



# the MESSENGERbell

March 2023

## It's A BIG DEAL

A capital campaign is a big deal. It only comes along once in a long time, and it offers the opportunity to build and strengthen the church. But this really raises the question: build and strengthen the church in what way? What kind of future are we imagining? What sort of church are we dreaming of becoming? What kind of church is God calling us to be? Getting the vision right is absolutely critical, and that involves a lot of listening, praying, and conversation.

Over the past two years, the church has held an extensive listening campaign, seeking to include a deep and wide cross section of our members. We received over 200 distinct, actionable ideas, touching every aspect of the life of the church from the building to the people and everything in between. Now that I think of it, what's in between the building and the people? Maybe the plants? Anyway...What I was trying to say is that we heard a wide array of exciting dreams. Church Council, working with our capital campaign consultants Latz and Company, have done yeoman's work sifting and categorizing and prioritizing those 200 ideas. We have developed four pillars that support the church's vision for what is to come. Those are (drum roll please):

- Deepening the community of care at First United;
- Increasing the sustainability and accessibility of our building;
- Strengthening our social justice work; and
- Improving the church's financial position.

There is a lot more information to share, including a lot more specifics on what goes in to those four pillars, how much money it will take to achieve our goals, and what is the plan for how to raise that money. But I'm already running out of space for this cover article, so if you want to know more, you'll have to come to one of four upcoming information sessions. They will be held on Sunday mornings, at 9:45, in Centennial Hall. They will be held March 5, March 12, March 19, and March 26. They will be identical sessions so, although you're welcome to come as often as you'd like, we are asking that all our members make a special effort to attend one of these sessions.

Can't make it to one of those sessions? Do you have choir every week? Are you in Barbados until the daffodils bloom? Please just let me know that you would like to have a meeting about the capital campaign, and I'll figure out a way to make that happen.

John Edgerton



*moving from*

WORDS TO WITNESS IN OUR  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

*moving from*

INDIVIDUALISM TO INTIMATE  
FELLOWSHIP IN OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE  
CHURCH COMMUNITY.

*moving from*

CHARITY TO CHANGING  
STRUCTURES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP  
WITH THE WORLD.

A few highlights from this month's Messenger Bell: monthly worship information, page 2; meet our new members, page 3; youth news with upcoming FUSH fundraisers, page 5; music and movie offerings this month, page 6; prayers concerns, page 7.



FIRST  
UNITED  
CHURCH OF  
OAK PARK

## Preaching in Lent

March 5	John Edgerton
Communion	
Baptism of Benjamin Jakupovich Dominski	
March 12	Lydia Mulkey
March 19	Alicia Reese
March 26	John Edgerton
April 2: Palm Sunday	John Edgerton
Special Music: Bluegrass band	
April 6 at 6 p.m. : Maundy Thursday Soup Supper & Tenebrae	
April 9: Easter	John Edgerton
Special Music: Brass Ensemble	

All services are at 11 a.m. on Sundays unless otherwise noted. Worship is also livestreamed and the videos remain on the YouTube channel so that you may view them at a later time even if you can't be with us on Sunday.

[CLICK HERE TO JOIN ON YOUTUBE](#)



Lenten Fellowship  
**SOUP SUPPER WEDNESDAYS:**  
March 8  
&  
March 22  
5:30 - 7:00 PM

**SUGGESTED DONATION:**  
\$5 - individual  
\$20 - family

*All are welcome!*

If you are able, RSVP to  
[areese@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:areese@firstunitedoakpark.com)

## Ways to Serve in Worship

Looking for a way to expand your worship experience? There are so many ways to serve in worship! Adults and youth can serve as ushers/greeters, volunteer liturgists, and members of our Sanctuary Choir, while our children are welcome to serve as acolytes.

- Sign up to serve as a volunteer liturgist [here](#).
- Sign up to serve as an acolyte [here](#).
- For more information about ushers, contact John ([jedgerton@firstunited.com](mailto:jedgerton@firstunited.com))
- For more information about singing with the Sanctuary Choir, contact Bill ([bill@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:bill@firstunitedoakpark.com)).



Love FIRST.  
UNITED Love.

