

THE FIRST PRESS

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ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING: BECAUSE WE ARE THE CHURCH, TOGETHER

Life during COVID has been challenging. That feels like an understatement, right? At times, we have all felt disconnected, confined. Missing family, missing friends. Lonely. Worried about the groceries holding out. Unsure of what the future may hold. Imagine feeling all of those things but living in a place or in a situation that was already challenging each and every day without the added pressure of the pandemic. A place where access to food is day to day. Access

to vital health care is questionable. Finding clean water is a daily struggle. A place where you are denied racial justice or plagued with outright violence and oppression.

But one thing remains steadfast and true: We are the Church, together, no matter where we are, and the Church belongs with those struggling for justice, righteousness and peace for life.

Continued on page 2



Because food is life... gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing are helping the people of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota through a partnership with Owe Aku — a grassroots, nonprofit organization that puts people in charge of their own food supply, nutrition, health, and well-being by reclaiming ancestral wisdom and teaching Lakota history and culture. The Pine Ridge Reservation is a food desert, located in the county with the lowest per capita income in the nation. The pandemic has dramatically amplified the desperate need for food security.

Because water is life... gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing are helping the families of Capirendita in a remote area of Bolivia face a more hopeful future by building infrastructure to address the communities' critical water shortage. Their goal is to create 500 meters of pipes to transport safe well water to those in need. One Great Hour of Sharing gifts will also support the distribution of plastic containers to collect and save rainwater.



Because survivors are key to shaping lives focused on justice for all... gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing are helping Black Women's Blueprint in its mission to take action on social justice issues and to deliver educational resources and support services to women, including those who have suffered sexual and other forms of abuse. Their work seeks to address the unique struggles of Black women and girls within the context of the larger racial justice concerns. They're not just addressing issues of trauma but they're also providing things like food and housing assistance that people need in order to be whole.

The Special Offerings of the PC(USA), including One Great Hour of Sharing, offer the whole Church a way to embody Matthew 25 through the Spirit-inspired stories and gifts that place us in service and partnership with those who have least. Our gifts directly support people experiencing hunger, homelessness, thirst, imprisonment, sickness and deprivation, as well as welcoming the stranger. One Great Hour of Sharing is the largest way that Presbyterians come together in mission and ministry with those whom we see are in need.

Because we are the Church, together... we give to One Great Hour of Sharing because of where the Church belongs, of who the church is. Please give generously so that our Church will continue to become, as Isaiah said, "repairers of the breach." And as we always say: When we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

Support One Great Hour of Sharing by visiting www.fpcgastonia.org/giving or by mailing a check to the church with "OGHS" in the memo line.

March Birthdays

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

Condolences to:

Anne Stowe upon the death of **Roger Stowe** on February 3, 2021.

Rev. Dr. Joan Martin and Jeff Barbour upon the death of Linda Fields Martin on February 6, 2021.

Pat and Bruce Sudderth upon the death of Davis Patrick Sudderth on February 16, 2021.

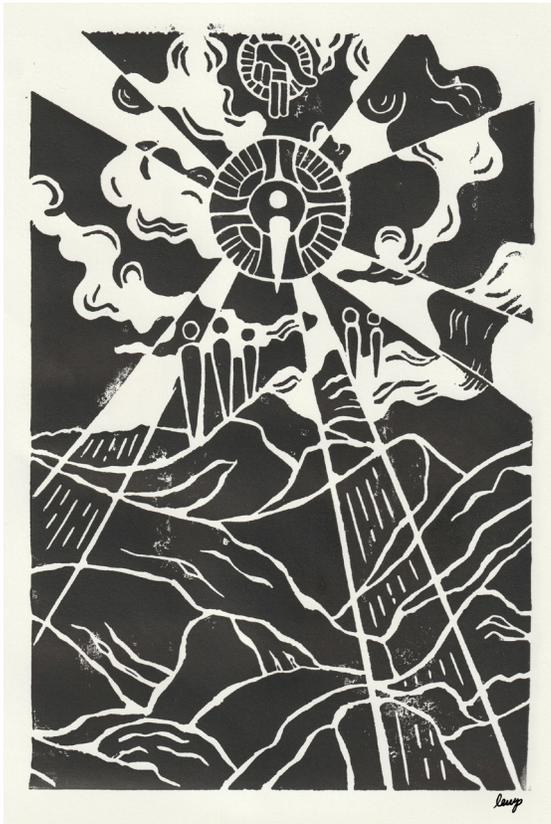
Elizabeth (Beth) J. Leeper and Zoe Patricia Leeper upon the death of **Sylvia Ledbetter Leeper** on February 16, 2021.

