

# PACIFIC

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY | VOL. 35, NO. 1



Uncommon  
HEROES



president's message

## COMMON SENSE, UNCOMMON HEROES

**“Maybe doing the common with a courageous faith is common sense manifested in uncommon ways.”**

— Joseph Jones, Ph.D.

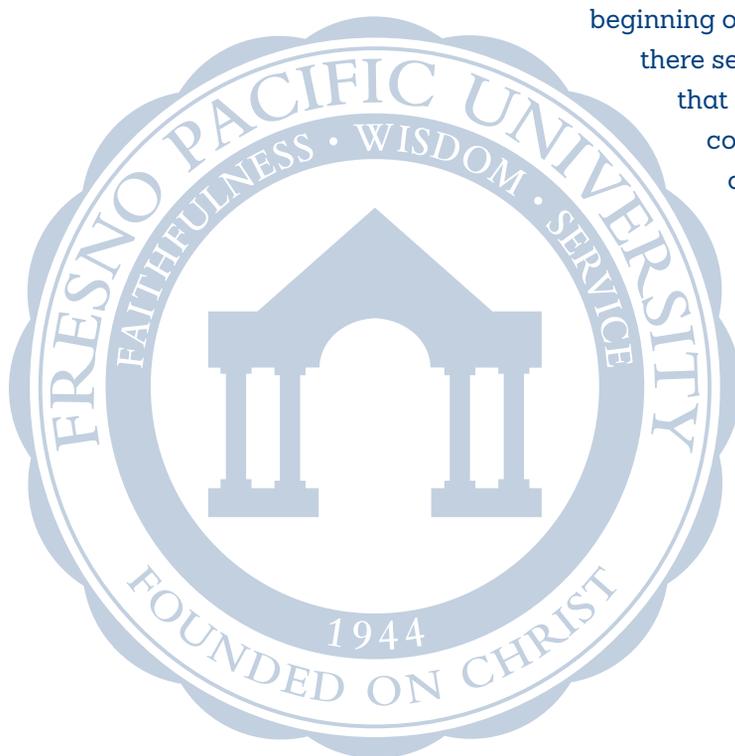
Years ago, I came across a saying by George Washington Carver while reading one of his biographies: “When you do the common things in life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world.” This issue is about uncommon heroes—individuals who step out of the box to make a difference in others’ lives.

Voltaire said: “common sense is not so common,” which seems to be more real today than ever before. Proverbs tells us “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” but there seem to be so few that seek it. Therefore, common sense is often masked as an uncommon notion. We often associate the uncommon with innovation, doing something distinctively different.

Maybe doing the common with a courageous faith is common sense manifested in uncommon ways.

George W. Carver awakened each morning looking for new possibilities for foods and other products made from peanuts and sweet potatoes. It is reported that he discovered over 300 uses of the peanut and hundreds more of the sweet potato. Doing the uncommon started with searching out the possibilities. As Alice in Wonderland said: “Sometimes I believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” Seeking the possibilities starts us on the road to what many would define as impossible. To do the common in uncommon ways, means living a life of possibilities.

The individuals in this issue are examples of those we consider uncommon heroes. They do the common in uncommon ways while dreaming of the possibilities to serve others. 



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Volume 35,  
Number 1  
MAY 2022



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



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In the May 2021 issue, "Lives of Promise" was written by Doug Hoagland. We apologize for this error.

*Pacific* is sent to alumni and friends of Fresno Pacific University and to members of the Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches.

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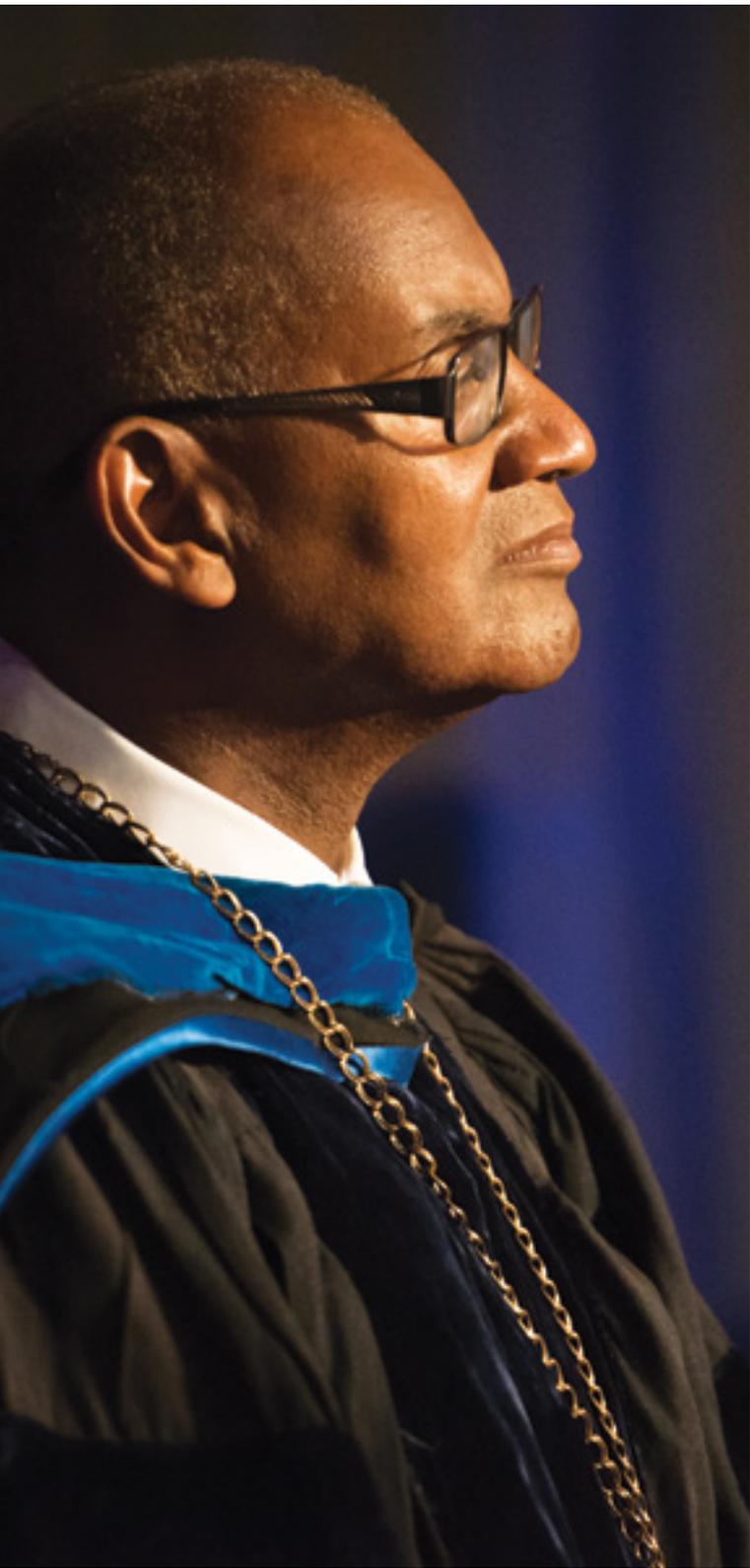
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# Joseph and Yvette Jones Built Relationships for FPU

By Wayne Steffen

A call from across the sea brought Joseph and Yvette Jones to Fresno Pacific University—a call centered on Christian higher education.

In 1992, Joseph Jones, Ph.D., wrote a personal mission statement in his journal: “To extend the influence of the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education.” In 2016, he was encouraged to consider the presidency of Fresno Pacific University. His reluctance was allayed after reading the second paragraph of the *Fresno Pacific Idea*: “On this foundation, the university seeks to build and extend the kingdom of God.”

The Joneses knew FPU was the right place for their next step of faith. “Building partnerships and engaging communities is what God has called us to do—be a light in the community and educate students to do the same,” Joseph says.

