

The Pilgrim

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**First Congregational
United Church of Christ**

On Not Crossing Over

Rev. Dr. Janet Parker

Dear beloved community of First Congregational UCC,

It has been 25 months since I began to serve you as your intentional interim senior minister in September of 2018. Where has the time gone? Sometimes, it seems like yesterday that I was first coming on board and getting to know you. At other times, it seems like we've done so much together that it must have been more than two years.

As my time with you draws to a close, I am feeling reflective. We have experienced challenges, including near constant staff turnover and the pandemic; and we have also received new gifts, including energetic new members who have plunged right in and made a huge difference. We have innovated new forms of ministry together, such as the creative and soulful "Out of the Darkness" service in Advent, the Blessing of the Animals service, Zoom worship, small group meetings throughout the week, and the Portland Protest Aid station. We have kept worship vibrant and created a new worship team that works with the Pastor and Music Director to shepherd the worship life of the church.

We have also struggled with certain areas of church life. It has been hard to recover from the loss of a dedicated full-time Assistant Pastor, Rev. Elizabeth Durant, who supported the children, youth and family ministries of the church, among other things. Our plans to hire a Director of Spiritual Life were stymied by the COVID-19 pandemic and shelved until the new Senior Minister arrives and reassesses the needs and assets of the congregation. But through it all, this congregation has been blessed by wonderful and dedicated lay leaders and an amazing staff. In particular, I have to thank our core staff, without whom I would have been lost: Grant Edwards, Cara Rothe, Andre Cordes, Steve Eggers, and Avena Ward.

And without pretending that this is an exhaustive list, I must offer a word of special thanks to some key volunteer leaders I've worked with during my time here: Moderators Sarah Vazquez, Anne Sullivan, and Daniel Russo; Treasurers Cath Clark, Belinda Moos, and Ed Eggleston; Core Ministry Facilitators Karen Hurst, Cheryl Clevenger, Nanci Tangeman, Margaret Baldwin, Nan Wagner, and Carter Latendresse; Called to Care Team Leader Ann Laskey; Artreach Gallery Director Sheldon Hurst; Transition Team leader Frank Baldwin; Search Committee Team leader Ted Heid; Youth Ministry Associate Denise Denniston...and so many more! I could NOT have made it through these two years without their partnership in ministry.

When I signed on to be your intentional interim minister, I knew what that meant. It meant that I would show up with my whole heart and pastor you to the best of my ability while also knowing that our time together would be brief. Wise elders across many denominations have recognized that the "tasks" of interim ministry are only truly accomplished when the interim pastor is not eligible to apply for the settled position. This enables the interim pastor to walk alongside a congregation, help it grieve and heal, assist it to give birth to new vision, and address thorny challenges. For these tasks to be done well, they need to be done by someone who doesn't have a horse in the race, someone who can be objective and who is not angling for the settled position themselves. But although I knew I would only be with you for a season, that doesn't mean that I haven't become attached to you. I have, and I am so proud of the ministry we have done together.

As a congregation, you have worked hard on your interim tasks. You have faced some hard truths and waded through significant grief and confusion; now your spirits are running higher and your eyes are brighter than when I came. You are ready to move forward. I am delighting in the fact that you have completed your search and call process and are preparing to welcome your new settled senior minister, the Rev. Eric Elnes. That means my job is almost done. Almost.

In the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, we find the figure of Moses hiking up a mountain to see the Promised Land from the other side of the Jordan River. He has led the people through their years of wandering in the wilderness, but he knows that he will not accompany them across the river to the Promised Land. That leadership position will fall to another, Joshua. But Moses is able to see the land of milk and honey promised to his people. As Deut. 34:4 describes the scene:

“Then the Lord said to Moses: ‘This is the land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I promised: ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have shown it to you with your own eyes; however, you will not cross over into it.”

I will not be crossing over with you into your new era of ministry; but unlike Moses, I’ll still be around. I won’t perform pastoral functions for you anymore, but I’ll be watching you from the sidelines, cheering you on, praying for you, and working in solidarity with you in our Conference and in the ongoing work of making the Portland Metro area a more just and inclusive community. After an appropriate amount of time has passed and with the invitation of Rev. Elnes, I can visit you again, worship with you, and see the great things you are doing together.

