



April 2023
THE MESSENGER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BELMONT

751 Alameda de las Pulgas, Belmont CA 94002 • 650-593-4547 • CCB@ccbmont.org • www.CCBelmont.org



CCB said farewell to its beloved matriarch Ella Mae Donovan with a memorial service and pie social reception on March 26. More photos appear on Page 6 and Ella Mae's obituary is in the Parish Personals on Page 2.

A note from Pastor Jim: Finding hope in the Resurrection season

By Rev. Jim Mitulski

*After the winter snows,
a wind of healing blows
and thorns put forth a rose
and lilies cheer us.
Life's everlasting spring
has robbed death of its sting.
Henceforth, a cry shall bring
our Master near us*

from "Easter" by John Masefield (1929 (the third stanza of a favorite hymn text from childhood that I still have memorized, even though it's hopelessly old-fashioned and rarely sung anywhere.)

Dear friends,

With April come Holy Week and Easter. Spring is in full bloom! New Life and pos-



Rev. Jim Mitulski

sibility are everywhere. The extent to which my Easter theology was tied to it being confirmed by what was happening in the natural world.

Spring doesn't really hit Duluth until May usually, and that held true in 2022. We couldn't even think about doing things like

sibility are everywhere.

A year ago at this time, I was serving a church in Duluth, MN and I was experiencing a minor spiritual crisis as I worked on my sermon for Easter. I had never noticed

the extent to which my Easter theology was tied to it being confirmed by what was happening in the natural world.

Spring doesn't really hit Duluth until May usually, and that held true in 2022. We couldn't even think about doing things like

an outdoor procession for Palm Sunday, or an Easter egg hunt around the church building. In retrospect I wasn't cut out for five-month winters even though I had grown up in Michigan. As the day approached, I came to accept that there would be snow on the ground, not lilies.

Rather petulantly, I was so sick of the continued snowfall and the unrelenting cold temperature that it almost affected my ability to see the fact of Easter unfolding all around me—resurrections—through many other lenses.

I finally remembered that a positive consequence of living through and surviving the AIDS years is that in my communities in **See PASTOR JIM, Page 3**

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

Pastor Jim

Continued from Page One

the 80s and 90s, we found ways to imagine a future. A resurrection of hope in the midst of widespread and seemingly endless grief and loss.

We had hopes for a cure because we imagined it before it was a scientific likelihood. We learned to demand an end to the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS long before we saw compassion reflected by religious or political leaders.

Sometimes you have to imagine resurrection before it becomes real, and fight for it if others aren't invested in it. I worked through my own resistance to resurrection in time to see Easter in different ways.

I remembered an often-quoted passage by the French writer Albert Camus that had been a source of solace during the AIDS years:

In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.

And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better, pushing right back.

Easter faith doesn't come easily, and it may not be for everybody. And you don't have to believe in the resurrection of Jesus or any fine point of doctrine to come to CCB. Still, I want to urge all of us to be open in new ways. I think Resurrections are everywhere if we can open ourselves to broader meaning.

And I am so happy to be back in the Bay Area where we do have spring, and to be serving you as your pastor at this time. I hope we see you on Easter!

LifeMoves Benefit Breakfast April 27

LifeMoves, a local organization dedicated to addressing the homelessness crisis, is hosting a benefit breakfast at the Hyatt Regency Burlingame on Thursday, April 27.

Featured speaker Liz Murray "will share her journey, providing a personal and inspirational message of having hope in the face of dire circumstances."

Pastor Jim would like to attend with 2-3 representatives from CCB. If you are interested, please contact him at pastor@ccbelmont.org.

Council approves choosing of attorney to assist with merger

By Steve Chamberlin

Plans are under way for the completion of the merger of the Congregational Church of Belmont with the First Congregational Church of Redwood City.