The couple—known as “Dr. Joe” and “Mrs. Yvette” at FPU—was wrapping up their third year at Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan, where Joseph had been vice rector (executive vice president and provost) and Yvette chief advancement officer. Prior to Forman, he had spent more than two decades at institutions in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities,

which includes FPU, rising from faculty to provost at North Park University, Messiah College, Taylor University and Roberts Wesleyan College. The Joneses also raised two daughters.

## HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

Building partnerships in a new place was the highlight of the Jones' five years at FPU. "We've raised FPU's profile in the Valley and Sacramento working with educators, politicians and community leaders, including those in the Black, Hmong and Hispanic communities," Joseph says.

As for what Yvette is proud of, she has a mission statement of her own: "Use what you have in your hand."

Making prayer blankets, hats and cards for FPU family and friends and surprising office staff with Friday doughnuts and baked goods was Yvette's outreach: "Just exposing everyone to the love of Christ in whatever vehicle he gave me," she says.

The biggest challenge for Joseph was often reminding people—in the community and in higher education—about FPU. "We're constantly making sure we're remembered among the UCs, CSUs and community colleges," he says.

Representing Christ as the center of FPU could also be difficult. "How do you take a pastoral role? Some people think you're preaching," Joseph says. Others were thankful. "I would get feedback from community people that they appreciated it when I spoke from a Christian point of view in ways they could not," he says.

**“The most important thing is the sharing of God’s word. I hope, I pray, we’ve helped to strengthen the spiritual foundation of the institution.”**

—Joseph Jones



## LEGACY AND REMEMBRANCE

Looking back, Joseph is quick to say that, crucial as they are, new buildings and balanced budgets are not the ultimate goals. "The most important thing is the sharing of God's word and modeling the life of Christ for our students," he says. "I hope, I pray, we've helped to strengthen the spiritual foundation of the institution."

God's word calls us to spread his love, Yvette adds. "I learned to use what's in my hand to pass on the love of God," she says.

Whatever they've done for FPU, the Joneses know the place has changed them. "I've learned a lot about humility. Seeing so many challenges and

“Use what you have in your hand.”

—Yvette Jones

having to seek God to see his hand,” Joseph says.

Yvette also feels closer to God. “I feel like I take away a deeper relationship with the Lord. He has

so we would be successful,” she says.

Both spoke of Vernon and Genevieve Janzen. Vernon is a retired pastor and educator who served as president of Tabor College. His son, Rod, and grandson, Chris, are on the FPU faculty today. In the time they knew the Janzens, Genevieve, who died in February 2022, was unable to speak and Vernon cared for her. “She would smile and hold my hand,” Yvette says. “And joyful giving radiated from him. The two modeled the life of Christ in

their seven decades of marriage to one another.”

## WHAT'S NEXT

As for life beyond June 2022, when the Joneses retire, they will reside near their two daughters, their husbands and their five children who impatiently await Nana and Papa in Pennsylvania. “We have a house that’s in the middle between our two daughters—15 minutes from each family. They can walk over,” Joseph says. 🏠



reminded me of his presence daily to overcome loneliness,” she says.

People will also live in their memories. Joseph mentioned two: Dr. Nzash Lumeya, director of the Fresno School of Mission, who sends the couple Scripture every morning, and the late Fitzalbert “Bert” Marius, M.D., a pioneering Black Fresno heart surgeon who received FPU’s only honorary doctorate.

Yvette praised Gwen Burks, executive assistant to the president, for her servant heart. “She said she was grateful the Lord called her to care for us



## THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PRESIDENT

Stay abreast of progress in the presidential search at this dedicated webpage:

[fresno.edu/president-search](https://fresno.edu/president-search)

# Applying for one job Edith Thiessen found the right one

By Cyndee Fontana-Ott

Edith Thiessen will retire in July as credential analyst after more than 34 years in the School (then department) of Education. At first, she was one of two candidates for president's assistant, and the university wanted both. Steve Varvis, Ph.D., then business manager, sent Thiessen to teacher education.

"I have told him many times how grateful I have been," Thiessen said.

Gary Gramenz, Ph.D., dean of the School of Education, is also grateful, saying her value cannot be overstated. "She has mastered the complex, ever-changing world of policies, practices and procedures and has helped maintain our high regard with the California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). She does her work with thoroughness, care and extremely good humor," he said.

Being on a team of dedicated colleagues making a difference in the lives of students is something Thiessen is proud of. Three of those colleagues especially stand out:

- Linda Hoff, Ph.D., former director of the Teacher Education Division. "She kept reminding me that I needed to trust my knowledge and understanding."
- John Yoder, Ph.D., former graduate dean. "He also pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and grow."
- Gary Gramenz. "He is the main reason that I have worked as long as I have."



FPU has been a family affair for the Thiessens. In Edith's more than three decades at the university, she, her two sons and two grandchildren have earned eight degrees and three teaching credentials.

Thiessen has also appreciated her turn on the statewide stage in the Credential Counselors and Analysts of California. She has served in nearly every position on the board, including president. "It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from others and it gave me an opportunity to interface with individuals at the CCTC," she said. "It also kept Fresno Pacific visible."

For her part, Thiessen wants to be remembered as someone who navigated state guidelines to resolve problems for students while never walking away from a challenge. "My work helped me become a much more compassionate person rather than the person who could just live within the thick black lines of the rules," she said. 

# Center for Community Transformation Celebrates 10 years

Fresno Pacific University's Center for Community Transformation is celebrating 10 years of helping build the economic, physical and spiritual shalom of Central Valley communities.



Faith and Finances



Spark Tank



Spark Tank



Certificado

## Events to mark the anniversary:

◆ **A video series highlighting testimonies of those benefitting from CCT initiatives, including**

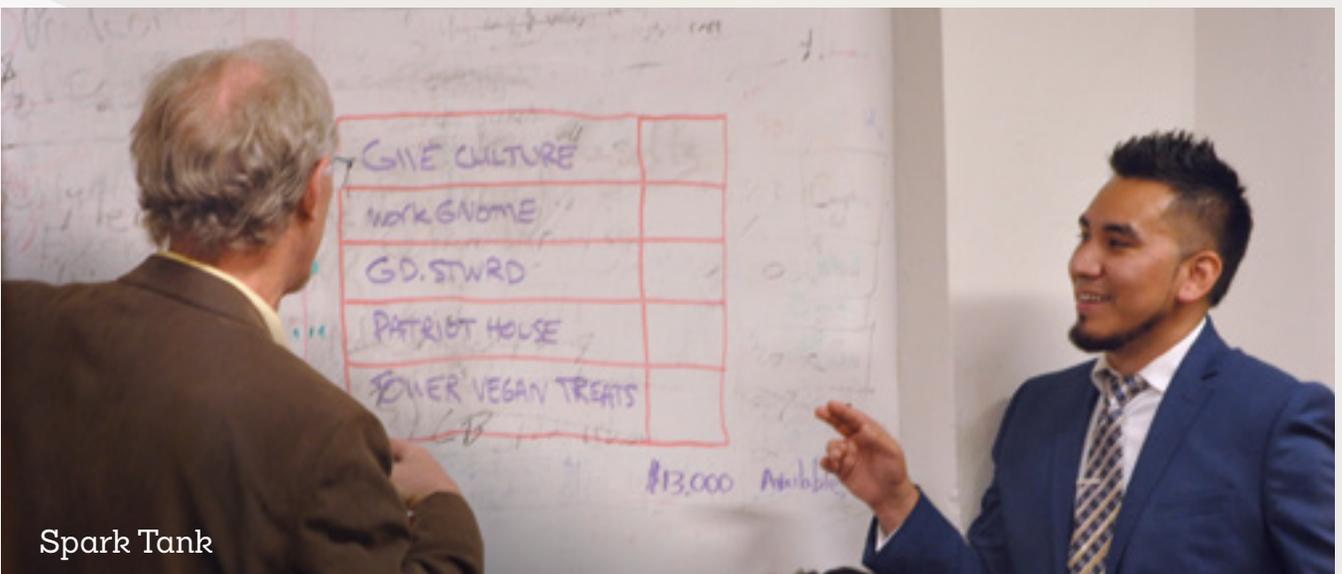
- Launch Central Valley Microenterprise training
- Spark Tank Social Enterprise process
- Faith & Finances financial literacy courses

◆ **Certificate in Community Transformation for Spanish-speaking leaders**

◆ **Leadership Perspectives on CCT's city-wide initiatives**

- June 16—The Spark Tank Expo in the new Culture & Arts Center, featuring current and previous award-winning social enterprises
- August 18—10-Year Ice Cream Open House at the CCT Offices, 4888 E. Townsend Ave.
- September 22—10-Year Anniversary Banquet in the Culture & Arts Center as part of FPU's Gather events

Get more at [cctfresno.org](http://cctfresno.org)



Spark Tank

## Classes to begin for FPU's new Bachelor of Science in Nursing program

A new nursing program at Fresno Pacific University will help close the gap between the number of nurses available and the need in the Valley and beyond.

