

# Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave  
United Methodist Churches  
Porterville, CA

December 2020

## O Come Thou Wisdom ...

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

*O come,  
Thou Wisdom from on high,  
And order all things,  
far and nigh ...*

Christmas time represents many different streams of thought for me. In November and December I celebrate my parents' birthdays which makes me thankful for them and yet miss them. Thanksgiving inspires me to gratitude and thankfulness and helps me focus on what God has given me and how to deploy my resources in a way that honors Christ and spreads His kingdom. The birth of Christ represents the miracle of the incarnation, that God is with us in all his human weakness and divine wisdom and power.

I, like you, are probably thankful but tired. Thankful for our church, that we can gather and sing praises to God. But tired of the pandemic, of wearing masks, of adhering to protocols, of not greeting people using physical contact, of obsessively checking statistics only to be disheartened, of washing our hands into a chap, cracked calloused lump. I am thankful, but tired.

But the things we have learned that make us tired we will treasure forever. We have learned that our hope is not in any of our possessions, in the size of our bank

account, in our health, in a vaccine, but only in knowing Jesus. We have learned that Christ can strengthen us for things we had no idea existed but are now before us to accomplish. Some of you thought Zoom was something you did with your hands to imitate a plane flying through the sky. For many of you a song sheet was always a piece of paper, and a mask was something you wore on Halloween.

What a difference a year makes. Come thou Wisdom. We need some ordering. We need some prioritizing. We need some peace, joy, and hope.

I sit in my office, or my home, or walk around the church campus and slowly review the events of wonderful days. I have just finished a phone call from one of you and you tell me you are well, or that you struggle but still give praise to God. That is good news.

Wisdom has come.

I laugh with people whose lives have not been filled with many things about which to laugh. I finished a Zoom Bible study and the discovery we all encountered deeply blesses us. It makes being together a further blessing. Some families will get together in smaller groups this Thanksgiving. I reviewed Tulare county's COVID-19 numbers and I am shocked again. How did we get here? Wisdom has come, but many still seek. May God help us to help them find Wisdom.

The new year will give us an opportunity to ask Wisdom to come and help us reset, rejoice, reclaim, repent, revise, and revisit all we require. The denomination has postponed decisions they must act upon and can no longer delay. I pray and wait for that day.

I am thankful that we have a plan with which to move forward. I

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### **Outdoor Worship Service - Sundays at 10:00 a.m.**

Grand Ave and First meet together Sundays at 10:00 a.m. in the Courtyard of First UMC. Bring your own lawn chair, Bible and face covering. A video of the Outdoor Service is available by Sunday evenings on [www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org).



### **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

**Thursday, December 24 at 4:00 p.m.**

**In the Courtyard of First UMC**

# Youth Ministry

For many people in our world, the year of 2020 has been one that could not end fast enough. Over the past year we have witnessed the impact of a global pandemic, which brought with it fear and questions of the unknown, the loss of loved ones, and financial hardship for so many. Teachers, youth, and children have had to endure learning virtually, separated physically from their friends and students. Hospitalized patients and the ill had to face their struggles alone as visitors were not allowed in to visit. Travel plans were interrupted, and quarantining became all too familiar. We have also experienced civil unrest in many parts of our country and other places around the globe. At times, each day made us wonder what may happen next.

So, what is next? Christmas! That is right, the most wonderful time of the year is upon us and I am so excited! During all our struggles throughout 2020, this season, we are blessed to be reminded of the world-changing event that changed history forever: the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Over 2000 years ago there was another pandemic sweeping the land and making people sick. This pandemic ran rampant and mankind was desperate for a cure. The pandemic was sin. It separated man from God. We needed hope, truth, and forgiveness. The cure for this pandemic came in the form of a baby, born in a manger to a virgin. This baby brought with him Good News for all God's creation. The Good News of Jesus Christ has transformed our lives in many beautiful ways and paved the way for all to spend eternity with him.

