

First Congregational Church of Long Beach
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

November 29, 2026 • 10:00 a.m.
First Sunday of Advent

Our Mission:
to be a visible and prophetic presence in the church and in the world,
to steadfastly proclaim the radically inclusive love of God,
to be open to, and celebrate differences; to honor thinking for oneself,
to faithfully work for the inclusion of, and justice for all people, regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, race or national origin, or any particular element of a person's total humanity, and for all of God's creation.

Please join in where words are shown in bold type.
Please stand if you are able for items with an asterisk*.

Centering ourselves with the sound of the chime and the Land Acknowledgement

Prelude O Come, O Come Emmanuel — Curtis Heard, piano
Arr. Mark Hayes

Acolytes: Dylan and Grace Whitesell

Invocation — The Rev. Petra Malleis-Sternberg

***Call to Celebration** — Rev. Malleis-Sternberg and The Rev. Wally Hoeger

One: In God's house,
Many: we are free to wear our hearts on our sleeves.
One: In God's house,
Many: we may come exactly as we are.
One: In God's house,
Many: we dare to hope. We dream new dreams. We cry out. We call upon God.
One: In God's house,
Many: all are welcome and all are heard.
One: So come and worship.
Many: God is here. God is listening.
One: Let us celebrate our with-us God.

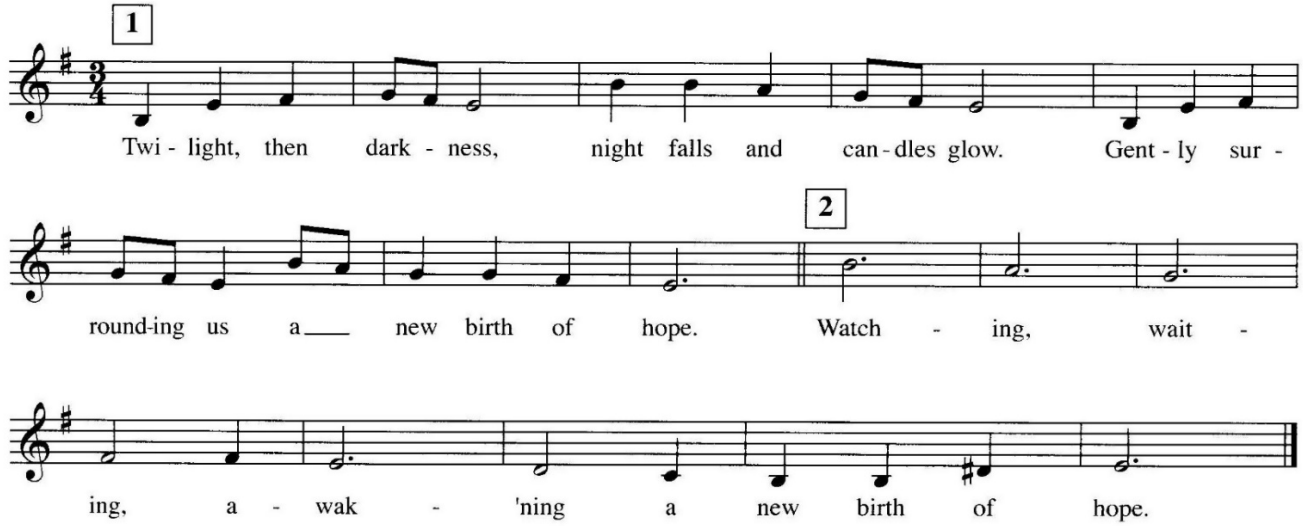
***Opening Hymn, No. 122** Come, O Long-Expected Jesus

See Page 8

Lighting of the Candle of Hope Beth, Dylan and Grace Whitesell

One: When the nights are long and the roads are hard,
Many: we turn our eyes to the stars.
One: When the work is demanding and injustice unending,
Many: we stand together, arm in arm.
One: When fear looms large and grief weighs heavy,
Many: we cry out to God without holding back.
One: And when the dawn of tomorrow feels far away,
Many: we gather together to light the candle of hope.
(The Candle of Hope is lit)
One: Like the stars above, may this light shine bright.
Many: May it guide our path. May it inspire deeper hope.
One: Until God's promised day,
Many: may it be so. Amen.

