



Photo of Zephyr Point in Tahoe

# THE FPC JOURNEY

Walking in Freedom,  
Wholeness, and  
Intimacy



March 2025

[www.ReachingTheValley.org](http://www.ReachingTheValley.org)

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# Welcome

to: The FPC  
Journey.



from left to right Linda and Lorri



Jose and Lyn

**Stay Connected with First Presbyterian Church of Santa Clara - Your Church Family in Santa Clara, CA- with The FPC Journey**

Join us as we share the latest news, events, and inspirational updates in our newsletter. Our newsletter is your go-to source for staying connected with our vibrant community, spiritual growth opportunities, and upcoming programs. Whether you're a long-time member or visiting for the first time, our newsletter aims to keep you informed about everything happening in our church and our local Santa Clara community.

Each month, we will strive to offer insightful devotionals/articles, upcoming event details, volunteer opportunities, and ways to get involved with the church. Stay up to date with our weekly services, youth programs, mission projects, and much more. Be part of the First Presbyterian family and grow in faith, fellowship, and service.

Visit our website at [www.reachingthevalley.org](http://www.reachingthevalley.org) for more details.



Reverend Dennis Woodsmall



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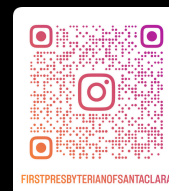
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CHURCH OF SANTA  
CLARA

OR



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# How to Look for a New Church

By: Chrys Sahgal

If you're new to the Santa Clara area and looking for a church to call home, you're in the right place! Santa Clara offers a variety of vibrant churches, each with its unique community and approach to worship. Here are a few steps to help you find the perfect fit:

1. Start with Your Priorities: Before you dive into your search, think about what's most important to you in a church. Are you looking for traditional or contemporary worship? Do you prefer a large congregation or a smaller, more intimate community? Understanding your preferences will help narrow down your options and save you time in your search.

2. Use Local Online Resources: Several online platforms can assist you in your search:

- ChurchFinder([churchfinder.com](http://churchfinder.com)) is a nationwide database that allows you to filter churches by denomination and location, helping you discover, for instance, Presbyterian churches in Santa Clara,



from left to right Deborah, Jose, Lyn, Kathy P, Susan, Jeaneen, Scott, Ghoncheh, Savion

like First Presbyterian Church of Santa Clara. (cont on next page)

- Yelp ([yelp.com](http://yelp.com)) offers local reviews of churches in the area, providing insights from members about their experiences.

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Chrys, Luke, Sandra Sahgal

3. Visit Church Websites & Social Media: Once you've narrowed down a few options, check out their websites or social media pages for more information. You'll find sermon recordings, worship schedules, and even online events that can give you a feel for the church's style and community.

4. Attend a Service: There's no better way to know if a church is the right fit for you and your family than by attending a service. Most churches in Santa Clara, like First Presbyterian Church of Santa Clara offer welcoming environments for newcomers and often provide special events to help you get to know the congregation.

5. Connect with the Community: Take the time to talk with church members or leaders after the service. Here at FPC after every service we gather together in our Social Hall to share some food and refreshments. It is a great time to connect with others and create new and lasting relationships.



Amy, Ida, Amutha, Mario, Christopher, Rosa

Finding the right church is about more than just doctrine; it's about the community. Pay attention to how you feel during your visits—and more importantly the Holy Spirit? Is the worship environment one where you can grow spiritually?

By taking the time to explore and connect with churches in Santa Clara, you'll find a community that feels like home. Happy searching!

## How to Look for a New Church (cont)



Marlene, Abe, Sam, unknown, unknown, Abrianna, Kamalei



# What is Ash Wednesday?

By: Amy Gunaseelan

Christians all around the world are going to church on Wednesday, March 5 for Ash Wednesday, which is the beginning of Lent and symbolizes repentance through ashes that are drawn on the congregation's foreheads.

On Ash Wednesday, there is a very solemn service followed by ashes being drawn on the people's foreheads in a cross design. The Bible intertwines ash and dust with the simplicity of humankind.

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return," Genesis 3:19 says.

However, here at FPC, the ashes don't just magically appear. Christopher Gunaseelan, the elder of Christian Education for Adults, helps out by burning the palm leaves and preparing the ashes.

