

# BE THE CHURCH

purpose + passion + love





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# The Struggle Is Real

*Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them. -Ecclesiastes 9:11-12*

A well maintained lawn. A white picket fence. Two point five children who attend a good school. A charming downtown filled with trendy restaurants and boutiques. Life is good here.



In relatively affluent communities across America, churchgoers and people of faith seem more concerned with other people's troubles than their own. In a sense, that's a good thing; Christ teaches us to put our neighbor - even those living in a different zip code - first. And in communities where gun violence is someone else's problem, where

poverty is someone else's problem, where immigration is someone else's problem, we often think that people here don't have any problems worth mentioning. "First world problems," we call them. Nothing to see here, folks.

Seth hails from the shores of New England with a Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School. He preaches "unusual" sermons – he'll take that as a compliment – and also serves as head of staff at FCCGE.

The Reverend's call to do God's work came when he realized that his pursuit of divine mysteries and his fascination with the secrets of the universe might be pointing him towards a career in the ministry, a deeply rewarding vocation that is also largely devoid of manual labor. Seth aims to cultivate a space where all are welcome, and where folks can grow closer to God and one another

He lives in Wheaton with his wife Angela and their two boys Ethan and Leviathan.

**REV. SETH CAREY**

But as a pastor in Glen Ellyn, I know that's not true. In just the last couple of years, people have come to me carrying terrible burdens. Cancer. Mental illness. Suicide. Sexual Assault. Parents and siblings who have died. In my tenure, I have seen three children lost to tragic circumstances. Last year, two of our staff members lost their husbands within a month of each other. People sometimes use the phrase, "the struggle is real" to ironically describe first world problems. But even here, in quaint Glen Ellyn, the struggle is very real indeed.

The church does a lot of amazing things for people in need. We house approximately 2600 homeless guests every year. We have lifted over twenty families out of poverty via our partnership with Bridge Communities. We've given thousands of gifts to disadvantaged children at Christmas over the decades. We've raised hundreds of children in the faith, dozens of whom have gone on to serve in innumerable ways.

But we've also helped people right here. We've been here for one another with pastoral care, counseling, hospital visits, and meals delivered to their homes. We have been here with Sunday morning hugs and phone calls and greeting cards, with prayers and with memorial services and with the simple question, "Are you OK?"

The church exists for many purposes. But it's in the depths of personal tragedy that I realize just how important God's love is. And that is why I give, probably more than any other reason; given my own personal struggles, I know how important this work is. And it's not just the work of the clergy. It is the work of the church.

So let's be the church, together.

### **Prayer**

Merciful God, hold those who struggle in the palm of your hand. May the church be their sanctuary, and may you be their solace. Amen.



## SYLVIA RODEE

Sylvia Rodee joined FCCGE in 2000 and she has volunteered in almost all aspects of the community including teaching 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Pre Confirmation, serving on the Annual Fund and Capital Campaigns, as well as ushering and working with the Kitchen Chix. She currently services as the Vice Chair of the Connections Committee. She lives in Wheaton with her husband, Tom and son, Spencer. Sylvia works for Fifth Third Bank as a Treasury Management Product Manager. Sylvia enjoys cooking, playing games – all sorts!, and going to movies – and each year attempts to see all the Oscar Nominated Best Pictures before the Academy Award

# The Legacy Left Us The Legacy We Leave

When I was active in my high school youth group, "I Am the Church" by Avery & March was a tune we sang often- in caravans of cars as we traveled on mission trips, in the annual Sr High service, and on youth retreats. It is an upbeat, sunny tune - just the sort that was popular in the 70's as churches were trying to attract and keep younger families- and to keep the youth like me involved.

While I loved singing this hymn, and recall the turn and (most of) the words from memory - I don't think I really understood what it meant to "Be the Church" when I learned the words over 40 years ago.

Thank God others did.

Ellen Armstrong understood what it meant to "Be the Church." She came to our house to help with cleaning and gently helped me understand that the family portraits featuring my mom might not be the most welcoming sign in the living room for our new step-mother.

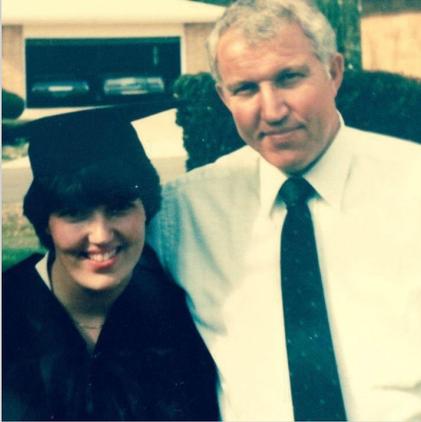
I am the Church, You are the Church, We  
are the Church together

- Avery & March



# I don't think I really understood what it meant to "Be The Church"... Thank God others did.

Marlon Gerber understood what it meant to "Be the Church." He volunteered at "Loaves and Fishes", our local food pantry and always had a hug for me when I saw him. (And he still does to this day!)



And my father understood what it meant to "Be the Church." Whether he was teaching Sunday school to recalcitrant middle schoolers, visiting house bound members for conversation and prayer, or joining with a few other to provide a gift of funds to a fellow member who was out of work and having difficulty making ends meet; he understood the gifts of our time are as important as our gifts of treasure- and sometimes even more difficult to give.

In the more than 20 years that I have been a member here at FCCGE, I have been blessed to be both servant and served. I have delivered meals to families after hospital stays and other difficulties; and I have received meals myself. I have helped organize Church Dinners from 100th Anniversary Picnics to Ally Church Dinners; and I have enjoyed the work of others as a guest at church dinners. I have taught Sunday School classes and I have been blessed with an army of volunteers like Steve Jungling, Sarah Waterloo, Debbie and Jesse White, who taught my son. I have served PADs breakfasts and washed PADs laundry and cleaned PADs- and have been blessed to live in a community where we have a safety net for those in need. I can tell you, I get as much out of serving as I do when I am served.

