

# SALT & LIGHT COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SEBASTOPOL APRIL 2020 NEWSLETTER



The Community Church of Sebastopol United Church of Christ 707.823.2484 www.uccseb.org office@uccseb.org

**Lead Minister** Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent

Associate Minister of Faith Formation Rev. Lacey Hunter

Associate Minister of Congregational Care Rev. Rachel Knuth

> Minister of Music Rev. Brian Plaugher

Pastor Emeritus Rev. Gene Nelson

> Handbell Ensemble Director Karna Roa

**Keyboardist**J. Althea

Congregational Administrator Becca Emerson

> Bookkeeper Julie Reimer

Custodian Maria Mojica

#### EASTER IN THE TIME OF CORONA

By Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent, Lead Minister

I write this article having recently made the decision to cancel public worship at Community Church through the month of April due to the shelter-in-place orders as a result of the corona virus pandemic. And now I am reading the sentence I just typed and I feel like pinching myself to make sure it's real. Perhaps "surreal" is an apt description.

In "Amor en los tiempos del colera," Gabriel Garcia Marquez was writing in the genre of "magical realism." Against the background of pandemic illness in his native Colombia, Marquez imagined fanciful intrusions into the realities of everyday life, magical disruptions that manifested humor and beauty even in the midst of tragedy.

Here are some of my observations of humor and beauty in these "tiempos de corona":

- Nature proceeds unabated. The blossoms and birds don't care that we are scared. Our pets, on the other hand, are blessed with the bounty of our added presence.
- As I've made calls to member households, I've noticed that retirees are having a much easier time with shelter-in-place. It seems it's easier to slow down to a stop if you're already driving under the speed limit.
- Now that we're told we have to stay apart, we want so much to be connected. Someone observed to me that we aren't so much social distancing as physical distancing while finding new ways to get socially connected. Who knew the telephone would make a come back!
- People seem hungry for worship, for ritual, for prayer, for bodies gathered in a sanctuary. I can say first hand that ministers are hungry for all of that as well.

The story of Easter, told against the background of tragedy and death, is a story of humor and beauty. Easter is God getting the last laugh. Easter is an event that happens at the breaking of a new dawn. The hopes that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah were dashed on Friday. Our Lord was crucified and breathed his last. The Savior of the World was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. Saturday was the saddest day the earth has ever known. But then, the dawn. The women arriving with spices. A rolled away stone. An empty tomb. Unexplained messengers. "What have you done with him?" Mary asked the strangely familiar gardener. "Mary," he replied, and that was all he needed to say to set the gospel in motion again.

How fortunate that Easter is not only a day, but a whole season of 50 days that outpace the mere 40 of Lent. Add to that the theological claim that every Sunday is a "little Easter" and we discover that, at any given time, Easter is never more than seven days away.

Let us pray that while we find ways to worship apart from each other, absence will indeed make the heart grow fonder. And let us give thanks that "there is no place where God is not," which means that Christ is more present than we previously thought, right here, right now, the embodiment of God's "love in the time of corona."

#### **WORSHIP**



#### **APRIL 2020 WORSHIP**

During the month of April we will continue to worship online. See https://uccseb.org/ and weekly All-Church emails for links to our church's YouTube channel and Zoom rooms.

#### **LENT**

April 5 – 6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday – Matthew 21: 1 – 11

Today Pastor Benjamin offers a sermon based on Matthew's version of Jesus' street-theater-parade from Bethphage into Jerusalem. Worshiping at home, you might find a leaf or branch to wave and sing "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" Find a place to display your "palm' for the week.



#### **HOLY WEEK**

April 9 - Maundy Thursday - John 13: 1 - 20

Pastor Lacey is creating a Tenebrae liturgy to use at home. Tenebrae, a word meaning shadows, refers to the extinguishing of lights on Maundy Thursday. Washing of feet and reenacting the Last Supper are also common practices on the Thursday of Holy Week. (See weekly email for details.)

