

## Sr. Pastor's Report for Spring Congregational Meeting 2024

Dear Members,

Over the last year, FMCC has seen some major changes. Some of the changes have brought joy and relief; others, grief and questioning. Yet, as always, I look to the “author and finisher of our faith” for guidance, knowing full well that the Spirit continues to lead us in all that Life brings to us as individuals and to us as a community of faith. Following are some of the highlights of the last year at FMCC:

We said goodbye to our Associate Pastor, Rev. Alejandro Escoto and our 1:30 p.m. Music Director, Peter Kirkpatrick. Both of these precious people have been a part of ministry here at FMCC for more than 20 years, so this was a major change to our Spanish-speaking ministries. The good news is that we have several speakers who are taking turns preaching at the 1:30 p.m. service, and Louis Ramirez has stepped into the role of Music Director for that service. For the time being, we will continue in this fashion, as the 1:30 p.m. service has begun to increase in attendance once again.

We honored the ministries of Rev. Dr. Lori Dick and Rev. Sandy Williams, as both of them retired.

We celebrated the lives of Rev. Steve Pieters and Norm Cox, as both passed away last year. We also celebrated the lives of members that passed during the pandemic, when we weren't able to meet in person: Keith Meinen, Christine Miller, and Natasha Santillan.

We celebrated Rev. Troy Perry's birthday, and we had an amazing 55<sup>th</sup> Church Anniversary concert.

We have continued to employ Louis Ramirez as the Music Director and Administrative Assistant. What a God-send he has been to this church and to me personally. In addition, Reyna Montoya and Tony Martinez have volunteered countless hours in administration for both English and Spanish services.

We have continued to employ a private cleaning crew – Lucas, Erica, and Inez. They do a wonderful job with cleaning, and they have been very gracious to work around many changes as new groups rent space from us all through the week.

We continued to use Church-Biz to manage our finances. Our treasurer, Ed Shaughnessy, has worked tirelessly with them, along with PushPay, to keep our finances in order.

We have continued our Food Pantry, lead by Martin Miny and Rodolfo Romero. This team receives food on Fridays and distributes food on Saturdays regularly to over 125 families! Thanks to Mark Talgo for picking up and delivering an extra food source each Friday. Thank you to all the volunteers that make this important ministry happen.

We have continued our Trans\*Unity ministry over the last year. We've had wonderful leadership with Amy LaCoe and Ina Serene. They have had many yard sales to raise money for the annual Christine Daniels Scholarships. We gave out \$1000 scholarships last year! They were able to do some work on the denominational level, as well. This team was also responsible for helping us enjoy the Trans Chorus of LA at several services. Thanks to all of you!

We continued our Glenn Payne Card Ministry under the direction of Pam Fairbanks and Lea Polumbarit.

We expanded our Media Team (broadcasting and sound) under the leadership of Sandra Contreras and Don Mueller.

Our Creative Worship Team always does an incredible job of getting our services together. I'm so thankful for their faithfulness in making sure we have quality worship.

We continued our Saturday Night Spiritual Interfaith service each month, lead by Rev. Sheena Metal.

Reece Whitaker began offering group therapy and Zumba sessions bi-monthly in our theatre.

Jair Bula performed a one-person show twice in our theatre, and we hope to expand our Arts Ministry in the coming year.

Our church has hosted a mobile vaccination unit several times, and our plans are to continue doing so in the future. More than 30 people have taken advantage of this ministry.

July of last year, we lost the pre-school that was renting space from us. So far, we have not been able to find a replacement, so we are losing rental income each month that it is vacant. We have, however, received quite a few new groups renting other spaces in our building that has eased some of that financial loss. Dean Coffey continues to manage all our rental space.

We have continued to represent FMCC in the community, having participated in LA Pride, WeHo Pride, and Trans Pride last year. We are also confirmed for two parades and Trans Pride for this year. Thanks to Oriel Briguella and Fernando Alfaro for leading the Pride Team last year and this year. They have designed a new tee-shirt for us to show up in solidarity! We also participated in the first-ever Huntington Park Pride Fair, where MCC began in Rev. Troy Perry's living room. The mayor and city council recognized FMCC and me for our participation and for being the beginning of their LGBTQ history.

Our church has hosted the LaQuICC (queer clergy) group several times, and we continue to be involved in that community ministry. I've been a part of the monthly Clergy Roundtable sponsored by LA County Dept. of Mental Health (Thanks, Brian Navarro, for bringing me on board!). I've also represented the church in several community forums, giving speeches, fighting for rights, and receiving awards. In addition, our church received lots of publicity at Christmas when "Jesus" (from our outdoor Nativity) was stolen from the rubble outside (representing war going on in the "Holy Land"). Yes, we did get a new "Jesus"!

I was also gifted (by contract) a five-week Sabbatical last year. It was such a blessing to take some time off and get refreshed. Thank you for that.

I've named some of the ministry groups here at Founders along with their leaders. There are many volunteers involved in each of these ministries, and we could not survive without them – without YOU. THANK YOU to all who give their time, talents, tithes, and testimonies so freely.

I know many of you have chosen to worship online, but I must say, our congregations continue to grow with new people, both online and in person. I've been so encouraged since the first of the year when I noticed so many new folks joining us, staying, and getting involved. What a gift! I pray we continue in our numerical growth, as well as our spiritual and ministry growth. That is something we can ALL make happen.

Pastor Keith