

Council Report

January 2023

Pastor Tim Delkeskamp

Grace and peace to you. I am grateful for the rain which falls outside my office window as I write these words to you. I am also grateful for this opportunity to pause and reflect on this last month of ministry and project into the future. God has been faithful in these tumultuous times, and I am content to report that we are moving forward with hope for growth in this new year.

December was quite a month. We had a wonderfully successful Snow Play/Hanging of the Green event that proved our first year was not a fluke. While we had some fears about the timing of the event itself and getting people to come out amid the various viruses that were wreaking havoc, people showed up. Children of all ages enjoyed the snow and adults came for the fellowship and of course... the lefsa. It was also part of the plan to try and lead folks over to the sanctuary and encourage them to stay for the 5pm singing of the carols. We simplified the HOG program for this same purpose. In the end, thanks to our efforts and some well-timed rain, people stayed. We pray that, in the future, school families will simply make this a part of their Christmas tradition each year.

We also had a wonderful One Ascension staff luncheon on December 16th. In the past, we ended the school day at noon, but we extended it 2 hours for the staff so that we could gather, pray, sing, and eat together. This connected us together again after our one Ascension staff day in September. We plan to continue these types of events throughout the year. The spirit of One Ascension is stronger among the staff than it has ever been.

Covid/Flu/RSV did its nasty work on our office staff in December. Several key employees, including me, had to take days off to recover and not spread these viruses through the staff. Some days in our busiest month of the year, it was surreal to have a minimum amount of people in the office. I am grateful for the extra work that those who managed to remain healthy did. I am proud of the way we adjusted and prioritized the work. I am also grateful for volunteers like my wife Chamie (who preached on a moment's notice) who were able to step in and cover some of the work at the last minute.

Our weekly Taizé services seem to be appreciated at least by a small group of people. We averaged about 35 people in attendance on each Wednesday. Thanks to Pastor Paul to whom we gave a small stipend to lead each service.

Finally, Christmas Eve services went well. Although numbers are down from pre-Covid years, I am grateful that we still did 5 services. Each service had at least 100 people in attendance and our total was just over 1000 people that night. I am not sure if the attendance would be the same if we had fewer services. And I am not sure how to answer that question other than actually creating a new schedule.

As we move forward into a new calendar year, we continue to work on our goal of revitalizing worship. I am grateful for the work of Mara Hassenbein in her relatively new role of worship coordinator. She has proactively covered many of the details of worship and helped increase volunteers. We are also in the process of finding a new worship leader for our 11am service. Please pray that God sends us the right person and that together we can revitalize our 11am worship service. I believe this could be a wonderful source of growth for our congregation.

As we move toward Lent, I am excited to develop an activity calendar that we will be doing together as a congregation. Typically, we read a book together but this year it is time for a bit of a sabbatical of sorts. Instead of reading I would like to share experiences. Hopefully, this will produce some stories that we can tell together. I am praying that as we begin to create a vision for involving more of our members in service activities, our Lenten activities may help catalyze the conversation.

In His service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Tim". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Church Council Report – Pastor Steve Herder – Jan. 6, 2023

Did Advent and Christmas seem to go very quickly for you too? We flew through both the Advent and Christmas seasons, and today, January 6th, we celebrate Epiphany, Jesus is the Light of the World! I greatly appreciated the worship that I could be a part of this past month. Pastor Paul's Taize services. Pastor Julie's Christmas Eve family service. Pastor Tim and Paul Trent's powerful sermon for Christmas Eve evening, with great help from the skills of Mark Foreman in making those three videos of Paul so realistically playing the role of Joseph. I was able to help lead worship at the Christmas Eve 3:00, 7:00 and 11:00 services. Also, one Saturday evening I filled in as the preacher.

