



Good News for the Pews

August 2024

A Quarterly for the English-Speaking Worshipping Community

Issue No. 40

The Changing Church

by Pastor Don

I've been doing some thinking. When I was up at Zephyr Point in mid-July, as a teacher for the Art of Transitional Ministry (what used to be called Interim Training). I listened to about thirty Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist pastors talk about their faith communities and some of the common things progressive churches are facing. I began to sketch out an analysis for our current era in the life of the church. The contemporary landscape of American religion, marked by the rise of Christian Nationalism, bears striking resemblances to historical religious and political movements. I want to explore some parallels between Pharisaical Judaism--the Pharisees, Priests and Scribes and King Herod's rule, the 4th and 5th century Roman Empire when Constantine declared Christianity the official religion, and the current rise of Christian Nationalism. This is only a kind of mental sketch that I'm thinking about, and I would like to share some thoughts before I leave for vacation.

Pharisaical Judaism, a religious movement within Second Temple Judaism, which was at its height during the life of Jesus, emphasized strict adherence to the Law and ritual purity. While it originated as a pious response to foreign Greek and Roman influence in Judea, it evolved into a rigid, legalistic system. This legalism, combined with a sense of superiority, alienated many Jews and ultimately contributed to the fracturing of Jewish society. The Pharisees' emphasis on external conformity over internal spiritual transformation echoes the "righteousness based" teaching often associated with certain strands of conservative or Evangelical Christianity.

The 4th and 5th century Roman Empire witnessed the Christianization of the Roman state. While Constantine's Edict of Milan granted religious tolerance, subsequent emperors transformed Christianity into the official state religion. This conflation of Church and State led to a politicization of faith, as religious leaders sought to influence imperial policies. The allure of power and privilege corrupted the Church, leading to a decline in spiritual vitality. Similarly, Christian Nationalism seeks to establish a Christian theocracy in the United States, blurring the lines between religious and political authority.

Both Pharisaical Judaism and the Christian Roman Empire were characterized by a sense of exclusivity and intolerance. The Pharisees viewed themselves as the sole custodians of true religion, while the Christian Roman Empire persecuted pagans and so-called "heretics;" basically anyone who didn't toe the lines of orthodoxy. Christian Nationalism, too, exhibits a similar spirit of exclusion, often demonizing marginalized groups and promoting a narrow, monolithic vision

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The Changing Church *(continued from page 1)*

of Christianity. In their cross hairs are the rights of women and place of women in society; access to medical and reproductive care; recognition of the rights of non-white racial groups; recognitions of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and of course the acceptance and honoring of religious pluralism.

The contemporary church faces a crisis of identity and relevance. Declining membership, coupled with the rise of secularism, has forced many congregations to reevaluate their mission and purpose. In this context, Christian Nationalism offers a seductive narrative of restoration and power. By promising to "take back" the country for Christians, it taps into a deep-seated longing, among some, for a return to a perceived golden age. However, this nostalgic vision is built on a distorted and selective interpretation of history.

To counter the allure of Christian Nationalism, the church must rediscover its prophetic voice and its commitment to social justice. I write that as if I know exactly what this means. I don't totally but I'm drawn to the idea that the church's core purpose is fostering community and shared spiritual experiences. While service and social justice remain important, perhaps we should emphasize shared faith journeys and community *building* well as *service*. By shifting our emphasis to community and spiritual connection, we may discover new and vital ways to engage with a changing world.

The historical parallels between Pharisaical Judaism, the Roman Empire, and contemporary Christian Nationalism provide valuable lessons about the dangers of conflating religion with politics. By understanding the historical context, the church as a whole can better equip itself to resist the temptations of power and exclusivity. Ultimately, the church's true calling is to be a community of love, justice, and reconciliation, a beacon of hope in a world often marked by division and fear. This aligns with Jesus' core teachings of love for God and neighbor. It invites a more inclusive and welcoming church, one that values diverse perspectives and experiences. As we navigate uncertain times, rediscovering the church's essential role as a source of community and spiritual growth could be the key to its enduring relevance. Even though I am about to go on vacation, I'll be thinking about these things. I hope you will too. We'll have plenty to think about and a lot of work to do in the coming season!

With blessings,
Pastor Don

Thank You from the SF Interfaith Council



Pictured left to right: Jeanette Huie, Michael Pappas – SFIC Executive Director, Cindy Joe, and Winnie Chu – SFIC Board Member

Members of the English Worshiping Community have supported the Interfaith Winter Shelter for over 15 years by cooking and serving dinner at one of their temporary shelters. The San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC) started this program in the early 1990s to ease crowded conditions in homeless shelters during the cold winter months.

