The First Press

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Final Report on the 227th General Assembly

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

[Senior Pastor's Note: Since participating in our General Assembly this past June, I have preached a sermon with my reflections, shared with the Session my experience, and also provided a summary during a Wednesday Night Alive this fall. What I haven't provided was a written reflection for posterity. To that end, below is the report I provided to the Presbytery of Western North Carolina.]

This summer, I served as a commissioner to the 227th General Assembly that met in Milwaukee, WI. I spent two weeks away from my family, congregation, and rhythm of life and ministry that normally occupies my time to discern how God is moving in the wider church. It was an honor to serve alongside several other fantastic commissioners from our Presbytery. Specifically, I served on the Climate and Environmental Justice Committee that considered five overtures that were presented to the Assembly. In those two weeks, we worshiped together, deliberated overtures of serious weight, proposed and debated amendments (and amendments to amendments), agreed, disagreed, and made votes while discerning what God is saying to us through it all. Beyond the actual votes that were cast, proposals to our constitution that will be considered by our presbyteries, and statements on what God's Spirit is saying to our nation and world, I offer the following brief reflections on my time at General Assembly:

The Spirit is active in Christ's Church

Most of my call is focused on discerning how the Spirit is calling the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia to be a faithful witness to one another and the community as it embraces and shares the Good News of Jesus Christ. While that continues to be a passion of mine, it was a blessing to see how God's Spirit is moving in every congregation in our denomination across the world. Hearing stories of different churches meeting and overcoming challenges, finding new and innovative ways to serve their respective communities, and continue to be Christ's hands and feet in our world inspired me and left me feeling grateful to be a part of God's story with our tradition.

Christ's Church is both connectional and hyper contextual

On the one hand, we are a connectional tradition that proclaims a sense of unity in God's Spirit that spreads across every congregation of our denomination. On the other, every congregation has its unique challenges and opportunities when responding faithfully to God's call. This tension often creates challenges when making decisions or statements that impact an entire denomination. I reported to my congregation that many votes passed by roughly an 80% to 20% margin, and I found myself in both the majority and minority of those votes. I struggled at times to understand how some votes would impact my congregation or community. I've also walked with members of my congregation who struggle to discern what it means when their denomination makes a statement with which they disagree. In a world where we often feel more connected than ever, I still find that each congregation's sense of call is often hyper contextual to its community setting. How we remain connected while faithfully pursuing our individual and congregational sense of call remains a challenge for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Our hope is ultimately built on Christ, not our accomplishments

We gathered, worshiped, prayed, discerned and debated, voted, and now seek to abide by what was decided. Much of our discernment will yield fruit. Some of it will not succeed and need to be reconsidered. Through it all, Christ continues to walk with us and speak to us, guiding us to his way, truth, and life. More than anything our General Assembly accomplishes, my hope remains in Jesus.

See you at Church!



Pastor Dan

2026 Trunk or Treat

Photography by Rachel Commerford

























Bold Generosity: Ready for What's Next?

Written by Michelle Melton, Giving Committee Member

You will be made rich in everything so that your generosity will spill over in every direction. Through us, your generosity is at work, inspiring praise and thanksgiving to God. —2 Corinthians 9:11

Generosity is more than a financial commitment; it is an extension of our worship. Through generous hearts and faithful stewardship, we glorify God and join the Spirit in building God's Kingdom in our church, our community, and the world.

At First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia, the evidence of past generosity is everywhere. Annual gifts and pledges support children and youth, faith formation, music, fellowship, intergenerational gatherings, community outreach, welcoming spaces, ministers and staff, and the daily operations that keep our doors open. These ministries enrich our lives today and prepare us to serve faithfully tomorrow.

This year's annual giving theme, "Bold Generosity," invites each of us to consider how God is calling us to respond. We are in different seasons of life, with different responsibilities and resources, but we share a desire to grow as disciples, build meaningful relationships, and contribute to something greater than ourselves.

At First Presbyterian Church, we stand at the edge of what's next in how God's Kingdom is lived out among the people around us. Now is the time to respond boldly — through faithful giving, dedicated service, and a shared vision of what it means to be the church our community appreciates.

