The First Press

First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia July 2026 • Volume 31 • Issue 7

Preparation for Ministry Team Reflections

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

For the last three years, I have served on the Presbytery of Western North Carolina's Preparation for Ministry Team (PMT), which guides those in our presbytery who are discerning how God may be calling them to ordained ministry as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. Every month, I meet either through ZOOM or at our Presbytery's office in Morganton to visit with these candidates, some of whom are just beginning their journey, while others are at the end of the process. During my time on this committee, I have been surprised by how much I have learned about the way God works in our church and in the world. As I conclude my service at the end of the year, below are some of my reflections of my time serving on the PMT.

1. God calls all people to ministry. Most candidates in our presbytery begin by seeking a path to ordained ministry, but that does not mean they end up serving as an ordained minister. While God calls certain people to ordained ministry, God calls and relies on all of us to be messengers of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Every time we show someone love and compassion; every time we take time to help those less fortunate; and every time we do anything to strengthen the faith of a brother or sister in Christ, we are doing ministry. God does not only call pastors and elders. God calls all of us to do the work of ministry.

2. God calls many different types of people to ordained ministry. Many of us may have expectations of what an ordained minister should be like, but my time on the PMT has taught me that there is no specific personality requirement for ordained ministry. We have both male and female candidates. We have candidates who are fresh out of college and others who are pursuing their call after spending decades in another profession. Some have clear gifts for preaching and leading worship, others have gifts suited for pastoral ministry, and others have gifts of leadership, strategy, and vision. We walk with candidates who are extroverted and outgoing, and others who are introverted and quiet. Just as it is throughout scripture, God calls a wide variety of people to ordained ministry.

3. God calls people to many different types of ordained ministry. It shouldn't be a surprise that, as diverse as the people who are called to ordained ministry, so too are the ministries to which they are called! Most think of an ordained minister as a pastor or associate pastor of a congregation. While that is often the case, there are many different types of ministries that require an ordained minister. Candidates have become ordained chaplains at hospitals, prisons, police and fire departments, and nursing homes. They become educators who serve at high schools, colleges, seminaries, and libraries. Others become ministers who work at various non-profit and mission agencies around the world. While this list is not exhaustive, it shows the many different places that those following God's call may go to serve.

4. God continues to prepare and equip those who are called to ordained ministry. This is perhaps my favorite part of the work I do on the PMT. I love to see how God continues to work in the hearts of those who are discerning their call. The average ordination process for a candidate is four years, and it is amazing to see the spiritual growth and maturity that occurs during that time! Looking back on my own process, I can identify where God worked in my heart, which helped me get to the point here I was ready to become an ordained minister (as much as anyone can be ready for such a call). And just as God prepares and equips those to become ordained ministers, God also continues to prepare and equip them after they become ordained ministers. No one can do the work of God's ministry alone. That is why we are given the gift of God's Spirit, as well as the gift of brothers and sisters in Christ who help and support us along the way.

I thank God for my season serving on our presbytery's PMT. As all of us discern where God may be leading us, please pray for those who are discerning their own call to ordained ministry.

See you at church!

Pastor Dan

Summer Ice Cream Social

Sunday,

July 19, 2026

6:00 pm

Fellowship Hall

Cost: Free

Scan the QR Code

APNC Update

Written by Craig Whitley

The APNC is pleased to report that our search is well underway. Our timeline thus far:

January 12, 2026

First meeting with Presbyter Rev. Dr. Byron Wade for our initial training.

January 27, 2026 – April 8, 2026

Regular in-person meetings and additional collaboration through email, working on refining our Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP) and the job profile and characteristics desired.

April 7, 2026

Our MDP was approved by the PWNC Committee on Ministry on and our MDP went live on our denomination's Church Leadership Connection (CLC) website.

April 28, 2026

We met to review the first matches. Some were automated matches, and some were self-referrals.

May 6, May 18, and June 2

We continue to meet to report on our networking efforts to discover more candidates. We also updated our MDP to include our new Vision and Mission statements.

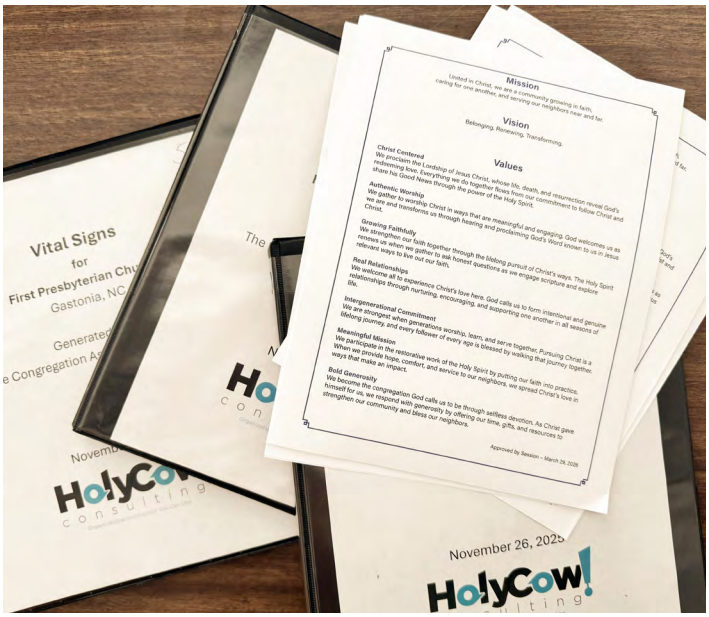
While all discussions and candidates must remain confidential, we encourage the entire congregation to be in prayer that we will be led by the Spirit to find the candidate God has planned for us. If you have ideas or suggestions for the committee, we encourage you to reach out.

