

First Presbyterian Church

Pottstown, Pennsylvania



175th Anniversary
1848 - 2023

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11 NRSV

Memories and Dreams

It has been said, “The principal part of faith is patience.”

This congregation, from its beginning, has been faithful and patient, often waiting years for dreams to become a reality. Through wars, times of pestilence and death, worry and stress for enough money to create a space to worship, learn, and serve, our congregation has been faithful.

As we celebrate another milestone in our journey together as a family of believers, we look forward to a new day in the life of First Presbyterian Pottstown.

We know life is always changing; in our lives, in our church, in our community and in our world. We are blessed with an energetic group of Christians who are worshipping together in new ways, listening to God’s word in Scripture, praying for guidance, and working together to reach out and share what we have been given to neighbors near and far.

As a long-time member of this congregation, I am excited to see what happens next. It will be different. It will be amazing. I can only imagine what lies ahead for us. Grateful to our Rock, our Shepherd, I am sure we will continue moving forward on the path started so long ago.

Jane Ayres Barndt
Ordained Elder and Former Clerk of Session

Historical Highlights in the Life of First Presbyterian Church

1999 – 2023

“We are but a few in a long line of pilgrims who have traveled this journey of faith before us.

We merely carry on the good work that was begun in them, the same work that will be carried on by those who are yet to come, until God brings it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.”

These are the words of Reverend W. Carter Lester, Jr. and Reverend Karen (Kerry) Pidcock-Lester from the 150th anniversary brief history by which they lived during their many years of faithful and loving service to God, to First Presbyterian Church and to the wider Pottstown community.

Kerry and Carter served as co-pastors at First Presbyterian Church from March 1994 to June 2022.



During their time at FPC, Carter completed his Doctor of Ministry at McCormick Seminary (1999), served as moderator of the Philadelphia Presbytery (2005) and on the Board of Directors for Camp Kirkwood. Kerry actively served on various community Board of Directors including the Pottstown Health and Wellness Foundation, the Pottstown Regional Public Library and the Tri County YWCA. “Merely” carrying on the good work was not what God intended for them or for us, the members of First Presbyterian Church (FPC). God extended an invitation to co-create and expand God’s kingdom and we, in partnership with our co-pastors, responded with a generative love, a love that continually desires to produce something new.

In 1999, after the 150th anniversary celebration, a former Sunday School classroom was dedicated as the Mary Ann Yost room, in honor of the woman who was the catalyst for the organization of a Presbyterian Church in Pottstown. During this same year, after (2) three-year capital campaigns, FPC was able to burn the mortgage on the Christian Education Wing and church membership was growing.

Remaining funds from the 150th Anniversary Celebration combined with generous contributions from several families in the congregation allowed for the construction of the Peace Garden on the church grounds. The grassy hill to the right of the church entrance was transformed into a welcoming place for rest and meditation, as well as a new place to gather for Easter Sunrise Service beginning in 2001.



“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”
Isaiah 43:19

But peace eluded us. September 11, 2001 marked the horror and devastation of terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the plane crash in Shanksville, PA which was headed for our Nation's Capital. Members of FPC, as well as the community, filled the sanctuary for a Service of Psalms and Laments. For weeks after the attack, our community continued to process our hard emotions through worship and an evening contemplative prayer circle. Monetary donations were sent to New York and Doctors without Borders in Afghanistan. We found God was a very present help in trouble, our refuge and our strength. People returned to the church community during these difficult days. Church membership continued to grow.

We are four generations of Christians seeking together to grow deeper in Christ to reach farther in love.

A Long-Range Planning Committee was formed to discern the best response to the new growth in membership. Additional seating was added in the sanctuary at the end of the pews to accommodate more people during worship and new fellowship groups were formed.

Worship took on new life. A Service for Wholeness was added during the season of Advent and Lent. These healing services included an individual's testimony regarding an experience of God's grace and wholeness in their life or in the life of a community. The Ash Wednesday service in the Community Room was added, to remind us that we are beloved dust, while the Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service invited us to watch and pray with Jesus during his time of trial. The Good Friday Cross Walk, instituted by Kerry Pidcock-Lester, was an opportunity to pray for our community during the hours of Jesus' death in an ecumenical setting.

