
PARISH NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN, NJ



Long-time FPC Church Member, Fred Bergholz, with FPC Puppeteers, 2026

BELONGING, FPC THEME FOR PROGRAM YEAR 2026-2027

- THE GIFT OF BELONGING
- BUILDING A MORE ACCESSIBLE WORSHIP SPACE

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- PICTURES FROM FPC'S SUMMER 2026
- RALLY DAY AND FALL PROGRAMMING SIGN-UP

THE GIFT OF BELONGING

Rev. Dr. Fred Garry

Speaking to a young parishioner who was about to leave for Princeton Seminary I said, “Julia, up until this moment in your life you have been an odd duck in the pond. Your questions, your dreams, your heart just didn’t fit. You were the odd one out. But now you are going to have a rare experience. Once you step into the seminary world you are going to fit. People will ask questions like you, speak like you, dream like you. You won’t agree with all or even like everyone, but you will be in your pond, you will not be the odd one out. You will be like everyone else.”

When Julia returned after her first semester she came to my office and said, “it turns out I found my pond. I am not an odd duck at Princeton. I am odd like everyone else.” Before she left my office I said, “be sure to enjoy this time as much as you can for it will end. Enjoy the pond for now.”

Being Presbyterian is at the very least a spelling challenge. Often when asked information and my response includes “presbyterian” the person taking the information will get a few letters in and then insert a period, “Pres.” Being “pres.” or Presbyterian is also a cultural challenge. We tend to be people who like to read, to structure our world by committees and commissions, we are likely to have traveled, gone to art museums, graduated from college, and in the spirit of full disclosure, we enjoy the sound of a pipe organ. If you do the math on this, our group, tradition, tribe, community could represent no more than 10% of the population.

When I was in college I invited my soon-to-be wife to worship with me at my home church. Kathy came to visit “The Church of the Valley.” Here there was lots of singing, lots of praying, lots of preaching. There was an altar call and hands were raised in praise. Afterwards she said that would be her only visit. Then she invited me to her church, First Presbyterian of San Diego. Within the first twenty minutes of the service I had an epiphany: I am Presbyterian and no one told me. I never looked back. I found my pond.

In my life there have only been a few moments of instantaneous belonging. Usually it takes time to become part of a community, part of a

congregation, part of a neighborhood. Sometimes no matter how long you try to fit in, you don’t. I can remember after living in the Northwest for five years, I can remember a light bulb went off: this is a beautiful place to live, with wonderful people, and breathtaking scenery, but I am an odd duck here. I can be happy, have friends, even enjoy the community, but I won’t fit in. Not my pond.

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

The opening line of the Brief Statement of Faith (PCUSA) begs an intriguing question. How do we belong to God? It could be we are a possession; we are belongings as it were. But such a sense of ownership doesn’t match with love. Love doesn’t own people. It could be we belong like Julia at Princeton, you belong to God because we are made in God’s image, a sense of being one with. Yet, for me belonging to God is more of a sense of being at peace, being in my pond. Like the great line in the Isaac Watts’ hymn,

*Your sure provisions gracious God
Attend me all my days;
Oh, may your house be my abode,
And all my work be praise.
Here would I find my settle rest,
while others go and come;
no more a stranger, nor a guest,
but like a child at home.*

To me, belonging to God is being “like a child at home.” I felt this on my first visit to a Presbyterian Church. It was at home in a home I never knew was mine. There was no clear reason, no matching system or algorithm. Sitting in the pew I felt a peace, a rest, settle over me.

During this year we will explore “belonging” as a theme. What does it mean to belong to God, to a church, to a community? Is belonging something we gain and lose? Can life be good without a sense of belonging? A strange yet important question is: how do we belong to ourselves? Is belonging to yourself what people mean when
(continued on next page)

BELONGING (CONT.)

they say, “I feel comfortable in my own skin?”

In all these questions we hope to hear a word of welcome deep in our soul. This year it would be a joy to hear the voice of God say, “you must sit and rest with me.” And in such a moment of rest what if we were to gain a clear focus as to what it means to welcome the stranger and the guest so they too may “be like a child at home.”

