

FPC NEWSLETTER

Deeper in Christ, Further into the World



WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE?

By **GERRIT DAWSON**

Senior Pastor

Been looking back and looking forward as this transition arrives. And so these next two newsletters, I have some reflections and thoughts for you. Twenty-two years ago, I did *not* come to Baton Rouge to change the direction of the church. Before I arrived, the elders had gone through a process of reaffirming the church’s mission, naming essential beliefs and creating a long-range strategic plan. The new pastor would have to fit the clear identity and mission of the church. In other words, I was told, “This is us. Will you come lead us to be more *us*?” The church’s clarity was a key reason I knew in my bones God was calling us here. No new direction. No new values. Just press into who God has made us to be.

That core sense of church identity has not changed. Today, we’re not looking for a pastor to lead us in a “new direction.” Our mission remains “Deeper in Christ, further into the world.” Our essential beliefs remain our foundation. Our core worship values inform every service we plan. The session has clearly laid out the path before us in our strategic plan. All the leaders of the church—elders, deacons, and staff pull in the same direction. The next pastor will be energized and motivated by that clarity.

Will there be some change in style? Of course. Change in leadership strengths? Favorite authors and passages? New ideas for how to enact our continuing mission? Certainly. But not a new direction. We flow out of two thousand years of central Christian belief, and two

hundred years of its particular expression here on the banks of the Mississippi.

I’ve loved that continuity. It’s like playing tennis with the actual rules, a firm net and clear boundaries. There’s way more engagement, skill, energy and joy required than if you just hit around in a parking lot making up rules. This church, by its very depth and faithfulness, demanded more of me than I knew I had to give. That’s exactly what has made these years so wonderful.

More, much more, is ahead as the Spirit leads us to the next pastor. So stay with First through the change. Pray for your church and her leaders. Be the church God called you to join. Changes will come, but not in our essential direction. More than ever, I have loved being your pastor.



Gerrit

Congregational Meeting, March 15

The session has called a congregational meeting for Sunday, March 15 at 10.10 am in the Sanctuary. We’ll elect at-large members to the officer nominating committee and hear the 2026 budget! There will be no adult Sunday school classes that day.

2 JOURNEY TO THE CROSS: HOLY WEEK

2 NEW MONTH, NEW PHOTO, NEW CHANCE TO WIN

3 TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT! MEN'S SKEET SHOOT

3 CELEBRATING A FAITHFUL LEGACY

MARCH EVENTS

- 1, 8 & 22 Discover First Class
- 6 rEcess
- 7 Men's Skeet Shoot
- 13 Women's 60s Social
- 15 Congregational Meeting
- 29 Palm Sunday

UPCOMING APRIL EVENTS

- 2 Maundy Thursday
- 5 Easter Sunday
- 17 Gala

DEATHS

- January 17: Tim Hatcher
- January 18: Ray Hartley
- January 31: Hots Aull

February 3: Donald Vaughn
Father of Hattie Guidry

CHAPEL AND SANCTUARY FLOWERS

The Chapel and Sanctuary flowers are given to . . .

March 1 . . . the glory of God and in loving memory of Helen & Wayne Barker and Christine & Sam Orwin, Linda and Wayne Barker's parents, as well as Wayne's sister, Kitty Barker.

March 8 . . . the glory of God and in loving memory of Bart Bennett by Ruth Anne, Claire, Adriane, and Sarah.

March 15 . . . the glory of God and in loving memory of Martha Ann and Don Cunningham, by their grandchildren, Mary Michael and Robert McDuff.

March 22 Open date.

March 29 . . . the glory of God and in grateful appreciation for the 22-year ministry of Rhonda & Gerrit Dawson by Dadie and Princeton Bardwell.

Please contact Kathy Mullins if you would like to donate flowers (603.4735).

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS: HOLY WEEK AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

PALM SUNDAY
Sunday, March 29 at 10 am

We joyfully welcome back our annual Palm Sunday festival on March 29. The congregation will process around North Boulevard promptly at 10 am followed by a combined worship celebration in the Sanctuary. Join us for a crawfish boil after worship with fun activities for the children: egg hunt (further details below), face painting, a balloon artist and a petting zoo. Childcare will not be available during lunch. Casual dress is encouraged. Overflow parking will be available in the Old Governor's Mansion lot on North Blvd. Our Palm Sunday service, including the procession, will be livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube. It's going to be a great time with good food, fun, and fellowship!



