

THE FIRST PRESS

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WITHDRAW LIKE JESUS DID by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

***Luke 5:15-16** But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.*

When I was in high school, my family and I spent a long weekend in New York City. We saw the sites, saw a show on Broadway, listened to amazing live jazz, and even got to attend The Late Show with David Letterman! After a few days, though, I found myself weary

and tired. The lights, activity, and sounds of a city with over 20 million people left me a bit over-stimulated. All of that changed when we went to Central Park for our last day. The buzz of the city faded away and all I could see were trees and grass. All I could hear were birds and a few others around me. I remember how refreshing it was to slow down, get away from the city, and take a day to gather myself and reflect on my time there.

Continued on page 2

Similarly, our lives are often filled with the buzz of activity like New York City. Between our jobs, families, and hobbies, many of us do not make any time to ourselves. In similar fashion, it's often difficult for us to take time to consider where God is working in our lives or where God may be leading us.

This month, we will be entering the season of Lent. It's a time to slow down, get away from all of our distractions, and recognize how all of us are in desperate need of Jesus Christ to be our savior. After the last two years of isolation and social distancing, I know we are so excited to "get back to normal." We may want to continue some of the practices that we had to suspend at the beginning of the pandemic. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves as busy and distracted as we were before the pandemic hit. No matter our season and circumstance, I believe that we can always strive to do as Jesus did when he withdrew from his life in

order to hear from God. My prayer for us this season is that we hear the Holy Spirit in a way that we never have before. I encourage all of us to find time to seclude ourselves in our personal lives for worship, prayer, and devotion. Also, my prayer is that we can come together to explore our need for Christ as a congregation. Whether it's making a commitment to come to Sunday worship, attending a Lenten Lunch, or carving out a few minutes every day to hear from God through prayer and scripture, Lent is an opportunity for us to escape the noise of daily life so that God can speak to us in new ways that lead us to new life.

May your Lenten season be blessed,

Pastor Dan



Blanket Sunday Success!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our collection for Church World Service on Blanket Sunday! Thanks to your support, we were able to raise \$3,980 to help keep people warm and safe in the wake of disasters. To learn more about this ministry, visit cwsglobal.org.

Isabella Thornburg	3/1	Emma Conner	3/13	Jewel Brown	3/21
Kevin Eads	3/2	Dolph Sumner	3/13	Lillian Osei-Boateng	3/21
John Stanley	3/2	Marshall Witherell	3/13	Don Thrower	3/21
Polly Jasmin	3/3	Pres Adams	3/14	Cliff Carver	3/22
Gwin Hilton	3/4	Riley Grubb	3/14	Mollie Trosper	3/22
Suzanne McLean	3/4	Allison Simmons	3/14	Ella Trogdon	3/23
Joseph Morris	3/4	Ben Digby	3/15	Lynne Hathcock	3/24
Louisa Sloan	3/4	Stuart Euliss	3/15	Rick Bryant, Jr.	3/25
Michael Lipscomb	3/4	Jackson Farris	3/15	Bailey Bullock	3/26
Janet Greene	3/5	Trevor Cherry	3/16	Ashe Carver	3/27
Rick Page	3/5	Susan Elkins	3/16	Dottie LaFar	3/27
Jason Shiflet	3/6	Kathy Skidmore	3/16	Leslie Lewis	3/27
Laura Costas	3/7	Rebecca Bounous	3/16	Cindy Wilson	3/27
Madeline Letts	3/7	Tony Curella	3/17	Betsy Burleson	3/28
Ring Stafford	3/7	Patty Ratchford	3/17	Jim Camp, III	3/28
Gail Eads	3/8	Fred Upchurch	3/17	Sherry Cloninger	3/28
Rob Bridgeman	3/10	Jay Falls, Jr.	3/18	Ashleigh Rockett	3/28
Martha Greene	3/10	Rick Jones	3/18	Gene Williams	3/29
Rees Gibbons	3/11	Karl Osei-Boateng	3/18	Anna Renfro	3/30
Ken Stuart	3/11	Judy Planer	3/19	Kimberly Witherell	3/30
Heather Carver	3/12	Evan Roberts	3/20	Lil Lanier	3/31
Bill Brown	3/13	Drew Johnson	3/20	Dottie Scher	3/31

Condolences to:

Sally Robinson upon the death of her husband, **Ralph Robinson**, on February 7, 2022.

