

The TIE



From our pastor,
Rev. Elisabeth Middelberg

Between Past and Future: A Year-End Reflection

"We all have our karma, which means that we all have a set of circumstances that we are born into or maybe we have created those circumstances ourselves or maybe they have been created for us... but we are not bound by our karma. We are empowered by this present moment, this moment between our past and our future. Because the present choices and decisions we make have the power to change and create something new and something very powerful. These are powerful moments, not just at the end of the year, but every moment in which we live is a moment between our past and our future and therefore every moment is a powerful moment to shape the future."

— Lobsang Phuntsok, founder of Jhamtse Gatsal, a children's community in the foothills of the Himalaya

Dear Friends,

I've heard some people say they were ready to put this year to bed, ready to be done with it. It has indeed been quite a year that we have lived through. The circumstances—many of them purposefully created—were harsh and detrimental to so many people.

Immigration pathways narrowed dramatically. Thousands of jobs and entire agencies were eliminated. The effects of cuts in foreign aid have already become visible. The Department of Education was gutted. These are just some of the sweeping changes that have moved through this nation. Many people have also spoken about their personal lives being affected by loss and other challenges.

Looking Back with Gratitude

And yet, here we are. Willing to look back to understand what we may be called to in this coming year. We also look back to see how we have come through, and who has stood beside us.

When I read through the issues of The Tie from this past year, what struck me was the steadfastness and persistence of this community. People kept showing up: for the Street Chaplaincy Dinners, to donate food for the food bank, to care for one another. The trustees kept taking care of the roof, the leaks, and the water issues. The choir, under Gerry's leadership, kept singing. The book club and the Elders' meetings continued to provide a place for people to come together and



Continued on the next page.

share their thoughts and ideas.

So many people supported those in need, supported each other, were willing to pray and to assist in the services. A special thank you to those who have also committed to support this church financially. Looking back, we offer our gratitude for all the people who cared and who inspired us.

Standing at the Threshold

We stand now at that powerful moment Lobsang Phuntsok describes—between our past and our future. The year ahead may not provide more ease or many solutions to the suffering we see. It will require courage to keep showing up, to hold on to truth-telling, to keep caring.

Our decisions, our actions, our commitments, and our care—persistently lived out—have the power to shape that future, and also to shape who we choose to be as we enter this New Year. Our relationship to one another and to God will sustain us.

As Rev. Cameron Trimble states:

We are still here.
We are still resisting.
We are still committed to one another and to the work of repair.
That is not naive hope.
That is practiced courage.
We are in this together.

I am grateful to be on this journey together.

Pastor Elisabeth

A Prayer at Year's End

Faithful Presence,
we bring you this year as it was—
its harm and its courage,
its grief and its persistence.
Thank you for the people who stood with us,
for the strength that surprised us,
for the love that endured.
As we step into what comes next,
steady our hearts.
Sharpen our discernment.
Bind us more deeply to one another.
May we meet the coming year
not with fear,
but with resolve rooted in justice and care.
Amen.

PRAYER PARTNERS

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



December 28 - January 3

Louis and Khamla Frost

January 4 - 10

Megan Fuller

January 11 - 17

Judy Girard

January 18 - 24

Caryl Hodges

January 25 - 31

Lorene Jackson

Come and Worship with us!



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

January 4	10 AM	Epiphany Sunday Matthew 2:1-14
January 11	10 AM	The Baptism of Jesus Matthew 3:13-17
January 18	10 AM	Martin Luther King Sunday Congregational Meeting and Potluck
January 25	10 AM	Called... Matthew 4:18-23

JANUARY 18



ANNUAL REPORTS DUE JANUARY 5

If you are a chair of a Board or Committee of the church your annual report is due in the church office on Monday, January 5. Please email the reports to Amy at office@fccsanrafael.org



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=c2V0RXEwWjF4STNNSTlxbWFFTENuZz09>

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

MEETINGS, MEETINGS, MEETINGS -- VIA ZOOM

Jan. 8: The Board of Trustees will meet on **Thursday, Jan. 8**, at 7:00 PM.

Jan. 13: The Board of Ministry will meet on **Tuesday, Jan. 13**, at 11:45 AM.

Jan. 22: The Board of Mission will meet on **Wednesday, Jan. 22**, at 12:15 PM.