Christmas has a powerful way of reminding us that there is so much more to our lives than what we may be experiencing in the

moment. Right now, we are experiencing a way of life that was foreign to many of us during last year at this time. Many of us have developed new habits in the hopes of keeping clean and safe. We do this and we do that and pray that our efforts will pay off in keeping the virus at bay. But, here's the problem: many of us have become so focused on the virus that we have taken the eyes of our hearts off of Jesus. Our focus has gone from focusing on peace, love, and joy, all attributes associated with Jesus when our focus is on him, to focusing on fear and the "What-ifs" of life. I have been guilty of this line of thinking. It has done me no good. Now, don't get me wrong, we should all strive to stay clean and

do our best to not contract or pass on the virus. But, we can't let the virus steal our focus from Jesus.

Join me this Christmas season in making a conscious effort in refocusing the eyes of our hearts on Jesus and his gift of love and life to each of us. Let us remember the miracle of a baby born to a virgin and how this baby grew up sinless, full of love for God's creation and ultimately gave his life for each one of us. May we be filled with awe and wonder as we ponder the love and majesty of Jesus our Lord this Christmas season.

God is Love,  
*Ryan Ridenour*

## O Come Thou Wisdom ... • [continued from page 1](#) by Pastor Tom Buratovich

I am thankful that flexibility has become an assumed value. I am thankful that we now see change as assumed and not resisted, though there is still the human part of us that naturally resists. We know in our hearts it is inevitable. Wisdom has come.

I am thankful because God is still on the throne, Jesus still loves me with an everlasting love. My future is secure eternally. My love will never be outmatched by His. I am thankful that I rejoice apart

from my circumstance because of these truths made evident by faith.

I am thankful that I get to celebrate gratitude with you, church. You have blessed me abundantly. Together we watch Wisdom come.

We are churches that exist to invite all into a transforming relationship with Jesus to serve God through our community. We will do this by making sure that character development is occurring regularly. To know Christ and depend on Him will change the way you live, spend your money, feel about things, and receive criticism. We want to be churches that emphasize that.

While the future does not have the clarity I would like it to have, I know the One who holds the future with perfect clarity. Because Wisdom has come and ordered all things we can rejoice – and rejoice I pray we do!



# The Story Has No Ending—Only Everlasting Life

There is nothing like reading a great story. Furthermore, how about a great series of books. You know, the ones where you learn so much about a character that you can actually start to believe that you are, best friends. The kind of character that makes you never want to put the book down or when you have to, you can't wait to get back to it just because, you have to know what happens next. Oh, the many adventures that you enjoy together, all from your comfy chair. I love those kinds of books. Don't you? The only problem is that they eventually end and you are never with your favorite character again for new adventures. You can only revisit the old ones.

Here we are, finally, in December. After a fun-filled eventful year that has never ceased to be full of surprises. Sort of like, those books we were talking about. Those never-a-dull-moment kind of books. I'm sure that all of us would have rather experienced this year reading about it from our comfy chair, while turning the pages of a book, instead of experiencing it first-hand. But through it all, we have had our favorite character right beside us, only in reverse rolls. Jesus. Actually, Jesus never stopped reading our books. He has never left us or put the book down, so to speak. He has been with us every step of the way. Ever vigilant of our wants and needs.

December is the time of year when we are all ready to revisit a wonderful story about Jesus. We open the story and begin, where Christmas began, with the birth of the Savior of the world. It is this time, when we get back to our roots and really think about Jesus and what Christmas signifies. Even the children are so involved in every aspect of The Christmas Story. We have Christmas Pageants and Nativities in celebration of this special event. There are time-honored traditions that we take part in each Christmas. We bring trees into our homes and decorate them with beautiful lights to remind us that

Jesus is the Light Of The World. We exchange gifts, eat candy canes, light Advent candles, hang wreaths, decorate our homes and take part in many other holiday traditions to celebrate Christmas. All of these traditions remind us of one story, Jesus's birth. Then after Christmas is over, we put away all of our lights and decorations and at the same time, we manage to put Jesus up on a shelf. Just like a book we have finished. The good news is, that we tend to forget, that the book is not finished. It keeps going, every day, that we live.