Sung Response:
by Phil Porter and Elaine Kirkland



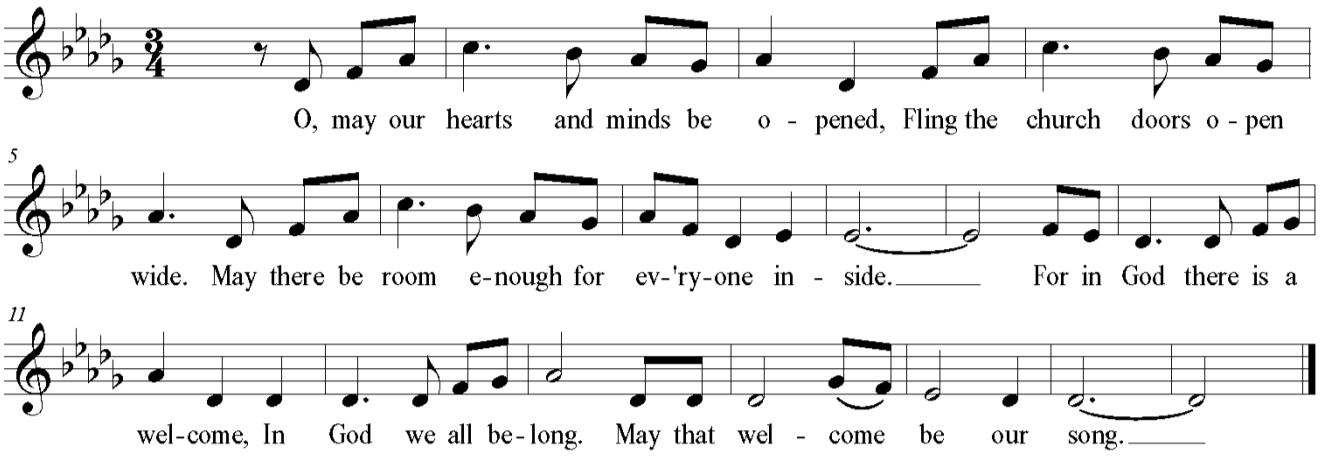
Welcome and Announcements Rev. Hoeger

Passing of the Peace Rev. Hoeger

Special Music Festive Celebration Beloved Bells
Kevin McChesney

Welcome Song

The children are invited to come forward during this song.



music and lyrics by David Lohman ©2007 Lohman Music Permission granted for congregational use

Time With Children Rev. Hoeger

Anthem Dawning Hope Sanctuary Choir

Words by Tina Datsko de Sánchez, music by Curtis Heard

The Children and Youth are invited to Sunday School.

Scripture Isaiah 64:1-9 Carmen Abbott

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition, adapted

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down; the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any god besides you,
who works for those who wait for you.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name
or attempts to take hold of you,
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O Lord, you are our God; we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Contemporary Reading Heavens Torn & Transformed Carmen Abbott
by Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Inspired by Isaiah 64:1-9
33”x24” Oil pastel on cambric fabric, stretched on wood panel with gold leaf; framed with white oak

Artist’s Statement:

As soon as I read the opening line of this passage from Isaiah, a bolt of desperation surged through my body and I repeated the prophet’s prayer in my own words: “Please, God, tear open the heavens and come down. End the wars. Protect those in fear. Stop the suffering. Save us!” The Hebrew word translated as “tear” (*qara`*)[1] is almost always used to describe the ancient grief practice of rending one’s garments. In that sense, the prophet is pleading for God to lament with us.

I began this piece with that concept in mind. I stretched a night sky of black fabric on a wood panel, and with oil pastels I dappled the horizon with light, as if the dawn were ablaze with fire. When I finished, I admired my creation, a tribute to a world filled with couple-color and pied beauty.[2]



Then it came time to rend God’s garment. I delayed and grieved this step, yet I felt the prophet’s plea urging me onward. I ripped the fabric, tearing the heavens and mountains open. In the space between, I added gold leaf—a glimmer of God’s presence in the gaping wound of the world. To finalize the artwork, my husband created a frame using white oak—a nod to the “oaks of righteousness,” the brokenhearted who mourn yet who receive God’s comfort and blessing in Isaiah 61:1-3.

