



the MESSENGERbell

April 2021

A TURNING POINT

Things seem to be finally, at long last, turning a corner. With a vaccine rollout picking up steam nationwide and case numbers falling across the state and across the nation, something has shifted. We are not completely out of the woods yet, that is true. But there is a reasonable basis for hoping that improvements in public health will continue or even accelerate. It feels a bit like tempting fate to say it out loud (well, in print) but we may be close to that day when we can breathe a sigh of relief.

So much has changed in the past year about our life together as a church. It is beginning to feel possible to reflect on what has transpired and imagine how our shared life might look. I find myself filled with questions: What is the heart of this place we call home? What work shall we pick back up again to live into that identity? What will we leave behind because it no longer fits us? Where is God calling us to go as we look to the future?

If these seem like airy questions, chalk it up to the season of Eastertide. All around new life springs forth, and we look ahead to a year of once again reimagining our shared life together. But these airy questions have a very practical element as well in the church's annual Stewardship Drive. For the next four weeks in worship, we will be focusing on themes of generosity and inviting members to pledge to the church. In gratitude for all that the church has meant to me in the past year, my family is planning to increase our pledge for the year. The stewardship team invites the church to prayerfully consider their pledge to the church.

It is with our collective generosity and service to the church that the life of this place is possible. As we look forward to a year in which we have more and more freedom in what we do, help us to have the resources we need to be creative and expansive by pledging generously to the church.

Rev. John Edgerton, Lead Pastor



moving from

WORDS TO WITNESS IN OUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

moving from

INDIVIDUALISM TO INTIMATE
FELLOWSHIP IN OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE
CHURCH COMMUNITY.

moving from

CHARITY TO CHANGING
STRUCTURES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE WORLD.

A few highlights from this month's Messenger Bell: an update from our Council Moderator, page 2; FUJI and FUSH are meeting in person, page 3; "Flower Power" fundraiser kick-off, page 4; this month's "Dinner and a Movie" selection, page 5; and volunteer care opportunities, page 6.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Worshipping Virtually Sundays at 11 a.m.

[CLICK TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)

April 11 Communion Sunday	John Edgerton
April 18	Youth Sunday
April 25 Fourth Sunday Offering	John Edgerton
May 2	John Edgerton

Council Moderator's Report

Greetings with highlights of recent meetings of your Church Council.

PPP Loan: The Council met in special session to consider an application to Byline Bank for the Church to receive a second PPP loan in the amount of \$208,000. The Council approved submission of the application, which, like the first PPP loan (which has been forgiven in full), will be used principally to meet our Church's payroll expenses. Shortly after the Church submitted its application, we learned from Byline Bank that the loan has been approved. This will help reduce some of the stress on the Church's budget that Council leadership reported in the recent letter to the congregation. Thanks to the Finance Team, Shirley Kyle, and Maureen Wheeler for their work, both to secure this second loan and in taking the necessary steps to obtain forgiveness of the first loan.

Limited Reopening of Church Building: The Council heard a report and proposal from the Public Health Task Force to re-implement in stages the plan for limited use of the Church building. The first stage approved by the Council is for the sanctuary to be open on Mondays for a 2-hour period for prayer and meditation, with adherence to attendance limitations and public safety protocols. Further reopening of the Church building will be considered after evaluation of this first stage. Thanks to Marcia Ashton, the Worship, Music and the Arts Team, and the Public Health Task Force for their leadership in this plan.

Capital Campaign Update: The Council heard an interim report from the team at Latz and Company who have been engaged to develop a strategic vision and plan to prepare the Church for an eventual capital campaign. The Council approved the Latz team's recommendation for the Church to review and update as necessary the Church's mission statement. More information on this

review will be forthcoming.

Lobbying Activity for Gun Sense Laws: The Council approved a proposal presented by Katharine Thurman on behalf of the Waging Peace group of the Faith in Action Team to engage in educational and lobbying activities in support of legislation to strengthen Illinois' Firearm Restraining Order and to advocate for federal legislation on enhanced background checks and a ban on assault weapons. Thanks to Katharine, Lois Love, and the Waging Peace group for pursuing these opportunities for learning and engagement by our congregation.

