

# THE Penn Street Letter

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FORT WORTH

DECEMBER 2025 / VOLUME 25, NUMBER 12

## ADVENT 2025 at First Pres

*Advent is full of opportunities for connection, celebration, and worship at First Presbyterian Church Fort Worth.  
We hope our church will be a place for respite, reflection, and renewal this season.  
We can't wait to celebrate with you! For a complete schedule of activities and events, visit [fpcf.org/advent](https://fpcf.org/advent).*

### LUNCH & ADVENT WREATH WORKSHOP

**Sunday, November 30**

Bring the whole family for a special day of fellowship and creativity on Sunday, November 30! After worship, enjoy a free All-Church Lunch, hosted by the Stewardship Committee as a heartfelt thank you for your generous 2026 pledges. Lunch begins at 11:30 a.m. in the Great Hall. Then, stick around for our Intergenerational Advent Wreath Workshop from 12:15-1:30 p.m. (come and go after you eat lunch). This hands-on experience is the perfect way to prepare for the Advent season together. All materials are provided, and all ages are invited! Questions? Contact Ann Nielsen ([anielsen@fpcf.org](mailto:anielsen@fpcf.org) or 817.335.1231, ext. 232).

### WEEKLY ADVENT WREATH LIGHTINGS ON ZOOM

**Sundays, November 30, December 7, 14, and 21 at 6 p.m.**

Celebrate the season of Advent from home! Each Sunday during Advent at 6 p.m., First Pres clergy will host a virtual Advent wreath lighting on Zoom. Gather on Zoom with your own wreath at home for a brief time of reflection and prayer as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. Scan the QR code here to join the Zoom.



### ADVENT MIDDAY PRAYER SERVICES AND CONCERTS

**Wednesdays, December 3, 10, and 17, at 12 p.m.**

These 30-minute noon services in the Sanctuary include Scripture, music, prayer, and reflections by clergy on the spiritual impact of Advent as a season preparing us to celebrate Emmanuel - God with us.

Throughout the season of Advent, we invite you to pause in the middle of your week for our Advent Afternoon Organ Concerts. Following the Noon Advent service, each program offers 30 minutes of beautiful organ music in the Sanctuary, followed by a complimentary lunch and fellowship at 1 p.m. in the West Concourse.

- December 3: Ahreum Congdon
- December 10: Owen Reid
- December 17: Mina Choi

### FOLLOW THE STAR LIVE NATIVITY

**Sunday, December 14, at 5:30 p.m.**

Celebrate Advent at First Pres! Experience the wonder of a live nativity, then warm up with a cozy come-and-go dinner featuring grilled cheese and tomato soup under the Great Hall's covered entrance. All are welcome - don't miss this festive evening! Questions? Contact Ann Nielsen ([anielsen@fpcf.org](mailto:anielsen@fpcf.org) or 817.335.1231, ext. 232).

### MORAVIAN LOVEFEAST: DECEMBER 16

**Tuesday, December 16, at 6:30 p.m.**

The Moravian denomination introduced the service of a Lovefeast in 1727, a simple meal with song and prayer, to encourage Christian fellowship and love. All are invited to come enjoy an evening of dinner, music, praise, and fellowship in the Great Hall as we continue the tradition, hosted by Circles of Christ. RSVP using the QR code here.



*(continued on page 3)*

# Pastor's Letter



Dear friends,

We are entering a liturgically rich month for worship. The Sundays of Advent (November 30, December 7, 14, 21), Midday

Prayers on Wednesdays (December 3, 10, 17), the Moravian Love Feast (December 16), the Longest Night Service (December 21), Christmas Eve (December 24) and the first Sunday of Christmas (December 28) fill us with **Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love**.

During the seasons of Advent and Christmas, **Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love** will be the themes for preaching and singing. Each Sunday service in Advent and the Wednesday Midday Prayers will have at its

heart both scripture and a featured Christmas carol that takes us more deeply into the themes. Christmas Eve and the First Sunday of Christmas will bring all the themes together as we hear once again Luke's account of the birth of Christ and raise our voices in beloved carols.

May this month ahead be a rich time of worship that keeps us all grounded in the God's gifts of **Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love** as we celebrate Emmanuel - God with Us. Hope to see you in worship often in person or online.

