
PARISH NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN, NJ



FPC Habitat Crew, Summer 2024

SLOW DOWN AND UNPLUG

- CREATING A NEW WORSHIP SPACE
- THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGING
- REFLECTIONS FROM MALAWI

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- HABITAT AND PUPPETEERING NEWS
- CHOIR MUSIC CAMP SIGN UP

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Capital Campaign Team

In early 2026, a committee was formed to explore the possibility of a capital campaign to support a sanctuary renovation. When this team, consisting of Maggy Cook, Brenda Day, and Margo Gunsser, gathered, the first decision necessary was whether to hire a campaign consultant.

In this decision, FPC consulted with The Presbyterian Foundation, an organization which assists congregations in both annual and capital campaigns. The Presbyterian Foundation advised that any capital campaign seeking to raise more than the congregation's annual giving should consider hiring a consultant. The Foundation recommended that FPC assess three bids from three separate firms—they passed along the names of two trusted firms and advised that we find a third, more local firm.



The FPC sanctuary shortly after 1950s remodel

After corresponding and interviewing the firms, the committee selected Richard Rogers of Horizons Stewardship. With over 25 years of experience, he has advised over 90 campaigns, raising over \$150 million. The committee's experience with Richard during the interview process has been reflected during the first several months of working together; he is an intelligent person with a keen understanding of churches and capital campaigns, he is kind, and he is honest.

The first step of determining whether or not to proceed with a capital campaign is a "feasibility study," to assess whether a congregation is ready. Taking the temperature of the members is a critical step to ensure that, if approved by Session, any campaign would find success

This began with a congregational information meeting held on Sunday, May 17 and again on Wednesday, June 3. The team presented why a campaign has been proposed, how the capital projects would transform our spaces and our congregational life, and specific details of each project, including costs. This project, if undertaken, would prepare our sacred space for the generations to come. It would have vital impacts, including some yet unknown, on our worshipping community.

Members of the congregation received a vision case statement, outlining the proposed projects, and were asked to complete a survey sent by Horizons Stewardship, which will compile a report to Session based on the results. This report will determine whether or not the congregation has the energy and desire to embark on a capital campaign.

Should this campaign be undertaken, it will represent a once-in-a-lifetime project to honor the history and legacy of our worship space while taking essential steps to help it better meet our needs and align with our church's mission. The life of our congregation would also experience significant disruption if the project proceeds.



The FPC sanctuary today

We are blessed to have our beautiful Social Center, which would temporarily house our worship and other activities while displaced (interestingly, during the major renovation of the 1950s, FPC worshipped at the Forum Theater on Main Street!). We are also blessed by our dedicated members, volunteers, and staff who work tirelessly to make First Presbyterian Church the thriving and loving community of faith that it is.

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT, VOICE!

Jordan Klotz

If you or your child grew up singing in any of FPC's many children and youth choirs, likely, you or your child have sung music by Helen Kemp, a beloved composer, voice teacher, church musician, children's choir pedagogue, and more. Of her many wonderful and memorable sayings, perhaps one of the best is, "Mind, body, spirit, voice—it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice!"

When singing is done right, it does involve the whole person—mind, body, spirit, and voice. When we consider why we sing, it is helpful to flip this idea on its head. Singing requires our whole person and in turn it lifts our whole person in mind, body, spirit, and yes, voice.

St. Augustine is credited with the phrase that some might deem overused, "The one who sings, prays twice." If it is overused, it's for good reason—because it's true. Singing offers a deeper engagement of our person, as Helen Kemp says so aptly.



All humans sing; regardless of where we come from or when we were born, humanity has been singing forever. Indeed, God commands us to sing. In countless Psalms, we are implored to "Sing to God a new song, play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts." (Ps. 33:4); James writes, "Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise." (James 5:13), and the Apostle Paul says to "sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts" (Eph. 5:19). Our songs join with a family album of Christians spanning two thousand years in outward expression of faith.



Karen Keithler, Virginia Shaw, Colleen Walker, and Margo Gunsser singing at the candlelight concert

Perhaps most importantly to modern life, with its fast pace and busy days, singing together helps us to mark the seasons of our lives, as individuals and as a community. The songs we sing, whether old or new, live with us as we grow and change. Perhaps we remember singing a hymn as children beside our grandmother on a Sunday morning, and that same hymn appears at the baptism of a child, the funeral of a parent, through times of joy and in moments of sorrow.

