



First Pres Challenger

WORSHIP *grow*
SERVE

Equipping the Family of God at First Presbyterian Church, Fresno

December 2005

Giving Differently for Christmas

By Terry Jaurena, Mission Director

If you struggle with the idea of purchasing something that a friend, family member or business associate neither needs nor wants, let me remind you, or tell you for the first time, there is another way. It's usually called Alternative Gift-Giving.

Maybe you've seen the "gift catalogs" from organizations like World Vision or World Concern. In relief and development organizations like these you can donate a set amount that provides a goat or perhaps a cow to a family in a developing nation for about the cost of a box of chocolates.

You don't have to have a catalog to have a need that can be packaged nicely into specific gift amounts. Let me give you a few such examples from my mailbox:

•Frontiers is a mission agency that sends church-planting teams into

Muslim countries. A team leader in Pakistan has developed a shelter for families left homeless by the recent earthquake. Three hundred dollars buys a shelter.

•Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries is looking to provide kitchen kits for newly arrived families. Fifty dollars buys a kitchen kit.

•Witnessing Ministries of Christ knows of more children of untouchables who need schooling. Three hundred sixty dollars pays for a child's schooling for one year, thirty dollars pays for one month.

•Habitat for Humanity here in Fresno is building homes so families have a decent place to live. Twenty dollars buys a 50-lb. box of nails, thirty-five dollars gets roof supplies and fifty dollars buys an interior door.

I think you get the picture. Giving a donation to efforts like earthquake relief

in Pakistan, relief to our own hurricane victims, or funds to sponsor an "untouchable" child's education are great alternatives that some on your gift list may appreciate more than you know.

We have a process here to receive gifts for ministries like this through our church, so we're prepared to forward your alternative gift-giving to great Kingdom investments. You'll find a flyer in the narthex with details about how to do this. It includes addresses and websites for our mission partners if you need some alternative gift ideas. This year, we've also prepared some gift cards you can use to communicate to friends, family or business associates when you've given a gift in remembrance of them.

Shopping, with a twist. I hope you will consider it as you're making your lists and checking them twice.

Teaching Future Leaders in Albania

By Rev. Tom Parsons, Pastor to the Congregation

I would like to share with you some highlights from my recent trip to Albania to teach at the Torchbearers Bible School in Erseke. I thought it might bring it closer if I took excerpts from my updates written during and just following the mission.

The Bible School offers a six-month curriculum in Old and New Testament studies, some theology and church history, biblical basis for missions, and practical courses on spiritual disciplines, evangelism, Christian counseling, ministry leadership skills and more. Students are welcome from all countries, and the American students chose it in order to receive this training in a cross-cultural mission setting. Many Torchbearers students

receive a calling from the Lord to mission and church leadership while there. Bob and Linda Osborne from First Pres



serve as house parents at the school. Torchbearers Fellowship has 20 such schools in Europe, North America and Asia.

After the first week: "I am writing from a computer in the student lounge on the second floor of the remodeled Bible school facility (formerly a grain storage warehouse under the communists). Next door is the comfortable apartment Linda and Bob enjoy with a private guest room and bath for the visiting teacher (that's me). Out my window is a great view of the nearby 5,500-foot-high mountains along the border of Greece. This building remodel, with dormitory rooms, meeting and dining rooms and kitchen, was completed last year after the Lord provided needed funds through a special gift to First

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Two Perspectives on the *Mission: Possible* Campaign

Editor's Note: In an attempt to promote constructive discussion of ideas, we have decided to publish two differing perspectives on the *Mission: Possible* campaign. Below is an article by Donald Norman and on the adjacent page is an article by Merlene Samuelian. We hope they will be informative to all.

Taking Our Responsibility to Heart

By Donald Norman

This article is in response to the recent congregational meeting held to discuss the long-range planning building project and other church matters.

