



# Good News for the Pews

May 2024

A Quarterly for the English-Speaking Worshipping Community

Issue No. 39

## From Pastor Don

So this is going to start going in one direction, and then take a turn and go somewhere completely different. Think of it like an adventure in reading. I'm sitting at my gate in the Denver airport this afternoon after a two day conference for the PC(USA) Board of Pensions. Don't worry I'm not thinking about my retirement. I was here as a representative from the San Francisco Presbytery Committee on Ministry (COM). In addition to our actual pension plan the Board of Pensions (BOP) is the agency that manages all of the benefits for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and other church workers, including our medical plan, various assistance programs, and host of continuing education and wellness programs. This year the benefits plan is going to change *dramatically* for many pastors.

Every year at the English Worshipping Committee Annual Meeting you see my total benefits package. About two thirds of my compensation goes to me as salary and housing allowance. Another third are the various dues for my pension, medical benefits, and death and disability coverage. The program was instituted in the late 90s, and (spoiler alert), the old model no longer functions for our current reality. When the plan was designed the amount paid into the pension plan was largest percentage of dues. Today the medical benefits portion is almost three times higher than the pension portion. All installed pastors, working 20 hours or more, (specifically all Ministers of the Word and Sacrament installed in PC(USA) churches) are required to be in the same benefits plan, and their churches pay the same percentage of their salary for benefits, 39%. Whether the pastor makes \$50,000 or \$110,000 their church pays an additional 39% for dues. For many churches the combined package is unaffordable.

Because some churches lack the financial resources to pay that amount they have to have part time pastors, or Commissioned Ruling Elders (who don't *have to be* paid the same—though they can be). 30% of churches with 150 members or less can't afford and do not have installed pastors. *Only 20% of Black congregations have installed pastors.* Of the 4049 ministers ordained in the last 15 years, 1167 have never received any benefits from the BOP; 63% of them are women.

The cost of the current plan, paid for by the local churches but subsidized by the BOP is simply unsustainable. The cost of health care continues to skyrocket. Newly ordained ministers, people of color, and women are more likely to be excluded. The BOP is thoroughly

committed to maintaining the full benefits, but the cost of the plans must change. More people must be brought in to share costs, but some flexibility must be found. For many churches the dues paid will go up. The standard package will go from 39% to 42% in 2025. Fear not! New options will allow single pastors with no dependents, like yours truly, to actually lower their dues. But if the next pastor after me is married with children, the dues will be higher than what is paid now. The dollars and percentages are not the story here. The out of control medical costs in our country aren't the story either. Many will tend to focus on the "what" that needs to change. Some might focus on "why." I want to look at the "implications."

And this is the turn I mentioned. The facts and statistical information is important. But as I usually do, I want to try to look at this through a theological lens. We say that God is outside of time. Another way to say it is that God exists completely in all moments in time simultaneously. The God of King David's time is the same God of now, and the same God of 30,000 years in the future. But as we know, human history moves forward in linear time. With me? OK, hang on. We think of the church as a human institution: the buildings, the Book of Order, the hymnals and the committee meetings. But we also think of the church in a mystical sense as the Body of Christ. Historically we have also referred to the church as the Spotless Bride of Christ, the Branches of the True Vine, the Family of God, the House of God, and the Holy Temple Wherein God Dwells. Still with me? OK.

So while in the theological sense, the Body of Christ cannot be diminished, but in the human sense, the institution of the church is obviously diminishing. The role of the church in society is changing. It is no longer the center of community spaces. Membership measured in both numbers and living people is declining sharply, especially in the liberal, but also in the conservative churches. Young adults are opting out of church participation and church membership in astounding numbers. I suspect that in the United States as the conservative political movement continues to roll back the rights of women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community in the name of "Christian" or "Biblical" faith, more and more people will turn from the church. And I can't really blame them. I mean I see that there is tremendous value, tremendous blessing to be found within the church, but I can also see that the church as a human institution can cause harm.

