

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia

May 2026 • Volume 31 • Issue 5



Making Room for What's Next

The Power of Words

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

At the beginning of every year, many of us make New Year's resolutions in an effort to improve ourselves. For the Day of Epiphany, we receive Star Words that are meant to give us direction for the next year, just as the star in the East guided the Magi to the newborn Jesus. When attempting to accomplish a task or complete a journey, we often repeat mantras like, "I can do this" or "The destination is worth the journey." Every Sunday, millions of Presbyterians gather to worship God through the reading, hearing, and proclamation of God's Word known to us in Jesus Christ. There is no denying that words have deep meaning in our world and possess the power to cultivate transformation.

This past April, the Curiosity and Courage Committee presented a new Mission Statement, Vision Statement, and Core Values that will serve as the foundation of our new strategic plan. These words presented to the congregation after being approved by the session represented many hours and nights the Committee spent together, poring over every single word in an effort to ensure its placement is intentional and meaningful. The result of this work is a prayerful statement of who God is calling us to be, where God is calling us to go, and how we will navigate that journey. It's the first crucial step in our strategic plan that will help us be a faithful, vibrant, and growing church for years to come.

However, there is a catch when we rely on words. The only way words have power is if we choose to live by them. If embraced, our new Mission, Vision, and Values have the potential to provide language that defines our current sense of purpose and identity, which can eventually guide us to ministries that will grow our church. If ignored, these words are only letters on a page. The direction our church goes from here is up to us and our curiosity and courage to let God define and lead us.

United in Christ, we are a community growing in faith, caring for one another, and serving our neighbors near and far. If we embrace that mission, we will be a place where people new and familiar will experience the lifelong journey of belonging, renewing, and transforming. We will experience that vision if we keep Christ at the center of our lives together, worship him authentically, pursue him in order to grow faithfully, make ourselves vulnerable enough to form real relationships, commit to experience God with other generations, make an impact through mission work, and prioritize our lives together through bold generosity of our schedule, our talents, and our finances.

My prayer is that we give these words power and meaning. May God use them to sustain, strengthen, and guide us to be the congregation we are called to be.

See you on Sunday!



Pastor Dan

Mission

United in Christ, we are a community growing in faith, caring for one another, and serving our neighbors near and far.

Vision

Belonging. Renewing. Transforming.

Values

Christ Centered

We proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection reveal God's redeeming love. Everything we do together flows from our commitment to follow Christ and share his Good News through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Authentic Worship

We gather to worship Christ in ways that are meaningful and engaging. God welcomes us as we are and transforms us through hearing and proclaiming God's Word known to us in Jesus Christ.

Growing Faithfully

We strengthen our faith together through the lifelong pursuit of Christ's ways. The Holy Spirit renews us when we gather to ask honest questions as we engage scripture and explore relevant ways to live out our faith.

Real Relationships

We welcome all to experience Christ's love here. God calls us to form intentional and genuine relationships through nurturing, encouraging, and supporting one another in all seasons of life.

Intergenerational Commitment

We are strongest when generations worship, learn, and serve together. Pursuing Christ is a lifelong journey, and every follower of every age is blessed by walking that journey together.

Meaningful Mission

We participate in the restorative work of the Holy Spirit by putting our faith into practice. When we provide hope, comfort, and service to our neighbors, we spread Christ's love in ways that make an impact.

Bold Generosity

We become the congregation God calls us to be through selfless devotion. As Christ gave himself for us, we respond with generosity by offering our time, gifts, and resources to strengthen our community and bless our neighbors.

Little Ones, Big Mission: FPC Day School is Coming

Written by Sarah Sumner, Day School Committee

Something wonderful is taking shape, quite literally, down the former music hall at First Presbyterian Church. The newly formed FPC Day School Committee is hard at work expanding our beloved Weekday School to include a full-time Day School serving children from 6 weeks to 5 years old. We anticipate opening this fall!

