

Mount Vernon
Presbyterian
Church



Physical Copies of The Grapevine can
be found in the Narthex at the Church

www.mountvernonpres.org

A decorative wreath of holly leaves and red berries surrounds the central text. The leaves are green with dark veins, and the berries are bright red. A large red bow is positioned at the bottom center of the wreath.

The Grapevine

November 2024 - February 2025





Discomfort & Joy

Friends at **MVPC**,

I'm honored to be part of the Grapevine this season, as one of your Commissioned Pastors. You all have welcomed so many of us at Underground Ministries over the years--not only by hosting our prison-reentry programs and returning community members into the church campus and offices here, but by holding me personally and our organization through some hard seasons of heartbreak and transition.

So it's only right that I get to return the favor, during a hard season for the beloved congregation.

You've probably heard by now that Pastor Dan had a scary health emergency this past Wednesday night. I was with him when it happened, and with Rebecca at the hospital, along with some of you. I thank God that my friend Dan is alive and well right now. As the Holland family takes some time to heal together, I'll be stepping in and walking with you for several Sunday mornings ahead--just as we enter the Advent season.

In Advent, we re-trace the startlingly uncomfortable story of how God snuck into our world.

An unplanned teen pregnancy. A government-forced migration. A homeless young couple. The nightmare of giving birth in a cold barn. Only night-shift workers--strangers--showing up to greet the no-status baby, because they saw a wild vision while at work? Then leaders from a foreign country (and foreign religion) show up with gifts?

This is how God arrives?

It's not the story we wanted. That odd ensemble of characters standing around the squirming baby, recognizing God's promise in an embarrassing, ugly and tender situation--I think that's a portrait of God's style. Every December, Jesus' jarring birth narratives call us out of our preferences: we obviously enjoy gathering with our favorite people, attending well-lit and manicured worship services, crackling fires and songs of comfort and joy.

The old nativity scene is, by contrast, more a portrait of discomfort and joy.

The better we get at entering difficult stories we want to avoid, the more I believe we get in on the joy. God is born in these situations. What if Mary or Joseph said, "But this isn't how it was SUPPOSED to happen! Everything is all wrong"? God chose a humble person who said, Let it be so. Or, Alright, let's do this.

Let's follow Mary's lead, and be people who say to the challenging calls ahead, "Let's do this." There's new relationships, unexpected community and mystery ahead. Joy.

I'll be with you for several Sundays ahead, including some more tamale-making with Underground families and OUR Journey youth in our valley on December 8th.

Let's bring our gifts this season, like the wise folks, to out-of-the-way places. Let's rub shoulders with strangers and night shift workers. Let's draw near to the low points in our lives, hidden places our community, not be afraid of the story we wanted radically changing. Let's not miss how and where God brings joy to the world.

See you soon.
Chris Hoke

Advent & Christmastide Season

Holly Jolly Tamales on Dec 8th

O.U.R. Journey would like to say "Feliz Navidad" and invite you to their now traditional, holiday season Fundraiser, Holly Jolly Tamales on December 8th. Everyone is invited to the All Ages event immediately after worship to make tamales, and show your support for the Skagit Valley Youth served by Genaro's Team! There will be festive snacks and refreshments available for everyone. And this year, handmade, fresh Tamales will be made the night before, so as soon as you've had enough fun, you can leave with a fresh batch. For more information about the event, keep an eye out for flyers around the church.



"Day of" All Ages Nativity on Dec 15th

We are trying out the fun of a "Day of" All Ages Nativity on **Sunday, December 15th**. Want to have a role in the Nativity? Please come to the **ONLY** practice at 9 am in the Fireside Room that morning. You will pick a role, receive your costume, and run through the Nativity once or twice before sharing the "Day of" All Ages Nativity with the congregation during Worship. There will be bonus roles for folks who show up for Worship and want to participate too. It's going to be fun for everyone! Please mark your calendars!!!!

Christmas Cookie Exchange on Dec 22nd

Do you have a favorite Christmas cookie or treat that you love to share? Would you like to support the Christmas Eve Fellowship AND take home an assortment of other's favorite Christmas cookies and treats? Please bring your favorite Christmas cookies and treats to Good Shepherd Hall before worship on **Sunday, December 22nd** and then be ready to enjoy and take home a plate of cookies and treats after Worship. We would love to have a few folks bring a healthy option or two to share too. It's a fun way to spread Christmas joy!



