



July 2023

SEER

Making God's Love Visible

FCCSR.org (707) 546-0998 firstucc.admin@sonic.net 2000 Humboldt Street Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Pastor's Letter

Dear Siblings in Christ,

This July has special importance for me as it is the one year anniversary of my grandmother's death. I suspect we all know that grief takes time and so it is when we have anniversaries the grief can come back or take a new expression. I am not surprised to find myself caught in memories and strong emotions once again, and yet there is certainly a part of me that wonders if there is a shortcut through the process. We all know the answer to that is a hearty, no! Sigh.

We have been grieving as individuals and as a community for some time. And, I would love to pronounce an end to the pain and suffering of missing beloved ones. I would love to be able to roll back the stress and strain of the pandemic. And I am reminded that in this life we are not promised a pain free existence. Rather, as Christians, our hope and our assurance is that even in the midst of our suffering God is with us. (*Isaiah 41:10, Mt 28:20b*)

Moreover even as one thing is ending, God is creating a new thing in our midst. I give thanks for the budding ministry of our Isaiah Partnership Team and the possibilities of the new ministry that God may unfold among us. We will recognize and introduce the team in worship this month (as schedules align). And we will hear more from the group in coming weeks and months about their process and I hope you'll join me in encouraging and supporting their work.

And so even as we continue to endure this time of difficulty and recovery, let us trust that we never do so alone. God is with us. And, God brings us together to care for one another. So, please reach out when you want to talk and/or to pray together. You don't have to walk this road alone – let us be God's hands and feet (and ears) for one another.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Diana

Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ Annual Gathering June 15-17, 2023

Winnie Hogboom

Friends, I attended the Annual Gathering in Palo Alto this year as your layperson delegate. I heard several interesting thoughtful and inspiring presentations, some of which I will be sharing with you in a later time.

The Conference Theme was **The Elephant Within**. It continues the long-running theme of **The Elephant in the Room**, or racism.



The Business Meeting had only two items:

Approving the slate of Officers, Conference Council members and Committee members. This passed.

Approving a resolution to encourage local churches to take actions to further repair the damage of racism. Rev. Barry Cammer and Susan Russell, both members of the Arlington Community Church, UCC, Kensington, presented their congregation's program called **The Black Wealth Builders Fund**. This passed.

"This resolution asks the Annual Gathering of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ to encourage local churches within the Conference to live out a faith-based belief in racial justice and to take intentional steps to put those beliefs into action by becoming a **Black Wealth Builders** congregation. The conference will encourage congregations to take specific actions to repair the damage done by centuries of White supremacist policies that have prevented our Black siblings from building generational wealth through the purchase of a home.



It is based on a project launched by Arlington Community Church UCC in 2021 called the **Black Wealth Builders Fund** which provides zero-interest loans to first-time Black homebuyers for down payment assistance."

The Arlington Church works with a local bank and realtors to identify Black families who qualify for a home loan but lack the resources for the down payment. They have assisted thirteen families in two years.

I hope we have future opportunities to discuss what our role might be in our community.

Council Highlights June 2023

Hannah Wallstrum, Clerk

- All the **financial motions** passed at the May Council meeting have been enacted (see May highlights for refresher).
- Learned that **CFF** has some exciting **summer plans** for our Sunday School kids. Judy Cramer is helping CFF by painting peg dolls to be used with the Godly Play curriculum.
- Council was charged by the Moderator to **think/pray about 3 items** between now and the July meeting:
 - (a) having committee reports on the agenda each month;
 - (b) creation of a **yearly calendar** of all team/committee dates, attached to the Council's monthly agenda;
 - (c) how can we get **more folks** in place to help shoulder church tasks?

Pastor Diana

- Her recent **vacation** was exciting and inspirational.
- The **Interfaith Pride** Service (June 11th) in which Diana participated was her "favorite" interfaith service she has ever attended.
- Along with delegate Winnie Hogoboom, Diana attended the annual gathering of the **NCNC** (Northern CA/NEV Conference). It was time well spent.

Regular **Council meeting dates** are currently held on the third Thursday of the month.

Treasurer's Report

Kathy Johnson

Earlier this year, we passed a budget with a significant deficit. The good news is that 5 months into the year, we are not as far in the red as we expected to be. Further good news for this year is that we had some "excess" income in 2022 which carried over making it possible to continue fully funding all our operations. The Finance Committee will be meeting soon after the end of the second quarter, and presenting its findings and recommendations to the Council. Watch this space for updates!

If you are looking for a new, secure, and easy way to donate to the church, try Text-to-Give. Just Text 707-383-7980, check to confirm the church name, and follow the prompts to set up your gift. You will receive an immediate response text allowing you to cancel the donation, then with your approval the payment will be made directly from the account or card you enter.

You may be wondering about proceeds from the Jack Farmer estate of which we are one of the beneficiaries. While we have received some funds, the Trust describes how those are intended to be used. Part of the proceeds are designated for care and maintenance of the house, and a good portion is intended for our Endowment -- a gift for our present and future!

