



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK
an open community united in love & justice



2022
Annual Report

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING NOVEMBER 13, 2022



AGENDA

Call to Order	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Opening Prayer	John Edgerton, Lead Pastor
FY 2023 Budget	Susan Macaulay, Finance Team Chair
Treasurer's Report	Dave Marshall, Treasurer
Ministry Outline	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Capital Campaign Report	Rick Ashton, Capital Campaign Task Force Chair
Adjournment	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Closing Prayer	John Edgerton, Lead Pastor

FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK STAFF

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Jésus Santiago, Custodian

Jesse Tijerina, Custodian

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LEAD PASTOR

John Edgerton
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The past year has been a roller coaster. Perhaps it is just the COVID effect of time seeming compressed, but really quite a bit has happened. It was almost exactly a year ago that we began holding our worship services indoors again. This involved yet another pivot of how our worship life functions, with our services being held in a hybrid format—both in person and online. We had about six or seven weeks to get used to that new reality before the Omicron wave showed up just prior to Christmas. We were thrown back on our heels again and had to return to full remote for a time. The Omicron wave—for all its ferocity—also was relatively short-lived and we were able to return to holding services indoors in time for our Lenten services. Once again, we had about six weeks before another, totally different kind of wave came crashing down on the church.

Our Lenten theme “Fasting from Whiteness” became a piece of international news. This occurred after a concerted effort by Turning Point USA chose to hold our congregation up for pillory. I am not going to recount the entire episode in this report. But for any who are reading this report in later years seeking insight into what occurred, I would recommend reading an April 11, 2022, piece from the publication [Religion Dispatches](#) authored by Frederick Clarkson.

What I will spend some time discussing is the steps we have taken since the end of Lent. We held a number of congregational “debrief sessions” in the hopes of learning how the congregation reacted to our shared experience. We held these first with Council and Deacons. We then later held multiple open sessions after church. Then, hoping we could engage even more people, we sent out an invitation for written responses as well. Over 100 individuals participated in these conversations. Members’ responses varied quite a bit. Some were enthusiastic that our church was taking a public stand on a central issue of the day. Others wished that our theme had been framed in a way that wouldn’t have caused any division. Just about everyone noted their deep gratitude for the hospitality of Oak Park Temple hosting us for Maundy Thursday. The main question that each session left with was “what are we going to do next?” Those who were excited about the theme as well as those who found it unnecessarily divisive were agreed in principle: our “fasting from whiteness” theme should be a springboard for further work in the area of racial justice. That is a large question, and you’ll see this reflected in a concrete way in this year’s ministry outline. It outlines racial justice as one of two crucial areas of work for our social justice program (the other being gun violence). Faith in Action also continues to work on projects and partnerships that value racial justice.

In addition, we are exploring ways that racial justice or other social justice programming might be part of a Capital Campaign. You’ll be hearing more

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LEAD PASTOR

about the Capital Campaign during this year's annual meeting, but I want to highlight some of the work we've done in the past year. Working with our consultants Latz and Company, we completed a broad listening campaign, seeking to know more about where the members of this church want to see us going in the coming years. This touched every team and committee of the church, numerous informal fellowship groups, and several open "come y'all" sessions. We received over 200 distinct suggestions, and spent the summer analyzing and considering that input. Church Council has wrestled with this over several months, and we currently consider there to be four main areas (or "pillars") to what we heard. The four pillars are: improve the financial position of the church, improve the experience of welcome in our church particularly as it relates to accessibility, deepen the sense of community among our members, and expand our social justice witness. That is the 30,000-foot view of what the congregation has said. The work that is going on right now as it regards the Capital Campaign is to develop that 30,000-foot view into a list of actionable, achievable projects that fit within a financial goal that is feasible for us. Church Council will continue to be a central leader in that work and you should expect to hear more about that in the coming months.

My work for the coming year will be to oversee the implementation of this year's ministry outline. So if you're wondering "what's John going to be up to?", I would point you toward that document to find my marching orders from the Council.

It has been quite an eventful year—even by the standards of my pastorate here at First United. Looking back over three years, the first year included needing to shift entirely to online worship. The second year included almost a full 12 months of online-only worship and navigating the tragedy and logistical nightmares of COVID. The third year included a shift to in-person (then back online!), then a most unwelcome brush with international attention. If these years have taught me anything it is that this church is resilient, hopeful, tough, and has a sense of humor. I am grateful for the opportunity to minister among you in this season; it is certainly one that future generations will look back upon and wonder "how did they handle all of that?" With God's help, with the generosity and prayers of the faithful, and with a sprinkling of good luck, the coming year will find us stronger and more faithful as a congregation.

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PASTORAL ASSOCIATE, YOUTH MINISTRY AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Alicia Reese

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When I think back over the last year at First United, here are the things that stick out:

Worship did not happen fully indoors until 2022! We did a combination of worshipping outside at 9 a.m. and then online at 11 a.m. while the weather permitted it. Once we were indoors and livestreaming regularly, COVID still forced us to pivot a few times. Since then, it has been such a blessing to be back worshipping in person in our sanctuary AND still worshipping online!

