



Let Us Help You Show Your



Make a valentine for someone who could use a valentine hug. After worship Sunday, Feb. 9, out on the patio, Family Ministries will provide cards and envelopes, stickers, craft supplies, and markers to make valentines. Valentine's Day is Friday, Feb. 14!

Joy of Giving Results

The Joy of Giving campaign during Advent 2024 collected a total \$21,815. The funds were distributed in the amounts that donors specified as follows:

- Save a Girl \$6,185
 - South Palo Alto Food Closet \$3,795
 - Ada's Cafe \$3,115
 - Bears Without Borders \$2,965
 - ECO Center \$2,690
 - Foundation for College \$2,565
 - The Global Uplift Project \$500
- A special offering on Christmas Eve for the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) collected an additional \$1,833. ❖

Words and Music Comfort and Inspire

by Michele W. Conway and Pastor Burke Owens

The Inauguration Eve and Multifaith Vigil remembering Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Jan. 19 was attended by more than 200 people. Religious and civic leaders were there along with community members who gathered to pray, sing and hear words of inspiration and comfort offered as our nation enters a new season of change.



The event began with calls to prayer in different religious traditions: Buddhist Kansho Gong, Jewish Shofar, Bahá'i Prayer, and Muslim Azan. Rev. Burke Owens welcomed everyone to First Palo Alto UMC, noting it as a place where all people can come and sit in fellowship together. "Hearing different calls to prayer," he said, "reminds me how rich God's creation is, and there is room for all of us in it." He invited the community to sing "This Land Is Your Land."

Rev. Gerald Sakamoto, of San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin, spoke about the economic hardship, and the freedom and dignity that Japanese Americans lost during the internment of WWII. He asked,



"How should we respond when we see similar things going on around us in the world today?" He advised being aware, responsible, and getting into 'good trouble' to address inconsistencies in our beliefs and values. Sakamoto suggested that churches, groups, and individuals look at what they are investing in. To celebrate and reaffirm the humanity we are all a part of, invest in

businesses that match your values and that benefit the communities in which they operate, he said.

Rev. Amy Zucker Morganstern, of Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, talked about segregation and integration, noting that the LGBTQI+ (or "queer") community perhaps more easily integrated

Story and photos continue on pages 8-9

Pastor's Corner

Image by Mike Adler



Dear friends,

It is late in January today. I know we are still in wintertime with nearly two months still to go. Yet right now I feel the seasons are changing, that spring is sniffing around and will be here sooner than we know. But first there is rain with the time needed for the land to soak in the blessings of water, of the quiet waiting that occurs during these short cool days and colder nights. I pray that the ponds and creeks and rivers fill up, that trees and grasses stand in pleasant joy as they feel their roots pulling in liquid nourishment and sense the sap beginning to slowly flow through their inner bark.

This month I will continue the religious journey we began in January worship, but last month it was closer to home as we

considered Epiphany, Judaism, and Islam. This month we journey further, looking at the Hindu tradition, followed by Buddhism, then Daoism and finally, a look into indigenous and native practices. These varied religious traditions are often considered quite foreign to our own. Yet I find much to recommend them, for while all are faith traditions that are different, they are no less fervent and grace-filled than Christianity.

The Hindu tradition in India is perhaps the oldest of all the world religions and, despite its many deities, is at its heart a great honoring of the divine mystery behind all existence. Especially in its very beginning, as this ancient Vedic scripture reminds us:

Then even nothingness was not, nor existence,
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.
All this was only un-illuminated cosmic water.
But, after all, who knows, and who can say
Whence it all came, and how creation happened?
Whence all creation had its origin, the creator,
whether he fashioned it or whether he did not, the creator,
who surveys it all from highest heaven, he knows —
or maybe even he does not know. Rig Veda 10.129

The Buddha, who was born in India a thousand or more years later, spoke of the four noble truths that he realized while living the life of a renunciant. They are:

- 1) the reality that life has inherent suffering,
- 2) recognizing that our own suffering is often brought about by greed and ignorance,
- 3) the understanding that our suffering can be reduced with practice,
- 4) that when we practice self-awareness and train ourselves to be wiser, more compassionate, to learn from our mistakes and so become better, more conscious people, we help to lessen the chain of suffering for ourselves and the world around us.

continued on page 4

Great Decisions 2025 Gets Underway

by Lou Bellardo and Tom Fingar

As the football season winds down and we prepare for the season of Lent, we are also 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 6. The sessions will be held on Sunday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30. You are welcome to attend in person in Kohlstedt Hall or online via Zoom. If you decide to attend in person, masks are recommended for all indoor events at the church. You are welcome to attend any or all sessions.

