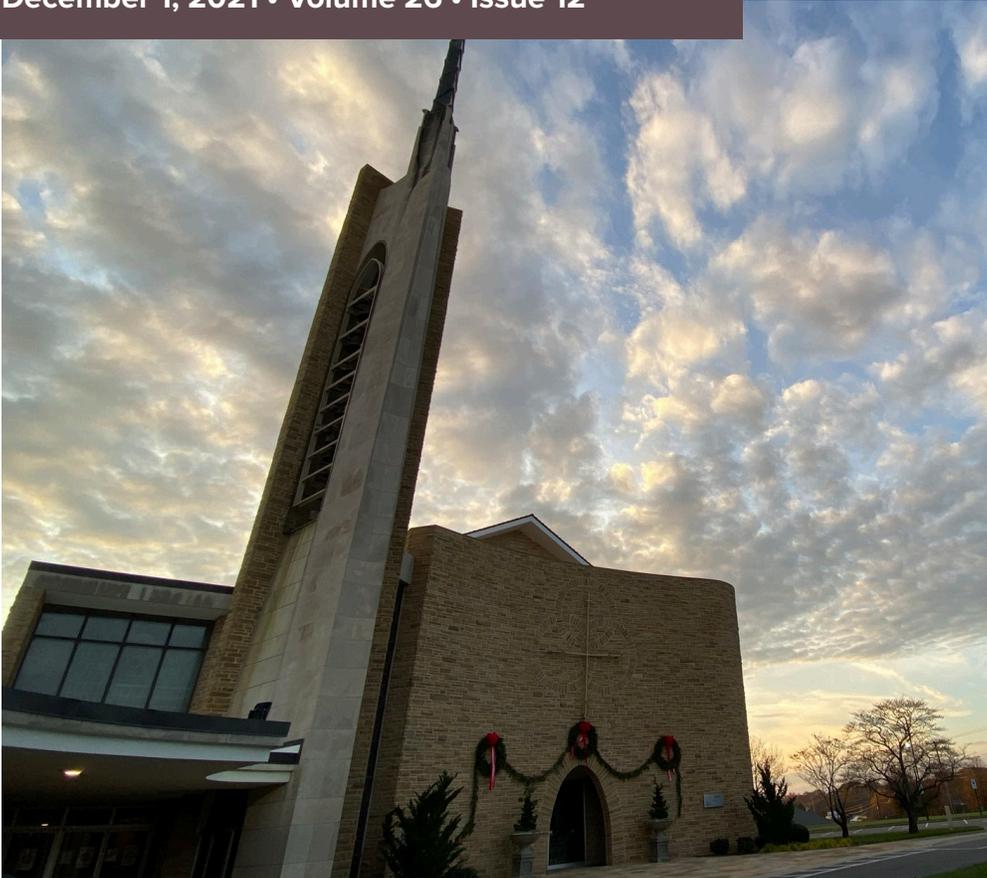


# THE FIRST PRESS

December 1, 2021 • Volume 26 • Issue 12



## IN THIS ISSUE

**News and  
Announcements**  
- Page 4

**History of the  
Chrismon Tree**  
- Page 6

**Faith Formation  
Updates**  
- Page 10

## NEW CELEBRATIONS, SAME CHRIST from Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

Over the past couple weeks, my family and I have begun to prepare our new home for the Christmas season. We unpacked our Christmas tree, ornaments, and stockings and found a place for them in our living room. We've begun to play Christmas music throughout the house and are now looking forward to seeing those famous Christmas lights in McAdenville. These are just a few of the ways we are excited to celebrate Christmas in Gaston County for the first time. If my memory serves me correctly,

this is the fifth state in which I have celebrated Christmas. I've spent Christmas day walking through my neighborhood as a fluffy white snow gently floated down to the earth, transforming it into a picturesque landscape. I've celebrated Christmas by playing a round of golf and then swimming in the ocean. I've eaten Christmas dinner in a familiar home surrounded by family, but remember fondly one year I ate at a packed IHOP in the

*Continued on page 2*

middle of Kansas. Some Christmases have been full of noise and activity while others have been quiet and peaceful. I consider myself blessed to have been able to experience the Christmas holiday in so many different ways. It's taught me that, no matter how many different ways there are to celebrate Christmas, Christ remains the same who was, is, and ever will be.