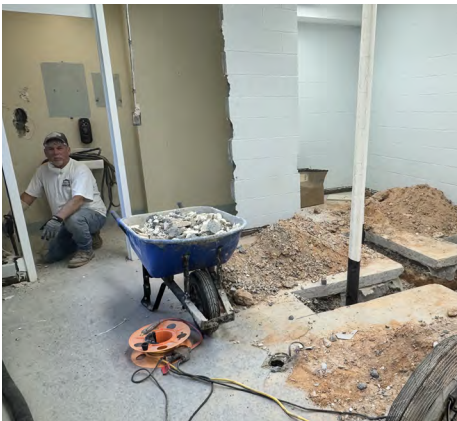
This is a mission of the heart. Any parent who has navigated the stress of pregnancy while scrambling for a spot on a waiting list, refreshing websites, showing up in person, and leaning on the kindness of friends who knew someone who knew someone understands exactly what this school will mean to young families in Gastonia. Quality, nurturing, Christ-centered care is hard to come by, and our congregation has the chance to change that.

Walls are going up in the new classrooms, a plumber is at work on fresh bathrooms, and our dedicated committee is finalizing enrollment materials, staffing plans, mudding and painting walls, and everything in between. A second parent information meeting was held on April 28th. Stephanie Blevins, Director of FPC Day School, and Becky Rowland, Assistant Director of FPC Day School answered questions. Can you feel the excitement?

As we pour out Christ's love into this community, we know it will come back to us tenfold: in laughter down our halls, in families finding a church home, and in the gift of caring for the littlest among us. Here is how you can help right now:

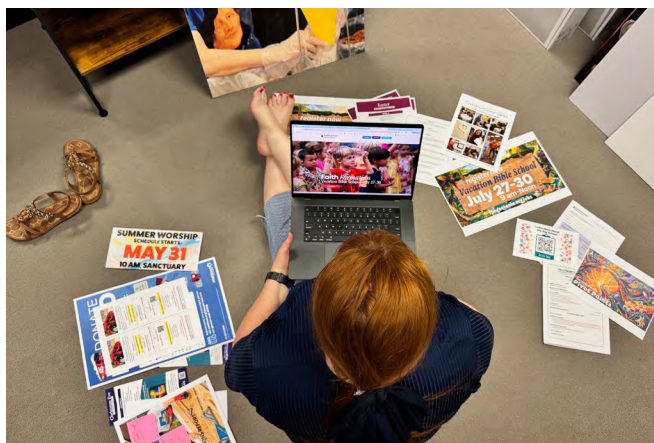
- Tell a young family. Know someone searching for childcare in Gaston County? They can join our notification list by visiting our website, www.fpcgastonia.org.
- Spread the word online. Share our Day School news on Facebook and Instagram. A single post can reach dozens of families in need.
- Leave a Google review. Search First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia, and share what this congregation means to you. A few kind words help new families find their way to us.

Thank you for being a congregation that says yes to our community. We can't wait to welcome children through our doors.



Office of Communications: Presenting a Clear and Trustworthy Identity

Written by Wendy Gem, Director of Communications



At First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia, communication is more than sharing information. It is how we live out our mission, grow in faith, care for one another, and serve our neighbors.

Clear, consistent messaging helps people find where they belong, understand our values, and participate fully in the life of the church. It also strengthens relationships, increases familiarity, and helps us move forward as one body. Every message we share reflects who we are and what we believe.

Whether it's a flyer, an email, a social media post, or an update on the website, people are forming an impression, not just of an event, but of our church as a whole. Consistency in tone, language, and visual style creates clarity, builds trust, and makes it easier for someone, whether a long-time member or a first-time visitor, to recognize what we value.

Continuity reinforces our vision of a community dedicated to *belonging, renewing, and transforming*. Centralized communications help ensure that everything we share reflects one clear identity, rather than many different voices. Over time, that consistency strengthens connection and confidence in our church and throughout the community.

Thank You Reading Soul Mates Volunteers

Written by Jill Kimbirl, Pastoral Assistant

The Mission Committee would like to thank and recognize this school year's Reading Soul Mates volunteers for their hard work, dedication, and the genuine care they have shared with students at Sherwood Elementary School and through Gaston County Public Schools.

Reading Soul Mates is a partnership with Gaston County Public Schools and the Gaston Literacy Council, Inc., supporting second-grade students who have been identified as needing help to strengthen their reading skills. This program has a proven track record of helping students make meaningful reading gains by the end of the school year. Our volunteers spend approximately 30 minutes each week working one-on-one with a student. In that short time, they do far more than practice reading—they help nurture a love of learning, build confidence, and encourage positive attitudes toward reading and books. Through these relationships, volunteers foster trust and friendship while supporting each child's creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Just as importantly, Reading Soul Mates helps students see themselves in the stories they read, making connections between the pages and their own lives in meaningful ways.

