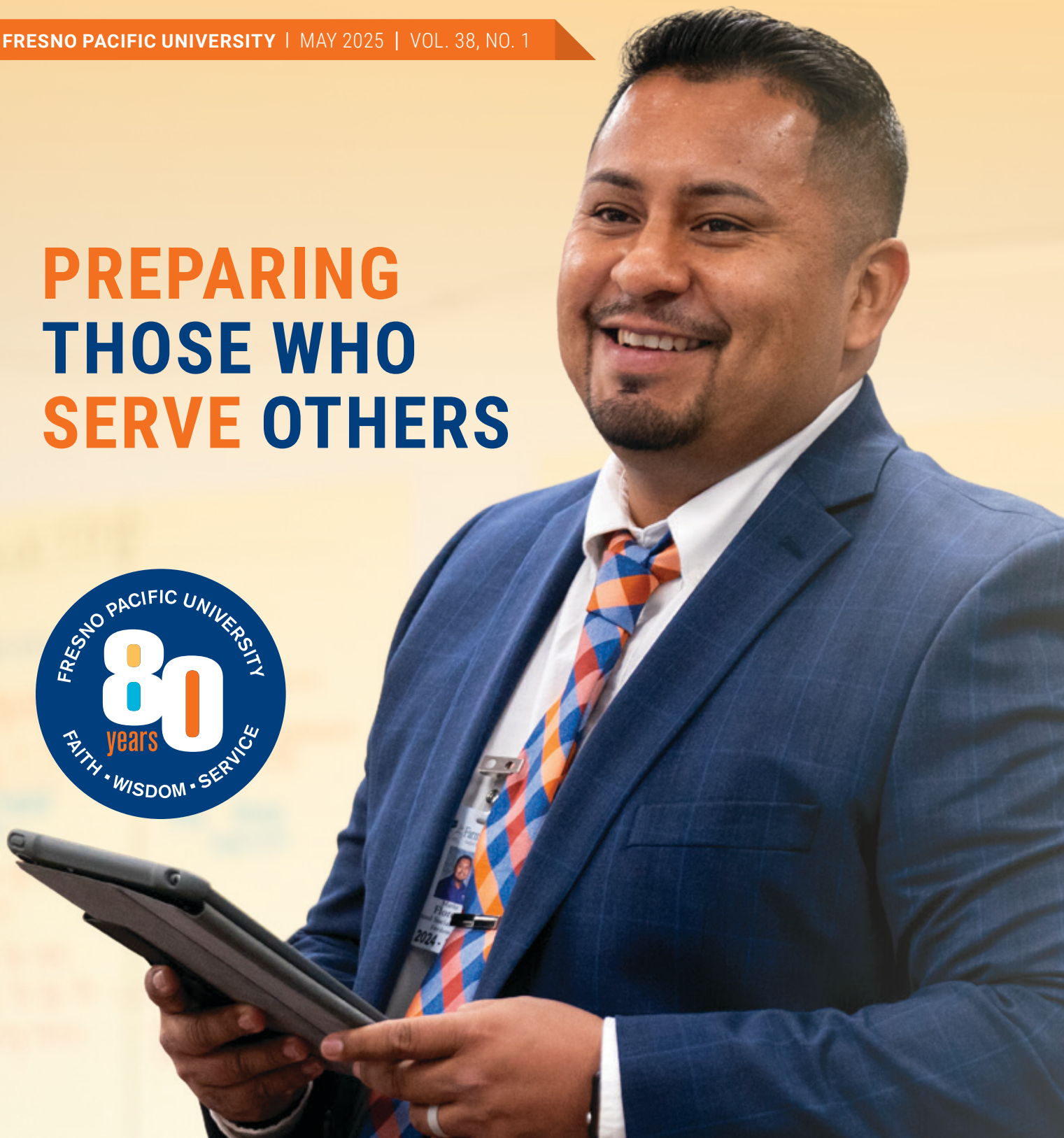


PACIFIC

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY | MAY 2025 | VOL. 38, NO. 1

PREPARING THOSE WHO SERVE OTHERS





“...I am confident that Fresno Pacific alumni will continue to step forward with hope and courage.”

— André Stephens, Ph.D.



president's message

ALUMNI SHOW “EVERYDAY COURAGE” THROUGHOUT ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE

As we conclude our celebration of Fresno Pacific University's 80th year—as we should, with commencement—we now honor the more than 28,000 alumni who have begun careers or dedicated their lives to serving their families, communities and the world. Inspired by the call to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8), our graduates embody the spirit of service in countless ways. I have had the privilege of meeting both current students and alumni who are making a profound impact for the collective good.

FPU's influence in the world is deeply rooted in our Christ-centered education, which fosters a heart of service and compels students—past and present—to meaningful action. Through academic programs, faculty mentorship, internships and co-curricular experiences, students are prepared to serve with integrity, compassion and excellence. In this issue, you will meet some of our alumni who represent the thousands serving around the world. Many serve quietly, without fanfare. As Robert Louis Stevenson noted, “Everyday courage has few witnesses. But yours is no less noble because no drum beats for you and no crowd shouts your name.” To all who serve faithfully, I thank you for answering this call with unwavering commitment.

Our world faces many challenges, yet I am confident that Fresno Pacific alumni will continue to step forward with hope and courage—whether in ministry, education, counseling, healthcare, social work, business or countless other fields. That confidence is shared by a family of longtime supporters who blessed us with a generous \$3 million gift that will improve the experience of our students in ways you will also read about on these pages.

Our current and future students will continue this legacy, carrying the light of Christ into the world. As John 1:5 reminds us, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

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Number 1
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- ▲ Grad Shantay R. Davies-Balch wins Irvine Foundation award

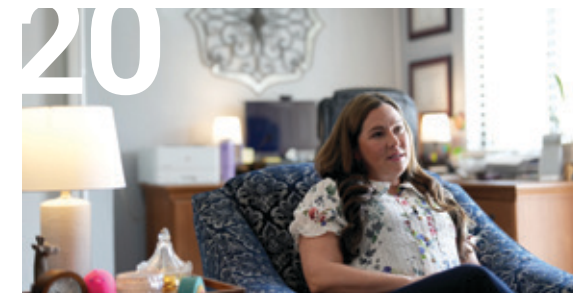
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Fresno Pacific University develops students for leadership and service through excellence in Christian higher education.



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Transformational Gift Expands Student Opportunities at FPU

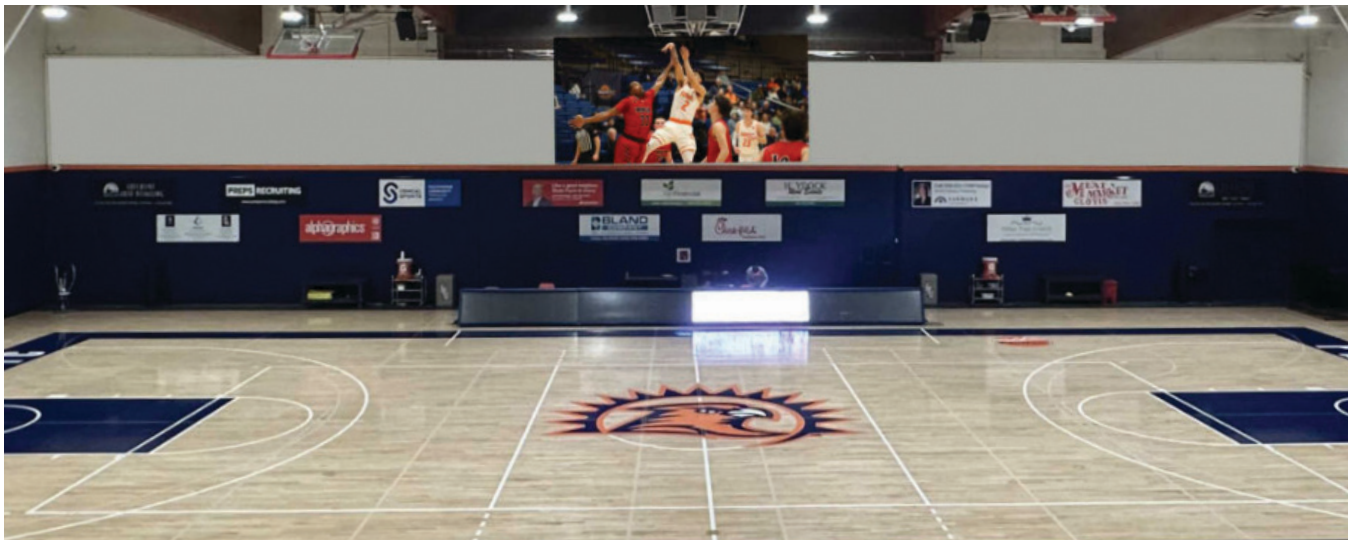
A generous \$3 million gift will empower Fresno Pacific University to enhance student learning and sustainability by providing laptops, upgrading classrooms and facilities, and installing solar panels. Thanks to the unwavering support of longtime donors, FPU will also elevate its chapel experience, further enriching campus life.

