

WINTER/LENT 2025



FAITH *at* FIRST

A PUBLICATION OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SPARTANBURG

PASTOR'S NOTE



Growing up in Ohio, I was accustomed to short days, cold weather, and long winters. Living in Coastal Georgia for nearly a decade, though, tricked me into almost forgetting that there is such a thing as four seasons! Down there it's just one long hot season, followed by a slightly cooler season, followed by another hot season. It may come as a surprise to those of you who daydream of year-round warmth and sunshine, but one of the things I have most enjoyed since moving to Spartanburg is experiencing the rhythm of changing seasons again.

Though the winter weather is not quite as extreme as points further north of us, there is certainly a distinctiveness to this time of year in the Upstate. Temperatures drop, trees stand bare, and children sit around praying that maybe (just maybe!) there will be a snow day. It is also a time when we all experience that strange sensation of being in between times. Namely, the busyness of Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas is now behind us, and yet the warmth and promise of Spring and Summer still feel impossibly far off. What are we to do in those "in-between" seasons of church and life?

This edition of *Faith at First* attempts to tackle that question. What do we do when we find ourselves sitting at the intersection of "has been" and "not quite there?" We dream, we play, we learn, we serve, we worship, and we trust that even in the midst of constant change, God's love is steadfast and guiding us in it all. So, whether you have picked up this magazine on a night when it is cold and dark outside or a day when it is bright and warm, I hope you will consider the stories within a personal invitation to join in the good work that God is up to in this exciting season of ministry at First Presbyterian!

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Alan F. Dyer
Senior Pastor

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VISION FOR A NEW PLAYGROUND

Play & Grow Together

By Mary Kathryn Ward

In Mark 10:14, Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God." First Presbyterian Church has a vision for a new playground that would serve as a welcoming space for children and families.

Our current playground, located near the Columbarium, has served us well for years but is hidden from view and disconnected from the main areas of church activity. The new playground, to be situated along Chestnut Street in front of the Clark Building, would offer greater accessibility, improved safety, and enhanced community engagement. Our goal is to break ground in May 2025 and open the new playground for the start of the school year in August. This initiative will leave a legacy of joy and connection for generations to come.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

Accessibility

The new location provides direct access to the Clark Building, which is essential for young children requiring proximity to restrooms or changing tables. It will also include features like padded turf, a paved walkway, and an accessible swing to ensure inclusion for all.

Safety

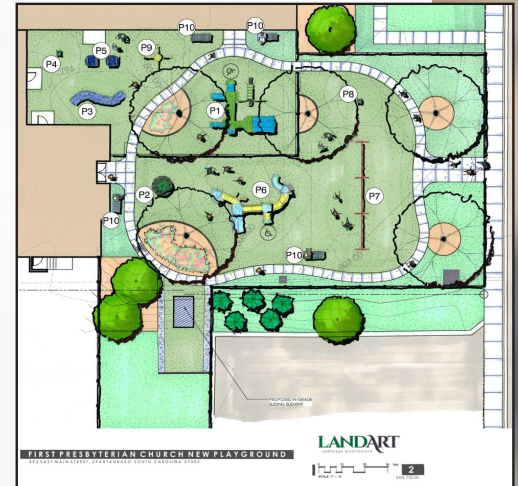
Unlike the current playground, which requires navigating outdoor paths to reach shelter, the new location allows for direct indoor access in case of inclement weather or emergencies.

Community Engagement

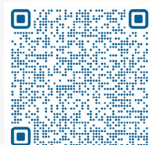
With its central location, the playground will be a visible and welcoming space for church members, Weekday School students, and the broader Spartanburg community.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

To build a new playground, First Presbyterian Church is raising \$350,000, which we hope to fund entirely through private contributions. To date, nearly \$20,000 has been generously given to this project and an additional \$131,500 pledged. We invite you to join us in bringing this vision to life. You can also honor loved ones with a special gift, such as personalized pavers and benches that will be part of the playground's hardscaping. Contributions are tax-deductible and can be made directly through the church. Together, let's give the gift of play to our children and community.



**To learn more about the Playground Project
and to support this exciting vision for our children and community,
visit fpcspartanburg.org/playground or scan the QR code.**





January

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



8 **WEDNESDAYS @ FIRST RETURNS**
fpcspartanburg.org/waf



10 **HIGH SCHOOL WINTER RETREAT**
fpcspartanburgyouth.org



24 **CONFIRMATION
OPENING RETREAT**



26 **SHELTER**
6:00pm, Sanctuary

Shelter is a unique worship opportunity at First Presbyterian Church. We gather in various locations three times a year to worship God, led by an emphasis on music, scripture, and prayer. Shelter was the brainchild of Rafe Andrews, son of Holt and Marcia Andrews, and is spearheaded by Rev. John Daniel, our Contemporary Band, and regular musical guests. In the "Seasons of Shelter," we explore different theological themes, with the music and scripture tied to the theme for the season. We worshipped and reflected on God's abundance in Forgartie Hall in October.

