

# FIRST NEWS

Revs. Josh and Lara Musser Gritter, Co-Senior Pastors

July-August 2024



## Deeply Rooted

# Reflecting Back On God's Living Presence

If you'd driven by the First Pres Courtyard one Wednesday in late May, you would have seen it filled with the joy of playing children. Five kids crowded around plates with big bubble wands making huge bubbles. Six-year-olds painting the faces of toddlers in a design that I can only describe as beautifully abstract. Kids are learning to jump rope and pretend to hula-hoop. Hula-hooping is hard! All around were parents laughing with their kids, chatting with one another, and thanking the teachers of the First Pres Day School for another year of incredible loving education where their bitties transformed into toddies and toddies into kiddies. As a parent and as pastor, I can confidently say that the First Pres Day School is an incredible blessing to our church and community.

We've made it through another school year. Thank God. When we reach any end, we ought to stop and take a little time to reflect on what it all has meant. Reflection enables us to learn from the past, grow from mistakes, celebrate successes, and give thanks to God for all of it. Take a few minutes to consider these questions. Bonus points if you write down your answers.

*In the last year, what was your best season? Why?*

*In the last year, what was your greatest struggle? Why?*

*What did God do in your life this year?*

*For what are you most grateful?*

This May, our church staff went on an overnight retreat to the mountains, where we took time to reflect on our year. We did some of this individually, but we also asked some reflection questions on First Pres's ministries in the last year. Questions like: What events or ministries best created deep belonging? What events or ministries had the most impact? What events/ministries best pointed to God's real, living presence? I wonder how you might answer those questions. Send me your answers!

As we reflected, we had to ask ourselves, what kinds of things point to God's real living presence? We ended up making the following short list, "Suffering, death, birth, guilt, transition, deep belonging, children, music, silence, prayer, and creation point to God's intimate transcendence." As Pastor Josh said in a recent sermon, "You're here because you've either seen something or you want to see something." We want to see the living God make a difference in our lives and in each other's lives. Let's point to God's living

presence the more we deepen our faith as Christians. So that's our plan.

Right now, we're finishing a sermon series called *40 Days with the Holy Spirit*, which will guide us in silence, prayer, and reflection of the Spirit in scripture. If you haven't bought your devotional of the same name by Jack Levison, it's not too late. Start now and let this devotional guide you through summer.

In late August, we will go on a retreat to Camp Carraway. Our retreat speakers will be Jack Levinson and his wife, Priscilla Pope-Levison, experts on the Holy Spirit and Mainline Evangelism, respectively. This retreat will connect us to God's intimate transcendence through music, play in creation, and the creation of deeper belonging. Registration is open, so reserve your spot today.

Starting with kick-off on September 15, we'll begin a sermon series on the *Lord's Prayer*. Prayer recognizes a simple but essential truth: God is God, we are not. In prayer, we reach out to the living presence of God, who is beyond us yet intimately close. In the midst of what will be a wild fall for our country, let's center ourselves in prayer.

I'm excited to reflect back on this season with you in another year and to hear about how God has deepened us all.

--Rev. Lara Musser Gritter

## Is It Really Christmas In July?

You bet it is! This year, we will formally kick off Operation Christmas Child on Sunday, July 14. During the Sunday service, a signup sheet will be circulated so you can let us know how you would like to help with this wonderful program for kids.

Then, on Monday, July 22, there will be a brief overview meeting (because I know how everyone just loves church meetings!) to discuss the numerous ways for you and your family to volunteer your time and assistance and define the timeline for the various initiatives.

Last year, thanks to your assistance and generosity, we had a "fantastic response" in completing 275 Operation Christmas Child boxes for kids. And we wrapped the program up with a fun and exciting "Packing Party" enjoyed by all ages along with pizza and sodas afterward - a great time for all to enjoy the benefits of your success! Those boxes were shipped to Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, and Honduras, as well as other hard-to-reach countries - "thank you" for making this program a huge success!

Please mark your calendar to attend a brief overview meeting on July 22 at 6:30 pm to learn more about the program. However, if you would like more information before then, please contact Del Denny, Program Leader. Let's make this year another wonderful *Christmas Season* for less fortunate kids throughout the world by your generosity and gracious assistance with this rewarding program. *Thank you in advance!*

Del Denny, del@deldenny.com, 770-841-9386

## Disciple 365 Award Winners Announced

Discipleship is our call 365 days a year. Each year, an anonymous church disciple provides funds to remind high school seniors that discipleship is a daily lifestyle.

