

THE Penn Street Letter

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FORT WORTH

AUGUST 2026 / VOLUME 26, NUMBER 8

Request to Make a Temporary Pastoral Relationship Permanent

The Session of First Presbyterian, upon recommendation of the Personnel Committee and the installed Pastoral Staff, voted unanimously at its May Stated meeting to request that Grace Presbytery Commission on Ministry (COM) grant permission for First Pres to create the position of Associate Pastor for Care and Connection and grant permission for the Session to call a congregational meeting to present the Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz as the candidate for the new position.

Background

In the spring of 2023, the Session, upon recommendation of the Personnel Committee and Head of Staff the Rev. Dr. Brian Coulter and Senior Associate Pastor the Rev. Dr. Michael Waschevski, and with permission of the Grace Presbytery Commission on Ministry (COM), contracted with the Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz to serve in a new temporary pastoral position as Parish Associate for Pastoral Care. The Book of Order allows for non-installed temporary pastoral positions to meet ministry needs, with the role of Parish Associate being approved by Grace Presbytery for ministers who also engage in other forms of ministry outside a congregational setting yet still desire ministry within a congregation. Ashley is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who operates a private practice in Parker County.

The Parish Associate position was created to address three needs/concerns: 1) an unmanageable workload for Michael, who at the time was responsible for resourcing and

overseeing the ministries of Worship and Music – including directing the Chancel Choir, Adult Christian Nurture – with significant

teaching responsibilities, increasing leadership and administrative duties as Senior Associate Pastor, and coordinating Pastoral Care – including supervision of the Parish Associates; 2) a need for additional pastoral care and support for the growing First Pres community of members, prospects, Community Crossroads neighbors and friends, the Early Education Center families, and church staff and their families, a community which now approaches 3,000 people; and 3) to coordinate and evaluate how pastoral care is offered by the clergy and ministries of Congregational Care.

Over the past three years the pastoral care needs of the First Pres community have been better served with the additional pastoral leadership gained from the Parish Associate position (30 hours). It has become clear that these pastoral care needs are not temporary but are an enduring part of the church's ministry. Rather than responding to a short-term need, the Session believes this ministry has become an integral part of the church's ongoing life and mission, and that an installed (permanent) Associate Pastor position will best serve the First Pres community. The current pastoral team has also



Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

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



Joseph Buchanan



Jovanna Miller



Cynthia & Bob Williams

-continued on page 6

Pastor's Letter



Dear friends,
August brings the familiar rhythm of a new school year. Hallways fill with energy, backpacks are packed with fresh supplies, and

teachers prepare classrooms for another year of learning. For many students, parents, educators, and school staff, this season is filled with excitement and anticipation. It can also bring uncertainty and anxiety. This year, many in Fort Worth ISD are navigating additional questions surrounding the TEA transition, making our prayers and encouragement all the more important.

As people of faith, we believe that education is holy work. Every classroom is a place where gifts are discovered, confidence is nurtured, and lives are shaped. Whether or not the school calendar directly affects your household, each of us has a role in supporting children, teachers, administrators, and staff as they create places where young people can learn, grow, and flourish. As a congregation, we have many avenues to offer our support.

A meaningful way our congregation lives out that calling is through Academy 4. After four years partnering with Briscoe Elementary, we are beginning an exciting new chapter with Morningside Elementary. Because of this transition, our ministry is expanding dramatically—we hope to provide nearly 80 mentors so that every fourth grader has a caring adult walking alongside them throughout the school year. Mentoring requires just 90 minutes one Friday each month, and Academy 4 provides all the training and materials you need.

We are also looking for volunteers to serve as Spark Club leaders. If you would like to learn more about either opportunity, please contact me or Sidney Goodfriend, our Site Coordinator.

Our commitment to children begins long before elementary school. We are grateful for the ministry of our Early Education Center, where young children are welcomed into a safe, loving, and faith-filled environment each day. There are many opportunities to support this ministry, including volunteering during Teacher In-Service Days from Wednesday, August 19, through Friday, August 21, as teachers prepare their classrooms and hearts for a new group of students. We are also looking for friendly faces to serve as greeters on our First Day of School, August 24, and we always welcome volunteers who would like to be classroom readers throughout the year. Your prayers, encouragement, and willingness to serve help create a nurturing environment where children, families, and educators can flourish together.