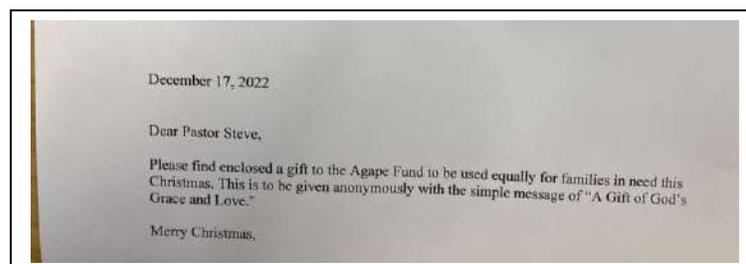
Thank you, Church Council and congregation, for the Christmas gifts to the pastors. We feel your love, support, and prayers, and you have our love and prayers as well.

Both your church staff and whole school staff had a Christmas party on Dec. 16th as we sang Christmas carols together in the sanctuary and then shared a meal together in Founders Hall. Thanks to our leadership team – Kaylee, Jenni, Rich, Pastors Julie and Tim – who worked so hard to make this event a good one. That evening our school had their Christmas Program and that was an outstanding, Christ-centered, program, for a packed sanctuary of family and friends.

Our Early Childhood Center children and teachers gave our church staff some Christmas gifts. These photos show what the "Butterflies" class gave to me.



The generosity of the congregation through our Agape Fund and through Caring Ones is astounding! The last day of the year, as people were worried about rent being due and bills to pay, we were able to help seven families in significant ways.



A favorite ministry for me each December, and for several you, is to go Christmas caroling to some of our seniors in Thousand Oaks. (I wish we could also go caroling to our seniors in all the surrounding cities as well.) And at each of our Christian Life Hours at senior living places we sang carols as well this past month. Thanks, Norm and team!



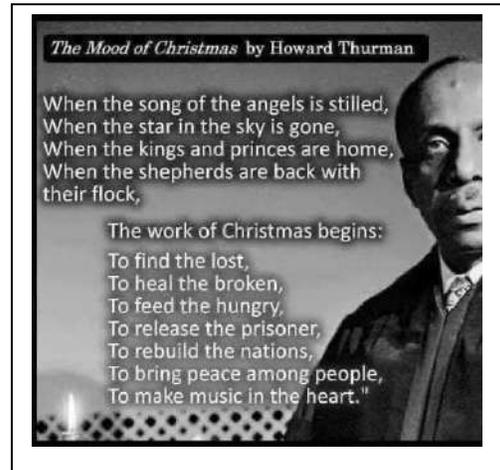
Our Church Council at the December meeting approved a gift from our Thrivent Choice dollars to be used for Bibles and devotionals to be given to people who come to our Friday Food Pantry. We'll purchase Bibles in Spanish and in English. I'll work with Chris Clark and our Community Concerns Team on this.

On December 23rd we had the joy of celebrating the baptism of Norman [Kusnierek] Combs! A very happy day for the family and for the Body of Christ!

On December 28th I led the graveside service for Carlene Schulz in Westlake. This month I spent a good amount of time visiting with our friends who are grieving. Ed Horton's memorial will be Jan. 28 at 11. Pastor Tim will lead the service for Homer Caston.



Each day I do two to six posts on Ascension's Facebook page. Here are some stats from the past month, along with a popular post that people use after Christmas, a quote from Howard Thurman.

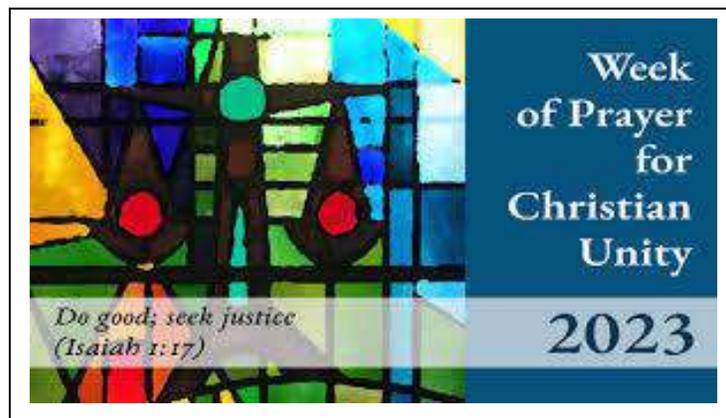


This month I took the notes for our Global Ministries Team meeting and those pages are included in this Council packet, so I won't add any more here.

