



THE NUGGET



Outdoor Worship at White Pines Sunday, August 23, 10am



It is almost time for our much anticipated Outdoor Worship at White Pines Park. Join us for praise and fellowship as we enjoy the majesty of God's beauty. There will be a potluck lunch after. Remember to bring a chair, a dish to share, and your own serving set.

*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on
life's journey,
You are welcome here.*

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

**Join us as we stand
for justice, peace
and democracy each
Sunday from 3 - 4
pm at the stoplight
in Murphys.**

*We are in the season
of Pentecost and the
color is green.*

Interim Thoughts



Beloved,

I've been thinking about starting a new "pop up" ministry called "Coffee with Gary." It's a simple idea: one morning per week I will get a table at a local coffee shop around 9 am willing to talk with anyone who shows up or wanders by about whatever it is they wish to talk about.

Wednesday morning could work. Or even Monday. Anyone remember that old pop tune, "Monday, Monday" ("can't trust that day") by the Mamas and Papas?

As I write this, I hear a bouncing basketball and the delightful laughter of children. This is VBS week, and we've had a good time singing, dancing, making crafts, hearing stories from the bible, and making connections. Any hour we invest in the children of our communities is an hour well spent. A moment ago, I gazed at a long table of children eating snacks and wondered: where will each of these kids be in ten or twenty years, and who will they have become? What will they remember about those sunny summer days they spent in Murphys? Will the seeds of love and kindness we planted bear fruit in the years to come? Even as I ask this question, I can hear Jesus, the Sower himself, say to me, "Yes, my child. Look what I did with you! Do you think I didn't see you goofing off in church, ignoring the sermon, reading the funny papers in the upstairs balcony away from the prying eyes of adults?"

In other news, thanks for your prayers about our housing situation. God heard your prayers! Our landlord offered us a new two-year lease! We signed it yesterday. God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.

What are you reading? If you're on our Facebook page, post something about a book you've been reading, or a new show you're streaming. We've been watching "Dark Winds" on Netflix, a fascinating series set in the 1970s southwest, in Navajo Nation. The show is based on the Leaphorn & Chee book series by Tony Hillerman, with Robert Redford & George R.R. Martin as Executive Producers.

I hope to see you in church this month! And remember that August 23rd is the date of our traditional outdoor worship service at White Pines! The So Called Band will be playing, there will be poetry and song and prayers and delight in God's great cathedral on the lake. And who knows, maybe some wild geese! See you there.

Gary



Save the Date:

NCNC Annual Gathering 2026

October 22–24, 2026

City of Refuge United Church of Christ & NCNC Conference Offices

Oakland, California

for more information: <https://ncncucc.org/annual-gathering-2026/>

Moderator's Message



As I begin my new role as Moderator for Open Door UCC, I commit to do my best to ensure communication with all our members regarding church business, and to conduct Council meetings as efficiently and effectively as possible. Whether you are a voting member of the council or not, these meetings are public, and I hope that you take the opportunity to attend these meetings, especially if you have an issue or concern that you wish to bring forward. This is an exciting time for our church, as we consider new directions and work toward calling a new pastor to lead us in these directions. I hope that all of you will join me in participating in discussions about these issues. The first major action that we will be taking happens at a special congregational meeting that will take place on August 16th, immediately following our services that day. Please try to be at church for this important discussion, as we will be voting on revising Pastor Gary's letter of call to one of a designated term, instead of an interim pastorate. Further detailed information about the action at the special congregational meeting is provided below.

Special Congregational Meeting Called

A special congregational meeting is being called for August 16, 2026, immediately following the 10 AM service. It will take place in the church, and we will present to the membership a proposal to replace Pastor Gary's current letter of call as interim pastor with a designated term of two years, and include the option of renewing for an additional two years as needed. This vote will be taken by written ballot, and Pastor Gary will not be present for the discussion and vote.

Impact of Your Vote

If the motion passes, a new letter of call with a term of two years, and including an option of extending the term for an additional two years, as needed, will be developed and signed. This call will be for a designated term pastorate with the goal of completing a cultural reassessment and identification of a future vision for our ministry.

If the motion fails, a new letter of call will not be created, and Pastor Gary will continue with his call as an interim pastor. He has committed to this call for two years, which will continue through June 30, 2027. We may also mutually agree to extend the current call for an additional period of time.

