



Live Well. Give Well.

Stewardship Season 2008
First United Church of Oak Park

“Live Well, Give Well” is our stewardship theme. Some churches state the opposite: if we give well, we will live well—that is, if we give generously, God will bestow on us material blessings. Jesus knew better.

Jesus put it this way: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” We are called to live well, loving God and our neighbors as ourselves. If that is where we put our treasure, our time and our money, then our hearts will grow to be there, too. We will be natural givers; we will benefit from being generous givers by growing generous hearts. When we choose to give, we invest ourselves more fully in that organization or mission or area of service. Our hearts follow our money and our time.

This stewardship season is truly a new beginning financially at First United. In December 2006 the congregation voted to stop using endowment funds to balance deficit budgets. A limit was voted on the use of those funds, a limit that will preserve the funds while still benefiting from them, primarily for mission giving. The 2008 budget, summarized in the center of this brochure, is balanced—thanks to a 5.7% reduction in expenses for 2008 compared with 2007. That still leaves a 6% increase in pledging required to achieve that balanced budget. Yet we can rejoice in moving toward a new day in stewardship of our finances at First United!

As you will see in this brochure, First United is a blessed congregation...able to be a blessing to others. If you are already giving generously to First United, thanks be to God! May you be led to “step up” to another level, as illustrated on page 11. If you are one of the many in the congregation who have not yet discovered the joy of growing joyful hearts through generous giving, please use this stewardship time to consider making a pledge, knowing that your heart will truly follow your money and time!

May we be God’s generous and joyful stewards!

Jim Brasel
Lead Pastor (interim)

Beginning in the summer of 2006, the Church Council, following the resignation of Pastor Mark Ramsey, entered into a consideration of needed emphases in the life of First United. This process, guided by an organizational development consultant, included confidential, in-depth interviews with current staff and Council members, former moderators of the congregation, former pastors and interims, and church members. A series of congregational breakfasts was held to discuss what was being heard and learned.

The conclusion was a strong affirmation of First United with four areas for priority attention.

Affirmation

We affirmed that the basic values of life at First United are strong. There is agreement with the emphasis on mission, social and civic action, youth and adult education, and the sense of community that exists.

Areas for Priority Attention

Worship and Spirituality: there was agreement that worship was central to the life of the congregation. Enriching worship and enhancing opportunities for spiritual growth is needed. The Church Council then voted the following WIG (Wildly Important Goal): “creating and maintaining a framework that nourishes the spiritual welfare of the congregation.”

Governance and Decision Making: helping everyone understand the church’s decision-making structure and who makes what decisions in what way is a priority. The goal is to make governance and decision making transparent to the congregation.

Communication: sharing information with and soliciting input from the congregation in ways that keep people informed and involved is a priority.

Finances: living with a balanced budget, stopping the use of the endowment funds to cover deficit budgets, and being able to pursue ministries and missions now only a dream because of current giving levels are priorities. This includes creating more understanding about giving patterns and budgeting, including increasing the understanding of stewardship as central to spiritual growth and development.

Generous giving allows us to live well, to answer God's call in many ways, by.....

...proclaiming the gospel, sharing in worship, and celebrating the sacraments:

Each week we share worship, gathering to give thanks, to pray, to reflect, to connect with God and with one another. The sanctuary choir, guest musicians, children singing, beautiful organ music and colorful art inspirations add to our worship. All are welcome in First United's intentionally inclusive community. We also celebrate special services of Advent, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Lent and Holy Week.

...nurturing the growth of personal faith, and studying the Word of God in relation to our daily lives;

150 children and youth share in Church School with 43 leaders guiding them. Quest Confirmation Class, lectionary Bible studies each Sunday morning, adult education opportunities that are diverse and challenging each Sunday are part of our life together. Youth are touched with God's love through the FUJI and FUSH youth groups. Bibles are given to those newly baptized, third graders, and those being confirmed.

