

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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REFLECTIONS ON GRIEF REVISITED *by Rev. Daniel J. Commerford*

I don't know about you, but the last couple months have been very difficult because of all the loss we've encountered. Since the New Year at FPC, we have grieved the deaths of four of our members and have also laid to rest our beloved Minister of Visitation. Beyond our experience at church, I've also heard of many who have lost loved ones, battled serious illnesses and injuries, and have faced difficult circumstances in our jobs and relationships. Life is hard enough without having to navigate all this grief along

the way! But amidst our hardships, Christ's resurrection gives us a hope that helps persevere through any challenge. To highlight that delicate balance between hardship and hope, I'd like to revisit the reflections I wrote about grief for the January 2022 edition of the First Press. For that edition, much of my focus was in the context of reflecting on a year navigating grief after the death of my mother. For this edition, I'd like to share those observations again through the lens of our shared grief as well as our shared hope in

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Jesus Christ. As we continue to navigate the Lenten season, my prayer is that this provides any needed comfort:

Christ's resurrection fundamentally shapes how we grieve. As people who believe in the Risen Lord, we have faith that those who die experience the fulfillment of God's promise to walk with us for eternity. That knowledge fundamentally shapes how we grieve. Our grief doesn't arise from any existential dread about our eternal fate. Rather, grief is centered on acknowledging the loss that death has created in our own lives and adjusting to living on earth without those we've lost. This does not make grieving easy by any means, but it prevents us from descending into despair. Christ's resurrection gives us the assurance that we will all be together again as a new creation in God's glory. For that reason, we grieve with hope instead of despair.

We cannot bear our grief alone. When we experience the profoundly painful loss of losing a loved one, it often takes all of our energy to function in the most basic ways. For that reason, having a support network beyond our family who is often grieving with us is vital to navigating grief. Friends, coworkers, neighbors, and members of the community are great resources to provide valuable support. More than that, God has brought us together as a congregation to support one another with prayer, food, and service when one of us is grieving. We should never be ashamed to ask for (and accept) help when we are grieving.

Grief is not linear; it's cyclical. In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote about the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) that have become a common way people articulate their grief. These stages aren't expe-

rienced in a linear fashion, but rather cyclically. We don't move from one stage to the next, but rather experience them all in different orders and different contexts. No matter what stage of grief we experience, we can go to the Lord as we are in that moment. God wants to hear our prayers, regardless of the shape they take.

We never conquer grief, but we can learn to carry it. Grief is not something we conquer. Rather, it's a reality of living in a mortal world that will accompany us for as long as we are on this earth. Grief is not only a process of healing, but also one of learning. As our hearts heal from the trauma of loss, our brains rewire themselves while learning how to experience life without a relationship that has been a part of our identity. For that reason, grief can be exhausting at times! The best we can do is learn to carry our grief in a healthy way that doesn't consume other areas of our life. When grief hits, it's tempting to resist the pain when it arises, to ignore it's there, or to numb it in various ways. However, the healthiest way to manage grief is to let it hit you and manage it in a healthy way. Crying when we feel like crying, finding ways to balance exercise and rest, and telling stories of those we lost are all healthy ways to navigate grief. If we do the work, those waves of grief will become more manageable over time.

Grief can pave the road for gratitude. God is good! If we really "do the work," we will be able to recognize the gift of comfort Christ gives us when we grieve. Positive memories of those who have died will replace the stinging feeling that acute grief often provides. Above all, we can be grateful that the pain of our separation is only temporary. One day, we will be reunited with all the saints and worship God together in a New Heaven and New Earth.

Grief impacts us all in one way or another, but God gives us hope. Grief doesn't only occur when a loved one dies. We experience grief when we lose a job or don't get the job we were seeking, when a relationship is strained or estranged, or when life takes a different path than what we planned. We grieve when we lose an ideal or become disillusioned, when a dream we've been pursuing doesn't come to fruition, or when we journey from one life stage to the next. Grief arises from many different circumstances and takes many different forms.

I don't think it's possible for any of us to have persevered through these past couple years without experiencing grief. If you are struggling

with grief in any form, please do not lose hope or try to bear it alone. If you need someone to talk to or a silent shoulder to weep on, please reach out to me or someone close to you! More powerful than the grief we endure is the truth that there isn't anything in this world that will ever separate us from God's love. God gave us Jesus Christ and one another so that we will never be without hope or have to grieve alone. May Christ's peace that surpasses our understanding meet us wherever we are and provide us the hope to meet a new day until he returns again.

God is good!

Condolences to:

Jim, Dan, and Lynn (Hovis) McKenzie upon the death of their mother **Dorothy "Dot" McKenzie** on Tuesday, January 31.

