





# WELCOME



Welcome to *Transformed Under the Pepper Tree*. In this monthly magazine, you will read stories of how God is changing people's lives at PazNaz, transforming them into the image of Jesus Christ by the power of his Spirit!

Some information about specific events on campus is found within these pages, but each month *Transformed* is focused on relating stories about what PazNaz is really all about. Rather than programs or events, there are stories about changed lives, stories about people coming in contact with the Savior, and people exploring what it means to become a follower of him. It is exciting to hear what God is doing in the lives of people!

Years ago, Pastor Earl Lee and a group of staff members gathered around a pepper tree located on the northern-most point of what was to become the site for First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena. They dreamed and prayed that God would provide a place where more people could find power for living through Jesus. What began then has been going on for over thirty years as men and women, boys and girls have come into relationship with Christ in significant ways under the shade of that old pepper tree. The mission of the church hasn't changed. May it continue to flourish as people experience the transforming power of Christ.

Blessings,

B. Scott Anderson  
Executive Pastor

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*Transformed* is a magazine publication of First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena (PazNaz). It is designed to highlight the Church's stories of personal transformation. For a complete overview of PazNaz, their beliefs, and ministries, please visit the website [www.paznaz.org](http://www.paznaz.org).

TRANSFORMED  
Issue #71—April 2017  
The Magazine of PazNaz  
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# Rites of Passage



from Pastor Heather Handley

## Growing up is Hard.

It is much harder when you feel like you are doing it alone. As infants, there is an adult to care for all your needs. When you reach elementary school your parents are still very involved and you are starting to make friends who walk the journey of life with you. But when you reach Middle School there is a fierce independent streak that comes out in all of us. "I can do it, Mom." "I don't need your help, Dad." "I'm not a little kid anymore; I know what I'm doing." The tension is that middle schoolers may be more grown up than they were, but they still have a lot of growing to do. The truth is that their brains aren't fully developed; but they are developed enough to make them think that all the growing has finished. This is why being a teenager is difficult. The part of the brain still developing is the decision making part. This is the part of the brain that sorts through emotion and reason to find the best solutions.

Teenagers need to take risks in order to form this part of their brain. Many cultures around the world and throughout history have taken notice of this transition from childhood to adulthood and celebrated with healthy risks. These risks are called rites of passage, and they are events or activities that mark the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. The Jewish culture marks this transition by allowing youth to read scripture aloud in front of the community and then throwing a big party

called a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Native American tribes would send their youth on vision quests where they would spend a few days alone in the forest connecting with nature and their spirits.

Rites of passage are an important part of teenagers navigating adolescence successfully. This last weekend Student Ministries went on their annual Middle School Retreat. For the students, this retreat is a rite of passage, marking the beginning of that transition into adulthood. Some of the students had never been away from their parents overnight. Many of them experienced community in a different way than they ever had before, and all of them took healthy risks.



The students worshipped together, ate together, and played together. They were given the opportunity to make their own choices. This year the students learned how to throw a tomahawk. This is the best kind of risk because it feels dangerous, but it took place on a specialized range with an instructor and was very safe. Trying new things and taking risks is natural teenage behavior, so offering healthy opportunities to exercise those skills gives confidence to students and helps them form good decision making habits.

One of the things Pastor Mack and I always do on these retreats is split the students into teams and then give them the opportunity to name their teams. While calling yourselves *The Avocado Penguins* or *The Squirrels with Attitude* may not seem very significant, two things have happened during this exercise. One, the students have been able to take a healthy risk by naming themselves something silly, and two, they have formed an identity within the community. After this moment the students have a role in the community and this is important in forming connection and belonging to the group.

Taking risks and growing up is hard enough without having to do it alone. Finding belonging is another significant part of adolescence. While on retreat the students spend the majority of their time with one another. Without their familiar routines and technology to distract them, they are provided an opportunity to learn how relationships work and to test their patience for one another.

During the sessions Pastor Mack spoke about being in Christ, doing like Christ, and going with Christ on mission. These are the foundations of what it means to be a Nazarene. They are important lessons for middle schoolers to learn while they are exploring what Christian community means. More than any eloquent lesson Pastor Mack or I could teach from a podium, taking risks together, spending time together, and worshipping together are the best teachers for young adolescents and are the lessons about

community that will stick with them into adulthood.