On the morning of June 13, the SFIC met at St. Mark's Episcopal Church to acknowledge all the churches and groups who provided meals this past winter. Jeanette and Cindy attended the meeting to accept their thank you gift - a bottle of extra-virgin olive oil!

The Mission & Evangelism Committee will probably reserve a date in February 2025 to cook and serve for the Interfaith Winter Shelter. We hope you can join us and volunteer next year!

Jeanette Huie

The NAPC held its annual meeting June 27-29, 2024 in Salt Lake City, Utah. Cindy Joe attended representing the Chinese Caucus, and I attended as moderator of the National Asian Presbyterian Women (NAPW). The NAPC is a Council that includes members from national ancestry group councils: Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Taiwanese, Thai and Vietnamese groups, and from NAPW.

The caucuses and the NAPC are under the aegis of the PCUSA National Ministries, Racial Ethnic and Women's Intercultural Ministries (REWIM). We had presentations by the Rev. Ralph Su, Associate for Asian Intercultural Congregation Support, and his boss the Rev. Chris Romine, Assistant Director of REWIM. We heard greetings from Rev. Hiroshi Oshiro of Japan Ecumenical Ministry, the Rev. Neal Presa former GA Moderator, and from our host church the Japanese Church of Christ.

Rev. Neal Presa is the new the Executive Presbyter of San Jose Presbytery, since Rev. Joey Lee retired.

Princeton Theological Seminary student, SueAnn Shiah, shared with us her journey of faith and calling for ministry using her experience biking around Taiwan as an illustration. As an American-born Taiwanese she sought clarity of her racial and cultural identity. The journey to/around Taiwan was transforming and affirming of her identity as a child of God.



DEACONS REPORT

by Diane Go

Greetings from the English Worshipping Community's Board of Deacons: Kathy Tong (co-chair), Dayton Leong (co-chair), Eunice Bejar-Lee, Pat Chan, Terry Chan, Carole Chinn-Morales, Shar Hall, and myself, Diane Go.

The Board of Deacons continues to provide compassion, witness and service to our members and visitors. We continue to meet monthly and are back to meeting in person on the third Sunday of each month. We also continue our outreach to our Super Seniors who are unable to join us in person at church with visitations, cards, and email cards.

On behalf of our worshipping community and also just for fun, my husband Stuart and I made a trip in May to Texas to visit Jeannette Wei, Jim Caldwell, Alex Hum, and Max Hum. All are doing well and were not impacted by the bad weather that was happening at that time.

In June, members of the Board participated in hosting the celebration of life at PCC for Phil Chin who had been a supporter of PCC and Cameron House.

The Deacons are planning some gatherings for the fall. Mark your calendars for a potluck dinner on Saturday, September 21st. Details and sign ups will be coming out in the Saturday PCC email and Rag Sheet.

We are also planning a workshop for EWC attendees on Pastoral Care for Asian Americans, presented by Chaplain Henry Wong, who has presented a similar workshop for the Board of Deacons in the past. Details will also be posted in the Saturday email and Rag Sheet.

And lastly, we have a newer, simpler email address for prayer requests:

prayers@pccsf.org. Again, it is a confidential email address for anyone who wishes to submit a request either to the Deacons only or to be shared with our English Worshipping Community.

Mother's Day and Father's Day Celebrations

by Kay Wong

To celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day, the Cantonese Worshiping Community held events to honor the importance of mothers and fathers in our lives -- Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Proverbs 11:16a – "A gracious woman gets honor."

After the May 12th Sunday worship, with Pastor Michael Chua attending, we gathered on the second floor of the church for a Mother's Day event. Ninty-seven year old Vicky Wong, one of the most senior members of our community, also joined this event. Every mother received a beautiful rose as the Mother's Day gift, and all of them took a photo to remember the event. Our choir began with the hymn "How Great Thou Art", following that hymn, everyone sang the hymn "You Know I Love You". After Pastor Chua prayed for the mothers and all the participants, all the people enjoyed a lunch containing three courses of delicious Chinese food.



The Father's Day event was held on June 16th. In this Sunday Worship, Pastor Chua preached a sermon with the topic on Christians honoring parents. He quoted the Ten Commandments in the Bible, Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." During the worship service, the choir sang the hymn "How Great Thou Art". Following the service, all the fathers took a Father's Day photo and received a gift, a lovely cup offered by Glen Choy, a member of the community.

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As with Mother's Day, the Father's Day lunch contained three courses of Chinese food which brought the enjoyment of the event to a higher level. The event concluded with Pastor Chua's prayer stating that honoring your father means to love and respect him. He quoted Leviticus 19:3, "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father."



