

Pastor Columns of 2022



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January

January 6, 2022

My dear Church Family,

Yesterday was the Twelfth Day of Christmas. A small and dedicated crew gathered in the sanctuary to store away the Christmas decorations. Murray and I have been slowly putting things away in our home, but we have not yet taken down our tree. I love it when everything is dark except the tree lights, sparkling and reflecting off the shiny ornaments. I'm never ready to give up the lights and the cozy feeling of the room. I always feel sad when we do.

But giving up the Christmas decorations does invite taking a new look at the space we've regained. Rooms look bigger and surfaces look clean and spacious. We are offered a new beginning.

The church calendar also offers us a new beginning. Today is Epiphany. The Greek word "epiphany" means manifestation or appearance. In our religious tradition, we associate Epiphany with the revelation of the Christ child to the magi. In the Bible story describing the visit of the magi to Bethlehem we are reminded that God's gift in Christ is not just to the people of Israel, but to the whole world. God offered humanity a new beginning or, as we say at communion, a new covenant in Jesus.





During the season after Epiphany, our New Testament lectionary scripture will follow Jesus' ministry. We will concentrate on the significance of Jesus' entire life, not just his birth. We will begin with Jesus' baptism. One of the several layers of meaning of baptism for us today is that baptism is a sign of the promise of new birth in Christ.



I have included here pictures of Annelin and Samantha, two of the children of the congregation. I love these pictures. I see so much life in the faces of these children.

The next time I walk into the sanctuary, I'm sure I will feel a sense of space around the chancel. I look forward to seeing the baptismal font near the communion table again. We will all take a close look at it this Sunday as we remember Jesus' baptism. I trust as we move into this season after Epiphany, that God will replace the sadness of another Christmas season ended with the hope we'll find in Jesus' life and ministry.



With hope,

Pastor Cindy

January 13, 2022

My dear church family,

I spent a delightful hour having breakfast with a fellow pastor and her 7-month old son. It was great to see her in person, even as we sat outside at a café in Oakland, bundled up in our down jackets.

What impressed me most about this outing was my observation of the woman who runs the café. As I waited in line, I observed her making snacks and lunches for two elementary aged children who later walked up the street to their school. As she prepared their food, she called them by name, helped them remember to pay, and gently reminded one to “save some for lunchtime.” My friend later told me that the proprietor knows the names of all the regulars, and described her as the “heart of the neighborhood.”

When we finished our breakfast, I chatted with the café owner. She left Cambodia 25 years ago. Her three children were born here. When she arrived, she knew no English, but took a two-month Adult Ed class to learn. To my ear, her English is quite good. She noted that one of her customers always corrects her English. I asked how she felt about that. She acknowledged that she appreciated it because she always wants to improve. What a great attitude! She then added that whenever anyone has been nice to her, they have become “family” because her birth family is so far away.

I received an email from Rose Kennedy this week. Over the years, Rose has helped many refugee families who have settled in Alameda. While her love is tutoring them in English, she has become welcomed into many of these families, most recently helping host a birthday party for the son of a family who arrived in September.

FPCA has been assisting a family that arrived in November through the “Never Alone in Alameda” committee. Rose has been arranging transportation for this family. She wrote:

I just had the delightful experience of taking [the mom] to the Food Bank. She is sweet, bubbly, and was happily chattering in English the whole trip. Their first language is Pashto, one of the Afghani languages, but she says she also speaks, reads and writes Farsi (Iran's language). She wants to learn to drive, so I explained that she needed to pass the written test to get her learner's permit. She is happy to be in Alameda and commented several times about how clean the city is. Her next appointment at the Food Bank is on Friday, January 21st at 3:30. If anyone wants to take her, please let me know.

I admire the mom's eagerness to learn English and her determination to adapt to the ways of her new country. I suspect that the kindness that Rose, and others from our church, including Barbara Curtis, Sonja Fisher, and more, are showing to these most recent refugees is helping them cope with the sadness of being so far from their Afghan extended family. This is an important way that we are showing God's love to our community. And, like the proprietor of the café in Oakland, our communities are being loved in return by the refugees. *"[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."* *1 Corinthians 13:7*

With love,
Pastor Cindy

January 27, 2022

My dear church family,

We have all been saddened by the deaths of our brother and three sisters in Christ this year. Their deaths cause us to reflect on the meaning of the body of Christ, and our hope for an eternal presence with God.



Paul writes to the believers in Corinth to help them understand that all believers are all equal members of the Church, which he calls the body of Christ. He emphasizes that there is no difference between people of different socio-economic classes, nor whether they are ethnically Jews or gentiles. He also cautions them that there is no hierarchy among the abilities or roles that each believer has been gifted with.



Paul writes,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:12,13

Lynn, Angie, Gene and Johanna each brought to our congregation their unique faith stories, talents, skills, energies and devotion. All were united with each of us through God's Holy Spirit. Each of them has left their own legacy in this congregation. We will hold them with joy in our memories.

Yet, the passing of so many dear ones in such a short time, also leaves us sad. It is an occasion for reflecting on our hope in Jesus. Paul writes later to the Corinthians,

But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture ... we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence.
2 Corinthians 4:13-14

Our hope in Jesus assures us that we will join in the resurrection of Jesus and enter the presence of God. With this confidence we can endure the sadness of the grief and mourning associated with the death of our loved ones. May the Holy Spirit comfort each of us in this time.

With hope in Jesus,
Pastor Cindy

February

February 3, 2022

My dear church family,

This week the Session held a special called meeting for the purpose of examining the newly elected officers on their readiness to serve as elders and deacons. The examination is a requirement of the Book of Order, one of the two books comprising the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), our denomination.

All the officers had completed a training, either recently or when they were first ordained as elders or deacons. In theory, then, they were ready to take the exam. To avoid any suspense, let me tell you that they passed with flying colors. In fact, since we were meeting on Zoom, we gave them the exam questions and then assigned them to a break-out room, where we allowed them to discuss the questions and then answer as a group. The church is, after all, one body!

One of the questions they were asked was, "What are the two sacraments celebrated by congregations of the PC(USA)?" They correctly answered, "Baptism and the Lord's Supper." There is evidence of these sacraments at the front of our sanctuary every Sunday. This week, please notice that in the center front of the church is the communion table. It will be set with bread and drink so that we can celebrate The Lord's Supper together. Most weeks, it simply has a bread platter and wine cup as well as the Bible and a cross. The baptismal font is standing just to the side of the communion table.

It is a joy to join in The Lord's Supper. This sacrament has many layers of meaning, one of which is a celebration of the unity of the body of Christ, the church. In fact, our frequent use of the title "Communion" highlights the close bond we have with Christ and fellow believers. We "commune" with Christ and we "commune" with each other.

This Sunday is also Scout Sunday. We often lament that more people don't join us for worship. This is a Sunday that our prayer will be answered, as there will be many guests. I trust that you will make every effort to worship in the sanctuary or on Zoom to show a warm welcome to the Scouts and their families. I have written a sermon which I hope will hold the attention of the scouts. It is about the dramatic shipwreck that Paul

experienced on his way to Rome. We are also allocating time for the scouts to share about the scout troops while still ending the service by 11:00 AM.

During the service, I will explain that the Lord's Supper is a meal which is hosted by Christ. It is Jesus Christ who invites each person to the table. Please join me this week in praying that the guests who are with us on Sunday will hear and respond to Jesus' gospel of grace. May they eagerly participate in Communion, with confidence in their relationship with Christ.

Our newly elected officers not only passed their examination, but each of them shared a short account of their personal faith story with us. I encourage you to ask them to tell you their stories. On Sunday, February 13, we will ordain and install the new officers during the Sunday worship service. Lorene Eggerth and Damon Rodrigues will be ordained as ruling elders. Then they, with the other newly elected officers, Jackie Barker, Rose/Kathy Kennedy, Kay Lamon, and Deb Saltzman will be installed to Session and the Board of Deacons respectively. We thank them for their willingness to serve in this important way.

With thanksgiving,

Pastor Cindy

February 10, 2022

My dear church family,

Our church is perfectly located to share the love of God with the people of Alameda. As you know, we are on a major bus line. People often sit in the bus stop or on the church steps waiting for their bus to arrive. The fact that there is a public school and a few preschools on Santa Clara Avenue means that parents and children are often walking, bicycling, and driving by. Since we are primarily in a residential area many people stroll their babies or walk their dogs right by the church.

People can't help but notice the impressive Neo-Classical Revival architecture of our church building. Of course, many people know us because of the striking stained glass windows. The two Little Free Libraries have also attracted many people to linger at the corner of the property. Every time someone pauses at the corner or passes by, there is a chance that they will read the invitations to attend a worship service posted in the "window boxes" by Alameda Korean and First Pres. Seasonally, the large banner stretched across the Chestnut Street lawn invites people to special services.

In September 1903, Reverend Frank Brush laid the cornerstone of the present church, blessing the neighborhood with these words, "We trust this building will stand on this corner as a messenger of goodwill to this community, as a source of light and blessing to all our citizens."

One of my favorite activities is talking to neighbors who are passing by or waiting at the bus stop. I often meet people on the afternoons that I open the church doors for "Open Sanctuary." I often pick up litter when I'm out front or on Chestnut Street. It allows me a comfortable way to begin a conversation.

One sunny morning this week I decided to step out of my office for some fresh air. I had a short conversation with a woman who was waiting for her bus to take her to her job at McDonald's. I thanked her for her work allowing us to safely drive up and order our food. I chatted with a dad pushing his toddler in a stroller while walking his dogs. We had a lovely time talking about his daughter and dogs, and I was able to invite him to church. Finally, I met a man who grew up in Alameda, attending Haight School (now Love) as well as Wood and Encinal High. He told me of being befriended by the Samoan kids who lived in his apartment complex so long ago, as well as his daughter's recent recruitment into the Air Force. With his permission, I prayed for him and his

daughter while standing there in the shade of the tree on Santa Clara. He then accepted a Bible from the Little Library. I read two passages that I had referenced in the prayer and marked them for him to read later. He was visibly touched by the words of God's love and indicated he would like to return and worship with us.

I am so thankful to be your pastor at FPCA. The interactions I have with our neighbors will only rarely result in more people in our pews on Sunday morning. But, by supporting me as your called pastor, and giving me this place from which to go into the world, even if that simply means "onto the sidewalk," you are obeying the command of the resurrected Christ to his disciples to, "*Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.*" (Mark 16:15). I also believe we are helping to continue Rev. Brush's blessing to be "a messenger of goodwill to this community."

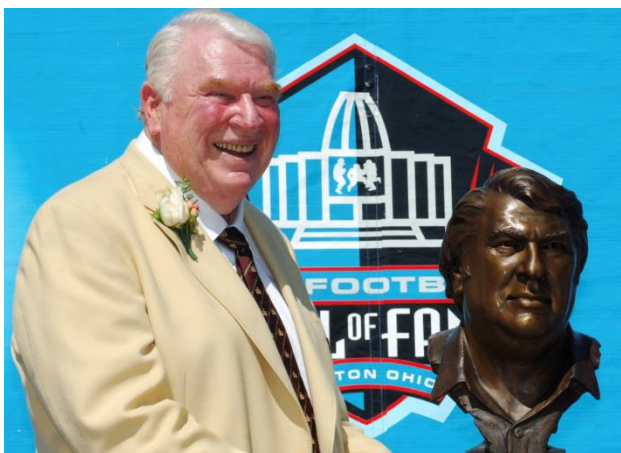
I thank you for the opportunity to minister to the people of our neighborhood in this way. And I thank God for the perfect placement of our church.

With gratitude,
Pastor Cindy

February 17, 2022

My dear church family,

Last Sunday afternoon I decided to watch the end of the Super Bowl. Late in the day I found the game on a YouTube channel. I was impressed that the Bengals were repeatedly scoring touchdowns in the fourth quarter. I was confused, though, because periodically the producers switched to a mode that made the players look like video game figures. I also wondered why a graphic logo “Madden 2022” frequently appeared across the center of the screen.