All high school seniors received a letter with an application for the "Disciple 365 Award," a gift of \$365. In addition, seniors were asked to give the names of two people who inspired them and encouraged them to be disciples of Christ.

This year, four seniors applied for this award. Here are the seniors and the disciples they chose who have encouraged them on their faith journey:

- Luke Bryan - Josh Musser Gritter & Troy Creamer
- Nick Loeblein - Stewart Adams & Troy Creamer
- Andrew Mead - Luke Bryan & Margaret Harris
- Faye Shellhorn - Susan Watkins & Dallas Godbold

Thank you to the anonymous benefactor for providing these funds and reminding us that

discipleship is a daily call within our faith journeys.

And a very special thank you to each person chosen for supporting, teaching, inspiring, and encouraging a high school senior in their daily walk of faith!

## Give Blood In July

The Red Cross will visit our Fellowship Hall for a Blood Drive again on Tuesday, July 30, from 2:00 - 6:30 pm. We had great support from the congregation last time, so great that the Red Cross increased our goal to 30 successful units of life-saving blood. Please consider signing up on the Red Cross website for a time-saving appointment.

Your body will restock the donated blood with fresh new cells within just eight weeks. Make your appointment now!

[WWW.REDCROSSBLOOD.ORG](http://WWW.REDCROSSBLOOD.ORG)

## Almost Time For Overton Backpacks

The summer will be over before you know it, so do be thinking of purchasing a backpack or two for the Overton students this fall.

We will dedicate the backpacks on August 4 during worship. Bring in your donated backpacks, and your kids bring in their personal backpacks to have them all blessed for the coming school year. Remember to enclose \$10 in the front pocket of the donated backpacks for school supplies. The students appreciate it so much!

Also, please consider becoming an Overton tutor for the fall. It only involves an hour a week. You will read to a student and have them read to you as well. You can select a day of the week that suits your schedule. Text Lynn Hales at 704-640-7156 or Mike Drinkard for details. It is a very rewarding commitment!



## Media & Communications

### Upcoming Newsletter Deadlines:

<u>Edition</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
July & August	June 19
September	August 21
October	September 18
November	October 16
December	November 18 (Monday)
January 2025	December 16 (Monday)

### Upcoming Meetings:

- Gather Team: August 12, at 6:00 pm on Zoom
- Grow in Friendship Team: August 5, at 3:00 pm in the Mary & Martha Sunday School Room



From Pastor Randy...

## Sabbatical as Pilgrimage

“Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God.” | Peter 1:18

A pilgrimage is a journey taken to a place of significance—a search for the meaning of something. In religious tradition, a pilgrimage takes us to a place where we believe we can deepen our connection to God, or it is at least a search to discover something of God’s will for our lives.

Pilgrimage had been a part of the Jewish faith from the time that Abram and Sarah set out from Ur not knowing where they were going but trusting God to go with them and guide them on the way. The pilgrimage of Abram and Sarah was both a physical journey and a search for the deep meaning of God’s will in their lives. Moses journeyed with the children of Israel in the wilderness, wandering pilgrims waiting for God to guide them to a homeland. Since the time of David, the children of Israel had observed the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and other holy days of Israel. Jesus was born into a pilgrim faith.

All of that may seem rather obvious. But it may not be so obvious that every religious holiday trip to visit family is a pilgrimage. Every time we



attend a candle-lighting service, we are on a religious journey. Every time we put on music or light a candle, longing to renew the spirit within, we are pilgrims seeking a deeper understanding of God’s will for our lives.

At the heart of faith, there is something fundamental about being on a pilgrimage. Whether we are traveling to a place in order to draw closer to God or seeking to discover God’s will in our lives while staying in place, our faith is a “pilgrimage faith.” We are always on the pilgrim’s way.

I embrace that understanding of the journey of faith as I set out on my three-month sabbatical in August. At its heart, it is about deepening my connection to God. While the itinerary is designed to explore topics around retirement, the goal is to discover something of God’s will for my life as I make the transition in the next couple of years from full-time ministry to being a retired minister. You can follow my posts at my Facebook page: Randy on Sabbatical. I hope you will hold my pilgrim’s journey in your prayers. I will be praying for you.

