

January 2012



Merry Christmas!

It is an especially powerful time to honor the Christ child as Chris and I prepare to welcome our own daughter into the world in early February. In our church's history, I am the first pastor to be pregnant and deliver a child! Chris and I are very appreciative of all the love and support you have thrown our way. We are thrilled to have such a wonderful congregation to welcome, teach, baptize and pray for our daughter (soon-to-be-named).

We are also thankful for those who are stepping in to help out while I begin my 12-week maternity leave beginning early February. The Adult Education Committee has planned the coming months with some wonderful educational opportunities, with thoughtful members and special guests sharing their gifts of teaching. Our FUSH and FUJI groups continue to thrive with the combined efforts of dedicated youth advisors, committed parents, the Youth Committee—each member has taken on a task over the coming 12 weeks—and our enthusiastic youth, particularly the FUSH Youth Board and the FUSH co-moderators Rebecca Robinson and Mahala Miller. Any questions or ideas for Adult Education or Youth Ministry may be shared with the other pastors of the church, our Youth Committee chair, Steve Mrkvicka, or our Adult Education chair, Chris Damon. I will be back in the office towards the end of April/beginning of May (depending on when my 12 weeks begins).

In the meantime, we appreciate your prayers. Motherhood and ministry are two very special things to be called towards, and I imagine it will take some balancing and grace to figure out how to be fully both. Many of you have learned from your own experiences in blending parenthood and work or volunteer life, and I hope you'll share in your wisdom.

I am truly excited and blessed for what is to come.

In New Year Hope!

Leah Fowler

Transitions

Baptism: *August Ray Balch, son of Nicole and Brandon Balch*

Compassion: *Will Stitzel and family*
Lynnae Hill Mead

January 2012 Worship

Jan. 1— Epiphany Sunday and New Year's Day

Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12

Sermon: "What Can I Give Him? The New Gift Culture"

Jan. 8— Baptism of Jesus and Communion Sunday - Guest Preacher Dr. Frank Yamada,

President of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago

Commissioning of Gabrielle Worley as a missionary to Lebanon.

Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 28; and Mark 1:4-11

Sermon: "Troubling the Waters: Wading into Our Future"

Jan. 15—2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 and Acts 4:23-37

Sermon: "The Beloved Community"

Jan. 22—3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Mark: 1:14-20

Sermon: What Have You To Do With Us?

Jan. 29—4th Sunday after Epiphany – Annual Meeting Sunday

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 and 1 John 3:11-24

Sermon: "Building Relationships"

Annual Meeting for All Ages

—Church Council

Sunday, Jan. 29, in Centennial Hall — 9 am

The 2011 Annual Report will be emailed to the congregation by Jan. 22, or you may pick up a paper copy at church. Our Annual meeting will be held from 9:00 to 10:30 am, taking the place of all education classes that day. We will be exploring our Council theme of "Building Relationships," with a focus on developing new small group opportunities so that every member is involved in a ministry.

Clerk's Corner —Janet Guevara

In the November meeting, council spent some spiritual time led by our pastoral staff and pondered on the question, 'What is an Elder?' Titus 1:6-9 outlined qualities of the early church elders and the work they were expected to do. Written on 'paper rocks' were myriad of wonderful gifts and core values that each council member brings to the church as an elder. Though Titus' list may be an aspirational one since nobody embodies everything, a challenge was posed on what each can do on its own and what can council embody as a group and pledge to do. This time spent was thought provoking, challenging and hopefully transforming.

The big picture discussion was shared by Len Palombi, a member of Personnel who presented the concept of moving our church structure from committees to ministries. This was inspired after observing a Chicago church that each new member was aligned to a ministry. There is a ministry for everyone, thus all are participants rather than spectators. Council will explore this further and has assigned some members to learn more about it.

Let us meet the challenges of the new year as a church family and move on with energy and enthusiasm to do what God has planned for First United!

Hunger Walkathon West CROP Walk 2011

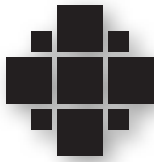
The area's 2011 annual CROP Walk raised a total of \$61,567.60. Thirty nine organizations and 9 local agencies participated in the event and were represented by 423 walkers. Once again, First United Church was among the top fundraising groups, raising \$9,991 with 62 walkers, coming in second to the top fundraising group, Ascension Church. Ascension raised \$10,564 with 18 walkers. Pilgrim Congregational Church came in third raising \$4,545 with 21 walkers participating. Seventy five percent of the money raised will go to Church World Service (CWS) and other international relief agencies to provide food, disaster relief and self-help development projects around the world. Please go to www.churchworldservice.org to learn more about CWS' important work.