That logo reminded me of an article I had stumbled across in the February digital version of the Catholic Voice. The columnist, Bishop Barber, cited the homily he offered at the funeral mass of the legendary Oakland Raiders’ coach, John Madden. Madden was a long-time member of the church, attending parishes in Pleasanton, Dublin, and Danville. Barber wrote,

“Today, we remember who John Madden was in the sight of Almighty God: A son, husband, brother, father, grandfather, and friend. And MORE: he was a baptized Christian, which made him a Child of God, and an heir -- an inheritor -- of the Kingdom of Heaven. His sins were forgiven in the sacrament of Confession; He received Christ's own Body and Blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion; as a young teen the bishop confirmed him and bestowed on him the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then John Madden acted in his life with the graces he received in these Catholic sacraments. The sacraments put divine life in him; and he showed it - by living out the beatitudes we just heard read. I'll give you just one example (although there are many): On August 12, 1978, at an exhibition game of the Raiders vs. the Patriots in the Oakland Coliseum, Patriot's receiver Darryl Stingley was tackled, and hit so hard that he never walked again. His vertebrae were broken, and he was paralyzed for life from the neck down.

That night John Madden was at Stingley's bedside in Eden Hospital in Castro Valley. No one from the Patriot's team was at the hospital. In fact, the Patriots were on their team plane, taxiing for takeoff from Oakland airport. John Madden got on the phone and made the plane turn around and come back to the gate. Madden insisted their coach attend to his injured player.

For the next weeks, although the Raiders were at training camp 1 1/2 hours north of here in Napa, John and his wife Virginia visited Darryl Stingley daily. They offered their home and the use of a car to Stingley's family. They bought clothes for Stingley's girlfriend who had no time to pack as she rushed to a plane to fly west. After the 1978 league opener in Denver, John Madden flew home with the team to Oakland and went immediately to Stingley's bedside to visit.

Coach Madden remained a friend and made good on his promise to help Darryl for the rest of his life. "I love that man" Stingley wrote in his autobiography "Happy to be Alive" in 1983. And we love you too Coach Madden. And so does the Lord. The Lord who created you, and redeemed you, and who said to you at the moment of your baptism "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." In Hebrew the root word for Victory is also the root word for Eternity. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:57) Coach, may you share in one last victory: the Victory of Christ. For eternity. In heaven."

As you undoubtedly realize, I know very little about football, and even less about NFL coaches. So, I was quite intrigued to read this tribute to Coach Madden. God called Madden to care for Darryl Stingley. Madden did so with great faithfulness, despite the many other demands on his time. This is an inspiring story.

On the night of Super Bowl Sunday we were talking about the game during our family Zoom call. Our kids were baffled when I confidently told of the Bengals' overwhelming victory. As I described what I watched, it became apparent to them that I had unknowingly been watching a "Madden" video game of the Rams vs. the Bengals. While my experience did not match reality, it can be said with confidence that John Madden was not only a great coach, but also a person whose reality matched his profession of faith in Christ.

With admiration,
Pastor Cindy

February 24, 2022

My dear church family,

On Sunday, the Rev. Terry Dwyer preached about the seriousness of climate change and challenged us to use our brilliant and creative minds to find ways to repair the damage to our planet. He chose Psalm 8 as our Call to Worship,

*LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*

Contemplating God's heavenly creation, we can be overwhelmed by the insignificance of humans. Yet the Psalmist acknowledges that God not only maintains an awareness of the people God created (is mindful of them) but also blesses them (cares for them).

The psalmist continues:

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

Rev. Dwyer reminded us that God has appointed us stewards over the earth. It is a huge responsibility. As with many challenges, it may seem overwhelming. Rev. Dwyer referred to "brilliant and creative" minds. I pray that God will use talented people to address the issues we face.

There are many things that many of us can do to care well for the earth and the creatures God has created. For many years, Murray and I have composted our food scraps. We put bones, meat scraps, nut shells and even used tissues and paper napkins in the green bin for the city to pick up. All the other food scraps go in our compost bin at the side of the house. I love to turn the compost to see the rich, dark soil

that is produced by decomposing orange peels and eggshells! We also dry our sheets, towels, and clothes on our clothesline to avoid using the gas dryer whenever possible. I am trying to train myself to drive more slowly on the freeway to save gas. ☺



When I came to First Pres I was impressed to learn that we have extensive solar panels on the roof of the Education Building. The Building and Grounds Committee has replaced our light bulbs with LED bulbs, has chosen a cleaning service that uses earth-friendly products, and has placed recycling and compost cans in the kitchen and offices. I know that Nancy and Thom care for kittens in their home, some of you drive electric vehicles, and I've seen Angie and Greg ride their bikes to church!

Many of us choose our food with the welfare of the animals and earth in mind, and some of us prefer to wear secondhand clothes when possible. We can also help to keep inappropriate items out of the landfill by using the Alameda County Household Hazardous Waste disposal sites. The Oakland facility is only a seven-minute drive from church. Call **1-800-606-6606** for more information or click here to make an appointment:

<https://www.stopwaste.org/at-home/household-hazardous-waste/free-household-drop-off-facilities/oakland-hhw-facility>

You can leave electronics and small appliances, batteries, light bulbs, and paint for safe disposal.

There are many ways we can fulfill the responsibility God has given us. As the psalmist reminded us, let us consider the work of God's fingers, and then let's put our own fingers, and indeed our lifestyles, to work to honor and care for the creation.

In humility,
Pastor Cindy

March

March 3, 2022

My dear church family,

This Sunday we will read a passage from Deuteronomy in which God commands the faithful to recount their harsh treatment in Egypt and their eventual deliverance to a “land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deuteronomy 26:9 NRSV) The transition to the promised land was long and difficult. During their travels, many of the Hebrews questioned whether the journey was truly any better than the enslavement they had left behind.

This will be the first Sunday in Lent, a period of self-reflection, of acknowledgement of our own sinfulness, and of repentance, or turning back to the way of God. Lent is often described as a journey. It can be difficult to face the truth about ourselves and our true motivations. Yet we are encouraged to keep moving forward by the knowledge that at the end of the journey we will celebrate Easter.

Our world is in a dark period now. We mourn the fear that has caused so many Afghans to flee their country, the violence that is destroying major cities of the Ukraine, and the disruption around the world from the Coronavirus, a menace which is unwilling to surrender to our best efforts at vaccines and protective measures. In our own communities, congregations, and families we have disagreements that sometimes result in conflict and hurt feelings. In many of these situations, we feel there is little we can do to provide relief, and we end up suffering from depression and loneliness. A survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that American adults who said they had symptoms of depression in 2019 was 6.5% but that figure increased to 23% in January – February, 2021-2022.

A recent article by a Licensed Family therapist, Linda Fodrini-Johnson, includes her advice regarding two ways to reclaim joy in one’s life: practice gratefulness and seek joy in the moment. Your Session has made a decision which I trust will give us all joy: we will begin singing and praying together in worship! We will also have the Bibles and hymnals back in the pew racks. While we will continue to wear masks and social distance, we can once again enjoy singing our praises together.

In addition, Session approved Soup Suppers every Wednesday during Lent. Please consider making soup for our simple meals together. Drew Cheney, the chair of the Fellowship Committee will coordinate the schedule. Perhaps best of all, Session agreed that we can safely gather after church for a time of fellowship including simple refreshments!

Session has also approved the installation of two display screens in the front of the church, above the large heat registers. I've been told that the possibility of screens has been under discussion at First Pres for many years. The pandemic has forced us to try things that we had never done before, and to be creative about how we conduct our lives. I envision creative ways to use the screens to preach the gospel in ways that have not previously been available to us. I covet your prayers for creativity, intelligence, and energy in this effort.

Friends, let us walk this journey, often dark, of Lent together. Let us lift each other's burdens and seek joy for one another. Let us be grateful that we are all part of the body of Christ in this place, all necessary for the functioning of this congregation. And let us always keep our eye on our destination: Easter morning!

Looking forward,
Pastor Cindy

March 10, 2022

My dear church family,

Thursday morning I will fly to Florida to officiate at our niece's wedding. I am excited for many reasons: our three children and their significant others will be with us, Murray's brother and sister-in-law will attend, and it's the first time I've flown since early 2019.

It will be a small wedding with a traditional Christian ceremony. I will offer a homily using the following passage from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,

*“Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:*

*If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.*

*Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?*

*Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.*

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

The words here speak of a couple's ability to be productive together, to pick each other up if one falls down, to comfort each other in times when the world feels cold and cruel, and to protect each other against whatever harm they may encounter.

The passage goes on to speak of a cord of three strands. The imagery of a cord is perfect for a wedding. Just as the strands of a cord are intertwined, the lives of the bride and groom are woven together in marriage.

But what is the critical third strand? For some couples it may be a supportive extended family or a group of close friends. Possibly it is a shared hobby or pastime, or maybe it is the addition of a child to the family.

Perhaps you've guessed already that at the service, I will encourage our niece and her husband to look to God as the strong third strand in their relationship. God has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. God will not weaken nor fray.

When Angie Klein and I recently visited Marilyn Johnson, she remarked, "Christ is ultimate." May our niece, Anna and her fiancé, Nick, and all of us, discover that Christ is, indeed, ultimate. And may God be the ultimate strand in our lives.

Please hold our niece, Anna and her fiancé, Nick, in prayer, as they begin their lives together!

Leaning on the strength of God,
Pastor Cindy

March 17, 2022

Slow Down for Lent

My dear church family,

Last week I wrote to you that I was headed to Florida to officiate at our niece's wedding. It is hard to believe that I have been there and back, and that this long-anticipated event is now over. It was a beautiful, intimate wedding at 4 PM in a small chapel in Cocoa, Florida. There were 35 people in attendance, all family and close friends who traveled in from across the United States. I was privileged to preach the grace of God while blessing the union of the couple and the joining of the two families.



While the weekend was generally fast paced, the change of scenery gave us lots to delight in. We saw many different types of wildlife, including a great blue heron which I photographed and many pelicans, geckos, horseshoe crabs, bright blue Portuguese Man-of-War jelly fish washed in with the tide, and even three dolphins which we spotted far out in the water. At a nature preserve we chatted with two boys on spring break who were proud to show us the spotted blue fish that they caught before they released it back into the pond.



Most guests stayed at, or very near, the small resort that had been reserved for the wedding party. This gave us plenty of opportunity to visit with our niece and her groom as well as our extended family. It was fun to watch the interactions between our adult children and relatives they hadn't seen in many years. I had the chance to try out my paddle-boarding skills in the warm waters of the Atlantic, and our sons took me out kayaking one sunset. Another benefit of the weekend was that we neither saw nor read any news. It was a welcome break from the stupefying news of the Russian attack on Ukraine.

During this season of Lent, we can slow the pace of our lives by setting aside regular time to immerse ourselves in the Bible. I encourage you to devote a portion of each day

to read the Lenten devotional that is included in this Thursday email. You might even read and reread the account of the passion of Christ and His resurrection in each of the four gospels, paying special attention to the words of Jesus from the cross, which comprise our current worship series.

Despite the pace of life that we experience, and the heaviness we feel at the war in Ukraine, we can be assured that God invites us to walk with Jesus through the challenges and sorrows, as well as the accomplishments and joys. We read in the gospels that the people who heard Jesus teach were astounded and amazed. I encourage you to slow down, sit in the presence of God, and be amazed by love and humility and devotion of Jesus.

In astonishment,
Pastor Cindy

March 24, 2022

My dear church family,

As I opened the paper this morning, I was confronted with the continued distressing news about Russia's attack on the Ukraine. On other pages, I read that the Taliban has reneged on its earlier pledge to reopen secondary schools for girls, a reminder of the deaths of 132 people on the crash of the Boeing 737 in southern China, about the dearth of potatoes in Idaho and Washington due to the extreme heat last year, of an increase in the number of new coronavirus cases globally, the first increase since January, of the death of former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, and finally, that one of our Christian brothers has resigned because of alleged misconduct, from Hillsong, the Australian megachurch he helped found.