Our next iteration of the Seasons of Shelter, the Winter Shelter Service, will be held in the Sanctuary on January 26 at 6:00pm. Our worship leaders look forward to spending another evening contemplating and praying with you! Be on the lookout for communications ahead of time regarding the music set list and more.

CHURCH LEAGUE BASKETBALL

More Than Making Baskets

By Bryan Pack

During New England's winter of 1891, a young educator from Springfield, Massachusetts, by the name of James Naismith explored possibilities for a new indoor pastime for his students. His vision was to create an activity for young people which would "develop the whole person - mind, body and spirit" in an athletic and recreational environment. Naismith's idea came to life through the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and he called his new venture...Basket Ball. His vision, based on Christian values, has undoubtedly shaped our culture worldwide and impacted countless lives over the last 133 years.

Today, the game of basketball is as popular as ever and serves as one of our favorite ministries at First Presbyterian. Just as Naismith originally intended, church league basketball continues to bring people together for Christian fellowship while cultivating new relationships, a sense of belonging, and character development in young people. Fellowship is not just limited to players, but to all participants including parents, coaches, friends, family, and volunteers.

As a parent and a coach, I've witnessed firsthand the impact our church's basketball program has had on countless families in our

community. It's exciting to see so many young people learning the fundamentals of the game and understanding what it means to be a member of a team. Each season, these kids learn about sportsmanship, leadership, friendship, and teamwork, all while experiencing personal growth for themselves. Growth happens organically, and it's amazing to see such progress with these kids from the start of each season to the end. To be involved as a participant and to witness this ministry in action is very rewarding.

“ IT'S EXCITING TO SEE SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE LEARNING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GAME AND UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF A TEAM. ”

It is important to recognize our FPC Recreation Committee and its volunteers who faithfully commit their time and efforts to provide an invaluable experience with our basketball ministry year after year. It is difficult to measure the impact our program has on our kids, coaches, our congregation, and our community, but the impact is real. And regardless if you've had a lifelong love of the game or if you've never picked up a ball, I would encourage you to participate in any way you can. This ministry is truly a gift for all of us.

Finding God in the Storm

By Caroline Goodman

In Mark 12:31, God calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This sounds good and easy in the everyday moments of life. We smile at people, ask them how they are, listen, and maybe even cook a meal for someone facing challenges. But what happens when we are met with catastrophe...when everyone in our area is affected by the same thing? Do we choose to follow God's call and help those around us, or do we focus inward?

The aftermath of Hurricane Helene opened my eyes to how this church embodies Jesus' love—how welcoming, nurturing, and impactful it is in our community. As soon as the storms cleared and the sun returned, I got a call from Pastor Alan saying that the Family Life Center had power and would be open for anyone who needed charging stations and hot showers or a place for children to play and to be surrounded by community. How is it that First Presbyterian Church was one of the only places in town with power? I'll never know, but I do know that our pastors and staff were given the opportunity to help people, and they answered the call.

In the following weeks, the Family Life Center doors opened to everyone, not just church members. When you walked in, coffee was ready (my saving grace) and smiling faces greeted you at the door. Jane made batch after batch of cookies, and my children enjoyed playing board games and basketball. More than the hot showers, coffee, and cookies were those who were here praying and lending a listening ear. Youth were in the parking lot helping clean up debris. There was a sense of community, and God's love was all around.

The blessing of the Family Life Center being open met needs of our neighbors here in Spartanburg. But the love of this church extended beyond our county lines. Even though many were dealing with damage to their own homes and property, this congregation generously gave truckloads of generators, food, and supplies to our neighbors who lost so much in Western North Carolina.

I find myself thinking back to the last weekend of September, especially when I am anxious about other things—not really important things. I think about the resilience, patience, ingenuity, and strength I saw all around me and how God provided those things through people he put in my path to encourage, uplift, and carry me through. Isn't that what he does every day? Doesn't he challenge us to help others even in the ordinary times?

Look for Mark 12:31 moments—the opportunities to love your neighbor. They can be found at home, work, driving down the road, and anywhere you go. Just think of the difference you can make in the world and the example you set for generations to come if you answer God's call to love your neighbor.





