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Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church

**Sun. March 17, 2024 | 4:00pm**  
First Presbyterian Church of Oakland

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# This chocolate cake is our favorite for birthdays

By Susie Iventosch



Chocolate cake

Photos Susie Iventosch

This decadent cake has become my “go-to” chocolate cake for almost any occasion! It is super moist, easy to make, calls for no eggs, and can be dressed up or down. Sometimes we add peanut butter chips and Reese’s to the batter, and

peanut butter to the frosting for our favorite peanut butter and chocolate lovers. Other times we add mint chocolate or raspberries, and often we leave it simply and divinely chocolate with either chocolate or vanilla buttercream. You can

make it in 8 or 9-inch cake pans, but it also makes a great batch of two dozen cupcakes. You have so many options with this basic cake recipe.

The reason we love this chocolate and vanilla version is because one of our very favorite cakes comes from Amy’s Bread, a fabulous bakery in New York City. For our daughter’s 30th birthday party several years ago, we ordered four cakes from Amy’s Breads, and while all were fantastic, their Black and White was our absolute favorite. It was a dark chocolate cake with white vanilla buttercream. Sooooo good! Ever since that time, whenever I visited Courtney while she was living in New York, we made it a point to pick up a couple of

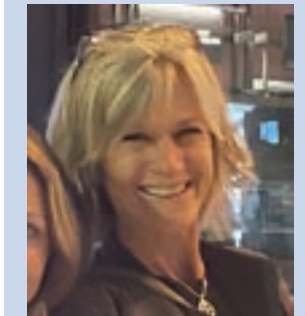
slices of this luscious cake. She no longer lives there, but we still needed our regular fix of this amazing cake, so we started making our own.

To make all the fun swirls of frosting on top of the cake, remove about 1 cup of the vanilla buttercream frosting and add 2-3 tablespoons of cocoa powder to it. Blend well, and add just a dash of milk, if the frosting is too thick. Then, using a pastry bag and a number 824 open star tip with the matching coupler, make the swirls on top of the cake and along the bottom edge. It looks so fancy this way! But, if you are more inclined, you can also just frost the top of the cake and in between the layers, to expose the cake layers. This is easy and makes a



beautiful naked style cake.

Thanks to Sora O’Dougherty, I now use even bake cake strips for placing around the outside edge of the pan to allow the cakes to bake more evenly. If you don’t have these, don’t worry, you can always slice off the rounded part on the top of each layer to make a flatter surface. Also, I have found over the



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years, that is it so much easier to get the cake layers out of the pans by using parchment paper rounds that fit into the bottom of the pan. They come pre-cut, with tabs which really makes it easy to get the cake out!

### Cooking Tools

- 1 large pastry bag
- 1 #824 open star cake decorating tips with matching coupler
- 1 offset spatula
- 2 eight or nine-inch cake pans
- Parchment paper cake rounds with pre-cut pull tabs (you can buy them or make your own)
- 2 even bake cake strips (helps the layers to bake evenly)

### INGREDIENTS

#### Cake

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder (the better quality, the better the flavor)
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 cups cold water (can use 1/4 cup strong coffee and 1 3/4 cup water to boost the chocolate flavor)
- 1 cup canola oil
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. cider vinegar
- 1 cup bittersweet chocolate chips

#### Frosting

- 2 cubes butter, softened to room temp
- 6-7 cups confectioners (powdered) sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla powder (or vanilla extract)
- 1/4 -1/3 cup milk or cream
- 2 tbsp. cocoa powder (for the chocolate frosting designs)

#### DIRECTIONS

Spray the bottom and sides of two cake pans and place parchment paper rounds on top of spray. You can make the parchment rounds by tracing the bottom of the pan and leaving two-inch tabs or you can buy them pre-cut. (See image) Soak the cake strips in water and secure them around the edges of each of the cake pans.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Place all dries for cake in a large mixing bowl and blend well with a wire whisk. In a large measuring cup, mix oil, water, and vanilla and add to dries, mixing thoroughly with a whisk or wooden spoon.

