

THE Penn Street Letter

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FORT WORTH

JANUARY 2026 / VOLUME 26, NUMBER 1

Make the Most of 2026

Here are some upcoming opportunities for education, support, and fellowship in the new year.



Bible in Depth New Session Wednesdays, 10:45-11:45 a.m. begins January 7



Join the Rev. Dr. Michael Waschevski for a new session of Bible in Depth beginning January 7, 2026. Bible in Depth meets both in person and online Wednesdays at 10:45 a.m. The January 7 - April 8 Bible in Depth study will be on the Hebrew Bible books of Ezra and Nehemiah. To register for the free course, scan the QR code here or contact Deneice Allen in the church office (dallen@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231).

Grief Group Sundays beginning January 11, 1:30 p.m.



First Presbyterian Church is offering a six-week Grief Support Group on Sundays beginning Sunday, January 11, through Sunday, February 15, 1:30-3 p.m. in the Parlor, 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. Scan the QR code here to register.

Thursday Around the Table January 22 at 6 p.m.



Wellness Together invites you to Thursday Around the Table on Thursday, January 22, 2026 at 6 p.m. in the First Pres Atrium. Come enjoy a delicious potluck dinner and connect with fellow members of the First Pres community! Bring your favorite main dish, and feel free to add an optional side, salad, or dessert - drinks will be provided. Scan the QR code here to RSVP.



Celebrate in Scottish style at Kirkin' of the Tartans: Sunday, February 1

You're invited to the 29th annual Kirkin' of the Tartans service, a vibrant celebration of the Presbyterian Church's Scottish heritage! Experience the stirring sound of bagpipes and the colorful procession of tartan banners as we honor centuries of tradition. After worship, enjoy a complimentary Scottish-themed luncheon in the Great Hall—complete with authentic flavors and lively entertainment.

Did you know?

- "Kirk" means church in Scottish.
- Tartans, with their distinctive plaid patterns, represent Scottish clans, regions, or regiments.
- The first Kirkin' service in America took place in Washington, D.C., in 1941.

Want to carry a tartan in the processional? Call the church office at 817.335.1231.

Wear your family tartan or favorite plaid and come experience the pageantry!

Pastor's Letter



Dear friends,

As we turn to this new year, there is something about seeing a new calendar. A blank page. Empty squares. A year waiting

to be written. I have always loved the rituals of beginning a new year—reflecting on the passing year and anticipating what is to come, the sense that possibility stretches out before us. Before a single appointment is scheduled or commitment made, there is space. And in that space, hope.

For people of faith, however, hope is never just optimism or wishful thinking. Christian hope is grounded in God's faithfulness—past, present, and future. It is the conviction that God is already at work, even before the ink fills our calendars. Scripture reminds us that God is "doing a new thing," often in ways we do not yet recognize. Hope propels us forward not because we know exactly what will happen, but because we trust the One who goes before us.

As a congregation, this new year invites an important question: What do we hope for together? Not simply what events will fill our calendar—though worship, service, study, and fellowship matter deeply—but what will shape our hearts and our shared

purpose? Where is God calling us to grow? Whom is God calling us to serve? What kind of witness are we being invited to offer in our community and beyond?

Perhaps 2026 will be a year when we listen more deeply—to God and to one another. Perhaps it will be a year when we take faithful risks, try new ministries, or strengthen old ones with renewed intention. Perhaps it will be a year when we practice hope in tangible ways: feeding neighbors, welcoming the stranger, tending to those who are weary, and nurturing faith across generations.

The beauty of a new year is not that it erases what came before, but that it gathers all we have learned and places it into God's ongoing story. We bring our joys and our griefs, our successes and our unfinished work, trusting that God can weave them into something meaningful.

So as we open the calendar of 2026, may we pray not only, "What will we do this year?" but also, "Who will we become?" May our schedules reflect our deepest values, and may our lives bear witness to a hope that does not disappoint.

The year is new. God is faithful. And the story is still unfolding.

Peace,

First Presbyterian Church's Session

2026 CLASS OF ELDERS

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

2027 CLASS OF ELDERS

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

2028 CLASS OF ELDERS

Elizabeth Carlock
Blair Chappell
Beverly Howard
Becky Jenkins
George Morey
Thomas Parsons
Mark Russell

Submissions

Submissions for the next issue of the *Penn Street Letter* are due Wednesday, January 21. 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



@fpcfw

Publisher Info

The *Penn Street Letter* is published monthly by First Presbyterian Church, 1000 Penn Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-3496. Periodicals postage is paid at Fort Worth, TX and at additional offices.

Editor: Pam Burkholder

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Penn Street Letter at 1000 Penn Street, Fort Worth, TX 76102-3496.



people first at First Pres

Each month we'll highlight First Pres staff team updates, including new hires, anniversaries, and more.

