

THE NUGGET

Open Door United Church of Christ



Outdoor Worship & Potluck Picnic at White Pines August 24

It is that time again for our special worship service in the beauty of God's creation! We hope you join us at White Pines Park on Sunday, August 24 at 10am. We will have a potluck picnic after worship, so be sure to sign up on the sheet in the Social Hall. Please also bring a chair, a plate and your own utensils. See you there!



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

*We are in
the Season
After
Pentecost
and the
color is
green.*

Interim Thoughts



I woke up this morning wanting raspberries with my granola. I checked the fridge: no raspberries.

Sometimes nothing makes you think of

something. In this case, the absence of raspberries caused me to think of the presence of the migrant workers who pick them, and the long journey from those fields to my fridge. Who are they? What are their names? Were my raspberries (currently missing) picked by a family? Did their parents also pick raspberries? Where are they from? Where are they going next, after the raspberries are picked?

Modern life is a series of abstractions. We talk about “the issues” of our day as if they are somehow disconnected from the lives of real people. Immigration or war or genocide or abortion are not “issues” up for debate, they reflect the lived experience of someone we do not know. Ultimately, “issues” are people we have yet to meet, neighbors on earth that we do not know.

“Gaza” is not an issue; it is that child over there bloodied and bruised, hiding in a ditch. It is that Roman Catholic priest injured in a recent bombing that killed three of his parishioners at the sole remaining Catholic church in Gaza, one that Pope Francis used to call every night.

When we abstract from the lived experience of people we create ideologies, and ideologies are deadly. At the heart of every ideology is the illusion that we are separate. Racism stems from the illusion that White people are separate and supremely different from those of other races.

Let’s call it “the ideology of White supremacy.” Sexism is the result of the same illusion, the illusion that men are separate from and distinct from women, a particularly absurd illusion, given the fact that men have their origins in the wombs of women! Illusions of separateness need not make sense to have domination power. Racism and patriarchy are not rational, yet they remain dominant. What can dispel the power of human illusions?

Native Americans speak of “all our relations”—sun and moon, plant and animal, tree and frog, human and non-human. Everything is connected. Africans speak of ubuntu: I am because we are. Buddhist monk Thich Naht Hahn spoke of interbeing as the source of compassion.

The biblical word for separation is sin. The bible is replete with stories of how the sin of separateness wreaks havoc on earth.

The only known cure for the illusion of separation is prayer. When we pray, Jesus prays through us. What does Jesus pray? Jesus prays the prayers of the Psalms. The book of Psalms is the prayer book of the bible.

I begin each morning with Morning Prayer, using The Book of Common Prayer, not because I am some sort of “spiritual giant” but because I have learned through bitter experience the power of my illusions, and that the only remedy is prayer. I would be embarrassed to tell you how long it took me to learn this.

In these perilous days I find myself drawn to those German followers of Jesus who “got it right” during the Hitler years, when so many capitulated, including hundreds of churches

and pastors, who bent the knee. People like theologian Karl Barth and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What did they know that I don't? What resources did they have that I lack? Their courage in the face of death is legendary, but what empowered them to resist "wickedness in high places?"

Karl Barth once said, "To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world"

The disciples, famously, asked Jesus: *Teach us to pray.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his little book on prayer, wrote these words:

"God's speech in Jesus Christ meets us in the Holy Scriptures. If we wish to pray with confidence and gladness, then the words of Holy Scripture will have to be the solid basis of our prayer. For here we know that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, teaches us to pray. The words which come from God become, then, the steps on which we find our way to God."

If you would like to join me for Morning Prayer, let me know. Perhaps we can form an online community of prayer one day a week. During Lent we could add Evening Prayer. We could even form a group to read Bonhoeffer's classic book on prayer together. There is no requirement to join other than a desire to lose one's illusions.

Gary



Vacation Bible School was a success. We had many children from our greater community join for a week of play, discovery, singing, snacks, and Discovering Jesus! Many thanks to all of the wonderful volunteers who made this possible. Patty Haskell, Evelyn Betts, Joe Jackson, Mary Kelly, Carrie Shinn, Marilyn Baisel and Stephanie, Connie Bowser, Ron and Darlene Davis, Tami Chesnut, Pam Kimes, June Perry, Kendra Soderer, and guest actors, Abby and Zoe Fuqua.





