

Michael Surrat Retirement Announcement

June 12, 2022

In the summer of 2011, as I was preparing to retire from the position I held for many years as Organist and Director of Music Ministries at the Union Church of Hinsdale, I received a phone call from Julie Harley, who was then the lead pastor here at First United. I had worked with Julie when she was an associate minister at Union Church before she came to Oak Park. Julie told me that Cathryn Wilkinson, who was the organist at First United, was leaving. Knowing that I was retiring and not interested in taking another position, she asked if I would consider being the interim until First United found a new organist. I told her I had planned to be a substitute organist and had in fact already agreed to play at some other churches for several Sundays, and the first Sunday I was free was in October. We met for coffee and discussed some details. I came to the church and met some of the staff and began as interim organist at First United in October of 2011. Meanwhile, the organist search committee, led by Phil Gehring, was receiving applications. I was enjoying getting to know the choir members, Bill Chin and other staff members and enjoying playing the organ and meeting church members. After a good deal of arm twisting on Phil Gehring's part, I said that I would interview for the job, but really hoped they would find an applicant who would be a good fit so I could move on with some extensive travel plans I had made for 2012. In February 2012, the word Interim was removed from my job title. I grew to love this congregation and the staff, so I moved to Oak Park and made First United my church home.

My life is like a book with many chapters. Major chapters were growing up in North Carolina, being intrigued with the organ and inspired by my cousin who was organist at the church where I was baptized, having teachers and mentors who led me through high school, college, graduate school, and 61 years as a church organist. Now it is time for me to start a new chapter. My last Sunday as organist here at First United will be August 28th. First United Church will still be my church home. I will continue to be a substitute organist, but not every week, and I plan to work on my bucket list of things to do and places to see.

I look forward to some opportunities in the coming weeks to say thank you for the encouragement, warmth, and friendship you have given me as we have been the church together for these past 11 years. I expect those relationships to continue and to grow in the coming years.

Peace be with you!

