

FOCUS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Alive!
In Christ... in the World



JUNE 2020

Contents

- Community2
- Mission3
- Staffing Update5
- Foundation.....6
- Session.....6
- Youth.....7
- Journey of Faith9
- Sermon Series 10



transforming OUR VISION

By Peter Whitelock - Pastor, Head of Staff

“Is the Christian life of prayer simply an evasion of the problems and anxieties of contemporary existence?... If we pray “in the Spirit” we are certainly not running away from life, negating visible reality in order to “see God.” For “the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole earth.” Prayer does not blind us to the world, but it transforms our vision of the world, and makes us see it, all people, and all the history of humankind, in the life of God.”

-Thomas Merton

As I write this column, our nation is reeling under the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic disruption, prolonged social isolation, and civil unrest in response to the killing of George Floyd. We look at the world around us with an unsteady gaze, wondering how we can possibly find a way to respond faithfully and hopefully to these challenges.

In times like these, I find myself drawn powerfully to prayer. As Thomas Merton reminds us in the above quote, prayer is that practice we attend to as people of faith in order to have our vision of the world changed, reshaped, and renewed. Left to ourselves, we can view external events simply in terms of our own needs and interests, but in prayer we open ourselves to the truth that God is active in all, working for the good, and inviting us to take action in love.

Prayer is not a way of turning away from the world, but rather a means to reflect on it in light of God’s sovereign care and seek alignment with that abundant vision for all things that Jesus revealed as the Kingdom of God. In seeing prayer as the necessary foundation for taking action, Martin Luther once famously observed about his daily routine, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” Let’s just say that the amount of time is negotiable, but the basic premise still rings true!



Pastors: Peter Whitelock, Head of Staff • Gerald Chinen, Care
 Lauren Gully, Mission & Spiritual Formation • Jaime Polson, Families & Executive Leadership

community



Going on now, we have a series of varied groups for fun and fellowship. Things are always changing, so be sure to check the LOPC website for additions and details about these groups!

Yoga

Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8:00 a.m.
with yoga instructor, Beverly Jane Peatross

Men w/Young Families and Professionals

Mondays at 6:30 p.m.
with Chris Baldwin

Visit lopc.org/community-zoom-groups to sign up!

Mount Hermon Update

Please continue to save the date for our All-Church Retreat at Mount Hermon, October 2 - 4. Normally, at this time of year, registration would already be open. This year will be different as we await further direction from Mount Hermon on when and how their campus will re-open. We appreciate your patience and flexibility during this time.

Please contact Michelle Browning at michelle@lopc.org if you have any questions.

Presbyterian Women

Needed: Coordinator for Presbyterian Women's Bible study groups.

Duties include inviting women to existing Bible study circles, chairing bi-monthly planning meetings, and assisting circle leaders as needed.

Contact Chris Baldwin at chris@lopc.org.

thursday Fellowship

A program of Senior Care Ministries

Thursday Fellowship ended the 2019-2020 program year with a celebration that included flowers, hats and horns, and singing through masks! Though the parties were small in number and had to observe social distancing, there was great joy.

The reason for this celebration? To honor LOPC member, Winnie Watson! On Thursday, June 4, 2020, Winnie turned 102 years old.

Winnie has been a faithful participant of Thursday Fellowship since its inception. Over the years she has been active in every facet of the program. She played an important role in the kitchen, creating and serving food to the guests and volunteers. She also loved creating crafts.



Winnie Watson

Some years ago, Winnie transitioned from being a dedicated volunteer to becoming a weekly guest, but she still has a servant's heart. Each week, without fail, she gives each volunteer and guest an individually wrapped chocolate candy. It's a small, loving gesture that says so much about Winnie and her gracious generosity! What a joy to have her as a part of our Thursday Fellowship community.

Now, Thursday Fellowship is officially on summer vacation! We wish you a pleasant summer, and even though activities and travel plans may be different this year, please know we look for the silver lining of a slower pace of life. It's with gratitude we also thank all the volunteers for their efforts this year. Each one of you is appreciated!

Contact Julie Peterson, julie@lopc.org, or Clarita Wooldridge, clarita@lopc.org, for more information.

mission

Special Offering

to Benefit Monument Crisis Center



During this unprecedented time, Monument Crisis Center (MCC) continues to be a place people can go to receive food and assurance that they will be able to feed their families. MCC addresses food insecurity and has seen an enormous spike in clients. Many new clients never thought they would need assistance, but the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated many service jobs, creating huge need in the community.

