

Christmas

December 24-25, 2016



Readings This week: Next week:

Isaiah 62:1-5 Numbers 6:22-27

Acts of the Apostles 13:16-17, 22-25 Galatians 4:4-7

Matthew 1:1-25 Luke 2:16-21

Psalm Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord. (Psalm 89)

Today Today's presider is Fr. Jack Izzo.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. Members of the Thomas Merton community plan these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate by check or cash, every Sunday there is a donation basket in the back of church or by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope in the bulletin the last Sunday of every month to mail your donation. Please do not put your TMC donation in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).

Calendar No 8:45 Mass tomorrow morning.

From Thomas Merton



It is good that somewhere in the world there are those who realize that Christ is born.

There were only a few shepherds at the first Bethlehem, and it is the same now.

The ox and the ass understood more of the first Christmas than the high priests in Jerusalem.

And it is the same way today.

-The Seven Storey Mountain

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy; to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality; and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

TMC membership:

The Thomas Merton Center was founded in 1995 by Roman Catholic lay persons to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support, and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and



other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, and through him, with God. We are a nonprofit religious education organization based on a membership model, which allows TMC the opportunity to sponsor the regular 8:45 a.m. Sunday Mass in this church and other liturgies, as well as spiritual education programs, social justice initiatives, and fellowship

activities that help build community. As an intentional faith community, inspired by the spirit and documents of Vatican II, we invite membership application from all interested persons; a brochure and application forms are available in the church vestibule. For more information about TMC membership, contact Kay Williams, (650) 270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net.



Your first Christmas present:

This Christmas Mass comes to you as a gift from about forty members of the regular 8:45 Mass community. To bring you this celebration today took not only the pre-



sider but also four greeters, three sacristans (to set up the altar environment), one bread baker, two ushers, two collection monitors, two lectors, seven Eucharistic ministers, two environment ministers (for the candlesticks and flowers), the musicians, two bulletin ministers, and six members of the liturgy team who planned it all. Not to mention the

many others who contributed to this bulletin and members of the parish staff who cleaned and decorated the church. We who did the work believe this is what Church is about, and we would be overjoyed to have you join us in 2016!

Envelopes:

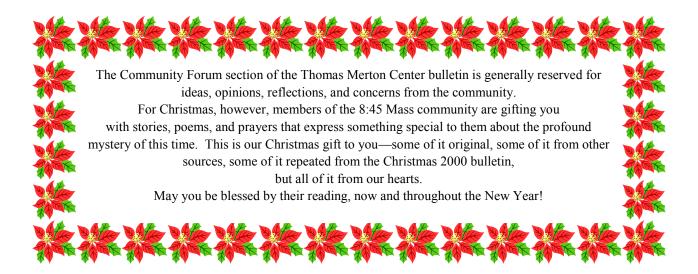
A Thomas Merton Center envelope is included in the bulletin the last Sunday of each month. Your donation makes possible our monthly contribution to Seton School; our spiritual education



programs, weekly bulletin, and other publications; and hospitality after Mass and at other meetings. We need your support—please be generous!

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns



A mother and her son at Christmas:

A mother told her children that there were a couple of families in their area who were very poor and would have no food or clothing and no tree this particular Christmas. So she told her children not to give them, their parents, any presents this year, but rather to give the money to these poor families. She then told of her son who was a basketball manager at his college and on the road a good deal of the time. He had just been home for a short visit and, as he was about to leave, he reached out to his mother's hand, saying, "Take this, Mom," and pressed some money into her palm. "Use it for one of the families so they can have a decent Christmas." A quick hug and off he went down the steps. The mother relates: "In my hand rested a crisp fifty-dollar bill. With the little money Chris had to live on in college, he must have been saving for months. I stood still for a moment. Then down the stairs I sprinted. I opened the door of the car, and I sat down next to him. He gave me a wonderful hug, and, in an instant, I was no longer sitting next to my twenty-year-old son. I was sitting next to my five-year-old Chris who forgave someone who had stolen his toy car because, he said, 'Mom, he must need it more than me.'

"A part of me wanted my boy of five back. Then Chris spoke, 'Please get out of the car, Mom, before I start crying, too.' I hugged him one more time, told him how happy I was. Because of his generosity, a family was going to have a good Christmas. 'I love you, honey,' I said, 'and God will bless you for this.' And with that I climbed out of the car, leaving with a moment that I shall cherish forever: the moment I saw Christ in my son."