God's peace to you,

*Michael*

## November Session Highlights

First Presbyterian Church's Session met on Sunday, November 16. Highlights from that meeting included the following items:

- Examination and approval of incoming elders
- Update from Michael Waschevski on the Stewardship campaign
- Heard a report from the Wellness Together Committee
- Received an update on the property purchase approved at the Congregational Meeting on Nov. 16
- Discussed and reviewed further action and information items from the Session Retreat

### First Presbyterian Church's Session

#### 2025 CLASS OF ELDERS

Brian Cunningham  
Jimmy DeFoor  
Mary Susan Farrar  
Vic Letbetter  
Linda Northern  
Lynda Richey  
Amy Ryan

#### 2026 CLASS OF ELDERS

Julia Bradley  
Al Comeaux  
Emily Hadley  
Janie Lesok  
Jane Mathis  
Andrew Michalove  
J.B. Smithson  
Brian Wharry

#### 2027 CLASS OF ELDERS

Mark Beasley  
Cesar Chavez  
Judith Kinser  
Ashli Smick  
Judy Stricklin  
Burch Waldron

## Submissions

Submissions for the next issue of the *Penn Street Letter* are due Wednesday, December 17. Submissions for the weekly *Penn Street Online* emailed newsletters are due the Wednesday prior to each week's issue. Have photos or a story idea you'd like to share? Scan the QR code here to submit!



## Follow Us

Do you follow First Pres on social media? Find us on the following sites and follow along for photos, reminders, encouragement, and more!



@firstpresfw



@firstpres\_fw



@fpcfww

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# ADVENT 2025

## at First Pres



### FORT WORTH OPERA CHRISTMAS CONCERT

**Saturday, December 20 at 2 p.m.**

As we enter the final days of Advent and draw closer to the joy of Christmas, we are delighted to welcome the Fort Worth Opera back to the Penn Street Arts Concert Series for a special afternoon of music and celebration in the Sanctuary. Their program, *Christmas & Carols*, blends the beauty of classical vocal artistry with the familiar melodies we cherish during this holy season. This festive concert will feature beloved carols, stirring arrangements, and seasonal favorites that invite us to pause, listen, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. It is a wonderful opportunity to experience the warmth of our sanctuary and the gift of great music. All are welcome!

### THE LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

**Sunday, December 21, at 6:30 p.m. in the Chapel and Zoom**

During Advent and Christmas, the church focuses on the happiness of receiving the Christ child into the world. Yet there are many among us for whom Christmas is a season of grief. This service allows us to name and acknowledge feelings of grief, sadness, or loss that may be present in this season. We'll come together for a moment of reflection for healing and self-care as we gather around Scripture, song, prayer, and acts of remembrance.

*First Pres Digital Ministry Offering:* The Longest Night Service is also being offered on Zoom for those who wish to participate in worship online. Online worshipers will be welcomed into this unique space and guided through the service by a First Pres staff member. Register using the QR code here or contact Eric Varnon (evarnon@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 244) to sign up to receive the secure Zoom link.



### FAMILY CAROLING: DECEMBER 22

**Monday, December 22, 5:45-8:30 p.m.**

Bring out those Christmas sweaters, jingle bells, and reindeer antlers! We will head out to sing carols at our homebound members' homes to bring them love and joy this season. 4th grade and older, may attend on their own.



**We can't wait to celebrate with you!**  
[fpcfw.org/advent](http://fpcfw.org/advent)

## Advent & Christmas Calendar

### 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: NOVEMBER 30

Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.  
All Church Thank You Lunch hosted by Stewardship, 11:30 a.m.  
All Ages Advent Wreath Workshop, 12:15 p.m.  
Zoom Advent Wreath Lighting, 6 p.m.



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 1:** Room in the Inn, 4 p.m.

### WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

Midday Prayer, 12 p.m.; Organ Concert, 12:30 p.m.; Lunch, 1 p.m.  
WOW (Worship on Wednesdays) Advent Worship, 5:30 p.m.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5:** Young Adult Christmas Gathering, 7 p.m.

### 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 7

Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.  
80th Annual Christmas Party for the Blind, 6 p.m.  
Zoom Advent Wreath Lighting, 6 p.m.



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 8:** Room in the Inn, 4 p.m.

### TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

PW Christmas Celebration Worship & Lunch, 10:30 a.m.  
Early Education Center Christmas Concert, 6 p.m.

### WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Midday Prayer, 12 p.m.; Organ Concert, 12:30 p.m.; Lunch, 1 p.m.  
WOW (Worship on Wednesdays) Advent Worship, 5:30 p.m.  
WOW Caroling at Downtown Health and Rehabilitation, 6:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13:** Annual Christmas Toy Store, 8 a.m.

### 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 14

Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.  
Follow the Star Live Nativity & Dinner, 5:30 p.m.  
Zoom Advent Wreath Lighting, 6 p.m.



### TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

Circles of Christ Moravian Lovefeast, 6:30 p.m.

### WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

Midday Prayer, 12 p.m.; Organ Concert, 12:30 p.m.; Lunch, 1 p.m.  
WOW (Worship on Wednesdays) Advent Worship, 5:30 p.m.  
Reunion Christmas Party (College & Young Adult), 5:30 p.m.

### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

Penn Street Arts: Fort Worth Opera Christmas Concert, 2 p.m.

### 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: DECEMBER 21

Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.  
Youth Christmas Parties at Art & Soul, 4:30 p.m.  
Zoom Advent Wreath Lighting, 6 p.m.  
The Longest Night Service, 6:30 p.m.



### MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

Room in the Inn, 4 p.m.  
Family Caroling, 5:45 p.m.

### CHRISTMAS EVE: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Christmas Eve Brunch at Community Crossroads, 10 a.m.  
Christmas Eve Worship at 12 noon, 5 p.m., 7 p.m., & 9 p.m.



### MERRY CHRISTMAS! DECEMBER 25 & DECEMBER 26

First Pres, including Community Crossroads  
& Early Education Center, closed

### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28

Morning Worship at 8, 9, and 11 a.m.

### MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

Wolf Creek Youth Ski Trip departs (December 29 through January 2)



# Be Inspired

## Order Christmas Poinsettias

### in Honor and Memory of Loved Ones

The First Pres Worship & Music Committee will place live poinsettia plants in the worship spaces from December 12-25. You may purchase a plant in honor or memory of loved ones by scanning the QR code here or by contacting



Deneice (dallen@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231) in the church office. Deadline is December 12. Cost is \$25 per plant. Plants may be taken home after worship on Sunday, December 28. Plants not picked up will be delivered to homebound members.

## Welcome Susan Whiteside, Parish Visitor Volunteer

While Parish Visitor Matt McGraw is out on leave following the birth of his child, First Pres member Susan Whiteside will serve on the Congregational Care team as a Parish Visitor. Susan was the co-leader of Stephen Ministry at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church in Austin for 16 years before moving to Fort Worth in 2022. She now volunteers in the Spiritual Care Department at Cook Children's Medical Center and in The Clothes Closet at Community Crossroads. She will serve in this role December 15-January 23.

Parish Visitors, as part of the Congregational Care team, spend time connecting with members who are ill, recovering from procedures, or otherwise have difficulty engaging in the full breadth of ministries of the church due to various limitations. This ministry is a great way for the church to stay connected with members throughout all life stages.

## Grief Group begins January 11

First Presbyterian Church is offering a six-week Grief Support Group on Sundays beginning Sunday, January 11, through Sunday, February 15, 2-3:30 p.m. in Room 102, led by the Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz. This group offers a supportive and encouraging space in which to experience God's presence, comfort, and strength. This group is free and open to members and friends of First Pres and the community. Visit [fpcfw.org/careandsupport](https://fpcfw.org/careandsupport) to register.

## First Pres Scholarships Return to Support Students in 2026-2027

We're thrilled to announce that First Pres will once again be offering scholarships for the upcoming 2026-2027 academic year! These scholarships aim to encourage and support:

- High school seniors graduating in Spring of 2026
- Individuals seeking to continue their educational journey

Scholarship applications will be available on the church website beginning January 5, 2026. Returning scholarship recipients will find a link to reapply. New applicants (or those reapplying with updated information) should use the link designated for new submissions and submit required documents. Application deadline is March 31, 2026.

All high school seniors who are members of the Youth Group, active participants of Community Crossroads, children of First Pres staff members, or any members seeking to support or continue their education are encouraged to apply.

Questions? Reach out to Marisa ([mpinon@fpcfw.org](mailto:mpinon@fpcfw.org)) or Susana ([sleon@fpcfw.org](mailto:sleon@fpcfw.org)) at 817.335.1231.

## Planning Ahead: First Pres Memorial Garden prices to increase January 1

Did you know First Pres offers a peaceful final resting place right here on our church grounds? Our Memorial Garden, located on the north side of the church facing Texas Street, provides three meaningful options for members and their families who choose cremation.