Our Joy is With:

Frances and Bill Henry upon the birth of their granddaughter Lucy Frances McMullen on February 3, 2021.

Again and Again: We are Called to Listen

During the season of Lent, we are focusing on the theme “Again and Again,” using resources from A Sanctified Art. Below we have included artwork, scripture, and artist reflection for the second week in Lent.



Transfiguration

by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Mark 8:31-9:8

Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink on paper

I’m not a good listener. In the midst of our national reckoning around structural racism and white supremacy in the U.S., I’ve found that I’ve done a terrible job listening to my Black and Brown siblings. I constantly have to resist the urge to explain myself, to be seen as good and antiracist. I try saying all the right things, I do performative acts of allyship, and quite honestly, I need to be quiet and listen. I need to be ready to accept criticism, and instead of trying to prove anything, I need to gain awareness of my internalized biases and learned racist tendencies and do the difficult work of unlearning them in every moment. “Get behind me, Satan” (Mark 8:33).

Here we find Peter stepping in and saying all the right things, rejecting the notion that Christ must suffer and die; but in the end, he’s not listening to Jesus. It seems Peter’s rejection of this narrative reflects his fear of the suffering he also might face in following Christ. “Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Six days later, the disciples are called to listen once again. In this image, I zoomed out to focus on the moment of Transfiguration. Jesus shines like a beacon atop the high mountain while former prophets appear. The disciples are terrified, but also want to live this moment forever, making the glory-filled rock face their home. At once a cloud descends, obscuring things further, and God’s voice echoes down, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” (Mark 9:7). It’s almost as though Jesus had exhausted all efforts to get the disciples to listen, and God had to spectacularly reiterate the importance of listening. I think it’s important to note that following God’s words, all the disciples could see was Jesus.

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Lenten Lord’s Supper on Wednesday Evenings

Receive the Lord’s Supper via drive-thru under the Chapel porte-cochere Wednesday evenings during Lent through **March 24, from 6:00-7:00 p.m.** Social distancing will be practiced and masks will be worn. Prepackaged communion elements will be offered, or participants may bring their own to be blessed. The pastoral staff will offer words of scripture, offer prayer, and share the Lord’s Supper, followed by a blessing.



Lenten Worship and Study Opportunities

Palm/Passion Sunday, March 28

Worship in the Sanctuary featuring the Carolina Brass at 10:00 a.m.

Pre-registration is required. Please visit www.fpcgastonia.org/services to sign up.

Wednesday, March 31

Holy Week Art Walk presented by the Christian Education Ministry from 12:00-7:00 p.m.

Throughout the afternoon, works of art representing the stations of the cross will be on display in the front Circle. This full-sensory experience will include music and interactive, hands-on exhibits to heighten the passion and resurrection of Jesus in preparation for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Staff members will also offer readings at the top of every hour.

**Please note that Lenten Lord's Supper will end on March 24, and not take place this Wednesday.*

Maundy Thursday, April 1

Lord's Supper Drop-In from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. or 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Drop-in to receive the Lord's Supper in the Sanctuary between 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. or 6:00-7:30 p.m. in commemoration of Maundy Thursday. Please enter through the Memorial Gallery and practice social distancing as we gather. Masks will be worn, but may be removed to take individually wrapped communion elements. (Elements brought from home are fine, too!) The drop-in experience will include scripture, prayer, and a blessing, in addition to gathering around the table.

Good Friday, April 2

Community Procession of the Cross at 10:30 a.m.

Join fellow churches at 10:30 a.m. for a Procession of the Cross beginning and ending at First United Methodist Church. Ability to walk a full city block is needed in order to participate in the complete experience; or, one can remain at FUMC to experience the first and the last stations of the cross.

Good Friday Tenebrae Service at 7:00 p.m.

This service in the Sanctuary will feature a string quartet and the seven last words of Christ. Please register in advance at www.fpcgastonia.org/services.

Easter Sunday, April 4

Easter Sunrise Service at 7:00 a.m.

A joyous Sunrise Service in the front Circle at 7:00 a.m. Please bring your own chair. No registration is needed in order to attend.

Festive Easter Worship in the Sanctuary at 10:00 a.m.

Worshippers must register in advance in order to attend with priority given to church members. Please visit www.fpcgastonia.org/services to register.

