

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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A TRIBUTE TO REV. LAUREN SEASE VANACORE *by Leslie Wallace*

When asked to write a tribute to Lauren, my mind started racing with words to describe her. Loving, joyful, enthusiastic, trusting, kind, role model, leads by example, brave, faithful, tender hearted, and faith filled were the words that quickly came to mind. She is a true blessing!

I asked my husband, Mike, his thoughts about Lauren. His answer came quickly. He recalled his first meeting of Lauren at the check-in table at the mission project Samaritan's Feet at Third Street Presbyterian. He introduced himself and she answered back with a quick recall that he was married to Leslie, and they had two boys. She was spot on with their

names as well. First impressions? Wow, she had only been here about a week, and she already knew our names! Not long after his meeting of Lauren that day, he recalls seeing her wash the feet of one of the children attending. Lauren was connecting, she was engaged, she was pouring out her heart. That was and is Lauren.

Her tasks have been many. From preaching, to praying, to confirmation, to missions, to adult education, to pastoral care, to weddings and to funerals. All the while, caring for her own family while caring for each of us. She exemplifies God's love in all she does.

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I am amazed at Lauren's outpouring of love for our youth and confirmands. She has worked joyfully and tirelessly as she planted seeds of faith in our youth, helping each of them to build a firm foundation.

Lauren has been a trusted advisor and role model for the girls and women of our church. She always strives to make things better doing so through thoughtful insight and support. She has delivered, time-and-time again, engaging and thought provoking lessons that have reached all circles and ages.

I thought it best that I reach out to others in our church for their insights on Lauren. And, as you read this, I challenge you to reflect on the impact that Lauren has made in your own life. You may also make a guess at the number of shoes that Lauren has in her closet! (Sounds like a Not-So Newlywed game question).

Gloria Hickson was a member of the search committee that brought Lauren to us. Gloria shared, "she is a part of each of us, more like family. She feels like a daughter to me. She is fun and warm, and she has carried a heavy load for our church. She brightens the world wherever she goes." Gloria described Lauren as having – **"amazing faith and compassion."** She added, "our loss will be someone else's gain." Gloria's guess for number of pairs of shoes – one hundred twenty.

"She has worked joyfully and tirelessly as she planted seeds of faith in our youth, helping each of them to build a firm foundation."

Laura Lineberger had lots to share. Not only is Laura a member of our church, but she is also the Executive Director of the Glenn Foundation of which, Lauren is in her second, three-year term as a board member. She describes Lauren as "loved by everyone. She is a valuable board member who has represented our church with insight, knowledge, and wisdom." Beyond the Glenn Foundation Laura enthusiastically shared that "Lauren jumped right into community involvement. Several years ago, Lauren put on an incredible performance in the Gaston County Boys and Girls Club's fundraiser, Dancing for Future Stars. She danced the night away and at the conclusion of the evening was crowned

the Grand Champion!" Laura also shared how impressed she has been with Lauren's involvement in so many community organizations such as the Family Promise and Crisis Assistance Ministry – just to name a few. Laura said, "she is confident and empowers and inspires others. She is not afraid to try anything. She is a sensitive leader, always feeling empathy for others. My two words for Lauren – **beautiful Christian!**" As for Laura's shoe guess – two hundred pairs of shoes – Laura's favorite pair are Lauren's red shoes for Pentecost.

John Stanley first met Lauren in July 2011, one month before Lauren officially began serving as Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Gastonia. Upon their first meeting, he knew she would be a great fit for our church. John's word to describe Lauren – **"dedicated."** He recalls her dedication to our congregation that included shortened vacations to stay back and comfort a family in the death of a loved one. Her filling the gap when there were needs for pastoral leadership in our church and in one year, participating in twenty-seven funerals. John shared, "Lauren faithfully served the Presbytery of Western North Carolina as Vice Moderator, Moderator and Past Moderator." John also shared, "Lauren has an incredible skill of multi-tasking. She could juggle writing a sermon, preparing for confirmation and stopping to tend to a pastoral care need." He also shared, "she is wise beyond her years! Her wisdom will be hard to replace. **Her trustworthiness is commendable.**" A final question for John. The shoe lover that Lauren is, what is your guess for the number of shoes in her closet? His answer – "two hundred pairs!"

Lauren, for eleven years you have opened up your heart, your mind, and your soul to all of us. You allowed us to get to know and love you, Jeff, Will and James. We have enjoyed watching your boys grow from toddler age to the handsome young men they are today. We are especially grateful to Jeff for giving up so much of you while we gained so much from you.