JANUARY SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

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

Monessa Valenzuela, Assistant Teacher (Infants), 1 year

Kimberly Agee, Nursery Caregiver, 1 year

Glynn Solomon, Dentist, 1 year

Will Henry, Youth Ministry Intern, 1 year

Jennifer Martinez, Director of Community Crossroads, 2 years

Madison Webb, Nursery Caregiver, 2 years

Sarah Pitcher, Lead Teacher (1s), 2 years

Leonora Orona, Nursery Caregiver, 4 years

Blake Hargrave, Maintenance Technician, 6 years

Ahreum Han Congdon, Director of Music/Organist, 8 years

Patty O'Brien, Senior Ministry Assistant, 11 years

Eric Varnon, Engagement Coordinator, 11 years

Leah Wyckoff, WOW Coordinator, 19 years



Festive fun at First Pres! Staff and Personnel Committee celebrated Christmas together on December 12 with great food and fellowship.



Below are some highlights of special events happening in January. For a complete calendar, visit fpcfw.org.

SUNDAYS IN JANUARY

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 8 a.m. | Worship in the Chapel |
| 9 a.m. | Worship in the Great Hall |
| 10 a.m. | Church School for all ages |
| 11 a.m. | Worship in the Sanctuary & Livestream |
| 3 p.m. | Middle School Bells |
| 3:30 p.m. | Youth Choir |
| 4:30 p.m. | High School Bells |
| 4:30 p.m. | Middle School Youth Group |
| 5:30 p.m. | All Youth Dinner |
| 6 p.m. | High School Youth Group |

MONDAYS IN JANUARY

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 6:30 a.m. | Men's Bible Study |
| 9 a.m. | Formula & Diaper Ministry at Community Crossroads |
| 9 a.m. | Hot Breakfast & Choice Pantry at Community Crossroads |
| 10 a.m. | Tai Chi |
| 11:30 a.m. | Clothing & Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads |
| 4 p.m. | Room in the Inn |

WEDNESDAYS IN JANUARY

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 10:45 a.m. | Bible In Depth |
| 11:30 a.m. | Food & Clothing Ministry at Community Crossroads |
| 11:30 a.m. | Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads |
| 5:30 p.m. | WOW! Worship and Dinner at Community Crossroads |
| 6 p.m. | Grace Notes Rehearsal |
| 7 p.m. | Chancel Choir Rehearsal |
| 7:30 p.m. | High School Bible Study |

THURSDAYS IN JANUARY

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 11:30 a.m. | Food & Clothing Ministry at Community Crossroads |
| 11:30 a.m. | Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads |

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

Church offices, Early Education Center, and Community Crossroads closed for New Year's Day

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 9 a.m. | Circles of Christ Circle Up for Coffee |
|--------|--|

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 9 a.m. | Family Service Day with Be the Neighbor |
|--------|---|

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

Church offices, Early Education Center, and Community Crossroads closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Be Inspired

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 are designed to encourage and support the educational goals of our church community.

High school seniors graduating in Spring 2026 who are members of the First Pres Youth Group, active participants in Community Crossroads, children of First Pres staff members, or members of any age seeking to begin or continue their education are encouraged to apply. Whether you're planning to attend college, vocational school, or another educational program, this is a wonderful opportunity to receive financial assistance and affirmation of your hard work.

Important Dates:

- **Applications Open: January 5, 2026**
- **Deadline to Apply: March 16, 2026**
- **Notification of Awards: Week of April 20, 2026 (via email)**



Returning scholarship recipients
scan the QR code here to reapply quickly.



New applicants or those updating their information scan the QR code here for the full application process.

Investing in education is one of the ways First Pres lives out its commitment to nurture and empower future generations. We encourage all eligible members to take advantage of this opportunity!

Questions? Contact Marisa at mpinon@fpcfw.org or Susana at sleon@fpcfw.org, or call 817.335.1231.

Ongoing Support Opportunities at First Pres

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

1ST MONDAYS | 10:30 A.M.

Caring for a loved one can be both rewarding and challenging. If you're a caregiver looking for a space to connect, share experiences, and find support, join us for meaningful conversation on the first Monday of each month at 10:30 a.m. in Room 102. Questions? Reach out to Ashley (adrakemertz@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 264) for more information.

THIRD THIRD OF LIFE MONTHLY GATHERINGS

3RD WEDNESDAYS | 9:30 A.M.

The Third Third of Life gathering is for those seeking connection and purposeful living in the third third (60ish and over) of life. Our gatherings will focus on topics such as spiritual growth and discernment, community and connection, health and well-being, and life planning and purpose. Come for conversation and fellowship on the 3rd Wednesdays at 9:15 a.m. for fellowship and 9:30-10:30 a.m. for programming in Room 102. Pastries and coffee provided. Reach out to Robyn (robynm@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 266) or Ashley (adrakemertz@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 264) with any questions.

