

FPC NEWSLETTER

Deeper in Christ, Further into the World



WHAT A PRIVILEGE

By Whitney Alexander
Associate Pastor for Missions

As I write this letter, my heart is filled with gratitude, humility, and a deep sense of awe for the journey we have shared over the past 26 years together. Serving this congregation as one of your pastors has been one of the greatest joys and blessings of my life.

Reflecting on these years, I am overwhelmed by the faithfulness of God and the ways in which he has moved among us. Together, we have fellowshipped, worshiped, prayed, studied his Word, served our community, ministered to missionaries around the world, and grown in our faith. From Sunday mornings in the Sanctuary and the Chapel to mission trips, Bible studies, meals, and community outreaches, each moment has been a gift.

It has been a profound blessing to walk alongside you through moments of joy – celebrating baptisms, confirmations, weddings, answered prayers, and new beginnings. We have also walked through seasons of sorrow, holding one another in prayer and offering compassion and comfort during times of loss, illness, and uncertainty. Through it all, the love of Jesus Christ has united and sustained us, and I am eternally thankful for the bonds of fellowship we share. This congregation has exemplified what it means to be the body of Christ: loving, serving, and growing in faith together and living out “SIMPLY JESUS”.

You have challenged me, encouraged me, and inspired me to be a better pastor and a better follower of Jesus Christ. For that, I will always be grateful. As I step into this new season of life, my prayers for this church remain

ferent. “I am confident that God, who has begun a good work among you, will bring it to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

This congregation is strong, vibrant, and deeply rooted in faith. I have no doubt that God will continue to do amazing things through you. I am excited to see how he will continue to lead and bless this congregation as you seek to glorify him and make his name known. I pray that you will remain steadfast in your commitment to worship, discipleship, and service, and that you will support one another and your next missions pastor with the same love and encouragement you have shown me.

While I may be retiring from full-time ministry, please know that my love and prayers for you will never retire. You will always hold a special place in my heart, and I will carry the memories of our time together as a treasure. In the coming weeks, I will look forward to reflect, celebrate, and say goodbye. My hope is that we can honor all that God has done and look forward to the new paths God is preparing for us all.

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FEBRUARY CALENDAR

- 2 Blood Drive
- 2 Discover First Dinner
- 2 H.S. Seniors Class Begins
- 4 Jeffrey Marx Men's Event
- 7 rEcess
- 9 Youth Super Bowl Party
- 20 Prime Time Club Luncheon
- 23 GriefShare® Begins

**SAVE THE DATE:
UPCOMING MARCH EVENTS**

- 5 Ash Wednesday
- 5 Lent Community Groups Begin
- 9 First Lent Sermon
- 15 Men's Skeet Shoot
- 22 Women's Spring Picnic

BAPTISMS

January 19, 2024
 Vivian June Maranto
 Parents are Emily & Justin

Tucker and Lilly Rogers
 Parents are Katherine & Brian

FLOWERS

The Chapel and Sanctuary flowers are given . . .

Feb. 2 Open date

Feb. 9 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of James Howard and Emogene S. Elliott by their family, Dr. and Mrs. Louis Cenac (Elizabeth Elliott) and Dr. Clifton O. Bingham III.

Feb. 16 Open date

Feb. 23 . . . to the glory of God and in loving memory of our father Mack Gregorie Sr. by Ann K. Gregorie and Nancy Sue Gregorie Burton.

IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

By Darin Travis, Associate Pastor for Discipleship

Praise the Lord that he blesses us with rhythms and seasons to structure our lives. Lent is a special season in the life of the Church in that it prepares our hearts to experience the joy and hope of Easter morning. Yet an additional blessing of this season is the rich experience of community we share while gathering around Scripture in groups. Our community groups are ready to dive into this year's Lent guide, *Golden Threads: Tracing the Tapestry of Scripture*. We will explore passages from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and several other key Old Testament passages pointing us toward the Savior. As we prepare our hearts for Easter, consider these reasons why joining a Lent community group.



Life is about relationships. By joining a group, you are choosing to make a weekly investment in the lives of others. Groups will meet weekly from March 5 to April 19. That's six weekly opportunities to grow closer!

We will likely have over 30 community groups meeting throughout the metro area. It is very likely you'll find a good fit. Groups meet in the mornings or evenings, weekdays or weekends. Many of our groups naturally gather with those in the same stage of life. If you aren't already connected to a group, reach out to Blake Fowler (blake@fpcbr.org) for help in finding a group. There's likely a group meeting nearby that would love to have you join in!