The family and friends of **Charles McCarter** upon his death on February 23, 2022.

Our Joy is With:

Susan Challenger and Joseph Smith upon the birth of their grandson, Fletcher Truss Davis, on February 9, 2022.



Coffee and Guitars

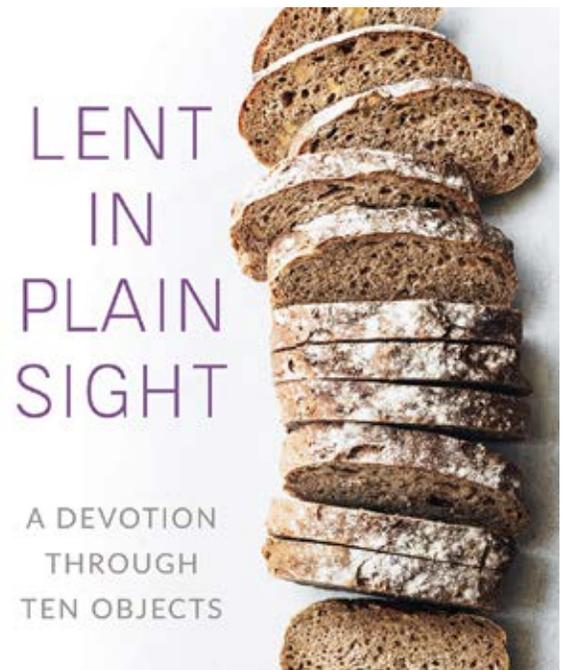
Gather with us on Saturday, March 26, for Coffee and Guitars! During this time of fellowship, we will enjoy free coffee and donuts, plus the chance to make music together! Bring your guitar or other stringed instrument and share a story about it. The first 10 people to RSVP will receive a free 5-minute assessment with luthier Bil Jones of Fret Garage (www.fretgarage.com). Please RSVP with your name and instrument (1 per person please) using the QR code to the right.



Winter and Spring Wednesday Night Alive!

Wednesday Night Alive! will continue with a new five-week series during the season of Lent. Dinner will begin in the Fellowship Hall at 5:30 p.m. followed by programming for adults and children at 6:15 p.m. Dinner costs \$6 per person with a \$20 family cap. No reservation is needed in order to attend! Watch your email for a copy of the menu each week.

The Adult Ministries Committee has selected *Lent in Plain Sight: A Devotion Through Objects* as our Lenten series for Wednesday Night Alive! We will focus on ordinary objects like dust, bread, cross, coins, shoes, coats, towels, thorns, and stones as we journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day. This conversation centered around ordinary objects will show us how God communicates epiphanies, salvation, revelation and reconciliation through what we perceive to be the mundane.



Scholarship Application Now Available!

The church business office is now accepting applications for scholarships intended to provide financial assistance to church members pursuing a secondary education. Awards are based upon financial need; however, merit, academics, Christian character, and the record of service within the church are taken into consideration during the review of applications. Previous award recipients must re-apply and are not automatically eligible for continuance of the scholarship. Those interested in applying may receive an application through the church business office.

The deadline to submit applications is May 1, 2022.



Help Setup for Communion

The Communion Committee is seeking volunteers to help prepare communion for the Traditional and Thrive services each month. If you are interested, please check out the signup link using the QR code for more information or to sign up for dates! Contact Amy Spencer with any questions.



