

Church profile

Name of church: First Congregational United Church of Christ

Religious affiliation: United Church of Christ

Neighborhood: Historic Downtown Naperville, 25 E. Benton and on the web at www.loveandjustice.org

Size and character of congregation: 350 members and growing.

We are open and affirming, which means that we welcome all as we celebrate the diversity of our world. We are a Just Peace congregation. We work continuously to make clear to ourselves, and others, the radical message of love and justice preached by Jesus. At First Congregational UCC we strive to be accepting, caring, and non-judgmental as we affirm God's presence in our midst and in the world. Our worship services and programs enable us to go out into the world to do God's work serving others. Mission is what we do. We are a progressive congregation and are theologically liberal.

Pastors: Rev. Greg Schneck-Skiba and Rev. Katie Morrison

Schedule of services: Sunday 9:30 AM

Biggest turnout: Our church hosted the two senatorial interfaith candidate forums in October 2004 where Barak Obama and Alan Keyes spoke about issues of concern to the interfaith community. The sanctuary was overflowing with people as were two additional rooms which were set up.

Biggest wish-list item: Wonderfully loving people to join and enhance our dynamic family of faith.

Biggest issue facing church: Figuring out how to make sure people know about our unique church and extravagant welcome.

Most memorable service: With a history like ours, there have been many memorable services. In the past year, two related services come to mind. The first was a service planned by the youth and their advisors to describe their experiences from their work trip to support the work of the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi MS. They had painted houses and worked in both a soup kitchen and a thrift shop. This service was the day before hurricane Katrina hit demolishing a quarter mile swath across the entire Mississippi coastline, leaving nothing of the homes where they worked. The second service was one planned by a group of adults who had gone on a work trip back to Biloxi in February 2006. They shared their profound experiences of reaching out to neighbors in need. Our group joined with adults from sister churches St. Matthew's UCC of Wheaton and First Congregational UCC of St. Charles for this project worked to help clean up from the hurricane.

Proudest moment:

Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has been airing commercials on the extravagant welcome we have for all people, NO EXCEPTIONS. In particular since we are an Open and Affirming church, this means we welcome all regardless of race, gender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender

people. Many people have been alienated by mainstream churches. We hope that people will give our church a try. Many people come from various church backgrounds and find comfort and community among us. Unfortunately, the major networks refuse to air the most recent commercial "Rejecter Pew". <http://www.loveandjustice.org/godisstillspeaking/index.htm>

A volunteer you'd like to highlight:

It is impossible to identify one volunteer, because our members are so active and volunteer a lot. One program we should point out is that our church invites the homeless people of the area for shelter and meals on Wednesday nights. Different churches provide food and staffing each week. We find that this mission activity is one where we serve and learn as well. We are an official PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) site.

Programs offered:

Our church is an active, busy place. We have a vibrant youth ministry for all ages. We have programs for youth in grades 6-12 which include youth fellowship, service projects, musical youth ensembles and plays, mission work trips, and a two-year confirmation curriculum. Youth have worship leadership roles on the first Sunday of each month. Our Christian Education programs have a strong lay led adult education component in addition to the education of children. Youth are welcomed to our adult education programs and enjoy them. There are various women's and men's groups as well as other groups such as the "Full Nesters" (parents with children at home) and Open Table (GLBT members & friends).

We shelter and feed the homeless in a program called PADS, run support groups, and join in prayer chains. We support food banks, family shelters, and hospice care. We lead recycling drives, and coordinate blood drives. We sell Fair Trade coffee and tea at coffee hour every Sunday. We run church-wide work projects such as a river cleanup and painting walls at Little Friends. We walk together to support the CROP walk. We also have an active Stephen Ministry program consisting of trained lay people who provide one on one spiritual care to members of our congregation who are in a difficult place in their lives. We also host a number of programs beyond the scope of our church – our church building is a community meeting resource.

Most prized treasure:

God's love discovered in Jesus' life and teachings and in our ministry with each other. Also, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, people have given great gifts to our church in the form of beautiful stained glass windows which give expression to God's beautiful creation. Most of the windows were dedicated with the sanctuary in May, 1906. Some of the givers include Naperville's founding families: Nichols, Martins, Scotts, Royces, Barnards, Goodrichs, Codys, Earls and Cramptons.

In one sentence what makes your church special?

As the oldest chartered church in DuPage County, chartered in 1833, we have a long history and commitment of being on the leading edge by adopting strong positions on social issues, such as abolition, grass roots recycling, welcoming gay and lesbian people, opening our doors every Wednesday evening for homeless people to find shelter, demonstrating against wars, and promoting fair trade policies.

Year the church was built (email or send photo to address below): Our church the corner of Benton and Center streets was built in 1906. We are celebrating 100 years in our worship home this year. This is the third church building built on the land donated to our congregation by Morris Sleight.

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Profiles are scheduled on a space-available basis and in order received. Email responses to thesun@suburbanchicagonews.com. Fax responses to (630) 416-5163. Mail responses to The Naperville Sun, Church Profile, 1500 W. Ogden Ave., Naperville, IL 60540, attn Wendy Fox Weber. Sorry, but profiles cannot be taken over the phone. For more information call Wendy Fox Weber at 630-416-5135 or mail or email her at the above address, attention Wendy Fox Weber.