That being said, as much as my Christmas season has been varied, my experience celebrating Advent has been fairly consistent. Advent is the time we anticipate the arrival of Emmanuel, "God with us." The idea of God being with us is radical if you think about it. God's desire to be with us was so great that God was willing to take on our flesh to bear it perfectly. Quite often, we focus on the end of Jesus' time on

earth, but Advent gives us the opportunity to celebrate the beginning of his time with us. As a baby born in a manger, Jesus revealed God's amazing plan for us to be reconciled, redeemed, and be given new life. Christ's birth was the dawn of a new creation and signifies our ability to become a new creation in him. What a wonderful thing to anticipate!

Personally, this Advent season is also characterized with the anticipation of a new beginning of a different kind. Being called to be your Senior Minister is the culmination of years of faithful preparation, obedience in an effort to follow Christ, and trusting him as we both take a leap of faith together for such a time as this. The timing could not be more perfect as God has prepared us for each other! I cannot tell you how excited I am to see what God has in store for us as we continue the journey God has set for us. No matter where God leads us, let us remember that we will always worship the same Christ who was, is, and ever will be.

May your Advent be blessed and Christmas full of joy!

Rev. Daniel J. Commerford

## *Calendar of Events for Advent*

**Sunday, December 12:** Children's Ministry Christmas Pageant at 4:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall

**Sunday, December 19:** One Service in the Sanctuary at 11:00 a.m. featuring the Carolina Brass

**Tuesday, December 21:** *The Longest Night: A Service of Hope* at 6:00 p.m. in the Chapel

**Friday, December 24:** Children's Christmas Eve Service at 11:00 a.m. in the Chapel  
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 5:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary  
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at 11:00 p.m. in the Chapel

**Sunday, December 26:** Combined Service of Carols at 10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

*We hope you will gather with us in joy and anticipation as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child!*

# Congregational Cares

## December Birthdays

York Bryant	12/1	Elizabeth McLean	12/14	Marini Shook	12/22
Rynn Carver	12/1	Hannah Spencer	12/14	Chuck Adams	12/23
John Bowyer	12/2	Garrett Voorhees	12/14	Beverly Bradshaw	12/23
Zan Frederick	12/2	Joan Barringer	12/15	Jim Smith	12/23
Lauren Vanacore	12/2	Betty Burrell	12/15	Jennifer Thomas	12/24
Harrison Falls	12/3	Sarah Winget	12/15	Catherine Cherry	12/26
Eva Pacetti	12/3	Emily Craig	12/16	Becky Voorhees	12/26
Alice Ragan	12/3	Megan Holland	12/16	Marsha Jones	12/27
Sarabeth Edwards	12/4	David Rogers	12/16	Spurgeon Mackie	12/27
Henry Humphrey	12/4	Arthur Spencer	12/16	Geny Ware	12/27
Anna Kathryn Clark	12/5	Will Trogdon	12/16	Dalton Green	12/28/
Holt Robinson	12/5	Charlie Hall	12/18	Alexandra Kessell	12/28
Natalie Caudle	12/6	Heather DuBois	12/19	Mike Wallace	12/28
Chip Withers	12/7	Sinclair Mason	12/19	Michael Wallace, Jr	12/29
Mary Frances Hite	12/8	Stuart Whitley	12/19	Sarah Wentz	12/29
Kay Nesheim	12/11	Nancy Moore	12/20	Sarah Park Rankin	12/30
Jennie Williams	12/11	Anna Robinson	12/20	Lauren Schultz	12/30
Miles Keeny	12/12	Jack Current	12/21	Chad Johnson	12/30
Cynthia Machuga	12/12	Henry Current	12/21	Victor Vaughn	12/30
Lexie Roberts	12/12	Susan Garrett	12/22	Pierce Deason	12/31
Ed Stebbins	12/13	Wyatt Keeny	12/22		
Jane Cole	12/14	Chrisie Pierce	12/22		

**Help us celebrate your day!** Contact the church office to make sure that we have your birthday and contact information correct. Please email Trip Stewart at [tstewart@fpcgastonia.com](mailto:tstewart@fpcgastonia.com) with your information or updates. Please note that your full birth date will never be shared publicly, only the month and day. Thank you for your cooperation!

### Condolences to:

The family and friends of **Dennis Hammerle** upon his death on November 29, 2021.