As a youth pastor one of the best experiences in ministry so far happened at the retreat. I had been talking with some of the high schoolers one Wednesday night about the upcoming retreat for middle schoolers and Rochelle, one of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, said, "That sounds fun, I'd like to go." While I thought she was just being facetious and didn't actually want to hang out with middle school students for a whole weekend, on a whim I told her I could make that happen and proceeded to ask her if she would be willing to come on the retreat to lead worship. It was a "Holy Spirit" moment because the next thing I knew, she agreed and spent the next couple of weeks planning and practicing what songs she would play. Rochelle came with us up the mountain, she led worship for us, and she led a team of students in the competitions. But she also talked with the kids, hung out with them during free time, and made sure they all felt included. It was such a blessing to see God working through her to impact the lives of the younger students, and the most unlikely part was that she enjoyed it!

"I had the best time singing and leading worship, but also in engaging with miniature versions of myself! I found that I really love connecting with the unfamiliar students in my youth group. I was nervous going into this weekend; but after those 36 hours, they're like family. I cannot wait to go again."

- Rochelle DeVries

The camp where the retreat was held happened to be the same one Rochelle had attended as a middle school student herself four years earlier. At the time, the retreat marked the beginning of her passage into adulthood. Now

as she finishes up her junior year of high school and looks forward to planning her future, she has grown from being a scared, unsure middle school student into a mature and gifted Kingdom worker. When I talk about rites of passage as stepping stones leading to adulthood, High School students coming on Middle School retreats is not what I normally think of but, after this last weekend, I should.

To watch students who you have journeyed with since their own middle school years grow and blossom into wonderful women and men of God is an incredible blessing. I cannot claim credit for who Rochelle has become but, as a witness of the work of Christ in her life, I can say that God is good and I am privileged to partner with God in ministry. This year's middle school retreat will be remembered not just for the things that went wrong or the things that worked out, but because of who God is and how he always does incredible things in the lives of people, even teenagers.

- Pastor Heather Handley

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# VANTAGE POINT



March 19-April 16



#VantagePoint #PazNazLent





# A Life of Service

from Judy Barr

“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.” (Matthew 25:23) While this scripture was referenced in the parable of the talents, the same could be applied to Ben and Bonnie Ramirez. There was no challenge they accepted that they did not perform to the utmost. Bonnie served faithfully until her death last November, and Ben continues to serve today, although tempered by physical limitations. You probably know them best from their years of faithful service to the Sunrise Bookstore for a combined 22 years. Indeed, they left their mark on many people while they served the church in that capacity, but they also served in a myriad of other ways which were not necessarily public knowledge.

Ben and Bonnie met at Ball State University, married in 1971, and moved from Indiana to California, where his parents had relocated. Bonnie worked for Pacific Bell, and Ben was initially a teacher in the Pasadena Unified Schools. They served Pasadena First Baptist Church for their first eighteen years, faithfully assisting in ministries of hospitality and leadership, before feeling the call to transfer elsewhere. A prominent reason for leaving was their desire to find a strong youth group for their teenage son. PazNaz fulfilled that desire. New opportunities and areas of ministry opened to them, and they didn't hesitate to respond. They even initiated some ministries as needs arose.

While at First Baptist, they were instrumental in creating a ministry called *Supper Clubs*. These were intergenerational groups, each consisting of 8-10 people, three or four family units, singles and families, babies to seniors. The groups would meet once a month, rotating homes, while sharing a potluck

meal together. The goal was to fellowship with an ever-changing group of members, getting to know them on a deeper level than merely attending a worship service. After four months, groups would reconfigure, and new relationships were established. Hospitality flowed freely from Ben and Bonnie, and they delighted in activities which welcomed new people and unified them within the church family.

PazNaz was a considerably larger church than their former one, so it was an even greater challenge to bring people together outside the church walls. That proved no obstacle to them, and new ideas began flowing. Having just become members themselves, they soon recognized a need to minister to those who were new to the church. They sought a way to demonstrate immediate support, while creating a sense of belonging. With the



blessing and support of a former pastor, Mark Sanford, *Partners in Ministry* was launched. As new members completed pastoral membership classes, they were matched with another individual or couple already in the church. Then they were invited, both new members and “sponsors,” to the Ramirez home for a meal and fellowship. Sharing their gift of hospitality with food and conversation provided a gracious beginning to becoming a member of the PazNaz family. These dinners were held quarterly in their home. Even today that tradition continues, though now it is provided at church, where the new members share a meal with pastors and church members with the same welcoming hospitality.