In either event, the Pastoral Search Committee will continue developing a profile of the church for candidates, and will seek a settled pastor.

History

The Pastoral Search Committee was tasked with finding and hiring an interim pastor, writing a profile of the church for candidates seeking the settled pastor position, and interviewing and hiring a settled pastor. In June of 2025, the committee selected Rev. Dr. Gary Percesepe as the interim pastor. With his assistance, we continued to gather information for the church profile, which is the first step in seeking a settled pastor. After concluding the church-wide conversations that were held in May of this year, the committee determined that further discernment of new directions that our church might take is necessary prior to completing our profile.

Because an interim position typically lasts for 18 to 24 months, and Pastor Gary has been here for 12 months now, the committee concluded that revising Pastor Gary's letter of call from an interim pastorate to a designated term pastorate would be the most appropriate action to take. In the UCC, a designated term pastorate creates greater stability for both church and pastor to work toward a particular goal, such as a cultural reassessment and identification of a future vision for our ministry. This is the type of call that the Pastoral Search Committee recommends, and the Council has approved.

We are asking that all members prayerfully consider the proposal described above, and join us for a discussion and final vote of this proposal on Sunday, August 16th, immediately following our services that day.

Tuning in With Our Music Director



Dear Friends,

I will be gone for the first three weeks of August, but your trusty music team has got everything covered! Big thanks go out to Liz Graham and Claire Coykendall for playing the organ while I am gone. Jesse Hampton will offer a couple of lovely preludes, his original guitar compositions. On August 9 he will play “More Than Many Sparrows,” based on Luke 12:6-7. On August 16 he plans to play “Alliteration Mountain Meditation” which will help open your hearts and minds for worship. Also on August 9 Mary Kelly will grace the service with “How Can I Keep From Singing,” a song that could have been written just for her.

My trip will take me as far north as Bellingham, Washington, and as far east as Couer d'Alene Lake (not too far east). I'll be presenting Musical Sanctuary in Nevada City, Portland, Olympia, Bellingham, and Lummi Island. If you know anyone in any of those neighborhoods who might like to attend - or if you will be there yourself! - you can direct them to katemusic.com for exact dates and locations. Also on this trip I will be recording a piece I wrote twenty years ago, “Friday Nights.” It's a three movement suite for cello and piano: “Fantasy - Variation,” “Release,” and “Blessing in Disguise.” I will be joined on the recording by Nick Strobel, a fine cellist with many impressive credits. I am grateful for your prayerful blessings on this journey.

I will be back in time for the August 23 White Pines service. The So-Called Band and Friends will lead the music, joined by birds, and maybe a goose or two. August 30, a fifth Sunday, will be a contemplative service of readings, music, and prayer. It is sure to be a beautiful and meaningful service.

HANDBELLS! Are you handbell curious? The handbell choir will be having a pot luck visit-and-plan lunch in the Social Hall on August 29 at 11:30. We won't be rehearsing that day, just enjoying fellowship and inspiration, and we'd love to have you join us!

All blessings,

Kate





Christian Education Recap

We just completed a FANTASTIC week of VBS! Each day the children were engaged with a skit introducing the day's theme, Bible stories, crafts, science, music and out door games of, course, there was a yummy snack each day, too. The theme was Kid Connections with friends, family and Jesus.

We had new t-shirts made with the Open Door UCC logo on the back and then the Sunday school kids got to tie-dye them! So they were ready to go one day one!

Each day we had happy children and an army of dedicated volunteers who created a safe and welcoming environment. Our mission project was filling a BIG galvanized tub with food for the Blessing Box. Our goal was met!

The children were also able to hear live music! Justin Glessman and Zoe Fuqua played guitar and drums at the end of the sessions on Monday and Tuesday! They did an amazing job and the children were enchanted.

We ended the week with an abbreviated program and then walked down to the park to play in the creek and have pizza before being picked up.

This program would not be possible without the generous donation of time from so many wonderful volunteers! Thank you so much!!

