



With any organization it is good to ask the question, how are we doing? To take time to reflect and evaluate where we are in comparison to where we want to be. This is the purpose of our annual meeting of the congregation and its corresponding written report. More than a business meeting or statistical report, it is a chance to look back and read the lines of the story we have been living together and to see God's hand in it.

Two things are essential when evaluating how we are doing as a church. First, is to have a big picture point of view. As a congregation we serve a greater goal than ourselves. The church is not an end in itself, nor the focus of God's kingdom. The scope of God's rule and attention is the world. We are called, as a church, to serve that end. We are like a mission outpost in God's kingdom working to reconcile the world and all things in it to Christ. Second, is to complete this assessment as a community together. Otherwise we might be tempted to evaluate the church by our own individual likes and dislikes or objectify the church as an entity with which we are not a part or a stakeholder. We are the church together. Any evaluation of the church is an evaluation of us all, together.

With such a perspective, we can read our story this past year as one of trusting God and experiencing gratitude. From June to August, we saw a dramatic shift in staff leadership positions. With each successive announcement we felt our momentum threatened and our future uncertain. But what we did not know and could not see, God knew. Our loss was opportunity for God to work. As a result we have grown deeper in our walk of faith, we have grown closer in our interdependence and sharing of life together, we have become more aware and engaged in our ministry and service to our wider community, and we have become more grateful for God's faithfulness and guidance of our congregation.

*Dale*

Dale Flowers, Pastor

# We Celebrate

*How we use creativity in worship of God and celebration of God's creation.*

## Sharing Truths about Life

Poet, educator, and advocate for the Arts, Dana Gioia, says: *There are some truths about life that can be expressed only as stories, or songs, or images. Art delights, instructs, consoles. It educates our emotions.*

The 2018 Gallery at First art shows demonstrated this observation about the way art reaches and teaches us in ways nothing else can.

*Windows of Time: Through Hubble Space Telescope*, displayed astonishing images captured by the Hubble Space Telescope. Astronomy and science enthusiasts Mario Zelaya, Bob Shoulders, and Jack Swearingen, who selected the photos, stated their intent with this exhibit was to build an awareness of the enormity and expansive nature of the universe and to inspire our worship of God's majestic creation. We experienced a sense of awe, not only from viewing what lies beyond our solar system, but the realization that the one who made it all directs his attention and purpose toward us.

The artistry of Peter Krohn's work, *From Grief to Gratitude* helped us appreciate the creative process of an artist's use of objects, materials, and technology to make something of beauty. At the artist's reception, Peter shared his life story, the story of his family's experience in Europe during World War II, and the fact that he took up art as a means of healing at age 70.

A show of photographs taken by Becky Stender that celebrated children and their expressions filled the walls during the summer. The photos captured moments of spontaneous emotions and honest expression. Artist Stacia Tauscher says: "We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that they are someone today." Becky hoped that those who viewed the show would come away with a greater respect and love for children.



## Honoring a Long-Standing Tradition in a New Way

For more than 30 years our church has maintained a tradition of presenting beautiful music to celebrate the joy and wonder of our Savior's birth. This year we continued our tradition of presenting a Christmas concert for our congregation and wider community under the direction of Interim Choir Director Daniella Caveney. The Advent Music Festival featured choir, handbells, brass ensemble, and organ and included Christmas carol sing-alongs. Daniella made this observation of what it meant for the musicians to be part of making this season a celebration in song: *The amount of love and dedication from singers, ringers, and musicians is inspiring. . . . It's as if we've been weaving a tapestry of our love for Jesus and each of us only has one color of thread. What we create together fills our hearts even more.*



## How We Live with Jesus



We began our sermon series in 2018 with prayer -- prayer of the heart and longings of the soul. We discovered through well-known prayers that we can grow our own practice of prayer to create sacred spaces. During Lent, we looked at conversations people had with Jesus over meals to better understand his life and how we live with him. Paul's charge to the church in Ephesus to build community and discover how they are better together was our Spring series. In early Fall we were reminded that justice and mercy are intrinsic to God and therefore, more than mere tasks, they become the very substance of our lives with Jesus. For Fall and Advent we undertook a journey through the world-changing Gospel of Luke, giving our attention to ways Jesus met and ministered to people on the outside looking in.

