



A Year in Offerings

A Lenten Reflection for 2021



WESTWOOD HILLS
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Preface

The resiliency of this congregation motivated me to collect these Calls to Offerings. There are 40 entries, each a snapshot of a week in 2020. It may seem like an odd choice for a Lenten Devotional, but I genuinely believe we need to hear from our 2020 selves again. While editing this book, the overwhelming theme seems to be the trials we face; and how we encourage each other to move through those tribulations together. I lightly edited some of the entries for space, clarity, and consistency. It is set-up for you to read one entry each day of Lent.

God has led you safely here; hold onto that thought as you glean some hope from these pages.

¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing, he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13

Be safe and be well,
Laura J. Fisk
Editor & Member of WHCC

February 17, 2021

In my youth (a long, long time ago), the Church's decision to isolate me from them was because of who I am. The very people who nurtured me in the faith now separated themselves from me. That was a painful period of my life.

Today we are all living in a period of isolation because of a virus. However, it is a different type of isolation. We cannot gather together physically, but we have this wonderful creation, "Zoom



worship." There is no touching. There is no hugging. But we get to see each other, and we get to wave palms, we get to share hymns, we get to hear the sermon, and not just read it. We get to worship and be the Church together.

We are together, and that is good!

Larry Trent

April 5, 2020

Palm Sunday

February 18, 2021

You've heard the expression "Something's Got to Give." For me, that comes in multiple ways.

First, I give some things to this Church that you probably don't want. I give you my anxieties and fears (sometimes big, sometimes little). That's because life's pressures are occasionally challenging to bear. And particularly now, aspects of this seem to be true for most of the world.

But second of all, I try, as we all do, to give in various ways to our Church. From the support we all give each other on typical Sundays to the work that our Church does that helps individuals struggling: whether it be feeding others who must sleep in their cars; to supporting the vulnerable trying to escape violence to a safe place. And we will likely now find new struggles to help.

"Something's Got to Give" is because the goodness of God pulls us. We *want* to give. And I'd like to think this is true more than ever on Easter Sunday. God always fulfills his promises, even though they don't frequently appear in the way we expect.

Jeannie Lessing
April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday

February 19, 2021

If you are like me, you are bored and spend all day and every day at home looking for anything to do. I am an introverted homebody who has frequent bouts of unemployment between freelancing jobs. So, I am quite used to entertaining myself for weeks at a time. But this period of extreme social, economic, and emotional upheaval has me looking for other sources of spiritual sustenance. I have increasingly been finding solace, beauty, and serenity in the natural world. As human civilization has receded, the animal kingdom has reasserted itself. On my walks through my neighborhood, the perpetual rush has given way to local birds' sweet melodies. The city's constant haze has parted, revealing a sky bluer than I have seen in my 14 years in Los Angeles. On Friday, afternoon I was sitting in the kitchen making myself a sandwich when suddenly there was a sharp screeching noise from the outer room. I quickly followed my barking dog into the living room, expecting to see an altercation unfolding between neighborhood pets on the street below us. Instead, I



realized that the previous unremarkable YouTube live stream I had left playing on our TV had suddenly erupted with a flurry of activity. The two adolescent bald eagles I had been watching from a camera placed in their nest in Northeast Florida were no longer sitting around passively as they had been for hours. But loudly and excitedly welcoming their father back from a successful fishing expedition. He deposited a large headless fish in the nest and then retreated to a nearby branch. At the same time, the two eaglets took turns tearing off meat. I'm not a particular bird lover, but these majestic animals entrance me. I ended up sitting down, eating my tuna sandwich in the company of the birds—just the three of us enjoying our fish. You can watch the eaglets grow up in real-time at the NEFL website. If you watch long enough, I guarantee you will see something awe-inspiring. And if you are lucky, you might catch Romeo or Juliet cautiously take

their first flight out of the nest. A leap of faith into the unforgiving world around them. As our civilization comes screeching to a halt, the natural world lives on in all its grandeur and wonder. Our Church's ministry and outreach continue throughout the Coronavirus crisis. And we urge you to continue to participate financially. Each gift, no matter how large or small, is valued and essential.

Tim Leavitt
April 19, 2020
Green Sunday

February 20, 2021

Thanks to Facebook memories as well as a photo from Chris Lamora last week, I was reminded I joined WHCC five years ago, April 19, 2015. For me, the commitment to join the Church does not come lightly. The Church that is the people make a covenant with each other. We will be there for each other. We will learn and grow together. On my very first Sunday visiting WHCC, Irene approached me. Who said to me, "I'm so happy that you are worshipping here with us today." How could you not fall in love with that?

Over the five years, you have allowed me to share my two justice passions with you—Transgender and immigration issues. Today we have been lifting up our immigrant siblings. We lift up the terrible situation they find themselves in. WHCC has been very supportive of the Ministry to Migrants. The groups that we have supported in the past continue to need our support. As I said in the sermon if you would like to support any of those groups, let me know, and I will tell you how. But all of the ministries here at WHCC continue. We encourage everyone's support and involvement, time, talent, and treasure. We are all in this together; it is a commitment. The covenant we make with each other, it takes all of us to make this happen.