In an attempt to commit ourselves to permanence in the downtown cityscape, the Long-Range Planning Committee has proposed that we undergo a period of expansion and renovation. A time in which we, the congregational members and regular attendees, along with First Pres leadership, are to devote prayer, effort and finances to the mission-style renovation of the sanctuary, refurbishment of the A-1 property, and the relocation of several age-group activities to new locations. The sum of these changes will cost over \$2 million.

In my mind, several questions arise: Are these truly God-willed projects? Is this the best use of our funds? Quite possibly. However, I think it more than relevant, indeed imperative, that before we vote with our dollars we also consider *not* spending this money on these projects. This is not to say that the prayer and dedication of the Long-Range Planning Committee was inconclusive or even misplaced, but simply to question our leadership, their decisions and their desired effects, as we are called to do in Scripture. These questions are not in the spirit of malice or ill-will, but rather in that of caution and diligence. I dare say

that this process would be incomplete and fatally flawed if questions were not raised.

What are the goals of the *Mission: Possible* campaign? I attended the congregational meeting on Sunday, Nov. 6, and was left wanting more information about the desired outcomes of the project. Are the outcomes simply to enhance our facilities, upgrading to the newest and latest? Or are they to challenge us to be more active in our downtown community? Is it a diligent use of our funds to construct a new façade rather than addressing the rust problems associated with part of the sanctuary structure? What portion of the A-1 property will be used for existing downtown ministries such as Hope Now for Youth? And what portion for First Pres-specific outreach? What are some possible alternatives to a sport court realizing that there is a local park literally across the street from our church campus?

While these questions are only a limited sampling, they are not primarily intended for the members of the Long-Range Planning Committee. They have been diligent in composing a plan of action. And now we, the members and active participants, have the responsibility of asking and answering these and other questions. If we do not or can not, the time and effort of the Long-Range Planning Committee is irrelevant.

Are the plans laid out before you in line with your view of God's plan for His church? Are they over the top? Or perhaps not enough? Do not simply listen to the words spoken by Wally Upton, Rev. Jamie Evans and others. Their commitment to thoughtful prayer and leadership deserves and requires much more. As a church body, we owe our leadership equal effort to what they have given us. Committees do not meet for four years, pastors and laymen alike do not pray continuously for us to simply listen. It is our call to be actively engaged in discussion and debate of these issues and the projects proposed to us.

Lastly, I would like to give encouragement. Well done to the Long-Range Planning Committee for your time spent sifting through the various plans and ideas in selecting the current one. It is not their call to single-handedly shape the future of our church; it is simply to challenge it and its members to a direction congruent with our faith. The congregation as a whole shapes the future, for the glory of the Kingdom or not.

We have faith in the God who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. It is in that faith and through that God that we petition for discernment, clarity and humility. And it is on that rock that we desire the continued life and growth of First Presbyterian Church of Fresno.

The Privilege of Serving

By Merlene Samuelian

The purpose of this article is to explain the process and rationale behind the *Mission: Possible* plan.

Over three years ago, the Long-Range Planning Committee began to meet monthly to study the strengths and weaknesses of First Presbyterian Church and to develop a long-range plan for the church. After meeting with staff, lay leaders and all the ministry teams, it became evident to our group that we had some areas of program growth that were being negatively affected by available space.

We compiled statistics and projected growth patterns, then hired an architect to help us develop a long-range plan for future growth. We developed a list of areas that needed to be addressed. Our architect presented us with over a dozen possible plans. We shared those ideas with the elders and deacons of the church and, with their guidance, decided on a long-range plan.

We then took a poll of a cross-section of the church to determine the size of the capital funding for stage one. After much prayer and many meetings we decided on the following items:

1. Acquire the garage next to our property and turn it into a youth center. This will enable the junior and senior high programs to have an area of their own that is adequate in space for their immediate needs. It will also allow for the development of a sports court area on the back of our property. The garage owned a piece of property next to our undeveloped property. We feel this will meet the needs

of the youth for the next five years and it is wise to own the land. We will do minimal work on the building.

