

# The Willow Word

A Publication of the Willow Glen United Methodist Church

God's Family Growing Through Caring, Sharing and Serving

## Christian Community: Advent Family Nights

6-8 p.m., Woodhaven

Tuesdays of Advent (Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 13 & 20)

It has become our tradition to gather as a church family to celebrate the season of Advent with activities and fellowship, food and preparation. We hope you will take a break from the "everyday" and join us each Tuesday for a simple potluck dinner and a little bit of "special" for the season. Drop in at Woodhaven anytime between 6 and 8 p.m. You'll find friendly faces, a warm meal, Christmas crafts and activities for the whole family.

We hope you'll come in from the cold and crazy of the Christmas season and get warmed and centered at Woodhaven with your church family. If you would like to help by bringing part of the potluck meal one evening, please contact Pastor Susan (susan@wgumc.org). We would also like to have a host family each week to help with the set-up, greeting, serving and clean-up.

## Celebrating Christmas

Christmas is a wonderful time to worship with your church family, and we hope you will join us on Christmas Eve for one of our two candlelit celebrations.

Our 5 p.m. Christmas Eve service is designed for families with children, but is delightful for worshippers of all ages. Our children will share some special Christmas music and their video of the Christmas story, and our praise band will lead us in familiar and contemporary Christmas carols. The joy of Christmas is shared with energy, hope and peace at this service.

Our 9 p.m. service is a peaceful, candlelit communion service. The familiar words of the Christmas story combine with the beauty of familiar Christmas music to create a peaceful and renewing celebration of the gift of Christ into our lives. Come and hear the good news in a way that will speak to your life for the year to come.

See more details about Advent and Christmas Services on the back page.



## Instead of Poinsettias, Something New for the Pews

We will have room for only a few poinsettias this year, so to begin to implement the worship plan that we approved at our church conference in October, we have decided that rather than selling plants, we would like to offer you the opportunity to purchase the new (five years old) hymnal supplement called "Worship & Song" in honor or memory of someone you love. For those of you who wish you had music for some of the contemporary songs we sing, you'll find it there. But there is a great variety of music in the supplement, including more oldies and goodies, too. The purchase price is about the same as buying a plant, but will last so much longer! Look for an order form on Sunday or call the church office to order. A suggested donation of \$15 will cover the cost of the book, shipping and maybe the imprinting also.



### December 2016/January 2017

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## Sunday Worship

**9:00 a.m.**  
Sunday School

**10:00 a.m.**  
Combined Worship

**11:00 a.m.**  
Fellowship Time

## Church Staff

Rebecca Ireland  
Senior Pastor

Susan Smith  
Pastor of Children &  
Family Ministries

Lisa Jacobs  
Director of  
Joint Youth Ministries

Lorene Sheridan  
Director of  
Weekday Ark Ministries

Robert Birnstihl  
Organist & Director  
of Music Ministries

Tom Mounts  
Director,  
the Willow Glen Ringers

Roxanne Kholin  
Office & Facilities Manager

## Living Forward

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." At a season of the year when we like to look back and find ourselves longing for something that's been lost, it's good to remember that while we can reflect on the past and learn from it, we can't live there. We have to live our lives forward. Perhaps if the elections were held in the spring rather than the fall, more people would vote to move forward rather than trying to go back to the imagined past. Advent, too, falls in the nostalgia season and it's hard to remember that Advent isn't really about looking back at the birth of Jesus; it is about looking forward to his kingdom coming. The word Advent means "coming."

That is a word full of hope for us this year. For "there is no future in the way things used to be," says my favorite folksinger, John McCutcheon. And ready or not, the future is coming at us, as John the Baptist and Jesus warn us: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near!"

So let's not dwell too long on the long-ago incarnation of God's love in the flesh of Jesus. Let's be on the lookout for where God's love is taking flesh in the here and now. In Jesus, the Eternal Christ got engaged with all the messiness of human affairs. Jesus got engaged with people on a personal level, but also on a political one. If this election taught me anything, it taught me that we, too, have to get engaged with the messiness of life on all levels.

There are so many ways that we can bring God's love into our lives and into our world. We can join together in worship and support one another on our spiritual journeys. We can strengthen the social institutions we care about, starting with the church, where disciples are made and community is created. We can be a sanctuary for people who may be feeling threatened by the hateful and hurtful things that were said about them in this campaign. And we can donate to organizations that work to uphold the values we cherish.