Larry Trent
April 26, 2020
Migrant Sunday

February 22, 2021

So, I woke up a little bit earlier than usual this morning for some reason but didn't want to get out of bed. And so, I laid there, taking a moment to experience some gratitude. Gratitude for the way life is for me anyway. The last conversation I had last night was with George and Del, in which we were all complaining—doing a lot of complaining. Especially Del and me because we can't go and do the things that we usually do together during the week because Descanso Gardens are closed. We can't go there and enjoy the flowers that are in full bloom right now. As I lay there thinking, part of our conversation had also been how we were lucky. Lucky that as middle-class retirees, pretty much nothing has changed for us other than we can't go and do all



the things we wanted. But we are not trying to figure out how we will buy the groceries, just where we will buy them. We are not trying to figure out how we will pay the rent like many retired friends. We have no rent or mortgage payments. So, we are

grateful. I am thankful that after a week of spending 24 hours a day with my husband, I am still grateful. On Sunday mornings, I get to come here and enjoy this time with people I love and care about and who likewise love and care about me. It is with gratitude on the first Sunday of every month; I write my check to the Church.

Larry Trent
May 3, 2020

February 23, 2021

I was reading an article entitled "Parenting during the Coronavirus." The editorial explained that part of becoming a parent is becoming hypervigilant to potential threats. You become a threat detection machine. And not to minimize the stress that men experience, but research shows that women are far more likely to do emotional parenting labor. Women are planning for that worst-case scenario. You can hear the hum. "Oh, what's next?" In mom's heads. And, of course, under the current circumstances, most moms have taken on many additional duties. So how can moms and all of us take better care of ourselves during this time in particular? First, accept that the new reality will make life challenging, so lower expectations of yourself. The second, ask for help. We all try to be there for each other here. And finally, try to have a

sense of humor. And to that end, I want to share a couple of quick quotes from mom's attempting to teach lesson plans to their children while sheltering at home.



One mom asked on the first day of teaching from home, "how can I get a child moved to a different classroom?" Another mom says, "If you see my kids walking outside today, don't worry; we have a fire drill."

And finally, all fairness to kids, Alex will read an amusing quote that went viral recently from an eight-year-old. Finn wrote his candid thoughts in a journal about his new home school experience. "It is not going good. My mom is getting stressed out. My mom is getting confused. We took a break so my mom could figure this stuff out. And I am telling you, it is not going good." Finn's mom had a good laugh when she read that entry.

Jeannie & Alex Lessing
May 10, 2020
Mother's Day

February 24, 2021

Like many of us, I've experienced a range of emotions over the past two months. And increase bouts of loneliness. Online Church is difficult for me. Many times, I have said to myself, "I'm done with this." You know, it is not the same being in the pews at 1989 Westwood Blvd. Yet, this is nine out of nine Zoom services for me. This time acts as an anchor, one of the few anchors in my life. There have been so many sudden depressing disruptions in our daily lives. But I have this time with you to break bread and to share our lives. And it has been wonderful to see our family of friends who have relocated to other parts of the country and world. It is no surprise revenue has decreased, yet our community's needs have grown during the crisis. Our non-profits are often the



last line of defense for those in need. At WHCC, we have saved some money on facility costs for a previous couple of months. To help pay for our staff during this time, we were blessed to get Federal Funding. But other expenses have increased and will increase as we prepare to

return to the sanctuary. As we prepare to return our preschoolers, that will allow our parents to work and get back some of their sanity. We also have a fantastic opportunity to make an even more significant impact with our donations. You see, I would like to bring everyone back to the pews. I didn't think I would say this, but I would like to see Zoom come back to the pews with us as well. Some friends can't make the journey, some don't want to, or are too sick. The rebirth of our ministry can include our friends near and far.

Steve Schultz
May 17, 2020

February 25, 2021

Next to my bed on one of my nightstands, I have this catch-all plate. It has a phrase on it "Love – What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love becomes a part of



you." – Helen Keller. As we have been through one of the most challenging times in our lives, that can never be truer. We see time and time again, the love of our community, this Church, who are near and far. I think of the power of love; and how it brings us to this place of peace and comfort. As we just heard in the Prayers of the People, when we share our sorrows, they seem to be cut in half. I ask that we continue to go forth in our lives and give our times, talents, and treasures to places that provide a sense of peace and love. In different ways, we have been going on trust that you are giving to those places of love and calm whenever you give to our Church.

Sarah Rotella
May 24, 2020

February 26, 2021

We find ourselves mired in a pandemic global economic uncertainty and social unrest. We are having just resigned ourselves to hunkering down in our homes to avoid an invisible enemy. Last night we stayed inside to avoid visible threats to our safety. I found comfort in these words, from a sermon by Reverend Mary Scifres of Corona Del Mar UCC" "Why do we turn to God in times of trouble? When God seems incapable of making the trouble go away? We pray for safety, but harm comes anyway. We pray for peace but wake up to violence. We pray to love but find ourselves thinking hateful thoughts. The joys of life always seem to walk alongside the tragedies of life. God can't make the bad things go away as we are all too vividly reminded every time we turn on the news. God's protective love doesn't make our lives perfect. Nor does it prevent us from being hurt. But it does cover us with God's constant presence in good times and bad.

God is in the midst of all this upheaval. He weeps seeing his beloved children harmed and harming. "I will be with them in trouble," God promises. Not that trouble won't come, just that we have a God that walks with us in troubling times. The promise of the company on the journey is intoxicating. Anxieties diminish with a friend by our side. Our church family offers that same comfort. A gathering of mortals ready to laugh together, cry together, pray, and just be together. We luxuriate together here, not quite ready to close this Zoom window at the end of worship.

