

SENTINEL

NEWSLETTER



We usher in the New Year with the celebration of Epiphany. The celebration of the Christmas season culminates on January 6 with the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as the Messiah. The Bible story associated with this holiday is the visit of the Magi who travel to Bethlehem to welcome and honor the Christ child, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:1-12). We will reflect upon this story and its meaning for us in worship on January 4.

We are reminded that God’s reign is different than worldly ones. The composer of “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” Gian Carlo Menotti, expresses this new vision well with these lyrics sung by one of the three kings, Melchior:

*The Child we seek
doesn't need our gold.
On love, on love alone
he will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter,
his haloed head will wear no crown;
his might will not be built
on your toil.
Swifter than lightning
he will soon walk among us.
He will bring us new life
and receive our death,
and the keys to his city
belong to the poor.*

Let us dedicate ourselves as disciples of Christ in this new year, the gift that God truly desires.

Rev. Greg Batson
Senior Minister

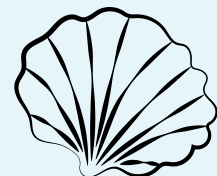
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BAPTISMAL RENEWAL

Each year as a new year begins, we enjoy the renewing of our baptismal vows as a time to recommit our lives in the example of Christ Jesus and receive a fresh out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. We invite you to prayerfully prepare for worship on January 11 together, in-person and online. If you are participating online, prepare a small cup or bowl of water which will become for us a source of new life. This is the water that refreshes life, nurtures growth, and offers new birth.

Sunday, January 11, during 10 a.m. worship



JANUARY at a glance

Thur Jan 1	New Year's Day - church campus closed
Fri Jan 2	Walk the Labyrinth/Chapel Open
Jan 2 - 4	Youth Ministry Retreat
Sun Jan 4	Epiphany Sunday/Holy Communion
Sun Jan 11	Baptismal Renewal Missions Council Meeting Free Blood Pressure screenings
Wed Jan 14	January Mid-Week Recital
Fri Jan 16	Martin Luther King, Jr., Breakfast, at Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Sat Jan 17	Spirit Sisters All-Day Retreat People Concern volunteer day Prayer Quilt Workparty
Sun Jan 18	Second Sunday of Epiphany Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday
Fri Jan 23	Kids Night Out
Sat Jan 24	United Women in Faith Game Day
Sun Jan 25	Third Sunday of Epiphany
Wed Jan 28	Westside Food Bank Volunteer Day
Sat Jan 31	Spiritual Formation Retreat with Rev. Keri

WALK THE LABYRINTH & CHAPEL OPEN FOR PRAYERS

Take a moment in the beginning of the new year for an hour to walk the labyrinth or visit the chapel. Walking the Labyrinth is an ancient spiritual practice, a way to quiet our minds and open our spirits to the presence of the Holy. View the 2026 Labyrinth schedule on the website:

<https://santamonicaumc.org/labyrinth/>

Friday, January 2, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. Simkins Hall, Chapel

SPIRIT SISTERS RETREAT

The Spirit Sisters, led by Paster Dorothy Bimber Worley, are holding an annual All-Day January Retreat as they prepare for Lent together. Theme: "I AM the Light of the World" Women are encouraged to come at 8:30 a.m. for registration and breakfast. \$15 donation for breakfast and lunch. All women are welcome! RSVP: Pastor Dorothy (626)826-8301 (call or text)

Saturday, January 17, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Fireside Room & Chapel

LISTENING DEEPLY: A SPIRITUAL FORMATION RETREAT

All are welcome to deeply listen for God through the practice of Lectio Divina, facilitated by Rev. Keri Olsen Paget. Lectio Divina or "divine reading" invites us to read/listen to Scripture with an open heart and expectation that God has a message to convey especially suited to our life circumstances. We ask, "What are you saying to me today, Lord?" and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to pray, reflect and respond to God. As we listen, pray, reflect and respond we will have opportunities to create. You will decide your creative modality-whether that be through sketching, collaging, poetry, music, journaling, etc. Anyone who is interested in focusing their attention on God for the day is invited, and no previous creative experience is expected. Please contact Rev. Keri at k.olsenpaget@santamonicaumc.org with questions or for more information. This retreat is free, but registration is required. A simple lunch will be provided. Register on the church website by Friday, January 23: <https://santamonicaumc.org/listening-deeply>