The Makuebo Family Update: The Council received a written report from the Migration Ministries group of the Faith in Action Team about the Makuebo family – how they are doing, how the activities and needs for their support are being shared between our Church and St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, and how our congregation is and can continue to be involved. Thanks to Kathy Pederson, Tara Dull, Sandy Jefferson, and Leah Beckwith, among others, for providing leadership in support of the Makuebos.

Devotion: Thanks to Council member John Borrero, who led a Council devotion with a captivating montage of young children's descriptions of God, reminding us of the gifts of wisdom our children can impart.

Sallie Smylie,
Moderator

Legacy Gifts to First United

First United welcomes your legacy gift through your will or trust or by listing the church as a beneficiary of your IRA, life insurance, or pension plan. When you make such a gift, please let the church know. We want to thank you and add you to our list of Kindred Spirits (those who have told us they have made a legacy gift). The church is grateful for these gifts. They help build our endowments and fund our ministry and mission for future generations. Questions? Contact Gene or Ann Armstrong: geneann1113@yahoo.com or 708-657-4484, or any of the pastors at 708-386-5215.





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

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

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

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

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

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



April 11 In-person! Weather permitting, we will have our first in-person youth groups in over a year on the church lawn. We will engage in fellowship and fun that adheres to all our safety and precautionary procedures and guidelines required by our Public Health Task Force. We hope that all our youth 7th-12th grade will join us! To participate...

- All youth must be [REGISTERED](#) for FUJI or FUSH.
- A parent or guardian will need to complete a waiver prior to, or day-of.
- Each participant will have to complete and satisfactorily answer a COVID questionnaire.
- Each participant will have their temperature taken upon arrival, which must be 99°F or less.

April 18 Fellowship & Exploration
Youth
Sunday

April 25 Fellowship & Self-Care

May 2 Fellowship

FLOWER POWER

Benefitting New Moms

It has been a rough year for many, with loss, isolation, worry, illness and even death. For others, it has been a time to reconnect with family, find new ways of doing things, follow the rules and look forward to the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. And, maybe for most, a confusing combination of both the bitter and the sweet.

Through it all, our mission partner [New Moms](#) continues to POWER UP by nurturing and educating young new mothers, transforming their lives and those of their children, and building strong, self-sufficient families. And we here at First United continue to POWER UP by finding a new way to worship and to reach out to church school children and adults, meeting the challenge and doing mission while practicing social distancing.

We have learned that while the COVID pandemic has changed the way First United does business, it has not changed the business we do. We still worship God. We are still in community caring for one another. We are still committed to mission.

So, even under continued COVID restrictions, we will celebrate Mother's Day with our annual "Flower Power" project to benefit New Moms. To protect everyone, church school children will **not** be planting actual plants. Instead, working at home with their families, they will be "planting pots" by drawing flowers in pots and adding encouraging messages to make Mother's Day cards.

We invite all church school children to participate in this important mission project. Kits with supplies to make the cards are available now and be delivered to participating families. To participate, please request your kit by calling Anne Koerber at 708-280-9914 or e-mailing her at akoerbergeneral@gmail.com. Cards must be completed by **Thursday, April 29**, and will be picked up at your house.

So what can you do? We invite you to sponsor a "virtual" pot or two of flowers for \$10 or \$15 per pot. [Just click here](#) and select the "FIA-New Moms" fund or text "firstunited" to 73256 and select New Moms. You can also write a check to First United Church, indicate New Moms Flower Power on the "memo" line and mail it to 848 Lake Street, Oak Park, IL 60301.

Your tax-deductible donation will help New Moms meet

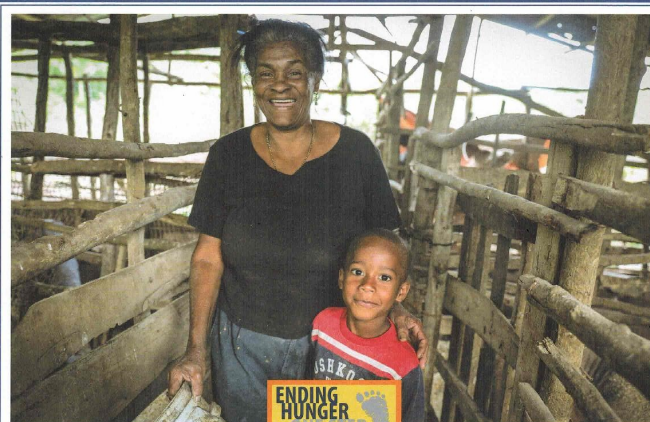
the urgent need for supplies such as diapers, formula, and cleaning products, and support these young mothers as they continue their journey toward self-sufficiency.

