



## Have a Green Christmas

The first Christmas Eve was pretty simple. Mary and Joseph made no reservations, sent no cards, and the baby Jesus received only three gifts—and those arrived long after his birthday. Since men brought the presents, they probably weren't even wrapped (sorry, guys). I'm pretty sure there were no cookies or eggnog in the manger, just locally raised hay. No trees were cut down, and no special sweaters were required.

The first Christmas was a low-waste, carbon neutral holiday. Transportation was provided by renewable sources: the shepherds, wise men, and angels arrived on foot, by camel, or using wind energy. The first Christmas focused on worship and music, not gifts and parties. Hmmmm...there could be something to that.

Do you think we could try to have a GREEN Christmas this year? The fact is the holidays have become a time of excess rather than simplicity. An additional 1,000,000 tons of waste is generated each week between Thanksgiving and Christmas (and that's just in my neighborhood). Tens of thousands of miles of ribbon are discarded each year — more than enough to tie around the earth (fact). We generate more pollution by excessive use of energy in December. We use more paper for wrapping and cards, meaning more trees are cut down, more air and water is polluted, and more toxic waste is generated.

If this is the season when we sing, "Joy to the WORLD," then let's be more conscious about our consumption. How can we celebrate a Green Christmas? Shop at the Alternative Christmas Store for most of the people on your gift list. Recycle live trees for mulch. Give handmade gifts. Re-gift!!! Avoid excessive packaging. Give gift certificates or tickets to events rather than stuff. Take reusable bags to the store when you shop; avoid plastic. Wrap gifts in recycled material (old maps, comics, old calendar photos or magazines). Give solar-powered radios, flashlights and other eco-friendly gifts. Join the Environmental Stewardship Team at church.

Increase: time spent with family and friends; volunteer work; singing; praying; thoughtfulness; compassion; loving kindness; earth-friendly practices.

Celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the birth of new hope, the birth of the Prince of Peace by spending more time in worship and less time at the mall. I'm dreaming of a Green Christmas this year.

In Christian love,  
Julie R. Harley

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## Transitions

### New Members:

Duane Cole and Joe Powers  
Leah Fowler and Chris Gajilan  
Nydia Sahagun and Beatrice Cruz  
Lisa Scott

### Compassion:

The Sordilla Family  
Jim McAulay  
Marian Jones  
Michele Wolford  
Vickie Engelhardt  
Claudette Zobel

### Condolence:

Cindy Schmidt O'Reilly, former member  
Al Strane, grandfather of Megan Lewis,  
great-grandfather of Jack and Katherine  
Bill Miller of Walter Miller, grandfather of Gehring, Ilse,  
and Mahala

## Please Take Note!

### Messenger Bell Goes Online January 2010

Given the current economic climate, we have made the hard decision to suspend the monthly mailing of *The Messenger Bell* to households which could receive it online. In order to reduce costs and save trees, *The Messenger Bell* will be sent by e-mail to all households for which the church has an e-mail address, **effective January 2010**. We will send printed copies of the Messenger Bell by postal mail *only to households which do not have internet access*. If you have a new e-mail address, please send it to: [office@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:office@firstunitedoakpark.com).

### December Worship

**December 6** — *Hanging of the Greens* worship led by our Church School Children and Youth, including the HOG Orchestra

*Malachi 3:1-4 and Luke 1:68-79 and Luke 3:1-6*

**December 13** — *Third Sunday of Advent*

Worship includes the installation of Rev. Leah Fowler, Associate Pastor for Youth and Adult Education  
Rev. Budd Friend-Jones, guest preacher

**December 20** — *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

*Luke 1:39-55*

“Birth Announcement”

**Thursday, December 24** — **Christmas Eve**

*5:00 pm* Church School Christmas Pageant and Communion

Worshippers are invited to arrive 30 minutes prior to each service for musical preludes.

*8:00 pm* Christmas Eve Service of Lessons, Carols, Candlelight and Communion

*11:00 pm* Christmas Eve Service of Lessons, Carols, Candlelight and Communion

**December 27** — *First Sunday of Christmastide*

*Luke 2:41-52*

“Linger Here”

### Deacons:

Carl Nauert  
Betsy Samore  
Neal McNish  
Lee Anderson  
Irene Worley  
Chris Davis  
Grant Jones

Franklyn (Bud) Hayes  
Karla Hayter  
Connie Ronnow  
Priscilla Sibley  
Sally Sutherland  
Karin Pietrini

### Pastoral Care Needs

Please contact a 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.

### Yes! We Record Services!

Each Sunday we record a CD of our Sunday service which is then placed in the library and is available for check-out. Right now this is all the work of George Ashman, so if others would be interested in helping occasionally, he would be glad for the assistance. If you are interested in a copy of any CD for yourself or to take to members who are unable to join us at church, you are welcome to copy it yourself or talk with George about how to obtain one. Sermons are available in print on the Elder's Desk in the Lounge and online through the Church website ([www.firstunitedoakpark.com](http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com)).



## Who Are the Greens and Why Are They Hanging?

—Marylen Marty-Gentile

Do not call 911. The Greens are not a family someone has hung. Instead, *Hanging of the Greens*, affectionately known as HOG, is a long standing tradition in this church. Not a Christmas pageant (read on for information about that), HOG is Advent worship service led by members of our church school, from three-year-olds to fourteen-year-olds. It involves an orchestra made up of children, youth and adults, directed by Bill Gilmer. Our children serve as the chancel choir. Our seventh and eighth graders are the preachers for the day, preaching an embodied proclamation. Our fifth and sixth graders are also liturgists.

