

CONGREGATIONAL CLARION

First Congregational Church ~ Salt Lake City, Utah

January 2024

January Worship Services

Services Held at 10:30am

January 7

Communion Sunday

Living the Questions:

“Does Faith Make Sense in a
World of Science?”

Taizé @7pm

January 14

Living the Questions:

“Is This All There Is?”

January 21

Living the Questions:

“How Does God
Communicate?”

Taizé @7pm

January 28

Living the Questions:

“Why Do Bad Things Happen
to Good People?”

February 4

Communion

Living the Questions

“Who the Heck Is in Charge
Here?”

The Season of Searching and Growing Hearts

By Rev. Doug Gray

“It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another.” —Margaret Wheatley, When Change Is Out of Control

When my kids were small, I really tried to spend extra time with them. On my day off, depending on the child and the week, I could be found going to aquarium stores, playing games, building legos, baking, running errands, and tying towels around our necks so we could have superhero capes. Yes, I love my kiddos. Yes, I think they are a blast. But I also knew something they didn't—I knew there would come a day when we would head into the wilderness of their teenage years. I believed every moment we spent together before they were ten, would build stronger, open, nurturing relationships we would need when we launched into uncharted territory and the going got *really* interesting.

Our fellowship is already in uncharted territory! We are journeying into a future for which we have few answers and lots of questions. This fall, we started thinking together about who we are, and asking questions about where we are going and whom God is calling us to serve. You'll notice we did that around the table together during the Congregational Conversations and Potlucks, because building relationships is an integral part of our adventurous journey! (see Report below)

Into this quiet space at the beginning of the New Year, let us remember some key promises God has made to each of us:

1. Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us—and so we know that God is not just our goal, but also walking with us. (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23)
2. Jesus is the long-awaited, much-needed shepherd for God's people—us! (Jeremiah 31, John 8)
3. Jesus will share in our challenges, teaching and helping us to face what lies ahead. (Matthew 11:28–30)

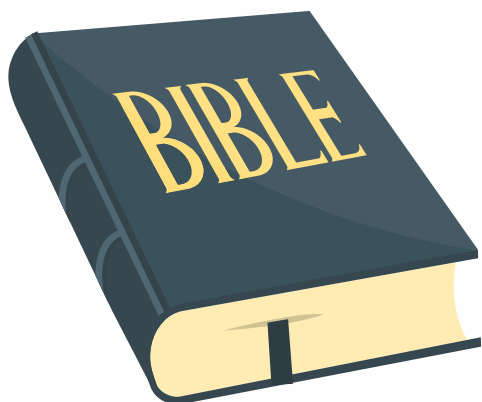
In this season of searching and growing hearts, let us continue to invest in and build our relationships with each other and with God. God knows we will need each other for the journey ahead!

Jesus said, “I'll be with you as you do all these things, day after day after day, to the end of the age.” — The Bible, Matthew 28:20

January Worship Schedule

Living the Questions

We have all asked the great questions of life—Is God out there? Does God even care? Why am I alive? If God is real, how do we communicate? Why do bad things happen? The great thing is...the Bible wrestles with all the greatest questions of life. During the six weeks between the Christmas season and Lent, we will journey towards answers to some of life's most perplexing questions, and see what the Bible has to say about them. For more discussion time on a question, come to the Friday Lunch Bunch the Friday before! (See below)



Friday Lunch Bunch Living the Questions

Do you have questions about God and the Bible and don't know where you can ask them? Friday Lunch Bunch is a safe place to ask questions, and to ponder them together. As Christians, we have wonderful resources in the Bible and in other travelers on the road of life. Between New Year's Day and February 11, we will explore the questions, share our experiences, and delve into these timeless topics. Every Friday, we will tackle the Question for Sunday. We will start January 5, with "Does Faith Make Sense in a World of Science?" As an added bonus, Pastor Doug and Rev. Joanna Hart will be team-teaching these sessions, each bringing their own unique perspective. Bring your great questions, and let's explore them together!

Date	Title/Topic	Scriptures
12/31	After Grinch: Growing Our Trust Three Sizes	Jeremiah 31:7-14 Ephesians 1:3-14
1/7	Communion Living the Questions: Does Faith Make Sense in a World of Science?	Genesis 1:1-5, 26-2:3 Matthew 22:15-22
1/14	Living the Questions: Is This All There Is?	Ecc 3:9-14 Acts 17:19-28
1/21	Living the Questions: How Does God Communicate?	Deuteronomy 6:4-12 1 Corinthians 2:9b-16
1/28	Living the Questions: Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?	2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Luke 13:1-9
2/4	Communion Living the Questions: Who the Heck Is in Charge Here?	Philippians 2:11-22

Taizé Worship with All Saints

January 7 and 21, @ 7pm

Worship is meant to be experienced with all our senses, to involve our whole body in praising and honoring God. The Taizé worship experience is designed to do just that. Twice a month, All Saints Episcopal hosts Taizé worship—meditative music, prayerful chanting, thoughtful message, and Biblical worship all rolled into one! Why not give it a try!