December 31st was my last day for my service on the Jubilee USA Network board of directors, having served both as secretary, and co-chair the last three years. It has been a joy and a privilege to witness this great ministry in action for the sake of the world. www.jubileeusa.org If you would like to be part of a zoom meeting for Jubilee Southern California, Thursday, January 12th, at noon, let me know and I'll send you the link to the meeting.

Every year the week of January 18-25 is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Since that was Jesus' prayer on Maundy Thursday (see all of John 17), it certainly is our prayer as well. If you'd like to be on our email prayer list, email Linda Morrow.

Seniors, mark your calendars! On Wednesday, Feb. 1st, The Reserve in Thousand Oaks is proving a lunch for all of us in Founders Hall at noon! It will be kind of like a Lunch Bunch Reunion! Simply call the church office by Jan. 27 to reserve a place for you!



Pastor Julie Council Report Jan 2023

Christmas Eve worship was a joy. We had about 180 people at the 3 and the same at the 5 pm, and there were lots of kids at both, as well as at the 7 pm. Our total of 1006, was about a 25% growth from last year's numbers, and every service grew by about that percentage. While these numbers aren't at pre-pandemic levels, I still think we should celebrate them! At the 3 and 5 pm services, I had an interactive storytelling piece to make the service child-friendly, and also had an entire page of stickers for kids to use to decorate a nativity. That handout at the children's message also included dates for this year's VBS, which is much earlier than we have ever advertised dates previously, and I hope will help us increase numbers.

Dianne Beck and I are working closely on engaging the youth in worship, and this will be a goal that the two of us will be working closely on in the coming months. To that end, on Sunday night, we had a conversation with the youth asking questions like: what do you love/not like/wish you had more of at our church? In youth group? In worship? We will meet again shortly, and what I want to do is have 4 targeted things we are going to try this winter/spring. One that we tried in the fall that worked well is having a breakfast for the youth between services. That had phenomenal results and brought 16 youth to church that day. So, clearly, we need to have more breakfasts, but we are also working on what we might do to get the youth who attend that one Sunday coming back the next week. This is just one piece of the conversation we are having, but our conversation with the youth was generative and we are excited trying some new things.

I am working with the school on connected VBS and the school's Staycation, so that kids could stay for the entire day. While this is something that used to happen, it hasn't in several years, and we also have some opportunities change the way things have been done, to be more collaborative and restructure in ways that will help both school and church. I also have a team of people that want help me direct VBS this year. While last year, with the departure of the Children's Ministry Director in the midst of our planning, we were more doing triage (that people still experienced as excellent), this year we have the opportunity to be more strategic and make VBS an even more excellent experience.

The principal and I hosted our second coffee outside the ECC. We'll continue doing it because it is an easy win. We have coffee available outside the ECC for people to grab and go at drop-off, or for them to grab as they stick around for a conversation. In particular, the combination of principal and pastor is gold because many who are not interested in one of us are interested in the other, and it affords the other one an introduction that wouldn't otherwise be available. It also shows parents that we care enough to stand outside in the cold to get them coffee.

I also continue to fill in for the Spanish teacher at the school occasionally, to teach religion to Tk-4 once a month, to be at lunch with the students a couple times a week, and at the ECC usually once a week

We are building the One Ascension bridges. My sense is that in many areas we have good energy. This is the result of lots of hard work; I am also convinced that energy is often evidence of God's Spirit moving and at work, and that is also something to celebrate.