...supporting, challenging, and affirming one another;

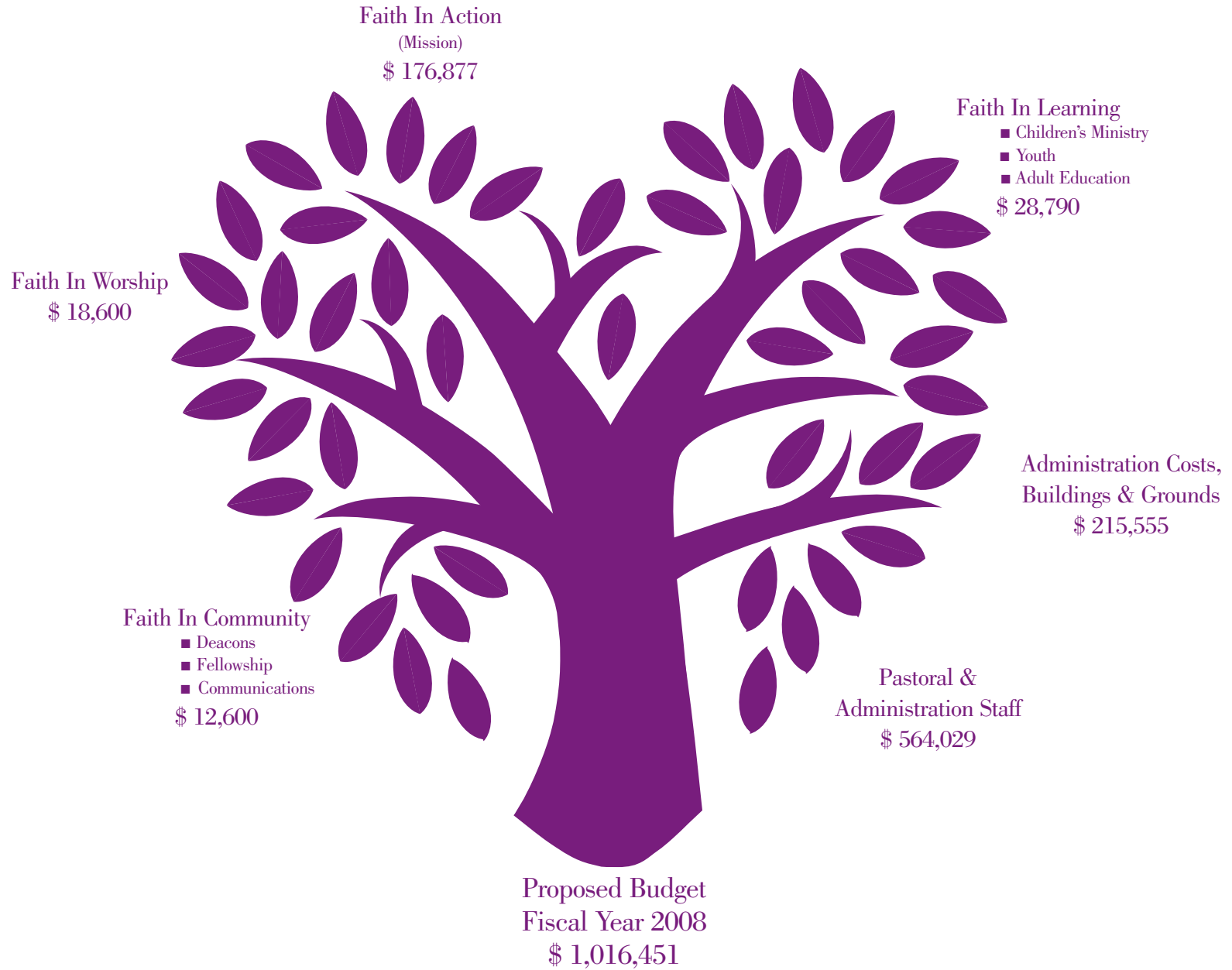
People gather in Evening Division women's group, a men's breakfast group, the breakfast bunch, Directions Women's Group, prayer shawl ministry, choir, family camp, fish fry, August cookouts, open gym nights, and Inner Peace/World Peace group.

...and reaching out to the community and world with ministries of compassion and justice.

Generous giving makes it possible for First United to host the food pantry, Walk-In Ministry, PADS homeless shelter, cluster tutoring, alternative Christmas store, PFLAG, the Oak Park River Forest Symphony, Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, and many others in our facility. As well, we sponsor mission trips, travel seminars, CROP Walk, and mission partners for church school classes.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

—Matthew 6:21



*H*ere are examples of how generous giving makes a difference in many lives.

Each week over 100 men and women are housed through the PADS emergency shelter program. First United volunteers serve as hosts at least once a month and our financial support helps people move from homelessness to housing.

Four families in Mississippi moved closer to recovery because of First United work teams after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their homes.

Over 50 youth spent a week preparing facilities for *Seeds of Peace* in Maine where youth leaders from regions of conflict are given skills to advance reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

Gloves, scarves and hats to ease the effect of Chicago winters are provided to the participants of Erie Neighborhood House and Sister House.

Six birthday parties are given each year for homeless men and women (who rarely receive such a celebration) at Interfaith House as they recover from medical concerns.

