

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

November 2025 • Volume 30 • Issue 11



Iona Abbey (Church of Scotland)
Iona, Scotland

Are You Ready for Renewal?

Written by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

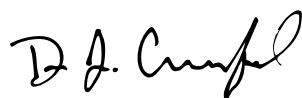
This month, our congregation will do its part in the Curiosity and Courage initiative by sharing what God has done and is doing at First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia. After a time of discernment through 40 days of collective prayer and study of the Sailboat Church book, participating in an online survey, and listening groups, we will have had a chance to speak about what God is saying to us individually and as a congregation. I thank God for the collective wisdom of our members and leaders, as well as the expertise the Curiosity and Courage Committee has enlisted to help us discern a focused vision amidst a wide range of input.

In some ways, this month's efforts mark the fruition of years of discernment and prayer. That discernment began when I first arrived at FPC Gastonia and prayed for God to provide us with a clear sense of identity, purpose, and direction in a community experiencing rapid change. That discernment continued in the fall of 2024 when I asked the incoming Chairs on Session to join me in prayer for what God has in store for us. Together, our collective discernment continued in January of this year when the Session met as a whole and commissioned the Curiosity and Courage Committee to lead and develop a discernment process in which the entire congregation could participate. After a spring and summer of vigorous planning and an exciting kickoff in September, we find ourselves at the moment when we are ready to bring our voices together. What an exciting conclusion to a prayer that began years ago!

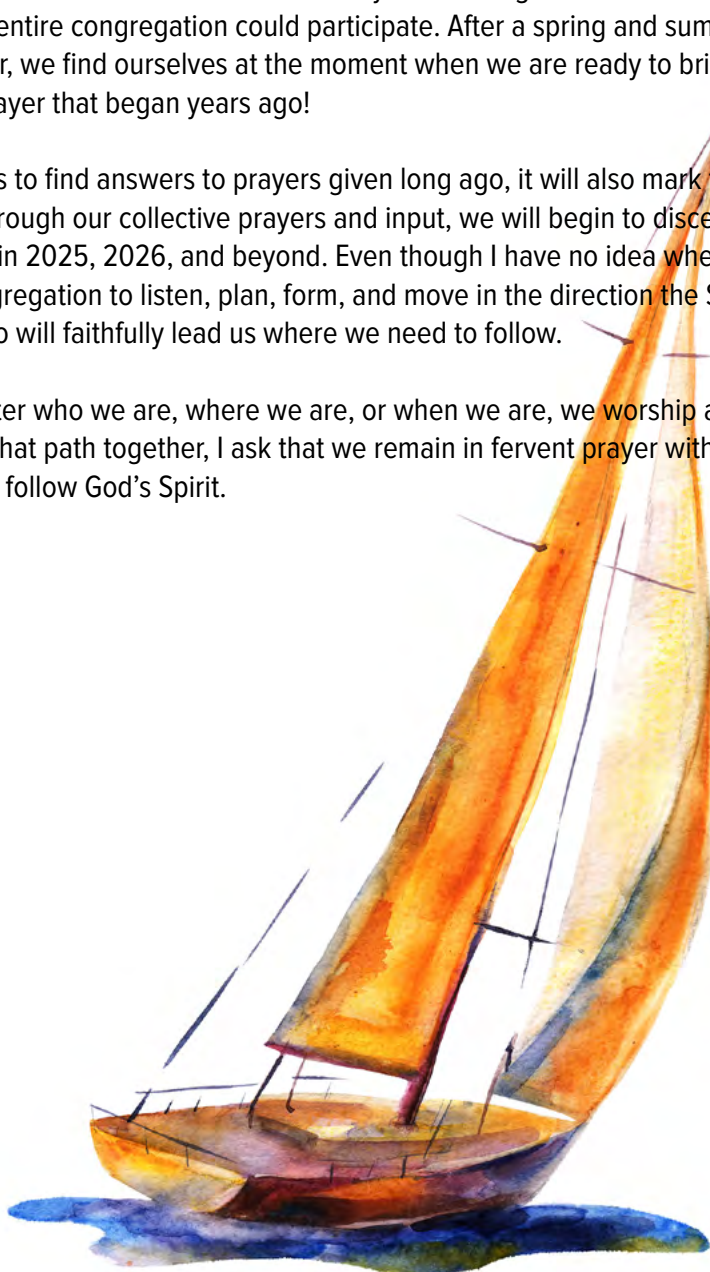
As much as this month presents opportunities to find answers to prayers given long ago, it will also mark the beginning of a season of pursuing God in new ways. Through our collective prayers and input, we will begin to discern who God is calling us to be and where God is leading us in 2025, 2026, and beyond. Even though I have no idea where those prayers and input will take us, I have faith in our congregation to listen, plan, form, and move in the direction the Spirit is leading us. Moreso, I have faith in the Holy Spirit, who will faithfully lead us where we need to follow.

