



FEBRUARY 2026



February 18
8-9 AM & 5-6 PM

Pastor Burke and Pastor Gerardo will provide ashes and a blessing in our parking lot on Ash Wednesday, Feb 18. Drive through or walk up!

Pastor Burke's Corner

by Reverend Burke Owens

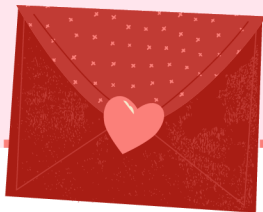
Dear friends,

Lent is nearly here and with it the time of year when we look more closely at our spiritual lives and practices. What do you do to keep yourself closer to God or Christ or the spirit? This season is the ideal time to take inventory. A time to reflect on how and when and where we ask ourselves a key question, 'How is it with your soul?' In particular, our relationship with Jesus.

I remember first looking at my relationship to Jesus in spiritual practice, many years ago. Caroline and I were living in upstate New York, in a faith community, which was still very new to me then. The spring came, after a cold, cold winter, and with it Lent. I knew very little about Lent but a person there, I've forgotten who, told me a little about this Christian practice of reflection on mortality and the spirit. I found this very interesting, but what really brought it home to me was a small print I was given. The image was Christ in the Praetorium, leaving for Calvary after facing Pilate and the trial. (cont. p. 2)

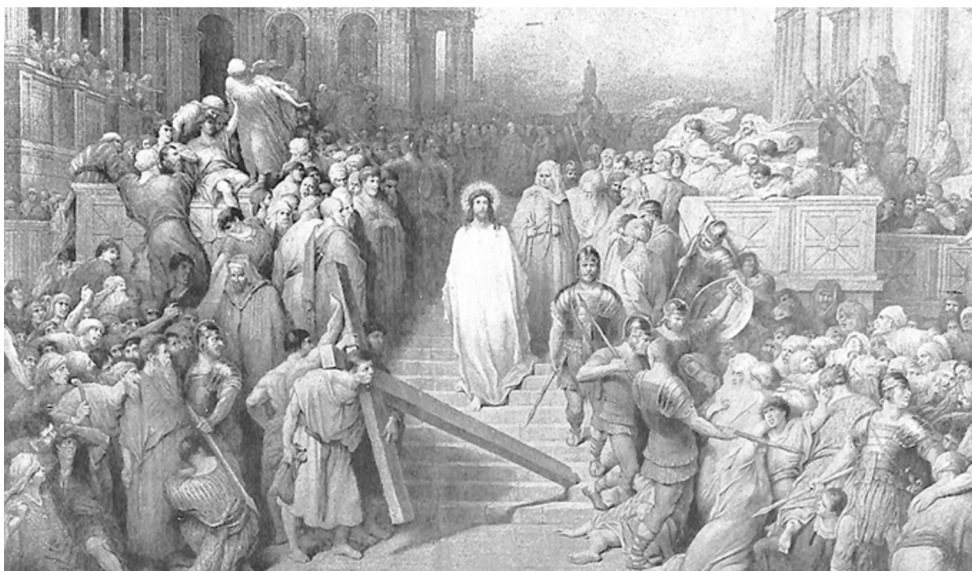
Make a Valentine

by Pamela Cutkosky



Family Ministries will host a Valentine-making station on the patio after worship on Sunday, Feb. 8. Cards, stickers, stamps, foamies, special pens, envelopes -- all supplies provided! Make a card for someone you love -- or make a card for someone who needs to know they are loved.

Plus, enjoy special Valentine's Day treats courtesy of Family Ministries! All ages welcome. Questions? See Pamela Cutkosky.



Jesus Leaving the Praetorium, Gustave Dore, 1872

Such a powerful image, the good and holy one, Jesus, alone in the midst of the rulers, Roman soldiers, assorted people from the temple, and his mother Mary. It touched me deeply as it still does. It's an image created by a wonderful artist and draftsman, Gustave Dore. Dore illustrated dozens of books and was particularly well known for his illustrated Bible.