The Walk-In Ministry, a First United partnership with other religious communities, provides bus passes, food vouchers, clothes, rental assistance and agency referrals to countless people in need; First United houses this ministry.

Five people are safely housed in Chicago having escaped death threats in Colombia with the help of First United's financial support for the Chicago Metropolitan Sanctuary Alliance.

Thousands of dollars are raised to fight hunger in our community and around the world as First United members of all ages take part in the annual CROP Walk for Church World Service.

Hundreds of people each month are assisted through the Food Pantry housed at First United.

University of Illinois-Chicago students are provided with Agape House campus ministry, an open and welcoming community that helps students explore God's call to them.

1. Find where you are on the 2007 Pledging Pattern stairs.

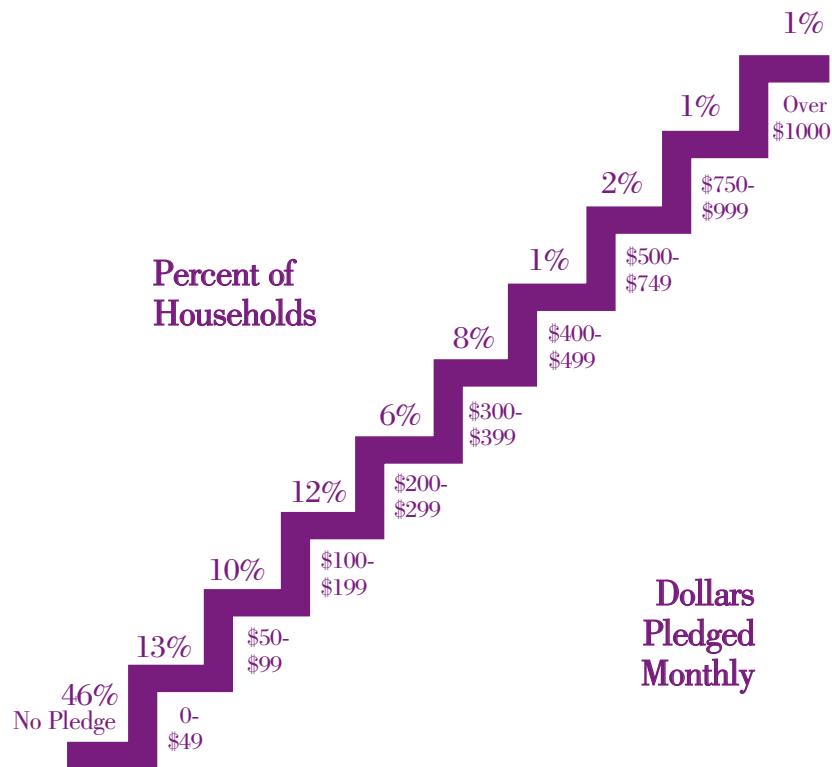
2. Then prayerfully consider moving up a step in 2008.

3. If you are not on the stairs, prayerfully consider joining.

Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

—Corinthians 8:7

2007 Total Households	443
2007 Pledging Households	239
% of Households Who Pledge	54%



First United Pledging Pattern for 2007

In response to God's call to live and give boldly, we are asking you to renew and increase your financial commitment to the many important ministries of First United. We are all blessed in so many ways, freely giving back to God what has been given to us is an important part of each of our faith journeys.

Live Well. Give Well.

2008 Stewardship Committee

- 1.** Prayerfully determine your estimate of giving for the calendar year 2008. Please consult the easy-to-use "Step Up For The Future" guide on page 10 and 11 of this booklet. You may also find the Monthly Giving Chart printed on your Estimate of Giving card helpful.

- 2.** Complete your Estimate of Giving Card. This is the most important step you can take for the life of our church.

- 3.** Return your Giving Card to the church by Stewardship Dedication Sunday, October 28, 2007.

We make a living by what we get.

We make a life by what we give.

—Sir Winston Churchill



First United Church of Oak Park
848 Lake Street
Oak Park, Illinois 60301
708.386.5251

www.firstunitedoakpark.com
An open community united in love & justice

Print out, cut out and return to church office at:

First United Church of Oak Park
848 Lake Street
Oak Park, Illinois 60301

Giving Card 2008 First United Church of Oak Park

Together as a community of faith, we encourage each other to prayerfully consider what God asks of each of us.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

email: _____

Annual Total Pledge: _____

I/we intend to make pledge gifts each:

week month quarter year

please send envelopes

I want automatic withdrawal—
Set-up at www.firstunitedchurchoakpark.com

please send children's envelopes
_____number

