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!

You might be asking, “Where can I find information about a specific PazNaz event?” 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

The Ties that Bind
from Pastor Julie Keith

Hanging on to Hope
from Barbara Lopez

Road Trips & Teddy Bears
An Interview with Sarah Shahan
If you have wandered around the PazNaz campus and peeked into Room 115 of the Lower Sanctuary or the Cave, where PazNaz Kids is located, you will have seen a glimpse of the amazing creativity with which God has gifted Gayle and Marlon Theilacker. I first met Gayle and Marlon when they started attending PazNaz a few years ago. They signed up to volunteer at one of PazNaz’s outreach events.

Gayle and Marlon jumped right in to serving in a variety of different ministries. Gayle’s creative genius can be seen not only on campus, but in the floral arrangements at the Helping Hands Christmas party, the Handmade Holiday Café for Women’s Ministries, the Child S.H.A.R.E. picnic crafts, or in scenes for backdrops.

A couple of years ago, I was in need of a teacher for the summer months and asked Marlon if he would be willing to do it. By the end of the summer they were hooked. So many children have been blessed by their love, compassion, and willingness to say yes to something they had never really done before. Their excitement about the Special Needs Ministries is contagious. You will find both of them inviting their friends and small group members to be a part of PazNaz’s Special Needs Ministries in some way or another.

Not too long after I came to PazNaz, I began to have a dream of a sensory room. To be honest, I was not really sure what it would look like, but knew that it would be great to have a space that would benefit children and teens with special needs. This dream began to take shape two years ago when Gayle started to dream with me.
Room 115 of the Lower Sanctuary has been the classroom of Oasis, special needs adults, and Mosaic, teens with special needs. The initial dream was to create a mural that would blend in with the Oasis theme. This quickly turned into a bigger dream of creating a sensory room. As PazNaz learns what it means to be an intergenerational community, this room provides many opportunities for families who have children with special needs to participate in church life. Some families will be able to participate with minimal support; however, there are other families whose children may need to take a break from the stimulus of classes or activities. It is for these children and teens that the dream of the sensory room became a reality.

After many months of research and visiting sites who have sensory opportunities, Gayle began to put these ideas on paper. The written designs were incredible! Within days of gaining final approval, the room began a transformation. The students of both Oasis and Mosaic classes were in awe each week as they walked into the room and saw the changes from just seven days before. Soon the room was almost finished and ready for one last project: two sensory rugs that required 11,720 strips of fabric to be tied into knots. God put within Gayle’s heart an even deeper vision for these rugs that came to her in the form of a hymn, “Blest Be the Tie that Binds.” In an email that was sent to Pastor Scott Daniels and myself, Gayle wrote the following:

I’m working on a project (creating a sensory room) for the Special Needs Ministries and hope to engage the congregation to participate by each one “tying the knot” in a rug hanging for the room. It’s a simple exercise of showing support for In His Image Ministries and our very special, special needs kids and adults. But, the finished product will be much more symbolic to me: a coming together of sorts for the congregation and its many ministries/groups. As those kids hands run up and down the many strands of fabric, they will be feeling the “touch” of the Body of Christ.

The song, “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” came to mind as I was planning this activity. In searching for the lyrics online, I came across the following blog about John Fawcett and how he was inspired to write the lyrics:

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

Before our Father’s throne we pour our ardent prayers; our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.

We share each other’s woes, our mutual burdens bear; and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.

- John Fawcett

I was not able to get through this email without tears coming to my eyes. The impact that Gayle and Marlon have had and continue to have on those with special needs and their families goes deep. Throughout the weeks that followed, the PazNaz community was invited to the Ties That Bind. Each week Gayle gave reports of her dream becoming a reality. One Facebook post truly depicts the coming together of so many individuals and ministries.

The velcro generation still knows how to tie knots! We’ve had seniors, preschoolers, high schoolers, college grads, mommies, Jr. High kids... and even MEN.... tying knots! Not to be outdone by the men (who took it with them on their retreat), the women of Women in the Word jumped in today and helped fill in many of the gaps. My favorite so far has been the baby that picked out the strand of fabric for us to tie. Some have stopped by the table to lay their hands on the rugs and pray for the ministry. Others have shared wonderful stories as they found themselves unable to tie just one.

(posted on June 10, 2014)

Behind the creative genius, Marlon faithfully painted, hung pictures and mirrors, built a storage bench, and even made a therapy sling that is now hanging in the room. Enjoying the fellowship of working with others, Marlon and Gayle even enlisted friends and their PazNaz small group, Count It All Joy, to join in on the fun of helping create this very special place!