BUILDING A MORE WELCOMING CHURCH

Jordan Klotz

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

-Romans 15:7

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”-Matthew 22:37-39

*Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive
Built of hopes and dreams and visions
Rock of faith and vault of grace
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions
All are welcome, all are welcome
All are welcome in this place
-Hymn 301, Let Us Build a House, Marty Haugen*

As Christians, we are called by our scripture, by our song, and indeed by ourselves—in our recently adopted Vision and Mission Statement—to love and welcome all people.

This basic tenet of our faith was the catalyst that led to “Our Hope for Years to Come,” the capital campaign which Session has voted to undertake this fall. A feasibility study conducted by Richard Rogers of Horizons Stewardship, our campaign consultant, determined that the congregation is incredibly unified; 97% of respondents in the congregation-wide survey agreed that a capital campaign to fund the proposed projects aligned

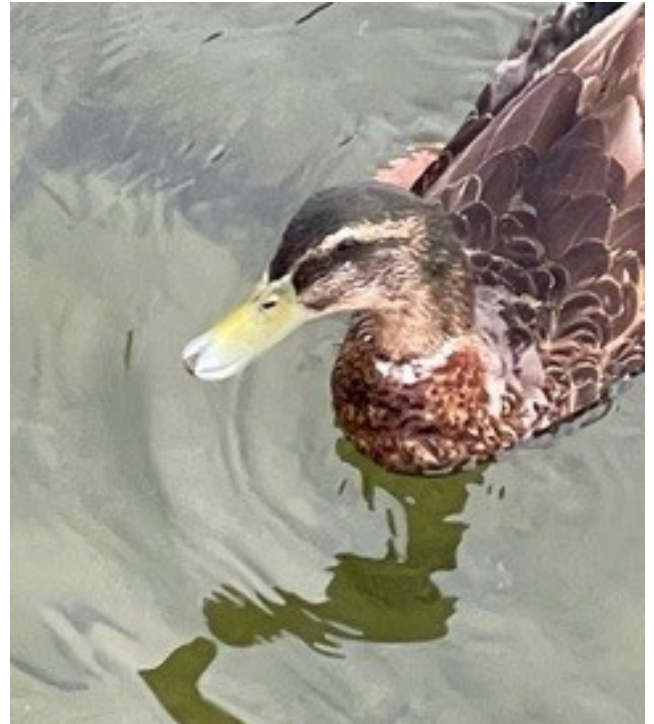


Photo by Rev Dr. Fred Garry

with FPC’s vision to “Love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.”

One of the greatest joys of serving this congregation has been how it intentionally welcomes all people, regardless of ability, to participate in worship, learning, and mission. While there are many reasons to be excited about taking this step together in faith, I am personally most eager that we will be able to live our values in our physical space. No longer will physical limitations be a barrier to full participation for those present in worship.

When future generations of our congregation look back on this time, may they see a legacy of unconditional welcome, of sacrificial generosity, and Christlike love.

A PRAYER FOR THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

*Gracious God, You have been so faithful to our church family, and we thank You for everything You have already done in our lives. As we look to the future, help me to trust You more deeply. Take away any worry or hesitation in my heart, and replace it with Your peace. This season isn’t just about a project; it’s about my relationship with You. So I simply ask: **God what do you want to do through me?** Give me the courage to listen to Your voice, and the faith to follow wherever You lead.*

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN TEAM

With much gratitude, we introduce to you the Capital Campaign Team, and we ask for your prayers and support for the big endeavor ahead.

Amy Bellisano	Gary Ostermueller	Lori Kellner
Bob Rosko	Heather Koball	Maggy Cook
Brenda Day	Jane Meyer	Margo Gunsser
Cathy Ostermueller	Jordan Klotz	Nancy Leardi
Colleen Walker	Kevin Trolaro	Niall Corbalis
Dan Cook	Rev. Khayla Henry	Paul Gunsser
Deb Teall	Rev. Leksmana Leonard	Virginia Shaw
Rev. Fred Garry		

AT THE CROSSROADS OF FAITH AND INCLUSION

Leksmana Leonard

Every church community is a tapestry woven from diverse stories and challenges. Recently, our congregation became part of a research initiative called The Crossroads Project, which was initiated by Princeton Theological Seminary. This research focuses on immigrant churches and explores the experiences of immigrant families who raise children with disabilities.