PLANNED GIVING SPOTLIGHT: TOM AND ANNE EFIRD

by Tom Efird

Your Planned Giving Ministry continues our outreach to members of the congregation who might have an interest in supporting the future ministry of First Presbyterian Church. If you have ever thought that you might have an interest in “leaving something to the church” to support its ministries after you are gone, then we want to give you some information as to how that can be done.

The most common way that members leave a gift to the church after their death is to make a bequest in their will. For example, you can add a provision that says, “I give the sum of ____ dollars to First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia.”

Anne and I want to share with you another cost-effective way to make such a gift. Many of us have saved money for our retirement through Individual Retirement Accounts. IRAs are a great tax-advantaged way to save. However, as you know, withdrawals from your IRA during your lifetime are generally income taxable to you when you receive them. Likewise, when you die, the beneficiaries of your IRA will generally have to pay income taxes on the remainder left in the IRA when they receive it. It’s a double whammy. So if you name your children as the beneficiaries of your IRA, they get the value of the IRA withdrawals less the income taxes they have to pay. But if you name a charity, such as First Presbyterian Church, as one of the beneficiaries of your IRA, it’s income tax exempt. That means it gets to keep 100% of the part of the IRA that is distributed to it. Most IRAs allow you to name the charity as the beneficiary of all or a percentage of the IRA or as the beneficiary of a specific dollar amount. It seemed to us a win-win taxwise and a great way to support the church after our deaths.

Making the gift is simple. In order to change your beneficiary



designation, you simply contact your bank, investment advisor or whoever is holding the IRA and fill out the change of beneficiary form. We called our broker, Dick Jarman, filled out the change of beneficiary form naming each other as primary beneficiary and the church as secondary beneficiary, and it was done. We will continue to receive our monthly payout until the last of us passes away and then whatever is left in our IRA at that time goes to the church.

If this sounds interesting, just contact a member of the Planned Giving Ministry. We of course can’t give tax advice, but we can provide information to get you and your financial adviser started. We look forward to hearing from you!

Nickel-A-Meal

The Nickel-A-Meal offering supports both regional and international hunger programs that show compassion and do justice for those in need. Thank you for your gifts as each nickel makes a big difference!

Below is a report of our Presbytery's disbursements for this past year.

The 2021 grants were as follows:

1. International Grants

Guatemala - Guatemala Health Program	\$20,000.00
Malawi - Nkhoma Hospital Children's Ward Food	\$11,000.00

2. Regional Grants

Bounty & Soul	\$3,000.00
The Corner Table (Includes soup kitchen, backpack program, and frozen food program)	\$8,000.00
Feeding Avery Families	\$8,000.00
Haywood Christian Ministry Food Pantry	\$7,500.00
Haywood Pathways Center	\$12,000.00
Heartlife at Pleasant View Baptist Church	\$1,500.00
Interfaith Assistance Ministries Food Pantry	\$8,000.00
Linc Home Meals Program	\$5,000.00
Reems Creek - Beach Snack Sack	\$2,850.00

Our next collection will be **Sunday, March 13**. Look for the red buckets on Sunday morning or make your donations at www.fpcgastonia.org/giving (select Nickel-A-Meal fund) or by mailing a check to our church.

Food Collection for S.O.C.K.S.

During Lent, we are collecting canned goods and monetary donations for S.O.C.K.S. (Serving Our Community with Kindness in Springwood.) Located between Belmont and McAdenville, S.O.C.K.S. serves one of the most impoverished areas in our county. Particularly, S.O.C.K.S. is seeking donations of jelly, corn, green beans, instant potatoes, dry beans, rice, canned meats, and cereal. Donations can be dropped off in the boxes by the Fellowship Hall or Reception Desk.

Meals on Wheels Seeking Volunteers

The FPC Gastonia Meals on Wheels route (from Linwood) is seeking volunteers to help deliver on the fourth Friday and the fourth Monday of each month. The commitment would only require your presence on those days, for roughly 45 minutes to an hour. The clients are very appreciative and will win your heart! Please contact Betsy Summer for more information or to sign up!



