First Church
UNITED METHODIST
EVANSTON

Inquirers and New Members - March 2025



Anya Abraham

When Anya moved to Evanston to begin her graduate studies in physics at NU, little did she know she would be living next door to what would become her church home. Raised in Toronto, Anya spent lots of time visiting family in Inda. When she isn't doing research in the lab or grading papers, Anya enjoys playing soccer and running. She appreciates the inclusiveness of this congregation, finds worship really meaningful, and wants to do more service and learn more about the Bible. Later this year Anya plans to be baptized and take membership vows. *Ask Anya what brings her to worship so regularly.*



Debbie and Roger Baugher

Longtime United Methodists, when Debbie and Roger moved from Georgia to Evanston last summer their first church visit was to First Church. They appreciate the welcoming and progressive theology they have found here. Already regular participants in adult classes, the couple looks forward to becoming more involved in volunteer opportunities (Debbie) and in social justice work (Roger). Debbie retired a few years ago from a career in education working with gifted students. Roger worked in railway analytics and management. They enjoy books and theatre. *Ask Debbie and Roger about the Christian Experiment Class they attend.*



Friedrich Doku

Raised in a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, Friedrich first attended worship here after moving to Evanston for a Ph.D, computer science program at NU. Friedrich's experiences in worship and Inquirers at First Church have included some "aha" moments. He enjoys karate, guitar and photography, and has just started a martial arts club on campus. *Ask Friedrich what "confidential computing" entails.*



Katie Fahey

Katie has attended First Church for years with her spouse Tim as their family grew to include two sons, now 6 and 3 1/2. A longtime United Methodist, she has served on the staff of Garrett-Evangelical Theology Seminary for nearly a decade and leads admissions, marketing, and communications areas. Over the years she has found this congregation to be supportive and friendly, and says "it's clear that folks care about living out the gospel not just on Sundays but in their daily lives." She looks forward to continued learning and serving. *Ask Katie what ministry area we don't want her to volunteer for!*



Craig Hobson

Curious about what Evanston churches had to offer, Craig visited First Church in August and has attended since then. Craig is a social worker in a Skokie elementary school; he lives there with his wife and two teenage daughters. He has felt welcomed and refreshed by the lives within First Church that are loving God and loving neighbor in a spirit of strength and joy. Craig appreciates the inclusiveness of this congregation, the pastoral care that says that all questions are welcome, and the message that all of us are children of God. *Ask Craig to share one of the highlights of his time at First Church.*



Winder Holeman

Raised in a United Methodist congregation in Durham, NC, Winder appreciates First Church's inclusivity, music, and outreach to the community. Winder teaches Spanish to lower elementary students at North Shore Country Day School, and in his spare time he enjoys photography, art, working out and cooking. Winder lives in Evanston with his wife and third-grade son; he and his son have helped with sack lunch making, and they look forward to more opportunities to serve. *Ask Winder what motivates him to "give back."*



Malik Kemokai

Malik is reinstating his First Church membership after life and career pursuits took him in a different direction for a number of years. His fifth-grade son is also reconnecting. Malik was baptized in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and raised in the Washington, DC, area in a Methodist family. Last year he founded and leads a non-profit organization that offers food service job training for immigrants. Malik has enjoyed cooking for the soup kitchen with Inquirers and wants to do more. He also wants to incorporate God into his daily life. *Ask Malik about the trainees he works with.*



Hannah McLean

Hannah moved to Evanston last May for a new job in corporate event planning and quickly jumped into First Church and young adult ministry. Raised in the Evangelical Free Church as a pastor's kid, she attended a contemporary United Methodist Church that was also a coffee shop and bookstore in Omaha, Nebraska. She really appreciated the progressive values and heart for serving the community that she found there, and was drawn to those same values and heart here at First Church. Hannah has enjoyed helping with the soup kitchen and hopes to find even more ways to get involved. *Ask Hannah about her unforgettable baptism.*



Ray Newland

Ray and his wife moved to The Merion last spring to be closer to their adult children in the Chicago area. Ray's Parkinson's progression necessitated some life changes, including retirement from his career as an insurance broker. With the exception of size, First Church remined him of the small United Methodist congregation in Orange County, CA, where he had been actively involved for 20+ years. Ray participates in the Men's Fellowship Group and has attended adult classes, and h enjoys exercising and reading. *Ask Ray what he's learned about sacraments in the United Methodist tradition.*



Belinda Numbi

Belinda was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and baptized in the Catholic tradition. When her mother died, Belinda became the mother figure as well as the big sister for the younger children in her family. She eventually made her way to Africa University where she began to feel a call to ministry that, as a woman, seemed unlikely. Yet she pursued the idea and applied in secret to Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Today Belinda is a first-year M.Div. student pursuing ordination. She works on campus at Eliza's Kitchen and Closet. As a First Church member Belinda seeks to continuing growing in faith and living it in the world. *Ask Belinda what it is like for her to be at a church with female pastors.*