#KidsConnect





Poet's Corner

Church Sign Missing Letters

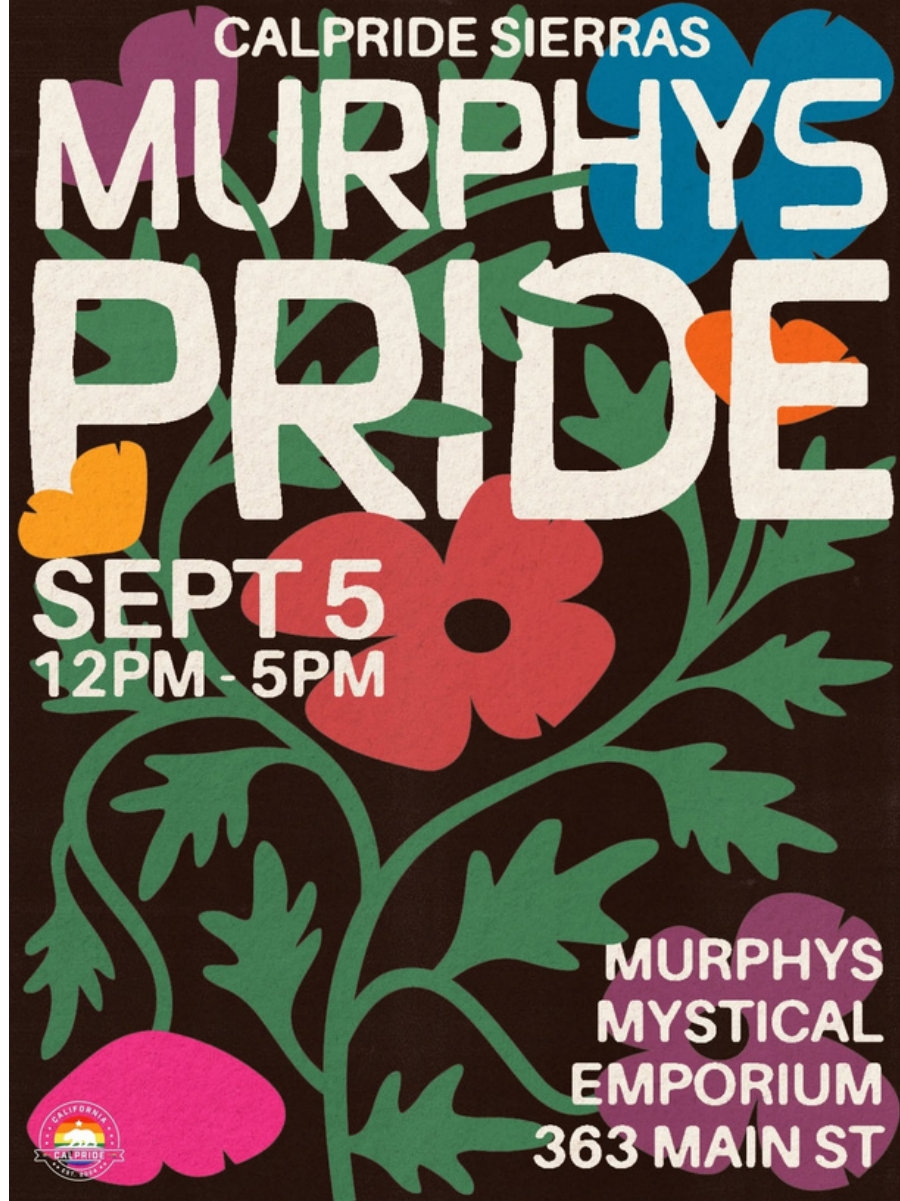
by Wilson

The wind took the E years ago
and now it says GOD IS NOW
HER,
and nobody has fixed it,
maybe because nobody wants to,

it being the best sermon
that church ever gave.



According to the World Poetry Collective website, the poems in Wilson's Revenge were written by an 84-year-old Oklahoma man named Wilson. He offered no other name when he sent in the manuscript, a stack of fifty-five poems rolled up and held together with a rubber band. He wrote them at his dining room table over a span of many years. His only instruction to the press was, "Print it the way I said it." And they did.



The Resource Connection, in partnership with the California Department of Public Health will be distributing food resources for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) on Thursday, August 13 from 9am - 4pm in the Open Door UCC Social Hall.

What does it mean to follow Jesus in a divided America?

By Bekah McNeel
Journalist and author

Our ultimate goal isn't winning an argument or even an election but bringing healing to a suffering world, writes a journalist and author.

I spend a lot of time talking about polarization and political conflict. Because I am bullishly solutions-oriented, it's only a matter of time in the course of almost every podcast, workshop and Q&A session before the question comes up: How do I make my neighbors and my family see that their politics are cruel and immoral?

