

**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
San Luis Obispo

The Kirk
August 2021

NEHEMIAH COMING HOME

We reopened cautiously on July 25th, and so far things are going pretty well. I chose the text and message very carefully for that Sunday, and I want to share some of it with you here.

We looked at the story in Nehemiah 8:1-10, where the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt after Judah came home from exile. Now that needs some background detail. After King Solomon died, his sons couldn't agree on who would take over, and in the end the northern region became Israel, and the southern part became Judah—it's in Judah where we find Jerusalem and some of the other holy places.

Over time Judah forgot the covenant with God that gave them possession of the land in the first place. They get taken into exile, and by the time we pick up the story they've returned to their home, rebuilt the Temple for worship, and now they're shoring up the walls around the city so they can be safe.

Part of coming home meant hearing the Law of God—that's shorthand for the first five books of the Bible (the Torah). They stood outside and listened to the words and they were heartbroken at how far they had strayed from who they were supposed to be and how they were meant to live.

Their return home was a mix of joy and grief.

It came with a call to live up to their covenant with God.

When the people heard who they were meant to be, they wept.

When they heard just how far they had strayed from the covenant, they wept.

When God's people heard what God expected of them, they wept.

Nehemiah could have spoken words of judgment.

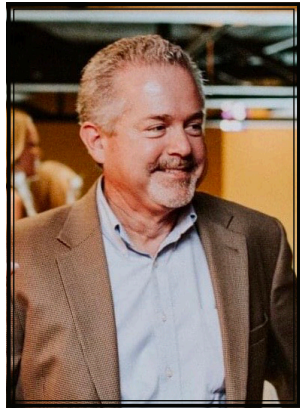
He could have called down punishment on the people.

Listen to what he said instead.

“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep. Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Let's get this straight. God's people were taken into exile because of their disobedience, and when they came back they were reminded of why they were in trouble in the first place.

Nehemiah and the other leaders of Judah read them the Scriptures, then told them all to have a party. And just in case anyone was left out, they said to make sure everyone had some good food and good drink so they weren't left out.



God's people in the time of Nehemiah made a priority of keeping each other safe—that was the point of the wall. They focused on the future of who they were called to be. They read and reflected on the Scriptures as their guide to understanding what God wanted from them. And they celebrated and shared with their neighbors.

I think this story from our Bible says something about our reopening. Of course, our story is different—no one here did anything wrong to get us closed down. A pandemic that threatened the health of the whole world forced us to close. It forced us to figure out how to be together while staying apart.

But look at everything we learned this past year—Zoom, YouTube, and so much more. We learned to be flexible, adaptable, and creative. We learned a lot about being the Church of Jesus Christ.

We can learn some things from Nehemiah and the people of Judah.

These lessons from the story of Nehemiah are going to be some of our priorities as we come back together in a new way.

- First, we need to continue to keep each other safe. Masks, vaccines, distance—all of that is there to keep you and the staff safe.
- We need to do what we can to rebuild this church for the next generation. The time to focus on the next generation is right now, when we're already being flexible, adaptable, and creative.
- We need to focus on the word of God, to shape our interior lives and to teach us how to serve.
- And finally, we should always remember to rejoice, to celebrate, and to make sure that no one around us goes without.

These next months are a critical time for this church. Join me in praying that we can all embrace these four lessons, and live into the blessing Nehemiah shared with his people.

“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep. Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

CHILDREN'S ED

Best week ever! After 15 months, we had kids on campus for one week of VBS. It was amazing and our hearts are full. We learned about God and ourselves. We sang, worked on arts and crafts, ate snacks, heard stories, and played hard. We collected for the Blessing Box and filled it up - with enough donations to continue to fill it for a while. We met new friends and loved seeing old friends. We wore our masks and washed our hands—a lot. Thank you to everyone who donated time and money. Lots of amazing memories were made and we really appreciate all of your support.

Watch for details for our programs and ministries to start in the fall. We look forward to getting back to it—in all new ways.



