



Volume 36 Issue 12

December 2017

Rev. Dr. Curran Reichert, Minister

Notes from the Pastor

Times Alone

By Antonio Machado, translated by Robert Bly

Is my soul asleep?
Have those beehives that labor
at night stopped?

And the water
wheel of thought,
is it dry, the cups empty,
wheeling, carrying only shadows?

No my soul is not asleep.
It is awake, wide awake.
It neither sleeps nor dreams, but watches,
its clear eyes open,
far off things, and listens
at the shores of the great silence.



Welcome to Advent; the season of mystery. As the days grow shorter and the nights cold and longer, may you be warmed by knowing that you are not alone. That the love of God, and this congregation, bind us together even through the darkest night.

Please plan to keep your spirit glowing by joining us for as many December community gatherings as you are able. They will be nurturing to your soul. All of these gatherings can be found in the **Worship** and **Fellowship** sections of this Grapevine.

Looking ahead, I will be taking time off for vacation and 'continuing education' in January and February. We will have guest preachers on January 14 (Rabbi Steve will preach on Justice), February 4, and February 18. If you are interested in preaching in February please let me know.

Blessings of light and love to each of you,
Curran

Message from the Moderator

I hope you had a blessed Thanksgiving and that you celebrated the holiday with relatives and/or good friends!

In the last month in Church, Curran has focused on Archbishop Tutu's and the Dalai Lama's *Book of Joy*. One of the Seven Pillars in the book, the Pillar of Gratitude, has been particularly relevant to me as I have reflected on how our congregation has responded to the Sonoma Valley fire and our outreach efforts in the Springs. We know that gratitude inspires joy, resilience, happiness, and connectedness. It has been good to think collectively and individually more about gratitude in the midst of the challenges that each of us experienced in the last month.

At the top of my list of things for which I have been grateful is the ongoing sense of community and care that exists at First Congregational Church Sonoma. Each Sunday we experience that community anew as we join in each other's prayers, delight in the Spiritual Sightings, sing together, check in on each other, hear Scripture, laugh a little, and offer thanks together for all that we have been given. To be part of such a community of persons with similar values and intentions and to have the opportunity to stand together in covenant and in abiding faith when the world is such a troubled place is both uplifting and enriching.

And now, as we move into the promise of the Season of Advent, we are grateful for the positive future trends impacting our church, including growing membership, new visitors each Sunday, our developing music program, numerous service opportunities, and enriching program and educational offerings. We have children and families in church again and a children's curriculum planned! There are, however, challenges that we face: several unexpected things have impacted our budget at yearend and we are facing difficult choices for the 2018 budget. We will need everyone's help in contemplating our challenges and in finding the best way forward.

Please mark your calendar for the Annual Meeting to be held in the Sanctuary following the 10:30 a.m. church service on Sunday, December 10. Then we will project the closure of the 2017 budget and present the 2018 budget and the challenges we are facing. As of this writing, the budget is not yet balanced. We will also propose the 2018 slate of church officers and committee chairs.

We hope you will plan on staying for the Annual Meeting to ask your questions and give us your opinion about the budget, give thanks for the service of those who have completed their term of leadership, and recognize the new slate of officers and committees for the coming year. **Please mark your calendar for the 10th!**

-Elizabeth Griego

Social Action Team

December 24 Morning Offering

"I remember taking the Christmas Fund Offering each year in my churches, and now I am the recipient of that heartfelt gift," said Rev. Charles Busch. "The dollars matter, but even more, it is **the impact of being remembered by my wider church family.**" Since 1902, the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and Emergency Fund – today one of four UCC Special Mission Offerings – has provided assistance to clergy and lay employees who, after years of service to others, now find themselves facing unexpected needs. In addition to pension supplementation, Christmas "thank you" gift checks and emergency grants, the Pension Boards-administered program also grants quarterly health premium supplementation to individuals and families in need. Our collection on December 24 will be for this Christmas Fund!

El Verano School Needs Classroom Help

After school reading tutors, classroom writing activities and art projects, and leveling books. Contact principal, Maite Iturri, at miturri@sonomavly.k12.ca.us or call the school at 707-935- 6050.

- Dotty Abbott and Janice Mattison

Earth Care Committee

- Our congregation affirmed and celebrated our FCCS becoming the 7th UCC "Creation Justice Church" in the nation, Sunday, October 8.



- The Committee co-founded and now hosts the monthly meetings of the "Sonoma Valley Climate Coalition." Your participation is most welcome.
- The November Earth Care Nature Walk was in the Jack London State Park. Next monthly nature walk, Monday, December 18, 9AM. If you are not registered for monthly walk notifications, you can register at contact info below.
- Upcoming Committee projects and events include: (i) Partnership with Vallejo State Park and VOM Garden Club to establish milkweed plantings for restoration of Monarch butterfly habitat; (ii) Offerings of inter-faith Healing-the-Land Blessings/Ceremonies in fire burned areas, including Bouverie Preserve and Sonoma Land Trust lands; (iii) Hosting community forums featuring May Boeve, Executive Director of 350.org; Sharon Duggan, environmental lawyer and co-founder of Our Children's Trust that supports the landmark climate lawsuit brought by 21 youth plaintiffs.