The summer found us in the Peace Garden with a Service of Thanksgiving for Creation/Blessing of the Animals, while September found us in the sanctuary with a Blessing of the Backpacks service. During the All-Saints Day service, we named those we loved and missed and when the lectionary readings turned to Jesus' Baptism, we, in turn, remembered our own in a Reaffirmation of Baptism Service. On Palm Sunday, we encouraged each other to "Invite a Friend" to worship with us. This has been the rhythm of our lives together, with God, for 25 years.



Seeking Together

The Fun and Fellowship Group was born and sponsored Advent Angels, Everybody's Birthday Party and the Progressive Dinners to name a few events. Groups were formed to accommodate people in the same stages of life: Prime Timers for older adults, the Young Adult Group and Mothers with Young Children. Over time, groups like the Mental Illness Caregivers Circle and the Dementia Caregivers Circle, were added to aid and support those members and friends struggling with specific issues. The Men's Breakfast Group continues as a monthly time of fellowship, as does a Yoga Class and the Faith and Nature Group to walk and hike together enjoying God's creation.

Over these 25 years, the Senior Seekers (Senior High Youth Group) and the Junior Seekers (Junior High Youth Group) thrived with dedicated long term volunteer advisors. The groups met for fellowship and fun activities, culminating in a mission work camp each year. The Senior Seekers traveled for one week away from home, usually to a partner organization in Richmond VA, Lynchburg VA, Lewes DE or Baltimore, MD for a time of hands-on construction, painting, yard work and spiritual formation based on a theme from scripture. Twenty-seven Senior Seeker work camps have been completed to date. The Junior Seekers participated in "Mission Mornings", a week of helping at local missions like the Cluster Outreach Center in Pottstown, for a half day, as an introduction to service and outreach in our community.

The Stewardship drive at FPC was another great time for fun and fellowship. Stewardship "Dinner and a Show" or "Stewardship Follies" or "Presbyterians Got Talent" started as the brainchild of Marlene Wrigley to lift up the joy of being good stewards. Marlene wrote and directed shows for nearly 20 years which involved the Chancel Choir, the children's choirs and other acts of talent and usually one act of silliness on the part of the co-pastors. The Stewardship Dinner continued until 2019.

The Deacons also contribute to the vibrant life of fellowship by preparing the Church Rally Day Picnic, the annual Deacon's Christmas Breakfast during Advent and the Easter Egg Scramble.

To Grow Deeper in Christ



The Sunday School program established a curriculum around building blocks of faith. Third graders receive bibles from the church community and graduating seniors are sent forth with an inspirational book to guide them into the next chapter of their faith. Rally Day marks the beginning of the Sunday School year and a church picnic was added to enhance the time of celebration and fellowship.

A Sunday School teacher appreciation breakfast became an annual event. JoAnn Bathurst, first visited preschool Sunday School classrooms to sing with the children before being hired in 2002 as the Youth Choir Director, replacing Karen Reitnauer. This ultimately transitioned to the Music and Recreation program for children in second through fifth grade. The Celtic Choir and the Cherub Choir (ages three through first grade) remain under her direction to this day.

The adult music program was led by Choir Directors Pat Bird, Karen Reitnauer, Corinne Griffiths, Diane Land and currently Cindy Foust. Organists were Pat Bird, Ruby Riggs, Stephanie Land, Amy Schreffler and currently Deb Voytko.

Vacation Bible School at FPC has taken many forms. Masterpeace, the intergenerational Vacation Bible School with original art and a liturgical drama written, directed and performed by church members as part of a Sunday worship service, highlighted some aspect of peacemaking, intended to fulfill our Commitment to Peacemaking as put forth by the PCUSA.

Backyard blessings, an intergenerational VBS in public and private spaces, along with traditional Vacation Bible School programming were offered based on the spiritual gifts of the congregation at the time.

Lenten School was offered during Wednesdays in Lent. Separate tracks were offered for adults, families and youth. The focus of Lenten school shifted with the needs of the congregation and the happenings in the community including book discussions, topics presented by guest professors from local colleges or video series, relationship guidance, and contemplative prayer. The StoryCorps recordings and the Bible timeline mural outside of Fellowship Hall evolved out of these evenings.



