



February 2012



“Slow Church”

Sunlight warmed our bodies as we gathered in the chapel at Dominican University on a mild January afternoon. We were on retreat, and Sara Stevenson gave us instructions for a walking meditation. In silence, we selected partners. Then, in pairs, we began to walk...verrrrrrr sloooooowly. We quietly lifted one foot from the ground, raised our knee with dignity and deliberate attention to the pace of our partner, then with great care placed that foot back on the floor. Each step was slow and thoughtful. Instead of focusing on reaching our destination as quickly as possible, we concentrated on taking each step...one slow movement at a time.

Slow walking is a simple action, yet a spiritually profound one. It reminds us that there are some things God can teach us only very slowly, at a walking pace. God spent 40 years teaching the Israelites to depend upon divine guidance during their long exodus from Egypt. God spent 40 days teaching Jesus to listen in the desert before he began his ministry.

Theologian Kosuke Koyama says God teaches and walks slowly because God is love, and the speed of love is slow. It is attentive. It notices. Koyama says God walks three miles an hour because that's the speed of our walking and God walks beside us in love.

Walk humbly with God. Match your pace with God's pace. Slow down. Practice paying attention. Experience the power of divine slowing. Focus on each step, each moment. Have you noticed that good things take time?

**There are
8 pages
in this
issue**

In Christian love,
Julie R. Harley, lead pastor

Transitions

- Birth:** *Ruth Daya Kulkarni* born to Shanti Kulkarni and Laura Lydigsen
Adelaide Eliza Glendinning Stitzel, granddaughter of Will and Mariel Stitzel
- Compassion:** *Will and Mariel Stitzel*
Juan Diaz
Mother of Porter Lockett
Carole Bergstraesser
Susan and Bud Meyers
Kelsey O'shea
Sean O'shea
- Condolence:** *Scott*, brother of Roman Ebert
Edith Crabbe, longtime member
Rev. Bob Sandman, father of Linda Sandman
Marian Hill, longtime member
Dora Jean Ludington

February Worship

Feb. 5 Communion Sunday

Scripture: Isaiah 40:21-31, 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Sermon: Where Everyone Knows Your Name – Rick Steele

Feb. 12 Anointing for Healing Sunday

Scripture: Psalm 30 and Mark 1:40-45

Sermon: "Dealing with Demons of Doubt, Despair and Disappointment"

12:15 pm Renewal of Covenant Vows Service in the Chapel

We will hold a 30-minute service to allow couples in the church to renew their covenant commitments, led by our pastors with music by Martha Reese and Michael Surratt.

Please let us know if you will participate by emailing Marylen Marty-Gentile at

Marylen@firstunitedoakpark.com.

Feb. 19 Transfiguration Sunday

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-12 and 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Sermon: "Succession Planning for Prophets"

Feb. 22 Ash Wednesday – 7:00 pm Service in the Sanctuary

Communion and Ashes

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-17

Feb. 26 First Sunday of Lent

Kickoff of One Great Hour of Sharing and New Members Join

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18-22 and Mark 1:9-15

Sermon: "Roots and Fruits"

Clerk's Corner

—Janet Guevara

The Big Picture Discussion during the December Council meeting was the presentation of Mark Jolicoeur, who headed the Capital Needs Task Force 2011 Committee. The scope of the work was to review, report, and to provide recommendations to Church Council concerning high dollar capital improvement needs. The repairs identified that needed urgent attention (Priority Code #1) includes the sanctuary roof, the rose window with missing glass panes and all the large upper windows; the chapel windows and the west patio. The old wiring, AV, lighting, platform, paint and plaster of sanctuary walls also needs repair, and not to forget the parking lot. As recommended, the Building Use Audit Committee was formed to carefully study how the building is used each day and every hour not just by the church but also the spaces used by our resident mission partners.

Come 2017, First United will celebrate its centennial anniversary. Wouldn't it be great that by then, we have a church building physically ready to further God's mission for another 100 years? Hmm...it's something.