KINDNESS — PASS IT ON!

Visit a sick friend

BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT



Many thanks to continuing Board members Louis Frost, Caryl Hodges, Val Sherer, and Bob Spofford.

Why do we Have New Toilets?

At the request of Marin Municipal Water District, in the first week of December we replaced 5 toilets with extra low flow versions and replaced the downstairs dishwasher with a more efficient model. Preliminary analysis of the first two weeks indicates we reduced our non-irrigation-time water use by about a third, which resulted several hundred gallons of water saved. Hopefully this will allow the water district to proceed with authorizing the landscape project. By the way, the toilets don't look different and have the same whooshing sound of the power assisted toilets we replaced.

Why is the Cork Oak Bleeding?

We consulted with Bartlett Tree Experts, who brought in a Ph.D tree pathologist to evaluate the tree. They determined that the tree has been weakened by root compaction related to the extensive concrete covering of the roots. This has contributed to Leaf Miner and Bark Beetle invasions. They recommend we increase our current parasite treatments and add a root invigoration regimen. This includes removing the iron grates, "washing" the compacted roots, adding nutrients, and covering with bark or gravel. The Trustees have agreed so the work should start in January.

Next Board of Trustees meeting is Thursday, January 8, at 7 PM on Zoom.

PICTURES OF THE CANDY MAKING PARTY





BOARD OF MISSION MISSION MATTERS



MANY THANKS FOR YOUR GENEROSITY



The Ritter Center's Family to Family Holiday Gift Card Program provides gift cards to Ritter Center registered families and individuals so they can fulfill their kids' holiday wishes and buy what they need this winter. We collected 19 gift cards on Sunday, December 14, totaling \$500.

SAVE THE DATE NEXT STREET CHAPLAINCY DINNER - FEBRUARY 3

The Board of Mission has committed to helping prepare and serve dinner for those in need four times this year. On Tuesday, February 3, 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.

also need you to save lightly used warm coats, scarves, boots, gloves, mittens, gloves, and sweaters that we donate to those who come to the dinner.

Please let Lucinda Ray know if you can attend.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO REMEMBER THE FOOD BANK

Please continue to 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.

In 2025, we donated 408 pounds of food to the Food Bank. Many thanks!!



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. We are grateful for the very personalized greeting cards that Helen has been sending folk and for the Agape church members and Pastor for their home or hospital visits, for offering rides to appointments and to church.

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

Tuesdays at 5 PM Meditation continues every Tuesdays at 5 PM. Tell Elisabeth if you wish to join by Zoom or need a ride if you cannot attend in person.

In Advent:

November 30 HOPE Rev. Elisabeth preached on "John the Baptist" and an exquisite special arrangement by Gerry Grosz of Dona Nobis Pacem Domine/ Give Us Your Peace by Jacques Berthier was sung by the choir.

December 7 PEACE Rev. Elisabeth preached on "A Peace That Transforms" and the choir sang an arrangement by Gerry Grosz of Come Thou Long Expected Jesus followed by the sharing of Holy Communion.

December 14 JOY Rev. Elisabeth's sermon "This Is The Son of Mary" was followed by a quiet time of reflection and an extremely moving performance of "Mary Did You Know," sung by Cindy Acker and by Gerry Grosz at the piano. The Communion Table was filled with a broad range of artistic figurines of Mary shared by members of the Congregation.

December 21 LOVE Rev. Elisabeth preached on "Love, Joseph's Willingness." The Sanctuary was filled with poinsettia to honor loved ones and the cross was bedecked with poinsettias as well. The choir and Gerry shared a beautiful performance of "Follow the Star," and Christina and David Santschi performed an exquisite duet of "Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear."



December 24 Christmas Eve, 7PM We had a family service telling the Christmas Story through Scripture and Carols and a Homily by Pastor Elisabeth. The music was led by Gerry Grosz, our Music Director, and our guest Cellist, Marci Brown. The choir's special music "In the Bleak Midwinter," brought us to a holy place. We ended with lighting candles and singing "Silent Night" in among a warm candlelit community. It was a special joy to see church family who came from a distance or reminded us of dear family who have passed on.

December 24 Christmas Eve, 11PM Although it was not "a midnight clear" members enjoyed reading the Christmas story through the scriptures and singing along to recorded Christmas hymns, thanks to David! In "communion" we shared hot cider and Gingerbread cookies.

