PARISHNE



CHURCH UNPLUGGED

Jordan Klotz

"Church Unplugged" may sound like the name of a flashy megachurch, but in fact, it is a subject which the staff invites you to consider as we enter a new program year together.

Because the "point" of this article is otherwise buried deep under a layer of exposition, I will use it to bookend my writing:

The Church offers a place to make human connections, to explore beautiful things, people, and ideas, and to encounter Wonder, Mystery, and Love.

The great lie of social media is that it would bring us together.

Perhaps it does help us keep in touch with greataunt Suzy in Ohio. However, social media's greatest achievement has been to isolate us. How many of our waking hours are spent scrolling, scrolling, and scrolling some more? How might we have spent that time fifteen years ago? Twenty years ago? Forty years ago?

One activity that can't compete with social media is book reading. In 1976, nearly 40% of high school seniors said they had read at least six books, for pleasure, over the last year, and only about 11% hadn't read any books at all. Today? Those percentages have flipped.

Another casualty to screen time is something we all need to thrive: human connection. Screens of various shapes and sizes have steadily replaced front-porch conversations, family dinners, and spontaneous chats with friends and neighbors.

Just as reading books is becoming more and more challenging for even the brightest students at the most prestigious universities—just as our isolation has reached levels higher than ever before, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic—BOOM!

In walks artificial intelligence.



Nikki Walter and Betty Kopetz praying

Al can read the book for you and give you a 5-sentence summary; Al can do the math problem (and show its work); Artificial intelligence can be an artificial friend or romantic partner, right in your pocket.

Now, machines can read the book, do the math, write the article—even simulate relationships. Why bother doing any of it ourselves?

Our children's brains are still being wired to think, ask questions, try hard things, and form relationships. For a young mind to develop these critical faculties, there can be no substitute for these activities.

Likewise, as we age, what better way to stay sharp than to stay curious, to read, to sing, to learn, and to be with others? One may therefore see a great benefit for people of all generations to gather as we do in the Church.

I don't know about you, but for me, I feel fulfilled and inspired by being curious, by seeing beauty, and by being with others. These are things that AI and our screens cannot do for us.

The Church offers a place to make human connections, to explore beautiful things, people, and ideas, and to encounter Wonder, Mystery, and Love.

This year, our programming will seek to understand what we, the Church, can offer to a world hungry for human connection, and we invite you to join us in this journey!

THE CANDLELIGHT CONCERT SERIES RETURNS!

Jordan Klotz

The goal of the Candlelight Concert Series is twofold:

- Provide beautiful music in a beautiful atmosphere "to glorify God and refresh the soul" (-J.S. Bach).
- Use the uniquely broad appeal of a concert by "candlelight" to attract guests who may otherwise not think of the Church as a space where one may find beautiful things.

I am excited to share the Candlelight Concert Series will continue in 2025-2026. Mark your calendars for these exciting performances!

Sunday, October 5 | 7:00 PM: The Phantom of the Opera with Live Improvised Organ Accompaniment Enjoy the 1925 silent film, The Phantom of the Opera, with live, improvised organ accompaniment by Jordan Klotz. During the silent film age, music was often provided by an organist live in the theater, which is what Jordan will recreate, improvising the score for the film as it is being shown.

Sunday, November 30 | 7:00 PM: Peace on Earth

The FPC Music Ministry will come together to present a program of seasonal music of the first Sunday of Advent, following the Metuchen Holiday Parade.

Sunday, February 1 | 7:00 PM: Songs My Mother Taught Me

Baritone Jonathan Walker-VanKuren presents his program of Black Spirituals to kick off Black History Month, accompanied by Tyler Canonico-Dilley, piano.

Sunday, April 19 | 7:00 PM: Midnight on the Water

Returning to FPC is the neo-classical string trio with virtuosic roots, Midnight on the Water.



