

January 2010

themessengerbell

www.firstunitedoakpark.com

In this issue:

January Worship
> page 2

Adult Education
> page 4 & 5

Special February
Event!
Music & Spirituality
with John Bell
> page 5

Faith in Action
> page 7

Calendar
> last page

There are 10 pages
in this issue.

Welcome to
the new
First United
e-newsletter.
This is a work in
progress.
Please be patient
with us.
—Thank you.

new
year
hope

“The Work of Christmas”

When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins.
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To teach the nations, to bring Christ to all,
To make music in the heart.

I read this poem at the beginning of each New Year. It was written by Pastor, Professor, Poet, Author of 22 books, and Modern-day Mystic Howard Thurman.

During his career, Dr. Thurman (1900-1981) was a professor at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, Howard University and Boston University, as well as a renowned preacher. He was involved in interfaith dialogue in the 1930s, traveling to India to meet with Gandhi and other religious leaders pursuing nonviolent social change. Decades later, Dr. Thurman inspired Martin Luther King and many other justice leaders. His life's goal was to reconcile the struggles of the civil rights era with the spiritual concerns of the church.

“The Work of Christmas,” captures for me the essence of our church's goal to sustain a spiritual framework for our ministries. The experience of Christmas is a powerful moment of holiness. We are captivated by the magic of singing “Silent Night” in a darkened sanctuary, illuminated only by candles, swept up in the sacred music of the ages. And yet we return after the holiday to the work of Christmas, the work that the Jewish tradition calls Tikkun O'lam, repairing and restoring the world.

But the work of Christmas is far from magical. It can be unpleasant. It is tiring. It is complicated. It is depressing. It is discouraging. It seems endless. While retailers are happy to swipe our credit cards and encourage us to celebrate Christmas, the work of Christmas creates enemies and incurs opposition. Releasing prisoners? Not in my backyard. Feeding the hungry? They oughta get a job. Healing the broken? Not unless they have good insurance. Bringing Christ to all? That's forcing your religion down other people's throats, you patriarchal oppressor.

And yet for this work God put the star in the sky. For this work, kings and princes laid down their gifts. For this work, shepherds watched and angels sang, and a child was born. For this work, Jesus was laid in a manger. A manger is not a place for rest, but a place to be fed. May our moments of spiritual depth in worship feed and strengthen us for the work that lies ahead. As Dr. Thurman said: “Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

In Christian love,
Julie R. Harley

Transitions

Birth: Thomas Jeffrey Carter, son of Sarah Deardorff Carter and Joshua Carter, brother of Madeline and Barrett

Tillman Register, grandson of Don and Delores Register

Baptism: Christopher George Shkutov, son of George and Sarah Shkutov
Eleanor Ann Balch, daughter of Brandon and Nicole Balch

Compassion: Nancy Carleton
Priscilla Sibley
Susan Meyers
Mildred, mother of Steve Saliny
Michelle, sister of Melinda Robinson
Bea, mother of Melanie Dykstra
Lynn Collins
Mother, of Jeff Olson
Kay, aunt of Bruce Caughran
Natalie Nemeth

Condolence: Father of Kim Cornman, grandfather of Eva, Amy and Jess
Cousin of Steve Mrkvicka
Edna Benson, aunt of Sue Saliny
Rebecca Daugherty, aunt of Janna Smith

Congregational Meeting

—Laurie Jolicoeur and Carole Ferguson

Council calls a Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 10 after worship for the purpose of voting on the revised charge of the Pastoral Search Committee from a full-time to a part-time position and of informing the congregation of the revised staff job descriptions.

Annual Meeting, Sunday, January 31 at 8:30 am

It is a tradition at First United to have an annual gathering of the congregation (families, singles, old, young, babies, new members, veterans) for a breakfast and a celebration of the year in our life together. This year we welcome the Visioning Committee into the spotlight as they debut the visioning statement they've discerned through our congregational vision process. Come to hear the vision statement. Come to be among those who are eager for us to live into a God-sized goal. Come to begin to imagine an emerging spiritual experience for each and everyone of us. Breakfast will begin at 8:30 am, hosted by our FFUN Committee and child-friendly care and activities will be provided around 9:00 am when the program commences.

The FFUN Committee would like to invite you to participate by bringing foods for this event. If you can make an egg casserole or bring breads or rolls, or juice, or fresh fruit, please call me at (708) 383-5566 or Janet Kenealy at (708) 386-5180 to volunteer. Thanks and we are looking forward to seeing you on January 31st.

Worship Themes for the Season of Epiphany:

Arise, Shine, Your Light Has Come!

Epiphany begins on January 6, the twelfth day of Christmas, when we celebrate the visit of the Magi to Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. These astrologers from the East traveled across national borders, following the Star of Bethlehem, to worship the Son of God.

