

# Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave  
United Methodist Churches  
Porterville, CA

**Beyond Easter**  
by Pastor Tom Buratovich

May 2022

It was an Easter service, a celebration of the risen Savior. While it was that, my beloved church decided to also mention my birthday. So, they surprised me. It is a strange feeling to read cards with lovely words that I aspire to in rare moments. It is a humbling feeling reading wonderfully kind words people write about you from whom I have received so much.

It is an expression of gratitude on their part resulting in wonder that fills me with appreciation. Easter is a time to appreciate the death and resurrection of Jesus, the selfless acts of His followers, the sacrificial service they tirelessly offer.

I am so glad this theme continues throughout our year in other forms. I wish to thank everyone who made Easter a wonderfully inspiring event. The sunrise service would have been much more difficult without Bill Means equipment and help. It is always great to see familiar faces early in the morning as we worshiped the risen Savior. The combined service was a wonderful beehive of activity that allowed us to truly spend time connecting with one another.

## Three Months -Three Combined Services

There is much more to come. Did you know the Porterville Methodist churches will have one combined service in April, May, and June? In

April we had a combined Easter service. **In May, we will combine again for Mother's Day on Sunday, May 8 at Grand Ave.** And then in June we will combine on Sunday, June 19 for our VBS service. Each of these combines services allows a streamlined effort for our children's ministry staff who are working with families and young children to give our congregation a "surprise." The excitement and anticipation of a surprise I know emphasizes the benefits of being together as the body of Christ, one Lord, one faith, one baptism—one service! I look forward to these events. I hope you do too!

## First Fridays

Imagine what it would look like for hundreds of believers coming together in fasting and agreeing prayer on a specific day of the month, each month, on the first Friday. Imagine how such a day each month would clearly demonstrate our solidarity and seriousness to God as we fast and prayer about the same things. Imagine the combined weight of agreeing and praying together to ignite a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit in our day. **Believing that prayer is the ignition source of all Spirit-fueled movements let us join in prayer beginning on Friday, May 6.**

On these days, schedule some

specific time to go into your prayer room and close the door. Pray to your Father in heaven. Consider asking a friend or small group of believers to join with you in group prayer. This can be done anywhere and at any time in person or on a zoom call.

Decide in advance, what meal(s) you will fast to give more time to focused prayer. Please note that fasting is not recommended for those whom it is not medically allowed. It is important to stay hydrated during your fast.

Fasting is a willingness to experience physical hunger to demonstrate our spiritual hunger for God to move in fresh ways among His people.

What should we pray for? Ask the Lord to bless the plan for our futures. What will the future for our two churches look like? Will we operate as one or two? How will we prepare and how should we approach discussions with one another?

Ask God for humble spirits, teachable and open minds and compassionate and forgiving hearts. Pray that the Spirit of God would dwell with us, fill us, and baptize us with His presence.

I am so filled with gratitude for Grand Avenue and First. I read the kind words on the birthday cards, and I choke up. However, I am equally excited and grateful for our future. I pray you are too.

# Youth Ministry

Recently, I was scrolling through different television programs, and I landed on a sports station that was airing the Boston Marathon. Immediately, I was drawn into this amazing spectacle taking place. I was impressed by all the participants as they ran with vigor and enthusiasm. Some were fast, others not so much. Step by step, they made their way down streets that inclined and declined and turned left and right, all the while fans stood on the sidewalks waving signs and cheering on the participants. Watching the race, it was clear to see how difficult running a marathon is. As one person or two would accelerate and others slowed down, they kept pushing and the runners never quit. They sweat from the strain they faced, and it was obvious that their bodies hurt, but step by step they ran until they crossed the finish line.

After watching the Boston Marathon, it was easy to draw comparisons to the Christian faith and the moments of difficulty that arise at times. In fact, most of you know that God's Word has moments where it compares our daily Christian walk with running a race and finishing strong. It implores us to continue the journey of following Christ even when times become difficult and including when doubtful thoughts tell us everything would be easier if we gave up and walked away.

Observing churches in the West, particularly post pandemic, it is evident that many people have not returned to the churches they once frequently attended, and this includes our church as well. Some of these individuals have become accustomed to watching church services online. Others have filled their Sunday mornings with other activities. There are also the few that have decided for one reason or

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another that church is no longer relevant in their lives. Be aware that I said, "Church is no longer relevant." I did not say, "God." As there are many people who no longer attend church but still are followers of Christ. Whatever the case may be, we must be honest with ourselves that church attendance is declining and relationships between Christians who were once dedicated participants with their local church are being affected negatively.

So, what do we do about this issue? Our church council has been meeting weekly doing our best to try to answer that simple, yet mysterious question. We are faithfully praying, reading God's Word, and at times fasting, trying to discover God's plan for our church family. We all know that something must be done, but we want that, "Something," to be what God desires for us. After each meeting with our council, I grow more confident that God has some mighty plans for our congregation.

