

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of our Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.

Thank you for coming! We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

It gives me great joy to tell you that  
First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is  
a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;  
Southern California Nevada Conference of the  
United Church of Christ (UCC).

Our service will be in voice and text.  
Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have your voice and media  
turned on.

If you don't know how to do that, let someone know and we'll try to help.  
There will be a link in Nearby Chat so you can watch it in your browser if the  
viewer isn't working for you.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder  
in the back along with a donation bowl.

And as a real UCC church, we'd like you to know that  
"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,  
You are welcome here.

One of the blessings and responsibilities that come with  
our being a real church with real standing is that we, like all UCC churches,  
support the work of the national church not only with prayer  
but financially.

So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry.  
If you prefer, donations can be made on our website, [firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org).

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.  
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

Today friends is the first Sunday after Christmas Day.  
Our candle in the middle is lit today as we did not hold a service on Christmas Day.

But each of us in our perspectives homes and lives celebrated the light come into  
the world.

And so we rejoice that the candle of the nativity is before us.  
A reminder of the great joy that came to us.  
God who among us was born.

Would you pray with me?  
Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence, your servant and your

people in awe of your wonders and in wait of the blessings that are to come.  
God of life and light thank you for coming to us and touching heaven and earth with  
your splendor.

In every corner of the world, shine with your peace.  
in every corner of our hearts, shine with your grace.  
Amen.

If you have any announcements in the life of the church please feel free to share  
with us as our gathering music plays.

I will like to share with you that I will be helping lead our social media accounts.

I'm looking forward to sharing with the world our services, nuggets of wisdom from  
our morning meditations, and Psalters.  
If you have a social media account and would like to connect with us please look for  
us online under the hastag - @firstUCCsecondlife  
<https://www.facebook.com/firstUCCsecondlife/>

You can also find me on all social media under the handle: @cre8tivepastor

We are hoping this year friends to take our digital nugget of hope, a safe and brave  
space out there for others to see.

#### GATHERING MUSIC

Cochren & Co. - One Day (Official Lyric Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=So94m-Lp6Pw>

#### SCRIPTURES

Today's scriptures come from Paul's First letter to the Corinthians 12:4-11 (The  
Message)

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God's  
spirit.  
God's various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God's  
Spirit.

God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself  
(themselves) is behind it all.  
Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it,  
everyone benefits.  
All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!

The variety is wonderful:  
Wise counsel,  
Clear understanding,  
Simple trust,  
Healing the sick,  
Miraculous acts,

Proclamation,  
Distinguishing between spirits,  
Tongues, interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin but are handed out one by one by the one Spirit of God. God decides who gets what and when.

The word of God for the People of God,  
Thanks be To God

SERMON – The gift of wisdom

We are two days away from the new 2025 year.  
That means new possibilities and great things ahead!

Throughout our Advent journey, we have explored the themes of joy, hope, peace, and love, all of which are woven into the fabric of our lives.  
Church these themes are not just a church thing, let me share with you, how capitalism can cash in on these themes.

See, many industries from fitness, wellness, and food catering services know they can create revenue on hope, change, peace and joy.  
A shared hope to change for the better and start again.  
Change created first within and then shared with the world.

The peace that comes with better sleep, better help a better life.  
The joy that comes with new gadgets, fun things.

But joy my friends as we know is not really happiness.  
For joy transcends where we are at the moment with or without money, or new gadgets.  
A joy that surpasses understanding because it is not grounded on what we have or want but what is inside us.

However, we do live in a capitalist world.  
So as I drive around town, my eyes wander up and catch glimpses of food prep kits, Yoga classes and mindfulness spas designed to better my life in the year to come.  
In Social media I see promotions to apps, software, digital things that are calling me to transform my life with their help!

There are also enticing deals on gym memberships brimming with activities and fresh options for healthier eating habits and the latest trend community!

Now I see ads, and micro commercials that invite one to work out in a community and build lasting friendships. So why not get a Peloton and a subscription to go with it?!

Come build lasting friendships or bring the whole family and sign up for the family package deal.

One ad that caught my attention in my email actually said:

“ P.S they don’t have to be your real family.” Clever!

See all these things present strategies for enhancing my sleep quality, thanks to sales on superior mattresses just in time for the new year.

The opportunities are plentiful, and with the countdown to a new year underway, the prospect of leveling up in 2025 is incredibly exciting!

How are you doing?

Have you seen these ads?

Have you been tempted with these new ideas to level up this 2025?

The most entertaining meme I've come across features a Chihuahua dog on the phone, with a caption that reads "Making sure I'm signed up for highly blessed and favored packaged and not the trials and tribulations package I received last year."

I absolutely love this, and I wanted to ask, what is that number so I can also verify I didn't get last year's package!

Change and transformation ultimately hinge on individual choice, regardless of the humor and enticing offers that surround us.