If you have participated in the past, it is likely that we have your contact information. If you would like to confirm that, please contact Lou Bellardo (lou@bellardo.com). You will need to register once for the entire series. Find instructions for registering on the church website at firstpaloalto.com/great-decisions-2025/. Reminders and the Zoom link will be pushed to all who have registered on the Thursday before each Sunday session.

The topics that are covered in the Great Decisions workbook prepared by the independent and non-partisan Foreign Policy Association are listed below. 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 www.fpa.org/great_decisions/index.cfm?act=show_material&product_id=16892 in order to access information on how to order. Copies are also available to read in the church library.

Feb. 16: American Foreign Policy at a Crossroads

The U.S., polarized and divided, faces a world overflowing with challenges, dangers, and uncertainties. Conflict and disorder have become the defining features of world politics. How will the contours of the U.S. foreign policy debate play out in this challenging environment?

Speaker: This session will be led by Dr. Thomas Fingar, the Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Fellow at Stanford's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. Fingar served as Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research in the Clinton and Bush administrations.

Feb. 23: U.S. Changing Leadership of the World Economy

Under President Biden, the U.S. has advanced new ideas about trade, technology, industrial policy, competition with China, and the organization of the world economy. For most of the postwar era, the U.S. has tied its global leadership to cooperative agendas aimed at creating a more open-world trading system, but that has apparently

come to an end. What are America's options and opportunities as a leader of the world economy? How will America's "foreign policy for the middle class" and strategic competition with China impact its leadership role? How can the postwar rules and institutions of the world economy be made safe for economic nationalism and great power competition?

Speaker: The discussion will be led by Dr. Michael Beeman. Beeman served as Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Japan, Korea and APEC (2017-2023) and published *Walking Out: America's New Trade Policy in the Asia-Pacific and Beyond* (2024).

The topics for March and April are listed below; dates and speakers for those sessions will be announced later.

- 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

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). ❖

Pastor's Corner from page 2

It is a moral path of reclamation, different but not unrelated in its outcome from the teachings of Christ as heard in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Daoist tradition is more philosophical than religious in the usual sense of worship to a god or gods. Like Buddhism it is sometimes seen as a belief system independent of a religion, yet that only tells part of the story. Daoists are keenly aware of the chain of existence for humans, from one generation to the next, and so they often honor their ancestors as part of their religious practices. In effect, Daoist, or Taoist, practitioners will see the family continuing through generations even after members have died. In this way, the generations stay connected and part of one another's lives.

Indigenous and native religious beliefs are often set in a geographic and cultural context, so the tradition is very much based on where a people are from and how the tradition grew out of a specific time and place. Of course, in many ways this is true of all religious systems. But some are able to more easily transcend time and place, whereas many do not. Yet it is quite common to find elements of older archaic religions maintained and given new purpose through incorporation into another belief.

So many wondrous ways for God to call each of us, and all valid as the spirit works through many

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Winter Worship Series: February Schedule

Exploring World Religions

In January, we took a closer look at Judaism and Islam. This month we visit India and the Far East to experience the Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions. Also, on the last Sunday of the month, we will look more closely at indigenous or native religious expressions. One thing is clear to me, that humans love to find meaning and the divine in many places and contexts. So come along for a magical, mystical tour as we journey to better understand the many aspects of the divine.