Family Snow Day on January 1st

Families of all ages and stages are invited to the MVPC Snow Day on **Wednesday, January 1st** (an attempt to replace some of the snow fun with Snow Camp being canceled this year). Please let Pastor Rebecca know if you and your family are interested in a day sledding with new and old friends at the informal Mount Baker sledding area, complete with a hot chocolate "picnic" lunch, and a good old church caravan up and down the mountain. Weather dependent.

Christmas Giving Program

This time of year we love to sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!". But we know it isn't the most joyful for everyone, so we are glad to be able to bring smiles into the lives of some of the folk with whom our mission partners work. This year we have opportunities for those who like to shop and wrap, and those who like the simplicity and expediency of gift cards. We will be:



- providing gifts for a single dad with four girls aged 6 - 14 through Love INC
- providing gift cards for Family Promise parents. (Toys for the kiddos are being provided by a large corporation in the area.)
- providing gift cards for Underground Ministries families in need
- New Earth Recovery managers. Last year Pat Papadupolos painted these beautiful cards to accompany the gift cards for NER house managers

We're asking that all gift cards be placed in an envelope with the ID# and name of recipient on it. All cards and wrapped gifts need to be in the church office by Tuesday, December 10th. The tree will be in the narthex starting Sunday, November 24th. Thanks so much to Linda Ream for making the tags, and to Mary Pugsley and Patti Allen for heading up the program. Thank YOU so much for bringing JOY to our part of the world!

Opportunities to Connect & Grow

Your church cares about you and wants to be supportive and helpful to you in whatever you are going through! Please reach out to the church office or to any of the church staff or leadership if you or someone you know is in need of care. The Deacon Board has approved and begun to use a new congregational care coordination tool to help better coordinate care at MVPC. The Deacon Board has also been busy building up the Commissioned Deacon Care Team in various roles of care in our church with quarterly gatherings for those providing care to receive training and support. Please talk with Pastor Rebecca if you have questions or want to find out more about receiving care or joining a team to help provide care. Here are a few of the care opportunities at MVPC:

The Prayer Email

Coordinated by Pastor Rebecca, can help get prayer requests out to folks in the congregation who have committed to praying for the prayer request emails. Please let Pastor Rebecca know if you have a prayer request or if you would like to receive the prayer request emails.

Care Team Deacons & Commissioned Deacons

Coordinated by the Deacon Board, can provide you with an assigned Deacon or Commissioned Care Team Deacon to journey with you during a challenging time of life. Please let Pastor Rebecca know if you are in need of a Care Team Deacon or Commissioned Deacon or if you might be interested in joining the Commissioned Deacon Care Team to check in, visit, and journey with one or more people in need of care (interview and quarterly training provided).

The Meal Train

Coordinated by Tracy Hall, can help provide you and your family meals when you bring home a new baby, after surgery, or when you are in need of help with meals. Please let Tracy Hall know if you are in need of a Meal Train or if you would like to be a part of the team receiving Meal Train requests to provide meals.

Caregiver Assistance

Coordinated by Becky Goodell, can provide an hour or two of simple care assistance for those who are providing care for an adult family member and need an hour or two off. Please let Becky Goodell know if you are in need of caregiver assistance or if you would like to volunteer to help provide caregiver assistance (interview and training provided).

Hospital & Recovery Care Home Visitation

Can help coordinate folks to visit you while you are in the hospital or in a recovery care home if you are wanting more visitors, although we are still looking for a Coordinator and more folks to add to the team who might be able and willing to help bring a bit of joy by visiting those in the hospital and recovery care homes. Please talk with Pastor Rebecca if you are in need of visits or if you might be interested in joining the team (interview and training provided).

Transportation Assistance

Can help you find out about the Dial A Ride or help coordinate a ride for you to and from worship and church programs, although we are still looking for a Coordinator and more folks to add to the team who might be able and willing to help provide a ride (interview and training provided). Please talk with Pastor Rebecca if you are interested in joining the team or would like to find out more.

Do you have an idea for a care team role?

There are folks on the Commissioned Deacon Care Team like Sumiko Reamer who helps provide flowers for people in the hospital, Mim Ambrose who writes birthday and special occasion cards from the church (aren't they wonderful), Becky Goodell who coordinates the Welcome Team to welcome people when they first begin to visit MVPC, Ward Ernst who prepares communion and extended communion for folks, Patti Allen who helps coordinate weddings and memorials, and Bev Helton who coordinates the amazing greeters for Sunday mornings and special services. Please let Pastor Rebecca know if you have an additional idea or would like to fill a Commissioned Deacon Care Team role!

