

# Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave  
United Methodist Churches  
Porterville, CA

October 2021

## Our First Response

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

*... let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.*

*I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.*  
*Nehemiah 1:6*

**Prophets**, leaders, virtual nobodies who end up changing the world all participate in this vital activity that changes their life, reveals mysteries, and resets their spirit and environment. It changes the eyes through which they see the world. It unclogs their sensitivities to the Spirit of God. It is the clarion call of the gospel and the need of every Christian.

What is it? What could possibly be so pivotal, so monumental, so perfect for such a time as this? Repentance. We have a growing sense that something, many things are not as they should be. We have a growing pit in our stomach that we have disregarded God's word, neglected the first things, our first love, and grown lukewarm, apathetic, stale, dried out, tired, and discouraged.

I know how you feel but now is not the time to commiserate. Before the pandemic roughly 40 churches a day closed. Recent studies think this number will accelerate drastically. The time is now. It could not be more urgent. We cannot tarry any longer. We must

be about the business of repentance.

We have failed to be a loving church that bleeds for our community. We have failed to understand the needs of our community and opted to tell them to repent rather than join them in that activity. We have disobeyed, devalued the atonement, ignored the resurrection, esteemed the Bible as ordinary, and lulled ourselves to sleep while neighborhoods, families, and people that God loves continue their journey to hell.

I have not used all the powers of my gifts wisely. I have made foolish decisions that often benefited myself at the expense of others. I have been silent when courageous answers were required. I have failed to model Christlikeness and become satisfied with mediocrity.

I have not asked you carefully enough, forcefully enough, and often enough, to pray, to volunteer, to give of your financial resources, and so neglected the work of the kingdom of God which leaves out precious people who matter to God.

Repentance must start in the house of God and in the heart of its shepherd. So, I offer my sincere request to Jesus to forgive my sin and ask you, the churches of Porterville, to forgive and pray for me.

In Nehemiah's prayer he referenced God's instruction to

Moses, "*if you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations.*"

That is appropriate. We are scattered, scattered in intention, vision, and endeavor, scattered in mission, values, attendance, and metrics.

The Church Council at Grand Avenue has been praying and studying. This is a process that will soon be duplicated at First UMC. We feel compelled to fast and pray. Like Esther, Moses, Nehemiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Jesus, John Wesley, and many more, who have taken up the mantle of prayer and combined it with the power of self-denial to awaken the power of God in our lives and our churches.

When the Council has finished, we will process our experience and then invite the entire church into this process. We will use the pastoral prayer time to explore corporate repentance and confession. We hope you will join us.

There are few definitive ways that declare our dependency on God and our need for the presence of Jesus, the fire of the Holy Spirit, and the irresistible grace of the

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**Charge Conference**  
**Thursday, October 14**  
**5:30 p.m.**  
In the Fellowship Hall  
At Grand Ave

# Youth Ministry

**Years** ago, when I began youth ministry, I was having one of our Wednesday Night youth groups. After an evening of playing games and learning about Jesus, plus a few snacks, our time together was ending. As I was making my rounds, spending time with each student that attended making sure they knew I see them and care about them, I had a student make a request. This student let me know that he had a job interview coming up and he was really wanting the job. This young man asked if I would pray for him, which I was more than happy to do.

After praying, I informed the young man that he also had the ability and option of praying to God and letting God know of his request for the job interview. After sharing this information, the young man looked at me with what I would call a look of guilt and apprehension. He told me something that I have thought about for many years, he said, "Well, you know, you're like... close to God and stuff and like a preacher.... and uh.... I'm just.... you know....me."

The young man's statement provided a wonderful avenue for me to share with him the honor and blessing of being able to pray and have direct communication with God. I also let him know that it wasn't as difficult as he thought it was and gave him examples. He seemed interested in what he learned about prayer and my hope is that he broke out of his fear of praying and shared his heart with the Lord.

Many people these days show a hesitancy to praying. For one reason or another, many people avoid an active prayer life. Maybe it's worry over saying the right words, confusion about the process of praying, or possibly it's something

*"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." 1 John 5:14*

they don't even think about participating in. Whatever the cause for the lack of a prayerful life, we all need to be aware that God wants to hear from us. He created us to be social, and part of that social nature we have is intended for us to communicate with Him. Jesus even demonstrated how to pray when sharing The Lord's Prayer with the disciples, and we say that prayer often as a church body. Prayer is essential for a healthy relationship with the Lord and is something we should all be doing daily.