MONTHLY GRANDPARENTS GATHERING

SECOND THURSDAYS | 9:30 A.M.

Join fellow grandparents who are actively involved in raising grandchildren or supporting their adult children in parenthood. This monthly gathering offers a welcoming space to connect, share ideas, and encourage one another on this unique journey. Enjoy morning coffee and conversation in the Parlor every second Thursday from 9:30–10:30 a.m. All are welcome! Questions? Contact Robyn (robynm@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 266).

FAITHFUL ACTION & RESPONSE

3RD TUESDAYS | 8:30 A.M.

Faithful Action and Response (FAR) meets on the third Tuesdays from 8:30-9:30 a.m. in the Youth Center for those discerning how to live out their faith intentionally in a divisive world. Each gathering has time for spiritual practices and ways to engage faithfully in a polarized and political climate. Reach out to Robyn (robynm@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 266) or Ashley (adrakemertz@fpcfw.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 264) with any questions.

Engage the World



December was a month of connection and celebration at Community Crossroads! Formula and Diapers (FAD) volunteers gathered for their annual Christmas brunch, a tradition that highlights the heart behind their work. WOW (Worship on Wednesday) enjoyed caroling at Downtown Rehab and the skate park. Finally, we celebrated interns Baleigh and Racheal as they concluded two semesters of dedicated service with a heartfelt farewell.





From the 80th annual Party for the Blind to a live nativity at Follow the Star and Youth Group parties, December was full of activity! Have photos of First Pres activities to share? Send them to pamb@fpcfw.org



Joys & Concerns

The following prayer concerns are those we have received as of December 17, 2025. 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

With joy we celebrate...

The birth of Cyrus Benjamin McGraw on December 10, 2025 to parents, Matt and Sydney McGraw.

Our loving sympathy to...

The family and friends of Paula Perkins following her death on November 21, 2025. Surviving First Pres family members include her sister, **Susie Kuipers**.

The family and friends of **Martha Brooks** following her death on November 20, 2025.

The family and friends of Norman Dingmore following his death on November 19, 2025. Surviving First Pres family members include his son and daughter-in-law, **Norm and Ellen Dingmore**.

Our loving thoughts and prayers are with...

William King, Jr., Joyce Norris, Gene Colvin, Mark Beasley, Charlie Gibbs, Clif Smith, Sharon Sullivan, Mary Elizabeth Austin, Jack Jones, Jackie Taylor, Phil Grossman, Heather Martin, Gail Stewart, Wil'lwin 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.

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...

Max Hamre (son of **David Hamre**), Craig Russell (father of **Mark Russell**), 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**), Lonnie Goolsby (father of **Kelle Tillman**), Lucy Redrow (daughter of Leigh Ann and **Grant Redrow**), Jack Barber (son of **Liz Barber**), Jolie Paprskar-Mozingo (daughter of **Joy Paprskar**), Terry James (nephew of **Rachele Williams**), Tahji Hoffman (great-niece of **Rachele Williams**), 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.

December Session Highlights

First Presbyterian Church's Session met on Monday, December 8. Highlights from that meeting included the following items:

- Celebrated outgoing elders (Class of 2025) were recognized and thanked for their terms of service and presented with a gift.
- Received a status report from JB Smithson, Chair of Finance Committee, on the 2026 proposed budget.
- Approved the Anti-Racism, Anti-Harassment, & Sexual Misconduct policy per General Assembly mandate.
- Approved updated Statement on the Purpose and Procedure Safeguarding the Well Being of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults per General Assembly mandate.
- Heard update on Property Purchase.

First Presbyterian Church

1000 Penn Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102

PERIODICALS POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to
The Penn Street Letter,
1000 Penn Street
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Church Office

Ph: 817.335.1231

WWW.FPCFW.ORG

Welcome, New Members!

Please join the Evangelism Work Group in welcoming these new members who joined First Pres in December 2025.



Chris and Monte Dobson recently moved back to Fort Worth and were previously members of First Pres. Their membership was reinstated by reaffirmation of faith. Chris is a retired social work professional, and Monte is a retired energy sector executive.



Jane Oosterhuis joined First Pres by transfer of membership from Arlington - Westminster Presbyterian Church. Jane has been visiting First Pres since last year. She is a PC(USA) elder.



Kayla Jenkins joined First Pres by reaffirmation of faith. Kayla has been attending for the past few months. She is the daughter-in-law of First Pres members Becky and Mike Jenkins.



Saundra Schmidt joined First Pres by transfer of membership from First United Methodist Church of Fort Worth. Saundra has been visiting First Pres since last year. She is retired from the education sector.