

Highlights

First Presbyterian Church
San Leandro

JANUARY 2024
volume 25• number 1

Epiphanies

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. . . for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself. . . (Isaiah 43:18-19)

[W]ise men from the East came to Jerusalem asking "Where is the child who has been born King of the Jews?" For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." (Matthew 2:1b-2)

Back in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, there was a special astronomical event as two planets converged on the evening of the winter solstice – Jupiter and Saturn appeared in the southern sky and almost looked like a star to the naked eye which some dubbed the "Christmas Star." Several members of the congregation I served took photos of this bright light in the middle of this dark time, and with wonder, we all noted, "It's a special sight."

In the story we celebrate at Epiphany, the magi (wise ones) who saw a star in the east when Jesus was born had also seen something special and unusual. They traveled to Bethlehem because they saw a star rise in the sky. I doubt that Jerusalem was on their "bucket list." Instead, they noticed this sign, wondered at this marvelous new thing, and began a journey that led them to the baby Jesus and his mother Mary at home. If they

had not noticed the star, the journey would not have been made, the holy experience would have been missed, and the gifts never given. They were willing to risk approaching King Herod, a king who was noted for killing those who disagreed with him, in order to find the child.

As the year turns into 2024, we journey too. Our world depends on those who know how to see when something new is appearing – to name it lovingly, to share it with others, and to begin the journey that it requires. Are you a spiritual stargazer and journeyer? I hope so.

The Three Kings by Leith Fisher

*In the dark of the night
we have seen a strange sight
of a new star's bright light
calling us to follow,
leave our sleepy hollow.*

*Moving out each day
on the unknown way ...
from the old to the new,
asking, looking, seeking*

Happy New Year, and Happy Epiphany!
Blessings and light, Pastor Renée



Star Words for Epiphany

The use of star words, also called "star gifts," is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in Protestant churches for nearly a decade now. The idea is that different intention words, or guiding words, are written or printed on paper stars. These paper stars are then arranged or in a large basket. On January 7, you'll be invited to draw a word from the basket, and to use that word as a guiding word throughout the year. We encourage you to trust the word you draw, but if you need to trade, that's ok too.





The monthly **Men's Bible Study Breakfast and Women's Fellowship Breakfast** will both meet on Saturday, **January 6** at 7:30 a.m. at The Manor Grill - 526 Manor Blvd. San Leandro



Young at Heart

The Young at Heart luncheon and program will be on Thursday, **January 18** at 11:30 am. We are happy to have Cindy Simons as our guest speaker from the San Leandro Historical Society. Please come and find out about the history of San Leandro and our church. Be sure to sign up ahead of time, so we have an accurate count for the delicious meal prepared by Bob Kraut and his team. Sign up on Sunday mornings or call the church office. Donations to cover the meal cost are appreciated on the day of the event.

New Worship Series: Seeking God

Beginning Sunday, January 7, we will begin a new worship series called Seeking God. We will begin with the story of the three wise men on that Sunday. Then we will look at other stories about what it means to be a seeker of God:

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|-------------|--|
| January 14 | Follow - the disciples are called to follow Jesus; Mark 1:16-20 |
| January 21 | Flee - Jonah is called to do a difficult task by God and flees; Book of Jonah |
| January 28 | Freed - Jesus heals a possessed person; Mark 1:21-28 |
| February 4 | Fallow - Jesus retreats to rest; Mark 1:35-39 |
| February 11 | Fear - the disciples go up to a mountaintop with Jesus; Mark 9:2-7 |

Ordination and Installation of Officers – January 14

In our tradition, we ordain all our officers in the church, both lay and clergy. On Sunday, **January 14**, we will ordain and/or install the following elders and deacons for the new classes:

Deacons

Jim Wakeman (2024)
Suzanne Yee (2024)
Michelle Owyang (2026)
Sue Robertson (2026)

Elders

Anne Milner (2026)
Ekaete Udofia (2026)
Faye Wilson (2026)



Deacons Meeting

The next Deacons meeting will be on Sunday, **January 28** at 11:00. We look forward to finally having an in-person meeting. Please be sure to attend, we will elect new officers for the coming year.

Women's Book Club Annual Brunch and Book Exchange



The Women's Book Club will be meeting on Saturday, **January 27** at 10:00 am in the Fireside Room for brunch and a book exchange. Come hungry! Bring any dish you like, no assigned categories- a true potluck.

For the book exchange, please bring a book wrapped in any style from fancy wrappings to an old section of the comic strips. The book can be old or new, and should be one you have enjoyed reading or would like to read. New members are welcome.