Pictured on opposite page: Box truck being filled with supplies for Western NC; Pictured above from left to right: Generators being loaded to take to Black Mountain Presbyterian Church; Rev. Rachel Klompmaker and Kara Clark welcoming people to the Family Life Center; Service of Song, Prayer, and Scripture on the Sunday following Hurricane Helene

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12:30-31

GUEST SPEAKER ON FEBRUARY 23

Dr. Andrew Root

Dr. Andrew (Andy) Root is a professor, author, and preeminent scholar of church and contemporary culture. He joined the staff of Luther Seminary in 2005 where he serves as the Carrie Olson Baalson professor of youth and family ministry. Root combines theology and storytelling to explore how ministry leads us into encounters with divine action. He is often mentioned as one of the leading scholars in youth ministry and practical theology in the world. He is most recently the author of four volume *Ministry in a Secular Age* series and *The End of Youth Ministry?*.

On February 23, First Presbyterian members will have two opportunities to learn from Andy. At 10:00am, he will be leading a combined Sunday School class that explores themes from his book *When Church Stops Working*. All are invited to attend!

After the 11:00am worship service, Andy will lead a workshop lunch for parents of children in 4th-12th grades. This “Faith-full Parenting” conversation will be based on Andy’s book *The End of Youth Ministry?*



More information about these events can be found at fpcspartanburg.org.

February

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



2 BOY SCOUT SUNDAY /
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING



5 FPC ANNUAL MEETING
LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD



14 YOUTH SKI
RETREAT



23 SPECIAL GUEST: DR. ANDREW ROOT
Visit fpcspartanburg.org to learn more!



28 TENDING THE FIRE: MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT WEEKEND
with Jeannie DuBose and Rev. Keith Grogg

Tending the Fire

By Rev. Ansley Page

Renowned children's author and self-described marriage expert Judith Viorst routinely shared, "I see marriage as a third thing - not mine, not yours, but this creation we build together, to which we owe certain obligations. To it, you bring the finest strivings of the human heart."

I love this image and its call to creative and nurturing action. Quickly, my mind moves to images of art studios, workshops, and especially modern-day maker spaces—you know, the kind where resources are at the ready, experts are on hand, and innovation is in the air.

For years, I thought of good marriages as coming out of quiet studios where serenity is in the air and genius is taking shape, where beauty and truth somehow emerge from a blank canvas and appear magically from alabaster. But the longer I live and the more people I know, I realize that good marriages, even masterpiece ones that have survived the hard things or that seem to be bliss, often come from crowded, busy lives – like a loud junior high maker space where safety glasses aren't always worn, and the creations are not perfect, but they are personal. Good

marriages come from real life and are made of real people. They are crafted with tenderness, patience, and intention, even when days are long. There is sacrifice in the story and giving – lots of giving. There is faithfulness in the daily kiss hello, or in the commitment to date night, or in the servant heart that cleans the kitchen or pays the bills again and again. Love does over and over in good marriages. I can see God's fingerprints of grace, hope, and resurrection all over them.

It is encouraging to know that good marriages hit dry spells and rocky spots. It is inspiring to know that love's flame can dwindle, and then be rekindled. Different seasons in life bring times of closeness even after a chapter of feeling distant. Miraculously, challenges can bring couples closer. A date night or a weekend without the regular routine or responsibilities can make a difference in how you see and treat each other. Good marriages come from the daily – often not glamorous, but beautiful and holy.

Crafting a good marriage to last in 2025 doesn't have to seem daunting. A growth mindset and faith in God's work, through love given and received, open doors to wonderful marriage possibilities. A marriage enrichment opportunity is one good way to foster that growth mindset. It's not a place of judgment, but instead one of encouragement and help. It is an opportunity for listening and reflecting together and space for creative fine-tuning. Every marriage is unique and holds the potential to be a masterpiece in its own way. In many marriages, old wounds are healed, and new strengths are developed.

Unfortunately, the speed of life and the intense pressures on families too often

crowd out energy and time for marriage care. Seeking to encourage couples, First Presbyterian is hosting *Tending the Fire*, a Marriage Enrichment Weekend with Jeannie DuBose and Rev. Keith Grogg. Jeannie DuBose is an author, illustrator, and speaker. She works with organizations focused on health and spirituality as well as with faith communities. Rev. Keith Grogg has been pastor of Montreat Presbyterian Church since 2014.

Jeannie wrote a book titled *Tending the Fire*, which is about her 33-year marriage to Richard DuBose. She looks back to their first meeting and chronicles their years together, reflecting on the power of nurturing a marriage that will keep a bright and warm flame going. When asked what "tending the fire" means, Keith said, "To quote Billy Joel, 'We didn't start the fire.' But we are its acolytes, and the more we tend to it, the more warmth we feel, our partners feel, our wider circles feel, and the world feels. God sparks the flame. We tend the fire."

