

The First Press

First Presbyterian Church Gastonia

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Embrace the "God Moments"

Written by Rev. Brad Simpson

There are those special moments along life's journey when plans come together or circumstances happen in ways that cause us to smile and simply to say, "Thank you, God!" Perhaps, we feel lonely and wonder if anyone cares, the phone rings or a letter arrives, you hear the voice of a friend, and wonder what ever happened to him/her. Or, you are trying to coordinate plans for your family vacation, and everything from the flight arrangements to the hotel accommodations, comes together in perfect order. Another scenario might be that someone you love very much is sick, and the doctor comes into the hospital room and says that all the cancer is gone. These and other examples remind us that God is the one who guides us along life's path, and we should always have faith that, with God, all things are possible.



Recently, while driving to church on Sunday morning, I was listening to a new song on the radio and experienced one of those "God Moments." Reflecting on the sermon I would preach in a couple of hours, I felt something was missing from the message, and then I heard David Howard Faircloth (the Pink Slips Band) sing this:

"Sometimes, there are rocks in the way...and the Lord puts up a signpost and lights my way so I can pass...God is great. God is good...He stood with Paul, He stood with Moses, He stood with Paul and Silas, and He'll stand with you." The message of this song reflected exactly the message of the Scripture passage about staying on the path God sets before us and faithfully following it.

As First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia embarks on the voyage ahead of us, we are reminded that God is with us. Whether in a rowboat or sailing craft, God is the navigator and scripture is our compass. Christ is the way, and as we follow where his voice is leading us, we know many "God Moments" will cause us to say, "Thank you." I invite you to keep your ears and eyes open for these times when God speaks to you and our church. I also invite you to share these moments with others. Sharing our faith will help that faith to grow even stronger.

Peace and Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Simpson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brad

Curiosity And Courage Visioning Process: Letter From Our Strategic Partner

Dear Member of First Presbyterian Church of Gastonia,

We at Pinnacle pray that we will connect with those churches with whom the partnership would yield robust fruit for God's kingdom. All indications suggest that this is the partnership we are forming through the *Curiosity and Courage Visioning Process*. I am delighted to serve with you, eager to learn, grow, pray, worship, discuss, vision, and dream together. I can't tell you what the specific outcomes of this vision quest will be, yet I can tell you the strategic initiatives you discerned as a church will significantly shape your church for years to come. To that end, we need you and everyone who calls FPC home. In the coming months, I will meet many of you in large gatherings and will get to know each of you more personally in our Listening Groups in early November. With holy curiosity and courage, let's go church, let's go!

During the Curiosity and Courage Visioning Journey, we will look to you, everyone involved with this church, for vision input. We will do that primarily through the **Listening Groups scheduled November 5-9**. Each group will have 10-12 people. You will be invited to sign up for a one-hour session with consultant Mark Tidsworth and your peers, sharing your hopes and dreams for FPC. This is a significant activity that will influence the vision pathway ahead.

Also, we will use two "behind-the-scenes" tools to raise awareness about the church and the community. Everyone in the church will be invited to participate in an online Church Assessment Survey. The logistics involved are simple, opening the door for your participation. The outcomes will provide your church leadership with insights into the faith and functionality of FPC.

The second tool is a Demographic Study with a company that specializes in gathering church data. Each of these "behind-the-scenes" tools is another view into the church and its context. As you can see, this *Curiosity and Courage Visioning Process* is comprehensive, inviting God's Holy Spirit to speak and guide through numerous activities, yielding a robust and energizing vision.

I look forward to seeing you **Sunday, September 7th** at morning worship and that evening, 5:00 to 7:00 pm at the Curiosity and Courage dinner.

Rev. Mark E. Tidsworth
Founder and Team Leader
Pinnacle Leadership Associates



Our Carillon

Written by Richard Rankin

The recent Mitchell Eithun carillon concert and Dan Commerford's introductory comments sent me to find out more about our carillon and its place among others in the state, nation, and world. Our carillon is truly a rare and remarkable musical instrument. Only about 170 traditional carillons are in the United States, accounting for roughly 25 percent of the world's total. In North Carolina, there are seven carillons. Four of them have a connection to First Presbyterian, Gastonia. Three of the state's seven carillons are located at churches. The other four are at universities.

Covenant Presbyterian, Charlotte, installed its carillon in 1966, seven years before we did. Because Covenant's minister, Warner Hall, and First Presbyterian, Gastonia's Harry Moffett, were close friends, I suspect that Moffett got the idea for our carillon, dedicated in 1973, from Covenant. A longtime church member recently told me that our steeple is several feet taller than Covenant's, which was a point of pride with Harry Moffett. So Moffett cared a lot about what Covenant was doing.

First Presbyterian Church, Belmont, is the only other church in the state with a carillon. Dedicated in 1984, Catherine Stowe Pharr donated the Belmont carillon in honor of her husband William J. Pharr. Surely, Mrs. Pharr was influenced to do so by the example at our church. So the only three churches in the state with carillons are all three Presbyterian: Covenant, Charlotte; First Presbyterian, Gastonia; and First Presbyterian, Belmont. No other North Carolina churches have one.

The four universities are Duke Chapel, Wake Forest, Gardner-Webb, and NC State. Bill and Frances Henry made a gift to complete the NC State Bell Tower, which houses the carillon. So, through the Henrys, our church is connected to another one of the seven carillons in North Carolina.

Our carillon is exceptional; we should celebrate, enjoy, and share it with others. We are truly blessed to have such a remarkable instrument. Those who attended the Mitchell Eithun recital heard his lovely music.