Too.” On the Communion Table a simple carved olive wood manger with rough hewn shepherds and animals made by refugees in Palestine remind us of Jesus who was born to an oppressed ethnic group and spent his early years as a refugee in Egypt, taught that as followers we must act to realize Christ’s Kingdom of compassion, forgiveness and peace. The special music “The Night of Silence” (Daniel Kantor) sung by the Choir and accompanied on piano by Music Director, Gerry Grosz was an uplifting and deeply meditative experience.



An especially “Holy Night” was experienced by those of us who participated in the **December 23rd Blue Christmas Service** prepared by Elisabeth and with open sharing of the “shadows,” the grieving or worries or fears in our lives that often are especially difficult during seasons of celebration. Additional spiritual support was offered by our devotional guide and by signing up for Advent Flash Text Prayers, a project of Into the Wilderness, supported by Plymouth Jazz and Justice UCC and coordinated by Rev. Leslie Leasure and Rev. Penny Nixon.



GRATITUDE Thank you to all who helped “Deck the Halls with boughs” in the Sanctuary, prepared the altar, brought flowers for the altar, gave toward poinsettias and those who shopped for them. Thank you to Amy Powers for the bulletins and weekly reminders and all the extra additions to the bulletins this time of year. Thanks to those who put out or put away “Red Hymnals,” who passed out Christmas Eve candles, served as greeters, hosted coffee making and delicious refreshments. Thank you to readers and candle lighters for the Advent Candles. Thank you to our tech team (David, Bob and especially Will), our Ministry Team and especially Pastor Elisabeth Middelberg for preaching and all the

extra time and thoughtful preparation to make our Advent services very special. Special thanks to the Christina and David Schiffner-Santschi, Cindy Acker, Gerry Grosz, Marci Brown and the choir for our special music that enriched our worship and lifted us up. We, recall with gratitude, the creation of our church’s wooden cross and metal inserts designed and built by Bob De Haan since the time of the church remodel! Thank you to all who brought Mary figurines and crèches from their family histories to share with us all. We remember with gratitude Millie Bransford and Julianne Stokstad who created our Mary, Joseph and Donkey for sharing in our homes.

Thank you to all who bought Poinsettia in honor/ memory of loved ones:

- Caran Cuneo: In honor and celebration of Family and Friends and Elisabeth Middelberg.
- Caryl Hodges: In honor of Amy, Justin, Sean & Cio Kaufman. In memory of David Hodges, L.J. & Sue Cox, Edward & Miriam Hodges, Theresa Tompkins.
- Judy Johnson: In celebration of Happy Birthday to Jesus and In Memory of Gary Johnson
- David Knopf, Cathi & Megan Fuller: In honor of Sisters, In memory of the Fuller, the Knopf and the Lester family Loved Ones.
- Elisabeth Middelberg: In honor of Cindy Acker and in memory of Darline and Washington Maxwell and Albert & Roelie Middelberg.
- Jim Turner: In Honor of Mary T Olson.
- FCC Board of Ministry: In memory of our dear FCC Family members who have passed on.

We, recall with gratitude, the creation of our church's wooden cross and metal inserts designed and built by Bob De Haan since the time of the church remodel! Thank you to all who brought Mary figurines and crèches from their family histories to share with us all. We remember with gratitude Millie Bransford and Julianne Stokstad who created our Mary, Joseph and Donkey for sharing in our homes.

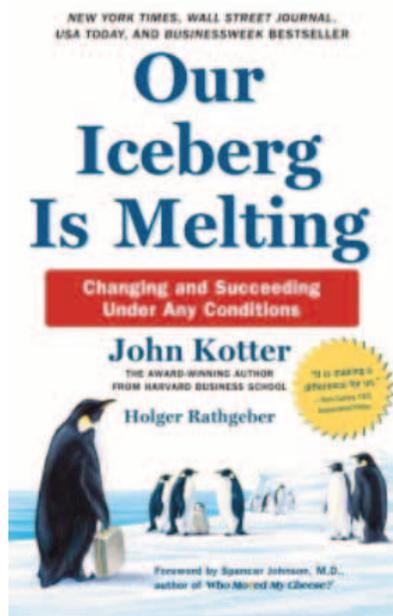


Next Board of Ministry meeting Tuesday, January 13 at 1145 AM on Zoom.