Retreat, the spiritual practice of making space for God alone, became part of the life of the community. While the women of the church began the practice in 1997 at the Mariawald Retreat Center, the men added their first retreat at Mensch Mills in 2001. Additional adult spiritual formation groups at First Presbyterian included the Men's and Women's Sunday School Class, the Evening Bible Study Group and the Theology Book Group. The Lectio Divina Prayer Group and the Thursday Morning Women's Bible Study group continue to meet in 2023.

In 2008, Olivia Stewart was hired as the Director of Children, Family and Youth Ministry.

Miss Liv, as she was known by many at FPC, introduced the Young Children and Worship program, which encourages children ages 4 through 2nd grade to experience and wonder about God in a worship setting developed especially for them. Trained story tellers share God's stories in an environment of reverence



and reflection, encourage the children to respond creatively, and prepare children to worship with the entire congregation. Third grade children are prepared for communion through instruction with the Pastors or the Director, so they can fully participate in the adult worship service as part of the body of Christ. Young children are encouraged to be part of our worship services. Worship bags are provided in the sanctuary to help retain their interest and instructions for adults can be found in the pew to help children fully experience our life together in Christ.

Young adults, ready to make a commitment to be a follower of Jesus, may join in the Confirmation Journey. They symbolically leave their parents and travel with their peers for eight months, as they learn about God's promises, their own faith and relationship with Jesus, and the workings of the Presbyterian Church USA. Each confirmand is given "Kingdom money" to seed an investment in a "Kingdom Project" of their own choosing. They are paired with a shepherd, someone from the community of faith, to assist them with their kingdom project. On the day of their confirmation, they take on "the yoke of Jesus" symbolically, by wearing a stole personalized with a symbol their parents chose to represent them and a list of gifts the confirmand possesses that may be used for the good of the community.

In 2011, the Christian Education Committee changed its name to the Spiritual Formation Committee, an outward sign of an inward condition in the life of FPC, marking the transition from not only teaching beliefs but also practicing the way of love Jesus taught in the world. The spiritual formation committee continues to purchase Lenten devotionals for the congregation as well as assemble and publish an advent devotional book comprised of personal meditations from members of the congregation.

In 2014, First Presbyterian Church welcomed the Reverend Jeff Fox-Kline as the Associate Pastor for Children, Family and Youth Ministry. Jeff Pinard was named the Director of Children, Family and Youth Ministry in 2017, and in 2020 the position was awarded to the current director, Jaylee Ferreri. We are deeply grateful to Jaylee for her leadership during the time between Kerry and Carter's retirement in June 2022 and the arrival of our transitional Pastor, Roberta Kearney, in November 2022.



Four Generations of Christians

In 2002, a Vision Coordinating Team was created to organize and implement a capital campaign on the recommendation of the Long-Range Planning Committee. The purpose of the team was to identify Capital Improvement projects required due to deferred maintenance during previous capital campaigns and discern potential capital projects that may be required due to the growth of the congregation and God's invitation to serve in the community. The Vision Fund was launched in 2002 and was completed in 2008. An astounding \$1 million dollars was raised during the campaign, with 10% going to a mission tithe.

In 2004, FPC was informed we were one of eight local charities that would receive a substantial gift from Martha Porter's Estate. Martha's estate was held in trust for the benefit of her younger sister Mary Porter during Mary's lifetime. Mary Porter, was a long-time member of the church with strong ties to her hometown and FPC. She died in her home in Florida at the age of 98 in 2009. Mary had been a major contributor to the Vision Fund and had been giving substantially to the general fund in the years prior to her death. Due to the size of Martha Porter's gift, FPC formed a Taskforce to discern options for the bequest and make recommendations to Session. When Martha's gift was received, Session designated 10% of the gift be used as a "mission tithe." The tithe was used to establish an endowed scholarship at Montgomery County Community College, purchase library books for the Pottstown School District, contribute to the Pottstown Regional Public Library and contribute to the Cluster Outreach Center Building Campaign. Session also designated funds for two high priority capital projects, installing surge suppressor protection devices to protect the newly rebuilt organ and replacing the HVAC system in the Christian Education Wing. In addition, a sum equivalent to two months of expenses was held in the general fund to ease cash flow. The remainder of the gift, approximately 2.2 million dollars, was invested in the previously established Endowment Fund. As of April 2023, the Endowment has grown to \$3,640,000 and provides a 4% annual distribution to the church, paid quarterly, which enhances rather than replaces our congregational giving. The Endowment distribution is designated for new missions and new ministries as well as capital improvements when needed.

