

# THE LIVING LIGHT

For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.  
Ephesians 5:9

Volume 65, Number 01

Whittier First Friends Church

January, 2026



The month of December was filled with Christmas worship, music, and cheer. At the beginning of the month, both Music Sunday and the December Tuesday evening organ recital, were devoted to music and hymns celebrating the coming of the birth of Christ. The Sunday messages prodded us to reflect on the love and hope of the season, and the Christmas Eve service reminded us of the comfort of its familiar



story.

In mid-December, the third annual Christmas potluck brought over 40 friends together to celebrate with a memorable evening of food, fellowship, and a bit of fa la la la la. This year's theme of Christmas Around the World was reflected in the beautiful table decorations and abundant array of foods and sweets. The evening

***Friends Celebrate continued on page 6***

## Friendly Fare by Lea Wright

**Dear Friends,** Happy New Year! That is actually weird to say because, as I write this, Christmas is just around the corner, and it's not New Year's yet. But, it also reminds me that, for me, during the holiday season, I have so much to do and so much to anticipate, and by the time you read this, we will have made new memories. I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas, and let's all enjoy the mystery of 2026 that is upon us.

**Friends Celebrate:** Welcome to **Rowan** and **Sawyer Grabmiller**, twins born in NC on December 8 to **Rex Jones's** daughter, **Melissa**, her husband **Alex** and new big brother **Everett**! Both beautiful boys were over 8 pounds! Mom and babies are doing well.



**Friends About Town:** The **Caringella** siblings—**Landon**, **Avalon**, and **Hudson**—joined their lifelong friends **Riker** and **Bishop** for a visit of Christmas lights in Brea this December, a tradition with these friends for many years now.



**Friends Correspond:** **Lori Graham** reports, "My journey back to health began with emergency abdominal

surgery back on March 3 of this year; after two additional surgeries. (1 planned, 1 not) I am finally returning to work on December 22! I wish to

thank everyone at First Friends who has been holding me in the Light all these many months as I have taken a VERY long road to recovery; I am truly blessed!"

**Friends Travel:** **Carrin Bouchard** is home from her cruise through the Amazon. Her trip began at Port of Miami boarding the Oceania Insignia. She traveled to St. Lucia, Saint George, Grenada, Grand Anse Beach, St. Maarten and San Juan, Puerto Rico - and many other places. She enjoyed bamboo rafting, snorkeling, sailing, and riverboat adventures, as well as beautiful sunsets from her balcony, **Elinore Petoletti** recently took a trip to Colorado. She really enjoyed her stay at the Broadmoor Hotel. "It's very elegant," she reports. She also took a train part way up Pikes Peak. "Very windy," was her comment on



that one. Other sites included Royal Gorge and Garden of the Gods. Here she is with the Living Light continuing our tradition: "The Living Light Travels." (Remember, your submissions are welcome and needed.)

**Friends Sharing News:** Help to keep the Friendly Fare going. Email me a quick note and tell me your news. Send to Lea at [lealouw@gmail.com](mailto:lealouw@gmail.com), or deliver to me at church on Sunday. See you next month!



## Loletta's Lines

Welcome to 2026! We have another New Year in which we can co-create with God. That is a radical idea for some people. Humans co-creating with God?! Yet Quakers have held on to, and taught, some outside-of-the-box ideas from the beginning: That of God in everyone. The Kingdom of God in the here and now, not in some time in the future or in an imagined heaven. Christ teaching us directly. Being led by the Spirit and not by clergy, tradition, or scripture.

The first Quakers heard, saw, taught, and lived differently than the society and churches around them. They were unafraid to seek the Truth and speak it, both to the arrogant and powerful, and the oppressed and lost. It is not an easy tradition to belong to. It takes work to stay open, to learn, and seek to go deeper in relationship with God. It requires dedication, courage, and determination not to take the easy way of following what we are told to believe, think and do, or to fall prey to the social pressures around us. But here in this meeting we have found a liberating and empowering community of people to gather with.

In this New Year, as in every moment, we have the opportunity to walk in the Light of God, to follow the path of Jesus, and to seek the leading of the Spirit. I invite you to join me for a moment of silent worship and listening when you read this, no matter where you are. Close your eyes and let God's vision come. What does it look like for your life? What does it look like for our meeting? What does it look like for our community and world?

