

2021

FirstGlance

Transforming the Heart of the City

*"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city...
Pray to the LORD for it because
if it prospers, you too will prosper."
Jeremiah 29:7*

First Presbyterian Church | Greenville, South Carolina



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On Sunday mornings earlier this year, we explored together the New Testament epistle of 1 Peter in a series called *A Fresh Focus for a New Beginning*. The themes that emerged from our study are replicated throughout this spring edition of *First Glimpse*.

Within this magazine you will find ministry updates, congregational priorities, and personal stories of how God is using First Presbyterian to be further committed to transforming the heart of this energized, lively, growing city.

Those of us who live in Greenville are convinced our city is the South's best-kept secret. As one of the fastest growing cities in the Southeast, we sustain a thriving arts scene, hundreds of restaurants, shops, and boutiques, popular annual festivals, numerous historic sites, museums housing significant art collections, and a flourishing family-friendly community.

At the heart of this highly successful 21st-century city lies a church that both impacts and reflects the vibrant community it serves.

Livestream

As a warm, intergenerational, and vibrant congregation, we have successfully navigated the uncharted waters of the past twelve months. Despite the complex and demanding challenges of the COVID pandemic, one of the surprising and unexpected blessings that have come our way has been the impactful and compelling nature of our livestream broadcasts. Individuals and families, often wearing matching pajammies and accompanied by their pet dogs, have faithfully joined us for worship. Viewers have regularly watched us from Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA; Cambridge, WI; Atlantic Beach and Cornelius, NC; New Windsor, MD; Unionville, MO; Oxford, MS; Portland,



“My family and I live in Indiana and found your service during our stay-at-home orders. We now watch it every Sunday!

“Love watching from Nassau in the Bahamas! You are a blessing.

“It has meant so much to me to be able to hear the Word of God brought through your ministers and music, as I’ve been in bed with COVID these last few weeks. First Presbyterian Greenville remains in my heart and prayers. God Bless You All.

OR; Sarasota, FL; Vine Grove, KY; and Cookeville, TN. Many of our livestream viewers now believe that pastors from South Carolina have a slight Scottish accent.

From overseas, we have been joined by viewers in Cape Town, South Africa; Nassau, Bahamas; Tbilisi, the Republic of Georgia; and Perth and Inverness, plus the Orkney Isles, in Scotland. Much to everyone’s surprise, rumor has it that a number of viewers from a royal household in the City of Westminster in central London have also joined us. Oh, and I almost forgot, the award for the most unusual setting goes to EMS personnel who watched us in the back of an ambulance.

Here are a few of the many encouraging comments we have received on our broadcasts:

“I love the streaming services because it allows me to listen over and over again!”

“Thank you so very much for your words for today and every Sunday through this time of isolation! Hope to be able to watch after I’m able to return to my own church.”

“Terrific! Piano quartet, solos, and the choir—all were just fantastic!”

“Thankful for all the wonderful sermons during this time.”

“Thank you for providing these beautiful services!”

“We were in church from home today, via YouTube, and wanted you to know every single sermon you deliver has touched me profoundly and made me grow in my faith, trying to live it out more and more each day. However, today’s sermon absolutely blew me away!”

Our livestreamed services, our Communications staff informs us, have regularly reached over 10,000 viewers on Facebook alone. We also make our services available on YouTube and on television through our Fox Carolina broadcast at 10:30am each Sunday morning.

You may be interested to know that in December 2020, we had 10,800 new visits to our website; 10,749 new

visits to the Sermons page; and 2,166 new visits to our Live Streaming page. Visitors were based mostly in Greenville County, then Charlotte (520), Atlanta (296), Raleigh (280), London (191), and Boardman (190). We are not sure if this is the Boardman in Ohio or Oregon. In January we had an additional 36 viewers from London and 75 from Toronto.

The last twelve months have been challenging, but in the providence of God, we have also been blessed and surprised amidst this strange and difficult period.

As a congregation living out our faith in a downtown context, please continue to pray for everyone involved in our campus redevelopment, for the priorities outlined in our strategic plan, and for our ability to be a connecting, engaging, thriving church that transforms the spiritual heart of our city.

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TRANSFORMING *the Heart of the City*



In February 2016, our elders approved a comprehensive Strategic Vision Plan for our church. For the most part, the imperatives and initiatives in this plan have been completed. One of the imperatives in the 2016 Vision Plan was to “develop and maintain welcoming, secure, and appropriate facilities.” In particular, the plan called for us to “develop a master plan that leverages our access to the Greenville community and ensures that our facilities are appropriate to meet the needs of the growing ministries of FPC.” We are well underway with the construction of new facilities to help accomplish this goal.

Our leaders realize God’s blessing of placing our church in the heart of our growing city. The master plan was developed with the knowledge that these expanded facilities are not just for our church; they are also designed to be a blessing to our city. Our 2021 Vision Plan, to be implemented over the next four to five years, includes new initiatives that will enable us to use our facilities as a means of outreach. A particular passage from Jeremiah became the compelling motivation for the development of our campus plan. Speaking to His people who were being held captive in Babylon, God said:

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Jeremiah 29:7

“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7).

God’s people were given a responsibility to be a blessing to the city in which they were being held in captivity. They were to seek the peace and prosperity of the city, and they were to pray for it. We are called to do the same for our city.