In Ecclesiastes 3:12 the Bible tells us that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and good while they live. I think it might be a cause and effect relationship- if you do good for others, then you will find happiness in your own life.

The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people... (Avery & March)

## **Prayer**

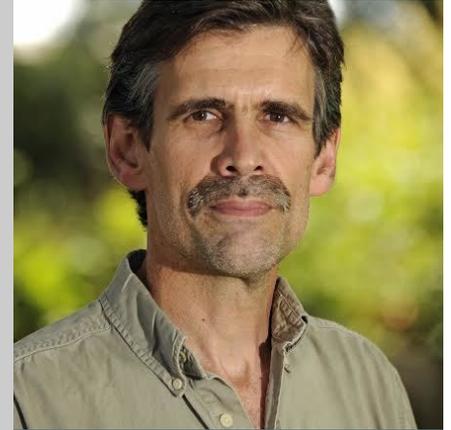
God make us all into your church. May I search my heart for the gifts you have given my and the ways you call me to serve you faithfully. Amen

# Being the Church of Belonging

“Church,” for me, is both a particular concrete place, and an enormous idea.

In the broad sense, it is a closely related community of Belonging, of transforming relationships where everyone is included, and contributes through their own individual *response abilities*. Church is the place where our *being* and our *longings* converge. This holds for congregations that are small or large, wealthy or poor, and in the city or suburb or country. “Being church” means creating a “Belonging church,” where everyone is invited and included. This is an idea that the United Church of Christ understands well.

Many years ago, my father was a UCC minister in a small Iowa town. That church was a deeply flawed and profoundly beautiful community of farmers and mechanics and school teachers and salesmen who worked hard and took care of each other amid the joy and grief in the routines of daily life.



**TOM FATE**

Is a writer and teacher who lives in Glen Ellyn.

**Church is the place where are being and our longing converge.**





Like FCCGE, it was a church whose Being was defined by the Belonging. My father, like most ministers, struggled to balance his roles as both pastor and prophet. Was he a patient seer or an impatient seeker? Sometimes he would walk *in front* of his flock, passionately condemning injustice or espousing some new theological insight as a mandate for action. But most of the time he walked *behind* the flock, wading through all their shit and assisting anyone who got trampled or left behind. The essential skill was not speaking but listening—an aptitude that I learned is related to prayer, to listening for God amid the routines of everyday life.

I mention this, because our three children have learned similar lessons about the basic values of community and responsibility and prayer/listening from the pastors and other leaders at FCCGE. I don't know anywhere else where they (we) could have gotten such a meaningful faith-filled education in such a supportive community. It is a church that embodies the great Belonging that God makes possible.

### **Prayer**

God help us to find piece in our being as you created us and may we listen to our longings and they ways they are calling us to be your people in the world. Amen.

*"The essential skill was not speaking but listening- an aptitude that I learned is related to prayer, to listening for God amid the routines of everday life."*

# From Scarcity to Abundance



*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

12 Mark 41-44

## KELLEY KALINICH

Kelley has the honor of being a life-long member of FCCGE and currently serves as the Moderator. A retired educator, she is a full-time parent to her two sons, Grange and Grayson. When the boys are at school, she is a volunteer at the Glen Ellyn Public Library Foundation, Providence Englewood Charter School in Chicago, the Illinois Master Gardener program and takes time for fun playing tennis, paddle tennis, golf, gardening, painting and reading.

I don't remember the exact first time I heard this Bible passage, but I do recall being comforted by these words in my early elementary school years. The idea that the contributions from me, a young child, could make a difference was very empowering.

My early years were during the Vietnam War. I had friends who had family members who were serving in this war. I vividly remember our class putting together a care package for one of my classmate's uncles. The War was everywhere in the news and the thought of someone I knew of serving in the war, caused me great worry. So, when I learned of a way I could contribute to help support the Prisoners of War (POW), I jumped at the chance.

The cost was \$2.50. I grabbed money from my piggy bank and taped it to a piece of paper, where I wrote down my intent for the money to be used to support a POW. A few weeks later, I received a nickel-plated bracelet with the name of my POW engraved on it. I wore the bracelet every day. Every night as I lay my head on my pillow, I would pray for my POW, as well as any of the soldiers in Vietnam.

# While our church needs to have the finances to support our day to day functions, our gifts go beyond our church doors.

For many of the five million people who contributed to this POW cause, they never knew what happened to their POW, as this was long before the Internet and our ability to “look up” such information. But I was fortunate. In the summer of 1975, when the Chicago Tribune was delivered to our house, right there on the front page, was my POW! Today, I don’t recall his name, but I remember looking at my bracelet and seeing how it matched his name. I do remember his face. I was so happy.

Most the time, we don’t really know how our specific gifts to First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn have an impact.....or do we? During the Pilgrim Hall renovations, one of our members recognized the need for a new ice-maker in the kitchen, but understood it was not part of the renovation budget. She stepped up and said, “I would like to pay for the ice-maker purchase.” Meals are provided for people who have experienced illness or trying times. Our missions, both old and new, depend on our support. We might not meet those who directly benefit, but there is no doubt our support makes a difference.

While our Church needs to have the finances to support our day to day functioning, our gifts go beyond our Church doors. A big part of our role in the world community, is to make sure we are taking care of one another. The amount of what we give is not as important as the heart in which we give it, just like the widow in the temple.

## Prayer:

God help me to as the widow gave - knowing you are working in ways seen and unseen. Amen.