"We collect the palm leaves from Palm Sunday and we save it," Gunaseelan said. "We have a small fire pit that we can burn it [the palm leaves] in...once it's burnt, I have to sift through it...so only fine ashes get collected."

Afterward, Gunaseelan mixes the ashes with olive oil to get a perfect consistency. Although the preparation of the ashes is important to the holiday, Ash Wednesday is very symbolic and holds a lot of meaning to the Christian community.

The Catholic Spirit writes that "when we come forward to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, we are saying that we are sorry for our sins and that we want to use the season of Lent to correct our faults, purify our hearts, control our desires and grow in holiness so we will be prepared to celebrate Easter with great joy."

(Continued on next page)

The ritual of drawing ashes on foreheads isn't a new, modern tradition- it was commanded by the Lord in the Bible as well!

"And the Lord said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it," Ezekiel 9:4 says.

This renowned Christian holiday holds many meanings, and although it can be deciphered in various ways with different people, its fundamentals are the same.

Christianity.com writes, "The ashes that are worn on the forehead on Ash Wednesday symbolize two main things: death and repentance."

The Bible reinforces Christianity.com's writings as well.

"Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes," Daniel 9:3 says.



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# Miracles in Our Midst:

By: Chrys Sahgal

## Real stories of real people



stock photo via web

Martha, a compassionate caregiver who works with children, was faced with a terrifying moment when one of her students, who suffers from severe seizures, became unresponsive during a classroom episode. "I knew something was wrong," Martha said. "The child could tell the seizure was coming, and told me I see lights." She did everything she had been trained to do, but it wasn't enough. Amid the confusion and urgency, with paramedics on their way and the child unresponsive, Martha found herself in a moment of deep despair.

Feeling overwhelmed, Martha turned to prayer. "I just had to ask Jesus, Please don't take this child from us...". Though the child remained unconscious as he was transported to the hospital, something unusual caught Martha's attention as she stood in the room where the child had been. "I noticed a small statue of Jesus by where the boy had been lying," Martha recalled. "I asked everyone in the room, even the paramedics, but no one knew where it had come from."

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# Miracles in Our Midst:

## Real stories of real people (cont)

In that moment, Martha felt an overwhelming sense of peace, believing the statue was a sign from God. "That was when I knew," she said. "It was God's message to me, showing that He was there with us." Miraculously, the young boy regained consciousness at the hospital and is now recovering. To God we give all the glory!



Actual photo of Jesus statue in story

## Call for Submissions: Share Your Stories with Us!

We'd love to hear from you! The FPC Journey is now accepting story submissions from members of our congregation. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the lives, actions, and experiences of the people around us. However, please note that submissions should focus on stories about others — not about yourself. Think of it as an opportunity to highlight the good deeds, inspiring moments, and heartfelt connections that make our church community so special.

Please submit your stories to Chrys Sahgal : [sahgalchrys@gmail.com](mailto:sahgalchrys@gmail.com) . We can't wait to read your contributions and continue celebrating the amazing people in our congregation!

While we truly appreciate every submission, please understand that not all stories may be included in the newsletter due to space limitations. If your story isn't featured, please know it's not a reflection of its value — we simply strive to include a diverse range of voices and experiences in each issue. Thank you for your understanding and continued contributions!



stock photo via web

Please note that all results are based on web research and do not reflect the views of any individual or organization

# TOP CHRISTIAN MOVIES

## (STREAMING)

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I'm Not Ashamed	Tubi, YouTube
To Save a Life	Tubi, YouTube
Faith, Hope & Love	Tubi
Touched By Grace	Tubi, YouTube
Remember the Goal	Tubi, YouTube



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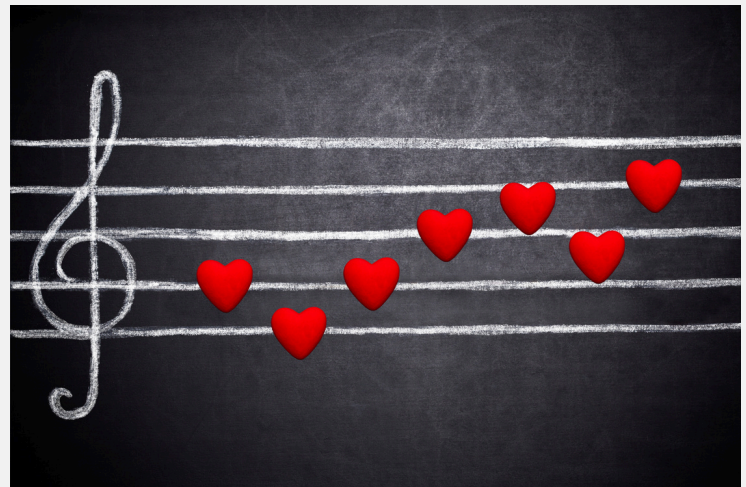
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# TOP CHRISTIAN WORSHIP SONGS

