



July 2010

themessengerbell

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Welcome to the First United Church e-newsletter.

**Party + Prayer Vigil + Pep Rally + Political Caucus = Presbyterian General Assembly Meeting**

What do hundreds of Presbyterians do when they gather for a week in Minneapolis? All of the above.

Every two years, our denomination throws a national meeting. This year the 219th General Assembly of the PCUSA will be held July 3-10, and our members Dr. Pauline Coffman and Rev. Kris Ronnow will attend as Overture Advocates. When you get lots of deeply faithful, highly committed, strongly opinionated and really smart Presbyterians together, you need seven days to talk about everything.

What's on the agenda? A serious discussion of peacemaking in the Middle East will be a focal point. Commissioners will hear two reports on Christian-Jewish relations and Christian-Muslim relations. There is an overture calling for divestiture from Caterpillar for profiting from the use of its equipment for non-peaceful purposes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There will be continued discussion of ordination for gay/lesbian/bisexual transgendered people who are called to ministry, and a debate about whether marriage should be defined as between "a man and a woman" or between "two people." There will be review of a new form of government for the churches. Folks will discuss whether we should add the Belhar Confession, which originated in South Africa during apartheid, to the "Book of Confessions."

A new moderator will be elected for the national body, with three men and two women (all but one are clergy) running for the office. Participants will consider how to make more budget cuts in the national staff and how much to increase per capita giving from congregations. A new strategic direction for world mission will be presented. An overture from First United Church (that's us!) will be considered, requesting the national church write to President Obama to ask him to close seven U.S. military bases in Colombia, South America. Our partners, the Presbyterian Church in Colombia, believe this American military presence causes more violence and creates conditions for thousands of Colombian people to be displaced from their homes.

These meetings are a time for many things: community discernment, worship, spiritual leadership, prophetic witness, pastoral ministry, relationship-building, reunions and new directions. We pray with our commissioners and advocates that "more light and truth will break forth from God's Holy Word" at this gathering. We look forward to a full report from Pauline and Kris when they return.

The national meeting of the United Church of Christ will be held in July 2011. At the Illinois Conference UCC meeting last month, Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales was named the new Conference Minister.

Our denominations allow us to do so much more than we could do alone. Our denominations keep us accountable to our history and tradition. Our denominations connect us to resources that we need on a daily basis. Our denominations help us find new clergy. Our denominations allow the diversity of the church to emerge fully.

May the Spirit inspire us to act in and through these connections with believers around the nation and around the globe. God knows, the world needs good news.

In Christian love,

Julie R. Harley

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## Transitions

**Birth:**

*Brett Beckwith*, son of Chris and Kristin, grandson of Leah and Paul

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# Transitions

- Baptism:** Ricardo Castaneda  
Nicholas Fascione  
Jackson Hickok-Fletcher  
Henry Hickok-Fletcher  
Eleanor Hickok-Fletcher  
Yu Lin Shen
- Compassion:** Susan Meyers  
Lawrence Coppage  
Nancy Masterson  
Patrick Guinan  
Joyce Carey  
Bobbie Isserman, mother of Don Kuntz
- Condolences:** father of Pat Hahn, grandfather of Katherine and Kyle  
Martha Hopkins, mother of Steve, grandmother of Alexander and Katherine
- Confirmation:** Andrew John Bell  
Kevin James Bunschoten  
Ricardo Alexander Castaneda  
Austin Jeffrey Cone  
Jesse Michael Cornman  
Nicholas Wesley Fascione  
Jonathan William Gilmer  
Joshua Wayne Harmon  
Thomas Peck Kuntz  
Madeleine Pierce Rees  
Victoria Margaret Reese  
Richard Warren Wheelock

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## July Sunday Worship Services

Summer Worship Time @ 10:00 am continues through September 5.