God placed First Presbyterian Church in the heart of Greenville. We have a responsibility to be a blessing to our city. The theme *“Transforming the Heart of the City”* expresses our calling to be God’s people who are to “declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9b). God is calling us to be a blessing to our city. Our desire is for the gospel of Jesus Christ to go forth through our ministries and members into the heart of our city so that lives will be transformed and God will be glorified.

Facilities are a means, but not the end. Our ultimate goal is to see a fresh movement of God’s Spirit flowing through the heart of our city and beyond. God uses people in the process. Thus, it is necessary for us to develop and train disciples of Jesus Christ who are serious about their calling to be His ambassadors:

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

As you read through this edition of *First Glance*, notice how God is working in our midst, raising up men and women to be His ambassadors. Christ has given us a clear mission:

“Therefore go and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

You will read stories of how God is using members of our church to make disciples of children, youth, and adults. You will see how God is working through our congregation and ministries to bring gospel impact to the heart of our city. Each one of us is needed. We are all called to be disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Numerous opportunities are available for you to grow in your faith and serve your city.

While COVID has limited us in some ways, we have also seen how God continues to work in spite of our inability to meet together as we have in the past. Our staff and leaders developed creative ways to ensure that we can be engaged with one another in community through social media, Zoom, streaming, and more.

Together let’s seek the peace and prosperity of our city, which can happen only through the transforming work of God. And let’s commit to pray for a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit in our lives, our city, our nation, and the world.

Be encouraged!

God is at work transforming the heart of our city.

Be available!

God will use you to accomplish His work during these most unusual days.

Take action!

Get engaged in the glorious work of God’s kingdom.



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Academy Street view of Worship & Arts Center



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Over the last several months, it has been incredibly exciting to watch the new building begin to take shape—the culmination of planning, hard work, and an outpouring of generosity from our congregation. As the land was graded, concrete footers placed, and steel beams erected to form the outline of the building, it became easier to imagine what the spaces will become.

- A **gym** to house a wide range of activities and sports programs
- Additional **education space** and a new home for our Student Ministry
- A beautiful **gathering area** to connect the church's two worship spaces and foster an environment of connection and fellowship
- A **Worship & Arts Center** that will be a welcoming space not only for the Ignite service, but also for a variety of community events, concerts, and performances

The Worship & Arts Center will fill a void that persists in downtown Greenville even as the city has experienced explosive growth over the last several years. It will provide a home for Christian art and music and make it accessible to everyone in our community. We want the space to serve as a blessing and a source of hope to the city of Greenville as it hosts plays, lecture series, concerts of all Christian music genres, and other performances.

Another special feature of the Worship & Arts Center will be a unique art gallery featuring exhibits by local and national Christian artists and



other rotating art exhibits. The Upstate has a thriving arts community with an incredible variety of talented artists of all ages, backgrounds, and styles. It is our hope that this gallery becomes a point of pride for our city that is known and enjoyed by everyone.

We also hope to continue community outreach programs that we have offered our space and resources to in the past, including the Greenville Youth Chorale and NGU String Project, while expanding the number of groups and ensembles that have access to the building. Part of our mission to “transform the heart of the city” is to use this space to engage with our community and bring people into the kingdom of God, whether it be inviting at-risk kids who want to learn to play an instrument or increasing seating for worship services.

CHURCH FINANCIAL UPDATE

General Operations

for six months ended 1/31/2021

	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Budget</i>
Contributions	\$ 3,807,084	\$ 4,075,375
Expenses	\$ 3,193,377	\$ 3,845,027
Net income	\$ 633,707	\$ 230,348

Capital Campaign

Transforming the Heart of the City

Total contributions received	\$11,818,239
Total pledges + unpledged giving	\$18,319,965

Thank you for your continued generosity!



Courtyard view of the Intersection



Outside of the gym near the courtyard



Construction is well underway



JOY of the TEST

To most of us, the very word “test” makes us a bit tense. That pressure eases up a bit when we are the test-giver. That means we get to hold someone else accountable based on their test results.

One scripture verse invites us to give our God a test—God actually wants us to test Him. In Malachi, chapter 3, God reminds us of the blessings that He will bestow upon us if we would only be faithful and return back to His house the first fruits of that which He has entrusted to us.

Returning our first fruits requires faith. That’s why so few Christians experience the blessings of the tithe. Some of us try to wiggle out of feeling this joy by rationalizing that the tithe is an Old Testament law that has been replaced by the grace of the New Testament. If it were really important, they say, God would have put Malachi 3:10 somewhere in the New Testament; He missed it by a few pages.

The truth, though, is that God put this declaration and test exactly where He wanted it. Old Testament or New Testament, we are reminded by Scripture that God does not change. He is quite clear in His messages to us that He wants to bless us by receiving and blessing our first 10 percent, our first and best fruits. He wants us to put Him first.

Just think of all the examples of God asking for the sacrifice of the first portions of harvests, firstborn animals, and, in Abraham’s case, first sons. The first portion carries His blessing.

There are 500 verses in the Bible concerning prayer, 500 that concern faith, and more than 2,000 that instruct us in our handling of money and possessions. Sixteen of the 38 parables have the same message.

Back to the joy of the test in Malachi 3:10. It works both ways. This scripture tells us to return the very best of our first fruits to the house of the Lord our God.

Our part of this test requires an act of faith to return this first portion before other obligations are paid; the portion left over after other bills are paid is not the first fruit. It means giving to God *before* you see if you will have enough. This act of pure faith originates in our hearts.

If we are faithful in this, God does not promise us greater prosperity. He does promise us a deeper relationship with Him and that all of our needs (not just financial) will be met and exceeded. His vision is not one of “getting” but one of “giving.”