So what is going to happen? Well God knows the future, and I certainly do not! But I do wonder... and so let me invite you to wonder with me. It seems that the institutional church may continue to contract as 'membership' continues to decline, and we tend to think of this as something to lament. Perhaps the institutional church needs to contract. Or perhaps the church needs something else; perhaps we need more transformation. Maybe there is a good metaphor? Perhaps "the Body of Christ is exhaling a bit before a big inhalation?" I don't know. But I still believe that the center of this is Jesus Christ. And that is enough. I believe the Gospel will always need to be delivered. I believe there is something here, something for everybody. What form? Beats me! Sounds like an adventure to me.

## Deacons' Report By Diane Go

The Deacons are off and running in 2024!  
Your current Board of Deacons is as follows:

Eunice Bejar-Lee  
Pat Chan  
Terry Chan  
Carole Chinn-Morales  
Sharlene Hall  
Dayton Leong, co-chair  
Kathy Tong, co-chair  
And me, Diane Go

The PCUSA Book of Order states—

“The ministry of Deacon as set forth in scripture is one of compassion, witness and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress.”

It has been 10 years since I last was a Deacon. The look and feel of the role of Deacon has changed in significant ways, and it is all good! The big change that I notice from 10 years ago is the shift from a focus on service to our worshipping community to a ministry of outreach and sharing of compassion and love. I wish to acknowledge and thank the Resource Committee for its support and service in making this shift possible.

So what have we been up to? We meet monthly with Pastor Don Hammond. We continue to reach our community through birthday greetings to all members. Led by Eunice Bejar-Lee, we have reached out to our college agers and “away” young adults with care boxes loaded with goodies. *(continued on page 4)*



**Deacons Report** (continued from page 3)

We continue to stay in contact with our Super Seniors, including Su Lee Tom, Frances Low, Ruth Leong, and Lulu Gam. Our Easter Project this year focused on sending cards to our Super Seniors, and also to those who have been experiencing loss and difficulties. And although we haven't had any recent requests, we continue to monitor our Deacons Compassion Fund.

What is different is the ongoing focus on the prayers for our worshipping community and beyond. There is a constant sharing of concerns and joys and the need for prayer for not only PCC members (all worshipping communities) but also families, friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. I truly believe in the power of prayer and so do your Deacons!

If you have any prayer requests, joys to share or other concerns, please contact the Deacons at [ewcprayers@pccsf.org](mailto:ewcprayers@pccsf.org). You can also talk to Pastor Don or any one of the Deacons in person.



**What I Learned from My Experience on an Accompaniment Team...**  
**by Carole Chinn-Morales**

Last year, Clinton and I responded to the plea from IM4HI (Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity) for a few volunteers to join Sha'ar Zahav Synagogue's newly forming accompaniment team. We were told that a young man from Honduras had landed in the Bay Area after being held in detention. He knew no one here, and needed supportive friends right away. Unbeknownst to one another, Clinton and I both volunteered.

Accompaniment was not a mystery to me when we first joined, having talked to members of other teams, studied the IM4HI website, did the training, and with the help of Clinton and Susie, proposed to the Commission that the English Worshipping Community might adopt accompaniment as a ministry. But this was all abstract learning, until we actually met Carlos and tried to establish a trusting relationship, encourage him to reflect on three goals that the team might help him with, and to plan for regular check-in Zoom meetings to share updates, address problems, and just be there for Carlos.

Carlos was, in fact, a leg up when we met him. He had been already welcomed by a nonprofit in Oakland, and together with IM4HI, had an apartment he was to move into in San Francisco, and a lead on a job at a factory that made bakery products, where he eventually did get employment. Some opportunities to be helpful seemed obvious, like helping him move from Oakland to San Francisco, obtaining safety equipment for his bike ride to work for the overnight shift, providing good usable clothing, and finding pots and pans and kitchen ware (all subsequently donated by PCC members...thank you!), sharing some hot meals, or taking Carlos out to dinner at our favorite neighborhood Chinese restaurant, where we quickly found out his favorites, salt and pepper pork

## **What I Learned from My Experience on an Accompaniment Team.....(from page 4)**

chops, but not bitter melon!