At CCB's annual meeting on Feb.12, the membership voted to approve a Memorandum of Understanding of intent to merge and directed the Church Council to proceed with finalizing the merger. FCCRC's membership did the same at their Annual Meeting on March 12.

Our next task was to identify and hire an expert with experience in similar church mergers who could walk us through the necessary practical and legal steps. The group that's leading this effort includes Steve Chamberlin, Micki Carter, and Mike Venturino. The Redwood City church has authorized the group to act for them as well and have agreed to pay the legal expenses. We don't know how much that will be yet, but we expect it to be less than \$10,000.

We interviewed attorneys with relevant experience and have settled on Steve Summers of Non-Profit Law Group, a California attorney with experience with mergers of non-profits. The Council authorized us to hire Summers at its March 27 meeting.

Both churches are religious corporations incorporated in California, and so a major portion of the work will involve combining these two legal entities. This will be very similar to the merger of two secular non-profit businesses. While our practical goal is "to merge," there are multiple ways

to accomplish this from a legal standpoint, including having one corporation absorb the other or dissolving one or both corporations. Each of these methods involves different tradeoffs of speed, cost and liability risk, and we'll be relying on the attorney to guide us here.

In the process of finalizing the merger, the membership of the Church Council, Trustees, and other governing boards will be updated to include people who are coming from both FCCRC and CCB. The constitution and bylaws of both churches will also need to be compared for any significant differences in governance practices, then we'll need to discuss and agree on what practices to use for the newly combined church. In order to finish the legal work, both congregations will need to vote once again to approve the final merger agreement.

Our goal is to finalize the legal work by the end of June, which is the end of FCCRC's fiscal year. The practical work of church combination will continue for some time after that, including combining the employee payroll systems, physical worship supplies, activity programs, and mailing lists. No decisions have been made yet regarding a name for the newly combined church, but members should expect to hear more about this very soon.

A shared drive has been created to start collecting critical documents needed for the merger from both sides. Please let us know if you would like to be involved in the work to merge the two churches.

FAITH HOUSING SUMMIT
THURSDAY, MAY 11, 2023

Ending Homelessness:
Strategies within our Faith
Communities

10 a.m.-1 p.m. with lunch included at the Congregational Church of San Mateo, 225 Tilton Ave., San Mateo. Register [here](#) by April 26.

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

Join us at Family Camp July 14-16

By Micki Carter

Tucked into the redwoods near Aptos, just a few miles from the Pacific, is Camp Monte Toyon where CCB has been enjoying Family Camp for the past few years.

This year we will arrive after dinner Friday evening, July 14, and claim our rooms in Cary Lodge. The camp will provide three meals on Saturday and breakfast on Sunday, and then we head home.

Activities will include hiking, a climbing wall, lawn games, lots of singing, a talent/no talent gathering and a campfire. The cost is \$206/adults and \$127/children 6-11; children up to age 5 are free.

For many years in the '70s, '80s and

into the '90s, College Heights UCC and Community Church of San Carlos joined CCB for Family Camp at Camp Cazadero every year. Some of us still remember Jim Garrison's Jabblewocky at campfire and the interchurch softball games on Saturday afternoons.

This year we have extended an invitation to College Heights, Island United and First Congregational Church of Redwood City to join us at Monte Toyon.

Email Office@CCBelmont.org by June 1 to let us know you're coming — individually or as a church group.

Check out CCBelmont.org/family-camp/ for more information.



NCNC Call to Honor Trans Day of Visibility

From *Upwellings*, the Northern California and Nevada Conference Newsletter

At a time in our country when efforts to constrain and limit trans life and expression are expanding, it feels especially important to celebrate [Trans Day of Visibility](#).

The international celebration of this day began in 2010, when trans activist Rachel Crandall sought to create a day where people could focus on celebrating the lives of transgender people, in contrast to the dominant media focus.

In honor of TDOV, the United Church of Christ will be publishing [Love Letters](#) for trans youth every 30 minutes to the UCC's social media pages and website.

