



January 2025

THE MESSENGER

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF THE PENINSULA

751 Alameda de las Pulgas, Belmont CA 94002 • 650-593-4547 • Office@ccpeninsula.org • www.CCPeninsula.org

Hark, the Herald Angels sang (a lot)!



The grand staircase at Ivy Park Senior Living in Belmont provided the perfect setting for a group photo of the carolers from the Congregational Church of the Peninsula who sang Christmas carols for the residents of Ivy Park, Bonnie Brae Terrace and Carlmont Gardens (including our own Brenda Garner) as well as homebound Millie Cole and Paul Michel in Redwood City. The evening ended once again with a pizza party at the home of Bob Donovan. As always, Mike Venturino accompanied the singers on his guitar. Carol Chivers did the hard work of arranging the schedule of caroling stops.

We are an Open and Affirming Congregation valuing everyone's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, physical and mental abilities.

Pastor Jim's Reflections

Pastor Jim's 'running into a new year'

I am running into a new year

By Lucille Clifton

*i am running into a new year
and the old years blow back
like a wind
that i catch in my hair
like strong fingers like
all my old promises and
it will be hard to let go
of what i said to myself
about myself
when i was sixteen and
twenty-six and thirty-six
even thirty-six but
i am running into a new year
and i beg what i love and
i leave to forgive me*

(Published in *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir* 1969-1980)

Dear friends: We are about to "run into a New Year," and I hope you are willing to join in as we move forward.

We have are revising our by-laws for a leaner, more efficient structure with a focus more on ministry than on governance.

In the next month, we'll review the

results of our recent congregational survey. We have hired new staff and added new positions that will help us expand our ministries and grow in both size and spirit.

We have planned wonderful services and events, and I invite you as part of your New Year's commitments to incorporate regular worship participation as part of whatever is happening in your life. You've heard, in other contexts perhaps, that you must be present to win, and we want your presence.

We are changing here at Congregational Church of the Peninsula, and we want you to be partners in this transformation. We gather once weekly on Sunday mornings and four other occasions online in a typical week.

I hope to see you at church or on Zoom with anticipation for our unfolding life together.

Pastor Jim

P.S. Here's a [link](#) to my editorial in the Bay Area Reporter, that blends Christmas themes, my own LGBT history and an invitation to deepen our commitment to Immigration Justice.

Members of our own community are threatened with deportation in the next few months. Let's make a difference by standing together.

Worship Highlights to come:

Dec. 29 — More Christmas, Kwanzaa, Watchnight, Hanukkah and New Year's

Jan. 5 — Feast of the Epiphany

Jan. 12 — Baptism of Jesus with Rev. Sheryl Johnson, our newest clergy staff member, preaching

Jan. 19 — Martin Luther King Remembrance

Jan. 26 — Congregational Meeting Sunday, celebration of Covenant

The Good Hope Luncheon will gather at noon Tuesday, Jan. 7, at the Veterans Memorial Senior Center, 1455 Madison Ave., Redwood City.

Warren's Wonderings

Joy in ringing the bell at the SA kettle

By Rev. Warren Dale

It is, of course, one of my most favorite times of the year. I love the decorations... I love driving through the neighborhoods and seeing their decorations... I love hearing the Christmas music especially from the Madrigal Singers and our choir... especially when Elizabeth and Emma Naomi sing, "Mary, Did You Know?"

Yes, I love this time of the year. And I have a few of "My Favorite Things."

We love to watch "The Sound of Music." We love to make our annual trek with our two best friends to the various decorations throughout the Peninsula. We finish off the evening at a good restaurant. I hope you also have some special traditions.

Well, all that above is very special... but there are more very special aspects of our

Christmas season. We love to join in with our Social Action Committee and buy some items for those less fortunate than we. We love to worship through our Advent series... seeking new "Aha's."

I love to write a check to some of my favorite food distribution centers... And my most favorite of all... the one that I just volunteered for again... I just love to ring the bell and solicit donations for our Peninsula Salvation Army: 100% of the kettle donations stay in our area.

During my previous moments with the kettle, I have had people come up and say how important the Salvation Army was to them at critical moments in their lives. I have seen people turn away from me, almost in embarrassment, as I ring the bell and say, "Share your blessings with those in need."

I have had young people from the high school give... go into the store and then give again as they pass by.

I believe we need these special moments to remember the gift of Jesus to us. I hope you celebrate traditions, and I hope this writing helps you develop new traditions of "sharing our blessings."

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.

Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.

To go to the Congregational Church of Peninsula website, click on [CCP](#).