This is what it means to be renewed! No matter who we are, where we are, or when we are, we worship a God who continues to lead us forward. As we discern that path together, I ask that we remain in fervent prayer with a hope only found in Jesus Christ and make bold steps to follow God's Spirit.

Blessings in Christ,



Pastor Dan



Building Faith and Friendship in Guatemala

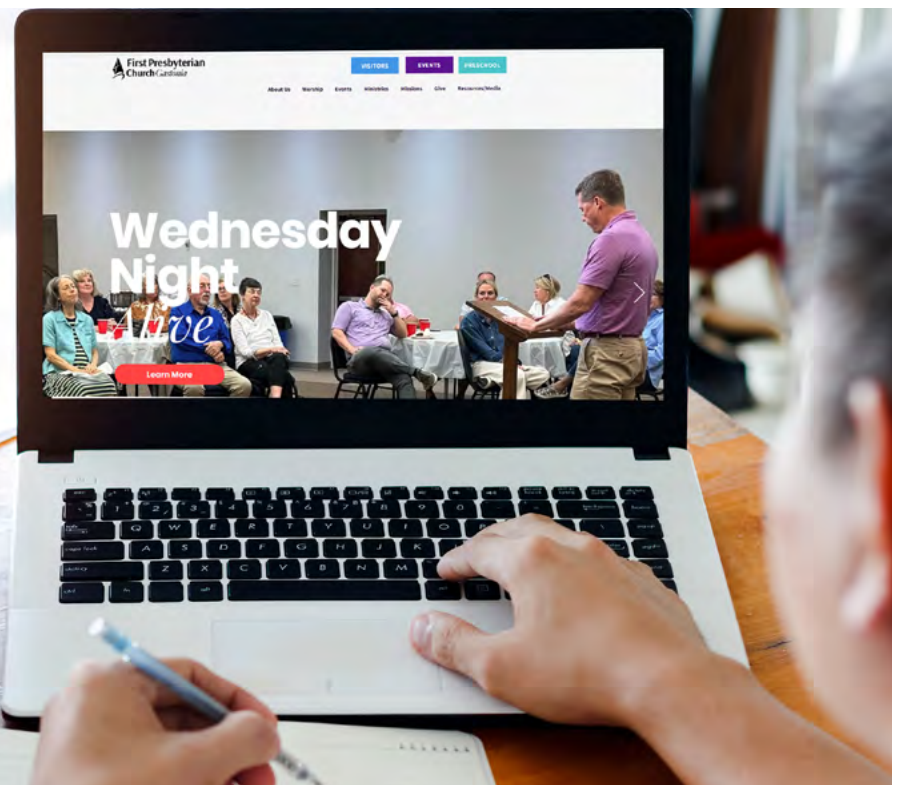
Written by Katie Reese

First Presbyterian Church has long been engaged in global missions, and one of our most meaningful international relationships is with **our partner church, Primitiva, in Tiquesate, Guatemala**. Through multiple mission trips, I have seen firsthand how faith and action come together to transform lives. What began years ago as a simple partnership built on friendship, prayer, and mutual encouragement has grown into a powerful ministry of hope. One of the most impactful pieces of this relationship is the [scholarship program to help children stay in school and pursue education](#). During visits with families in Tiquesate, I have watched scholarship students grow into adults who now serve and lead in their communities. This partnership continues to thrive, reminding us that when we invest in people through love and faith, hope takes root and multiplies.



**First
Presbyterian
Church**
has a
NEWLY DESIGNED
website!

www.fpcgastonia.org



Working Together for Children

Written by Josie Conner

Children arrive at Black Mountain Home for Children with nothing. Their lives before arriving have not been easy ones. They are scared and carry scars resulting from abuse and neglect. At Black Mountain Home, siblings can grow up together while being nurtured, protected, and loved. While their painful pasts can't be erased, the donations and generosity of others help them heal.

Our Presbyterian Women at FPC have supported the Fall Festival at Black Mountain Home for Children for many years with items to sell in their silent auction. When the festival was cancelled last year, due to Hurricane Helene, we continued to support the mission by selling the items at FPC Gastonia.