Many thanks to all of those who walked and pledged! The 2012 Hunger Walkathon West CROP Walk is planned for Sunday May 6, 2012. Members of the Faith In Action committee will be organizing the walk with the wider community. If you are interested in hunger issues and would like to be part of the 2012 CROP Walk team at First United Church, please contact Mary Anne Loafman at 708-383-9048/mmloafman@comcast.net

News from the Library—Check it Out. — Rob Coffman

A good way to start the new year is to read a good book and expand your faith and knowledge. Our church library not only has books on the Bible and our Christian tradition, we have magazines, books on family relationships, even some novels. Look for a shelf on resources for current adult class studies. Check out our books for children and young teens! Reading a good book to your child has many rewards.

Some of our scholarly-type church members keep trying to reduce their own libraries. In January we will designate a shelf for free books that you to take home. There will be some exceptionally good selections. Check it out.



Always We Begin Again: A Spiritual Retreat

for Members and Friends of
First United Church

**Saturday,
January 7, 2012**

9:30 am to 3:00 pm

Dominican
University
Priory Campus,
7300 West Division St
River Forest, IL

Classroom 263
and Chapel

As the Christmas and Epiphany season ends and a new year begins, you are invited to take time to retreat and reflect, to clarify your values and identify your priorities for 2012. Why should you register for this retreat day?

A clear sense of our values brings joy and purpose to life.

A clear sense of our priorities helps us achieve our goals and find abundant life.

To live out our Church Council priority: to nurture relationships that bless, challenge and transform us – with God, each other and the world.

\$20 donation welcome, lunch included.

RSVP by Jan. 3 to Pastor Julie R. Harley at jrh@firstunitedoakpark.com.

An Outline of the Day

- 9:30 am Coffee and snacks – gathering time and introductions
- 10 am Presentation: Discerning your values and priorities for the new year led by Julie
- Noon Teaching Meditation Practice
- 12:30 pm Lunch together
- 1 pm Reflecting on the Word through Guided Meditation; Walking Meditation; Journaling; Body Sculpture and a Contemplative Communion Service
- 3 pm Blessings — go in peace

PADS Coffee Challenge—DECAF Needed

—Faith in Action

Our friends in West Suburban PADS got a 40 percent reduction in their funding this year, and they need our help to serve coffee to 60 homeless people every Monday night. Are you up to the Coffee Challenge? Bring ground **DECAF COFFEE** to the church office – any brand or size is fine.

Dinner and a Movie 6:00 pm Friday, Jan. 13

—Julie R. Harley

Our January movie is “Midnight in Paris,” directed by Woody Allen and rated PG-13. This movie explores the themes of nostalgia and vocation, a good choice for the beginning of a new year. Sign up in the lounge for dinner at 6:00 (\$5 per person) followed by the movie and a discussion of spiritual themes.

Offerings and Worship —The Stewardship Committee

During worship services, we have the opportunity to respond to the Gospel by making an offering as the collection plate is passed. The plate reminds us that all we have is from God and that it is right to return to God part of what God has entrusted to us as God's stewards. Participating in the offering is as important as listening and responding to the word, participating in communion, joining in prayer and song and passing God's Peace. Regularly presenting our time, our talents, our money, our all to God is truly worship.

The collection plate also has some practical value. It provides opportunity for each person, including our children to participate. It provides adults the opportunity to model a spiritual habit, a behavior of faith for our children, and it encourages us to grow in faith by participating regularly, just as we do in prayer, song and communion.

Passing the empty collection plate along is akin to not passing the peace of Christ or not taking part in communion. Practically speaking, however, we know that many people give in other ways and do not bring an offering of money each week. We have the green offering cards in the pew racks for just this reason. If you have already given for this period, you can put a green offering card in the offering plate instead of money. It honors the relationship of offerings to worship and does not allow the plate to pass "empty".

Travel to the Middle East?

Make a new year's resolution to learn more about the Middle East. In addition to an adult education series (Jan. 15, 22, Feb. 6, 12, 19, and 26, and finally March 4) there are three trips being offered:

See Lebanon, Feb. 29 - March 8, 2012 with Pauline Coffman.

See Israel and Palestine, March 7 - 19 with Garnett Foster. (Or go to Izmir and Istanbul, Turkey, with Pauline Coffman, March 8 - 14).

See Israel and Palestine, June 12 - 25 with Pauline Coffman and Dr. Paul Parker, chair of the religious studies department at Elmhurst College.