As any good friend, the songs of our faith grow alongside us and speak to us in different ways at different stages of life. It only takes a brief internet search to read that 21st-century life has a number of challenges—depression, loneliness, disconnection, stress—much of this attributed to the ways in which we interact with the world (namely, through screens of various shapes and sizes). In singing together, we find a path through all of the burdens of modern life. We open books containing melody and poetry, theology and history, calls for justice, pleas for mercy, and celebrations of life; we read and sing together, and we defy the isolation of modern society.

Perhaps, the next time our voices join on a Sunday morning, you will remember: "mind, body, spirit, voice—it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice," and you will let your whole person be lifted in the singing.

REFLECTIONS FROM MALAWI

Gillian Perilstein

After two weeks of travel in Malawi, it's no wonder they call it "The Warm Heart of Africa." Despite a multitude of hardships — like lack of infrastructure and fuel shortages — the people and deep-seated culture of this country are what make this place so special. Arriving in Lilongwe, I felt a range of emotions: excitement, anticipation, and curiosity about a place that I had heard so much about.

What I did not expect was just how welcomed and embraced we would feel everywhere we went. In the village of Mzimba, Sarah Teti and I had the opportunity to visit the clinic and deliver



(Above) Gillian at InLight Charity; (Right) Gillian at Lake Malawi

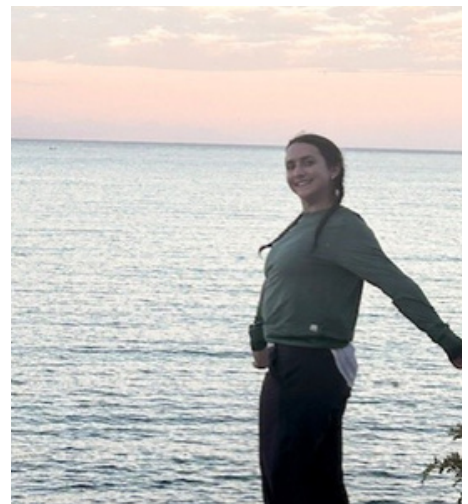
supplies that will directly support the community. As we arrived, the people greeted us with song and dance, filling the village with joy and celebration. We were honored to shake hands with the village chiefs and spend time with the families whose lives are being impacted by the work already taking place there.

It was amazing to meet the nurse currently living in the nurses' house that FPC Metuchen helped build. Seeing that project come to life reminded me that mission work is not just about buildings or donations — it is about people. It was incredible to witness the gratitude the community expressed for what has already been accomplished, but even more encouraging was their excitement for the future. The people of Mzimba are eager to continue growing alongside us, and it became clear that this partnership is only beginning.

Even with a language barrier, kindness and gratitude were communicated so clearly through smiles, laughter, and handshakes. I have never truly felt more welcome in a place. The children running to greet us, the warmth shown by Honorable Sam Chirwa and Matthew throughout our travels, and the overwhelming hospitality we experienced everywhere we went are memories I will carry with me for a long time.

We also had the opportunity to visit other organizations serving communities throughout Malawi. I spent two clinic days with Ministry of Hope, an organization bringing mobile clinics to remote villages. This was especially meaningful to me as I prepare to begin medical school, and it showed me both the challenges and possibilities of medicine in underserved communities. We also visited InLight Charities, where we toured a feeding station and clinic serving another rural village.

Traveling to these communities on long dirt roads helped us understand the realities of limited infrastructure but it also allowed us to see the



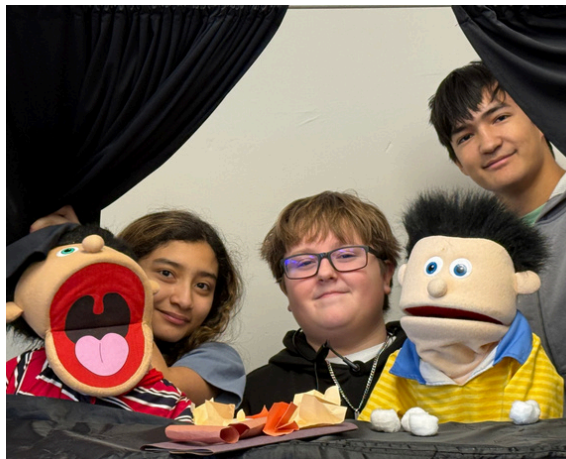
incredible impact that dedicated people and faithful partnerships can have.

Beyond the work itself, I already miss the simple moments of daily life in Malawi — the freshness of the local chicken, learning to roll nsima with my hands, and gathering around meals with new friends. I even picked up some Chichewa! Above all, I miss the people. Their joy, resilience, and generosity left a lasting impression on me. The work being done in Malawi is making a real difference, and after witnessing it firsthand, I can confidently say that the people there are just as much a blessing to us as we could ever hope to be to them. Zicombo, Malawi.

