

newhope news

Lutheran Church - Agoura Hills

December, 2023

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.” (James 5:7-8)

Patience is a hard thing. A couple of years ago, I grew some strawberries out of a small herb garden. I was eager to watch the plants grow from small saplings, looking forward to the delicious fruit that would soon be in my future. I imagine putting them in ice cream or as a topping on a fancy salad. Soon, the plants were covered with white flowers, which grew into the beautiful fruit.

I had never grown strawberries before. In my excitement, I picked all of the berries before they had turned completely red. The fruit was so sour it was almost inedible. It would have been so much better if I had waited even just a few days.

A talented gardener knows the virtue of patience. The Book of James uses this image as he speaks about faith; the farmer has to wait for the right time to harvest the crops. In the same way, we might want God to speak to us right now, in this very moment. But God works according to a different timeline. Sometimes we might have to wait, even though we are eager, to hear how God might be speaking to us.

What does this have to teach us in these weeks leading up to Christmas? The holiday season can be one of the most stressful times of year. There are cards to send out, presents to buy, and family to visit. There is always more that can be done! But James teaches us to slow down. Spend some time in stillness, waiting like a farmer watches over his crops.

If we eagerly jump into the excitement of Christmas, we might find ourselves overwhelmed. The fruit is ruined by picking it too soon. In these weeks before Christmas, which the church calls Advent, take some time to rest. Wait with patience for the coming holiday. Spend some time in quiet reflection or prayer. Listen in stillness for the many ways God speaks to you. Strengthen your heart, for the Lord is near.

Peace,
Pastor Steve Simpson



From Deacon Lynn



Thank you to everyone who took the time to fill out the “Five Big Questions” survey about the things that happen on Sunday morning at New Hope. Forty-two folks voiced their opinions on things like worship, music, what leaders wear, the tables in the sanctuary, and what happens in the seasons of the church year (and who makes everything happen.)

Some questions could have more than one answer, so in a few cases there are more than 42 answers if they’re added up. Some were very plain, and others weren’t. For example, people are okay with the tables at the sides of the sanctuary. Sixteen said they like them and use them, and seventeen said they were okay. Five don’t care, four are not fans, and three would help take them down.

Regarding music and liturgy, five like hymns and formal liturgy, while twenty-nine say the blended style we have now is fine. Five enjoy worship in any form while four said that worship is important enough to them to be part of a work group that would meet quarterly.

Vestments, what leaders wear in worship, had the most opinions. Sixteen said they liked to see them all the time, thirteen said they were fine on important days like Christmas and Easter, but fourteen said a stole over regular clothing is fine. Twelve said they didn’t care what worship leaders wear as long as it’s respectful.

The biggest seasons of the church year are Advent (four weeks before Christmas) and Lent (the weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter.) Nine people said they’d do at-home or in-service Advent projects and crafts, with fourteen more saying they might do a journal or calendar of some kind. Fourteen would go to a midweek Lenten worship, with most of those saying they’d enjoy a light meal (equally split between lunch and dinner) to go along with that.

As a worship leader, it really helps to know what people are thinking. We can’t make decisions in a vacuum and expect everyone to be happy with those decisions. Thank you again for everyone who voiced their opinion.

Deacon Lynn



Let us remember the following people in our prayers.....

Continued prayers of healing for Evelyn Colby, Sandy Cowden, Lou Fiore, Steve Frye, Lyla Grant, Pat and Kara Henkel, Vi and Chuck Kemmerer, Joyce Lawson, Jim and Cheryl Merrill, Debbie Niebolt, Ava Grace O'Connell, Cindy O'Hare, Ahoo Pilehvari, Sharon Pryor, Phyllis and Wayne Rickert, Suzanne Sahlie, Madelyn and Stan Swope, Rob and Jane Taschereau, and Fred Turner.

Prayers for our servicemen - Heather Brown, Keith Brown, Patrick Clohessy, Cynthia Colby, Farrah Hayden, and Ikenna Olelewe.



We rejoice with Kailey and Cameron Wood on the birth of Otto Ryan. He was born on November 19th and weighed 7 lbs. 12 oz. and was 21" long. Proud grandparents are Kara and Tom DeMelfi.



Women's Christmas Gathering

*Monday, December 4th - 7 PM
in the sanctuary*

Ann Church and Natalie Larkin will be leading a time of devotion and a craft project! Come make Christmas gift bags for you to take home, they are a present themselves! All supplies will be provided. A donation to Prototype Women's Center of Oxnard will be

appreciated. "Prototype rebuilds the lives of women, children, and communities impacted by substance use, mental illness, and domestic violence. We promote self-sufficiency while ensuring safety and shelter for those in need."

