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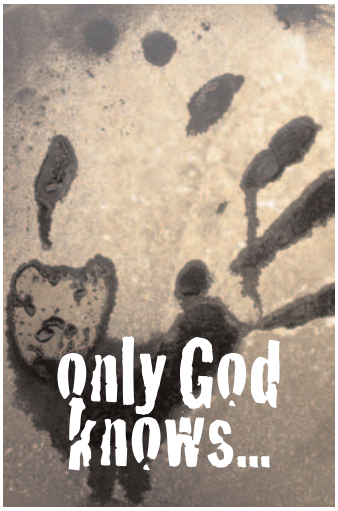
February 2009

The Messenger Bell



God is good, all the time...

A longtime church member told me he likes the phrase we often use in worship, "God is good, all the time, all the time, God is good." But he confessed he finds it harder to say those words now that the economic recession has cast a pall over our national mood. What's good about high unemployment and plunging stock market returns? What's good about a stagnant housing market? What's good about dire predictions for the year ahead? In short, what is good about a LOWER standard of living?

Not much is good about any of these things. It goes without saying that we will hope, pray and work in ways that relieve the suffering of those most deeply affected. But what spiritual attitude can help us in the living of these days? How can we resist being dragged down by pessimism and panic?

I remember an old story that may help. Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. He was poor, but was envied by all because he owned a beautiful white horse. One morning he found the horse was not in the stable. The villagers came to see him and scoffed, "We told you someone would steal that horse because it was so valuable. Now you've been cursed."

The old man said, "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know. The rest is judgment. Whether it is a curse or a blessing, I can't say. Who knows what will come next?" The people laughed at him, but after 15 days the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only that, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. The villagers gathered around the woodcutter. "Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse turned out to be a blessing. Please forgive us." The man said, "Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back and has brought 12 other horses, but don't judge. I can't say that this is a blessing. I am content with what I do know, and I am not perturbed by what I don't."

The old man had one son. The young man began to try to train the wild horses. After a few days, he fell and broke both legs. The villagers ran to his home, saying, "You were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing but a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. You are poorer than ever." The old man spoke. "Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? Life comes in fragments." A few weeks later the country engaged in a war against a neighboring country. All of the young men were called to serve. Because the old man's son was injured, he could not go off to war. Most of the other villagers knew they would never see their sons again.

"You were right old man," they wept. "Your son's accident was a blessing. At least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever." The man responded sadly, "No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows."

We believe that all things work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8:28). Not all things are in themselves "good," but we believe nothing, however evil, can separate us from the love of God in Christ. God's action and presence is so powerful that suffering is not a final obstacle to joy, but may be transformed to blessing. In the meantime, live in this moment. And know that God is good, even now. All the time, God is good.

In Christian love,
Julie R. Harley, *Lead Pastor*

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Every morning
The world
Is created
Under the orange

Sticks of the sun
The heaped
Ashes of the night
Turn into leaves again

continued>

Transitions

Birth *Eva Sordilla,* daughter of Linda and Frank, sister of Anna and Sophia

Compassion:

Joan Porter, mother of Josephine Porter
George Mandel, father of Audrey Todd
Pat, daughter-in-law of Liz and Bob Howells
Father of Elaine Pierce
Paul Soderdahl
Evelyn Dickerson, mother of Anne Dickerson
Lee Anderson
John Armour
Eva Sordilla
Ellen Goldstein, mother of Judith Loevy

Condolence:

James Mizen, uncle of Michael Mizen
Gabriel Valencia, uncle of Carlos Pareja
Alfred Dick Webster, brother of Alice Miller

Deacons:

Janet Haisman
Franklyn (Bud) Hayes
Neal McNish
Harriet Udelson
Melinda Haag
Matt Kemper
Sally Sutherland
Carl Nauert
Betsy Samore
Sam Dammers
Lee Anderson
Priscilla Sibley
Chris Davis

Pastoral care needs

Please contact any member of the pastoral staff if you need a home visit, hospital visit, nursing home visit or personal counseling. If there is a pastoral emergency after office hours, Lead Pastor Julie R. Harley can be reached on her cell phone at 630-561-4255.

Parish, Meet Julie...Julie Meet Parish —Mamie Broadhurst

Starting in February...that's this month! The Deacons are hosting small gatherings for our members to get to know our new Lead Pastor, Julie Harley. We are using the parish system to organize ourselves, so we encourage you to keep an eye out in the *Messenger Bell* for your parish's event. If you don't know where your parish is, just check with Harriet Udelson (hshawk@att.net) or Janet Haisman (jhais@sbcglobal.net). Because we know schedules vary, anyone is welcome to come to any gathering, just RSVP to let us know you'll join us and to see what you can bring!

When we get together from 12:30-2:00pm we will eat a light lunch starting in Centennial Hall. When we gather from 3:30-5:00pm we will meet in the Lounge.

Holy Week Worship Planning Workshop Monday, Feb. 23

—Julie R. Harley

All are welcome to meet with our pastoral and music staff to plan our Holy Week services (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter). We will begin with dinner at 6:00 pm in the lounge and then adjourn to the chapel. Please RSVP to Julie R. Harley so we can plan for food (jrh@firstunitedoakpark.com).

Here is an opening schedule for Meet Julie!

