

A Note from Pastor Caroline

he Hindu festival of Diwali fell in mid-October this year, meaning that for the past month the homes of my Indian neighbors have been decorated with strands of twinkling multicolored lights. Their cheerful sparkle in these inky fall evenings is a daily reminder that no matter where we're from or how we worship, there is something universal in the human longing to find light in the darkness.

While there is a particular delight in enjoying the holiday decorations of one's neighbors (all of the beauty with none of the ladders!), watching these celebrations unfold makes me long for Advent, our own season of joyful anticipation. Sometimes we pastors speak about Advent as a time of waiting for joy. We urge everyone to hold out with bated breath, catching back our "Alleluias" until Love is born on Christmas Day. And yet if we're entirely honest, we might admit that the joy we're waiting for surrounds us already. The spirit of Christmas doesn't magically appear on December 25, any more than the love we feel for our spouse materializes when we say our vows at the altar, or our excitement for a trip the moment the plane takes off. Many parents have a sense of loving their children before they know them, from the moment they begin to imagine a life that includes their presence. Joy is an orientation of the heart, a set of lenses for seeing the world, and Christmas is a time that invites us to honor and bless that joy not only on a day or for a season, but throughout the year ahead.

We also know that for many the start of the holidays comes with a familiar pain. The dread of long to-do lists and navigating the logistics of extended families, and also of isolation, estrangement, and grief. Many of you who are reading this are anticipating the first Christmas without someone dear—are living in memory or regret, rather than hope. The holidays can be one of the loneliest times of the year. I hope that this church, and especially our church family, is a place where both joy *and* sorrow can live, and where none of us has to carry our burdens alone. If we step beyond the glitter and reindeer, we find that the music and ancient language of our faith holds this tension well: we are a people who stand firmly in the world, with all of its grief and complications, and just as firmly in the hope that is God. It is for this reason that our Advent theme this year is the music of Christmas. Each Sunday our worship will focus on a beloved hymn that tells the story of Christ's birth. (An aside: do thank the entire church staff, who forbade me from making "In the Bleak Midwinter" the focus of all four Sundays; despite its gloomy name and questionable claims about snow in the desert, it's my favorite carol of all.) Those who wish can also participate in a daily Advent devotional that pairs our weekly hymns with Scripture and reflections.

There is a fullness to this Advent that I haven't felt since before the pandemic; indeed, this Advent may be the busiest one I can remember in my time at First Pres. We're bringing back beloved traditions like the Giving Tree, Advent Workshop, Fabric Missions sale, and the Christmas Concert, and starting new ones. On December 3 First Pres will be a stop on the Holiday Home Tour benefitting the West Chester Library, and on December 4 we are hosting a Christmas Market featuring thirty local artisans (see back page). Make sure to stop by Fellowship Hall between services on December 18 for a Christmas Cookie Coffee Hour provided by the Sunday School students, or catch the Miner Street Brass performing on December 9 at Tel Hai Retirement Community. The Wednesday Lunch group is hosting both a Thanksgiving meal and Christmas lunch (December 21), and they hope those who are able will come to celebrate with our neighbors.

As we prepare for all of the joyful busyness of the season, we also know that the coming year will mean saying goodbye to Eric Hankins as he, April, and baby Juniper join Eric's parents in Ohio, and First Pres moves to a new chapter of contemporary worship.

Each time I compose the opening to our church newsletter, I wonder whether this will be my final message before the next Head of Staff arrives. Like you I wait with joyful anticipation for all that is to come, and also gratitude for this season in the church's life. (I'll also give that pastor full warning not to use the words "waiting" or "patience" in any sermons for at least 3 years – I think we've all pretty much mastered those virtues by this point!) While I'm anxious for what's next, for now I'm also deeply grateful for the chance to serve along-side you, and to watch the many ways that you all, each in your own ways, bring light to this world. Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to serve in this role, and for the joy of Christ that I feel as part of this remarkable congregation.

