Finally, I bring my three grandchildren to attend our Learning Community. I love supporting our superb Religious Education program.

Kathleen Vinson: When I was first approached by Sally Shorr to co-chair the luncheons, my immediate thought was, no way. I’d watched Evie and Sharon run those luncheons, and I was intimidated. Besides, it conflicted with my Wellspring course. And I’d just taken on leadership of Quilts of Love.

Then Sally came back. This time she argued that my Wellspring would be done in June and this job wouldn’t start until September. And the kicker: I would be co-chairing with Ruth. I didn’t know Ruth, but Sally assured me she was wonderful and the most spiritual person she knew. That did it for me. I was still intimidated, but ready to dive in.

I’m so grateful to both Sally and Ruth. This has been an amazing experience. I love the creativity of working with Ruth to develop each theme, and stay within budget. I love working with the volunteers, which gives me an opportunity to meet more people. It’s a long day, and I do get tired, but that is over quickly, and what I’m left with is the joy of a successful day with Ruth, the Leadership Team, the volunteers, and the lovely members of The Alliance. Thank you for allowing me this honor.

Ruth Lewellen-Dix: I echo every accolade Kathleen attributes to me in reverse. I also add how much I have learned from her in just four short months. What a perfect match Sally made when teaming the two of us as The Alliance’s “Luncheon Ladies.” The Leadership Team meetings are meaningful and well worth the time spent there. What a fine-tuned instrument this group of committed leaders is. They demonstrate cooperation in shared leadership at its finest.

Having been a First Church member for more than 46 years, I have played many roles here. I am finishing up work on the Mosaic Project. The Alliance has supported the restoration of this treasured historic art piece. Singing with the Chalice Choir gives me a special connection to worship through music and sense of community. Chalice Choir is where I met my partner of three years, Stephen Cross. Covenant group gives me spiritual connection with long-time members as well as newcomers. I have been with this wonderful group for the past 13 years.

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MEMBER IN PROFILE: Sophia Douglas

Parker Palmer defines spirituality as “the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected to the largeness of life.” Sophia Douglas’ life journey may be a fine illustration of his definition. Her ancestors were Oregon pioneers, her parents attended U of O, but Sophia was born in Washington D.C. where her father worked for the National Archives, and later, the military. Even early in her teen years she was exposed to the world beyond Oregon, to diversity and cultural differences, when her father’s work led her family to live in Paris, Berlin and other European cities. Such grand opportunities, as well as occasional returns to live with Oregon relatives, inspired Sophia to "dream big dreams." She enrolled at Duke University as a French major.

But, Sophia admits, “I
Sophia Douglas, continued

derailed my dreams.” She earned a Masters in Journalism from Indiana University. While married and “raising three children and a husband,” Sophia dedicated 25 years to a career in publications and communications.

Sophia credits a “mystical experience” on the Olympic peninsula as the harbinger of a major transition in her future. Years followed in which she explored alternative communities and spiritual programs, trained and was certified in personal therapies, and reflected on the course of her life and future.

In 2001, after “launching career, husband and grown children,” Sophia came full circle back to Oregon. “I didn’t want to miss more of [my first] grandchild’s growing up time.” She worked in Portland for Friends of Hoyt Arboretum, directed a community mediation center in Salem, moved to Eugene to support her aging mother, and completed her career in public service as an adjudicator for Oregon’s unemployment claims.

As soon as Sophia joined First Church in 2017, she sought active roles in the faith development program. She designed and taught classes in Transitions and Resilience, co-led a Women’s Retreat with Rev. Mary Gear, completed Wellspring and then became certified as a Spiritual Director. Always a compassionate and positive companion, she continues to guide seekers through various levels of Wellspring classes as well as a group that explores issues of grief and resilience.

Recently, Rev. Sinkford reminded us: “After the resistance comes transformation.” Sophia’s life is a testament to those words. Welcome Sophia!

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Emily Herbert

Emily Herbert speaks with quiet conviction. “We are stewards on this planet. This amazing planet is what keeps me going.” She loves any activity that takes her outdoors where things that grow sustain her. Before coming to Portland in 2009 to be closer to her son and daughter-in-law, she lived for 30 years in Redmond and worked as a psychologist in private practice. Living in Central Oregon she could access Smith Rock, and enjoy day-hiking and cross-country skiing.

Before Redmond, Emily lived and attended high school in Ogden, Utah. She was a non-Mormon in a predominantly Mormon community. Though not drawn to churches and their creeds, she acknowledges she was “the token religious person in my family.” She graduated from the University of Utah with a major in philosophy and religion. Aware “there were no jobs” in such a major, she remained at U of Utah to acquire a doctorate and then earned a post-doctorate in Psychology at University of Kansas.

Our church was her first connection in this city. Here she has found congregants who share her deep concerns for the health of our planet. Working actively with our Community for Earth program as well as with Portland’s Clean Energy Task Force, she defines herself as “a climate activist.” Emily learned to testify at the City Council as a supporter of its policy banning any new fossil fuel terminals. In order to moderate climate change impact, Emily explains, “Portland is the first [city] in the nation to combine front-line communities (people most impacted by climate change) with other environmental groups.” Emily remembers her parents’ advice and her own convictions: “Leave the world in better condition than you found it.” She has taken action by parking her car permanently.

“The church—this beloved community—is the center of my life,” Emily maintains. “I do believe we could create heaven on earth. This amazing earth supports all we need.” Emily’s convictions are consistent with her actions. She is a warm-hearted and inspiring presence among many in The Alliance.