

## The TIE



### From our pastor,

Rev. Elisabeth Middelberg

### Care for our neighbor or working for our own self-interest?

“The grave danger is to disown our neighbors. When we do so, we deny their humanity and our own humanity without realizing it; we deny ourselves, and we deny the most important Commandments of Jesus. [...] But here we also find an opportunity: that the light of the love of neighbor may illuminate the Earth with its stunning brightness like a lightning bolt in the dark; that it may wake us up and let true humanity burst through with authentic resistance, resilience, and persistence.”

Pope Francis (2017)

Jesus's greatest commandment is to love God and love your neighbor. Jesus taught that these two commandments are equally

important and that all other commandments are based on them. In the book of Exodus, we find some more specific instructions: “You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If you ever wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely listen to them.”

The Book of Exodus was likely written between the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, during or after the Babylonian exile. Of course, at that time there would not have been a distinction between legal or illegal aliens. The admonition was to not oppress or afflict anybody “residing among you.”

*They seem such simple instructions...*

Yet the implementation of significant policy changes, already made by this new administration, seem largely based on the self-interest of specific groups of people, installing fear and chaos in so many others. For human beings to be well, they need to have a sense of safety, dignity and belonging. For communities to thrive, they too, need to have a sense of safety, dignity and belonging. When one or all of these values are under siege, people are under siege, become isolated, start to feel expendable and often are then treated in such a way as such as well.



We see this played out in the rising of racial injustice, political backlash, anti-trans and queer legislation, the global rise of fascism,

Continued on the next page.

and climate change. The call to refuse a place of belonging to “the resident aliens” among us, is the call to disown our neighbor, to expel people from our midst. So many people are suffering.

I wonder if in all of this we also will find our opportunity, as pope Francis suggests, to wake us up and “let our true humanity burst through with authentic resistance, resilience, and persistence.” We have our work cut out for us in the days ahead. But know, that this work is nothing new. The history of this country is a history of resistance. May this be our story as well, and the basis of a more just and more humane future for all.

May we grow in our awareness of God’s love for us and may that in turn settle us, so that we can go about the business of loving our neighbor, protecting their sense of safety, dignity and belonging. This is a time to look at which voices we are listening to, where we can connect with other people and organizations, who are also doing the work of protecting people, comforting, and consoling people. We hope you join us as we seek to grow in our relationship with the Holy One and seek to grow in our care for our neighbor. Thank you for the many ways each one of you is already answering that call.



May God bless us and keep us.

*Pastor Elisabeth*

## FEBRUARY 23



## PRAYER PARTNERS

*Please remember the following members of our church family in prayer. Pray for their welfare and growth in faith and discipleship.*



**January 26 - February 1**

Roger Barber

**February 2 - 8**

Edward Briggs

**February 9 - 15**

Caran Cuneo

**February 16 - 22**

Anne Dannecker

**February 23 - March 1**

Bob De Hann and Nancy Sangster-De Hann



*Come and*  
**Worship**  
**w i t h u s !**



***We will be worshipping at 10 AM inside the sanctuary.  
The service will also be available streaming on YouTube (see next page).***

**February 2      10 AM      Rev. Davena Jones**

Rev. Jones is the Conference Minister for the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ. She will be speaking and provide assistance in our search for a settled pastor.

**February 9      10 AM      Chaplain Chitoka Webb**

Chaplain Webb will be preaching. (Pastor Elisabeth is on vacation.)

**February 16      10 AM      Dr. Cindy Acker**

Dr. Acker will be speaking on the life of Coretta Scott King, in honor of African American History Month. (Pastor Elisabeth is on vacation.)

**February 23      10 AM      Pastor Elisabeth  
11 AM Annual Congregational Meeting, followed  
by a pot luck luncheon**





## ZOOM MEETINGS LET US GATHER TOGETHER SAFELY

We are also providing our Sunday worship service streaming on YouTube at 10 a.m. You can use either your computer, your cell phone, or your tablet. See below.