YOUTH GROUP 2025-2026: A YEAR TO UNPLUG, SLOW DOWN, AND RECONNECT

Rev Khayla Johnson

For youth ages 12 and up - All are welcome!

As summer winds down and fall begins to take shape, we're thrilled to look ahead to a brandnew year of youth group! Whether you've been part of our community for years or are just stepping into this space for the first time, we want you to know: you belong here.

This year, we're doing something a little different. Our theme for the 2025 youth program year is: "Unplugged: Making Space for What Matters." It's no secret that the world our young people are growing up in is fast-paced, high-pressure, and digitally driven. Between school, sports, family responsibilities, social media, and ever-growing expectations, many of our youth are running on empty—mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

We believe our youth group can be a countercultural space, a place where students can take a breath, slow down, and unplug from the chaos around them.

Why "Unplugged"? We chose this year's theme because we see the impact constant noise has on our youth. There's pressure to always be available, always performing, always "on." But spiritual growth often happens in the quiet spaces—in the moments when we step away from the scroll, turn down the volume, and listen. This year, our weekly gatherings, events, and discussions will explore: The practice of Sabbath, what it means to rest with intention. Silence and stillness, how to find God in quiet moments. Digital boundaries, learning how to live with technology without being ruled by it. Presence, rediscovering how to be fully here, now, with ourselves, others, and God. Real connection, building friendships that go beyond surface-level.

What to Expect This Year

Youth group will meet Wednesday nights at 7:30pm beginning on October 1, 2025 in the Social Center, then move to the Youth room the next week. Each week will include: A time to gather, check in, and share a meal or snacks. Games and team-building activities. Honest conversations about life, faith, and everything in between.

Throughout the year, we'll also offer: Special events designed around digital detox and spiritual renewal. Service projects that help us give back and reconnect with purpose. Guest speakers and workshops on mindfulness, faith in a digital age, and healthy rhythms of life.

Who Can Join?

If you're 12 years old or older, this group is for you. No matter where you are on your faith journey, whether you're quiet or outgoing, techsavvy or looking for a break from screens, you have a place here. Bring your questions, your doubts, your stories, and your whole self. And yes bring a friend! Everyone is welcome.

How to Get Involved

To sign up or ask questions, reach out to: Reverend Khayla Johnson Email: kjohnson@fpcweb.org Phone: 843-312-7288. Or follow us on Instagram at @fpcmetuchenyg for updates and announcements.

We live in a world that's constantly telling us to go faster, do more, be more. But what if youth group could be the one place where we're reminded that we're already enough? This year, we're creating space to slow down. To breathe. To listen for God's still, small voice. To find joy in community and rediscover what matters most.

We can't wait to unplug with you.



FPC Youth, Toby, Johannes and Maggie unplugging

STEP INTO THE GLOW ROOM, WHERE GOD'S LOVE **IGNITES WONDER**

Introducing Sunday GLOW (God's Love, Our Wonder), our newly refreshed children's ministry program! We're saying goodbye to the term "Sunday School" and embracing a name that better reflects the joy, curiosity, and faith-filled wonder we want to nurture in our children.



A skit by the puppet ministry

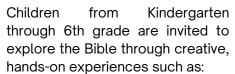
Program Year Kickoff: Rally Day, Sunday, September 14. Our 2025-2026 Theme: "Church Unplugged"

Events will be held in the GLOW room, nursery, and other classrooms, with the GAGA pit featured year-round. Registration is now open!

Please see page 10 to sign-up for children's choir and **GLOW** activities



Kimberly Denny Ryder reads in the GLOW room.



- Puppet shows
- Mindfulness Movement
- Legos
- Games & activities
- · Story-telling & singing



Top: Chef Dan with the GLOW





Erika reads to Nathan in the nursery



Top: Nancy Leardi listens to Ellie during Lego Sunday; Below: Brenda Day leads songs in the GLOW room.



