

PARISH NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN, NJ



The pier at Pismo Beach, California, photograph by Colin Poellot of New Orleans. To view more of his photography visit www.colinpoe.com

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

- **WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR OUR YOUTH MINISTRY**
- **REFLECTIONS ON AN OPEN BAPTISMAL FONT**
- **CELEBRATING FPC'S INDONESIAN FELLOWSHIP**
- **EXPANDING ASSISTANCE TO OUR COMMUNITY**

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- **SIGN UP FOR VACTION BIBLE SCHOOL**
- **CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR CONFIRMANDS AND GRADUATING SENIORS!**

1 WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR OUR YOUTH

Rev Khayla Johnson

There's a stirring in our church that's hard to ignore. It's in the prayers of our leaders, the dreams of our young people, the way worship fills the room with expectancy. Something is happening—something fresh, something divine. In my short time here at FPC Metuchen I have seen and felt this energy in the ways I have been welcomed, celebrated and loved. I have also felt the energy in the joy of baptisms, the new food pantry and even in the staff working together. And as we look ahead to what God has in store for us, it's clear: we are stepping into a new season of purpose, growth, and revival.

For our church, and especially for our youth group, the future is not just bright—it's brilliant. And that brilliance doesn't come from human plans or perfect programs, but from the light of Christ leading us forward. This generation is not waiting for a seat at the table. They're creating their own spaces, asking bold questions, seeking deeper truths, and desiring real encounters with God.

In a world that is full of noise and distraction, our youth are leaning into the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. They're hungry for something authentic—something eternal. And as a church, we are being called to come alongside them, not to control or contain their fire, but to fan it into flame.

The next phase of our youth ministry is about empowering, equipping, and encouraging. We're creating environments where students can discover their gifts, develop spiritual disciplines, and experience the presence of God in powerful, personal ways. What lies ahead is not just a calendar of exciting events (though we have plenty of those!). It's a movement. A movement fueled by vision, anchored in Scripture, and covered in prayer.

We are reimagining what youth ministry can look like—less about entertainment, and more about encounter. We want our young people to know what it means to follow Jesus fully, love radically, and serve sacrificially.

And it's not just the youth that are changing. The entire church is stepping into this season of

renewal. We're seeing intergenerational bridges being built, with older members pouring wisdom into younger hearts, and younger voices speaking life and energy into the church body. It's a beautiful exchange that reflects the heart of God.

The church is welcoming new projects that will have the greatest impact on our community and set us up for a successful future. With the Food Pantry expansion, the conversations around the preservation of our campus and the renewed energy in worship, we are seeing the Spirit moving all around us.

Hope isn't passive. It's active. And as a church, we are stepping into this next season with intentionality and expectation. We're dreaming big. We're believing that what we pray for starts here—with us. In the way we serve our neighbors. In how we welcome newcomers. In how we show up for each other, week after week. In the quiet moments of surrender and the loud moments of celebration.

As we move forward, we are not leaving behind the faithfulness of the past—we are building on it. We are carrying the testimonies, the answered prayers, and the miracles we've seen into a new season filled with even greater promise.

This isn't just optimism. It's hope anchored in Christ. And it's a call to all of us—youth, parents, leaders, and members alike—to step into the future with courage, unity, and joy. So let's embrace the excitement. Let's show up expectantly. Let's pray boldly, worship passionately, and serve generously. Because God is still working here in Metuchen.



Youth group Mardi Gras party. Rev Johnson helps Myles Bourne hit the pinata

AN OPEN BAPTISMAL FONT, A READINESS TO LOVE

Rev Fred Garry

We baptized ten people on Palm Sunday.

There was an “Open Font.”

Some of the baptized were babies; some teens and tweens; and there was one person who “waited my whole life to be baptized.”

I have dreamt of this day a long time. Part of the dream was the idea that grace is a gift without requirements or restrictions. You simply want to be baptized or have your child baptized. What if baptism was that simple?

Baptism, and the baptismal font, are the last vestige of “sacramental fences.” There was a time when you needed to go to confession to receive the Lord’s Supper; there was a time when to be ordained you needed to be male; and, there was also a time when to be married you needed the pastor’s approval just as there was a time when to be a member of the church you needed to pass the theological examination of the elders. All of these fences have been removed, save the baptismal font. To have your child baptized still came with the fence of “members only.” This was a privilege we extended only to people who were members of the church. Exceptions were sometimes made. Just as there were comments about new members ever returning once their children are baptized.

