



the
MESSENGER *bell*
 December 2023

A SHIFT IN SEASONS

Our theme for Advent is, “How does a weary world rejoice?” When life includes pain, loneliness, stress, violence, and war; how do we experience joy? We will explore that together in the coming weeks.

If you are finding yourself weary this season, (and who among doesn't experience weariness?) I hope you will consider joining us for Blue Christmas on December 20 at 6 p.m. Childcare will be available and dinner will be provided. Rev. Ally Vertigan will lead a service of quietly acknowledging that even at Christmas time, we can feel blue with candle lighting, readings, and songs in the chapel. Then Mark Breen has offered to prepare a soup supper so that we have an opportunity to find strength in community.

This Advent will also be a time full of rejoicing! Sunday morning worship will include poetry, beautiful music, candles, worship leaders of all ages, and so much more. You won't want to miss Hanging of the Greens on December 10 as our church school classes sing, act, and speak to help us worship. The theme of our Hanging of the Greens service will be “We Find Joy in Connection,” and I have a good feeling we will do just that! It's going to be a wonderful season here at First United. Come and find a few reasons to rejoice!

With love,
 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.

Advent and Christmas Worship

Dec. 10	11 am	Hanging of the Greens
Dec. 17	11 am	Advent III
Dec. 20	6 pm	Blue Christmas: Liturgy for the Weary
Dec. 24	11 am	Advent IV: virtual worship only
Dec. 24	5 pm	Christmas Eve worship with pageant
Dec. 24	8 pm	Christmas Eve worship with lessons & carols



A few highlights from this month's Messenger Bell: Advent and Christmas Worship highlights, page 2; seasonal adult ed programs, page 3; Interim Search Tam update, page 4; Peace Vigil information, page 5; youth and family programs, page 6; prayer requests, page 7.



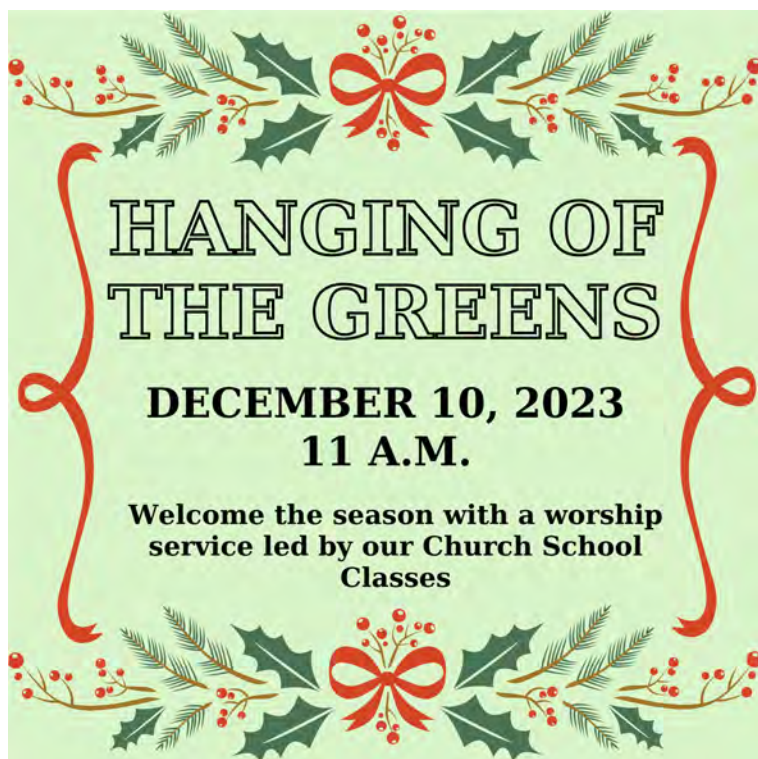
FIRST
 UNITED
 CHURCH OF
 OAK PARK

Preaching in December

December 10 Hanging of the Greens	6-8th Graders
December 17	Rev. Ally Vertigan
December 20 Blue Christmas: Liturgy for the Weary	Rev. Ally Vertigan
December 24—Advent IV 11 a.m. (Virtual)	Lydia Mulkey
December 24—Christmas Eve 5 and 8 p.m.	Lydia Mulkey
December 31 Sticky Church in Centennial Hall	No sermon

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](#)



Blue Christmas & Soup Supper

For those who have experienced loss, the joy of the holiday season can often feel elusive and out of reach. Rev. Ally Vertigan will lead a service that quietly acknowledges that even at Christmastime we can feel blue.

After the stay for a simple supper of soup and bread. To help us prepare, please email office@firstunitedoakpark.com and let us know if you are coming for supper.



Sing We Joyous This Weekend!