Saturday, January 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. First UMC campus

JANUARY ONLINE MID-WEEK RECITAL

First UMC is pleased to present the 2026 Online Mid-Week Recitals, beginning with **Noah Sonderling, piano**. Noah is a piano fellow with New World Symphony and studies with Anton Nel. Awards include second place in the 2022 Sidney Wright Accompanying Competition, and first place in the 2018 Indiana University Concerto Competition. He has also appeared with the National Repertory Orchestra. To read full bio and view past recitals, visit the website:

www.santamonicaumc.org/mid-week-recital-series

How to watch the Livestream:

- Facebook: [@santamonicaumc](https://www.facebook.com/santamonicaumc)
- YouTube Channel: [@SantaMonicaUMC](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSantaMonicaUMC)
- Website: www.santamonicaumc.org/livestream
- The First UMC App: (App Store, search FirstUMC_SM)

You may also view past recitals on these channels.

Wednesday, January 14, at 12:10 p.m., online

KIDS NIGHT OUT

Kids Night Out will be back in January! While parents enjoy a well-deserved night out, children are provided a safe and fun evening of games, activities and crafts, pizza dinner, and a movie with our trained childcare team. \$40/child + \$20 for each additional sibling, 2 years – 5th grade. Registration is January 13. Sign up for Family emails on the website:

www.santamonicaumc.org/kids-night-out

Friday, January 23, 4 – 8 p.m. in the Education Building



UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH GAME DAY

The UWF are excited for their annual Game Day! ALL are welcome for an intergenerational afternoon of Scrabble, Bridge, Mahjong, Rummikub tiles, fun and fellowship, with proceeds supporting the missions of UWF. \$10 suggested donation, includes pie!

Saturday, January 24, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. in Simkins Hall

HONORING 150 YEARS: A LOOK BACK AT THE HISTORY AND ARCHIVES COMMITTEE'S WORK

by Tricia Guerrero, Pastoral Associate

The journey to celebrate the 150th anniversary of First UMC Santa Monica began in earnest in November 2024, when the History and Archives Committee held its first planning meeting. What started as an exciting yet daunting idea soon evolved into a year-long mission as we entered 2025.

Our initial efforts centered on uncovering and organizing a vast collection of photographs spanning the decades. This led us to host a "History and Archives Community Day" in the spring, an invaluable event where the community shared stories and helped us gather missing details, names, and information about key events. It was a time of shared laughter and the preservation of wonderful, sacred stories from our church family. Inspired by this success, we revived our Oral History Project. We are profoundly grateful that over 30 individuals enthusiastically participated, recording their personal narratives for preservation. With the expertise of Adam Guerrero, these recordings were integrated into both the Archives display and our anniversary video.

The culmination of our year came to life with the History and Archives Exhibit, proudly displayed in the Fireside Room from Sunday, September 7, through Sunday, November 16. The exhibit featured an inspiring array of pictures, memorabilia, church models, written and oral stories, music, books, and more, inviting all to browse, learn, remember, and celebrate our shared heritage. This work is set to continue into 2026 and beyond, including creating a History and Archive page on our church website that will include oral histories, pictures, and special pieces from the exhibit.

We extend our deepest gratitude to those who made this exhibit possible:

- **Janet Guyette** for her generous and grueling work in the Archives Room, which was essential in helping us organize our materials.
- **Ron Theile** for his meticulous cleaning and repair of our church models, ensuring they were ready for display.

Committee Members: Our sincere thanks to the committee members who dedicated their time and effort this past year to create a beautiful and meaningful exhibit for our community:

Char Smith, Adam Guerrero, Sue Payne, Claudia Flanders, Karen Ing, Ben Ing, and Leslie Nordby

We also offer our gratitude to the church staff, especially Tina Gage, whose support and skills were instrumental in bringing our vision to life as we honored this historic 150th Anniversary.