February 2	4th Sunday in Epiphany, Holy Communion Joint worship with First Tongan Church Scripture: Romans 12:10-17 Sermon: Krishna and Jesus
February 9	5th Sunday in Epiphany Scripture: Psalm 34 Sermon: Taking refuge in the Buddha
February 16	6th Sunday in Epiphany Scripture: Philippians 4:4-9, 11-13 Sermon: The Tao and grace
February 23	7th Sunday in Epiphany Scripture: Psalm 104:1-23 Sermon: Creation is filled with the Great Spirit



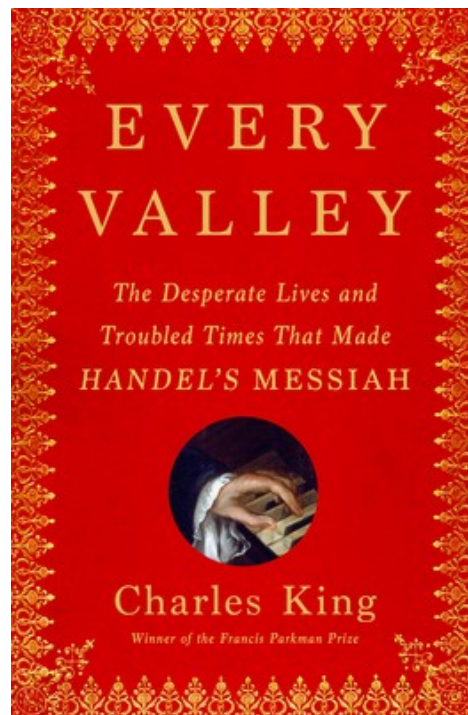
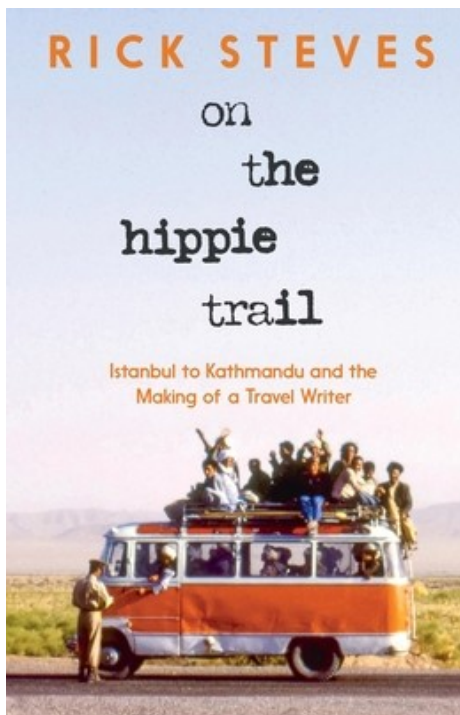
Star of the Hero, Nicolas Roerich, 1920

Hello, First Palo Alto Readers!

by Char Cutkosky

We have two new nonfiction books for the month of February.

For travel fans: If you're a travel-lover, chances are you're familiar with Rick Steves' European travel guides and PBS travel series. Steves seeks to make travel affordable and authentic through his recommendations, and believes that visiting other countries is key to creating a more open-minded and respectful world community. His recently published memoir, *On the Hippie Trail*, details his first backpacking adventure as a young man, traveling the "Hippie Trail" from Istanbul to Kathmandu in the 70s, and how the experience gifted him a love for exploring the world.



For music-lovers: George Handel's "Messiah" is performed in churches and concert venues around the world, including our own First Palo Alto. *Every Valley* by Chris King dives into the making of the piece, and the turbulent political and social events that surrounded it. A middle-aged Handel shaped his greatest masterpiece at a time when Britain was bursting with Enlightenment-fueled art, but also mired in political scandal, war, and government corruption, and this uncertain atmosphere served as a backdrop for the hopeful, victorious "Messiah."