Lent was a lovely experience of making room for diverse voices, choosing to center voices of People of Color in our worship through music, liturgy, poetry, and story. This included participating in the “Tell Me the Truth About Racism” series in partnership with St. Christopher’s. It was a beautiful coming together of our churches and our people, sharing fellowship over meals in an intergenerational setting, and engaging on the topic of racism. It is so important that we do these kinds of things because the church has historically been and often still is an institution that perpetuates harm.



I don’t think anyone will forget the backlash we received in response to our Lenten theme of “Fasting from Whiteness.” It was a difficult season for all involved in or associated with First United. However, this led to probably the most incredible and generous gift of hospitality I have ever experienced from our Jewish siblings. The congregation of Oak Park Temple graciously offered us the use of their space, in the midst of their own high holy days, to host our Maundy Thursday services when we did not feel safe enough to do so in our own space. This was a profound experience.

Quest consisted of a larger class than usual because it was a combination of freshmen and sophomores. It made for a wonderful, rich learning environment driven by all our questions, doubts, and wonderings. We finally got to celebrate the Quest class of 2020 with an in-person worship service in May of 2022 and a month later celebrated the Quest class of 2022 in June. Between these two classes we had 25 confirmants confirmed into membership!

FUJI & FUSH (our junior high and high school youth groups) met regularly and worked hard to plan activities that were fun and meaningful, but also took seriously our want to keep one another safe with social distancing in mind. Some spikes in COVID numbers and exposures at church forced us to cancel or adapt plans on more than one occasion, but overall, it was a positive experience that we could be back together, in person, the majority of the time. So far, this year has proven to be more of a return to “normal” with the ability to do many of the beloved outings and experiences that had been put on hold the last couple of years.

PASTORAL ASSOCIATE, YOUTH MINISTRY AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Congregational Care has continued to be the driving missional phrase for the Fellowship Team, the Deacons, the PAL note writing ministry, Prayer Shawl Ministry, FCS: Fostering Connection and Support, and all of the other ministries and fellowship groups that are a part of First United. As your staff, we have sought to better communicate the joys, concerns, and needs of congregants in the e-blast, the Messenger Bell, and prayers. We hosted the first Fellowship Fair as an opportunity to foster connection within our own community as well as with our wider community. Through these different areas of ministry, we continue to discern what it looks like to be a community of care and what we can all do to help meet the needs of those in the congregation.

With a potential Capital Campaign on the horizon, First United is in a difficult season again. But one that I hope inspires us to live out of our excitement and the wonderful possibilities that such an endeavor contains, rather than out of our fear and anxiety. Our calling, as the church, is to be the hands and feet of God in the world, to share the good news of God's love, justice, mercy, and peace. A church is not, nor has it ever been, four walls and a bell tower. It is the people, the congregation that is the church. It is easy to lose sight of that.

I look forward to seeing what God has in store for this next chapter at First United!

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CHURCH COUNCIL

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Tim Dull, Clerk

Council Members

Mark Burkland
Karen Christopher
Chris Damon
Paul Dickerson
Dave Hanson
Kathryn Heavey
Gwendolyn Keyes, youth
Lucas Kult-Banout, youth
John Lurain
Dave Marshall
Tammy Meyer
Susan Pierson
Lynn Raducha
Sue Saliny
Susan Swords Steffan

When the congregation approved this Ministry Outline at the July 18, 2021, congregational meeting, we (like the rest of the world) were still dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout this worldwide event, our Church continued to operate and in some new areas, we flourished. We gradually reintroduced in-person worship, operations, and programming according to Cook County and CDC official guidelines for religious institutions. As a result, we also started to welcome many of our resident partners back into using our facilities.

We also briefly closed our doors during Lent when our decisions to only use hymns and readings from Black/Indigenous/people of color (BIPOC) authors during the Lenten period, donate the royalties that were not being charged for spirituals to a Chicago-area music school, and the initiative's name ("Fasting from Whiteness") attracted negative hostile attention on a national and then international level. Amid our phone voicemail services being overwhelmed, our website being taken down by an attack, and our pastors receiving threats, we found a way to safely meet as a Church community on Palm Sunday through a slightly restricted version of our online YouTube service. This momentary event has not dampened our community's resolve to find ways to uplift and work toward greater racial equity.

As in the previous fiscal year, physical closures of the Church and brief moves to online-only worship did not stop us from moving forward on the priorities of the Ministry Outline. Below we identify activities and initiatives that have occurred during the past year that have furthered the Ministry Outline. While activities directed toward the identified priorities for this year will continue into next year, there also is much progress to be celebrated.

- 1. Engage Fully the Church's Whole Community to Strengthen Congregants' Relationships with God, with Each Other, and with the Wider Community**

Explore new opportunities for vibrant, engaging, and faithful worship (in-person and live-streamed)

Last year, congregants expressed interest in continuing to have the option to participate in worship remotely over YouTube. A remote worship option not only facilitates attendance when out of town but also accommodates those who cannot return (or might be uncomfortable returning) to in-person worship.