After Mary Porter's death, FPC unexpectedly received sizable checks from the Broward County Foundation. Since Session was not certain this contribution would continue, the Porter-Broward Task Force was established to discern the use of any monies received from the Broward County Foundation and make recommendations to Session for expenditures. Traditionally, the money received is split one third to mission, one third to capital projects and one third to seed new ministries or projects over and above the annual budget. The parish nurse position is funded through the Broward County Foundation donation which enabled the church to hire Dawn Skelly in 2015.

Thanks to the on-going financial support of the members of FPC, memorial gifts, distributions from the endowment fund and/or the Broward County Foundation, FPC has been able to make improvements to our building and manage maintenance and repairs in a timely manner.





Over the years we have purchased and installed new organ stops, maintained hand bells and chimes, added 2 octaves of handbells, purchased new choir robes, purchased five Wenger library cabinets to protect and organize the sheet music collection, purchased new hymnals and pew bibles, installed an elevator and a lift for handicap access to fellowship hall, renovated the community room, the Mary Ann Yost room, the W. Carter Lester, Jr and Karen Pidcock-Lester Library (dedicated in 2022), the first-floor toilet rooms, and the entrance lobby. We replaced and upgraded the boilers, repaired portions of the flat roof, repaired and restored the stain glass windows, upgraded the exterior outdoor lighting on the building and added new parking lot lighting to create a safe environment. We updated the lighting in the sanctuary, upgraded the audio system in the sanctuary, community room and fellowship hall, continued with steeple repairs, added a bell carillon, installed a prayer labyrinth

with seating on the grounds, and updated and expanded the playground.

In 2014, funds were granted to purchase a tool trailer for the Adult Mission trips. We also invested in and updated technology along the way, adding livestreaming capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Administration Committee at FPC has faithfully worked to maintain the building and property in a safe, sustainable, beautiful and energy efficient way. The building has been used in partnership with Montgomery County as a polling place and also to host the “One Night at a Time” program which provided sleeping arrangements for the homeless in colder months. We continue to host the Community Meals Program, the Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs in our building, as well as provide a welcoming space for the HENS nursery school program. Our outdoor space, the Peace Garden and Labyrinth, was used as much needed community space during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In January 2005, we hosted our first Presbytery Meeting in our facility. Over 225 guests came through our doors to do the work of the Presbytery, to worship together and to install Rev. W. Carter Lester, Jr. as the Moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Our facility and grounds continue to be a beautiful place for community to gather for fellowship, worship, outreach and spiritual formation.



To Reach Farther in Love

Caring for each other can be easy in this community. While we may not always agree, we always find a way to love. The Deacons organize and maintain a meal ministry for members in need. The Petal Pushers create and deliver beautiful arrangements of donated flowers to those who cannot be with us in person. The Prayer Shawl ministry has been knitting shawls and scarves for those suffering illness and grief, guests at community meals, students at Barth and gifts to homeowners on mission trips, wrapping them in prayer and love since 2007.

We continue to reach out to our local community by forming supportive partnerships with local missions like Operation 143 (formerly Operation Backpack), Habitat for Humanity, The Ricketts Center, Schuylkill River Greenways, the Tri County YWCA literacy program and the Montgomery County Women's Center. Our 175th Community Mission Project was a trash clean up event in partnership with Hobarts Run.

We have been serving Community Meals for 40 years and hosting dinner guests in Fellowship Hall for 28 years! In 1995, the Cluster Outreach Center moved the daily community meal program, which was held exclusively at Trinity UCC, to five area churches. FPC stepped up to host the Thursday suppers. A faithful crew of Presbyterians greeted guests in fellowship hall every week while different congregations prepared, served and cleaned up the meal. FPC continues to prepare and serve supper every second Thursday as we had done at Trinity UCC since 1982. In 2002, we planted a vegetable garden on our property to provide our community meal guests access to fresh vegetables and good nutrients. The garden continues to produce nourishment for those who tend it, as well as those who reap the bounty of their labors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community meals did not miss a week of offering sustenance to neighbors in need. From March 2020 to September 2020, the community meal crews from FPC provided take out meals. In September, crews from other churches joined us. In May of 2022, the Community Meals program joyfully returned indoors to Fellowship Hall at FPC.



