



By PASTOR ERIC LEDERMANN

This year has definitely been one for the pages of history. It will not soon be forgotten thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, a lengthy and bitter election that still seems to linger in the headlines nearly two months after election day, Russian infiltrations into U.S. elections and other sensitive information systems, and all this on top of the normal triumphs and tragedies of any other year. Many of us are more than ready to say goodbye to 2020 and hello to 2021. But, will 2021 be all that different?

In 2021, we will still have COVID-19 with us, until at least mid-year if not later; like 2020, there will still be an uncountable number of events that will need to be cancelled; we will likely still be dealing with fallout from the election by a president (soon to be ex-president) who refuses to accept his loss; we are likely to still be dealing with and suffering from legislators gridlocked by competing political ideologies, and many more focused on staying power than trying to do what is right for our country and the world; we will likely still be looking at an escalating U.S. response to increasingly widespread Russian hacking; all this on top of the normal triumphs and tragedies of any other year. We will still have to deal with rampant systemic racism—which we're

still seriously struggling to deal with as a nation, even after more than 50 years since the Civil Rights Act. We will still be staring down the barrel of a growing global environmental meltdown.

However, in 2021 vaccines will hopefully get widely disseminated, helping us to return to some sense of the life we had before COVID. Barring extravagant evidence of election tampering, we will have a new president sworn in on January 20th. And, hopefully, our government will be able to rebuild relationships with our allies, relationships that have been at best ignored or severely hampered. My hope, though, is that we can see some things that we have an opportunity to really change. We've seen what just a couple of weeks of lock down can do to repair the environment. We've experienced isolation and, hopefully, have gained a new appreciation for community and human relationships. We've been in the mud politically for so long that maybe it's time we start looking out for one another rather than ourselves, and electing leaders who are interested in the same. I'm sure there are many other things that we just as soon not get back to as they were pre-COVID.

For the vast majority of the population, it will be up to us to take care of each other until the vaccines come. It will

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*This issue of the  
UPC NEWS & Current Events  
is brought to you by...*  
**the word...**

*Grace*

An English word borrowed from Old French, *grâce*. In Latin, it's *gratia*. The meaning is the same, though: kindness, favor, esteem, pleasing. It can also refer to elegant movement or poise. In finances, it can refer to a reprieve from having to pay (a grace-period). Grace can also be a thanksgiving as in saying "grace" before a meal. In the Christian faith we discuss grace as the unmerited mercy or favor that God freely offers humanity, especially as a result of sin. May we all offer grace toward one another, especially in these difficult times of a pandemic, bitter partisan politics, and increasing social divides as a result of the turmoil.

**ADVENT**

Continued from page 1

be up to us to take care of those who have been let go from jobs or who have lost their businesses and are now starving. It will be up to us to try to maintain some sense of community despite our continued need for physical distancing, wearing masks, and limiting our exposure to and from others. And it is this kind of work for which the Church is especially equipped.

For two thousand years and even before, it has been people of faith who have reached out and helped those who have fallen through the cracks of our communities. It has been people of faith who have served those forgotten or ignored by government leadership. It is people of faith, mandated by our belief in God and in humanity, that have led the charge to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and help the poor get back on their feet.

It is also people of faith who have been instrumental in addressing the social systems that have contributed to the hungry being hungry, the poor being poor, and the sick being sick. Consider slavery: the abolitionist movement was started by people of faith. Consider women's suffrage: started by people of faith. Consider the Civil Rights: started by people of faith seeking equality and supported by people of faith who had a vision for a better world based on the teachings of Jesus.

Yes, to be fair, we also need to

acknowledge how much suffering the Church has caused: antisemitism, the crusades (anti-everyone-who-wasn't-Christian), rampant child abuse and abuses of power, bad theology that sought to exclude many (very anti-Jesus) in favor of a few. And now, many in the anti-mask and anti-vaccine world are bible-thumping Christians who claim belief in a savior who healed the sick, brought meaning and purpose to the outcasts, and sought to reform the systems of oppression. Irony?

But some of the fundamental characteristics of Jesus' ministry, and the ministry of the prophets and servants of God throughout the ages, has been healing, compassion, and justice, both personally and systemically. As we look to 2021, I pray our UPC family will continue to grow in our understanding of our part in making God's gracious kin-dom a lived reality, where systems of oppression are dismantled, where the poor are lifted up and given a chance, and where racism and exclusionary mentalities have no place. I pray we will continue to seek to protect the weak, lift up the lowly, and feed the hungry, heal the sick, and seek to reform the systems that create so much suffering. So, while we say goodbye to 2020, let us look to 2021 through the lens of faith in a God who continues to be faithful. ■

*Be of good courage and  
know that you are loved!*

## MONTHLY CANNED FOOD DRIVE

### JANUARY 24, 2021

*Fourth Sunday of each month! Drop off at church!*

Food pantries are often short of money and protein foods. The pantry at Tempe Community Action Agency (TCAA) needs your contributions of:



- tuna
- beans
- canned meats
- ramen noodles
- canned vegetables
- soups

#### Drop off food donations to the Church Office.

Financial contributions may be sent to the office  
(make checks out to "TCAA"  
with "Food Pantry" in the memo).



139 E. Alameda Dr.  
Tempe, Arizona 85282  
(480) 966-6267  
[www.upctempe.org](http://www.upctempe.org)  
[www.facebook.com/upctempe](https://www.facebook.com/upctempe)

#### Office Hours

Tue. & Thu.: 11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.  
Wed. & Fri: 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
(Closed for lunch 12:00 p.m. -1:00 p.m.)

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UPC NEWS & Current Events is published monthly. Submissions of announcements, stories, op-eds, and reflections on recent events at UPC are welcomed.

#### Requirements:

Announcements: 500 words or less  
Articles/Reflections: 1200 words or less  
Letters to the Editor: 750 words or less  
Submissions may be edited for content, grammar, and space available.

**Send submissions  
by the 20th of each month to:**  
[newsletter@upctempe.org](mailto:newsletter@upctempe.org)

# Support UPC Youth, Buy Groceries at Fry's, Shop at Amazon

## Supporting youth ministry is as simple as shopping!

*Do you shop at Fry's using your VIP card?*

Enroll or re-enroll in the Fry's Community Rewards Program by visiting [www.frysfood.com/topic/new-community-rewards-program](http://www.frysfood.com/topic/new-community-rewards-program). Register using your Fry's VIP account and our organization number (NN199). Each time you swipe your VIP card at checkout, a portion of the sale will go straight to UPC!