Robin Heckendorf
May 31, 2020
Pentecost Sunday, Part I

February 27, 2021

As most of you know, I don't have any problem doing this Call to the Offering. Just call on me at the last moment, and I am more than willing to do it. I signed up to do it today, and I have been struggling with what to say. You see, this has been a tough week, ten days that we have gone through. Indeed, we are still in the midst of it. We were already beaten up by the Coronavirus when suddenly a policeman killed one of our fellow humans. There were protests, rightfully so. There were riots, and there was some looting. When the looting was going on, I wondered what Jesus would do, and then I remembered Jesus in the temple turning over the tables and causing quite a stir there. Making a mess, and I am sure people got upset with him.



I have had moments this past week where the darkness overcame me. At times there is fear. I have wondered where to turn. Fortunately, on Tuesday, there was a prayer time. There were a couple of us who showed up to pray. We shared what we were feeling, and we even laughed some. And then this morning, I am here with you, sharing in worship, sharing in song, hearing God speak to us, and things somehow feel better. So, this morning I did my usual first Sunday of the month ritual. Here is my check that I sat at the dining room table to write. And I ask you to know that this Church cannot function without people continuing to give. We can't meet in person, but we are still meeting, we are still doing the Church's work, which requires us to continue giving.

Larry Trent
June 7, 2020
Pentecost Sunday, Part II

March 1, 2021

When I was growing up, I loved watching Roger Hammerstein's version of Cinderella. I loved it so much because it was the first time I had seen a Disney Princess that looked more like me. Brandy was an R&B star in the 90s, and she plays the title role, Cinderella. And her fairy godmother was played by Whitney Houston. This incredible scene in the movie, where Cinderella is getting ready for the Ball, is concerned with this lifestyle of spending time with wealthy people. Whitney Houston, her fairy godmother, is getting her prepared for her Ball; she sings this song, "Impossible." And one of the lines in the song is "Impossible things are happening every day." And it is a line that I replay in my head all the time, even now as an adult. And yes, I sometimes pull up the video on YouTube so that I can watch Whitney Houston



in this gold bedazzled dress, singing about how impossible things are happening every day. At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, we had many concerns as a congregation back in March. As someone who had just taken on a leadership role as the Chair of the ED Board, I had my worries about how we would keep doing our ministry. And it felt that it was going to be, in some ways, an impossibility. Especially when working with young people and the various needs that they have. The numerous wishes that we have for them as well. We benefit from hearing their laughter and hearing them whispering to each other, listening to the things they offer during the children's time. It's a loss for all of us. There was a huge question of what it would look like to do our ministry online. How would we suddenly transition to this brand-new way of doing worship? Apostle Paul spent so much of his time away from the congregations whom he served. He spent time writing letters acknowledging how he missed them. Paul could not be with them, but they could continue to be the Church. He thanks them for taking care of him even in his absence and how they continue to serve God.

In some ways, we have to continue upon that 2000 year history of the Christian Church. Even though it is odd to have this social distance, it is like that ministry of the early Church. They couldn't always be together in person, but they could still worship God together.

Jaimie Crumley
June 14, 2020
Strawberry Sunday

March 2, 2021



Can you imagine what the world would look like without color? Would everything and everybody look gray? No, everything would be white, for color would be absent. Can you imagine our church service would be without music? We come to worship

together with our prayers of hope for today, for our children, for our future. Our church services each week are so greatly enhanced by the gift of music. Velly's exceptional talent so blesses us at the piano and the magnificent voices of our choir members. But also to see their beautiful faces as they help to enrich our lives. How fortunate are we to have this music coming into our homes each Sunday morning while we remain sheltered safely? Thanks to Yasu for his ability to edit these songs of faith during this challenging time. By the way, did you know that the choir also been working with our Sunday Cool children? Typically, during the summer months, our choir is on hiatus. We would like our musicians to continue to inspire us through the summer. This year, of course, is a time of great financial hardship for all of us. Please give what you can to keep this valuable music program during the summer.

Elaine Avak
June 21, 2020
Father's Day

March 3, 2021

Some businesses are opening as we arrive at the end of June. Many recall when general good sense and some authorities had the presence of mind to close businesses, Schools, churches, and other facilities to slow down the spread of Covid-19. However, some facilities are open because the need is essential. The need to help is always current, and Westwood Hills United Church of Christ is still here helping charities and other organizations throughout our community. Many of us feel fortunate for being kept safe and doing much better than others.



Our Church offers us spiritual sustenance and comfort. It provides guidance, hope, and the certainty that things will be better. However, we live in a material world where we must keep the electricity on, and we must pay the utilities. Your participation not only helps to keep the lights on but supports many programs in our community.

Clerio Demoraes
June 28, 2020

March 4, 2021

This past week I found myself pondering on the subject of giving. What IS giving? Why do we give? What does giving do to our psyche? It didn't take long for me to see that we give several ways during our everyday life.

In this particular environment, we give clothes and food to those who need it; we provide contributions to the Church. Still, there is a much deeper meaning of giving ourselves, our time, friendship, and talents.



Giving this way is much more than letting go of what we have too much or what we don't need. Here I found people giving more than money or things. Here I found people giving dedication to causes, commitment to this Church, and the ways of Christ.

When I first came to this Church, I believed that I would give, but now I see that more important than anything I could give is what I have received in terms of genuine friendship, comfort, and God's Divine Light.

I want to thank this Church for all that it has given to me.