You may be wondering what you can do during this time, and

that is a great question. I ask that you pray alongside our council, and pray for our council, as we strive to make the correct decisions for our church. I encourage you to share any concerns you have regarding the state of our church with the council as well. We want to hear from you. Each one of you are important members of our church family and your voice matters. You can also reach out to people you've noticed who have not returned to church in awhile and give them an invitation to rejoin us on Sunday mornings or to a special event. Your invitation may be the difference the person was needing.

Lastly, I encourage you to continue the race. Keep running, placing one foot in front of the other. Times may get hard, but hard times create good character. If you feel the race has become too difficult, reach out to a Christian brother or sister and request a helping hand, as we all need help at times. May God bless you on this beautiful race we're running.

God is Love,  
*Ryan Ridenour*

## ***Council Hosted Dinner with Church Update***

The Administrative Council of **Grand Avenue** will host a **FREE** dinner for the congregation of Grand Avenue on **Wednesday, May 18 from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.** in the Fellowship Hall. The menu will include a delicious array of catered Chinese food, beverages, and some great desserts! The only thing you are asked to please bring is a dessert to share. If you can't bring a dessert, come anyway!

Pastor Tom and the Administrative Council will provide updates on several important topics they feel you should be informed about such as the status of the United Methodist Church (UMC), the newly formed Global Methodist Church (GMC), the Wesleyan Covenant Association, and current church planning the Council has been working on. You are encouraged to write down questions or issues you would like addressed and bring them with you. Your thoughts and feedback are very important to us.

We look forward to a wonderful time of fellowship and sharing of information that is critical to the future of Grand Avenue! You are urged to make this a priority on your calendar.

*Pastor Tom and the Administrative Council of Grand Ave UMC*

# HayDay

Next month, both churches will be celebrating VBS together at Grand Ave Church. VBS is **Thursday and Friday, June 16 and 17, with a Sunday Celebration on June 19.** The Sunday Celebration will be at Grand Ave Church at 10:00 a.m. also.

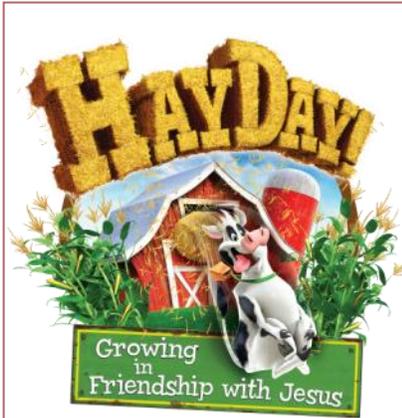
VBS will have a farm theme that will prove to be fun. Young and old alike will be able to plow through the Bible lessons together. Through the teachings of Jesus, we will plant the seeds of the gospel in everyone's heart and be up to our elbows in farming fun as we learn one simple truth: Jesus will always love us.

There will be wonderful Worship songs with Pastor Tom and Kelly in Moo-sic and More. This will be an exciting time for everyone to Worship through song. Who knows, we may even have some special visitors, seeing as we will be on a farm.

Ann White will be with us to bring to life our Bible Adventures. We will be visiting with Zacchaeus and learning about his story on Day 1. Then, we will walk with Jesus through the Garden of Gethsemane all the way through the Resurrection, in Peter's shoes, on Day 2. These lessons will prove to be powerful.

We are visiting these lessons because we will be establishing our Bible Point "Jesus will always love us". These lessons will prove to us that even though both men had faults, Jesus never stopped loving them, no matter what they did. This will help us understand that Jesus feels the same about us. No matter what happens, Jesus will always love us.

We will also be learning our Bible Verse Romans 5:11 "Our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."



**VBS • June 16 and 17  
at Grand Ave**

**Sunday Celebration**  
June 19 • 10:00 a.m.  
*Combined Service  
at Grand Ave*

Next will be Farm Fun Crafts with Melody. We will have a good time together creating fun crafts that will help us remember the Bible Stories.

After this, Dave will take over with Hog Wild Games. There will be some fun times during the exciting games he will have for us. This is always a highlight of the day.

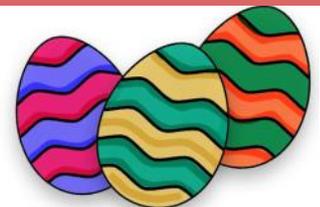
Ending each day, Pastor Tom will bring us back together for Friendship Finale. This is always a good time together to sum up the lessons that we learned during the day.

All in all, I know this event will be such an exciting time for everyone. We are always in need of volunteers to help with decorating, to help with many things the days of the event, and to help clean up after the Sunday Celebration. If you would like to help with any of these things, please contact me. I know it will be a wonderful experience. There is nothing more rewarding than helping children learn about Jesus. Together we will help them learn the simple truth that they can always rely on throughout their lives. "Jesus will always love us".