To participate in any of above Committee activities, or offer suggestions, contact John Donnelly, Chair, donnelyj63@gmail.com. The Committee meets next Tuesday, December 12, 4 p.m. in the Community Room.

- John Donnelly

Hospitality

Our thanks to all of the Fellowship Team members who are creating a warm and welcoming time after the 10:30 a.m. service each Sunday. Here's the schedule for December and January.

Dec. 3, Hospitality Committee with a birthday cake

Dec. 10, Team Three (Margie Mitchell, Bev Pearson, Bill Hutchinson, Kim Pack, and Elizabeth and Bob Griego)

Dec. 17, Team Four (Kathy Randles, Tom Edwards, Patricia Henley, Taras and Diane Lumiere, and Kathleen Gray)

Dec. 24, *Please bring Christmas goodies or finger foods to share, and we need volunteers to help with setup and cleanup*

Dec. 31, Team Five (Dave and Susan Berry, Rudy Doorman, Mary Beth Halsey, and Lory and Eugene Campagna)

Jan. 7, Hospitality Committee with a birthday cake

Jan. 14, Team Six (Janet Engelbrecht, Elizabeth Palmer, Lori Barron, Dotty Abbott, Marge Evans, and Susan Harris)

Jan. 21, Team Seven (Cozette Shenks, Kit Conforti, Kathy Jewell, Joan Brady, Lori Anderson, and Cheryl Franzini-Pegan)

Jan. 28, Team Eight (Joan Howarth, Nancy Ladd, Jan Edwards, and Susan and Alan Kelchner)

-Patricia Henley



Caring Friends

A NEW WAY OF TELLING TIME.....a reflection

BF, before the fires and AF, after the fires. As I enter my later years I am increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities of aging - lack of mobility, injury, illness, fewer familiar connections, growing dependency on others...and loneliness.

If you are thinking of someone, give them a call. Many elderly folks don't check their emails regularly; some don't have computers. Please, give them a call or arrange a visit. It would mean so much to both of you.

And, as you read this, please remember the third of our three-paragraph Church Covenant*:

"We covenant with God and each other to love and support one another,
to listen and learn from one another,
to forgive and trust one another,
to pray for and with one another,
to answer God's call to be the body of Christ."

[*COVENANT (noun): agreement, commitment, guarantee, pledge, promise.]

Jan Edwards

West Spain Thrift Shop

Holiday Sales Schedule

50% off linens and clothing, Thursday, Dec. 7

50% off everything, Saturday, Dec. 9

75% off everything, Thursday, Dec. 14

Fill a Bag \$2, Saturday, Dec. 16

Shop Closed Dec. 17, 2017 - Jan. 17, 2018

Shop reopens 10 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 18, 2018

We're absolutely delighted to welcome several new volunteers - Lori Anderson, Joan Brady, Cheryl Franzini-Pegan, Jean Hart, Judy McCracken, and Margie Mitchell. It's wonderful to have them on the Thrift Shop team.

Even with these new people on board, there's always more to do in the shop. It's true that it takes a village to keep the Thrift Shop running. We still need someone to drive things to FISH and Goodwill on occasion; if you're interested, please contact Cozette Shenks (935-1916, cozshenks@comcast.net).

And we could use more volunteers in any capacity, whether it's sorting and pricing, working with the customers, or doing other tasks. If you're interested in finding out more about the possible ways to volunteer, please contact Patricia Serota (707-815-2759, patriciads@comcast.net).

We do have one announcement — for safety and liability issues, only volunteers are allowed in the workroom.

-Patricia Serota, shop manager

Dear FCC Sonoma,

I have repeated this frequently and will continue to do so.

We are so grateful for the outpouring of love and support from this congregation.

People anticipated needs that we had not yet noticed, and met them.

We turned around and things were done.

People have been making sure that we are comfortably housed. That could not be better.

Need clothes? Our drawers and racks are full. Need anything? Our needs are met.

We are certainly luckier than many people.

There are many others who need your abundant compassion. We can only say thank you again and again and pay it forward when we have the opportunity.

~ Linda States

The Light and Love of Advent

December 3 - Hope

Both services will explore the theme of **HOPE** and celebrate Holy Communion.

December 10 - Peace

Both services celebrate the theme of **PEACE**. What's not to love? Congregational Meeting to follow the 10:30 a.m. worship service.

December 17 - Joy

Both services will explore **JOY!** The poet Mary Oliver writes, "If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate." The hand bells will ring during the 10:30 service.

December 24 - Love

There will be **one morning service, 10:30 a.m.**, in which our children will gift us with a Christmas offering. The Hand Bells will play and we will celebrate **LOVE**. At 7 p.m. we will come together again for a **Christmas Eve service** of singing and beauty, ending with a candlelit circle. All ages and abilities are welcome. Financial gifts will be received for the Pastoral Discretion fund during this service.

