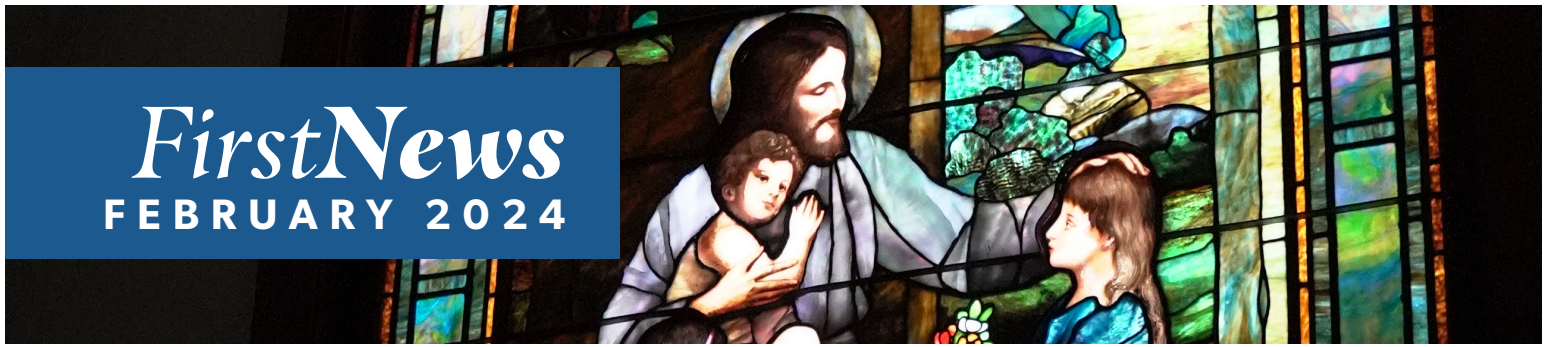


FirstNews

FEBRUARY 2024



Room at the Inn HOSPITALITY AND WARMTH

In a spirit of warmth and community, Christian Flohr and his family recently exemplified the essence of hospitality during our Room at the Inn (RITI) program. Christian, accompanied by his parents, two daughters, and girlfriend with her two sons, treated our guests to a homemade dinner before heading to the Knight Theater for a memorable performance by the Ivey Handbell Choir.

Our overnight hosts, veterans, and friends, Chad Peterson and Steve Godwin, embraced their roles with enthusiasm, engaging in heartfelt conversations with the guests.

Contributing to the program's success, Suzie Lovitt and Marla Reschly prepared lunches and packed breakfast bags, ensuring our guests had nourishing meals. Meanwhile, Sarah Firquin stocked the fridge with snacks, water, and magazines for those participating in the program.

Among the stories that emerged from the RITI program was that of Henry Allison. Despite having visited our sanctuary only once, Henry and his wife, who watch services on television from Matthews, volunteered as hospitality hosts. His warmth and kind-heartedness left a lasting impression, and he



FPC members Steve and Anna Godwin volunteer at Winterfest with Kate Herring (center) and friends.

expressed eagerness to volunteer again, vowing to bring his wife along for the next opportunity.

As we approach the final month of the RITI program in March, the need for volunteers remains crucial. February and March still require dedicated individuals to step forward and make a positive impact on the lives of our unsheltered neighbors in Charlotte. It's a very fulfilling way to make a difference. You don't even have to commit to staying overnight — there are several ways to serve in other capacities.

Westerly Hills Winterfest

Over 200 students and their families joined the inaugural Westerly Hills Academy Winterfest on December 19, creating a joyous community atmosphere. The event, supported by 35 First Presbyterian volunteers and 17 Westerly Hills Academy staff and parents, featured games, holiday card-making, cookie decorating, and book giveaways by Promising Pages.

Sarah Shifflet, FPC member and volunteer, expressed, "Winterfest was a festive time for students, parents, and staff to simply have fun as a community with games, crafts, and yummy snacks while building camaraderie among FPC volunteers."

Recognizing the challenge some families face with a lack of school-provided food during winter break, the Second Harvest mobile food pantry, assisted by FPC volunteers and the Phillip O. Berry High School football team, provided food boxes. Addison Ayer, an FPC member, shared, "Participating in the Second Harvest Food Pantry's Winterfest event at Westerly Hills was a real highlight of my Advent season. Many hands made light work, and having nutritious food to take home was a bonus for Westerly Hills families."

First Presbyterian's Outreach staff would like to extend a special thanks to all attendees and leaders Kim Bowman, Kristina Hoops, and Beth Guinan for orchestrating this meaningful event!

Ash Wednesday Reflection

Written by Rev. Mary Bowman

The church has set aside a season of preparation to encourage God's people to reflect on the significance of Lent and to prepare for Holy Week. The season of Lent invites God's people to intentionally carve out more space to draw nearer to God and to reflect on Jesus' commitment to care for his people and to turn his face to Jerusalem and the cross. The season of Lent allows us to journey with Jesus through his ministry and his suffering. We do this by adding or expanding our times of prayer, Bible reading, fasting, or other spiritual practices.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent and includes the centuries-old tradition of marking Jesus' followers with a cross of ash on their forehead. This ash cross is a mark of our identity and belonging to God and of our companionship with Jesus on his journey to the cross. The words spoken over us as the cross is made on our forehead remind us that in all things, we belong to God: "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return. In life and in death, you belong to God." Wherever life may take us, we are reminded that God is always with us and has also endured suffering, even to death, on our behalf.

