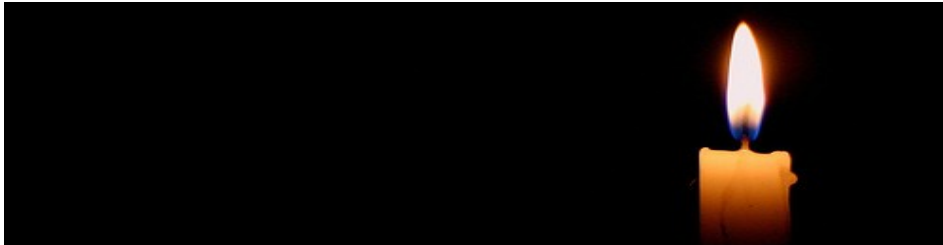




# Fear and Darkness

...and other racist tropes



By PASTOR ERIC O. LEDERMANN

Mystery and fearfulness have shrouded “darkness” for probably as long as humanity has been in existence. Darkness hides things, including things that could be dangerous or even deadly. “Dark” has always been associated with scary or bad, while light has long been associated with goodness and joy. Dark represents death and dying, while light represents life and renewal.

But what happens when someone has dark skin? Are they scary or bad?

The season of Advent in the northern hemisphere comes as the period of daylight gets shorter and the dark nights become longer. The themes of the Christian Advent are full of dark-light comparisons.

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light!*

(Isaiah 9.2)

*The people who sat in darkness  
Have seen a great light.*

(Matthew 4.16)

*The light shines in the darkness  
and the darkness did not overcome it.*

(John 1.5)

These are the texts that fill our Advent season. Jesus is the light that shines in our darkness (read: the light of God’s

love and forgiveness shines redeems the darkness of our sins). It is the darkest time of year, and the Yuletide celebrations of ancient peoples were a way to fill the dark nights with the light of fire and revelry and have a good time during the gloom of long northern nights.

Even in old movies, the villain wears dark clothes and a dark mask while the hero wore white or at least light-colored clothes, and in the westerns the hero would ride a white stallion (e.g., the Lone Ranger). Zoro was an exception, though he was considered an outlaw who did good things (kind of a Robin Hood character, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor).

However, when the light/dark dichotomy is applied to people in general, people with light colored skin have an unearned advantage over people with dark colored skin. The “war on crime” of the 1960s and 1970s didn’t help as posters and advertisements reinforced the mysterious dark figures lying in wait to pounce on innocent white victims.

Maybe we need to discern some new language for Advent that doesn’t reinforce these racial biases. Dark is not always bad. Without dark, our sleep patterns can be dangerously disrupted causing all kinds of physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Plants even need dark to rest from their growth in the

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

*Love*

In the Greek language there are several different kinds of love: *eros* (romantic or passionate love); *philia* (intimate friendship); *ludus* (playful, flirtatious); *storge* (unconditional, familial); *philautia* (self-love); *pragma* (committed, companionate love); *agape* (empathetic, universal love). Every culture in every age has various understandings of “love.” The first known use of the English word, “love,” is sometime before the 12th c., evolved from the Old English word *lufian* (“to feel love for, cherish”), which is similar to Old High German *lubon*, both referring to love as a noun. In Latin “love” is *libere* (n.) or *libere* (v.), which means “to please.” Who do you love and how do you express it?

## DARKNESS & HOPE

Continued from page 1

light—many of them depend on that cycle for overall health. Then there's the old fashion adage that black clothes can be slimming for those of us with heavier builds. And, did I mention that the hero Zoro wore black?

In Exodus, the mystery of God is found in the darkness. Yes, there's the blazing bush, but there's also chapter 20, verse 20-21: "Moses said to the people [at the foot of Mt. Sinai, after having delivered the ten words/teachings that God had given him on the mountain amidst the clouds and thunder and lightning], 'Don't be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you don't sin.' The people stood at a distance while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was present" (CEB).

I don't believe God "tests" us so much as tries to draw us into a way of being that invites us to into hope, peace, joy, and love (the themes of Advent). It's up to us to respond. So by reinforcing "dark" as "bad," are we living into those themes? Isn't God also present in the darkness? And, to be honest, it's in the darkness of the forest or the darkness of night when the world around us is most still and we are probably more able to experience the presence of God. We close our eyes to pray so that we can focus our attention.

Words mean things. The ancient He-

brew people believed words had 'power' and could make things happen. Words were more than mere thoughts or arguments, like the Greek philosophers thought. Words have the power to change the landscape of people's lives. Words start wars! But words can also bring peace. So when we associate otherwise neutral words with bad things or bad thoughts, that affects our thinking and how we see the world.

What I love most about the season of Advent is the stillness of the darkness that invites me to ponder more deeply life, faith, and God.

*"Silent night, holy night;  
all is calm, all is bright."*

This Christmas, let us embrace the darkness of the season as an opportunity to block out of our minds the things that so often distract us from the life-giving faith Jesus taught and embodied. Let us embrace the dark skies that make it possible for us to see and ponder the incredible galaxy in which we live, worlds light years away, and the vastness of God's creation—for it is only on the darkest nights that we can see the glimmer of light that began its trek across the universe centuries and even millennia ago. Let us embrace the dark as opportunity, giving rise to hope and promise. ■

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



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## MONTHLY DRIVE 'n' DROP

December 6, 2021, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Normally First Sunday of each month! Drop off at church!