Sharing resources, changing lives: One Great Hour of Sharing begins on February 26

Since 1949 the Presbyterian Church (USA) and members of the United Church of Christ have joined with millions of other Christians from nine Protestant denominations in an effort known as the through One Great Hour of Sharing. These millions commit and collect to share God's love with those in need. OGHS gifts support ministries of disaster response, refugee assistance and resettlement, and community development that help people find safe refuge, start new lives and work together to strengthen their families and communities.

One Great Hour of Sharing, the PC (USA) and the UCC reach out in the name of Christ to:

—**build sustainable communities.** OGHS supports self-help programs in more than 80 nations to build sustainable communities that enable people and communities to stand against and rise above hunger, disease, illiteracy, and other forces of injustice that deny and destroy dignity.

—**respond to disaster.** OGHS provides emergency and long-term assistance to people in the aftermath of hurricanes, tornados, storms, floods, tidal waves, fires, explosions, technological disasters, civil strife, war, or other natural or human-caused events. On average, OGHS responds to a disaster once every 2.5 days.

—**minister to refugees.** OGHS responds with advocacy and help, hope and hospitality for people who have been uprooted from their home of origin. More than 30 million of the world's people are uprooted at any given time.

These nine denominations work with international partners to provide sources of clean water and food, education and health care, small business micro-credit, emergency relief, and advocacy and resettlement for refugees and displaced persons. OGHS also supports domestic and international ministries for disaster preparedness and response.

You can be part of this too. On February 25, we will make OGHS giving calendars and collection boxes available to children and youth through our church school classes and to everyone before and after worship. Each day the sharing calendar focuses on one way the money you give is used.

Coin by coin, bill by bill you can make a difference in the life of another.
Give hope. Give life. One Great Hour of Sharing 2012.

Dinner and a Movie— 6:00 pm Friday, Feb. 10

—Julie R. Harley

We will watch "A River Runs through It," a beautiful film about two sons of a Presbyterian minister who learn life lessons through fly fishing. Please register in the lounge; cost is \$5 per person.

Lenten Family Workshop

—Marylen Marty-Gentile

What is this long season about? Do I have to eat fish for six weeks? Do I have to wear purple all the time? Is Lent for Protestants?

Come and see! On Friday, February 17 from 6:00-7:30, First United will host a family Lent workshop. We'll gather at 6pm in Centennial Hall for pizza and drinks and then have learning time and creating time so that together we can mark this holy season in our homes. Most activities are geared for children 4 and above or younger with parental hands working alongside your child's hands.

The cost is \$25/family to cover dinner and materials. If you are interested or have questions, please contact Marylen (marylen@firstunitedoakpark.com). RSVPs required.

The Quest Continues

Part of the Confirmation experience is the Friend in Faith program. Friends in Faith are adults from the congregation who are paired with our confirmands. The FiF's build relationship with our youth and often share thoughts on faith and doubt, God and service with our youth. They are another person from the community attached through prayer to a youth, a friendly face, a caring presence.

This year's Friends in Faith (and their Questors) are Bob Berry (Sam Bell), Susan Buchanan (Fiona Byrne), Anne Dickerson (Andrea Hayden), Brian Duwe (Sam Cooke), Don Drews (Josh Harmon), Pennie Ebsen (Jane Kuntz), Bobby Everson (Andrew Fascione), Janet Guevara (Karina Donayre), Dave Kenealy (Daniel Wheelock), Megan Lewis (Anne Barker), Beth Mrkvicka (Larisa Gehring), Steve Poe (Ethan Alter), Priscilla Sibley (Kelly Cerniglia), Sarah Shkutov (Maddy Gillette), Gené Stephens (Lan Jian Manley), Deb Stracco (Olivia Oettel), Katharine Thurman (Viv Crowell), Dale Youngkrantz (Collin Pearce). Pray for them as they begin new relationships.