Thank You to Task Force

Special thanks to the Session's Task Force on Reopening for its conscientious guidance and counsel in safely navigating the use of First Presbyterian Church's building during this year of COVID-19. In-person worship resumed February 21, with a vibrant service. We pray that circumstances will further improve so that the Sanctuary can remain open for worship and we can begin to safely open other areas of the building. The Task Force includes: Dustin Letts, Richard Rankin, Craig Whitley, Tim Witherell, Celeste Crowe, Bethany Jennings, Rodney Owens, David McFadden, and the Pastoral Staff—Fred Lyon, Lauren Vanacore, and John Stanley. They will continue to monitor conditions and keep the Session and Congregation informed.



Beverly Bryant, recipient of the 2020 Honorary Life Membership award pictured with her daughter, Pam Glenn.

Presbyterian Women Honorary Life Membership

Each year an Honorary Life Membership in the Presbyterian Women organization is conferred upon an individual in recognition of her faithful service in some area of the church's work and the work of Presbyterian Women. The person selected is generally announced at the Birthday Luncheon in May.

Please carefully consider nominating someone for this honor. Proposal forms and guidelines for a candidate are available at the Reception Desk or Vestibule. Previous Life Members are listed on page 5 of the 2019-2021 Women's Directory. Please return completed forms to the Reception Desk by **March 29**. Contact Judy Planer (704-860-0844) with any questions.



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

During Lent, we are collecting canned goods and other food pantry staples, as well as monetary donations for S.O.C.K.S. 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 pasta, peanut butter, jelly, canned meats, cereal, dried beans, green beans, and corn. Donations can be dropped off at the Reception Desk.

Planned Giving

Just a quick note to let you know that the Planned Giving Ministry is still active! Although COVID-19 restrictions have curtailed our ability to reach out to our congregation in person as we had planned last year, please know that we will be happy to meet with anyone interested in discussing planned giving in a masked and socially distanced setting of their choice. Or we will be glad to discuss planned giving on the telephone or by email. Just call or email Liz Sumner at 704-616-0389 or lsumner@mhc-law.com and she will make the arrangements. In the meantime, please know that we are keeping each and every member of our congregation in our prayers.

Transformer Repair

Beginning on **Monday, April 5**, the church building will be closed while repairs and upgrades are made to the building's electrical transformer. We anticipate that this project should take roughly 3 days to complete, but there is the possibility that it may take longer. In the event that repairs are not complete by Sunday, April 11, a special communication will go out regarding the service.

While the office will be closed on Monday, April 5, in observance of the Easter holiday, church staff will work remotely beginning on Tuesday, April 6, until power in the building is restored. If you have a concern during this time, please reach out via email.

Scholarship Applications 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. Applications must be completed and returned by **April 1, 2021**, in order to be considered.



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 2020 grants were as follows:

1. International Grants

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Guatemala - Guatemala Health Program | \$24,400.00 |
| Malawi - Nkhoma Hospital Children's Ward Food | \$12,000.00 |

2. Regional Grants

| | |
|--|------------|
| Beloved Asheville | \$5,000.00 |
| Bounty & Soul | \$5,000.00 |
| Dulatown Presbyterian Church Food Pantry | \$5,000.00 |
| Mountain Projects, Inc. | \$5,000.00 |
| Pay It Forward Food Pantry (Fairview Presbyterian) | \$7,000.00 |
| Sherrills Ford PC Blessing Box Ministry | \$5,000.00 |
| Sherrills Ford PC Third Thursday Meal Program | \$5,000.00 |

Our next collection will be **Sunday, March 14**. 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.

Parish Nurse Updates



Learning to Swim in a World That is Treading Water

On **Tuesday, March 9**, at 12:00 p.m., join the Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry on Zoom for a special presentation by Dr. Garry Crites, Executive Director of National Alliance on Mental Illness. During this presentation, Dr. Crites will discuss the importance of self care in the wake of a pandemic. Use the following link to join the conversation: <https://zoom.us/j/96272696755?pwd=dnBTMThrVGtqTmlVRGhiSjVPQnRldzO9>.

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

Interested in receiving the COVID-19 vaccine? Below are some suggestions and resources to help you get registered.

To date, the following groups are eligible to receive the vaccine:

- Group 1 - Health Care Workers and Long-term Care Staff and Residents.
- Group 2 - Anyone 65 years or older.
- Group 3 - Anyone working in childcare or in PreK–12 schools and frontline essential workers

Currently the following organizations are scheduling appointments:

- DHHS - Call 704-866-3170 between 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Information can also be found at gastonsaves.com. Please note that beginning March 5, Gaston County vaccination clinics will no longer be held at the Farmer's Market and will instead be held at Eastridge Mall.
- CaroMont Health - Call 704-834-2000. You do not have



to be a CaroMont Health patient to schedule or receive a vaccine through CaroMont.

