

God is still speaking.

CONGREGATIONAL TIMES

Newsletter of EGCCUCC



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"What I See..." by Pastor James

I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see..." (Revelation 1:10-11)

Just a Couple of Things...

Do you remember those bright orange forms for this summer's Sermon Survey? Well, I received several that had some general ideas and feedback, a few good sermon topics (which I'll try to address in early September), and a couple of questions that don't really lend themselves to a sermon. I thought this space would be the perfect place to address them!

1. Why don't we have a flag pole?

I remember one or two conversations about this as long as I've been here. I don't think anyone objects to having a flag pole out at the front of the church somewhere; it's one of those "nice-to-haves" that cost some money, take some time and attention, and just hasn't made it to the top of our "to-do" list. Those are the practical aspects. I expect that if we ever get close to installing a flag pole, we might have a more philosophical conversation about what it means to us, and what we want to present about ourselves. Would we be the same congregation if we were living in Canada or the Philippines or

Germany? Does the national flag matter, or is there some other way to communicate who we are? These are some nice, "chewy" questions for the day we really tackle this project!

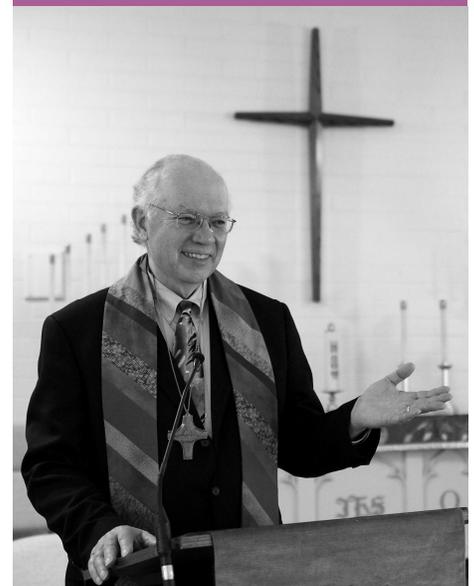
2. How old is the earth?

I love this question because it really sets up the differences between scientific examination and Biblical literalism. Neil deGrasse Tyson has presented a fascinating series on TV titled "Cosmos: a Spacetime Odyssey" that looks at the creation and age - not only of our earth, but of the whole universe. In this series, Tyson describes how scientists use techniques like carbon dating to determine the age of different things on earth; ancient redwoods, fossils, and geological features (like rocks found at the bottom of the Grand Canyon). They tell us that the earth's age is approximately 4.5 billion years. This figure "fits" with the general theories about evolution of plant and animal species, and the emergence of humankind (*homo sapiens*) about 200,000 years ago.

There is another point of view called "Young Earth Creationism" that has proponents who say the earth was created by God
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Council Happenings

- The council approved, with some modifications, a License Agreement with Caring Connections Children's Center. The negotiating committee will be meeting with the owner of the preschool to finalize the agreement.
- Bids are being accepted for plumbing hot water to the sinks in the classrooms and bathrooms in the preschool area.
- A revitalized Stewardship committee has been formed and approved by the council. Judy Bello, Steven Hurley, and Bev Withington are co-chairs, and will be the council representatives.
- Bryan Celey-Butlin received word that our roof loan has been extended for another 5 years, and the interest rate decreased from 7.25% to 5%.
- The council approved a program of E-Giving on a trial basis. People will be able to make donations to the church from their computer or mobile device.
- Pastor James will be taking his two week study leave 8/18 to 9/1. We will have guest preachers on the Sundays of those weeks.

Backpack Service Project

In August, the men's Breakfast sent out a plea to the entire congregation to help them collect supplies and backpacks as a service gift to our friends in the Marshallese congregation (SMM-UCC). An overwhelming amount of material and money poured forth, and we were able to present them with 34 filled backpacks as well as extra supplies! The men's Breakfast wishes to thank everyone who helped in this act of service and love! Here is an excerpt from a letter of thanks sent to us by Pastor Riklon:

"Please convey our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the men and women of your congregation for the gifts and donations of the backpacks and school supplies. We handed them

out to the children after our worship service on Sunday, and we save the left-overs for those children who did not come. The children and their parents are very happy and thankful. We just bow our heads with prayer of thanksgiving and appreciation.

