

News at First

Vol 5, No 1—August 2009
www.FirstOakland.org

Inside this Issue

Our Mission Statement & Special Announcements	2
Birthdays & Anniversaries	2
God Has Left the Building, Pastor Lynice Pinkard	3-4
First Congo Happenin's	5-6
Some Things About Marriage Charley Lerrigo	7
First Congo Honored	7
Film Ministry at First Congo	Back Cover
Calendar of Events	Pull Out
Ministry Teams Listing	Pull Out

Welcome to our Sunday Celebration!
Sundays, 10:30 am

Kids LIFE begins each Sunday following praise time in Worship
 1-2-3 Ministry for toddlers is held in the Angel Room

Rendering Our Whole Lives

August 2

The Cosmic Christ

John 6:24-35

Dr. J. Webb Mealy

August 9

Transformative Truth-Telling

John 13:31-35, 14:15-24

Nichola Torbett

August 16

John 6:51-58

Rev. Lynice Pinkard

August 23

John 6:56-69

Rev. Lynice Pinkard

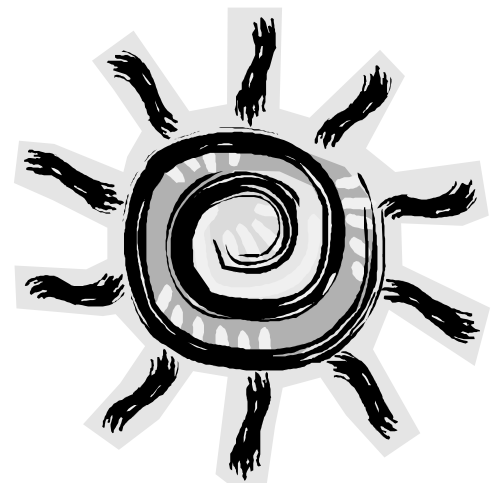
August 30

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Children, Youth, and Families' Sunday
 (See Page 6 for details)

Come and be blessed!

For information about the scriptures for each week, go to www.textweek.com



Our Mission Statement

First Congregational Church of Oakland gives glory to God by reaching out to people of all racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds, ages, abilities and sexual orientations, to welcome them into the beloved community, where together we discover our gifts; develop authentic relationships with God and each other; join in passionate, creative, Spirit-led worship; grow in faith, understanding, power, love and service; and respond to the word of life we encounter in Jesus Christ by becoming part of what Spirit is doing to create justice and peace, to heal the earth, and to restore kinship with all creation.

NAF is Back!

First Congo's monthly newsletter, News-at-First, is back in production. We know some of you missed it, and truly, I missed creating it.

Dawn M. Raymond

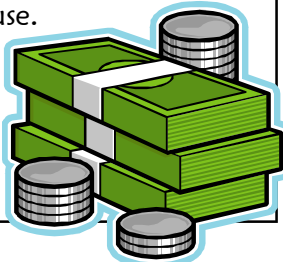


Search the Internet & Make \$\$\$ for First Congo

Use www.GoodSearch.com with First Congregational Church of Oakland as your non-profit of choice and every time you do a search we make a penny. Don't laugh! It's amazing how fast it adds up and you get to watch it do so.

Just use GoodSearch.com as your search site instead of google, etc. by making it your homepage or entering the website whenever you need to search the web. When you first pull up GoodSearch.com go to the box that says "Who do you GoodSearch for?" and type in First Congregational Church of Oakland. It's that simple and you can use it and benefit First Congo from any computer you use.

If you have any questions please contact Dawn, newsletter@firstoakland.org, 510.444.8511 X18.