This year, the festival was held on October 11th. A variety of gift baskets with items for adults and children were donated to the silent auction by Presbyterian Women.

Ashley Starnes, who leads the effort at BMH, was excited to see the quality and variety of items from FPC. She indicated to Barbara Yarbrough, PW Mission Chair, that some of the churches in the mountains were still struggling and unable to donate to this year's auction, so FPC Gastonia donated a few more items than usual to help the cause.



WEDNESDAY NIGHT ALIVE:

Snippets from "The Abilene Paradox"

Wednesday,

November 19, 5:30 pm

Fellowship Hall

Charlie Grissom will briefly introduce "The Abilene Paradox," which is about managing agreement, avoiding failure, and improving communication. All are welcome to join us for Thanksgiving dinner! A traditional Thanksgiving meal will be served.

To avoid food waste, RSVPs are encouraged but not required;
register through the Church Office or on Realm.



Pipes, Pride, and Presbyterian Tradition

Written by Mike Wallace



Each November, First Presbyterian Church gathers to celebrate one of its most meaningful traditions — the Kirkin' O' the Tartans, a worship service rich with history, symbolism, and joy. This cherished observance began at First Presbyterian in 1992, when Noel Johnson of the Gunn Clan helped introduce the Kirkin' tradition to our congregation. That first year, tartans representing families such as Lauder, Wilson, Guthrie, McGregor, MacQueen, Montgomery, MacDougal, Robertson, and others were presented and blessed.

Over the years, our celebration has continued to grow, embracing additional clans including Stewart, Blair, Keith, Campbell, MacDonald, Cunningham, Armstrong, Rose, Gordon, Sinclair, MacLean, Wallace, Carmichael, Anderson, MacArthur, Craig, Rankin, Love, Moffat, MacLaren (Boy Scouts), and even Montreat, reflecting the deep roots and wide-ranging heritage within our church family. Last year, we proudly added our 80th and 81st tartans — Hamilton and Duncan to this colorful display of faith and ancestry.

The first Kirkin' sermon at First Presbyterian was preached by Rev. John DeBevoise, who returned again in 1994 and 2004. In 2001, the pulpit was filled by Dr. Tom Long, then recognized by TIME magazine as one of America's ten best preachers. The Kirkin' has also served as a homecoming occasion, featuring a heartfelt message in 2002 from our beloved Dr. Jim Stuart.

For many years, Noel Johnson served as Beadle, carrying the Bible into the sanctuary and calling the congregation to rise. That meaningful role has since been faithfully continued by Luther Blair, who will once again open this year's service with the traditional charge.

We are honored this year to welcome **Rev. Matt Conner, pastor of Newell Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, as our guest preacher.** Rev. Conner's connection to First Presbyterian runs deep. He is the son of Josie and David Conner and was born into our church family.

We invite you to join us for this year's **Kirkin' O' the Tartans, Sunday, November 9 at 11 am**, a joyful morning filled with bagpipes, drums, color, and community. Together we give thanks for the faith, family, and enduring legacy of our Scottish Presbyterian heritage. **Everyone is invited to the Kirkin' covered dish luncheon at noon in the Fellowship Hall.**

One Church. One Mission. One Future.

Written by Michelle Melton

November 23 is not just a date on the calendar, it's a celebration of our shared faith, dedication, and vision for the future. On this special day, we will honor how our church community has responded to God's call — through unwavering commitment to our mission, ministries, and the ongoing operation of our beloved church.

What are we truly celebrating?

We celebrate being part of a living, growing church that questions, serves, and worships together with open hearts. We celebrate contributing our voices, presence, and talents to a community that depends on us and inspires us in return.

We celebrate fortifying the foundation of our future—a foundation built on faith, hope, and generosity. Each financial gift, each act of service, each prayer is a brick in that foundation, supporting young families, enriching worship experiences, expanding outreach, and deepening our faith across all generations.

