MAY 2026 VOLUME 24 ISSUE 5

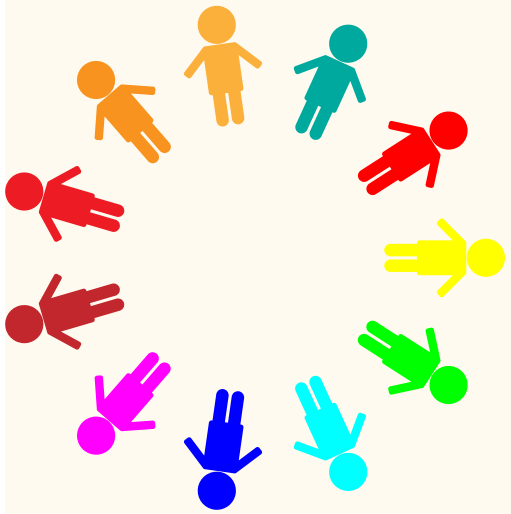
THE NUGGET

Open Door United Church of Christ

Special Congregational Meeting Sunday, May 3

Save the date for a special Congregational Meeting on Sunday, May 3 following worship. The single agenda item will be viewing and selecting a new "Open Door UCC" logo and slogan. The options have already been refined and narrowed down by the Council, and the final choices will be presented on May 3rd. It's important that we make a decision on this soon, as our marketing plan to roll out our new name this summer relies on it. Please plan to attend church, and stay after on May 3rd for this important decision.

Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey,
You are welcome here.



Strengthen the Church

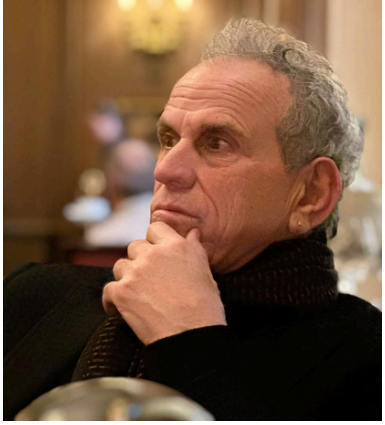
We will be having our Strengthen the Church (STC) offering on May 24, 2026. The STC offering reflects the shared commitment of people across the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build the UCC. The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations.

SENT FORTH IN

LOVE

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

Join us as we stand for justice, peace and democracy each Sunday from 3 - 4 pm at the stoplight in Murphys.



Interim Thoughts

Beloved,

What brings you joy these days?

For me, it's watching our new puppy play with Soren, his "older brother" (they are from the same breeder in Rocklin, CA).

Soren has welcomed Prince into the family. He shares his toys with the new puppy. He doesn't mind when Prince jumps on his back, steals his bone, eats his food. He watches Prince's shenanigans with an air of serenity that I admire. He is regal. And mostly patient with puppy nonsense.

What does Soren know that most humans don't?

That there is enough?

That we are all ultimately part of the same family, have the same breeding, our lineage traced to the same mother and father?

That he can help teach the new arrival the ways and rules of the house, rather than sit in a corner and pout that he has lost his special status as "THE dog of the family?" Or use violence to put the puppy in his place?

I'm projecting, of course. And yes, "anthropomorphizing" a canine, treating him as if he had human traits.

But I want to believe that as a "mature" six year old who has lived in three states in six years (NY, HI, and CA) Søren has secure attachment to his humans. He's not going anywhere without us, and wherever we land he will always be part of the family.





The book of Genesis is an “origin story,” most likely written during the Babylonian Captivity when things were at low ebb for God’s people. Everything they knew had been taken from them. Exile was their new identity. It was important for them to reflect on their origins in the faith, and to trust in God, that one day their deliverance would come.

It’s fascinating that it is during their seventy year captivity, they finally gave up their dual loyalty to both Yahweh and idols. The Jewish people became monotheists during the Babylonian Captivity.

They would recover a sense of purpose. Mission, yes. They would learn to adapt to changed circumstances.