A SUMMER OF JOY AND SERVICE

Save the dates for Vacation Bible Camp 2026 - Bug Zone June 22-26th



PICTURES OF HABITAT 2025



THE NURSE'S HOUSE AND CLINIC IN MALAWI

Lori Kellner and Sarah Teti

July 16, the FPC-M Social Center at 3:00AM, our group (Sarah and Steve Teti, Lori and Robin Kellner) hurries to load 5 action packers and one military duffel bag filled with medical supplies into the van that would transport us to Newark airport for our 6:00AM flight to Malawi. Suitcases were also loaded. Once packed up, Sarah said good-bye to Steve and we began our 36 hour journey to Malawi. At Newark we picked-up our other traveler, Elizabeth Russell.

We arrived in Malawi at approximately 3:00PM on July 17, and our journey on the ground began. We joined up with Rev. Garry and went to our hotel in the Capital, Lilongwe.

The next several days were filled with extensive driving and meeting with various government and church officials. These meetings helped to lay out our agenda and rekindle relationships and expectations. Our first village stop was in the Widows Fund site at Mbowe. We were greeted by the village women with singing and dancing.



Lori Kellner visiting the Widows Fund in M'bowe

Rev. Garry spoke and his words were translated by the Honorable Sam Chiwa's assistant Matthew Ngunda. After Rev. Garry's sermon, we distributed some toothbrushes and tooth paste to the women and were subsequently treated to a demonstration of sewing work they do to generate income. We had the opportunity to give them a few items our PW group had sent, too. They were delighted! It was wonderful and inspiring. These women, many of whom were in their 70's and beyond, were generous spirits, with great respect for Rev. Garry and grateful for the support of our church.

One of the objectives of this trip was to establish a Presbyterian Women bank account in Malawi to

help facilitate the transfer of funds that will support our future mission projects. This also included establishing a non-profit corporation. After a day and a half, and some very expedited paperwork, The Metuchen Presbyterian Women Malawi Fund was created. Thanks to the Honorable Sam Chirwa MP and his office this task was accomplished.

The following day, we were off to Luwerezi, Mzimba to officially open the Nurse's House and the Clinic. We arrived to much fanfare. Dancing, singing, and a caravan! And after we presented the medical supplies we brought to the Honorable Sam Chirwa, we were escorted to the area of the village where the Nurse's house and Clinic were located. We toured the house and the clinic and then presented the medical supplies to the community at large. The area chiefs and residents were so amazed by the extent of our donations. One official commented that we brought more supplies in one visit than they would receive from the government in a year.

There were speeches, singing and dancing to commemorate this occasion. The clinic would open the next day. It was very moving.

All of this would not have been possible without your generous support of this project. This clinic will allow 40,000 people to have access to healthcare in their own area. Words cannot adequately express the gratitude we experienced during this visit. However, our take away from this trip is that our work is not done here. We will continue to stay in touch with Honorable Sam Chirwa and his team to see what needs we can fundraise to meet in the future. Stay tuned!



Rev Garry, Robin Kellner, and Elizabeth Russell outside the new nurse's home

NOURISHING OUR COMMUNITY

Sarah Teti and Heather Koball

Last month, our community gathered for a conversation about food insecurity, hosted by the Metuchen Human Rights Commission. Food pantry director Sarah Teti joined representatives from REPLENISH (the Middlesex County food bank) and Metuchen Schools for this July 9th discussion. Here are insights from Sarah's presentation.

The Work of the FPC Food Pantry In Metuchen and Edison, hunger touches families from all walks of life, often when they least expect it. The FPC Food Pantry provides hope, giving not just sustenance, but dignity, choice, and pathways to stability for those facing food insecurity.

The FPC Food Pantry operates with a clear vision: to serve as part of a comprehensive path for families and individuals journeying toward financial stability. This isn't simply about handing out groceries—it's about creating sustainable change and independence.