### Our Joy is With:

**Kelly and Rick Hovis** upon the birth of their grandson William James Pharr Carstarphen, IV, on October 26, 2021.

## Winter Wednesday Nights will be *Alive!*

Wednesday Night Alive! will take a break after the December 8 program, but mark your calendars for an exciting Winter 2022 line-up! Dinners will resume (HOORAY!) at 5:30 p.m. and programs for Children and Adults will begin at 6:15 p.m. Get these awesome dates on your calendars now and stay tuned for more details!

**January 5** — Epiphany Workshop to explore the depth and meaning of the Magi.

**January 12 through February 16** — During this six-week series, we will focus on being our best selves as disciples of Jesus Christ. How can we care for others, ourselves and our relationship with God in ways that are meaningful and compelling? Come find out during this compelling series!

**February 23** — Dr. Crystal Bowe, a CaroMont Family Physician, will be our special guest speaker sharing her thoughts on how to be resilient in the midst of new ways of life after COVID-19.

## Christmas Joy Offering

We will collect the Christmas Joy Offering, a national offering of the PC(USA), on Sunday, December 19. By giving to the Christmas Joy Offering, you provide assistance to current and retired church workers in their time of need and aid the development of our future leaders at Presbyterian related racial ethnic schools and colleges. Gifts can be made using the envelopes found in the bulletin or by visiting [www.fpcgastonia.org/giving](http://www.fpcgastonia.org/giving).

## Holiday Office Hours

With Christmas fast approaching, please note adjustments to the church office hours during the holiday season.

Friday, December 24, Christmas Eve	Open 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Monday, December 27	Closed
Tuesday, December 28	Closed
Wednesday, December 29	Open 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Thursday, December 30	Open 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Friday, December 31, New Year's Eve	Open 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Monday, January 3, New Year's Day Observed	Closed

If, over the holidays, you need pastoral care in the event of an emergency or due to the hospitalization or death of church member, please call the church office at (704) 864-2651, and please press 5 to be connected to the pastor on call.

We wish you a safe and happy holiday season!

## 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, December 13, at 10:00 a.m. at Gloria Hickson's (2961 Heritage Commons Lane.)

Circle 2/3 will meet on Monday, December 13, at 10:30 a.m. at Covenant Village.

Circle 4 will meet on Tuesday, December 14, at 11:30 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

