

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

March 2025 • Volume 30 • Issue 3



Practice Provides Preparation

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

I know an athletic trainer who specializes in preparing athletes to excel in a wide variety of sports like football, volleyball, golf, basketball, and soccer. One day, I asked him how he helped clients with such different athletic needs. Did he take time to learn skills from each of these sports? He told me that his success as a trainer did not come from teaching them specific skills relating to their individual sports. That is the job of their coaches, he told me. Instead, he boiled his work down to four broad practices to help each athlete succeed:

1. **Core strength** that provides enough power to accomplish the tasks required of them.
2. **Balance & flexibility** to prevent injury.
3. **Hand/eye coordination** to increase response time to expected and unexpected challenges they meet when competing.
4. **Cardio endurance** to ensure strong performance when fatigue sets in.

Listening to his answer made me think of all the spiritual practices and disciplines we can employ to help us maintain our faith in all circumstances we face in life. For instance:

1. **Worship** reminds us that our power derives from an eternally loving God whose power created and sustains all of creation, including all of us.
2. **Committing to regular prayer** helps us learn to discern God's voice from our own, preventing us from injuring ourselves by making decisions that lead to self-inflicted pain.
3. **Studying God's Word**, both individually and with others, teaches us to see our lives and the world around us through the lens of our faith, and how to respond to different circumstances we face in a way that is true to our faith.
4. **Participating in the life of the Church** provides us with a support network of fellow Christians who support us in good and challenging times alike, providing us the endurance to pursue Christ for the entirety of our lives.

Practicing spiritual disciplines helps us be prepared for anything we face in life. As we begin the Lenten season, I encourage us to reflect on what spiritual disciplines we can improve upon. Perhaps we can make worship a higher priority in life. Maybe we can commit to praying at a certain time every day or joining a Bible study at Church. God may be leading us to get to know our brothers and sisters at Church. Wherever we are, I pray we use this season to grow closer to Christ, strengthen our faith, and use every opportunity to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. If you are looking for ways to incorporate more spiritual disciplines in life, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

See you at Church!



Pastor Dan

Presbyterian Women Spring Gathering

By: Josie Conner and Cathy Parrott

On **Saturday, April 5, 2025**, First Presbyterian Church will have the privilege of hosting the Annual Spring Gathering for the Western Presbytery. The women of the Western Presbytery gather twice yearly in the fall and again in the spring. The Western Presbytery represents ninety-four congregations that cover as far east in our state as Gastonia, as far north as Banner Elk, and as far west as the North Carolina/Tennessee border. These gatherings provide the opportunity for women representing all of these congregations to come together for a time of business and fellowship.

Each gathering begins with a business meeting, at which time all women who have passed away during the previous year will be remembered. There is a guest speaker and presentations on various topics. This year, the offering goes to the Children's Hope Alliance. "*Children's Hope Alliance is committed to helping families of all shapes, sizes, and definitions through a vast array of community-based services. Their comprehensive programs give hope to North Carolina's children and families by providing hope for a safe home, a pathway to healing, and a healthy start.*" The women of the Western Presbytery are involved in circles in their churches and Bible studies, are



active in their communities, and contribute in ways large and small to impact the world.

The Purpose of Presbyterian Women is:

Forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study, support the mission of the church worldwide, work for justice and peace, build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (USA), and witness to the promise of God's Kingdom. Register at fpcgastonia.org/gathering.

The **Reverend Grace Boyer will speak at the Spring Gathering**, and will address "*Finding Resilience, Joy, and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*" as an introduction to our [2025-2026 Horizon Bible Study](#). The Reverend Boyer is a chaplain at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Asheville. She is a graduate of the College of William and Mary, the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Columbia Theological Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary. She grew up in South Korea as a child of missionary parents.

MARCH 2025 S.O.C.K.S. COLLECTION



S.O.C.K.S. (Serving Our Community with Kindness Springwood)

Current food needs:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| •canned meats | •potatoes (instant/canned) |
| •soup | •rice |
| •fruits and vegetables | •grits and oatmeal, |
| •dried pasta | •cereals |
| •spaghetti sauce | •pancake mix and syrup |
| •macaroni and cheese, | •jelly |

Drop off contributions in the boxes located near the Fellowship Hall or the Reception Desk.