By this time, Ben had become an administrator in both the Pasadena and South Pasadena School Districts. In his position he was able to facilitate PazNaz youth ministers in a variety of ways on the PHS high school campus. A special bond was formed, and mutual respect developed. Ben also stayed aware of PazNaz students who moved on to college, and periodically sent care packages to let them know they were not forgotten by their church family.

During this time Bonnie was still employed by Pac Bell but, when management offered early retirement plans, Bonnie decided to take advantage of it. She was ready to retire and had asked the Lord to provide direction. Following God's leading, she met with a former pastor, Dick Pritchard, seeking possibilities for volunteer work at PazNaz. Since God had given her this gift of early retirement, she chose to give of herself as an expression of gratitude to him. Pastor Pritchard mentioned staff discussions regarding starting a bookstore at PazNaz, and Bonnie eagerly accepted the challenge. She immediately did the footwork to attain state certification. She investigated various Christian publishers to determine how to go about reviewing and stocking books. She tirelessly completed credit applications and reviewed books which would soon begin

filling the shelves. Finally she created a warm, inviting atmosphere and was ready to open the doors of *Sunrise Bookstore*.

In the early stages, book sales moved slowly. There were several Christian bookstores in the area, so the need was not as great. Carol Wagstaff, a staff member at that time, shared with Bonnie that she had once worked in a bookstore and realized that success did not happen only with books. She suggested that they add greeting cards and gifts to the merchandise offered. With Bonnie's research, hard work, and dedication, this proved to be the key to a more successful bookstore. She spent countless hours managing, buying, displaying, bookkeeping, and the list goes on. Bonnie lovingly served as manager for ten years until her health began to decline and required her to give up the overall management. A huge piece of her heart remained dedicated to her belief in the value of the bookstore, so she was delighted when Ben took the reins. Sadly, Bonnie passed away on Friday, November 4, 2016. Ben was nearing retirement in the education field, but still had the health and passion to embrace the duties as manager.

Ben had a vision to take the bookstore to even further levels. He ordered books for Sunday School classes, fulfilled congregation requests, and even mailed books requested by members to be sent to prisoners. He hosted book signings for numerous authors within our congregation and provided communion kits for shut in visitation. As the church attendees became more diversified, he expanded offerings in the bookstore to meet the needs of a multicultural congregation, adding Bibles in Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish, and *Daily Bread* devotional books in numerous languages as well. Whether it was literature, cards, or personal gifts, the products were

selected with thoughtfulness in regard to culture and diversity.

As Christian bookstores began closing in the area, word got out about the existence of the *Sunrise Bookstore* on the campus of PazNaz, and customers began calling from the community at large. Visiting pastors would seek information about starting a bookstore within their congregations. In addition to our own church groups, the ladies of the *Wednesday Bible Study Fellowship (BSF)* were especially loyal to the bookstore and to Ben specifically, as he patiently listened to them to better accommodate their needs. They appreciated his desire to offer the perfect card or gift and were willing to stand in long lines for the opportunity to make a purchase. Some vowed that he had the best cards in the valley. One patron exclaimed that Ben purchased with the customer's needs in mind, so there was always just the right card or gift on the shelves. Another expressed that everywhere she turns in her house, she's reminded of Ben and the bookstore by all the wonderful items she has purchased.

For Ben and Bonnie Ramirez, the bookstore was not merely a business they managed for 20+ years until 2016. It was a devoted ministry. Whether it was a cup of hot cider, a listening ear, a prayer, or a smile, the *Sunrise Bookstore* offered so much more than merchandise. God clearly led them into that ministry of service, and they truly honored him as good and faithful servants! Thank you Ben and Bonnie for your years of service.

- Judy Barr

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**PALM  
SUNDAY**

WELCOME THE KING

**SUNDAY, APRIL 9 | LEE CHAPEL AT 8:00 AM | SANCTUARY AT 10:30 AM**



**MAUNDY  
THURSDAY**

THE LAST SUPPER

**THURSDAY, APRIL 13 | LEE CHAPEL AT 7:00 PM**





**GOOD  
FRIDAY**

TENEBRAE SERVICE

FRIDAY, APRIL 14 | SANCTUARY AT 7:00 PM



**EASTER  
SUNDAY**

HE IS RISEN!

