



# *Messenger Newsletter*

## *First and Grand Ave*

### *United Methodist Churches*

#### *Porterville, CA*

#### *February 2021*

## **A Lenten Pandemic**

*by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

There is a disease among us, and we have a vaccine for it. There are issues with getting the vaccine. There is frustration and waiting in line while our patience wears thin.

I have described the well-worn path we have all walked for the better part of year. But now, we get to reevaluate it within the boundaries of our spiritual life. There is a disease that gives a shortness of breath and some barely notice it while others perish. The disease is sin. Some are stricken with guilt and shame. Others go on with their lives hardly noticing anything wrong. We have a vaccine. It is the blood of Jesus whose sacrifice is a cure for the disease and a deep drink from eternity's fountain.

As we approach the season of Lent, let me define it. Lent is a period of 40 days before Easter, not including Sundays which are self-contained celebrations of the resurrection.

Why 40 days? Moses spent 40 days and nights on Mount Sinai receiving the law. The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness one year for every day Moses spent lying prostrate before the Lord asking God not to destroy them. Elijah spent 40 days and nights fasting as he traveled to the mountain of God. Jesus fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness before the devil tempted him.

To mimic this rhythm the early church put new Christians through a 40-day preparation period to prepare for baptism. They were taught about the Christian faith and shown the wonders of God. On Easter Sunday they entered the baptismal waters "being buried in death" as they were submerged in the waters and raised to new life as they emerged new creatures.

For those of you who have not experienced baptism, I encourage you to use the season of Lent to explore that. For baptized believers, it is a time to reconnect with the challenge of growing in faith, grace, and power.

I grew up as a Catholic boy annually constrained to give up meat on Fridays during Lent. So, beyond the fish fries and vegetarian pizza, there was little connection to my development as a growing child of God. However, in the last 20 years I have seen a richness to the season of Lent yielding many opportunities to grow spiritually. Part of the means of this growth has been through

denial. Let me explain.

Our lives are so full of distractions, it becomes crucial to our spiritual growth to intentionally eliminate the competing voices that clamor for our attention so that the whisper of God can become the amplified shout. I am not talking about simply giving up chocolate. Let me give an example.

About 12 years ago I decided to give up hurrying for Lent. I know it sounds ridiculous but stay with me. I had to spend the first week discovering where hurry resided in my life. I found that to eliminate hurry I had to commit to "slowing." I drove in the slow lane, followed the garbage truck, the tractor, the tow truck. I got into the long line at the grocery store, the drive-through, and the appointment queue. I hated it. But, after several days it finally dawned on me how often I felt hurried. I was in a hurry and did not even realize I acted that way. In prayer, I asked God why I was in a hurry. While I did not hear an audible voice, I did get an

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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 chair, Bible and face covering. A video of the Outdoor Service is available by Sunday evenings on [www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org).



Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God.  
1 John 4:7

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8*

The month of February is finally here and with it we are blessed to celebrate some special days. On February 1, we celebrate “No Politics Day,” and I confess that sounds great to me. On February 4, we have “Stuffed Mushroom Day.” I am a big fan of mushrooms so this will be a great day. February 11 is “Make a Friend Day,” and this day reminds us that you can never have too many friends. Of all the fun and wacky special days in February, my favorite by far is Valentine’s Day.

Growing up from the age of kindergarten through grade school, I would wake each Valentine’s Day morning and find on the kitchen table a bag of treats and a special card from my mom. In the card my mom would tell me how much she loves me and that I was her special Valentine. I would read the card which always made my Valentine’s Day special and fill my heart with joy and I would try to sneak a candy before breakfast, which did not always end well if I got caught.

Often people view Valentine’s Day only as a day of love for the romantic types. I like to view this special day as a time to be reminded of the life-changing power of love and how important love is in each of our lives. Each one of us seeks out love. Some try to find love through material goods, through their work, sports, hobbies, and human relationships just to name a few. I was blessed to grow up in a home where love was given freely between the family members. This helped guide my heart in the direction of love and painted a picture of what it

should look like. As a young adult I began searching for a love that had the power to change my life. Not romantic love or love that was associated with “things”. My heart desired something more everlasting, a love that was unshakeable, unchanging, and gave direction for my life. I found this love from God.

God in his very essence is love. He operates in love. All that God does is centered around love because his being is love. And He directs his love towards you and I and everyone in this world. When we learn of the love that God has for us, this can transform every facet of our lives if we allow it to. God’s love changed me and continues to work in my heart each

day. I am grateful for God’s love. His love resonates in our hearts and is so encompassing that we are drawn to share this love with all we encounter.