The pantry's mission encompasses three key pillars. First, we provide healthy food in a dignified way to anyone in need, regardless of background. Second, we strengthen our community by providing meaningful volunteer opportunities. Finally, we educate both clients and the broader public about safety net programs and hunger-related issues in our area.

The Power of Choice What sets our Food Pantry apart is our commitment to client choice. Rather than distributing pre-packed bags, our pantry operates like a store where clients can select foods that best meet their family's needs and preferences. This approach provides clients with dignity and control, reduces waste since people choose foods they'll actually use, and allows them to tailor assistance to their unique circumstances.

A dedicated volunteer accompanies each client through the aisles, offering guidance while respecting their autonomy. As Sarah noted in her presentation, "Client choice is where we get the conversation started—and from there, we work to connect people with additional resources and support services."

HOW TO DONATE

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

Community Partnerships The Food Pantry collaborates with numerous local agencies to ensure comprehensive support for clients, including the NJ Division of Youth and Family Services, Edison Housing Authority, Homeless Outreach programs, Mission First Housing, NJ Reentry services, and many others. These partnerships address not just immediate food needs, but underlying issues that contribute to food insecurity.

Our food comes from multiple sources, reflecting community-wide efforts to combat hunger. Community donations come from local schools, organizations like the Elks, American Legion, and Knights of Columbus, Scout troops, neighborhood food drives, and the YMCA. We also partner with REPLENISH and Elijah's Promise Food Truck, purchase items with donated funds, and rescue food through partnerships with Share My Meals, Whole Foods, and Paris Baguette.

Impact by the Numbers The scope of the Food Pantry ministry is remarkable. Each month, we serve approximately 1,000 people through client choice shopping, weekly home deliveries, emergency food distribution to local agencies, and deliveries to hotels through the Rutgers PATH Program. Additionally, we distribute over 700 individual, pre-cooked meals on Wednesdays and Thursdays. In a typical month, we conduct 15 deliveries per week, welcome 150 families for pantry visits, and distribute 30 emergency bags to caseworkers.

Assistance extends beyond food. Last month, we provided \$4,000 in utility and rental assistance.

The Food Pantry ministry exemplifies our church's commitment to loving our neighbors as ourselves. Together, we're not just feeding bodies—we're nourishing hope, rebuilding dignity, and creating pathways to brighter futures for our neighbors in need.

A TREASURER TRANSITION AT FPC

Heather Koball

After four years of dedicated service, our church treasurer Colleen Walker will be stepping down from her role. We are pleased to announce that longtime church member Kevin Trolaro will be taking over this important position.

Celebrating Colleen Walker's Service

Colleen began her work at First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen in June 2021 and has been an invaluable asset to our church family. During her tenure, she has made significant contributions to our financial operations, including creating а comprehensive Bookkeeper's Handbook that details all the activities required for the position. This living document will serve as an excellent resource for Kevin as he transitions into the role. "I've really enjoyed my four years working here in the office and will miss seeing everyone," Colleen shared. "But I won't be a stranger as I plan to volunteer in the office when needed."

As Colleen looks ahead to her next chapter, she's excited about having more time for travel and visiting family. Her first planned adventure is a week-long trip to San Diego at the end of September. We're grateful for her years of faithful service and look forward to seeing her around the church as she continues to volunteer. "The office and church are in great hands with Kevin," Colleen noted.



Left: Colleen Walker; Right: Kevin Trolaro

Welcoming Kevin Trolaro

We are fortunate that Kevin Trolaro, a dedicated member of our congregation for 25 years, has accepted the role of church treasurer. Kevin and his family joined First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen in spring 2000 after moving to town that March, and he has been deeply involved in church life ever since. Kevin is a lifelong

Presbyterian, having attended First Presbyterian in Rahway, while growing up in Clark, NJ.

Kevin brings extensive financial expertise to this position. He holds an accounting degree from Virginia Tech and an MBA from Notre Dame, and has been a Certified Public Accountant since 1994. With 33 years of experience in accounting and financial reporting spanning public accounting firms, the U.S. government, and public companies, Kevin is well-equipped to guide our church's financial stewardship.

