



FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK  
*an open community united in love & justice*



2023

Annual Report

# ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING OCTOBER 22, 2023



## AGENDA

Call to Order	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Opening Prayer	Rev. Alicia Reese
FY 2023 Budget	Dave Hanson, Finance Team Chair
Treasurer's Report	Dave Marshall, Treasurer
Ministry Outline	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Capital Campaign Report	Rick Ashton, Capital Campaign Task Force Chair
Adjournment	Marteki Reed, Moderator
Closing Prayer	Rev. Lydia Mulkey

---

### FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF OAK PARK STAFF

**Rev. Lydia Mulkey**, Associate Pastor of Education  
lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Alicia Reese**, Pastoral Associate, Youth & Congregational Care  
areese@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Bill Chin**, Director of Music  
bill@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Bobby Nguyen**, Organist  
bnguyen@firstuniteoakpark.com

**Heather Vanderberg**, Church Administrator  
hvanderberg@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Shirley Kyle**, Financial Administrator  
skyle@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Melissa Lurio**, Administrative Assistant  
mlurio@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Keith Liesse**, Manager of Building and Grounds  
kliesse@firstunitedoakpark.com

**Jésus Santiago**, Custodian

**Jesse Tijerina**, Custodian

**Daniel Blancarte**, Custodian

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

3

---

## ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF EDUCATION

Lydia Mulkey

[lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:lmulkey@firstunitedoakpark.com)

The world is changing and shifting around us at a rapid pace. As I sat down to write my report to you, I looked for a report from a previous year that could serve as a template, but no two years seem to compare anymore! Then, I realized what First United has done this year:

- Comforted those who were grieving
- Shared the stories of our faith and used them to inform our living
- Shared meals
- Held each other close through transitions and change
- Celebrated new life in baptism
- Opened our arms to new members
- Given generously
- Offered acts of mercy to the poor and oppressed
- Worked for justice

So, as it turns out, maybe this year was just like any other. These are the things we have always done. Sure, maybe we used to do them differently, but the essentials remain. Circumstances shift around us, individuals come and go, but this community continues to do the work of living in the way of Jesus.

As we look toward another year of uncertainty (the only kind of year there is), the one thing I know for sure is that we will do it all again. Some of it we may have to do in new ways, but the essentials of community will remain. I give thanks for you, people of First United. May God bless us in the coming year with courage for what lies ahead.

---

### ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Alicia Reese

areese@firstunitedoakpark.com

One of the greatest joys and accomplishments for me in the past year was my ordination and installation as an associate pastor here at First United on Saturday, November 19, 2022. It was a truly joyous occasion! I am blessed and grateful for the outpouring of love and support that was gifted to me that day in so many ways.

In the realm of **Youth Ministry**, we started the year with a full slate of advisors for our FUJI & FUSH youth groups, many of whom returned to First United to serve after having had impactful experiences themselves in the youth programs. The theme for the year seemed to be “a gradual return to ‘normal’” in which we brought back youth retreats (FUSH to Pilgrim Park and FUJI to Tower Hill), lock-ins, and other beloved activities and traditions, including the summer work camp trip for our high school youth. There were two new events of note: we welcomed guest speaker and author, Kate Ott to lead a session for parents as well as one for youth, and the other, a day-long ski outing, which may easily become an annual tradition.

FUSH opted to try some new fundraisers: a Parent’s Night Out and a church-wide BINGO night. Cookie Bake made a comeback in December and we punctuated the program year with a car wash.

In June of 2023 we confirmed eight youth into membership after a wonderful year in **Quest** together. Their confirmation service was awesome. I’m particularly proud of the sermon skit they put on based on the book and story of Job. They also did an incredible job leading the Tenebrae service on Maundy Thursday, the first one we’ve had in our building in several years.

In the realm of **Congregational Care** there were a great many events the Fellowship Team planned and participated in such as A Day in Our Village and our own version of it, the Fellowship Fair in the fall. They also hosted Lenten soup suppers, which were well-attended and enjoyed immensely by all. We ended the program year by bringing back our traditional “Potluck Picnic.”

