

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

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The Sacredness of Sabbath

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

Ahhhh Montreat! For the third year in a row, my family and I made our way to Montreat over the 4th of July holiday. One reason we love going to Montreat at that time is their annual 4th of July Parade that reminds me of a similar celebration my hometown holds every year to mark the same occasion. For the week following the parade, our children attended Summer Clubs at Montreat Conference Center, a day camp where they enjoyed nature while making new friends. While they were on their adventures, Rachel and I hiked the local trails, found new places to read our books, and even got some much-needed rest after a busy spring and beginning of the summer. There is a magical feeling that one has when crossing through the Montreat Gate. It's as if the busyness of normal life temporarily suspends itself so relationships, creativity, vibrancy, and hopeful optimism can flourish again. For that reason and more, I am grateful for the sacred Sabbath Montreat offers to those who seek it.



In the Fourth Commandment, God instructs the people of Israel to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Just as God rested on the Seventh Day, the Israelites were reminded of the importance of balancing the busyness of work and other responsibilities with the necessity to rest and tend to our relationships with ourselves, our neighbors, and most importantly, God. These days, life seems to be as busy ever. That makes it even more important that we intentionally honor God by prioritizing time and space for Sabbath. It is in that sacred rest that we often hear God's words of life most clearly and remember what's most important to us.

As the summer winds down, I encourage you to take a sacred Sabbath. Whether it's a trip to Montreat, a night alone with a good book, or even a 10-minute meditation focused on deep breathing in the midst of a busy day, allow time to disengage so that God can engage with you.

See you on Sunday!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. J. Commerford'.

Pastor Dan

Curiosity And Courage Committee Initiative: Courage is a Virtue

Written by Coerte Voorhees

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

—Joshua 1:9

Some people fear flying, but they do it anyway to visit someone they love. Some are afraid of heights, but they climb the mountain anyway. Others fear public speaking but stand up to deliver an important message.

Courage isn't the absence of fear—it's the triumph over it. Like discipline, courage means doing what needs to be done, even when it's hard. It is one of the most universally admired virtues.

When I was asked to join the Curiosity and Courage Committee, I was honest about my struggles—especially with being open-minded and the other "C": commitment. I don't like change. I know I'm not alone in that.

Change can divide or unify us. What excites me is that our entire congregation will be invited to participate in discerning our church's future direction this fall. Our committee will not do this work alone. We've been tasked with helping to develop a new vision and mission statement and a strategic plan. But every member will have a voice.

It will take courage from all of us—to be open, to be vulnerable, to welcome both new and familiar ideas. But through courage, faith, and honest conversation, my prayer is that we will find unity in a shared purpose and clearer direction.

Coerte Voorhees is a member of the Curiosity and Courage Committee.



By Wind and Word

Anchored in Scripture. Moved by the Spirit.

Sunday,
September 7, 2025
5:30 pm, Fellowship Hall

Hoist the sails and gather the crew—we're launching our Curiosity and Courage Initiative with a joyful evening of food, fellowship, and faith! All ages are welcome—let's raise the sails together and follow where the Spirit leads us as our church begins charting this new course. Childcare will be provided.

For more information, contact a member of the Curiosity & Courage Committee:
Charles Gallman, Malinda Lowery, John Mudd, Amy Spencer, Jessica Stewart, Coerte Voorhees, Mike Wallace

2025 Vacation Bible School Recap

Written by Josie Conner

While temperatures outside soared into the upper 90's during the week of July 21, the halls of First Presbyterian Church became a cool respite from the heat after being transformed into the snowy landscape of Alaska. From the kickoff of Vacation Bible School on July 20 until the closing program on July 24, the fellowship hall, classrooms, and halls of our church were alive with the sounds of over eighty children as they laughed, sang, learned, and engaged in activities that helped them learn that Jesus is our "True North."

The children were greeted each morning by their adult leaders, youth helpers, and other adult volunteers. To really set the scene for our wilderness adventures, children were divided into animal families based on their age. These groups included Moose, Huskies, Eagles, Caribou, Snowy Owls, Reindeer, Wolves, Grizzly Bears, and Polar Bears. Each day began with songs and dancing all together. Bible points were introduced each morning that helped the children learn that we can always trust Jesus. These points included:

- When we wonder, we can trust Jesus.
- When we feel alone, we can trust Jesus.
- When we feel powerless, we can trust Jesus.
- When we need hope, we can trust Jesus.