FROM PEANUTS TO PATIENTS: CONTINUING OUR COMMITMENT IN SOBIER

by Todd Erlandson, Haiti Team Leader

For the past five years, our church's initiative Pennies for Peanuts has helped smallholder families in the village of Sobier, Haiti plant peanut fields—bringing food security, income, and dignity. Our most recent \$3,000 investment supported 20 families and yielded nearly \$6,000 in return. With guidance from a local agronomist, each harvest has grown stronger, and the project has truly taken root.

Now, as that agricultural program enters a new phase of local ownership, we're excited to turn our focus toward another vital need in the community: health care.

Starting this fall, First UMC Santa Monica is teaming up with the Haiti Partnership—a group of U.S.-based churches and volunteers—and with local leaders in Sobier and Yvon, including Evangelist Wesnet Dieujuste and the Haitian-led group OPB2M, to help support quarterly mobile medical clinics. These clinics—led by a nurse, doctor, and dentist—take place in the community health center our church helped build years ago, and now provide care to hundreds of patients each quarter.

Thanks to your continued generosity, our Mission Council has committed \$2,500 per quarter for the next six quarters, with every dollar going directly to staffing, supplies, and patient care. Funds are transferred securely through the Haitian Methodist Church's financial office, with regular updates from our trusted partners on the ground.

In a time when communities like Sobier and Yvon are facing enormous challenges—from political instability to road blockages and storms—these clinics offer a steady, healing presence. It's a simple but powerful way we can continue walking alongside our friends there, offering encouragement, care, and connection.

The photos included here give a glimpse of that care in action—familiar faces, thoughtful work, and the clinic we helped build being used exactly as we'd hoped. Thank you for making this mission possible. We're excited to keep sharing stories with you in the months ahead.

With gratitude,
Todd Erlandson



SCROOGE THE MUSICAL

by Dorothy Nichols, Director

It was just meant to be a continued celebration of our 150th Anniversary, a new start after an eight year hiatus from using the stage, but God had other plans.

Only one child was available from our church and we needed at least eight. There was no on-stage rehearsal space or ANY rehearsal space at the church available until just five weeks before the performance. This forced us to reach out to the larger community to fill our needs and it was then that we discovered what we thought were obstacles turned out to be blessings.

The Community United Methodist Church of the Pacific Palisades, which had burned down in the fires, volunteered their children, and other actors, many of whom had also lost their homes. From there, Joey Hargrove came on board as the children's director.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Santa Monica, as a gift to us for our 150th anniversary, gave us their social hall as our rehearsal space. Unfortunately, well into rehearsals, a burst pipe required them to move their preschool into it. However, by then, a three-church collaboration had already been formed in our hearts. Upward Bound House then generously lent us their community room and we were able to rehearse from there.

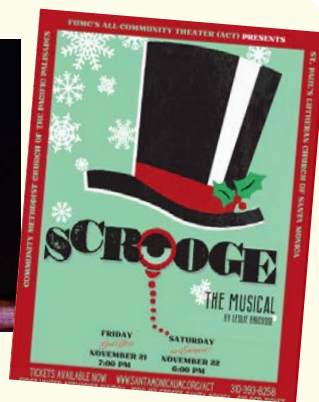
Members of the cast and Carol Greenwood donated money to cover all the costume rental costs. Old and new friends like our music director Marjorie Poe came forward to fill crew and casting gaps. Adam Guerrero put in long hours to rehabilitate our stage. Emily Payne did as well on our sets. Jon and Lara Ganz, whose theater space was burned down in the fire, lent us their microphone set, their expert advice and their very talented son. In the final weeks, when two shining faced little girls from Azerbaijan joined us, we finalized a cast and crew that ranged in ages from seven to over 90 years-old.

The show sold out, in fact it OVERSOLD. The cast and crew generously chose to donate \$1,600 of the proceeds to the Pacific Palisades church to help in their rehabilitation from the fire, as well as over \$500 dollars to St. Paul's for its 100th anniversary and over \$500 for our own 150th celebration.