We have now committed to live-stream our indoor worship services, allowing simultaneous participation in worship by congregants whether in-person or remote. The live chat feature on YouTube stays robust and enriching during our services for connecting congregants who join virtually.

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b. Grow the congregation through new membership

Our Church is growing, as we received 30 new members over the last year!

The Church joyfully received 5 new members who participated in the Newcomers' class during fall 2021 and spring 2022 before deciding to join the Church. The receiving of these members was done in person during two of our outdoor services. The new members quickly became engaged in the life of the Church through activities such as singing in the Church Choir or being a Church School class leader.

The Church also jubilantly received 25 new members through our Quest confirmation process. This confirmation ceremony did not take place during the 2020-2021 Church fiscal year, and our double classes of confirmants were eager to formally join into full Church membership.

c. Continue to foster a community of care within the congregation

The Church Council continued to discuss what aspects of congregational life needed particular focus and attention. The Pastoral Staff identified the strong need to emphasize pastoral care of our congregants as well as activities by which our members could be in connection with each other. Among other activities and initiatives were the following:

- We continued activities to further our community of care by learning about each other that were planned and supported by the Board of Deacons, including Fostering Connection Drop-In; Weekly Prayer Circle; and daily devotionals during Advent by congregational members.
- Fellowship events such as Dinner and a Movie, Midpoint, and PrimeTime, book group discussions, Bill Chin's hymn sing, and the prayer shawl ministry continued to take place on Zoom or as the year went on, in-person with a return to some pre-2020 practices.
- Our church residents in Brookdale were supported with bread for communion and ashes for Ash Wednesday.
- Programming for FUSH, FUJI, and children was adapted to facilitate continued gatherings for learning, crafts, and fellowship. Church School classes occurred online over Zoom, and as of September's Gathering Day, classes returned to being fully in-person.

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2. Cultivate Ways of Working Together to Further the Church's Ministries

Focus the objectives of our service to the wider community through a Church-wide program of coordinated, prioritized activity

Our Faith in Action team investigated various initiatives that the whole church could coordinate around. Serious discussions were had around concrete ways to support racial equity and to support a stop to gun violence. As an example, a coordinated effort was made to bring in adult education around racial equity, to give financial support to new partners such as the Lighthouse Foundation (an organization that advances justice for Black LGBTQ+ people across Chicagoland), and to bring elements of racial equity into worship through initiatives such as our Lenten series "Fasting from Whiteness."

Expand the diversity and reach of the First United Church Nursery School in the wider community

We continue to look to integrate the Nursery School operations and decision-making into Church processes. The head of the Nursery School, Amy Cardin, is a frequently present member at Council meetings and is integrated into the conversation. The Nursery School discussions continue to explore ideas about how First United Nursery School can expand into our community.

b. Clarify roles and processes so that the Church's purposes can be achieved more efficiently and effectively, including the completion of a comprehensive set of policies and procedures

We continued our progress on the development of a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for various aspects of Church governance and operations. A chapter on finance was completed and approved by the Council, as were chapters covering IT standards, facilities use, and safe practices. A chapter for our safe church policy covering both children and vulnerable adults was also approved in the spring, with a new task force that is slated to be formed soon.

Our new Church Office Administrator was successfully hired and is contributing greatly to the success of our operational posture. We hired a part-time Church Office Administrative Assistant due to the workload and variety of tasks needed to keep our office functioning well.

In addition, to streamline internal processes as well as to facilitate staff and congregant access to information, we successfully updated our software systems to ACS Realm, which replaced the outdated and no longer fully sup-

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ported ACS MemberLink and ACS ChurchLife applications.

3. Enhance the Church's Financial Resources

a. Increase pledging and total giving by current and new members

The Stewardship Team leaned into their chosen campaign themes around “overflowing blessings” and generosity to have a successful stewardship campaign. In addition, with an internal goal to increase pledges by 5%, pledges collected during the stewardship season to be applied to our current fiscal year ended up as an increase of 5.94% over those collected in the past fiscal year.

The role that was created last year of the Pledge Registrar — a volunteer church member who will serve as the point person for the congregation, the Stewardship and Finance Teams, and the Finance Staff for tracking and following up on pledged and non-pledged gifts to the Church — was instrumental in helping us have a clear view of how our numbers lined up when it came to financial giving to the church. This role also provided answers to questions from congregants and assisted them as needed with online gifts.

b. Explore external sources of financial support in collaboration with the Nursery School and our mission partners

Work was begun to determine the current fair market value of renting rooms in a not-for-profit building such as ours to see if we should revisit some of the agreements made with non-mission partners that use our building space. Further work on this will likely continue outside of a formal capital campaign.

c. Continue to assess the prospects of a capital campaign to advance the Church's purposes

The consultants who were engaged by the Capital Campaign Planning Task Force with Council's approval, Latz & Company, continued to work with us on determining the next steps toward a possible capital campaign. The congregation approved a refreshed Purpose Statement and Covenant at last year's Annual Meeting on July 18. Latz and Company proceeded to meet every week with the Task Force and every month with Council to develop a case for support of a campaign, a summary of the needs for a campaign, and a summary of potential case priorities. This case and summaries were arrived at through numerous interviews, focus groups, and meetings with congregation members (with an initial focus on Council members, Deacons, and team chairs). Latz has recently provided a more final summary of the case for a capital campaign to the Council, which is considering the next steps forward in approving some, all, or none of the proposal.

