

First News



Advent 2025



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The Weirdest Book of the Bible: Reading Esther in Uncertain Times

Depending on who you ask and what mood they are in, the book of Esther has been called historical fiction, revenge fantasy, political comedy, or diasporic saga. It manages to be horrifying, hopeful, and humorous at the same time. To read this ancient and enigmatic narrative without wondering why it's in the Bible at all is impossible. And still, the contemporary resonance of the Esther story is unmistakable: state power bears down to settle personal scores; non-native residents are acutely vulnerable; God is silent throughout--hiding among coincidences, (or not?). The weirdest book of the Bible is a noisy, rambunctious response to all our prayers for God's will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Sermon Text: Esther 1:1-5, 10-19

Sermon Title: Vashti

Sunday School Title: Esther in Persia

Sunday Night Title: Esther in America

Rev. Amos Disasa is the Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, TX, a historic congregation in the heart of the city. Previously, he served as the co-pastor of Downtown Church, in Columbia, SC.

Amos' family immigrated from Ethiopia when he was a young child. Amos earned degrees from Presbyterian College and the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. He serves on the Board of Governors for Downtown Dallas Inc., the Board of Directors for PubCore, the Board of Directors for Montreat Conference Center, and is a Trustee of Austin College. Amos and his wife Sarah, along with their two children, reside in Dallas.

Sunday, February 1

9:45a - Rev. Disasa leads Sunday School in Fellowship Hall

11:00a - Unified Worship Service in Sanctuary

5:00p - Program (First) then Dinner in Lewis Hall

(Nursery is Available)

What is the Season of Advent?

by Rev. Lara Musser Gritter

Presents under the Christmas tree are so exciting. Pastor Josh is notorious in his family for shaking presents in an attempt to spoil the surprise of what is coming. A book that will change our minds? A toy that will change the way we play? A tool that will change the way we work?

In Advent, we wait for something coming. First, we reenact the long wait of the people of Israel 2000+ years ago for their messiah. These were a people under violent captivity who longed for God to loose their binds and set them free. They needed not a charismatic leader to lead an uprising as they thought, they needed someone from outside, not their nation, but the created world—they needed God. Wrapped in swaddling clothes in the arms of a poor, insignificant young woman, that's exactly what they got. Only God could conquer the true enemies of sin and death to free them from bondage. Jesus was their long-awaited Christmas gift who came to change the way we live and love.

This Advent, we wait for something coming still. We wait for a future that will again come from the outside. It will not unfold from the already formed bud of the present. Instead, it will come with Jesus reigning in glory, coming to bring a new future so hopeful, universal, so healing and whole, that it's immeasurably far more than we could ask for or grasp. It is for this good future in the coming of Christ that we wait now.

The good news is, just as the people of Israel did nothing but wait for Christ 2000 years ago, the only thing you HAVE to do this Advent, in a true and ultimate sense, is wait for God. Wait and see what God will do with your sorrow, your sin, your grief, your captivity, your hope. In the coming of God, all things will be made new.

Advent is the right time to think about newness. In this newsletter, you will find newness arriving as a present under the tree from God. You'll learn about our plans to celebrate Dr. Kirby's retirement. After almost 25 years of faithful ministry, Pastor Randy is beginning a new chapter in retirement. We give thanks to God for all that Randy has done and meant to this congregation. Also in this newsletter, you'll see a new plan for staffing at the church in the new year. Hint: Prepare to meet a new pastor.



First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 30

We light the first **PURPLE** candle of HOPE! With Christians around the world, we use this light to help us prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of God's Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Christians can often confuse the word hope for wishful thinking. If we hope something will happen, we have no control over whether or not it will take place. But the biblical sense of hope is very different. Hope, in the Bible, exists as a secure assurance, a trust placed in a trustworthy God. God has not failed us in the past, and therefore, if he claims he will do something in the future, we can have a hope that he will fulfill that claim. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Isaiah 2:1-5 and Matthew 24:36-44

Sunday, November 30

8:30am - Contemporary Worship with Communion in Lewis Hall

9:15-10am - Advent Gatherings in Fellowship Hall (Hosts are Gather Team, EMBC, and Contemporary Christians)

9:45-10:30am - Countdown to Christmas - Advent Wreath Making in Lewis Hall (NO Children's Sunday School)

11am - Traditional Worship with Communion in the Sanctuary

Tuesday, Dec 2

5-7pm - RSS International Teachers' Dinner in Lewis Hall

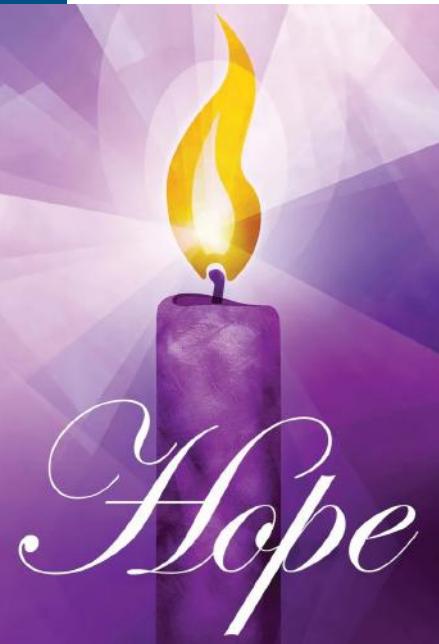
Saturday Dec 6

JOY @ Motown Christmas Concert

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 7

We light the second **PURPLE** candle of PEACE! As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, we remember that Jesus is our hope and our peace. Jesus brought about peace in the most unexpected ways when he arrived on earth. The Jews, particularly the zealots, wanted a rebellion. They wanted their Savior to overturn the oppressive rule of the Romans and bring about peace in a violent way. But Jesus had something else in mind. Jesus gives us inner peace. Because of his work on the cross, we receive peace through grace and salvation. We also have the peace of mind knowing God will heal this broken world and will come again. We are also reminded to have peace with others. We must put aside our differences and have the



same purpose: to let others know about the peace of Christ. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Genesis 22:15-18; John 1:1-14

