

FIRST NEWS

Reverends Josh and Lara Musser Gritter, Co-Senior Pastors

May 2024



Deeply Rooted

The New Commandment

What does the world hear about Christians? Here are a few headlines from recent years:

- *“Hillsong, once a leader of Christian cool, Loses Footing in America”*
- *“Former Deacon Excommunicated After his Son is Sexually Abused by a Priest”*
- *“At Christianity’s Holiest Site, Rival Monks Struggle To Turn the Other Cheek”*

If you follow just the headlines, you might think Christianity is an intellectually weak front for hateful people to grasp at control while they neglect Jesus’s teaching or, worse, exploit it only for their gain. One might look at this Maundy Thursday scripture where Jesus commands his disciples to love one another and think: these Christians don’t practice what they preach.

At Jesus’s last meal with his friends and followers, he kneels down before each disciple and takes on the role not of a servant but a slave. He washes the dirty, nasty, grimy feet of his disciples. This is his last interaction with most of his disciples before he dies. They’re all soon to abandon him, and he knows it. But even still, he takes the time he’s been given to show his love for them. Notice how NOT abstract his choice is. He doesn’t stand up at the table and say to his friends, “Thank you for following me. I love you.” He surrenders his status as their leader; he divests his dignity. He physically touches them—warm hands-on cold feet drenched with cleansing water. In other words, he doesn’t just speak



of love, he lives it. His novum mandatum—his new commandment is to love as he loves.

It’s all too easy to lose the small moments that profoundly reflect God’s love. All too easy. But if you slow wayyy down, if you look and listen with a heart attentive to the Holy Spirit, you’ll catch glimpses of Jesus’s novum mandatum - new commandment to love one another. You can glimpse it in the quiet, unsung acts of love that often go unseen but reflect God’s love with a subtle shimmer. You can glimpse the novum mandatum in the man who drove 30 minutes every other week for months to visit his church friend, who was very slowly and painfully recovering from a broken pelvis.

You can see God’s love in the women of different generations who walk together regularly so that they can keep up with each other and pray for one another. You can see God’s love in
(continued next page)

The New Commandment

(Continued from front page)

the women who spend hours knitting and crocheting blankets for others going through hard times so that they can be literally covered in prayer and the warmth of God's love. And in the friendships formed over months, now years, of book discussions on hard topics. And the youth who doesn't have much of a bank account of her own but bought a special little stuffy for a little child because she wanted her to feel seen and special.

And in the old man who goes up to the woman who missed church last week, not to scold her, but to show how wanted and essential she is. You can see the shimmer of God's love reflected in the older couple who scoops up a young family and makes them their own, offering to babysit and mentor the parents. And the youth who decides to join the church all on his own because he has been loved here. And the leaders who made a hard, non-unanimous decision together but chose to walk forward with intentional unity and grace.

And the person who finally admits to their pastor about their addiction and is received with the relief of grace. And in the young widow who quietly writes bereavement cards to every widow in the church and gives them a special book to guide them through the first year of loss. And in the grandmother who drives 45 minutes to Whole Foods to buy fresh pasta so that the youth of the church can experience a very special homecooked meal on their retreat.

I could go on and on. This is just a small part of the long list of the profound acts of love I've seen here at First Presbyterian Church. Someone might say, "Well, these are just small acts of kindness. They're like cotton candy: sweet but passing." But I'd say each of these small acts of love have a profound impact. God uses them to do incredible and essential things. Through these acts of love, God knits a community and draws together people who otherwise would have no business being together. God bears witness to our world's suffering and changes the trajectory of lives and communities.

Of course, the Church - the capital C big church universal - fails and falls. Of course, we don't live up fully to the novum mandatum to love one another. No church is perfect—not even the most pious Christian community is immune from the virus of sin. All churches, even our First Pres, are infected with that very plague. But we point to the ultimate doctor who touches our sin and washes it with great love and care.