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See you at the Annual Meeting on November 13, where you will hear more about where our church is headed on both our finances and our ministerial priorities.

The Church Council
October 30, 2022

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DEACON BOARD

Anne Koerber, Chair
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Deacons

Rob Auch
Chris Davis
Jackie Eckholm
Karla Hayter
Walter Miller
Len Palombi
Georga Parchem
Betsy Samore
Linda Sandman

John Lurain, Council Liaison
Alicia Reese, Staff Liaison

Some highlights from our year with the Deacons:

- Some deacons rolled off (Sara Stevenson, Leah Beckwith, Porter Luckett) and some rolled on (Chris Temperly, Chris Davis, Walter Miller, Jackie Eckholm, Linda Sandman) .
- We, with the guidance of Alicia, revised the Deacon's Handbook.
- We are thinking through how to be deacons as church changes from in person to virtual to a mixture of the two.
- Each meeting we review the state of our souls, we review parishioners in need of support, and we discuss how we can best support the congregation. We have made suggestions to improve caring and communication, which have resulted in some additions to the eblasts.

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ADULT EDUCATION

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Team Members

George Ashman
Elaine Pierce
Debbie Preiser
Martina Reese
Dale Sorenson

Susan Sword Steffan, Council
Liaison
Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison

Adult Education offered the following through 2021-22:

2021

- January: “Introduction to Systemic Racism,” four sessions led by Alicia Reese.
- February and March: “The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions,” several virtual sessions led by Lydia Mulkey.
- April: “Climate Reality,” one virtual session on climate change, facilitated by Jim Babcock and the Interfaith Green Network and led by two members of “It’s Our Future,” a local youth sustainability group.
- May: Two virtual sessions on the book, “God Can’t: How to Believe in God and Love After Tragedy, Abuse, and Other Evils” by Thomas Jay Oord, led by Anne Koerber and Kathryn Heavey.
- October: Two on-site sessions on “Our Calling.” One session led by Ally Vertigan, and the second led by Len Palombi. The prophets were called to serve the Lord; pastors and other church leaders are also called. How do they react to this, how does it feel?
- November: Three on-site sessions about “Anti-Racism Lessons from South Africa,” led by Dr. Oliver Lawrence from Elmhurst University.

2022

- January: Two virtual sessions on “Evangelical Christianity and Politics,” led by Dr. Rhys Williams at Loyola University-Chicago. (Note, this was scheduled for September 2021, but Dr. Williams had to reschedule.)
- February: Three virtual sessions on “Reading the Bible in the 21st Century,” led by Dr. Nancy Lee at Elmhurst University.
- March/April: Four on-site sessions on “Migration in the Bible,” led by Dr. Ted Hiebert from McCormick Theological Seminary.

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BUILDING & GROUNDS

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Team Members

John Bell
Christine Bohlman
Gary Cerniglia
Ryan Issel
Ann Tanner
Sara Thompson
Ben VonFisher

Tim Dull, Council Liaison
Keith Liesse, Staff Liaison



Here are the highlights of projects that were completed in this fiscal year:

The rain garden was completed, and the southwest sanctuary roof down-spout was disconnected from the village drain system and connected to the rain garden's underground piping.

Gutter guards were installed on the west side of the sanctuary to prevent the gutters from clogging due to dead leaves.

Several concrete sidewalk slabs along the west side of the Memorial Garden were replaced.

Damage to the roof and interior walls in the northeast corner of the sanctuary caused by ice buildup were repaired by the company that installed the slate roof. The interior plaster repairs were completed, and the damaged area painted.

The trees in the playground were trimmed, and cables were installed connecting the main trunks to each other in case one of these main branches were to break off in a storm.

Oak tree branches overhanging the Sunday School wing were removed to eliminate the annual collection of dead leaves on the roof.



All of the exterior doors on the Lake Street entry to the sanctuary were sanded down, stained, and given several coats of polyurethane. This included the four Lake Street-facing doors and the east and west side doors as well.

With grant money obtained by Beyond Hunger, the church parking lot was completely rebuilt. It now can accommodate the weight of their delivery trucks and their anticipated increase in auto traffic for food pickups. Additionally, the church was able to have several curbs rebuilt along the northeast corner of the lot. This was all accomplished with no additional costs to the church, and we did not have to sacrifice any existing parking spaces in the lot.

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CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

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Team Members

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Ben Magnuson
Julie Nauert
Megan Premo-Hopkins
Shannon Saliny
Caitlin Zinsser

Mark Burkland, Council Liaison
Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison



The 2021-2022 school year brought back the return of in-person Sunday school. On Gathering Day we met for worship and began the church school year in outdoor classes gathering on the lawn ahead of an outdoor worship service.