Oh, there are some greens, but not many. After 30 years, we can't think of a better name, but about the only thing you might see hung are some eyes. You'll need to come to worship on December 6 to see what that's about.

*Hanging of the Greens* is worship that thanks and praises God in new ways and marks the Advent season of waiting and watching.

### HOG Schedule

Parents new to the community may wonder if their children have responsibilities for Hanging of the Greens. A schedule was e-mailed to all parents for whom we have an e-mail address. If you did not receive information on HOG, please e-mail me, (marylen@firstunitedoakpark.com) and I will e-mail you everything you still need to know.

### Calling All Angels, Shepherds, Animals and Wise Ones

The 5 pm Christmas Eve worship is a service of lessons and carols and communion and also the Christmas pageant for children ages three to (you decide). Sign up for the pageant will begin on Saturday, December 5 and continue through Wednesday, December 16. You will find sign up sheets in the lounge on the elder's desk. A pageant rehearsal is scheduled for Sunday, December 20, immediately after worship for all children who plan to participate in the pageant.

If you have questions, please e-mail me, (marylen@firstunitedoakpark.com).

## Healing Service Date Set for December 20

Following the inspirational Service of Wholeness and Healing on October 25th, the Pastoral Staff will offer a second service of this type at 4:00 pm on December 20 in the Chapel. This service will be for any and all who wish to experience the comfort of God's healing presence for body, mind, and spirit. While this service is scheduled for the weekend before Christmas, we invite you to participate in this period of quiet reflection as a means of settling our souls in preparation for the coming of Christ again into our world. Please join together with other members of First United in this effort to further implement our "wildly important goal" of creating and maintaining a framework that nourishes the spiritual welfare of the congregation.

## Flowers in the Sanctuary

—Katharine Thurman

Don't forget...the beautiful flowers that frequently brighten our sanctuary are gifts from people like you. Sometimes people dedicate them to lost loved ones, sometimes in thanksgiving for anniversaries and birthdays, sometimes just because. After worship, the flowers aren't wasted—they are divided, wrapped, and delivered by volunteers to people who are sick, suffering or otherwise need to be reminded of God's caring. Look for the order sheet on the desk in the lobby, and come be a part of this worthwhile tradition.

## Spiritual Guidance Groups Expand in January

—Julie R. Harley

Each month, about 20 people gather in the Chapel at First United to listen for God's voice in their lives. We pray and listen to a scripture text being read aloud. We listen to it again. We pray in silence. Then we divide into groups of four or five people and share our responses to the scripture passage. If you would like to feel connected to others in a confidential and caring community, please consider joining our Spiritual Guidance Groups. We meet from 7 to 9 pm on the third Thursday of each month and will welcome new members on Jan. 21, 2010. Pray about how God might be nudging you to try something new. No special preparation is required, and we include people of all life stages. Speak with Julie Harley, lead pastor, for more information.

## WIG

The Wildly Important Goal of First United Church is "creating and maintaining a framework that nourishes the spiritual welfare of the congregation"

O God, you are my rock,  
my rescue, and my refuge,  
I leave it all quietly to you.

—George Appleton, *England*

## All Church Retreat—2010 —Julie R. Harley

Mark your calendars for next year's spiritual retreat, to be held September 25-26, 2010, at Pilgrim Park Conference Center in Princeton, IL. We will have space for 30 people.

## Vision Task Force —Rick Ashton

With thanks to God for the energy and commitment of First United, the Vision Task Force has completed the extensive information-gathering work of the summer and fall. We have listened to hundreds of members as you have voiced your hopes and expectations in nearly two dozen Congregational Conversations. We have interviewed a score of community leaders about the issues and needs around us, and we have spoken with pastors of several congregations known for their active vision. We have prayed and reflected together, seeking God's will for our church in the coming decade.

The shape of the vision is beginning to emerge. Most of all, we see that First United is a congregation that wants to be actively involved with people in need, with the overall direction of our community, with the sufferings of the world, with each other as companions on the spiritual journey, and with God's presence and the message of Jesus for our time. We see that the members of First United do not regard Christianity as a spectator sport.

Inspired by what we have seen and heard, the Vision Task Force is now engaged in the drafting of a statement of the vision for the consideration of the Council and the Congregation. We expect to complete this phase of our work by early January and to engage everyone, once more, in the discussion of the path that our congregation will take. We welcome your further thoughts in the coming weeks and months. Mark Loafman, Julie Harley, Dick Krissingner, Mark Jolicoeur, Sara Stevenson, Jane Barker and Rick Ashton.

## Clerk's Corner

—Beth Mrkvicka

We welcomed McCormick Seminary intern Jeff Foels to the October Council meeting and he shared his excitement and energy for the coming year. He will be rotating his work by spending several weeks at a time with each of the staff and is currently working with Marylen Marty Gentile and Quest. He is focusing his internship on preaching and worship, pastoral care, church programming and written communication.

Our Big Picture Conversation was led by Joanne Despotes, a guest appearing on behalf of the Finance Committee and Stewardship. She and Julie Harley recently attended a by-invitation conference on the *Foundations of Fundraising for Churches* and Joanne enthusiastically reported on some of the ideas they heard about and ways to implement them. Currently only about 50% of our congregation supports the church financially and we would like to establish a goal of 90% of households pledging by 2015. We need to think about stewardship all year long, not just during the fall financial campaign. We need to educate committed givers and stress that giving is an investment in God's mission, not an obligation. Joanne & Julie have many ideas about ways to make these things happen and we look forward to helping them fulfill these goals. Connie Ronnow spoke briefly about the importance of planned giving and the need to remember the church in your will. The Deacons recently approached Council with a recommendation that committees in the church establish their own Institutional Memory: a written record of important policies, procedures and documentation that will create a sense of continuity and scope for future committee members so as to eliminate the need to "reinvent the wheel". Committee chairs will be alerted of this request and asked to provide this documentation early in 2010. A suggested template of the types of information that might be helpful will be provided with the understanding that not every committee will require the same level of detail.