SUNDAY, APRIL 16  
SERVICES AT 7:00, 9:45, & 10:30 AM





# Un-Belonging

from Korea to Peru to California

from Josi Hwang



My journey with God begins with the story of my family. The trajectory of our family life made a significant turn 31 years ago when my parents and sisters packed up and moved from Korea to Peru, South America. We went from being an average Korean family to becoming a Korean-Peruvian missionary family. During a time before the Internet and when smoking was still allowed on planes, they moved without knowing a single person in Peru, with a Bible in one hand and a dictionary in the other. God did not miss a beat, though, having prepared people – strangers – to receive them all along the way. God was already in Peru and our family was invited to join in the Kingdom work.

I was born not too long after this move when we were living in the mountains of Peru, so I narrowly missed the pain of moving to a new country. While my family adjusted to

could be next. Even at a young age, I sensed that we were not always safe on the street – no one really was, but being different did not help.

Being different also impacted my identity. Just like any other kid I wanted to blend in with my peers, but looking Korean and having missionary parents made me a foreigner in their eyes. Strangers complimented me on my Spanish and close friends asked me when I would be “moving back home.” Life in Peru was the only life I knew, but I was not allowed to belong. To them, I was entirely Korean. They even thought, “Who would want to be Peruvian anyway?”

I questioned God, wondering why God had wished this for me. I felt like a casualty. Somehow I was the cost of God’s expanding Kingdom across cultures and languages. Though God had done wondrous things in my parents’ ministries, I

to un-belonging so that I might forever know my belonging to God.

When I began to embrace this, I sensed God calling me back to Peru through the letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce ... Increase in number there; do not decrease. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

I was not a casualty in God’s plans. God had all along been inviting me to partner in Kingdom work, to put down roots where I was least expected, to cast my lot with those who believe I do not belong. Through this I believe that, in the same way God met me in my un-belonging, my un-belonging will draw others to find their belonging in God’s Kingdom.

In the meantime, as I finish up my

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a new life, language, and culture, I grew up in the only life I have known. When people ask me what it was like to grow up as a missionary kid, I usually respond that it was pretty normal. There was also the aspect of switching between languages, toggling cultures, eating Peruvian food for lunch and Korean food for dinner, and spending half of my life in church. But that was normal life for us.

I loved much of it, but being different was not always easy. Peru in the 1980s and 90s was marked by terrorism and much political tumult. I feared that our family would be targeted because my parents were foreign religious workers. Starting in late elementary school, I checked, double checked, and triple checked the locks in our house before going to bed. We heard news of missionaries that had been threatened, kidnapped, and asked to leave the country. I feared we

had fallen by the wayside. People said it was a blessing to be multicultural, however un-belonging felt more like a curse to me. It followed me everywhere. Even in Korea I did not belong. Though I looked like everyone else, on the inside I was also Peruvian and American. Though I desperately longed to belong somewhere, it seemed that I did not belong anywhere and I could not escape.

Then God, in kindness and faithfulness, began to meet me in scripture through Israel’s exile narratives. I felt like an exile, forced to wander without ever belonging. I met God there in my un-belonging. With nowhere to go, I turned to the one I already belonged to – the one with whom I *rightfully* belonged. I learned that all other founts were broken cisterns, unable to hold water. I would not find belonging anywhere else but in the one fountain of living water. I was called

degrees in clinical psychology and theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, I have found a community who lives by a similar vision in La Fuente Ministries. La Fuente’s multicultural, multilingual, and multigenerational community has been a nurturing family. Weekly I am challenged to put my hope in Christ and to see the redemptive work that God through the Spirit is doing in our midst. Additionally, I am being deeply nourished by La Fuente’s commitment to pursue social justice and Kingdom ethics in our local communities. At La Fuente, slowly but surely, we are building houses, planting gardens, increasing, and seeking the peace of Los Angeles. It is a joy to be part of such a community.

**- Josi Hwang**





PazNaz Presents

**EGGSTRAVAGANZA**  
**Adventure Is Out There**

**Saturday, April 15 | 11:00 am-1:00 pm**

**Egg Hunts • Easter Bunny • Bounce Houses • Prizes & Games • Popcorn • Food & Drinks**

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