The **Deacons** ended the program year with a retreat in June to thank and send off those deacons rolling off as well as to onboard and welcome the new deacons. Fair Oaks was kind enough to host us for this retreat and it proved to be a wonderful way for our current board of deacons to start the year off feeling renewed and supported for the work ahead!

The new structure of monthly communion being prepared and served by a deacon and members of their care group has been a wonderful opportunity for shared experience, sharing the responsibility of preparing and serving the sacrament more widely, and given more folks the chance to serve communion. It has been a beautiful thing.

## **PASTORAL ASSOCIATE, YOUTH MINISTRY AND CONGREGATIONAL CARE**

The **P.A.L.** (People Are Loving) Note ministry has continued to thrive after officially being adopted under the “umbrella” of the deacons. It has proven to be an excellent way to keep the deacons informed of all care needs of members, in particular those in their care groups.

It was another awesome year of the Holy Spirit at work in, among, and through this church community.

As we transitioned into this new program year, without a lead pastor and in the midst of a capital campaign, there was understandably, a lot of anxiety. In response to that, I wrote an evotional in July of 2023 with the goal of reminding you all of a few things...

*Change can be scary, uncomfortable, and involve some hard work, but change is the only thing certain in life, and thankfully this is a change we have navigated before and one we do not go through alone.*

*As Winnie the Pooh would say, “you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think, and loved more than you know.” You are a brave, strong, smart, loved, and loving church family. Whatever the next chapter is for First United, my cup runs over with faith and hope...*

*I want to challenge you to see this as the opportunity it is for reconnection, for nurturing and strengthening the bonds within our community, to be a community of care that supports one another, that can fortify the congregation as the church...*

*God’s Spirit is alive and well, working in, among, and through us, guiding us, encouraging us, holding us together. Thanks be to God.*



### DEACON BOARD

Jackie Eckholm, Co-Chair  
jmeckholm@comcast.net  
Linda Sandman, Co-Chair  
lindsand8@gmail.com

#### Deacons

Robert Auch  
Christ Davis  
Karla Hayter  
Walter Miller  
Meghan Premo-Hopkins  
Don Sibley

Beth Dickerson, Community  
Minister  
John Lurain, Council Liaison  
Alicia Reese, Staff Liaison

This year the Board bid a grateful good-bye to Anne Koerber (previous Chair), Len Palombi, Georga Parchem, and Betsy Samore. We welcomed Meghan Premo-Hopkins and Don Sibley as new Deacon elders.

Our goal this year was to increase our visibility within the congregation and improve our skills as Deacons.

#### Highlights from the Deacon Board year (2022 – 2023):

- Communicated regularly with our Care Groups
- Brought the PAL note ministry under the responsibility of the Deacon Board
- Brought back Donuts with the Deacons as a fun way to familiarize the congregation with who the Deacons are and what they do
- Met for a summer Deacon Retreat to recognize and thank retiring Deacons and to welcome and onboard new Deacons
- Began new responsibility for preparing and serving monthly Communion, inviting Care Group members to participate
- Conducted home visits to those in our Care Groups unable to attend worship in person due to age or illness
- Continued to support and sponsor the Fostering Connection and Support small group
- Continued to offer Chapel Prayer after Sunday worship services
- Began using meeting time for hands-on learning of Deacon roles – spiritual and technological, calling it “Deacons in Action”

#### Coming Events for 2023:

- Continuing to sponsor Donuts with Deacons
- Begin participating in the worship service as greeters and liturgists (at least monthly)
- Plan and participate in a Healing Worship Service, with Deacons offering to anoint anyone from the congregation who desires a healing touch

### ADULT EDUCATION

Elaine Pierce, Interim Chair

#### Team Members

George Ashman

Debbie Preiser

Martina Reese, secretary

Dale Sorenson

Susan Swords Steffan, Council Liaison

Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison



#### **Bible Group: Open Heart, Thoughtful Mind**

This program year marked the much-requested return of Adult Ed's bible study, which had been on hiatus since the start of Covid. The group restarted in January 2023 with an immediately good turnout, averaging 9-10 attendees per Sunday. Dale Sorenson and former AET member Kathryn Heavey managed the group, enlisting a leader for each class.

