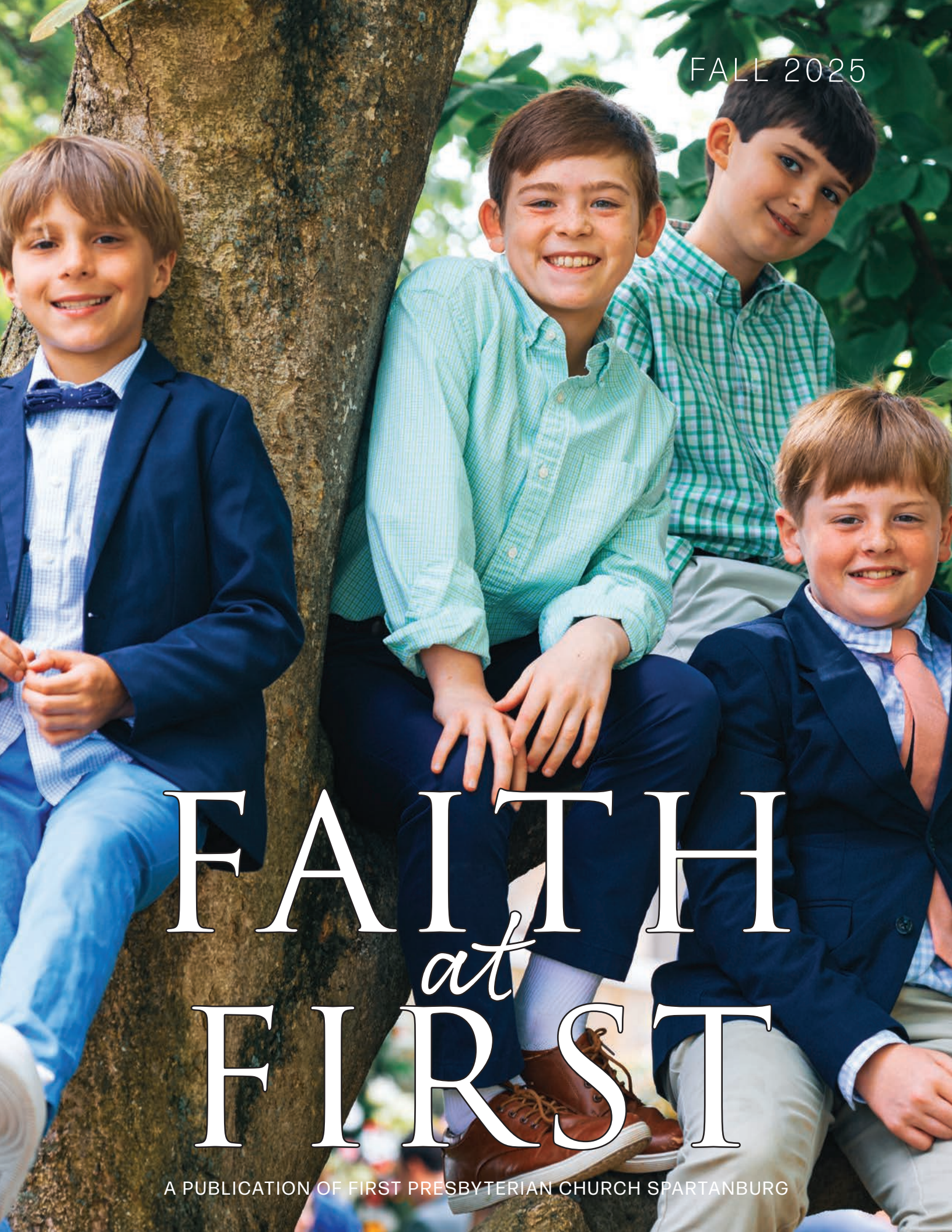


FALL 2025

FAITH *at* FIRST

A PUBLICATION OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SPARTANBURG

PASTOR'S NOTE



Hello my name is...

Have you ever noticed how our church staff are almost always wearing nametags? It's not because we don't know each other – it's because we want to make it clear that everyone who walks through the doors of our campus feels seen, welcome, and invited to belong. We never want someone to feel like they're on the outside looking in just because they don't know a name or a face. A name tag is a small but meaningful reminder that hospitality begins with being known.

This spirit of welcome and connection is at the heart of the stories you'll find in this issue of *Faith at First*. Each article is a glimpse into the many ways our church continues to reach out to one another and to our neighbors. Whether we're celebrating work that's already taken place or preparing for what's to come, we are reminded again and again that we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in a world that is hungry for hope.

As we look toward the fall, that same spirit will be shaping our lives together in new ways. Our congregational Vision Team is preparing for a season of deep listening, inviting church members and friends into in-person small group conversations around what discipleship, care, and mission might look like in the years ahead. At the same time, our September sermon series – ***Beautiful Belonging*** – will invite us to deeper reflection on what it means to truly belong to God and to one another.

So this September, don't be surprised if you're handed a nametag when you show up on a Sunday morning. Remember that it's more than a sticker – it's an invitation. Because church is more than a building. It is a community of belonging that we create together: one name, one story, one grace-filled moment at a time.

I am grateful to be building with you!

Peace,



Rev. Alan F. Dyer
Senior Pastor

Faith at First is a quarterly publication. To stay up to date on all news at First Presbyterian Church, please refer to the weekly eNews delivered on Fridays and www.fpcspartanburg.org.

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The After People

Stephen Ministry: A Ministry of Christian Care

Sometimes the heaviness of life is too much to carry on your own. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, a painful divorce, or just the feeling of loneliness, there are people at First Presbyterian who genuinely care about you and who can be a person to help ease your burdens simply by lending a listening ear. Often referred to as the "after people," Stephen Ministers are ready to come alongside you to provide comfort and support after all others have left, after the phone call you never expected, after your baby arrives and demands more of you than you ever thought – after...

Stephen Ministers are lay people who work behind the scenes, using their God-given gifts of listening and compassion to help people through difficult times. Each Stephen Minister is paired with an individual, or care receiver, to provide one-on-one Christian care for as long as necessary. Many sign up for Stephen Ministry training because they truly want to help others. What they unexpectedly receive in return is long-lasting relationships with people they may never have been able to meet before this opportunity.