We are nearing the end of First United's 2023-2024 Stewardship season with pledges moving us closer to our \$628,900 goal. We are deeply grateful for members who have confirmed their pledges that will support our ministries in the 2023-2024 program year.

Your First United pledge will support expenses related to five areas:

- Worship (31%)
- Congregational Care (23%)
- Mission and Service (20%)
- Adult Ministries (20%)
- Children and Youth Ministries (6%).

Within each budget area, many smaller spending categories are combined demonstrating the extensive blessings that make God's gift that is First United Church.

If you have questions about registering your Pledge through Realm, please contact Kelly Pollock, Pledge Registrar ([pledgeregistrar@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:pledgeregistrar@firstunitedoakpark.com)). It is important to remember that recurring on-line gifts must be confirmed with a pledge for the 2023-24 fiscal year. Also, Pledges made on Realm in the current year must be re-registered to continue as a 2023-2024 Pledge.

Your LOVE FIRST. UNITED LOVE pledge is an important spiritual decision as you reflect on God's gifts to you and your gratitude for these gifts. Every gift matters and every gift is used wisely to increase the love of God and neighbor.

# Welcome New Members!

We are so happy to welcome the following people into membership at First United. Folks below have joined over the course of the past few New Member classes and may already be familiar faces to you. If not, please take a moment to introduce yourself and extend a word of welcome when your paths cross at First United.

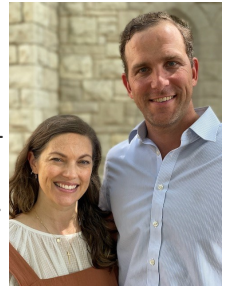
## Elaine Labuz

Elaine moved to Oak Park from Florida and Michigan in 2020 to be closer to her daughter's family. She enjoys walking and sewing. Elaine comes from an Evangelical Covenant background but has also belonged to Presbyterian and UCC churches. Elaine has been worshiping regularly with us for some time and has become an active member in the Prime Time Group.



## Meghan & Mark Premo-Hopkins

Meghan and Mark have lived in Oak Park since 2016. They have three children: Sam, Will and Jay. Meghan is a former teacher; enjoys crafting of all kinds, reading, and volunteering. She was our Intern at First United in 2021 - 2022 (attending Chicago Theological Seminary). Mark is an attorney; likes to play golf, coach his kids' sports teams, and play guitar. Both Meghan and Mark are teaching Sunday school classes: Meghan: Preschool/Kindergarten and Mark: Middle School. Their children are big into hockey, ceramics, skiing, and camping.



## Cait Smith

Cait moved to Oak Park about a year and a half ago and found First United on YouTube. She is a social worker and is currently working with NAMI. She enjoys hot yoga, horseback riding, Reese's peanut butter chocolates, and creative writing. Cait's earliest thoughts about God were that God is love. Having explored several theologies through her life, she has come full circle to that idea again. She is looking to create an authentic relationship with God.



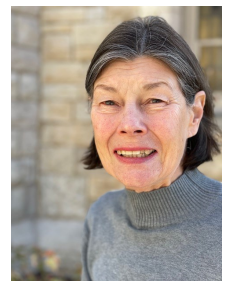
## Chelsea & Geno Scaletta

Chelsea and Geno live in Berwyn and began attending First United before the pandemic. (Soon to be moving to Riverside). They had looked at many churches before deciding on First United, endeavoring to find a place where the threads of life and spirituality connect. They have two children who were both baptized at First United and the family recently participated in worship by lighting the Advent candles during the first week of Advent.



## Ann Zinsser

Ann recently moved to Oak Park to be closer to her daughter Kate's family who are active members of First United. She has visited many times over the years and has always enjoyed worshiping at and participating in activities at First United. She comes from an Episcopal background and was very involved her former church, Grace Church in Brooklyn Heights, NY.





# March Peace Corner: Peace, Peace...When There is No Peace

Pauline Coffman

How do I write about the Middle East for the First United Peace Corner when there is no peace, and the U.S. is making it worse? Palestine/Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Iraq...the list goes on. All of them are experiencing terrible upheaval because of the earthquake and the punishment of bombing during wartime, or because of U.S. foreign policy problems.

