



Congregational Meeting Report By Walter and Daphne Saul

Two identical congregational meetings were held at First Presbyterian Church on September 21 and 28 between services. These were informational meetings to discuss the transfer of First Pres from the PC (USA) to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). On September 16, 2008 the elders voted unanimously for the congregation to consider this move.

Brian Roberts began the meeting with prayer. He emphasized that we are in no rush. Jamie Evans agreed that this move would happen slowly, at “glacial speed.”

Jamie Evans spoke about why we are considering this transfer. In the PC(USA) our elders have observed a collapse of biblical authority, collapse of the moderate middle, and a leadership loss with Presbyterian seminaries loaded with revisionists who maintain an unbiblical outlook. The PC(USA) also has more bureaucrats than missionaries.

Jamie emphasized the need to follow our conscience, and the desire to protect our young people. He also stated that we must clearly present the Gospel to the world.

Chris Rosik attended two General Assemblies, and has twelve years of involvement and chairmanship in denominational issues. He was encouraged by the 1997 passage of fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness. However, he noted that the denomination protects itself rather than allowing voice to evangelicals. They have also been unwilling to discipline wayward ministers and other church staff. Chris noted that the decision to leave is not a joyous one, but a decision of gravity, which has taken over 18 months to

complete.

Wally Upton has been involved with church property since 1973. “First Presbyterian Church of Fresno, Inc.” owns much the property. Other property used by our church is owned by the “A Place For You Foundation,” which was formed in 1992. Wally recounted a fascinating history of all of our church property. Since separation is likely to be amicable, it is unlikely that the PC(USA) will desire our property, and Wally assured the congregation that the property is not owned by the PC(USA).

Phil Crantz reported on the impact on our pastors. Our intent is to retain all pastors and 28 staff as currently structured. One issue will need to be settled. The fully vested retirement funds of Jamie Evans and David Abdo need to be transferred to them completely from the PC(USA). A meeting on September 23 aimed to achieve this purpose and a well-respected consultant was engaged.

Jamie and Kristy Evans along with David and Dana Abdo expressed their intention to leave the PC(USA) for the EPC even this means that they must abandon their retirement accounts. Jamie Evans pointed out that Sanger transferred to the EPC, Millbrook is on the way, and Trinity and Hanford are also in process of joining the EPC.

Committees will be formed; conversations will happen. We hope for a smooth transition like Millbrook Presbyterian, where the pastors and elders blessed them on the way out. *(There is a related article about the Millbrook vote in the July 2008 issue of the Chal-*

lenger.)

David Abdo explained why we chose the EPC. First, it is a Reformed denomination, like the PC (USA), so the transfer will be easier. The EPC has a positive view of women in ministry as ordained elders, deacons, and pastors. The EPC has a similar form of church government—we want to stay with this government. We believe in elder-run churches. Those who met with David Abdo expressed spiritual maturity and recognized the realistic process involved.

David outlined the differences between the EPC and the PC(USA). The PC(USA) debates the “historical Jesus.” The EPC states that Jesus Christ is God. The PC(USA) questions the authority of Scripture; the EPC says the Bible is God’s Word.

The PC(USA) uses church property as a tether to keep congregations, while the EPC says that church property belongs to the local congregation. The PC(USA) has three bureaucrats for every missionary. The EPC has one bureaucrat for every 30 missionaries. Church attendance is higher in the EPC, as is giving per person. The EPC is a growing church, while the PC(USA) is in an accelerating decline.

If you want more information about this decision, you may ask for an information packet, visit the website, or ask for personal visits or calls by our elders. But most of all, please pray regarding the future of First Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and the PC (USA).

A congregational letter from the First Pres elders, may be found inside this issue of the Challenger.

Letter from the Elders to the Congregation

This letter, published in full, was mailed to the congregation on September 17, 2008.

Dear First Presbyterian Family,

In 2006, the elders wrote to you stating that we had voted unanimously to separate, but not yet divorce, from our denomination after a disastrous General Assembly. That summer, the PC(USA) had decided to unhinge ordination standards from what we considered biblical authority in adopting the "Peace, Unity, and Purity" Report. It, thereby, declared its intention to make ordained standards of behavior and belief debatable on the Presbytery level.

Since that time, our elders and staff have carefully watched national events. We fully expected that our 2008 General Assembly in San Jose would be relatively biblical and peaceful. We were massively wrong.

This summer, the PC(USA) voted on a series of sweeping changes affecting everything from Christology and creeds to biblical authority over personal life. Each of five problematic votes was a frontal assault to our view of the witness of the Lord's Word over our lives; it was the worst General Assembly in three decades.

