

Engaging Together In Christ's Work

I'm so glad that you have opened the pages of this FPC Fresno Annual Report for 2017. This is one of the ways we try to sum up what we have done in the past year to pursue our church's purpose of engaging together in Christ's work of making disciples for the redeeming transformation of our city and world. This report is full of important information; I encourage you to read through it all. But, before you do, it's my privilege to share with you a few of my reflections on this year past.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

One of our core values as a congregation is transformational partnership. This last year we continued to grow in our practice of this core value. One way we did that was through the generous work of hosting. In 2017 we hosted City Summit conference, Pastors' Prayer Day, the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Reconciliation Pastors' Luncheon, Hope Authentic conference, one of the last meetings of the Presbytery of the Pacific, as well as many other partner-sponsored events. Hosting takes a toll on the team, but it's one of the important ways we continue to insert ourselves in the work of the Lord. It's one of the ways we engage together for the redeeming transformation of our city and world.

This year we also launched a new and significant partnership for the sake of reaching and discipling college students. You can read more about it in the Community Growth report that follows, but let me just say that I think this is one of the most important partnerships we've had the privilege of launching. Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO) is a college ministry organization that specializes in partnering with churches to integrate college students into the life and ministry of a local congregation. Geraud Brumfield, our CCO partner and Director of College Ministries, is already making an impact in the life of FPC Fresno while building relationships with students and leaders at Fresno State, Fresno Pacific, and Fresno City College. I am grateful for the Session's courage and faith to take this bold step for reaching the next generation of our city.

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Candidating Sermon August 12, 2012



FPC Service October 28, 2012



Rebekah, Diane, Andrew, Jeremy & Kate Vaccaro

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

In our annual Session retreat in the spring, as we prayed together and discussed the status of FPC Fresno, the Lord led us to three strategic areas of focus. Our continued priority since our Church Vitality Weekend in 2016 is to become more and more of a Great Commission church where people are coming to faith in Jesus and growing as disciples who make disciples. The areas of focus we identified at our Session retreat were (1) preemptive prayer, (2) testimony, and (3) disciple-making. Our hope and prayer is that as people engage more in these priorities it will spark a deeper passion in our hearts for the transforming power of the Gospel.

So, my question for you is this: Have you grown in these areas this year? Have you become more consistent in praying for those who don't know Christ, in praying for Church activities focused on reaching new people, in praying for our congregation to have a passion for sharing the Gospel? Have you learned to share the powerful work that God has done in your life? Have you learned to ask the kinds of questions that draw out God's story in other people? Have you become more equipped to be a disciple maker? Have you pursued anyone this year to help them discover Christ or grow in Christ? Our hope, as the strategic priorities continue in 2018, is that more and more FPC Fresno folks will be able answer these questions positively in the months ahead.

LEANING IN FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

The second half of this year was also a very difficult one for several families in our congregation. As the Lord uncovered some sin in our midst, we realized the collateral damage of that sin was significant. This isn't the place to rehash all the details, but I can't think of 2017 without being mindful of this difficult season. During the worst of it, I felt the Lord draw my attention to John 1 where it talks of the incarnational witness of the Word become flesh. John writes, "we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, come from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14b). The Lord, very intentionally, moved toward us full of grace and truth. And that's what I felt the Lord was calling us to do as well. I'm so grateful for the way you, the congregation of FPC Fresno, have lived into that call. I know that I haven't always lived into it as I feel the Lord is calling me to do, and for that I repent. Thank you for leaning into me full of grace and truth as you have done for one another. The families closest to the situation still need our love and care. So, I'm praying that we will continue to lean in full of grace and truth in the year ahead.