As another school year begins, we surround every student, teacher, and school employee with our prayers, our encouragement, and our presence. We will celebrate our annual Blessing of the Backpacks during worship on Sunday, August 16. Students of every age, along with teachers, administrators, school staff, and anyone beginning a new season of learning, are invited to bring their backpacks, briefcases, or work bags to receive a blessing as we pray for the year ahead. As a family of faith, we offer our presence and prayers as this new school year begins.

Peace,

Robyn

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, August 19. 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!



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Publisher Info

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A New Chapter: Celebrating Matt McGraw's First Call

It is with joy that we celebrate Matt McGraw and wish his family well as he receives his first call!

Matt has served as Parish Visitor at First Pres since May 2022 while completing his Masters of Divinity from Brite Divinity School. We will gather to congratulate and thank Matt, Sydney, and Cyrus on Wednesday, August 19 from 4-5 p.m. in the Parlor. Matt's last day serving as Parish Visitor will be Sunday, August 23.



AUGUST Calendar Highlights

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

SUNDAYS IN AUGUST

- 8 a.m. Worship in the Chapel
- 9 a.m. Worship in the Great Hall
- 10 a.m. Wonder, Love & Play Children & Youth Church School
- 10 a.m. Summer Church School: Bible Study on Parables
- 11 a.m. Worship in the Sanctuary & Livestream
- 1:30 p.m. Grief Support Group

MONDAYS IN AUGUST

- 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
- 11:30 a.m. Clothing & Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads
- 3-6 p.m. Cooling Station Open at Community Crossroads
- 3 p.m. Room in the Inn
- 6 p.m. Digital Campus Summer Bible Study (ends August 10)

WEDNESDAYS IN AUGUST

- 11:30 a.m. Food & Clothing Ministry at Community Crossroads
- 11:30 a.m. Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads
- 3-6 p.m. Cooling Station Open at Community Crossroads
- 5:30 p.m. WOW! Worship and Dinner at Community Crossroads

THURSDAYS IN AUGUST

- 11:30 a.m. Food & Clothing Ministry at Community Crossroads
- 11:30 a.m. Sack Lunch Distribution at Community Crossroads
- 3-6 p.m. Cooling Station Open at Community Crossroads

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2

- 12:15 p.m. Presbyterian Ministry at UN Lunch & Learn

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

- 9 & 11 a.m. Blessing of the Backpacks for all ages
- 10 a.m. All Church Continental Breakfast

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

- 4 p.m. Farewell Reception for Matt McGraw

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

- 10 a.m. Intergenerational Mission Project
- 4:30 p.m. Conversation with Meredith Miller

FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

- 5 p.m. Youth Overnight Lock In
- 5:30 p.m. Youth & Kids Back to School Party @ Rollerland West



people first at
First Pres

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

AUGUST SERVICE ANNIVERSARIES

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

Michelle Gutierrez, Assistant Teacher (2s), 2 years

Celeste Falter, Business Office Manager, 26 years

Grace Clingman, Youth Intern, 1 year

Laura Collins, Music Associate, 11 years

Josh Stewart, Associate Pastor for Youth, 21 years

Dakota Lester, Lead Teacher (2s), 3 years

Alyssa Martin, Director of Early Education Center, 13 years

Chris Clingman, Assistant Teacher (Toddlers), 19 yrs

Keyanna Smith, Lead Teacher (3s), 3 years

Tonya Campbell, Lead Teacher (1s), 21 years

Cathy Farris, Lead Teacher (4s), 21 years

Daniel Connor, Lead Teacher (3s), 30 years

Reena Krishnan, Assistant Teacher (4s), 8 years

Be Inspired

Grief Support Group begins August 2

First Presbyterian Church is offering a six-week Grief Support Group on Sundays beginning Sunday, August 2 through Sunday, August 30, 1:30-3 p.m. in Farenkhamp, led by 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.



Blessing of the Backpacks: August 16

Students of all ages are invited to bring their school backpacks, day care bags, or laptop cases to 9 or 11 a.m. worship to receive a special blessing for the year ahead. Come early or stay after worship and enjoy a delicious continental breakfast on the Third Floor Concourse from 10-10:45 a.m.