If you are interested in growing in your prayer life and would like to join others who are also on a prayer journey, there is a great opportunity available to each of you. Each Thursday morning at 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. Robin Galloway and Hope Overholt hold a prayer group in the Fireside room at Grand Avenue. They are knowledgeable about prayer,

incredibly patient with anyone who wants to learn about prayer, even those of us who struggle with praying out loud. This time together they spend in prayer is so valuable and enriching for the soul and I highly recommend each of you to, "come and see" and be blessed by your experience in the prayer group. Each of you are formally invited to attend this wonderful time of prayer and we look forward to seeing you there. If you have any questions regarding the prayer group, please contact the church office. May God bless you and yours.

God is Love,  
Ryan Ridenour

*We always thank  
GOD for all of you  
and continually  
mention you in  
our prayers.*

1 Thessalonians 1:2, NIV

## Our First Response • continued from page 1 by Pastor Tom Buratovich

Father than to empty ourselves of all distractions, desires, and earthly pleasures and confess our sin asking that God come and visit us again, revive us, make us new.

We may be scattered. However, the promise remains in response to our faithfulness: God will call us home, together stronger than before and wiser, we pray: *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Let's use the following prayer of repentance. Pray this prayer, or one like it, daily and ask God to visit us with a spirit of conviction, confession and repentance.

*Return again to us, O Lord God, and pardon the iniquity of your servants.  
Cause your face to shine upon us, and heal our barren land.*

*O visit us with your salvation.*

*Raise up sons and daughters from the seeds of repentance  
and grant that there might come a mighty bloom of forgiveness.*

*That brings a great ingathering of souls. Amen.*

# “Holding Fast” in Difficult Times

Do you remember when you sat behind the steering wheel of a car and you were actually going to drive out of the driveway and onto the street for the first time? Remember how excited you were and how terrified you were, also?

How about the first time you were going to fly on an airplane? You were so happy to fly and go on a trip to a new place, but utterly terrified to actually FLY in the sky.

How about the first time you went somewhere by yourself and you had no idea where you were going? Do you remember being completely filled with terror at not knowing if you were going to go to the right place? What if you got lost? What would you do? Who would help you?

All of these things have one thing in common. “Not knowing” and with “not knowing” comes its own kind of terror. It is so scary when we have no idea about what is going to happen. Why? Because we lack experience. But once we do these things, we know what to expect so, we do them again, without hesitation. This is because knowing what will happen brings

confidence and takes away fear. It brings peace.

In the times that we are living in now, there are many uncertainties, many “firsts” that we all have been faced with. We have to fix the “I have no idea how to handle this situation” type problems that seem to be staring us all in the face. Many people have lost loved ones, are lonely, depressed, or just sick of dealing with this “new world” that we have been thrust into. As you look around, there is really no peace around us. But is that where peace comes from? The world? Really, all we can expect from the world is unfairness, uncertainty, and death, not peace. I believe it is in times like these that we have to turn to Jesus and realize that He is the one that gives us peace in troubled times. He has given us hope and reassurance that He is always there for us. It is a permanent hope, a guaranteed hope, an eternal hope that brings with it, peace.

Jesus encourages us to keep our hearts from fear and despair. Yes, I know, it is impossible not to

Peace I leave with you,  
My peace I give to you;  
not as the world gives do I give to you  
Let not your heart be troubled,  
neither let it be afraid.  
*John 14:27*

feel these things, because we are human. He does want us to acknowledge our suffering, but in our suffering, trust Him because He will always keep His promises. He has told us so many times what He will do for us. If we “hold fast” in difficult times, He will hold us in the palm of His hand and, He will give us, His peace.

I hope and pray that if you have troubles weighing heavy on your heart and in your spirit that you will listen to what Jesus says in John 14:27 and seek Him in prayer. He says “*Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*” Blessings,  
*Melody Burkhart*  
Children’s Sunday School Director

*Maybe God is speaking to you about helping teach young lives about Jesus! It has never been easier to prepare! The materials are excellent and “Sunday Morning ready” for you to dig in with your class. Send me an email at [mellyab@icloud.com](mailto:mellyab@icloud.com).*

## Church Work Day

### All Church Work Day at Grand Ave

Thursday, October 14  
8:30 a.m. to Noon

Help us with painting, weeding, trimming low tree branches, trimming bushes away from fascia boards, cutting back dead Iris flowers, gate repair, drip line and sprinkler repair, and interior cleaning. There will be something for everyone's talents and ability level to participate. Please plan on attending and helping us maintain our campus. Contact Ray Holdsworth with questions 202-9010. Thank you.