*Faith* **IN ACTION**

**Mission Trip to New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina Recovery Work**

—Julie R. Harley

More than four years after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, recovery work continues to move slowly. Thousands of people live in substandard housing, and volunteer mission trips are vital to rebuilding this hard-hit community. First United is organizing a group to travel to New Orleans June 19-27, 2010, with other UCC churches in the Chicago metropolitan area. Mark your calendars now. This is a great opportunity that is open to adults and teenagers. Julie Harley is leading the trip.

**Calvary Memorial Church Emergency Clothes Closet**

—Calvary Memorial Church

On October 17, Calvary Memorial Church began operating the Emergency Clothes Closet for the Walk-In Ministry and has served 50 - 75 clients every Saturday since opening. The Closet is open every Saturday from 9:30 to 11:30 am at the front entrance of 931 Lake Street. Items needed for The Closet: winter coats, long underwear, jeans / pants, sweat pants, hoodies, boots, gloves, and underwear.

**Promoting Peace with Education**

—Bob Haisman and Kris Ronnow

Have you ever wanted to know more about how Greg Mortenson (*Three Cups of Tea*) has been able over the past 16 years to build 131 schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Karin Ronnow has been working with Greg and the Central Asia Institute (CAI) and has traveled a number of times to see first hand the work of CAI and the dedication shown by the rural community folk who make this happen while educating 1000's of children, especially girls. On Monday evening, December 28th in the Church lounge at 7 pm, Karin will report about her two trips to the area this year and help us understand how the work of CAI in Pakistan and Afghanistan is a "journey of hope". Karin is the Associate Editor of the Bozeman, Montana Chronicle. This gathering is sponsored by the Peace with Justice Committee and Faith in Action.

**Christmas Offering**

The Faith in Action Committee has designated the Walk-in Ministry as the recipient of the mission portion of this year's Special Christmas Offering. The goal of this gift is to enable WIM to expand its hours to some of the times that the Food Pantry is serving its clientele, in order to address the root causes of hunger and hurt in the lives of those whom we serve. As you consider your Christmas offering to missions and ministries of First United Church, please consider that this special, local mission directly affects the lives of our neighbors helping, blessing, enabling them to make their way through life a little easier, a little less fraught with hunger, homelessness (or its threat), transportation needs, and a variety of ways that people may be assisted to make their way through life. Please consider adding something extra to what you would normally "leave at the manger" in this time of giving.

**Whatever Happened to all that Candy?**

Remember the Halloween Candy that First United Church's children "tithed" on November 1st? It was put right to work to assist the ministries of some of the organizations that First United Church supports throughout the year. About half of the candy was taken to Hephzibah Children's Association to assist them in their services to children throughout the county. The rest of the candy was donated to the Oak Park River Forest Food Pantry where they will serve as special treats for some of their clients. If you have a child who "tithed" their Halloween haul, give them a big hug on behalf of those whom they helped.

**A Word of Denominational Mission**

*Child Sponsorship*

— Mark Buck

If you have hugs to spare, consider sponsoring a child through our Global Ministries Child Sponsorship Program, a global children's ministry of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For more than 40 years we have provided assistance to destitute children in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Europe.

continued pn next page>

**Prayers for Peace**

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

**INNERPEACE  
WORLDPEACE**

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



Take time to think...  
 It is the source of power.  
 Take time to play...  
 It is the source of perpetual  
 youth.  
 Take time to laugh...  
 It is the music of the soul.  
 Take time to pray...  
 It is the greatest power  
 on earth.

—Words written on a wall of the  
 Missionaries of Charity, children's  
 home, Calcutta, India



### *Sponsor a Child—continued>*

Currently, we have eleven centers participating and approximately 1000 children in the program.

Our program works closely with private centers that have long-established links with a UCC or Disciples global ministry partner. The program helps to provide basic meals, clothing, shelter and health care to children in orphanages and shelters for homeless children. In some cases partial school fees and uniforms are provided through support of sponsors.

Sponsorship fees range from \$25 to \$40. Sponsorship costs vary according to the services a center provides and the cost of living in that country. No funds are sent to government institutions or individuals. Sponsors receive a letter, with a brief biography and photo of their child. If the child is old enough to write, sponsors can expect a minimum of two letters a year, and/or periodic progress reports from the center's administrator.

For more information about this program, please contact: Linda Lawrence, Wider Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115, 216-736-3222, lawrencel@ucc.org.

### *Children's Ministry*

—Marylen Marty-Gentile

#### **How Do You Thank a Church School Leader?**

Our Children's Ministry decided that giving our 40 adult and senior high church school leaders a gift card for Caribou Coffee was a good way of saying Thanks a Latté.

### **YOUTH NEWS** —Leah Fowler

#### **FUSH**

On the 8th of November FUSH played host to Ali Falah, a student studying Civil Engineering and Urban Planning at Dominican University from Iraq. We asked him questions about his life in Iraq and how he likes the Oak Park/River Forest area. It was an interesting experience to speak with him, and to learn what people in Iraq thought (and think) about America, politics in Iraq, and other subjects that crossed our minds. It was a very enlightening experience.

—Don Kuntz

#### **FUSH calendar:**

Dec. 6: Ask an Advisor Night

Tuesday, Dec. 8: Youth Board, 7 pm in the Youth Room

Dec. 13: Cookie Bake time!