**July 4** – We welcome Rev. Rob Leveridge on his first Sunday at First United!  
*Psalm 30 and Luke 10:1-20*  
“The Kingdom of God is on Your Doorstep”

**July 11** – Proper 10  
*Psalm 82 and Amos 7:7-17*  
“The Difference Between Charity and Justice”

**July 18** – Proper 11  
**Blessing of the Animals Sunday!** We will worship in the shade of the labyrinth, weather-permitting. Bring your pets (and if public spaces and other animals are difficult for your pet, you may bring a collar, picture, etc. instead) to receive a blessing and to celebrate all of our roles as God’s good creation.

Baptisms: Stephen Faust, son of Stan and Sara Lange Peterson, son of Drew and Melinda

**July 25** – Proper 12 and Communion  
SCARF Camp participants  
*Exodus 3, 1 Kings 19, Luke 24 and Acts 9*  
“Hello God”

**Worship and Sermon Talk-Backs in July** —Julie R. Harley

We will host talk-back sessions at 11:15 am each Sunday in July, to get your responses to worship and preaching at First United. Join us in the Chapel for dialogue with the preacher of the day.

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## Deacons

— Carl Nauert

The Deacons oversee numerous care ministries within First United. Many of these are a perfect fit for members who want to serve their church and don't have the time for monthly committee meetings. These ministries include memorial receptions, meal delivery, flower delivery, PALs, Greeters, Ushers, Prayer Shawl and Visitation. This month we highlight the Ushers.

### Ushering Team

On Sunday mornings we have a team of ushers responsible for the collection of the offering and prayers cards. The Lead Usher will recruit members that morning to assist with these two duties and is a contact for people with questions, visitors requiring directions or assistance, hearing aids, and large print bulletins/hymnals/bibles. Typically, the Lead Usher will be at the back of the church before and throughout the service. The Lead Usher Coordinator is David Wilson. Please contact him if you are interested in this important ministry.

Our THANKS to the current team of 10 lead ushers. They are Gene Armstrong, Renee Davis, Jackie Eckholm, Nell Lurain, Don Minas, Mike Mizen, Carl Nauert, Harriet Udelson, Matt Udelson, and David Wilson.

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## Living the Vision

— Rick Ashton

From individualism to intimacy (our relationship with the church community).

One of the most important elements of First United Church's Vision for Transformation is a commitment to build and sustain stronger and deeper personal relationships among the members of the congregation. We understand that the practice of our Christian faith is a team sport, not an individual personal pursuit that can be done in a God-pleasing way in isolation from each other.

One important example of this commitment to Living the Vision is the advance planning now being done by the members of the Children's Ministry. This is the committee that is charged with supporting and sustaining the work of Christian education for children in the church. On several Sunday mornings during the fall season, Children's Ministry will organize and host meet-and-greet gatherings for the parents of children who are attending Sunday school classes. These parents will have an opportunity to make connections with each other informally, just as their children are connecting with the Christian faith and with each other in their classroom settings. Rather than dropping off their children and leaving for errands, a cup of coffee, or the Sunday newspaper, parents will get to know each other in ways that strengthen the ties of faith and support for them and their children.

As we explore the meaning of God's Vision for First United Church, we are blessed by the creative efforts of all people, all groups, to give real, concrete expression to our transforming faith. Thanks be to God.

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## How are we doing \$\$\$

— Julie R. Harley

You may remember that we trimmed the budget last fall due to a reduction in our endowment income and an increase in our building repair expenses. Thanks to your exuberant generosity and diligent stewardship, it appears that we are running a budget SURPLUS of at least \$12,000 as of June 15, 2010. We cut \$27,000 from the clergy staff budget and \$8,000 in custodial expenses, and we experienced increased giving. We have received more than 50 brand-new pledges in 2010. Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

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## Mark your calendar for All-Church Spiritual Retreat

— Julie R. Harley

Our annual spiritual retreat weekend will be September 25-26 at Pilgrim Park Conference Center in Princeton, IL. This time of communion with God and one another is led by our pastoral staff. Please contact Julie to register.

