



February 2022

# THE MESSENGER

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BELMONT

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**Greg Thornhill leads a crew installing basketball backboards and painting lines at George Hall School in San Mateo on Martin Luther King Day of Service. More photos appear on Page 3.**

## **Trains of Thought Happy Valentine's Month all February!**

**By Pastor Sally Train**

When I was a child, February was all about valentines.

We would each get a shoe box and cover it with some kind of paper – white, red, or even aluminum foil! Then we would decorate it with ribbons and hearts. We would cut a slit in the top so valentines could be slipped inside.

On the Big Day, we would bring our box to school, place it on our desks, and wait for the little love notes to start arriving. According to strict (but unspoken) rules of Southern Hospitality, every child in the class had to give every other child a valentine. No exceptions! So, the box would fill up.

I would take my box home, read the valentines with delight, and pore over every detail. Did Johnny give me the one with two hearts on it because he really likes me?



**Rev. Sally Train**

I would place the valentines all over my room and look at them every day. Little love notes. It was a sweet tradition.

So, I declare February Valentine's Month!

My hope is that all month we will give each other little valentines – not necessarily physical ones – but little gestures of love. Saying “thank you” for a job well done. Taking a little extra care with the things we do in the church ... remembering that we do it for love. Calling someone we haven't seen for a while just to say “hello.” Helping out with a task – just because... because we love this church and the people in it. Bringing flowers to brighten up the place and maybe brighten up a few faces. We do it all with love.

We share that love with everyone. No exceptions!

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



**Willing  
CCB'ers  
help out  
at MLK  
Service  
Day on  
Jan. 17**

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





**READING**  
PARTNERS



# BECOME A READING PARTNER

Reading Partners is a literacy nonprofit that mobilizes community volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring to struggling readers. We believe reading unlocks opportunity and it is the cornerstone for learning and future success in life. We partner with high-need schools and community volunteers to provide personalized one-on-one tutoring using our proven curriculum to help students succeed in school and beyond.



## HOW IT WORKS



1

With our school partners, we identify students who are six months or more behind grade level in reading.

2

Trained volunteer reading partners deliver individualized one-on-one tutoring twice a week for 45 minutes by following a structured curriculum.

3

Students become proud, confident learners ready for success.

**95% tutor  
satisfaction rate  
with over 450  
community  
volunteers**

**BECOME A VIRTUAL TUTOR**

**DONATE TO OUR CAUSE**

**SPREAD THE WORD**

*For more information, visit <https://readingpartners.org/location/silicon-valley/>*

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

# A look at churches from business perspective

By Steve Chamberlin

*The Economist* isn't normally thought of as a great source for religious news, but a recent article from the Jan. 8 edition is the exception. Squeezed between stories on inflation and Vladimir Putin, the article's headline bluntly proclaims "The world's religions face a post-pandemic reckoning. Many need to sell their property; some branches will have to merge."

Ouch!

It may seem strange to find discussion about churches in a business magazine, but viewing a church as a special type of business can be constructive. In his classic book *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argued that churches are enterprises just like butchers, bakers and brewers and face many of the same competitive pressures. With over 1,200 Christian denominations in the United States, plus other faiths, and secular alternatives like yoga and meditation, the landscape is certainly competitive. In the face of shrinking demand for traditional religious services nationwide, *The Economist* observes that church mergers, acquisitions and bankruptcies are inevitable.

In the business world, mergers and asset sales are common and unremarkable events. But in the world of religion there can sometimes be great resistance to the idea, even when churches have dug themselves into a deep hole of demographic and property struggles. *The Economist* article examines how shrinking congregations and aging buildings can lead to an untenable situation.

"Organized religion is grappling with the same problems faced by landlords of tired shopping malls and vacant offices as businesses go online. Do they stand by and watch attendance shrink? If not, how should they rethink their property?"

It goes on to say that building expenses comprise more than a quarter of American church budgets, while the churches are estimated to have 80 percent more space than they actually need. Something has to give.

How do churches arrive at the decision to seek a merger? They may have no other good choice. According to the article, Covid has merely accelerated a pre-existing 21st-Century trend for churches to merge, especially among mainstream Protestant churches in the United States.



It cites Jim Tomberlin, a Detroit-area pastor turned consultant, whose advice was sought by a local church with barely 50 members. Tomberlin describes their situation bluntly: "They recognise we either merge or die."

Some mergers may work better than others. *The Economist* claims that one in five churches will lose over 40 percent of their membership within the first year post-merger. "As in any business, when two churches combine, their leaders can clash, cultural changes can put members off, and joint finances do not always work out."

Their analysis says the weaker of the two churches is more likely to lose members, with congregants feeling that their church was simply "swallowed up" rather than truly merging. According to one pastor quoted in the article, "a good coupling of parishes is like a successful marriage. Each partner must bring its own gift to the arrangement."

