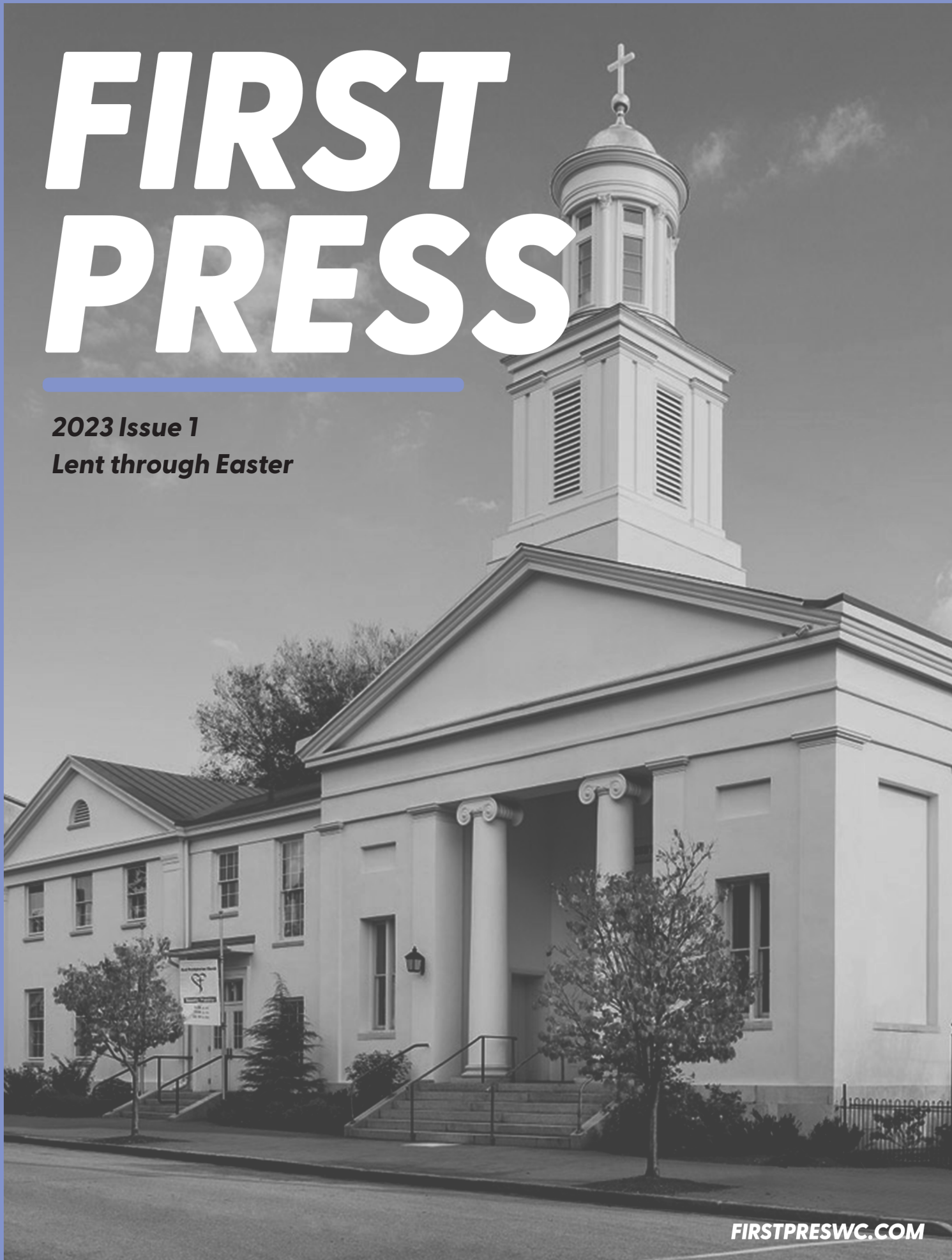


FIRST PRESS

2023 Issue 1

Lent through Easter



A Note from Pastor Caroline

Dear First Pres family,

I was a late convert to Lent; growing up I always felt a bit envious of my friends' pious ashes, their breathless comparisons of what they planned to give up in the weeks ahead (it was the 80's, so sacrificial options were mostly limited to Clear Pepsi or MTV). In those days Presbyterians hadn't totally dropped our guard when it came to traditions that had a Catholic bent to them, so I my forehead was sadly bare, my potential sacrifices unrequired. Even then, there was something in me that hungered for ritual and rootedness, longed for a God that demanded something concrete. A deity that made me step back and take notice. And so I've delighted as our Reformed tradition has softened on ritual, and embraced the ancient invitation to tomb and shadow. While our holy seasons of Easter and Christmas have settled into an uneasy armistice with the wider culture, the world is more than willing to let us keep Lent to ourselves. No one is knocking on our door for a dose of repentance.

There are those wiser than me who argue that a world which turns its back on Lent's invitation to humility and reflection is one that needs it most. And while they're technically correct, I must admit that a part of me (ok, most of me) is secretly thrilled that Lent is just for us—this peculiar family tradition that we aren't forced to explain or justify because frankly, no one but our little band of Jesus-followers notices it's even happening. From the moment that smudge of ash is placed on our foreheads, the strange and terrible blessing laid upon our heads—ashes to ashes, dust to dust—our world begins to pivot toward Resurrection. Outwardly not much has changed, but the engine of the church is revving, dusty gears cranking to life, as our songs are tuned to lament.