Sunday, December 7

8:30am - Contemporary Worship with Lessons & Carols in Lewis Hall
9:15-10am - Advent Gathering in Fellowship Hall (Hosts are Sisters and Mary & Martha)
9:45-10:45am Sunday School for all ages
11am - Traditional Worship with Lessons & Carols in the Sanctuary
5pm - Race & Justice Ministry Christmas Party at Debbie Collins' home
5-6:30pm - Youth Christmas Party at church

Thursday, Dec 11

4-6pm - Annual 3-Wide Christmas Dinner in Lewis Hall

Third Sunday of Advent



Sunday, December 14

We light the third PINK candle of JOY! We remember that the good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring us great joy. Our joy isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, or the people that we are with. It doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us complete joy. Our joy comes from Jesus. That joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Matthew 11:2-11; Isaiah 35:1-10

Sunday, December 14

8:30am - Contemporary Worship in Lewis Hall
9:15-10am - Advent Gatherings in Fellowship Hall (Hosts are Open Horizons & Outlook)
10-10:30am Family Stories with Karl Hales, all families w/children (No Children SS)
9:45-10:45am - Sunday School for Youth and Adults
11am - Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary
5pm - Christmas Dinner & Pastor Randy's Celebration Party (nursery for 2yr & under)
5pm - Happy Birthday Jesus Party (3-12 yrs) in Fellowship Hall

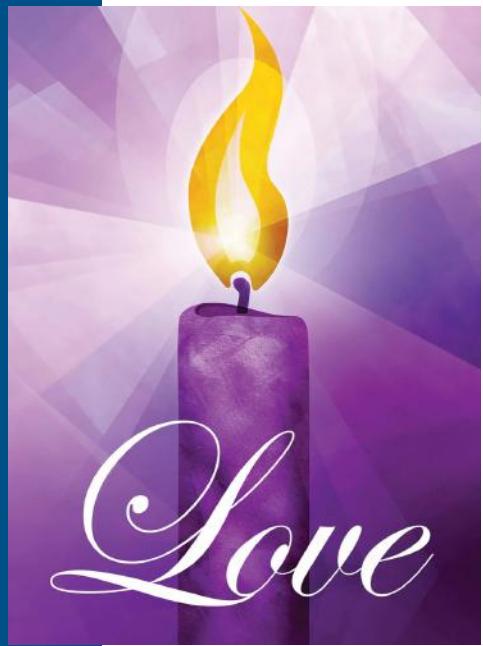
Wednesday, December 17

12-1pm - Church Office Volunteer Lunch in Fellowship Hall
6:30pm - First Kids Christmas Pageant in Lewis Hall (congregation is invited)

Thursday, December 18

10:30am-4:30pm - JOY @ Billy Graham Library (Lunch & Tour)

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Sunday, December 21

We light the fourth **PURPLE** candle of LOVE! Jesus focused on preaching love throughout his ministry. Two of his greatest commands involve love: Love God, love your neighbor. Love encompasses Jesus' entire purpose for being on earth. God is love. They know we are Christians by our love. Love sacrificed Jesus' son for our sins. Love is patient, kind, it does not envy, etc. We cannot walk with Christ without it, and we cannot have the Christmas story without it. May we receive God's light as we reflect on our scripture readings. Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Matthew 1:18-25

Sunday, December 21

8:30am - Contemporary Worship in Lewis Hall

9:15-10am - Advent Gathering in Fellowship Hall (Discovery & HS/MS Youth)

10-10:30am - Acolyte Training for Candlelight Service in the Sanctuary

10am - Karl Hales Adult Christmas Stories in Fellowship Hall

11am - Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

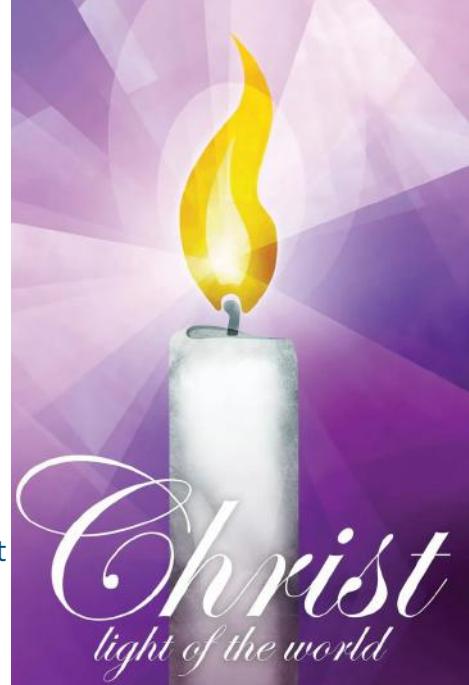
7pm - Longest Night Service of Reflection and Healing in Lewis Hall

Christmas Eve Worship

Wednesday, December 24

The Christ Candle

We light the **WHITE** Christ Candle during our Candlelight & Communion Worship Service. The Christ candle represents Christ and the role he plays in the Christmas story. Jesus Christ connects all the Advent candles. Through him, we have Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Jesus brought light into the world through His arrival on earth as a baby, and he continues to be our **LIGHT!** Because of him, we can be a light unto others, showing them the true meaning of Christmas.



3pm - Contemporary Worship with Children's Pageant in Lewis Hall

8pm - Candlelight & Communion Worship Service in the Sanctuary

(Prelude Music begins at 7:30pm)

There will be a Unified Worship Service on Sunday, Dec 28 at 11am in our Sanctuary.
No Sunday School classes.