These messages gave us a picture -- an intimate, personal, relational, and Jesus-centered picture--of what we might be together as we learn how to live with and for Jesus.

# We Care

*How we promote a culture of care for everyone to give and receive care and deepen our relational bonds.*

## Meeting People Where They Are

*"Grief is not an enemy or a sign of weakness. It is a sign of being human,"* write Bill Dunn and Kathy Leonard, authors of *Through a Season of Grief*. *"Grief is the cost of loving someone. . . ."* For those who suffer such loss, we offer an opportunity to grow from the care and support of others who share a similar life experience. GriefShare brings people together in a group setting to walk alongside one another and honor the fact that each person's journey with grief is unique. This video series and workbook is honest and filled with grace, encouraging participants to share authentically and prompting healing conversations. Regardless of a person's faith background, those who attend find hope and direction amidst the pain and loss of a loved one. Participants come to see God, one another, and themselves in new ways.

Co-facilitator of this year's gathering, Nina Campbell shared what sharing this experience has meant for her: *Gratitude flows when I think about the GriefShare alumni who have been praying for us each week. Gratitude overflows when I add to that the Stephen Ministers, who unbeknownst to them, were training me (and Scotty) to transfer their endless hours of deep listening to serve GriefShare. Gratitude bubbles over when I think about the precious preschoolers that fill my tank. Gratitude floods my heart when I think about the tender loving mentor Colleen has been. Gratitude bursts into laughter when I think about how God orchestrated circumstances to relocate to Santa Rosa my sister who knows how to get a giggle out of our group like no other.*

## Hope for a Difficult Journey

DivorceCare is a blend of lessons on specific topics with open group sharing for those who've embarked on a difficulty journey. By hosting this program we offer God's perspective on divorce, help participants experience God's grace, and provide hope for their lives going forward. Offering DivorceCare is a powerful and tangible way to demonstrate Jesus' call for us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Co-directors Rich Mason and Penny Cleary said, "experiencing divorce was, for us, like the man in the parable lying helpless on the side of the road. Not everyone stopped to help, but those who did showed us great love and compassion. It was a startling and humbling way for us to experience God's mercy and the love and care of others. Having experienced the fullness of God's grace, we now gratefully give away our love and care, without judgment, to those who need hope and healing."

## The Place We Still Call Home

The First Sunday in October we celebrated worldwide communion. We also prayed for our community as we marked one year after the devastating North Bay wildfires. We prayed for healing, renewal, and endurance for each family in their recovery efforts and our whole community's process of being restored.

Worship leader Lesley Van Dordrecht shared some of her fire story and encouraged us in our care for one another saying: *Let us commit together to looking up to the Lord God and his call and provision, and please let's continue to help one another do it in the months ahead. Psalm 62 says, "Only in God is my soul at rest, in Him is my salvation. My stronghold, my Savior. . . I will not be afraid at all." As long as God is with us, we are held in his grasp. As we go forward toward rebuilding, relocating, or just carrying on in the place we still call home, let's do it together, loving one another as Christ loved us. Just like the four friends who carried the paralytic to see Jesus, we can't do this alone. We need one another. Let's not be weary in well-doing, but continue to be God's people, together.*

## Deep Listening

Stephen Ministers hosted a two-part workshop as a way to teach skills needed to listen well. During a time when our world seems full of noise and everyone has a need to express their opinion, it is more important than ever to truly listen to the people around us. What better way to show someone they matter and we care.

## Standing Together in Love and Support



*On November 1, we joined together with other faith traditions at Congregation Shomrei Torah to mourn the loss of life, comfort one another, and convey a message of hope for our community and our nation in response to the murders of Jewish worshippers at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. By coming together we affirmed as people of faith we will not live in fear, but continue to make a difference in the world and call our fellow citizens to stand up against crimes of hate, political rancor, and acts of violence.*

*Other participating congregations included: Christ United Methodist, Church of the Incarnation, Congregation Beth Ami, Congregation Ner Shalom, First United Methodist Church, Center for Spiritual Living, and Unitarian Universalist Church.*

# We Grow

*How we make disciples and grow community.*



## A Soul-Shaping Journey

Dozens responded to our invitation to go on a soul shaping journey that began in the Fall. We speak of soul rather than life, because it implies something not superficial, but deep, important, and often neglected. Philosophers have argued the existence of a soul saying we should use instead reason or education to achieve enlightenment. The Bible says otherwise. Soul is the part of ourselves that most interests God. What made Jesus' teaching so compelling and life-changing is that he taught to the soul. He met people where they were and showed them a better way.