Your brother in Christ, Pastor Julian Riklon"



"What I See..." (continued from Page 1)

somewhere between 5,700 and 10,000 years ago. This age is determined by a strict literal interpretation of the book of Genesis, and accepts that the earth was created in six 24-hour long days. Fundamentalist Christians are attracted to this idea as part of their rejection of the theory of evolution.

Ancient Jewish texts generally place the date of creation at between 5500 and 4300 BC (6300 to 7500 years ago), although very few Jewish historians agree with this calculation in light of the abundance of scientific evidence for a much older earth.

As for me...I can easily imagine some kind of harmony between creation and evolution. It seems possible that the days of creation we read about in Genesis are what I call "God days" which might be many hundreds of thousands of our years. It seems possible to me that God created the universe and through time set huge forces in motion that created the planets, the oceans and continents, and the

environment in which life could emerge. I understand science as a systematic approach to the study of God's creation and while science may never prove the existence of God, it certainly keeps showing us the wonderful and incredible handiwork of God!

Certainly, both of these questions come from our concern to figure out the questions of "Who are we?" and "Where do we fit in the grand scheme of things?" These are eternal questions, and the best answer is what it has always been: We are God's children, given the gift of life here and now. Our thanks and praise to God is the best response we can give as we acknowledge Jesus as the fulfillment of the law setting us free into life! With this knowledge, we live beyond human definitions of "here and there" as well as "then and now," and instead live in God's kingdom of forever and ever.

Blessed be,
Pastor James

Co-Moderator's Corner by Roger Tinsman



Blessed to be a Blessing
... All peoples on earth will be
blessed through you. (Gen. 12:3b)

How often do you stop and think about how much God has blessed you, your family, and our country? Did you know that if you make \$51,000 per year (the average income in the United States), you earn more money than 99% of the world's population? Or if your family earns \$23,850 per year (the U.S. poverty level for a family of four), that you are still in the top 19% of the world's richest people? More than half of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day! Truly we are blessed!

But God doesn't give us good health and resources so we can

just spoil ourselves. God gives us blessings so we can bless others. What we are given should meet our needs first, but it is also intended to be shared, so that others can see the love of Christ in action.

Even while our church struggles to pay our bills, we still find room to give. The most recent example is how we rallied to offer school supplies to our Marshallese friends! That inspires me to dream big about what the future holds, as we choose to be a blessing.

Just opening our doors and hearts to those who have been rejected or harmed by other churches is a blessing that we offer every week here at EGCCUCC, because we are an open and affirming congregation. When we shop for groceries and pick up something extra for the Food Bank giving tree, we are being a blessing. When we knit, or sing, or cook, or otherwise serve, we are being a blessing. When we make a pledge for 2015, we promise to bless others within this church as well as in the wider community.

We will continue to be blessed. God promises it. So let's continue to be a blessing. It is our calling, and the best response I can think of to God's abundant love.



Pledge Drive Bake-Off Competition

Join the fun on Sunday, September 28th, right after the Worship Service. The Stewardship Committee is inviting everyone to bring their favorite dessert to the Fellowship Hour for a sweet bake-off competition.

Everyone is invited to come and sample all of the desserts, and then vote for your favorite! A prize will be awarded for the Best

Dessert and the Most Unique Dessert. Will you be known as the best baker/sweet maker in the church? You'd better get out your recipes and pre-heat your ovens!



How God Provides

Buildings & Grounds

by Jim Addlesperger, Chair, Buildings and Grounds

At the August Council meeting, Julie from the "Caring Connection Children's Center," our new potential renter, was asked to convey the one thing that she found most attractive about our preschool rental facilities. She replied that it was that the classrooms were in great shape and ready to move in!