2. We responded to the need to move the nursery to the ground level. The nursery will be in the administration building adjacent to the library. If it is determined that they need additional space, they will use some of the library space and the library will be relocated to the Christian Education building.

3. We will relocate classrooms making better use of the space that we have in the Christian Education building. Watch out for major shifting and relocation after the first of the year. We are grouping the age-related programs for better programming. We will then have more space available for adult education classes.

4. The beautiful stained glass windows of the sanctuary are being blocked by dated, clouded plastic. We will use new materials to protect the windows and allow them to be seen from the outside.

Our church loves to fellowship with each other between and after services, but we need more shade. We asked the architect to develop a shaded area adjacent to the sanctuary.

We decided that the aging sanctuary needed an exterior face lift and we studied many different styles of architecture. We decided that Mission Revival would be appropriate for our community and for the lines of the existing structure. We plan to use this style in the future remodel-

els and buildings as proposed in the long-range plan.

5. The console of the organ is over 50 years old. The life of an organ console is usually about 30 years. The music and worship ministry team researched many possibilities and have selected a console that will utilize all of our organ pipes and also have the capability of being digital - the best of both musical worlds.

It has been our privilege to present this stage one of the plan to the congregation for their financial support. We believe this is a very practical way to start building on the rich heritage that First Presbyterian Church of Fresno has and continues to develop.

We are very proud of our commitment to the heart of Fresno and continue to look for new ways to serve Christ in our community. We realize that change causes confusion and sometimes inconveniences, but we also realize that we are called to grow in our ministries and our faith.

On behalf of the Long-Range Planning Committee, it has been a privilege and honor to be given the opportunity to dream and plan for the future of our church.

If you have a dream, a new ministry area, or a vision for the future of our church, please contact one of our members. Committee members are: Robert Wood, Merlene Samuelian, Liz and Scott Hulme, Scott McCallum, Dick Griffin, John Slaughter, Skip Lynn, Ronnie Samuelian, Wally Upton, Erick and Diane Johnson, Sam Reeves, Jamie Evans and David Abdo. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mission: Possible Kicks Off

By Karin Temple Deffebach

Mission: Possible, our capital campaign to fund facility improvements, officially got underway Nov. 6 with an all-church luncheon and meeting. Scott McCallum, Wally Upton, Robert Wood, Merlene Samuelian and Diane Johnson introduced the plan for upgrades, renovation and expansion of the church campus. They also answered questions and appealed to the congregation to support the campaign with contributions over and above their normal giving.

The Long-Range Planning Committee appointed by Session developed the improvement plan out of the desire to use our unique downtown assets for outreach and building God's Kingdom, and to accommodate exciting growth in many church programs including youth, junior high, high school, college and adult educa-

tion.

The total cost of these improvements is estimated at \$3.1 million. *Mission: Possible* is our campaign to raise the funds necessary for the expansion and renovation, and members of the congregation are asked to prayerfully consider their role in making these plans a reality.

To date, approximately \$1.6 million in donations and pledges have been received. It is exciting to see how God is moving individuals to help fund this legacy to future generations as we work toward our goal of building His Kingdom through improvement of our church facility and new spaces to welcome congregants of all ages. Pledges (suggested over three years) and one-time gifts of any size are invited. Pledge cards are available through the church office.

Currently there is a special tax

advantage in giving cash gifts. This window of opportunity to receive extraordinary tax benefits for charitable contributions was created by the Hurricane Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act. While the original intent of the legislation was to encourage donations to hurricane victims, qualified cash contributions to the *Mission: Possible* campaign will meet the law's requirements and qualify for the special tax benefits.

