



December 2022

# THE MESSENGER

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BELMONT

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## The Rev. Jim Mitulski to join CCB as settled pastor; he will start on Feb. 1

By Micki Carter

The Rev. Jim Mitulski has accepted the call to be pastor of the Congregational Church of Belmont.

More than three years after the retirement of the Rev. Kristi Denham, CCB's Search Committee invited Pastor Jim for a candidating sermon on Nov. 13. At the congregational meeting that followed the worship service, the members of CCB voted unanimously to issue a call. After the vote, Pastor Jim was invited into the Sanctuary where he was greeted by applause and cheers.

The vote capped a busy weekend at CCB. Pastor Jim spent most of the day on Saturday, Nov. 12, meeting one-on-one with individual church members. Then at a potluck dinner Saturday evening, he made the rounds of the tables to sit down to talk and answer questions.

Pastor Jim will conclude his interim ministry with Peace United Church of Christ in Duluth, Minn., and take up the pulpit at CCB in early February. He has a home in Oakland (where he will live with his cat Keats) so he won't be occupying the apartment on the second floor of the church, but he has pledged to maintain regular office hours at CCB.

He's quite familiar with the Peninsula after serving as an interim pastor at Island United Church in Foster City before he accepted the assignment in Duluth. He also served as co-chair of the Peninsula Multifaith Coalition, which CCB belongs to.

Moderator Danielle Chamberlin told the congregation during Sunday's meeting that Pastor Jim had received enthusiastic recommendations from Island United and from Pastor Kristi who has worked with him at PMC.

See PASTOR JIM, Page 3



Rev. Jim Mitulski will join CCB as its new settled pastor Feb. 1. He is pictured here on the CCB veranda with some local friends who came to support him during his candidating sermon Nov. 13.

### Trains of Thought

## A season of preparation

By Pastor Sally Train

This is the season of Anticipation and Preparation. This church has so much to look forward to! Christmas — with all the joyful activities swirling around it! And the arrival of a new settled pastor! It is truly a time of renewed hope, energy, and joy!

As we happily engage in all the activities of preparation — shopping, wrapping, cooking, decorating — I would encourage us to take a pause and think a little bit about

preparing our hearts for a new birth.

Each week we light an Advent Candle and reflect on one Spiritual Quality. It is not just a ritual. It is truly a way to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Hope allows us to face each day with a cheerful and positive attitude, looking for the best in the world around us and believing that tomorrow can be even better. Hope gives us courage and strength for the tasks that are



Rev. Sally Train

See TRAINS OF THOUGHT, Page 3

We are an Open and Affirming Congregation valuing everyone's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, physical and mental abilities.

## Moderator's Report

# Look for many new beginnings for CCB in the coming year

By Danielle Chamberlin

Advent is the beginning of a new church year and, like the turn of the seasons, brings change.

CCB will be going through a big transition next year with the call of our new settled pastor, Rev. Jim Mitulski. While we are very excited for the new energy and vast experience that Jim will bring to CCB, this means that December marks Rev. Sally Train's last month with us.

Pastor Sally has been our steadfast rock as we have gone through this time of interim ministry, first with us from December 2019 through February 2020, and then with us again from August 2021 through December 2022.

While we love the weekly worship service she leads for us, she has also given us many gifts beyond the written job description which will have a lasting impact on CCB.

- She created the "love your church" exercise we did at Annual Meeting 2022, leading to the creation of several projects including this year's Medical Debt Relief project which eliminated over \$2 million of medical debt.

- She introduced Council to a new way of holding meetings called the "Quaker Process" which has helped us with decision making in difficult and sometimes contentious subjects.

- She has created new structures for our worship service, having a once-a-month "theological reflection" Sunday where we could discuss and reflect on the Bible readings in the Dining Room or veranda, which was a nice change during the summer.

- She reached out to First Church of Redwood City, leading to conversations of partnering in new ways with FCRC which are coming to fruition in sharing our administrative assistant so it can become a full-time position with health benefits as well as hosting FCRC's Madrigal Singers concert on Dec. 11.

- And many more!

Sally also created a new CCB Advent tradition where we bring an ornament from

home to share on the CCB Christmas tree. This creates a very special tree that reflects our whole church family, and it creates an avenue to share some of our most special memories with each other. Please bring a favorite ornament to church on Dec. 4 to share and take it home after Epiphany.

