

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

February 2026 • Volume 31 • Issue 2



Messy Love

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

February often contains two special days that point us to the love we find in life. The first is Valentine's Day, which points us to the love of a spouse, significant other, family member, or a special friend. On this day, many of us may fret over who we want to be our Valentine or how we will celebrate the occasion with our Valentine. Restaurants provide us with fancy dinners in an effort to woo those looking for the perfect Valentine's Day date. With that comes the pressure to curate a perfect experience that adequately celebrates a love that is neat, tidy, and all put together.

But genuine love is anything but neat and tidy. Genuine love is found when two people commit to showing one another their true selves and accepting one another as they are. In that vulnerability, we find a glimpse of the beauty in ourselves and one another that God sees in us. In our best and worst moments, we are seen, desired, and valued. In marriage, we commit to love a spouse in sickness and in health. Parents love their children even when they misbehave. The best friendships persevere through differences and conflict. Love takes into account the messiness of our lives and shines through anyway. Genuine love is as messy as it is beautiful.

That's why I prefer Ash Wednesday (observed on the 18th this month), as the second special day in February that points to a love we find in life. This love is found in God's unyielding faithfulness to us. Despite the messiness in our broken lives that brings us to dust, God loves us enough to send us our Savior, Jesus Christ. In him, we find God's genuine love that takes into account our best and worst, accepting and redeeming us along the way. God's love is not messy; it is perfect. My prayer is that, amidst the messiness we find in our lives, relationships, and world, we would be shaped and guided by God's perfect love.

See you on Sunday!

Blessings in Christ,



Pastor Dan

Ash Wednesday

Start of the Lenten Season.

Noon — 1:00 pm
Imposition of Ashes
Chapel Portico (drive-thru)

5:15 pm
Simple Meal
Fellowship Hall

6:00 pm
Worship Service
Chapel



February
18

A Bake Sale That Refuses to be Just a Bake Sale

Editorial Written by Wendy Gem, Communications Director



With beef, ham, vegetable casseroles, pastas, pimento cheese, seafood, chicken, chili, and yes, cookies, cakes, and pies, the sheer variety of foods available for purchase on **Saturday, March 7, from 9:00 to 11:00 am in the Fellowship Hall** quickly makes it clear that this annual event is a “Bake Sale” in name only.

What it is, is a well-thought-out, highly developed, and beautifully organized system of cooperation, powered by hard work, exceptional cooking skills, and a deep passion for raising funds that support mission efforts and meet real financial needs throughout our community.

During this so-called “Bake Sale,” our Presbyterian Women move strategically from table to table with the fluidity and grace of professional ballerinas crossing a Broadway stage. It’s a sight to behold and a quiet revelation of just how talented, dedicated, and magnificent these women truly are.

But don’t take my word for it, come see it for yourself. Buy a little something while you’re here. Just know this: if you arrive late, you may miss it entirely. This event moves quickly, with purpose and precision.

If you’d like to be part of this delightful anomaly we affectionately call a “Bake Sale,” food donations may be dropped off on **Friday, March 6, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm at the Fellowship Hall**. Set your alarm, come early, and prepare to be impressed, by the food, the mission, and the remarkable Presbyterian Women who make it all possible.

If you have questions, reach out to:

Kathy Brown at kathybrown24@gmail.com or 843-283-5599 or

Donna Dickson at dmdwatz3210over@hotmail.com or 704-616-7557

College Scholarship Available

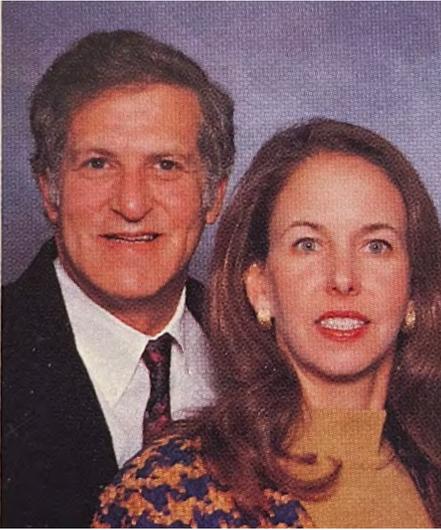
The Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina (PWNC) offers an annual scholarship to a graduating high school senior (male or female) or a student already enrolled in a 4-year undergraduate degree program at a college or university. The scholarship, valued at \$3,000, is made for one year and renewable upon request for one additional year if the student maintains a satisfactory GPA. Applicants must be members of a Presbyterian church of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. The criteria for awarding scholarships are scholastic ability, need for financial assistance, and leadership in church, school, and community. Contact Barbara Yarbrough, 704-900-4510.

Applications must be postmarked by:

February 15, 2026

Alice T. Arkin: Secret Philanthropist

Written by Barbara Voorhees, Planned Giving Committee



Philanthropy can occur serendipitously. Such was the case with Alice Taylor Arkin's philanthropy. In her will, she left her home in the Armstrong Circle neighborhood to our church, but her generous gift came as a lovely, unexpected surprise after her death in December 2024.

Why First Presbyterian? Alice loved our church, and her roots here ran deep. She joined when she was 11. Throughout her active church life, Alice served as a deacon, a member of a service circle, and taught Sunday School to preschoolers. Among other activities, she volunteered at church-sponsored blood drives and was a blood donor.