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# WIG

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

more light  
& truth

## Clerk's Corner

—Beth Mrkvicka

Stuart Gillette convened and led his first Council meeting as Moderator. Our Big Picture discussion this month centered around the coming year in Council, as seen through the lens of our Vision. Using the Vision themes as our guide, we plan to spend time focusing on interfaith relationships, church growth, communication and social justice, just to name a few.

The third in a series of monthly visits we've had from representatives of our resident mission partners was Lynda Schuler, Executive Director of West Suburban PADS. It has been in existence in our area for 18 seasons, and First United has been right there with them from the beginning. This past year, PADS has focused efforts on its new year-round day program, which operates in its Maywood location. It offers counseling, showers, laundry, life skills training and medical and mental health services. PADS is also concentrating on chronic homelessness by offering long-term rental support and permanent supportive housing. Thanks to federal stimulus funds and an Americorp grant, PADS is fully staffed and able to work on some exciting new programming.

Our other guest in June was Rick Pollock, new chair of our Finance Committee. He will be providing monthly reports in person, hoping to keep Council informed on budgetary items as well as any areas of concern. Currently our magnificent building is also our greatest source of “unexpected requests” due to roof repair and other maintenance costs. Overall, however, our budget is in the black.

*Council will not meet in July so Clerk's Corner will return in September!*

## Not in the Clouds

—Marylen Marty-Gentile

In her book, *Something More: Nurturing Your Child's Spiritual Growth*, Jean Grasso Fitzpatrick writes that a spiritual life is not something other-wordly or in the clouds. Being spiritual does not mean being connected to the Big Far Away Guy or the Man Upstairs. Being spiritual does not mean being disconnected from daily life or spending all one's time in prayer. If that were the case, no one I have ever known could be called “spiritual.” I would have to give up the possibility of living a more spiritual life and being more spiritual. I deeply believe that a parent can be fully spiritual and also yell at the kids. Loudly. Spiritual family life or spiritual every day life is not a contradiction in terms. The spiritual and the physical are not somehow disconnected.

Spiritual nurture is noticing and celebrating our sacred connections with all of life in our everyday family activities. Spiritual nurture rests on every now and then seeing and hearing what is around us a little more clearly. Spirituality is a giving-over to wonder and delight periodically. Spirituality is not doctrine or dogma or right answers. Spirituality is not being holier than anything. It is noticing the holy in our midst, and that holy could be crying and mud-covered.

When we share a reverence for being together and for nature and when we demonstrate unconditional love and trust, we show the face of God. And God knows, (God really knows) that sometimes loving children or friends or partners or spouses is not easy.

Living a spiritual life means being open to God showing up in the unexpected times and places and people—that means children too. God came to us first as a baby, remember.

Slow down. Be open with your children. In doing so, you model for them and practice with them what spirituality is truly and really about.

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## Summer Reading List

I've been recommending two books to our staff and leaders. Both were recommended to me by friends (not Amazon.com).

*Not Your Parents' Offering Plate* by J. Clif Christopher blows away a lot of our conventional thinking about how and why people give money to churches. The top three reasons are: (1) belief in the mission of the church, (2) a high regard for the church staff, and (3) the fiscal responsibility of the congregation. Clif also talks about how to talk about money with different generational groups (PayPal on a computer in the lounge, anybody?). And people don't get inspired by giving to a budget. They are inspired by seeing changed lives. Good stuff for our stewardship and planned giving ministries.

*Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership* by Daniel Wolpert helps me understand why the longer I'm in ministry, the more time I spend being silent. Weird, huh? It's just that all the words I inhale and exhale don't make sense after awhile unless I am quiet with God a lot of the time. This book has a great insight on every page. How do you know your community is growing spiritually? There's less anxiety; more people feel empowered; there is an increase in trust in God; more people invite friends to come; there is more generosity, more saying "yes" to change, and more FUN. All of you who sign up for the Sept. 25-26 spiritual retreat will probably hear a lot more about this book.

