



FIRST PALO ALTO
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

INSIGHTS

OCTOBER 2025



by Pastor Gerardo

Family Ministries is getting ready to celebrate fall with our local community! Join us Saturday, Oct. 26, from 4–5:30 p.m. for our now famous Trunk-or-Treat in the church parking lot. There will be treats, pumpkin painting, and lots of costumes. All kids are welcome to come in costume and enjoy the afternoon.

We need volunteers from our congregation to decorate their car trunks and hand out candy to the children. Whether you go all-out with a theme or keep it simple with a few pumpkins, your participation will bring joy to our neighbors and make this a welcoming event for all.

If you'd like to decorate a trunk, volunteer, or learn more, contact pastorgarcia1679@outlook.com or call the church office.

Let's come together to bless the children of our community with joy, fun, and the love of Christ. We can't wait to see you there. Spooky tales and organ music follow at 6 p.m. if you dare. ❖

World Communion Sunday Soup Lunch Welcomes Back Pastor Burke

Sunday, Oct. 5, is World Communion Sunday. We will worship jointly with First Tongan Church and celebrate communion. Pastor Burke will be back with us and preaching! His renewal leave ended Sept. 30.

On this special Sunday we feel ourselves in communion with congregations around the world. And we can celebrate the sense of community in our own congregation with our annual soup and bread lunch after the worship service.

Organizer Pamela Cutkosky is looking for volunteers to make a pot of soup, or serve soup, or provide a loaf of sliced bread or rolls, or bring cookies for dessert. Please contact Pam at pamelareasner@yahoo.com if you are able to help out.

The United Methodist Church collects a special offering on this special Sunday to support racial and ethnic minority students with scholarships, grants, mentoring, and leadership training. ❖



First Palo Alto UMC joined the "From Santa Clara to Redwood City Protest" on Labor Day, Sept. 1. Twenty-two people from our congregation participated.

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Pastor's Corner

Lincoln College Chapel, Oxford, with John Wesley inscription on glass door: "The best of all is God is with us." Photo by Burke Owens

Dear friends,

Hello everyone! I am back and excited to be with you after my renewal leave. Really good to return to all of you, the blessed souls of First Church!

When I left on my renewal leave July 1, it was to travel on pilgrimage overseas and later at home. More importantly, it was also to journey within my own soul.

The former was challenging but thrilling too, the traveling not always enjoyable, but the arrival, the being elsewhere, consistently fulfilling. This was also true at home in Palo Alto, but without the challenge of travel. Though not as exotic as Iona or Paris, it's been good to have time to relax and reflect in my own backyard.

A few of many highlights from my leave, include visits to Salisbury, Tintern, Laugharne, Tal-y-Lyn, Moy Castle, Iona and Paris. The sense of place found in these ancient places, in cathedrals, churches, museums, wild natural landscapes and urban settings, was exhilarating and renewing for me. I look forward to sharing more about my travels this summer in a program at church Oct. 24th.

The later exploration of soul and inner self, the heart of my work as minister and human, is where the renewal leave has helped me reset my self-care and as a result, the understanding of God's call.

I believe, now more than ever, that God the creator has brought us each into this life to fulfill our mission in creation, and that mission is to consistently search for and respond to the divine call inherently within us, part and parcel of each of our lives.

The cosmos is beyond vast; deeper, broader and higher than we can imagine or comprehend. This limitless, ongoing, endless creative act, i.e., the universe, is where God ultimately lives and has their being. In the midst of this complex multiplicity of form, action, stillness, change and mystery, is where we also live, together with God.

All of creation is a vast call to being and at the same time, the individual response to that call. As a single cell organism responds to an unconscious need to join and become something more, so we each hear our own soul/heart/mind desire to connect, act, and create—all central to the act of becoming.

Though each of our calls is distinct, like a fingerprint or DNA extract that is ours alone, yet in some mysterious way our individual strands do join harmoniously with those beings who co-exist with us, to create a multi-part work that sings throughout creation. We are all inter-related, each a part of a larger whole, incarnated at this time and place, along with countless others.

At the same time, the human world is in a state of flux, loss and conflict. This summer has seen more of this as authorities and groups attack each other with little evidence of harmony or care for others. We see many people and species suffering while others take advantage of their power and might to claim all they can.

continued on page 4



Halloween Tales and Scary Organ Music

Join Diane Keller, maestra of the keyboard, and Pastor Burke for a set of chilling tales and thrilling autumnal music as we approach All Hallows Eve and All Saints Day.

