

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia

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Looking Back at Vacation Bible School

Written by Mary Taneti, Director of Faith Formation



VBS 2005 in the Fellowship Hall.

I memorized the Books of the Bible, learned the stories and the names of the disciples and prophets, memorized scripture, said prayers, and a little bit of church history during Vacation Bible School (VBS). In India, I spent the whole month of May attending summer Bible schools and looked forward to it each day with great enthusiasm. I loved every moment I spent at Bible school and credit my strong faith to it. Little did I know that when I grew up, I would be directing Bible school as a career.

Vacation Bible School (VBS) began in the late 19th century in New York City to educate children and provide them with a safe learning space during the summer. In my experience, Vacation Bible School continues its original idea of helping children learn the Bible and providing a safe space for one week in the summer. It is an all-hands-on-deck kind of event. At First Presbyterian Church, we have the littlest to the oldest come together to make a community that is the church, learning about the Bible and the people in it, and God's story. While doing that, we grow to love one another, as we laugh, dance, sing, and do missions.

Vacation Bible School is more than a week together. It is to build memories that last forever. Children from within and outside the church community come together. During the three years I have been directing vacation Bible school at FPC Gastonia, we have had

about 70-80% of the children from our community. Some have grown old enough and return to volunteer. Some have made connections that will last a lifetime. Little Eli cannot wait each year to be in Mrs. Barbara's class. In fact, Mrs. Barbara has to move up each year, so she can be Eli's teacher. Knox has started the tradition of being the first one to sign up for Bible school and has enrolled his brother to do the same, well, second, of course. We see these children in the grocery store and at Trunk or Treat, and they remind us by saying, "You were at my Bible school."

Josie and I (a.k.a. Lydia and Abigail) have traveled from ancient Nazareth to the North Pole, and this year we will be venturing through the Rainforest. A truly all-hands-on-deck kind of an event as we make snacks, tell stories, do science experiments, play games, collect for local non-profits, sew costumes, register children, decorate the building, dance, sing, clean up, band-aid a bruised knee, hug a child, give high-fives, and find God's presence in each moment. Since the 1890s, Vacation Bible School has continued to be a place for everyone. We come together to learn and grow in God's word with love. We make memories that will last forever and provide a safe space for our young disciples.

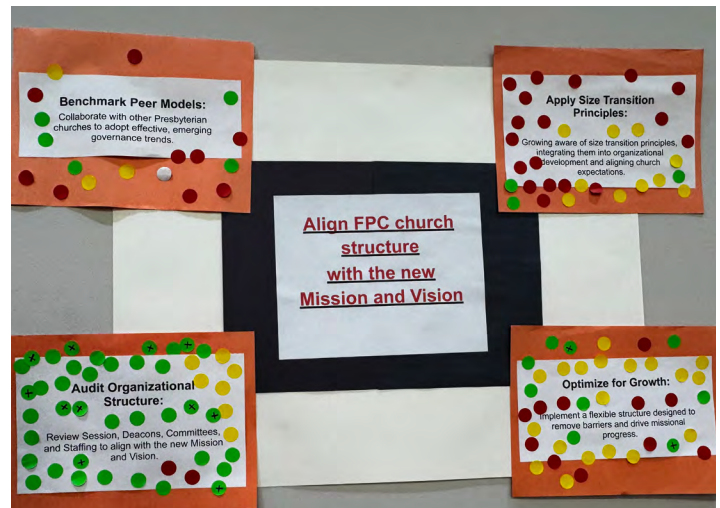
CCC Update: The Strategic Planning Process

Written by Mike Wallace

The Curiosity and Courage Committee (CCC) continues to meet regularly as we move closer to completing a new Strategic Plan for First Presbyterian Church. We are pleased to share that the newly developed Mission, Vision and Values Statements have now been presented to and approved by the Session and were introduced to the congregation during the April 19th Fellowship Dinner.

In recent weeks, the CCC has focused much of its attention on studying the committee structure of our church and exploring ways to create an organizational model that better balances effectiveness, communication, and meaningful engagement for members and leaders alike. The committee has carefully reviewed feedback gathered through the Holy Cow! Congregational Assessment, listening groups, leadership discussions, and ongoing ministry conversations.