It is, thus, with sadness and yet hope for the future, that the elders have voted unanimously to respectfully request the Presbytery of the San Joaquin to transfer our congregation, pastors, and property to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). We will always be Presbyterian, and our intent is to unite with a like-minded denomination that is uncompromising on issues of biblical authority.

This crisis in our Mainline Denomination has been mounting for five decades. In 1965, fifty percent of the U.S. population belonged to one of the numerous Mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Episcopalians, Evangelical Lutheran Church of

America, American Baptists, Methodists, U.C.C., and Presbyterians, to name but a few.

Today, the Mainline claims less than eight percent of the American population. In a generation and a half, unbiblical revisionism has fully invaded these once great denominations and done what the frigid waters of revisionism always



does: drown faith, dilute the uniqueness of Christ, and stifle evangelism.

Today, the Episcopalian and the PC(USA) denominations are collapsing faster than any other. The Diocese of the San Joaquin has already fled its Episcopalian parent for the more biblical Anglican Church. Sanger and Millbrook Presbyterian left in the first wave; now a second wave of departure prepares to exit the San Joaquin Presbytery. We will not travel alone, should you vote to join this exodus. Other evangelical Presbyterian churches in this presbytery have contacted our leadership with their intention to travel with us to a different Presbyterian denomination.

Those in the denomination who are evangelical are splitting into two alliances, one of which believes they need to stay and fight. For decades, we were part of this team. Our efforts to reverse, or halt, the erosion of basic tenets of the Faith have been completely unsuccessful.

Now we are joining a second group of evangelicals who believe this denomination is no longer in compliance with biblical truth. Since 2006, and accelerated by the 2008 General Assembly, our elders have seen the collapse of the moderate middle, the fifty percent to sixty percent of our denomination's population that used to hold the center.

This middle prevented the unbiblical revisionists from conforming the denomination to the culture's ways and values. It no longer serves this purpose; more and more, it sides with the revisionists on key issues and votes. The freefall of this once great denomination has begun.

Now we see the denomination nearing terminal status. Its bureaucracies and seminaries are dominated by moderate to radical elements, with barely an evangelical voice. Biblical issues suffer neglect, as what once would have been correctly seen as heresy is now accepted as following in the cultural norm.

Discipline of theology has evaporated. Everyone's opinion is held in equal esteem. We fully believe that to stay is to compromise our collective integrity and commitment to Scripture, and thus wither. The denomination, as we once knew it, no longer exists. It has radically shifted toward cultural conformity and is bleeding membership at record levels. Prognosticators estimate that in less than twenty-five (25) years, it will cease to exist as a viable entity.

What does your elders' decision mean for us? What will happen to our property, our pastors, and our future? When will we leave, and what role does our Presbytery have in this future? Leaders such as Wally Upton have been preparing for this for three decades. On September 21 and September 28 leaders such as Chris Rosik, Brian Roberts, Jamie Evans, David Abdo, and Wally Upton will describe what has transpired, what

process we will follow with our Presbytery, what risks we face, and what churches may be traveling with us.

Our website has been updated with critical information on the pertinent details of this denominational decline for those inclined to research further. We will have hard copies available, too.

We now enter a time of Elder discernment and congregational prayer, during which our communica-

tion team will be eager to pay home visits to any who have questions. Once this discernment and briefing period is over, we will bring to the congregation a vote on the question, for this is your choice, too.

The Presbytery will make its decision concerning our request in its own time. It was most fair and judicious to both Millbrook and Sanger Presbyterian when they petitioned to leave the denomination.

San Joaquin Presbytery has regularly placed the Kingdom ahead of issues. We hope it will continue to do so, yet the longer we wait the more difficult it will be to leave amicably.

Above all, pray for the church of Christ to be loyal to His Word.

In Christ,

The Elders and Pastors of First Presbyterian Church, Fresno

Session Notes By Scott McCallum

Accounting Results:

We normally we expect lower giving in the summer months, and budget accordingly. The following are the results for June, July and August:

Giving as of 6/30/08 was 4 percent below budget. Spending as of 6/30/08 was 1.68 percent above budget. As of 6/30/08, cash available for operations is estimated at 2 months of budgeted spending.

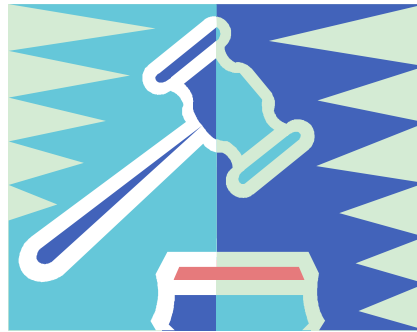
Giving as of 7/31/08 was 2 percent below budget. Spending as of 7/31/08 was .62 percent above budget. As of 7/31/08, cash available for operations is estimated at 1 1/2 months of budgeted spending.

