



January Special Event

Join us after worship **Sunday, Jan. 21**, to hear Brenda Birrell tell about her extensive work with The Global Uplift Project (TGUP), bringing hope and help to various communities in Africa, Asia, Central America, and even the Bay Area. Through CEF grants, Joy of Giving, and individual donations, FUMCPA has been part of this work giving thousands of people a hand up to help themselves and each other.



Brenda will give us a quick overview of TGUP projects, with emphasis on how our donations have been and are being used to improve the lives of some of the poorest people in the world.

2024 Grants Awarded

by Jeff King, CEF Chair

The 2024 Centennial Endowment Funds (CEF) grant process concluded in December, 2023, at the church conference, when we approved grants totaling \$157,050. This year, the CEF will support a diverse group of projects that will impact our church’s programs, properties, and infrastructure, as well as our local, national, and global communities.



The grant approvals at the church conference in December were the culmination of a process that began last August with the distribution of the CEF committee’s call for proposals. Sixteen grant requests for a total of \$192,804 were received.

The CEF committee met Sept. 26, 2023, via Zoom, for our annual Grant Review Meeting, during which the leads for the grant requests had the opportunity to present their proposals. After review and discussion, 14 of these grants were recommended for full or partial funding. In addition to the grant requests, four “Restricted Use Endowment Grants” qualified this year, totaling \$15,600. Jeff King, CEF committee chair, presented the grants to the Church Council for approval in November, which was given. The grant amounts, project names, and leads are detailed on page 9.

We are thankful for the gifts throughout the years that have made these grants possible. With this proposal, the CEF will have awarded over \$2M in grants since 1988, and we celebrate the hard-working grant recipients who have made such good use of these funds! If you have questions about the CEF, our processes, or more details about the 2024 grants, please ask me.

God Knows

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the Year: “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied: “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.” —from a poem by Minnie Louise Haskins

May that almighty hand guide and uphold us all.



Baylands, November 2023. Photo by Burke Owens

Hello, Dear Friends, and Happy New Year!

As we leave the old year and begin our entry into 2024, I see vast opportunities for growth and renewal; too many perhaps. Still, we are once again at the start of a new trip around the sun.

I remember a few months back now, coming to First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto to visit. I walked into the sanctuary, sat down in a pew, and prayed for this remarkable new chapter in my life. A stage that came about, at least partly, because of a resolution I made a long, long time ago. A resolution that still surprises me: to be of service to God and, I hope, to the greater good of all creation. This may sound presumptuous, but it is meant with as much humility and hope as I can muster.

This resolve was formed in me many years ago, over the course of countless woodland journeys to a protected nature preserve and swimming hole near my home as a boy and teenager in Connecticut. The resolve has been adjusted and tweaked over time, edited to fit the understanding of who I took myself to be in various seasons, yet it never lost its central theme. Being of service to God and creation is a

large resolution, one difficult to grasp until one has lived long enough and experienced the many sides of life: good, bad, and indifferent.

Today, I appreciate more fully that being of service is not as difficult as it once seemed. In fact, it is often simpler and more direct than anything else. Part of what I have learned is that putting God first is pretty much always the best answer. As a result, acknowledging God's guidance in my life is often a very practical step to living a better life. But when I was younger, with less experience, a simpler life seemed to be a boring life, a life without fun or achievement or satisfaction in it. The benefits of youth are many—energy, passion and determination, yet the downsides are often impatience, narrow mindedness, and fear of missing out—any of which can freeze one's actions and options.

So, if we are lucky, we live and learn over the course of our all too short lives that God is always with us, no matter our fears, doubts, or obsessions. If we are willing to lean into the divine spark which is in each of us, and ask God to enter our lives fully and unabashedly, then miraculous things can happen.

For 2024, my prayer is that our beloved community continues to flourish and grow, so that we understand more fully God's purpose for us here in Palo Alto.

