

# Messenger Newsletter

## First and Grand Ave

### United Methodist Churches

#### Porterville, CA

## November 2021

### Choosing Gratitude

by Pastor Tom Buratovich

*You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Matthew 24:6*

We have heard rumors of a virus that took hold of our world quickly. People became sick, some died, families and loved ones mourned and our nation went into lockdown. “See to it that you are not alarmed,” Jesus said. We tried mightily but the constant din of bad news made us weary, and many grew discouraged. Amid discouragement can we find gratitude?

A brief summer sprinkle accompanied by errant lightning strikes caused massive fires to rage and burn with their monstrous destructive force growing to the size of Rhode Island. The pyrochemicals filled the air and reminded us of the war our brave men and women on the front lines were fighting. “See to it that you are not alarmed,” but we again, easily felt overwhelmed by the taxing pace of crisis.

However, now we can reframe much of what we have experienced. That is what Thanksgiving challenges us to do. We emerge from the worst of times and cultivate a deep sense of gratitude.

Gratitude must be chosen and there is much to choose instead of gratitude - fights over whether to mask or not, to be vaccinated or not, to get a booster or not, to go to restaurants or not. Family and friends can choose to bicker over political positions that weaponized pandemic perspectives. All this is tempting but it only makes life harder.

What if we chose gratitude? What if we chose forgiveness and reconciliation? Is that not what the church should do?

Be thankful we must. Be thankful we should. Be thankful we can and are. We

are recipients of the grandest grace in the cosmos. How can we not be thankful?

We have lost much but it has given us the opportunity to pray hard for wisdom, direction, and to “not be alarmed.”

We have wondered exactly what to do, how to do it, and how to decide if we are successful. Can we make disciples virtually? Can we incite a mobilization and equipping of the church to help Christ followers make an impact in their community?

The questions seemed endless; the answers seemed elusive. However, it has been over a year of deep learning for which we are thankful. What have we learned?

#### **What Defines the Church?**

First, a church is not defined by its pastor, staff, and buildings. Companies might do this, but we are not a company. We are an organic organization; we are a physical entity with a spiritual source. We are different. The church is defined by its head, Jesus and by the members and attenders. They are the church, a church for which we are thankful.

#### **Who Is the Church's Customer?**

Second, our attenders are not our customers. They are owners. The community are our customers whom we need to continually engage and serve to persuade with the Gospel.

The alternative makes owners into consumers, and customers invisible. The pandemic and other ensuing crises have showed us this clearly. We are thankful for our community.

#### **What Are We Doing?**

Our existence is linked to inviting people

in our community to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and respond to God's grace, to awaken their faith in Jesus as personal Savior. While we love being together, we must not neglect going out and inviting, persuading, and compelling our community to join us.

We must get back to providing opportunities to deepen personal faith and commitment to Jesus Christ, grow in maturity and discipleship, and utilize our gifts and serving the local church and our community.

We exist to be a model of Jesus Christ to others, to proclaim his invitation of new life to all who will listen.

#### **Why Do We Do This?**

Our desire is to be obedient to the mandate of Jesus to teach and make disciples of all peoples. Our desire is to train and instruct ourselves and others in the Christian faith grow in likeness of Jesus. We do this because it is important for our church to be a hospitable, caring place that is attractive to our community. We do this because we value our community as a place the Holy Spirit longs to see touched by the gospel and the healing power available to them.

#### **How Shall We Proceed?**

We would love to ask all to return to Sunday worship, whether in person or online. We should make every effort to bring back adult Sunday school, small group Bible study, the sharing of personal testimonies, special children's events i.e., VBS, Christmas program, etc.

Midweek activities, choir, grace groups, parent project, programs for single parents and at-risk youth. We will continue the Clothing Closet at First and

*Continued on Page 2*

# Youth Ministry

The month of November is upon us, and it is that time of year where we will gather with family and celebrate thanksgiving and be reminded of all the blessings in our lives that produce thankfulness in our hearts. For many of us, the pandemic we have experienced over the past many months has caused us to switch our focus from realizing all we have to be thankful for and replaced it with the reminders of the seriousness of Covid. This has been true in my life as well. With that being said, I want to take time to refocus my thoughts this month on all that I have to be thankful for in my life.