FPC'S PUPPET MINISTRY

Kat Davis

Over the past few years, the First Presbyterian Puppeteers revved up with frequent performances in worship, in Sunday School, during Vacation Bible Camp and for our seniors at a local nursing home. About a dozen youth from our church roll out of bed early on Sundays, turn up for rehearsals and retreats, and tackle every performance with teen energy and enthusiasm.



The puppet scripts are almost always simple –an older character sharing a Bible story with a younger character, who often misunderstands the message, forcing a fuller explanation and reinforcement of the message. We edit our scripts to keep the messages clear, joyful and uplifting. While playing the characters, our puppeteers are reminded of the Bible stories that they first learned in Sunday School, energizing their own religious journeys.

The kids like to guess who is behind the puppet theatre – at the end of each skit, they excitedly try to figure out which puppeteers are behind the curtain. One of the best parts of

the puppet program is that it builds bridges between our youth leaders and our kids – bringing them together to learn a Bible

message while interacting with each other in a fun way. All the kids learn each other's names and continue to build our church community.



Church kids in grades 7 and up are invited to be puppeteers – no experience necessary.

(Top Photo) Carl, Charles, and Johannes
(Right) Bella, Charlie, Alex, Noah, Claire
(Left) Kat Davis and the Illuminators



SUMMER FAITH GROWS WHERE YOU PLANT IT

Nancy Leardi

Summer's slower pace is a great time to nurture faith in simple ways. Try setting a few family goals:

– Share one gratitude at dinner – Read a Bible story weekly – Pray before outings – Take a “God’s Creation Walk” – Do one act of kindness each week – Keep worship part of your rhythm

Like a garden, faith grows when we make space for God each day. May your summer be filled with joy, rest, and growing closer to Christ. Looking for family-friendly faith reads? Stop by my office—you might find something new to enjoy!

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 with Rev. Fred Garry or Rev. Khayla J. Henry, please call the church office or call Rev. Garry at 315-771-3590 or Rev. Henry at 843-312-7288.

OUR 2026 GRADUATES



Dylan Casey

Second from left
 Son of Heather and Jim Casey. BA History and Secondary Education, minor in Law, Politics & Philosophy, The College of New Jersey. Starting a full-time teaching position in the Fall.

Ryan Casey

Second from right
 Son of Heather and Jim Casey. MAT Business Education, Rider University. Beginning a full-time teaching position in the Fall.



Ethan Draper

Son of Laura and Mike Draper. Bachelor's in Sacred Music and Organ Performance, Lebanon Valley College. Minister of Music and Organist at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Hanover, PA.

Ronan Gray

Son of Johanna Hoecker and Evan Gray. Graduating from Metuchen High School. Enrolling at Rutgers University in the Fall.

Joon Lee

Son of Sarang Kim and Hyun Lee. Graduating from Metuchen High School. Enrolling at Cornell in the Fall to study Government.



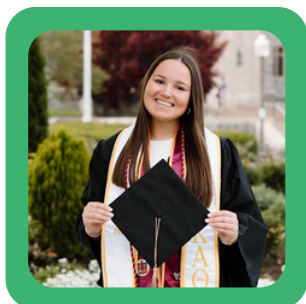
OUR 2026 GRADUATES

Kayleigh Rohrer

Daughter of Nina Rohrer. Graduating from South Plainfield High School. Attending Muhlenberg College to double major in Communication & Media and Dance. Joining Muhlenberg's Dance Team.

Maya Pennix

Daughter of Michael and Andrene Pennix. Graduated summa cum laude, B.S. double major in Animal Behavior Ecology Conservation and Psychology. Plans to pursue graduate studies to be a school psychologist.



Nicole Trolaro

Daughter of Kevin and Carla Trolaro. Graduated with honors from Virginia Tech. B.S. in FinTech and Big Data Analytics, minor in Statistics. Plans to work as a data analyst or financial analyst.

Keira Walker

Daughter of Colleen and Tice Walker. B.S. in Food Science, Penn State. Working as a lab technician for DeLoach Family Vineyards in Santa Rosa, CA.



Bella Staal

Daughter of Roland and Debbie Staal. Graduated from Metuchen High School. Attending Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA in the Fall.

7 MAKING LUNCH FOR ELIJAH'S PROMISE

Heather Koball

Each month, volunteers from First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen gather to pack lunches for Elijah's Promise in New Brunswick, an organization that provides hundreds of thousands of meals each year to people experiencing homelessness or food insecurity. Our church is grateful to support this important work in a hands-on way.