Sunday, Oct. 26, at 6 p.m. in the sanctuary after Trunk-or-Treat.

Expect the unexpected! ❖

Come on a Virtual Pilgrimage with Pastor Burke

Join Pastor Burke on Friday, Oct. 24, at 7 p.m. for a virtual journey to England, Wales, Scotland, and France—as he revisits his renewal leave. Hear about notable John and Charles Wesley sites including Epworth, Bristol, Oxford and London, and other locales such as Salisbury, Tintern, St. David's, Iona, Glencoe, Mull and Paris. Count on lots of photos and a video or two, alternating with reflections on a fantastic journey.

Check the e-news for location. Cookies and beverages will be served. ❖



Koinonia Fellowship: Upcoming Events

Koinonia is a FUMCPA fellowship group that welcomes couples or singles of all ages.



Join the group at 6 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 11, for a **Fiesta Dinner** at Celia's Mexican Restaurant, 3470 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. RSVP to Bud Buttrill, 650-380-5362 or Bud.buttrill@mindspring.com. Bring cash to pay for your food.



Koinonia meets again at 7 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 8, in Kohlstedt Hall at the church for **Jigsaw Puzzle Mania**. Work alone, or with a team for more challenging puzzles. Take some puzzles home at the end of the evening.

Cookies and punch will be provided. RSVP to Curt and Carol Gleason: curtglea@pacbell.net or 650-494-2340 (leave message). ❖



Photos by or courtesy of Burke Owens, July 2025. Top: Ruins of St. Mary's Church, Wye Valley, Tintern, Wales. Middle: Pastor Burke in Glencoe, Scotland. Bottom: Wesley Pilgrimage Group, Sarum College, Salisbury, England.

Pastor's Corner from page 2

Such is the chaotic state of the world; constant change and suffering, much of it unnecessary, powered by ignorance and greed.

The Psalms tell us (46:1-3):

God is our refuge and strength,
a help always near in times of
great trouble. That's why we
won't be afraid when the
world falls apart, when the
mountains crumble into the
center of the sea, when its
waters roar and rage, when the
mountains shake because of its
surging waves.

How do we deal with this
heartache and frustration that
comes up so often in the world
we share with one another?

By remembering who we truly
are. For in reality, we are God's
agents in this life; we are Christ's
hands and feet; we are the love
and grace of the spirit that is
called to serve in a time such
as this.

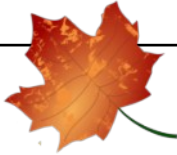
We must continue to do all we
can, in all the ways we can, in
every place we can and as long as
ever we can, to make a healing
difference in this broken world.
For if not us, then who will?

Let the call that is ours alone
awaken in us the ability to serve,
to love and to appreciate each
other rather than dismiss one
another. Some are called to serve
on the front lines, some to
nurture and help at home, others
to create new paradigms to better
understand a complex and
confusing time, still others

October Worship Schedule from Pastor Burke

Voices, Concerns, and Visions in Our Church

While I was away renewing, a powerful and inspired group of individuals spoke from the Sunday worship pulpit. I am thankful for all the preachers we have among us, and the gifts that they shared in worship through voice, service and spirit. Each brought their own understanding, perspective, and faith to bear, for this is what we each do in worship, whether in the pulpit or the pews. In this month's worship, the many themes heard in sermons from July through September will be explored and considered. We'll also initiate the stewardship campaign for 2026. Looking forward to being back with you all on Sunday!

Oct. 5	17 th Sunday after Pentecost World Communion Sunday Joint worship with First Tongan Church Sermon: Hope, despair, and the good Samaritan Scripture: Luke 10:25-37	
Oct. 12	18 th Sunday after Pentecost Sermon: Healing, sin, and love Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:8-15	
Oct. 19	19 th Sunday after Pentecost Laity Sunday Sermon: Like clay, we are formed by the word of God Scripture: Acts 9:32-43	
Oct. 26	20 th Sunday after Pentecost Reformation Sunday Sermon: There are multiple ways to access God Scripture: Joel 2:23-28	

prayerfully keep the peace in their hearts and minds, sharing with others, thereby bringing balance to a world of strife and anger.