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## Planned Giving, Meet Endowment

—Gene Armstrong

Do you sometimes wonder why people make legacy gifts to the church (and other charities and institutions)? The three top reasons are: belief in the mission, confidence in the leadership and trust that the money will be well managed. To generate legacy gifts, therefore, we must recognize it is not enough that members are committed to the church mission and confident about the church leaders. Think about it: no one wants to make a legacy gift if he or she worries that the church will fritter the money away.

How does this impact First United? It means that our efforts to increase planned giving are directly linked to our efforts to be good stewards of our endowment. As chair of the Planned Giving Committee and Chair of the Endowment Committee, I am pleased to be able to report that we have proven to be good stewards of our endowments, and that this makes a big difference when we meet with members to discuss planned gifts.

### Here are some facts about how we have managed our endowment in recent years.

- ❖ We voted to end the practice of relying on disorganized draws from the endowment to make up shortfalls in our operating budget.
- ❖ We adopted a formula to determine the annual draw from the endowment: a set percentage of the endowment's market value at July 1 of each year.
- ❖ We started with a draw equal to eight percent (8%), and then we systematically reduced that draw to seven percent (7%) and then to six percent (6%). We are studying the possibility of a further reduction.
- ❖ We retained professional investment managers: US Bank (formerly Park National Bank).
- ❖ We adopted a conservative portfolio policy: maintaining between sixty and seventy percent (60-70%) of the investments in safe, fixed-income securities (e.g. government notes and top-quality corporate bonds). Keep a reasonable amount in reliable money market funds and invest the remaining portion in blue-chip common stocks.

Because of these and other related decisions and policies we have not had to sell any security except on a schedule that was planned for in advance – no "forced sales" in order to provide funds for our draws. Our draws are orderly and, for the most part, are funded by maturing notes and bonds that were purchased in order to provide such funds as and when needed.

I have previously reported that the market value of our endowment fell during the 2008-2009 tumult in the securities markets, but the value rebounded quickly and our endowment is once again growing – a very positive development.

All of this is good news, indeed. Members who might consider a legacy gift to First United can be confident that the money they donate will be carefully managed so as to be available in future years for the purposes intended. The Endowment Committee knows that God is pleased to see good stewardship of all gifts to the church. Our efforts to provide that stewardship will continue.

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more light  
& truth

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.

pray  
for  
peace

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## PrimeTime Third Annual Summer Picnic

—Marcia Ashton

Mark your calendar for Saturday, July 17 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm. for PrimeTime's Summer Picnic. This year we gather at Gy and Sylvia Menninga's back yard (306 Wesley Ave, OP). This year's picnic will feature Salads Galore (entrée salad, veggie salad, fruit salad or pasta salad) plus PIE (or cobbler) topped with homemade ice cream. Homemade ice cream will be featured IF someone (or two or three) makes it! Ice tea and lemonade are provided by the hosts, and other beverages are supplied by attendees. Also, please bring your lawn chairs or blanket. Third, we have many willing hands—Co-hosts are Nancy Carleton and Lee Pennington, Hilda Fischer and Marion Davis. RSVP by July 11 to Anna Sadowski – 708-386-7896 or annahsadowski@gmail.com.

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## Stay connected during summer travels

— Julie R. Harley

Even if you can't be here on Sunday, sermons are now available in audio and script version on our website: <http://www.firstunitedoakpark.com>, and you can still pick up a hard copy of last week's message on the Elder's desk in the lounge. Sermons are also available free as iTunes Podcasts. Subscribe through iTunes and each sermon will be automatically downloaded to your computer when it's posted on our website. To subscribe, go to <http://www.itunes.com> and click on the iTunes Store link on the left side of the screen. Enter "First United Church of Oak Park" in the Search Store box on the top right side of the window and click "enter." Your search will return the First United Church Podcast page. Click on the link to "Subscribe" and you're done. If you do not have an iTunes account, you may create one – it's free.