Every group is unique. All of our groups spend time in prayer, studying God's Word, and fellowship. Many groups enjoy a meal together or some sort of tasty treat. Several groups collect prayer requests and keep a prayer-chain going throughout the week. Every group seeks to encourage one another in a life of faith pursuing intimacy with Christ.

We can support you. Life is in full swing while you care for your children, and you wonder how you could possibly manage to pull away to attend a group, we have wonderful news. We have groups that meet on Wednesday and Sunday evenings at the church where childcare is provided! So not only can you enjoy community around God's Word, your kids will also have a wonderful night being cared for and invested in by loving childcare workers.

In a world with so much distraction and worry, I invite you to invest in what matters. Join a community group and enjoy the blessing of the body of Christ. For more information or to get connected, contact Blake (blake@fpcbr.org).

WHO CAN DECIDE? | LENT BOOK, EMAILS, AND PODCAST

There are multiple ways to hear, read or pray through this year's Lent guide. *Golden Threads: Tracing the Tapestry of Scripture* includes a published book, daily emails and a daily podcast. Visit the Resources tab at fpcbr.org to subscribe. Lent guides will be distributed in worship on Sunday, February 23 and March 2. The first Lent sermon, emails and podcasts all launch Sunday, March 9.

A COUPLE OF NOTES FROM GERRIT

PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE

The search is on! The Pastor Search Committee is actively seeking, receiving and evaluating applications from candidates. Following this sifting process, we will move towards live conversations. We review any name referred to us. Of course, because the pastors considered are all currently in active positions, we cannot report back about our evaluations or conversations. Please keep us in prayer! The usual length of time for a search of this magnitude is one to two years. We will keep you posted.

WHAT A GENEROUS CONGREGATION YOU ARE!

Wow, how you came through for the work of Christ through your church! With staff transitions and expanded programs, we worried we would end the year with a deficit. But bountiful December giving pushed us well into the black! What's more, you contributed \$62,643 to our Christmas offering for city ministry. The Christian Outreach Center and Gardere Community Christian School send their heartfelt thanks for your contributions. And, while awaiting a few more cards, our 2025 estimates of giving have been strong. We've got a full year planned.

I say over and over that every single dollar matters. This means that every giver is part of every single thing the church does. From great staff to soaring worship to hands-on city ministry to global outreach to rocking babies, youth Bible studies, women's testimony nights, men's special speakers, children learning the Bible, Christmas Eve and Easter and so much more. You made that happen!

Thank you. I love being your pastor, for so many reasons, but especially for this faithfulness.

NEW GRIEF SHARE® GROUP STARTING IN FEBRUARY

The death of a loved one is one of the greatest challenges we face in life. GriefShare® is a Christian program that has been used in thousands of churches over the past 25 years to bring expert counsel alongside the love and gifts of God's people to provide healing and help in the midst of loss. FPCBR's new group will meet on Sundays, 4–6 pm starting February 23. Pat Canfield and Jim Carver will be our facilitators and, we will meet at the First Presbyterian (security is being provided).

Over the 13 sessions, a well-presented 30-minute video touching on topics such as difficult emotions, loneliness, questions for God, and moving forward while remembering loved ones, coupled with discussion, prayer, and support from others are important parts of the time together. Space is limited and there is no charge for the program. Please let Scott Graham or Laura Shaw in the Pastoral Care office know promptly if you are interested in participating (225.387.0617).

THE QUEST FOR MEEKNESS AND QUIETNESS OF SPIRIT

Have you ever considered Matthew Henry's 17th century treatise on the godly life, "The Quest for Meekness and Quietness of Spirit?" This is a spiritually forming work alerting us to the focus of deliberately worshipping God. In our hurried and distracted world, to know the nature, excellence, and application of the meekness and quietness of Jesus is life transforming. Denise Hatcher begins this Sunday school series on February 2 during the Tom & Jerry Class which meets in Education Building, room 202 at 9 am. Note: this is an hour before our normal Sunday school time of 10.10 am.

SERMON TEXTS

Texts are subject to change.

FEBRUARY 2
Luke 15:11–24

FEBRUARY 9
Luke 15:25–32

FEBRUARY 16
Luke 16:1–13

FEBRUARY 23
Matthew 18:21–35

IN MEMORIAM

January 19, 2024
Kay Stone

January 23, 2024
BeBe Fleshman



PASTORAL STAFF

GERRIT DAWSON
Senior Pastor

WHITNEY ALEXANDER
Associate Pastor of Missions

DARIN TRAVIS
Associate Pastor for Discipleship

SCOTT GRAHAM
Associate Pastor for
Pastoral Care and Prayer

COLTON UNDERWOOD
Associate Pastor of Children,
Youth and Families

Welcome Rachel!