VBS participants heard each morning from Mission's Committee members. The children were the hands and feet of Jesus as they brought in paper products, cleaning products, and non-perishable food to support the FPC Christmas in July mission project. They also raised almost \$400.00 in monetary donations.

After opening activities, each morning, our herds, flocks, and packs were off to learn more as they participated in Wild Bible Adventures where our daily Bible story was brought to life, Sticky Scriptures where they began to learn to memorize the daily Bible verse, Imagination Station where they engaged in hands-on science activities, and Glacier Games where they participated in games and challenges that revolved around the daily Bible point. A mid-morning snack brought all groups back together as they heard from Ponder the Otter, Clawdia the Crab, Kody the Bear, and Earnest the Eagle, who helped them better understand the Bible point.

To spend time with these children and other volunteers was truly a gift. Learning to sing and dance with abandon and to laugh those deep belly laughs as we learned to trust in Jesus was a blessing beyond measure. Each adult volunteer left at the end of VBS, hoping and praying that this fire for Jesus will burn strong in these children and each of us, for the rest of our lives, and that we will never forget to trust in Jesus!





Photos courtesy of Rachel Commerford



Happy New Year!

Written by Josie Conner

Happy New Year! Yes, you read that correctly. I am wishing you a "Happy New Year." Let me explain. I do realize that we celebrate the beginning of a new calendar year on January 1, but from the time I was a little girl, a young mom, a third and fourth grade teacher, and now a "Jo-Jo," August always felt and continues to feel like the beginning of a new year to me. As a child, I always anticipated the excitement of new school supplies, new clothes, wondering who my teacher would be, and which friends would be in my class each new school year. As a young mom, it meant returning to routine and, yes, new school supplies and the anticipation of my children then, and now grandchildren beginning a new year. As a teacher, it was the feelings of new supplies, setting up my classroom, new students to teach, and love.

Summer is such a wonderful time. It gives us time to relax and recharge in many different ways. As women of the church, August signals the beginning of a new year for us! This brings excitement as we gather together with our circle members, enjoying fellowship, and studying God's word. Our circles have so much to offer, and there is a circle that fits everyone's needs at FPC! Did you know that when you join First Presbyterian Church, each woman is assigned to a circle? We have circles that meet during the daytime hours, at night after work, and service circles that work together on specific projects. On **Wednesday, August 27, 2025, at 5:30 in the Fellowship Hall**, we will kick off the beginning of our new circle year with dinner, fellowship, and learning the first lesson in our new curriculum.

Our book to study this year is *FINDING RESILIENCE, JOY, AND OUR IDENTITY IN JESUS CHRIST*, by Rhashell D. Hunter. In the introduction, Rev. Dr. Rhashell Hunter says, "In the last several years we have experienced stress and change. We have adjusted based on global, societal, and governmental events, and our lives are different than before. How do we find joy in a chaotic world? This is an invitation and an opportunity for you to become grounded again, renew your faith, and reconnect to Christ."

You are cordially invited to our

Presbyterian Women's
Kick-Off Dinner

Wednesday, August 27, 2025

5:30 p.m.

Fellowship Hall

RSVP by August 21, 2025

704-864-2651 or
aadams@fpcgastonia.org



Events & Announcements

Congratulations



Recognition and Awards
Ford Poag
Eagle Scout Award

Summer
FELLOWSHIP EVENTS

Special Performance:
Carillon Recital
Sunday
August 17
11 am, Memorial Gallery

You are invited to enjoy a very special performance by guest musician and carillonneur, Mitchell Eithun. Dress casually, Hors d'Oeuvres will be served.

Contact Jill Kimbirl for more information at jkimbirl@fpcgastonia.org

Backpack Blessing
August 17, 2025

We will bless our children and their backpacks during the children's sermon.

Sunday,
September 7, 2025

Fall programming returns as we kick-off the beginning of a new Sunday School year.

BACK TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

9:00 am: Thrive Service
10:00 am: Sunday School
11:00 am: Traditional Service



Faith Formation Sunday August 24, 2025

Learn about our Sunday school offerings for all ages. Our rising third graders will receive their own Bibles, and we will enjoy breakfast and fellowship together.

Contact Mary Taneti for more information.

FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.fpcgastonia.org/announcements

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

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2025 Vacation Bible School

Service Views and Attendance

COMBINED SERVICE		
Date	Service	Livestream
July 6	107	94
July 13	96	89
July 20	225	—
July 27	120	86

Please note service views do not include those watching via closed circuit stream at Covenant Village.