In the meantime, from this side of the Jordan, we have a little time left—until the end of October—to say goodbye, to celebrate our two plus years of ministry together, and to prepare you for the exciting journey ahead. I hope you’ll reach out to me sooner rather than later if you’d like to have some one-on-one time to say goodbye—either by zoom or phone or socially distanced outdoor face-to-face time. First Congregational UCC, I love you, and I will miss you! I will always carry you in my heart and in my prayers.

Blessings always, Rev. Dr. Janet Parker





Crawling

by Daniel Russo Moderator



My eight-month-old son, Dante, started crawling a few weeks ago. He can’t get enough of it. He crawls all around our living room, dragging along toys, banging on the furniture, and trying to open cabinets, giggling hysterically all the while. The world has busted wide open for him, and he’s loving every minute.

In the past few days, though, my wife Joanne and I have started to notice him getting moodier. He’ll be thrilled to bits one minute, and inconsolable the

next. Things that used to entertain him for ages are now sometimes tossed aside without a second glance. It's like he wants something, but he can't quite express what that is, and perhaps he doesn't even know what it is. Has crawling given him a peek at a broader world that he barely had an inkling of before, but which now seems impossibly huge and overwhelming?

Maybe I'm projecting all of this onto poor little Dante, but I can definitely relate to that feeling right now. After two years of wondering what our future will be as a church, we have a new pastor lined up! Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes will be joining us at the end of this year, and we'll be very grateful to have him here. After all that he's accomplished at Countryside Community Church in Omaha, the potential for growth and new opportunities is very exciting!

...And yet, it's also intimidating. Things are going to change. New relationships will need to be forged. Rev. Eric is going to challenge us at times. While I'm really looking forward to that, I also wonder about my ability to meet those challenges. Perhaps others among you have been wondering that as well?

Also, after two years under the excellent, compassionate guidance of Rev. Dr. Janet Parker, we'll be saying goodbye to her. She came to us at a time when we were wondering and worrying about our future, and did a great job of establishing a new normal at First Congregational, but we knew from the beginning that her time with us would be limited.

I'm sure Dante's orneriness won't last. Joanne and I have seen him go through these kinds of phases before, and we've been incredibly fortunate that they haven't lasted long. They're all part of the growing process, and before long he'll be figuring out even more new skills to be entertained by. We can never truly know every facet of this vast and amazing world God has placed us in, but that means our chances to learn and grow are equally endless. I hope to find my place in the new state of things at First Congregational, and I hope all of you will too, as we cross this grand threshold together.



We Welcome Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes

by Ted Heid and Nan Wagner



A well-attended virtual congregational meeting to vote on extending a call to Reverend Dr. Eric Eugene Elnes to be our new settled minister was held on August 23–24, 2020. The vote was a landslide, 93 to 2, and Eric accepted our call. Eric had to give his current church, Countryside Community Church UCC in Omaha, Nebraska, three months' notice of departure and therefore he will begin serving First Congregational UCC Portland on December 1, 2020. Eric brings exceptional senior pastor knowledge, skills, and experience to our church. During his twelve years at Countryside he helped guide his church through adoption of the TriFaith Initiative wherein Countryside UCC moved together with a synagogue and a mosque onto

a new 38-acre campus. During his thirteen years as senior pastor at Scottsdale Congregational UCC in Arizona, the church experienced significant growth and program development. There he spearheaded “Crosswalk America,” a 2,500-mile walk across America to raise awareness of “Progressive” Christian faith and values, including the Phoenix Affirmations. Eric is a well-known biblical scholar with many publications, among them *Gifts of the Dark Wood: Seven Blessings for Soulful Skeptics and Other Wanderers*. He created www.darkwoodbrew.org, an online offering of the world’s largest collection of Christian, progressive-friendly multimedia resources. Take a look at Countryside UCC’s YouTube channel or their website to see examples of Eric’s personable style of preaching and his pre-service guided meditations. He believes his relationship with congregation members and among members is a key to success. Eric was raised in Washington State and his wife, Melanie, grew up in North Bend, Oregon, and they are delighted to be returning to the Pacific Northwest. Many of us have been blessed by connecting with Eric already, but are respectful of his time as he draws his ministry in Omaha to a close.

