

# Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave  
United Methodist Churches  
Porterville, CA

**Surprised by Faithfulness**

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

**September 2022**

***“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?” Matthew 24:45***

It had been a long time. I hadn't heard from anyone in the school system in over two years. No doubt, they were all dealing with the enormous rearranging effects of the pandemic. And it's not like I didn't have anything else to do myself. It's no mystery to anyone here that the pandemic has made being the church very challenging. We have a population that eschews social gathering. We still titter on the edge of the hyper-sanitized, germophobic, continuum of not wanting to get sick, or not wanting to get back into the social fray just yet. We're not exactly sure when we will venture out of our shop-online-barely-talk-to-anyone cocoons. But we pray it will be soon.

So, you can imagine how thrilled my soul was when a colleague from Porterville Unified School District, now at the Burton District invited me to come as her guest to the SARB training (School Attendance Review Board).

I was optimistically cautious because training officials usually invite many other community leaders who help support the school system's mission to this training. So, you can imagine my surprise

when I was introduced at the training as the only outside guest!

The trainer spent the first few seconds telling everyone how helpful I was in SARB meetings at her last assignment. She was so glad that I had accepted her invitation and was in attendance.

I was deeply humbled. She asked me to introduce myself which I did. I gave the shortest, encapsulated version of myself I knew to give. I sat down still a bit mystified at such a gracious introduction.

I was asked during the training to give input in a few select instances on how meeting procedures could be reworded and reworked to feel more positive to families attending the hearings. These are previous conversations I had with the trainer that I had long forgotten about. But she had remembered them. She thought I could make a difference. At that moment she had more faith in me that I did.

After the training she greeted me and introduced me to several colleagues. I left feeling like I had just attended a surprise party - for me. I sat in the car for a moment overwhelmed with how grateful I was. However, I wasn't exactly sure for what I was grateful.

As I have thought about that experience that is exactly the kind of feeling we have when it is God's faithfulness that has surprised us.

God kept me going to some not very exciting SARB meetings. Most weeks I was sure I was wasting time that I never had enough of.

I kept going because I was waiting for that one opportunity to make a difference, to say something that would spark a parent or child and help them get back on their horse and go to school, to help them move a little closer to the success we all wanted for them.

I was walking the walk of faithfulness. However, it was not my faithfulness. I never went for the sole purpose of impressing anyone or leaving an impression. However, because God was at work behind the scenes and always is, an impression was made, an impact that endured the test of passing into memory and recalled after moving to another district in the mind of this young assistant principal now in charge of the whole SARB process. She remembered me. But, she didn't really remember me. Rather, it was God's faithfulness. God was working through me, and I never even knew it. I was surprised. Surprised by God's faithfulness.

So, who is the faithful and wise servant? Well, it's not me because I would have seen that working. But I did not have to for God to work. I only needed to practice faithfulness

*Continued on Page 2*

***“Yet to those who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-”***

***John 1:12***

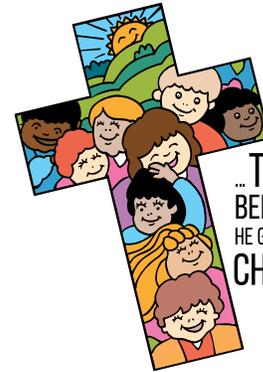
Last month in my messenger article I wrote about the importance of setting goals. And for our youth group, we focused on setting goals focusing on three areas of our lives. These areas are school, home, and church, discovering what we can do in these different areas of our lives that will bring us closer to Jesus and bless those around us. For the month of August our youth group during Sunday school has been hard at work setting up their personal goals. It has been wonderful to witness how the youth come up with their own goals and how unique each goal is to each student. This has been a great process and I'm really proud of our youth for making the effort to make these goals. For our youth and many adults alike, one area that has an effect on goal making and achieving their goal is identity.

One area in our lives that we often overlook is our identity. When we know our identity, it has the power to change our goals in life. To discover our identity, it is helpful to ask ourselves questions such as: who am I? what is my purpose? The true answer to these questions revolves around your relationship with Jesus. Do you view Jesus as simply a great teacher? Was Jesus simply a great man who did wonderful things while he was alive? Or is Jesus so much more than that? Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God? When we answer these questions honestly in our hearts it reveals to us our true identity.

