

THE FIRST PRESS

April 1, 2023 • Volume 28 • Issue 4



WILL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE REPLACE THE CHURCH?

by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

Recently, I read an article exploring the rapidly growing advances of artificial intelligence (AI). Currently, there is software that is smart enough to take notes during a meeting, write complex literature ranging across all sorts of genres, and converse with individuals. I even listened to a podcast where actors from a long-cancelled television show used AI to write additional scenes of their show before performing the finished product for all to hear. AI is now able to perform tasks we never imagined anyone

but humans could do. It is predicted that AI will begin to replace jobs (and even industries) that used to rely on human intellect and interaction to succeed.

As industries begin to adapt, I found myself wondering how AI will impact the life of the church. Some have speculated that it won't take long for AI to be able to write sermons for pastors and create programming for church members. Although the notion of someone

other than human doing the work of ministry is an unpleasant thought for me, I don't think we can ignore what is happening. The church has a long history of resisting or ignoring change. It also has a history of suffering because of that resistance. I feel we do better when we face new possibilities with curiosity instead of suspicion. With that in mind, I offer two brief observations when it comes to artificial intelligence impacting the church:

If we regard church only as a place to improve ourselves, AI is already a more enticing. There is a temptation to use church as a place to only work on ourselves. For those who fall in this category, the worship service is meant to make us feel good, the sermon is meant to teach us how to be better people, and the congregation is meant to support us when we are in need. If that's all church is meant to be, then AI has already made the local church obsolete! There are thousands of churches on YouTube that broadcast their worship services, sermons, and offer an encouraging word for those who are struggling. If all we are looking for is a place to make ourselves better how we see fit, we will eventually find something that is more comfortable on YouTube than in the local church.

If church is the place for us to grow in faith alongside brothers and sisters in Christ while spreading the Good News, we will always need one another. AI can't prayerfully craft a message that is tailored to what we NEED to hear instead of what we WANT to hear. AI can't wrestle with the nuances of scripture while navigating the challenges of life. AI can't cook a casserole for someone grieving the loss of a loved one. AI can't stand next to us and be as moved as we are while doing mission work. The very nature of God is relational as God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer dance together in a Trinitarian mystery.

For that reason, the church will always be relational and will rely on us to worship together, grow together, and serve together amidst all the walks of life from which we come.

I have no doubt that artificial intelligence will make its way into the church. Almost every other form of technology has done so, and we have benefitted because of it. That being said, artificial technology will never replace the church because only God's children can be the church. My prayer is that we can, with curiosity and faith in the Spirit to guide us, use whatever God gives us to glorify Christ and make him known.

See you in worship!

Congratulations to:

Rick and Jan Jones upon the birth of their grandson **Luther James Vaden** on Thursday, March 2.

Condolences to:

Charlie Burrell and Family upon the death of his sister **Bonnie Gibson** on Sunday, February 26.

Payton and Ronald Warren upon the death of their mother **Edith Warren** on Sunday, March 12.





Congratulations to our Spirit of North Carolina Award Winner: Barbara Yarbrough!

The Spirit of North Carolina Award offers United Ways in North Carolina communities an opportunity to honor organizations and individuals who exemplify the “spirit” of their community. Winners meet specific standards of achievement and are nominated by their local United ways. United Way of North Carolina leads the award nomination and process and presents the award annually.

On March 1-3 2023, United Way of North Carolina recognized 74 Spirit of North Carolina Award winners, representing 17 local United Ways. These companies and organizations not only demonstrated excellence in their United Way campaign but are building a philanthropic culture community-wide.

Notifying the Church of Health Care Admissions

The Diaconate would like to remind all church members that if you, your family, or other loved ones are admitted to a health care facility such as a hospital, nursing home, or rehab facility, FPC will not be notified by these facilities; doing so would be breaking HIPAA laws. If you would like the church staff and church family to know about such an event, please call and notify the church office.

First Presbyterian Church Scholarship Applications

The church business office is accepting applications for the 2023-24 academic year. 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 or by visiting fpcgastonia.org. Applications must be completed and returned by May 1 in order to be considered.

Ushers Needed for Thrive Services

We are seeking volunteers to help usher each Sunday. If you are interested, please contact Becky Adams with any questions.