Let us love one another as Christ loved us. Friends, you know how to do this. You already do. It won't make the headlines, and it might be lost on most people, but the love of this Christian Community is so stunning that it'll take your breath

away. It does mine. ---Pastor Lara

This is a modified version of Pastor Lara's Maundy Thursday Sermon

Deeply Rooted Care

Congratulations To:

- Carol and Acey Worthy on the birth of their great-granddaughter, Ivy Jane Schwanz. Ivy's parents are Alex and Courtney Schwanz.

Our Sincere Sympathy To:

- Billie Bryant on the death of her daughter, Wendy Gow.

Letter of Appreciation

I want to express my gratitude to everyone in the FPC family for your outpouring of intercession and encouragement to us over the past months. The blue cards, Blessing Bunch cards, and other expressions of support mean more than I can convey. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Fred and Marjie Aggers

Media & Communications

Upcoming Newsletter Deadlines:

<u>Edition</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
June	May 22
July & August	June 19
September	August 21
October	September 18
November	October 16
December	November 18 (Monday)
January 2025	December 16 (Monday)

Give Yoga A Try

Now is the perfect time to dedicate yourself to Spiritual Growth!

Join us on Wednesdays in Lewis Hall, 9:00-10:15 am, for a practice that involves all of you--- Body, Mind, and Spirit! It's more than a good stretch!

A flexible (or bendy) body is not required for our Yoga practice, but a willing heart is! Everyone is welcome at any time, and first-timers are especially encouraged to give it a try.

Registration is not required. Dress comfortably. Yoga mats are available. The first class is free, and then \$10 is suggested. The class is taught by Rev. Felicia Stewart Hoyle (RYT-500). Email Felicia at fshoyle@gmail.com for more information.



From Pastor Randy...

Remembering a Friend

This week, I am gathering with friends in Virginia as I often do. We have gathered for the Virginia State Frisbee Tournament since 1977. Through the years, I have made it about half the time. Some years are more important than others. This year is important.

In January, one of my college friends died. Duke Stableford had been a part of the Frisbee family in Fredericksburg, Virginia, since 1978. He made an immediate impression. Duke was tall and easily spotted on the field of ultimate competition. That was the immediate part. He was also friendly, with a great smile and genuine concern for others. Which endeared him to his students as a high school government teacher. He was also beloved for the many years of coaching his chess teams to championships at all levels. Many tributes have been shared online from the students whose lives he guided.

I always looked forward to seeing Duke on the Friday of the tournament weekend. He would be seated under his canopy for shade, awaiting friends to stop by and sign up for his pre-tournament practice round of disc golf called "The Carl's Open." Carl's is a local favorite soft-serve ice cream spot. The trophies were hand-painted wooden ice cream cones. A treasure to anyone who was fortunate enough to win one. Disc golf was an excuse to catch up on family, careers, life, and the Grateful Dead. He always had some music to share. Sometimes, he had embroidery projects or tie-dye to show and share.

One song from his beloved Grateful Dead is 'Ripple.' Among other things, it draws from the 23rd Psalm to talk about our journey through life. In the song, our lives are ripples in still water "when there is no pebble tossed, no wind to blow." It goes on to promise that if your cup is empty, it may be full again: "let it be known there is a fountain that is not made by the hands of men." The song is not quite an expression of faith as it is a wondering about the journey between "dawn and the dark of night."

Last year, when I saw Duke, it was obvious that his kidneys were failing, but he persevered in his chair for the Friday gathering,

asking about friends and family, smiling, and laughing as much as possible. In January, he was surrounded by his wife, children, and friends at the end. I am glad Duke had others to walk him home.

We all need others to share the journey with us. Paul encourages the church in Corinth to laugh with those who laugh and to weep with those who weep. If you are looking for others with whom you can weep, a grief group is forming on April 28 at 5:00 pm in the Educational Building. We will start regular meetings in May. Contact me if you have any questions or want to join. We will walk together for a while.
--Pastor Randy Kirby

Facilitate-Property Maintenance

Sanctuary Waterproofing Project Continues to Progress

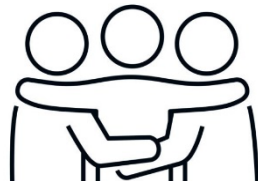
There appears to be light at the end of the tunnel for the major waterproofing project on our sanctuary building. Beginning back on November 1, the contractor, R&L Glover Enterprises, under the supervision of Bryce Evans, excavated down some 20 feet all around the exterior of the church building to repair and replace waterproofing materials.

