

Onward & Upward

MEN'S MEXICO BUILD TRIP

Men's Mexico Build must be experienced! This year nine FPC men chose to participate in this annual trip. The result: they watched God's love move through their own hands as they built a house for a family in need. Although most teams have 13-15 people building one house together, our team of 9 was complete. The skills, laughter, and encouragement of our Amore worksite supervisor kept us on track to do things right the first time. In three days the two-bedroom house for a family of four was finished. The family's smiles, tears and words of appreciation pushed the pain out of our cuts, blisters, and physical exhaustion.

Elder Ben Wiele, who led the physical construction part of the trip, showed his keen situational awareness, putting guys into "time out" with the requirement to drink more water in the dry 90° heat. God truly put together a great team! Each one of us was needed to get the house built for the family in need. A group of men have already committed to this April's trip. Men, you can still get in on it-hopefully with cooler temperatures this time.

WEDNESDAYNIGHTS@FPC

God continues to do something good when his people gather together, read his word and worship his holy name. In the spring the men of FPC went through a video series called DISCIPLESHIP EXPLORED which asks the question, "What is following Christ all about?" Christian author and speaker Barry F. Cooper challenged the men to run the race marked out for them with perseverance. The women explored Spiritual Practices in a "sampler" format developed and led by Diane Vaccaro and Pastor Lana Roberts. Each week the women learned about and experimented with a different spiritual practice (e.g. worship, prayer, journaling, etc.). By the end of the spring season, each woman had the opportunity to develop her own 'rule' for regular spiritual practice to make space to hear from God and go forward in discipleship.

In the fall Katie Brown lead a group of 12-15 women through the video series, TEACH US TO WANT by Jen Pollock Michel. The series invites women to pray for the things on God's heart by using the Lord's prayer as a pattern for prayer. Special thanks to Katie for stepping out on faith to lead the women's study. The 15-20 men walked through an inductive study of the Gospel of Mark using the SOIL (Survey, Observation, Interpretation, Life application) method in a small discussion-based setting with sufficient time at the end for specific prayer needs.

The fall WednesdayNights@FPC were infused with two nights of worship held in the sanctuary. It became clear by tears, smiles, and conversations afterward, that God met us in our time of worship as well as our time of study during WednesdayNights@FPC. Special thanks to the bands that played for these Wednesday Night worship evenings.

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ADULT EDUCATION HOUR

God continues to work in our hearts and lives when people study his Word and hear testimonies of his kingdom work. Over the past year our Adult Education Hour classes have thoughtfully considered God's word and how it applies to our context in Fresno, California.

A staple of the Adult Ed Hour this year has been a Matthew Bible study. Taught by a cadre of retired pastors under the leadership of Pastor Paul Armstrong, these men have walked halfway through Matthew, engaging their audience with stories and thoughtful study and reflection upon the text.

Others were trained last spring to share the gospel with friends, family and coworkers as part of the training for the Luis Palau City Fest. In April, Dennis DuPertuis helped us understand that "Love Is Not A Mushy Feeling," but rather, a response to the love God has shown us. Parents learned more about how to love and offer their children grace through the Grace Based Parenting class facilitated by Diane and Jeremy Vaccaro.

This fall we heard from many of our members as they gave their testimony to God's goodness and power in their lives. We also heard testimony of how God is working in and through the Lowell neighborhood to bring about kingdom change that points to God's goodness, his love and his call to the church to love our neighbors. Touradj Etezadi shared from his life experience and in-depth study of God's word that Culture Counts when studying the word of God. Others learned the missed expectations of the Jews as they longed for the Messiah under the thoughtful teaching of Dr. Brian Schultz. This class also piqued the interest of many who are perched to explore the promised land this summer. Lastly, families gathered in the Fellowship Hall to celebrate Advent in a multi-generational context with songs, crafts, teaching and discussion.

Many thanks to all the teachers and speakers who gave of their time and energy, preparing for these classes. All of you have given incredible gifts to this community. May we steward your teaching well.

LOVE OUR CHURCH, COMMUNITY, SCHOOLS

I believe the best way for us to steward what God has given us is to love and care for it. This summer we loved our church, our neighborhood and our schools with prayer and physical acts of service. Our Church facility was cared for even in the heat of the day in practical ways our custodians can't always get to. Our Community was cared for in partnership with Bethany and Hope Now Church as many bags of trash were collected from streets and alleys around the church. Area schools and their students were covered in prayer as teams took to the campuses to intercede on their behalf.

COMMUNITY GROUPS TRANSITION

When we launched Community Groups (CGs) in the summer of 2014, in conjunction with our church's new purpose statement, we stated three driving goals:

To Build Christian Community | To Make Disciples | To Live Out The Gospel In Our Neighborhoods

Through God's grace and the good work of our Community Group leaders, CGs have been successful in many ways.