Email: becky.adams@allentate.com

Phone: (704) 813-1367

Announcements and Upcoming



HOLY WEEK
Schedule of Services

	4/2	PALM SUNDAY WORSHIP WITH PALM PROCESSIONAL 8:55 AM THRIVE 11:00 AM TRADITIONAL
EASTER EGG HUNT TO FOLLOW AT 12:00 PM		
	4/6	MAUNDY THURSDAY 6:00 PM FELLOWSHIP HALL
	4/8	GOOD FRIDAY 7:00 PM SANCTUARY
	4/9	EASTER SUNDAY EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE 7:00 AM COLUMBARIUM 8:55 AM THRIVE 11:00 AM TRADITIONAL

New Eastertide Sermon Series *Heavenly Encounters*

On Easter Sunday, we will begin a new sermon series titled, *Heavenly Encounters*. Each sermon will focus on Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to Mary, the Disciples, Peter, and others! To get familiar with the scripture content, we encourage you to read through John chapters 20-21, Luke chapter 24, and Acts chapter 9.

Presbyterian Women Birthday Luncheon

The Presbyterian Women Birthday Luncheon is May 8 at 12:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. Rev. Ellen Crawford True will be our guest speaker.

S.O.C.K.S Collection

The Missions Committee will be collecting food for S.O.C.K.S (Serving our Community with Kindness in Springwood) Crisis Ministries now through April. Please leave donations of canned goods, dried foods and non-perishable food items in the boxes located at the Reception Desk and Fellowship Hall. S.O.C.K.S provides a variety of basic needs assistance to individuals and families in need in the community, such as food, clothing, and crisis intervention services.

Collection for Our Neighbors at Grier Middle School

Throughout the month of April we will collect clean, gently used leggings and sweatpants in sizes appropriate for middle schoolers in the marked boxes near the front office and just outside the Fellowship Hall. Please also bring donations of sanitary napkins for Grier students as well. These items may seem simple to us, but are in great need at Grier. Let's help our neighbors in April.



A Day at Black Mountain Home for Children

Please join us for a day at Black Mountain Home for Children on May 30. We are looking for 50 people, including children, to volunteer. Lunch will be provided. Transportation will be available for up to 30 people who would prefer not to drive separately.



Call for Substitute Sunday School Teachers

When we baptize an infant or child, we promise to help with the spiritual journey for the child. One of the most enriching church experiences in childhood is Sunday School. We have an amazing team of teachers but are in need of substitutes on the occasions of travel and illness. Please consider serving as a substitute teacher for one or more of the following age groups:

- Kindergarten-First Grade
- Second-Fourth Grade
- Fifth-Seventh Grade
- Ninth-Twelfth Grade

If you are willing to serve as a substitute teacher for any or all of these age groups, please email Josie Conner at asiajosie@icloud.com and include the age group(s) for which you are interested, as well as your contact information.

2022 Missions Report

Benevolences

Black Mountain Home for Children Angel Tree	\$5,959.87
Black Mountain Home for Children Christmas Eve Offering	\$3,815.00
Children's Hope Alliance	\$1,500.00
Christmas Joy Offering	\$2,725.00
Disaster Relief/World Outreach Ukraine	\$5,183.36
Nickel-A-Meal	\$11,752.50
One Great Hour of Sharing Offering	\$9,078.00
Presbyterian Foundation Teaching Honorarium	\$200.00
Presbytery of Western North Carolina	\$100,200.00
Union Presbyterian Seminary	\$300.00

Local Missions

Boys/Girls Club Meals	\$3,582.50
Cancer Services of Gaston County (Christmas in July)	\$6,457.00
Christ Community Baptist Outreach (Souper Bowl)	\$1,425.00
Crisis Assistance Ministry (CAM)	\$5,095.50
Habitat for Humanity (Connections Class)	\$50.00
Gastonia's Potter House	\$1,000.00
Gastonia Residential Services	\$1,000.00
Gastonia Street Ministry	\$1,435.65
Gateway Gaston Assistance	\$139.50
Salvation Army/Seekers Food Pantry Donation	\$800.00
School Support - Grier/Sherwood	\$1,000.00
S.O.C.K.S	\$2,220.00

Presbyterian Women

Black Mountain Home for Children Fall Festival	\$500.00
Microloan Donations Guatemala	\$850.00
Presbyterian Women Donation	\$250.00
First Presbyterian Church Scholarship Program	\$25,500.00

Benevolences Total **\$192,018.88**

2022 PET Annual Report

The Presbyterian Endowment Trust (PET) was established by our congregation in 1979 for the purpose of holding and managing the endowment funds of the church. According to our congregational resolution, these funds are to be used to expand our witness to Jesus Christ, to serve God and mankind through our denomination, to provide new and varied opportunities for religious fellowship, worship and education, and to support worthy community projects and programs designed to attend to the needs and wants of the elderly, sick, poor, young, bereaved, and disabled. To those ends, the funds of PET award grants each year to a variety of worthy causes which are set out in this Annual Report.