Each day, not only Valentine’s Day, we are presented with the opportunity to love. Be it a family member, a neighbor, or a stranger, each person desires love, and God has made you and them to be loved. I encourage each of you to fully accept the love God has for you and then share that love with those you are blessed to encounter. I pray each of you be blessed by God’s love today, tomorrow, and every day after.

*Ryan Ridenour*

## A Lenten Pandemic ... • [continued from page 1](#) *by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

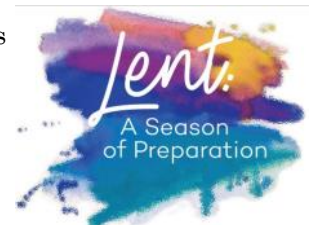
answer. “I do not know.” Neither God nor I knew why I was in a hurry. I was in a hurry with nothing to be hurried about!

As I probed deeper, I discovered that the source of my hurry — I thought my time was more important than anyone else’s. It was a source of pride. It was the sin of thinking I had better, more noble things to do than anybody else. I was wrong and I repented.

How likely would I have discovered that had I not eliminated hurry? How long would it have taken me to discover that to eliminate hurry I needed to practice slowing? I doubt it would have happened.

The season of Lent is before us. Should you give something up to gain a sharper focus on Jesus? Only you can answer that question honestly. I pray you will give serious thought to that question. Otherwise, you might miss all that God has for you. I have provided for us a Lenten devotion to use as a tool to guide us. You may find the devotion [www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org).

There is a disease, a potentially lethal virus. The good news is we have a cure, an eternal cure. You should take it.



# Why Be Still?

Have you ever had this type of scenario happen? You have somewhere you need to be in 20 minutes but you just happen to be driving past Target, and you remember that you need to pick up something from there. An item that you need for later that evening but won't have enough time to come and get it. Just one simple item, but a very important one. You evaluate it. Should I or shouldn't I stop. You decide that you have just enough time to stop. It will be easy to just run in really quick, pick it up and make it to your appointment on time. So you do.

You hurry into the store, grab your item and book it to the registers. Quickly, you survey the lines for the shortest one but all of them are long. So, you just pick whichever line seems to be the shortest one. There you stand, STUCK. Trapped. At the mercy of the cashier.

You look at your watch. Ok, you're fine. You have 12 minutes left. Then you start evaluating how much time you need to get to your destination. Saying things like "If I can get checked out in 2 minutes, I will still have 10 minutes to get to my appointment. It's going to work out fine." So, you stand there, waiting and after a minute or two, you realize that this line is going, nowhere. Now you start getting impatient, upset, and frazzled. Shifting your weight back and forth on your feet, muttering under your breath, and looking around at the other lines to see if they are moving faster. Those things don't help you so, you try to scoot closer to the person in line in front of you, in hopes of getting checked out faster.

Just try "being still" in that kind of situation. Nearly impossible! But in all actuality, that is exactly what we need to do. There is nothing that we can do that will get us out of the store with our item any faster. We

are now in a "waiting period".

There are so many different times in our lives when we have to go through those "waiting periods". Where it seems like nothing is happening or what we want is not happening.

By nature, we are "fixers" and always want to fix whatever situation comes at us. We like to take charge. When we do this, we are forgetting that that is what God does, not us.

In these "waiting periods" God is working behind the scenes to fix our situations. After all, we only have a piece of the puzzle. God is the only one who knows what the whole puzzle looks like. But we believe, that we know what should happen so, we try to fix it. Though, sometimes, what we want, is not supposed to happen. This is a frustrating thought. Does this mean that we shouldn't do anything? No, it doesn't. These are the times, according to Psalm 46:10, when we should do as the verse says. "Be still and know that I am God".

In this realization, we must surrender our "I will fix this situation" attitude and be calm and at peace. Accepting that God is in charge and He has got this situation. He didn't need us there to "fix it" when He created the Heavens and the Earth or when He separated the light from the dark. So, He can handle ALL of our situations without us intervening. Then, what are we supposed to do? Just be still. Really? Why be still? Being still, goes against our very instinct.

If we look at the instruction to "be still" in Hebrew, it means to let go, stop striving, slacken and let drop. So, the call is to surrender. Though, it does not mean to just give up and do nothing. In that case, then what can we do? Well, we can refocus our energy and put



our all into the following.

