ADVENT
2026

ISSUE
NO. 17

PARISH NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF METUCHEN, NJ



BELONGING, FPC Theme for program year 2026-2027

- Reflections on Advent and Belonging
- Update on improving the chancel accessibility

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- Schedule of Advent events
- Poinsettia and luminary order forms

AT HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Rev. Dr. Fred Garry

As long as I have worked with associate pastors I always tell them to go home at Christmas if this is their desire and opportunity. Senior pastors preach on Christmas Eve and Easter. The rule has no written citation, but a rule it is. Hence I tell associate pastors, “if you want to go home at the holidays, go. There may come a day you cannot.”

I have never “gone home” for Christmas since 1989. But I have always been “at home”. When Kathy and I ventured from San Diego to Princeton in 1990, the first Christmas was rough. We were “alone” even though there were two kids and a cat with us. We were alone because there were no blintzes at John and Anne's, no black olives in a crystal tray at the Garrys, no poker games with my grandmother and aunts or champagne and coffeecake with Kathy's parents. This first Christmas was tough. We were alone.

Two things came quickly to us. The first was a new rule. On our holidays “alone” no one had to eat anything they did not want. We prepared a Christmas meal and our two young ones were neither cajoled nor directed to eat anything. There was a sense of being on “holiday” with this freedom, something like the ancient tradition of “misrule” when normal rules are suspended.

The second tradition coming quickly was a recognition: where before we had a family, now we had to become one. This was not a rejection of traditions or tribes, definitions or roles. Becoming a family was maturing, but mostly becoming a family was learning to trust we had each other, needed each other in ways we had not.

Through the years we have made some of our best memories during Advent. (Although to be very honest it was not until I became a pastor that the word Advent was ever spoken.) Maybe our first such memory was watching our young, first born climb our Charlie Brown tree and bring it down on himself. He did this once. We had a cat who did it too many times. There was the moment our daughter Zoe discovered the length and thus potential windfall of Hannakuh and asked if we could be Jewish. A deeply cherished memory was finding our youngest clad only in



Fred Garry and his father and grandmother around 1970



underwear running through the fellowship hall of the church during the Christmas Eve service. Long story.

Yet, the moment I cherish the most was the deep sense of being a family, the belonging together I came to appreciate when we ventured out. It wasn't better being “far from home,” it was a deep sense of being joined to the past and the present, we were in this together. It was as if life belonged to us and we to life. We were in this together even when apart. We had to venture far away to find how close we could become.

The soul needs to belong, to be a part, to have a place, to have a sense of home. This need is so poignant during Advent when we remember the babe born in the barn displaced far from home but yet in an ancestral home. The child announced by angels and sought by kings, yet, humble and other. Our confessions proclaim “we belong to God” yet somehow in Advent I feel a powerful peace knowing God belongs to us in Mary's child.

Perhaps this is the deep truth of Advent where we long to go home: somehow God came home to us. We belong to each other; we are in this together. As you prepare your heart for Christmas with decorations and trees and lights, wonder if perhaps you are preparing a welcome for God to come home to you. We belong together.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Capital Campaign Chairs

Gatherings
Members of the Our Hope for Years to Come team have been busy through the fall. The congregation was invited to attend one of three gatherings hosted by the Garrys at the Manse. The purpose of these gatherings was to explain the deep connection between our faith and the purpose for this campaign. Those who attended had an opportunity to enjoy some delicious food, much of it prepared by Pastor Fred. He also spoke to the group as did our campaign consultant, Richard Rogers. Attendees had an opportunity to comment, ask questions, and consider how God might want them to participate. Our thanks to the Garrys for opening their home and welcoming all who attended.

Videos
Pastor Khayla has been busy interviewing and videotaping staff, congregants, and community partners about the importance of FPC to their lives. Videos have been posted weekly on the church website and Facebook page. If you've missed one or more, be sure to catch up on them and see how FPC makes room for all.