As I thought about how to recover from my disgust and dismay over this political season, I wondered what I could personally do to share my faith that somehow God's love will have the last word, that there is nothing anyone can do to keep God's kingdom from coming. So far, I have made three commitments. First, I will recommit to tithing my cash salary to the church and return my pledge card when I get it in the mail. Second, my family will celebrate the twelve days of Christmas this year by putting the names of organizations that protect women, immigrants, minorities and the environment into a hat. Each day, we will draw out a different name and write a check to that organization, because they are all going to need support in the months ahead. Third, on January 21, I will join my two sisters, daughter, and niece in Washington, D.C., for the Women's March on Washington because I need to put flesh on my belief that women, too, are made in the image of God and are called to be incarnations of Christ's love for the world today.

I can't wait to see how that love of God will take flesh in your life in amazing ways this Christmas and in the new year.

Forward in faith,  
Rebecca



## Give Everyone a Gift This Christmas: Share Your Faith in Our Advent Devotional

I Peter 3:15 says: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you..." So this year's home-grown Advent Devotional will publish your reflections on the question, "Why Christian?" There are several ways you could answer this. You could share a story about the person who made the most impact on your faith growing up. You could tell a story about an ancestor and their spiritual journey. You could share about an experience that convinced you that God was real and that Jesus was Lord. You could take a philosophical approach and offer your answer to people who want to know why you are associated with a religion that has such a bloody history (heresy trials, witch burnings, wars, etc.) or that has been touted by so many racists and bigots or why you believe in a God who can't stop cancers and earthquakes, etc. Since we are faced with these questions every day, it would be good for all of us to share our stories to shore up our faith. Please send your contributions via email to Pastor Rebecca at rebecca@wgumc.org. Thank you.

## Update on Church Staff and Finances

Good news: We have had a big increase in building use requests in the past month or so. Bad news: Our new Office and Facilities Manager can't keep up on the work because we reduced her hours from 32 to 20 hours per week to save money. So the SPRC has requested and Finance has approved increasing the office hours to 25 hours per week. But we are in need of your help to keep the office going and building use income coming in. We are also having trouble meeting payroll every two weeks. Some of you may take it for granted that you will get paid for the work you do. The pastor never does! She always says a prayer of thanks every time she opens an envelope with her paycheck in it.

## Thanks to God and Thanks to You!

Many of you will be receiving a pledge card in the mail soon. We need to raise around \$320,000 in pledges and other giving (in addition to rental income) and we have about 100 families and individuals who give. So give what you can and give a little more for those who can't. Thank you.



One way to save money and further the ministry: We have several office projects that volunteers could do. One job is to enter the attendance figures in the computer weekly (or monthly). Another project we need to do is an update on our pictorial directory. We have the software and all we need to do is update information and solicit new photos from new families and from those who would like to update their photographs. If anyone would like to take on either of these jobs now or after the holidays, please contact the church office.

## Why Do I Give?

by Jodi Edwards

I have a very simple belief – every dollar I earn; every penny in my bank account; my ability to pay the bills; the responsibility of raising my kids – all of it is God's. There is nothing in my life that does not start or end with God. When I was younger, I tried to live my life without acknowledging this fact and the results were anything but successful. My life was defined by my own limitations, a lack of belief in myself. My experience of the world was that there was never enough, my needs would never be met. My actions were ruled by financial insecurity, worry and doubt. I didn't trust God with a single dollar I earned and it showed. My commitment to giving came like most of the best revelations in my spiritual life – slowly, gently, with quiet conviction. It started with a single, humble commitment to give a portion of my earnings to church every month. My best months were the ones when I wrote that check first. I couldn't take it back or shortchange the gifts God manifested in my life. Of course, it wasn't always easy. Some months, my faith faltered. I took my will back. Or I didn't acknowledge that everything I had, every bill I paid, every need of my children could be met by my maker, by my creator, by the one who allows me to get up in the morning and work another day. Finally, I took a last, final step of faith and signed up to give online every month. It's not as tangible. It means I don't start each month by writing that first check. But it does mean that I never shortchange God or my spiritual community. And then there's Marni and her new used van. There's the Walkathon and a dozen students brave enough to ask me for my support. Then there are the wreaths and the See's candy and all the things we do to support others in our community. As long as I acknowledge that God is my source, there always seems to be enough. I'm always amazed. I've learned to have faith when it comes to my – or I should say God's – finances.

## Finding Joy in Sunday School

We will spend the month of December exploring the difference between happiness and joy, and taking a closer look at the way joy shows up throughout the Christmas story.