In the Reformed Tradition we believe infant baptism is about God’s choice. Before we know God, God chooses to love us, calls us beloved. When Jesus came out of the water there was a voice from the sky saying, “this is my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” This voice from above is our basis for baptizing children. We believe God does the same with the little ones we lift up and say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Our words are an echo of the words Jesus heard at the river.

The idea of an open font always seemed like a bridge too far. The requirement of membership is a long-standing tradition. Yet when the session voted to lay aside the requirement of membership it seemed as if it might be possible. After a brief discussion the decision was reached



Rev Johnson baptizes a young parishioner during the open font baptisms on Palm Sunday 2025

to open the font of Palm Sunday. From this point forward it was really a matter of communication. How do we communicate this opportunity? Can’t really put out a sign that says, “free baptisms from 8:30-9:30 this Sunday.”

In the end it was Facebook and word of mouth that led to the ten baptisms. Some people we know were baptized; there were strangers; there were also family of church members. It was one of the most beautiful moments I have seen in the church. One after another people came forward, some walking and some being carried. Some came alone; some had sponsors (godparents).

When there were sponsors, I asked them this: when this one is lost, will you find them; when they fall, will you lift them; when they are afraid, will you give them hope? Their answers were all tear-filled yeses; each question was answered with a readiness to love. That is what an open font truly is: a readiness to love.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

OUR NEXT CONGREGATIONAL MEETING IS **JUNE 15**, DIRECTLY FOLLOWING THE 9:30AM SERVICE

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SONGS, STORIES, AND SHARED FAITH

Isabella Novsima and Rev Leksmana Leonard

On Sunday, May 4, the Indonesian Fellowship had the special opportunity to participate in worship during the morning service. This opportunity not only marked a moment of joyful expression of faith and cultural identity but also reflected the vibrant diversity of the broader church community. Their presence was a testimony not only to their faith but also a celebration of cultural richness and shared service, providing a vibrant and heartfelt contribution that wonderfully reflected the spirit of unity in diversity.

A highlight of the morning came during the children's message. Bridget Sanger engaged the young ones with a thoughtful and interactive lesson, speaking to them in both English and Bahasa Indonesia. The message, centered on kindness and God's love for all people, bridged cultural gaps, reminding everyone of the universal values at the heart of Christian life.

Later in the service, during the offertory, the Indonesian Fellowship offered a musical gift: an Indonesian worship song originally composed in Germany, sung in both their first language and German. The harmonious melody and heartfelt delivery stirred the congregation, evoking a spirit of reverence and unity. It was a poignant moment—worship expressed through cultural identity, reminding all present that the body of Christ is a beautiful global community.

After the morning service, the Indonesian Fellowship continued by hosting the Second Hour Forum. The forum began with a comprehensive presentation on the history of Christianity in Indonesia, offering attendees insight into how the faith took root in the world's largest Muslim-majority country.



To the left: Parishioners share in delicious Indonesian food during the May 4th, 2025 Indonesian Fellowship celebration.

Top right: The Indonesian fellowship's choir sings during the worship service



Then the Indonesian Fellowship shared the story of their history at FPC Metuchen, a group born out of a desire for spiritual fellowship, cultural connection, and mutual support among Indonesian immigrants and their families. What started as a small gathering has since grown into a vibrant and integral part of the FPC community, nurturing intergenerational bonds and deepening the spiritual lives of its members.

No Indonesian cultural event would be complete without its culinary and artistic expressions. Tables overflowed with a delightful spread of Indonesian food—from traditional appetizers like *cucur* to ceremonial main courses, such as *nasi tumpeng*—each dish representing a region and a story. Attendees were also invited to a traditional dance performance, featuring expressive movements that conveyed the deep cultural heritage of the Indonesian people.

One of the most moving highlights of the Second Hour forum was a talk show featuring the youth of the Indonesian Fellowship. In a candid and heartfelt conversation, second-generation Indonesians and Indonesian-Americans shared their experiences growing up between cultures, navigating identity, balancing traditional values with American norms, and finding a sense of belonging in both worlds. Their reflections offered profound insight into the joys and challenges of bicultural life, and their voices gave depth and perspective to the broader narrative of immigration and integration.