Join the discussions on new bylaws

By Greg Thornhill

The Bylaws Committee has embarked on a journey to create new and streamlined bylaws for the newly combined congregation.

With a clear directive and vision for simplification, the committee quickly recognized that addressing the underlying organizational structure was a critical prerequisite to making substantive changes to the bylaws themselves.

In many respects, the bylaws are a reflection of our current organization structure. Therefore, to simplify the bylaws and what many see as inherent cumbersome processes, a fundamental overhaul to our organization structure is required.

After extensive research and discussion, the committee has developed a draft organizational structure designed to enhance CCP's

efficiency and effectiveness, and better equip our leadership, volunteers and staff to fulfill the mission of the church. This draft was recently reviewed with the Council, receiving feedback and support.

With a goal of achieving congregational approval for this proposed organizational structure at the Jan. 26 Annual Meeting, the committee is now turning its focus to broader engagement with the congregation. To facilitate meaningful discussions and gather input from all members ahead of the Annual Meeting, the committee is planning two informational meetings open to all.

The committee invites and encourages you all to participate in one or both of these upcoming discussions to help us ensure that our structure reflects the collective mission, vision and needs of the entire community.

Your input and feedback will be invaluable as we work together towards a more cohesive and forward-looking congregation.

Meeting dates:

Jan. 5 — Immediately after worship (in person only); lunch will be served.

Jan. 12 — 6 p.m. after the Sunday evening service (via Zoom only)

Look for a separate communication in the next several days which will overview the proposed organizational structure and the focal point of the two informational meetings.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the Bylaws Committee at Bylaws@ccpeninsula.org or you can contact any of the committee members: Henry Altorfer, Danielle Chamberlin, Pastor Jim, Carol Chivers, Maura Whitmore and me.



This banner, with its image of the Holy Family, replaced our Ceasefire banner, for the holiday season.

From Your Moderator

What do YOU see as CCP's mission?

By Maura Whitmore, Moderator

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!

As members of the Congregational Church of the Peninsula, United Church of Christ, we value each other's diversity and remain open to one another's spiritual interpretations as we strive to create safe spaces for spiritual growth and to do justice in God's world. (As amended Jan. 28, 2024.)

Above is the Mission Statement that we

voted into the bylaws last January. We will revisit this statement at our upcoming Annual Meeting on Sunday, Jan. 26.

Please ponder, in advance of the meeting, whether this statement works for YOU?

Does it say what you think our church is, what you want our mission to be, what our spiritual goals are?

I like this instead:

We value each other. We are open to each other's spiritual interpretations of God. We

engage in social justice causes and philanthropic giving to those in need. We strive to live Micah 6.8: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

This is just MY opinion; what is yours?

I wrote a [Messenger article](#) in October about this very subject. I'm on page 7! I haven't gotten any feedback, but would love some.

Your Moderator Maura
moderator@ccpeninsula.org

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CCP Christmas elves delivered 100+ gifts for the families at First Step in San Mateo

By Linda Howard

Beginning around Dec. 1, the Amazon truck made deliveries almost daily, leaving packages on the church doorstep. At the same time, dolls, Lego sets, Ninja turtles, Furby Friends, Squishmallows, pajamas, warm shirts and household items started appearing under the Christmas tree in the Narthex. About the only item missing was a Partridge in a Pear Tree.

The Christmas elves of CCP, both near and far, participated in the LifeMoves Gift Giving program. LifeMoves, an organization that provides housing for hundreds of formerly unhoused people, operates over 26 shelters and service sites in Silicon Valley. This holiday season our church had the opportunity to make Christmas a little merrier by providing gifts to families at one of those sites, First Step for Families, in San Mateo at the Villa Terrace apartments.

LifeMoves gives the people who live in our community experiencing homelessness a temporary place to call home while providing other services and case management to help individuals and families get on their feet.

The bountiful gift giving of the people of CCP helped to ensure a joyous, fun-filled holiday for the families staying at one of the LifeMoves shelters.

This generosity is illustrated in a quote by John Wesley that Pastor Jim offered a few Sunday ago:

*Do all the good you can, By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can, In all the places you can,
At all the times you can, To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.*



The Madrigal Singers of Mountain View High School gave a Christmas concert in the Sanctuary of CCP on Dec. 8. This is an annual gift to the congregation from Pastor Warren Dale and his wife Georgi.



To go to the Congregational Church of Peninsula website, click on [CCP](#).

