

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT *by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford*

On January 3, I watched with so many others as Damar Hamlin, a safety for the Buffalo Bills, collapsed after a play during a Monday Night Football game. I watched the medical staff come onto the field and immediately begin to perform CPR as players from both teams watched in shock and horror. Eventually, Hamlin was placed into an ambulance and rushed to the hospital and the rest of the players and staff made their way to the locker rooms. At that point, a decision had to be made whether to continue the foot-

ball game or to send the players, staff, and fans home that night. It came as a pleasant surprise that the NFL, a billion-dollar organization, decided to suspend the game out of concern the well-being of its players. Even if it took longer than it should have to make that decision, the NFL made a statement that those players were not simply money-making machines. Rather, they were human beings who witnessed a traumatic event and needed to be cared for accordingly. It was a moment that reminded all of us what is

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really important. Beyond all the ways we identify ourselves, we are all humans who need to take care of one another, especially when we see others in need.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus reminded the world what was really important. In a world that encouraged people to identify themselves by race, wealth, religion, and how much power one could yield, Jesus spent his time ensuring that everyone received love and care equally. He healed those who were chronically ill. He ate with those whom society cast aside. He spent time with thieves, scoundrels, and criminals. He made common folk his closest advisors and partners in ministry. In doing all of this, Jesus leveled the playing field for everyone, reminding the world that all are created and loved by God equally. It's that understanding about God and humanity that serves as the foundation for deciding what is important. We are not the sum of our successes or failures,

nor are we the heights of our power or depths of our depravity. Rather, we are God's children, whose love shown in Christ is given as equally as it is powerfully.

Against seemingly insurmountable odds, Hamlin was resuscitated and has now begun a long road to recovery. What a testament to what is possible when everyone halts their routine in order to care for those who need it most! In our own lives, it's so easy to get caught up in our busyness that we can forget who we are and who others are. Luckily, it doesn't have to take a medical emergency or a traumatic event to change our perspective. Every day is an opportunity to seek God's love, be shaped by God's love, and share God's love by caring for others. As we continue to make our way into the new year, let's remember what's really important. In doing so, may we embrace and extend the care Jesus gives to all of us.



Souper Bowl of Caring and Nickel-A-Meal

On Sunday, February 12, FPC Youth will collect a special offering in recognition of the Souper Bowl of Caring. The Souper Bowl of Caring reminds us that while we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, there are many within our community who go without a bowl of soup to eat. Learn more about this initiative at tacklehunger.org. We will also collect tithes and gifts for the Nickel-A-Meal Program. Be sure to keep saving your change to contribute to this special offering! Offerings can be placed in the red buckets on Sunday morning.

Lenten Small Group

Have you ever wanted to deepen your spiritual life? Do you long for a prayer or scripture reading practice that is meaningful and sustainable? Beginning March 1, Rev. Perry will lead a small group on Wednesday mornings based on Henri Nouwen's book "Making All Things New." We will explore Nouwen's understanding of the spiritual life and will review various spiritual practices. The group will meet from 9:30 am- 11:00 am for five weeks. For discussion purposes, the group will be limited to 12 people. Participants are asked to order the book and read it before the group begins. The book is available to order online from various places for \$10-\$15. Please email Rev. Perry at lperry@fpcgastonia.org to register.



Ash Wednesday

The tradition of receiving ashes dates back to as early as the 10th century when Christians used the symbol of the cross marked on their foreheads in ashes as a reminder of their mortality and their need for repentance.

On Wednesday, February 22, we will have a drive through at 1:00 pm for you to receive ashes, prayers, and a blessing from the Pastoral Staff. At 5:30 pm, we will have a simple supper, with an Ash Wednesday service to follow.

Congratulations to:

Shannon & Brandon Caudle upon the birth of their daughter, **Melody Jane Caudle**, on Thursday, December 29.

Meredith Hastings Witherell upon graduating from the University of South Carolina with honors from the Arnold School of Public Health on December 12, 2022. Witherell completed her undergrad with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health with natural science cognates in Biology and Chemistry. Proud parents are **Kimberly and Tim Witherell**.

Murphy Dobbins Burrell upon graduating from Appalachian State University on December 16, 2022. Burrell completed her undergrad with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a concentration in Human Services. Proud parents are **Betty and Charlie Burrell**.

Condolences to:

Susan Adams, Minor Adams, and Cooke Thompson upon the death of **M.R. "Chuck" Adams** on Sunday, January 8.

Carol Brittain and family upon the death of her sister, **Peggy Belk Jolley**, on Wednesday, January 18.

Les McLean upon the death of his sister, **"Topsy" McLean Robinson**, on Monday, January 23.