The Longest Night - A Service of Advent Reflection

by Dr. Randy Kirby

The holidays are upon us. By the time you read this, you may be recovering from the Thanksgiving stuffing and getting ready for the Christmas celebrations. Most years, the holidays are a time for gathering with friends, singing joyful songs, and enjoying your favorite holiday foods. It is the season of celebration!

However, for some of us, the songs of celebration simply intensify the difficulties of the year. Perhaps a loved one died, and this is the first holiday without them. Or maybe there was an unexpected diagnosis that has left the future uncertain. For some, it is simply the daily news of war and disaster. If you can relate to any of these feelings, I invite you to attend the "Longest Night: A Service of Advent Reflection" on Sunday, December 21, at 7:00 pm, in Lewis Hall.

During the last few years, the Longest Night has become a special part of our Advent Services. It is a service of prayers, special music, and reflection. Participants are invited to a time of prayer for their needs and for the world. You will also have the opportunity to light a candle for those individuals and concerns on your heart in this year's season.

The liturgy we follow describes the longest night this way: "For those who have experienced loss, the holidays can be a particularly painful time, stirring up grief in acute ways. As a result, churches around the world have adopted the practice of having a "Blue Christmas" or a "Longest Night" service during the Advent season. In the Northern hemisphere, this service is often observed on or around the Winter Solstice, which is the longest night of the year."

"A Longest Night service is designed to provide space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the holiday hustle and bustle... We hope that this service of worship can be a gift to individuals and communities, providing a space of calm, quiet, and healing" (adapted from "The Longest Night," a Liturgy by Rev. Sarah Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.)"

I hope you will consider joining us on December 21.

Let us wait in hope together for the Christ that is coming!





LET'S CELEBRATE

Pastor Randy Kirby & 25 Years of Ministry

This year, our annual Christmas Extravaganza will take on a very special meaning. Instead of our usual festivities, we will gather to honor and celebrate Pastor Randy Kirby's 25 years of faithful service at First Presbyterian Church.

Please join us on Sunday, December 14, at 5:00 pm, in Lewis Hall, for an evening filled with food, laughter, and heartfelt fellowship as we express our gratitude for Pastor Randy's many years of ministry, leadership, and love for this congregation.

To help us prepare, please make your reservation with Christine Mowery at cmowery@firstpressalisbury.org or (704)636-1321. Deadline is December 5. To be certain we have plenty of food for everyone, registration is mandatory.

A separate Happy Birthday Jesus party for children ages 3-12 will also be provided, so families can relax and enjoy this special evening together. A nursery will be provided for children 2 and under.

In true Christmas spirit, come dressed in your favorite seasonal attire or "tacky" Christmas sweater as we celebrate Randy's lasting influence and many contributions to our church during his years of faithful service. We encourage you to consider donating to the love offering for Pastor Randy as opposed to giving individual gifts. Your contribution may be made to Christina Lewis in the Church office with the subject line "Love Offering."



From Pastor Lara

New Ministry, New Pastor

Pastor Randy is completing his ministry here at First Presbyterian Church after almost 25 years of faithful service. Pastor Randy has officiated your weddings and led baptisms; he's been at the bedside of your loved ones and presided over their funerals. He has walked with you through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4) and he has proclaimed good news from the mountain tops (Rom 10:15). Pastor Randy has been just that, your pastor: a trusted, steady presence through many seasons.

As our congregation prepares for his retirement and departure, many of you will be wondering, "What comes next?" In recognition that no one person can simply replace someone who has meant so much to our congregation, our Session, in collaboration with several ministry teams, has created a new staffing plan for after Randy's retirement.

First, I, Pastor Lara, will be taking on Pastoral Care. I am eager to spend more time with you in your homes, hospital rooms, and care facilities. I want to bear witness to Christ's presence in your joys and sorrows. I want to grasp your hand and seek God together in prayer. I have already shifted from working part-time to full-time in order to take on this role.

Second, we are searching for an Associate Pastor for Formation and Mission. The new pastor will not be "Randy's replacement." He or she will be the person God has hand-picked to love and serve this congregation in the areas of Christian Formation and Mission. They will collaborate with Grow in Faith, Gather, Community Ministries, and Showing Up Ministry Teams. They will bring new gifts in preaching, worship leadership, and care. The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (APNC) has been hard at work searching for this new Pastor.

Stay tuned...and please continue to pray for our AP search team.



Epiphany Stars

"Shine Bright! Shine Far! Don't be shy...be a star!"

I have had these lines from a Disney/Tyra Banks song burned into my brain for the last 25 years. I love a poppy, overly girly moment from the 2000s. Fortunately, in the church, we know better than to believe these adorable lyrics. We are not the stars of our own shows, Christ is. We don't have to "do it for the plot" because God is the main character of our life-stories and we, blessedly, get to follow Christ's lead.

In the church calendar, Christmas lasts 12 days, hence the song. After Christmastide comes Epiphany. This is the day we remember the star that guided the Magi to Jesus at his birth. God is the one who guides us all. No time of year is this more clear than in the new year. As you look out into 2026, make a plan to come to worship where you will receive a star with a biblical word that God will use to guide you through 2026. On the back, you'll find the name of a family at First Pres for whom you can lift up in prayer and encouragement as they embark on this new journey guided by the light of Christ shining bright and far!



*Epiphany Sunday
Jan 4, 2026
Come get your Star!*



From Pastor Randy

Providing Shelter

Part of our tradition as Presbyterians is a statement that enumerates the six Great Ends of the Church. These Great Ends guide the church, reminding us of what we believe we should be doing if we really want to be the body of Christ in the world. It will come as no surprise that the first End is “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind.” Every Sunday, and a thousand ways in between, we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for the sake of a world in need of saving in a thousand different ways.

The second one, you may not have guessed. The second End is “the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God.” Even when said like that, shelter seems so obvious that we tend to slide right over it. Yet it seems appropriate for the disciples of a savior for whom there was no room when he was to be born. Our Facilitate Team takes its task seriously. Providing shelter for the children of God is a noble task that requires expertise, energy, and imagination. At First Pres, we are blessed with property that has been built and cared for by generations. We are fortunate to have it to use and to offer it to the children of God in our community who need shelter.

