

BEHOLD! SMYRNA

February 2026



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Dear Smyrna Folks,

Recently someone recommended “The Book of Awakening: Having the Life You Want By Being Present in the Life You Have” by Mark Nepo. Even though my writing is often included in them, I admit that I am sometimes cynical about daily devotional books. I think that too often they are either over sentimental or just don’t seem relevant to my situation. This one, however, reveals something beautiful and worth pondering almost every day.

The day I’m writing this, Nepo quotes Jacques Lusseyran, a blind young man who describes how he learned to navigate near objects, even without sight. “It’s more than seeing them, it is tuning in to them and allowing the current they hold to connect with one’s own, like electricity. To put it differently, this means an end of living in front of things and a beginning of living with them. Never mind if the word sounds shocking, for this is love.”

What a wonderful reminder as we enter the season of Lent. As we prepare for the 40 days before Easter, we often think of this as a time to give something up. And maybe for some of us, it will be. But the purpose of Lent is to draw closer to God day by day, hour by hour, practice by practice. And as we draw nearer to the Holy, we are invited to come closer to all of the Creator’s creation. What would it mean for this Lent season to come to an end “of living in front of things and a beginning of living with them”?

Nepo follows his story with a suggested practice. What if, instead of giving up chocolate or phone games or whatever else traps us, we instead tried this during Lent? This is the kind of practice that can take a day or lifetime, but just for a day or two, give it a try. What do you notice?

Here’s the practice. Give it a try and tell me what you think:

- Close your eyes and be still until you can sense the presence of the things about you.*
- Breathe softly and feel the current of their silence.*
- Breathe evenly and open your heart to all that you sense.*
- Feel the electricity of Being that informs the world.*

See you in church,
Jennifer

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Memory Café at Smyrna

Memory Café's guest on Feb. 5 will be Peggy from Gleaners of Clackamas County who will give us insight into this unique way of meeting food insecurity in our region. Their website describes their history and work like this:



In 1978, the Oregon Legislature encouraged commercial growers to participate in gleaning programs by passing a state tax credit for contributions made. This law continues to this day.

That same year, a handful of Clackamas residents formed a group and began picking fields and distributing food along the highway system. In 1981, they became an official organization, what is now Gleaners of Clackamas County, Inc., and occupied a rented facility to manage the abundance of food and the growing number of Members. Then, in 1992 property was required, and a fund was established to build the current warehouse at the top of the hill in Oregon City.

We remain an all-volunteer cooperative run by and serving limited income Members and our Adoptees. Though we continue to glean the fields, gleaning has evolved to include grocers, food manufacturers, and other distributors, partially used chemicals from transfer stations, and clothing from the public's surplus.



Join our creative group as Christine Foster leads the February Art project. The theme will be hearts and hands. Come prepared to design and make different kinds of Valentines.

Smyrna's Annual Chili Cook-Off

February 8, 2026, is the date for our next Chili Cook Off to be held following our church service at Smyrna. The sign-up sheet is in the Narthex and awaiting for your team to sign up. We hope to have a few teams entering the contest.



Chili Cook-Off

People can taste test the chili and then vote for their best team by placing money in a jar or receptacle at each chili station. The team with the most money wins the cook off. So come prepared to taste and place your vote.

Ash Wednesday —
February 18, 6-7 pm

Ash Wednesday is the day we step into Lent and receive ashes on our foreheads, as a sign of repentance (or returning to God) and as a symbol of mortality. This



year, we will have the sanctuary open from 6-7 pm for a self-guided Ash Wednesday experience. There will be different stations to light candles, to write what **we'd like to "set down" for Lent, to create with clay, to pray with scripture, and I will be available to place ashes on your forehead or hand.**

We will begin and end our time with music, but feel free to come by any time during the hour, as each person will move through the stations at their own pace. This is a very special and powerful time to connect with our community and the Divine. I look forward to seeing you there!

—Pastor Jennifer

Oak Savanna update

"In 2018 Smyrna received a grant from the Clackamas Soil and Water District to finance the planting of a small oak savanna. In March of 2019 we planted 80 white oak trees and 10 red cedar trees on the vacant lot north and west of the graveled parking area. With the long term goal of creating wildlife habitat and other future uses like a shaded picnic area or a walking trail.

Last summer, Peace Camp participants surveyed the young trees. They found that 14 oaks and 9 cedars had died. Most of the cedars did not survive their first 2 years, and likely died from drought and heat stress. However, the oaks had been surviving until last winter when voles started girdling them. This winter we cleared weeds and grass from around the trees and installed guards at the base of each tree, this should make the trees less attractive to the voles. Also, Carl built a barn owl box, which has been erected on a pole. If we are able to attract an owl pair, they will help keep the vole population in balance.