They would refuse to be reduced to a one word description: captives.

I believe we’re living in our own “Days of Exile” as a church. The country we thought we knew has largely disappeared. Christendom is over.

How can we be joyful in a strange land?

Joy is a choice.

Over and over the scriptures admonish us, “Trust in God and do not be afraid.”

Oddly enough, watching two dogs adapt to each other and to their humans has restored my human faith and unleashed pure joy. It feels good.

What brings you joy these days?

Grace and peace to you,

Gary







Tuning in With Our Music Director

May is here - is this everyone's favorite month?! May begins with Lei Day, a day that honors Hawaiian culture, particularly "aloha spirit." In 1986, the Legislature of the State of Hawaii passed Act 202: "A Bill for an Act Relating to Aloha Spirit.
'Aloha Spirit' is the coordination of mind and heart within each person. It brings each person to the self. Each person must think and emote good feelings to others. In the contemplation and presence of the life force, 'Aloha', the following unuhi laula loa (free translation) may be used:
Akahai, meaning kindness to be expressed with tenderness;
Lokahi, meaning unity, to be expressed with harmony;
'Olu'olu, meaning agreeable, to be expressed with pleasantness;
Ha'aha'a, meaning humility, to be expressed with modesty;
Ahonui, meaning patience, to be expressed with perseverance.
These are traits of character that express the charm, warmth, and sincerity of Hawaii's people. It was the working philosophy of native Hawaiians and was presented as a gift to the people of Hawaii. "Aloha' is more than a word of greeting or farewell or a salutation. 'Aloha' means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. 'Aloha' is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. "Aloha" means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen, and to know the unknowable.
In exercising their power on behalf of the people and in fulfillment of their responsibilities, obligations and service to the people, the legislature, governor, lieutenant governor, executive officers of each department, the chief justice, associate justices, and judges of the appellate, circuit, and district courts may contemplate and reside with the life force and give consideration to the 'Aloha Spirit'."
A fine aspiration for us all!

We also get to celebrate Holy Spirit and the birth of the church on Pentecost, which is May 24 this year. Both the vocal and handbell choirs are preparing lively music for Pentecost that will uplift your spirits. The handbell choir will play "This Little Bell of Mine (I'm Going to Let It Ring)," inspired by "This Little Light of Mine." The handbell ringers shine whenever they play!
The vocal choir will lead "Le Lo," a Puerto Rican setting of the Sanctus:
Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!
The Le Lo version opens and closes with "Le lo le lo lai lo," words that are part of a kind of scat singing of the traditional jíbaro (rural farmers) of Puerto Rico.

The topic of the May 19 Musical Sanctuary is "Inner Harmony." Musical Sanctuary centers on the Connect & Glow meditation practice, which includes humming. The "Inner Harmony" exercise uses lots of humming and helps bring inner integrity and a sense of comfort, aliveness, and flow. A recent Washington Post article, "Stressed? Just a Couple Minutes of Meditation Might Help" touts the benefits of humming: "Try a minute or two of humming, or if you're on a stressful work call, let out a big sigh (just don't forget to mute yourself first). Helen Lavretsky, geriatric integrative psychiatrist and professor in residence in the psychiatry department at UCLA Health, said both humming and sighing can stimulate the vagus nerve, which helps calm down the body's stress response." Targeted humming relaxes parts of the body - jaw, forehead, neck shoulders, solar plexus, lower back, etc. When we hum together in the meditation it often feels like being in the middle of a bee hive. Very sweet! You are welcome to join - the self-healing Connect & Glow technique is suitable for beginning as well as seasoned practitioners. Wednesday, May 19, 5:30 pm.



HANDBELL REHEARSALS

Saturday, May 9

10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 23

10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 24

8:45am

VOCAL CHOIR REHEASRALS

Saturday, May 2

10:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 3

9:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 10

9:00 a.m.

Sunday, May 24

9:10 a.m.