Anna Renfro upon the death of her mother, **Iris Sturgis**, on Wednesday, February 1.

Jewel Brown upon the death of her husband, **Bill Brown**, on Saturday, February 4.

Betty Davenport upon the death of her husband, **Charles Davenport**, on Wednesday, February 22.

Barbara and Dennis Winkles upon the death of their daughter, **Karen Winkles Hubanks**, on Friday, February 24.

Earthquake Assistance

Amid news of a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Syria and Turkey, the Presbyterian Mission Agency has reached out to offer assistance to partners in the area and is asking Presbyterians to pray for those impacted by the quake and its aftershocks. Through a coordinated response by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and World Mission, PMA has contacted multiple long-term partners of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Solidarity grants to meet immediate needs are being processed and ACT partner GOPA-DERD is distributing winterization items (blankets, mattresses), food items and medicines. To donate go to pda.pcusa.org.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Jake Kennington	04/01	Barbara Spencer	04/17
Scotty King	04/02	Jackson Falls	04/18
Helen Rogers	04/02	Marsh Spencer	04/18
Cynthia Anderson	04/03	Laura Anderson	04/19
David Pacetti	04/03	Jim Cookson	04/19
Joseph Morris	04/04	Thomas Hobson	04/19
Jimmy Greene	04/05	Isobel Rose	04/19
June Jones	04/05	Nell Alala	04/20
Nancy Harrill	04/06	Raleigh Chapman	04/21
Robert Cinq-Mars	04/07	Donna Dickson	04/21
Nancy Robinson	04/07	Sherry Kirby	04/21
Jessica Schultz	04/07	Rachel Commerford	04/22
Anna Vaughn	04/07	Tim Efird	04/22
Ross Boyd	04/09	Emily Simpson	04/22
Julie Craig	04/09	Brendon Withers	04/22
Sharon McGerrigle	04/09	Barbara Voorhees	04/24
James Vaughn	04/09	Jack Beaty	04/25
Nan Bridgeman	04/10	Luther Blair	04/25
Allison Howe	04/10	Elizabeth Crabtree	04/25
Elizabeth Mecum	04/10	John Rhyne	04/25
Knox Winget	04/10	Tim DuBois	04/26
Dick Akers	04/11	Mac Kelly	04/26
Braden Crabtree	04/11	Evie Nester	04/27
Marshall LaFar	04/11	Megan Reen	04/27
Will Choquet	04/12	Leigh Williford	04/27
Sally Kate Buckles	04/13	John Lowery	04/28
Peggy Cooke	04/13	Donna Atkins	04/29
Emily Dickson	04/13	Greg Cherry	04/29
Eric Francum	04/13	Barbara Hammerle	04/29
Erika Wallace	04/13	Hugh Bryant	04/30
Beverly Stewart	04/14	Dustin Letts	04/30
Susan Adams	04/15	Mandy Mudd	04/30
Larkin Efird	04/16	Jennifer Poag	04/30
Evan Shiflet	04/16		

CAM Update

During our food drive, we collected 15 boxes and 25 grocery bags full of non-perishable food items. This is a huge step in helping those in need!

An Update from the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee

By Matt Miller

On behalf of the Associate Pastor Nominating Committee, we continue to meet weekly and review Personal Information Forms (PIFs) from candidates. As we continue to review new PIF's, we are excited to announce that we have begun conducting interviews with candidates via Zoom.

