



the MESSENGERbell

October 2023

ALL THE GOOD STUFF

In the last month or so, First United has:

- Had its first ever Wholly, an experimental intergenerational worship experience!
- Held our 90+ Birthday Party.
- Hosted a successful Fall Fellowship Fair despite the rain.
- Begun the public phase of the Capital Campaign: Next Is Now.
- Formed a hard-working interim lead pastor search team.
- Held the Kindred Spirits luncheon to thank all those who have included First United in their estate planning.
- Heard from excellent guest preachers from within our congregation.
- Read Evotionals from wonderful guest writers from within our congregation.
- Started youth groups back up for the program year.
- Started Church School back up for the program year.
- Started Sanctuary Choir back up for the program year with beautiful music!
- Collected home goods for House to Home, ensuring folks transitioning out of homelessness and into a home a good start.
- Come back to school at our First United Nursery School with a full day option for the very first time!

That is a loooooooooooooong list! How did we do it? That's just the thing, *WE* did it. No one could accomplish half of this alone. As our sermon series has been reminding us, there are superheroes of the faith among us. Thank you for doing your part! Without the most incredible, dedicated, joyful group of volunteers in the world, there is no way all this could have happened.

Looking for a place to jump in and be a part of it all? Talk to a pastor, a member of church council, or another member about your passions and skills and find a place that brings you a sense of joy and belonging. Together, we've already done so much and there's more good stuff ahead!

Pastor Lydia



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: update from the interim pastoral search team, page 2; new pastoral care office hours, page 3; education program offerings, page 4; opportunities to sponsor FUSH and FUJI activities, page 5; put your faith into action, page 7.



FIRST
UNITED
CHURCH OF
OAK PARK

Preaching in October

October 8	Lydia Mulkey
October 15	Alicia Reese
October 22	Lydia Mulkey
October 29	Dirk Labuschagne
November 5 All Saints Sunday Communion	Alicia Reese

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](#)

Update from the Interim Search Team

When will we have an interim lead pastor for the time between Pastor John Edgerton and nominating a new settled lead pastor?

The Interim Search Team has been hard at work trying to find the right person for this important role. Over the last month and a half, we have met with Presbytery and UCC denominational officials to make sure that we are following the correct processes and making the right connections. We have asked them many of the questions that you may have, such as "Can we offer the settled pastor position to a strong interim that we like?" (No, the denominations consider this bad policy, as it may lead to "politicking that would not serve the church.") Can we offer the settled position to one of our excellent associate pastors? (Again, no, the denominations have rules that do not allow that.)

We have completed writing an abbreviated First United Church of Oak Park "church profile" and position announcements, which have been posted on both UCC and PCUSA websites. We have also been in contact with Deborah Kapp and other pastors and individuals who may have contacts with potential interim pastors who would be a good fit for our church. Some of these individuals have already been in contact with the UCC and PCUSA offices. If church members are aware of good candi-

dates, please feel free to direct them to these websites.

In the meantime, we have planned and started to execute "listening sessions" to hear from you, members of the First United Church community, to better understand what characteristics First United members hope to find in this interim leader. The next listening sessions will be held before and after worship services on October 15 and October 29 in Room 13.

We are pulling ideas for interview questions from information gleaned through conversations during the Strategic Planning, Capital Campaign and listening sessions. We hope to start initial interviews with prospective candidates within the next few weeks. In short we are moving with expediency and care to get this right!

In the Home Stretch: NEXT BEGINS NOW

The busy holiday season is coming soon. But NOW, before those holidays, all the members and friends of First United Church have an opportunity to BEGIN our NEXT historic chapter. We are invited to help our church grow and thrive. NEXT BEGINS NOW, our multi-year capital campaign, is in its final phase. The campaign's goal, \$1,750,000, will help the church improve physical access and energy efficiency, bolster our support of social justice, strengthen our caring culture, and improve our financial picture by making us debt-free.