Another long-term, local outreach partnership established more than 25 years ago and still going strong is with Barth Elementary School. This relationship grew in stages and changes with the current needs of the students. Our intention is to be a partner who works with rather than for the school, with the principal setting the direction and priorities of the partnership.



The partnership began in response to a PCUSA initiative called “One Child/One Hour/Once a Week“, a weekly tutoring/mentoring program. In addition to volunteering as tutors, some of the other programming supported by volunteers and funds from FPC included: Barth Bookbusters, a book club for advanced readers lead by FPC members; piano, keyboard and art after school clubs; the Barth Bull Dogs, a leadership development program for 5th graders; the Barth Jobs Program which encouraged students to apply and interview for jobs around the school in exchange for school store credit, and the Peacemaking Award. The Peacemaking Award is given to the boy and girl nominated by their peers as the students who most exemplify the qualities of a peacemaker -- prior to the nominations, students discuss what it means to be a peacemaker. A special assembly is held each year and the Peacemakers are awarded a plaque and a \$100 check, as well as their names added to a plaque in the school. In 2023, the current principle shifted the focus of the partnership to underwriting field trips, something which had been cut from the district budget. This year, the entire school will visit the Philadelphia Zoo, the first field trip since the COVID-19 pandemic. Other facets of the Barth partnership include the subsidy of a community garden by a Porter-Broward grant, Mission Mornings service projects, and Back-to-School collections of school uniforms, back packs and school supplies.

FPC met Dr. Reeta Rao in 2002 when the Medical Benevolence Organization came to speak to the Women’s Thursday Morning Bible Study. Dr. Rao is the Director of SNEHA, an organization



that helps disadvantaged communities in northern India. FPC initially supplied sewing machines to SNEHA to help local women support their families. This was the impetus for a very long-term international mission partnership with the students, staff and families at SNEHA Doon Academy, a school in the impoverished community of Dehrandun, India. We continue to partner with SNEHA in 2023.



Camp Kirkwood held a special place in the hearts of the members at FPC and was a formative ministry for us in many ways. In 1999, 30 members of the congregation representing three generations, spent the day at Camp Kirkwood building the Jones Pavilion. In 2004, we sent a team of “builders” to construct a cabin along with funding for three more.

In 2009 and 2011, we sent teams to build tent platforms, tables and trusses and replace windows. We sent our children and the children of Pottstown to spend time during the summer in God’s creation, to build friendships and to grow in Christ. It was with heavy hearts and after much prayer the Kirkwood Board of Directors along with the Presbytery of Philadelphia, decided to close the camp because of financial struggles which culminated due to the loss of two camping seasons during the COVID-19 pandemic. The closing worship service, held on July 17, 2021 was attended by Carter and Kerry and other church members. The plaque was removed from the Jones pavilion and returned to FPC.

The construction skills honed through our Kirkwood volunteer experience was put to good use for Christ during our initial Adult Mission Trip. Thirty adults travelled to Gautier, Mississippi in February 2006 to help those ravaged by Katrina, initially a category 5 Atlantic hurricane which made landfall in southeast Louisiana and Mississippi on August 29, 2005. In one week, several families were helped with home repairs and property clean up. The Domestic Adult Mission Trips often partner with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) which enables congregations of the PCUSA to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crisis and catastrophic events. The one-week domestic Adult Mission Trips have been faithfully organized and lead by Tom Zeigler for 18 years. In addition to five years dedicated to Hurricane Katrina relief, other locations have included Superstorm Sandy relief in Bayville NJ, hurricane relief in Beaumont TX and New Bern NC, poverty relief in Nashville TN, and most recently in March 2023, tornado relief in Madisonville KY.





In 2009, a partnership was formed with Living Waters for the World, a faith based nonprofit that trains, equips and supports volunteers in forming global clean-water mission partnerships. This mission partnership empowers international communities to install and sustain water purification systems and health education programs to transform lives. In 2010, FPC established a relationship with Tim and Gloria Wheeler, mission co-workers in Honduras, serving in partnership with Heifer International and the Presbyterian Church in Honduras. Thanks to the Wheeler's connections we were able to travel to San Juan Planes, Trinidad, Copan to educate Hondurans about the benefits of clean water and supervise their installation of the water purification system we brought with us. Since 2010, we made several international mission trips to Honduras to install a total of eight water purification systems. In addition, we supported the repair of two systems installed by other organizations. In 2022, through our partnership with Hondurans Helping Hondurans, we were able to purchase a system and virtually assist with its installation in San Juna de Opao.