You can also sign up to receive our weekly e-mail "Evotionals." Send a message to: [office@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:office@firstunitedoakpark.com). Prayer Partners can visit the church website to get ideas on How to Pray, updated weekly by our deacons.

Become a Friend of First United Church on Facebook. We got 150 friends in the first month ...let's pump it up! This is a place to post God-sightings. Share the good news. See photos of what's happening now. Comment on the softball team! See God's vision in action.

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## Evening Division Benevolences 2009-2010

—Marcia Ashton

Evening Division has a long-standing tradition of providing financial support for local organizations and international programs. This year our generous members contributed \$2,730 through Thank Offerings and our best-ever White Elephant Auction. Many thanks to the wonderful crafts people, technical specialists and chefs who donated their talents and services resulting in a record-breaking \$1,776 raised in this auction. Hats off to our special contributors: Ted Despotes, Gy Menninga, Rick Ashton, Marcia Ashton, Carole Ferguson, Tom Ferguson, Louise Wornom, Belinda Bremner, Mike Mizen, Priscilla Sibley, Clara Kearley, Hilda Fischer, Lynn Collins, Carole Bergstraesser, and our ministerial staff.

These funds were donated to OPRF Food Pantry, OPRF Youth Services, Haiti Relief, Youth Work Camp scholarship, PADS, Walk-In-Ministry, Community of Congregations, First United Church, college student scholarship, and ED Emergency Fund. In addition, \$1,000 from the Helen Loughlin Trust was contributed to Casa Central to support Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs.

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## Camping Anyone?

—Priscilla Sibley

First United Family Camp will take place August 12-16, 2010 at Tower Hill Camp, Sawyer, Michigan. Come for the weekend or plan to stay from Thursday through Monday. Summer is here, so mark your calendar. Questions? Call Don or me at 708) 848-2840.

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Save  
These  
Dates



**Monday, July 5**

Sunday, July 11 11:15a

Saturday, July 17 5:30p

Monday, July 19-23 9:30a

Wednesday, July 21 6:00p

Thursday, July 22 9:00a

Sunday, July 25 3:00p

**Church Offices Closed for July 4th**

90 Plus Birthday Party

PrimeTime Summer Picnic

SCARF Arts Camp

Dinner and a Movie

Colombia Mission Trip through August 1

PFLAG Group

**FIRST  
UNITED  
CHURCH**  
*of Oak Park*

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**Staff:**

Julie R. Harley, Lead Pastor

Leah Fowler, Associate Minister of  
Youth and Adult Education

Rob Leveridge, Associate Minister of  
Membership and Congregational Care

Marylen Marty-Gentile, Director of  
Children & Family Ministries

Bill Chin,  
Director of Music Ministry

Cathryn Wilkinson,  
Organist



Deadline for the August issue 2010 is July 15th.  
Please e-mail information or articles for the MB to:  
[office@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:office@firstunitedoakpark.com)  
6.2010.emorymead



# July 2010

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

|                                |                             |  |   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 2nd 3rd 4th and 5th<br>and 1st | 3:30p<br>7:00p              | Food Pantry Open<br>Food Pantry Open   | Kathy Russell/Michele Zurakowski - 386-1324 |
| Fridays                        | 7:00p                       | Peace Prayer Vigil                     | Bob Haisman – 383-2035                      |
| Saturdays                      | 8:30a<br>9:00a              | Inner Peace/World Peace<br>Food Pantry | Jeff Olson - 383-3154                       |
| Walk-in-Ministry               | Monday— Saturday 10 to 11am |  | Susan Zaruba—386-1946                       |