Our church is an outpost for God's ongoing work in the world. We are each asked to give ourselves to this divine effort, to make a difference, in both little and big ways. By our own faithful and heartfelt actions, we really do help the world change.

Each one of us is a remarkable being, created with a unique relationship to creation. Through our efforts, we enhance this piece of heaven we call our community, God's kingdom. Through our efforts, this world becomes complete and even miraculous. As individuals our identities can keep us apart from others, but through fellowship and unity, a significant transformation takes place. In connection, we can achieve much that alone is beyond us.

continued on page 4

Seeking Input for Website Redesign Project

by Pamela Cutkosky, Communications Chair

Thanks to a Centennial Endowment Funds grant, the Communications Committee will be able to launch a redesign of our website this year.

Our website was last redesigned in 2016-17. Website technology has improved, and our website lacks the flexibility that is available today. Some of the technology from 2017 is no longer supported.

Step One of a redesign is research. The Communications team will begin by investigating website designers, the current technology options for websites, and other church websites that are newer, fresher, and more flexible than ours.

Another part of our research is getting feedback from the staff, congregation, and other users of our website. So, we'd like to know:

- What do you like about our current website? What bugs you?
- What is easy to use? What is too hard to figure out?
- Are there church websites you have liked that we should look at?

Send your thoughts to Communications Chair Pamela Cutkosky at pamelareasner@yahoo.com or contact another member of the committee: Michele Conway, Ben Conway, Char Cutkosky, Karla Ebrahimi, Robert Lasater.

Our website is www.firstpaloalto.com

Please send us your thoughts, comments, ideas by Friday, Jan. 19. 📍

A group of FUMCPA music lovers sauntered down University Ave. Saturday, Dec. 9, to share songs of the season with all and sundry. Pastor Gerardo on guitar, Alan Cooper on violin, Julianne Stafford on accordion, accompanied ably by Pam Cutkosky, Emily and Annie King, Steve Hickman, and Pastor Burke, all singing heartily and with good will. A fine time was had by all.



Celebrate Chinese New Year with Koinonia

by Diane Allen

Koinonia, a church fellowship group that usually hosts an event once a month, kicks off 2024 with a catered dinner Jan. 20. No need to be a member of Koinonia or First UMC Palo Alto to join us.

January's event celebrates Chinese New Year with a meal from one of our favorite Chinese restaurants. The dishes will be served buffet style in Kohlstedt Hall starting at 6 p.m. We will eat together at tables set up for the occasion.

Attendees will need to register in advance and pre-pay for their meals so we can get an accurate count before ordering. Please watch the weekly church emails for details of cost and registration deadlines.

Hope we see you there! 📍

CONCERT NOTES Start the new year with music!

On Monday, Jan. 1, the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra returns for their annual New Year's Day concert in our sanctuary. This free and very popular concert begins at 3 p.m. Arrive early to get a seat. Donations are appreciated.

<https://www.thesfco.org/main-stage-202324> 📍

Pastor's Corner from page 2

Step by step, over the course of our lives and the lives of those who preceded us and of those who will follow us in the future, the miracle of creation becomes more comprehensive, subtly tuned, and perfected through our efforts, our faith, and our love.

So please, let us join together in this new year, to continue the divine process of bringing God into the world.

Blessings to each of you, with a prayer that we each enjoy a bountiful, healthy, and grace-filled 2024.

Pastor Burke



Our church donated 28 pairs of socks, 6 warm jackets, 9 blankets, 1 set of long underwear, 20 warm hats, 2 hairdryers, 2 sets of brushes and combs, 2 journals, and some pens to the LifeMoves holiday collection in December. Sophie Pigman from LifeMoves (*below, center*) was very happy to receive the donations delivered by Brenda Birrell (*left*) and Nancy Olson (*right*). Brenda had a very busy but fun three hours handing out all the gifts at LifeMoves, Dec. 18. Thank you to Brenda and Nancy for organizing this giving opportunity at our church!