We re-worked the structure of Sunday School, consolidating grade levels to address lower enrollment so we had pre-K to 2nd, 3-5th, and 6-8th grade classes meeting. We also re-worked our structure having a single storyteller each week giving a message to each class in addition to the teacher provided activities (crafts, discussion etc.) and, of course, music instruction. We also limited the number of Sunday school sessions each month (skipping the last Sunday of each month generally.)

From a logistical perspective, we also adopted a new check-in procedure to ensure increased student safety (allergy awareness, pickups etc.) and ease of attendance taking. Throughout the year, we hosted several events, including a Halloween scavenger hunt throughout the church, our Advent craft event, and the Spring family craft event during Lent. Midway through the year we returned to indoor, masked Sunday school and planned to do an in-person Christmas Eve pageant which had to pivot to online at the last minute due to a spike in Covid cases. In-person classes resumed again in February. We also worked with our Faith in Action team to involve the children in helping our mission partners. The families signed up to donate lunch supplies for Housing Forward and supported New Moms with a book fair in the spring.

Lydia continues to be a wonderful leader for church school providing high-quality resources for church school leaders and other volunteers and shepherding us expertly through all the changes that have been required of all of us as of late due to Covid. At the end of the year we collaborated to ensure the children's experiences and needs are top of mind when drafting our updated Church mission and vision. We continue to collaborate to further improve the experience for children at First United and increase the number of families in church and church school.

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COMMUNICATIONS

Vickie Engelhardt, Chair
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Team Members

Ruth McBeth
Debbie Prieser

Karen Christopher, Council
Liaison
Heather Vanderberg, Staff
Liaison



Our small team has continued to meet via Zoom during the past year. We have been successful in updating the church's website with weekly sermons. Preachers have forwarded the written sermons after each Sunday, and our team has proofread, edited and formatted them before sending on to Heather for uploading to the website.

We have coordinated with the Building and Grounds team to consider updating or replacing the monument sign on the front lawn. After much consideration and pricing of options, we have agreed this should be a Capital Campaign priority. With regard to seasonal signage on the lawn, we have produced and displayed banners for Christmas, Lent, outdoor summer worship, and return to church school for the 2022-23 church year.

Our team met via Zoom with a representative of Latz & Co. regarding the Pillars of the church and in preparation for a possible capital campaign. In addition, each of us individually attended in-person discussions regarding our wishes and priorities for the future of our congregation.

At the request of the clergy staff, we drafted guidelines for notification of deaths and memorial services. Communications to the congregation regarding members' illnesses have increased, most frequently as part of the Thursday eblasts.

Updating the church website remains a priority, and we expect to discuss the scope, goals and intentions of the website at our upcoming meetings.

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FAITH IN ACTION

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Team Members

Jim Babcock
Lynn Barrier
Pauline Coffman
Marilyn Giles
Sandy Jefferson
Debbie Stracco
Lois Thiessen Love
Katharine Thurman

Lynn Raducha, Council Liaison
John Edgerton, Staff Liaison



Our Mission: Seeking to be God's actor in the world, Bringing people together to serve God and to have a greater impact collectively.

Faith in Action focuses on five areas by seeking care to address needs, supporting system change to reduce injustice and engaging congregants in sharing time, talent and contributions.

Housing Highlights:

- Five new House to Home Kits and Loving with Books!
- Submitted many legislative Witness Slips to influence Illinois legislative committees to support gun sense legislation.
- Hosted two peace vigils that invited "Mothers on a Mission 28," a non-profit providing support to families of gun violence victims. The fall vigil included a time of small group sharing in which attendees shared stories of how they have been affected by gun violence. Everyone received a gift of a snake plant, a plant with healing properties.
- The June vigil was a memorial for gun violence victims and a call to action. During the program, the gun violence victims scroll was buried in the Memorial Garden. Families whose son's or daughter's name is on the gun violence victims scroll aided burying the scroll with shovels full of dirt.
- Sharing 270 lunches with the homeless on their way to housing stability
- Continuing support for asylum-seeking family in partnership with the lead church, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church



Children's Highlights:

- Clothing children and parents with warm winter coats
- Nurturing children for school success with the help of volunteer tutors
- Palestinian children reading library books (libraries established by Seraj Library Project)
- Syrian children and families getting help with housing, fuel, food through Compassion and Peace Society, NGO for National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

Hunger Highlights:

- Volunteers...Many congregants assist with Beyond Hunger, the food pantry housed in our church building
- Expanding fresh produce for families experiencing a food desert

Justice Highlights:

- **Racial Justice**
 - Beginning exploration of Guns to Gardens Project in conjunction with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

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FAITH IN ACTION

- Calling for justice in the wake of innocent Black lives taken by police
- Supporting Black LGBTQ justice efforts
- Advocating for Oak Park housing racial diversity, equity, and inclusion
- **Peace**
 - Praying for peace at two vigils and through activism, burying list of names lost to gun violence in Memorial Garden
 - Seeking peace on our streets through safe gun technology and responsible legislative action
 - Encouraging travel of four congregants to Israel/Palestine with Seraj Library Project (partially funded by Gebhardt Fund)
- **Climate Change**
 - Continued use of solar power by First United
 - Continued education of congregants for ways to practice environmental care
- **Christian Community**
 - Active member of Community of Congregations
 - Support UCC and PCUSA global & US Missions



