

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia

April 2026 • Volume 31 • Issue 4



Investing in Our Youth

The Mystery of PW Circles

Written by Josie Conner and Susanne Current

What exactly is a circle?

A circle is a small group of women, typically part of the Presbyterian Women (PW) organization, who meet regularly for Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and service. It is a simple, meaningful way to build relationships and grow in faith together. Circles serve as the primary connection point for women within the local congregation, fostering a supportive community of faith.

What makes circles different from Bible study?

Circles include Bible study, but they offer more than that. In addition to studying scripture, circles create space for fellowship, prayer, and sharing life. They also stay connected to the broader women's ministry, with circle leaders sharing updates, opportunities, and ways to get involved. Some circles follow the Presbyterian Women curriculum, while others rotate leaders or explore different ones, but the heart of a circle is both spiritual growth and meaningful connection.

What's the difference between active circles and service circles?

Active circles gather regularly in person for fellowship, Bible study, and hands-on mission work. They meet at various times and locations, including the church, homes, and community spaces. Service circles, on the other hand, do not meet in person. Instead, members stay connected through email, phone, and other communication while continuing to support the mission and outreach of the women's ministry.

Can women choose their own circle?

Yes. We help connect each woman to a circle that fits her schedule, preferences, and sense of community, so she can find the right place to belong.

What does "each circle has its own personality" really mean?

Each circle reflects the season of life and shared experiences of the women in it. Some groups include younger women building careers and raising families, while others include women whose children are grown and who may be caring for aging parents or enjoying "grandparenthood." While every circle looks a little different, they all share the same heart, a place of connection, support, and belonging. It is a community where women walk alongside one another through both celebrations and challenges.

Beyond circles, what is the bigger purpose or mission?

Circles connect us, but the mission goes further. Together, women support the life of the church through service, events, and outreach that make a real difference.

How do these activities make a difference in the church or community?

They matter because they change lives. Through events like the Bake Sale and Blanket Sunday, women of the church raised over \$10,000 this year alone to support mission and outreach. The total of \$12,600, including additional contributions, will address needs locally and beyond. From providing blankets that offer warmth and shelter to supporting children through outreach partnerships, each effort meets real needs. Even when challenges arise, like last year's canceled Black Mountain Home Fall Festival, the commitment to serve continued, raising over \$3,000 to support children in need. This is faith in action, tangible, meaningful, and life-giving.

Faith in Action: A Weekend With Presbyterian Women

Written by Josie Conner

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its parts form one body, so it is with Christ.” Over the weekend of March 6th-8th, the women of First Presbyterian Church lived out *1 Corinthians 12:12* through participation in the Women of the Church Bake Sale and Women’s Sunday (Blanket Sunday).

Beginning on **Friday, March 6th**, volunteers collected and arranged soups, casseroles, breads, pies, cookies, cakes, and many more delicious items for the Women of the Church Bake Sale, prepared by members of FPC.

The sale, which is the major fundraising event for Presbyterian Women, was held on **Saturday, March 7th**. This year’s bake sale, while filling the freezers and tummies of customers, raised \$7,683.00 and was the culmination of many hours of hard work by the Bake Sale chairs, Kathy Brown and Donna Dickson. The funds made from our annual Bake Sale support many local charities, including Crisis Assistance Ministry (CAM), Black Mountain Home for Children, Least of These, Boys and Girls Club, and many more. Last year, our benevolences totaled a little over \$11,000.



On **Sunday, March 8th**, FPC celebrated Women of the Church Sunday. Members of the Women’s Council, Diaconate, choir, Thrive band, and Girl Scouts, as well as youth, participated in leadership and service at both Thrive and Traditional Services. Mary Taneti, Director of Faith Formation, delivered the sermon, “Walking Faithfully Before God,” as part of our “Promises Made, Promises Kept” sermon series, which helped us to understand that God’s faithfulness is unchanged and unwavering.

Girl Scouts and youth representatives delivered the children’s moment. They assisted Linda Lamb, Creative Ministries chair, in giving the moment for missions and highlighting the importance of what a blanket can mean to those who have so little. This year’s *Blanket Sunday* offering brought in \$3,436.

Presbyterian Women’s
Spring Gathering
Saturday,
April 18, 2026
10:00 am–Noon
Long Creek Presbyterian Church, Kings Mtn.
Registration begins at 9:00 am.
Cost: \$15/person

A promotional poster for the Presbyterian Women’s Spring Gathering. The background is a soft-focus image of green foliage and blue sky. In the foreground, a single white daisy with a yellow center is in sharp focus. The text is overlaid on the image in various colors and fonts.

Presbyterian Women’s
Birthday Luncheon
May 4
Noon
Fellowship Hall
Cost: \$8/person

Guest Speaker:
Susanna Kavanaugh,
Executive Director/Co-Founder,
Least of These Carolinas

A promotional poster for the Presbyterian Women’s Birthday Luncheon. The background is a soft-focus image of pink and purple flowers. The text is overlaid in various colors and fonts. A QR code is located in the bottom left corner of the poster.

Confirmation Weekend at Montreat

Written by Mary Taneti, Director of Faith Formation



Our recent trip to the Montreat Conference Center was an opportunity for our seventh- and eighth-graders to deepen their faith, connect with each other, and grow together as a confirmation class. This year, we brought a group of seven students to their confirmation retreat. Josie Conner, Barbara Winkles, and I led the retreat while Claude Hathcock served as our driver. The confirmation class of 2026 displays a mix of personalities: smart, witty, funny, playful, shy, serious, and dedicated. When they began their journey in January, most students were shy and unfamiliar with each other. However, by the time of our ride up to Montreat, Adriel, Brynn, Ethan, Harper, Everett, Nathan, and Parks had become a close-knit group focused on faith and fellowship.



