



First Pres Challenger

WORSHIP_{grow}
SERVE

Equipping the Family of God at First Presbyterian

March 2008

Where Was The Storm? By Jamie Evans

Kristy and I left the congregational meeting this Sunday shaking our heads, absolutely astounded. What we had just experienced was novel to us from our experiences with churches in our distant past.

Where were the arguments, the hard glances, the accusations and the many tensions that often lurked beneath the veneer of civility? No one had launched into diatribes! People weren't sitting in their cliques and factions. Instead they were with friends and new acquaintances thoroughly enjoying fellowship and great food. When questions were asked they were done so with civility and character, and answers were politely acknowledged while affirmation was profuse!

It has been close to seven years now that we have been with the First Presbyterian family and my wife and I are realizing that this is an amazingly healthy place in which we find ourselves. It appears that over the decades there has been a general consensus.

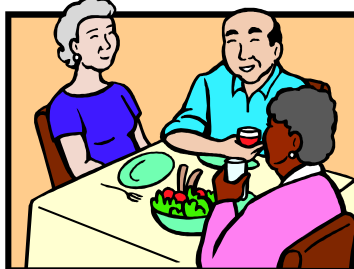
When there is conflict, which is natural for any ministry to go through as we grow and change, the system of conflict here seems most biblical. I often get calls or hear of situations where conflict was occurring here in which one confronted in love the other, in pri-

vate and with a spirit of Matthew 18. That passage teaches that when one conflicts with another they are to meet and hash it out in person, not through back-room gossip, or political factions, neither through character assassination nor passive aggressive techniques, but in simple truth balanced with kind love.

This allows relationship to be better secured, keeps outside parties to a minimum and disturbs the family with conflict's trauma the least. It provides the "way of escape" as the Bible states, and egos are less involved. Compromise is even possible in a milieu like this.

Congregational meetings can be places of proxy wars as old wounds find public vent and cliques voice their frustration over perceived wrongs. Especially in financially trying seasons venting in public can become high art.

This has not occurred in my experience here. The family system of First Presbyterian seems instead to tend towards charity in public and conflict when necessary in private one-to-one sessions as the Word

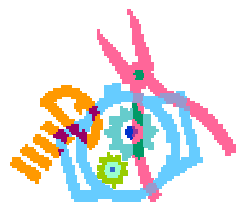


counsels. This speaks to me of decades of practice, where leaders with strong wills have learned to love one another more than they love their own venting and frustrations.

After our congregational meeting I mused as I listened to David Abdo preach his magnificent sermon on the centrality of grace and truth held in strong tension, that this was already afoot in our midst. Grace had softened truth and truth had given grace courage, as our people worked out their natural conflicts in clear biblical fashion. The roots of evil and bitterness had precious little soil in which to grow.

Kristy and I could not be more proud of this family and privileged to do ministry with you. This church loves, serves, fights, and grows well under the tutelage of the Scriptures. Christ knew what He was teaching about when it came to building harmony among folk with strong opinions and yet a desire to love one another. What a wonderfully rare and welcome custom here, congregational meetings that are celebrations and occasions of worship and unity. I can get used to this

Deacons' Corner— The Blessings of Caring By Roger Taylor



The Deacons' Board of First Presbyterian Church is developing a five-year plan to strengthen and streamline our services and brainstorm in order to find creative means of providing these services. One way of achieving this plan is with the Harvest of Helpers. We need to develop caring ways of aiding many folks in need of assistance which are not related to serving our S.T.A.R.S. (Seniors That Are Really Special).

Love I.N.C. (In The Name of Christ) is one such service that involves a number of local churches which helps with minor household repairs, transportation and various other needs. Consider that all of us, at some time or other, will have such needs. Caring service, even when inconvenient, can be a two-way blessing! You should try it. Hebrews 12:28 states "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude by which we may offer an acceptable service with reverence and awe." Romans 12:13 tells us "When God's children are in need you be the one to help them out." Please pray that you may fulfill these instructions. (Love I.N.C. accepts volunteers through the Harvest of Helpers.)



