

For Immediate Release

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NAPERVILLE CHURCH WISHES FAREWELL TO PASTOR OF 14 YEARS

Naperville, IL - First Congregational United Church of Christ in Naperville will celebrate the ministry of Rev. Greg Schneck-Skiba on August 14th as he steps down after 14 years of service. A special worship service and celebration party is being planned.

Rev. Skiba came at a difficult time in the life of the 178-year-old church. After a 1995 congregational vote to move the church from its downtown Naperville location didn't fully succeed, a large group of congregants left to start a new church, and another group, including the pastor, left altogether. Over the next few years, interim ministers worked with the remaining congregants to help them reclaim the church's identity and instill a sense of strength, after which time Rev. Skiba was called to serve as the full-time pastor.

Rev. Skiba's background and beliefs closely matched those of First Congregational Church: he had served churches in South Africa and the metropolitan Chicago area, worked for the national Christian anti-hunger organization Bread for the World, and served as director of the Justice and Peace network for the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

He immediately felt connected with the church members who served on the search committee, and was excited to be a part of new growth and opportunity, and to encourage new leaders to emerge. In addition to the church's strong commitment to Christian theological and biblical tradition, he was drawn to the church's commitment to peace and social justice, and its open and affirming status—promising a safe place for people of diverse backgrounds to share in their faith.

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Several years into his ministry, Rev. Skiba played an integral part in a congregational-wide initiative to increase attendance during Sunday worship and to take care of the historic building that the church has called home for more than 100 years. He worked with lay leaders of the church in launching a major capital campaign to raise \$750,000. The campaign has a three-part purpose: increase the level of missions giving, provide needed upkeep and maintenance of the building, and call a second pastor to minister specifically to children and families. The successful campaign not only reached but surpassed the goal by more than \$80,000, allowing First Congregational Church to move forward with an emerging sense of God's spirit working for and with the congregation.

Upon reflection, Rev. Skiba considers the one defining moment for the church over the past 14 years as the Sunday in May, 2005 when the results of the capital campaign were announced. After many months of hard work and discernment, the unveiling that pledged dollars were in significant excess of an already lofty goal created an overwhelming sense of joy, surprise and almost disbelief among the congregation. The announcement instilled a realization that a united effort could and would bring hope and vitality for the future of the church.

In 2008, the church entered into its 175th anniversary with the theme, "Awaken to the Promise: Listen, Imagine, Ignite." With guidance from Rev. Skiba, the congregation joined together on a year-long journey to Listen to God's Still-Speaking voice, Imagine new possibilities of who God was calling them to be, and Ignite in them the Holy Spirit as they broadened their mission and ministry in the community and the world. The anniversary served as a fulcrum year and prepared the church to launch into the next 175 years as a people of faith, with a lasting place of ministry and a strong sense of God's promise.

Now, after a two-year transitional period of working in a co-ministerial role alongside Rev. Mark Winters, his successor, Rev. Skiba will complete his time at First Congregational Church at the end of August. He plans to explore short-term interim ministry for churches in transition.

When asked what he enjoyed most during his time at the Naperville church, he replied, "the

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intellectual stimulation I get from being part of a church where people think with open minds about God's purpose and participation among us, and where folks continually look for ways God is still making an impact in the universe." He also indicated the joy he received in being a part of faith formation for many people by teaching adult education classes.

His hope for the future of First Congregational Church is more of an expectation, that "the people in leadership will continue to grow and be committed to ministry and mission, and to each other; that the church will continue to be a place of extravagant welcome to all, especially those of diverse backgrounds; and, the people will hold true to their enthusiasm for what God is doing through them so they can continue to be instruments of God's creation."

First Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Naperville began worshipping together as a congregation in 1832, making it the oldest organized church in DuPage County and the second-oldest Congregational church in Illinois. It has been located on its present site in downtown Naperville since 1846. The church became part of the United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1961.

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