Now is a great time to plan ahead - for the first time, prices will increase on January 1, 2026, following a recent Session vote.

### Memorial Garden Options:

- **Scattering:** Ashes are scattered in the central flower bed, with the name and dates engraved on our memorial wall.
- **Interment:** Cremains are buried in a biodegradable box beneath the jasmine near the labyrinth, with a plaque on the memorial wall.
- **Columbarium:** Niches hold up to two urns, with names and dates engraved on both the urn and niche faceplate. Over half of our 160 niches have already been reserved.

Each option includes a brief committal service led by one of our pastors.

If this is something you've been meaning to take care of, now is the time. Many have shared how relieved they felt to have this decision made.

To learn more or begin the process, contact Michelle Goodwin ([mgoodwin@fpcfw.org](mailto:mgoodwin@fpcfw.org) or 817.335.1231, ext. 234).

# Engage the World



## Christmas Joy Offering: November 30–December 21, 2025

Through the Christmas Joy Offering, one of the four churchwide Special Offerings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we reflect God's perfect gift to us, with generous support of church leaders among us — past, present and future — who have pointed us to God.

The Christmas Joy Offering honors the faithfulness of current and retired church workers and their families in need. Thanks in part to support from this Offering, church workers can receive critical financial assistance to support them through life's challenging circumstances. These generous actions bear witness to our faithful response to God's charge to love one another as Christ commanded.

Please consider a gift to this special offering. Gifts can be made by using the envelopes found on the back of the pews in the 11 a.m. service or at the Welcome Station just outside the Great Hall at the 9 a.m. service and placing your gift in the offering plate. Whether placed in the offering plate or sent to the church, checks should be made out to First Presbyterian Church of Fort Worth, with "Christmas Joy" in the memo line. You can also use the QR code found in the Sunday worship bulletins or visit [fpcfw.org/give](http://fpcfw.org/give).



Community Crossroads extends a heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped make this year's Thanksgiving basket drive a tremendous success! Last year, we aimed for 200 baskets. This year, we set an initial goal of 360, and thanks to your generosity, we surpassed expectations with over 425 baskets donated! Together, we've ensured that hundreds of families will enjoy a warm, nourishing holiday meal.



As we head into colder weather, **please consider donating men's athletic shoes, winter coats, and blankets** to help keep our community warm this season.





From swinging hammers at the Habitat build to cheering at the annual Youth Turkey Bowl and gathering for Grace, Gratitude & Grub, November was full of activity! Have photos of First Pres activities to share? Send them to [pamb@fpcf.org](mailto:pamb@fpcf.org)





# Joys & Concerns

The following prayer concerns are those we have received as of November 20-. In an effort to respect the privacy of those listed below, names are only printed once permission from the individual is obtained. Are you in the hospital or dealing with an illness? Let us know by contacting Parish Associate for Pastoral Care Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz or Parish Visitor Matt McGraw. Let us keep the following persons in our thoughts and prayers this month...

## *With joy we celebrate...*

The birth of Rita Jane Pechon on November 3, 2025 to parents Catherine and Jonathan Pechon. She joins older siblings, Odin, Ari, and Ruby. First Pres Family members include grandparents, **Frank and Jane Mathis**, aunt **Lenora Reece** and cousins Elijah, Isaac, and Asher Reece.

The birth of Margot Amelia Chavez on October 23, 2025 to parents **Cesar and Janet Chavez** and big sister, Emma.

## *Our loving sympathy to...*

The family and friends of **Pete Van't Slot** following his death. Surviving First Pres Family members includes his wife, **Melinda Van't Slot**.

The family and friends of Bill McGovern following his death. Surviving First Pres Family members include his twin sister, **Willa Dunleavy**.

The family and friends of **John Miller** following his death. Surviving First Pres Family members include his wife, **Suzanne Miller Ward**.

The family and friends of **Lois Tilley** following her death.

The family and friends of Marion Lee following her death. Surviving First Pres Family members include her sister **Caro Colvin** and brother-in-law **Gene Colvin**.