There are copies of brochures for each trip in the church lounge on the counter around the corner from the coffee pot! — Pauline Coffman 708-524-5444 (Home) 708-710-4288 (Cell)

Gephard Funds Available for National and International Mission Travel

—Faith in Action

Is there an overseas study tour, national volunteer mission project or wider mission event that is calling your name, but you simply can't afford the full cost? The Angeline and Paul Gebhard Fund at First United provides funds for our members to participate in such events, to expand the awareness and understanding of the mission of Christ's Church on the national and international levels. See Julie for more information.

Volunteer Tutors Needed

The Congregation of St. Joseph of La Grange Park is greatly in need of volunteers for its adult literacy program, School on Wheels. Tutors are needed to teach one hour or so per week from 9 am to 2 p.m. or evenings from 3:00 to 8:00 p.m. in Cicero, Hodgkins, Woodridge, Westmont, Villa Park, or Summit. A two-day training will be provided on Saturday, January 14, 2012 and on Saturday, January 21, 2012 from 9:00 am-3:00pm. Volunteers must attend both training days. No prior second language skills are needed. For more information, call (708) 482-5060 or (708) 482-5077.

unHoly disOrder —from our missionaires in Colombia

As did many of you, we celebrated communion this past Sunday at church. Perhaps unlike you (at least for the pastors out there), Mamie and I were each asked, literally without a moments notice, to participate in a baptism, welcome of new members, ordination of new elders and deacons, installation of the session and deacons for the year to come, and finally, to help with communion.

While I am not one to be too formal or uptight in sharing in worship, this was a lot. Even after living here in the Colombian context with our partners, the *Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia*, for a while now, this was a lot to happen all at once, and without any preparation on our part. We were not at our own church but visiting another. It was a gesture of great hospitality to invite us to participate, but admittedly a bit overwhelming.

I tried to be a good sport - smiling and rolling with it all as the pastor leaned over to ask if I would pray, or talk about the role of deacons and elders, or welcome the new baby into the congregation. I put on a good face - you kind of have to, standing up in front and all - but underneath it all felt wrong. Hectic. Rushed. Uneven. And that most un-Presbyterian of words – disorderly...

As we came to the time of communion, I limped through the words of institution, turning those holy and transformative words into a jumbled train-wreck of ill-phrased Spanish. I felt particularly inadequate in this presentation, compounding the chaos of the morning with the wondering of when my Spanish will improve to a non-embarrassing level.

Every church lives out this ritual a little differently, so once I finished I was on alert for how to fit into their rhythm. The pattern usually varies only slightly, and in short order you can go with the literal flow. But not here. As I looked out at the congregation, everyone got up at once. They seemed to swarm to the table from all directions, and my inner decency and order began to cringe. But just as I braced myself to just *make it through this*, I began to see what was happening.

It wasn't a flash or a miracle, but rather a slow drip of love and reconciliation that was palpable in the congregation. Instead of disorder, the table transformed into a symbol of how this broken and hurting world can instead transform in God's love. Rather than the mob I had imagined converging in one gangly clump, people met at the table, served each other the bread and cup, and then hugged and embraced one another before going back to their seats. They came from all sides of the church, so you couldn't tell who you would meet in this very intimate yet very public act of sharing and reconciliation. You simply approached the table as you were, with no expectation of who you would meet except God who was present to meet us, change us, reconcile us, and send us back into God's world.

It took forever. It wasn't flawless. It still wasn't very orderly. But what I saw was the transformation of the world that we are anticipating this season of Advent. All of our songs, scriptures, traditions, decorations, and preparations of these days point us to this single, holy, and disorderly truth – just as God was present at that table, God is present in this world transforming each of us to serve, to love one another, and to take that love into all the world.

We continue to put new things up on the blog , so please check it out at: www.calledtocolombia.org.

We appreciate your support, prayers, actions, and blessings as always. As we wait and watch in this Advent season we know that we do it beside a great cloud of witnesses that includes each of you. We give thanks for the gift of your presence in our lives, and we wish for you impatience, watchfulness, joy, hope, and peace as we all find our Way.