TCAA has requested **breakfast items** for the homeless and those needing food boxes. Here are the items needed for TCAA and UPC Refugee Ministry



- tuna
- beans
- canned Meats
- ramen noodles
- canned vegetables
- soups
- breakfast items
- towels/washcloths
- baby wipes
- travel snacks

Financial contributions may be sent to the office. Make checks out to "TCAA" and reference "Food Pantry" or to UPC and reference "Refugee" in the memo

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

# Adult Christian Education



This four week Advent study explores the sacred stories of Advent and Christmas through the biblical narratives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary in dialogue with short excerpts from film: particularly, the documentaries by the Story Ministry division of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, produced alongside the affected communities. Using brief clips as conversation starters and interweaving them with the biblical narrative and Advent themes, a dialogue is created between the Bible's sacred stories, our own human experience, and these also-holy stories from the films. Each week also includes a brief filmed interview connecting the day's topic with the unfolding impact of COVID-19. The films share stories that are drawn from the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami that killed 230,000, gun violence, refugee resettlement, immigration detention and environmental racism. ■

## A Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Video Series

**Nov. 28-Dec 19**  
**11:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.**  
**Sanctuary & Zoom**

Led by:

**Nov. 28**  
**Dec. 5**  
**Dec. 12**  
**Dec. 19**

**Pastor Eric Ledermann**  
**Rev. Dr. John Herman**  
**Vicki Jacobs**  
**Rev. Dr. John Herman**

## “Rise & Shine Bread” Champions

### Recently Dubbed “Angel-Bakers” by Local Recipients

By ANDREA WHITE

I met the team from Sun Valley Church recently as they were serving dinner and introduced myself to their host. She had heard about the bread project and was elated to receive bread which they planned to make available with dinner or for taking with them in the morning. She got the attention of the entire group to announce: ‘This lady represents home-bakers baking bread for you...they are our “angel bakers!” Be sure to thank them! And they did! **Our orders are increasing and we need your help!**

Here is a link to a video you can view for more information:  
<https://youtu.be/Go5IILJTuw>

Please contact Andrea White at [info@riseshinebread.org](mailto:info@riseshinebread.org) or (480) 580-3021 for more information. ■





# Presbyterian Women

## Let the Festivities Begin This Holiday Season

### Christmas Angel Tree

Nov 22—Dec 12

By CHERYL HARDY

University Presbyterian Church believes that every child deserves to know the joy of a new toy at Christmas. To help make the holidays brighter for the less fortunate, we've partnered with Tempe Elementary School District to provide Christmas gifts to children in need.

Our goal is a commitment for 60 children this year. We have done 75-100 tags in the past, and last year we had 52 /\$100 gift cards. They mentioned that they have some homeless children and that gift cards are better for them. UPC will offer both options to those who would like to participate. The tags will tell us if the child is homeless and we can offer those tags to people that would rather purchase a gift card instead of shopping. The gift cards can be in any amount and from any store. We'll also do the shopping if you would like to make a monetary donation

Taking part is easy to do. Stop by the Christmas Angel tree in the Narthex on or after Sun., Nov. 22, and

1. Pick up the Angel tag,
2. Purchase the gift or gifts,
3. Wrap them,
4. Return them to the tree **with the tag attached.**

For those not attending worship in person, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact Cheryl Hardy at [Cheri@TempeAgents.com](mailto:Cheri@TempeAgents.com) or (602) 920-5176 or Suzanne Niemann (480) 221-6115. ■



## Holiday Boutique and Treats



This year PW will have a virtual shopping guide that includes handmade Christmas/holiday home décor items as well as delightful stocking stuffers made by our talented PW members. The sales brochure will be released the week after Thanksgiving with instructions on how to order. The sale will begin on Wed., Dec. 1 at 6:00 pm and will be on a first come, first serve basis. Purchased items will be available for pick-up starting Sun, Dec. 5 during church service and the Choir Concert at 3:00 pm that afternoon.

At the UPC Holiday Concert on Dec. 5 at 3:00 pm, PW will have delicious homemade holiday edibles to purchase. These specially wrapped treats will be perfect for you, your family, and friends. There will also be two special.

All proceeds from the Holiday Boutique and Concert treats will help PW fulfill its mission work. Happy Holidays and happy shopping! ■

# ARIZONA FAITH NETWORK

Be Together • Talk Together • Act Together



### Christmas Dinner Box Project

Walking in Beauty has maintained a consistent delivery of donated necessities and basic supplies to the Native communities of Northern Arizona. This Christmas, by working together as a community of various faith and community groups, we will provide a box of non-perishable Christmas Dinner staples to 450 families. Boxes will be collected from the Phoenix area by Knight Transportation and delivered to central locations on the reservations in Mid-December. Community organizations will be responsible for publicizing, collecting, and storing boxes until that date. **If you are interested in helping out, please call Carla Miller at (480) 334-9945.**

### Circles of Hope, Healing, and Humanity Dec. 15 - 7 p.m. (Zoom)

Please join AFN for our collective healing in a virtual space. These healing spaces are for Social Justice & Movement Practitioners Caretakers, Teachers, Community Members and Faith Leaders. We explore the use of somatics - embodiment work - breathing, storytelling, art, and even movement to unite to create positive change for the common good.



### Dec. 8, 5:30 p.m. (Zoom)

Sofa Spirituality allows people of faith and hope, curiosity and interest, to learn about each other while being in dialogue with each other. The intimate style of Sofa Spirituality affords each one of us to have a seat on the sofa and a voice in the conversation. Register: <https://www.arizonafaitnetwork.org>



Join the anti-hunger and food systems advocacy calls with the Arizona Food Bank Network and the Arizona Food System Network, held every other Friday. More information and recordings of past calls are available at: <https://www.azfsn.org/>

**Learn more about the Arizona Faith Network by subscribing to the newsletter at:**

[www.arizonafaitnetwork.org/subscribe](http://www.arizonafaitnetwork.org/subscribe)



# Molly Winkler Retires, Honored

## After 41 Years in the Healthcare Industry



Martha "Molly" Winkler, 2021 John A. Garza Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient

By LAWN GRIFFITHS

Longtime UPC ruling elder Martha "Molly" Winkler recently retired after 41 years in the health care administration industry, including 38 years with Banner Health. The company recently bestowed on her the 2021 John A. Garza Lifetime Achievement Award.