**April 10 – Good Friday – John 18: 1 – 19: 42** 

Pastor Rachel will offer a videoed cemetery stations of the cross on this day that commemorates Jesus' crucifixion and death. (See weekly email for details.)

April 11 – Holy Saturday – Matthew 27: 57 – 66

Our Northern California Nevada Conference offers an online vigil today that will include prayer, music, silence, and scripture-readings. Participants are invited to join for as long or as short as time permits. (See weekly email for details.)

#### **EASTER**

April 12 – Easter Sunday / Feast of the Resurrection – John 20: 1-18 Though we will be apart, this is the day the Lord has made, the day of new creation, the day we remember that by the power of the resurrection, God overcomes the power of death. Pastor Benjamin preaches a sermon entitled: "The  $8^{th}$  Day of Creation."

April 19 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter – John 20: 19 - 31

Fortunately, Easter is not only a day, but a whole season – 50 days, outpacing the 40 days of Lent – when we praise the Lord of all creation for the gift of new life in Christ. Today we hear the story of Thomas, whom we call the doubter, but is in fact one who has come to believe.



April 26 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – *Luke 24: 13 – 35* 

Today we continue in the season of Easter and hear the story of Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Coming in May... Hoping for a return to public worship on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. in the Sanctuary, Easter Season, Faith Formation Sunday, Ascension Day, Music Appreciation Sunday, and Pentecost Sunday

#### **BALCONY VIEW**



## THE BALCONY VIEW... HOPE FOR OUR COMMON LIFE

By Michael Ott, Moderator



The Leadership Council's meeting on March 18 adapted to the reality of shelter-in-place. We gathered with the help of Zoom, a video communications tool, to conduct our meeting. Yes, it was different, but it worked and we had some fun with it too.

The Council discussed how we can lead the congregation through this difficult time. We know we want to stay in touch with you, opening communication in new ways, gathering information and listening to concerns, to continue to build community. We are aware that there is a need for all of us to come together in these hard times in as many ways as we can. We will expand our capacity to meet the needs of the congregation, by learning new skills to provide information, updates and spiritual nourishment through organic pop-ups, YouTube and other technologies, as well as providing more of every kind of information on our church website and e-mail blasts.

In a Christian context, discernment is perception in the absence of judgment with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding. Providing for a time of healing and discernment will give us hope of living through this present moment without a shattering of our common life. Take more time to pray, reflect, meditate, read the bible, and praise and worship God. This reading of discernment aligns with Lent, a time of moderation and self-discipline, the season we are observing now. It does feel as though we are traveling through the wilderness – but not alone, because we are all in this together.

It can be challenging to lead when we may not know where we are going. For the Council, we can rely on our Mission as a guide. "To worship God and share the love of Jesus Christ, teaching the message of Jesus to all ages and putting our faith into action." Our task is to provide all of us new ways to worship, love, teach and act as we go through this trouble together. Above all, we are deeply moved to be part of this wonderful church family. God Bless.

https://uccseb.org/docs/2020-March-Council-Meeting-Minutes.pdf





#### FAITH FORMATION: FORMED FOR INTERCONNECTEDNESS

As a minister of faith formation, I am always asking myself, "What are the times we are living forming us for?" What kinds of things are we learning? How is life teaching us or shaping us into particular ways of being in the world? In the time of COVID-19, amidst these days of sheltering-in-place, I believe we are being formed, shaped, molded for interconnectedness. We are being remind that we live as people whose lives are deeply entwined with one another and all of creation. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave language to this reality when he said, "In a real sense all life is inter-related. All [of humanity is] caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

The order to shelter-in-place is in many ways an isolating, lonely, possibly scary ask of all of us. To shelter-in-place comes with economic ramifications and challenging, painful realizations that many of the places we accessed for comfort, play and nourishment are currently off-limits. In that longing for connection, it can be tempting to go out anyway. But, we also recognize that to shelter-in-place is also the most loving act we can do during these days. So how can we make sense of this time? How can the very daily act of sheltering-in-place, become for us a spiritual practice? These are the questions and experiences that I have found myself meditating on: our interconnectedness, on the "web of mutuality" that forms us as God's kin-dom makers.