We embrace this invitation not because we seek sacrifice or eschew comfort, but because our eyes are open to the paradox of Christ: that it is through

the shadows we receive shelter, that lament paves the path for joy, and, in an echo of Mary's pregnancy, the tomb that gives birth to resurrection. The mystery of Lent is an invitation to doubt all that we think we know, to wonder which is the real world, and which the illusion. It is an invitation that presents itself to us year after year, one to which we respond differently depending on the chapter of life we find ourselves in.

Whatever you are carrying into Lent this year, in the pages that follow you will find opportunities to connect. There are evening studies led by members of our Tuesday men's group and a weekly class facilitated by Bridge Pastor Tara Woodard-Lehman. Join us for monthly dinners throughout the season, lunch each Wednesday, or a craft beer night. The Matthew 25 Lenten campaign returns with a focus on unhoused veterans in our community, and children's activities like the Young Justice Builders and choir practice continue. Follow our e-news for prayer topics, and hold the work of the Pastoral Nominating Committee close to your heart as they continue to do the work of seeking our next head pastor. Despite the length of this search, the committee continues to have high spirits and eyes open to the wonder and mystery of the work God is doing in our midst.

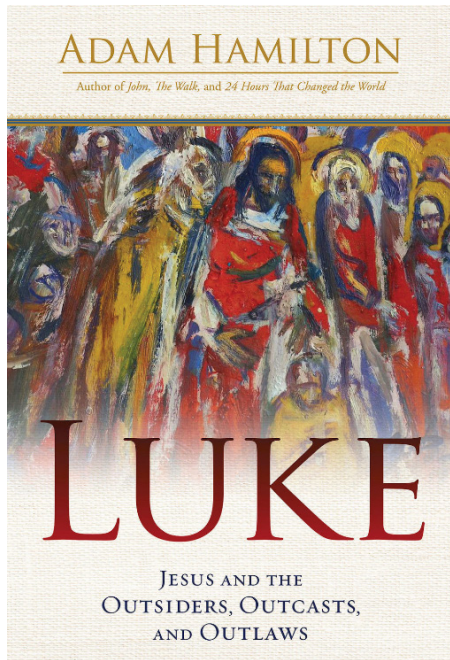
The poet Jan Richardson writes:

*Wait with your hands open to receive
what could never come
except to that which is empty and hollow...
You cannot know it now,
cannot even imagine what lies ahead,
but I tell you the day is coming...
You will see the world ablaze with blessing.
Wait for it. Still yourself. Stay.*

May you carry this blessing with you throughout this holy season.

