

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope for though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice. —Rev. Dr. King

First Church Hosts Multi-Faith Worship

by Pastor Burke Owens

This month two important events occur. Monday, Jan. 20, is Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a federal holiday, as well as inauguration day for the 47th president.



To honor Dr. King and to reflect on the new era our nation is entering, First Church will host a multi-faith worship Sunday evening, Jan. 19, at 5:30. Local church, temple, and mosque communities will gather to discover hope and connection in the midst of the storm. ❖

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear. —Rev. Dr. King

UWF Invites You to Thrive in 2025

by Nancy Olson

Welcome to the new year from United Women in Faith (UWF)! We have some inspiring ideas for everyone, to help you nurture your mind, body, and spirit. As the year begins, UWF is focused on bravery—stories, tips, and actions that cultivate courage to change and grow. We hope these ideas encourage you to connect with your own inner strength and thrive in 2025!

One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. —Maya Angelou

To grow, we need to move beyond our comfort zones and allow our minds and spirits to soar. Here are suggestions to build courage every day.

Help in new ways. Be open to service opportunities outside your normal routines. Volunteer in a new role, greet a new neighbor, or help a stranger. Each new experience puts love into action and strengthens your resilience too.

Practice affirmations. Care for yourself and your soul by training your brain to focus on daily wins.

Compliment others. Notice when someone else steps out of their comfort zone and acts with courage. Take a moment to give them a compliment. Spreading positivity will empower you both.

For many people, and perhaps especially for women, this time of year isn't always associated with joy. It can be mentally, emotionally, or financially challenging or even connected to painful memories. We encourage everyone to face difficulties with courage and support others with kindness and compassion.

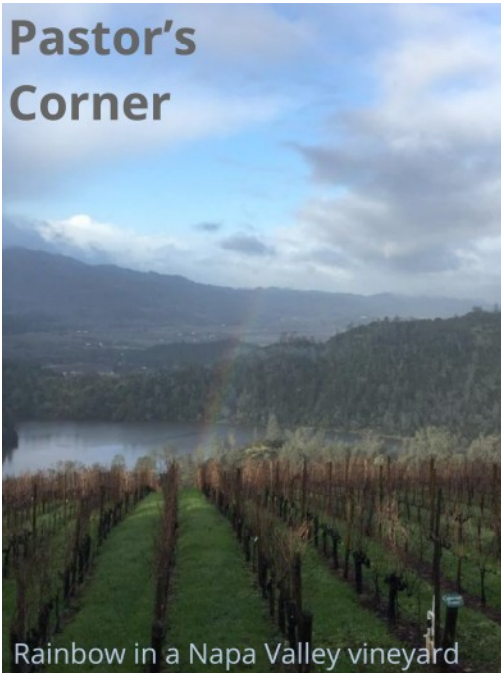
Be aware. Learn the signs of stress and mental health strain so you can recognize them early in yourself and others.

Give relief. Listen with compassion and without judgement so you can create healing for others.

Practice self-care. Find time and space to recharge and relax, and remember to share responsibilities so your to-do list doesn't become overloaded.

Find more ways to thrive in 2025! ❖

Pastor's Corner



Hello Dear Friends and Happy New Year!

I pray that you are enjoying a good and blessed Christmas time thus far. January 1st is the eighth day of Christmas, with the final of the traditional 12 days falling on the 6th at Epiphany.

Christmas can be an extreme holiday in terms of the time and energy it takes, but it is also such a wonderful, joyous time too that I cannot regret or begrudge any of its demands. Scrooge's nephew Fred in 'A Christmas Carol' says:

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say, Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas-time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to

think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

Our Christmas decorations at the parsonage are up and the house is festive with holiday cheer, warmly shared with family. May each of us continue to frolic, enjoying this most wonderful time of year, celebrating the birth of Jesus.

It has now been 18 months since I came to First Palo Alto UMC. Without a doubt, it has been a life changing and transformative experience. Long before I arrived here on the peninsula, for years I prayed for guidance, asking the Holy Spirit to lead me ever deeper to my work in the church. The divine brought me to this faith community in 2023. Here I continue to learn that being of service is a hard, yet ever expanding blessing, one that both humbles and inspires me.

This month, I am beginning a new Sunday worship series that will continue in February and March, exploring the major religious traditions around the world. We will start with those most closely related to our own, Judaism and Islam, before we dive into Hinduism and Buddhism next month. I strongly believe that God is the source for all religions and beliefs and so it is wise to try to understand or at least appreciate the differences and similarities of each. For we are all part of creation, no matter where we live, what we believe, or how we worship.

