# Community Church of Sebastopol United Church of Christ

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### **Lead Minister**

Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent

Associate Minister
Open

Faith Formation Coordinator Tirza Dawn

Congregational
Administrator
Joy Richards

**Choral Director** Andy DelMonte

**Keyboardist**J. Althea

Handbell Director Karna Roa

> **Bookkeeper** Deanna Euritt

**Custodian**Paul Louden

**Pastor Emeritus** Rev. Gene Nelson



# SALT & LIGHT

# COMMUNITY CHURCH OF SEBASTOPOL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER

January: The Most Political Month Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent, Lead Minister

It probably won't surprise you that I've been hearing more comments lately about politics in church. Some would like to hear less about politics: "I come to church to hear about spirituality, not politics." Others want to hear more: "Why don't you preach more about [insert issue]?" Still others want to know what I, as a pastor, think about the relationship between religion and politics.

January is a good month to consider that question. It is the most political month.

January 6<sup>th</sup> is, of course...
 Epiphany. (Chances are your brain wanted to finish that sentence differently.) Epiphany is arguably the most important Christian festival after Easter, but it has been overshadowed for a century by the commercialism of Christmas, and for the past 5 years by the





violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

- And January is the month we celebrate the birthday of civil rights leader Rev.
   Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when people on all sides of the political spectrum try to claim him as their own.
- January 22, 1973 is the anniversary of the historic Roe v. Wade decision which safeguarded a U.S. citizen's right to an abortion. Roe was overturned in 2022, but January remains the month when bodily autonomy was once affirmed.
- Finally, January is the month of the presidential inauguration, representing the peaceful transfer of power that is a hallmark of democratic societies.

I was recently introduced to the work of a fellow United Church of Christ clergyperson, Rev. Barry Lynn, who served many years as Executive Director of Americans for the Separation of Church and State. In his book, "Piety & Politics: The Right-Wing Assault on the Religious Freedom," Lynn passionately advocates for a high wall between religion and government. This separation is not only good for our constitutional government which is required to regard all religions as equal, but also for churches and other spiritual communities who do not need the government attempting to influence the beliefs and practices of citizens.

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# January: The Most Political Month Continued from Page 1

How does this principle impact what happens in our local church community, and specifically, what happens in worship? I think a role of the church is to nurture the spiritual maturity of its members. I think this includes a focus on theology, art, spiritual practices, education, and service to others. I also think the church is "political" in the sense that it is a group of people living in the world, impacted by and seeking to influence the society of which it is a part. We should do this work in a non-partisan way, not officially endorsing any particular party or ideology. We will sometimes criticize political policies, parties, or people, but we should strive to do this while grounded in our Christian faith, the person of Jesus, and the challenge of the Gospel.

Our commitments as an "Open & Affirming" congregation are both theological and political. We are convinced that LGBTQ+ people are children of God, made exactly the way they are, and we are critical of any law that would seek to treat them otherwise. As a "Sanctuary" congregation, we are committed to standing in solidarity with and supporting our migrant and immigrant neighbors, even if it means defying the cruel and unlawful practices of the current so-called immigration enforcement. This political-theological stand is based in the Hebrew scriptures which demand that we treat the "alien" with respect (e.g., Exodus 22:21).

This January, as we navigate the relationship between religion and politics, I hope we'll extend the same grace to others that we would like others to extend to us. For my part, I want to remain open to and respectful of the diversity of political and theological ideas and opinions within our congregation. And I want to remain faithful to my calling as your pastor to share what I think the Holy Spirit is calling us to embrace. If we are ever unsure of what that is, we can always return to Jesus' own words. "Blessed are the poor/those who mourn/the meek/those who hunger/the merciful/the pure in heart/the peacemakers/the persecuted..." Sounds political to me.

# Thank you, Everyone!

Working together, we did it!

76 Christmas Bags to SameJones Hall.

71 warm clothing items to: 2nd Saturday Lunch, Food Pantry and The Living Room.

# A super big achievement!

# JANUARY 2026 WORSHIP Season of Epiphany

# Worship Details...

We worship in the sanctuary on Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
Services are live streamed on YouTube & Facebook
Weekly bulletin and announcements available at www.uccseb.org

# JANUARY 4 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas

Today we continue in the season of Christmastide. The Chancel Choir, directed by **Andy DelMonte**, shares worship music, we celebrate Holy Communion, and **Rev. Dr. Benjamin J. Broadbent**, Lead Minister, preaches a sermon on John 1:1–18 entitled, "Mirror and Window."