"Having served in various churches in many capacities over the years, I have to say I've never experienced such a powerful sense of God's presence as I have as a Stephen Minister. The dichotomy of feeling incredibly humbled and empowered at the same time is very strong. There is comfort in the vulnerability for both the receiver and the giver. This allows tears, pain, joy, and laughter, as well as a sharing of a powerful peace that only God can provide," says Terry, a current Stephen Minister.

> "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
>
> Galatians 6:2

A Stephen Minister meets regularly—typically once a week—for about an hour with their care receiver. This provides a safe and confidential

space where individuals can share openly, knowing they are supported in love and prayer. While Stephen Ministers are not counselors, coaches, or mentors, they are trained to help others process thoughts and emotions in light of God's truth—gently, without pressure or agenda.

Care receivers are not required to be members of First Presbyterian Church. One care receiver says, "I was skeptical at first. So many others said they'd visit but never did. My Stephen Minister shows up every week. Those visits have kept me focused on Jesus, lifted me up when I was down, and brought me back to God when I was drifting away. Thank you for being the hands and heart of Christ to me."

Galatians 6:2 reads, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." If you are looking for a way to serve others, but don't know where to start, consider Stephen Ministry. There are no prerequisites, no degrees to earn...just a willing heart and a desire to share God's love.

STEPHEN MINISTRY

INTERESTED IN STEPHEN MINISTRY?

The next training class begins in January, 2026.

Contact Dana Halliday

danahalliday1@charter.net or (864)237-0330

WHAT IS STEPHEN MINISTRY?

JOB DESCRIPTION

Provide one-to-one Christian caring to someone experiencing challenges in life.

HOURS

Flexible.
One hour (more or less) each week, in-person, or on the phone, at the place of your choice.
One group meeting per month for 1 hour.

JOB REQUIREMENTS

Be a good listener.

If you aren't already, we will train you!

No "fixing!"

EXPERIENCE

Being a Child of God to walk beside a person who is hurting.





Cokesbury Kids

ROAD TRIP

ON THE GO WITH GOD











VBS 2025











The LORD your God is with you **wherever you go.**
Joshua 1:9





On Mission

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC























This past June, the First Presbyterian high school youth experienced a powerful week in San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, serving with Solid Rock International and fully immersing themselves in faith, service, and community.

Immediately upon arrival in San Juan, our youth jumped right in—helping with chores, learning about their work assignments, and visiting the barrios where they were instantly surrounded by joyful children shouting, "Americanos!" They were quickly running and playing together, connecting in meaningful ways despite their language barrier.

Each day began with a shared breakfast and devotional, often led by Pastor Enol, grounding the group in purpose and scripture. From there, the youth split into two teams—one to lead VBS and the other to help with construction.

Team VBS led music, skits, games, and memory verses for local children in rural and urban churches. They brought Bible stories to life with creative energy—whether reenacting David and Goliath or the Lost Sheep, the youth jumped into each role with complete joy. Children learned verses like 1 Samuel 17:45 and Luke 19:10, and our students danced, sang, and supported Dominican leaders in sharing the gospel.

"For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."
Luke 19:10

Meanwhile, Team Construction was hard at work helping build a three-story church facility in downtown San Juan. They mixed and poured concrete, laid cinder blocks, and even dug trenches in the hot sun—all without complaint. Supervisors commended their teamwork and dedication. Again, language barriers didn't stop friendships from forming.

"This trip changed the way I look at many things. It really opens your eyes seeing how happy and positive the children are when they have practically nothing compared to how we live in the United States. On top of that, the people of the DR truly treat you like family and welcome you with open arms, despite many of us not speaking their language," said Thomas Coleman.

In the afternoons, the youth returned to the barrios to play with children, sharing simple joys like tag, piggyback rides, and laughter. The group enjoyed time together in the evenings, playing basketball and card games, making bracelets, and even celebrating Mrs. Carrie's and Camille Cleland's birthdays.

While VBS and construction were the major points of the trip, youth and adults had the chance to explore San Juan on a scavenger hunt that included visiting a cathedral and climbing it's tallest dome. They were also able to shop at an open-air market and have dinner out at a local restaurant. It was a chance to soak in Dominican culture, bond as a group, and reflect on the beauty of their surroundings and the purpose of their trip.

Throughout it all, the youth showed remarkable initiative, enthusiasm, and compassion. As Mrs. Carrie shared, "Time flies when you're having fun. It soars when you're serving with joy." And indeed, this trip was a soaring experience—filled with growth, faith, service, and unforgettable memories.

On September 17, some of our youth missionaries will talk about their experience in the Dominican Republic during the Wednesdays at First program beginning at 6:30pm. We encourage everyone to attend to hear their stories and how they were able to see God on their trip.

Written with contributions from Carrie Coleman, Thomas Coleman, Grace deMaine, Jeff Edwards, Sloan Evans, and Amy Usry

Why I Ride to End ALZ

FPC Establishes First Ride to End ALZ Team



by Rev. Craig Foster

What is it that made me decide to spend three days riding my bike across the state of South Carolina in the July heat back in 2014?

One answer is that both my grandmothers had Alzheimer's in a day when the only way to know if someone's dementia was caused by Alzheimer's was by performing an autopsy. My uncle received his Alzheimer's diagnosis years later. All of them are now dead, but my memory of them and the family that cared for them gives me a very personal reason to ride. Of course, as a pastor, I encounter a lot of people who are impacted by Alzheimer's Disease, which gives me even more reason to do what I can to help support Alzheimer's research and care.

A second answer to why I ride is my grandfathers and father. Both of my grandfathers died too young (before I was born) from heart attacks. More recently, my father also died from heart disease. None of them reached their 80th birthday. So I also ride to keep my heart healthy – to give me a reason to get up early and get out on the bike to train (even when I would rather hit snooze a few more times) for the long ride across the state in July.

> The more research and clinical trials we do, the better diagnostic tools and treatments we get, and the more we understand how to prevent and treat this dreadful disease that affects so many.