**Grocery Donations**  
**Sep. - Nov., 2020**  
**23 Households**  
**\$79.69 in donations**



*Do you shop at Amazon.com?*

AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support UPC's youth ministry every time you shop, at no cost to you. AmazonSmile is available at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app your phone or tablet. To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) or activate AmazonSmile on your Amazon Shopping app. On your first visit to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), search for "University Presbyterian Church Tempe," click on "Select" next to UPC, and start shopping. Be sure to always go to [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) for UPC to receive funds. You can change your charity at any time. Simply select "Change your Charity" in "Your Account." ■

# Mission Month — February 2021

## Office of Public Witness Advocacy Days Come to UPC

By FAYE GARDNER

*Mission, Social Justice, and Peacemaking Chair*

In February, we will only have two weeks of Mission Month before Lent begins. But, they will be great weeks! The theme for Mission Month is "Advocacy Days." On Saturday February 6th, we will have a plenary session where the Rev. Jimmie Hawkins, Director of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., will present an overview of advocacy and why advocacy is a spiritual discipline.

Then, we will break into separate workshops centered on particular issues such as hunger, ra-

cial justice, how to be a good ally, immigration, etc. After breaking for lunch, we'll come together for a "mini" worship session and then break into separate workshops again. On Sunday, February 7th, the Rev. Hawkins will preach and serve communion with Pastor Eric. All of this will be done on Zoom, of course!

The following weekend, February 13th and 14th, we will have local leaders present Zoom workshops on local issues on Saturday. On Sunday, Pastor Eric will preach, wrapping up what we've learned as we begin our journey into Lent.

Please plan to attend! ■



# The Mitchells — Installment No. 25

By ERIC O. LEDERMANN

*Recap:* When we last visited Faith Presbyterian Church it was the first Sunday after an unfortunate plumbing incident that required the sanctuary to be cleaned and sanitized. The carpet in the sanctuary hadn't looked so clean since the day it was installed. Many thanks were given to those souls who bravely faced the stench and worked feverishly to fix the plumbing and get the sanctuary back into working order. One might say, as Pastor Cobb said as worship began, it was a rather "crappy" situation. The congregation chortled at his less than subtle attempt at humor.

After all the excitement, life at Faith Presbyterian had returned to a normal rhythm. There were birthdays, anniversaries, and the usual life events. One Sunday, as the leaves on the trees were turning color and beginning float to the ground, a mysterious guest walked through the sanctuary doors and quietly sat in the back corner pew. A sharp odor emanated from him. The greeters tried not to grimace. The scent mixed with the freshness of the newly cleaned carpets creating a confusing aromatic experience—sweet and sour. His bleached light brown hair, deeply tanned skin, and soiled clothes caused alarm for some. He sat quietly, pretending to mumble the words of the service, having not received a bulletin. Yes, the greeters forgot to hand him a bulletin as they said good morning to him, distracted by his dirty green polo shirt, ripped jeans, and old sneakers that had so many holes in them you could see the bare threads of his socks and the skin of his well calloused feet poking through.

Spry Ms. Gentry caught the man before he could escape after worship. She tried to engage him. He was polite, but obviously on guard. He was not used to being addressed, much less noticed. She introduced Alex to Mr. Mitchell, who approached the two more out of concern for Ms. Gentry than a genuine interest in meeting the man. Mr. Mitchell tried to

put on a welcoming face, despite his unease. Pastor Cobb quickly changed the tone of the conversation to a more authentic one, greeting and welcoming Alex. This made Alex all the more uneasy. He was not used to such attention. He left politely. It would not be the last time they would see Alex.

It was a particularly cold January. The air felt like it could bite the skin off even the thickest of warm blooded animals. Though he was rarely much for sleeping in, as Mr. Mitchell put his feet on the floor and sat on the edge of his bed he looked at the bright blue numbers of his ancient digital alarm clock sitting on his night stand. Even for him 6:06 a.m. on a Saturday was early. He had already been laying in bed wide awake for more than 20 minutes. He decided it was futile to fight the day's start. He tried to quiet the involuntary groan that started escaping his lips as he reached his arms high and arched his back. He turned and looked at Mrs. Mitchell. She didn't move a muscle. Her breathing was slow and heavy. Still deep asleep.

He leaned forward, rose from the bed, and then gently bent forward and reached for his toes, stretching his tight hamstrings. He spread his feet apart and lay his hands flat on the floor as he gave his back another good stretch. He rolled his back and head back up, raising his hands in a dramatic action from his sides out and up to the ceiling, taking in a deep breath. He held it for a moment before sweeping his hands in ballet fashion back down to his sides and letting his breath out slowly. His wake up routine every day. Mrs. Mitchell gently stirred, rolled over, and like most morning, couldn't help but quietly chuckle as she watched her husband. It was endearing to her.

Mr. Mitchell had no specific plans for the today. He relished those weekends without obligations. They were increasingly rare. He grabbed his thick blue terry cloth robe off the hook of the

door as he walked out of the bedroom and downstairs to make some coffee. Would he go for a run today, or just enjoy the quiet?

As the water moved through the fine grounds and dripped into the pot, Mr. Mitchell went to open the front door to retrieve the newspaper from the driveway.

"Where will it be this morning?" he whispered to himself.

It was a game that he and the newspaper delivery person seemed to be playing lately. It seemed the newspaper company had some staff roll over, and the new delivery person didn't seem too concerned with where the paper landed—whether it was under Mr. Mitchell's car or somewhere in the bushes in the midst of rocks. Mr. Mitchell had caught on to the new rules and slipped his running shoes on just in case he had to walk across the sharp rocks that covered most of the yard. Desert xeriscaping.

He took three steps out the door and said, "What is this?"

The paper was sitting there on the walkway with a single beam of sunshine barely peeking through the clouds illuminating it like an Indiana Jones treasure making itself known in some ancient tomb. Choirs of angels would have made the scene perfect, though more like a Monty Python skit.