YOUTH

This summer our Youth have been busy. Enjoying vacations and family time and really just being out and about. We have had fun the times we were able to get together. We look forward to the fall and our programs being in full swing. We look forward to being able to invite friends to join us and see where the program year leads us. Our Youth and their families are awesome, and we appreciate their hanging in there this past year and a half. Some of the Youth were able to volunteer for VBS and help with all the getting ready and taking down. The kids loved having them join us and so did the leaders. We are all looking forward to some fun activities throughout the rest of the Summer.



MUSIC AT FPCSLO

After a seemingly endless time apart from group singing, I am THRILLED to announce we will be resuming church choir in the fall!!

As the pandemic and the worship process at church is adapting by opening with one service, we too will open with one choir. This choir is open to all former chancel choir singers, praise singers, and even people who have never sung in an FPCSLO choir before. All are welcome!

We will sing a wide variety of hymn arrangements, praise song adaptations, traditional and more modern music, with a few surprises thrown in (always!).

To begin, we will only meet on Sundays to practice, be in community, and sing. It is likely that we will work back into our weekday rehearsal time as time goes on. But for now, we will keep it to the schedule below:

Sunday mornings

8:45 a.m. Rehearsal

9:45 a.m. Prayer and break

10 a.m. Service

Our first rehearsal will be Sunday September 5, and our first time singing in THE service will be September 19, just to give us a few weeks before we are ready for public presentation.

All singers will need to be vaccinated to sing.

I am sure that you will have many questions. Do we have to wear masks? To robe or not to robe? In this time, please know that many of these details are still to be worked out and are ever changing in our current environment. Please be patient, and in time, the scales of blindness shall fall from thy face and all shall be revealed.

Can't wait to be in community together soon!

Scott

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

To the following seniors (over 85) who have birthdays in August:

John Stechman – August 1

And to everyone else with a August birthday!

Our church records may be incomplete. If we have overlooked someone, please contact the church office.

CONGREGATIONAL CARE CORNER

Please pray for our church family, especially

For Pastor **John D'Elia** as he leads our congregation;

For our **Elders** as they guide our congregation in making decisions about the life of our church;

For the members of our various church committees as they help us find new ways to worship and interact within this changing COVID situation;

For the **Deacons** as they care for our church family;

For **Jen Rabenaldt** and others as they stay in touch with our children and youth;

For our church members, friends, and family who are undergoing treatments for various health issues;

For our church's seniors, especially those who are alone in their homes or care centers;

For members, family and support personnel serving in the military;

For all of us as we serve God wherever He calls us.

If you have a prayer concern, please call the Church Office at (805) 543-5451 or email me at gdekley@calpoly.edu.

God bless us all,
Gloria DeKleine

ENDOWMENT

As predicted a month ago, the second quarter 2021 Endowment Fund ended with a healthy gain. On June 30, the Fund returned 5.16 percent, all from market growth, compared to three months earlier. And for the first half year, the Fund grew by 3.61 percent. Put another way the Fund expanded enough to not only recover the 2021 allotment of over \$33,000 but also it added over \$34,000.

The FPCSLO Endowment Fund is invested in the New Covenant Funds Balanced Growth Fund, owned by the Presbyterian Church (USA) Foundation.

Of course, there is no assurance that these earnings will continue or hold for the next six months; but they bode well that there will be more than enough reserves to allow for another allotment in 2022. The annually allotted funds are used to help pay for Christian Education and Youth Ministry, Missions, Worship and Music, Property maintenance, and general budget support.

Thank you to those who have invested in our church's future by donating to our endowment or have included First Presbyterian SLO in your wills or trusts. All gifts are used as the donors specified.

Have you prepared your will? NOW! is the best time to do it.

If you are currently doing tax or estate planning and/or feel led to include a gift to the First Presbyterian Church of San Luis Obispo in your financial or estate planning, please contact any member of Endowment Committee: Peggy Estes, Don Green, Jerry Kaml, Ray McKelvey, Diane Shervem, Bert Townsend, or Virginia Walter (Chair). If you haven't already done so, please consider inserting one simple statement in our wills: *after all my bills are paid, 10% of my estate will go to First Presbyterian Church of San Luis Obispo.*

BUDGET & FINANCE

Our financial situation as of June indicates a weakening financial health that gives us some concern.