“This gift is a powerful endorsement of Fresno Pacific University’s mission and future,” said President André Stephens, Ph.D. “We are deeply grateful to these valued partners for recognizing the impact of the changes we have made and continue to make in support of our students. Their generosity enables us to build on 80 years of service to California’s Central Valley and beyond, preparing us for an even greater future. As the region’s only accredited Christian university, we remain committed to transforming lives, families and communities through higher education.”



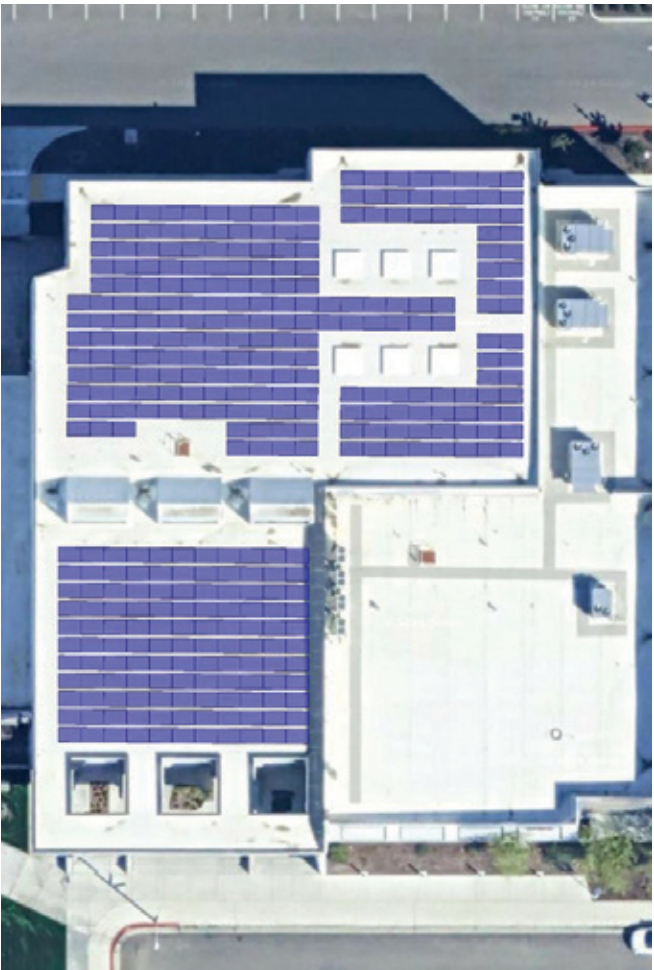
THE FUNDS WILL SUPPORT FIVE KEY AREAS:

- **Classroom Enhancements:** Four classrooms will be renovated with cutting-edge technology, updated furniture and modernized infrastructure—including new carpet, lighting and dry-erase boards—creating dynamic learning environments that attract and engage students.
- **Special Events Center Upgrades:** With overwhelming student engagement in the revitalized College Hour program, FPU will expand its capacity by moving chapel services to the larger Special Events Center. The installation of new seating and a video screen will enhance the worship and event experience, benefiting chapel services, athletics and student life activities.



- **Solar Panels for the Warkentine Culture and Arts Center:** This investment is both environmentally and financially impactful. The panels will generate at least \$70,000 in annual energy savings and will pay for themselves within three years. Additionally, FPU will qualify for federal incentives, allowing for expanded solar installations on the main campus to further reduce energy costs.
- **Laptop Library:** In today’s digital world, access to technology is essential. Recognizing that not all students arrive with reliable devices, FPU will establish a laptop lending program, ensuring every student has access to the tools they need to succeed.
- **Budget Relief:** This moves the university past its goal of securing \$3.5 million in unrestricted gifts, providing essential support for operational needs.

FPU Student Body President Sariya Flores emphasized the transformative impact of these initiatives. “The laptop library will be a game-changer for students who might otherwise



Continued on page 6



struggle to afford one. It's one fewer financial worry, allowing them to focus on their studies," she said. She also highlighted the importance of the Chapel improvements: "This will create a space where students can connect not only with their faith but also with each other."

Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, Alison R. Noble, Ph.D., sees this investment as a reflection of FPU's renewed energy and vision. "President Stephens and his leadership team are strengthening our university, improving processes and facilities to provide high-quality, accessible education. This investment will enhance the learning experience for all students, providing access to better technology, upgraded facilities and enriched campus life."

Thanks to the generosity of these committed donors, FPU is poised to expand its reach and impact, ensuring students are equipped with the tools, spaces and opportunities to thrive. 🏠

JOIN US!

We are so grateful for this generous support that will empower Fresno Pacific University to enhance student learning, campus sustainability and the Chapel experience. While we celebrate the impact of this gift, we invite you to consider other opportunities to serve our students, including:

- ▶ For \$3,000 each, **new starting blocks** for the Sunbird Swim and Dive team.
- ▶ For \$10,000, upgrade a **Pacific Counseling Center** office and help create a place of safety and healing through new rugs, pillows, art, bookshelves, a therapist chair or a couch.
- ▶ Contribute any amount toward **The Hiebert Library Project**. Transform the library into a Learning Commons—a hub for student learning, collaboration and support—through library upgrades, collaborative working pods for students, technology and other resources.
- ▶ **University and Seminary Scholarship Funds**. Help make Christian higher education affordable and accessible for students.

Give to any area at fpu.edu/give—enter your choice into the "Other" category—or contact the Advancement Office at 559-453-2251. Thank you for investing in FPU as we develop students for leadership and service through excellence in Christian higher education.



Valerie Rempel reflects on the past and future of Anabaptism during 500th Anniversary

The 500th Anniversary of Anabaptism—the Christian movement that birthed the Mennonite Brethren denomination and Fresno Pacific University—was commemorated January 22, 2025, on the main campus.

The celebration included a luncheon and historical presentation by Valerie Rempel, Ph.D., former vice president and dean of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and a morning Chapel by Brian Schulz, Ph.D., professor of biblical and theological studies.

The beginnings of Anabaptism, a movement within the 16th century Protestant Reformation, are marked by the meeting of a small group of Christians in Zurich, Switzerland, on January 21, 1525. Their decision to baptize one another as adults resulted in imprisonment and death for many but inspired Christians worldwide to discipleship focused on the way of Jesus.

Rempel summed up sixteenth century Anabaptists as "radical Bible readers at the core." "They understood the reign of God to be centered in the church rather than the state and believed that the body of Christ was to give visible witness to its proper citizenship. They saw themselves as present-day disciples of Jesus and because of that, they gave special weight to Jesus's teaching—to his invitation to live generous lives, to his call for love of enemies, to his encouragement to participate in God's work of healing and justice and hope," she said. 🏠



LEARN MORE

Read more about Rempel's presentation on Anabaptism at fpu.edu/news



A CULTURE OF *SERVICE*

Jannette Gardner Supports the Next Generation of Students and Teachers

By Cyndee Fontana-Ott

Growing up in Selma, **Jannette Gardner (MA '22, TC '16, BA '13)** watched her parents scrape to make ends meet. She remembers “the hustle, the grind” and pitching in where she could as her mother and father cleaned laundromats, worked swap meets and sold handmade creations on holidays.

While the family didn’t have much, they always had something to give through service. Starting at age 5 or 6, Gardner spent summers helping teachers at her aunt’s year-round school in Parlier and later teaching Polynesian dance to students.

She learned face painting—simple images like a snowman or snowflake at first—and shared that skill at events over the years. “That is the culture of my family,” she says. “If we are ever needed, we are there to serve others.”

That belief only strengthened as Gardner completed her bachelor’s degree, teaching credential and master’s degree at Fresno Pacific University. While many factors went into her decision to become a Sunbird, the university’s foundational commitment to service was especially meaningful.

“God places us in all these different situations and experiences with other people,” says Gardner. “If you have something to give or you have a talent, or you have a passion, it was because God put you in that position to be able to serve someone.

“I feel like that because that is one of the focuses of Fresno Pacific. I was very intentional and very mindful of that when I became a teacher: I am here to serve kids, I’m here to serve the families and I’m here to serve the community.”