Mr. Mitchell exaggeratedly crept up sideways on the paper, folded and in a plastic bag in case of rain. Was he still in bed dreaming? He reached down, lifted the paper partly off the walkway like he was inspecting a bomb or something. Not seeing anything of concern, he took the paper, stood, and looked around half wondering if he was being punk'd. No cameras. No one watching. Shaking his head he turned back into the house to get out of the cold that was beginning to seep through his terry cloth robe and thick flannel pajamas.

# Presbyterian Women News

## Thank You UPC!

The Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women would like to thank the UPC

congregation for their incredible generosity to the 2020 Christmas Angel Tree program. It is with great joy that we were able to provide the Tempe Elementary School District with 52 \$100 Walmart gift cards to brighten the holidays for families in need.

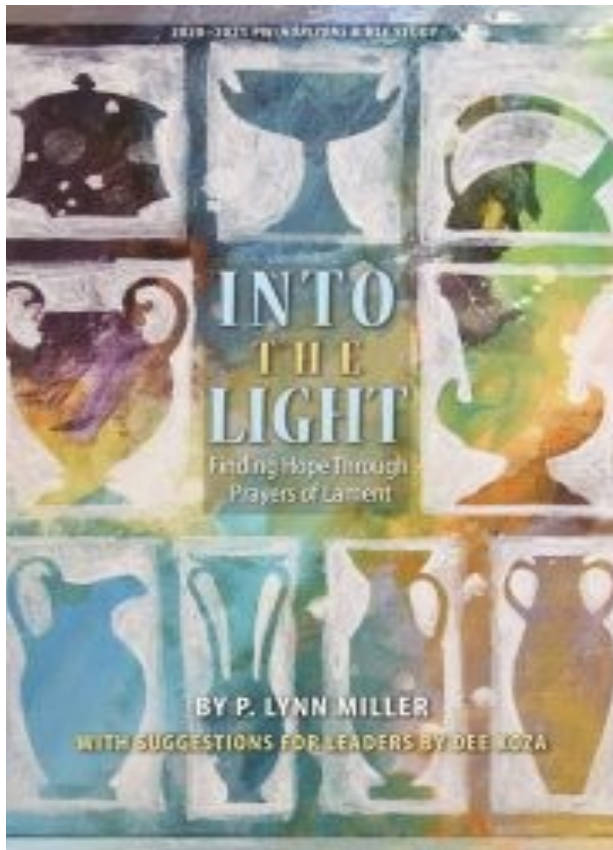
Thank you very much to everyone who donated!

Thank you also, to Cheri Hardy, Diann Vale, Suzanne Niemann and Jan Felton for coordinating, purchasing, delivering, and collecting to make this offering such a success.



All women of the church are invited to join in on finding hope through lament. On January 25 at 7 PM on Zoom, Bev Phillips will lead us through lesson five of Horizons Bible Study, Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Lament. No previous experience necessary. Please join us for fellowship and study. ■

# Adult Christian Education



**Jan. 10, 17, 24**

**11:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.**

## **“Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament ”**

*Author Lynn Miller*

**Led by Jan Felton, the Rev. Beverly Phillips, and Chris Casanova**

What better way to start the 2021 year than lamenting the current world-wide pandemic and leaning into the HOPE that God provides. Laments are not the appropriate response for situations over which we have control, but rather responses to tremendous grief, natural disasters, tragic accidents and times of great loss of human life. They offer hope that God is with us in our sadness. Let us find hope, as we learn to lament and to seek God in times of chaos and distress.

His joy at finding his paper miraculously not lost in the bushes or in some new hiding place all quickly faded after he grabbed some coffee, sat at the kitchen table, and unfolded the newspaper. The headline looked like a novelty paper from 1941. Instead of “War!” one word was emblazoned across the top: “PLAUGE!” It was a grim reminder that the pandemic still had a death grip on everyone’s life.

One of Mr. Mitchell’s good friends who now lived in London regularly reported that they were just as bad as the U.S., and sometimes worse. The number of cases continued to rise, along with the number of hospitalizations and deaths.

“Life,” Mr. Mitchell said as he read the latest stories of tragedy. “So fragile.”

The paper had taken to writing up stories on some of the people who had died because of the novel Coronavirus. How could something so small bring the entire world to its knees?

Mr. Mitchell was so engrossed in the stories that he didn’t hear Mrs. Mitchell make her way downstairs. He was somewhat startled when he heard her pouring a cup of coffee. She caressed his shoulder gently as she walked past him and joined him at the table.

She spied a special section on gardening—an odd section in January. On the front page of that section was a large article about planning for spring planting for desert gardens. Despite the arid climate, the desert still seems to be a great place to grow food. Mrs. Mitchell dreamed of having a vegetable and fruit garden, but has yet to bring that dream to fruition.

“So many,” Mr. Mitchell mumbled.

Mrs. Mitchell looked up and saw Mr. Mitchell’s distressed face. “So many?”

Without lifting his eyes off the page, he shared, “So many lives lost and affected by this pandemic.”

Mrs. Mitchell had no words to offer.

Mr. Mitchell looked up without looking at Mrs. Mitchell, saying, “No one is talking about the homeless. How are they being affected?”

“You’re right,” Mrs. Mitchell said. “I haven’t heard anything. What are some of the service agencies doing?”

“I don’t know,” Mr. Mitchell said as he looked at her for a moment, and then looked back at his paper. “I’m sure they’re doing something. I’ll ask Pastor Cobb about it.”

Pastor Cobb sat with his iPad reading the latest statistics of the pandemic over toast and coffee.

Mrs. Cobb refreshed Pastor Cobb’s cup, saying, “Is there any good news today?”

“Is there ever good news? That doesn’t sell,” he responded. “It’s getting worse. Numbers are up. Hospitalizations are up. Deaths are up. And this new strain, which evidently may not be all that new, is wreaking havoc.” He paused for a moment before muttering loud enough for Mrs. Cobb to hear, “What can I say to our people?”

“Well, is there any good news?” Mrs. Cobb asked from across the kitchen as she returned the coffee pot to the coffee maker.

“It’s been ten months,” Pastor Cobb said without taking his eyes off the iPad. “Story after story of people’s lives being destroyed by job losses, illness, and death. What good news is there in all this? I can’t keep preaching ‘everything’s going to be alright’—especially when I’m not entirely sure it is or will be.”