#### **Speaker Series**

The speaker series offered a wide variety of presentations, with a seven-Sunday hiatus during February and March to allow the Capital Campaign to make special presentations to the congregation. Topics included discussions of MLK's famous statement that 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America, church work in prisons, identifying and fighting systemic racism and the importance of the words we use, progressive Christianity, changing interpretations of women in the bible, how Evanston became the first municipality in the nation to implement a reparations program, and presentations by several of First United's mission partners.

#### **Advent Series**

In a departure from AE's usual topics led by religious, civic, and academic scholars which sometimes had attendees asking presenters to please repeat that last sentence, this year Adult Ed presented a special Advent series which consisted of joyful discussions of Christmas in our culture, based on O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*, Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon Advent and Christmas stories, and Charles Schultz' *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. We finished the season with a potluck breakfast and Christmas carol sing with members of the congregation providing orchestral accompaniment.

#### **Attendance**

Attendance ranged from a low of 14 to a high of 45, averaging 25. As a sign of audience members' engagement, many of the morning sessions extended to 11 a.m. as attendees lingered to speak with the presenter(s).

### **BUILDING & GROUNDS**

John Zaruba, Chair  
johnzaruba143@gmail.com

#### Team Members

John Bell  
Christine Bohlman  
Gary Cerniglia  
Ryan Issel  
Ann Tanner  
Sara Thompson  
Ben VonFisher

Tim Dull, Council Liaison  
Keith Liesse, Staff Liaison

The Building and Grounds team worked with the Village to have the Kenilworth Ave. handicap ramp re-built. The design was modified to include the retaining walls that create the planting area on the parkway. The Village also included the plantings in that area. The public sidewalk and some portions of the church sidewalk had to be replaced to establish the proper pitch up to the patio. This was all done at no cost to the church.

Keith Liesse has been trying for more than a year to get Gast Monuments out to add names to our Memorial tablets in the Memorial Gardens with no luck. He is continuing to communicate with them. You may have seen that Gast was the subject of a recent consumer investigation on CBS2 news. It seems that we are not alone in our difficulty working with Gast. Keith and Church Administrator Heather Vanderberg are working together to identify and explore alternative engravers—which are hard to come by!



Electrical work was completed in the basement electrical panel which controls the sanctuary LED lighting, and the lights no longer flicker, although we now do not have the ability to dim them. There will be a discussion later in 2024 about replacing the components in the fixtures that are not working. This will require scaffolding in the sanctuary, so it is a summer project.

The large Red Oak tree in the church yard had to be cut down, as a large branch broke off and it was determined that the tree was rotting within the trunk. A new Sugar Maple tree has been planted in its place to honor Joan White, the retired head of the Nursery School. The cost of this tree is coming out of the Nursery School budget.



In October, extensive planting projects around the church yard were completed, including removing the yews flanking the south entrance to the sanctuary and replacing them with new Arbor Vitae and ground plantings.

B&G anticipates that the wrought iron light fixtures that were mounted flanking the steps to the patio will finally be re-installed this fall.

The church bell was not working for most of the summer due to the electrical storm we had in June. The bell is now working.



### CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Sarah Severson, Chair  
sarahseverson@gmail.com

#### Team Members

Marilee Castenada  
Lura Honderich  
Ben Magnuson  
Julie Nauert  
Megan Premo-Hopkins  
Shannon Saliny  
Caitlin Zinsser

Mark Burkland, Council Liaison  
Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison



In the 2022-23 school year, we continued our updated curriculum approach, which included having combined classes for pre-K to K, 1st-3rd, 4th-5th, and 6th-8th grades. We also continued our structure of having a single storyteller each week giving a message to each class in addition to the teacher-provided activities (crafts, discussion, etc.) and, of-course, music instruction. Pastor Lydia improved the approach further with the creation of a detailed curriculum binder for each classroom. The binder included an overall calendar and detailed weekly lesson plans that included the topic for each Sunday, ideas for enrichment activities, and connections to the storytelling and music portions.