Have you ever taken the test offered to us by our Creator in Malachi 3:10? Perhaps you were unaware of this scripture and test. Are you willing to specifically test and trust God? If the answer is yes and your heart aches for a closer relationship with our Father, take the test. Truly tithe for one month, then another, and another consistently. God will hold up His portion of the promise. He loves us unconditionally and He never changes.

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in!

Try it! Put me to the test!”

Malachi 3:10 (NLT)

Stay Tuned for the *REVIVAL!*

No, we're not erecting a tent in a nearby field! We have simply determined that we are not using the full potential of our First Pres Foundation. While our Foundation is a powerful tool to move God's Kingdom forward in our community and world, there has been an absence of clarity as to its function. The current board is proactively working to bring on the revival!

Corey Phillips and Mark Clary, members of the Foundation Board, have been working with an outside firm, Align, to:

1. Clarify our identity and purpose
2. Define our vision and the unique future goals of the Foundation
3. Detail our commitments and actions that will drive us to these goals

The board has examined and discussed previous perceptions, uncompromising core values, and future aspirational values. While we are hovering around \$2,000,000 in assets under management, we want to aim for a much larger and more robust financial footing. Although we have been quite effective with grants to ministries and mission work throughout our community and the world, we have so much more potential.

This past year, our First Pres Foundation issued grants and scholarships totaling \$163,000. Some of the recipients include Samaritan's Purse, Christian Learning Center, Eastern Dominican Christian Mission, The Salvation Army, and Meals on Wheels. We have also awarded 22 student scholarships to colleges and seminaries. Imagine the potential with a Foundation ten times larger!

We ask for your help as we bring revival to our Foundation.

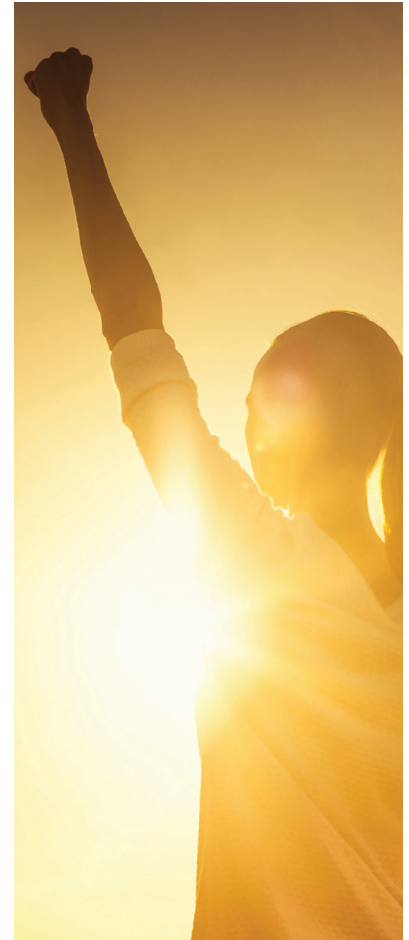
1. Please pray for God's blessings and direction as the board continues to make plans and act on the growth and renewal of the Foundation's ministry.
2. Consider the First Pres Foundation as your beneficiary as you plan for your current and legacy giving. Opportunities here include naming the Foundation as one of your heirs in your life insurance and estate planning; naming the Foundation as a recipient for your Required Minimum Distributions from your retirement accounts; and establishing Donor Advised Funds and Charitable Remainder Trusts, to name a few.

As we move ahead, our aspirational goals are:

1. Clarity of purpose that ignites beyond the board's involvement and flows to ministries, donors, and grant recipients
2. A confident presence of the Foundation's identity and role
3. The power of "storytelling" to share stories of lives changed and souls brought to Christ by the Foundation's ability to fund and support
4. A persistent pursuit of growth to move the Kingdom of God forward

This is a major reset for the First Pres Foundation. It will not happen unless we engage your input, support, and encouragement. We pray for God's hand to guide us as we move forward, and we pledge to keep you informed.

If you are interested in knowing more about legacy giving opportunities or the process of the Foundation's revival, please contact Andy Douglas, Director of Stewardship Ministries (adouglas@firstpresgreenville.org).



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Missional DISCIPLESHIP: Transforming Hearts and Minds Here and Around the World



By Eric Swofford

“I feel blessed to serve, listen, and witness how the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ is transforming hearts and minds all over the world.”

For fifteen years, I sat in the pew at First Pres as a consumer Christian and protected my idol called “security.” My pride, self-righteousness, and focus on financial gain came between me and my obedience to our Savior. Thanks to God’s grace and mercy, I now enjoy a missional lifestyle and mindset.

Just before his passing, Pastor George Moore blessed me with these encouraging words: “Eric, boldly tell your story.” This is my story of transformation, shared not to glorify me in any way. Instead, I want to invite you to be transformed and encourage you to share and live your faith in Jesus Christ wherever you live, work, and play.

In the summer of 2019, I joined others from First Pres who traveled to Liverpool, England, to visit our sister church—a congregation of Iranians without a church building, focused on ministering to the refugee population there. Through this trip, my eyes were opened to the hardships and intense scrutiny that Christian populations in nations like Iran face. Liverpool is one of the first places refugees land when they seek asylum in the UK, and this church is a place where many experience the love of Christ after years of persecution. Many, but not all, of the refugees come from the Middle East. Many are also escaping the homes they have known their entire lives because they are fearful of what might happen to them for being Christian. In Liverpool I saw firsthand the scars on one man’s back from the lashes he received when he was caught participating in an underground

house church in Iran. I also had the experience of witnessing a young housekeeper at the refugee center give her life to Christ with tears of joy and repentance.