San Diego County Flood, January 22, 2024

by Douglas Clark

When people think of San Diego, often what comes to mind is pleasant weather, moderate temperatures and a relaxed lifestyle centering around outdoor activities, often at the beach.

For the most part, a lot of that is true. But San Diego County is a big land area with varying types of terrain, climate and density. Years pass by and things go along pretty smoothly, until they don't. Most often we think of fire. Or earthquakes.

But on January 22 of this year, the sunrise at 06:49 hours was on time and what seemed to be another winter day with rain started off OK but rapidly deteriorated at 09:34 hours when the National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning for South San Diego, an area south of State Route 94 and to the east of Interstate 5. The neglected Chollas Creek Storm Channel was unable to handle all the water flowing through it, so it overflowed and backed up into residential neighborhoods.

Not only South San Diego but Spring Valley, National City, and other parts of the county were affected. And to make matters worse, for two hours according to KFMB-TV (CBS), the storm stalled over the county. Damage was major.

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And as before, UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and other aid agencies across the county responded as needs became known. A new group called Together San Diego has formed and is coordinating folks and resources to help those affected.



*Torn up flooring and cut drywall with sled to drag to skip container.
With Krista Bilderbach of the Costa Mesa United Methodist Church.*

In March, my UMCOR team leader, Karl Ports and I worked with another volunteer to help a recent Iraqi immigrant and his family “muck out” the damage to their home. Karl made cuts to the drywall, which had been damaged by water, and the other volunteer and I used hammers and other tools to rip out the drywall, bag it and take it to the curb for collection.

The following month, Together San Diego brought together some of us UMCOR volunteers together with others to an apartment complex to rip out drywall, damaged flooring for about six units and haul it away along with stoves, refrigerators, heating units and other damaged appliances to large skip containers on site. And the work continues weekly helping those displaced to this day.



With Tom Davis and another volunteer dismantling a damaged closet.

Long-term recovery from events like these or the Lahaina fire on Maui or the Paradise fire in Butte County take a long time. Together San Diego will continue to coordinate and gather volunteers for as long as it takes. And church affiliated groups like UMCOR will continue to help put into practice our faith and offer a “caring Christian presence” to those in need.

A Day in the Life of This PCC Member – Sunday, June 2, 2024

by David Soohoo

Woke up to the morning light streaming through our bedroom windows. It's going to be another beautiful and clear day. As most days, I lay in bed planning and thinking about the day ahead. (Not very good at morning prayers). Got up to feed our cat "Bumble Bee" and took care of "bathroom business" before checking in with Marcella and grabbing a bit of breakfast.

This morning I had also to check in with Karen and her family, who were in the midst of the "Corral Wildfire". Her community was on standby for evacuation. I was told it was 70% contained, so there was no need for evacuation. Whew, a relief for both our families. In the meantime, we were also preplanning four days of solo house sitting with the grandkids. One of those days included a day at the Oakland Coliseum with the Oakland A's.

I checked and waded through emails and stumbled upon a curious message on "Linkedin" website regarding a AAPI Heritage Month Recognition of none other than Jonathan Soohoo. I had to re-read it a couple of times to confirm it was authentic and real. So that prompted a phone call to Jonathan to ask about this recognition. He didn't answer, so I left a message for a call back. No call back this morning, must have been "busy".

With the little time I had left, I worked on preparing and collecting data for the end of May financial reports for our Session. Not hearing back from Jonathan, I jumped in the car to make my 30 mile trek to the church. Prior to the worship service, I had to check on our assigned greeter/monitor and communion servers. At the service, Rev. Hammond's sermon was "Observe the Sabbath and Keep it Holy". Had a nice Sabbath Sunday lunch and fellowship and hopped on to my trusty Honda to head home.

I did speak to Jonathan regarding his AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) Heritage Month recognition from the Young, Gifted and Green, <https://www.younggiftedgreen.org/> a non-profit environmental justice organization that influences policy change through political advocacy, mentorship, and training. I found the recognition enlightening!

I also had an opportunity to speak to Irene Ng, regarding the *Good News for the Pews* newsletter.

I spent the rest of the afternoon preparing the end of the month financial reports and an agenda for the Resource Committee. Dinner was followed by some YouTube clips and a movie.

