



The Oasis

December 2023

Cross in the Desert UMC

Where God's Love Transforms Lives, building a just and joyful community.



Advent and Christmas at Cross in the Desert

December 3	First Sunday of Advent Service	10:00 am	Sanctuary
December 10	Second Sunday of Advent Service	10:00 am	Sanctuary
December 10	UWF Christmas Tea	3:00 pm	Fellowship Hall
December 15	Santa's Workshop	5:30 pm	Parsons Village
December 16	Food, Fellowship & Fun	5:00 pm	Fellowship Hall
December 17	Third Sunday of Advent Service	10:00 am	Sanctuary
December 17	Blue Christmas Service	5:00 pm	Sanctuary
December 24	Fourth Sunday of Advent Service	10:00 am	Sanctuary
December 24	Christmas Eve Candlelight Service	6:00 pm	Sanctuary



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Pastor's Corner



Beginning A Season; Ending The Year

As we celebrate the Christmas season and bid farewell to another year, we come together to reflect on the profound significance of this special time. It is a moment of joy, a season of love, and an opportunity to embrace the true spirit of Christmas. There is no time more fitting to express our warmest wishes and share the blessings that have graced our lives throughout the year.

Embracing the Blessings of Christmas

We invite you to join us in this journey of celebration filled with faith, hope, and love. Christmas is not merely a day on the calendar but a season that awakens our hearts to the birth of Jesus. As we gather in His name, may we find solace in the peace and quiet reflection this season brings.

Moments of Peace and Quiet Reflection

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, let us remember to take moments to pause, seek stillness, and reflect upon the true essence of Christmas. May the Light of Christ illuminate our minds and hearts in these moments, leading us to a renewed understanding of His unconditional love and infinite mercy.

Looking Back on a Year of Grace

As we prepare to welcome the New Year, it is important to acknowledge the many blessings and challenges that have shaped our lives. Together, we have faced uncertainties with resilience, kept our faith alight through difficult times, and celebrated moments of triumph and joy. Let us cherish these memories and give thanks for the grace that has guided us every step of the way.

Wishing You a Blessed Season

I extend my heartfelt wishes for a blessed Christmas season and a joyous New Year to each of you. May the timeless story of the nativity inspire you, bringing peace and love into your homes. May the melodies we sing echo the joy in your hearts, and may the spirit of Christmas fill your lives with renewed hope, unyielding faith, and endless warmth.

Christmas Eve Service: Join us on *December 24th at 6:00 PM* for a beautiful service, where we will come together to sing carols and remember the reason for the season.

In Closing

As we end another year, let us remember to embrace the spirit of Christmas—love, kindness, and compassion. May our celebrations remind us of the remarkable gift we have received from Jesus Christ and his teachings that continue to inspire us.

May the peace that surpasses all understanding be with you and your loved ones this Christmas and throughout the coming year.



December Birthdays



Helen Holloman	December 3
Eugene O'Bryan	December 4
Tim Foster	December 8
Joy Moore	December 8
Tucker Pleake	December 9
Lynne MacVean	December 11
Sophia Quinton	December 11
Dick Bulkeley	December 12
Thomas Hartwell	December 18
Sam Miller	December 19
Kay Caris	December 23
Tyler Pallante-Bulkeley	December 24
Bob Hood	December 27
Sandy Hansen	December 28
Malcolm MacVean	December 29
Elizabeth O'Bryan	December 30
Jonathan Foster	December 31

John Easter & Merrily Abels	December 5
Larry & Billie Albright	December 18
Charlie & Jeannine Diller	December 19
Augustine & Madhu Gavini	December 22
Bob & Jewell Hood	December 22
Paul & Suzy Zarkovich	December 24
Dick & Martha Bulkeley	December 28

We apologize if we have missed your special day. It means that the office does not have your information. Please notify the office if we need to update your information.

Blue Christmas Service December 17th 5:00 pm



Join us for a special Blue Christmas Service, where we invite the community to gather and find solace during the holiday season. This unique Christmas service aims to provide a quiet space amidst the hustle and bustle, allowing individuals to reflect, remember, and find comfort during what can be a challenging time of year.

This service acknowledges that Christmas can evoke a range of emotions for many people. Whether you're experiencing grief, loss, or simply needing a more serene atmosphere amid the festivities, this event welcomes you with open arms.

The Blue Christmas Service features peaceful music, dimmed lights, and a message of empathy and understanding. It provides an opportunity to honor whatever you may be going through, offering a safe place for heartfelt prayers, meditation, and healing.

Food, Fellowship & Fun

December 16th, 5:00 PM

Mark your calendars for an all church potluck. (Child care will not be provided.)

Join us for FOOD, FELLOWSHIP AND FUN.