Joy is a response to the character of God. When God created the world, He made it to be a place of peace and contentment. In the Magnificent Paradise, God provided fruit trees that were pleasing to the eye and good to eat. And He personally walked with His creation! But when sin entered the world, so did greed and jealousy. As circumstances changed and life presented more challenges, people found it harder and harder to be happy. However, even now in this broken world, God wants us to have joy.

Even though we try to find joy through our stuff, or our vacations, or our relationships, joy isn't dependent upon any of those things. Joy is about being content beyond our circumstances. We can have joy when we recognize that God's plan is greater than our own. Joy is a response to our trust in God.

Jesus is the reason we find joy. God sent His only son as a baby, born in humble circumstances. Jesus wasn't what anyone expected, but this was how God wanted to rescue the world. God made good on the promise He made hundreds of years before. This December, we pray that through the story of Jesus, kids realize that God loved them so much that He sent His Son to be here on this earth. The story of Christmas can remind us through every season, regardless of our situation, there's a reason to celebrate what it means to have a relationship with God. That's why it's important for us to help our kids and families discovery more about joy—finding a way to be happy even when things don't go your way.

Our Memory Verse for December comes from Philippians 4:4. When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi, he wasn't saying to have joy only when it's easy. Paul was writing from prison and learned the secret of having joy no matter what his circumstances looked like. Paul's faith in God made him strong and gave him the ability to find joy, even in the difficult times.

In Philippians 4:4, we read, Always be joyful because you belong to the Lord. I will say it again. Be joyful! (NIRV) As kids memorize this verse, we hope they remember that their joy is not tied to their circumstances. Instead, we find joy when we realize that we belong to God. When we trust God no matter what, we can find joy knowing that whatever happens God is good.

*Please note that there will not be Sunday School on Sunday, December 25, or Sunday, January 1. Sunday School information for January is on Page 7.*



## CrossWalk

Faith and Fellowship for  
Third, Fourth and Fifth Graders

**Friday, December 9, 7-8:30 p.m.**  
**Kohlstedt Hall & Wesley Room**  
**Theme: The Living Word of God**  
**Scripture: John 1:1-18**

Christmas brings light and hope and grace into the world. How can we be part of God's living love? We'll explore what it means to live like Christ at Christmas and throughout the year. Please bring a canned or boxed food donation for the food bank.

As always, there will be fun and friends, food and fellowship. CrossWalk is for all third, fourth and fifth graders. Bring a friend! E-mail Pastor Susan ([susan@wgumc.org](mailto:susan@wgumc.org)) to ask any questions or let her know you are coming.



**Friday, January 13, 7-8:30 p.m.**  
**Wesley Room & Kohlstedt Hall**  
**Theme: TBD**

We'll start the new year off right with friends and faith, continuing to discover how we can walk like Jesus! Watch your inbox for more information about our CrossWalk 2017 kick-off.



## Christmas Giving Tree: Gifts Due December 4

Here's an opportunity to share with others during the holiday season. Stop by the Christmas Giving Tree in the Wesley Room to choose a gift tag for a special someone in the community. You can make Christmas a little brighter by donating a gift as designated on the tag. Donations should be returned to the church as instructed on the gift tags. All gifts will be distributed through Esther's Outreach at Cambrian park UMC and the Family Giving Tree. What a wonderful time to surround others with joy and love! Gifts should be returned to the gift-wrapped box in the Wesley Room by December 4.

## Come Volunteer at the Family Giving Tree

Sunday, December 18, 6-8 p.m.

Come be an elf for the Family Giving Tree – sorting and wrapping gifts for needy children in the valley. We will meet at the church at 5:30 p.m. and carpool to the Family Giving Tree warehouse in Milpitas for a two-hour shift of Christmas wish fulfilling. This is a great project for older elementary children on up. Bring the family! E-mail Susan ([susan@wgumc.org](mailto:susan@wgumc.org)) for more information or to let her know you're coming.



Family Giving Tree™

Bringing Hope and Joy to Those in Need

## Village House Rotating Shelter for Women: Volunteers Needed

By Liz Pense

Our participation in the rotating shelter last winter was a tremendous opportunity to provide shelter, food and – more importantly – love and compassion for our houseless neighbors. It took our entire WGUMC village to make this ministry a reality. In 2016, WGUMC teamed with three other churches to provide 14 weeks of shelter. An interfaith team has been hard at work to expand this program to become a year-round rotating shelter for women. Village House will open its doors in January 2017. To date, eight faith communities have committed to house the women for one month each. WGUMC has committed to support this shelter program and house 15 women during April 2017.