### Link to join all church Zoom meetings

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2011092691?pwd=c2V0RXEvdWxkF4STNNSTlxbWFFTENuZz09>

Meeting ID: ID: 201 109 2691

Password: FCCSR!

Call in number 1-669-900-6833

## SUNDAY WORSHIP IS NOW LIVE ON YOU TUBE

We broadcast live Sunday mornings on YouTube. Our channel address is:

- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbqlXLjsBEmjdGuoOKnOykA>
- Then click on videos->live
- Subscribe and each week you will get a direct link.

We will also post a direct link each week in the What's Happening? email.

The whole service unedited will be available for a few days; then an edited version to include just the sermon will be posted.

If you are having trouble getting connected, email [Knopf.david@gmail.com](mailto:Knopf.david@gmail.com)

## MEETINGS, MEETINGS, MEETINGS -- VIA ZOOM

**Feb. 5:** The Board of Mission will meet on **Wednesday**, Feb. 5 at 1 PM.

**Feb. 6:** The Church Council will meet on **Wednesday**, Feb. 6 at 6 PM.

**Feb. 6:** The Board of Trustees will meet on **Thursday**, Feb. 6 at 7 PM.

**Feb. 11:** The Board of Ministry will meet on **Tuesday**, Feb. 11 at 11:45 AM.

**Feb. 11:** The Search Committee will meet on **Tuesday**, Feb. 11 at 6 PM.

**Feb 19:** The Church Council will meet on **Wednesday**, Feb. 19 at 6 PM.



**KINDNESS — PASS IT ON!**

*Visit a sick friend*



## THE INTERIM PROCESS -- HERE ARE THE NEXT STEPS:

- We appoint an Interim Search Committee to locate and recommend an interim pastor  
**The Interim Search Committee is Louis Frost, Megan Fuller, and David Santschi.**
- We hire an Interim Pastor **Rev. Elisabeth Middelberg began on March 17, 2024.**
- We appoint a Search Committee **The Search Committee is Caran Cuneo, David Santschi, Annie Song-Hill, Lucinda Ray, and Cathi Fuller.**
- We update our church's website and engage the congregation through surveys to better represent who we are.
- We create our Church Profile, a description of our church to be read by potential pastors
- The Search Committee will consider all potential candidates
- The Search Committee will select possible candidates
- The Search Committee will interview these candidates
- One candidate will be recommended to the congregation
- The congregation will have an opportunity to meet the candidate
- We will vote on the recommended candidate
- We will join in worship to install our new pastor

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

### FACILITIES



We had a few repairs in January including:

- The flat roof on the street side of the Community Room was repaired so it shouldn't leak in the next storm.
- The broken mirror in the restroom by the office was replaced with an ADA commercial grade angled mirror.
- The lever for the flushing mechanism of the toilet in the same restroom was replaced by Francisco of Pilgrim Park.

Congratulations and thanks to the many church members and friends who pledged to support the church's ministry in 2025. This year we had an all-time high amount pledged, over \$95,000. We still face a budget dilemma of how to meet the amount needed to hire a settled pastor. We will discuss this more in the Annual Report and Annual Meeting on February 23.

The next Board of Trustees meeting is Thursday, February 6, at 7:00 PM on Zoom.

## SEARCH COMMITTEE NEWS

On January 26, following worship, the Search Committee shared the results of the survey from the Congregation Assessment Tool that such a large number of our congregation completed in the fall. Below and on the next page you can see the summary of those results. We are all excited and energized by the optimism and health that these survey results reveal about our congregation. It will be a very helpful tool as we work to create a profile of our church to attract a qualified and effective new settled pastor.