Say 'hi' to Music Associate Justin Porto

Justin Porto, 24, whom most of us know as the bassist in the CCP Worship Band, is now on the church staff as a part-time music ministry associate, assisting Music Director Elizabeth Mye.

Justin, who lives in El Granada, has been a classical pianist for 20 years, an organist for eight years and a jazz bassist for nine years. He has been teaching piano to children for five years and serves as a tutor for the music department at College of San Mateo.

"I love teaching," he said. "I love seeing my students' progress and improvement. Teaching is what I love to do, and I might want to become a professor in the far future."

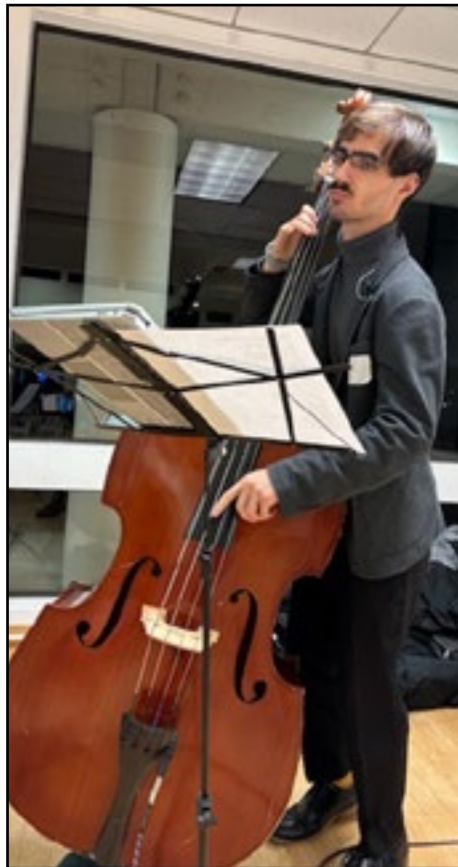
He has also served as the choir director for the 10 a.m. mass at Our Lady of the Pillar Catholic Church in Half Moon Bay, and he still plays the organ for the 6 p.m. mass.

"I am excited to be a part of your welcoming community," Justin said. "When we get a flow going, I would also love to sing with the choir."

"I gig around the Bay with my quartet, Of the Moment Quartet, and you might find us playing at some of the local wine bars. I also do pit work for operas and musicals."

Justin also loves climbing and photography. "I love shooting film, I have several old film cameras that I use to take portraits. I never leave home without a camera."

"Justin will be a part of our music ministry and pastoral teams supporting church



Mostly we're used to seeing Justin Porto playing bass with the CCP Worship Band, but he's also the guy above who loves to climb — especially Mount Diablo.

music programs and activities," Elizabeth Mye said.

"He comes to us with a music degree from the College of San Mateo and rich experience as a church musician.

"This is an exciting opportunity to evolve the music ministry to make a difference in attracting new congregants to our dynamic and social justice-missioned church community"

Rev. Sheryl Johnson to bolster youth program

By Mary Beth Gray

CCP would like to welcome the Rev. Sheryl Johnson, PhD, as our new Youth Minister Associate. She has recently come on board to help strengthen our youth program.

Sheryl was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and originally ordained in the United Church of Canada (Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist).

She moved to Berkeley in 2016 with her wife, Rev. Kelly Colwell, for a doctoral program in Christian economic ethics. The couple now has a 7-month-old daughter Andrea (Andie).

In addition to her studies, she worked as a teaching assistant, program coordinator for

the Women's Studies in Religion Program, and for several Bay Area UCC churches. Most recently, she served for more than five years at the Congregational Church of San Mateo.

Last spring several of our youth joined her in a rewarding multi-church youth volunteer trip to Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco and the SF Night Ministry, where they worked together to serve lunch to the needy at Glide and distribute basic supplies to the homeless at the Night Ministry.

Sheryl said she is delighted to begin her new role with CCP, focused on strengthening education programs and offerings for children, youth and adults.



Rev. Sheryl Johnson

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The cookies were just part of the fun!



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Join us for a
DEATH CAFE
to discuss how we think about dying.



We promise it's
not as dark as it
sounds.

We talk about
end-of-life issues
(that we may not
even care to think
about) over coffee
or tea and cake.

Sometimes we
laugh!

Thursdays
at 1:30-3 p.m.