## *Our loving thoughts and prayers are with...*

**Clif Smith, Sharon Sullivan, Mary Elizabeth Austin, Jack Jones, Jackie Taylor, Phil Grossman, Heather Martin, Gail Stewart, Wil'win Chocola, Steve Brotherton, Nancy Lynn Scott, Gaylon Peyton, Ann Biggs, Pat Graham, Martha Brooks, Ronnie Sherwood, Pat Richardson, and Irene Howard** who are recovering from surgery or injury. We also pray for their caregivers.

**Margaret and Butch Miller, Benjamin Adams, and parents Will and Lauren Adams, Elizabeth McCartney, Margo Dean, Judy Stricklin, Roxy Sherwood, Rachele Williams, Manning Day, Grace Camacho, Robert and Dinah Riddle, Tad Delgado and parents Emily and Bryan Delgado, John Patterson, Larry Kinard, Fred Wilson, Frances Blake, Phyllis Propes, Chuck Sullivan, and Karl Travis** who are dealing with illness or undergoing treatment. We also pray for their caregivers.

## *Our Caring Prayers for Extended Family include...*

Deneice Allen (First Pres staff), Chris Austin (cousin of **Sean Austin**), Joel Ballew (father of **Bryan Ballew**), Dan Lyne (brother-in-law of **Sam Steele**), Martha Meador (mother of **Martha Letbetter**), Ron Feagins (father-in-law of Blake Hargrave), Dave Broz (uncle of Ashley Drake Mertz), Lonnie Goolsby (father of **Kelle Tillman**), Lucy Redrow (daughter of **Leigh Ann and Grant Redrow**), Jack Barber (son of **Liz Barber**), Andy Hedrick (brother of **Patti Bradley**), Jolie Paprskar-Mozingo (daughter of **Joy Paprskar**), Terry James (nephew of **Rachele Williams**), Tahji Hoffman (great-niece of **Rachele Williams**), Paula Perkins (sister of **Susie Kuipers**), Audrey Hart (great-granddaughter of **Bob and Jane Trask**), Nancy Hatfield (mother of **Sarah Haddock**), and John DeMore (son-in-law of **June Sprott**).

Prayers for the safety of **Rolf Tilley**, (son of **Jaret and Katie Tilley**) who is stationed in Turkey with the U.S. Navy. Prayers for the safety of Pape Russell (grandson of **Barbara Russell**), who is serving in the US Navy. Prayers for the safety of **Diego A. Saldivar** (son of **Becky and Renee Saldivar**), who is serving in the US Navy. Prayers for the safety of Nathan Gunter (nephew of **Russell and Vivian Norment**), who is stationed in Korea.

We pray for safety and peace for those affected by conflict.

We pray for our partner congregations: Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist in Fort Worth and for the congregations of Buen Pastor, Resurrección, and Cidra Presbyterian Churches in Cuba.

## Welcome, New Members!

*Please join the Evangelism Work Group in welcoming these new members.*



**Ailene Gibson** joined First Pres by reaffirmation of faith on Sunday, November 9. Ailene has been worshipping at First Pres for several months now. She is a retired administrative assistant.



**Corey Segars** joined First Pres by reaffirmation of faith on Sunday, November 9. Corey, his spouse Doug, and their sons Dax and Riker, have been active in the life of First Pres since 2023. Corey is a PA with MHMR of Tarrant County.



## people first at First Pres

*Each month we'll highlight First Pres staff team updates.*

## DECEMBER SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

We celebrate the following members of our team on their years of faithful service with First Pres:

**Caleb Gaul**, Maintenance Technician, 1 year

**Silvia Perez**, Housekeeper, 5 years

**Melinda Anderson**, Senior Director, Human Resources, 2 years



**First Presbyterian Church**

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# CHRISTMAS EVE AT FIRST PRES

## CHRISTMAS EVE BRUNCH | COMMUNITY CROSSROADS WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24 AT 10 A.M.

Neighbors and friends are invited to enjoy a Christmas brunch together at Community Crossroads, then ride the bus (optional) to First Pres for the noon Christmas Eve worship service. This event is free and open to the public.

## CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP | FIRST PRES WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

**12 p.m. Service of Lessons and Carols** (Sanctuary)

**5 p.m. Service for families with children with candlelight** (Great Hall)

**7 p.m. Service with candlelight** (Sanctuary and livestream at [fpcfw.org/livestream](http://fpcfw.org/livestream))

**9 p.m. Service with Communion and candlelight** (Sanctuary)

*Childcare provided at 7 p.m.*

*The shuttle (providing transportation to and from Trinity Terrace) will be available for the 7 p.m. service.*