The third answer is hope. Alzheimer's Disease was first discovered by Alois Alzheimer in 1906, and for a century after that, there was no real progress in diagnosis, prevention, or treatment of the disease. And it's important to remember that Alzheimer's is a disease. It is not an unavoidable part of aging. With enough research and attention, it is a disease that can be prevented, treated, and hopefully cured. And what gives me hope is that just in the 11 years that I have been doing this ride, real progress is finally being made. There are medications available that help, especially at the early stages of the disease. There are brain scans that can detect the plaques and tangles in the brain that cause Alzheimer's. There are exciting new diagnostic tools and treatments in clinical trials now. Maybe one day soon, we will be able to detect Alzheimer's with a routine blood test or an eye exam! And the more research and clinical trials we do, the better diagnostic tools and treatments we get, and the more we understand how to prevent and treat this dreadful disease that affects so many. In these days when federal research funding is getting cut, I am even more motivated to raise money and to raise awareness to help the fight against Alzheimer's and to support and care for those who have it, along with their caregivers and loved ones.

That is why I keep getting on my bike year after year to ride across South Carolina in July. And I am excited this year to have been able to ride with two other members of our congregation: Bill Craft and my son Sam Foster. We joined with over 400 other riders from Spartanburg and around our state and country, all united in our efforts to end Alzheimer's. Many riders carry names and pictures pinned to the back of their cycling jerseys, remembering specific people in their lives who have or had Alzheimer's. We share stories, we hear about the progress being made, we encourage and support each other each mile of the ride, and together we hold out hope for the day when Alzheimer's itself is but a memory.



FPC End Alzheimer's Team 2025 (from left to right): Rev. Craig Foster, Sam Foster, and Bill Craft

August

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



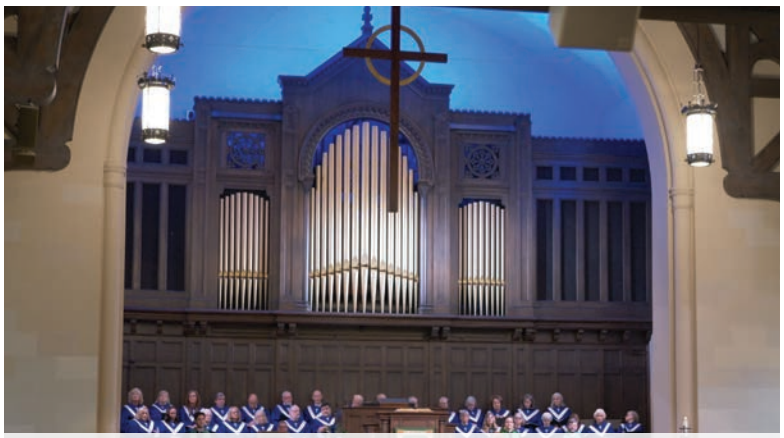
8 WOMEN'S CONNECTION



10 BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS



24 RALLY DAY



31 WORSHIP AS ONE AT 11:00AM

"Rally" means to come together—and that's exactly what we'll do on Rally Day at First Presbyterian! As summer winds down, join us for a time of fellowship, refreshments, and find out how you can get plugged into upcoming discipleship opportunities. There will be something for everyone. Please dress so that you and your children feel most comfortable.

Vision Team Update

Your First Presbyterian Church Vision Team is delighted to report that 442 church members completed the survey this May, providing us with a reliable and representative view of their perceptions of our strengths and their hopes for the future of FPC. There is a deep pool of information within the responses, a pool from which we can draw guidance for the congregation-wide listening sessions this fall.

We can affirm that members overwhelmingly see our pastoral staff, our worship and music, and our fellowship as fundamental strengths in our shared life of faith. As they look to the future, members express a strong desire to deepen:

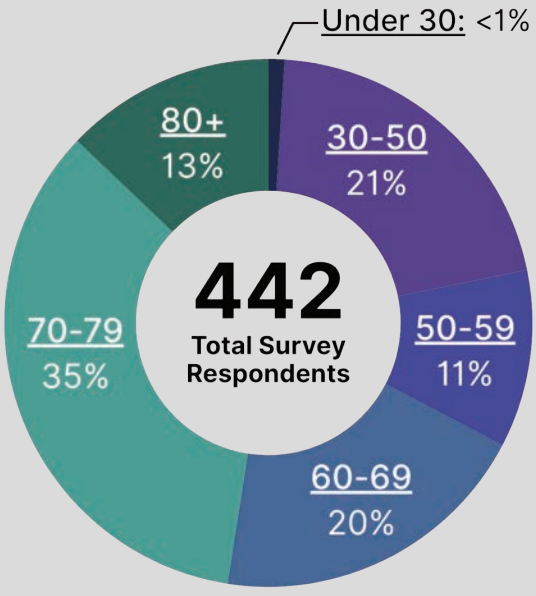
- our spiritually renewing discipleship through Christian education, small study and prayer groups, and other forms of mutual learning and growth;
- our vital and compelling work in local missions;
- and our devotion to congregational care for those at all ages and stages of life.

Look for more updates as we move toward fall, when all will be invited to participate in small group discussions as we listen for God's call to become more deeply rooted in faith and more fully devoted to a Christ-like love of our neighbors. Thanks to all for your engagement so far; much more to come as the Spirit leads us!

Vision Team: Cheryl Lang (Chair), Bill Craft, Mary Elizabeth Evans, John Lefebvre, Beth Neidenbach, Will Ringo, and Carter Smith

And the Survey Says....

AGE BREAKDOWN
OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



TOP THREE PERCEIVED
STRENGTHS & FOCUS AREAS



Grace in Motion

2024 Witness Season Update

by Chamlee McGuire

Witness Season is one tangible way we as a church act on our faith—sharing God's love and grace with our community. It reminds me of a favorite verse in Hebrews: "God is not unjust; God will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10).

Last year, during Witness Season, we raised money for a playground to serve children at the Early Learning Center at the Bethlehem Center and the Highlands community. Designed with education in mind, the playground supports the way young children learn best—through play. What we helped create is not just a fun, safe space—it's a tool for improving school readiness.

Why does that matter? Because one key indicator of a child's future success is whether they enter kindergarten ready to learn. Children who don't meet this benchmark are more likely to fall behind in school and face long-term challenges. Knowing that makes the project worthwhile on its own.