—From A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers and all who love stories that and challenge, by William J. Bausch

The flight into Egypt:

Through every precinct of the wintry city
Squadroned iron resounds upon the streets;
Herod's police
Makes shudder the dark steps of the tenements
At the business about to be done.
Neither look back upon Thy starry country,
Nor hear what rumors crowd across the dark
Where blood runs down those holy walls,
Nor frame a childish blessing with Thy hand
Toward that fiery spiral of exulting souls!
Go, Child of God, upon the singing desert,
Where, with eyes of flame,

The roaming lion keeps thy road from harm.

—Thomas Merton, A Man in the Divided Sea

A compassionate God acts now, through us:

This is the text of a letter sent to Santa Clara University faculty and staff by SCU President Fr. Paul Locatelli in December 1999 and printed in the San Jose Mercury.

...Jesus calls Christians to this beautiful and inspiring vision for all people, as Isaiah did earlier with the ancient Israelites: Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. ...Make straight. ..a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low. ...The poetic image of the smooth highway for God will also be ours when we help awaken God's presence and life deep down in every person and in our communities. Isaiah's valleys to be filled are not about geological crevices in the earth, but about people who suffer, who are lonely and ne-

glected, and whose lives are empty of meaning. It is whenever street children are forgotten by their families and society, or the single mother is left without the means to provide food and shelter for her child. . . .When we seek to lift others out of the deep valleys of life, we too will speak tenderly and give comfort to God's people. When Isaiah refers to every mountain and hill being made low, he is not talking about a major excavation project but rather breaking down the barriers that separate

us from each other.

Whatever prevents us from seeing every person we meet is our sister or brother hinders the realization of Isaiah's inclusive vision. But by embracing diversity of people and ideas, we will build a richer community where all of us can see the glory of God fully shining in every person regardless of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, age, gender, or religious beliefs.

. . . Isaiah, in predicting that the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain, is not talking about fixing potholes in the freeways, but how we treat each other. Rough are the roads whenever a thoughtless remark is left unreconciled. Or, when our indifference makes us forget the more than one million citizens living on city streets without shelter or food. . . . The prophetic promise of comfort, revealing a compassionate and welcoming God for all people, means we are all in this together, all called to the same vision of community. God does not act in some distant time or place, but now, through us. My prayer during this holy season is that the new year will be a time when the glory of God is made visible in our reconciling of differences, in our calling each other sister or brother, in our learning to respect the culture of all whose religion or skin color is different from our own, and in our being compassionate and generous with all, as God is with us. Then, through us, the glory of God shall be revealed and we will all see it together. . . .

The Cosmic Christ:

By Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the author of numerous books, including his newest, The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation.

To get a proper divine conversation started and going, we all have to think of God as a "person" somehow. Otherwise there is no reciprocity, mutuality, give and take, no ONE to love, no "I" and Thou." Humans only know how to relate to other persons initially. But if you stay there too long, you pay a big price, because God ends up being on the other end of YOUR conversation, which keeps God SEPARATE and somehow in need of daily "appeasement." True intimacy is pretty hard to experience at this level, at least for long.

The whole point of prayer is to lead you to experience and say what Jesus finally says: "I and the Father are one!" (John 10:30). Then you do not pray to God as much as you pray THROUGH and WITH God. (Note how the official liturgical prayers end "THROUGH Christ our Lord. Amen.")

Eventually you must stop looking AT reality, and you will learn to look OUT FROM reality! This is a major and heart stopping change, and admittedly most people never go to this mystical level—because they were not taught very well, frankly. It is not because they are not worthy or incapable, but they usually feel unworthy and feel incapable. They are not.

When prayer naturally matures, God is not so much "A Person" out there, that I must cajole, adore, and obey, but God has become the VERY GROUND OF ALL BEING, which is in dialogue with you, loving you, receiving your praise, calling you forth, forgiving you, and revealing a gracious divine will in all things as they are. Prayer is now all the time and everywhere, as long as you are conscious and awake!

At this point it is still OK to think and talk of God as a continued on page 6



"So much for your flying angel chorus idea."

A thought for Christmas:

Do you know what would have happened If it had been Three Wise Women Instead of Three Wise Men? They would have asked directions, Arrived on time, Helped deliver the baby, Cleaned the stable, Made a casserole, Brought practical gifts and There would be Peace On Earth.