Giving as of 8/31/08 was 5 percent below budget. Spending as of 8/31/08 was .33 percent below budget. As of 8/31/08, cash available for operations is estimated at 2 months of budgeted spending.

Program Highlights:

Adult Nurture has established a new program called Satellite Sunday which is intended to create and foster relationships among our Church Family. Please contact Heidi Lynn, Mindy Franklin or Chris Rosik for information on Satellite Sunday, or if you have any ideas for small group fellowship opportunities.

Have you ever wondered how you can support our Mission Part-



ners in prayer? Now it is easy to do. The Mission Ministry Team has contacted our Mission Partners, and has assembled a Prayer List. If you want a copy, go to the Mission's page on our website, or call Terry for the list.

Mark the fourth day of the month on your calendar to pray for our Presbytery. Pray for the churches, the seminary students, our pastors and their families.

Also please pray for the issues facing our denomination, that the Lord will open the eyes and ears of the denominational leaders.

Remember to pray for Sudan. There will be a standing prayer meeting on the first Sunday of each month in Room 101 at 8:30 a.m. (during First Service).

Important Dates:

Women's retreat is scheduled for October 3-5.

The Messiah Sing-a-Long will be held on November 30 this year.

Deacons' Corner By Roger Taylor

A long-time member of First Presbyterian Church, Ruth Williams-Lawrence is a retired schoolteacher. Ruth and husband Tully Williams, moved to California from Ohio in the 1946 and to Fresno in 1950. Ruth taught grades 4 and 5 in Tranquility and also Fresno's Emerson and Norseman schools, and later was a special education teacher for FUSD.

Ruth and Tully had two children, Sara and Cleve. They were active in the Mariners Couples' Ministry. Ruth sang in the choir and taught Sunday school. Tully was an elder. Ruth is twice a widow. Tully went to his heavenly home at an early age.

Ruth later married Ivan Lawrence, also a long-time First Pres member, a close friend and a widower. They were married for twenty years. Ruth's extended family included Ivan's sister Ruby Jones who recently went to be with the Lord and her husband Bob and Alan and Mary Jones and their family.

Ruth and Ivan traveled by motor home across the Northern States to the East Coast, down the East Coast and home via Southern states. At 94 years of age Ruth is looking forward to more travels. She has twelve grandchildren, two great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Other Voices From Other Places By Terry Jaurena

One of my favorite scriptures is Revelation 7:9-10: “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”

It’s where this road of following Jesus I’m on leads. I’m part of a great multitude and so are some from every nation, all tribes and peoples and languages. Before we get to that end, I think we have much to learn from those who are on the same road of following Jesus who started from some of those other nations, those tribes, peoples and languages. Their journey has taught them other lessons that just might serve us well at this place in our road.

After hearing just a bit of the address that Oscar Muriu, a Kenyan, gave at Urbana 06, I wanted to hear all of it. I even bought the video and showed it to the Bible Students in Erseke this past February. I think I even left it there as I can’t seem to find it! Thankfully, it was on the Urbana 06 website, so I can still share some of it with you.

His topic was the Global Church and he explained to the students at Urbana that the center of Christianity has shifted from the west to other parts of the worlds. He explored what implications that has for missions and missionaries. Paul Pierson said the same thing when he was here recently. Christianity is

alive and well and growing in Africa, Asia and South America.

Here’s the part that grabbed me initially: “Could it be that to drink from the cup of Western theology is to drink from a poisoned chalice?”

Now hear it in the larger context: “... If Western models of Church are not working in the West, and the Church is in decline, then should the Church in the two-thirds world copy the models of the West, or embrace Western theology? If we do, will we not end up in the same problem? Could it be that to drink from the cup of Western theology is to drink from a poisoned chalice?”

I think our brother from Kenya has a good point. It’s not unlike the one I heard long ago from Tom Sine, saying that what we preach in America is so often “the American Dream with a little Jesus over-

lay.”

Wonderfully, those from other nations to whom missionaries from the West brought the gospel still believe it, and want to bring it back to the West.

Muriu also says in his address something Paul Pierson said when he was visiting: “The largest congregations in London, in Zurich, in Kiev and in several gateway cities in Europe are today led by African pastors. There are now more missionaries today being sent out of the two-thirds world than are being sent out of the Western Church today.”

It’s a great time in the history of the church around the world. It gives me hope as I travel along this road of following Jesus here in Fresno with you all.

Note: You can listen to the address on the Urbana 06 website: www.urbana.org It’s the web cast of the December 28 evening session. You can also download a transcript of his entire address. Good stuff!

From Every Nation



Albanian News By Bob and Linda Osborne

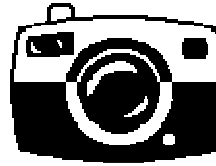
It's early in September as we write this to you and summer continues in Erseke, although there is a cool evening breeze most nights which makes it all very bearable. The trees remain green, roses are still in bloom and the grape vines are lush with fruit.