We certainly will miss the way you walked a newly christened baby down the aisle, your heartfelt, and sometimes tearful sermons, your ability to say just the right thing in time of need and most of all, your friendship. It is not what you have done, it is how well you have done it. For that, we are grateful.

You have taught us the importance of living the fruit of the Spirit. We have seen how beautiful God has instilled the fruit of the Spirit in you. May we continue to be reminded of what

is written in Galatians 5:22-23, By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

I'm going to close with one word, it is a word you often have closed with, and it is my wish for you, Jeff, Will and James – **Peace!**

P.S. Lauren, it has become apparent that having a generous number of shoes was necessary to fulfill all your jobs at church! We hope you take time to relax, kick those shoes off, and enjoy your family. My guess – one hundred seventy-five pairs of shoes!



Nickel-A-Meal

Check your pockets, purse, and car for any loose coins you see. Save them for collection day so we may feed the hungry! Please remember that 5c a meal a day helps keep away!

Our next collection will be Sunday, June 16th. 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.)



Living within Lauren's Light

by John Stanley



It seems recently we have been reading much about the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. That lighthouse was first constructed over 150 years ago in 1870, and it stands 197 feet above the Atlantic Ocean off the Outer Banks. The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, is the tallest brick light tower in the United States.

And, what does the Cape Hatteras Light House have to do with Lauren Vanacore? Well let me explain. When we read about this lighthouse, we are reminded of the passage from Isaiah 58: "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn". As we ponder that passage of scripture and the Cape Hatteras Light house, we can just imagine years ago a small sailboat nearing the coastline of North Carolina after dark. Naturally, at that time the boat isn't equipped with modern Satellite Technology. Steering depends the light from the lighthouse and on the skill of the sailor. How welcome a sight that guiding light would be! And, we wonder how many sailors have kept a night watch and looked with yearning for the dawn. And, as Isaiah's passage indicates, dawn's light came as a welcome relief for eyes that were on duty in the dark.

That pretty much describes my ten-year relationship with Lauren. I was the small sailboat drifting near the shore, and Lauren, the mighty light house, guiding me in several directions. You see, there were many, many days that Lauren

was the shining light of First Presbyterian, guiding the staff and church leaders in the right direction. To paraphrase the prophet, Isaiah, "Lauren's guiding light broke forth many days like the dawn!"



When the church's Senior Minister was attending to a sick wife, it was Lauren who was the guiding light, and ultimately when the senior minister's wife died, it was Lauren who guided the staff. During the time when the Senior Minister was planning for and

ultimately retired, it was Lauren's light that guided several boats. During the time when we were without a Senior Pastor, yes, the guiding light duties became Lauren's and when we had two different Interim Pastors again, it was Lauren.

For ten years I witnessed her guiding light wonderfully di-



recting the operation of First Presbyterian-Gastonia while keeping her family and household intact. Together we officiated and cared for approximately 50 bereaved families. Together we endeavored to support two interim pastor search committees, while Lauren’s dedication did not lose sight of the mission of the church.

The Psalmist writes in 119: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”. There were those times that the staff was much like being on a lonely trail in the dark of night. How valuable a flashlight! We know the confidence that flashlight can provide. Yep! Lauren was that light on our path in many uncertain days.

The Psalmist knows well that God’s Word moves with us like a light along our path, like a lighthouse on shore. In all the uncertainty, Lauren never seemed to lose sight of the fact that God’s Word will bring us home. Lauren’s dedication to the Church and to the Presbytery is as beautiful as a lighthouse in the dark, as beautiful as the dawn. May we all imitate Lauren Vanacore’s example of faith and dedication. She will be missed.

“For ten years I witnessed her guiding light wonderfully directing the operation of First Presbyterian-Gastonia while keeping her family and household intact.”

The Strange and Wondrous Nature of God's Call

by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

In the Old Testament, God appeared to Abraham and commanded him to move to the land of Canaan in order to establish a new nation of people. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and commanded him to lead the People of Israel out of Egypt and to the Promised Land. God appeared to many prophets, sending them on various journeys to accomplish God's plan. In the New Testament, God spoke to Jesus as he was being baptized, saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus invited the disciples to follow him in order to fish for people. After his ascension, Jesus appeared to Saul, asking why he was persecuting those who followed the Risen Lord (temporarily binding him in the process).

