



Worship
Online
With Us
Through
February

The SEER February 2022

Inside this issue

Pastor's Message.....	1,2
Stewardship of Your Time	2
Council Highlights.....	3
Financial Report	4
February Birthdays	4
Love.....	5
Mission Story	6,7
More Love	8

Pastor's Message

The season of Epiphany is here again. We remember the story of the Magi following the light of the star towards the Christ child (Matthew 2:1-12). God did not start or end with that one star, but continued to lead the Magi home by another way. God continues to be found among the stars and lights in our lives.

As part of our Epiphany celebration, you are invited to join in the spiritual practice of Star Words. The practice is very simple, and yet can offer profound gifts to those who seek. We sent paper slips out to our snail mail addresses with a Star Word chosen at random on your behalf. If we missed you, please let us know! We're happy to send you a word! And, if you know of someone who would like to pray and play with us, please let me (or Paddy in the office) know and we will send them their very own Star Words.

Here's what you do: Place your Star Word somewhere where you'll see it regularly (bathroom mirror, next to your chair, dashboard of your car, etc.). Your practice, should you choose to play along, is to reflect on this word for the coming year, to ponder what significance this word might have in your life, and ask God to speak to you through this simple word. And, for bonus points (as I mentioned in my sermon on 1/30) consider how this word might apply to our *community*. So, instead of asking, "what is God suggesting for me?" the question becomes, "what is God doing/suggesting to us?"

As you pray with your star word, wrestle with the meaning(s) and definition(s) and application(s), it might lead to an epiphany or two for you along the way. Sometimes a message seems clear and other times the word takes on new meanings over time. I've wrestled

(continued on page 2)

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Pastor's Message, continued

with a Star Word before, so if you get stuck, you are probably on the right path. If you want to play and pray together, please let me know.

May this practice lead you towards connecting with Christ's light as we journey together this year.

In the Light of Christ,

Pastor Diana



Stewardship of Your Time

Virginia Greenwald, Vice Moderator

Dear Friends,

As we begin 2022 with hope for renewed activity within our church community, I encourage you to think about what aspect of church life you might feel drawn to serve. There are a number of ways to support the organization of the church in order to strengthen our mission of **Making God's Love Visible** to each other, to the community in which we live and beyond.

Our teams include: Worship, Outreach, Faith Formation (Christian Education), Stewardship, Facilities and Maintenance and Congregational Care. Each of these teams is waiting for the gifts and skills you could bring and would be enriched by your participation. If you would like to know more about these teams and their responsibilities, please call or email me or Pastor Diana. There is a place for you to grow in service.

Council Highlights January 13, 2022, via Zoom

Winnie Hogoboom, Clerk

- The **Safe Regathering Committee** has recommended that services return to Zoom through February (and now March) as the newest COVID variant spreads; Council agreed.
- **Pastor Diana** spoke of a need for a Communications group and shared her experience of using a QR code that links people's phones directly to our website. The Council is interested!
- **Vice Moderator Virginia Greenwald** is working to fill the many open positions we have now, including the Communications group above. Team members are needed for Stewardship, Outreach, and the newly formed Church Education Team. A nursery worker will be needed when we return to the sanctuary; the position has been advertised.
- **Financial Secretary Kathy Johnson** has emailed and snail-mailed letters acknowledging giving in 2021, which many people need for tax purposes. If you have not received yours, please contact Kathy (fkathj@sonic.net) or call the church office.
- **Treasurer Mark Adams** is holding a meeting of the Finance Committee for input on the 2022 budget. The budget will be presented to the congregation at the **Annual Fiscal Meeting on February 20**, following the worship service, where it will be voted on by the members.
- In addition to the budget, members will vote to **approve two delegates and an alternate to the Northern California Nevada Conference** of the UCC. Please contact Virginia (dvgreenw@comcast.net) for more information if you are interested in serving.
- **Worship representative Rebecca Schroeder** reported that the Worship Team is discussing how we can bring Communion back into the sanctuary when we return once again.
- The **next Council meeting** is scheduled for **February 10, 6:30** via Zoom. Please notify the office if you would like to attend so the link will be sent to you.

Financial Secretary Report

Kathy Johnson

Statements of donations were sent by email or US Postal Service early in January. If you didn't receive yours, or you have reviewed it and have any questions or concerns, contact me by text at 707-292-8684 or email at fkathj@sonic.net. We can work it out!