A portion of the funds for the water purification systems came from purchases through the Alternative Gift Market sponsored annually by the Mission Committee. This market was offered prior to the holidays as a way of providing alternatives to traditional holiday gift giving and included items like shares of animals from Heifer International, jewelry "house pins" to support Habitat for Humanity, a baked goods table with donations from members, sustainably grown coffee from the eco boutique, reusable grocery bags, and everybody's favorite soup made by the Women's Thursday Morning Bible Study. It was a lunchtime event after Sunday worship.



During 2014, members of FPC conducted many prayerful conversations around the topic of same sex marriage, meeting together to study scripture, contemplate Spirit's movement and listen to each other's opinions and concerns. We did not all agree when the PCUSA voted to allow pastors to marry two persons of the same gender, in states where it is legal. But we held fast and together. Shortly thereafter, we opened Conversations on Race in response to the 2014 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri. Out of these conversations, FPC offered a workshop with Debbie Irving, author of *Waking Up White* in March 2018. One hundred people from FPC and the community attended. Conversations on Race continued with different partners and in different formats through the years drawn from Bethel Community Church (including a bus trip to the Smithsonian African American Museum), First Baptist Church, NAACP, and the Rev. Khristi Adams who served as a pastor/teacher in residence in the winter of 2021. The intentional changes to the FPC library collections are a result of these conversations as is the formation of the Mark 12:31 Team (2021), noting that Jesus calls us to "love our neighbors as ourselves". In 2021 the Fair Funding in Education Team was formed. This group of members monitors the battle for fair funding and coordinates advocacy efforts with the Pottstown School District, Interfaith POWER and Pennsylvanians for Fair Funding. This team grew out of conversations with Interfaith POWER and the Pottstown School District.

We Are Not Alone

While the events of 9/11 drew people into community, the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic did just the opposite. On March 19, 2020 the governor of Pennsylvania issued a new directive requiring all state residents to shelter at home and limit movements outside of their homes beyond essential needs.

At the very beginning of the quarantine, when the co-pastors and staff at FPC realized that the church and worship services were going to be shut down, they immediately went into technology mode. At this time, the church did not have the capability to livestream, nor were cameras installed in the sanctuary. A cell phone camera was used to videotape the worship service on Saturday with 10 people present. The recording was then uploaded to YouTube and published at 10:30AM on Sunday morning so the congregation could watch it simultaneously and continue to worship together. In person Sunday evening communion services were offered in the Peace Garden and the Mothers of Young Children group met in the co-pastor's driveway around a fire pit, as did many small gatherings of friends. Zoom meetings became a way of connecting. Staff and committee meetings, lectio and evening bible study continued regularly via Zoom. The Confirmation Class and the Seekers groups met weekly with a check in and participated in games and conversations virtually. Kerry and Carter visited each church member at their home at the beginning of the pandemic. Along with the co-pastors, the Spiritual Formation committee delivered Spark Story bibles to all of the elementary age children and devotional books to the Junior High students to keep them connected. Packets of Sunday School lessons were also available for pick up or delivery.

The Music and Rec program became just Recreation outside for an hour with the elementary students. The Senior Seeker work camp pivoted to a local workcamp in the Pottstown community. Youth worked masked, in community, sitting 6 feet apart for dinner and going home every night and gathering again the next day. In a time of “drive by” birthday and graduation parties, the church gathered for worship in the parking lot to support our graduating seniors and continue the “Blessing of the Backpacks”. A 10-week email/zoom retreat was offered during Lent for adults. We formed a COVID Response Team, a group of health advisors from the congregation, to discern and give guidance on how we could safely meet together in community, how we could share in communion and what regulations we should implement to keep each other safe. We also formed the COVID Emergency Fund which accepted donations and stimulus checks from members for redistribution to those experiencing hardship.