During Epiphany, we celebrate the good news that Christ came for ALL people, not only the people of Israel. We look for signs of God's glory, which lead us to find God in the same way the Magi followed the Star. And we are challenged to live in a world in which rulers like Herod still have great power... They use it to silence Jesus and all who live by his prophetic message.

January 3 – Communion Sunday	Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14 and John 1:1-18	“Moving from Words to Witness”
January 10 – First Sunday of Epiphany	Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 and Matthew 2:1-12	“Hungering for an Epiphany”
January 17 – Second Sunday of Epiphany	Isaiah 43:1-7 and Luke 3:15-17 and 21-22”	“Passing Through the Waters”
<i>Baptism</i>		
January 24 – Third Sunday of Epiphany	Nehemiah 8:1-10 and Luke 4:14-21	“Moving from Charity to Changing Structures”
January 31 – Fourth Sunday of Epiphany – Annual Meeting Sunday	1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and Luke 4:21-30	“Let's Talk of Love”

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.

Deacons:

Carl Nauert	Franklyn (Bud) Hayes	Chris Davis
Gary Cerniglia	Karla Hayter	Karin Pietrini
Neal McNish	Connie Ronnow	Grant Jones
Lee Anderson	Priscilla Sibley	
Irene Worley	Sally Sutherland	

January's 4th Sunday Offering

The Fourth Sunday offering for January will support the Colombia Accompaniment Program. Leaders in The Presbyterian Church of Colombia are taking great risks in their human rights work and their support of the communities of Colombians who have been displaced by the violence of the forty-year war in their country. They have asked North Americans to act as international accompaniers in order to provide a measure of safety—international eyes—for their work. The Colombia Accompaniment Program trains and deploys short-term mission workers to assist in this valuable work. To understand some of the purposes of this mission, please review Richard Williams' and Mamie Broadhurst's blog at calledtocolombia.org. Please plan to give generously on January 24th in support of this part of our global mission emphasis.



Arise,
Shine,
Your
Light
Has
Come!

new
year
hope



Clerk's Corner —Beth Mrkvicka

Our November meeting began with a guest presentation from Joan White, Director of First United's Nursery School. She shared its 51 year history and its objectives. Several Council members have children who attended the Nursery School and one Council member, Elizabeth Crowell, is a graduate! We also had Bob Hahn visiting, as a representative of Faith in Action. He and Council member Bob Haisman envision First United as a mission church and spoke of their desires for us to all be involved in some aspect of mission. While we have always been involved in various mission related programs, in the last several years we have brought mission into the church through the Food Pantry and Walk-in Ministry, and are now moving outward, through our support of Mamie & Richard in Colombia and other justice efforts. Faith in Action now has a line item in our budget and would like to see 10% of our operating budget going to mission by 2020.

Most of our meeting was focused on the budget and with pledges still coming in as we met on November 17; we spent time understanding and discussing changes to our 2010 budget. The three significant changes this year involved adding a \$10,000 line item for mission, an increase in the budget for Buildings & Grounds and a half-time associate pastor replacing the position vacated by Mamie Broadhurst. In weeks leading up to our meeting, conversation and collaboration between Finance, Faith in Action, Buildings and Grounds, the staff and Council leadership resulted in thoughtful, prayerful, difficult decisions. Collaborative conversation will continue as decisions are made about staffing responsibilities and how we might distribute additional funds should they become available.

Other items covered included Council approval to support two overtures being brought forth at the 2010 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). These involve endorsing the ordination of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered persons and to support conducting civil marriages and commitment ceremonies of GLBT persons.

Hanging of the Greens and Leah Fowler's ordination took place in December. Mission trips for adults to New Orleans and Colombia are both being planned for 2010. We ended with a conversation about the pastoral staff evaluation process. Julie Harley's contract with First United requires an annual review. Personnel, with input from Julie developed an online survey that covered various aspects of her ministry and leadership. Council members responded to the survey and these results will be shared with Julie in early December.

Spiritual Guidance Groups Open to New Members in January —Julie R. Harley

In our congregational vision conversations last fall, many members said they are seeking more intimate fellowship with others. The monthly spiritual guidance groups provide this. They also offer a way to emphasize our congregation's Wildly Important Goal: creating and sustaining a spiritual framework for our ministries. Most importantly, the groups help us grow spiritually – individually and as a congregation.

On the third Thursday of each month, about 20 people gather in the Chapel from 7 to 9 pm to pray, sit in silence together, and listen to a scripture passage. Then we divide into small groups of four or five people, with one person as a facilitator, and we share together our response to the text. Sometimes we ask for guidance in making a decision, sometimes we share our joys and concerns, sometimes we provide spiritual and emotional support for one another. Our sharing is confidential, and you do not need to be a "spiritual guru" to participate.

Please contact me (jrh@firstunitedoakpark.com or 708-386-5215 ext. 22) if you would like to register for the group, which meets on Jan. 21. Leah Fowler, Marylen Marty-Gentile and I all serve as facilitators, along with Jane Barker and Jeff Olson.