Clerio Demoraes
July 5, 2020

March 5, 2021

I am relatively new to this Church and community. I was born in the Netherlands and raised in one of the branches of the Dutch Reformed Church. Churches reflect the local culture. Americans are a sharing people, and what made the strongest impression on me the first time I attended were the Prayers of the People. People were sharing concerns, asking for help, and thanking for small or large blessings. I thought that this was wonderful. But I also thought that this would not work in the Netherlands, with the Dutch being a rather reserved crowd. There would be a painful silence.

This Independence Day weekend, I remember what the Netherlands and the US have in common.

Some historians claim that the Dutch Declaration of Independence from Spain in 1581 inspired Jefferson. Both countries considered themselves model nations, the Dutch republic in the 17th century and the United States.

However, people discuss how both histories have their dark sides. The Dutch do not have a good reputation in the English language. There is Dutch courage and double Dutch, and there is a Dutch treat. The latter confirms the reputation of being tight-fisted. That is not a good thing. So, I appeal to the American spirit of sharing and, in particular, sharing with your Church. The Church needs your help.

Please share if you can.

Geert Ridder
July 12, 2020

March 6, 2021

Good morning; I was going to something different from the Call to the Offering, but here I am doing the Call to Offering. I'm Sabra if you don't know me, but I know all of you. I have been a member of WHCC since 1996. Yes, it is true, my daughter Kelsey brought me to this Church, but that is another story for another time. I've been working in the church office since 2003. I always say, "I do everything but teach and preach." I am about to do both those things right now. I found this on the UCC website about giving:

"Every moment in the life of the Church is a teaching moment. The offering is an important moment to teach about God giving to us and giving back to God a portion of the abundance that we have received. It is a perfect moment to teach about God's goodness

respond to each
to the best of our
that reminds us
hope to repair
the good news,



and our longing to
other in our way. And
ability. It is a moment
that our gifts stand for
the world, to preach
and to be the body of
Christ together. Some of you know I am in the office almost every day. I miss you, the building being open, and the laughter of the children. But I mostly miss our church family. I know you are out there. The building is waiting for you. I'm taking outstanding care of it. Everything takes money, and we will get there. We'll get back together soon, I pray. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life of what we give." And it was Mother Teresa who said, "It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in; giving."

Sabra Gibson
July 19, 2020

March 8, 2021



One of the things I like to do in my free time is to teach myself how to play songs on the piano. It's a great source of inspiration. When going through the steps to learn and then finally getting the piece, there's this heartwarming feeling of accomplishment.

Now more than ever, we all need that sense of inspiration and reassurance that we're doing the right thing to help make this a better world.

The stories about love and the Bible are more relevant now than ever, as to our music ministry's beautiful voices, the prayers we share, leadership and fellowship, youth programs, philanthropic endeavors, and our mission statement. Our Church offers so many gifts.

And thank you to all who have helped support our music ministry program. We are grateful.

Greg Avak
July 26, 2020

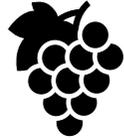
March 9, 2021

We live in suspended time, where our lives seem to be on hold. Over the years, I would teach in Brazil in July or August. My wife is from there, this way we can spend some time with her mother and brothers. The US and Brazil are engaged in a set competition to see which country has the worst outbreak for the Coronavirus and which country has the worst leadership during this crisis. Brazilians are used to firsts. The country has gone through major political and economic upheavals. Brazilians are the master at what the Portuguese call the "o atalh." An untranslatable word that means "short cut" or "workaround." In a typical crisis, that works well. But the "o atalh" is not effective against the pandemic. How much lasting damage the situation will do is unclear. We hope that in a year from now, we will be back to "normal." I'll be back teaching in Brazil in July and August. In the meantime, we become more of a community that you are part of for support. The Church is this such community. It provides spiritual, emotional, and material support. The Church needs your help to be able to do its work.

Geert Riddler
August 2, 2020

March 10, 2021

As we attended Church via Zoom last week, words of the scriptures and from the sermon itself made us reflect upon the idea of giving unconditionally. The words "Drink this water and never be thirsty again" and the idea of the "True Bread" that feeds our souls. God helps us understand the good we receive in our hearts and to carry on during this pandemic lock-down. The sermon last Sunday, this Sunday, and all Sundays allow us to see how fortunate we are to be in the position of giving a little when so many are desperate to receive.



Giving is the center of our faith. "For it is in giving that we receive." Our Church gives the spiritual force we receive every weekend and physical help to organizations in the community.

Giving will keep the lights on, the facilities' maintenance, and all other places where we need to keep going, from our dedicated musicians to the gardeners of our beautiful Church.

Jeannie & Clerio Demoraes
August 9, 2020

March 11, 2021



I don't know about you, but I am pining for our funky little Church on the corner of Westwood and LaGrange. So, I ask you this morning to go with me on a bit of visualization exercise. Let everybody close their eyes. Imagine once again we are inside the sanctuary as we have done so many Sundays before. We come in a little late, and at 10 o'clock, there looks like only a few of us; by 10:06 AM, the place was rocking. Kirsten welcomes us, we respond, and then she says to greet one another. Most of us have a favorite spot where we sit in the sanctuary. So, then the question is, do you start with the ones that are closest to you and shake hands or reach out for a powerful hug? Or do you make a B-line for someone you haven't seen in a while?