Actually, this personal narrative was a lead in to sharing a little tidbit on our son, Jonathan. Some of PCC church members have asked about Jonathan. So, I am proud to share his following honor:

HONORING JONATHAN SOOHOO: A CHAMPION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE JUSTICE

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**YOUNG
GIFTED
& GREEN**

Climate Champion

**ASIAN AMERICAN,
NATIVE HAWAIIAN, AND
PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE MONTH**

JONATHAN SOOHOO

Learn More

bit.ly/celebrateaanhpi24

As we celebrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, we are proud to highlight the remarkable work of Young, Gifted & Green’s Board of Director Member Jonathan Soohoo, a tireless advocate for environmental and climate justice. Throughout his career, Jonathan has made invaluable contributions to protecting our planet and empowering underserved communities.

After graduating from The George Washington University with a degree in Political Science, Jonathan began his journey in the world of organizing as a field organizer – his first job out of college – supporting a U.S. Senate candidate in Louisiana. Jonathan’s exposure to environmental advocacy began while working for a communications firm that provided services to a national coalition of environmental advocacy groups.

In 2016, Jonathan’s career trajectory took an exciting turn when he joined the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)’s youth initiative, Defend Our Future. Defend Our Future mobilized young people across the United States to become active champions for climate action and environmental protection. Working with a team, the initiative flourished, and he helped lead a nationwide network of student-led chapters, local elected officials, volunteers, and other young activists who united in their mission to drive meaningful change. Jonathan also led Defend’s legislative strategy, bridging the gap between policymakers and young leaders across the country. While with Defend, Jonathan honed his skills in managing complex operations, fostering effective partnerships, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Jonathan’s commitment to environmental justice is unwavering, whether when empowering young activists, urging policymakers to take action on more equitable solutions, or working with impactful and environmental justice-focused organizations like Young, Gifted & Green that are on the ground and solving challenges faced by communities of color and low-income neighborhoods who often bear the brunt of environmental degradation.

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Most recently, Jonathan brought his skills to philanthropy, where he partners with environmental, community-based, and grassroots organizations that share a commitment to advancing an equitable clean energy future – a world in which anyone can benefit from the clean energy revolution and where those who have been marginalized have a seat at the decision-making table.

Throughout his career, Jonathan has been a tireless advocate for environmental justice, recognizing that the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect marginalized communities. He has worked diligently to ensure that the voices of people of color as well as other underserved communities are heard and that their unique perspectives and needs are prioritized in the fight for a sustainable future.

As we celebrate Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, we celebrate individuals like Jonathan Soohoo, whose dedication to environmental and climate justice has had a profound impact on communities across the United States. Through his laudable efforts, Jonathan has demonstrated that by amplifying diverse voices and fostering collaborative solutions, we can create a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

Many of you know Jonathan as quiet, shy, unassuming, and reserved. And he still is!

Marcella and I are extremely proud.

“Observe the Sabbath and Keep it Holy”

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Have you ever wanted to be a web page designer?

It's actually not that hard! The PCC web site uses software from Wix that makes editing a page as easy as laying out a slide in PowerPoint.

If you'd like to give it a try, contact Dave Miller.

In November 2, 2015, residents at The Sequoias were offered a three-session workshop on writing a legacy letter. Here’s what I wrote. *

Ethical wills or legacy letters are your values, values to live on. This has deep roots in Jewish tradition, e.g. Jacob gathering his 12 sons and giving his blessings. Moses gathering the Israelites and giving them his blessings. Jesus teaching his disciples to “love one another.....”

An ethical will is a complementary text that communicates personal values, beliefs, blessings, and advice to relatives and future generations. It allows their writers to convey their values, the lessons they have learned through living, to their loved ones. While these documents can become a cherished keepsake for their recipients, the process of writing these documents can also be extremely valuable for the writer and a powerful way for a community of writers to learn from and about each other.

Why write?

- 1. For yourself: What do I stand for? What are my values? Self-reflection. Self-discovery
- 2. Pride and accomplishment that I wrote this.
- 3. I can be a better person that I’m now—self-improvement.

Homework: *The Quick Write* for 10 minutes. Write ideas on paper, once a day, for 10 minutes on 4 topics:

- 1. These were the formative events of my life.
 - 2. These were some important lessons I have learned in my life
 - 3. This is my definition of true success
 - 4. This is how I feel as I look back in my life.
-

November 2, 2015 – 10 minutes of Quick Write (1)

These were the formative events of my life:

- 1. Moving: Chicago, Seattle, S.F
- 2. Going to Cameron House
- 3. Graduating from high school as valedictorian
- 4. Going to college
- 5. Teacher
- 6. Marriage
- 7. Children
- 8. Preacher’s Wife (PW)
- 9. Swarthmore: 1st home. Director of Children’s Education
- 10. “Glamorous” (but taxing) life as Associate in Women’s Program, NYC
- 11. Sons graduating from college
- 12. Returning to the SF Bay Area
- 13. Widowhood
- 14. Life at The Sequoias

These were some important lessons I have learned in my life

Maturing/Learning: Can be motivated by overheard negative remark from a woman who didn’t know me at Swarthmore Presbyterian Church: “How can she be the new Director of Children’s Education? She’s so shy and quiet.” While this is true, I was determined to prove her wrong!

