



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
OF
SAN RAFAEL

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October 15, 2020

Greetings!

As members and friends of First Presbyterian Church of San Rafael, we are part of a vibrant, determined, and deeply loving community. Each year at this time we reflect upon our responsibilities as stewards of this community, asking ourselves what we are called upon to do personally and financially to ensure the fulfillment of its calling.

Together with those who've gone before us, our community has endured devastating wars, the Great Depression, political and social turmoil and catastrophic natural disasters. Yet we could be forgiven for thinking that 2020 has been different. More difficult. More painful. More unsettling.

This has been a year of loss: of beloved members of our families and church community, of jobs and livelihoods, of trust in public institutions and political leaders. For the sake of our neighbors locally and around the world, we've given up the ability to move about freely, visit with those we care about, worship and sing together in church. At times, even the fresh air we breathe has been scarce.

The losses of Grant Pritchard, Chuck and Binny Fischer, and Darlene Nickel accentuated the pain we were already feeling this year. Yet their examples – in life and in passing – of deep kindness, generosity, and care for others and the world around them give us cause for hope and renewal.

Being stewards of this community means using all of our gifts and resources wisely and responsibly. And this year, examples of this abound. When worshipping in church became impossible, we quickly pivoted to using video technology to gather, worship, sing and comfort one another. This required an enormous adjustment on the part of our entire congregation and staff, yet we embraced it with remarkable speed, enthusiasm and humor. As an unexpected benefit, it also meant that members, friends and interested people across the country could enjoy our services, reminding us of our connection to all people everywhere. When public safety and weather permitted, we established our "roofless church" services on the front patio, celebrating being together at this time.

Sheltering in place and putting many of our routines on hold has given many of us cause to think, read and pray with new purpose. Teetering on the edge of fear and hope, we're asking ourselves what's really meaningful and important. And we're asking these questions not in isolation, but together, as part of a church community that's unafraid to ask tough questions. Our Wednesday Zoom meetings provide one example. Recent discussions have delved into some very challenging questions regarding the environment and racial equity, leading to respectful discussion and deep insight.

In this time that feels so complicated, people naturally seek that which is true and enduring. In March, just as the world was shutting down, we welcomed seven new members – people who sensed God's love and justice among us and wanted to be part of this community of faith.

Sacred Journey, Intelligible Faith

Careful fiscal management on the part of Session and the Finance Committee has meant that – despite a significant decline in rental income – our financial health remains stable. The enclosed narrative budget is designed to shed light on the nature of our income and expenses. We do anticipate new costs in the coming year for technology and personnel to continue to provide online worship and safe, meaningful in-person services when that is possible.

Planned giving has become vital at this time; generous gifts received this year, along with our endowment, have enabled us to remain focused on serving our community and fulfilling our mission. If you haven't done so, we encourage you to visit the Planned Giving portion of the website – or if you prefer, call the church office to schedule time to speak with someone about it.

This has been a year of transformational change for our church community – a year of terrible loss, yet also of hope. We are blessed to be led by a pastor, elders and deacons who are embracing these changes, always guided by our mission. As Cynthia reminded us in her September sermon series, we are like the roots of magnificent redwoods – intertwined, deeply connected, providing health and stability for generations. Our stewardship is a reflection of our steadfast belief in the power of God's love to renew us, and our tireless concern and care for each other and the world around us.

It's in that spirit of renewal that we humbly ask you to consider your financial commitment to the church. This means re-thinking the importance of our church's place in your life and the broader community, and your ability and willingness to support its important work now and for generations to come. In practical terms, it means that those of us in a position to increase our pledges by 5, 10 or 15 percent or more should take this opportunity to do so, and those who cannot will, as always, do our best. Together, we can fulfill our mission, maintain our facilities that serve our needs and those of other important organizations, provide our wonderful and hard-working staff with cost-of-living adjustments, and continue to express our faith in God's love to care for us all.

Regardless of the amount, each and every pledge is very important. By pledging, you provide the Session with the means to carry out our plans. We ask that **every one of our members and friends pledge some level of support** as a way of participating in the financial life of our community.

As a reminder, your pledge is not set in stone. If your circumstances should change after you've made your pledge, just tell the church office, and we'll adjust in whatever direction works for you. Also, you can fulfill your pledge through an annual donation or weekly or monthly payments; in cash, check or via credit card; or even by donating stock or other securities. Many have found that making automatic, monthly credit or debit card payments or an automatic debit to your checking account is easy and convenient. It also benefits the church, distributing income evenly across the year. Contact the church office if you need help setting this up.

Thank you in advance for your prayerful consideration of this important matter. We ask that you kindly complete the enclosed pledge card and submit it by mailing no later than **November 11**.

Finally, please join us for two important events:

- At 11 am on **Sunday, October 25**, members of the Stewardship Committee will answer your questions about the budget and pledging in a Zoom meeting. All are welcome.
- On **Sunday, November 15**, we'll dedicate our pledges and look ahead in hope to the new year.

For 150 years our church has stood as a welcoming beacon of hope and renewal in San Rafael, Marin County and the world. Your generosity will ensure the continuation of this spirit well into the future.

With gratitude,

The FPCSR Stewardship Committee:

Steve Astle Susan Bryant Leslie Purdy Ralph Purdy