Beyond the basics

Today, Gardner is a fourth grade teacher at Malaga Elementary in the Fowler Unified School District—where she was named district Educator of the Year in March 2025. Located on the southern edge of Fresno, the school serves nearly 200 students in a tight-knit but disadvantaged community.

Gardner offers more than educational basics on campus. She has volunteered lessons in Polynesian dance—the moves, meaning and history—and is the school’s climate and culture director. In that role, she helps create engaging, inclusive experiences and events that range from Donuts with Grownups to Kindness Week.

One of her university mentors is Darrell Blanks, clinical associate professor of education and director of the multiple subject program. Gardner, he says, embodies the concept of redemptive service.

“She took her preparation and that call to service and she went back to the kids who represent what her life was like,” Blanks says. “She didn’t go out to make massive amounts of money somewhere—she went to serve the kids that were like her. I think you see that it was a calling for her.”

Early goals and a long road

In fact, Gardner knew from an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. Aunt Noemi Flores, a teacher in the Parlier Unified School District, was a huge inspiration.

“I used to see how she interacted with her staff and her kids, and the culture was so supportive and loving,” Gardner says. “I wanted to do those things for kids.”

Her family also prized education. Her father would show his hands, worn from hard work, and say: “This is why you get an education.” He labored in the fields as a young man but wanted the American dream and security for his children.

“All of that really molded me to serve others,” Gardner says.

While Gardner’s goal was clear, her path to college was not straight. After graduating Selma High School in 2008, she married at age 18 and was pregnant at 19 with her first son, Aiden. Her parents worried that Gardner wouldn’t finish her education, but she did complete her journey after years of perseverance.

First, she earned an associate degree at Fresno City College. That was followed by a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts in 2013, through the degree completion program, and a multiple subject teaching credential in 2016 she started three months after her second child, Ethan, was born. She completed her master’s degree in 2022 and was named an Outstanding Graduate by the university.

Getting support

Along the way, she leaned on family and her husband, **Justin Gardner (BA ‘21)**, who sandwiched his studies at Fresno Pacific in between hers. “It was a village that helped me,” Gardner says.

She is grateful for the encouragement from FPU and its professors. During the degree completion program “is when I fell in love with Fresno Pacific,” Gardner says. The professors “were my champions, they wanted me to do well and succeed. You could feel the passion in their teaching.”



Blanks, for example, was supportive through personal challenges and beyond, including during some research focused on math—not Gardner’s best subject.

“To her credit, she took the thing that wasn’t her strength or her love and she made that into something that she could challenge and learn to overcome,” he says. “What a great example to her family, to the kids that she works with.”

To support the next generation of teachers as well as students, Gardner also has served as a mentor teacher for several years and now is part of the FPU’s Rural Teacher Residency Program. “Being able to mentor teachers so that they can come back and serve in those communities is the goal,” she says. “I was very excited that Fresno Pacific is providing this opportunity because it is my way of serving, too, and supporting a resident teacher.”

Supporting others

After growing up in a small community, Gardner also wanted to build her career in one. She worked briefly at other campuses but felt drawn to Malaga after interviewing at a job fair.

She remembers walking on the Malaga campus and seeing the elementary school’s mural and green grounds. “I felt that feeling: This is where I belong,” Gardner says.

Gardner is an example of why the teaching program’s students are well-respected in the community, Blanks says. “Jannette embodies what makes them highly regarded, and that is a deep and genuine compassion to serve as a teacher and to face your own challenges in that service. That’s what makes the difference.”

She always talks about her class and work “from a vantage point of finding pure joy in that service and not to her own end, but just for the kids that she’s serving,” he adds.

God has been with her through life’s challenges, Gardner says, while Fresno Pacific and its professors also have been a critical support. The university’s commitment to service reinforced her dedication and approach to her chosen profession.

“Yes, I’m a teacher,” she says. “I teach academics but I also help my families. I help my kids. I consider the community—it’s not just academics... I feel like that is really who I am as a teacher.”



Mario Flores Made Spreading the Good News a Family Affair

Mario Flores (MSW '25, BA '19) was 10 years old when a neighbor invited him to church. After hearing the Good News, Flores went home and shared the Gospel with his parents and three siblings. There's no way of measuring the number of souls the Flores family has saved since they began ministering together, but the tradition is continuing into the next generation. Flores has dedicated his life to bringing people to Christ, and he and wife Breanna are raising their four young children to continue the mission that began in his heart all those years ago.

"I can look back and see that the Lord has always had his hand on my life and I've been set apart," Flores says. "I embrace that I'm the Lord's in everything I do. I always find my hope in the Lord, in my family and in my community."

Service drives Flores, whether through coaching basketball, planting a church or being a social worker for Farmersville Unified School District. He works tirelessly in pursuit of growing God's Kingdom, but never looks at it as a job. "To me, this is not work; it's a lifestyle," he says. "I love what I do and it makes everything I do special."

Following the path set before him

Flores, 37, completed his Master's in Social Work (MSW) at FPU in May. As an older student earning his B.A. in Business Management with a focus in organizational management at the university, he

MINISTRY BEGINS AT HOME

By Amy D. Fienen

brought the wisdom only learned through experiencing the joys and struggles life brings. The MSW program was brand new when he applied for the 2021-22 school year and was awarded a full scholarship. With a resume that includes pastoral and restorative justice roles, he's tackled issues like substance abuse, mental health and gang violence. It was during his graduate studies that he saw how his diverse work experience fit so well together.

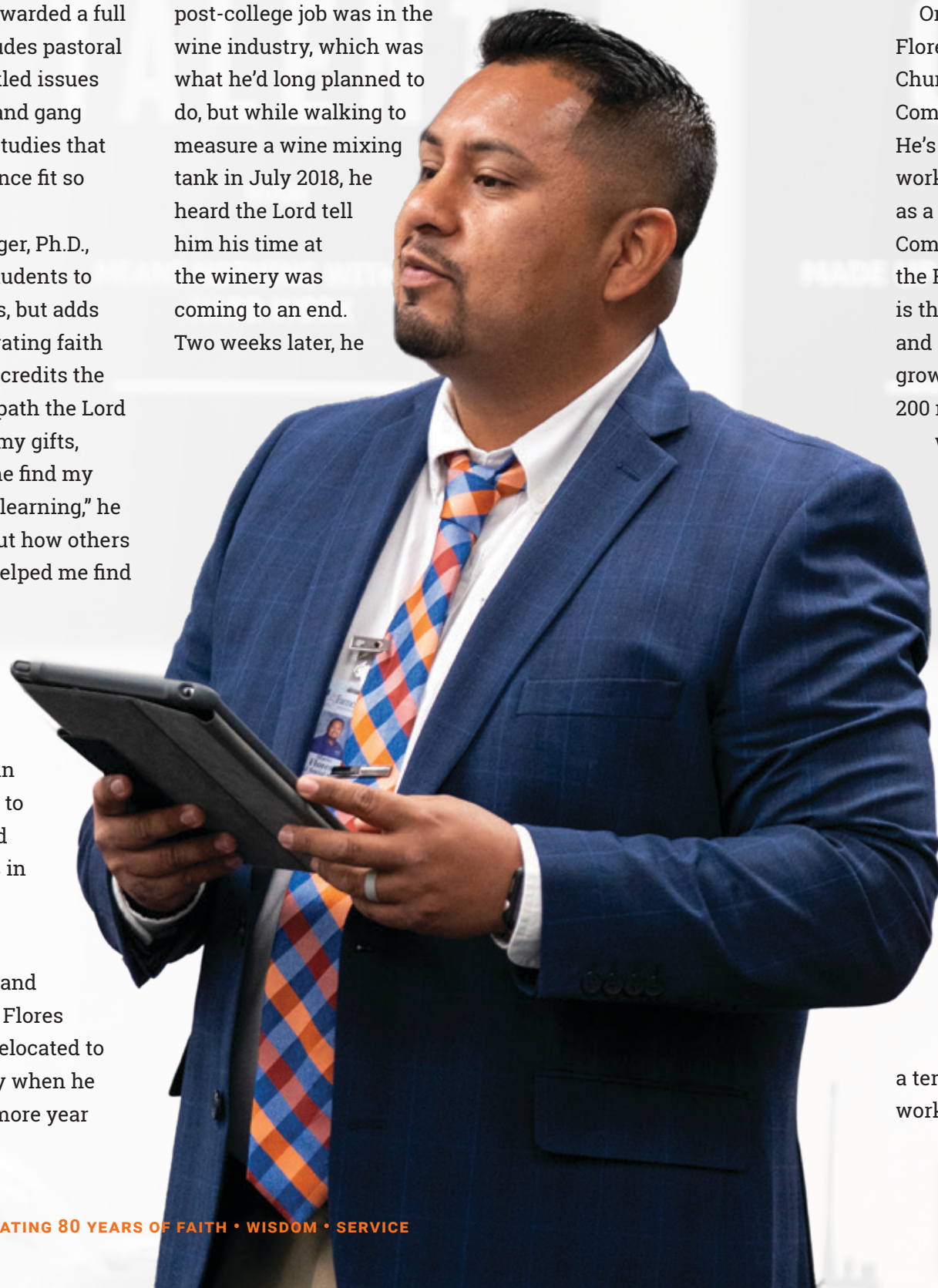
MSW Program Director Sonia Pranger, Ph.D., says FPU seeks to not only prepare students to work in the public and private sectors, but adds a strong emphasis on ethically integrating faith and practice that sets it apart. Flores credits the university for guiding him along the path the Lord set before him. "FPU helped identify my gifts, my passion for serving, and helped me find my community and embrace my style of learning," he says. "FPU uses a model for finding out how others learn and helping them excel. They helped me find my way to what I'm doing now."

