



December 6, 2024

Dear Friends and Members of First Church Berkeley UCC,

Star Stuff. How has this Advent theme become a part of your waiting time for Christmas? I am writing this Christmas Offering letter during the first week of Advent, the week of **Hope** when Rev. Kelly has asked us through her sermon and prayers to look for signs of hope. Her first prayer has stayed with me: **Holy Hope, energize us to the bone, that we might see the signs of your coming all around us.** How can we **energize** ourselves to see the hope in the world? One way is to learn about our two Christmas Offering recipients **Puente de la Costa Sur** and **Common Hope**; two organizations that are grounded by their vision and mission to bring hope to individuals, families, and their communities.

Puente de la Costa Sur works toward building a healthy, sustainable, and inclusive South Coast community. In the communities of Pescadero, La Honda, Loma Mar, and San Gregorio, Puente advocates for equitable access to education, health and mental health services, and economic security. Your donation will allow Puente to purchase \$100 Safeway gift cards for people in the **62+ Connection and Wellbeing Program** who are experiencing food insecurity. First Church Berkeley has been connected to Puente since 2001; take a look at Puente's informative website to see their recent hopeful news. <https://mypuente.org>

Common Hope creates opportunities for families in Guatemala to break the cycle of poverty and build a more hopeful future. They provide support for education, family development, health care, and housing. Common Hope shared this story: *In 2011, the Chacon family sought Common Hope's support to ensure that all of their [six] children stay in school, be successful learners and have access to health services. Through the commitment, dedication and encouragement of their parents, three of the children are pursuing university level education and the youngest, Oscar, recently graduated from high school after years of dealing with a severe health issue. Each of the children contributes to the household income, showcasing not only their individual dedication but also the family's collective resilience and aspiration for a brighter future.* First Church Berkeley has been in partnership with Common Hope since 2006; to learn more about Common Hope's work, please visit their website. <https://www.commonhope.org>

We accept Jesus' call to serve him by serving others - the hungry, the unhoused, the refugee, the immigrant, the oppressed. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us generously support **Puente de la Costa Sur** and **Common Hope**. You can donate online at www.onrealm.org (log in, click **Giving**, then the **blue +Give** button, then choose **Christmas Offering** from the **Fund** dropdown menu) or at paypal.me/firstchurchberkeley. You may also write a **check to First Church Berkeley UCC** with **Christmas Offering in the memo line**, and mail to First Church Berkeley UCC, 2330 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704, or you can put it in the offering plate on Christmas Eve.

Thank you for your very generous support of **Puente de la Costa Sur** and **Common Hope**.

Blessings,

Maureen Prochaska, Chair, writing for your Justice and Service Ministry

Stan Boghosian, Barbara Grady-Ayer, Doris Lynch, Chuck Monroe, and Susan Shome