

First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto  
Yearly Retired Pastor's Report for  
Church Conference. 2023

Dear Friends in Christ,

Often, in this season, I re-look at my favorite Advent Devotional Guide, written by Mary Lou Redding, former managing editor of *The Upper Room*. Her study guide, entitled, *While We Wait: living the questions and mystery of Advent*, I will share from her Study Guide:

“Each year when the Christmas movie *Miracle on 34th Street* airs, I am reminded of our dual needs to question and to believe in the way Mary did at learning she would bear a child. In that movie, a sophisticated woman and her child each meet and come to care for a man who claims to be Kris Kringle - Santa Claus.

The movie follows their experiences. Though their questions are handled in a somewhat lighthearted way and are not about Christian faith, the dynamic is similar to raising questions within our faith. The woman decides finally that not to believe contradicts what her heart has learned. Many of us think we are too sophisticated for belief. We are grown-ups, after all, and we have moved beyond childish acceptance of what clearly does not make sense. But God offers us anew in each Advent season the opportunity to claim our faith, as with Mary we voice our questions and acknowledge our doubts. We can decide that it will never make sense rationally - and we decide to believe anyway.”

As we each have moved through the year, questioning and doubting, feeling hope as well as abandonment, let us keep moving just the same. I believe Christ is guiding each one of us, slowly sometimes and briskly other times, to more deeply know Christ's heart. Let us have faith!

Report of Clergy Activities this year

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| Communion Assistance   | - 7 times  |
| Pulpit Supply  | - 3 times  |
| Book Study leader  | - 14 weeks |
| Insight Posting  | - 6 times  |
| Hotel de Zink meal\<br>Prep and delivery with<br>Jerry Johnson | - 1 time   |

Blessings of Advent to each of you,

Rev. Karen Paulsen