



# FIRST PRESS

The newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California

May 2021



Towards the end of the Book of Ezra, the priest Ezra gets some – to him – bad news: apparently, the people of Israel have not been separating themselves

“from the peoples of the lands.” Instead, they have been marrying these foreigners! Hearing this, Ezra reacts with horror, tearing his mantle, pulling his hair out, one minute sitting appalled, the next falling onto his knees in prayer. Pretty dramatic stuff.

Eventually, a crowd gathers, also weeping bitterly, and the decision gets made to send away all the foreign wives and their children.

Now, I am not generally a fan of this book of the Bible. I think its concluding scenes – the tribes of Judah and Benjamin huddled together in the pelting rain with their soon-to-be separated families – is full of pathos, and opposed to an example of a community legitimately

living out God’s will. I prefer the Book of Ruth, with its much more progressive attitude towards foreigners – and foreign women in particular.

But it strikes me that this book may raise some interesting questions for us to consider as we, like the exiles it depicts, find our way back to a holy place, our Jerusalem of sorts: in-person worship.

For example, is there anything we need to separate ourselves from as part of the process of returning to church?

Some of us have spent this last year watching more news and Netflix than we ever thought possible – without giving much thought to the versions of the world we’ve been imbibing along the way. (For my part, I’ve found myself hooked on a series of Nordic police procedurals).

It may be that this is a good time to consider the messages we’ve been

receiving through these media about violence or consumerism, how these messages relate to the values we hold dear as Christians, and whether it might not be a good idea to curtail our screen time.

Others of us may have gotten a little too comfortable with the new “virtual” ways of interacting, and how Zoom and WebEx, for example, allow us to check out of conversations by muting ourselves, turning off our video or not attending all that carefully to what other people are saying. (I know I’m not the only person to get distracted from time to time by my own image on the screen!) It may be that this is a good time to recognize that some of our social habits have changed over the course of the pandemic and

to “separate” ourselves from these changes by recommitting ourselves to be more active listeners.

The Book of Ezra ends with a comprehensive list of all the Israelite men who had married foreign women and who will now need to send away their wives and children. Clearly, this is not an example we will want to follow as a church. As a church we will want to welcome families of all sorts, as well as people who come to us looking for family. The question is, what habits, perspectives or attitudes will we need to separate ourselves from in order to be that welcoming church.

*Rev. Dr. Johanna McCune Wagner*



## **New Service Information**

Sacred Saturdays is a service for people with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia and their caregivers. Starting in June, it will meet at 11:00 a.m. in our handicap-accessible sanctuary on the first and third Saturdays of the month. Services will be 25 to 30 minutes in length, and include our favorite hymns, interactive messages, prayer time and communion. There will be a fellowship hour after the service.

## Facilities Springing Back to Life



It's wonderful to have people back in church again after having our church facilities essentially shut down and vacant for 14 months.

We were able to continue our preschool, which continued to

operate throughout this time, albeit with fewer students.

At the start of the shutdown we knew we needed to save money wherever we could. Of course, our PG&E bill has been lower, as fewer lights and furnaces were on. We also cut back on our trash pickup and deferred some maintenance when we could.

But even with nobody here there were still routine maintenance jobs that need to be done. I give special thanks to Terry Jones for all of his work, especially with the landscaping and other odd-jobs that needed doing. And, starting this year, Jeremy Martin and Josh Maitland have taken over as co-chairs of property and have stepped up for a few projects, including our continuing effort to reduce electricity consumption by replacing lighting with LEDs.

Beginning last fall we experimented with outdoor worship services in the courtyard on Sunday mornings. We put "X"s on the concrete to space people out, told people to bring their own chairs, made hand sanitizer available, took temperatures and recorded names when people entered. And while it was good to be together for those of us who chose to attend, most of us still weren't ready. And as the weather began to chill, we were forced to end outside services.

Our first full in-person worship in the Sanctuary was this past Easter Sunday. It brought on some additional challenges, as we grappled with how we could safely meet and observe CDC, State, and County guidelines. We roped off every other pew and sprayed all of the touch surfaces with a disinfectant solution. We opened all of the windows and turned on the heat and the ceiling fans to assure good ventilation. And, as with our outdoor worship, we provided hand sanitizer and took temperatures and recorded names for everyone who came to worship. We had a good turnout, and it was apparent that people were beginning to be more comfortable meeting, now that so many had been vaccinated.

Since Easter, we have continued meeting in the Sanctuary; but that presented another problem. Up until now we had been recording videos of Sunday worship on

Saturday and uploading the recording to YouTube. This gave us time to correct mistakes, edit the video and insert captioning for song lyrics and scripture. Now we needed to figure out to do all of this while livestreaming worship straight to YouTube.