“Vaccines are on the way, though, right?” Mrs. Cobb offered.

Pastor Cobb didn’t respond as he kept reading. Finally he said, “It says here that vaccines for the general public are likely not to come for months. Yes, there’s a light at the end of the tunnel ...” He looked up at Mrs. Cobb who had joined him at the kitchen table, both still in their bathrobes. It was Saturday morning. “Maybe that’s a bad metaphor to use.”

Mrs. Cobb smiled slightly as she took a sip of her hot coffee.

“God always gives you a message, Gary,” she offered. “What do you always say? Even in the most dire of circumstances, there is always good news in there somewhere.”

“I’m sure there is, but that doesn’t mean I always know what it is.”

Mrs. Cobb put her hand on his to reassure him. He looked at her and

smiled. Pastor Cobb often said that next to God in Christ, his wife was his rock that grounded him.

Just then their son, Brandon, and daughter, Lizzy, came bounding into the kitchen. Despite the pandemic, they came home for winter break. They hadn’t really been close to anyone since Brandon’s classes at UC Berkeley moved to online and Lizzy was now in the “all but dissertation” phase of her PhD. They both planned to stay home for at least a couple of months since neither had any in-person commitments.

They both immediately sensed the somber mood in the room. Brandon quietly poured a cup of coffee for each of them as Lizzy put some bread in the toaster.

“Everything alright?” Lizzy asked.

“Your father is struggling with his sermon for tomorrow,” Mrs. Cobb said, her hand still on Pastor Cobb’s.

“Dad, you never fail to come up with something,” Brandon said as he sat with two cups of coffee in front of him.

“It’s been a tough year,” Lizzy said as she waited for the toaster to pop. “People just need to be reminded that God is with them in all this.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying,” Pastor Cobb responded, his eyes glued back to his iPad with the New York Times before him. “I feel like a broken record.”

“Well, maybe they need to keep hearing it until they believe it,” Mrs. Cobb said, removing her hand from his and taking another sip of coffee.

Pastor Cobb could feel his anxiety melting just from having his family home.

“I miss this,” Pastor Cobb said.

“You miss what?” Lizzy asked as she brought the toast over for her and Brandon to share.

“This,” he said as he put his iPad down and looked at everyone at the table. “I miss sitting at the table on Saturday mornings and just being together. It’s been a while. And it’s going to be so great having you two home for a while. This house is pretty big just for your mom and me.”

“It’s good to be home,” Brandon said.

“Definitely,” Lizzy added. ■

# COGA Sets Meeting Date for the 225th General Assembly

## Plenary Dates to be Determine

By RICK JONES

*Office of the General Assembly*

The dates for the 13 committees of the 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to gather in-person in 2022 have been set. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) voted on Thursday to hold the meetings over a two-week period, June 19 – July 2, 2022, in Louisville, Kentucky.

Earlier this month, COGA approved plans for a hybrid assembly that will include both online and in-person gatherings. The assembly committees will split the time during the two-week schedule to consider church business.

Some COGA members expressed concern regarding overlap with other denominational meetings such as the Worship and Music Conference to be held at the Montreat Conference Center.

“It’s inevitable that the summer of ‘22 will be a big jubilee summer, where we all get back together in a safe way,” said Wilson Kennedy, who facilitated the COGA working group focusing on future assembly gatherings.

Kerry Rice, deputy stated clerk of the Office of the General Assembly, says staff has not reviewed the church calendar for potential conflicts, adding that the time set aside for committees will require fewer people to be involved.

“The weeks we set aside will look very different than the traditional eight-day assembly and will not be a ‘ya’ll come’ for these committees,” he said. “The committee times will be focused on commissioners and advisory delegates that have business before them. I’m not sure we will have the same level of conflict that we might have during a traditional GA.”

All plenaries will be held online except for an initial quorum gathering. Early next year, COGA will determine the dates

for the plenaries. OGA staff say they have confirmed the availability of hotels during the period.

The assembly was initially scheduled to be held in Columbus, Ohio. The move is expected to save the church more than \$300,000.

COGA also voted to form a 12-person design team to assist OGA staff in planning the 2022 assembly. The team will consist of COGA members, the stated clerk, a Youth Advisory Delegate and a former GA moderator, among others.

The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PC(USA), provided his vision for the next assembly in Louisville.

“Louisville, like every city, is plagued with its own struggles. None are free from deprivation, brokenness and pain. There is no way of being free from engaging that,” he said. “In past assemblies, we’ve been inside buildings and big arenas, and yet there is a sense of calling people outside to engage the communities we are a part of.”

Nelson said that now is the time for transformation within the denomination.

“We cannot be all things to all people, but we can be a very present help in times of trouble,” he said. “One of the things I hope will be different at this next assembly is the engagement in the life of this community.”

Nelson says he hopes to empower people at General Assembly to do more



GA Committee on Local Arrangements (COGA) meets via Zoom to plan the 225th General Assembly. PHOTO: PRESBYTERIAN NEWS SERVICE.

than pass policy, but to also engage in their own communities’ needs and issues.

“I’m convinced in this time of history, there is a need for a real sense of re-evaluating who we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” he said.

COGA members asked the clerk to provide his vision in writing so they can best determine how to move the vision forward.

“The next General Assembly will not remain in this form forever and ever,” said Robin Pugh, COGA member. “We will do the best we can, because this is the form that the church needs right now, but we might make more changes in the future. We need some framework to show the direction in which we are going.”

“The clerk’s vision of an assembly is not just about passing resolutions, but taking action and that is very exciting,” said COGA’s Dave Davis.

COGA also heard a year-end report from the Merger and National Unity working group. Eliana Maxim reported that the group has gone as far as it can go

See COGA on page 13

# Courageous Leadership

## The Church's Biggest Asset in 2021

By KRYSTLE S. MOREY  
*Presbyterians Today*

This wasn't as bad as it might have been. That's the message the Rev. David Kilgore and his congregation clung to after learning someone attempted to burn down their sanctuary. Members of Lima Presbyterian Church arrived the morning of Aug. 23, 2020, to find their sanctuary full of smoke. According to the local sheriff's investigation, someone entered the church building, located 25 miles south of the city of Rochester in upstate New York, via the basement. They set ablaze a Bible from the pulpit, damaging a pew and cushion, and burning a basketball-sized hole in the church floor.