I imagine myself opening the door to my home and walking out into the hallways of my apartment building. I imagine the children who play in those hallways, running and sliding up and down the banisters. I imagine the parents and grandparents they live with. As I get to the main door of the building and reach for the doorknob, I imagine the mailperson who visits our building daily to deliver mail to 20 apartments. I imagine the countless other homes they will deliver to, the post office they will return to, the dear ones awaiting them at home. With each imagining, I give thanks for each of those people, known and unknown. I hold them in compassion, care, warmth. I remind myself that my life is part of theirs and their life is part of mine. And each surface I touch is in turn touching them and all whom they touch and all whom they touch, and all whom they touch. In this way, sheltering-in-place is transformed from isolation to deep connection, an opportunity for us to intentionally enter into relationship with all of creation and honor the depth by which our lives always touch one another. And it reminds us why sheltering-in-place is such an important act of social justice and compassion; as we limit our exposure to illness and to potentially passing along illness, we also protect all those who our touch touches. I invite you to explore this meditation for yourself. What is the wondrous, expansive web of your life?

We are exploring the beauty of these connections in new and creative ways throughout the ministries of our church. Here are some ways we are deepening our formation for connection at Community Church in these COVID-19 days:

- Every Tuesday evening in Lent we have been posting Faith Journey videos from church staff and members asking the question, "What gets you through difficult times?" In Eastertide, you are invited to send us your videos of resurrection: Where/how are you encountering resurrection/new life?
- Middle and High School Youth Groups have started to meet weekly on Zoom, an online video communication platform. Here we delight in seeing and hearing one another all while sheltering-in-place. We take time to share how we are doing, play, dance, and brainstorm how we are being called to serve one another and our wider communities in these times.
- Ministry Teams are meeting on Zoom to think creatively about how to live into what is at the heart of our ministries, such as summer camps, Service and Learning Together (SALT) trips, Godly Play and Bible Studies, so that we can faithfully offer these formation opportunities amidst the current realities and demands of our world.
- Recognizing that the work of creating anti-oppression practices is ongoing no matter where we
  are sheltered, our adult formation class *Imagining Beyond Empire* continues via Zoom. Stay
  tuned for additional opportunities for adult formation in Eastertide.

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#### **FAITH FORMATION**

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- A new Faith Formation site, (In)formation: Spiritual Growth for a More Just World, is available now with new weekly resources for children and families, youth, and adults, including rituals, meditations, learning and growing together from home. visit https://commchufaithformation.wordpress.com/blog/ to find resources like handwashing prayers, playlists, table prompts, and spiritual practices for you to engage with on your own, over the phone or video with others, or those in your household.
- Church staff and leadership are finding new ways of gathering online for worship, fellowship and prayer.

Wherever you are sheltering, whether these days are calling forth a greater sense of stillness and quiet in you, or stirring up longings to reach out and be in conversation, know that your church family, in communion with the saints and angels, the One who forms you, the fierce love of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit, gather with you, this day and always.

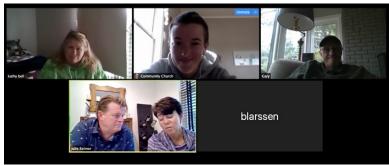
in communion, Pastor Lacey

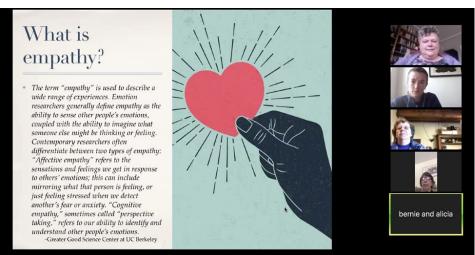
#### FAITH FORMATION DURING THE DAYS OF COVID-19 & ZOOM ROOMS