Jan. 23, Feb. 20 & March 20

Congregational Church of the Peninsula
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CCPeninsula.org • 650-593-4547

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Those who toiled in the storage units in Redwood City over the last year well remember the life-sized papier mache Mary and Joseph that seemed unlikely to find a home since they were much too big for CCP. But they did find a home — at St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church in Redwood City! St. Joseph’s is the practice site for Ragazzi Boys’ Chorus, and Elizabeth Nordt, mother of Ragazzi singer Andrew Altorfer, was able to make the connection! Carol Chivers remembers her mom and dad working long hours to create the figures that were displayed at First Congregational Church of Redwood City each Christmas until the building was sold. She’s thrilled they now have a permanent home — and still in Redwood City!

Have you been wondering how CCP investments are doing?

	11/30/24 Actual	11/30/24 Budget	Better/(Worse)
Income	382,857.38	373,195.11	(71,137.81)
Expenses	441,299.91	461,345.18	20,045.27
Income - Expenses	(139,242.61)	(88,150.07)	(51,092.54)

	11/30/24	12/31/23	Better/(Worse)

Very well, actually. Treasurer Danielle Chamberlin sent this report to Council in December: “In 2024 we targeted our budget to draw investment dollars at 6% of invested capital, which — in an average year — would draw down our endowment versus keeping up with inflation. Conventional wisdom is that a target of 4% draw should keep our endowment essentially forever. However, the stock market did quite well this year, and at this point our YTD assets have gained 6.3%, nicely outpacing inflation which is currently at 2.6%.”

Annual Reports are due in the office by Jan. 3. Annual Meeting is scheduled for Jan. 26 with a potluck lunch right after worship!

To go to the Congregational Church of Peninsula website, click on [CCP](#).



PUBLIC ACTION JANUARY 20

Reading of Dr. King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*



As we inaugurate a new president, Dr. King's letter serves as our call to unity, love and action—a call as relevant and powerful today as it was 62 years ago.

Join us for an action of public witness on Martin Luther King Jr. Day— which is also Inauguration Day.

Gather together to hear representatives from diverse organizations, faiths and communities in our county read aloud Dr. King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.

**Monday, January 20 at 11:00 a.m.
400 County Center Plaza, Redwood City**

Co-sponsored by:

Bay Area Community Health Advisory Council
Black Parents Association, San Mateo
Burlingame United Methodist Church
Christ Church, Portola Valley
Coastside Jewish Community
Congregation Beth Jacob
Congregational Church of San Mateo
Congregational Church of the Peninsula
County Supervisor Noelia Corzo
Faith in Action Bay Area
Fixin' San Mateo County
Foster City Association of Black Residents

In Our Care SMC
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Island United Church
NAACP San Mateo Branch
Peninsula Jewish Community Center
Peninsula Temple Beth El
Peninsula Temple Sholom
Puente de la Costa Sur
San Mateo Buddhist Temple
San Mateo County Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
San Mateo Quaker Group
Sequoia High School Dream Club

Sisters of Mercy Solidarity Committee
St James AME Zion Church
SURJ San Mateo
Trinity Baptist Church of San Mateo
Trinity Presbyterian Church, San Carlos
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Redwood City
Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo
West Region Antiracism Group
Woodside Road United Methodist Church

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It really does take a (Hillsdale) village

By Linda Howard

Driving past the parking lot of Hillsdale High School on a Friday morning, you will see a beehive of activity. The Peace Pantry, in the form of a farmer's market, is in full swing as volunteers assist families "shopping" for healthy foods (free of charge).

An on-site community garden provides much of the healthy food available in the Peace Pantry. A Community Closet opens its doors on other days to support students' clothing needs.

The Peace Pantry was initiated to address the increase in the cost of living. Second Harvest Food Bank partners with Hillsdale to supplement the food offered at the Peace Pantry.

Depending on the season, much of the food comes from the Community Garden, on the grounds of the school. Community and student volunteers work in the garden year-round putting fresh layers of wood chips down to help prepare the garden before the winter rains, planting in the warmer months and harvesting the fruits of their labor.

The Community Closet is currently in an expansion phase. Hillsdale students are learning marketable skills as they design an aesthetically pleasing place where students can browse for clothes for prom and job interviews.

Hillsdale educators realize that learning takes place only after basic needs are met – safety, food, and shelter, according to Dean of Students Brett Stevenson who serves as co-director of the Empowerment through Action (ETA) program. Meeting these needs optimizes learning.

Led by volunteers from the community and Hillsdale staff, ETA was established in 2018. The Peace Pantry, Community Garden and Community Closet grew out of this movement. Initially, ETA served about 60 students. The mission of the program is to close the opportunity gap and foster belonging for historically underserved students, according to Stevenson.