Moderator's Message

Dear Open Door UCC Members and Friends: Our National UCC denomination holds a meeting every two years to deal with UCC business.

This meeting is called the General Synod and it occurred this month in Kansas City MO. Please read the information about the work that was conducted by our denomination, and particularly about the resolutions passed by the Synod, as I believe they reflect the beliefs many of us also hold:

Every two years, General Synod brings together faithful members of the United Church of Christ for inspirational worship, fellowship with friends (old and new), and public witness including through engagement with the business of the church.

In July 2025, we welcomed thousands from across the country for General Synod 35 in Kansas City, Missouri – the barbecue capitol. Together, we discerned resolutions of witness, church structure, and function. We celebrated our faith and joined in spirit-filled worship each day.

At the final plenary, on the final day of General Synod 35, delegates were engaging in faithful and urgent deliberation around two resolutions:

resolutions: “In Support of Restoration of Full Funding for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)” and “In Support of Restoration of Full Funding and Autonomy for the Voice of America (VOA).” Each resolution reflects the

Church’s broader commitment to human dignity, global justice, and freedom of the press — values deeply rooted in the gospel call to love neighbor and pursue peace.

The resolutions call upon the Church and its members to speak out against funding reductions and political interference that threaten the vital humanitarian work of USAID and the editorial independence of VOA. Advocates for the resolutions emphasized the lifesaving and truth-bearing roles these agencies play on the global stage, particularly in vulnerable regions where democratic values and public health infrastructure are under threat.

The vote on both resolutions’ results are:

USAID Resolution vote: 567 approval, 9 deny, 3 abstain

VOA Resolution vote: 503 approval, 50 deny, 43 abstain

During floor discussions, speakers highlighted the importance of holding public institutions accountable to their founding missions of service and truth-telling. They named how restoring full funding would help stabilize global partnerships, combat poverty, address climate change, and support journalistic integrity in a time of growing disinformation.

As the body continues to wrestle with these important matters, the energy on the floor reflects the depth of care and conviction that delegates bring to their work — discerning and ultimately seeking to speak a collective word rooted in justice and hope.

Submitted by Carrie Shinn

Treasurer's Report

Thank you to everyone for the Budget adjustment approval back in June. Finances are looking good and teams are doing a good job keeping expenses down. Pledges are doing well and endowments continue to grow. Thank you for your continued support and hope everyone is having a nice summer. Patty

