DECEMBER 2025 VOLUME 23 ISSUE 12



THE NUGGET

Open Door United Church of Christ

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

Advent Workshop Sunday, December 7, 3 - 6pm, soup provided

Longest Night Service (With Faith Lutheran Church of Murphys)
Friday, December 12, 4:30pm.

Multi-Generation Family Christmas Pageant Sunday, December 21, 10am

Christmas Eve service on Wednesday, December 24, 7pm.

Lessons and Carols worship service on Sunday, December 28, 10am.

New Year's Eve Family Game Night on Wednesday, December 31, 6 - 9pm.



Its time to order your Christmas poinsettias! Every year, the Sanctuary is beautifully decorated with poinsettias that are in honor of the memory of our loved ones. They are available for $15 and the deadline for ordering is December 17. Order forms will be included in church bulletins. You can also contact the church office with the name of your loved one and payment info.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

We will be having our Christmas Fund offering on December 14. The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Funds is a Special Mission offering that congregations have been supporting for over 100 years. Funds provide direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties.



Interim Thoughts

As we draw near to the season of Advent—perhaps the most misunderstood season of the Christian year—we are forced to reckon with the meaning of time itself.

You don't have to be a Christian for a long time to realize that the church does not keep time as the world keeps time. Perhaps this is because, as philosophers say, "time is a human construct," meaning time does not exist in itself, it is an organizing principle we impose upon our world to make sense of it. Another way to put it is, "God doesn't do time the way we do," for a thousand years in God's eyes are but a blink of the eye. Advent is the season when we must reckon with our illusory ideas about time, reminding ourselves that "Our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith" (Romans 13:11).

The church invites us to live under another calendar. Sunday, November 30, marks the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the Christian year. Despite what the world may tell us, Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving when merchants hope to make huge profits that will balance their books) is of little significance from God's point of view. Far more important is what God is doing in out of the way places—not in Times Square, not in the Macy's parade, but in a remote part of the world known as Bethlehem in Galilee, where events are transpiring that will rock the foundations of the world.

So, if you sometimes feel "out of step" with the world, take heart. Advent's message is for you.
And what is the message of Advent?

Contrary to popular belief, even among Christians, Advent is not "preparation for Christmas." Advent is not a "transitional season" coming just before "the good stuff" as we slide into the Christmas season: Advent is a season in and of itself. And, as Rev. Fleming Rutledge points out, Advent communicates a message of immense, even ultimate, importance. Of all the seasons of the church year, Advent most closely mirrors the daily lives of Christians and of the church; it asks the most difficult ethical questions of us; it presents an accurate picture of the absolute mess of the human condition; and most importantly, it orients us to the future of the God who will come again, the God who is always coming to us (no wonder we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel during Advent!).

This "Second Advent" which we focus on in Advent, is too easily dismissed by those who chafe at the absurdity of the "end of the world" crowd, who crow about the coming "Rapture" when Christ returns and destroys all the enemies of God. Advent's emphasis on the Second Advent of Messiah is meant to teach us that God has commandeered the human construct of time. Modernity sought to banish God from time. Modern views of God presuppose that God is dead, or at least mortally wounded and utterly irrelevant to modern life; God is depicted as detached, serene, distant, who is said to "care" about us, in some vague way, but never actually shows up anywhere to do anything, never intrudes into our time.

We must dispel all such illusions, and Advent teaches us how to do this. In Advent we focus on a God who not only loves us but also shows up among us, as one of us, as the human face of God.
Advent is our yearly reminder that at any given moment, your time could become God's time. The time you thought was your own, to do as you please?—yeah, God has a prior claim. The times of your life—whether they be good or bad, painful or joyous—can change in an instant, because time is not completely in your hands. Our time can come to an end! (just as democracy can come to an end); our time can be disrupted (consider the disruptive

time we are currently living through!) and time itself can be redeemed, when God shows up in unexpected ways and in unlikely places. We are not redeemed away from time; God moves in time, adopts our time as God's time, and redeems us from the ravages of time to create what St. Paul calls "the fulness of time."

Fleming Rutledge, in her remarkable little book on Advent, lays out *Advent's Trajectory*:

- The past: God's initiative toward the world in Christ (Christmas)

- The future: God's coming victory in Christ (second coming, or parousia, made present by the power of the Spirit at Pentecost)
- The present: a cruciform (cross-shaped) life of love for the world in the present time (Epiphany, Lent, and Holy Week)

The church teaches us to mark time according to Epiphany, Lent, and Easter, rather than the Mother's Day, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving.
When I was a kid coming up in the Bronx, I was taught on the street that there are some folk who "know what time it is." And some folk who just don't.
The time before us is both a gift and an assignment, judgment and grace. What will we do, and what will God do, in the time before us?
I look forward to exploring with you the beauty and mystery of Advent, starting on November 30, when we begin again, perpetual beginners.