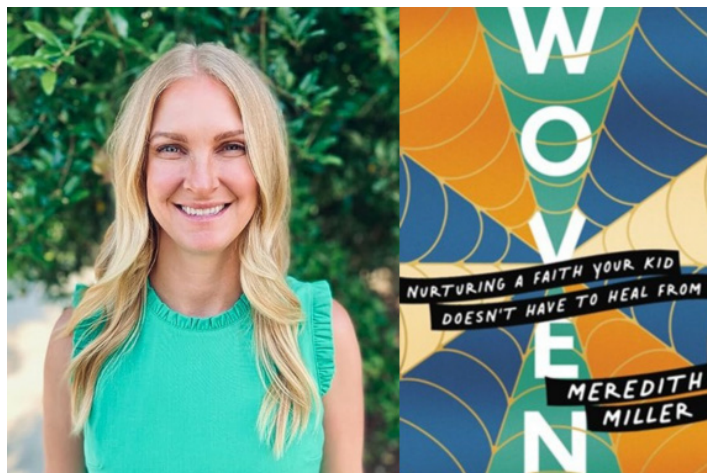
First Pres on the Move: 30th Annual Festival of Faiths

The Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz states, *"Over the past several years I have been renewed in mind and spirit by attending the Festival of Faiths in Louisville, KY. The event has a way of reminding us of our connection to one another while also honoring and allowing space for people of various faith backgrounds to share their rootedness in their own traditions. It has, for me, been an enriching experience of growing in my own faith. I invite you to attend this fall's gathering!"*

The Festival of Faiths is a nationally acclaimed, multi-day festival, which hosts spiritual practitioners, thought leaders and movement makers. The festival will take place November 11-13, 2026, at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Louisville, Kentucky.

In its 30th year the festival will celebrate Sacred Courage and explore the many ways we can lead with radical love, stand for justice and embody bravery rooted in purpose. Through dialogue, workshops, art and music, the festival will foster a courageous compassion that honors our interdependence, calls us toward the common good and emboldens us to act.

Visit festivalofafaiths.org for more information and plan to attend the information session with Pastor Ashley on Sunday, August 30 at 10 a.m. in Room 312.



Conversation & Dinner with Meredith Miller: August 23

On August 23 from 4:30-6 p.m., we'll welcome Meredith Miller, author of *Woven*, for a special evening of dinner and conversation around raising our kids in faith. All parents and grandparents are encouraged to attend. Childcare will be provided for ages 6 weeks - 5 years old and volunteer led activities will be available for Kindergarteners - 3rd graders. Scan the QR code here to register.



Chancel Choir welcomes New Singers

The Chancel Choir begins a new season of ministry with rehearsal Wednesday, August 19 from 7-8:15 p.m. New singers are welcome! The Chancel Choir is composed of singers from a variety of backgrounds and abilities, all united in a love for music and the power of singing sacred texts in community. Rehearsals are joyous and inspiring as community is formed and excellence achieved. If you are interested in singing with the Chancel Choir, or would like more information, please contact the Rev. Dr. Michael Waschevski in the church office. (817.335.1231 ext. 229 or michaelw@fpcf.org).

Horizons Bible Study Lunch: August 25

All Presbyterian Women are invited to the Horizons Bible Study Luncheon on August 25, 2026, at 10 a.m. in the Great Hall. Guest speaker Dr. Sarah Leer, author of the 2026-2027 PW/Horizons Bible Study questions, will present "United through Christ, Bound to Each Other." The program is free; lunch is \$15. Register by August 14 at fpcf.org/pw or contact Deneice at 817.335.1231 or dallen@fpcf.org.

Engage the World



Backpack Drive for Morningside Elementary

In partnership with IMSRN Church (imsrnchurch.com), we are collecting backpacks for Morningside Elementary School, our new Academy 4 partner. Bring new backpacks to drop-off points outside the Great Hall and Sanctuary now through August 6. Our partner church will offer a back to school event for students on August 8.



Make a Difference: Mentor at Morningside this Fall with Academy 4

First Presbyterian is excited to partner with Academy 4 at a new school this fall - Morningside Elementary (2601 Evans Ave., 76104).

At our previous school, about 40 mentors faithfully served students each month. With the move to Morningside, we will need to double that number to meet the need, as well as invite volunteers to lead nine monthly spark clubs.

Academy 4 connects fourth graders with caring mentors who meet one Friday afternoon each month, building meaningful, supportive relationships.