These are just a few examples of God's call. Throughout Scripture, there is a clear pattern of God using humans to fulfill the promises God has made to be with us, to protect us, and to guide us through every season. In almost every instance in scripture, those who are called are as surprised as they feel inadequate to do what God has called them to do. God has a knack for finding the person no one expected, but ended up being the perfect person for the job. Everyone in scripture who follows God's call was required to stop, listen, and obey in order to go where God is leading them. It is a strange and wondrous component of God's relationship with humanity.

In the same way, we live in a time when we proclaim Christ's resurrection. We believe that God is alive and active today, and that the Holy Spirit continues to lead us every day in order to fulfill God's promises. Like those in scripture, those who follow God's call must stop, listen, and ultimately obey that sense of call, moving where God is leading. While I believe God calls all of us to our particular seasons and vocations, I also believe God sets aside certain individuals to serve as ordained pastors. Pastors live by a sense of God's call. We believe that God intentionally leads us to certain places at certain times to accomplish certain tasks. Often, we have no idea what that task is when we arrive. From my own experience, obeying God's call leads to gratitude, no matter how different God's call is from the plan I had constructed for myself. We do our best to stop, listen, and follow where God is leading us.

This month, we say farewell to Rev. Lauren Vanacore as she

follows God's call elsewhere. Lauren has stopped, listened, and is now following God to her next season of ministry. While it's okay for us at FPC to be saddened by her departure and to miss her when she's moved on, we can also express gratitude for what God did through Lauren during her time here. She was faithful to God's call for eleven years at FPC. She guided the congregation through many seasons of transition. She helped the new Senior Pastor get on his feet (for which he will always be grateful). Throughout it all, she loved us and cared for us in moments of joy and sorrow. Because of her tireless ministry, we are a congregation prepared for what God has in store for us next. For that reason, we can send Lauren off with love, gratitude, and confidence that God is guiding this process. As we move ahead, may we continue to rely on the strange and wondrous nature of God's call. Also, be sure to take time this month to stop and listen to God so that we may follow God where we are being led next.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Dan



From the Congregation

From the first time we met Lauren at Memorial Presbyterian Church in Greensboro where she was the pastor working with our daughter who was the Director of Music, we knew she was special. When our Associate Pastor position became open, the first person we thought of was Lauren because we knew that she would be the perfect candidate and she was. What we did not know was how special she would be to our family. Lauren has been with us for our most joyous celebrations and at our most difficult and sorrow filled times. She has shepherded us to a closer walk with our Lord and inspired us to look outside ourselves toward others in need around us. She married our daughter, Mary Lauren, traveled across the country to marry our son Wade, lead our youngest, Murphy through confirmation and baptized our grandsons Wyatt and Miles. She held our hands and prayed with us when we lost our parents and held up Mary Lauren and Wade when they lost their beloved mother Caroline. She became our family. Even though we are sad that our time with her as our Associate Pastor is ending, our time as family will not. She will forever and always be our family.” - *Betty and Charlie Burrell*

“What is your favorite memory involving Lauren: Where do I begin? I have been at First Presbyterian since Lauren was called to be our Associate Pastor. One day we were talking and we discovered that she knew my cousin, Doug McLeroy, who was a pastor at a Presbyterian church in Reidsville, NC. She assisted with his ordination service! Furthermore, when Doug assisted with my mother’s funeral at our church in 2019, he and Lauren were able to reconnect.

What about Lauren are you most grateful for? My most grateful interaction of many with Lauren was her invaluable support and guidance during my Session role as chair of the Missions Ministry Committee. Thank you so much for being my friend. I am grateful for our times of laughter and of tears.” - *Lynn Hathcock*

“Lauren has been such a positive influence on me, First Presbyterian Gastonia and on the Gastonia community at large. She has shared the love of Jesus in so many ways. Her preaching has been scripture based with thoughts and interpretations in which any person no matter their age or stage in life could find comfort. Baptisms have been heard often bringing strong emotions to all who shared in this sacrament. Our Confirmation class has been a strong point in her ministry leading a dedicated group over the years to bring teens into the church prepared. Committees she has

worked with have benefited from her wise council. Presbyterian women have enjoyed her support in Bible study which often started the yearly studies and in other ways always being there to help. During some difficult years she has stayed steady stepping in often to keep our church on its mission of being the hands and feet of Jesus. It is with great sadness we say thank you and good-bye but with great joy to see Lauren move forward following God’s will for her.”