## The Timothy H. Waugh Children’s Music Fund Created

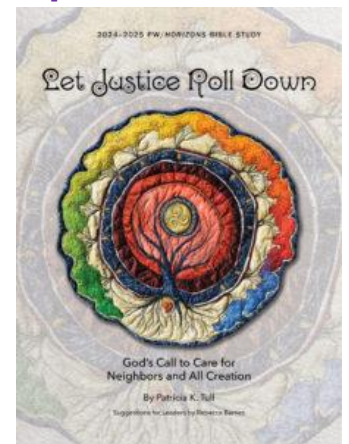
The Bell Tower Ringers have established a fund in memory of Tim Waugh that is restricted to advancing the children’s music program at First Presbyterian. The Timothy H. Waugh Children’s Music Fund will be used at the discretion of the Music Director to purchase music and instruments or provide support for special music opportunities for our children and youth.

Tim devoted 40 years of his life to music education for children and planned to grow the program here at First Presbyterian before his death. This fund honors that intention and takes a positive step toward supporting music participation by our children and youth.

Anyone wishing to contribute to this fund can do so through the church business office.

## Next PW Bible Study Upcoming In September

It’s not too late to order Patricia K. Tull’s lesson book *Let Justice Roll Down: God’s Call to Care for Neighbors and All Creation* for our next season, beginning Monday, September 9. It promises to be an exciting study of Bible history up until our present times. Any women in First Pres and Trinity Church are invited to attend. Contact Joyce Durkee at 704-647-0754 or let the church office know you want a book. Cost: \$14. Best wishes for a wonderful summer. Hope to see you in September.



## Embrace your Elephant Spiritually (EYES) Table

The Race and Justice Ministry Team is recruiting First Presbyterian Church disciples on a community journey in one evening a week during October 2024. Participants will select the day of the week they are available.

Men and Women of different races and denominations will meet at an EYES (Embrace Your Elephant Spiritually) table to journey and focus on educating, sharing, and addressing the elephant in the room for many Christians ... Racism. The friendships and conversations will lead to an honest dialog. The Word of God will open and seal each session as these men and women journey into The Truth, The Emotions, The Walk, and The Healing. Men and Women interested in participating in the



## Vacation Bible School 2024



### Jesus said “I am the light of the world. Follow me.” – John 8:12

As 90 children and 60 volunteers gathered nightly to seek Jesus, the verse above guided our time together at First Presbyterian’s summer Vacation Bible School. This year’s VBS was a curriculum from Shine, *Seekers in Sneakers*, and focused on finding Jesus through five stories about Jesus’ life. We focused on Jesus the learner (Luke 2:41-52), Jesus our companion (Matthew 4:17-22), Jesus our teacher (Matthew 5:14-16, John 8:12), Jesus our example (John 13:1-17), and Jesus our helper (John 21:1-14). Children from preschool to fifth grade heard stories of Jesus’ humanity and his divine example that we still seek to follow today.

The Grow in Faith team used the curriculum to create a VBS that nourished the whole child. We encouraged wonder and seeking Jesus through our high-energy opening led by Robin Fisher. She even had special guests, Shaggy (Pastor Josh) and Scooby-Doo (Steve Fisher), to help solve our clue words each evening. Robin’s amazing energy and joy in leading our music set the tone for an evening of learning that would be anything but boring. Cathy Adams created an art program that encouraged creativity and happiness. The children created tie-die handkerchiefs. In the evening, we learned about servant hearts and washing feet. I like to think that Jesus would have used a colorful cloth to wash his feet had it been available. Noel Adams had delicious dinners each evening that filled our children’s tummies and allowed them to spend time in fellowship with adults from our congregation who helped to serve each meal. Allison Adams kept the wiggles at bay by providing great games that encouraged teamwork and companionship. Beach ball sillies, pizza box relays, and water games are just a few of the activities our children engage in during recreation. Maggie Behrooz shared the word of God each night through storytelling with the help of some of our favorite characters and stuffed animals. Buzz Lightyear makes a wonderful stand-in for characters in the Bible! Gwynne