We began our trip with a visit to My Father's Pizza, a cherished tradition. After settling into our rooms, we focused on building connections. The next day flowed with moments of praying, laughing, learning, eating, walking, and exploring together, all enhanced by the beautiful weather and Montreat air. Saturday afternoon brought a special touch as mentors joined confirmands for lunch, collaborating on stoles and faith statements. A fun ice cream treat marked the mentors' departure, and we enjoyed a bit more of Montreat before checking out that evening. The trip concluded with everyone feeling happier, stronger in faith, more connected, and excited to proclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.





Sleep in Heavenly Peace Build Project



MAY 2 & 23

For more information, contact: **Volunteer Today!**
Jim Ratchford
jratchford79@gmail.com



You Did It Again! Volunteers Packed 29,800 Meals for 2026.

Thank You.



DONATE BLOOD

**First Presbyterian
Church of Gastonia**
Tuesday, April 21
1:00 PM - 6:00 PM

All donors will receive*:

- \$20 eGift Card
- Umbrella
- **Wellness Checkup** including blood pressure, pulse, temperature, iron count, and cholesterol screening.

Fact: Only 3% of those who are eligible actually donate blood.



Appointments are encouraged, please visit oneblood.org/donate-now and use **sponsor code 47798**

ID REQUIRED

*One offer per donor, per donation. No cash value. Not-transferable. Gifts may vary. For more information please visit oneblood.org/details.

Donors Receive



- PLUS -



- PLUS -



Beyond Today: Creating a Legacy Through Planned Giving

Written by John Mudd



Planned giving offers a meaningful way to extend the impact of our faith into the future of the church. By including the church in wills, estate plans, or other legacy gifts, members can support the mission that has shaped their spiritual lives while helping ensure that future generations experience worship, fellowship, and ministry.

Many planned gifts are made through bequests, beneficiary designations, or charitable trusts. Because these arrangements are made in advance, they allow members to make significant contributions without affecting their current financial needs. In this way, faithful stewardship becomes a lasting legacy.

Planned gifts strengthen the church's ability to support ministries such as outreach, youth development, community service, facility improvements, and leadership formation. These resources help the church look beyond immediate needs and invest in the long-term mission and ministry.

As our church embraces a renewed vision for the future—deepening faith, strengthening belonging, and living as a Christ-centered community, planned giving is one way members can help bring that vision to life. Through thoughtful planning and generous hearts, we help ensure that the church remains a place of worship, service, and hope 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.

APPLY NOW For a FPC Scholarship

New Scholarships (*first-time applicants*)

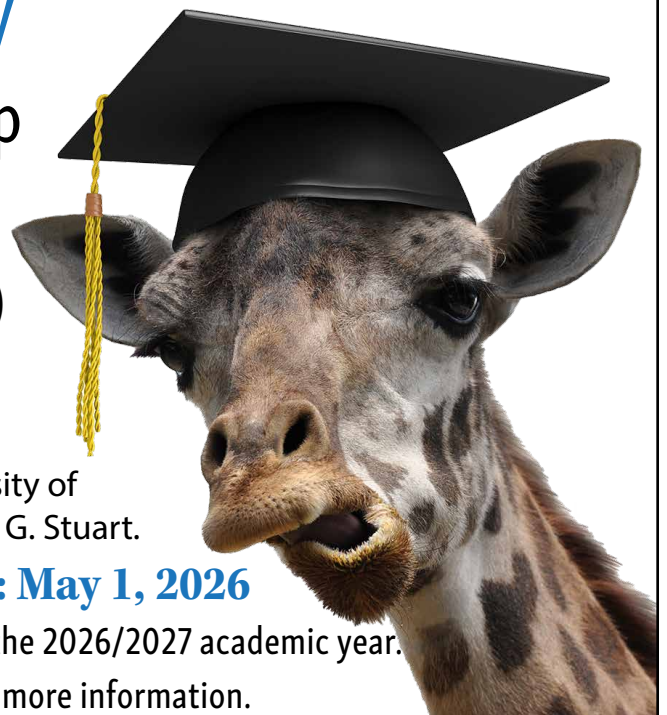
Renewal Scholarships (*returning applicants*)

This scholarship is funded through the generosity of Elizabeth W. Robinson, John W. Parks, Sr. and James G. Stuart.

Deadline: May 1, 2026

The FPC Scholarship Fund is accepting applications for the 2026/2027 academic year.

Contact the Business Administrator for more information.



Connect, Share, and Look Forward



Sunday, April 19 | 5:00 pm | Fellowship Hall

All are invited to join the Deacons for an evening of fellowship and shared vision. Dinner will be served at 5:00 pm, followed by an update from the Curiosity and Courage Committee at 5:45 pm. This is a chance to come together, enjoy a meal, and engage in the life and direction of our church. Childcare will be available at 5:45 pm for children through 5th grade. Middle and high school students are welcome to participate in the gathering or assist in the nursery. Cost: Free.



FOR THE LATEST UPCOMING EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.fpcgastonia.org/Events

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

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Congratulations Alyson Schultz, winner of the Rise Against Hunger raffle for a "Screen-Free Family Fun Gift Basket."

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
March 1	93	59	114	16
March 8	88	52	94	43
March 15	90	37	90	25
March 22	85	21	—	—
March 29	162	48	135	24