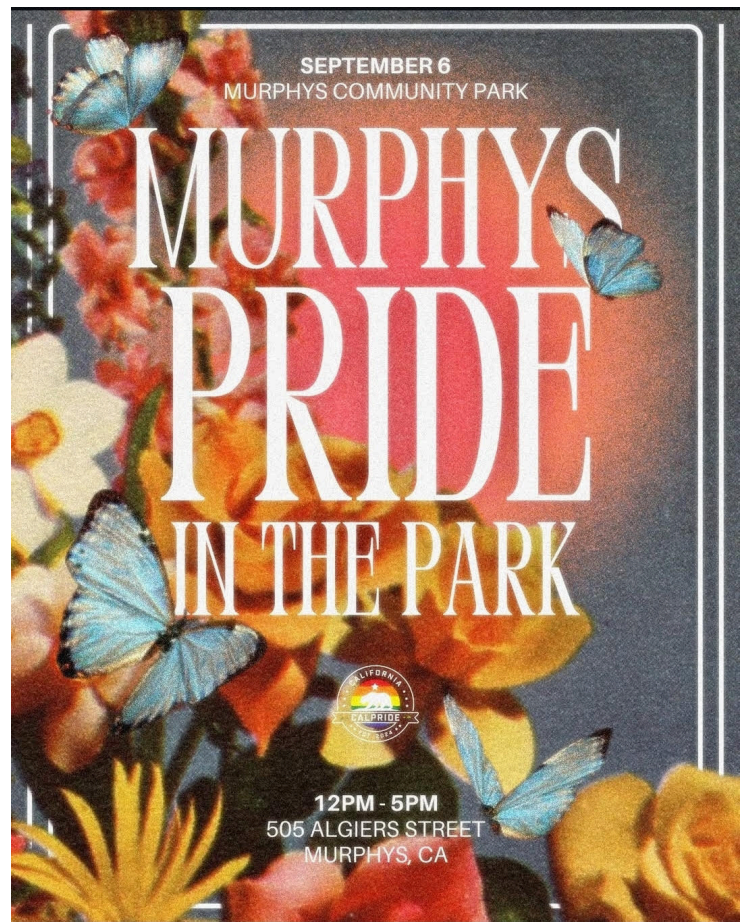


Christian Education Recap

Summer has been busy for Christian Education. We had 2 youth attend camp at Camp Tamarack and also had volunteers help with camp. VBS is completed and everyone had a great time. Thank you to all the volunteers that helped. I will be working with Pastor Gary on some service projects in the Fall and discussing with him the Family Program. We will also need to start planning for the Advent season. Where does the time go?? We will be scheduling our back to school root beer float Sunday School open house soon, so look for that fun event. Hope everyone is having a wonderful summer. Patty

Save the Date!

Murphys Annual Pride in the Park will take place on Saturday, September 6 from 12 - 5pm. We will have our usual booth set up. More details to come!



Camp Tamarack, an Honored UCC Tradition

Camp Tamarack is a wonderful place for the youngsters in the Northern California United Church of Christ conference. Kids from our Murphys church have been going for many years. It is set in the High Sierra east of Fresno. Kids get to meet other youngsters from all over Northern California.

I was honored to be the health Supervisor for the Junior Camp. Kids entering 4th 5th and 6th grade attended. This year there were 2 boys and 13 girls. My Grandson Soloman was one of the boys. This was his third year. In the past my daughter Melissa, my son Robin, and my niece Erin and nephew Owen loved their time there too. Many other kids from the Murphys church looked forward to going to camp Tam over the years. They would recommend the experience to all of the youths in our congregation.

I was really surprised to find out that Liz Restivo was one of the counselors. She was a member of our church and youth group about 15 years ago. She and her best friend who she met at camp Tam volunteered to be counselors this year. They were excellent.

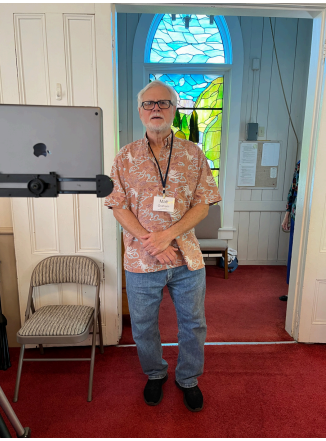
Over the week the kids had time with the chaplain Shirley who led them in singing and worship every morning. There was time to create crafts, hike, swim in a local swimming hole, and play capture the flag. At night there were campfires, songs, s'mores, star gazing (some kids saw the milky way and shooting stars for the very first time) and a talent show

Justin Glessman is attending Jr High camp and JT Glessman will be going to High School camp.

Enjoy the pictures we took this year at camp.

Submitted by: Tami Chesnut





Finance & Facilities Projects Update

We have so many projects this year! We have an old building to take care of after all, and we have plenty of deferred maintenance due to previous years with lean budgets.

I want to thank all of those who have contributed to repairs and projects. Joe Jackson along with volunteers and some contractors have finished the repairs requested by our insurer. Alan Horvath investigated two issues: the Fisk House foundation (It is wobbly and too expensive to fix; so a replacement in the future is most likely), and the county property map issue.

Due to Alan's work with contractors, the county has updated our property lines and created a single map (instead of two conflicting ones). This will allow any future projects to move more quickly. Alan has secured multiple bids for another project: repaving the parking lot. Finance and Facilities will discuss the bids in August and present our findings to the Council.

What is upcoming?

We are looking for painting bids for our front pillars and door as well as windows on the sanctuary, but so far all painters Joe contacted are not available right now. This is a priority for the team to fix.

Other projects and repairs are on-going. We will have more updates as those are in progress or completed.

Matt Graham

Chair, Finance and Facilities Team



*The WIC Program
(Women, Infants,
Children), in partnership
with the California
Department of public
health will be
distributing resources
here at UCC Murphys on
**Thursday, August 14
from 9am until 4pm.**
They are here to provide
assistance on the 2nd
Tuesday of every other
month.*



GUEST COLUMNIST: TONY ROBINSON

Note: Our Guest Columnist this month is theologian and author Anthony (Tony) Robinson. Tony is a longtime UCC “guru” and former pastor who has served congregational churches in Seattle, Honolulu, and other places. In addition to his many helpful books on theology and church life, Tony publishes a blog, “What Tony’s Thinking.” Here is his blog post from July 22, 2025. Dept. of Full Disclosure: Tony is my clergy coach, and a valued friend. While I don’t agree with everything he says in his blog, I think in this case he is spot on. My own position on this issue is in agreement with Karl Barth and Tony. Read his blog and see what you think. Enjoy!