Churchgoers at Lima Presbyterian were furious at first, but strong leadership has carried them through. "This is a resilient congregation. They have been through setbacks for quite a few years. They are people who just have a lot of grit," said Kilgore, adding that some of the families in the congregation are farmers. "Farm families are tough families. They don't quit easily."

### How courage is born

When confronting any crisis, a cycle of emotions occurs, during which courage is born. Courage — and resiliency — are what breed the strength to overcome any challenge. Whether it be picking up the pieces after an arson, protecting one another from the coronavirus pandemic or working to dismantle systemic racism, ministers like Kilgore agree that courage will be a leader's biggest asset in the new year. What, though, does leading with courage look like?

"Courageous leadership is something that calls us beyond ourselves," said the Rev. Stephen Lewis, president of the Forum for Theological Exploration in Decatur, Georgia. "It's about organizing and mobilizing a community toward a vision."

Lewis spoke last summer at "Courageous Leadership Matters," a Fa-



After a suspicious fire closed the Lima Presbyterian Church building, the congregation had to be resilient and flexible, adapting to worshiping outside under a tent. When cold weather approached, community organizations, including the Lima Ambulance Service, opened their doors. PHOTO: COURTESY OF LIMA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

cebook Live chat that was hosted by the Rev. Dr. Lee Hinson-Hasty, senior director for Theological Education Funds Development for the Committee on Theological Education of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Presbyterian Foundation. During the chat, Lewis noted that courageous leadership was not about leadership for one's own platform.

Rather, "It's the kind of leadership that gets at this larger moral, ethical, benevolent vision ... a vision of a new heaven and new earth, a new relationship between who we are and how we relate to the eternal."

However, leading courageously should not fall on any one person's shoulders. "Leadership is not the practice of an individual; it's the practice of a community," Lewis said.

The Rev. Dr. Dan Saperstein, executive presbyter of the Presbytery of Lake Huron, agreed, stating, "Leadership is a team sport." In addition to working with session and allies in the community, Sa-

perstein stressed the importance of looking to the presbytery to assist in managing hurdles.

Kilgore said he found the courage to lead by reaching out to others in Lima Presbyterian's time of need. After the fire, area churches offered prayers and help with the clean-up. One church in the Rochester area even volunteered to replace the pulpit Bible that was burned.

"Each Sunday there was another letter to read to the congregation about somebody offering something or holding us in prayer," Kilgore said. "It is important to help the church realize that we are all connected to each other. It's important that we stay in touch with each other, hold each other up and offer each other help and assistance wherever we can."

Kilgore has relied a lot on courage throughout his ministry, but even more so recently. Two years ago, he was called out



The Rev. David Kilgore, called out of retirement two years ago to lead the small congregation of Lima Presbyterian Church, reached deep to find the courage to guide his flock through a pandemic and then a fire which burnt a hole in the sanctuary floor and caused extensive smoke damage in the building.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF LIMA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## COURAGE

Continued from page 8

of retirement to lead Advent and Christmas celebrations at Lima Presbyterian, a small congregation averaging about 25 parishioners each Sunday. He soon found himself back in the pulpit regularly, taking on the role of part-time pastor for the congregation.

Never, though, did he imagine coming out of retirement would mean dealing with not just a fire and where to worship, but also a pandemic.

"The pandemic, with the necessity for isolation and social distancing, was already significant, creating its own strain and pressure," Kilgore said. The fire was "right on top of that."

"In some ways, it's a bit like wandering in the wilderness," said Kilgore.

During the first few weeks, gatherings were held on the church lawn in a tent. "People drove by and saw that we were back in business," Kilgore said. As cooler weather deterred outside worship, other community organizations, including the Lima Ambulance Service, offered space for the group to meet. Other pastoral duties such as premarital counseling and session meetings were also displaced by the fire. Kilgore has met couples at local restaurants to discuss their plans before their big day. The pandemic also forced

congregations to utilize online forums, which for some was not an easy task. But Kilgore and his congregation have done their best to embrace the new thing God is doing.

Saperstein commends churches like Lima Presbyterian for the courage to be open to the Spirit. "This is an opportunity for us to discover new ways of being the church, ways that we have been reluctant to embrace because we were doing just fine with the old normal and nobody likes change," he said.

As 2020 drew to a close, Lima Presbyterian Church was still unsure when it would be able to return to its sanctuary. Smoke caused a majority of the damage, including disabling the organ. "The penetrating smell of smoke is really difficult to get rid of," said Kilgore, noting the organ needs to be dissected and each part cleaned. Repair and cleanup costs are expected to exceed \$250,000, with approximately \$100,000 going toward repair of the organ. The kitchen and fellowship room will be the first spaces cleaned, so that churchgoers can at least return to the building. Social distancing will be a challenge though, the pastor says, because the fellowship room is not as large as their sanctuary.

### Tasked with minimizing fear

Another earmark of courageous leadership is the ability to move a group for-

ward during a challenge or a crisis and be able to minimize the stress that is caused by fear. "Managing and modulating the level of anxiety in a congregation is really important because anxiety functions hydraulically: the more pressure that is built up, the more it is likely going to explode in not a good place — the place that is the weakest part of the system," said Saperstein.

To say Lima Presbyterian Church is under stress would be an understatement. But the stress doesn't just stem from a suspicious fire and an ongoing pandemic.

Kilgore's emergence from retirement has also meant finding the courage to tackle the unrest and divisions attached to dismantling systemic racism.

The pastor has begun sending out a "Midweek Missives" newsletter to his parishioners that broaches the topic by posing questions and providing education. The upstate New York church may be a white congregation, he says, but "the newsletters help remind them that current events like the Black Lives Matter movement need to be a topic of discussion."

"It's very easy in a rural congregation that is 100% white to feel like what's happening just up the road in Rochester is not really a part of our lives," said Kilgore. Rochester, a city of nearly 210,000, is 62.9% Black, Hispanic and other minority races, according to City-Data.com (2017). "We need to make sure that we see ourselves as part of the greater community, and what happens there is important to us as well," said Kilgore, adding, "The work of prayer has been important in holding the congregation together."