First off, I want to say a big thank you to each one of you. I have been blessed to work at Grand Avenue for quite a long time and it has been an adventure to say the least. We, together, have seen the youth group grow, then shrink, then grow again. And during this time, I have been showered with your continual love, guidance, and prayers, never doubting your trust in me to do my very best. Recently, the church took time to publicly thank the pastoral staff during one of our church services. I was so honored and filled with joy by this recognition, and want to say thank you for this blessing, and the cookies were a nice bonus. Whether you know it or not, a simple gesture such as this creates endurance in the hearts of our staff as we continue to strive to grow God's kingdom and bless His church at the same time.

Secondly, during this journey in ministry, there has been a continued presence in my work at Grand Avenue that has provided support, guidance, instruction, and a listening ear that has helped me to grow confidence in the work I do for the Lord. This person is our very own Pastor Tom. Thank you, Pastor Tom, for all that you continue to do in helping shape me into the very best version of myself that I can be for the Lord. Your efforts and

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

dedication to the Porterville Methodist Churches and your staff are noticed and appreciated.

I also want to take some time to say thank you to my amazing wife. When I decided that I wanted to start volunteering in youth group many years ago, and then transitioned into being the youth director, my wife supported me without hesitation. She has been with me on this journey when things were going great, and when things are not going as planned. Ministry is a lot more work than most people understand, and it usually affects the family around you in one way or another. During all we have encountered, my wife has been a rock I can lean on, showing endless love and support.

Thank you, Amanda, I am eternally grateful for you.

While writing this article, I realized how much I have to be thankful for. This realization has reminded me of the importance of a thankful heart. I encourage each of you to take some time this month and reach out to someone who has blessed you in some fashion. Let them know how thankful you are for them and all they've done for you. Return the blessings into their lives that they have poured into yours and witness the joy you both experience. Happy Thanksgiving to each of you at First UMC and at Grand Avenue UMC.

God is Love,  
*Ryan Ridenour*

## Our First Response • continued from page 1 *by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

cultivate a Healing Room at Grand. We are thankful for the God-given passion of people longing to provide this for our community.

We must also consider the power of the two churches working together. We give thanks for both of them. The combined force of our energy, creativity, and leadership ability can multiply our efforts. We must make every effort to put aside our differences for the larger goal of winning our city for Jesus.

### **We Have Succeeded When ...**

When people attending Bible studies comment how helpful they are and how they have changed. We are successful when worship attendance becomes electric and has a feel of freshness and there is evidence of the presence of God's spirit.

We are successful when people tell stories of the work of God in their life and the ways God shows up in ordinary life in extraordinary ways. We are successful when we get new members when the desire for baptism grows. When the willingness to serve grows, when people touched by the ministries of the church began to touch others. When people ask about volunteering before we ask them to volunteer.

We succeed when successful when people in the community begin to tell us about "that wonderful church" before we can tell them. We look toward those days and give thanks.

"See to it that you are not alarmed," Jesus said. Maybe being alarmed is an indication that we have forgotten the greatness of our God and his largeness is eclipsed by our anxiety. Let the greatness, and majesty of our God drown out all those things that would make us alarmed and keep us in a state of fear and timidity. God did not give his life for us to live that way. Let us be not alarmed church! And let us be thankful!

# A Grateful Heart



**This** month, the song that the children are singing to open Worship Service is "Give Thanks With A Grateful Heart." We are focusing on this song in observance of Thanksgiving. Beautiful words that speak such a simple truth.

Giving thanks is something that we do all of the time in many different situations. Someone holds the door open for us, or hands us a book, or gives us a program, we say "Thank you." But is that "thank you" something that we mutter out

of a hum-drum habit, to be polite, or do we say it with a grateful heart? Do we have this same attitude in our prayers? These are some things to ponder.