RACHEL
UNDERWOOD

Youth Discipleship Assistant



Rachel is delighted to serve as the Youth Discipleship Assistant at First

Presbyterian Church.

Growing up as a pastor's daughter in the Midwest and the DC area, Rachel developed a profound love for serving the body of Christ at a young age. After marrying her high school sweetheart and graduating with a degree in Christian Counseling from Liberty University, she moved to the Deep South to pursue an advanced degree in counseling and biblical studies from Reformed Theological Seminary. During her time in seminary, Rachel worked as the Admissions Coordinator for RTS Jackson while serving part-time as a youth leader in several churches. Over time, she has cultivated a sincere joy in watching teens and young adults navigate the challenges and milestones that accompany adolescence, while shepherding their hearts toward a deeper love for their Savior. Through teaching, special events, church retreats, and various other activities, Rachel loves connecting with the FPC youth!

CELEBRATING 200 YEARS OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN, PART 1

By Zora M. Olsson, First Presbyterian Church Historian

As we think about celebrating First Presbyterian Church's two hundred years, let's begin by looking back to see how far we have come. This begins a series of looking back on that history.

What was it like to be a missionary in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Louisiana? At that time there were no real roads, trains, or cars; it was foot, horse, or boat. The political environment and language barriers (French to Spanish, Spanish to English, then back again) added to the difficulties. Many cultures had arrived and the various Native American tribes each had their own religion and way of life.

Missionaries looking to plant a church were a completely new thought. They wanted to bring the hostile natives to God but the population was spread out over great distances. Many of the tribes were rough and preferred living without the supervision missionaries imposed. The political situation at that time didn't help. Trying to plant new churches was not an easy accomplishment, especially for Protestants.

The first missionaries to come into the Mississippi Valley (what is now Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas) were sent from the Carolinas and Virginia by four denominations within two decades. The Baptists came by boat down the Holston River into Tennessee where they settled to Coles Creek north of Natchez Mississippi Territory in 1780. Reverend Adam Cloud, an Episcopalian, settled on Catherine's Creek in the same area in 1792. One Methodist clergyman, Reverend Tobias

Gibson, went to Nashville by horseback, sold the horse, purchased a canoe and rowed it to Natchez. Three Presbyterian ministers, Reverends William Montgomery, James Hall, and James Bowman, explored that country in 1801 organizing groups of Protestants for religious work and worship.

All encountered the same dangers and hardships, some worse than others. While the missionaries hoped to teach the natives religion and love, the Spanish

were spreading suspicion and hate. Smallpox brought by the Europeans was epidemic among the natives while also taking the lives of many missionaries.

This region was under English control until 1783 when they ceded to the United States. On the strength of a secret clause in the treaty, the Spaniards took charge and retained possession of the region until June, 1798. Many settlers at that time had received land grants for their service

in the Revolutionary War and brought their families to settle on the land. Under Spanish rule, adult Protestants could worship as they wished but no more than eight persons could attend. All children were required to be baptized by a Catholic priest and be raised in the Catholic faith. Protestant ministers were not permitted to preach, baptize, or perform marriages or funerals. Those who did, were sent to Spain to stand trial. In addition, only Catholics were allowed to settle within Spanish domain. Those who were not Catholic were required to renounce their religion and convert.



Sanctuary Building art by Shea Firnberg

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WHAT'S FOR LUNCH? | FEBRUARY PRIME TIME LUNCHEON

All FPC members over the age of 60 are invited to join the Prime Time Club for our next luncheon on Thursday, February 20 from 11.30 to 1.30 in the Reception Room. The program for the day will include games, door prizes, and a representative from Zachary Travel who will present travel options ranging from day trips to international travel (dream big!). We look forward to your input and discussion about what Zachary Travel can offer us as a group. Come prepared with ideas!



Catering is by Unique Cuisine and will include three sandwich options (smoked turkey, Cajun roast beef, or shrimp croissant), chips and a fudge walnut brownie. Please visit fpcbr.org to fill out the online registration form or visit the Prime Time Club table in the Reception Room on Sunday, February 2, 9 and 16. The cost is \$20 per person. Please pay in advance by credit card to ensure that we have enough food available. The firm deadline for registration and payment is February 16. If you miss those opportunities, please call Maureen Rucci at 225.933.5813.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE NEWS

DO YOU VISIT THE CHURCH PORTAL?