. *Bloom where you are planted* – a suncatcher given to me by Associate Pastor, David Coleman upon working with him as the DCE. (continued on page 13)

. Dave was proud of me. At Swarthmore PC he was known as Irene’s husband and not the reverse

This is my definition of true success

I have to think about this

This is how I feel as I look back in my life.

1. Grateful...to God...to church....to family....to friends
2. Amazed: being alive.

Being able to afford to live at The Sequoias. My mother was worried when I married a minister. She sent me “Care Packages,” to help out with his minimal salary.

November 4, 2015: 10 minutes of “Quick Write” (2)

My parents emigrated from China to the U.S. It was only when I was in my late teens that I recognized and admired their adventurous spirit. My parents did not assimilate into the American culture; they never spoke English with us. Unfortunately the cultural differences did not fare well with our family of nine. Two of my brothers developed mental illness and had to be hospitalized. My marriage to Dave was the positive force in staying healthy mentally.

I was the 2nd child and the 1st daughter to go to college. As years went by, this was an excellent decision. I first became an elementary school teacher and in later years used my education skills in church education.

Ten minutes is up. After writing this, I think I should go into #2 which would help me more in writing my legacy.....

November 5, 2015: 10 minutes of “Quick Write” (3)

These were some important lessons I have learned in my life

One of the personality traits which I didn’t have but wanted to possess was “the gift of gab.” To do this, when I traveled to Ireland in 1984 when I was 47 years old, I kissed the Blarney Stone, not once, but twice. Did it work? Well....sometimes. You see, once Dave said to me about communication skills, that “no one likes to be told that “the emperor has no clothes” or saying this another way “you catch more flies with sugar/honey than with vinegar.”

Besides going to Ireland, I’ve been blessed that when Dave did workshops at conference centers, he often took the family. I went to a class on Transactional Analysis based on work by Eric Berne, and using the Thomas Harris book in the late ‘60’s *I’m OK--You’re OK*.

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At the Women's Book Group in Swarthmore in my early 30's, started by my mentor, Mary Thompson, I found I could hold my own with the female church leaders and speak openly with conviction. This was when the feminist movement began. Mitch Estey gave me my first *Ms. Magazine* which was a surprise because I didn't consider myself to be a feminist.

I like to read.

I found this quotation is a goal for me:

Goodwill is not enough;
Your good intentions are not enough;
you have to be artful.
Mindful living is an art, and
each of us has to train to be an artist.

Thich Nhat Hanh, 2015, in *How to Love*

My definition of true success: is to be a Christian. Questions I also ask myself:

Am I a good person? Was I a good daughter? Was I a good wife? Was/am I a good mother?

Am I a good grandmother?

My mother told me that her goal in life was to see that her four daughters owned their own homes. Since we all did, she acknowledged that her role as a mother was complete.

My definition of true success: To love God with all my heart and soul and with my mind and strength and to love my neighbor as myself.

Homework: Now do 15 minute writing. You don't have to complete the letter. This could be a gift that keeps on giving. **Add the blessing: "I hope....."**

Maturing/Learning: Can be motivated by overheard negative remarks about oneself.

I hope that if life or someone throws you lemons, you use those lemons to make lemonade.

I hope you keep on learning, becoming more mature as you age.

I hope you celebrate life transitions.

. (Upon leaving a job and moving from the east to the west coast). I received a framed art work from the Synodical of the Northeast where I worked as the Associate for Women's Program, 1985-1988 in New York City. "To Irene with thanks for teaching us how to reach for rainbows".....

. I did upon retirement as the office administrator at First Presbyterian Church, San Anselmo, with a wonderful party!

As this is my last issue as the editor of *Good News for the Pews*, I thought this article would be a fitting piece for me to include. I hope it will be an incentive for YOU to write a legacy letter. My first draft for this issue summarized the above into one page. Then I thought, "I am leaving out all the interesting parts of the legacy letter!" Thus, you have 3 pages!