Whether it's the progressive niece and her Trump-loving uncle, the dismayed father and his adult children who think socialism is the way forward or the neighbors with competing yard signs, everyone is looking for that one winning argument that will flip their politically recalcitrant loved ones.

"Oh," your uncle will finally say, "the Republican Party has been taken over by white Christian nationalists!"

"Aha!" your niece will concede, "the Democratic platform is inherently socialist!"

Even if it's not so extreme, many of us are appalled by others' opinions on abortion, immigration, race, guns and any number of other issues that divide us. I think it's a good and good-faith question to ask how we might talk some sense into our family and friends without sacrificing the relationships.

It's a sincere question, but I don't believe there's a good answer to it. I wrote [an entire book](#) about these divisions, and the only solutions I found were, unfortunately, not based on winning arguments. They were way more radical.

We don't need airtight, unimpeachable rhetoric. We don't need to win more Republicans or Democrats to our side. We need total narrative reorientation so that our ultimate goal isn't winning an argument or even an election but instead bringing healing to a suffering world.

I believe this to be not only the most effective path forward but also what it means to be Christlike. If Jesus' goal was to win people over to a political strategy, he failed miserably. If his goal was to bring democracy to the Middle East, mission not accomplished.

But if his goal was to bring healing and shalom to a world straining under the weight of empire, oppression, sickness, sadness and scarcity, he was among the greatest leaders the world has ever known. In that way, I believe we are invited to be like Christ. We are invited, specifically, to take up our cross.

What this points to are hundreds if not thousands of opportunities to choose the good of others instead of selfishness. It's a scary proposition, because anything other than self-interest might involve sacrifice. It might involve pain or discomfort. If it weren't for an earthy, practical theology of resurrection, it would be insanity. If life were limited to what we amass here, we'd be fools not to hoard and protect.

But if we die with Christ, Paul's second letter to Timothy promises, we will live with him. The rhythm of death and resurrection isn't a one-and-done ticket to heaven; it's the motif of our lives that we choose over and over and over again. One way to do that is through telling cruciform stories, stories that show us how to die to political advantage, power and privilege and to rise to mutuality,

compassion and solidarity. Stories are how we make sense of the world; they allow us to take sensory input and transform it into relationships and motivation. The kinds of stories we tell matter so much.

My book analyzes the stories that have kept us acting in our own best interest, the tales that we tell ourselves to dull our hearts to compassion. But then, looking to the Gospels, I ask what it would mean to die to self-interest and rise to compassion in the context of our most divisive political debates. What kind of story would Jesus tell in response to people literally dying as they try to cross the border? Or to the gun lobby?

I believe the stories of the Gospels do speak to our current situation. They don't offer a political solution, but they might affect our politics. Mutuality is not some internalized decision to "just love everybody" and retreat from the fray. Compassion drives us to act. Sometimes our solidarity is a vote; sometimes it is getting involved in protest or aid work or organizing. Ironically, I also think that radical compassion and connectedness would go further than any political messaging to heal our divides.

Cruciform storytelling is different from prioritizing unity as we've come to understand it. For too long, we've been told to set our political differences aside and prioritize the feeling of "us"-ness. Don't bring up controversial issues at the dinner table. Leave the politics and "stick to Jesus" in our sermons. Focus on what brings us together — even if that means we have to ignore the suffering of others.

This approach treats unity as something maintained by good vibes rather than the shared reality that we are all human beings and members of God's family.

Jesus' life was a nonstop pursuit of suffering people, interrupted periodically with rebukes of others who were overly preoccupied with their in-group dynamics. He had to break social norms and religious rules and was ultimately crucified as a lawbreaker — all in pursuit of the people society would rather forget. The lepers, the sick, the poor, the unclean. He didn't always play nice, and he never set aside his mission to avoid conflict.

So while I don't think there's a political solution to national disunity to be found in Jesus' life, I do think there's moral clarity. The stories of the Gospels offer vignette after vignette of what the dying-and-rising motif will look like in our lives, from "Man was not made for the Sabbath" (death) but "the Sabbath was made for man" (resurrection) to "The Son of Man came not to be served" (death) "but to serve" (resurrection). It's only in the end that the Gospel writers tie it all together in the story of Holy Week.

