

The Bell Tower

First Presbyterian Church Happenings

December MMXXV

News from Certified Transitional Pastor (CTP) Search Team

Thank you to all the Covenant Partners who were a part of the weekend church assessment (Nov. 14-16) as conducted by our ECO national leader, Rev. Dr. Dorington Little. We enjoyed meeting Pastor Dori and his wife, Elizabeth, in focus groups where we identified and shared strengths and challenges of our church. The feed back collected by Pastor Dori will be part of a SWOT analysis and presented to Session and our congregation in early January, 2026. On that January weekend Pastor Dori will be joined by his colleague, the Rev. Dr. William Enns, to conduct a 1.5 day Leadership Structure and Dynamics Seminar with our Session.

In November 16th worship we also appreciated the message from the pulpit by Pastor Dori entitled "Who is in the deep with Jesus". Our scriptures were taken from Isaiah 6:1-5, and Luke 5:1-11. If you were unable to attend in person you will enjoy listening from our website archived services.

As led by ECO, our goal is to discern what God's plan is for the future of First Presbyterian Church and to develop a unifying vision that will help us to further the kingdom of our God Almighty.

If you have questions or concerns about this process please contact any CTP Search Team member: Sam Dailey, Ericka Dershimer, Tim Eckhardt, Gail Fay, or Jill Jones.



Sunday, December 14 all are invited for breakfast, a play, and a report on "Pay It Forward" projects. This event will take place in **Westminster Chapel**. A light breakfast will be served by the parlor at **9:30 AM**. Following breakfast, our children, youth, and adults will present the Christmas play "**Voices of Bethlehem**" in Westminster Chapel. After the play, we will hear from our groups about the projects they completed through "Pay It Forward."

Please join us for this special time of fellowship and celebration.

DECEMBER NURSERY SCHEDULE

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|-------|-------------------------------|
| 12/7 | Matt & Kelly Minner |
| 12/14 | Ericka Dershimer & Barb Deist |
| 12/21 | Jamie/Megan/Josh Ickes |
| 12/28 | Michelle Harris & Sue Wilson |

Greeters Schedule

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|-------|-----------------|
| 12/7 | Terri Clark |
| 12/14 | Becky Bray |
| 12/21 | Michelle Harris |
| 12/28 | John Russell |

Men's Breakfast is gathering
December 13 at 8:00 a.m. All
men are welcome!



FPC family,
Thank you for ALL the birthday wishes and cards.
They were very much appreciated.
Love in Christ, Helen Ohle

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|-------------------|-------|
| Michelle Harris | 12/2 |
| Tom Mentch | 12/3 |
| Treasa Gruber | 12/5 |
| Drew Dershimer | 12/6 |
| Aldra Ritter | 12/10 |
| Kaye Williams | 12/10 |
| Jackie Grisetti | 12/17 |
| Bob Ohr | 12/18 |
| Jane Loutzenhiser | 12/19 |
| Phil Godfrey | 12/20 |
| Randy Curtis | 12/20 |
| Gail Fay | 12/29 |
| Kendal Ohr | 12/30 |
| Brook Truby | 12/31 |

Youth

| | |
|------------------|-------|
| Brayden Straw | 12/4 |
| Dominic Deist | 12/16 |
| Savannah Johnson | 12/20 |
| Henry Minner | 12/21 |

WANT TO HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE but feel short on time? Here are a few suggestions from your *Congregational Life & Fellowship Committee* that will use less than an hour of your time:

- **CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE:** There is still a bit of time (until Dec. 7) to grab a tag from the giving tree and select a gift for an underprivileged local person. It's not hard - the tag tells what is needed and you're going shopping anyway, right? Dan Baker will answer any of your questions on this.
- **HAT/MITTENS:** While you're out and about this season buy a hat or gloves or mittens for someone that is unable to make such a purchase. Nothing fancy. Any size. No need to be gift-wrapped. The warm items will be collected on the tree in the downstairs Sunday School area. After the holidays the clothing will be distributed to schools and other local needy persons.
- **BE A CHURCH GREETER:** Sign up for a date into the future of 2026 and use a half-hour of your time before worship to meet and greet our members and guests. What a great way to start your Sunday! Karen Patterson is the contact person for this ministry.
- **INVITE SOMEONE TO CHURCH or SUNDAY SCHOOL:** This wouldn't take much time or effort on your part but it could make a life-changing difference for someone who needs to know the Lord! I Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." John 13:35 "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."



CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING

The Mission Committee has decided to designate St. Paul Homes and Shenango Homes in New Wilmington the recipients of the Christmas Joy Offering. The money will go towards helping the residents who no longer have funds available for their expenses. You can contribute by using the special envelopes for the Christmas Offering or use an envelope in the pew and marking it for the Christmas Offering. We will collect throughout Advent. Thank you for your generosity.