The journey began when my friend Febrianto reached out to ask if our church could participate in the study. Knowing the project's heart, I gladly welcomed the idea, and the results have proven fascinating. Febrianto noted that our Indonesian Fellowship is quite unique within the project. While most research participants are independent immigrant churches, our fellowship is and continually remains under the covering of FPC of Metuchen. This relationship allows us to blend resources and support in a way that enriches our diverse community.

Participation in the project also brought an opportunity to apply for a grant that helps ministries support immigrant church members who have children with disabilities. Navigating spiritual journey far away from home country while caring for a child with special needs involves unique challenges, and this grant could help us build stronger support systems and inclusive programs.

As we stand at this exciting intersection of research and potential ministry expansion, I warmly invite every church member to bring this initiative into your prayers. Please pray for wisdom and discernment for our leadership, for strength and comfort for families raising children with disabilities, and for continued unity and growth between our fellowship and FPC Metuchen. Let us lift this up together, trusting that God is opening doors for us to serve one another more deeply.

A CHURCH FOR EVERYONE

Throughout the year, our Belonging series will highlight members and families whose experiences help us better understand what it means to create a truly welcoming church. This month, we feature a family living with disability and their journey of faith, community, and inclusion. By listening to one another's stories, we grow together as the Body of Christ.

IT'S A VILLAGE

David Kozo

Loise Kiru and Joe Mwaniki have faced plenty of challenges over the past few years: moving thousands of miles, living apart for over two years, getting their kids acclimated to new schools and surroundings. But they can't say enough about how our church has blessed them and helped make these transitions easier.

Joe and Loise have three children: Betty, 16, Jeremy, 11, and Eric, 6. Betty was baptized in our church in 2009, when Loise lived in New Jersey, first in Carlstadt and then with her brother in Edison. Eventually, Loise moved with Betty back to Loise's native Kenya. There, Loise, who grew up Presbyterian, reconnected with Joe, who'd been a high-school friend and who had lived in the U.K. They started dating and eventually married, in 2014. Their family grew over that time, while they settled into their careers: Loise an HR professional, Joe a land economist.

But the U.S., specifically Edison, called them back after the Covid pandemic, for Jeremy's sake. Edison is known for its strong special-needs education, and after they arrived back in the U.S., Eric was also identified as needing specialized support. But there was a hiccup: Loise and the kids were able to come, in summer 2022, while Joe was held up for immigration reasons, until March 2025. Regular zoom calls followed, with Joe missing his family and the kids having trouble understanding. "Why is he there and we are all here," Loise remembers the kids asking.

The family's return to FPC Metuchen happened in early 2024. Loise recalls that growing up in Nairobi, her mom used to take her and her siblings to church on public transportation, so while it seemed like a lot to lug the kids to the 9:30 service, Loise says she did have a car, so,

"What's my excuse?"

Right away, the family says they felt the love that our church can provide. Nancy Leardi jumped right in to ask what the boys needed to get the most out of Sunday School. Betty, who had to move just before high school, became more involved with the youth, eventually joining the choir and going on Habitat trips. Loise recounts that early on, Betty would tend to her brothers at Sunday School, but Nancy quickly made sure Betty could be relieved of that duty so she could have her own spiritual growth. "Sometimes, God just says, 'I got this,'" Loise says.

By the time Joe arrived, he says, their family was fully a part of the church family. Now, they can't say enough about the church's warm embrace and our commitment to inclusivity.

"It's a village," Joe says of our church. "And everyone has a role that they play."



Loise, Betty, Jeremy, Eric, and Joe in front of FPC

ALL ARE WELCOME HERE

Heather Koball

As Christians, we believe that all people are created in the image of God and are called into relationship with God and one another. For many LGBTQ+ people, however, the church has not always felt like a place where they belong.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has spent decades prayerfully wrestling with these questions of inclusion. Over time, the denomination has moved toward greater inclusion. In 2011, the PC(USA) approved a constitutional change allowing openly gay and lesbian persons to be ordained as ministers, elders, and deacons. In 2015, the denomination officially expanded its definition of Christian marriage to include couples of the same gender.