Gene Matthews upon the death of his father, **Frank Matthews**, on Tuesday, January 24.



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Isabella Thornburg	03/01	Rebecca Bounous	03/16
Kevin Eads	03/02	Tony Curella	03/17
Polly Jasmin	03/03	Patty Ratchford	03/17
Gwin Hilton	03/04	Fred Upchurch	03/17
Suzanne McLean	03/04	Jay Falls	03/18
Joseph Morris	03/04	Rick Jones	03/18
Louisa Sloan	03/04	Karl Osei-Boateng	03/18
Michael Lipscomb	03/04	Judy Planer	03/19
Janet Greene	03/05	Evan Roberts	03/20
Rick Page	03/05	Drew Johnson	03/20
Jason Shiflet	03/06	Jewel Brown	03/21
Laura Costas	03/07	Lillian Osei-Boateng	03/21
Madeline Letts	03/07	Don Thrower	03/21
Ring Stafford	03/07	Cliff Carver	03/22
Gail Eads	03/08	Mollie Trospen	03/22
Martha Greene	03/10	Ella Trogdon	03/23
Rees Gibbons	03/11	Lynne Hathcock	03/24
Ken Stuart	03/11	Rick Bryant	03/25
Heather Carver	03/12	Bailey Bullock	03/26
Bill Brown	03/13	Ashe Carver	03/27
Emma Conner	03/13	Dottie LaFar	03/27
Dolph Sumner	03/13	Leslie Lewis	03/27
Marshall Witherell	03/13	Cindy Wilson	03/27
Pres Adams	03/14	Betsy Burleson	03/28
Riley Grubb	03/14	Jim Camp, III	03/28
Allison Simmons	03/14	Sherry Cloninger	03/28
Ben Digby	03/15	Ashleigh Rockett	03/28
Stuart Euliss	03/15	Gene Williams	03/29
Jackson Farris	03/15	Anna Renfro	03/30
Trevor Cherry	03/16	Kimberly Witherell	03/30
Susan Elkins	03/16	Lil Lanier	03/31
Kathy Skidmore	03/16	Dottie Scher	03/31



An Update from the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee

By Ernest Sumner, III

On Jan. 10 we completed our training with Dr. Byron Wade, General Presbyter of Western Carolina. We are now actively soliciting candidates, either through the Presbytery, by seminary recommendations or contact by candidates themselves. We are in the process of reading their Personal Information Forms (PIF) which tell us about their education, experience in the ministry and the reason for their interest in First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia.

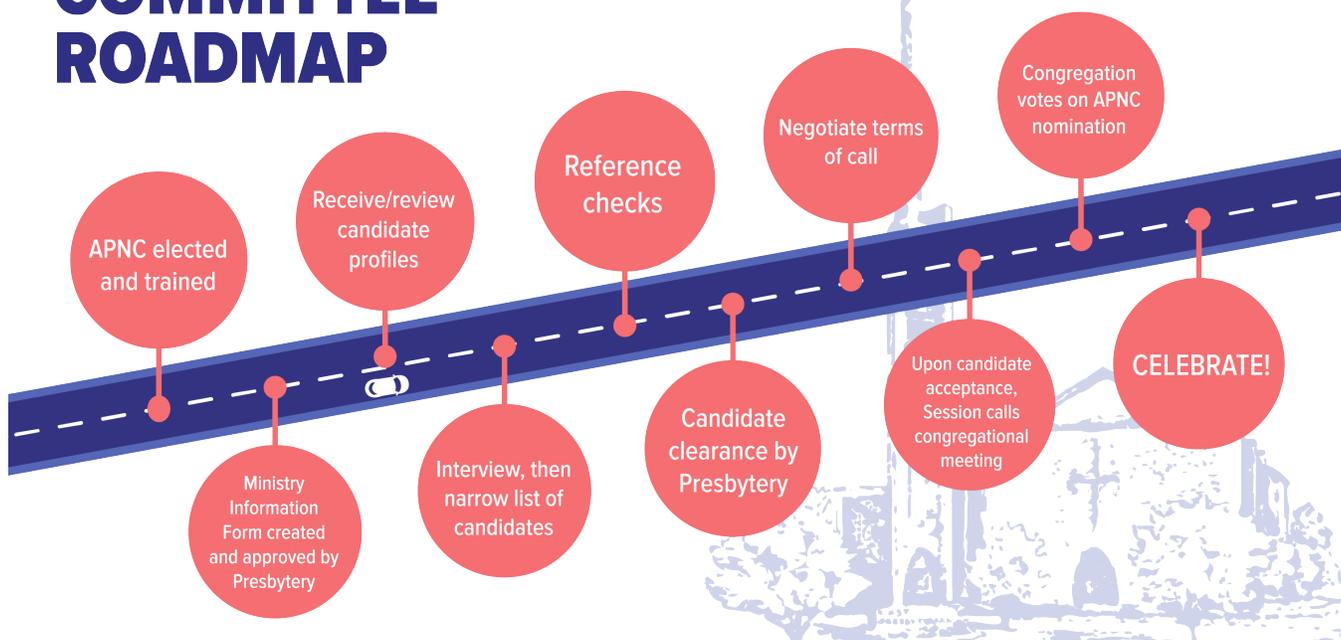
We are excited to report that we have received many PIFs of potential candidates and have begun the process of careful and prayerful consideration. In the coming weeks we will

narrow down the field and invite candidates for interviews.