Hunger Walkathon West celebrates!

2020 was the highest ever fundraising year for Hunger Walkathon West!

The event raised \$100,000 and was the 5th highest money raising walk in the country! First United's team raised \$17,430 - a record that made us 7th of 5000 participating teams.

On Sunday, May 2, at 2 p.m., First United participants will gather at First United for a Team only event. Become a participant fundraiser and join us by signing up online at crophungerwalk.org/oakparkil and joining the First United Team - OR - go to the site and donate to the team or a specific walker. Contact Ted and Joanne Despotes (708-209-1377) for more information and to sign up offline.



An initiative of Church World Service • crophungerwalk.org

Church World Service

Certificate of Appreciation
to

First United Church of Oak Park

A national Cream of the CROP top fundraising team
with the 2020 Hunger Walkathon West (Oak Park Area) CROP Hunger Walk
raising \$17,430.01 to end hunger and poverty around the world.



Mary Catherine Hendricks
Presented by
Director of Fundraising Strategy
February 12, 2021

Climate Change: Let's Talk About It

As our Earth's weather patterns change, people all over the world are impacted. It's becoming obvious: Climate change is a reality.

Two members of It's Our Future, a youth sustainability group, will present to our congregation and the local faith community on climate change and potential solutions. Sponsored by our Adult Education and The Interfaith Green Network, a group of area congregations working to build a role for the faith community in caring for Earth, this Zoom session on April 12, 7:30pm, will be followed by a Q&A/discussion period.



To register, click [here](#). A Zoom link will be emailed after you register.

Do Not Stand Idly By

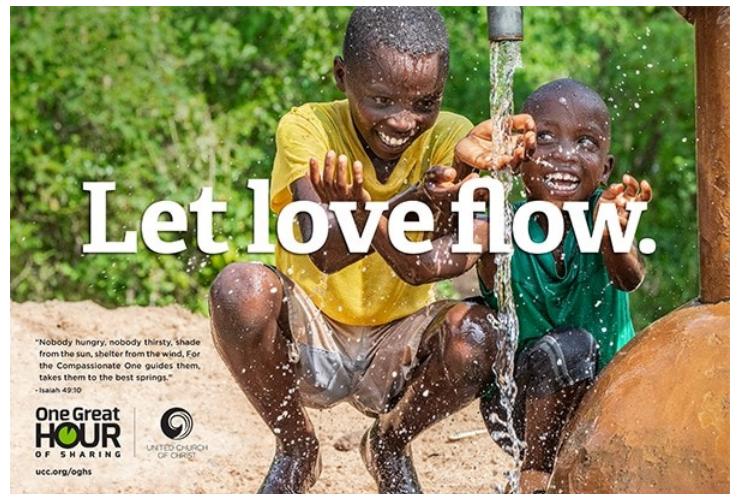
Launched in 2013, [Do Not Stand Idly By \(DNSIB\)](#) is First United mission partner United Power's national campaign focused on reducing gun violence. In 2020, DNSIB launched a **GUN SAFETY CONSORTIUM** in cooperation with the US Conference of Mayors and Police Chiefs from across the country. This consortium includes municipalities, counties, and states that wish to participate in the testing and evaluation of safety products for guns. The consortium's goal is to drive the gun industry towards a focus on safety instead of increased lethality and firepower by organizing public purchasing power. Testing of new safety products by police departments who are members of the consortium began in the 4th quarter of 2020 and will continue throughout 2021. As of March 2021 there are 5 member police departments in the process of testing safety products.

When the gun industry focuses on safety, there will be fewer accidental shootings by children, no suicides by an unauthorized gun user, and reduced gun crimes using stolen guns. It's encouraging to know that there is some progress on increasing gun safety. Stay tuned.