Blessings,  
*Melody Burkhart*  
Children's Sunday School

## Thank You!

I would like to thank Tamara and Joe Mitchell for providing the children with a wonderful Easter Celebration. Thank you for all of the time you spent stuffing eggs, buying Easter prizes, decorating and setting up the event, and cleaning up. Thank you for all of the things that you do to make this such a special event for the children. They had such a wonderful time.



Also, thank you to everyone that donated stuffed Easter Eggs to help with the event. They were greatly appreciated.

Thank you to everyone that brought food for Coffee Hour, and helped with setting up the event and cleaning up afterwards.

Lastly, a thank you to Ann White and Lenora Rodarte for organizing coffee hour for Easter.

This was a wonderful day of celebration for both churches. Thank you so much to all who were involved.

# Then Their Eyes Were Opened

By Judy Lowery

*“He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see: a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.’” Luke 24:38-39 NIV*

While I was in the dentist’s office one day, our dentist asked if I knew about a popular word game that was circulating around. I had to laugh. Our friends, Jim and Sue Verhage, had introduced the game to us when we were together playing cribbage one evening.

The word game was new to us, so they proceeded to explain how it worked. Six tries to guess a five-letter word. Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Well, there were a few other complications that made it challenging. Between the four of us, we managed to figure out the word in five guesses. Fun!

“Well, yes, but I’ve had to put it down. It just compels me to keep working until I find the answer and takes up way too much time!” I responded.

The dentist said that his brother had got him started and texted him the new challenge each day. He held his cell phone up so that I could see the screen. He almost had the word for the day figured out.

“I’m going to get it soon!” he said.

“So that’s what you’re doing behind the closed door in your office,” his assistant said chidingly. He just grinned.

I could relate to that grin. It was tempting to tackle the daily challenge, but oh so time consuming. And all of that thinking even gave me a headache!

When our grandson, Nate, and his younger brother were visiting a few days ago, I thought it would be fun to find the day’s word together. After accessing it on our cell

phones, Nate told me to start with “adieu” because it had four vowels. A good tip!

While I was entering the word “adieu” and arranging all of the remaining letters in alphabetical order to make it easier to recognize the missing word, he said, “Got it!”

“What? You couldn’t have!” I was astounded! He had recognized the word on the second try! Oh my! Adieu, Nate!

Word recognition is one thing, recognizing people is another. Seeing someone who looks vaguely familiar and trying to figure out who it is can also be mind boggling.

Al and I were at the Senior Center when a fellow came up to Al and asked his name, saying that he looked familiar. But neither of them had met before.

“Some people say I look a bit like Gene Wilder!” Al responded.

We parted smiling. Hopefully the next time the three of us meet,

we will recognize each other!

Mary Magdalene went to the Garden of Gethsemane, intending to anoint the body of Jesus with spices on the Sunday morning after His crucifixion. She discovered to her amazement that stone in front of the tomb had been rolled away and that the tomb was empty. When she encountered a man standing near the empty tomb, Mary thought he was the gardener, not recognizing Jesus until He spoke to her.

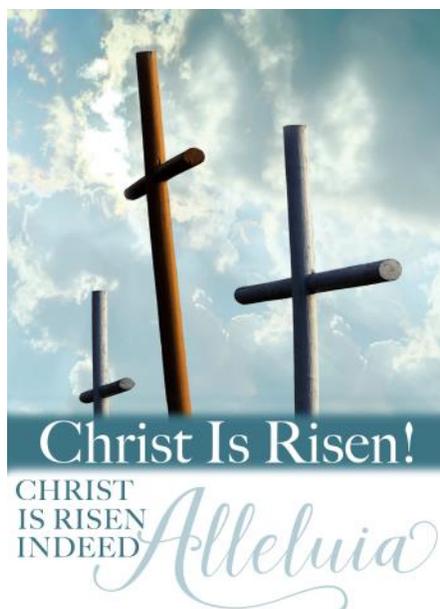
Later that afternoon, Jesus actually walked along with two of His followers on their way to a village called Emmaus. They didn’t recognize Him at first either until they stopped to eat. When He broke bread and gave it to them, their eyes were opened and they realized that it was the Lord.

The two of them ran back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples and while they were talking about what had happened, Jesus came into the room! Again, He had to identify Himself... “Look at my hands and feet. It is I myself!”

Why was it so hard to recognize Him? Because none of them were expecting to see Jesus alive, let alone have Him show up in their midst. Jesus had to convince them! “Touch me and see...”

I wonder if we often miss the presence of Jesus among us because of this very reason. We forget that He is alive—too many other things get in the way. With patience He reminds us, “Here I am! Hey, it’s me! Don’t you know? I’ve been with you all along!”