Other ways to be of help were related to Carlos' stated goals. One of these was to reunite with his family who were separated from him when he entered detention. When he thought that his wife and son could come soon from Indiana, Clinton immediately started checking on possible schools in the area, looked up flights and dates, and even offered his own travel miles to purchase the tickets. (Clinton has let Carlos know that the offer is still good into the future!) When the plans fell through, all of us were disappointed, but this is part of what I discovered that was very valuable to experience--being able to accept flexibility, adjusting to starts and stops, missed appointments, communications failure--these are all part of the experience, which tested my own endurance, persistence, ability to reset and move on, my capacity to deal with my own disappointment, and how not to let temporary setbacks deter moving forward, or morph into anything negative.

The learning from more positive experiences included trying to problem solve as a team, to experience being interdependent in a good way. No one person had the complete knowledge or the bandwidth to respond to complicated issues alone—all of us had to rely on each other, be alert, weigh in with good ideas, thoughtful questions, a willingness to learn, and share resources. We all contributed as we could, and it somehow worked out.

At our closing session at the Chinese restaurant mentioned above, we shared gratitude and a sense of wonder that time had elapsed so quickly. I felt thankful, but also wondered at how much more we might have accomplished together. Unfortunately, Carlos had lost his employment around that time and also had to find new housing, so the realities and pressures of survival continued to be present, and, thankfully, the team and Carlos together found a “crisis mode gear” to find and to sort through the options.

As I look back and reflect, Carlos' own resilience was the most impactful lesson for me. His positive attitude in the face of obstacles, his commitment to do whatever it took to survive throughout the years, but especially now in the United States, dealing with his sense of trauma and uprootedness, as well as to continue pursuing his goals without giving up—challenged and inspired me, and I think, all of us. I only hope that our team was as helpful to him. And I hope that our PCC accompaniment team will act as lovingly, wisely, and with grit and determination--all in Christ's name and with the energy of the Holy Spirit, that all will be blessed--the asylum seeker, the team, and all of PCC, as we live into becoming a Matthew 25 congregation.

## The Cantonese Worshiping Community

by Eleanor Wong

The Cantonese Worshiping Community celebrated Easter Sunday on March 31<sup>st</sup>. We had prayers, scripture readings, and hymns to celebrate this joyful moment. Pastor David Pan was the preacher. His sermon *Walk with the Lord of the Resurrection* was based on Luke 24: 13-35. Pastor Pan explained that “the road to Emmaus” reveals how Jesus opens our eyes to see who He is and how we can come to know Him. The journey to Emmaus is both a literal and a spiritual journey.



*Cantonese choir with Pastor David Pang*



*Scripture reading Elder Raina Mak*

A special luncheon followed after the service of worship. We joined together to sing Easter hymns led by Elder Kay Wong and Pastor Raymond Yee.

We also had time for members to share with their own experiences and to tell their reasons why they thank God. Here are four stories:

Sister Huan Yi Zhen – Thanks to the Lord for all the blessings in her life. Last November, she took a full month’s trip to visit her hometown in China with her entire family. Also, she fully recovered from her cataract surgery on both eyes last September.

Sister Feng Liu – All thanks go to our Risen Savior. She has been experiencing the grace and peace from God, as well as her family of 4 children, 8 grandchildren, and 3 great grandchildren.

*(continued on page 7)*



*Testimony given by Sister Liu.*



*Testimony given by Brother Luo.*

Sister Vicky Wong – Praising God for bringing her son back. He had been a troubled kid since high school. He faced disappointments and challenges for many years. God listens to her prayers. She sees a big change in her son now. He even takes care of her more often.