We know that God has already chosen our new Associate Pastor. His hands guide us every step of the way. Thank you all for your prayers as we look forward to the day that we can introduce our new Associate Pastor to you. We are so grateful to Interim Associate Pastor Lance Perry for his advice and support.

Committee members: Chairman Mike Wallace, Robert Buckles Judy Planer, Melanie Duncan, Matt Miller, Mary Layton, and Ernest Sumner III.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE ROADMAP



Rise[®] AGAINST HUNGER

Sunday, March 26 at 12:00 pm

The Mission Committee is pleased to announce the long wait created by the pandemic is over! As part of our commitment to meaningful mission, First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia will again be participating in a Rise Against Hunger event. They may look like simple bags of rice and soy, but Rise Against Hunger meals represent the hopes and dreams of people worldwide. Volunteers are the heart of the mission to end hunger by 2030. More than 40% of the prepared meals are distributed to school feeding programs. For many students, this is their only meal of the day. **We will be hosting this event in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday, March 26, immediately after the 11:00 am worship service.** Our goal is 30,024 meals, which will mean we need about

150 volunteers. Please volunteer to help! We encourage you to register online by visiting: events.riseagainsthunger.org/firstpresgastonia2023 or you can register by scanning the QR code with your phone's camera app. If you have trouble registering, please contact the front desk for assistance.



See you on March 26 with your ball cap, sensible shoes, and no dangling jewelry! Childcare will be provided.

Rise Against Hunger is not supported by One Great Hour of Sharing, but shares a similar version and mission to hunger insecurity.



Missions Update

Guatemala Microloan Project Trip

Please prayerfully consider whether this is the year you might be able to join. Participants who have helped within the last three years have found it to be an extremely rewarding experience. This year, trip participants will spend time with ADEHGUA staff and visit microloan groups and some of their businesses. The group will also spend time learning about Guatemala history, culture, and geography. The cost for the trip is \$1,800 per person and may be supplemented by our Missions Committee. If you would like an application form, please contact Ellen Dozier or Mary Louise Forsythe.

Ellen Dozier: (828) 403-3988, ellendozier@hotmail.com

Mary Louise Forsythe: (314) 303-3563, mlbforsythe@gmail.com

Crisis Assistance Ministry Food Collection

The Missions Committee has extended the CAM food collection through mid-February. Please leave dried goods and canned foods in the boxes at the Reception Desk, Fellowship Hall, or Narthex.



Malawi, Ebenezer School

Ebenezer School, which PWNC helped start in 2009 and continues to support, has almost 400 students; pre-kindergarten through middle school. Over the years, the presbytery has built classrooms and housing and provided continuing education.

The Malawi Missions Committee is planning a trip in April 2023. A specific date will be determined soon. The cost for the trip will be approximately \$3,000. For more information about the trip, contact Michael McKee at mikemckee12@gmail.com.

Presbyterian Women

Deadline for Presbytery Scholarships is February 15

Scholarship opportunities are available! Packets containing information and applicant forms are available at the reception desk at the church office. The scholarship application is also posted on the website of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. ***You can find it by navigating to www.presbyterywnc.org/ministry/presbyterian-women and then looking under "items of interest."*** ***The application deadline is February 15, 2023.***



Food Fest and Bake Sale

Saturday, March 4 — 9:00 am-11:00 am
First Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall

Casseroles, soups, cakes, pies, and so much more! Come help support our local missions!



Blanket Sunday

On March 5 we will be receiving an offering for Blanket Sunday. This mission, supported by Presbyterian Women, provides assistance for those in need. Church World Service provides blankets, hygiene kits and other supplies to those recovering from natural and man-made disasters in the US and around the world. Consider a generous donation to this ministry by making your check payable to First Presbyterian Church with Blanket Sunday in the memo line.



Spring Gathering featuring Rev. Margaret LaMotte Torrence

Saturday, April 22 — 10:00 am-12:00 pm
First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia

All Presbyterian women are invited to come and bring a friend for the Gathering and Lunch. “Off The Streets, Gastonia” will be the recipients of the offering. Registration coming soon!