FPC has two safe and secure sites to help you manage your church membership data online. The Member Portal allows you to access the online church directory, update personal information and review your estimate of giving and donation history. In the Online Giving Portal, you can make a donation, update your bank or credit card information and make changes to your recurring gift schedule. Links to both the Member Portal and the Online Giving Portal are in the top right corner of the homepage, or by scrolling down to "Member Portal and Online Giving" in the FPCBR app. Separate login information is required for each site. Contact Laura Shaw (225.620.1222) if you have questions about setting up your account.

DISCOVER FIRST DINNER | FEBRUARY 2

Do you know someone interested in becoming a member of First Presbyterian? Invite them to the next Discover First Dinner. Discover First is an opportunity to learn more about how to become part of our mission and ministry. Our next Discover First Dinner is Sunday, February 2 at 4 pm. Please contact Emily Viguerie (emily@fpcbr.org or 225.333.9084) for more information.

BLOOD DRIVE | FEBRUARY 2

You have the most precious resource of all: the ability to save a life by donating blood! First Presbyterian is hosting a blood drive on Sunday, February 2 from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm! Stop by the LifeShare blood truck before or after worship and help share this invaluable gift with someone in need.

SHARE YOUR LOVE OF COOKING

If you would like to volunteer to prepare and deliver a meal to individuals or families in need, please contact Emily Viguerie (emily@fpcbr.org). FPC's Meal Ministry focuses on developing a sense of community among our members, guests and partner ministries as we live out our mission to go deeper in Christ and further into the world.

Farewell Sherry!

SHERRY TUCKER

While we are sad Sherry is retiring, we are thrilled she will continue to help us as our Wedding Coordinator. We are excited for the new opportunities and adventures that await her beyond FPC and are confident that wherever she goes, she will continue to shine and make a positive impact. As Sherry embarks on this new chapter, we wish her all the best in her future endeavors and pray God guides her to many opportunities to share his glory. Farewell Sherry!



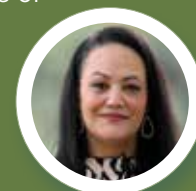
Welcome Maria!

MARIA BARRERA

Director of Program Support

Maria is a native of the big state of Texas and is fluent in both Spanish and English. She has lived in Louisiana for over 10 years and is happily married with two beautiful daughters and three handsome "bonus" sons. Maria's faith is an integral part of her life. Her belief in God guides her actions, and she strives to reflect his love and compassion in everything she does. She is thrilled to be a part of First Presbyterian Church.

Maria loves to travel and spend time with her family. She lives by the motto, "teamwork makes the dream work."



DEACONS ARE HERE TO HELP!

The Diaconate has a growing passion to help the home bound and needy within our congregation. If you have a need, know of a need, or would like to participate, please contact Laura Shaw (225.387.0617 or laura@fpcbr.org).

FPC APP

Sermon video, sermon audio, sermon transcripts, lectures, ESV Bible, news, announcements . . . if it's on the website, it's on the app. Download from your favorite app store by searching FPCBR.

MEN'S MINISTRY NEWS

HAVING JEFFREY MARX OVER FOR DINNER.

Nationally known Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, author and speaker Jeffrey Marx will be our guest speaker at a special Men's Ministry dinner on Tuesday, February 4 at 6 pm in the Reception Room. Jeffrey will be with us to talk about his classic book, "Season of Life: A Football Star, a Boy, a Journey to Manhood." This is a great event to bring your son, your father, or your friend from work. Register online today at fpcbr.org. Seats are limited.



Register online today at fpcbr.org.

GOOD FOOD, GUN POWDER AND COMPETITION

By Darin Travis, Associate Pastor for Men's Ministry

What does good food, the smell of gun powder, and good-natured competition have in common? If you said the annual First Presbyterian Men's Ministry Skeet Shoot, you would be exactly right! This year's skeet shoot will be back in the rolling hills of Saint Francisville on Dr. Chat Kleinpeter's property on Saturday, March 15. Each participant will shoot 100 shots from multiple stations to determine the individual and team winners.

Further details and registration is now online at fpcbr.org. Please email me if you have any questions (darin@fpcbr.org).

WOMEN'S MINISTRY NEWS

LAISSEZ LES BON TEMPS ROULER!