But what moved me most wasn't the data. It was what I saw at the ribbon cutting.

After the formalities, we walked through the center to the new playground. As we admired the garden, the outdoor theater, the tricycles, and the play kitchen, the doors behind us opened—and the children ran out. We hadn't known this was their very first time seeing the space. Their joy was instant and contagious. Every inch of the playground came alive. Tricycles zipped by, little hands dug in the dirt, laughter echoed through the air.

And then I looked around at the adults. First Presbyterian members who had supported the project. Officers who had built trust in the Highlands neighborhood over decades. Parents beaming with pride. Nonprofit and philanthropic partners who work daily to make this kind of moment possible. Volunteers and staff from the Bethlehem Center who pour themselves into this mission every day.

I realized: this is community. A "feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals." Without the shared purpose that day, we might not have recognized how deeply connected we already are. But in that moment, we were reminded.

When Hebrews says God will not forget the love we show to others, I believe it includes moments like this—when adults surround children in joy, safety, and hope. When people from all walks of life invest in something bigger than themselves. When the love we've received from God spills over into action.

That playground may look like a simple place to play—but to me, it looked like grace in motion. It looked like community made visible. It looked like love.













Letter of Thanks from Montreat

2025 Witness Season Update

In recognition of your incredible generosity and support following Hurricane Helene, it is with a truly grateful heart that I offer this update on the status of our rebuilding efforts in Robert Lake Park. Thanks to your gift, we have completed construction on the boardwalk that serves as the primary accessible entranceway to this important part of the Montreat experience. Thousands of children and families find joy and renewal in the peaceful environs of the park, and we give thanks for your generosity which allowed us to restore this walkway so that all may enter.



The boardwalk has been rebuilt such that, barring another generational water event like Helene, it will remain rooted in place. The location of the creek crossing has been moved significantly downstream so that water will hit the stone headwalls prior to reaching the boardwalk, lessening any potential flood impact on the structure.

Remaining is the painting of a mural underneath the Bell building, which you see as a blank wall pictured below. Following conversations with a local artist, this educational art installation is in the final stages of design. The painting will feature flora and fauna of Montreat, including trout, black bears, piebald deer, trillium, galax, rhododendron, and many other features of God's creation native to this beautiful valley. When the painting is done, we will send a further update on the project and pictures of the final product.

Please feel free to reach out to me or any of my staff when you are in Montreat, as we would be happy to give you a tour of the project. .

Again, thank you for your love of Montreat, and your generous support throughout this time of rebuilding. We give thanks to God for all of you, and for the sacred partnership we share.



Richard DuBose
President, Montreat Conference Center

MONTREAT
CONFERENCE CENTER

First Steps in Music... and Beyond

Children's Music Ministry

By Marcia Andrews

I vividly remember the phone call I made to my husband, Holt, in the summer of 2008, while attending a training course in Silver Lake, Wisconsin, on the curriculum of First Steps in Music. "We're doing it all wrong!" I said. In just the first few minutes of my coursework, I learned that by far the largest amount of musical growth in a child's brain happens between birth and age three. Up until that time, here at First Presbyterian, we were offering choirs for our children starting at age four. I was immediately convinced that we needed to provide the same musical opportunities to the youngest children.

For the past 16 years, I and several other teachers (who also took the First Steps in Music training course) have had the joy of meeting with parents and their children age three and under to begin constructing the building blocks of rhythm, melody, and movement, while at the same time providing precious quality time between parent and child. When we ponder how family life has changed over the past 60 years, we realize that the days of





large families living in close proximity and multiple generations sharing songs and rhymes with children and grandchildren have started to fade away. First Steps in Music provides a wonderful opportunity for the parents (and grandparents!) to begin learning a large repertoire of songs and other musical activities they can be doing with their child at home every day.

Our classes run for approximately eight weeks each fall and spring here at the church. Classes are divided into age-appropriate groups and activities, each class lasting for 25 minutes. The curriculum is based on extensive early childhood research related to the development of:

- Music intelligence and singing skills
- Sensitivity to beat and expressive movement
- Neurological connections relating to musical skills.

The very best thing about participating in these classes is the joy it brings to both the parents and the children. Through class activities, parents are reminded that the most important way to play with or soothe their child is with their own face and voice... nothing more complicated than that! It also allows children to interact socially with others their age, and for parents in our church to get to know other parents whom they otherwise might not have had a chance to meet. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord,” the Psalms say, and indeed we do that every time we meet.

More happy news is that our Children’s Music Ministry continues on through the fifth grade! Joyful Sound for 4K is a training choir, and the group has been most capably led by Debbie Keiser for the past several decades. Debbie is trained as a music therapist, and for many years, taught music at the FPC Weekday School. The next group, Angel Chatter, is for ages 5K-1st Grade and taught by the gifted and creative Martha Bean, who has been with the program for over 30 years! And our most advanced group, LightShine Choir for 2nd-5th graders, is taught by yours truly. These groups meet throughout the school year (September-March). In these choirs, the musical education that begins in First Steps continues, and we add to that instruction in the role of music in worship, with the older choirs having the opportunity to offer leadership in our Sunday services.

We certainly notice a cumulative effect as children who start in the First Steps program advance through the choir program, but there is no wrong age to start singing in a First Presbyterian Children’s Choir. All the teachers are experts at taking our young singers where they are and making them feel a part of their groups. All children are welcome, always!

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN FOR FIRST STEPS AND CHILDREN’S CHOIR!



Visit fpcspartanburg.org/childrensmusic for details and to sign up.

September

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



10 WEDNESDAYS AT FIRST RETURNS



16 JOY FELLOWSHIP LADIES' TEA



25 PHILIP STOPFORD WORKSHOP

A WAY HOME

A Way Home, formerly Spartanburg Interfaith Hospitality Network (SPIHN), is a rotational model that hosts families experiencing homelessness in different churches while they work with a case manager to find permanent housing. First Presbyterian Church recently hosted its first rotation, and plans to house families four times yearly. Rhonda and Tim Dickerson lead the program at First Presbyterian along with many volunteers who come together to make this ministry happen. Read below an acount from Rhonda prior to FPC's first hosting week.