The truth of the matter is that life is very demanding. We are very busy and the fast pace of life, tends to consume us. We deal with worries, stress, frustration, all of the hurdles in life and keep moving along. But is this how we should be living? No.

When we live life this way, we are putting our troubles first, instead of putting God first. By doing this we are wearing ourselves down and letting weariness in, thus pushing ourselves further from God.

Instead, we can make a lasting difference in our lives. If we choose, every day, to give our Heavenly Father thanks, with a heart of thanksgiving, our lives will change. We will realize that no matter what we face, He will help us though our problems. We will

see how many things we really should be thankful for. The many wonderful blessings that He most graciously gives us.

When our hearts are filled with gratitude, we can not complain or be negative. There is no way to be truly grateful and be ungrateful at the same time. Having a grateful heart invites God's presence to be with us and renews and refreshes our spirits. It reminds us that God is our provider and that all of our blessings and gifts come from His gracious hand.

This month as we sing this song together in Worship, I challenge us all, to really think of the words to this song and ponder them making sure to show through our actions, that we are indeed "Giving Thanks With A Grateful Heart."

Blessings for a wonderful Thanksgiving Season,  
*Melody Burkhart*  
Children's Sunday School



I would like to express my gratitude to both my church families for the wonderful gifts, cards and beautiful words that were give to me in celebration of Pastor Appreciation day.

Thank You!

*Melody Burkhart*



## *Service of Remembrance November 17*

The *Service of Remembrance* is for those who have lost loved ones. We invite you to come and remember those we have lost and look forward to the future. This service is **Wednesday, November 17 at 1:00 p.m.** in the Sanctuary at First UMC. All are welcome to attend. Invite friends and family to join you.

*Service of Remembrance*  
Wednesday  
November 17  
1:00 p.m.  
First UMC



**Combined  
Worship Services  
December 19  
10:00 a.m. at First**

**December 24  
4:00 p.m. at First**

**December 26  
10:00 a.m. at Grand**

**January 2  
10:00 a.m. at Grand**



# Thanking God for the Gift of “Order”

By Judy Lowery

*“...For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”*

1 Corinthians 14:33 NIV



“Did you rake up the pinecones?” Al asked one day when we were both working in the back yard. He pointed to a rather large, tidy pile of green cones next to our back fence. Funny, that’s the same question I was going to ask him! They had been scattered all over the yard... so, who or what piled them up?

Then another mysterious happening occurred one night: the whole pile of cones was moved from our side of the fence to the neighbors’ side! They had been somehow moved through the chain link fence where they were stacked in another orderly pile, most likely by our resident squirrels.

After an uplifting and relatively calm day on Sunday, we were awakened at 4:00 a.m. by frantic barking from the back room where TJ the lab sleeps. Neither Al nor I got up though, hoping that he was having a bad dream and would go back to sleep.

Now TJ usually sleeps through the night. In fact, it seems like he sleeps most of the day too! Occasionally he has had a dream where he whimpers and lets out muffled barks, and his legs jerk as though he is running, either chasing something or running away from it.

This time though it sounded less like dreaming and more like a warning, letting us know that something was amiss. The barking continued, building up in intensity instead of dying down. Whatever or whoever was outside the house wasn’t being scared away.

I put on my slippers and hurried down the hall to find TJ

standing in his room facing the backyard, very alert. A quick check out the window didn’t show anything, even with the outside light flipped on. After saying “No more barking!” authoritatively, I turned off the outside light and went back to bed.

A few minutes later, it started up again. I tried shining the flashlight out all of the windows in the room, not wanting to go outside in my slippers and pajamas. The flashlight didn’t help much though. It only made a reflection on the glass that prevented me from seeing anything at all.

“TJ, no barking! Not scary.” I repeated over and over. He finally curled up on his bed. Before heading back to our bedroom, I covered him from head to toe with one of Al’s old t- shirts, hoping that would do the trick. Either that was the secret or the culprits went somewhere else, because that was the end of TJ’s barking.

Perhaps the commotion was caused by squirrels digging around for more pinecones or other tidbits. Thankfully, I went right back to sleep and didn’t wake up again until 10:00 a.m.

When I finally got up, the day was already in full swing and I was at least two hours behind schedule. There were several things requiring my attention all at the same time. Besides having breakfast ready, Al had thoughtfully already taken care of

TJ’s needs. That was nice, as well as a big help!

The house was in disarray, kitchen chores were calling and my precious early morning hours reading the Bible and praying had disappeared. In addition to making a grocery list before going shopping, there was also an alert from a friend that someone had most likely hacked into one of our online accounts.

Confusion set in. It was a typical, unpredictable Monday! And I wasn’t prepared for it, even after a restful Sunday! When I finally was able to sit down for a bit of quiet time, the first thing that came to mind was to thank God for the gift of “order.”

Order? A scripture immediately popped into my head, something to the effect that God is not the God of confusion, but of order and peace! Jesus addressed this same idea with His disciples many times... “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?” (Luke 12:25)

There was no need to worry. It certainly wouldn’t add minutes to the day. God would help me figure things out when I turned everything over to Him.

Sure enough, with Al’s help and the Lord’s orchestration too, everything fell into place. There were no feelings of confusion, anxiety or of being worn out—only peace and gratitude. God is faithful!

# November 2021 Prayer Calendar

**Monday, November 1** - Pray as we start the month of November.

**Tuesday, November 2** - Please take a moment and pray for our church families today.

**Wednesday, November 3** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, November 4** - Pray for the children and youth of our churches and community.

**Friday, November 5** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he works on his sermon for Sunday Worship Service.

**Saturday, November 6** - Pray for the Clothing Closet at FUMC.

**Sunday, November 7** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, November 8** - Pray for the prayer groups in our churches.

**Tuesday, November 9** - Pray for Melody and Ryan as they work on Children's Church and getting more youth interest in our churches

**Wednesday, November 10** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, November 11** - Pray for the Veterans in our churches and community who have served our country.

**Friday, November 12** - Pray for strength to the ones who will be having procedures and who are rehabilitating.

**Saturday, November 13** - Pray for the Greeter's at Sunday Worship Services as they welcome all who enter.

**Sunday, November 14** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, November 15** - Pray for the ones who serve on the church committees as they make decisions for our churches.

**Tuesday, November 16** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse 2 Corinthians 4:15 *"All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow the glory of God."*

**Wednesday, November 17** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom. Pray for the **Service of Remembrance** at 1:00 p.m. at First UMC.

**Thursday, November 18** - Pray and read Bible verse James 1:17 *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."*

**Friday, November 19** - Pray that our churches will make a difference in our community.

**Saturday, November 20** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse 1 Thessalonians 5:18 *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

**Sunday, November 21** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, November 22** - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Sunday Worship Service.

**Tuesday, November 23** - Pray and read Colossians 2:67 *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."*

**Wednesday, November 24** - Pray for the Bible Study at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, November 25** - On this **Thanksgiving Day**, pray and praise God for all that we are thankful for.

**Happy Thanksgiving!** 

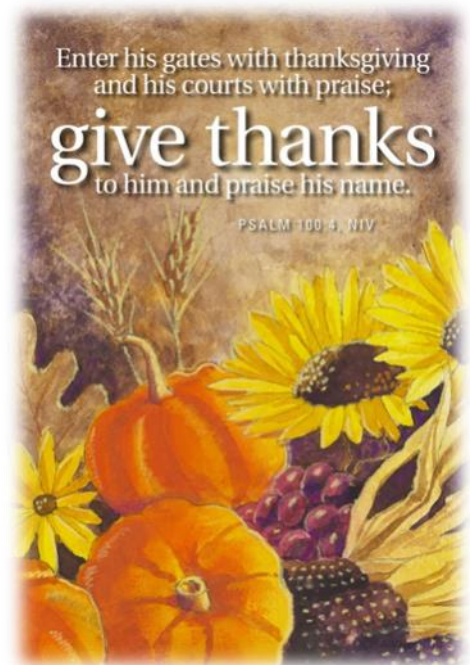
**Friday, November 26** - Pray for our church families that they will have safe travels.

**Saturday, November 27** - Pray and reflect on Ephesians 1:16 *"I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."*

**Sunday, November 28** - Pray for Sunday Worship Services:  
GAUMC 9:30 a.m.  
FUMC Porterville 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, November 29** - Pray and read 1 Chronicles 16:34 *"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."*

**Tuesday, November 30** - Pray and reflect on 2 Corinthians 9:15 *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"*



# NOVEMBER Birthdays

## First UMC

Joe Mitchell • November 11  
 Dave Hammelmann • November 18  
 Frankie Feldman • November 25  
 Gayle Hammelmann • November 27  
 Ray Woffinden • November 27

## Grand Ave UMC

Elon Wright • November 7  
 Rodelyn Lipumano • November 8  
 Dorothy Anderson • November 15  
 Presleigh Ridenour • November 19  
 Nancy Nevels • November 26



*Turn your clocks  
 back one hour on  
 Saturday night  
 November 6.*

## Community Thanksgiving Service

**Wednesday, November 24 • 6:00 p.m.**

*First Assembly of God • 105 E Olive Ave., Porterville*

A community celebration of Thankfulness!

A special offering will be taken for  
 Christmas food boxes giveaway.



### Grand Ave Staff

**Senior Pastor •** *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Director of Youth Ministries •** *Ryan Ridenour*  
**Children's Director •** *Melody Burkhart*  
**Worship Administrator •** *Judy Buratovich*  
**Treasurer •** *Rodel Lipumano*  
**Custodian •** *The Congregation*

### Grand Ave Office Hours:

**Monday–Thursday**  
 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-3791

**Fax:** 559-784-3798

**info@grandavenue.org**

**www.grandavenue.org**

*Grand Ave United Methodist Church  
 776 W. Grand Ave.  
 Porterville, CA 93257*

# Announcements

## Clothing Closet at First

Clothing Closet will open at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 6. We just received a VERY large donation of all types of clothing and assorted novelty items.

## Celebrant Singers Concert

You are invited to *First Congregational Church*, 165 E Mill Ave. in Porterville on **Sunday, November 14 at 3:00 p.m.** for an afternoon Concert of Praise, Encouragement and Prayer. Please contact Judy Buratovich for more information.

## Tithes and Offering

Thank you for your continued support of the ministries of First UMC and Grand Ave UMC

## Wednesday Online Bible Study

The Online Bible Study meets 10:00 a.m. each Wednesday. All are welcome to join us. Contact Pastor Tom for a link to the zoom online meeting, [tburatovich@gmail.com](mailto:tburatovich@gmail.com).

## Next Newsletter Deadline

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at [judy.bur87@gmail.com](mailto:judy.bur87@gmail.com). The deadline for the December 2021 Messenger is **November 20**. Thank you.

## Sunday Worship Services

**Grand Ave • 9:30 a.m.**

**First UMC • 11:00 a.m.**

Children's Sunday School at Both Services

[www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC](https://www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC)

[www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC](https://www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC)

### First Staff

**Senior Pastor •** *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
**Counseling Center Director •** *Joy Semple*  
**Administrative Assistant •** *Melissa Sutherland*  
**Music Coordinator •** *Christine Klippenstein*  
**Children/Custodian •** *Melody Burkhart*

### First Methodist Office Hours:

**Monday–Thursday**  
 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-4232

**pvfumc@ocsnet.net**

*First United Methodist Church  
 344 E. Morton Ave.  
 Porterville, CA 93257*