The trustees are thinking about the next steps and would like anyone interested to join the discussion. Should we replant the empty spaces to oak? Or should we try something different in some spaces? We are aware of a new invasive beetle, the Mediterranean oak borer, that could affect both the new planting as well as the old oaks around the Church and cemetery. If you have some ideas or would like to join the conversation, contact Paul Y., Carl, or Mary. We will meet after Church during coffee hour at least once during February. If we plant any trees this year, we will want to do it late winter or early spring."



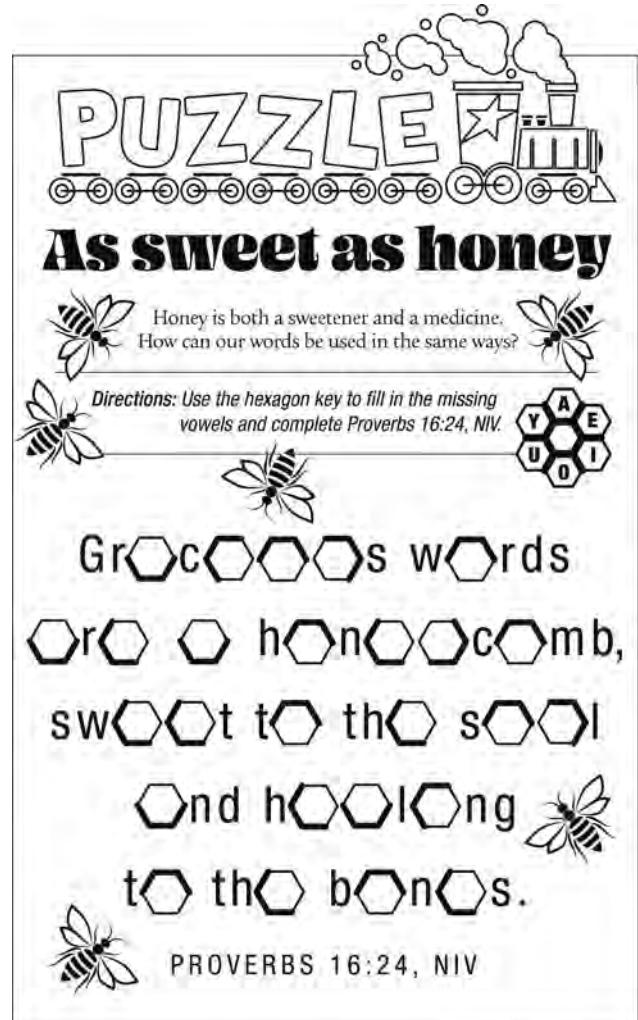
One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. It connects you to disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe.

When disasters strike, or when individuals are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Smyrna will collect a One Great Hour of Sharing offering on March 1, 2026.

LONELY? Medical issues? Need Help?

Please visit the Smyrna Resource page. **On Smyrna's** website, www.smyrnaucc.org, just click the Resource tab



Answers: Gratious words are a honeycomb; sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Proverbs 16:24, NIV

Meet our new musician, Susan Johnson

Music has been a constant thread in my life for as long as I can remember. I began serving as a church pianist at the age of 13 in my hometown of Pensacola, Florida, where I first discovered the sacred power of music to shape worship and community. Under the guidance of my longtime teacher, John Morrison, I studied piano throughout my teenage years, eventually pursuing a degree in piano performance for two years before realizing that my calling **wasn't in performance or teaching**—it was in accompaniment, collaboration, and the quiet ministry of music in sacred spaces.



Though my early musical roots were planted in the Southern Baptist tradition, my adult journey has led me through a rich tapestry of ecumenical congregations. I've had the privilege of accompanying communities that span denominations, styles, and liturgical expressions, and I've come to cherish the way music can bridge theological differences and invite us into shared wonder.

In 2021, I completed a Master of Divinity, which deepened my understanding of worship, theology, and the role of music in the life of the church. For me, church music isn't about performance—it's about presence. It's about creating space for wonder, lament, joy, and silence, and letting music carry what words alone can't hold. I've directed choirs since my mid-20s, and I've always been drawn to the art of blending voices—listening for the moments when individual lines become something more than the sum of their parts. I love introducing singers to music that's fresh, unexpected, or quietly profound—pieces that stretch us just enough to stay curious and connected. As we begin the tender work of rebuilding the choir after years of pandemic quiet, I'm honored to walk with this community—listening, learning, and lifting our voices together in hope.