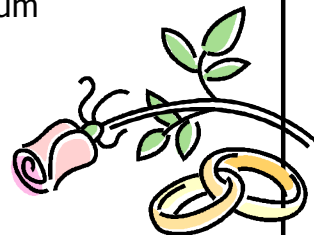
August Birthdays

- 4 Megan Tolva
- 7 Sarah Conner-Smith
- 13 Michelle Jacques
- 20 Inge Hansen
- 21 Soo Hyun Han
- 29 Victor Lewis

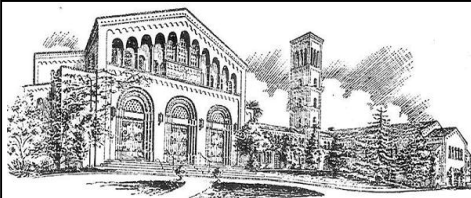


Anniversaries

- 11 Dawn Marie Raymond & Loren Haralson
- 18 Molly & Ryan Dowell Baum
- 18 Dennis Fagaly & Marcia Lovelace
- 18 Erica Britton & Gwen Bikis
- 27 Craig & Jennifer Breismeister



Please let us know when your birthday or anniversary is so that we can send blessings. Contact Dawn, newsletter@firstoakland.org or **510.444.8511 x18**



News at First

We welcome your input & feedback!
We're also interested in your ideas for articles, poetry & artwork... Contact Dawn Raymond, newsletter@firstoakland.org **510.444.8511 x18** with your comments or for submission information.

God Has Left the Building

A Letter from Pastor Lynice Pinkard

Rev. Mark Gornik tells the story of visiting El Salvador and standing in shock at the condition of the cathedral over which Archbishop Oscar Romero presided. Parts of the building appeared to be falling apart, the paint was peeling, the whole place was in disrepair. Dilapidated scaffolding stood alongside the building, clearly fallen into disuse. Gornik learned, after further inquiry, that Romero had made a decision to redirect the money that was slated for the building—the little money that could be scraped together—toward meeting the needs of people: food, shelter, spiritual sustenance in a time of civil war and incredible poverty.

In our own time, when our own foreclosure-wrecked neighborhoods are wracked by turf-related civil wars, when public assistance to those with the least is being drastically reduced or eliminated, when addiction rates are soaring, when one in three African-American and Latin-American men are in prison, when human beings are living in tent cities and cardboard boxes under freeways, God is on the move, living out among the people, unable and unwilling to be fortress-ed in church buildings.

Still we are an insecure people, and like all insecure people, we crave legitimacy, the legitimacy that comes from a big, beautiful building. This is the temptation that David faced when, newly made king of Israel, he conceived the idea of building God a house. (Read about this in 2 Samuel chapter 7.) Perched between newfound power and faithful yieldedness, David wants to insist on building a temple—building God a house. David's concern is that God lives not in a house but in a tent. (God still lives in a tent—in tent cities and over sewer grates in our cities.)

But God doesn't need a house. He's just fine in a tent. God is like "I was out here with you in a tent coming out of Egypt. From a tent, I was able to free you; why do you want to box me up in a temple? Why are you insisting that I stay locked up in a house?" See, permeability—radical openness to God's Spirit—precedes liberation.

David never did build that temple, but his son Solomon did. He built that and much more. He built Jerusalem up--all the public works projects and waterways and highways and retaining walls and God-centric coffee houses and book stores and shopping malls and parking lots, and forced millions of people into labor and slavery and trampled everybody and everything including the earth, and all Solomon has to say about it as he looks back in the book of Ecclesiastes is "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! It's all meaningless! Or better, "vanity, vanity, all is vanity!"

While all in our churches today is certainly not vanity, institutional church programs and denominational structures are often too removed from real, radical, Biblical discipleship and evangelism, instead becoming bulwarks against the movement of the Spirit and preserving old patterns of power ill-suited to the real message of our faith.

Big buildings with baubles with bloated, big-bellied budgets with big bunches of butts bolted into seats tend to make for a kind of permanence, a kind of lockdown. But, God can't be locked down! God can't be fortress-ed! Any time you start trying to secure God in a space, to box God in a house, you are trying to limit God's power and freedom to exercise it. When that happens, God is going to break up the structures and disperse the resources outward. God dissolves God's life outward like salt, uses it like yeast to leaven the whole, and causes it to illumine the darkness like light. The church cannot fortress God's spirit. The church cannot be a stronghold set apart from the community.