- Medical Center Pharmacy - Call 704-867-5343.
- Atrium Health - Visit www.atriumhealth.org/COVID19Vaccine.
- Novant Health - Visit www.novanthealth.org/mynovant.aspx.
- Walgreens Pharmacy - www.walgreens.com.

Ladies' Self Care Event

On **Thursday, March 18**, from 6:30-8:00 p.m., the women of the church, along with friends, are invited to join us via Zoom for a special presentation by guest speakers Kim Leppert and Stefanie Patyak Jester.

A self-care gift bag, charcuterie box, and beverage will be available for the first 100 women to sign up by **March 10!**



Visit www.fumcgastonia.org/ministries/parish-nurse to sign up!

Spring Cleaning and Safety Event

Working on your spring cleaning? On **Saturday, March 13**, from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., stop by First United Methodist Church of Gastonia to safely dispose of unwanted medications and shred personal documents. Each person can bring up to 3 boxes of paper to shred for free. In addition, the Gastonia Parish Nurse Ministry will be giving away free Personal Protective Equipment, such as masks and face shields, and offering assistance with registration to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. We hope to see you there!

Community Foundation Run

The Community Foundation is hosting a virtual run on **Saturday, April 17**. How does a Virtual Race work? You get out and run the distance that you registered and bring along your favorite tracking device. When you are finished, take a picture or screenshot that shows your distance and time. Please consider supporting the Gastonia Nurse Ministry by registering or making a donation at www.cfgaston.org. All funds raised are used to promote health education awareness programs, events, and giveaways. Contributions can be made through **April 23**, to qualify for matching funds.

Upcoming Blood Drive

Our next blood drive will be held on **Monday, April 12**, from 2:30-6:30 p.m. in the Chapel Parking Lot. Walk-ups are welcome, but advanced registration is recommended and preferred. Visit donor.oneblood.org/donor/schedules/drive_schedule/1040018 to schedule your appointment today!



Faith Formation Updates



Summer Travel Opportunities

We would like to invite all FPC youth to consider participating in a conference, camp, or mission trip this summer! Read more about each opportunity below. Visit www.fpcgastonia.org to sign up or contact Susannah Bryant at sbryant@fpcgastonia.org for more information!

Montreat Youth Conference

Youth who have completed 8th-12th grades are invited to register for Week 1 (June 6-12) of the Montreat Youth Conference! The cost is \$130/youth and a \$50 deposit is due by the registration deadline, March 10.

Massanetta Springs Middle School Conference

Youth who have completed 6th-8th grades are invited to register for Week 2 (June 22-25) of the Massanetta Springs Middle School Conference! The cost is \$130/youth and a \$50 deposit is due by the registration deadline, March 10.

Sr. High Mission Trip

Youth who have completed 9th-12th grades are invited to register for the Sr. High Mission Trip to Lexington Co., SC, which will be July 18-24! The cost is \$150/youth and a \$50 deposit is due by the registration deadline, March 10.



Youth PAD Yard Clean-up

On **Sunday, February 28**, the youth group and boy scouts gathered at the PAD to work on cleaning up the grounds. Leaves were raked, and a wonderful time of fellowship and service was had by all!



Confirmation Retreat

COVID-19 may have kept us from a lot of things over the past year, but it didn't keep our confirmation class from an awesome at-home retreat! The confirmands dove into their lessons on God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit with gusto and enjoyed a church-wide scavenger hunt, making their own stoles to remind themselves of the priesthood of all believers, and a trip to the U.S. National Whitewater Center.

Souper Bowl of Caring

Thanks to your contributions, FPC Youth collected a total of \$685 for Christ Community Outreach Food Ministry through the Souper Bowl of Caring. Thank you for helping to support this local ministry!

Vacation Bible School 2021

"Arise! Shine! Your light has come: the Lord's glory has shone upon you!" - Isaiah 60:1

Mark your calendars this summer for Vacation Bible School! This year, we will explore "Discovery on Adventure Island" from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. on **August 2 - 5**. Classes are available for children aged 3 years through 5th grade, and nursery care will also be provided for infants - 2-year-old children. Registration will open in April!



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 | Livestream | 10:00 a.m. Worship |
|-------------|------------|--------------------|
| February 7 | 107 | - |
| February 14 | 88 | - |
| February 21 | 80 | 93 |
| February 28 | 86 | 67 |

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