

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This letter is being distributed to both the Chula Vista Presbyterian Church community and the Chula Vista Presbyterian Church Preschool staff and families.

At the special called session meeting on Tuesday, November 10, the session concurred with the proposal of the Preschool Board to continue the school through June, 2010. This is not a prolongation of closing; rather, it is a new beginning. Developments that have taken place since the session's announced decision to close the Preschool have charted a new and different course.

In short, the change is a result of God answering prayers by providing an alternative not previously available. The proposal is essentially Preschool 2.0.

This has been an emotionally charged and exhausting time for many people. While there have been some tough moments, it appears that God has provided a reason to celebrate. The clarity provided by this crisis has led to enormously constructive conversations, changes, and personal investment by many different people.

It is a story worth telling.

The first thing to mention is that there has been a consistent understanding and appreciation of the ministry and care provided by the teachers. Their relationships with the children and families are special. That was never a question.

### **What Happened.**

The problems were structural and administrative. An unintended consequence of the merging of finances of the church and the Preschool was that the losses incurred by the preschool were never reported to the Preschool community. Over the course of the last several years, the losses were reported to the Preschool Board, it approved changes in policy to avoid incurring further losses, but those changes were not fully implemented and losses continued to accrue. Again, this was not reported to the staff or families of the Preschool.

When plans for the Fall, 2009 term were approved, it was with the understanding that there would be a close watch on finances to make sure that income would exceed expenses. Instead, August and September showed substantial losses. Multiple efforts to have a Preschool Board meeting to address the deepening financial crisis were unsuccessful. The church was being required to cover losses for which it never intended to serve as

guarantor. The losses had accumulated to a point where it put the programs and staff of the church at risk to be cut. The finance committee of the church was presented with the information and recommendations from the annual audit – and – had no proposal or viable alternatives from the Preschool Board for steps to be taken to rectify the situation. In light of the ongoing nature of the losses, the finance committee recommended to session that the Preschool be closed at the end of December, 2009. The Preschool Director was informed of the finance committee’s recommendation. She apparently did not report this information to the staff or families of the Preschool.

After the church’s finance committee made its recommendation, elders and staff of the church took a more directive role intervening with the Preschool Director to devise an alternative proposal to the finance committee’s recommendation. Although the church had made numerous attempts to work with the Director to revise processes, implement the Board approved policies, and take the steps to insure fiscal accountability; now it was evident those offers of assistance were insufficient. The church took a lead role in trying to make a proposal for changes that would address the fiscal issues and the lack of connection between the Preschool and church communities. Despite all of these efforts, the staff and families of the Preschool were not informed.

When session met in October to take action on the finance committee’s motion, the proposal to fix the Preschool was offered as a substitute motion. The administrative corrections followed closely the recommendations of the audit; however, the discussion was cast in the context of recognizing that continued losses by the Preschool would require immediate staff and budget cuts to the church’s mission and ministry. Doing more and better with the same administration was not a persuasive option to the session. Thus, with those being the only two alternatives available from which to choose, the decision to close the Preschool was made.

### **Then, what happened.**

The Preschool Director was notified in writing on Wednesday. She asked for assistance drafting the letter to be distributed to the Preschool community; that was the letter distributed which – for the first time – informed the Preschool community that there was a problem. Predictably and understandably, the reaction was quick and grieved.

The following Monday morning, the Preschool teachers distributed a letter to the families expressing their shock at what had happened, their commitment and intent to take steps necessary to achieve a different result, and unanimously calling for the immediate resignation of the Director. She did resign Monday morning, effective immediately.

Additionally, the church was contacted by Karen Koehler, a former director, who offered to serve as Interim Director of the Preschool on a volunteer basis through June, 2010. Her offer included a series of specific steps to assure fiscal accountability, to effect repayment to the church of the losses incurred, to establish a strong Preschool Board with clear delineation of the responsibilities for the administration and oversight of the operations of

the Preschool, and to develop an understanding of the importance of the Preschool community investing in the mission and ministry of Chula Vista Presbyterian Church.

The commitment of the teachers and Preschool families combined with the detailed plan of action by a leader respected by both the Preschool and church communities generated a proposal approved by the Preschool Board. The movement towards that proposal moved several of the elders of the church to call for a special meeting of the session to concur.

### **What Now?**

The good news is that there will be a Spring, 2010 term for the Chula Vista Presbyterian Church Preschool. The ministry and care provided by the Preschool staff will continue – aside from a few days in which the adults were walking around with concerned looks on their faces, the children will not experience any disruption in the quality Christian relationships they have come to appreciate.

That said, there is much work to be done. The Preschool stands on its own for financial viability. The church will no longer serve as guarantor to cover any losses incurred. The Preschool will need follow through on *all* of the commitments made to eliminate the debt, establish fiscal viability, and invest in the mission and ministry of the church.

There are many lessons to be gleaned from the events that have taken place:

- God answers prayers;
- The ministry on this campus is an ongoing partnership between the church and the preschool that needs mutual participation, cooperation, and support;
- Communication and transparency are vital for any ongoing and long term relationship; and,
- We cannot take for granted the things we value.

It has been a tough road that we have walked. It is a tough road we continue to walk. Yet, now, we seem to be walking together rather than pulling apart. For that, we can only give thanks to God.

Your brother in Christ,

Bob Davis, Pastor  
Chula Vista Presbyterian Church

Karen Koehler  
Interim Acting Director  
Chula Vista Presbyterian Preschool