2022 Presbyterian Endowment Trust (PET)

General Fund

Backpack Weekend Food Program	\$24,954.00
Black Mountain Home for Children	\$16,115.00
Cancer Services of Gaston County	\$2,000.00
Children Hope Alliance	\$15,000.00
Gaston Literacy Council	\$4,950.00
Habitat for Humanity - Dixon Village	\$50,000.00
Heart Society of Gaston County/Medication Assist	\$5,000.00
Kintegra Health Free Dental Clinic	\$15,000.00
Presbytery of Western NC/Ukraine Relief	\$3,000.00
Presbytery of Western NC/Guatemalen Scholarship	\$4,620.00
Presbytery of Western NC/Microloan Project	\$3,750.00
Union Presbyterian Seminary/Kuykendall Grant	\$10,000.00
Heritage Fund - Boiler Replacement	\$4,086.47
Frank Davis Children's Fund	\$0.00
David Groves Fund - CAM	\$4,280.00
Presbyterian Weekday School Endowment Fund	\$5,619.00
Jackson Youth Fund	\$0.00
Torrence Fund	\$0.00
Pearl Wilson Mission Fund	\$7,762.00

PET Total **\$176,136.47**

The market value of PET funds as of 12/31/22 was as follows:

General Fund	\$2,840,325.08
Heritage Fund	\$351,932.26
Frank Davis Children's Fund	\$197,099.03
David Groves Fund	\$89,252.72
Jackson Youth Fund	\$212,767.15
PWS Endowment Fund	\$103,773.48
Torrence Fund	\$73,185.93
Pearl Wilson Fund	\$151,348.73
Sally and Ralph Robinson Fund	\$1,007,654.00

Presbyterian Women



Spring Gathering featuring Rev. Margaret LaMotte Torrence

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

Our speaker for the 2023 Spring Gathering is the Reverend Margaret LaMotte Torrence. She will introduce our 2023-2024 Bible Study: *Sacred Encounters: The Power and Presence of Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts*. The Reverend Torrence is a graduate of Davidson College and Princeton Theological Seminary. She has served several interim pastorates including Black Mountain Presbyterian, First Presbyterian, Sarasota, and University Presbyterian, Chapel Hill.

Register online by using the tear-off slip or by visiting our website. Please mail checks and slips to:

Gloria Hickson
2961 Heritage Commons Lane
Gastonia, NC 28054
Phone: 704-865-6109
Email: hghickson@aol.com

The deadline to register is April 7.