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- 1) Praise: By Elevation Worship featuring Brandon Lake, Chris Brown, and Chandler Moore
- 2) Hard Fought Hallelujah: By Brandon Lake
- 3) That's Who I Praise: By Brandon Lake
- 4) The Truth: By Megan Woods
- 5) I Know A Name: By Elevation Worship, Chris Brown, and Brandon Lake



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# MARCH UPCOMING EVENTS

## HERE AT FPC

### March 5th is Ash Wednesday

- Join us in the Social Hall here at FPC @ 6:30 for a wonderful Soup Supper

### March 26th- Love, from a Biblical Perspective

- Join us in the Social Hall here at FPC @ 6:30 where we will explore how God's teachings on love can be applied to our lives in a meaningful and impactful way. Catered dinner afterwards. RSVP to attend with Chrys Sahgal @sahgalchrys@gmail.com Attn: Class RSVP

## COMMUNITY AT LARGE

### March 5, 2025 Tea with The King:

### He will Help Her Psalm 46:5

- At St. Francis Episcopal Church, with sessions at Noon and 6 PM. This event includes a tea gathering and a reflection on Psalm 46:5

### March 14, 2025, SCU Presents:

### Concerto Aria

- Bask in the prodigious talents of the Concerto Aria Competition winners in this awe-inspiring concert with the SCU Orchestra and Wind Ensemble.



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# CLOSING LETTER

By: Reverend Dennis Woodsmall

## Congregation,

This month, we embark on a new endeavor with the launch of our monthly newsletter. Chrys is leading this effort, so if you have an announcement or something to contribute, please pass it along to him.

Last summer, I had the incredible opportunity to study C.S. Lewis in Oxford, England, at his home, "The Kilns," located just a few miles outside the city center. There, I spent time with resident scholars specializing in Lewis' work, as well as a visiting scholar from Wheaton College. While I had read Lewis before and enjoyed his books on theology and fantasy—such as *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—I must admit that I didn't fully grasp the depth and meaning behind his writings. However, after that experience and reading dozens of books analyzing his work, I have come to appreciate his sheer brilliance and profound gift for storytelling and theology. Listening to recordings of his messages or reading his books, it becomes clear why he is so widely respected across the world.

Recently, someone sent me a video about four things to pray to the Holy Spirit before bed. I found it meaningful and wanted to share a summary with you:

**1) Invite the Holy Spirit into your life.** Acknowledge your desire for the Spirit's work and remember that this is not a passive relationship. The Spirit is actively working—even as we sleep.

**2) Ask the Spirit to reveal any unconfessed or hidden sin.** This is not about shame or condemnation but about refinement, drawing us closer to the Trinity and the Kingdom. We continually need grace to be at work in our lives.

**3) Seek the Spirit's guidance through your sleep.** Ask for preparation for the next day's troubles, pressures, and blessings. The Spirit is not bound by time—past, present, or future—and can prepare, correct, empower, and transform us.

**4) Give thanks for the Spirit's presence.** As we recently read in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in everything, for this is the will of God." Often, we think of giving thanks to the Father and the Son, but how often do we thank the Spirit? I calculated that since my conversion, the Holy Spirit has been with me for 36,882,000 minutes—through every high and low, every joy and sorrow. How often have I stopped to say, "Thank you"?



Reverend Dennis Woodsmall

Jesus told us that He was giving us a gift until the end of time—the presence of the Holy Spirit—to better our lives, to liberate us, and to transform us into the image of Christ. If nothing else, we should be grateful.

So, next time you get ready to sleep, try these four prayers and see how your life changes. I know I'm going to try.

**Blessings,**  
Dennis