FIVE YEARS

October of 2017 marked five years of ministry for me with you, First Presbyterian Church Fresno. It seems like a bit of a milestone, but honestly, I feel like we're just getting started on what the Lord has for us in the future together. It is my deep privilege to be the Senior Pastor of this congregation. God has given us (the Vaccaro family) a deep affection for you. One of the Sundays I was particularly grateful for you in 2017 was the Sunday that two of my children, Katelyn and Andrew, stood in front of you to publically proclaim their faith in Jesus and become members of our congregation. I am so grateful for the way you have loved them, and for the way you are shaping all three of my children (Rebekah included) to know and follow Christ. So, FPC Fresno, thank you for another year of your incredible love and grace for me. May the Lord give us many, many more together, all for His glory.

Rev. Jeremy Vaccaro

Senior Pastor

Fanning God's Gifts Into Flame

Dear Congregation,

It's good to reflect on the past year to take stock of where we have been and think about where we are headed. With that in mind I thought you all might appreciate a brief description of what's been going on in my areas of ministry during 2017. You may notice that New Members and Women's Ministry are covered in the Community Growth section of the report. I felt it important to list them here as well to give a full picture of my areas of ministry oversight.

NEW MEMBERS

Twice each year, I gather and facilitate the New Members classes that are offered in the fall and spring. 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. Some of those baptized were youth, and some were adults. 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.

EPC'S WOMEN'S MINISTRY

As the director of FPC's Women's Ministry, I have oversight of several ongoing ministries and regular events. Along with our two longest-running Bible Studies, Tuesday Morning Glory and Thursday Morning Women's Bible Study, we offered Wednesday evening opportunities for study and growth in discipleship. This year I chaired the Women's Conference team, a role that meant greater investment of time and creativity than in many previous years. It was time well-spent, in quality and quantity, as we had a great team and a successful conference. You can read more about these Women's events in the Community Growth section of the report.

DEACONS

Our Deacons and I enjoyed a challenging and uplifting retreat in August, led by Rev. Heidi Johnson of Danville. She brought us a number of ideas for making the Deacons ministries more relevant to the life and mission of the church. We now have a Deacons Vision Team that consists of Shelly Coburn, Debby Rader, Kim Peltola, Dennis DuPertuis, Chester Goodale, and me. That team is ready to work with the congregation's Vision Task Force to be sure any plans Deacons have for the future are in alignment with the G.O.1 missional aims adopted by our Session.

CHAPLAINS

It's a joy to supervise our chaplains, Rosemary Avery and Susan Glover. They are an amazing team! They regularly visit and call several dozen of our congregants, and make themselves available to check in on those who are hospitalized or preparing for surgery. Because of her particular life-experience, Susan is able to walk alongside those who are facing dementia diagnoses. Rosemary greets on Sunday mornings and so is always "in the know." Pastor Paul Armstrong is not on paid staff, but he continues to make regular visits, check in on folks as needed and serves communion when requested. Truly, these three servants show the love of Christ in a very tangible way.

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STEPHEN MINISTRY

I am pleased to report that in 2017 the Stephen Ministry has been growing much in depth. As we train new Stephen Ministers, our currently commissioned Stephen Ministers are giving care to members of our congregation. All of them are gaining skill and experience for continuing to serve the Lord well in this meaningful and much-needed way. Our lay leadership has also grown. Here are the leaders and their positions: Dianne McKneely, Referrals Coordinator; Debby Rader, Training Coordinator; and as our Supervision Group Leader, Allan Knepper has done a great job of getting us started. He's handing the baton to David Parker, who will do a great job starting in January. Looking to the future, FPC is sending two of our leaders, Debby Rader and Charlene Henry, to Leadership Training Conference the first week in February. Charlene will most likely become our Stephen Ministry Awareness leader, so expect to hear her sing the praises of Stephen Ministry and invite you to get involved!

