Early in the year (February), Leslie & John celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary with a quiet celebration at home. We also got away for a long weekend up north for Leslie's birthday (May).

2025 included a variety of opportunities to connect with family, near and far. Rachel came to visit (May) and so did Whitney (Thanksgiving). We celebrated a grand nephew's first birthday (July) and hosted a graduation party for Leslie's two nephew's and one niece (July). In September John and his brother, Al, took a road trip and saw baseball fames in Cleveland, Philly & New York (Yankees). We also gathered as family to say goodbye to Leslie's mom's husband, Ernie, who passed at 94 years of age.

Our big event for the year was our trip to California to be with family for Christmas. Think of a shelf with two books held up by two bookends. The books were fabulous! The bookends were horrible.

Below is a picture of our plane waiting to depart Saginaw to start our journey westward. After delays of almost 12

hours, we were finally de-iced, and landed in Detroit, just in time to miss our connecting flight to Los Angeles:

After Delta put us up in a hotel, we caught a plane to San Francisco and then finally got to L.A., only to find our car reservation had been cancelled. A quick Uber got us to Ventura County and we staggered into a GLORIOUS Christmas gathering at Whitney's in Ventura. Food, food and more food – and presents. Gifts with family and new friends. Sarah and Nora and Jack were there. As was Rachel and Whitney's friend, Christina.

Nora & Jack guarding the appetizers before our arrival…

…and joined by Sarah & Rachel

Whitney receiving, Rachel giving – both enjoying.

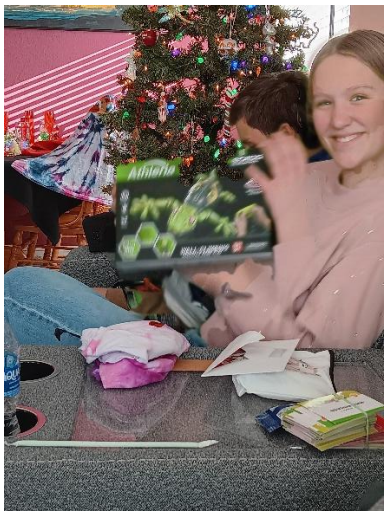
John playing Santa

We collapsed into bed only to pop up the next morning and party again, this time at Nancy's (Rachel's mom). Again a WONDERFUL time together, with more family and friends, food, fun, even a magic show – and more presents.

Nora & Jack with one of Nancy's dogs.

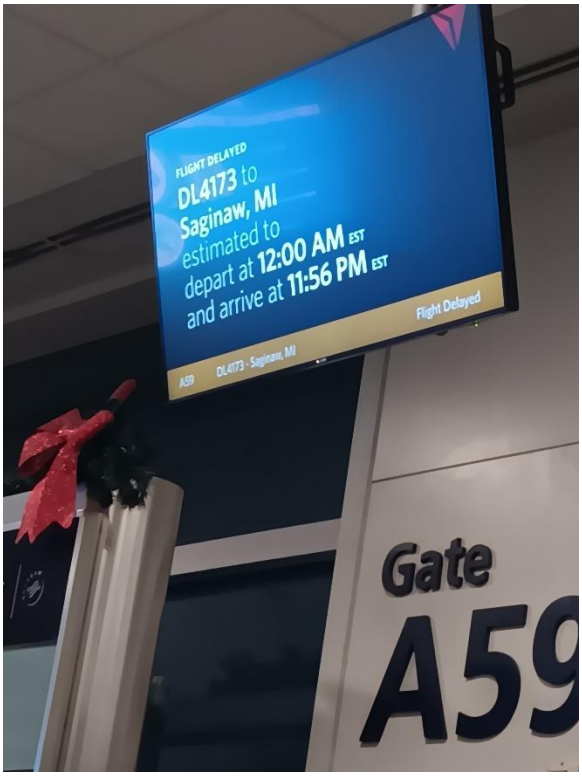
Sarah & Whitney enjoying a sunny Sunday after Christmas.

Rachel's turn to play Santa.



Nora enjoying her new battery-powered, wall-climbing gecko.

Once the parties were over, it was time to try to get home. The first leg (L.A. to Detroit) went well, but the connection to Saginaw was about 3 hours late.



Luckily, the last leg of our journey was **not** almost 24 hours long!

We finally fell into our own bed at 3:00 a.m. (Did someone say, "Never again!?)

John has continued to be a regular Sunday Supply pastor, usually alternating between St. Matthew's or Prince of Peace. He continues to play in the Classic Legacy Band and just about every morning he's in his woodworking shop. New in 2025 was joining the Great Lakes Bay chapter of PFLAG and taking part in numerous sidewalk protests and marches.

When we survived the recent pandemic, many of us probably said, "2020 was the worst year ***ever!***" To which the year now ending says: ***"Hold my beer!"***

After such a year, I hesitate to say, "It can't get any worse." I will also hesitate (here) to say more about that. But one of the simplest messages of this season is captured in the name given to the one whose birth we continue to celebrate: ***Emmanuel***. If God is with us, we'll ~~find our way~~ be led through 2026 by the Good Shepherd.

Peace and health to all.

John & Leslie

P.S.

An early Christmas present.