Reading Soul Mates is an ongoing ministry of First Presbyterian Church. Each school year, we invite members of our congregation to consider volunteering. It is a deeply rewarding opportunity that blesses both the children who are served and those who serve. Stay tuned this fall for more information on how you can get involved.

Planned Giving: Supporting Our Mission Together

Written by Trey Robinson

At First Presbyterian Church, we are grateful for the many ways God's work is sustained through the generosity of our congregation. While regular giving supports the day-to-day ministries of the church, there is another meaningful way to make a lasting impact: planned giving. Increasingly, we use the term legacy giving to reflect the enduring influence these gifts provide for future generations.

Legacy giving involves including the church in your long-term financial or estate plans. These gifts can take many forms, such as a bequest in your will or trust, a designation from a retirement account, gifts of real estate, or charitable trusts. Though arranged today, they become a lasting expression of faith that continues to support the mission of the church well into the future.

One important avenue for legacy giving is the Presbyterian Endowment Trust (PET), which serves as a steward of funds that are designated to support specific ministries and outreach efforts. Through PET, members can direct their generosity toward causes that reflect their personal passions and commitment to service. For example, the David Groves Fund supports local organizations that care for the hungry, the needy, and the displaced. In recent months, PET distributions have helped fund several impactful missions, including our Backpack Weekend Food Program, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Crisis Assistance Ministries, and Rise Against Hunger. These ministries are tangible expressions of Christ's love, reaching both our local community and those in need around the world. Legacy giving is more than financial planning. It is a faithful response to God's call to serve, allowing each of us to participate in the church's mission beyond our lifetime.

As you consider how you might support First Presbyterian, we invite you to reflect on how a legacy gift could express your faith and values. Together, we can ensure that the church remains a source of hope, service, and compassion for generations to come.

For more information, please contact any member of the Planned Giving Committee or David McFadden, Business Administrator, at 704-864-2651.



Presbyterian Women: FPC Women's Annual Birthday Luncheon

Written by Josie Conner

When you hear the words “birthday celebration,” what comes to mind? Is it a memory of a child’s birthday celebration, a loved one’s, or your own? Do you think of a special cake, perhaps topped with ice cream? All of these thoughts come to my mind, but my favorite is the memory of birthday celebrations in my kindergarten class in 1970. Whenever a child in the class had a birthday, my teachers always had an angel food cake with grape juice at the ready. The special birthday child got to wear a crown to celebrate their big day, and we all sang and celebrated with them. Regardless of what our memories are, it is a time to celebrate with friends and family. At FPC, we understand the importance of celebrating!



On Monday, May 4th, the women of FPC celebrated the accomplishments from this year, as well as remembering those who have passed away this year, at our annual Birthday Luncheon. While enjoying a delicious lunch, those gathered heard from Susanna Kavanaugh, Executive Director/Co-Founder of Least of These Carolinas. Least of These Carolinas provides programs and services to improve the quality of life for children affected by kinship and foster care.

The annual offering from this year’s luncheon is going to City Mission of Findlay Women and Children’s Crisis Shelter in Findlay, Ohio and to Haywood Christian Ministry Rural Food Assistance Project in Waynesville, North Carolina. Each year, the Presbyterian Women’s Council gives a gift that improves the life of our church. This year, the bride’s room is in the process of being refurbished.

Part of celebrating at this annual luncheon involves remembering the women in our church family who have passed away in the past year and acknowledging their family members present. Finally, each year concludes with honoring the new recipient of the annual Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award.

FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.fpcgastonia.org/Events

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

THE FIRST PRESS Volume 31 Issue 5 May 2026 Edition is published monthly for church members free of charge by First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia Communications Office located at 1621 E. Garrison Blvd. Gastonia, NC 28054-5130. Periodicals postage paid at First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia, NC. Permit Number 14845. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Office of Communications, First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia, 1621 E. Garrison Blvd. Gastonia, NC 28054-5130.

THE FIRST PRESS

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1621 E. GARRISON BLVD

GASTONIA NC 28054

(704) 864-2651

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PERIODICALS
US POSTAGE PAID
GASTONIA NC



Stephanie Blevins, FPC Day School Director, helping out at the PWS Fun Day event.

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
April 5	213	97	143	60
April 12	80	47	93	30
April 19	143	53	80	22
April 26	145	56	64	19