Our flights went very smoothly after leaving Fresno on September 3. After landing in Tirana at noon on September 4, we were met by our dear friends, Asim and Beta Hamzai, who then drove us to Erseke where we arrived around 7 p.m. Nice to be home again!

The next morning we checked out the roof addition that our First

Pres team had begun. It's now all finished on the outside and they're beginning to work on the interior. What a nice addition of space for this ministry site.

The camps are finished for the summer and the missionary staff is taking needed breaks before getting ready for the beginning of Bible school. Students will arrive by September 26 for orientation and classes begin on September 29. We're in the midst of setting up our apartment and getting resettled in this delightful community. So while everyone is away



we have the time to focus on unpacking and organizing our living quarters here.

Last Sunday our church service was held under the grape arbor patio that surrounds the church buildings. We had seven people baptized and each shared their testimony telling of their walk of faith that led them to that moment. What an encouragement for all of us to hear how God is at work to accomplish His purposes.

This is just a little snapshot of life for us now. We are so grateful to the Lord for His mercy and grace and thankful for each of you who support and care for us.

Prayer Grasps Eternity By Greg Ehler

"Poverty-stricken as the Church is today in many things, she is most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few pray-ers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many inter-ferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere."

These words were written by Leonard Ravenhill, an understudy of A.W. Tozer and published in the book *Why Revival Tarries* in 1959. To think that this was written nearly fifty years ago is sobering, to say the least.

The Bible consistently teaches that prayer is essential to our vitality as Christians. But it is "old hat" to assert that prayer is a necessary component of authentic discipleship.

I'm not suggesting that prayer should be an occasional aspect of our overpacked, super-paced, exhausting weekly schedule. Spiritually speaking, prayer is the oxygen

we breath and it is my concern that we're turning blue as we suffocate in the atmosphere of tyrannical busy-ness. Ravenhill states in his book, "Friend, if you were as good at soul-cultivation as you are in developing your business, you would be a menace to the devil; but if you were as poor in business matters as you are in soul, you would be begging for bread."

Like in Isaiah 6, when we see God for who he truly is, we will see ourselves for who we truly are, broken and unclean. As we confess our need for God's mercy, he cleanses us and restores us to be commissioned for His work in the world. The word "passion" means to "suffer" and in our day, very few people are willing to suffer for anything.

Apathy is a marked symptom of a prayerless life. Communicating with God is the highest calling we could ever have yet it is often our last resort in the midst of the pressures, distractions and options our society puts before us.

In seven years of seminary training and ordination examination, I was not once asked about my personal walk with Christ in terms of prayer. Prayer is unquantifiable and can often feel like a "waste of time." Yet, it is from being with God and hearing from Him directly that we have the power to know His will and to obey what He says. Prayer changes eternity.

I recently spoke with Amy Coombs, Children's Director of Bethany Inner-City Church, who told me that her grandmother pled with God to save every member of her sixty-person extended family before she died. She prayed for decades, and before she died, all sixty came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

So, rather than having you read any more about prayer, I encourage you to pray Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Deadline Information

The deadline for the November Challenger is Friday, October 24 at 5 p.m. It will be mailed out on November 5. Please contact Daphne Saul, 252-4064, or e-mail her at daphne4926@sbcglobal.net. You may also leave articles in the newsletter box in the church office.

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

October 2008

(USPS 572-240)

Published monthly by
First Presbyterian Church
1540 M Street
Fresno, CA 93721-1277



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Bob and Rosemary Avery *Chaplains*
Craig Blodgett, *Assistant Youth Director*
Dr. Julie L. Carter *Coordinator Worship & Music*
Rev. Greg S. Ehlert *Associate Pastor*
Rev. James S. Evans *Senior Pastor*
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Corrie Sands *Children's Director, Birth-Preschool*
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Marcie York *Children's Director, K through 6th Grade*

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Church Staff contact: staff@fpcfresno.org and include staff person's name in the subject box.

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For Your Information



Looking for T-Shirts

Krista Moore and Daphne Saul are looking for missing t-shirts. If you are a former member of Full Court Pres or Kids' Praise, please look around and see if you still have one of our t-shirts. You may bring them to the church office. Or, you can give them directly to Daphne or Krista on Sunday mornings between 11 and 12 in rooms 201 and 202. Thanks so much.



Not On The List Yet?

If you would like to receive monthly copies of the *Challenger*, please contact the church office at 485-6460 and speak to Cheryl Eaker. You may choose to receive this newsletter by e-mail, online, or by US mail. Please tell Cheryl which you prefer, and she will be happy to help you.

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