We are very excited that Rev. Jim Mitulski has accepted our call and will join us on Feb. 1. Unfortunately, this also means our time with Sally must come to an end. At the end of this month, we will say goodbye to Sally as she retires. On Jan. 1 we will celebrate her time with us and wish her well in the new year with a party after church, and we hope you will join us.



**Pastor Jim**  
Continued from Page One

During Sunday's worship service, friends and colleagues of his filled two pews. The group included the Rev. Penny Nixon, the former pastor of the Congregational Church of San Mateo whom Pastor Jim served with at the Metropolitan Community Church in San Francisco years ago.

## Trains of Thought

Continued from Page One

placed before us. As we live hopeful lives, we build the world we are hoping to see.

Peace – inwardly and outwardly – promotes harmony and wellbeing for ourselves and those around us. Inner Peace gives rise to contentment and joy. Outer Peace also gives rise to contentment as we happily cooperate with one another and celebrate the gifts each person brings.

Love is the foundation and pinnacle of spiritual life. It manifests in kindness shown to ourselves and to others. It is often said that God is Love. Love is certainly the highest principle by which we can live. Love is also at the core of life. Without love, there is no life. We come into the world knowing how to love, and we spend our whole lives learning how to love more perfectly.

Joy springs from the heart as gift from God. It is also the delightful offspring of all the other spiritual qualities. The more we can live with hope, peace, love and kindness, the more joy there will be in our lives.

I recently read that, "What matters most to my soul is the attitude I bring to my activities, not so much the activities themselves."

If we can live each day with hope, peace, love, and joy — in a very real way — we are living in the Kingdom of God. We do not have to wait for the world to become a perfect place. We do not have to wait for some monumental future event. By cultivating our spiritual qualities, we can enter the divine realm and live there. As we inhabit that inner reality, we also help build the Kingdom of God in the outer world. It is here, and it is coming.

**Bring a favorite ornament (and a brief story about it) to church on Sunday Dec. 4. We will decorate the CCB tree with our memories.**

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).

# Madrigal Singers to offer holiday concert on Dec. 11



The Madrigal Singers of Mountain View High School will perform in concert at 5 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 11, in the CCB Sanctuary. The concert is a gift from the First Church Redwood City, and we are combining it with a Christmas Cookie Exchange. Children will be decorating cookies during Sunday School the morning of Dec. 11. Your price of admission is a plate or two of your favorite Christmas cookies. We will provide baggies so we can enjoy some with coffee or punch after the concert in the Dining Room — and take some home as well. We want to have enough to give each singer a selection. Pass the word to friends and family! No one will be disappointed.

## THE REASON FOR THE SEASON!



Dec. 11 at 5pm — Madrigal Singers Concert  
Dec. 18 at 10:30am — Pickup Nativity Pageant  
Dec. 18 at 5pm — Community Caroling  
Dec. 24 at 9pm — Candlelight Chorale  
Christmas Eve Service

Please join us! Details at [CCBelmont.org](http://CCBelmont.org)  
Listen to the music of Christmas at [CCBelmont.org/Christmas/](http://CCBelmont.org/Christmas/)



Ella Mae Donovan recently celebrated her 97th birthday with friends and cake during coffee hour.

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](http://CCB).

# CCB Sanctuary gets a major clean-up

By Micki Carter

Catedral da Familia moved out of the Sanctuary on Nov. 3., and CCB was hosting the candidating sermon of Rev. Jim Mitulski on Nov. 13. That gave us 10 days to transform the Sanctuary from cluttered to CLEAN!

The Deacons gathered the cleaning elves on Friday and Saturday afternoons, and we went to work!

Mike Venturino and Henry Altorfer set up big ladders in front of the altar to install new speakers on either side of the Sanctuary and hide the wires behind the cross-beam.

Mike Venturino and Henry Altorfer set up big ladders in front of the altar to install new speakers on either side of the Sanctuary and hide the wires behind the cross-beam. No more tripping over wires trailing across the floor!

Linda Howard (fresh out of her Covid bed) and Maura Whitmore gave the pews the most thorough cleaning they've had, most likely since they were built and installed more than 70 years ago. They pulled the cushions out and wiped them down, vacuumed the seat beds (and pocketed at least a dollar or two in loose coins). Then they tackled the pew racks, unscrewing the brochure pockets to clean out decades of

“stuff” and drilling out melted crayons from the pencil slots.

Into the racks went hymnals and Bibles that Linda and Henry had used engineering erasers on to remove the scribbles. The covers were wiped down individually.

We noted that each pew has a brass plaque indicating the parishioner who built the pew and suggested adding a plaque for the ones who cleaned them!