Parish 10—
Sunday, February 15 – 3:30-5:00 pm
Parish 7—
Sunday, March 1 – 12:30-2:00 pm
Parish 9 and 12—
Sunday, March 15 – 3:30-5:00 pm
Parish 2 and 3—
Sunday, March 29 – 3:30-5:00 pm
Parish 4—
Sunday, April 5 – 12:30-2:-00 pm
ALL PARISH BRUNCHES
Sunday, April 19 (Parish 1)
Parish 8—
Sunday, April 26 – 12:30-2:00 pm
Parish 6 and 11—
Sunday, May 17 – 3:30-5:00 pm
Parish 5—
Sunday, May 31 – 12:30-2:00 pm

February Worship

February 1
Epiphany 4
8:30 am Annual Congregational Meeting
9:00 am New Member Class
11:00 am Worship
Sermon – "Even Demons Will Obey"
Deuteronomy 18:15-20, Psalm 111, Mark 1:21-28

February 8
Epiphany 5
9:00 am New Member Class
9:30 am Christian Education for All/Quest
11:00 am Worship with Communion
Sermon – "Storytelling"
1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Mark 1:29-39

February 15
Epiphany 6
9:00 am New Member Class
9:30 am Christian Education for All/Quest
11:00 am Worship
Sermon – "Love, Medicine and Miracles"
Psalm 30, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Mark 1:40-45

February 22
Transfiguration of the Lord
8:30 am Church School Leader Breakfast
9:00 am New Member Class
9:30 am Christian Education for All/Quest
11:00 am Worship-New Member Introduction
Sermon – "Is This Heaven?'
2 Kings 2:1-12, Mark 9:2-9

February 25
Ash Wednesday Service
with Communion and Placing of Ashes
7:00 pm Service
Isaiah 58:1-12, Matthew 6:16-21

Ash Wednesday

—Kelly Brouwer

In the Western Christian Calendar, Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent and occurs forty days before Easter (excluding Sundays). It falls on a different date each year, because it is dependent on the date of Easter; it can occur as early as February 4 or as late as March 10. This year it's on February 25.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are often gathered after the Palm Crosses from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burned. In the liturgical practice of some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil. This paste is used to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of those present. Often the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" are recited.

First United Church of Oak Park will have a worship service at 7:00 pm on Ash Wednesday. The texts will be Isaiah 58:1-12 and Matthew 6:16-21. Come join us as we begin our journey toward the cross together.

Lent Soup and Study

—Kelly Brouwer

Lent is often described as a 40 day journey toward the cross filled with reflection and prayer. Lent is a journey. Come and share part of that journey with other folks at First United. Each Wednesday during Lent (March 4, 11, 18, 25) from 6:30-7:30 pm, come to church for a time of soup and a brief Bible study. The Senior High School kids will provide the simple meal of a variety of soups, bread and dessert; the staff will provide the Bible study. There will be a freewill donation with proceeds going toward Work Camp '09.

And fasten themselves
to the high branches—
And the ponds appear
Like black cloth
On which are painted
islands

Of summer lilies.
If it is your nature
To be happy
You will swim away
along the soft trails

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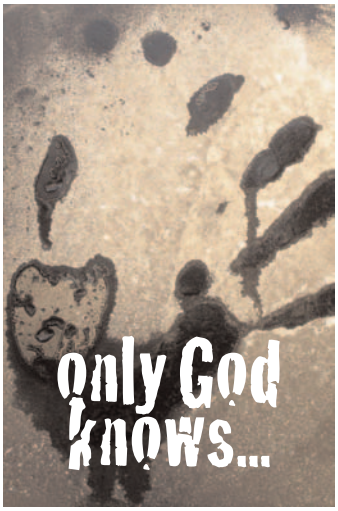

New Member Class in February —Mamie Broadhurst

Are you interested in becoming a member at First United? Please contact me or any one of the ministers so that we can talk with you about the church, what your interests are, and next steps. We have a set of four classes for anyone who is thinking of joining and would like to know more about the church. Each Sunday morning in February from 9:00-10:30 am we will gather to talk about the church, about our faith, and about ourselves. Child care is available in these hours, so please talk to me if you would like to make use of it! We will welcome new members into the life of the church at our worship service on February 22nd.

Have You Talked to a New Member (or someone new to you…) Today?
Each time I talk with visitors to First United they inevitably mention how warm and welcoming our community is. They are grateful when people greet them and take the time to talk. Way to go! The problem comes a few months later. People begin to look familiar, but we haven't talked to them yet. Or we have talked to them, and we still can't remember their name. So we look down, or wave from afar, because we are embarrassed. The New Member Committee would like to offer everyone a clean slate! In February, walk up to someone who you don't quite know and introduce yourself – again, perhaps! Guilt-free, worry-less, it's your chance to just step in and try again. It's easy, so say hello to someone new to you each Sunday in February!

Faith IN ACTION

—Mamie Broadhurst

Sharing our Fruits – 4th Sunday Offering —Mamie Broadhurst

In an effort to continue outreach with our local, denominational, and global communities, Faith in Action in coordination with the Finance Committee and Church Council have decided to give away one offering each month. We will use the offering collected on the 4th Sunday of every month to go to specific organizations/causes with whom we have a relationship.

What do we mean by offering? It is any coins, currency, and/or checks collected in the offering plates other than that which is specifically designated to fulfilling a pledge or dedicated to a different purpose.

What are we going to do with the funds? Faith in Action has selected four areas of concentration: Justice, Peace, Hunger/Housing, and Renewal. First quarter 2009, we will concentrate on Justice.

February's offering will go toward support for Luis Fernando Valencia Angulo whom we have invited to take sanctuary in our midst. Luis Fernando is a 21 year old Afro-Colombian man whose life has been threatened and who needs to leave the country. We hope his visa will come through in short order and that he will join us in the next few months. Your money will help cover his costs while he is with us for six months.

Food Pantry Shatters Attendance Records

—Michele Zurakowski and Kathy Russell, *Co-Operations Managers of the OPRF Food Pantry*

We knew the worsening economy would impact the Food Pantry. By the end of September we were serving 34% more families than we had seen through September of 2007. In November, the Food Pantry served a record 788 families, representing 2806 individuals. (In comparison, Nov 2007 saw 390 families served.)