Dec. 20: FUSH Formal Holiday Dinner; wear party dresses, blazers, or whatever makes you feel special and festive!

#### **FUJI**

FUJI youth have explored every inch of the church as they ran—stealthily or not—from one end of the church to the other, in darkness, trying to elude the Adult Advisors during Night Crossings. They slithered through the sanctuary and peered under pews. Our group grew in friendship and in faith. At the stroke of 12:30 am, we went into the chapel for a candlelight vespers service, where we shared prayers and confessions the youth wrote. We have more times of fun and faith as we lead into the winter months.

#### **FUJI calendar:**

Dec. 6: FUJI Service Project: Christmas Shopping for PADS

Dec. 13: Christmas Party at the Kuntz home-835 Monroe Ave., River Forest. Bring a wrapped gift to swap, either something under \$5 or something recycled for our silly gifts.

Dec. 20: Charlie Brown Christmas

### **Quest**

#### **Questors and Friends in Faith**

—Marylen Marty-Gentile

If you have had any reason to walk through the tunnels lately, you may have noticed that they are freshly painted. You can thank many of our confirmands (Questors) and their adult faith partners (Friends in Faith) for that. They gave up a Saturday to spend time with brushes and rollers and drop cloths (and donuts and juice and coffee) to serve the church. Hands and brushes to work and hearts to God!

**Adult Education**

—Leah Fowler

Holy Family! Using the Holy Family as one lens, we see many family situations that are still relevant today: unplanned pregnancy, surrogacy, extended family relations, families under political danger...We will look at our own families today, and how the church and community can better support families.

**Dec. 6: Living Well with our Families**

When we baptize a child of the church, families and the congregation make a set of physical and spiritual commitments to that child. How well do we fulfill them? Associate Pastor Leah Fowler will share ways the messages of the church can extend to the ways we live at home with our families, and how we support families in our community. You will leave with specific practices you can share with children and grandchildren or between adults, and ways you can extend Christian commitments to families in our community.

**Dec. 13: Holy Family—The Problem with Marriage**

This class will be a provocative one, as Dr. Scott Haldeman probes society's expectations of marriage. He questions the assumption that a spouse can provide everything his or her partner needs: emotionally, intellectually, physically, spiritually, etc. Scott Haldeman is a professor of liturgical studies at Chicago Theological Seminary and is a member of our congregation.

**Dec. 20: Holy Family—The Committed Marriage**

This panel, led by Jim Smith, will explore the case FOR marriage. Hear directly from couples: newlyweds, long-timers, gay and straight couples, and blended families as they share why they think marriage is important and what it brings to their lives.

Make me  
a still place of light  
a still place of love  
your light radiating  
your love vibrating  
your touch and your  
healing far flung and near  
to the myriads caught  
in darkness, in sickness  
in lostness, in fear  
make a heart-center here,  
Light of the World.

—Malling Abbey, Denmark

**"Called to Be Family"**

Women's Retreat February 5-7, 2010

—Jackie Eckholm

Our 26th annual joint retreat with Lincoln Park Presbyterian will once again be held at the Siena Center in Racine, Wisconsin. This year our leader will be the Rev. Alex Hendrickson, a Presbyterian pastor from the St. Louis area. She will help us explore the ways that we are called to be "family" as individuals and faith communities and what the joys and responsibilities of that calling are.

The Women's Retreat Committee needs volunteers to help make this retreat a success. The fee for the "Called to Be Family" retreat will be \$150.00 for the weekend. This includes 2 nights lodging (in a room all by yourself) all meals and snacks and art supplies for our creative activity. Scholarships are available if needed. Carpools are organized to make the trip to and from Racine.

It's a great time to be in community with women from First United Church of Oak Park and Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church. If you have any questions and/or would like to volunteer for some of the retreat preparations (making name tags, shopping, putting together folders) feel free to contact me (386-5478 or [jmeckholm@comcast.net](mailto:jmeckholm@comcast.net)) or Cindy Palombi (383-0945 or [cindy.palombi@sbcglobal.net](mailto:cindy.palombi@sbcglobal.net)).

**Sponsor A Family**

—Sher Watts Spooner

The Holiday Food and Gift Basket Program needs sponsors to buy Christmas presents for needy families again this year. This may be the only way some needy local families will receive any Christmas gifts. Can't afford to adopt a whole family? You also can take a gift tag for just one individual. Sign up before and after church, take a gift tag or two, and buy gifts, to be returned wrapped and tagged, on Sunday, Dec. 6. Questions? Look for me by the little Christmas tree in the lounge on Sundays; call me at 383-4408; or e-mail me at [sandaspooner@comcast.net](mailto:sandaspooner@comcast.net).

Good people,  
 Most royal greening  
   verdancy,  
 Rooted in the sun,  
 You shine with radiant light.  
 In this circle of earthly  
   existence  
 You shine so finely,  
 It surpasses understanding.  
 God hugs you.  
 You are circled by the arms  
   of the mystery of God.

—Hildegard of Bingen



## Sing We Joyous...Seven Reasons and Counting —Elaine Pierce

*Music At First* presents *Sing We Joyous!*, a Christmas concert for the family, the neighbors, the cranky great-uncle, and anyone else who loves, wants or needs the spirit of Christmas, on Saturday, December 19 at First United Church of Oak Park. Come for the concert (seven reasons given below), but also come to support the Cluster Tutoring Program. By attending the concert and buying tickets for the cash raffle you will help one of the area's most needed and appreciated service agencies.

So here are seven reasons (out of many) you'll want to come, not including the mistletoe, twinkling lights, punch and cookies!