January Worship Calendar

Epiphany and Understanding

Epiphany is a sudden realization that historically came to the Three Wise ones when they finally arrived in Bethlehem and saw baby Jesus. But an epiphany can happen in any number of contexts or times or places and to any of us. For epiphany is when we are suddenly struck with how things connect in ways we could not have seen before.

This month we will look at how epiphany is not a onetime occurrence for a few, but rather how it is a way in which the spirit awakens us, even now, with transformative understanding and grace.

Jan. 7	Baptism & Epiphany of the Lord, Holy Communion Sermon: A new chance, a new life and a new year! Scripture: Psalm 148
Jan. 14	Second Sunday in Epiphany Sermon: A realization that changes the world Scripture: Matthew 2
Jan. 21	Third Sunday in Epiphany Sermon: Epiphany in science and civilization Scripture: Acts 10: 30-43
Jan. 28	Fourth Sunday in Epiphany Sermon: Epiphany in art and culture Scripture: Wisdom 19: 18-22

Great Decisions 2024 Begins in February



by Tom Fingar and Lou Bellardo

As we relive another glorious Christmas and move into the Sundays after Epiphany, we are looking forward to and preparing for the return of the Great Decisions program that has been sponsored by First Church for more than 30 years.


Each year we examine eight international issues and their policy implications for the United States. The program this year will begin on Feb. 18 and continue each Sunday until April 14 (except March 31, Easter). The sessions will be held on Sunday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30. They will be in person but will also be accessible via Zoom. All are welcome to join and attend as many or as few as you wish.

If you have participated in the past, we probably have your contact information but whether you are a returning or new participant, we encourage you to contact Lou Bellardo (lou@bellardo.com) so that we can send you updates and the Zoom link for each session. You will also find instructions for registering on the church website. It will be necessary to register for each of the weekly sessions. Reminders and Zoom links will be pushed to all who have registered on the Thursday before each Sunday session.

At this point, we know the topics that are covered in the Great Decisions workbook prepared by the independent and non-partisan Foreign Policy Association, but we do not yet know the order in which we will discuss the topics. It is not necessary to purchase or read the workbook, but if you want to do so, you can use the Foreign Policy Association website at https://www.fpa.org/great_decisions/?act=gd_materials. The topics we will cover are:

- Mideast Realignment
- Climate Technology and Competition
- Science Across Borders
- US-China Trade Rivalry
- NATO's Future
- Understanding Indonesia
- High Seas Treaty
- Pandemic Preparedness

The order in which the topics will be discussed will be determined by the schedules of those who lead the discussions. We will announce the schedule as soon as possible. Tom Fingar will serve as coordinator of the program; Lou Bellardo will oversee logistical arrangements.

You need not be a foreign policy expert to attend; just bring an open and eager mind. Newcomers and guests are welcome! If you have general questions, please contact Tom Fingar (tom@fingar.net). 




Green Notes

by Nancy Olson

Happy New Year! 2024! Wow!

It truly amazes me that we are facing the opportunities and challenges of a new year.

I don't usually make a New Year's resolution but I am making one now: I will strive to be aware of all God's blessings all around me, and aware that my actions have reactions. May my actions be beneficial to our environment.

Please join me in reducing the waste generated by choices we make. Join me in planting a tree in my yard or to replenish a forest; in conserving water even when it is raining; in making sure neighbors are not hurting or ill. In remembering to thank God daily for our many blessings. 