The good news is that we have been able to provide each of those families with good, nutritious food to help tide them over in their time of need. As always during the holiday season, our community dug deeply to give to their less fortunate neighbors.

While canned food drives are a staple of the pantry business, nothing goes further towards feeding the hungry than cash donations. If you'd like to donate, please send a check to OPRF Food Pantry, PO Box 3365, Oak Park, IL 60303 or visit www.oprffoodpantry.org and click on the Donate button. Many thanks.

Walk-In Ministry Needs Saturday Volunteers

—Mamie Broadhurst

The Walk-In Ministry has some staffing shortages on Saturday mornings, and needs our help! On that day the Walk-In Ministry sees mostly referrals from the Food Pantry so most clients are new and need an intake form done. This is the most time consuming but also perhaps the most important visit a client makes.

The atmosphere is very co-operative and offers a great deal of give and take and problem solving by all the volunteers, and the small amount of time you provide (9:45 – 11:30 am) makes a world of difference. To learn more you can talk with Susan Zaruba or Laurie Jolicoeur from our congregation and to find out about the next volunteer training or to sign up please contact Brenda Matson by email at brendajm@comcast.net or get her phone number from Mamie.

Coats, Coats and More Coats

—Marilyn Kauffmann

Early in the fall the Walk-in Ministry volunteers were having a discussion about the need for warm winter outer wear for our clients. In late October, I went to Breit and Bright Cleaners, 7322 West Madison in River Forest, to pick up some items. I asked the clerk what happens to coats and jackets that are not picked up. She introduced me to Mark Breit, the owner. We discussed the Walk-in Ministry and our connection with PADS. It was at that point that Mark said he was thinking of doing a community project – How about a coat collection? 200 coats and jackets later, in excellent condition and freshly cleaned, brought smiles and sometimes tears to our clients faces. The first jacket I gave out was to a man who was stunned – "It's new! I have never had anything this nice!" The book of Matthew tells us, "Knock and a door shall be opened unto you. Seek and you shall find." How true, good people come into our lives in such unexpected ways!

A Joyful Report
on the Alternative Christmas Store (ACS)

—Laurie Jolicoeur, Beth Mrkvicka, and Brian & Jamie Shamhart

Once again, our congregation has stepped up in a very meaningful way by incorporating ACS into our Advent and holiday ritual. We hope that the ACS was able to offer all participants a meaningful connection to both family and friends, as well as to the First United mission partners that we support. In these times of economic uncertainties both at home and abroad, the Oak Park community organizations and international causes that the ACS supports also find it harder and harder to meet their financial goals. Fortunately, we were able to set another ACS revenue record of nearly $14,900 and continue to grow our support for the following organizations:

Church World Service – ($4,800+ donation including 6 Water Buffaloes, 30 Water Wells, 18 Mosquito Nets, 12 Beehives, 18 Blankets, and many other items)

Women's Guild – (Snugglies (23), Layettes (16), Pack-n-Plays (6) $1,200+ donation)

PADS – (Gift Cards and Pins, $1,000 donation)

Colores del Pueblo – (Various gifts $1,900+ contribution)

Equal Exchange – (Coffee & Chocolate $900+ contribution)

SERRV – (Various gifts $1,500+ contribution)

Palestinian Fair Trade – (Olive Oil, Spices, Soaps $1,100+ contribution)

Erie House – (192 pounds of Pecans $1,500+ contribution)

First United Preschool – (Art work, Cards $300+ contribution)

Infant Welfare – (Cookbooks $100+ contribution)

We look forward to the 2009 Advent season and to further expanding the offerings of the ACS. If you know of an organization that you feel would be a good fit, or have any questions/comments, please feel free to contact one of the volunteers listed above. We would love to hear from you. A special thanks to: Kelly Brouwer and the FUSH/FUJI groups for kicking in over $800 in purchases and contributions and Joanne Despotes who created the Alternative Christmas Store more than 20 years ago and helped build a wonderful tradition.

For hours, your
imagination
Alighting everywhere.
And if your spirit
Carries with it

The thorn
That is heavier than
lead—
If it's all you can do
To keep on trudging—

There is still
Somewhere deep
within you
A beast shouting that
the earth
Is exactly what it
wanted—

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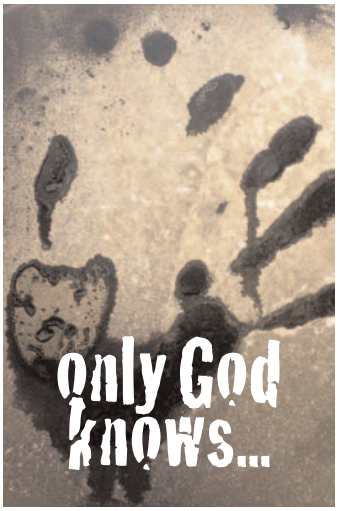


The State of the Economy and PADS: Report and Forecast

—Wendy Epstein, Development Coordinator for PADS

You might be surprised to learn that PADS has not seen a surge in the number of individuals seeking shelter this season. Generally, people who have lost their homes will stay in a hotel, double up with friends or family, or live in their car before seeking food and shelter at a homeless shelter. It is only after they have depleted all of their savings and worn out their welcome with those family and friends that they will come to PADS.

Where we have seen a dramatic increase is in our Homeless Prevention Program. Homeless Prevention provides households at imminent risk of losing their housing due to a short-term financial crisis with a one-time rental, mortgage and/or utility payment, and a security deposit or first month's rent for those leaving homelessness. In 2007, 119 individuals in 46 households received Homeless Prevention assistance. By comparison, 190 individuals in 73 households received assistance in 2008. Clearly, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of people who are on the brink of homelessness in the last year.