Have you noticed that we get lots of reports of earthquake damage inside Turkey, but very few from inside Syria? There are reasons for that! There is only one road that permits travel between Turkey and northwest Syria, and it was heavily damaged by the earthquake. There are big fissures in the road that make it impassable. How are the vehicles supposed to get to Syria with aid? Late addition: Over a week later, we learn that Syrian President Assad has agreed to three more roads, while some reports blame rebel groups for refusing to use additional roads. Stay tuned!

The earthquake crisis has prompted a public debate of sanctions imposed on countries by the U.S. Seen as a non-violent way of sending a message to rulers of a country, they end up hurting the people instead. The leaders manage to carry on their lives through liaisons with governments that support them, further establishing the split between the West and those who oppose the West (that means the U.S., these days).

Here is a sample of the coverage regarding sanctions from the New York Times:

The crisis has been so grave for the government of President Bashar al-Assad, a staunch ally of Iran and Russia, that it asked the European Union for emergency assistance. Mr. Assad's government is under E.U. sanctions, but humanitarian aid would be exempted. [Turkey-Syria Earthquake: Millions Await Aid While Suffering Cold and Grief - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/09/middleeast/syria-earthquake.html)

The quake's toll in Syria is huge. As I write this on February 18, the numbers are 41,000 dead—35,000 in Turkey, and 6,500 in Syria--and there are many buildings inside Syria yet to be added to the total. Here is a February 9

report from the Middle East Council of Churches with summaries of the damage. [Click here to read more.](#)

Meanwhile, the new government of Israel is moving ahead with more actions that enforce the system of apartheid—something three human rights organizations have documented (B'Tselem.org – an Israeli human rights organization), Human Rights Watch-Palestine, and Amnesty International.

The prophet Jeremiah (Bible, chapter 8) warned about false messages of peace. Let us see beyond the rhetoric of foreign policy and focus on God's promise to be with us. The Bible tells us that God is with those who suffer. May those of us who are comfortable in our daily lives be challenged to look deeper into the effects of U.S. foreign policy.

**"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10.**



One Earth Film Festival, March 3-12, features top-rated films plus expert panel discussions that will equip you with ways to take action on climate change, environmental sustainability, and environmental injustice. All films will be screened virtually and some have in-person options around the greater Chicago area (including some in Oak Park). Unless otherwise specified on the schedule, the showings are free with an \$8 suggested donation. For a full schedule of films and more information, visit [oneearthfilmfest.org](https://oneearthfilmfest.org).



# FUSH Trip MEETING

This summer FUSH is headed to Sunset Gap in Crosby, Tennessee from July 23 through July 29 as we return to our summer work trip. We are excited!

Join us on Sunday, March 5 for an informational meeting after worship to share details and answer your questions. Can't make it and have questions, reach out to Alicia ([areese@firstunitedoakpark](mailto:areese@firstunitedoakpark)).



**Upcoming Schedule**  
5-7pm

3/5	FUJI & FUSH
3/12	FUJI & FUSH
3/19	FUJI & FUSH
3/26	OFF - Springbreak
4/2	FUJI & FUSH

Upcoming

# Quest

9:30-10:45am

**March 5:**  
Session #11 "Sacraments"

**March 19:**  
Session #12 "Life After Death"

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**April 2:**  
Session #13 "Holy Week"



# FUSH FUNDRAISERS

Help FUSH raise money to return to Sunset Gap in Tennessee for a week of service by participating in our monthly fundraisers

## Save the Dates!

### Parents' Night Out: April 15; 5-8 p.m.

Enjoy a nice dinner out!

**Suggested Donation:!**

|                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1 Child: \$20    | 3 Children: \$30 |
| 2 Children: \$30 | 4 Children: \$40 |

### Bingo Night and Silent Auction May 7; 5-7 p.m.

Meet the youth, play bingo, and win prizes!

**\$5 for 1 card; \$20 for 5 cards**

### Car Wash!!

**June (Date TBD); 12-2 p.m.**

Stop by after church for a quick car wash.