The Indonesian Fellowship's participation on May 4 was more than a set of roles fulfilled; it was a joyful expression of community and shared faith. Their involvement enriched the worship experience, bearing witness to how culture and faith can intertwine in worship, strengthening the bonds of our diverse yet united church family.

EXPANDING ASSISTANCE TO OUR COMMUNITY

Sarah Teti

Last year, while planning for the upcoming 2025 budget in the Local Mission Ministry, we took a close look at our Local Assistance Fund. Local Assistance is what we call the informal program that was created years ago to help food pantry clients, congregants, and community members with rental or utility bills. When people come to us for more than food, we have always had a way of helping them out with additional resources or with financial help. As our popularity increased, so did the demand for this kind of help. So, we were left with the need to re-vamp the program – and we DID!

In the past, when folks came in for help with rent or utility bills, they would need to fit into certain criteria. They would have to live in Metuchen or Edison. They would have to have a physical bill that we could pay OR have a valid rental agreement we could have a copy of. Will the impact of this assistance be lasting or if it's just a band aid until they will need assistance again. Determining whether or not to help someone is a complicated problem and not one that any of us love – and with a limited budget of \$2000 a month to offer, these decisions were critical. With the increase in people calling in for help, we needed to increase the amount of money we were able to offer, and it was time to tap into our partnerships!

Garden State Home is a local non-profit agency based in Highland Park who does eviction prevention. They have an office full of dedicated case workers who, through a referral program, will interview folks who need help to determine what programs they are eligible for, how much they owe versus their income, and then refer them out to agencies in the area that they know have funding. Basically, they are vetting these individuals to know what assistance would be appropriate. I was able to meet with them back in October of 2024 and I asked them to partner with FPC to start vetting folks for local assistance funding and they accepted!

HOW TO DONATE

You can donate to the food pantry local assistance program: by check - just indicate local assistance in the memo line; online at fpcweb.org/give - use the row labeled "local assistance;" or call the church office 732-491-2300.

Since we now have this agency vetting our clients for local assistance funding, the pressure is off us to decide if a person gets the assistance or not. Garden State Home has access to eviction records through the court system, they are hooked into the Middlesex County Board of Social Services to check on what assistance people are already receiving, and they are referring people out to other agencies for us automatically if we are unable to assist. Truly it is a win/win!

For 2025, we were able to increase our local assistance funding to \$4000 a month through the local mission budget. Since January, we have helped single moms avoid eviction, an elderly couple keep their lights on, a homeless man get a hotel room when it was below freezing outside, and a family pay for a storage for their belongings, while they wait to move into a new house after being homeless.

The bottom line is that the more we help those in need, the more those in need will find us. However, we cannot do everything! Through partnering with other trusted agencies, we can be a part of a larger solution.



Carrots and cans await their chance to help a family in need

THE 2025-2026 CANDLELIGHT CONCERT SERIES

Jordan Klotz

This fall, the Candlelight Concert Series will return for its second season at First Presbyterian Church.

Designed to offer moments of beauty, stillness, and shared humanity, the series has a unique appeal. The soft glow of candlelight, paired with thoughtful programming, has brought new faces into the sanctuary—even some who might not have expected to find themselves in a church, but who came in search of something meaningful and found it through music.



The upcoming year's series will again include four performances. Our fall program will open the season in October, with more details to be announced soon. December's concert, titled *Peace on Earth*, will bring the sounds of Advent and Christmas into focus. This will not be the loud, bright music of department store speakers, but rather the kind of quiet peace the season invites: ancient carols, tender lullabies, all to ask God to grant us peace during a time our world so desperately needs it.

In February, we're honored to present *Songs My Mother Taught Me...*, featuring guest artist Dr. Jonathan Walker-VanKuren, Artist Teacher of Studio Voice at Lebanon Valley College. This powerful program explores the deep legacy of African-American spirituals, blending personal reflection and historical tradition.

The series will conclude with a spring performance that, like the rest, will seek to offer music that uplifts, invites reflection, and builds connection.

The Candlelight Concert Series continues to be shaped by a commitment to thoughtful programming, meaningful collaboration, and a quiet sense of purpose. Each performance is more than just a concert—it's a chance to share something human and heartfelt. We hope you'll be part of it.