Some notable total receipts for 2021 include:

Christmas \$986.55, half of which went to Veterans of the Cross and half this year to Heifer International. Two different organizations, Jonas Philanthropies and a national group of UCC families, matched our donations to Heifer this year.

Missions: \$9,299, 80% of which goes to Our Church's Wider Mission to support our conference and national organization which in turn support UCC congregations, and national and international charities. The other 20% of our Missions donations was divided among Caritas Village, Redwood Empire Food Bank, and FISH.

Memorial Gifts: \$220 in memory of some of our members who have passed on.

Disaster Aid: \$734 to help victims of the climate disasters in Haiti and Kentucky.

FISH: \$910 in targeted donations to FISH. Since we haven't been able to make the monthly donations of non-perishable food, it is good to be able to help this local food pantry keep serving our community.

EScrip: \$370. If you shop at Oliver's and have their community card, you can name our church as recipient of their generous donation of a percentage of your purchase. We received \$370 from this source in 2021—so easy!

Thank you all for continuing to support our church and its missions locally and globally.



February Birthdays

- 2 Mary Pack
- 3 Sam Walker
- 4 Sarah Pack
- 7 Dorothy Hinz
- 25 Linda Duckett
- 25 Rose Williams

Not that any of you need reminding but a refresher course is always helpful.

Show God's Love by Listening.

Show God's Love with Generosity.

Show God's Love by Encouraging.

Show God's Love with Acts of Kindness.

Show God's Love by Praying for Others.

It's Possible to Show God's Love to Everyone.

Deep love is seeing someone at their most vulnerable, often lowest point, and reaching out your hand to help them get back up. Because deep love is **selfless**. It's realizing there's someone out there that you don't think twice about caring for. Caring for them is as involuntary as breathing.

Agape — Selfless Love. Agape is the highest level of love to offer. It's given without any expectations of receiving anything in return. Offering Agape is a decision to spread love in any circumstances. Agape, Greek agapē, in the New Testament, the fatherly love of God for humans, as well as the human reciprocal love for God. In Scripture, the transcendent agape love is the highest form of love.

Have you reached out recently? Is there someone in your life, or perhaps someone you know of, who needs your selfless love? You may not have to think too hard to discover who that might be.

One Family & the Gift of Music

Hannah Walstrum

The following story comes from First Congregational (Santa Rosa's) Story Team. Our goal is to publish stories that help us get to know each other better and to live in our church's mission, which is to make God's love visible.

Their lives were suffused with music long before Chris and Dana fell in love and married 20 years ago. Continuing the tradition, their ten-year-old daughter Ella started playing the piano five years ago and is an accomplished clarinetist.

Chris Alexander was born in Oakland to a second-generation Finnish American father and an Issei Japanese mother (first in her family to live outside Japan). When business took his father to Japan, the family went along, and Chris spent his first four years in Tokyo. By the time he was in kindergarten the family was back in California. Chris started piano lessons at five and never looked back. In high school he focused on learning everything from classical music to Gilbert and Sullivan, was soloist in Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and sang baritone in the high-school choir.

Like Chris, Dana was young when she embraced music. At four she started piano lessons, and she grew up singing in a 7th Day Adventist church. Back then she looked on music as a hobby; she was advised by her parents that at the end of college, she needed to find a job that supported her. She dreamed of "having my own piano studio." At the same time, having sung in church choirs, she realized she had a love of voice "and working with a group of singers."

Chris entered Stanford University as a physics major, but changed his major to music, graduating with a BA in Music. He was a member of the infamous Leland Stanford, Jr. University Marching Band, playing clarinet and tenor saxophone.

Likewise, Dana did not begin her undergraduate days at Fresno State focused on music. But she went on to graduate with a BA in Music and a credential to teach K-12 music. Along the way she discovered that as a piano soloist she had "tremendous performance anxiety." Singing, however, starting with a solo in 11th grade, came without any anxiety or nervousness. At Fresno State, Dana was expected to perform a recital. Her piano teacher suggested "doing my recital in voice because he had seen me struggle at the piano," a winning strategy.