As always, happy reading! ❖



"Love ... is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. ... It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses." —Ann Landers



Thank you to those who got up early Jan. 11 to "undec" the sanctuary from Christmas and put all our decorations away: John and Nancy Larson, Rick and Diane Allen, Pamela and Mark Cutkosky, Peter Colby, and Linda Grossman. ❖

"Jesus seeks to bring about the kind of inner transformation we need to transform our world God's way," Michelle Sanchez writes in *Color-Courageous Discipleship*. That echoes Martin Luther King Jr.'s statement: "Only through an inner spiritual transformation do we gain the strength to fight vigorously the evils of the world in a humble and loving spirit." (*Strength to Love*)

Pastor's Corner from page 4

times and places, and in some instances, far beyond them. I look forward to sharing the gifts of these other faith traditions with you this month!

Blessings,

Pastor Burke

Thanks to Janet Nicholls for sharing the image on page 2, by her friend Mike Adler, of a couple of galaxies passing each other in space, like two astral ships in the night! ❖

Kindness Kickbacks

Random Acts of Kindness Day, observed each year on Feb. 17, is a reminder of the power of altruism. Followers of Jesus express kindness selflessly, out of love for God and our neighbors. Yet in return, we reap emotional—and even physical—benefits.

Researchers have identified a “helper’s high” that can ease anxiety and depression. And spending money to benefit others, or “pro-social spending,” has been shown to reduce blood pressure, improve heart health, reduce pain and even extend longevity.

In his TED Talk “How To Buy Happiness,” Michael Norton talks about the common adage ‘money can’t buy happiness’ and how that may not be true. It depends on how you use your money. As it turns out, several studies and experiments indicate that pro-social spending has profound effects on your own happiness.

Pro-social spending is one way to intentionally bless others, but there are many ways—volunteering, praying for others, visiting, writing cards, speaking words of encouragement, just smiling at someone, and more.

Get creative with ways of intentionally blessing others. For maximum impact, mix it up! No matter how small, acts of kindness—random or otherwise—will bless you too. ❖

Compiled from ChurchArt.com and BYU Human Resources Dept.



by Nancy Olson

While wandering through my ‘Green Things to Think About’ file this popped out at me: The American Dental Association estimates one billion plastic toothbrushes are thrown away each year in the United States.

What if there was a way you could get the feeling of a clean mouth and a clean conscience at the same time? Switch to toothbrushes made from bamboo or other natural fiber—and you contribute to reducing plastic waste. Bamboo is a renewable material.

Now in the effort to be transparent, I am addicted to my electric toothbrush, but I do have a bamboo brush in my travel case, and I am in the process of changing to toothpaste tabs. My daughter (who does not allow single use plastic in her house) just told me she uses David’s toothpaste that comes in a metal recyclable tube.

I did online searches on fiber toothbrushes and on toothpaste tablets (tabs) and found many sources for these products. Unfortunately, I did not find local stores offering products. Then my daughter said to check out Country Sun in Palo Alto. I did and found they carry a variety of environmental dental products which I encourage you to join me in trying. Country Sun, 440 California Ave., Palo Alto, open daily.

I also ask that you share any other places you have found locally that offer a good line of environmentally friendly household goods.

Using less is doing more—for our environment. ❖

Editor’s note: Right On! Refillery in Los Altos carries bamboo toothbrushes, toothpaste tabs, and compostable dental floss in addition to many other environmentally friendly household products. Right On! Refillery, 300 State St., Los Altos, closed Mondays. ❖



UWF CONNECTIONS

by Nancy Olson

Top of my list is a hats off to each and every one who supported our end of the year greeting card sale. Thanks to each of you that bought one card, or more, to help us reach a total of \$1,004. Combined with other funds, this allowed us to make a total contribution of \$1,500 to worthy charities in our community to end the year. And a special tip of the hat to Ruthie Waters and her helpers who created the lovely cards!

Also I want to say “thank you” again for all those who contributed cookies to the cookie plate project—and those that helped assemble the plates, and those that delivered them, and to Pam Cutkosky for being a wonderful organizer. I am still getting good comments from recipients.

It is the coming together to accomplish a project that warms my heart and continues to make my church family so dear to me.

Bernice Smoll is joining me in the online reading group with two south county UWF groups. Our first meeting will be on Friday, Feb. 7, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m., discussing *After the Last Border: Two Families & the Story of Refuge in America* by Jessica Goudeau. Join us in discussing one book or all five to be discussed in this group. Contact Nancy or Bernice if you are interested.