What would an alternative model look like?

For a while, I led a church in West Oakland. In addition to meeting weekly for worship in a rented space (\$25/week), we had church in the community park, we worked in collaboration with another small church (St. Luke's in West Oakland) to do a needle exchange program on Saturdays, and we got five volunteer dentists to



serve people in the neighborhood for one twelve-hour day once a month from a mobile dental unit we rented for \$1000. Those dentists served on average 60 people a month, filling cavities, cleaning teeth, treating gum disease, and referred people via a low-cost arrangement for root canals and extractions. (People can't hear the gospel when their teeth hurt.) Many dental patients came to church, but we didn't do it for the purpose of increasing our numbers. It's just that they were excited about experiencing the good news of the gospel on a practical level—free food, free dental, friends, fellowship. When that ministry ended after one year, we were able to give away \$28,000 to churches and nonprofits that were advancing the work of the gospel in community.

Or here's another model: Imagine a church deciding to put its building and all its resources in the service of God's life in the city. The congregation decides to refurbish the building to provide transitional housing—and more important, deep spiritual community—for people who are coming out of homelessness. First they go to the ten other churches with mostly empty buildings in the downtown area and work together as a collaborative to get grant funding. One church turns its building into a health clinic. Another starts an adult school to teach job skills and literacy. A third church works with newly released prisoners to develop community antiviolence programs. The original church invites twenty formerly homeless folks to move in—literally—and to take part in every aspect of the church's life along with them. In fact some of them move in, too, to form intentional community with the formerly homeless. They turn the sanctuary into a giant living room for movie nights. Yes, they use it for worship every Sunday morning, but worship becomes as much a way of being as something that happens once a week. When those twenty folks are ready to move out, twenty more move in, and then twenty more and twenty more. People occupy the church at all hours, cooking and eating meals together in the kitchen, caring for each other's children, doing laundry together. All of the collaborating churches work together, no longer competing for members and funding. Everyone attends life recovery meetings to recover from "empire affective disorder." They recognize that this work is as much or more about their own salvation—their unlearning of the alienating mores of contemporary American life—as the "salvation" of the people they are seen to be "serving."

And a final model: A medium-sized urban congregation decides to put everything at their disposal into facilitating life in the congregation and then out from the congregation into neighborhoods around the city.

To that end, the congregation organizes itself, according to neighborhoods, into twenty house churches of 7-10 people. The house churches meet weekly for collective worship, prayer, Bible study, and deep sharing of each other's lives. Further, each house church takes on some small project in the neighborhood in which it is located—start a community garden, work with kids twice a week for homework support, start a neighborhood sports team, serve "potluck" communion in the park to all comers—and members commit equally to that outer work and to supporting each other in their inner work.

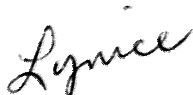
The entire congregation—all twenty house churches—meets together twice a month for joint worship, renting space inexpensively in a building downtown. Members are also encouraged to come to the rented space on Wednesday night for a fellowship dinner followed by spiritual formation classes.

Newcomers are welcome to come to joint worship and Wednesday night activities for as long as they like as friends of the church. Membership requires joining a house church and also taking a certain number of spiritual formation classes that prepare them for high-cost, high-commitment discipleship. Eventually, house churches grow to become full-fledged congregations in their own rights, and those subdivide into more house churches, and the movement spreads outward like a virus.

What makes these models different from the traditional institutional church? They have traded hierarchy and top-heavy administrative structures for the priesthood of all believers. They have traded a focus on high-visibility buildings for a focus on high impact ministry—impactful for themselves as much as or more than anyone else. They've stopped outsourcing their own discipleship to paid ministerial staff and made a serious commitment to their own spiritual formation and the formation of the others in their communities.