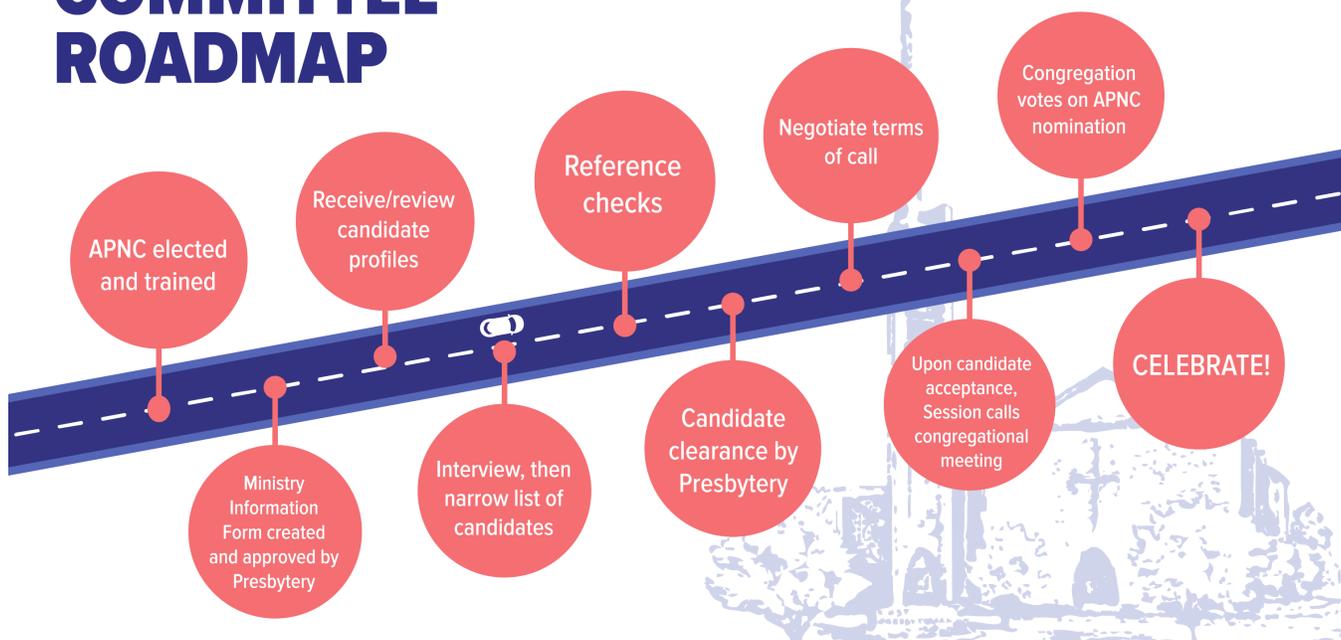
We ask that you continue to pray for the committee and the congregation. We ask for patience as we commit to finding God's choice for our next Associate Pastor. Although that we know God has already chosen the candidate, we ask that you pray that we have the wisdom to choose the right person. We also ask that

you pray for our new associate pastor and their family.

We thank Lance Perry for his continued guidance through this process.

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



Sign Up Now for Rise Against Hunger!

FPC will be packing meals March 26.

We need your help, so register online soon!

If you have ever participated in this event, you might have thought “are these meals I am helping provide a good source for nutrition? Yes, they are! Let’s talk about it a little bit.

Are the meals nutritious?

The meals that are packaged contain caloric intake and include 20 essential vitamins and minerals. These meals directly address those who suffer from micro-nutrient deficiencies such as iodine, iron, and vitamin A. By doing so, this helps prevent blindness, poor immune functions, and death.



Why is it important to prepare and provide nutritious food?

Quantity does not equal quality. According to Rise Against Hunger’s Nutritional Technical Advisor, Chelsie Azevedo, it is the difference between eating the same food every day and eating something different every day. One might satisfy the hunger, but it won’t help your body reach its full potential. We want to make sure that everyone has access to “safe, nutritious, and sufficient food” (riseagainsthunger.org/articles/nutritional-value-of-meals).

How do food security and nutrition impact health?

According to the World Health Organization, nutrition impacts immune systems, pregnancy and childbirth, childhood development and the risk of contracting disease (riseagainsthunger.org).

What are the benefits to those we serve?

By providing these meals to those in need, it can improve maternal health, encourage school attendance (which can help with academics), and promote poverty reduction. A good majority of the meals distributed go

out during lunches at school. Doing this helps encourage kids to go to school where they receive quality food that not only satisfies their hunger, but provides the necessary nutrients to boost their academic thinking.



If you would like to read more about the Rise Against Hunger mission, we encourage you to go read more blog posts and articles on the website at riseagainsthunger.org/articles



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:

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

3/13 @ 10:00 am
Church Parlor
Hostess: Cookie Brenner, Gloria
Hickson

Circle 2/3

3/13 @ 10:30 am
Covenant Village Living Room

Circle 4

3/14 @ 11:30 am
Church Parlor
Hostess: Katie Reese, Frances
Henry

Circle 5

3/13 @ 7:00 pm
Church Library

Circle 6

3/13 @ 6:30 pm
Church Parlor
Hostess: Martha Greene

Circle 7

3/14 @ 7:00 pm
Rachel Commerford's Home

Name: _____

Email: _____

Church: _____



Welcome our new Director of Faith Formation!

After an extensive search, we are excited to introduce Mary Taneti as our new Director of Faith Formation. For the last ten years, Mary has served as Director of Christian Education for First Presbyterian Church, Goldsboro. When she arrives, Mary will oversee all the ministries of First Presbyterian Church, Gastonia that involve faith formation and discipleship such as Children & Youth Programs, Wednesday Night Alive, Sunday School curriculum, and small groups. Mary's gifts, talents, and experience will be a blessing to the congregation and community. Mary's first day at FPC will be May 1, 2023. Please keep Mary and her family in prayer as she makes her transition from Goldsboro to Gastonia.

