

Highlights

First Presbyterian Church San Leandro

January 2026
Volume 27 Issue 1

Spiritual Stargazing

[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)

2020 was a special year in popular astronomy 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” while scientists called it the Great Conjunction. I saw some of the photos on Facebook, and with wonder, we all noted, “It’s a special sight.” If you missed that event, well, you’re out of luck. Astronomers tell us that the next projected appearance of these two planets together isn’t until 2080.

The magi 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, and the holy experience would have been missed, 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 we journey into 2026, 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? 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

Worship at a Glance

January 4 – Communion and 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 well over a decade now. The idea is that a list of intention words, or guiding words, are written or printed on paper stars. These paper stars are then arranged in a large basket. On January 4, you’ll be invited to draw a word from the basket, and to use it as a guiding word throughout the year. We encourage you to trust the word you draw, but if you need to trade, that’s okay too.

January 11 – Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows

This is traditionally the Baptism of the Lord Sunday in the church calendar. We will reaffirm our baptismal vows this Sunday with water and small glass pebbles.

January 18 – Come and See

We will look at what it means to be invited to journey with Jesus.

January 25 – Rethinking Repentance

We often think of repentance as something negative. It doesn’t have to be that way.



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Growing & deepening your faith

Heart to Heart

Thursday, January 8, 2026 at 12:30 pm

Knowing the Third Part of the Trinity: God the Holy Spirit

Heart to Heart women's ministry will return this month! All women are invited to come be a part of this Christian community where women connect with one another and seek the heart of God as we study God's word and share life and faith together. Each monthly gathering begins at 12:30 pm in the Fireside room and includes a light lunch followed by an all new study that will explore the least understood part of The Trinity: God the Holy Spirit. Together we will encounter the Holy Spirit afresh through deep Biblical study and simple practices that will help to fill your life with the living presence, the almighty power and the peace that surpasses understanding that all comes from *Knowing the Holy Spirit*.



Women are asked to sign up each month to ensure that there will be a seat and enough food for everyone attending. If you have not yet signed up for the gathering on January 8, please do so by Sunday, January 4 or call the church office.

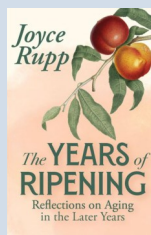
New Class: The Years of Ripening

Sundays, 11:00 am January 11 through March 29

Led by Pastor Renée

Over the last couple of months, I've had conversations with members who are realizing that they need to give up some activities that had brought them happiness and meaning – as a part of natural aging. But is that all that is going on? Is it just about loss?

I don't think so! Joyce Rupp, who wrote *The Cup of Our Life* – about prayer – is also the author of *The Years of Ripening: Reflections on Aging in the Later Years*. We will read this book through the lens of thinking about this stage of life as one of transformation, in which we are invited to claim the truest quality of our inner being. Each week we will read a section and discuss our responses and learnings.



We will also offer books to those who wish to read the book on their own. The cost is \$18, but financial assistance is available to anyone who needs it.

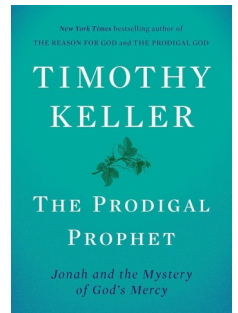
Let's Read This Book!

Tuesdays, 1:30 pm, February 17 through May 5

Read by Shari Plunkett

This unorthodox book group returns on Tuesday, February 17 and will meet in the Fireside Room every Tuesday at 1:30 pm through May 5. Come and join us as I read aloud one chapter each week, and in real time we discuss this well known and ancient story which begins with God giving an assignment, a mad dash in the opposite direction, a big fish at the perfect place at the perfect time and ultimately mission accomplished but done with a resentful and angry heart.

As we dig into *The Prodigal Prophet* we'll begin to see that possibly the actual message of the text has yet to be uncovered by most people. It's a timely message for today. It's a message that looks at combining evangelism and doing justice not pitting them against each other as we often see in our churches today and it's a message that once again considers that important question of "who is our neighbor?"



Our time together is filled with interruptions in the reading for a free-flowing discussion to question what the author is trying to say, to strongly disagree or to share an experience or a thought conjured up because of the text. Last year friendships developed and deepened and hearts and minds were challenged to think in new ways! I hope those from last year will participate again, and if you missed it last year, please join us this time! There will be a sign up sheet in the Fellowship Hall and you can get a book from me for \$10.00.

There's no preparation involved, you don't even need to buy the book, if you don't want to. We're always done long before 3 pm and I LOVE to bake! See you there!

- Shari Plunkett



Save the Date!

Annual Congregational Meeting will be on Sunday, February 22 following Worship in the Fellowship Hall.





HAPPY New Year

We enter the new year with gratitude for recently completed building improvements, including fresh paint, new hardwood flooring in the entrance hallways, new carpet in the Pastor's office, and added security with a Ring camera.

We are especially thankful to share that the protection of our stained glass windows is now complete, helping preserve these beautiful and historic features for years to come.

Special thanks to Donald Pollard, Building & Grounds Chair, for his dedication and leadership throughout these projects.

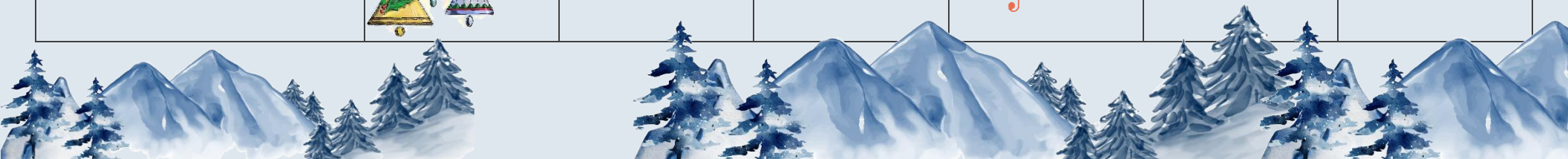


12/13/2025 - A Magical Morning

Our Marvelous Magical Morning welcomed over 100 guests and was filled with Christmas spirit, smiling faces, and joyful moments shared by all. Thank you to all of our wonderful elves who volunteered their time, with special thanks to Suzanne and Don Yee for transforming our space into a Christmas wonderland.