- *Carol Brittain*

“One of my most vivid memories of Lauren was during the first Samaritan’s Feet event we did at the old YMCA. I can’t remember the year. We had an overwhelming response, and we ran out of shoes. The remaining guests were none too happy. They were very upset as a matter of fact and it began to get a bit chaotic. I was still getting to know Lauren personally so i was really surprised when she confidently strode right into the middle of this group as if she had a shield around her to inform the group of the situation and took the brunt of the anger and disappointment with kindness and respect. I remember telling her I had never been more proud to tell someone ‘that is my minister.’ God bless you Lauren for all you have done for our church over the years.” - *Lewis Efird*

“Coming to Gastonia as a ground-breaker, she brought energy and imagination tempered with a profound level of authenticity. She will be remembered in her role here for being a friendly face in a time of sadness, an encourager, a supporter, a reliable resource, leading by being an example in faithfulness. See Ya’ Later!” - *Kathy Gallman*

“Connecting with your minister can be a tricky thing, wanting to be the best version of yourself, yet open and honest. Lauren came to First Pres with a disarming grace and vulnerability that made knowing her easy. It also let me be myself in our friendship. Having a female in the pulpit with the similar struggles of raising boys and work / life balance has provided great material for many sermons that have hit “close to home.” Lauren has always listened and given honest feedback, but most importantly, Lauren has been pastorally present. Lauren has great instincts for ministry, and her genuine tears have become a hallmark of leadership. Next Sunday there will be a lot of tears, full of thankfulness, for the strong work of the Holy Spirit through Lauren’s beautiful ministry. May love and blessings continue Lauren, and thank you for so fully answering the call to Gastonia.

- *Susanne Current*

Attempting a Good Goodbye - by Rev. Lauren Sease Vanacore

Parting is such sweet sorrow," Juliet imparts to Romeo in William Shakespeare's classic tale of two star-crossed lovers. When we describe sorrow, rarely do we say it is "sweet." Yet, I stand in the crossroads and grieve that this season of ministry is ending, even as I look back on our nearly eleven years together and give thanks for how sweet it has been.

Jeff, Will, James and I remain deeply grateful that God saw fit to lead us to Gastonia in the spring and summer of 2011. "If the way be clear" is how we describe God's clarity of call in the Reformed Tradition as a pastor unites with a new congregation. The way couldn't have been any clearer for us as we met with the Pastor Nominating Committee (what an awesome bunch of people!) and accepted the call to be part of the First Presbyterian Church family. We were embraced by the dear folks of FPC and throughout Gastonia in ways we could have never imagined ahead of time. Strangers became friends, co-workers became treasured colleagues in ministry, and church members have become for us beloved disciples who journey with us as we worship and serve our Risen Lord.

As most of us know, every day of the last eleven years hasn't been a walk in the park! As I reflect upon all the ups and downs we have been through together, I can reflect upon it now with gratitude and with an understanding that I have grown in my faith, in my discipleship and in my skills in ministry. We have weathered the storms together and this is the best way to be a church family.

Upon my departure as your Associate Pastor, our relationship will change. I will no longer be your associate pastor. While I will always care about church members and their families, I will no longer participate in worship services, weddings, funerals or baptisms. I will no longer provide pastoral care by making visits to hospitals or those in health care centers. I will not attend other meetings and gatherings of the congregation. Although I will not be present on the church campus, my daily prayers will include the ongoing health and vitality of First Presbyterian Church as you continue to be the hands

and feet of Jesus in our community and throughout the world.

Because our family is remaining in Gastonia, this town we have come to love so dearly, if we see you while we are out and about, or bump into you at the boys' school, please know that while our conversation will not be about the church or things related to it, we will be glad to see your face and share friendly conversation. We will all learn to live into a new way of navigating our relationship as friends, but we will all need to release our relationship as pastor and parishioner.