Congratulations Carter!

by Bruce Bishop



Frank Baldwin and I had the privilege to nominate Carter Latendresse, our Peacemaking Core Ministry facilitator, for the 2020 Central Pacific Conference Justice and Witness Award.

I’m pleased to announce that yesterday morning at its annual business meeting, the conference

awarded this much-deserved recognition to Carter. The conference is now officially aware of what we’ve all observed over the last year—Carter has not only faithfully and effectively led our Peacemaking ministry, he’s engaged in it with his personal time and effort.

Carter would be the first to emphasize that he didn’t do this by himself. But those of us who’ve been around the block bounded by Park and Madison and Main and Broadway more than once know that our efforts have never been as energetic or as needed in our downtown community.

On behalf of the members of Portland First Congregational and of the Central Pacific Conference, thank you, Carter, for your wisdom, your inspiration, and your work on our behalf.

As Janet commented online during Carter’s recognition yesterday, “We are so proud of him and blessed to have him as a leader at our church!”

And, immediately following the presentation, Carter was back to “work”, heading downtown to support the medic aid station in Fellowship Hall for the afternoon.

Your Soul Boxes Have Meaning

by Nanci Tangeman

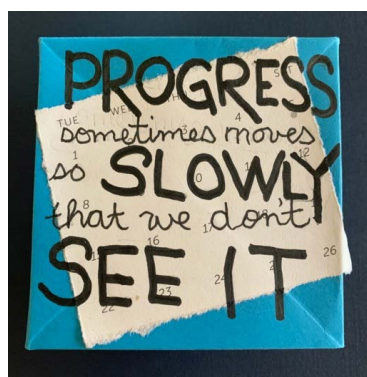
Progress sometimes moves so slowly that we don't see it. Together we've folded over 8,000 Soul Boxes as a congregation. Around 135,000 have been collected and thousands exhibited around the country. Still, the number of people killed or injured in the US doesn't seem to decrease.

That doesn't mean our work with The Soul Box Project is meaningless. Every time you fold a Soul Box you are taking a moment out of your day to remember and honor a gunfire victim. A person. You're also spending time in a meditative, often prayerful, act. Thank you.

Lately, I've been folding Soul Boxes during our Zoom worship services, listening closely and sharing some of the lessons from sermons, readings and hymns on those Soul Boxes. I hope you are finding a meaningful way to incorporate the practice of folding Soul Boxes into your life. It's something we can do while we're apart to stay connected.

If you haven't yet folded a Soul Box, there are instructions online or you can join one of the online folding sessions via Zoom. Find the schedule and more information about The Soul Box Project at www.SoulBoxProject.org or contact Nanci Tangeman nanci@nancitangeman.com

In October we will open our Soul Box collection point in the Fellowship Hall once again. You will be able to drop off your Soul Boxes there or at the monthly Boxing Day collections at Multnomah Arts Center. Stay tuned to church media for more information.



New Book Club

by Nan Wagner

Hooray for Small Groups!

Here's what happened: Ann Muir wanted a book club. She didn't find a book club. She started at book club here at First Congregational. Way to go Ann! The goal? In Ann's words: Have fun, meet new friends and discover new books!

The Book Club has had two meetings so far. The first was just organizational with runaway enthusiasm for much loved books to share. The attendees came up with a convenient meeting time and settled on a trial structure, just to get started.

The first book discussed at the September 8th meeting was *The Truths We Hold* by Kamala Harris facilitated by Rachel Stevens. Rachel came up with some great discussion questions. Many people shared links and videos, and as you might imagine, current politics sifted into the conversation.

Here's the structure: Meet by Zoom for the Covid-time-being, on the second Tuesday of each month from 4:30 to 6:00 (ish). The link will be in "This Week" weekly email. If or when we meet in person a new time might be chosen.

Things Book Lovers Do



Here's the calendar of upcoming chosen books and discussion leaders:

October 13	News of the World by Paulette Jiles	Facilitator: Nan Wagner
November 10	Deep River by Karl Marlantes	Facilitator: Susan Rogers
December 8	End of October by Lawrence Wright	Facilitator: Al Horn
January 12	A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles	Facilitator: Eileen Deerdock
February 9	The Book of Lost Friends by Lisa Wingate	Facilitator: Ann Muir

As you can see the choices are eclectic! Not all political, but there is some of that. Not all fiction, but there is some of that. Not all spiritual but there is some of that. All are welcome, all the time, even if you want to just sit and listen quietly. Even if you haven't read the book. See you on Zoom!