Keith says that marriage is bigger than just two. In Ecclesiastes 4, "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" alludes to the presence of God in our relationship with others. Not only is the marriage covenant made with God, but marriage has the capacity to bless more folks than just the two in it. A good marriage has a sheltering reach and can offer an inspiring light of love to a world hungry to know what real love looks like. This shelter of grace, tenderness, selfless giving, and faithfulness reaches beyond offspring and close neighbors. The stability and nurture experienced in a good marriage blesses generations and serves as a cornerstone for the wider community. Amazingly, a marriage enrichment weekend has a ripple effect of strengthening love between two people that goes out to all with whom they connect.

During her time with us, Jeannie will expound upon her book and the influence of her reading of Alain de Botton. She says, "As a people and a culture, we would be much happier and saner if we re-examined our view of love. We would do ourselves and our children a favor if we acknowledged how love deepens, stumbles, survives, and evolves over time. And how that process has much more to do with ourselves than what is right or wrong about our partner."

“**GOD SPARKS THE FLAME.
WE TEND THE FIRE.**”

- Rev. Keith Grogg

Maybe there can be a shift from how we think marriage is “supposed to be” to more of a growth mindset and of the possibility of good to come. Too often folks shy away from thinking and talking about marriage. Many fear judgement or what they might find if they look too closely. Yet if they don’t attend to love, the flame will flicker and shrink.

So for *Tending the Fire*, there will be no microscope or spotlight; instead it will be a relaxed time for couples with faith friends hearing new insights and encouragement. Jeannie and Keith plan to playfully and reverentially engage the topic of marriage through a variety of angles. Participants can expect to encounter both themselves and their partner with a fresh lens, as well as enjoy a chance to deepen their sense of church community by learning and laughing together with other couples.

Here are takeaways attendees can expect: 1) tangible tools for navigating the inevitable ups and downs which attend any long-tenured relationship,

2) researched sources which normalize conflict and transitions that every couple faces, and 3) a reminder of the importance of being awake to the Holy Spirit and its wondrously hydrating effects.

As Keith put it, “Those who attend will have an opportunity to think, wonder, and consider their lives together in an environment that is safe for all: people of all ages; couples of all durations; introverts and extroverts. What does it mean to be a life partner? What does it mean to my partner? What does it mean to be partners with God? All of these questions and more will offer springboards to ongoing conversations at home and in private prayer for years to come.”

All those who are married are invited to attend. I pray you will consider participating for yourself, your marriage, and our community. Come tend the fire of the blessing of love given to you!

TENDING THE FIRE

MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT WEEKEND

**FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 1
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Read more about this event, our facilitators, and register at fpcspartanburg.org/marriage or scan the QR code below.



SERVING OUR NEIGHBOR

The Greatest Commandment

Compiled by the Local Missions Committee

When we look around our community, we see people in need of physical, spiritual, and financial support. The congregation at First Presbyterian Church seeks to meet these needs and follows the greatest commandment in Mark 12:31: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Each year, the Local Missions Committee provides benevolent funds to organizations that work within the needs categories identified by the Faith Initiative to End Child Poverty.

In 2024, First Presbyterian provided over \$134,500 in benevolent grants to 17 local nonprofit organizations. Two of those were St. Luke's Free Medical Clinic and Healthy Smiles. Both organizations provide critical health and dental care for uninsured and underserved people in Spartanburg County.

St. Luke's Free Medical Clinic opened its doors in 1992. According to Development Director Chet Cantrell, "St. Luke's Free Medical Clinic (SLFMC) was conceived and brought into existence as a faith initiative to follow the mandate of God to 'do justice,' knowing that fulfillment of its mission would have a far-reaching impact.



The wellbeing of one person influences the wellbeing of their families - spouses, children, extended family - with ripple effects into the wellbeing of neighborhoods, communities, and onwards."

Last year, St. Luke's provided \$28.6 million of free, top-tier medical care to over 1,700 people through over 6,000 onsite visits. Their St. Matthew's satellite location began seeing children, and is being utilized mainly by families who work seasonally in Spartanburg or are awaiting citizenship. The clinic also started a community garden that provides superfood vegetables to patients and promotes a healthy diet as part of overall wellbeing.



"Our patients struggle with many issues in their daily lives, and your support gives them peace of mind that comes from compassionate and caring people attending to their health needs and questions. Thank you for your leadership in sustaining and growing St. Luke's ability to care for our Spartanburg County neighbors in need," said Cantrell.