Everyone at the Council meeting looked at me and said that they credited me with doing a great job (along with the help of many others)! But the truth is that I give the credit to GOD, since we received some of the biggest gifts out of the blue in totally unexpected ways. Here are a few examples I've seen this last year:

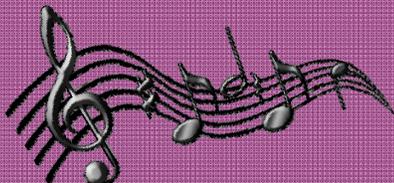
We were given free carpet because "something told me" to stop by Marsh's Carpet, and it happened to be their remodeling week! I was there just at the right time, and the carpet was donated free. Not long before that, we were given a \$1,200 floor buffing machine and valuable cleaning supplies, just because I answered an advertisement on craigslist to try to buy one. We have also received an almost-new refrigerator, and more than \$100 in credit at Home Depot from someone who does not even attend our church.

These are just a few examples of how God provides, if we only have our minds, eyes, and ears open and focused on what God wants to give us, we start to see God's gifts all around us.



Choir Starts Again

The choir will be starting up again in September, but the first date has yet to be determined. The choir rehearses most Sunday mornings from 9 to 10 a.m. More voices are always welcome. If you are interested in joining in, tell Doris Loughner, and she will let you know when the first rehearsal is scheduled. Tra la la.



Volunteer Spotlight – Lucky 13

Shortly over two months ago, an exploratory meeting convened to chart a path toward establishing a Stewardship Committee. Since that first meeting, 13 members have committed themselves to the goal, and stepped into positions of leadership. That number of individuals is equivalent to 1/3rd of all worshippers who attend every Sunday!

They are rallying to promote a culture of caring and generosity in our congregation as they foster giving back to God from all that we receive. Their commitment speaks to how important this church is to the wide range of people who attend. You'll be hearing from many of them this month as we focus on receiving your pledges. So our spotlight this month is focused on:

George Baladjay
Judy Bello – Co-Chair
Roxanne Fisk
Steven Hurley – Co-Chair
Jim Knapp
Doris Loughner
Dick Ober
Mary Kay Rose
Jamie Ross
Roger Tinsman
Mary Wenger
Bev Withington – Co-Chair

Listening Visits

Many of us come from church backgrounds where we received regular visits from church leaders. Within the next few weeks, as a part of our new Stewardship committee, George Baladjay (our former two-term Moderator) will be telephoning you to see if you are interested in a "Listening Visit" with him. The purpose is NOT to twist your arm about money! It is to hear directly from you about what you love about our church, and where you want EGCCUCC to go from here as we plan our future. You'll have the chance to express your concerns, dislikes, or areas you'd

like to see refined. And anything you share will be in confidence. It is George's hope, and that of the whole committee, that this process will bring us closer together by strengthening our ties to EGCCUCC and one another, and giving us all a deeper understanding of what our personal roles are within the larger body of our church family. We hope you'll be comfortable enough to give a visit a try, and if you'd like to be one of the first, please call George at (916) 667-9010 to schedule an appointment.

What's Happening in the Garden?



As you can see, we're moving and staining our raised garden beds so the preschool can have more open space. The plan is to set up the first bed in front of the center window outside the Fellowship Hall. The beds will have low water-use plants and flowers, vines going up a trellis, and a wicking watering system. Given the intended placement of the trellises, we may even be growing produce on the building side of the beds.

To create a wicking system, the beds are lined with a waterproof liner. We plan to line the beds as two 6-foot beds, instead of one 12-foot bed. A PVC watering pipe is put in each bed. The bottom foot is filled with gravel, covered with burlap, and filled with dirt. Plants, vines, and flowers are planted, watered to get them started, and

then the watering pipe is used to fill the gravel bed. Water wicks up to the plants through the burlap and the soil. This method encourages the roots to grow deeply, which makes them more resistant to drought. The gravel bed acts like groundwater for the plants, and will not evaporate or dry out as quickly as watering from above.