After church Sunday morning Dec. 10, Ellen Haffner showed off "THE TIE," which she selected at the Koinonia Christmas Party and White Elephant gift exchange the previous evening. Photo by Lou Bellardo



Many Thanks to Those Who “Decked the Halls”

Thank you to those who came out early on a brisk Saturday in December to adorn the sanctuary with greens and decorations for Advent and Christmas: Mira Dabrowski, Pam and Mark Cutkosky, Nancy and John Larson, Steve Wood, Mike and Jamie McCartney, Patty Bellardo, Linda Grossman, Peter Colby, and Pastor Burke. 🕊️



Above: John Larson (*left*) and Mike McCartney (*right*) hang a wreath in the sanctuary. Nancy Larson (*left*), Patty Bellardo (*center*), and Linda Grossman (*right*) wrangle wreaths. Photos courtesy Patty Bellardo

Below: All done Dec. 2: the halls are festively “decked” for Advent and Christmas! Poinsettias were added Dec. 15. The sanctuary at night in late December. Photos by Burke Owens



Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4: 4-7



Pictured L to R: Pam Cutkosky, Michele Conway, Brenda Birrell, Lucy Tompkin, and Nancy Olson (inset) were among those who assembled cookie plates Dec. 7. Photo by Patty Bellardo

UWF CONNECTIONS

by Nancy Olson

It is good to start a new year with gratitude:

- Thank you, God.
- Thank you to the members of our congregation who supported our greeting card sale. Your purchases help provide resources for our contributions to new and long term mission projects. This year we made more than \$1000, the most ever!
- Thank you to those of you who provided cookies and helped assemble our traditional cookie plates for church members, many who are unable to come to services in person. Thank you to those who volunteered to deliver the cookies. You all truly made this annual event successful!



My energies and attention have been diverted for a while, but I am now trying to line up interesting speakers for our meetings. I hope to set dates in the near future.

I always appreciate your comments and suggestions.

Happy New Year! 🙏

Prayer for a New Year

Lord Jesus, at this time we can look back to the old year and look forward to the new. We give thanks for the blessings of the past year, and we place into your hands the mistakes we have made.

As you are "the Light of the world," take away the darkness in our lives. As you are "the Way," lead us in the year ahead. As you are "the gate of the sheepfold," protect us from danger.

We entrust the past to your mercy, Lord, the present to your love, and the future to your providence. Amen.

La Comida Senior Lunches Are Back!

La Comida's senior lunch program returned to First UMC Palo Alto in December, this time in Fellowship Hall. La Comida now serves sit-down lunches Monday through Friday from 11:45-12:30 p.m.

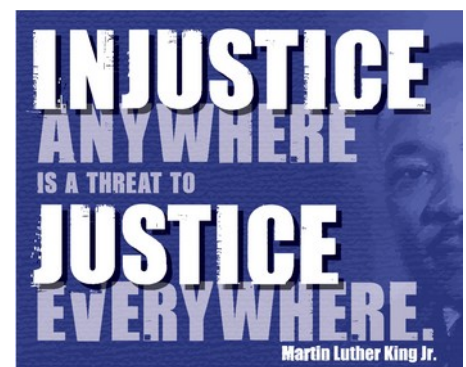
All the food is prepared offsite and brought to the church, starting at 10 a.m. La Comida staff use part of the kitchen area to prepare coffee.

Seniors enter from the patio or parking lot and use the stairs or elevator to reach Fellowship Hall. La Comida sets up signs and a volunteer in the reception area helps direct the guests.

La Comida staff and volunteers clean up each day and return tables and chairs so that Fellowship Hall can be used by the dance groups and others in the evenings.

Thank you to our Trustees and staff for working hard to provide a place for this worthwhile program and the seniors in our community!

La Comida also serves weekday lunches at Stevenson House in south Palo Alto. 🙏





It Takes a Community to Celebrate Christmas

by Pastor Burke Owens

Many thanks to all who took part in the many meetings, events, celebrations, and worships of Advent and Christmas!