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- We've increased community and connection. There were many new friendships and connections built across generations and existing friend groups within the church. Plus, Community Groups quickly became a very effective way of connecting new people in our community.
- We've increased our reach into our neighborhoods. Every Community Group worked in some way to connect with their city. Through prayer walks, baking of cookies, service projects, neighborhood parties, Christmas caroling, teacher appreciation, etc ... together as a body, FPC loved our neighbors in ways we have not done corporately before.
- We've developed a new onramp for congregational care. Community Groups quickly became a mechanism to engage together in caring for those in need in our body. Led by our Deacons, Community Groups stepped up to provide meals for many families in need. And, those unable to attend to their yards or house projects were often supported by their Community Group neighbors.
- We've grown in praying outwardly for our city, neighbors and friends. Community Groups engaged in prayer together for those outside the congregation, and supported one another in prayer as well. Out of those prayers, groups saw and heard of God's work in their lives and the lives of those around them.

We celebrate these great things that God has done among us in our Community Groups. However, we desire to go further and deeper as we live out our purpose as a church. So, in conversation with Community Growth elders and Community Group leaders, we have discerned that it's time for a new strategy to take us to the next level of engaging together in Christ's work of making disciples for the redeeming transformation of our city and world.

Community Groups are not completely gone, though. Because of the great success of the congregational care that happened out of Community Groups, we will maintain the groups on our database.

The pastors, Session, and the Community Growth Committee is thankful for the effort that was made in the past three school years around Community Groups. And special, special thanks to the leaders who gave much time, effort and energy towards making the meals and meetings happen for programs and events in this coming year.

NEW MEMBERS

Pastor Lana Roberts gathers and facilitates the New Members classes that are offered in the fall and spring of each year. In 2017 First Pres received 22 adults and 12 youth into membership. We had the great joy of baptizing nine of our new members as they were welcomed by the congregation. Please remember to be intentional about reaching out to our new members and helping weave them into the life of the congregation. They will deeply appreciate your continuing welcome and inclusion. The Deacons are leading the way as they have committed to walking as friends alongside each new member for a full year.

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WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

This year's Women's Conference (aka WoCo) was a great success! We took advantage of the opportunities created by being "in town" in 2017 and headed off campus on Saturday morning for High Adventure with Jesus. We sent women to see where God is at work in downtown Fresno: at Elevate Technologies in Bitwise; through a visit to Rescue the Children; on a walking tour of nearby neighborhoods; on a tour of Lanna Coffee; and to Community Regional Medical Center, and we had prayerful and creative adventures on campus too. We drew on the women of FPC as our speakers. Each one shared her High Adventure with Jesus with authenticity, honesty, and a few tears. Many thanks to our leadership team: Linda Guzman-Ellenberger, Bekah Hanson, Charity Whitney, and Pastor Lana. And many more thanks to all the women and men who participated in making our High Adventure a great time together and in the community. We were inspired to go where God is leading, follow Jesus, and share the Gospel in our everyday lives.

Community Growth is excited about what is being planned for 2018. Continue to keep the Community Growth elders, Pastor Chris and Pastor Lana in your prayers as they seek the Lord for his direction for programs and events in this coming year.



Chris Popadich

Assistant Pastor

New Beginnings

Hey, I am Geraud Brumfield, the new Director of College Ministry here at FPC in partnership with the CCO. It has been a huge blessing to come be a part of the First Pres team! Thank you so much for the hospitality you have shown and invitations to be a part of your lives. I wanted to take a minute to share with you my transition from Clarion, Pennsylvania to Fresno, California.

In June 2012, I started working with the CCO at Clarion University with a community board. After five years of service, it became more apparent to me that God was calling me to stay in ministry, but the question was, "Where?". In my mind, I thought I was going to become a teacher in Columbus, Ohio. However, I received a phone call from a CCO representative who had recently visited FPC. She said, "While I was in Fresno and walked on the campus, I prayed to see if someone would come to mind and it was you." My response, "Wow! That's awesome! Where's Fresno?"

We spoke for a while and I told her I was going to pray about it but it seemed further than I would prefer from all things familiar. We ended the call knowing it was a "no pressure" situation. I made up my mind that I was not going that far.

In February 2017, FPC sent seven representatives (3 elders and 4 students) to scope out CCO. During that time, I met with the elders. Although I loved the elders, it still felt like a long shot. After the Jubilee Conference, plans for a visit to Fresno began to be in the works. In April, I visited to see if this was going to be the right fit for FPC and for me personally. After my visit wrapped up, I called my mom. (Who else do you call on big decisions like this?) I asked how she would feel if I moved to California and she responded, "Although I would like you to be closer, I am not going to allow my feelings to stop what God is doing." This was a big deal!! I went back home and took my time in prayer, calling mentors and friends. It became more and more apparent Fresno was going to be my new home. Once it was official, I was moving to Fresno, I then began to pray about why God wanted me here. I began to have dreams of college students being on fire for the Kingdom of God.

Now after four months of being in Fresno, we are able to praise God together about the work that has happened with this partnership:

- Hotdog Outreach with congregants from FPC to Greek Life students at Fresno State
- Relationships being built with athletic department at Fresno Pacific, specifically the basketball team
- Over 20 different college students coming to Bible study throughout the first semester
- Meals being hosted in the homes of FPC families for college students to enjoy
- Discipleship conversations being held weekly with students to help them grow in their faith

This is just the beginning! I am looking forward to seeing how God continues to transform the lives of college students for the sake of His Kingdom. 2018 has much in store.

With eager anticipation and love,



Geraud Brumfield

Director of College Ministries