



The Pine Tree

The Congregational Church of San Mateo

United Church of Christ

225 Tilton Avenue • San Mateo, California 94401

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Vol. 64

Issue #10 • November/December 2015

ADVENT 2015

Unopened Gifts



Join us for
worship at
10:30am

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ADVENT 1: Nov. 29 -- *The Unopened Gift of Hope.*
Jorge preaching.

ADVENT 2: Dec. 6 -- *The Unopened Gift of Natural Spirituality.* Bonnie preaching.

ADVENT 3: Dec. 13 -- *The Unopened Gift of Joy.*
CCSM Christmas Concert.

ADVENT 4: Dec. 20 -- *The Unopened Gift of Love.*
Children's Christmas Pageant.

Dec. 19: Las Posadas at CCSM, 5:30 - 9:00pm

Dec. 20: Franc D'Ambrosio: Christmas in NY, 2pm



12/24 CHRISTMAS EVE
"UNOPENED GIFTS"
5 pm: Family Worship
11 pm: Candlelight service



A Word from Penny

Many of you have traveled with me on the *Road to Character* this fall. Thank you. It has been a challenging series and many of you have engaged it wholeheartedly. I learned so much along the way.

As we prepare for the season of Advent, particularly in the midst of the pain of Paris, Beirut, Syria and the other places of pain in the world, we remember that the Advent season invites us to focus on bringing in light into the midst of night. The gospel of John talks about this as "the Light that enlightens every person coming into the world." Advent invites us to reconnect with this Light. It is the Light at the heart of every newborn child. It is the Light at the heart of all life.

Mary Oliver captures it this way in her poem

—cont. on page 4—

Daily Advent Flash Prayer

by Penny Nixon

Stay in touch this Advent season through daily prayer. Each day of Advent receive a brief prayer, written by Penny texted to your phone at some random time (between 7am-7pm Pacific time). Let the surprise of it be part of the mystery. Let prayer enter in at unexpected moments and let it be an invitation to stop, to breathe, to experience the Holy in the moment.

To participate, text the word JOIN to 510-256-3366. All are welcome!

More information: itwcommunity.org/advent



**SNEAK PEEK
EPIPHANY**



*How's Your Faith?
Deepening Spirituality in
Uncertain Times*

Children, Youth and Families

The Unopened Gift of the Christmas Pageant

The magic of a familiar story retold by our children. The sparkly eyes and (askew) wings of angels. A donkey carrying (and maybe accidentally dropping) the precious mother and child. The Innkeeper who can't decide if there is room. The stable animals bearing creaturely witness (by baaing and braying) to the birth of hope and peace in newborn baby, Jesus. Joseph, the unlikely, adoring father standing by (or somewhere in the vicinity). The Three Kings (or Two Kings, if someone can't make it) guided by a beckoning star (which gets lost before finding the manger). The shepherds frolicking (or racing) down the hillside to see this infant who promises to light hearts with love. The miracle of the unfolding Christmas Pageant, just like the miracle of Christmas, is not in what should be, but in what is. As much as we try to rehearse our lives and structure them around a particular dream or plan, we often end up surprised by what actually happens. Why not embody that spirit of surprise and joy at what is, rather than what should be, in our Christmas Pageant this year?

We have such a rich tradition of Christmas Pageants at CCSM. Trying something new, especially when it means "letting go" is really challenging. But, at the suggestion of one of our parents and the inspiration of several Children's Ministers who have experienced the beauty of an unrehearsed pageant, here's what we'll do, at least for this year. **ALL CHILDREN (AGES 3-12) WHO WANT TO PARTICIPATE—GET TO PARTICIPATE.** Just sign your child up here: **Christmas Pageant Sign Up** (<http://tinyurl.com/nsfa9em>) or let Bonnie know. **There will be no formal rehearsals to try to fit into your schedule ahead of time. The whole pageant community—kids, parents/grandparents/responsible adults and our pastors—will gather at CCSM on the Pageant Day, December 20, at 8:30am,** to help our actors get into costume and run through the story once before worship starts. Older kids who want speaking parts will be given the script ahead of time—all the other actors will enjoy the surprise of taking an important role chosen for him/her. The whole congregation will get to sigh in wonder as we let go of "perfect" and allow the gifts in the Christmas story to open up to us in unexpected ways.

With questions, to help iron the beautiful costumes Robin Truffa made, or to help with the set, staging and blocking, please contact Bonnie, brambob@ccsm-ucc.org. She will be extremely grateful for your help. Plus, it will be lots of fun!