Understanding the Habits of Nones Adult Formation on Sundays @ 9:15a

In every poll of religious involvement, the category growing the fastest for the last decade or so is the “Nones,” those with no religious affiliation. Yet still, Gallup reports that well over 90% of Americans believe in God. For six weeks—starting January 7—we will explore Ryan P. Burge’s *The Nones: Where They Came from, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (2nd Edition, 2023). One interesting thing about the author: He is a published political scientist and an ordained pastor in the American Baptist Convention! Our prayer is that this fascinating topic for our times will help us understand ourselves, our families and our communities better. The discussions will be team-led by Father Trace Browning and Rev. Doug Gray.

1/7 Chapter 1:

What Does the American Religious Landscape Look Like?

1/14 Chapter 2:

A Social Scientist Tries to Explain Religious Disaffiliation

1/21 Chapter 3:

The Demographics of Disaffiliation

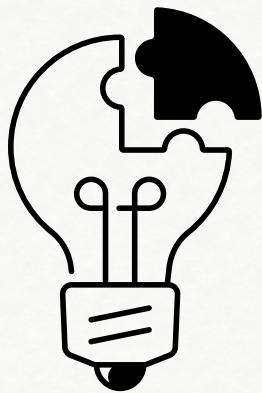
1/28 No discussion

2/4 Chapter 4:

Nones Are Not All Created Equal

2/11 Chapter 6:

What We Can Change and What We Cannot



Breakfast Feeds the Soul

Men’s Breakfast

January 3 at 8am at Sharon’s Café –
Conversations are always good and the food is always tasty. Not all are members of the church, but all of us are trying to live lives marked by grace.



Women’s Breakfast

Ladies, mark your calendars! We are thrilled to invite you to a Women’s Breakfast on January 12 at 9am, we are meeting at IHOP on 5300 S. and State Street. It is going to be a fantastic opportunity for us to come together, enjoy a delicious meal, and connect with one another. We will be making this a regular monthly event, held on the second Friday of every month, so if you can’t make this month, we hope to catch you next month.

Building Requests and Calendar Updates

Please direct all building use requests through the church office by email at firstcongregationalslc@gmail.com or by leaving a written note. This will help eliminate any building conflicts. If you have any items that need to be added to the church calendar, please also let the office know by email.



Congregational Conversation Report for December 10

On December 10, members and friends of our fellowship gathered for worship and then a potluck meal. As we gathered around the tables, we discussed the following topics:

1. How do we make people feel welcome in our worship? What are some other signs that people know that they are welcome with us? Are there ways we could be more welcoming and accepting?
2. Who are the people God wants us to reach out to, so that we can be a blessing and show grace? What are those people looking for?
3. What questions would you like to ask about our community and the people in it?
4. As individuals, all of us try to reach outside of ourselves to address the needs of our greater community. Do you think we do (enough / not enough / too much) as a faith community to reach out to address societal issues? How could we make our social outreach as a faith community more impactful?

Thank you to everyone who participated, and thank you to all who brought such delicious food—there was plenty and to spare for everyone, including some guests from All Saints! One of the interesting things was that during the first set of conversations (November 12), the conversations were very similar from table to table, but as I walked around this time, the conversations were completely different! I (Pastor Doug) have reorganized the answers for clarity, as some answers appeared under more than one question.

Welcome and Hospitality

Things we do now

- Don't swarm guests
- Greeters at the door (duties defined)
- Encourage participation in worship
- Visit with people before and after—esp. look for new people!
- Bulletin helps people know what is coming. Larger print helps people read.
- Praying for people
- Follow up with people who come for the first time

Things we could do to welcome even better

- Improve outdoor signage on Sundays. Finding and getting to us is confusing
- Follow up with people who are absent
- Birthday cards. Need more birthdays in database!



Questions around those we are called to serve

- **Who is our community? Neighborhood? The Valley? Socio-economic, racial, like-minded? Members only? Homeless? The poor?** (This question was asked several times that day! It's a key question!)
- What are members doing outside the church? What are our hobbies or occupations? How can we support them in those endeavors?
- What kinds of people are we best equipped to make a difference with?
- What kind of community are people looking for? Kindness. Willing to change .
- How do we serve “non-joiners”?
- What would bring in young people with children?
 - o Free babysitting for neighborhood people one evening a week or month?
 - o Would they be attracted by serving?
- How could we use TikTok in a way that helps people?
- How do we reach the people we see in our regular lives each week?

Questions around our community and the people in it

- **Who is our community?** See above.
- How do we ask people, “How can church add to your spiritual needs?”
- Do we need to do a demographic study?
- How do we identify the liberal, intellectual, religious people?

Questions around social outreach

Things we do now or have done in the past

- Monthly outreach projects
- Acts of kindness to individuals
- Minister's discretionary fund for needs, food, emergencies
- We are good at donating for a particular project or drive

Other thoughts:

- We are limited by age and ability to do a lot of physical things.
- We are not in the middle of the ones we're helping.
- Should we be involved in legislative issues as individuals or as a fellowship?
Who decides which ones?
- Are there non-profits we could partner with in particular areas of interest?
- Could we get our grown kids (who may not come to church) to help out with the physical parts of a project?



