



FirstNews

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Arts+ Piano Teacher Dzidra Reimanis A JOURNEY OF MUSIC AND SERVICE

At the age of 97, Dzidra Reimanis reflects on a life dedicated to music and community service, particularly through her involvement with the Community School of the Arts (now Arts+), founded at First Presbyterian Church. Born in Latvia, Dzidra journeyed to the United States in 1949 and began a remarkable new chapter in her life.



Dzidra Reimanis and feline friend

“When I first came to the United States I was working in an office. I had some problems with my health and had to stay at a hospital. When I got better, a friend told me, Dzidra, you will not go back to the office anymore. Your life has to be in music. So I began teaching the piano.”

After settling in the United States, Dzidra immersed herself in her passion for music. She began her work as a piano teacher tutoring students through private lessons. Then, in 1969, she received an invitation from Henry Bridges, choir director and organist of First Presbyterian Church, to participate in a project aimed at providing music education to children from all backgrounds and areas of Charlotte.

“I received a letter from Henry Bridges at First Presbyterian Church. And he

said, very simply, that they are having this project, that they just started and he would like me to be one of the teachers. I never found out where he got my name! But I was one of the first four teachers they had. I really longed for involvement in the community in some way, but I didn’t know exactly how to go about it. I was thinking maybe at my church I could do something. But as it happened, I didn’t have to do anything because Henry Bridges invited me, and I was part of the community!”

Many of the children served by this program did not have access to musical education, and through her dedication, Dzidra played a pivotal role in shaping the musical journeys of countless students over the years. This program would come to be called the Community School of the Arts (now Arts+).

“At home, I taught private lessons to children from the neighborhood I lived in. But Henry wanted to teach all children. The Presbyterian Church had all these pianos that were quiet apart from Sundays. And there were children who could study music and have a place to practice. So Henry hired four piano teachers and one theory teacher, and I was one of those teachers.”

Transportation was a big issue for the school. Back then, some students, particularly those from underserved areas, had to rely on bussing to get to their lessons. This meant long rides and sometimes unpredictable schedules. Despite the challenges, Dzidra and her fellow teachers were determined to give every student the chance to learn music, no matter where they came from.

Reflecting on her decades-long involvement with the Community School of the Arts, Dzidra highlights its positive impact on students and the community

as a whole. She fondly remembers moments of joy and fulfillment as she witnessed her students’ musical abilities blossom over time.

Now retired, Dzidra remains grateful for the opportunity to share her love of music with generations of students and looks forward to seeing the school’s legacy continue to thrive in the years to come.

“I was very excited to be there. It was my life. I felt I was doing something good. As far as my profession goes, if everything had gone right in my life, I would still want to be a piano teacher. I am just so grateful it happened that way.”



Henry Bridges, Choir Director and Organist of First Presbyterian Church with students

The the Community School of the Arts (now Arts+) was founded in the church building in the fall of 1969 with 20 children receiving free lessons. Over the years, lessons were offered in dance, art, and violin, and satellite locations were set up around the city.

Henry Bridges remained executive director until 1984 when he resigned to teach piano at the satellite program at Piedmont Courts Public Housing Project.

In 2018 when the school changed its name to Arts+ it was serving 4,500 children. Mr. Bridges passed away at the age of 90 in March 2018.

Spring Luncheon MAY 19, 12 PM, FRONT LAWN

Join us for a picnic on the front lawn. The church will provide fried chicken, rolls, and beverages. We are asking each family to bring a potluck contribution to share. Potluck contributions (one per family): last names A-I: Dessert, J-R: Side, S-Z: Salad. There will be tables and chairs, but bring a blanket if you prefer! Please register at fpc.tiny.us/lunchonlawn.



Member Profile: Amy Hockett

How did you come to know about our church?