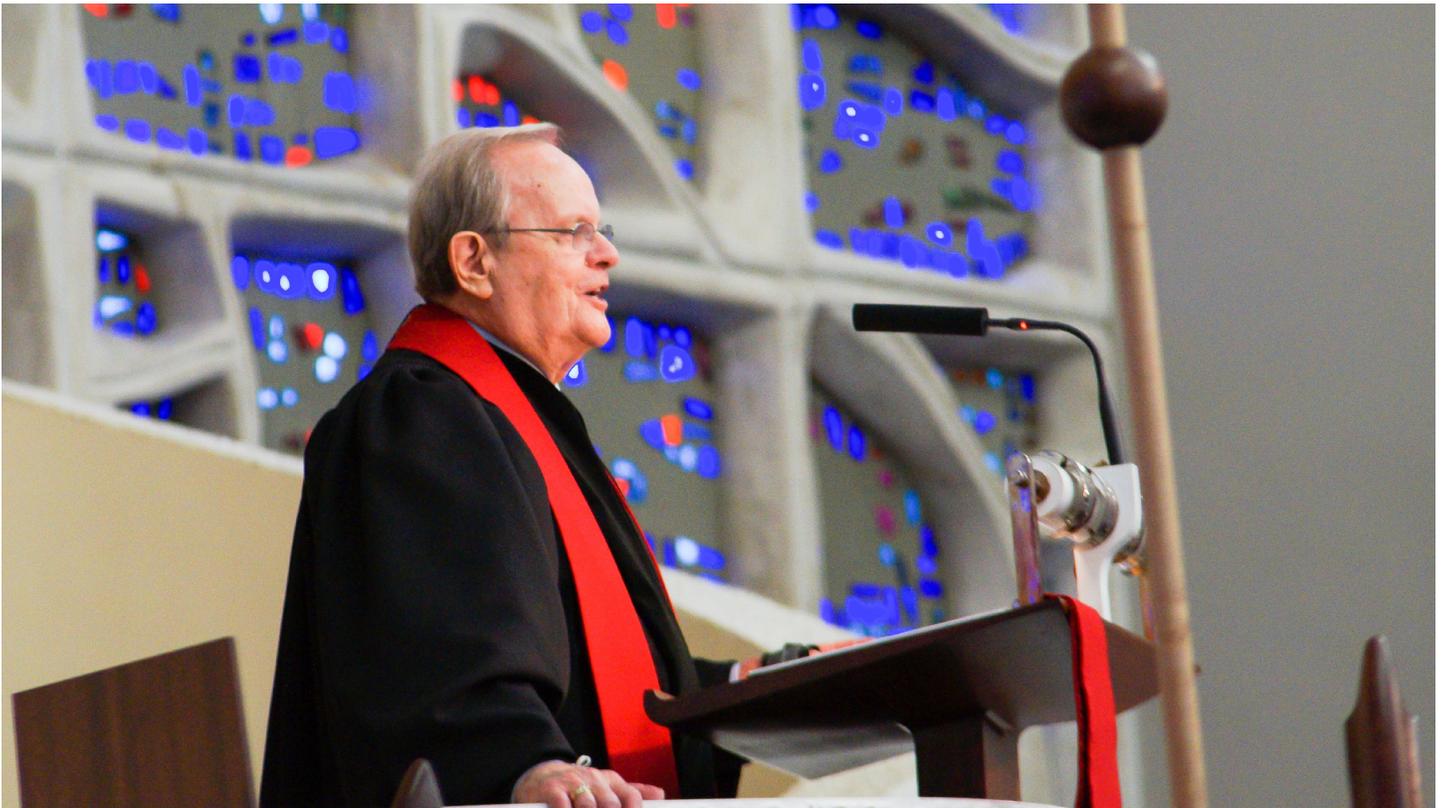
Circle 6 will meet on Monday, December 13, at 6:45 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

## Nickel-A-Meal

Are you still saving your nickels? Our next Nickel-A-Meal offering is coming up on December 12th! Be sure to bring your change and your "green" to support this wonderful ministry that provides meals for the hungry both in our region and worldwide. Just look for the red buckets during the worship service!

## 2021 End of Year Contributions

All 2021 contributions must be postmarked by the U.S. Postal service or delivered in-person to the church office by 12:00 p.m. on December 31, 2021. Any donations received with a postmark of January 1 will be credited to 2022. Contribution statements will be mailed in December showing your 2021 giving activity from January 1-November 30. Your complete tax statement record will be mailed in January.



## Thank You from Pastor John H. Stanley!

Dear First Presbyterian Congregation,

You are such an amazing congregation, and Rose and I take this opportunity to say, "Thank You!" I have been spending a fair amount of time lately thinking about how you have allowed me to be a part of your lives for the better part of 14 years. I remember the visits to hospitals, physical rehabilitation, and the assisted living facilities. Of course, I remember the funerals at which I have had the honor of assisting and officiating.

While you have provided me the honor of serving at various church functions and teaching Sunday School, most of all I remember the heartfelt conversations that have happened in my office, in Surgery Waiting Rooms, and at the parking area of the church.

Today I am simply writing to say thank you. We are deeply grateful for the farewell service and reception you gave us October 31, 2021! You are such a splendid congregation and it has been a blessing to be your Minister of Visitation. I am continually deeply moved by your compassion, generosity and willingness to serve. I can only hope that I have inspired you as much as you have inspired me.

Thank you so much for all that you do. You glorify God in this church and in its mission in so many awesome ways.

Yours, in Christ's Love,

John H. Stanley

*On Monday, November 22, Pastor John H. Stanley received the Order of the Long Leaf Pine in recognition of his contributions to the Gaston County community.*





## THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISMON TREE

Chrismon ornaments were first developed by Frances Kipps Spencer at Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia. In 1957, Mrs. Spencer began thinking about a way to decorate the Christmas tree in her church that would be more suitable for a Sanctuary. She thought that the traditional bright ornaments were not appropriate for a worship setting and began looking for something that would reflect the Christian faith.