Smyrna feels like home to me, and I'm grateful to be part of its music and ministry. I'm excited to see what we'll discover together—one rehearsal, one Sunday, one song at a time. Bring your voice, your questions, your coffee—we've got music to make.

Blessings,
Susan Johnson

Karyl, The Dollmaker

Dolls have been my “thing” since birth. My mother wrote in my baby book about how I loved to bat at a dancing doll made of beads that hung above my bassinette. I remember having soft dolls and rubber baby dolls and a good size collection of *Nancy Ann Storybook dolls*. Their costumes were wonderful but it troubled me that all their faces were identical.



When the *Raggedy Ann Stories* came into my life (my earliest one is inscribed Happy Birthday 1944) I immediately started campaigning for my Grandmother to make me a Raggedy Ann. My birthday falls 4 months before Christmas and of course the doll was **supposed to be a surprise. But I knew where the “work in progress” was kept and at every visit I would check on it.** Probably, being the young perfectionist that I was, I told Grandma where she might make improvements. But in the end she did manage to surprise me with Raggedy Andy as well. 80 years later I still have those dolls.



So is it any wonder that dollmaking became my hobby and business. In high school I made Raggedy dolls for babies. When my sons came along I made boy dolls for them. And in 1966-67 I won prizes—a first for Mary Poppins and second for my pioneer family, both of which I sold. When I discovered the International Wizard of Oz Club in the 1970s I started making Oz Dolls and refining my techniques. I have continued until this day.

Karyl Carlson

**No matter who you are,
or where you are on life's
journey, we welcome
you.**



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST
a just world for all



- Paul and Mary Ashton
- Barack Holt and Family
- Anne Stronko and Roger Marin
- The Crispin Family
- Murlene Liechty
- John Farrell (Janet Bess' brother)
- Christine Albright
- Winter Pebley
- Jeannie Rogers' brothers, Steven and John

If you know anyone who should be on the prayer list in the Behold, please let Jeannie or Elaine know. If they would enjoy receiving cards notify someone in the Diaconate.

Mission Statement

Smyrna United Church of Christ is striving to be:

- ♦ A place of peace, where we offer to all an extravagant welcome wherever you are in your life journey regardless of your ethnicity, marital status, religion, gender, race, age, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation, and where we teach the stories of God's love and call on our lives.
- ♦ A spiritual haven, where we accept and care for all people and God's creation in an outreach of grace.
- ♦ A lighthouse of God's compassion, where worship, teaching, learning and spiritual growth take place in community, powered by thought and action.
- ♦ A Christian people, working for God's realm in ecumenical harmony with other people of faith and conviction.

February 2026

Holidays in United States, smyrnaucc.cal@gmail.com

Feb 2026 (Pacific Time - Los Angeles)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 BD: Barbara Menkel 10:30am - Sun. School 10:30am - Worship	2 BD: Aurora S BD: Helen P 7pm - AA/AO Meeting	3 10am - Office hours 11am - Office meeting - Jen 7pm - Diaconate @ zoom	4 BD: Loretta W 12:30pm - Gentle Yoga 2pm - Bible Study @ https:	5 BD: Jean A 10am - Office hours 12pm - Memory Cafe	6 BD: Carl M BD: Lois J BD: Skyler W 6:30pm - Meaning Makers	7
8 SS: Play Day 10:30am - Sun. School 10:30am - Worship 11:30am - Chili Cook Off	9 7pm - AA/AO Meeting	10 BD: Elaine D BD: Sandra M 10am - Office hours 11am - Office meeting - Jen	11 12:30pm - Gentle Yoga 2pm - Bible Study @ https:	12 W.F. Luncheon 10am - Office hours 12pm - W. F. Luncheon	13 BD: Peter H BD: Holly K BD: Virgil F Valentine's Day 10:30am - Art and Soul @	14
15 WA: Dave & Ann C 10:30am - Sun. School 10:30am - Worship	16 BD: Donna Y BD: Joe Y Presidents' Day 7pm - AA/AO Meeting	17 BD: Rye H 10am - Office hours 11am - Office meeting - Jen	18 12:30pm - Gentle Yoga 2pm - Bible Study @ https: 6pm - Ash Wednesday	19 10am - Office hours 7pm - Church Council Meeting	20 BD: Beryl F 6pm - Meaning Makers	21
22 10:30am - Sun. School 10:30am - Worship	23 BD: Eldon B 7pm - AA/AO Meeting	24 10am - Office hours 11am - Office meeting - Jen	25 12:30pm - Gentle Yoga 2pm - Bible Study @ https:	26 W. F. Lucheon 10am - Office hours 12pm - W. F. Lucheon	27 BD: Bill H BD: Jane D	28