

Biweekly Newsletter

August 11, 2026

From the Pastor



"How was it?"

There is a moment – well several moments, really – when I get back from one of our summer trips, and one of you asks me, "How was it?" It is an earnest and beautiful question. It demonstrates that you're plugged into the life of the church, that you care about our young people, and that you recognize that when I'm not in the building in the summer, it's usually because I'm out there doing ministry. Thank you for asking the question.

But I never have a good answer.

I usually say, "good" or "lovely," and then try to make a joke, but those words are not sufficient. No one word is sufficient for the experiences we get to have together. Pictures do it some justice, but I am a mediocre photographer as youth ministers go. Stories can do it some more justice...

- In Asheville, with the middlers, I saw youth growing up before my eyes. Some of it was the whirl of serving – the chaos of a soup kitchen, the physical effort of an urban farm, the gentleness of speaking with those whose brains have been rearranged by trauma. But it is also in the way that youth leave behind their younger selves to be wiser, kinder, and more inclusive, bit by bit, like hair growing, until one day you realize it's a new hairstyle altogether.
- In Appalachia, I witnessed high schoolers claiming their gifts. We talk a lot about Spiritual gifts in Confirmation – those Holy Spirit-given skills and abilities that each of us possesses. But at the homes/on the worksites (for they are one in the same), there were youth just itching to dig holes, because it was active and kinesthetic. These same youth self-admittedly couldn't hold wood to be measured; it's easy to get distracted and move it accidentally. Going down 24 inches through roots, clay, and rocks, however, well sign them up! It seems mundane, but nothing God puts in our path is mundane.
- At Massanetta Springs, they have a spring, surprisingly enough. It comes right out of the ground, and you can drink it. You can also stand, sit, or lay in it, if you dare, because it is as cold as cold can be. And we do, because the weather is hot, and because it's a place of community, because they are middle schoolers, and if the mood is just right, you can start a water fight. Unlike food fights or shaving cream fights, nothing is used up. The water continues to flow either way. And in that, there is something playful, delightful, and restorative to the child-of-God identities we forget most days. I get to watch – and feel the shiver of – people remembering their true selves.
- At Montreat, our group experienced challenge. Every day has a new text about the theme, and Wednesday's was Hagar and the birth of Ishamel, in Genesis 16. If you peruse it, you'll notice enslavement and sexual violence, as well as promises of covenant and a bright future. It is a complex, holy story, and our keynoter did not shy away from any of its elements or saying, "I don't know why God sent her back. This is not the God I know." Hard questions and challenging narratives for high schoolers experiencing a hard and challenging world. For youth who themselves don't shy away from the Word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

"I don't know why God sent her back. This is not the God I know."

Of course, there are dozens of other stories. You can hear some of them at our stock brunch on Sunday, August 23, after worship. I hope you'll join us whether or not you bought stock. (Please RSVP to me via my email.) I hear the photos might be better, too.

Grace & Peace,
John

In the Next Two Weeks...

Light the City: Utility Bill Assistance and School Supplies

On **Saturday, August 15 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM**, Light the City comes to Durham County Memorial Stadium. Presented by Duke Community Affairs and powered by First Calvary Baptist Church, this is one of Durham's largest community service events, bringing together churches, nonprofits, businesses, and volunteers to serve our city.

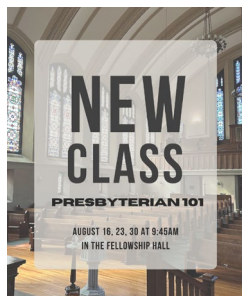


This year's offerings include \$25,000 in utility bill assistance, free school supplies for every middle school student in Durham Public Schools, household essentials like diapers and toiletries, health screenings, and family friendly activities throughout the day.

If you or someone you know could use a hand, or if you would simply like to see Durham showing up for Durham, this is a great way to spend a Saturday morning.

Learn more at fcbcdurham.org/light-the-city.

New to FPC? Join Us for Presbyterian 101



What's with the robes and stoles? What's a session? How do I get involved? If you're a visiting friend (or new member!) with questions like these, join FPC leaders for Presbyterian 101 — a conversation on Presbyterian theology, polity, worship, and how to get connected.

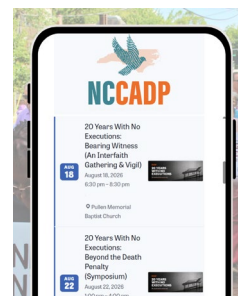
When: August 16, 23, and 30 at 9:45 a.m.