Congratulations to Jana and Darren Woo! They have a baby girl named Dayna to add to their family. Big brother is Jaylen. Grandparents are Jojo and Jerrick. The Woo's and Cheuk's families had a nice vacation. They went on a Disney cruise ship to Alaska. I hear the kids just loved seeing the Disney characters. The adults enjoyed the excursions, food, and the entertainment on the ship.

Amoena and Jim Quan, along with their daughters, Aimee and Jeanee, and some of their family members went to Alaska. It must have been a nice family reunion. Jeanee later met up with her son Shane in Vermont and New Hampshire. Shane has been walking the Appalachian Trail which he started in March and will complete in Maine very soon.

Jik, Josh Chuck, and their kids went to Thailand to visit with her family so the kids can see their grandparents and other relatives. Josh had a busy year showing *Chinatown Rising* to school children, college students and other adults who invited him. We hope Josh had a good restful trip.

This year my friends and I took a bus to the Canadian Rockies. We started in Vancouver and ended in Calgary. Weather was cool like San Francisco. The scenery was just beautiful. Mountain tops were covered with snow. The lakes were full of water. Lake Louise wasn't as blue as I remembered it. This photo is the Columbia Icefield in Jasper. I am so sad now. Jasper had a huge forest fire. The town is all gone. Trees are burnt. I hope somehow the people can rebuild their homes and the town can be restored.



Pastor Don will be taking a much needed vacation to Germany. We wish him a good trip.



Theme for the 226th General Assembly in Salt Lake City, June 30-July 4, 2024

I get the PC(USA) Weekly News online. Here's one of the items that caught my eye:

“Live into Hope,” the theme for the 226th General Assembly, is drawn from a hymn text by Presbyterian hymnist Jane Parker Huber, which was originally written for a United Presbyterian Women’s National Meeting in 1976. The hymn reflects Jesus’ first sermon in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus, reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, announces that he has been anointed by the Spirit to proclaim good news to people who are poor and oppressed....”

Hurray for PW!

Irene Ng



2024 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women
August 8–11, 2024 • St. Louis, Missouri

Behind the Scenes of Plenary

by Linda Lee

At the Churchwide Gathering (CWG) the plenary sessions are focal times when the whole community gathers to celebrate, worship, hear from our upcoming Horizons Bible Study authors, and receive updates on mission partners and PW offering recipients. But it doesn't just happen! Jeanette Huie, chair of the 2024 CWG recruited me to be a member of the Planning Team. I was assigned the members of the Plenary Work Group: Khayla Johnson, Beth Olker, Lydia Tembo, and PW staff program associate, Cheri Harper,

The task of building Plenary started almost 2 years ago. Taking the theme—"Do Everything in Love"—decided by the PW Board, the work group studied the scripture, I Cor.16: 13-14, and we selected five topics for the five plenary gatherings:

What Does Love Have to Do With It? - Cindy Kohlmann

Loving Our World—Yung Me Morris

Loving Our Neighbors –Evelyn Torres

Loving Ourselves—Laura Cheifez

Loving Out Loud—CeCe Armstrong

Speaker suggestions had been submitted by January of 2023, and the Plenary Work Group reviewed all the names and prioritized our top choices. Our PW staff, Cheri Harper, contacted the women as well as contacting the Bible study authors, mission partner speakers and PCUSA officers, scheduling them into sessions.

It was a gift to have young women Teaching Elders on the work group, although each faced the challenges of young adults: raising young children, job changes and uncertainty. Often finding times to schedule our meetings was a challenge! But Beth Olker and Lydia Tembo worked together to produce the beautiful liturgies and scripts for each session. (Lydia and I stood together after first plenary and almost cried at how moving the liturgy was!) *(continued on page 17)*

Khayla Johnson volunteered for the role of Energizer/Emcee. Unfortunately Hurricane Debby kept Khayla stranded at home (at least safe and with power). Shari Stump had been in communication with Khayla about this role, and from her past years of experience was able to step into the full responsibility at the last minute. We missed having Khayla's wit and personality bless this CWG, I hope she's available next time!

Other decisions include selecting the hymns, the musicians, contracting for the tech team, the zoom transmission, the translators, the stage décor and endless details. Cheri Harper is the queen of details and managed contracts and hauling in the communion supplies and other décor. She timed all the presentations from speaker scripts sent to her and coordinated the slides and visuals with the techs.

Even after all the planning every plenary session needs prep! Microphone checks for each speaker (up to 20 per session), instructions for 16 ushers taking offering and 32 communion servers; organizing the processional of past/new Board members, USAME participants, PW Synod Moderators, PW staff, and CWG Planning Team; preparing the offering bags, the communion elements—Whew -- approximately one hour before each plenary, the work group assembled to take care of these details.