These decisions reflected the faithfulness of real people who felt called by God to serve. Many gay and lesbian pastors continued to minister courageously even when full recognition was uncertain. Their witness helped the church better understand that the gifts for ministry are not limited by sexual orientation. In 2018, the General Assembly went further, welcoming transgender and non-binary people, acknowledging past harm to the LGBTQ+ community, and committing itself to greater welcome and inclusion.

This movement toward inclusion is not confined to the United States. In July 2026, the Igreja Presbiteriana Unida do Brasil (United Presbyterian Church of Brazil) voted to allow local congregations to receive LGBTQ+ people as members and to permit them to serve as pastors. This is the first Presbyterian governing body in South America to do so. The vote represents a significant step toward inclusion within Brazil and within South America.

At First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, we have sought to live out this spirit of belonging in visible ways to signal welcome to LGBTQ+ people. We hang Pride flags as a public sign that all are welcome here. During Pride Month, many members wear Pride pins, demonstrating our commitment to standing alongside our LGBTQ+ neighbors and friends. Each week of June, church members sponsor extra flower



arrangements for the church, in honor of Pride Month. The celebration of Pride month in June begins with the choir's moving anthem, "Love Is Love," reminding us that God's love transcends every boundary we create.

FPC's work extends beyond our church walls. For the past several years, the Queer Fellowship and the Social Justice Committee have organized events and partnered with community organizations to expand our church's work toward LGBTQ+ inclusion. We have celebrated National Coming Out Day, in October, at the church, by inviting people from the church and community to share their stories of coming out. We have also partnered with OutFront Metuchen, a local nonprofit that focuses on strengthening the LGBTQ+ community in Metuchen and the surrounding areas, on events such as a gender inclusive closet and improv workshops to promote understanding and inclusion. These partnerships have strengthened our connections with our neighbors and enriched our witness as a congregation.

These actions communicate something important. They tell people who may have felt excluded or invisible that they are seen. They tell visitors that they do not have to leave parts of themselves at the church door. As we continue to grow in faith together, may First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen remain a community where all people can experience that truth and hear the good news: All Are Welcome Here

A JOYFUL FPC SUMMER



Pictures clockwise, from top left: VBC kids, the next VBC generation, VBC volunteers, youth Sunday in June, Music camp, and the Habitat Father's Day car wash.





Pictures clockwise, from top left: Food pantry's Disco Soup event, Mission Fair, VBC kids, Habitat youth in Roanoke, VA, a surprise birthday party for Elaine Hansen, and the church picnic.



FALL ADULT EDUCATION: DISCOVERING DEVOTIONAL CLASSICS TOGETHER

Nancy Leardi

Come for one Sunday—or join us for the whole series! This fall, Adult Education invites you to gather for a relaxed and meaningful journey through *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith.

A Book Filled with Voices of Faith

Devotional Classics brings together 52 selections from beloved Christian devotional writers across the centuries. The book introduces readers to a wide range of spiritual voices, including Augustine, Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and many others. Each selection connects the writer's reflections with Scripture and offers opportunities for meditation and discussion.

The collection is organized around six dimensions of Christian life: prayer, holiness and virtue, the work of the Spirit, compassion, Scripture and the Word, and the sacramental life. Together, these readings invite us to consider the many ways Christians throughout history have sought to grow closer to God.

Different Voices, One Community

Our Adult Ed gatherings will take a somewhat different approach. Each session will feature a different leader, who will share their own reflections on one of the devotional writers represented in the book.

This fall's leaders will include Gilly McKie, Pete Bellisano, and Russ and Maggie Dickow, with additional leaders joining us throughout the series.

No Homework. Just Come and Be Part of It.

The groups will meet on specific Sundays following coffee hour in the GLOW Room. You don't have to commit to the entire series. Come with questions. Come with curiosity. Come simply to listen. Come to meet new friends. We hope you'll join us this fall as we discover some enduring voices of Christian faith—and discover what they might have to say to us today.