Brother Lizhi Luo – After 11 years of waiting, he and his wife finally got selected to a Section 8 housing at Broadway Street. They are very grateful to God for being able to move in to a much bigger and comfortable living place.

Through this Easter season, these are the few things for which we are most thankful to God.



*Hymn singing led by Pastor Raymond Yee.*

Meditating through what the cross meant for me this Easter season, I looked back at some of the Old Testament prophecies that proved the sanctity of Christ and his sacrifice through their fulfillment of God's word. The prophecies in the Old Testament are God's testimony of Jesus' status as our Savior, reinforcement of our faith: "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true", "the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.", and "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:31-32,37,39). But beyond being proof of the promise, the prophecies bring an understanding of the greatness of Jesus' acts and our gifted grace.

In Isaiah 63:7-14, the passage recounts God's steadfast love, and how when God judges his people, He doesn't recount their merits but the merits of his own work in building us up. God brings himself glory by being undeservedly compassionate, sustaining the people of Moses like a shepherd and his flock. And He had the right to judge his people, who rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit, when He had previously saved and lifted up in righteousness.

Through our flesh, we might only see redemption as a consumable, constantly requiring more forgiveness as we fall short. Moreso, through the lens of truth, we know we cannot produce any forgiveness worthy to bring us to a righteous state. Alone, we can feel justified to continue sinning, feeling undeserved to partake in the light. But God's forgiveness is unrelenting, unchanging, and insurmountable. He gives us reason to rid our ways to prolong in despair of our unrighteousness. It is this great promise and his good, just character that should encourage us to "press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). Jesus' eternally completion of our salvation was motivated by God's will to make us perfect, to prioritize our efforts towards our transformation walking with Him. And this God did through unbearable pain on his son Jesus, no matter the weight of our sins past, present, and future.

When we read of God's unwavering, just, yet compassionate nature, it should encourage us to follow His teaching through Christ. God strategically created a way, through overflowing grace, toward completing the works of righteousness He seeks out for us, as recalled in Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." The greatness of our salvation isn't merely being made clean, but being given privilege to perform good works through Christ. We are his workmanship, as we are called in Ephesians 2:10, that God painstakingly propitiated and planned a path to partake in his holiness. I pray that this brings as much encouragement to me this Easter to walk in the light and bear fruit as it does for everyone.



## Community Connections

With 2024 being a year of the Dragon, legends explain that the mythical creature's good fortune will be sprinkled upon all. But the dragon has one requirement before all that wealth and wisdom is spread about — people need to be kind and compassionate to each other first. (*Calgary Herald*)

Whether or not you believe in Chinese legends, acts of kindness and compassion can go a long way.

With a focus on the Matthew 25 Initiative that calls us to be **actively engaged in the world**, the Mission & Evangelism Committee organized three opportunities for engagement in communities where need exists. Each opportunity was in partnership with another local nonprofit organization.

The Peninsula Special Interest Lions Club and the Global Initiative for Health & Wellness set up a Vision & Medical Clinic on March 16<sup>th</sup> in the Fellowship Hall. Over a span of six hours, 168 adults and children received health and vision screenings. Free eyeglasses were provided by Zenni. Thanks to Lesley Kraechan who introduced us to the Lions Club and recruited the large cadre of volunteers.

The PCC kitchen was buzzing with activity on April 7<sup>th</sup> as volunteers were swiftly making 100 bag lunches before the start of worship! We learned about San Francisco Night Ministry a few years ago when its Executive Director, Rev. Trent Thornley, was a guest preacher during English worship. SFNM staff and volunteers provide a variety of spiritual and emotional care and referrals for unhoused individuals. Our bag lunches were provided for their Open Cathedral, a non-denominational Christian outdoor worship service at Civic Center.