To watch the videos, scan this QR code

Or click this link
Capital Campaign Video Series

Celebrations
Sunday, November 15th was an exciting day in the life of our church. We celebrated the beginning of a new chapter for First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen. The celebration began in worship with an announcement of the progress the Capital Campaign has made.

Following worship, congregation members enjoyed a delicious catered brunch along with special treats for the children. The Capital Campaign team expressed gratitude for the congregation members' prayers, conversations, preparations, and advance commitments. We celebrated God's love and the opportunity to move forward with this project together with clarity, purpose, and trust.

Commitments
As of this writing, Commitment Sunday, November 22nd is ahead of us. We look forward to congregation members, after prayerful consideration, committing to join us as we prepare for this renovation of our sacred space.

Construction Plans
Plans are moving forward with respect to the actual construction. A project team has been formed, led by Elder/Trustee Jan Margolis and including Treasurer Kevin Trolaro and Finance Leaders Bob Rosko and Lori Kellner, along with Gary Ostermueller and Dan Cook as representatives of the congregation. This team will be responsible for interfacing with contractors and securing bids. They will be our church's eyes on the project from groundbreaking through completion. Banners displaying the rendering are located in the Narthex at both entrances to the sanctuary and also in the entrance to the Social Center.

Questions?
If you have questions about anything regarding the campaign or renovation, please contact one of the Capital Campaign team members or the Church Office.

CELEBRATING OUR CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PROGRESS

As of November 16, Our Hope for Years to Come has received early commitments that total $981,104 from 67 gifts. We have reached over 75 percent of the campaign goal of $1,300,000, but our work is not done. We are eager to see what God can do when our entire Church family has an opportunity to respond to this exciting moment.

THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN CELEBRATION!
NOVEMBER 15












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 that has been part of our church for many years. By listening to one another's stories, we grow together as the Body of Christ.

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON: THE RIVAS FAMILY

By Dave Kozo

It seems like it would be a lot. Corralling four "sheep," one "camel" (played by two people), 10 "angels" and at least a dozen "townsfolk" onto one stage, and then into the hearts of an entire congregation and wider community on Christmas Eve, is a daunting task. But Kim Rivas seems quite calm about it all.



The Rivas family

Kim is the co-director, along with Janine Haulenbeek, of our annual Christmas Pageant. This is Kim's fifth year working the pageant; she first got involved when her two children, Addie, now 10, and Bobby, 9, played roles a few years ago. Kim has been coming to our church since she was very young, had her confirmation and married her husband, Rob, at FPC, and the kids were baptized here.

Kim is a manager at a wholesale warehouse, and she doesn't mind taking a break from the chaos of the Christmas shopping season to do something more spiritual. Before she got involved in the pageant, "I felt like I was starting to lose the reason for the season," she says.

The pageant is held each year in the sanctuary on Christmas Eve at 5 pm, and while it usually lasts just a half hour or so, it takes months of planning —starting as early as August—with Music Director Jordan Klotz and Christian Education Director Nancy Leardi. There is the casting, then the rehearsals, and the costuming, as well as the mini-construction site that is the building up and tearing down of the stage.

Kim says there are many things that are rewarding about the whole enterprise, especially seeing some of the newer kids come out of their shell as the weeks go by, leading up to the big performance. Kim and Janine sit in the front row during the performance itself, helping with cue cards and last-minute direction for the cast members.

Kim, who recently began serving a term as a Deacon, says she finds it all very fulfilling amid the busy holiday season: "I just like that in the middle of all the hectic chaos I can stop and remember what all the chaos is about."



The FPC creche, 2025

CARE MINISTRY RESOURCES

Wendy Kukowski

FPC's CARE Ministry was begun to offer support to senior congregants, homebound church members, and others who may want additional care. Volunteers meet monthly to discuss participants' needs and ensure that resources and support are provided to those who would like them. As part of this mission, the CARE ministry has gathered information about resources in the community that serve seniors.