Blessing

Lord, In the beginning
When all was very dark, you said: Let there be light.
And there was light.
And life throughout the universe. And when the human race
Was exhausted, tired, and weary,
In the darkness of anxiety and confusion
Into that darkness you came as light in Jesus.
God became a human being among us all.
We are still experiencing times, which can be frightening and confusing.
Come, Light of Life
Lighten the darkness in our lives with your mighty word of love.
Lighten our hearts with the joy of your promised coming.
Lighten our world with the hope that faith in you brings.
We travel towards Christmas Day in the peace of Jesus Christ.
May this peace,
That lightens the soul with faith, lift our spirits with hope
And enters the world as Love, be ours tonight and always.
And may the blessing of God and Creator,
Go with us, and remain with us, now and always.

BOOK CLUB - JANUARY 29, 7:30 PM



We will be reading *Our Iceberg Is Melting*, by John Kotter. This book is NOT available from either the Sonoma County or Marin County libraries. However, copies will be available during worship, starting January 11. It's a very short book (about 150 pages), and a very fast read.

On the surface, *Our Iceberg Is Melting* is a simple story of a colony of penguins facing a dilemma. But contained within the story and the characters is a powerful message about the fear of change and about how to motivate people to face the future and take action. A good book to read at the beginning of a new year!



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

6 — Oak Dowling
20 — Doug Shannon
20 — James True

ELDERS MEET ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 6:30 - 7:30

HAPPY NEW YEAR ALL

On Wednesday evening, January 28th, 2026, we'll meet at 6:30 to talk about our early religious and spiritual experiences. When did you first go to church? What kind of church? Did you not go to church until later? Did you have important religious or spiritual experiences outside of church? Did you leave a church for a while or change churches?

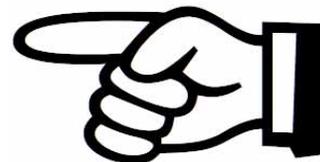


We'll share our experiences, things that are similar and those that are different. Of course we will not be proselytizing, just sharing. See you then over the church's Zoom link:

Charles

TIE DEADLINE for FEBRUARY 2026 TIE - MON., JAN. 26

The deadline for articles and news for the January 2026 issue of The TIE is Monday, January 26. Please email your articles to lucindaray@aol.com by January 26.



Rev. Elisabeth Middelberg

Thursday mornings
or by appointment

Phone: 707 280-0382

Email: Elismid@yahoo.com

Amy Powers – Office Manager

Monday and Thursday 10:30 AM - 2 PM

You can contact Amy by phone
or email any time.

Office Phone : 415 479-2747

Email: office@fccsanrafael.org

FCC Calendar **JANUARY** 2026

January 2026						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
28 10.am  Worship, Church School & Child Care 10.am-11.am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10.AM	29 5.am  THE DEADLINE 5 PM	30 5.am-6.am  Meditation in the Sanctuary	31	January 1 New Year's Day	2	3
4 10.am  Worship, Church School & Child Care 10.am-11.am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10.AM	5	6 5.am-6.am  Meditation in the Sanctuary	7	8 7.am-8.am  BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING via ZOOM	9	10
11 10.am  Worship, Church School & Child Care 10.am-11.am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10.AM	12	13 11.45.am  Board of Ministry Meeting 11.45 via ZOOM 5.am-6.am  Meditation in the Sanctuary	14	15	16	17
18 10.am  Worship, Church School & Child Care 10.am-11.am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10.AM 11.am  ANNUAL MEETING AND POTLUCK LUNCHEON	19 Martin Luther King Day	20 5.am-6.am  Meditation in the Sanctuary	21 12.15 pm-1.15 pm  BOARD of MISSION Meeting on ZOOM	22	23	24
25 10.am  Worship, Church School & Child Care 10.am-11.am Our service is on YOUTUBE at 10.AM	26 5.am  THE DEADLINE 5 PM	27 5.am-6.am  Meditation in the Sanctuary	28 6.30 am-7.30 pm  ELDER'S MEETING ON ZOOM	29 7.30 am-8.30 am  BOOK CLUB reading OUR GEBERG IS MEETING	30	31

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.