Presbyterian women save the dates:

March 4, 2023
March 5, 2023
April 24, 2023
May 8, 2023

Presbyterian Women Food-fest and Bake Sale
Women’s Sunday
Presbyterian Women’s Council Lunch
Birthday Luncheon

Circle 1

Betsy Summer

When: 2/13 @ 10:00 am

Where: Parlor

Hostesses:

Sylvia Seawell
Beth Bowlin

Circle 2/3

Tina Barringer

When: 2/13 @ 10:30 am

Where: Covenant Village Parlor

Hostesses: N/A

Circle 4

Frances Henry/Katie Reese

When: 2/14 @ 10:00 am

Where: The PAD

Hostesses:

Angie Sellers
Linda Ratchford
Alice Matthews

Circle 5

LeeAnn Harris

When: 2/7 @ 7:00 pm

Where: The PAD

Hostesses: LeeAnn Harris

Circle 6

Lenise Melton

When: 2/13 @ 6:30 pm

Where: Parlor

Hostess:

Beverly Bradshaw

Circle 7

Stephanie Miller

When: Contact Steph Miller

Where: Rachel Commerford’s Home
@ 7 pm

Hostess:

Rachel Commerford

Service circle members are welcome to visit any regular circle for the Bible study.

Planned Giving Spotlight

Bob & Janet Spencer

When Bob and Janet Spencer joined First Presbyterian Church in 1984, Jim Stuart was the pastor and he said to them in a home visit that the best way to grow closer to God and to feel a part of their new church was to get actively involved. The Spencers certainly took that to heart! Both of them have consistently volunteered at our church throughout the years, serving on numerous church committees including the Diaconate and the Session. Their hard work, deep reverence and enthusiastic Christian spirit have been a blessing to our church and our community. This commitment to First Presbyterian led the Spencers to include the church in their estate planning. We asked them to share a little bit about how they came to that decision.



Why Planned Giving?

No one is promised tomorrow. We plan our estates now to provide for our families and to further our priorities and values in the future. Setting out in clear terms what those priorities are makes sense. Proverbs 21:5 says “Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run...” Leaving the decision to your children or spouse can be stressful for them and may not reflect your wishes at all.

Why the church?

First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia has been our church home for all the years we have lived here since locating to the area in 1984. FPC has been a place of worship for our family. Our children had the benefit of Sunday school teachers, scout leaders and youth leaders throughout their childhood. FPC provided resources we took full advantage of with the after-school program and other programs for children and youth. Attending church services each week was the only consistent activity we did as a family. We would like FPC to continue to provide worship services, Christian education, and to be a place to learn and grow in faith. There really isn't anything more important than telling the story of God's love and how to bring about His kingdom.

What method to use?

We found that the easiest method or planned giving tool for us was to have our last will and testament spell out a percentage of remaining assets to be directed to our Donor Advised Fund at the Community Foundation at our deaths. We set up our Fund at the Foundation several years ago and have recently revised its terms to provide that a certain percentage of the assets in the Fund will pass to our church after our death. This is a very easy and quick process, and now we have the

satisfaction of knowing that we will be contributing to the long-term future of First Presbyterian.

There are a variety of options available to include First Presbyterian Church in your estate planning. The method chosen by the Spencers exemplifies the ease of one of these options. If you would like more information about including the church in your estate plan, please call, text or email Liz Sumner (704-616-0389 or lsumner@mhc-law.com) or any one of the Planned Giving Ministry members.

Planned Giving Ministry members: Cindy Clark, Lee DuBois, Caroline Efird, Tom Efird, Kathy Gallman, Lee Ann Harris, Spurgeon Mackie, Hayley Nester, Liz Sumner



Open registration began on February 1, but it's not too late to register your pre-schooler! If you need to register, you can do so by visiting the PWS page located under the "more" tab on our website. For more information or if you would like a tour, please contact the preschool by calling (704) 864-2651 ext. 111 or by emailing pws@fpcgastonia.org. We would love to hear from you!



Harris Teeter's Together In Education program gives schools a chance to earn funds when you link your VIC card and shop Harris Teeter brands. When you shop Harris Teeter brands, and link your VIC card, a percentage of your purchase is donated to our preschool. To link your card and help PWS, please scan the QR code.

THE FIRST PRESS

First Presbyterian Church

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

Return Service Requested

PERIODICALS
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Service Views and Attendance

Date	Traditional Service	Traditional Livestream	Thrive Service	Thrive Livestream
Jan 1	61	65	-	-
Jan 8	150	143	43	55
Jan 15	114	83	58	42
Jan 22	98	120	62	47
Jan 29	150	55	60	25

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