Through this work, the CARE Ministry has identified a wonderful resource for seniors and caregivers that we wanted to share with the congregation. Marybeth Sondergaard, RN, is the Advocacy Director, at The Institute for Dignity & Grace, a nonprofit organization, where she helps provide care coordination for older adults and their families.

She will work with you and your family to identify the safest way to help you age in place with dignity by building a support system around you as your needs grow or by coordinating the transition to other senior living. She will help you evaluate safety, health needs, social well-being and financial realities. Each option has its benefits and challenges, and the right choice depends on many factors.

Families often find themselves facing difficult decisions regarding healthcare, caregiving, housing, and long-term planning. Having a knowledgeable advocate can make a difference. The Institute for Dignity & Grace aims to help families prepare for challenges before they become crises and to maintain the highest possible quality of life, while preserving independence and dignity.

More specifically, the organization does the following:

Guide: Helps families navigate complex medical systems.

Support: Provides resources during medical crises.

Connect: Links clients and families with appropriate medical, community, and support services.

Educate: Creates a plan that honors each person's needs, safety and dignity.

Advocate: Ensures that older adults and families have a partner to navigate difficult healthcare journeys.

For more information or to connect directly with Marybeth Sondergaard, RN, email marybeth@dignityandgrace.info or visit www.dignityandgrace.info.

For CARE Ministry information or assistance, please contact Wendy Kukowski at 732-983-2457 or wkukowski14@gmail.com.

MISSION TO MALAWI

Deb Teall, Co-Moderator, Presbyterian Women

Malawi is a beautiful country...blue mountains that fade back in layers...one enormous glistening lake...sunrises and sunsets that make your heart ache with indescribable beauty...wild animals that mostly tolerate humans...hordes of little kids who chase after visitors with huge grins yelling mzungu (white person) and want to touch your skin and (blonde) hair!

Four of us spent two October weeks in Malawi: Sarah Teti, Director of Missions for FPC Metuchen, Rev. Glory Thomas, Parish Associate at FPC Metuchen, Karen Loek, Master Gardner for the FPC Food Pantry Community Garden, and me, Deb Teall, Co-Moderator of Presbyterian Women.

We were on a MISSION, I told myself as we threaded our way north on the M1 (echoes of British rule 1891-1964) from Lilongwe, the capital, toward Mzuzu, up into the mountains. We wanted to learn what a "feeding program" is. After navigating a truly treacherous road to Mponela, we found Inlight Charity, an orphanage created by 30-year-old Raphael Katondo. Raised by a struggling single mom, Raphael is determined to feed and educate and protect the youngest children in that part of the Northern Region of Malawi. (Check it out on Instagram.)

MISSION TO MALAWI (CONT)

Another day of driving north brought the horrifying discovery the country is in a fuel-shortage crisis – caused by America's war with Iran. Lines of tractor trailers snake along the road for miles, hoping to get diesel. Lines of cars and motorbikes stretch even longer, hoping for petrol. The fuel is rationed, so even if you manage to get some, it doesn't get you too far.

We reach the town of Viyelle. We are in Presbyterian country, where a new church is about to be dedicated. Elder Lazarus introduces us to a different kind of feeding program, where "the elderly" come to the old church twice a week. With the work of volunteer cooks from Viyelle, they receive two meals on Mondays and Thursdays. We share their noon meal. They sing and dance and clasp our hands as we say farewell.



We travel more difficult roads to MBowe, home of the Widows of Grace started by Rev. Garry, the women of the Watertown (NY) church and the wife of the Honorable Sam Chirwa. The Honorable Sam serves as our host and chauffeur in Malawi. The widows have graduated from pedal sewing machines to electric, fueled by solar panels and battery backup. Like the women in Viyelle, they sing and dance to welcome us.





Top photo: Pastor Glory hands out treats to children at Inlight Charity.

Bottom photo: Angelina cooks chicken and vegetables for the elderly at Viyelle.