At Christmastime, we only look at one story, in the book of Jesus. It is the treasured story of a woman named Mary who was going to be married and from there, her life takes a total twist. She is told by an angel that she will have a baby, which doesn't settle very well with her fiancé. But the angel smooths everything over. Then, just before she gives birth, they have to go to Bethlehem to pay taxes, so she may have ridden a donkey there. After this, they cannot find anywhere to stay, so she must give birth to her baby in a stable, filled with animals. A star marks the sky, where the Baby lays in a manger. Shepherds are told of the birth by Angels, and they, like the Wise Men follow the Star to where Jesus is, only to find the King of Kings, in a manger. The Wise Men bring gifts to the newborn King. Such a beautiful story but only the beginning of it. You see, this story continues still today, because of the birth of the Savior.

In the many books, that make up the life of Jesus, there are many amazing stories of miracles that He performed, people He taught, children He held, and people he brought to God. But the most exciting, is how He willingly sacrificed everything, for us. He freely gave his life. The Lamb of God, was sacrificed on the cross, for



sinners. His body was broken and His precious blood was shed. All was given just to save us from our sins. That way we can have Everlasting Life, through him. After three days, He was resurrected and showed us that we too, can have this. The best gift ever! A gift given to every person who has ever or will ever walk the Earth. This is what Christmas is all about. A Savior, given to the world to deliver them from themselves.

So, Christmas is so much more than a manger, or a stable, or a woman, or a man, or angels and shepherds, a shining star, or Wise Men, Christmas trees and lights, candy canes and wreaths, gifts, or baking cookies. It's also about a cross, and a stone that was rolled away, a broken body and precious blood that was shed to pay the price for sinners, a Savior who's unfaltering love was so selfless that He would deliver us from ourselves and grant us the gift of Everlasting Life.

If it wasn't for that wonderful Christmas Day, a very long time ago, our stories would all end. But because of it, we will continue to live on after this life, with our Heavenly Father and Jesus in heaven. So, while we enjoy this Christmas season, I hope when January comes around and we are putting our Christmas decorations away that we remember the story doesn't end there. Don't put Jesus on a shelf with the rest of the books, until next Christmas. Keep walking, every day, with him because He is walking with us. He never puts us up on a shelf. He never has.

May God bless you during this Christmas Season,

*Melody Burkhart*

*“Live in harmony with one another.”*

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”*

Romans 12:16 & Romans 14:19 NIV

With the onset of winter and noticeably chillier weather, all of our summer clothes have been put away and replaced by jackets, long-sleeved shirts and sweatshirts. The Michigan motto is to always ‘layer up’ just in case the weather changes.

I had to come to a decision about several things that were in need of repair. Either get rid of them and buy new ones, or try to fix them. Not one, but four zippers had broken last winter—on a nice reversible vest, a reversible sweatshirt, an old ski jacket and a heavy-duty weatherproof rain parka that Al and I bought for a trip to Alaska thirty years ago.

As each zipper broke, I tried various tricks to fix it. When possible, a cut was made just above the place where the teeth had broken, putting the zipper puller back on track so that both sides would close, then sewing the two sides below the cut together, so that the zipper puller wouldn’t slide off the track when it reached the cut. This was just a temporary remedy though.

It was disappointing when the zipper on my warm ski jacket broke. Mom had given the jacket to me years ago, a bargain from a yard sale. I sewed the two sides of the zipper together by hand about halfway up from the bottom, so that the jacket had to be put on over my head, however that was not very practical. The hand stitching was taken out and some big safety pins were used instead; but cold air came through easily.

All four of these garments had seen a lot of wear and tear. Were they worth the time and effort to fix? They were great for wearing outside to walk the dogs especially in inclement weather but not nice enough to wear out in public.

Well, I finally decided to put my high-tech sewing machine to work and give it a try. Not that I had ever put a zipper in a reversible sweatshirt or replaced a heavy duty one on a ski jacket. But it couldn’t be much more complicated than putting a zipper in a dress or skirt, could it?