A comprehensive mailing has gone out to all First United households. Along with additional detailed information on the campaign, it includes an easy-to-use Commitment Card. Mailed or personally delivered, the card will inform the church of our planned multi-year contributions.

Every gift counts. Please take the NEXT step and help initiate the vital development that BEGINS NOW.



First United

ANNUAL MEETING



SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 22

Immediately following
worship in the Sanctuary
and available in the
livestream

**Watch the eblast
for :**

- 2023-24 BUDGET
- 2023-24 MINISTRY OUTLINE
- ANNUAL REPORT

Community Minister Supports Staff by Supporting Congregation

Rev. Beth Dickerson is our Community Minister, a volunteer position Beth stepped into during the pandemic. The role of the community minister is to “support the pastoral staff by filling any gaps in pastoral care.”



Since Pastor John’s departure, and while we await the arrival of an interim, a large number of things have been added to Pastor Alicia and Pastor Lydia’s plates, mostly an influx of meetings, administrative tasks, and trying to keep a larger number of plates spinning! Which unfortunately, leaves less time for the more connectonal and personal pieces of ministry.

Pastor Beth has graciously offered to take on some more pastoral care responsibility during this time and we have gratefully accepted. In addition to her variety of roles serving on teams and facilitating the Thursday morning Fostering Connection & Support (FCS) group, Pastor Beth has agreed to preach when needed, work on restarting our visitation ministry, make regular pastoral care calls and visits, as well as hosting office hours at the church on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Pastors Lydia and Alicia will by no means stop doing pastoral care! Connecting with you all and being present with and for you is an important part of our ministry that

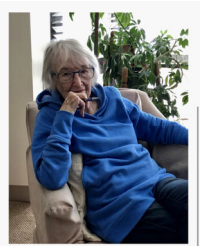
we value and enjoy, but we hope that you will view Beth as an extension of the pastoral staff. She is ready, willing, and called to serve our church community by being a supportive and pastoral presence.

Take advantage of her office hours on Tuesdays! You can also call or email her. She likes taking walks with folks and talking over a cup of tea or coffee.

We are grateful to have Beth and others stepping in to help in all kinds of ways during this season of transition. Thank you!

Ballinger Legacy Gift to First United

We are pleased and honored to announce that the church has received a substantial legacy gift from the Estate of Barbara Ballinger. Barbara died on November 14, 2022. She was 97.



Barbara was a devoted member of First United. She attended worship faithfully for more than 50 years. She participated in pastoral visits to members. She served on the social justice committee and the buildings and grounds committee. She helped organize a fellowship group at Brookdale which continued to meet online throughout the recent Covid pandemic. She was a devoted friend to many and had a deep commitment to her family. Barbara was a voracious reader and had a special love for poetry, opera and classical music. The poem she asked to be recited at her memorial service was beautiful – and still confounds many of us.

In addition to her service to our church, Barbara was a vital fixture in our community. She was the head librarian at the Oak Park Library for 32 years. As a librarian, she championed regional cooperation among Chicago-area libraries and was a recognized authority in Illinois and the nation. She also played leading roles in the Ernest Hemingway Foundation, the Doris Humphrey Society for modern dance, and several other nonprofit organizations.

Barbara was a well-deserved recipient of the Senior Citizens’ Center of Oak Park-River Forest’s 2017 Ulyssean Award, which honors seniors committed to lifelong

Continued on page 6.

Education

October Adult Education Speaker Series

Each Sunday, Adult Ed sponsors speakers on issues of interest and concern and hosts free-wheeling conversation at the end of each session. 9:45-10:45 a.m. in Centennial Hall.

Otherness in the Old Testament (2 sessions remain!)

Dr. Steed Vernyl Davidson, Executive Director of the Society of Biblical Literature, continues the series on experiences of otherness in the Old Testament: the complex institution of the monarchy and its continuing ramifications today and the depictions of the prophets with both traditional masculine and feminine characteristics.