The communion table, hand-built by caretaker Art Armstrong in the '70s, and the altar were polished. The glass tops were removed and cleaned separately, and the brass cross and candlesticks were shined up with Brasso.

Jane Fernald spent an entire afternoon cleaning the organ space, organizing piles of sheet music and discovering a beautiful tiny hymnal belonging to Reba Brandenburg, longtime church organist and Gary Brandenburg and Galyn Evans' mother.

A banner, made by Elizabeth Mye and secreted away in the Parlor, was hung on the back wall. The retractable multi-media screen was restored to its wall position.

All the parments (altar cloths), many of them made by our dear Belinda Sims, were sent off for commercial cleaning, and the Altar Guild pledged to decorate the altar each Sunday.

Kim Reininger took on the task of cleaning all the Narthex windows. Another elf spent an afternoon on the Dining Room windows.

Just so the congregation could appreciate the work of the



**Kim Reininger cleans windows.**

cleaning elves, we squirted a couple blasts of Lysol into the air before people arrived Sunday morning!

**More photos appear on Page 7.**



**Mike Venturino and Henry Altorfer hide speaker wires.**



**Maura Whitmore cleans the pews.**

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).



Jane Fernald organizes the organ area.



Decorating the altar for advent was also part of the project.



Lea Mavroudis refills the sanctuary candles.



Linda Howard vacuums the pews.

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).

# CCB abolishes more than \$2 million in medical debt for 1,482 Californians

By Micki Carter

Abolishing medical debt among Californians was the primary social justice action that the members of CCB chose to take on at Annual Meeting in 2022 — and we have learned that we have been effective beyond anything we could have imagined.

We have abolished \$2,671,553 in medical debt for 1,482 Californians — an average of \$1,802 per debtor — with just an investment of \$6,500 raised through our Yard Sale, pie sales, memorial donations and an anonymous matching funds donor.

“It was absolutely mind-blowing that a small church like ours, with fewer than 100 members, could do something this big, something that affects the lives of so many so positively,” said Micki Carter, chair of the Medical Debt Relief program.

“However, we were thrilled to have the help of First Church Redwood City, College Heights UCC and Island United Church with our Yard Sale.”

CCB is continuing to fundraise for Medical Debt Relief so you can make a donation [here](#) any time. Just designate that it’s for Medical Debt Relief in the memo line.

CCB worked with a debt consolidator, RIP Medical Debt, which buys up medical debt from debt collecting agencies that, in turn, buy the uncollected medical debt of hospitals and other medical institutions. And once the debt is abolished, RIP helps the former debtor to re-establish their credit scores.

On average, each dollar raised eliminates about \$100 in debt, but in the case of CCB, each dollar was able to erase more than \$400 of debt.

In each case, the buys met specific criteria: qualifying debtors were those earning less than two times the federal poverty level; in financial hardship, with out-of-pocket expenses that are 5 percent or more of their annual income; or facing insolvency, with debts greater than assets.

Each person whose debt was erased

RIP MEDICAL DEBT		Purchase Cycle: AG-0047		
		Total Donations: \$6,500.00		
<u>Congregational Church of Belmont Medical Debt Fulfillment Report</u>				
State	County	Recipients	Amount abolished	Avg abolished
CA	Amador County	5	\$2,689.40	\$537.88
CA	Butte County	22	\$19,244.74	\$874.76
CA	Calaveras County	1	\$454.45	\$454.45
CA	Colusa County	1	\$374.00	\$374.00
CA	Del Norte County	6	\$4,502.85	\$750.48
CA	El Dorado County	10	\$6,393.49	\$639.35
CA	Fresno County	66	\$74,889.70	\$1,134.69
CA	Humboldt County	12	\$4,586.46	\$382.21
CA	Imperial County	17	\$47,687.40	\$2,805.14
CA	Kern County	66	\$153,543.51	\$2,326.42
CA	Kings County	14	\$39,360.36	\$2,811.45
CA	Lake County	11	\$11,770.27	\$1,070.02
CA	Lassen County	1	\$321.45	\$321.45
CA	Los Angeles County	772	\$1,477,621.15	\$1,914.02
CA	Madera County	7	\$7,931.95	\$1,133.14
CA	Marin County	15	\$19,829.87	\$1,321.99
CA	Mariposa County	6	\$11,162.85	\$1,860.48
CA	Mendocino County	8	\$27,624.93	\$3,453.12
CA	Merced County	21	\$26,404.99	\$1,257.38
CA	Mono County	2	\$2,900.36	\$1,450.18
CA	Napa County	9	\$34,631.30	\$3,847.92
CA	Nevada County	3	\$558.02	\$186.01
CA	Placer County	30	\$68,275.94	\$2,275.86
CA	Plumas County	1	\$543.69	\$543.69
CA	Sacramento County	140	\$158,534.88	\$1,132.39
CA	San Benito County	3	\$1,458.34	\$486.11
CA	San Joaquin County	44	\$70,048.83	\$1,592.02
CA	Santa Cruz County	11	\$12,590.65	\$1,144.60
CA	Shasta County	21	\$37,331.02	\$1,777.67
CA	Solano County	34	\$75,559.19	\$2,222.33