In recent years, we have been looking for more ways that we can offer shelter to groups, both in the church and in the community, that fit our mission of nurture and fellowship. We host dinners for our mission partners from time to time. We welcome groups from the Rowan-Salisbury School System on a regular basis. In November, we are hosting a Thanksgiving dinner for International Teachers. In December, we will once again host the Christmas dinner and coat giveaway sponsored by the 3-WIDE Foundation.

Since before the pandemic, we have hosted Kids at Work weekly, a culinary program for at-risk teens provided by Aspire Youth and Family Inc. In the last couple of years, our Showing Up Team has been hosting Red Cross Blood Drives. Over seven drives, we have collected 227 units of blood.



**American
Red Cross
Blood
Drive**

Save a Life, Give Blood

Embracing the Unchurched has been hosting MomCo on Mondays twice a month for two years. This is a small group ministry designed to support mothers of young children.

This fall, we have begun hosting weekly rehearsals for the Rowan Choral Society. Beginning in November, we will provide space for a Girl Scout Troop twice a month. We also recently hosted once again the Messinger-Williams Family Community Education Initiative under the leadership of Hood Theological Seminary.



And I am sure that I have overlooked others. The point is that we are attempting to fulfill our calling to “Shelter” the children of God. Let the Showing Up Team know if you want to help or need more information about what is going on. May God continue to bless us with shelter to share!



Many thanks to all who contributed to our Advent/Early Winter newsletter. For your planning purposes, here is our newsletter deadline schedule for 2026.
Please submit your articles by the deadline.

Lent Edition: Deadline January 21, 2026

Spring: Deadline March 4

Summer: Deadline May 6

Fall: Deadline August 12

Advent Edition: Deadline November 4 10



From Pastor Josh

Raising The Young from the Dead

It's been a lovely fall in youth ministry, to say the least. We've dived headlong into Scripture on Wednesday nights, served alongside one another, and gathered for hearing God's good news on Sunday mornings and evenings. It still amazes me that young people today drive their cars to church.

Lately, my thoughts have turned to a penetrating question, one that I placed before 18 PC-USA pastors at a recent conference in Roanoke, VA, "What kind of youth ministry only makes sense because Jesus was raised from the dead by the Spirit of the God of Israel?" It's a complicated and somewhat convoluted question. Even so, the question suggests that Youth ministry is something more than mere moral formation. Most people suppose that "what we do up there in that youth room" is all about telling kids to be better, and showing how to be better, and then they're better.

But good morals just won't raise Jesus from the dead. We live in a society that baptizes the self. We believe that the self, and not the soul, controls and wills us into happiness. Are you sad? Buy something. Are you in grief? Here are 5 ready-made lifehacks to suck you out of the sadness. In short, says theologian Andy Root, we believe that happiness is achievable, attainable, and accessible, if only we make it so through our actions in the world.

Social media algorithms exacerbate the issue. They're "self-machines," endlessly putting before us content that further entrenches what we already believe, and endlessly mirroring back to us who we think we are. And what's more, YouTube is the news source of choice for most young people these days. To that point, I recently heard of a YouTube page called "redeem

zoomer," a page curated by a young adult who is a member of the PC-USA. The page has 600,000 subscribers. As a part of the page, "redeem zoomer" rates various churches by his selected criteria, encouraging his followers to only attend churches with a "1." Youth ministry is not about "morals" because the gospel isn't about morals. The gospel is the good news that in Jesus's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension God has destroyed death, gut-punched sin, transfigured the universe, and has thus given us a new way to be human in the world. And just what microphone did God choose to communicate this ridiculous message? The church.

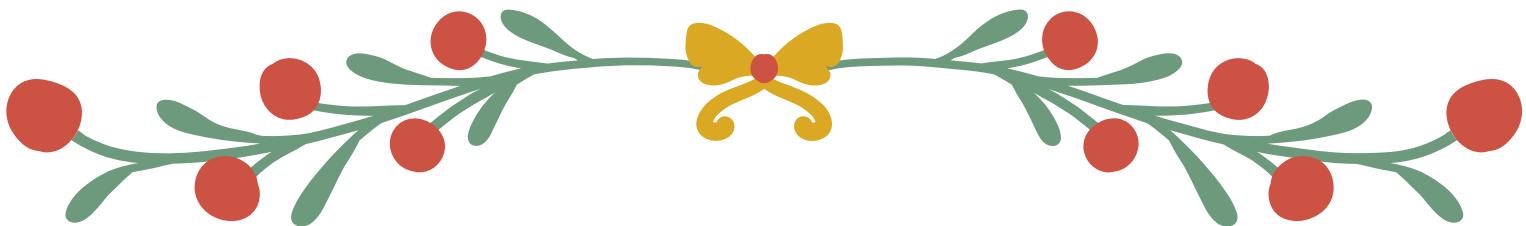
So, what's youth ministry about? In my 7 years of experience, my answer has changed. These days, my answer has to do with relationships. Because God meets us in the person of Jesus Christ, youth ministry is about how Jesus accompanies us as we meet young people, especially in their sadness and sorrow. Over the years, I have wondered just what is the secret sauce that is mixed into our annual TWAM Mission trip. Is it just that serving feels so good? Is it that the tacos are just that tasty? Is it that learning skills to build a home for the poor fills our souls? It is all those things. But more than all of that, what happens on these trips is that the God of death and resurrection encounters young people as they meet the death and resurrection of others. It's the kind of ministry that only makes sense because Jesus was raised from the dead.