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-
over and over announcing your place

In the family of things.

--Mary Oliver



There was a time, in the second half of the 19th century, when it was said that everyone in America had a Dore Bible in the home. His style is grandly heroic, romantic and perhaps a bit sentimental, but I love it! This particular image of Christ being led to the cross always touches me and reminds me of the amazing gift he gave us. A gift of love and sacrifice, of truth and service, of humanity serving God and God serving humanity. It reminds me to take seriously how I live with God in my life. All of which is good and I believe helpful. But the model and example of Jesus can be a bit overwhelming for us simply doing the best we can. He sets the bar pretty high in some ways. So, it's important that we consider who we are and the actual scale of our own lives. Because we do not need to perform miracles or heal the sick or walk on water to be close to God and Christ. We simply have to be the best at being ourselves, of letting the divine within us come out into our life so that it interacts with all we meet. For each of us is a living spark of God, and this is what is required of us, to honor and live it fully.

Blessings this month as we move from carnival to Lent,

Pastor Burke

Lent & Easter Worship Calendar:

Exploring Jesus' meaning, message and ministry

You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is in you? No one will get by with wasting God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred—and you, remember, are the temple. -1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Jesus came to earth as a messenger, a teacher, an inspiration for us all. He also was born to remind us of the greatest truth of all. That we are in him and that he is in us. As the poet says, 'The miracle of Jesus is himself, not what he said or did.' Humanity has been touched and inspired by Jesus' compassion, his wisdom, his joy, his regard for others and his constant love of God. Though his example is always apt, this is never more so than at Lent, the most sacred time of the Christian church year. For Lent 2026, I approach worship with curiosity, with the wish to look at Jesus' life, teachings, meaning and influence on all creation. Who was Jesus? What did he teach exactly? How was he understood in his own times? In what ways has he influenced the future in the larger world? Join me for a closer look at Jesus: the person, the divinity and the legacy.

February 1 - Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

Holy Communion with First Tongan Church of Palo Alto
Sermon: What Does the Lord Require of You?
Scripture: Micah 6:1-8 (NRSV)

February 8 - Fifth Sunday After Epiphany

Sermon: The Holy Spirit
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:7-16 (CEB)

February 15 - Transfiguration Sunday

Mardi Gras & Waffles Sunday
Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:1-2, 7-18

February 18 - Ash Wednesday

Drive-up Blessing of Ashes (8-9 AM, 5-6 PM)
Scripture: Genesis 3:19

February 22 - First Sunday in Lent

Sermon: Who was Jesus?
Scripture: Matthew 16: 13-20



"We look forward to the time when the Power of Love will replace the Love of Power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace."

-William Gladstone



Join us for **PROTEST**
Information and Community--
email Nancy Glaser at
glasernancy@gmail.com if
you are interested in our church
protest group.



Prayer for Overcoming Indifference

For the sin of silence,
For the sin of indifference,
For the secret complicity of the
neutral,
For the closing of borders,
For the washing of hands,
For the crime of indifference,
For the sin of silence,
For the closing of borders.
For all that was done,
For all that was not done,
Let there be no forgetfulness
before the Throne of
Glory;
Let there be remembrance
within the human heart;
And let there at last be
forgiveness
When your children, O God,
Are free and at peace.

-Rabbi Chaim Stern



Waffle & Mardi Gras Sunday

Join us at worship and afterwards on Sunday February 15th for a special celebration as Epiphany ends and Lent begins. Consider this a practice run for Fat Tuesday, but it's time to let the good times roll! Or as they say in N'Orleans, *Laisse rouler les bonnes gaufres!* (Let the good waffles roll!) Bring your beads and an appetite for worship as tasty buttermilk waffles are served hot from the waffle irons! My oh my, but its gonna be a carnival celebration, one y'all won't wanna miss!

Isaiah 58:6-9

- ⁶ Isn't this the fast I choose:
releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,
setting free the mistreated,
and breaking every yoke?
- ⁷ Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry
and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
covering the naked when you see them,
and not hiding from your own family?
- ⁸ Then your light will break out like the dawn,
and you will be healed quickly.
Your own righteousness will walk before you,
and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.
- ⁹ Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the finger-pointing, the wicked speech...