First, I ordered specialized jacket zippers of the required length online. Fifty dollars for the four zippers seemed outrageously expensive, but they could not be returned.

After they arrived in the mail, the real work began, with the ski jacket as my first project. Taking out the old zipper was harder than I had anticipated. Several evenings were spent ripping out rows of tiny stitching with an exacto knife while watching TV. It took extra caution in order not to slice the fabric or cut my finger.

The next step was to baste in the new zipper by hand, pushing a large needle through the heavy material with a thimble. I wondered if my sewing machine would even be able to handle the thick fabric, insulated with polyester.

When it was time for the actual sewing, for some reason my new machine just wouldn’t start. An “E 1” sign kept flashing on the

screen. It took some time looking through the manual to discover that “E 1” meant “error, put down the presser foot!” Woops! It had been raised to the highest point so that the thick jacket would slide under the needle.

After lowering the presser foot, I stepped on the starter pedal and carefully guided the needle along the zipper. It was the type of zipper that had to be separated at the bottom; so first one side was stitched and then the other.

Would the two sides mesh together when finished? What a great relief it was when I put on the jacket, connected the two sides and pulled the zipper to all the way to the top without any problem.

Just as the success in getting a zipper to work depends on its teeth meshing together perfectly, so the success in growing the kingdom of God depends on Christians living and working in harmony with one another as well as with those in the world around us. It takes dialogue, prayer and unconditional love—love that covers offenses, love that never gives up.

*“Dear friends, let us love one another...”* (1 John 4:7a NIV)

### ***Voice of Hope***

The First United Methodist Church of Birmingham & Berkley First campuses in MI, have a **Voice of Hope** phone line, with a new message taped each week. Judy Lowery records the message for the second week of each month. Each week’s message is inspiring. The phone number to call is 248-646-6407 and press 2 for the **Voice of Hope**.

For more information, please visit [www.goodnewswithjudy.blogspot.com](http://www.goodnewswithjudy.blogspot.com)

# December 2020 Prayer Calendar

**Tuesday, December 1** - Pray for this Advent 'Coming' season. As we celebrate Jesus coming into this world. The Advent wreath where the candles are placed symbolizes God's infinite peace.

**Wednesday, December 2** - Pray for the Advent Bible Study at 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. Contact Pastor Tom to join.

**Thursday, December 3** - Pray for our church family today, for courage, hope, and endurance.

**Friday, December 4** - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Service.

**Saturday, December 5** - Pray for the Clothing Closet at 10:00 a.m. at FUMC and Sack Lunch (GAUMC) at 12:00 p.m.

**Sunday, December 6** - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at FUMC at 10:00 a.m. Please wear a mask and bring a lawn chair. Pray for the second week of Advent when a candle is lit for "Peace".

**Monday, December 7** - Pray for Ryan as he works with youth and Melody as she works on the Children's Church Video.

**Tuesday, December 8** - Pray for the GAUMC Finance Committee

**Wednesday, December 9** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. If you would like to join in, please contact Pastor Tom.

**Thursday, December 10** - Pray for the ones who are ill or who are rehabilitating. Pray for healing and strength.

**Friday, December 11** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for this Sunday's Worship Service.

**Saturday, December 12** - Pray for the ones from FUMC who set up for the Outdoor Worship Service

**Sunday, December 13** - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. Please wear a mask and bring a

lawn chair. Pray for the third week of Advent when we light the candle for "Joy".

**Monday, December 14** - Pray and reflect on John 1:9-10. *"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him."*

**Tuesday, December 15** - Pray for the ladies in Linda Circle, & UMW.

**Wednesday, December 16** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. If you would like to join in, please contact Pastor Tom.

**Thursday, December 17** - Pray for GAUMC and FUMC Trustees Committees.

**Friday, December 18** - Pray for our community of Porterville, for the homeless, city leaders, and First Responders.

**Saturday, December 19** - Pray for the ones who set up for the Outdoor Worship Service tomorrow.

**Sunday, December 20** - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at FUMC at 10:00 a.m. Please wear a mask and bring a lawn chair. Pray for the fourth week of Advent when a candle is lit for "Love".