# Being The Church Globally and Locally

I smile whenever I pass our outdoor sign proclaiming us to be an open and affirming church. This value is detailed in every bulletin, repeated in every Sunday service, and actively practiced in the many activities sponsored by our church. In everyday life I try to observe our congregation's basic Christian principle that people need to care for others, regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status or personal beliefs. This value is especially relevant now in our divided country, where even faith groups can be seen isolating others simply because they have different ethnicity, beliefs or sexual orientations. I am proud that First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn never contributes to such divisions. Rather, our church community seeks to help the disadvantaged, build relationships with each other, and heal divisions in society.



## TOM RAUSCH

My wife Debbie and I have been members since the early 1980's. Our two children Tim Rausch and Sarah Bush and their families live close by and we enjoy being grandparents and part of their lives. I have had two productive and interesting careers, first as a nuclear engineer with Exelon/ComEd, and then as a technologist and radiation safety officer performing high-tech imaging for patients being diagnosed with or treated for cancer. I very recently

In everyday life I try to observe our congregation's basic Christian principle that people need to care



On Rally Day September 2018, with my full retirement looming, I was looking for opportunities to serve. The Environmental Ministry Team activities matched my interests, so I signed up. At that time, I was taking an online class on the science of climate change simply because it interested me. Coincidentally, the EMT was preparing to host a discussion and author presentation on Rev. Jim Antal's book Climate Church Climate World. The reverend's book references the Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) and it's work on a bill to substantially decrease fossil fuel's impact on climate change by gradually adding a fee to the cost of such fuels. Businesses and individuals are then incented to use less fossil fuels and revenue generated is returned to citizens as a dividend. Several studies show this approach to be both effective and socially just.

I am now an active CCL member, working via grass roots and "grass tops" outreach, lobbying, and letter writing to bring about non-partisan action on what is arguably the world's biggest moral crisis. Of particularly interest to me is conveying to others three aspects of climate change: the issue is urgent, it is socially unjust, and we aren't helpless-- by acting together, we can make a difference. This is how I am trying to "be the church", both locally and globally.

### Prayer

God help me to "be the church" within my heart, within my home, within my community, and within the world. Amen

**This is how I am trying to "be the church", both locally and globally.**

**For as you have done unto the least of these you have done unto me**  
**Matthew 25:48**



# Teaching Generosity

I was recently asked whether we give our children (ages 12, 10, 7) a weekly allowance to which I responded "No, we've been meaning to for ages, but haven't started yet because they don't need money for much."

Yet, as I said these very words, another truth rang out in my own ears. I realize that in not providing them an allowance, we are also depriving them of the lesson of saving, the responsibility of spending (wisely), and the joy of giving.

For my husband Tim and me, we give with joy to FCCGE's annual fund because we believe in the good works that our church does in relation to PADS and Bridge Communities as well as the many ministries that address injustices in our community and world. We also strongly believe that the music, worship, education and fellowship that occur within the walls of our church fills our heart and soul and provides us more than any amount of money could.

Teach your children in the way they should go: and when they are older they will not depart from it.

Proverb 22



## HOPE RODINE

Hope has been an active member of the church for 8 years and has served on the Connections Committee, Church Council, Annual Fund Committee and as an usher. She loves participating in Soul Sisters as well a small group where she has been able to connect with other members of the church. As a mentor for FCCGE's Bridge Communities' family she experienced tremendous joy and fulfillment as she helped a family understand and manage their finances so that they were able to transition homelessness to homeownership. She also enjoys volunteering for PADS with her daughter for the summer shifts.

We were... depriving them of the lesson of savings, the responsibility of spending (wisely), and the joy of giving.

One of our greatest wishes as parents is that we raise our children to have similar beliefs and values. We hope that as we begin to provide allowance to our children they will come to trust in God's abundance and understand the impact that their giving can have not only for the world around them but on their spirit.

### **Prayer**

God may I live in a way that reflects and teaches of your love and generosity.

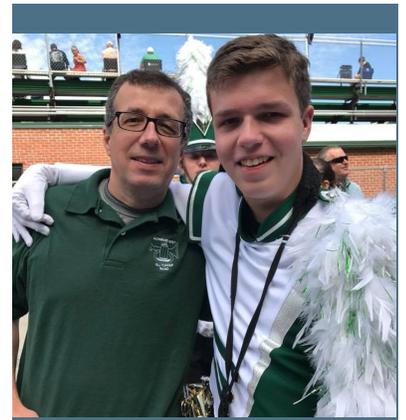


# Where + What's The Church

Our church is not the bricks and mortar located halfway up Forest.

People occasionally ask me “where do you go to church?” I answer First Congregational and, if met with the question of “where’s that?”, describe FCCGE as the “one halfway up Forest.” This is technically true. Further, the answer often leads to a discussion of the architecture and history of our beautiful structure.

While I love our building and I am proud of all we are doing to preserve it so that this place where we gather will be here for generations to come, our Church is not the bricks and mortar located halfway up Forest. Instead, our Church is us—its members. This includes those who came before us and those who will come after. Indeed, in the Bible “Church” is a translation of the Greek word “ecclesia” which literally means “assembly,” “congregation” or “meeting.”



**TED HARMAN**

Is a lawyer, trivia buff and sports fan. I have been married to Stephanie for thirty years. They have three children, Kendall, Danny and Jaime. They started attending FCCGE in 1999 and became members in 2000.



Our congregation is not an inanimate object or some amorphous organization. We are part of a collective living, breathing and functioning organism with each of us having a role to play.

Our congregation is not an inanimate object or some amorphous organization. We are part of a collective living, breathing and functioning organism with each of us having a role to play in sustaining our collective body and helping that body serve its purpose in the World. While we receive thought-provoking wisdom and guidance from the pulpit and other staff-directed programs, through our communal worship and fellowship, we help guide and support each other on our individual spiritual faith journeys and the struggles and joys of this life. We each bring our individual talents, treasures and perspectives to the Church (i.e. each other) and together we are stronger. To me, "Being the Church" means giving myself over to being part of the collective—both offering what I can and being open to receiving the love, support and comfort which come back to me.

