

Messenger Newsletter

*First and Grand Ave
United Methodist Churches
Porterville, CA*

In the Mood for Gratitude

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

November 2022

It is the season to revisit the many benefits of gratitude. Yes! Being thankful increases happiness, lifts your mood, takes you away from obsessive materialism, give you greater endurance, enhances your health, your sleep, your resiliency, and aids the development of patience, humility, and wisdom.

Of course, these are not the reasons we are thankful. Gratitude is a byproduct of being the objects of grace. We have received so much compared to what we deserve. We are so valued, cherished, and loved. We are thankful because we have reason to be not because we benefit from it.

I am thankful for people - beautiful, spiritual, crazy Jesus-loving people. That is the church, the body, the bride of Christ. I am called to serve the church. And I love it. I'm thankful for it

I'm also thankful for people - neurotic, negative, cynical, melancholy, burned out, obsessive, people. That is the church, the body, the bride of Christ, the hapless hope-of-the-world. The church gives me gray

hair, indigestion, and insomnia. And I love it. I am thankful for it

My preference is that you would come to know the following from me. But I also realize this might not be possible. Most of our church family have probably heard that I have submitted a request, which has been approved, to take family leave effective February 1, 2023.

My life journey has reflected the very familiar pattern of family caregiving. I moved back to California from Florida in 2003 to care for my mom and dad. Each of my parents passed from a terminal condition and yet each experience was so unique as many are.

I have watched so many of you give from an ever replenished well of care to your loved ones as a testimony to your love and commitment to service. My wife, Judy, has modeled this for me as she joyfully followed me to California unopposed. As she helped with my parent's care, so it is fitting for me to help now with hers.

I feel the need to follow her as she has followed me. The calling of one partner is indelibly tied with the other. That is what we vow to do before God and friends. That is part of our commitment to become one flesh. Although, I had no idea when I said those words that it included that. Most people probably don't.

But as I started, I wish to give thanks for you, the Porterville Methodist churches. I'm thankful that our itinerancy system will not leave us without pastoral leadership. I am thankful that the last 12 years have been filled with the land, and the people of Porterville. I'm thankful that I have a lot of cards to read, faces to see on social media, jokes to tell and hear from you, and memories that moved me deeply.

My heart is full and there is no conflict, no disagreement, no degree of annoyance, which can prevent me to overflow with gratitude for each one of you. Thank you. While I go to be close to biological family, Jesus redefined family as those who "do the will of the Father." It is

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"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"

1 Thessalonians 5:18

One of my favorite months of the year has finally arrived, November. This month also brings with it that time of year where we will gather with family and friends and celebrate thanksgiving and be reminded of all the blessings the Lord continues to pour into our lives. For many of us, we have much to be thankful for, yet we may not express our thankfulness publicly. I am guilty of this. My heart is often bursting with thankfulness and gratitude, but I don't always share it with those that need to hear it. With that being said, I want to take some time to share my thankfulness for each of you.

First, I want to share how thankful I am for each one of you here at Grand Avenue. As I look back over the years that I have attended Grand Avenue and then became the youth pastor here, I can't help but be thankful for the love and support my church family has poured into my life. Each of you has played a role in helping my ministries through out the years. Whether by taking time to speak to the youth and doing something that seems so small but it's big for our youth like shaking their hand when they greet, giving me an encouraging word during the struggles, donating funds and goods to our youth group so that students can have amazing experiences while here at church and in our travels. You have blessed me in many ways, and I Thank you all.

Secondly, ministry is a difficult task to go at it alone.

I have been immensely blessed with volunteers throughout the years that have lessened the load on my shoulders and brought fresh ideas and perspectives for myself and with the youth. A church often relies heavily on volunteers, and we are no different. We have a small staff and each of our volunteers provides much needed help. Whether you have volunteered with the youth, dedicated your time to be on a church committee, or have come to our workdays and pulled weeds and cleaned the church property, I personally want to thank you for your time and energy. You provide the positive difference we need to have a healthy church.