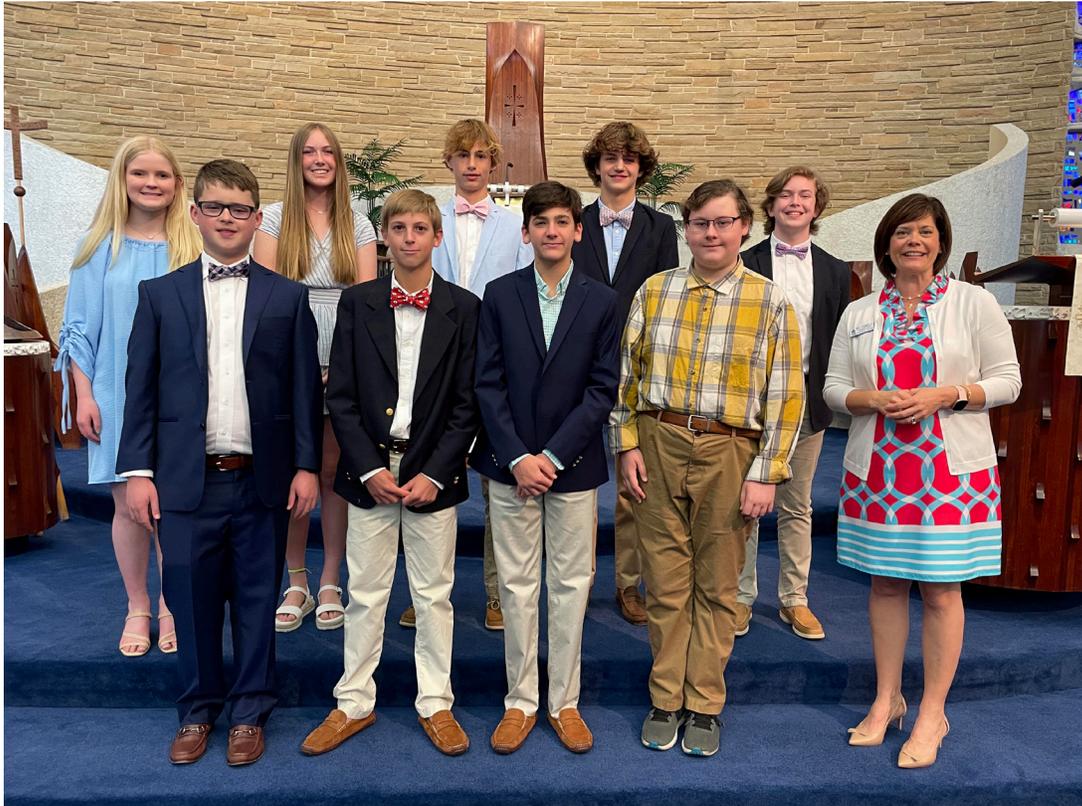
The "Former Pastor Policy and Covenant of Closure" of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, that has been signed by the Session and by me, reads in part:

"This policy does not require that the former pastor move from the area or cast aside friendships within the previous congregation. The former pastor is simply no longer the pastor of the congregation and may not provide pastoral services to the congregation or its members. This is an important distinction which needs to be carefully discussed and completely understood by both departing pastor and congregation. The fundamental principle underlying this policy is that the long-term needs of a congregation transcend the needs of the departing pastor or the congregation's grief over the pastoral transition. The burden of responsibility for ensuring a healthy transition lies primarily with the pastor who is leaving, although such a transition demands empathy and maturity from all parties—the former pastor, the new pastor, the session, and the members of the congregation."

As is clearly stated, the long term needs of First Presbyterian Church are my priority. What is most important to me as I depart is the healthy transition of First Presbyterian Church to welcome and embrace your next Associate Pastor. I am certain God is already working in the heart of the person whom this congregation will call. Whomever God sends to serve as Associate Pastor is going to quickly learn how blessed he or she is to be in ministry at First Presbyterian and throughout Gastonia! In the coming months, the Pastor Nominating

Committee that is elected by the congregation will discern that call and identify the person who will join you in the next leg of ministry at FPC. It will be up to all of us to respect the process and allow God's will to be done. Even with years of pastoral care experience, one of the tasks I have never fully mastered is how to say goodbye. I have read articles and books, blogs and memes about the best way to say a "good goodbye." Alas, I still struggle. So I impart this sentiment in-

stead, "I'll see you later." As followers of Jesus Christ, we lean deeply into the hope that God will bring us all together again one day, where we will rejoice in the new life given to us through Christ our Lord. Until that day, I charge you to live into all the ways God is calling you into renewed discipleship during this season of transition and to consider how you may serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. May God be glorified in all we say and do.



Congratulations Confirmation Class 2022

Nine students made their profession of faith before a delegation of the Session, their parents, mentors and pastors on Sunday, April 25. On Sunday, May 1, they were presented to the congregation and their Profession of Faith was confirmed by First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia. As a part of their confirmation experience, each student created his or her own stole, using Christian symbols to represent this time in their faith journey.