During these events, volunteers prepare sandwiches and pack bags with nutritious food for distribution. Currently, we assemble about 200 lunches each month. This effort complements our broader outreach, including our food pantry and rental and utilities assistance program.

This year, we expanded the program through a partnership with the special education and transition program at Metuchen High School. Students, along with their teachers, paraprofessionals, and church volunteers, joined us for six lunch-packing events during the school year.

This partnership was made possible through a grant from Coordinated Family Care (CFC), a nonprofit organization that supports children with behavioral, emotional, and developmental challenges, funded in part by federal and state Community Development Resource Funds.

Students participated in many steps of the process, including shopping for supplies, preparing sandwiches, and assembling lunch bags. They also decorated the bags with drawings and messages, adding a personal touch to brighten someone's day.

The program has been meaningful for everyone involved. Students gained practical skills and new experiences, volunteers built relationships through shared service, and most importantly, those served by Elijah's Promise received nourishing meals.

If you are interested in participating in any of our lunch packing events, you can volunteer, donate supplies, or provide financial support. Details about upcoming opportunities will be shared in the bulletin and church announcements.



Metuchen High School transition class packing lunches

UPDATE ON NANCY'S YURT

In 2022, our church contributed funds to Camp Johnsonburg to help build a yurt in honor of Nancy Blomn-Kipnis. Progress on the yurt has been slower than anticipated due to permitting requirements and coordination with licensing inspectors. However, the yurt is now currently awaiting finishing touches such as windows and gutters.

The dedication ceremony—and the installation of the commemorative plaque—have not yet been scheduled. Camp Johnsonburg will notify us as soon as plans for the dedication are finalized. Thank you for your support as this meaningful project moves forward.



The yurt under construction

Camp Johnsonburg



A WARM WELCOME FOR JUMP IMMERSION

Heather Koball

On June 29, our new tenant, Jump Immersion School will begin classes. The school will be using classrooms and shared common areas during the week for its educational programs. This arrangement represents an opportunity for our congregation to share our space in a way that supports learning and serves families in the wider community.

Jump Immersion School is a private bilingual school serving children from preschool through elementary grades. Established in New Jersey more than 20 years ago, the school has expanded to several locations and will now be relocating its Edison campus to Metuchen.

The school's educational model is based on language immersion. Students are taught in English along with either Spanish or Mandarin, with both languages incorporated throughout the school day. Academic subjects such as reading, writing, math, and science are taught within this bilingual environment, rather than separating language learning into its own class time. This means that students encounter language naturally as part of their daily activities and lessons. Teachers are native speakers of the language they teach, which helps create an authentic setting for students as they learn and practice communication skills.

In addition to academic instruction, the program includes opportunities for social and emotional development. Class sizes are intentionally kept small, allowing teachers to give individual attention to each child and to support a consistent classroom environment.

Jump Immersion will serve children beginning at approximately age 2½ and plans to offer programs up through the elementary grades at the Metuchen location. The school day accommodates a range of family needs, including before- and after-care options. As a result, members of the congregation should expect to see regular weekday activity in and around the Education Building, particularly during arrival and dismissal times. Before care drop off begins at 7:30AM. The school day drop off will be at 9AM. The regular school day pick up is at 3PM, and aftercare pick up goes until 6PM.

Jump's lease allows them to use the entire basement. On the first floor, Jump will use room 109 (formerly the Deacons' room), room 103 (formerly the medical supply closet), and the Indonesian and drama/puppeteer coach's (Kat Davis') office. The medical supply closet is now housed at the Social Center, and the Indonesian/drama coach's offices were moved to room 105. Rooms 105, 106, 107, and 108, will remain FPC rooms, for now. On the second floor, Jump will use all the rooms, except for the Youth room, the Youth Room storage closet, and rooms 204 and 206, which currently contain many arts and crafts supplies. As Jump expands, they will have the option to lease additional rooms.

Jump has made many updates and improvements to the space, including painting the hallways, classrooms, and bathrooms; updating the floor on the second floor; replacing older drop ceilings; and updating the basement bathrooms.

Although Jump Immersion School operates independently from the ministries of First Presbyterian Church, sharing our space reflects a broader pattern seen in many congregations. Churches often partner with schools, childcare centers, and community organizations as part of their commitment to stewardship and outreach. Providing space for education is one way we can extend the use of our facilities beyond Sundays and support the well-being of families in our area. As this new relationship begins, we recognize that it will bring both opportunities and adjustments. Increased weekday use of the building may be noticeable, but it also reflects our building being used fully and purposefully. Church leadership will continue to monitor how the arrangement is working and to address any concerns that arise.