JUNE 15

NEXT PER CAPITA PRIZE DRAWING

If you pay your per capita before June 15, you will be entered to win one of the prizes: \$50 gift card, *donated by Hailey's Harp & Pub*; \$25 Paris Café gift card; \$25 gift Fresco by Jimmy card.

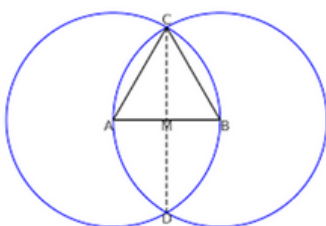
Per capita was introduced in the 1700s and formally adopted in the 1800s to cover travel expenses for General Assembly meetings. Over time, it evolved to fund the church's broader administrative and ecclesiastical functions. In 1995, it was defined as a way for all members to share in the cost of governance and mission coordination, fostering unity among Presbyterians. The Presbytery of the Coastlands relies on per capita for over 60% of its budget, with the 2025 rate set at \$40 per member, ensuring the denomination's continued operations and collective support. It's more than just a financial obligation; it's a reflection of communal faith and commitment.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

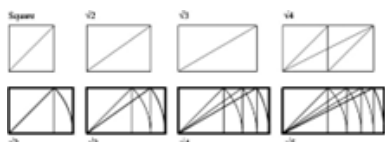
PROPORTIONAL HARMONY AND A SUMMER ABROAD

Rev Fred Garry



It's called "proportional harmony." It's all about the circle, and triangles, and squares, and something called the vesica piscis. As a

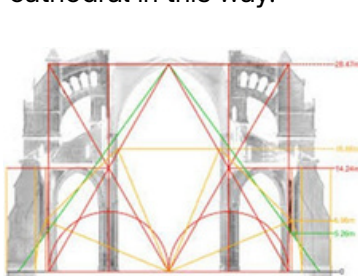
mathematical equation it looks something like this:



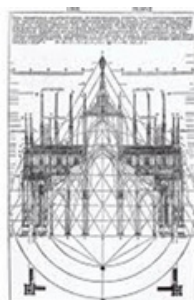
In moments like these I am ever reminded why I have a degree in Arts and Letters. But yet, maybe not had someone showed me this early on in my education. This is fascinating. It is also the key to Gothic Architecture.

A Gothic Cathedral is a wild gathering of circles ever in proportional harmony. It was as if the builder and masons kept applying this principle again and again and again until the spire scrapped the sky and the ceiling looked like the canopy of heaven.

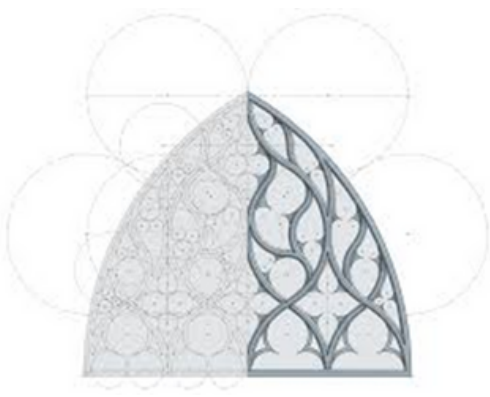
You can begin to see this if you consider the cathedral in this way:



Or
this



My favorite though is when you can see the riot of circles in the rose windows with the intricate tracery:



You can begin to see how many circles create the interior of the window, but then, it gets even more intense when you consider that the window itself is two intersecting circles, or a portion of two, more like a slice.

This Summer, Kathy and I, plan on visiting the eight Gothic Cathedrals that encircle Paris: Bourges, Amiens, Chartres, Rouen, Strasbourg, Laon, Reims, and Beauvais. Most of the churches are a few hours by train, so our plan is a day trip for each. The plan is to test a theory: does the proportional harmony of the cathedral create harmony within? In other words, what does the architecture do? My hunch is that the harmony will conjure something, something sublime in us. If not, I am sure each cathedral town will have a nice place for lunch.

The other half of the month will be spent in the Louvre, the Musee d'Orsay, and the many, many other art museums in Paris. This too has a purpose, especially the Louvre. I want to see how it compares and "cures". A museum is a collection that is "curated." At the heart of this word is healing or "cure." I want to see how the curated collection differs from the proportional harmony of the cathedral. Is there a difference, a common ground, a complement?