In addition to supporting each other, we are called upon to act for others and make this World a better, kinder, more humane and safer place. I am amazed by what of all our members do, either collectively or individually, through large and small acts to protect our Earth and its inhabitants, particularly the marginalized and the powerless. Being the Church means doing these things not for the recognition or prestige that they might bring to us, but rather as cheerful servants to a greater good.

### Prayer

God may I do good for you not for notice but because of how my life and heart are changed in the doing. Amen.



# We are the hands and feet of Christ

*I see so much of this call to serve within our congregation, so many who embody Christ in our community and around the world*

## 1 Peter 4:10

Each one should use whatever gift [they] have received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.



**KATHY BAYERT**

I have often heard members of the church referred to as "the hands and feet of Christ." Attributed to St. Teresa of Avila, she describes our responsibilities as members of the Body of Christ quiet simply. Through us, Christ can serve the disaffected, those in need, the voiceless, and the homeless. We are called to be the hands that offer a hot meal, the feet that march for justice, the voice that speaks for those who have been silenced, and the body that enfolds the sacred and lonely in a warm embrace.

One of my earliest memories of being the church was in the early 1970's. I watched as my mother prepared meals for a family of Vietnamese refugees who had recently settled in our community. Our congregation provided furniture, clothing, food, and my mother brought me long to play with the children. Laughter and a game of tag can transcend any language barriers.

I see so much of this call to serve within our congregation, so many who embody Christ in our community and around the world.

Kathy Bayert and her family have been members at FCCGE for over 13 years. She is active in the PADS ministry and is a small group leader for Senior High Youth Fellowship.

It is inspiring to see the work that we individually, and as a congregation, accomplish. And at the same time, it is humbling to see all the work that remains. All we can really ask, as members of the one Body, is to respond to a call to serve with a willing heart and the many gifts we have been given

### Prayer

Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which we walk to do good, yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has not body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world-  
St Teresa of Avila\*

\*Attributed to St Teresa of Avila, but possibly written by Mark Guy Pearse and Sarah Elizabeth Rowntree



Christ has no hands but yours.

# Unfinished Products



Let's start by suggesting that there is no single way in which people can "be the church". From where I sit, the very foundation of our church is that we celebrate the journey and not necessarily the destination. This what makes a church so very different from the many non-profits that daily carry out important work designed to help our neighbors and the larger community. To me being the church involves a bit of a struggle. None of us are a finished product. Every day we make choices that mold how we develop. There is nothing passive about this. It's about actively engaging and making conscious choices to be better people. To me, the greatest gift from God is the opportunity every day to be a better person and recognizing God's grace forgiving us when we don't fully take advantage of this opportunity.



## RICK MATOON

Rick and Jane have been members of FCCGE for 16 years and their son 18 year old son Charlie was confirmed as a member in 2016. Rick has served as a moderator, treasurer, annual fund team member and is proud to have been an usher for most of his time at the church. Rick's day job is as an economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

Being the church involves a bit of struggle.

This is where the church comes in. We all need a guide in this development process. A great church (like ours) challenges us to apply the lessons from scripture into our modern world and daily lives. This guidance isn't like a recipe. You don't just add certain ingredients and come out a finished product. Rather it is a guidance that each of us has to interpret in our own way. At times these ideas will be uncomfortable or even painful and sometimes they may be joyful or even funny but they must be engaged with actively for a person to develop. This guidance sustains us on our spiritual journey but the path of that journey will be different for each of us. Even the pace will differ. Sometimes I feel like I am sprinting ahead full of hope and revelation about how I can grow into God. Other times I am inching along or even walking in place. The key is that I need to be listening and watching for opportunities to engage. The bottom line however is that the only way this process of growth works is if you make participating in the church and your spiritual development a priority.

Finally "Being the Church" means that you recognize your responsibility to make sure that others can take this journey. Let's make sure that the doors to First Congregational are always open.

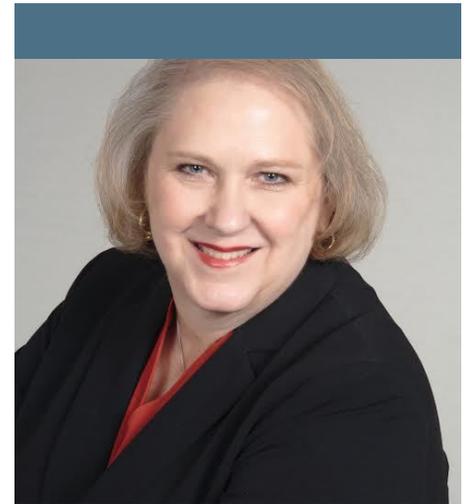
### Prayer

God may we be a church not just for our own needs but for the needs of folks who need your radical love. May we open our hearts beyond what we know and what we've done to imagine how we could live your radical welcome more abundantly.

**"Being the Church"  
means that  
you  
recognize  
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journey**



# Part of Something Bigger



**JACKIE MCCARTHY**

Jackie McCarthy is Assistant Moderator and a member of the Music Makers Ministry and Choir at FCCGE. She has worked in non-profits and corporate communications her entire career and is currently National Workplace Services & Security Leader for Ernst & Young. She lives in St. Charles, IL, and in her spare time loves reading and making jewelry.

Instead of comparing our lot with that of those who are more fortunate than we are, we should compare it with the lot of the great majority of our fellow men. It then appears that we are among the privileged.

Helen Keller

When I count my blessings, I know I am among the privileged. I am privileged to be a part of this Church community and grateful to be among the leaders helping to guide and counsel the workings of this Church.