A Prayer for Peace

This prayer was offered by Rick Ashton at the Season of Peace vigil on Friday, December 4 on the steps of First United Church.

Oh Lord, this war in Afghanistan is heavy on our hearts.
We have such differences with the Afghans!
They call you Allah. We call you God.
They worship on Friday. We worship on Sunday.
They honor your prophet Muhammed. We embrace your son Jesus.
They study the Koran. We read the Bible.
They are captives of their history.
We forget our history.
They oppress women by making them cover up. We oppress women by making them undress.
They raise and sell opium. We buy and use drugs.
They are poor and live by bribery. We are rich and live by bailout.
They harbor terrorists, often against their own wishes.

We fear and challenge terrorists, often against our better judgments.
Over these differences, Oh Lord, we are spilling blood and treasure and we are surging to do more.
We know that this is not your will. We know this cannot succeed.
Yet even our wise and thoughtful leaders persist.

We pray for changes of heart, changes of mind, on all sides. We pray that your spirit will enter into this dreadful mess, that your purposes for this world may be known and heeded, that swords may be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and that we may study war no more.
Amen.

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.

**new
year
hope**



YOUTH NEWS

— Leah Fowler

FUSH

Hey church! In case you didn't already know, FUSH is going to S.O.W.E.R. in Bethesda, Ohio this coming summer for Work Camp.

We will be gone from June 14th to the 20th helping repair homes for those who don't have the means to do so themselves financially and/or physically. We are all very excited, and we ask you to help support us in any way you can. You can buy stock from us, or just giving a youth a word of encouragement and blessing would be wonderful. Thank you so much!

—Emma Mrkvicka, Sophomore, OPRF.

Here is what FUSH is up to this month:

January 3: College Students are welcome back for a Reunion Night! We will also be rolling out the details of Work Camp 2010 to Bethesda, OH. Margaret Hartmann will be showing a slide show of work camps past, and current and alumni FUSHes will reflect on what Work Camp means to FUSH, to the church, and to the people we serve.

January 10: Dan Sack and friends will lead a conversation on race and class in Oak Park.

January 17: It's Movie Night! We're starting early at 5:00 pm, so we have time to chat after the movie.

January 22-24: It's the FUSH Winter Retreat to Tower Ridge, Michigan!

January 31: FUSH Coffeehouse, Open House! All are welcome! Hear youth play guitar, sing, rap, throw poetry, and more unleashed creativity. All ages welcome. We will pass the hat for donations for Work Camp; suggested donation is \$5 for adults and \$2 for kids and teens.

FUJI has a good month planned too:

January 3: No FUJI

January 10: Small Groups

January 17: Service Project with Interfaith House

January 24: Broom Ball in Franklin Park

January 31: Come to FUSH Coffeehouse (bring \$2 donation to Work Camp)

Weekday Bible Study

Beginning Wednesday, January 13, we will engage in a 12-week course, taught by our pastoral staff, called "First Light: Jesus and the Kingdom of God." This class will examine the subversive theology of the subversive Galilean who still transforms lives today. We will delve into the parables, the Sea of Galilee as a metaphor for our world, and theological ways to look at the crucifixion and resurrection. We must have at least 6 people sign up by Jan. 10 to begin class, and we ask that participants pay \$15 if able for course materials.

January 3 and 10:

God With Us

During major challenges to its existence and when new conditions confronted the church, the church struggled to state publicly the meaning of Christian faith in that moment. It did this by writing confessions. We recognize the names of these confessions: Nicene, Apostles Creed, Instruction in Faith, The Confession of 1967, The Barmen Confession, The Declaration of Faith in 1983, and others.

In this series we will examine several of these confessions to discover the challenges and conditions to Christian Faith and the churches' response as it sought to be faithful to God in each moment of its history. During the season when we celebrate God's act toward us in Jesus Christ, we will seek to learn from those Christians who struggled before us, and in the final session think about the challenges that face Christians in our moment and discuss the meaning of what God has done in Christ for us and for our world. What is our confession of faith today? The class will be led by Jeff Foels, our Seminary Intern from McCormick Theological Seminary.

January 17: Now that we have heard what the historic confessions have said about Emmanuel—God-with-us—we hear from church lay and clergy members some personal stories that testify to the power and presence of God-with-us today. Brenda Potts and Lead Pastor Julie Harley will lead this class.

January 24: Our tradition affirms the responsibility of the church to make the Christian faith its own with each generation. What do you of this generation have to say about the nature of Jesus? Jeff Foels will lead us through the process of writing our own profession of faith about Jesus, whom we follow.

January 31: No Adult Ed; Annual Meeting

Ongoing Course:

Connecting to God, the Environment, and Community through Vegetables.

The Bible is rich with stories/passages that meld of God's gifts of earth, sun, and water to nurture and in some case restrict the growth and harvesting of fruits, grains, and vegetables. In this 10 month Adult Ed session we will strive to mix a theological references to gardens, vegetables and grains with a hands-on introduction into the joys and trials of home vegetable gardening. If all goes well, we will harvest in nearby gardens a bountiful basket of fresh, locally grown vegetables, and experience the joys of sustainable community agriculture. Class is the second Sunday of the month.

