



# First Pres Challenger

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Equipping the Family of God at First Presbyterian Church, Fresno September 2008

## Collapse of the Middle By Jamie Evans

The moderate moral middle has collapsed in America. Signs of this massive shift are everywhere if we have eyes to see the symptoms.

Richard Nixon, for all his faults, knew history and the United States well. During the turmoil of the Viet Nam era and subsequent violent demonstrations, he stated that there was a large "Silent Majority" anchoring the U.S. against the radicalism of the anti war protesters.

He was right. Polls during and after the war were clear—the majority of America was in favor of the war and against retreat, though one would not know that from the news media or the talk from the elites.

This quiet majority has vaccinated both our nation and our denomination from radical choices and excursions into societal insanity of the left. In both our Presbyterian denomination and our nation this large mass of solid opinion is now giving way, capitulating to elements of liberalism and social experimentation.

The Blue Dogs in the Democratic party have well nigh become extinct, those Southern Democrats who voted conservatively and had largely Catholic morals that helped boundary that party from extremism. Now they are only a memory.

I recall the days when Al Gore was pro-life and his wife Tipper staunchly campaigned against pornographic rock lyrics. They were Blue Dogs par excellence, but no more. Republicans too have seen their moderate middle waning.

Much of the moderate middle of

America has now shifted to a new thesis of belief both politically and religiously—the concept of the Big Tent.

Today most moderates embrace not a traditional philosophy of God and country, but rather a form of tolerance and inclusion that speaks of plenty of room in the moral tent for all opinions on the left and the right.

In this mentality it is appropriate to believe whatever occurs to you, as long as you don't try to enforce that upon my life. Absolute truth has faded and been replaced by a social contract of live and let live. Intolerance is the ultimate cardinal sin. This now has become the Vapid Middle.



For five decades in our denomination the moderate middle, perhaps 50 percent of our Presbyterian population, kept us from drifting too far to the left in radical liberation theology and secular materialism while at the same time disallowing we who are conservatives from casting out or disciplining the left.

A tacit peace was kept, heresy trials were made socially illegal for the right, and the left was not allowed to come theologically

drunk to our party—no moral experiments were allowed.

Traditional Biblical ethics were insisted upon in leadership even if ideas ranged from the fundamentalist to communist. The tent was big, but the doors to change were barred. People understood that delegates were to "come to the gathering but leave your extremism at home."

The moderates have slowly collapsed and have no more stomach for such guarding of the peace. Repeatedly over the past decade they have begun to slip into weariness, and as watchfulness has declined they have become comfortable to be embraced by the left.

The mantra of the Big Tent today is allow all to choose for themselves "local option," which we call forfeiture of leadership. Biblical values and ethics, once loosely held, are buried now since they are too antique for modernity, and conformity to the culture is high art. As J. I. Packer puts it, the fallacy is now accepted that "The present is wiser than the past, and the church must play catch up with culture."

Our denomination has decided to allow presbyteries to do as they please both theologically and morally. Leadership such as pastors, elders and deacons now may hold what habits and beliefs they deem appropriate and each presbytery. synod or session may choose locally what is right in their own eyes, including the ordination of practicing gays.

Standards are negotiable, and truth is up for constant and changing

*(Continued on page 2)*

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debate, for God’s Word is bartered and negotiated. Everyone’s opinion on interpretation of the Lord’s Word is equally acceptable.

We have become truly modern in this denomination, up to date, and thus confused, lacking the unity of the Mind of Christ. This will be the last act for the PC(USA) as a viable diverse denomination. Soon it will be overwhelmed by the liberal left who will gladly lead the moderates into theological oblivion of universal unitarianism.

Rates of decline now at record levels will escalate into free fall. Conformity to the shifting culture will be complete. The denomination will die by its own hand. The Lord

does not prosper weak theology; it fades fast as it bores its practitioners. Their god is too small to inspire real devotion and sacrifice.

Evangelical elements, now a small minority or sub culture in our denomination and society will have two choices: remain and wither with the rest or move to new theological shores and blaze a path to real unity with the Mind of Christ.