As I worked on this piece, I contemplated what grief does to the body. In my experience— having lost my mom to cancer when I was a child—grief begs to be

metabolized. I must find ways to acknowledge, release, and transform it; otherwise, it steeps in my body like a poison. Therefore, I came to realize that Isaiah is not calling for God to destroy the earth, but to dramatically transform it. Though we may "fade like a leaf,"[3] the prophet makes a hopeful turn: leaves decompose into the clay of the earth, which then gets reshaped in the potter's hands.

In a war-torn world filled with dappled beauty, we cry out for God to come down and radically transform us into a new creation. May it be so.

1 biblehub.com/hebrew/7167.htm
2 See the poem, "Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins. poetryfoundation.org/poems/44399/pied-beauty
3 In the weeks I was working on this piece, I collected several decaying leaves, admiring the intricate lacework of their exposed veins, which is not so unlike the veins visible in my own skin. I experimented with adding the leaves to my artwork, but I was unsuccessful in finding a way that revealed their aesthetic appeal. However, I marveled at how something so beautiful was fading into dirt.

Special Music Immanuel — Lisa Bode Heard, soloist
Paul Boyd-Batstone — Paul Boyd-Batstone, ukulele
Curtis Heard, piano

Sermon Clay and Leaves — Rev. Malleis-Sternberg

Hymn This Time of Darkness Bears a Dream
See Page 9

Prayers of the People — Rev. Hoeger

Our Common Prayer

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
May the hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the people of the earth!
With the bread we need today, feed us.
For the hurts we inflict on one another, forgive us.
In the time of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For your reign is in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever.
Amen.

Offering

Invitation to Give Carmen Abbott

Offertory Offertory: Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming Curtis Heard, piano
Arr. by Mark Hayes

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or go to firstchurchlb.org/donate

***Doxology:** Old Hundredth (Hymn No. 780)
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God with all the hosts above;
Praise God in wonder, joy and love.

*** Prayer of Dedication** Rev. Hoeger

***Closing Hymn, No. 121** All Earth is Waiting
See Page 10

***Benediction** Rev. Malleis-Sternberg

Benediction Response Love Came Down at Christmas Sanctuary Choir

Postlude Thanksgiving Theme Charles Sharp, alto sax
Vince Guaraldi Curtis Heard, piano

One License: 706147-A *(in support of our livestream)*

First Church has both assistive listening devices and noise-blocking headphones available to borrow for services. Please see one of the Diaconate, ushering in the entry to the church, to borrow one of these assists or to ask any other questions about available accommodations. Thank you!

The sanctuary flowers this morning are provided by Chuck Fowler in recognition and celebration of his 80th birthday.

Parish Concerns

Please remember in your prayers: Cathy Chambers and family, Tim Rhodes (Nephew of Gary Shelton), Jim Carhart (Megan O'Toole's husband), Kimel Conway and Joseph Ward, Jeanne Whitesell, Cynde Soto, Logan Townsend, Adreana Langston, Laura McCrary, David McMillin, Dale Whitney, Michel Guy, Marion Hinze, Wayne Hester, Joanne Paine, and Aida Porteneuve.

Birthdays This Week – Happy Birthday!

29 - David McMillin, Yvonne SaMarion 05 - Finn McKiernan

This Week at First Church

Sunday, November 29

8:45 AM Sunday Study – Pownall Room & Zoom
9:00 AM All Seasons Choir Rehearsal – Ramsay Dining Room
9:30 AM Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal – Choir Room
10:00 AM Service of Celebration – Sanctuary & Youtube.com/1stChurch
Sunday School – Klar 1 & 3, Sacred Space & High School Room
11:30 AM Advent Workshop – Patterson Hall
Alternative Christmas Fair Trade Market – Courtyard
1:30 PM UCO Drop-In Center – Patterson Hall

Monday, November 30

10:00 AM Archives Group – Ramsay Dining Room

Tuesday, December 1

10:00 AM Handmakers Small Group Meeting – Koinonia Room

Thursday, December 3

5:00 PM DAYS Leaders LB – Ramsay Dining Rpp,
Jubellance Rehearsal – Sanctuary
6:00 PM Bellissimo Rehearsal – Sanctuary
7:30 PM Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal – Choir Room