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FELLOWSHIP

Priscilla Sibley
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Team Members

Janet Haisman
Bobbie Kmiec
Karin Pietrini

Susan Pierson, Council Liaison
Alicia Reese, Staff Liaison



The Fellowship Team was created just before the pandemic began, so it was not a time when anyone could get together in person. Still, the church leadership - in conjunction with the Fellowship Team - created several events that kept us in contact with one another, usually via Zoom or by email. Since things have opened up, the team has worked with staff on several organizational projects.

This fall the Fellowship Team swung into action with three events during September.

- September 11 was Gathering Day. We helped with root beer floats and encouraged participation in “People Bingo,” our ice-breaker prepared by Alicia.
- September 17 was a celebration of Michael Surratt’s music ministry among us. Food included cake and fruit skewers – a big hit!
- On September 28 we hosted the all-church Fellowship Fair on the church lawn. Each Team had a table with food, games, and/or information about their ministry. The goal was to attract attendees from the church and the community. Council and Personnel served hotdogs, Finance and Stewardship popped popcorn, Adult Ed handed out apples, and Fellowship poured apple cider. Children could collect a distinct sticker from each table to plot out the many Teams we have and what they do. There were several people from the community who stopped by and participated.

The Team learned a lot from these activities and has plans for more all-church and small group activities. We are looking forward to hosting a reception after Alicia’s ordination on November 19. The Fellowship Team also provides receptions after memorial services so that family and friends can gather. We consider it a ministry.

There are many other groups in our church that are self-sustaining and do not require much oversight from the staff or the Fellowship Team. These are largely volunteer-driven groups: some limited to certain age groups and others limited only by interest level. They live under the Fellowship Team banner so that they have a place in the church structure. Here are some of them:

MIDPOINT (40's and up) had a great gathering in early summer and members were able to say goodbye to Jane Barker and Melinda Haag, who moved away. Multiple events are planned for the program year and evites are being sent soon. People seem eager to get together. We have a new host for our holiday party, and that's good news. (Barbara Metric)

PFLAG OAK PARK has been meeting since April in the church building every fourth Sunday since April. They meet at 3:00pm - 5:00pm in the conference

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FELLOWSHIP

room. Some people attend in person and some are on Zoom - people from as far away as N.Y. have joined since the pandemic! Some of our speakers lead talks from home - this has been exciting! Our bake sale Labor Day weekend at the Oak Park Farmers' Market was a big success! PFLAG also marched in the Pride Parade this year! They hope to have an in-person meeting at First United for the wider area council before the year is over! (Sandy Jefferson)

PRIMETIME (60+) met during Covid via Zoom and held several socially distanced picnics. This September 19 we met for a breakfast at Al's Grill in Oak Park (32 people attended). We are planning events for October 17 (an outdoor picnic) and November 14 (a soup luncheon in the church building). This group is always up for a get-together! (Janet Haisman, Sher Spooner, and Brenda Matson)

DINNER AND A MOVIE has met virtually during the pandemic and in person at the church during 2022. We meet on the second Friday of each month in the church lounge. We order sandwiches from Starship Subs (\$5 per person) for dinner at 6 PM, and the movie starts at 6:30 PM. (Ron Haas, Liz Swan, and Marilyn Palmer)

Other groups include Family Camp, the Women's Retreat, the Knitting Group, Fostering Connection and Support and others organized by staff. We hope to continue to create and support opportunities for fellowship among the members of First United Church of Oak Park!

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NEWCOMERS

Teri Omert, Chair
tomert@comcast.net

Team Members

Brenda Matson
Adie Magnuson
Priscilla Sibley

Susan Pierson, Council Liaison
Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison

Though small in numbers, the Newcomers Team endeavors to extravagantly welcome potential new members to First United Church by providing opportunities to learn about the church and how to engage with our congregation. The team offers three sessions per year which provide the attendees with information about our beginnings, our mission, and our future goals and aspirations. We learn about one another's spiritual journeys that have led us/them to First United Church. We discuss ways we have found to connect to others in the church and suggest ways that they may also do so.

The pandemic has been a challenge in terms of recruitment of new members, as well as providing a welcoming classroom experience for them. We adapted our in-person classroom to a Zoom setting, then moved to hybrid Zoom class and in-person tours, and have finally begun a wholly in person experience complete with a hot breakfast with Council on joining day. Despite all challenges, we provided three classes and have officially welcomed 18 new members into our congregation in the past fiscal year. Many of the ten adults and eight children have become active on various teams, Sunday school, and other activities.

Our potential new members find us in various ways, through our website, First United Nursery School and by recommendation of current FUCOP members. The virtual pew pad has also been helpful in identifying persons who may be interested in joining us. First United's weekly online services have been mentioned by several new members as a reason for their interest in joining.