Jesus spoke about humans being so much more than the clothes we wear or the food we eat. I

believe that Jesus really wants us to understand that life is more than what we see on the outside or what title we have next to our name. I believe that Jesus wants us to understand that our identity is revealed in our relationship with him. In the gospel of John, it tells us that those who receive Jesus and believe in his name were given the right to become children of God. This is absolutely amazing! If you pay close attention to the text, you come to understand that a person's identity changes depending upon their relationship with Jesus. When you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life you are now His. You are no longer just the high school student who plays water polo or volleyball, nor are you the student who struggles with math and has a hard time fitting in; you are so much more. You are a child of God!

When you understand that you are a child of God, your goals in life begin to change. One of your goals may be to play sports. This is a fun goal. Many high schoolers and junior high students love playing sports and being on teams and it's a great way to make friends. Now that you know you are a child of God, now your goal



**... TO THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.**  
JOHN 1:12, NIV

may go from being a star player to glorifying God through how you play the game and how you interact with your teammates and opponents. This can work in every area that you have set goals for yourself in. You don't have to be the star because you already are God's star.

It may take a while for you to comprehend the idea that you are a child of God, and we will continue to work on understanding our identity in Christ in Sunday School. In the meantime, I encourage you to pray asking God to reveal to you a mindset of understanding your true identity as a child of God. I will be praying for you as you embark on this journey. Blessings to each of you.

God is Love,  
*Ryan Ridenour*

## Surprised by Faithfulness continued from page 1 by Pastor Tom Buratovich

myself by walking in assurance that God was at work somehow, someway.

Sometimes church can be very mundane. Sometimes meetings seem mind numbingly irrelevant. Sometimes proposals are scary, strange, and we're not sure what all the hubbub is about. God is at work in more ways than you can imagine. Please give yourself to that truth and you will be surprised by God's faithfulness, surprised at the divine activity behind the curtain of your awareness. Keep walking good and faithful servant!



# A God of Promise

In Children's Sunday School, we have just finished learning about Moses and the Israelites. These stories really show that no matter what happens, when God promises something; He keeps His word. He does not forget His promises. In all honesty, when I think about all the trouble God put up with from the Israelites, I would think He would have said to the them, "All bets are off! I'm done with you guys." Instead, His provisions and unfailing love are always present.

The amazing thing to me is that the Israelites saw many miracles, but they still lost their faith many times. For example, Moses saw a burning bush that did not burn and God speaking to him from it. God told him to go to Egypt and free the Israelites. Moses said "No." That is mind blowing! Moses is seeing a miracle right in front of him and God is talking to him and he says, "No" to God. Then, God asks him again to go and Moses says, "No" because of his stuttering problem. Amazing! After God reassures him, Moses does go back to Egypt and frees the Israelites.

Next, the ten plagues of Egypt. These are all miracles God performed in order for the Pharaoh to release the Israelites. The last one being the death of every first born child of each household, except for the Israelites homes that were marked with lamb's blood over their doors. This is a miracle that they do not forget, because God has them celebrate Passover in the wilderness. Yet, they do, sort of, forget the Passover Miracle because their faith waivers. They complain and are ungrateful off and on all through the wilderness.

After God parts the Red Sea, so they can escape from the Pharaoh, they again forget this amazing

miracle and start complaining, when they are in the wilderness, that they are going to starve and that they have no water. They blame Moses for bringing them to the wilderness to die. Wow! Even after seeing these miracles, their faith wavered. Again, God just keeps on moving steady in their lives, as always, and gives them food and water. He provides enough food for them to eat every day.

Still, when Moses goes to the mountain to talk with God and brings back The Ten Commandments, the Israelites want to construct a God to worship. What? They already have a God. But again their faith fails. They need to worship a golden calf. This will surely help their situation. Well, after the wrath of Moses they realize this wasn't a good idea at all. Though, through it all, God still continues to provide for them and love them.

Another major event is when they get to the land of Canaan. God has been providing miracles all along and tells them that this is the Promised Land, but they have to fight for it. God says that He will be with them, as He has been all along. Again, they lose their faith. They decide not to take the land of Canaan and because of this, they have the pleasure of wandering for another 40 years in the wilderness.

In the wilderness, they continue off and on to lose their faith as does Moses once again. The Israelites are complaining again and God tells Moses that to get water out of the rock, Moses needs to speak to the rock in front of the Israelites. Instead he hits the rock twice with his staff. Thus, disobeying God.