Perhaps, you've caught sight of Sigrid after her time away in Germany. Or the Favini's, or the Griffins have come from far away and are back in the Church. Imagine you are shaking a hand that feels different from yours. It small, like a child's hand. Or it is older and has been through more. Imagine you reach out to hug somebody that you haven't seen in a few weeks. Do you remember how those hugs felt? God, I am missing those hugs. The choir starts singing, and that is our signal to wrap it up and hold off until fellowship. You make a mental note you've got to connect with a couple more people after worship. Then you go back to your seat and settle in so we can worship, sing, and hear the word of God together.

We are grateful to Zoom for everything that it has allowed us to do together in this time. It will never take the place of being back in the sanctuary together. So, this is what we do for now to mark time. But if you enjoyed that little remembrance of what it felt like to be in the sanctuary, I invite you to go to the WHCC YouTube channel. There is a video there that everyone needs to watch—"I Am Infinite Work." One of our talented musicians has set our beautiful stain glass

windows to music. It made me cry when I saw it. And I invite you to take a look.

Robin Heckendorf

August 16, 2020

March 12, 2021

I especially look forward to each Saturday night when we get together with our family on Zoom.

Last weekend we were all excited talking about my daughter Jacqueline's plans for teaching her third-grade class in San Francisco.



Last night, the excitement talked about my son Greg's plans to work with children with special education and academic and emotional needs. It was both stimulating and inspiring.

What has inspired me most this past week was listening each of four evenings to people around our nation in need of security and compassion, seeking the right person to secure this for them and us.

Each of us has unique needs. We require shelter, food, love, peace, compassion, and recognition of us as worthwhile human beings.

We find this and so much more each time we meet here with our church family. Thank you for fulfilling these needs and giving us so much more.

Please share as generously as you are able so that we may continue to have our needs met.

Elaine Avak
August 23, 2020

March 13, 2021

We live in a society where more is usually better. Right now, we see lots of people who want more power, more fame, more recognition, more money just for the sake of having more, and that is not only people; many organizations follow the same path. Then we have other people who prefer following a different line of thinking. For example, in terms of money, they think that having more is good because it allows them to help others. They give freely. When they give, they offer as a form of receiving.

We teach our children to thank you, and we send a thank you card when someone gives us a present because this is the polite thing to do. It is a social convention of politeness and good manners.

However, right here and right now, I am talking about giving for the pleasure of seeing something good done for others, offering to help people we don't even know. Freely, without recognition or a thank you. The way the Son of God did.

Some of us give our time freely feeding the ones in need or saving the lives of those prosecuted; others give their talent to teach God's Word to our children in Sunday Cool. Plenty of us provides their contribution to see the wheels turning because we all know the needs of keeping an old building, keeping the lights on, and even more recently, acquiring a security system with cameras and sensors that will keep our Church safe.

As for me, and I am only talking about myself right now, giving to this Church is a pleasure. After all, I get from this congregation in terms of life lessons, Divine Light, and friendship, for me, having the opportunity to give back is almost a duty.

Now we come back to needing more. We may need more followers to help us spread not only the Gospel but solidarity,

friendship, the word of peace, respect, and care for one another. And yes, we always need more funds to keep our work going.... and this is when you come in.

Clerio Demoraes, August 30, 2020

March 15, 2021

Last week I was indeed emotionally affected by the double doors' beautiful images into and within our church facility.

These are the doors that welcome us to take part in worshipping God, in worshipping our faith.



The doors invite us into the narthex; people greet us as we enter the facility. They asked us into Ray Hall with its beautiful beamed ceiling. They offered us the opportunity to come into the Fireside room with its warm-colored tiles. They even opened to the kitchen where the coffee is prepared, placed on the cart with goodies to nibble on in the patio, weather permitting, following church services.

Most importantly, the doors opened to the grace of the sanctuary where we felt one with God, where we heard the voices of our choir members, watched the children interact, and where the meaningful messages from the pulpit continue to inspire us.

Thank you, Julie Hinton, for the photos.

Thank you to every one of you who continues to meet with us each Sunday and keep our spirits high.

To keep us going, please give as generously as you are able.

Elaine Avak
September 6, 2020

March 16, 2021



Hearing Anjola today reminds us how important our children are. We have watched her grow into a healthy, confident person. We watched Kelsey grow from a six-year-old to a 29-year-old altogether. And all of you have shared your children with our family. We are grateful. They represent the future of our Church and our world. Thank you, Anjola. As you have called us to do, as we strive for a just world for all. Our preschool opened this week. It is so wonderful to hear the laughter and some crying. And to see the little faces as they enter even though they are behind a mask. It is surreal, but it is happening. Please stay for fellowship today to see some pictures of our first week together. Over the last six months, even though we have not been together in person, life at the Church goes on. The building is alive. Many projects have been completed, such as upgrading our HVAC system, landscaping, painting, general maintenance, and keeping the facility safe and clean. I have a lot of projects in the hopper, and I can hardly wait to get started. Preparing for the opening of school with all the CDC and licensing guidelines has not gone without cost. I like to thank all of you for your continued support. It seems like everyone I see here is giving something. And something counts. Anne Frank wrote, "no one has ever become poor by giving."



Sabra Gibson
September 13, 2020

March 17, 2021

"Making your way in the world today
Takes everything you've got
Taking a break from all our worries
Sure would help a lot
Wouldn't you like to get away?"