Friday, December 4

1:30 PM DAYS Grocery Program – Patterson Hall and Potholder Lot

Saturday, December 5

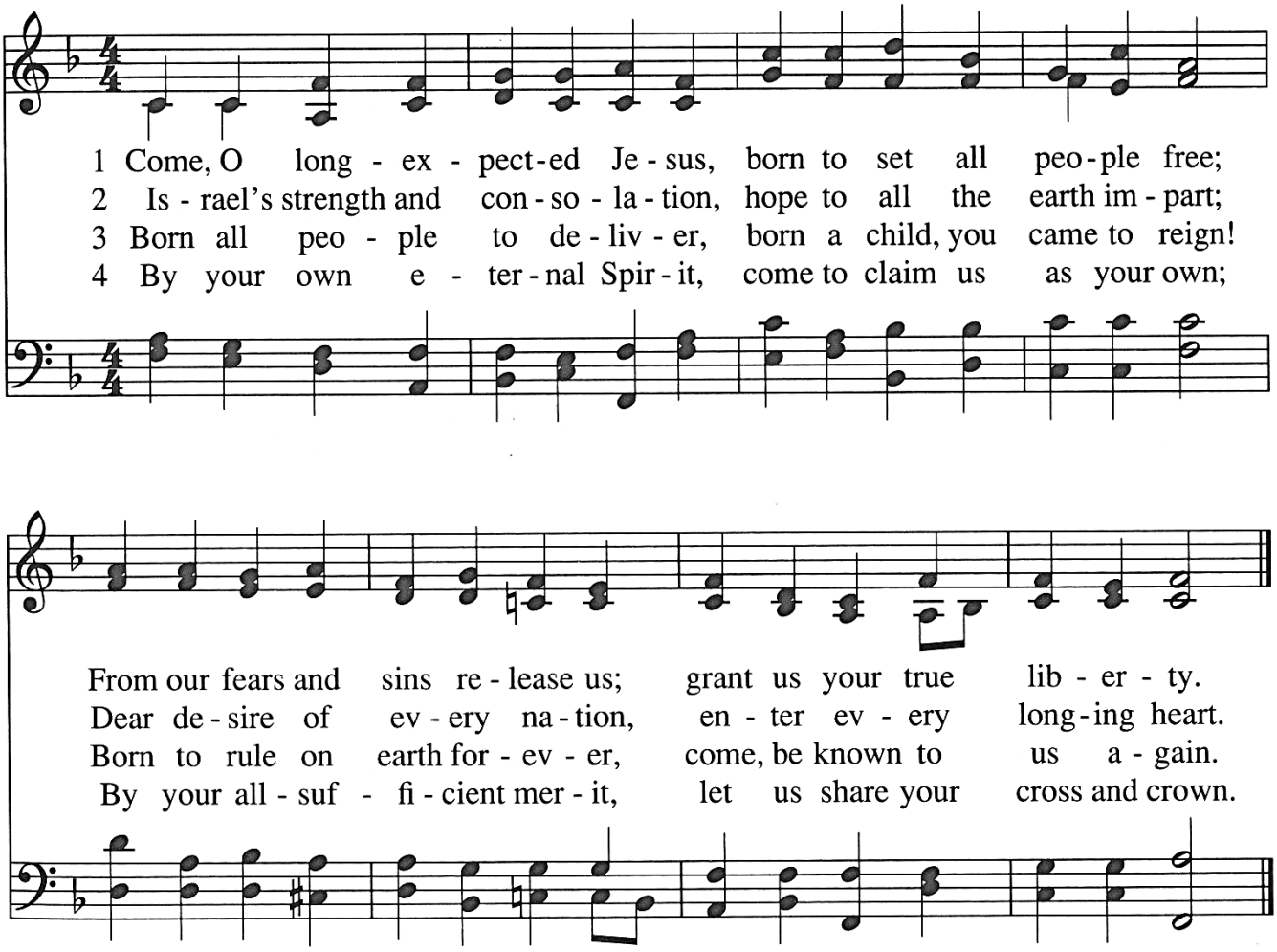
10:00 AM Ceremony of Carols Rehearsal – Choir Room and Ramsay Dining Room
2:30 PM CSULB Fine Arts Affiliates Reception – Koinonia Room
4:00 PM CSULB Winter Festival Concert First Show – Sanctuary
8:00 PM CSULB Winter Festival Concert Second Show - Sanctuary