Here is what Scott Bailey, Director of Employee/Labor Relations at Banner Health, shared regarding "the impact Molly had at Banner Health in equal employment and affirmative action space." As I would sit and watch Molly over the years, her colleagues would reach out to her with questions about regulatory issues or what the federal code said about something – really any question.

"Molly, just at the tip of her tongue, would be able to answer these questions. The knowledge Molly has in this space is really unparalleled. As I would watch Molly I saw even more how creative she could get, just her passion that not only that we be consistent in how do, we make sure that we were compliant with the laws and regulations. Molly always had this inspiration of what is the right thing to do. You would hear Molly ask, 'What is the right thing to do for the organization, what is the right thing to do for the person involved?'"

"To say that Molly was a trusted advisor in our organization would be an understatement. Rarely would a day go by that you didn't hear someone say, "Why don't you ask Molly this question. It has been so meaningful to watch Molly's impact and her fingerprints all over this state."

Pastor Eric Ledermann noted in the video that Molly has been a UPC member, with her husband Jon, for more than 15 years. He called Molly "an instrumental member of the congregation and the Presbytery of Grand Canyon. She has brought her H.R. expertise to the church, helping us share employment policies and developing staffing structures to further the work and the ministry of our church in innumerable ways. She has personally been my 'go-to person' when

it comes to personnel issues. She is so generous with her time and her energy. She is always willing and genuinely interested in helping people be and do their best. I am blessed to have Molly as a member, as a colleague in ministry and as a friend. I am proud of her accomplishments, and I am so thrilled she is being recognized for her hard work."

In response, Molly said she, too, was thrilled and humbled to be recognized. "About 16 or 17 years ago, I moved into the space of human resources, regulatory, affirmative action work," she said. She called that work "so vital." Molly was able to participate in producing policies for the company. Questions were "why do we have policies? What are the consequences if someone breaks a policy." That led to her work over the succeeding years. "It has been very important, but more important was doing this, not because I had title authority, but with relationships and teaching and working with leaders and influencing them."

"It was a long time. I am humbled." She told her colleagues that should recognize how important their work is. "You can build on those who came before and make it better in the future for all of us."

The entire video may be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJxFTkAXz-o>. ■



## Let's Talk Podcasts

By JAN FELTON

My daily morning walk begins with the 13 minute podcast call Pray as you Go. This Jesuit created podcast combines music, scripture and some questions to reflect on—it's a good way to get centered for the day and at times gets me wrestling over theological issues. A new prayer session is produced every day of the working week and one session for the weekend. It is not a 'Thought for the Day', a sermon or a bible-study, but rather a framework for your own prayer.

Lasting between ten and thirteen minutes, it combines music, scripture and some questions for reflection. <https://pray-as-you-go.org/> ■



University Presbyterian Church Presents

# Christmas Together!

An afternoon of joyous music featuring the chancel choir, handbell ensemble, organ, piano and more!

**Sunday December 5th – 3:00 pm**  
139 East Alameda Drive - Tempe - Free Will Offering

Join us after the concert for the Christmas Boutique hosted by the UPC Presbyterian Women. Shop for gifts, cookies, and Christmas goodies! Masks will be required indoors at all times.

## A Christmas Treat Everyone Will Love!



By MIKKI GALLAGHER

### Pumpkin Cake Roll

#### The Cake

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup canned pumpkin
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 cup chopped nuts
- 3/4 cup flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. Cinnamon
- 1 tsp. ginger
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. nutmeg

1. Beat eggs 5 minutes and gradually add sugar, pumpkin, and

lemon juice.

2. Combine flour, baking powder, spices and salt and fold into pumpkin mixture
3. Spread into a greased and floured 15" x 10" pan (consider using waxed paper on pan to assist removal)
4. Top with chopped nuts
5. Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes

Turn out on terrycloth towel sprinkled with powdered sugar. Roll towel and cake up together to cool. Unroll and fill. Do not let cake get too cold, as it will break.

#### The Filling

- 6 oz cream cheese
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 4 Tbsp. butter
- 1 tsp. vanilla

1. Beat filling ingredients together until spreadable.
2. Spread filling on cake
3. Roll up. Chill.
4. Roll in saran wrap then with foil. Freeze.

To slice, take out of freezer and slice thin with electric knife. Cake will thaw on plate quickly. This recipe will make at least 20 slices. Very Rich! Enjoy! ■



# Christmas: No Celebrating Allowed?

## Reformers once frowned on holiday celebrations



By **FRED TANGEMAN**  
*Presbyterians Today*

Christmas is a time of traditions, nostalgia and even a little contention. Who makes the best sugar cookies? Where will the family dinner be held? And in the church, how and when will the sanctuary greens get hung? It might surprise you to hear that there was a time when Presbyterians didn't wrangle over hanging greens. In fact, they didn't pay much heed to Christmas at all.

In "The Battle for Christmas," author Stephen Nissenbaum unwraps the most notable holiday traditions, many fewer than two centuries old. Among his tales of how Nicholas of Myra, who took part in the Council of Nicaea and was sainted for his miracle working, even though rumor has it he once slapped a heretic in the face with his sandal, morphed into jolly Santa Claus, and how the modest 4-foot Christmas trees dating back to Martin Luther's Germany began supersizing into the floor-to-ceiling Norwegian Spruces, is an interesting tidbit about how the argument of canceling Christmas is not a recent one.

