

# What's Brewing | Low Income Housing | Fremont

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Fremont, Abode, church, congregation, activities, services, low-income housing

## SPEAKERS

Carla Long, Terri McRhoads, Kent Barnett

### **Carla Long** 00:27

Hello and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long and today I am so so excited because I'm here with two dear and wonderful friends. I'm here with Kent Barnett and Terri McRhodes. Hi, Kent. Hi, Terri. <Hello,> Kent and Terri and I became good friends when I was living in California on my first assignment with Community of Christ. I lived in Northern California for six years, and I just fell in love. I fell in love with the church there. I fell in love with the people there. I fell in love with the weather. I fell in love with how blond my hair became. I fell in love with Northern California. And I also fell in love with how close it was to Disneyland. So there's so many reasons to love California. And these two people on this podcast are two of my big reasons. So Kent and Terri, thank you so much for being here. Before we jump into what we're going to talk about today, if you would introduce yourself. So Terri, tell us a little bit about yourself.

### **Terri McRhoads** 01:23

I was a part of the Sierra Pacific Mission Center and prior to that the San Francisco Bay Stake since 1973. And two of my best friends Kent's late wife, Diane, I was kind of her assistant. I followed her around and did her bidding as far as helping her out in her job working for the church in whatever fashion over the years. And my family, I have an extensive family, the McRhoads family. Many of them are members and scattered here and there. They have enjoyed our Mission Center, including our wonderful campground, Happy Valley with the Redwoods in proximity to the ocean. It's a wonderful place to live.

### **Carla Long** 02:04

It's truly a wonderful place to live and Terri, I will never forget when I met Emily, the first time I ever met Emily, I had just moved to California and I was helping out at a youth retreat at Happy Valley. And someone had found out that I was a math teacher before and they mentioned Emily. She literally grabbed my hand pulled me to a table and said I really need help with my math homework. And so I got to help her with her math homework. And it was really fun because I got to get to know her while I helped her with her math homework. I don't know if she remembers it. But I remember it with great fondness.

**Terri McRhoads** 02:32

Never heard that story. Love it. Love it. <Me too.> It's o Emily. She looks very shy and retiring. But she's very not at all.

**Carla Long** 02:40

She's not at all. Thank you, Terri. Kent, what about you?

**Kent Barnett** 02:46

Well, I have to say, Carla, we also fell in love with you. From the time you came out here the whole time you were here. It was just great to count you as a friend. Absolutely. I've been in the Bay Area since I think April of 1970. I moved up here, went to work for Bank of America. I worked for them for 30 years. My late wife Diane died about two years ago. I was just telling Carla my comment, "Diane, not only did you die and then left me the dog, and that dog has cost me over \$10,000 in health bills lately." Anyway, onto that I live a half a mile from the church. That's good, that's bad. It's good I'm close. It's bad, because you know, who gets called when there's a problem? Me, I'm supposed to be retired. But if you're involved in the church, you know, that never really happens. I do a lot of coordination of a lot of things in Fremont, and handle a lot of that types of stuff. So is that enough on me?

**Carla Long** 03:43

That's great. In fact, it might be a little too much. <Okay. All right. I'll leave it at that.> I'm just kidding. As you know, as you can probably already tell listeners that Kent has a wicked sense of humor. He's super fun to be around for sure. So this question is for both Terri and Kent and feel free just to jump in whenever you want to do it. But I haven't even mentioned to our listeners what we're talking about today. So what is the ministry that we're talking about today? Can you tell me why I wanted to podcast with you too?