- A ham will be provided.
- Bring a side dish, dessert or salad to share if you would like. Or a main dish if you don't like ham.
- Paper plates, plastic silverware and paper napkins will be provided. You are welcome to bring your own dinner service if you prefer "real dishes"



Mary Tassi will be playing some Christmas Carols. Plan to sing along, or sit back and enjoy the sounds of Christmas.

There may be a surprise or two that you won't want to miss!

There is no RSVP necessary, but you can tell Rhonda M. or Cathy M. if you will be joining us so we can be sure to have enough tables and chairs set up in Fellowship Hall.

Luminaria Event

On November 4th we honored our departed loved ones with a beautiful and meaningful luminaria display in the courtyard. We extend our thanks to Linda Lulkovich and Eugene O'Bryan for coordinating the event! The proceeds from sponsoring a memorial luminaria were applied toward the payment of apportionments. This year's theme was butterflies. The theme was also reflected on the altar the following day for All Saint's Sunday.





CITD Financial Corner

I am very grateful and pleased to announce the status of our Stewardship Campaign, "A Future With Hope". Our goal was 50 pledges with \$150,000 pledged. To this point we have received 49 Pledges with \$155,154 pledged. This is a 40% increase in the number of pledges in our last Stewardship drive and an increase of 16.7% in the amount pledged. We usually get some lagging pledges so I'm confident that we will meet or exceed our goal on both pledges and dollars pledged. These results for fiscal year 2024 are the highest numbers we've seen since the pledges for the fiscal year 2021.

I am also grateful and pleased to announce that our Luminarias had a significant increase in the number of donors (37) and in the number of names memorialized (172). Several people did give above the minimal \$10 per name to help with Apportionment. We received \$2,440 in donations. We were able to add to that so that we have now paid 2 months' Apportionment for the year. If we continue to see some improved giving, especially with the Christmas season approaching, I'm hopeful that we'll be able to do more.

After having disappointing giving results for August and September, October really came through for us. October was the second-best month of the year for giving. November at least looks to be on track with budget. The expected result for the year is looking so much better than it did at the start of the year.

I want to thank every one of you for making these positive things happen.

In His service,

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CITD Finance Committee
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Prayer Corner

Dear Holy God and Christ our Savior, It seems the entire world is in chaos. Another war broke out as Hamas attacked Israel. O God, we pray for his violence to end. We pray for the people of the Ukraine. We know when your home is blown up people suffer greatly. What will people do for food and their medications? Something different has to happen to stop this evil. We are all children of God and deserve basic lives met with our needs.

Dear God we also pray for those here at home. We pray that people will be grateful for what we do have and care for those who don't have their needs met. If we believe in you, then help us live that way—all of us. We pray for those among us who are grieving; those who are lonely and those who have given their lives to protect our country. God bless and heal those who are sick. Bless the children and help us provide better schools and homes so that they can grow up to be good citizens and good Christians. Teach us to pray every day against the violence, and for people to share with others equally and freely. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Prayer written by Rev. Sharon MacVean

PRAYER NOTES

Rev. Sharon MacVean

Jesus held a vision of Christians to come and of our love and unity. (first called followers of the Way) Christ anticipated our future belief in him. Jesus prayed that we may be one "so that the world may believe we are One." This is so that the world may believe You have sent me. We are more dependent upon one another than we may realize. We could easily adopt the African affirmation: 'I am because we are.' It is said that the Lakota elders of North America open their gatherings with a greeting that means "we are all relatives".

It is a statement that reinforces mutuality and equality. Jesus said and acted out that all are equal and children of God..

Let us pray and live our lives on these faith principles. We are to believe and live differently than those around us who do not believe and who follow the world's ideas of some more deserving than others and who do not live by these faith beliefs.

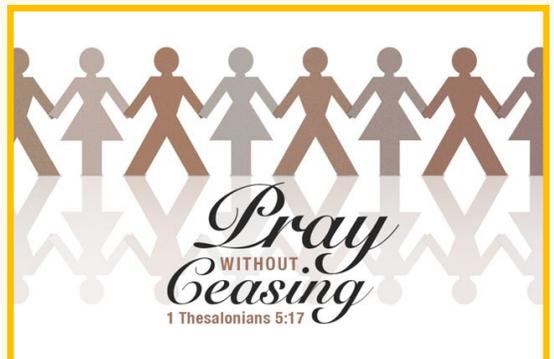
(Taken from Jesus and Prayer by A. S Fosua)