"God is one, truth is one, and the religion is one. There cannot be two religions; that is the confusion, the illusion of the human mind. All wisdom is from God; from whatever scripture, whatever religion, whatever form, it all comes from one source." —Inayat Khan

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it." —Rumi

Thank you for your generosity and faith this year. I know that God is working carefully, with us and among us, to build a more vital and loving community.

Blessings,

Pastor Burke



Plan to Attend Great Decisions 2025

by Lou Bellardo and Tom Fingar

As we turn the page on the old year and move into 2025, we are 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 Feb. 16 and continue each Sunday until April 13. The sessions will be held on Sunday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30. The sessions will be in person but will also be accessible via Zoom. All are welcome to join and we encourage you to 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: www.fpa.org/great_decisions/index.cfm?act=show_material&product_id=16892

The topics we will cover are:

- American Foreign Policy at a Crossroads
- U.S. Changing Leadership of the World Economy
- U.S.-China Relations
- India: Between China, the West, and the Global South
- International Cooperation on Climate Change
- The Future of NATO and European Security
- AI and American National Security
- American Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead

The order in which the topics will be discussed will be determined by the schedules of those we hope will 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 logistics.

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). ❖

CONCERT NOTES

January 1, 3:00 p.m.

San Francisco Chamber Orchestra "Celebration and Hope"

The San Francisco Chamber Orchestra is back for their annual New Year's Day concert at First UMC Palo Alto. The program includes Grażyna Bacewicz's Concerto for String Orchestra, works by Saint-Saëns featuring debut violinist Hiro Yoshimura, and Haydn's Symphony No. 103 "Drumroll."

The concert is free, but sign up at www.thesfco.org/events/mainstage-concert-palo-alto-1 and arrive early for this popular annual event.

January 10 7:00 p.m.

Voices of Music

"Haydn, Chevalier & Boccherini"

Enjoy an evening of Early Classical music from Madrid, Paris, and Vienna with music by Haydn, Joseph Bologne Chevalier de Saint-Georges, and Boccherini. Soloists: Augusta McKay Lodge, Eva Lymanstull, and Shelby Yamin.

Purchase tickets at www.tix.com/ticket-sales/voicesofmusic/7611: \$63 adults, \$58 seniors, and \$5 for full-time students with ID. ❖



A Note from Pastor Burke

Pastor Burke will be away this month on Conference business Jan. 7–9 at the Core Team retreat, and again Jan. 14–16 at the Gathering of the Spiritual Leaders. ❖

Did You Know?

Beyond the church walls, Pastor Burke is involved in several local and conference-wide projects.

He is a member of the United Methodist Silicon Valley circuit, on the steering committee for Multi-Faith Voices for Peace & Justice, and for the Silicon Valley Pride Parade and Ecumenical Team. Recently, he joined the board of the Bay Area United Campus Christian Ministries.

For the Annual Conference, he is Chair of the Council on Finance and Administration, co-chair of the Fossil Fuels Summit Committee, a member of the Conference CORE Team, and a founding member of the Called to Wholeness team offering retreat and renewal for conference pastors.

In addition, Pastor Burke mentors a candidate on the path toward Elder's orders and Ordination and serves as liaison on the District Committee on Ordained Ministry. ❖

The Three Magi journey to Bethlehem, James Tissot, 1890



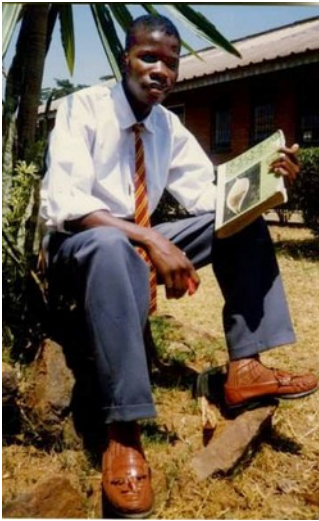
January Worship Schedule From Epiphany to Judaism and Islam

This month we travel from the end of the Christmas season on to a brief introduction to the other two desert religions. Both the Jews and the

Muslims see Abraham as their founder and they share much with Christianity from scripture, to values to geography and traditions. Come climb aboard the caravan as we explore our common faith story.

January 5	Epiphany Sunday Sermon: The wise men arrive in Bethlehem! Scripture: Matthew 2: 1-15
January 12	Baptism of the Lord Sermon: Rev. Karen Paulsen preaching Scripture: Luke 2: 21-32
January 19	2nd Sunday in Epiphany Sermon: What is Judaism? Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-9
January 26	3rd Sunday in Epiphany Sermon: What is Islam? Scripture: Genesis 16:1-16





Education Was “Big Break” for Freeborn

by Nancy Glaser

Freeborn Rwere was born in Zimbabwe in 1978 during the War of Liberation (2nd Chimurenga). His family was living in a Freedom Camp at the time. By 1980 Zimbabwe finally won independence and the family moved to their village in Chiweshe, Zimbabwe.