- * The Chancel Choir, Diane Keller, Mark Shaull, Fiume di Musica, Kyle Sofman, Peter Colby, and the many, many musical groups who performed in our church in December!
- * Daniel Fifita and family, Bill Nicholls, Scott Thomas, Mira Dabrowski, Lucy Tompkin, Linda Grossman, Pam Cutkosky, Carol Kumer, Kathy Rose, Joe Witte, Dan Conway, Char Cutkosky, Susan Stephens, Conrado Jr., Juana Reynoso, and all the others who organize and facilitate our busy church calendar!
- * Pastor Gerardo, Pastor Sepeloni, and all the First Tongan UMC members, Pastor Karen and earlier this year, Pastor Doug, all those who help bring the holy spirit and God’s grace, and Jesus’ love into our sanctuary and church community.
- * Trustees, Finance, Staff Parish Relations, Worship, Church Council, Centennial Endowment Fund, United Women in Faith, and all the many committees, sub-committees, small groups and large who make up the many aspects and orientations of our church.
- * And of course, to each of you who are the community of faith, who by your prayers, gifts, service, and questions help make this whole thing possible. You are the beloved community and without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you for a blessed 2023; here’s to a magnificent, healthy, and vital 2024! 🙏



First UMC Palo Alto was the scene of Christmas music all through the weekend, Dec. 16 and 17.

Above: Cantare, a local community choir, presented holiday music including Bach’s “Magnificat in D” Saturday evening. Those from our congregation who attended this community event called it “glorious.”

Top right: The Community Carol Sing on Sunday afternoon attracted more than 100 people, young and old, to sing favorite Christmas carols. An offering at that event collected \$750 for Joy of Giving. Photos above and top right by Burke Owens

Bottom right: Sunday morning worship featured a brass quintet, percussion, the Chancel Choir, and Diane Keller on the organ, all under the direction of Mark Shaull. Photo by Michele W. Conway





Thank You

Blossom Buddies thanks the congregation members who have generously donated their altar flowers after use in the worship service. Using church flowers plus flowers from other donors, in 2023 Blossom Buddies created and delivered more than 2500 free bouquets to nursing home residents and hospitalized veterans, many of whom are lonely and have few visitors. Thanks, also, to those of you who donated vases. BlossomBuddies.org.



Summary of CEF Grant Awards

A maximum of \$141,450 was available for distribution for grant requests this year, in addition to \$15,600 for restricted use endowment grants.

- \$5,200 - Sanctuary System Upgrades, Bill Nicholls and Scott Thomas
- \$6,000 - Global Uplift Project: Low Smoke Stoves- Tanzania, Brenda Birrell
- \$50,000 - Staff Compensation Support, SPRC
- \$2,500 - Website Redesign, Pam Cutkosky
- \$6,000 - FUMC Music Concert Series, Sandra Wilson
- \$6,000 - Sibling Cities USA, Bridging Regional Divides Program, Vicki Veenker

Trustees Grants

- \$16,046 - Pipe Organ Maintenance, Bill Nicholls and Diane Keller
- \$7,000 - Greer Sewer Line Replacement, Alan Cooper
- \$13,854 - Sanctuary Handicap Door Operators, Rick Allen and Steve Wood
- \$1,440 - Fellowship Hall Lighting, Rick Allen and Steve Wood
- \$6,200 - Fellowship Hall Environmental Cooling, Rick Allen and Steve Wood
- \$4,450 - Education Building Water Heater, Rick Allen and Steve Wood
- \$11,450 - Greer Parsonage Electric Service Upgrades, Rick Allen and Steve Wood
- \$5,310 - Greer Parsonage Double Convection Oven, Rick Allen and Steve Wood

Restricted Use Endowment Grants

- \$2,900 - Cox Organ Fund
- \$6,800 - Waitte Music Fund
- \$2,300 - Angell Special Music Fund
- \$3,600 - Stuart Landscaping Fund

Special Offering January 14

HUMAN RELATIONS DAY

TOGETHER
OUR REACH IS BEYOND MEASURE

The United Methodist Church's special giving structure ensures your generosity blesses as many people as possible in sustainable, strategic ways

YOUR DONATION CHANGES THE WORLD ONE LIFE AT A TIME

GIVE TO YOUR CHURCH:
Make checks payable to your local church or donate online via credit/debit card at ResourceUMC.org/SSGive