With Christmas blessings,

— Pastor Caroline

Advent and Christmas Preaching Schedule

November 27 – Eric Hankins, with sacrament of baptism

December 4 – David Dickey

December 11 - Sally Brown

December 18 - Sara Pantazes and Caroline Cupp, with sacrament of baptism

Christmas Eve Services – Caroline Cupp (3 pm, 5 pm, & 7 pm), Ann Dickey (10 pm)

December 25 – Ann Dickey (single service at 9 am)

January 1 - tbd (single service at 9 am)

The Giving Tree Schedule

"O Giving Tree, O Giving Tree, how lovely are your ornaments!"

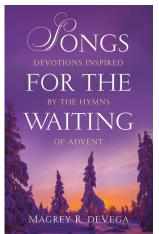
It *is* the most wonderful time of the year; a time when the members of First Pres get to play Santa Claus to so many members of our community who are experiencing hardships. On November 20, when you walk into Fellowship Hall, the Giving Trees will be up and decorated. The congregation will be sponsoring the following organizations: Migrant Ministry, West Chester Food Cupboard, Matthew 25, Napthali, Pocopson Home, Northstar, Domestic Violence Center, and MCHC (Maternal and Child Health Consortium).

If you are unable to get to the church to select an ornament but would still like to support this ministry, email David Teager (dteager@firstpreswc.com). He will select an ornament for you and email the information needed to purchase the gift.

Finally, drop-off for gifts or gift cards will be on Sunday, November 27 from 9-12, Saturday, December 3 from 11-1 or Sunday, December 4 from 9-1.

Choose an ornament and give from the heart. Please sign the tracker before you depart. Thank you for spreading Christmas cheer To the ministry partners we work with here!

Focus on Faith Formation



Church-wide Advent Study

All members of the First Pres community are invited to read *Songs for the Waiting: Devotions Inspired by the Hymns of Advent* by Magrey R. DeVega, as your daily devotional this Advent season. Every December, we are challenged to tune into the spiritual riches that await us in this liturgical season in the midst of the busyness and fullness that our culture has laid on top of these days. Each day's devotion in this book offers Advent hymn lyrics, Scripture, and a short reflection to help us prepare anew to celebrate Jesus' birth. Your weekly email will include a link to a YouTube performance of that week's featured hymn, in case these are unfamiliar to you.

The books are available for pick-up in Fellowship Hall now or contact the church office to have one brought to your home. People who are able are asked to contribute \$5 toward the cost of the book. Contact Sara Pantazes with any questions.

Winter Wednesday Might Adult Study

This winter, the Rev. Dr. Sally A. Brown comes to lead a study on 1 Corinthians, the Gospels and "power." The New Testament, both in the Gospels and elsewhere, asks us to rethink what really counts as power in this world. I Corinthians 1–3 provide us with thought-provoking material on this subject. Alongside assigned verses from these chapters, we will turn to the Gospels to discover what Jesus' acts and words teach us about the true nature of power, and what it means to use it wisely and compassionately in everyday life. This study will take place over Zoom on Wednesday nights, January 11 – February 1, from 6:30 – 7:30 pm.

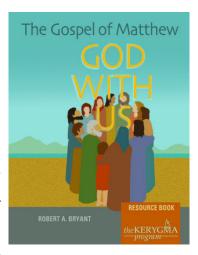
Rev. Dr. Sally A. Brown recently retired after over twenty years as professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary. She taught previously at Lancaster Theological Seminary, and in the 1980s and 90s, was a pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem, PA, for thirteen years.

Sunday Might Bible Study

First Pres is offering an adult Bible study on the book of Matthew using the Kerygma program's book *Gospel of Matthew: God With Us.* The study is introduced in this way:

"With all we have to unite us, we still find ways to create division. It is an age-old question: do we focus on what sets us apart, or what holds us together?...

According to Matthew, the Church is an earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God, and it is comprised of Jesus' followers who have been called out to live righteously in the world and to serve in the manner of the Christ with deep humility and unfathomable forgiveness. In Jesus, there is a new community at work for the blessing of the world. What is it that binds us together? Jesus—God With Us."



The study will take place on Sunday from 7 – 8 pm over Zoom beginning on Sunday, January 8. All participants will be given a study book at no cost. Contact Sara to request a book or share any questions.

— Sara Pantazes

Focus on Congregational Life



Trick or Treat

On October 29 we welcomed 139 friends and neighbors through our doors for our indoor trick or treat. This was our first time hosting this community event since before Covid and we received many comments that people were glad to see it again.