Classes begin in August 2022 for FPU's Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) first cohort of 24 students. The program received final approval by the California Board of Registered Nurses (BRN) Education and Licensing Committee in February.

BRN approval means a program meets all professional standards to equip students with advanced skills and training and prepare graduates for a rewarding career. With its commitment to developing leaders and integrating compassionate faith with the latest knowledge to serve the community, Fresno Pacific goes even further.

"The creation of this program at FPU has been an answer to the call and mission of the institution. The Christian education that students receive here is transformational," said Tara Sirvent, Ph.D., dean of the School of Natural Sciences, home to all nursing education at the university.

The University of California at San Francisco states that California faces a shortage of more than 41,000 nurses that will persist until at least 2026. Further, in 2020, 26% of registered nurses ages 55-64 said they plan to leave the field in the next two years, up from 12% in 2018.

Collaboration with the region's medical and health care community has been crucial to building the new BSN program. "For decades, the nursing shortage has been critical in the Central Valley—

and even more so with the onset of the pandemic," said Daniel Davis, vice president and chief nursing officer at Community Medical Centers. "Community constantly looks for ways to provide more access for local students who want to join the frontlines caring for our region's patients. We are excited about the new opportunities that will come with the growth of Fresno Pacific University's program."

### The new BSN offers two study options:

- ◆ The new program creates a pathway for students to enroll at FPU without prior experience in the profession and who may be right out of high school.
- ◆ The university's pre-existing RN-to-BSN offers a pathway for registered nurses seeking further education and career opportunities.

Leading the program is Mary Wickman, Ph.D., who brings over 40 years' experience to her position as interim director. A retired captain in the U.S. Naval Reserves with a background in maternal-child nursing and nursing education/research, she has also been a staff nurse and nursing coordinator/manager at hospitals around the country and held administrative roles at Santa Ana College; Mount St. Mary's College; California State University, Fullerton; and Vanguard University.

The university plans to hire four additional faculty members to fill out the existing instructional staff.

Many have supported the BSN program over the last five years, including: Karen Cianci, Ph.D., former dean, School of Natural Resources; Alan Thompson, Ph.D., associate professor of biology; Rox Ann Sparks, DNP, retiring program director and chair of the nursing department; Don Diboll, Ph.D., associate professor of kinesiology; Sandra Isaak, MSN, associate professor of nursing; Magdalena Ruiz, DNP, assistant professor of nursing; and Stacy Wise, DNP, former chair of the nursing department.

The new BSN program builds on FPU's RN-BSN program for registered nurses and Master of Science in Nursing with a Family Nurse Practitioner emphasis.



## LEARN MORE

About all nursing programs at [fresno.edu/nursing-programs-fresno-pacific-university](https://www.fresno.edu/nursing-programs-fresno-pacific-university)





# RAW, REAL, LIFE

## THE MAKING OF AN UNCOMMON HERO

By Doug Hoagland

*John Drotos arrived at the Fresno group home to find 18-year-old Jason finishing a dinner of fried chicken and eager to talk about stringing along three girls.*

Drotos, a student at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, pulled a metal chair across the white tile floor, sat down and waited for Jason to begin. Drotos, a staff member with Fresno-Madera Youth For Christ, befriended Jason as part of his commitment to helping others understand the love of God through Jesus. A judge had sent Jason (not his real name) to the group home on a charge of possessing a stolen firearm during an adolescence scarred by loss, drugs and violence.

Drotos, 25, could relate. He struggled with family dysfunction as a boy and suffered anxiety, depression and a sense of loss. The Christian faith he embraced in high school offered peace and ultimately a new direction. Attending the seminary

to earn a Master's of Divinity degree continues his journey – and healing.

### **Respecting yourself**

At the kitchen table, Jason – muscular and broad shouldered – grinned. “Hey, John, right now I have three girls at school I’m talking to.”

Drotos: “Do they know about each other?”

Jason: “No, not really. I’m just trying to be out there. Do you think that’s right?”

Drotos considered his response. “So Jason, who’s the favorite person I talk to you about?”

Jason quickly replied. “Jesus.”

Drotos: “Favorite person outside the Bible?”

Jason: “Oh, Dr. King. Martin Luther King.”

Drotos – who finds inspiration in King’s commitment to faith and social justice – told Jason about a speech King gave to students in 1967. “Dr. King said to have a successful blueprint for life you first have to have dignity for yourself.”



Jason's grin faded as Drotos asked: "How are you showing dignity and respect for yourself in all of this, by being with three girls?" He continued: "As a married man, I can tell you we only have the capacity to connect emotionally with one other person. If we're honest, the rest is trying to get our physical pleasure on."

Jason looked at Drotos. "Damn, you're right."

### **Holistic Gospel**

The talk with Jason was ministry in raw, real life. It's what Drotos does each week visiting 30 to 35 young men in six group homes. It's also the practice of ministry he unpacks in seminary courses taught by Brian Ross, D.Min., an associate professor and director of the M.A. in Christian ministry, master of divinity and ministry leadership and culture programs. "Brian has really challenged me to think about the implications of all we're learning in seminary and what it could mean for the unbeliever," Drotos says. "He's also helped me see how our stories of upbringing affect and shape us, and how they can play a vital role in connecting with others."

Drotos' story of growing up in Tulare played out with an absent father and a mother who coped as best she could but struggled. Drotos found

belonging and stability playing football and became obsessed with the sport. Then his life began to change when an academic tutor in high school invited him to her church. The congregants were largely African American and older. "The crazy thing is that's where God met me, a young guy who's white and Latino," Drotos says. "It was the first time in my life I met people who wanted to invest in my life and really cared."

That experience at Living Christ Church would

shape Drotos' commitment to a holistic Gospel. "We as the church are called to not only be a voice and spotlight on Sunday mornings but to be with people in the midst of their pains and struggles," he says. As Drotos continued

**“ I also felt God was calling me into deeper and deeper relationship.”**

*— John Drotos, Seminary Student*

in high school, he still struggled with depression and anxiety. But, he says, "I also felt God was calling me into deeper and deeper relationship."

A pivotal moment came at a midweek service the summer after graduation. Drotos planned to play football at community college but sensed God calling him to give that up and do something else. "My body shook and I thought, 'Nah, God.' But I eventually decided to lean into that even though I had no idea what it meant."



## Recklessness

After Drotos graduated from college in Southern California, he started with Youth for Christ in Fresno, where he met Jason. (He hopes to one day lead a church as senior pastor.) In Jason, Drotos met a young man ensnared both by circumstances outside his control and choices freely made. Jason grew up believing in God but angry about his mother's death. "I thought, 'Why did God put me through this if he's all the things that people say he is?'" So he took drugs and with blurred consciousness sought out violence. "I was trying to assert my dominance in recklessness. I thought I was hardcore, and I liked that persona," Jason says.

Jason and Drotos first connected because of a shared interest in working out and lifting weights. "John told me his story, so I could relate to him in a lot of ways," Jason says. Drotos addressed Jason's stew of emotions by pointing to the Psalms, where people poured out to God their anger, hatred and desire to seek revenge. He also told Jason: "God is calling you to come to him and let him handle everything."