I also want to thank the parents who have allowed me to be a part of your children's lives here at Grand Avenue. It is an honor and privilege to play a role in helping your children grow in their faith and develop into amazing children of God. My heart fills with joy each moment I am blessed to witness a child decide to give their heart to



Jesus. Thank you for this blessing of having this important role in the life of your child.

While writing this article, I realized how much I have to be thankful for. This realization has reminded me of the importance of a thankful heart. I encourage each of you to take some time this month and reach out to someone who has blessed you in some fashion. Let them know how thankful you are for them and all they've done for you. Return the blessings into their lives that they have poured into yours and witness the joy you both experience. *Happy Thanksgiving to each of you.*

God is Love, *Ryan Ridenour*

In the Mood for Gratitude **continued from page 1** *by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

a joy to do the Father's will with you!

It is fitting to conclude on the note of family because the holidays are filled with events that magnify the joys and heartbreaks around families. We fit together a lot like a table filled with irregular clothes. There are no returns and whatever we buy, we must keep. We are committed.

However, God in his grace, uses families in church and in our community to bless us deeply that we might bless others deeply. I pray that we will seek to prayerfully do that. Give thanks, church! Give thanks!

My Lord, My God—How Great Thou Art

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of sitting in on a Youth Class that Melinda Beer was teaching. The lesson that she was giving was on the Holy Ghost. Though, the lesson was having the youth explain what they know about the Holy Ghost, God and Jesus. The lesson led us to view many Bible verses about the three and had the youth figure out who the Bible was talking about: God, Jesus, or the Holy Ghost. We had a very fun time doing this task.

While doing this, we read Genesis chapter 1 and 2. These chapters talk about the creation. It was such an amazing day, sitting around that table with five youth and reading about the creation. I can not even put into words how moved I was by the moments spent with those special children. They were so excited about reading the Bible and about God's awe inspiring story of creation.

I, myself, was reminded and stand amazed at the fact that our God, is so powerful. He had the mind and power to make everything work so perfectly. The universe, and the solar system. All of the planets move with such precision. They do not move chaotically. He gave us the sun for warmth and light that we need to live.

He separated the water from the land. He created the mountains and deserts. He made trees and plants to give us food and oxygen. We breathe out carbon dioxide, which the trees breathe in. Such precision in His work.

He made the birds, fish, and all the animals. Amazing accomplishments. Look at our bodies. They are awesome, finely tuned machines. Our breathing, our heart beating, our brain and nervous system, and, of course, that a women's body can not only support herself but also a baby. Our



God is truly great and marvelous.

It brings to mind, the song "How Great Thou Art". When I was sitting with the youth; I was so happy to be able to be with them and hear them speak of how great our God is. Seeing their eyes light up as we were talking was definitely something that I will cherish. It truly made my soul sing "My Savior God; How great Thou art".

This is something that helped to strengthen my testimony. It reminded me of how great He is. Obviously, that is something that I know, but it is also something that I needed to be reminded of. Something that we all need to be reminded of. Why wait until we

see God face-to-face, to fall at His feet and tell Him how great He is. We should be saying it every day in humble adoration; "How Great Thou Art".

I challenge you to pick up your Bible and reread the story of creation in Genesis. Really contemplate it and remind yourself of how truly marvelous our God is. That way, your soul can sing to our God "How great Thou art".

Blessings,
Melody Burkhart
Children's Sunday School

***"There is none like you, O Lord;
You are great, and great is Your
name in might."***

Jeremiah 10:6

Advent Season Combined Worship Services

Sunday, December 18 • 10:00 a.m. at First UMC

Saturday, December 24 • 4:00 p.m. at First UMC

Sunday, December 25 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC

Sunday, January 1, 2023 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC



Making Our Voices Heard

By Judy Lowery

“As God’s fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 NIV

Al’s affinity for bananas has led to an unexpected friendship with one of the workers at our local supermarket. He and Roberto, who works in the produce department, get a chance to talk every few days after all of the bananas in the house have disappeared,

The store is only a few miles from home and happens to be on the way to and from the gym. So, it’s very convenient to pick up more fruit or other items when needed. We usually do our main grocery shopping together on Mondays, one of the days Roberto is scheduled to work, and often see him in the produce aisle.