Thinking of the tradition of decorating a birthday cake with the honoree's name, Mrs. Spencer decided to place the name of Jesus and his title, Christ, on the tree. Rather than using English, however, she used the Greek monograms. Thus the Greek "Chi Rho" became one of the earliest Chrismons because they are monograms for Christos, the Greek word for Christ. These simple monograms and some crosses decorated the first Chrismon Tree.

Over the years, Frances Spencer added other designs using signs and symbols utilized by the early Christians. As these designs increased in number, they included references to Jesus' life, ministry, and teachings. Chrismons are traditionally white, gold, and/or silver. White is the Church color for Christmas and symbolizes Jesus' majesty and glory. Chrismons can be made from anything, but paper and embroidered ones are the most widely used.

Many of the original ornaments on the Chrismon trees at First Presbyterian Church were created by Anne Efird and a team of faithful disciples. Over the years, the original ornaments were lost or damaged. In 2019, the Worship and Music Ministry voted to recreate the Chrismon trees at

FPC. Over the last two years, a team of dedicated women, including Barbara Yarbrough, Ibbey Page, and Becky Adams have gathered crafters together throughout the fall to teach others how to create new ornaments out of wire and beads. The intricate nature of making a single Chrismon is not to be underestimated. One ornament can take anywhere from two-to-four hours to make.

Displayed in our Sanctuary this Advent and Christmas are the beginnings of this new ministry which seeks to educate the congregation, as well as remind us all of the majesty and glory of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, our Emmanuel.

Be sure to stop by the trees, located in the chancel of the Sanctuary, to take a closer look. On the next page are descriptions of the some of the symbols depicted in the ornaments and what they mean as symbols of our faith.





### **THE ALPHA AND OMEGA**

The Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. They are used to refer to Jesus as he is referred to in the book of Revelation as the beginning and ending of all things (Revelation 22:13).



### **THE ANGEL**

The Angel reminds Christians of the angel who came to Mary to announce she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). Angels also remind us of the heavenly host who told the shepherds about the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-20). The Angel can also represent the second coming of Jesus, which the Bible says will start with an Angel blowing a trumpet (Revelation 8, 9, 11)



### **THE BUTTERFLY**

The Butterfly is a symbol of resurrection, or of the transformation of life. In addition to Christmas ornaments, one will often find the Butterfly on Easter Sunday and throughout Eastertide.



### **THE FISH**

The Fish was first drawn by early Christians during the time of persecution as a mark of identity as it appears in early Christian iconography. The first letters of the Greek words “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior” are woven into the fish, or ichthus Greek.



### **THE DESCENDING DOVE**

The Descending Dove represents the Holy Spirit who came down in the form of a dove at the baptism of Jesus by his cousin, John the Baptist (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3).



### **THE KEY**

The Key is a symbol of the “keys of the Kingdom” promised by Jesus to Simon Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus would build his Church (Matthew 16:18-19).



### **THE STAR**

The Star is the symbol for the Star of Bethlehem Star (or Epiphany Star) which the Wise Men followed in order to find the Newborn King, Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).



### **THE CROSS**

The Cross, in a variety of shapes and sizes on the Christmas tree, is the representation of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. There are many cross forms, but all remain empty, as a sign of the empty tomb of Easter day (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20).

## Parish Nurse Updates



### January Fitness and Wellness Initiative

Do you regularly walk, run, hike, or bike? Would you be interested/willing to lead an exercise group at a day and time that is convenient for you? Lisa is trying to secure as many opportunities for people to be active throughout Gaston County and participating in an exercise group can help with accountability, sustainability, and success for New Year's resolutions. Please contact [nurse@fumcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fumcgastonia.org) or [nurse@fpcgastonia.org](mailto:nurse@fpcgastonia.org) if you are interested in participating in this initiative.

### Whole 30 Info Session

Are you thinking you'll need a "nutrition reset" after the holidays? Plan ahead, and come to our Whole30 info session on December 14 at 6:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall at First United Methodist Church. Request access to the private Facebook group "Mind Body Whole" and you'll be able to see details of Whole 30 recipes and get daily support. Everyone is invited, and the ongoing group info/support is free. Be Proactive, not reactive! Through the holiday season do your best to maintain... not gain.