Throughout his time at First Presbyterian, Kevin has served the church in numerous capacities. He began his volunteer service on the Evangelism and Nurture Committee and has served multiple times on both the Audit Committee and Finance Committee during his session terms. He served as President of the Board of Trustees in 2019 and filled an open session term in 2022, joining the Buildings & Grounds Committee. Kevin was also an active member of our church choir from 2013 to 2022. When he's not working with numbers, Kevin enjoys going to the beach, following his favorite sports teams (the Yankees and Rangers), and playing golf.

Kevin is enthusiastic about his new role and the opportunities it presents. "One of the reasons I joined this church was that there is always so much going on here, and throughout my career, I've seen that being in finance puts you in the middle of everything," he explained. "I'm really excited to have this opportunity and hopefully be able to make a lasting contribution to the financial operations of the church, and whatever else I participate in."

After taking time to get oriented in his new position, Kevin hopes to bring fresh approaches to the role, particularly as the church transitions to QuickBooks Online. He hopes that transition will allow different approaches to records retention and the ability to simplify the annual audit process

Please join us in thanking Colleen for her years of faithful service and in welcoming Kevin to his new role. We are blessed to have such dedicated members willing to serve our church community in these important capacities.

OUR CHURCH RENOVATION PROJECTS

Heather Koball and Jordan Klotz

Our congregation is moving forward with two exciting building improvement projects that will enhance our space for worship, fellowship, and ministry. These updates reflect our commitment to honoring our church's heritage while meeting the evolving needs of our community.

New Doors to Enhance Security and Accessibility

Thanks to a \$144,000 federal grant awarded to FPC in 2024, we are moving forward with door replacements in both the Education building and sanctuary. These new doors will feature glass panels for improved visibility, electronic key fob access systems to enhance security while maintaining accessibility, panic bars to allow quick exits from the building, and push-to-open door activation to improve accessibility.

After consulting with multiple vendors, we received detailed bids from three companies. Each was evaluated based on cost, quality, timeline, and relevant experience. Baut Studios, a nearly 100 year old company, was selected as our contractor, based on their competitive bid and strong recommendations from St. Francis Church in Metuchen, which recently completed a similar project.

Baut has provided several design options to ensure the new doors complement our building's architecture while meeting functional needs. The electronic key fob system will allow us to manage access more effectively and eliminate the need to rekey locks when staff or volunteer leadership changes.

An ad hoc door committee—comprising members with experience in construction, security, and church operations—has been finalizing design details. We expect to sign the contract in September following Session review and approval.

Once finalized, the manufacturing period will take approximately five to six months. Installation will likely occur in February or March and will take about three weeks. We will work closely with the contractor to minimize disruption to church activities and worship services during this time.

Chancel Remodel Project Takes Shape

The Chancel Committee has made steady progress on our sanctuary renovation. In 2024, the committee established a guiding vision: "To create a chancel space that is beautiful, accessible, and liturgically flexible, facilitating worship, music, and preaching."

We've partnered with John Milner Architects, Inc. (AML) of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania—a historic respected firm specializing in preservation. Their expertise will help ensure our honors the sanctuary's historic renovation character while supporting modern worship practices.

The design process is underway. In July, two JMA architects visited our church to take measurements and assess the current chancel layout. They evaluated structural considerations and discussed our congregation's specific goals. We expect to receive design proposals soon, which will illustrate how the space can be reimagined to better serve our worship services, music ministry, and preaching.

A key component of this project involves our pipe organ. After consulting with technicians, we've determined that all organ pipes must be removed during construction to protect them from dust and debris. This presents a unique opportunity: the pipes will undergo their first thorough cleaning in 70 years, removing decades of buildup. Necessary repairs will also be completed while the pipes are safely stored. Once reassembled, the organ should sound clearer and more vibrant than it has in years.