Now, back to Small Groups. If you have an idea or desire for a small group just do it! Don't worry that you'll have to carry the burden of the whole thing. Others will be there to support you and share the load. Send Nan Wagner, Community Core Ministry Coordinator, an email and let's see what magic can happen. I'm here to support you. nannwagner@gmail.com

Join Us For Eve's Circle

Mark your calendar for the rest of the year's fun. Eve's Circle is open to any female-identifying church members or friends. Zoom links in weekly church media.

Eve's Circle 2020-21 Program Schedule

- Oct. 24 Know Your Rights Workshop (with Immigrant Welcoming)
- Nov. 28 Christmas Giving Tree & White Elephant Exchange
- Dec. 26 BYOArt in December: Share your art (virtual or live)
- Jan. 23 "When God Was A Woman"
- Feb. 27 Stained Glass Windows Tour
- Mar. 27 Human Trafficking
- April 24 Eves Read
- May Retreat in a real forest or a virtual one (date TBD)
- June 26 Lan Su Visit
- July 24 Picnic in Willamette Park
- Aug. 28 Service Project or a break
- Sept. 25 Bell Choir - Dorothy



For more information about Eve's Circle contact Paris Hancock or Nanci Tangeman, this year's Eves wranglers. eves@uccportland.org

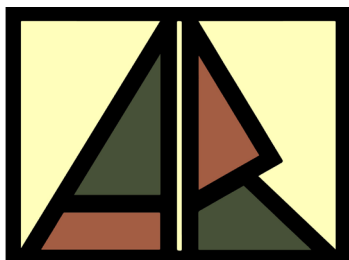


Waddya Know About First Congo? *by Nanci Tangeman*



With 15 players and a host, the discussion was lively in the Waddya Know About First Congo? trivia quiz. The group was split into two teams who discussed their answers in breakout rooms. When we all came together to check answers and tally scores, we decided that after all that heated competition, we were all winners! Some of us learned. Some of us shared their knowledge. All of us had fun!

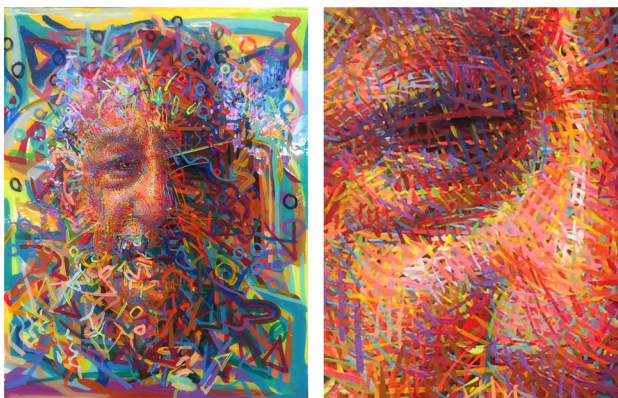
If you missed it, a bit of the trivia competition is on our YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/hsU5vDWmlmQ>



ArtReach Gallery

by Dr. Sheldon Hurst, Art Curator

COVID-19 has made our art gallery go through some major adjustments which we have made in ways that have created new visions for our work. Here are some examples:



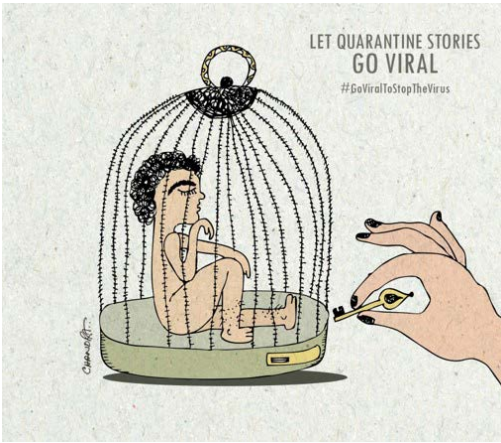
John Capputo and detail, John Hampshire

John Hampshire's **LINEAR / NONLINEAR** and Bill Hornaday's **WATER OVER STONE** were exhibitions that began in March and almost immediately closed. Six months later we returned the shows with very small attendance. We created our usual interpretive brochures to encourage deeper understanding of the art. However, we did something unique: for each exhibition we made videos to present the work of the artist to the church and to our visitors on artreachgallery.org. One of the best stories that came out of this show centered on a book of art by Chuck Close that is in our ArtReach Library. One of our young children saw the book, looked at the pictures and said "That looks like church art." Chuck Close was a very influential artist to the John Hampshire in creating his art.