We have the trellises, the boxes, the dirt, and the gravel. We could use some donations for the stain, burlap, three frames for the trellises, and some labor to put all these things together. If you would like to help in any way, please talk with Mary Kosko, or leave a message in the office at (916) 685-4825.

See you in the garden!

2015 Pledge Drive

The Stewardship Committee has dedicated September as our 2015 Pledge Drive Month. Pledge Cards will be passed out on Sundays August 31st and September 7th. If you are not present on either Sunday, your card will be mailed to you the week of September 8th.

What's involved in making a Pledge? Filling out a pledge card is the act of making a commitment to the church for the upcoming year. You can pledge your support in three areas; Finance, Time & Talents, and Prayer.

New for 2015: We understand that some people don't feel comfortable making a set financial pledge to the church. As a result, we are starting something new. You can pledge to continue giving to the church in 2015 without designating a set amount. Knowing that you plan to give is what's most important as we consider our 2015 needs.

What is the purpose of having a Pledge Drive? There are a couple purposes. The financial pledge will help us in determining our budget for 2015. A pledge of time and talent will let us know which

committees or ministries can be strengthened in the new year. And knowing you pledge to pray will help to sustain us through tough times.

Is the Pledge binding? The pledge is a personal commitment to our church. If at any point you feel you cannot keep that commitment, you only need to tell the Financial Secretary of the change. Coincidentally, this same person (Rob Champion) is the only person who ever sees your financial pledge.

The Stewardship Committee is kindly requesting that every family or individual complete and turn in a pledge card – even if you cannot make a financial commitment. Our goal is to collect all cards by the end of September. In early October, we will follow up with members who did not turn in a pledge card.

Thank you – You are Blessed to be a Blessing.

The Stewardship Committee



Stewardship is...



...EVERYTHING we think, say, and do after we say "I believe"

Blessed

TO BE A BLESSING.

PLEDGE
this
September!

30 Attend River Cats Game

Our church sold out a 30-seat block for the game on Friday, August 1st. Everyone in our section enjoyed seats shaded in the late afternoon, as well as evening fireworks after our home team won! It was a wonderful evening to enjoy the fellowship of our church family and friends. It's been put on the schedule to repeat in summer 2015!



God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
 OF CHRIST**



Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendars for the following September events.

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| Tuesday, September 2 nd | Fundraising Dinner at <i>The Habit</i> |
| Tuesday, September 9 th | Church Council, 7 p.m. |
| Sunday, September 14 th & 28 th | Communion Sundays |
| Sunday, September 14 th | Homecoming Sunday & Potluck Fellowship Hour after worship |
| Monday, September 15 th –
Sunday, September 28 th | Pastor James' Vacation |
| Tuesday, September 16 th | Fundraising Dinner at <i>The Old Spaghetti Factory</i> |
| Saturday, September 20 th | Men's Breakfast, 8 a.m.
All Church Work Morning, 9 a.m. to noon |
| Sunday, September 28 th | Bake-Off Competition after worship (see article on page 3) |

September Birthdays

September 8th – Susi Owens and Steven Hurley, September 14th – Cliff Wenger,
 September 17th – Celia Scott, September 26th – Rob Champion

Save
 the
 Date



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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
9624 MELROSE AVENUE
ELK GROVE, CA 95624

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**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



ELK GROVE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

9624 Melrose Avenue, Elk Grove, CA 95624

www.elkgroveucc.org

Office phone: (916) 685-4825 and e-mail: egccucc@yahoo.com

Office Hours: 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., Tuesday-Friday (please call ahead, just in case)

Sunday Choir Practice: 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Wednesday Prayer Circle, Knitting Ministry: 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday Bible Study: 7:00 p.m.