"You never know when God will send you a sign that you're on the right path. Tim and I visited The Episcopal Church of the Advent when it was their turn to host families for A Way Home to see how things were going and meet the families. As we entered the building, Elisabeth Hayes met us with a big smile on her face and several volunteers introduced themselves and welcomed us.

But the best part, the absolute icing on the cake, was when an even bigger smile came from a 12-year-old boy who was walking toward me. The look on his face said it all. He knew me, which meant he had attended the school where I taught. He was in the kindergarten class next door to mine, but he remembered me! I got three of the biggest, most wonderful hugs one can imagine. His face beamed and my heart was full of joy and love during that special moment and for that precious child.

And to think that just that morning I wondered to myself, 'What are the chances that I'm going to know a child who walks through the front door of the Family Life Center during this ministry?' God was listening and God answered."

The next FPC rotation begins **September 14**. Please visit fpcspartanburg.org/awayhome to learn how you can get involved in helping our neighbors.

Real Good

Working Together to End Child Poverty

By Scott Neely, Director, Faith Initiative to End Child Poverty

A young girl flipped upside down into a handstand, feet planted high against the wall.

“Look at this,” she said.

“I see you. I cannot do that!” I responded.

Flipping right side up, she sat on the hallway floor of the day shelter. “Next week, we go to First Presbyterian. Then we go to the next church for two weeks. Two weeks! Why does that church want to do that?”

“I think they are excited to help. That is Fernwood Baptist. And a bunch of other churches will work with them.”

“That’s good. Then we go back to Trinity, and then Second Presbyterian, and then New Beginnings.”

“I am impressed you remember all these places,” I said. “Has it been good so far?”

“Real good,” she said.

“And the day camp with the Salvation Army each day, how has that been?”

“Real good too.”



WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN DO REAL GOOD FOR THE CHILDREN OF THIS COMMUNITY – FOR ONE CHILD, AND FOR MANY MORE.

The purpose of the Faith Initiative To End Child Poverty is to help end child poverty in Spartanburg County by activating the gifts of the faith community. Launched following publication of Spartanburg's Racial Equity Index in 2018, five congregations – First Presbyterian, Mt. Moriah, Macedonia, Church of the Advent, and Life with Jesus Ministries – recognized that even with all we already do to serve, we must do more to make Spartanburg a place of thriving for every person. Working together seemed like part of the answer. Today the Faith Initiative is comprised of more than 50 congregations and more than 700 participants. Based on the sharing of gifts preached by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, we pursue a five-step strategy to serve our most vulnerable children and their families:

1. BE WITH: Our first and most important step is to be with children and their families living in poverty. The promise God makes to us throughout the Bible is to be with us, and in the image of God that is what we can offer each other. Research witnesses to this too: a study on economic mobility from Harvard Business School found that when people enter the life of congregations, barriers to economic mobility disappear because people who are different from one another become connected with each other, and resources flow between them (Chetty et al. "Social capital II: determinants of economic connectedness." Nature, August 2022). Be with people different than you are. It is one of the most powerful tools for economic mobility we have, especially as people of faith.

What the Faith Initiative is doing:

- A dedicated team member travels the city, focused on neighborhoods with the highest percentage of child poverty, building relationships and channeling direct support where it is most needed. This is the church out on the street.
- 10% of the annual budget of the Faith Initiative, a tithe, is given in direct support to aid children and their families in financial distress.
- We urge all congregations on repeat to welcome people different from themselves into their life, and to go be with their immediate neighbors outside the walls of the church.
- Hanging out with a kid doing handstands in the hallway and telling them they are amazing – because they are – is being with.

2. CONGREGATIONS CREATE MINISTRIES: Second, we encourage congregations to do one of the things they do best: create ministries that serve our children and their families, especially those who are most vulnerable. Then we connect these ministries to expand our collective impact. With an estimated 600 congregations in Spartanburg County, the potential for serving families throughout all of our neighborhoods through our congregations is very great.

What the Faith Initiative is doing:

- Rev. Dr. Mekeshia Bates pilots a program to reduce stigma and increase access to mental health services in the Black community through Black congregations, connecting seven congregations across the county to lead more than 1,000 community members in mental health trainings and workshops.
- The Faith Initiative convenes quarterly lunch gatherings of congregations and community organizations to build connections throughout the faith community, fellowship with one another, develop projects, and train. On average 120 participants from 30 congregations attend each meeting.

- A Way Home, the family shelter organized by the Faith Initiative in partnership with the City's housing and homelessness project called A Place To Call Home, connects 25 congregations and 600 volunteers every quarter to shelter and support unhoused families while they work with a case manager to stabilize housing, employment, and finances.

3. ALIGN WITH COMMUNITY EFFORTS: We can do more and better when we work together. Our third step is to align with larger community efforts to end child poverty in order to instill best practices in our congregational ministries, share new research, and amplify all of our efforts through cooperation and shared resources.

What the Faith Initiative is doing:

- Through data on high density child poverty areas provided by our community partner Spartanburg Academic Movement, the Faith Initiative supported Hand-in-Hand and its work with Mayo Elementary to secure a $30,000 Women Giving grant for direct support of children and their families in the Mayo community, where there is a 100% child poverty rate.
- From her work increasing access to mental health services through Black congregations, Rev. Dr. Mekeshia Bates provided on-the-ground input in the development of a new county-wide plan to address behavioral health.
- A Way Home is one part of a county-wide strategy to address housing and homelessness, led by a team from the City of Spartanburg and steered by seven lead organizations, of which the Faith Initiative is one.

4. ADVOCACY: When we are with children and their families, create congregational ministries, and align with larger community efforts, we will discover gaps in the services we offer as a community. Advocacy is filling these gaps through program development, fundraising, good policy, and systems change. We will be able to fill these gaps together, across our many different religious and political perspectives, because we are committed to serving the children and families of our community together.

What the Faith Initiative is doing:

- In collaboration with congregations and county and state organizations working in early childhood care and education, the Faith Initiative has helped bring people together to advocate for expanded early childhood care and learning options for all families.
- A Way Home can serve a maximum four families at a given time, on average eight children. This is very effective for those eight children. Our seven school districts report at least 1,200 children across our county who are unhoused at a given time. We challenge the congregations involved in A Way Home to seek housing solutions to help every child and their family, and we work with A Place To Call Home to find these solutions.