In the end, actors and crew who were Jews, Muslims and from different Christian denominations came together in love to joyfully retell Charles Dickens' iconic story of greed and redemption.

That touched all our hearts and we are all so grateful for this spot of joy at a time when we all needed it.

Scrooge the Musical, by Leslie Bricusse, was performed on November 21 and November 22, 2025 by the All Community Theater. (ACT). To view the printed program with cast listing and bios, visit the website: www.santamonicaumc.org/act.





Community News

BAPTISM

- **Stone William Hardin** was baptized by Rev. Greg Batson on Sunday, December 21.



THANK YOU, COMMUNITY!

- Thanks to **Mary Crawford**, the Spiritual Formation Committee, and to all who wrote an Advent Devotion. Also thanks to those who recorded audio devotions for the last week of Advent. You may still access the written devotional booklet: www.santamonicaumc.org/advent.
- Thanks to **Rev. Larry Young** and **Bill Buxton** for hosting this year's Advent Bible Study class, in-person and online.
- Thanks to **Jocelyn Hicks-Garner** and the Missions Council for organizing December's Alternative Christmas for four Sunday's during coffee hour with information about the mission projects. And thanks to all who supported Alternative Christmas!
- Thanks to **Chris Ruud** for her 22nd year organizing Angel Tree Project. Chris organized gifts of new household items to provide the families of Family Place/ Upward Bound House with new things for Christmas. Many thanks to all the community members who purchased and wrapped gifts for this mission.
- Thanks to **Mike & Patty Eskridge** (The Seasonal Display Committee) for providing the beautiful poinsettias and seasonal displays in the Sanctuary during Advent.
- Thanks to **Dan and Cooper Nessel, Ron Theile and Javier** for setting up our beautiful creche in the Courtyard, and thanks to **Jim Menzies** for providing the hay.
- Thank you to **Chuck Kearsley, Jon Ward** and **Adam Guerrero** for help with the First UMC scene at the City of Santa Monica Nativity Scenes.
- Thank you to **Sue Payne, Char Smith, Sarah Rold**, and the **Prayer Quilt Ministry**, for making the purple paraments for this year's Advent services (see photos on page 6.)
- And to all the incredible **volunteers** who stuffed envelopes and sent out mailings, decorated tables, visited folks in hospital and at home, ushered for worship services and the concert, volunteered at the Westside Food Bank, and more, we **THANK YOU!**

THANK YOU, CONGREGATION

Thanks to all of you for your care and concern during my recent hospital admission. I prayed to feel God's presence. My prayers were answered with your thoughtful calls, texts, and visits, which were so welcome and so much appreciated. Your love and prayers uplifted me, and brought healing and recovery.

With love and gratitude,
Linda Diane Anderson

LAY LEADERSHIP 2026

We lift up and thank all of the Lay Leadership team for their dedication and continued service into 2026:

- Lay Leader Team:** Todd Erlandson, Leigh Erlandson, Jocelyn Hicks-Garner, Michael Lamb, Molly Smith, Glenda Martinez
- Fellowship & Events:** Sandra Jones
- Finance Committee:** Kim Defenderfer
- Health Ministry:** Debi Jenkinson Wong & Evelyne Markel
- Nominations & Leadership Development:** Leigh Erlandson
- Loans & Scholarships:** Mira Pak
- Missions:** Jocelyn Hicks-Garner
- Prayer Quilt Ministry:** Sue Payne and Maile Marquand
- Seasonal Displays:** Mike Eskridge
- Spiritual Formation:** Cindy McQuade
- Staff-Parish Relations:** Lindsay Dewald
- Trustees:** Sam Johnson
- United Methodist Women:** Robin Henning and Karen Ing
- Youth Ministry:** Adam Guerrero and Cady Senior
- Methodist Foundation of Santa Monica:** John Youngman

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CELEBRATIONS

- The Santa Monica Area Interfaith Council is hosting a Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast at Mount Olive Lutheran Church on **Friday, January 16**, beginning with breakfast at **7:30 a.m.**, and program starting at **8 a.m.** *1343 Ocean Park Blvd. Santa Monica, CA 90405*
- Join the Santa Monica Symphony and Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles for their annual MLK Concert. **Saturday, Jan 17, 3 - 5 p.m.** *Barnum Hall 600 Olympic Blvd.*



WESTSIDE FOOD BANK - NEW DATES!