Prayer Group

Do you long for a deeper life of prayer? Prayer Group meets on Thursdays from 9 to 10 am in the church library and would love to welcome you whenever you are able to make it. We spend time checking in on how we are doing and then do a guided prayer practice like Lectio Divina, the Awareness Examen, Centering Prayer, the Welcome Prayer, and more, before spending some time in intercessory prayer for family, friends, the congregation, the community, and the world. We will not be meeting on November 28th (Thanksgiving) or December 26th (the day after Christmas). In January, during Prayer Group, we will be doing a ten week exploration of Spiritual Practices through a book study of "Joy Together" by Lynne Baab that will introduce us to a variety of spiritual practices for the new year including Thankfulness, Fasting, Contemplative Prayer, Lectio Divina, Hospitality, and Sabbath Keeping. Books will be available in the church office in mid-December for a suggested donation of \$16 to help cover costs.



Please donate to the MVPC Community Pantry!

Please donate to the MVPC Community Pantry! A huge thank you to David Gale for fixing the broken door on our Community Pantry and adding in better hinges to help it close and not get caught in the wind as easily. It is ready to be filled! Please bring in non perishable prepackaged food either straight to the pantry or to the bin in the Narthex and the youth will add it to the pantry. Food that can be eaten straight out of the package is easiest for folks in need, especially as the weather gets colder. Thank you!



Senior Bible Study

Come join us on Wednesday's at 1:00 PM for Senior Bible Study in the Fireside Room. We will be using the book, "40 Treasured Bible Verses," by James Howell. This book comes with a short commentary for each verse, but our reflections will be a chance to get to know each other and the bible. If you have questions, please contact Patti Allen at (360) 840-9911

December Souper Seniors

If you are 55+ you are eligible to be a Souper Senior! Each month we provide lunch and enlightenment on the first Thursday of the month in Good Shepherd Hall. The lunch is usually soup (two choices) with all the trimmings. The enlightenment portion is conversation with each other and guest speakers. The next Souper Seniors Lunch is Thursday, December 5, noon to 1:30 PM. We hope to corral a chorale group to sing for us. Come celebrate the Advent season with your friends!

Sign up now to be a part of the MVPC All Ages Summer Service Learning Week at Campbell Farms in Eastern Washington!

When: Sunday, July 27th to Thursday, July 31st plus a few meetings in the winter and spring before we go
Where: Campbell Farm in Wapato, WA (with projects in the surrounding Yakama area)

What: Campbell Farm will help us put together our program of daytime service projects as well as learning opportunities and then we will have our own evening program and activities (with breaks and fun and naps as necessary).

Why: It often takes leaving the comfort of home and putting ourselves in situations of service and learning for us to really grow as people and as followers of Christ. As people shared at the info meeting, experiences like these are a bit crazy and a whole lot of fun. You will bond with the team and become a better person while making a difference in the world!

How do I sign up or find out more: Let Pastor Rebecca know if you have any questions or want to find out more or are ready to join the team! We are forming the team now so we can reserve the spaces and so the team can plan for Winter and Spring fundraising that is fun and easy as well as start working with Campbell Farm to plan out our week of service and learning opportunities!



Godly Play

The Godly Play kids program has been having fun exploring the stories from the beginning of the Old Testament this Fall with the stories of Creation, the Ark and the Flood, the Great Family, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. This Winter they will be heading into the stories of the Ten Best Ways, Exodus, Ruth, the Ark and the Tent, Samuel, the Ark and the Temple, and David. Plus, there are always a few bonus stories for the whole congregation to be a part of on the first Sundays of every month when the Godly Play kids remain in worship to celebrate Communion. Please let Pastor Rebecca know if you have questions about Godly Play or if you might be interested in joining the Godly Play team as a Storyteller or a Helper (interview, background check, and training provided).



Thank You from the Skagit Mom Co

The Skagit Mom Co mom's group would like to say a huge thank you to Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church for all that they are doing to support the Moms of Skagit Valley. With MVPC volunteers on the Kid Co team providing care for the babies, toddlers, and a program for the preschoolers, donations of homemade treats from the amazing Laurie Parker, and fantastic people like Jessica Jasper who serves as our treasurer and Pastor Rebecca who leads us in prayer and so much more, we can't say thank you enough! -From the Skagit Mom Co Board



Youth Group

The MVPC Youth Group has been diving deep in their journey through the Old Testament, utilizing Bible Project videos to inspire discussion and wonder together about what we are able to learn from the Old Testament to apply to our lives today. Plus, they have been enjoying pizza, potlucks, and more as they spend time checking in about life, sharing their "highs, lows, and buffalos". Not sure what a "buffalo" is? Ask one of the youth! And be sure to thank the youth for their increased role in helping to lead worship on the first Sunday every month. It takes bravery to read scripture and lead prayers from the pulpit, so please let them know how amazing they are whenever you get a chance. Feel free to introduce yourself and ask them their names too!