Reliance on God is the cornerstone of Drotos' counsel to Jason. Drotos didn't begin the relationship by telling Jason what he should – or shouldn't do – to live a Christian life. "Guys like Jason already have therapists, drug counselors and group home staff telling them how to act," Drotos says. "I wanted him to know the Gospel isn't calling him to first be a better person. It's just

asking him where he currently stands, to invite God in and allow the Holy Spirit to do the transforming."

## 'God is there'

Jason is receptive to that message but still goes his own way sometimes, like when he used drugs at the group home, got caught and was sent back to juvenile hall. "I wouldn't say I felt invincible, but maybe untouchable," Jason says of the incident. So, wearing an inmate's orange jumpsuit, he appeared before a judge; Drotos looked on with Jason's grandmothers. The judge could have locked Jason up but instead gave him a second chance, and he returned to the group home. Jason sees God at work in the decision, and he sounds determined not to blow it again. "Now the first thing that comes to my mind is: 'Do I want to mess up this great opportunity?'"

After graduating from high school this spring, Jason hopes to move out of the group home and study business at a community college. He will take with him Drotos' words about seeking dignity in life and relying on God. "I know that when I'm down and lonely at night, I can pray and God is there," Jason says.

Drotos remains hopeful about Jason's future. "Like anyone dealing with things that are deeply ingrained, he needs time to believe and act in different ways. But he has the potential to be so successful. I tell him, 'You need to start using all that God has given you.'" 

# BRIDGE





# BUILDER

## GRACE, PATIENCE AND CARING NEIGHBORS

By Cyndee Fontana-Ott

### Loren Dubberke (SM '00) and Rogelio Valenzuela come from distinctly different worlds.

Dubberke lived much of his childhood in the fresh air of Mariposa on the doorstep of Yosemite National Park. He graduated high school and earned a bachelor's degree at Fresno State—expanding his faith and working at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship—before achieving a master's degree at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

Valenzuela grew up on the hardscrabble streets of Mendota, an agricultural town known as the Cantaloupe Center of the World and where roughly 40% of the population lives in poverty. He was selling and using drugs by age 12—an addiction that soured his relationship with family, school and the law. The high school dropout hated Christians because he couldn't understand why they were happy.

Roughly 15 years ago, these two men crossed paths: Dubberke, associate pastor at North Fresno Church, and Valenzuela, a former gang member

and homeless father. Their friendship shows the power of faith and Dubberke's determination to address the stumbling blocks faced by Valenzuela and so many others.

Their meeting was a driving force behind Fresno Area Community Enterprises (FACE), a non-profit helping people overcome barriers and become thriving members of the community. The community benefit organization focuses on education, employment—mainly through three social enterprises—and emotional, spiritual and social support.

“That encounter, along with many others like that—it rocked our world, in the sense of trying to rethink how we respond to issues that are far beyond what we're trained for,” says Dubberke, the organization's executive director. “And it also introduced me to larger social and systemic issues that didn't have quick fixes or easy solutions.”

Since its founding in 2012, FACE's budget has grown from \$30,000 to \$300,000, mainly through donors and an annual fundraising banquet. Fresno Pacific University's Center for Community Transformation also has pitched in to support



social enterprises, which address community problems like poverty and homelessness through business principles.

FACE has helped roughly 50 people progress from part-time to full-time employment, frequently via social enterprises like Rock Pile Landscaping and Moving On Up (a moving company). It's helped countless others identify and achieve goals and develop life skills.

Today, roughly 100 North Fresno Church members are involved in FACE as tutors, volunteers, employers and financial backers. That structure has been a lifeline for Valenzuela.

"They reflected a kind of love from a family that was unconditional, really unconditional," says Valenzuela, who calls Dubberke a big brother. "There was always some member of this (church) family that had time for me, a prayer for me, something good to say or who wanted to do something nice with me."

But his transformation didn't happen overnight. Back in the 1990s and 2000s, when crime was escalating and Fresno was struggling for answers, city leaders encouraged churches to adopt troubled apartment complexes like Whispering Woods, a densely populated cement jungle near North Fresno Church.

The outreach was exactly the challenge Dubberke sought. "I wanted to not just work inside the walls of the church, but outside in the neighborhood," he says. "I wanted to be a bridge builder."

He began shepherding efforts to serve the neighborhood around Robinson Elementary School in north Fresno, which struggled with unemployment, poverty and other challenges. A reading club was in place at Whispering Woods;

Dubberke brought in college students as tutors and started a sports club for the hundreds of kids living in the complex.

Slowly, the harsh reality of that world emerged. "Pastor," a child would say to Dubberke, "did you know that Johnny doesn't have a bed?" Or another family didn't have any furniture. Or another couldn't pay the electric bill.

He and the church provided bags of groceries, cash for the power bill or bus tokens and other emergency aid. As requests flooded in, the church formed the Social Action Response Team to sort through the cries for help.

And then there was Valenzuela. When the two men first met, Valenzuela was homeless and weighed down by a record of incarceration. He lived in an old Cadillac with his three young children in the Whispering Woods parking lot—and that was just the first of many problems.

A friend gave him Dubberke's phone number, and Valenzuela was surprised when he answered. They talked and met the next day, where Valenzuela opened up about all of his troubles with the law, the volatile relationship with his wife and more.

Afterward, Valenzuela was hesitant to trust the man he thought looked like the "Where's Waldo" character. He worried that Dubberke had leverage—his history—that could be used against him.

But Dubberke only listened and began by attacking the family's most immediate need: housing. There was no shelter for men with children in Fresno, so church members located temporary housing vouchers and helped drive the children to and from school.



Valenzuela stabilized—temporarily. Trust issues, and the pull of his old life, led to an up-and-down cycle that Dubberke remembers too well.

“I’ve almost thrown in the towel because of situations where I see someone relapse after giving so much,” Dubberke says. “He tested me in terms of my patience and what it means to really stay committed to someone through thick and thin, and how you love someone continually even when they are making choices that are harmful.”

“I think a lot of us don’t know how hard it is sometimes to get out of that cycle.”

— Loren Dubberke

One morning about five years ago, Dubberke spotted Valenzuela in the church parking lot wearing a bright jail uniform. He’d walked all night to get to the church following his release, and this time he was invested in change.

Valenzuela found housing and a job with the FACE landscaping service. He stayed out of trouble by staying busy. Valenzuela’s renewed commitment to a Christian lifestyle and the church

led to a job in the mountains related to wildfire reduction.

For the first time in a while, he was reliable—and that translated into an opportunity with an electrical company. Now, Valenzuela is working toward his landscaping license and residential electrician certification. He is, finally, a success story.

“This kind of work is long term, and it takes a lot of relational, emotional, social and spiritual

investment,” Dubberke says. “He’s definitely an example.”

Valenzuela wasn’t the only one who grew in this journey. Dubberke says he learned valuable lessons about street smarts, the struggle of incarceration and the difficulties of substance abuse and trauma.

“I think a lot of us don’t know how hard it is sometimes to get out of that cycle,” Dubberke says. “He’s

taught me a lot about resilience and adapting and perseverance—and faith, too.”

Valenzuela, now 44 and the father of six, is engaged to a former schoolmate. They reconnected on Facebook, and she is one of many people who prayed for him during his childhood. Valenzuela used to bark at her to leave him alone, but now he appreciates the power of prayer.

He calls Dubberke “my rock” and someone he turns to for advice—even if he didn’t always take it at first. In turn, Dubberke calls Valenzuela a friend and “a walking example of what we hope everybody could do—except that it took him 15 years. It’s really a story of restoration and hope, and that’s what we’re about.” 



**LEARN MORE**

About FACE at [facefresno.org](https://facefresno.org)

LIVES TRANSFORMED  
EMILY HAND (BA '23)

## The Community She Needed

By Christopher L. Scott

Emily Hand was regularly discouraged in her Christian faith because she felt she was pursuing Christ on her own. Growing up in Auberry, a town of only 2,369 people, her high school graduating class consisted of 74 students.