The program expanded to include services to more students in need, as well as their families. It now includes wraparound services such as extra-curricular activities, mentoring and other programs of enrichment led by ETA volunteers.

Stevenson noted that Hillsdale's gradu-



Volunteer Greg Thornhill of CCP and Hillsdale's Brett Stevenson

ation rate climbed to 97% compared to 82% of similarly underserved students within the San Mateo High School District. Suspension rates fell by 50%.

In addition, ETA strives to connect students to at least one adult on campus, to involve students in meaningful activities, to develop skills to address stress in their lives, to improve attendance and to graduate.

Part of the mission of CCP is to "do justice in the world." Five thousand dollars

from the Lyman Covenant Fund was recently donated to the program to further the cause of social justice in our community.

If you are looking for an opportunity to make a difference in young lives, volunteers are needed on Wednesdays for the Community Clothes Closet, Thursdays for the Community Garden and Fridays for the Peace Pantry.

For more information, contact Stevenson at bstevenson@etahhs.org.

To go to the Congregational Church of Peninsula website, click on [CCP](#).

CCP's January Calendar

1 Wed	11:00AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Prayer Time with Pastor Jim and Pastor Warren
2 Thu	6PM - 7PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Thursday Night Prayer & Check-in
	7:30PM - 9PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir Rehearsal
5 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	11:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Coffee Hour
	12PM - 1PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Church Staff Meeting
	12PM - 1:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	ByLaws Informational Meeting
	5PM - 6PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Zoom worship with Pastor Warren
7 Tue	1:30PM - 2:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Book Group
8 Wed	11:00AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Prayer Time with Pastor Jim and Pastor Warren
	5:00PM - 6:00PM 📺	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Holy Cow Zoom meeting
9 Thu	6PM - 7PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Thursday Night Prayer & Check-in
	7:30PM - 9PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir Rehearsal
12 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	11:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Coffee Hour
	5PM - 6PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Zoom worship with Pastor Warren
	6PM - 7:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Bylaws Informational Zoom
14 Tue	1:30PM - 2:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Book Group
15 Wed	11:00AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Prayer Time with Pastor Jim and Pastor Warren
	6:30PM - 8PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Trustees Meeting (Zoom)
16 Thu	6PM - 7PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Thursday Night Prayer & Check-in
	7:30PM - 9PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir Rehearsal
19 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	11:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Coffee Hour
	5PM - 6PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Zoom worship with Pastor Warren
20 Mon	11:00AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Reading of MLK's Letter From Birmingham Jail
	1:00PM - 4:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	MLK Jr. Day of Service
21 Tue	1:30PM - 2:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Book Group
	6:00PM - 7:00PM 📺	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Deacons' meeting
26 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	12:00PM - 3:00PM 📺	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	CCP Annual Meeting
	5PM - 6PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Zoom worship with Pastor Warren
28 Tue	1:30PM - 2:30PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Book Group
29 Wed	11:00AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Online Prayer Time with Pastor Jim and Pastor Warren
30 Thu	6PM - 7PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Thursday Night Prayer & Check-in
	7:30PM - 9PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir Rehearsal

Peninsula Multifaith Coalition's MLK Day of Service will be on Inauguration day! The event will be shifted to the afternoon for the first time. It will be especially meaningful to come together to work as people of faith on that day. Save the date to volunteer! Those who have led projects in the past, should have been contacted. If you are planning to participate, it's necessary to register as soon as possible. To register, click [here](#).

CCP high school youth invited to Confirmation Day at Fremont church

High school youth from CCP have been invited to join in an exciting day of service, learning and connecting with young people from other Bay Area UCCs at a Youth Confirmation Day on Saturday, Jan. 11.

It will take place at Niles Discovery Church in Fremont from 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. and include meals, snacks, games and exploring topics like expansive understandings of God, the diverse faces of Jesus, and the connection between faith and social justice. All are welcome!

Please let Rev. Sheryl know if you are interested at sheryl@ccpeninsula.org.

Book club will read 'The Life Impossible'

The Life Impossible by Matt Haig will be the January selection of the Chat & Chew Book Club which meets from 1:30-2:30 p.m. on [Zoom](#) on Tuesdays.

You are welcome to join in any Tuesday.

Copies of the book are available in the back of the Sanctuary. Please take one for free or make a donation to CCP.

February Messenger deadline will be Jan. 20.



Register now for IMMERSION 2025 winter youth event. Don't let money be an obstacle. Please tell Rev. Sheryl (sheryl@ccpeninsula.org) if you are interested.

To go to the Congregational Church of Peninsula website, click on [CCP](#).