Photo by Diane Allen

2026 Women's Retreat

Twenty-five women from First United Methodist Church Palo Alto and Aldersgate UMC met for an inspirational Women's Retreat in Santa Cruz, CA, January 23-25, 2026. The beautifully situated retreat center, the Villa Maria Del Mar, hosted their activities. Diane Allen from First Church and Emily Allen from Aldersgate coordinated the event. Our spiritual leader, Rev. Motoe Yamada Foor, provided stories, prayers, and teachings to help us see we are beloved children of God. Thanks to Jerry Johnson, we had accompaniment for group singing. Ocean views and beach walks along with good food and fellowship contributed to a successful retreat!

Green Notes

by Nancy Olson

As I write this, we are experiencing a mild day with blue skies and scattered fluffy clouds. A sweater or light jacket and we are all set to walk our dog or just take an exercise walk around the neighborhood... but:

- Be prepared for storm season and power outages. The City of Palo Alto offers residents an Outage Management System which provides 1) Customer alerts through text 2) Faster response time 3) Web outage map—view details on outages. Sign up for emergency alerts at: www.paloalto.gov/Connect
- If you need to report a power outage or other electrical emergency, please call or text OUT to 650-496-6014
- Remove debris from storm drains and move vehicles on street sweeping days to help prevent flooding.
- Knowing about available sandbags in advance of need allows you to respond to inclement weather more quickly. Find a map of locations, instructions on how to fill a sandbag, and more resources at: www.PaloAlto.gov/Storms.

! Breaking Victory News:

Section 453, a provision in Appropriation Bill Fiscal Year 2026 that would have given the pesticide industry immunity from pesticide-harm lawsuits, has been removed due to public pressure! But the fight is far from over. The pesticide industry has more tricks up its sleeve. And unfortunately, there are still many politicians paid to do its bidding.

! Action Needed:

More than 2 million acres of privately owned land sit within our national parks, leaving visitor access and wildlife at risk. Lawmakers must protect the Land and Water Conservation Fund, our most effective tool for acquiring these lands. Urge Congress to safeguard LWCF and complete our parks.

! Bad/Sad News:

I received this news from 3 different sources, but the one you might recognize is The New York Times on January 17, 2026:

“Breaking News: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will stop considering lives saved when setting pollution limits and instead calculate only the cost to businesses.”

Studies show that up to 200,000 people a year die prematurely from pollution related illnesses - and that's under the current rules.

This is what happens when corporations and billionaires capture our government. They move forward with these acts of violence, perhaps believing their kids won't be the ones to become ill or die from the consequences of their actions. ❖



FAITH IN ACTION

CEF Grant Spotlight: Faith in Action Bay Area

*by Nancy Glaser,
Social Action Committee*

In February of last year, our church was introduced to the immigrant activities taking place by the newly formed Peninsula Multifaith Coalition for Immigrant Justice. Many of our local faith groups are involved and attended the Rapid Response Training organized by the Peninsula Multifaith Coalition. Several of us from our church attended the training held in March 2025, where we met the Executive Director of the San Mateo County Faith in Action, Loretta Melgareja. We were impressed by her leadership and the work this organization was undertaking during this difficult time for immigrants on the Peninsula.

I believe the importance of this project and the objectives of our church are in complete alignment. Immigration rights and actions needed to be taken by our faith group were immediately brought to our attention and supported by our California - Nevada Conference Bishop Sandra K. Olewine.

As our church website states: “We’re happy you’re here. First Palo Alto is an open and supportive community church where anyone is welcome, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or immigration status.”

During this time of cruelty in our country and injustice towards immigrants, both documented as well as undocumented, we as Christians have this opportunity to show the love that Jesus taught us.

Supporting Faith in Action Bay Area, a highly rated nonprofit doing the important work for the immigrants in our community, is critical. They are the only organization--public, government, or private--that is filling the financial need for families losing their breadwinner to deportation by ICE. Faith in Action was invited to make a CEF grant request this year to address immigration needs in our community.