Summing all of this up, even though this all sounds so depressing, it is not. I think it is cause for us to rejoice. As we go through hardships in our lives and sometimes we stumble and fall and lose our faith; we can rest easy knowing that our Heavenly Father is a God that does not forsake us. His love is unfailing. He will never forget us. He is a God of forgiveness and second chances. He does not promise things and not follow through. His word, His promises, are given to us to comfort us, in the knowledge that He will keep His promises. Even though we lose our faith; He never loses His faith in us or in Himself. He knows who He is. He is "I Am". The deliverer of His people, the God of fulfilled promises.

The Bible is full of God's promises. In Deuteronomy 31:8 it reads, "*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.*"

See, having faith in His promises is not up to our Heavenly Father. He has already told us what He is all about. It's up to us. We just have to choose to keep our faith. More good news: He helps us with that too!

Blessings,  
Melody Burkhart  
Children's Sunday School

← BE STRONG →  
and  
COURAGEOUS →  
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,  
for the Lord your God  
will be with you wherever  
you go

# To Poland with the Celebrant Singers

By Judy Lowery

*“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.’”* John 12:23-24 NIV

After the shock of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many people felt a great burden for the Ukrainian people and wondered how they could help. The images on the news of family members saying good-bye to each other at train stations as fathers and sons stayed behind to fight in the war were heart breaking. And the exodus of people leaving the country was unimaginable, over ten million of them, mostly women and children.

With compassion for the Ukrainian refugees as well as for the people who have taken them in, the Celebrant Singers under the direction of Jon Stemkoski, planned an outreach to Poland this summer, “Operation Poland.” The Celebrant Singers is a contemporary music and missions ministry based out of Visalia, California.

It was fitting that Jon travel with the team to Poland because it was in that country where he first felt God’s call to take the message of Christ around the world. In 1975, Jon started the Celebrant Singers ministry, recruiting teams of musicians and vocalists to give concerts, pray with people and share the Good News of Jesus.

Also traveling with the team were Pastor Tom Buratovich and his son Jason. Tom, who is currently the pastor of two churches in Porterville, California has had a longstanding friendship with Jon Stemkoski and in 2016 went with a Celebrants team to Greece.

Pastor Tom was the assistant director for Operation Poland, overseeing the setup of the equipment at each venue, taking

over for Jon when necessary and participating as one of the singers. Jason was a percussionist, also helping by setting up the drums at each concert. This was Jason’s first time out of the country and his first time traveling with Celebrants.

When asked what his first impression was of Poland, Tom shared that it was beautiful in many ways. They crisscrossed through the small country by bus, passing fields of sunflowers and seeing the beauty of the land. The hearts and spirits of the Polish people also impressed Tom as being beautiful in the way they graciously received the Celebrants team—the same way the Ukrainian refugees were being received.

The people in the group came from California, Wisconsin, France and Poland. During a week of preparation and rehearsing in Visalia and then two weeks of traveling abroad, the group of about thirty folks fell “into a rhythm of cooperation, flexibility and following marching orders,” according to Pastor Tom.

Originally, his wife, Judy was going to join the team also, but had to stay home at the last minute. According to one of the Polish members of the group who was dealing with a tough situation in her home, watching the loving, nurturing interaction between Tom and son Jason encouraged her greatly.

When Jason was asked to share his testimony during one of the concerts, he spoke about the value of the Bible, God’s love and

Jesus’ sacrifice for us. He liked talking to the audience and “at the very end, everyone loved my testimony.”

Something God impressed upon Pastor Tom was to thank the Polish people for demonstrating “radical hospitality” to the world by opening their doors to receive their Ukrainian neighbors. This he did at every opportunity.

Some of the pastors Tom met were carrying heavy burdens; some were exhausted from housing people in their churches. He was able to pray with many of them. Tom and the team also prayed with refugees at the concerts and listened to their stories...sad stories of separation from loved ones, of waiting to hear news from home and of leaving everything behind.

While speaking to a congregation during one concert, Pastor Tom used the illustration of sunflower seeds to convey a message of hope and encouragement. “We saw sunflowers everywhere,” he shared. “Veggies were even served with sunflower seeds!” He praised them for the seeds of kindness, love and good-will that they were sowing, and reminded them that the harvest was coming.