Special thanks to our nearly sixty volunteers who decorated, greeted, led games and snacks, and answered doors for the event, and for the many donations of candy!

Christmas Ornaments

If you're looking for a nice addition to your tree this year, or a gift for a friend, we have just the thing! The Congregational Life committee will be selling First Pres Christmas ornaments. These slate ornaments will make a beautiful addition to your Christmas decorations. The ornaments are \$10 and proceeds will go towards provide sponsorships for guests at our monthly Bridge dinners. Ornaments will be available beginning Nov. 27 on Sunday mornings at the Welcome Center.



Advent Wreath Workshop

On Sunday, November 27 from 4-5:30 p.m., we'll welcome in the Advent season with an afternoon of fellowship and making some wreaths and gifts. Adults will be able to decorate and take home freshly made Christmas wreaths, and our younger friends will have a chance to make some gifts for their loved ones. Our Youth Group members will be on hand to help our younger group, and also make something themselves. Please sign up by November 25 using the sign-up tab at firstpreswc.com, or contact Elizabeth Hess (ehess@firstpreswc.com).

Bridge Dinners

This fall we were happy to bring back Bridge Dinners. Before COVID, this was a weekly dinner (along with evening programming for music, studies, children and youth). We tested the waters with a monthly Bridge dinner September through November, accompanied by a worship service in the Chapel. Each month we welcomed between 40-50 dinner attendees and enjoyed the fellowship. Whet your appetites for more dinners in the winter and spring!





Bucket School Update

The Bucket School is 40 years old this year!



The Bucket School is having a wonderful year! Our students and teachers are learning, growing and having lots of fun. Our year has been very full with tons of hands-on learning, Halloween parties, a visit from the fire department (see picture), service projects, visiting musicians, Mrs. Koons' PE classes, Mrs. Rosenberg's library lessons, extended day programming and lots of laughter! Our wonderful teachers continue to amaze with their creative and clever lesson plans. There is never a dull moment in The Bucket School!

Each month we "fill our buckets" with different Christian values. We learned about love in September by making new friends and getting to know our

teachers. Thankfulness was October's value, which we celebrated by donating our used children's clothing to the Clothing Closet. November brought us lots of joy as we made Christmas ornaments for the church's giv-

ing tree. During our final month of the year, we will be sharing the spirit of Christmas by making cards for those in our community.

As we prepare to begin registration for the 2023-2024 school year, we ask that you pray our school continues to provide the quality, Christian education we have offered for so many years. Spread the word. The Bucket School is the place to be for the best in preschool education.





Focus on Stewardship

Three Ways to Help Fund First Pres Ministries and Missions:

We greatly appreciate all who help support First Pres ministries and missions with financial gifts. There are three main ways to provide financial support.

- Stewardship / Annual Fund Giving: By pledging your financial support each year and following up your pledge with regular contributions, you help First Pres to budget and then fulfill our ministry and mission commitments.
- Matthew 25 / Special Missions Giving: Your contributions to the ongoing Matthew 25 Fund for home-insecure persons and other specific mission projects that First Pres supports during the year are forwarded directly to those specific missions.
- Legacy Giving: By including First Pres in your will or making a legacy gift to First Pres, you are contributing to a better future for your loved ones and making a lasting impact on the faith community here at First Pres.

From Eric to his First Pres Family

y now I expect that you have heard that I have accepted a new ministry position at The Bath Church (UCC) in Akron, Ohio. Beginning January 1, I will be their Director of Youth and Family Ministries. The church is 20 minutes from my parents' house, and we are excited to be around family in this season of our lives. My siblings are local, and April's sister is about two hours away in Columbus, Ohio. Juniper and Azalea (due in March) will be surrounded by their cousins, aunts, uncles, and one side of their grandparents.

I have enjoyed my time at First Pres and will cherish the memories we made together. It was with eager hearts that we began preparing for the 10:42 service almost five years ago. I came to First Pres to play a part in the dream you had already begun: to add a contemporary worship service. It has been my joy to lead worship in that service since its launch in 2018.