Based on the overwhelming responses to each session I knew the Holy Spirit used all the efforts the work group made to inspire, energize, and empower the 2024 PW CWG. Indeed we did everything in love! Praise God!



Linda leading the closing prayer at Plenary 1

The PW Gathering: *Do Everything in Love.* Remembering Almerita by Mary Wong Leong



I signed up to attend the Presbyterian Women Churchwide Gathering because I wanted to support Jeanette and Linda, who were key figures in the planning of the event. With my frustration in registering on line (I must have tried over half a dozen times or more!), anxiety in booking travel and being bombarded with Churchwide Gathering information, I was feeling as if I made a mistake signing up. Anxiety of travel, not being able to sleep the first night, confusion and disorientation in new surroundings, struggling to find where I was to go, only confirmed the fact.

But by the end of the Gathering, I was glad I'd attended. Some inspiring speakers at the Plenary (gathering of all the women) alone was reason enough to be there. Rev. Cindy Kohlman knows it's hard to hold onto love in the midst of anger - but to claim peace, hold tight to compassion; fiercely hold onto love. Cecelia (CeCe) Armstrong, Co-Moderator of the 226th General Assembly, said learning to love is like learning a foreign language, you have to immerse yourself in it, practice it, use it. Veda Pendleton, a Horizon's study author, shared that 'equity' (not equality) is not a dirty word. Equity is what each person needs to thrive. She compared it to shoes! Looking forward to the study! Laura Cheifetz unveiled that love is revolutionary, practicing love helps us to love more. Love requires courage. Yung Me Morris was such an inspiring speaker, I missed taking any notes! The Plenary speakers were not the only inspirations. I attended 6 workshops, one where we got a clearer understanding of setting boundaries in love (bullies and other offenders not welcomed!) and another one where we were able to create our own 'soul collage'. Lots of 'food for thought'.

Almarita Rout was a faithful, strong, Black Presbyterian woman. She attended Presbyterian Women gatherings every triennium. When the time came she could no longer travel to the gatherings, she spent time making souvenirs. One year it was laminated book markers, another year, beaded bracelets for the attending Presbytery's women to bring there to share. To continue the tradition, I carried fans to pass out to strangers who became sisters in the faith that touched my heart. Each and every one was surprised and delighted to receive this gift of appreciation.

It was a whirlwind experience, packed with so much enrichment in so short a time. Impossible for one person to digest. So glad to have experienced this with five sisters from our church!

by Pat Chan

This was my fifth time attending a Churchwide Gathering. My first time was year 2000 in Louisville. Jeannette Wei and I were roommates. We had a good experience and had good company.

This year was a different experience since the last in-person gathering was in 2018. I was being installed as the Asian American Member at large. This time I was invited to join the processional Thursday night at the plenary. I barely made it because we got in late for dinner. It was really an honor to walk with my fellow board members. I was able to see and chatted with about six board members and two of the three Moderators.



Linda asked me to help with the table decorations for the Saturday night banquet. I folded some paper cranes at home. Four crafting friends at church offered to help me fold more cranes. We had good fellowship that day. The origami paper we used was so pretty. I thanked them for sharing their paper. Thursday night we gathered at Jeanette's suite. I learned how to string them up. We taped the string onto the wooden skewers. Friday night we completed the 80 we needed. The left over cranes were on the table and later given away. Here is the photo I was able to take. The room that had all the jars made up without the lights. The lights were so pretty when we sat down for dinner.

Workshops were good; the keynote speakers were excellent. We had our Synod lunch to do some catching up and had a short business meeting. I'm so glad that the committee decided on zooming the plenary so those women that could not travel could see some of the gathering. Even though attendance was low, all those who attended were all excited and happy to be there. The new Board and the two Moderators will be working hard the next three years.

When I learned that the Churchwide Gathering 2024 theme is “Do everything in love” (1 Cor. 16:14), I thought, “That’s good, and it’s a nice theme.” But by the time the gathering concluded, I realized the theme was clear, definite, powerful, and a calling from God.

From the plenaries to the workshops to the evening receptions in Conference Chair Jeanette’s presidential suite, the theme was the glue that wove together what I learned and was inspired to practice.