JANUARY 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 8:30 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship	29 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Office Closed</div>	30 	31 	1 Office Closed 	2 	3
4 EPIPHANY SUNDAY 8:30 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship 	5 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal 	6 	7 	8 12:30 pm Heart to Heart: Women's Ministry 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	9 	10 7:30 am Men's Bible Study & Breakfast / Women's Fellowship @ Manor Grill  MEN'S BREAKFAST
11 8:30 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship/ Manna Bags & Equal Exchange 11:00 am The Years of Ripening Class	12 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal 	13 	14 	15 11:30 am Young at Heart Luncheon/Program 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal	16 	17 9:00 am Session Retreat  Session Retreat
18 8:30 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship 11:00 am The Years of Ripening Class 1:30 pm "UP" Movie Showing	19 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal	20 6:00 pm Session Meeting  Session Meeting	21 1:00 pm Christian Education Team Meeting	22 	23 	24
25 8:30 am Chancel Choir Rehearsal 9:30 am Worship Service 10:30 am Coffee Fellowship 11:00 am The Years of Ripening Class	26 6:17 pm Chancel Bells Rehearsal 	27 	28 	29 7:00 pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 	30 	31 10:00 am Women's Book Club Annual Brunch and Book Exchange





JANUARY



Men's Bible Study & Women's Fellowship Breakfasts

Saturday, January 10 at 7:30 am at Manor Grill

Men will continue their study of the "Fruits of the Spirit." For the January 10 meeting, Don Atkinson-Adams will lead a discussion on "Kindness." Women will meet for fellowship at a nearby table. All are welcome to the no-host breakfasts.

Young at Heart

Thursday, January 15 at 11:30 am; Fellowship Hall

Join us as our guest speaker shares valuable insights on staying safe at home and in public. Please sign up ahead of time so we can plan for the meal prepared by Bob Kraut and his team; donations toward the meal are appreciated.

"Up, Up, and Away!" Movie Showing

Sunday, January 18 at 1:30 pm; Fellowship Hall

Join us as we watch Pixar's "UP" and create UP-inspired crafts for all ages. Our own Don Pollard will be joining us dressed as the delightfully cranky Carl Fredrickson, adding extra fun to the afternoon. Bring your family, invite friends, and come enjoy the movie together!

Women's Book Club

Saturday, January 31 at 10:00 am; Fireside Room

Join us for a book exchange and potluck—bring any dish you like and come hungry! For the exchange, bring a wrapped book (new or gently used) that you've enjoyed or would like to read; new members are welcome. Keep an eye out for sign-up sheets in mid-January.

Scholarships of Graduating High School Seniors

For over 30 years, First Presbyterian has awarded scholarships to graduating high school seniors, recognizing Christian commitment and encouraging further education in students who have been active in the ministries of our church. It is awarded based on each individual's level of church activity, the length of time they have been active at the church, and the depth of their personal Christian commitment. Students must complete an application and provide a letter of recommendation to be considered by the Scholarship Committee. Each applicant must also meet with the Scholarship Committee for an interview to discuss their individual Christian faith, church involvement, and educational goals.

Applications will be mailed this month to High School Seniors. If you are, or know of, a graduating High School Senior who has been active in our church, please contact Lou Pennebaker. Applications are due no later than Sunday, February 15. They may be mailed or delivered in person to the church or emailed to Lou@firstpresbyterianchurchsl.org.

Session Assignments for 2026

We are in our third year of a reorganization of Session Teams/Committees. Last year we made some tweaks at the beginning of the year and revised things along the way.

Team	Elder
Building & Grounds	Donald Pollard
Stewardship & Finance	Shari Plunkett Donald Pollard
Mission	Lowell Hickey Ekaete Udofia
Christian Education	Anne Milner
Community Life (includes new Community Outreach)	Bill Gile Don Atkinson-Adams
Worship	Linda Morine
Personnel	Shari Plunkett
Nominating Comm. Reps	TBD
Clerk of Session	Faye Wilson
Treasurer	Don Yee
Moderator	Renée Rico



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 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 of \$45 for 2026. For those of you who have offering envelopes, you can use the one that says "Per Capita Apportionment", or simply indicate "per capita" with your payment. Thank you in advance!



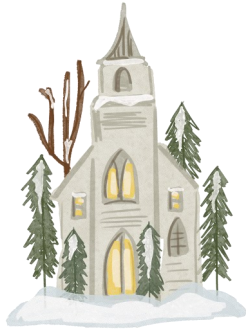


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Stump the Pastor Returns on February 1!

It's back by popular demand! You, too, can Stump the Pastor. Here is how it works: You can submit a question about our faith, or a scripture passage that you don't understand. While Pastor Renée will get a chance to look at the questions ahead of time, all of them will be put on cards and she'll pick them randomly out of a basket and have to answer those. She'll also take questions from those attending worship. Will Pastor Renée be stumped? Will she find a nugget in our faith that you haven't considered? Or will she just laugh hysterically? You'll have to come to find out.

Questions can be sent to Renee's email address (renee@firstpresbyterianchurchsl.org) or you can write down your question or scripture on a card in the Fellowship Hall.