It's been evident from his admissions interview through the completion of his master's that Flores is a servant-leader, Pranger says. "He has fully invested his time in becoming all that God has called him to be," she says. "I feel incredibly blessed that a pastor and person like Mario is in our program."

Finding where he was meant to be

Born in New York to parents Justo and Norma, immigrants from El Salvador, Flores didn't learn English until his family relocated to the South Valley community of Pixley when he was 6. He moved to Tulare his sophomore year

of high school and attended a couple different colleges before eventually enrolling in FPU's bachelor's degree completion program. His first post-college job was in the wine industry, which was what he'd long planned to do, but while walking to measure a wine mixing tank in July 2018, he heard the Lord tell him his time at the winery was coming to an end. Two weeks later, he



was approached by one of his former basketball coaches about a local church in search of a youth/associate pastor, and Flores' ministry career began.

Ordained by the Alliance of Reformed Churches, Flores spent three years pastoring Tulare Nazarene Church before he was recruited by Tulare Community Church to become a church planter. He's been bi-vocational for the past 10 years, working full-time in education while moonlighting as a pastor. On Easter Sunday 2020, Tulare Community Church East Campus began meeting in the Flores home. "The crazy cool thing about God is that a year later, we moved into a leased building and it was a beautiful thing," he says. Flores helped grow what is now Hope City Church to more than 200 members before stepping down as lead pastor when he felt the Lord calling him to return to FPU to pursue a graduate degree.

"I can look back and see that the Lord has always had his hand on my life."

– Mario Flores

Loving, learning and sharing the Good News

Flores took 24 units to complete his master's degree, in addition to working on his counseling and administration credentials. In the meantime, he was hired as a social worker for Farmersville Unified School District. Pranger says Flores has been a terrific example of how social work and faith work together. "Much of his vocation has been in

the church and I see his faith and ministry coming to life in his courses, internship, and work," she says. "I anticipate God continuing to use Mario in a variety of ways, but with a much broader reach to help the most people."

Meanwhile Breanna, to whom Flores has been married for 10 years, works for Tulare County Younglives, a ministry that supports adolescent parents, and her husband works alongside her. With the help of their four children, all under the age of 10, and Flores' parents, the family prioritizes serving the Lord and their community together. "My parents, family and mentors have poured into me in so many ways," he says. "Any good, healthy ministry you don't do by yourself. We're firm believers of discipleship and have a good, healthy community around us."

The reason for doing what he does is simple, Flores says: "I want people to know I love Jesus. My greatest joy is to share the Good News with the next generation. I want to teach them how to break generational curses and see revival through relationships." Working in ministry is not without its challenges, but Flores says that in seasons of discouragement, the love he has for what he does keeps him moving forward.

While Flores has crossed one finish line by obtaining his master's degree, he doesn't see this as the end of his educational marathon. He plans to study for his Ph.D., with a goal of one day returning to FPU as a professor to give back to the place he says has given him so much. In every job he undertakes, he does so with the mission of leading, guiding and empowering. "My heart is always to bring revival in our community," he says. "I want to be a change agent and make things better." 🏠



Being the SOLUTION

Monika Grasley Empowers Communities to Tap Resources from Within

By Katie Fries

“Your life story is not your life sentence.”

Monika Grasley knows of which she speaks. As a child in post-World-War-II Germany, her homelife was marked by violence and poverty. By 13, she’d left school and was homeless. But three years later, a chance encounter with a stranger led her to a Christian youth group—and a new path.

“I was 16, ready to commit suicide,” she recalls, “but God just got hold of me and started transforming my life.”

She went back to school, immigrated to the United States, married and, with her husband, Jim, was a missionary and teacher in China before returning to the States to be closer to family. Working in a church, she became aware of “a huge disconnect between well-meaning folks wanting to help, but only doing parachute jumps—bringing things at certain times.”

Many organizations working with the impoverished, Grasley says, offer help for individual needs without considering the bigger picture. “Everybody has gifts and abilities to bring to the table, but people often have trouble piecing things together. It’s a lot of organizations they have to keep track of. We use an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to empower people.”

Rather than focus first on community needs, ABCD offers a model for sustainable development based on strengths and potential in the communities. Participants assess the resources, skills and experience available in a community, organize around issues that involve them and determine and take appropriate action. The premise is that people in communities can drive development themselves, responding to challenges and creating local social and economic development.

Piecing things together

Grasley founded LifeLine Community Development Corporation, a registered nonprofit since 2007, to address this issue. Based in Merced, it specializes in connecting those in need to services designed to help them move out of poverty.

The nonprofit operates three community centers offering programs and resources for people of all ages, including youth programs, food pantries and recovery programs for those experiencing addiction. In 2024, Grasley says LifeLine served 3,981 individuals in its community centers alone.

LifeLine also connects people to partner organizations, such as First 5 Merced, Central Valley Community Foundation and area churches.

“It is about individual connections,” Grasley explains. “Our community centers are open every day, eight-to-five. Every day, we have dozens and dozens of people coming in. We might have a homeless person coming in who just needs a cup of coffee, a teenager coming in for court-ordered community service, people coming in for help with their resume, people who need rides to the hospital. We help families with taxes. People learn social skills, have a safe place to be. It’s all about how we help people move out of poverty.”

The need for this type of work, she says, is greater than ever. “There are so many people who have been born into generational poverty. The question becomes, how do we help them move out of the system? What people need at this point are

relationships, somebody who helps them move forward in life—whether helping start a garden, get food stamps or get a driver’s license.”

Similarly, relationship building has enabled Grasley to grow and strengthen her organization. In 2023, she enrolled in FPU’s M.A. in Strategic and Organizational Leadership program.

According to **Suzana Dobrić Veiss (MA '02, BA '99), Ph.D.**, program director and an associate professor, the program helps students develop the skills to lead and manage others. As such,

it attracts people from a variety of industries, including medicine and healthcare, law enforcement, for-profit companies and nonprofits like Grasley’s.

“Most often, the students that are coming into the program already have the experience of being in their field and have realized they want to contribute

in a meaningful way...but don’t know how to be a leader,” Dobrić Veiss says. In the 20-month program, she says, they learn about systems and engage in problem solving. A year-long project requires students to choose an organization, identify a need and provide recommendations. Grasley chose to look at LifeLine for her project.

“As I was looking at succession planning, I wanted to make sure the organization was on a good footing,” Grasley explains. “Most of us who start nonprofits have a great vision but have no clue what we’re doing. I didn’t know things I should have known. FPU has prepared me to create structures and policies and pathways for people

“It’s all about how we help people move out of poverty.”

– Monika Grasley



to move forward. Strategic planning needs to happen, but policies also need to be in place for an organization to thrive.”

Among the benefits of the program, Grasley says she’s become more adept at research, strategic planning and policy implementation. All while keeping an eye toward ethical, servant leadership.

Extending her hand in leadership

Dobrić Veiss describes leadership as, “one hand extended up to grab the hand of somebody who has gone before you and extending your other hand to somebody who is coming behind you.”

Grasley’s hand is extended, according to Dobrić Veiss. “She is transforming the lives of people she directly works with, but as an extension is transforming to all the clients they serve as well. Good leadership is contagious; the hope is that as these students who are in the program become confident in who God created them to be, to fulfill the purpose that they were created for, they will go on to serve their communities in a more powerful way.”