1. *The First United Church family*, joining together to celebrate the joy of Christmas and the pleasure of spending a delightful evening with people who care for each other.
2. *The Oriana Singers*—Enjoy this group of six professional musicians, who will perform—beautifully and exquisitely—Christmas music from the 16th to the 20th century.
3. *The Oak Park & River Forest Children's Chorus* —These extraordinary young singers have performed at Carnegie Hall, St. Mark's in Venice, Notre Dame in Paris, and have collaborated with the Joffrey Ballet and other ensembles.
4. *Momenta*, Oak Park's premier dance company, *City Voices*, Chicago's newest chamber chorus, and the *First United String Ensemble*, all joining together to make the evening merry.
5. *The OPRF High School Saxophone Quartet* —These amazingly talented kids will impress you with their jazzed arrangements of traditional Christmas favorites.
6. *\$500 in cash!* Buy a raffle ticket for a chance to win \$100, \$150, or \$250 and make your Christmas shopping a lot easier (or just give a great gift to yourself). All proceeds of raffle tickets sales will go to Cluster Tutoring.
7. *Wonderful silent auction items*, including weekends at gorgeous vacation homes in Wisconsin and Cape Cod, professional sports and concert tickets, wine, artwork, jewelry and more.

But best of all, support the *Cluster Tutoring Program* in its vital work to help those who need a little extra help. The Cluster Tutoring Program provides free one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to school-aged youth in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago's West Side. Cluster addresses the academic and social needs of the students and their families while providing an opportunity for members of the Oak Park/River Forest/Austin community to become involved in an important one-on-one volunteer mission.

Each Cluster tutor is matched with a student, working together and developing a significant relationship in the process. Every week during the school year at Pine Avenue United Church (Austin) and First United Church (Oak Park), the tutor and student move toward preparing the student for a more successful academic career. The program now serves more than 75 students and has more on the waiting list. For more information on the program or to volunteer call 773-378-5530 or email [clustertp@hotmail.com](mailto:clustertp@hotmail.com).



Such a worthy cause and such a lovely evening! What a wonderful way to honor the spirit of Christmas!

Doors will open for the silent auction at 7:00 pm and the concert will start at 7:30 pm. Childcare will be provided. Tickets are \$20 adults, \$15 seniors/students, and \$50 families. Raffle tickets are \$5 each or 6 for \$25. Contact [musicatfirst@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:musicatfirst@firstunitedoakpark.com) or 708.386.5215, ext 39, for group ticket sales (ten or more) or for more information.



Music At First is First United Church's performing arts series, with a wide variety of events planned each year. These musical delights have become a tradition in Oak Park and the near western suburbs. Concerts, sing-alongs, recitals, operettas —

Music At First presents them all and is proud to be an important and established part of our community's vital cultural life.

**Sounds of Advent**

— Cathryn Wilkinson

Recently I read a thoughtful essay on language and how people often communicate through sounds without words. Humans have developed a special kind of listening to comprehend a language that doesn't depend on strings of letters and grammar and syntax. In November, we heard Rev. Harley preach about "tuning out" other sounds and distractions in our lives so that we could listen to the call of Isaiah. Looking ahead, many themes of Advent also invite us to "listen to the word of the Lord."

That word may not come in visible communication – pictures, a touch, an encouraging smile all relay meaning to us through images we can see. But other messages arise from an inner and invisible imagination that can translate sound. Tuning out the visible world so that we can tune in to wordless sounds takes some effort and extra concentration—two things that are often in short supply in our hurried December schedules. I will be taking lots of time to listen this month as I practice and play the organ, and I encourage you to do the same. Tune out the words that surround you and let the sounds in your imagination take over for some moments of every day during Advent. You might receive a message that is too powerful for words.

**Musical Preludes on Christmas Eve**

—Bill Chin

All are invited to hear special musical selections as a prelude to our two evening services on Christmas Eve. Thirty minutes of music for voices and organ, starting at 7:30 and 10:30 pm, will precede our two later services at 8:00 and 11:00 pm. Please come early and share in this First United holiday tradition

**"It's not always easy bein' green"**

— Kermit the Frog

—Laurie Bunkers

It may not be easy, but being "green" is something our faith calls us to be. This summer a small group of interested parishioners formed the Environmental Stewardship Committee to look at how First United might improve and expand efforts to be a greener faith community. Information sharing is one important way to assist that effort. Thus "Green Space" was born—your Messenger Bell corner for news about green church programming, building and grounds efforts, special events and tips for everyday use.

**BUILDING & GROUNDS**—In the "It's already being done department," did you know!

- 1) First United has been recycling paper, plastic and aluminum for years? So successfully, in fact, that in late October we added an additional dumpster to accommodate all the recycled materials from the Church, Nursery School and Food Pantry. Look for baskets outside the sanctuary each Sunday to recycle your bulletin, and for other containers throughout the building. (NOTE: Recycle your pop tabs to benefit Ronald McDonald House at Loyola by adding them to the collection basket outside the bathrooms on the first floor.)
- 2) Reuseable cups, plates and flatware are used at church and nursery school events as a first choice, whenever possible.
- 3) The beautiful First United gardens were enhanced with transplants from parishioners gardens (talk about green GREEN!), and we use environmentally safe lawn care products.
- 4) Both the Church and Nursery School have greatly reduced paper usage thanks to increased communication via email and electronic newsletters. 5) The Nursery School is using more environmentally friendly (and less harsh) cleaning and sanitation products in the classrooms.

And 6) improved fluorescent lighting was recently installed in the gymnasium and in all the classrooms.