Sunday, May 31

9:00am

Open Door Earth Day Booth at Feeney Park

The folks at Open Door don't let a little rain scare them away from setting up a booth at our annual community Earth Day Celebration! Pictured below (left to right, both photos) are Michael Masuda, Liz Graham, Tami Chesnut, Laura Good, Teddie Jackson, Denise Alexander and June Perry.





Moderator's Message



What an exciting time it has been lately! Not just that we seem to (mostly) have gotten through winter, but the interesting and engaging future planning and dreaming we are doing with the ACT (Adaptive Change Team) on Sundays following worship.

But before looking ahead too much, I want to give thanks to the many volunteers and staff that made our holy week celebrations memorable and beautiful. Most especially thanks go to Pastor Gary and to Kate Moody for the sermons, music and worship celebrations. None of this would have been possible without the help of the Worship team and their adornment of the sanctuary with flowers, banners and altar décor. Also, to our sound team and phalanx of greeters and ushers, and gracious hospitality team. Lastly, Christian Enrichment did a marvelous job with the children, and the annual Easter egg hunt. None of your contributions go unnoticed!

Looking forward, we are now in the midst of our weekly contemplations about where we are going as a church, how we are perceived by our community, and how we can provide more of what is needed in these troubling times, both within our church walls, and out in the greater world. These conversations will continue every Sunday after worship for one hour, and will run through May 24 th . Please join us, the time is stimulating and hope-filled!

Don't forget two important all church meetings coming up: one May 3 rd following worship, at which we will vote on a new logo and slogan for Open Door UCC. This is an important decision to kick off our marketing plan for the new name. We will also meet on June 28 th to vote on the slate of officers and team members nominated for the 7/1/26 to 6/30/27 time frame. It's not too late to volunteer for a position, contact me if you have interest!

See you in worship, and Blessings to all!

Carrie Shinn, Moderator

ACT Team Update

We look forward to continuing our Sunday conversations after church in May! We'll be considering where our church is at this time in the life of the congregation and where we may be headed. This is an ongoing conversation that will continue through May 19. We want to hear from all of you; come to as many of the Sundays as you are able. Childcare will be provided. We'll begin 15 minutes after the service ends and will keep the length of the conversations to one hour.

If you cannot attend on any given Sunday but would like to add to the discussion, you can submit any thoughts and ideas to the Pastoral Search box in the social hall.

The Adaptive Change Team

Tami Chesnut
Darlene Davis
Noel Helmbrecht
Mark McCormick
Barbara Olivier
Gary Percesepe
Judy Regalia
Penny Sarvis
Carrie Shinn
Mickey Williamson





Christian Education Recap

Our Easter Egg hunt was a big success! We had a full house of eager students hearing the joyous story of Jesus and waiting patiently for the fun to begin. The older students hid eggs for the littles in the fenced yard of Eastman and Joe Jackson (Easter Bunny) hid for the big kids in the front yard area. Each child found the eggs with the letters of their name and turned them in for a golden egg with a $2 inside. As far as we can tell all the eggs have been found. Thank you for generously donating candy for the 300 plastic eggs!

The reptile exhibition garnered a lot of attention from our students, they really enjoyed holding and interacting with all the critters. Our thanks to OSJ team for the wonderful experience.

Sunday school is staying strong and we have a dedicated group of teachers and volunteers. Our SAFE CHURCH POLICY requires we have two adults present at all time with our children. If you are interested in helping us with this mission, please let us know. There are times when we could use a little extra support. There are a few requirements but the process is painless!

We are starting to plan for VBS in late July. This is a wonderful experience for students and adults. We always have fun and it takes a crew to pull it off. We need helpers for snacks, games, crafts, drama, and bible stories. We will have a sign up sheet in the social hall.

Future ideas… book club for adults, reading a novels with an focus on how faith impacts the characters… I'm open to other suggestions for adult studies.

Evelyn



Treasurer's Report

It has been a busy time for our Church. I have changed our name at the banks and also at the investment companies. Pledges and non pledges are right on track so far this year. We made $1500.00 on the Pancake breakfast. Good job everyone!!! Expenses and income are right on budget so I am not recommending a budget adjustment at the June Congregational meeting.