Crawfish Boil

To secure your plate, please register on the church website or on the Church Center app (\$20 for a crawfish plate; \$10 for a hotdog plate). Registering online is Step 1. After registering, please pick up a physical ticket at the Connection Center through Sunday, March 22. This ticket is necessary to get your lunch on Palm Sunday. If you can't make that day, pickups are available in the church office March 23–27. **Important: Day-of registrations will only be allocated a limited number of plates. Please reserve your plate in advance.**

Egg Hunt Details

Children through 3rd grade are invited to participate in the egg hunt. Those in pre-k and younger will hunt eggs in the playground next to the Gym. Those in kindergarten through 3rd grade will hunt eggs in the Courtyard.

Parents, please bring 12 plastic candy-filled eggs by Sunday, March 22, for each of your children participating in the egg hunt.

Place them in the large baskets stationed at various church entrances. Eggs should be lightly taped shut. NO nuts, peanut butter or chocolate, please.

The hunt begins following worship. We ask that parents assist their children by limiting their finds to 12 eggs per child.

MAUNDY THURSDAY
Cursed Tree / Wondrous Cross
April 2 at 7 pm

Let us love and sing and wonder! Let us praise the Savior's name!—John Newton

A multi-sensory, multi-media service of worship inviting all to consider the shimmering facets of the finished work of Christ Jesus on Calvary's cross.

EASTER SUNDAY
Sunday, April 5
6.30, 9 and 11 am Worship

Easter is a time to come together with fellow believers and celebrate the victory of life over death, and rejoice in the hope of Christ's resurrection. Bring your loved ones and let us celebrate this blessed day together!

Start your day with a 6.30 am sunrise service in the Terraced Garden.



Experience the beauty of the morning light as we gather outdoors to honor the hope and new beginnings Easter represents. This a peaceful way to begin your Easter journey. Stay after worship for a

light breakfast in the Courtyard. No worries if it rains. We'll gather in the Sanctuary.

If a later start suits you better, join us at 9 or 11 am in the Sanctuary for a vibrant and joyful service filled with uplifting music and a powerful message of renewal.

New Month, New Photo, New Chance to Win

Stop by the Connection Center any Sunday in March and hop into our photo booth to snap a quick, updated picture of you and your family for our online directory! Bonus: Everyone who uploads a new photo in March will be entered into a drawing for a First Presbyterian Church tumbler filled with goodies!

TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT—MEN'S MINISTRY SKEET SHOOT

The Men's Ministry Skeet Shoot will once again be back in the rolling hills of Saint Francisville on Dr. Chat Kleinpeter's property. This event is only partially about shooting and mainly about building friendships. Please bring friends! Like previous years, prizes will be awarded for excellent shooting.

Registration is required and will cover the cost of clays, ammo, and food: \$65 for Shooters, \$20 for non-Shooters. Boys 12 years old and younger are welcome but must be accompanied by an adult. Visit fpcbr.org for further details or to register.

Celebrating a Faithful Legacy, Building a Bold Future: April 17 Gala

Mark your calendar for "From Generation to Generation: A Night of Celebration & Vision" on April 17 at Boudreaux's in Baton Rouge. This special evening will joyfully honor Gerrit and celebrate his faithful leadership while also sharing our new Master Campus Plan and the vision for what's ahead for our property. The night will feature a festive atmosphere, dinner, live music, and dancing as we give thanks for God's faithfulness and look ahead with anticipation to where he is leading us next. More details to come!

Local Missions Volunteer Opportunities

The After-School program at Gardere Community Christian School and the Grocery Assistance Program at the Christian Outreach Center are looking for volunteers. Visit the church website or contact Lindsay Stratman for more information.