## Week of July 4

|             |   |   |  |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| Sunday 4    | 10:00a<br>11:15a                                | Worship<br>Sermon Talk-back   |  |
| Monday 5    | <b>Church Offices Closed for July 4 Holiday</b> |   |  |
| Tuesday 6   | 7:00a<br>6:30p<br>7:00p                         | Columbia Film Crew<br>Library Committee<br>Faith in Action Committee<br>Adult Education Committee | Cindy Palombi<br>Mark Loafman<br>Jim Smith |
| Wednesday 7 | 7:00a<br>7:00p                                  | Columbia Film Crew<br>Planned Giving Subcommittee   | Gene Armstrong                             |
| Thursday 8  | 10:00a  | Center for Cultural Interchange   | Emily Messaros                             |
| Friday 9    | 9:00a   | Center for Cultural Interchange   | Emily Messaros                             |

## Week of July 11

|              |                                     |   |  |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Sunday 11    | 10:00a<br>11:15a<br>11:15p<br>3:00p | Worship<br>Sermon Talk-back<br>90 Plus Birthday Party<br>CLRN/CSLA Meeting        | Sally Sutherland   |
| Tuesday 13   | 9:00a<br>7:00p                      | Center for Cultural Interchange<br>Shawl Ministry<br>Deacons<br>Finance Committee | Emily Messaros<br>Elan Long<br>Carl Nauert<br>Rick Pollock |
| Wednesday 14 | 8:00p<br>9:00a                      | Communications Committee<br>Center for Cultural Interchange                       | Ted Despotes/Bonnie Beck<br>Emily Messaros                 |
| Thursday 15  | 1:00p<br>7:00p                      | Center for Cultural Interchange<br>Spiritual Guidance Groups                      | Emily Messaros<br>Julie R. Harley                          |
| Friday 16    | 9:00a                               | Center for Cultural Interchange   | Emily Messaros   |
| Saturday 17  | 9:00a                               | New Directions  | Kathy Allison  |

## Week of July 18

|              |                                  |  |   |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Sunday 18    | 8:30a<br>10:00a<br>11:15a        | Environmental Team<br>Worship-Baptisms-Blessing of the Animals<br>Sermon Talk-back                     | Ann Alexander   |
| Monday 19    | 9:00a<br>9:00a                   | Center for Cultural Interchange<br>SCARF Arts Camp   | Emily Messaros<br>Marylen Marty-Gentile               |
| Tuesday 20   | 9:00a<br>9:00a<br>7:00p          | Center for Cultural Interchange<br>SCARF Arts Camp<br>Computer Committee                               | Emily Messaros<br>Marylen Marty-Gentile               |
| Wednesday 21 | 9:00a<br>6:00p                   | Finance Budget/Committee Chairs<br>SCARF Arts Camp<br>Dinner and a Movie                               | Rick Pollock<br>Marylen Marty-Gentile<br>Ted Despotes |
| Thursday 22  | 9:00a<br>9:00a<br>9:00a<br>7:00p | Colombia Trip through August 1<br>Center for Cultural Interchange<br>SCARF Arts Camp<br>Shawl Ministry | Emily Messaros<br>Marylen Marty-Gentile<br>Elan Long  |
| Friday 23    | 9:30a                            | SCARF Arts Camp  | Marylen Marty-Gentile                                 |

## Week of July 25

|              |                           |   |  |
|--------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| Sunday 25    | 10:00a<br>11:15a<br>3:00p | Worship-SCARF Camp-Communion<br>Sermon Talk-back<br>PFLAG               | Kate Kroker  |
| Monday 26    | 8:00a                     | Center for Cultural Interchange   | Emily Messaros   |
| Tuesday 27   | 7:00p<br>7:00p            | Youth Committee<br>Building & Grounds Committee<br>New Member Committee | Stan Faust<br>Justin Lewis/Russell Brown<br>Susan Saliny |
| Wednesday 28 | 9:00a<br>7:00p            | Center for Cultural Interchange<br>Stewardship Committee                | Emily Messaros<br>Joanne Despotes                        |

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