TO GIVE ONLINE SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR SMARTPHONE CAMERA

Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church®

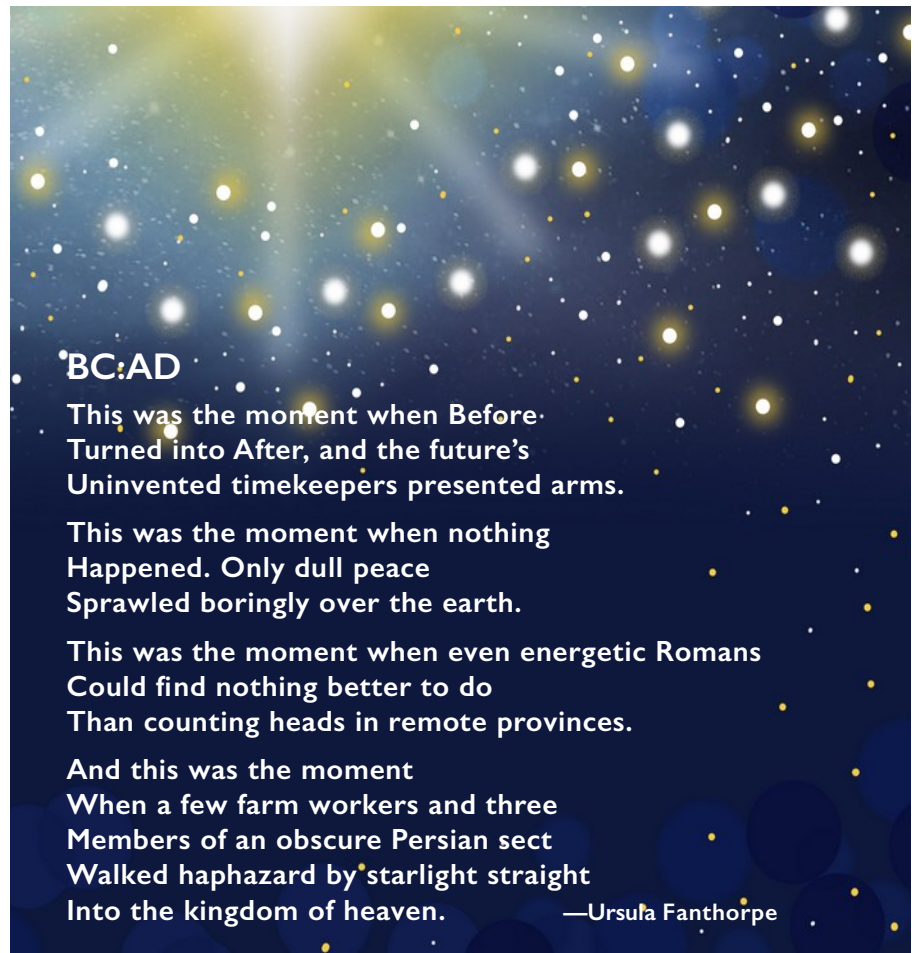
Birthdays and Anniversaries

- 1/02 Pam Cutkosky
- 1/02 Diane Keller
- 1/03 Jerry Irizarry
- 1/04 Megan Sheridan
- 1/09 Peggy Foiles
- 1/09 Carl Herbert
- 1/10 Allyson Laughton/Santos
- 1/11 Tom Fingar
- 1/12 Samantha Sasaki
- 1/18 Andrew Breen
- 1/19 Kyle Trammell
- 1/19 Mark Bui-Ford
- 1/20 Fran Moyer
- 1/20 Joe Witte
- 1/23 Thomas Garner
- 1/24 Andrew Michel
- 1/25 Ally Yang
- 1/27 Chrissie Blair
- 1/28 John Larson
- 1/29 Al Nilsen
- 1/30 Scott Thomas