It is powerful to act out and remember the story of Jesus' journey to the cross. Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent encourage us to make time to take seriously and to fully appreciate the gifts that God has given us, culminating in resurrection on Easter.

This year's Ash Wednesday service will take place at First United Presbyterian Church – just a few blocks from our church – at 12 p.m. The Reverend Pen Peery will preach. Ashes to go will be available at the CDC and Weekday School drop-off locations at 8:15 a.m., and on the Square (corner of Trade and Tryon) at 12 p.m.

Member Profile

BILL STEVENSON

How did you come to know about our church?

We moved to Charlotte in 1996 and were looking for a church home.

Margaret Rainey, a friend of my wife Leslie's from Wake Forest, suggested First Presbyterian Church as did our next-door neighbors at the Colony Apartments, Sarah and Allen Shifflet. We felt right at home from our first attendance. The welcome was warm, the service moving and inspirational, and the sense of history and tradition very appealing to us. We joined in 1997 and have been so grateful we did. Our children, John and Annie, were confirmed at First Presbyterian. Rev. Anna Dickson (Margaret's daughter) married our daughter and baptized our two grandsons, Will and Cam. Thank you, Margaret, Sarah, and Allen, our outstanding clergy and staff, and all those who have made us feel so welcome from the start!

How has First Presbyterian helped you with your spiritual journey and faith?

Like many, the truth is that over time my faith has wavered. But, in the past twenty years or so, I have felt my faith in Jesus Christ grow steadily stronger, deeper, ever present in good moments and sad. Why is that? First Presbyterian, its faithful and loving members, and our wonderful pastors have been instrumental in that growth.

Are there specific ministries or activities in the church that have been particularly meaningful to you?

The Willard Committee One of the great benefits was listening to the podcasts of potential speakers. We had great discussions within the committee, polite disagreements, and were fortunate to have terrific speakers. Garrell Keesler is a gifted leader, motivator, and get-it-doner.

Thursday Men's Bible Study How I love this group. Chuck Williamson guides us through the Bible at a pace that reveals just how rich the Bible is. A great group of guys from whom I've learned a great deal.



Passages and Passages Committee

We have explored a variety of fascinating topics in this class and have had terrific leaders. The socials are outstanding!

Contemplative Service As I imagine the early Christian services might have been: communal, respectful, loving. Thank you, Mary. If you can swing the trifecta – Contemplative Service – Passages – Traditional Service – it is a deeply spiritually enlightening Sabbath!

Have you had any memorable experiences or events you've participated in within the church?

There are many, but the one experience that stands out above all others is the trip to the Holy Land in 2016. I recall we had the opportunity for a time of silent prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane! Can you imagine being there? During our times of gathering at

the end of the day and our communion services led by Pen, I just felt a oneness with our small group of pilgrims. Unforgettable. Thank you, Pen, Chuck, Garrell, and Doron.

Will you share a favorite Bible verse or inspirational quote that has been meaningful to you?

*"for we walk by faith, not by sight."
2 Corinthians 5:7*

From Paul, of course. And powerful. I chose it because I am putting together a Sunday School lesson on the history of Christianity, and this verse was highlighted while reading about Paul. It struck me as an apt description for the early Christians – what else explains the triumph of Christianity? Ultimately, it's all about faith. Isn't it?

Advocacy Ministry Focus ANTI-RACISM SPOTLIGHT

First Presbyterian's history dates back to 1821, when the small town of Charlotte (yes, Charlotte was once considered a small town!) set aside a plot of land for the creation of a town church. The church's 203 years spanned a number of racial periods: from the Civil War to Reconstruction, from Jim Crow laws to the Civil Rights era.

In 2020, a group from First Presbyterian Church undertook research to better understand the church's history as it relates to race, with the ultimate goal of making our church more welcoming and equitable today. The Racial Justice Task Force "spent endless hours reading documents stored in our church archives, including many Session minutes," explained Task Force and Anti-racism Subcommittee member Ross Loeser. The research led to a 27-page report and contributed to the development of FPC's History Hallway.

When asked about the importance of this work today, Ross replied, "It's telling the truth about our past. 'Truth' is a fundamental value of our faith. There are multiple places in scripture that highlight this. It's also the starting point of the approach, 'Truth, Confession, Repentance, Repair,' which is a very appropriate model for thinking about our role in racial injustices."

In honor of Black History Month, the Advocacy Committee challenges you to spend some time learning about Black history and understanding the "truth" of our past. Resources are available on the church's website at firstpres-charlotte.org/anti-racism, or scan the QR code below. Additionally, you can spend some time exploring the History Hallway, which spans the corridor behind the sanctuary. Within the hallway, you'll find pastor biographies and a piece of art that includes a repentance and reconciliation statement. Rev. Pen Peery explained that the artwork "resulted from a prayerful and thoughtful reflection on our history and our desire to be for Christ in Charlotte."

Janet Lyman, who also serves on the Anti-racism Subcommittee, said, "We are hoping that people understand we're all on a journey. One might say we have both individual journeys and a journey as part of a group. There is work to be done, and the first step is to educate oneself."