East District Prayer Focus for December

Grace UMC, Mesa
Rev. Sharon Pajak

Journey UMF, Maricopa
Pastor Gary Williams

**North Scottsdale UMC,
Scottsdale**
Rev. Christopher Wurpts
Rev. Leah Bergstrom





United
Women
in Faith

December Meetings of UWF



December 7	Leadership Team	3:00 pm	Fellowship Hall
December 10	Christmas Tea & Officer Installation	3:00 pm	Fellowship Hall
December 14	Outreach Circle Meeting	11:00 am	out for lunch
December 14	Mary Martha Circle	4:00 pm	Longhorn Steak House, 4585 E. Cactus Rd.
December 21	Bookworms United	10:00 am	Zoom

Book: *The Twelve Topsy-Turvy, Very Messy Days of Christmas*
by James Patterson

Unit Meeting 11-11-2023

Call to Prayer and Self Denial

United Women in Faith gathered to learn about our long history of working toward racial justice. Most recently, UWF is striving to eradicate the school to prison pipeline, which unfairly singles out people of color for more harsh consequences starting as early as preschool. Let us never forget that we are all children of God.



UWF Officers are pictured here with items donated for fighting Period Poverty in our schools.

You're Invited...

UWF Christmas Tea and Installation of Officers

**Sunday December 10
at 3:00 pm in Fellowship Hall**



**Bring a Christmas song and
a \$5.00 bill**

INTRODUCING THE “#CITD LOVE DUCK”



At the 2023 Church Conference, District Superintendent Melissa Rynders presented CITD with our own “Love Duck”. She asked that we use the duck to spread love and blessings, and to remember our sister church Journey UMF.

In that spirit, beginning in December watch for our purple Love Duck hiding around the CITD campus. If you are lucky enough to find the Love Duck you are encouraged to complete several small tasks:

1. Say a quick prayer for CITD and Journey UMF;
2. Take a moment to write a special blessing CITD has brought to you on the paper provided with the Love Duck;
3. Take a picture of you with the Love Duck and pass it on to Pastor Gina or Phillip Botts, along with information on what you chose to identify as the blessing CITD has given you, for posting on social media. (If you don't want your picture or other identifying information on social media, send information on your blessing and ask that you remain anonymous);
4. If you're comfortable, post your picture and blessing on your personal social media account(s) using #CITDLoveDuck and #WEAreLove
5. Hide the Love Duck in a new place for someone else to find!

Let's join with our fellow East District United Methodist Churches to spread love, blessings, and ducks!

INTRODUCING YOUR NEW LEADERSHIP BOARD

By: Karen Bulkeley

In October, at Church Conference you voted to move from a traditional administrative structure to the simplified, accountable structure model for conducting the business of the church. This vote happened after many months of study, discernment, and prayer. In moving to this new model it is hoped that the business of the church will become more streamlined and more members will be freed up to do the truly important business of the church: to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

First, I would like to thank the brave individuals who have agreed to join me on this exciting journey. This model is often referred to as the One Board Model. For the time being, CITD will be referring to our board as the Leadership Board. The 2024 Leadership Board members are: Karen Bulkeley, Eugene O'Bryan, Wanda Picciotti, Jonathan Foster, Mary Nell Woodward, Romi Simons, Ada Thompson, Sophia Quinton, and Rhonda Mortensen.

As a refresher, the Leadership Board will be combining the work of the Church Council, Board of Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations, and Finance. All other existing committees will continue to operate as usual including: Missions, Prayer, and Foundation. It is our hope that this modification will allow for more opportunities for the friends and family of CITD to find a place to serve the church and the community and that these experiences may become more fulfilling as we reduce bureaucracy and focus on the prime objective of service.

At this time, the plan is to conduct Leadership Board meetings on the last Tuesday of the month at 7:00PM, just like the Church Council has been meeting for many years. The Leadership Board meetings will be open meetings. You can find announcements of the meeting date and time on the church calendar. You are welcome and encouraged to attend these meetings. The only time a meeting may briefly close to non-committee members is to discuss confidential personnel issues.

If you ever have any questions about the Leadership Board, please don't hesitate to reach out to any of the board members.



Santa's Workshop

For many years, CITD has sponsored a Santa's Workshop for the children residing at UMOM's Parson's Village. Parson's Village is a permanent, low-income apartment complex located in Sunnyslope.

This year's Santa's Workshop is scheduled for **December 15th from 6:30-8:00PM.**

What is Santa's Workshop? It is an evening of fun that provides an opportunity for approximately 40 children residing at Parson's Village to "shop" for Christmas presents for their parents or other important adults in their life. In the past some children have told us that they have never been able to give a gift to their parent before. In addition to shopping, the children participate in a craft project and story time.

How can you help? Volunteers and Donations are needed. Everyone is encouraged to participate.