Financially, the picture is worrisome. We have been denied funding from private foundations whose assets are tied to the stock market, our Emergency Fund allotment has been cut in half, and we are bracing ourselves for a major reduction in United Way funding for FY2010. These reductions will affect all of our program areas – Emergency Shelter, Supportive Services, Transitional and Permanent Supportive Housing and Homeless Prevention.

Financial support from community-minded congregations like First United Church has helped cushion these blows. We are thankful for our long-standing partnership with First United and hope that First United will continue to support our mission in what may be very difficult years ahead.

"And The Survey Says....."

First and foremost THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU to all who responded to the mission survey. We learned a lot!

Over the past couple of months the Faith In Action (FIA) Committee prepared, presented and now tabulated a mission survey designed to ascertain the major mission focuses of the congregation. After distributing surveys with the Sunday morning worship bulletins and also on line we received just over 100 completed surveys. The tabulated results are as follows:

Missions	*Response Count*	*Response Percentage*
Homelessness/Housing	43	16.7
Immigration	3	1.2
AIDS	2	0.8
Criminal Justice	4	1.6
Environment	30	11.6
Civil Rights	18	7
Health Care	40	15.5
Labor Rights	2	0.8
Education	43	16.7
Hunger	43	16.7
Poverty	22	8.6
Domestic Violence	8	3.1

Join Us For a "Mission Luncheon" on Sunday, February 22!

All are invited to a light lunch after worship at 12:30 pm in Centennial Hall where the results of the survey will be presented and group discussions initiated on the areas of greatest interest according to our survey results. Participants will help generate ideas to initiate programs and projects that address the specific needs of the most noted mission emphases.

Our goal is to come up with one major mission emphasis which will have long term and short term projects that can be initiated by our church. Faith in Action will take the information and ideas from the "Mission Lunch" and design and implement a long term,

Mission Lunch continued>

Mission Lunch continued

multi-pronged local mission plan for the congregation. First United has a long history of leading the community in supporting those whom God calls us to help and this is another BIG step to continuing our journey.

Please contact Bob Hahn, Mamie or any member of the FIA Committee with any questions. Sign-up sheets are available in the lounge, and RSVPs are requested by February 15th to assist in our planning.

Clerk's Corner

— Ann Armstrong

Continuing our conversation about what Church Council is doing:
At the December meeting, our "Big Picture Conversation" focused on the five questions that Rev. Julie R. Harley asked several church members during her first several weeks with us. These five questions were:

- What are the biggest challenges our church is facing?
- What created these challenges?
- What are the unexplored opportunities for our congregation?
- What would need to change so that we could explore these opportunities?
- If you were in my role as the new Lead Pastor, where would you focus your attention?

Council broke into groups of four to discuss each of the questions. Each group recorded their responses. (The responses included the December Council meeting minutes available at the elder desk in the lounge, on the Council bulletin board in the lounge, and on First United's new web site.)

The process of discernment is a gift given to the Council. And listening is a key element in discernment. Going forward, as we look at and digest what was said in our small groups and what is said at meetings of church members, such as the upcoming Annual Meeting on February 1, certain themes will emerge. As we listen to one another and begin to hear the same things over and over, we can start to hear God speaking to us and get a better idea of where God wants us to go. These kinds of conversations are the beginnings of a visioning process later this year that will involve the whole church in discerning what God is calling us to do. It is highly likely we will uncover several things God is calling First United to do, so we must be prepared to make choices about what to do first so that we can focus our efforts for maximum impact.

Seeking Sanctuary?

—Scott Haldeman

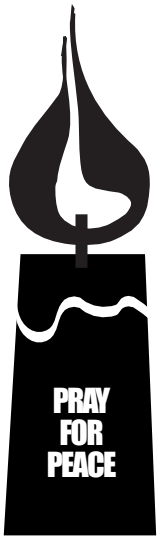
The Faith-in-Worship Committee seeks volunteers to help maintain the worship space at First United. More concretely, we would like to establish a "Sanctuary Guild," a member or group of members who take responsibility for checking each week before and after service that the worship space is tidy, inviting and hospitable—and that items needed for worship (such as candles, hymnals for worship leaders, etc.) are in their proper places and in working order. We are developing a check list and will offer training. We especially encourage new members to consider this opportunity for service. Besides individuals, families might consider doing this together. Obviously, the more people who volunteer the less frequently each person or family one would actually be asked to serve. Also, at least one member of the "Sanctuary Guild" would be invited to serve on Faith-in-Worship to facilitate communication. Please call or email Scott Haldeman if you are willing to help out in this way:
708.488.9334 or shaldeman@ctschicago.edu.

Sanctuary Clean-up!

Before the "Sanctuary Guild" begins its work, Faith-in-Worship would like to do a general cleaning and beautification of the narthex and sanctuary. So, on Saturday, 21 February, from 9:00 am to 11:00 am (or until we finish), we could use help removing junk, polishing pews and general tidying up to make our worship space more inviting and orderly. Please put on some old clothes, grab a bucket and a bottle of Murphy's Oil soap and join us!

Prayers for Peace
On the front steps of the church every Friday evening at 7pm

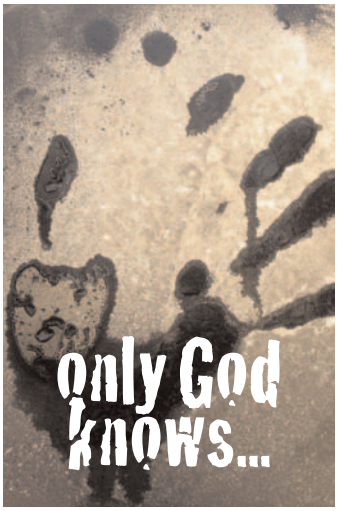
INNERPEACE WORLDPEACE
Saturday at 8:30am, in the Conference Room
All are invited.



Each pond with its
blazing lilies
Is a prayer heard and
answered
Lavishly,
Every morning,

Whether or not
You have ever dared to
be happy,
Whether or not
You have ever dared
to pray.