Fourth Sunday Offering: One Great Hour of Sharing

The Fourth Sunday offering in April will be used to support One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS). OGHS is an ecumenical effort in which both of our denominations, United Church of Christ (UCC) and Presbyterian Church (USA), participate. In general, a gift to OGHS enables the church to share God's love with neighbors-in-need around the world by providing relief to those affected by natural disasters, providing food to the hungry, and helping to empower the poor and oppressed. Please prayerfully consider a generous gift to OGHS. For more information, please visit the [PC-USA website](#).



Dinner & a Movie—April 9

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

Marshall, recounting an early case of attorney Thurgood Marshall -- who would later become the first African-American Supreme Court justice -- this riveting drama depicts his defense of a black chauffeur accused of sexual assault. The movie will be shown online through Zoom. Start time is 6:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to join and participate in the fellowship.



COMMUNITY OF CARE

The Prayer Shawl Ministry

We continue to meet the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month. Follow this link to join us. Reach out to Alicia Reese if you have any questions or if you know someone who would benefit from the loving care of receiving a prayer shawl.



Keeping Connected: Monthly Mailing



This month we sent out 18 packets to our “non-tech” members. We included the March Messenger Bell, the Spring 2021 activity packet, five sermons and four devotionals in this month’s mailing.

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

FCS: Fostering Connection & Support Drop-In



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

Please join us on **Wednesdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.** for an informal time of fellowship. We will use this [LINK](#) each week, so hold on to it!

Care Opportunities

Are you looking for volunteer opportunities? Ways to feel more connected to our church family? If so, have you considered...

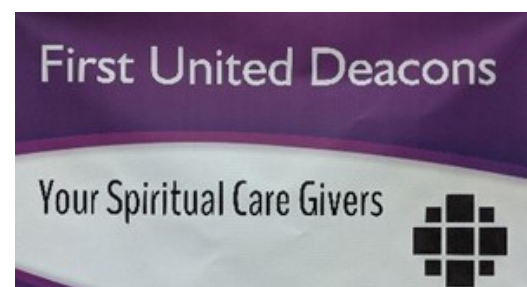
- Helping make homemade baked goods for those who are grieving
- Baking communion bread for some of our elderly or homebound members
- Doing drop offs of prayer shawls, or other helpful church materials

Last month our bakers delivered homemade baked goods to three grieving families and provided communion bread to several individuals.

To volunteer for any of these opportunities, or if you have any questions, please contact Alicia Reese.

Virtual Chapel for Prayer with Deacons

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



If you don't know who your deacon is, please contact Alicia Reese!



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

For the wider world:

- For all Asian-Americans and those who lost their lives or a loved one as a result of the racial violence in Atlanta
- For those in Boulder, CO
- For justice, reparations, and reconciliation
- For all those who are COVID+ and fighting for their lives
- For the front-line medical workers, overworked, exhausted, and struggling with PTSD
- For all the caregivers
- For the essential workers continuing to make everyone's lives better
- For all those who have had a loved one die in the last year whether from COVID or not
- For anyone who is struggling with feelings of isolation, depression, and/or anxiety

For those in our midst:

- For Nancy Wagner's father-in-law who entered hospice
- For the Reid family on the death of Sherlynn Reid
- For the Beckwith family on death of Paul's mom
- For the Saliny family and concerns for Evan
- For the Castaneda family on the death of cousin Dan
- For the Logan family on the death of a brother-in-law
- For the Damon family, remembering Connie 3 years after her death
- For Lois Merrill's brother-in-law Virgil, undergoing treatment for lymph node cancer
- For George Ashman's sister Jane, in need of comfort and peace

For the joys in our lives:

- For Clara Kearley and family on the birth of her new granddaughter
- For the vulnerability of our deacons sharing testimonies in worship: Beth Dickerson, Anne Koerber, Robert Auch, and Sara Stevenson
- For Herta Lisic's 99th Birthday!
- For Mary Lou Anderson that she is home, but continued prayers for her health
- For the continued manufacturing and distribution of the COVID vaccine to more and more people
- For some warmer and longer days
- For things opening up to be able to do some things in person

CHECK OUT OUR RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

March 2	A Lent that Begins and Ends with Death	Alicia Reese
March 9	An Evotional Letter: One Year Ago	John Edgerton
March 16	A Retelling of Luke 15:1-6	Lydia Mulkey
March 23	100% of Nothing	John Edgerton
March 30	An Introduction to Cluster Tutoring	First United Staff
April 6	Vitality	Ally Vertigan

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submissions

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



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