**GREEN TIP:** For suggestions on how to have a green Christmas go to [Http://www.buynothingchristmas.org/alternatives/index.html](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org/alternatives/index.html).

**UPCOMING EVENTS:** There are plans for an adult education gardening seminar and an electronics recycling day through the Nursery School. Details to follow in future MBs!



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## Amazing Response to "Giving as a Sacred Act"

—The Stewardship and Finance Committees

Our financial manager said, "Wow!" when she totaled the pledges that came in as of November 16. By that date, we had received \$652,471 in pledges for 2010 – an INCREASE from \$639,030 pledged in 2009. What an amazing faith response in a time of economic recession. We expect even more pledges to continue to come in by the end of the year. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

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## Providing for the Future of Our Church

—Planned Giving Committee

Dear Fellow First United Members,

*Have you ever wondered with First United would be like in 40 or 50 years? We would not be around then, but wanting to be a part of it we decided to make an annuity gift to the church. We had some stock that had appreciated about six times over what we had paid for it, meaning that if we sold it we would have a huge income tax problem.*

*We called the Presbyterian Foundation and found out that by giving the stock to them we could have an income for life and then the church would receive the money on our deaths. Now we know we will be a part of First United for a long time.*

*There are many ways you can be a part of the Church for many years too. If you don't have a plan, call Pastor Julie Harley or Gene Armstrong from the Planned Giving Committee and they will give you some suggestions.*

This letter was written by a church member who wishes to remain anonymous. Both the Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ offer charitable gift annuities, as described in the letter above. To learn more details, please talk with Julie at the church or Gene Armstrong at 708-524-0381.

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## IRA Charitable Rollover Alert!

—Gene Armstrong

Until December 31, 2009, anyone age 70 1/2 and older may make an IRA rollover gift to a charity of up to \$100,000 and face no withdrawal tax (but get no charitable deduction). You IRA fund administrator can provide the forms. So, if you've got a spare IRA, First United Church would be a grateful rollover recipient.

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## Automated Pledge Contributions

—Julie O'Shea

At the church, we need our members who are able to fulfill their pledge obligations. We rely on the pledge support to keep our congregation and church vibrant and strong. If paying your pledge is a difficult task to remember or is always getting put at the bottom of the pile of things to do – consider automatic contributions. The church, or you, can set up a recurring transaction that transfers your pledge amount all at once, once monthly, twice monthly or quarterly. You can choose if this transaction is to happen on the 1st, 5th, 15th or 20th of the month – whatever works for your finances. Please consider setting this up by going to the church website [www.firstunitedoakpark.com](http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com), choose the Giving Tab, go to *Stewardship/ Giving* and scroll down to the *Give Online* section and select the donate now link. From here you can set up a one time transfer or a recurring gift to the church. For questions contact me at the Church office.

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## Our Library ✓ Check This Out

—Cindy Palombi

The holiday season is so full of excitement and anticipation for children. And, as adults, we wait for that same Christmas feeling we used to experience as children to come upon us. We probably don't remember most of the things we received as gifts when we were little but our senses hold deep memories of all things Christmas. Carols, cookies, candles, and coziness. The book *Unplug the Christmas Machine* has been a resource 20 years for parents looking for ways to deepen the meaning of Advent and Christmas in the home. And one tradition that can be enjoyed is reading aloud in the evening. Parents read to toddlers and young children all the time - but reading to an older child is truly a gift. I suggest *A Newberry Christmas*, a collection of short stories written by award winning authors. *Happy Christmas* is another book with enough poems, stories and carols to last many nights. Another idea for a day without school is to stop by the Church library, bring a sack lunch, light the candle for a little while, and enjoy exploring this cozy space with your children. The memory will be more than just about the books!



## Christmas Season of Peace Night

—Mark Buck

For more than eight years a group of First United Church's members have gathered on the front steps of the church to express their yearnings for peace. Averaging about a dozen souls, the group's quiet presence on Friday evenings reflects the deep yearnings that people of faith have for peace across the spectrum of the world's faith and cultures. On November 17th, the Council voted to give special recognition to the First United Peace Makers who witness for peace. An integral part of this recognition was the declaration of a Christmas Season of Peace Night, set for the first Friday of Advent, December 4th at 7:00 pm. On this evening, all of First United's membership is invited to join the witness for peace in honor and recognition to Christ's call for all humanity to exist together in peace and non-violence. Please plan to join with other members of Oak Park's faith community in witnessing for Peace, especially in this season when our songs of the season implore the gift of "peace on earth, goodwill to all."

## Evening Division Celebrates Christmas

—Marcia Ashton

Join us on December 3 for our annual Christmas event in Centennial Hall. At 6:00 pm, we begin with a traditional Wassail Bowl followed by a festive dinner. This year "The Profiles Singing Ensemble" will take us on a musical journey to launch our Christmas spirits. The Christmas Thank Offering will be received that night. You are welcome to invite a guest. January – no program. February 4 – "Laughter Therapy" will be led by Carole Bergstraesser. This program is bound to lift our dragging winter spirits.

## PrimeTime Carol Sing

—Janet Haisman

(With a special invitation to those 50+!) On Friday, December 11, beginning at 7 pm in the Church lounge, PrimeTime will host a carol sing for all PrimeTimers. We are also inviting those who are 50+ to join us for this special event. Rev. Julie Harley will give us background on many of our favorite carols, and we will then sing those, accompanied by Pauline Coffman on the piano. There will also be a time for requests, and we anticipate much joy and merriment as we engage in this wonderful holiday tradition! Come join us for light refreshments and great fellowship! Please call or e-mail Connie Henderson-Damon to let us know you'll be joining us: (708) 386-4271 or hendamonc@earthlink.net

## Alternative Christmas Store

—Beth Mrkvicka

The Alternative Christmas Store provides a direct connection to some of our mission partners, while also offering you and your family the chance to transform your holiday giving ritual. We will again be open the four Sundays of Advent. Through various worker cooperatives around the world and local organizations such as The Food Pantry and PADS, ACS offers some wonderful handcrafted items along with soups, chocolates, coffee and, of course, Erie House pecans.