Specifically, the contribution limit for cash gifts to charities made before December 31, 2005, has increased from 50 to 100 percent of adjusted gross income (AGI). In addition, cash gifts are exempt from the three percent reduction in itemized deductions for individuals with AGIs over \$145,950. This is an excellent tax incentive to support church

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Care Fresno Needs Volunteers

By Catherine Franz

In October I was shocked to read a report on concentrated poverty stating that Fresno is number one in the nation. One of the areas of concentrated poverty, the Lowell School area, is around the corner from our church. Our congregation has been involved in this neighborhood and we are now seeking volunteers to work at Martin Park. I believe it is not by accident that our church has remained downtown. God promises that "*He who gives to the poor will lack nothing.*" (Proverbs 28:27, NIV)

Sunday morning, Oct. 23, I was able to hear Bruce Edwards speak on C.S. Lewis. He explained how C.S. Lewis felt the presence of the Lord when he wrote. Edwards challenged us to discover where we feel the presence of the Lord. I thought about it and realized I truly experience the Lord's presence when I work at a Care Fresno tutoring site. I see children working and building relationships with each other and the mentors. It is an amazing thing to see vol-

unteers giving of their time to help students with homework and reading and writing skills.

The mission of Care Fresno is to create safe and healthy communities in at-risk apartment complexes in Fresno County through partnerships with law enforcement, faith-based organizations and community agencies with resident neighborhood leadership.

Care Fresno was born in 1995 when the police department, pastors and local apartment complex owners, distressed by rising rates of crime calls to the apartments, formed a partnership. As a result of this program, the tested reading ability of elementary children at one Care Fresno site increased 17 percent in one school year, and crime in these complexes has been reduced by 60 percent. In addition, the transience rate in the complexes where Care Fresno sites are located has been reduced. Care Fresno

apartment sites have reported an increase in occupancy from 70 to 98 percent. Families are staying longer because they have become stake holders in the community, feel safer and want to keep their children in the Care Fresno program.

A handful of First Pres members have relocated and live in the Lowell neighborhood. Two in particular, Marty and Joanie Martin, have opened up an apartment on their property for the purpose of tutoring and mentoring children in the area. First Pres has been involved with the tutoring center in the past, but the tutoring center currently needs volunteers. Care Fresno, in partnership with First Pres, is looking for volunteers to be trained for and work in the tutoring center after school. If you would be interested in this ministry opportunity and would like more information, please contact me at 233-2000 x135, or by e-mail at catherine@onebyoneleadership.com.

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Pres missions from a generous member, now deceased.

We have an outstanding group of students: Four Albanian men from Kosovo in their early twenties who are already leaders in a young church in the town of Malishev. They have been disciplined by a missionary couple from southern California. (One of them is typing at the computer next to me and Linda Osborne just brought us some chocolate peanut clusters she made.) These men are seasoned through persecution by the Muslim population, who oppose the witness to Christ in their town. They are eager to learn all they can for witnessing boldly to Christ among their people.

There are also three Albanian young women, one recently graduated from university in elementary education, another has a law degree from the university in Tirana, and a third has been working in Tirana, the capital. Another Albanian is a young man from Erseke who came to Christ a year ago and served on the camp staff last summer.

Our Canadian student is a recent high school graduate from Saskatoon who is seeking God's will for his future calling. The five American students include three women, two of them recent university grads, and two men, one a 25-year old investment counselor who took a Perspectives on the World Christian Mission course and decided to give the Lord "a year of my life before I get too far up the corporate ladder." Perhaps you can see why this has been an exciting first week of opening the book of Ephesians with these enthusiastic young disciples!

I've been doing an inductive study of Ephesians. In this method of study, students read

the passage ahead following study questions in Albanian or English. They often discuss their findings in small groups and I weave my teaching in and out with questions and discussion. It's about half lecture and half interaction. It has gone very well, as they are quick to grasp things.

All but two understand some English, and the more experienced are helpful to the younger students. My translator has a very good grasp of English, is full of good humor, and that makes it fun to teach and learn. Most of all, we sense the presence of God's Spirit helping us learn together and experience Christ in a loving and joyful community."