For many years, EWC members have prepared dinner for the Winter Shelter program of San Francisco Interfaith Council. On February 16<sup>th</sup>, we cooked meatloaf and broccoli casserole for 65 men and women who were spending the night at the First Unitarian Universalist Church. The Sequoias donated mashed potatoes and gravy



Dr. Terry Chan, OD (background) selected appropriate eyewear for clients of the Vision & Medical Clinic. Bilingual student nurses were invaluable with translation of health terminology.



Blood pressure readings, BMI measurements and glucose tests were provided free of charge along with with vision screenings.



which helped us earn ★★★★★ from one of the recipients.

The Matthew 25 invitation focuses on Matthew 25: 31-46, the parable of the sheep and goats in which Jesus makes clear, that what we do matters to God and how we treat others is important to God.

When we welcome others, we welcome Christ; when we bring together people who are divided, we are doing God’s reconciling work. We are called to serve Jesus by contributing to the well-being of the most vulnerable in all societies – rural and urban, small and large, young and not-so-young. From affordable housing to community gardens equitable educational and employment opportunities to healing from addiction and mental illness to enacting policy change – there is not just one way to be a part of the Matthew 25 movement. Make no mistake, Jesus is calling us to perform ordinary acts of compassion in daily life. In so doing, we continue Christ’s work of proclaiming release to captives and good news to the poor — the good news of God’s righteousness, justice and peace for all.

*-- Jeanette Huie, for the Mission & Evangelism Committee*



Lunch bags for the Open Cathedral contained one sandwich, cookies, popcorn, bottled water and a Mandarin orange.





Pictured are a few of our Winter Shelter volunteers who cooked and washed pots and pans. During the dinner service, we had time to chat with some of people staying in the shelter and hear their stories.

Matthew 25 t-shirts are still available! Pick one up during teatime. A requested donation of \$11 per shirt will be used for a future project.

## UPcoming EVENTS

- May 4 Cameron House Carnival
- May 5 Communion/Sabbath Sunday
- May 7 M&E and W&N Committees
- May 12 Mother's Day – No Resource Committee meeting
- May 19 Day of Pentecost
- May 19 Board of Deacons
- May 21 Presbytery of San Francisco
- May 21 English Commission (to be rescheduled)
- May 27 Memorial Day Holiday Observance
- June 5 - ? Mandarin Pastoral Center (Every Wednesday 11am-2pm Fellowship Hall)
- June 17-August 2 Cameron House Summer Youth Program

Spring Break has come and gone and some of us had some fun spending time with friends and family.

Alisa Ho and Laurene Chan spent some time in Southern California. Their sons are now studying in Southern California after two years in Oahu. Cody Ho and Tully Chan had a chance to eat some of their favorite foods with their mothers and a few friends. They even had a meal with Justin Wong, son of Heidi and Anthony.

Kyle and Dean Shin spent some time in Japan and Korea.

Josh Hee and Tim Go spent some time in Japan. They went separately, but they were able to meet up and did some sightseeing together.

My friend Marci and I went to Tucson, Arizona to visit our friends. We had a nice time meeting their cousins. We did a lot of eating and chatting. Weather was perfect. Marci and I are pickleball players and our friends aren't, but their cousin had 4 paddles. In the morning, they took us to brand new pickleball courts that were once tennis courts. They were happy we taught them the game, rules, and how to score. Their college age children wanted them to get some exercise and bought them two sets of paddles and balls. We visited Tombstone, a cute little Western town about two hours outside Tucson. We will be going on a bus tour visiting Canada in mid-June.

Congratulations to Kati Chan, daughter of Jeanine and Greg. She married Sung Wan Jo at City Hall in San Francisco on April 11. In October, Kati and Sung will have an additional wedding ceremony in Italy.

*Good News for the Pews* is published quarterly  
by the English-Speaking Worshipping Community of the  
Presbyterian Church in Chinatown, 925 Stockton Street  
San Francisco, CA 94108  
Website: [www.pccsf.org](http://www.pccsf.org)

Irene Young Ng, Editor  
David Miller, PDF Assembler/Web Site Posting