PRAYER BIBLICAL LITERACY EVANGELISM SERVICE WORSHIP MISSION

Living The Word By Greg Ehler

Teaching the Bible is a dangerous profession. It's much easier to preach a sermon, teach a lesson or put together a Bible study than it is to actually live out what is being taught or studied. I heard Steve Brown from Key Life Ministries once say about obedience to Scripture, "I'd be doing fine if I actually lived what I already know."

This does not negate the value of studying the Bible. However, it does point to the challenge of allowing the Word of God to penetrate our lives to the point of transforming us.

A passage of Scripture I've been looking at again comes from 2 Corinthians 5. This chapter is rich with theology and images and could take months to exposit and describe. However, verse 15 has struck me hard lately.

Paul has been talking about being controlled, motivated and empowered by Christ's redemptive love. Since Jesus died to make it possible for people to be reconciled to God, He tells us in verse 15 that "... He (Jesus) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" –

NIV.

We nod our heads in agreement that this is what Christ did for us, but we easily forget about what it *really* means to live for ourselves no longer.

Living for ourselves is a terrible kind of slavery. It's really a bondage that shackles us from living the abundant life of freedom God created us to live.

Living a life "compelled" by the love of Christ shakes us free from the false redemptive promises of safety, security and status.

We begin to realize that when we live a life that is surrendered to and controlled by Christ, we are shaken from our complacency and released toward profound significance. Everything and everyone around us takes on new meaning.

Paul continues in verses 16-21 to tell the Christians in Corinth that they will: no longer view people from a "flesh-oriented" or worldly point of view, that they are new creations and no longer need to be defined by perspectives from the past, that the source of salvation is always God himself, that they have become minis-

ters of reconciliation, that they are God's literal "ambassadors" as God appeals to humanity through them, and that they are becoming the "righteousness of God."

Because of who Christ is and what He has done for us we are now: free to love others unconditionally because we are loved unconditionally, free from our past because Christ dealt with our past, free from needing to "prove" ourselves to God or others because God's approval of us is already secure in Christ, free to be ministers of reconciliation because God reconciled us to himself through Christ, free to be ambassadors of God's love because God loved us in Christ and free to become the righteousness of God because we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ alone.

When I consider all that God has done for me in Christ, I can begin to "let go" of my desire to compare myself to others, to feel guilt or regret from my past, to feel the need to "prove" myself to God, to feel the need to be "right" all of the time and to feel the need to be "perfect" before I can talk to God or be used by him.

My tendency to live for myself rather than Christ shackles me indeed. But to live for Christ brings freedom, joy and power I could have only dreamt of before.



An Abundant Gift By Corrie Sands

As I stood in the entry of the new nursery space greeting people with babies, and welcoming others to peek in who were just anxious to see the final product, a similar thought continued to wash over me. This is an abundant gift. The physical space taken from the administration building was a giant gift. The ability to custom design a space that would suit the particular needs of our young families was incredibly generous. The priority placed on finishing the nursery spaces first was unbelievably gracious. On top of all of that, the perspective I have after having conversations with other children's directors from churches around the country

punctuates for me our church's commitment to caring for the next generation. Not everyone is so fortunate.

In addition to the great gift of facilities and resources to furnish and otherwise outfit the space, we have been abundantly blessed in other ways. Our nursery coordinator line-up would make other churches green with envy. Lisa Rush, who just completed a nearly six-year stint creating a consistent, warm, safe place for our parents to leave their smallest treasures, was a major blessing to us in her loyal service. She was trained as a special education teacher and chose to use her talents to serve our congrega-

tion for years. She continues to serve and bless little ones in her new teaching job. Please give her a hug and let her know how appreciated she is for her great sacrifice to serve when you see her on campus. Currently we are staffed with a dynamic duo of extremely over-qualified nursery coordinators. God continues to provide in extravagant ways. Stacy Johns and Rebecca Pope are credentialed teachers who are also mothers with young children in the nursery and other children's programs. They signed on to share responsibilities for the nursery and are a fantastic team. If you haven't seen their handiwork,

(Continued on page 3)

Abundant Gifts, Continued

peek into the new nursery and check out the well-oiled machine they have set up to serve our young families.