CAM Food Drive at Hoffman Place

Hoffman Place Homeowners hosted a food drive for CAM and are pleased to report the best response ever! Fifty-one homes in the neighborhood collected over 1,100 food items/paper products for CAM and received a great thank you letter! Esther Nelson is pictured loading up items to deliver to CAM. Thank you to those who contributed! Your help fills so many empty tummies in our community!

PW Circle Meetings

Please note the following locations and meeting times for Presbyterian Women's Circles this month. If you have any questions, please contact your circle moderator.

Circle 1 will meet on Monday, March 14, at 10:00 a.m. in the Parlor.

Circle 2/3 will meet on Monday, March 14, at 10:30 a.m. at Covenant Village.

Circle 4 will meet on Tuesday, March 15, at 11:30 a.m. in the Parlor.

Circle 6 will meet on Monday, March 21, at 6:45 p.m. in the Parlor.

Welcome New Members!

We are excited to welcome eleven new members who joined after our most recent new member class! New members include:

Brian Edwards

Paul Faris

LeeAnn, Jack, Carlisle, and Rusty Harris

Sherry and Mike Kirby

Johnathan Lowery

Nancy and Michael Robinson

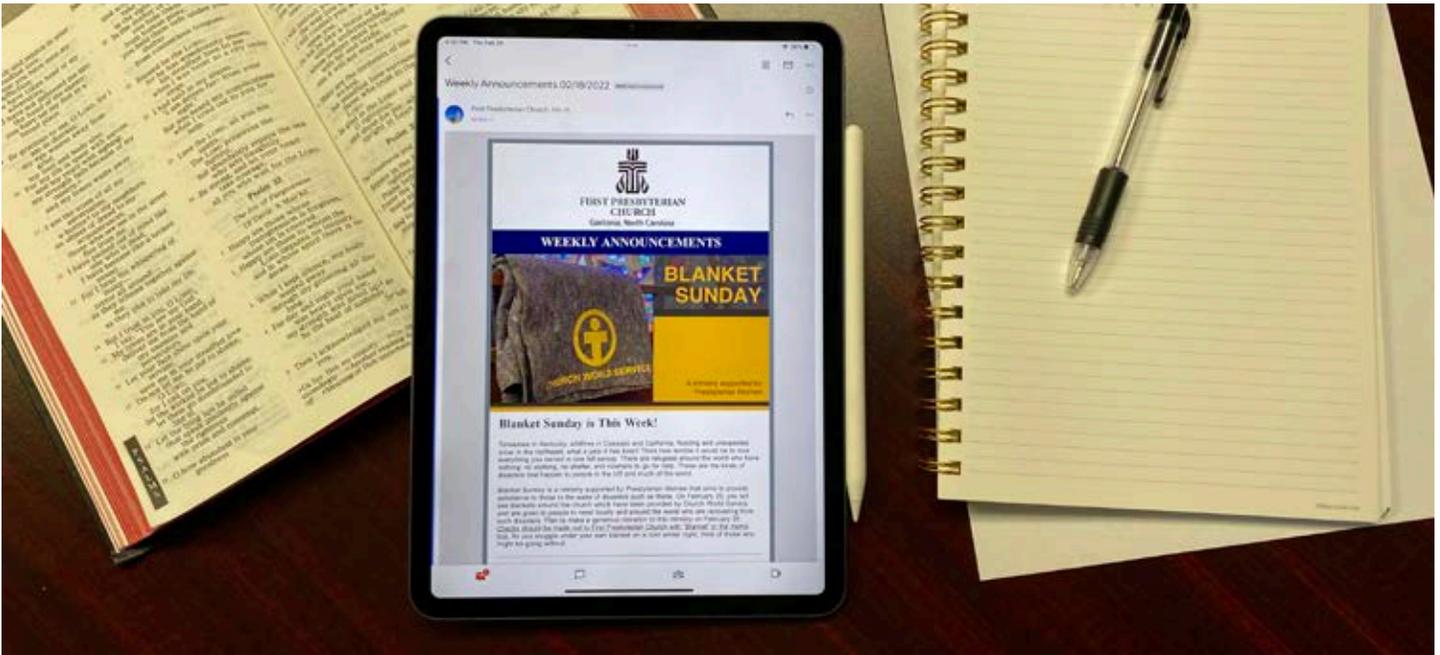
More information and pictures of these new members will be included in next month's First Press!