Church Nursery

The church Nursery is a wonderful place for the youngest in our congregation to experience God's love through welcome and play while their adults participate in programs and worship at MVPC. The Nursery is open on Sundays from 10 am to Noon and during special services like Christmas Eve Worship. Please let Pastor Rebecca know if there is a program at MVPC that you would like to have the Nursery available during for you to be able to participate.

Volunteer with the Kid Co Team

The Kid Co midweek kids ministry team is looking for additional volunteers to join their team in providing a program for kids in preschool and loving care for babies and toddlers on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday mornings while their moms participate in the Skagit Mom Co Program. Please talk with Kid Co Director Sandy Pinare if you are interested (interview, background check, and training provided).

Women's Fellowship

Recently, I became the new Team Leader for our church Women's Fellowship Group. Currently, I am joined by Sandy Pinnaire and Cathy Riddle on our Planning Team. We would like to add a couple more women to this team, so if anyone would like to join us, please let me know!

A church Women's Fellowship group is a group of women who come together to grow in their faith, connect with others and serve their church and community. Women's fellowships often include activities like Bible study, Workshops and Speaking events and can also provide opportunities to reach out to each other. When I volunteered to lead this fellowship group, I had been thinking about ways our women could get to know each other better. Our planning team came up with the idea to do a series of interviews to do just that. We have enjoyed some very interesting personal stories in the past year and are looking forward to continuing this project. We also held a lovely luncheon with a speaker at another meeting. We are open to new possibilities and encourage you to please share your ideas with us.

Our Women's Fellowship group invites any woman who wishes to join and we encourage attendees to bring friends and neighbors. It has been said that the four pillars of a successful women's ministry are study, service, support and social. We are not specifically a Bible study group, but we do bring and discuss Scripture and offer Devotions, as well as sharing our joys and concerns. The characteristics of a Biblical fellowship are many and include the following: Confidentiality - we do not gossip! We share our true feelings and encourage, support and forgive each other. We speak the truth in love, admit our weaknesses and respect our differences. Our goal is to offer a safe and comforting environment to all of our women.

We meet on the Fourth Saturday at 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., September through May, in the Fireside Room at the church. A light breakfast and beverages are available. This meeting coincides with the Men's Breakfast meetings which are held in in Good Shepherd Hall.

Bev Helton, Team Leader

Men's Breakfast

The Men's Breakfast typically meets on the 4th Saturday of the month. We usually take a break in November and December due to the busyness of the holiday season. The Agenda consists of 9:00am-Opening Prayer, Introduction, 30 minutes for breakfast, the presentation with Q&A and Sending Prayer by 10:15am. It includes a topical presentation by invited guest speakers

on varying topics of interest from within the church and around our community. Recent examples of topics were given by the Airport Manager of the Port of Skagit Regional Airport, giving us its history and purpose and Bruce Lavers describing the Election Ballot Process in Skagit & WA State. A couple of hopeful 2025 topics to plan for will be from our Skagit Coroner's Office and the Director for Skagit Habitat For Humanity. We welcome all men from the church and men from outside the church in our local community. We encourage our members to invite friends and neighbors to join us for great food, fellowship and information. We typically have 14-18 attendees that include 4-6 of our invited community friends. The more the greater the fellowship.

These Days Devotionals in 2025

NEW in 2025! Strengthen your faith with **These Days**, an inspiring and uplifting daily devotional! Each issue of **These Days** features: Scripture suggestions, Thought-provoking daily reflections written by clergy and lay leaders, Inspiring prayers, Colorful artwork on the outside covers with poems, prayers, and songs pertinent to the issue's theme, and Information about the writers. **Beginning in January, this daily devotional will take the place of Upper Room.** This devotional is released in printed format **quarterly** in regular or enlarged print. These devotionals are available at the Info area in the Narthex. A gift from MVPC for you!

News & Highlights



Austin is Going on Family Leave

Hello everyone. Firstly I want to say thank you to all of you who have shown so much generosity and support and love to my family. Our team and this congregation has been an incredible blessing for my family, and I wanted you all to know how grateful we are.

Secondly, I have the opportunity to take a leave of absence to better support my family over the next few months. And during those months, Pastor Dan and Chris Hoke and I have put together a plan to make sure that my absence is not too disruptive towards the day to day stuff going on during the week. I will be in the office one day week, minimum, starting on December 9th until March 10th. Barbara and volunteers will be available most days at the desk. But during this time, the office hours will change, and coverage at the desk will not be "all the time."