How will you participate with God in shaping what that looks like at First Presbyterian Church?
Our goal for Bold Generosity is 191 households pledging $1.6 million to support the church's ministries and operations in 2027. **Celebration Sunday is November 15**, when we hope to celebrate strong participation and give Session the confidence to plan responsibly and faithfully for the year ahead. Every faithful response matters.

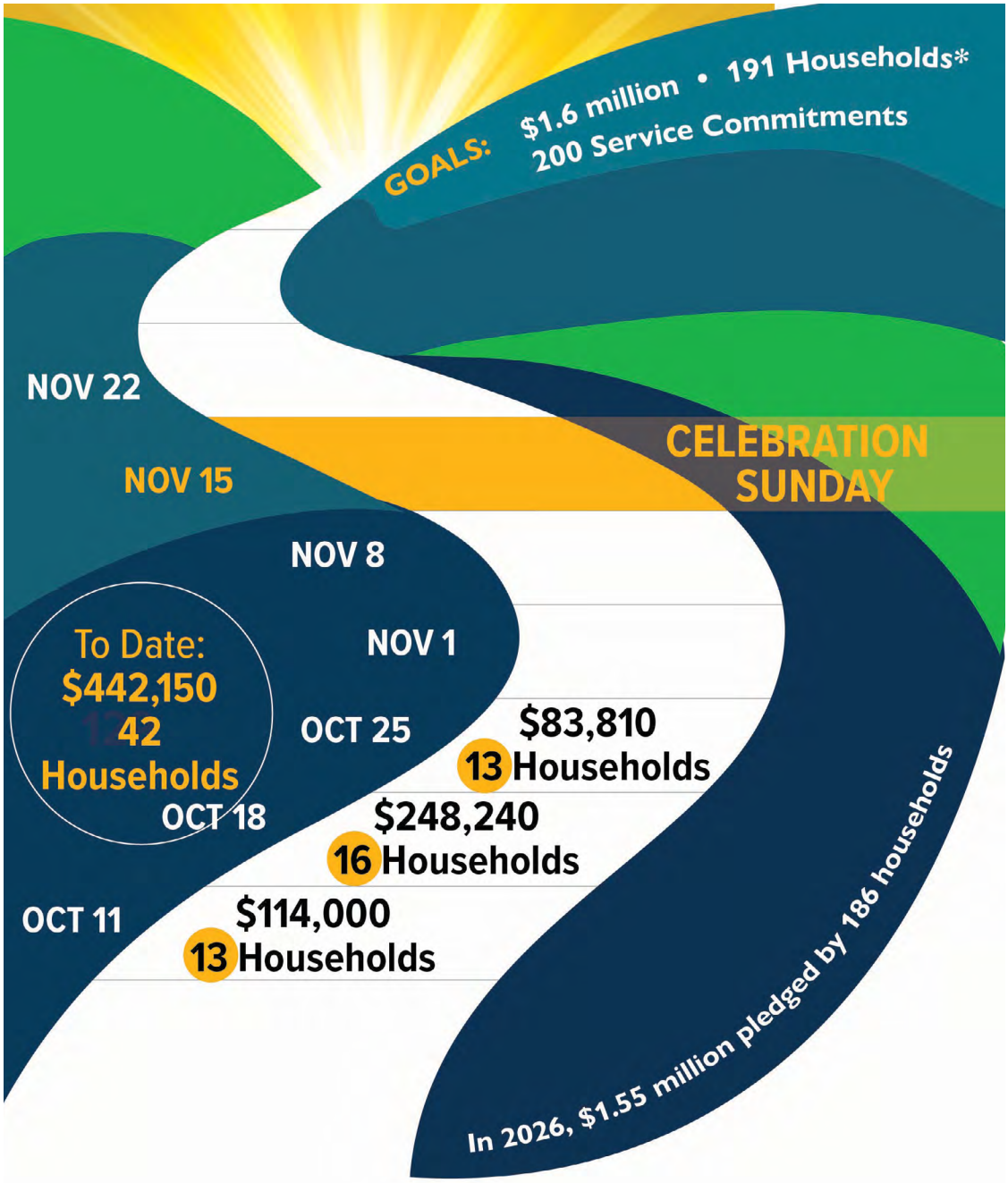
Whether you have pledged before or are considering a first commitment, your participation strengthens our congregation. A pledge is not about pressure or performance. It is a statement of faith and a way to participate in something enduring. Together, our gifts allow us to worship joyfully, care for one another compassionately, and reach out generously.