Those are the opening lyrics to the famous TV sitcom *Cheers*. Recently, I watched the pilot episode again. It unfolds like a play. Sam is alone at the bar; soon, joining him is Carla, Coach, Norm, and Cliff. The story reveals Diane's fiancé isn't coming back, but Sam offers her a place at the bar as the newest waitress before she could leave. Everyone at the Cheers bar lost something or someone. A career, love, direction, or control. Even when they got annoyed with one another, they still wanted to be around each other. The characters weren't perfect, and neither was the show, but they gathered together because they meant something to someone. As we watched from our television each week, we too felt a little closer, "And they're always glad you came."

We gather each week around our computer screens to share each other's stories and animals. Our troubles might not be all the same; however, we hold spaces for those troubles. Our Church is still making its way in the world. Our music, worship, Sunday Cool, building maintenance, Rev. Kirsten, Yasu, Sabra, and staff all need funding. Your financial tithe is vital to our ministries. Please give what you can; we understand the world is asking much of you these days. The call to the offering is more than what we pledge financially. It's a call to what we have that's worth holding onto – each other. Each week, our sisters and brothers pop into our Zoom screens. Because "Sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name."

Laura J. Fisk
September 20, 2020

March 18, 2021

Good morning. My name is Diane Bedrosian, and I am talking with you from beautiful Cape Cod. Wherever you are, during this period of relative isolation caused by the Coronavirus, time alone allows the mind to wander.

I love to read and am addicted to crossword puzzles. As a result, I am fascinated with words. My wandering mind causes me to think about opposite terms but often are used together—for example, winter-summer, land-sea, woman-man, and meat-potato. However, the two words I have thought about the most are giver-receiver. The everyday use of these words is as opposites. One gives, and another receives. In the context of our Church, however, the phrase giver-receiver are not opposites. That is, we both donate and receive back from the Church. Our collective donations create the funds for all to receive the benefits of our wonderful Church. Hence, what we contribute, we receive back multiples in return. Our Church is dependent upon our gifts for its operations.

Thank you,
Diane Bedrosian
September 26, 2020

March 19, 2021

This year is a hard time for many people. You might say a dark time. We all need some light and uplifting these days.

“Light Shining Through the Darkness” by William Cowper

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines,
Of never-failing Skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his Sovereign Will.

Ye fearful Saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with Mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his Grace,
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour,
The Bud may have a bitter taste,
But wait, to Smell the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain,
God is his own Interpreter
And he will make it plain.

Connie Graham, October 4, 2020

March 20, 2021

The year was 1933. It was a Friday evening. My mother was in the kitchen of our Los Angeles home preparing dinner while my older sister was setting the table. We were waiting for my oldest sister to return from UCLA, and my dad still had not come home from work. I was sitting on the kitchen floor talking about all the great things I had learned in Kindergarten that day.

The year again was 1933. The day was Friday, March 10th. It was 5:54 in the evening. Suddenly, there was a startling sound, a rumbling sound. Our frame house was shaking violently. My mother called out to my sister, grabbed me, and the three of us ran out to the backyard.



We were experiencing the 1933 Long Beach earthquake with a force of 6.3, which included many more horrific aftershocks.

There had been no warnings. Not every home had a telephone. As we stood in the backyard, I cried as I saw my elementary school, Sheridan St., destroyed, burning from the quake.

Much later, when my father and oldest sister finally safely returned home, we huddled together to thank God for the blessings of our safe being. After listening to the radio, we learned of the many lost lives.

There was no return to Kindergarten that school year. There were no cell phones; there were no classes on Zoom.

One hundred fifteen people died due to that earthquake. Fortunately, structural safety laws were enacted for all Los Angeles schools and later for high-rise buildings.

Each day we are met with new challenges, new obstacles. Let us meet them head-on with love with acceptance, and appreciation for one another no matter how we look, what language we speak or where we live. Life is so precious, and we are all so fragile.

Elaine Avak
October 11, 2020

March 22, 2021

God tells us in the Bible not to be afraid. And that requires that we let go of thinking that we are on our own. To that end, I want to focus a bit on the Justice and Service Board of our Church. I'm grateful not only for the great work they do but also for the opportunities they have given all of us to get involved. As most of you know, Tim and the board have been working with the Reclaim Our Vote organization. Our congregation members personally wrote postcards to disenfranchise voters in the South to ease their voting experience. On a personal level, I have to say that writing those postcards was at least as helpful for me as it may have been for the receiver. It removed some feelings of helplessness, and it was comforting to know many people were working together united on this action. That's just one example of the board doing the intricate footwork and making it easy for the rest of us to get on board. Other examples are Ellen and her safe-parking initiative, and of course, everything that Larry personally brings to the table on immigration and LGBT concerns. And those are activities that are just off the top of my head.

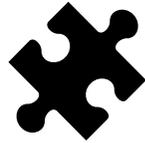


Our gifts to the Church are a way that we show our trust in God, even in a world that keeps telling us to be afraid.

Jeannie Lessing
October 18, 2020

March 23, 2021

We have this constant flux of new challenges; however, significant challenges are nothing new to our community and our Church.



For the Call to Offering today, I took the insert from the Pledge Letter written by Greg Avak, the Stewardship Board head, which we all received this week.

The theme for our stewardship this year's "The Things They Handed Down." The Great Depression happened soon after the completion of our Church, and pledges dried up; however, our members came through to pay the bills and keep our Church going.

As the past difficult years brought out the best in our members, it will not be any different this time. We will overcome these crises, and this pandemic will make us even more animated to face new challenges in the future.