From a logistical perspective, we continued our Safe Church check-in procedure to ensure increased student safety (allergy awareness, pickups, etc.) and ease of attendance-taking. Throughout the year, we hosted several events including the 3rd grade Bible breakfast, a Halloween scavenger hunt throughout the church, our Advent craft event, and Spring Messy Church during Lent. We also supported worship with Hanging of the Greens and the Christmas Eve pageant, as well as various classes singing and reciting psalms during the service. We also worked with our Faith in Action team to involve the children in helping our mission partners. The families signed up to donate lunch supplies for Housing Forward and supported New Moms with a book fair in the spring.

Pastor Lydia continues to be a wonderful leader for church school, providing high-quality resources for church school leaders and expert stewardship of our children's faith formation. The new curriculum model she has spearheaded makes it very easy to be a Church School teacher while also ensuring that our children have thoughtful, meaningful religious education. We regularly hear how fast and fun the Church School hour goes from kids and teachers.

### COMMUNICATIONS

Vickie Engelhardt, Chair  
v.engelhardt@yahoo.com

#### Team Members

Ruth McBeth  
John Chapman-Rienstra  
Lauren Macaulay  
Rick Pollock

Melinda Robinson, Council  
Liaison  
Heather Vanderberg, Staff  
Liaison

Our team has resumed in-person meetings after several years of meeting exclusively via Zoom. We are delighted to have added new members for the new fiscal year.

After a year of work, the Communication Strategy was officially adopted by Council in April 2023. The strategy was shared with Team Chairs and, later, with the Congregation in the Messenger Bell. The strategy will guide when, where, and how we promote the many programs and activities of the church. As of this writing, the strategy largely addresses the internal communications of the church. As the team continues to develop external communications tools and procedures, we will revisit the strategy to incorporate those tools.

In 2023-24, our focus will be directed outward after several years of focusing on internal communications. Specifically, redesign of the church's website will be our priority. We need to identify a "brand" in presenting ourselves to the community. To that end, we circulated a survey to the entire congregation, seeking members' thoughts on how the church could be described. We are researching companies to assist us with website redesign.

For social media, we recognize that Facebook is insufficient to reach younger audiences. Developing a church Instagram account will be another priority for the year. We have reached out to the youth groups for assistance with content creation as we look to develop that account. We welcome photos from anyone and everyone who feels like sharing. Please forward any photos that you would like to [office@firstunitedoakpark.com](mailto:office@firstunitedoakpark.com).

### FAITH IN ACTION

Tara Dull, Co-Chair  
tdull@sbcglobal.net  
Pauline Coffman  
p.coffman@sbcglobal.net

#### Team Members

Jim Babcock  
Lynn Barrier  
Beth Dickerson  
Marilyn Giles  
Jim Heiningger  
Sandy Jefferson  
Anne Koerber  
Debbie Stracco  
Lois Thiessen Love  
Katharine Thurman

Lynn Raducha, Council Liaison  
Alicia Reese, Staff Liaison

**Our Mission: Seeking to be God's actor in the world, bringing people together to serve God and to have a greater impact collectively.**

Faith in Action strives to support organizations, near and far, that work toward systemic change by reducing barriers to justice and equity. Faith in Action seeks to engage congregants in sharing time, talent, and contributions. Early in 2023, Faith in Action team engaged in Saturday workshop sessions to discern core values and goals.

#### Housing Justice:

- Generous donations secured four new House to Home Kits for families entering stable housing through Housing Forward
- Continued support for United Power for Action and Justice; rebuilding neighborhoods on west and southside of Chicago
- Sharing 270 lunches with the residents in Interim Housing, Write Inn
- Many congregants served as volunteers and meal providers at the winter Emergency Shelter at St. Catherine & St. Lucy's
- Congregants attended New Moms 40th Anniversary Fundraising Gala on April 28th

#### Children:

- Clothing children and parents with warm winter coats from the Kids Kloset
- Loving with Books program: Over \$2000 raised in May 2023 for New Moms
- Nurturing children for school success with the help of volunteer tutors at Learning Edge
- Palestinian children reading library books (libraries established by Seraj Library Project)
- Syrian children and families getting help with housing, fuel, food through Compassion and Peace Society, NGO for National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon
- Alternative Christmas Store December 4, 11, and 18, as well as Ten Thousand Villages night on December 7. Congregants supported locally made or fair-trade items; proceeds went to several mission partners including Learning Edge, New Moms, Build, Beyond Hunger.