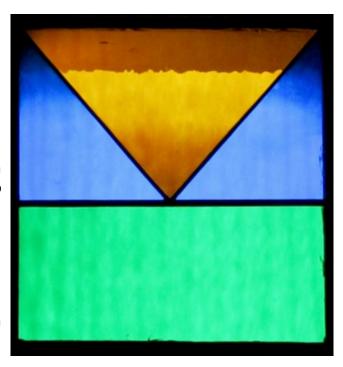
### JANUARY 6 - Feast of the Epiphany

# JANUARY 11 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany / Baptism of Christ Sunday

Today the Handbell Ensemble, directed by **Karna Roa**, shares worship music and **Pastor Benjamin** preaches a sermon on Matthew 2:1–12 entitled "Not Returning to Herod."

# JANUARY $18 - 2^{nd}$ Sunday after Epiphany / MLK Jr. Holiday Weekend

Today the Chancel Choir, directed by **Andy DelMonte**, shares worship music and **Pastor Benjamin** preaches a sermon on <u>Isaiah 49:1–7</u> entitled, "Not Laboring in Vain."



# JANUARY 25 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany / Annual Meeting of the Congregation

To the All Things New Band shares worship music, new members join our congregation, and Pastor Benjamin preaches a sermon on <u>Matthew 4:12–23</u> entitled, "Belonging to Each Other."

Coming in February... Transfiguration Sunday, Ash Wednesday & First Sunday in Lent

### **HOME AGAIN**

Born and raised here in Sebastopol, Reena's early spiritual life was shaped as much by the two acres of



ground her family tended as by any sanctuary. The Community Church youth group was her doorway in. Here, she found a mentor in her youth minister, who she describes as "a witch, a Christian and a Jew" who was inclusive. "There was no 'you need to believe this.' You be lieve in God, you don't believe in God, whatever, you're welcome here."

That foundation carried her into adulthood, where she felt called toward ministry. But entering the wider church brought painful disillusionment. In both seminary and a church where she served, she

encountered dynamics that felt "very patriarchal," marked by minimization and unhealthy boundaries. "It was heartbreaking," she says. "I realized I would have to disembody myself to serve in the way I felt called."

What followed was a deep crisis of faith where she stepped back from ministry entirely. For years, she pulled inward, marrying, having her first child, reconnecting with pagan practice, and searching for ways to commune with Spirit that didn't hurt. "I didn't know" recalls Reena "if I would ever be able to be in Christian community again."

Her return to the Community Church happened slowly, in small glimmers. "I would come occasionally, just to see how it felt," she remembers. The first breakthrough came in the simplest form: language. She sat in worship one Sunday and heard the church pray to "our Creator" instead of "our Father." She heard "kindom" instead of "kingdom." "I cried," she says. "It mattered to me so much. That language made me feel seen. I didn't feel like I belonged with the old words anymore, they hurt. But this...this felt like home."

There were other signs of change. She watched as Ben, the senior pastor, created genuine space for Rachel to lead as his equal. "What I was seeing was a male minister creating space for a woman to be in power as his peer," she explains. "It gave me hope."

And then came the conversation that shifted everything. She met with Rachel in the Fireside Room, just the two of them, and shared the whole journey: the harm, the wrestling, the longing, the slow softening. "She was so receptive," she says. "So validating. As another woman, as a mom, as someone now in ministry, she just held it. Being witnessed like that was healing."

Today, she says she feels something she wasn't sure she'd ever feel again: a sense of spiritual safety. Where trust once felt impossible, it has returned in layers through inclusive language, through healthy leadership, and through relationships that show her she does not have to choose between her faith and her full self."

Your gifts make it possible for us to offer the kind of inclusive ministry, pastoral care, and spiritual community that transformed Reena's life. Thank you for helping create a church where every person can feel safe, seen, and at home.

Written by: Linda Basso

Watch this space every month as we feature stories about how the individual members feel connected with the church.

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# BIRTHDAYS IN JANUARY



Birthdays are also listed in the Kindred Connection email sent every Thursday. If you would like to receive the weekly email, please contact the church office at 707-823-2484 or office@uccseb.org.