As Greg put in his excellent letter, let's help ensure that our worship place continues to be here for future generations. This inheritance builds into the way we live our faith, and passing it down to those who come after us will be our legacy."

Clerio Demoraes
October 25, 2020

March 24, 2021

This Stewardship season, we are talking about "the things we hand down" or "things inherited." There is a Native American proverb, "We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." To inherit is to receive or own, while to borrow is to "take, use, and then return."



During my teen years, I worked at a camp in Groton, Massachusetts, called Grotonwood. In the last few days of the camp, the staff would clean cabins, the beachfront, docks, the gym, the chapel, and the kitchen. I don't remember my cleaning assignment, but I remembered working side by side with my friends as we prepared Grotonwood for winter camp. We scrubbed, vacuumed, washed, boxed up, and painted. After the summer banquet, my friends and I drove to a campsite for some respite. Snug in our tent under the stars, we fell fast asleep. The next morning, Dave made us eggs, and then we all turned to each other and said, "let's go back to sleep." At that moment, Dave, Jamie, Catherine, and I knew we had left camp better than we had found it.



God chooses us to be the caretakers of all creation. God also calls us to leave the earth better than we found it.

Laura J. Fisk
November 1, 2020
Stewardship Culmination Sunday

March 25, 2021



So, a Sports' analogy comes to mind: "Your beloved team is in the NCAA basketball tournament, the championship round. They and you have been preparing for months, even years, for this moment. The game is finally here. It is a close one. And you are on pins and needles the entire game, which happens to be continually playing for days on end. Your team finally makes that glorious winning shot, and there is pure unadulterated joy. There is dancing in the street, but oh no, you find yourself in some kind of bizarre overtime. The refs have reset the clocks, and they are researching obscure sections of the rule book. And the game continues.

The experience of the last few weeks has been emotionally exhausting. So, when I started to think of what to say for the Call to Offering, it was necessary to look outside myself. I am not feeling defeated, but simply because I have run out of fuel for the moment. So, I would like to share a few short quotes regarding the state of uncertainty or anxiousness.

The first source is anonymous, and I think of our nation as a whole when I read it. "Storms don't last forever; this too shall pass, and just as life changes again and again, so will you. Let yourself fall into the ebb and flow of the journey. Fall into the goodness of yourself." "Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Philippians 4:8. This last short quote made me laugh. Anne Lamont says, "Almost everything works again if you unplug it for a few minutes, even you." Finally, I am grateful that we are all going through this together.

Jeannie Lessing
November 8, 2020

March 26, 2021

In these nervous times, I find myself remembering an earlier period when life seemed to be less complicated, at least from an 8-year-old boy's perspective. I inherited from my father the importance of tithing. In our Church, there were two types of lay officials: the elders and the deacons. The elders were just a younger group. They were in charge of the church finances and the social welfare net that the Church provided. Elders and deacons sat on reserved benches close to the pulpit.



perspective. I the importance there were the elders and were just a younger

My father was a perennial deacon. On Sundays that he served as a deacon, he sometimes let me sit with him upfront. That also meant that I entered the Church in the procession that started the Sunday service. The service's high point was the offering because my father would ask me to be his assistant during the collection. It involved keeping track of collection pouches passed along in an intricate pattern because of the sanctuary's layout. After the service, I would go with him to a back room where I, numerically inclined, helped him count the money.

I learned from my stints as assistant-deacon that the Church and the church community can only thrive if we support it. That support could take different forms. At this time, we ask you for financial backing. Please contribute if you can.

Geert Ridder
November 15, 2020

March 27, 2021

We have been attending Church remotely during this time, and I am so thankful for those in the Church who have devoted their time and energy to keeping our young people engaged and involved. From Reverend Kirsten and Erin McConahey, hosted a physically-distanced movie night on the church patio. A holiday tradition that the kids were so happy to participate in, even in a slightly modified form. To Jaimie Crumley, who is developing a remotely-filmed pageant for us to enjoy.



Of particular note, we enjoyed a lesson taught by Laura Fisk during a breakout session for the Pathfinders after the church sermon a couple of months ago. She led a class during the Stewardship season and discussed our call to be good stewards of the earth. She asked the children to research companies who use animals as mascots to promote their brand and ask those companies, notably if the endangered ones, to support the protection and conservation of those animals. She sent follow-up emails to the parents after the lesson detailing what they talked about and asking them to do this activity with our child. Theo and I did our research, and I immediately thought about Mutual Life Insurance, which uses an image of a colossal breaching humpback whale in their advertising. A visit to their website informed us that they already do support humpback whale conservation by donations to The Nature Conservancy, which we were thrilled to find out. We wrote the company a feedback email to indicate our pleasure at seeing them being good stewards of the earth and particularly of the animals they are using to promote their brand. We also decided to donate to The Nature Conservancy to support further this cause and the many others. Laura's lesson inspired me, and I truly appreciate her effort and dedication to



planning a great teaching activity for the children and their parents. And we are so thankful to the Church for their never-ending commitment to our children.

Christa Bancroft
December 6, 2020

March 29, 2021

Good Friends:

To say that we live in challenging times is an understatement. This pandemic is causing an extraordinary amount of suffering, both physically and economically. This event is a once in a lifetime experience. Except, I have lived through WWII, another once in a lifetime experience. Perhaps this means I have lived two lives!