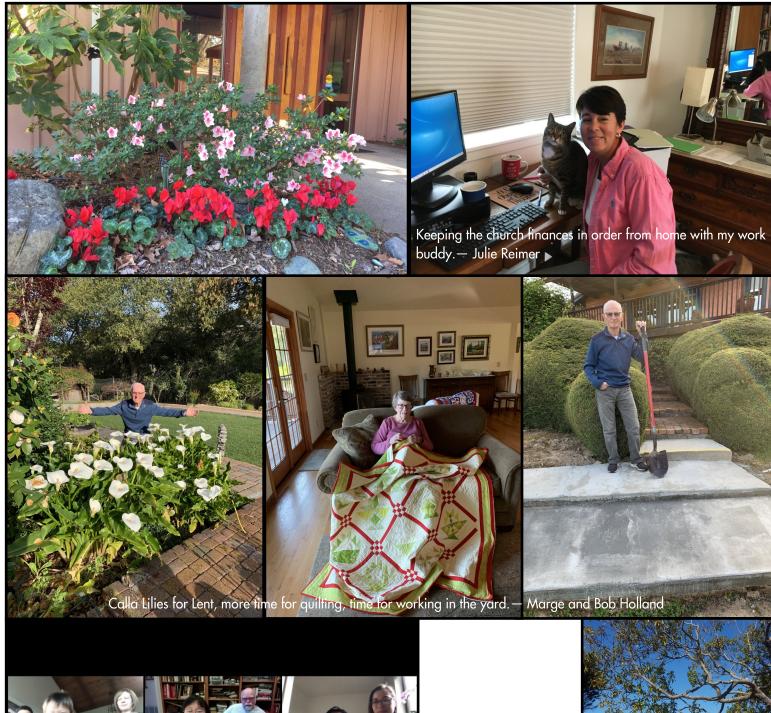
Children's Faith Formation Action Team met to brainstorm how we can prayerfully journey alongside one another. Ideas include zoom laughing rooms for children, Godly Play videos, card writing and Rise Up! Camp from home.

Youth Ministry Team met to prayerfully consider how to empower youth members in their faith lives, care of self, service with others, and the importance of play.





Imagining Beyond Empire met Sunday morning to discuss the powers and limits of empathy and to practice "constructive listening" as a tool for anti-oppression work.





There is no place you can go where God is not.

- Gladys Chappell



#### **CONGREGATIONAL CARE**

#### A CARE NOTE FROM PASTOR RACHEL

Dear Companions on the Journey,

I'm so grateful for you all. As some of you may know, your Pastors have been calling you by phone, with the goal of calling every household in the next few weeks.

If you haven't heard from us yet, you will! It's been a blessing to hear your voices on the phone, and to connect with you in this way. I've heard stories of folks hunkered down with good books, movies to watch, and the main task of walking the dog. Some of you are enjoying a slower pace, and feel worried about a return to what seems like a hamster wheel. I've also heard from a few people how lonely this time is, how insecure you feel about your job or people you love being laid off, how worried you are about our homeless neighbors and especially for the children who rely upon their schools for meals and safety. So I've been thinking about how really, this Lenten season of shelter-in-place, we are coming face to face with our fears around illness and death. And what we are experiencing is grief.