-Anonymous, submitted by Marci Ariagno

The Koran on the birth of Jesus:

"And you shall recount in the Book the story of Mary: how she left her people and betook herself to a solitary



place to the east. We sent to her Our spirit in the semblance of a full-grown man. And when she saw him she said: 'May the Merciful defend me from you! If you fear the Lord, leave me and go your way!' 'I am the messenger of your

Lord,' he replied, 'and have come to give you a holy son.'

"'How shall I bear a child,' she answered, 'when I am a virgin, untouched by man?' 'Such is the will of your Lord,' he replied. 'That is no difficult thing for Him.' 'He shall be a sign to mankind,' says the Lord, 'and a blessing from Ourself. This is Our decree.'"

"Thereupon she conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And when she felt the throes of childbirth she lay down by the trunk of a palm tree, crying: 'Oh, would that I had died and passed into oblivion!' But a voice from below cried out to her: 'Do not despair. Your Lord has provided a brook that runs at your feet, and if you shake the trunk of this palm tree it will drop fresh ripe dates in your lap. Therefore rejoice.'

Carrying the child, she came to her people. She made a sign to them, pointing to the child. Whereupon he spoke and said: 'I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Gospel and ordained me a prophet. His blessing is upon me wherever I go, and He has commanded me to be steadfast in prayer and to give alms to the poor as long as I shall live. . . . 'Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. That is the whole truth. . . ." (Sura 3:45-46)

A Christmas memory:

I grew up in the land of White Christmases: St. Paul, Minnesota. When I was little, the snow banks that lined my front walk were taller than I was, the freshly fallen December snow sparkling brightly in the sunlight. Even at night, when the moon shone with all its splendor, the white snow cast a bright glow in the moonlight that illuminated our way if we had to go out. I grew up believing that everyone in the country experienced 20 below zero temperatures, the kind of cold that often made the snow squeak loudly at Christmas time.

Because my heritage is Eastern European, German and Czech, I was doubly lucky. My family celebrated two Christmas observances: St. Nicholas Day on December 6 and Christmas Eve, December 24. Not everyone celebrated St. Nicholas Day among my classmates and playmates. I think they found it strange when I talked of hanging up my stocking on the night of December 5 to see what St. Nick would bring. On December 6 morning, I would awaken at the urging of my parents to see what my stocking held. Usually it was filled with some of my favorite treats: Mars bars, chewing gum, Little Lulu comics...sometimes even Classics comic books, which probably had something to do with my ultimate choice of becoming an English major.

One St. Nicholas day, I awoke to find that my stocking had been filled with coal...a definite sign that I had been more "naughty than nice." (The coal had been easy for "St. Nick" to come by, since it was the main source of heat for our furnace.) I remember my sadness: what had I done to deserve this? But before I could come up with an answer, my dad appeared with another stocking, full of goodies. "It looks like St. Nicholas made a mistake. I just found this one. This must be your real stocking," he announced. Inside was the much desired treasure of sweets and comic books.

That was the only time I ever got "coal in the stocking" from St. Nicholas. My brother Bob, who was 11 years younger than I, used to get a much more unique gift in his Christmas stocking. Because he was a real bacon fanatic, St. Nick would often leave him a slab of Canadian bacon. It makes one wonder how that Eastern European saint ever learned about Canadian meat products.

-Barbara Kent



"...on several occasions this past year, I wasn't all that jolly...."

Nativity an altarpiece:

The wise men are still on the road, searching, crowns and gifts packed in their saddlebags.

The shepherds are still asleep on the hill, their woolen caps pulled over their ears, their campfire low.

It's the wandering animals, ox and ass, unused to human company after dark, who witness, alone with Mary and Joseph, the birth; who hear the cry, the first cry

of earthly breath drawn through the newborn lungs of God.

And the cord is cut, and the shepherds
that selfsame moment have sprung to their feet
in a golden shower of angels, terrified, then
rejoicing. They lope downhill to the barn
to see their Redeemer. A cloud of
celestial music surrounds them.

The wise men
are still far off, alone on the road with a star.

But the ox and the ass
are kneeling already, the Family's oldest friends,
in the glow of light that illumines the manger, the straw,
their eyes and the human eyes—a glow
shed from no source but the living Child Himself.

—From The Door in the Hive by Denise Levertov

MURRAY'S LAW . Leslie Moak Murray



Mother of God, light in all darkness:

Mother of God
Light in All Darkness,
shelter Him our flame of hope
with your tender hands.
And in our times of
dread and nightmares,
let Him be our dream of comfort.
And in our times of
physical pain and suffering,
let Him be our healer.
And in our times of separation
from God and one another,
let Him be our communion.
Amen.