The Oriana Singers, City Voices, and Pro Musica Youth Chorus will ring in the season with the holiday spectacular "Sing We Joyous," now in its 18th year. Directed by William Chin, this treasured Oak Park winter tradition returns with the usual mix of seasonal music and family-friendly hijinks. Enjoy traditional settings of "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day" along with William Byrd's "Sing Joyfully," Mel Torme's "The Christmas Song" and a rousing rendition of Three Dog Night's "Joy to the World," capped off with a zany send-up of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

Performances are December 9 at 7:30 p.m. and December 10 at 4 p.m. at First United. Tickets are \$30; 18 and under free. Visit oriana.org to purchase and for more information.



Alternative Christmas Store: Christmas Shopping for Good!

Our first Sunday of the Alternative Christmas Store was so successful that we had to restock several items! If you missed out on one of your favorites or didn't have a chance to shop for good yet, never fear! The Alternative Christmas Store will continue before and after worship on December 10 and 17. All items purchased at the Alternative Christmas store will benefit our local mission partners and/or support international fair trade. Shopping done? You can still help by donating directly to some of our Faith in Action mission partners.



December Adult Education

The Speaker Series meets at 9:45 a.m. in Centennial Hall.

December 10

Hope, peace, joy, and love - God's gifts to us during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Nancy Ball will lead us as we watch clips from four movies, each showing one of these gifts, then you can share a personal memory which embodies that gift for you. William Hurt, Janelle Monáe, Tom Hanks, and you!



December 17

Celebrate the beautiful Advent and Christmas hymns of our Christian heritage as we sing some of our best-loved hymns and carols (with orchestral accompaniment by congregation members), learn the stories behind them, and view Christmas art from across the centuries and around the world. Bring a dish to share for the potluck breakfast and enjoy a lovely morning with our church family.



The Bible Group meets on Sunday mornings in the Conference Room, 9:45-10:45 a.m. when Rev. Charles Morris will return to the Bible Group to lead the Advent studies, refreshing and deepening our understanding of the events preceding the savior's birth.

- **December 10** – Should you care about the genealogy of Jesus? [Matt 1:1-17]
- **December 17** – The marital drama of Mary and Joseph [Matt 1:18-25]





This Advent season reminds us of our deep and abiding connection to the origins of our faith. Celebrating the miraculous birth of Jesus, we renew our commitment to the Church, the Body of Christ, carrying the message of peace, love, and redemption across the centuries.

One vitally important expression of this commitment is our financial support for the Church. Sharing God's generous bounty through the work and witness of First United Church of Oak Park, we insure that the Christian tradition will continue. We happily invest today's resources in tomorrow's better world.

The NEXT BEGINS NOW capital campaign will conclude at the end of December. The campaign now stands at nearly \$1,400,000 raised toward a goal of \$1,750,000. The results of the final month will determine how much we can invest toward making our building more accessible and more energy-efficient, increase our support of social justice, strengthen our community of care, and stabilize our long-term finances. If you have not yet made your gift or declared your multi-year commitment, now is the time. For information or assistance, contact the Capital Campaign Team (Rick Ashton, Dave Hanson, Marteki Reed). Act now!

Update from the Interim Search Team

The Interim Search Team has been hard at work trying to find the right person for this important role. Over the last month, we have hosted in-depth conversations with some fine candidates. We are still searching for the mutually beneficial fit.

We are learning it is a competitive job market. For example, in the UCC in Illinois, alone, there are over 42 open positions. We have had an even mix of UCC and Presbyterian candidates.

We have been sharing with the candidates the importance of aspects of our life together that we heard about in our listening sessions in the fall. In those sessions, we heard about strengthening our caring community, mission/social justice, inclusion, etc.

We can report that Church-Leadership Connection of the PCUSA is now successfully posted despite the technical issues on the Presbytery website over the last several months.

In the meantime, we know that our preparation and research, and the notes that we have created, will serve the Pastoral Nominating Committee when the times comes for them to begin their work.

In short, we are in motion! We appreciate those who offer words of encouragement and gratitude for our work.

Peace Corner

During this Advent season of peace and hope, we offer up this prayer to our sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel, and for all around the world holding fear and sorrow. From *Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community*, written by Irish poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama.

A prayer for reconciliation

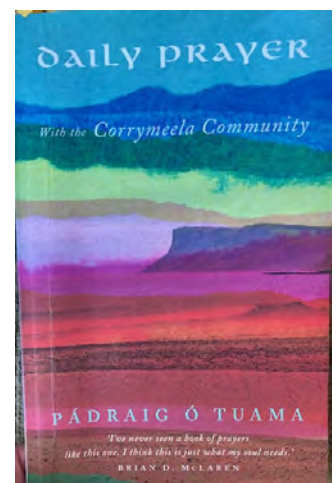
where there is separation, there is pain,
and where there is pain,
there is story.