As part of a practice of respect and affirmation, you are invited to participate in this offering by spending time with the witness to God's love that these letters offer and sharing them with anyone in your community who is in need of these steadfast affirmations. If you would like to write a letter (200 words or less), you can email it to Lettersoflove@ucc.org, and it will be added to the site later.

As part of the Conference's witness on TDOV, representatives will be sharing these letters with the youth being supported by Loomis Basin UCC through The Landing Spot.

At 6 p.m. on March 31 join in a Conference-wide time of prayer from wherever you are.



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

Another \$1.6 million in medical debt relieved by CCB

By Micki Carter

At the end of February, \$5,400 was transferred from CCB's Medical Debt Relief Fund to RIP Medical Debt, and this week we learned that that donation has relieved \$1,654,542.96 of medical debt for 1,214 residents of San Mateo County! With that, the medical debt of 52 Belmont residents (\$61,963.75) and 28 San Carlos residents (\$92,432.32) was erased.

The bulk of the \$5,400 came from two anonymous donations of CCB members.

Last November, we abolished \$2,671,553 in medical debt for 1,482 Californians — an average of \$1,802 per debtor — with an investment of \$6,500 raised through our Yard Sale, pie sales, memorial donations and an anonymous matching funds donor. That means we eliminated a total of \$2,836,095.96 of medical debt for our neighbors in just six months.

To accomplish this, the Medical Debt Relief team worked with the 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 allows RIP to eliminate about \$100 in debt, but in the case of CCB, each dollar of the \$11,900 we raised was able to erase more than \$238 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 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.



The Medical Debt Relief Team is grateful to the Board of Social Action for its donation of \$350, which will go toward our next purchase. We'd like to set up a schedule of making two donations a year to RIP for medical debt relief so perhaps there's another Yard Sale in our future!

An advertisement for a webinar. The top half shows two hands of different skin tones gently holding a small green seedling in a mound of soil. The background is a soft-focus landscape with mountains and a bright sun. Below the image is a green banner with white text: "Getting Ready for Earth Sunday" in a large font, followed by "Resources for Congregations" in a smaller font. Underneath that, it says "Free Webinar: Wednesday, April 12, 1:00 PM ET". At the bottom, there are three logos: "Interfaith Power & Light", "UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST", and a logo with a sun and the word "GATHERING".

Many churches celebrate God's creation on the Sunday closest to Earth Day, which falls on April 22. To support congregations in making the most of this occasion, Creation Justice Ministries of Interfaith Power & Light has created a resource that brings the lens of justice to food, the most immediate and tangible way that we connect with the natural world around us. In this webinar, Karyn Bigelow will introduce the resource and talk about specific ways churches can deliver a powerful message and experience on Earth Sunday. Even if you cannot make the webinar at its scheduled time on April 12 at 10 a.m. PDT, still sign-up, and we will send you a link to a recording of it. [Register now!](#)

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

Online book group with Island United Church has new selection for April

CCB has been invited to participate in the weekly Book Discussion, hosted online by Island United Church, which has participants from around the Bay Area and the country. The book for April is *Devotions: Selected Poetry of Mary Oliver*. The group meets via Zoom on Tuesdays from 1:30-2:30 p.m. This group is open to everyone. Here's the [link](#).

Order your Easter lilies!

Remember family and friends by dedicating an Easter lily in his or her name. Sign up in the Narthex or send an email to Office@CCBelmont.org with the name of the honoree, the relationship to you and your dedication. The cost is \$15 a piece. You can drop a check in the collection plate or pay online. Then you can take your lilies home on Easter!



San Francisco Giants bobbleheads and pins with the team colors of black and orange decorated the Dining Room for the reception pie social after the memorial service for Ella Mae Donovan on March 26. The last time CCB had a tea party, Ella Mae was pouring into china cups from a silver tea service. Linda Howard and Jane Fernald poured this time, wearing Ella Mae's gloves. And there were pies, lots of pies!