Managing a Trust is a complicated process which is moving forward, but not nearly complete. We have received title to the house and are paying related expenses; within the next few months the congregation will be asked to bring forward ideas and prayerfully discern how to use the house.

Putting Faith into Action on Climate

We find ourselves in the midst of ongoing climate and environmental justice crises. The future sometimes seems uncertain and even frightening. Yet as people of faith, we are called to heed prophetic voices and fight for a livable planet.

It is in action that hope is found. As the Israelites confronted the challenges of their time, the prophet Jeremiah passed along God's message: Your labor is not in vain. There is hope for your future (Jeremiah 31:17).



The UCC Climate Hope Cards campaign is part of an effort to save thousands of lives, address societal inequities, and get our nation on track to meet its climate goals. The Environmental Protection Agency is in the process of updating a number of protections that could significantly impact our environment and public health.

Right now, the United Church of Christ is putting faith into action through a yearlong campaign called Climate Hope Cards. Through this effort, UCC congregations will collect thousands of postcards to encourage the EPA to take the action our country so desperately needs to move toward our country toward carbon-free electricity by 2035.

Congregations are now collecting as many postcards as possible to urge the strongest possible protections. **Your outreach Team hopes that you will fill out a postcard (available in the sanctuary during worship beginning July 9) and drop it in the offering plate in the back of the sanctuary.** These postcards will be delivered to decision makers in Washington, D.C. in September. Thank you.

This Is Who We Are: Environmental Justice in Action

The central commitment of Christians to care for God's creation has found unique expression in the life of the United Church of Christ. Leaders from the UCC were integral to the launch of the environmental justice movement in the 1980s with its pioneering focus on environmental racism.

Through General Synod resolutions, we have repeatedly stepped forward to lead the way as people of faith on critical matters such as fossil fuel divestment, mountaintop removal, and the Green New Deal. Today, congregations throughout the country have answered our first calling as Christians in tending to God's creation by becoming Creation Justice Churches. Through webinars, newsletters, reports, and more, we stay connected and informed. Learn more about our denomination's Environmental Justice Ministries at <http://bit.ly/UCCejustice>.

Christian Faith Formation

Judy Adams



SUMMER TIME!

CFF has been busy planning the summer and fall possibilities AND looking as far ahead as our Second Annual Advent Festival!

1) **SUNDAY SCHOOL** - With vacation schedules coming and going for teachers and children, our Sunday School will be on hold through mid-August. We will work with Pastor Diana, and the church Music and Worship teams to make Summer Sundays in worship meaningful and interesting for our children and youth! Besides worship bags, we perhaps have special children's music, etc. I wonder...might there be a WONDER WALL?

We hope to have a Back to Sunday School event on our return in August. We will also be sending out a new form for our Sunday School attendees - with important info like birthdays, allergies, etc.

2) **YOUTH** - There are three more Youth/Parent gatherings on the Calendar. More information will be sent directly to our families about these dates!

Monday, July 10 , 6-7:30pm Sunday, August 13, 5-6:30pm Sunday, September 17 5-6:30pm

3) **CAMP** - remember registration funds are available for children and youth attending church camp! Contact me for information at judyalean@aol.com.

May your Summer be blessed with rest and renewal. Judy A, Judy G, Erin M., Marcia M.

Scholarships, Anyone?

Are you planning to attend college or a trade school during the academic year 2023-2024? Do you have a child or grandchild who is planning for college in 2023-2024? If so, you will be interested in The First Congregational UCC of Santa Rosa Scholarship Program.

These scholarship grants are from the Endowed Giving Fund established by Fred and Mable Hall, former members of this church. The scholarship supports any active member, or child or grandchild of an active member, who meets the criteria of this Scholarship Program.

Scholarship applications may be picked up in the church office or you can request that one to be emailed to you. For email, please contact the church office, or Dana Alexander at vocalee@yahoo.com.

Applicants must complete and return these forms to the church office, or by email, by August 1st, 2023.

Applicants must be high school graduates (or equivalent) and have applied for a specific degree program as a full-time student (12 units) in good standing at an accredited school of higher learning. Awards will be announced by mid-August, 2023.

Coffee Hosts

It has been more than a year already since we initiated our Coffee Hosts ministry. A huge thank you to **Patti Blumendahl, Dorothy Hinze, Virginia and Dan Greenwald, Sue Hines, Linda Balfour, Erin Moore, Gretchen Van Tassel**, for having been wonderful, dependable and gracious hospitality hosts over the last year. It is so important that our church family gets to mingle and socialize after the service. And it serves as an outreach mission to make sure guests feel welcome!