#### Food Justice:

- Many congregants volunteer with Beyond Hunger program housed in our church building
- CROP Walk on May 7th: First United sponsored a team that raised money and awareness for Church World Service; providing food locally and internationally
- Congregants donated funds to sponsor several families in the Holiday Food and Gift Basket Program (both Thanksgiving gift cards and Christmas gifts), Community of Congregations



## **Racial Justice:**

- Supporting LGBTQ justice at the Lighthouse Foundation of Chicagoland
- Continued support for our mission partners BUILD, United Power for Action and Justice

## **Waging Peace:**

- Continued research on Guns to Gardens Project in conjunction with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
- Submitted many legislative Witness Slips to influence Illinois legislative committees to support gun sense legislation; Protecting Illinois Communities Act
- Congregants volunteered at the Austin neighborhood's Mercy Garden of Peace and Healing, a space designated to offer serenity and healing to families of gun violence victims
- During June's Gun Violence Awareness month, First United led the community in a banner and lawn sign campaign "Imagine a World Without Gun Violence"
- Seeking peace on our streets through safe gun technology and responsible legislative action; supporting Safe Gun Storage in Oak Park
- Encouraging travel of four congregants to Israel/Palestine with Seraj Library Project (partially funded by Gebhardt Fund)
- Continued support for CRLN: Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America

## **Climate Change**

- Continued use of community solar power by First United
- Education and advocacy for the Oak Park Climate Action Plan
- Supported the One Earth Film Festival March 3-12

## **Migration Ministries**

- Continuing friendship with asylum-seeking family from Angola, supporting them with gifts after the birth of their daughter in May 2023

## **Middle East**

- Four congregants traveled to Israel and Palestine to visit our mission partner Seraj Library Project (partially funded by Gebhardt Fund)
- April 16 lunch and Seraj program to educate the congregation on Palestine, the military occupation there, and how Seraj libraries provides the community with books and resources

## **Christian Community**

- An active member of the Community of Congregations
- Support UCC and PCUSA global & US Missions
- Prison Ministry—began collaboration with Unity Temple in pen pal program with men and women incarcerated in Illinois

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

13

## FELLOWSHIP

Bobbie Kmiec  
Robertakmiec@comcast.net

Team Members  
Brenda Matson

Alicia Reese, Staff Liaison



In keeping with our community of care vision at First United, the Fellowship Team has been actively involved in providing opportunities for fellowship to our members and friends. Here are some highlights from the past year:

- Inaugural Fellowship Fair, September 25, 2022 was modeled after A Day in Our Village to invite members and the wider community to experience what First United Church has to offer through our teams and mission groups. Our second Fellowship Fair was held Sunday, September 17, 2023.
- Our Gathering Day tradition of post-worship root beer floats continued in 2022 and 2023.
- Two Lenten Soup Suppers were held on Wednesdays, March 8 and 22. We hope to add one on Ash Wednesday this year.
- Many celebrations and receptions were hosted, including a goodbye reception for Michael Surratt (9/18/22), Alicia Reese's Ordination/Installation reception (11/19/22), Sylvia Menninga memorial (5/7/22), year-end church-wide potluck picnic (5/21/23), goodbye reception for Mark Sudeith (7/30/23), welcome reception for Bobby Nguyen (8/6/23), goodbye reception for John Edgerton (8/13/23).

Many other groups exist in our church that are self-sustaining and do not require much oversight from the staff or Fellowship Team. These are largely volunteer-driven groups-some limited to certain age groups and others limited only by interest level. They live under the Fellowship Team banner so that they have a place in the church structure. Here are some of them:

**MIDPOINT** (40's and up) This group gathers for a holiday party each year.

**PRIMETIME** continues to sponsor fun social events every few months for those 60 and over (or even those close to it). In the last year we have had breakfasts outdoors at Al's Grill; a fall soup luncheon, complete with homemade soups and Don Lennie's homemade bread; a dinner that followed the love theme of the Stewardship campaign, and a Bastille Day picnic on the church lawn. Look for announcements in the church bulletin or Messenger Bell for upcoming events (Sher Spooner, Brenda Matson or Janet Haisman.)