- **October 8 - Otherness in the Old Testament #2: The Divine Right of Kings**
- **October 15 - Otherness in the Old Testament #3: Queering the Prophets**

Thinking About Mortality (October 22 and 29)

Drs. John Lurain and Jane Llewellyn from the Oak Park/Western Suburbs End-of-Life Action Team of Compassion & Choices and Rev. Beth Dickerson will offer a 2-part exploration of planning and caring for ourselves through the transition from life to death, including end-of-life decision-making, conversations with loved ones, spiritual thoughts on dying, conquering anxiety, and care options, including appropriate medical interventions, hospice, dementia provisions, and medical aid in dying.

Presenting Bibles to Our Kids

Each year, our third graders receive the gift of a Bible. To mark the special occasion, we provide breakfast for the whole family and help families learn how to use the Bibles together. This year's breakfast will be on October 8 with the presentation of the Bibles in worship following breakfast!



Deferred: Quest Class of 2024

After a great deal of discernment, we have decided to defer this year's Quest class. This is not a decision that has been made lightly, but is one that we truly believe is in the best interest of our youth as we want them to have the richest and most meaningful Quest experience possible.

The kind of Quest experience we seek to offer is reliant on group discussion and sharing different perspectives as we explore our many questions and doubts. We believe that these kinds of discussions and explorations are most beneficial with the participation of at least four or five youth. This year's class of 9th graders is particularly small, and we do not have that number of youth ready to participate this year.

What does this mean?

This means that all current 9th graders will have another opportunity next year to participate in Quest as sophomores! This is not the first time we have deferred a Quest class. The Quest class of 2022 included both freshmen and sophomores and it was a wonderful experience!

We look forward to welcoming the combined 9th/10th grader Quest class of 2025 in the fall of 2024!

Our Youth Programs Need Your Support!

Our junior high (FUJI) and high school (FUSH) youth groups are off to a great start! Currently, there is no cost to participate in the weekly Sunday evening meetings of FUJI and FUSH. And I believe that no family should ever be asked to pay a fee for their child to participate in a church youth group. Such programs are integral and valued ministries offered by the church for the youth and families who are a part of the community.

A thriving youth group is created and sustained through many people, activities, events, and supplies which require resources. Resources like time and money. Unfortunately, this year our youth ministry budget was cut by approximately 19%, which seriously impacts our youth programming.

Over the seven years I have served alongside you here at First United, I have heard from many people how much they love, value, and wish to support our youth programs. This is why I am writing to you; I am hoping you will consider making a donation specifically to the youth groups. While any amount is greatly appreciated!, you may prefer to sponsor a specific youth group event or activity this program year! Here are some of the events and activities that are a part of making our youth groups the fun and meaningful experience they are and what it costs to make them happen:

\$50 Weekly Meal. Weekly meals are an important part of being a community! Some meals will be provided by families, but both youth groups also take turns cooking together. Cooking together provides practice at an important life skill and also creates more opportunities for bonding among peers and with their advisors.

\$20 Care Package. Every year we send college freshmen a care package of yummy things and notes from the youth and advisors. The cost of the contents and mailing is about \$20 per package. This year we have 15 freshmen!

\$20 Advisor Gift. We entrust the care and well-being of our youth to our youth advisors, ask them to sacrifice their Sunday evenings, several weekends, and give a lot of themselves. We express our gratitude for each advisor with gifts at Christmas time and at the end of the program year. This year we have 10 advisors!

\$175 Retreat. This is the cost per youth to attend a retreat. Each youth group is scheduled to go on one retreat this year.

\$200 Broomball outing. A favorite fellowship event among all our youth!

Service Projects

\$500 to throw a birthday party at The Boulevard by covering the cost of birthday gifts for the residents, prizes for BINGO, and cake and snacks. Both youth groups are hoping to finally return to The Boulevard this year.

\$200 Making and distributing blessing bags or working with one of our mission partners on a project together.

