



FIRST PRESS

The Newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California

Winter 2021

From the Editor's Desk

Well, the calendar confirms that All-Saints Eve has passed, Veteran's Day has been remembered (thank you Vets, for all your service), and we are entering that time of the year traditionally referred to as the Holidays. With that in mind, this edition of First Press is devoted to recalling some of our memories from the past, honoring our present, and taking a look toward the future, so join us in our journey of giving thanks for what we have learned, what we have become, and what we may yet be . . .

Reflections . . .

As a child, I wanted to grow up as fast as possible – to such a degree, in fact, that my parents always knew what to get me for birthdays or Christmases: anything I would associate with being an adult. For example, when I was five, and my family moved to Germany for a year, I went through a crying phase. My dad would drop me off at kindergarten in the morning and the tears would flow, so my parents made me a deal. If I could go ten days without crying, they would get me my own umbrella – just like my father's. The crying stopped the next day.

Indeed, my favorite present of all time is something my parents got me for Christmas when I was seven. I still remember coming down the stairs from my bedroom that fateful morning and seeing to the side of the tree a little wooden rocking chair with my name on it. I was like – yes! I have my own chair – just like my dad!

I wanted to grow up as fast as possible as a child: to be able to have my own jar of pickled herring in the frig – just like my dad – my own carton of half and half, my own bedroom.

Now that I am an adult, however, I seem to be reversing course. I am often filled with nostalgia for my childhood and younger years. In particular, I miss the sense of possibility that was so much a part of that time of life.

So for this Advent I chose for a theme for the church and also for myself the word, Awake – in the hope that this theme would focus our attention on the many ways this season invites us to wake up to the possibilities God is preparing for both the world and us:

- The possibility that a Savior can come from Nazareth, of all places.
- That big things can grow from little seeds – or little babies.
- That regular people can take giant leaps of faith – especially when they find themselves in the position to help someone in need of love, support and protection.

May we awaken to the blessings of this season with the same zeal little children awaken Christmas morning!

Pastor Johanna McCune Wagner

For several years we have set aside a weekend shortly before Christmas to spend in San Francisco and really get into the spirit of Christmas. We would drive to the City on Friday afternoon and check into a downtown hotel. Then, we got all dressed up in our Christmas attire (including our Santa Claus hats) and go out to a nice dinner at a restaurant. From there we went to the Grace Cathedral to enjoy the American Bach Soloists' Presentation of "Handel's Messiah."

On Saturday, after a leisurely breakfast, we walked around enjoying the downtown Christmas sights and doing a little last-minute shopping. On those walks we always be sure to pass by the windows at Macy's department store to view all the cute little cats and dogs that are always on display at Christmastime and are available for adoption. Then, we would cross the street and go to Neiman-Markus to see the 5-story high Christmas tree inside the store, wondering how in the world they got that tree in there.

We always made sure to allow plenty of time to spend at the ice-skating rink in Union Square, watching all the youngsters (and oldsters) skating, or shall we say, "trying to skate." We then crossed over to the Westin St. Francis Hotel to see the traditional giant gingerbread house made out of real gingerbread. While there, we would go down to the basement hoping to see the famous "washing of the coins." This may be the only place in the world that washes all of their coins. These days you might call it "money laundering."

On Saturday evening we attended "The Nutcracker Ballet" performed by the San Francisco Ballet. After having a big breakfast on Sunday morning, we returned home enjoy our Christmas tree and prepare ourselves for the many other things yet to enjoy before Christmas arrives, like attending the FPCC Christmas musical and taking one evening to simply drive around the local area looking at the best outdoor light displays. Having done that for so many years, we know exactly which neighborhoods to go.

Finally, we turned our attention to Christmas itself. That typically involved a family gathering either at our home or at the home of another family members. One year David secretly arranged a surprise visit from all of Kimi's children, most of whom lived out of state, who showed up at the front door on Christmas Eve with all of the makings of the Christmas dinner. Well, that's another memory, but we don't have time for it here. Maybe next year. MERRY CHRISTMAS, EVERYONE!

David and Kimi Dowell

Admittedly, I was not raised in a church-attending family. There were several reasons, but the point is just that going to church was never part of my Sunday activities. As a working adult, I worked Monday - Friday, played tennis on Saturday, and watched sports on television on Sunday – especially during football season. But this one year I got to thinking about what a waste of time that was becoming, so on a late November Sunday as I was watching the Cleveland Browns playing the Pittsburgh Steelers, it struck me so hard that I was sincerely depressed. You see, I'm a native Californian and had never been to Pittsburgh or Cleveland, knew nothing of the teams or the players, and didn't care who won. That's when it occurred to me that there had to be something better to do with my Sundays.