**PFLAG OAK PARK** gathers every 4th Sunday from 3 to 5 p.m. in the church conference room to provide support, education and advocacy for LGBTQ families. Friends have the opportunity to meet in person or on Zoom. Guest speakers include film writers, health care professionals and political activists. Once again, our Labor Day weekend bake sale was a big success. PFLAG also marched in the Pride Parade this year. (Sandy Jefferson)

**DINNER AND A MOVIE** has met for over a decade to enjoy informal dinners from local restaurants, watch movies from a variety of genres, and partake



## FELLOWSHIP

in thoughtful conversations regarding all aspects of the film. Movies are chosen with great care to offer documentaries, independent films, musicals, dramas, and comedies. Dinner begins at 6 p.m. followed by the movie which starts at 6:30 p.m. (Ron Haas and Liz Swan)

Other groups might include Family Camp, the Women's Retreat, the Knitting Group, Fostering Connection and Support, and others organized by staff. We hope to continue to create and support opportunities for fellowship among members of First United Church of Oak Park.

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

15

---

## NEWCOMERS

Teri Omert, Chair  
tomert@comcast.net

### Team Members

Nancy Ball  
Cathy Cerniglia  
Adie Magnuson  
Brenda Matson  
Priscilla Sibley  
Diane Stephenson

Lynn Raducha, Council Liaison  
Lydia Mulkey, Staff Liaison

The Newcomers Team endeavors to extravagantly welcome potential new members to First United Church by providing opportunities to learn about the church and how to engage with our congregation. The team offers three sessions per year which provide the attendees with information about our beginnings, mission, and our future goals and aspirations. We learn about each other's spiritual journeys that have led us/them to First United. We discuss ways we have found to connect to others in the church and suggest ways that they may also do so.

This year we have doubled our team members adding three new members in January 2023.

We held new member classes in August, November, and April – which resulted in thirteen new adult members and seven children joining us. The curriculum has remained the same, but we improved the New Members information sheet and updated the Newcomers Field Guide.

We developed an audit tool to evaluate the experiences of first time visitors. Implementation is planned for late 2023 to early 2024. An evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of classes in helping new members integrate into FUCOP was also developed.

A Newcomers bulletin board with new member's pictures was created to better identify them to the congregation. We continue to place a short bio for each new member in the Messenger Bell.

The Newcomers team now wears gold buttons on their nametags on Sunday to identify them as persons to talk to in order to gain more information about First United.

The team participated in FUCOPs first Friendship Fair.

We were finally able to have a New Member Reunion Breakfast to which all new members since 2020 were invited. Nineteen families were invited. Five families responded yes for a total of 11 persons for breakfast. The purpose of the event was to check in with the new members, assess their integration into FUCOP and assist them with any needs.

In addition to continuing to offer classes three times a year and hold a new members reunion, our goals for next year will be to use the information gathered from the audit and the evaluation forms to improve the experiences of visitors and potential new members.

---

### PERSONNEL

Marsha Hubbuch, Chair  
cdamon@ameritechmedtech.com

#### Team Members

Bob Downs  
Ron Haas  
Chris Nied, Nursery School Liaison  
Martha Sorenson

Chris Damon, Council Liaison  
John Edgerton, Staff Liaison  
(until 8/2023)

The Personnel Team met ten times between July of 2022 and June of 2023. We also communicated via emails, phone, and shared reports.