Women, come enjoy an evening of fellowship, crafts, dessert, and the opportunity to help others. We will also be collecting toys to be given to Harbor House for them to give to children at Christmastime.



Decorate the Church

All of you great Santa's helpers, please put Saturday, December 2nd on your calendars at 10 AM to decorate our church for Christmas. You are an amazing group who dig in and get it done beautifully and efficiently. The more people we have, the quicker it is finished. As always, everything will be out and ready for you to hang. If you cannot make it right at 10:00, come when you can. Thank you all.

Karen Orefice



Christmas Dinner

Mark your calendars for Sunday, December 10th at 5:30 PM for our annual church Christmas dinner. Santa Claus will visit with the children at 5:45 PM, followed by a delicious turkey

dinner. Don't miss out on a memorable evening with your church family. Sign-ups at church or you can let Gail McGinnis know (gsmcginnis@roadrunner.com).



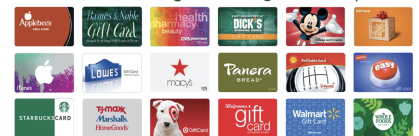
Thanks to those that purchased greenery this year. We appreciate you supporting our fundraiser.

*Place your orders now for your
Christmas gift giving!*

Kathy Rogers, our Scrip Coordinator, will be taking orders this week for Christmas gift cards. She will be in the narthex on Sunday after the worship service, or you can contact her by email (kathleen.rgrs@gmail.com) or by phone (818.399.5064). Orders need to be received by Saturday, December 2nd. The cards will be delivered to you at church on Sunday, December 10th. You can pay for the cards by check, cash, or electronically through your bank using Zelle® (New Hope Account is: laurie@newhopeagoura.com)

Scrip

Fundraising while you shop!



SAFETY AND SECURITY MINISTRY

On behalf of the Safety and Security Ministry, we want to thank you for your support and positive responses and feedback to the initiatives we have identified and implemented this year to help keep all who visit our church safe.

We have made progress this year with some initiatives.....

- CPR/AED training conducted
- Exit or No Exits signs posted in case of emergency
- Flashlights purchased for use during a power loss
- Dead trees cut down to reduce fire hazards
- Emergency supplies ordered to sustain 100 people for 3 days with food and water in the event of the need to shelter in place.
- Three first aid kits purchased
- Earthquake preparedness information disseminated
- Door at the entrance of church locked during services with a Door Monitor assigned
- Tablets connected to the cameras at the entrances to the church for monitoring during the service (this is also so we can admit latecomers)
- Parking lot safety driving pattern instituted
- Scheduled Mark Hollinger to conduct Church Security and Awareness Training February 25, 2024

And look forward to more in the coming year.....

- Parking lot lighting
- Fire alarms
- Key audit
- Cyber security
- Safety railing for altar steps
- And more



Also a big, big thanks to all on the Safety and Security Ministry who have worked many hours on these initiatives throughout 2023.

If you have comments or suggestions for this Ministry, please let us know. Any of our members would love to hear from you.

Blessings for a wonderful and safe holiday season from your Safety and Security Ministry,

Pastor Steve, Karen Ingram, Joe Bulock, Wayne Rickert, Calvin Beeker, Lorie Paulson, Jim Olmstead, and Gaye Khan

Harbor House Meal Program

Hello everyone. Moving into 2024, New Hope will be continuing with our participation in the Harbor House Meal Program, like we have been doing. After the service on Sunday, December 10th and 17th, there will be a sign up sheet in the Narthex with a few areas needing to be filled. I will be heading this program for New Hope and am learning also as I go along. Feel free to call or text me for more information. At this point, we will be needed to supply pot pies only one day a month. Thank you!

Karen Reed (805) 405-0518
kreed0753@gmail.com



We need a volunteer to serve as the liaison between the support groups that meet at New Hope and the church office. This person will process the monthly contributions from the groups, coordinate the meeting schedules, inform groups when church activities are happening, etc. The tasks will take 3-5 hours per month. Some computer skills are necessary. If interested, please see Laurie. Thank you!



Social Ministry

New Hope again showed your generosity in providing holiday gifts to Harbor House families in the Conejo Valley and the children of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in

Houston. \$2,300 of \$25 Target Gift Cards were shared with these two organizations. Thank you for making Christmas brighter for these children and families.