—Mary Oliver



Spiritual Guidance Groups Begin on Thursday Nights

—Julie R. Harley

Monthly spiritual guidance groups will begin meeting in February from 7:00 to 9:00 pm in the chapel. We will most likely meet on the third Thursday of each month. Watch the church web site for the dates and contact Julie R. Harley if you would like to join one of the groups.

Gaza Humanitarian Aid

—Mamie Broadhurst

The situation in Gaza remains difficult and dangerous. The conflict has already caused the loss of hundreds of lives, a rapidly mounting score of injured civilians and the systematic destruction of basic means of subsistence. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) is responding to the current crisis in the Middle East as a member of the Action by Churches Together (ACT) International alliance. The PDA supported efforts have included provision of food, including high-energy biscuits for children, medicine and blankets, as well as the deployment of trauma counselors. Additional information on the response can be found on the PDA website at www.pcusa.org/pda. If you would like to donate to this effort, you can do so on the PDA website or by giving a check to First United with "Gaza Relief" on the memo line.

Join us for Ecumenical Advocacy Days

—Mamie Broadhurst

A new administration is in charge in Washington, D.C. and a new Congress. Don't you want to tell them something? Plan to attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days, March 13-16, 2009. Several thousand church members will gather, attend workshops, worship together, and on Monday call on elected officials. Topics targeted include: Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Middle East, the U.S., Eco-Justice, Global Economic Justice, and Peace & Global Security.

Talk to previous participants if you want more information: the Rev. Mamie Broadhurst, Claudette Zobel or Pauline Coffman, or go to http://advocacydays.org for more information. The deadline to register is February 13. Financial assistance is available. There will be another opportunity for advocacy in Washington, D.C. in early June sponsored by Churches for Middle East Peace. Stay tuned!

YOUTHNEWS

—Kelly Brouwer

The FUJI'S have the opportunity to attend a weekend OWL (Our Whole Lives) retreat on March 14 and 15. *Our Whole Lives* helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior. It equips participants with accurate, age-appropriate information in six subject areas: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. Grounded in a holistic view of sexuality, *Our Whole Lives* provides not only facts about anatomy and human development, but helps participants clarify their values, build interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality. First United has trained individuals that lead this training along with Kelly Brouwer, Associate Pastor for Youth Ministry and Adult Education, and our dedicated FUJI youth advisors.
Come to a meeting for parents on February 26 @ 7:00 pm to learn more.
Some important dates to remember:

February 8: Broomball in Franklin Park! 5:15-7:30 pm
February 15: FUJI Broomball in Franklin Park! 5:15-7:30 pm
February 20: FUSH Lock in @ church—8:00 pm-8:00 am
February 26: FUJI Parents meeting to learn more about O.W.L.—7:00 pm at church.
March 14-15: O.W.L. Retreat for FUJI's
March 20: TENTATIVE date for FUJI lock in
March 22: Mostaccioli Luncheon immediately following worship—
this is the only FUJI fundraiser of the year.
April 25: Youth Sunday practice—Time to be determined
April 26: Youth Sunday@11 am
May 8-10: FUJI Retreat at Tower Hill Camp
July 24-July 31: WORK CAMP!

Adult Education

—Kelly Brouwer

New Member's Class—February 1-22—Chapel

This class is for people interested in joining First United and becoming members of the church. The class includes information about church history, our two denominations, the activities of First United, and how to get involved. It also includes opportunities for members to get to know one another and to share their interests and hopes as potential church members. If you would like to come to this class and/or know more about it, please contact Rev. Mamie Broadhurst at 708-386-5215 or mamie@firstunitedoakpark.com.

How Can You Be a Church Without Doctrine?—February 8-22—Centennial Hall
What do we really mean when we say we believe? Is faith more about trust and relationships or belief and doctrine? This course will explore these questions and more by engaging the theology and practices of the "Emergent Church" movement, which has been adopting new ways to reach out to those disaffected by the church. Presentation and guided discussion will be led by Rev. Nanette Sawyer. She is the pastor of Wicker Park Grace, an emergent church launched by the Presbytery of Chicago and in mission covenant partnership with First United Church of Oak Park.

Art and Spirituality—March 1-29—Chapel
These four weeks will allow you that chance to explore art as it relates to Spirituality. Some of our very own artists will share both their art and how it feeds them spiritually.

Exploring Common Relationship Challenges:—Spouses and Partners; Parents and Children
March 1 & 8—Centennial Hall —Elena Vassallo

Continued Conversations on Race—March 15—Centennial Hall —Lee Butler
March 15—Centennial Hall

Renewal in the Wilderness—March 22—Centennial Hall —John Lionberger
John Lionberger's book *Renewal in the Wilderness: A Spiritual Guide to Connecting to God in the Natural World* shows meaningful but ordinary ways of connecting with God. John, a UCC pastor and chaplain at Three Crowns Park in Evanston, will come and share his work with us.

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless—March 29—Centennial Hall
A group of people, formerly or currently homeless, will describe their experiences on the streets and how we can make an impact on this pressing social problem.

Lectionary Bible Study—All year long!—Conference Room
This class gathers each Sunday to look at the Lectionary texts for the day. Come and explore the Bible with this group! Bring questions, comments and discussion!

**Please pick up a copy of the latest Adult Education brochure on the elder desk in the lounge.*

Hymn Lovers Invited to Compose for Lent

At our Lenten worship planning workshop, we agreed to invite members of our congregation to write a hymn for Lent. You may compose new words to a familiar tune, or you may wish to compose words and a new tune. Please give submissions to Bill Chin or Julie R. Harley by Feb. 25.