Circle Meeting Schedule for March

Circle 1

4/17 @ 10:00 am
Church Parlor
Hostess: Donna Atkins & Kay
Brown

Circle 2/3

4/17 @ 10:30 am
Covenant Village Living Room

Circle 4

4/11 @ 11:30 am
Church Parlor
Hostess: Katie Reese, Rebecca
Crank

Circle 5

4/17 @ 7:00 pm
Coleman Efird's Home

Circle 6

4/10 @ 6:30 pm
Church Parlor
Hostess: Betty Davenport

Circle 7

4/11 @ 7:00 pm
The Chapman Home

Name: _____

Email: _____

Church: _____

May Birthdays

Rebekah Dixon	05/01	Sonya Spencer	05/15
Brooke Maxwell	05/01	Scott Digby	05/16
Jennifer Gibson	05/02	Farris Smith	05/17
Priscilla Quinn	05/02	Tom Wallace	05/17
Tucker Doyne	05/03	Buck Glenn	05/18
Morgan Finley	05/03	Matthew Poag	05/19
Archer Price	05/03	Lee DuBois	05/21
Bill Current	05/04	Hayley Nester	05/21
Patty Everhardus	05/04	Geoff Wallwork	05/21
Sally Kennington	05/04	Bill Aycock	05/22
Lauren Empey	05/05	Ben Carmichael	05/22
Greg Sellers	05/05	Susanne Current	05/22
George Current	05/06	Ryan Howe	05/22
Robert Rutherford	05/06	Becky Adams	05/23
Robbie Lineberger	05/07	Bob Blake	05/23
Jonathan Murphrey	05/07	Bryan Farris	05/23
Megan Euliss	05/08	Jack McLean	05/24
Lance Brenner	05/09	Kay Moss	05/24
Julia Shovelin	05/09	Barron O'Shields	05/24
Robert Sumner	05/09	Daniel Vaughn	05/25
Tate Cherry	05/10	Sam Schroeder	05/26
Nancy Paschall	05/10	Katie Sumner	05/26
Dee Upchurch	05/10	Rusty Harris	05/27
Gena Craig	05/07	Caroline Mudd	05/27
Susan Challenger	05/11	Robin Lewallen	05/27
Don Barringer	05/12	Margaret Smith	05/27
Hugh Sales	05/12	Liz Sumner	05/27
Becca Shiflet	05/12	Brian Edwards	05/28
Bo Abernethy	05/13	Tim Farris	05/28
Baity Ferguson	05/13	Jim Ratchford	05/28
Wayne Finley	05/13	John Garrett	05/29
Betty Wren	05/13	Scotty Pierce	05/29
Kelly Hovis	05/14	Teddie Falls	05/30
Emily Seawell	05/14	Nancy Garrett	05/30
Gretchen Akers	05/15	Barbara Hite	05/30
Wade Coffey	05/15	Meredith Wallace	05/30
Alison Cookson	05/15	Alice Wood	05/30
Margaret Craig	05/15	Kyle Holland	05/31
Dakota Shook	05/15	Alice Thompson	05/31
Amy Spencer	05/15		

Planned Giving Spotlight

Carol Andrews (11/29/1954 – 7/11/2022)

Many of us in the church remember Mickie Andrews as a soft spoken, nurturing teacher in our Presbyterian Weekday School. Lots of us were lucky enough to have either had her for a teacher or had children or grandchildren in her classes. Mickie and her husband Ed, who was a career U. S. Postal employee, were long time members of our church, giving of their time, talents and treasures until Ed passed away in 1991 and Mickie in 2015.



They were also devoted parents who were blessed with one daughter, Carol. Carol grew up in our church and enjoyed Sunday School and youth handbells. After high school she attended Lees McRae College and then graduated from Lenoir Rhyne College with a degree in Early Childhood Education. Following in her mother's footsteps, she began a 35 year career in the Gaston County School System as a first grade teacher. Carol and Mickie shared a love of young children and spent their adult lives making sure the children in their classes got off to a good start with their education.

They also shared a love of First Presbyterian Church. Carol was a faithful member of our congregation who attended church when she could and watched our services online regularly when her infirmity prevented her from coming in person. Sadly, the last decade of Carol's life was spent in declining health with limited ability to get out of the house, but in spite of her physical limitations, her caregivers described her as kind, loving and generous until her last day.

The Andrews were a family of great values, living Christian lives and by example teaching those Christian principles to those around them. As teachers and public servants, they gave back to this community every day.

Ed and Mickie left their estate to Carol to make sure she had the resources to care for herself as her health declined. They also instilled in her the value of being generous and the importance of supporting the church. Even when she was in failing health, Carol did what many of us put off--she had an attorney prepare her will with her instructions to distribute the remainder of her estate to the charities that meant the most to her and her parents. First Presbyterian Church is one of the beneficiaries. By including the church in her will, Carol honored the Christian legacy of her parents and will help sustain the church's missions for generations to come.

Our Second Celebration of Planned Giving Sunday

May 7, 2023 will be a special day in the life of First Presbyterian. We will celebrate Youth Sunday and Planned Giving Sunday at a combined service in the sanctuary at 10:00. Having these two themes together in one service is perfect. The purpose of planned giving is to support the long term mission of the church, and the ones who will benefit from that foresight are our youth. After the 10:00 combined service, the Planned Giving Ministry will host a luncheon for all members of the 1882 Giving Circle which is comprised of church members who have remembered the church in their will, retirement plan, life insurance policy, donor advised fund or otherwise. If you would like to learn more or be included in the 1882 Giving Circle, please reach out to any of the members of the Planned Giving Ministry or the church office. We look forward to seeing you on Sunday!

Pictured standing left to right: David McFadden, Business Administrator; Kathy Gallman; Tom Efird; Caroline Efird; Hayley Nester; Liz Sumner, Chair.

Pictured seated left to right: Cindy Clark; LeeAnn Harris.

Not pictured: Spurgeon Mackie; Lee DuBois.



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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	Traditional Service	Traditional Livestream	Thrive Service	Thrive Livestream
Mar 5	107	74	56	37
Mar 12	105	85	24	28
Mar 19	138	70	37	28
Mar 26	157	55	61	25

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