Healthy Smiles recently celebrated 20 years of providing free dental screenings and care to children in uninsured or low-income families in Spartanburg and Cherokee County. In fact, Healthy Smiles is the only organization in Spartanburg that provides completely free dental care to children who qualify for their program, which includes children ages 4 to 18 with no dental insurance or Medicaid.

Statistics show that tooth decay is the number one childhood disease. According to Healthy Smiles, "Oral health is directly related to overall health. Better oral health at a young age prevents a myriad of health problems – and their financial, physical, and emotional costs – later on. By improving oral health in children, we are setting a foundation for better health habits and healthier, more productive adults."



Healthy Smiles served 86 schools in Spartanburg and Cherokee County in 2023, distributing nearly 36,000 toothbrushes and screening nearly 24,000 children. They were able to provide dental treatment to 590 children through over 1,000 visits at their free clinic. All this is possible through generous contributions, grants, and dental volunteers who provide their time and expertise to improve the wellbeing of children in our community.

Your gifts to First Presbyterian truly make a difference not only within the walls of the church but throughout our community. A comprehensive list of local organizations supported by benevolent funds can be found at fpcspartanburg.org/localmissions.



Witness Season Through the Years

Witness Season is a tradition at First Presbyterian that dates back to at least the 1930s when a special offering was collected during the month of February. Church records indicate in the early years of Witness Season, there was a day or week of self-denial and prayer, and at the end of that week, an offering was taken. In some cases, the money was used for missions through the general fund of the Presbytery. Other years, several thousand dollars were collected and given to build schools in the Congo, support a new mission in Zaire, and purchase a dental clinic van in Korea.

Witness Season of First Presbyterian Church has supported both local and international missions, extending the love of Jesus beyond our community and country's borders. Recently we have seen children in Lesotho, a country located in South Africa, playing on new playground equipment and learning in upfitted classrooms because of generous Witness Season donations. Clean water is now available through Living Waters in Cuba where the situation deteriorates for our friends and mission partners daily.

Your gifts in February matter, and they are changing lives both here and all over the world. To learn about the 2025 Witness Season project, visit fpcspartanburg.org/witnessseason.

March

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



2 YOUTH SUNDAY



4 CONCORDIA CHOIR CONCERT
7:00pm in the Sanctuary



5 ASH WEDNESDAY



8 PIG 'N PICKLE
Youth Fundraiser



9 GIRL SCOUT SUNDAY



26 CHILDREN'S CHOIR CONCERT



29 CHURCHWIDE DAY OF SERVICE

CONCORDIA CHOIR CONCERT
AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

Closing the Circle

By Holt Andrews

When the 70-voice Concordia Choir performs at First Presbyterian on March 4, lucky audience members will hear one of the finest collegiate choral groups in America. They have sung throughout the United States and around the world to great acclaim and routinely fill the 2,000 seat Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis when they present their annual Christmas Concert. This by itself should be enough to convince anyone to attend their concert at First Presbyterian, but there is a great deal more to say about the impact this one choir has on the institution to which it belongs, the people who hear it and, above all, the students who give it life.

Continued on next page





First Presbyterian Church member Bill Craft, recently retired President of Concordia College, said one of the things he and his wife Anne quickly noticed about the choir was the pull it exerted on aspiring young singers. "Kids would dream, sometimes from an early age, of being a member of the Concordia Choir" he said. "Concordia would become their college choice for that one reason." Others would attend a Concordia Choir concert and abandon their previous college plans so they could have a chance to sing with the group. Bill remarked, "A few years ago a high school student from Hawaii heard the choir at a concert, and from then on there was no other college for her but Concordia." In the same way an instrumental musician might aspire to play in a major orchestra or a basketball player in the NBA, young singers hope to be a part of the Concordia Choir.

When students make it into the choir, they find the musical excellence that attracted them in the first place, but many also find themselves profoundly (and perhaps unexpectedly) impacted by the great music of the Christian faith. Through their choral experience, they encounter hymns that have inspired the church for generations, music of the European masters, and of fresh new voices from around the globe, and because they are members of the Concordia Choir, they can sing this music at a level that is hard to find anywhere else.

At the college, the choir, perhaps more than any other student entity on campus, gives (literal) voice to Concordia's mission: to influence the affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian Life. When you look at (and especially listen to!) the group, you might naturally assume that the vast majority of the singers are music majors. And though it is certainly true that the music discipline is well-represented, the 70 voices comprise of an astonishing 35 different majors and 26 minors that cross the arts and sciences. Future doctors, lawyers,

businesspeople, educators, and many more are having their lives impacted in a profound way by being a part of the Concordia Choir.

And, finally, there is the concert experience itself. It is difficult to describe, but can be extraordinary to be a part of.