This has been a learning experience for many of us. Fortunately, Pastor Johanna possessed quite a bit of technical knowledge about how to accomplish this that came with her from her previous church. We are still working out a few bugs, so we ask for patience from those still watching from home.

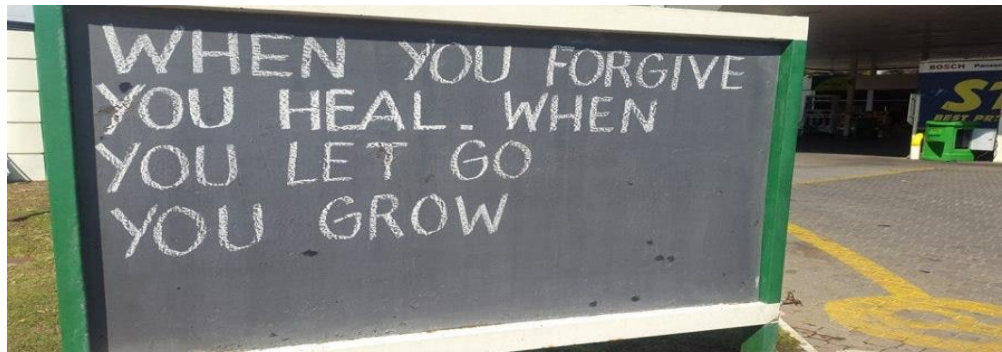
In addition to FPCC, the other churches who use our facilities have also returned to worship. This includes our three Hispanic churches, CDRJ, Shiloh Centro, and Iglesia Bautista; and the Tongan church. City Blessings Indonesian church will be starting soon. Hills Vineyard, who use the PCC building

on Grant Street, has not yet made the decision when they will resume. In addition, Community Bible Study (CBS) is starting to make plans for resuming their Wednesday classes in September.

We are also making plans for reopening the office open during weekdays and the return of office staff. This involves some shuffling of office space to make social distancing easier and to improve the work environment. Rebecca Chase will be moving into the Administration office, and Lisa Justice will move into Rebecca's office. The front desk will be left unoccupied except as we may be able to cover it with volunteers.

It's good to have life in the church buildings again, and I am sure we all look forward to a return to full operations.

*David Stearns  
Property Chair in 2020*





**Dear FPCC Family,**

Normalcy is certainly around the corner! We are gradually gaining more opportunities to meet in person. Since Easter Sunday, our services are once again live in the sanctuary and we are even streaming simultaneously on YouTube. Please be patient as we continue to tweak the audio and video quality of services after this change in format. It is truly a pleasure to worship in person again, even with masks and distancing.

Along these lines, our choir quartets have now merged to become an octet! As of now, we are singing anthems twice a month in worship. Pending further developments with the pandemic, we will expand our choir even more and sing more frequently in the near future. We are excited to be singing in worship again, and hope to organize a concert in the Fall or Winter if all goes well, stay tuned for more details!

The Worship and Music Committee continues to meet once a month to help navigate changes in our worship environment and they have been working hard this year! Many thanks to Ron Potts, Lee Borden, Beth Byrne, Gary Beck, Maren Stanczak, Charmaine Ferrera, and of course Pastor Johanna, for their tireless efforts as we gradually transition back to normalcy at FPCC.

Our praise band, now known as Grateful Heart, is setting a goal this year to learn exciting new songs and feature them in worship! We hope to tap into new trends while bringing old classics back every now and then. Lee Borden continues to provide great piano and organ accompaniment, and Evelyn McCollum continues to shine in sound design and post-production work.

I foresee many more exciting changes in the world of Worship and Music as the pandemic continues to improve.

*In Christ,  
Andrew Cardiasmenos*

**The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart.**

Antoine de Saint-Exupery  
The Little Prince



## Keeping You Connected

Our church facility may have been closed during the last 14 months, but our members did not stop working to maintain our family. There are so many things happening within our congregation that to list all of them would fill up the First Press. Stay tuned to this section in future editions to see what is happening within our congregation. Here's a sample –