This journey is about learning Jesus' character through daily application and practice of his teachings. It is a gradual, intentional process, but an experience that is liberating and profoundly rewarding. We call it Apprentice Immersion.

The cohort group meets for 30 weeks to study and discuss a series of books written by James Bryan Smith: *The Good and Beautiful God*, *The Good and Beautiful Life* and *The Good and Beautiful Community*. In addition, the group engages in soul training exercises designed to help us see and understand the world as Jesus does. Each year we will extend the invitation to form new cohort groups and repeat this process of discovering our good and beautiful God.

## Refreshing Our Upstairs

Session is charged with responsibility for directing financial resources to meet the priorities and mission of our church. When giving exceeds our expenses at year end, Session decides what to do with the retained income. An agreed upon amount is kept in reserve to address a possible shortfall. At the start of 2018 we were blessed with a substantial amount of retained income beyond the reserve level. Session reviewed a list of possible uses for the money, and after deliberation and prayer chose to refurbish classrooms, floors, and walls of our upstairs. This long overdue and much needed improvement of our building's second floor serves our elementary-aged children, middle and high school students, and offices of program staff. New carpet and wood-like vinyl flooring were installed; walls, ceilings, and hallways painted; and new lighting, signage, artwork and furniture added to complete the "refreshed" look.

"The upstairs update definitely created a designated and intentional place for kids to be kids" said Cory Myers, Director of Youth Ministries. "Both youth rooms are abuzz with students engaging each other on Sunday mornings – kids know they have a spot to hang out and be together." When Session approved this project our hope was that children, teens, and their families would see our church's commitment to them by providing an inviting and safe place to gather and worship. This was all made possible thanks to the generosity of our congregation.

## Investing in Our Youth

Our Youth Internship program accomplishes two important objectives: (1) relational investment in the lives of our students; and (2) ministry training and leadership development of young adults.

Our current population in youth ministry is quite diverse. Half of our student participants have no family ties to FPC. Yet, as a result of attending a youth event, they have found a community, and a sense of belonging. Our need for leadership in this area is greater than ever.

Luke Shoulders, Lizzie Walls, and Lauren Walters provided leadership during the year as youth interns. They connected with students on a personal level, engaged them in small group learning experiences, and followed up with them during the school week.

## One Book, One Church

*"Always be on the lookout for the presence of wonder," wrote E.B. White in his classic book, Charlotte's Web. We looked out on the young adult novel, Wonder, by R. J. Palacio and chose it for our One Book, One Church summer read. Then at the end of July we gathered in the sanctuary to view the movie version of the book about the life of middle school student Auggie Pullman. Who will forget the life lessons Auggie's teacher, Mr. Browne taught when he spelled out (P-R-E-C-E-P-T) on the chalkboard and asked his class what it meant. When they didn't answer he wrote: Rules About Really Important Things! -- the kind of rules or words that motivate us, govern our behavior, and determine our life choices. Then Mr. Browne wrote out the first month's precept: When Given the Choice Between Being Right or Being Kind. Choose Kind.*



## Connecting Through Nature

Through shared interests in nature, we came together to experience new discoveries and build community in the process.

Bird enthusiast Scott Campbell shared characteristics of bluebirds and we constructed bird houses together. Experienced bird watchers Marcia and Keller McDonald led a group to view migrating Vaux Swifts. Amateur astronomers Bob Shoulders and Mario Zelaya, set up telescopes on the church lawn for an evening of star gazing. Trailblazer Bruce Purcell led a group of hikers on a day trip through Jack London State Park.