~ Pastor Gary

What's Tony Thinking **Churches Free to Endorse Political Candidates? A Bad Idea** **July 22, 2025**

Recently the IRS decided that it was okay, after all, for churches and their leaders to endorse particular candidates for political office. This goes against the so-called “Johnson Amendment,” which ruled out ecclesiastical endorsement of political candidates lest they risk their tax-exempt status. Trump has inveighed against the Johnson Amendment. You could also wonder if the shrunken IRS simply doesn’t have the manpower to check on violations.

In a brief but excellent article at the Atlantic Elizabeth Bruenig points out the risks of such a departure. She terms it a “Faustian bargain.” “Churches can now openly involve themselves in elections, but in doing so, they risk becoming de facto political organizations.”

I would say that a lot of churches have already made the move to become “de facto political organizations.” Increasingly churches tend to hew to the same polarization as the country, being red or blue, progressive or conservative, which is a great loss — one more place/ space that people of different views might rub shoulders gone. Yes, there are some that manage purple, or simply avoid, political issues altogether.

As a preacher I don’t think it is entirely

possible, or even desirable, to avoid political issues. Christian faith addresses all of life. That said, a preacher, and a church, can address the issues without being partisans for one party or candidate. That would be my own preferred stance.

Churches cannot — should not — ignore the moral and theological issues at stake in politics. But their teaching should be directed toward what light their faith and tradition shed on issues, not on telling people what to think or who to vote for. In the Catholic tradition, this is referred to as “the formation of conscience.” Drawing on the resources of faith and community, i.e. listening to one another, to examine the issues so that people reach their own decision on a candidate or policy.

When churches go all Democratic or all Republican the real loss is not their tax-exempt status, which is for the moment off the table thanks to the IRS ruling, but their integrity. As Karl Barth argued in the 1934 Barmen Declaration directed against the Nazi’s (largely successful) efforts to co-opt the churches, the Christian Church has one Lord, one Leader, Jesus Christ. “Listen to him,” thundered Barth.

Bruenig points out further complications

(Robinson cont.)

and risks in the move to allow endorsement of candidates: “Providing political endorsements makes churches susceptible to powerful campaign tactics: PACs, for example, will have incentives to fund churches that reflect their agendas, meaning that pastors’ livelihoods could come to depend on contorting their religious beliefs to suit political interests. Politically active congregants will also have good reason to lobby their pastors for certain endorsements, another source of pressure for church leaders to say that supporting a particular candidate is the will of God.

“And the practice of offering endorsements prioritizes accepting specific instructions from church leaders over cultivating Christian values and methods of reasoning that allow the faithful to determine which candidates to support for themselves. (Indeed, the Christian religion itself seeks to cultivate those very things for that very reason, rather than providing an itemized list of every behavior to perform and every behavior to avoid.)”

In recent times it has been the Trump supporting parts of Evangelical Christianity that have become the most politicized. But there was a time, in the 60’s, when at least some liberal Christians became political partisans, with an eventual cost in terms of membership and participation. People didn’t want their church to simply be a place to rehearse the hot issues and latest headlines, and be told what to think. My guess is that this will prove true, in fact already is, for Evangelicals who anoint Trump as their Savior and the Republican Party as God’s chosen vehicle. Thoughtful people of faith come to church to know God not to be told how to vote.