Jesus told us, "With God all things are possible." The only requirement is our loving and faithful participation. We are the hands and heart of God in this world. We are the ones who are tasked with the work of feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, caring for the sick, and building the beloved community with our hands, minds, voices and votes. Welcome to the New Year Friends! Let us go joyfully together where our Companion and Friend leads us.



## Reminder: Winter Mission Project - Tree of Christmas Peace

It's not too late to donate to our "Tree of Christmas Peace." This special tree in our foyer has been generously decorated with beanies, gloves, scarves, and socks! All of these cozy items will be distributed by The

Loving Thing, at St. Matthias Episcopal Church. This Winter Mission runs through Jan. 11, so there is still time to make your contribution to keep our less fortunate neighbors warm this winter.

In addition, we are asking for monetary donations which will be used to purchase grocery gift cards for the Interfaith Food Center and The Loving Thing. Make your check payable to First Friends Church with "Winter Mission" noted on the memo line, or visit our website's Donations page at [firstfriendswhittier.org](http://firstfriendswhittier.org) for more options. But don't wait too long. Merry giving, Friends!

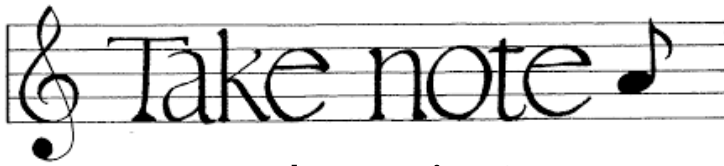


**First Friends will be  
hosting a Candidate Forum**

**January 24th at 2:00 pm  
in the Meeting House**

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**Candidates running for  
Whittier Mayor and  
City Council Races - District 2 & 4**



## Tuesday Evening Organ and Singing Hymns Series

The Harris Organ in our meeting house was dedicated in October of 1976, and as we approach its 50th anniversary in 2026, we will celebrate with a number of recitals and events. For the next several months, Russ has planned a series of Tuesday evening Organ and Hymns programs. The next one will be January 6th, at 7:30 pm for Epiphany, featuring settings and hymns articulating the birth of Jesus and his revealing to the apostles and the gentiles.

Mark your calendar for these upcoming recitals as well, which will feature organ compositions according to the theme interspersed with hymns:

- **January 6th**, Epiphany - Jesus is manifest to the world
- **February 17th**, Mardi Gras - Celebration before Lent
- **March 31st**, Holy Week - Cross and Passion
- **April 21st**, Good Shepherd - Jesus is My Shepherd
- **May 26th**, Spirit and Trinity - Fire, Wind, and a Mystery

All recitals will begin promptly at 7:30 pm and last about an hour. "I hope to use many of the colorful voices of our organ and offer a spiritual experience through the singing," says Russ. Be sure to invite friends and come join your voices with those assembled.



## FUM's Michael Sherman to Bring the Message in Worship on Jan. 11

Michael Sherman, Coordinator for North American and Caribbean Ministries for Friends United Meeting, will join us remotely for Meeting for Worship and bring the message on January 11. Michael has served as the Program Director at Quaker Haven Camp and been pastor of both Raysville Friends Church and Muncie Friends Church. He has a Liberal Arts degree from Purdue University with minors in Organizational Leadership and Supervision and History. He also earned his Master's of Divinity from Earlham School of Religion. He and his wife of 26 years, Kristen, have four delightful children. Be sure to join us that day to hear what he has to share with us.

## Hygiene Kit Packing

### Start Collecting:

- 1) Clean, screw top, prescription bottles with labels removed.
- 2) First Friends Church is supplying moisturizing shampoo.