One of the clearest themes emerging throughout this process is the deep value our congregation places on relationships, meaningful worship, faith formation, and mission outreach — the very foundations that define the heart of our church. At the same time, many members have expressed a desire for greater clarity, stronger pastoral care, improved organizational structure, and a more unified sense of direction as we move into the future together.



This work is both important and prayerful. Meaningful discernment takes time, thoughtful conversation, honesty, patience, and participation from the entire congregation. The future of our church will not be shaped by one committee or one leader alone, but by a community seeking God's guidance together.

As we continue this season of discernment, we remain grounded in our mission and guided by our vision of becoming a church marked by belonging, renewing, and transforming. We are grateful for your prayers, encouragement, and continued engagement as we seek the path God is calling us to follow together.

**Belonging.
Renewing.
Transforming.**

A Legacy of Service, A Life of Faith

Written by Cathy Parrott

Each year at the annual birthday luncheon, we carry on the tradition started in 1912 of honoring a woman in our congregation with a Presbyterian Women Honorary Life Membership. We recognize a woman who has shown her commitment to Christ, our church, and our community through her faithful service.

The recipient is given a pin to commemorate this honor. The design is composed of four parts that come together to form a butterfly, a symbol of newness in Christ and the emergence of the new Presbyterian Women, as Presbyterian Women from the former United Presbyterian Church in the USA and the Presbyterian Church (USA) came together. The four parts of the pin are a set of hands, representing the caring, supportive women in the community of Presbyterian women; a leaf representing growth of our personal and corporate response to Jesus Christ as we nurture our faith; a dove indicating our work for peace in our own lives and throughout the world; and at the center of the design is the cross, by which our sins are forgiven, and we are freed to live in Christ, who is at the center of our lives. The recipient of this pin can proudly wear it to show our appreciation of her dedicated service.



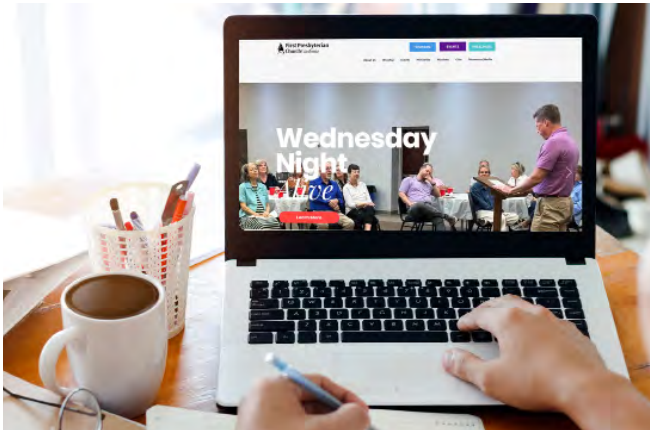
This year's recipient is the most deserving Barbara Voorhees. She is a long-time member of our congregation and has served in just about every position possible within our church. Barbara has served as an elder, deacon, clerk of the Session, Sunday school teacher, youth leader, PW council member, circle member, VBS volunteer, choir member, and as a member of many different committees of the church.

She has also been very active in the community, serving on many boards that help the underserved. These positions include past Executive Director of the United Way, past Executive Director of the Glenn Foundation, the Partnership for Children of Lincoln and Gaston Counties, Gaston Community Healthcare Commission, and the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness. Barbara was chair of the Board of Trustees of Gaston College, president of the Rotary Club of Gastonia, founding member of the Gastonia Police Foundation, and the recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award and the Athena Award. She is a dedicated wife, mother of two children, and grandmother of two grandsons. What a joy to honor such a dedicated servant!



The Strategy Behind Church Communications

Written by Wendy Gem, Director of Communications



Have you ever wondered why some announcements appear in the bulletin, while others are featured in an email, highlighted on social media, or shared during worship?

The answer is simple: communication is much more than sharing information. It is a science, and it involves managing human attention, memory, emotion, behavior, and decision-making under conditions of overload.