Grasley concurs: “I know that every staff member I have could be at another organization, but most of our staff has come to us through the program. You can’t live in a silo. God has given us gifts and we need to share those gifts—that means empowering other people to live up to their full potential. If I’m not doing that, I’m missing the point of what LifeLine is all about, and what Scripture is all about.”



LEARN MORE

about Monika Grasley’s work at lifelinedc.org

Helping the Helpers

By Christopher L. Scott



Jennifer Toler Smith is CEO and president of Link Care Counseling Center, a nonprofit in Fresno that began in 1965 to provide counseling services to local pastors and missionaries. In all, more than 7,500 local pastors and missionaries have been helped.

Link Care's pastors' program offers five free counseling sessions. The intensive seven-week program for missionaries is a needed resource because missionaries often struggle with depression, anxiety, spiritual warfare and difficulties moving to new countries.

Most people would agree with Smith when she says,

“Mental health things affect every single person no matter what you are doing.”

— Jennifer Toler Smith

“Mental health things affect every single person, no matter what you are doing.” But the need is particularly important among those in ministry. “Pastors probably need more counseling than anyone else because spiritual leaders are under attack even more,” she says.

Current research on the mental health of pastors shows the deep need. “70% of pastors report dealing with depression and 80% of pastors believe their ministry is negatively affecting them,” Smith says. “Being a pastor is a very lonely position. You don’t get to fall apart at any moment. You need to keep it together. There’s a lot going on in this world and our pastors are the frontline defense.”

Smith graduated from FPU with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She started at Link Care in 2010 as a clinical psychologist and in 2020 became the CEO and president upon the retirement of Phil Collier, Ph.D., former FPU faculty. She now serves in an advisory role overseeing all components of Link Care and performs eight client hours per week.

While her success has been obvious, it was a surprise to Smith that she became involved in mental health. “I didn’t know I was going to do this,” she says.

Running cross country and track originally attracted Smith to FPU, but classes with Collier and Ted Nickel, Ph.D., emeritus psychology, drew her to counseling and helping people. One of the core things she learned was flexibility in life and ministry. “People are so diverse and individual, you have to learn to pivot to them when they come to you,” she says.

FPU introduced Smith to the broad field of psychology during what were formative years for her. “I learned people are still people. They are not a diagnosis, and they are not symptoms,” she says.

While at FPU she took various psychology classes, including Abnormal Psychology and Introduction to Assessment. “I was taught to think critically and not just regurgitate information for tests,” Smith says. She was introduced to Link Care through a class Collier taught when he was agency president.

The classes, people and atmosphere all prepared Smith to serve others. “The culture and the community of FPU really shaped how I view my faith and how that plays out in my career,” she says. While a student, everyone from her professors, resident advisors and cross country coach regularly reminded Smith how important her relationship with the Lord is. All these people taught her, “a career is going to be about more than making money and it matters how my soul is doing,” she says.

Now in her fifth year as CEO and 15th year as a clinical psychologist, Smith acknowledges there’s still much work to do as it relates to helping pastors and missionaries. “I’d love us to work ourselves out of a job,” she says. [🏠](#)



FIELD OF DREAMS

By Wayne Steffen

A milestone, a launchpad—a dream come true.

The idea that FPU's Dan Martin Stadium is more than a top-tier baseball field came through loud and clear at the ribbon-cutting ceremony April 9, 2025.

Bright sun warmed the eager spirits of fans, alumni, students, faculty, staff and supporters as the celebration began at 4:30 p.m. at the stadium, on the southeast side of the main campus.

President André Stephens, Ph.D., spoke of the student-athletes stepping onto the new field, full of dreams of their own. "I pray this stadium reminds them that they are seen, supported and called to something

greater. That here, at Fresno Pacific, their potential is not just recognized—but nurtured," he said.

The stadium includes a concession stand, restroom, covered seating for 700, a press box, clubhouse and locker room fit for the big leagues. The facility was built by Quiring General, designed by Centerline Design and funded by \$3 million from Fresno's Daniel R. Martin Family Foundation, a lead gift from the Briscoe Family Foundation and Valley Iron, Inc., and other donations.

No one has waited longer to cut this ribbon than Oscar Hirschhorn, FPU's only baseball coach. "When we started this program, we didn't have a field. Just a vision, a few practice balls and a group of young men who believed," he said.

Today's field is more than just a place to play, Hirschhorn said. "It's a space where young men will grow—athletically, academically and spiritually."

Fresno Mayor Jerry Dyer, who stood with Stephens and Hirschhorn in February of 2024 for the stadium groundbreaking, happily echoed his earlier optimism. "This is more than a field—it's a launching pad."

More at fpu.edu/stadium. 🏠

STEINERT ATHLETIC COMPLEX



» GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jo Ellen Misakian (emerita teacher librarian) received the 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award from Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. Misakian served FPU from 1999-2014 as program director of library and educational technology and interim dean of education. Before coming to FPU, Misakian served as a library technician in Sanger Unified School District and library services specialist at FCSS. A highlight of her career came in the late 1970s when she inspired Lone Star Elementary School students to read the *The Outsiders*, which so resonated with them that she sent a petition signed by the students to Francis Ford Coppola, who made the book into a 1983 hit that launched or boosted the careers of Tom Cruise, Patrick Swayze, Matt Dillon, Diane Lane, Rob Lowe, Ralph Macchio, Emilio Estevez and C. Thomas Howell. Coppola credited Misakian with bringing the book to his attention, and some cast members later visited Lone Star.



A trio of graduates are among Fresno's 40 Under 40 for 2024:

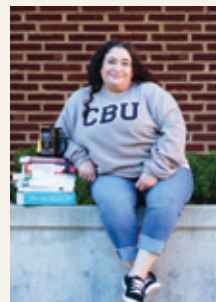
Elizabeth Jaramillo (MA '24) director of personnel at California Teaching Fellows Foundation.

Vianey Baraza (BA '16) special projects manager at the Education and Leadership Foundation.

Charah Coleman (BA '07) founding coordinator of the Financial Wellness Center at UC Merced. She also created and leads the social enterprise Sound for the People.

Ashlee Sanchez (BA '23) is a case manager with Sierra Meadows Behavioral Health Clinic and plans to finish her MSW by September 2025.

Luz Lopez (BA '22) graduated with her Master of Social Work in April 2024 from California Baptist University. She works as a mental health clinician/medical social worker at Valley Children's Hospital specializing in suicide prevention while she prepares to become an associate clinical social worker.



Joanna Mendoza (BA '19) passed the California Bar Exam November 8, 2024, and was sworn in as an attorney December 4, 2024. She is an immigration attorney with the Education and Leadership Foundation.

Greg Barragan (CTE '18) received the Fresno County Community Hero Award at the 2024 State of the County luncheon.

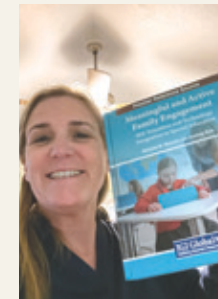
Priscilla Gowens (BA '17) is a Resource Support Program Teacher for Kings Canyon Unified School District.

Dustin Maddox (SEM '17, BA '12) published the article "Everyday Discipleship" in the January/February issue of *Christian Leader*, the magazine of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Conference of Churches.

Rachel Baskin (BA '15) received the Public Safety Hero Award at the 2024 State of the County luncheon.

Jerome Trembley (BA '15) finished a pediatric residency in Albany, NY, in June 2024. That fall he started as a pediatrician with Southern California Permanente Medical Group in Bakersfield.

Nikki Donnelly (MA '14, BA '07) published the chapter "Engaging Families in the Special Education Assessment Process" in the book *Meaningful and Active Family Engagement: IEP, Transition and Technology Integration in Special Education*.



Arianna Perry (BA '14) was appointed head cross country coach and assistant track coach for runners at College of the Sequoias in December 2024.

Andy Haussler (MA '13, BA '01) was appointed Clovis City Manager starting January 1, 2025. He had been city deputy manager and community and economic development director.

Christina Stokes-Johnson (BA '10) earned an executive MBA at Fresno State's Craig School of Business. She is now director of real estate development at Fresno Housing Authority.

Mgeni Mpolo (BA '06) has been appointed director of sales and marketing at Pendry West Hollywood. His previous roles include managing director at The Brilliant Advice Company in Zanzibar as well as leadership positions at W San Francisco, The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco and Marriott International.

Efrain Tovar (MA '06, BA '95) was featured in a September article in *Alta Quarterly* about his work with newcomer students, both in his classroom at Abraham Lincoln Middle School in Selma Unified School District and in the community.