The purpose of the UWF Reading Program is to educate members by exposing different life experiences and different ways of navigating unknown and unexpected events. I find it educational and rewarding, especially sharing with other members.



I welcome all suggestions of projects we can do to help members or our greater community! Please don't be shy. I am big on enthusiasm, but 'small' in imagination. I need your help.

How might you complete these sentences?

Wouldn't it be nice if?

I've always wondered why we don't?

Isn't it time we?

Thank you! ❖



Women from First Palo Alto and Aldersgate United Methodist Churches gathered together over the weekend of January 24-26 for the annual Women's Retreat at Villa Maria del Mar in Santa Cruz. With retreat leader Rev. Jill Ross (center), they reflected on themes of repair and restoration, and through art they explored making something new and whole out of broken bits.

There was also time for fellowship, games, shared meals, and enjoying the ocean and sunsets. Many thanks to Lori Hammar Sapigao for organizing the retreat this year.

Multifaith Vigil from page 1



communities because community members did not recognize the queer members among them. As community members came out as queer, they were recognized as family members, neighbors, co-workers and people said ‘Oh, I know him!’ ‘Oh, I like her!’ Morgenstern said we are more likely to seek justice for those we know and like personally. She advised getting proximate, getting close, getting connected with others soul-to-soul.

“Once we feel that soul connection, we *must* act with love and defend justice. That love inspires action and it feeds our souls. We need to get close to those from whom we are self-segregated. When we do, we won’t have to decide to love; we won’t be able to help it.”

Julie Lythcott-Haims, Palo Alto City Council member, recognized the difficult times we face, but said, “these are our times and as it turns out, we are the people who are going to get through it together.” In reference to a sermon she heard that God has lessons for the ‘in-between times,’ she said “We are the people in the in-between times. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., took us to the top of a mountain and we are in the next valley, and it is our turn to journey toward the next mountain top. We are the people who must and we are the people who can because ... we are the ones devoted to creating a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-racial democracy.” Everyone wants to be treated with dignity and kindness. When stereotypes come to mind, clear them out of your head. Respond with love. “Radical love for everyone is not just achievable, it is everything,” she said.



Ruben Abrica, East Palo Alto City Council member, asked what are we to do in the face of all the chaos and confusion the federal government is set to unleash? He advised organizing, coordinating efforts, and building community together in order to resist any and all injustice that may come. He encourages everyone to learn and educate others about these four constitutional rights we all have: 1) the right to remain silent, 2) the right to not open your door unless there is a warrant signed by a judge, 3) the right to ask for due process, and 4) the right to not sign any documents. He said, undocumented immigrants fear most the potential separation of their families—separation from their children, their elders. But “they show courage and determination to help each other and stand firm against injustices. In this they join all of you in a supportive struggle for a more humane national government,” he said. *more on page 9*

Multifaith Vigil from page 8

Abrica encouraged houses of worship to offer sanctuary for individuals or families in dire need for their safety. He encouraged individuals and businesses to exchange phone numbers with workers, saying: ‘If something happens, you call me and I will try to help.’ He said, “It will go a long way because this is a time when our government is trying to separate us, to divide us, to disconnect us from each other. We must ... reclaim and transform our government for the common good—a government of the people, by the people, for *all* the people no matter who they are or who they choose to be.”



Rev. Diana Gibson, of Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice, said in her concluding remarks, “Take in the beauty, the fear, and the incredible potential for healing and justice that we have in our communities and that we are going to carry from tonight out into the world. ... We’re going to get through this together.”



Four choirs sang during the evening. (Middle photo shows Eastside College Preparatory School Choir.) The event concluded with everyone lighting candles and singing “We Shall Overcome.” Folks gathered afterward for snacks and conversation, meeting old friends and potentially making new ones.

Thanks to Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice for organizing the event, and thank you to the speakers and singers who inspired us. Thank you to Mark Shaull, Diane Keller, our Chancel Choir, greeters Lucy Tompkin and Debbie Krueger, a-v techs Scott Thomas and Dan Conway, set-up folks Mira Dabrowski, Peter Colby, and Michele Conway.