Neither of the two churches Emily attended in high school provided fellowship with kids her age. "My churches were so small, there really wasn't anyone around my age to be able to talk about the Bible with. I didn't have friends that were solidified in Christ," she says.

But coming to Fresno Pacific University gave her the liberal studies major the community she was missing. "When I hang out with these people it's comforting because I know their intentions are to point me to Jesus and to love me in the way Jesus does," she says.

Those friends made all the difference. "When I came to FPU I experienced friendships that were encouraging and based on fellowship centered on Christ. I finally felt encouraged by people that were my age that could point me to the Gospel and center my heart on Jesus," she says.

Emily's deepened faith led her to get re-baptized. She says, "I got baptized again with the right intentions. I got baptized when I was little, but my mindset was, 'I'm a Christian now so I have to get baptized,'" she says. "But I got baptized again with the mindset of 'I love God so much and I want the whole world to know what Jesus did for me.'"

Students, faculty and staff all emboldened Emily in her faith. "I am surrounded by people that encourage me to live out my faith, to mirror Jesus and to represent him to the community," she says, "This has been a blessing."



### EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you know a student who has been transformed at FPU? Contact Wayne Steffen at [wsteffen@fresno.edu](mailto:wsteffen@fresno.edu)



# Developing Gifts You Didn't Know You Had

By Amy D. Fienen

When Alicia Garcia came to FPU, she had no idea she would become both an advocate and an athlete. In just two years she became a javelin thrower, having never been on a track team before, and started a campus youth coalition to fight human trafficking.

After playing softball at Selma High School, Garcia had no college sports aspirations. That changed last year when she met head throws coach Raymond Hansen at her campus job. He told her she looked like a javelin thrower and invited her to practice. Her time as an outfielder had developed her throwing arm, so she picked up a javelin for the Sunbirds in January 2021, just three weeks before the first meet.

While finding her feet on the track team, Garcia was also involved in founding SEE (Students Ending Exploitation) FPU. She discovered a passion for fighting human trafficking after her older sister **Marissa Garcia (BA '18)** went to work for the Central Valley Justice Coalition in 2018. This faith-based community-benefit organization fights human trafficking in the region through partnership, education and outreach.

Garcia says she didn't know anything about human trafficking until she attended a CVJC fundraiser in 2019, when her eyes

were opened to an issue too many people know little about. According to Central Valley Against Human Trafficking, more than 700 trafficking survivors were identified and rescued in the Valley from 2010 to 2018. Worldwide, the number of trafficking victims is 27 million.

After hearing firsthand stories of local survivors, Garcia volunteered for the CVJC. She now shares the message that the commonly accepted idea that human trafficking doesn't happen in our community couldn't be further from the truth. "It can happen anytime and anywhere, and making yourself more knowledgeable could one day come in handy," she says.

Fresno's central location between Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as its large numbers of migrant workers and foster care youth, makes it a human trafficking hub. "It's heartbreaking what survivors have been through, but their stories are so inspiring," says Garcia.

A big part of what SEE FPU does is make people aware of their vulnerability. For example, middle and high school students are particularly susceptible, as the average age of victims entering sex trafficking is just 12 to 14.

As SEE FPU's president, Garcia recruits new members, spreads awareness on campus and gets students involved with the CVJC. She will



graduate this May, but has successors in place to maintain the club after she's gone.

Garcia plans to continue volunteering with the Central Valley Justice Coalition and SEE FPU, but is looking forward to living away from home for the first time this summer. She has been accepted to Columbia College Chicago's Semester in Los Angeles, where she'll bolster her communication major with media and entertainment industry experience. Her dream is to work in sports media.

Having grown up in Selma and attending Reedley College for two years before transferring to FPU, Garcia was drawn to the sense of community she recognized on campus. FPU has prepared her both academically and spiritually for

this summer's opportunity and whatever follows.

"I've grown professionally and learned so much about myself," she says. "FPU has helped build my confidence and taught me to face the real world." 🏠



**IN STEP WITH  
SUNBIRDS**

[fpuathletics.com](http://fpuathletics.com)

## **Elvina Epp Willems Gave Voice to the First Days of PBI**

*By Doug Hoagland*

The Fresno of 1946 disappeared in the distance as the car from the Pacific Bible Institute rumbled north. One passenger still remembers the journey.

Elvina Willems was one-third of the singing “ladies trio” at PBI, which would become Pacific College in 1960 and Fresno Pacific University in 1997. The trio made the road trip with others from PBI to visit Mennonite churches in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Their goal: spread the word about the school, which had opened in 1944.

Willems – who was Elvina Epp then – is one of five living members of the charter class. The others are Joanne Becker Frantz of San Luis Obispo, Ruth Huebert Braun of Canada and Anna Fast Enns and Bob Willems, both of Reedley. Elvina Willems, who’s 95 and lives in Reedley, doesn’t remember some details about PBI, but she’s clear on how she came to enroll in 1944. Her pastor, George B. Huebert of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church, paid her way. “I wanted to go, and my parents couldn’t afford to do it,” Willems says. She lived in a dormitory, where room and board for a semester was about \$200.

### ***Joy in singing***

The Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches opened PBI near downtown Fresno on September 18, 1944, with brief remarks, a prayer and one stanza of “What A Friend We Have In Jesus.” Willems, a soprano,

would have willingly added her voice to the hymn – she’d started singing as a little girl. “When I was 3, my mother took me on stage at church, and I sang a solo,” she recalls.

Twenty of the first 28 students were women, and many had part-time jobs. Willems worked behind the candy counter at the Kress 5-10-25 Cent Store, and later at another sweet spot: Wilson’s Confectionary. She chuckles when reminded of those jobs: “Well, in your early days, you do all kinds of dumb stuff,” she says.

The music program – led by Professor Otto Richert – was her favorite part of PBI, and she had several opportunities to sing on special occasions. There was the 1946 road trip to the Pacific Northwest churches, which offered “cordial receptions” to the visitors from Fresno, according to the school paper. And that same spring, Willems performed a solo when PBI’s Oratorio Society presented the sacred “Hymn of Praise” at her home church in Reedley. Of that performance, the paper reported, “It is the hope of the society that someone may have been blessed.”

Then on June 6, 1946, Willems was the only student soloist at PBI’s first commencement. She was one of eight women graduating from the two-year general course; her class had chosen as its motto: “Not I, but Christ.”

### ***A place in FPU’s history***

Willems returned to Reedley after graduation to get married. She’d met Harry Willems at church

# THE P.B.I. MESSENGER

The Official Organ of the Pacific Bible Institute

*Earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

Volume II

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA, JUNE, 1944

No. 8



ELVINA EPP

VIOLA GOOS

CLARA HILL

ANN DUTT



CLARA HILL

ANN THORNTON

TONA GOOSBY

ANN DUTT

TWO-YEAR GENERAL COURSE



AS-CHURCH T.S.A.

PACIFIC  
+ BIBLE +  
INSTITUTE  
Conducting  
Class of  
1946

"Worthy 'Tis I, 'Tis Christ"



BETTY BLANDIN

Pastor for M. B. Stroffler  
Hubert Liberty  
1717 S. Chestnut  
Fresno, Ca. 93702



when she was 17 and fell in love. "He's a special person," she says. He built her a house before their wedding, and when they returned from their honeymoon, they had only a mattress to sleep on. Some memories, it seems, never fade. The Willems have five children: James and Paul, both of Kingsburg; Randy of Napa; and Connie Koop and Sandra Reimer, both of Bakersfield. The Willems also have nine grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. Harry Willems is 100.

Willems smiles when reminded she made history as one of the first students and first graduates in the history of FPU, but confesses: "I haven't thought much about that. I had a family to raise. But Fresno Pacific was a good, interesting part of my life." 🏠

## Leap of Faith...Life of Service Endowed Scholarship

In 1944, 28 young people took a leap of faith as the first class at Pacific Bible Institute—a leap that led to a life of service. Since then, thousands of students have taken that leap at Fresno Pacific and entered into a life of leadership and service. The new Leap of Faith...Life of Service Endowed Scholarship will help future generations do the same.