February at Presbyterian Weekday School

We've had such a fun February at PWS! We had a great fire truck visit with the nicest firemen. Ms. Lisa, a dental hygienist, spent time in each class and taught children about taking care of their teeth in such a fun way. Ms. Rene from Gaston County Library visited us and we had a blast dancing and enjoying a one of a kind story time. More fun things are coming soon!

Enrollment for 2022-2023 is OPEN! We have just a few spots left if you know anyone interested! We would love to have them join us! Contact Becky Rowland or visit fpcgastonia.org/presbyterian-weekday-school for more information!





Changes Coming to Friday E-Blast

Beginning March 4, you may notice that our Friday email announcements look a little different. In an effort to increase readability, the number of announcements and stories featured each week will decrease and the e-blast will take on a whole new look! Please note that all information currently included in the e-blast will still be available on the website at www.fpcgastonia.org/weekly-announcements.

If you or your committee has an announcement or story to feature, please send information to Celeste Crowe at communications@fpcgastonia.org.

Sabbath Days for Pastoral Staff

Please be reminded of the work week schedule for each of our Pastoral Staff. Sabbath days for each pastor are as follows:

Fridays—Dan and Lauren

Mondays—Charles

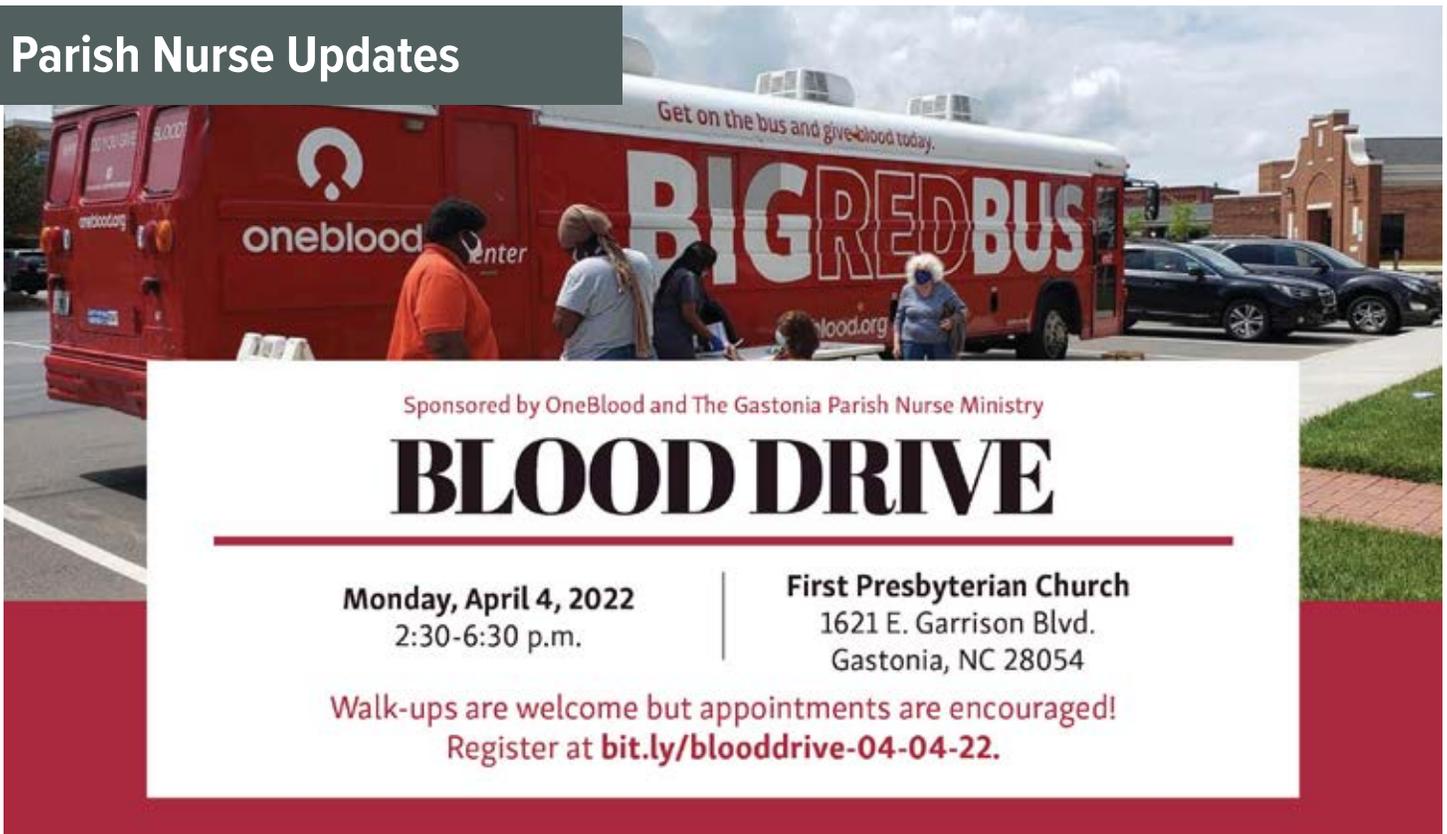
Each weekend, a pastor is on call for emergency needs. Please only call the emergency line if it is a true emergency. To reach the pastor on call, dial the church office (704-864-2651) and press “5” to follow the prompts to the emergency line to reach the pastor on call. Your kindness in honoring each pastor’s day of sabbath is appreciated so that they can all rest and renew.



Help Congregational Care Help You