As we are inundated with such news, can we not help but ask, "Why, O God, do we not see your presence in our world today?"

Our Lord Jesus asked a very similar question as he hung on the cross. In his agony, he called out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) Undoubtedly Jesus was quoting the psalmist who wrote in Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest." This Sunday we will explore the theology behind Jesus' words of despair.

Friends, I want to remind you of two other scriptures. Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. But God enabled Joseph to rise to prominence in Egypt, and eventually save both Egypt and Israel from famine. Genesis 50:20 NRSV says, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today." God, in God's sovereignty, can create good out of the evil we see perpetrated on earth.

Isaiah 43 is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. The prophet assures us with the words of the Lord that through all the challenges, pains, and disappointments of life, God is with us: "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be

burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Trusting in God's presence,
Pastor Cindy

March 24, 2022

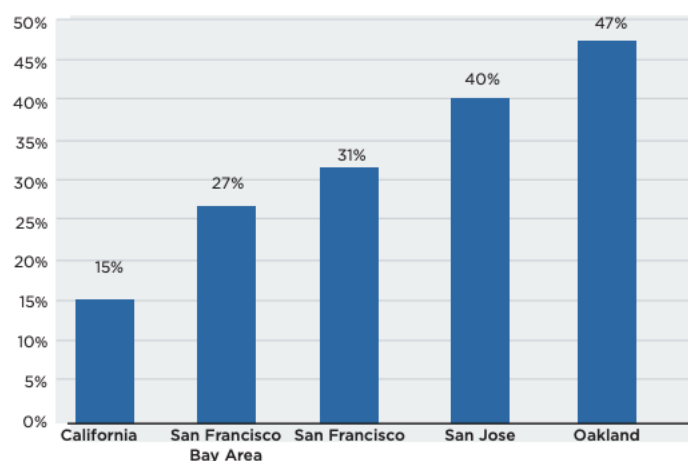
My dear church family,

The psalmist wrote of the joy of being in God's temple, and not only in that physical space, but in the presence of God.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.*
Psalm 84:1-4

We, too, at First Pres Alameda experience the joy of being in our beautiful sanctuary to worship God. Fortunately, most of us can then return to a secure and comfortable place we call "home." But that is not true for many in the San Francisco Bay area. The following graph shows how the problem of homelessness worsened over the years from 2017 to 2019.

FIGURE 1. THE STUNNING SURGE IN CALIFORNIA HOMELESSNESS, 2017 TO 2019



The causes of homelessness appear to be many and varied. The Bay Area Council Economic Institute in Berkeley points to the high rents and shortage of housing units as the main contributor to the homeless situation, “The Bay Area’s high rate of homelessness is inextricably tied to its housing shortage.”¹

The Independent Institute reports, “Some causes of homelessness are more personal in nature. Alcohol and drug abuse was the second most commonly cited factor in the 2019 San Francisco homelessness survey, self-reported by 18 percent of all respondents and 24 percent of those experiencing chronic homelessness.”² It further states that some of those who have experienced homelessness due to economic reasons, then resort to alcohol or drug abuse out of desperation.

There are examples of success in providing sustainable housing. Andrew Hening, a graduate of the Haas Business School at Cal, led a program in Marin, which resulted in a 28% decrease in chronic homelessness over a two year period.³ Our Deacon moderator, Rob Ade, works for the Independent Institute in Oakland. Rob and the Reformed Christian Church in Alameda are inviting our congregation to a film and discussion on Friday, April 8 at the Reformed Church. Rob writes, “The film is called [Beyond Homeless: Finding Hope](#). It highlights a program in San Antonio, TX called Haven for Hope which has drastically reduced homelessness there. Mary (Mary Theroux, Sr. VP at the Independent Institute and the producer of the film) is determined to build a similar initiative in the Bay Area. The idea is to open a campus where people can get drug treatment, medical treatment, job skills and life skills. It combines private

¹ <http://www.bayareaeconomy.org/report/bay-area-homelessness-2/>

² <https://www.beyondhomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/homelessness-executive-summary.pdf>

³ <https://newsroom.haas.berkeley.edu/qa-andrew-hening-mba-17-on-solving-chronic-homelessness/>

industry with police, fire and medical services. As San Francisco's homeless crisis has grown, San Antonio's has fallen at the same rate.”

I will attend the showing of this film and I hope that many of you can join me there. I believe there is a home for everyone, a place where each person can find “a nest for herself.”

Thankful for the sanctuaries God has provided,
Pastor Cindy

April

April 7, 2022

My dear church family,

Lent is a solemn season, a time when we remember the crucifixion of Jesus, and the emotional, spiritual, and physical pain he endured for humanity. It is a period of self-reflection where we acknowledge our own complicity in the death of Jesus and, often, a time of fasting. This Lenten season has been especially somber as we read of the war raging in Ukraine and the new Covid variants which are so highly contagious. We suffer spiritually and emotionally as we face day after day of depressing events over which we have no control. Therefore, it is important to our well-being to occasionally step away to find joy.

Palm Sunday gives us a ray of light in the darkness of this season. It is a Sunday when we can remember the excited cries of “Hosanna” as the people greeted Jesus, riding into Jerusalem. Crowds of people believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Despite the warnings of the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers, the children, who had no fear of punishment, tore palm branches from the trees, waving them and laying them on the ground, creating a path for Jesus to follow.

Our waving of palms and singing songs of loud praise on Sunday will refresh us and prepare us to enter the agony of the rest of Holy Week, until we celebrate once again, on Easter Sunday. As we remember the triumphal entry of Jesus, we notice the irony of the day. The very crowds who are shouting, “Hosanna” on this day will soon be demanding, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Just like the humble donkey who carried Jesus, he will humble himself and subject himself to the shame of crucifixion. We will remember the darkness of that hour as we come together for the Maundy Thursday service.



Please plan to attend the Maundy Thursday service at 7:00 PM on April 14, and then stop by the sanctuary between noon and 3 PM on Good Friday to pray below the window depicting Jesus in Gethsemane. As Christians, we are “Resurrection People,”

sharing the good news of the resurrection with those who have not yet heard it. Easter Sunday is a wonderful day to invite family members and neighbors to join the worship at First Pres. Bring them to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord on Sunday, April 17th, and rejoice in the good news of God's grace.

Thankful for the hope Jesus gives us,
Pastor Cindy

April 14, 2022

My dear church family,

I hope that you can come to the sanctuary this evening for the Maundy Thursday worship service. It will be at **7:00 PM**, tonight, **April 14**.

Maundy Thursday derives its name from the Latin "*mandatum novum*" meaning "new commandment". The last night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." John 13:34.

On that last night, Jesus had gathered with his disciples for a Passover meal. Passover is an ancient Jewish festival which is still practiced today. It commemorates the escape of the Hebrew people from Egypt. The tenth plague which God sent upon the Pharaoh and the land of Egypt was the death of the firstborn of every family and the firstborn of all livestock. Before the plague descended on the land, the Lord instructed Moses that each Hebrew family should slaughter a lamb and place some of the blood on the doorposts of their home. The Hebrews' homes were "passed over" and their families were spared, as described in Exodus 12.

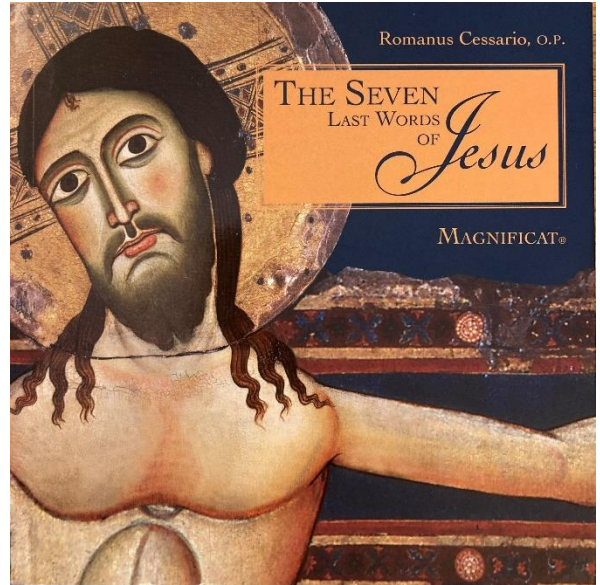
Christians today refer to the Passover meal which Jesus shared with his disciples as the Last Supper. During this meal, Jesus demonstrated his humility, his servant nature, and his love for his disciples, by washing their feet. It was also at this meal that Jesus instituted the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. This practice is the sacrament which we refer to as Communion or The Lord's Supper.

During the Maundy Thursday worship service tonight, we will remember the Last Supper by sharing Communion together. We will conclude our Lenten Worship Series by meditating on the last two "words" of Jesus from the cross. The bell will toll thirty times, counting the "reward" Judas received to betray Jesus: thirty pieces of silver. The rumbling of the earthquake, at the moment of Jesus' death, will be remembered tonight in the sanctuary. We will symbolically demonstrate the crucifixion, by plunging the sanctuary into darkness and stripping it of all decoration.

The Christ candle will then be relit to symbolize the hope of Easter which nothing can extinguish, not even death itself. In keeping with the somber nature of the Maundy Thursday service, there will be no organ postlude, and all will leave the service in silence and darkness.

May this service of remembrance bring each one of us a deeper understanding of God's great love for us and a renewed commitment to honor God by loving one another.

In remembrance of Him,
Pastor Cindy



April 21, 2022

My dear church family,

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

What a joy it was to celebrate Easter once again in our sanctuary after two years of being on Zoom. The music was outstanding. The flowers on the cross outside and on the chancel signaled new life in Christ. The sunshine in the courtyard during Fellowship Time warmed our bodies even as our conversations warmed our hearts. The narrative from the gospel of John reminded us that God is not a distant, impersonal being, but through Jesus, has invited us to be in an intimate relationship as our parent and our God.



We approached this Easter with the invasion of Ukraine heavy on our hearts. We also brought the stress of a pandemic which does not end, our personal sorrows and concerns, and an often-frustrated desire to participate in the ministries of our church and the maintenance of our aging facilities while already being stretched thin by our busy professional and home lives. Our time of worship was an opportunity to soothe the stress of fatigue, uncertainty and fear that has characterized these last two years.



It is helpful to remember that we are not the first generation to suffer sorrow and uncertainty.

Easter in 1865 was referred to as "Black Easter." The joy of Palm Sunday, when General Lee surrendered to General Grant, was quickly overshadowed when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated five days later and died on Saturday, the day before Easter. On the Wednesday after

Easter in 1906, death and destruction in our own Bay Area resulted from one of the

world's worst earthquakes. Some of you reading this personally remember the Easters during World War II. The final push into Japan was initiated by the invasion of Okinawa on April 1, 1945, Easter Sunday, resulting in one of the bloodiest battles of the war.

Friends, on that dark Friday when an earthquake signaled the death of Jesus, many of his followers hid in fear and uncertainty. But their hope was renewed upon hearing the words of the two from the Road to Emmaus, "The Lord has risen!" (Luke 24). May we find hope and peace even as we proclaim, "**He is risen indeed!**"

With Easter hope,
Pastor Cindy

April 28, 2022

My dear church family,

One of the joys of being your pastor at First Presbyterian church, is taking a stroll around the outside of our magnificent church building. I am especially excited that you will have a chance this Sunday to step onto the newly painted front steps and enter the sanctuary through the doors that have been shuttered throughout the painting project. The building is a monument to our founders' love for God, and a treasure to the people of Alameda.



You may have been wondering what it cost to paint this huge structure. It was, approximately, \$180,000. This was not the highest bid from the three general contractors who Angie Klein and the House & Grounds Committee considered hiring, but the price did not vary significantly among them the three.