Small Groups Schedule:

First Fridays

Friday, August 1
2pm

Alan Horvath

South Grove Bunch

Monday, August 11
5:30pm

Faye Morrison

The Seekers

Tuesday, August 19
5pm

Faye Morrison

Faith & Friends

Thursday, August 21
10am

Pam Kimes

The Wanderers

Friday, August 15
10:30am

Marilyn Baisel

Angels Angels

Weds., August 27
11am

Barb Olivier

General Synod 35 of The United Church of Christ

One of the distinctive features of our denomination is that although we are comprised of thousands of churches across the nation, we are one church. *Although the “national setting” of our denomination does not necessarily speak **for** all of us here in Murphys, all of the time, it does nevertheless speak **to** us.* Nothing reminds us of this more than when the “General Synod” convenes for worship, discernment, and action on matters of deep spiritual and moral importance. As a member congregation of the UCC, it is important for us to keep abreast of the latest news from our “national setting.” Here is a brief summary:

- The United Church of Christ convened in Kansas City, Missouri for General Synod 35, from July 11–15. There were over 600 delegates among the approximately 2000 registrants gathered together to be “the church in this moment.”
- In her State of the Church address, Rev. Dr. Karen, Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President, invited us to reflect honestly on who we are and who we are becoming as the United Church of Christ. She offered both lament and hope—acknowledging the weight of shrinking numbers and financial challenges, while calling us to courageous imagination, faithful innovation, and bold engagement with our communities. She reminded us that we are not simply managing decline but discerning how to be church anew in such a time as this.
- A Keynote to Stir the Soul: We were blessed by a stirring keynote from Rev. Jennifer Butler, founder of Faith in Public Life, who preached with prophetic clarity and deep love. Her message? Don’t lose heart. We are built for this moment. You are encouraged to read more about Rev. Butler and her message, [here](#):
- Resolutions & Wider Church Engagement: Synod celebrated 25 years of Our Whole Lives (OWL), our denomination’s life-affirming sexuality education program, and overwhelmingly affirmed its continued ministry in interfaith collaboration. Delegates also adopted a resolution recognizing the importance of continually evolving language around mental health, encouraging churches to break stigma and foster inclusion.

- Two historic resolutions established full communion with both the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany and the Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico — partnerships rooted in shared theology, mutual respect, and global solidarity. Another significant vote formally recognized the needs and gifts of small town and rural churches, granting them official standing within the wider church's life and leadership.
- Synod 35 also took bold stands on global and domestic human rights. Delegates called for an end to the genocide in Palestine, affirmed human rights in the Philippines, and decried persecution of Christians in India. Two additional resolutions urged the federal government to restore full funding and autonomy to USAID and the Voice of America, recognizing their importance in global development and truthful media.
- Perhaps one of the most visible acts of public witness was the Church's protest against federal attacks on immigrants, migrants, and refugees — a deeply faithful expression of our call to “welcome the stranger.” That resolution, too, passed with clarity and conviction.
- Closer to home, a resolution to consolidate all four UCC Conferences in Pennsylvania into one unified Keystone Conference passed, reflecting the evolving nature of church structure in response to shifting needs. However, not all proposals moved forward — notably, a major change to the UCC's bylaws did not pass, leaving space for continued dialogue and discernment.

“General Synod is where the Holy Spirit moves among us — not always with easy agreement, but always with faithful engagement. The Church is alive, dynamic, and committed to doing God's work in this world. May we continue to live into these resolutions with courage and compassion in our local ministries”~ Rev. Sam Houser

General Synod 35 marks the end of our biennium cycle with the next General Synod 36 taking place in Cleveland, OH July 21-28, 2028. Before that, we will be celebrating the UCC at 70 in 2027!

For more specific information on the Synod, please refer to our Moderator Message on page 4.



The Poet's Corner

In this corner of *The Nugget* we feature the poetry of Andrea Gibson, a queer spoken word poet who died this week at the age of 49. At their death, for one shining moment, their poetry took over the internet, seemingly everywhere on Facebook and other social media, demonstrating the enduring power of a life fueled by love and hope rather than death or fear.

Gibson grew up in an intensely religious, socially conservative world – their parents are observant Baptists--another reason why we must look past labels to listen to the beating heart of what is being born new in this world. Sometimes it is good to turn off the news and lose yourself in poetry, which offers a truer world, one more real and hopeful.

Take a moment to read some of Andrea's last poems, and follow this link for more about [Andrea Gibson](#) -- be sure to watch the video embedded in this article in the New York Times celebrating their work.

Here is a sampler of Andrea Gibson's poetry, circulated by millions at their death:

In the chemo room, I wear mittens made of ice so I don't lose my fingernails. But I took a risk today to write this down.