“When a family calls to report that a loved one has been detained by ICE, we first connect them to legal counsel, which is the urgent first need to prevent immediate deportation and ensure some measure of due process. In over a decade of accompanying families affected by ICE, we know that they will also need material and financial support, especially if the person detained is the family’s primary financial provider. In such cases, the rest of the family members are at risk of (cont p. 7)

(cont.) homelessness, food insecurity, and lack of other necessities such as transportation or educational supplies. This is where our community can come in to support and ensure the family has what they need during such a challenging time. 100% of funds donated will be used to provide material support to impacted families with food, rent and other basic needs.

“As operators of the San Mateo County Rapid Response Hotline since its inception in 2016 as the first such hotline in the country, Faith in Action Bay Area is on the frontlines of connecting with community members and families who are impacted by immigration detention or deportation. Together we can provide stability and keep our communities whole through this time of crisis. Your solidarity is greatly appreciated.

“For families whose breadwinner is detained or deported, we provide 3-4 months of rental assistance and up to \$1500 per month depending on need, to prevent them from losing their home.”

Centennial Endowment Fund Committee approved a grant of \$10,000 for use in 2026 to fund the Faith in Action support of families in our community.

Website: faithinactionba.org

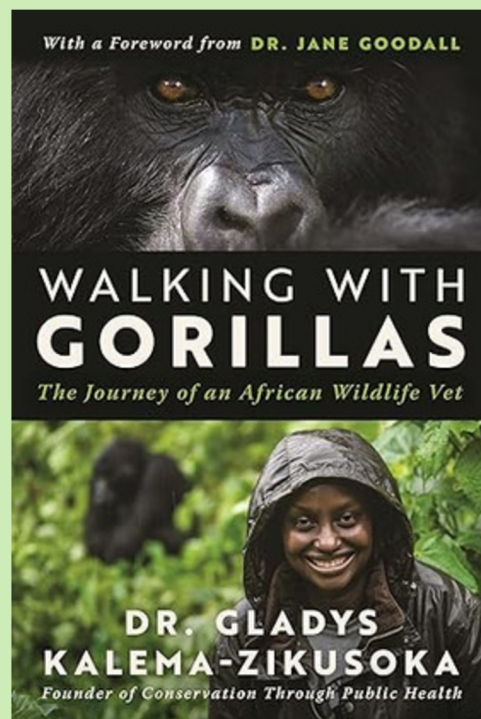


Photo by Reverend Burke Owens

Hello, First Palo Alto Readers!

by Char Cutkosky
Library Committee

This month, I am spotlighting a submission from one of our Library Committee members, Orlene Fingar, that we've recently added to our collection (thank you, Orlene!) *Walking With Gorillas: The Journey of an African Wildlife Vet* is a memoir by Dr. Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka, founder of the Uganda-based organization Conservation Through Health. Dr. Kalema-Zikusoka established Uganda's first department of veterinary health. She is respected around the world for her approach to conservation, which ties together environmental justice and care for animals with initiatives that help local people protect their neighboring wild spaces. She is especially known for her work in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, home to the critically endangered mountain gorillas (a subspecies of eastern gorilla).



UWF Connections

by Nancy Olson

I was going to write a column on the history of the Reading Program, but God in his wisdom put a copy of RESPONSE Magazine in my hand. So I am going to include a few comments from Emily Jones - a United Women in Faith Executive for Racial Justice, and end with my comments on the importance of the Reading Program. The name of the women's group has changed many times over the years, as the name of the church itself has evolved when different religious groups have joined to make it the UNITED Methodist Church.

"Amid the mental clutter of the headlines and neon attention grabbers, the choice to read a book in full, slowly and carefully, or as the Reading Program suggests, to read at least 5 in such a manner annually, seems practically counter-cultural—and maybe exactly what we need.