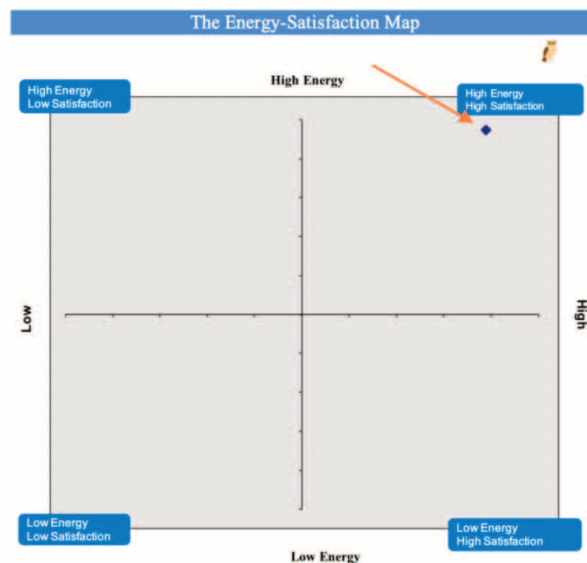
### Overview

We had excellent participation (38) representing 112% of our most recent average Sunday attendance (33% provides us with valid, reliable and representative data). We are confident that the results reflect our entire congregation. Our responses were compared to the responses of the last 2500 congregations (nationally) that have participated in the survey over the last 36-48 months.

The CAT is designed to measure the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of our congregation through the measures of congregational climate, culture and performance milestones.

### Congregational Climate

Two characteristics are necessary to create a vital and healthy congregation – high levels of member satisfaction and energy. Satisfaction is the sense of joy, committed passion to mission and lack of discord in the congregation. Energy is force of engagement, the spirit of the congregation that makes people want to be involved in its mission and ministries.



- Churches in the high energy-low satisfaction quadrant are often struggling to structure and channel their energy in a direction they feel good about.
- Churches in the low energy-low satisfaction quadrant require major changes to regain vitality.
- Churches in the low energy-high satisfaction quadrant have normalized a low level of vitality.
- Churches in the high energy-high satisfaction quadrant are sources of new meaning and purpose for their members.

Compared with other congregations nationally, our overall member satisfaction and energy are high. This places us with the top 20% of congregations regarding vitality and health.

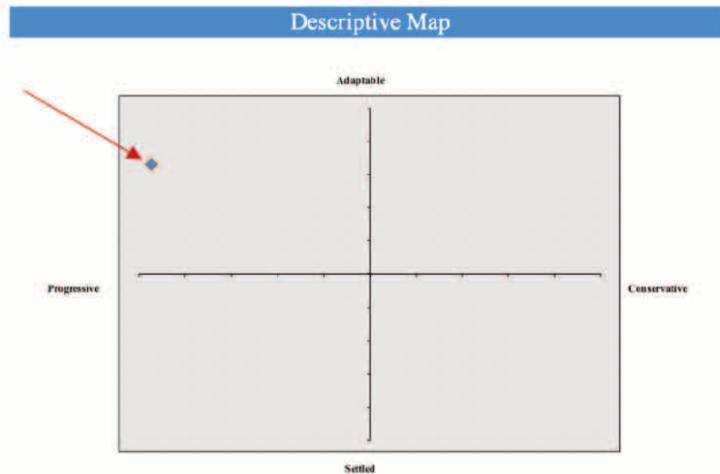
### Transformational Climate

Our overall measures indicate that we experience what is called a *Transformational Climate*. Fully transformational climates have discovered ways to be vibrant and healthy despite national or local trends. The more tangible expressions include an external focus, a distinctive mission, and an influx of new people; more intangible expressions describe a corporate spiritual zest, inspired worship,

healthy/meaningful relationships, purposeful activity in the world and an atmosphere of well-being. Currently, transformation climate churches are those that are growing.

### Flexible Style Index

The Flexible Style Index registers the degree to which the church is willing to make adjustments in the way it goes about its ministry. The more flexible a church, the more likely it is to adapt to the particular context in which it is serving to meet either the needs of its members or those of the community. The degree of flexibility in a church should be consistent with its strategic priorities.