### LEARN MORE

Contribute by contacting Katherine Herms at [Katherine.Herms@fresno.edu](mailto:Katherine.Herms@fresno.edu) or 559-453-3678.

# IN TOUCH WITH ALUMNI



## » FROM FIRST GENERATION TO MANAGEMENT

**Karla Contreras (BA '20)** has been hired as JPMorgan Chase & Co. Fresno Community Manager. As the first in her family to graduate from a college or university, Karla started out as a teller and overcame obstacles to eventually work her way up to a local community leader.



## » ALUMNI GROUP SAVES LIBRARY

**Melissa Bergen (MA '18, BA '04), Katie Wiebe (TC '05, BA '04) and David Franz (BA '00)** helped save Shafter Library after Kern County defunded it. The library is now run by the city in partnership with Bakersfield College. Melissa and Katie's group Listen to Shafter led the campaign. David is Shafter's education partnership director.

## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Steven Hunt (MBA '21, BA '18)** is the director of purchasing for Family HealthCare Network.

**Victoria Pendergrass (MA '21)** is now an AMFT (Associate Marriage and Family Therapist) at Rebecca Orchard Counseling, Fresno.

**Parker Forrest Lewis (BA '20)** read "The Last Customer," a short story by John Gaspard, for *Mysteryrat's Maze* podcast hosted by *King's River Life*, an online Valley magazine.

**Alisen Moore (BA '20)** is an education specialist for Visalia Unified School District. As an intern she helped

teach in the district's first co-taught general education and specialized learning center classroom.

**Loren Friesen (BA '19)** created a 30-minute documentary on the Climate Ride sponsored by the Center for Sustainable Climate Solutions (CSCS). Friesen was one of 18 participants who bicycled from Seattle to Washington, D.C., to raise awareness about climate change in Anabaptist communities. *Moving the Story: CSCS Climate Ride 2021*, is on YouTube.com.

Former Sunbird **Robert Griswold (FS '19)** won two gold medals in swimming at the Tokyo Paralympics.

**Taylor Moore (MBA '19, BA '16)** is a staff accountant at Fresno Pacific University.



» **HAUSSLER JOINS CLOVIS STAFF**

**Andrew Haussler (MBA '13, BA '01)** is the assistant city manager for the City of Clovis, CA. He previously served as the community development grants coordinator, housing program manager, deputy city manager and the community and economic development director.



» **HALL TAKES FCC HELM**

**Marlon Hall (MA '97)**, Ed.D., has been appointed interim president of Fresno City College. He recently retired after serving as superintendent/president of Lassen College in Susanville, CA, but is happy to come out of retirement and serve in this way. Previously, he worked as an educator for Fresno Unified School District and West Hills College.

Three former FPU men's basketball players signed contracts to play professionally: **Sam Burt (BA '18)** in Italy, **Rafail Eleftheriou (BS '20)** in Cyprus and **Toby Christensen (BS '19)** in Denmark.

**Noemi Vega Quiñones (MA '17)** presented the paper "Reclaiming Consent: A Latinx Ideological Hermeneutic on Rahab in the Wakes of #MeToo and #ChurchToo" during the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings in November 2021 in San Antonio, TX.

**Nulek Singkeovilay (MBA '17, BA '16)** was promoted to Tulare County Probation Department Administrative Services Officer II. He began as an accountant with the department in May 2020.

**Carl Weigley (BA '17)** was appointed primary assistant to the UC Davis head women's swimming and diving coach. Carl was a member of FPU's original swim program and competed in the U.S. Olympic Trials.

**Savannah Heskett Beck (BA '16)** and Sarah Oliveira are founders/co-owners of Savvy Construction Co. in Clovis, CA. Along with home construction, the company also does home renovations for investment properties.

**Dexter Young (MA '16)** was a guest on the Clyde Travis and Company talk show October 25, 2021, on radio station WVON Chicago. Dexter is a businessman and head coach at Premier Academy.

**Shantay Davies-Balch (BA '15)**, who advocates and empowers Black women in the labor and delivery process, was profiled September 8, 2021, in *The Business Journal*.

» **GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)**



**Evon Mendrin (BA '13)** launched, Optometry Wealth Advisors LLC, which provides financial planning and investment management for optometrists nationwide. More at [optometrywealth.com](http://optometrywealth.com).

**Kevin Rule (MA '12)** was hired as assistant softball coach at Cloud County Community College in Concordia, KS.

**Andrew Douglas (BA '11)** passed all requirements to be a Certified Financial Planner.

**Brandon Benziger (BA '08)** is attending Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's residential Ph.D. program in biblical studies (with a concentration in biblical theology). He and his family have relocated to Gladstone, MO.

**Dinorah Olmos (MA '06)**, is the founder and executive director of the Latino Education Advancement Fund. She was profiled October 29, 2021, by the *Maryland Daily Record*.

**Suzana Dobric Veiss (MA '02, BA '99), Ph.D.**, assistant professor of business and director of the LEAD program, co-presented two workshops at the 23rd International Leadership Association's Annual Global Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, and online in October 2021. Suzana co-presented with former staff member **MaryJo Burchard (MA '09, BA '02), Ph.D.**, founder, chief consultant-researcher, Concord Solutions, LLC; and Elizabeth K. Hunt, Ph.D., associate professor and director of character in leadership, communication, University of Jamestown. The workshops were "Finding Your Feet: 10 Readiness Exercises in Overwhelming Change" and "Sensegiving During Change: A Guided Process." Suzana was also keynote speaker at the Character in Leadership Fall Conference in October 2021 at the University of Jamestown (ND), which is viewable on YouTube.com.

**Jim Yovino (MA '00, TC '96)** announced in January 2022 that he will not seek a third four-year term as superintendent of Fresno County schools. He has headed the Fresno County Office of Education since 2013 and his current term ends in January 2023.

**David Luft (MA '98)** retired in June 2021 after 32 years teaching elementary school for the Madera Unified School District.

**Richard Rawls (BA '87), Ph.D.**, presented "Cultural, Military, and Propaganda Purposes in the Use of Corpses in the Greco-Persian Wars" in November 2021 in the European section of the Southern Historical Society Conference, held in New Orleans and virtually, as part of a panel titled, "Bodies of Work: How the Dead Have Served the Living Throughout History." A former FPU faculty member and director of Hiebert Library, Richard is now a professor of history at Georgia Gwinnett College.

**Karen Balske Tobin (MA '80)** was selected for the *Continental Who's Who Registry* and the *Marquis Who's Who Registry*. She retired after teaching 30 years in the Clovis Unified School District and is now the historian for American Legion District 14 and Post 147. She also co-authored a remedial reading book with **Nancy Beinhorn (MA '81)** in 1980.



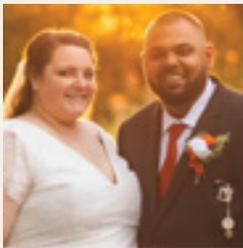
**Bob Weathers (BA '79), Ph.D.**, was selected for *Who's Who in America* for his career-long contributions in psychology and addiction treatment. He also published a book of original poetry, art and music in collaboration with his daughter, Amanda Tate. *Reflections for Three*, includes a series of journaling exercises and

is available in paperback and Kindle formats. Finally, he presented at CCAPP's Eighth Annual California Addiction Conference in October 2021.

**H. James Hopkins (BA '78)** appeared on Mosaic, on KPIX, Channel 5 (CBS TV) in San Francisco in August 2021 in a show about Pentecost. He pastors Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church in Oakland, CA.

**Ruth Snapp (Harder, BA '71)** retired as a Board Certified Chaplain for Ascension Via Christi Behavioral Health in Wichita, KS.

## » WEDDINGS



**Jaclyn Nelson (BA '21)** married Satnam Grewal on November 22, 2021. Jaclyn is a direct response professional at Central Valley Training Center.