Westside Food Bank offers a volunteer opportunity every 4th Wednesday of the month. Volunteers will unpack cases of food for distribution at the Mobile Pantry at Virginia Avenue Park.

Upcoming dates: **Wednesdays: Jan 28/Feb 25 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. 1914 14th Street, Santa Monica**

To volunteer, sign up on the WSFB website: www.wsfb.org/take-action/volunteer-opportunities



STEWARDSHIP 2026

Thank you to all who have generously pledged for 2026. Pledge Commitments are still due! We are \$157k from plan and need your help in fulfilling stewardship commitments. If you haven't yet had the opportunity to commit to giving for 2026, now is the time! Your gifts help every ministry in every possible way. From worship, to congregation care, to local and world outreach, and youth, families and children. Thank you for making a difference in our community and around the world.

www.santamonicaumc.org/stewardship





Community Photos



New purple paraments created for this year's Advent services

Advent candle-lighting families



United Women in Faith's Annual Christmas Bazaar

Rev. Larry Young's in-person Advent Bible Study class

Movie Night on the Lawn, hosted by the Youth Group



December's Messy Church



Listening Hearts Women's Group Christmas Brunch



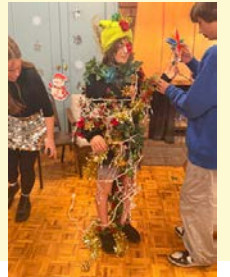
PRESCHOOL CORNER



Preschool Christmas Concert



Youth Christmas Party



WORSHIP



WORSHIP IN THE SANCTUARY

We worship on Sundays at 10 a.m. in the Sanctuary, and we Livestream the service on the platforms listed below.

COMMUNION SUNDAYS

Char Smith will be baking the bread for Communion Sunday. Thank you for your service!

WORSHIP ONLINE

Sundays 10 a.m. Worship Online LIVESTREAM on:

- **Website:** www.santamonicaumc.org/livestream
After 10 a.m. livestream airs, go to:
www.santamonicaumc.org/sunday-service-archive
- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/santamonicaumc
- **YouTube Channel:** [@SantaMonicaUMC](https://www.youtube.com/@SantaMonicaUMC)
- **The First UMC App:** Go the App Store, search *FirstUMC_SM*

Let us know if you need assistance in joining online.

ONGOING MINISTRIES

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY / SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR THE FALL

Families are invited to worship in the Sanctuary. Parents with infants are welcome to worship in the Sanctuary, in the Family Zone in the Narthex, or in the nursery. We have 3 groups for Sunday School following the children's message in worship:

- Nursery Care for 6 months through toddler
- Younger Elementary for Kinder-3rd graders
- New Sunday School group for 4th-7th graders

Contact Jamie (j.jones@santamonicaumc.org) for more info.

Website: www.santamonicaumc.org/childrens-ministry

YOUTH MINISTRY

Youth Group is open to all 6th -12th graders in the community. They gather on Sunday evenings for dinner, games and a program or topic for discussion and reflection. Meetings are on Sundays from 6 - 8 p.m. 3rd Floor Edu. Bldg. Contact Tricia with questions:

t.guerrero@santamonicaumc.org

January Meetings: January 11/18/25

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

Men's Bible Study is a weekly Zoom meeting where men of all ages and generations gather to ground themselves in the Holy Scripture. As men try to navigate the stresses and complexities of this modern world and daily life, Men's Bible Study is a place for community, prayer and fellowship through the sharing of God's Holy word. For more information and to join, call the church office: 310-393-8258.