Youth Ministry

FUJI (7-8th grades) and FUSH (9-12th grades) meet Sunday nights from 6-8 pm unless otherwise noted. We welcome Andrea Kirksey as the new Youth Ministry Consultant. She will be a connecting bridge between FUSH and FUJI youth, advisors, parents and the church as a whole during Pastor Leah Fowler's maternity leave, until the end of April. You may reach Andrea for youth ministry questions at akirks@gmail.com.

2/5 FUSH Empty Bowls- Meet at OPRF High School at 6 pm in Pennie Ebsen's studio to decorate ceramic bowls for the Empty Bowls project. Afterward, we will grab pizza and/or watch the rest of the Superbowl together!

FUJI: No FUJI tonight due to Superbowl Sunday!

2/12 FUSH Andrea Night! Andrea, who will be with us while Leah's on maternity leave, will share a bit about herself and get to know you too.

FUJI Capture the Flag in the Sanctuary followed by Gehring offering a reflection

2/17-18 FUSH Lock-In! Please arrive at 8 pm, and plan to leave at 8 am. Enjoy the night together doing Night Crossings, small group reflections, games and more.

2/19 No FUSH

FUJI Andrea Night! Andrea will lead the show tonight with her own reflections and group-building games.

2/26 FUSH welcomes Whitney, a drama therapist, to lead the group in drama games.

FUJI plays Broomball at Franklin Park Ice Arena. Wear sneakers or boots and warm clothes and gloves! Dinner is at Culver's; bring money for food.

Alternative Christmas Store... “Unwrapped”!!!

Greetings and thank you to all who stopped by to browse, shop, or just to ask questions about the ACS, and the various mission partners we supported this year. Once again, we asked you to rethink your shopping, to shop with us, and to support our mission partners. As our congregation continues its focus on relationships that bless, challenge and **transform**, your purchases at the ACS helped to transform the lives of others.

Each year, we look at the mission partners that our congregation has selected, and align our ACS partners to that list. Our Mission Partners represented at the 2011 ACS were: Colores del Pueblo (Guatemalan goods), Equal Exchange (fair trade coffee & chocolate), SERRV (artisans from around the world), Church World Service, Mamie & Richard (Columbia), Erie House (pecans), Palestinian Olive Oil, OPRF Food Pantry, Walk-in-Ministry, and PADS!

So let's “unwrap” the gifts of your donations and purchases - and see where they are going now:

Erie House Pecans—	\$1566.00	(174 bags of pecans!)
SERRV Bean Soups, Tea, Jam, other—	\$1,940.50	(includes 112 packages of soup!)
Equal Exchange Chocolate, Coffee —	\$934.00	(196 bars of chocolate and 74 bags of coffee!)
Palestinian Olive Oil, Soap, Za'atar	\$722.00	(includes 34 bottles of olive oil)
Colores Items —	\$1,779.50	
Mamie & Richard —	\$1,436.00	
Walk in Ministry —	\$1,550.00	
Faith in Action —	\$236.00	
PADS —	\$1,145.00	
Food Pantry —	\$692.00	
Church World Service —	\$2,705.00	

Your **purchases of \$6,942.00** and **donations of \$7,764.00** totalled **\$14,706.00**. 100% of this money goes back to our mission partners. Thank you for supporting the efforts of the Alternative Christmas Store team (*Laurie Jolicoeur, Beth Mrkvicka, Brian Shamhart, Jamie Shamhart*) for another year. Please let us know if you have any questions. Have a great 2012, and we will see you again in November!

Free Books!

—David Wilson

Wow...library books you don't have to return! The Bergstraesser Library has a variety of books that we will not be incorporating into our collection. The books cover a variety of topics from alcoholism to zen...and a lot of things in between. Come to the library and have a look. While you are here check out the books and periodicals we have in our regular lending collection.

Back of the Sanctuary Ministry

—David Wilson

Have you ever thought about the “mechanics” of the First United worship services? Who dispatches the ushers to pass the offering plates? How do we know how many worshipers are in attendance? How do the “Joys and Concerns” cards get in the hands of the pastors? It is the “shepherding” by the Lead Usher. I like to call it the “Back of the Sanctuary Ministry.” Want to participate? You can sign up on the table in the lounge or by contacting David Wilson at davidwilson10@comcast.net. We are looking forward to your participation!