"When Anne and I would accompany the choir on tour, we couldn't wait for the program every night," said Bill. "We'd watch people come in and take their seats as if it was a normal evening. Then we'd watch their expressions change as the students began to sing, and note how their bodies leaned forward towards the choir. They were no longer an audience; they had become part of the program."

“We’d watch people come in and take their seats as if it was a normal evening. Then we’d watch their expressions change as the students began to sing, and note how their bodies leaned forward towards the choir. They were no longer an audience; they had become part of the program.”

-Bill Craft,
Retired Concordia College President and FPC Member

Former director Rene Clausen called it "closing the circle." Though not every piece of music sung is sacred, for many, the concert becomes a kind of worship service.

The Concordia Choir performance is at 7:00pm on Tuesday, March 4 with a reception to follow. We recommend arriving early. Generally these concerts are ticketed events, but their performance at First Presbyterian is free and open to the public. There will be an offering taken to help defray the choir's (considerable) concert expenses. Sponsorships are available; if you would like to become a sponsor for the concert, or have any questions, contact Holt Andrews (rhandrews@fpcspartanburg.org).



THE SEASON OF LENT

In the Wilderness

By Rev. Rachel Klompmaker

You would have to do a lot of planning and preparation to safely spend time in the wilderness, and you would be particularly vulnerable there in ways that we spend most of our time trying to avoid. Things lurk there around corners, in the dark, in the shadows. You would trade what we call 'creature comforts' for just plain creatures.

The wilderness around Judea at the time of Jesus was not a safe place, and you would do your best to avoid being there after dark. We read Gospel accounts of robbers and thieves leaving a man for dead on the side of the road, Roman soldiers forcing Jewish citizens to carry their stuff for a mile or more, and exiled people possessed by demons or plagued with unclean skin conditions needing to make their home there.

During the season of Advent we often remember that John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-12) was in the wilderness proclaiming to those who were there with him that the places of shadow where bad things happen—the hills, the valleys, the uneven ground, the rough places—will become places of light and safety in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, the one through whom the kingdom of heaven has now come near.

John's use of Isaiah's words to bring comfort to a shadowed people (Isaiah 40:1-5) reminds us that the wilderness has not always been a place of fear.

Read the story of Hagar in Genesis 17 and 21. Though she was an Egyptian slave running into the wilderness to escape the abuse of her masters Sarai and Abram, El-Roi, the God Who Sees, met her there and reminded her not to be afraid.

Shepherd Moses had "led his flock beyond the wilderness" (Genesis 3) and there God, the Great I AM, met him in a bush that wouldn't burn up.

It was in the wilderness that God promised to hear the cries of the Israelites and lead them out of Egypt and then, once freed from slavery, the wilderness became the place where God shaped Israel and trained them to be a blessing to the nations. And though eventually they wandered in that wilderness for 40 years, never were they without the illuminating and protective presence of God in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire.

During Lent this year we will consider Jesus's own understanding of the wilderness and look to the stories of the Old Testament to see how God has chosen to reveal himself to us there. Do you have a story of light in the midst of shadow? How or where has God met you in your own wilderness places? May God give us eyes to see gifts of the wilderness in this and every season.

New Members *July to November*



Leonora and Grier Bomar recently moved from Winston-Salem, NC. Grier grew up in Spartanburg and attended First Presbyterian, and Leonora is from Mountain Brook, Alabama. Leonora is a Dermatologist at Spartanburg Dermatology and Grier is a Radiologist at Spartanburg Regional. They met while attending Davidson College and both attended medical school at Wake Forest University. Their daughter Martha Louise attends the FPC Weekday School. They love to hike, cook, and spend time together.

Rachel “Tweetie” Bowman grew up in Anderson. She attended Erskine College, Anderson College, and University of West Georgia. Tweetie is a retired high school music educator and served as a victims legal advocate and a resident services director for a senior living facility. She lived in Douglasville, GA for 30 years and thought Atlanta was too busy, so she came back to the Upstate. Most Sundays you will find Tweetie in the choir or playing the handbells. She also loves playing pickleball and creating diamond art.



Kelly Clark and Angelica Paglia have lived in Spartanburg for a little over a year with their six cats. They were introduced to the PC (USA) Church by a friend and were drawn to First Presbyterian because of its inclusivity. Kelly works as an Administrative Coordinator for Ulta Beauty. In addition to knowing American Sign Language, Angelica can recite all Harry Potter movies 1-7, parts 1 and 2. Kelly loves being outside on the trails especially in the mountains.