-William Hart McNichols

The birthday of baby Jesus:

When they were very young, my three children were, like many children, very excited about the secular Christmas—Santa, gifts, cookies, etc.—but I wanted them to also be aware of and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas. So each year our family tradition was to bake a birthday cake and decorate it together. This was the children's project and at times the cake turned out "interesting" and laden with sprinkles and candy. On Christmas Day we would have a birthday party for the Baby Jesus. There would be singing "Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus," and candles to blow out. The children looked forward to this tradition and remember it to this day.

—Kathy Kubit



Do not be discouraged:

For years I was held in a tiny cell. My only human contact was with my torturers. For two and a half of those years I did not experience the glance of a human face, see a green leaf. My only company was the cockroaches and mice. The only daylight that entered my cell was through a small opening at the top of one wall. For eight months I had my hands and feet tied. On Christmas Eve, the door to my cell opened, and the guard tossed in a crumpled piece of paper. I moved as best I could to pick up the paper. It said simply, "Constantina, do not be discouraged; we know you are alive." It was signed "Monica" and had the Amnesty International candle on it. These words saved my life and my sanity. Eight months later I was set free.

—Constantina Coronel, Uruguay

The Cosmic Christ, continued:

person—as long as you know it is not really true—in the way you ordinarily use that phrase! God is no longer a mere person, but ALL of reality itself has become PER-SONAL, relational, dialogical, giving and receiving, loving and loveable. God cannot be localized here or there anymore (Luke 17:20), but as the old catechism said "God is everywhere."

This is a major and important maturing in one's relationship with God, yet so few spiritual guides know how to lead us across when we think we are losing our initial faith. You indeed are! But you are finding a much deeper faith, and you must go through this necessary trial and darkness to grow up spiritually and experience true and full intimacy with God. (Read St. John of the Cross, if you doubt me.)

For Christians the paradox is resolved in the Trinity. They can continue to relate to Jesus PERSONALLY, but when prayer becomes fully Trinitarian, as we see in the Christian mystics, God is not just A Person that they have a relationship with, but God is RELATIONSHIP ITSELF (internally in God) and draws everything into that ONE DIVINE DANCE (externally in the universe). More and more people, I am finding, are ready for such adult Christianity and such mature spirituality (See Hebrews 5:12-13). Only then does "everything belong," and only then do we get off the childish teeter-totter and fall onto the solid ground of joy. But it will surely feel like falling!

"Don't be afraid!"

We are all meant to be Mothers of God.

-Meister Eckhart

(We are all meant to give birth to God at every moment, just as God gives birth to us at every moment. We are all mothers of God, birthing the divine.)

Advent, by Sr. Jessica Powers:

I live my Advent in the womb of Mary.
And on one night when a great star swings free
From its high mooring and walks down the sky
To be the dot above the <u>Christus I</u>
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,
With hope's expectance of nativity.

I knew for long she carried me and fed me, Guarded and loved me, though I could not see. But only now, with inward jubilee, I came upon earth's most amazing knowledge: Someone is hidden in this dark with me.

The Bethlehem explosion:

"...To all who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God."...(Jn 1:12) This verse in the midst of the beautiful words of the first chapter of the Gospel of John leads us to the more familiar infancy narratives that we cherish as the record of the birth events of Jesus, God with us. The infant Messiah offers us anew the opportunity to claim the power of being a child of God. In an immensely complicated world with complex problems, it is not our first thought to embrace one another and ourselves as children of God. Nonetheless, this is essential to our life in Christ. In another scripture, Jesus tell us "unless you become as one of these (a little child) you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Recently, I went to the magical Radio City Musical Hall Christmas Spectacular—and spectacular it was. The famed Rock-



ettes danced with precision, grace and rhythm. The scenes of the child dreaming under the tree of opening enormous gifts each with a dancing bear or rabbits or other adorable and marvelously costumed creatures and Santa's workshop dazzled. The ice skaters emerged from the orchestra pit on an ice rink. Production numbers and stage effects drew continued audience response.

At the beginning of the show a stern voice warned the audience that pictures were not to be taken. For the most part this was observed until...