I've recently enjoyed my time serving as the Youth Director. The last year and a half have been a blast and have confirmed for me that youth ministry is what I want to be doing for this chapter of my life. We have amazing students and leaders and are well supported by the larger congregation here at First Pres. I have no doubt that the strength of those groups will continue to fuel the incredible things that are happening in the youth ministry.

I will miss you all. While this move is a good family and ministry move in our lives, it is bittersweet to say goodbye to the many wonderful people at First Pres. We will never forget our time here and we are grateful for the time we've been a part of this church.

I will remain at First Pres through the end of this year and will work to set up my ministry areas for ongoing success after my departure.

Yours in Christ,

- Eric (Hankins

Focus on Youth

Since our previous newsletter, the youth group has been up to a huge variety of activities and having a great time. One of the most meaningful events was the collection and organization of children's clothes to support The Francis Kettenring Clothing Closet. Thanks to the donations from our congregation, hundreds of articles of clothing were added to the Clothing Closet. We've also participated in our middle school retreat, Breakaway, where we worshipped, heard inspiring messages, and had tons of fun on the zip line, the high ropes course, basketball, and dodgeball. From November 18–20, we'll head off to our high school retreat in Johnsonburg, New Jersey. Through numerous other events, lessons, and service projects, we have been actively seeking to cultivate community, grow in our spirituality, and work for justice in our world.

Christmas Cookie Sunday

Church families are planning a sweeter than normal coffee hour for **Sunday, December 18**. Stay after the 9:00 service or come early for the 10:42 service to enjoy our church family's favorite Christmas cookies. There will even be hot chocolate along with coffee! Let's close out the Fourth Sunday of Advent with joy and fellowship as we turn our hearts and minds toward celebrating Christmas Day!

The Ongoing Work of the PNC

The Pastoral Nominating Committee is grateful for all of the assistance, prayers, and support of the congregation. By its nature the work of this committee lacks transparency. As we move into Advent, a season of waiting, we are well aware that your season of waiting began over a year ago when the PNC was called.

The PNC has been hard at work. Inviting someone to leave a place they're currently serving is a different kind of task than calling someone who is actively seeking a new position. It also means that the caliber of candidates we have interviewed is remarkable. We are grateful for the support of the Presbytery and the ongoing guidance of Bill Wilson and the Center for Healthy Churches throughout the process.

October 25, 2021 - The congregation elected a nine-member PNC

October – March 2022 – Preparation Period

- Multi-day orientation, weekly meetings scheduled, covenant written and signed.
- PNC homework involved reviewing material provided by CHC and reading and discussing two books, including *Who* by Geoff Smart and Randy Street and *The EQ Interview: Finding Employees with High Emotional Intelligence* by Adele B. Lynn.
- Reviewed congregational survey responses to set priorities for qualities sought in the next Head of Staff.
- Interviewed First Pres staff members, as well as current and former pastors.
- Created a Church Profile with valuable input from the congregation; created the Ministry Information Form (MIF) to comply with denominational guidelines.
- Created questions, held an interview preparation session with leadership, and had a practice mock interview.

March 2022 - Ongoing Interview Period

The PNC received names of candidates from the Center for Healthy Churches. They were pre-screened by CHC for emotional maturity, excellent preaching, and administrative skills.

- Reviewed sermons and other online materials.
- Conducted approximately fifteen half-hour interviews, followed (for most candidates) by two-hour interviews.
- Met with some candidates in person in West Chester, sharing information about and showing the area.
- Carried out numerous reference calls and continued with web-based searches.

November 2022 - Where we are today

The PNC is focused on several highly qualified candidates who are interested in the role of Head of Staff at FPC. We are excited about the prospects and the continuing journey of discernment.

Our goal is to do God's will and each step involves waiting not only for the Holy Spirit, the combined schedules of candidates, the PNC, and Presbytery. We are so grateful for your trust and patience during this long process, and are looking forward to all that lies ahead.

Yours in Christ,

Your PNC: Chris Menan, Deb Shyrock, PJ Dakes, Molly Dolan, Beth Farcht, Brooke Gamble, Ellen Endslow, Carmelo Ortiz, and George Zumbano

Colossians 4:17 "...be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave you."