I could go on, but I suppose what's left is to ask you, dear member of First Pres, how can you engage with this youth ministry? Well, the first and most important thing you can do is pray. Pray that God's life will interrupt, challenge, and comfort our young people. Pray that they might meet and seek discipleship's cost and find themselves coming back for more. The second thing you can do is volunteer. Has God laid on your heart the desire to mentor a young person? Have you ever asked? There's no such thing as too many youth leaders, and we invite you to join in with what God is up to, trusting that the Spirit of his Son will move within and around us.

Advent Gatherings!

Fun
Food
Fellowship

All Sundays in Advent
9:15-10am in Fellowship Hall



Annual 3-Wide Christmas Dinner

Thursday, Dec 11
4:00-6:00pm in Lewis Hall
for Needy Families



Needed:
New winter coats
Cooked Turkeys & Dessert Donations
Set-up Crew & Clean-up Crew

Contact Steve and Donna Thomas to help



What A Year of Music It Has Been!

Sanctuary Choir

It has been such an amazing year accompanying and directing our fabulous Sanctuary Choir every Sunday. My heart overflows with gratitude for each and every one of our choir members and our beloved choral scholars. Thank you for all that you do! You are truly amazing, and I am sure many of us have been deeply touched by your singing and music, and that God has been at work in our midst.



Bell Tower Ringers

I could not be more proud of our ringers. We had an incredibly successful Bells Tower Ringers Festival in March 2025, and our dedicated volunteers have already organized everything for the next one coming up this March. Keep your ears and eyes open — we'll be sharing more information in the coming months. The Bell Tower Ringers continually brighten and enrich our worship with their beautiful ringing. There will be many more opportunities to hear them in worship in the weeks and months ahead.

First Pres Concert Series

My heart is overflowing with gratitude and joy as I look back on all the unforgettable concerts we've shared through our First Pres Concert Series.

We started strong in May with the dazzling pianist Caroline Owen, whose artistry left us all breathless. June brought the Elektra Woodwind Quintet, filling Lewis Hall with their sparkling sound. Then came August and the enchanting Astralis Ensemble—what a night of elegance and beauty!

September was extra special, as I had the joy of performing alongside Stephen Williams from St. Luke's, joined by the gifted Mia Mason and Lawrence Gwinnett from Livingstone College. That afternoon was pure joy from start to finish! And October... Matthew Weaver and his ensemble whisked us away to the mountains with their soulful Appalachian tunes.

Just when we thought the year couldn't get any better, we were treated to a bonus concert! The Rowan Choral Society graced us with a breathtaking performance on November 8—a perfect finale to a year filled with harmony and heart.

More Musical Magic Ahead

And we're not slowing down! 2026 is already shaping up to be another fantastic year filled with inspiring performances and community spirit. I hope you'll be part of every moment! Come, bring your family and friends, and let's fill our Sanctuary and Lewis Hall with music, laughter, and love.

Musically yours,

Teresa de Fritas



*Christmas & Its Beautiful Music
Are Coming!*



Lessons & Carols on Sunday, December 7

Contemporary Worship @8:30am in Lewis Hall

The LCW Praise Team invites you to travel with us through song on the road from the Garden of Eden to the stable in Bethlehem as we seek the Christ Child, the Messiah, the King of Kings. Along the way, we'll listen in as God promises Abraham that through his seed, the nations of the earth will be blessed. We'll hear the prophet Isaiah foretell the birth of Christ and his kingdom. Along the way, we'll stop in the city of Nazareth and eavesdrop as the angel, Gabriel, tells the Virgin Mary that she will bear a son and will name him Jesus. From Nazareth, we'll move on to Bethlehem to the humble manger where the Son of God and Son of Man is born. We'll watch as the shepherds, who have travelled a great distance, fall on their knees before the baby Jesus, God Incarnate, the Savior, Messiah, and Lord. Hallelujah! All led by our pastoral staff, eleven vocalists & five instrumentalists with special music by Blaine Smith, Tony Shaw, Caroline Forrester, Mia Mason, Rylan Lowe, Emma Blackwell, Jessica Holman Settineri, and First Kids. Lots of great new music!

Traditional Worship @ 11am in our Sanctuary

Our Sanctuary Choir will be accompanied by a full orchestra, including members of the Salisbury Symphony and Lake Norman Orchestra. Some of our friends from the Salisbury-Rowan Choral Society will lend their voices too. Our Bell Tower Ringers will add their joyful sounds, and BONUS...our precious "child stars" will melt our hearts with their songs.

Christmas Eve on Wednesday, December 24

Family Christmas Worship & Pageant Service @3pm in Lewis Hall

Presenting the Christmas story told by our sweetest little ones (First Kids) along with special music from our LCW Praise Band and worship with our Pastors. Join us for a memorable service, ending with the passing of the "Light" of Christ. Cocoa and cookies in the courtyard following the service. Prelude music begins at 2:45pm. All ages invited. Little ones welcome!

Christmas Eve Communion & Candlelight Worship Service @8pm in Sanctuary

Join us for a candlelit celebration of beauty, hope, and wonder in the Sanctuary. Prelude music begins at 7:30pm, setting the stage for worship that reminds us of why we sing—because our Savior has come!

*Let music help our hearts be ready to receive our Savior,
who comes to us as a Baby this Christmas!*



Coming in the New Year!!

The Five Senses of Worship

Rev. Daniel Heath, J.D.
Associate Chaplain and Director of the Davidson Forum
Davidson College



The Five Senses of Worship

Beginning in January, our contemporary worship service will explore The Five Senses of Worship, a special once-a-month series led by Rev. Daniel Heath, our LCW accompanist. Each service will invite worshippers to experience God through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—deepening our connection with God and one another through creative, sensory-rich expressions of faith.

Join us for these unique worship services at our 8:30am Contemporary Worship Service in Lewis Hall on Sundays - January 4, February 8, and March 1. Come ready to encounter God with all your senses!



Property: Construction Underway!