But now it is time for some new blood! We need:

- a coffee host and assistant for the **1st Sunday** of the month
- an assistant for the **2nd Sunday** of the month
- a coffee host and assistant for the **4th Sunday** of the month
- a coffee host and assistant for the **5th Sunday** of the month



The coffee host and assistant are responsible for making coffee, getting tables and chairs set up, coffee cups and plates out, sugar etc. set up. And at the end of coffee hour, cleaning it up and putting away tables and chairs. Usually others help with tables and chairs (Thank you, Manuel and Gary!), and most Sundays others jump in to help wash and dry dishes.

Let **Judy Cramer** know if you'd like to join this rewarding and fun ministry!
judithcramer@rocketmail.com

School Supplies Already??!

Our Annual Drive Begins!

School just got out and I can't believe we are talking about school supplies already. But it takes time to gather all the things our little ones need. And Back-To-School sales start soon!



Every Sunday in July we will collect items here at church. Backpacks are a great need! We also will need all standard supplies, such as notebooks, pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, markers, notebook dividers, folders and any other things you may come across.

The last day will be July 25th. The following week the backpacks will be stuffed with the supplies and shortly thereafter will be distributed. School starts Aug.14th! We want the children to be secure that they have all they need for the school year.

Questions, please contact me at judithcramer@rocketmail.com

Introducing... The Isaiah Partnership Group!

*Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, Do you not perceive it?
Isaiah 43:18-19a*

You've heard Pastor Diana and Rachel Kau-Taylor share their excitement for all things Isaiah Partnership. And they are pleased to announce that God did pull a team together here of would-be innovators (just like they promised She would).

The Isaiah Partnership (IP) is a 10-month participatory project run through Princeton Theological Seminary to train in models of innovation and change. We are part of a cohort of six churches who are working with the Changemaker Initiative (CI) curricula. Changemakers are based in Los Altos and are based in scripture, Christian tradition and proven innovation processes from Silicon Valley.

Our team came together from a variety of means: some were invited based on criteria set forth by the CI and others put themselves forward after Pastor Diana preached on IP themes in the spring. We are pleased to introduce you to our team: Sarah Henneberque, Sue Hines, Andreas Petersen, Hannah Wallstrum, and Gina Williams. We hope some of these names are familiar to you and we suspect a few might be new! They represent a LOT of diversity from among our community! Our Isaiah Partnership group has already met three times and will continue meeting every 2-3 weeks through the fall. Already we are learning about ourselves (personal gifts and saboteurs), learning the stories of Jesus, and we are exploring our church's living history (and how we can learn from past mistakes). A researcher from Princeton will join us over the weekend of August 5-6th and will hopefully join us for worship! We are doing new things, and we pray new, vital expressions of faith will spring forward!



July Birthdays



| | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 5 - Sandy Rosen | 7 - Julie Watson | 8 - Sue Green | 9 - Maggie Robinson |
| 12 - Ella Alexander | 19 - Debi Stewart | 20 - Clay Williams | 22 - Martha Stefenoni |
| 24 - Melinda Gill | 29 - Dan Greenwald | 30 - Rumi Williams | |

Mark Your Calendars

| | |
|---|---|
| Sunday, July 2 at 10:00am | Worship & Communion |
| Tuesday, July 4th | Independence Day -- church office closed. |
| Sunday, July 9 at 2:00pm | Celebration of Life in Memory of Linda Noel First Congregational Church of Berkeley 2330 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA For more details, contact Katie at 401-749-3606 |
| Wednesday, July 12 at 12noon | Outreach Meeting in the Fireside Room |
| Thursday, July 20 at 6:30pm | Council Meeting on Zoom |
| Saturday, July 22 from 3:00—5:00pm | Farewell Party for Mike & Peg Ferrel in the Friendship Hall |

A Shift on Tuesday Mornings

As you probably know we have a Tuesday Morning Contemplative Prayer group that meets weekly on Zoom. We have spent almost two years with a contemplative format (scripture, silence, music, prayer). We tried a different format with the prayer cards starting in Lent. And we decided to try yet another format this summer. Beginning this month and lasting through August (or until the Spirit moves us) we will practice lectio divina using a scripture for the coming Sunday.

Lectio Divina is a way of listening to/for God by praying with scripture in a slow, repetitive way. This practice goes back to early centuries of Christianity (6th century?!) when it was a regular prayer practice for monks and clergy in the western church traditions. We will engage in this form of prayer as we read a scripture slowly, listening to what may arise as we read. Then we will read it again, and again, noticing what comes forward and grabs our attention each time.

The point is to listen for how the scripture resonates within our bodies/lives. This is not a study of the scripture, and so we will not consider history or word study or any such literary or historic tool. Rather, we will try to stay open to what the scripture might suggest to us on this day in this moment. Like all spiritual practices what we experience will vary over time, and yet we set the intention to be with God and practice staying present.

I hope you will join us – no experience required! The zoom link is sent out in the weekly email. You can join any week and please note that if you come into the zoom room and everyone is silent, know that we are already going, so please keep the silence, listen for the Spirit, and you'll hear the scripture