This expenditure has been made possible through your generosity and the generosity of many people in our congregation who have gone before us. In this calendar year alone, members and friends have donated \$1800 designated for capitol repairs, e.g., painting and repairing the sanctuary and reroofing our buildings. The bulk of the expense, however, is covered by our "Reserves." The Reserves currently have a balance of \$800,000. This will be significantly decreased when the final invoices for the painting and roof repairs are paid.

In addition to capital expenditures, these monies are used to finance about a third of our operating costs each year. Therefore, the Finance and Stewardship (F&S) Committee has chosen to invest in conservative funds. F&S regularly monitors and discusses these monies which are held at Charles Schwab and the Presbyterian Synod of the Pacific (where Pastor Nancy is currently the Synod Executive). Fluctuations in the stock market affect the balance, but the nature of the portfolio ensures that the swings in value are not huge.

We are the fortunate beneficiaries of these Reserves, which were initially donated by members of FPCA, such as Bev Johnson, Marryat Fletcher Parker, Louise Parker, the Meyers sisters, and others. Just like the donors of our windows, these individuals chose to keep their legacy alive by including the church in the final distribution of their assets. In this way, their contributions to the ministries and mission of First Pres have been extended beyond their lifetimes.

Our denomination has many resources for those wanting to give to the church in the future. I encourage you to review the information here: [PCUSA Composing a Legacy](#). I would also be happy to meet with you and/or put you in contact with Maggie Harmon, our Presbytery's Ministry Relations Officer, who happens to live across the bridge in Oakland.

In his farewell speech to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of generous giving. Acts 20:32-35 says, ³² *And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.* ³³ *I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.* ³⁴ *You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions.* ³⁵ *In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*”

We at First Pres remain grateful to those who worshipped in this special place before us. I am personally grateful for the generosity of each of you, who have called me to be your pastor. You and those earlier Christians, enable me to be here participating in the ministries and mission of Jesus Christ in Alameda. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Pastor Cindy

May

May 5, 2022

Dear the Congregation,
Pastor Cindy is on vacation and study leave until May 15th. Below is a write up from Church Elder, Jackie Barker.

Have a blessed week,
Mark Munoa

The Lectionary for this Sunday focuses on the Good Shepherd. From the 23rd Psalm through the parables Jesus used of the Good Shepherd we see God watching over us and guiding us back into the flock. Each of us has had people in our lives who have watched over and guided us. This Sunday we will recognize Mother's Day by talking about women who have been 'Good Shepherds'. There are many women in the Bible who influenced the lives of others. From Deborah who was the only woman to be a judge of the Jews, through Esther who saved the Jews from destruction, to Priscilla who with her husband led the early church at Ephesus, women have watched over and guided the people in their area of influence. This week for our Meditation we will have three people from our congregation cite other women 'shepherds' in the Bible and give personnel examples of how mothers or other women have influenced their lives. We hope you will take some time to think about the women who have influenced your faith journey and your life as we celebrate the Mother's Day.

-Jackie Barker

May 12, 2022

Dear the Congregation,
Pastor Cindy is on vacation and study leave until May 15th. Below is a write up from
Church Elder, Jackie Barker.

Have a blessed week,
Mark Munoa

We are blessed to have Rev. Charie Reid with us this Sunday as our guest preacher. Charie was ordained by the Presbytery of San Francisco at Grace Presbyterian Church in Walnut Creek in 1978. Charie Reid served Grace Presbyterian Church for many years as Associate Pastor, where she learned to love pastoral care, in addition to Christian Education. She retired in 2013 and has served on the San Francisco Presbytery's Committee on Ministry and as pulpit supply periodically. Currently she is a member of the Board of Diablo Valley Foundation for the Aging, Contra Costa County.

Charie enjoys reading, especially mysteries; baking, especially muffins; Zoom gatherings, especially weekly Bible Study with Mark Burnham, Grace's new pastor. As we are battered daily by bad news – high prices, COVID resurgence, rising crime rate, wars – we need to pause and remember. Remember that God watches over and cares for us. That he sent his son, Jesus, to take on our sins and redeem our souls. That He will always give us strength for the day. I hope you join us on Sunday to hear Rev. Reid. She always gives us interesting and thought-provoking messages.

-Jackie Barker

May 19, 2022

My dear church family,

It is so good to be back with you. I felt as if I had been away for a long time. I know all went well during my absence. That is both humbling and reassuring! I had a wonderful vacation/study leave. I was reminded that we are blessed by God to live in families and community, and it's important for me to periodically take time away to rest and reflect.



Let me start by telling you about the wedding of our son and daughter-in-law. (I now have a daughter-in-law!) The wedding was in Westport, north of Ft. Bragg. Westport used to be a busy port, receiving lumber by rail, and shipping it to San Francisco. Now it is a hamlet with a general store, one gas pump, an old motel, and an old hotel (both upgraded and nicely decorated) and the wedding venue, a restored 1880's farmhouse situated in a field which slopes down to a cliff above the ocean.



The view of the rocky shoreline and the vast Pacific Ocean was magnificent. The weather prompted me to designate the setting, "The Wild and Wonderful California Coast." We experienced sporadic heavy rainfall, hail, gusty winds and crashing waves on the days before and after the wedding. However, on Saturday, the day of the wedding, the sun shone brightly, the rain jackets and warm coats were tossed aside, and an aqua blue ocean provided the backdrop for the ceremony.

Covid did cause a disruption in the plans. Our younger son, Andrew, who was to be the best man, tested positive for Covid on Monday and was still positive on Saturday. He "attended" by standing about 200 feet up the hill during the ceremony, then returning to his solitary quarantine in the motel for the rest of the day. Another groomsman, and a friend with a blue suit remarkably like the groomsmen's outfits, substituted in, standing with our son, and raising the toast at the reception. It was a beautiful wedding. The bride and groom were relaxed and gracious. Everyone seemed to have a lovely time.

For Murray and me, it was a wonderful long weekend of family gatherings. We rented a house north of Ft. Bragg for the three sets of aunts and uncles and Murray and me. The younger family members, five pairs of cousins, stayed in Westport, but visited us at the house frequently, which made our generation feel special. We were truly blessed to be surrounded by so many family members. Everyone pitched in to make meals at the house, prepare for the wedding, entertain guests, and take lots of candid pictures.

The time away reminded me that God gave us the Sabbath to both worship and rest. I realized how important it is to rest, and to get outside to enjoy the beauty of God's creation. We as a community and a country are burdened by many difficult current events: the one millionth death from Covid, the war in Ukraine, the struggle of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees to assimilate to new homes, the drop in the stock market, the senseless shootings, and the seemingly intractable problem of homelessness.

May I encourage you to occasionally step away from the news, take an afternoon nap, spend time outdoors, maybe walk on Crown Beach if you haven't been there in a while. Rest your mind and your heart from these difficulties. Then join with your church family to help each other. Come to the Music and Meditation for Ukraine event in our sanctuary on Sunday, June 5th, from 1:30 to 2:30 PM. It is a wonderful way to spend time in prayer with each other.

Remember these words from Psalm 37:

- Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
³ Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
⁴ Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.
⁷ Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him;



do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.

⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

Resting in the Lord,
Pastor Cindy

May 26, 2022

My dear church family,

How quickly we can be tossed from joyful celebration (weddings, family gatherings, Easter!) to the burden of unfathomable evil acts. We are faced with the shooting in Texas this week on top of the hate crime shooting in Buffalo last week.

I encourage us to discuss opportunities to promote Gun Violence Prevention Education. If you are interested in pursuing this topic, please contact elder Barbara Curtis. My reaction to incidents such as these is to instinctively ask, "What was he thinking?" If you, like me, consider mental illness to be a major contributing factor in these crimes, consider becoming involved with [Beyond Homeless](#) . You can get more information from our Deacon Moderator, Rob Ade.

The following article challenges those of us who are White Christians to act. Please read it.

Most importantly, may I encourage you to pray for God's presence to be known in our country, for justice, and for God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Please plan to attend the "Music and Meditation for Ukraine" on Sunday, June 5 at 2:00 PM where we will pray for our country and the families affected by this violence, as well as the people of Ukraine.

With a heavy heart,

Pastor Cindy

A call to action for White Christians following the shooting in Buffalo

White Christians in the U.S., let this be a call not to contemplation but to action.

BY RICK UFFORD-CHASE | MAY 26, 2022

While this piece focuses on the racism in the mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, I also feel deeply for the victims and families of the shooting on May 15 at the Taiwanese Church banquet in Laguna Woods, California, the mass shooting of 19 children and two adults at Robb Elementary school on May 24, and,

for that matter, the constant stream of gun-related injuries and violence that took [over 45,000 lives in the United States in 2020 alone](#). Our nation's willingness to live with this consequence of the gun industry's stranglehold on America's politics is a topic for another essay. I have spent the last week focused on my concern for the implications for White Christians in the wake of the shooting in Buffalo.

There are no words to describe the sadness I feel for the families whose loved ones were killed in the shooting on May 14 in Buffalo. However, there also are no words to describe the outrage I feel about the racist fervor that has been intentionally generated in our country and around the world to cultivate the hatred behind this horrific act.

White Christians in the U.S., let this be a call not to contemplation but to action. We have no need of further empty pleas for healing nor prayers with our eyes closed and our faces raised to the heavens. Our shock that this could happen is embarrassing. There is no Black person I know who is shocked at what took place on May 14 at that grocery store. For people of color, this is simply confirmation of their lived reality and a sign of yet another place it is not safe for them to go.

This moment, in the wake of so many others when angry White men have committed acts of terror against people of color, must move us. We must fully commit ourselves to sustained, deliberate action to dismantle the intentionally created structures underlying entrenched racism faced by African Americans in our communities every day of their lives.

Here are some ways to begin. Notice that they DO NOT begin with more book studies. By all means, read and discuss. But by some means – any means – act.

- Look to organizations that are led by people of color and that demonstrate a long-term commitment to dismantle the roots of White supremacy and systemic racism. For a clear example, check out [“Live Free”](#) and its local chapter called [Voice Buffalo](#). Follow their lead. Show up at their demonstrations and vigils (don't invite them to yours). Take their direction without trying to improve upon their strategies which are built upon a lived experience you do not have.

- Immerse yourself in Black-led conversations. Start with podcasts or videos where you can listen and learn without causing harm, and move toward quiet participation in Black-led organizations that have the capacity to deal with well-meaning White folk who often do thoughtless, hurtful things. When called out in those moments when you make mistakes, listen — and be grateful that someone cares enough to take the time to tell you what they really think about the impact of your words and actions. Apologize, mean it, learn from it, and move on — don't make it about you!
- Gravitate toward work that makes you uncomfortable – where people are organizing around reparations and abolition of prison and police structures that put Black people (especially Black people) and other people of color at risk. Honestly, this is what it means if you say you are committed to dismantling structural racism. If you aren't working to take responsibility for and dismantle the institutions that enforce White supremacy, you aren't dismantling structural racism – you're just pleading with other White people to be more kind.
- Take a bystander/upstander training course so that you can practice what you will do when violence is committed against people of color (or others who experience discrimination in the dominant culture) in your presence. This work isn't natural. It takes courage — and courage in the face of fear takes practice. If you think you haven't seen that kind of discrimination — you are almost certainly mistaken. Practice paying attention and counter your first instinct, which is likely to try to explain it away.
- Learn somatic practices to help calm your body in traumatic moments. This is the best way to avoid White fragility — which is a natural but entirely unhelpful reaction to being called out for racial trauma that White people have participated in but which we also have been systematically trained not to recognize.

So –YES – Pray. AND — take action inspired by the hurt and the anger we feel in this moment and sustained by the faith of our calling as followers of Jesus.



RICK UFFORD-CHASE

Rick Ufford-Chase served as moderator of the 216th General Assembly (2004-2006). He is the co-director of the Center for Jubilee Practice (www.jubileepractice.org) and the program associate for Curriculum Development at Johnson C Smith Theological Seminary (www.jcsts.org).

June

June 2, 2022

My dear church family,

Wear red this Sunday! Red is the traditional color used in the church to symbolize the Holy Spirit. Red is reminiscent of the flames that are described in Acts 2:3,4. The people “saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that ... came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit ...” We decorate the sanctuary every Pentecost with red, as we remember God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.



Within Judaism, Pentecost is a harvest festival traditionally called the “Feast of Weeks” or Shavuot. It was celebrated fifty days after Passover. The word “Pentecost,” translated from the Greek, means “fifty days.” In the New Testament book of Acts, we learn that Jews had gathered in Jerusalem from areas as far south as Libya and Egypt, as far east as Parthia, and even from Rome. This was one of only three feasts for which the Jews made the trip to the Holy Land. They came on Pentecost to acknowledge and celebrate God’s goodness toward the nation of Israel.

In the Old Testament, we see many examples of the Holy Spirit working in the world and guide specific individuals. However, as Christians, we celebrate Pentecost as that day that the Holy Spirit descended on the believing community at large. We also understand that it was on this day that the Spirit came to guide and comfort each believer. We speak of this phenomenon as the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit” in a believer.

As a Christian community, we express our gratitude to Christ who promised in John 14:16 and 17, to ask God the Father to send “another Advocate,” a counselor or helper, to be with us forever. Jesus then describes this advocate as the “Spirit of truth” who abides in

Christ's followers. As a result, we can claim the power of the Holy Spirit as we devote ourselves to fulfilling our mission to bring the good news of Christ to the world.

Wearing red on Sunday,
Pastor Cindy

June 9, 2022

My dear church family,

Last Sunday afternoon 20 people gathered in our sanctuary to pray for the people of Ukraine. I have found these monthly services of music and meditation to be comforting and spiritually satisfying. There is comfort in joining together in solidarity for the same purpose and for lifting our lament to God in community. I'd like to share with you the diverse group that came together:

- Merrill, Barbara and Armand were there to host the event and lead the music.
- Merrill's husband, Yvon, videotaped it.
- Three students from Bishop O'Dowd were invited by Merrill. They shared their beautiful voices with us as they sang songs of longing for peace.
- A Scout from Troop 2 and his parents attended. He played the cello during the event.
- Two people came from Trinity Lutheran Church,
- A neighbor received the door hanger created and distributed by Barbara Curtis, so attended,
- Another neighbor came after having seen the lawn sign put up by Lorene,
- Michael read a passage from Isaiah,
- and there were five others from FPCA.

These times of music and meditation are important to me in many additional ways. They are spiritually satisfying because they enable me to purposefully set aside a time to pray for a situation that I otherwise feel helpless to affect. Also, they remind me not to forget about Ukraine. With the continued violence on so many fronts, it is understandable that concerns such as Ukraine fade over time. Yet we do not ignore the violence in our own country. We also prayed for the families of the victims of the recent mass shootings in US cities.

Finally, they help to give me hope not despair, knowing that God can work good out of evil. The scripture Michael read tells of a future time when God will eliminate all war from the land:

He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.
Isaiah 2:4

This theme is illustrated in a statue entitled “Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares” given to the United Nations in 1959, and on display at the UN headquarters in NYC. As I researched this sculpture, I found that it was a gift from the Soviet Union. How ironic. In my great antagonism toward the leadership of Russia, I have found that the monthly services have challenged my ability to forgive. I do believe that most of the people on earth, whether in Russia or Ukraine or the United States, are seeking peace. I must have a forgiving heart, just as God has shown me grace and mercy.

The young man from Bishop O’Dowd sang a song entitled, “Peace.” The music was composed by, and the lyrics written by Merrill. It includes the line, “When you are filled with peace, there’s no room for war.” You may watch and listen to the song here:

<https://youtu.be/OYA7U57OXWk> May it fill you with hope for our world and the end of war.

With peace and hope,
Pastor Cindy



June 16, 2022

My dear church family,

Every day our bodies remind us that food is basic to our existence. When we have adequate food mealtimes can be moments of rest and enjoyment in our busy days. If we share meals with others the food is enhanced by the fellowship we share around the table.

Murray and I experienced extraordinary meals when we visited Greece four years ago. The food was simple, delicious, lovely to look at and unfamiliar. The settings in which we ate were beautiful. The picture you see here is a small café in Kardamyli, a town where we spent three nights. Kardamyli is a quiet place with few tourists. We ate every breakfast outdoors overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It was as wonderful and romantic as this picture and these words make it seem.



But for those who are not able to access adequate food for themselves and their families, food becomes a source of both physical and emotional challenge. In Isaiah 58, God reminds us to share our bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our homes. In Matthew 25, Jesus equates giving food to the hungry with giving food to Christ himself!

I have been impressed with the attention the congregation of FPCA gives to feeding those in need. I learned that the Meals on Wheels program in Alameda was founded in 1973 by members of FPCA and that Millie Black was a loyal volunteer for more than 40 years. The deacons provide dinners each month for the women and children of Midway Shelter and casseroles for those in the congregation who are temporarily in need. During the pandemic, the Session approved the donation of thousands of dollars granted by the Presbytery of San Francisco to the Alameda Food Bank.



Yesterday I had my first opportunity to visit the Alameda Food Bank, located at Alameda Point. The Afghan family sponsored by FPCA in conjunction with the “Never Alone in Alameda” team qualifies to shop at the Food Bank. I substituted for the driver who usually takes Masooda, the mother of the family, on her weekly shopping trip. Masooda observed that the lines were longer than they have been recently. I wondered if this was because of the sharp increase in food prices in the grocery

stores, as well as the fact that school is out, so children who may have received free breakfasts and lunches at school are now eating these meals at home.

The Food Bank is well run, with pleasant volunteers who graciously greet the shoppers and confirm their eligibility to shop there. Because of the long lines, Masooda and I had to wait about an hour before her turn to enter. The other shoppers were, for the most part, patiently waiting for their numbers to be called. I was impressed that the warehouse setting was clean and bright, with well-stocked shelves and new grocery carts. Once inside, the shoppers were free to walk among the shelves, choosing the items they wanted. Large signs in each area indicated in various languages the limit per shopper of each item: 2 juice boxes, 1 cantaloupe, 8 potatoes, 1 carton of eggs, 1 cleaning product. I noticed how carefully and efficiently Masooda shopped. I was intrigued that she ignored certain items such as celery, broccoli and sweet potatoes while studiously examining each apple and box of strawberries before putting it in her cart.

I realize how fortunate Murray and I are to have as much healthy food as we need or want. We can go to a grocery store and buy whatever quantities of food we desire. I acknowledge that Murray and I can choose to take a vacation to a distant land and experience the wonder of excellent food in magical settings. Most of all, I am grateful that I am the pastor of a congregation that cares for the people who don't have the many advantages I've just described. May we never lose sight of the fact that Jesus calls us to feed the hungry, and that in doing so we have the privilege of feeding Christ.

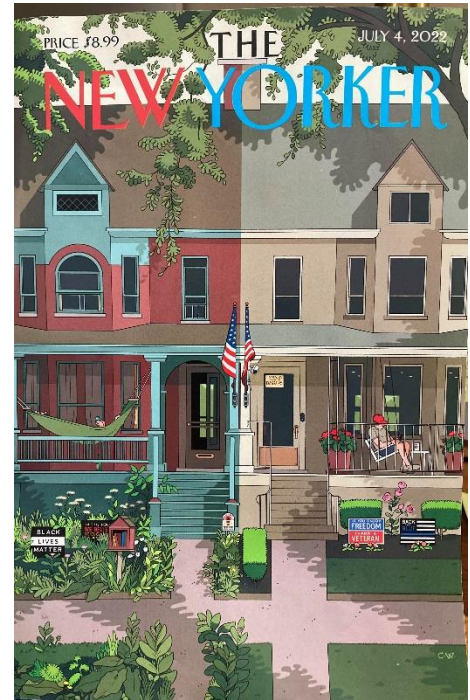


With gratitude for FPCA's generosity,
Pastor Cindy

June 30, 2022

My dear church family,

I love this picture on the cover of the recent New Yorker magazine. It shows two neighbors, each relaxing on their front porch with a cold drink and something to read. Each one proudly displays the American flag. Yet if you look carefully, you see that what is important to each of them is different from the other. One encourages passersby to acknowledge and thank veterans and support the police, while the other reminds the neighborhood that “Black Lives Matter.” One has planted a drought resistant native garden while the other has a neatly trimmed and planted grass lawn. One uses screens in the windows and has left the front door open while the other has left the interior lights on and it appears may have air conditioning.



These differences are not examples of “right” versus “wrong” but rather indicate different preferences and outlooks on life. In the United States, neighbors can live side by side while holding these differences. The differences make our country strong, as they prevent our country from going too far in any one direction. Having neighbors with different points of view can help us personally examine our own thinking and sometimes modify our opinions.

As we look forward to celebrating the US Independence Day, we can be thankful for the many freedoms we enjoy in this country. One of the greatest of these is our religious freedom. I was recently talking to a Christian who grew up in the Middle East. As a Christian, she was cautious about expressing her faith to anyone, because the religious majority was known to prosecute Christians. When she moved to the US, immigrants of her nationality often made unkind or threatening remarks to her if they learned she was a Christian.

Her daughter, however, grew up in the US. Her daughter easily identifies as a Christian, posting on Facebook and Instagram without concern. Growing up in the United States, she does not carry her mother’s fear of being stigmatized or persecuted because of her faith. She is acculturated to living where freedom of religion is a basic human right.

Freedom of religion not only affects our personal lives of faith. It also affects our willingness, even the legality, of sharing our faith with others. Session has identified “outreach” as a priority for FPCA in 2022. We have created many opportunities to both reach into our community and to invite our neighbors into our lives of faith. We frequently place Bibles in both our children’s and adults’ Little Free Libraries. We sponsor the inter-faith Music and Meditation for Ukraine. We carry delicious meals to the mothers and children of Midway Shelter. This Fourth of July, we will display an invitation on our parade float to attend our Sunday worship services.

Most recently the Mission Committee sponsored the Parking Lot Concert to raise awareness of gun violence in the United States. Since I was not able to be here, I wrote a short paragraph for Barbara Curtis to read during one of the pauses in the music. I noted statistics about gun violence, outlined steps we can take to help prevent gun violence, and ended with a short prayer. In reflecting on how my words could have been a better means of outreach, and how they might have spread the gospel to the people in attendance, I wish I had written something like, “First Presbyterian Church is holding this concert because Jesus Christ taught non-violence.

When Peter attacked the servant of the high priest in defending Jesus, Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” Matthew 26:52. I wish I had emphasized that as followers of Christ, we want to break the cycle of violence, not perpetuate it. In using the teaching of Jesus to justify our thoughts and beliefs, we are reaching into our community with the gospel message, not just our own personal opinions.

On this Independence Day I will enjoy riding on the FPCA float in the 4th of July parade. I will also spend at least a moment reflecting on the freedoms we have as citizens of the United States of America, especially the freedom of religion that we enjoy.

May God bless America,
Pastor Cindy

July

July 14, 2022

My dear church family,

In the two scripture passages we will read this Sunday we will see that some of Jesus' closest followers are not clear on the way of life Jesus expects of them. We'll read about disciples who want to call down fire to consume a Samaritan village which is not welcoming to Jesus. We'll hear Jesus gently reprimand Martha, who can't understand why her sister isn't helping in the kitchen.

Even now, 2000 years later, we are not immune to misunderstanding what it means to be a Christian. But, sometimes, we do experience the pleasure and peace of walking in the way of Jesus. I believe many in our congregation had that experience when planning for, creating, and riding on the float we entered in Alameda's 4th of July parade.

Last night the float team evaluated what went well, what could be improved, and whether the congregation might like to enter a float in next year's parade. Two things stood out: the collaboration and comradery. Each person took responsibility for various parts of the effort: submitting the application, ordering the banners, creating the church façade, picking up the

U-Haul, providing the music, decorating the float, etc. etc. Church members and two Committees who heard about the float donated money, exceeding the actual expenses! Last night, everyone agreed that the task had been easily completed. It was fun working together. We each may appreciate and feel closer to each other than we did before the project.

More than the collaboration and comradery, however, were the momentary interactions with the people at the parade. It was great seeing the spectators enjoying themselves. Even more, we had the deeply meaningful experience of making direct eye contact with individuals along the route. It was obvious to those of us on the float that a small percentage of the spectators studied the depiction of Jesus and were touched by it. In those cases, when their eyes moved to mine, I offered a blessing to them, mouthing the words, "God bless you" and placing my hand on my heart. None of us expected this reaction by the spectators. What peace and joy it brought us!

Another benefit of the float, of course, was the opportunity to literally bring our message into the community. The float with the pictures of Jesus passed by 60,000 people during the 3.3 miles that Damon and his SUV pulled it through the streets of Alameda! Many thanks go out to everyone within the congregation who, over the years, has worked on a float, maintaining our congregation's tradition of having a presence in the parade. And, in case you're wondering, there was unanimous agreement to plan to enter a float again next year!

I believe that planning, creating, and riding on the float gave many of us the chance to experience the pleasure and peace of walking in the way of Jesus.

Thankful for opportunities to be in the world,
Pastor Cindy

July 21, 2022

Happy Thursday! Pastor Cindy is on vacation both this Sunday, the 24th, and next Sunday, the 31st. This week we are fortunate to have Rev. Delianne Koops preaching for us.

Delianne (Greydanus) Koops is a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. She has served churches in the Boston area and in Michigan. Most recently, she served as a pastor (Temporary Supply) at First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley (2014-2020). She and her husband J. Barry Koops, have four grown children and grandchildren—some of them living in the Bay Area. She is delighted to worship with the congregation at First Pres of Alameda this Sunday, July 24.

Your Session met on Monday to discuss the business of the church. Session has selected two areas of focus: Youth Director and Outreach. The Personnel Committee has finalized the job description for the Youth Director and are ready to begin recruiting. We have money from a grant to pay for a part-time person for a year and are hopeful we can find someone who will work well with our middle and high school youth. For Outreach, several of our Elders will be attending and Organic Outreach Retreat in Danville in August. We also viewed a request from Alameda Sings!, the Alameda Community Chorus, to rehearse weekly in the Sanctuary as an outreach activity. The Mission Committee is looking at creating a scroll in the Sanctuary listing those who died from gun violence. If you have ideas for other opportunities, please let us know.

One item we discuss each month is the status of our services in relation to the pandemic. Because case rates are continuing high, and we have had some members of the church affected, we do not plan any changes at this time. Please continue the focus on outside activities, either the court yard or the parking lot, as much as possible.

The Nominating Committee, chaired by Joab Muchiri, is starting the search for Deacon and Elder candidates. Please think, and pray, about whether either is a way you can give back to God in time and talent for all the many good things He has given you.

See you Sunday!
Jackie Barker

July 28, 2022

Happy Thursday! Pastor Cindy is still on vacation but will be back next week. This week we are fortunate to have Rev. Dr. Randy Young preaching for us.

Rev. Young has been an ordained minister of the word and sacrament in the Presbyterian Church since 1978. After graduating from Fuller Theological Seminary, he served churches in Montclair, NJ; North Arlington, NJ; Clarkston, WA; and Walnut Creek, CA. In addition, he served at Fuller Seminary in Northern California as Director of Mentoring and adjunct professor for 15 years. He is an avid basketball fan (go Warriors) and has been an assistant Varsity Boys Basketball coach at Las Lomas High School for 20 years. The love of his life is Claudia with whom he has been married almost 46 years. He has three children: Taemi, Tyler and Cameron as well as 3 grandsons.

I've been thinking about time today. Seems like yesterday school ended for the summer and now it is starting again in a couple of weeks. Where did the time go? We talk about 'spending time' which implies time has a value. How do you 'spend' your time? I seem to spend a lot of my time on things that are of no value to anyone but me – reading a book, playing computer games, watching TV. I have decided to do a time budget to help me focus on the things that are important to me – church, family / friends, health, and music. What are the things that are important to you? Our church can always use any time you have to spend – in physical labor, mental labor, care for our members, or all of the above. Let me know if you have any success with your time budget.

See you Sunday!
Jackie Barker

August

August 11, 2022

The Alameda Schools are rated among the best in California and the US. We are fortunate that our city can boast about its schools. The excellent schools are part of the reason we at First Pres can also boast about a miracle that many of us had been praying for. The miracle relates to the Afghan family whose transition to life in the US has been eased by the help of many in the community, including those at FPCA.



It all started at a Deacons meeting shortly after the withdrawal of US Forces from Afghanistan in mid-August. A deacon, reflecting on the large FPCA facility, lamented, “Isn’t there some way we could use our resources to help the Afghan refugees arriving in California?” For many reasons, it is not possible to house people in our facility. However, the prayer that followed prompted another deacon to donate money to begin a fund for refugee support. Soon after, Kathy/Rose Kennedy and I met with Anna Rossi, a long-time Alameda resident and Roman Catholic Christian. Anna founded Shelter in Peace, a local non-profit organization which has been providing transitional housing to refugees and immigrants for more than eight years. <https://alamedashelterinpeace.org/>

Soon, a committee was formed, chaired by Robin Seeley, a FPCA congregant and active member of the Rotary Club of Alameda. <https://portal.clubrunner.ca/4362>

The founding committee members named it, “Never Alone in Alameda.” With Robin’s persistence, many in FPCA, the Rotary, and others in Alameda, donated to the

committee. FPCA became the guardian of the funds and Cindy Hovermale, our bookkeeper, has been graciously writing checks as necessary.

Anna introduced the committee to an employee at nearby Love School, whose family had been contacted by the father of an Afghan family. This man had worked in support of international workers during the US's presence in Afghanistan. As a result, his family had been awarded Special Immigration Visas (SIV's). These visas entitled the family to three months of financial aid by the US State Department, administered through the Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS). <https://jfcs-eastbay.org/urgent-afghan-evacuation/>

Many members of Never Alone in Alameda met the family at SFO on November 13. That meeting began nine months of help. People shopped for the family, took them shopping for clothes, helped them register for school, helped them get access to the Alameda Food Bank and drove them to numerous appointments. Others provided them with bus passes and detailed instructions about how to use the bus system, drove their children to school, helped the children successfully make the transition to school, and tutored them in English and other school subjects.

The Love School employee and her husband are Afghan immigrants. They generously housed the family for the first two weeks of their stay. After that, they were temporarily housed in an apartment on Encinal which had been generously offered by St. Joe's, the owner of the property. When transitional housing became available through Shelter in Peace, FPCA was asked to guarantee the rental for the family.

The Session of FPCA considered the request, and assessing the possible financial exposure, decided that the commitment would honor Jesus' statement that to help someone in need was to help Jesus himself. "Matthew 25:35 "... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." The FPCA commitment ended on June 30th. The family was able to pay their own rent, so the church never had to expend any money. Without the agreement of the church, however, the family would not have been eligible for the Shelter in Peace transitional housing in Alameda.

For many months, the family looked for an apartment to rent in Alameda. No suitable apartment was found. Many members of the committee encouraged the family to look outside Alameda because, "rental fees are too expensive in Alameda for your family." The family resolutely refused to look anywhere else, even in nearby Oakland, where the

dad had eventually found a job. Their two teenagers had assimilated to Alameda High School and their younger daughter was finally settled at Wood Middle School. The family was determined that their children would start the fall semester at the same schools.

As the date for leaving the transitional housing came closer and closer, the anxiety of the family and the committee members rose. My prayers for a miracle increased. The committee prepared to move the family's belongings into a storage unit and provide very temporary housing for them through St. Vincent de Paul. The local Alameda Afghan community, who had been helping with interpretation and apartment hunting, found short term housing for the family so that they wouldn't have to stay in emergency hotel housing.

During that time, the miracle occurred. A member of the East Bay Afghan community agreed to co-sign with the family for an apartment. A local real estate agency agreed to accept a co-signer, an apartment (very small for a 6 person family) was found, and the family is now settled within walking distance of Alameda High School. Thus, the excellent schools of Alameda convinced the family that against all odds (and against my advice and that of the committee), they should remain in this city.

It is truly a miracle! There is so much more to this story. There have been many challenges and much joy. A large group of concerned Alamedans, both native born and immigrants, came together to help this family. Through all of this may we say, "Praise God," and may we continue to be the people who Jesus described in Matthew 25.

In gratitude,

Pastor Cindy

August 18, 2022

Dear Church,

Session met early this month, August 15th, to accommodate vacation schedules. All ruling elders were present, as was our Moderator, Rev. Cindy Towle Kephart. The ruling elders are: Jackie Barker, Drew Cheney, Barbara Curtis, Lorene Eggett, Angie Klein, Joab Muchiri, and Damon Rodrigues. Elder Joab Muchiri presented a devotional focused on the importance of studying the Bible and making time to spend with God in daily devotions.

We spent a lot of time discussing mounting a display screen on the rear wall of the sanctuary so the Pastor and others on the chancel and in the choir loft will be able to see what the congregation is seeing on the screens in front. We will test first to make sure the screen at the back can be read from the front. Hopefully this will work and prevent the problems we have had in the past where what was on the screen was not what was on the printed material the Pastor and Worship Assistant were using.

We are planning to lease the extra office that Small Size Big Mind Preschool has been using. We have a potential tenant but are trying to verify the appropriate fee before committing.

A Seekers and Joiners meeting is scheduled for August 28 to provide potential new members with information on FPCA and for us to learn more about them. If you are interested in attending, please contact Barbara Curtis at barbarahcurtis@gmail.com

Our job description for a Youth Director was posted on Indeed, and we have received one response. We are hoping to be able to post on Coast Guard Island as well. If you know of anyone who would be a good fit for this part-time position (about 10 hours/week), reach out to Drew Cheney at cheneyab@gmail.com

The Afghan refugee family has found an apartment near Alameda High School (AHS). The two older children have grown accustomed to AHS and the family is delighted they will continue their schooling there. The support of FPCA has been crucial to them getting settled into Alameda.

Sincerely,
Jackie Barker, Clerk of Session

jackieb6j@yahoo.com

Editor's Note: A new feature of the Weekly Update will be a report from the Clerk of Session. On each Thursday which follows a Session meeting, Jackie Barker, will provide a "Clerk of Session Column." This will replace the "Pastor's Column" for that week.

Please feel free to talk with any of the ruling elders about the discussions and decisions made by the Session. All members and friends of the congregation are invited to attend Session meetings. Watch the Thursday email for the dates and times of these meetings, most of which are held on Zoom. The next Session meeting will be in-person on

Monday September 26 at 7:00 PM in the Youth Room, upstairs in the Education Building.

Mark Munoa, Editor, Weekly Update

August 25, 2022

My dear church family, What fun we had last Sunday at “Worship in the Park.” Forty people gathered for a wonderful morning of worship and food at Lincoln Park, as this summer tradition was observed again after a long two-year hiatus.

It was a beautiful day: sunny, but not hot. The food was delicious, with the BBQ prepared by the Fellowship Committee and lots of appetizing side dishes brought by the congregation. Merrill played the portable organ and Barbara led the singing with people enthusiastically requesting their favorite hymns.



Our scripture was Luke 13:10-17, narrated and acted out by Rob, Ellen, Victor, and Michael, who brought the story to life. It is the record of Jesus healing a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. After the healing, the synagogue leader spoke to the gathered crowd, reprimanding the people for coming to Jesus on the Sabbath to be healed. While the synagogue leader did not address Jesus directly, it was obvious that he was accusing Jesus of disobeying the Law, by “working” on the Sabbath.



Witnessing this, Jesus addressed the synagogue leader and the other religious leaders gathered with him. Not mincing any words, Jesus declared, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water? And shouldn’t this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” His harsh words demonstrate that Jesus allows no room for hypocrisy.

A pamphlet that we display in the narthex includes the following statement about First Pres, “We seek to be a friendly congregation where Jesus Christ is honored and people are served in His name.” I think that’s an excellent statement. It’s short, yet comprehensive, and it’s easy to remember. I also think it aptly describes the congregation I have come to know and love.

Luke 13 challenges me to ponder, however, whether there are ways in which we can do even better so that we aren’t in a position for Jesus to accuse us of being hypocrites. The lovely park setting last week reminded me how pleasant it is to be visiting with others outdoors over a bite to eat. We have been blessed with many visitors and even regular new attendees this year. For a new person to attend Fellowship Time is a risky venture, “What if no one speaks to me? What if I end up standing alone watching everyone else enjoy socializing? What if I get button-holed by the pastor who wants me to commit to joining the church next week?”

I wonder if those of us who have been at First Pres for a couple of years, or a couple of decades, might commit to being even more friendly than we are now. If we don’t normally stay after the service, might we plan to attend Fellowship Time? If we normally take a minute to get a cup of coffee, might we plan to spend a few extra minutes visiting? Might we introduce ourselves to someone we’ve not yet met? Are we willing to serve Jesus by forgoing a conversation with a friend to speak to a newcomer? Could we reach out to make a new person as comfortable as possible? May each of us honor Christ by showing the compassion to others that he showed to the crippled woman on that Sabbath day.



Grateful for the friendliness of the congregation,
Pastor Cindy

September

September 1, 2022

My dear Church Family,

My husband had a Cal grad co-worker who, years ago, exclaimed, “I love September. The Bears are undefeated, and I can smell the roses!” That’s also true this year, as the Cal Bears will play their first



game this Saturday against UC Davis. The Bears are, indeed, undefeated, and we wish for them to play their ninth Rose Bowl game on the first day of the new year.

While FPCA doesn’t field a football team, we do need to bring on new “recruits” to our leadership teams each year. Just like the practices the football teams begin in the summer, our Nominating Committee has already been hard at work preparing for the new members of the Session and Board of Deacons for 2023. The Nominating Committee is chaired by Ruling Elder Joab Muchiri and consists of Stacey Rodrigues and Nancy Lewis as members. I serve as ex-officio, non-voting member.

Last Sunday we studied the text from Luke 14 in which Jesus told the parable of a wedding banquet in which the guests who seated themselves at the place of honor were then embarrassed when the host moved them to a modest place at the table. In verse 14, we hear Jesus explain, “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” We don’t disagree! Humility is a beautiful characteristic that we as Christians aspire to exemplify.

However, we each must recognize that God has given us gifts and abilities which are important to the healthy functioning of the whole congregation. We must be careful that we don’t let humility prevent us from offering our gifts to the church. It may be that your special skill or experience or wisdom are what are needed on the Session or Board of deacons in the coming three-year term.

With that in mind, I encourage you to pray about whether God is calling you to serve in 2023. If so, please talk with a member of the Nominating Committee and express your interest. Likewise, if you know someone in the congregation who you believe would be a good candidate, please talk to a member of the committee to suggest that person. You may call the office and leave a message for the committee, or email the members directly:

Joab Muchiri joab.muchiri@gmail.com

Nancy Lewis nancyalameda@comcast.net

Stacey Rodrigues staceyrodrigues22@gmail.com

May we use all that God has given us to bless the congregation as we serve Christ.

In humility,
Pastor Cindy

September 8, 2022

My dear church family,

Last Sunday I preached on the difficult saying of Jesus from Luke 14. Jesus preached to a large crowd as they were traveling to Jerusalem. He asked them to carefully consider the cost of being his follower. He announced that a person cannot be his disciple unless they give up all their possessions, hate their family members, and hate even life itself.

Perhaps for most of us the most disturbing requirement is that to “hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters...” Luke 14:26. This is contrary to everything we believe and everything we believe God taught. We serve a God of love. Jesus repeated the command given in Leviticus to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:31. He went even further to teach, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Matthew 5:44.

How could we be asked to hate those with whom we are most intimate? I believe Jesus is using the word “hate” here to grab the attention of his listeners (and ours). We can understand his teaching as comparative i.e., we should love Jesus to such a degree that our love for others pales in comparison, even to the point of appearing to be hate.

Last weekend the Wall Street Journal published an article about the Christian author and founder of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NYC, Dr. Tim Keller. As a college student, Keller prided himself on his being the smartest in his class. In a subsequent reading of St. Augustine, he learned that his loves were “not ordered properly.” The article continues,

“Seeking fulfillment from his intelligence made him susceptible to despair if he got a bad grade. By learning to love God first and making this love central, he says, he became more able to manage life’s disappointments.

“Unless you love God the most, you will turn your children or spouse or job into a kind of god that you will expect to completely fulfill you,” he explains. This is a recipe for dissatisfaction, he adds, and often alienates those we love by burdening them with unreasonable expectations.” Wall Street Journal, September 3-4, 2022, Page C6.

Perhaps we will also find insight, and reassurance about our love for our families, by reading this teaching of Jesus in the parallel passage from the gospel of Matthew. Jesus said,

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:37.

God, increase our love for you to the point that it is the most important aspect of our lives. Amen.

On the journey,
Pastor Cindy

September 22, 2022

My dear church family,

One year ago, my neighbors' adult son, Ashley Dias, was killed in the middle school crosswalk near our home. He was hit by an SUV driven by a person who had just picked up her grandson from school. Witnesses said that when he saw the car wasn't stopping, he rushed in front of it to push two students out of the way to safety.

Ashley was a computer analyst by profession but had been working remotely since the pandemic. His niece was a student at the nearby elementary school, so he had become acquainted with the crossing guards when going to meet her after school. When he heard that the school needed crossing guards, he stepped up to help until they could find someone permanent.

One recent Friday evening about 100 people from the community gathered in a park downtown to observe the unveiling of a plaque in Ashley's memory. Several people told stories about his life. I am a friend of Ashley's mother but did not know him. Through the many anecdotes, however, it was obvious that he had joie de vivre. One of the speakers was his twelve-year-old niece. She spoke of the many adventures her uncle shared with her, his love for eating at fancy restaurants, and his willingness to hold a party for any occasion, something he coined a "celie." Reflecting on what she learned from her uncle, her final words of advice to the gathered crowd were, "Choose life."

Her words startled me, as just hours before, I had been contemplating our Old Testament scripture for the upcoming Sunday. It was Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall certainly perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him...

Friends, may we choose life. May we devote ourselves to loving God and holding fast to the One who loved the world and gave himself for the redemption of all.

Choosing life,
Pastor Cindy

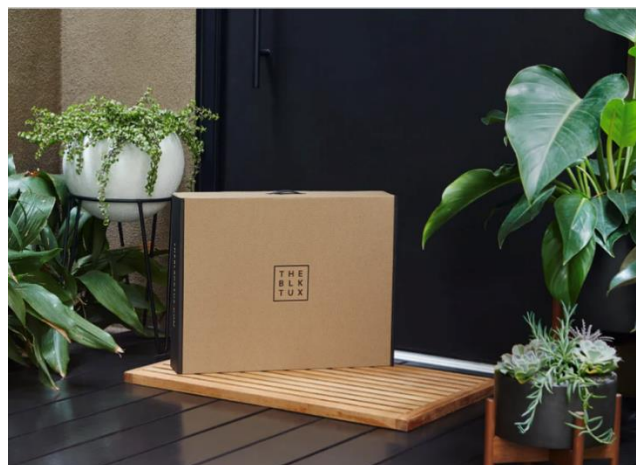
October

October 13, 2022

On Renting a Tux

My dear Church Family,

Years ago, a sturdy cardboard box the size of a small suitcase was delivered to our front door. It was addressed to our son. The return address indicated it was from an on-line rental business called, “The Black Tux.” The box contained all the elements of the tuxedo he would wear when he served as a groomsman in his friend’s wedding: jacket, vest, slacks, shirt, tie, shoes and even socks! A couple of weeks after the wedding, we stuffed everything back in the box, slapped on the prepaid return address label, and dropped it at the nearby UPS location.



The day the tux arrived, I sat in our living room and admired our son modeling the outfit. I marveled at how times had changed. What seemed like a few short years earlier, when our son was preparing for the Junior Prom, we had to drive 20 minutes to a tuxedo shop, spend an hour getting fitted, drive there again to pick up the outfit he had rented, and finally return the tux the Monday after the Prom. The entrepreneurs who founded The Black Tux figured out a way to provide their customers with a high-quality tuxedo that fits well, in a way that is not only easy, but fun. Customers order from a beautifully designed website, in the comfort of their own homes, and even take an on-line quiz to determine the right sizes needed for the various components of their outfits!

In Isaiah 61:10 (NIV) we read, “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

As Christians, our garments of salvation are a gift from God, a package arriving at our front door, awaiting our acceptance. But, this isn't a rental arrangement. The good news of faith in Jesus is that we wear the robe of Jesus' righteousness forever. Jesus calls us to share this gift, this clothing, this robe of righteousness, with others. Some decades ago, we could share the gospel at church, because families came to worship services on Sunday morning, and sent their children to weekly Youth Group and summer Vacation Bible School. But that model has changed. We now need to find ways to go into the world, the homes, the lives of those who have never heard the gospel.

First Pres Alameda has been awarded the consulting services of a Christian consulting firm called Kaleidoscope Institute (KI). Eleven of the leaders of our congregation met in my office last night to become familiar with some of the tools offered by KI. Barbara Curtis and I led this wonderful time of learning, Bible study and prayer. We believe that we can use these tools and learn from the consultants who will be available to us over the next nine months, to creatively find new ways to carry the gospel into our neighborhood.

The Black Tux company found a way to take tuxedos to its customers. Let us step out of our familiar ways and depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us to new ways of sharing the gospel. It may that Jesus, more than 2000 years ago, already envisioned what we will discover when he said, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel..."* Mark 16:15 (NIV)

May we help others become well-dressed,

Pastor Cindy

October 20, 2022

Hope for the Journey

My dear church family,

We arrived in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania on a hot and humid September afternoon. My parents and I made the eight-hour trip in a borrowed car, leaving our hometown in rural Massachusetts for an unknown big city. I was 18 years old and about to begin a solo journey, my first big departure from home: four years of college. Now that the journey had begun, I was sick with the grief of being separated from my family and apprehension about what lay ahead.

All of us here at First Pres are on a journey together. While there are bumps in the road and we don't know what our travel time will be, there are signposts of hope and reasons to rejoice along the way. The leadership team of elders and deacons, while smaller than ideal, is dedicated to the mission of the church. While we have had almost a dozen deaths among the people of First Pres, none of them was caused by COVID-19. The buildings and grounds at First Pres, while aging, are debt-free and have recently received significant repair and maintenance. The years of accumulated storage that had been in the smaller office was sorted, distributed, or discarded. That office is now rented to an educational psychologist. The larger office is vacant again and we are searching for a tenant.

Two years ago, God quickly provided Small Size Big Mind (SSBM) after the departure of the Jump Start preschool at the start of the pandemic. SSBM has rejuvenated our classrooms and transformed the outside play area. Our Sunday School rooms, courtyard and play areas are filled with children during the week. In the evenings, the facility is well used by basketball teams, 12-step groups, and the Scouts.

The Deacons and Mission Committee continue to offer opportunities for service as they care for people within our congregation, as well as reach into the community and world. First Pres offers music and prayer for the people of Ukraine, serves the mothers and children at Midway Shelter, collects food for the Alameda Food Bank, and medical supplies and toiletries for the homeless. Our Godly Play teaching steadfastly meets weekly despite having only one or two students most Sundays.

The Sunday Zoom services are encountering fewer and fewer glitches, and the big screens in the sanctuary are proving to be an asset to our gatherings. The choir returned in mid-September and is looking fuller every week. The Sunday morning worship attendance appears to be recovering from summertime lows in the 30's to an attendance of almost 50 on many recent Sundays. We are welcoming visitors almost every week. Participation at the Fellowship Time has been encouraging.

Despite all the signs of recovery, we still mourn the days of a full sanctuary, an active Youth Group, and multiple Sunday School classrooms full of children. It is important to acknowledge the grief of what has been lost. We can receive comfort from each other, and together we can be energized for continued ministry. We may not be able to see very far down the road, but we believe that God has continued ministry for First Pres.

Proverbs 3 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." God continues to be the guide on this journey. For almost 157 years God has been directing First Pres in the ministry of the Kingdom of God in this place. This church will continue to glorify God as we seek to be a friendly congregation where Jesus Christ is honored, and people are served in His name.

During the journey of my college years, I endured homesickness and other challenges. But it was also at college that I met Murray and grew in my life with Christ through the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. At my graduation, I was again surrounded by family members, but this time I was welcoming them to a campus and a city I had grown to love. I look back on those four years and see how much I learned and was stretched. God does indeed "direct our paths" as we journey with Him.

In Christ on the journey,

Pastor Cindy

November

November 10, 2022

My dear church family,

I am taking a Zoom workshop on adapting one's home to life as we age. It is being presented by a close friend of ours who is an architect, Susi Stadler. Susi designed our kitchen and breakfast room when we remodeled sixteen years ago and we thoroughly enjoy the space she created. In the first session, Susi assured us that she will talk about enhancements such as grab bars in the bathroom and enhancements that help people manage stairs inside and out.



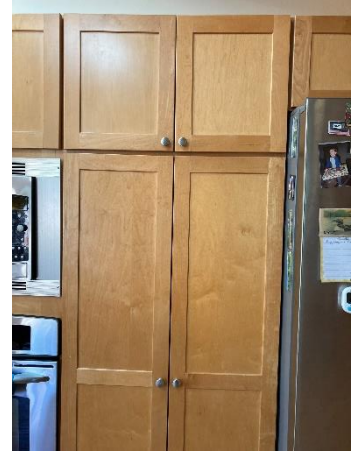
However, in our first session last Saturday, she mainly focused on what I'll call "attitude adjustment." She referred to aging as an "extreme sport" which requires specific gear to participate in. She made the analogy of the high-quality ropes and crampons that mountain climbers use. They love to climb, but they would never attempt to scale a rock face without the proper equipment.



Susi challenged us to acknowledge that as we've aged, we've changed. Our physical, and sometimes mental changes, mean that some aspects of our homes have now become barriers to doing what we love. Susi gave us "home" work, challenging us to identify a few barriers in one area of our home, and brainstorm solutions thinking about what gear would enable us to continue what we love. I was amazed at how

quickly I found problems in the kitchen and breakfast room she had designed for us so many years ago.

I loved the spacious cabinet above our pantry which held the tall cereal boxes needed for the five of us. Recently, though, I realized that reaching up that high before breakfast sometimes made me a little dizzy. So, I moved my two cereal boxes to a lower shelf – such a quick and easy solution! Murray uses a lamp which he brings to the table each morning to make reading the paper easier. Unfortunately, the cord stretches across the floor and has been a tripping hazard. I noted that in my homework. Murray subsequently went on Amazon and purchased a similar lamp which is chargeable, so has no cord! Finally, I wrote about the problem we have with our curtains coming unhooked from the loops which hold them on the bar. It wouldn't be too bad except we know that at our age it's better not to be climbing on a stepping stool to reattach them. We haven't yet solved that barrier to enjoying our backyard view!



There are many barriers which people face in their lives of faith as well. Nicodemus is a good example of this. In John 3 we read that Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews came to Jesus in the darkness of night. He was prevented from coming in the daylight for fear his reputation as a Jewish leader would be compromised. He had an intellectual barrier as well. When Jesus told him that he must be “born anew” Nicodemus questioned how anyone could return to their mother’s womb and be born again. Fortunately, as we continue to read the gospel of John, we find that Nicodemus has followed Jesus and is there at his grave after the crucifixion.

So, I challenge you, what are your barriers to living your life of faith? How can you take steps to overcome those barriers and live a fuller life with Christ? May you be blessed by the efforts you take to discover and break down the barriers that prevent the growth in faith that you desire.

Humbly,

Pastor Cindy



November 23, 2022

My dear church family,

Murray and I have each noticed how beautiful the fall foliage has been this year. I commented on the beauty to Joan Curtis. She explained that the early cold spell in the Bay Area slowed the production of chlorophyll, the pigment that gives plants their green color. As the chlorophyll broke down, the leaves turned yellow and orange. Some species of trees then produced a different pigment which resulted in the striking red and purple colors.



A few Sundays ago, I invited you who were in the sanctuary to help create a piece of indoor autumn foliage by writing prayer requests on yellow and orange and gold slips of paper. We then displayed them on our “branch.” I was touched by how many requests were written.

Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

It is good to know that God not only hears our prayers but tells us to pray! And to pray with thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving Day holiday this year immediately precedes the first Sunday of Advent. As a result, we will be making the transition from the beautiful orange, yellow and brown colors of fall into the green, red, white, and gold of Advent.

Frederick Law Olmstead, the landscape architect of Golden Gate Park, once said,

“Landscapes move us in a manner more analogous to the action of music than to anything else. Gradually and silently the charm comes over us; the beauty has entered our souls; we know not exactly when and how.”⁴



When you arrive at church on Sunday, in person or over Zoom, you will be greeted with the joyful appearance of the sanctuary prepared for Advent, those special four weeks when we wait eagerly to greet the Christ Child. We will be celebrating the season by focusing on joy, the deep satisfaction of knowing our place and purpose in the world. Jesus told his followers to abide in his love *“so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”* John 15:11

We will use the beloved hymn, “Joy to the World” as our theme song and will concentrate our visual worship arts on those items that remind us that “heaven and nature sing” as every heart prepares room for the coming of the Messiah, Christ the King.

I encourage you to invite your extended family and neighbors to worship at First Pres this year. They will appreciate the invitation, even if they are not able to attend. And for all who will join in the worship, it will be a beautiful time together as we abide in Christ’s love, and experience the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.

In joy,

Pastor Cindy

⁴ <https://www.ajc.com/lifestyles/biltmore-the-genius-frederick-law-olmsted-hides-plain-sight/P6kL1FPjQuiuywQjYXR1WJ/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CLandscapes%20move%20us%20in%20a,not%20exactly%20when%20and%20how.%E2%80%9D>

December

December 8, 2022

My dear church family,

Our Advent theme this year is finding the joy that we have in Christ despite the challenges and sadness in our personal lives and the troubles in the world. We have looked at hopeful joy, which reminds us that though emotionally, we may not be “happy,” we can still be joyful because of our hope in the sovereignty of God and our reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

Last week we looked at loving joy and were reminded that one way to think about love is to consider whether we want to spend time with another person. If so, we are loving that person. Sometimes the time we spend is time together, but other times it is time on the telephone or texting, or even preparing a hand-written letter! There is a deep satisfaction or “joy” when we spend time with another person, loving them.

This week we will consider “joyful joy!” For the poets in our midst, we’ll refer to it as “unabashed joy.” Joyful joy often *does* bring a happy smile to our face. Joyful joy or unabashed joy is confident, fearless, audacious joy! It is joy that shows a willingness to take surprisingly bold risks.



When Mary was greeted by her relative Elizabeth, who exclaimed Mary's blessedness among women, Mary's response was one of unabashed joy. The gospel of Luke tells us that Mary said, *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."* Luke 1:46-48

Mary's song of praise seems to tumble out of her heart with joy. Despite the challenges her pregnancy will present to her as a young, unwed woman, she exudes joy. It is joy that shows a **willingness** to take surprisingly bold risks.

It may be only occasionally that anyone experiences this level of joyful joy. A few weeks ago, when I first saw the First Pres sanctuary decorated for Advent, I felt joyous. I don't claim to have experienced unabashed joy, but it was a type of joy that caused me to immediately want to share the experience with another person. I went outside and saw a man sitting at the bus stop. At my excited invitation, he willingly came into the church and admired the evergreen garlands, angels and stars shining above the chancel.



Earlier this week I invited two women who had arrived early for their 12-step meeting to attend our Christmas Eve service. They were so taken by my explanation of how beautiful the sanctuary is decorated, that they asked to see it. We went immediately. Since it was already dark outside, the sparkling white lights on the trees and in the "heavens" above the chancel were especially brilliant. As we stood in silence, one woman said she would like to say a prayer for a relative who is ill. The experience for her was one of hopeful joy. Hope in the love of God which assures us that God is with her relative.

I trust that you will each experience these many different aspects of joy during this Advent season. If you are not able to join the service on Christmas Eve, I invite you contact me at 925-788-4120 to arrange to bring your family or friends, or just to come alone, to experience the joy of seeing the sanctuary decorated in a way that reminds us that "Heaven and Nature Sing" in joyful acknowledgement that Jesus Christ has come and will come again.

With joy,
Pastor Cindy

December 16, 2022

My dear church family,

Last weekend I went shopping for gifts for my Angel Tree children. It was a challenging experience. The children I shopped for are two girls, aged 12 and 15 years old. My younger girl wanted jewelry from Claire's. My teenager wanted a "crystal bead bracelet-making kit." I have a daughter, but as a child she never introduced me to children's jewelry nor jewelry making, so I felt somewhat inadequate as I began.

I did a little research and learned of a Claire's store not too far from my house. A wonderful clerk guided me to the section that held the jewelry for 12-year-olds. What an amazing selection! He helped me mix and match several pieces that he felt confident she would like. Hopefully, I asked if Claire's sold a bracelet-making kit. No, but I could check out the nearby Hobby Lobby Store.

A clerk at Hobby Lobby pointed me to the jewelry section. With glee, I spotted a large box that purported to be a jewelry making kit with beads. Success! That is, until I asked a fellow shopper if she thought the beads in the box qualified as "crystal beads". They were not. She then took time away from her shopping to help me, suggesting that the kit I had found was for a child younger than 15.

Last Sunday our new testament scripture from Matthew highlighted the tremendous dilemma that Joseph faced when he learned that Mary was pregnant. The text tells us that Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to bring any harm to or disgrace on Mary. He resolved to "dismiss her quietly."

Reading the word, "resolved" leads me to believe that he must have considered all the actions he might have taken, and the consequences of each, before making his final decision. It must have been a miserable and exhausting time for him. After Joseph had "resolved" to take the most gracious approach to Mary, God spoke to him in a dream and explained the situation to him. Joseph followed God's guidance to take Mary as his wife.

Joseph's dilemma was far beyond the challenge of my gift shopping adventure. I received guidance from retail employees and another shopper, not directly from the voice of God. But there is one way in which our challenges are similar. When I got home that night, I took significant care to wrap each component of each gift as beautifully as I was able. I want the girls to be delighted when they open their gifts Christmas morning. Similarly, on that first Christmas morning, Joseph's song was a beautiful gift to humanity. Jesus is the one gift that can transform our lives and restore all of creation.

I know that the Christmas season, and this year in particular, can be difficult for many of you. I want you to know that I pray for you as members of this congregation, and I pray for you individually. I pray that you will experience the presence of God, and that the Holy Spirit will bring you peace, no matter what your circumstances are.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah 35 says:

*“The desert and the dry land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus
They will burst into bloom,
And rejoice with joy and singing...
“Be strong! Don’t fear!
Here’s your God...
God will come to save you.”*

May you be strong this Advent season, and may god enable ou to rejoice with joy and singing.

In prayer for you,
Pastor Cindy