Committee Members:

Craig Whitley and Lee DuBois (Co-Chairs), Tim Efird, Kathy Gallman
Lenise Melton, Kelly Pacetti, Barbara Winkles

Telling the Story of Who We Are

Written by Wendy Gem, Director of Communications



As First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia continues the work of discerning our future through the *Holy Cow assessment* and *Listening Groups*, you may notice something changing about how we communicate.

That change is intentional.

Communication is often thought of as newsletters, bulletins, social media posts, or announcements. Those are certainly part of the work, but communication is much more than sharing information. It is one of the ways we build and strengthen our church.

The *Holy Cow assessment* and *Listening Groups* gave us valuable insight into who we are as a congregation, what we value most, and where we are being called to grow. As church leaders prayerfully discern next steps, communication plays an important role in helping us move through that process together.

Every ministry, every event, and every initiative depends on people understanding what we are doing, why it matters, and how they can participate. When communication is clear, consistent, and connected to our mission, it creates alignment. It helps us move together rather than in separate directions.

That means you'll see us placing greater emphasis on connecting our ministries to our mission, ***United in Christ, we are a community growing in faith, caring for one another, and serving our neighbors near and far.*** Rather than simply promoting events, we want to tell the story of how those opportunities help us live out our vision of ***Belonging. Renewing. Transforming.***

This approach also reflects our core values. Whether we're inviting someone to worship, sharing a mission opportunity, celebrating intergenerational ministry, or encouraging generosity, every message should point back to who we are as a Christ-centered community.

Good communication isn't about producing more content. It's about creating greater clarity. It's about helping people see the connections between worship, discipleship, relationships, mission, and generosity so that every part of church life feels like part of one shared purpose.

As we continue this season of listening, discernment, and growth, communication will continue to evolve alongside our congregation. My goal is not simply to keep everyone informed, but to help our church understand where God may be leading us, why that matters, and how each of us has a place in the journey.

When communication is aligned with our mission and values, it becomes more than information. It becomes one of the ways we strengthen our community, deepen our faith, and move forward together.

I'd love to hear your thoughts about this series on communication. Are there topics you'd like to see explored? Questions about how we communicate as a church? Feedback on what's been helpful? Your perspective helps shape future articles and ensures our communication continues to serve our congregation well.

Reach out to me at **communications@fpcgastonia.org**.

Help a Child Turn the Page-Christmas In July

You can donate new, hard-backed books from the list and place them 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 or the lock box under the tree.

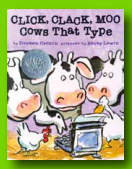
Help a Child Turn the Page

by Donating a Book for

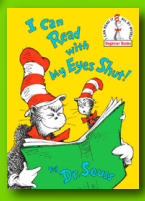
“Christmas in July”

Book List:

BUFFALO FLUFFALO
by Bess Kalb

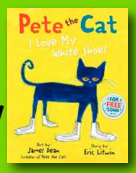


CLICK, CLACK MOO COWS THAT TYPE
by Doreen Cronin



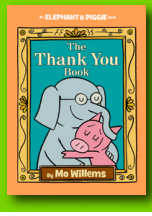
I CAN READ WITH MY EYES SHUT
by Dr. Seuss

MAYBE
by Kobi Yamada



PETE THE CAT
I LOVE MY WHITE SHOES
by Eric Litwin, Kimberly Dean, James Dean

THE RAINBOW FISH
by Marcus Pfister



THE THANK YOU BOOK
by Mo Willems

Scan the QR Code to donate online.

Through the Lens

Fun Day at PWS

Claude Hathcock with the Roadrunners at the NC Transportation Museum

David Dickson at the Ghost Peppers Game

Baptism with Laura Anderson, Ellie Morgan, and Connor Morgan

Young Presbyterians at Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens

Proud Dad Showing Confirmand's Stole

Youth Rafting at Whitewater Center

Catching a Foul Ball at the Ghost Peppers Game

Roadrunners Touring the Schwab Car at NC Transportation Museum

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Majestic birds: A family of hawks nesting at FPC.

Service Views and Attendance

COMBINED SUMMER SERVICE

Date	Livestream
June 7	54
June 14	56
June 21	34
June 28	74