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

Synod 2023 is asked to affirm commitment to transgender and nonbinary dignity amid a new onslaught of legislative attacks

By Kayla Berkey

The 2023 General Synod of the United Church of Christ will consider 17 resolutions and several bylaw changes when it meets June 30-July 4 in Indianapolis. This is the first in a series of articles about them. Full texts of each of the proposed resolutions are available at the [General Synod website](#).

When the state of Alabama passed a law to criminalize the provision of gender-affirming healthcare to youth in April 2022, punishable as a felony with prison time, it was the first of its kind.

The Rev. Paul Eknes-Tucker, pastor of Pilgrim Church UCC in Birmingham, Ala., joined a group of parents and medical providers in the state to file a lawsuit against it, and a judge blocked its enforcement while the case proceeds.

“This dangerous law is an unthinkable infringement on parental rights and the freedom of pastors and other faith leaders to counsel their own parishioners. This law is destructive not only to families in Alabama, but to the freedoms and values Alabamians hold dear,” Eknes-Tucker said, describing his stake in the case in a press release from the Human Rights Campaign.

The law is one in an unprecedented wave of anti-LGBTQ legislation, with more than 150 bills proposed in the last year that would restrict the rights of transgender people.

It’s amid this flurry of U.S. state legislative actions that General Synod of the United Church of Christ is being asked to actively affirm the dignity of transgender and nonbinary people.

Pay attention and engage

“What sparked this was the bills coming up against youth and children, but it really is a comprehensive resolution,” said the Rev. Kim Wood, Conference minister of the Southeast Conference, one of the Conferences proposing the resolution.

“There have been so many oppressive acts — not just from this time, but for a long time — and we felt that since the UCC has clearly made a statement that we stand with, stand for, accompany and value people who are transgender and nonbinary, that we needed to go a step further. We really needed to pay attention to what is happening now and engage in it.”



The resolution comes from the geographical area where many of these bills have originated — the Southern United States. It was submitted by the Florida Conference and the Southeast Conference, which includes the states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and northwestern Florida. Contributing writers also come from the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas. Writers consulted with Carmarion Anderson-Harvey, the Alabama state director for Project One America with the Human Rights Campaign and a trans woman of color, which “brought broader perspective” of responses happening elsewhere and responsiveness to the language used, Wood said.

Wood said that the Southern region might seem like an “unexpected place” for such a resolution to emerge, given historic and current controversy in the area. “There have been some volatile times down here, so I think for us to offer this call is a real statement to how important this work is.”

Affirm commitments

The resolution of witness is also one of reaffirmation. It invites the UCC to actively engage in its commitment to being an open and affirming denomination and to recognizing in the present moment that all people are created in the image of God. It builds on a 2003 resolution passed by General Synod affirming the ministry and rights of transgender people.

“We wanted to make sure that we were not just repeating something that had already been done on the floor, though we wanted to call attention to those resolutions that General Synod had passed before so we could bring those decisions back to the forefront and remind us all of what we committed to,” Wood said.

The proposed resolution adds a focus on

meeting the needs of trans and nonbinary youth and seeking to protect equitable rights for all trans and nonbinary people while they are being actively threatened. It cites high rates of harassment experienced by gender expansive students and points to studies that show the harm of excluding trans people from sports teams consistent with their gender identity.

It also notes higher rates of violence and death experienced by trans and nonbinary youth and adults compared with peers, with disproportionately high amounts for transgender women of color.

Advocate and empower

The resolution calls for response and action.

Some of what it resolves includes promoting equitable laws for transgender and nonbinary people, committing to “lift up our religious text” and stand in solidarity against the harm done, and addressing ways to “develop gender-affirming space and inclusion in all aspects of the United Church of Christ.”

It names that it is the UCC’s responsibility as a Christian denomination to “advocate for and empower” transgender and nonbinary people who “God is already working through to enrich the whole life of the body of Christ.”