Midpoint Game Night

It's time to get your game on! All 30 to 50-something First United members/friends are invited to a Game Night at 7:30 pm on Friday, February 10th at the O'Shea's home (413 S Grove Ave).

Please BYODOC (bring your own drink of choice); appetizers, desserts, and games will be provided. Contact Rick Pollock (richard@pollock.net; 708-524-5125) or Julie O'Shea (Julie O'Shea soshea15@comcast.net 708-383-8598) if you have any questions.

Adult Education

(9:30 am Sundays; check Lounge Monitor for room listings)

2/5 Israel/Palestine Part 3 Mr. Shahar Arieli, Deputy Consul General of the Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest will provide the perspective of Israel on the issues presented in the Kairos Palestine document. He will also provide a sense of Israel's own plans and hopes for establishing a sustainable peace for the Palestinian people.

Bible Study— This ongoing class meets in the Conference Room of the church. Newcomers are always welcome. They have been studying The Minor Prophets and will then shift to study The Beatitudes.

2/12 Israel/Palestine Part 4 Rabbi Brant Rosen, of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, and co-founder of Jewish Fast for Gaza will offer a Jewish spiritual response to the challenges posed by Kairos Palestine.

“We Have a Teenager” Family Life series continues with a discussion of depression and anxiety in teens. We will have a panel including a counselor who works with teens, and church members who have dealt with depression and anxiety in their own families.

Bible Study

2/19 Israel/Palestine Part 5 Pastor Julie Harley will address the “Reality on the Ground” in Palestine, and will reflect on her study trip to the region last summer.

Bible Study

2/26 Israel/Palestine Part 6 Pauline Coffman will report on a meeting in Bethlehem during Advent 2011 where representatives from several countries are gathering to meet and consider a common format for the response to Kairos Palestine. Together we will ask, “What Does the Lord Require of Us?”

Spiritual Practices for Lent Pastor Julie Harley will explore Lenten devotional habits you can practice each day through Easter on April 8. Each participant will develop an intention or discipline for the season. We will also explore praying with icons.

Bible Study

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper! Tuesday, Feb. 21 6-7:30 pm

FUJI (7-8th grade youth) invites you to kick off Lent with a church-wide Pancake Supper. Come and enjoy different flavors of pancakes and sausage and fruit, made by FUJI parents and served by FUJI youth. You will also hear from FUJI youth themselves about their activities at FUJI, and some creative offerings as well. We ask that families make a donation at the door for dinner, and proceeds will go towards FUJI scholarships for their spring retreat. Bring the whole family! Or, if you have committee meetings at church Tuesday night then you can get your fill of pancakes before hunkering down. Contact Julie O’Shea for more info- financial@firstunitedoakpark.com . needed.

New Lebanon Missionary BLOG

Gabrielle Worley was commissioned on Jan. 8 as a missionary to Lebanon, sponsored by Global Ministries. At people’s request, here is her blog address: <http://itwillnotreturntomeempty.blogspot.com/> You can also follow her blog posts by clicking the “Lebanon Missionary Blog” link from the firstunitedoakpark.com homepage.

The Kingdom of God in the Church School —Marylen Marty-Gentile

Each year in church school we have a week when all the classes study a parable. We found in our curriculum that most of the parable lessons fall in the summer when our classes do not meet. There are way too many important parables for our children to miss. There are way too many important images and metaphors to skip.

On that one day in February, we set aside the regularly scheduled lesson and each class digs into a parable as follows:

Toddlers—Good Shepherd
 Preschool Class—Lost Coin
 Kinder Class—Mustard Seed
 First Grade—Leaven
 Second Grade—Lost Sheep

Third Grade—Sower
 Fourth Grade—The Great Banquet
 Fifth Grade Good Samaritan
 Sixth Grade—Prodigal Son
 Seventh/Eighth Grade—Talents

As they experience these parables, our children discover, the kingdom of God is at hand.