Listen to your call and follow it, while remembering that someone else's call is not the same as yours but is no less valuable or necessary.

I am so grateful to our church for the support you offered during my renewal leave. It has helped so much and offered me the chance to take care and be better able to whole-heartedly respond to the call of this church and its beloved community.

Looking forward to seeing you and catching up soon!

Blessings and many thanks,

Pastor Burke

A Shelter in Time of Storm

by Julianne Stafford and Finance Committee

Do you find it difficult to believe, as I do, that October and the new stewardship campaign have arrived? Amazing! At my family's rice farm in the Sacramento Valley, October is rice harvest time. An exciting time when all of the work and care dedicated to growing rice over the last six months comes to fruition with a bountiful harvest. This is also the time when one looks to the sky and prays that the storm season will not start until the harvest is complete. The rain is so important to farming, but we always hope that the mature rice will not be damaged by early storms.



In Matthew 14, we find the story of the disciples crossing the sea through the night. A storm of rain and wind developed which battered their boat and made them afraid. Matthew tells how Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the storm-roiled sea and urging them to take courage. When Peter got out of the boat to meet Jesus, he walked on the water too, until he became afraid again and began to sink. Jesus stretched out his hand and helped Peter into the boat and calmed the storm. Jesus again provided shelter to the disciples in a time of storm.



Life in our time can toss us daily with storms of all kinds—personal, environmental, or political. We can take comfort in the shelter provided us by

Jesus' promises, and also feel the support of our church community as we navigate.

On Sunday, Oct. 5, we kick off our annual stewardship campaign, when we make plans for giving to the church for the coming year. We will have conversations about the stewardship campaign during worship services in October. Also, you will find a letter in your mailbox describing the campaign, along with a pledge card to help you share your plans with FUMCPA. Please be in prayer about your upcoming giving, which supports worship and our work with those in community around us in their times of storm. As you complete a pledge card and return it to church in October, ask yourself, "What is God's vision for my stewardship in the community during time of storm?" ♦

Rice photo by Frank Schulenburg, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) via Wikimedia Commons
Storm photo from ChurchArtPro.

New Privacy and Cookies Policy for Church Website

by Pamela Cutkosky

Have you visited the church website recently? You will be asked to confirm your cookie preferences before you can go to the giving page or click on an event.

Communications Committee Chair Pamela Cutkosky worked with Susan Stephens in the office to help a company called Termageddon create a new privacy policy for the website and the church.

You've seen cookie policies on commercial websites for years. Nowadays, nonprofits are doing this too, asking permission from website visitors to collect certain kinds of information (location, what pages are visited and for how long, what the Shelby system records, etc.).

Termageddon will continue to update our policies as various states change their right-to-privacy policies. ♦



Thank You, Patty!

Patty Bellardo recently tested out the headsets used during worship so our tech team can replace worn-out ones. ♦



Hello First Palo Alto

Readers! by Char Cutkosky

We have some eerie new novels perfect for the Halloween season.

***Katabasis* by R.F. Kuang**

You may have heard some of the buzz around *Katabasis*, which is currently in the top three of the NYT bestseller list. “*Katabasis*” is Greek for stories in which a hero descends into the underworld, such as the story of Orpheus or the Epic of Gilgamesh. *Katabasis* takes place in a fantastical version of the present-day, when grad student Alice’s academic adviser is dragged into the underworld. Alice and her academic rival, Peter, descend into the underworld after him, with only works of literature like Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as a guide.

Check out our large print edition!

***The Last Cuentista* by Donna Barba Higuera**

This Newberry-winning YA sci-fi follows young Petra, who dreams of becoming a “cuentista” (Spanish for storyteller) like her grandmother. She and her family are selected for a journey to a new planet. A group called the “Collective” takes control in the journey, bent on hiding the dark stories of humanity’s past, but storyteller Petra remembers Earth and carries these stories, and tales of hope, inside her.

Be sure to give *Katabasis* and *Cuentista* a look, as well as our seasonal Halloween books on display. Happy Halloween! ❖

UWF CONNECTIONS



by Nancy Olson

The Reading Program was established years ago to help educate women in areas not generally available to women. Four general areas were considered important to promote growth within the individual and help prepare them for leadership and participation in decision-making—especially within the church, but also as individuals: Education for Mission, Nurturing for Community, Social Action (originally geographic details of world countries), Spiritual Growth. In the last 10 years, a fifth area was added: Leadership Development.