Santa left the North Pole, the curtain came down and after a brief silence the orchestra began to play softly and reverently "O Little Town of Bethlehem," and a narrator reminded us all that the genesis of our festivities was the birth in Bethlehem of Judea of the one called Prince of Peace, a child born during a journey by his parents to fulfill a legal requirement of the time. What can only be described as a procession followed. The actors in the unfolding tabloid moved with deliberate reverence to the scene of the birth of Jesus. As Mary and Joseph and the shepherds gathered signaling the birth with the background music, "Angels We Have Heard on High," you could not count the number of flash bulbs that went off. It was as if the audience could not get enough of this magnificent, simple scene.

As I witnessed this and felt my own heart moved once again, I realized that there was a real need on the part of those flashing pictures and perhaps on those without a camera to freeze this moment in time. It was as if the theater erupted in a moment of recognition that "the Word became flesh and lived among us," and at that moment the audience glimpsed his glory, "the glory as of a

father's only son, full of grace and truth." Everyone in that theater had become a child and through this extraordinary presentation of the nativity experienced the profound invitation to become a child of God and the real power of this invitation to transform the complex, complicated maze of life into meaning.

The gift of this blessed season is the hope we give one another as we listen to the Word—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In places we least expect it, the divine presence breaks into our life and we are once again rocked by what Madeleine L'Engle expresses as "The Bethlehem explosion." In this poem, she wrote:

The little town

Was like the glass jar in our lab.
One by one they came, grain by grain,
All those of the house of David,
Like grains of sand to be counted.
The inn was full. When Joseph knocked,
His wife was already in labor; there was no room
Even for compassion. Until the barn was offered.
That was the precipitating factor. A child was born,
And the pattern changed forever, the cosmos
Shaken with that silent explosion.

—Rosemari Gaughan Sullivan, Secretary of the Episcopal Church and Executive Officer of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church



Mary's hiding:

Before these possessions you love slip away, say what Mary said when she was surprised by Gabril, "I'll hide inside God."

Naked in her room she saw a form of beauty that could give her new life.

Like the sun coming up, or a rose as it opens. And she leaped, as her habit was, out of herself into the divine presence.

There was fire in the channel of her breath.

The light and the majesty came.

I am smoke from that fire, and proof of its existence, more than any external form.

-By Rumi, Sufi mystical poet, 1207-1273

A Gaelic blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you, of water flowing, rising and falling, sometimes advancing, sometimes receding... May the stream of your life flow unimpeded! Deep peace of the running wave to you!

Deep peace of the flowing air to you, which fans your face on a sultry day, the air which you breathe deeply, rhythmically, which imparts to you energy, consciousness, life. Deep peace of the flowing air to you!

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you, who, herself unmoving, harbors the movements. and facilitates the life of the ten thousand creatures, while resting contented, stable, tranquil. Deep peace of the quiet earth to you!

Deep peace of the shining stars to you, which stay invisible till darkness falls and disclose their pure and shining presence beaming down in compassion on our turning world. Deep peace of the shining stars to you!

Deep peace of the watching shepherds to you, of unpretentious folk who, watching and waiting, spend long hours out on the hillside, expecting in simplicity some Coming of the Lord. Deep peace of the watching shepherds to you!

Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you, who, swift as the wave and pervasive as the air, quiet as the earth and shining like a star, breathes into us His Peace and His Spirit. Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you!

-Submitted by Barbara Kent

A Christmas blessing:

- ♦ May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.
- [⊕] May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.
- ♣ May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honor given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.
- † May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.
- May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.
- May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.
- ⊕ May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind, and spirit.
- ♣ May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the
 One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.
 —Sr. Joyce Rupp

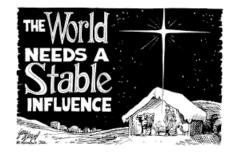
Things aren't always what they seem:

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead the angels were given a small space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel how could you have let this happen? "The first family had everything, yet you helped them," she accused. "The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die."

"Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied. "When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

Sometimes that is exactly what happens when things don't turn out the way they should. If you have faith, you just need to trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You might not know it until some time later....



Board: Vicki Sullivan, vickisullivan@comcast.net, 327-5339 Bulletin: Michelle Hogan, myhogan@comcast.net (December 24-25) Kay Williams (January 1)

Finance: Judy Creek, 493-5371 Hospitality: Jim Davis, 328-2584

Liturgy: John Arnold, 325-1421, jsaoso@comcast.net; Sally Benson, (408) 972-5843, red5@svpal.org

Needs Net: Roberta Kehret, 494-1488, robkehr@yahoo.com Spiritual Education: Mary Coady, 261-9155, Jim Davis, 328-2584