And where there is story,
there is understanding,
and misunderstanding,
listening
and not listening.

May we— separated peoples, estranged strangers,
unfriended families, divided communities—
turn toward each other,
and turn toward our stories,
with understanding
and listening,
with argument and acceptance,
with challenge, change
and consolation.

Because if God is to be found,
God will be found
in the space
between.

Amen



2023 CANDLELIGHT PEACE VIGIL TO END GUN VIOLENCE

**A time for remembrance of all
those impacted by gun violence.**

Purpose – An assembly of our broader community to honor all gun violence victims and survivors impacted by the violence, to lament the tragedy and pain, and to build community, creating hope, healing and change, supporting violence prevention in all of its forms.

**#HonorWithAction
#EndGunViolence**



**FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK
848 LAKE STREET, OAK PARK
7PM, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12**

LOCAL SPONSORS:

- Moms Demand Action Oak Park–Austin Area • Waging Peace of First United Church of Oak Park
- Gun Violence Prevention Team of Unity Temple UU Congregation • Mothers OnA Mission28
- Ascension–St Edmund Peace & Justice Committee • Gun Responsibility Advocates
- Community of Congregations • Congregations Committed to Peace
- Live Free–Community Healing Resource Center • Congregations Networking for Social Justice



Rehearsal

December 9th

9:00-11:00am Hanging of the Greens Rehearsal
and Advent Event for Preschool-5th
10:30-12noon HOG Rehearsal for 6th-8th

First United Church of Oak Park

The Advent Event

December 9th from 9:00-10:30AM

Make an Advent wreath, Christmas ornaments,
a peg people nativity set, and take fun
holiday pictures in the photo booth!

Free to the whole community!

FUSH Cookie Sale

Sunday, December 17
before and after worship.

Miss the deadline to order? We've got you covered!

CHURCH SCHOOL RECESS

DECEMBER 24
AND DECEMBER 31

We're Back January 7th

Christmas Eve Pageant

- ➔ Sign up no later than Sunday, December 10th
- ➔ Rehearsal immediately following worship on December 17th
- ➔ Pageant December 24th at 5pm



Sign Up for the Christmas Eve Pageant!

There are parts for all ages from preschool through middle and high school narrators. We are especially in need of narrators! Sign up to be a part of this beautiful tradition by [clicking here](#).



COMMUNITY OF
CONGREGATIONS

Community of Congregations' Information Hub for Oak Park Migrant Response

Community of Congregations has developed a webpage to keep track of the various volunteer opportunities and most pressing needs of the migrant families living in and around the Oak Park area. Opportunities are frequently updated to respond to the evolving situation. Visit communityofcongregations.org/migrant-response/ to see the current opportunities.



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

For the wider world:

- PEACE! For Just peace and reconciliation
- Families torn apart by violence
- World leaders: may they hear cries for peace
- The safety of the Palestinian people
- Ceasefire, justice, and peace in Israel and Palestine
- Those who do not have as much this season

For those in our midst:

- Betsy Samore, recovering from a car accident and mourning the loss of her mother
- Vickie Engelhardt's daughter, in the hospital in California
- Sandy Jefferson, undergoing cancer treatment
- Mary Sue Voth, with health concerns
- Jon Slocum, recovering from COVID
- Mary Lou Anderson, recovering from pneumonia
- Don Lennie, recovering from surgery
- Stan Davis, continuing to recover from health challenges
- Brian Shamhart, mourning the death of his father

For the joys in our lives:

- Celebrating wonderful music led by children in worship
- Gratitude for Priscilla, Karin, and the Fellowship Team for a beautiful send off for Pastor Alicia
- The ministry and service of Pastor Alicia
- Pat Hahn, incredible gift to donate a kidney
- Dale and Carol Sorenson, opening their home to someone in need
- Wonderful to see Don Register recovering and back in church
- Meghan Premo-Hopkins for a wonderful puppet show during Sharing Time
- Joy for the holiday season of giving and family and friends

Deck the Halls With Soup and Singing

Prime Time is planning a holiday soup luncheon and Join other Prime Timers for a soup luncheon and a chance to sing Christmas carols at noon Monday, December 11, in Centennial Hall. Soup, bread, dessert, and cider will be supplied; the cost is \$5. RSVP by December 7 to Sher Watts Spooner (sandaspooner@comcast.net).



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.



RECENT EVOTIONALS

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

Belly of the Whale	Ally Vertigan
Anchored in Gratitude	Lydia Mulkey
A Different Kind of Calm	Dirk Labuschagne
Gratitude: The Antidote to Anxiety	Alicia Reese



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK

848 Lake Street Oak Park, IL 60301
www.firstunitedoakpark.com
office@firstunitedoakpark.com