Where: Fellowship Hall

Come as you are, with all the small questions or big doubts. We're excited to have you!

NC Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

On **Tuesday, August 18th**, the NCCADP will be holding an interfaith service and vigil from **6:30 to 8:30 PM** at Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh. This evening will include music and liturgy, followed by a candlelit march to Central Prison to hold vigil for the 43 people executed in North Carolina and the 123 people currently living under a death sentence. Our own Rev. Esther Hethcox will be one of the speakers.



A community symposium will follow later in the month on Saturday, August 22 from 1:00 to 4:00 PM at Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4907 Garrett Road, Durham. The afternoon will feature panel discussions with experts and directly impacted people on the legacy of the death penalty and community-centered responses to harm and violence.

We hope you will join us at one or both events.

First Presbyterian Church of Durham

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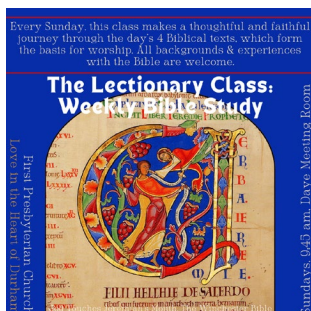


Youth Summer Trips Stock Brunch

You are invited to a light lunch on **Sunday, August 23**, to hear the stories and see the pictures from a summer of youth trips to Asheville, Nicholas County (WV) and Montreat. Several of our youth will share the meaningful parts of these faith-forming experiences. We'll gather in Fellowship Hall after worship lets out.

You need not have bought stock to join us - we'd love to see you.

RSVPs are encouraged - j.weicher@firstpres-durham.org.



Lectionary

Robert Daye Meeting Room

Join us each Sunday at 9:45 in the Robert Daye Meeting Room for discussion of the lectionary readings.

August 16: How can we understand God's great mercy? Because Joseph, understanding God's purpose, forgave the brothers who sold him into slavery, a family and a nation were saved. Does that mercy extend beyond the children of Israel? "God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all."

August 23: Do the people around you know who you are? Do you know who you are? You might be a humble baby in a basket, as Pharaoh's daughter thought about Moses, or you might be the leader of a nation. How will you use your gifts and your identity?

Join Us for Worship



August 16

Sam Miglarese, preaching

August 23

Mindy Douglas, preaching

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Children's Ministries

Children's Faith Formation

Children's Summer Faith Formation will meet on **Sunday at 9:45**.

This year, during summer faith formation, we've been talking about some of the surprising ways that Jesus welcomed people. Throughout this season, we've shared many meals following the journey of Jesus and enjoying his surprising welcome all along the way. So far, we've celebrated breakfast on the beach, lunch with Zacchaeus, dinner with Mary and Martha, and this week we'll be sharing a midnight snack with a late-night visitor.

If you'd like more information about children's faith formation or serving with our amazing kids, please email Lenore Champion: l.champion@firstpres-durham.org

Youth Ministry

Books with Dads



This summer, our own faith formation teacher Bob Pleasants and his friend Montez Thomas will again be reading & leading Books with Dads. This year, they're working through Jason Reynolds' "Track" series.

The gatherings are hybrid, so kids can join however works best for their family. This is particularly good for middle schoolers, but other youth are welcome. Youth don't have to do all of them to do one - each is a stand-alone event.

Last Gathering: **August 10 - Lu**

Questions? Email Bob Pleasants at bob.pleasants@gmail.com.

Events

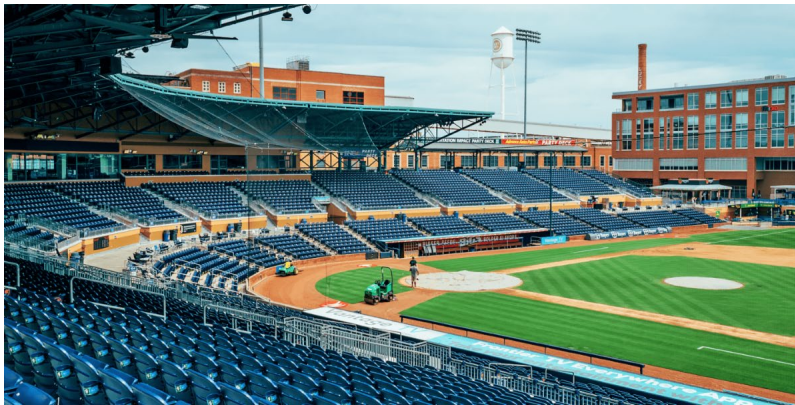
Mary Berry's Ordination

You are joyfully invited to **Mary Berry's** ordination at FPC on **Sunday, August 30 at 4:00 PM**. With the support of FPC and New Hope Presbytery, Mary will be ordained as a Teaching Elder in her role as Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Campbell University Divinity School. We hope you will be able to attend!