From France I head to Malawi to dedicate the nurse's house which we built and thus opening a clinic for a village. And then, to conclude the Sabbatical, Kathy and I will take our pup to Nova Scotia for three weeks of beauty in nature. Amongst the bays and the sunsets and the lobsters, the only proportional harmony I plan to ponder is how much thyme is too much thyme in a lobster bisque.

Rev Garry's new book, *The Price We Pay*, is now available on Amazon in print or E-book. This book explores how we seek to pay the price of memory we owe in honor, in grief, and in penance. We can see the way we have tried to pay the cost in monuments, museums, and memorials.



OUR CONFIRMANDS' EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH

Rev Fred Garry and our ten 2025 confirmands

On April 27th, the church welcomed ten new confirmands to our congregation. Every opportunity to teach a confirmation class is a moment to rediscover faith. This year was no exception. The rediscovery was found by exploring faith as trust. What does it mean to trust God, to trust Jesus? How does one trust a spirit? Here we share the highlights of the confirmands' statements of faith.

A Spirit is a small part of God that is with us every day. A small part of God that I find in me is peace.

- Phoebe Gathigia

Jesus ate with the outcasts so that he could tell them the good word of God.

- Bella Messina

Heaven is found differently for all of us. Eternal life is shown in worship and joy, not as a physical experience after death.

- Jack Teti



From L to r: CarlJames Lewis, Bella Messina, Lexington Donahue, Phoebe Gathigia, Taylor Welsh, Jack Teti, Ronnie Kaminski, Will Hajjar, Eli Bourne and Collin Casey

I am chosen by God because God could have created another kid instead of me. God is faithful because he believes in all the good in people.

- Eli Bourne

I trust in Jesus from the stories I have read.

The good news is the release of the captives. Jesus ate with the outcasts because he knew their hearts.

- Will Hajjar

To trust God means to feel safe and at peace in his hands and in his plan.

- Lexington Donahue

I trust that I belong to God because I am one of God's children.

- CarlJames Lewis

I trust I belong because of his grace and his everlasting love.

- Collin Casey

A holy life is straight, good, true, and beautiful. It's when God works through us to do good things.

- Taylor Welsh

I trust Jesus because I believe he died for my sins. The good news is the gospel, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

- Ronnie Kaminski

CONGRATULATIONS 2025 SENIORS!



Josie Gray is graduating from Metuchen High School. She plans to attend Rutgers University in New Brunswick.



Kylie Trolaro is graduating from Metuchen High School. She plans to attend Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA.



Sophie Villegas is graduating from MHS. She plans to study political science at George Washington University in DC.

Arthur Burr is graduating from Metuchen High School in June. He plans to study HVAC at a technical college.

Zoltan Bedenek completed his B.A. in English Education at Kean University. He is currently teaching in Carteret and plans to pursue a Masters in English at Kean.

Paul Burr is graduating from The Calais School. He plans to attend Montclair State University for a combined BA/MS in Accounting.



Sayla Fischer is graduating from Metuchen High School. Sayla plans to study Fashion Design at Brookdale Community College.



Julia Armeli graduated from Wesleyan University in May with a B.A. in Government and Data Science. She plans to work as a policy analyst.



Joe Duhme is graduating from Metuchen High School. He plans to attend Brown University in Providence, RI.



Ethan Kozo graduated from the University of Miami in Florida in May with a B.A. in Film Production. He plans to work in the film industry.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

For two decades, Vacation Bible School (VBS) at FPC has been a cherished summer tradition, offering children an engaging and joyful environment to explore their faith. Through uplifting songs, creative crafts, exciting games, and enriching Bible stories, VBS has become a vital ministry that shapes young hearts and minds. Our evolving VBS programs not only instill biblical principles but also cultivate a strong foundation of faith for children, youth, and adult volunteers alike. The experience fosters lasting memories and deep connections, strengthening the sense of community that makes our church family so special.



A unique hallmark of FPC's VBS is the leadership opportunities it provides for youth. From planning to leading activities, young volunteers gain valuable experience that enriches their spiritual journey while contributing to the success of the program. Additionally, VBS serves as a welcome respite for local parents, offering their children a safe and nurturing space to learn and grow.