I feel strongly that it is imperative for us as individuals and as a congregation to look deeply at our own spiritual formation, to look deeper at the resources we have and how we are prioritizing using them in alignment with our commitments to doing God's work at First Congo and beyond

In God's Love,



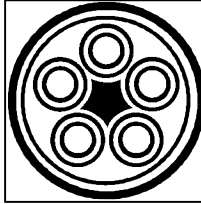
First Congo Happenin's

All events are at First Congo unless otherwise noted.



Congregational Life

Coming together
with openness & respect



Community Events

On First Congo Campus &
About Town

FIRST CONGO BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETINGS

Sunday August 16, 1:15-4:15 pm

Agenda items include:

- Updates from Making Change Team, Stewardship Ministry, Personnel Committee, and the partitioning of the endowment
- Pastoral vision discussion
- Pastor Evaluation progress report;
- Appointment of Church Secretary
- Consideration and approval of proposed policy regarding creation and dissolution of ministries

Board meetings are open except during times of executive session concerning personnel or otherwise confidential issues.

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES MINISTRY

See the Spirit Led section on Page 6 for more information on the programs offered at First Congo. Also check out the CYF pages at www.firstoakland.org

1ST SUNDAY FELLOWSHIP

Sunday September 6, following service

Starting in September, Food Fellowship Ministry is back in a revised form. The first Sunday of each month we'll gather for a community potluck supplemented by cooks in the kitchen. We need someone to be the cook(s) for September. If you are interested please contact Kai, kai@firstoakland.org, 510.444.8511 X10 and let him know. Thanks!


CHURCH DIRECTORY UPDATES

We're working on getting a new directory out soon. To update or add your contact information contact Kai, kai@firstoakland.org, 510.444.8511 X10

FIRST CONGO WEBSITE: WWW.FIRSTOAKLAND.ORG

We're working hard to make our website a contribution to the community, both internally and at large. Send submissions and/or suggestions to Jon "Moses" Jackson, jonjackson@gmail.com

FIRST CONGO MUSIC MINISTRY

 If you would like to contribute to the Sunday morning service with a gift of music (or dance, poetry or spoken word), contact Sista Monica Parker, 510.444.8511, X 17, sistamonicaparker@gmail.com

SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE!

Your help is needed to maintain this community of service. Sign up for 1st Sunday Hospitality with Kai, 510.444.8511 X10; to welcome our guests and friends with Karen Mitchell, 510.451.2747; or to give a reading with Charley Lerrigo lerrigo@sbcglobal.net

MOVIE NIGHTS @ FIRST CONGO

Friday August 14, 7pm—"Bagdad Café"

Movie nights are back—2nd Friday of each month. See the back cover for more information.

SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE "TOO BIG TO FAIL"

Saturday August 29, 1:30 to 3:30

Mosswood Park--Broadway at MacArthur Blvd., Oakland

Let's gather to watch this year's offering from the San Francisco Mime Troupe. *Too Big to Fail* is an entertaining, thought-provoking, parable-filled story about economic injustice. The performance is free, and donations are strongly encouraged. If you plan to be there, email Emily Wheeler, emily4english@gmail.com, or call her at 510-725-5484. If there's interest, we'll get together afterward to discuss the show.



OAKLAND LAUGHTER CLUB

Tuesday August 4, 7:30-8:45 (no meeting 3rd Tues In Aug)

 The Oakland Laughter Club meets monthly on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays. Sharing laughter is good for the soul, mind and body. Laughing together sparks positive connections and promotes peace. Medical studies show that laughter relieves stress, improves circulation & digestion, AND strengthens your immune system. Please wear loose comfortable clothes for easier laughing. No mats or yoga experience needed. \$15 (\$20-\$10 sliding scale). Led by Annie Goglia, Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher, Life Coach & Storyteller. For more info & to RSVP contact Annie, annie@lifefire.com, 510.655.1433



Happenin's, Con't

All events are at First Congo unless otherwise noted.

