



FIRST PRESS EXPRESS

The newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California

October 2021



Church Life

A topic that was broached during the October session meeting had to do with church size. Given that most

churches in the U.S. – 80 to 85 percent – are small churches (churches with less than 250 members), I suggested that the challenge facing us at FPCC might not be how to become a big church, but how to do small church community well. After all, something must be keeping all these people coming back to their small churches!

So next time it meets, session will be discussing the following:

What are the potential strengths of small churches – and what does session need to do as leaders to ensure that these strengths are in play at FPCC?

And what are the potential weaknesses – and how does session guard against these derailing FPCC's ministries?

Another topic from that meeting had to do with meetings, and the reality that different generations – and people – have different attitudes toward and capacities for these.

I shared my experience as a typical Gen-Xer whose career has been in fields (education and the church), in which Baby Boomers have held the majority of leadership positions – and been the ones to set agendas and meeting times/durations. I remarked that this has shaped my meeting persona! (I can be impatient when meetings run long – even those I am running.) I also discussed the difficulty younger generations may face as they attempt to balance the demands of work, raising children and civic engagement. Out of this discussion arose the decision to try to find ways to give everyone who wants to have a voice in church decision-making the opportunity to do so.

For more information about session's new initiative, "15-Minute Meetings," be sure to check out FPCC's weekly Friday email.



Break Every Chain, by Jesus Culture

Several worship services in September and October have focused on the wideness of God’s mercy, as well as Jesus’s ability to transform lives and cultures when we put our trust in the Lord. One song that captures this so well is “Break Every Chain,” by Jesus Culture, which the band taught the congregation a few weeks ago and later brought back to solidify the message and the melody.

“Break Every Chain” is a powerful song about a spiritual transformation. It chronicles a forgiving God that can erase the burdens of the past and replace them with love.

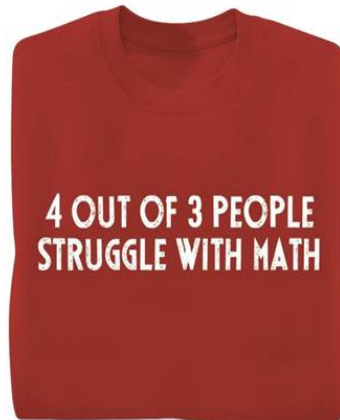
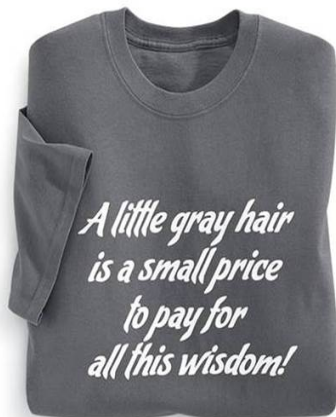
Being human, we simply cannot avoid forging a variety of chains along our journey, some small and some large, some willingly and some unwillingly. Yet with the gift of the Holy Trinity, and a strong faith, the Lord has the power to shatter our chains and lighten our spirits. With Jesus in our corner, not only do we have the power to heal ourselves, but also quell the sorrows and injustices of our society and community.

The song’s imagery is simple, but vivid: “there’s an army rising up” to “break every chain,” since “there is power in the name of Jesus.” The song’s repetitive nature gives it meditative qualities, almost like a mantra. The words can soak in freely and we can aspire to make them a reality in our world.

As we reflect on the lyrics and melody of “Break Every Chain,” let us be reminded that anything is possible in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Andrew Cardiasmenos
Worship & Music Director





September Session Meeting

An outside Communications consultant, Bill Hargraves, has shared some ideas with Pastor Johanna regarding ways to deepen FPCC's relationship with the surrounding community. He has been studying our county's demographics and the history of our church and has suggested that we be on the lookout to see where people are gathering in our area. He also suggests we look closely at the impression we make on first-time visitors, including the aesthetics of the campus, signage, and the messages conveyed to visitors by our web page. Improvements being made in the children's program will be key to attracting young families.

The Connections Team will be hosting a series of monthly dinners to enable people to meet with Pastor Johanna in less formal circumstances. Pastor Johanna and Michael will kick off the series with a gathering at their new home the first Friday in November.

A refund of an \$11,000 trust has been received from the State of California thanks to the efforts of David Stearns, who has worked on this for a long time.

Beginnings & Beyond has taken over responsibility for its financial recordkeeping in order to free up time for the church's financial coordinator, Lisa Gonzalez, who plans to retire in 2022.

The church's applications for forgiveness for the two loans it received under the Federal Payroll Protection Program have been approved, netting the church \$99,000 in additional funding for 2020 and 2021.

Financial Chair, Susan Koester, presented the 2022 budget to session for approval. The projected shortfall of \$66,000 can be covered by endowment funds, if necessary.

October Session Meeting

At the recommendation of the Mission's Committee, Session voted for the Christmas offering to be used to support United World Mission's work with Afghani refugee families.

There was an in-depth discussion about how our church might appear to newcomers and visitors. It was suggested that a team of members and others conduct a walkthrough, inspecting the facilities and noting issues like wear and tear and the need for painting or upgrading, as well as any unnecessary clutter or other needs. Ideally the team should include people who have a keen sense for these types of issues.

Another idea that was discussed involved the possibility of having a Saturday night service specifically designed to engage the people and organizations either based or living in the downtown area. Such gatherings might include a community meal followed by a short service and/or other activities. The discussion will continue, and no action was taken.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

FPCC Staff

Rev. Dr. Johanna McCune Wagner	Senior Pastor
Rebecca Chase, CLP	Director, Children and Family Ministries
DeVonn Powers, CLP	Director, Outreach
Andrew Cardiasmenos	Director, Music & Worship
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Lisa Justice, Student Pastor	Director, Adult Education & Church Administrator
Lisa Gonzalez	Financial and Human Resources Assistant
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Editor's Note: *First Press Express* is a publication of the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California, printing several times each year. Comments or questions may be directed to Allen Nickerson at allen_nickerson@comcast.net.