*Also welcomed are: women's hygiene items, deodorant, toothbrushes, and travel size: toothpaste, and basic first aid items (band aids, antiseptic ointment)*

**New this year - We are collecting gently used clothing for our friends at the LGBTQ+ Community Center.**  
**Check your closets!**

## Bring Items & Help Assemble

Saturday January 24, 2026

1:00PM - 4:00PM

First Friends Church

13205 Philadelphia Street

Whittier CA 90601

562-698-9805





## News from Whittier Friends School



Whittier Friends School sure had a holly jolly Christmas, with activities and festivities to make the season bright. Once again, with money collected by the children during the month of November from their "Count Your

Blessings" calendars, the older children helped purchase shelf-stable food items for the Interfaith Food Center. Ten children, second grade and up, enjoyed shopping with teachers and parent volunteers on December 11. Their shopping budget was \$110! They were especially interested in picking out items they thought other children might enjoy, such as macaroni and cheese (the kind with the cheese sauce - because it doesn't require milk and butter for families who might be limited on those foods).

Thirty Preschool and elementary children also cheered up local elderly residents last month when they walked over and sang in the Brookdale lobby for thirty minutes. This was also a great practice for the children in preparation for their holiday performance.

Of course, the highlight of the month was their annual holiday performance on the evening of Wednesday, December 17. "The Many Meanings of Christmas," an original play written by the Upper Elementary Class, offered lines for every one of the 17 elementary students, as well as opportunities for the preschool and elementary children to sing. It touched on eight different facets of Christmas, including "The Snow of Christmas," "The Faith of Christmas" and even "The Warmth and Coziness of Christmas". It was very special to facilitate the collaboration of these students as they created a cohesive story, and many of the children



commented that it was the best Christmas play ever. It was also the first time that our "Webby Dancers" got to perform. Eighteen of our students have been taking dance class here on campus from an outside dance instructor from Webby Dance. This special learning opportunity culminated in some very entertaining dancing!

But December wasn't just about Christmas. We also had a very special visit from retired teacher Pam Leestma, who presented a lecture and hands-on activity she called "I Need My Space" to our elementary class. Space travel is a passion of hers, and she knows many people who have been involved in space exploration, including her cousin who has traveled into space as an astronaut! We were so appreciative of her visit, and of parent Gil BevenFlorez who helped get us connected with Space Pam. (Pam and Gil serve on the board at the Columbia Memorial Space Center).

Thank you for your continued support of our special school and fantastic students. Our enrollment continues to grow every year, so to support this growth, we are offering for the first time an "Early Commitment" opportunity. Families who enroll by January 15, will save \$400 off their annual tuition for 2026-2027. Spread the word!

And as always, you can follow Whittier Friends School's adventures on Facebook at:

[facebook.com/whittierfriendsschool](https://facebook.com/whittierfriendsschool)

and on Instagram at:

[instagram.com/whittierfriendsschool](https://instagram.com/whittierfriendsschool)

-Cassie Caringella

## Committee Service and Plans for Giving for 2026

The first of the year is a great time to get organized and review our priorities. At First Friends January Monthly Meeting, we will be prayerfully considering our budget for the year. Please plan to attend on Jan.11, after worship, to contribute to this process. To aid us in planning, the Business and Finance Committee asks that you prayerfully create a plan for your financial support of First Friends in 2026 and share it with us (if you haven't already.) This is not a hard and fast commitment, as we know that life changes, but we do need our best estimate of what individuals plan to give, so that we can plan accordingly and responsibly. There are physical cards available to fill out; you can fill one out electronically [forms.gle/FzwCiLhTwP9rYC7FA](https://forms.gle/FzwCiLhTwP9rYC7FA) ; or scan this QR code.



Additionally, we value and need each person's individual gifts and talents to carry out our mission and ministries, so we ask you to also prayerfully consider your committee service. If you have a desire to serve on a particular committee or task group (or join a different one) please let the clerk of that committee know. Most meet monthly by Zoom, so you don't even need to live locally. Here is a list of the current committees: Ministry and Counsel (Worship and Member Care); Christian Education and Outreach; Business and Finance; Trustees; Personnel; Music; Fellowship; Kitchen; Tech Group; and Memorials & Hospitality. For more information on committees and clerks, contact Elisabeth Elliot or the church office, and you will be directed to the corresponding contact.

Always know that you are genuinely appreciated for your generous and faithful support of our beloved community. We wish you love, peace, hope, and blessings in 2026.