"The history of the Reading Program is long and laudable. Reading has always been important to our organization. A June 1876 issue of *Heathen Woman's Friend* (yes, that was the name of the magazine!) described a program of Uniform Readings for Auxiliaries, suggesting the titles of helpful books of reference, such as may be found in school libraries and those of ministers.

"In 1922, the Women's Woman's Missionary Society of the Evangelical Association had 87,275 readers complete their reading course. Meanwhile, Audrie E. Reber, in *Women United for Mission: A History of the Women's Society of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1946-1968*, describes at length "The Reading Course" of the women's organization of the EUB, one of the churches that merged to form The United Methodist Church. She writes, "The women had always been encouraged to read both that they might know more about the mission areas for which the church has responsibility and that they might understand and care for people."

"The women of that time, like our Reading Program participants today, were not just engaging in surface-level reading. The 1947 Reading Program list included *Dachau Sermon; Beyond Prejudice, A story of the Church and Japanese Americans*, and other challenging and important texts. In 1968, titles included classics like Georgia Harkness' *Disciplines of the Christian Life*, and then cutting-edge documents like *Church Women United for Peace* from the National Council of Churches.

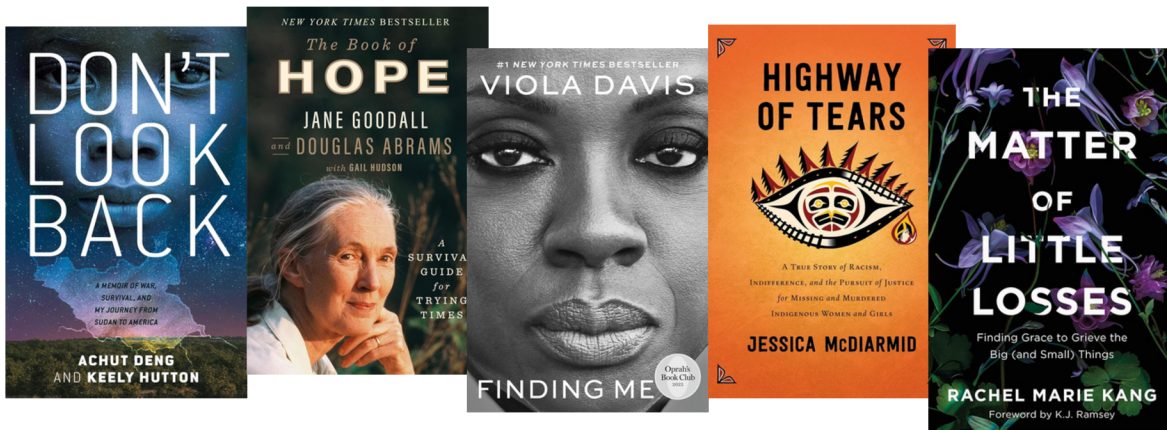
"In 1962 more than 46,000 people participated in the Reading Course, but shortly thereafter there were concerns — also not dissimilar to today — about the "overall trend of a decrease in disciplined reading."

"Yet here we are today, more than 60 years later. None of the 2026 Reading Program titles would be familiar to the 1947 or 1962 cadre of readers, of course—the Reading Program then and now is committed to uplifting contemporary work—but our purpose and posture would surely feel familiar. To read books, purposefully, is to acknowledge that not everything we need to learn can be communicated adequately in just a smattering of sentences and a rapid-fire splash of images. If you are able, consider reading with others. The insights we glean from one another's differing takes on a book may be just as valuable as what we read in the text itself. God speaks to us in many ways, and sometimes God speaks on the page, and sometimes God speaks God's word to us from another woman's lips. (cont. p.9)

(cont) To help facilitate these sacred moments, we encourage you to join or form a local group to discuss a subset of the Reading Program books.

“You do not need to be a UWF member to participate. Most importantly, whether you read alone or together, whether one book or more than 20, I pray that your encounter with the 2026 program be a blessing on your journey.”

Peace, Emily



We are indeed blessed here at FUMC. There are at least three book groups reading together and discussing books. And we have our own in-house library at First Church.