Photos on left (Top) With Karen Loek and Deb Teall, Sarah Teti holds up elephant rock on the road to Luwerezi.

(Bottom) Sarah Teti and Pastor Glory sit with the women of Luwerezi.

Finally, we reach Luwerezi, where FPC Metuchen raised $9,000 to fund construction of a nurse's home for the village clinic. We meet Limbani, who has replaced the original nurse. There is a second nurse and a second nurse's home. We are delighted to see the growth of the project. Then one of the chiefs announces their request for Luwerezi – a feeding program AND a preschool – because 400 little ones need a safe place to learn and eat. The two go hand-in-hand. And on our way back south to Lilongwe, the Honorable Sam reveals another much-needed project – a preschool and feeding program in Mzuzu on land he owns, sandwiched between a primary and a secondary school, that would feed approximately 300 children.

We are home. Sarah immediately begins work on a new PW Thank Offering Grant, I write an accompanying letter, we submit the application two days before the deadline. Now we pray and talk to the congregation. The PW mission is to support the vulnerable. Our hearts are already with the children in Malawi. We hope we can help feed and educate them for many years to come. We hope you can help.

FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITIES: PREPARING OUR HEARTS FOR CHRISTMAS

Nancy Leardi

The Advent season is a wonderful time for families to come together, celebrate, create, and prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus! We have several special opportunities planned for our children and families as we begin this season of joy and anticipation.

Saturday, Nov 22: Family Advent Activities
Join us after worship for a special time of Advent fun! Families are invited to stop by the GLOW Room and enjoy a variety of festive crafts as we begin preparing for Christmas together..



Beginning Dec 6: A Special Advent Project
Our Sunday School classes will begin a special Advent project in the GLOW Room. Each child will have the opportunity to decorate their very own wooden Nativity while learning about the meaning of Advent and why we celebrate this special season. As the children create, they will also discover the story and significance of Jesus' birth.

Take Home an Advent Calendar!
Be sure to pick up an Advent calendar in the church narthex or find one in your child's worship bag. These calendars are a wonderful way to help families slow down, count the days, and share meaningful moments together as we prepare for Christmas.

To download the 2026 Advent Calendar, please click here **2026 Advent Calendar**

Or scan this QR Code

Join Us for the Christmas Pageant!
And, of course, we invite all children to be part of our Christmas Pageant! It is a special opportunity to share the story of Jesus' birth and celebrate the true meaning of Christmas with our church family.

We look forward to sharing this beautiful season with you and your children. May this Advent season be filled with creativity, joy, wonder, and opportunities to grow in faith together!

Christmas Pageant Details

Date: Dec 24, 5PM

Rehearsal Dates: After worship Dec 6, Dec 13, and Dec 20

Adult Volunteers Needed!

Sign your child up here
Christmas Pageant Sign Up

Or Scan this QR Code



Advent & Christmas Worship

Sunday, November 29 | 9:30 AM
First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 29 | 7:00 PM
Candlelight Concert Series: Hope Will Not Fail
Featuring Senior Choir, Covenant Ringers, and FPC Choral Scholars

Sunday, December 13 | 9:30 AM
One Church Together Intergenerational Worship
Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 20 | 9:30 AM
Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Thursday, December 24 | 5:00 PM
Christmas Eve Worship
with Christmas Pageant

Thursday, December 24 | 9:30 PM
Christmas Eve Worship
Candlelight Service





HOLLY FAIR, DEC 5

Find the perfect gifts and embrace the joy of the season at the annual Holly Fair. Featuring an expanded holiday boutique, jewelry, baked goods, seasonal crafts, and a festive coffee, tea, and chocolate bar, this event has something for everyone. Bring family and friends to enjoy a day of holiday shopping, a picture with Santa, and community fellowship. Doors open 9AM-2PM.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Collecting Wine Corks for PW
Attention wine drinkers, please save and collect your used wine corks for the PW Crafty Ladies to repurpose for crafting. There will be a collection site designated soon.