**Sunday  
Worship Services**  
Grand Ave • 9:30 a.m.  
First UMC • 11:00 a.m.

**Children’s  
Sunday School  
at Both Services!**

# From Now to Thanksgiving ... and Beyond

By Judy Lowery

**Did** you know that from Tuesday, August 17 to Thanksgiving, there were exactly 100 days? Now, if you're like me, Thanksgiving seems really far off. But when I heard that it was one hundred days away, it didn't seem so far in the distance.

Am I ready for the holiday season? Are you kidding? I'm trying to get hold of the idea that summer is almost over and that school has already started in many parts of the country.

Some of Al's friends who support each other in their effort to stay physically fit decided to start a 100-day challenge on that Tuesday. It was up to each individual to decide what his/her goal would be; however, the key was to do something specific every day until Thanksgiving Day.

Their goals were as varied as each unique personality in the group but they all involved improving in some area. One person decided to do push-ups to improve upper body strength; another committed to stretching exercises every morning and a third friend set a goal of reading her Bible every day.

Al set a goal to ride his bike the distance from our house to Copper Harbor, a small coastal town on Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, some 589 miles north. He figured it would average out to about six miles a day. Always up for challenges, he rode 88 miles the first week!

Concentrating on one blessing from God every day seemed to be a good way for me to be in the proper mindset for Thanksgiving, with a positive attitude and my focus where it should be—on God. I started on Saturday, August 14 a few days early. We had to miss a highly anticipated 22-mile bike ride that morning due to an extended

*"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air."*

*1 Corinthians 9:24-26 NIV*

power outage. What would be the blessing for the day? The gift of Life! We could participate in the ride another time...at least we were alive and well!

On the August 15, it was the gift of Light! The power had been restored at 11:30 p.m. the night before and we were finally able to get our car and bikes out of the garage! Hallelujah! And the gift of Love was the focus on the August 16. Love just seemed to naturally follow Light!

Tuesday, August 17 was the official starting day for the group and it seemed fitting to spend time thanking God for Peace, for the promise of establishing peace on earth through Jesus Christ in the future as well as praying for the people of Afghanistan in their time of dire circumstances.

Day five was gratitude for the gift of Jesus, who not only will return to usher in a whole new world where peace and love reign, but who also shows us the way to have peace with God moment by moment.

Subsequent days have been filled with praises ranging from the gifts of husband Al to God's Word to family, not in any particular order but coming to mind spontaneously each morning. My 100-day challenge is already bringing much joy! Now I can hardly wait till Thanksgiving! Come to think about it, praising God daily is a goal that can continue indefinitely.

The apostle Paul had his heart

and mind set on being a faithful follower of Christ and spent much of his life encouraging others to do the same. His wasn't a 100-day challenge, but rather a lifelong commitment.

Whether it's training the body to be in top shape, the mind to think good thoughts and the tongue to speak them, the heart to love others rather than to judge, the soul to praise God for His goodness toward us or maybe all of the above, setting specific goals is crucial to positive personal development. As we pray for guidance and seek God for his strength, He will certainly enable us to do just that.

*Help us, Lord, in our commitment to follow You. May You receive all of the glory now and forever, Amen.*



Start a  
**Thanksgiving Challenge**  
today with the remaining days  
until November 25. Consider a  
prayer goal, an exercise goal or a  
Bible reading goal and Give  
Thanks to God!

# October 2021 Prayer Calendar

**Friday, October 1** - Pray for the start of a new month and take a moment to thank God for the Fall season.

**Saturday, October 2** - Pray for the Clothing Closet at FUMC.

**Sunday, October 3** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, October 4** - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they plan Fall activities and lessons for the youth and children of our churches.

**Tuesday, October 5** - Pray and reflect on Bible Verse Philippians 4:7 *"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

**Wednesday, October 6** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, October 7** - Pray for all the ones involved in the Prayer Groups in our churches.

**Friday, October 8** - Pray for our community of Porterville.

**Saturday, October 9** - Pray for all the committee members of our churches.

**Sunday, October 10** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, October 11** - Pray and remember 1 Corinthians 1:3-4 *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

**Tuesday, October 12** - Pray for our church families.

**Wednesday, October 13** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, October 14** - Please pray for the **Charge Conference at 5:30 p.m.** in Fellowship Hall at GAUMC. FUMC, Vida Nueva UMC and GAUMC will join for this meeting led by our new District Superintendent Rev. David L. Niu.

Also pray for the Goodwin family as they celebrate the life of Mary-Jo.