Sunday, December 6

8:45 AM Sunday Study – Pownall Room & Zoom
9:00 AM All Seasons Choir Rehearsal – Ramsay Dining Room
9:30 AM Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal – Choir Room
10:00 AM Service of Celebration – Sanctuary & Youtube.com/1stChurch
Sunday School – Klar 1 & 3, Sacred Space & High School Room
11:15 AM Beloved Bells Rehearsal – Bell Room
11:30 AM Alternative Christmas Fair Trade Market – Courtyard
Board of Christian Education Meeting – Senior High Room
Board of Cultural Arts Meeting – Pownall Room & Zoom
Board of Parish Life Meeting – Booth Chapel
Board of Social Justice & Outreach Meeting – Sacred Space & Zoom
Board of Stewardship & Finance Meeting – Klar 2
1:30 PM UCO Drop-In Center – Patterson Hall
2:30 PM CSULB President's Reception – Patterson Hall & Courtyard
3:00 PM CSULB Winter Festival Concert – Sanctuary
6:00 PM Winterfest: Sparkling Reception

Come, O Long-Expected Jesus 122

Charles Wesley, 1744; alt.

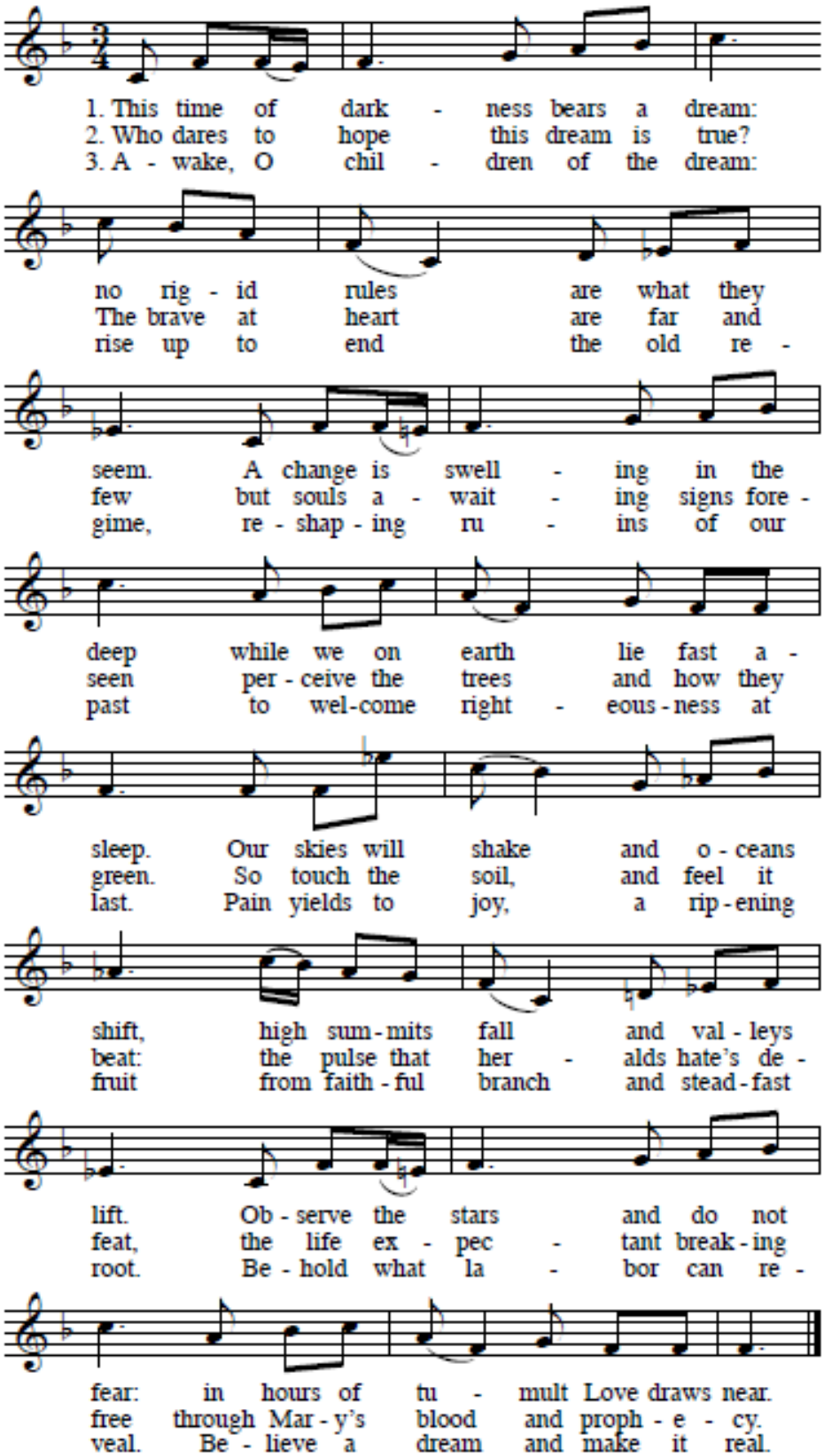




THIS TIME OF DARKNESS BEARS A DREAM

Hannah C. Brown

WEXFORD CAROL
Traditional Irish carol



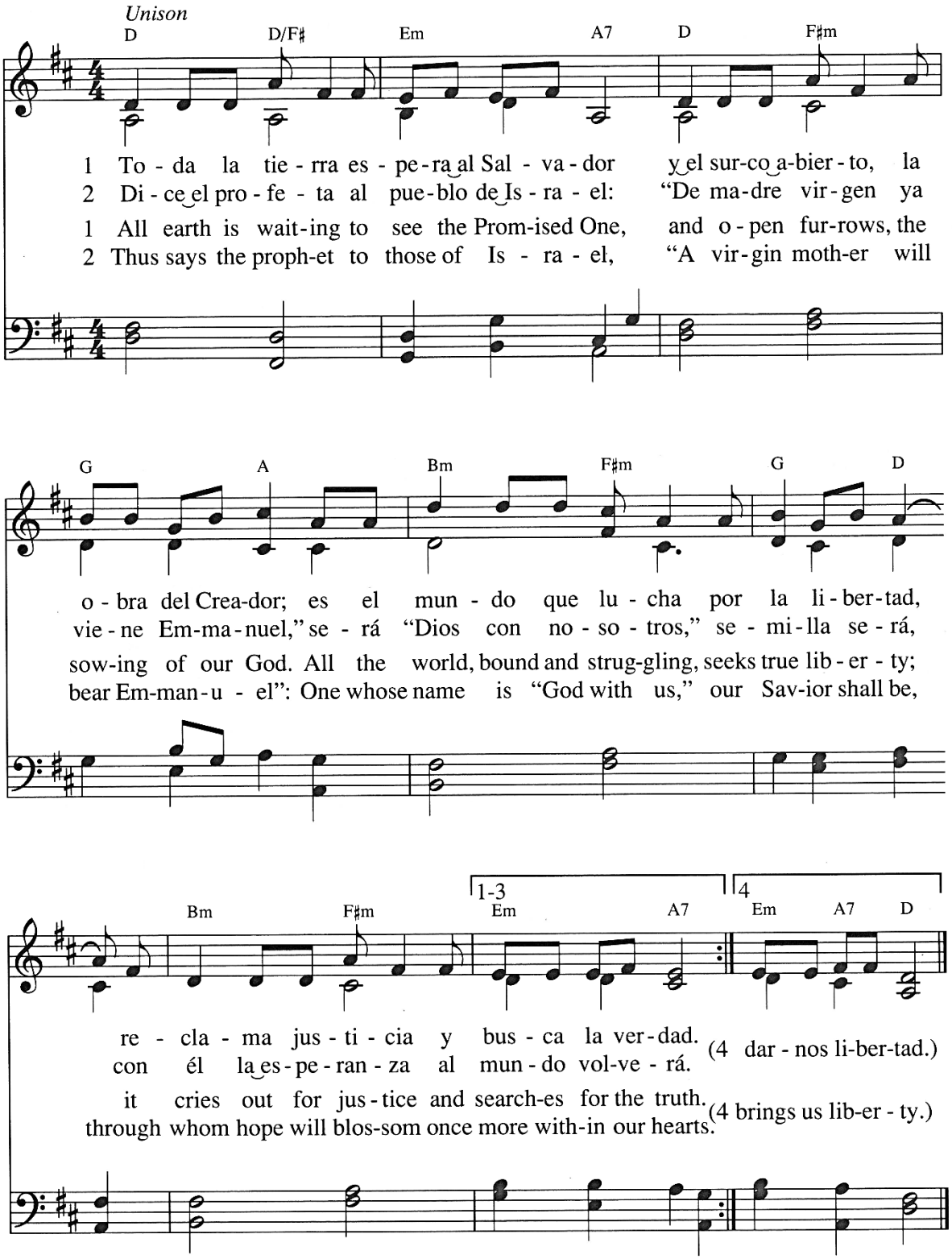
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Toda la Tierra
(All Earth Is Waiting)