Reformed leaders of the 17th and 18th centuries wanted Christmas very

much gone. Along with their Puritan siblings, Presbyterians disapproved of Christmas observances. Puritans, as did Presbyterians, found no biblical evidence for the birth of Christ on Dec. 25. Strict Sabbatarians, they kept churches closed on Christmas unless it was Sunday.

For the Reformers, nativity worship services were too closely linked to Catholic feast and saint days, as well as with pagan holidays some of those days had replaced on the calendar. According to Dr. R. Scott Clark, a Reformed church historian and curator of Heidelbergblog.net, John Calvin even showed his disapproval of Christmas celebrations by stating, "When you elevate one day alone for the purpose of worshiping God, you have just turned it into an idol."

In New England, Christmas was often excluded from red-letter days of colonial almanacs, and from 1659 to 1681 the holiday was illegal throughout Massachusetts. Reformed congregations stayed closed on Christmas Day and encouraged businesses to remain open. Puritan minister Cotton Mather warned against a Christmas season "spent in reveling, dicing, carding, masking and in all licentious liberty." Concealed identities, and costumes of the kind still popular in

carnival celebrations around the world today, encouraged an unseemly disorder.

New England Congregationalist attitudes toward Christmas aligned with Presbyterian ones in the Middle Atlantic colonies, where Scots Irish immigrants lived in the largest numbers. A smaller Reformed presence generally meant more public celebrations. As the Presbyterian Heritage Foundation notes, Presbyterians in Philadelphia only began celebrating Christmas when they noticed members of their own congregations attending Anglican services. Still, views on not celebrating Christmas were not wavering. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, a founder of the Presbyterian Historical Society, argued as late as 1842 that the term "Christmas" (Christ-mass) was historically "papist" (Catholic). A change in attitudes was happening, though.

Nissenbaum suggests that one of the reasons for the embracing of Christmas celebrations was due partly to the 19th-century's transformation from an agricultural to industrial economy, which created a middle class that could afford more goods, including nonperishable items (toys!) for the home. Christmas celebrations went from community reveling to ones spent with friends and family, often inside the home. But has this led to the celebration being a time of idolizing our own comfort and wealth to the neglect of others? What about the people on the other side of a door?

Perhaps COVID-19, in reminding us of the importance of shared experiences, is helping us as Presbyterians to believe once again that when it comes to celebrating Christmas, it is about being more selfless in our giving and looking out for each other year-round in the way the Lord instructs.

As Nissenbaum writes, "Christmas always illuminates ... what we are becoming despite ourselves." ■



# The Mitchells — Installment No. 28b

By ERIC O. LEDERMANN

Several minutes passed as Alex stared at his coffee cup. Ms. Gentry and Pastor Cobb sat quietly, sipping theirs as Alex found himself again. He slowly took a small bite from the danish next to what was left of his blueberry muffin, and then lifted his cup to his lips. His movements were slow and deliberate, and clearly nervous.

As Alex put his cup down, Pastor Cobb softly started again, “Alex, we don’t want to cause you any stress. If we say or do anything that upsets you, you let us know. And know you don’t have to tell us anything you don’t want to.”

“Of course, Pastor,” Alex responded, his voice a bit shaky. His head nodding helped reinforce his understanding. He paused for a moment, cocked his head to one side slightly, and furrowed his brow. “Why are you being so nice?” He raised his eyes and looked right at Pastor Cobb, and then at Ms. Gentry. “People aren’t very nice to me at most places.”

“This isn’t most places,” Ms. Gentry responded.

Pastor Cobb quickly added, “That means we try to treat everyone here with respect, dignity, and love. It’s not always easy, but we try.”

For the first time Ms. Gentry and Pastor Cobb witnessed the corners of Alex’s mouth rise slightly into the most subtle of smiles. “It’s good you try. I wish more people tried.”

Pastor Cobb wanted to hear Alex’s story, but knew it needed to be in Alex’s time. “Are you able to tell us your story?”

Alex’s smiling face turned into a furrowing brow and a disconcerting look.

“I mean,” Pastor Cobb try to clarify, “how did you get from LA to Arizona? How did you end up living on the streets? How did you end up at Faith Church? Things like that.”

“The church part is easy,” Alex responded slowly and with eyes focused on his cup of coffee. “I’ve been to a lot of churches. Most either want me to go

away as quickly as possible, or they run me off. But I felt something different here.” A slight pause, but it was clear he wasn’t done. “I know you don’t want people spending the night on your property, but for several months before I came here last time I was spending the night in the bushes near the grassy area outside your sanctuary. People can’t really see me there, and it just feels safe. I still do most nights.”

He looked at Pastor Cobb out of the corner of his eyes to gauge how his story was being received. So far the pastor showed no signs of disappointment or distress.

“I know some of the church people saw me a few times in the morning when I had forgotten to get up early. But they didn’t say anything. They didn’t try to get rid of me. In fact, one lady started bringing me fruit and bread and even gave me a metal water bottle that I could fill up. It’s here in my backpack.”

He reached for his backpack on the floor next to his feet and pulled out a non-descript powder coated white aluminum water bottle with a plastic sport top. It looked like a nice one.

“I try not to spend the night every night. I don’t want to wear out my welcome. But that’s just it, I felt welcomed. I felt like people knew that I knew they didn’t like me sleeping on the church grounds, but not because I was sleeping on the church grounds. They were trying to help me. We on the streets don’t get kind of compassion too often.”