This map indicates the particular style of a church using two characteristics. The first characteristic is whether the church is theologically conservative or progressive. The second characteristic is whether the church is more adaptable or settled in its approach to its life.

### Performance Areas

You assessed our congregation in the following eight areas:

- **Hospitality**
- **Morale**
- **Conflict Management**
- **Governance**
- **Spiritual Vitality**
- **Readiness for Ministry**
- **Engagement in Education**
- **Worship and Music**

According to our responses to questions around these eight indices, on six of these eight indices, our congregation scores higher than congregations nationally.

### Future Priorities/Aspirations

As our members look to our future, several priorities surface that require improvements or additional energy (which is usually the case with highly satisfied and energized congregations). These top priorities indicate where the congregation is placing its attention and most helpful to planning for our future:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people.
2. Make necessary changes to attract families with children and young people to our church.
3. Work to renew and revitalize the community around the church by creating coalitions and partnerships with other organizations.



## BOARD OF MISSION MISSION MATTERS



### STREET CHAPLAINCY DINNER - FEBRUARY 4



The Board of Mission has committed to helping prepare and serve dinner for those in need four times this year. On Tuesday, February 4, a group of us will volunteer at the Street Chaplaincy dinner at the First Presbyterian Church in San Rafael. We need to be there from 4 - 7 PM. We are also collecting warm coats, rain gear, hats, and socks to give away. Sleeping bags are especially welcome.

It costs about \$250 dollars to purchase the groceries for each meal, at which we feed about 80-100 people. So where does the money come from? The Board of Mission is using money from The Pilgrim Hill Fund, which was created two decades ago by our church as a special fund for mission in our community. Please contact Lucinda Ray if you can help. [lucindaray@aol.com](mailto:lucindaray@aol.com)



### ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING OFFERING COMING UP IN MARCH

The One Great Hour of Sharing, which will be received in March, supports partners in countries with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries and both international and domestic disaster response. Your gifts help organizations confront food insecurity and hunger. OGHS partners with others to provide immediate aid to those affected by disasters, poverty, or fleeing conflict—providing food, water, shelter, and companionship during times of distress. Your dollars support soup kitchens and food pantries. OGHS shows up when people are in crisis. In addition, your financial gifts enable the building (and rebuilding) of structures and processes that make a difference for the future, providing education and helping hands for long-term improvements.

### REMEMBER THE FOOD BANK

Please help us continue to stock the pantry at the Marin Food Bank for neighbors in Marin who continue to struggle with food insecurity.

Bring in non-perishable food items - coffee, tea bags, cooking oil, boxed milk, peanut butter, canned goods, rice, cereal, canned meat are especially welcome. Sugar and flour are also needed. Please deposit them in our Food Bank barrel in the Narthex.





## BOARD OF MINISTRY REPORT

The Board of Ministry Team's key role in the church is to coordinate with the Pastor and Music Director in providing meaningful worship services throughout the liturgical year. We address the spiritual life of the church through the following areas: welcome and outreach, worship and prayer, fellowship, and education.



### Agape Team

The Agape Team provides "compassionate connection to our church community through words of encouragement, cards, phone calls, home visits, and other support as needed. Leave a message in the church office or contact Jackie Dema or Cathi Fuller if you have a request. If you need a visit or other support, please leave a message in the office, or let Pastor Elisabeth know for more urgent matters.

**Prayer Chain** E-mail either Julie Dowling [isabella1472@comcast.net](mailto:isabella1472@comcast.net) or Annie Song-Hill [asonghill@gmail.com](mailto:asonghill@gmail.com) if you have a prayer request you would like included in the prayer chain.

### In January

**January 6 Epiphany Sunday**

**January 15** Elders met to talk about memories of former times.

**January 19** "Third Sunday" luncheon at the church.



### Coming In February

Meditation continues every Tuesdays at 5pm (except Tuesday, Feb. 4, because of the Street Chaplaincy dinner). Tell Elisabeth if you wish to join by Zoom or need a ride if you cannot attend in person.