The Beatitudes, Peter walking on water, Jesus calming the storm, healing the centurion's servant, raising Lazarus, even producing the new wine at the wedding at Cana point us to dying to having it our way and rising to something better.

We cannot prioritize political answers, or nationalistic ones, ahead of our commitment to oneness in Christ — a connection

based in dying even to our shared national interest and rising to the shalom of all creation.

The practical flaw in our “play nice and look the other way” approach to national unity is just as fundamental. It assumes that there is something real and objective to rally around when we talk about the nation. But what is the nation? Are we a melting pot? A city on a hill? A nation of laws? A nation of immigrants?

Whenever we see outbreaks of violence — be it police or political — social media erupts with, “This is not who we are!” Inevitably, a second wave of posts follows with countless historical examples demonstrating that the United States has always had violence in its bones. Or cruelty toward immigrants. Or bonkers conspiracy theories.

We remain one nation as long as we can tolerate the current balance of safety and freedom, of privilege and responsibility. Yet we cannot just ignore our significant differences on these topics, because at some point, those who disagree may decide that they cannot abide the current balance. They may decide that their freedoms are being curtailed to the point of oppression. Or that the government’s demands constitute tyranny. At some point, the suffering engendered by the prevailing national imagination becomes irreconcilable.

So what’s the solution, if not unity for unity’s sake? What do we rally around, if not the dominant imagination of the nation? I believe the Gospels point us to our oneness in Christ as the basis for unity. By this I don’t mean simply replacing “Americans” with “confessing Christians” as our “us.” I think that until we see the whole of creation — including our enemies — as our “us,” we will continue to suffer and to tolerate the suffering of others.

To answer that question for myself, I had to do more than pick a side. In fact, I couldn’t pick a side. I’m a journalist, and journalists aren’t supposed to try to convince you of things. We’re not supposed to pick sides at all. For the most part, I like the distance journalism affords. There’s a comfort in being able to observe, record and relay facts without having to get into the messy work of solving problems. I’m not terribly disappointed that I can’t go door to door canvassing for political candidates. In reality, I prefer not to make life awkward with my neighbors.

Cable news and partisan outlets aside, most journalists I know share this affinity for life as an outside observer. But there are times when, for many of us, the truth beneath the facts becomes difficult to ignore. For me, this hidden truth began to show itself Sept. 1, 2021, when Texas enacted a six-week abortion ban. The truth became impossible to ignore May 24, 2022, when a young man murdered 19 fourth graders and their teachers with an AR-15-style rifle in Uvalde.

I saw the truth of our national division, and it went so much deeper than red vs. blue. It cuts to our very souls.

I reported the facts of those news stories, just like I’d reported the facts of immigration, education policy, COVID-19 and climate change. For over a decade I have faithfully relayed the stories of suffering people with accuracy and detail, and every time, I am freshly reminded of the truth beneath the facts: Americans are unmoved by certain kinds of suffering.

We are unmoved by any suffering that makes us look bad. If my preferred policy or my economic advantage is causing someone else’s suffering, then I’m keen to explain it away. When it comes down to you and me, if one of us must suffer, I’d rather it be you.

As I wrote the story of Kendra Joseph, the mother who had aborted her pregnancy after finding out the baby had a life-limiting condition, I could already hear the anti-abortion response, the counternarrative in my head. The suffering she was trying to prevent — hers, her family’s and the baby’s — was inconsequential compared with the baby’s “right to life.”

As I wrote the story of Uvaldeans devastated by the deaths of their children, I could hear the counternarrative that their suffering was random, arbitrary and unexplainable and that guns were — against all evidence — keeping us safe, not leading us to death.

I remembered posting the story of Jessica Menjivar on Facebook. In one scene, she was lying on the floor of a holding cell in an immigration detention center without “even ... the strength to talk to God.” She eventually did find the strength, praying to be reunited with her daughters, who had fled a life of sexual exploitation by the gang who controlled their town in El Salvador. I had seen the counternarrative, in the comments under that story on social media: “The law’s the law.”

These and more stories came rushing to me as I thought about how we have inured, or maybe numbed, ourselves to the suffering of others so that we will not have to bear the discomfort of compassion, especially if it might lead us to take on a little suffering of our own in order to alleviate the suffering of our neighbors.