Looking to the future the Newcomers team will develop and conduct an audit of the experiences of persons visiting the church for the first time. We hope to learn ways that we can better meet the needs of visitors and truly provide an extravagant welcome to all.

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PERSONNEL

Marsha Hubbuch
cdamon@ameritechmedtech.com

Team Members

Bob Downs
Martha Sorenson

Chris Damon, Council Liaison
John Edgerton, Staff Liaison
Chris Nied, Nursery School
Liaison



The Personnel Team met eleven times between August of 2021 and September of 2022. Only two of those meetings were in person, due to Covid precautions. We also communicated via email and sometimes by phone when decisions needed to be made prior to the next meeting.

Significant work of the Personnel Team over this past year included:

- Meeting with staff individually by phone, email or sometimes in person to serve as liaisons in support of our staff.
- Proposing clarifications of the roles and responsibilities of the Personnel Team with annual reviews as outlined in the Personnel Handbook, which Church Council approved.
- Confirming that a Personnel Team member will observe all annual staff annual reviews except for Nursery School staff and Lead Pastor, which are reviewed differently.
- Conducting a market search of compensation for managers of building and grounds and recommending a salary raise for Keith Liesse, which was approved by Council. (Former chair, Melanie Jakupovic)
- Organizing an all-staff appreciation luncheon for First United Church and Nursery School staff in late April.
- Participating on a search team for the role of Administrative Assistant, resulting in hiring of Melissa Lurio. (Bob Downs)
- Participating in an ongoing search team for a new organist. (Martha Sorenson)
- Conducting an exit interview with Michael Surratt and sharing insights with the team and Council leadership. (Marsha Hubbuch and Chris Damon)
- Providing the Nursery School staff with needed support with facilities and personnel matters. (Chris Nied and John Edgerton)
- Helping to facilitate the congregational vote to call Alicia Reese as an ordained pastor at First United Church of Oak Park. (Marsha Hubbuch)

The Personnel Team has supported our dedicated team of new, current, and departing staff over this past year. Having Chris Nied as our Nursery School Liaison, Dan Pietrini and Chris Damon as Council liaisons and John Edgerton on our team has been invaluable. We sincerely thank all of those who generously gave of their time and look forward to continuing our efforts.

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PLANNED GIVING

Gene and Ann Armstrong,
Co-Coordinators
geneann1113@yahoo.com

Team Members

Stan Davis
Anne Dickerson
Linda Sandman
Tom Wolford

John Edgerton, Staff Liaison

First United's planned giving program is built on the premise that financial support of the church is a sacred act of worship and that a person's commitment to the church's ministry and mission can endure beyond his or her lifetime. Recognizing that our church and its worship, mission and education programs stand on the work of those ministers, staff and congregation members who have gone before us, and taking seriously Christ's call for us to give back a "measure" of ourselves, including our time, talents, and treasure, the Planned Giving Committee encourages members to include legacy gifts to the church in their estate plans.

During fiscal year 2022 (July 2021 – June 2022), with the church doors closed to in-person worship and meetings due to COVID 19 for much of the year, our activities continued to be somewhat reduced. We ceased in-person meetings with prospective planned giving donors, but stayed in touch remotely with those with whom we had already met. We are delighted and grateful to report that during this pandemic time, four new households informed the church that they have included a gift to First United in their estate plans.

Those who have let the church know that they have made this commitment are called "Kindred Spirits." As of June 30, 2022, Kindred Spirits now include the 54 following families and individuals:

Anonymous (11)
Leland ("Lee") and Mary Lou Anderson
Gene L. and Ann H. Armstrong
Marcia and Rick Ashton
Jim Bailey
Barbara Ballinger
Jane Barker and Melinda Haag
Carole Bergstraesser*
Hank Bode and Susan Cartland-Bode
Sara Giddings Bode
John and Michelle Chapman-Rienstra
Christopher Damon and Connie
Henderson-Damon*
Marion Davis
Stanley and Christine Davis
Theodore and Joanne Despotes
Bob Downs
Marjorie Fallon
Sara (Rickert) Faust
Thomas D.* and Carole A. Ferguson
Hilda Fischer

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PLANNED GIVING

Bob and Marilyn Giles
Stuart Gillette and Yvette Bouchard
Bob and Janet Haisman
Bud Hayes* and Vickie Engelhardt
Marsha Hubbuch
Rosemary Irmis
Sandy Jefferson
Marilyn Kauffmann
Lois Thiessen Love and Brian
Thiessen Love
John Lurain and Nell Lurain*
Carl and Julie Nauert
Allen and Georgia Parchem
Betty B. Peaslee and Donald E.
Peaslee*
Dan and Karin Pietrini
Naa Marteki Reed
Sherlynn D. Reid*
Kris and Connie Ronnow
Sallie and Mark Smylie
Doug and Martha Sorenson
Sara Stevenson and Mark Breen
Mary Sue Voth
Richard Wheelock and Linda
Sandman
Thomas and Michele Wolford
Herbert* and Claudette Zobel

