

April 2019
Open Letter to Valley Pastors
the President of Fresno Pacific University



“Extending the Influence of the Kingdom of God”

Dear Pastor,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I wish to communicate to you the renewed direction of Fresno Pacific University (FPU) and solicit your prayers as we reaffirm the need for a Christ-centered university education. I am addressing pastors throughout the Valley because of our sense of responsibility to the Central Valley, where most of our students reside. We have campuses in Bakersfield, Merced, Visalia, a north and south campus in Fresno and a seminary on our main (south) campus.

Established in the Valley in 1944 as a Bible institute, we evolved into an evangelical Anabaptist institution. We believed then that every student should enroll in Bible courses as a requirement for graduation and this commitment continues to this day for all undergraduate students.

In the mid-60s we developed the *Fresno Pacific Idea* which affirmed our role as “an integral part of the mission of the church” and provided a charge “to seek to build and extend the influence of the Kingdom of God by enabling persons to serve church and society.” We continue to affirm the authority of the Bible, that wisdom grows out of commitment to Christian faith and faith grows out of creative encounter with Christ and the world.

I came to FPU because of its commitment to extending the influence of the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education. This has clearly been my life calling, which led me to move from New York to Chicago and several places in between. This same call sent me to Pakistan as a missionary, then guided me here to Fresno. This is not just the call to a Christian university, but it is a call to the Body of Christ – the church. This work can only significantly impact the Valley as we work beyond the boundaries of our organizations and to that end we are here to serve you.

I have discovered some have the perception that the university has become isolated, moved away from the church and may have compromised the faith. The university serves over 4000 students on five campuses. They come from a wide range of church traditions and some without any faith commitment at all. By contrast, the 300+ employees and corps of over 600 adjunct faculty are all expected to affirm faith in Christ. They sign an agreement to honor the university's faith statement which is aligned with the Mennonite Brethren Church, the founding denomination. Nevertheless, I do not doubt that various concerns have emerged over the years, given the sheer size of our workforce, student body and various campus locations.

I write to assure you that the new leadership affirmed by the FPU Board of Trustees is committed to strengthening our spiritual core through Christ-centered education. Every member of the President's Cabinet is deeply committed to the Lordship of Christ and models this faith in their leadership. I am humbled to work with a group of people who intercedes not only for our faculty, staff and students, but also prays for the work of pastors and their congregants in the Valley. In addition, we offer ministerial grants (scholarships) to the dependents of those serving in full-time pastoral work. Funds are also available for pastoral staff wanting to begin a seminary program. If you are interested in following our progress, please let me know and we will add you to our regular communications.

We will be recruiting several volunteer chaplains to work with our athletic teams and on our regional campuses one night a week. Our hope is to better connect our non-church student populations with churches in their communities. In addition, we would love to invite many of you to campus to share at chapel, do devotionals at staff gatherings, etc. We are unquestionably a Christian institution, but as noted earlier, not all our students are Christian or associated with churches. We do believe that part of the prophetic calling of a Christian university is to provide pathways for its graduates for service and commitment to the local church. We trust that our future partnerships will honor the name of the Christ we love and follow.

Thank you for taking the time to pray for our students and giving consideration in ways we might partner with your congregation. If you are interested in continuing this dialogue, that can be facilitated through Rebecca Bradley, director of public relations and community engagement, at 559-453-2021 or rebecca.bradley@fresno.edu. My wife and I are also committed to serve you through pulpit or seminar meetings as per your need and our availability.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph Jones, Ph.D.
President, Fresno Pacific University