February is Black History Month. Anticipate wonderful music from Gerry Grosz and our choir.

**Sunday, February 2** We will be joined by our Northern California Nevada Conference minister, Rev. Davena Jones. She will preach, and she will lead us through a "Day of Discovery."

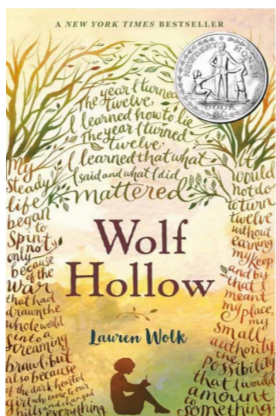
**Sunday, February 23** The Annual Meeting will be immediately following worship. After the meeting, we will have a potluck luncheon in the Community Room.

**Thursday, February 27** The Elders group will meet to talk about our parents.

If you have ideas or interest in being a part of the Ministry Team for 2025 please let Louis Frost know. Anyone is free to attend meetings whether a Board member or not.

**Next meeting of the Board of Ministry:** Tuesday, Feb 11 at 11:45 AM on Zoom.

## FEBRUARY BOOK CLUB - THURSDAY, FEB. 20, 7:30 PM



The book we have chosen for our next Book Club meeting is *Wolf Hollow*. It is available at both the Marin and Sonoma County libraries. It is available as a book, a large print book, an audiobook and an ebook. Please join us to discuss this book on Thursday, February 20, at 7:30 PM on Zoom.

*Wolf Hollow* is a realistic fiction book by Lauren Wolk about a girl who uses honesty and compassion to overcome bullying. The book won several awards, including the 2017 Newbery Honor Book. Wolk was inspired to write *Wolf Hollow* by her mother's childhood in rural western Pennsylvania.

The story is about Annabelle, an 11-year-old girl who lives in the quiet town of Wolf Hollow. Despite growing up in the shadows cast by two world wars, Annabelle has lived a mostly quiet, steady life in her small Pennsylvania town. Until the day new student Betty Glengarry walks into her class. Betty quickly reveals herself to be cruel and manipulative, and though her bullying seems isolated at first, it quickly escalates.

Toby, a reclusive World War I veteran, soon becomes the target of Betty's attacks. While others see Toby's strangeness, Annabelle knows only kindness. And as tensions mount in their small community, Annabelle must find the courage to stand as a lone voice for justice.

The book deals with themes of bullying, war, injustice, prejudice, mental illness, moral dilemmas, and socio-economic status. It also reinforces the idea that people should fight for what's right and help others when they can.

## ELDERS TALK ABOUT PARENTS, THURSDAY, FEB. 27, 6:30 PM

Nine FCCSR elders met in January and shared memories of places, people, events and travels in our lives. Once again we uncovered sides of our church friends that we had never known, and some that surprised us! And folks got to talk about themselves and their histories, often a favorite pastime of elder folks (although some had to be prodded!). Spurred by our memories, we unanimously decided to talk about our parents in February, the lovely memories and perhaps some that are difficult, but probably all related to ourselves today. The Elders' February meeting will be on Thursday, February 27th, from 6:30 to 7:30 over Zoom.



## EVERY DOLLAR FEEDS KIDS IS A MISSION PROJECT STARTED BY OUR CHURCH

For more than 25 years, members of First Congregational Church of San Rafael have supported feeding very very poor children in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and the surrounding vil-lages. Every Dollar Feeds Kids (EDFK) sends funds to help support the feeding program that is part of the educational programs provided by VAMOS!, a nonprofit based in Vermont but operating in Cuernavaca. In 2024, EDFK sent \$15,150 for food. The follow-ing is an excerpt from the most recent newsletter from VAMOS!, showing why we continue to support this worthy program.

### Love Is Our Call to Action!

by Sean Dougherty, Executive Director of VAMOS!

“This is an unsettling time. Everywhere you look, people are grappling with anxiety, despair, and the gnawing ques-tion: What can I even do? We feel it too—the heartbreak, the exhaustion. It's as if we've all been dealt blow after blow, leaving us uncertain, disheartened, and tempted to shut down.