\$100 Travel Expenses. We no longer charter buses for retreats and offsite events, but we do always reimburse our volunteer drivers for gas and the mileage.

Recently, Al and Georga Parchem offered to make a donation to the youth programs in exchange for some youth volunteering to help set up and tear down the annual Kindred Spirits luncheon at their home. What a wonderful idea! We were grateful for this opportunity to help serve our church community that also raised some money.

If there are other creative solutions you can come up with, let us know! We appreciate your support and consideration for additional support!

To make a donation by check, please make the check out to First United Church of Oak Park and include "youth group" in the memo line. Watch upcoming eblasts for information on how to give electronically.

Thank you for loving and valuing our youth,
Pastor Alicia



Sunday Morning Youth Circle (9-12th graders)

Starting on Sunday, October 8th Pastor Alicia will begin a new bi-monthly offering for 9-12th graders on Sunday mornings during the church school hour.

It will be a practice of community that seeks to foster support, encouragement, and presence for and among youth without a formal curriculum or agenda.

Youth are encouraged to bring whatever is on their hearts or mind! Questions or wonderings, joys and struggles. These can be (but do not have to be) church related.

- Are you wondering or concerned about the future? College? The next year of high school?
- Are there relationships in your life that are in a difficult season? Friendships, parents, siblings, significant other?
- Have you been doing enough self-care? Or have ways of coping with stress?
- Does the state of our country and our world make you feel anxious or hopeless?
- What are the questions you have?
- What are the things you wonder about?
- What are the things that bring you joy?

Together, we will invite sharing, discussion, hands-on activities, movement, ritual, or other things that will be renewing and life-giving.

Bring your authentic self and your morning beverage of choice. I'll have a cup of coffee!

Meet in room 13 on October 8. Future meetings may be held outside, if the weather cooperates, or in another location! We will see how the Spirit moves us.

Ballinger, continued from page 3.

learning and who have made significant contributions to the community.

Church council has decided that the gift from Barbara will be counted toward the goal of the Capital Campaign and, in keeping with her wishes, will thereafter be allocated to the Special Mission Endowment Fund. The church is indeed grateful for her gift. Her generosity to the church is a lasting testimony to her Christian faith.

Alternative Christmas Store

The Alternative Christmas Store (ACS) is a First United tradition that invites us to live into Advent and our mission of "empowering people by changing structures." After a successful Reboot last year we are continuing the tradition. The store will run three weeks only December 3, 10 and 17.

ACS is an opportunity to purchase locally made goods and fair trade products as an alternative to mass produced items. Food, scarves, and ornaments come from SERRV International and Equal Exchange through cooperatives which promote social justice through economic fair trade. All profits from the store benefit our local mission partners and we also offer a way to donate directly to some of our Faith in Action Mission Partners.

We are currently looking for a few enthusiastic people to help us with promoting the event, set up, and take down as well as general help on the days of the event. We are particularly looking for someone to chase down literature from Church World Service and to decide which items we will offer at our store. If you can help us with anyone of these tasks please contact Teri Omert. (tomert@comcast.net). This is a great way to be involved with a joyful and significant church activity.



FCS on Thursdays

Fostering Connection and Support meets weekly on Zoom for a time of prayer, connection, and support. Rev. Beth Dickerson joins us to facilitate conversation. Come when you'd like. Stay as long as you can. The group meets virtually on Thursdays at 10 a.m. [Click here](#) to join.



Put Your Faith Into Action

ON PEACE

By Rev. Stan Davis

"In our age that prides itself on being the Atomic Age...it is contrary to reason...to regard war as a suitable means of restoring rights that have been infringed on."

These are the words written in 1951 by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Barth struggled with the concept of a Just War throughout his life, with World War II as an example.

But the Atomic Age changed any further thought of a "Just War." As he wrote after the Atomic Age began:

"Nuclear warfare from the outset means the end of all things."