**Monday, December 21** - Pray for the ones who will travel this week. Pray that they may stay safe and healthy.

*And they went with haste  
and found **Mary**  
and **Joseph,**  
and **the baby**  
lying in a manger.*



**Tuesday, December 22** - Pray and reflect on this Bible verse *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."* Isaiah 40:29.

**Wednesday, December 23** - Prayerfully meditate on this verse *"For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe."*

**Thursday, December 24** - Pray for the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 4:00 p.m. in the FUMC Courtyard. *"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* Luke 2:10

**Friday, December 25** - On this Christmas Day, let us be thankful to God, for giving us the greatest gift of all. *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."* Luke 2:11.

**Saturday, December 26** - Pray and reflect on John 8:12 *"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world, Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"*

**Sunday, December 27** - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service at 10:00 a.m. at FUMC. Wear a face covering and bring a lawn chair.

**Monday, December 28** - Pray and give thanks for all your blessings.

**Tuesday, December 29** - Pray and thank God for His mercy and His Grace.

**Wednesday, December 30** - Pray and reflect on Psalm 119:105 *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."*

**Thursday, December 31** - Pray as we approach a new year that we will remember *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* Lamentations 3:22-23.

# Announcements

## First United Methodist Church Grand Ave United Methodist Church

*Weekday Meetings are via Computer Connection*

**Grand Ave and First UMC will meet together for an Outdoor Worship Service Sundays at 10:00 a.m. in the Courtyard of First UMC (344 E Morton Ave)**

[www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org) or

[www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC](https://www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC) or

[www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC](https://www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC)

### Happy Birthday!

#### First UMC

Robert Keck • December 4

Sandi Pike • December 5

Carly Ladrigan • December 20

Joy Leah Leach • December 26

Rev. Don Roulsten • December 29

Ethan Burkhart • December 29

#### Grand Ave UMC

Jan Geiling • December 4

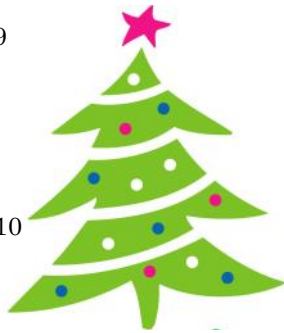
Amanda Ridenour • December 5

Fernando Gutierrez • December 10

Elizabeth Gill • December 15

Sally Howen • December 17

John White • December 31



### Year End Giving

Please remember your church as you plan your year-end giving. Help us change our community! Please have gifts in the offering plate by Sunday, December 27 to receive giving credit for 2020. Thank you for any gifts you are able to give.

### Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at [judy.bur87@gmail.com](mailto:judy.bur87@gmail.com). The deadline for the January 2021 Messenger is **December 18**. Thank you.

#### Grand Ave Staff

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

#### First Staff

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

#### 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

#### 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

### Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

This year our Christmas Eve Service will be outside in the Courtyard of First UMC at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 24. Please bring your own chair and face covering.

### Wednesday Morning Zoom Bible Study

All are welcome to join Pastor Tom on Wednesday morning 10:00 –11:30 a.m. for an online Bible study via zoom. Please email Pastor Tom for the zoom link information, [tburatovich@gmail.com](mailto:tburatovich@gmail.com).

### Thank You

The Trustees would like to thank the following people for their help with our All Church Workday on October 17: Tom, Judy and Jason Buratovich, Jack Egorov, Ray Rodarte, and Patricia Holdsworth. We are grateful for your help. *Ray Holdsworth*, Trustee Chairman

### Clothes for the Needy

The First Methodist **Clothing Closet** is open on the first Saturday of every month. We are open December 5 at 10:00 a.m. for those in need. Greeters and volunteers are welcome to help distribute and engage visitors. Social distancing and face coverings are required.

### Christmas Turkeys

We are collecting turkeys to give out to those in need during the Christmas season. Please consider donating a frozen turkey to the office at Grand Avenue in the next few weeks. For more information, please contact Pastor Tom.