Big Tent theology and polity have been the unifying features of our denomination, but these are not enough. Now only theological unity will truly unite our future associations. Will an evangelical remnant break off from our dying denomination to form a new Pres-

byterian body? Will we move to another Presbyterian denomination already up and functioning?

Our Elders will have to sift this conundrum. What we may not do is remain passive. This historical wave that is now looming over us must either be ridden or allowed to crush us. I will always be Presbyterian, that is, I will be led by the presbuteros, the elders. But the valid question now is what kind of Presbyterian?

Pray for the elders, for these shepherds must discern the times and find our theological home. We will keep you posted. History is changing; we will not be left in its wake to drown amidst the confusion of liberalism.



## Happy New Year By Corrie Sands

The beginning of the school year, whoever you are, feels like a new beginning. It is fresh, a time to reflect on years past and look forward with anticipation to things yet unexplored. Resolutions from the beginning of the calendar year are usually dusty and forgotten by now.

Well, here is a new opportunity to be resolute. The goals may look a little different, but could actually have a dramatic impact.

If you are a parent, you know this time of year is flooded with flyers and other announcements tugging at our kids for opportunities to play sports, take lessons and try new things. This double-edged sword is tricky to navigate as parents. Kids often want to experience new things, and wanting them to have every advantage, we want to nurture their desires.

At the same time, we are called

to be their boundary makers. We are their only protection from a workaholic lifestyle that begins at 4 years old. We are given the enormous responsibility of teaching the pattern of life they will likely continue on into adulthood. When put that way, the responsibility to create balance as a pattern becomes vital.

Our kids will do what they see us do. If we are clear about our boundaries that create space for family, rest



***We are their only protection from a workaholic lifestyle.***

and God, they will incorporate that into their foundation of understanding about how to live life as adults. If we overextend ourselves, we will likely contribute to the overextension of our kids in their many ac-

tivities.

Likewise, if we spend our lifetime seeking experiences that enhance our quality of life, they will seek a similar path. If we walk in a way that incorporates rich, authentic, accountable relationships into our lives, they will follow suit. If we seek to serve other people, even at the risk of our own comfort, our kids won’t be afraid to do the same.

The one and only everlasting legacy you can give your child is an authentic relationship with Christ. If we take time continually staying involved with the “Vine” as “branches” who desire life need to do, our kids will move the same direction.

So, as you make your resolutions, make them to last. Trust the Holy Spirit for discernment about when to say yes, and when not to. He will be clear with you, and it won’t look like everyone else’s pattern. He means to be personal and connected with each family as differently as He has created them.

# Oh, My God By Marcie York

Recently the complexity with which children try to make sense of their world was again brought home to me. Four-year-old Katherine asked one of those childlike, profound questions that plumb the mental and spiritual depths of the adult mind for answers. "Nana, what does 'Oh my God' mean?"

Where had she heard that, I wondered? Did someone flip by a TV talk show channel and she caught the words from some trendy celeb? Did she overhear mothers at playgroup talking, teenagers exclaiming at the mall, or someone's overly loud cell phone dialogue?

The phrase is pervasive in our culture, one of the most frequently used in conversation today. It is described as an ex-

clamation, often of amazement, excitement or shock. It is internet slang, it is one of the most frequently used YouTube titles and a Google search turns up 33,100,000 results!

I figured I might as well get some good theology in and responded to Katherine's question by telling her that it is the beginning of prayer, of communicating with God, the Creator and Sustainer of all life. It is like my calling to her and saying, "Oh Katherine!" I told her that when people say "Oh my God" that He listens and waits to communicate back with them. That satisfied her and she moved on to the next thing.

I, however, was struck by the

thought of the Sovereign God of the universe waiting to communicate His love and His character back to those who call upon His name with their innocent exclamation. How carelessly His name is thrown about, with a little "g" as in "ohmigod" or with the initial G as texted in OMG.

Yet He is the eternal "I AM." God's great love for His created beings is unending and unending. When someone exclaims, "Oh my God," He hears from His temple (Psalm 18), and He says, "Come, let us reason together..." (Isaiah 1:18). His yearning is heard in Isaiah 42:20, "You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing."