Front row (left to right): Rev. Lauren Sease Vanacore, Jackson Farris, Reilly Spencer, Thomas Efird, Braden Crabtree.
Back row (left to right): Morgan Finley, Clara Wallwork, Sam Kelly, George Current, Copeland Smith.

Special thanks to the Confirmation Teaching Team: Susanne and Will Current and Rev. Rachel Vogado.
Additional thanks to student mentors: Jeff Beaty, Robert Buckles, Tim Efird, Kenley Howe, Grady Kennington, Matt Miller, Lee Nester and Barbara Yarbrough.

Welcome to the newest members of the church! May God bless them as they continue their journey of faith and service to Jesus Christ. (Photo credit: Margaret Smith.)

Faith Formation

Youth Sunday

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in preparing for and leading Youth Sunday! Big thanks also goes to our graduates who shared inspiring messages with us from Psalm 23. All of our youth did an incredible job creating a truly meaningful opportunity to worship God together.

Graduate Recognition

Join us in congratulating the following members as they graduate from High School as the Class of 2022!

We also lift up our members and friends who have graduated from institutions of higher education, both undergraduate and graduate programs. May God bless you as you begin a new chapter in life!

Wild and Wacky Wednesdays!

Wild and Wacky Wednesdays are just around the corner! The children of the church (PreK-5th grade) are invited to join us for some summer fun! Look for more information and sign ups in the Faith Formation Weekly Update newsletter.



Emma Grace Conner is the daughter of Josie and David Conner. She is a graduate of Gaston Day School and will be attending the College of Charleston.



Carly Elaine Craig is the daughter of Julie and Frank Craig. She is a graduate of Forestview High School and will be attending the University of Georgia.



Anne Larkin Efird is the daughter of Caroline and Lewis Efird. She is a graduate of Gaston Day School and will be attending the University of Mississippi.



Isabel Pate Wallwork is the daughter of Thomissa and Geoff Wallwork. She is a graduate of Gaston Day School and will be attending North Carolina State University.



Join us this summer for Vacation Bible School! Register now to join the fun! Look for sign-ups for both children participants, and youth and adult volunteers in the Faith Formation weekly newsletter.

When: August 1-4, 2022
Time: 9:00 a.m. - Noon

June Birthdays / Congrats and Condolences

Parker Sytz	6/2	Ben Connor	6/18
Edith Warren	6/2	Caroline Letts	6/18
Megan Christenbury	6/3	Bill Roberts	6/18
Dena Beaty	6/4	Derek Bing	6/19
Davidson Hobson	6/4	Lisa Gibbons	6/19
Mila Rose Beaty	6/5	Martha Beal	6/20
Randy Silvers	6/5	Melanie Duncan	6/21
Dick Voorhees	6/5	Gloria Hickson	6/22
Hank Buchanan	6/6	David Kessell	6/22
Rick Hovis	6/7	Avery Price	6/22
Jessica Coffield	6/8	Sabrina Robinson	6/22
Hu Craig	6/8	Nan Thomas	6/22
James Vanacore	6/8	Drew Boyd	6/23
Mary Beth Stuart	6/9	Harrison Conner	6/23
Tom Watson	6/9	Carter Robinson	6/23
Haley Withers	6/9	Bethany Helms	6/23
Celia Frye	6/10	Joshua Duncan	6/24
Sally Hilton	6/10	Amanda Rutherford	6/26
Will Hooker	6/10	Mattox Trogdon	6/27
Betsy Thrower	6/11	Hub Hickson, Jr.	6/28
Becky Fail	6/12	Eddie Reese, Jr.	6/28
Jim Ragan	6/12	Tom Avery	6/29
Bennett Rockett	6/13	Shannon Caudle	6/29
Janet Jones	6/16	Mylah Howe	6/29
Tim Paschall	6/16	Joyce Wilds	6/29
George Reese	6/17	Tyler Bullock	6/30
Robert Reese	6/17	Jeff Howe	6/30
Craig Whitley	6/17	William Joles	6/30

Births

5/8 **Bowen Ray Burrell** – Jenny & Wade Burrell. Proud grandparents; Betty & Charlie Burrell.

5/10 **Tate Daniel Cherry** – Catherine & Trevor Cherry. Proud big brothers; Owen & Luke Cherry

5/12 **Yates Charles Bynum** – Meredith Wilson & Zach Bynum. Proud grandmother; Lydia Wilson. Proud great grandmother; Vicky Wilson

Deaths

5/12 **Marlys Nesheim Stackhouse** – sister of Ron Nesheim

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