



GROWING  
IN FAITH

FIRST UNITED CHURCH  
**BUILDING TO SERVE**

# Devotional Guide

## Six Daily Devotions for Our Capital Campaign

*February 2006*

*“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”*

—1 Corinthians 3:7-11

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*The church is not a building,  
The church is not a steeple,  
The church is not a resting place,  
The church is people!  
I am the church!  
You are the church!  
All who follow Jesus all around the world—  
We are the church together!*

I learned that little song, complete with gestures, in first grade church school. Sure, it's a bit simplistic and may not hold up under the closet of theological inspection, but it still rings true all these years together.

This devotional booklet is one piece among all the materials you are receiving about "Growing in Faith – Building to Serve" –the Capital Campaign for First United as we renew our building for future generations of service as a tool for ministry and mission.

We hope you study the plans, look at the DVD, read the brochure, and catch sight of the exciting vision we have for First United in this first part of the 21st Century. But I also hope you take time to put down all the rest of the material and use this booklet—all at once, or once a day—to think, to study, to meditate, to pray.

God is the author of all we do. If this is not about God, it won't work—it's as simple as that. We are the church together. We are those who follow Jesus on a path of hope and love. We are seeking to live a life of peace and welcome in a world so hungry for all that God offers. We invite you into these pages as we try to keep that value above all values—and as a reminder especially as we embark on this exciting journey together.

—Mark Ramsey

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*The one who plants and the one who waters each  
have a common purpose, and each will receive  
wages according to the labor of each.  
—1 Corinthians 3:8*

It seems odd to speak of wages when it comes to growing a garden, but then I am not a farmer, or a migrant worker. My garden is for beauty and I put food on the table with my labor in the church.

It is also odd, even for me; an employee of the church, to speak of wages when it comes to God's garden work—the planting, sowing growing of the church. I rarely count the pennies, nickels, dimes and dollars that are my church wages. Instead I count the number of ordinations we have celebrated together, the number of youth who attend workcamp every year, the joy that fills our church school classes, the gift and grace when another person claims the church as their home.

We make our Living at the church, but most do not make a living as servants of the church.

The wages for ministry well done rarely fill our pockets with great amounts of money, but rather fill our hearts and lives with hope.

The wages are a church where everyone is welcome. The wages are a faith community where 6 and 7 year olds speak theologically and prayerfully with 70 and 80 year olds. The wages are a community of hope, shelter, care and promise; a beautiful garden that blossoms with God's love.

We begin this year together; shovel, spade and watering can in hand.

God, help our garden grow, give us mulch and fertile seed, give us sunshine and rain. We till and plant, water and work together with you for a bountiful harvest. Amen.

—Diane Wendorf

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*“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,  
but only God who gives the growth”.*

*—1 Corinthians 3:7*

Geez...Just when we've made our resolutions about how to improve, we read this. What's the point of being made in the image of God when God does everything anyhow? Why should we bother with planning when God is the spoiler? Before I get myself too riled up I have to read carefully to see Paul is not talking about God putting slugs in the gardens of our plans to cause root rot. Paul is just reminding us of what is true in the gardens of our lives

We can imagine. We can tend. We can plan. We can plant and water. Yet without God as our partner, every process, every action, every hope, every dream is less than what it might be. Only when we make space for God, only when we open the door to God's work in the all of our lives, do our actions, hopes, dreams, relationships flourish.

Maybe God is the Miracle-Gro of our lives. Without God, what we do is stunted. With God, we get tomatoes beyond anything we could grow alone. Nothing is impossible for God.

Tiller. Sower. Nourisher. God, you work the raw materials of our lives and our community and make miracles happen. You alone can take the small seeds of our hopes and make them grow and flourish. You help us do what we cannot do without you. We are grateful for the work of your hands and the power of your grace in our lives, grateful that you use us to serve you and honor you in all we do. Amen.

*—Marylen Marty Gentile*

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*“For we are God's servants, working together;  
you are God's field, God's building.”*

*—1 Corinthians 3:9*

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul is attempting to address some rather grievous divisions which have sprung up in that fledgling congregation. He recognizes that the only way to avoid being done in by these divisions is to appeal to the common Lord (verse 7), the common mission (verse 8), and, in verse 9, to remind the Corinthians that they are all servants of the one God and that what they work for belongs to God. His point was so cogent that it has outlasted by a couple centuries the particular circumstances to which it was initially addressed.

I find it interesting that the translator uses the word 'building' in this verse: "You are...God's building." I think that's worth keeping in mind as we move into this building campaign. The real 'building' here is us and our ministry. The building of brick and mortar at 848 Lake Street in Oak Park, is a vehicle for this ministry, a vehicle in considerable need of renovation and expansion. Improving this building of brick and mortar is not just one more fund raising or construction project, it is at the very center of who we are as God's people.

Prayer: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." (Psalm 118) Help us remember, O Lord, what constitutes the real building in our life of faith, and who is the true cornerstone of that edifice, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*—Bud Hayes*

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*“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.”*

*— 1 Corinthians 3:10*

*“It’s hard to believe...my little girl, all grown up...”*

If you haven’t said it, you’ve heard it. Maybe it was at a graduation ceremony, or a wedding, or maybe it was just when she turned around and the light caught her just right as she laughed and waved from the car. As a parent you lay a foundation and then other people build on that for the rest of your child’s life. Each builder they encounter chooses how they will build, and our children choose whether that style of building fits them. In many ways it is all we can do – lay a strong foundation and hope for the best – and one of the surest ways we begin that process is through our involvement with the church.

Our building has seen a lot of kids grow up here. Some of you remember when you played with blocks in our nursery or baked cookies in the kitchen. Others of you have brought your children here to help with PADS or to sing in the choir. Still others are just glad to come here and see the children – symbols of hope and possibility in a world that tends to squash that in us sometimes.

I can say with certainty that the stone building on the corner of Lake and Kenilworth is not the church. But I can say with equal certainty that the building plays a significant role in what helps us be the church and live the church. It is where we are called together each week to learn about our true foundation – Jesus Christ. So we’ll keep bringing our kids here to strengthen their base and shore up their footers and help them learn what it really means to be the church.

*—Mamie Broadhurst*

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*“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.”*

*—1 Corinthians 3:11*

I wonder, by now, how many blueprints, models, and architectural drawings I’ve looked at in the last two years?

I think each of us has some appreciation for the labor of love and expertise that has been contributed by a key group of our church members over that time in preparation for this building project. Plans, measurements, engineering studies, consultants, late night meetings at the church, more measurements, more cost estimates, more conversation and questions for the congregation—models, plans, blueprints. It’s all crucial for success.

And yet...

And yet...important as the careful planning is, it only serves to give us a better, more refined tool to grow faith and increase the ways we can serve those in need.

And yet...all the plans in the world about the building are rendered irrelevant without a commitment to what happens in the building.

And yet...this starts and concludes...with God.

For can-do, make-a-plan and then work-the-plan kind of people we tend to be, this can be the hardest part. God is the foundation. First, there is God—trust, grace, hope, abundance—and THEN there is everything else.

Come to think of it, right now—these days of raising money and reviewing one more set of plans, maybe that is our prayer:

God, first there is you—all of you—trust, grace, hope, abundance—and THEN there is everything else. Help us believe this. Help us trust this. Help us live this. Amen.

*—Mark Ramsey*

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