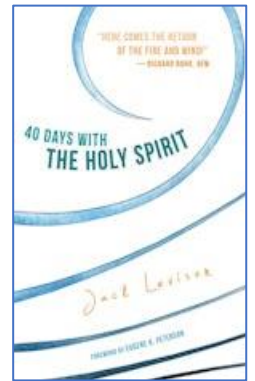
Shoaf kept our registration running smoothly and helped to comfort those children who needed a little more encouragement in a new situation. These women are just some of the many amazing volunteers who allowed our Vacation Bible School to share the Light of Christ with the children in our community. With over one hundred children registered and averaging ninety children in attendance each night, we sought Jesus, his love, and his example within the campus of First Presbyterian. We started summer with a reminder that Jesus loves us and seeks us, and we are to follow his example. I think some Jesus, lively games, creative crafts, and the occasional popsicle are all terrific ways to remind our community that church is a place of Christ's love, God's light, and the Holy Spirit's unconventional stirrings. Thanks to *all* the volunteers who created this week of Christian education for our children & community.

Still Following the Light, Amanda Hathcock

---

## 40 Days with the Holy Spirit

*"40 Days with the Holy Spirit* will inspire you to encounter God in fresh and surprising ways. You'll develop stronger spiritual muscles as you breathe, read, reflect, and pray—all with an eye to cultivating a relationship with the least familiar member of the Trinity. The book is **interactive**, offering the opportunity to write and pray each day; **intelligent**, rooted in a rigorous study of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation; and **inviting**, with 40 insightful, well-planned 20-30-minute daily exercises; and **prayerful**, with 40 original prayers that capture each day's insight into the deep, spiritual work of the Holy Spirit."



Dr. Jack Levison's devotional is available through the church office; copies are \$10 each. Use this resource to learn more about the Holy Spirit and our speakers for the 2024 congregational retreat. Pick up your copy today!

---

## First Kids Save the Date

# First Kids at First Pres

**SAVE THE DATE**

**Wednesday, September 18**

**Join us on Wednesday evenings from 5:30-7pm for our First Kids Club. It is the same fun as VBS with lots of learning, singing, playing, & loving with children ages 3 - 5th grades.**



Contact Amanda Hathcock for  
more information  
[ahathcock@firstpressalisbury.org](mailto:ahathcock@firstpressalisbury.org)  
(704) 636-1321



Join us for our summer unified Sunday School series, Revolving Reverends!



*-Summer Unified Sunday School-*  
**REVOLVING REVERENDS**

**Sunday Mornings 9:45 - Fellowship Hall**

June 23- Rev. Alicia Wilson

June 30- Rev. Felicia Hoyle

July 7-Rev. Barrie Kirby

July 14- Dr. Barry Sang

July 21- Dr. Randy Kirby

July 28- Rev. Josh Musser Gritter

August 4-Rev. Lara Musser Gritter

*Coffee will be provided. A unified children's sunday school will be provided as needed and will meet in room 206.*







## Volunteer Opportunities

As we begin planning for our fall season, we are always in need of a few good folks to share in this church's ministry. Whether you are looking for a season-long commitment, a new team to join, or just a moment in time to volunteer, we have a place for you! Our Elementary & Preteen classes need volunteers to lead and shepherd their Sunday morning classes from 9:45 to 10:45. Our nursery could use volunteers to shepherd every few weeks along with our paid attendant.

First Kids is beginning again in September and welcomes individuals or groups to volunteer to make the meals for our attendees or to shepherd our children each Wednesday evening. If you are called to support any of these ministries, please share your interest with Amanda Hathcock (ahathcock@firstpressalisbury.org).

---

## Exciting Music Ventures Await at First Pres!

Greetings, First Pres family!

We are thrilled to share the latest updates from our music ministry as we embark on an exciting journey filled with melodic delights and harmonious experiences. Get ready to tap your feet, hum along, and be mesmerized by the incredible talent that will grace our church.

### 1. 3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays at First Pres Concert Series:

Mark your calendars for the inaugural event of our "3<sup>rd</sup> Fridays at First Pres Concert Series" on July 19 at 7:00 PM. We are honored to present a captivating piano solo recital by Russian pianist Elena Lyalina. Prepare to be captivated by her extraordinary skills as she transports us to a world of musical enchantment. Best of all, the concert is free for all to attend! We guarantee that this evening will leave you absolutely delighted. Stay tuned for more information, as we will be sharing further details soon.