Arts Positive

Sharing our gifts & ourselves



Spirit-Led

Opening to healing & growing
in power & love

FIRST CONGO ART GALLER(IES)

We're in the process of renovating our spaces, including creating gallery space in rooms that will have a more efficient system of displaying artwork. We'll let you know when we're ready to receive submissions and who to contact.



Peace & Justice-Making

Living our values & building
a just society

SEMINARY OF THE STREET FALL CLASSES

Times & Dates below

or on www.seminaryofthestreet.org as scheduled

Seminary of the Street and First Congregational Church of Oakland are delighted to be cosponsoring a number of spiritual formation classes and workshops this fall. Registration for all cosponsored classes is on a donation basis for members and pledging friends of FCCO; no formal tuition will be charged. All classes are also open to the public, so tell your friends! Some dates and times are still being determined, but here is a list of offerings, with others potentially to be added:

- **Theology for Ordinary Radicals** eight-week class, taught by Ryan Dowell Baum
- **Dissident Discipleship** 9am Sunday morning Bible study, taught by Dr. Webb Mealy and Nichola Torbett
- **Toward Full Aliveness** (formerly called "Finding Your Calling in Community") eight-week class, taught by Nichola Torbett, most likely on Saturday mornings
- **The Transformative Power of Forgiveness** workshop, Saturday, November 7, taught by guest teacher Rev. Scott Hutchinson
- **Seeding the Irresistible Revolution** three-week book group, facilitated by Nichola Torbett

More details will be posted online as available at www.seminaryofthestreet.org. Contact Nichola to register: ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org.

GENESIS

Genesis is group of clergy and laity on it's way to becoming a region-wide collaboration of congregations, labor unions, universities, seminaries, and other organizations empowered to enact change. We address issues including housing, education, and transportation with our governmental representatives on the city, state, and national levels. To get involved or for more information contact our First Congo representatives **Dennis Fagaly** or **Marcia Lovelace**, 510.465.7192.

CELEBRATING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Sunday August 30, 10:30am

The 5th Sunday of this month will be a special celebration of our Children, Youth & Family Ministry. We'll share the rituals, spiritual practices and artistic transformations that all of us share as part of this ministry. Children and families will be included in all aspects of the service, leading the way for an amazing worship experience. All teachers and volunteers will be honored for their time and talent. This will be a truly wonderful celebration of the joy and depth this ministry brings to First Congo. Please be sure to join us for this special day!

1-2-3 MINISTRY!

Sundays 10:30-12:15, For toddlers ages 1-3

Bring your toddlers to participate in their own hands-on worship time here at First Congo! This program includes time to explore a variety of open ended materials, story circle, prayer, and special projects. Your children will be in safe and loving hands.

KIDS LIFE (LIVING IN FAITH EVERYDAY)

Sundays 11:15-12:15 (after praise time, during service)

For children ages 4-10

Kids LIFE is about FAITH BUILDING; faith in ourselves, faith in each other, and faith in a loving God. Talented teachers support children to experience God's love through prayer, ritual, creative movement, stillness, yoga, the arts, music, and community building activities. We create age-appropriate lessons that offer Jesus' life as an example of radical loving. We honor First Congo's Mission to celebrate diversity of all kinds and strive to make this group a safe place where children from all backgrounds and beliefs can thrive.