When I first came here 10 years ago, I had never been in a choir before and I couldn't read music. But they welcomed me in. I had never had to learn a separate voice part before, like an Alto or Tenor. It was difficult at first because when you sing just one part, it doesn't even sound like a song. But when all the parts come together, that's when something miraculous happens. All the different parts make the song a whole.



Every time I walk into worship to lift my voice to God in song and prayer I feel the love and community of this place. It fills me with a deep sense of belonging and gratitude. This Church has been a literal Sanctuary for me at times and is a place I know I can be myself as I learn and grow closer to God. I know that Church isn't the only place to be with God, but I believe Church is the best place to learn how to be with God everywhere else.

To me, being the church means being part of something bigger than myself and welcoming others to feel that same sense of connection and belonging. Whether it's the music, sermons, prayers or just being together, when two or more are gathered in His name, we are the Church.

#### **Prayer**

God may we lift our voices in prayer- praise- protest- may we lift our voices to seek justice- give comfort- and tell of our faith. Amen

To me, being the church means being part of something bigger than myself and welcoming others to feel that same sense of connection and belonging.



# Lessons From My Grandmother

Every contact you have with another human being is an opportunity to reveal God's love

When my grandmother passed away in 2016 she left a journal with a collection of thoughts and experiences that she wanted to share with her grandchildren. I treasure this journal and appreciate the wisdom articulated within its pages. One of the most influential passages talks about living in service to God. She writes, "Every contact that you have with another human being is an opportunity to reveal God's love for them just by the way you respond to them, maybe by listening attentively to them, putting your hand on their shoulder, a kind word, or even just a smile. Better yet, a hug. I like knowing that I can serve God in such simple ways."



## KEVIN MERTZ

Kevin lives in Glen Ellyn. He is married to Jennifer and father to Spencer, Samantha, and Simon. He works for a large not-for-profit company in financial services. He loves music and to travel and is happy to have found a faith community in FCGE.





It certainly is an empowering realization that you can serve God in such simple ways. When I reflect on what it means “to be the church” I gravitate toward this idea of a commitment to revealing God’s love in all your daily interactions. These acts carry a beauty that comforts, builds community, inspires, and can help to create purpose.

I aspire to be present in this way, striving to always look for ways to show God’s love as a husband, as a father, as a son, as a sibling, as a member of our church, and as someone that shares the earth with all living things. Yet, revealing God’s love to all you encounter, is something I fail at all the time and is no easy task. At a minimum it requires one to be acutely present and invested in the well-being of all those you interact with. Still, even if I am able to be present in this way a fraction of the time it makes me feel more connected to those around me and to God.

### **Prayer**

God may I do simple acts with great love. Amen.

**Striving to look for ways to show God's love as a husband,  
as a father, as a son, as a sibling, as a member of our  
church, and as someone that shares the earth with all living  
things.**

# A Song of Gratitude

Our Church has been and continues to be a welcoming place for all and those different from what may be considered normal.

An inspiration for me is the passage in Romans chapter 12:

"We are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body.....So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't."



**TOM PULVER**

Tom and his wife Karen have been part of the FCCGE community for years. Tom has served the church in a variety of ways and can be found most Sundays shaking hands and passing out bulletins as our head usher.

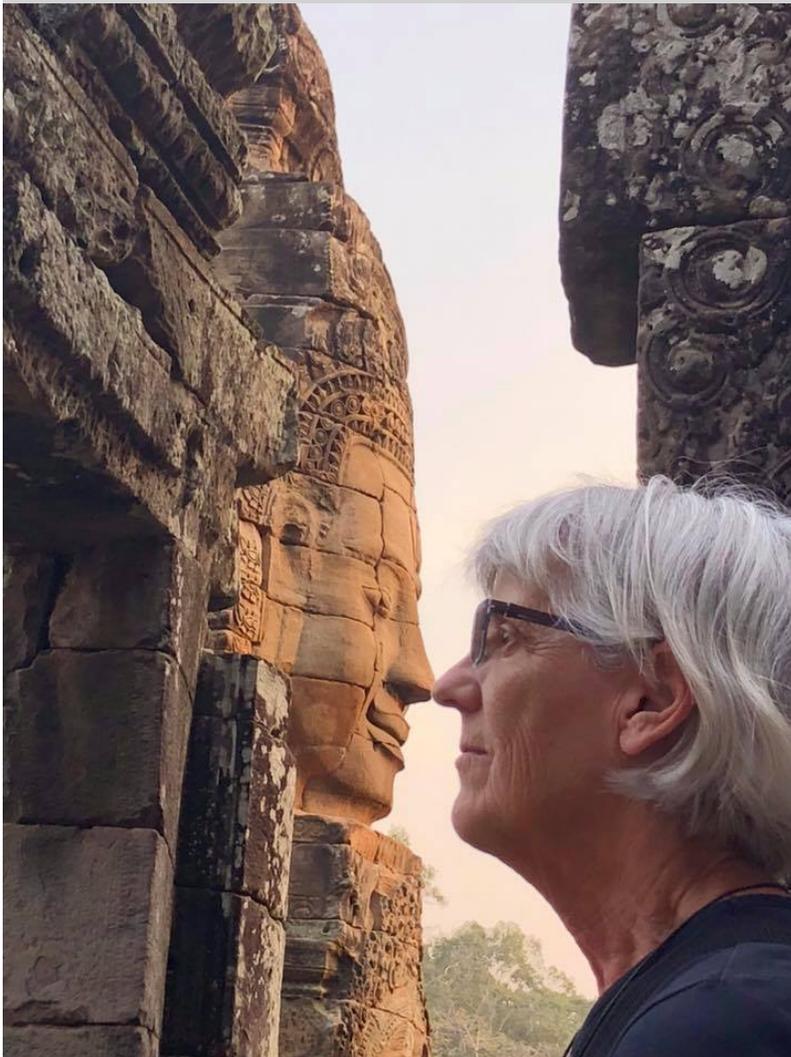


This has been a guide for me to use my skills where they may be useful and appreciate the contributions of others as they conduct the good work that I cannot. I have never been invited to sing a solo (a wise move by our musical directors) and you won't see me presenting an inspiring soliloquy from the pulpit, but I can smile and hand out bulletins as an usher.