In 1996, I was working as an architect at Jenkins-Peer Architects. We were invited to submit a proposal to FPC for a new education building, fellowship hall, and renovation of the current minister's suite. At the time, FPC member Jimmy Dudley was my co-worker and mentor at Jenkins-Peer, and we were both on the proposal/interview team. Our team was selected, and I began to learn all about the church, its buildings, and, more importantly, its ministries and faithful members. Throughout the planning and design process, I interviewed the entire staff, most committee chairs, and other congregants. I was simply blown away by the passionate staff and congregation who fully embraced enhancing the facilities to best serve Christ in the heart of Charlotte. I joined the church not long after the project was completed and have been an active member ever since.

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

FPC has so many wonderful, important and meaningful ministries and partnerships. So many in fact, that it can be daunting to figure out where to plug in! And in true Amy Hockett style, I jumped in with both feet and have been active in many programs and ministries. As a new FPC member, I discovered the lay-led Stephen Ministry program. Our very own Mary Bowman was one of my Stephen Ministry trainers (called Stephen Leaders) before she became a pastor. I became very involved with this transformative ministry for over 10 years as a Stephen Minister and then later as a Stephen Leader.

I formed many great friendships and

gained many great insights into what I consider a pivotal moment in my spiritual formation, developing a love for "faith in action." One Stephen Ministry highlight was attending the national Stephen Leadership training in Pittsburg with Woods Potts, where through weeklong workshops and classes, we were equipped to become Stephen Leaders. Simply being with hundreds of Stephen Ministers and Leaders from around the country was a true inspiration. Another important ministry I actively participated in was youth ministry as a youth group advisor. Of particular importance, I learned much about my faith and about how to talk about my faith through relationships with our youth, many of whom are now adult members of FPC with children of their own (a true full circle!). An impactful ministry partnership I participated in, which no longer exists, was the Upper Room Prayer ministry with the then Urban Ministry Center (now Roof Above). And I have been involved with our Mexico and Haiti mission ministries. There is something particularly magical and spiritual about mission trips, and I believe these experiences were blessings. One special memory on a Haiti mission trip was a hike to a satellite school where Pastor Actionnel imparted a few Haitian proverbs – one made an impression on me: "One hand does not clap alone."

Share any memorable experiences or events you've participated in within the church:

A few of my memorable and impactful experiences within the church include serving on the Strategic Planning Committee (AKA The Balcony Group) in 2017, hosting participants of and participating in the Scotland Presbyterian "exchange," making sandwiches monthly with a small group as part of the Sandwich Kitchen, serving on the Willard Lecture Committee, Christmas Eve service with candles and exiting the church singing Silent Night, and Wednesday Night Bible Study led by Julia McLean and Barbara Williamson.

Do you have a favorite Bible verse?

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2

Living Out Resurrection Faith EASTER OFFERING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING EXCEEDS GOAL

On Easter Sunday, the day we celebrated Christ's resurrection, this congregation demonstrated resurrection faith through generosity to support neighbors in need.

In the weeks before Easter, Rev. Pen Peery challenged the congregation to raise \$100,000, which would be matched dollar-for-dollar to double the impact. He explained, "One hundred percent of the offering we collect will go to support Freedom Communities' efforts to build affordable housing in the Westerly Hills neighborhood."

Not only did this congregation reach that goal, you exceeded it. First Presbyterian Church is thrilled to share that together, we raised an astounding \$273,885.53 for affordable housing.

In response to this news, Hannah Beavers, Executive Director of Freedom Communities, expressed her gratitude and excitement for the impact it will have.

"We are blown away by the incredible generosity of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church and the way you have come alongside this project to bring affordable homes to teachers and social service providers. We know that we will be able to downprice at least 10 homes into affordable housing – what a blessing! Homebuyer seminars will soon be taking place for Westerly Hills teachers, preschool teachers, and social service providers working within the Freedom Corridor. This partnership has been such an incredible blessing, and we look forward to sharing our progress in the months ahead!"

Communion Prayer INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! They will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God. According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at the table with his disciples, he took the bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. This is the Lord's table. Our Savior invites those who trust him to share the feast which he has prepared. Amen.

We will celebrate the Sacrament of Communion on Sunday, May 5. Whether you attend in person or virtually, you are invited to participate.