It is right to grieve this moment, where things are on-hold for an unknown amount of time, and there may be long-term changes to our society, economy, and healthcare system. The whole experience we're having right now is disorienting—but it's not entirely unfamiliar. When I meet with people for funeral preparations, often they express the feeling of being in a "time out of time" where they feel disoriented and "foggy." In her book Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I've Loved, Kate Bowler writes about being diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer, as a new mother at age 35. She describes the first few days after her diagnosis, when she was alone in the hospital, couldn't see her child, and didn't know how many months she might live. And in that moment, she felt like she'd discovered something new in her faith, that she couldn't describe, a floating feeling. She didn't know what it was, but she knew she was afraid of losing this feeling. She writes,

"I began to ask friends, theologians, historians, pastors I know, and nuns I liked, What am I going to do when it's gone? And they knew exactly what I meant because they had either felt it themselves or read about it in great works of Christian theology. St. Augustine called it 'the sweetness.' Thomas Aquinas called it something mystical like 'the prophetic light.' But all said, yes, it will go.... The sense of God's presence will go. ... But they offered me this small bit of certainty, and I clung to it. When the feelings recede like the tides, they said, they will leave an imprint. I would somehow be marked by the presence of an unbidden God."

I believe the feeling of mental fogginess in the midst of a crisis, can actually be an experience of the Presence of God surrounding us. That's often the way God shows up when we are heartbroken and anxious: God covers us with Love. And that's my prayer for our church and the world, as we move through these challenging and unknown times, that God's grace will imprint upon us, marking us with Love. May God bless you in this season of challenge, and may you feel the Spirit moving in your life.

Warmly, Pastor Rachel



#### PRAYER CIRCLE

We hold in prayer... All people who welcome babies with joy and love, including Bobbie Johanson, upon the arrival of her grandchild Michael Johanson, and Chris & Jim Jenkins, upon the arrival of their grandchild Luke Patrick. We pray for all people who are especially impacted by the current physical separation, especially school children, homeless people, and households experiencing domestic violence. All people who are homebound, including Virginia Hughes, Wynneth Longfellow, and Nancy Mathews. God, we pray your Presence surround these beloveds with comfort and care, and connect us spiritually even while we are apart. Amen.

#### **CONGREGATIONAL CARE**

#### GOOD FRIDAY SPIRITUAL GATHERINGS

Nurture your contemplative spirit in a Virtual Open Chapel. The Northern California-Nevada Conference (NCNC) of the United Church of Christ, the regional body to which our congregation belongs, is offering a Good Friday Virtual Open Chapel. The Virtual Open Chapel will be open for seven hours, and will feature short meditations on the Stations of the Cross, every hour and half-hour, with photos and music looping in between meditations. Local Church Pastors from around the NCNC will lead the meditations, including our own Pastor Rachel. All are welcome to join the site— look to your email during Holy Week for the link. Come and center-down for as long as you like, joining your heart in prayer. You'll be in good company, sharing contemplation alongside many others in our Conference.



Good Friday Cemetery Walk continues online this year. Pastor Rachel will be telling the story of Good Friday, in a family-appropriate way, from our local cemetery. There will be opportunities for contemplation and ways to participate from home. Look for the video link in your email during Holy Week.

#### SPRING NINE-TO-DINE

Although our Spring Nine-to-Dine groups are not meeting in person, I encourage you to either gather on a Zoom call in April, or begin a "reply-all" email group, to check in with one another. Here are some conversation-starter questions for your April distanced gathering:

- How are you doing with the current shelter-in-place?
- What practices sustain your spirit in this time of stress?
- How might God be making space for new life, even amidst this experience of disorientation?

May God bless you as you find new ways to gather and support one another.