EPC WOMEN'S RESOURCE COUNCIL & PRESBYTERY WOMEN'S LINK

Although the timing was not what I originally expected, I am now serving as the chair of the EPC's national women's ministry board, the Women's Resource Council. You can check us out online at www.epc.org/thewell. I'm in the middle of a one-year term that began in August of 2017, after which I will remain on the council for one more year as the immediate past-chair. In addition, in 2017 a small group of women in our presbytery launched Pacific Women's Link as a means of connecting women from the churches, sharing resources, and providing a place for all of us to grow, share ministry ideas, and pray together when our presbytery meets. Diane Vaccaro is part of Pacific Women's Link, so feel free to ask either of us more about this growing ministry.

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

I have the privilege of a formal mentor relationship with one of our Ruling Elders. We meet weekly and heartily agree that it has been a blessing to both of us, one we are eager to continue. Much less formally, I was able to call together a small Bible Study group last summer, and some of those women are still meeting regularly for discipleship. What a blessing, when the Holy Spirit moves and makes connections among God's people! I regularly extend pastoral care and counsel to women, and sometimes men, who express a need. I also serve as FPC's liaison to both Meagan Bergem and Beth Paz, as candidates for ordination in the EPC. It's one of the joys of my calling to have time to invest one-to-one with others, and to be allowed the privilege of sharing in what God is doing in their lives.

As I look back over this report, it seems to me that much of what I do, one way or another, is a reflection of 2 Timothy 1:6-7:

*For this reason I remind you to fan
into flame the gift of God, which is in you...
For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid,
but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

Thank you, God's people of First Pres, for calling me to be one of your pastors and fanning my gift into flame so I can do the same for others.



Lana, Brian, Davis & Dixie

Rev. Lana Roberts

Associate Pastor

A Year Of New Things

It's been a year of new things. Having arrived in Fresno in December 2016, Lisa and I are thankful for the new ways we've experienced God's great love for us here at First Presbyterian Church. Each of these new experiences brings celebration and thankfulness to God for his excellent work in my life and the lives of others.

The year began with the celebration event of being ordained as a pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church here at FPC. It was the apex of years of hard work and confirmation of God's call on my life to become an ordained minister of the Gospel. Without a doubt, it ranks as one of the top five most joyful moments in my 36 years of life. And I continue to remember that day of ordination and the vow I took to love and serve Christ's church—specifically the church here at FPC. Although the weight of that responsibility in calling can be overwhelming for any pastor, I continue to remember that I do not respond in my human strength, but must daily and even moment by moment remember Christ holds the church. I am an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd, Christ, who will care for His flock to the end. I am humbled and honored to be one of your pastors. And as many of you have for the past year, please pray for me and my wife Lisa as we continue in this calling here at FPC.

In June it was a joy to receive three new elders to serve on the Community Growth committee. Bekah Hansen, Michele Cooper and Ben Wiele joined Marty Martin and me on the mission to cast the vision and direction for seven distinct Community Growth ministries here at FPC. God continues to call us to prayer and discernment as we seek His will for our church community. How can we thoughtfully and prayerfully move toward our church mission of engaging in Christ's work of making disciples for the redeeming transformation of our city and world? - 0 8 -

"God, guide us!" is our prayer. I'm thankful for each of these elders, and I thank all those who continue to pray for us. May the Lord continue to lead us in our planning process.

When the FPC Session took steps to enter into partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach and invite one of their campus staff to serve our college students, I never imagined that we would receive such a highly qualified candidate as Geraud Brumfield. His five years of campus ministry combined with his dynamic personality, a deep heart for worship, and humility before God move me to praise God for sending him here to FPC. I count it a joy to support and encourage Geraud as together we strategize how to reach college students with the Good News of the Gospel, inviting our FPC college-age young adults into an ever-increasing relationship with their Savior, Jesus Christ. Geraud has only been here four months. Already there are great stories of transformation occurring in the lives of college-age students at FPC and nearby campuses.

Lisa and I have formed many new relationships within the past 14 months. Each smile, each handshake, each new family connection we make, each meal we have with the congregation, we grow in our thanksgiving for the Lord's call, bringing us here to FPC. We look forward to getting to know more of you in the coming year.

Rev. Chris Popadich

Assistant Pastor