**Kent Barnett** 04:10

Well, I'll start off. In Fremont, we had a very large piece of property. We had a front piece of property that was on the corner of two main streets in Fremont. And we've owned that property for over 40-45 years. As time went on, there was a master plan that something was going to be built out there. But as time went on, it became more and more obvious that that wasn't going to happen. And over those years, we had people would come by and they'd want to buy that piece of property and put a gas station on it. They would come by and they want to put a 7-11 on it. Or some developer wanted to come by and might build multimillion dollar homes on it. We were not interested in any of that happening. Actually, we weren't interested in selling it at all for a long time. Finally, a man came to Diane who had been pastor for many, many years So we're interested in mine and put a branch bank on there. That got us to thinking, you know, that wouldn't be a lot of traffic wouldn't be a lot of loitering of people all around. And long story short, I think a friend of a friend got Diane acquainted with a nonprofit named Abode. Abode is a fantastic nonprofit highly respected. They build apartment complexes for low-income people. And they've done that throughout the Bay Area. Long story short, we ended up selling that front piece of property to Abode. The only thing that's ever been on that front piece of property was a Christmas tree lot for a number of years. It was literally blank, Empty. Dirt. And we had sprayed for weeds so we didn't have to mow anything. If you're familiar with prices in California, that one acre piece of property sold for \$2.8 million dollars. Half of that went to the world church for the Bridge of Hope. Half

of it was for us. Diane's plan was to create a peace and justice center in Fremont. She was already working in half a dozen peace and justice organizations and groups. The plan was to use that money to hire a couple or an individual to work with her in creating this Peace and Justice Center. For a number of years, we had already had a Fremont Children's Peace Pavilion housed in the Fremont congregation, which Diane was executive director of. We've had 7-8-9 years, I forget how long it had gone on. We had 1000s of kids that came through, mainly grade school kids, and hundreds of parents and numerous teachers that came through. All of them just raving about what a fantastic experience this was. And part of the plan was to expand that Peace Pavillion for not only grade school kids, but for older kids and for adults to be part of the Peace and Justice Center. Well, Diane died, and with her unfortunately died all the plans for that Peace and Justice Center. Out of that tragedy, came a blessing in a way in talking with Steve and Cathy Veazey. And Cathy, of course is very involved with the Peace Pavillion in Independence and Peace Pathways. It turned out that they had bought their own building, which was fantastic. They were redoing everything to be code compliant. It was a fantastic opportunity, but they needed money. Our part of that \$2.84 million was \$1.4. In discussions with members of the Fremont congregation. We voted to donate \$1 million to the Peace Pavillion in Independence, Missouri to help them complete the renovation of this building and converting all the activities to be COVID compliant. My daughter-in-law and I were invited back for the ribbon cutting, which we went back to. They have an assembly room they've named after or in honor of the Fremont congregation. And one of the first rooms down the hallway they have dedicated in memory of Diane. So what I suggest is if you have property that your church owns, and you're thinking of what to do with it, if you're thinking of selling it, look to some kind of a nonprofit or something that will do good. They're building a 54-unit apartment complex on that piece of property for low-income people. This fits right in with our belief of the Worth of All People and Abolish Poverty and End Suffering. We felt that those beliefs really go along with our selling that piece of property to Abode and what they're doing with it. It's a fantastic opportunity for those people, as well as a blessing for them. The other part of it was and we've got a congregation, we have a sanctuary that will hold over 100 people, the grand piano. So there were lots of activities of other groups going on in the Fremont congregation. And some of them were very oriented to helping people like the Girl Scout troop. At one time we had an AA meeting going on. We have a Hindu or Muslim group, I don't really know which one they are. But they meet every Friday night. They have their church services, their religious services and have met for many years except during the pandemic. So unfortunately, the problem is, is that of all the groups that met there were no activities where any of our own members became involved with those groups. So it was a matter of facilitating, like in the Hindu group, them being able to have a place to have their religious services or community support, like the piano recitals. If you're going to have activities in your church, it'd be fantastic to be able to have groups in that your own members could become part of. But in all those years of the use of the Fremont facility, unfortunately, I have to admit, never once did a person from any of those groups ever come to church on a Sunday morning. They knew us. Absolutely. They knew who we were. And we have the Enduring Principles and the Mission Initiatives on big placards at the front, which they look at. And I think most people that are in there read. When we were having the groundbreaking for Abode for the apartment building, they're building, one of the directors or something of them came in, we were talking in the sanctuary. He's not a member of our church, but he looked at all of those. And he says, "That's what we need to get back to." So there was a witnessing in a way with those up on front. But it would be great, also, if it was possible to have activities in the church where we could become part of

that, and invite the people to participate with us. So that's where it's at. Any questions you can let me know.