What I saw in Liverpool was the love of Jesus shown by former Iranian refugees to weary new refugees, men and women who were just seeking a safe place to live out their faith and learn more about Christ.

In late 2019, First Pres hosted the Rev. Dr. Sasan Tavassoli, an ordained ECO minister. With the Liverpool experience guiding my understanding, I listened carefully as Sasan described his ministry to Iranian Christians, both inside and outside of Iran. As a former Sufi Muslim from Iran, Sasan is uniquely equipped by God to speak truth to those who need to hear the gospel proclaimed in the Persian language.

In early 2020, Shadi Fatehi, from the Pars Theological Centre in the UK, visited First Pres and shared an update on the seminary's success in training a new generation of biblically rooted, theologically informed, spiritually mature servant-leaders who are committed to transforming the Persian-speaking world for the glory of God. I was struck by Shadi's single-minded and unselfish sense of purpose.

Most recently, I began serving as the Finance and Operations Director with the Pars Theological Centre, the same ministry described by Shadi one year ago. In the last 10 years, the Lord has shaped Pars into a dynamic ministry, home to the Persian-language School of Theology and Leadership, Pars Counseling Center, a publishing house, and multiple online

platforms devoted to discipleship and leadership formation.

God is working powerfully in what many believe to be one of the greatest movements of Christ today. Underground house fellowships are rapidly mushrooming all over Iran, forming worshiping communities that radiate Christ's light in both rural and urban regions. Iranian churches are also forming across the growing diaspora in Europe, North America, and the Far East, even as the Underground Church in Iran continues to be persecuted.

I feel blessed to serve, listen, and witness how the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ is transforming hearts and minds all over the world. We are all called to share the love of Christ wherever we are. Will you join me?





Making Space for **STRINGS**

By Dustan Chevalier, Director of Instrumental Music

Excited chatter and the sounds of violins being tuned are emerging from the First Pres Choir Room. It's a Tuesday afternoon and students from local schools have come to our church campus for music lessons. These children, students as young as 3rd grade, are part of the North Greenville University (NGU) String Project.

The NGU String Project was created with the vision of making musical experiences and the study of stringed instruments more accessible to all students in Greenville County from elementary through high school. First Pres provided space when the program needed a new home in the heart of Greenville to host lessons. The String Project's director, Michael Weaver, is a Professor of Music and the head of orchestral activities at NGU.

"This program formed several years ago when we wanted to address the need for all students to have access to quality strings instruction regardless of their socioeconomic status or whether they have a program at their home school," explained Weaver. "It's a wonderful program for the kids, but it also serves as a way for our students at NGU to get several years of teaching experience before they graduate."

Tuition is paid based on school lunch status, so students with free or reduced lunch get a reduced rate

for lessons. Participants whose families cannot afford to rent an instrument have the opportunity to borrow one. Each year, there are two recitals—one in spring and one in fall—that give the students performance experience and build confidence in their skills.

By providing space for this amazing program, we are helping the NGU String Project reach their goal of providing opportunities for underserved students in Greenville to grow their natural gifts and talents in music. Our biggest hope as we move into the future, especially with the new building, is to continue to offer our facilities to groups like this that are transforming lives right here in Greenville.

Students remain in the program as long as they'd like, and many end up moving on to play in the Greenville County Youth Orchestra or ensembles in the school system. "We've seen this program changing the lives of kids," said Weaver. "My greatest hope is that someday one of the students will choose to continue studying their instrument through college and end up being an instructor."

If you'd like to learn more about the NGU String Project or make a donation to help grow the program, visit ngu.edu/string-project.php.





Miracle Hill
MINISTRIES

RECOVERY Program

By Mary Jane Clayton

It has been my honor to volunteer with Miracle Hill Ministries for several years now. Miracle Hill does an incredible job of providing a variety of services to adults and children in crisis, meeting their physical needs while guiding them toward more stable lives and always toward Jesus Christ. I have been involved with several of their initiatives, but working with Renewal and the Overcomers Center especially touches my heart.

Renewal and Overcomers are residential recovery programs that treat individuals battling life-dominating drug and alcohol addiction. Addiction, an “equal opportunity” disease, affects far too many families right here in our community. These men and women represent all ages and stages, races and religions. They come from homes of plenty or poverty and ones filled with love or scarred by abuse. Renewal is a 24-week-long program specifically designed for women; the men’s Overcomers program runs a bit longer at 27 weeks. All participants go through a biblical adaptation of the twelve-step program, offering group and individual counseling, Bible study, education, and life skills classes. Their goal is to graduate, move into transitional housing for additional support, and then live independently and remain addiction-free.

The culmination of so many months of hard work and prayer is Graduation Day, which occurs every month for those who have successfully completed all facets of their treatment. It is a Spirit-filled evening of worship kicked off with robust singing by the Renewal or Overcomers choir, followed by the graduates publicly sharing their heartfelt testimonies. And since all

celebrations *must* include food, that’s where I pitch in.