In the new year, we will all be getting to know a new associate pastor. To make this new pastor more visible and to bring our ministry staff closer together, our conference room (on the first floor) is being divided into 2 new office spaces.

We encourage groups that used to meet in the conference room to consider using the Welcome Center across from Lewis Hall or the Adult Library.

Thank you for your flexibility and patience as we make this new arrangement a reality.



Race & Justice Ministry Team

This fall has been focused on community. The RJMT continued with discussion groups. The Sunday evening group read **Overlooked: A Celebration of Remarkable, Underappreciated People Who Broke the Rules and Changed the World**, and the Wednesday group read **Everyone Who Is Gone Is Here: The United States, Central America, and the Making of a Crisis**.

The first men's **EYES** (Embrace Your Elephant Spiritually) Table was led by Frank Strong, III, with participation from First Pres and other local churches. The goal of the EYES Tables is to model how to navigate conversations on a subject matter that divides us ... race. First, we remember what unites us...Love God and then Love People.

RJMT joined with JOY for a tour of Davidson College with the Davidson Forum students on Oct 20. The tour was created to provide an overview of Davidson College's legacy of colonialism, enslavement, and white supremacy - beginning with colonial violence against indigenous nations and ending with contemporary issues that students of color face. You are invited to review the materials shared in the tour in one of three ways:

1. Short introductory videos about each pillar can be found on the landing page (scroll to the bottom of the page) -
<https://www.davidson.edu/about/history-traditions/davidson-forum>

2. Take the virtual historical tour. This will be a great primer for the walking tour -
<https://anayapatel44.github.io/>

3. A good third step is to read the newly published history of Maxwell Chambers, a connection between Davidson College and our congregation -
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OVtbzpFBGa43WHLOaXKUhdkazcMJoQ_1/view

WORSHIP NEEDS YOU!

Volunteers needed

Have you ever considered, while sitting in Sunday worship, what it takes to put a worship service together?

Perhaps what comes to mind is that the pastors have to study and prepare a sermon. But that's not all that goes on. Thanks to the maintenance staff, the room is clean and organized for the service. Someone lines up the volunteer greeters. Someone else coordinates the ushers. Altar flowers are ordered. The music team selects, practices, and performs meaningful music. The tech team makes sure all sound and video equipment is working and attends practices for worship. The weekly bulletin is typed up, printed, and then folded.

Did you know that someone researches ideas for the children's sermon relating to the scripture of the day? Volunteers deliver the children's sermon. When communion is served, someone has to set up and break down the communion table.

Holidays and changes in church seasons require additional attention. Many hands are needed for decorating for Christmas. Easter lilies must be ordered and set up. When the worship area is used for a special occasion or service, others are needed to make that all happen. The narthex needs to be decorated, too, so that it is warm and welcoming. WHEW! That's a lot! All this to say, our worship teams, LCW and Sanctuary, would LOVE your help! Please let us know how you can serve as part of our team! We are looking for new team leaders and members. Contact the church office or speak to anyone on our team (Blaine Smith, Judy Mabe, Barry Sang, Anne Cave, Kathy Pulliam, and Savannah Lucas.



GIVING

As 2025 draws to a close, I want to sincerely thank you for giving to First Pres Salisbury this year. Your faithfulness and willingness to share the blessings God has given you allow us to continue sharing God's love within our community and beyond. Every contribution, big or small, plays a vital role in the ministries of First Pres, from First Kids to Youth to Sunday School to keeping the heat on during the winter and the AC on in the summer. May God bless you for your kindness and generosity!

We would love to finish this year strong. If you pledged, please complete your pledge. If your portfolio performed well this year, please consider the church in your end of the year giving. Gifts of generosity are a beautiful way to celebrate the birth of Christ!

Below are some ways you can give to the church:

- Cash or check (mail or Sunday offering)
- Online (www.firstpressalisbury.org/give)
 - One-time gift
 - Recurring gift - If you give online, would you consider setting up a recurring gift? Not only is it convenient for you, it helps us with our annual budget projections.
- IRA
 - If you are over 70.5 years of age, you can give a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) to the church. This request can be made through your IRA administrator.
- Donor-Advised Fund
- Stock Gift (contact the Business Office for more information)

If you have any questions regarding your giving, please stop by the Business Office, email clewis@firstpressalisbury.org, or call the church.

Sincerely, Christina Lewis



FIRST KIDS



Our First Kids ministry has gotten off to a great start with 32 children attending weekly. Our Wednesday evenings are full of learning, fellowship, songs, games, and delicious suppers! We have been learning about prayer and how we can pray at any time for and with anyone.

As we head into Advent, our focus turns to the birth of Jesus and our Christmas Pageant. Our children are so excited to bring you TWO performances of our Christmas Pageant. This is to help include all our children, especially those who will be traveling on Christmas Eve and not able to attend our LCW Christmas Eve service and 2nd performance. The 1st performance will be during First Kids on Wednesday, December 17, at 6:30pm. A pizza dinner will be provided for families @5:30pm. The second performance will be on Christmas Eve at 3pm in Lewis Hall. Hot cocoa and cookies will be served afterward in the courtyard. We are always excited to have new children join us, so spread the word.

As we move into Winter, our children are going to journey through all the wonderful stories of Jesus and his incredible miracles, also to include his baptism and then his crucifixion.

Watch out -
We've got more singing in worship and our Feed the Fish Competition during Lent. Wednesday's First Kids is where it is AT!



Mission Trip Alert! January 18-23, 2026

Get ready to buckle up the sandals of Jesus on your feet and spend a week helping survivors of Hurricane Helene in Swannanoa and Old Fort.

In September, our church sent 23 people to help rehabilitate homes that were severely damaged in the wind and waters that came with Hurricane Helene. They left Salisbury with plans to hammer, saw, paint, plumb, wire, and dig. They did do all of that, but they came home with hearts full of love and the full belief that they had been the hands of Jesus for a week.