5. CULTURE: As the Bible and Harvard Business School tell us, congregations are good at sharing. When we connect with people different than we are and share our resources, we create economic mobility. Even more, we build a community of mutual thriving. There is more than enough. No one needs to be poor. Connect and share.

What the Faith Initiative is doing:

- Everything we can. Come share your gifts too.

To learn more about the Faith Initiative and to get involved, contact Scott Neely at scott@faithinitiativespartanburg.org / 864-590-8260.

A Weekend of Worship and Song

Composer Philip Stopford Visiting September 25-28

By Holt Andrews



One of England's best-known musical figures will be at First Presbyterian Church this September. Philip Stopford, composer of over 100 choral and instrumental works (10 of which are in our church's music library), will be in residence with us from September 25-28. During that time, he will work with our Chancel Choir and area instrumentalists, will lead music at the 11:00am worship service on September 28, and conduct a concert with our choir and an orchestra that afternoon, featuring his new composition *Missa Deus nobiscum* (God With Us).

Philip got his musical start in 1985 at age seven in London. "I thought my mother was taking me to the zoo or to Madame Tussauds," he said, but their actual destination was Westminster Abbey, where she had signed him up for a voice trial. He was quickly accepted, lived at the Abbey Choir School, and sang in the Cathedral Choir for four years. His continued musical training took him to Truro and Canterbury Cathedrals, among others, and he became the youngest Anglican Director of Music in the U.K. when he was appointed to Belfast Cathedral in 2003. His work eventually led him to the United States, where he was first Composer in Residence and then Music Director at Christ Church, Bronxville, NY, from 2016-21, before returning to England to help care for his parents.

During his tenure at Bronxville, Marcia and I became acquainted with Philip. We had a sabbatical in 2019, and one of our destinations was the New York City area. I knew Philip was in Bronxville, so I contacted him and asked if we could sit in on one of their weekly choir rehearsals. That rehearsal turned out to be a sabbatical highlight. We were really impressed with how he worked with the group and hoped from then on that we might have him as our guest in Spartanburg.

Stopford's visit to First Presbyterian continues a recent trend of our church being able to host extraordinary musical guests. In the spring of 2023, composer Dan Forrest helped the Chancel Choir prepare and perform his signature composition, *Requiem for the Living*, and just this past March, the Sanctuary was filled to overflowing to hear the legendary Concordia Choir in concert. I am particularly excited that this trend continues with Stopford. In addition to his self-evident gifts as a composer, we saw in the Bronxville rehearsal that he is also an outstanding conductor. I'm pleased that our singers will get to work with him. Stopford's compositions are beautifully phrased, colorful, and spiritually expressive. I think everyone in worship and at the concert that afternoon will understand why his music has become so popular.





SCOTLAND CHOIR TOUR, MAY 26-JUNE 4











Sharing God's Love One Coat at a Time

By Natalie Mullen

Winter Warmth is my favorite mission project at First Pres. I am fortunate enough to see both sides of the program as I have been an elementary school counselor in Spartanburg District 7 for 26 years, and if I remember correctly, I have referred children for new coats from Winter Warmth all of those 26 years. From my school, we typically have around 30 students each year who benefit from receiving coats; although, the years following the recession in 2008 brought upwards of 60 or more children in need. Teachers at school tell me of children who could benefit from a coat, and then I call the parents to explain about the program and get their size information.

The children and families who are gifted coats need our help. Some of them have just had a rough year financially, while others have been impoverished their entire lives. Of course, the children do not choose to be poverty-stricken, but they endure the same difficult daily circumstances as their family. It is unhealthy to go without a coat in cold weather, and although the solution to dress adequately seems simple, when the family budget is tight, a warm coat doesn't always make the cut.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 35% of children in the U.S. under 18 are considered low-income, and 16% — approximately 1 in 5 — are poor. Children make up a disproportionately large percentage of our nation's poor. Here in Spartanburg, the poverty rate for children ages 6–11 years is sadly much higher: 41.8%. The consequences of poverty are far reaching, especially for children, affecting their mental and behavioral health as well as their physical well-being.

At school, I have witnessed the confidence and self-worth instilled in a child when they receive their new coats through Winter Warmth. The act of choosing a new article of clothing for themselves is empowering. By giving them a coat, we help to clothe children to keep them warm and healthy and increase their overall success at school. Boys and girls come to school wearing new coats and big smiles on their faces!

The impact one coat can have on a child is everlasting. The primary reason we ask for coats is to keep the children warm, but these coats have kept our students in school, have given them confidence, and have given them the knowledge that there are people in Spartanburg at a church called First Presbyterian who care about them. What a wonderful way to share God's love!

Winter Warmth is October 25, and we need you!

There are several ways to get involved in Winter Warmth.

VOLUNTEER

Jobs include set up crew, greeters, shopping assistants, parking attendants, and more. We also need translators, especially those who can help communicate with Eastern Slavic- and Spanish-speaking families.

DONATE

Donations of new or knitted caps, scarves, and gloves are needed to ensure children are equipped for the cold weather. You may also donate $35 to Winter Warmth to provide a winter coat for a child in need.

PRAY

Pray for those in our community who may be struggling to make ends meet. Pray for the guidance counselors, teachers, and all who support these families on a daily basis. Pray for the Winter Warmth team and volunteers and that each person will see God's love on October 25.

Visit fpcspartanburg.org/winterwarmth or scan the QR code below to learn more.







October

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



5 WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY



25 WINTER WARMTH



26 KIRKIN' O' THE TARTANS



26 BLOOD SUNDAY

Visit fpcspartanburg.org/health to schedule your blood donation appiontment or scan the QR code. Thank you!

The Gift of Life

Ecumenical Blood Drive on October 26

by Beth Cecil

Several years ago, I was asked to contribute to an Upstate newsletter from The Blood Connection. They wanted me to reflect on why First Presbyterian Church hosts blood drives, their importance to our church, and their impact on the local community. It wasn't difficult to respond.

I shared that our church hosts blood drives with the joy of knowing that every ounce of blood donated directly sustains the lives of those on the receiving end. Every unit of blood donated impacts the lives of three people. Beyond those three who need it, donated units affect countless others who care for the recipients. Because of its life-saving power, I am inspired to encourage as many people as possible to donate blood.