Giving Options

There are many different ways one can donate to New Hope. In addition to offerings of cash and checks, one can donate electronically via Zelle, Vanco or PayPal.

One can also donate directly from an IRA to help with a required minimal distribution (RMD)-or donate stocks or funds directly to the church (and avoid capital gains taxes).

Contact the church office if you want more information.

Giving Reminders

It's time to designate any remaining Choice Dollars earned in 2023! Please consider New Hope when you designate.

Please remember to modify your scheduled electronic donations if you have changed your pledges. Contact the church office if you need to modify donations via Vanco or PayPal.



Men's Bible Study and Fellowship

Thursdays at 8:30 AM

Our men's group uses Rev. Andy Stanley's sermons to focus our discussion. We frequently stop the video to discuss our reactions and applications to our faith journey. We are always marveling at how helpful

they are in developing spiritual growth. Recent series included such compelling topics as: *Your Integrity: Our World, Not in It to Win It, and Heaven: Who Goes There?* Join us when you can. Attend in person in the church library or join us on Zoom.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

Come by the Amplify Room (behind the kitchen) to our next gathering on Sunday, December 3rd at 9:15 AM and see what we're about. We knit, crochet, or loom shawls for those who may be in need of comfort, support or to recognize a celebration or a blessing.



You are invited to be a part of our 50th Anniversary Timeline!

We would like to include your household on our 50th Anniversary Timeline posted on the bulletin board in the main hallway. Flowers, butterflies and sun bursts are located in the white basket on the bulletin board ledge.

Please choose one, add your household name and the year you first came to New Hope, then pin it closest to date you started attending New Hope.

"SERVICE FOR THE WEARY"

"For those who have experienced loss, the joy of the holiday season can often feel elusive and out of reach. As a result churches around the world have adopted the practice of having a "Blue Christmas" or a "Longest Night" service during the Advent season. These services are designed to provide space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the twinkle lights and holiday hustle and bustle. Instead of advertising this as a "Blue Christmas" or "Longest Night Service," we are calling this a "Service for the Weary," inspired by our Advent theme, "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?" Our service will be on Sunday, December 17th at 4 PM. Because of the nature of this service, it will not be livestreamed.



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December 24th
Christmas Eve Services
at New Hope
10:00 AM - Traditional Service
5:30 PM - Candlelight and Family Service



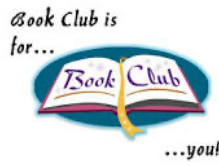
Drop your quarters in the
laundry love jar!

Join New Hope Church in
helping low-income
neighbors in our community
have clean laundry.



Please place any of these "top priority items of the month" in our Manna Box in the hallway:

1. Personal Care Items: shampoos, conditioner, soap, toothbrush & paste
2. Diapers— all sizes
3. Paper Products: toilet paper, paper towels, tissue
4. Shelf-stable Drinks: juices, oat, almond, soda



December Birthdays

- 5 Vi Kemmerer
- 6 Shannon Mader
- 11 Mimi Beals
- 14 Laurie Scott
- 20 Suzanne Sahlie
- Gail McGinnis
- 25 Holly Dolliver
- 26 Jerry Orefice
- 29 Jeffrey Rausch
- 30 Sonja Speer

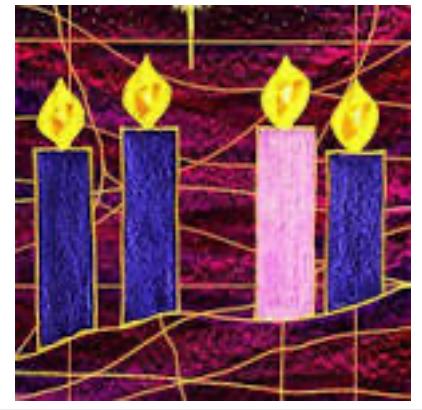


The daytime Book Club will meet at 11:30 AM on Zoom and/or in person on Tuesday, December 5th to discuss "West With Giraffes" by Lynda Rutledge. Please join us if you can. The future books we are....

February 6th - "Black Cake - a novel" by Charmaine Wilkerson

March 5th - "Lessons in Chemistry" by Bonnie Garmus

The deadline for all articles for the January newsletter is December 26th. Be sure to email them to gsmcginnis@roadrunner.com



"The only things that we can truly give to each other are the only things that we truly need - an ear to listen, a heart to care, a word of encouragement and a hand to help."

-- Jimmy Carter

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