Freeborn has five siblings. His mother was a peasant farmer, and his father lived away from the family in a city where he could support them as a tailor.

Freeborn lived in the village and attended the village school from 1st grade to 7th grade. He was one of the best graduating students at his 7th grade national examination.

At the age of 14, Freeborn moved to Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, when he entered the 8th grade (form 1) where he benefited from a much-improved education system. He said that this was his big break and he was so thankful. This move kept him on a positive trajectory. He entered the University of Zimbabwe and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry and biochemistry in three years.

Freeborn’s first trip to the U.S. was in 2005 when he was awarded a scholarship to start a PhD in chemistry at Marquette University in Wisconsin. African friends who were looking to study in the U.S. told him about the opportunity. In 2009, he graduated from Marquette and moved to Michigan as a postdoctoral scholar at University of Michigan Medical School (2010- 2014).

In 2014, Freeborn returned to Zimbabwe to help his country and fulfill his dream of inspiring people from his country. Together he and two other doctors from Chinhoyi University of Technology started the Department of Chemistry where he taught chemistry through 2019. He also has a passion for farming and helped farmers in the region while there.



Freeborn is now a researcher in anesthesiology at Stanford Medical School. He applied for the job online! He attends First Church.

Freeborn has a son named Ryan who visits here every year. Ryan, who was born in Milwaukee, is 15 years old and a student at Kutama College (a high school in Zimbabwe). He just finished form 2 (9th grade). He loves trying new foods from around the world. This year we went out after church for Chinese food and he loved it. Keep a look out for his visit with us in April of 2025. ❖

Hello First Palo Alto Readers! by Char Cutkosky

Welcome to 2025! At the start of the new year, we’ll be sending out reminders about books that have been checked out for over a year. (No fines—these are just gentle reminders!) You can help by taking a look around your home to see if you have any books from the First Church library.

As always, happy reading, and we hope you’ll send us book requests for the new year! Please send suggestions to charlottefirstpaloalto@gmail.com.



Green Notes

by Nancy Olson

Perhaps it is time to gift yourself with a reusable mug. Oh, of course you already have one, but have you noticed it is always elsewhere when you actually need it? How about another one to keep in your car, or in your desk drawer, or in your to-go bag, or even in the coffee room?

In the U.S., we use an estimated 50 billion disposable coffee cups each year. As we welcome the new year, treat yourself and reduce waste by enjoying a special drink in a reusable mug.

I have discovered something that is useful for holiday meals—a GUEST-IMATOR tool! It can be hard to plan meals when there are more people to feed than usual. This handy tool can help you plan for variables such as preparation, leftovers, meal types, number of people, and can help you cut down on food waste. Find the GUEST-IMATOR tool at savethefood.com. ❖

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. May that almighty hand guide and uphold us all."

—Minnie Louise Haskins



Thanks for a Lovely Holiday Season

Last month a number of wonderful events took place during Advent and Christmas. It was a blessed month of community, faith, spirit, and joy. See photo memories on page 7. Many thanks to all who participated in these events and special thanks to those who helped make them happen, including ...

☆The many folks who brought cookies for Christmas Eve, and to Char Cutkosky, Pamela Cutkosky, and Cathy Katen who set up the cookies and cocoa feast, and Peter Colby who laid the fire.

☆The Fifita family, who made the Christmas Eve services a family affair: Dan Fifita ushered both services; Dan and Asotolu's daughter Christina Fakalata, husband Isileli, and baby Jesse played the Holy Family at the family service, while Jesse's brothers Tutu, Tuli, and Isi Jr. ushered.

☆The rest of our pageant cast: Pastor Burke (narrator), Sarah Joy Espinoza-Evans (scripture reader); Jasmine Mokhlessi (lead angel); Lou Bellardo (lead shepherd); Chad Yoshikawa, Gregory Gondwe, and Mike McCartney (wise men); Pastor G (innkeeper/King Herod); and all the children who were shepherds and angels. What a cast! More than 160 people attended the family Christmas Eve service this year.

☆Ruthie Waters and Peter Colby, who assembled the pageant set, and Juana Reynoso, Mira Dabrowski, Pamela Cutkosky, and Ruthie, who helped everyone get into their costumes.

☆Diane Keller, who played the organ at both Christmas Eve services.

☆The marvelous brass players, under Mark Shaull's direction, at our final Advent service Dec. 22.

☆The Chancel Choir, Alan Cooper and Julianne Stafford, Diane and Mark, for a beautiful candlelight Christmas Eve service at 11 p.m.

☆Char and Pamela Cutkosky, who unpacked and set up the poinsettias in the sanctuary, and Peter Colby, who hung the white cross drapery.