**Carla Long** 10:54

That's awesome. Kent, thanks so much. Terri, do you have anything to add to what Kent was talking about?

**Terri McRhoads** 10:58

Well, I do have something that Kent may have not thought about. But I was involved with scrapbooking groups, various scrapbooking groups, because it's a big passion of mine. And this included church members, non church members, people from different ethnic groups, and all ages from teenager up to 80s. And we did that activity in both the Fremont congregation for years, and in the congregation, I've moved to in Marina, which is about an hour 20-minute drive from Fremont. I retired and moved in 2020. So that activity, actually, sometimes we would have church services during our scrapbooking, and people would go in there and be part of it, and then return to scrapbooking and created quite a nice impression of our church amongst the people participating in that. And it also performed a ministry that people may not recognize. When people get together, and they're making things together, that they enjoy the same activity, they talk. And over a period of decades, they get to know each other and talk. And they share and they support each other in a very definite and profound ministry does go on. I also want to say that I do think that the Abode partnership was wonderful. And I think you have some other questions. And I'll get to my part of that later.

**Carla Long** 12:25

I do have more questions. Thank you. That was a really good overview from both of you. I appreciate everything you had to say.

**Kent Barnett** 12:30

I want to add one comment. Terri is a rabid scrapbooker. That one thing I forgot to mention as some groups were charged for use of the facility, others we did not, if they were doing what we consider to be a community service, like the Girl Scouts, we didn't charge for the use of the facility for that. Some of the other groups like the piano recitals, we would charge and we found that our rates were dirt cheap. I'm not greedy.

**Terri McRhoads** 12:59

If I could tag on to him, is a donation basis, those that stayed at the church for the activity for scrapbooking, would donate whatever they felt was appropriate.

**Carla Long** 13:08

Oh, that's wonderful. I love that kind of community building stuff as well. I mean, it's important that we have enough funds to run our congregations and so on and so forth. But it's also so important to build community. And that's what we're here to do as well. So I see all of our Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles in what you're doing. What were some challenges along the way, when you decided to go with Abode? And what challenges did the congregation face?

**Kent Barnett 13:35**

Well, it was a question of discussion. We went through a period of discernment. Is this what we want to do? Is this the best thing to do? I'll be real honest, we only had one person that was against it. Everybody else was absolutely for it, particularly after they found out where Abode came from and everything like that. At one point, Diane in talking with the people from Abode, and she said, "Are you people sure you're not members of our church? Because a lot of the stuff you are talking about and your beliefs and your approach to your ministry and your service, right down the same line we are." "No we're not members of your church." But you know, it was a lot of mutual agreement on things. But yeah, it was a matter of talking, you know, you got to discuss with the members, the possibilities, pros and cons and everything else. And there had been nothing on that front piece of property for 40 some years. And it wasn't going to happen. And somebody said, "Well, what if we want to expand?" Well, we got a backside that has a bunch of evergreens and everything else you want to build another building we build another building back there.

**Terri McRhoads 14:37**

And, if I can add also when, say another one of our congregations decides to investigate this. Be patient and keep going. Because it takes time. It does take time to do this because there are city permits to get and there are a lot of things that have to be done in preparation. And it takes going the distance to see this thing through. But it is so so worth it because organizations like Abode don't just build the property. They have the services there afterward to help these people. And that's the big key to selecting somebody to do this to, to sell to.