January 1	Elliott Norton
January 2	Larry Cote
January 3	Gary Gordon
January 4	Holly Willoughby
January 6	Marge Holland
January 6	Diana Wilson
January 7	Marlene Hooper
January 7	Bryan Peterson
January 8	Susan Nestor
January 8	Sharon Olson
January 8	Buck Buckman
January 8	Carolyn Davidson
January 9	Ted Babcock

January 12	Gail Thomas
January 14	Vicki Reno
January 15	Julie Smith
January 15	Brenda Flynn
January 15	Scot Covington
January 17	Rhonda Matheny
January 19	Leslie Wiser
January 20	Benji Margulis
January 23	Joanne Matson
January 23	Jane Rasmus
January 26	Paula Berndt
January 28	Garth Watson
January 29	<b>Emily Davis</b>
January 29	Yvette Morris
January 30	Alan Murakami
January 30	Gene Nelson
January 30	Jordan Cassells
January 30	Cecilia Christensen

# STANDING TOGETHER AT SUNRISE: A THANKSGIVING MORNING ON ALCATRAZ

Tirza Dawn

Wrapped in blankets against the cold, surrounded by hundreds of people gathered in quiet anticipation, the atmosphere "felt electric," as one young adult, Tamar (18) reflected.

This Thanksgiving morning, our church youth group—alongside other teens, families, and community members—rose long before dawn to travel by ferry to Alcatraz Island for the Indigenous Sunrise Gathering. For many of us, it was our first time setting foot on the island. For all of us, it became a moment of listening, witnessing, and standing in solidarity at a place layered with deep historical and living significance.



Wrapped in blankets against the cold, surrounded by hundreds of people gathered in quiet anticipation, the atmosphere "felt electric," as one young adult, Tamar (18) reflected. Tamar, who has swum between Alcatraz and San Francisco in races added. "Arriving



to Alcatraz before the sunrise and following the crowd up to the plateau... I couldn't have imagined a better way to first physically be there than to witness and support the sunrise ceremony. Prayers, songs, the scent of sage, and the steady presence of elders and youth alike grounded us in a shared rhythm of remembrance and resilience.

For our younger participants, the experience opened new awareness. "I realized there's a lot of pain in the world," shared Alena (12), "but it felt meaningful that they kept fighting and we should all keep fighting... I'm very grateful." Others spoke about the courage of Indigenous youth who



addressed the gathering, especially young women claiming their voices and identities. "Even though she's young and female and Native American, she's still standing up and making a difference," said Abi (13).

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# STANDING TOGETHER AT SUNRISE: A THANKSGIVING MORNING ON ALCATRAZ

Continued...

Liam (57) reflected on the power of listening and being present in prayer: "...Being in prayer with the Native Americans, standing strong, learning what's going on with the native people, and supporting them by listening to what they have to say."

Several teens reflected on how stepping outside their comfort zones—traveling early, braving the cold, and entering a ceremony not their own—became part of the learning. "It was a rare experience... to witness such a special ceremony at a place with so much history," noted Ashea (17).



For Indigenous youth present, the morning carried an even deeper resonance. "Being there on Thanksgiving... felt reclaiming of our narrative," shared Nicky (17), of the Yuki tribe. "It was a powerful experience that incorporated a mix of protest and reaffirmed our enduring identity. The songs and prayers weren't just sounds; they were a call to action."

The intergenerational nature of the journey mattered deeply. Judy (84) reflected on "What a wonderful opportunity for us, our kids to show up for a cause bigger than ourselves" and spoke of the importance of preparation and reflection, while also expressing gratitude for the middle schoolers who

helped push her wheelchair.

Others shared how meaningful it was to be in a space where grief, history, and present-day struggles did not need explanation. Jen (53) expressed, "Myself and other people there were feeling the heaviness of our reality right now and historically: the depression that so many are feeling, particularly those who are Latino, Indigenous, and People Of Color... In that space it felt good to not be in insolation going through these feelings. There are so many of us sharing this experience. That feeling and awareness is not always so palpable in predominantly white spaces.

For many adults, the experience was both educational and deeply moving. Liam (57) reflected on the power of listening and being present in prayer: "It was really beautiful to see all the people that early in the morning to show support to this special ceremony. Being in prayer with the Native Americans, standing strong, learning what's going on with the native people, and supporting them by listening



to what they have to say."

Others spoke of the sacred atmosphere and the call to unity. Liz (45) shared, "My first journey to Alcatraz with the wonderful crew of the Sebastopol Community Church, my family, and dear friends, was truly a sacred

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# STANDING TOGETHER AT SUNRISE: A THANKSGIVING MORNING ON ALCATRAZ Continued...

Liz (45) shared, "My first journey to Alcatraz ...was truly a sacred experience..."



experience... fulfilling my lifelong desire to stand in solidarity, to witness, listen, unite, and give thanks for the survival of ancient wisdom and traditions of this land and its people."