Focus on Music Ministry

As you may know, First Presbyterian supports the education of music students at West Chester Univeristy through sponsored participation in the Chancel Choir as Choral Scholars. These students, in turn, develop an interest in (and, we hope, a love for) participation in worship that will persist when they leave to start their own careers and lives after school. In this way we help keep choral music alive for future generations.

This year our choral scholars roster includes:

- Junior Kiley Aikey, who studies music education to become a choral director. She also hopes for time to also participate in theatre and opera work. A mezzo-soprano, she is from Mifflinburg, PA.
- Sofia Bobrysheva, a senior, from Toronto, Canada. Sofia is majoring in voice performance (soprano) and plans to go to graduate school to further a career in conservatory teaching and opera performance.
- Joseph Galdi, a junior from King of Prussia. He is singing tenor in various ensembles and studying psychology. He plans to attend graduate school, and is certain that music will always be a part of his life.
- Soprano Jessica McNeely is a junior, studying vocal performance and music education. She hails from Yardley, PA, and plans to go to graduate school for further education in vocal pedagogy.
- Mezzo-soprano Miranda Nilan is a junior in the Music Education program at WCU. She is from nearby Oxford, and also plans to go to graduate school in vocal performance.
- Also planning a career in choral conducting is Evelyn Stohlman, a Music Ed and Vocal Performance major. She is a senior from Dumfries, VA.
- Last (alphabetically) but not least, Ryan Zicakfoose is another tenor in the ensemble. Ryan has majored in general music but also completed pre-med requirements! While he graduates this fall, he will stick around for the spring semester. Ryan is from Allentown, PA.



Christmas Poinsettias

You will find in the pew card racks, and throughout the church, Holiday Flower envelopes that you can use to request the poinsettias that will bring our sanctuary to life during the Christmas season. Return the envelope, or contact the church office with a gift of \$15.00 by **December 11**. Be sure to complete the envelope with your name and the name of your loved ones and whether it is in honor of or in memory of someone. You may also use the form below, or the online order form at the website. Thank you from your Worship Committee.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS						
Name						
Phone						
Amount Enclosed (\$15 each)						
In Memory/Honor of						

Celebrate Christmas at First Pres

Whether you attend in person or on line, and in real time or later in the week, please rejoice with your church family as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

Christmas Eve, December 24

Candlelight services will be held at 3 pm (Family Friendly), 5 pm (Contemporary), 7 pm (Traditional), and 10 pm (Communion). The nursery will be open for the 3 pm, 5 pm, and 7 pm services, but will not be staffed. Caregivers are welcome to watch the service while staying in that space with their children. There will also be a program for preschool and elementary aged children during the sermon of the 5 pm and 7 pm services.. Please know that children of all ages are always welcome in worship!

Christmas Day, December 25

There will be a single, traditional service at 9 a.m., led by the Rev. Ann Dickey. The nursery will be open but will not be staffed. The Christmas Day service will be broadcast over WCHE (1520 AM or 95.3 FM) at 11:00 on December 25.

First Sunday of Christmas, January 1

In keeping with the holiday schedule, there will be a single service at 9 a.m. The nursery will be open but will not be staffed. Sunday School and other activities will resume on January 8.

Stephen Ministry Training

Now is the Time!

Do you feel called to make a difference in another person's life? Stephen Ministers are trained to do just that, by showing up consistently, listening without judgment and serving as a steady reminder of God's presence. Through regular visits they can be a strong anchor for someone whose life feels unsettled, providing space to truly focus on the care receiver's needs. Stephen Ministers go through a training class that builds up caregiving skills, and prepares them to provide confidential, one-to-one, emotional and spiritual support to others who are struggling.



A few openings are available for the upcoming class which will run from January through early June 2023. Please contact Becky Gamble, sandbgamble@comcast.net or Rev. Caroline Cupp to express your interest.

To view inspiring videos that will deepen your understanding of this ministry, and possibly open your heart to serving or being served through SM: Click here or go to www.stephenministries.org/stephenministry/default.cfm/1596

Church Office Hours

The church building is open from 8:30 am-4:30 pm, Monday-Friday. The church's open office hours are based on the availability of our current administrative staff and volunteers. The ministry and program staff are also on-site throughout the week, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you need to come to the church building outside office hours. We are always looking for more front office volunteers. To learn more about this hospitality ministry, please contact the Office Administrator, David Teager.