In order to get a headcount for a reception following the service, please RSVP.

To RSVP: email communications@firstpres-durham.org or call **919-682-5511**.

Fellowship Night at the Durham Bulls



Before your fall routine resumes in full, enjoy a late summer evening at the ballpark! The Fellowship Committee has reserved a block of 30 seats for the game against the Norfolk Tides on **Saturday, August 29 at 6:45 p.m.** The seats are in Section 117 by 3rd base and cost \$22 each.

If interested, please purchase your tickets.

To purchase tickets: email communications@firstpres-durham.org or call **919-682-5511**.

First Friends Beach Trip 2026



Calling all Beachcombers! The annual First Friends Beach Trip is set for **September 11 through 13**, and the search for this year's location is underway. If you would like to join the fun, now is the time to let the group know.

Housing costs are expected to run between \$350 and \$400 per bedroom for the full weekend. To hold your spot, please Venmo \$100 to @Kathy-Conner-11 by **July 15**. This deposit is non-refundable, though if your plans change, you are welcome to find someone to take your place.

First-timers are always welcome and always delighted in. For more information, contact **Kathy Conner** at kwc.enoriver@yahoo.com or **Deborah Momsen-Hudson** at 919-417-8664 or dmomsenudson@gmail.com.

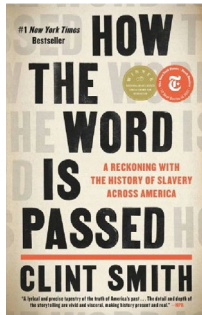
Get Involved

25th Anniversary of Fill That Bus! Campaign

It's that time of the year! FPC has been part of a long-standing tradition of showing up for public schools and making a tangible impact across public school classrooms in Durham. Last year, you donated a mountain of goods valuing \$1250+. Join us again in ensuring 2,400+ DPS educators and staff at 100% of DPS schools have access to free classroom supplies through the Teacher Store so they can focus on teaching, not out-of-pocket spending. See list of supplies needed to restock the store or support financially through the FPC Durham campaign page!



Fall Book Club: How the Word Is Passed



Join FPC's Racial Equity Task Force this fall for a book club tour by Zoom, from Monticello to the African American History Museum in DC. We'll be reading **How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America** by Clint Smith, one of the New York Times' top ten books of 2021.

Six sessions on Zoom, **every other Thursday night from 7 to 8 p.m.**, September 10 through November 19. Please have your book ready before the first meeting (local booksellers encouraged).

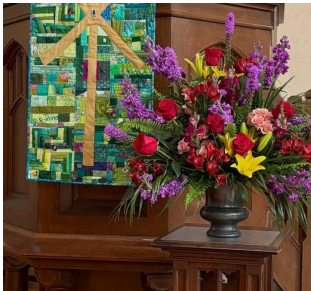
To RSVP or get the Zoom link: email communications@firstpres-durham.org or call 919-682-5511.

Volunteer in the Office

Share your time to support the daily work of the church.

To learn more: email communications@firstpres-durham.org or call 919-682-5511.

Sanctuary Flowers



There are open dates for worship flower donors in September. This ministry offers a meaningful way to donate flowers for the sanctuary in memory or in honor of a loved one, or in celebration of a special occasion. The flower arrangements bring the colors and beauty of nature to our worship service each Sunday.

To sign up: email communications@firstpres-durham.org or call 919-682-5511.

Community Events

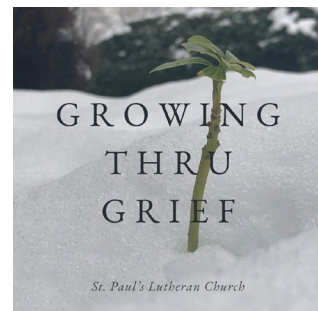
Growing thru Grief

August schedule details are listed below:

August 18: Eloise Jordan, Growing thru Grief Facilitator – Grief Illiteracy

August 25: Heidi Hannapel, Bluestem Cemetery – Growing thru Grief in Nature

Growing thru Grief meets every Tuesday at 4:00, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 1200 W. Cornwallis. Our short presentation is followed by a small group discussion. There is no cost to participate, and no preregistration is necessary. We are open to all who grieve.



