

# FirstNews

## APRIL 2024

### A Figurative Fairy Godmother VOLUNTEERS NURTURE CAMPERS AND FUTURE LEADERS

In the rolling hills of North Carolina, nestled amidst towering trees and babbling brooks, lies Camp Grier. Founded over half a century ago as an outdoor ministry of the Presbyterian Church, the camp has served as a sanctuary for young minds to explore, grow, and connect with nature.

Each summer for over 50 years, First Presbyterian has been sending kids to Camp Grier through a scholarship program with the goal of allowing children from urban areas to experience the outdoors. But sending your child to camp, especially for a first-time camper and parent, can be intimidating. That's why FPC enlists the help of "Camp Connectors" – church member volunteers – who provide a personal connection to campers and their families as they prepare for the week at Camp Grier.

For Jayson Faulkner, a Westerly Hills Academy and Camp Grier alumnus, his experiences at camp and his relationship with his Camp Connector, Elise Barksdale, have impacted his life in more ways than one. He explains, "Engaging in outdoor adventure activities within this camp setting allowed me to surmount personal challenges and cultivate unwavering resilience ... shaping my mindset and fortifying my ability to overcome obstacles in various facets of life."

Jayson is attending Morehouse College in Atlanta as an honors biology major with a minor in public health science. He serves as a residential advisor, he's a member of Phi Delta Epsilon, and he is the Director of Communications for the Howard Thurman Honors Program. He was the first Camp Grier alum to receive



Jayson and his brother with Elise before camp, 2015

an academic scholarship.

Each year that Jayson attended camp, Elise Barksdale was there to serve as his Connector. She recalls, "Volunteering with

Jayson has given me an opportunity to get to know all of his family, and I have been inspired by their many and varied activities. They are a strong-knit family, and I am certain he will serve as an inspiring role model as each of their children goes into adulthood."

For Elise, serving as a Camp Connector is more than just a duty; it is a labor of love spanning over 25 years. "I loved Camp Stewart, our former Presbytery Camp, as an elementary school child in the '50s ... I looked forward to going for a week every year in the summer," she reminisced. "I have found that the Camp Grier experience provides a similar wonderful opportunity."

Last summer, Jayson returned to First Presbyterian to see Elise – just like summers past. "My bond with Ms. Elise has bloomed beautifully from its inception during my formative years at Westerly Hills Academy," he shared. "I hold great affection and admiration for her, considering her a figurative fairy godmother. Her inherently kind nature has deeply touched me, and I am sincerely grateful for her presence in my life."

Camp Grier believes, "You can pave the world, or you can put on shoes," and camp teaches kids how to put on the shoes. Rather than looking for the smoothest and easiest path through life, experiences in the outdoors give young people the skills and confidence to embrace challenging circumstances, persevere to solve critical problems, and see the world through a lens of compassion.

If camp teaches kids to put on shoes, then Camp Connectors put on their own shoes and walk beside them. They give families the knowledge and confidence



Jayson and Elise, summer 2023

to prepare for camp. But it is more than just preparing families for summer camp – it's ministry. Elise says, "My faith is strengthened by my involvement at First Presbyterian, and [the church] is truly 'home' for me. I am grateful for the many volunteer options I have been gifted."

*Camp Connectors are needed for the summer 2024 camp season. Contact Heather Herring ([hherring@firstpres-charlotte.org](mailto:hherring@firstpres-charlotte.org)) if you'd like to volunteer.*

### On the Shores of Service REVIVING A BEACHSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CAMP IN MEXICO

Situated on a white sandy beach in the Yucatan Peninsula with a view of the turquoise Gulf sits Camp Chuburna, a coastal Presbyterian retreat center. Despite its picture-perfect location, the building has been in need of some work to prepare for the summer season. Rev. Lucy Crain, who led a group to Mexico, explained, "Each summer, the camp provides a setting for hundreds of youth the opportunity to worship, study, and play."



Eager for our church to return to our partners in Mexico, a group of First Presbyterian Church members stepped in to help.

From March 17-23, a group of seven FPC members traveled to the Yucatan to work alongside Accion Ministries. Accion is a long-time FPC mission partner that works with the Mayan people in church development and providing young people access to education. Our group, along with several from Accion, spent their days in the ocean breeze painting, sanding tables and benches, preparing meals together, and taking in the beautiful view of creation just steps away.

Otis Ku, a church member who traveled with the group, shared, "It is so special to spend some time in Mexico with our brothers and sisters in Jesus. This is my first mission trip, and I could not have anticipated the power of the Lord's spirit in a place like this. I will take this back home to Charlotte and be grateful for such a gift!"