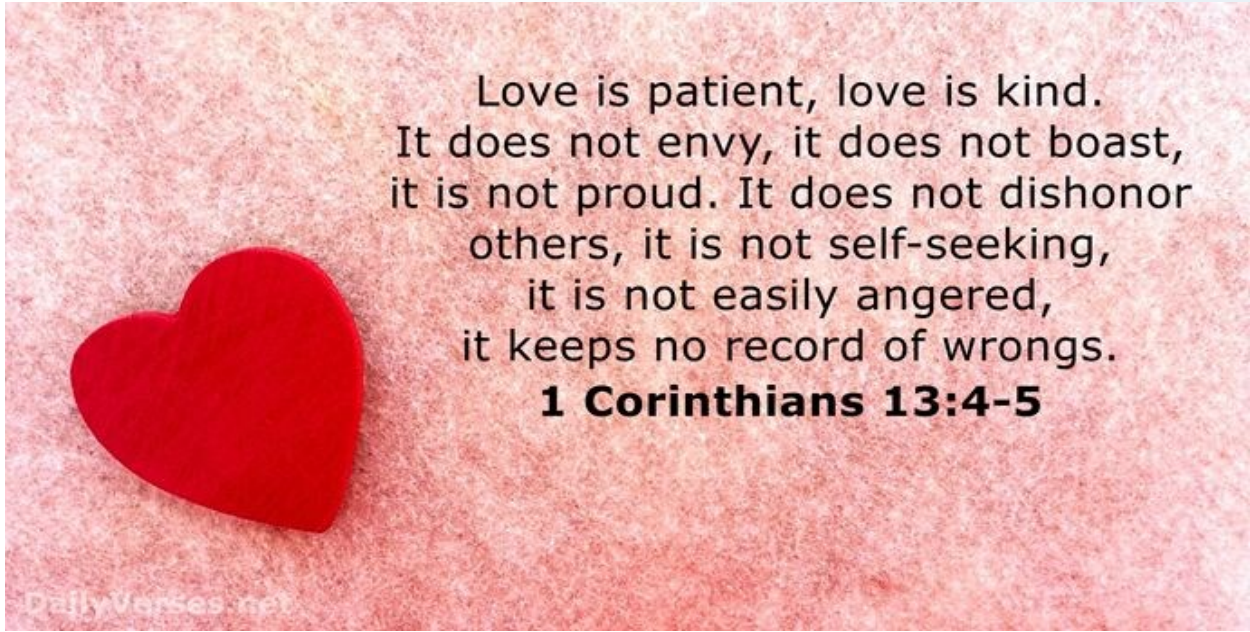
Growing up with church music meant Dana was offered jobs in several different churches after graduating. Chris grew up unchurched, though his father loved to study religion. Then music opened the chancel door. He remembers, "My first regular contact with churches," as a keyboard player, "was in the 1990s with a Unity Church in San Jose." A similar position opened up at First Church of Religious Science of San Jose.



“So my entry into church was through music,” Chris remarks. There he honed his ability “to work with singers and choirs.” He loves the collaborative effort. “I am not, by temperament, a solo player and do not seek to be the center of attention.” He may prefer to be behind the piano, but his mastery of the piano gives a professional sheen to our church’s musical program. When Chris and Dana moved to Santa Rosa, Dana looked for a church where Chris “would feel comfortable.” She told him, “We need to find a church with a good music program, so we don’t become the *whole* music program.” After hearing our choir, then led by Ron Hawks, hearing as well the singing of the Samoan congregation sharing our sanctuary, Dana nudged Chris and said, “Hey, I think we found our place.”

Today Dana directs three choirs and two piano classes at Montgomery High School, teaching music to each new generation of Santa Rosa citizens. I asked Dana how teaching high school choir and sacred music intersect for her. She told me that she teaches secular *and* sacred music to her classes. “After all, choral music is rooted in the church.” When asked what sacred music means in a secular classroom, she offered this view: “It doesn’t matter who your God is, it means you treat each other with kindness, each other with love, each other with equality.” Chris, besides accompanying our choir, is regularly featured in Sonoma County’s theater arts and musical life. What you may not know is that he has a day-job as a public health care administrator for Sonoma County!

The Alexander family has warmed our hearts with their music, starting with the youngest – the choir was delighted when Ella became a member. What you probably don’t know is that her very favorite extracurricular activity is, no, not music, but tap-dancing!



Toward a spirit of truth and reconciliation, First Congregational Church recognizes that our building and our ministries are on the traditional territories of Coastal Miwok and Pomo people.

First Congregational United
Church of Christ

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PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE