



First Church Tucson Digest

12.4.2025

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“Light in the Darkness: A Christmas Invitation to Hope”

By Pastor Eun Ko

Beloved FUMC family,

As we enter this beautiful season of Advent, my heart is filled with anticipation and joy for each one of you. December is a month when our faith feels especially alive—when hope is rekindled, peace is renewed, joy deepens, and love takes on flesh among us once again.



This year, I pray that the true spirit of Christmas would rest gently upon our congregation—reminding us that Christ came to bring light where there is darkness, healing where there is brokenness, and belonging where there is loneliness.

In a time when so many in our nation are hurting—from families grieving the loss of loved ones to ongoing struggles with economic hardship, homelessness, and rising division—we are called to embody Christ’s compassion more than ever. The world longs for the Light that only Christ can bring, and we are invited to carry that Light together.

In this holy season, we are also called to widen our hearts beyond our own walls. Through our Christmas Offering, we will support mission partners doing life-changing work around the world:

- Africa Mission (Congo) – Global Assistance for Women and Children, led by our own church member, Blaise Lolika
- Honduras Mission – Ministry of GBGM missionary Daniel H. Contreras Varas

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Light in the Darkness: A Christmas Invitation to Hope cont.

These ministries carry the compassion of Christ into places where hope is urgently needed.

In addition, we will continue our Advent acts of kindness through our Socks Tree for our homeless neighbors and our Animal Food Drive. This season offers us many opportunities to be generous and to share God's love. Your generosity will help provide food, education, medical support, and spiritual care to our brothers and sisters across the globe. This is one of the sacred ways we embody *Emmanuel*—God with us and God with the world.

As you prepare your homes with decorations and your hearts with expectation, I invite you to join us in preparing the world with love. Every prayer, every act of kindness, and every gift shared becomes a star of light pointing to Jesus.

We also invite you to our special worship celebrations this month:

- Christmas Cantata – December 14 at 10:00 AM
- Christmas Eve Candlelighting Service – December 24 at 6:00 PM
- Joint Worship Service with the Korean Choir – December 28 at 11:00 AM

Please join us with your prayers and your generosity. An envelope for the Christmas Offering is included—please pray deeply and consider how God is calling you to share your love for God and for our neighbors.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” — John 1:5

May the grace of Christ dwell richly with you and your loved ones.

May peace surround your homes.

And may this Christmas season draw us deeper into God's joy as we celebrate the One who came for all.

With love and blessings,

Pastor Ko

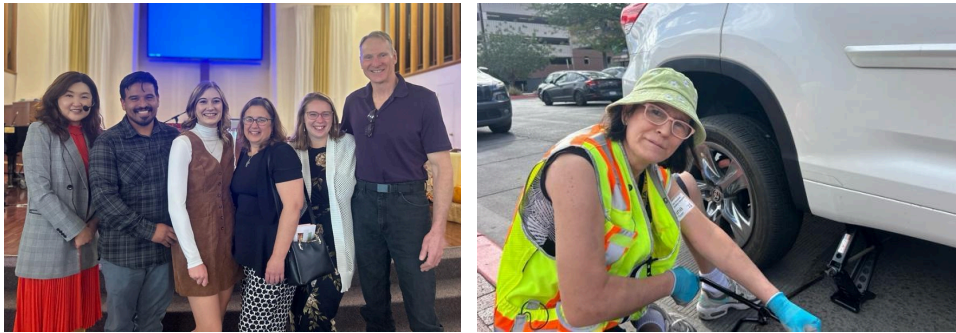


WHAT'S HAPPENING AT FIRST CHURCH OF TUCSON!

Below left: We had a beautiful time of remembering all the saints on All Saints Sunday, November 2nd. *Below right:* Minkyung, our pianist, presented a concert as part of her Doctoral program on November 7th, and our church members showed their support for her.



Below left: Diego and Aleta's family worshiped with us on November 23 while visiting from Massachusetts. *Below right:* Tina helped Pastor Ko replace the spare tire after a flat tire right after the service on November 16.



Below: Changgon Kim successfully passed the oral defense of his Ph.D. dissertation and gave thanks to God by offering to treat the Korean congregation to lunch on November 16. Even in a season of financial tightness, his gratitude was generously shared around the table.



Right: Halla Kang, Pastor Ko's daughter, was accepted into the Tucson Philharmonic Youth Orchestra this fall. She had her Fall Showcase on November 23, and church members came to support her.



Our Thanksgiving Feast was held on November 27 at 12 PM, on Thanksgiving Day. Top row, left: Some of the abundant food; *middle*: Wolfgang, Ethan, Peter, & Jessie; right: Halla and Youngeun. Second row left: Glenn (Anita's brother) and his girlfriend Majerita; people enjoying the meal together; and Sam Haney's family in our courtyard.



Below left: A gathering was also held on the day after Thanksgiving at Steve and Lana's house. Steve kindly offered the use of his home while he was traveling to Irvine, CA during the Thanksgiving break. We were blessed with two heartfelt testimonies on Thanksgiving Sunday. Their testimonies deeply inspired and touched our hearts. *Middle*: Jeannie Lee at the 10 AM service. *Right*: Youngeun Kim at the 11:30 AM service.



Right: Kathryn Shorts worshiped with us on November 30 from Connecticut. Her grandmother, Vorda Smail, used to attend our church in the 1960s.



The church was beautifully decorated for the season during the Hanging of the Greens by our dedicated members on November 29.



Kin-dom not Monarchy: A Pastoral Letter for Christ the King Sunday

by Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut | Nov 19, 2025

Beloved in Christ,

Grace and peace to you!

As we come to the close of the Christian year and prepare to enter Advent, we pause on this Christ the King Sunday to proclaim that Jesus Christ reigns. Yet his reign is unlike any earthly ruler we have ever known. His throne is the cross, his crown is of thorns, and his power is love poured out for the world. To declare Christ as King, therefore, is to dethrone every idol of power—wealth, violence, extremism, and empire.

All throughout scriptures, we are warned of the dangers of domination and authoritarianism, echoing this time-proven truth: that no human ruler should hold ultimate power. Christ's reign is not about domination at all—it is about justice, humility and solidarity with the marginalized. His authority is compassion, his sovereignty is mercy, and his kingdom is shared life.

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And so, to proclaim Christ is King, we must speak clearly against the rising tide of Christian nationalism, which seeks to merge faith with political control, distorting the gospel into a tool of exclusion and supremacy, rather than a vessel of liberation and belonging. Christ the King Sunday is a direct rebuke to this distortion. Jesus does not sanctify flags or borders; he gathers all peoples into one body. His reign is not about elevating one nation above another, but about reconciling all of creation in love.

Christ the King Sunday is also a hinge between seasons. As we proclaim Christ's reign, we turn toward Advent, a season of waiting and preparation. We do not await a conquering monarch, but a child born in vulnerability. We prepare not for domination, but for incarnation. God comes not as king of armies, but as Emmanuel—God with us, whose reign is characterized by hope, peace, joy, and love.

John Wesley reminds us: "Whosoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth." And the hymn writer proclaims: "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive journeys run; his kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more."

This is the vision we hold: Christ's reign is not bound by borders, but stretches across creation. To celebrate Christ the King is to resist every false enthronement—whether nationalism, authoritarianism, or idolatry of self. It is to prepare our hearts for Christ's reign by living as kin, not as subjects. And so we proclaim: No kings but Christ—and Christ's reign is not monarchy but kin-dom, a shared life of love.

May this season strengthen us to reject the crowns of empire and nationalism, and to embrace the reign of love where the King comes not in power, but in vulnerability, and calls us to live as kin in God's beloved community.

May it be so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carlo", with a long, sweeping underline that curves around the bottom left of the signature.

Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut



THIS WEEK'S
ANNOUNCEMENTS & GATHERINGS

10AM SUNDAY SERVICE

Join us in person for our English-language service! Or you can watch it live online at <https://www.youtube.com/c/TucsonFirstUMC>.

한국어 사역

주일 오전 11시 30분에 한국어 예배가
현장예배와 온라인예배로 진행됩니다.
기도와 참여 부탁드립니다.

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS



**December 14 at 10 AM - Joint Service
with Christmas Cantata**

We will hear our choir sing wonderful
music which they have been preparing
since August. Don't miss it!

WEEKDAY GATHERINGS

Wanderers on a Spiritual Quest (WSQ)

-WSQ meetings are on hold during the
Advent study

Narcotics Anonymous (Underground)

-NA meets at 7:30PM on Monday evenings in
the Arizona room.

-On the last Monday of the month, there is
Medallion Night in the Social Hall.

All God's Creation (AGC)

-AGC meets on Tuesdays at 3PM over Zoom.

[Zoom ID: 994 3610 1655](#) [Passcode: 6226481](#)

Chancel Choir

-The choir Christmas party is on December
18th at 6:30 PM.

-After the Christmas cantata, the choir will
take a break from December 18th-January
7th. Weekly practice will resume on January
8th.

Progressive Book Study (PBS)

-The current book is "The Fourth Gospel:
Tales of a Jewish Mystic" by John Shelby
Spong.

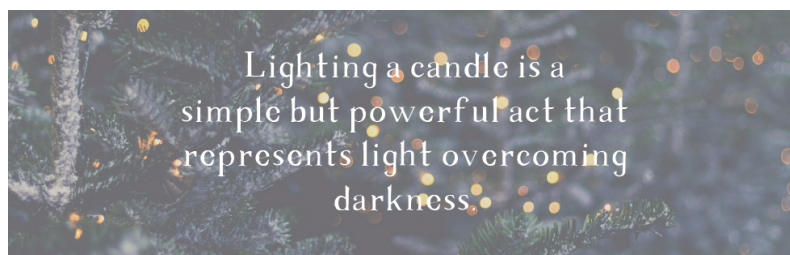
Questions? Call Rev. Gaston at (520) 323-1611.

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Office Closures

-The office will be closed **December 25th**
for Christmas and also **December**
29th-January 1st for the New Year.

-It will reopen on **January 5th**.



Lighting a candle is a
simple but powerful act that
represents light overcoming
darkness.

GIVING TO FIRST CHURCH TUCSON



When you attend Sunday services in person, the offering box is in the narthex for your generous giving. Head to our website www.firstchurchtucson.org/give to give online. As always, you can mail in checks to the church office at the address printed on the front page. Alternatively, have your IRA advisor automatically make payments from your IRA.

When we give to God from our hearts, it is always enough. We see you, and we thank you for your commitment to making a difference in our community.

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PRAYERS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

We offer our prayers for those in our community who are suffering, who are physically, mentally, & emotionally unwell, and for those caring for them.



We offer our prayers for these sister faith communities:

Chaplains & Counselors in the South District
TMM Family Services – people served and staff, Tucson

If you have a prayer request you would like to share in the Digest, please contact the church office at office@firstchurchtucson.org or (520) 622-6481.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Adam Lange (Dec 9)

Jim Rollings (Dec 19)

Deane Kelly (Dec 23)

Duk Hong (Dec 19)

Christiana Ageh (Jan 3)

Gary & Dottie Poczulp (Dec 28 - 48 yrs)

(If we have missed your birthday or anniversary, please let us know so we can update our records!)

December Meet'n'Eat

This is a fellowship time to visit with each other and see old and new friends. *All are welcome, everyone is invited!* The next Meet'n'Eat is on **Friday the 12th at 11:30 AM** at the Olive Garden on the northeast corner of Oracle/Wetmore ([300 W Wetmore Rd, Tucson, AZ 85705](http://www.olivegarden.com/locations/300-W-Wetmore-Rd-Tucson-AZ-85705)). If you're interested in coming, please notify the church office or Shirley Murray (520-297-4796) by the 10th so that enough seating can be reserved at the restaurant.

Animal & Environmental Holidays for December 2025

By Diane & Victoria Russell



December – Operation Santa Paws

Operation Santa Paws was founded in 2001 by Justin Rudd from Long Beach, CA. The goal of this month is to help stock your local shelters and rescues with much needed supplies to care for all the animals. Ways to celebrate include donating blankets, treats, food, toys, time, and money.



December – Safe Pet Toys and Gifts Month

Safe toys and gifts month are not just for kids but for your pets too. Help keep your pets safe this holiday season by choosing the safest toys. Match toys to your pets size and age, choose durable, non-toxic materials, avoid small parts that may become choking hazards, and replace damaged toys.



December – National Giving Month

December is a time of giving by spreading kindness, generosity, and joy to others. Ways to celebrate this month include donating to your

favorite charity, volunteering to help others, or even doing an act of kindness for someone. Remember to be generous every day, not just in December.



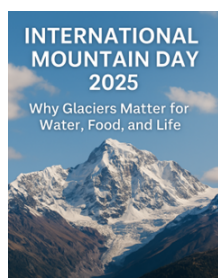
November 30th – December 24th - Advent Season

Advent is a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation leading up to Christmas Day with candle lighting and prayers. Each Sunday during advent, special purple and pink candles are lit starting with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day the white Christ Candle is lit to symbolize the purity, light, and holiness of Jesus Christ.



December 10th – International Animal Rights Day/Human Rights Day

Created in 1998 by the animal rights group "Uncaged". This day is also shared with Human Rights Day, because both animals and humans have the right to be treated with respect and without cruelty. All animals and humans should be treated with kindness.



December 11th – International Mountain Day

Designated by the UN General Assembly in 2003 to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable mountain development. The 2025 theme: “Glaciers matter for water, food, and livelihoods in mountains and beyond”. This theme highlights the importance of glaciers for a source of freshwater which is essential.



December 13th – National Day of the Horse

Created by Congress in 2004 to recognize the historical, cultural, and economic contributions of horses in American history. It is a day to appreciate and honor these amazing animals and to raise awareness about their welfare.



December 14th – National Monkey Day

What started as a joke between art students at Michigan State University in 2000 has turned into an annual holiday dedicated to raising awareness about non-human primates. This day honors monkeys, apes, lemurs, and tarsiers.



December 14th – January 5th Christmas Bird Count

Calling all bird lovers to take part in the 126th Annual National Audubon Society Christmas bird count. The 54th Annual Tucson Valley Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is held on December 16th. This is a community science event that counts every bird species encountered within a certain area.



December 25th – Christmas

Christmas is one of the most important Christian holidays during the year. The true meaning of Christmas is the celebration of our Savior – Jesus Christ. Wishing everyone a wonderful and blessed holiday.



First Church Tucson is an inclusive multi-ethnic faith community and a reconciling congregation of the United Methodist Church. Established in 1879 as the first Protestant church in our city, First Church Tucson continues to pave the way in creating a faith community that embraces all peoples into the grace of God.

As a courageous family of faith, we celebrate the diversity of all God's children, welcome everyone to share in God's love and grace, and offer a sanctuary of hope.

We seek to be in ministry with all God's people, regardless of gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, culture, country of origin, ability/disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. We continue to work towards building a loving and faithful community in Tucson, and welcome all of you to be part of it.