**Friday, October 15** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares his sermon for Sunday Worship Services.

**Saturday, October 16** - Pray for the Sunday Worship Greeters who will welcome all to tomorrow Worship services.

**Sunday, October 17** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, October 18** - Pray that God will be with us as we go through the week with all of our different activities and situations.

**Tuesday, October 19** - Pray for strength and healing for those in our church who are ill, going to have a procedure and who are in rehabilitation.

**Wednesday, October 20** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, October 21** - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

**Friday, October 22** - Pray and reflect on what Jesus said to His Disciples in John 14:1 *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."*

**Saturday, October 23** - Pray and ask God how you can be of service to others.

**Sunday, October 24** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, October 25** - Pray and remember this verse from Psalm 28:7 *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him."*

**Tuesday, October 26** - Pray for encouragement, strength and compassion for Pastor Tom as he manages the affairs of our churches.

**Wednesday, October 27** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, October 28** - Pray and read Deuteronomy 31:8 *"The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*

**Friday, October 29** - Pray that we can have a transforming relationship with God. Also pray for the Lowery family as they celebrate the life of Marge Lowery.

**Saturday, October 30** - Pray and reflect on Micah 7:8 *"Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light."*

**Sunday, October 31** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.



## Combined Worship Services

**December 19**  
10:00 a.m. at First

**December 24**  
4:00 p.m. at First

**December 26**  
10:00 a.m. at Grand

**January 2**  
10:00 a.m. at Grand



# OCTOBER

## Birthdays

### **First UMC**

Joy Semple • October 16  
 Danny Burkhart • October 17  
 Tamara Mitchell • October 22  
 Ellen Lohneiss • October 29

### **Grand Ave UMC**

Lenora Rodarte • October 5  
 Charles Nevels • October 7  
 Linda Brown • October 9  
 Kathy Bartlett • October 20  
 Mike Wait • October 20  
 Gordon Young • October 26  
 Raymond Lipumano • October 28



**We will gather for a Memorial Service to honor the life of Mary-Jo Goodwin.**

*October 14, 2021 at 12:00 p.m.*

*Myers Funeral Home*

*248 North E Street, Porterville, CA 93257*

### **Graveside Service**

Friday, October 29, 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

At Lindsay Cemetery to celebrate the life of **Marge Lowery**.

[www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC](http://www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC)  
[www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC](http://www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC)

### **Grand Ave Staff**

**Senior Pastor** • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Director of Youth Ministries** • *Ryan Ridenour*  
**Children's Director** • *Melody Burkhart*  
**Worship Administrator** • *Judy Buratovich*  
**Treasurer** • *Rodel Lipumano*  
**Custodian** • *The Congregation*

### **Grand Ave Office Hours:**

**Monday–Thursday**  
 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-3791

**Fax:** 559-784-3798

**info@grandavenue.org**

**www.grandavenue.org**

*Grand Ave United Methodist Church  
 776 W. Grand Ave.  
 Porterville, CA 93257*

# Announcements

## **Charge Conference—October 14**

The annual Charge Conference is **Thursday, October 14 at 5:30 p.m.** in the Fellowship Hall at Grand Ave. First UMC, Vida Nueva UMC and Grand Ave UMC will join together for this meeting led by our new District Superintendent **Rev. David L. Niu**.

## **Thank You**

Thank You to all who helped with the First Church Estate Sale.

## **Church Planning Questions**

Help us plan for future ministry! Visit our website [www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org) and click on the *Church Planning Questions* box. There are questions that will help us explore future ministry opportunities at both First and Grand Ave Churches. Please plan to fill out these questions in this week.

## **Tithes and Offering**

Please continue to support your church through tithes and offerings in the fall months. Thank you.

## **Clothing Closet at First**

FUMC will open their **Clothing Closet** on Saturday, October 2 at 8:00 a.m. All items are free. We have many new items for children and adults. Contact Ann 559-920-0977 for more information.

## **Wednesday Online Bible Study**

The Online Bible Study meets 10:00 a.m. each Wednesday. All are welcome to join us. Contact Pastor Tom for a link to the zoom online meeting, [buratovich@gmail.com](mailto:buratovich@gmail.com).

### **First Staff**

**Senior Pastor** • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Counseling Center Director** • *Joy Semple*  
**Administrative Assistant** • *Melissa Sutherland*  
**Music Coordinator** • *Christine Klippenstein*  
**Children/Custodian** • *Melody Burkhart*

### **First Methodist Office Hours:**

**Monday–Thursday**  
 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-4232

**pvfumc@ocsnet.net**

*First United Methodist Church  
 344 E. Morton Ave.  
 Porterville, CA 93257*