- Bring 1 or more UNWRAPPED ADULT gifts valued between \$20-\$25 to the church on Sunday December 10th and place them under the tree. (NOTE: This is not Pink Sunday, the schedule has been moved up a week this year due to the way the calendar falls).
- Sign up at the Missions Table to donate other items such as gift tags, bows, or snacks.
- Volunteer to attend Santa's Workshop and help the children shop; wrap their gifts; create crafts; etc.

Don't miss this big event that brings Christmas cheer to children and adults alike! Please see Karen Bulkeley after service to sign up to help or email ksbulkeley@gmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Dinner & Dialogue

The first meeting of Dinner & Dialogue will be held Thursday January 25th at 6:00 pm in Fellowship Hall.

This event invites people from various backgrounds to come together and listen to each other in real time over a meal. By pulling topics from current events and areas of individual concern, participants will be invited to share their experiences with the issues in the news. We want to build bridges and reduce loneliness. Building bridges reduces loneliness with the potential for increasing productivity and personal well-being.

Additionally, we want to ensure that Cross in the Desert continues to be known as a safe place for those who want to find a spiritual community to call home.

More details will be coming soon.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

It has been about 11 months since many of you joined together to dream and plan for the future of CITD through the creation of an ambitious and comprehensive strategic plan. As we look toward 2024, I'd like to update you on the tremendous progress we have made towards our goals.

Strategic Goal #1: Establish and implement a strategy for financial stabilization so that our current obligations and programs are driving our finances instead of our finances driving our obligations and programs and to set ourselves up for the future and needs of Cross in the Desert.

Many steps have been taken during 2023 to identify opportunities and increase stability of our finances. These include:

- Moving to a ¾ time pastor and reducing the total number of paid staff to align our human resources costs with our income;
- Signing a Letter of Intent with Global Minds Preschool that will result in a steady, monthly rental income beginning in early 2024;
- The Foundation is tithing 10% of grants awarded to the church to apportionments; and
- Completing a successful stewardship campaign.

Strategic Goal #2: Create a structure of accountability, effectiveness, and simplicity in order to facilitate joyful service to Christ, each other and our community.

After months of prayer, study and discernment, the Church Conference voted to move to a simplified structure model (aka One Board Model) in October. This change will become effective on January 1, 2024. (For more information on the new leadership board, see the article elsewhere in this month's Oasis.)

Strategic Goal #3: Identify and assess suitable actions to meet congregation needs, both individually and corporately.

- A group of volunteers have begun to reach out to individuals who have not been seen in church for awhile or who are homebound and unable to attend church;
- A volunteer is contacting visitors within a week of their attendance at CITD; and
- A grief workshop was facilitated by Pastor Gina prior to the annual Luminarias event.

Strategic Goal #4: CITD will become visible in the community by identifying and assessing suitable actions to embrace community opportunities.

- New signs and solar lights were installed on Sweetwater with updated information on worship times and programming;
- The "NICE GUYS" have returned and spend many hours on repairs and improvements on the CITD campus;
- Social media accounts have been re-activated or created and positive, uplifting information about CITD is posted numerous times per week;
- The UWF held a work day to clean the sanctuary pews and other areas of the sanctuary; and
- The Missions Committee has chosen Arizona Helping Hands as a church-wide mission focus. They are an organization located in our neighborhood that provides supports to foster parents and foster children throughout the state.

While it is exciting to see all the work that has been done in 2023, the work is not done. Please join us on January 13 to celebrate our successes and develop the next steps for CITD in the form of our 2024 strategic plan. Stay tuned for more details coming soon.

Desert Southwest Conference News

“Give Peace A Chance”

Christ's true disciples must work for peace: build it and not just keep it; live it and not just aspire for it. If Christ is our peace, then peace must be imperative. (Resolution 6129: The United Methodist Church and Peace)

The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops, along with millions of people across the globe, are weeping and praying for the people of the Holy Land. We decry the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas and the continuing loss of life of Israelis and Palestinians including thousands of children.

We cannot remain silent while a preventable humanitarian crisis in Gaza unfolds with no safe haven for the citizens in Gaza or the volunteers and agencies seeking to prevent starvation and to treat the wounded. We value all life. We encourage every effort toward a peaceful solution.

We call for the release of hostages and for the killing to stop. We also call for the immediate allowance of unrestricted humanitarian assistance. As Bishops of the Church, we denounce acts of and the proliferation of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and hate crimes that may begin with words and often turn to violence directed toward persons whose race, ethnicity or religion is disparaged.

We cannot stand by as though God is not weeping when the innocent, including children, are dying. We cannot abandon the way of Peace.

May we find ways to listen to the stories of those most directly impacted by this centuries-old conflict. We commit to join all people in creating life-giving ways to journey toward peace with justice for all.

*The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church
Meeting at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina*

Conference Contacts

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Vacant

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