*Do you know someone who is homebound and can't get to a COVID-19 vaccination clinic but would like to receive the vaccine or booster? Please call Gaston County Emergency Medical Services (GEMS) at 704-866-3212 to arrange a homebound visit.*

## COVID-19 Booster Shots

**Booster shots are now available and recommended for all adults over 18.**

COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters are available at Medical Center Pharmacy, Akers Pharmacy, and You 1st Pharmacy all without an appointment, as well as the Health Dept and local chain pharmacies. To find a COVID-19 booster visit [myspot.nc.gov](https://myspot.nc.gov) to search for vaccine locations near you.

**Have questions?** Talk to a doctor, pharmacist, or nurse about whether you should get a booster and which booster shot might be right for you.

## COVID-19 Antibody Therapy

COVID-19 antibody therapy is now available in Gaston County through StarMed Healthcare! This form of therapy can help to reduce symptoms of COVID-19 following exposure, greatly decreasing the risk of hospitalization due to symptoms. This treatment is recommended for COVID-19 patients experiencing mild to moderate symptoms.

Located on the corner of W. Walnut Ave. and N. York Street in Gastonia, the clinic is open Monday thru Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Walk-ups are welcome or you can register ahead of time by visiting [www.starmed.care/antibody](https://www.starmed.care/antibody) or calling 980-445-9818.

## The Longest Night: A Service of Hope

First Presbyterian and First United Methodist Churches, along with the Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry, invite you to attend The Longest Night: A Service of Hope on Tuesday, December 21, at 6:00 p.m. in the Chapel. This service is open to anyone but is particularly for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, who have difficult family relationships, who are feeling isolated, or who are experiencing anxiety due to general challenges over the past year. If you would rather join remotely, Livestream will be available at [www.fpcgastonia.org/parish-nurse-ministry](https://www.fpcgastonia.org/parish-nurse-ministry).



**The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine has been approved and is available for children aged 5 or older!**

The Ministers of  
First Presbyterian and First United Methodist Churches  
and The Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry

Invite you to join us for

***The Longest Night:  
A Service of Hope***

Tuesday, December 21, 2021  
6:30 p.m.

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

This event will also be available for viewing via  
Livestream at [www.fpcgastonia.org/livestream](https://www.fpcgastonia.org/livestream).

## Faith Formation Updates



### Children's Ministry Christmas Pageant

Help us joyfully share the Christmas story! On Sunday, December 12, at 4:00 p.m., the children of the church will share the story of the birth of Jesus in the Christmas Pageant in a fun and meaningful way.

Children from age 4 through 5th grade are invited to be a part of the pageant as a character or with a speaking part. If you would like your child to participate with a costumed role, speaking role, or both, please sign up using the Faith Formation E-Blast. If you would be willing to help as an adult volunteer with our rehearsals and with the pageant, you can sign up too!

In order to prepare for the pageant, we will rehearse on Sunday, December 5, following the worship service at 12:15 p.m. We will have lunch and then work on getting everyone ready for the pageant. Please make every effort to be at the rehearsal if your child intends to participate in the pageant.

If you have questions, contact Rachel Vogado at [rvogado@fpcgastonia.org](mailto:rvogado@fpcgastonia.org).

### Children's Christmas Eve Service

Join us for our family friendly Christmas Eve service on December 24, at 11:00 a.m. in the Chapel. The children and families of the church are invited to come to the manger, step into the Christmas story and experience it in new ways. As we worship together we will see, hear, create, pray, and give thanks as we celebrate the birth of Jesus in our lives.

### Remind Texts

It has come to Rachel's attention that there have been some problems with the Remind app/texts. Because of the new account needs, all youth and parents who would like Remind texts will need to join the new group. Even if you have signed up recently, that group will not work. Once you have joined the new group, please let Rachel know if you are not receiving the weekly texts so that she can work to solve that issue.





### First Youth Fellowship

As we're preparing to wrap up the year, First Youth Fellowship will have its end of year party on December 12. Be sure to keep an eye on the weekly Faith Formation newsletter to get all the details for our fun and festivities and don't forget to sign up to the new Remind text group to stay in the loop for all the updates and get connected!

### "Food Banksgiving" Food Drive

In the month of November, the children of the church shared many good gifts and supported Crisis Assistance Ministry. Our Preschool, Kindergarten and Elementary Sunday School classes shared in a food drive and joyfully shared with our neighbors in need.



# 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
November 7	47	27	77	93
November 14	-	-	212	145
November 21	54	35	130	91
November 28	23	39	118	42

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