Erica Lassen (BA '05) joined the ASSIST leadership team as assistant director. ASSIST is California's official statewide database for prospective California transfer students. She had been senior articulation analyst for the agency's central services.

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities has selected **Felipe Hinojosa (BA '99) Ph.D.**, professor of history at Baylor University and The John and Nancy Jackson Endowed Chair for Baylor in Latin America, as one of 45 fellows of its prestigious Leadership Academy/La Academia de Liderazgo.

Bruce J. Evans (BA '93) was elected vice-president/president-elect of the Music Library Association. He began his service in March, and will serve one year as president-elect, two years as president and one year as past president. Bruce has been involved in MLA since 1997 and has been librarian at Baylor University since 2003.

Tim Allison (TC '92) received the Community Hero Award at the 2024 State of the County Luncheon for Fresno County.

» **MARRIAGES**



Heidi Orender (BA '20) and **Tyler Hodges (BA '16)** married July 20, 2024.



Ronald Orr (BA '12) married Courtney Ericson in Lubbock, TX, June 14, 2024. The couple lives in Charlottesville, VA.

» **BIRTHS**



Christina Husbands (BA '10) married Lonny Johnson October 28, 2023. She is now Christina Stokes-Johnson.



Suzanne Rose Jacobsma was born July 30, 2024, to **Aaron (TC '23)** and **Nicole (Marshall TC '18, BA '14) Jacobsma**. She weighed 8 lbs., 2 oz. and was 21 1/2 inches long.

» **BIRTHS**



Chloe Mae Bridges was born July 7, 2023, to **Courtney (Smith BA '20)** and **Stephen Bridges**. Courtney and Stephen married September 20, 2022.



Koa Everette William O'Dell was born December 12, 2023, to **Amanda (Blackburn BA '17)** and **Christopher O'Dell**. He joins sister Kyla, 6.



Eloise Rose Delk was born September 28, 2024, to **Kelsey (Lowrey BA '20)** and **Samuel (BS '19) Delk** in Oxnard.



Brynn Rose Samson was born October 22, 2024, to **John (BA '17)** and **Danae Samson**.



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» DEATHS

Lynn Celano (MA '95), 69, died October 15, 2024. Born in Los Banos, she served as an educator and administrator for more than 40 years in both public and Catholic schools at all levels and had particular expertise with autistic and special needs students. She was listed in Strathmore's *Who's Who* as Professional of the Year and America's *Registry of Outstanding Professionals*. Most recently, she was education director at Huntington Learning Center, Parker, CO.

Karen Jeanne Bockman (MA '87), 81, died November 25, 2024. Born in Santa Monica, the family moved to Fresno. She taught at Fort Miller Middle School in Fresno as well as in Greeley, CO, Ivanhoe, CA and the Visalia Unified School District. Active in church, Karen also loved her 1931 Model A Victoria, outdoor sports and won a state marksmanship trophy. Survivors include husband David, son Michael (Victoria), daughter Susan (Brian) Groh and four grandchildren.

Alan H. Whaley (SEM '72), 78, died October 15, 2024, at his home in Phoenix. He attended Fresno Pacific College 1963-1966, then earned a Master of Divinity degree from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in 1972. He pastored Palm Glen Mennonite Brethren Church and First Mennonite Church, both in Phoenix, spending over 50 years in ministry. Survivors include Carol, his wife of 58 years; children Scott Whaley and Melissa Kisich; and five grandchildren.

Roger Leo Wiens (BA '66), 80, died December 17, 2024. Born and raised on a farm in Mountain Lake, MN, Roger dedicated more than three decades to teaching at Sanger High School as a beloved history, government and driver's education teacher. He was a part of Trinity Community Church and the West Coast Mennonite Men's Chorus. Survivors include Carmen, his wife of 58 years; daughters Christi, Dareth, Erika, Tiffany and Hillary; and 22 grandchildren.

Lorraine "Dolly" Friesen (PBI '59), 85, died July 3, 2024. Born in Dallas, OR, she fell in love with music and with the choir conductor's son, **Walter Friesen (PBI '59)** at Pacific Bible Institute.. They married in 1959, living in many places in California during Walt's social services career. Dolly worked for Fresno Bible House, the Bank of America, the State of California and Vinewood Community Church, Lodi. She was always involved in music and other church activities, including at Butler Church, Fresno. Survivors include sons Randall (Chay) and Richard (Bunni), sisters Laverne (David) Knapp and Judy (Russell) Lowen and granddaughter, Pepper. Walt preceded her in death in 2015.

Roland Glen Ewert (AA '56), 92, died September 1, 2024. He taught government and economics at Fresno's Roosevelt High School and coached wrestling, golf, football and track. He was involved in Gideons International and West Coast Mennonite Men's Chorus. At PBI, Glen met Frances Regier, and they married in 1957. They were active in North Fresno Church. Glen is preceded in death by his wife and son Darren. Daughter Denise Ewert survives.

Frances Jean Ewert (PBI '54), 89, died July 24, 2024. She was born March 12, 1935, in Henderson, NB. In Fresno Fran had a career as a real estate escrow officer. Fran and husband Roland Glen Ewert had children Denise and Darren. The couple were members of North Fresno Church, where she sang in the choir and enjoyed various ministries. She is survived by her daughter. Her husband and son preceded her in death.



Welcome to a new feature in *Pacific*!

Take a look at these vintage photographs from deep within the vaults of Fresno Pacific, Pacific College and Pacific Bible Institute. See anyone you know—maybe your mom or dad? Remember these adventures—why are all those young people riding on the outside of that car?

If you know anything about these photos, or if they spark a memory of Sunbirds or Vikings past, please share by scanning the QR code, or follow the link fpu.edu/mystery. We will highlight some of the responses in the next issue of *Pacific*.



SHARE YOUR MEMORIES WITH FPU'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Alumni Development Office is excited to partner with Concepts, Inc. (PCI) to produce the FPU Oral History Project. This project allows us to hear about your personal experiences from your time at Fresno Pacific or any of its preceding institutions and how the school has helped to shape your life since then.

If you have received a postcard or an email with a telephone number, please call the number to speak with a dedicated PCI representative, who will verify or update your contact information and then ask you to share about your time here.

Participate in FPU's Oral History Project and help us gather stories spanning eight decades of alumni! Those memories will be compiled into printed and digital publications, preserving them for years to come. If you choose to purchase the publication, prepare for a walk down memory lane as you flip through the pages.

It has been so encouraging and fun to read through some of the stories and hear how the Lord has moved in your lives. Thank you for helping make this project a success and sharing your stories!

For more information, please visit fpu.edu/historyproject.

Morgan Schlesselman
Director of Alumni Development



WHAT'S GOING ON?

It's so easy to let your classmates and friends know what's happening in your life—job, marriage, children, new address and awards. Visit fpu.edu/alumniupdate.



NEW MEMBERS OF THE FLOCK

Recently had a baby? Let us know—we'd love to send you one of our cute little Born to Soar baby t-shirts, like the one pictured here.



LIVES TRANSFORMED

JULIAN BLOEMHOF (B.A. '25)

FROM STRUGGLING TO STRONG

By Christopher L. Scott


While in high school Julian Bloemhof kept sports and church in separate categories that didn't mix. He also noticed he acted differently around his friends than how he acted with his family. Julian realized these were weaknesses in his spiritual life and came to FPU hoping to improve these areas.

As he began at FPU he found himself involved in its Fellowship ministry. Each week Julian and other student leaders met with their spiritual formation leader, Jordan Greynolds, discipleship and outreach coordinator in the Office of Spiritual Formation, who walked them through a passage of Scripture. "It has been helpful to pick other people's brains and have conversations because it has helped me gain a different perspective on things as it relates to different Bible stories or passages," Julian says.

Julian says Jordan helped him grow by asking, "Are you taking the time to put God above other things?" and "Are you really being intentional with your prayers?" This relationship with Jordan, discipleship with other men and probing questions were exactly what Julian needed to shore up his spiritual weaknesses.

Now Julian has integrated his Christian faith into all aspects of his life. Sports and church are no longer separate. He acts the same way around different groups of people. Julian does this by asking himself, "How can I give everything to God and reflect him in my everyday walk?" Today Julian's spiritual life is very different than just

three years ago. "Every morning I wake up and try to do something to praise God," he says.

FPU helped Julian become strong in areas where he struggled. "I know where I am at in my faith. And my faith has been strengthened. I learned how to dedicate everything I do to God's glory," he says. 



EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you know a student who has been transformed at FPU? Contact Wayne Steffen at wayne.steffen@fresno.edu

The Ninth Alumni and Friends Tour!

Switzerland

June 2026

Tour the great cities of Switzerland, the Alps and contemporary cultural centers. We'll also visit ancient archeological sites like the Neolithic pole dwellings and Roman, Medieval and Renaissance old towns.

- ▶ Gronergrat open-air cog railway
- ▶ Lindt Home of Chocolate
- ▶ Trachselwald Castle and Mennonite Museum
- ▶ Chillon Castle
- ▶ Visp and Zermatt with view of the Matterhorn (weather permitting)
- ▶ Omega Watch Museum
- ▶ Basel and Bern Old Towns
- ▶ Gruyere cheese tasting
- ▶ Interlaken and Harder Klum Funicular
- ▶ Optional Heidelberg and Rhine Valley extension

See more at fpu.edu/alumnitours



THE MENNONITE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES

1962

By Kevin Enns-Rempel, Director Emeritus, Hiebert Library

In the southeast corner of Hiebert Library is a truly one-of-a-kind collection of historical documents, images and artifacts known as the Mennonite Library & Archives. It provides a window for understanding the history of not only Fresno Pacific University but also the larger Mennonite Brethren Church.

When the new Hiebert Library building was completed in 1962, it included "an archives room" to store "any documents or other materials of peculiar historical value," with a particular emphasis on "materials relating to Anabaptist and Mennonite history." In 1975 the archives and library became part of an official system of North American Mennonite Brethren archival centers, together with ones at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Manitoba and Tabor College in Kansas. The Fresno Center was designated as the official archives for the Pacific District and the bi-national General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

In its new official capacity as a "Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies," the historical library and archives at Pacific College grew quickly. Denominational records that had been scattered in various locations were shipped to Fresno and became part of this collection. The largest single record group was that of Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services (today known as Multiply) and included records that documented Mennonite Brethren mission work around the world. The

center eventually would eventually house records for most of the earliest Pacific District congregations; collections of writings, images and audio recordings from a wide range of historical figures in the Mennonite Brethren Church; and the records of Fresno Pacific University.

While the archives focused primarily on the Mennonite Brethren Church, the historical library collection extended far beyond that to include the entire Anabaptist-Mennonite story, collecting both new publications as well as rare historical volumes. Among the most significant volumes are a 1688 edition of Menno Simons' writings, a 1685 edition of the *Martyrs Mirror* and a 1536 copy of the *Froschauer Bible*.

Today the Mennonite Library & Archives continues to collect books, periodicals and unpublished historical documents. In recent years it has turned to digitizing many of these records, some of which can be found at digitalfpu.fresno.edu. In addition to its digital access, the library and archives are open to the public on weekdays. Visitors are welcome to pursue research projects or just visit and enjoy the historic treasures.

This is Kevin Enns-Rempel's last From the Archives. I thank him for his marvelous work in writing this column since its 2014 inception and wish him well in his retirement after 40 years of exceptional service with Fresno Pacific University—Editor 🏠



STUNT takes *Flight*

By Marina Gaytan

When Sunbird athletics announced in May 2024 that STUNT was coming to FPU, the big question was—"What is STUNT?"

STUNT is described by USA Cheer as one of the fastest-growing female sports in the country, removing the crowd-leading element of cheer to focus on the technical and athletic components, including partner stunts, pyramids, basket tosses, group jumps and tumbling. FPU's program will officially kick off in the spring of 2026.

While STUNT may look like an amped-up cheerleading routine, it has its own specifications that set it apart from the cheer squad. USA Cheer created STUNT as an opportunity for colleges, universities and high schools to meet Title IX team sport requirements.

"It's basically taking every element out of cheer like the tumbling, the stunting, pyramids and the jumps, and eliminating the dancing," says Alyssa Troutt, FPU's head STUNT coach.

Troutt came aboard the athletics team in the summer of 2024. Not only is she in charge of recruiting talented individuals for her 50-person roster, but she has been developing the program along the way. One of her objectives is to showcase the talent of local student-athletes.

"My goal is to teach technique," Troutt says. "Get those solid to have good building blocks for the harder routines and to be able to perform them."

A game of STUNT is four quarters, with four rounds each quarter. There's a referee in the middle and two officials on hand. Both teams go out simultaneously and perform the same routine. Whichever team succeeds with a lesser number of deductions wins.

"It's more like gymnastics," Troutt says. "If the base takes a step, that's a minor deduction. If a flyer falls, it's a major deduction."

Since the National Collegiate Athletic Association recognizes STUNT as an official women's sport, FPU can win titles and championships. Director of Athletics Kyle Ferguson believes STUNT will bring tremendous value to both FPU and the Valley.

"We are creating a program that will allow us to compete at a high level while also offering local student-athletes an opportunity close to home," he says. "STUNT's growing popularity aligns well with our mission of providing opportunities that develop student-athletes holistically. I'm confident that this program will energize our campus, attract new support and deepen our engagement with the community in meaningful ways."

For Troutt, reaching that goal is part of a 10-year plan. "I've done cheer for so long, I know all the elements," she says. "I know how to teach the technique, now it's just taking what I know and putting it into a different box."

Troutt does have an extensive background in cheer. She grew up in the San Francisco Bay area, where she did competitive dance and cheered throughout college. Troutt attended Fresno State, where she was a cheerleader between 2005 and 2007. She has worked with FPU's cheer team for seven years, helping with STUNT clinics and choreography.

The most challenging part of building a new team will be competing against established programs up and down the state.

"I love winning," Troutt says. "I'm super competitive, however, I am teaching life lessons. I'm not just coaching. Some of these athletes need more than just a coach. They are a student-athlete for a reason, they are here to be a student first, athlete second." 🏠

“Some of these athletes need more than just a coach.”

— Alyssa Troutt



KEEP IN STEP WITH
THE **SUNBIRDS**

fpusunbirds.com

Kevin Enns-Rempel (1984)

*Emeritus Director of Hiebert Library
Director of the Mennonite Brethren Archives*

Kevin Enns-Rempel (BA '82) spent 40 years at FPU—all in one building: 26 years as archivist at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, then 14 years as director of Hiebert Library. “My father lived no more than 1.5 miles from the same intersection in Dallas, Oregon, for his entire life,” he says. “We both seemed to have had a skill for picking a lane and staying in it.”

One thing Enns-Rempel’s hometown could boast was Mennonite churches, with three. While one was Mennonite Brethren (MB), his family attended the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church. He applied to Fresno Pacific because his mother’s family were MB and her siblings were alumni.

Arriving without clear goals, one faculty member reawakened Enns-Rempel’s childhood love of history and libraries. “One American history class from Paul Toews convinced me that I should major in history,” he says.

The wily Toews suggested that the archival profession might be a good fit. Knowing the then-archivist was retiring, he saw the timing would be perfect for Enns-Rempel to earn his master’s and return. The plan worked. “I graduated from FPC in 1982 and completed a master’s degree at the University of California, Riverside, in 1984. A few months before completing that degree I learned that I had been hired,” he says.

Four decades has provided the freedom to pursue professional interests, including California Mennonites and the library art collection. He and Toews worked on numerous books. “My professional relationship with him was profoundly meaningful. I miss him a lot,” he says. Toews died in 2015.



Kevin Enns-Rempel

A fellow student became a personal interest—eventually. After graduation the friendship of Kevin Rempel and **Connie Enns (MA/MFT '93, BA '84)**, deepened and they joined names as well as lives. “She’s still the best part of what I got from my time here,” he says.

Wayne Steffen (1996)

Associate Director of Publications and Media Relations

A desire to leave home and contribute to a larger good brought Wayne Steffen to FPU and kept him here for over 28 years.

The Indiana native discovered Mennonites while working at Goshen College (GC), a Mennonite Church USA school, after about a decade in community newspapers. “Not being born into the tradition, I didn’t know the difference between Mennonite Church USA and the Mennonite Brethren,” he says.

All Mennonites have been welcoming, Steffen says. “At GC I called myself an adopted kid, and at FPU I’m an adopted kid working for the MB cousins.” Marrying GC piano faculty Arlene Hinckle brought him further into the fold. At FPU she spent 25 years as a piano instructor, choir conductor and accompanist.

One look at the FPU website convinced Steffen to come west. “When I saw palm trees on campus, I knew this was for me.”

Logistics did cause the couple pause. “Many things came together for us to sell one house, buy another and move myself, a very pregnant Arlene and our older son, still in diapers, across seven states and three time zones,” he says. First FPU boss Joy Hofer hosted him until the new house was ready and the rest of the family came out.