From Baton Rouge to the Nations through Friendship

International Friendship Partners, better known as IFP, is a great opportunity to plug into church life. God doesn't need any of us, but this is an opportunity to be a co-laborer with Jesus! Started in 2014 by Valerie Gastinel, IFP's vision is to connect FPCBR members to unreached internationals, including students, families, and professionals. IFP aims to build bridges of friendship, trust, and Christ's love. With encouragement and support from FPCBR's leadership, we have been doing this ever since. We'd love for you to be a part of IFP's future. Contact Valerie Gastinel (225.241.1386, vgastinel@yahoo.com) or LeeAnn Kozan (850.899.5444, leeannkozan@gmail.com) to get involved or hear more about IFP.

Adventure, Relaxation and Fun! Senior Citizens Day Trip

On Wednesday, April 15, members of the Prime Time Club will board a comfortable chartered coach for a trip to Lafayette. Our first stop: a mouthwatering lunch at Prejean's Seafood Restaurant, known for its local flavors and amazing seafood. Then we'll continue to New Iberia to explore Jefferson Island, the historic Jefferson Mansion, and the tranquil Rip Van Winkle Gardens. Stay tuned for more details on how to register online—spaces will fill up quickly, so don't miss out!

Spring Is In the Air!

Join us for our next ladies' social — a 60s+ spring picnic at the home of Annette Lamond on Friday, March 13 from 11 am to 1 pm. We'll enjoy some sunshine, salads, and sips! This social is intended for ladies 60 and up, but truly anyone is welcome. Please RSVP to jai-me@fpcbr.org.

Lent: Listen, Learn and Worship

Each Wednesday of Lent, join us at noon in Dunham Chapel for a brief Lent service (no meeting April 1) and invite a coworker to come along. There's still time to join our churchwide study of *Rich Wounds* by David Mathis, with weekday devotions throughout Lent, and to tune in to our 2026 Lent podcast on Apple, Spotify, or YouTube for deeper discussion. Consider listening to David Mathis read *Rich Wounds* as a companion piece.

SERMON TEXTS

Texts are subject to change.

MARCH 1

Hebrews 9:19–26
Leviticus 17:11

MARCH 8

1 John 2:1–2,
Romans 3: 23–26

MARCH 15

Revelation 5:9, 1 Peter 1:17–21,
1 Corinthians 6:20

MARCH 22

Ephesians 2:14–18

MARCH 29

Colossians 2:15,
Hebrews 2:14–15,
1 Corinthians 15:54–57,
Revelation 1:17–18

PASTORAL STAFF

GERRIT DAWSON
Senior Pastor

DARIN TRAVIS
Associate Pastor for Discipleship

SCOTT GRAHAM
Associate Pastor for
Pastoral Care and Prayer

COLTON UNDERWOOD
Associate Pastor of Children,
Youth and Families

DANIEL CROSKREY
Pastoral Resident



CONTACT INFORMATION

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Mother's Day Out and Preschool
225.620.0245

BR Christian Counseling Center
225.387.2287

brchristiancounseling.com

1827: THE FIRST BAPTISMS AND PROTESTANT COMMUNION

Church History: Continued from the February 2026 Issue of FPC News

By Zora Olsson

In the earliest days of what would become First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge, God was already gathering his people. On Saturday, May 26, 1827, Rev. Benjamin Chase preached and baptized Mrs. Sarah Walker, Mr. Albert Penny, and Mrs. Mary Parsons—marking some of the first souls formally received into this new Presbyterian witness in Baton Rouge.

The following day, Rev. Jeremiah Chamberlain preached from Malachi 3:7 and administered the Lord's Supper. This sacred moment marked the first time a Protestant minister had celebrated communion in the city. Rev. Chase then explained the nature and purpose of a Presbyterian church and read the Articles of Faith and Covenant adopted by its founding members.

Here, before there was a building or long history—there was faith, obedience, and a beginning. Wouldn't you have loved to be there?

To be continued in next month's issue of FPC News



Vacation Bible School Registration Is Open!

Dates: June 8–12

Cost is just \$10 per camper, with free registration for volunteers' kids. Spots are limited—register now on the Church Center app or fpcbr.org!

Slide Operators Needed!

Did you know that everything you see on the screens is controlled by a slide operator? This vital, yet unseen, ministry is in need of more volunteers. The commitment is one Sunday a month at a Sanctuary service of your choosing. Contact Lauren (lauren@fpcbr.org) for more information!