And now, you are invited to taste this blessing. We will, again, partner with Fuller Center for Housing - Disaster Rebuilders. They are centered in Montreat to help those with something left to rebuild and will start a new housing project for folks who have no home left to rebuild. We stay in a lodge in Montreat, and meals are provided. Folks with all skill levels are welcome.

Howard Kessler wrote of this experience in September on Facebook, "It was such a blessing to be part of this effort, one of the 23 volunteers, and the amazing private organizations that have boots on the ground in this area - and it was heart-warming to meet with the home owners that will in the near future be back in their homes, better than they were before Mother Nature released her fury."

Barry Sang told us in his "Minute for Ministries" that what Jesus and Christianity offered us was HOPE. And he said, hope was what we offered through our efforts with the Fuller Center - Disaster Rebuilders.

We hope you will join us in January.



MEALS on WHEELS ROWAN

One thousand seven hundred!!! That's the number of meals delivered by our First Pres Meals on Wheels team so far this year. Our volunteers contribute more than just meals; we bring hope, friendship, and daily contact with those who need it most. We deliver 10 routes on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of every month. From January to August 2025, our team's service hours total 180, and we have driven 2100 miles. Together, we ensure that our Rowan County homebound seniors remain independent, nourished, and connected to their community. If you would like to find out more about joining our team, please call First Pres coordinator, Mary Greene, at 704 633-4164.

We are very grateful to the following church members and friends of our church who have delivered meals during the summer months: Tony Shaw, Carol and Del Denny, Wayne Hayworth, Tracy Smith, Beffie and Ed Cook, Paula and Bill Troxler, Randy Lassiter, Dianne Scott and Tony Blackwell, Lyn Beaver and Tricia Johnson, Bob Cook, Mary Greene and Teresa Williams, CC Crofton, Missy and Henry Brown, Kim Johnson, Lawana Ford and Dave McGaha, Linda Jones and Buddy Farnan, Eleanor Sandifer, Joan Horner and Susan Sember, Ed Lewis, Anne and John Cave, Jim Mitchell, Nancy Eason, and Frank Eason and Bob Steele. As always, our substitutes are willing to fill in as needed.

On October 14, Meals on Wheels Rowan held a Volunteer Service Award Luncheon to honor outstanding volunteers from all over the county for their dedication to homebound seniors during the past year. Among those recognized were several First Pres MOW team members who have volunteered for many years: MOW Board of Directors President Tracy Smith for 35 years, Bob Cook for 30 years, Kim Johnson for 19 years, and Eleanor Sandifer for 17. While not part of our regular volunteer team, another church member, Dr. Gayle Yatawara, was also honored. Yatawara Gynecology, Wellness, and Aesthetics was selected as the Outstanding Business Team. Gayle and two of her assistants were in attendance and recognized for their service in delivering meals.

We are grateful to the following church members and friends of our church who have delivered meals during the past several months: Tony Shaw, Carol and Del Denny, Wayne Hayworth, Tracy Smith, Beffie and Ed Cook, Paula and Bill Troxler, Randy Lassiter, Dianne Scott and Tony Blackwell, Lyn Beaver and Tricia Johnson, Mary Greene and Teresa Williams, CC Crofton and Sandee Carrigan, Missy and Henry Brown, Kim Johnson, Lawana Ford and Dave McGaha, Linda Jones and Buddy Farnan, Eleanor Sandifer, Joan Horner and Susan Sember, Elizabeth Bergsma, Joe Sember, Ed Lewis and Bobby Williams, Nancy Eason, and Frank Eason and Bob Steele. We welcome Sandee Carrigan as a new member of our team. She is a friend to many church members and a longtime MOW volunteer in the China Grove area.

We are pleased that all our regular routes are currently covered, but we need a carrier route driver. Please call First Pres coordinator, Mary Greene, at 704 633-4164 if you might be interested. We wish everyone a joyous and meaningful Christmas!

Ho ho ho!





Who is the Session of First Pres?

The Session is the church's governing body, which makes spiritual and operational decisions for the church between meetings of the Congregation. It is composed of twelve Elders who are elected annually, four at a time, for three-year terms. The Session elects a Clerk, who is the official record keeper but not an active member of the Session, to maintain the records of the Session. Any member may submit another member for Elder nomination consideration.

Each Elder works with one or more of our Mission Teams to ensure that all our members are spiritually supported and cared for. The Elders are also responsible for the care and upkeep of the First Pres facilities and the employment of staff to assist with program implementation.

The Session meets monthly, except for July. The Ordained Pastors are the Moderators of the meeting and establish its agenda. Any member may ask to present on the agenda by contacting the Moderator or the Clerk.

When you observe the parking lot's recent pavement project, it came through the Facilities Team to the Session for approval and implementation. When you participated in submitting your annual pledge, that came through the Fund Team to the Session for approval and implementation. When you participated in First Kids or Sunday School, that came through the Grow in Faith Team to the Session for approval and implementation.

As Presbyterians, we use a representative form of operation, and the Session is our decision-maker between meetings of the Congregation, who is the ultimate decision-maker for the church.