As abundance has overflowed for us and we stand in thanks, God has given us an opportunity to serve. Cheryl Taylor, who attends our church, works with impoverished teen moms in Mendota.

These are young women who have chosen life for their children and are working hard to go to school and make ends meet while learning how to parent a child. Cheryl recently approached me and asked if we would be willing to filter any used baby items (clothing,

strollers, toys, etc.) through our nursery for her to share with these young women and their infants. I knew that God was offering us an avenue to bless others out of our position of great privilege. So, of course, I told her it would be our pleasure. As a result, there is now a drop off point in the nursery entry for any donations anyone from church has to give. Contact Corrie with any questions at csands@fpcfresno.org.

Praise God with me, First Pres! What occurs to me even as I write this is that we have been given means to make a new space possible to serve

better the exploding infant population. Even better than that, we HAVE an exploding infant population. We have a group of young families who have hope in God, which gives them a hope and purpose for the future, which translates into more babies! What a testimony to His faithfulness to us!

If, by the way, you are touched by the great movement of abundance happening with our little ones, we would love to welcome you to come and hold babies or tell stories to preschoolers any Sunday morning you are available. Thank you, First Pres, for the tremendous gifts!



O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing By Marcie York

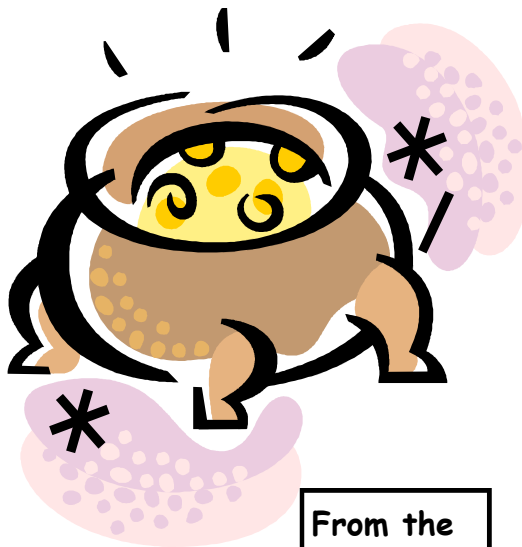
It is 9:45 Sunday morning in room 102, the elementary Children's Ministry "Media Room" and it rocks with the sounds of guitar and drum, children singing and clapping hands. The words to "O For a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise" fill the movie theater-size screen. As children sing the revved up version of this great hymn they are once again expressing the ageless truth of the gospel through an eighteenth century "building block" of the True Church.

Written by English itinerant evangelist Charles Wesley in 1749, it is one of 6,500 hymns he wrote during his life time. This one commemorated the first anniversary of his conversion, expressing his joy in the new life that now filled him. Even as he lay dying he dictated one last hymn of praise to his wife and dedicated it to her!

Charles Wesley's life-time dive into God's eternal purpose is one example that I pray will ignite a fire in our First Pres children. Included in the mission statement of the Treasure Chest is that children will "understand their heritage in the Body of Christ and choose to take their place in it."

To meet this goal we are intentional in helping children understand how God has used ordinary people to further His grand purpose of reconciling a dying world to Himself in Christ

(2 Corinthians 5:19). As children understand their spiritual heritage in biblical and church history we pray they will catch the vision of what it means to be Christ's ambassadors in the 21st century.