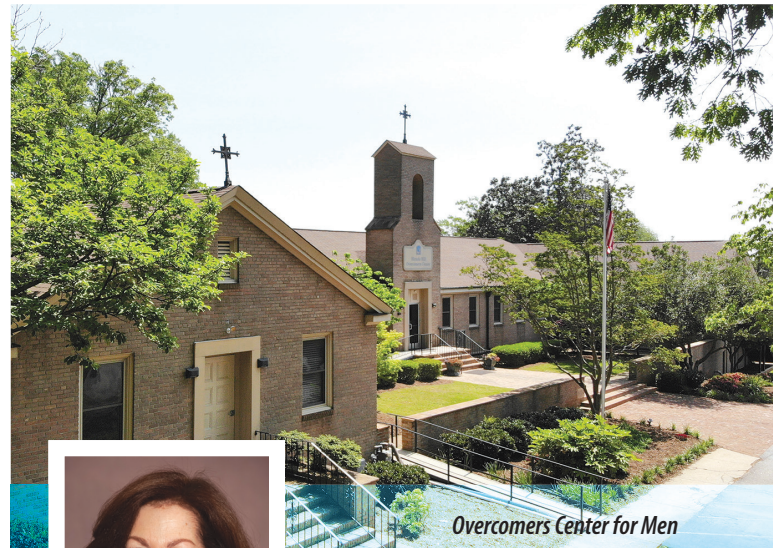
Our church sponsors four Miracle Hill graduation receptions each year: two for Overcomers and two for Renewal. These celebrations rely on generous monetary donations from our congregation as well as a team of volunteers to prepare or purchase food and beverages, and another team to serve at graduation. And some folks just show up to mingle, encouraging and celebrating right alongside Program guests and their loved ones.

Helping with Miracle Hill Renewal and Overcomers graduations is such a blessing. For me, it’s also personal. My brother had a 20-year love affair with heroin but successfully kicked it; a friend’s son is spending his life in prison because of drug use; and several of my friends and my children’s friends have died from drug overdoses. I am convinced the Lord prepared my heart to serve in this way, to be salt and light, hands and feet.

What interests you? What are your talents or gifts? What life experiences reshaped your priorities? How can the Lord use you

to support the ministries of Miracle Hill? You can volunteer at a homeless shelter or with the foster care ministry, become a mentor to a Renewal or Overcomers graduate, donate food or clothing, or serve in various other ways. If you’d like to learn more, please visit MiracleHill.org/FirstPres.

Transforming the heart of the city, one action at a time!



Overcomers Center for Men



Mary Jane Clayton



Volunteers at an Overcomers Graduation

#FPCFollowMe

Transforming the Heart of the City, One **DISCIPLE** at a Time

Over the last year, the Life Connections Committee has taken Christ's Great Commission to heart and asked, "What does it look like to intentionally build a disciple-making culture at FPC?" In their book, *The Church As Movement*, authors JR Woodward and Dan White write, "Before we think about concrete ways that God might have us be a blessing to the neighborhood, we must see that our greatest gift is our life together, our interdependent love-filled community."

Authentic community embodying the gospel has always been God's design for His church. That's because in gospel-centered community, members form a covenant partnership around their new identity in Christ. Loved and forgiven people love and forgive others. Cherished and redeemed people cherish and redeem others. A love like this can't help but grow and multiply.

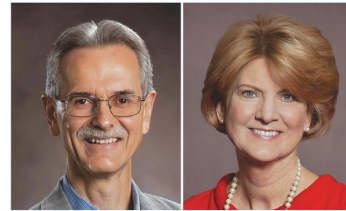
We are a church on mission to make disciples in 2021 and beyond! The

Life Connections Committee (pictured below) welcomes you to a new series of messages on discipleship and a discipling culture. Watch for #FPCFollowMe in the *GrapeVine* newsletter and on our website as we discover how Jesus formed his own disciples.

Come discover what it means to be a disciple where you live, work, and play!



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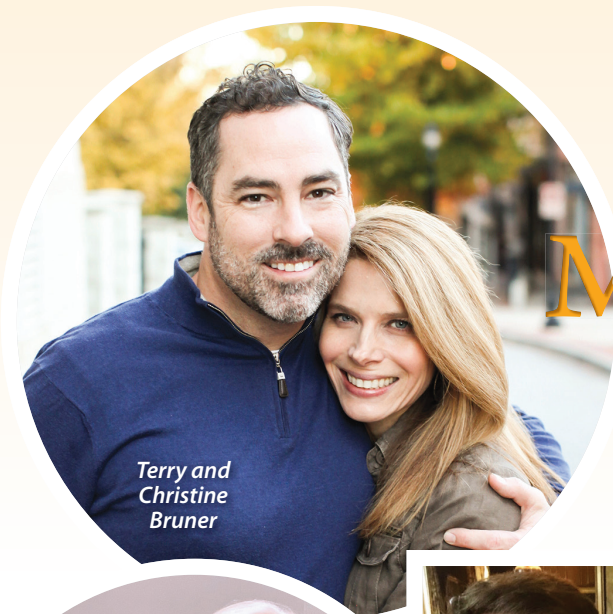


Kent Barber
Mark Massingill
Russell Guest



Erin Brackbill
Heidi Wright
John Bomar

Re|engage MARRIAGE Ministry



Terry and
Christine
Bruner



Mike and
Meredith
Roddey



Jason and
Jeanette
Terry



Todd and
Claire Ripley

Re|engage is a marriage enrichment ministry that equips and discipless couples to grow in their walk with Christ. With the heavy demands of career and family life, it is so easy to put our marriages on “autopilot” and expect that everything will go fine. But here’s the bottom line: Marriage is a big deal to God, and there is a world of difference between a marriage that simply survives and one that thrives!