Parent/Young Kid Hangout, December 6

Parents with young kids, join us after church for a Parent/Kid Hangout on the grass. We will have food to share and bubbles to blow! Bring healthy snacks to share! Come for conversation and connection with others on the parenting journey. Be in touch with Nicole Lamarche with questions Nicole@siliconvalleyprogressivefaith.org

Advent in Church School, PreK-5th grade

Date	Godly Play Story
Nov. 29	The Holy Family: Pointing the way to Bethlehem
Dec. 6	On the Way to Bethlehem
Dec. 13	The Shepherds Hear the News
Dec. 20	Family Worship – Christmas Pageant
Dec. 27	The Mystery of Christmas

Living Advent Wreath – Children Needed

Each Sunday in Advent, the very beginning of our worship service is enriched by four children who stand with candles in a living wreath. We light one more candle each week in expectation of coming hope, love, joy and peace. On Christmas Eve, we add the Christ candle.

It would be lovely to see your child in the wreath. There is no age requirement, just the willingness and ability to hold a candle for a few minutes and say one sentence into the microphone. Please let Bonnie know, brambob@ccsm-ucc.org, when your child will be able to participate.



Ministry of Service & Justice

PILGRIMAGE TO THE SOUTHERN BORDER

APRIL 15-17

Experience the challenges of our neighbors across the border. Spend Friday with former CCSM minister Jerri Handy at Las Memorias (a shelter for deportees from the US who are HIV positive). On Saturday help a sister church build a house for a needy family in Tijuana. And Sunday travel with the border patrol between the walls and then stroll through Chicano Park in San Diego. Room for only seven—so sign up soon. Estimated cost about \$600, including flights. Email msj@ccsm-ucc.org for details.

HELP OUR NEIGHBORS HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS

AFTER CHURCH PICK AN ORNAMENT OFF THE ADOPT-A-FAMILY TREE on the loggia. On each ornament is the name of a gift requested by a needy neighbor. Bring the gift back to church, and Anne Fuller will bundle the presents for each family; Blanketeers adds a quilt for each family member. **Deadline for bringing gifts to the office is December 18.**



The newest members of the CCSM family, November 15, 2015. Left to right: Front row: Sarah Iya, Valerie Wong and Javier Ruiz, Ramona Beukema, David Cuellar and son Rowan, Silvana Quintanilla. Back row: Leslie Herndon, Kristal Burns, Karen Joliffe, Fred Kerwood, Barbara Reynolds Sky, Dennis Gribben, Pablo Quintanilla

Come Caroling with CCSM

Sunday, December 20, we'll meet in the Buckham Room after church for a quick but delicious soup lunch (or mac and cheese.) We'll divide up into groups and off we'll go to visit some of our CCSM members, singing songs of the season. We should be back in the parking lot by around 1:45 pm. (just in time for the concert if you are planning to attend!)



MSJ



TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS (AND WEDNESDAY, DEC. 16), join our hungry neighbors from Samaritan House who dine in Kloss Hall from 4:30 to 6:00pm. Volunteer at [Sign up for the Dining Room \(tinyurl.com/qz2uzed\)](http://tinyurl.com/qz2uzed)

MLK DAY OF SERVICE, JANUARY 18

Ministry of Service & Justice

Celebrate our hero of freedom and justice by helping the less fortunate in the county. **Over twenty-five projects to choose from** including ones at North Shoreview School.

Family-friendly with children 5 and up welcome at most projects. An opportunity to work side by side with those of other faith and cultures! Save the date—start the new year with kindness. More info to come.

2016 Stewardship Update

Current pledges:
\$369,535

Goal:
\$600,000

Current units:
126

Goal:
245 units

Pick-A-Poinsettia

Stop by the loggia on your way to coffee hour on **Sunday, December 20**, and pick up a poinsettia to take to one of our members who can't make it to church regularly. We'll supply the name and address, and we ask members of the congregation to re-connect with someone you haven't seen in awhile, or better yet, meet someone new. The board showing the "CCSM Neighborhoods" will be set up nearby, so you can spread some holiday cheer to a neighbor!

When I Am Among the Trees:

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Maybe the greatest unopened gift is reconnecting with the Light within ourselves, and letting that light shine, no matter what is going on in the world. It is a light that dispels fear, that sees the good, that lives in peace, and that believes that Light is greater than darkness, and goodness is stronger than evil.

—MARK YOUR CALENDARS—

**Upcoming Brown Bag Lunch Discussion
Protecting our kids by freeing our children**

January 31, 11:45am, Buckham Room

Led by Steve Davis with Bonnie Rambob

Child predators. Cyberbullies. Sexting. School shootings. Fear. Fear. Fear. We are being buried in news that our children aren't safe and that we must be right there to protect them. The result:



- Kids afraid and unable to make basic decisions when they leave home.
- Helicopter parents.
- Deserted neighborhoods where no one plays outside.
- Adults afraid or forbidden to be part of the lives of children.
- Fear of the police and child protective services.