While I could not get an in-house Reading Program started, Bernice Smoll and I have joined a small online group of south county church women for interesting and educational discussions, meeting once per month from February through May to discuss a total of 5 Reading Programs books- one from each of the 5 subject areas. The 5 books are already in our church Library. Please do give this some thought. More next month. ❖



Photos from the Staff & Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon, by Mira Dabrowski. Thank you to all our amazing volunteers and staff, and to the Staff Parish Relations Committee for the wonderful luncheon!



Trū School & First Palo Alto UMC

CELEBRATION OF LOVE

Concert ♥ Food ♥ Crafts

PERFORMING ARTISTS:

EASTSIDE COLLEGE PREP CHOIR - SILICON
VALLEY BOYCHOIR - FIUME DI MUSICA - LEFT
BANK TRIO - MARINA & THE BLUEGRASS
PROFESSORS - THE TRU PLAYERS



FREE
ENTRY

2.7.2026
10AM TO 12PM



Great Decisions 2026

by Lou Bellardo

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 on February 15th and continue each Sunday until April 12th. We will not meet on April 5th – Easter. 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. You will find instructions for registering on the Church website at <https://firstpaloalto.com/great-decisions-2026/>. 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 product ordering site at <https://fpa.org/product/great-decisions-2026/> to place an order.

The workbook topics for Feb 15th and Feb 22nd are:

Feb 15: America and the World: Trump 2.0 Foreign Policy by G. John Ikenberry

Trump's return has marked a break from 80 years of U.S. foreign policy leadership, embracing an "America First" approach. This chapter explores the risks of isolation and diminished influence in relation to Trump 2.0 foreign policy.

Feb 22: Trump Tariffs and the Future of the World Economy by Michael Mastanduno

Trump's aggressive trade and tariff policies have shaken global economic norms. What's the rationale behind this radical shift in economic policy, and what are the implications for multilateral trade and geopolitics?

Our speaker for Feb. 15 and 22 is Thomas Fingar. He is 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 and as Deputy Director of National Intelligence.

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

Mar 1--U.S.-China Relations

Mar 8--Ukraine and the Future of European Security

Mar 15--U.S. Engagement of Africa

Mar 22--Ruptured Alliances and the Risk of Nuclear Proliferation

Mar 29--The Future of Human Rights and International Law

Apr 12--Multilateral Institutions in a Changing World Order (cont. p. 12)



- 3 Staff Parish Relations Committee, 7 PM (Zoom)
- 7 Celebration of Love w/ TRU School, 10 AM
- 8 Making Valentines, after worship
- 10 Board of Trustees, 7 PM (Zoom)
- 15 Mardi Gra Waffles, after worship
- 15 Great Decisions starts, 7 PM
- 16 Presidents' Day--Church Office Closed
- 18 Drive-Through Ash Wednesday, 8-9 AM and 5-6 PM
- 20 Insights Deadline
- 28 San Francisco Chamber Orchestra Free Concert, 7:30 PM



Information for the next issue of the Insights newsletter is due Feb. 20. Include photographer's name, date of the photo, and a brief description. Everything is subject to editing. Please email submissions to insightsfirstpaloalto@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!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

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

Sunday

- 10:00 AM Sunday School for ages 4-11
- 10:45 AM Worship, in person and livestreamed. Check firstpaloalto.com or Thursday e-news for the link.
- 11:45 AM Snack-n-Chat
- 12:15 PM Couples Group (1st & 3rd Sundays)
- 12:15 PM Bible Study (2nd & 4th Sundays)
- 6:00 PM Covenant Class (Zoom)

Monday

- 7:00 PM Social Action movie discussions (Zoom) See e-news for details.
- 7:00 PM Fiume di Musica rehearsal
- 7:00 PM Bible Study (Zoom)

Tuesday

- noon Current Affairs Fellowship (Zoom)

Wednesday

- 7:00 PM Upstream Contemporary Worship (Zoom)

Thursday

- 1:30 PM Call to Prayer
- 7:00 PM Chancel Choir Rehearsal