Please sign up Sunday at the table in Fellowship Hall on January 14th or 21st. If you aren't in church, please RSVP to Jeanette Rauscher or contact the church office.

Paying Per Capita – Our Connection to the Larger Church

We as Presbyterians are part of a connectional church – the Presbyterian Church USA. Here at First Pres San Leandro, we belong to the Presbytery of San Francisco, and then a level up, the Synod of the Pacific. Through our group efforts, we can witness and accomplish mission and ministry that is impossible to do alone. These kinds of ministries are funded in part by “per capita” (such a bad name for important work), which we pay for each active member. We invite each of you to add the amount of per capita which is \$40 for 2024 to your regular giving. For those of you who have offering envelopes, you can use the one that says “Per Capita Apportionment”, or without one, simply indicate “per capita” with your payment. Thank you in advance!

Emely Wendell Confirmed as our Permanent Church Administrator



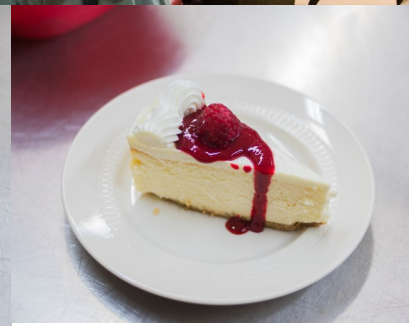
The Session is pleased to announce that we have made Emely Wendell our permanent Church Administrator following her time as our interim. Over the past few months, Emely has helped update our processes for the church office and recruited volunteers to help her with additional tasks. She does

all of this with a positive attitude and working as a great team member! We look forward to Emely continuing to provide excellent administrative support to our church.











SLHS Notables Sang for the Holidays

The Notables, San Leandro High School's choir, provided holiday cheer to the Young at Heart luncheon in December. We learned that they have been invited to participate in the Worldstrides Festival of Gold at Carnegie Hall in NYC this spring. They are currently fundraising for their expenses and will be holding a fully student run Benefit Concert on Friday, **January 19** at 7:00 pm in the San Leandro High School Arts Education Center. Tickets are \$7 and will be sold at the door the night of the concert. Donations can also be made to San Leandro High School, % Susan Dent, 2200 Bancroft Ave, San Leandro, CA 94577.



January 2024



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am NYE: Donuts & Sparkling Cider 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship	1	2 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal 	3	4 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	5	6 7:30 am Men's Bible Study and Breakfast/Women's Fellowship Breakfast @ Manor Grill  MEN'S BREAKFAST
7 EPIPHANY SUNDAY Worship Series: Seeking God Star Words for Epiphany 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship/Donuts 	8 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal	9	10	11 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 	12	13 9:00 am – 1:00 pm Session Retreat  Session Retreat
14 Worship Series: Seeking God (Follow) Ordination and Installation of Officers 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship/ Manna Bags & Equal Exchange Chocolate Sales 	15 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal	16 6:00 pm Session Meeting 	17	18 11:30 am Young at Heart Luncheon/Program- San Leandro Historical Society  7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	19	20
21 Worship Series: Seeking God (Flee) 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship/Donuts 11:00 am Mission Study Team Update 	22 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal 	23	24	25 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 	26	27 10:00 am Women's Book Club Annual Brunch and Book Exchange 
28 Worship Series: Seeking God (Freed) 9:30 am Worship Service 11:00 am Deacons Meeting 	29 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal	30	31	1 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	2	3 7:30 am Men's Bible Study and Breakfast/Women's Fellowship Breakfast @ Manor Grill

San Leandro Ambassadors are here to help!

Did you know that our church is located in San Leandro's Downtown Community Benefit District? One benefit of this is the San Leandro Ambassador program that works to keep downtown San Leandro clean and safe. There are both Cleaning Ambassadors and Safety Ambassadors who are on duty seven days a week. Maybe you have seen them when you are downtown.

The Cleaning Ambassadors can be seen dressed in green shirts or jackets pushing carts with cleaning supplies. They sweep sidewalks, pick up litter and remove debris; power wash food spills and stains on sidewalks and public plazas; remove graffiti, stickers and handbills. They also clean feces and urine from sidewalks and the front of buildings and relocate unsheltered sleepers from businesses.

The Safety Ambassadors wear blue shirts or jackets and walk or ride bikes throughout downtown. They de-escalate non-emergency situations; report suspicious behavior or vehicles; address public nuisances (i.e. public smoking, drinking). They also know and maintain relationships with downtown unsheltered neighbors through daily wellness checks and the distribution of bag lunches provided by local churches and community groups. (Once a month these lunches are provided by members of our church!) They will also escort anyone who feels unsafe to/from their vehicle.