With the multitude of crises at hand — some hitting churches all at once like the Lima congregation — Saperstein says every church is under some sort of strain.

It is important, he adds, to not let different crises get entangled with one another. It is also important to be a leader who doesn't react, but rather responds.

The courageous leader is one who can self-differentiate, Saperstein says. "The leader's role is to self-differentiate, not to be reactive, but to stay cool, calm and connected to people who are spiking in anxiety or who may be the source of conflict." ■

# 'Pray the Psalms and You Will Learn What It Means to be Fully Human'

## Scholar, pastor note the power of lament during twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice

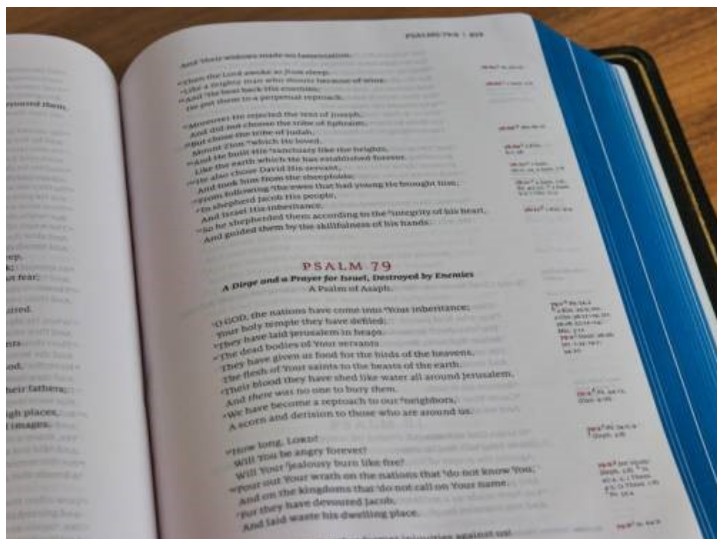


PHOTO: COURTESY OF HUMBLE LAMB VIA UNSPLASH

By **MIKE FERGUSON**  
Presbyterian News Service

As dark December transitions into nearly-as-dark January and February, preachers in need of resources can serve both God and their hearers by preaching the psalms of lamentation.

A Synod of the Northeast webinar offered Tuesday explored why such texts as the 13th and 22nd psalms are “in your face” and “I” psalms that give voice to anyone who prays them, said the Rev. Dr. Beth Tanner, a vice president, dean of Academic Affairs and the Rev. Dr. Norman and Mrs. Mary Kansfield Professor of Old Testament Studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

“We talk about the psalms and put them in the mouth of David, or ‘the psalmist,’” she said, but that “blunts our ability to use the psalms. This intercessory person keeps us from having a full-throated conversation with God ... Everyone gets to be an ‘I’ in the psalms — the king, president, pastor, synod leader,” as well as the people in the pews.

“We all stand before God in the psalms,” Tanner said.

“They allow the people to speak their truths to their power,” said the Rev. Eric Thomas, the interim pastor at Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York. “Where in the world are you, God? The God who is sovereign is big enough to hold the ‘where in the world are you?’”

The psalms are unique, Tanner said, in that they’re the only words of the people to God and, at the same time, are Scripture. “They were given to us by God, and we in return give the words back to God,” she said.

Many are feeling blue this Christmas season, and Thomas said he’s felt “sangry” lately — both sad and angry. “Christmas in New York has been removed from us because of safety precautions,” he said, including holiday traditions such as taking a crowded subway to visit the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree or attending a Pops concert at Lincoln Center.

A modern lament psalm might go this way, he said: “God, I’m angry because it’s not safe to take the subway, or at the supermarket people aren’t wearing masks, or my family member works in the restaurant industry, which is on its knees right now. Maybe that’s my psalm,” Thomas said — “my angry psalm.”

Tanner said the pandemic “has exposed the myth of America’s happy machine. Look at how we grieve,” she said, citing a company that grants an employee a week off to grieve her father’s death, “but we expect you to be back on Monday and we expect everything to be fine.”

“Pastors are struggling with people who think they are grieving too long, that there’s a time limit for our pain,” she said. “Part of it is the Protestant work ethic: you keep going until you collapse from everything going on around you. [Pastors] aren’t supposed to share pain or sorrow or weakness. That happens in private.”

Thomas said he also laments congregants’ inability “to grieve properly, to exercise our funeral rituals. I talk to people about the impossibility of being with a grieving family and negotiating safety with them over how many people can be in the sanctuary at one time.”

As she teaches students who will one day be pastors, “I invite impolite prayer,” the kind found in the psalms of lament, Tanner said.

“How do we present our whole self before God even if we are broken, even if we broke it? You can be your full, broken, human, complicated self before God,” she said, citing as examples Moses in Exodus 32 (“Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people”) and the Syrophenician woman in Mark 7 (But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”).

“As someone who teaches pastors, I wish every Christian would know what that feels like,” she said.

“I can’t fix Black Lives Matter or the pandemic, much as I would like to,” she said. “The psalms give me the chance to vent before God, and white folk don’t get a bigger space than anybody else does. You are the ‘I’ standing before the Creator. It helps justice be heard, and it democratizes the way we stand before God.”

“We can see people who have been invisible to us during the pandemic,” Thomas said, including “the receptionist



The Rev. Dr. Beth Tanner

## LAMENT

Continued from page 10

at the hospital, the people who drive MTA trains and buses when the curfews were happening and the people who restocked the grocery shelves after we hoarded up on toilet paper and [disinfectants].”

“It the psalms are about anything,” Tanner said, “they’re about human agency. Pray the psalms and you will learn what it means to be fully human.”

“There is no ‘Canoeing the Mountains’ for a pastor in a pandemic,” Thomas said, adding he’s suggested to the congregation he serves that “we worship the Lord our God with our mind” as well as our souls and our hearts.

Still, Tanner said, the psalms teach us that “sometimes we have to fight for our faith. We are unaccustomed to that, but the person praying the psalms is grabbing onto God and saying, ‘I am going to hang

on with everything I’ve got, even though nothing I am doing is making any sense right now.”

Both the Old and New Testaments “were shaped in the midst of empire,” she said. “These are folks who were persevering when everyone around them was telling them, ‘Give it up!’ For all their imperfections, they remained faithful to God. The psalms teach us to do that.”