Oh how our children have been filled with that heavenly vision in the past month! On one weekend in the month of February our elementary-aged "Treasures" blessed the hearts of many as they expressed God's eternal Word in word and song.

On Friday night of that weekend nine of them culminated six weeks of

preparation for the annual central valley AWANA Bible Jamboree. Twelve churches throughout the valley converged on a church sanctuary in Kingsburg, filling it with the energy and expectation of uniform-clad kids and their leaders, family members and friends.

As competition began between the age group teams, it was apparent that this was much more than a simple Bible memorization event. Questions ranged from stating the content of verses to explaining the doctrinal meaning behind passages.

I watched as quick little minds thought carefully and responded quickly and could almost see the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) sharpening in each one. How well they will defend the faith some day, I thought, as they learn how to handle rightly the Word of Truth!

That Word not only blessed all of us who shepherd these kids in AWANA ministries around the valley, it went into the unsuspecting hearts of many parents and grandparents who have not yet responded to the atoning work of Christ on the cross on their behalf. Hallelujah!

In addition, our First Pres teams took first, second and third place awards in the competition that night.

(Continued on page 4)

O For A Thousand Tongues, Continued

Joy and affirmation overflowed as they hugged their leaders and families, snapped pictures and exulted in God's goodness!

The next morning those tired but happy children were in our church sanctuary, joining the entire Full Court Pres choir for final rehearsals for their musical presentation Sunday morning, "Acts Alive!" Ready to use their tongues again, this time in singing, our First Pres "Treasures" warmed up voices and went through their final paces and Sunday morning filled the

choir risers with exuberant music and testimony to God's great hand in forming the Church for His glory.

Months of preparation in Sunday morning choir practices and hours of memorizing lines and learning songs at home were reflected in the focus and determination of their earnest faces. New-found levels of discipline and commitment were evident and I rejoiced at their growth in these two areas which will be crucial to their spiritual walks in the future. We, their church family, were blessed beyond

measure by their ministry that morning, but it was their creative rendition of Wesley's "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing" that brought down the house! The fun our kids had as they presented their varied renditions of that staunch old hymn was a joy to watch. Would Charles Wesley roll in his proverbial "grave" at that rendition? Oh no, his words resonate throughout time; "Hear him, ye deaf, his praise ye dumb, your loosened tongues employ; ye blind, behold your savior come, and leap, ye lame, for joy!"

Kenya News By Terry Jaurena

We recently put their picture up during the service. Roger and Shirley Brown live and serve in Kenya. They have two daughters, Rachel and Hannah. Rachel is in the US at college right now, but Kenya is where she grew up, where her parents and little sister still live. It's home. I thought you needed to read this from the Brown's latest update. Gratefully, the author granted permission.

This is from Shirley Brown's e-mail dated February 13. "Rachel wrote a poem from her perspective of a girl far away who is concerned about her homeland. It has been difficult for her to have been here for the initial violence and then feel so distanced from it, yet her heart is still very much entwined with the pain and loss."

When Will It End?

When will it end?

This killing

This hatred

This meaningless ending of beautiful lives

My country was a beacon of inspiration to the continent called the "heart of darkness"

And now this ...

This destruction that has affected every aspect of life

And now life will never be the same

Not for any of us

Not for the wife who hid as her husband was hacked to death

Not for the merchant whose goods were looted

Not for the bystander who narrowly escaped with his life

Not for the refugee of a country that used to be a haven for external refugees



Not for the family who now fears their closest neighbors

Not for the youth fighting for what he believes to be freedom and justice

Not for the policeman who was forced to shoot to break up the crowd

Not for the child who is ostracized by her teacher because

of her tribe

Not for the missionary who watches as God's work seems to be a case of "things fall apart"

Not for the girl far from home who can only pray and try to spread the word as she watches her homeland crumble

Life is different now

There is a brutality and evil that I have never had to face so closely before

And it hurts

It hurts in ways that words could never hope to describe

Beyond tears - a pain so deep

Who will save them?