Monument Crisis Center has been able to do the unimaginable by responding to the increased demand for food with only a staff of eight and no volunteers. Your assistance is needed to help MCC keep up with the relentless demand. Below are ways you can help.

Three ways to give:

- Write a check to LOPC with "MCC Support" in the memo line.
- Go to LOPC.org > GIVE BACK > ONLINE GIVING and click "MCC Support" in the dropdown menu.
- Use the LOPC APP > Press "Give button" > Click "MCC Support."

Other Ways to Support MCC:

- Donate to the Food Barrels located on the LOPC campus next to the Ministry Center.
- Volunteer to help repack beans and rice by contacting Jim Boyd at jasboco@gmail.com.

Warm Winter Nights

COVID-19 Update

Save the dates!

LOPC will host WWN this year from Nov. 2 - 16.

Warm Winter Nights is a traveling homeless shelter that moves to faith communities throughout Contra Costa County from September to May. Every year, LOPC hosts families on campus in the fall for two weeks and provides meals, tutoring, and activities with the help of volunteers from the congregation. We checked in with them to see how they are doing and what challenges they have faced during COVID-19.

The Warm Winter Nights program has been substantially impacted by the shelter-in-place order as it relies heavily on the use of volunteers to run its program. This greatly changed the dynamics of the shelter as families were not allowed to leave, and volunteers were not allowed to enter. The order, coupled with school closures, made the communal living situation even more challenging than usual. The increased health and sanitation concerns, along with social distancing requirements, have added to the challenge.

Many of the WWN staff have worked overtime to keep the shelter running. With the absence of volunteers to make meals, they ordered food from local restaurants. Traveling tutors set up video conferencing to motivate and support students with online learning. In spite of the extra workload, the staff also worked tirelessly to help families find permanent housing. Those who did not receive housing by the time the WWN program ended on May 4 were placed in motels for as long as funding allows, or permanent housing is found.

Though the shelter was able to pivot quickly to adhere to the new guidelines, it has impacted their budget, and they are looking for ways to compensate for the increased food and housing costs.

To learn more or help, visit cccwinternights.org.



“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”
-Desmond Tutu

Many in our congregation have found ways to help others during the endless days of sheltering in place. Some have seen this COVID-19 pandemic as a call to action to help those who are on the front lines, the elderly, and the most vulnerable. In one of his sermons, Pastor Peter Whitelock even challenged everyone to commit to at least one practical deed to help others during the pandemic.

Several LOPC fellowship groups accepted the challenge and have worked together to find different ways to help the community. The Freebirds decided to help Trinity Center, a non-profit located in downtown Walnut Creek that provides vital services to the homeless in our community. They assembled over 100 lunches that were distributed to Trinity Center clients. In addition to making sack lunches, the Freebirds made a donation of \$330 to Trinity Center. Another group, the Lasers, collected \$350 to benefit the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, which was matched and effectively resulted in \$700. The Hobie Cats donated \$300 to the LOPC COVID-19 Community Fund which benefits both Monument Crisis Center and the Food Bank.

Valerie Hodgskiss, her husband, and daughter all decided to start sewing masks. “It was also in response

to my own need to do something tangible with my hands after a day of working in mental health,” says Valerie. The first batch of 30 masks went to family and friends and then expanded to helping friends working at food pantries, those she knew that were high risk, supermarket workers, some of her colleagues at Kaiser, and her own son who is an essential worker.

Ginny Ross also stepped up to use her lifelong love of sewing quilts and transferred it to sewing over 500 masks for medical professionals, people she knows in senior care facilities, and friends and family. Ginny also donated masks to Monument Crisis Center staff and clients.

Still other members volunteered to bag rice and beans for Monument Crisis Center. Wearing masks and keeping social distancing, they repackage 50-pound packs into gallon-size bags for easy distribution to clients to help meet the growing demand for food during this time.

These acts of kindness are tangible reminders that we are all capable of making a difference and give us hope for the future. Please email Robin at robin@lopc.org if you would like to share how you have been making a difference!

lopc staffing update

Since the beginning of this pandemic, your staff at LOPC and Seedlings Preschool have faced many unanticipated challenges. With the campus and office initially closed, they needed to quickly adjust to working remotely, overhauling existing programming, and developing new online ministry opportunities to serve our community. Not surprisingly, they rose to these demands with impressive energy and have thoughtfully provided LOPC members and friends with meaningful ministry!