An excerpt from the introduction to the 2026 Reading Program:

“One of the greatest gifts of reading, in my opinion, is the invitation to think slowly and deliberately, to tend to just one idea at a time, to immerse myself in the author’s world, and to be fully present. Sometimes, I find myself nodding along with an eager internal agreement, practically sighing with relief that someone else has articulated what I feel like I have always known but never been able to put into words. Sometimes, I feel myself challenged, puzzled, even irritated, and confounded by new ideas that rub up against my prior assumptions and create internal friction. Comfort is easier to embrace than agitation, but both are helpful on the path of personal growth.”

“Thank you to the amazing team of 175+ volunteer evaluators and the Reading Program Committee (chaired by Kelly G. Loeb) whose faithful work made possible the 2026 Reading Program. May it be a blessing on your journey.”

—Emily Jones, Executive for Racial Justice, United Women in Faith

Personally, I love this program! Over the many years I have participated, I have learned so much, and un-learned quite a bit too. I am sad that I could never get a purely local group together, but have been blessed with a Zoom group in San Jose and south county. We choose a book from each of the five areas and meet monthly starting in February to discuss the books. Bonnie Home chairs the group and leads wonderful discussions. We are choosing our books currently.

Please join me in selecting five books to add to our own church library here at First Palo Alto. Let me know if you would like to participate in this fun and important role. I will send you the website to download the complete booklist. It is long and fascinating. I am slowly making my way through. You can work at your own speed, but we should make our local choices before the end of November.

And, won’t you consider joining the Zoom group for a monthly meeting for five months beginning in February 2026? ❖



Let's Talk About Trees by Nancy Olson

The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, is a recognized Tree Campus healthcare facility by the Arbor Day Foundation, meeting standards for tree care and community engagement at the intersection of trees and public health. Across their campus, trees are being used in innovative, intentional ways to support healing, solve environmental challenges, and enhance patient and staff well-being.

Decades of research have shown that exposure to nature can help improve mood, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, and even reduce recovery times.

At Mayo Clinic, this science is guiding real-world solutions. Some physicians have begun prescribing nature itself, encouraging patients to engage with green spaces as part of their care.

When my family moved to Palo Alto in 1973, we were impressed by the neighborhood parks and tree-lined streets. (I still am.) Back then, after a tiring day at work when we were thinking one more step was out of the question, to stroll through the neighborhood enjoying the shady umbrella of the street trees was so restful we would actually go further than intended each time. But we came home tired in a good way and actually ready to fix dinner, and perhaps eat on the deck enjoying the green restful trees in our own backyard. Aaah—a pleasant memory.

But now is the time to think about the importance of trees in our yards, in our city, in our parks and National Parks. Trees and especially our National Parks are threatened.

Natural disasters—hurricanes, floods, wildfires—destroy thousands of trees every year. Recovery after natural disasters takes a toll on everything and everyone in the area. While the immediate focus after a disaster is correctly on first responders and personal safety, restoring lost tree canopy plays a vital role in long term recovery. When communities are ready to rebuild, replanting trees is a powerful step toward renewal.

Wildlife has adapted to cope with smaller fires and floods, but high-severity fires and floods result in habitat loss that threaten the survival of plants and animals. For example, habitat loss is a severe threat to migratory birds, resulting in increased mortality and lower reproductive rates. Climate change projections predict more extreme natural disasters in our future. *continued in next column*

Congratulations:

Heinz Erzberger Honored

At the recent 2024-2025 NASA Ames Honor Awards ceremony, FUMCPA member Heinz Erzberger was awarded one of the top honors—NASA Distinguished Public Service Medal. He is retired from NASA and received this award for



“distinguished public service in pioneering Air Traffic Management research and mentoring NASA’s future leaders” beyond the time when he retired. In fact, he still volunteers regularly at NASA in this capacity. FUMCPA members might also know Heinz by the luscious garden tomatoes he shares on the patio after the Sunday worship service. ❖

Green Notes from column 1

We should prepare as much as possible to protect against personal loss as well as habitat and tree loss. We should also be aware of current threats to our National Parks and protected open spaces. Many current threats to end environmental protections and renew drilling, and to build roads in pristine areas, scare me. So signing petitions and writing to elected officials takes much of my time. Please be aware and take action to protect our environment at every opportunity. ❖





Saturday, Oct. 18, 7:30 p.m.