— *Caroline Cupp*

Lent Study Programs



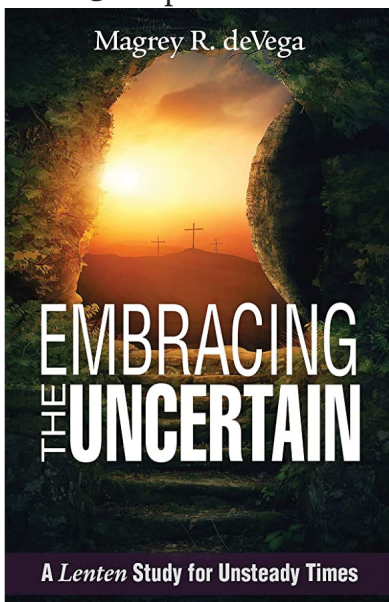
While many may view Lent as a time to give things up (and fasting is one component of spiritual practice), it can also be a time to take on something different. This year we offer a variety of spiritual practices, whether you prefer a group study or an individual devotion. Read more about these offerings below.

Tuesday evenings, 7–8 p.m. over Zoom

This study begins on February 21 and continues through the six weeks of Lent. We will follow the life of Jesus leading to the cross and the resurrection through the book *Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws* by Adam Hamilton, a noted minister. Facilitated by Glenn Burkland and members of the Tuesday Men's Bible group, but intended for men and women, young and old. Contact Glenn Burkland for more information, and/or use the sign-up tab on the website or the sheet in Fellowship Hall.

Wednesday evenings, 6:30–7:30 p.m. over Zoom

Beginning March 1, Bridge Pastor Tara Woodard-Lehman will lead a 4-week Lenten study titled *Tears for Food: A Series of the Practice of Lament*. The biblical practice of lament offers language for grief, loss, shame, and injustice. Participants will be invited to explore practices of lament that are personal and communal, ancient and modern, secular and sacred. Sessions will draw on scriptures, songs, prayers, and the arts. Participants will be invited to listen deeply, share freely, and more fully reclaim lamentation as both a spiritual and embodied practice. Sign-ups are available in Fellowship Hall or by contacting Sara Pantazes at spantazes@firstpreswc.com.



Individual Devotion Book

For those wishing to focus on a Lenten devotion book on your own, First Pres has ordered copies of *Embracing the Uncertain: A Lenten Study for Unsteady Times* by Magrey deVega, the same author as our Advent study last Christmas! The book offers six chapters (one for each week of Lent) that will help readers engage with life's uncertainties while looking toward the cross and following in Jesus' footsteps with courage, hope and obedience. Limited copies are available in Fellowship Hall for \$10 or can be ordered online.

— *Sara Pantazes*

Youth Programs

After concluding 2022 by sending Eric off with a bang and well wishes, the First Pres Youth continued on at the start of 2023 without missing a beat. Members of the extremely dedicated Youth Committee are collaborating to make sure the regular programs of Middle School Bible Study, High school Bible Study and Sunday night Youth Group continue. Students have participated in local and global based service projects and had a night out at Round1 Bowling & Amusement center. By the time this newsletter is published, a group of about 25 students and leaders will be away for the Winter Re:Fresh retreat, an annual weekend away to grow in relationship with one another and in our faith. In addition to their own age-specific programs, First Pres Youth are also regularly involved with the life of the church by attending worship, assisting with Sunday morning ushering, running the sound booth, and helping with the Young Justice Builders Club.

As winter moves into spring, the youth and Youth Committee will be busy preparing for Youth Sunday, summer trips, and digging into the work of shoring up and building out the infrastructure around our Youth program that will support a new Youth Director whenever that person is found. We appreciate your prayers (and anyone willing to occasionally help out!) during this season of transition.

Weekend with the Arts



16th Annual Weekend with the Arts

Friday, March 3
6:30-9:30 p.m.

Art Show Gala Opening
Live music by Jazz Sanctuary

Saturday, March 4
9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Gallery open

Sunday, March 5
8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
3:00 p.m.