See you in church!

Gary

Pastor Search Update

The pastor search committee continues to work on the best ways to gather information for our church profile. The church profile is what (hopefully) will attract candidates to consider applying for the position as our pastor. Our next step will be a survey on the characteristics wanted in our next pastor. Meantime, please be sure to look at the bulletin boards in the Social hall. One of them will have a display of the results from our phone call interviews on the four basic questions that we discussed with as many of you as possible.
As always, the members of the committee invite your comments and suggestions regarding this process. There is a suggestion box in the Social Hall, and you are always welcome to give any one of us an email, text, or call. As a reminder, the names of the pastoral search committee members are listed at the bottom of this article. Please keep our work in your prayers.



The Pastoral Search Committee:

Tami Chesnut Noel Helmbrecht
Mark McCormick Barbara Olivier
Judy Regalia Penny Sarvis
Carrie Shinn



Tuning in With Our Music Director

Advent is one of my favorite seasons. As the sun travels south and the days shorten and soften here in the northern hemisphere there is an inclination to rest, reflect, and prepare for the coming of Christ. Part of my annual reflection is the Release and Renew practice. You are welcome to join with me for that practice at the December Musical Sanctuary, at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 21. In this contemplative service of music, readings, and the Connect & Glow guided meditation we will prepare for the new year by releasing inappropriate coping mechanisms (ICMs), replacing them with divine expressions of life force energy (DELFEs). The result is usually an increase of inner peace and calm, which in turn brings more ease to a life of service to God and life.

The vocal choir will share an abundance of music during Advent. One of my favorites is Chris Tomlin's version of Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone). Rather than the original 3/4 waltz time, Chris sets the traditional tune in 4/4 time, with a tolling bell accompaniment in the bass of the piano. The song then breaks into a transcendent chorus, "My chains are gone, I've been set free!"

Speaking of bells - the handbell choir is gearing up for an appearance at the Christmas Eve service. This is my first experience with handbells, and I am learning a LOT from my kind and patient guides in the handbell choir. It is a delightful and fun experience! If you love playing handbells or are curious about playing handbells but weren't able to join this season we will be starting up again in February. Please contact me for details.

All blessings of peace and love,
Kate



Moderator's Message



Well the end of the year has certainly snuck up on us! The whirl of events surrounding Thanksgiving and Advent has already taken hold. Be sure to check the calendar attached, and to read your weekly emails...You won't want to miss the wonderful array of church sponsored events coming up, including the Advent Workshop, the Longest Night celebration, the Christmas Pageant, the New Years game night, and so much more.

Let's commit to caring for each other and our neighbors this holiday season. Spare a prayer, a meal, a visit, for those who are homebound or lonely or battling physical or emotional challenges. No one can know what the new year will bring, so don't put off providing care to a loved one.

With all the blessings of the season to you,

Carrie Shinn



Treasurer's Report

The Budget Committee had their meeting on November 21. They are faithfully working together and the date for the Annual Congregation Budget Meeting will be announced soon.

Christian Education Recap

Important Dates:

Sunday, Dec. 7: Advent Workshop from 3 - 6pm. A soup supper will be provided.

Sunday, Dec. 21: Multi-Generational Family Christmas Pageant at worship.

Sunday, Dec. 28: Lessons and Carols Worship

Wednesday, Dec. 31: New Year's Eve Family Game Night from 6 - 9pm

Poet's Corner

The Writer
by Richard Wilbur

In her room at the prow of the house
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;
And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,
Beating a smooth course for the right window
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish
What I wished you before, but harder.



Richard Wilbur was born on March 1, 1921 in New York City. One of the most lauded and honored poets of 20th century American verse, Wilbur was the second poet laureate of the United States. During his lifetime, Richard Wilbur won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for his collection Things of This World: Poems in 1957 and a second Pulitzer for New and Collected Poems (1988).

SMALL GROUP SCHEDULE

First Fridays
Friday, Dec. 5
2pm
Alan Horvath

South Grove Bunch
Monday, Dec. 8
5:30pm
Faye Morrison

The Seekers
Tuesday, Dec. 16
5pm
Faye Morrison

Faith & Friends
Thursday, Dec. 18
10am
Pam Kimes

The Wanderers
Friday, Dec. 19
10:30am
Marilyn Baisel

Angels Angels
TBD
Barb Olivier

Affirmation of Faith for Advent

Advent Credo

It is not true that creation and the human family
are doomed to destruction and loss—

This is true:
For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination,
hunger and poverty, death and destruction—

This is true:
I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word,
and that war and destruction rule forever—

This is true:
Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given,
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God,
the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil
who seek to rule the world—

This is true:
To me is given authority in heaven and on earth,
and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted,
who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—

This is true:
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy,
your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.