Where rubber meets the road

This proposed resolution is seen as another UCC response to the current political climate. Another, most recently, was a statement from leaders across the denomination affirming the value of trans youth lives.

“As we were engaged in this, it was really important to us to draw the wider Synod and denomination to the touchpoints of places where we have been in acknowledging people who are transgender and nonbinary and supporting, caring for, including and engaging them, to where we are now,” Wood said. “Now it’s a full political scale in huge ways and this place where the rubber meets the road, and all that we’ve talked about being — it’s here.”

“Can we engage in those ways that we’ve called ourselves to?”

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

NCNC ANNUAL GATHERING



June 15-17, 2023

Palo Alto, CA

Northern California Nevada Conference's Annual Gathering is set for June 15-17 at the First Congregational Church of Palo Alto. CCB gets two voting delegates (with registration paid by CCB) and a clergy delegate (Pastor Jim). We also get one youth delegate. In that past the youth delegates have had a really engaging experience. If you would like to be one of CCB's delegates, please contact Danielle or any member of Church Council. It's a great opportunity to learn about the nuts and bolts of the wider church community. More information is available [here](#).

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

Family Fun Day, planned by CCB youth, to take place on May 13

Kendall House had a great idea for outreach into our community, so we are organizing a free Family Fun Day on May 13! The youth have provided their vision of what this event should look like.

The event will include:

- Our CCB bouncy house
 - A petting zoo or pony rides
 - A bake sale
 - Carnival games
 - Face Painting
 - Popcorn and cotton candy
- Scout Troop 27 will help us staff

the event.

In addition to sharing the event with Scout Troop 27 and their families, we will invite Carlmont Parents Nursery School, OT4Kids, Bay Area Art Therapy, and NarcAnon to come join in the fun.

We will enjoy learning more about our partner organizations and hope they will have a chance to learn a little more about CCB as well.

We hope you will spread the word to your friends and family. It will be a ton of fun!

Musical Festival moved to end of summer; energy is still strong

By **Lea Mavroudis**

After some recent deliberation, the Music Festival committee (Garrett, Pastor Jim and I) has decided to move the date of the planned music festival benefit from June 10 to later in the year. The new tentative date is Sept. 9, with details to be confirmed within the next few weeks. Keep an eye out for an update in the May edition of The Messenger.

For those unfamiliar with the backstory: the CCB youth originally conceived the idea of a multicultural music festival last year during the visioning process for future church projects. Eventually, the idea coalesced into its current form: an art and music festival benefiting the Trevor Project, which is an organization supporting mental health and suicide prevention for LGBTQ+ youth.

The decision to move the date—which had been slated to take place right in the middle of Pride Month—back to late summer/early fall was not an easy one, but was necessary for several scheduling-related reasons.

The main reason was to prevent conflicting with another event in the area that was recently announced: the San Mateo County Pride Celebration. Since there were no other dates in June that would work and many of the target audience members would likely be gone during the summer, the committee chose a date that falls after most local schools will already be back in session.

This also gives the committee plenty of time to complete the planning and execution of the event, and creates the opportunity for a great kickoff to the fall season.

There is still a lot of energy behind this project and the committee welcomes any contributions from the CCB community, whether it's volunteering time, helping to fund the event, or if you would like to perform at the event yourself! Please contact office@ccbmont.org if you're interested.

MULTIFAITH SOLIDARITY FAST

April 2-8, 2023

In support of immigrant hunger strikers in ICE detention facilities calling for dignity, respect, and immediate release.



Learn More & Register: bit.ly/MultifaithSolidarityFast

Over the past month, 84 people who are currently detained at Mesa Verde (Bakersfield) and Golden State Annex (McFarland) joined a hunger strike to protest the dehumanizing and unjust conditions of immigrant detention. The strikers are calling for immediate release and closure of the facilities. Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity will host a Multifaith Prayer Vigil on April 4. They will gather at 11a.m. at the San Francisco ICE Building, 630 Sansome St. to bring spiritual voices into the public space, and to echo the demands of those fasting for release and the closure of these facilities. To register, click [here](#).