This year we are offering 9 Spark Clubs for Academy 4 and we are looking for leaders to facilitate these electives one Friday a month. We provide the curriculum, and you do not need to be an expert! They are: (1) money, a partnership with a local bank, (2) drum, (3) engineering, (4) gardening, (5) mindfulness (yoga), (6) pickleball, (7) soccer, (8) cooking, (9) and art.

To learn more, visit academy4.org/mentor or contact Robyn Michalove (robyn@fpcf.org or 817.335.1231, ext. 266).

Presbyterian Ministry at the UN Lunch & Learn August 2

Join Alejandro Salazar, Interim Young Adult Coordinator and lifelong First Pres member, on Sunday, August 2 at 12:15 p.m. in Room 235 as he shares insights from his experience serving as a Presbyterian Young Adult Delegate to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum.

During the conference, Alejandro engaged with global conversations on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, and partnerships for the goals. Together, we'll explore how these global priorities intersect with our Christian faith and the PCUSA's commitment to justice, service, and caring for God's creation. Whether you're curious about the work of the United Nations, interested in the intersection of the church in global issues, or simply want to learn more, all adults and young adults are invited to attend. Scan the QR code here to register.



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Fall Church School Classes for Adults begin September 13

Beginning Sunday, September 13, twelve adult Church School classes will meet to study and support adults in nurturing their faith and discipleship. Classes meet from 10-10:45 a.m. each week and are led by an outstanding faculty of members, staff, and friends of First Presbyterian Church. Bible study, faith formation, and contemporary issues in church and society form the curriculum. For more information, visit fpcf.org/adulted or contact the Rev. Dr. Michael Waschevski in the church office (817.335.1231 or michaelw@fpcf.org).

Reading the Bible in 9 Months

Over the past several years, hundreds of adult members and friends of First Presbyterian Church have completed the Reading the Bible in 9 Months program developed by Sr. Associate Pastor Michael Waschevski. Daily readings from September – May are arranged in such a way that the connections between the books of the Bible and the overarching themes and story cycles of scripture come together to reveal the unity of the Bible.

The reading plan for the 2026-2027 Reading the Bible in 9 Months program will be available on the First Pres website at fpcf.org/rb9m at the beginning of September. If you would like to receive a copy by email, please reach out to Deneice Allen in the church office (dallen@fpcf.org).

Bible in Depth Resumes this Fall

This popular course is offered Wednesday mornings from 10:45 -11:45 a.m. in room 235 and by Zoom. Led by the Rev. Dr. Michael Waschevski, a book of the Bible is studied verse by verse. Throughout the study participants grow in their understanding of scripture and its application to their daily life of faith. The fall session begins on Wednesday, September 9 with a study of Matthew.



Register by scanning the QR code here or by contacting Deneice Allen in the church office (dallen@fpcf.org; 817.335.1231 ext. 261).

Get Your First Pres Name Tag Today!

Get your permanent First Pres name tag today! Choose a pinback or magnetic style and order via the QR code. Adhesive name tags will still be available on Name Tag Sunday (3rd Sunday of each month). Ushers and greeters receive a permanent name tag at no cost. Wear your name and help build connections within our church community!



Request to Make a Temporary Pastoral Relationship Permanent

-continued from page one

developed a collaborative and complementary pattern of ministry that has served the congregation well. The Session believes maintaining that continuity will strengthen the church's ministry in the years ahead.

Presbyterian Polity and calling a pastor

Installed pastoral calls in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are between three parties – the pastor, the congregation, and the presbytery. The presbytery, through its Commission on Ministry (COM) has the sole responsibility of approving the creation of pastoral positions. Additionally, the presbytery, by a $\frac{3}{4}$ vote can allow a minister serving in temporary pastoral relationship to become installed into an Associate Pastor position. Book of Order G-2.0504c. Upon Session's request of Grace Presbytery COM, permission has been granted for First Pres to create a new Associate Pastor position – Associate Pastor for Care and Connection.

The Session also requested permission to present Ashley as the candidate for the position given her skills, leadership, and the strength of the pastoral team experienced with Brian, Michael, Robyn, Josh, and Ashley. Because Ashley has faithfully served in this role for the past three years and the Session believes she is the right person for this ministry, the Session requested permission from COM to present her directly as the candidate rather than conduct a national search. COM agreed that this process was appropriate under the Book of Order and granted permission to proceed.