Divide batter evenly among the two cake pans. Sprinkle chocolate chips evenly over the batter in each pan.

Bake for about 30-35 minutes, or until the cake tester comes out clean. Cool completely and remove from the pan. Place one layer on your cake plate and spread vanilla frosting over the top and sides of that layer. Place the second layer on top of the first, and frost top and sides of that layer, smoothing out the frosting on top and around the sides of the cake with an off-set spatula. Using the chocolate part of the frosting, make your decorative swirls on top of the cake and smaller stars all along the bottom edge, using the same tip.

#### Frosting

Place softened butter in the bowl of your standing mixer. Using the paddle attachment, beat until creamy and very white with an electric beater. Beat in vanilla powder or extract.

Add powdered sugar alternately with milk, beating well after each addition, until you reach the desired spreading consistency. Reserve 1/4 cup powdered sugar for the last addition, in case you’ve added too much milk. Remove about 1 cup of the vanilla frosting and set aside in a separate bowl. Stir cocoa powder into this frosting for the chocolate decorations on the cake.

**Cake Strips:** Wilton and King Arthur Baking Co., among others, make these and you can buy them online or at stores like Michaels or Williams Sonoma.  
**Parchment rounds:** The Smart Baker makes these. <https://thesmartbaker.com/>



A cake spinner like this one is not absolutely necessary, but it sure makes cake decorating easier!

# 'Io Capitano' – A hero’s journey

By Sophie Braccini



Image provided

What makes a good movie? How about giving the audience a window to a moment of the human experience that will touch them so deeply that they will leave the theater a different person. Such is "Io

### Capitano."

The movie that will be shown at the Orinda Theatre for at least a week, starting on March 8, comes from Italy and is set almost entirely in Africa. It tells the perilous voyage of two 16-

year-old Senegalese cousins who dream of Europe and cross half of their continent to reach Libya and from there, a boat for Italy. The scenario tells real stories, including that of Mamadou Kouassi, who was a consultant on the movie. After fleeing his country and crossing the Sahara Desert on foot, he was captured and tortured in Libya, sold as a slave laborer, before being able to cross the Mediterranean Sea. When Kouassi and film director Matteo Garrone were interviewed by the Huffington Post last January, they explained that the purpose of the film was to change the way immigrants are perceived around the world.

The linear movie follows Seydou and Moussa, two dreamers who, in spite of warnings from their relatives and friends, want to leave their small Senegalese village and make a better life for themselves and their families. They have no idea of the violence and exploitation they will be confronted with.

Kouassi explains that the film shows only a portion of the violence he encountered. The physical violence is quite difficult to bear at times, but maybe what is worse is how these people are dehumanized by those who exploit them or use them as targets for their sadism. Where no law protects them, the immi-

grants fall prey to trafficking and racketeering.

The movie follows the classical form of the Hero's Journey. Seydou especially has such a good and incredibly brave heart. He overcomes obstacles one after the other and he always gets up again, sometimes on his own, other times supported by his fellow men's solidarity. And this is one of the most optimistic elements of "Io Capitano," showing the support these people who are at their wit's end still give to each other. "Solidarity is a big part of our African culture," commented Kouassi in the Huffington's interview, "something we bring with us wherever we go."

This important movie is overall hopeful and a tribute to the courage of the immigrants, including a touch of fantastic imagery that adds lightness and poetry when reality is too harsh for the protagonists.

"Io Capitano" is a nominee for the 2024 Oscar in the Foreign Films category (just as "The Teacher's Lounge," last month's Orinda programming, is a nominee for Germany). It is a part of the International Film Showcase that brings a remarkable foreign movie to Lamorinda once a month. Details and tickets at [www.orindamovies.com/](http://www.orindamovies.com/)