We invite members of the congregation to keep the students, families, and staff of Jump Immersion School in prayer as they prepare for this transition. Sharing our space with others is one expression of hospitality, and we hope this partnership will be a positive experience for both the school and our church community.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS UPDATE

Heather Koball and Pete Bellisano

First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen has completed a new Safety Manual, the result of extensive work by the Safety Team led by Pete Bellisano. This manual is designed to provide clear, practical guidance so that staff, volunteers, and congregation members can respond effectively in a variety of emergency situations.

The Safety Manual serves as a straightforward reference for common scenarios such as medical emergencies, evacuations, unfamiliar visitors, lockdowns, and more serious threats. Its purpose is not to cover every possible situation in detail, but to give enough guidance so that people can act quickly and appropriately when needed. Copies are available in the Narthex, and all members are encouraged to review it so they understand the basics.

The manual also clarifies roles and responsibilities. Church staff, ushers, and designated volunteers—referred to as “Safety Reps”—are expected to be familiar with the procedures and help lead responses during an emergency. The Deacons and ushers, in particular, play a key role since they are already positioned to assist with communication, movement, and coordination during worship services. They had the opportunity to review the manual and provide input, helping ensure that the procedures are realistic and workable.

To make key information easier to access, the church has added new safety cards to the friendship pads. These cards highlight the most important steps to take during an evacuation or a medical emergency. For example, in an evacuation, the congregation is asked to exit calmly and proceed to the Social Center rather than going to their cars. In a medical situation, 911 should be called right away, and responders will need clear directions about which building they should enter. Everyone is encouraged to take a moment to review these cards so the information is familiar if it is ever needed.

The Safety Manual emphasizes simple but important practices, such as keeping aisles clear for emergency responders, following directions from ushers and staff, and remaining calm during unexpected events. It also highlights the

importance of communication, including making clear announcements and ensuring that emergency responders receive accurate location details when called.

This new manual is part of a larger effort to strengthen safety across the church. Later this year, selected staff members, members of the Safety Team, and head ushers will begin training in CPR and the use of defibrillators. These skills can make a critical difference in a medical emergency.

As a reminder, the church currently has two defibrillators on site: one in the hallway between the Chapel and the Education Building, and another in the Social Center foyer. The Safety Manual reinforces the importance of knowing where this equipment is located and being prepared to use it if needed.

Building improvements will also support these efforts. New doors are scheduled to be installed in July. These doors will include secure, break-resistant glass, allowing staff and volunteers to see who is entering the building. Over time, they will also include electronic locks that can be secured quickly in an emergency. You can view pictures of the new doors on the banner in the Narthex.

Taken together, the Safety Manual, training efforts, and building updates reflect a shared commitment to preparedness. By becoming familiar with these procedures, everyone in the congregation can help create a safer environment for worship and community life.

CHURCH CALENDAR



To keep up-to-date on all church events, please use this QR code to see our online church calendar

SIGN UP FOR CHOIR & MUSIC CAMP!



August 10-14, 2026

Give your child a week of exceptional, joyful music-making this summer!

Young Voices Track

Entering Grades 1-3

9:00 am - 1:00 pm

\$75/child, includes snacks

After Care 1:00 - 3:00 pm: \$75/child (on request)

Choir and Bells Track

Entering Grades 4-10

9:00 am - 3:00 pm (Mon-Thurs), 1:00 pm (Fri)

\$150/child, includes lunch and snacks

Register by May 15 for a \$25 early-bird discount.

Multi-child family discount available.

A faculty of music professionals, teachers, and dedicated volunteers will lead the camp.

Pick up a brochure to learn more.

Registration is open - scan the QR code to register.



HABITAT UPDATE

Our youth will travel to Roanoke, VA, July 19–25 for our annual Habitat for Humanity mission trip. We're excited to have 28 youth and 9 adult chaperones participating—thank you for your prayers and support!

We welcome donations of:

- Boxed cereal (regular or snack size) – Peanut butter (smooth), jelly, Nutella, marshmallow fluff –
- Condiments (mayonnaise, brown mustard, salsa) – Penne pasta and pasta sauce (plastic jars only) – Iced tea and lemonade mix – Individually packed snacks (chips, granola bars, cookies, fruit snacks, etc.) –
- Bottled Gatorade (cases) – Bleach wipes, paper towels, gallon Ziploc bags – Lidded boxes (e.g., office boxes)

Items to borrow (please label): large coolers and Bluetooth speakers. Please label all donations "H4H" and drop off at the church office by July 15. Thank you!

SUMMER 2026 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!



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