The various apps and deals available serve merely as enhancements or tools to help us reach our goals.

However, without a genuine commitment to change—whether that means adopting a new routine, engaging in workouts, or exploring new opportunities—these resources and tools will remain ineffective.

We can accumulate knowledge through self-care books and ideas, but until we make the conscious decision to act, all that information will simply remain as suggestions rather than catalysts for real growth.

In today's reading, the Apostle Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians, encouraging them to recognize their collective efforts as a community enriched by unique gifts.

He emphasizes that everyone possesses something valuable to contribute, and the Holy-One is aware of these gifts and their timing for the benefit of all.

Every talent bestowed upon us originates from the Holy-One, shaping our actions and existence.

When utilized thoughtfully, these divine gifts hold immense power.

Just like the people in Corinth from many centuries ago we are all human beings learning to live in community, work in community and belong to one another, no subscription necessary.

We are all connected, regardless of our diverse backgrounds, religions, or origins. As children of God, we are called to both give and receive love.

The Apostle Paul illustrates this connection through the analogy of the human body, reminding us of our interdependence.

Each of our bodies have different functions, and different ways to co-exist.

The church in Corinth aspired to be spiritual and grounded in righteousness, yet they often overlooked the fact that those around them carry gifts to support one

another in ministry, and in life as a community.

In particular I want to highlight that God's design for our bodies serves as a blueprint for our collective life as a church, where every part relies on the others.

When one part is in distress, the entire body shares in that struggle and healing, and when one part thrives, we all celebrate together. That should be how we function as a community that when one member of the community suffers, we all feel the pain.

In our world today we see and hear how church people often pass judgments based on appearances.

Perhaps the way someone looks, talks, or acts leaves little to desire or acknowledge that powerful gift from adobe resides within.

This tendency to label can lead to exclusion, as people may feel dismissed for being too old, small, tall, uneducated, uncivilized, unhappy, or even boring.

Some might think they are too introverted or too extroverted, further complicating their sense of belonging.

But friends true wisdom lies in nurturing our relationships within the community, recognizing the sacredness in everyone we meet.

Imagine the trans-formative power our nation would have if we all approached one another with unwavering respect and dignity, regardless of who we love and what our gender identity and gender expression are.

When I am asked to share what it means to be a Pastor at First UCC in 2nd Life, I often say that I absolutely love the way we care for each other, for practicing blind grace.

Blind grace, because regardless of our avatars and how we present ourselves, we are divine, sacred and held in the highest esteem, because each avatar is directed by a person made in the imago dei (The image of God.)

Deep spirituality friends invite us to reveal the closeness of our relationship with God and Jesus in our lives and how we treat each other.

There are many times where we do not know what others are experiencing in their lives.

I invite you to acknowledge the parenthood of God and the kinship of all those around us.

Because church it is in that wisdom that comes from pain and suffering where we learn empathy.

Let the painful moments of our lives not desensitize how we see and experience the pain of others, but rather connect us on a deeper level.

They say that when one gets older that one gets wiser.

But I have met some mean old people who have grown angry, bitter, and alone. Often the alone part is the cycle of the other two, angry and bitter.

My friend who is an end-of-life chaplain tells me stories of people who are the kindest people and some who till the end are mean.

My friend told me but regardless of their behavior remember that perhaps it is a shell of self-preservation, or protection.

We as people of God pray for them, stand out of harm's way but show love through our actions not by arguing or frustrating them further.

Oh this lesson came alive in my life this past few weeks.

See in Real life I work for a company that offers digital skills to those in marginalized communities.

One of the classes I just concluded had this elderly lady on a motorized wheelchair.

She often tried to run me over when I would open the door for her.

Sometimes when walking around the class trying to teach.

But yours truly was fast. I often will call her out in a loving and joking way, "Mrs...are you trying to run me over or give me a ride?"

Church, what I did not know was that she was upset because she felt that the gift cards given to others at our end of class raffle was rigged and unfair.

I did not know this but the Spirit nudged me and she finally "won".

At the end of the five weeks of meeting once a week she came to me and said, "I'm sorry I was mean to you and I'm glad you did not quit."

But she said, "Yadi, I should have just asked for help but the truth is I really needed this Walmart gift card to buy groceries."

This year, may you experience the manifestation of spiritual wisdom and the gifts of the spirit in your life.

It is essential we don't jump quickly to condemn someone but rather pray and hold it in your heart that no harm comes to you.

In the coming year and today, may you hold the image of Jesus Christ in your heart, mind, and spirit, allowing it to guide your life throughout all seasons.

Spiritual wisdom seeks a deeper spiritual foundation that enriches your life, guided not just by the passage of time (Chronos) but by the profound lessons the Spirit of the living God imparts to you.

"Chronos" is not only time that wakes you up and keeps you moving in space, but may remind you to keep your heart in sync with the one above.