Thanks for all your support!! Patty



Easter Celebrations!





At the end of a glorious Easter morning that included a Sunrise Service in addition to a service where Holy Communion was shared and 3 baptisms were celebrated, our beloved Easter Egg Hunt was held. Of course no Easter would be complete without it and we had some pretty happy children!





Huddy Pratt, Lucy Abando and Lewis Hitchcock , members of the winning team from 6 the grade Avery Middle School. They recently participated in the county wide Mini Math Bowl Congratulations!





The Church Cleanup has been rescheduled for Saturday, May 9 at 9am. Bring your gloves and tools!





Love to knit? Open Door ministry group, the Knitters and Hookers meet monthly to create prayer shawls for those who are struggling and are in need of loving comfort. The shawls are blessed by Pastor Gary and given away. If you would like to join, please contact Liz Tussey. You can also knit shawls on your own and bring them to church.

Scaly Friends Come to Church!

On April 12 the Outreach and Social Justice team paired with Sierra Scales and Exotics to bring an informative reptile exhibit right to our church! Ashley Gelhaus led the demonstration and showed folks all of the wonderful reptiles, snakes, and amphibians who share our earth with us. Adults and children alike learned all about so many magnificent creatures. It was an engaging event that had people talking for weeks!











SIERRA SCALES EXOTICS

REPTILES • AMPHIBIANS • INVERTEBRATES













Guest Column

VOICES

Has worship become a luxury good?

As working-class stability erodes, congregations are quietly remaking themselves in the image of the middle class.

by Melissa Florer-Bixler in the May 2026 issue of The Christian Century

It wasn't easy for Cecilia and Manuel to get to church on Sunday morning. They took whatever shifts were available at Walmart, working as long and as often as the manager allowed. The city bus appeared, if at all, once an hour outside the hulking box store, making a timely arrival anywhere nearly impossible. Ryan and Tom were in the same boat. Money was tight, and even though they worked 40 hours a week, both adult men lived with their parents to make ends meet. A vet tech and a butcher, when shifts came open, they would take them.

I thought of my former church members' economically driven attendance when Ryan Burge assessed the data on church membership in relation to class and declared that "religion has become a luxury good." The religious demographer's research found that churches are increasingly the habitat of the more educated and wealthy in our society. The people most likely to attend Christian worship have a master's degree and earn a salary between $60k and $100k. Those least likely to attend worship, who ticked the religious box "nothing," hold a high school diploma.

Burge's assessment is stark. Our churches are increasingly designed by and for those who have done everything right according to the White, middle-class script: college degree, marriage, stable income.

Other studies confirm Burge's findings. One researcher, seeking to understand why White working-class people were defecting from institutional churches, noticed that the economic erosion of viable working-class wages led to a crisis in values and identity. As livable wages, adequate housing, and affordable health care options evaporated in the 1970s, churches that upheld values of education, delayed gratification, and self-control—bourgeois virtues—increasingly became detached from workers' lives. Churches have not simply lost working-class people; they have been formed as institutions built on a brand of moral superiority that requires middle-class stability to participate.

Jason Shelton noticed a similar trend in the Black Church. Looking at 50 years of data on church membership, Shelton notes that Black families attaining middle-class status were relocating to the suburbs and seeking congregations with similar levels of education and wealth. This economic shift, along with the rise of interracial marriages and the influence of social media, led more Black Christians into nondenominational and majority-White churches. At the same time, more Black working-class people are rejecting organized religion altogether, leading to an exodus of working-class Black people from Sunday worship.

As a pastor, I watched worship attendance teeter and then topple after the pandemic, and I read many position papers and assessments on how we, as religious professionals, could address this de-churching: tech-driven youth programming, slicker children's ministries to attract young families, higher-end amenities, captivating sermons, and increased social media output. But while programmatic suggestions like these may temporarily stem the tide, they don't address the root of working-class discontent with the church.