We would like to ask, **if there are any of you who would be willing to volunteer to cover the front desk during my leave, please send me an email at office.mvpc@gmail.com**

Closer to the day, I will send out a schedule that includes hours of availability. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. My family genuinely appreciates you all for this opportunity for leave, and we hope you have a wonderful Holiday Season.

With Great Appreciation,
Austin, Jessica & Oliver

Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church Brings Joy and Creativity to Where the Heart Is

Every Monday, our residents eagerly anticipate a delightful tradition that has quickly become a highlight of the week. Thanks to the generosity of Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church, we now have the pleasure of enjoying weekly visits filled with coffee, violin music, and engaging craft activities.

The morning begins with an inviting atmosphere as the MVPC group arrives, bringing

with them a sense of camaraderie and cheer. One of the standout features of these visits is the enchanting violin music performed by the talented Lou. Her skillful playing provides an uplifting backdrop but the magic doesn't stop there. The group also leads our residents in a creative craft session. Recently, the activity involved decorating fall flower pots, a project that brought out the seasonal spirit of everyone involved.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church for their dedication and enthusiasm. Their visits have become a cherished part of our week!




Lacee showing off her fall craft!


Originally published in Frontier (a Where the Heart Is Owners Newsletter)

WOULD YOU LIKE A PHYSICAL COPY OF THE GRAPEVINE?

If you would like to continue to receive physical copies of the Grapevine throughout the year, please send an email or call the front desk. We would be happy to provide anyone with physical copies upon request.

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Get Involved at MVPC

There's so many ways to get involved at MVPC, diving deeper in your faith and getting to know people beyond Sunday morning Worship. Get involved in a program, join a small group, or join a ministry team! You can find more details about most of the opportunities throughout the Grapevine Newsletter, but please call the church office or talk with the church staff or leadership if you have any questions or want to find out more. Here's a few of our "regular" opportunities:

Sundays

- Sunday Bible Study - Sundays 9 to 10 am in the church library
- Godly Play Team - Volunteer Rotation on Sundays during worship
- After Worship Fellowship - Sundays after Worship in Good Shepherd Hall
- Youth Group Team - Volunteer Rotation on Sundays from Noon to 1:30 pm
- Family Small Group - Monthly usually on the 1st or 3rd Sundays 5 to 6:30 pm

Mondays

- Care Pals Team - Mondays 10 to 11 am at Where the Heart Is (Memory Care)
- Bell Choir - Practice Mondays at 2 pm and occasionally during Sunday Worship

Tuesdays

- Kid Co Team - 2nd and 4th Tuesdays 9:30 to 11:30 am
- Advent Small Group - Tuesdays at 2 pm during Advent (December 3, 10, 17, & 24)
- Mere Christianity Book Group - Tuesdays at 2 pm starting January 7th
- Friendship House Team - 2nd Tuesdays from 3:30 to 6:30 pm at Friendship House
- Join the MVPC Choir - Tuesdays from 6:30 to 7:30 pm in the Sanctuary

Wednesdays

- Seniors Small Group - Wednesdays at 1 pm

Thursdays

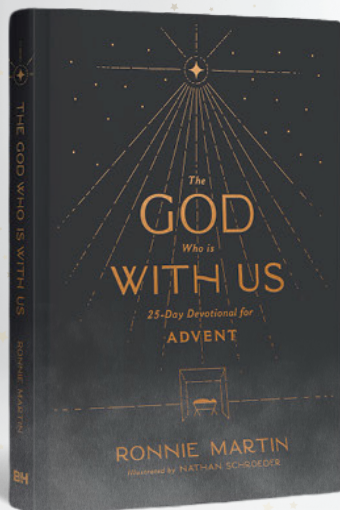
- Prayer Group - Thursdays 9 to 10 am in the church library
- Souper Seniors - 1st Thursdays Noon to 1:30 pm
- Women's Pop Up Lunch Small Group - 2nd Thursdays Noon to 1 pm at Haggan

Saturdays

- Men's Breakfast - 4th Saturdays 9 to 10 am
- Women's Fellowship - 4th Saturdays 9 to 10:30 am

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS

Every Week on **Tuesdays** at **2:00pm** on **12/3 12/10 12/17 & 12/24**



\$12 Suggested Donation

We ask for a **suggested donation of \$12** or more, in order to help cover costs.

- Please tag checks & credit card donations for "**Advent Devotionals**"
- Please leave any cash donations in the envelope provided at the front desk at the office.

Would You Like a Reminder?

If you would like reminders & updates about the Advent group meeting this year, please leave us your email and we'll be sure to keep you in the loop! It is a great way to get to meet and know folks!