I also was struck by the use of the word "my" in context with God when those who speak it have no inclination at all to be aligned with Him. The postmodernist thought that tends to dismiss the idea of absolute truth has permeated our culture, coloring the way in which people perceive God.

John MacArthur, in his book *The Truth War*, states "The goal of human philosophy used to be truth without God. Today's philosophies are open to the notion of God without truth." People are thus free to create their own personal spiritual framework for living, tucking in their own pliable and ambiguous "gods."

Now when I hear someone use any of the variations of "Oh my God," I am secretly hopeful. They do not know that they open a communication with the One True Living God.

They do not know that the right to say "my" God comes only after they have received the atoning work of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross for their sins, and they do not know that the Holy Spirit pursues them as Spirit of Truth, testifying of

Christ. (John 15:26.) But I know that God has set eternity in their hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and that according to Lamentations 3:22, because of His great love they are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. He waits to extend mercy to their unsuspecting hearts.



## From The Treasure Chest



# I Want To Be One Of Them, Too! By Terry Jaurena

*Over a month ago now, Kaylan Roberts sang this great song during our worship time. What I caught of the lyrics prompted me to search to find them all. Then, of course, I downloaded the song by Sara Groves so that I could listen again and again and again. Maybe you weren't here that week. Maybe like me, the lyrics went by too fast. So, here they are because they're worth reading and pondering.*

Lord I have a heavy burden of all  
I've seen and know  
It's more than I can handle  
But your word is burning  
like a fire shut up in my bones  
and I cannot let it go

And when I'm weary and  
overwrought  
with so many battles left  
unfought

I think of Paul and Silas in  
the prison yard  
I hear their song of freedom rising  
to the stars  
And when the Saints go marching  
in  
I want to be one of them

Lord it's all that I can't carry and  
cannot leave behind  
it often overwhelms me  
but when I think of all who've  
gone before and lived the faithful  
life  
their courage compells me  
And when I'm weary and over-  
wrought  
with so many battles left unfought

I think of Paul and Silas in the  
prison yard  
I hear their song of freedom rising

to the stars

I see the shepherd Moses in the  
Pharaoh's court  
I hear his call for freedom for the  
people of the Lord

And when the Saints go march-  
ing in  
I want to be one of them  
And when the Saints go march-  
ing in  
I want to be one of them



*Now this is the part that you  
might really have missed. It's the  
part that inspires me to the most,  
so read on!*

I see the long quiet walk along  
the Underground Railroad  
I see the slave awakening to the  
value of her soul

I see the young missionary and  
the angry spear  
I see his family returning with no  
trace of fear

I see the long hard shadows of  
Calcutta nights  
I see the sisters standing by the  
dying man's side

I see the young girl huddled on

the brothel floor  
I see the man with a passion come  
and kicking down the door

I see the Man of sorrows and His  
long troubled road  
I see the world on His shoulders  
and my easy load

And when the Saints go marching  
in  
I want to be one of them  
and when the Saints go marching  
in  
I want to be one of them  
I want to be one of them  
I want to be one of them

*I want to be one of them, too!*



## Chancel Choir Begins

The Chancel Choir will have a special Kick-off Rehearsal on Wednesday, September 10 from 6:30 until 8:30 p.m. in the choir room. Regular rehearsals will begin on Sunday mornings from 9:45 until 11:00 a.m. The choir retreat will be at the church on Saturday, September 27 from 8:30 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Perhaps you are not sure you can sing the whole year. If not, then try something shorter. You can participate in the "Fall Fling" from September 10 until November 30. The "Christmas Choir" rehearses from November 2 through December 24.

High school students through adults are welcome in the Chancel Choir. Contact Dr. Julie Carter at the church for more information, or just come on down and sing!

## Battle of the “C”s By Greg Ehlert



Research reveals that we receive nearly a message per minute telling us that we “need” a product or service to be happy and that happiness is something we deserve and are entitled to.

In a powerful way, John Piper argues in his book, *Desiring God*, that we are created for happiness and pleasure and that our happiness and pleasure are to be found in God alone. Sin takes us off the path of finding abundant life precisely because it promises something it can't deliver...wholeness in God.

In our culture, we are conditioned by the messages we receive from marketers and one another to be consumers and clients. We seek to find fulfillment in what we can purchase whether it be products or opportunities others give us in the way of services.