Celebrations & Concerns of the Congregation

We Remember in Prayer

Joe Harvard, following surgery.

Ann Huff, following surgery.

Ongoing Prayers for Members of the Congregation

Tony Brown • Paul Cornsweet • Sam Crabtree • Susan Cyr • Sue Fricks • Elizabeth High • Kerry Holbrook • Lee House • Charlie Kelley • Elizabeth Manceras • Harriett Mitchell • Fred Moore • Sara Radtke • Franzi Rokoske

Care Communities

Croasdaile Pavilion: Dub Gulley, Alfred Tisdale

Durham Ridge: Phillip Herndon

Hillcrest Convalescent: Carol Wills

Pruitt Health – Durham: Fred Callaway

Brookdale Senior Living: Debbie Mathews

Southpoint Atria: Madge McKeithen

Chatham Ridge Assisted Living: John Fricks

Family and Friends of the Congregation

Ashley Alvord, colleague of Sharon Hirsch

Francisca Cristobal, relative of Al and Judy Arrowood

Sara Degand, cousin of Deborah Momsen-Hudson

Rosalynn Farrell, mother of Rachel Bethune

Cheryl Fowler, friend of Cheri Reece

Larry Hethcox, father of Esther Hethcox

Katie Jackson, wife of Matthew Hirsch

Edward & Meryl Keenan, brother and sister-in-law of Mary-Jo Keenan

Sandra Mikush, mother of Katie Fogleman

Patrick O'Neill, father of Brianna Bennett

Rebecca Todd ("Toddie") Peters, mother of Sophie Peters

Joe Quirk, stepfather of Tim O'Brien

Vivian Turner, mother of Donald Turner

Eddie Cheatham, mother-in-law of Donald Turner

Kim Cummings, father of Drew Cummings

Minnie Sue Douglas, mother of Mindy Douglas

Linda Foster-Momsen, mother of Deborah Momsen-Hudson

Jennifer Hervey, daughter-in-law of Jeanne Hervey

Donna Holladay, friend of Jane & Robert Brawley

Donna Johnson, mother of Ann Huff

Anthony Ketcham, brother-in-law of Wil James

Ana Sofia Ochoa, family member of Becky Martin

Janet and James Ouzts, sister and brother-in-law of Celia Dickerson

Bill Prochaska, friend of Al and Judy Arrowood

Annie Reaves, great-niece of Floalice and Robert Reaves

Jim Vacca, father of Jamie Chambliss

August Birthdays

Celebrating our congregation's August birthdays

Aug 1 — Sydney Curtis

Aug 1 — Eric Hanson

Aug 1 — Fred Moore

Aug 1 — Steve Rimmer

Aug 1 — Sheri Tibbs

Aug 1 — Katharine Whitmore

Aug 2 — Rebekah Jakel

Aug 5 — Juliet Bethune

Aug 5 — Joy Kerner

Aug 8 — Stan Luboff

Aug 8 — Eric Wiebe

Aug 9 — Sharon Hirsch

Aug 10 — Libby Gulley

Aug 10 — Glenn Johnson

Aug 10 — David Smith

Aug 12 — Luke Everett

Aug 13 — Lesley Curtis

Aug 13 — Elizabeth Everett

Aug 13 — Tom Morrell

Aug 14 — Elizabeth High

Aug 14 — Rosa Ramirez

Aug 17 — Sarah Cunningham

Aug 18 — Sherry Everett

Aug 18 — Madge McKeithen

Aug 19 — Mary Banner

Aug 19 — Laura Kelley

Aug 20 — Kati Ruark

Aug 21 — Jim Rogers

Aug 21 — Susan Thompson

Aug 23 — Diana Carrasco

Aug 23 — Caroline Rourk

Aug 27 — Clark Bass

Aug 27 — Floalice Reaves

Aug 27 — Lucy Weicher

Aug 28 — Ellie Meade

Aug 29 — Cesar Ramirez

Aug 31 — Adrienne Allison

Aug 31 — Webb Cummings