Significant work of the Personnel Team over this past year included:

- Meeting with staff individually by phone, email or sometimes in-person to serve as liaisons in support of our staff
- Providing ongoing support and small thank you gifts for church staff
- Observing all staff annual reviews except for Nursery School staff and Lead Pastor, which are reviewed differently
- Co-conducting an exit interview with Lead Pastor John Edgerton instead of an annual review because he had previously announced that he was leaving First United
- Conducting an exit interview with departing organist, Michael Surratt
- Facilitating the medical leave and eventual departure of a custodian, which required seeking advice of an employment attorney. Because this hasn't been in the budget, we requested a new line-item to cover legal expenses, when needed
- Facilitating the hiring of a new custodian for evenings and another one for weekends
- Organizing an all-staff appreciation luncheon for First United Church and Nursery School staff in mid-April. In lieu of small gifts, we donated to the FUNS tuition assistance program in memory of a Nursery School parent and part-time staff member
- Participating in a search team and hiring of a new organist
- Supporting the Nursery School staff with facilities and personnel matters
- Helping to facilitate the call and ordination of Alicia Reese
- Proposing official recognition of Juneteenth as a paid holiday for staff
- Participating in Fellowship Fair
- Working with Shirley Kyle and John Edgerton to prepare the budget request for all church staff, with two new budget line-items for legal services and a weekend custodian

The Personnel Team has supported our dedicated team of new, current, and departing staff over this past year. Having Chris Nied as our Nursery School Liaison, Chris Damon as Council liaison, Martha Sorensen as the meeting notes reporter and John Edgerton on our team has been invaluable. We sincerely thank all of those who generously gave of their time and look forward to continuing our efforts.

---

## PLANNED GIVING

Gene and Ann Armstrong,  
Co-Coordinators  
geneann1113@yahoo.com

Team Members  
Stan Davis  
Anne Dickerson  
Linda Sandman  
Tom Wolford

First United's planned giving program is built on the premise that financial support of the church is a sacred act of worship and that a person's commitment to the church's ministry and mission can endure beyond his or her lifetime. Recognizing that our church and its worship, mission, and education programs stand on the work of the ministers, staff, and congregation members who have gone before us, and taking seriously Christ's call for us to give back a "measure" of ourselves, including our time, talents, and treasure, the Planned Giving Committee encourages members to include legacy gifts to the church in their estate plans.

During fiscal year 2023, (July 2022 – June 2023), we were delighted that the church was open for in-person worship so that we could resume meeting with new prospective planned giving donors and continue our conversations personally with those with whom we had already met. We are grateful to report that during this fiscal year, two new individuals or households informed the church that they have included a gift to First United in their estate plans.

Those who have let the church know that they have made this commitment are called "Kindred Spirits." As of June 30, 2023, living Kindred Spirits now include the 53 following families and individuals:

Anonymous (12)  
Leland ("Lee") and Mary Lou Anderson  
Gene L. and Ann H. Armstrong  
Marcia and Rick Ashton  
Jim Bailey  
Jane Barker and Melinda Haag  
Hank Bode and Susan Cartland-Bode  
Sara Giddings Bode  
John and Michelle Chapman-Rienstra  
Christopher Damon and Connie  
Henderson-Damon\*  
Marion Davis  
Stanley and Christine Davis  
Theodore and Joanne Despotos  
Bob Downs  
Marjorie Fallon  
Sara (Rickert) Faust  
Thomas D.\* and Carole A. Ferguson  
Hilda Fischer  
Bob and Marilyn Giles  
Stuart Gillette and Yvette Bouchard  
Bob\* and Janet Haisman

---

## PLANNED GIVING

Bud Hayes\* and Vickie Engelhardt  
Marsha Hubbuch  
Rosemary Irmis  
Sandy Jefferson  
Marilyn Kauffmann  
Lois Thiessen Love and Brian  
Thiessen Love  
John Lurain and Nell Lurain\*  
Allen and Georga Parchem  
Betty B. Peaslee and Donald E.  
Peaslee\*  
Dan and Karin Pietrini  
Naa Marteki Reed  
Kris and Connie Ronnow  
Jerry Sebesta  
Sallie and Mark Smylie  
Doug and Martha Sorenson  
Sara Stevenson and Mark Breen  
Michael Surratt  
Mary Sue Voth  
Richard Wheelock and Linda  
Sandman  
Thomas and Michele Wolford  
Herbert\* and Claudette Zobel