Thank you Gayle and Marlon for catching the dream and uniting a congregation in an intergenerational project that will have lasting impact for years to come.

The PazNaz community is invited to a dedication and open house on Sunday, September 28, following the 10:30 am service. The open house and reception will be held in front of Room 115, Lower Sanctuary. Come and check out the finished product of the Ties That Bind.

- Pastor Julie Keith
Fall Festival 2014

Friday, October 31
6:00 - 8:00 pm

A free fun-filled, family-friendly event with candy, costumes, carnival games, bounce houses, and more!

Volunteers Needed!
If you would like to volunteer for this huge community event, please contact Pastor Jayme Lenker at jlenker@paznaz.org or 626.351.2469.
Sometimes faith is just hanging on in the dark. Sometimes things just don’t make sense. Sometimes we simply can’t see beyond the pain. Sometimes we can’t even manage to utter a prayer. In those dark nights when life seems to suffocate us with sorrow, faith compels us to hang on. While we may learn God’s reasons later, for now all that is required is for us to hang on in the dark until God’s light illuminates the way again.

Although I cannot take credit for having written these words, they clearly describe where I was in my life nearly three years ago, and how PazNaz and Valley Center, along with the people currently in my life, have shaped the faith and love for God that I have today.

I was born and baptized in the Catholic Church. Some of my fondest childhood memories were of walking to church with my grandmother and carrying sugar cubes or apple slices to feed the horses that we would pass along the way. Truth be told, I think back and the only reason I would go to church was so I could see and pet the horses that would run up to the fence knowing that we had treats for them. Then again, I was about six-years-old, so who could blame me? In the years to follow, I received my First Communion and later, in my teenage years, my Confirmation. I also participated in the youth group. I traveled to the islands in the rivers of Buenos Aires and to the outskirts to clean up churches and schoolhouses in the underprivileged areas. I did this while living in Argentina for a few years. Unfortunately, as time passed I found myself participating and going to church less and less. But I continued to believe in God, and always considered myself a good Catholic. I would give to those less fortunate than I, and would assist those who were in need. During these later years I occasionally attempted to attend and participate in different churches, all within the Catholic faith, but I just kept feeling like I did not belong. I thought that the faith I had within me (with the previous years of attending church and actively participating) was sufficient and that I was not in need of a church family to hold me accountable for my actions. Nor did I think to continue in my education of God and reading the Holy Bible. I did not know it yet, but something very important was missing; I was not growing spiritually and I was feeling a sense of loss and of not belonging.

A Bit of History
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A New Spiritual Family
Fast forward approximately 20 years… God already knew what lay ahead for me. He led into my life a wonderful group of friends that would guide me back to where I needed to be in my faith, so I could get through the difficulties that my future would soon hold. He knew that over the next few years my life would change in ways that I could not yet comprehend. God set his plan into motion and the people that he brought into my life would help me...
through those dark nights. We started to build a strong relationship over the next few years. Soon, when things just didn’t make sense anymore, and when I simply couldn’t see beyond the sorrow and pain, let alone utter a prayer, they were there to guide me. They led me back to God and into the life of faith that I once had nearly lost along the way. My new friends, who supported me emotionally and spiritually during this difficult time, I now refer to as my family. Little did they know that they would be adopting me in spirit along the way. They talked to me about scriptures and sent me messages throughout the day to uplift my spirit. They guided me towards a renewing faith that gave me the strength to hang on in the dark until I was ready to see God’s light illuminating my path once again.

In 2012, the Martinez family (the same family that God guided toward me in the previous years) invited me to attend church with them. I remember going with them one Sunday morning to Valley Center Church of the Nazarene and witnessing for the first time the energy and loud “Woohoo’s” and “Can I get a witness in the house” from Pastor Joe Halbert. It was because of the energy and passion with which he delivered the messages each Sunday that I kept going back and looking forward to Sunday mornings. As weeks went by and I was faithfully attending church at Valley Center, it felt like every message that Pastor Joe gave was directed at me. I’m sure we all feel that way from time to time as we relate to the teachings and stories he shares. I must have cried every Sunday for the first few months, either because of the topic, or the emotions with which Pastor Joe preaches, or because of the prayers led by Pastor Terry Irish, or because of the beautiful music and songs that we sang. I embrace and appreciate the energy that Pastor Joe blesses us with every Sunday. I also look forward to hearing from Pastor Scott Daniels and Pastor Mano Agulian when they come to Valley Center with an equally energetic message of their own.