APPLY NOW

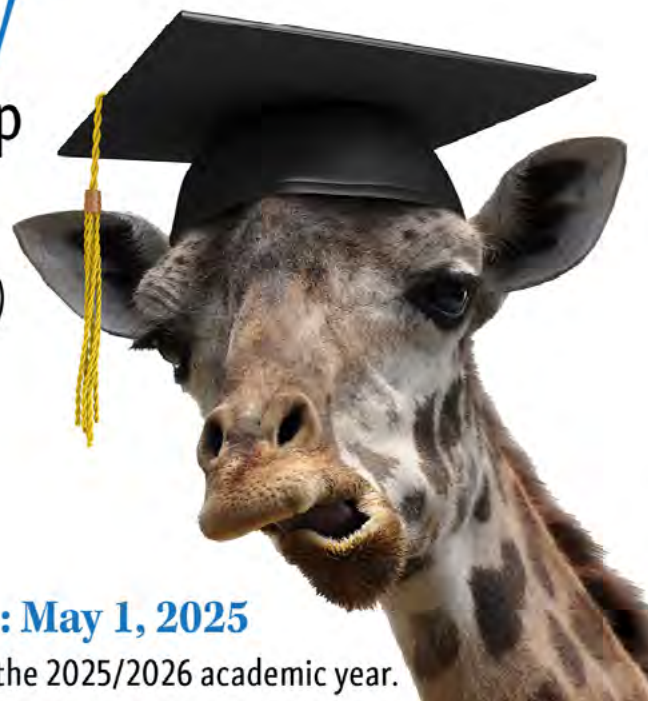
For a FPC Scholarship

New Scholarships (*first-time applicants*)
Renewal Scholarships (*returning applicants*)



Deadline: May 1, 2025

The FPC Scholarship Fund is accepting applications for the 2025/2026 academic year.



Be the Hands That Feed: Rise Against Hunger

Written by Wendy Gem in collaboration with Craig Whitley

Imagine a world where no child goes to bed hungry. At First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia, we believe in living out our faith through action, and on **April 6th at 11:00 am**, we have a chance to do just that. We invite you to participate in a powerful movement of compassion and service by volunteering for our Rise Against Hunger Meal Packing Event.

What Is Rise Against Hunger?

Rise Against Hunger is an international mission dedicated to eradicating hunger by distributing nutritious, shelf-stable meals to communities in crisis. With just a few hours of service, we can help prepare thousands of life-sustaining meals that will be sent to children and families in need worldwide.

Why Does This Matter?

Hunger is a crisis that affects millions, but the solution is within our reach. These meal packages are more than just food—they are hope. They nourish bodies, fuel education, and create community opportunities to thrive. And it all starts with willing hands and open hearts, just like yours.

How Can You Help?

No experience is required! Whether you're 6 or 85, there's a role for you:

Meal Assembly: Work at a station to measure, scoop, and fill food packages.

Runners: Take bags to the sealers to close using special machines.

Sealers: Operate machines and seal the packages of food.

Loaders: Pack the finished packages into boxes and load them onto the truck.

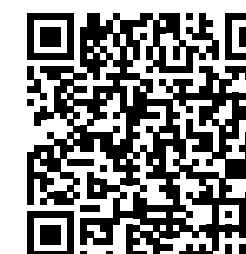
Beyond the impact we make globally, this is an opportunity to connect with your church family, build friendships, and be part of something significant. The energy in the room is contagious—laughter, teamwork, and a shared sense of purpose make this event a highlight of the year.



We encourage professionals, retirees, families, and Sunday school groups to sign up. *If you can give just two hours, you can help change lives.*

Will you answer the call?

Sign up today! Scan the QR code below to reserve your spot. Let's put our faith into action and make a difference, one meal at a time. Contact Charlie Grissom at (704) 907-2993.



From Wilderness Glory

LENT AND EASTER
FOR EVERYONE

N. T. WRIGHT

Wednesday Night Alive

Spring 2025 Schedule
Time: 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Mar. 12	<i>Prologue: Jesus in the wilderness</i>
	<i>Week 1: Jesus among the crowds</i>
	Rev. Daniel Commerford
Mar. 19	<i>Week 2: Jesus in prayer</i>
	Mr. Charlie Grissom
Mar. 26	<i>Week 3: Jesus among friends</i>
	<i>Week 4: Jesus among enemies</i>
	Mrs. Coleman Efird
Apr. 2	<i>Week 5: Jesus in the city</i>
	<i>Holy Week: Jesus on the cross</i>
	Mr. Charles Gallman
Apr. 9	<i>Easter Week: Jesus in glory</i>
	Rev. Brad Simpson

*Contact Mary Taneti if you need childcare.

FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.fpcgastonia.org/Events

Cultivating the Future of FPC Gastonia

Written by John Mudd

The future of our church depends on its ability to evolve while remaining true to its core mission of faith, service, and community. As times change, FPC Gastonia must adapt to maintain its relevance, attract new members, and provide meaningful spiritual guidance. There has never been a more important time to make a lasting impact on the church and consider including the church in your estate plans.

One of the most crucial aspects of maintaining our church's future is fostering a strong sense of community. As we actively engage with the broader local community through outreach programs, charitable initiatives, and social gatherings, we can nurture a sustainable and lasting presence for many generations to come. Hosting events such as community service days, food drives, and mentorship programs can create meaningful connections and encourage participation.

Additionally, we can continue to develop and expand support groups for various demographics, such as youth, seniors, and families. Providing spaces where people can share their experiences and grow in faith together strengthens the church's role as a pillar of support and fellowship.

Another aspect to consider as we move forward is the importance of technology and using it to connect with members both near and far. Live-streaming services, offering online Bible studies, and maintaining an active presence on social media platforms help keep congregations engaged. A well-maintained website with updated event schedules, sermons, and community resources ensures accessibility and outreach to a broader audience. This will only further cement FPC Gastonia's importance within the community and allow the church to continue to flourish in the future.

Strong leadership is fundamental to the sustainability of our church. Encouraging leadership development among members ensures continuity and growth. By continuing to invest in training programs, mentorship initiatives, and theological education, FPC Gastonia will better equip the younger generations to become future leaders both within and beyond our community.

Empowering young leaders and volunteers with opportunities to engage in active worship, organize events, and contribute to decision-making processes fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to spreading the word of the Lord.

Maintaining the future of FPC Gastonia requires adapting worship styles and ministries to meet the evolving needs of the congregation. Understanding and addressing the needs of different generations, cultural backgrounds, and spiritual journeys create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel welcome and valued.

Ensuring FPC Gastonia's future requires community engagement, technological adaptation, leadership development, financial responsibility, and flexible ministry approaches. By remaining faithful to its core mission while embracing necessary changes, our church can and will continue to thrive for generations to come. A forward-thinking, inclusive, and spiritually enriching church will sustain itself and inspire growth and transformation in the lives of its members and beyond.

One of the most beneficial ways to support the future of our church and leave a legacy of love for generations is by including FPC Gastonia in your estate plans. For more information about planning your legacy, please get in touch with the Church Business Administrator, a member of the Planned Giving Committee, or an 1882 Giving Circle Ambassador.



Scan the QR code to download the 2025 Planned Giving brochure.

Announcements

Order Your Easter Lilies! March 9 – April 13, 2025

If you would like to honor or memorialize someone with a lily presented as a witness to the Resurrection of Christ, complete the order form (available March 9) and return to the Church **BY APRIL 13, 2025**.

Cost: \$15

Lenten Lunch Schedule

Various churches in the community will host a Lenten lunch at noon on Wednesdays throughout Lent. Meals will be available at a cost of \$8 per person. An offering will be taken during the lunch. If you require transportation, please gather under the Church Portico at 11:30 am.

March 12	FPC Gastonia	Cramerton Middle School Choir
March 19	First ARP	Rev. R. Dwayne Burks (FBC)
March 26	FBC Gastonia	Kim Wheeler, Executive Director, CAM
April 2	Holy Trinity Lutheran	Pastor Ryan Henkel (Holy Trinity Lutheran)
April 9	FUMC	Seminarian Cody Carpenter (Holy Trinity Lutheran)

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

THE FIRST PRESS Volume 30 Issue 3 March 2025 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 of Gastonia, 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



**This year’s bake sale was a “Sweet Success.”
Congratulations ladies! Well done.**

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
February 2	141	102	54	27
February 9	213	201	—	—
February 16	104	118	72	43
February 23	114	97	86	36

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