Many people think communication is simply telling people something and expecting them to remember it. Research tells us otherwise. In today's world, people receive information constantly through email, text messages, websites, social media, news sources, and conversations. As a result, our brains have become highly skilled at filtering what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

As communication professionals, we study how people notice information, what they remember, what motivates them to act, and how trust is built over time. These fields include psychology, behavioral science, marketing research, education, and organizational leadership. This means communication decisions are not made on a whim.

When the Office of Communications develops a campaign, writes an article, designs a graphic, or

chooses how and where to share information, those decisions are guided by research, best practices, and measurable results.

Research also shows that people are more likely to engage when they understand why something matters to them. Before deciding whether to invest their attention, most people unconsciously ask, "Why should I care?" That is one reason we often lead with purpose and meaning before sharing dates, times, and logistics.

Data also plays an important role in our decision-making. We monitor engagement patterns, participation trends, website traffic, and audience response to better understand how our congregation receives information. These insights help us continually improve and adapt our communication strategies.

Not every event requires the same level of promotion. Not every audience uses the same communication channels. Not every message serves the same purpose. Effective communication requires prioritization, clarity, and thoughtful planning.

At First Presbyterian Church, communication is not simply about sharing announcements. It is about helping people connect with our mission, understand opportunities for involvement, and participate more fully in the life of our church.

When communication is clear, consistent, and intentional, it strengthens relationships, builds trust, and helps us move forward together.

Christmas in July: Help a Child Turn the Page

This summer, we invite you to be part of something life changing for local children through Reading Soul Mates, a mentoring program that helps second graders who are reading below grade level build confidence, literacy skills, and a love of reading.

Reading Soul Mates Volunteering in June

Throughout June, we will focus on recruiting volunteer reading mentors, caring adults who commit to showing up consistently for a child through weekly one-on-one reading sessions during the school year. Reading Soul Mates is built on a simple but powerful belief: when a child feels seen, encouraged, and supported, they begin to believe in themselves.

Book Collection for Christmas in July

Then in July, our Christmas in July book drive will help provide brand new hardcover books for each student in the program. These books become more than gifts. They become treasured first libraries, reminders that someone believes in them, and opportunities for the joy of reading to continue at home.

You can donate new, hard backed books from the list under the tree in the Memorial Gallery and at the Fellowship Hall during VBS. You can also write a check with "Christmas in July" in the memo line, and leave it in the offering plate, online, or in the lock box under the tree.

Whether you volunteer, donate books, or both, you can help a child turn the page toward confidence, growth, and possibility.

In partnership with:





Reading Soul Mates (RSM) is a preventive program providing support to identified children in 2nd grade who need some assistance in improving their reading/literacy skills.

Scan the QR Code to learn how to volunteer to be a mentor.



"A child cannot learn academically if they are not emotionally healthy. Making connections and building trust lays the foundation for a successful student. RSM is key in providing these necessary tools to become a well-rounded student." —Sally Taylor, RSM volunteer

Contact at FPC:
Betty Davenport
 (704) 689-0295
 davenportfamily@hotmail.com

Contact the Gaston Literacy Council
Jami Gibson
 (704) 868-4815
 j.gibson@gastonliteracy.org

Help a Child Turn the Page by Donating a Book for "Christmas in July"

Book List:

-  **BUFFALO FLUFFALO**
by Bess Kalb
-  **CLICK, CLACK MOO
COWS THAT TYPE**
by Doreen Cronin
-  **MAYBE**
by Kobi Yamada
-  **THE THANK YOU BOOK**
by Mo Willems
-  **THE RAINBOW FISH**
by Marcus Pfister
-  **I CAN READ WITH MY
EYES SHUT**
by Dr. Seuss

Scan the QR Code to donate online.




Ghost Peppers

Baseball Game

Friday,
June 19
7:00 PM
CaroMont Health Park
Cost: \$11/person



Contact Jill Kimbirl for details.

volunteer now
Vacation Bible School
July 27-30
9 am-Noon

fpcgastonia.org/vbs

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Lindy Vohs visiting Falls Family Farm with Young Presbyterians on Sunday, May 17.

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
May 3	99	41	90	33
May 10	172	173	88	29
May 17	148	105	107	26
May 24	100	—	—	—