Your help is needed to make this a reality! Volunteers are needed to serve on the WGUMC shelter leadership team. The team will start the work in earnest in January. Leaders are needed in many areas including coordination of volunteers, meals, the clothes closet and supplies. We also need volunteers to develop our operations plan, prepare our facility and provide leadership to the program. If you are able to be part of the shelter leadership team or would like more information, please contact Pastor Rebecca, Pastor Susan or Liz Pense. If you would like more information about the interfaith Village House program, please contact Liz Pense or Becky LaBree.

## Thank You From JYM

In November, the Joint Youth Ministry took 38 teenagers to San Francisco for a weekend of service. Our students woke up early (like 5 a.m. early), to serve in kitchens by washing dishes, bussing tables and serving food. Thanks to many generous item and monetary donations, we were able to hand out 250 bags of care items to people on the streets of the Tenderloin district. We were met with gratitude and grace.

Thank you to all who helped to make this trip possible. Your generous support of the JYM and our fundraising events, like the recent Walkathon, allows all of our students to participate in these types of life-changing events and trips, regardless of ability to pay.

Please take a moment to visit our website at [jointyouthgroup.com](http://jointyouthgroup.com) and check out all our pictures from the weekend! There is always some way to be part of our JYM family. Please join us at any upcoming events!



## Women's Groups

Open to all, newcomers are welcome. Please call the contact listed below for information.

### Heart & Hand

Thursday, December 1  
Ornament Exchange  
7 p.m. in Woodhaven  
Susan Smith

### Friendship Circle

Thrid Wednesday  
12:30 p.m. in Woodhaven  
Sue Johnson

UMW Executive Board  
January meeting TBD

UMW is open to all women regardless of church membership.

For more information about UMW, call Patricia Madsen.

The deadline for the February *Willow Word* is **January 20**. Please send your story ideas and submissions to Leslie Chamberlain.

## UMW Christmas Luncheon

All are invited to the Christmas luncheon being planned by United Methodist Women, to be held Wednesday, December 7, beginning at 11 a.m. in the Wesley Room.

Come enjoy the songs and stories of the Christmas season and share a delicious vegetarian luncheon. The cost will be \$10 per person and reservations are needed. Please contact Ruth Granfors at [ragsanjose@aol.com](mailto:ragsanjose@aol.com) by December 5.

## World Thank Offering

For those who were unable to participate in the Lunch and Learn presented by Becky Morgan (treasurer of the local unit of United Methodist Women) it's not too late to participate in this project.

United Methodist Women and our foremothers have used the World Thank Offering since 1881 to give thanks to God for our blessedness and to share with others. The World Thank Offering supports United Methodist Women-related national mission institutions and projects as well as international ministries. During this season both of thanksgiving and giving, this is a great way to share God's love and celebrate God's abundance. Let's continue our tradition of joyful giving so that all may live joyful lives. Checks may be made to United Methodist Women, marked for "World Thank Offering" and handed to Becky or left in the UMW box in the office workroom.

## Do You Know Someone in the Service?

Marilyn Clough is a regular player in our Thursday Bridge Fellowship. She is a member of the Campbell chapter of AARP, which supports our service men and women by sending care packages. Marilyn is enlisting our help in supplying names and addresses of persons currently serving in the military at an overseas location. The care packages must each be addressed to a specific person. If you know of someone in the service at a military post overseas who would enjoy getting a care package, please send this information to Marilyn at [marilyn1338@yahoo.com](mailto:marilyn1338@yahoo.com). The packages include various small gift items that can bring joy to someone away from home, and are sent throughout the year, not just at holidays.

## God Called Us to Become God's Communities

by Emma Cantor, a UMW regional missionary in the East Asia/Pacific region

The Book of Isaiah 2:1-5 tells about vision, anticipation, a prophecy, hope and the destiny of nations and peoples in their relationship with God. The passage is a revelation of God's work among peoples and nations, of which the house of God is the center "where nations shall flock together." The passage assures the certainty of the rule of God on the mountain of the Lord, on the highest hill, where peace flows "like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream, and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees." (Isaiah 66:12) In this passage God created the earth, nature, humanity and communities, a revelation of God's self to us.