Our Current Members of Session include: Richard Miller, Clerk of Session

Class of 2028

Donna Beaver - Reach
Kia Creamer - Connect
Mindy Muire - Connect
Barry Sang - Worship

Class of 2027

John Cave - Facility
Steve Coggin - Support
Ames Flynn - Fund
Savannah Lucas - Worship

Class of 2026

Cathy Adams - Grow
Maggie Behrooz - Grow
Margaret Harris - Serve
Jon Nagy - Share

Member Updates

JOYS (June-August):

- Lee and Tricia Johnson on the birth of their granddaughter, Atlee Wood Ehlers. Atlee's parents are Rollins and George Ehlers.
- David and Nadine Potts on the birth of their great-granddaughter, Selah Grace Bost. Selah's parents are Brandon and Kammy Bost, and her older brother is Sebastian.
- Keith and Carr Garner on the birth of their granddaughter, Layne Katherine Alcorn. Layne's parents are Clark and Sarah, and her older sister is Sutton.
- Mackenzie Stevens and Alexander Hagar, who were married here on October 4. Mackenzie is the daughter of Jay and Kimberly Stevens.
- Jeff and Lyn Beaver on the birth of their grandson, Charles Lewis Mosack, on September 27. Charlie's parents are Mackenzie and Braxton Mosack, and his great-grandfather is David Jordan.
- Drew and Wendy Weant on the marriage of their daughter, Ginny, to Adam Corriher.
- Brian and Melody Lee on the marriage of their daughter, Abby, to Warren Whitley.
- Austin and Savannah Lucas on the birth of their daughter, Amelia Katherine, on October 31. Amelia's grandparents are John and Cindy Ware.
- Lee and Tricia Johnson on the birth of their granddaughter, Leena Corell Halsey, on October 27. Leena's parents are Philip and Alee, and her brother is Brent.

DEATHS (September-November):

- Vickie Clark and family on the death of her husband, Eric Clark.
- David Carmichael and family on the death of his mother, Betty Bonner Steele.
- Gordon Hurley and family on the death of his sister-in-law, Gerry Hurley.
- Nadine Potts and family, on the death of her sister-in-law, Laura Barger.
- Zandra Spencer on the death of her brother, Mike Harrison.
- Karl Hales and family, on the death of his sister June Deindoerfer.
- Kathy Sanborn and family on the death of her brother, Mark Purser.
- Marjie Aggers and family on the death of Fred Aggers.
- Jan Kichefski on the death of his brother, Brian Kichefski.
- Mary Ellen Kennedy and family on the death of her father, Tom Overcash.
- Jan Corriher-Smith and family on the death of her mother, Barbara Corriher.
- Sara, Michelle, Christopher, and Carter Cook on the death of Bob Cook, Jr.
- Andy Storey, Spencer Storey, Katelyn Lee (Alex & Emerson) on the death of Diana Storey.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

October 31, 2025

OPERATING FUNDS

YTD Income **1,079,890.59**
 YTD Expenses **1,062,443.11**
 Cash Flow - **POSITIVE** **17,447.48**

YTD Budgeted Income **1,088,041.67**
YTD Actual Income **1,079,890.59**
UNDER **8,151.08**

YTD Budgeted Expenses **1,164,781.67**
YTD Actual Expenses **1,062,443.11**
UNDER **102,338.56**

DAY SCHOOL

YTD Gain **4,052.28**

GIVING

YTD **Budgeted** Giving **1,040,541.67**
 YTD **Actual** Giving **981,929.74**
UNDER **58,611.93**

YTD Budgeted Pledges **946,375.00**
YTD Actual Pledges **925,205.65**
UNDER **21,169.35**



DAY SCHOOL GOOD NEWS



The Day School is very busy with a lot of fun activities. In October we had a Farm Festival with live animals for the children to pet. All the children dressed as farmers and we practiced our farming skills like milking a cow, herding sheep and picking crops.

The children made some adorable bookmarks to give to their grandparents for "Gifts for Grandparents". We invited all of our grandparents to come visit and over 35 visited. We had a book fair during the same week and are able to add new books to our library. The Day School is starting to prepare for our Christmas program, A Birthday Party for Jesus. Every week the children meet with Pastor Lara for Praisetime and learn a different bible story. Also, during Praisetime, Ms. Teresa teaches the children worship songs and have begun to learn Christmas songs. Our program is December 19th at 11am in Lewis Hall and everyone is invited to our Birthday Party for Jesus!

Upcoming JOY Events



**JOY (Just Older Youth)
Lunch & Tour @ the Billy Graham Library**

**Thurs, Dec 18 from 10:30a-4:30p
\$12.50 per person**

Payments and reservation deadline is Nov. 23

 first
pres
SALISBURY

JOY: Just Older Youth January Chili & Soup Cookout

Thursday, Jan 15 @1pm

Host Home:

**Martha & Vijay Michael,
117 Hazeltine Court,
Salisbury**

**Please bring a side dish
or dessert.**



**RSVP to the church office
by January 5.**





Yoga for Everyone!

Every Wednesday in Lewis Hall (9:00-10:15am), a group of 5-8 folks join together for movement in the yoga tradition. It's a time to "stretch" the mind, body, and Spirit! A flexible body is not required, and everyone is welcome at any time. First-timers and new students are especially encouraged to give it a try. Registration is not required. Dress comfortably. Yoga mats are available.

First class is free, then \$10 suggested.

Taught by

Rev. Felicia Stewart Hoyle (RYT-500)
fshoyle@gmail.com for more information

Year End Information

The church office will be closed for Christmas break from 12noon on Christmas Eve thru Thursday, Jan 1. We will be open from 8am-1pm on Friday, Jan 2.

For gifts to be included in your 2025 giving statement:

- Checks must be postmarked no later than Dec. 31.
- Online gifts must be submitted through our website www.firstpressalisbury.org by 11:59 pm, on Dec. 31.
- Hand-delivered donations must be dropped off no later than 12:00 noon on Dec. 31.
- Appreciated Stock, initiate transfers by Dec. 15. This allows sufficient time for processing.
- IRA qualified distributions must leave and clear your IRA account by Dec. 31.

During the office Christmas break, you may slip your envelopes into our door mail slot at West Fisher Street entrance.

The church staff would like to thank Personnel and Policy for their thoughtfulness and generosity throughout 2025. This year has been a busy time of growth. We look forward to more exciting and wonderful times in 2026!

yoga class

Are you ready to try something new (or old!) for your Body and Spirit?

Taught by Rev. Felicia Stewart Hoyle

(RYT-500)

fshoyle@gmail.com for more information





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