☆Mira Dabrowski's Miracle Jones Trio and Fiume di Musica's Alan Cooper and Julianne Stafford, who provided music at the Winter Solstice Gathering; Dan Fifita and Carol Kumer who ushered; and Pastor Burke, Lucy Tompkin, Scott Thomas, Pastor G, Pamela Cutkosky, and Mira Dabrowski, who re-enacted an ancient horn dance. More than 60 people attended.

☆"Santa Mike" McCartney and Pastor G, who created a magical setting for 16 children—and a few adults—to get pictures taken with Santa.

☆Alan Cooper on fiddle and Julianne Stafford on accordion who accompanied carolers Pastor Burke, Emily King, Annie King and her friend Izzy, Tom and Orlene Fingar, Mira Dabrowski, Pamela Cutkosky, and Peter Colby in downtown Palo Alto. ❖



Gondwe family lights peace candle, Dec. 8



UWF delivers cookie plates, Dec. 12



Caroling, Dec. 21



Santa pictures, Dec. 21

Advent & Christmas Highlights

Photos by Lou Bellardo, Ben Conway, Pamela Cutkosky, Cathy Katen



Family service pageant, Dec. 24



Solstice gathering, Dec. 20



Cookies and cocoa, Dec. 24



Let us pray:

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.



01/02 Pam Cutkosky

01/02 Diane Keller

01/03 Jose Irizarry

01/09 Peggy Foiles

01/10 Allyson Laughton/Santos

01/11 Tom Fingar

01/18 Andrew Breen

01/19 Kyle Trammell

01/19 Mark Bui-Ford

01/20 Fran Moyer

01/20 Joseph Witte

01/24 Andrew Michel

01/25 Ally Yang

01/27 Chrissie Blair

01/28 John Larson III

01/28 David M Gherardi

01/29 Al Nilsen

01/30 Scott Thomas

01/22/1994

Keith Perry &

Heather Perry



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.

November 2024 Income and Expense Summary	November 2024 Actual	Actual YTD 2024	Budget YTD 2024	Budget Annual 2024
Income				
Total Member Giving	24,882	352,420	350,179	407,617
Total Income All Other Sources	75,543	347,211	228,702	273,189
Total Income	100,425	699,630	578,881	680,806
Expenses				
Conference Tithe	7,775	66,385	59,583	65,000
Council on Ministries	495	13,556	31,962	40,050
Staff Parish Relations	36,357	358,509	389,414	425,732
Office and Finance	1,681	16,887	18,047	20,100
Board of Trustees	14,536	160,404	166,259	176,150
Total Expenses	60,845	615,742	665,265	727,032
Excess (Deficit) of Income over Expense	39,580	83,889	-86,384	-46,226



January

Monday–Friday, La Comida, 11–1 p.m., ongoing

- 1 New Year's Day
San Francisco Chamber Orchestra (free concert),
3:00 p.m. See details on page 3.
Church office closed
- 2 Fellowship Hall floor re-coating (through Jan. 3)
- 6 Epiphany
Volunteer and Staff Appreciation Day
- 7 Staff Parish Relations, 7 p.m. (Zoom)
- 14 Trustees, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 19 Multi-Faith Worship honoring Martin Luther
King, Jr. and reflecting on a new era for our
country, 5:30 p.m.
- 20 Deadline for February issue of Insights
- 21 Finance, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 24 Women's Retreat, through Jan. 26. Offsite.

Women's Retreat

First UMC Palo Alto Women's Retreat will take place
Jan. 24–26 at Villa Maria del Mar in Santa Cruz.

Find retreat details and registration information
[here](#). Space may still be available. Register soon!

Information for the next issue of the Insights newsletter is due January 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!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

→ **Masks are optional but recommended for in-person activities.** Some activities meet online via Zoom, as noted. See e-news for details.

→ 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 4-11
- 10:45 a.m. Worship, in person and live-streamed. Check firstpaloalto.com or Friday e-news for the link.
- 11:45 a.m. Snack 'n Chat
- 12:15 p.m. Couples Group (1st & 3rd Sundays)
- 12:15 p.m. Bible Study (2nd & 4th Sundays)
- 5:00 p.m. Fellowship Friends (schedule varies)

Mondays

- 7:00 p.m. Social Action 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). See e-news.
- Noon Current Affairs Fellowship (Zoom)

Wednesdays

- 5:00 p.m. Covenant Class (Zoom)
- 7:00 p.m. Upstream Contemporary Worship
(Zoom)

Thursdays

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

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!





FIRST PALO ALTO
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

FIRST PALO ALTO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Next INSIGHTS deadline:
January 20



Come in out of the cold. First Church welcomes you.

Snow in the mountains above Santa Cruz. Photo by Burke Owens