1. *We can worship. For example, when we worship in song, we can not worry.*
2. *We can pray. Praying develops our relationship with our Heavenly Father.*
3. *We can remember. God has a flawless record of faithfulness.*
4. *We can give gratitude to God for all that He has done for us. Count our blessings.*
5. *We can watch. Actually, see what God does for us on a daily bases and wait for His wonderful blessings to unfold, as He works out His plan for us.*

All the while, when we are embracing "being still," we are developing our spiritual strength which is what God needs us to be doing. Not only during the "waiting periods" that we go through in life but every day, we need to practice being still, so that we may know that He is God.

May God bless you to the fullest,  
*Melody Burkhart*

Children's Sunday School

**Please join me every Sunday online for Children's Sunday School.**

## ***Sunday School Online***

Join Melody online for Children's Sunday School every Sunday morning at [www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org)



**See you on Sunday!**

*“Ask, and it will be given to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find. The door will be opened to the one who knocks. Suppose your son asks for bread. Which of you will give him a stone? Or suppose he asks for a fish. Which of you will give him a snake? Even though you are evil, you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! In everything, do to others what you would want them to do to you. This is what is written in the Law and in the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:7-12 NIVR)*

Although she was the child of a pastor, Anika-Kafi Summers initially had no intention of becoming one herself. Her father, a Methodist minister, served in several churches around the state of Ohio while she was growing up. This necessitated many moves from one city to another for their family.

According to Anika, “being a preacher’s kid was not always easy. Meeting a wide set of family and church family expectations, moving to new locations and transitioning during difficult academic years shaped my life.”

When she was in the second grade, her father was assigned to the Clifton Church in Cincinnati. Theirs was the first black family in an all-white congregation. She has good memories of the time spent there: beautiful Tiffany-stained glass windows in the sanctuary, friendly church members and the parsonage so close to the church building that she could look out the kitchen window and wave to her dad as he sat in his office.

Anika attended a nearby school and made friends with a girl who lived a block away. It was difficult when they were moved to Toledo and from there to Columbus before she could complete her senior year in high school. At that point, she wanted nothing to do with “church.” Too much disruption and disappointment.

After graduation, she had several part-time jobs, then went on to get her Master of Education degree in student personnel and higher education. The country was in the throes of an economic downturn when she finished in the early 90s. “It would have been a good time to serve, but I resisted.”

Anika then worked for several universities in the Student Services division, ending up at the University of Detroit-Mercy and “that is how I got to Michigan!” Eventually the work became unfulfilling, so after getting married and having children, she decided to stay home with them—a big change for her. Although she felt called to serve God, the time just wasn’t right.

As her children grew, she became the director of a Michigan Kitchen Network—finding available kitchens in churches in underserved communities and connecting them with food entrepreneurs who were looking to start small businesses.



“My goal has been to create an environment where underserved communities have opportunities and resources to create their own success.” The most challenging part of that position was helping the “micro” business owners expand into bigger kitchens.

Going through some difficult periods in her life, Anika has found that God was with her through it all. “It was only when I was astute enough to listen quietly that the waters of my life shifted from sandy ground to rock,” she said. And when she heard His call for the third time, she was ready to say “Okay!”

When Anika applied for a scholarship to the Methodist Theological School of Ohio, not only was she accepted, but she was also awarded a full scholarship. While currently taking classes in the Master of Divinity program at MTSO, she has moved from the Kitchen Network program to teaching cooking classes to people of all ages and is also the director of nutrition at Detroit’s famous historic Eastern Market.

In addition to school, work and supervising her two children plus a step-daughter who are doing all of their schooling from home, Anika is also serving as an intern at the First United Methodist Church of Birmingham and Berkley.

Her plans after she graduates? “I don’t know where God is going to send me. I want to serve the community and to connect people who have a need. God knows and mentors have discerned my gifts and skills and will put them to good use through ministry.”

Thank you Anika for following His call!

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

# February 2021 Prayer Calendar

## Monday, February 1 -

1 Corinthians 13:4-6 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* Pray that we can remember this verse in our relationships with others.

**Tuesday, February 2** - Pray for our community of Porterville today.

**Wednesday, February 3** - Pray for the "Wednesday Online Bible Study" 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Pastor Tom leads a Bible study via zoom each Wednesday.

**Thursday, February 4** - Read Leviticus 19:18 *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."* Pray that we can love our neighbors as ourselves.

**Friday, February 5** - Pray for the ones in our congregations that are ill or have ill family members. Pray for strength and healing as they rehabilitate.