### Deacon Board: Pastoral care in your neighborhood

- The Deacons have been caring for the congregation nonstop during this time of Covid isolation. Phone calls, emails, notes, and even driveway visits taken place on a regular basis so that we keep in touch with everyone we can.
- The Deacon Board met monthly, staying updated of changes in our parishioners' health status, and looking ahead in order to define best practices for the coming year.
- The Board spent time comparing Board models of different Presbyterian churches in our area, essentially to see if the way we do things is the way we wish to continue doing them. We uncovered several strengths:
  - Parish partners work really well (2 Deacons per Parish). Each Deacon uses their strengths, and can share duties accordingly
  - A 3 year commitment gives each Deacon real time to get to know the people in their Parish
  - The Parish model is also good for the congregation. Each parishioner gets to know a caring, pastoral person so when a need arises, they feel comfortable reaching out
- The Officers met to clearly outline a proposal for best practices, including timing of outreach, committees to lead and equip volunteers to support, as well as ministries best suited to other teams. This was presented to the Board and approved for further follow-through. Once the proposal has final approval, the Deacons will share the details at the Leadership Retreat, or another opportune time.
- During the process, the Deacons observed that, compared to other churches, our model really shines! It is encouraging to learn that what we do does have meaning and is successful

Parish Assignments 2021

Class of:

Parish 01 – Matt Chapman	2023
Parish 02 – Carrie Smith	2023
Parish 03 – Terry Jones (Moderator)	2021
Parish 04 – Josie Mauck	2023
Parish 05 – Emily/ Bill Selb	2023
Parish 06 – Charmaine Ferrera (Prayer Chain)	2021
Parish 07 – Beth Byrne	2021
Parish 08 – Carolyn Thornton	2022
Parish 09 – Judith Snider (Vice Moderator/ Trudy Meigs (Secretary)	2022
Parish 10 – Don Horgan	2021
Parish 11 – Harold Lund	2022

*Rebecca Chase, CLP*

**Church Attendance**

Thank you for remaining faithful.

**2020**

	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>
In Person	109	110	98	----	----	----
On Line	----	----	174	175	130	145
	<b>July</b>	<b>August</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>
In Person	----	-----	-----	15.25	20.33	-----
On Line	126	140	101.25	109.25	112.4	326

**2021**

	<b>January</b>	<b>February</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>
In Person	----	-----	-----	53.75
On Line	111	126	131.5	91

*Lisa Justice*



## **What Is Clayton Valley Village?**

Have an old battery in your smoke alarm that needs changing? Need a ride to the dentist? Call Clayton Valley Village! We are a “virtual” village (no

building but have an internet connection) to “help Seniors live successfully in their own homes.” Member benefits include educational, cultural, and social activities and volunteered services for simple household repairs, transportation, technical support, and friendly visits. We also have a directory of referrals for professional services that have been recommended by our members.

We are one of over 300 villages that exist nationwide. There are at least 44 villages in California, 22 of which are in the Bay area alone! We participate in all three organizations. At present our village has 40 members and 38 volunteers. We serve all of Clayton, Concord’s districts 1 and 5, and the unincorporated area between. Our dues are very reasonable, considering the support provided

and the comfort of knowing there is a screened volunteer available to help.

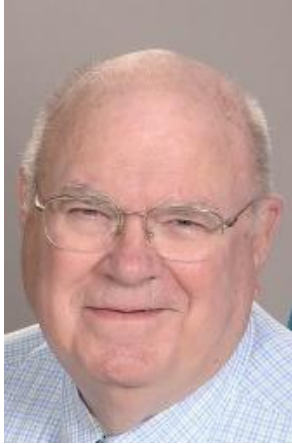
Some of our programs include Armchair Travelers where a member does a presentation of a trip or excursion, they have taken followed by an offering of refreshments typical of the area they presented. We also offer lectures, Lunch and Learn on various topics such as health, gardening, cooking, etc. We have a Bocce ball team and the Village Explorers, a walking group that take 2 mile hikes or strolls in the area. Once a month, we meet for a social time via Zoom until we can meet in the various restaurants again. Our biggest service to members has been transportation to shopping, medical appointments, hair/nail salons and various other trips. In 2020 we provided almost 400 service requests!

*If you are interested in finding out more, you can contact Marilyn Wollenweber or Jim Whitfield. We have been with this organization since 2014 when it was just in development. You can reach us at 925-672-2250 for information.*

## **From Our Missionary Team . . .**

Christy Reiners, one of our missionary partners serving overseas, needs a secure place to keep her car until she gets back in August. Please contact Christy #925-596-5646.





## **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HERITAGE**

I have had many people approach me with questions regarding the background of how the Heritage came into existence and the relationship to FPCC. Let me answer some of those questions in this article.

Originally, The Heritage was proposed by Dr. Robert Christensen, Senior Pastor at FPCC in 1969 as part of a list of possible projects that could benefit the church and the community at large. The Session approved moving forward with the concept of a senior housing project. In good Presbyterian style, a committee was formed to make the project happen. They oversaw the purchase of the necessary properties, obtaining HUD financing and planning the structure.