Karen and I have had many wonderful adventures in our many years together and many of these have revolved around our Church life at FCCGE and the other Church homes we had as we moved around the country. Our contributions to each religious community may not have been exciting or significant as others but I believe the work that we have done helps in small but necessary ways.

### **Prayer**

God may we be your people in the small but necessary ways- listening to the ways you are calling us to give of our time- of our talent- of our treasure to be your church.



# A Church of Welcome

If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,  
I am a noisy gong or clanging symbol

1 Corinthians 13

I've been raised in church. Dedicated. Baptized. I've gone to Christian grammar and high schools. I have recited by memory - verses of the Bible - lots of them. I've had prizes for remembering minutia in the Bible (Scripture proficiency prizes) & spent hours reading and answering questions from the Bible (a program called Scripture Searching) I attended a Christian Liberal Arts College. I've studied with Bible Study Fellowship.

I say all of that not to brag but because it is my context.

What does it mean to "Be The Church"?

I could offer you a very heady answers based on that context. I could pull together various verses and perhaps sound very pious or perhaps smart. What I've been reflecting on is more visceral.

I am excited to see my wife pushing for more involvement at FCCGE. I wanted her to want to be involved at church because church for me has never been casual. It has been rich in community. At times, church seemed to need a lot more of me than it nourished in me. Yet, over and over again, church community showed up to give rides for surgery, or bring a meal & even to re-roof a garage.

When kindness & goodness are abundant as people genuinely try to "be the church" to each other, subtle messages of exclusion can sneak in alongside. They are messages that are painful but they are alongside a lot of good. Prior to FCCGE - churches questioned my sincerity of faith if I were to live as a gay woman. I tolerated this & enjoyed the good stuff.

I'd say that FCCGE has a talent at "being the Church" in its inclusion.



**DEB WENNINGER**

**Deb and her wife Tricia have been part of the FCCGE community for several years. Recently Deb has become part of the bell choir, the tec. team ministry and is a long time part of a Bible study group. Deb always has a smile on her face and a kind word. Professionally Deb works in orthopedics.**

I'd say that FCCGE has a talent at "being the Church" in its inclusion. I first realized what a gift this was during our Bible study. The question posed in our study of the gospel of Mark was from the section where Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?". The question posed to us was "Who do you say Jesus was? & to what degree of certainty". I found myself choked up answering because I realized that my "degree of certainty" had increased simply because I was around people who didn't question my sincerity of faith. I want to be clear that this "certainty" isn't because I am in an echo chamber. This group of people is very diverse in belief. We can be all over the board on exact theology because no one has to convince anyone else that they are right!

A second example of FCCGE inclusion is as follows. My wife signed up to usher and Tom immediately responded. She e-mailed again saying that I might be able to join, too. Tom didn't respond immediately. She worried that the delay in response was because we were gay (that's our own history messing with us- its easy to anticipate rejection). A short while later, she received a lovely note & an apology for the delayed response from Tom who had been out of town & a welcome to the team. In addition, at on our anniversary, the first words from Tom's mouth were "Happy Anniversary! How many years is it?".

For a third example - Christmas Eve. After the second service - we were wrapping up & groups were taking pictures in front of the Christmas tree. Michelle offered to take our picture in front of the tree. Seems simple, right? Tricia & I are used to quietly watching others hold hands & stand together as family -knowing it's not safe or acceptable for us to do the same. In offering to take our picture, Michelle normalized us right into a new tradition. I think it is even more significant that she did so when she was likely the most tired individual in the building!

What does it mean to "Be the Church"?

I'd say this - encourage all to participate fully just as you do.

I don't feel on the margin at FCCGE. I've jumped in & been welcomed at every turn. Even so, there are times I still need an invitation as I'm conditioned by prior experience not to step in.

### **Prayer**

God help me hold up your rule of love so that I may grow and push myself to live the radical love and acceptance you call us to embody. Help us to welcome more fully those who here and ask who God is calling us to meet on the road of life as well. Amen.



# And a Child Shall Teach Them

I've moved far away from the manger, buying Christmas decorations at Halloween and gift cards instead of spending time with a colleague or friend

My mother has always said, "Christmas is designed to kill women." Of course she's joking, but traditionally it's fallen to women to figure out how to live up to the hype, the bling, to make THIS Christmas the most magical. Still, even in these 'mindfulness' times, no question I've moved far away from the manger, buying Christmas decorations at Halloween and gift cards instead of spending time with a colleague, friend or relative. This year, as work and family obligations started amping up toward Christmas, all I heard myself say was, "I'm so tired," "wish I could just stay home," "maybe after I get this done, we can do that." I needed to find the store that sold humility, time and rest, but settled for \$19.99 blue cords at Lands End for my husband and went home, defeated.



**CAROLINE ANDRES**

Caroline is a middle school teacher, a mother, wife, actress, writer. She and her family live in Glen Ellyn and Caroline has been the paegent coordinator at FCCGE for many years. Caroline has a huge passion for justice issues and LGBTQ rights.



And yet, there was more to do: grades (I'm a teacher), decorating and the Christmas Pageant. All-nighter got the grades done! Then I decked out my house and in one night with the help of our daughter Maggie, got my parents' house decked out too. By the time the first pageant rehearsal arrived, I wasn't all that excited about saying 'yes' to another Christmas tradition. By the end of that first practice it was me that needed affirmation about why we tell this story.