## Oasis Mom's Group

In the fall women who had been involved with a mom's group that met several years ago started talking to each other about how much they missed that gathering: the community, the study, the time to meet and share with other moms in the same season of life. They decided to work together to get the group started again: choosing a day and time to meet, finding available space, coordinating childcare, thinking about what to study, and getting the word out to other moms who might want to participate. Angel Maszy, in her role as Director of Children's Ministries was a huge help and support in facilitating all of the details. What started in September has become a wonderful experience of renewal.

About twelve moms gather each Thursday morning for an hour and a half to share their lives, study, and pray together. Some moms have older kids who attend school for the day, others bring their toddlers to play in the nursery/preschool room with childcare helpers, and others hold their babies on their laps. Some moms are long-time members of First Pres, while others are new to the church or have kids attending Presbyterian Preschool. Just as before, this group is a joyful, loving, and encouraging place to be, where women journey together as they follow Christ.

## A Lasting Imprint

Following the Gesell learning method, over sixty children at Presbyterian Preschool are given freedom to develop at their own pace and learn through play and discovery in a stimulating environment. Parents of three and four year olds value our Presbyterian Preschool as a place where their children are given an opportunity to grow and develop socially, physically, intellectually, creatively, and spiritually.



After thirteen years of leadership, coordination, and loving service to preschool-age children and their families, Co-Director Carlyn Knight retired at the end of the 2018 school year. Drawn to Carlyn's bright and warm smile, children were enriched by her attentiveness and kindness. Her skills of teaching, training, and administration will leave a lasting imprint.

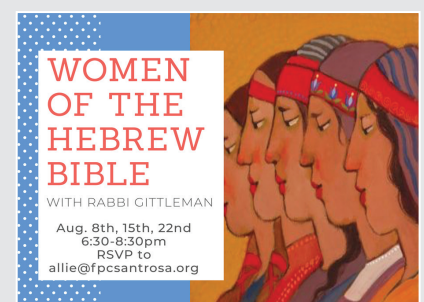
The Preschool's future is in good hands as fellow Co-Directors, Amby Takekawa and Lucy Loupy continue to provide direction and outstanding leadership along with beloved teachers and dedicated parents who serve on the Board of Directors.



## Soul Training Workshops

*Author and seminary instructor, Helen Cepero led a workshop on journaling as a spiritual practice. Participants learned how to grow in relationship with God using prayer and writing exercises.*

*Rabbi George Gittleman of Congregation Shomrei Torah taught a three-part series on Scripture study focused on Women of the Hebrew Bible. Using Scripture, midrash, and class interactions, Rabbi Gittleman increased our understanding and appreciation for how we read texts which speak of women whose lives and faith stories influenced Israel's history and tradition and ours.*



# We Serve

*How we encourage each other to live in a missional way — fully immersed, culturally aware, and effective witnesses of the gospel.*

## In the Middle of God's Mission



The missions dinner in October featured our mission partners Perry and Karen Shaw, from Beirut, Lebanon. It was a grand and celebratory occasion with great Middle Eastern food, fabulous décor, and a challenging talk about hope in the Middle East. Perry and Karen have worked for decades in Syria and Lebanon, and they interact with people who hail from all over North Africa and the Middle East. Through their storytelling they brought some of those people into our midst to help us see how God's kingdom is breaking through even in the midst of war, oppression and turmoil.

The Mission Committee has the job of (1) overseeing our church's significant commitment to serve God's kingdom around the world, and (2) involving our whole congregation in it. Most of what we do happens through our mission partners, and it happens overseas.

How can people be involved in what they can't see? The missions dinner tried to answer that question. For one night, we *could* see and hear the people we support and the work that God does through them. Given the excellent turnout—of over 200 people—and the enthusiasm that filled the room we accomplished our goal.

What we saw and heard through Perry and Karen could be multiplied a dozen times with each of our mission partners and associates. They serve God in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia and in Europe. Where they are, we are there with them—they are us! More than partners of our Mission Committee—they are partners for all of us in First Presbyterian Church.