I thought about it for a couple of weeks, staying away from television on Sunday, and came up with "well, why don't you go to church." I attended by myself at the Christmas Eve service for a nearby Methodist church. Nice building: big and gray and concert with lovely stained-glass windows, a large choir, and a nice service. Just not at all friendly and kind of cold, both reception and temperature. So the next week I went to a Presbyterian church. I can honestly say that my life started to get a whole lot better staring on that day and at that church. I will be forever grateful, but do wish Cleveland and Pittsburgh good seasons.

Allen Nickerson

The words "Thank You" are rendered in a large, 3D, multi-colored font. The letters have a gradient of colors including red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, giving them a vibrant, blocky appearance.

Please join me in thanking each member of the staff for the amazing efforts and accomplishments they have made to make 2021 so meaningful. The next time you see one of the folks whose name appears in the little box at the end of each issue of *First Press* and *Express*, let them know they are important.



Dear FPCC Family,

The music program is finally in full swing again after the pandemic, with the choir back in worship singing anthems and leading hymns each week. It's truly a blessing to be able to glorify God this way and it adds so much more to the message behind each service. Meanwhile, Grateful Heart praise band is learning impactful new songs featured on the radio, such as "Your Love Never Fails" by Jesus Culture, and eagerly teaching them to the congregation.

The choir is also gearing up for a very exciting concert on Sunday, December 12th at 7:30 PM, featuring guest vocal soloists, a brass quintet, flute and percussion! Grateful Heart will play a few songs, including one combined with the choir, and the wind instruments will lead Christmas carols. You certainly don't want to miss all the incredible talent! Hope to see you there.

Pastor Johanna's exciting worship theme for Advent this year is "Awake," derived from the hymn "Awake, awake, and greet the new morn." As we enter this holy season of anticipation, symbolism plays a large role in enhancing the message. Many services will feature prayers, music, and visuals that represent a spiritual awakening. It should be a very powerful experience.

Finally, our Christmas Eve service is at 7 PM. It will also feature the choir, as well as the traditional candle lighting with Silent Night, one of my favorite moments in the church year.

I wish all of you a very meaningful and worshipful holiday season this year.

In Christ,
Andrew Cardiasmenos



May your day be filled with love,
warmth and remembrance.

News and Notes . . .

Year End Giving Deadlines

Mailed contributions to FPCC dated and postmarked on or before December 31, will be credited towards 2021. All hand-delivered checks to the church office must be received by noon on Friday, December 31, when the office closes, to receive 2021 credit. If the office is closed, you may drop your contribution in the lockbox to the right of the office door.

All giving using Zelle must be sent on or before December 31 to be credited towards 2021. Gifts not meeting these deadlines will be applied to 2022.

For questions regarding year-end giving, you should always consult with your tax advisor.

Year-end contributor statements will be prepared and mailed in January by our Administrative Coordinator Lisa Gonzalez. If you received a paper copy in the mail of your 09/30/2021 contributor statement and you would prefer an email copy, please provide your email address to Lisa at lisag@fpccconcord.org. Thank you very much!

Lisa Gonzalez

Checking Beneficiaries - An Important Year-End-Task

It's easy to forget about naming beneficiaries for bank accounts, mutual funds or brokerage accounts, once you have done the task. But it is important to review these at least once a year, or when changes such as births, deaths, changed street addresses and even changed email addresses have taken place.

Many people have set up a family trust to make the beneficiary management job easier, but even then, things, like a new savings account, mutual fund or Treasury Bond purchase, can be overlooked and a beneficiary is not designated or the new account is omitted from the trust agreement.

This happened to me when some Treasury Bonds and Mutual Funds that were purchased by my wife many years ago were examined after she passed away. I found they were not included in the family trust and showed only her name with no named beneficiary. That created a paperwork chain and involved hiring an attorney and a year of court procedures to comply with the probate process. It also involved a significant cost, reducing the amount received by the beneficiaries.

So, the message is clear. Review beneficiaries at least once a year and keep a paper or digital record of that review in your file of important papers."

Vern Hance

FPCC Solar Project Update

The installation of solar panels at FPCC is back on track. A new subcontractor has been selected by our contractor, WattHub and they are working with PG&E to obtain the electrical permit. We anticipate that to happen early December and panel installation should happen December 20 – 31 during PreSchool vacation.