Witnesses from the past can help us reshape our future. Keri Day's work on the Azusa Street Revival pays particular attention to Black domestic workers who led the revival in worship practices unabashedly rooted in their African legacy and slave heritage. In doing so, they challenged both White evangelical and upper-class Black religious leaders who staked their futures on capitulating to the demands of racialized capitalism. Day narrates Azusa Street as a revival that was both racially and economically subversive, fostering an interracial community that shifted away from individual uplift and toward communal forms of abundance and belonging.

A few decades later, Claude Williams, a radical Presbyterian socialist pastor, also imagined a religious and economic future for his Alabama community, one that defied the logic of the upper-class southern aristocracy. Following several years of labor organizing with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Williams and his friend Owen Whitfield, a Black Baptist preacher and sharecropper, formed the People's Institute of Applied Religion.

For several weeks, groups of Black and White preachers, Sunday school teachers, and Sunday school superintendents gathered around a chart labeled "The Galilean and the

Common People" and "Way of Righteousness." The simple drawings depicted the story of the God of working-class people—Moses calling down a plague on Egypt, the fiery chasm between the rich man and Lazarus, and the call to unity among the poor in the Sermon on the Mount. Whitfield and Williams knew from their own lives that the southern poor weren't looking for handouts. They were natural leaders whose faith and experience were integral to the possibilities for a more just and hopeful society. All they needed were the skills and the support to realize God's reign among them.

The Azusa Street Revival and the People's Institute are exemplary not because they took on issues of social justice, but because their theological practice produced counternarratives and theologies of belonging that refused the racialized logic of mass consumption and accumulation. Day points to how Black domestic women challenged the patriarchy and professionalization of the clergy in the Azusa revival, shifting the center of spiritual authority. Whitfield and Williams took the biblicism of their rural kin seriously. Rather than dismissing their scriptural accounts, the People's Institute invited poor southerners to identify themselves within the arc of Jesus' redemption.

Demographers' warnings are dire: the church has not merely failed the working class; it has re-formed itself in the image of middle-class capitalism. As the US economy cedes to technocracy, the urgency of integrating a theology of labor and human dignity into our churches is more pressing than ever. The insecurity produced by the gigification of labor, AI-driven job loss, and algorithmic scheduling is an occasion to shift the site of our theological knowledge. Until we reckon with the legacy of worship and belonging that requires middle-class stability, the bus schedule will continue to decide who meets God on Sunday morning.

Poet's Corner

Here is a poem about...well, what IS it about?
I'm guessing it has something to do with the joy and fear of making ourselves vulnerable.
What do you think?
Aloha nui loa,
gary

On Finding a Turtle Shell
in Daniel Boone National Forest
by Jeff Worley

This one got tired
of lugging his fortress
wherever he went,
was done with duck and cover
at every explosion
through rustling leaves
of fox and dog and skunk.
Said *au revoir* to the ritual
of pulling himself together...

I imagine him waiting
for the cover of darkness
to let down his hinged drawbridge.
He wanted, after so many
protracted years of caution,
to dance naked and nimble
as a flame under the moon—
even if dancing just once
was all that the teeth
of the forest would allow.

From *Best to Keep Moving*,
Larkspur Press, 2009, by JEFF WORLEY.

Cherishing our members, friends, and community...



Happy Birthday!

Susan Medeiros 1
Alma Oneto 1
Susana Crow 1
Brenda Whaley 2
Emma Olivas 6
Barbara Matthews 7
Marilyn Baisel 8
Bonnie Lee Hollinger 11
Alan Horvath 14
Rev. Dr. John Randlett 16
Asher Armstrong 19
Asher Armstrong 19
Justin Glessman 20
Sean Markus 20
Miriam Thorsen 21
Robin Chesnut 22
Norma Fritsche 22
Caity Johnson 24
Michael Abando 24
Carolyn Anctil 26
Gretchen Thompson 27
Tommy Pratt 31
Phil Hosmer 31

Don't see your birthday listed? We promise it isn't on purpose! If you would like to have your special day listed in the newsletter, please call or email the church office.