But here's the thing: VAMOS! doesn't have the luxury of shutting down. While others wrestle with despair, the people we serve, families living in severe poverty in Mexico, are facing something far more immediate and cruel. A mother told me, "I wake up and I can't feed my kids. How do you explain to them that there's no milk again, or that today it's just tortillas and salt? And even then, maybe not enough tortillas? I have to hide my tears."



That is despair, distilled into the simplest, most painful terms. Her words revealed a truth as sharp as a knife. When despair whispers, “What I do won't matter,” VAMOS! answers dif-ferently: We will love you. We love by showing up where no one else will. In neighbor-hoods devastated by violence, where people are too afraid to step outside, we serve meals to children who haven't eaten since yesterday. They sit at our tables, filling their stomachs with warm, healthy food and their hearts, for a moment, with relief. VAMOS! Serves 2,500 meals per week.”

## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS



11 — Samuel Dempsey

25 — Rachael Knopf



### **TIE DEADLINE for MARCH 2025 issue - MON., FEB. 24**

The deadline for articles and news for the March 2025 issue of The TIE is Monday, February 24. Please email your articles to [lucindaray@aol.com](mailto:lucindaray@aol.com) by Monday, February 24.



#### **Rev. Elisabeth Middelberg**

Thursday mornings

or by appointment

Phone: 707 280-0382

Email: [Elismid@yahoo.com](mailto:Elismid@yahoo.com)

#### **Amy Powers – Office Manager**

Tuesday and Thursday 10 AM - 2 PM

You can contact Amy by phone  
or email any time.

Office Phone : 415 479-2747

Email: [office@fccsanrafael.org](mailto:office@fccsanrafael.org)

# FCC Calendar FEBRUARY 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>26 10 am  Worship, Church School &amp; Child Care Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10AM</p>	<p>27 5 am  TIE DEADLINE 5PM</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31</p>	<p>February 1</p>
<p>2 Grounding Day 10 am  Worship, Church School &amp; Child Care 10 am - 11 am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10AM 10 am - 11 am Rev. Deavina Jones: DAY OF DISCOVERY</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4 4 am - 7 am  Street Chaplaincy Dinner</p>	<p>5 1 am - 2 am  BOARD OF MISSION Meeting on ZOOM 6 am - 7 am  Church Council Meeting via ZOOM</p>	<p>6 7 am - 8 am  BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING via ZOOM</p>	<p>7</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>9 10 am  Worship, Church School &amp; Child Care 10 am - 11 am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10AM</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11 This Day  Board of Ministry Meeting 11AM via ZOOM 5 am - 6 am  Meditation in the Sanctuary 6 am - 7 am  SEARCH COMMITTEE</p>	<p>12  Lincoln's Birth Day</p>	<p>13</p>	<p>14 Valentine's Day</p>	<p>15</p>
<p>16 10 am  Worship, Church School &amp; Child Care 10 am - 11 am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10AM</p>	<p>17  President's Day</p>	<p>18 5 am - 6 am  Meditation in the Sanctuary</p>	<p>19 6 am - 7 am  Church Council Meeting via ZOOM</p>	<p>20 7:30 am - 8:30 am  BOOK CLUB reading JACQUELINE IN PARIS</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p>
<p>23 10 am  Worship, Church School &amp; Child Care 10 am - 11 am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10AM 11 am - 12:30 pm  ANNUAL MEETING and POT LUCK LUNCH</p>	<p>24 5 am  TIE DEADLINE 5PM</p>	<p>25 5 am - 6 am  Meditation in the Sanctuary</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27 6:30 am - 7:30 am  ELDER'S MEETING ON ZOOM</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>1</p>

*This calendar is also available on the church's website in interactive form. There you can click on any event to see more details. Check it out at [www.FccSanRafael.org](http://www.FccSanRafael.org).*