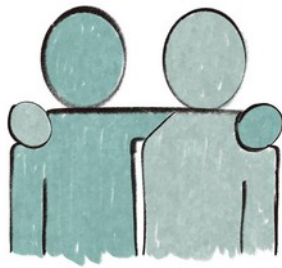
Special thanks to all the people who joined us that evening when the spirit was with us. ❖

Photos on pages 1, 8, and 9 by Chris Cassell and Linnet Kwok, ProBonoPhoto.org
For more photos of the event, see: www.probonophoto.org/2025/19-Jan-2025-Palo-Alto-Inauguration-Eve-Multifaith-Vigil



Consolation Prize

In *Bread for the Journey*, theologian Henri J.M. Nouwen calls consolation—from “to be with” (*con-*) “the lonely one” (*solus*)—“one of the most important ways to care.” Although consoling doesn’t necessarily remove someone’s pain, Nouwen notes that it serves a deeper purpose: To console means “to be there and say, ‘You are not alone, I am with you. Together we can carry the burden. Don’t be afraid. I am here.’ That is consolation. We all need to give it as well as to receive it.” ❖



Finance Update

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

02/01	Lee Buttrill	02/18	David Tsai
02/02	Christy Fung	02/18	Jonathan Tsai
02/02	Heinz Herzberger	02/21	Carol Foster
02/03	Asotolu Fifita	02/22	Sheralee Igelhart
02/03	Leslie Furney-Howe	02/24	Rick Riley
02/06	Nathaniel Sterling	02/25	Marianna Kombou
02/10	Katie Bartholomew	02/26	Victoria Crayton
02/11	Viliame Fifita		
02/11	Sheila Gholson		
02/11	Nathan Bailon		
02/12	Jim Carpenter		
02/12	Keith Perry		
02/12	Sophia Sasaki		
02/13	Amy Flaskerud	02/14/2009	Bill Davidson, Sandra Florstedt
02/15	Azi Mokhlessi	2/14/1981	Dave Shelly, Pat Shelly
02/16	Kent Iglehart		
02/16	Kaylee DeBacker		



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.

December 2024 Income and Expense Summary (DRAFT)	December 2024 Actual	Actual YTD 2024	Budget YTD 2024	Budget Annual 2024
Income				
Total Member Giving	72,755	425,174	407,617	407,617
Total Income All Other Sources	54,466	401,677	273,189	273,189
Total Income	127,220	826,851	680,806	680,806
Expenses				
Conference Tithe	11,949	78,334	65,000	65,000
Council on Ministries	8,740	22,297	40,050	40,050
Staff Parish Relations	37,519	396,029	425,732	425,732
Office and Finance	3,213	20,100	20,100	20,100
Board of Trustees	15,797	176,201	176,150	176,150
Total Expenses	77,218	692,960	727,032	727,032
Excess (Deficit) of Income over Expense	50,002	133,891	-46,226	-46,226



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

- Monday–Friday, La Comida, 11–1 p.m., ongoing
- 4 Staff Parish Relations, 7 p.m. (Zoom)
- 8 Koinonia: Games and Dessert, 7 p.m.
- 11 Trustees, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 14 Valentine's Day
- 16 Great Decisions: American Foreign Policy at a Crossroads (in-person and Zoom), 7 p.m.
- 17 Presidents Day
Church office closed
- 18 Finance, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 20 Deadline for March issue of Insights
- 23 Great Decisions: U.S. Changing Leadership of the World Economy (in-person and Zoom), 7 p.m.



Relief efforts continue in southern California in the aftermath of the devastating wildfires. Please continue to pray for the people and places affected; recovery will continue long after the fires have left the headlines. For the latest information from the UMC, search online for UMC Cal-Pac wildfire updates.

Information for the next issue of the Insights newsletter is due Feb. 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: insightsfirsttpa@gmail.com or bring them to the church office. Thank you!

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: Feb. 20