We sat in a circle and after a few questions the kids told me, "We tell this story because it reminds us that money does not make a person great."

They said, "We tell this story because Jesus taught us about love and everyone should be loved."

Finally I asked, "Why do children tell this story?"

Silence. Then Patrick Hibbard, a 6th grader says, "Jesus valued children's voices." Mic drop.

That's what I needed to hear. I needed to remember that Christmas is about beginnings, about wonder, about not knowing everything, about love, giving it and needing it, about really valuing children's voices. Of course it was Patrick, a kid that turned it around for me.

Be the church, let a kid turn it around for you too.

### Prayer

God may I learn lessons of faith from little ones- their wisdom- honesty- generosity- and hope. Amen

I needed to remember that Christmas is about beginnings, about wonder, about not knowing everything, about love, giving it and needing it, about really valuing children's voices.



# To See & Be Seen

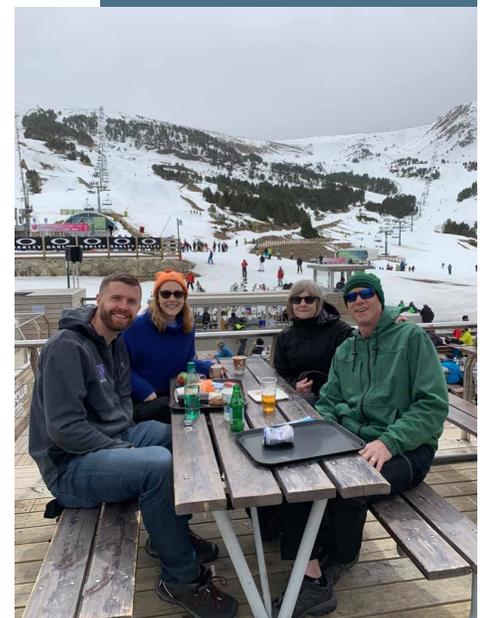
It has been clear to me that students will gladly become part of any lesson- regardless the subject- if they are seen."

I once heard that when we sing, we pray twice. At FCCGE I've been blessed to hear and participate in a wide spectrum of music, from classical to modern, so it may come as a surprise that I feel we could all be a little like Johnny Cash. As a fellow human, he experienced loss, dysfunction, love withheld; as an artist, he saw the pinnacle of success and the depths of despair. At some point in his life, he became a friend first to those who were broken, understanding their plight, reaching out to them, sitting down with criminals, enemies, critics, etc. And he shared his—and others'—music as a celebration to a better life, right until his death. I think he prayed twice, and often.



## ANDY LIVINGSTON

Andy is a retired German/Math teacher & football coach. He continues in education by tutoring those subjects & others, while observing student teachers through Northwestern University. From May to November he plays with a bluegrass band in Door County, Last Man Standing.



Beyond this, my time in education suggests we treat others as we would any children who come in to our classroom, our charge, or in random encounters. Teenagers, who may scare some of us when engagement occurs [“ok, Boomer”], react like younger children when that engagement shows interest & recognition in *them* and their world. It has been clear to me that students will gladly become part of any lesson—regardless of what the subject—if they are seen [literally & figuratively] as part of the class, as integral as any of their classmates, and treated the same as those around them. Simply being recognized—as an adult, or as a member of the community & society—can bring anyone into a group and its direction. Then the cultivation of relationships within that group can bloom & grow, the proprietorship allows more and better solutions—in short, healthy, productive connections are effected, and may bring about more.

PADS, Youth Ministry & OWL, Stephens Ministry, Social Justice Ministry, to name a few, all embody these concepts of being the church, with tentacles reaching further than their immediate encounters. And they affect the future, bringing light & hope.

What if each of us sets a table every day for others [and ourselves] with what is good, what is right, what is equal, what is fair, what is just, and hope that we can all sit down to eat? That is a table for my enemies *and* me. And were no one to come? Set the table again tomorrow.

### **Prayer**

God may I sit at your table and know that it is a place where there is always enough



# A Song of Gratitude

Our Church has been and continues to be a welcoming place for all and those different from what may be considered normal.

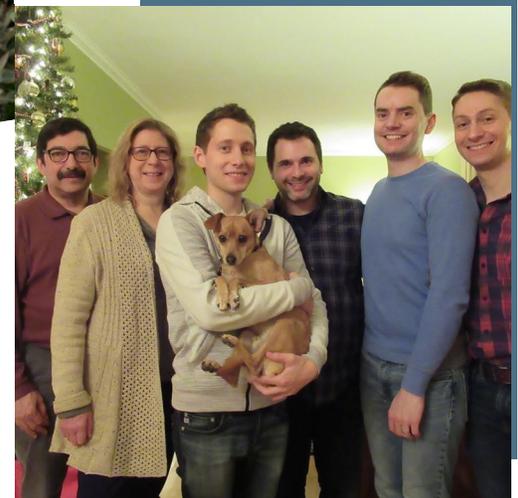
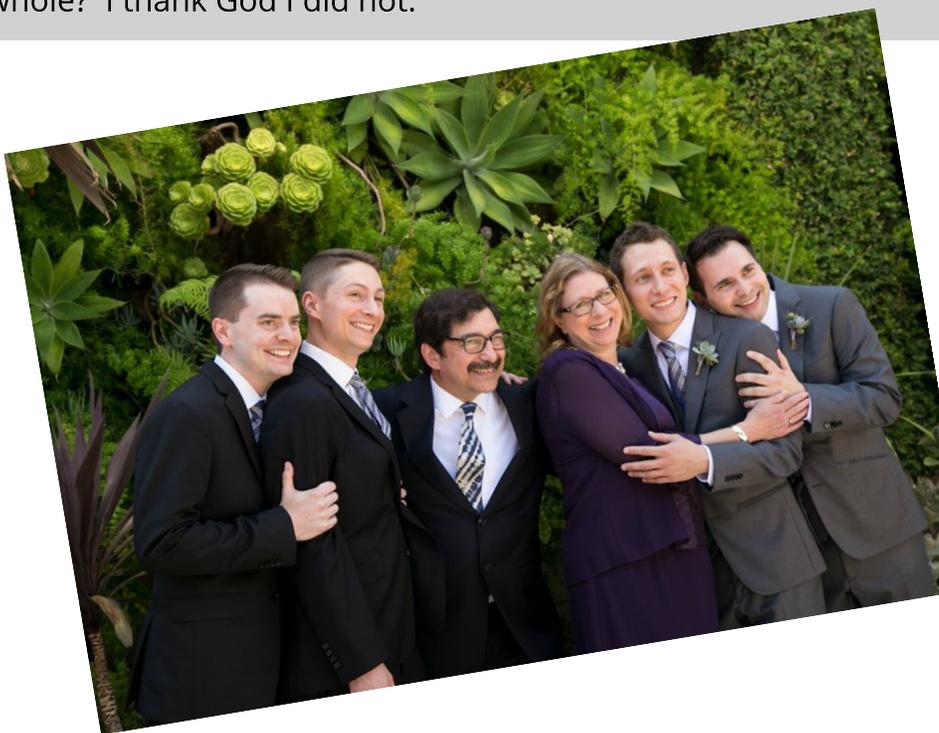
Wow am I glad I found and raised my sons in this church. Was it dumb luck? Not really, as I'd been raised in a Congregational Church in Oak Park. So when I walked in the door on Palm Sunday 1993 it felt like home. A safe place. A place where "world without end" made sense.