1/10—Introduction, Planning/Design and Seed Selection

2/7—Final Plans, Order seed, Indoor Gardening

3/7—Construction, Transplant Seedlings, Soil Testing

4/11—Spring Planting

5/9—Early Summer Planting

continued on page 5

Adult Education

new year hope

more...

Adult Education

Ongoing Course—continued>

- 6/13—Summer Planting, Pests & Pest Control, Maintenance, Fertilizer
- 7/11—Maintenance, Pests & Pest Control, Harvest,
- 8/8—Harvest,
- 9/12—Final Harvests, Cleanup, Notes
- 10/10—Cleanup and Planting for Spring (e.g. garlic).

Course Instructor: Paul Aeschleman has been an avid vegetable gardener for the past 20 yrs and is looking forward to sharing his experiences with the design, planting and maintenance of numerous vegetable and native gardens. Pre-registration is required for the workshop; please send name, phone and email to Paul at aeschlemanp@sbcglobal.net.

THE GREEN SPACE

—Laurie Bunkers

Organic Gardening Seminar: See “Adult Education announcement” for news about January’s organic gardening seminar, led by Paul Aeschleman.

Environmental Stewardship Team: Next meeting: January 10 at 8:30 am, in the Conference Room. Please join us!

GREEN TIP – Did you know CFLs (compact fluorescent bulbs) cannot be recycled through your regular curbside recycling program? However, they CAN be recycled at numerous drop-off locations, including, Dressel’s Hardware at 1137 Chicago Avenue in Oak Park, and at all Home Depot locations. (Fluorescent bulbs should not be thrown in the regular trash because of their mercury content.) For other locations go to www.lamprecycle.org

New Member Classes Set for February

— Mark Buck

Orientation Classes for those seeking to join, or at least find out more about, First United Church of Oak Park will be held on the four Sundays in February (7, 14, 21, & 28). The classes focus on the history and theological basics of our denominations: Presbyterian and United Church of Christ, and the way First United relates in its unique way to each. We will explore the way First United works, both among its membership, in the immediate neighborhood, and throughout the world. We will also explore our own faith histories and become better acquainted with our classmates and other members of the church who will be joining us during our journey.

Persons seeking to join First United are expected to attend three of the four sessions, meeting with the Church Council at a welcome breakfast on February 28. If you have questions about First United or the affiliation process, please contact me, Mark Buck, Interim Associate Pastor for Membership and Mission at 708-386-5215, or via e-mail at mbuck@firstunitedoakpark.com.

Good News Abounds! — Claudette Zobel

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!

The First United stewardship campaign is almost complete and we have reached a remarkable \$674,500 in pledge income including 45 new pledges. This has enabled the church to make a modest increase in staff salaries, more adequately fund building needs in the coming year, budget for the interest payments due on our building loan and make a contribution of \$10,000 in pledges to the mission component of our budget. In these difficult times this is an amazing demonstration of the dedication of the congregation to the work of the church—truly sacred giving.

Music and Spirituality with John Bell

Thursday, February 11, 2010
First United Church of Oak Park Chapel

John Bell is based in Glasgow and works with his colleagues at the Iona Community in the areas of music, worship and spirituality. He does not have a mobile phone, driving license, camera, i-pod or wife. He has never traced his family origins, played a guitar, or eaten a Big Mac.

>Making Friends with God — 1:30-4:30 pm > Singing with the World Church — 7:00-9:30 pm

Cost is a requested donation of \$25 for both workshops, or \$15 for one. Please register by copying the following form and submitting it, with a registration fee made to First United Church, to the church office marked “Adult Ed.”

Name _____

Phone _____

Email _____

I will attend: ___ Making Friends with God, 1:30-4:30 pm
and/or ___ Singing with the World Church 7:00-9:30 pm

I have enclosed my payment of : \$ _____

photograph: Andrew Spurr



new
year
hope

“Why Denominations” — Mark Buck

(Note: This is the first of a two-part series gleaned from a presentation made to the Church Council on December 15.)

At the outset, I want to call attention to the title I've assigned to this article: “Why Denominations.” Please note the punctuation. This is not supposed to be a question, nor is it a statement, nor is it an imperative. It is all of these and more in order to indicate, perhaps that this is one of the elements of our life together (as, say, our beating hearts) that we sometimes ignore but that quietly and efficiently routes the life-blood through our system.

In almost every parish, sooner or later, the question is asked, “Why do we have to be a part of a denomination?” It's a question that indicates that mainline churches, especially, have done a less-than-adequate job of educating our members about not just the function of a covenantal wider church structure, but about connections to the historical faith that makes mainline Protestants not Roman Catholic, not Southern Baptist, not “Willow Creeks,” and not the local Community Church.