Over a year ago the Downtown Ambassadors were extremely helpful in relocating an unhoused individual who was discovered to be living on our church property. And just last month, early on a Sunday morning an individual was found to be sleeping in front of the handicap entrance to the church building. The individual left without any issues but left behind all his belongings and a mess of human excrement. A single call to the Ambassador Help Line resulted in the prompt and thorough cleanup and disinfecting of our handicap entrance before most of the congregation arrived for the morning worship service.

If you are ever at church (or anywhere downtown) and feel unsafe, or if you encounter an unsheltered individual sleeping or residing on the church property, please call the Ambassador Help Line.

The Ambassador Services Help Line (415) 404 8463 is available daily from 7 a.m. – 9 p.m.

This information and phone number is posted at church but you might also want to save this number in your phone for easy access. And, of course, if someone is in immediate danger or a crime is in progress call 911 immediately.



CLEANING AMBASSADOR SERVICES

Cleaning Ambassadors are here to help!

- Sidewalk sweeping, litter and debris removal
- Power washing food spills and stains on sidewalks and public plazas
- Graffiti, sticker, and handbill removal
- Feces and urine removal from sidewalks and building frontage

Help Line
(415) 404-8463
Daily, 7:30am - 3:00pm



SAFETY AMBASSADOR SERVICES

Safety Ambassadors are here to help!

- De-escalation of non-emergency situations
- Report suspicious behavior or vehicles
- Report a public nuisance
 - Public drinking or smoking, sleeping on sidewalks, etc.
- Wellness check on unsheltered neighbors

Help Line
(415) 404-8463
Afternoons and Evenings



Westminster Woods Summer Camp Re-structure

For the past few years, Westminster Woods summer camps have struggled to reach pre-pandemic attendance. Due to the lower number of campers, Westminster

Woods is working to re-structure summer ministry camps, while striving to maintain the ministry mission of Westminster Woods, which is to guide persons to Jesus Christ so that through Him they may come to a true knowledge of God, to a living faith, and through the power of the Holy Spirit live as Christ's disciples through the fellowship of the church.

The hope of the re-structure is to move forward without forgetting or ignoring the past, looking back at where Westminster Woods has been while also looking forward to where it is going. The re-structure will include changes to how summer camp is structured but it will not change

what summer camp is. This summer, when campers cross the bridge, they will still be drawn closer to Christ so that they may come to a living faith, just like in summers gone by.

An email from The Woods with further information regarding the re-structure of Summer Camps and the 2024 Summer Camp calendar will be sent out on January 9. This information will also be posted on the camp website <https://www.westminsterwoods.org>. Registration for Summer 2024 is scheduled to open on January 23. Registration information and further details about summer camps for San Leandro First Presbyterian campers will be included in future church newsletters as well as emailed directly to families. If you have any questions or concerns regarding Westminster Woods Ministries please reach out to Lou Pennebaker.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

180 Estudillo Avenue
San Leandro, CA 94577

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April Showers: Thanksgiving

The April Shower's Thanksgiving dinner was a real hit! Our church family went all out in showing kindness – more than 30 folks pitched in. We cooked up a massive 17-pound turkey, made lots of tasty gravy, and put together 80 containers of fruit salad.



Our members graciously gave 145 pairs of socks, 365 drinks, 587 snacks, three pairs of gloves, and hand sanitizers/wipes. Plus, our bakers whipped up a whopping 45 dozen homemade cookies that everyone loved!



Noel Moritz, of April Showers, wrote:
"I want to thank FPSL for all you did to make our Thanksgiving extra special. The guests were so pleased to receive all the extras you went out of your way to provide, and I soooooo appreciate the congregation's help with all the cooking that had to happen this year. You are all wonderfully generous with your time and resources."
Thanks again for helping to bring God's Grace and Bounty to our community this Thanksgiving!

Letting the CAT Out of the Bag on Sunday, January 21

Many of you have been wondering when you would see the results of our recent Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) survey, which was completed by 114 of you. The answer is Sunday, January 21.



The Mission Study Team along with the Session, recently met via Zoom with a representative of the Holy Cow Consulting firm, which conducted the survey. The representative interpreted the results for us. We're still processing some of the data but the results tell us a lot about our congregation. The Mission Study Team is looking forward to presenting the insights with all of you after worship on Sunday January 21.

Thank you for your patience. We realize this is a long process but a very important one, especially as we search for our new pastor.

Blessings,
The Mission Study Team:
Lowell Hickey, chair
Sue Goodnow
Linda Pollard
Ex-officio: Renee Rico
Extraordinary staff: Lou Pennebaker

Leland Morine
Chad Pennebaker