As a church, First Presbyterian is committed to mission work, both locally and internationally. Donating blood, in my opinion, is mission work. Not everyone has the ability to travel to another country or make time to volunteer locally. But everyone can take part in this ministry. No check needs to be written. No time needs to be taken off work. Just 45 minutes—every 56 days—is all it takes to make a life-saving difference.

Since 2016, we have had the privilege of working with several other churches in our community. Together, we hold ecumenical blood drives on the same Sunday, called Blood Sunday. All participating churches display large banners on our campuses and invite members and non-members to donate. This serves as a visible sign to our community that we are of one blood and have one Father. There are no barriers—only love for one another—to working together for our fellow man. A powerful statement!

Over the past nine years, our ecumenical group has seen a steady decline in participation. In 2016, collectively, 828 members and non-members donated blood. Thus far in 2025, collectively, we have only had 96 donors, 37 of whom participated at First Presbyterian Church. With one more drive coming up on October 26, we're hopeful that number will grow, but it's clear that we're seeing a shift.

Blood cannot be manufactured or mass-produced. We, as God's children, have to be willing to make time, roll up our sleeves, and allow our blood to be taken from our bodies to help save the life of another. The first blood donation was witnessed over 2000 years ago... it was Christ who shed his blood for you and me. The gift of life, then and now. Sign up to give life on October 26 at fpcspartanburg.org.



New Playground Near Completion

Construction crews have been hard at work this summer to build a new playground on Chestnut Street for the children of our church, the Weekday School, and our community. We are on schedule to have the project completed by the first day of the 2025-2026 Weekday School year and plan to dedicate this space in the coming months. Thank you to all who supported this project whether it be through planning and preparation, financial giving, or prayer.



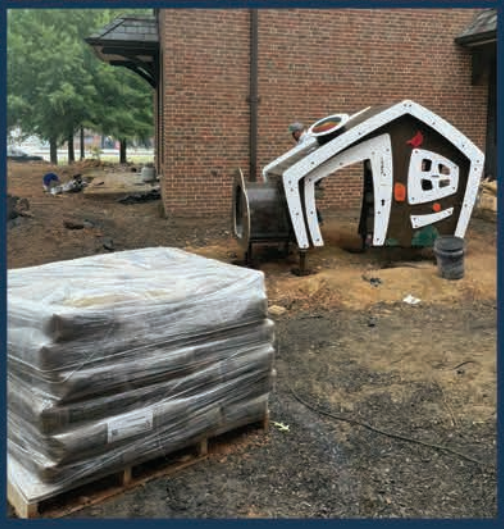












Beauty with Purpose

Showing God's Love Through The Flower Guild

With contributions from LeAnne Thurmond

Have you ever admired the beautiful floral arrangements in the Sanctuary on Sunday morning? The vibrant arrangements don't appear by accident, and their purpose doesn't end after the closing voluntary. Each of these arrangements is carefully planned and crafted by one of our five Flower Guild teams and is sponsored by church members in memory or honor of a loved one each week.

LeAnne Thurmond, co-chair of the Flower Guild, says, "We order flowers and greens from a wholesale flower distributor, augmented by cuttings from members' yards. When they are delivered on Thursday mornings, we 'condition' the flowers – place them in fresh water containing floral food – and put them in the coolers to maintain their beauty. The large Sanctuary arrangements are designed in place on Saturday mornings."

The beauty of these flowers continues to bless others beyond the service. Each week, they are disassembled after worship and are made into small bouquets for pastoral visits and Mobile Meals recipients. Each small arrangement is accompanied by a card featuring a drawing of the Sanctuary and Chapel, reading:

These flowers have glorified God in the Sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church. They heard the hymns that were sung, the prayers that were offered, and the sermon that was preached.

Now they come to tell you in their silent way of God's love and healing power. We pray that you will be blessed with faith, hope, health, and happiness.

In the mid-2000s, the late Christie Smith, a longtime member and gifted floral designer, brought the vision of a Flower Guild to First Presbyterian Church after being inspired by a group at Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. With the help of Beverly Tesseneer, the Flower Guild at First Presbyterian was launched in 2007.

Our first chairpersons—Marsha Calvert, Linda Mullen, and Marsha Hagins—helped lay the foundation. In 2009, Marsha Calvert attended a workshop at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., titled *Arranging Flowers in Holy Spaces*. The insights she gained sparked a reorganization of the Guild, shaping it into the vibrant and well-run ministry it is today.

The Flower Guild is fortunate to have the Sacristy; a dedicated workspace located to the right of the Chancel. Outfitted with sinks, shelves, running water, and three coolers, the Sacristy is the perfect spot to prepare and preserve flowers for worship each week.

If you would like to become a part of the Flower Guild, you don't need any experience, just a willing spirit! Each flower team welcomes new members and offers hands-on guidance in everything from prepping blooms to creating arrangements. It's a meaningful and creative way to serve—and a wonderful way to connect with others.

For more information, contact LeAnne Thurmond at leanne.thurmond@gmail.com or 864-621-0213).

New Members *April to June*



Meghan and John Barnet both grew up in Spartanburg and attended Pine Street Elementary, where they met in 2nd grade (and started "dating" in 5th). They attend the Contemporary Worship service with their one-year-old son, Andrew, joining John's mother, Valerie Barnet. Meghan's family has deep roots at FPC, including her grandfather, Pat Carey. She is the fifth generation to work at Carey Moving & Storage. John, formerly a teacher at McCracken Elementary, now works full-time as a realtor at W. Lewis White Company and serves as Vice President of Barnet Development Corporation. Meghan enjoys art, reading, and organizing; John enjoys golf.

Nick Caggiano is a lifelong Spartanburg resident. He was introduced to First Presbyterian Church through his wife, Page (Morehead). The couple has an eight-month-old son, George, and a dog, Gumbo. They look forward to building lasting memories and a life rooted in this church. Nick runs Bell Laundry and Cleaners and enjoys fly fishing in his spare time. His brother Chris and his family are also members of the church.