“God is God enough to listen to us speak to God with hot sauce — with anger, sadness and frustration,” Thomas said. “‘Just as I am without one plea?’ We have many pleas, and God gives us permission that in Jesus, God was reconciling the world to God’s self. We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. Part of that truth is feeling sad and angry and abandoned, and yet having the trust to find safety and rest and wholeness.”

Preachers who preach the lament psalms do well to start with Psalm 22, Tanner said. “They were the words of Jesus. It helps [hearers] understand how this type of prayer has been legitimized by the words of our Savior.”

Proclamations of justice also come from “the women of our faith,” Thomas said. Mary’s Magnificat draws from the songs of Miriam, Deborah and Hannah, “who talked about how God moves on behalf of the people. We can connect those voices with the voices of BLM, Say Her Name and Time’s Up, the many social justice movements here right now.”

When it was time to draw the webinar to a close, the moderator, the Rev. Dr. Amaury Tañón-Santos, the networker for the Synod of the Northeast, asked Tanner to pray. Her prayer included these words: “We are facing such uncertainty. We confess as humans we don’t like that at all. We ask in this Advent season that you be our guiding star. Fill us with hope when



The Rev. Eric Thomas

we feel like we have none.

“Embed us with your justice for the world. Call us into a future we can’t see. As we follow the Christ child, we are thankful for your Advent with us, Emmanuel ... We ask your grace and your presence to embed us with the creativity we don’t feel like we have anymore. Love us in the name of the Christ child we pray, Amen.” ■



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En Español: 1-888-628-9454

Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

# Worship Volunteer Schedule

Most of what happens at UPC would not happen if not for an actively involved membership! Below is the schedule of worship volunteers for the next couple of months. If you are listed and have a conflict, you are asked to please find a replacement and then contact Ruling Elder Sada Reed, co-chair of the Worship Committee.

To volunteer or get on one of the rotations, Sada Reed! Thank you!

## January 2021

**Deacon of the Month:**..... Natalie Horne  
**Sanctuary Readiness Team:**..... Larry Seubert

### Jan. 3—2nd Sunday After Christmas / Epiphany (1/6)

Liturgist..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Children's Moment..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Worship Tech..... Jim Niemann

### Jan. 10—Baptism of Jesus

Liturgist..... Jim Hershauer  
 Children's Moment..... Pastor Eric  
 Worship Tech..... Scott Horne

### Jan. 17—3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Fred Boyd  
 Children's Moment..... Fred Boyd  
 Worship Tech..... Chris Trella

### Jan. 24—4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Dan Abbott  
 Children's Moment..... Dan Abbott  
 Worship Tech..... Mike Williamson

### Jan. 31—6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Children's Moment..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Worship Tech..... Jim Niemann

## February 2021

**Deacon of the Month:**..... TBA  
**Sanctuary Readiness Team:**..... Larry Seubert

### Feb. 7—6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Joni Jacobs  
 Children's Moment..... Joni Jacobs  
 Worship Tech..... Scott Horne

### Feb. 14—Transformation Sunday

Liturgist..... Mary Danforth  
 Children's Moment..... Pastor Eric  
 Worship Tech..... Chris Trella

### Feb. 17—Ash Wednesday

Liturgist..... Helen Griffin  
 Children's Moment..... Helen Griffin  
 Worship Tech..... Mike Williamson

### Feb. 21—1st Sunday of Lent

Liturgist..... Lawn Griffiths  
 Children's Moment..... Suzanne Niemann  
 Worship Tech..... Available

### Feb. 28—2nd Sunday of Lent

Liturgist..... Chris Casanova  
 Children's Moment..... Chris Casanova  
 Worship Tech..... Jim Niemann

## COGA

Continued from page 7

until the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board completes its own evaluation. She added that group members will continue to have conversations with the PMAB over the next six to eight months.

### In other business:

COGA voted to form a communications committee to coordinate its ongoing communications strategy and needs.

COGA voted in favor of adding Debra Harton Love to the Presbyterian Historical Society Board of Directors to fill the remainder of a two-year term. She is founder of DHS Analytical Laboratory, Inc. and E3 Solutions, Inc.

She is an ordained elder at Westminster Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, Alabama and historian for the church.

Retiring OGA staff members Diane Minter and Cora Brown were honored for their years of service to the church. Brown, who serves as human resources specialist and associate director for OGA, has been with the agency for five years. Minter has served as program assistant since 2000. The two officially retire on Friday, December 18.

COGA will hold its next full meeting January 19-21, 2021 19-21, 2021 . ■

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Please don't share your link.

The service will continue to be live streamed to [www.upctempe.org/YouTube](http://www.upctempe.org/YouTube), but we would love to have you join us live in Zoom for both worship and the fellowship that follows!



1 Paula Murray	15 Bob Knox
2 Alexander Tamayo	21 Julie King
8 Joe Simmons	26 Erica Maloney
10 Greg Hamilton	28 Carl Smith
12 Joni Jacobs	29 Holly Herman
14 Martha Walker	
Kathleen Davison	

*Prayers of thanks for all  
these beautiful lives!*

*If your birthday is missing or we have the wrong date,  
please contact the office so we can update our records.*

## Newsletter Submissions

### Poems, Stories, Reflections

UPC actively seeks submissions. Did you have a particular “God moment” you’d like to share? Send stories, information, letters to the congregation, photos, and announcements for the *UPC News & Current Events*.

Send submissions to:  
newsletter@upctempe.org  
and be sure to review the submission requirements on page 2.