Al is always happy when the shelves are stocked with ripe bananas! Al’s theory is that at our age only ripe bananas should be bought, because who knows if we’ll be around long enough for the green ones to ripen!

Recently a new venue opened in one corner of the store, a “made to order” pizza place. The smell of pizza baking in the ovens filled the entire facility, making it difficult to concentrate on buying potatoes and veggies in the adjacent area!

When Al disappeared one day, I couldn’t figure out where he had gone—until I heard a voice calling out, “Get your hot pizza here! Get your hot pizza!” And along came Al, pushing his cart towards the produce area all the while advertising the new restaurant.

“Well,” he explained, “they aren’t getting any business, so I thought I’d help them out. You know like the hot dog vendors at the football games.”

Roberto happened to be putting bananas on the shelves nearby.

When Al spotted him, he switched his singsong call to “Get your bananas here. Get your ripe bananas!”

Oh my! Roberto responded with a laugh and a big hug for Al. The three of us laughed and talked for a minute before we let Roberto go back to work and finished our shopping.

Putting together bits and pieces of conversations with him over the past several weeks, we discovered that he was originally from the Philippines but worked for seventeen years in the middle east. “It was there that I was saved!” he shared one day.

Even though he was living and working in a country that was closed to Christianity, someone approached him with the good news of Jesus Christ to which he responded with an open heart. Christians in that country had to share their faith discretely, because to do so overtly meant risking severe punishment.

When Roberto became a Christian, he became involved in a house church. Meetings and worship services had to be very secretive. If the meeting started at a certain time, everyone had to be there beforehand, because the doors would be locked. Windows were covered; and sounds were prevented from being heard outside the meeting room. People came by themselves or at the most two by two.

“We followed a very strict code,” he said, meaning that they had to be extremely careful. Those who were from the Philippines conversed in the Tagalog

language, which made detection harder for authorities.

“You know,” he said in a subsequent conversation, “There are still underground churches everywhere in closed countries. The good news is spreading and people are being saved. We need to keep praying! That’s the most important thing we can do!”

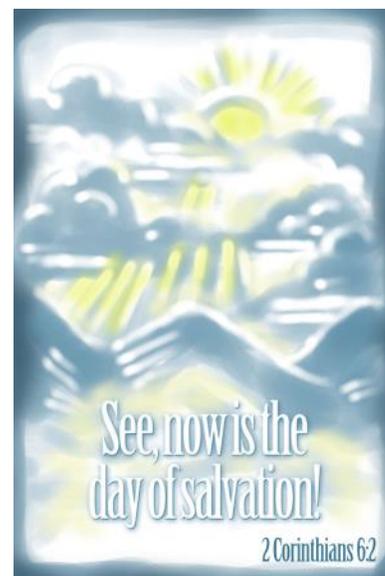
Well, talk about being inspired! Roberto has been a blessing to us! Who would have thought that such a good friendship could be formed in the produce section at the grocery store?

Sunday, November 6th, is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. The thing that people living in countries closed to the gospel want and ask for most is prayer! Perhaps your church, Bible study group or circle of friends can organize a prayer vigil on that day.

Like Roberto said, “Praying is the most important thing we can do!”

The focus of the IDOP this year is that people in the persecuted church might receive Bibles. Along with praying, we can also support ministries that provide Bibles to closed countries.

Let’s make our voices heard... in heaven and on earth.