Tuesdays: 7 a.m. via Zoom

PRAYER REQUESTS

The First UMC Prayer Group is a network of persons who provide regular, dependable, and confidential prayer support. You may send a prayer request to the church at any time, and our Prayer Group will be notified of your request. Call the church office, or visit:

www.santamonicaumc.org/prayer-requests/

LISTENING HEARTS WOMEN'S GROUP

Listening Hearts is a group for women of all ages, grounded in the practices of sacred listening, prayer and reflection. We gather both in person and online. All are welcome to join!

Contact Tricia Guerrero to learn more:

t.guerrero@santamonicaumc.org

Meeting dates:

Wednesday, January 7 & 21, Coffee & Connect, 10 a.m. Literati Cafe (12081 Wilshire Blvd)

Wednesday, January 14, 2 p.m. via Zoom



THE CHANCEL CHOIR

Sing in the Chancel Choir! **Thursday evening rehearsals are 7:40 - 9 p.m.** Contact Jim Smith if you are interested:

djes@roadrunner.com

FREE BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS

The Health Ministry Council hosts Blood Pressure screenings one Sunday of the month in the Fireside Room. We are grateful to this ministry for their continued care of the congregation! Next Screening:

Sunday, January 11, 11 a.m. in the Alcove



REQUEST A PRAYER QUILT

Led by **Sue Payne and Maile Marquand**, the Prayer Quilt Ministry offers Prayer Quilts to those in need. To request a quilt:

1. Talk to the intended recipient. Ask if the person is willing to be prayed for and to receive a quilt. Ask what specific prayers are wished for. There is no charge for the quilt – it is a gift of love.
 2. Contact Maile Marquand and Sue Payne at: prayerquilts@santamonicaumc.org. **(Prayer quilts may only be requested and sponsored by members of the First UMC congregation.)**
 3. Select the quilt, if some are already made, or suggest colors if one is to be selected for you. First UMC will display the quilt in the Friday Community Email, and during Sunday 10 a.m. worship, where you may tie a prayer knot during in-person worship, or view the quilt on the Livestream.
- Next Meeting: Saturday, January 17, Room 300**
Contact info@santamonicaumc.org if you would like to volunteer. www.santamonicaumc.org/prayerquiltministry



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF SANTA MONICA



Scan to visit
the website



@santamonicaumc
www.santamonicaumc.org

1008 11th St.
Santa Monica, CA 90403
310-393-8258



FIRST UMC OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., and by appointment. (Office closed on Fridays.)

Pastoral Care : 310-393-8258, enter ext. 1



CONGREGATION CARE

Feel free to leave a phone message anytime (310-393-8258) or email message for any of the church staff.

The Pastoral Care line (**310-393-8258 and enter extension 1**), is always available for people to leave a message requesting care.

Pastoral Care Resources: Explore the resources on our website to see how we can support you and your loved ones through every season of life. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact: Anne Premer a.premer@santamonicaumc.org or (310)393-8258 ext 103. www.santamonicaumc.org/health-ministry



Looking forward to **February**

Feb 1 **Children's Sabbath/4th Grade Bibles**

On Sunday, February 1, the children of First UMC ages 3 yrs through 5th grade will lead our church family in worship. We will also present 4th graders with a Bible. All children in our church, preschool and community are invited to participate in Children's Sabbath or receive a Bible. Contact Tricia: t.guerrero@santamonicaumc.org, if you know a 4th grader who would like a Bible.

Feb 8 **Youth Sunday**

Feb 15 **Youth Service Project Fundraiser**

Feb 17 **Preschool Lunar New Year**

Feb 18 **Ash Wednesday services / Ash Wed Brunch**

Feb 24 **Messy Church**

FIRST UMC CHRISTMAS CONCERT

You can now view this year's Christmas Concert on our website and YouTube Channel! This year's musical celebration featured Arthur Honegger's *Une Cantate de Noël* with the South Bay Children's Choir—along with the return of our beloved "Carols, Etc." Enjoy the glorious sounds of the Chancel Choir and guest singers, the Los Angeles Concert Orchestra, and the South Bay Children's Choir, all under the direction of James Smith. Enjoy the performance! <https://santamonicaumc.org/music-theater>