In the two years since the beginning of 2020, pandemic-related concerns have driven many churches to shift partly or entirely

online. They're finding that streaming video worship doesn't just provide a new way of listening to church sermons — it actually changes people's behavior.

*The Economist* describes a survey from April-May 2020, just a few months after most churches had shifted online. The survey found that a paltry 35 percent were still attending their pre-Covid church exclusively, and the other 65 percent had changed their attendance practices, all in a matter of a few months. Eighteen percent had started attending a second church in addition to their original one. Fourteen percent had switched completely to a new church, and a frightening 32 percent stopped attending church altogether.

The article explores how streaming video worship can also lead to other disruptive changes. As more people watch online from home, the church buildings "risk becoming obsolete." And without face-to-face opportunities for interaction with other church members, online viewers may feel disengaged and become more likely to drift away.

If we here at CCB are feeling a bit dizzy and disoriented over the rapidly changing church landscape, this article reminds us we are certainly not alone. While it can make for hard reading, this is a valuable look at the state of American churches today.

You can read the full article [here](#).

## Youth watch 'Little Rock Nine' as they study progress on Civil Rights

By Linda Howard

Baking and learning more about the progression of Civil Rights occupied the CCB youth in January.

Our kids met on the veranda the early part of January, mixed and measured gluten-free flour along with blueberries and apple sauce to create magnificent muffins. The muffin treats were served the next day during Coffee Hour on the veranda after church.

Andrew and Sarah took advantage of a nifty blending appliance to create the delicious treats for Sunday morning.

The next activity involving the youth

was more serious in nature. In conjunction with Martin Luther King Day, several of our youth and adults viewed a video on the Little Rock Nine, the Black students who were the first to integrate all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., in 1957. They also took part in a discussion and an art activity.

In the future, several ideas are percolating to involve our most valuable resource — the kids: a trip to Monterey Bay Aquarium, creating Valentines, a scavenger hunt, Family Camp, and possibly a mission trip in the summer.

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# Home & Hope still helping homeless families

By Linda Howard

Have you wondered about Home & Hope’s status since the start of the pandemic? They’re still doing great work despite some big challenges that include being unable to house or feed families within church facilities.

For some background, recent reports from the National Income Housing Coalition show that someone earning minimum wage would have to work 89 hours per week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment in San Mateo County.

Other statistics report that it would take about four minimum-wage jobs to support (house and feed) a family of four in San Mateo County.

Many of the families involved in the Home & Hope program have at least one adult who is employed and often employed at minimum wage, which isn’t enough to maintain permanent housing, pay for food,

and pay other bills.

And often, a life-altering event – such as a major illness or domestic abuse – is the catalyst that pushes families into homelessness.

But Home & Hope is still doing its best to support their families by providing hotel rooms and groceries to the roughly 20 families in their program.

Additionally, Home & Hope helps families with transportation to work, job or housing interviews, or physician appointments as well as maintaining their Day Center so that families have a safe and comfortable place to shower, use the computer, do homework, and rest and relax.

Even though families have emergency shelter and food, many arrive with no essentials for daily living. Congregation volunteers have been providing care kits that include shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap and other important supplies. Donors

have also provided gift cards for food, clothing and miscellaneous needs like diapers and other baby-care supplies.

These small acts of kindness are extremely meaningful to Home & Hope families and often help families feel stable and back on the road to normalcy.

How can you help support Home & Hope families? Cash donations are the most straightforward way. Volunteers can also provide meals or non-perishable foods and drop them off at the Home & Hope offices at 1720 El Camino Real #7, Burlingame.

Another way you can help is to coordinate food deliveries to families. If you’d like to help Home & Hope families on their road back to independence, contact Home & Hope at 650-652-1103 or via e-mail [info@homeandhope.net](mailto:info@homeandhope.net).

Donations may be made online [here](#) or by sending a check.

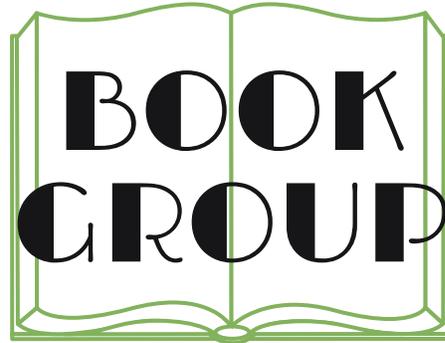
## CCB Calendar for February 2022

3 Thu	7:30PM - 9PM ☹️	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir practice
5 Sat	3:30PM - 5:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	CCB Youth Group on the Veranda
6 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	11:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Coffee Hour
10 Thu	7:30PM - 9PM ☹️	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir practice
13 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
	11:45AM - 2:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	CCB Annual Meeting
17 Thu	7:30PM - 9PM ☹️	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Choir practice
19 Sat	3:30PM - 5:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	CCB Youth Group on the Veranda
20 Sun	10:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Worship	Sunday worship
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	11:30AM - 12:00PM	<input type="checkbox"/> Church Events	Coffee Hour
28 Mon	7PM - 9PM ☹️	<input type="checkbox"/> Off-site events	Council Meeting