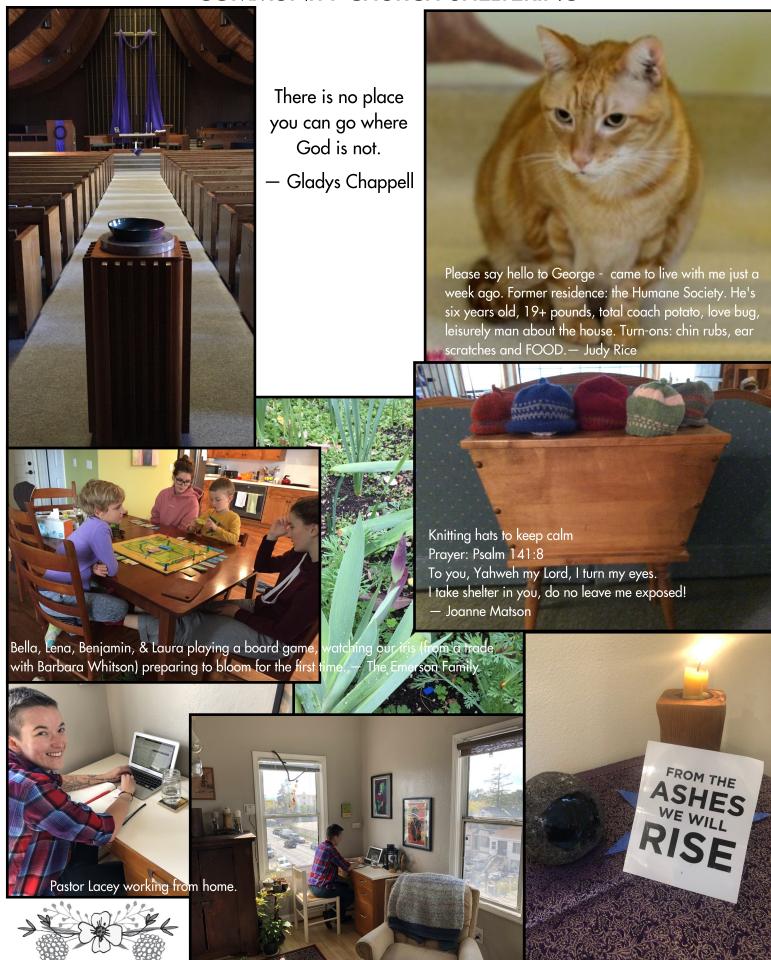
The next Nine-to-Dine groups will form in August, for Fall 2020. For more information about Nine-to-Dine, contact Pastor Rachel: pastorrachel@uccseb.org.



#### KINDRED GROUPS



Kindred Groups are the church's neighborhood groups, all named after apples. Our Kindred Groups continue to check in with one another in these times of physical isolation. Kindred Group Leaders have made connections with their groups by sharing songs, poems, calling group members, and emailing greetings and prayers. Kindred Group Leaders also share pastoral concerns with the Ministers. Thank you, Kindred Group Leaders, for being a point of connection and a shining light in our midst! For more information about Kindred Groups, contact Pastor Rachel: pastorrachel@uccseb.org.



#### **CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR & BIRTHDAYS**

#### MEET CHRIS, NEW CONGREGATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

On April 6, Chris will begin working with Becca to transition into being the full-time Congregational Administrator. That transition will be very creative and may involve a lot of Zoom conferencing or Facetiming in this unusual time, but by April 13, Chris will be the new voice on the phone and at the keyboard for Community Church. Chris has already begun some preliminary preparations for this role and looks forward to starting.

Chris Chang Weeks joined the Community Church of Sebastopol in October 2018. She had been looking for a spiritual home ever since Gary, her husband, and she had moved to Santa Rosa six years ago. Joining Community Church felt like a natural fit since



Gary and Chris have two adult children. Madeline, their daughter, is a graduate student at the Stanford School of Business. Alec, their son, lives and works in Seattle with his fiancé, Nicole. Their wedding is scheduled for August 8, 2020. Gary, who is a retired sales engineer from the high tech industry, cycles at least 100 miles every week in Sonoma County.

Chris has spent most of her working career fund-raising for nonprofits. She has worked for Triton Museum of Art in Santa Clara, Santa Rosa Junior College Foundation, and most recently, the Humane Society of Sonoma County. She has also been the Temple Administrator/Operations Manager at Congregation Shomrei Torah in Santa Rosa

Chris enjoys cooking, and sharing meals with family and friends. When her extended family gets together, the conversation always includes planning for the next meal together. For her son's wedding, Chris is putting together a cookbook of family recipes with contributions from all the family members. With the restriction of social gatherings during Covid 19 outbreak, her family has scheduled a Zoom family conference on Sunday afternoons.