Life Events

CONTACT

FIRST PRES

In Memoriam

- Alfred Miller, member of First Presbyterian Church from June 2, 1946 to August 23, 2022
- George W. Nagorny, member of First Presbyterian Church from February 28, 2000 to August 30, 2022

The sympathy and prayers of the congregation are extended to

- Stephen Miller and family on the death of his father
- The family of George Nagorny
- David and Jennifer Singley and family on the death of Jennifer's mother

Baptisms

- Charlotte Mirielle Ivy Das, born June 8, 2022, daughter of Arnold Varun and Stephanie Lee Das
- James Tyler Smith, born January 31, 2021, son of Tyler and Morgan Smith
- Scarlett Elizabeth Damadio, born February 5, 2020, daughter of Brett and Diane Damadio
- Savannah Grace Agnew, born December 17, 2021, daughter of Jennifer Agnew

Births

- Collins Isabelle Ferry, daughter of Lena and Thomas Ferry, granddaughter of Esther and Rich Smith, July 25
- Sebastian James Kressler, son of Brian and Alyssa Kressler, grandson of Rick and Tracy Burke, September 1
- Wrenly Simonin Brandl, daughter of Rachel and Chris Brandl, granddaughter of Russ and Lisa Buckley, October 25

Our newest members

- Rich and Lyn Blessing
- Susan Walker
- Sally Hall (reactivated membership)

Executive Pastor

Rev. Caroline Cupp (ccupp@firstpreswc.com)

Program Staff

Director of Music:

Sándor Kádár (skadar@firstpreswc.com)

Assistant organist:

Peyton Cole (peytoncolemusic@outlook.com)

Children's Choir Director:

Marci Major (mmajor@wcupa.edu)

Director of Engagement:

Elizabeth Hess (ehess@firstpreswc.com)

Director of Faith Formation:

Sara Pantazes (spantazes@firstpreswc.com)

Preschool Director:

Jennifer Rosenberg (jrosenberg@firstpreswc.com)

Director of Youth & Contemporary Ministries: Eric Hankins (ehankins@firstpreswc.com)

Church Office

Office Administrator and First Press Editor: David Teager (dteager@firstpreswc.com)

Director of Operations:

Jeff Somers (jsomers@firstpreswc.com)

Office Manager:

Karen Goldstein (kgoldstein@firstpreswc.com)

Wedding & Funeral Coordinator:

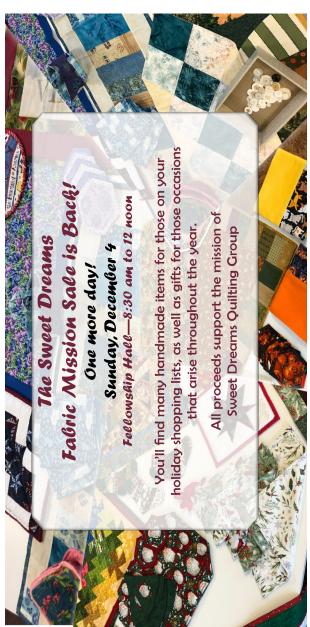
 $Gretchen\ Huebner\ (ghuebner@firstpreswc.com)$

Custodian:

Willy Oliveras (contact church office for requests)

Third Quarter Financial Update

	October Actual	October Budget	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Full Year Budget
Income	\$77,224	\$86,270	\$855,060	\$868,975	\$1,094,775
Expenses	\$77,223	\$86,415	\$756,439	\$875,616	\$1,094,775
Difference	\$1	\$145	\$98,621	\$6,641	\$0







On the same day as the Christmas Concerts, leave yourself time to experience this NEW event being held at First Presbyterian. Local vendors will be set up for the Shopping Extravaganza between the Sunday worship services and the concert.

Any questions please contact Kara Baxter at karabaxtercoachi

ENJOY THE FOLLOWING:

the Chancel Choir, Miner Street Brass, Children's Choir, and the Brandywine String Quartet

will perform traditional Christmas music including beloved Christmas carols.

A freewill offering will be collected. Reserve seats on the church website.

Sunday, December 4, at 4:00 and 6:00 p.m.

christmas Concert

Column Classics Presents