After all, not being a part of a denomination has advantages...you don't have to put up with a church hierarchy that is either too bossy, or too liberal, or too conservative, or too any of the other labels we paste on them. You don't have to send money off to someplace far away, you can keep it all for your own local ministry, and building expense, and mission that you can control, and building expense, and church school, and building expense, and staff salaries, and building expense, and, and, and, and building expense. You don't have to be embarrassed by pronouncements, resolutions, edicts, handed down by denominational officers that you can't imagine anyone at all agreeing with. But there are solid and mostly intangible reasons for being part of a denomination, and here are four of mine:

A denomination provides us with an historical anchor to the faith we express today. United Church of Christ history runs a close parallel to the quest for social and political independence and freedom that still rings true in our American society. Presbyterian history and theology invites us to be active participants in the world as a part of a spiritual discipline.

Denominations foster covenantal relationship between and among congregations and the various institutions that have grown from the church's historical mission. Locally, churches of similar denominational background can unite for common worship, fellowship, education, and witness. On a larger dimension regionally and nationally, denominations offer an identity that can be understood by those outside the fold that this church is a certain “brand” of Christian expression. Globally, denominations have the resources to be able to go where the local church member can't go. Could Mamie & Richard have gone to Colombia without the support and infrastructure of Presbyterian Missions? Could I know that every dollar I give to my Global Ministries sponsored child in India goes directly to her education and care without a denominational system that helps in addressing these needs and underwrites the costs of financial administration?

Please watch for the conclusion of these thoughts in next month's Messenger Bell.

Congregational Meeting

—Laurie Jolicoeur

Council calls a Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 10 after worship for the purpose of voting on the revised charge of the Pastoral Search Committee from a full-time to a part-time position and of informing the congregation of the revised staff job descriptions.

Annual Meeting, Sunday, January 31 at 8:30 am

It is a tradition at First United to have an annual gathering of the congregation (families, singles, old, young, babies, new members, veterans) for a breakfast and a celebration of the year in our life together. This year we welcome the Visioning Committee into the spotlight as they debut the visioning statement they've discerned through our congregational vision process. Come to hear the vision statement. Come to be among those who are eager for us to live into a God-sized goal. Come to begin to imagine an emerging spiritual experience for each and everyone of us. Breakfast will begin at 8:30 am, hosted by our FFUN Committee and child-friendly care and activities will be provided around 9:00 am when the program commences.

Food Needed for Congregational Meeting

—Carole Ferguson

The Annual Meeting of the Congregation is on January 31st, 2010, 8:30-10:30 am in Centennial Hall. The FFUN Committee would like to invite you to participate by bringing foods for this event. If you can make an egg casserole or bring breads or rolls, or juice, or fresh fruit, please call me at (708) 383-5566 or Janet Kenealy at (708) 386-5180 to volunteer. Thanks and we are looking forward to seeing you on January 31st.

PrimeTime Winter Picnic

— Marcia Ashton

Join us on Saturday, January 30th, 5:30 pm to 9:00 pm in Centennial Hall for a summer-style potluck to help us remember that we are slowly inching toward short-sleeve weather. We have planned a timely program — “Aging Is Not for Wimps” presented by Sandy Stroub, Director of Wellness Services for Alliance Rehab. This insightful, humorous and inspirational presentation will help us consider, “Where does the rest of my life go from here?” Natalie Nemeth and Pauline Geary are chairing this event, and Chris and Stan Davis are co-chairing. RSVP by January 24th to Barbara Ballinger, 708-386-3230 or barbaraballinger@att.net.



WIG

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

new
year
hope

Faith IN ACTION

Has it Really Been Six Months?

—Mamie Broadhurst and Richard Williams

Hello First United, and Happy New Year! It seems hard to believe that we have been gone from Oak Park for six months now and perhaps even harder to believe that we have only been in Colombia for two and a half months. We have finally moved into our apartment, we have been through some serious celebrating, and we are coming up on the national General Assembly meeting of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC) in just a few weeks.

We cannot begin to tell you how grateful we are for your thoughts and prayers, for those of you who follow us on the blog, send us emails and/or write us notes. To that end knowing that the 3rd graders are praying for us each week, the first graders are collecting pennies like crazy, the sixth graders have had conversations about Scripture and our mission here is a blessing beyond measure. We are also very appreciative of the financial support that individuals and the church itself has offered to us. We could not be here without that help.

We hope you all will continue to go to our blog, www.calledtocolombia.org, and if you subscribe (off to the right side, it's free) then you will get an email when a new post comes out. We also hope a group of you will seriously consider going to Ecumenical Advocacy Days this March in Washington, DC (March 19-22). This year's theme includes a focus on displaced persons, a central concern here in Colombia and to the work that the church here is doing. You can find out more about the event at www.advocacydays.org or at www.crln.org.