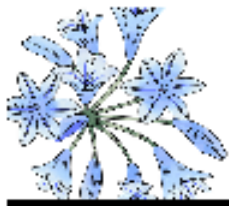
The waterproofing portion of the project around the building is essentially complete with replacement of the courtyard steps and waterproofing under the courtyard porch up next. That should begin in early May and take about three weeks to complete. Once that work is complete, the sanctuary will be available for use for worship and other activities.

The longer-term and final aspect of the project is delivery of matching brick, primarily for the steps and porch for the Fulton Street entrance, plus the reconstructed steps and elevated landing for the Innes Street entrance. The brick will not be manufactured and delivered until late summer delaying completion until approximately October. The final step of the project is landscaping all around the building.

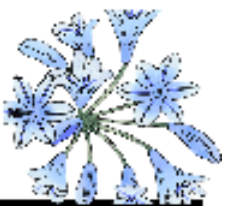
The total budget for the extensive work is about \$580,000, which is being funded by our Church Maintenance Reserve fund. The project remains on budget, possibly a little below budget. The project is being monitored closely by our Facilitate Team leadership, our maintenance supervisor Archie Tucker and our architects, Ramsey and Burgin.

The Facilitate Team remains grateful to our congregation and church staff for their patience during this lengthy process. It is a relatively short-term inconvenience, but the long-term benefits will ensure the integrity of our beloved sanctuary building for many years to come.





Day School Good News



You can see signs of spring all around at the Day School! The Day School celebrated Easter with an indoor egg hunt but still had a grand time! The JOY club came and helped the children make yummy tomb rolls and learn about Easter. The JOY club helped decorate eggs with the children and helped stuff eggs for our egg hunt, too. A big THANK YOU to the JOY club for helping make Easter so special for the children!



During March we celebrated Dr. Seuss's birthday and "Read Across America" week, which was during our Spring Break. Day School kids shared lots of pictures of them reading everywhere. Some children went to the beach, camping, cruising, a tree house and even Ireland and Scotland! In April we will be going on our spring fieldtrip to Lazy 5. For spring time we have been learning about baby animals and plants growing. We have been planting seeds and we got to see real tadpoles.



Registration update:

The Day School is almost completely full for the 2024-2025 school year! We would like to get a few more to fill another two year old class.



Catch the Fire of the Spirit this Pentecost!

Ruach. Pneuma. Holy Spirit

These are the words to describe the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is the living, moving, breathing presence of God in our midst today. Presbyterians are not known for having a rich relationship with the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is fire (as represented in Exodus 3 and Acts 2) then we're careful not to burn our house down with it. Rightly so. Yet, this member of the Trinity can enliven our faith and guide us in the midst of a world that is constantly sliding closed the door to wonder, transcendence, and God's living presence.



Instead of running from the fire of the Spirit, we can put a furnace around it so that it heats our house while also not burning it down. This Pentecost, we're going to do just that! Join us as we spend 40 Days in the Spirit! We will be preaching about the Spirit for 40 days following Pentecost. We will also be using a church-wide devotional called "40 Days with the Holy Spirit" by Jack Levison. Levison is an expert in the Holy Spirit in the Bible. Does encountering the Holy Spirit always have to look like an ecstatic experience? Or can the Spirit speak in quieter, more subtle ways? What about speaking in tongues? Where is the Spirit today?

These are all questions that Levison tackles from a rigorous Biblical perspective while inviting us to know the Holy Spirit more intimately. Plus, Jack Levison and his wife, Priscilla Pope-Levison will be our church-wide retreat speakers this fall! How can you participate? Come to Pentecost worship on Sunday May 19th. Buy a copy of "40-Days with the Holy Spirit" online or call the church office to have one ordered for you. Let's heat up our faith this spring/summer together!