Save them from the unforgiveness and rage

Malice and anger

Greed and pride

The evil that prevails in this world

Who can?

Foreign aid tries, but how can they bring supplies to all those people?

Diplomats and peacemakers attempt to bring reconciliation,

but what has been accomplished?

Church workers want to provide, but how much can they do?

Government powers put on pressure and sanctions, but where is the good from that?

God promises to be there, to provide and to love, to protect and to save, but where is He?

God is in control

I know it in my head

And I believe it in my heart

At least, sometimes

It's hard when the world is so full of evil everywhere I look

Hard to trust that God is in control

In small ways, though, I see His provision

And I know

And I believe

God has plans for His beloved Kenyans

Plans we cannot even dream of

They are not forgotten

God knows their names

—Rachel K. Brown

February 2008

Craving Connection By Lana Roberts

“We’re starting a new, Monday night Bible study for women. Is our purpose for women to study the Bible, or is it to give them a time and space to forge closer friendships?” Our immediate answer was, “Bible study.”

But we had to take note that folks everywhere are hungering for deeper relationships and there is a profound desire for a greater sense of community among our congregation. We’re craving connection. What if we dared to admit that deeper relationships were at the top of at least *some* peoples’ list? Stepping back from the “Sunday school” quickness of our answer, we began a long discussion that I believe touched on talks many of you have had at various times and in many venues.

Jamie Evans often remarks, with a certain relish, that First Pres isn’t convenient. We aren’t conveniently located for many folks. We don’t cater much to the whims of culture, or even to the latest and greatest thing to hit the Christian marketplace this season. Witness that fact that—for good or ill—we never jumped into the *Purpose Driven Church* phenomenon. Our lack of convenience often means people who come here

regularly are drawn to that commitment by other, very different facets of our fellowship.

Not diminishing the role of the Holy Spirit, it seems that some sense at least the possibility of “church family” here. Our new members often remark on having felt welcomed when they first arrived. This is not to say that we welcome everyone exceptionally well, but for those who stay it’s often an important factor.

Reflecting both on new members and on those who have been here for generations, I have come to the conclusion that First Pres is a big church that feels in some ways like a smaller church. Over the years and the changes, many of us have felt, kept, and hoped to foster in new and old alike the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a church that understands itself as “family.”

And it isn’t unusual for families to feel the need to connect to one another—especially in the busy seasons of life. Some of you are working on ways to help others make and deepen relationships. Some of you are looking for opportunities to get connected.

Church-wide events are a delight; they give those present a great feeling of being all together. Our Annual Meeting on January 28 was a recent example.

And connection also requires shared time in smaller settings, formal and informal, in peoples’ homes, over coffee or a Pepsi, or on a walk in the park. So, we plan things like *Satellite Sundays*, or *Suppers for Seven*. Some of you have the gift of hospitality. What a joy it is seeing you employ that divine gifting! As a word of encouragement to all, in all of these ways, let me say a hearty, “Go for it!”

Most of you already know how we answered our question about our new *Monday Night Moore* women’s Bible study. “Is our purpose for women to study the Bible, or is it to give them a time and space to forge closer friendships?” The answer is, “Yes. Our purpose is Bible study *and* forging deeper relationships.”

Monday Night More, a Bible study for women, started on January 28. We are using a Beth Moore study. For more information, contact Melanie Franz, Gerre Brenneman, Jill Brackett, Joanie Brackett Joy, or Lana Roberts.



Footsteps of the Apostle Paul By Paul and Louise Armstrong

Are you one of those persons who likes to go places and see things, especially places named in the Bible? For many years I have wanted to see the places the Apostle Paul touched with his powerful preaching and teaching. A couple of months ago we looked at the calendar and decided this is the year we had better take some action.

We know that seeing the actual places named in scripture really adds to the depths of our faith. We experienced that a few years ago when we went to Israel. This time we will be touring Greece, the isles of Mykonos, Rhodes, and Patmos, plus Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Phillipi.