A letter from Karla Koll in Guatemala

December 3, 2009 Advent

Friends,

This fall as I traveled around the mid-Atlantic region of the United States as part of World Mission Challenge '09, I was introduced to Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) devices. In Guatemala, many commercial vehicles have GPS tracking devices that allow them to be located in the case of theft, but GPS devices that provide driving directions are unknown.

As I was driven from one meeting with Presbyterians excited about mission to another, a voice issued instructions from a little box. When I had to drive myself around a city I had never visited before, these directions got me to where I needed to be without any problem. But I found myself paying much more attention to the disembodied voice filling the car than to the landmarks I was passing. I wonder how such devices are changing our relationship to the landscape around us.

When my husband Javier was growing up in Managua, Nicaragua, there were no street signs or maps. Javier found his way around by learning where things are located in relationship to certain landmarks. To this day, this is the way he navigates, even after living in the United States and Guatemala for many years.

I think of my students Carmelina and Loida Rebeca as they and their extended families walk along the paths between the corn fields that link their houses in the village of Pachaj, Cantel. They have been kind enough to teach me which paths to take so I don't get lost amid the tall cornstalks this time of year. I think of Rosario and her three boys working their way from coffee tree to coffee tree to pick the beans along paths they have already traveled several times during this harvest. No need for signs or maps or GPS devices. They know this land.

Christ's call to participate in God's mission still comes to us today. Sometimes I think we treat the call to mission as if it were a disembodied voice speaking to us out of a GPS device, telling us where to go and what to do. All we need to do is to follow the voice to be faithful. But the logic of Christmas points to a different way. Upon entering a new context, we must first be willing to learn, to become, like Jesus says, as children. We should let those who are already there teach us their ways of communicating and their ways of understanding the world. We need them to show us the pathways of their lives, to tell us where to go and what to do. Only then will we be able to build community with them as together we strive to live out God's call to mission and work for a world in which none are lost or considered least.

In Christmas joy,
Karla Ann Koll

The work and reflection of Karla Ann Koll is supported by our gifts to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. along with First United Church's involvement in CRLN and CSLA here in the Chicago Area.

Chase the Blues Away with Song

—Carole Ferguson

The FFUN Committee is hosting an evening called "Chasing the Blues Away" on Saturday, Feb. 13th at First United Church (7-9 pm). Just for FUN, save the date. We'll sing Show Tunes around the piano...with the very able assistance of Pauline Coffman playing the piano, and refreshments provided. We'll meet in the lounge. If the February weather gets you down, come along and help Chase the Blues Away.



new
year
hope

Book Reviews

Three Cups of Tea

By Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin

—Bud Hayes

First of all, you'll love the story. This is one of those times where truth is stranger than fiction, or at least more interesting. Each chapter pulled me into the next. "You have to be kidding! You did that?" I kept saying stuff like that to myself. It's about a man who started schools for kids in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which in itself does not sound all that interesting, but what he did to accomplish that in a cultural setting totally removed from our own is. You learn about what it's like to enter another culture in a meaningful way.

Then there are the lessons to be drawn from the story. One man could accomplish all this? Well, it wasn't just him but Greg Mortenson was at the center of everything that happened. He was an extraordinary man to be sure with just the right combination of aptitudes, passions and values to get this done but that doesn't leave me, or you, off the hook. Because of his story, I have to take another look at what I might be able to do, ill equipped as I think I might be.

This leads to a third thing. A bunch of us who have started a kind of floating committee at First United called Peace with Justice are going to meet for three sessions at times and a place to be determined to discuss the implications of this book. The book doesn't just let you enjoy the story. It hooks you. We're hooked. You might be too if you read or have read the story and want to join us. Discussion of the book will open out onto a broader discussion of what we might be doing around peace and justice issues at First United.

More Cups of Tea.....
and it gets better!

—Priscilla Sibley

I'm with Bud – I couldn't put it down. *Three Cups of Tea* is a compelling story that boggles the mind and inspires at the same time. What could be better? Three Cups of Tea X 3! Greg Mortenson has collaborated with Susan L. Roth on a charming picture book, *Listen to the Wind*, and with Sarah Thomson on a *Young Readers Edition* of the original title.

Listen to the Wind is packed with beautifully created collages (also by Susan L. Roth) illustrating the people and land that first claimed Greg Mortenson's heart. The story is written in a way that children here can connect with the struggles of the children of Pakistan. The Young Reader Edition includes a Q&A with Greg's 12 year old daughter Amira, a glossary, of "Who's Who", and a reader's guide to help intermediate readers make sense of an unbelievable true story.

Wherever you start – the original *Three Cups of Tea*, the *Young Readers Edition*, or *Listen to the Wind*, the story of Dr. Greg and the children of Pakistan is a must read. Check it out in the Bergstraesser Library!

On the evening of December 28th over 50 people gathered in the lounge to hear Karin Ronnow, daughter of Connie and Kris, tell her remarkable story of working with Greg Mortenson, the author of *Three Cups of Tea*.