Prayer List

The scriptures tell us:

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Jesus Christ."
Philippians 4:19

We continue to witness the stories of how God answers our prayers!
God hears our cries and answers them.
Let us pray daily for the following members and friends of our community:

Matt Grassmyer
Miley Sophia (Breen)
Will and parents (Penny Sarvis)
Sandy Maus
Diane Tussey
Enoch Samraj
Herb Good
Ryan VanCleave
Carl Smith
Lisa Shinn
Faye Morrison
Miriam Thorsen
Shoshana (Laura Leonard)
Jodie Gibson
Tabitha Kremesec
Lauren, Gordon, Emre, Willow (Jesse Hampton)
Shirley Soderer
Bonnie & Chuck (Mark McCormick)
Terry Dowell
Robin Chesnut
Tari Takara
Ben Richardson (LaMonts)
Bruce (Miriam Thorsen)
Dodi Horvath
Brian Whitehead (Nancy Burton)
Rev. John Randlett
Rev. Marty Williams



MAY 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 **12pm** Women's AA	2 **10am** Vocal Choir rehearsal
3 **9am** Vocal Choir Holy Communion **Congregational Meeting on New Logo** **11am** small group	4 **6:30pm** Al-Anon	5 **12pm** ACT meeting	6 **8:15am** Morning Prayer, Zoom **10am** Worship committee mtg. **12:30pm** AA **6:30pm** AA	7	8 **12pm** Women's AA	9 **10am** Bell Choir rehearsal **9am Church Clean Up**
10 **9am** Vocal Choir rehearsal	11 **6:30pm** Al-Anon	12 **12pm** ACT meeting **1:30pm** F&F mtg.,	13 **8:15am** Morning Prayer, Zoom **12:30pm** AA **6:30pm** AA	14	15 **10:30am** The Wanderers **12pm** Women's AA	16
17 **11am** Council mtg., EEC	18 **5:30pm** South Grove Bunch **6:30pm** Al-Anon	19 **10:30am Family** Connections. EEC **12pm** ACT meeting **1:30PM** M&C mtg., Social Hall	20 **8:15am** Morning Prayer, Zoom **5:30pm** Musical Sanctuary **12:30pm** AA **6:30pm** AA	21	22 **12pm** Women's AA	23 **10am** Bell Choir rehearsal
24 **8:45am** Bell Choir rehearsal **9:10am** Vocal Choir rehearsal **Strengthen the Church offering**	25 **MEMORIAL DAY OFFICE CLOSED** **6:30pm** Al-Anon	26 **12pm** ACT meeting **5:30pm** The Seekers	27 **8:15am** Morning Prayer, Zoom **11am** Angels Angels **11am** Knitters & Hookers **12:30pm** AA **6:30pm** AA	28	29 **12pm** Women's AA	30
31 **9am** Vocal Choir rehearsal						

THE NUGGET

First Congregational Church of Murphys
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
PO Box 48
509 N. Algiers Street
Murphys, CA 95247

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

DATED MATERIAL - DO NOT DELAY
MAY 2026

Phone: (209)728-3141
Email: nugget@fccmurph.org
Webpage: www.fccmurph.org
God's love echoes through us to all creation.

Staff
Interim Pastor Rev. Dr. Gary Percesepe
Pastor Emeritus Rev. Dr. John Randlett
Music Director Kate Moody
Secretary Jenny Fuqua
Christian Ed Director Evelyn Betts
Childcare Abby Fuqua

Officers
Moderator Carrie Shinn
Vice Moderator Barbara Olivier
Treasurer Patty Haskell
Clerk Darlene Davis

www.ucc.org

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, MURPHYS MISSION STATEMENT
We believe that all people are beloved by God and we strive to serve as a welcoming and nurturing church community to discern the Bible with insight for today and to live out Christ's teachings.

The Nugget Committee invites you to submit articles of interest and wishes to stress that the deadline is always the 20th of each month.
The Committee reserves the right to edit submissions for length and content.