MO, NOV 23, 7PM
Packing Food for Thanksgiving
Pack Thanksgiving food to distribute FPC's food pantry clients.

SU, DEC 6, 5PM
Community Dinner
Help provide a home-cooked meal to all who would like one.

TH, DEC 10, 7PM
Food Pantry Holiday Bazaar
Help food pantry clients select donated gifts and wrap them.

SA, DEC 19, 9AM
Mission Volunteer Saturday
Make sandwiches and pack lunches to distribute to food insecure and homeless people.

MO, DEC 21, 7PM
Packing Food for Christmas
Pack groceries to make a Christmas dinner for FPC's food pantry clients.

MO, JAN 18
Mitzvah Day
Join MENCH Hadassah and Congregation Neve Shalom Tikkun Olam at First Presbyterian Church for a day of service.

TH, JAN 21, 7PM
Mission Volunteer Night
Prepare food to distribute to food insecure people.

STEWARDSHIP

As we look ahead to 2027, we invite all members and friends of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen to prayerfully consider making a pledge during our annual stewardship campaign. Our church continues to thrive through worship, fellowship, outreach, youth and children's programs, Bible studies, and community ministries, but the operating costs that support these vital activities continue to rise. While grants and bequests provide valuable support, they cannot be relied upon to fund the day-to-day work of the church. Pledges provide the steady foundation that allows church leaders to plan effectively for the future. We encourage everyone to join in supporting our shared mission by submitting a pledge and helping ensure that FPC remains a vibrant and welcoming community for years to come.

To submit a pledge, please click here **Give Online** or scan this 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 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.

POINSETTIA ORDER FORM

In keeping with our Christmas tradition, we invite you to help us decorate our worship space with poinsettias.

- The **deadline** for placing your order is **December 14.**
- The names of those remembered and donors will be listed in the worship bulletin on Sunday, December 20st , 9:30 am service.
- When paying by check, please note: poinsettia order.
- **The plants may be taken home after the 9:30 PM Christmas Eve Service.**
- Our deacons will take the remaining plants for shut-in families.

Your Name: _____

Phone No.: _____

For Bulletin Listings of Donors (Please print clearly.)

GIVEN BY: _____

IN MEMORY OF: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IN HONOR OF: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IN GRATITUDE: _____

_____

_____

Number of plants @ $10.oo each: _____

Enclosed Payment $ _____ **Cash** ___ **Check #** _____

Please mark (X) on one of the following options:

[ ] I will take home my plant after the 9:30 pm Christmas Eve Service.

[ ] Leave the poinsettias' for the Deacons to deliver.



(2026 Form)

LUMINARY ORDER FORM



Celebrate the wonder of Christmas!

On Christmas Eve, we will decorate our church steps and walkways with paper luminaries that will be a beautiful welcome to all attending the service, and will shine through the night.

Proceeds of the sale of luminaries will help fund the various ministries of our Deacons.

Another request – please consider donating a canned good for each luminary to keep them in place in windy weather.

The names of those remembered and donors will be listed in the 9:30 pm Christmas Eve worship bulletin.

Please make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church, with memo note "Luminary."

Send the form and payment to the Church office by Wednesday, Dec 16th.

Your Name: _____

Phone No.: _____

For Bulletin Listings of Donors (Please print clearly.)

GIVEN BY: _____

IN MEMORY OF: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

IN HONOR OF: _____

_____

_____

_____

IN GRATITUDE: _____

_____

_____

Luminary order @ $5.oo each: _____

Enclosed Payment $ _____ **Cash** ___ **Check #** _____

_____ Should you choose, you may take home your luminary and votive after the worship service. Please check the box if you plan to take it home.

(2026 Form)

ADVENT 2026 PARISH NEWS

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

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ
PERMIT 746

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The information contained herein is for Church use only. Individuals using this information must receive permission of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen, NJ

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!

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).