September began two amazing exhibitions. The first is **CONSCIOUSNESS: Contemporary Printmaking in Oaxaca at the Rufino Tamayo Studio** guest curated by Abigail Merickel, a professor of printmaking at Columbia Gorge Community College. She teaches a printmaking course in Oaxaca each winter, and the art comes out of this past year's class. A catalogue for this exhibition is available in English and Spanish. We are also pleased to co-sponsor this exhibition with Miraglo Theater in Portland. The second exhibition is **TAPESTRIES by Stephen Karakasian**. He wrote some interesting comments about his personal images and expressions related to social justice issues. Our vision adjusted for how we might present this work on our website and we seek to make sure that each artist is well represented for those who visit the galleries AND by those who visit our artreachgallery.org.



The Tomb of the Pharaoh, 2015, Stephen Karakasian

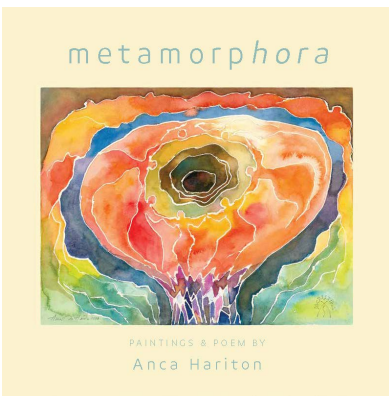


Quarantine, Chandra Mondal

During the Pandemic I discovered Uttaran Chaudhuri, a man in India who has developed a program called **#GoViralToStopTheVirus**. The idea is to creatively attack the virus in a positive way. The result is an amazing number of young artists in India and also throughout the world have sought to participate. I heard about this and ask to participate by showing up to 8 posters of this art each month in our **MADISON STREET WINDOW GALLERY**. In August we began our participation and continued in September. We will participate in this manner until the world is able to control the virus. At the end we will have a grand celebration in our MAIN GALLERY with all creative posters on the walls. It is a great vision using creativity to fight the virus, all the while giving young artists encouragement and affirmation.



7 x 7 Art Galleries, seven art galleries in seven churches in Portland, had a major disappointment in having to postpone the exhibition **FOOTPRINTS: Immigration / Migration** which had been scheduled for September and October 2020. The group mad a decision to reschedule to Sept/Oct 2021. But in the meanwhile we would make a video “teaser” to get everyone in our churches and in the community to know about the plans and our concern about the social justice issue. That 10 minute video https://youtu.be/_E4FJ19omJY is available to our churches to assist in planning education program and create a common concern for one of the major Human Rights issues of our day.

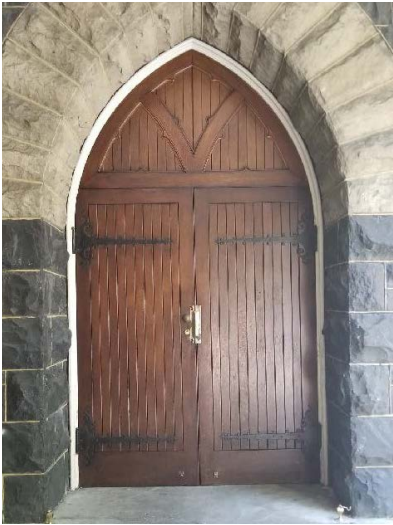


METAMORPHORA by **Anca Hariton** is published by ArtReach Gallery as our first booklet relating art and poetry. Many will remember the class we shared with poet/ artist Anca Hariton during January and February this year as we explore many creation myths and the art that surrounded us in the Chapel Gallery. The booklet is free, with the encouragement of a \$15 donation to the ArtReach Gallery.