November 2022 Prayer Calendar

Tuesday, November 1 - Pray and reflect on Psalm 118:24 *"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."*

Wednesday, November 2 - Pray for the Coat Give-away at The P'ville Welcome Center 9: 00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.-1pm

Thursday, November 3 - Pray for the prayer groups of our churches.

Friday, November 4 - Pray and read Bible verse Matthew 6:21 *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Saturday, November 5 - Pray for the ones who are having procedures, who are ill and those who are rehabilitating.

Sunday, November 6 - Pray for Persecuted Christians around the world who risk their lives to share the Gospel. Protect them, Lord, and grant success!

Monday, November 7 - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they plan activities for the children and youth of our churches.

Tuesday, November 8 - Pray for our community.

Wednesday, November 9 - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email Pastor Tom for link at: tburatovich@gmail.com

Thursday, November 10 - Pray for our church families.

Friday, November 11 - Pray and reflect on Colossians 3:15 *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And, be thankful."*

Thank God for the many **Veterans** who have served our Country faithfully.

Saturday, November 12 - Pray for the Greeters at tomorrow's Worship Service that will welcome all.

Sunday, November 13 - Pray for Sunday Worship Service - GAUMC - 9:30 a.m. and FUMC - 11 a.m.

Monday, November 14 - Pray that we will feel God's presence as we go through this week.

Tuesday, November 15 - Pray for the music team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

Wednesday, November 16 - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email Pastor Tom for link at: tburatovich@gmail.com

Thursday, November 17 - Pray and praise God for our many blessings!

Friday, November 18 - Pray for Pastor Tom as he completes his sermon for Sunday Worship Service.

Saturday, November 19 - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Psalm 107:1 *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."*

Sunday, November 20 - Pray for Sunday Worship Service - GAUMC - 9:30 a.m. and FUMC - 11:00 a.m.

Monday, November 21 - Pray for safe travels for those that are traveling this week.

Tuesday, November 22 - Pray and read Psalm 95:2 *"Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song."*

Wednesday, November 23 - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email Pastor Tom for link at: tburatovich@gmail.com

Thursday, November 24 - Pray and give thanks to God for His love and many blessings on this **Thanksgiving Day**.

Friday, November 25 - Pray and reflect on 2 Corinthians 2:14 *"But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the*



knowledge of him everywhere."

Saturday, November 26 - Pray and read Philippians 4:12-13 *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."*

Sunday, November 27 - Pray for Sunday Worship Service - GAUMC - 9:30 a.m. and FUMC - 11:00 a.m.

Monday, November 28 - Pray and reflect on Colossians 2:6-7 *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*

Tuesday, November 29 - Pray and read Numbers 6:24-26 *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."*

Wednesday, November 30 - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Email Pastor Tom for link at: tburatovich@gmail.com

Thank You

A special Thank You to Lorraine Fleming who has submitted this prayer calendar to the Newsletter since 2016.



First UMC
 Joe Mitchell • November 11
 Dave Hammelmann • November 18
 Frankie Feldman • November 25
 Gayle Hammelmann • November 27

Grand Ave UMC
 Rodelyn Smith • November 8
 Dorothy Anderson • November 15
 Presleigh Ridenour • November 19
 Nancy Nevels • November 26



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

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<https://vimeo.com/grandavenueporterville>

Grand Ave Staff

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

Grand Ave Office Hours:

Monday–Thursday
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Announcements

Clothing Closet at First UMC

Clothing Closet is open on Saturday, November 5 between 8:30 –10:00 a.m. Call Ann 559-920-0977 for more information. Thanks to all who have made time to help.

Church Offices Closed

November 11—Veterans Day
 November 24, 25—Thanksgiving

Christmas Choir

Combined Christmas Choir rehearsals begin Wednesday, November 16, 7:00 p.m. at First UMC. All are invited to sing with us! Contact Christine Klippenstein for more information.

Next Newsletter Deadline

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

Fall Back

Turn your clocks back one hour on Saturday night November 5. Daylight-savings time ends.



Tithes and Offering

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

First Staff

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

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