The father of the atomic bomb, J. Robert Oppenheimer, recalled these words from the Hindu Scripture as he watched the first-ever atomic bomb explode in New Mexico:

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

We who are Christian must recommit ourselves to work for peace....within our families, our church, our communities, our nation, the world.

Each step, however small, builds the Beloved Community based on Love that the Jesus movement taught.

Holiday Food and Gift Basket: November Gift Cards

I'm writing as the new director of Holiday Food and Gift Basket, a program of the Community of Congregations. You might be familiar with our program if you've seen the Christmas tree in the lounge that Sher Spooner coordinates, offering a chance to purchase holiday gifts for local families. First United is a big supporter of Holiday Food and Gift Basket and typically sponsors 60 individuals each Christmas.

But Holiday Food and Gift Basket is much bigger than that. Last year, we served 800 families totaling more than 2,200 individuals. And what you might not know is that in addition to holiday gifts in December, each family gets a grocery gift card in November. While community members sponsor the holiday gifts, the more than \$30,000 in gift cards is paid for with donations.

Would you please consider supporting the November gift cards? If you aren't able to shop for holiday gifts but still want to support families in our community, then please consider making a donation to Holiday Food and Gift Basket. You can give via our website at www.communityofcongregations.org/holiday-food-gift-basket/ or by mailing a check to:

Holiday Food and Gift Basket
% Community of Congregations
P.O. Box 3365
Oak Park, IL 60303-3365

If you have any questions, you can contact me at hfgbholidays@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support.
Kelly Pollock
Director, Holiday Food and Gift Basket





The Prayers of God's People

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

For the wider world:

- All those impacted by the earthquake in Morocco, picking up the pieces and mourning loved ones
- Those suffering in times of war and having to flee their homes
- Flooding in Libya
- An end to senseless violence, especially gun violence

For those in our midst:

- Janet Haisman and all mourning the death of Bob Haisman
- Betty Gehring hospitalized for some testing
- Kelly Bechtel recovering from surgery
- Don Register recovering at a rehab facility
- Don Lennie recovering from hip surgery after a fall
- Jerry Sebesta returning to Park Place after a hospital stay
- Sandy Jefferson undergoing testing and treatment
- Stan and Chris Davis
- Teri Omert and family mourning two loved ones
- Pat Hahn undergoing extensive testing to be a kidney donor
- Al Parchem recovering from knee surgery
- The Anderson family mourning cousin, Sandy
- Dirk Labuschagne and the many others training for the Chicago Marathon
- Hannah and Melissa

For the joys in our lives:

- All our youth returning to or beginning their first year of college
- Celebrating the birthdays of and honoring our members who are 90+ years old
- The start of a new program year! Church school, youth groups, choir, and more
- Church members opening their homes to migrant Venezuelan families: Elaine Pierce and the Chow-Jansen family
- Wonderful guest preachers! Caden Eckert & Beth Dickerson

- Pastor Lydia's wedding and marriage
- Kindred Spirits luncheon and all those who include First United in their estate planning
- A fun Fellowship Fair
- Successful youth camping weekend
- Sailing with family
- Many birthdays

Dinner & A Movie

Friday, October 13: Other People's Children. Dedicated high school teacher Rachel forms a deep bond with her boyfriend's young daughter Leila. Fearing becoming an extra in her own life, Rachel must decide whether to embrace the entanglements of her current situation or strike out again on her own. Dinner at 6:00 (\$5 donation); movie at 6:30 (free). Call Liz Swan (708) 567-3490 or email easwan@gmail.com.



Donuts with Deacons!

Meet your Deacon and learn about what they do.

October 8 and 22 after worship



RECENT EVOTIONALS

[Click here](#) to read our most recent evotionals online.

Why We Worship	Lydia Mulkey
Notice the Shift	Ally Vertigan
The Kingdom of Heaven	Alicia Reese



**FIRST UNITED CHURCH
OF OAK PARK**

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