**Carla Long 15:19**

That's really good advice. Terri, I'm so glad that you said that. And I totally agree, this kind of thing really takes a big group of people to be in agreement and to support even if it's just a few people doing the actual work, there needs to be support from the congregation. And I know that that's been true in many instances, where just two or three, you're doing all the work, but the support of the community is really important. What were some successes along the way, or what were some really positive things that continue to help you going on this path?

**Kent Barnett 15:48**

Well, Abode was very interested. As Terri said have did take a lot of time, lots of things, even for Abode had to be lined up. In fact, even after the papers were signed, and they owned the property, it was quite a long time before they actually started building because they had other projects going on other buildings they were building, and they had to complete those. It's like you can't take on too much at one time. So yeah, it took time. But you're patient and you know, there was a sense of feeling that this is the correct direction. <Yes.> This will happen.

**Terri McRhoads 16:19**

Yes, pay attention to the Holy Spirit working and follow that and don't quit.

**Carla Long 16:26**

I think that that's good advice almost in every circumstance in our lives, pay attention to where the Spirit is moving, and moving that direction. Really, really, really good advice. Do you have a story that you

can tell about how lives have changed for the better because of this ministry? Maybe someone in the congregation, maybe someone who will benefit from the apartment? Is there a story that you can tell us about how something happened?

**Terri McRhoads 16:50**

Yes! Okay, I'm gonna jump into this one Kent. I talked to Kent before this to refresh my memory, and I don't think he was with us. Diane, and I went to another location of Abode in southern Fremont, where they had already built and were operating a location of this type. Different style of building that they build to try to mirror what's around them. And so we went to talk to a person who lived there, and how their life had changed. And when we walked into the building, and it was also a tour of the building. First of all, I just want to say on the style the buildings. This was built like a highrise apartment building, because there were commercial things around them. And the one that is being built at Fremont, they showed us a picture of what it's going to look like in the end at the groundbreaking and it looks like a three story normal apartment building with landscaping around—a totally different thing. They can go either way. And in the one we went to the high rise, I noticed on the outside door, it said no smoking of anything in this building. And as an old underwriter and manager in an insurance company that appealed to me. And it also said something about how the building was managed. We've went in there and there were the public parts of the building on the ground floor there, including rooms where the occupants can go and get help with finding a job or childcare or addiction, things of that nature. And so the stuff was right there ready for them, so that they wouldn't have to flounder trying to make a life in this building. And one of those areas on the ground floor of the building, they had this man come down and meet with us. And he told us the story of him being a veteran. And having challenges because of that, and hitting bottom, challenges with addiction and so forth. And how the Abode services had helped him with his life and getting it back together. And he was so happy because he was finally able to see his son, and bring his son into the building for visitation. You do these things, because it's the right thing to do. But it's also good to see what can happen in a human being when you get done. And that really energized Diane and I to go on with this. And keep going until we got there in another location for a vote.

**Kent Barnett 19:15**

I don't know that there's a particular story of an individual in the congregation whose life was changed, but rather, the recognition by all of us in the congregation of the good that's coming from this. Yes, the lives that will be changed. I was talking to one of the building people, building contractors and they said, you know, you can get a person a job. If they don't have a place to live. It's not going to last. Where do they get their mail? Where do they get contacted? You know, none of that happens. And the nice part of this building they're building is it's going to be one, two, and three bedroom apartments. So you can have families. <Yes, yes.> Not just individuals but families and it's not a shelter. This is not going to be an in and out kind of thing. It was funny in a way, when Diane was talking with them to begin with, and coming to the final resolution of you know all the paperwork and legalese and all that, they said, "Well, now there's two things you cannot do." Diane says, "Oh, what are those?" She says, "You cannot force these people to come to church, in spite of the fact it's right across the driveway." Diane said, "We can't get our own people to come, how would we get them to come?" He said, "And you cannot proselytize among these people." "What is that word meaning? We're not sure what that word means. So I don't think there's a problem there either."

**Terri McRhoads 20:35**

Shows that we're bad at it. Since we don't know what it is.