with CCB’s donation got a letter from RIP explaining that they are now free of their medical debts, thanks to a gift from the Congregational Church of Belmont.

Here’s a [link](#) to a video which explains how RIP Medical Debt Relief works.

CCB is a member of the United Church

of Christ which has teamed up with RIP Medical Debt Relief for dozens of different campaigns to abolish medical debt — for pennies on the dollar — for tens of thousands of people who were overwhelmed with medical debt since 2019.

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).

# CCB begins gearing up for giving to Samaritan House’s Family and Senior Sharing Project

By Linda Howard

The term Good Samaritan has become synonymous with someone who shows mercy. Many organizations use the name to show how they care for people. Samaritan House in San Mateo is one such organization. Throughout the years, the Congregational Church of Belmont has contributed to the good works of the Samaritan House. This year for the first time since the onset of Covid, our church is participating fully in the Samaritan House’s Family and Senior Sharing Program (FSSP), formerly known as Family 2 Family.

Samaritan House’s Family and Senior Sharing Program is one part of Samaritan House’s Holiday Programs. FSSP has served between 100 and 320 families and seniors in recent years. This year, the Samaritan House projects that between 125-175 seniors and families will receive assistance from FSSP. The numbers have increased with the lessening of Covid restrictions.

The pandemic and, more recently, the inflationary spiral, has hit the Samaritan House’s clients harder than most. Many of their jobs are in the service sectors of the economy such as restaurants, hotels, house-cleaning, etc. – all of which were affected by the economic downturn.

Many clients lost their jobs during the pandemic which put them in even greater need. As a result, there was also a doubling of clients needing Samaritan House’s ser-

vices — food, medical, rental assistance, etc. The need continues as we climb out of the pandemic.

The Social Action Committee began the task of obtaining information from the client families in mid-November. As of this date, volunteers from our church have interviewed the families and gathered information on all members in the household regarding gender, size of clothing, and a “Wish List” (especially for children). On Dec. 4, red and green paper stockings “hung with care” will adorn the Christmas tree in the Narthex. The names of the family members and their gift request will be written on the stocking tags.

### Important Dates:

Dec. 4 – Take a tag or two off the tree and shop for the family member whose name is written on the stocking tag.

Dec. 11 – Return the purchased gifts to the church. Be sure they are wrapped and the tag with the name of the family member is attached to the gift.

Dec. 15 – The gifts will be delivered to



Linda Howard poses with last year’s donations

the families. If, for some reason, you cannot return the gifts by Dec. 11, you can drop the gifts at the church office by Dec. 13.

One of the client family members, when asked what she would like for gift replied, “Don’t worry about me. Just give the kids something.” When asked a third time, she finally said, “We really need some warm clothes.”

Many of the families who register with Samaritan House for support are working hard to make ends meet – sometimes holding down two jobs just to survive. Participating in FSSP is a gift you can give yourself this holiday season. Your gifts really make a difference in people’s lives.

**The Peninsula Senior Band who played for worship Nov. 13 is looking for more members. If you consider yourself a senior and you play an instrument (washboards and harmonicas included), come to the CCB Dining Room at 10 a.m. Fridays and join in.**



Twins Stella and Nick show off their Advent Jars, a Sunday School craft project.

To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).

# Vanderbilt doctor of ministry degree equips VA, military chaplains for ‘real-world’ roles

*Our own Rev. Thomas Crosby, one of the doctoral candidates featured in the following article, serves as a Veterans’ Administration chaplain at the Menlo Park VA Hospital. Crosby is in a three-part covenant with the Congregational Church of Belmont, the VA and the United Church of Christ, our denomination.*

**By Ann Marie Deer Owens**

Vanderbilt Divinity School’s first class of integrative chaplains—who are focused on serving veterans and active-duty service members through best practices in spiritual and mental health care—will earn a doctor of ministry next spring.