--Pastor Lara Musser Gritter

Look What God Has Done - Baccalaureate 2024 May 19, 2024

When I first arrived at First Pres there was *a lot* that was new. New town, new faces, new job, new house (for the first time), new *everything*. Chief among the new things was my hybrid title, "Co-Senior Youth Director." Or something like that. I had never been a senior pastor before. But more to the point, I'd never been a Youth Director before! I remember those first weeks of youth planning and youth events. I had no idea what I was doing. Fake it till you make it, they say. Well, I must've really made it because, in the beginning, I had to really fake it.

It's now been almost 6 years. In youth ministry, you're supposed to count your time in dog years. So, I've been the youth pastor for...33 years! God has seen this youth ministry through a global health crisis and through the ups and downs of living life alongside young people. And it's not an easy time to be a young person. Their world is on fire. Political turmoil, the constant reminder of an ecological crisis, the moors of social media, and skyrocketing mental health issues.

What word does God have to speak to such a world? But if I had to sum up all of this time with our young people, the word I would use would not be crisis or turmoil or difficult, it would be "relationships."

You can be the best planner in the whole universe, but if you don't know how to build relationships your youth ministry is going to have the same population as the North Pole—zero. Relationships take time to build, especially with youth. Trust is hard to gain and easy to lose. But at the end of the day, the biggest gift we have to give is our time.

It's hard to believe that the wonderful group of seniors graduating this year were 7th graders when I arrived. In case you don't remember, a lot of new things happen between 7th and 12th grade. I've watched them grow up before my very eyes; I've watched them grow in their faith, ask a mountain of questions, and become young adults.

On Sunday, May 19, we will celebrate this group of young people with our annual Baccalaureate service. This year, we're putting a new and exciting spin on things. We're going to do something that we all love to do at church—eat lots of food. Following worship at 11, we're going to celebrate our graduates and have a church-wide picnic in Lewis Hall.

Pastor Josh Musser Gritter



Greetings From Operation Christmas Child!

THANK YOU! Because of the kind and generous giving by First Pres members and friends, last year, we collected a record **275** shoeboxes for children under this wonderful program. For Iredell, Rowan, and Cabarrus counties, a total of **29,961** were donated. This is a critical part of the more than **11,330,126** million children around the world who received a gift, heard of the Gospel, and had an opportunity to connect with a local church for ongoing follow-up and discipleship through The Greatest Journey.

Please join me in praying that the Lord will use these shoeboxes, Christian literature, and the local churches to bring many children to faith in Jesus Christ.

This year, the Shoeboxes donated by you, your family, and your friends **went** to the following countries:

Columbia - shipped 11/25/23

Peru - shipped 11/27/23

Ecuador - shipped on 11/29/23

Honduras - shipped on 12/05/23

Uruguay -shipped on 12/18/23

Thank you so very much for your continued support for this wonderful program!

The OCC Team Leader - Del Denny

A Successful "All In Group" Season

Thank you! What a great winter/spring semester we had with our All In Groups. Everyone enjoyed lively discussions on the weekly sermons and their time of fellowship with other members of First Pres they might not have known before. All In gave everyone an opportunity to share God's word and love.

We want to thank ALL the hosts for All In. You helped make this another successful session.

---Grow in Friendship Team

Summer Meals 2024

First Presbyterian is once again hosting a site for RSS and its Summer Meals Program. Any child or youth up to 18 can enjoy a free lunch regardless of their family's financial status. Families must be here at church at 11:30. They eat in Fellowship Hall and then go on about their day.

We need volunteers to host this group. Beginning June 5 through July 26, Monday through Friday, 11:15-12:15, we need three people each day to help. Parents and grandparents with kids at home? You can still volunteer AND feed your children at the same time! Sign up with the QR code.



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The JOY group plans a trip to the Salisbury Emporium on Tuesday, May 7, at 10:30, followed by lunch at DJ's. Several members of First Presbyterian have shops there, and it will be a fun get-together! Please call the church office to make a reservation by Thursday, May 2.

Overton Backpack Program Returns

It's never too early to pick up those bargains at local stores! We've heard that backpacks are on sale now at Walmart and other stores. So, as you are out shopping over the summer and find great deals, please pick up one or several. We will be collecting them in August for the new school year.