Holy Week Services

Palm/Passion Sunday

Sunday, April 2

- 8:55 am Thrive Service in Fellowship Hall
- 11:00 am Traditional Worship Service in Sanctuary with procession of palms and Carolina Brass
- 12:00 pm Children's Ministry Easter Egg Hunt

Maundy Thursday Dinner and Service

Thursday, April 6

Service and meal will begin at 6:30 pm.

Join us around the table as we observe Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. Meal and service will take place in the Fellowship Hall. Children age 5 and up are invited to attend. Nursery care will be available.

Good Friday Service

Friday, April 7 @ 7:00 pm

This traditional tenebrae service will take place in the Sanctuary. Nursery care provided.

Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 9

- 7:00 am Sunrise Service at the Columbarium
- 8:55 am Thrive Service in the Fellowship Hall
- 11:00 am Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary



Planned Giving Spotlight

Sally and Ralph Robinson

Sally and Ralph Robinson, both lifelong members of First Presbyterian Church, were blessed with 68 years of marriage. They were devoted to each other and their family of three children, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Ralph passed away on February 7, 2022, and his family and friends celebrated his life here on May 7, 2022. Ralph faithfully served his church and his community throughout his life. He was both an ordained Elder and a Deacon and served on numerous committees and special projects. He had a deep appreciation for the music program and enjoyed the fellowship of the Henderlite Bible Class. Sally has also given generously of her time and treasures to support this church as an ordained Elder and member of numerous committees, including leading the Presbyterian Endowment Trust (PET).



Ralph's obituary affirmed his life commitment to the Christian scripture: "To whom much is given, from him much will be required." (Luke 12:48) Publicly and quietly, Ralph was known for his generosity to his faith and his fellow man. Both Sally and Ralph were blessed by parents who set an example of the importance of service and giving back to their community and their church.

The Robinsons traveled extensively with their children and close friends. Ralph visited all seven continents, and Sally has visited six. They loved exploring ancient churches and cathedrals wherever they traveled. Sally said touring the Holy Land with our former minister, Dr. John Frye, and seeing the places where Jesus spent his earthly years and walking where he walked, was one of the highlights of their travels.

When the Robinsons made the decision to move to Covenant Village, they very generously donated their Sheffield Drive residence to First Presbyterian. Sally said their donation was made in gratitude to God for the many ways in which He had blessed their lives. They were also inspired and influenced by Ralph's parents who donated their home to our church before their deaths. With Ralph's and Sally's permission, the home was sold by the church, and the proceeds were placed in the Presbyterian Endowment Trust. First Presbyterian Church is deeply grateful for this extraordinary gift.

Ralph's and Sally's legacy at First Presbyterian will continue through this donation, along with an additional gift from Ralph's estate, which established the Sally and Ralph Robinson Fund of the

Presbyterian Endowment Trust. The Robinsons have supported PET and the church in many ways throughout their lives, and they have been especially supportive of the Music Ministry of the church. At their request, and in accordance with the congregational resolution which established PET in 1979, their gift will be used for long-term support of the missions of the church and for the glory of God.

In 2019 our church Session created the Planned Giving Ministry to assist all church members who would like to include the church in their estate plans. If you would like more information about this ministry and the various ways to include First Presbyterian in your estate planning, please call, text, or email Liz Sumner, Chair of the Planned Giving Ministry (704-616-0389 or lsumner@mhc-law.com) or any of these team members: Cindy Clark, Lee DuBois, Caroline Efird, Tom Efird, Kathy Gallman, LeeAnn Harris, Spurgeon Mackie, Hayley Nester.

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.

New Member Orientation

A New Member Orientation Class has been scheduled for March 19 following worship. If you have been visiting and want to know more about FPC or if you are ready to join the church, plan to come! We will have a light lunch in the parlor, talk about the church's ministries, and provide a brief tour of the building. Childcare will be provided. To register please contact Trip Stewart at tstewart@fpcgastonia.org.

Honorary Life Membership Nominations

Now is the time to nominate a woman for her faithful service in various areas of our church's work. Nomination forms are available at the front desk or by email request to kreese8293@gmail.com. Please return forms to the church by Wednesday, March 15. Recognition will be announced at the Birthday Luncheon in May.

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.

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	Traditional Service	Traditional Livestream	Thrive Service	Thrive Livestream
Feb 5	105	66	50	26
Feb 12	95	80	72	44
Feb 19	108	68	75	40
Feb 26	132	38	79	22

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