Final day
Gallery open
Column Classics Concert (see cover)

Featured artists

Lindsay Adams
George Baldt
Linda Barr
Gregory Blue

Lee Bradley
Richard Chalfant
Kathy Deaville
Fred Jackson
Ray Jackson
Linda Killingsworth
Marty May
Dennis Minch

Al Moretti
Roe Murray
Bette Naughton
Dennis Park
Nick Santoleri
Jim Serum
Don Shoffner
Mary Lou Sicoli

Merritt Sloan
Kenny Stier
Donna Streisfeld
John Suplee
Nancy Thompson
Barbara Tlush
Katy Winters
Jean Roney Yoder

Children's Choir: Embodied Prayer

This winter, in addition to preparing their spring musical, the kids choir will be participating in an Embodied Prayer project through the *Real Kids, Real Faith* hub at Union Presbyterian Seminary.

This project provides an opportunity for children to practice praying with their bodies and explore how the practice helps them draw close to God. For six weeks, the children will be led through movements that align with the words of that week's prayer. Prayer topics will include connection, wonder, empathy and justice. I'll be leading this practice each week and reporting back to the project's leaders at Union, staying in conversation with them and other project participants at other churches to assess how kids react to this practice and how it might contribute to their faith lives.

Our children's choir is a strong, energetic community of 4-11-year-olds who are eager each week to make music and be in community with one another. We are looking forward to this project as new way to invite the Holy Spirit into our midst!

— *Sara Pantazes*



real kids
real faith



Congregational Life

Bridge Dinner Schedule

First Pres has a Wednesday evening program called The Bridge (“bridging” the week from Sunday to Sunday). We’ll meet for dinner one Wednesday a month this winter, and each evening will include a worship service or a project or activity. Dinner begins in Fellowship Hall at 5:45 p.m. All are welcome to join in.

- February 22: A simple Lenten supper of soup and salad, and then an Ash Wednesday worship service in the sanctuary at 6:30pm.
- March 15: Pizza dinner and a service project assembling Easter baskets for area organizations.
- April 19: Meal and activity to be announced!

Please sign up by using the Sign-Up tab at firstpreswc.com, or on the paper form in Fellowship Hall.

New Members for 2023

We are pleased to welcome the newest members of First Presbyterian Church: Drew and Mary Cramer (Nathan and Gwen) and Paul and Lauren Richards (William, Annabel, Madelyn).

— *Elizabeth Hess*

Why Should We Talk to Kids...

This article by Sara Pantazes articulates much of the theology that underlies the Young Justice Builder's Club, in which First Pres families have been participating for the last three years. For those church members who do not fit the demographic to participate in this program but would like to know more about it, please reach out to Sara and she will be happy to share more.

Following the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in the winter of 2018, my husband and I took our four- and seven-year-old children to our community's anti-gun violence march. I wondered if they were too young but also felt confident in their ability to handle it. Intruder drills at school were already part of their lives. I wanted them to know that there are people in this world who hate that they have to live with that threat and are working for change.

Kids are neither immune from nor unaware of injustices. Their lives have been shaped by the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the renewed

national conversation about race, continued mass shootings, increasingly intense climate events, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, in my experience, we don't seem to talk about these things with kids at church very often. I believe there are several compelling reasons for that to change.

1. Kids are already aware of injustice — most of them have experienced it, in some shape or form, first-hand. Talking about justice in church is an opportunity for us to connect their growing understanding of the divine to their growing understanding of what is going on in the world. These conversations lay a foundation of

—continued next page

Bucket School Update

The Bucket School is 40 years old this year!

The Bucket School ended its 2021–2022 school year saying goodbye to director Dr. Marissa Troung. The 2022–2023 school year opened with a new director, Jen Rosenberg, and 53 students and 9 teachers. By January, there were 62 students and 11 teachers.

The Bucket School offers morning classes for children 2 ½ - 5 years old. The children receive hands-on experiences to facilitate a greater understanding of topics being presented to them as well as monthly music classes and mini worship classes, weekly physical education classes, bi-weekly library lessons. Opportunities for an extended day are available on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.



Registration for the 2023–2024 school year is now open at <https://tinyurl.com/1stPres-Preschool>. Tours are available by contacting Jen Rosenberg (jrosenberg@firstpreswc.com).