In response, Pastor Cobb offered, “Like I said, one of our values is trying to treat people with the dignity that everyone deserves.”

Alex was clearly becoming more comfortable. The shakiness in his voice was near gone. He was speaking at a more normal speed, and he was sitting back in his chair a little bit.

“It shows, Pastor,” Alex said. “You’ve done a good job with that.”

“Not my doing,” Pastor Cobb said. “This congregation has had that ethos for a long time—long before I came along.

The people have created that for themselves and for the wider community.”

“I’d like to hear that story someday,” Alex said with a smile, revealing his clearly unbrushed but surprisingly healthy teeth. “But, the story of how I ended up in Phoenix and on the streets is a bit of a long one. I’ll try to give you the Cliff Notes version.” He paused for a second, looking up and cocked his head to one side in a quizzical look. “Do people still use Cliff Notes?”

Both Pastor Cobb and Ms. Gentry chuckled a little. Pastor Cobb then responded, “I imagine as long as schools require reading books, there’ll be Cliff Notes not far away.”

All three chuckled.

Alex quipped, “I wish I knew more people like you, Pastor Cobb. You’re not afraid to say things that need to be said, but in a really nice way.”

“So,” Pastor Cobb said encouragingly, “let’s hear whatever version of your story you’re willing to share, Cliff Notes or long edition.”

Alex took a long breath, and then began. “After serving for eight years in the Marines, and the two tours in Afghanistan, I was honorably discharged due to injuries sustained because of the bombing. I had been shot previously, but it just went through my shoulder and I was back with my unit within six weeks. I lost four brothers when our convoy was hit by a roadside I.E.D. I was thrown from the vehicle and sustained a pretty serious back injury. I was in the hospital for about three months before I was discharged from there and from the Marines.

“I moved back home with my family in L.A. My parents had set up a spare room on the ground floor of their house because I had some trouble walking and a really hard time navigating stairs. I got better physically, but the nightmares were intense. I kept going to counseling at the V.A. hospital and was in a couple of support groups for injured vets. I happened to with all Marines, which was good.”

## THE MITCHELLS

Continued from page 9

Alex raised his eyes up from his coffee cup at which he had been staring and looked at Pastor Cobb. “Nothing against the other branches of the military, of course. It’s just that fellow Marines understand more what many of us have been through, more so than other branches.”

“Of course,” Pastor Cobb said. He had never served in the military. He went to college straight out of high school, and seminary straight out of college.

Alex’s eyes went back to the coffee cup as he continued. “I couldn’t hold a job for very long. It was hard to sleep at night, so I was always tired. I felt bad that I put so many of my bosses in that position, to have to fire me. But I just couldn’t help it. I even tried sleeping pills my doctor gave me. Nothing really worked. I tossed and turned all night, and then was like a zombie during the day.

“After about a year, my parents tried to push me to get better. I tried. But it was just so hard. I kept seeing the faces of my brothers killed in the bombing, as well as the faces of some other guys I knew in other units who were killed. It was like I could see them dying in my mind, whether I was awake or asleep.”

He paused. His eyes were welling up. Then a tear ran down one cheek. Ms. Gentry and Pastor Cobb remained silent to give Alex all the space he needed.

He looked up at Ms. Gentry and said, “I haven’t talked about this in a long time. I don’t know how I’m doing it. For a long time I just couldn’t.”

Ms. Gentry, stilling holding his arm, smiled and nodded, but didn’t say anything. She didn’t have to.

“It was clear that I was burden to my parents and my whole family. They didn’t know what to do, and neither did I. Though thoughts of suicide kept popping up in my mind, I knew I didn’t want to do that. Some guys in some of my groups did it, and I saw what it did to their families and the rest of the group. I couldn’t do that people I cared about. It was selfish.

“So, one day, I just left. I had a small

backpack with some clothes and things, and walked out the door. I left behind my uniform, my medals, and a whole bunch of stuff. It all just didn’t mean anything to me anymore. I just started walking. First toward the V.A. hospital which was about fifteen miles away, and then I just headed east. I had some money back then. So I was able to get on a bus to Phoenix. I had heard there were vets out here and I hoped to just start a new life. I thought that maybe being home was keeping me stuck.

“When I got out here, I had no plans. I didn’t have any place to live. I started finding dark corners behind bushes and buildings to sleep at night. I had money for a hotel room, but I knew that would run out pretty quick. I figured I needed to save that for food. It wasn’t very long before I had spent it all. I remember being hungry for several days. I had no idea where to get help. I didn’t know where anything was. I ended up not eating for about four days. I got water from hose spigots and filled an old water bottle I found. If there is one thing that is plentiful in the desert, it’s water bottles. Everyone has ‘em, and a lot of people leave them all over the place.

“I met a bunch of people on the streets here. It was a real shock to me how friendly and welcoming the homeless people were here. It was like they saw me and knew I was one of them. I didn’t want to be homeless, but it kinda worked for me. I had spent the last year trying to be a good member of society and do all the things that good people are supposed to do, like find an apartment, get a job, pay your bills. But here, I found freedom from all that pressure. These people helped me learn how to live here on the streets. That first summer was brutal. But it was nothing compared to Afghanistan. I survived. And slowly the nightmares faded away. They still come back every once in a while, but not like before.

“Well, I got a little too full of myself after a while. I started building a pretty good chip on my shoulder. The people who welcomed me slowly disappeared. They didn’t want anything to do with me because I was such a jerk. In the Marines

I was a Sergeant, so I was used to being in charge of stuff. I guess it kinda got to my head. Before long, I was by myself again. It’s been that way for a long time now. I still know some people, and we’re cordial. But we’re not friends.”