Friends look at your gifts and see how they connect with your spirituality and the wisdom from above

•  
And may this New Year bring you awareness.  
Awareness of what triggers your anger, frustration, anxiety and depression.  
Make a note of it.  
Allow yourself to feel your feelings whatever they might be and see when they often

show up. Make a note of it.

Slow down your breathing when you feel overwhelmed and visualize images that bring you peace. Make a note of it.

If you have a doctor, spiritual guide, counselor, or a supportive friend, take the time to explore your feelings before they become overwhelming.

This year friends, I invite you to recognize God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of our faith and one that holds us even when we are broken into many pieces.

Church I invite you this year to be conscious of the environments around you and ask yourself if they bring joy to your lives?

I challenge you to name what you faced this year, and left you feeling drained? Take a moment to reflect on it, (no need to share).

But in those challenging times, I invite you to wonder if God was in the midst of it? Could you feel in some way being cared for from above?

Was there anything that brought a brief moment of joy?

Life can be tough, and for many, this year has brought loss or significant struggles.

Some of us may still be navigating through tough times.

Yet, I hold onto hope for you and our community, wishing for us to embrace joy, peace, and love.

Just like desert flowers that store water to endure harsh conditions, may we find the strength to thrive despite our circumstances and cultivate a deep thirst for wisdom and spirituality.

A wisdom that thirst for spirituality.

The blend of resilience and hope enables us to not only endure our challenges but also to progress toward a life of abundance and fulfillment.

This deep yearning for justice and divine insight leads us to Jesus, who offers us the refreshing waters we seek in the vast landscapes of our existence.

Spiritual wisdom, particularly, directs us to Christ, who invites all who are thirsty to come to Him, as stated in John 7:37.

Our actions reflect our wisdom, and the distinct talents we hold are intended to support each other.

This profound insight inspires us to seek completeness and to make significant progress.

It is this synergy that enables us, amid challenges, not merely to endure but to advance toward a life of abundance and fulfillment.

The spiritual wisdom from above us calls us into wholeness and into action.

Jonathan Jackson Jr, in In Search of Wisdom, says, "A spirituality of wisdom deals with the infiniteness of God and God's creation, which encompasses all that is, all that lies beyond what is observable and verifiable, yet brings everything together."

Through the lens of spiritual wisdom, we can see the whole picture.  
For those with the gift of clarity who can see the bigger picture may you be the light to those of us who might not see it.

But even if we can't see things clearly at times may we know we can still hold on to hope.

In the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, take a moment to pause and listen to the quiet voice urging you to persevere and hold on to joy.

This year, let's be mindful of how we engage in both digital spaces and real life, fostering kindness towards ourselves and each other.

May spiritual insight enrich your life and guide you back to the importance of self-care and caring for others.  
If you choose to explore an app or software to improve your life, I would be thrilled to learn about your journey!

Feel free to drop me a note card.  
As a digital enthusiast, I'm eager to hear your insights.

It could turn out to be a valuable resource for me or something I can pass along to others.

May the upcoming New Year serve as a fresh beginning, a continuation of blessings, and be filled with Peace, Joy, Hope, and Love.

May it be so,  
Amen  
PRAYER PREPARATION:

We have come to the time where we come together in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gift of this day  
and pray for the life of the world.

If you have a prayer of joy or concern that you wish to lift to God, and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, we invite you to share.

As this song plays, in the silence of our hearts or type your request in the nearby chat.

Katy Nichole - "When I Fall" (Official Music Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EH87xXauLoI&list=RDkKBQrWWX570&index=4>

COMMUNITY PRAYER



If there was a prayer inside of you that you couldn't quite get out, it's ok.

Because the Psalmist tells us that God knows what we are going to say before the words can even form on our tongues.

And so we know.

We know that God has heard our prayers.

Those spoken out loud, those typed into SL chat, and those spoken only in the silence of our hearts.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

God with us, We are in awe of you made child—small and needy and held.

We are grateful to belong to a God who dares approach us with trust and tenderness.

As we honor your birth, may the hope that has waned throughout the year be renewed; that we would know the world is more than death and decay.

May we imagine the divine not just in the stories of your teaching and sacrifice, but also in the vulnerability of the divine child. Help us to weep.

Remind us to never punish ourselves for asking for help.

Restore our trust, that just as a baby believes they will be carried, that they can cry and be fed, we would believe and find those whom we can trust.

God, make us small, that we would be held in you once again. Amen.

Breathe INHALE: God was born.

EXHALE: I can rest in the beauty. Closing Glory to the one who comes in flesh for all flesh.

Amen.

Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human, Riley Cole

Amen.

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over

our ministry to the world is just beginning.

The world is waiting.

Go in peace, come again in hope.

Amen.

#### MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Lets get some praise on with Bishop Yvette Flunder of the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries

Yvette Flunder (Orginal Vocalist) "Thank You Lord" By Walter Hawkins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4h5WNkAIb6M>