It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind,
of justice, of human dignity, of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—

This is true: The hour comes, and it is now,
that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.

So let us enter Advent in hope,
even hope against hope.
Let us see visions of love and peace and justice.
Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage:
Jesus Christ—the life of the world.

written by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. in *Testimony: The Word Made Flesh*, Orbis Books, 2004.
Posted on Dan Clendenin's **Journey with Jesus** website. http://www.journeywithjesus.net/

What is the Theology of ICE?

Guest column by Rev. Michael Wolf



Clergy members hold bread for the Eucharist as they protest near the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Broadview, Illinois, on October 10, 2025. (Photo by Joshua Lott / The Washington Post via Getty Images)

When I went down to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement processing center in Broadview, Illinois, to protest the actions of federal agents in Chicago, I did not expect a warm welcome. But nor did I expect to be assaulted by ICE agents, who grabbed my neck and left bruises all over my body after pushing me with truncheons. One zealous officer even grabbed my chest and twisted hard. I was wearing my clerical collar, and another agent said something that has stuck with me ever since: "Jesus said to follow the law."

In the middle of a conflict like the one our country finds itself in, it is rare to encounter such a robust theological touchstone. Here was a profound statement about the role of Christians in the world. Christians ought to follow the law—even if that law results in dehumanization, even if it goes against God's laws of mercy, love, and truth. In an age of rising Christian nationalism, this federal officer made a strong statement about whether God or country ought to come first.

First-century people had similar questions and difficulties when it came to parsing the dividing lines of their loyalties. That's how I read the exchange in Matthew 22:15–22. It begins with someone asking Jesus a very practical question: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" For people living under imperial occupation and with a history of tax resistance, this was a pressing consideration. Jesus offers the answer, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

In every sermon I've ever heard on this text, Jesus' response has been treated as a sort of demarcation between worldly and spiritual authority. Even in the early church, this was the prevailing understanding. Take, for instance, Tertullian's interpretation:

The image of Caesar, which is on the coin, to Caesar, and the image of God, which is on man, to God; so as to render to Caesar indeed money, to God yourself. Otherwise, what will be God's, if all things are Caesar's?

Tertullian's final question seems most striking here. We live in a time when the state is asking an awful lot of us, from acquiescence to norm-breaking to the establishment of a secret police force that does not have to reveal faces or badge numbers. Even making fun of the president seems to be off limits. The question that must be asked is Tertullian's: What becomes of us if we offer everything to Caesar?

I've always seen Jesus' answer less as instruction and more as an invitation to a question. Just what is God's, and what is Caesar's? This is perhaps the most important framework that scripture has given us to reckon with our present times. Every Christian must take up and ponder this question, especially in a time when Caesar is demanding more and more and our prevailing political landscape is tilting toward authoritarianism and dehumanization.

In my youth group's morning Bible study, the entire group of 12- to 15-year-old boys told me they are being served ICE recruitment ads by YouTube. These ads promise rich rewards—a $50,000 sign-up bonus chief amongst them. They also often contain Bible verses, including this one from Isaiah: "Here am I; send me" (6:8). This is perhaps the most pernicious example I have ever seen of the mingling of state, God, and money. ICE recruitment videos sell a

reality in which you can serve all three at the same time. In fact, they conflate the three: to be an ICE agent is to serve a monstrous amalgam of the greatest powers in our lives. Jesus had something to say about that as well: "You can only serve one master" (Matt. 6:24).

Christians have reckoned for millennia with the question of when the state can command our obedience. Paul says to "submit to the authorities" (Rom. 13:1), but this submission did not include abiding by laws that he found immoral. Time and again, we find Paul and first-century Christians in prison for preaching the gospel. I'm a Baptist, and my tradition has taken that example to heart. By the start of the American Revolution, half of all Baptist preachers had spent time in jail for preaching without a license.

While plenty of Christians have argued that we are not bound by laws that restrict the practice of our religion, resisting lawful authority in other matters has been more complex. Martin Luther King Jr. famously had to deal with White moderate critics who argued that his tactics were misguided. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King offers a prescient statement:

There are two types of laws: There are just laws and there are unjust laws. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.

We find ourselves in a time of unjust laws. The dehumanizing tactics I saw used against protesters at Broadview mirror the disregard for human life and for God's image that ICE has enacted as part of its plan to terrorize communities. As I write this, at least 22 people have been killed in ICE custody this year; more will surely die before it is published.