Kelly and Adam Colley recently moved to Spartanburg from Hannibal, MO. They have two children, Larsson and Lenora, and love their dogs Max and Chase. Adam works for Spartanburg County and Kelly is Operations Director for the Middle Tyger River YMCA. They enjoy family time and especially love being outside. Adam enjoys hunting and fishing, and Kelly loves swimming. She swam the Charleston Harbor! Their family can be seen most Sundays at the Contemporary Worship Service.



Barbara Colvin has been attending First Presbyterian for over 20 years. She and her husband Ron typically attend the Chapel service. Barb brings joy to people as she delivers homecooked meals every night. She has worked in customer service, has been a skin care consultant, worked for a non-profit, and spent 15 years catering. She loves to travel and says that every day is an adventure. She also loves gardening, sewing, and cooking. Her husband Ron is an FPC member, but the warmth of the community is what drew her to our church.

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



Jenny and Luke Connell have lived in Spartanburg for 19 years. Both are Alabama natives and graduated from the University of Alabama (Roll Tide!). Jenny works in marketing at Spartanburg Regional, and Luke has worked in marketing and PR for the last 10 years. They enjoy traveling, especially to Spain. Luke completed the Camino de Santiago, and Jenny has visited over 22 cities in Spain. Luke enjoys photography and Jenny dabbles in oil painting and knitting. Fun fact: Alan stayed in their guest house when he was visiting Spartanburg.

Susan "Woozie" Dell was born in Greensboro, moved to Charlotte when she was 12, and went to Converse College. She and her son share the same birthday on New Year's Eve! For 19 years, she worked as an Event Coordinator for the Charlotte Country Club. She loves planning events and helping brides. Woozie is an interior designer and currently a nanny. Fun Facts: Woozie has several ties with FPC. She visited First Presbyterian with her sister Jackie Putnam, and Dr. Jim Fogartie, former FPC minister, was her minister in Charlotte.



Marcus and Meg Elliott were introduced to First Presbyterian through the Weekday School. They have three children; Avanell (7), Eloise (5), and Wiley (1). Marcus works as a CPA at Elliott & Painter, LLC., and Meg was a teacher for 10 years before staying home with their children. Both are graduates of Clemson University. They love being at Lake Burton and Edisto Beach. Fun Fact: Meg swam at the Olympic Trials!

Nancy and Randal Ellison recently moved from Charlotte, NC. Nancy grew up in Spartanburg and is a graduate of Wofford College. Randal is from Statesboro, NC and is a graduate of Georgia Southern University. They have two children; Annie (4.5) and Jack (3). Nancy worked as a physicians assistant, and is currently staying home with their children. Randal works in construction management and loves to bird hunt and play golf. Nancy is a fourth generation member of First Presbyterian Church. Her great-grandmother, Mary Ellerbe, helped found the FPC Weekday School in 1944.



Neal Karn grew up in Spartanburg and is the owner of Needlepoint Lane. She and her husband Trey met at Clemson, and they have three daughters; Catherine and Anne Hamilton are in college and Hattie, who joined FPC with her mother, is a student at Spartan High. Neal was raised at FPC and was baptized and married here. She loves Clemson football, and her family enjoys vacationing to the beach and the mountains.



Aubrie Lauderdale grew up in Greenville, SC and attended Fourth Presbyterian Church. She has lived in Spartanburg for 10 years. She earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in education. In 2015 and 2016, Aubrie was a youth intern at FPC. She loved her time working with youth and felt welcomed back by the congregation. She loves the opportunities for young adults and the various services offered every Sunday. She is an instructional coach at Drayton Elementary School and coaches lacrosse at Spartan High.

Linda McGarity grew up in Seneca and has lived in Spartanburg for 51 years. She holds degrees from Clemson University and Converse College and was a Language Arts teacher at Spartanburg High School. In retirement, she loves reading, bridge, traveling, and fitness and is a great travel companion. If you're planning a trip, Linda would love to be your travel buddy.



Jeff and Ashley Owen are both graduates of Wofford College. Ashley has a master's degree in higher education from Vanderbilt University, and Jeff has an MBA from Murray State University. The FPC Weekday School introduced them to First Presbyterian Church, but mentors and fellowship are what made them return. They have two children, Liam (10) and Eliza (8). Jeff is a CPA and Senior Director for Finance and Strategy for Milliken's Textile Apparel Businesses, and Ashley is the Associate Dean of Students at Wofford College. They love spending time with family, traveling, the arts, and reading.

Erica Pedone is from Melbourne, FL and has lived in Spartanburg since 2021. She has two children, Allie, who is in high school, and Michael, a student at Wofford College. They felt welcomed the moment they visited First Presbyterian Church. Erica loves the messages of inclusivity and the warm welcome of the congregation. Erica thrives on helping others and loves to plan large charity events. She has been a part of many organizations and has had a long career in retail.



