



## Shaping Minds and Hearts:

### A VITAL PARTNERSHIP FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Being “For Christ in the Heart of Charlotte” means always staying attuned to the needs of the uptown community in which we are situated. To this end, our church entered into a partnership with Sun Counseling and Wellness to provide much-needed mental healthcare to the uptown community. Since September 2022, two Sun Counseling and Wellness therapists have been practicing in the Fresco Lobby office space. In that time, they have seen 83 clients (16 minors) for a total of 519 clinical hours. Clients remark that they appreciate the confidential, separate entrance, the free parking we provide, and the convenience of our location for those who live and work in uptown.

Our members can benefit from the counseling services offered in our space (though you do not need to be a member of FPC to use them). Appointments for 1-1 therapy are available at the Sun Counseling and Wellness website. Additionally, our partners provide periodic educational opportunities for our community to learn about ways improve our mental health. Most immediately, parents of small children might be interested in our upcoming Wednesday night series on mental health and parenting in September.

Our partnership with the excellent therapists of Sun Counseling and Wellness is meeting a recognized need in our community. Scan the QR code to learn more about their services and available scholarships for those who qualify. ◆



# FIRSTNEWS

## SEPTEMBER 2023

### A Camp Grier Thank You!

Thank you to all of the volunteers who made our Camp Grier ministry possible this summer! Camp Connectors Suzanne Ross, Flo Bryan, Kim Bowman, Jason & Christy Snead, Cathy Bradley, Katie Caldwell, Cameron Strubinger, Martha Ogburn, Page Hull, Mike & Debbie O’Hara, Julie Jones, Sarah Shifflet and Linda Henley kept our campers informed and ready for camp, and Camp Coordinators Jenny Craver, Jen Dauska, Julia Wood and Page Hull made sure our departures and returns ran smoothly and campers had an awesome lunch to eat when they arrived.

This ministry means so much to the children who are able to attend. One of our connectors reached out to me afterward and said, “My camper’s camp experience was close to life-changing for her. She completely dove into camp life and all the wonderful experiences. She left Charlotte a depressed teenager and came back with a weight lifted off her shoulders. I hope I am not being too dramatic, but it made a big difference in her life. Thank you, thank you.”

Our Camp Grier volunteers are critical to this ministry and ensure that it is a great experience for everyone involved. ◆

### Bonds Beyond Books

When Lillie Cochran arrived to chaperone a field trip to the Museum of Illusions this summer, she was greeted with a shriek and a huge hug from her excited Heart Math student, Jada, who attended our Above and Beyond summer camp! Most tutors serve one hour per week, and while the academic support is incredibly important, most tutors will tell you the relationship they form with their students is their favorite part! Tutoring will start in October, with training in September, so keep an eye out for information from our partners Heart Math, Augustine Literacy Project, and HELPS (who will be returning to Westerly Hills this year)! Want a quick comparison of the three options? Visit the Tutor Charlotte website: [tutorcharlotte.org](http://tutorcharlotte.org) ◆



## From Heart to Hammer

### FPC MEMBERS DEDICATED TO HOUSING IMPACT

Twenty-four years; thirty-four Habitat houses; one important mission: to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ through affordable housing.

Amidst the challenges that come with construction, nobody will claim it's an easy task. Especially during the early days of fall, when high temperatures continue to linger, the effort required can be demanding. But those difficulties swiftly fade into the background when you see the beaming faces of a new homeowner and their child. Or when you see the structure begin to look like a home. Or when you have the camaraderie of friends with whom you have stood shoulder-to-shoulder in house-building for years. Or in that moment of warmth when a first-time homeowner looks into your eyes and says, "Thank you."

In April, two First Presbyterian members received recognition for their commitment to this mission. The prestigious Governor's Volunteer Service Award honors those who have shown significant concern and compassion for their neighbors. Habitat for Humanity nominated Brenda Suits and Marwen McDowell for their care, compassion, and dedication to the affordable housing cause in Mecklenburg County.

"Receiving the award was a total shock to both of us," Brenda admitted. "We don't do this for the recognition."

Brenda began volunteering with Habitat shortly after the "Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Project" built 14 homes in Charlotte

in 1987. While she didn't work on that particular project, it ignited a spark within her that continues to this day. "I got very excited about Habitat and the mission of Habitat. Every day after work, I'd drive by the Carter Project, and I'd walk around the outside looking at the progress made. I thought, as soon as I have an opportunity, I'm going to get involved."

That same year, she started a team at the bank she works for. That team has worked at least one Saturday a month for over three decades, building two full houses in Charlotte each year. Not only does Brenda lead the bank's builds, but she is also active in FPC's builds, which is how she and Marwen met.

"Unlike Brenda, I've never picked up a hammer. I will paint, I will clean, I will wash windows. But I don't hammer because I'm just not good at it," Marwen, who serves as First Presbyterian's Habitat for Humanity coordinator, joked. She also serves as the liaison between Habitat and the Charlotte Church Partners, a group of churches that work together on the home builds. "I wear two hats," she explained. In other words, she does a little of everything – from organizing the build and recruiting volunteers to helping on the job site and keeping drinks iced. "I said I'd retire after our 20th year, but I just can't leave. I love all the people involved: the partners, the Habitat staff, and the homeowners



– it just doesn't get any better than the homeowners."

Thirty-three of 34 original homeowners still live in homes built by FPC and the Charlotte Church Partners, and Marwen remembers many of them. "I went to renew my driver's license in July. When it was my turn, I was called to an open window. Immediately I hear, 'You built my house!' It was our 2016 homeowner. We hugged, and we cried, and I asked her about her kids and the house."

This fall, volunteers from First Presbyterian will work on our 35th and 36th houses, but this year's build will look a little different than years past. In October, The Carter Project will return to Charlotte to begin building 27 homes on a historical piece of land near the airport. In November, FPC and the Charlotte Church Partners will work to finish two of those builds. At completion, the land donated to Habitat by the City of Charlotte will be Habitat's largest housing development to date, and it's just around the corner from Westerly Hills Academy in the 28208 zip code.

First Presbyterian needs volunteers to work on our two homes this fall. "You can volunteer for one day or ten," Marwen says, "but once someone comes out one time, they almost always say, 'Oh, I'll be back!'"

Twenty-four years, 34 families, and countless volunteers later, the love of Christ resonates through the architecture of compassion, dedication, and community. We've got the hammers; now we need more hearts. ♦

*For more information and to volunteer, visit our Local Outreach page: [firstpres-charlotte.org/local-outreach](http://firstpres-charlotte.org/local-outreach)*

### ADVOCACY MINISTRY

#### Climate Change Subcommittee

Are you passionate about the environment and our planet? We have a committee of church members that seeks to provide understandable information and education about the science of climate change. The committee is early in its work; now is your chance to get involved. In an era marked by growing environmental concerns and the urgent need for collective action, this work presents a unique opportunity for FPC members to make a meaningful impact on FPC's footprint and, ultimately, the future of our planet.

Calculate your Carbon Footprint, view research, and get involved in this work on our website: [firstpres-charlotte.org/climate](http://firstpres-charlotte.org/climate) ♦