— Jen Rosenberg

...about Justice Issues?

understanding that the God of the universe cares intimately for every single person, especially those who are suffering, that God hurts when we hurt, that God's power is within all who are suffering and empowering all who seek to help them, and that God's love will ultimately win in the end.

2. It is part of the biblical story. We witness God's concern for justice at the moment Adam and Eve leave Eden, in the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, in the Deuteronomic law, in Jesus' ministry, and in the early church. There is a common theme that runs throughout these narratives: God lovingly created – and is continually concerned with – the well-being of all creation, and God wants each of us to contribute to that well-being. If we aren't talking about justice as we teach Bible stories to children, we are not giving kids a full picture of God and what God is up to within each of us and creation. We need to show how each of story in the Bible is a part of the redemption of all creation.
3. Justice is an important, arguably underexplored, component of faith. Many church leaders spend a lot of time thinking about how their congregation helps people live faithful lives. Common components of a church's life include worship, music, learning and service. These are all good and fruitful things to focus on, and many churches find ways to invite children into each of those pieces of ministry. We do so hoping that their participation in the life of the church will help develop a faith that will stay with them into adulthood. If a church cares about God's justice, shouldn't we invite children into that care? Learning about justice has implications for all ages.

Congregations that want to talk to children about justice issues could start by digging into the difference between justice and service/mission. The latter looks at meeting people's immediate needs while justice looks at why those needs exist in the first place. They are not mutually exclusive. It is critical to have people paying attention to both, but many churches

have been missing that opportunity. If churches began to frame their engagement with the world in this way and taught that framework to kids, whole generations might grow up with a broader understanding of how to bring about meaningful change in the world.

Justice is about what is fair, what is right and wrong. When I talk about justice with the kids at my church, we start with the story of creation and remember how God made everything good. We talk about shalom, which is the biblical idea of wholeness and peace and well-being that God wants for all people and every part of creation. Whenever something is broken or hurting or not right, it is not in a state of shalom. God cares about everything and everyone in the world, and God wants us to care too. That's what justice is about.

Pairing experiences and knowledge of injustices with faith in the creator and sustainer of the world may sound like a pretty hefty building block of a child's faith. But maybe that's what we all need to keep chipping away at the mountains of injustices in our world. I'm pretty sure our kids are ready for it. Are you? †

— *Sara Pantazes*

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Read more at pres-outlook.org.



Learning to Wait in Lent

by Diane Rosier Miles

Diane Rosier Miles joined First Pres in 2020. She is the author of two full-length works of fiction, including her new thriller *Blood for Sail*, as well as *Gabriel, The Training of an Angel*. Diane has also published numerous short stories in literary journals and her devotionals have been featured nationally in *A Cup of Comfort Devotional for Women* and in *The Secret Place*.

I am a person who hates to wait.

For me, it's hard to wait for the light to change from red to green, which is a part of the law that keeps us safe; my impatience has often yielded results that run from fingerprints in the wet paint, to steaks that are frosty in the middle, to jagged bangs that take two weeks to grow out to cover the crease on my forehead. If only all of the consequences for a failure to wait were so minor.

Anything that requires slowing down, for me, exacts nearly enough effort to make the Earth cease turning or the moonbeams halt shining. Waiting can seem difficult because I'm always hurtling toward something, a goal, a deadline, perhaps, as if on a trajectory like one of the celestial bodies. Also, the act of waiting often comes as a response to authority, like that inherent in the stoplight, or the rule in physics that makes the planets stay on their path and nowhere else. Authority typically presents itself with an air of insistence, and I'm rather independent in my compliance, so to speak.

Hence, I grapple with waiting, generally find it inconvenient and frequently exhausting, and resist it. In my flawed estimation, "results" in all their varieties are what matters, and waiting is usually just a waste of time, a delay, a detour. Whenever I can, I outright avoid waiting and probably miss the wisdom and positive outcomes that might accompany it. In almost every situation, I wish that waiting did not apply to me, but, of course, it does.