Nevertheless, there are many similarities. The loss of loved ones. The transformation and sacrifices of our day to day lives and future uncertainties. The constant, however, is the role of the Church – our Church. It provides a community of people with shared values that supports each other and others who are struggling outside of our Church. If ever there was a need for such an organization, it is now. To continue our ministry in this time, we encourage everyone's support in time, talent, and treasure. We are in this together, and it takes all of us to make Church happen. Every gift is valued and appreciated.

Thank you,
Diane Bedrosian
December 13, 2020

March 30, 2021

I've been thinking about calls.

Imagine Mary and Elizabeth sitting together with Jesus and John in their wombs – marveling over their miracles. Suddenly, Mary bursts into song, like a Broadway musical. Singing how the generations will call her "blessed." "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." Luke 1: 46-56. Herod is on a rampage killing little boys under the age of two. Angels have visited both women. Elizabeth's husband suddenly went mute, and Mary's fiancé doubts his future marriage's legitimacy. Life and death hang in the balance. It is an all-out pandemonium.



One could argue that when we sing, we are singing in the past, present, and future all at once. Barbara Brown Taylor says that "she (Mary) was singing about it ahead of time – not in the future tense but the past as if the promise had already come true." Mary and

Elizabeth's calls were to give birth, and then a short time later, they sacrifice their sons. Their calls have no ending or beginning. Whether we "filled the hungry with good things" or "lifted up the lowly," we will have answered the eternal call.

Laura J. Fisk
December 20, 2020

March 31, 2021

I think that we are all ready for 2020 to be in the rear-view mirror. When people have been afraid, or isolated, or sad, this has been a consistent church community to support us throughout this time.



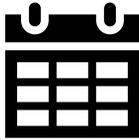
As we look to the future, we are keenly aware of all of the changes that need to happen to better our society. I remember a Ted Talk I once watched that featured a Harvard professor named Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who talked about the six critical steps of positive change. I will share them with you today:

Show Up
Speak Up
Look Up
Team Up
Never Give Up
Lift Others Up

I give to support this community because I saw you do these things for and with each other all year long and because I want us to be ready to do that for others in 2021 and beyond.

Erin McConahey
December 27, 2020

April 1, 2021



It's the first Sunday of the new year. In a few weeks, I will start my 6th and final year on the Board of Deacons. I thought I would remind you of how this started.

At my first Leadership Sunday, I told Amanda Clayton that I was willing to do anything except the Call to the Offering. First thing you know, it was one Sunday's deacons with no one to give the call. I read a poem off my phone. I finished up by saying, the ushers will now receive the morning offering.

A Sunday later, there I was standing in front of you reading a Call to the Offering that I wrote myself. The next thing I know, I seemed to be doing the Call every Sunday. I was willing to do it any time, but advance notice was appreciated, but hey, I'll think of something last minute. Well, that happened on Sunday. It was time for the call to the offering, and I suddenly realized no one signed up to do it. I don't know what I said that morning, but I remember that several of you spoke to me afterward with words of grace.

This morning, my point is that you, Westwood Hills, have encouraged me to grow by pushing me into places that are not always comfortable. The first Sunday of the month, I sit at my dining room table to write the check for my pledge. It is a sacred moment for me. A moment to give thanks for this Church we call Westwood Hills Congregational United Church of Christ. For the people who are this Church. And to give thanks for the blessings of life.

Larry Trent
January 3, 2021

April 2, 2021

Emily's family has a tradition every New Years' Eve where the family gathers together. Everyone gives an update on their year and the year ahead. This year, of course, was a gigantic Zoom session. Emily's brother, David, who many of you know, shared some insight that captured how I feel about the stress we have endured for the last ten months. We each have anxiety unique to our situation. Even when we think about how others may be experiencing the total opposite of what we are experiencing, it is equally stressful in their shoes. Parents, especially single parents, feel little to no rest after taking care of their kids at home—people who are solo could face loneliness. People in specific jobs are overworked and face burn out. Then others are out of work who live in fear of losing their homes. And a billion different situations in



between. Taking the time to recognize what others are going through is a good exercise in humility and just being a good human.

For me, one of the most significant stressors is the possibility of bringing home illness to Emily and the girls. I will never forget early in the pandemic, Emily had me strip down outside our front door before coming into the house. We have a better system in place now. Thankfully, we both have access to vaccination due to our work with patients. Another source of sadness and frustration is not introducing our new daughter, Eliana, to our family and you, our church family. Thankfully, we use Zoom and Facetime to stay connected. And this, of course, to tune in every Sunday to see yawl, yawl at Zoom church. These virtual gatherings give me hope.

Oren Rodriguez
January 24, 2020

April 3, 2021

"We thought every good record collection should include this." These are the words my brother and sister-law wrote on my birthday card yesterday. Inside was Carole King's *Tapestry*. I quickly put the record on the turnstile. "So Far Away," played. The words felt eerily real for today, even 50 years



after the recording. In April of 2020, King adapted some of the lyrics for Songs of Comfort. She sang, "So far away. Everybody has to stay in one place anymore. It would be so fine to see your face at my door. Doesn't help to know your

just time away. Long ago I, reached for you, and there you stood. Holding you again could only do me good. How I wish I could, but you're so far away. So far away." Carole King sings from a place of truth and heartache.

Although we are so far away, each week, we continue to show up here like someone who has been on the road for so long. Our ministry now is to continue to hold each other in multiple ways; in prayer, in lending an ear, or just holding space for someone until we can be together again. The Church can be experienced outside the building, even so far away.

Laura J. Fisk
January 31, 2021