TREASURER'S UPDATE: PER CAPITA ASSESSMENT

Kevin Trolaro

Many of you are aware that each year the Presbytery assesses a Per Capita fee for every church member. For 2026, the assessment is \$42 per member.

If you have already paid your 2026 Per Capita, thank you for your support. Because many of our members live throughout the United States, some may not have seen the weekly bulletin updates reporting Per Capita contributions earlier this year or may have overlooked the letter mailed by the Stewardship Commission.

If you have not yet paid your 2026 Per Capita, please know that it is not too late. Your contribution would be greatly appreciated and will help support our upcoming Presbytery payments in September and December. Thank you for your continued generosity and commitment to the ministry of First Presbyterian Church.

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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SU, SEPT 20

Rally Day

September 20 is the beginning of our program year. Join us for the first day of Sunday School, the blessing of the backpacks, a Gaga pit, and an intergenerational worship service. To sign up for fall programming, please see the flyer on the next page.

SU, SEPT 27, 4PM

Presbyterian Women's International Potluck Dinner

Come share a meal, a smile, and a story with your church family! Bring your favorite dish — homemade or store-bought, savory or sweet — and let's enjoy a feast together. Let's continue to build community, one plate at a time. Everyone is welcome — families, friends, and new faces too!

Please RSVP to pw@fpcweb.org and let us know what you're bringing.

SU, SEPT 27, 7PM

Candlelight Concert: An Evening of Baroque Flute & Harpsicord

Join Michael Alampi, altus flute, and Jordan Klotz, harpsicord, for a program featuring music of lesser known baroque composers. Suggested donation: General Admission: \$22, Seniors: \$15, 17 & Under: Free

SA, OCT 10, 1PM

Empty Bowls Fundraiser

Join us on Saturday, October 10, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. for a food pantry fundraiser. Your \$50 ticket includes a soup meal, a handmade ceramic bowl, and entertainment, with all proceeds supporting the food pantry. This community-wide event will showcase the creativity of local artists while helping provide food for our neighbors in need.

FR AND SA, OCT 16 & 17,

Fall Rummage Sale

Drop off for the rummage sale is Mon Oct 12- Thurs Oct 15. Doors open Fri, Oct 16 at 4PM and Sat, Oct 17 at 9AM. Volunteers are always needed and welcome, and they get to shop early!

SU, OCT 25

Harvest Fest: Fish and Chip Deacons' Fundraiser and Trunk or Treat

Join us for a day of fun and celebration, following the Kirkin' O' the Tartan. We will sell a fish and chips dinner to raise money for the Deacons and a trunk or treat Halloween celebration in the Social Center parking lot

SU, NOV 29

Candlelight Concert

Stay tuned for more information about the second candlelight concert series in the sanctuary.

CHURCH CALENDAR



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



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
of Metuchen

Family at First Pres

RALLY DAY SUNDAY

September 20, 2026

9:30 AM

Join us on Rally Day for an intergenerational worship, Blessing of the Backpacks, Gaga Pit and Coffee Hour.

Something for Everyone

FIRST TUESDAY CLUB (From K-2nd Grade)

JUNIOR CLUB (From 3rd-6th Grade)

YOUTH GROUP (7th-12th)

Carol Choir (Age 4 to 2nd Grade)

Junior Choir (3rd to 6th Grades)

Joy Ringers (3rd to 6th Grades)

Westminster Choir (7th to 12th Grades)

Trinity Ringers (7th Grade to Adults)

Habitat for Humanity

Vacation Bible Camp

Your family has a home at FPC Metuchen, a friendly and welcoming church that believes in and lives 'Jesus' teachings of love, caring, and inclusion. All levels of faith are welcomed - questioning, visiting, and firmly established.



Register for Children and Youth programming online using the QR code below. Or download from FPC website <https://fpcweb.org/resources/forms/> and submit to the church office.



Contact

Youth Group: Rev. Khayla Henry
(732) 491-2302 | kjohnson@ipcweb.org

Music Programs: Jordan Klotz
(732) 491-2266 or jklotz@ipcweb.org

Christian Education: Nancy Leardi
(732) 491-2264 or nleardi@ipcweb.org

FALL 2026 PARISH NEWS

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN
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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