I feel the presence of my family that led me to my new church, Joanna Martinez, her husband, Ron, their children, Ronnie and Natalie, and their niece, Kimberly, surround me with love. Joanna always had a tissue to discreetly pass my way when needed and her hand on my shoulder let me know that everything was going to be okay.

Within the first few months I had learned the names of almost everyone that regularly attends Valley Center and was filled with emotion to see that most of them had learned my name as well. Very soon handshakes during the morning greeting turned into hugs and warm hellos. I truly felt welcomed by all. Pastor Joe and his wife, Cindy, always made a point to ask how I was doing, or would send me texts or Facebook messages to let me know that they were praying for me. Today I can truly say that I have found my church home and family, and would never have imagined how much this had been missing in my life until I experienced it firsthand.

**Getting Involved**

Over the past two years I have participated in several PazNaz and Valley Center functions and activities. I attended my first Women’s Retreat where I was paired up with a wonderful group of ladies that also adopted me and make a point of reaching out to me to make sure that I was doing okay. We have had a backyard movie night, breakfast at a quaint café in Monrovia, have shared stories, and have stayed in touch. They were even there to help when I sold my home and moved earlier this year. I always look forward to seeing them again when I’m on the PazNaz campus. I even attended the Dave Ramsey Financial Peace University program at PazNaz, which I rave about to all my friends every opportunity I get.

I continued to make more church friends at the Worship Concert held at Valley Center featuring our very talented Amy Oden. I have participated and assisted for the past two years in the Valley Center Egg-stravaganza. With the help of my youngest son, we participate and assist with David Mimms in the morning breakfasts at Valley Center. I have also passed out pamphlets around the Valley Center neighborhood with James Feinner. I have helped with the Bible Study for the children of our campus and even enjoyed spending one morning in the Valley Center nursery. I was also blessed to participate and lead the Tribe of Levi during the Vacation Bible School on the Valley Center campus. I even recently attended a membership meeting and I can proudly say that I’m one of the newest members of the PazNaz/Valley Center Church family.

PazNaz and Valley Center came into my life in a time when I felt hopeless and full of despair. Those who knew me then and are still in touch with me today know that my life has changed for the better in more ways that I could ever express. I can now say with certainty that I trust in God’s reasons for the darkness and sorrow that I once felt. The help and support of my family and the PazNaz/Valley Center community made it possible for me to hang on in the dark. Today, my life is much brighter as it reflects that I can now see God’s light illuminating the way again.

- Barbara Lopez

PazNaz and Valley Center came into my life in a time when I felt hopeless and with much despair. Those who knew me then and are still in touch with me today know that my life has changed for the better in more ways that I could ever express. I can now say with certainty that I trust in God’s reasons for the darkness and sorrow that I once felt.
VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

If you feed those who are hungry and take care of the needs of those who are troubled, then your light will shine in the darkness. - Isaiah 58:10

Church in the Park Needs You!

There are approximately 80,000 homeless individuals, including children and adults, in Los Angeles County. Church in the Park provides a hot breakfast and uplifting devotional to nearly 150 people each week at Central Park near Old Town Pasadena. Each Sunday, breakfast is prepared on the PazNaz campus at 6:30 am and is served in the park at 8:45 am.

Ways You Can Help

• Pray  • Volunteer Your Time  • Financial Support

Please fill out a Sign Up Form from the rounders on campus or contact Pastor Joe Halbert at jhalbert@paznaz.org or 626.351.2421.
We’ve got it cookin’ for you!

Fairly new around the PazNaz campus? There is a luncheon in your honor on Sunday, October 12, following the 10:30 am service in Gilmore Hall. You will enjoy a delicious lunch, get acquainted with the Pastoral staff, and meet other new friends around the table. You will also get a great overview of the different ministries available at PazNaz and a gift bag to say “Thanks for being here!”

Please RSVP to Stacey Maljian at smaljian@paznaz.org by October 8 if you can attend.
Have you ever taken a 2,600-mile road trip through six states with 25 teenagers over the course of six days? Me neither, at least not until a couple of months ago.

Every summer, middle and high school students look forward to an annual event called “DU,” which stands for “Destination Unknown.” The students basically agree to come on a trip and they have *no idea* where they are going. Each day of the trip is a new, unknown adventure. DU has become a summer tradition and one of the highlights of the year for PazNaz Student Ministries.