Our church has been and continues to be a welcoming place for all and those different from what may be considered the norm. I never was so proud and relieved when the vote to become an "Open and Affirming" church passed, as both my sons had come out as gay a few years before. Even before that vote it was a safe place for them to be raised, safe to be themselves and not judged or preached against. Can you imagine if I had unknowingly thrust them into a place which told them they were not whole? I thank God I did not.



**KATHARINE TYLER**

**Kathy Tyler is a real estate attorney with an office in the Monadnock Building in Chicago and she and her husband Bob have been members since 1994. They live near downtown Glen Ellyn. Their sons are now an engineer with Intel and a professional cellist in Hollywood.**



Among others, a place in this church which has been welcoming and accepting for us all has been the music program. Music is one of the things which drew my husband and me together 45 years ago and which has helped to nurture both of us and our sons throughout the years. Each of us at one time or another has been singing, ringing bells, playing piano, organ, cello and violin before our congregation's welcoming parishioners, who are always eager to hear us and helping us help them feel the spirit we feel when we make music. Bob and I continue to share making music with you all to this day and not only enjoy the warmth of the services but also the camaraderie of rehearsals and feeling God's spirit present in those spaces. Those are safe spaces and ones in which we continue to grow in both mind and spirit.

### **Prayer**

God help us to be makers of safe and courageous space where we may dare and dream how we can be Your Church. Amen.



# The Towers We Build

Nothing they propose to do will be impossible  
Genesis 11:6

If you look at architecture you see where a culture puts its' priorities and importance. I laugh as I drive by a colossal Lifetime Fitness that is on the way to my husbands church- a temple to the body- or am struck with wonder as I look at the beautiful sky scrapers lining the Chicago River reflecting the blue of a summers day- temples to finance and industry.

Recently I was reading the story of the Tower of Babel. It is a Bible story I remember from childhood being of humanities arrogance; thinking we could build a tower all the way to the heavens. What I found instead was something quiet different.

The first part of the Babel story tells of the materials humanity gathered to accomplish their project the stones and mortar as they share in their common goal and common language. But, then, as we see folks working we hear God say these words "nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them." It is after this revelation that God disperses the people of Babble sending them to different parts of the earth and giving them different languages.



**REV. KENDRA JOYNER MILLER**

Kendra loves so many things- she loves the outdoors- baking- reading a novel- listening to music- dancing around the kitchen- playing board games with friend- and a good nights sleep! Pastor Kendra is from a little bit of everywhere but can be found at her creekside home with Lutheran Pastor husband Dan and their dog Connie.



I wonder if the lesson here is less about the arrogance of humanity, as I learned in Sunday school. I wonder if the lesson is about the power of humanity - how, when joined together for a common purpose "nothing they propose to do will be impossible." Nothing we propose will be impossible. How often are we like the people of Babel building pointless towers to the heavens (or especially beautiful Lifetime Fitnesses)? I wonder if the people of Babel has used their power to care for one another, or work for justice in their world, if God would have scattered them? I imagine not. And I wonder what we as the people of FCCGE are courageous enough to propose so that we may live as the church daring to do good for God in our world. But our power comes from individual decisions, yours and mine.

My husband Dan and I recently met with a financial planner. We realized as a Religion and Philosophy major- me- and a Classics major- Dan- we were woefully ignorant on how to take the small steps needed to make long term plans with our finances. As we talked with our planner we shared how we want to plan intentionally so we can live generously. We want to be aware what we our building our lives our of and into- what are the temples or towers we are making. While we give to some other charities we believe giving to religious institutions and then watching them do good in the world is a powerful witness. It is not just Dan and Kendra caring about public radio- or Bridge Communities- but these congregations feel it is important as their Christian witness to work together for good in the world. These are the towers we build.

And so this year, even with a little one on the way, we feel called, in both of our churches to give more generously, because we know it cannot happen without each and everyone of us for together "nothing they propose to do will be impossible."

### **Prayer**

God help us to plan intentionally so that we may live generously. Recognizing that everyone has a gift to give for Your work in the world. Amen.

**Start by doing what is necessary; then by doing what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible. For it is in giving that we receive**  
**St Francis of Assisi**





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