Thankfully, we were blessed with resources that afforded salary support for LOPC staff and Seedlings teachers during the early months of the pandemic. As we developed a better understanding of what realities we are facing for the remainder of the year, it became necessary to look at all of the staff positions and forecast needs for the next six to nine months. During this time of careful evaluation, there were several positions identified for which we will not have assignable work for the foreseeable future. A difficult decision was made that we would need to lay off the following part-time positions:

- Terry Conte, Kitchen Administrator
- Jimmy Lim, Printer
- Renée Wigginton, Administrative Assistant

We want to take this opportunity to thank Terry, Renée, and Jimmy for their years of service, and remind you of their labor in service to our congregation.

Terry was a member of LOPC for many years before joining the staff as Kitchen Administrator seven years ago. Those who have had an opportunity to work with Terry agree that she has been an invaluable part of the kitchen ministry. Her thoughtful management of the kitchen team, careful oversight of health codes and food safety, and her epicurean talents are just a few gifts Terry has shared with all of us.

Renée Wigginton has worn many hats during her two years of employment at LOPC, most recently supporting the Care and Spiritual Formation ministries. While programming continues in these areas, the decision was made to consolidate the LOPC administrative team due to fewer hours of program support across all ministry areas. Renée made significant contributions to the LOPC office while developing improved organizational systems which helped staff as a whole, one of her special gifts!

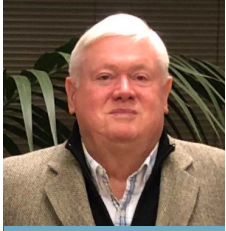
Jimmy Lim has been on staff for 30 years. During that time he has provided dependable support, using his printing skills in helping produce many of the LOPC publications. While most people in the congregation never met Jimmy because of his nighttime and weekend hours, his steady and reliable presence has been a gift to LOPC.

Please join us in thanking Terry, Renée and Jimmy for their time on staff.

lopc foundation

Strategy for an Uncertain World

By Jerry Ducey, LOPC Foundation Trustee



Jerry Ducey

Like many of you, I have been pondering if the uncertainty in the world relating to the pandemic is the “new normal.” It’s difficult not to get weighted down by the effects of unemployment and inequality across the nation, the fear of getting sick, plus the unknown of whether

a treatment or vaccine will be available soon. In the midst of these uncertainties, I feel privileged to serve as a Trustee of the LOPC Foundation as an opportunity to work toward the positive and hopeful goals of supporting vital LOPC ministries well into the future.

While the Foundation’s investment portfolio has been subjected to the pandemic-induced market volatility, we have a solid long-term investment strategy and will continue to assess that in consultation with our advisory firm. Our strategy is designed to preserve the corpus, grow invested net assets, and smooth the uncertainty related to market highs and lows.

The Foundation provides prudent support to LOPC of 4% of invested net assets, averaged over the past 12 quarters. The Foundation continues to be committed to providing the pledged 2020 financial support to the LOPC operating budget and campus maintenance projects.

There will be many upcoming needs that are yet to be revealed in our community and globally. LOPC members have an incredible reputation for discerning need, reaching out, and helping people and organizations all over the world. We believe with prayer, guidance from scripture, Session, the LOPC staff, and you, the Foundation will be led in the ways to support LOPC’s ministries, now and into the future.

I encourage you to become a Friend to the Foundation to support the Foundation’s vision of striving to be a permanent, reliable source of significant funding for LOPC’s ministries. Contact a Foundation Trustee to learn more: Jim Beckemeyer, Lois Boyd, Jen Crocker, Jerry Ducey, Kristi Haigh, Staci Johnston, Mike Ross, Phil Placier, or Dara Youngdale.

session highlights

May 2020 Highlights

By Paul Koenig, Clerk of Session

In April and early May, Session continued to meet via Zoom.

Peter reported and updated Session regarding the staff, including staffing adjustments to deal with the needs to stay at home and to maintain social distancing.

Jaime Polson provided a report relating on planning going forward. At this point there is no date set for a planned reopening of our church and programs. The leadership and staff have spent significant work to identify the possible needs and information for reopenings at some appropriate time in the future. Jaime reported that a significant number of staff will likely have to continue to work at home, and that there will be further communications with staff regarding some working at the church in the future. She also reported about significant adjustments to programming and scheduling for Seedlings, including effects on schooling and summer camps.

Jim Nagle, elder for Finance, gave an updated report on church finances. While the church as of April is on budget, the Finance team is following pledges, gifts and other receipts, as well as expenditures.

Lauren Gully provided information on helping other organizations. Gerald Chinen gave information as to some programs and presentations, including issues that likely are needed by some of our members.