This year, the youth staff wanted to give students the experience of a lifetime: a six-day road trip to Denver, Colorado. The group spent two days getting there by way of Arizona and Utah, making some memorable stops at Cracker Barrel and Arches National Park. The group then spent two days in the Denver area itself. They played at a giant water park, rafted down the rapids of the Clear Creek, and enjoyed the eccentric entertainment of the famous Casa Bonita Mexican restaurant.

From Colorado, they headed to northern Utah (via Wyoming) for dinner and a show. The final day was mainly spent on the road as they made the long trek back to Pasadena from Salt Lake City.

I could write about all of the great stories from DU. I could tell you about sleeping on church floors, driving with a broken van window, playing ridiculous games of “What Are the Odds,” going to the emergency room after midnight, getting...
uncomfortably close to a bear on the highway, "riding the bull" down the river, or taking pictures with strangers with unusual facial hair. Instead, I want you to see DU from a teenager's perspective.

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Sarah Shahan and her family have been a part of the PazNaz community since she was very young. Sarah is a senior in high school and this was her third DU with Student Ministries. "I have this thing for seeing different places," she told me. "So going to five different states in one week was amazing." Sarah loved seeing the beautiful scenery of Colorado and Utah. She had so much fun participating in the big activities like whitewater rafting, but she also said there was something special about our moments of downtime. Whether it was throwing a Frisbee in a parking lot or playing Mafia in a dark church lobby, unstructured experiences also helped build close friendships within the group.

“We were just all playing together and being nice to each other,” said Sarah. “There’s something about ‘going away’ that brings people together.” Sarah told me about other high school students she barely knew before the trip and how much closer they are now. The long hours on the road allowed for deep and meaningful conversations about life between new friends. “Each time I go on a youth event, especially a big one like this, I find that I become closer to the people around me and to God,” she said. “I want to go to church and be with these people. I want to share more experiences with them.”

Sarah understands why some students (and parents!) would be hesitant about a trip like DU. The mystery and unpredictability of it can be uncomfortable and scary, but Sarah called this year’s DU the highlight of the summer. “Once you’re done, you look back and say, ‘I’m so going again!’ You just have to take a leap of faith and do it.”

Sarah has taken other leaps of faith in the last year. She has been involved with Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership in Los Angeles, more commonly known as HOBY, for almost three years. HOBY is a youth leadership development organization that empowers high school students to be agents of positive change in their communities. Sarah spent the summer mentoring a group of kids about leadership and community service. She remembers hearing a fellow mentor leader share about an organization he started that helps clean up trash on beaches. “I had been wanting for the last year to start something similar,” she said. “I wanted to start something that would benefit the community.”

Because she really loves working with children, Sarah had an idea for a stuffed animal donation program. She wanted to collect teddy bears and other plush toys and give them to patients at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA). “They usually get blankets, hats, water bottles…basic needs stuff,” she said. “It’s a good feeling, but it also reminds them that they’re there and that they need this stuff. They need a blanket because they can’t keep warm on their own, or they need a hat because they’re bald.” Sarah thought that the young children at CHLA could use something a little more special, something they could play with or hold as they go through treatments like chemotherapy.

Sarah started Teddy Talks in June and she has already collected 135 plush toys, most of which are teddy bears. She plans on personalizing each toy by giving it a name and tying a note of encouragement to it for its future owner. She has a heart for children, especially young children who are sick. As a cancer survivor herself, Sarah knows what it’s like to feel like your childhood is being taken from you. “Because I lost my childhood so early, I want every child to have that. I don’t want them to lose it,” she told me. “I want them to be kids and I want them to be valued.”

Many people from PazNaz have poured themselves into Sarah’s life over the years and she is grateful for the deep roots she has in this community. Her life has been transformed by a loving God and a loving community, and she is compelled to live a story that transforms the lives of others.
In His Image presents

LOVE
WALK AND ROLL
Saturday
October 4
10:00 am

This event is to create community and help raise funds for the Special Needs/In His Image Ministries of PazNaz. Special Needs families, individuals, and community partners who wish to be involved can pre-register to walk or roll.

Online registration is now open at: www.paznaz.org/online-forms/love-walk-and-roll
Contact Pastor Julie Keith at jkeith@paznaz.org or 626.351.2485.

First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena
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