Pen from Ben...

As you read this, we have entered the season of Advent—a time of preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord and reflecting on Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy each week.

This Advent, we also pause to remember two anniversaries that shape our life as a congregation.

The first is the “official birthday” of FPC. On December 29, 1825, the people who would become First Presbyterian Church held their first worship service. We emerged from the old Hillside congregation—often called simply the “congregation of Salem”—and eventually grew into our own church community.

Those early years were filled with change and movement. The first members trusted God, trusted each other, and adapted as needed. Their willingness to follow where God led allowed the church to take root and grow. Advent reminds us of that same hopeful trust.

The second anniversary is one year since the passing of Rev. Dobi. Like our founding members, we too are walking through change—change we didn’t ask for, but must face together. Leadership changes are never easy, but one thing remains constant: **Jesus**. From our earliest days until now, He has never stopped leading His Church.

In seasons of transition, we must learn to adapt—not the Gospel, but *how* we share it. Every person receives things differently. Scripture shows this: Paul shaped his message to fit his listeners, yet the heart of his message always stayed the same—Jesus.

We have already experienced a great deal of change this year, and God has carried us through it. Advent reminds us that our **hope** is not in our programs or our preferences but in **Christ alone**. **Jesus** calls us to follow Him, obey His commands, and love one another deeply.

This Advent, I invite us to focus less on programs and more on relationships—real, biblical relationships where we share life together, encourage one another, and build a community shaped by the hope, peace, love, and joy of Christ.

Those first believers 200 years ago didn’t have programs; they had each other. That same kind of shared life is what has carried us through this past year, and it is what will carry us into the next.

May we commit ourselves to building meaningful relationships—both within our church family and with those outside our walls—so that the true meaning of Advent can be seen in Greenville, PA.

Hope, peace, love, and joy to you all this Advent season—Pastor Ben

200th Anniversary

The Bicentennial Committee was thrilled with the congregational response as well as the response from former staff and other invited guests to the events that were held the weekend of October 18-19 but a number of those invited guests did respond either by letter or phone conversation with a committee member. The committee would like to share some of those responses:

From **Bob and Florence Funk**: Rev. Funk served as Senior Pastor from August 1988-January 1996. They currently reside in Grand Rapids, MI.

9/30/25--Dear Members of First Presbyterian Church,

Thank you for your invitation to the upcoming Bicentennial Celebration events in Greenville. What a wonderful opportunity to celebrate God's grace and blessings!

Florence and I, unfortunately, cannot travel to Pennsylvania that week – our daughter, Sarah, along with husband and 2 daughters will be visiting us that entire week. That's their once-a-year trek from North Carolina to Michigan. Our whole family, including Nathan and his wife and 3 children have much planned here for that special week.

Our hearts will be with you, even if our physical presence cannot be. Perhaps we can visit another time.

Thanks again for inviting us. May God richly bless the Bicentennial Anniversary and the next century of ministry in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sincerely, Bob Funk

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**Doug and Lynn McElree Portz**: A note was received from Doug and Lynn. Lynn grew up in this congregation as a daughter of Dr. and Mrs. (Gerry) McElree and both she and her husband, Doug, are ordained Presbyterian ministers. They now reside in Gibsonia, PA:

September 16, 2025: Dear Bicentennial Committee Members,

Thank you for your invitation to attend events for the Bicentennial Anniversary of First Presbyterian Church. Unfortunately, we are unable to attend. We have many treasured memories of the wonderful people through the years who have faithfully served the Lord in so many ways, and we are grateful for their wisdom and care for our family.

We continue to pray that First Church will be blessed with a future filled with the hope and joy of our Lord.

Lynn and Doug



## Remarks from the Bridge Pastor:

I wanted to share some things with you all about what it means to be ECO Church that are different from being a PCUSA Church.

- The emphasis of Session from a board room mentality to an Upper Room mentality
  - This means that the session is going back to it's Biblical roots of being spiritual leaders and not just doing business
  - Elders are to be shepherds of the flock alongside the pastor
  - The Biblical qualities of an elder are to be adhered to because of the nature of what they are doing—Spiritual Leaders
  - Elders do not represent the congregation at Session. They are voted on because they are to be “elder” or mature in the faith. That means they are able to discern the will of God for this congregation and lead them accordingly
  - ECO recommends having 7 Elders for churches but only requires that you must have at least 4 plus a pastor
- Congregational votes—the only times congregations vote
  - Calling/Dissolving a Pastor Call
    - Calling—terms of call and Salary (this is the only time the congregation determines a Pastors Salary—Budgets are voted on by Session)
    - Dissolving—asking a pastor to leave but only after consulting with presbytery
  - Buying or selling of property
  - Taking on a debt for a building project
  - Changing of the By-Laws
  - Approve the calling of Elders and Deacons
- Presbytery Staff
  - The staff of the presbytery are not full time employees of ECO they are all full time pastors who do the presbytery stuff part time. PCUSA had full time staff in every aspect of the denomination.
  - ECO allows for churches to determine for themselves what is best for them but also highly recommend ways of doing things from the presbytery level.