One of the most beloved traditions to emerge from VBS is our puppet ministry, which began as part of the program and has since grown into a unique and cherished aspect of FPC's faith-based programming. These performances bring biblical lessons to life in

an engaging and interactive way, capturing the imagination of young participants. Our VBS children frequently share how much they look



Pictures clockwise from top right: Hayley Francobandiero, Brenda Day, Samantha Cook, Elaine Hansen, 2011; Nancy Leardi, Lindsey Leardi, Melissa Leardi, Julie Shaver, Collin Draper, Bradley Shaver and Greg Shaver, 2012; Emily Almeida, 2007. VBS 2024.

forward to this experience, with families even planning their summer vacations around VBS week to ensure their children don't miss out on the fun and fellowship.



The continued popularity of FPC's VBS is a testament to its role in nurturing spiritual growth year after year. A special thanks goes to Nancy Leardi and Julie Shaver, whose dedication and collaboration have been instrumental in maintaining the momentum of this beloved tradition for the past 20 years. We are deeply grateful for the unwavering support of our church community, which makes the success of Vacation Bible School possible.

As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to many more summers of faith, fun, and fellowship!

SIGN UP FOR VBS

To Sign up for VBS 2025, June 23 - 27

Visit <https://fpcweb.org/vacation-bible-school/>

Or scan this QR code

If you have questions or want to volunteer, please contact Nancy Leardi, Director of Christian Ed., 732-491-2264 or nleardi@fpcweb.org



UPCOMING EVENTS

Community Dinner. June 1 SU, 5PM. All are welcome to this delicious home-cooked meal, in the Social Center.

All Church Picnic. June 8 SU, after the 9:30 worship service. Join us in the Social Center ballfield



Church Picnic 2023

Habitat Car Wash Fundraiser. June 14, SA, 9AM-12PM in the church parking lot.



Habitat Car Wash 2024

TOY DRIVE

**for Community Nursery School and VBS Kids
Until June 8**

Help bring smiles to kids! We're collecting bubbles, chalk, jump ropes, balls, frisbees, beach buckets, shovels, lawn games, and sprinkler toys. To keep things equitable, please donate items under \$10. Collection bins are in the Narthex and Social Center.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!

Thank you for your generous donations to Operation Care Package. On May 9, members of the Mission Commission dropped off many boxes of personal care items, all donated by FPC's congregation, to the American Legion. The items will be sorted into care packages for our service men and women.

To see all upcoming church events, visit our website at <https://fpcweb.org/resources/events/> or scan the QR code



BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Celebrate Father's Day by sharing Christ's love through Church World Service (CWS) Tools, helping families build strong, lasting foundations. Honor your father with a gift that supports rebuilding efforts and strengthens communities. Return the completed form with your contribution to the Church Office by **June 2**. Checks may be made to First Presbyterian Church with "CWS Tools" on the memo line. Honorees will receive an acknowledgment card, and donors will be listed in the Father's Day worship bulletin. Join us in making a difference today.

YOUR NAME _____
PHONE NUMBER _____
PLEDGE ENVELOPE NO (IF KNOWN) _____
AMOUNT OF CONTRIBUTION (\$5.00/ TOOLS) _____

INFORMATION FOR BULLETIN INSERT & ACKNOWLEDGMENT (PLEASE PRINT)

GIVEN BY _____
GIVEN IN HONOR OF _____
HONOREE'S ADDRESS _____

GIVEN IN MEMORY OF _____

MAIL OR DROP OFF THE FORMS NO LATER THAN MONDAY JUNE 2

SPRING 2025 PARISH NEWS

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Stay up to date with just one click!

We are now using Mail Chimp to bring to you the latest church happenings. Sign up to make sure we have your correct email address.

Visit the church website, send an email to fpc@fpcweb.org or use your cell phone to go directly to the link using this QR code.

We promise not to spam you!



First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Parish News Submission

Items for the upcoming newsletter may be emailed to hkoball@fpcweb.org

Church Office

270 Woodbridge Avenue, Metuchen, NJ 08840
Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm
Telephone: (732) 491-2300
Email: fpc@fpcweb.org

Sunday Worship Service 9:30 am

Online Sunday Morning Worship 9:30 am

Livestreamed on FPC Metuchen Facebook