May our eyes and hearts be opened so that we can recognize Jesus, who is always with us and always working in our lives. Christ is risen indeed!



# May 2022 Prayer Calendar

**Sunday, May 1** - Pray for the Worship Services today  
Grand Ave UMC at 9:30 a.m. and  
FUMC Porterville at 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, May 2** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse 2 Corinthians 5:17  
*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!"*

**Tuesday, May 3** - Pray for all the leaders and members of our church committees as they make important decisions for our churches.

**Wednesday, May 4** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. led by Pastor Tom via Zoom. **For a link to the Zoom, email Pastor Tom at [tburatovich@gmail.com](mailto:tburatovich@gmail.com).**

**Thursday, May 5** - Pray and reflect on the Bible verse Romans 12:2  
*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

**Friday, May 6** - Pray for Pastor Tom as invites us to fast with him this First Friday. Pray for the Holy Spirit to come and visit us.

**Saturday, May 7** - Pray for the Clothing Closet.

**Sunday, May 8** - Pray for the **Combined Worship Service today at 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave.** Praise God for mothers today, Happy Mother's Day.

**Monday, May 9** - Pray that we know that God is with us as we go through the week and as we go through many situations.

**Tuesday, May 10** - Pray for the ones of our churches who have been ill or have been rehabilitating. Pray for healing and strength.

**Wednesday, May 11** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. led by Pastor Tom via Zoom.

**Thursday, May 12** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Psalms 51:10  
*"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

**Friday, May 13** - Pray for our church families.

**Saturday, May 14** - Pray for the Greeter's who will greet all who come to Sunday Worship Services tomorrow.

**Sunday, May 15** - Pray for the Worship Services today  
Grand Ave UMC at 9:30 a.m. and  
FUMC Porterville at 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, May 16** - Pray and read Bible Verse 1 Corinthians 10:13  
*"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*

**Tuesday, May 17** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 40:29  
*"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak."*

**Wednesday, May 18** - Pray for the church as it meet at 5:30 p.m. to share a meal and be updated on the future and the present. Pray for the Council as they present.

**Thursday, May 19** - Pray for the city of Porterville.

**Friday, May 20** - Pray for all the Prayer Groups of our churches.

**Saturday, May 21** - Praise God for our many blessings.

**Sunday, May 22** - Pray for the Worship Services today  
Grand Ave UMC at 9:30 a.m. and  
FUMC Porterville at 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, May 23** - Pray for the Praise Team and Choir as they prepare for Sunday Worship Services.

**Tuesday, May 24** - Pray and read Bible verse 2 Corinthians 4:16  
*"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."*

**Wednesday, May 25** - Pray for the Online Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. led by Pastor Tom via Zoom.

**Thursday, May 26** - Pray and read Bible verse Ephesians 4:22-24  
*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

**Friday, May 27** - Pray for Melody and Ryan as they prepare for activities and VBS for the children and youth of our churches.

**Saturday, May 28** - Pray for the teachers and students of our congregations as this school year comes to an end.

**Sunday, May 29** - Pray for the Worship Services today  
Grand Ave UMC at 9:30 a.m. and  
FUMC Porterville at 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, May 30** - Pray for safe travels for our church families.

**Tuesday, May 31** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Acts 2:38  
*"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*





### **First UMC**

Loretta Sonksen • May 5  
Adam Garrett • May 11  
Margie Mylander • May 20  
Ethel Anderson • May 26  
Linda Rhoadarmer • May 27  
Stacey Farquharson • May 28  
Dare Quatacker • May 30

### **Grand Ave UMC**

Jason Buratovich • May 1  
Electa Milinich • May 5  
Shirley Gutierrez • May 10  
Fernando Gutierrez • May 23

## Announcements

### ***Clothing Closet at First UMC***

Clothing Closet will be open at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 7 and by appointment during the month. Call Ann 559-920-0977 for more information. We have made some new connections within the community and have been able to serve many families by appointment. Thanks to all of you that have made time on your busy Saturday to help us.

### ***Combined Mother's Day Service • May 8***

First & Grand Ave will worship together on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 8 at 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave.

### ***VBS***

VBS is June 16 and 17. On Sunday, June 19 we will have one VBS Combined Worship Celebration at 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave. Contact Melody for volunteer opportunities. Pray for the children in our community who will attend.

### ***Next Newsletter Deadline***

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

### ***Tithes and Offering***

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

### **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>

#### **Grand Ave Staff**

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

#### **First Staff**

**Senior Pastor** • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Counseling Center Director** • *Joy Semple*  
**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](mailto:info@grandavenue.org)**

**[www.grandavenue.org](http://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](mailto:pvfumc@ocsnet.net)**

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