Perhaps one of the more notable changes over the course of this recent history is how we communicate with each other. The church bulletin, monthly mailed newsletter, handwritten note and telephone call from 25 years ago, while still remaining, have evolved into a new thing, accelerated by the pandemic. In 2023 we email, text, consult social media sites and websites, meet via Zoom and livestream worship. We click links to sign up and RSVP and install water purification systems virtually from afar. We are more interconnected now than ever before; do you not perceive it?

**We believe in God, who has created and is still creating,
Who has come in Jesus to reconcile and make all things new.**

As we contemplate our life together in Christ and our history, let us be reminded: that God is faithful to God’s promises, that we remain God’s people, that the God who sustained us in the past can be trusted to lead us into an unknown future,
that together with God,
we are making our new way.



Our Pastors

First Presbyterian has had wonderful years of spiritual leadership through our pastors and we have been blessed by these pastors who served our congregation. We also have many members of this church who have entered the ministry:

Tim Bathurst, Kathryn Lester-Bacon, James (Max) Creswell, Douglas Ibach, Keith Jones, Frank Ladner, Barbara Lucia, David Morris, and Paul Morris.

They have had excellent role models to lead them:

Rev. William R. Work	1848-1856
Rev. Robert Cruikshank	1857-1860
Rev. William B. Stewart	1860-1864
Rev. John C. Thompson	1864-1873
Rev. Henry F. Lee	1873-1880
Rev. Halsey B. Stevenson	1881-1887
Rev. Henry M. Dyckman	1888-1906
Rev. W. J. Wilkinson	1907-1910
Rev. Melville B. Gurley	1911-1914
Rev. Arthur H. Simpson	1915-1939
Rev. A. Burtis Hallock, Jr.	1940-1956
Rev. William A. Guenther	1956-1966
Rev. Richard B. Martin	1966-1978
Rev. Simmons Gardner (Assistant Pastor)	1975-1979
Rev. Carl D. Rosenblum	1980-1983
Rev. Dana F. Lindsley	1984-1992
Rev. Karen Pidcock-Lester	1994-2022
Rev. Dr. W. Carter Lester	1994-2022
Rev. Jeffrey Fox-Kline (Associate Pastor)	2014-2016
Rev. Roberta Kearney (Transitional Pastor)	2022-

Presbyterian Elders Ordained at FPC 1999 – 2023

Our “Presbyterian” name comes from the word, “presbyter”, which means “elder.”

At the heart of our tradition is the belief that the church should be governed by lay people elected by the congregation. We elect elders to terms of service (although elders remain ordained for life) and more people have the opportunity of leadership.

Walter DePrefontaine, Jr.	1999	Andrew Lane	2015
Barbara Albright	2000	Robert Geyer	2016
Robert Hartman, Jr.	2000	John Livezey	2016
Ronald Baxter	2001	Karen Stacks	2016
Daniel Fuller	2001	Eileen Wade	2016
Gina James	2002	Thomas Babbony	2017
Charles Jenkins	2002	Debbie Remelius	2017
Michael Ferreri	2003	Sharon Sgriccia	2017
Barbara Fletcher	2004	R. Kurtz Holloway	2018
Kathleen O'Hara	2006	Timothy Peckham	2018
W. Scott Sample III	2006	Gary James	2019
James Short	2007	Rosemary Roseo	2019
Donald Grim	2008	Margaret Calvario	2020
Karen Keiser	2009	John MacDonald	2020
Robert Wade	2009	Jane Sample	2020
Charles Stacks	2010	Michelle Thompson	2020
William Dupree	2013	Donald Kisela	2022
David Allebach	2014	Charles Krueger	2022
Sharon Trevoy	2014	Timothy Allen	2023
Sharon Holloway	2015	Heather Temple	2023

Witnesses for a Half-Century or More

This 175th year we are blessed to be able to have the pleasure of recognizing these 39 beloved members. This is a milestone for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are faithful servants, serving our Lord in many ways and keeping our “home” a vital part of their lives.