In the month of June 2021, total income was \$27,268 and total expenses were \$39,367. This decreased Total Reserves (our savings account) by \$12,099, leaving a balance of \$83,713 as of June 30, compared to the \$112,099 balance reached in January 2021. In other words, some of our operating expenses for the past five months have been funded out of Total Reserves.

Total giving was less for the past two months, averaging \$30,118 a month, which is less than average monthly giving previously this year. This gives the committee concern that we may not reach our budgeted giving level this year.

Expenses in the worship, education, and congregational life committees have been below plan because of curtailed activities during the pandemic. We anticipate increases in these committees, and perhaps in staffing once we resume in-person worship and education programs.

Session, particularly committee chairs, and staff will monitor spending in order to assure that critical elements of our mission will be fully funded.

Your continued faithful giving will enable FPCSLO to continue and enhance our service to the congregation and the community.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

THANK OFFERING

During the month of August our church's Presbyterian Women and Missions Committee are asking you to help support our denominational Thank Offering (<https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/giving-funding/give/thank-offering/>) that provides much-needed financial assistance to 20 to 30 worthwhile programs each year. The recipients are always a mix of domestic and international projects, but all meet crucial needs. At least 40 percent of this offering funds health ministries, often helping the most marginalized members of God's community.



A grant proposal written by former member Dana Easton was awarded to our local “Shower the People” project in 2018 to help purchase the portable unit used to provide homeless with a means to be clean on a regular basis. For more information on Shower the People, see <https://www.showerthepeopleslo.org>. Please give generously to help support more projects of this kind.

This is one of four annual denomination donations supported by our Missions Committee. Donate by sending a check or giving through on-line giving with Memo line PW Thank Offering.

If you have questions about this offering, please contact one of the current board members of Presbyterian Women. They are Mary Blythe, Nellie Beecher, Peggy Estes, Gloria DeKleine, and Evelyn Ruehr.

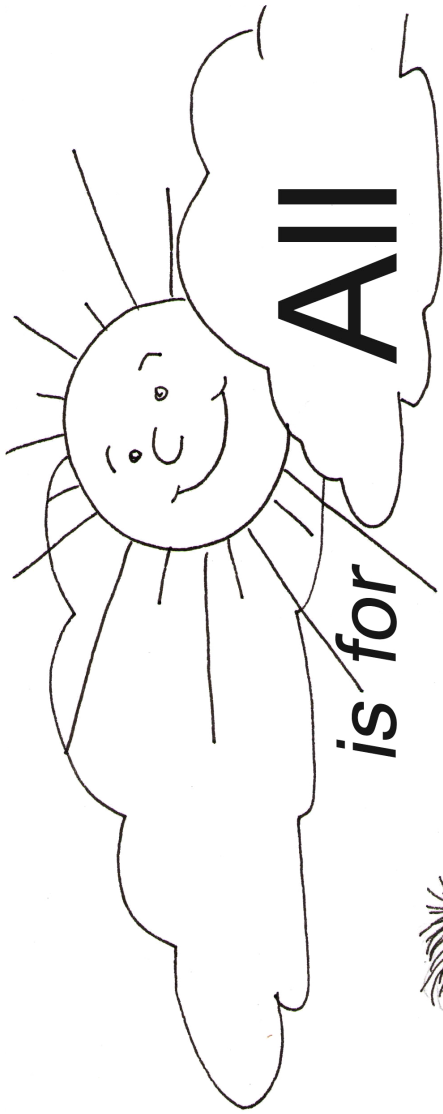
JAZZ VESPERS

SAVE THE DATE

Jazz Vespers resumes this Fall.

October 17 at 4 pm The Dave Becker Quartet
(Marshall Otwell, Dylan Johnson, Darrell Voss)

December 12 at 7 pm Christmas Jazz Vespers
with Inga Swearingen and the Marshall Otwell Quartet
(Jeff Miley, Ken Hustad, Darrell Voss)



All

is for



A



A is for All of Us Working and Playing Together



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