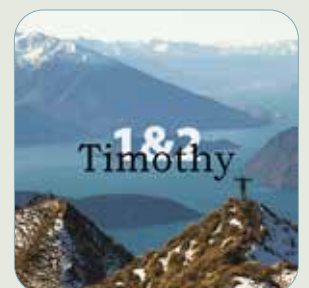
There is no agenda! This is just an opportunity to get together, have some apps and king cake and just hang out. Our next social for 20s and 30s is on Thursday, February 20 at Morgan Shirley's house (7446 Shrewsbury Avenue) from 6 to 8 pm. Please RSVP to Jaime Carnaggio (jaime@fpcbr.org). Feel free to bring an appetizer or beverage of your choice. King cakes will be provided.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY SPRING PICNIC MARCH 22

Ladies, save the date for the annual Women's Ministry Spring Picnic. Stay tuned for details and registration online. The picnic will be Saturday, March 22.

1 & 2 TIMOTHY STUDY CONTINUES

The Women's Ministry 1 & 2 Timothy Bible study continues. In a world marked by false teaching, moral decline and spiritual compromise, we are called to guard the gospel of Jesus Christ and live it out in practical and visible ways. Join us at one of our three weekly offerings (Tuesdays at 7.15 am, Wednesdays at 6 pm, or Thursdays at 9.30 am). May we feel a renewed sense of responsibility and confidence to fight the good fight of faith.



SOME CHILDREN'S & YOUTH NEWS

THE SENIORS ARE HANGING OUT WITH GERRIT | STARTS FEBRUARY 2

Gerrit is hosting his world-famous Senior Sunday School class series beginning Sunday, February 2. These classes will take place in Gerrit's office each Sunday at 10.10 am through February 23. Contact Jessica Saffell if you have any questions (jessica@fpabr.org).

YOUTH SUPER BOWL PARTY | FEBRUARY 9

All middle and high school students are invited to the annual Super Bowl Party on Sunday, February 9 at 5 pm. We'll hang out, watch the game until halftime and have fabulous snacks. Meet us at the Jones' home (2065 Ferndale Avenue). Contact Colton Underwood if you have any questions (colton@fpabr.org).



WELCOME MARY PAGE TO CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Children's Ministry welcomes Mary Page Wood as So Loved Team Leader. Mary Page has been a familiar face in the So Loved hallway as a Butterflies Room Mom. Children's Ministry is thrilled that she is taking on this position. Stay tuned for Mary Page's bio and pic in next month's issue.

A LITTLE BIT OF THIS AND A LITTLE BIT OF THAT

GERRIT'S LATEST ON DESIRINGGOD.ORG

"Is It Good That You Exist?" is Gerrit's recent article for desiringgod.org based on his Christmas Eve sermon. Visit the Desiring God website or grab a printed copy at the Connection Center.



CLEANING OUT THE LOST AND FOUND

It's time to clean out the Lost and Found box in the Sanctuary building. Please be sure to check for your lost items by the end of February. Any unclaimed items will be "shared" with the Purple Cow or thrown away.



CELEBRATING 200 YEARS *continued from page 4*

Several churches were established in the region. After some time, they organized into a unit to form a larger body for representation on the national level. In 1815, the synod of Kentucky formed which consisted of Presbyterian churches in Mississippi, Louisiana, parts of Arkansas and parts of Alabama. The Kentucky

synod joined together with the other denominations to counter the immorality prevalent in the territory.

Stay tuned for our next installment on the founding of First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge!

FPC AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Sanctuary services are livestreamed on the web and we frequently post photos on social media of members engaged in fellowship at our small groups, worship services and events. If you have any questions, contact

Katie Robinson

(katie@fpabr.org) or

Jay High (jay@fpabr.org).

PRAYER TIME

Join us at 10.10 am each Sunday for additional prayer in the Prayer Room (just to the left of the elevator in the Sanctuary building). One or more pastors/elders, along with others willing to intercede on your behalf, will welcome you.



225.387.0617
fpabr.org

763 North Boulevard
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Mother's Day Out and
Preschool
225.620.0245

BR Christian Counseling Center
225.387.2287
brchristiancounseling.com

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving as your Associate Pastor of Youth and Missions for 26 years. It has been an honor and a joy beyond measure. "May God bless you and keep you, may his face shine upon you, and may his peace be with you always".

Whitney Alexander



Whitney with Dick Gates, former FPC Associate Pastor for Missions, and Dick's wife Judie.