Editing *Pacific* magazine, making friends across the university and being a go-to guy for editing have been highlights. “A few faculty friends would like to see more commas and capitalization, but our discussions are always friendly,” he says. “I really love this place; so many wonderful people.”

Friendships have been crucial in facing the challenges of working in higher education. “Critique is the culture in academia, where every idea and decision is always up for discussion,” he says. “Sometimes we just need to take a break to remember all the good FPU does.”

Jeffrey Wilson, D.M.A. (2020)

*Professor of Music
Director of Choral Activities*

Jeff Wilson brought FPU a wealth of experience. Before his 20 years at Greenville (IL) University, he taught K-12 vocal music in Iowa and Illinois. His choirs toured North America and Europe, performing with nationally known ensembles. Wilson is also an organist and church musician.

A Maine native, Wilson grew up in Illinois with interests in sports, math and science. “Music turned out to be the field that chose me,” he says.

That sense of being chosen helped him start a new position far from family in a very different part of the country during COVID. “I stayed because



Wayne Steffen



Jeff Wilson

I was called to be here, enjoyed working with my students and colleagues, and felt supported and appreciated by community members,” Wilson says.

FPU highlights include Festival of Lessons & Carols services and Masterworks Concerts, moving into the Warkentine Culture and Arts Center and the 2022 choir tour of the Central Valley and Midwest. One challenge? “Teaching choral music online,” Wilson says.

Plans now are time with family—think grandchildren—continuing to make music, especially in church, traveling, hiking, reading and composing. “Many thanks to the FPU community for making me feel welcome and partnering with me,” Wilson says. 🏠

SUNBIRDS FLY CYBER— FPU levels up its athletic efforts with esports

By Wayne Steffen



A short walk across the Schlichting Quad on the main campus—at the end of Super Smash St.—is Fresno Pacific University’s newest sports arena.

There’s a poster of a jacked Sunny the Sunbird on the glass door. Behind that the scene is spartan, but the focus is clear.

Welcome to the Sunbird Esports Center.

Colorful posters of characters from various games pop from the flat-black painted walls. There are a couple of cloth chairs and leather/vinyl couches, but the action is centered on about a dozen gaming computers on long tables in the main part of the room. On a random Thursday afternoon three gamers practice their craft so intently that an obviously out-of-place visitor can gaze around for several minutes before anyone looks up.

The wave of the present

FPU launched into the esports multiverse in September 2024, when its fledgling teams started competing in weekly Super Smash Bros. Ultimate and Rocket League tournaments. These were

no spur-of-the-moment excuses to zone out and binge takeout pizza and energy drinks, but official matches with other university teams sanctioned by the National Esports Collegiate Conference (NECC). West Coast teams include Fresno State and several UC campuses.

Like any athletic endeavor, esports at FPU are carefully calibrated to appeal to the interests of young people today, build school spirit and attract new students to FPU. “If you look at the research, the number one way of recruiting male students is football. Number two is esports,” says Jake Gilbertson, Ed.D. vice president of student development. “It’s not a small thing. It’s not just nerds hanging out in their dorm rooms. It’s serious. It’s not fringe, its mainstream.”

“The goal is to make a footprint and to recruit players from area schools,” adds Christopher Carlson, special assistant to Gilbertson, coordinator of FPU esports and coach of both teams. He notes that Fresno Unified School District has a team that meets at nearby Sunnyside High School, and area clubs are also potential recruiting grounds.

Super Smash Bros. Ultimate requires a minimum of five players, four playing at any given time and one on the bench. Rocket League requires at least four players, three playing and one on the bench. The spring semester saw the addition of an Overwatch 2 team with a full roster of 10 players.

International reach

Esports are organized multiplayer video game competitions. By the 2010s, esports was a major part of the video game industry. Today top players are considered professionals, playing in internationally broadcast matches complete with onsite audiences and commentators.

The NECC began sponsoring esports in the fall of 2020 and today includes more than 300 colleges and universities in both regular season competition and championships. More at neccgames.com.

A new kind of student-athlete

At FPU, there is a concerted effort between student development and athletics to integrate esports. Players get scholarships, wear jerseys, take part in Sunbird Media Day and have a presence on the athletics website as well as their own webpage at fpu.edu/esports.

“We try to treat them as much like a student-athlete as we can,” Carlson said.

So far reality has exceeded Carlson’s expectations. More players came out than expected, teams are doing better than expected in their rookie seasons and IT has been very helpful. “It’s been lots of work, but lots of fun,” he says.”



LEARN MORE

Read the complete story at
news.fresno.edu/esports

Rory Angulo Joins FPU as Seminary Major Gift Officer

Rory Angulo joined Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary as major gifts officer March 17, 2025.

"As a missionary and a pastor, I got great hands-on experience in how a church and a ministry run, and developed discipleship skills, as well as practical knowledge," Angulo said.

Before accepting this position, Angulo and wife Claire, a nurse, were missionaries in Ecuador. Prior to that he was director of missions and youth ministry for Living Streams Church in Phoenix, AZ, and gained business experience as an inside sales representative for Avnet, Inc.

"We are excited for Rory to join the seminary family and engage with us in kingdom work," said Cynthia McGrady, Ph.D., seminary department chair. "His efforts will allow many new students to study and prepare for pastoral roles."

"Rory has a heart for Jesus and is incredibly enthusiastic about spreading the good news of the Gospel," said FPU Advancement Vice President Liz Garvin. The position is part of the Lilly Foundation Pathways for Tomorrow Phase 2 grant held by FPBS.

More about Rory Angulo, seminary major gifts officer, at news.fresno.edu/rory.



Social Media Highlights

Check out a couple of our top posts from the last few months. Catch all the latest—just hit follow!



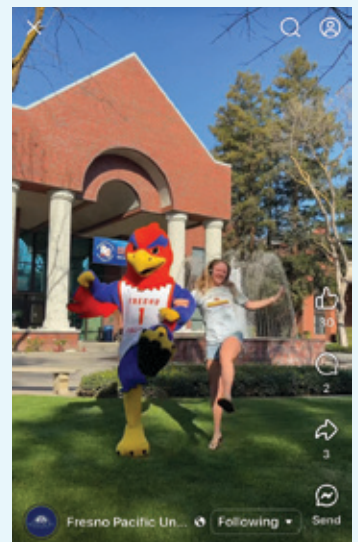
fresnopacific



Dan Martin Stadium
Clubhouse unveiling reel
21k views



fresnopacific



Somebody's watching
me (Anxiety) reel
1.5k views

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LEAVE A LEGACY FOR YOUR FAMILY AND IMPACT FPU'S FUTURE



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A FINANCIAL PLAN AND SUPPORT FUTURE FPU STUDENTS:**



Asset



Bequest



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Charity**

BENEFITS OF A CHARITABLE BEQUEST:

- ▶ Establishes your wishes today without relinquishing needed assets during your lifetime.
- ▶ Gives you continued use and control over whatever you decide to leave to FPU in your will or trust.
- ▶ Enables you to leave a lasting legacy that continues to support our work even after you are gone.
- ▶ Allows you to transfer a specific asset or give a percentage of your estate after costs and taxes.
- ▶ Can produce a charitable estate tax deduction.

Plan Your Estate—Let us help you write or update your estate plan. Experience the many benefits of planning and create a powerful gift to benefit students. Notify us of your bequest intention or inclusion in your estate plans—we value your commitment to FPU student success!

The Fresno Pacific University Foundation can help you use tax breaks and maximize retirement income while leaving a blessing to Christian higher education.



For more information on setting up your own gift annuity, charitable remainder trust or other planned giving strategy through Fresno Pacific University, contact Vice President/Executive Director Liz Garvin or Director of FPU Foundation Development and Legacy Gifts Steven Redekop.

elizabeth.garvin@fresno.edu | 559-453-3485
steven.redekop@fresno.edu | 559-453-3451



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Parents of Alumni:

If your son or daughter no longer maintains a permanent address at your home, please notify the Alumni Office of their new mailing address by emailing alumni@fresno.edu. Thank you.



Remember the life-changing moment you received your first scholarship?



Join us in celebrating 80 years of faith,
wisdom and service at FPU by supporting the
Leap of Faith – Life of Service Scholarship

Your gift empowers students who demonstrate faith
and a passion for serving others, equipping them to
take bold steps toward transforming our world

Keep the legacy alive – make your gift today!



"I am committed to honoring the scholarship by living a life that embodies its Christian values."
- Yvonne Arzate