“You’ve been through a lot,” Pastor Cobb responded. “It’s a heart wrenching story.”

“Yes,” Ms. Gentry agreed. “I think you are so brave.”

Alex looked at Ms. Gentry, who was still holding his arm. “Brave? But I ran away.”

“You ran away so you wouldn’t be a burden to your family,” she said. “But, I doubt they saw that way.”

“Have you ever tried to reach back out to your family?” Pastor Cobb asked.

“Once,” Alex said. “I borrowed a cell phone and called my little brother. I left a message for him and asked him to call me back on a pay phone. He never called.”

Silence filled the room as the heaviness of Alex’s story and the grief of being rejected by his brother made the air heavy.

Pastor Cobb then asked, “What do you think your parents would say today if they could talk to you?”

Alex thought for a moment. He took a sip of his now cold coffee. “I don’t know. It’s been so long. I don’t even know if they’re alive still.”

“Well,” Pastor Cobb said, “we could try if you want. You could call on my cell phone and give them my number if they don’t answer right away. You could tell me where you are living or where you usually hang out, and if they call I could come get you to call them back.”

Alex’s eyes went wide as he sat back and contemplated that thought. He really had no idea how his family would react. He figured they had moved on already and didn’t want to be bothered by him anymore. “Heck, he thought, they probably think I’m dead.”

“Think about it,” Pastor Cobb said as he realized that was a lot for Alex to ponder. “The offer is an open invitation. No need to decide today.”

*To be continued.* ■



## POETRY CORNER

# Santa

By HELEN ALDERSON

Santa, you are a myth.  
Or are you?

Every Christmas you surface from  
your hidden digs in the North Pole,  
driving your reindeer, sailing across  
continents in our loaded sleigh.

Some say your rosy visage  
is only a tool for merchants  
to drive up sales. Others say  
you are an imposter, as  
Christmas is all about Baby Jesus.

However, in reality, you are  
an adjunct to Baby Jesus  
with your jolly demeanor, your

HO-HO laughter, your kindness,  
your generosity, and your love of  
children. Your circle across  
continents, checking on boys and  
girls, depositing happiness and joy.

Santa, you are no newcomer;  
you have gained permanency.  
You are an icon, infusing the world  
with warmth and cheer, casting out  
cynicism, despair and disillusionment.

Santa, I beseech you never to disappear,  
or stay frozen at the North Pole. Keep  
shining forth, driving your reindeer,  
through the skies, across roof tops,  
down chimneys—touching every  
child's heart with the magic of love. ■



## MSJP Supports Afghan Family Through Peace and Global Witness Offering

By HOLLY HERMAN

As you may recall, 25% of the gifts received from the Peace and Global Witness Offering stay right here with UPC. This year, UPC's Mission, Social Justice and Peacemaking Committee designated our share to support Afghan refugees in the Phoenix area. After doing some research, we heard about Shadow Rock UCC, long a sister sanctuary congregation.

About two months ago, Shadow Rock was asked to sponsor an Afghan family who were especially vulnerable. The request came through friends and a chain of personal contacts. Since that time, this family has been in an agonizing hold, waiting for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to approve their application for humanitarian parole and travel visas to the United States. Shadow Rock had to raise \$23,000 to satisfy DHS that they could financially support this family. UPC's share of the Peace and Global Witness Offering went to support this Afghan family.

Shadow Rock received word that they were finally approved! We introduce to you Navid, Shajia, Omar (5 years), and Yosuf (18 months).

We are pleased to announce that the family arrived safely in Phoenix on Sunday morning, Nov. 28. ■





# I-HELP

Until there's a place called HOME

UPC now hosts I-HELP every week, Friday through Sunday. Our faith partners and Tempe Community Action Agency (TCAA) help provide meals. UPC provides meals the third Friday and the following Saturday of each month.

For info on volunteering, contact Jill Russell, Bonnie Henry, or Cathy Richardson



## ONLINE WORSHIP

REGISTER TODAY!

(In-person Worship began Aug 15th)

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

A confirmation email will be sent with a login link that is unique to you!

Services also live streamed to [www.upctempe.org/YouTube](http://www.upctempe.org/YouTube).

# National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

## 1-800-273-TALK

(1-800-273-8255)

### Talk to someone.

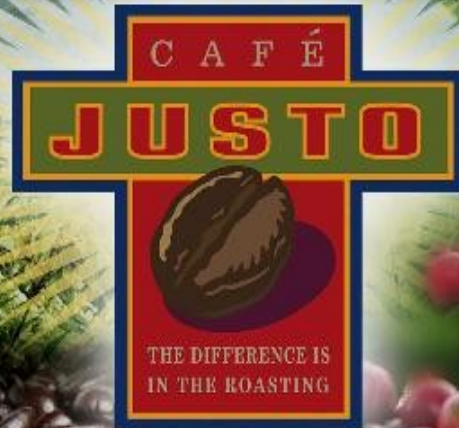
If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States.

En Español: 1-888-628-9454

Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889

Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255

# MORE THAN JUST COFFEE



## Discover the Difference

The official coffee of choice at UPC

For sale by Sunday mornings or by contacting the church office

**\$10 / lb.**

## MEXICO



# Worship Volunteer Schedule

Below is the schedule of worship volunteers for the next month. 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!

## December 2021

Sanctuary Readiness Team..... Larry Seubert

### Dec. 5—2nd Sunday of Advent

Liturgist.....Helen Griffin  
 Children’s Moment.....Helen Griffin  
 Worship Tech..... Chris Trella, Jim Niemann

### Dec. 12—3rd Sunday of Advent

Liturgist.....Kathy Wagner  
 Children’s Moment..... Pastor Eric  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Dec. 19—4th Sunday of Advent

Liturgist.....Joyce Godfrey  
 Children’s Moment.....Joyce Godfrey  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Dec. 24 —Christmas Eve (6:00 p.m.)