After graduating from Ashley High School, Alice attended Bauder Fashion College in Atlanta. In ensuing years, she worked at various jobs, including in a bank, as a teacher's assistant, and at Douglas Harris Jewelers.

In her early 20's, Alice married Joel Arkin, vice president of Joel-Togs, a Gastonia textile company. Joel was a member of Temple Emanuel on South Street and was the love of her life. He died at age 57.

Friends described Alice as a loving and caring person throughout her life. She loved to laugh, but she was also an independent thinker who was not afraid to speak her mind. After a struggle with health issues, Alice died a year ago at age 75. She is buried at Gaston Memorial Park in the Jewish section with her beloved Joel.

Planned giving is about honoring what is important in our lives, and what could be more important than First Presbyterian? Gifts, large or small, become extremely significant when combined with those from others and provide a lasting foundation of support for our church.

Alice did not designate her gift, and so it will be split between financial reserves and the General and Heritage Funds of our Presbyterian Endowment Trust. Our church will benefit from her generosity for years to come. We say gratefully, "Thank you, Alice."



New Day School Director

We're excited to welcome Stephanie Blevins as the new Director of FPC Day School. With more than 30 years of experience in early childhood education and leadership, Stephanie brings a strong background in both classroom learning and school operations, along with a deep love for children and families.

Stephanie is looking forward to building relationships with our church and school community and helping FPC Day School exceed expectations. As she puts it simply, "I just love God, my family, and people!"



people in crisis in Western North Carolina, across the U.S., and around the world. Your gift becomes a tangible expression of care when it's needed most.

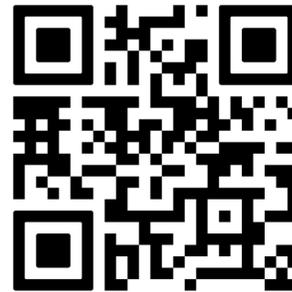
For many years, Presbyterian Women have supported this mission through Blanket Sunday, and this year we will observe it on **March 8 as part of Women's Sunday**.

How you can help: Write your check to FPC and include "BLANKET SUNDAY" in the memo line. Envelopes will also be available during worship.

Written by Linda Lamb

Sometimes the most meaningful gifts are the simplest ones. A blanket may seem small, but for someone recovering from a disaster, forced to leave home quickly, or living through uncertainty, it offers warmth, comfort, and a powerful reminder: you are not alone.

Through Church World Service (CWS), blankets and other essential items, like hygiene kits, cleanup buckets, school kits, and welcome backpacks are delivered to



You can also scan the QR code to donate now.

LENTEN LUNCH SCHEDULE

Churches in the community are hosting Lenten lunches and worship every Wednesday at noon during Lent, with donations supporting Least of These Carolinas. If you require transportation, please gather under the Church Portico at 11:30 am. Cost: \$8/person.

DATE	HOST
Feb 25	FPC Gastonia
Mar 4	Holy Trinity
Mar 11	First ARP
Mar 18	First Baptist
Mar 25	FUMC

Where:
Earl Scruggs Center

Roadrunners Day Trip

Thursday,
February 26
9:00 am to 4:00 pm

Contact:
Connie Gesser, 704-473-6430

Cost: \$12/person, \$8/seniors



One Simple Morning Makes a Global Impact

Hunger can feel overwhelming, but this project reminds us that faithful action makes a difference. Through our partnership with Rise Against Hunger, we will package thousands of meals for people facing hunger around the world.

This experience matters because it allows us to live our faith in a tangible way. Serving side by side strengthens our sense of purpose and reminds us that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. In just a few hours, your hands help bring hope, nourishment, and dignity to others, and deepen your own connection to God and community.

We need at least 150 volunteers to make this impact possible. Join us on **Sunday, March 22 at 11:00 am in the Fellowship Hall.** There will be people available to help you register, if needed, beginning mid-February.

What's in it for you?

This is one of those rare events that fills your heart while you're using your hands. It's fun, fast-paced, and meaningful, an easy way to serve with your family, friends, Sunday school class, or someone you've been meaning to get to know better. The room is full of teamwork, laughter, and purpose.

Everyone can help!

No experience needed, and there's a role for every age:

- **Meal Assembly** (scoop, measure, and pack)
- **Runners** (deliver bags to sealers)
- **Sealers** (operate sealing machines)
- **Loaders** (box meals and load the truck)

Help change lives in two short hours.



Sign up today by scanning the QR code.



Questions?

David Pacetti at 704-868-6376 or dpacetti78@gmail.com

Welcome New Members



Connor Morgan & Laura Anderson



Lynn Stewart



Marge Surdock

Happy Retirement Gloria



Gloria Hickson retired as the Chair of the Pastoral Care Ministry in December. The Pastoral Care Ministry made an honorarium gift to the Sherwood School Reading Program. Thank you, Gloria, for your many years of dedication, leadership, and service. We pray God's continued blessings for you.

Congratulations Lynne Hathcock



Lynne is the Employee of the Month at Hornets Sports and Entertainment. A dedicated member of the Spectrum Center team since 2008, Lynne supports everything from Hornets games to concerts and college basketball, all while bringing professionalism, joy, and pride to her "fun part-time job."

FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.fpcgastonia.org/Events

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1621 E. GARRISON BLVD

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(704) 864-2651

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Join us each Wednesday at 5:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall for Wednesday Night Alive.

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
January 4	123	69	76	27
January 11	157	60	68	28
January 18	63	68	66	32
January 25	—	—	—	—