We will be using a Globus tour, leaving Los Angeles September 2, and returning September 12th. We invite you to come along with us! However,

we can’t buy your ticket—sorry about that! The cost is just under \$2000, not including the air fare, or the bus to Los Angeles. Our travel agent, Debbie Soto, is from Jamie’s former congregation in Cambria. She is presently shopping hard to get us to Athens from L.A. We expect the cost will be about \$1500 a person.

We have 20 spaces presently reserved on a Globus Tour, and we can hold them until late April. But the really crucial part is arranging for the air travel. Especially, since we are seeking to get very competitive rates for a group, we just have to know how many of you are ready to sign up, and put down \$200 per person so we can go ahead and make arrangements for the plane tickets. If you plan to fly in a group, we must have this information

by March 15 or earlier. Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

A few persons have already asked if there might be an optional extension so we could see a bit of Italy, especially Rome. This is an option at present. But of course this would add to the cost. Debbie Soto tells me passports must extend six months beyond the expected date of return (September 12th).

So check those passports, check your funds and give me a call, at 439-4605. I have brochures and will do all I can to assist you in completing your decision. We are studying and praying and planning to have a wonderful time in our Lord Jesus Christ. If this trip is not for you, please pray for us; that the Lord will guide us and speak to us, and that we will be faithful witnesses and grow in our faith.

Deadline Information
**The deadline for the April
Challenger is Friday, March 21.**
It will be mailed out on April 3.

Please submit articles to newsletter box in church office. Or, contact Daphne Saul, 252-4064, or daphne4926@sbcglobal.net.

The deadline for "A Place for You" is each Monday at 5 p.m. Please submit announcements to: Cheryl Eaker at 485-6460 or staff@fpcfresno.org and put Cheryl Eaker's name in the subject box.

First Pres Challenger

March 2008

(USPS 572-240)
Published monthly by
First Presbyterian Church
1540 M Street
Fresno, CA 93721-1277



The Ministry Team

Rev. James Evans, Senior Pastor
Rev. David Abdo, Executive Pastor
Rev. Lana Roberts, Associate Pastor
Rev. Paul Armstrong, Pastor to the Congregation
Rev. Thomas Parsons, Pastor Emeritus
Bob and Rosemary Avery Chaplains
Rev. H. Spees, Pastor-At-Large
Craig Blodgett, Assistant Youth Director
Dr. Julie Carter, Coordinator, Worship and Music
Greg Ehlert, Youth Director
Susan Glover, Administrator
Terry Jaurena, Mission Director
Corrie Sands, Birth-Pre K Children's Director
Marcie York, K-6 Children's Director

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Daphne Saul

Editorial Board: Karin Cook, David Kimball, Paula Lloyd and Bobby Temple

If you would like to send an e-mail to any staff member at First Pres, please address it to: staff@fpcfresno.org and include the name of the staff member in the subject box.

For Your Information

Mission Possible:

Contributions to Mission Possible need to be made out to **A Place for You Foundation, NOT Mission Possible**, and preferably mailed to: A Place for You Foundation, c/o Allison Alexander, Finance Chair, 1368 West Herndon, Suite 103, Fresno, CA 93711. Thank you very much.



Bring Your Friends

Palm Sunday
March 16

Maundy Thursday
March 20

Easter Sunday
March 23

Cordon of Prayer

Our church has a prayer chain of over 20 persons who pray faithfully for the concerns of our church body. Please call Karin Cook (439-6905) or Nancy Weaver (447-1648) with your requests. All requests remain in confidence with the prayer warriors.



By special request, Jamie made a CD of his Christmas sermon. You may request a copy of the CD by contacting the church office.

Return service requested
Fax: 559-485-1538
559-485-6460
Fresno, CA 93721-1277
1540 M Street
First Presbyterian Church