\*deceased

Planned gifts to the church, unless otherwise designated by the donor, are allocated (at the direction of Council) to either or both of the church's endowments, the Special Mission Endowment Fund and the General Endowment. Since 2010, when the present Planned Giving Committee was formed, First United has received gifts totaling \$618,621 from the estates of the following Kindred Spirits who are deceased:

Matthew Allen  
Barbara Ballinger  
Connie Henderson-Damon  
Edith Dennis  
Rosemary (Pat) Godfrey  
Rev. Julie Ruth Harley  
Janet and Raleigh Hegwood  
Irene W. Herrick  
Carol Kelm  
C. Vincent Long and Eleanor Davidson Long Charitable Trust



## PLANNED GIVING

Lynn McClure  
Jim McClure  
Ruth Peaslee  
Carolyn Poplett  
Vivian Soderdahl  
Paul Soderdahl

The Committee continued to build awareness of planned giving opportunities through *Messenger Bell* articles, reminders in E-Blasts, Sunday worship bulletins, and testimony from the pulpit. And on September 25, 2022 we were delighted to host our thirteenth annual Kindred Spirits Thank You brunch in person after two years of hosting it via ZOOM. It was a spirited and lively gathering – people were glad to be back together in person! Thanks to Georga and Al Parchem for their generosity in allowing us to use their home for this event.

### WORSHIP, MUSIC & THE ARTS

Laurie Jolioeur, Chair  
magistra.jolioeur@gmail.com

Monthly Meeting Team  
Caden Eckert  
Pedro Garcia-Alonso  
Cate Readling  
Paul Dickerson, Council Liaison

Friends of WMA  
Karin Pietrini  
Nina Roher  
Pete Todd

Worship, Music & the Arts is in an emergent chapter. We are reclaiming how we will devote our work in the interim time, welcoming new members who bring in new life perspectives and worship backgrounds. We developed a branch within WMA, called “Friends of WMA,” who serve in areas of worship and whose work does not necessitate attendance at the monthly meeting (although they are welcome).

Our monthly time together tries to balance who we are *being* with each other with what we are *doing* to serve. We are consciously evolving how we address the questions, “What are the spiritual needs of the congregation?” We welcome your perspective. Additionally, knowing the power of the arts and music to open our awareness and spirit, we are beginning to explore again how, in partnership with the Staff, the worship experience might be enhanced through the integration of a variety of art forms and music. Are there artists among us who would like to help?

We are creating a way to receive worship feedback and process it together. We are practicing how to be in meaningful conversation with people, building relationship in kind and respectful ways. Lastly, we sponsored a pilot Mindful Experience outside in August, including individual and collective meditation. It drew interest then and also for the future. Maybe we will sponsor something similar in the future.

### YOUTH MINISTRY

Julia Huff, Chair  
magistra.jolicoeur@gmail.com

#### Team Members

Ted Barnes  
Mark Breen  
John Chapman-Rienstra  
Kathryn Heavey  
Connie Hill



Quest spent a conscientious year in discernment that culminated in a wonderful celebration for the Questors on June 11, 2023 with Confirmation. Quest is thankful for the leadership of Alicia Reese and Art Spooner as well as the opportunities to collaborate and bond with their FIFs (Friends-In-Faith)

FUJI & FUSH (our junior high and high school youth groups) had a solid post COVID return with weekly gatherings and the return of meals (once a month, provided by families). They participated in many traditional youth group activities such as retreats and lock-ins. Additionally youth enjoyed apple picking and families opened their homes for the youth group Holiday celebrations. The much loved Cookie Bake returned this year with the addition of a brand new cookie as well! FUSH also saw the return of Work Camp and traveled to Sunset Gap in Cosby, TN for a week in July. Some of the activities that the youth participated in were working at the Food Pantry, meal packing building a porch, painting, digging a water trough, as well as some free time to enjoy one another's company. FUSH raised funds for material costs through stock sales, Parent's Night Out, Bingo Night, and a car wash.





# First United Church of Oak Park

An open community united in love & justice

848 Lake Street, Oak Park, IL 60301 | 708-386-5215  
[firstunitedoakpark.com](http://firstunitedoakpark.com) | [facebook.com/firstunitedoakpark](https://facebook.com/firstunitedoakpark)