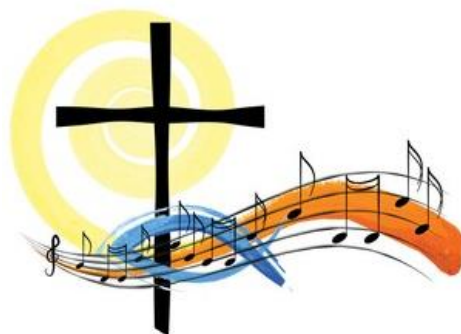
### 2. Introducing the Choral Scholars Program:

We are thrilled to announce the launch of our brand-new Choral Scholars Program, set to begin this August. This initiative aims to foster and nurture the musical talents within our community, creating a space for aspiring vocalists to flourish and grow. Through this program, we will provide training, mentorship, and performance opportunities for high school and college students, passionate about choral singing. Stay tuned for more updates as we unveil further details about this exciting endeavor.

As always, we are committed to fostering a vibrant music ministry that connects us all through the power of music. We are grateful for the continued support and enthusiasm from our First Pres community as we embark on these musical adventures together.

Keep an eye on your inbox and our church bulletin for more updates on these projects and other upcoming events. Let the melody of anticipation fill your hearts, for there is much to look forward to!

Faithfully, Teresa



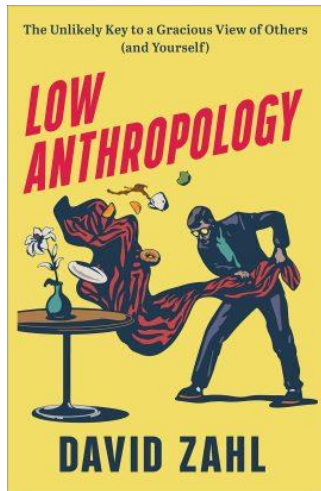
## Summer Reads from Mockingbird Ministries

Check out these titles from our Lewis Preaching Series presenter, David Zahl, and other contributors to Mockingbird ministries.



### **Life is Impossible and that's Good News** By Nick Lannon

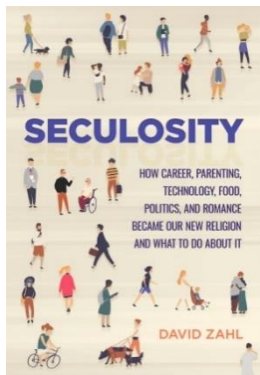
“No one ever said life would be easy...”  
Many of us will admit that, at times, life is hard. We buckle down, put our noses to the grindstone...and all too often wind up exhausted or burned out. But the problem isn't that life is difficult. The problem is that life is impossible! Fortunately, what sounds like bad news is merely the beginning of the Good News in this concise, gospel-centered book about God's abundant mercy and love. With wisdom, humor, and compassion, Nick Lannon casts life's painful realities in the light of Jesus, the One who achieves the unachievable.



### **Low Anthropology** By David Zahl

Many of us spend our days feeling like we're the only ones with problems while everyone else has their act together. But the sooner we realize that everyone struggles like we do, the sooner we can show grace to ourselves and others.

In *Low Anthropology*, popular author and theologian David Zahl explores how our ideas about human nature influence our expectations in friendship, work, marriage, and politics. We all go through life with an “anthropology”—an idea about what humans are like, our potential, and our limitations. A high anthropology-thinking optimistically about human nature—can breed perfectionism, anxiety, burnout, loneliness, and resentment. Meanwhile, Zahl invites readers into a biblically rooted and surprisingly life-giving low anthropology, which fosters hope, deep connection with others, lasting love, vulnerability, compassion, and happiness.



### **Seculosity** By David Zahl

At the heart of our current moment lies a universal yearning, writes David Zahl, not to be happy or respected so much as *enough* — what religions call “righteous.” To fill the void left by religion, we look to all sorts of everyday activities — from eating and parenting to dating and voting — for the identity, purpose, and meaning once provided on Sunday morning.





THANK YOU  
SO MUCH

Dear First Pres Church Family,

Thank you so much for the beautiful cross necklace and kind recognition in worship. I feel very blessed to have been welcomed in and to work with your amazing Grow in Faith team. I am excited about the ways we can grow together in discipleship and share the love of God with our community.

In Christ's Love,  
Amanda Hathcock

## JOY (Just Older Youth 50+) 2024-2025 Calendar 2024

Friday, August 9, 6:00 pm: JOY's Annual Pizza Party hosted by Acey and Carol Worthy! Pizza and drinks provided. Side dishes and desserts are requested.