## Friends Celebrate continued from page 1

began with a seasonal themed bingo game of "Find Someone Who" - as in, find someone whose dog loves Christmas, find someone who has lived close to the North Pole, find someone who's wearing



the most green. . . you get the picture. It was a great way to get everyone up and mingling. Following the dinner feast, there were crafts for young and old, such as mixed up mini jigsaw puzzles and scratch-off Christmas art. The FCNL Advocacy Group offered an opportunity to send holiday greetings to our US senators and local representatives with a reminder of the importance of peace. There was even a surprise appearance by Father Christmas, resplendent in his traditional red and gold robe with a crown of holly. He graciously took time out of his busy schedule to host a question and answer session and pose for photos. The evening's program closed with a Christmas carol sing-along, which included songs from Germany, Spain, England, France, and Wales.

Heartfelt thanks are extended to Marilyn Fant for the artfully curated table decorations and to the friends that loaned their Christmas items including nesting dolls from Russia, corn husk dancing dolls from Mexico, and several nativity sets. Special appreciation goes also to Mindy Van Dorn for bringing crafts and working tirelessly in the kitchen, to Russ for arranging and directing the carolling, and to the planning committee for putting together a delightful celebration. And thank you to all who gathered for this festive event. We can't wait until next year!



## FCNL Advocacy Team's 2025 Year-in-Review

As we enter a new year, it's not a bad idea to reflect upon the previous year's events. The Whittier FCNL Advocacy Team's list is encouraging. With the fundamental goal of supporting peace, humanity, and active participation in a free democracy, we sought to build relationships with legislators, believing that legislative change at the national level may be challenging, but it is also very possible. The Team kept a consistent schedule of lobbying, training, and community engagement. Additionally, it attended monthly FCNL National Calls as well as its own Team meetings. The Whittier Team was also active with the Statewide FCNL Team.



Several lobby visits with lawmakers resulted in positive interactions and memorable connections, including three "drop-by" meetings with Rep. Linda Sanchez's staff. Some from the Whittier Team also attended the Congresswoman's virtual town hall meeting in February and her live Pico Rivera meeting in April. Additionally, the Whittier Team took part in two virtual lobby visits held by the Statewide Team: one with Senator Schiff's Senior Policy Advisor, and the other with Senator Padilla's staff. Again, we were advocating for peace and humanitarian issues.

A highlight of the year was hosting a well-attended advocacy skills training in March in which we invited interested community members to join in an interactive workshop. Best practices for lobby visits and advocacy were shared, and attendees were invited to talk about their own issues of concern, experiences, successes, and



challenges. Contacts with elected representatives, such as sending post and greeting cards, emails, and direct phone calls were considered. Participants also shared thoughts on community involvement, including attending important town hall meetings.

The Team actively engaged throughout the year with our own community by staffing tables at several events. These included Founder's Day in Central Park, Pop Up Pride at the Whittier Museum, Pride and Purpose at the La Mirada Methodist Church, Pride Festival at Whittier College, and Christmas in July at the East Whittier Methodist Church. These events offered opportunities to support equality and meet a broad spectrum of people, encouraging them and letting them know about our work. Visitors to our booths gave feedback on issues most important to them, such as "protecting human rights for all." Many of us also joined a Candlelight Vigil in June, supporting human equality and our immigrant neighbors.

Last year's campaign focused on the restoration of UNRWA funding in the Middle East which supported humanitarian aid such as food supplies and hospitals. As these concerns continue, the 2026 focus will be upon the balance of power and support for our democratic government. For more information on FCNL and advocacy, visit their web page at [fcnl.org/act/join-advocacy-team](https://fcnl.org/act/join-advocacy-team) or contact Darrell Warren or Loletta Barrett.

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## All Friends Fellowship Night Resumes January 14

Be sure to join us on Jan. 14 at 6 pm in Fellowship Hall for the January AFFN when Kathy Marin will share photos and stories from her recent travels. Potluck dinner is at 6 pm, and the program is at 7 pm. Bring a dish to share and invite friends and family for a night out with Friends!

If we've missed your birthday, we apologize (and happy birthday)! We work hard to keep our birthday calendar up-to-date, so please let us know if we're forgetting anyone. Thank you!