Session approved an ongoing COVID-19 Community Support special offering, started March 22, to benefit Monument Crisis Center and the Contra Costa Food Bank. Session further approved a contribution from the LOPC Foundation for various programs and expenditures.



A Time of Reflection

2019 salinas service learning

By Keris Dahlkamp, Director of Youth Ministry

Each year, the high-school-aged youth from Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church (LOPC) spend a week of their summer serving a community in need. In July 2019, they went to Salinas, CA. Given it is only about 100 miles away from the church, it was initially met by some participants with a lack of enthusiasm. That quickly changed once they arrived.

The youth served in food banks, a homeless shelter, an organic farm, churches, and summer school programs for children of migrant farmworkers. Each visit deepened a collective connection and love for the Central Valley, and the people who live there. Overall, the goal of these trips is to develop empathy and faith so that as these youth grow into adults with increased power and privilege, and they will remember communities like Salinas and advocate for them.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive experiences the group had, the residents of Salinas still experience many challenges. Communities of color, and farmworkers in particular, often experience pervasive racial injustice in the form of inadequate education,

infrastructure, and even threats of deportation. But in Salinas, it is the environmental injustice that communities of color experience that might actually prove fatal.

Much of the life of a farmworker revolves around the care and cultivation of crops. On factory farms, this means that many farmworkers are made to deal with harmful pesticides. Pesticides flow into the river systems or are swept up in chemical drifts as the daily winds pick up. Pesticides cause harm to the elderly, sick, and children. Heightened rates of ADHD, asthma, and other long-term problems are prevalent in the children of Salinas due to their exposure. Oscar Ramos, a teacher at Sherwood Elementary School in Salinas, who partnered with LOPC last summer, said, "They [the fieldworkers] are threatened a lot. Either you take the job or you get out. They are not told about the types of pesticides used or their side effects."

Ramos says farmworkers often do not get briefed on how to keep their families safe from the residues that stay on their clothes and hands. For example, washing



work clothes separate from children's clothes, taking a shower before hugging, and leaving shoes outside all help prevent exposure. Farm owners, however, often fail to give farmworkers even these brief instructions and are usually neglectful of the health problems faced by farmworkers. Chemicals such as Chlorpyrifos, along with oil leaked into streams from nearby drilling at the San Ardo Oil Field, can and will harm the environment along the Salinas River. The Salinas River feeds into the cities of San Lucas, King City, Greenfield, Soledad, Gonzales, Spreckels, and Salinas. These locations are mainly home to working-class communities, and about 50% of them are people of color.

What then, is the duty of people of faith when presented with such issues of environmental injustice? What role might congregations play in advocating for marginalized communities that are not their own? After all, LOPC is situated in a leafy suburb a hundred miles away from Salinas. These were the types of questions that the LOPC teens, volunteers, and staff asked themselves. Elementary school children and adult volunteers connected with the Youth Service-Learning Trip by discussing the importance of standing up for the people experiencing this kind of systematic racism during their Vacation Bible Camp.

Amanda Young, a high school junior in LOPC's youth group, said, "While the fields were pretty to look at, there's no doubt in my mind they contain dangerous pesticides that harm the farmworkers and those who live nearby. In a time where these people are often already outwardly marginalized and discriminated against, it seems even more unfair to be quietly threatening their health with these chemicals. In terms of our faith, I have always been taught that God wants us to love all of our neighbors, and that we should also acknowledge all of the amazing things he has created on earth. It's important that we remember both of these things because the poor, underrepresented people of the world are the ones who have unfairly experienced the gravest effects of climate change and environmental injustice."

In the coming years, LOPC will continue to visit Salinas. Much of the nation's food will continue to be grown there, and the church cannot remain silent while those seeking profits harm those most vulnerable. What is the first step? Ramos says one thing people can do is demand organic produce in the grocery stores and farmers markets so that farmworkers no longer suffer the impacts of such destructive chemicals. We all have a responsibility to this land. If not for us, then for Oscar Ramos, his family, and his students. We are all neighbors.



journey of FAITH

By Bobbie Dodson-Nielsen, LOPC member



Dr. Mark Agness, son of LOPC member Carol Agness, shares the story of his faith journey—including service in Italy during the coronavirus pandemic crisis.

“I grew up in Lafayette. While attending Acalanes High School, I won a scholarship to the Young Life football camp at Woodleaf. My first impression of their staff was one of joy. This intrigued me and began a week-long process of discovery. I explored my own nature, need for God to fill the emptiness in my life, and necessity of a Savior to bridge the gap between my fallen nature and God’s righteousness. I accepted the invitation to faith upon understanding both my need and the amazing free gift of grace through Jesus that summer in 1975.