Through Church World Service, you can help provide needed materials around the world. Why not consider purchasing a school kit for children in Kenya, or buying a sewing machine for women in an Argentinean village? There will be new opportunities for giving this year including a partnership with FUSH as they begin planning and working towards their work camp next summer. We plan to offer a way to support Presbyterian outreach in Colombia and will once again be selling fair trade olive oil from Palestine.

The Alternative Christmas Store will be open before and after worship on the four Sundays of Advent.

Living Spirits of Earth  
 Mother and Father of us all  
 You hold us in Your breath  
 You who bathe us in your  
     waters who feed us  
     with Your fruits  
 Guardian of where we are  
 of who we are becoming  
     Cradle of our days  
 and comforter of our nights  
 You who carry us folded  
     in Your arms  
     Sailing silently  
     among the stars  
 Hear our prayers—

—The Terma Collective

O Creator God, let me feel the  
 "isness" of things and people,  
 without resistance, without  
 trying to impose my own pattern  
 upon them or exploit them  
 for selfish ends.

Let me welcome them, enjoy  
 them, value them,  
 for what they are and for what  
 they are becoming  
 through your creative love.

—George Appleton, *England*




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### **Women's Retreat Scholarship Fund Bread Sale** —Jackie Eckholm

**December 5, 2009 - 9 am to Noon**

During Saturday rehearsals for Hanging of the Greens, the aroma of fresh bread will be wafting through First United Church. Please help the Women's Retreat Scholarship Fund by purchasing a loaf or more of homemade, fresh bread. We would like to see that every women who would like to attend the annual retreat held in Racine, Wisconsin be able to make the trip. Every year we give scholarships — full and partial — to anyone in need of a little help. With our slower economy we are anticipating a greater need this year.

If you would like to knead some dough and bake some bread the Retreat Committee would love your help. We will be making dough on Friday, December 4th and then getting up very early the morning of December 5th to begin baking. Please contact our Chief Chef, Nancy Carleton (708-386-9195 or reclues@sbcglobal.net) if you can give us a hand.

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### **The Oak Park River Forest Infant Welfare Society**

Presents their 11th Annual Holiday Housewalk & Market on Friday and Saturday, December 4 & 5, 2009. This newly expanded 2 day festive event includes 5 homes in the Oak Park historic district decked out for the Holidays and a specialty market at the 19th Century Club featuring 40 vendors selling "one of a kind" gifts. Tickets cost \$35.00 in advance for house tour & 2 day market pass. For ticket and group sales information call (708) 848-0528 ext.300 or visit [www.childrensclinicwi.org](http://www.childrensclinicwi.org). Proceeds from this event benefit The Children's Clinic at 320 Lake Street in Oak Park, a community supported health care organization providing medical, dental and social services for children whose families are unable to afford the cost of private health care.

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### **What Happened to the Children's Benefit Tea?** — Priscilla Sibley

The Children's Benefit Tea, usually held annually in November is not being held this year. We have not forgotten the Tea's beneficiaries, however. Lifelink children's ministry and Erie Neighborhood House have each received a donation so that their Christmas programs will not be affected by a loss of our usual gift. Want to help with next year's Tea? To help organize or to offer to host in your home, please call Priscilla Sibley 848-2840.

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### **Honoring Rev. Edward Bergstraesser** —Julie R. Harley

The Community Room at the Lifelink main campus in Bensenville will be named in memory of the Rev. Dr. Edward W. Bergstraesser in a ceremony to be held at 11:30 am on Tuesday, Dec. 29, at 331 South York Road in Bensenville. Mrs. Carole Bergstraesser and family members will be attending, along with Rev. Julie R. Harley, who now serves on the Lifelink Board of Directors. Rev. Bergstraesser lived in Bensenville as a child and provided many years of leadership on the Lifelink/Bensenville Home Society boards during his ministry. We are grateful for this recognition of our former pastor.

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*May the season  
 be a time of renewal  
 and new birth*

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

<i>Wednesdays</i> 2nd 3rd & 4th and 1st	3:30p 7:00p 7:00p	Food Pantry Open Food Pantry Open Adult Choir	Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski - 386-1324
<i>Thursdays</i> <i>Fridays</i>	6:30p 7:00a 7:00p	Cluster Tutoring Classes Men's Breakfast Group Peace Prayer Vigil	Bill Chin - 386-5215 Kathy McCabe - 773-378-5530 Ted Desportes - 386-4809 Bud Hayes
<i>Saturdays</i>	8:30a 9:00a	Inner Peace/World Peace Food Pantry	Jeff Olson - 383-3154 Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski - 386-1324 Susan Zaruba - 386-1946
<b>Walk-in-Ministry</b>	<i>Monday—Saturday 10 to 11am</i>		