Chris and Mary Case Quiroga have lived in Spartanburg for nearly two years. They have two daughters, Mary Ellis (22 months) and Mollie Mae (7 months). Mary Case graduated from Arizona State. Chris is from Simi Valley, CA and graduated from California State University Northridge. When they are not busy with their family, Mary Case enjoys walking, hiking, being outdoors, and dancing. Chris relaxes by gardening, animal husbandry, cooking, and playing soccer. He works in the restaurant and hospitality field. Mary Case has worked as a freelance editor and in the legal field.



Katherine Seerden is from New York and has lived in Spartanburg for two years. She was drawn to First Presbyterian Church because she felt it was a vibrant congregation and because of the varied learning and mission opportunities. Katherine is a registered nurse and loves playing any board game. A few of her favorites are Yahtzee, Sequence, Mexican Train, Rumikub, and Monopoly. Her next adventure is to learn to play Mahjong. She is currently a Vice President of Quality Management in the health insurance industry.

Jan and Sharon Smoke recently moved from Greenwood. They were drawn to First Presbyterian Church because their daughter, Donna Pulliam, is a member. Sharon grew up in Kingsport, TN and is a Vols fan. Jan grew up in St. Matthews, SC. Sharon graduated from Emory University and is a mother, homemaker, and professional volunteer. Jan holds an undergraduate degree from Clemson University and an MBA from the University of South Carolina. He is retired from Monsanto and enjoys hunting, sports, reading, politics, and investing. Sharon enjoys Bible study, needlework, singing, bridge, and travel.



Rafe and Jeanette Villagran are from Renton, WA, a suburb of Seattle. Jeanette and Rafe both attended Seattle Pacific University. She furthered her education at The Fashion Institute of New York, and Rafe attended Pace University in NY. Jeanette works as a visual merchandiser for Kohls. Rafe owns Genesia Investments, LLC. They love the Contemporary Worship service and have felt welcomed by everyone at FPC. Rafe enjoys college sports, especially rooting for the Baylor Bears and Clemson Tigers. Jeanette loves health, wellness, and flower gardening. Fun fact: Jeanette and Cathy Bagwell attended the same junior high school in Renton, WA.

Interested in becoming a member?

If you are interested in becoming a member of
First Presbyterian Church, you are invited to meet ministers and
members of Session on the second Sunday of each month in the Parlor.

To give you a great welcome to the First Presbyterian family,
it would be helpful to us, but not necessary,
to know of your desire to join before the meeting.

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



CARES & CONCERNS

IN MEMORIAM

Claire Gregory Capell
Monday, October 21, 2024
Sister of Wallace Gregory

Arthur McMurray "Mac" Erwin, Jr.
Thursday, October 24, 2024
Father of Sarah Erwin

Suzanne Parris Bagwell
Friday, December 6, 2024
Wife of John Bagwell, Mother of
Molly Colbath and Suzette Laney

Rev. Dr. Kirk Hudson Neely
Thursday, December 12, 2024
Husband of Clare Neely, Father of
Scott Neely, Brother of Beth Hedden

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

Chamlee McGuire, on the death of her parents, Michael H. and Ann C. McGuire
Cassi MacNaughton, on the death of her brother, Laurence Buie Wells
Cheryl Lang, on the death of her father, Sherrel Edwin Ottinger
Kaki Verticchio, on the death of her brother, James Curtis Akers, Jr.
Pat Quantz, on the death of his brother, Newton Gaston Quantz, Jr.

BIRTHS

Nell Rhame Henderson
Saturday, November 2, 2024
Daughter of Kelsey and Jacob Henderson

George Nicholas Caggiano
Thursday, November 7, 2024
Son of Page and Nick Caggiano

BAPTISMS

Penelope "Poppy" Hays Nash
daughter of Chelsea and Lucas Nash, on October 20, 2024

Christopher David Quiroga
on November 17, 2024

Marywin Olivia Berry
daughter of Becky and Jeff Berry, on November 24, 2024

Thomas Franklin Gamble, Jr.
son of Courtney and Frank Gamble, on November 24, 2024

WEDDINGS

Adam Steele Johnston and Caroline Knight Gressinger
Married November 8, 2024

Constantine Anastase Ghionis and Anne Harrison Lominack
Married November 23, 2024



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Ash WEDNESDAY

March 5, 2025

**Join us for the Imposition of Ashes and Prayer
any time 8:00am-1:00pm in the Chapel**

and for the

**Ash Wednesday Service
6:30pm in the Sanctuary**