The Congregational Care Ministry of the Diaconate is charged with making sure that health care concerns of our FPC family are identified and followed up by our church staff and the FPC family. Please know that if you or your loved ones are admitted to a hospital or other care facility, we are not automatically notified of this admission due to HIPAA rules. If you or your loved ones are admitted to a health care facility and desire the church staff and members to know and follow-up, please notify the church office. Thank you for your help!

Parish Nurse Updates



Sponsored by OneBlood and The Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry

BLOOD DRIVE

Monday, April 4, 2022
2:30-6:30 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church
1621 E. Garrison Blvd.
Gastonia, NC 28054

Walk-ups are welcome but appointments are encouraged!
Register at bit.ly/blooddrive-04-04-22.

Spring Cleaning and Shred Event

On Saturday, April 9, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., join us at First United Methodist for a Spring Cleaning and Safety event. Community members can bring up to 3 boxes to shred for free and medication take-back will also be available to safely dispose of expired prescription and over the counter medications, no questions asked. Please see the Winter-Spring Parish Nurse Booklet for more information.

Community Foundation Run

The Community Foundation Run will take place on Saturday, April 9. Please consider making a donation to the Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry by visiting cfcgaston.org.

All funds raised are used to promote health education awareness programs, events, giveaways, honorariums, etc. Contributions can be made through April 15 to qualify for matching funds.

Advance Directive Class

Next month, we will be participating in Healthcare Decisions Month! The Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry will present a class on Advance Directives, led by Tim Patti. This discussion will include information about living wills and healthcare power of attorney. These are ways you can help "make your wishes known." Join us on Wednesday, April 6, at 6:30 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, room #315.