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

National Poetry Month April 2023



...we
were
all meant
for
something.

Artwork by Marc Brown. Line excerpted from the poem "Carrying" by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón, from *The Carrying* (Milkweed Editions, 2018). For more free poetry resources, visit Poets.org/npm.



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

CCB Calendar for April 2023

| | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 2 Sun | 9AM - 10:30AM | Church Events | Worship Preparation |
| | 10:30AM - 12:00PM | Worship | Palm Sunday worship with Rev. Jim Mitulski |
| | 11:30AM - 1:00PM | Church Events | Coffee Hour |
| 4 Tue | 1:30PM - 2:30PM | Off-site events | Online Book Group |
| 6 Thu | 7:00PM - 9:00PM | Off-site events | Maundy Thursday Service |
| | 7:30PM - 9:00PM ✉ | Church Events | Choir Rehearsal |
| 7 Fri | 7:00PM - 9:00PM | Off-site events | Good Friday Worship Service |
| 9 Sun | 9AM - 10:30AM | Church Events | Worship Preparation |
| | 10:30AM - 12:00PM | Worship | Easter Sunday worship with Rev. Jim Mitulski |
| | 11:30AM - 1:00PM | Church Events | Coffee Hour |
| 11 Tue | 1:30PM - 2:30PM | Off-site events | Online Book Group |
| 13 Thu | 7:30PM - 9:00PM ✉ | Church Events | Choir Rehearsal |
| 16 Sun | 9AM - 10:30AM | Church Events | Worship Preparation |
| | 10:30AM - 12:00PM | Worship | Sunday worship with Rev. Jim Mitulski |
| | 11:30AM - 1:00PM | Church Events | Coffee Hour |
| | 12PM - 1PM ✉ | Church Events | Social Action board meeting |
| 18 Tue | 1:30PM - 2:30PM | Off-site events | Online Book Group |
| 20 Thu | 7:30PM - 9:00PM ✉ | Church Events | Choir Rehearsal |
| 21 Fri | | Admin Schedule Change | Admin Out of Office |
| 23 Sun | 9AM - 10:30AM | Church Events | Worship Preparation |
| | 10:30AM - 12:00PM | Worship | Sunday worship with Rev. Penny Nixon |
| | 11:30AM - 1:00PM | Church Events | Coffee Hour |
| 24 Mon | 7:00PM - 9:00PM ✉ | Off-site events | CCB Council Meeting |
| 25 Tue | 1:30PM - 2:30PM | Off-site events | Online Book Group |
| 27 Thu | 7:30PM - 9:00PM ✉ | Church Events | Choir Rehearsal |
| 28 Fri | | Admin Schedule Change | Admin Out of Office |
| 30 Sun | 9AM - 10:30AM | Church Events | Worship Preparation |
| | 10:30AM - 12:00PM | Worship | Sunday worship with Rev. Jim Mitulski |
| | 11:30AM - 1:00PM | Church Events | Coffee Hour |

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



**Share Holy Week with us —
and see how this
Progressive Christian church does Easter!**

Come meet our new pastor, Rev. Jim Mitulski!

Palm Sunday — April 2 at 10:30 a.m.

Easter egg-coloring party for kids!

Maundy Thursday — April 6 at 7 p.m.

We'll worship at College Heights UCC. You're welcome to come, too.

Easter Sunday — April 9 at 10:30 a.m.

Easter Celebration with live caterpillars

and a giant Easter Egg Hunt for kids.

We'll even sing the Hallelujah Chorus!

Congregational Church of Belmont

United Church of Christ

CCBelmont.org • 650-593-4547

May Messenger Deadline will be April 24



United Church of Christ

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