## Stay Informed on All-Things-Presby! Subscribe to Presbyterian News Sources

### Stay informed about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

#### PC(USA) News & Announcements

Available in a daily or weekly digest format  
[www.pcusa.org/newsupdates](http://www.pcusa.org/newsupdates)

#### Presbyterian Outlook

An independent magazine covering all things Presbyterian  
\$19.95/yr, 18 issues  
<https://pres-outlook.org>



### Presbyterians Today

Award-winning denominational magazine published by the PC(USA). Also available is a free twice monthly e-newsletter  
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today>

### Presbytery of Grand Canyon Weekly E-focus Newsletter

News and views around our presbytery, and words of wisdom from our presbytery leadership  
<https://pbygrandcanyon.org/subscribe-to-efocus>

# Let us remember in our prayers...

- ✘ **Homebound:** Evelyn Colby, Elaine Murray
- ✘ **All affected by Hurricane Iota** and all the hurricanes who have destroyed homes.
- ✘ **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** in the U.S.
- ✘ **Communities** bearing the weight of violence in their streets and neighborhoods
- ✘ **All affected by COVID-19**, especial those who are hospitalized and their families, and the families of those who have died.
- ✘ **Medical personnel** and first

responders on the front lines of battling COVID-19

- ✘ **Indigenous People** who are suffering under the weight of COVID-19 and hundreds of years of subjugation.
- ✘ **Teachers and students** as they continue online and in-person.
- ✘ **Grant Griffin**
- ✘ **Helen Alderson**
- ✘ **Don Morton**
- ✘ **Carl and Barb Smith**
- ✘ **All of creation**, and for the strength to stand up for environmental conservation
- ✘ **Elected & community leaders**, that

they can bring peace to our nation and world

- ✘ **Military personnel**, stateside and abroad
- ✘ **Peacemakers/Mission Workers**
- ✘ **Our nation and world**—praying for peace
- ✘ **Immigrants**, especially those separated from families
- ✘ **UPC Officers:** elders, deacons, trustees
- ✘ Those who are **suffering & are marginalized**
- ✘ Those struggling with **mental illness**

# UPC Calendar

Submit corrections, additions, or deletions to the church office at (480) 966-6267 or [upc@upctempe.org](mailto:upc@upctempe.org).

Check online for updates or to subscribe on your computer or device:

[www.upctempe.org/calendar](http://www.upctempe.org/calendar)

## January 2021

### Fri, Jan 1

*New Years Day*

*Church Office Closed*

2:00 pm I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sat, Jan 2

ALL DAY I-HELP (FH, K)  
9:00 am Chancel Choir Winter Retreat (CH)

### Sun, Jan 3

8:45 am Children's Bible Time (Zoom-P)  
9:30 am Worship Service (Zoom)  
11:00 am Adult Christian Education Class (Zoom-U)  
12:00 pm I-HELP Guests Depart

### Mon, Jan 4

*Deadline for Annual Reports*

7:00 pm Administration Committee (Zoom-U)

### Wed, Jan 6

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (Zoom-U)  
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)  
4:30 pm Staff Meeting (Zoom-U)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (Zoom-U)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:00 pm Choir Practice (Zoom-P)

### Thu, Jan 7

11:30 am Theology Group/Reflection Study (Zoom-U)  
7:00 pm Christian Education Committee (Zoom-U)

### Fri, Jan 8

2:00 pm I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sat, Jan 9

ALL DAY I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sun, Jan 10

12:00 am Ordination and/or Installation of Officers  
8:45 am Children's Bible Time (Zoom-P)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S)  
11:00 am Adult Christian Education Class (Zoom-U)  
12:00 pm I-HELP Guests Depart

### Tue, Jan 12

7:00 pm Worship Committee (Zoom-P)

### Wed, Jan 13

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (Zoom-U)  
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (Zoom-U)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:00 pm Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Zoom-U)

### Thu, Jan 14

7:00 pm MSJP Committee (Zoom-U)

### Fri, Jan 15

2:00 pm I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sat, Jan 16

ALL DAY I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sun, Jan 17

12:00 am Annual Report Distributed  
8:45 am Children's Bible Time (Zoom-P)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S)  
11:00 am Adult Christian Education Class (Zoom-U)  
12:00 pm I-HELP Guests Depart

### Mon, Jan 18

7:00 pm Deacon Meeting (Zoom-U)

### Wed, Jan 20

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (Zoom-U)  
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (Zoom-U)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:00 pm Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Zoom-U)

### Thu, Jan 21

11:00 am Tempe Interfaith Fellowship (Zoom-P)  
11:30 am Theology Group/Reflection Study (Zoom-U)

### Fri, Jan 22

2:00 pm I-HELP (FH, K)  
7:00 pm Book Club Meeting (Zoom)

### Sat, Jan 23

ALL DAY I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sun, Jan 24

12:00 am Annual Report Distributed  
8:45 am Children's Bible Time (Zoom-P)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S)  
11:00 am Adult Christian Education Class (Zoom-U)  
12:00 pm I-HELP Guests Depart

### Tue, Jan 26

7:00 pm Session Meeting (Zoom-U)

### Wed, Jan 27

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (Zoom-U)  
4:00 pm Worship Planning Team (Zoom-U)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (Zoom-U)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:00 pm Choir Practice (Zoom-P)  
7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Zoom-U)

### Fri, Jan 29

2:00 pm I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sat, Jan 30

ALL DAY I-HELP (FH, K)

### Sun, Jan 31

8:45 am Children's Bible Time (Zoom-P)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S)  
10:45 am Annual Congregational Meeting (Zoom-U)  
12:00 pm I-HELP Guests Depart

Get calendar updates at  
[upctempe.org/  
calendar](http://upctempe.org/calendar).

#### Location/Room References:

(CH)-Choir Room (CR)-Conference Room/Office (COR/Rm7)-Community Room (FH)-Fellowship Hall (HSR)-High School Room (MSR)-Middle School Room (K)-Fellowship Hall Kitchen (L)-Lounge (MR)-Meeting Room (N) Nursery (PO)-Pastor's Office (Rm#)-Room Number Indicated (S)-Sanctuary

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## Church Office Hours

Tue. & Thu.  
11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Wed. & Fri  
10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
(Closed for lunch 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m.)

## Quick Links

- **Sunday morning worship** at 9:30 a.m. (to attend via Zoom, register at [www.upctempe.org/worship](http://www.upctempe.org/worship)), followed by fellowship breakout rooms!
- **Get the Weekly Update Email:** Make sure you're in the loop with all the latest info! Sign up at: [www.upctempe.org/email](http://www.upctempe.org/email).
- **Days for Girls Mission:** For training and lending a hand contact Helen Griffin ([helen.e.h.griffin@gmail.com](mailto:helen.e.h.griffin@gmail.com))
- **Deacons:** Contact your neighborhood deacon if you have a particular need or just want to chat.