The committee continues to meet regularly to review plans and coordinate with the architects. Their goal is to ensure the final design supports our diverse worship styles and improves accessibility for all members.

Looking Ahead

These improvements represent meaningful investments in our church's future, creating spaces that will support worship, fellowship, and ministry for years to come. We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our volunteer committees, and the patience of our congregation as we move through these changes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome Back: Rally Day and Fall Programs

Join us for Rally Day and the Blessing of the Backpacks on **Sunday Sept 14** during worship as we celebrate the start of a new year for children and youth! All ages will worship together, followed by Coffee Hour in the Social Center with games—including the Gaga Pit. Sunday School resumes **Sunday Sept. 21**, with special programs on the first Sunday of each month (Puppet Skits, Mindful Teachings, Bible Baking, and LEGO Sundays).

Children & Youth Groups begin in October:

- First Tuesday Club (K-2nd): Oct. 7, 4:30-5:00 PM
- Junior Club (3rd-6th): Oct. 16, 5:30-6:15 PM
- Youth Group (7th-12th): BBQ Kickoff Oct. 1, weekly Weds

Choirs Begin in September:

- Carol Choir (Age 4-2nd): Tues 9/16, 4:00-4:30 PM
- Junior Choir (3rd-6th): Thurs 9/18, 4:15-5:00 PM
- Joy Ringers (3rd-6th): Thurs 9/18, 5:00-5:30 PM
- Westminster Choir (7th–12th): Wed 9/17, 6:30–7:00 PM
- Trinity Ringers (7th-Adult): Wed 9/17, 7:00-7:30 PM

Register online <u>here</u> or download the form https://fpcweb.org/resources/forms/ and submit to the church office. Please complete a separate registration for EACH child.



Or use the QR code to register



Register online or at fpcweb.org/resources/forms.

Questions? Contact Nancy Leardi (Christian Ed) or Jordan Klotz (Choirs)

Parking Update Church members who need to use the parking lot for a day or two are asked to let the church office know. Please tell us your car's make, model, color, and license plate number. Monthly parking is also available for \$50 per month for church members and \$80 per month for non-members. To reserve a spot, please contact Heather Koball in the office.

Deacons and Elders Retreat, Sept 6. All Deacons and Elders, please join us on Saturday, Sept 6 for training and information about the upcoming program year. More information to come!

Community Dinners Return, Sun, Sept. 7, 5PM. All are welcome at the table—come share a delicious meal and meaningful fellowship as our Community Dinners resume! Volunteers are needed to help make these evenings special. And if you haven't picked up your copy of Come to the Table, the Community Dinner cookbook, they're still available—contact the church office or Gilly McKie to get yours.

Grant Supports Sandwich Packing with Metuchen High. FPC received a grant from the Community Resource Development Fund to support a partnership with the Metuchen High School Special Education Program. Students and teachers will join church members at FPC to pack lunches for Elijah's Promise, which serves people experiencing homelessness. Four event dates will be announced this fall and winter.

Next Per Capita Drawing - Sept 14 Be sure to pay your per capita of \$40 to be entered into this and future prize drawings.

World Communion Sunday, Oct 5. We join Christians worldwide in celebrating World Communion Sunday and Christ's call to be peacemakers. Your gift to the Peacemaking Offering supports healing in our community, our Presbytery, and around the world. Watch for a letter with more information in September!

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



CONTACTING THE PASTORS OR CHURCH STAFF

To reach the church office or any staff member, please call 732-491-2300, during office hours, Mon-Thurs, 9AM-2PM. If you would like to speak or visit with Rev. Fred Garry or Rev. Khayla Johnson, please call the church office or call Rev. Garry at 315-771-3590 or Rev. Johnson at 843-312-7288

FALL 2025 PARISH NEWS

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN 270 Woodbridge Avenue, Metuchen, NJ 08840

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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!



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



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