Our first Re|engage ministry was a huge success! Over a period of 16 weeks, 54 couples met in small groups to learn how to apply the gospel to everyday life in our marriages. Take a look at what some of the couples had to say about their time in Re|engage:

“I loved this time in Re|engage with my spouse each week. The people in our small group have become our good friends.”

“We learned that a good marriage doesn’t just happen. Each of us must actively pursue the other as we dig into Scripture to see what it says about God’s design for marriage.”

“We definitely grew closer to Christ while growing closer to one another. It was a remarkable 16 weeks!”

“My husband and I now end each day in prayer.”

“Re|engage has given us a common language so that we know how to better communicate with one another.”

“My wife and I now have a deeper appreciation for how God uses marriage to make us more like Him.”

Each fall, FPC hopes to offer Re|engage by zoom and in person. Watch for more information in the coming months about how you can engage with Re|engage!

Reaching the HEART of a COMMUNITY through its CHILDREN

By Beth Simmons



In 2010, First Pres sensed a leading as a congregation to become more intentional and more deeply involved in the community beyond our church walls. One way we did this was investing ourselves in the Judson community, just two miles from our church campus. We established a partnership with Hollis Academy, a public Title 1 elementary school in the Judson neighborhood, where 99 percent of students receive free and reduced lunches. What better way to reach the heart of a community than through the lives of its children?

We have implemented a variety of programs at the school. Room parents in every classroom assist the teachers and get to know the



students. Mentors and Reading Buddies establish relationships with children in need of a role model in their lives. Our “Feed the Children” program sends food home with 111 students every weekend throughout the school year. Our “Refresh” ministry provides homemade treats for teachers once a month to encourage them and let them know that we support them and are grateful for them.

Each Christmas, we host the Hollis Christmas Store at a neighborhood church where parents are invited to come and shop for their children’s Christmas gifts. These gifts have been donated by generous members of our congregation based on a wish list from each child. Every spring, members of FPC also help out with the Hollis Carnival, which raises money for the school’s PTA. We provide emergency assistance (clothes, furniture, appliances, etc.) when the school’s social worker determines that a family is in crisis.

Through these programs and many others, we have been able to build strong relationships with teachers, administrators, students, and families. The students at Hollis are our community’s children, and we have been given the opportunity to

be a part of their lives—to share with them what the love of God looks like. As Hollis Principal Sofia Tsambounieris explains, “The success of a school is measured by the positive differences it makes for the children academically, socially, and emotionally. The greatest impact made is when we educate the *whole child*.” We pray boldly that the hope of God will capture their hearts and that through them, and their future leadership, the Judson community will be transformed.

The South Carolina School Boards Association presented FPC with the *Champions for Public Education* award this year for our work at Hollis Academy. In their nomination for this award, Greenville County Schools explained that our church’s partnership with Hollis has “resulted in better meeting students’ needs, encouraging parent engagement in the school and community, and supporting staff so they are better able to focus on teaching.” We would like to thank the hundreds of First Pres members who have given their time and resources to faithfully serve the children at Hollis. Our hope is that other churches will sense the call to get involved in other Title 1 schools in Greenville, transforming the heart of the city in a powerful way.

Focusing on our NEIGHBORS

By Keith Groce

Acceptance Letters!



One of the things I love about Neighborhood Focus is the clear ability to see Kingdom impact moving through a whole community right here in our backyard.

A great example is Neighborhood Focus's work with the Cruz family. For many years, Ofelia's boys, Javier and Emanuel, attended our Afterschool, Friday Club, and Summer Enrichment Programs, initially as elementary and middle school students and then as high school interns. Later, Ofelia's sister Racquel began sending her daughters, Valeria and Daniela; they also have now literally grown up at Neighborhood Focus. Most recently, Racquel's cousin Angelina began bringing her daughters, Jocelin and Sarai.

Neighborhood Focus welcomed this extended family into our ministry of hope, and in turn, these families have adopted Neighborhood Focus and become champions for our cause to empower the next generation of at-risk youth through Christ-centered

enrichment opportunities. Along the way, the Neighborhood Focus staff has shared directly in the joys of baptisms, school plays, soccer games, family meals, quinceañeras, and graduations.

And the staff has been right there during the most difficult times as well. In late 2019, 17-year-old Jocelin began having headaches and couldn't shake whatever was causing her problem. Eventually she ended up in the hospital with a serious case of meningitis and the diagnosis of a brain tumor. The prognosis was not good. Jocelin encountered complications after a first surgery, but she fought courageously and persevered. The family showed incredible grit and

resiliency as they leaned hard on their faith and a support community that included Neighborhood Focus to get them through those dark months. By God's grace, Jocelin not only survived the initial ordeal and two brain surgeries, but recently received acceptance letters to USC, Furman, and Spartanburg Methodist College.

As Angelina shared with Neighborhood Focus, "I am grateful to God for the opportunity He gave to my daughter in 2019 to live. She was between life and death and now she can share her testimony. I do not wish the experience we went through on anyone, but God is good and merciful. He loves my daughter and has great plans for her, and now she has been accepted to the school that she always wanted to attend. It is a huge happiness for my daughter because despite everything, she continued to work hard in her studies and make up for lost time. God gives us tests to see how strong we are in our faith. I have always told my daughters that with faith and hard work, everything is possible through God."