Liturgist..... Vacant  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Dec. 26 —1st Sunday of Christmastide

Liturgist..... Molly Winkler  
 Children’s Moment..... Molly Winkler  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

## January 2022

Sanctuary Readiness Team ..... Larry Seubert

### Jan. 2—2nd Sunday of Christmastide

Liturgist..... Vacant  
 Children’s Moment..... Vacant  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Jan. 9—Baptism of Jesus

Liturgist..... Paul Green  
 Children’s Moment..... Paul Green  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Jan. 16—2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (MLK Holiday Weekend)

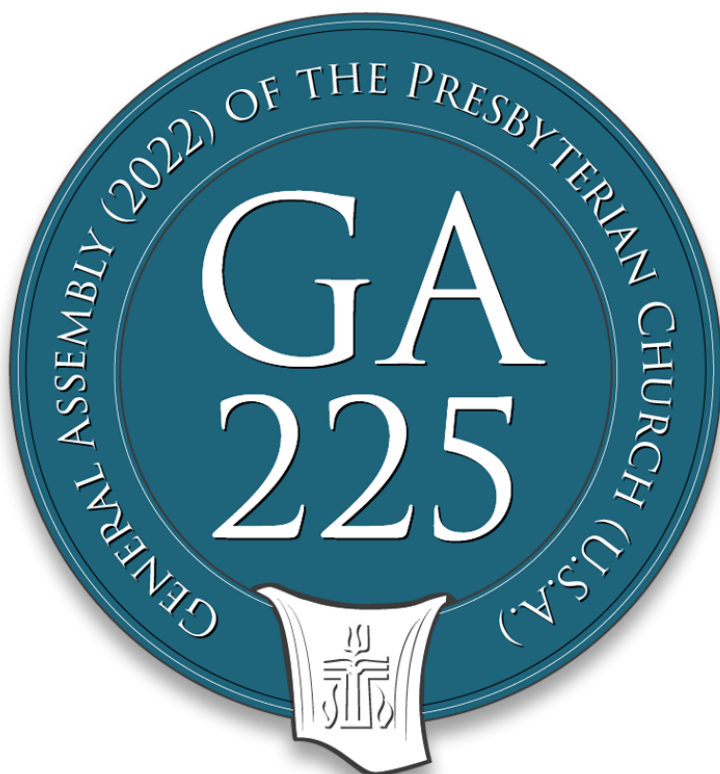
Liturgist..... Chris Casanova  
 Children’s Moment..... Chris Casanova  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Jan. 23 —3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Children’s Moment..... Rev. Shelly Moe  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant

### Jan. 30 —4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Liturgist..... Nob Ichishita  
 Children’s Moment..... Pastor Eric  
 Worship Tech..... Vacant



## Welcome to the 225th General Assembly

*from Lament to Hope*

The 225th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is less than a year away, but plans are well under way for the denomination’s hybrid gathering. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly (COGA) is knee-deep into working on how to combine in-person committee meetings with online plenaries and how to conduct those at the Church’s Louisville office. Visit <https://ga-pcusa.org/> regularly to see what’s new.

**June 18 - July 9, 2022**

Hybrid - Committee sessions in Louisville, KY,  
 Plenary sessions online.

### Have Questions?

**Contact GA Meeting Service**

**Email: [gameetingservice@pcusa.org](mailto:gameetingservice@pcusa.org)**

**Phone: (888) 728-7228 x 2417**



- |    |                  |    |                 |
|----|------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1  | Laura Knorr      | 16 | Ray Betts       |
|    | Debbie Sands     |    | Gary Anderson   |
| 2  | Beth Hermanson   | 19 | Sally Niles     |
| 5  | Jason Knorr      |    | JoJo Fraser     |
| 6  | Stephanie Liska  | 21 | Robyn Hardesty  |
|    | Susan Greenfield | 25 | Diann Vale      |
|    | Larry Gardner    | 26 | Nob Ichishita   |
| 8  | Jack Armstrong   | 28 | Cathy Benigno   |
| 10 | Wendy Sevlie     |    | Pam Overton     |
|    | Sindy Ledermann  | 30 | Kathy Hermanson |
| 14 | Tom Sands        |    |                 |
|    | Clarissa Knorr   |    |                 |

*If you see a birthday is missing or we have the wrong date, please let the office know as soon as possible.*

## Stay Informed on All-Things-Presby!

### PC(USA) News

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

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

News and views from our presbytery. [pbygrandcanyon.org/subscribe-to-efocus](http://pbygrandcanyon.org/subscribe-to-efocus).

### PC(USA) Office of Public Witness

Housed across the street from the U.S. Supreme Court in what is referred to as “the God Box,” the OPW is the PC (USA)’s advocacy and information center in Washington, D.C. Sign up for OPW Alerts and be an advocate! [www.votervoice.net/pcusa/home](http://www.votervoice.net/pcusa/home). Learn

more about the OPW at:

[www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington).

### Presbyterian Historical Society

Organized in 1852, the PHS is the oldest denominational archives in the U.S. and serves as the national archives for the PC (USA) and its predecessor denominations. PHS exists to collect, preserve, and share the story of the American Presbyterian and Reformed experience. [www.history.pcusa.org](http://www.history.pcusa.org).