The creation of community, humanity and earth is the fulfillment of God's kingdom. The fulfillment is expressed in the advent, in the birth and in the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus seeks his mission among large throngs of people in vast communities and in diverse cultures. Jesus healed and taught women, men, youth and children. They are poor, sick, hopeless, wandering, exploited, imprisoned and blinded by systems and beliefs. Jesus heals his community of the "beloved ones" of their sicknesses and casts out demons. Jesus teaches them to love one another as a community and as families. Jesus preaches to them parables about the earth, creation and nature as God's kingdom.

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## Brain Games: Sunday School in January Is All About Knowledge

**Knowledge is a response to the character of God.**

God designed people in such a unique way—different from the rest of creation—to pursue finding the answers to life's hidden secrets. The very fact that we naturally pursue knowledge is proof that there is a God. It's actually genius that God would make us in such a way that we are always discovering, wondering, exploring, innovating, improving, and solving. He wants us to pursue knowing more, because He wants us to know Him more.

Jesus helps us know God better.

If you want to know who God is and how God loves, look to Jesus. When Jesus stepped foot onto the planet, God was once and for all with us. John writes this about Jesus, The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. And the Word was full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, NIV) As we dig deeper into the story of Jesus, we discover more about how God desires a relationship with us and invites us to help Him spread the message of Jesus throughout the world. To do that, we need to know God through Jesus.



That's why we're starting off the new year by taking a closer look at the way knowledge shows up throughout the gospel and learning more about God. Knowledge is discovering something new so we can be better at whatever we do.

Our Memory Verse for January comes from Psalm 119:105: Your word is like a lamp that shows me the way. It is like a light that guides me. (NIV) When we dig into God's word, we start to know how God wants us to live. God's words act like a lamp that shows us the next steps to take on our journey through life. God's word points the way towards a growing relationship with Jesus.

## God Called Us to Become God's Communities

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### Reclaiming God's Prophecy

Today, the message of the prophecy of God's rule and kingdom needs to be reclaimed by many communities. The Lumad, a community of indigenous peoples in the southern Philippines, are peace-loving people. The Lumad live in the mountains where they have abundance and peace. Respecting nature is sacred, as it is a source of life in the community. As a community, the Lumad respect every breath as an expression of the living God. The Lumad believe in the sacredness of every human being and every creation. Bees, flowers, trees, mountains, rain, rivers, the sun and the moon are all expressions of God's presence. But the Lumad are suffering. They are suffering as a community because of aggressive development by big corporations. Their community is being destroyed, and many Lumad are killed in defense of their land and God's earth, and of God's master plan of a peaceful and abundant community.

Communities are organizing to help the Lumad protect their lives and stay safe. Churches, secular and legal organizations, and women's organizations like United Methodist Women pray, advocate for and support the Lumad in their search for meaning as a community and in defense of their life and land.

### Anticipation of Hope

The anticipation of hope, peace and abundance as promised in John 10:10 is ongoing in all communities on this earth. God's love to us is certain, and God's rule of love is consistent. God's call to communities and families continues in order to fulfill God's presence in the restoration of our communities, families and the earth. We are all called to be witnesses as life-enforcing communities. God called us to become God's communities.

### Prayer

*God of Creation, we thank you for communities, brothers and sisters, young and old. We thank you for the whole of creation as one among us. We thank you for your sustaining love and grace. Amen.*

# Advent and Christmas Services

## November 27 – First Sunday in Advent: Dark to Light

Matthew 4:12-17

We are Christians because faith in Christ brings us out of the darkness and into the light. There is plenty of darkness in our lives and in our world this year. Thank God for the light!

## December 4 – Second Sunday in Advent: Fear to Love

Luke 1:26-38

We are Christians because Christ's perfect love casts out all fear.

Believing in a loving God, rather than a wrathful God, we are better able to love others and not to fear them.

## December 11 – Third Sunday in Advent: Alone to Together

Luke 1:39-56

We are Christians because "Christianity is a social religion" (John Wesley) and when we gather together, we don't feel so alone. We are better together!

## December 18 – Fourth Sunday in Advent: Chaos to Order

Genesis 1:1-5 and John 1:1-5

We are Christians because God's love comes into our chaos and takes flesh there. What form does your love take in the world?

## December 24 – Two Christmas Eve Candlelight Services

5 p.m. Family Service, come early to get a seat

9 p.m. Traditional Service with choir, candles, communion and quiet

## December 25 – Christmas Day

Yes, Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. We will read a Christmas story, sing some carols and share communion.

## January 1 – Informal Worship in Kohlstedt Hall



## Willow Glen United Methodist Church

1420 Newport Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125

408-294-9796

[www.wgumc.org](http://www.wgumc.org)