Letters to President Obama

— Julie R. Harley (jrh@firstunitedoakpark.com)

The last issue of "Sojourners" magazine contains letters to our new president written by a variety of religious leaders. I'd like to challenge all of our members to write a paragraph or two about what you would like President Obama to keep in mind as he assumes office. Please send or e-mail these to me by Feb. 28, and let me know if we can use your quotations on our website or in a future newsletter.

Annual Meeting — February 1, 2009 —Laurie Jolicoeur

First United's Annual Meeting where we celebrate the events of 2008 together. It's a family-friendly gathering which includes a light breakfast and coffee before the education hour. A light compendium of our 2008 life together is provided, a concise record of key action items from the past year. More details will be rolled out in the weeks to come. If you haven't been to an Annual Meeting, come and see what it means to witness our year in review. But, we won't stop there, expect to have some discussion about 2009, too. It's been a big year for First United. Come.

Church Finance/Stewardship Questions Answered —Joanne Despotes

As a new member of the Finance Committee I have been investigating how our church finances work and sharing what I learn in a monthly column. I hope that the things that I write about are what you want to know. If not, please let me know! Last month, I wrote about why we pledge and provided an update on the 2008 Stewardship Campaign. This month I want to start to tackle financial assets and liabilities. First United finances are indeed a complex blessing. We have so much that we sometimes take it for granted and forget the real value it gives us in terms of choices. Consider for example, that we have no mortgage on our church building(s) and we have multiple Endowment Funds with a current value (12/08) of $2,623,531.74.

Liabilities:
We have one active loan with Park National Bank currently in the amount of $375,000. This loan allowed us to pay for the reconstruction and updating of the lounge, staff offices, Centennial Hall, and the north/west entrance to the sanctuary that was completed in Dec. 2006. Members/friends pledged approximately $1.9 million to the Capital Campaign to pay for this construction but the pledges did not cover the entire cost of $2.4 million.

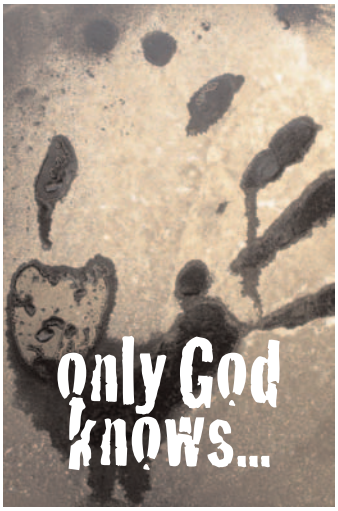
Furthermore, all the pledges have not yet been collected. We are expecting another $143,000 by March 2011 to complete the campaign. Unless unexpected gifts are received, we plan to convert the remainder (approx. $250,000) to a long-term debt or mortgage with the payments coming out of annual operating expenses in future budgets.

Assets:
Most of the 15 Endowment Funds of the church are co-mingled and managed as one asset by Park National. The church's Endowment Committee meets with the bank's representatives quarterly to review management of the funds. If this interests you, consider volunteering for the Endowment Committee by contacting Gene Armstrong, Endowment Committee Chair at 708-524-0381 or Justin Lewis, Finance Committee Chair at 708-660-8439.

The General Endowment consists of funds that have been donated by members or friends of the Church. Prior Church Councils have set these funds aside for support of the annual operating budget. The value of the General Endowment is generally expected to remain and hopefully keep up with inflation with only the earnings being spent for current needs. Anyone who has been around First United for any length of time would agree that we have NOT done this consistently through the years. In fact, there were a few years in which we wholeheartedly 'raided' the General Endowment in order to balance the operating budget when there was a shortfall in pledges. The congregation voted to stop this practice and since 2004 the Church Council has strictly followed a formula that (as of 2006) limits draws to 6% of a 5-year rolling average of the mid-year market value. The idea of this formula is to keep the spending fairly even year to year and to try to keep up with inflation. The value of the General Endowment as of 12/31/08 is $795,873.35 as compared to 12/31/07 when it was $1,136,282.15. The reduction in value is due to $72,074.00 withdrawn for operating in 2008 and the economy.

I imagine by now many of you are thinking 'enough already' so I will end this month by saying that this is the start of the story that I will continue next month. But this is only money. We have an obligation to be good stewards of the money but must be careful not to let the money control us. After all, God may have plans that we can't even imagine at this time. If we understand the blessings we have, we may be better able to discern how God would have us use them.

Future Questions to be tackled in this column:
1. What are the other Endowment Funds and how do they impact what First United can do?
2. What is Planned Giving? How can I make sure I give to the Church after I'm gone?
3. How much should I pledge?
4. Anything you want to know? Call or email me and I will try my best to get the answers, Joanne Despotes, 708-209-1377, jdespotes@ameritech.net.



To the Women of First United!

—Cindy Palombi

The 25th Annual Women's Retreat will be February 6-8, 2009 at Siena Center in Racine, Wisconsin. Our guest speaker will be Rachel Srubas. Rachel is a Benedictine oblate and Presbyterian clergywoman whose writings have appeared in *Christian Century, The Best American Poetry* and other publications. She is also a spiritual director, retreat leader, preacher, and teacher and lives in Tucson, Arizona with her husband, Ken McAllister. She has attended past retreats with our group and has been a past retreat leader.

Evening Division Programs

—Marcia Ashton

"Memory and Aging" (February 5th – 6:30 pm Centennial Hall) Tired of looking for your keys/credit card/glasses? Join us for an exceptional program by Drs. Helga and Tony Noice, faculty members at Elmhurst College. Their research on brain health was recently featured on the NBC Evening News Hour. Dinner reservations by February 1 to Grace Behrendes (708-386-2721.). You are welcome to come at 7:15 pm for the program only. Let us know if you need a ride.

"Influence of Jane Addams and Hull House Internationally" – by authors Rima Schultz and Peg Strobel. (March 5th, 6:30 pm, Centennial Hall.) Insights into early peace and social justice work and "Settlement House" movement.