### The Presbyterian Outlook

An independent magazine covering all things Presbyterian — \$19.95/year, 18 issues. [pres-outlook.org](http://pres-outlook.org)

### Presbyterians Today

Award-winning denominational magazine published by the PC(USA). Also available in a free twice monthly e-newsletter. *Get a free 1 year subscription!*

[www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/today)



## Remember prayer...

- ✘ **Homebound:** Evelyn Colby, Elaine Murray, Helen Alderson
- ✘ **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 who continue to be on the front lines of battling COVID-19
- ✘ **Indigenous People** who are especially suffering under the weight of COVID-19 and hundreds of years of subjugation.
- ✘ **Teachers and students** as they continue online and in-person.
- ✘ **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**, particularly the Rev. Leslie Vogel and the Rev. Mark Adams, Jocabed Gallego, and all at Frontera de Cristo.
- ✘ **Our nation and world**—praying for peace
- ✘ **Immigrants**, especially those separated from families
- ✘ **UPC Officers:** elders, deacons, trustees
- ✘ Those who are **suffering and 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)

## December 2021

### Wed, Dec 1

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)  
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice  
7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal  
7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Starbucks MU, ZU)

### Thu, Dec 2

7:00 pm CE Committee (ZU)

### Fri, Dec 3

2:00 pm I-HELP  
8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

### Sat, Dec 4

7:00 am I-HELP Guests Depart

### Sun, Dec 5

*Second Sunday in Advent*

8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)  
11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)  
11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Dec 6

2:00 pm I-HELP  
4:30 pm ACE Team (ZP)  
5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZP)  
7:00 pm Administration Committee (ZU)  
8:30 pm A.A. Meeting (Rm 7)

### Wed, Dec 8

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)  
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice  
7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal  
7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Starbucks MU, ZU)

### Thu, Dec 9

11:30 am PGC Theological Reflection Group (ZU)  
7:00 pm MSJP Committee (ZU)

### Fri, Dec 10

8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sun, Dec 12

*Third Sunday in Advent*

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)  
11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)  
11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Dec 13

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZU)  
7:00 pm Board of Trustees (ZU)  
8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

### Tues, Dec 14

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
7:00 pm Finance Committee (S, ZU)  
7:00 pm Worship Committee (ZP)

### Wed, Dec 15

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)  
1:00 pm Chinle Circle (MR)  
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice  
7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal

### Thu, Dec 16

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
11:00 am Tempe Interfaith Fellowship (ZU)

### Fri, Dec 17

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
2:00 pm I-HELP  
8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sat, Dec 18

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
7:00 am I-HELP Guests Depart

### Sun, Dec 19

*Fourth Sunday in Advent*

*Family Promise (MR, K, L, Rms 2, 4-6)*  
8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)  
9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)  
11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)  
11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Dec 20

5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZU)  
7:00 pm Board of Deacons (ZU)

8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

### Tues, Dec 21

6:30 pm CIO Committee (ZP)  
7:00 pm Stated Session (S, ZU)

### Wed, Dec 22

9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)  
3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)  
6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice  
7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal

### Thu, Dec 23

11:30 am PGC Theological Reflection Group (ZU)

### Fri, Dec 24

6:00 pm Christmas Eve Service (S, ZU, YT)  
8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sat, Dec 25

*Christmas Day*

### Sun, Dec 26

*First Sunday of Christmastide*

9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)  
11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Dec 27

7:00 pm PW Kayenta Circle (MR)  
8:30 pm A. A. Meeting (Rm 7)

### Tues, Dec 28

*Office Closed - Christmas Observed*

### Wed, Dec 29

*Office Closed - Christmas Observed*  
5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)

### Thu, Dec 30

8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Fri, Dec 31

8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sat, Jan 1

*New Years Day*

See CALENDAR, page 16

#### 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

# UPC NEWS & *Current Events*

University Presbyterian Church  
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Tempe, AZ 85282

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## CALENDAR

Continued from page 15

### Sun, Jan 2

*2nd Sunday of Christmastide*

- 8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)
- 9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)
- 11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)
- 11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Jan 3

- 4:30 pm ACE Team (ZP)
- 5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZU)
- 7:00 pm Administration Committee (ZU)
- 8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Tues, Jan 4

*Office Closed—New Years Observed*

### Wed, Jan 5

- 9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)
- 3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)
- 5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)
- 6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice
- 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal

- 7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Starbucks MU, ZU)

### Thu, Jan 6

*Epiphany (End of Christmastide)*

- 11:30 am PGC Theological Reflection Group (ZU)
- 7:00 pm CE Committee (ZU)

### Fri, Jan 7

- 8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sun, Jan 9

*Baptism of Jesus*

- 8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)
- 9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)
- 11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)
- 11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Jan 10

- 5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZU)
- 8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Tues, Jan 11

- 7:00 pm Worship Committee (ZP)
- 7:00 pm Finance Committee (S, ZU)

### Wed, Jan 12

- 9:00 am Lectio Divina Bible Study (ZU)
- 3:30 pm Worship Planning Team (ZU)
- 5:15 pm UPC Social Hour (ZU)
- 6:00 pm Bell Choir Practice
- 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal
- 7:30 pm UKIRK @ ASU (Starbucks MU, ZU)

### Thu, Jan 13

- 7:00 pm MSJP Committee (ZU)

### Fri, Jan 14

- 8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)

### Sun, Jan 16

- 8:45 am Children's Bible Time (ZP)
- 9:30 am Worship Service (S, ZU, YouTube)
- 11:00 am Young Group (Rm 9, ZP)
- 11:00 am ACE (S, ZU)

### Mon, Jan 17

*Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday*

- 5:30 pm Mission Month Committee (ZU)
- 7:00 pm Board of Deacons (ZU)
- 8:30 pm AA Meeting (Rm7)