Faith Formation Updates



Sunday School During March

This month, our Children's Sunday School classes will be trying a new thing! The Children's Ministry Committee has been reflecting on the importance of music for our faith formation. In the month of March, our Pre/K and Elementary Sunday School classes will meet with our Children's Music Director, Holly Howell, for music for the first part of their time together on Sunday mornings, before heading to their classrooms. Please check the Faith Formation Weekly newsletter for details and updates about this faith-forming endeavor.



Become a Faith Formation Volunteer!

Are you looking for a way to support our families as an intergenerational church? The Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry Committees need your help to make all of our Faith Formation programs possible! Here are some specific ways that you can support our children and youth.

- **Join the Shepherd list!** A Shepherd is a second adult who is in the classroom to help support the teacher and ensure that we always have two adults in spaces where children are learning or playing. This list is for people who can be called in when one of our teachers cannot be present, so it is on an as needed basis, not every Sunday.
- **Help with our Wednesday Night Alive program!** Come and join the fun with our children on Wednesday Nights as we learn, grow, and play together. We are in need of people willing to be a second adult to make sure that we have two adults present with our children.
- **Join the Nursery Support list!** Sometimes one of our staff on our nursery team is unable to be present. When this happens we need folks who would be willing to help with our nursery coverage. If you join this list, this means that you are willing to be contacted to see if you might help in the event we need some back up nursery help.
- **Sign up to support our youth with Bibles and Biscuits!** If sharing food is your love language, sign up to bring food for our Youth on Sunday morning. By providing food, such as donuts or biscuits, you will bring some good joy to our youth!

If you are interested in helping in one of these ways, or if you have other gifts that you would like to share with our children and youth Faith Formation programs, please contact Rachel Vogado (rvogado@fpcgastonia.org) or reach out to a member of the Children's Ministry Committee or the Youth Ministry Committee.

BROKENNESS AND BEAUTY

LENTEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORSHIP AND STUDY

Ash Wednesday Wednesday, March 2, 2022

- 12:00-1:00 p.m. Drive-Thru Imposition of Ashes at the Chapel Portico
- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday Night Dinner in the Fellowship Hall
- 6:30 p.m. Ash Wednesday Service in the Sanctuary

Community Lenten Lunches

Services begin at 12:00 p.m. Meal will be served at 12:30 p.m.

Each week we will gather at a different church in our community to worship God in an ecumenical setting. Following each service a meal (with a take-home option) will be provided. Meals will cost \$7 per person. Please see full schedule below.

DATE	HOST CHURCH	PREACHER
March 2*	St. Mark's Episcopal	Rev. Steven Fuller
March 9	First Presbyterian	Rev. John Simpson
March 16	First ARP	Rev. Brack East
March 23	First Baptist	Rev. Dan Commerford
March 30	Holy Trinity Lutheran	Rev. Jeremiah Caughran
April 6	First ARP	Rev. Brian Wood
April 15	First Methodist	Procession of the Cross led by Rev. Matthew Burton

**No meal will be served.*

Wednesday Night Alive! Lent in Plain Sight Wednesdays, March 9-April 6, 2022.

Dinner begins at 5:30 p.m. Program begins at 6:15 p.m.

During Lent, we will focus on devotion through ordinary objects such as dust, bread, coins, shoes, and stones as we journey to Easter Day. This conversation will show us how God communicates epiphanies through the mundane.



THE FIRST PRESS

First Presbyterian Church

1621 E. Garrison Blvd.
Gastonia, N.C. 28054

Return Service Requested

PERIODICALS
US POSTAGE PAID
Gastonia, NC



Service Views and Attendance

Date	Thrive	Thrive Livestream	Traditional	Traditional Livestream
February 6	53	25	77	92
February 13	52	66	71	62
February 20	42	23	111	52
February 27	40	27	97	44

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