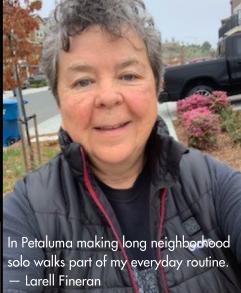
Chris' other hobbies include training dogs, hiking, gardening, yoga and knitting.

#### APRIL BIRTHDAYS

- Sebastien Jame
   Sara Margulis
   Jillian Gonzales
- 5 Jeff BoalBecky Wessling
- 6 Irma Bachelor Althea
- 8 Tristyn Nichols
  Jessica Steyn
  Lacey Hunter
- 9 Lena Emerson
- 11 Tony Given
- 12 Catie Carciere
- 14 Charlotte Mitchell
- 15 Susanna Simms Scott McGinnis
- 17 Roger Wilson
- 18 Becca Emerson
- 19 Lorinda Bradley
- 20 Nolan Petersen
- 21 Russ Reimer Marshall Clark-Cupp
- 25 Dave Madsen
  Dennis Olson
  Terri Harper
  Molly Wreden
- 26 Kathleen Matthies
- 27 Deidra Warner Sharon Fennema
- 28 Julie KleinChris Chang Weeks
- 29 Christine Ford Brooke Bell
- 30 Nancy Dougherty Nancy Shimetz Sabina Malone









There is no place you can go where God is not.

GladysChappell









### **EVENTS IN APRIL AT COMMUNITY CHURCH**

All in person gatherings at Community Church are suspended. Check our online calendar at <a href="https://uccseb.org/Calendar.php">https://uccseb.org/Calendar.php</a> for updates when significant improvements occur in the current COVID-19 Pandemic and the impacts on Sonoma County.

Apr 5	Palm/Passion Sunday-5 <sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, Worship recordings on YouTube	
Apr 8	Staff Team, 10:00 am, Zoom Room	
Apr 9	Maundy Thursday	
	Card Writing Ministry, 11:00 am, from home	
	Maundy Thursday Service, TBD	
Apr 10	Good Friday	
	Cemetery Walk, YouTube	4
Apr 12	Easter Sunday	V
Apr 15	Leadership Council, 6:30 pm, Zoom Room	
Apr 19	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter, YouTube	
	High School Youth Group, 12:00 pm, TBD	
Apr 20	Prayer Shawl Group, 10:00 am, from home	
Apr 21	Health & Safety Team, 1:00 pm, TBD	
	Lead Minister Pastor-Parish Relations Team, 4:00 pm, TBD	889 1
Apr 26	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, YouTube	



#### New Office Hours with Chris

Beginning April 13 (pending re-opening)

 $M_1W_1F 9:30 \text{ am} - 2:30 \text{ pm}$ 

Tu, Th 11:30 am - 5:00 pm

#### **Event Changes**

- All Church Dance Party—Postponed
- Rebuilding Together Sebastopol—Postponed
- Sonoma County Pride Parade—Canceled
- Camp Caz Summer Camps—Canceled
- Adult Mission Trip—Still on as scheduled



The following are all suspended until further notice:
Sundays at 9:00 am—Faith Formation Hour

- ⋄ Godly Play, Preschool-5th Grade in Classroom 5
- Middle School Youth, 6th-8th Grade in the Youth Lounge
- Bible Study, Adults in the Fireside Room

Sundays at 10:30 am—Worship in the Sanctuary
Tuesdays at 4:00 pm—Handbell Ensemble rehearses in
the Sanctuary

Thursdays at 7:15 pm—Chancel Choir rehearses in the Choir Room

Fridays at 10:00 am—Uke Stars meet in Fellowship Hall

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