Thursday, September 19, 9:00 am - 3:30 pm: Arborcrest Gardens in Boone (walk or ride through spectacular large private gardens) followed by lunch at Echota on the Ridge Condo provided by church member families: Glasgow, Hall, Lewis, and Wenker). Church van and carpooling provided.

Monday, October 21 (Tentative date), 10:30 am: High Rock Lake Cruise on Pontoon Boats provided by church families: Hays, Hudson, Kessler, and Kurey! Picnic lunch will follow at Dan Nicholas Park Shelter.

Saturday, November 9, Morgan Ridge Winery - 12:00 pm: Wine Tasting, 1:00 Lunch at the winery.

Thursday, November 21, 10:00 am: Day School Thanksgiving Tea with JOY in Lewis Hall

Sunday, December 8, 4:00 - 6:00 pm: JOY Christmas Party at the Gables Club House. Dinner is a Potluck, and drinks and entertainment are provided.

## 2025

Tuesday, January 21, 3:00 - 6:00 pm: Game Day and Dinner in Fellowship Hall. Potluck dinner and desserts.

Sunday, February 9, 2:00 - 4:00 pm: Lake Norman Orchestra performing in Lewis Hall.

Thursday, March 27, 10:00 am: Trip to Concord to see the Tulips, followed by lunch. Carpooling provided.

Tuesday, April 15, 10:00 am: Easter Celebration with the Day School in Lewis Hall

Friday, April 25, 5:30 pm: Dinner at Chef Santos, 7:30 pm. Then on to Piedmont Players performance of "Murder on the Orient Express! (Tickets not provided.)

Tuesday, May 13 (Tentative date), 10:00 am - 3:00 pm: Tour the Whitewater Rafting Center (USA Training facility for Olympics) and have a picnic lunch.

Wednesday, June 4, 9:30 am - 2:00 pm: Tour Reynolda House and gardens in Winston-Salem, followed by lunch at a restaurant in Reynolda Village. Church van and carpooling provided.

### Core - Fund Management

#### FINANCIAL SUMMARY

May 31, 2024

#### OPERATING

YTD Income	521,333.84
YTD Expenses	<u>537,591.59</u>
Cash Flow - <b>Negative</b>	<u>-16,257.75</u>

YTD <b>Actual</b> Income	521,333.84
YTD <b>Budgeted</b> Income	<u>513,845.42</u>
<b>OVER</b>	<u>7,488.42</u>

YTD <b>Budgeted</b> Expenses	557,870.00
YTD <b>Actual</b> Expenses	<u>537,591.59</u>
<b>UNDER</b>	<u>20,278.41</u>

#### DAY SCHOOL

YTD Gain	<u>-5,262.32</u>
----------	------------------

#### GIVING

YTD <b>Budgeted</b> Giving	493,637.08
YTD <b>Actual</b> Giving	<u>474,159.01</u>
<b>UNDER</b>	<u>19,478.07</u>

YTD <b>Budgeted</b> Pledges	450,512.08
YTD <b>Actual</b> Pledges	<u>439,669.01</u>
<b>UNDER</b>	<u>10,843.07</u>







# IN CELEBRATION

OF OUR BELOVED 90+ YEAR-OLD  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN MEMBERS  
THE GROW IN FRIENDSHIP TEAM  
INVITES YOU TO A RECEPTION  
CELEBRATION IN HONOR OF OUR  
NONAGENARIANS.

AUGUST 18 | 9:45-10:45 AM  
IN FELLOWSHIP HALL



SAVE THE DATE

# BACKPACK BLESSING

Students and teachers are invited to bring their school bags to be blessed during both worship services as we offer a blessing and celebrate the milestone of beginning a new school year.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024

8:30 & 11:00



[www.firstpressalisbury.org](http://www.firstpressalisbury.org)

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**308 West Fisher Street**  
**Salisbury, NC 28144**

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US Postage  
PAID  
Salisbury NC 28144  
**Permit No. 62**

Sunday Worship Schedule

- 8:30 am Contemporary Worship Lewis Hall
- 9:45 am Sunday School
- 11 am Traditional Worship – Sanctuary
- Unified Worship 11 a.m. beginning June 23 in Lewis Hall