So many children at Overton are in need. Your donated backpacks, along with a \$10 bill, help them start off the school year on a positive note. The \$10 will be spent on specific grade-appropriate school supplies.

Watch for the announcement in August for when to bring the backpacks and money in to the church!

ATTENTION:

Reading Tutors at Overton School

If you are a current Overton tutor this year and would like to continue again next year, please let us know. There will be a poster in Jasmine Brooks' office, just above the shelf where you pick up your students' folders. You can sign up there or text Lynn Hales at 704-640-7156. We would just like to know your intention about next year. This will not be a solid commitment if your situation changes. Thanks so much for your help!

If you are interested in volunteering to be a tutor next year, please contact Lynn. It is a very rewarding program that requires only an hour or so per week. The Overton students benefit greatly from the program, and they are so appreciative.

I want to send a huge thank you to our current tutors for their time and care to help at Overton. You have made a big difference in these students' lives!

--Lynn

Catching Up With Our Presbyterian Women

Once upon a time, before many of us were born, the Presbyterian Women's Organization (PW) at our church included every woman in the church. We were divided into groups of about 15 women in each group. These groups were called "Church Circles." We would meet in the morning once a month in various members's homes and have refreshments followed by a Bible Study.

Gradually, these groups have dwindled. Now, our women have only one larger circle. We meet on the first Monday of every month at 11:00 am in Fellowship Hall. All women in the church are invited to attend for Bible Study, fellowship, and light refreshments. Dr. Randy Kirby teaches an excellent lesson using the national yearly PW publication which always focuses on an extremely well-researched biblical lesson.

We are excited to announce that the women of Trinity Presbyterian, a neighboring church, have recently joined our Bible study. They are a much-valued addition.

As a group, PW sponsors many worthwhile projects. Overton School is at the top of the list. Money has been donated, and clothing has been purchased to help with student needs. Also included are book bags, teacher treats, and tutors. Our final meeting of the year will be on Monday, May 6, at 11:00. A covered dish luncheon will follow our lesson. Everyone is asked to bring an appetizer, salad, main dish, or dessert. Please join us as we gather together in love.

Sowing Seeds of Generosity:

How can you leave a financial Legacy at First Presbyterian?

We are all aware of the societal changes we frequently see, and many of them concern us and leave us wondering, "What can I do to make a difference?" Our church faces the same challenges. Financial giving is very different from years ago. Why? Many worthwhile non-profits do wonderful work that didn't exist in earlier years and take a larger portion of our giving. The income gap is squeezing many folks, not to mention the cost of living. This is evident in our overall giving to First Presbyterian Salisbury. Here are a few stats for us to consider:

- Those 50+ years old make up 93% of donors and giving.
- Those 70+ years old make up 61% of donors and 63% of giving.
- Of 186 pledging units, 17 are between the ages of 20-49 and represent only 7% of giving.
- If this trend continues, the operating budget is estimated to go from \$1,000,000 to \$600,000 over the next 10-20 years.

First Presbyterian, as we know it, will be very different if we don't act to minimize this impact on our finances. This is why the Session formed the Legacy 200 Committee and fund. So, back to the question, "What can I do to make a difference?" Take some time to think about your financial assets at your death and consider leaving in your will an amount of money to help fund the church's operation. For example, a \$100,000 gift will generate a \$5,000 return for the church annually in perpetuity! A \$250,000 gift will generate \$12,500, and so on. Maybe you want to consider a gift that matches what you give annually. Of course, this happens at your death, so there is no impact now, and if your financial picture changes over the next few years, it can be adjusted.