“Young Life became my spiritual home in high school with Jimm Edgar (YL leader), my mentor and trainer, continuing through college at Stanford and medical school in North Carolina. I often struggled with the idea of a ‘call’ to ministry. It seemed difficult to discern the still, quiet voice of the Lord from my own ambition and desire for adventure. Throughout my career, I have been able to pursue care for the underprivileged, both as a family physician and later as an ER doctor serving on short medical missions to Mexico, Kenya, Bulgaria, and, most recently, Ethiopia. God’s wonderful use of providence led me where he wanted me, when he wanted me there.

“Growing in the faith, I’ve come to realize that my future is, and always was, in God’s hands. My service for him carries no real risk, despite fears to the contrary. He gives me opportunities to exercise the gifts given to me and develops them with his blessing. He invites me to participate in ministry. I see the New Testament as a call to action and an operational guide.

“Accepting an appointment to Samaritan’s Purse DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team) last year, I and my wife, also a physician, were scheduled to go to Ethiopia this spring, but the COVID-19 outbreak closed the door. On Friday, March 13, we called off the trip.

The very next day Samaritan’s Purse DART issued a call for volunteers to serve in a Respiratory Care Unit (RCU) in northern Italy, the epicenter of the pandemic. I responded without hesitation. God was using me where and when he wanted me to go. I felt a sense of peace and joy.

“I worked a month in the ICU field hospital in Cremona, Italy, taking care of very sick COVID-19 patients on respirators. I worked 12-hour night shifts for 28 of 30 days. Asked if I could do this prior to leaving, I confidently would have answered no. I didn’t have that kind of stamina.

“Though the media portrayed the pandemic as a disaster, several themes became clear in Cremona. God’s grace was at work. Again and again, this secular nation heard the Gospel and responded. Many came to faith. Patients who should not have recovered, did. Miracles occurred. Italians from the upper-levels of government to the common citizen understood we were there as servants of Jesus. Samaritan’s Purse’s mission, as expressed in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10, is helping our neighbor. We answered a call to action because the Italians were our ‘neighbors’.

“When fatigue overcame me, and circumstances threatened to overwhelm me, these verses returned to me. Isaiah 43:1-2, ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior...’

“Our mission needn’t be overseas. We’re called to respond to our neighbor wherever we find him or her, stepping forward in faith to do things we may be uncomfortable doing or that seem to have little chance of success. Jesus’ grace gift was costly, but it was offered to all. It needs to be shared by active service.”

Summer Sermon Series

FAITH *at the* MOVIES VIII

- 7/5 A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD
Romans 8:28-39
- 7/12 THE TRUMAN SHOW
Galatians 5:1
- 7/19 JUST MERCY
Micah 6:8
- 7/26 HARRIET
Jeremiah 29:11

SERIES RUNS THROUGH AUGUST 6!

CHECK BACK IN NEXT MONTH'S FOCUS FOR MORE FILMS TO WATCH WITH US THIS SUMMER!

Fellowship Hour

DIRECTLY FOLLOWING THE 9 A.M. WORSHIP SERVICE, WE WILL HOST A ZOOM CALL THAT WILL BREAK OUT INTO CONVERSATIONS TO GO DEEPER WITH THE SERMON AND FILM THEMES. IT'S GOING TO BE AN AWESOME WAY TO GET TO KNOW OTHERS AND GO DEEPER IN YOUR FAITH.



JULY 2020

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Brett Strader, Director
Stewart Scharch, Organist

TREASURER

Char Casella

MINISTRY DIRECTORS

Chris Baldwin, Ministries Associate for
Community Life
Keris Dahlkamp & Allison Kunz, Youth
Coleen Moulton, Seedlings Preschool
Ryan Timpte, Children

FOCUS NEWSLETTER

Jon Corry, Communications

Editors: Dick James, Lexi Morrissey,
& Renée Wigginton

Thank you to all who contribute to each issue!

Monthly FOCUS Newsletter Deadline:

July 1 for the August issue.
Email items to communications@lopc.org.

Weekly CONNECTIONS Deadline:

Every Monday by 5 p.m. for the following
Sunday's issue.

Submit items at:
lopc.org/submission-for-connections

We're all in this
TOGETHER!

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LOPC.ORG

Sundays at 9 a.m.
or any time you wish!

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