<b>Week of December 1</b>			
Tuesday 1	11:00a 7:00p	Evening Division Board Devotional Adult Education Committee Library Committee Faith in Action Committee Children's Ministry Committee	Carole Ferguson William Tweedley Cindy Palombi Bob Hahn Andrea Alter & Barbara Metric
Wednesday 2	6:30p 7:30p	Hanging of the Greens Reader Rehearsal Hanging of the Greens Orchestra Rehearsal	
Thursday 3	6:00p	Evening Division Wassail Bowl/Dinner	Carole Ferguson
Saturday 5	4:00a 9:00a 9:00a 10:00a 10:30a 1:00p	Women's Retreat Bread Bake Hanging of the Greens Singing Rehearsal Bread Sale Hanging of the Greens Reader Rehearsal Hanging of the Greens Reader Rehearsal Dances of Universal Peace	Marylen Marty-Gentile Marylen Marty-Gentile Cindy Palombi
<b>Week of December 6</b>			
Sunday 6	8:30a 8:30a 9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:15p 6:00p	Vision Team Holiday Food & Gift Program Received Christian Education for All Quest Worship-Advent 2-Hanging of the Greens Children's Choir FUSH/FUJI Youth Groups	Mark Loafman Sher Watts Spooner Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile Bill Chin Leah Fowler
Monday 7	7:00p	Fellowship of Reconciliation	
Tuesday 8	7:00p 7:00p 7:00p 7:00p 7:00p 8:00p 7:00p 7:30p	Finance Committee Youth Board Shawl Ministry Deacons Communications Committee PrimeTime Carol Sing Midpoint Holiday Gathering at Kuntz's	Claudette Zobel Leah Fowler Elan Long Carl Nauert Martha Reese Janet Haisman Amber Pareja
Friday 11	7:00p 7:30p		
<b>Week of December 13</b>			
Sunday 13	9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:15p 4:00p 4:00p 6:00p	Christian Education for All Quest Worship-Advent 3-Leah Fowler Installation Children's Choir OPRF Symphony Concert FUSH Cookie Bake FUJI Youth Group	Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile Bill Chin Leah Fowler Leah Fowler
Tuesday 15	4:00p 7:30p	FUSH Cookie Bake Church Council	Laurie Jolicoeur
Wednesday 16	4:00p 6:00p	FUSH Cookie Bake Dinner and a Movie	Ted Desportes
Thursday 17	4:00p 7:00p 7:00p	FUSH Cookie Bake Spiritual Guidance Groups Shawl Ministry	Julie R. Harley Elan Long
Saturday 19	9:00a 4:00p 7:30p	Directions FUSH Cookie Bake Sing We Joyous Concert	Liz Howells Leah Fowler Bill Chin
<b>Week of December 20</b>			
Sunday 20	8:30a 9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:15p 12:15p 4:00p 6:00p	FUSH Cookie Pick-up Christian Education for All Quest Worship-Baptism-Advent 4 Christmas Pageant Rehearsal Children's Choir Healing Service FUSH/FUJI Christmas Parties	Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile Bill Chin Mark Buck Leah Fowler
Monday 21	12:00p	Food Pantry Ham Give-away	Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski
Tuesday 22	10:00a 7:00p	Food Pantry Food Packing Building & Grounds Committee Personnel Committee New Member Committee Youth Committee	John Zaruba Al Parchem Susan Saliny Judy Bradeen
Thursday 24	5:00p 8:00p 11:00p	Christmas Eve-Church Offices Closed at Noon Worship-Children's Christmas Pageant with Communion Worship-Candlelight Service with Communion Worship-Candlelight Service with Communion	
Friday 25		Christmas Day-Church Offices Closed	
<b>Week of December 27</b>			
Sunday 27	11:00a 3:00p	Worship PFLAG	Kate Croker
Monday 28	7:00p	Three Cups of Tea Presentation	Karin Romnow
Thursday 31		New Year's Eve-Church Offices Closed	



Julie R. Harley,  
Lead Pastor

Leah Fowler,  
Associate Minister of Youth  
and Adult Education

Marylen Marty-Gentile,  
Director of Children  
& Family Ministries

Mark Buck,  
Interim Associate Pastor for  
Membership and Mission

Jeff Foels,  
McCormick Seminary Intern

Bill Chin,  
Director of Music Ministry

708.386.5215  
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## Save These Dates

<b>Sundays, December 6, 13, 20</b>		
	9:30a / 12:30p	Alternative Christmas Store
<b>Thursday, December 3</b>	6:00p	Evening Division Wassail Bowl / Dinner
<b>Friday, December 11</b>	7:00p	PrimeTime Carol Sing
	7:30p	Midpoint Holiday Gathering at Kuntz's
<b>Sunday, December 13</b>	11:00a	Installation of Rev. Leah Fowler at worship
	4:00p	OPRF Symphony Concert
<b>Wednesday, December 16</b>	6:00p	Dinner and a Movie
<b>Saturday, December 19</b>	7:30p	Sing We Joyous Concert
<b>Sunday, December 20</b>	4:00p	Healing Service
<b>Thursday, December 24</b>	Christmas Eve-Church offices closed at noon	
	5:00p	Worship-Children's Christmas Pageant with Communion
<i>Worshippers are invited to arrive 30 minutes prior to these services for musical preludes.</i>		
	8:00p	Worship-Candlelight Service with Communion
	11:00p	Worship-Candlelight Service with Communion
<b>Friday, December 25</b>	Christmas Day-Church offices closed	
<b>Monday, December 28</b>	7:00p	Three Cups of Tea Presentation by Karin Ronnow
<b>Thursday, December 31</b>	New Year's Eve-Church offices closed	
<b>Friday, January 1, 2010</b>	New Year's Day-Church offices closed	

**Deadline for the January 2010 issue is December 15th.**

*Please e-mail information or articles for the MB to:*

office@firstunitedoakpark.com

1109.emorymead

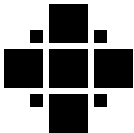
### December 2009

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