Dear Alliance Sisters and Brothers,

Accepting the position of Alliance Secretary last spring has catapulted me into a more engaged role with our Alliance membership and Leadership Team. Listening, which was last month’s First Church theme, has been essential to this role. I’ve listened to committee reports, discussions, announcements, and readings during general and Leadership Team meetings. I’ve listened to the cares and concerns of Alliance members, and to the many thank you messages expressed for assistance with the Greens Sale, the monthly luncheons, and other activities.

Through all the note-taking, I’ve been inspired by the energy and commitment of Alliance members’ work on projects that raise money for a variety of causes as well as provide additional support to the church.

For the month of January our church theme is Transition. Transitions are connections, bridges, movement from one part to another. For 2019, I pray that we may move into the New Year aware of our rich history full of examples of the generosity of our members and this congregation. I pray that we transition into co-creating the Beloved Community through our connections with ministry, religious programming, social justice, and the larger community of which we are a part. May all beings be free from suffering.

Blessings of peace and well-being in 2019.

Yours in Fellowship,
Lena Lee
Alliance Secretary

LEADERSHIP NOTES: SECRETARY

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Sarah McKenzie

Just inside the front door of Sarah’s century-old home, her altar displays meaningful keepsakes, objects found in the natural world: small sea shells, bird feathers, pebbles. Mink, a bright, white cat, comes to check me out. Her sibling, jet-black Sable, is hiding for now. Sarah admits, “I was a failed foster parent for cats because I couldn’t resist adopting these two.”

Sarah volunteers with Marathon Mentors, which helps students become first generation college graduates like she was. Because she shares a mutual fondness for felines with her current mentee, Sarah connected her with the CAT (Cat Adoption Team) in Sherwood. Sarah and her mentee spend a few days together each month.

Born in Dearborn, MI, Sarah is the oldest of four girls. Her parents chose to move to a middle-class suburb when she started 7th grade, a move she credits with “changing my life.” The new school system offered course work enabling her to set her sights on college.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

February 6
Lynn Renken
Executive Director, Mercy Corps Northwest
Second Chances for Incarcerated Women at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

March 6
Dr. Raina Croff
OHSU Neurology Department
Bringing It Back for Brain Health: SHARP African American Oral History Project

JOIN US!

For $20 a year in dues, members are enriched by fellowship, learning, and service to the First Unitarian community.

To join, pick up a form at the Welcome Table during a monthly luncheon or contact Membership Chair Marty Anderson.
martaffy@aol.com
503-643-1177

Fellowship Newsletter Date
Sarah McKenzie, continued

At Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, she majored in English and Sociology and remained in Michigan to teach high school English for ten years. Sarah discovered and settled in Portland via a 30-day Greyhound bus pass and taught high school English in PPS for another ten years. But, after 20 years teaching English Sarah was ready for a change. Passion for children’s literature motivated a big career transition: she then worked 14 years as a librarian for elementary school children.

Sarah joined First Church in 2002 and became an active member of Adult Programs. She enjoyed stewarding classes and helping with the annual church book sale. “I loved the camaraderie!” Now she has turned her concerns for climate change into action with the Community for Earth Social Justice Group.

Book love continues to inspire her gift-giving of a children’s book, whose title includes the baby’s name, to new parents and her weekly visits to Powell’s Books to hear author talks.

At home, a blue chaise and tall lamp in her cozy library invite frequent reading. Sable may even emerge to serve as fur blanket. But today, just days away from Christmas, Sarah wishes to make the house ready for a holiday visit from her daughter and fiancé. They will marry next fall. Better yet, they will move to Portland!

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Isabel Sheridan

Isabel remembers receiving from her mother a Black baby doll that would drink from an offered bottle. Isabel says the lifelong metaphor in that gift to a six-year-old was about nurturing. Isabel has devoted her life to two intersecting passions: children and racial justice in this country.

Born in Allentown, PA, Isabel was raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools through college. “We were taught we were our brothers’ keeper,” she notes. “I saw this principle as an opportunity.” In college she majored in English and graduated in 1965 at a time of great change in our society.

Teaching in Brooklyn at the start of her career, she welcomed children from Bedford-Stuyvesant into her classroom in 1966, the first year of voluntary busing in NYC Public Schools. Later she saw the privileged Philadelphia suburb where she taught for 26 years gradually become integrated through real estate sale rather than white flight. Isabel determined she would give her African American students “opportunity in their lives for magic.” By reading works of culturally diverse authors, her students would identify their personal stories. That practice, of course, enriched the experience of her White students, too.

Later living in Tallahassee, Isabel chose to come to Portland for General Assembly. She recognized this city and First Church as places “where I could do the spirit work before my life is over.” She joined the church in 2008. Her spirit work found frequent outlets here as an inspirational teacher with Adult Programs. She co-led classes in the plays of August Wilson with Eric Terrell, examined mass incarceration in Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow alongside co-teacher Debbie Kaufman, and discussed racial justice issues in current non-fiction.

Isabel also praises John Boelling’s practice of radical hospitality as choral director. While singing under his direction, Isabel has experienced a deep connection with the Women’s Choir.

Now living at Holladay Park Plaza, Isabel speaks of “this challenging journey.” Breast cancer has returned after 20 years in remission. “I am thankful to be doing very well on my regimen,” she comments. She chooses to focus her energy mainly on projects promoting racial justice and equity. Isabel cites a quotation attributed to Pablo Picasso. He said the meaning of life “is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away.” Isabel continues to live life with admirable intentionality.