Black Mountain Home Fall Festival

Written by Sally Hilton

Each year, First Presbyterian holds a workday at Black Mountain Home for Children (BMH), where we perform general maintenance needs such as landscaping, painting, and general repairs. This year, we have been presented with a special workday opportunity.

On **October 11, 2025, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm**, BMH will hold its annual Fall Festival, a primary fundraiser for the children's home. The festival was cancelled last year due to Hurricane Helene's devastation. The home is working hard to make this year's festival extra special, bigger and better! On this day, BMH opens its campus to the community, donors, alums, and, of course, the children. People from all over can come to enjoy games, hayrides, and live music. There will be a bouncy house, horse and car show, face painting, silent auction, alum breakfast, and many more activities. They will also open cottages for tours and share a behind-the-scenes look at what God is doing in the lives of these precious children.

This year, our church volunteers will help staff the Fall Festival, freeing up BMH staff to help with the children and be where they are most needed. There will be numerous volunteer opportunities for us, ranging from helping with the **auction in the gym, registration, and t-shirt sales to helping outside with games, food trucks**, etc. We will need to provide Black Mountain with a list of volunteers by **September 29th**. If you are unable to volunteer, please bring your family to enjoy a fun fall day at Black Mountain.

Because parking will be in demand, Missions is organizing group transportation for our volunteers.

Scan the QR code to sign up. If you need help signing up, please contact **Sally Hilton at 704-460-0813** or one of our mission committee members.



Photo courtesy of Black Mountain Home for Children

Pull Up a Chair: 2025 Women's Connection

Written by Josie Conner

You Can't Go Home Again, by Thomas Wolfe, is about identity, belonging, and the search for meaning in a changing world. Its protagonist, George Webber, returns home after finding success, only to discover that his town and relationships have transformed. For Presbyterians, Montreat, NC, has become a home away from home where we rest and renew. After Hurricane Helene devastated our NC mountain communities, we wondered if we could "go home again." Despite the scars from the physical devastation, the FPC women who journeyed to Montreat August 8th-10th can assure you that we, as Presbyterians, can "go home again."

This year's theme is "Pull Up a Chair." The description provided by the conference was: *"Has seeking meaning amidst the overwhelm left you exhausted? Are you burned out, longing for a collective experience of beloved community? You are invited to join us as we lean into our limits, welcome our capacities, and honor our shared humanity. Pull up a chair and listen, share a story, rest in the abounding love of God, and so much more. Together we'll sit and stay awhile, creating space for discernment and renewal so we might return to the world to do the work God sets before us."*



During the weekend, participants had the opportunity to engage in activities such as yoga, hiking, Bible study, writing, crafting, and thematic discussions and learning experiences. We attended four worship services throughout the weekend. The conference artist, Rachel Paige Mastin created a visual backdrop in the sanctuary that consisted of a large dinner table set for a meal with cloth napkins. Surrounding the table were different chairs, stools, wheelchairs, and other seating. This symbolic backdrop helped us to understand the importance of coming to the table with many different people, regardless of background, and spending time listening and learning from one another, just as Jesus prepares a table for each of us. We heard sermons and presentations from our keynote speaker, Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, who is a distinguished professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, Reverend Lolimarta Reiter, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Seffner, and Jacqueline Lapsley, president of Union Seminary. Our music was led by Sofia Friedley Fernandez.

The weekend provided an opportunity for Presbyterian women to gather, fellowship, laugh, and learn from one another. Women traveled from all over our country to attend. Old friendships were rekindled and new friendships were born. The cool mountain air surrounding us provided respite and refreshment from our everyday lives and the stressors of our world. Sometimes, going home will look different to us. Time marches on and things change. However, the love and relationships we establish with each other and with Christ will carry us through.

Events & Announcements

**ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES
FOR SOMETHING THAT MATTERS!**

September 13 & 20

Join us as we build beds for children
in need and with your help, they
won't have to.



**Sleep in Heavenly Peace
Build Project**



For more information, contact:
Jim Ratchford
jratchford79@gmail.com



NO KID SLEEPS
ON THE FLOOR
IN OUR TOWN!



WEDNESDAY
Night Alive

Nutrition Basics

Speaker:
Beth Silvers
Registered Dietitian

SEPTEMBER 17
5:30 pm, Fellowship Hall

Dinner will be served. Cost: \$5/person

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
Serving size	1/4
Amount per serving	
Calories	
Total Fat 0g	% Daily Value
Saturated Fat 0g	
Trans Fat 0g	

ROADRUNNERS

"LIBERTY MOUNTAIN"
KINGS MOUNTAIN THEATRE
OCTOBER 4, 1:00 PM
TICKETS: \$15
PICK UP TICKETS AT CHURCH OFFICE

VISIT OUR WEBSITE
www.fpcgastonia.org/announcements

Play the new **"QUESTION QUEST"** trivia game each month for a chance to win a prize* by answering a question about FPC. Place your answer in the box at the Memorial Gallery or the Fellowship Hall.

DEADLINE: MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

QUESTION FOR SEPTEMBER:

What are the 3 pillars of Stewardship and what chapter and verses of Romans speak to these?

*When more than one person answers correctly, a drawing will determine the winner.

CONTACT:

Cynthia Anderson at
canderson44@outlook.com for details

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David Jennings, Bethany Jennings, and Pastor Dan at the Carillon Recital.

Service Views and Attendance

COMBINED SERVICE		
Date	Service	Livestream
August 3	134	49
August 10	75	66
August 17	197	65
August 24	164	83

Please note service views do not include those watching via closed circuit stream at Covenant Village.