We’ve fed ourselves a steady diet of these counternarratives so that we’ve become primed to fight, not heal. We’ve allowed ourselves to believe that these are political fights and that a win for “our side” is the best way to heal the country.

It’s not, and I think we see that in the stories of someone who was neither Republican nor Democrat. Not because he was “too conservative for Dems and too liberal for Republicans.” But because he wasn’t an American at all. Jesus of Nazareth, as his stories are told in the Gospels, calls us to a oneness and a compassion so antithetical to our partisan divisions that we should be blushing. Because this oneness and compassion isn’t based on ignoring the suffering that divides us; it’s found in putting that suffering at the center. It’s found, not in pursuing pleasantness, but in dying to comfort so that we can rise to healing.

The oneness Jesus offers makes the imagination of the nation seem puny and petty until it serves the good of all.



Bekah McNeel is a journalist and the author of “This Is Going to Hurt: Following Jesus in a Divided America.” You can contact her through her website www.bekahmcneel.com, Instagram @wanderbekah or X @BekahMcneel.

Cherishing our members, friends, and community...

Happy Birthday!

Tami Chesnut 2
Karen Rojas 4
Patti Hennessee 7
Teddie Jackson 7
Liz Graham 7

Hank Fletcher 12
Diane Hosmer 11
Teri Olivas 13
Bob Henning 19
Jerry Patterson 19
David Kelly 28

*Don't see your
birthday listed?
We promise it
isn't on purpose!
If you would like
to have your
special day listed
in the
newsletter,
please call or
email the church
office.*

Prayer List

The scriptures tell us:

**“And my God will meet all your
needs according to the riches of
his glory in Jesus Christ.”**

Philippians 4:19

***We continue to witness the
stories of how God answers our
prayers!***

***God hears our cries and answers
them.***

***Let us pray daily for the
following members and friends
of our community:***

Linda Winters
Teddie Jackson
Jodie Gibson
Angela Patterson
Yvonne & Jim Heryford
Mark McCormick's sister, Teta
Doug Fraser (Doug & Patti Lau)
Miley Sophia (Breen)
Will and parents (Penny Sarvis)
Diane Tussey
Enoch Samraj
Ryan VanCleave
Faye Morrison
Shoshana (Laura Leonard)
Tabitha Kremesec
Lauren, Gordon, Emre, Willow (Jesse
Hampton)
Shirley Soderer
Terry Dowell
Robin Chesnut
Tari Takara
Ben Richardson (LaMonts)

August 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					12pm Women's AA	1
2 Holy Communion 11am small group	3 6:30pm Al-Anon	4	5 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 10am Worship Comm. mtg., Zoom 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	6	7 12pm Women's AA 10:30am The Wanderers	8
9 11am Outreach/Social Justice mtg., EEC	10 1:30pm F&F mtg., 5:30pm South Grove Bunch 6:30pm Al-Anon	11	12 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom	13 9am - 4pm WIC in Social Hall	14 12pm Women's AA	15
16 11am Council mtg., EEC	17 6:30pm Al-Anon	18 5:30pm The Seekers	19 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom	20	21 12pm Women's AA	22
23 Outdoor Worship and potluck at White Pines	24 6:30pm Al-Anon	25	26 8:15am Morning Prayer, Zoom 11am Angels Angels 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	27	28 12pm Women's AA	29
30	31 6:30pm Al-Anon					

God's love echoes through us to all creation.
Webpage: www.fccmurph.org
Email: nugget@fccmurph.org
Phone: (209)728-3141

AUGUST 2026
DATED MATERIAL - DO NOT DELAY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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Murphys, CA 95247

THE NUGGET



www.ucc.org

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Pastor Emeritus Rev. Dr. John Randlett
Music Director Kate Moody
Secretary Jenny Fuqua
Christian Ed Director Evelyn Betts
Childcare Abby Fuqua
Ministers at Large: All Members at Open Door UCC!

Officers
Moderator Barbara Olivier
Vice Moderator Patty Haskell
Treasurer Carrie Shinn
Clerk Darlene Davis

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, MURPHYS MISSION STATEMENT
We believe that all people are beloved by God and we strive to serve as a welcoming and nurturing church community to discern the Bible with insight for today and to live out Christ's teachings.

The Nugget Committee invites you to submit articles of interest and wishes to stress that the deadline is always the 20th of each month.

The Committee reserves the right to edit submissions for length and content.