Celebrate Robin Sharp's 20 years as concertmaster of the SFCO. Robin's incredible artistry and leadership have lifted the SFCO to new heights, and her beautiful violin playing has charmed audiences for decades. Robin will perform Max Bruch's iconic Violin Concerto in G minor.

"Dance Card" by Grammy award winner Jennifer Higdon, featuring virtuoso SFCO string players, and Beethoven's Egmont Overture, a symbol of the struggle for liberty and freedom, are also on the program. Reserve your free ticket at [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com).



Finance Update

October Birthdays and Anniversaries

10/2 Carol Chatfield	10/24 Dan Conway
10/5 Emilie Sweet	10/24 Margaret Branyon-Goodman
10/6 Keith Ferguson	10/25 Tim Crockett
10/6 Sean Kurian	10/25 Katherine Jacob
10/9 MaryLu Wood	10/26 Lynn Gibbons
10/10 Ada Shelly	10/28 Julianne Stafford
10/11 Richard Lubman	10/29 Patrick Riley
10/13 Kristen Larson	
10/14 Kim Venaas	
10/16 Christopher Martin	10/13/2018 Joseph Witte and Caety Chong
10/17 Patricia Riley	10/19/2019 Maurine Tong and Kai Tong
10/22 John Baglin	10/21/1995 Dave Gee and Angela Chen
10/23 Nancy Larson	
10/24 Dail Koehler	



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.

August 2025 Income and Expense Summary - DRAFT	August 2025 Actual	Actual YTD 2025	Budget YTD 2025	Budget Annual 2025
Income				
Member Giving	31,986	273,479	238,563	426,040
Income from All Other Sources	25,335	424,018	207,622	349,207
Total Income	57,321	697,497	446,185	775,247
Expenses				
Conference Tithe	6,956	58,503	44,351	73,000
Council on Ministries	1,149	16,100	23,791	41,450
Staff Parish Relations	39,772	329,798	346,494	518,669
Office and Finance	1,485	12,748	14,125	21,400
Board of Trustees	11,785	127,780	136,775	198,100
Total Expenses	61,147	544,929	565,536	852,619
Receipts Over (Under) Expenses	-3,826	152,568	-119,351	-77,372
Offset from 2024 Surplus	6,448	51581	51581	77,372
Net Over (Under) after Offset	2,622	204,149	-67,770	0

OCTOBER



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

- 5 World Communion Sunday (special offering)
Soup, bread, and cookies on the patio after worship
- 7 Staff Parish Relations, 7 p.m. (Zoom)
- 11 Koinonia Fiesta Dinner, 6 p.m. (offsite) See p. 3.
- 14 Hospitality Meeting, 1:00 p.m.
Trustees, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 18 San Francisco Chamber Orchestra Concert,
7:30 p.m. (free) See p. 8
- 20 Deadline for November issue of Insights
- 21 Finance, 7:30 p.m. (Zoom)
- 24 Virtual Pilgrimage, 7 p.m.
- 26 Trunk or Treat, 4 p.m.
Spooky Organ Music and Halloween Tales,
6 p.m.

Celebrations of Life

Pam McKee

Oct. 18 at 1:30 p.m. 11th floor of Channing House, 850 Webster St., Palo Alto. Members of First Palo Alto UMC are welcome to attend.

Mona Blackburn

Mona was a longtime FUMCPA member and former UMC missionary in Alaska. Please stay tuned to the church e-news for memorial information.

Jim Van Horne

Nov. 1 at 3 p.m. Stanford Faculty Club, 439 Lagunita Dr. Stanford. RVSP to charlotte@firstpaloalto.com who will forward RSVPs to the faculty club.

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 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 Thursday 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)
- 6:00 p.m. Covenant Class (Zoom)

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

- Noon Current Affairs Fellowship (Zoom)

Wednesdays

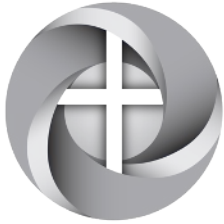
- 7:00 p.m. Upstream Contemporary Worship (Zoom)

Thursdays

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

Information for the next issue of the Insights newsletter is due Oct. 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!



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

FIRST PALO ALTO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Next INSIGHTS deadline: Oct. 20



Lower slopes of Cader Idris, Gwynedd, Wales.
Photo by Burke Owens