If you would like to know more or have questions please feel free to come and speak with me.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STATED MEETING OF SESSION

The regular meeting of Session gathered on Monday, October 13, 2025 6:00 PM.

Pastor Ben led us in a memorial service honoring Pastor David Dobi.

Call to Worship: Psalm 100: 5

Hymn: Blessed Assurance

Scripture Readings: 1 Peter 5: 1-4, John 10: 7-15

Brief Reflections, Portrait Dedication, Prayer of Dedication

Hymn: In Christ Alone

Benediction

### Upcoming Dates

\*Alternative Christmas 12/7/25

\*Session Meeting December 8

\* Sunday, December 14, 2025: An All-Church Breakfast during the Sunday School hour

\*Messiah December 14 1:30 PM

\*Christmas Service December 25

\*Bicentennial Sunday December 28

### Certified Transitional Pastor Search Team: (Gail Fay and Jill Jones)

#### Information:

1. The CTP Search Team is appreciative of the opportunity to serve and is grateful for your support and encouragement.

2. Sign-ups for focus groups with Rev. Enns and Rev. Little are available for Saturday, November 15th and after worship on November 16th. Please encourage Covenant Partners to join in this important opportunity for our future.

3. The ECO led Focus Group designated for Session is scheduled for Friday, November 14th. Dinner will be served at 5:30 pm in Calvin Hall with focus group meeting to follow. We aim for full participation.

4. Payment by electronic transfer of funds has been arranged for current obligation to the ECO national leaders. Future payments will be made monthly as they become due.

5. Please mark your 2026 calendars for January 9-10-11 weekend for our Leadership Seminar with ECO national leaders. Specifics to follow.

### Christian Education/Youth: (Dan Baker and Laura Stitt)

#### Information:

1. Sunday, December 14, 2025: An All-Church Breakfast during the Sunday School hour in Calvin Hall to talk about this year's Christmas Pay It Forward Project and enjoy a short Christmas play. The play will include both children and adults from all FPC ministries.

2. Bibles for our third-grade children have been delivered. The date to present these Bibles during Sunday Worship will soon be decided.

#### Personnel: (Gail Fay and Sam Dailey)

#### Information:

On Sunday, November 2, 2025 a congregational meeting was held to approve dissolving the call of Reverend Ben Claypool as Associate Pastor and affirming his role as Bridge Pastor as approved by Session.

#### Social Concerns: (Tim Eckhardt and Jack Hittle)

We have made arrangements for the church to volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army during the month of November. The schedule I agreed to take is the weekend of Thanksgiving. November 26, 28 & 29

#### Property Committee:

Electrical upgrade: We are awaiting finalization of this project. The new connection to Penn Power is complete and the front lawn has been repaired.

#### Deacon Liaison Report – Pertinent Information

\*Firmed up plans for the Deacon Brunch on November 9, 2025 after worship service.

\*Discussed upcoming December responsibilities: Messiah, Christmas Eve Worship Service. Plans will be firmed up at the Deacon meeting on December 7

The next Deacon Meeting will be December 7, 2025 at 8:30 am in the Church Parlor.

#### Approved Motions:

**(msp)** motion Linda, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sam

Reinstate the Klingensmith's as Active Covenant Partners, Chuck and Betsy

To approve Michele Groover as voting Elder at the National Gathering

**(msp)** motion David, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sam, to approved minutes of the Special Meeting of the Congregation 11/2/2025

**(msp)** (coming out of committee) motion is to remove fifty-one (51) persons from our Active Covenant Partner membership roll.

#### FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 323 Main Street, Greenville, PA. 16125 CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Called to Order 11-2-25, at 11:48 am, a Quorum was declared by CLERK OF SESSION, James Miller. Pastor Ben offered scripture from Ephesians 3, beginning at verse 14. Prayer followed scripture.

MODERATOR status was given to Clerk of Session, James Miller, by PASTOR BEN CLAYPOOL.

Gail Fay presented the subject MOTION which was: To dissolve the current call of Rev. Ben Claypool as Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Greenville (PA), and to affirm the Session's decision regarding his future position at the church as Bridge Pastor. Motion seconded by Randy Curtis.

Discussion followed after which the MODERATOR called for a voice vote on the Motion on the floor in favor of dissolving Pastor Ben's call as Associate Pastor. Motion passed

Moderator offered a Prayer. Pastor Ben was invited back into meeting. MOTION to adjourn presented and seconded at 12:24 pm. Pastor Ben closed meeting in prayer.