It doesn't have to be this way. It didn't used to be this way.

There is a movement that is taking on the fear. Pushing back against restricting parent rights and treating our youth like babies. It is the Free Range Kids movement.

Come join a discussion about Free Range Kids. Parents, youth, kids, single adults and anyone else is welcome.

P.S. - by any and all measures we are all safer today than we were ever before.



**Christmas in New York with Franc D'Ambrosio
December 20 • 2pm at CCSM**

CCSM is thrilled to welcome the legendary Franc D'Ambrosio—Broadway's "Iron Man of the Mask"—to the Bay Area for a special engagement of his Christmas in New York to benefit Accademia Vocale Lorenzo Malfatti di Lucca and the programs of CCSM.

With over 2,300 performances, Franc held the title "World's Longest Running Phantom of the Opera" for over a decade, and starred as Anthony Corleone in Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather III. Franc co-founded the Accademia in Lucca (Italy) in honor of his teacher, Lorenzo Malfatti.

Appearing with Franc are Portland-based pianist Stephanie Lynne Smith and prospective Accademia student, contralto Jasmine Johnson, currently in studies at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

This event WILL SELL OUT. Only a limited amount of tickets will be available at the door. General admission is \$35. You may purchase tickets at francatccsm.brownpapertickets.com/ or ask Pearly in the church office if you need help.

**CCSM's
Epiphany Party**
Friday January 8
7:00 pm - 10:00 pm
Suggested Donation \$25
Heavy Appetizers
DJ
Ornament Exchange
Bring a wrapped ornament
to exchange
(No more than \$5)

20/30s at CCSM

Monday, December 7 at 7:00 p.m.

Guadalajara Grill, 19 Laurie Meadows Dr., San Mateo

If you're an adult under 40, you're invited to join us for fellowship, dinner, and conversation!

Stay tuned for more ways to gather during Advent! Contact Joliene (joliene.wade@gmail.com) if you would like more information or would like to be added to our email list.

Peace Village: A Wandering Star

We are reminded during the Advent journey that important moments happen in the fullness of time. Apparently, a winter Peace Village is not the right time. Last week, the Peace Village Planning Team, comprised of faith leaders from CCSM, PTBE, Muslim Children's Garden School and the Yaseen Foundation, decided to **move our Peace Village into July**. We found that it is very difficult for our high school teens and our children to add another scheduled program during the winter break—a time needed for rest and renewal in the middle of their busy school lives.

The commitment to creating the best Peace Village ever is strong and vibrant. So, watch for it, San Mateo—**Peace Village is coming in July**. More details and an open registration opportunity will be coming soon.

Please contact Bonnie with your questions or thoughts, brambob@ccsm-ucc.org.

Music and Art

Friday, December 18 at noon

Pat Pepper's home, 325 W. Bellevue Ave., SM

Carl Pantle will honor us with vocal solos of the Christmas season as well as piano renditions of carols. We'll conclude with a caroling-along. There will also be a cookie exchange. Bake 2 or 3 dozen of your holiday favorites (or purchase if you don't bake). Guests and newcomers are most welcome. Bring your own sandwich/salad; dessert and beverages are provided. Please reserve your space by calling Zelta Adams, 650-341-1644.



Joys and Concerns

Prayers of Joy...

We extend very happy birthday wishes to very special people: **Marjorie Griffin (Dec. 14th)**, **Jim Ingerswen (Dec. 15th)** and **George Kromhout (Dec. 16)**. May the upcoming year be especially blessed with love and joy.

Dakota Brown, CCSM member and seminary graduate in discernment, has been approved unanimously by her ecclesiastical council and is now ready for ordination pending a call. Blessings to you, Dakota, and best wishes as you serve.

Carolyn Shaw thanks everyone for their prayers and cards and looks forward to seeing you in church very soon.

Prayers of Comfort...

Our heart-felt prayers go out to all who are affected by the violence in Paris this past week. We also offer prayers for mutual understanding, healing, peace and solutions to the crisis.

Laura Padgett Brickey, most treasured friend of **Brett Ruona**, died suddenly of lymphoma on Nov. 10 at the age of 35. Laura is survived by her husband, Daniel, and their three year old daughter Padgett. Prayers for Brett and Laura's family and friends as they mourn.

Prayers of Healing and Support...

Lynette Kady is experiencing difficulties with her living situation. May Lynette find God's comfort, new ways to problem-solve and peace in the midst of uncertainty and pain.