TALE OF FIRST CONGO

Our Teen Arts and Leadership Ensemble (TALE) is back! Youth ages 12 and older will have a couple of opportunities to get together this summer, have a great time, and give their input about the future directions of the program. Interested? Contact **Allison**, 510-444-8511 x14, allison@firstoakland.org

LIFE (LIVING IN FAITH EVERDAY) GROUPS

LIFE Groups are a way to cultivate spiritual friendship and to grow in faith. LIFE Groups meet regularly for practices that help us to become who God is calling us to be. To find out about joining a LIFE group contact **Robin Kinney**, 510.847.9030, robinkinney@yahoo.com

FREEDOM TRAIN/NEW MEMBERS CLASS

If you'd like to join First Congo as an active, voting member of the community, join Nichola Torbett and other First Congo folks for a discussion of First Congo's theology, church history, membership agreements and exploration of our gifts. All are welcome! To sign up, please contact **Nichola Torbett**, ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org, 510.444.8511 X 11

Some Things About Marriage

For Sarah Joy and Jordan

Some things need figuring out.
We had always hoped
they would emerge full blown
and not need tending.
But that is not the way beauty grows
in the earth, as do flowers and food,
or in our lives, as in marriage

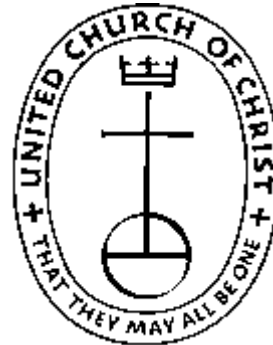
Now is the time for romance to settle down
Now is the time for making love last
So it can always be first, every day,
every day
and every day again,
even when it is not so easy,
that constant work we first discovered as hope
and now would keep as life

So when time has happened to us
we will be surprised
how those things we each had to figure out
were always there,
waiting only for the doing,
and ready for the unknown time yet to come.

--Charley Lerrigo, 2 August 2009



First Congo Picked to host Regional UCC Meeting



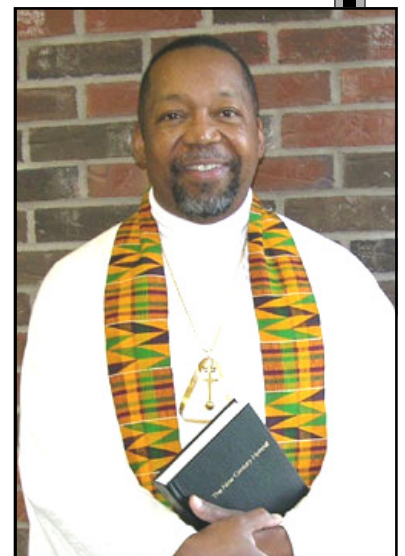
Sunday September 20, 2-4pm
Town Meeting with Geoffrey Black,
General Minister and President Elect
of the United Church of Christ

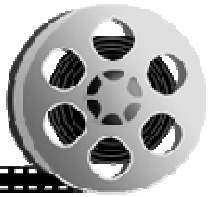
Rev. Geoffrey Black was called and elected to the post of General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ at the General Synod held in Grand Rapids this July.

This fall Rev. Black is coming to Northern California for a town hall meeting with people from around the Northern California Nevada Conference. First Congo has been asked to host this gathering.

It is a huge honor that out of 130 churches in the Conference they asked us to host the event. This will be a wonderful opportunity for people to meet our new President and to let him know what's on their minds.

We hope you'll join us. If you can help us set up or greet people please contact **Tony Lewis, 510.728.8423**, or tlewis@exelana.com





First Congo Movie Nights Are Back!

2nd Fridays at 7 in the Chapel, discussion afterward

These exceptionally well-crafted films have something to say about communal love and justice. Come join us for superb entertainment—and discussion of what's important to us.