And so, during the season of Lent, God once again works on my character. He teaches me to abide, to

wait, during a time that can seem full of spiritual shadows. Contemplating the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus intently for 40 days is begun with a sobering mood of ashes on a Wednesday, and the solemn chill does not lift until the glory of Easter. I find that the sustained awareness of mortality sharpens my ability to hear the voice of the one who is going to guide me away from the grave. I listen for God's voice like my life depends upon it, and I'm still learning to do it.

For me, then, Lent is a time of God's tutorship, so that I might be instructed in how to wait productively in a broken world. My confidence in the Lord's presence in my life increases during Lent. My ability to endure uncertainty deepens, which produces greater trust in God. I feel more acutely the intensity of the cosmic spectacle of the Passion. My yearning for the New Heaven and the New Earth is comforted with the knowledge that the Kingdom is already present, already in place, and revealing itself in ways that I occasionally get a fulfilling glimpse of.

During Lent, I am trained in the discipline of waiting because such a focus brings spiritual understanding, and the solace that is granted to me to allay any deprivation of the season is the anticipation of an absolutely sparkling, dazzling resurrection. In Lent, I remember that the dusty hole in the ground that is intended to trap me forever will be mercifully and



completely refilled with God's grace. Thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, my grave will become a welcoming, cozy home for Easter bunnies, not a sorrowful container for my bones. Let the rabbits rest, let the blue jays nest, in my grave, because I don't have much use for it, otherwise.

I'm busy waiting. God works with me during every Lenten season to remind me that Jesus is still his provision for me, still the one who took the Law and went into the dank earth with it and emerged to transform mankind's future. Jesus did not live and die and resurrect to make things just a little bit

better for everybody by being a good example and leaving a fine code of ethics. Jesus, as God, unceremoniously kicked human death to the curb, and put it out like garbage that was never intended to be in our relationship with him.

For the time being, God has not removed the darkness of this life, but he has come and stood in the very center of it, radiantly, energetically, as its master. The Lord has promised that the darkness is not our boss. In the season of Lent, I think about these things. ✠

Recent Life Events

In Memoriam

- Michael Siegfried, member of First Presbyterian Church from September 28, 1986 to January 3, 2023.
- Ella Kester, member of First Presbyterian Church from September 28, 1955 to January 20, 2023
- Sylvia McKee, member of First Presbyterian Church from October 25, 1993 to January 29, 2023

The sympathy and prayers of the congregation are extended to

- Jackie Siegfried and family in the death of her husband, Michael
- Frank and Kathleen Skoromucha and family in the death of Frank's godfather
- The family of Ella Kester
- The family of Sylvia McKee

Baptisms

- Simon William Ohms, born May 16, 2022, son of Stephen and Elyse Ohms, grandson of Dan and Nancy Ohms

Lent and Holy Week Services

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 passion and resurrection of the Lord.

Ash Wednesday, February 22 at 7 p.m. *Following the monthly Bridge Dinner.*

Palm Sunday, April 2. *Worship at 9 and 10:45 a.m.*

Maundy Thursday, April 6 at 7 p.m. *A simple dinner honoring the last supper, followed by a service with communion.*

Good Friday, April 7 at noon. *Description?*

Easter Sunday, April 13

Traditional sunrise service at 6:30 a.m. at the Abbott family's barn.

Morning worship in traditional style at 9:00 a.m. with musical guests.

Contemporary worship at 10:45 p.m. with special guests.

Matthew 25: For Those Who Served

Ash Wednesday marks one year since our Wednesday Lunches began. What was intended to be a five-week program over Lent has become a cornerstone of our congregation's connection to our neighbors, as each Wednesday dozens of people come through our doors for a warm meal and fellowship. Almost imperceptibly our lives became intertwined: a need in the congregation filled by a lunch guest, hospital visits made, Christmas cards exchanged. The opportunity for close connection has also opened our eyes to the grinding challenges faced by our community: a dire lack of affordable housing, limited public transportation, and a healthcare system ill-equipped to support those with chronic illness.