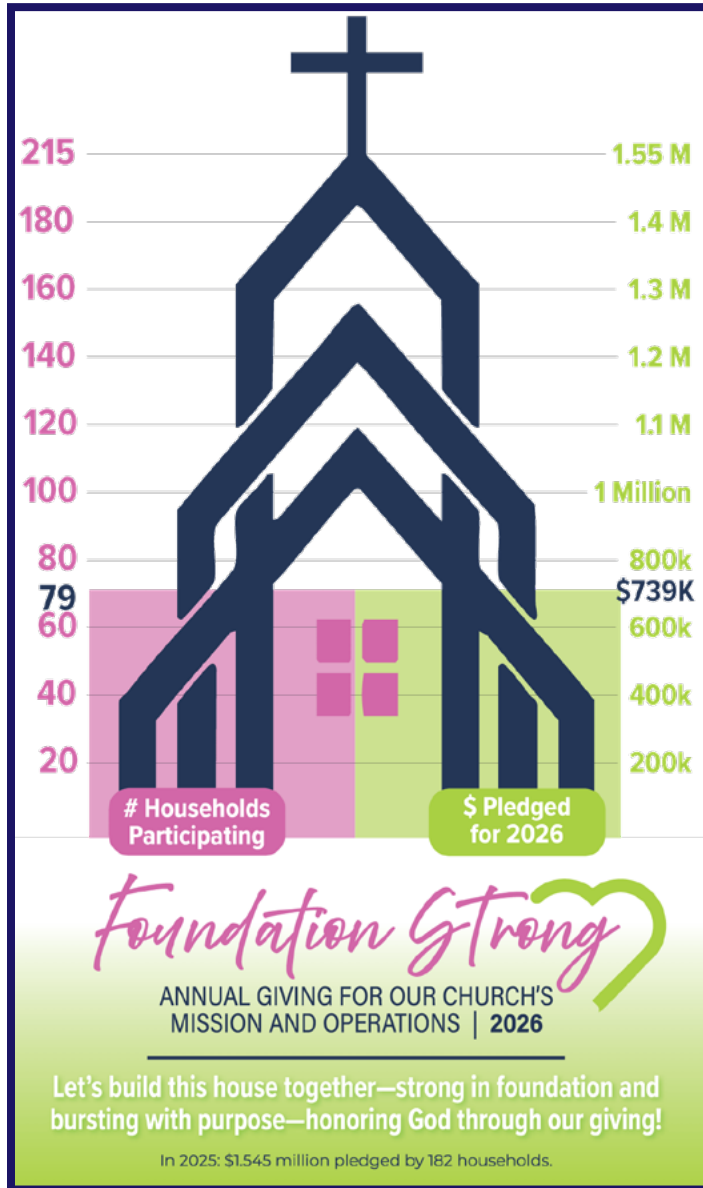
On November 23, we also honor the spirit of growth in our annual giving:

- Celebrate those pledging for the first time.
- Commit to generosity as an expression of trust & gratitude.
- Make regular pledges that support a vibrant, living church.

Our church consists of roughly 475 active households. Last year, 182 households pledged \$1.55 million to support the church's ministries and operations in 2025. Imagine the possibilities if every member dedicates a part of themselves to this shared calling.

There is no “right” amount to pledge. Each of us must prayerfully consider what is a meaningful response to building a faith community that reflects the love of Christ and serves a world in need. Every commitment of time, talent, treasure, and prayer is essential to what makes our church, Foundation Strong.

Let us keep building together with hope and faith. Please return your pledge before November 23.



EXAMPLES OF EXPENSES AT FPC

- Utilities: \$5800–\$7800/month
- Sanctuary Pipe Organ: \$500-\$900/annual tuning
\$2700/unexpected repairs
- Bus Maintenance: \$350–\$600/month
- Livestreaming License: \$2500/year
- Housekeeping: \$600/week
- Youth Trip to Montreat: \$6370/year
- Fall Trunk or Treat Community Outreach: \$2550

Trunk or Treat 2025



Events & Announcements

YOUTH BAKE SALE



NOVEMBER 23

8:00 am | Fellowship Hall
10:00 am | Memorial Gallery
Noon | Memorial Gallery

DROP-OFF

Friday and Saturday,
November 21 & 22
2:00 to 4:00 pm
Fellowship Hall

Contact: Mary Taneti for details

Play the new **"QUESTION QUEST"** trivia game each month for a chance to win a prize* by answering a question about FPC. Place your answer in the box at the Memorial Gallery or the Fellowship Hall.

DEADLINE: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17

QUESTION FOR NOVEMBER

How many silver crosses are on the chains holding the large cross in the Sanctuary?

ANSWER FOR OCTOBER: Noah's Ark

WINNER FOR OCTOBER

David Dickson

*When more than one person answers correctly, a drawing will determine the winner.

CONTACT:

Cynthia Anderson at canderson44@outlook.com for details

USPS IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

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Trunk or Treat, October 2025.

Service Views and Attendance

Date	TRADITIONAL SERVICE		THRIVE SERVICE	
	Service	Livestream	Service	Livestream
October 5	94	72	77	31
October 12	195	252	71	28
October 19	92	58	66	30
October 26	116	63	63	24

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