Northern Illinois Conference 2024 One Matters Award

First United Methodist Church
Downers Grove, IL – Lake South

This year, as we reflect on baptisms, confirmation, and welcoming new members, we are struck by the power of our baptismal vows and the ways in which our laity live out those vows, inspiring and inviting others to join us.

This year, thanks to the work of our Missions, Justice, and Community Work Area, community members connected with our congregation for the very first time by attending a weekend-long anti-racism and faith training. Others joined us as we heard from Rev. John Dorhauer (former United Church of Christ General Minister and President) on the dangers of Christian nationalism. As our congregation sought to learn better how to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression" our community joined us.

This year and each year, women from our church joined for spiritual exploration and faith development as they read books and discuss together without a clergy-person taking the lead.

This group, and others, explore what it means to be followers of Christ. Other members of our church, in recognizing a deep sense of call to do as Jesus did and feed our neighbors, opened up a Community Kitchen site, feeding those in our neighborhood experiencing hunger every Thursday. When there were signs it would be a cold winter, they teamed up with laity from a local UCC church to open a warming center on the coldest of nights.

When we celebrated the confirmation of 18 youth, those youth had their mentors right by them. More than 30 adults in our congregation have answered "yes" to an invitation to be confirmation mentors and nurturing our children in faith. For two years, they join with us in confirmation classes and offer guidance, support, and presence to our youth.

In all of this and more, our laity have lived out their baptismal vows and in doing so, we have had the opportunity to grow in relationship with our congregation and our larger community.

Written by Rev. Andi Voinovich