's the End of the World as We Know It	John Edgerton



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

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