



First Presbyterian Church at the heart of Anaheim

November 14, 2024

Dear Members and Friends of Anaheim First Presbyterian,

In our recent congregational survey the last question was, *In ONE word, how are you feeling about your church right now?* We received many answers to this question (Dying, Good, Positive, Inviting, Well, Troubled, Valued, Anticipation, Done, Concerned, Love, Sad, Wonderful, Happy Memories, Okay, and Content) but the most commonly offered word was “HOPEFUL” followed closely by “BLESSED.” This makes sense to me because those two feelings go hand in hand. We are hopeful not because we wear rose colored glasses and are naturally optimistic, but because we have experienced God’s blessings and so trust in God’s continued care. Hope is an emotion, but it is also an action verb. A quote I recently ran across defines hope as “a verb with its sleeves rolled up. Hope is always busy trying to change the odds.” So, this letter is an invitation to counting your blessings with sleeves rolled up as we lean into hope as we try and change the odds for our congregation through two upcoming opportunities.

Counting (and Sharing) our Blessings: a Service of Thanksgiving and Commitment on November 24.

In Genesis 12 God tells Abraham that God will bless him so that he can in turn be a blessing. We too are invited by God to count our blessings as individuals and as a congregation so we can pay God’s gifts to us forward into the lives of others. Enclosed you will find an **Estimate of Giving Card for 2025**. Please take some time between now and November 24 to count your blessings and then prayerfully decide what you sense God calling you to use to bless others through the ministry of our congregation. We also invite you to bring non-perishable items (food, personal care, and cleaning items) to donate to Hub of Hope and Family Promise. During the worship service we will offer both our 2025 Estimates of Giving and our donation items to God so that others may be blessed.

Financial Realities and an Update on the Calvin Sale.

The sale of the school building has hit another snag. The buyer (Vibrant Minds Charter School) lost the offsite parking that is a requirement imposed on them by the City of Anaheim. This means that the sale could not close in November as originally planned. However, the good news is that as I was writing this letter we learned that they have secured a new (and better) parking location. We now hope to close the sale when their financing window reopens in mid-January. At that time we plan to address some desperately needed deferred maintenance and property improvements as well as fund an investment account to provide an ongoing income stream for the church.

However, even after the sale, our financial challenges will not disappear. We have operated in the red for many years, but have received unexpected funds and donations that kept us going. Recently our General Fund balance dropped low enough that we have had to transfer funds from an investment account to pay legal fees (associated with the Calvin sale) as well as cover payroll and other bills. The sale will help our financial situation (likely generating somewhere between \$90,000-\$120,000/year in income) but our annual budget is around \$400,000/year. We will continue to receive rent from our property partners and the Session continues to explore additional funding sources, but we will always need members of our community to roll up their sleeves and dig deep to fund our ongoing mission. With fewer members, it is also more important than ever for each person get involved by offering their gifts of time and talent.

Seeking to Change the Odds. Join the Storytelling Gathering on December 8 following Worship.

We are in the midst of a congregational discernment process. We have completed a congregational survey that offered a snapshot of our congregation. This week and next we are holding Focus Groups to flesh out our understanding of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities of our congregation. The next step in this journey will take place after church on December 8. While we enjoy a light lunch we will be led in a time of storytelling by our consultant, Craig Williams. We will remember the high and low points of our congregation's long history and tell stories from our experience with the church. Please try and clear your calendar so you can participate in this event.

Let me remind you why this is important. As I have said on numerous occasions, my "Best By" date has passed and my "Expiration Date" is quickly approaching. For this reason, as well as for family commitments, I need to retire no later than sometime in 2026. This discernment process will allow us to call a co-pastor or seek the next pastor while I am still with you. Rather than going through a long period of temporary, transitional leadership the congregation will be able to move smoothly from one pastor to the next. There is no doubt that pro-actively engaging in this discernment process will greatly increase our odds of thriving in the next chapter of our congregation's life.

This is a critical point in our life as a congregation and there is no doubt that some challenges lay ahead. However, one of the blessings of being a congregation that is nearly 155 years old is that we have been here before. We know that God is faithful. We know that God provides. We have seen what God can and has done in and through us in the past. So, as we enter 2025, let's count our blessings. With sleeves rolled up, let's offer what we can to God to change the odds. And let's lean into hope.

Gratefully and Hopefully,

Kim Skilling