The Trump administration has branded protesters as rioters even as it has insisted that its campaign of terror is aimed only at violent criminals. This, of course, is untrue. The protesters I've seen have been peaceful, but that hasn't protected them from violence at the hands of the federal government. This administration has deported countless individuals with no criminal background whatsoever.

It's worth remembering that Jesus' death was imposed by the Roman government, using a cross—the empire's typical punishment for sedition and criminality. The gospels indicate that he was crucified alongside two criminals. Would we say that the Roman Empire's judgment is correct today? Surely not. Christians have developed a theological imagination that can see beyond the labels the state uses, the kinds of labels often used against undocumented immigrants and protesters.

It's important for church leaders to not only speak out about this but also put our bodies between ICE and the people they seek to harm. If we don't, we risk becoming what King called an "irrelevant social club." That said, not everyone has the privilege or the desire to physically stop ICE vans filled with people slated for detention. Some Christians are especially vulnerable right now, and others won't feel that such direct action is for them. But there is something for everyone to do at this moment.

One of the most poignant forms of resistance I've witnessed came on a Saturday evening at Broadview, when Catholic clergy assembled and asked to be allowed to offer communion to those imprisoned there. They were callously turned away, in violation of laws that guarantee the incarcerated access to spiritual care. God's body was turned away from Broadview by federal agents, but God's presence was there in the form of clergy and laypeople who demanded recognition of the fundamental humanity of those held there.

If there is anything that I am sure Christ would condemn, it is the reduction of the church to a quiet, acquiescing presence that does not speak out strongly to condemn such actions. "Jesus said to follow the law," but when the law is unjust, Christians must resist. Otherwise, the church will fail the test of our times.

Michael Woolf
Michael Woolf is senior minister at Lake Street Church in Evanston, Illinois, and author of Sanctuary and Subjectivity.

Cherishing our members, friends, and community...



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Sadie Oneto 1
Carrie Shinn 6
Jodie Gibson 8

Ilona Logodi 8
Bob Mulvaney 17
Judy Hanson 18
Dylan Shinn 28

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:

Faye Morrison
David Nak (Alan Horvath)
Family of Vienna Watkins
Patty Haskell
Maria (Michael Abando's mother)
Shoshana (Laura Leonard)
Elaine Lewis & Family
Diane Tussey
Jodie & Dianne Gibson
Gordon, Emre, Willow (Jesse Hampton)
Tracey Ellifritz
Tabitha Kremesec
Shirley Soderer
Bonnie Danielson (Mark McCormick)
Terry Dowell
Bob Olivier
Robin Chesnut
Sandy Fox-Hill
Adrienne Zimmerman (Carrie Shinn)
Tari Takara
Ben Richardson (LaMonts)
Bruce (Miriam Thorsen)
Dodi Horvath
Brian Whitehead (Nancy Burton)
Rev. John Randlett
Rev. Marty Williams

DECEMBER 2025

12:30pm M&C mtg., EEC

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 6:30pm Al-Anon	2	3 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 4:30pm Worship mtg. Zoom 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	4	5 2pm First Fridays 12pm Women's AA	6 10am Choir rehearsal
7 9am Choir *Holy Communion* 3-6pm Advent Workshop	8 6:30pm Al-Anon	9	10 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	11	12 12pm Women's AA *4:30pm The Longest Night Service*	13 10am Bell Choir rehearsal
14 9am Choir ***Christmas Fund Offering***	15 11am F&F mtg. ZOOM 5:30pm South Grove Bunch 6:30pm Al-Anon	16 10:30am Family Connections. EEC 5:30pm The Seekers	17 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	18 10am Faith & Friends	19 10am The Wanderers 12pm Women's AA	20 10am Bell Choir rehearsal
21 *Family Christmas Pageant* 11am Council mtg., EEC 5pm Musical Sanctuary	22 *10am OSJ Golden Nursing Home* 6:30pm Al-Anon	23	24 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA *7pm Christmas Eve Service*	25 office closed 12/25 & 12/26	26 12pm Women's AA	27
28 *Lessons & Carols Service*	29 6:30pm Al-Anon	30	31 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom *Family Game Night 6-9pm* 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	office closed 1/1 & 1/2		



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
DECEMBER 2025

Phone: (209)728-3141
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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
Custodian Lucie Tardif
Christian Ed Director Patty Haskell
Childcare Abby Fuqua

Officers
Moderator Carrie Shinn
Vice Moderator Barbara Olivier
Treasurer Patty Haskell
Assistant Treasurer Alan Horvath

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.