August 14 🍷 **Bagdad Cafe**

Community grows from a self-possessed German tourist's patience and grace when she's stranded at a run-down desert motel. Magical and healing. Age 13 & up

September 11 🍷 **Duma**

A white South African boy sets off on his own across the desert to take a grown cheetah he's raised from a cub back to its natural habitat. To survive, he casts his lot with a tribal African man who's just been released from prison. Age 7 & up

October 9 🍷 **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**

When a purely mischievous, transgressive prisoner is sent to a mental hospital for evaluation he breathes life into the place, to the dismay of an abusive head nurse. Age 13 & up

November 13 🍷 **To Kill a Mockingbird**

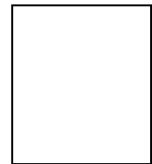
A strong-willed girl learns about compassion and integrity when her father, a small-town southern lawyer, defends a black man accused of raping a white woman. Age 10 & up

December 11 🍷 **It's a Wonderful Life**

A banker drives a small town savings and loan to the brink of collapse, but the community built with the thrift's help rallies around its beleaguered manager. Age 7 & up



First Congregational Church of Oakland
2501 Harrison St. @ 27th
Oakland, CA. 94612



Blessings to:

If you do not wish to receive this Newsletter please let us know at (510).444-8511 x18

August 2009

1



See First Congo Happenin's for Event Details

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
2 9 Choir Rehearsal 10:30 Worship	3	4 7 LIFE Groups 7:30 Laughter Club	5 7 LIFE Groups	6 7-9 Voices of Praise Rehearsal	7	8
9 9 Choir Rehearsal 10:30 Worship	10	11 7 LIFE Groups	12 7 LIFE Groups	13 7-9 Voices of Praise Rehearsal	14 7 Movie Night "Bagdad Café"	15
16 9 Choir Rehearsal 10:30 Worship 1:15-4:15 Board Meeting	17	18 7 LIFE Groups NO Laughter Club this week	19 7 LIFE Groups	20 7-9 Voices of Praise Rehearsal	21	22
23 9 Choir Rehearsal 10:30 Worship	24	25 7 LIFE Groups	26 7 LIFE Groups	27 7-9 Voices of Praise Rehearsal	28	29 1:30 SF Mime Troop, "Too Big to Fail"
30 9 Choir Rehearsal 10:30 Worship <i>Celebrating First Congo's Children, Youth, & Families Ministry</i>	31					

Ministry Teams at First Congo

Here's who to contact to get involved, or find out more about what's going on...

Worship and the Arts

Core Team Chair	Webb Mealy	510.444.8511, X 21	webb@selftest.net
Music Ministry	Sista Monica Parker	510.444.8511, X 17	sistamonicaparker@gmail.com
Readers	Charley Lerrigo	510.531.5539	lerrigo@sbcglobal.net

Children, Youth, and Families

Program Director	Allison Kenney	510.444.8511, X 14	allison@firstoakland.org
-------------------------	----------------	--------------------	--------------------------

Spiritual Formation

Core Team Chair	Nichola Torbett	510.444.8511, X 11	ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org
LIFE Groups	Robin Kinney	510.847.9030	robinkinney@yahoo.com
Freedom Train/ New Member Class	Nichola Torbett	510.444.8511, X 11	nichola@firstoakland.org

Mission/Service

Core Team Chair	Webb Mealy	510.444.8511, X 21	webb@selftest.net
------------------------	------------	--------------------	-------------------

Community Care

Core Team Chair	Grant Kinney	510.292.6758	grant@grantkinney.com
Pastoral Relations Committee	Erica Britton	510.331.4849	ebritton1@earthlink.net

Prophetic Public Witness

Core Team Chair	Marcia Lovelace	510.465.7192	marcialovelace@yahoo.com
------------------------	-----------------	--------------	--------------------------

Administration

Church Administrator	Kirsten Swenson	510.444.8511, X 19	finance@firstoakland.org
Administrative Assistant	Kai Lavatai	510.444.8511, X 10	kai@firstoakland.org
Board Moderator	Patricia Bruce.Lerrigo	510.531.5539	pblerrigo@sbcglobal.net
Treasurer	Tony Lewis	510.728.8423	tlewis@exelana.com
Stewardship	Dawn Raymond	510.444.8511, X 18	newsletter@firstoakland.org
Newsletter	Dawn Raymond	510.444.8511, X 18	newsletter@firstoakland.org