We will lose approximately 6 parking spaces for equipment storage during construction, so we encourage use of the public parking garage if our lot is full. Full approval is planned for early March 2022. Details are available from Jim Whitfield, David Stearns, Frank Fribley or Jon Myers.

Jim Whitfield

From the Missions team

- In the last quarter, the Mission Team has sponsored 2 successful donation drives for SHARE Food Pantry and blankets for Core (formerly *Under the Overpass*). We are very grateful for the willingness of our congregation to help the less fortunate. We are planning to sponsor Covid versions of two of our regular seasonal projects with the same goal in mind.
- The Giving Tree program provides holiday support to families involved with Hope Solutions. (You may remember that Dena Betti, their director, spoke about the organization in August.) They have assigned us 4 families (with 8 children and 6 parents). Sign-ups will be November 21 or 28 after church in the Fellowship Hall. This year, because of Covid precautions, our tree will be virtual. There will be slips of paper ready for pick up with ideas for each family member that FPCC will be providing 2 wrapped gifts each or \$25 gift certificates from Safeway or Grocery Outlet to pay for special holiday dinners. The drop-off date is December 5.
- Our Christmas Offering for 2021 will go to United World Mission in Colorado. Sharon Azbell, wife of our former Pastor, Bill Azbell, works with this organization. She is demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to Afghan refugees who helped our military. She has started an English as a Second Language class to help them adjust to living in the US. Our offering will go toward a printer to be used for class materials. Watch for special Christmas Offering envelopes starting Sunday, December 5.

Instructions for both events will be in upcoming bulletins and e-newsletter. The Mission Team is proud to work with you in supporting out mission partners all year long and wishes all of you a Blessed Christmas and safe holiday season!

Maren Stanczak

From the Spiritual Growth team

- October 24 a Harvest Brunch was held after church. 60 people enjoyed great food (bacon, pancakes, egg casseroles, fruit and pumpkin bread) and conversation was enjoyed by all around the tables. Pumpkins were given faces made out of mixed crafting materials. If you enjoy good food and community, please mark on your calendar the next event. A New

Year's Brunch is Set for January 23 immediately after church. More pancakes and quiches will be offered with all the sides as before. Hope to see you there.

- Advent Sunday school with Pastor Johanna will be marked by 4 weeks looking at the different accounts of the advent season in Matthew and Luke on Sundays in Fireside Room after coffee time.
- We have 2 advent study groups. One is a small group on Monday and another one on Wednesday. Both groups meet via zoom in the evenings. If anyone would like to join either group during advent contact Jim Whitfield or Judith Snider to sign up.
- One heads up: In January adult Sunday school will return to study with the pastor.

Church Attendance Thank you for remaining faithful.

2021	January	February	March
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Average Sunday Attendance	n/a	n/a	n/a
Average Online Service Views	111	126	131.5

2021	April	May	June
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Average Sunday Attendance	53.75	65.4	66
Average Online Service Views	91	78.6	65

2021	July	August	September
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Average Sunday Attendance	77	69.2	74.75
Average Online Service Views	67	59	81

2021	October
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Average Sunday Attendance	70.4
Average Online Service Views	60.4

What to do this Holiday Season . . .

- November 5 - Ice at the Veranda
February, 2022 The Veranda shopping center
Check theveranda@icerinkevents.com for information*
- November 19 - Niles Canyon Railway Train of Lights
December 28 Trains depart from Niles (4:30 PM) and
Sunol (7:30 PM) on selected
Wednesday, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays
Contact Niles Canyon Railway for information*
- November 19 - Walnut Creek Ice Skating
January, 2022 Civic Park, 1375 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek
Check walnutcreekonice.com for information*
- November 26 Danville Tree Lighting Ceremony
5 - 8 PM Downtown Danville
Musical entertainment and refreshments at stores, shops and
restaurants invite the public to wander and check out the
downtown (All ages)*
- Late November - Cornish Christmas Celebration
December Grass Valley
Friday Evenings*
- November 26-28 Contra Costa's Ballet's "The Nutcracker"
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400*
- November 27 Milk & Lily Holiday Market
11 AM - 5 PM, Locust Street, Walnut Creek
Local business vendors will be selling perfect gifts for the
holidays*
- November 30 Walnut Creek Concert Band Holiday Concert
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400
7:30 PM*
- December 3-4 Once Upon a Christmas ballet
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400*