After the second week: "After teaching Ephesians in the first week, this second week my focus has been on practical application from Dr. Neil Anderson's *Steps to Freedom in Christ*. The Steps help the students learn to resolve spiritual conflicts in their lives and experience the marvelous resources of our new life in Christ.

On Wednesday we set aside an extended time for each student to meet individually with a staff member to share and pray over specific areas in their lives. More than half requested a prayer partner, and the leaders found the Steps very helpful in their ministry to the students. These personal relationships can continue as needed throughout the school year, and should encourage most students to benefit from continuing one-to-one mentoring and prayer with their leaders.

Most of the Albanian students are from Muslim families and are at the Bible School against their parents' wishes. They struggle with the issue of

how to follow the Lord while still 'honoring father and mother' and standing up to the accusation that they are 'being manipulated by those rich Americans.' Paul's teaching on Christian marriage, family life, and the issue of submission to those in authority must be carefully interpreted to help them work out their discipleship in Albanian culture, where the father usually expects his children to follow family tradition and his wishes. We had some challenging discussions!

I've been amazed at the way insights, illustrations and applications have come to me during preparation times and often while I'm teaching the students. God's Spirit is so real and active. I've been relishing the time for deeper study of this marvelous epistle of Paul, so my own mind and heart are being enriched and stretched by God's truth."

I am grateful to many of you who prayed faithfully for me during the mission. I have never felt more supported and upheld by God's people than in this adventure.

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improvements. This might be especially attractive to members who own savings bonds, tax-deferred annuities, and (for those over age 59½) IRAs and other qualified retirement accounts in excess of what they will likely need during retirement. You are encouraged to consult your financial advisor or tax professional for more information on this special, perhaps once-in-a-lifetime, opportunity.

Mission: Possible has a dedicated team praying for the future of First Presbyterian Church, and all members of the fellowship are asked to join this effort. If you have questions, feel free to contact the individuals mentioned above, members of Session or staff.

Deadline Information

The deadline for the March issue of *The Challenger* is Friday, Feb. 17 at 5 p.m. It will be mailed out Mar. 2. Please submit articles to Carol Valencia (454-9467), cjm44@cvip.net, or leave in newsletter box in office.

The deadline for "A Place for You" is each Monday at 5 p.m. Please submit announcements to Cheryl Eaker (485-6460), via email at ceaker@fpcfresno.org.

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For Your Information

Offering Envelopes

Every year at this time we make available offering envelopes to all who use them. The use of the envelopes is a real time-saver for the accounting office.

If you have used yours regularly, they will be available for you to pick up in the church library Sunday mornings starting in December. You are also welcome to come in during the week so we can help you find your envelopes.

If you have not used envelopes in the past, but would like to start, we always have some extra envelopes. Please put a note in the offering plate requesting envelopes with a number where you can be reached and we will see that you get them. Thank you.



Joyful Ringers would like to thank you for your prayers and encouragement as we share the joy of Jesus Christ's birth through music.

Our schedule is as follows:

- Sat. Dec. 3, 12:30 pm—River Parkway Christmas Boutique
- Wed. Dec. 7, 6:00 p.m.—Christmas Tree Lane
- Sat. Dec. 10, 2:00 p.m.—Glen Apartments Open House
- Wed. Dec. 14, 6:00 p.m.—Silvercrest Senior Residence
- Sun. Dec. 18, 8:30 & 11:00 a.m.—First Pres Worship Services

Session Report

By Scott McCallum

Highlights from the October financial report: Giving was above budget (5.98 percent); spending was below budget (14 percent); cash available for operations is approximately two months of budgeted spending.

Important Upcoming Dates:

- World Impact Dinner will be held at our church on Dec. 15.
- Bethany Church will have an enchilada sale on Jan. 8 and 15, with deliveries on Jan. 22.

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