What emerged from the morning was not just education, but relationship, across generations, cultures, and lived experiences. As Komala (18) beautifully named it, "When you align yourself into the sacredness of culture, you'll be aligned with the rhythm of love and connection." Standing on Alcatraz as the sun rose, we were reminded that gratitude can coexist with grief, and that listening itself can be an act of solidarity.

Together, these reflections tell the story of a morning marked by listening, learning, grief, gratitude, and connection. Standing at sunrise on Alcatraz, we were reminded that bearing witness is not passive. It is an act of solidarity,

and a beginning. We returned changed: more aware, more connected, and more committed to continuing these conversations, carrying them forward with humility, care, and action.

# **JANUARY 2026 Events at Community Church**

JAN 1—JAN 5 CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED

JANUARY 1 Happy New Year

JANUARY 4 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Worship Service, 10 am, Sanctuary

Kinship Time, 11:15 am, Bell Tower Courtyard Donor Arc Training, 11:15 am, Media Room

JANUARY 5 Prayer Shawls, 10 am, Fireside Room

JANUARY 6 FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

Grounds Team, 9 am, Church Campus Handbell Ensemble, 4 pm, Sanctuary

**Men's Discussion Group** 

JANUARY 7 Women's Bible Study, 10 am, Room 6

Online Bible Study, 5 pm, Zoo

Faith In Action Team, 5:30 pm, Fireside Room

JANUARY 8 Meditation Group, 12 pm, Room 6

Member In Discernment Meeting, 5 pm, Fireside Room

Drop-in Dreamwork Group, 5:30 pm, Room 6

Chancel Choir, 6:30 pm, Choir Room

JANUARY 9 Budget Committee, 3 pm, TBD

JANUARY 10 Second Saturday Lunch, Noon, Fellowship Hall

JANUARY 11 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Worship Service, 10 am, Sanctuary

Godly Play (K-Grade 5), 10:15 am, Room 5 Kinship Time, 11:15 am, Bell Tower Courtyard Inquirer's Class, 11:15 am, Fellowship Hall

Intergenerational Gym, 11:15 am, Memorial Hall Gym

New Policies Forum, 11:15 am, Media Room

Faith Formation, 11:15 am, Room 6

JANUARY 13 Grounds Team, 9 am, Church Campus

Shower Program, 9 am, Memorial Hall Personnel Committee, 10 am, Chapel

Facilities Committee, 10 am, Fireside Room

Handbell Ensemble, 4 pm, Sanctuary

Pastor-Parish Relations Team, 5 pm, Fireside Room

Outreach Committee, 7 pm, Fireside Room

JANUARY 14 Women's Bible Study, 10 am, Room 6

Online Bible Study, 5 pm, Zoom Chancel Choir, 6:30 pm, Choir Room

# **JANUARY 2026 Events at Community Church**

JANUARY 15 SALT & LIGHT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Meditation Group, 12 pm, Room 6

Women's Card Writing Ministry, 2 pm, WF Room Drop-in Dreamwork Group, 5:30 pm, Room 6

JANUARY 16—18 Women's Retreat, 4 p.m., Petaluma

JANUARY 18 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Worship Service, 10 am, Sanctuary

Kinship Time, 11:15 am, Bell Tower Courtyard

Budget Forum, 11:15 am, Media Room Faith Formation, 11:15 am, Room 6

JANUARY 19 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Holiday

Prayer Shawls, 10 am, Fireside Room

JANUARY 20 Grounds Team, 9 am, Church Campus

Shower Program, 9 am, Memorial Hall Finance Committee, 3 pm, Fireside Room Health & Safety Team, 3:30 pm, Room 6 Handbell Ensemble, 4 pm, Sanctuary

JANUARY 21 Women's Bible Study, 10 am, Room 6

Online Bible Study, 5 pm, Zoom

Leadership Council, 6:30 pm, Media Room

JANUARY 22 Meditation Group, 12 pm, Room 6

Drop-in Dreamwork Group, 5:30 pm, Room 6

Chancel Choir, 6:30 pm, Choir Room

JANUARY 25 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Worship Service, 10 am, Sanctuary

Kinship Time, 11:15 am, Bell Tower Courtyard

Annual Meeting of the Congregation, 11:15 am, Memorial Hall

JANUARY 27 Grounds Team, 9 am, Church Campus

Shower Program, 9 am, Memorial Hall Handbell Ensemble, 4 pm, Sanctuary

JANUARY 29 Women's Bible Study, 10 am, Room 6

Meditation Group, 12 pm, Room 6

Drop-in Dreamwork Group, 5:30 pm, Room 6

Chancel Choir, 6:30 pm, Choir Room

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