**Saturday, February 6** - Pray for the Clothing Closet that for now, is by appointment only, for faithful conversations.

**Sunday, February 7** - Pray for the Outdoor Worship Service at First UMC Campus Sundays at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

**Monday, February 8** - Pray that God will guide us through any or all situations that we may come across



this week.

**Tuesday, February 9** - Pray for the GAUMC Finance Committee.

**Wednesday, February 10** - Pray for the "Wednesday Online Bible Study" 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Pastor Tom leads a Bible study via zoom each Wednesday.

**Thursday, February 11** - Pray and reflect on Proverbs 3:1-2 : *"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity."*

**Friday, February 12** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for Sunday's Outdoor Worship Service.

**Saturday, February 13** - 1 John 4:9: *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."* Pray and give thanks to the Lord.

**Sunday, February 14** - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service at First UMC Campus at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

**Monday, February 15** - Praise God today when you pray and keep in mind John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

**Tuesday, February 16** - Pray today for the ladies of Linda Circle.

**Wednesday, February 17** - Pray for Ash Wednesday today. Pray that as we begin Lent we can focus on Christ and the Resurrection. Pastor Tom will have an online service today.

**Thursday, February 18** - Pray for the GAUMC Trustee Committee today.

**Friday, February 19** - Pray for our

church families today.

**Saturday, February 20** - Pray for the youth and children of our congregations. Pray for Melody and Ryan as they try to plan lessons and ways to connect to the kids.

**Sunday, February 21** - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service at First UMC Campus at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

**Monday, February 22** - Pray and think of this verse today. Micah 6:8 *"He has shown you O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

**Tuesday, February 23** - Pray that we can invite someone to the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service this Sunday or invite them to watch the sermon online.

**Wednesday, February 24** - Pray for the "Wednesday Online Bible Study" 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Pastor Tom leads a Bible study via zoom each Wednesday.

**Thursday, February 25** - Pray and love the Lord. Mark 12:30 *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*

**Friday, February 26** - Pray that today we can reflect on all the things we are grateful for. If it helps, write down all the things you are grateful for on a list.

**Saturday, February 27** - Pray and reflect on 1 John 4:18 *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."*

**Sunday, February 28** - Pray for the Sunday Outdoor Worship Service at First UMC Campus at 10:00 a.m. Please bring a lawn chair and face covering.

**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 or  
www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC or  
www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC



**First UMC**

Emma Burkhart • February 1  
Wyatt Burkhart • February 1  
Sharon Fisk • February 17  
Barbetta Narin • February 18  
Samuel Ho • February 23  
Marilyn Schaffer • February 26  
Beverly Farquharson • February 26  
Deborah Hutchinson • February 28

**Grand Ave UMC**

Kyle Wright • February 2  
Rodel Lipumano • February 7  
Elaine Jenne • February 8  
Paige Borges • February 12  
Diane Bergthold • February 13  
Charlotte Crawford • February 23

**Short Devotions on Facebook**

Each Tuesday and Thursday short 2-3 minute devotion videos are posted on each church Facebook pages. The church pages are public pages and a Facebook account is not needed to view these videos. Check it out at either page ...  
www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC  
www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC

**Grand Ave Staff**

**Senior Pastor • Rev. Tom Buratovich**  
**Director of Youth Ministries • Ryan Ridenour**  
**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**

**Clothing Closet**

The Clothing Closet continues to provide clothing by appointment only for the month of February. Please call Ann at 559-920-0977 for an appointment. We are in need of men's pants-all sizes.

**Need Prayer?**

Both churches have people who come together to pray. One such meeting occurs on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. Maybe you have another time of the day you would like to gather a group to pray. It could be a quick meeting of 10 or 20 minutes to share prayer requests and pray for one another. We are beginning to use a tool called free conference call. With this tool, anyone can call in and join our prayer time. Below please find the meeting credentials.

**Dial-in number** 425-436-6320

**Access number** 465-784-0

**Host PIN:** 6626

**Online meeting ID** - tburatovich

Most of you will only need the dial-in number and the access number to join our prayer meeting. Joining on the phone allows us to hear one another's voice and voice our prayers to God together. If you would like to gather a group of people at another time of week, I encourage you to do so with the use of this new tool. Let us flood 2021 with the prayers of the saints to the throne of God! - Pastor Tom

**Lenten Devotion**

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 17. A devotion will be available on our website beginning February 10. May God guide us in this reflective season leading up to Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

**Next Newsletter Deadline**

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the March 2021 Messenger is **February 17**. Thank you.

**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**

**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*