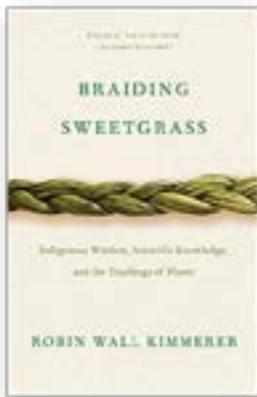
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Peninsula Multifaith Coalition  
invites you to our monthly

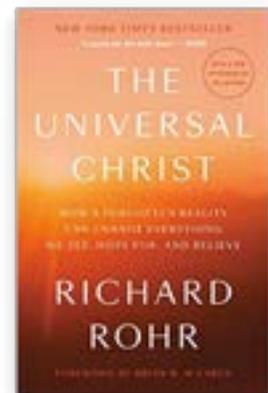


**Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022 • 7-8:30 pm**  
**"Braiding Sweetgrass"**  
**by Robin Wall Kimmerer**



In February, we will continue our discussion of "Braiding Sweetgrass", a book that explores the connection between living things and human efforts to cultivate a more sustainable world through the lens of indigenous traditions.

In March we'll tackle our first officially Christian book with a reading of "The Universal Christ" by Richard Rohr.



**RSVP to [revkristi@aol.com](mailto:revkristi@aol.com)**  
*We can cover the cost of the book, if needed*

# Small book offers some remarkably big ideas

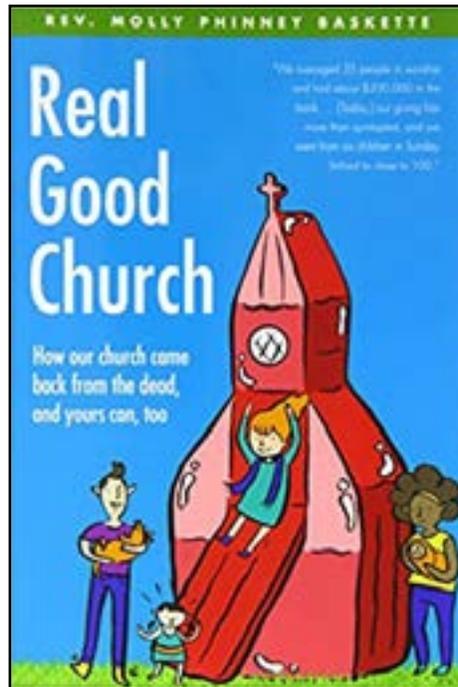
By Pastor Sally Train

Danielle Chamberlin discovered a small book that is a big treasure — *Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back From the Dead, and Yours Can Too* by the Rev. Molly Phinney Baskette, who now serves First Church, Berkeley.

In 2003, Baskette was called to serve a UCC church in Somerville, Mass., which had about 35 people in worship, six kids in Sunday School, a “bad building,” a parsonage, and about \$200,000 in the bank. Ten years later, average worship attendance was 130 even in the summer, 350 on Easter, and close to 100 children in Sunday School. Their giving more than quintupled in that time, and they raised \$600,000 in a capital improvement campaign to fix their building.

How did they do it? Well, read the book.

There was no one silver bullet. No one brilliant epiphany, no one perfect vision



spelling out God’s call to them. They simply created a church that was real (spoke to the reality of people’s lives and struggles). A church that was good in a multitude of ways. A church that was a safe place to be.

The book is filled with stories about all the things they did, all the changes they made, all the risks they took, all the ways they lived into their visions. It is truly a “how-to” manual on how to do good progressive church in the 21st Century. I have not even finished reading it yet, but already I am filled with ideas I want to try — Aha moments!

Every page has something on it that is revelatory simply because it makes so much practical sense.

All I can say is: “Read the book.” If purchasing the book is a barrier to you, just ask. I will be happy to buy you a copy. Just READ THE BOOK!

**March Messenger deadline will be Wednesday, Feb. 23.**



**Help! All the tea towels from the CCB kitchen have disappeared. If you’ve got them, please let Maura Whitmore know ASAP.**

## Annual Meeting Sunday, Feb. 13!

**Join us for a soup/salad lunch right after worship and then share in the work of the church.**

**If you can’t be with us in person, email Lea at [Office@CCBelmont.org](mailto:Office@CCBelmont.org) so we can arrange for you to join us via Zoom.**

**We absolutely need your input as we tackle budgeting, planning for a new settled pastor and goal-setting during this time of transition for the church.**

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