Thanks to a unique partnership between the Divinity School and Integrative Mental Health, a national program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 105 students are enrolled in the three-year doctorate program. About 90 percent of the students are either VA chaplains or active-duty chaplains in the Department of Defense.

“This program is an important priority for Vanderbilt Divinity School because today’s chaplains are on the front line of mental health care, particularly in the VA and DOD,” said C. Melissa Snarr, program director and associate professor of ethics and society.

Snarr, who also holds the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Chair, noted that DOD chaplains must maintain complete confidentiality in conversations with service members, so training in mental health care is vital. She and Keith G. Meador, director of Integrative Mental Health with the VA and the Anne Geddes Stahlman Professor of Medical Ethics, began conversations about five years ago on how best to extend and transform the VA certificate program into a full-fledged Vanderbilt Divinity School doctoral program.

Read more [here](#).



**Rev. Thomas Crosby celebrated his birthday during coffee hour on Nov. 20 after leading worship.**

# Rev. Andrew Lang, director of the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition, says: Let’s Talk About Club Q

*Rev. Lang penned the following piece shortly after the recent mass shooting at Club Q, an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs.*

**By Rev. Andrew Lang**

When Open and Affirming congregations gathered Sunday to honor our transgender and nonbinary neighbors who have lost their lives to hatred, we were stunned by the news that a young man inside an LGBTQ club in Colorado Springs shot and killed at least five people and injured 25 late Saturday night.

Once again, lives have been irretrievably lost by the rising tide of hatred and gun violence in America.

As I heard the news Sunday morning, my thoughts went to Jeremiah 31, verse 15:

Thus says the Lord:

A voice is heard in Ramah,

lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;

she refuses to be comforted for her

children,

because they are no more.

This week, we join in prayer for each person murdered or injured Saturday night in Club Q. In the coming days we will know their names.

We also pray in union with the Rocky Mountain Conference and especially with our Open and Affirming churches in Colorado Springs: First Congregational UCC, Vista Grande Community UCC and Black Forest Community UCC, as well as Church in the Wildwood UCC in neighboring Green Mountain Falls.

It is not easy to hope in a time like this. We are overwhelmed with shock, bewilderment, grief and anger. Our emotions now cannot simply dissolve into hope. It will take time to heal. But there will be a time to hope again. The prophet Jeremiah continues in verses 16 and 17:

Thus says the Lord:

Keep your voice from weeping,

and your eyes from tears;

for there is a reward for your work,

says the Lord:

they shall come back from the land of the enemy;

there is hope for your future,

says the Lord:

your children shall come back

to their own country.

Sunday was also the feast of the Reign of Christ. As a movement, Open and Affirming churches are working for the vision of God’s future realm, where everyone is wanted, everyone is needed, no one is lost to hatred. But that future realm is also taking shape here and now: in your congregations and your families in more than a thousand communities across America.

So there is reason for hope. Your mission is to save lives, and there will be a reward for your work: the beloved community where all of God’s children can return home.

**To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).**



# CCB Calendar for December 2022

1 Thu	7:30PM - 9:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Choir Rehearsal</a>
4 Sun	9AM - 10:30AM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Worship Preparation</a>
	10:30AM - 12:00PM	■ Worship	<a href="#">Sunday worship with Pastor Sally Train</a>
	11:30AM - 1:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Coffee Hour</a>
8 Thu	7:30PM - 9:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Choir Rehearsal</a>
11 Sun	9AM - 10:30AM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Worship Preparation</a>
	10:30AM - 12:00PM	■ Worship	<a href="#">Sunday worship with Pastor Sally Train</a>
	11:30AM - 1:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Coffee Hour</a>
	5:00PM - 7:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Madrigal Singers Concert</a>
15 Thu	7:30PM - 9:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Choir Rehearsal</a>
18 Sun	9AM - 10:30AM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Worship Preparation</a>
	10:30AM - 12:00PM	■ Worship	<a href="#">Sunday worship/Christmas Pageant</a>
	11:30AM - 1:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Coffee Hour</a>
	5PM - 9PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Caroling and pizza party after</a>
22 Thu	7:30PM - 9:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Choir Rehearsal</a>
24 Sat	9PM - 10PM	■ Worship	<a href="#">Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Pastor Warren Dale</a>
29 Thu	7:30PM - 9:00PM	■ Church Events	<a href="#">Choir Rehearsal</a>

**December Messenger deadline will be Dec. 28.**



To go to the Congregational Church of Belmont website, click on [CCB](#).