In summary, future generations will have difficulty filling the financial void when our senior members die. It's just that simple. And we have the opportunity to help ease that transition. Currently, 19 families have pledged almost \$2,000,000 in future assets to the church, creating \$100,000 in income for the church in the coming years. Please consider a Legacy pledge to First Presbyterian Salisbury. --The Legacy 200 Team

Core - Fund Management

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

March 31, 2024

OPERATING

YTD Income	326,715.10
YTD Expenses	<u>298,779.31</u>
Cash Flow - Positive	<u>27,935.79</u>

YTD Actual Income	326,715.10
YTD Budgeted Income	<u>308,307.25</u>
OVER	<u>18,407.85</u>

YTD Budgeted Expenses	334,722.00
YTD Actual Expenses	<u>298,779.31</u>
UNDER	<u>35,942.69</u>

DAY SCHOOL

YTD Gain	<u>3,790.08</u>
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GIVING

YTD Actual Giving	299,920.46
YTD Budgeted Giving	<u>296,182.25</u>
OVER	<u>3,738.21</u>

YTD Actual Pledges	279,980.71
YTD Budgeted Pledges	<u>270,307.25</u>
OVER	<u>9,673.46</u>

4 WAYS TO GIVE

- ONLINE & RECURRING**
WWW.FIRSTPRESBYTERIAN.SALISBURY.ORG
- MAIL IT IN**
333 W. FISHER ST.
SALISBURY, NC 28144
- TEXT 2 GIVE**
704.286.1055
- IN PERSON**

Register Children



SEEKERS in SNEAKERS
Discover Jesus!

Join us for Vacation Bible School
Pre-K (3yo & 4yo) - 5th Graders
Sunday, June 2 - Thursday, June 6
from 5:00-7:30 pm
FREE Supper, FREE t-shirt, FREE fun!
Use QR code to register now.
To ensure free t-shirt, please register by Friday, 5/3.

308 West Fisher St, Salisbury
(704) 636-1321
www.firstpressalisbury.org

Volunteer!



SEEKERS in SNEAKERS
Discover Jesus!

Volunteer for Vacation Bible School
Help is needed in all areas from teaching to decorating!
Sunday, June 2 - Thursday, June 6
from 5:00-7:30 pm
FREE Supper, FREE t-shirt, FREE fun!
Use QR code to register now.
To ensure free t-shirt, please register by Friday, 5/3.

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SPRING PICNIC

MAY 19 @ 12 NOON

DON'T MISS



RSVP PLEASE

IF YOUR LAST NAME
BEGINS WITH:

A-G: PLEASE BRING A DESSERT
H- Z: PLEASE BRING A SIDE
GATHER TEAM WILL PROVIDE
HOTDOGS & HAMBURGERS



Worship Music

Welcome to Teresa de Freitas—Director of Music Ministries!

Teresa de Freitas comes to us from Lake Murray Presbyterian Church in Chapin, SC, where she has been Director of Music since October 2022. Prior to Lake Murray, Teresa was a Teaching Assistant at the University of Georgia, where she received her Master of Music in Piano Performance and will receive a Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano and Organ in the fall of 2024. While pursuing her advanced degrees, she was an Assistant Musical Director at Watkinsville UMC (GA) from 2016-2022.



Teresa also holds musical credentials from the music conservatory Ecole Normale De Musique De Paris “Alfred Cortot,” Paris, France, and a BA in Piano Performance from the Universidade De Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil.

As a Teaching Assistant at UGA, Teresa directed the Portuguese Flagship Program from 2013-2022. This is a program from the US Department of Defense that sends American students to countries of interest to the United States to help them learn the language and culture of these countries.

Before going to UGA, Teresa was the Choir Director for the Brazil Parkinson’s Association from 2000-2012. She led weekly rehearsals and educated choir members on proper vocal techniques and warm-ups while working with speech therapists to help those affected by Parkinson’s Disease.

In her application to First Presbyterian, Teresa wrote, “Serving as a church musician is not only my passion but also my calling. As a Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I strive to fulfill my calling to facilitate worship that is both pleasing and acceptable to God and to help the congregation to immerse in His presence through music.” Her references echoed her strong faith commitment, along with her being a consummate collaborator, always doing more than what was asked. Teresa has an adult daughter in Athens, GA, and a sister already in NC.

Let us all open our hearts and arms in Christian faith and love as we welcome Teresa to First Pres. A reception will be held to welcome her on Sunday, May 12.

First Presbyterian Church
308 West Fisher Street
Salisbury, NC 28144

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Sunday Worship Schedule (Effective 11-5-2023)

- 8:30 am Life Center Worship Lewis Hall
- 9:45 am Sunday School
- 11 am Worship - Lewis Hall