There was once an American businessman who took the production of his company to the Philippines. While there, he found many men who were diligent workers for him at the factory. After the first week of work, however, the men failed to show up the following Monday. The owner went into town to try to find the workers

who had been so faithful and diligent in their first week.

Finally, he found them at a restaurant, grateful for the money they had earned the week before. When he asked them why they hadn't come back to work, they said, “We have everything we need for several weeks with what we've been paid.” So, the owner gathered several catalogues of products popular in the West, and after seeing all that they could buy with their money, the men came to work on time the next day and remained for years to come.

We find it easy to think of ourselves as “entitled” to things, especially when we've paid for them with our “hard-earned” money. Unfortunately, these attitudes don't leave us in the marketplace but follow us into every arena of life, even in our corporate gatherings at church.

It is my contention, however, that in the kingdom of God, the roles of consumer and client must shift. As we allow Jesus to have jurisdiction of our hearts and minds (ultimately our wills), we move from identifying ourselves as consumers to contributors.

Ultimately, the “church” isn't “for” us, but for God's glory as He communicates His love to a broken and dying world. Consumers ask questions from the foundation of “me.” Colleagues ask questions from the foundation of “us for God.”

To be a colleague in anything requires a person to know his/her gifts and talents. If you were to

be asked today how God has gifted you and how He would have you serve in His kingdom, how would you answer?

Another movement that takes place for followers of Jesus is the movement from client to contributor. We exist not to receive but to give. When we gather for worship, for Bible study or any other church event, we have to be intentional about reframing our expectations from reception to investment.

How does God want me to contribute to what He is doing in this situation today? How might God want me to use my gifts and abilities to partner with His will for these people or this situation?

Ultimately, if we are going to shift from a spirit of consumerism, we will need to help one another remember who Jesus is and what He has done for us. As we learn about our gifts and seek to contribute to our shared lives together, we will begin to understand more deeply the kind of abundant life God desires for His people.



Deadline Information

**The deadline for the October**

**Challenger is Friday, September**

**19 at 5 p.m.**

It will be mailed out on October 2. Please submit articles to newsletter box in church office. Or, contact Daphne Saul, [daphne4926@sbcglobal.net](mailto:daphne4926@sbcglobal.net), or 252-4064.

**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](mailto:staff@fpcfresno.org) and put Cheryl Eaker's name in the subject box.

**First Pres Challenger**

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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*
- Susan Glover *Business Administrator*
- Terry Jaurena *Mission/College Director*
- Rev. Thomas L. Parsons *Pastor Emeritus\**
- Rev. Lana J. Roberts *Associate Pastor*
- Corrie Sands *Children's Director, Birth-Preschool*
- Rev. H. Spees *Pastor at Large\**
- Marcie York *Children's Director, K through 6th Grade*

*\*Indicates Honorary Position*

Church Staff contact: [staff@fpcfresno.org](mailto:staff@fpcfresno.org) and include staff person's name in the subject box.

**Newsletter Staff:**

Editor: Daphne Saul  
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# For Your Information

## Ministry Fair

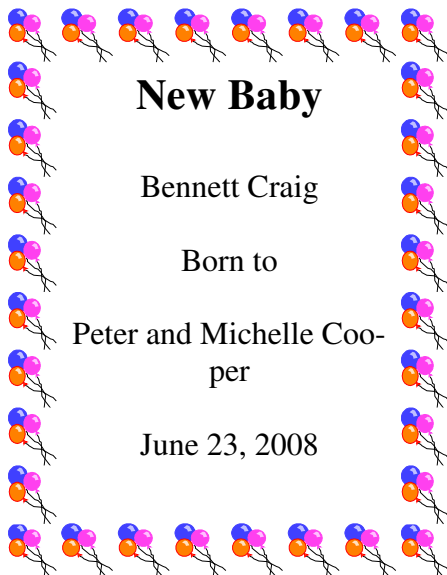
**Sunday, September 7**

**Come and see what plans the Lord has for you this fall.**



### 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.



### New Baby

Bennett Craig

Born to

Peter and Michelle Cooper

June 23, 2008



Return service requested

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