Jocelin and Sarai at the Neighborhood Focus Fall Family Picnic at Glory Ridge, October 2020

Thanksgiving Grace



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Most of us prefer to hide our mistakes and sins from society. Of course we know that none of us is perfect, but we still don't want our shame hanging out on a line in the front yard for all to see. Yet when a parent has had a child removed from the home and placed in foster care, that is what happens. It cannot be hidden. The child is no longer there. The mistakes or needs of the family are on exhibit for all to see.

To tell you the truth, I had never looked at foster care from the eyes of the biological parent before this past fall. My assumption was that this parent must have "done something wrong" and caused the necessity of the removal. This can certainly be the case, but not always. In fact, physical or sexual abuse situations make up less than 7 percent of the cases in which children are removed from their families.

In November, First Pres partnered with Fostering Great Ideas to host a Thanksgiving meal for children in foster care and their biological

families. Let me explain. These are children who have been living with foster parents for a myriad of reasons—and who, in some cases, were placed in different foster homes than their siblings. This event allowed them to sit down with their siblings, their mom and/or dad, and even some grandparents. The parents enjoyed the time with their children, had family photos taken, and were served a very special Thanksgiving lunch on china dishes, with cloth napkins and silverware. They were given respect.

In conversations with each family, we learned some of the reasons their children were placed in the system. In one family, the mom lost her job during COVID, the dad left, and then the mom needed treatment for depression. She loves her children but didn't have any family support,

so the children were placed in foster care. She's followed all the steps to get them back, but it's an uphill battle.

Another dad has a drug addiction. He needed to go into rehab after his son was born. He wants to be involved in his son's life and is trying. He's having to prove himself.

These are not people who physically harmed their children. They want to be good parents. And they were incredibly humbled to be here, receiving the Thanksgiving blessing of a meal and time with their children.

Those of us who served were also blessed. We had the opportunity to encourage them, pray for them, and give them this memory. We hope this will be an annual event for other families in similar situations.

References: *Speakupnow.org, Cafo.org*





Doubly Blessed!

By Karen King

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted us all in one way or another. From parents learning the new normal of working from home and navigating schooling changes, to homebound seniors dealing with loneliness and fear, people faced new and incredible challenges. The First Pres Children's Ministry found creative ways to overcome our own challenges while continuing to support our families and finding new outreach opportunities.

At the beginning of quarantine last March, our children mailed handwritten letters to the homebound members of First Pres. The letters were such a blessing that several recipients responded with thank you cards to the children. This sparked a brand new "pen pal ministry," where children and homebound members built special friendships entirely through the mail.

Each year the Children's Ministry looks forward to the Easter Angels program, when children and families visit residents at the Greenville Summit and spend time with them, sharing cards and sweet treats. Because of the pandemic, visits couldn't happen, but the residents still received gifts of handmade pictures, cards, and goodies. We were grateful to be able to continue this outreach despite the unique circumstances of the season.

Many First Pres families participated in our Family Missions month in July by serving our homebound and elderly in the community with yard work, errands, house cleaning, phone calls, grocery deliveries, and more. This was truly a "bounce-back blessing" moment—these families wanted to be a blessing to those in need but ended up "doubly blessed" in return. These transforming moments were amazing intergenerational opportunities that the children won't soon forget.

Our Family Missions also cheered up homebound members of our church and community by packing and delivering over 100 treat bags to share the sentiment "You are loved and not forgotten!" The response from those who received the gift bags was both incredible and humbling.

The smallest gestures can truly make the biggest difference—in warming hearts, transforming lives, and sharing the love of Christ with our neighbors.





Finding our **ROOTS** in the **WORD**



REV. CHARLIE BUCHANAN

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In His final words to His disciples, Jesus instructs that they go out and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey Christ as Lord. These disciples had journeyed with Christ for years, watching Him minister, perform miracles, and tell stories. They shared laughs with Him and also went through painful and uncertain times together. By the end of His earthly ministry, Christ had disciplined these followers to a point where He knew, whether they believed it or not, that they would be capable of making more disciples.

This past year has been unbelievably difficult in a variety of ways. As the Student Ministry closed its doors for in-person meetings, our team was forced to get creative and seek out new ways to meet, fellowship, and disciple students. Our desire is not for this discipleship to be the end goal, but that our students will be emboldened to go and disciple others throughout the city. God blessed the ministry this year as students met via Zoom, engaged with videos from our leaders, and submitted questions for our podcast. We witnessed incredible growth in many students' faith during this difficult time.

One of the most successful avenues to emerge for discipleship is a new program called *The Core Book Project*. This is intended to be an endeavor for senior high students to choose one of six books of the Bible—three Old



Testament and three New Testament—to study for an entire year. The First Presbyterian Foundation has generously granted the funds to provide each student with a commentary and an ESV Illuminated Journal. Students work their way through each book, diving deeper into the context, application, and tools utilized for biblical study.

As one student explains, “Before I had *The Core Book Project*, I sometimes struggled to figure out what to read in the Bible. Looking at the Bible can be a bit overwhelming. *The Core Book Project* gave me a place to start and focus, as well as set guidelines on how to read and study. It’s a great guide for me and my friends in our relationship with God.”

The Core Book Project has already proven to be a fruitful launching pad for students to feel more equipped in handling the magnitude of God’s Word. We look forward to helping them gain an understanding of the resources available to help them.

As we continue into 2021, the Student Ministry eagerly anticipates seeing God do amazing things. If your 6th to 12th grade student wants to get involved in Roots, we would love the opportunity to help foster them in their faith.

Got Questions?

Students can submit questions and have them addressed during our lessons by visiting [slido.com](https://www.slido.com) and entering the specific code for their age group.