**Megan Renna (BA '20)** and **Trey Sena (BS '19)** married September 11, 2021, at Wolf Lakes Park. The bridal party and guest list included several FPU alumni.



**Robert Martin (BA '12)** married **Mekayla Coughran (BA '16)** on December 19, 2020.

**Dave Wainscott (BA '86)**, whose first wife **Sonya (Kriegbaum, BA '89)**—daughter of former FPU president Richard Kriegbaum—died February 18, 2018, married **Andrea Ramirez Darlow (BA '22)** on October 9, 2021. Dave is pastor of Third Day Fresno and adjunct instructor in Bible for FPU degree completion.

## » BIRTHS



**Katy (Hetherington, BA '11)** and **Sam Kelly (BA '12)** announced the birth of Augustine "Auggie" Francis on August 27, 2021.



**Sarah Larson (MA '19, TC '14, BA '13)** and **Eduardo Pina (BA '13)** married December 16, 2017. They welcomed daughter Selene on October 6, 2021.



**Emma (McBride, BS '19)** and Collin Mitchell announce the birth of Isaiah Charles on August 12, 2021.



**Alysia (Leong, BA '09)** and Fortunato Yabut III announce the birth of Zayden Ceodore on August 27, 2021. He joins brother Edgeworth Rylan, 2.5.



**Josh (BA '14)** and **Jane (BA '14) Rogers** announce the birth of Benjamin Levi on January 8, 2022. He joins big sister Cecelia.

**UPDATE** your info at [fpu.edu/alumniupdate](http://fpu.edu/alumniupdate)

**ADVISE** & mentor students [fpu.edu/Sunbirds-Can](http://fpu.edu/Sunbirds-Can)

**JOIN** the LinkedIn [FPU Alumni Assoc.](#)

**LIKE** or comment at [facebook.com/FPUalumni](https://www.facebook.com/FPUalumni)





## 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](https://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 Future Sunbird baby t-shirts, like Rowyn Henry is wearing, pictured here with dad **Brennen (BA '13)**.

## DEATHS

**Maricela Cortez (BA '09)** died of cancer on October 15, 2021. She was a pre-school teacher in Kern County.

**Mary Rystad-Smith (MA '98)** died October 25, 2021. She worked for the Fresno County Office of Education for over 30 years and was an adjunct instructor at FPU.

**Roxie Moore Martin (MA '96, BA '90)** died December 1, 2021, at her home in Lemoore. She was a first-grade teacher at St. Rose-McCarthy Catholic School in Hanford for three years, then a teacher and later principal of Caruthers Elementary School, serving there 20 years. Following her retirement, she was vice principal of Mary Immaculate Queen School in Lemoore for four years and principal for two years.

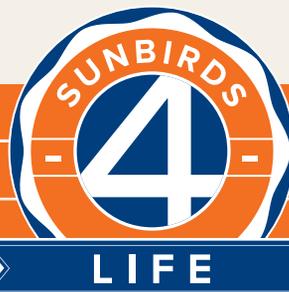
**Virginia Walton Pilegard (MA '90)**, 79, died January 13, 2022. The Fresno native was an elementary school teacher and award-winning author of children's mathematical adventure picture books who also wrote Christian contemporary mystery/romance novels. She was active at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Easton, and Sierra Pines Church, Oakhurst.

**Margaret Wall (PBI '45)** died August 23, 2021. She was 96 years old and part of the first class at Pacific Bible Institute, which became FPU. Look for an article on this family in the June 2022 *Alumni Enews* and on the *Alumni Blog*.



## STAY IN TOUCH

Get a monthly alumni update in your email. Subscribe at [fresno.edu/enews](https://fresno.edu/enews)



# GREAT BRITAIN AWAITS!

Dust off your kilt and get ready to kiss the Blarney Stone as the FPU Alumni and Friends Tour heads to Scotland and Ireland in June 2023.

Your guide, as always, is Stephen Varvis, Ph.D., professor of history. Details at [fpu.edu/alumnitour](https://fpu.edu/alumnitour). Check out the 2021 and 2022 tours at [grouptoursite.com/stevevarvis](https://grouptoursite.com/stevevarvis)

## FPU ALUMNI & FRIENDS TOURS

### Sites include:

- ◆ Edinburgh
- ◆ Scottish Highlands
- ◆ Belfast and the Titanic Museum
- ◆ Dublin
- ◆ St. Patrick's Cathedral
- ◆ Library of Trinity College
- ◆ Galway
- ◆ The Dingle Peninsula
- ◆ The Blarney Stone
- ◆ Waterford Crystal Factory
- ◆ Kilkenny
- ◆ Optional extension to London for Windsor Castle, Stonehenge and Oxford





# THE FIRST REGIONAL CAMPUSES 1972-89

*By Kevin Enns-Rempel, Director, Hiebert Library*

**From the  
Archives...**



Today's regional FPU campuses began in the early 1990s with "degree completion" programs in various Valley cities. Between 2003 and 2011, FPU established campuses in Visalia, Bakersfield, North Fresno and Merced. But in the early 1970s came an almost forgotten chapter to this story.

In 1972 dean Dalton Reimer announced an "Extended Campus Program in Biblical Studies and Religion" in Kern County in cooperation with a group of Christian leaders called the Experimental Learning Fellowship (ELF) of Bakersfield. ELF created partnerships with Fuller Theological Seminary and then-Pacific College for accreditation, and teaching was primarily by local instructors approved by Fuller or PC.

## LEADERSHIP FORUM 2022

By spring 1974, ELF had 43 students in five Pacific College courses, and a full B.A. in Contemporary Christian Ministries was added in 1975. By then ELF was also working with Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary to offer classes for credit.

In fall 1978 the now-Fresno Pacific College and MBBS established a second extended campus program, this time with the Center for Biblical Studies at the First Baptist Church of Modesto, offering seminary courses and a B.A. in Biblical and Religious Studies.

Almost as soon as the Modesto program began, the program in Bakersfield started to unravel. ELF would not appoint a full-time program director as required by Fresno Pacific College. FPC thus closed that degree program and simply offered individual courses. In 1980 ELF closed and suggested the college work with Kern County Mennonite Brethren churches. FPC declined and the Bakersfield program ended that spring.

The Modesto program continued for several more years, but new accreditation rules made it difficult for the college to operate these cooperative programs. The college ended its relationship with the Modesto program in August 1989.

Neither the Bakersfield nor Modesto extended campuses ever enrolled more than a few dozen students, but these early efforts were an example of the innovation that eventually would blossom into today's regional campus system. 🏠



## Forum Explores Transformational Leadership

Leaders interested in transforming their organization and communities attended Leadership Forum 2022 on March 30 at the main Fresno Pacific University campus. “Transformational leadership inspires innovation and collaboration, building a shared vision for the flourishing of our region,” said Steven Redekop, director of FPU Foundation development and legacy gifts in the university Advancement Office, which hosted the breakfast event. Keynote speaker Fresno Deputy Mayor Matthew Grundy (pictured) shared leadership principles he has learned through the ups and downs of his own personal and professional journey, including leading Fresno’s Habitat for Humanity. 🏠

# CONGRATULATIONS Outstanding Graduates

## FALL 2021

### **School of Business**

Jose Luis Madrigal | B.A. in Business Administration: Organizational Leadership Emphasis

### **School of Education**

Desiree Stumpf | M.A. in Special Education  
Anthony Segura | M.A. in Reading and Language Arts

### **School of Humanities, Religion and Social Sciences**

Gillian Lehman | B.A. in Liberal Studies and Spanish  
Olivia Pacheco | Individualized Master of Arts Program

### **School of Natural Sciences**

Caesar Angulo | B.S. in Environmental Science  
Hannah Weaver | B.S. in Biology: Environmental Emphasis

### **Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary**

Jorg Letkemann | M.A. in Community Transformation  
Blong Yang | M.A. in Theology