Praxis, putting word, and in this case, theological learnings into action. First, there were the rousing words of the plenary speakers, especially those of the Rev. Yung Me Morris and the Rev. Laura Mariko Cheifetz who reminded us that loving the world requires that we have appropriate self-love. Second, there were the workshops which were opportunities to explore how what was soaking into my heart and mind could be put into practice in real life. Although the workshops I attended were wide ranging in their focus (best practices for church finances, getting to know the young adults in 2024, family disaster preparedness training, Racial Equity Dialogue (RED Model), social justice is love in action, and the roots and remedies for anti-Asian hate). The connections between the plenaries and workshops and worship were cohesive and coherent. And finally, there were the connections, formal and informal, planned and spontaneous, with old friends I had met before who once again blessed me with their love and warmth, and new friends who opened their hearts as we shared stories, photos, smiles, and tears.

Love is the reason these things happened. “Do everything in love” was the perfect theme for this Churchwide Gathering. Thank you, God, for the honor and privilege to attend this event and have precious connections with my PW sisters!



A Transformative Experience

by Jeanette Huie

Now that the 2024 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women has taken place with positive outcomes, I can relax again! I was asked to be Chair of the Gathering back in November 2021 and my first task was to form a team of five work groups (16 women), which took nearly six months, but it was well worth the time to build this strong foundation. Linda Lee was part of this team as Chair of the Plenary Work Group and you can read about her experience on pages 16-17. The next step was to work the PW Board of Directors on selecting a theme. I’m amazed at how much work can be accomplished via zoom. We narrowed it down to about a dozen suggestions but we kept gravitating back to “Do Everything In Love” from I Corinthians and so the decision was made.

(continued on page 21)

Initially I felt that it was an honor to serve as Chair but now I feel that it was a gift. The PW staff and the work group members became a part of my life for over two years. As to why I took on this job, I was curious about the process of planning for this event and wanted to be part of the decision-making. But the relationships and connections made with everyone along the way was more sustaining for me. I thought I had a busy schedule... I was humbled by the women on the planning team when I learned about all that they accomplish between work, church and family.

My first PW Churchwide Gathering was over 30 years ago at Purdue University in Indiana. At that time, I had become more active with Women's Fellowship and learned about the PW organization, which Women's Fellowship supports. I recall feeling overwhelmed at that Gathering, being in the midst of 5,000+ women and overloaded with too much information. More importantly though, I also recall feeling a sense of community and sisterhood that extended beyond race and age. As I became more active with PW locally, and then regionally, I eventually served one term on the PW Board of Directors at the national level from 2012-15. I was following in the footsteps of Cindy Joe, Doreen Der-McLeod, Mary Wong Leong, and then Pat Chan served in 2018-2021. Did you know that Irene Ng was on PW staff when she and Dave lived in New York City? She provided resources and support to all the PW groups in the Northeast section of the United States!

Changes in our churches throughout the country also affects Presbyterian Women. Attendance at the Churchwide Gatherings dwindled each time (every three years) and in 2024, our attendance was just 900 women. I actually prefer this size over thousands of attendees but it's not financially sound.

The morning plenary sessions started at 8:30 in the morning but the beautiful singing and powerful speakers kept me awake! The Rev. Yung Me Morris, in her dramatic plenary address titled "Did You Eat Yet"?, explained that this typical Korean greeting is shorthand for asking "Are you taking care of yourself? Did you meet your most basic need today because you are important, your life is important, and it's worth preserving."

When I think of hospitality, I immediately think that involves welcoming a friend or neighbor into my home and offering them something to eat or drink.

Yung Me offered a broader perspective - "Hospitality is how we love the world, but it is not easy because hospitality puts people over profits. Hospitality challenges unjust policies that might cut food stamps or deny children lunch at school. It will also confront unjust laws that make it illegal to feed the unhoused. There are cities with that law on the books."

She challenged us to show more hospitality in a world gripped by famine, war and polarization; and for those going without food because of traumatic experiences such as war, homelessness and greed. "Remember, hospitality doesn't ask, 'Are you a Republican or a Democrat?' Hospitality doesn't ask, 'Who's right and who's wrong?' Hospitality doesn't ask, 'Is it in the budget?' Hospitality saves lives, and it's a moral imperative even today."

NAPW PARTY AFTER CWG CLOSING BANQUET by Cindy Joe

After the closing banquet, Asian Presbyterian friends headed to Jeanette's Presidential Suite to hold a Gathering to promote our next National Asian Presbyterian Conference to be held on April 25-27, 2025 at Mercy Center, Burlingame.

The PCC-6 met Asian Presbyterians from Kansas, Indiana, and Southern California and the cities of Houston, Los Altos, Irvine, and San Jose. Kelsey Law is now the Vice Moderator of PWCT Board and also Moderator of our Southern Cal APW. Ruth Fong of San Jose Presbytery is the Asian member-at-large of PWCT Board. Ruth will be our piano player at Mercy Center.

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