Isa. 40:3–5; Luke 3:4–6; Matt. 1:23

Alberto Taulé, 1972; alt.
Transl. Gertrude C. Suppe, 1987; alt.



3 Mon-tes y va-lles
ha-brá que pre-pa-rar;
nue-vos ca-mi-nos
te-ne-mos que tra-zar.
Dios es-tá ya muy cer-ca,
ve-nid-lo a en-con-trar,
y to-das las puer-tas
a-brid de par en par.

4 En un pe-se-bre
Je-sús a-pa-re-ció,
pe-ro en el mun-do
es-tá pre-sen-te hoy.
Vi-ve en-tre la gen-te,
con e-llas es-tá;
y vuel-ve de nue-vo
a dar-nos li-ber-tad.

3 Moun-tains and val-leys will
have to be made plain;
o-pen new high-ways,
new high-ways for our God,
Who is now com-ing closer,
so come all and see,
and o-pen the door-ways
as wide as wide can be.

4 In low-ly sta-ble
the Prom-ised One ap-peared,
yet feel that pres-ence
through-out the earth to-day,
For Christ lives in all Chris-tians
and is with us now;
a-gain, on ar-riv-ing
Christ brings us lib-er-ty.



Christmas Caroling – December 13 @ 4pm

Come join our caravan of carpooling carolers as we spread a little Christmas cheer! All ages and singing abilities are welcome. Whether you love to sing, prefer to ring jingle bells, or just want to come along for the fun, we'd love to have you with us.

We'll gather at 4pm at the church before heading out to sing carols, and we'll wrap up the evening together at Straw Hat Pizza (**6522 E. Spring St., Long Beach**). Use the QR Code to sign up.

First Congregational Church of Long Beach
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHURCH OFFICERS

Doug Emslie, Moderator
Charlotte Waldo, Vice Moderator
Julie Gholson, Treasurer
Kirsten Pickus, Secretary

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Pam Chapin, Dorothy King
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Jenn Tafel
Stewardship & Finance:
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Cathy Chambers, Heather Chambers & Sebastian Jobin-Reyes

COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE

Curtis Heard

POET-IN-RESIDENCE

Tina Datsko de Sánchez

HISTORIAN

Bob Kalayjian

BOOKKEEPERS

Melody O'Keefe & Heather Chambers at Privity CPA Partners, LP

CLERGY

Rev. Petra Malleis-Sternberg, Senior Minister
pmsternberg@firstchurchlb.org
Rev. Wally Hoeger, Associate Minister
whoeger@firstchurchlb.org

MUSIC STAFF

Curtis Heard, Director of Music
Tracy Halter-Balin, Associate Director of Music
Megan O'Toole, Soprano Soloist
Lisa Bode Heard, Alto Soloist
Charlie Carlos, Tenor Soloist
George Carson, Bass Soloist

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Tracy Halter-Balin, Director of Christian Ed.
Eric Peterson, Business Manager
Rhyan Humphrey, Office Manager
Preston Andres, Lead Custodian
Sophia Valenzuela, Kyla Baker, Yesi Urrea Castro, Sebastian Lytwynec, Mercy Segastume Castillo, Sunday School
Elijah Brown, Joel Gantt, Cassie Jordan, Custodians
Julianne Fung, Audio Technician
Abby Zidonis, Video Technician

CLERGY IN OUR COMMUNITY

Rev. Jerry Stinson, Senior Minister Emeritus
Rev. Katy Hyman, Director of Pediatric and Adult Palliative Care, MemorialCare
Dr. Marc Dickey, Organist Emeritus