The ground breaking ceremony for the project took place on October 27, 1974, with the first residents moving in in November 1975. The Heritage was dedicated on October 10, 1975, at a ceremony where U.S. Senator Alan Cranston was a featured speaker. The original committee of Dr. Christensen, James Fenner, Hank (Bud) Hansen, Doris Loverage and Sam Wells were also in attendance. One of the original residents, Vlasta Hannon also addressed the audience. The church choir also performed under the direction of Jerry Smith.

The Articles of Incorporation state as part of the purpose of the non-profit corporation "... to provide elderly persons with housing facilities and services specially designed to meet their physical, social and psychological needs, and to promote their health, security, happiness and usefulness in longer living...on a non-profit basis."

Originally, Concord Homes, Inc., the non-profit corporation formed to build and manage The Heritage, was made up of six members of the board plus the senior pastor of FPCC (making up the Board of Directors) and the Session of FPCC. The board was given the authority to oversee the operation, reporting once a year to the Session. The board hired Barcelon Management and Associates, to manage the facility, reporting to the Board of Directors at bi-monthly Board meetings. This arrangement has worked well over the decades.

In 2014, the Board completed a refinancing of The Heritage to take advantage of lower interest rates and to provide cash to accomplish other projects. On completion of the refinancing, we had the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of Concord Homes, Inc., reviewed by attorneys who specialize in these types of legal documents. Their strong recommendation was to modify the by-laws separating the

church and Concord Homes. Specifically, it was recommended that the corporation be modified to remove the Session and the Senior Pastor from membership in the corporation and that all formal connections be ended. After providing explanations to the Session and answering their questions, the Corporation met on April 19, 2016 and voted to modify the by-laws to allow that to happen. Currently, the board is responsible for overseeing The Heritage.

The current Board of Directors are: Dennis Horgan, President; Frank Fribley, Treasurer; Trudy Meigs, Secretary; Marilyn Wollenweber and Claudia Macias, Members at Large. Gary Rowe served as Vice President until his passing. His insights, financial knowledge, humor and compassion will be greatly missed.

*Dennis Horgan, President, Board of Directors, Concord Homes, Inc.*

## **Solar Panel Installation Update**

Our solar contractor received approval from the Concord planning and engineering office, and we are awaiting approval from Contra Costa Fire District to proceed with the installation of approximately 80 solar panels on the fellowship hall, fireside room and preschool roofs. This effort will significantly reduce our electricity costs for several years, while reducing our carbon footprint. More information will be provided in future newsletter issues.

## **Remembering . . .**

It is never easy to say good-bye to those we have worshipped with and enjoyed time spent around learned from or simply appreciated. On May 16, we took a few moments during a special Memorial Service to remember our friends and loved ones. Each of these folks spent a life making others aware of their presence and each of them will be missed.

**Luella Beck  
Lee Culemann  
Mary Grant  
Ellen Hague  
Carol Hance  
Hank Hansen**

**Catherine Longoria  
Joyce McCollum  
Lois Morgan  
Don Ome  
Mike Rogers  
Linda Phillips**

**Gary Rowe  
Jacqueline Serena  
Glenna Nelson Slayton  
Howard Stutzman  
Harold Sundquist  
Kathy Sundquist**



# About First Presbyterian Church of Concord

**MISSION:** Love God, Love People ... Serve

**VISION:** As a community hub, connect with the needs of people, joyfully sharing Jesus and serving where God calls.

## **VALUES:**

- Guided by Scripture and prayer, we are a welcoming place where people, service, and God's love meet.
- Focused on hospitality, inclusiveness, and spiritual gifts, we worship God with delight.
- Unified in Jesus Christ, we are led by the Holy Spirit to invite, engage, and share God's Truth with each other, our community and the world.

### **FPCC Staff**

Rev. Dr. Johanna McCune Wagner  
Darryl McCollum  
Rebecca Chase

Andrew Cardiasmenos  
Robin Stearns  
Lisa Justice

Lisa Gonzalez  
Harold Lund

Pastor  
Commissioned Lay Pastor  
Commissioned Lay Pastor  
and Director of Community Care  
Director of Music & Worship  
Preschool Director  
Administrative Assistant and  
Student Pastor  
Administrative Coordinator  
Custodian & Night Watchman

**Editor's Note:** First Press is a quarterly publication of the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California, printing in February, May, August, and November. Members of the Congregation, and others may submit articles for publication no later than the month prior to a publication date. FPCC reserves the right to review all articles for content and value prior to publication. Comments or questions may be directed to Allen Nickerson at [allen\\_nickerson@comcast.net](mailto:allen_nickerson@comcast.net).