Bendiciones~

Mamie Broadhurst and Richard Williams,
and of course, Nora Elena



FUSH and FUJI – Youth Ministry

- Jan. 1- No Youth Group- Happy New Year!
 Jan. 8- FUSH Craft Night with Kathrine
 FUJI sorts clothes at *Kids' Kloset* (please bring your own youth sized clothes to donate!)
 Jan. 10 FUSH Youth Board
 Jan. 15 FUSH Gym/Board Games Night
 FUJI Plans a song for Coffeehouse 1/29
 Jan. 16 FUSH Breakfast 9 am at George's followed by MLK Rally in Austin
 Jan. 20-22 FUSH Retreat at Tower Hill
 Jan. 21-22 FUJI Our Whole Lives Lock-In (begins 8:30 Saturday morning, ends noon Sunday)
 Jan. 29 FUSH Coffee House (FUJI attends!)

Adult Education

- Jan. 1** *Spiritual Practices for the New Year*— Instead of writing New Year's resolutions, Lead Pastor Julie Harley will teach some ways to deepen your meditation and prayer life in 2012.
- Jan. 8** *What Does Culture Have to do with Biblical Interpretation?* Dr. Frank Yamada, President of McCormick Theological Seminary and Professor of Biblical Studies, will teach this class using Asian American, African American and Latino/a contributions to biblical studies.
- Jan. 15** *Israel/Palestine Conflict: Overview of the History of the Conflict* Beginning with Theodore Herzl in the late 1800's and ending with the current political situation, this will be a speedy review led by Pauline Coffman of the Adult Ed Committee.

Bible Study— *Minor Prophets*

Living in Intentional Community — Lead Pastor Julie Harley will describe the elements of Intentional Community, a Christian practice since the time of the early church. She will explain her project to found an intentional co-housing community in Oak Park this summer.

We Have a Teenager Sessions continue due to popular demand last fall! We will discuss topics such as bullying, depression, sexuality, and media. Learn from each other's experiences as well as from current research. Support one another as Christian community. This will be an ongoing discussion group with rotating leadership.

Jan. 22 *Israel/Palestine Conflict: Introduction to Kairos Palestine Document* Led by Ms. Niveen Sarras, a doctoral candidate in Old Testament at Lutheran School of Theology who is Palestinian Christian, this will introduce an important ecumenical study and theological piece of our time.

Bible Study— *Minor Prophets*

Living in Intentional Community — Is it possible to practice elements of intentional community even if you are living in an apartment, condo or single family home/ How does intentional community help promote an eco-friendly, spiritually rich way of life?

Jan. 29 No Adult Ed (Congregational Meeting)

Our Nursery – Gateway to the Church — Marylen Marty-Gentile

During worship and meetings, while parents and other adults are engrossed in prayer or the business of the church, four women extend care to our youngest members. The four caregivers also are the face of the church for new young families. As such, they are women you should know.

Pam Ellis is our Nursery Supervisor and oversees the day-to-day operation of the nursery as far as scheduling, supplying and trouble-shooting. Pam finished her Master's in Education in December and is looking for a full-time elementary teaching job. A resident of Forest Park, Pam has worked in the Nursery for two years as both a caregiver and now a supervisor. She is Marylen's right hand there.

KT Bill is an Oak Parker and an OPRFHS graduate. KT has been a caregiver here for five years, coming to us after having been a sitter for a member of this congregation. She is a student at Triton College studying early childhood education and hopes to be a kindergarten teacher. We have watched KT grow up, and the journey together is a wonderful experience for the parents of this church.

Megan Cheney began her work with First United in the late summer. A photography student at Columbia College, Megan also volunteers at Opportunity Knocks, a program that serves special needs students and with TEAM through OPRF to serve special needs students in the classroom, gym and theater.

Erin Harmon is a child of this church who was confirmed in May. When Erin considered how she could be involved in First United, she asked if she might be a caregiver here. The other staff felt she could be a real asset. In the past 6 months, she has proven that to be true.

In sharing God's love with our children, they help them feel loved and special in the church. These four women are gifts to our community.

A Gift We All Continue to Receive —Planned Giving

On December 31, 1966 Dr. Craig Butler retired from his medical practice in Oak Park where he had practiced pediatrics for his entire career. He and his wife Betty followed their close friends, the Clarence Monroes, to retirement in Ohio, but they did not forget the village or the church that had nurtured them throughout their adulthood. The Butlers were deeply involved in the life of the community and active members at First Presbyterian Church where she was involved in women's work and he on the governing boards of the church. Additionally he was a prominent member of the West Suburban Hospital Staff.

To support the charitable endeavors of the village, they left the Community Chest of Oak Park the building that housed its operations at the northeast corner of Marion and Pleasant. And to the church they left a one-sixth interest in a fund that they created at Northern Trust Bank. First United receives a quarterly check for its share of the interest. Last year those checks totaled \$16,246.00, a gift that enriches First United and supports its ministry long after the lives of the Butlers have ended.