In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) the congregation must vote to call its installed pastors. Therefore, the Session will include at the October 4 Congregational Meeting the motion to elect the Rev. Ashley Drake Mertz as Associate Pastor for Care and Connection (30-hour position). The title "Care and Connection" reflects both Ashley's leadership in pastoral care and her work helping people become more deeply connected to the life of the congregation. Her terms of call would be approved along with the terms of call for the current installed pastors.

The Session and pastors are excited for this new chapter and pastoral relationship at First Pres and look forward to the congregational meeting. If you have any questions about pastoral relationships (temporary or installed), the role of the presbytery in pastoral relationships, or the Session's recommendation feel free to reach out to your pastors or Session members.

We are grateful for Ashley's faithful ministry over the past three years and are excited about this opportunity to strengthen the church's ministry of care and connection for years to come! We encourage you to attend the congregational meeting on October 4 and participate in this important moment in the life of First Pres.

Joys & Concerns

The following prayer concerns are those we have received as of July 22, 2026. 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 Annie Blair Gwyn to parents **Michael and Maddie Gwyn**. Annie joins big sister Amelia.

The birth of Grant Warren Goebel, Jr. to parents **Cecelia and Grant Goebel**. First Pres family members include grandparents, **Jennifer and Gene Regen**, great-grandfather, **John Melcher**, and uncles, **John and Marshall Regen**.

Our loving sympathy to...

Family and friends of **Pat Richardson** following his death on July 9, 2026. First Pres family includes his wife, **Elizabeth Richardson**.

Family and friends of Valerie Brewer following her death on July 9, 2026. First Pres family includes her sister and brother-in-law **Becky and Patrick Sheppard**, her niece and nephew-in-law, **Stephanie Sheppard and Brandon Whited**, and their children, **Garrett and William Whited**.

Family and friends of Ann Bartley following her death on July 9, 2026. First Pres family includes her son, **Chris Bartley**.

Family and friends of **John Patterson, Jr.** following his death on July 5, 2026.

Family and friends of Janyth Hughes following her death on July 5, 2026. First Pres family includes her daughter and son-in-law, **Hilary and Mark Cox**, and grandchildren, **Owen and Adelyn Cox**.

Family and friends of **Barbara Willis** following her death on June 28, 2026.

Family and friends of Winifred Cartwright following her death on June 29, 2026. First Pres family

members include her nephew, Robert Montelongo, Digital Media Specialist for First Pres.

Family and friends of **Julia Carter** following her death.

Our loving thoughts and prayers are with...

Ann McKinney, Mark Connolly, Joan Wright, Fred Oberkircher, Dawn Shepard, Susie Kuipers, Hardy Phillips, son of **Austin and Blitz Phillips, Jane Mathis, William King, Jr., Gene Colvin, Heather Martin, Gail Stewart, Wil'win Chocola, Nancy Lynn Scott, Gaylon Peyton**, and **Ronnie Sherwood** who are recovering from surgery or injury. We also pray for their caregivers.

Susan Garrett, John Pumphrey, Benjamin Adams, and parents **Will and Lauren Adams, Margo Dean, Judy Stricklin, Roxy Sherwood, Rachele Williams, Manning Day, Grace Camacho, Robert and Dinah Riddle, Tad Delgado** and parents **Emily and Bryan Delgado, Larry Kinard, Fred Wilson, Frances Blake, Phyllis Propes, Irene Howard, 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...

Cecilia Gallegos, (wife of staff member David Gallegos), Troy Chapman (friend

of **Bill Stokes**), Tim Alexander (cousin of **Susie Kuipers**), Missy King (niece of **Bill and Barbara Holmes**), Michele Hargrave, wife of Blake Hargrave (First Pres staff), Max Hamre (son of **David Hamre**), Chris Austin (cousin of **Sean Austin**), Joel Ballew (father of **Bryan Ballew**), Martha Meador (mother of **Martha Letbetter**), Lonnie Goolsby (father of **Kelle Tillman**), Lucy Redrow (daughter of Leigh Ann and **Grant Redrow**), Terry James (nephew of **Rachele Williams**), Tahji Hoffman (great-niece of **Rachele Williams**), Audrey Hart (great-granddaughter of **Bob and Jane Trask**), and Nancy Hatfield (mother of **Sarah Haddock**).

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.

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