It has been an important year in the ArtReach Gallery. Our interim minister Dr. Janet Parker has been very supportive and encouraging through each step of the journey. Her help has made it possible for us to make headway in each of our endeavors. As we prepare to say goodbye to her, we look forward to working with our newly called minister, Dr. Eric Elnes.

A Safe Space For All

by Cara Rothe, Business Manager



Summertime at the church felt a little more normal as we had a few more visitors to the building. Our beautifully re-finished front doors were proud to welcome all.

We were excited to partner with Oregon Historical Society and Oregon Women's Consortium on #ChalkTheVote. Staff, members, and visitors showed-up to honor the important changes to our state's and our nation's history of voting rights by creating art on the sidewalk in front of the church. The event lasted only a week, but since then, visitors are still creating chalk art as they express their hope in the November elections.



The wildfires and smoke created an opportunity to partner with EMO as we signed-up to create a temporary shelter for evacuees. It was inspiring to see so many churches around the tri-county area volunteer to open their doors in this way. While no one contacted us with a need, the situation reminded us of the need to be prepared for this kind of emergency in the future. So, we now have a handful of cots, linens and hygiene kits that can be easily accessed in the event of an immediate need for shelter.

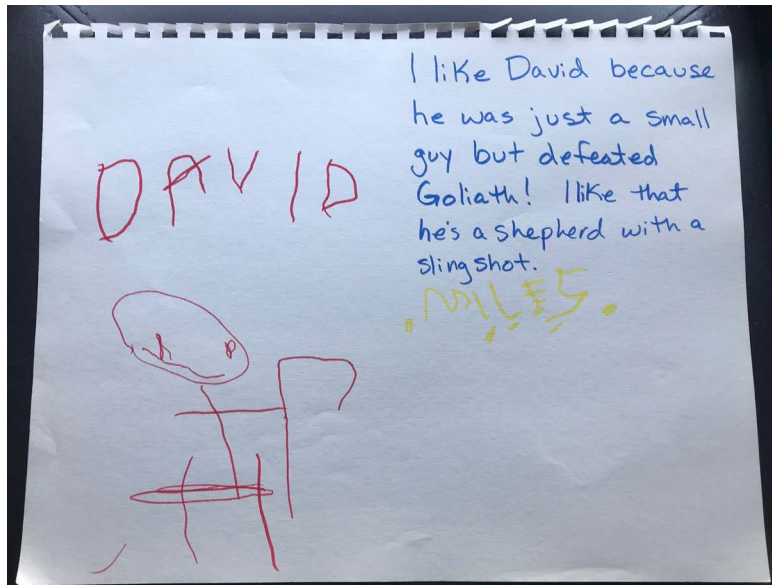
The staff had a special visitor in Eric Elnes, our incoming senior minister. I gave him a tour of the building, and he had an opportunity to meet with staff. We enjoyed our visit with him and look forward to welcoming him here in December!

While the Aid Station is seeing fewer visitors these days, the work on activism has continued with the many in-person conversations that are ongoing about racism, equity, and our mission as a church to provide a safe space for all.

The social distancing guidelines make some interactions awkward, but community finds a way, and staff and the building seem happy to have more company.

Family and Friends of FCUCC

My Favorite Bible Character
by Miles Varquez



That Spark In Us
by Cathy Cordes

I've been a contemplative and a spiritual director for many years, so when we went into lockdown, it didn't seem to affect my life much — at first. But when weeks went by, then months, and people I listened to started unraveling emotionally, I also started struggling with the isolation. I began sending messages out regularly, trying to find ways to encourage and uplift people, to share hope and meaning with them. I've been meditating on God's creative nature, and how he has shared that gift with us. It's been life-giving to think about that spark in us, the spark that writes down words or reads them, that makes things or enjoys observing them, that composes music or listens. Try this for yourself: choose one image or piece of music or poem, perhaps, and spend time with that piece of creativity that is meaningful to you, and be thankful for being able to enjoy it. Each new day shines light and new life in God's own creation, including the changing seasons, and he wants us to enjoy that in fellow human beings as well, to celebrate our creativity. Let your hearts be glad, if only for a few moments, or, as I pray for each of you, throughout the day.



First Congregational United Church of Christ

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Follow us on social media for event updates, news of our spiritual community, and more.
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