**Kent Barnett 20:39**

We will be there, you know, if people want to come to church, that's great. That's fantastic. So I can't put my finger on any one individual or experience but rather a kind of a group, being happy with recognizing that we're affecting other people's lives for the good.

**Terri McRhoads 20:55**

Yes.

**Carla Long 20:56**

And also by giving money to the Children's Peace Pavilion in Independence, Missouri, the money that you gave made that possible and the amount of children's lives that will be touched by that? Well, there's really no value you can put on that. So absolutely. What the Fremont congregation has done has really birthed a lot of ministry for a lot of people in the future. Absolutely. Thank you for sharing those stories. Any other stories coming to mind before I move on to my next question?

**Terri McRhoads 21:21**

Just to tag on to the end of the part about doing good in people's lives. If you're going to have this happen on your property, and it's next to your church like this will be for Fremont, it'd be a good idea to have a marquee style, sign out in front of the church with the times when you meet, because then people in that building can see when they could come over if they have an idea that they'd like to investigate. And that's for anybody else that might be trying to contemplate something like this. Absolutely. Yes. Thank you for saying that. Terri. What advice would you have for people, for congregations maybe if they happen to have something like this? Do you have any advice for them moving forward? Since I moved, I acted on this on a couple of different ways. I would say to people that are contemplating it. This is based on what I've done, since I moved, I'm still part of Fremont in that I go to Wednesday nights on zoom with Fremont and go up there and visit and go out to lunch. I didn't leave Fremont really. But my membership has officially transferred to Marina. Before I talk about Marina, I want to talk just about another congregation that shall remain nameless, but they have property to sell. And I gave him the idea of Abode. So I got that going in a discussion phase. And so in investigating that, I did find out that Abode only operates in a certain region. So I would say if you're contemplating doing something like this, investigate, who might be the groups that are building housing for low income and homeless around your area, I did get in touch with someone else that, I found an employee had left Abode and gone to another organization, I was in touch with her. And where she went was Episcopal Community Services. And they also do this sort of thing. Now from the name, I don't know for sure yet, but I'm assuming that they probably do this in a wider area, but I'm not positive. It might be local to the San Francisco and Central California region like Abode is, but I'm not sure. And I'm just starting to talk to them, in addition to talking to Abode about Marina, and not Marina, the congregation because that property is too small, we don't have enough property to sell to anybody for this specific purpose. But I would like to get these types of builders just involved in my community with land that we might have. That's not part of the church land. So I'm just trying to stay involved in doing

this type of good, okay. And in doing that, hopefully the information I've gathered would help somebody trying to get involved. Maybe they have church property in another state, how would they get going? I would say, based on my efforts, get involved in local service clubs. I went to luncheon in the other day where the mayor served me as part of his duty in our little activity that we had. But, I'm getting to know people and I'm getting to know who does what. And if you do that and stay connected to the community, then you can start finding these people, getting something started with the church to get something going.

**Kent Barnett 24:30**

In our case in Fremont, we weren't even looking. We'd had many, many years with that front piece of property just empty, you know, no, no thought being given to it whatsoever other than a Christmas tree lot people came in and that was nice, because they gave us a nice big Christmas tree that Diane went out and picked out the biggest one they had for free and the Learning Tree the preschool when they gave them Christmas trees also. But we weren't even really looking now at what Terri's saying was, you know, if you got a piece of property like that, and you begin to say what can we do with it, then you need to start investigating. That turned out that you know, in our case, it wasn't till this guy came with the idea of a branch bank. And then it was, if I remember correctly, it was a friend of a friend that got Diane in touch with Abode. Kind of goes back to my theological statement, God does what God wants to do when God wants to do it. Sometimes we don't recognize it till well afterwards. But if you're really looking to do something, then you need to investigate. If just sitting and letting it be, then maybe God will move

**Terri McRhoads 25:31**

Well, and it gets to a, that's a good thing for me to tag on to. Pray to God, but row towards shore. I would say that otherwise, you too might have your property sit too long not doing anybody any good. It's good if you can go out and get connected, so you can find what we found by accident, sooner.