1942	William Jesse McFarland *
1952	Nancy Lord Orgill, Theodore Reed, Doris Jean Sweeney
1953	Gail Ann Ebert Chaplin, Richard Clark
1954	Evelyn M. Ibach
1957	Leonard Ebert
1958	Jane Dewey Marshall
1959	Carol Jones Patterson
1960	Jo Ann Bathurst, Jane Whisler Dames Hopple, James L. Chaplin
1962	Betsy Klink Mullin
1963	James Bathurst, Ruth Waite Forney Clark, Mary Ann Bauer Hartman, John McNey
1964	Dominic DeRenzo, Ruth Kimble DeRenzo
1965	Jean Harding Grim, Sara Case Grim, Marcia McDevitt Zeigler, Thomas Lee Zeigler
1966	Susan Prizer Moyer, Susan Graves Ploppert, Joan Bartman Rissell
1967	Albert Blademoore Wrigley, Marlene Chase Wrigley
1968	Jane Ayres Barndt
1969	Patricia Hollenbach Follweiler, Carolyn Saylor McFarland, Barbara Taylor Winter
1971	Dorotha Patton Christman Melchiorre
1972	David Hollenbach, Howard E. Kalis III, Shirley Bahrs Kalis
1973	Keith C. Rissell

*William was included on the 150th Anniversary Members List for 50 years.
He has now been a member for 81 years.

Our Session in 2023

Peg Calvario	Bill Dupree	Tim Allen
Bill Campbell	Gary James	John Macdonald
Kurt Holloway	Don Kisela	Patty Picardi
Jane Sample	Chuck Krueger	Heather Temple
Michelle Thompson	Rob Wade	Tom Zeigler

Clerk of Session: Jane Sample

Our Diaconate in 2023

Bruce Achuff	Ida Detar	Brad Chandler
Joe Collins	Jenn Drago	Marguerite Detwiler
Tim Feroe	Elizabeth Genther	Perry Frain
Penny McClimon	Scott Houting	Andy Hazeltine
Lynn Reichenbach	Lauren Hoyt	Laura Hazeltine
Brent Stark	Jim McClimon	Rob Land
Sally Stetler	Susan Stark	Elisa Rose
Kay Vogt	Sandy White	Kimberly Wheelles

Youth Deacons

Shyloh Dugan
Jack Thompson

In Gratitude

In October 2022, nine faithful servants volunteered to help with the planning for the 175th Anniversary Celebration. We knew the short preparation time for the May 21st celebration presented a challenge but using the 150th anniversary resources to guide us and the team's willingness to help, we rose to the occasion. At our first meeting in November, we came together to form the 175th Anniversary Team.

I have heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for these sisters in Christ. God bless Jane Barndt, Kathy Benning, Joan Evans, Laura Hazeltine, Gina James, Mindy Lipsky, Amy Shutt and Sandy White. I especially appreciate Patty Picardi's guidance as our Session Representative. The 175th festivities would not be complete without the help of Gwen Allen, Dave Voytko, Paul Lepard, Diane Land, Perry Frain, our Seekers with the help of Jaylee Ferreri, Marie Kayati, Rev. Roberta Kearney and the many members who shared their memories for this Anniversary Booklet.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you all and for saying YES!

Ginny Bleyer – 175th Anniversary chair

See I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43.19)

I feel so blessed to be a part of the 175th anniversary celebration of First Presbyterian Church of Pottstown. The vitality of who you are and the ministry you do is evident on every page of the history, so well captured by the anniversary committee and told by Amy Shutt.

As I think about the theme of this anniversary: Making Our New Way, I am thinking about God's faithfulness over all the hundreds of thousands of years of human history.

Different church leaders identify a variety of factors we need to anticipate and engage. One of those leaders, Karl Vaters has named five changes already upon us: 1) the way people earn money is changing. Many people now work two jobs, coming home to sell items online, do clerical work, tutor, consult and whatever else is available. 2) the way people give is changing as earning patterns change. 3) the way people attend church is changing, through attendance online, or about once a month in person. 4) the way people commit is changing, in shorter segments of time. 5) the way people trust is changing, and so it is something we must attend to in all our interactions.

In each generation there are new developments changing our lives, often serving as a springboard for the next set of ideas, information, techniques, tools and approaches.

I believe your amazing gift as the people of FPC, will be central to Making Our New Way, and that is holding on to your core purpose of touching and transforming lives, so people can taste and see the Lord is good.

We cannot anticipate the details of your story for the next twenty-five years, but it is God who journeys with you, into new ways of being.

Peace – in Christ,
Roberta



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