Please prayerfully consider your pledge for 2027. You may return your confidential pledge to the Church Administrator in one of the bright orange envelopes or pledge online through Realm or at www.fpcgastonia.org. For your convenience, you can also set up or renew a monthly automatic bank draft.

Through your presence, prayers, service, and bold generosity, First Presbyterian Church will be ready for what God is calling us to do next with faith, courage, and gratitude.

Bold Generosity Co-Chairs:
Davidson and Caroline Hobson

Giving Committee Members:
Co-Chairs LeeAnn Harris and David Ratchford; David Conner; Michelle Melton; John Mudd, Secretary; Hunter Peak; Jay Rawls; Trey Robinson, Vice Chair; David Rogers; Coerte Voorhees; Marshall Walker; and David McFadden, Business Administrator



GIVING OF OUR FINANCES, GIFTS, TIME, AND TESTIMONIES WITH

BOLD Generosity 2027

PLEDGE TODAY

ANNUAL GIVING FOR OUR CHURCH'S MISSION AND OPERATIONS

*First Presbyterian Church is comprised of approximately 425 households

More than a Basket, a Gift of Hope

From Josie Conner

In Matthew 19:14, Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Jesus was clear about how to treat children. Black Mountain Home for Children meets the needs of children at all stages of their growing-up years when they need out-of-home placement. "From infants born prematurely or with addictions to young adults working toward an educational or career goal, the ministry provides a safe, supportive home for youth of all ages and stages."



First Presbyterian Church has a long history of supporting Black Mountain Home (BMH). One way our church family has supported BMH's important ministries is by providing theme baskets to auction at the Annual Fall Festival. The Women of the Church have continually supported this mission. Barbara Yarbrough, chair of missions for Women's Council, created 15 baskets and procured a stunning agate necklace with a labradorite pendant set in 18k plated gold, 18k gold-plated earrings donated by Becky Voorhees (valued at $200), and an infant hand-smocked dress made by Ibby Page (valued at $75). The total value of the baskets that Barbara created is $1,560.00. The basket themes for this year included:



- Sam I Am Loves Green Eggs and Ham
- Tailgate Time
- Meet Me at the Pool
- Disney Princess
- Entertain in Style
- You Had Me at Pickleball
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar
- Everybody Loves Ice Cream
- Easy Peasy Lemon Squeezy
- Beginning Baker
- Disney Halloween
- Home is Where My Honey Bee Is



The staff at BMH keeps saying, "FPC baskets are the best!" This year's auction was held online, and the festival was canceled due to bad weather.

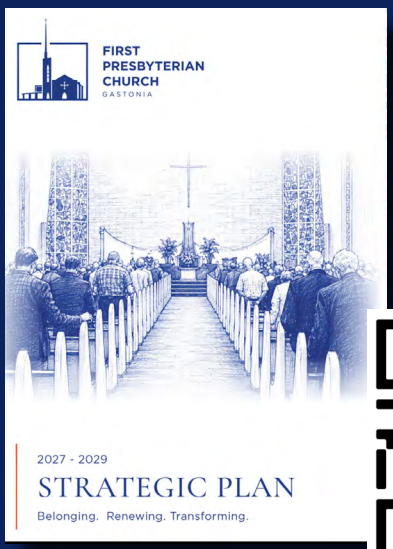
Announcements and Upcoming Events

Veterans Day LUNCHEON

Wednesday,
November 11
Noon, Fellowship Hall

Our guest speaker will be Teresa Morris.

No RSVP Required.
Cost: Honorees/free | Guests: $8/person.





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The 148th Western North Carolina Presbytery Meeting on October 27th.

Service Views and Attendance

	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
Date	**Service**	**Livestream**	**Service**	**Livestream**
October 4	102	93	54	30
October 11	92	134	54	26
October 18	94	70	82	37
October 25	80	38	60	44