Zaillah Rufus Gurugulla

Zaillah is a Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary student in the Pastoral Care and Counseling Program. She grew up in India and was baptized in a Mennonite Brethren church as a teenager. Zaillah's faith grew rapidly after a near death experience, and as a college student in fine arts, she and her father developed a "boot camp" to educate students in Christian music. Zaillah loves the traditional worship here and has served as scripture reader, crossbearer, and soup kitchen cook. She is enthusiastic about continuing her faith journey as part of this congregation. *Ask Zaillah how her interests in culture and art history are part of her seminary coursework.*



Ann Sinclair

Ann has found this congregation "welcoming and very kind" and appreciates worshipping in a Reconciling Congregation and being part of a church "that talks about current events in the world." She actively participates in young adult ministry gatherings and enjoys cooking and serving at the soup kitchen. Ann is a Ph.D. student in the Climate Change Research Group on campus. She enjoys baking, reading, gardening, and swimming. *Ask Ann about her favorite vegan recipes.*



Sandra Sony

Sandra was baptized in a Catholic church in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she was raised, and attended Africa University in Zimbabwe. Doing ministry work was something that she always wanted, but she wasn't sure about her calling until her father died. Losing her father was a painful moment and a pivotal moment that led to self-discovery and deeper understanding of God's calling for her life. Now Sandra is pursuing an M.Div. degree at Garrett Evangelical-Theological Seminary. She has a heart for children and their well-being and volunteers with Children's Ministry here. Outside of her courses, Sandra enjoys books, exercise, travel, and games. She appreciates the diversity and inclusiveness of First Church and is inspired by her worship experiences. Ask Sandra about the children she has worked with in our congregation. *Ask Sandra about her volunteer experience with Children's Ministry.*

August Venuh



August grew up in Nagaland, India, where Christianity, particularly Baptist denomination, is the dominant faith due to the influence of American Baptist missionaries. After completing college, they moved to the U.S. to pursue a Master of Theological Studies (MATS) at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta before continuing into the Ph.D. program in Theology and Ethics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. They are currently in the dissertation writing stage, exploring how colonial Christian teachings have shaped current views on gender and sexuality in Nagaland. After hearing from fellow Garrett students and faculty about the inclusivity of this congregation, August was encouraged to visit. Shortly after their first visit, they joined the Inquirers class. The Methodist emphasis on both personal spirituality and outward service resonates deeply with them, and they look forward to building relationships within the congregation. In their spare time, August enjoys painting and listening to music. *Ask August about how colonial Christian teachings have shaped current views on gender and sexuality in Nagaland.*



Courtney Zirkle

Courtney first visited worship in February 2024 when the Evanston church she had attended for a number of years was no longer feeding her soul. A native of Tennessee and a retired speech pathologist, Courtney enjoys learning, painting, exercise, and stained glass. She loves learning, gravitates toward Christian mysticism, wants to do more with lectio divina and silent prayer. In the past year she has attended adult Sunday School, participated in Inquirers, volunteered for the soup kitchen, packed diapers and made sack lunches. Courtney describes this congregation as "warm, friendly, and spirit-filled." *Ask Courtney about being part of an iconographers guild.*

ALSO



Meghan Lohr

After participating in Inquirers in winter 2023, Meg discerned about when she might be ready to take membership vows. When Meg and her partner Robel welcomed a son to their family in September 2024, she realized she wanted faith to be part of her son's life and decided it was time for her to take membership vows for herself. Meg works as an Executive Assistant at the Bank of America in downtown Chicago and enjoys working in the financial sector. In the (little) free time she has, Meg enjoys fishing and biking. *Ask Meg about her family.*



Richard Mosley, Jr.

Richard is returning to First Church, where he served as Associate Pastor in the late 1990's, to make this congregation his church home. As an ordained pastor Richard's membership is with the Northern Illinois Annual Conference; he wanted participate in the Inquirers Class as a way to familiarize himself with First Church as it is today. Being a Star Wars fan Richard is a Wesleyan J.E.D.I. Master. He is committed to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. *Ask Richard what is noticeably different about our congregation today.*

Contact info for these persons is available on Realm Connect according to the privacy settings each individual has chosen.

Thanks to these persons who serve as **First Friends** for the Inquirers: Katie Brick, Alli & Mark Henry, Kali Jankovich, Catharina Maerklin, Jan & Joe Womack.

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Curious about First Church? Want to further explore this congregation, its people and programs? Learn (or relearn) some basics about Methodism? Make meaningful connections with others and tap into your own faith journey? **The next Inquirers Class begins August 27.**

Please contact Mary Taylor-Johnson, Director of Membership and Engagement at (847) 864-6182 or *mary@faithatfirst.com*.