*deceased

Planned gifts to the church, unless otherwise designated by the donor, are allocated (at the direction of Council) to either or both of the church's endowments, the Special Mission Endowment Fund and the General Endowment. Since 2010, when the present Planned Giving Committee was formed, First United has received gifts totaling \$280,132 from the estates of the following Kindred Spirits who are deceased:

Matthew Allen
Connie Henderson-Damon
Edith Dennis
Rosemary (Pat) Godfrey
Rev. Julie Ruth Harley
Janet and Raleigh Hegwood
Irene W. Herrick

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PLANNED GIVING

Carol Kelm
C. Vincent Long and Eleanor Davidson Long Charitable Trust
Lynn McClure
Jim McClure
Ruth Peaslee
Vivian Soderdahl
Paul Soderdahl

While we were not able to sponsor an Adult Ed program due to the pandemic shutdown, the Committee continued to build awareness of planned giving opportunities through *Messenger Bell* articles and reminders in the weekly E-blasts. And in spite of the pandemic, we hosted our twelfth annual Kindred Spirits Donor Thank You brunch on September 26, 2021 – held for the second time via ZOOM. This year’s fellowship event included coffee cake delivered or shipped in advance -- coffee or beverage of choice was left up to each attendee -- and Michael Surratt playing, live from the church Sanctuary, the opening bars of several favorite hymns with attendees breaking into groups to work together to guess the names of the hymns. It was a spirited and lively gathering!

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STEWARDSHIP

Marcia Ashton, Chair
marciaashton@msn.com

Team Members

Leah Beckwith
Bob Haisman
Deborah Morris

Naa Marteki Reed, Council
Liaison
John Edgerton, Staff Liaison

This year's Stewardship campaign was a BLESSING. Beginning in February, we launched "Overflowing Blessings," a theme energized by popcorn as a metaphor. We emphasized that financial support for First United turns into many blessings - a warm and safe building, inspirational worship and song, a community of care, faith building for youth and children, public declarations of justice and peace, and so much more. We illustrated the abundance of First United blessings with references to overflowing popcorn, illustrated by bags of popped popcorn, microwave popcorn and "My Cup Overflows" coffee mugs. These enhancements provided energy and were well received. Homebound members gratefully received these items thanks to a special delivery team.

The Stewardship Team is delighted to share this year's success. When the campaign ended at the end of June, the Pledge total was \$636,501 from 166 pledging households, representing an average pledge of \$3,834. It is important to note that this is \$7,848 above the original goal and includes pledges from 14 new households. Stewardship response reflects member movement and the degree of member connection with the church. In reviewing last year's Stewardship report, 25 households that pledged last year did not pledge this year. This includes three members who moved out of state and two members who are deceased. A list of inactive pledging members was forwarded to Clergy for review.



Beginning in February Stewardship messages were featured in four worship services, followed by various communications including all-member mailings, Messenger Bell inspiration, E-blasts, and personal contact. Heather Vanderberg, our Church Office Administrator, served as a valuable planning guide and creative message delivery resource. Shirley Kyle, Financial Administrator, provided essential record keeping and pledge reporting.

Our church database system (Realm) continues to offer challenges and opportunities for financial management. In previous years some members set up recurring gifts in the Realm database, but they had not taken the step of entering their pledge intention for 2022-2023. Our Church Registrar Kelly Pollock reviewed Realm records and reached out to many households with the result of identifying 38 members with recurring gifts who had intended their support to be a pledge. Kelly provided a valuable resource by connecting with members and making Realm adjustments to reflect their intention for a pledge in the upcoming year.

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WORSHIP, MUSIC & THE ARTS

Laurie Jolicoeur, Chair
magistra.jolicoeur@gmail.com

Team Members

Laurie Jolicoeur
Karin Pietrini
Nina Roher
Peter Todd

John Edgerton, Council Liaison
Bill Chin, Staff Liaison
John Edgerton, Staff Liaison



Worship Music & Art is in a reflective chapter as worship roots more deeply as an in person experience. We are rebuilding how we will work together. We have created Agreements about how we will work together in conversations to create safety for diverse perspectives. Agreements help us all hold the conversations in our meetings with kindness and respect.

We are exploring what our purpose is in this emerging time. We are consciously evolving who we are and how we serve. Maybe we create an agile meeting pattern. Maybe we don't all come to all the meetings. Staff is transitioning too, how worship is planned and how lay people are involved.

Additionally we are exploring how the "worship experience" is being redefined in a much more expansive way; now we are talking about worship being from arriving to departing from the church. A 24 hour 7 days a week experience rather than an isolated Sunday 11-12noon experience. What does that look like? Feel like? What does this shift in perspective call us into as a community? Additionally, we are exploring how the current art installations might be evolved or if there is interest in developing new installations for unrepresented parts of the year.

We welcome others who would like to sit with us in this chapter. We are creating a way to receive worship feedback and process it together. We will be practicing how to be in meaningful conversation with people, building relationships in kind and respectful ways.



First United Church of Oak Park

An open community united in love & justice



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