**Suggested donation: \$15 per car**

### Stockholders' Lunch TBD in Fall After the Trip

Stocks will be sold before and after church in April and May. The youth will host a stockholders' lunch to share their experiences after the trip

**\$20 per share**



# Saline High School Chorale

FROM SALINE, MICHIGAN

Directed by Sarah Price

CONCERT



CONCERT

Friday, March 17  
4:30 PM

First United Church  
of Oak Park



848 Lake Street  
witte Performance Tours

FREE  
ADMISSION

## Dinner and a Movie, March 17

Friday, March 17:  
"Descendant." Documentary filmmaker Margaret Brown follows descendants of the survivors from the Clotilda, the last ship that carried enslaved Africans to the United States, as they reclaim their stories. Dinner at 6 p.m. (\$5 donation); movie at 6:30 p.m. (free). Call Liz Swan (708) 567-3490 to RSVP.



## FUNS Plant Sale

Plan and source your spring garden and support First United Nursery School at the same time! Place your orders for spring plants by Tuesday, March 14. Pick up will be at First United on Friday, May 5 from 3-5 p.m. and delivery options may be available. Visit [bit.ly/FUNSpplantsale2023](https://bit.ly/FUNSpplantsale2023) for more information.



## One Voice for Arts

### Launch Party

March 10, 4:30 pm - 6:30 pm  
First United Church  
848 Lake Street, Oak Park, IL

First United is excited to host the launch celebration for [One Voice for Arts](https://onevoiceforarts.org), a new collaboration of four long-standing and respected members of the arts community here: Oak Park Festival Theatre, The Oriana Singers, Pro Musica Youth Chorus, and The Symphony of Oak Park and River Forest. Please join us on March 10. Contact [karen@onevoiceforarts.org](mailto:karen@onevoiceforarts.org) for more information or to RSVP.

## Zoom Links for Recurring Virtual Groups

### Fostering Connection and Support

FCS meets weekly on Zoom for a time of informal connection and support. This is a drop-in group. Come when you'd like. Stay as long as you can. Here's the link to join whenever you are able: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88937766305>

### Prayer Shawl Ministry

Prayer Shawl Ministry meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month from 10-11 a.m. Please join us if you are able. If the day and time do not work for you, please reach out to Alicia Reese ([areese@firstunitedoakpark.org](mailto:areese@firstunitedoakpark.org)). Use this link to join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85035296628>



# The Prayers of God's People

**We lift up the prayers that have been shared in worship.**

**For the wider world:**

- All those suffering as a result of earthquakes
- Those impacted by unjust systems and policies
- For an end to oppression, hatred, and violence
- For anyone without sufficient food and/or housing

**For those in our midst:**

- The Menninga family and those mourning the death of Sylvia Menninga, particularly her beloved, Gy.
- Cyndie Chow in the midst of a difficult pregnancy.
- The Pollock family, concerned for the health of Kelly's dad, Bruce.
- Maddy Gillette recovering from surgery after a fracture sustained skiing
- Jerry Sebesta, recovering from another fall
- Beth Dickerson and her sister who is suffering from pancreatic cancer
- All those in the midst of difficult transitions

**For the joys in our lives:**

- For the life of Barbara Ballinger and the beautiful concert that celebrated her
- For all those who shared their First United "Love Story" as a stewardship testimony in worship! Marcia Ashton, Lois Thiessen Love, Cate Readling, Mark Premo-Hopkins, & Lois Jean Thompson
- For a generous and love-filled stewardship season
- A ski trip for our FUJI & FUSH youth



Have you ever visited the chapel at First United? It is full of stained-glass windows that create a calm and peaceful space that lends itself well to meditation, reflection, conversation, and prayer, among other things! We also use this space for monthly council meetings, deacon meetings, youth group activities and so much more.

Our deacons take turns hosting this space on Sundays immediately following worship for anyone who would like to visit!

You can use it for...

- A personal time of peace and quiet, meditation or prayer
- Conversation with a deacon, who may offer to pray with you or bless you with anointing oil.

We look forward to welcoming you into this special space!

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## RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here to read online](#)

Feb. 8 The Best Kind of Book Alicia Reese

Feb. 21 Dust Lydia Mulkey

Feb. 28 We Would Be Building John Edgerton



**FIRST UNITED CHURCH  
OF OAK PARK**

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