### Note of Thanks from the Shaws

*A word of thanks for all the affirmation, encouragement, and support you gave us in our recent visit — and over the years. We appreciate how you include us as part of the congregation and for the trust you put in us. We are grateful for the opportunity to preach and speak of our mission work and your involvement with us . . . We admire what has been accomplished, by the grace of God, at FPC: the vision, energy and atmosphere of love and openness.*

## You Have Our Love and Support

Our mission operating budget for 2018 was \$126,032 which represented 10.8% of our total budgeted income. Additionally, we gave another \$64,865 in designated mission giving. When budgeted and designated mission giving are combined it represents 15% of our total giving as a congregation.

Of these designated funds, \$51,884 went locally to address such needs as: homelessness, housing, hunger, and fire recovery. \$12,981 was given toward global outreach. All three seasonal mission offerings were designated to support local community service partners with whom we work to convey God's love and care of those in need.

- Our Easter Mission Offering in the amount of \$8,463 supported Sonoma County's Habitat for Humanity's Aging in Place program which provides low-income seniors affordable and reliable solutions for their critical home repair needs. Kylie Dayton, Habitat Family Services Associate, says, "This program offers financial support to a vulnerable population which can become socially isolated due to few or no support networks. It helps maintain precious Sonoma County housing stock and creates enjoyable, enlightening experiences for both volunteers and homeowners."
- Our Fall Mission Offering in the amount of \$13,957 supported Catholic Charities' proposed Caritas Village. With this gift we contribute to two of the largest issues of our immediate community; namely, housing and homelessness. Once constructed, Caritas Village will provide 130 units of housing, 52 family shelter rooms, program facilities to address homelessness and health, and staff offices.
- With shared experience of California wildfires devastation, our Christmas Mission Offering in the amount of \$11,796 was designated for Butte County's fire recovery work.

# We Support

*Management of resources and infrastructure to support and sustain our mission and ministries.*

## Change All at Once

The summer began with Bob Brazeau's announcement of his retirement at the close of the choir season in June. By the start of fall, three more people shared news of leaving their roles on staff; namely: Jerry Lindberg as organist; Brenna Hesch as Associate Pastor; and Angel Maszy as Director of Children's Ministries.

Suddenly we had four positions to fill. Musicians Norma Doyle and Craig Hanson filled organist/pianist roles and a team was formed to begin a search for a new choral director. Margi Vonk and Suzanne Brazeau Carr provided continuity of choral groups. Daniella Caveney was hired as Interim Director of Choral Music in September. In October we announced that Kent Webber and Emily Stockert would share part-time pastoral duties to fill the vacancy of our Associate Pastor position-- Kent started in October and Emily in December. Daniella made us aware of John Pavik as a possible organist and he joined our staff in late November. Lead teacher Darcy Fluitt and volunteer leaders continued to address Children's Ministries priorities until a director could be found.

Anxious and wondering if suitable and qualified candidates could be found for each of these roles, God answered our prayers. We have been blessed to welcome competent and skillful leaders who serve God and our congregation with great enthusiasm and grace. Praise God!



## A Chorus of Praise and Appreciation

It was a beautiful, sunny September day, the first day back for the choir. Twenty tables were decorated with old sheets of music for placemats; vases held yellow and white daisies; and in the center was the number 29 stacked atop hymnals. The decorations and theme were arranged to honor Bob Brazeau's 29 years of service as Director of Music Ministries at First Presbyterian Church.

More than 175 people filled Ingram Hall for Bob's retirement celebration and to demonstrate our love and appreciation for his leadership of a quality music program. A lunch of quiche, salads, fresh fruit, homemade rolls, and cupcakes were displayed on tables set up in the shape of a cross to reflect Bob's love of the Lord and his dedication to prepare and present choral music as an offering of praise to God.

The celebration was characterized by fun, laughter, and appreciation. The Chancel Choir sang lyrics describing Bob's conducting style and distinctives, and select speakers paid tribute to Bob's musical skills, worship integrity, and relational bonds. The event concluded with a presentation of a gift from the congregation and Bob--holding grandson Tavi in one hand and a microphone in the other--telling us what it has meant to work with so many people and share life with them as a church family.

Mary Rodgers and Elaine Carlson served as coordinators of this event along with a lot of ready volunteers who shared a strong desire to make this a wonderful celebration for this beloved servant of God. Thanks Bob - as you and a famous fellow musician said, "To God Be the Glory!"