Think of the harvest of souls, of lives forever transformed because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. May we also be faithful in planting seeds, good seeds, in the lives of those around us. Thank you, Pastor Tom and Jason, for serving the Lord in Poland!



# September 2022 Prayer Calendar



**Thursday, September 1** - Pray for our church family.

**Friday, September 2** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 41:10 *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

**Saturday, September 3** - Pray for the Clothing Closet.

**Sunday, September 4** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services - GAUMC. 9:30 a.m.  
First UMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, September 5** - Pray for safe travels.

**Tuesday, September 6** - Pray for the children and youth of our churches.

**Wednesday, September 7** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. [Email Pastor Tom for a link at: tburatovich@gmail.com](mailto:tburatovich@gmail.com)

**Thursday, September 8** - Pray for our community.

**Friday, September 9** - Pray for the prayer groups of our churches.

**Saturday, September 10** - Pray for the Greeters of our churches as they welcome all to Sunday Worship Service.

**Sunday, September 11** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services - GAUMC. 9:30 a.m.  
First UMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, September 12** - Pray for the week ahead that we will remember God is with us as we deal with different situations.

**Tuesday, September 13** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Romans 8:28 *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

**Wednesday, September 14** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, September 15** - Pray for the ones who are ill or having procedures done. Pray for strength and healing.

**Friday, September 16** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his Sunday Worship sermon.

**Saturday, September 17** - Pray and read Bible verse Ephesians 2:10 *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

**Sunday, September 18** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services - GAUMC. 9:30 a.m.  
First UMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, September 19** - Pray and praise God for our many blessings!

**Tuesday, September 20** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Romans 15:13 *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

**Wednesday, September 21** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, September 22** - Pray for all of the members of the church committees.

**Friday, September 23** - Pray for the Praise Teams of our churches as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

**Saturday, September 24** - Pray and reflect on Ephesians 4:31-32 *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

**Sunday, September 25** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services - GAUMC. 9:30 a.m.  
First UMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, September 26** - Pray and reflect on John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

**Tuesday, September 27** - Pray and read Bible verse 1 Corinthians 15:10 *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."*

**Wednesday, September 28** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, September 29** - Pray and read Bible verse Psalm 30:5 *"For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."*

**Friday, September 30** - Pray and reflect on Matthew 11:28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

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



**First UMC**

Jo Ann Miske • September 11  
Ruth Brinkman • September 18  
Dorothy Sandberg • September 23

**Grand Ave UMC**

Pat Duboski • September 8  
Jackie Borges • September 15  
Barbara Means • September 20  
Shaughn Galloway • September 24

# Announcements

## **Clothing Closet at First UMC**

Clothing Closet is open on Saturday, September 3 8:30 –10:00 a.m. Call Ann 559-920-0977 for more information. Thanks to all who have made time to help.

## **Tithes and Offering**

Thank you for your continued support of the ministries of First UMC and Grand Ave UMC.

## **Next Newsletter Deadline**

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the October 2022 Messenger is **September 20**. Thank you.

## **Care Portal Training**

We proudly partner with Valley churches to help those in the Foster Care system either stay together or be reunited. Many of you have expressed an interest but remain on the edge of Care Portal involvement. We are hosting a training/refresher for those wishing to reacquaint themselves, and those who want to learn and gain access to the system to be more available.

**We will gather in the Fireside Room at Grand Ave UMC on Thursday, September 1, at 11:00 a.m.** to meet with the Care Portal coordinator of Tulare County. Please prayerfully consider joining us!

## **Children’s Books Needed for Church Library**

Grand Ave is expanding its library to include more children’s books. Donations of books you may have in your home are welcome. Contact Hope Overholt for further information.



## **First United Methodist Church Grand Ave United Methodist Church**

[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)  
**View Past Worship Videos on Vimeo**  
<https://vimeo.com/grandavenueporterville>

## **Church Offices Closed on Labor Day**

The church offices will be closed on Monday, September 5 in observance of Labor Day. Business resumes the following day.



### **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/Beverly Farquharson*  
**Custodian** • *The Congregation*

### **First Staff**

**Senior Pastor** • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Administrative Assistant** • *Melissa Sutherland*  
**Music Coordinator** • *Christine Klippenstein*  
**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**

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344 E. Morton Ave.  
Porterville, CA 93257*