Stewardship—Giving

Two favorite scripture stories regarding giving:

(Mark 14:3-9) Jesus sat in the house of Simon, a leper. A woman came, opened an alabaster jar containing costly ointment and poured it on the head of Jesus. Some who saw this scolded her, saying the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. But Jesus accepted her gift, recognizing she had done what she could to show her love and worship.

In like manner, we come to worship leaving our gifts and offerings as an expression of our love, adoration and devotion to Christ/God.

(Luke 12:13-21) The second story is of the rich man who had no place to store his abundance of crops. So he built larger barns to stow all his grain and goods. And God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Whether it is hoarding for tomorrow, or today's greed to have all one wants now, the biggest, the best, the most, this desire for abundance of possessions can end up demanding one's whole life. In the parable, Jesus warns us to take care and be on guard against all kinds of greed. For, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of things we possess." *(Luke 12:15)*

The challenge is not to abandon our "barns", but to trust our lives to God. Jesus said, "Seek the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you." *(Luke 12:31)*

Empty Bowls Community Dinner — Pennie Ebsen

The dinner will take place on Friday, February 24, at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Soup lines will form from 6 - 8 p.m. Your entry fee is \$15.00 per person, (\$10.00 for children) which offers you the opportunity to choose a hand crafted pottery bowl, enjoy a simple meal of soup and bread, take your bowl home and use it with your family daily, as a remembrance of those throughout the world who have an empty bowl for dinner each night. Your entry donation will go to *West Suburban PADS*, the *Oak Park/River Forest Food Pantry*, and *Global Alliance for Africa* for use toward feeding the hungry. Many thanks to this congregation for their years of participation and support of this event. See you on the 24th at 6 p.m. and thank you! thank you!! Thank You!!!

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Isn't it time you visited Israel and Palestine? —Pauline Coffman

Pauline Coffman and Paul Parker (from Elmhurst College) will be co-leading a trip, June 12 - 25, 2012, that will look at Religious Diversity in Israel and Palestine and how daily life is impacted by the political realities. We will be meeting with Jews, Christians, Muslims, Samaritans, Ba'hai, and the Druze. Our itinerary will take us to Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Museum), Masada, the Dead Sea (for a swim), Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Acco, and Jaffa.

There are brochures available in the Church Lounge, or you may contact Pauline at p.coffman@sbcglobal.net for an electronic copy. The deadline for group rates is March 7, 2012, so if you have been pondering this trip, it is time to decide!

Pauline Coffman — 708-524-5444 (Home) 708-710-4288 (Cell)

All are invited to a Short Organ Recital

Sunday, February 5, 5:30 p.m. Cathryn Wilkinson, organist

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 393 N. Main Street in Glen Ellyn (two blocks south of Metra) Hear the lovely Walker tracker organ for 30 minutes preceding the service of Evensong, followed by a light dinner. *Program:* Sanctuary, a new work commissioned from Vermont composer Gwyneth Walker, March on a Theme of Handel ("Lift Up Your Heads") by Alexandre Guilmant, and two chorales from J. S. Bach's Keyboard Practice. For more information, please contact St. Mark's at 630-858-1020

Evening Division

— Rosemary Irmis

Join First United Evening Division on Thursday, February 2nd and hear Laura Dean Friedrich, Deputy Director of Protestants for the Common Good, speak on the **realities** of the Illinois State budget. Come and hear a timely and relevant discussion of Illinois budgets and revenues especially with the start of the spring session of the General Assembly on January 31st.

Dinner at 6:00 pm in Centennial Hall is \$15.00. Call Ruth Ashman at 708-366-3689 by January 31st for reservations or sign up at the Elders Desk. Program begins at 7pm with no reservations

www.firstunitedoakpark.com

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

FIRST UNITED CHURCH of Oak Park

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an open community united in love & justice

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Membership and Congregational Care*

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Bill Chin, *Director of Music Ministry*