Junior High: 30380

Senior High: 56160

Roots Weekly E-newsletter

Sign up for the Roots Student Ministry weekly e-newsletter by contacting Autumn Clark at aclark@firstpresgreenville.org or 565.0947.

Transforming the *SPIRITUAL HEART* of the City



TOM ROE

Head of School/Chief
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Vardry McBee, the father of Greenville, let it be known that three things were necessary for the city to grow: churches, schools, and law. In the 1800s, he and his family gave land for five churches in the downtown area, which geographically form a cross. At the heart of the cross is First Presbyterian Church. And since its formation in 1952, First Presbyterian Academy (FPA) has been a mission of First Presbyterian Church. The school joined efforts with Shannon Forest Christian School in 2019 to create a broader outreach for K2 through 12th grade.

FPA's evangelical, or missional, focus reaches far beyond the walls of the church and school. For example, less than 8 percent of the student population attends First Presbyterian Church; the other 92 percent attend other denominational churches or no church at all, yet those students are influenced daily by FPA's Christian values.

Why Christian education? Christian parents considering the educational setting they wish for their children look at several main factors. First, parents seek an educational institution that focuses upon the Lord and the core teachings found in His Word. Next, they seek an environment that will guide and nurture

their child emotionally and spiritually. And finally, they desire a small classroom setting so that each child receives the necessary attention.

The long-term outcome of our efforts is stated well in the findings of *Walking the Path: The Religious Lives of Young Adults in North America*. Christian school graduates differ from public school graduates in three key ways:

- Christian school graduates report a significantly higher belief in orthodox Christian teachings, such as the belief that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and the belief that the Bible is infallible in matters of faith and practice.
- Christian school graduates are much more likely to pray, read the Bible, attend church regularly, and tithe.
- Christian school graduates are less likely to switch religious affiliation or turn from the faith of their childhood.

The mission of Christian education is to instill an attitude of service in the community and to equip students to be transforming influences in the world for Jesus Christ. FPA is reaching 530 students in K2 through 12th grade, and this number does not even reflect our extended family. As we work in God's



EVERY STUDENT MATTERS...EVERY MOMENT COUNTS!



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN ACADEMY K3-12TH GRADE • VISIT TODAY!

vineyard daily, we are planting seeds that will transform our community and the world beyond.

What sets FPA apart? We are a Christian community dedicated to providing a premier college preparatory education, grounded in a biblical worldview, which develops character in students from varied backgrounds for a lifetime of learning and service. The school's outstanding faculty of believers works to educate the children that God places in our hands. The home is the child's first teacher, and the school seeks to bolster and carry the student to the next level. In addition to an outstanding educational curriculum, FPA offers students opportunities to grow spiritually in their personal knowledge and relationship with God. They are encouraged to seek God's plan for their lives. The solid biblical foundation provided in Bible classes

is also threaded through a Christian worldview in the core curriculum.

A variety of Christian outreach opportunities in the form of missional activities are organized throughout the academic year. Activities include mission projects with the Greer Relief Food Bank; the Bridges Program, an outreach to a local assisted living facility; Impact Days in the community to assist various organizations in need of physical support; "Toys for Tots" to bring Christmas joy to less fortunate children; the Veterans Day Program; the Key Club at Washington Center; the Senior Mission Trip; and the Choir Ministry. For the Greer Relief Food Bank, our students collected 600 cans of food, 150 packs of diapers, 350 toiletry items, and 100 packs of paper towels. They also collected money to supply two families with enough fuel to get them through the winter.

Our faculty and staff take the words of our Lord seriously in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20):

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This year we are ministering to 530 students, but we plan to grow to reach 600 students at our two locations, the Downtown Campus and the Shannon Forest Campus. These students are being transformed as we minister to them daily. And in turn, Christian education teaches them to serve others and equips them to be a transforming element within our community and the world beyond. Our vision statement sums up the core beliefs of First Presbyterian Academy:

*We strive to **IGNITE** a passion for excellence in learning and **INFUSE** God's Word as a lens for learning, so that our students may grow to **IMPACT** the world for Jesus Christ.*

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About the Cover Artist: Edie Fagan is a Salem, South Carolina, based painter working in watercolor and acrylic. Her award-winning paintings have appeared in newspapers and

magazines and are treasured in clients' homes nationwide. Prints of her charming streetscapes, abstracts, and dog portraits can be purchased on her Etsy shop or at ediefagan.com.

Operation CHRISTMAS

By the Congregational Care Team

Rev. Stan Johnson, Tammy Burkhalter,
and Susan Stewart



The need to stay connected to one another has never been greater than during the COVID pandemic, especially for our homebound members who were more isolated than ever before. Yet, despite the challenges, First Presbyterian volunteers stepped up to bring some cheer to over 100 of our senior saints!

Operation Christmas provided some holiday joy with a bag of goodies and reassurance that the FPC church family loves them and misses them. We received numerous "thank yous" from recipients, who expressed their delight in this surprise "act of kindness and love!"

The bags were prepared and delivered by loving volunteers of our church, including members of the Diaconate and Pastoral Visitation Ministers.

The Congregational Care Team wishes to extend a sincere **thank you** to all of those who worked together to show Christ's love to our homebound FPC family, and we want to assure all of our covenant partners that we care about YOU! We plan to continue outreach projects throughout the year, and we invite you to get involved! To volunteer or for more information, contact Tammy Burkhalter at tburkhalter@firstpresgreenville.org or 565.0943.