## Faith in Action

### ANSWERING THE CALL TO CARE FOR CREATION

At the heart of our Christian faith lies a key belief: God created the world. God called it good and delights in God's creation. As Christians, these words should resonate deeply within us, reminding us that our planet is not merely a place we inhabit but a sacred trust bestowed upon us by God.

As faithful stewards, it is our duty to recognize this trust and act accordingly. We do not believe that God placed us in this world to mistreat it but to cherish and preserve it for generations to come.

First Presbyterian's climate change committee affirms that the science is clear: human activity, including the burning of fossil fuels, is warming the earth, causing changes in weather and adversely affecting nature and humankind. Hal Clarke, co-chair of the climate change committee, urges, "Taking action against climate change is a faithful response to the facts that fossil fuels and other human activity are causing harm to all of God's creation, including human beings. If we do not take action as a society, we will leave our children and our neighbors with a world that is much more dangerous and bleak than the world we inherited."

This month, the congregation is invited to join in a series of educational events about climate change. Hear a scientific perspective from UNC-Charlotte professor Jacob Scheff on April 14; hear about the concerns of our own youth as they face the future we are creating on Youth Sunday, April 21; and hear from our Willard Lecturer Brian McLaren about how we can approach this issue as Christians on April 28.

In his book, "Life After Doom," Brian McLaren writes, "Survival of the fittest did not mean survival of the most competitive, survival of the most aggressive, or survival of the most dominant. It meant survival of those who fit best within their environment. In other words, if we do not fit in with earth's ecosystems, if we overshoot our environment's carrying capacity, we will go extinct."

This series provides opportunities to learn more about the facts of climate change, the risks it poses, and the pros and cons of various proposed remedies. "Our duty as stewards requires us to face the facts about climate change – its causes and the risks it poses – and to act on that basis," Randy Phillips, committee co-chair, explains.

Join us on Sundays in April as we embark on a journey of learning, reflection, and collective action to safeguard our environment for generations to come. Let us heed this call with courage and conviction, knowing that by acting together, we can make a meaningful difference for God's creation and in the lives of all God's children.

For more information about FPC's climate change committee and further steps to take, visit our website at [firstpres-charlotte.org/climate-change](http://firstpres-charlotte.org/climate-change) or scan the QR code to the right.



## Young Adult Ministry

### UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Life in one's 20s and early 30s can be characterized by constant change and self-discovery. First Presbyterian's young adult ministry serves as a stable place amidst these uncertainties; it reminds our young adults of the importance of their faith and relationship with God.

This ministry is dedicated to providing a wide range of opportunities. From social events and service days to study opportunities and educational meetings, there's something for everyone. On the first Tuesday of the month, First Draught of Faith is hosted at a local brewery. This is an open discussion format that tackles a different idea, question, or theme every month. On the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month, The Presbyterian Men's Square (a play on the Presbyterian Women's Circle) meets as a study group. Currently, The Rev. Dr. John Hart is leading this group's exploration of the Presbyterian Study Catechism.

While fellowship and education are important, service is a key component of this ministry. Young adults participate in the Second Saturday Service, volunteering at Crisis Assistance Ministry alongside other church members. Robert Galloway, Pastor for Discipleship, explained, "This not only serves those in need but also fosters a sense of community among participants. Afterwards, we enjoy lunch together."

"We are always looking to build connections amongst this group," Robert said. "The fourth Tuesday of the month is our young adult monthly social. While participating in numerous recreational offerings in Charlotte, they are getting to know one another and building a community of other people in similar stages of life. In the past, we have gone to a trivia night, played pickleball, attended a build-your-own terrarium workshop, had a wine-tasting lesson, and much more."

The young adult ministry's goal is to be a gateway into the larger church

community. It serves as a great landing spot for new people or those returning home after college, but it also strives to help our young adults engage with other programs and ministry areas. By doing so, they develop relationships and connections to the larger membership.

Robert encourages members to help get our young adults involved: "This is one area where current members can help us. We encourage you to introduce yourself and welcome young adults when you see them in worship, invite them to the areas you are involved in, or take them to coffee to get acquainted with them. With everyone's help, we can be the ministry and congregation that supports those whom God has called to this place."

As young adults continue to learn about who they are, "we remind them that they are valued members of the Body of Christ whom God loves," Robert emphasized. "Our ministry aims to provide a community for those seeking to deepen their faith and live as disciples in today's world."