PrimeTime Goes to the Movies

—Janet Haisman

On Sunday, 2/15/09, the PrimeTime Group (people aged 60+ and their spouses/partners) are invited to share an afternoon of movie-going and dessert. The movie will be a matinee at the Lake Theater. We don't know yet what will be playing, but the idea is to go to a movie that starts between 2:15 pm and 3:15 pm (your choice) and then meet afterward at the home of Ruth Luthringer (151 N. Kenilworth #2A). Ruth is providing dessert and hopes to see many of you there! Please call Ruth at 708-763-9029 or email Ted and Joanne Despotes at thedespotes@ameritech.net by 2/13/09 to let us know that you'll be joining us. See you then!

A tale...

"Tell me the weight
of a snowflake,"
a coal mouse asked
a wild dove.

"Nothing more than
nothing," was the
answer.

In that case I must tell
you a marvelous story,
the coal mouse said.
"I sat on the branch of a
fir, close to its trunk,
when it began to snow…

Since I didn't have
anything better to do,
I counted the snowflakes
settling on the twigs and
needles of my branch.
Their number was
exactly 3,741,952.

When the next
snowflake dropped onto
the branch – nothing
more than nothing,
as you say – the branch
broke off...

" The dove, since Noah's
time an authority on the
matter, thought about the
story for a while and
finally said to herself:

"Perhaps there is only
one person's voice
lacking for peace to come
about in the world."

Dinner and a Movie is on Hiatus!

In February, Dinner and a Movie will be replaced by…Ash Wednesday! We hope you will all join us for our service at 7pm on February 25th. In March, we will have a Lenten series on Wednesday nights – Soup and Bible Study from 6-7pm – that will also take the place of movie night, so mark Wednesday, April 22nd for our next gathering.

Empty Bowls – February 27 —Pennie Ebsen

The 6th annual Empty Bowls Community Dinner takes place on Friday, February 27 from 6:00-8:00 pm at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Empty Bowls is a soup dinner to raise money for local organizations working to fight hunger. This year's proceeds will go to PADS, the Food Pantry, and Global Alliance for Africa.

Bowls are $15.00 for adults, $10 for children and students under 18 with an ID. The soups are generously donated by area restaurants. The bowls have been made by dedicated students and generous potters. We can promise an opportunity to see many people, often someone you haven't seen in a while! (You'll probably see them while standing in the soup line!) You can see proud students, many from our own FUSH who are serving, coordinating or running errands.

- Last year we sold out of our stock of 500 bowls in less than one hour.
- Persistent students have set a goal of 1000 bowls for this event.
- Choose your bowl and take it home after enjoying your soup.
- Use it and remember that there are those whose bowls are empty on a regular basis.
- Or give yours as a gift and spread the story of the Empty Bowls Project.

Should you wish to volunteer call me, Pennie Ebsen at 708.434.3324. Or...just come and see what it is all about.

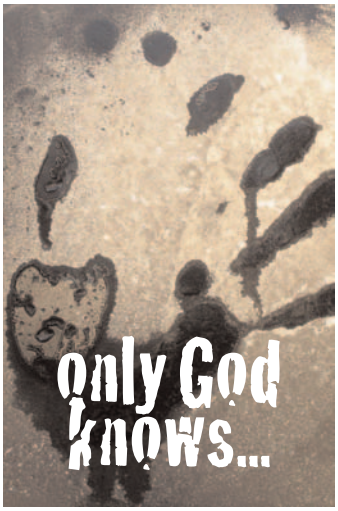
Thank You!

Thank You!
Thank You!
Thank You!

This passage from Hebrews 12:1 has been a source of strength for me for a long time... especially in the last five years since the onset of Bob's illness and the recent need to part with our car. There are so many witnesses to us , please forgive me if I don't mention you I am confident you know who you are. Among our witneses are Marilyn Heinrichs who has been a source of Christian strength to us and Bob Hahn who spent hours helping evict a tenant who hadn't paid her rent in a year and is now consulting on repairs to our home.

Many witnesses have given us rides including; Connie Ronnow, Priscilla Sibley and Claudette Zobel who drive me to the Wednesday Women's Breakfast. Bob is grateful for the rides to the Friday Men's Breakfast by Ted Despotes, Lee Anderson, Herb Zobel and others...and the many, many witnesses who offer us rides home from church, led by Melinda Haag. We enjoy visits from Marylen Marty-Gentile and are grateful for the prayers led by Julie and other pastors for the recovery of our son David's wife, Pat after a serious surgery.

May God Bless You. —Liz Howells



Fish and Fun and Food

We're getting out the cast iron skillets. We're picking out the menu. We're calling the cooks. Marylen and Mamie are planning the oh-so-fabulous decorations and looking for volunteers for the oh-so-easy tasks that make up a fish fry. The Fourth Annual Foolish Fish Fry is on its way. Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 7 from 5:30 pm.-7:30 pm. It's a time to sit and eat and hang out with First United folks that you don't get to spend much time with in the rush of a Sunday morning, and all the proceeds go to support One Great Hour of Sharing, the disaster relief offering taken up by both our denominations. Serving others and having fun. That's win-win.

If you are interested in helping out, please let Mamie or Marylen know (708-386-5215).