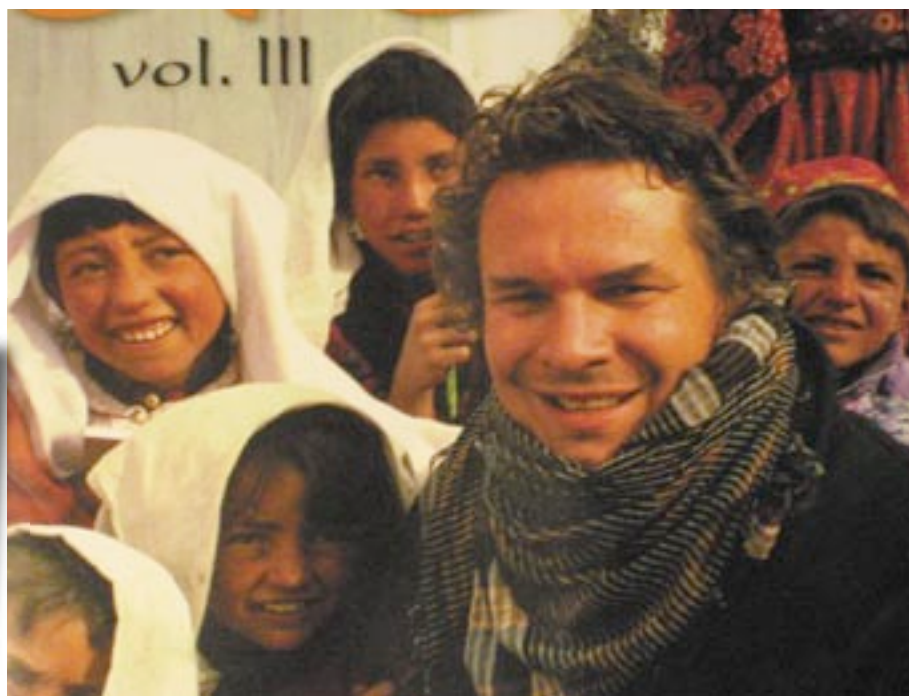
new
year
hope



Karin Ronnow, writer,
Livingston, Montana

Dr. Greg Mortenson and
Afgan children

All Photographs by
Teru Kuwayama



The Planned Giving Committee: —Gene Armstrong

Resolutions for 2010: at the beginning of each year, how many of you resolve to do what it takes to put your finances in better order? You all know that a review of personal finances and long-term financial goals and plans deserve a high priority among the New Year's resolutions you make. Be sure to include a review of your estate plan. Does your will still reflect your desires and intentions? Would a living trust make sense? Are your insurance coverages appropriate to your needs and desires? Have life or financial circumstances changed in ways that require revisions? (What's that? You don't have a will? Well, put "make a will" at the top of your list!)

As you move through this review process, please remember our church. While a bequest to the church as part of your will may not "mature" for many years (at least that's what we all hope), unless it is included in your will, the gift you intend for the church may never occur. The Planned Giving Committee stands ready to help. We can provide names of attorneys who can work with you. We can suggest language that you can use to include First United Church in your estate plan. We can explain the purposes and history of our endowments and how your gift can help assure the long-term financial stability of our church.

For assistance, contact our lead pastor, Rev. Julie Harley, or me, chair of the Planned Giving Committee.

Here's the recipe for the sweet snack offered at Leah's installation

—Megan Lewis

Caramel Corn Puffs

(Recipe from Alissa Strauss, past member)

8 oz. bag corn puffs

1/2 lb. unsalted butter (2 sticks)

1 cup packed brown sugar

1/2 cup Karo light corn syrup

1 teaspoon baking soda

1. Preheat oven to 250.
2. Melt butter, brown sugar and corn syrup in small/medium pot over medium heat.
3. After melted, cook for two minutes on medium to medium low heat.
4. Remove from heat. Immediately add baking soda and stir thoroughly.
5. The mixture will be caramel colored and foamy.
6. Put puffed corn in medium roast pan. Pour warm mixture over corn and stir, covering each piece completely with the mixture.
7. Bake for 45-60 minutes, stirring every 10-15 minutes.
8. Spread caramel corn out over waxed paper to cool.
9. After the caramel corn cools, break it apart if it sticks together.