After being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, I saw our world as if it were a new planet. Confronting my mortality was the seed that grew into a newfound gratitude for life. Even when I lost my eyelashes to chemotherapy I wrote, 'That's four hundred wishes I wouldn't have made otherwise.' But because I did not want to lose my fingernails too, I'd religiously ice my hands for hours during treatment—unless a poem begged me to type it. 'Is that line worth losing a nail over?' my partner would ask. Almost always, I'd smile and say, 'Yes.'

Whenever I spend the day crying,
my friends tell me I look high. Good grief,
they finally understand me.

Even when the arena is empty, I thank god
for the shots I miss. If you ever catch me
only thanking god for the shots I make,
remind me I'm not thanking god. Remind me
all my prayers were answered
the moment I started praying
for what I already have.

Jenny says when people ask if she's out of the
woods,
she tells them she'll never be out of the woods,
says there is something lovely about the woods.
I know how to build a survival shelter
from fallen tree branches, packed mud,
and pulled moss. I could survive forever
on death alone. Wasn't it death that taught me
to stop measuring my lifespan by length,
but by width? Do you know how many beautiful
things
can be seen in a single second? How you can blow
up
a second like a balloon and fit infinity inside of it?
I'm infinite, I know, but I still have a measly
wrinkle
collection compared to my end goal. I would love
to be a before picture, I think, as I look in the
mirror
and mistake my head for the moon. My dark
thoughts are almost always 238,856 miles away
from me believing them. I love this life,
I whisper into my doctor's stethoscope
so she can hear my heart. My heart, an heirloom
I didn't inherit until I thought I could die.

Why did I go so long believing I owed the world
my disappointment? Why did I want to take
the world by storm when I could have taken it
by sunshine, by rosewater, by the cactus flowers
on the side of the road where I broke down?

I'm not about to waste more time
spinning stories about how much time

I'm owed, but there is a man
who is usually here, who isn't today.
I don't know if he's still alive. I just know
his wife was made of so much hope
she looked like a firework above his chair.
Will the afterlife be harder if I remember
the people I love, or forget them?
Either way, please let me remember.



August Birthdays



Tami Chesnut 2
Patti Hennessee 7
Teddie Jackson 7
Liz Graham 7
Diane Hosmer 11
Hank Fletcher 12
Teri Olivas 13
Jerry Patterson 19
David Kelly 28

Don't see your birthday listed? We promise it isn't on purpose. Please contact the church office to have your special day added to our list.

Prayers answered



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:

Prayer List

The Family of Bob and
Connie Bowser
The Family of Clint Graves
Pat Keene
Jodie and Dianne Gibson
Terry Dowell
Chino Henderson
Lauren Clark Tusa
Tracey Ellifritz
Carl Smith
Rev. Mickey Williamson
Baby Rowan
Lynne Klein
Matt Olivier
Robin Chesnut

Angela Patterson
Dan Kuhn
Sandy Fox-Hill
Laura Miller
Adrienne Zimmerman
Sandra Sather
Tari Takara
Ben Richardson
Liz Tussey
Bruce (Miriam Thorsen)
Dodi Horvath
Brian Whitehead
Rev. John Randlett
Rev. Marty Williams

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 12pm Women's AA 2pm First Fridays	2
3 10am worship Holy Communion	4 6:30pm Al-Anon	5 10:30am Past. Search mtg., EEC	6 4:30pm Worship mtg. ZOOM 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	7 WIC in Social Hall 9am - 4pm	8 12pm Women's AA	9
10 10am Worship 11am OSJ mtg., EEC	11 5:30pm South Grove Bunch 6:30pm Al-Anon	12 1pm F&F mtg. ZOOM	13 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	14	15 10am The Wanderers 12pm Women's AA	16
17 10am Worship 11am Council mtg., EEC	18 6:30pm Al-Anon	19 10:30am Past. Search mtg., EEC 12pm M&C mtg. EEC 5:30pm The Seekers	20 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	21 10am Faith & Friends	22 12pm Women's AA	23
24 White Pines Outdoor Worship & Picnic Potluck 	25 6:30pm Al-Anon	26	27 11am Angels Angels 12:30pm AA 6:30pm AA	28	29 12pm Women's AA	30
31 10am Worship						

God's love echoes through us to all creation.

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AUGUST 2025

DATED MATERIAL - DO NOT DELAY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

First Congregational Church of Murphys

THE NUGGET



www.ucc.org

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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 25th of each month.

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