Leslie, Genel Morgan's cousin, has been diagnosed with cancer. Leslie has had a double mastectomy and is in need of a hysterectomy. Please pray for God's comfort and strength at this time.

Linda Hodges is currently housebound with extreme pain waiting for a hip replacement. Prayers for Linda that her pain can be managed and she can be well enough for surgery. Linda could use assistance with some daily tasks.

Mary Ann Notz has had two

surgeries, skin cancer surgery and a heart procedure. Mary Ann requests prayer for her healing and renewed health.

Joy Accosta, Jon Karesh's sister-in-law, had surgery on a tendon in her hand on November 10. May God's healing touch give her relief and restored use of her hand.

Anne McEntee, partner of Connie McEntee, has been hospitalized for a minor stroke, diabetes and renal failure. Anne is gradually improving. Please keep Ann and Connie in prayer as Anne heals.

Betty Stout is in need of prayer as she continues to recover from her falls. Betty has moved to a small board and care she considers "home."

Please pray for **Kate Engelberg** (friend of **Holly Allen** and **Camille Grant**), **Paula** (sister-in-law of **Kirsten Smith**), **Janice Kennedy** (cousin of **Margaret** and **Gordon Smith**), **Randy** (nephew of **Stan Higgs**), **Bill Daniels**, **Emily Tomasi**, and others as they walk their unique journeys with cancer.

Continuing prayers for **Shirley Kavanaugh** (mother of **Janet Bower**), **Ruth Black**, **Marjorie Griffin**, **Penny Gahagen**, **Martha Grannis**, **Lorraine Gustafson**, **Martha Imai**, **George Kromhout**, **Rosalee Lower**, **Jim Lowrie**, **Phyllis Mead**, **Adrienne Mitchell**, **Genevieve** and **John Parsons**, **Fred Petri**, **Janet Smith Roberts** (sister of **Gordon Smith**), **June Schutte**, **Betty Stout**, **Eva Thomson**, **Virginia Weir** and **Travis Woodmansee**.

THE PASTORAL STAFF WANTS TO THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR JOYS AND CONCERNS WITH US. There are many that we pray for each week; some we can share with the congregation and some we are asked to hold in confidence. Please know that all of your joys and concerns are important. You may contact the church office or email jbower@ccsm-ucc.org if you need support during the week.



George Parker in his pith helmet, feeling much better. He's home from the hospital and back singing in the choir.

Mark Your Calendars

- 12/6 Parent/Kid Hangout after church
Masterworks Chorale Concert (2pm and 4pm)
- 12/7 Forgiveness Film and Discussion (6-8pm)
20s/30s Dinner (7pm)
- 12/9 Seniors Christmas Tea (3pm)
- 12/11 Penny preaching at Peninsula Temple Beth El
- 12/13 CCSM Christmas Concert
- 12/19 Las Posadas (5:30pm)
- 12/20 Christmas Pageant and Worship
Soup, Caroling, and Poinsettia Delivery
Franc D'Ambrosio Christmas Concert & Benefit (2pm)
- 12/24 Christmas Eve Services (5pm and 11pm)
- 12/25 CHRISTMAS DAY! Offices Closed
- 12/31 Offices Closed at Noon for New Year's Eve
- 1/1 Offices Closed
- 1/8 Epiphany Party (7pm)



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The Pine Tree

A newsletter for the families & friends of the
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Las Posadas

December 19, 5:30-9:00 pm
at CCSM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are entering the wonderful season of Advent! And of course that means, along with many other events, I am excited about CCSM's third year of celebrating the religious and social celebration of Las Posadas.

For those who don't know or need a reminder, Las Posadas means "the inns" or "the shelters" in Spanish and it commemorates Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and their search to find shelter for the birth of Jesus. It is a re-enactment of their difficult journey. A journey, in keeping with Luke's biblical story, where Mary and Joseph hear the words "No!... No room!" as they ask for a place to stay.

I love this celebration and creative re-enactment of Luke's story because it always reminds me and encourages me to consider my own practice of hospitality. I believe Advent is an appropriate time to consider how we respond to newcomers in our midst.

So mark your calendars for the service of Las Posadas. It will be a great day of not only a communal and participatory liturgy, but a time to enjoy tamales, pan dulce, ponche, and a piñata for the kids. Finally, my mom, along with several women from the community, have already volunteered to make the tamales! For those who are interested in helping or learning how to make tamales, ALL are welcome to join the tamalada! It will be a great opportunity not only to meet my mom, but to develop relationships with our neighbors.

Details to come as we get closer to the day. Many blessings to all of you during this advent season.

Jorge Perry Bautista



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