01/22/1994 Keith & Heather Perry



Finance Update



The Finance Committee thanks you for your generous and gracious support and requests that you continue to keep your pledges current. Please direct inquiries to [Lou Bellardo: lou@bellardo.com](mailto:lou@bellardo.com)

November 2023 Income and Expense Summary (DRAFT)	October 2023 Actual	Actual YTD 2023	Budget YTD 2023	Budget Annual 2023
Income	33,280	352,844	284,559	386,556
Total Member Giving	12,738	198,365	182,016	220,500
Total Income All Other Sources	46,017	551,209	466,575	607,056
Expense				
Conference Tithe	4,301	53,230	45,000	52,000
Council on Ministries	165	12,473	38,440	41,650
Staff Parish Relations	31,663	350,700	384,766	418,563
Office and Finance	1,755	14,747	18,421	20,100
Board of Trustees	11,720	179,389	187,612	200,700
Total Expenses	49,604	610,538	674,238	733,013
Excess (Deficit) of Income over Expense	-3,586	-59,329	-207,663	-125,957



- 1 New Year's Day
Church office closed
San Francisco Chamber Orchestra concert,
3 p.m. (free, donations appreciated)
- 2 Staff Parish Relations, 7 p.m. (Zoom)
- 5 Women's Retreat, offsite (through Jan. 7)
- 6 Epiphany
- 7 Baptism of the Lord
First Sunday in Epiphany
Holy Communion
- 9 Trustees, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 14 Second Sunday in Epiphany
UMC Human Relations Day, special offering
- 15 M.L. King, Jr. Day
Church office closed
- 16 Finance, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 19 Deadline for submitting website redesign
comments to Communications Committee
- 20 Deadline for February issue of INSIGHTS
Koinonia Chinese New Year dinner party, 6 p.m.
(pre-registration required)
- 21 Third Sunday in Epiphany
Brenda Birrell talks about her mission work,
after morning worship
- 28 Fourth Sunday in Epiphany

Our electronic giving page is always open! Give with a few clicks at firstpaloalto.com/giving or text Give to 1-650-376-6784 for a link with instructions. Your generosity makes our mission possible. Thank you!



WEEKLY SCHEDULE

→ **Masks are recommended for in-person activities.** Some activities meet online via Zoom.

→ Church office hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Doors are kept locked. Please phone the office or ring the electronic door bell to be admitted. **Masks are recommended.**

Sundays

- 10:00 a.m. Sunday School for ages 3-11
- 10:45 a.m. Worship, in person and live-streamed. Check firstpaloalto.com or Friday e-news for the link.
- 11:45 a.m. Reflection After Worship
Snack 'n Chat
- 12:15 p.m. Couples Group (alternate weeks)
- 5:00 p.m. Fellowship Friends (alternate weeks)
- 6:00 p.m. Covenant Class (Zoom)

Mondays

- 7:00 p.m. Social Justice movie discussions (Zoom) See e-news for details.
- 7:00 p.m. Fiume di Musica Rehearsal
- 7:15 p.m. Bible Study (Zoom)

Tuesdays

- 9:50 a.m. Walking Group (offsite)
- Noon Current Affairs Fellowship (Zoom)

Wednesdays

- 6:45 p.m. Upstream Contemporary Worship (Zoom)

Thursdays

- 1:00 p.m. Call to Prayer
- 7:30 p.m. Chancel Choir Rehearsal

Information for the next issue of the Insights newsletter is due Jan. 20. Photos of church events are accepted at any time. Include photographer's name, date of the photo, and a brief description of the event. Everything is subject to editing. Please send your submissions via email to Insights Editor Michele W. Conway: insightsfirstpa@gmail.com or bring them to the church office. Thank you!



First Palo Alto United Methodist Church
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Palo Alto, CA 94301-2016
www.FirstPaloAlto.com

FIRST PALO ALTO
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

FIRST PALO ALTO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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