## SPRING 2022

### **School of Business**

Joshua Newfield | B.A. in Business Administration: Management Emphasis  
Caroline "Lum" Lumnwi | M.A. in Strategic & Organizational Leadership

### **School of Education**

Jannette Gardner | M.A. in Teaching  
Megan Kate Sullivan Medeiros | M.A. in School Psychology

### **School of Humanities, Religion and Social Sciences**

Liliana Becerril | B.A. in Graphic Design  
Veronica Mendez Garcia | B.A. in History and Social Work

### **School of Natural Sciences**

Callen Moon | B.S. in Pre-Health Sciences  
Chloe Sharp | B.S. in Kinesiology: Exercise Physiology Emphasis

### **Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary**

Jireh Mukawa | M.A. in Community Leadership and Transformation  
Shellie Warren | M.A. in Marriage and Family Therapy

# FAMILY LEGACY PLANNING THROUGH STEWARDSHIP AND EDUCATION



## BIBLICAL FINANCIAL FREEDOM SEMINAR

- Discover the two biblical principles leading to financial freedom
- Learn how to get out of debt—and stay there
- How to fulfill your five biblical asset obligations and enjoy peace
- How to be a blessing to the next generation



## ESTATE PLANNING

- The FPU Foundation Guide to Planning Your Will is available
- Cultivate a Christ-honoring legacy while communicating your values to your family



## PLANNED GIVING SOLUTIONS

- Increase your capacity to give to the causes you care about
- Make a significant charitable impact while reducing your taxes
- Discover gift options that provide tax and income benefits
- Fulfill your philanthropic objectives while advancing Christ's Kingdom

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

# UNCOMMON HEROES

## make personal investment

**“Not all heroes wear capes.” It’s become a mantra for Don Griffith, vice president of advancement and executive director of the FPU Foundation.**

Griffith likes to tell stories about the uncommon heroes making an impact in the lives of students and inspiring the university’s annual campaign.

Like the story of Richard Martinez, who wears a Pep Boys uniform rather than a cape. Martinez, a general manager at Pep Boys at Kings Canyon and Clovis in Fresno, organized a scholarship to the university because of its importance to the community where he works. This sparked the corporate offices to encourage every Pep Boys to invest where they are. “An uncommon hero is a person who sees a need and, without expecting accolades, rises up to meet the need,” Griffith said.

These are the donors FPU has relied on throughout its 77 years—people who use their talents to bolster the work of the university



Martinez with Katherine Herms, assistant director of donor engagement

and invest in students. “This place was built by uncommon heroes,” Griffith said.

The Uncommon Heroes Campaign celebrates this legacy and invites new donors to contribute in ways meaningful to them. Launched in December 2021 with initiatives ranging from stocking the student food pantry to sending students to the Urbana missions conference to funding the Culture and Arts Center, the campaign offers the specificity that allows donors to make a more personal connection than a gift to a general fund.

For Griffith, it’s also an antidote to the isolation wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. “We need the joy of giving to counteract the turmoil of the last few years. We need to engage in the lives of others because we’re made for that,” he said. 🏠



## UNCOMMON HEROES

Join the ranks of Uncommon Heroes at  
[fpu.edu/uncommonheroes](https://fpu.edu/uncommonheroes)

# GETTING JOY FROM GOD'S WORK

## Al & Dotty Warkentine

By Amy D. Fienen

Al and Dotty Warkentine have been good friends to FPU for many years, with their generosity helping to build the university's new Warkentine Culture and Arts Center and a number of other facilities. They give not because they're alumni or because they expect to receive blessings in return. They give because nothing makes them happier than seeing the Lord's hand at work at FPU.

"We are tickled pink to see the results that come from giving; the reward is in seeing how God uses it," Dotty says. "That's where our joy and blessings come from."

And one of their favorite ways to see their generosity working is in the lives of students.



"So many people find Christ at FPU," Al says. "We consider it our mission field."

The Warkentines are graduates of Tabor College, but when Al started his dental practice in Fresno in the 1960s, the couple started making connections to FPU through the Mennonite Brethren community. Al became a charter member of the school's first board of trustees in 1971, a seat he held until 1985. The couple has continued to support

Tabor College, but agreed it was important to get plugged in locally.

"We felt like we needed to be committed to supporting our community, so we shifted our loyalty from Tabor to FPU," Dotty says.



From left: Joe Bogart (Quiring), Dotty, Warkentine granddaughter Bethany Ogawa and Al

It's been 20 years since the Warkentines committed to be seed donors for the Culture and Arts Center, and Dotty says they are grateful the project is coming to fruition while they're still alive to see it. The 26,000 square-foot performing arts facility, scheduled to open in fall 2022, will fill a long-held void for FPU's arts students.

"Having a facility like this is part of recruiting and maintaining quality faculty and students," Dotty says.

Though she is now retired, Dotty was a professional freelance harpist who played with various FPU musical groups and lent her talent to a number of the university's performances. During her many years playing at the university, she saw firsthand how badly a performing arts center was needed. While Al doesn't share his wife's musical abilities, he does share her love of fine music. He majored in science at Tabor, but recalls how much he enjoyed a required music appreciation class.

He maintains that having a well-rounded liberal arts education is essential to FPU students' future success, and feels that the new Culture and Arts Center will prove beneficial to all students, not just those studying the arts.

The Warkentines readily share that while they made a good living in their respective professions, their ability to support a number of charitable causes has come through prudent investments made during their 61-year marriage. They initially invested in real estate, but the stock market is where they've made most of their money. Al learned how to invest in the stock market and handles all the couple's investments himself, but they're on the same page when it comes to how the money should be spent.

"Al has a God-given gift of knowing how to invest," Dotty says. "His gift is in making money and using that money to make more money."

The Warkentines give first to the church, and



while they support a number of local causes, FPU is closest to their hearts. Beyond contributing to a number of on-campus facilities, it's the time they've spent there over the years that has left a mark. The volleyball and basketball games and musical productions are where they're able to see the real investment being made. It's in the hearts of the next generation of Christian leaders that the most important work is being done. 🏠

## PUTTING THE COMMUNITY IN THE CULTURE AND ARTS CENTER

Excitement around the completion of the Warkentine Culture and Arts Center on the main Fresno Pacific University campus is palpable both on campus and off.

Long a dream for visual and performing arts faculty, students, alumni and arts patrons, the facility is also part of FPU's vision to engage the cultures and serve the cities throughout the region. "The vision was to have a building that served the community; a building that would be bustling with activity. That was why we created flexibility in every square foot," says Don Griffith, vice president of advancement and executive director of the FPU Foundation.

A ribbon-cutting May 25, 2022, both celebrated completion of the CAC and marked a significant step in Fresno's Central Southeast Specific Plan. "The center will provide important opportunities for FPU to meet crucial needs within the community," says Rebecca Bradley, executive director of public relations and community engagement.

In addition to FPU's plans for the center—ranging from showcasing student artists in the gallery, to musical and theater performances, to weekly chapel—Bradley is talking with groups seeking to use the facility for Christian conferences, children's theater and music camps, lectures and more. "This offers a tangible way for us to engage the surrounding cultures and to serve our region," Bradley says.



### LEARN MORE

Read about the Culture and Arts Center at [fpu.edu/togetherwebuild](https://fpu.edu/togetherwebuild)



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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 calling 559-453-2236 or emailing [alumni@fresno.edu](mailto:alumni@fresno.edu). Thank you.



# *Gather* 2022

*Thursday-Sunday  
September 22-25, 2022*

*Fresno Pacific University Main Campus  
Connecting meaningfully with our alumni  
and community.*

## *Enjoy:*

- ◆ *Warkentine Culture and Arts Center Grand Opening*
- ◆ *Center for Community Transformation  
10th Anniversary Celebration*
- ◆ *Alumni and athletic events including home  
volleyball/soccer games*
- ◆ *Music by FPU musicians*
- ◆ *Food and family fun*

*Visit [fpu.edu/gather](http://fpu.edu/gather) for updates  
We look forward to seeing you!*