**Carla Long 25:49**

That's great advice. That's all great advice. And maybe someone listening might think you know what, maybe I should take a look at our property. I think this is excellent. Thank you so much, both of you for sharing all of this cool information about the Fremont congregation and also sharing a few things that are happening in Marina. Is there anything else you want to say?

**Terri McRhoads 26:07**

Yes, I'd like to add a few more activities that can be done on church property other than church on Sunday. This has largely been about housing the homeless, there's also other things that can be done. Marina has a labyrinth that they built on their property, not big enough to sell off a piece for housing, but big enough to build a labyrinth on. And we invited the community to use it. And because the community was invited to use it, we've had interaction with people. And it's created a positive image for the church. And there has been a lot more knowledge of who we are from that. Also it's an old building with a basement, which is unheard of in California, and we have storage for the local food pantry there. For the people who need food that are hungry, we are storing food for that purpose there as well. And we also have youth retreats come because we are close to the ocean. Wherever some other property might be that belongs to the church, what's around you that people might want to come to for a

weekend retreat to get some relaxation? You have some nice trees, you have a nice park close to you, something pretty about your congregation that could be shared with a youth retreat, or a silent retreat or a spiritual growth retreat of some sort, and maybe get that going.

**Carla Long** 27:26

Thank you, Terri. That's great advice, Kent, anything else that I didn't ask that you want to say?

**Kent Barnett** 27:31

We're very fortunate. Our sanctuary is very high, we have three cell phone towers on top of our roof. <Yes.> The pandemic has been disastrous for our attendance, we're actually only meeting the first and third Sundays of each month in person. And to be quite honest with you the size of our facility, if it wasn't for the cell phone towers on our roof, we would not exist any longer. We literally are paid about \$6,000 a month for that. Now you're all going to run out and go like, "Oh, I want cell phone towers on my roof." It doesn't work that way. You got to be in the right spot. You got to have the right height. They come to you. You don't go to them. They know what they want. They know what they need. We're very fortunate and very blessed to have that to be able to continue the congregation.

**Terri McRhoads** 28:20

Kent, when you say they come to you, you don't go to them. Do you think it might be worthwhile though, if somebody had a congregation with a tall roof compared to the buildings around them to just let the communications companies know they're there, just in case they've been overlooked?

**Kent Barnett** 28:35

They could. But I'll tell you, they come to you. None of them, did we contact them. All three of them, they contacted us.

**Terri McRhoads** 28:42

Well worth a shot, I think,

**Carla Long** 28:45

Worth a shot for sure. Well, thank you. And you know what having those cell phone towers on your building really set you up to be extremely generous when you sold off the land. Knowing that that money was coming in, you could be generous and you could help people and all of these wonderful ministries could be birthed out of the sale of that property. So God does what God wants to do for sure.

**Kent Barnett** 29:08

I did have it put in a sale agreement. Absolutely. The building could not interfere with a cell phone tower operation.

**Carla Long** 29:16

Good call. Good call. Yes. Terri, did you want to say one more thing,

**Terri McRhoads** 29:19

The building cannot interfere with the cell tower operation?

**Kent Barnett** 29:23

That's correct. They had it in the sale agreement between us in Abode, that building knowing it was going to be three stories high, could not interfere with the operational hours.

**Terri McRhoads** 29:32

Okay, the Abode.

**Carla Long** 29:36

Well, big thanks to both of you, Kent and Terri for being on the podcast with us and for giving maybe some good advice or some different ways to think about property that church owns because we do have a lot of property. That's for sure. So thanks so much. You're wonderful.

**Terri McRhoads** 29:50

Well, thank you, Carla for making this possible to hopefully spread some ideas to other people.

**Kent Barnett** 29:56

Yes, thank you.