If you were unable to come to the Congregational Conversation and Potluck in December, we would still love to hear from you. You can jot some ideas down on a notepad or email and send them off to the church. We will add them to our summary, and they will add clarity to our future conversations.

Finding Out What We Don't Know

The questions and comments from December 10 fall into a few categories

- Demographic questions about our neighborhood and city
- Demographic questions about the people in our fellowship—members and recent former members—including education
- Generational questions—how do we understand and serve people who are different from us in experience, perspective and culture?
- How do we improve our welcome? What are best practices?
- How do we improve our hearts in God—to serve without asking what's in it for me?
- How do we help people in the congregation engage and make a difference?

At December's Council meeting, we began the process of gathering resources to answer these questions. If you have experience or knowledge that would help us, please get in touch with either Moderator Bill Brown or Pastor Doug Gray.

Anniversary

Anniversary Sunday

Join us on January 21 for our anniversary luncheon, following worship. Watch for upcoming details in the weeks leading up to this special day.

From the Trustees ~ Phil LeHoux

The trustees continued to address its primary areas of responsibility relating to the economic and business aspects of congregational governance. Spending patterns are as expected and are closely monitored at our monthly meeting. The income trend from congregational giving continues to improve, both to the General Fund and to our Outreach projects. For all the members' generosity in their support, we are grateful and blessed.

The outline of the equipment to achieve our goal of an enhanced quality for our online streaming has been identified by Pastor Doug in consultation with sister churches who have already achieved many of our desired objectives. Currently, quotes are being solicited and standardized to allow an efficient selection process. From the proposals received to date, the overall cost is expected to exceed the amount committed to this project in the current year's budget, especially considering the practical requirement of a simple, manageable setup on Sunday within the practical constraints of a multi-use space throughout the week. It should be noted that this equipment falls within the designated use of FCC Trust funds.

You will also note that some of our old red folding chairs have reappeared in our meeting space to replace the black chairs which are quite rapidly disappearing. Unfortunately, the black chairs' ruggedness has not matched their comfort. The trustees are participating with All Saints representatives to select and replace the St John's Hall chairs. These chairs are used extensively during the week by various support and social groups, and the selection process will consider the high wear and tear resulting from heavy use and frequent handling.

From Our Parish Nurse ~ Diane Forster-Burke

Yes, It Is Still Out There

Utah is one of 10 states showing “very high” levels of Coronavirus according to the CDC and the people at the Health Department, who monitor virus levels in wastewater. (Again, not a job that I would want). This report stated that 65.7% of wastewater stations are seeing an increase in viral loads.* Monitoring wastewater gives a sense of the amount of virus circulating in the community, since case counts include only those people who are hospitalized. Most people are testing at home and can often get a prescription without an office visit to the primary care provider.

What is recommended is to get your Covid booster NOW if you didn't get the booster earlier in the fall. We are not quite ready to mandate masks again at church, but if you are feeling unwell, STAY at HOME! We love you and do not want another outbreak at church. Masks are recommended for traveling around the community, where you don't know who has been vaccinated or who is feeling sick. I wear my masks whenever I go into a crowded place. Vaccines help protect you from getting sick enough to be hospitalized. Your 3 parish nurses all believe in vaccines and together, we have over 125 years of nursing experience! So roll up your sleeve and get your booster! And stay tuned for more information as we watch the virus levels in the wastewater.

*SL Tribune, Dec 1, 2023. www.sltrib.com/news/2023/12/01/utah-has-very-high-covid-19-levels/

January Outreach ~ Becky Bishop

Our Outreach for January is the Volunteers of America, as we continue to collect items from the Urgent Winter Needs List. Designated Monetary Donations will be sent to the VOA. If you would like to see the complete list, it can be found at www.voaut.org under the Donate heading. If it would be more convenient for you, they have a link that takes you directly to their Amazon Wish List. Items purchased there will be delivered directly to the VOA. Please let Kristi know if you use this option, so that your donation can be included in the Outreach total for the month.

They are unable to accept the following: Used underwear, clothing in poor condition (dirty, torn, tattered, or otherwise damaged), large and small appliances, computers, furniture, mattresses, pillows, construction materials, flammable materials, electronics—including televisions or small appliances—or any other material over 75 pounds. We do not need baby items, including clothing, toys, furniture (walkers, swings, or play yards), car seats, or other equipment, unless specifically requested.

The 125 items that were placed under the Share the Warmth Tree were delivered a couple of weeks ago and included: 10 Puffer Coats (men's and women's) 45 pairs of socks, 4 Heavy Quilted Flannel Jackets, 2 Sweatpants, 8 knit shirts, 5 fleece jackets, 28 knit hats, 20 pairs of heavy gloves. The employee who took the delivery was very excited to see the coats especially. I will continue to make regular deliveries.

As an update to the past few months, \$1,700 of baby formula was delivered to Crossroads Urban Center. The YWCA Candy Cane Lane received 178 items that were purchased with the Outreach donations for November. Several other toys were donated. An additional \$430.00 was sent to them; the total funds collected was \$1,415.00. The YWCA Campus currently houses 200 families in Salt Lake City.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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