Christmas Open House

Sunday, December 10

All are invited to a Christmas Open House, from 3 - 4:30 p.m. at Curran, Katie, and Ellis Jane's home, 131 W. Agua Caliente. Parking is limited so carpool if you can.

breathexperience Breath Workshop

Sunday, December 17

Join Margot Biestman for the second of three breath workshops from 4 - 5:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary. This is a free event and open to all.

Lighting of the Menorah and Hanukkah Celebration

Sunday, December 17

At 4:30 p.m., we will gather with Congregation Shir Shalom at the front of the campus (Spain St.) to light the menorah in celebration of Hanukkah. Stay for the Hanukkah celebration in Burlingame Hall hosted by Congregation Shir Shalom! Enjoy menorahs, latkes, dinner, music, and more! Tickets are \$10 per person/\$20 per family. For more information and to purchase tickets, contact Maddy Leader at maddy@shir-shalom.org.

Winter Solstice Walk

Thursday, December 21

Join in the second annual Winter Solstice Labyrinth Walk in Burlingame Hall from 6:30 - 8 p.m. Surrounded by evergreen bows and twinkling lights, this gentle evening of walking meditation invites us to lean into the gifts of winter. There are no spoken words at this event only gorgeous instrumental accompaniment and hot cider. All ages and abilities welcome.

Circles of 8

Please join us in our Circles of 8 dinner group beginning in January

Once a month, groups of 8 to 10 - couples and singles - meet to get to know each better and eat delicious food. We take turns hosting, either at home or at a restaurant. The first round will begin in January. We welcome you to join a circle if you haven't already done so. Contact Gitte Cochrane (please refer to church directory) to join or ask questions.

Stone Soup – New Day and Time

Stone Soup will reconvene on Thursday's, from 9 - 10 a.m., beginning January 18.

This article was published in November on the UCC's national website.

The Story of an Earth Care Festival

Written by Elizabeth Griego



Envisioning an Earth Care Festival

Ten years ago, our church adopted an *Earth Care Covenant* with the goals of reducing our impact on the environment and helping to repair the damage that has been done to God's Earth. Since then, our Earth Care Committee has assumed a leadership role throughout the California Sonoma Valley in the work of advocacy, education, and preservation of the environment. One highlight of the past two years has been an Earth Care Festival organized to engage local partners and to highlight contributions being made to climate, ecology, and earth justice. We intentionally planned the Festival for the Saturday closest to the national observance of Earth Day, April 22.

Organizing Our Work

As a committee of twelve, we started brainstorming the organizations that we believed to have an environmental purpose aligned with our interests. We added to our list those organizations that have products to sell related to ecology. We divided this list among the committee members, so we might share in making personal contacts to invite participation in the Festival. We also wanted to feature entertainment, so a sub-group previewed short films that could be shown. A committee member who is also a caterer suggested an organic farm-to-fork lunch that we could offer at a modest price. We planned most of the tabling to be set up in our large multi-purpose room, but also organized activities for children and some exhibits outside on adjoining patios.

Publicity

Within a very small budget, we printed flyers and posters to place in restaurants and shops around Sonoma. We wrote an article for the Sonoma newspaper and advertised on a local radio station. We encouraged support from the Ministerial Association.

Information and Organizations Featured

A member of the local Pomo Indian tribe blessed the opening of the Festival in a ceremony with singing, prayer, and burning sage. Immediately following, a Sonoma County Taiko Drumming Group provided a rousing welcome to all participants. Thirty-five tables had sponsoring organizations providing information and give-aways related to earth care, ecology, conservation, solar energy, birding, raising bees, and building trails. Members from political and philanthropic organizations answered questions and invited participation from the 300 people who attended. Participants could purchase water filters, green skin care products, baked goods, and indoor plants proven to purify the air. Children made bird feeders and art projects. The teen center sponsored a bicycle tune up and repair station. High school students planted a tree in honor of Earth Day/Arbor Day. Our Earth Care Committee provided information on green cleaning supplies and invited participation in our Earth Care Advocates political group that extends beyond our church. The delicious lunch encouraged people to linger and converse, and its purchase brought in a small income that covered our costs.

Evaluation

The Earth Care Committee will continue the Festival in the coming years in support of our outward-facing mission to serve our community, build our ecological partnerships, and make a difference in caring for the Earth, and by extension, for one another.

The FCC Sonoma calendar is online via our website www.sonomaucc.org

For all FCC Sonoma events and happenings, please refer to the online calendar, weekly bulletins, worship service announcements, and the twice-weekly email blasts.



Happy
December
Birthday!

2 – Jessica Guest
5 – Brian Smucker
6 – John Donnelly
6 – Janet Engelbrecht
6 – Jackie Steuer
8 – Kathleen Carter
9 – Veronica Love
9 – Susan Harris
12 – Tyler Dickie
17 – Toni States
17 – Roger Brandt
23 – Amy Seyms
29 – Alexanne Bassett

If you know of a birthday that isn't listed, please let Angela know.

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