Church Calendar

February 2009

Regularly Scheduled Weekly Meetings: *Please check with convener if you have questions.*

Mondays & Tuesdays	*7:30p*	*PADS Homeless Shelter*	*Bill Lovell – 445-2665*
Wednesdays 2nd & 4th	*3:30p*	*Food Pantry Open*	*Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski - 386-1324*
and 1st	*7:00p*	*Food Pantry Open*	*Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski - 386-1324*
	7:00p	*Adult Choir*	*Bill Chin - 386-5215*
Thursdays	*6:30p*	*Cluster Tutoring Classes*	*Mamie Broadhurst – 386-5215*
Fridays	*7:00a*	*Men's Breakfast Group*	*Paul Beckwith – 386-4809*
	7:00p	*Peace Prayer Vigil*	*Bud Hayes*
Saturdays	*8:30a*	*Inner Peace/World Peace*	*Jeff Olson - 383-3154*
	9:00a	*Food Pantry*	*Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski – 386-1324*
Walk-in-Ministry	*Monday—Saturday 10 to 11am*		*Susan Zaruba—386-1946*

Week of February 1			
Sunday 1	8:30a	Congregation Annual Meeting	*Julie R. Harley*
	9:00a	New Member Class	*Mamie Broadhurst*
		No Christian Education	
	11:00a	Worship	
		No Youth Groups	
Monday 2	7:00p	Fellowship of Reconciliation	*Amy Pappageorge*
Tuesday 3	7:00p	Library Committee	*Cindy Palombi*
		Youth Board	*Kelly Brouwer*
		Faith in Worship Committee	*Scott Haldeman*
Wednesday 4	7:00p	New Member Committee	*Karen Christopher*
Thursday 5	6:30p	Evening Division Dinner	*Carole Ferguson*
	7:00p	Planned Giving	*Julie R. Harley*
Friday 6-8	6:00p	Women's Retreat at Siena Center	*Cindy Palombi*
Saturday 7	9:30a	Breakfast Bunch	
	1:00p	Dances of Universal Peace	*Cindy Palombi*
Week of February 8			
Sunday 8	9:00a	New Member Class	*Mamie Broadhurst*
	9:30a	Christian Education for All	
	9:30a	Quest	*Art Spooner/Gabrielle Worley*
	11:00a	Worship-Communion	
	5:00p	FUJI (Jr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
	6:00p	FUSH (Sr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
Tuesday 10	7:00p	Shawl Ministry	*Elan Long*
		Finance Committee	*Justin Lewis*
		Deacon Meeting	*Bud Hayes*
		Youth Committee	*Lou Valsoano*
	8:00p	Communications Committee	*Connie Henderson Damon*
Thursday 12	7:00p	Nominating Committee	*Linda Sand man*
		NO Cluster Tutoring Classes	
Week of February 15			
Sunday 15	9:00a	New Member Class	*Mamie Broadhurst*
	9:30a	Christian Education for All	
	9:30a	Quest	*Art Spooner/Gabrielle Worley*
	11:00a	Worship	
	2:00p	PrimeTime Movie Gathering	*Janet Haisman*
	3:30p	Parish 10 Meet	*Julie R. Harley*
	5:00p	FUJI (Jr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
	6:00p	FUSH (Sr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
Tuesday 17	7:30p	Church Council	*Laurie Jolicoeur*
Wednesday 18	7:00p	Food Pantry Volunteer Orientation	*Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski*
Thursday 19	7:00p	Spiritual Guidance Group	*Julie R. Harley*
Friday 20	6:00p	FUSH (Seinor High) Lock-in	*Kelly Brouwer*
Saturday 21	9:00a	Directions	*Liz Howells*
		Sanctuary Volunteer Work Day	*John Zaruba*
Week of February 22			
Sunday 22	8:30a	Church School Leader Breakfast	*Marylen Marty-Gentile*
	9:00a	New Member Class	*Mamie Broadhurst*
	9:30a	Christian Education for All	
	9:30a	Quest	*Art Spooner/Gabrielle Worley*
	11:00a	Worship-New Member Introduction	
	12:30p	Mission Luncheon	*Bob Hahn*
	3:00p	PFLAG	*Sylvia Menninga*
	4:00p	OPRF Symphony Concert	
	5:00p	FUJI (Jr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
	6:00p	FUSH (Sr High Youth Group)	*Kelly Brouwer*
Monday 23	6:00p	Holy Week Worship Planning	*Julie R. Harley*
Tuesday 24	7:00p	Building & Grounds Commmittee	*John Zaruba*
		Personnel Committee	*Melinda Robinson*
		Faith in Action Committee	*Bob Hahn*
Wednesday 25	7:00p	Ash Wednesday Service-Communion/Ashes	
Thursday 26	7:00p	Shawl Ministry	*Elan Long*
Saturday 28	9:00a	Fourth Grade Bread Baking	*Marylen Marty-Gentile*

Julie R. Harley,
Lead Pastor

Mamie Broadhurst
Associate Pastor

Marylen Marty-Gentile
Director of Children & Family Ministries

Kelly Brouwer
Associate Pastor for Youth and Adult Education

Bill Chin
Director of Music Ministry

708-386-5215
Fax: 708-386-7480
office@firstunitedoakpark.com

Save These Dates

Sunday, February 1	8:30 am	Congregation Annual Meeting
Thursday, February 5	6:30 pm	Evening Division Dinner
Friday, February 6-8	6:00 pm	Women's Retreat at Siena Center
Sunday, February 15	3:30 pm	Parish 10 Meet Julie R. Harley
	2:00 pm	PrimeTime Movie Gathering
Wednesday, February 18	7:00 pm	Food Pantry Volunteers
Thursday, February 19	7:00 pm	Spiritual Guidance Group
Saturday, February 21	9:00 am	Sanctuary Volunteer Work Day
Sunday, February 22	12:30 pm	Mission Luncheon
	4:00 pm	OPRF Symphony Concert
Monday, February 23	6:00 pm	Holy Week Worship Planning
Wednesday, February 25	7:00 pm	Ash Wednesday Service

Deadline for the March 2009 issue is February 15th.
Please e-mail information or articles for the MB to:
office@firstunitedoakpark.com

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February 2009

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WEB Edition

FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH
of Oak Park

*an open community
united in love
& justice*