Save These Dates

Friday, January 1	Church Offices Closed for New Year's Day
Saturday, January 2	1:00p Dances of Universal Peace
Sunday, January 10	8:30a Church School Leader Breakfast
	12:15p Congregational Meeting
Monday, January 18	Church Offices Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
Wednesday, January 20	6:00p Dinner and a Movie
Friday, January 22	6:30p FUSH Youth Retreat-Tower Hill
Saturday, January 30	5:30p PrimeTime Winter Picnic
Sunday, January 31	8:30a Annual Congregational Meeting/No Christian Education

www.firstunitedoakpark.com

Deadline for the February issue 2010 is January 15th.
Please e-mail information or articles for the MB to:
office@firstunitedoakpark.com

First United
Church of
Oak Park

848 Lake Street
Oak Park, IL 60301

708.386.5215
Fax: 708.386.7480

office@firstunitedoakpark.com

Staff:

Julie R. Harley, *Lead Pastor*

Leah Fowler,
*Associate Minister of Youth
and Adult Education*

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

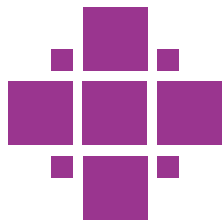
Mark Buck,
*Interim Associate Pastor for
Membership and Mission*

Jeff Foels,
McCormick Seminary Intern

Bill Chin,
Director of Music Ministry



new
year
hope



January 2010

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 Bill Chin - 386-5215
<i>Thursdays</i>		6:30p	Cluster Tutoring Classes	Kathy McCabe - 773-378-5530
<i>Fridays</i>		7:00a 7:00p	Men's Breakfast Group Peace Prayer Vigil	Ted Despotes - 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
Walk-in-Ministry	Monday—Saturday 10 to 11am			

Week of January 1

Friday 1	Church Offices Closed for New Year's Day		
Saturday 2	1:00p	Dances of Universal Peace	<i>Cindy Palombi</i>

Week of January 3

Sunday 3	9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:00p 6:00p	Christian Education for All Quest Worship-Communion FFUN Committee FUSH Youth Group (No FUJI)	<i>Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile</i> <i>Janet Kenealy</i> <i>Leah Fowler</i>
Monday 4	7:00p	Fellowship of Reconciliation	<i>Scott Haldeman</i>
Tuesday 5	7:00p 7:00p 7:00p 7:00p 7:30p	Faith in Worship Committee Adult Education Committee Library Committee Children's Ministry Committee Midpoint Holiday Gathering at Kuntz's	<i>William Tweedley</i> <i>Cindy Palombi</i> <i>Andrea Alter/Barbara Metric</i> <i>Amber Pareja</i>

Week of January 10

Sunday 10	8:30a 8:30a 9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:15p 12:15p 6:00p	Church School Leader Breakfast Environmental Stewardship Christian Education for All Quest Worship Congregational Meeting Children's Choir FUSH/FUJI Youth Groups	<i>Marylen Marty-Gentile</i> <i>Ann Alexander</i> <i>Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile</i> <i>Bill Chin</i> <i>Leah Fowler</i>
Monday 11	7:00p	Nominating Committee	<i>Judy Vojta</i>
Tuesday 12	7:00p 7:30p 8:00p 9:00a	Finance Committee Youth Board Shawl Ministry Deacon Meeting Vision Team Communication Committee Directions	<i>Claudette Zobel</i> <i>Leah Fowler</i> <i>Elan Long</i> <i>Carl Nauert</i> <i>Mark Loafman</i> <i>Martha Reese</i>

Week of January 17

Sunday 17	9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 12:15p 5:00p 6:00p	Christian Education for All Quest Worship-Baptism Children's Choir FUSH Movie Night FUJI Youth to Interfaith House	<i>Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile</i> <i>Bill Chin</i> <i>Leah Fowler</i>
Monday 18	Church Offices Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday		
Tuesday 19	7:30p	Church Council	<i>Laurie Jolicoeur</i>
Wednesday 20	6:00p	Dinner and a Movie	<i>Ted Despotes</i>
Thursday 21	8:00a 7:00p	Endowment Committee Spiritual Guidance Groups	<i>Gene Armstrong</i>
Friday 22	6:30p	FUSH Retreat - Tower Hill	<i>Leah Fowler</i>

Week of January 24

Sunday 24	9:30a 9:30a 11:00a 2:00p 3:00p 6:00p	Christian Education for All Quest Worship FUSH Retreat Return PFLAG FUJI Youth Group-Broom Ball	<i>Art Spooner/Marylen Marty-Gentile</i> <i>Kate Croker</i> <i>Leah Fowler</i>
Tuesday 26	11:00a 7:00p	Evening Division Board Building and Grounds Committee Personnel Committee Faith in Action Committee New Member Committee Youth Committee	<i>Carole Ferguson</i> <i>John Zaruba</i> <i>Al Parchem</i> <i>Bob Hahn</i> <i>Susan Saliny</i> <i>Judy Bradeen</i>
Thursday 28	7:00p	Shawl Ministry	<i>Elan Long</i>
Saturday 30	5:30p 7:00p	PrimeTime Winter Picnic First United Nursery School Concert	<i>Marcia Ashton</i> <i>Joan White</i>

Week of January 31

Sunday 31	8:30a 11:00a 6:00p	Annual Congregational Meeting/No Christian Education Worship-One Great Hour of Sharing Begins FUSH/FUJI Youth Groups Coffeehouse	<i>Leah Fowler</i>
-----------	--------------------------	--	--------------------

“Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking... for peace to come about in the world.”

new year hope