Sophia and Will Caldwell have lived in Spartanburg for 10 years and recently had their seven-year-old daughter, Izzi, baptized at First Presbyterian. Sophia is the Assistant Director of Children's Services at the Spartanburg County Library. Will is a National Park Ranger for the Overmountain Victory Trail and is passionate about teaching history through reenactments. Will, originally from Elmira, New York, holds degrees from North Greenville and Clemson Universities. Sophia previously lived in Michigan and California. She enjoys painting Dutch folk art, also called hindeloopen, and Burn Boot Camp workouts. They both enjoy camping, hiking, historic sites, and good coffee.

Kelly and Karl Lagerlof recently moved to Spartanburg from Indianopolis with their son, Sam. Kelly holds a Music Therapy degree from The College of Wooster and previously worked with children with disabilities. She now stays home with Sam and teaches piano lessons. Karl is a Data Analyst at Michelin. He holds degrees from Valparaiso University and Indiana University and is a former Army Ordnance Officer. They enjoy reading, video games, and music—Kelly plays piano and trombone, and Karl enjoys speaking French and caring for feral cats. They were drawn to FPC because of its values and strong Children's Ministry.



Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God. Romans 15:7



Fred Martin was born and raised in Bristol, Rhode Island, and spent most of his adult life in Norfolk, Virginia. For the past five years, he has lived in Spartanburg with his daughter Merritt Ray. Fred has degrees from the University of Florida and Georgia State and is a retired financial planner. He was on the University of Florida track team, where Gatorade was invented, and he got to taste test the first Gatorade products.



Susie Roberts is a returning member to First Presbyterian Church. She grew up in Ridgewood, New Jersey, and graduated from Columbia University. Susie worked as a nurse and was a stay-at-home mom to her four grown children; Christine, Luke, Katie, and Matthew. She has two bonus children; Anja from Germany and Oscar from Hong Kong. In her free time, Susie enjoys cooking, eating, and gardening. Although she still lives in Greer, she felt called to re-join First Presbyterian Church.

Discover FPC

SEPTEMBER 14, 21, & 28
10:00-10:45am in the Large Private Dining Room (Family Life Center)

Discover FPC classes are designed for visitors and new members who want to learn more about First Presbyterian Church—our values, mission, programs, and the Presbyterian tradition. These classes are open to all and offer a welcoming space to ask questions and get to know our church community. While encouraged, attending Discover FPC is not required for membership.

Contact Cathy Bagwell, Volunteer Visitor and New Member Coordinator, at cbagwell@fpcspartanburg.org.

Milestone Moments





















5th Grade Ice Cream Celebration, Confirmation, and Baccalaureate







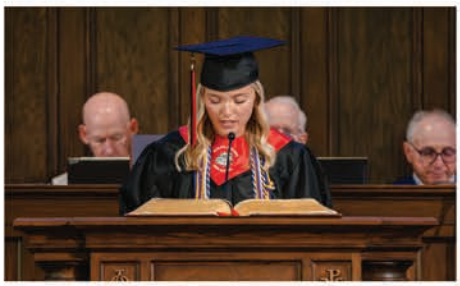















OF THE LORD

CARES & CONCERNS

IN MEMORIAM

Dianne Curry Boulware
Saturday, March 22, 2025
Wife of Charley Boulware
Mother of Suzy Cole

Phyllis Dorothy Ball Abele
Tuesday, April 8, 2025

James "Jim" Jay Traviss
Saturday, April 19, 2025

Donald Alan Owen
Sunday, May 25, 2025
Husband of Sally Owen
Father of Christi Brown

Lisa Ann McGahey Lefebvre
Wednesday, May 21, 2025
Wife of John Lefebvre
Mother of Alex and Max Lefebvre

Roberto Mark Inclán
Sunday, June 15, 2025
Husband of Charlene Inclán

Susanne Gabriel Arthur
Sunday, July 6, 2025

Marthanne Colvert
Wednesday, July 9, 2025

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

Becky Winslow, on the death of her father, Jackson "Jack" Rash
Lynn Edwards, on the death of her brother, Richard Leon Kimball, Jr.
Virginia Adams, on the death of her husband, James "Jay" Leander Adams, III
Libby Dym and Mary Hammock, on the death of their brother, James "Jay" Leander Adams, III
Margaret Savko, on the death of her husband, Paul Michael Savko
Mary Lynn Savko and Jules Bryant, on the death of their father, Paul Michael Savko
Judy Saad, on the death of her father, George Lake Johnson, Jr.
Valerie Barnet, on the death of her uncle, George Lake Johnson, Jr.
Rob Hines, on the death of his mother, Barbara Joyce Alwran Hines
John Verreault, on the death of his mother, Peggy Perou Verreault
Terry Thruston, on the death of his brother, Malcom Gordon Thruston
George Graham, on the death of his sister, Lynda Graham McCarty
De Calvert, on the death of his sister, Elizabeth "Libby" Calvert Andrews
Pat Hevener, on the death of her brother, Ben Garst
Janet Cann, on the death of her mother, Ann M. Hurley
Kristin Hamilton, on the death of her mother, Karen Williamson Cook.
Wanda Gordon, on the death of her brother, Jeffrey Franklin Crocker
Paul MacPhail, on the death of his sister, Bonnie Shuman

BIRTHS

Claire Elizabeth Timmons
Thursday, March 13, 2025
Daughter of Isabelle Edwards

Oliver Holt Muthig
Tuesday, April, 22, 2025
Son of Travis and Carrie Muthig

Evelyn Elizabeth Strasburger
Saturday, May 17, 2025
Daughter of Andrew and Raiford Strasburger

Parker Collins Murphy
Sunday, May 25, 2025
Daughter of Will and Pearson Murphy

Henry Blalock Ward
Thursday, July 3, 2025
Son of Justin and Mary Kathryn Ward

BAPTISMS

Samuel Ivar Lagerlof
son of Karl and Kelly Lagerlof, on July 13, 2025

WEDDINGS

Parker Blanchard and Emery Carr
on May 10, 2025

Matthew MacPhail and Kaylyn Good
on May 10, 2025

William Shaw and Harrison Blackford
on May 24, 2025

Leslie Lang and David Denny
on June 21, 2025

First Presbyterian Church
Spartanburg

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