Each week we also see far too many veterans who are struggling with housing and financial issues. While no one should wonder where their next meal is coming from, there is a particular ache when someone who served in the military is unhoused. It is estimated that across the country, 11% of homeless individuals served in our armed forces, and our community partners have told us that there are fewer and fewer local housing units designated for

former service members. For this reason, our 2023 Matthew 25 Lenten campaign is going to focus on the housing needs of veterans. As in past years, our goal will be to raise \$25,000 between Ash Wednesday and Easter. This year, the proceeds will be divided between a general assistance fund helping people with emergency housing-related needs and programs supporting former service members. One such organization is the Veterans Multi-Service Center, which provides housing support, employment guidance, and benefits guidance to vets. We will share more about the organizations we are working with over the course of Lent, so please stay tuned. Gifts to the campaign are tax-deductible and can be made over the website (designate Matthew 25 Lenten Campaign) or by check.

Thank you for your continued support of Matthew 25.



Music Ministry Trip 2023

This June First Presbyterian's Music Ministry heads to Europe. Why, might you ask? For two reasons: first, the choir has a beloved history of travelling together, though we have not had the opportunity to do so for many years. Secondly, the younger members of the choir (scholars and section leaders) expressed interest in an international choir tour. In response, we put together an intergenerational 11-day trip though Germany, Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary, open to all members of the Music Ministry. Before long we had 45 participants signed up, including 30 choir members, 5 brass players, their spouses/partners, a travel chaplain (Caroline) and conductor (Sándor). While in Europe the choir, soloists and the brass quintet will present two concerts at historic churches, one in Vienna and the other in Budapest.

While there are no shortage of places to explore, we chose five historic cities for some very specific reasons. Dresden is one of the most visited cities in Germany and has a long history as the capital and royal residence for the Electors and Kings of Saxony. Leipzig is a city well-known to those who have studied music history: Johann Sebastian Bach and Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy are two well-known composers who lived and worked in the ancient city; and the famous Thomaskirche is home of the Thomanerchor (St. Thomas Choir of Leipzig), founded in 1212 and thus the oldest choir in the world. The Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, established in 1743, is one of the oldest symphony orchestras in the world. Prague is has been a political and cultural center of central Europe since the 13th century and is packed with medieval architecture including stunning monasteries, cathedrals, and synagogues.



It will be the first trip to Vienna for the West Chester University students, a stunning city with a long history of music, gardens, art, and (most importantly?) pastries. In fact, most of the students on this trip have never traveled outside of the United States; we anticipate that this will be a magical experience for all.

We look forward to sharing more details of our trip in the months ahead!

— *Caroline and Sándor*

Fourth Quarter Financial Update

	December Actual	December Budget	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance Year to Date
Income	\$109,981	\$140,525	\$1,063,787	\$1,094,775	(\$30,988)
Expenses	\$183,441	\$138,004	\$1,014,067	\$1,094,775	(\$80,708)
Difference	(\$73,460)	\$2,521	\$49,720	\$0	\$49,720

Financial details will be provided in the Annual Report, and discussed at the annual meeting of the congregation on February 26, 2023.

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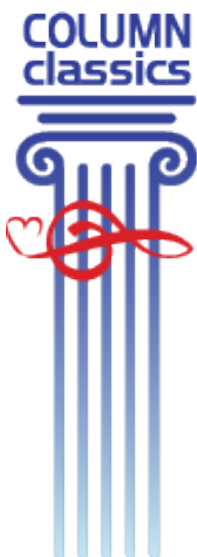
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Custodian:
Willy Oliveras (contact church office for requests)

The church building is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,
Monday-Friday. Phone: 610-696-0554.

Contact David Teager if you are interested in serving as
a receptionist.



Column Classics, a music ministry of First Presbyterian Church, is proud to sponsor the 16th annual **Weekend with the Arts**. All events are free and open to the public. See the list of artists inside on page 4.

On Sunday, March 5, Hungarian organ virtuoso **Ádám Tabajdi** and the Choral Scholars of First Pres present a Column Classics Concert. A free-will offering will be collected. A reception in Fellowship Hall concludes the weekend's events.



Ádám Tabajdi, organist

For artists' information, contact Dennis Park: dpark1730@aol.com.
For other information, contact the church: office@firstpreswc.com or 610-696-0554.