Mary Browne, a current First United member, recalls that in 1920 when the land north of Division Street was first opened for development, her parents constructed the home in which she still resides at 1015 Woodbine. The Butlers built the house next door to the Brownes and the two families remained friends and neighbors till the Butlers left town in the late '60's. The Butlers had four children, two of whom were twins. Mary says the boys were particularly active and "challenging."

The construction of Mann School attracted young couples to the neighborhood and the Mother's Club of Mann School in which Betty Butler was deeply involved became the social hub of the area. The pinnacle of its accomplishments, or at least the one most fondly recalled, was the Mother's Club purchase of a typewriter for Mann School. It is unclear whether that was the school's first machine or simply a replacement for a previous model.



Community Epiphany Concert

Sunday,

January 8 2012

4:00 pm

Our church will host the community Epiphany concert in 2012.

Church choirs, children's choirs, and instrumentalists perform music of the season and lead carol singing.

Oak Park's Annual Epiphany Concert – Sunday Jan 8 at First United

Started in 2001 as a way for members of Oak Park area churches to gather together, this annual musical celebration of Epiphany is held at various locations in the area. This year's concert – Sunday, Jan 8 at 4 pm – is at First United Church and as always will feature adult choirs, children's choirs, instrumentalists performing music of the season, and an audience carol sing. A reception follows the concert.

There is no admission fee, but a free will offering will be collected for the Walk-In Ministry, which helps the many people in this area seeking emergency aid. Previously, those in need often went from place to place without finding a substantial program to help them. By pooling resources from faith communities and other donors, WIM can now effectively assist those who are living on the margins or who are faced with unexpected challenges.

Membership Class at First United —Rob Leveridge

If you've been attending First United Church and feel a resonance with this community of faith, we invite you to participate in the membership class this February. The class is an opportunity for people to get to know the church and our ministries very well, and to connect with other people around personal stories of life and faith. At the end of the class, participants will have the opportunity to formally become members of First United Church, though it's not assumed that everyone who participates in the class will choose to become a member. The class is a time for people to discern how they are connected with and take personally the ministries of the congregation. The class has four sessions on Sunday mornings, Feb. 5 - 26 at 9 am. The first two sessions will also be available online Wednesday evenings, for people who cannot attend either of the first two Sundays in person. Contact Pastor Rob if you have any questions. — rleveridge@firstunitedoakpark.com

Primetimers...Save the date!

Chase away the winter chills and join us for our chili cook-off on Sat., **Jan. 28** (6-9 pm) in Centennial Hall. More details to come. Any questions please contact Susan Saliny at 708-848-2757 or susaliny@aol.com

Community Renewal Society MLK Day Assembly in Austin

Gov. Quinn to Attend

— Faith in Action

Our goal is to get at least 50 people from First United (including 10 youth) to meet with Gov. Pat Quinn at the CRS Martin Luther King Day Assembly at Kingdom Baptist Church, 301 N. Central Ave., Chicago. The event will be held from 9:30 am to noon on Monday, Jan. 16.

Throughout Dr. King's life, he challenged the church and powers that be to stand for justice. Yet too often the MLK Holiday has been turned into a day off rather than a day to address issues of racial and economic injustice. This is our chance to pray, meet with 60 other congregations and confront our governor and other legislators about the issues of education funding reform, affordable and livable rental housing and job opportunities for ex-offenders. Please register your attendance at a table in the lounge or email Julie at jrh@firstunitedoakpark.com.

Nursery School News

The Nursery School children celebrated Christmas by entertaining their families in December, treating them to cookies, a lovingly made gift and a concert of songs to tell the story of Jesus birth. Classrooms also gathered gifts of socks, mittens and hats to decorate their classroom Christmas tree and to share with the Kids K closet.

Priority registration for Fall, 2012 is open for church families until the evening of the **Nursery School Open House, January 17, 7:30 PM**. Church families interested in registering for school should call Joan White, 708-848-4910 to arrange a tour and/or to get registration information.

www.firstunitedoakpark.com

The January Messenger Bell
deadline is **January 15**.
(or if falling on a holiday or weekend,
the following Monday).
Please limit words to 250 or less.
Thank you.

emorymead.12.2011

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CHURCH**
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an open community united in love & justice

Staff:

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Rob Leveridge, *Associate Minister of
Membership and Congregational Care*

Marylen Marty-Gentile, *Director of
Children & Family Ministries*

Bill Chin, *Director of Music Ministry*