- December 3 Todos Santos Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony
5:30 - 8 PM Concord
Santa taking pictures, horse and carriage rides taking families around the park, and more. (All ages)*
- December 4 & 5 Teddy Bear Tea
11 AM - 1 PM, Heather Farm, Walnut Creek
Guests share in a scrumptious tea-time buffet with variety of savories, sandwiches and sweet treats (All ages, children especially)*
- December 5 Super Holiday Boutique
11 AM - 3 PM Centre Concord
Holiday season shopping extravaganza*
- December 5 Contra Costa Wind Symphony
2:00pm Las Lomas High School, Walnut Creek
Winterfest Concert*
- December 9-23 A Christmas Carol
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400*
- December 10 Candlelit Christmas Evening
6 - 10 PM, Benicia Historical Museum
Music, Entertainment, Adult beverages, appetizers (Adults)*
- December 10 Diablo Regional Concert Band - Holiday Concert
Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall
1150 First Street, Benicia
7 PM*
- December 10-11 Interactive Live Nativity
Morello Hills Christian Church, Martinez
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM*
- December 11 Holidays with the Fratello Marionettes
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400*
- December 11-23 A Visit to the North Pole
The Leshner Center - Contact (925) 295-1400*

- December 12 Holiday Concert
First Presbyterian Church, Concord
7:30 PM*
- December 12 Danville Community Band - Holiday Concert
AAE Del Valle Theatre, Walnut Creek
3 PM*
- December 17 San Ramon Symphonic Band
7 PM, Dougherty Valley Performing Arts Center
Holiday Winds Concert*

Just a note. There are many events scattered throughout the Bay Area that cannot be captured in this brief (but interesting I hope), calendar of events. For other items consider checking newspapers and the Internet. Most important have a wonderful holiday season!



*How many of you recall the first tree you ever bought?
I think mine looked something like this one, so thank you, Charlie Brown
For reminding all of us that Christmas is about being hopeful and
Grateful and focusing on the meaning of the day and
Not the commercialism that surrounds it.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY ALL MY FRIENDS, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

December

Don Horgan	1	Marie Asistin	9	Carol Barrilleaux	19
Matt Chapman	4	Tony Marin	10	Sue Jamerson	23
Janet Fribley	5	Harry Byrne	10	Jan Sprague	31
Kim Gilmore	6	Allen Nickerson	11		
Dennis Horgan	8	Donald Crowe	15		

January

Griffin Shea	2	Eric Harvey	15	Sheila Frey	25
Lisa Justice	5	Terry Jones	21	Kime Smith	29
DeVonn Powers	9	Adiya Herlen	23		

February

Beth Byrne	2	Jon Myers	12	Susan Lawson	26
Charlotte DeWitt	3	Kathleen Hartwick	12	Tim Patterson	26
Charmaine Ferrera	3	Mary Shipley	13	Stephen Anderson	27
Lydia Hawkins	10	Janet Beck	15		

March

Jason Stanczak	2	Trudy Meigs	13	Ron Potts	21
Helen Crowe	5	Mike Haswell	14	Diana Stearns	23
Ed Stevenson	5	Dulamjav Ganbaatar	18	Isobel Erickson	28
Joanne Myers	11	Laurie Koester	18	Ginny Schwab	30

April

Marge Hull	1	Vern Hance	6	Jonathan Aanestad	30
Suren Auysh	6	Grace Lenz	16		
Lori Vickers	6	Chuck Rose	21		





FPCC Staff

Rev. Dr. Johanna McCune Wagner
Rebecca Chase, CLP
DeVonn Powers, CLP
Andrew Cardiasmenos
Darryl McCollum, CLP
Robin Stearns
Lisa Justice, Student Pastor
Lisa Gonzalez
Harold Lund

Senior Pastor
Director, Children and Family Ministries
Director, Outreach
Director, Music & Worship
Director, Special Musical Services
Preschool Director
Director, Adult Education & Church Administrator
Financial and Human Resources Specialist
Custodian & Night Watchman



Editor's Note: First Press is a quarterly publication of the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, California, printing in Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. 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 me at allen_nickerson@comcast.net.

A Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 12. 2021 7:30 PM

HOPE
PEACE
JOY
LOVE

Featuring:

FPCC Choir

Grateful Heart Praise Band

Vocal Soloists

Brass Quintet

Flute

Percussion

Free admission all ages

Reception follows -
cookies and drinks

Optional free-will offering

Masks required



First Presbyterian Church of Concord

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