

First Presbyterian Church **2024 Annual Report**

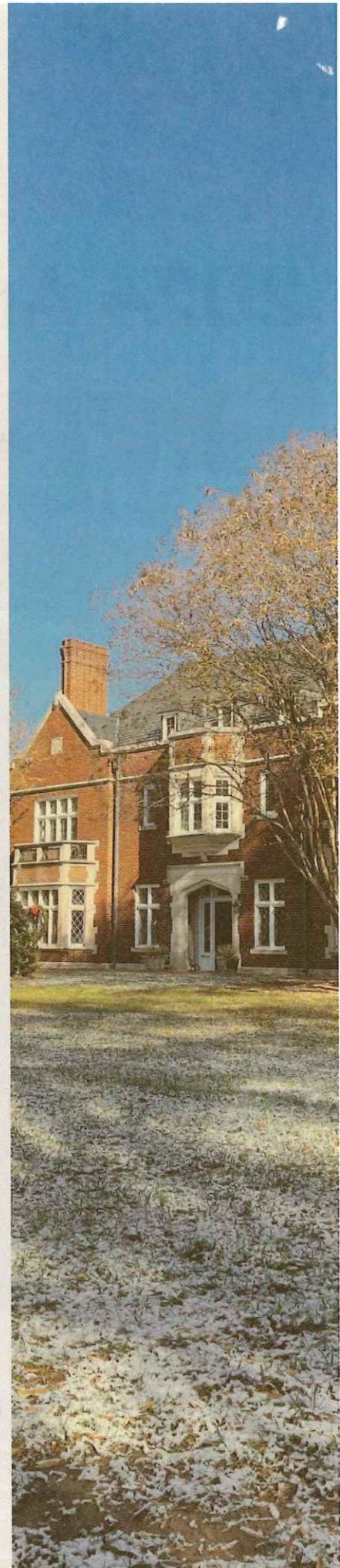


FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
C O N C O R D

JANUARY
2025

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Worship & Music

Worship and music is central to who we are and what we do at First Presbyterian Church, and the **Worship and Music Committee** spent 2024 both maintaining precious traditions like the Flowered Cross on Easter morning, Youth Sunday, or the Christmas pageant *and* thinking creatively about new ways to worship together.

With a growing number of children attending worship and Pew Prep, the Worship and Music Committee increased the number of children's worship bags from 16 to 21, and created 5 additional "backup bags" for when we welcome unexpected guests! The committee also recruited Pew Prep teachers, and worked with Jacquie to restart a Children's Choir program that has been dormant since before COVID.

As an Earth Care congregation, the committee experimented with compostable communion cups as an alternative to single-use plastic cups before settling on reusable glass cups that will be environmentally *and* financially responsible.

The committee created traditions this year that it intends to carry into 2025 by building an All Saints' Day Banner on which members hung bells representing loved ones who had passed. It also piloted the first ever *Peace Increase* in The Commons, an early morning prayer service for peace both near and far that built upon the success of previous events in The Commons that lifted up prayers for people caught in the crosshairs of global conflicts.



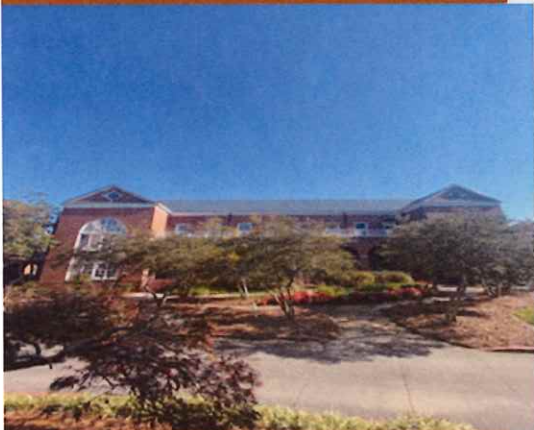
Buildings & Grounds

The **Building and Grounds Committee** worked on three major improvements to the campus in 2024. Another set of two hand rails were added to the front entrance of the sanctuary and all the railings were painted black.

The HVAC systems in the Fellowship House were inefficient, failing to heat and cool, and began leaking natural gas. Of the nine HVAC units in the building, two systems were replaced in the last two years. The Building and Grounds Committee formulated a plan for replacing the remaining units. To help with the costs of replacing seven HVAC units, the committee applied for a grant from the Cannon Foundation and received a grant equal to half the cost of the replacing seven of the HVAC systems. All nine systems in the Fellowship House have been replaced and as a result the church is seeing reduced energy costs and better efficiency in heating and cooling of the building.



The largest project of the Buildings and Grounds Committee completed in 2024 was the replacement of the roof on the Will Young Building. The roof on the building was original to the building and showing signs of aging. The committee met with several contractors and selected Davco Roofing, a commercial roofing company in Charlotte. The roof was replaced with the Eco Star roofing product and carries a 40 year materials warranty. The project was scheduled to take two weeks and was completed in six days.



The Building and Grounds Committee has begun working on a plan to replace the HVAC units in the Education Building. One unit was replaced in 2022 but all the other units are 20-30 years old. They are inefficient, and sourcing parts for repairs is becoming more difficult. The committee's hope is to have these units replaced during 2025.

The Building and Grounds Committee has also been tasked with improving the use of space in the Education Building and Will Young Buildings, in addition to developing a plan to improve security and building access. A security assessment is being conducted and improvements will be made based on the information received in the final report.

Finally, the concrete driveway entrance from Union Street has failed and is collapsing. The Building and Grounds Committee is working with the City of Concord to make the repairs. The City of Concord is responsible for the oak trees in the sidewalk median and the arborist has advised the committee one of the trees needs to be removed as it is showing signs of disease. Once the tree is removed, the necessary repairs can be made to the sidewalk and driveway to improve the entrance.

+ Christian Education + 5

From the growing number of children participating in Pew Prep and children's moments to the diverse and vibrant adult Sunday School classes offered on Sunday mornings before worship, the **Christian Education Committee** has a lot on its hands, and a lot to celebrate. Here are just a few of the highlights from 2024.

Vacation Bible School

Last summer, 50 First Pres & First Kids staff and volunteers helped 113 children celebrate the ways that we are *all* created in the image of God. For the first time, our VBS "Olympics" participated in the work of the PC(USA) Giving Catalog, raising \$393.66 for a community irrigation water pump, a rainwater catchment system, and two jerrycans for communities in Nigeria. The Christian Education Committee also organized a volunteer training ahead of VBS and included VBS participants in worship on the Sunday following VBS.

The committee organized a new class series on the Bible for children. In 2024, *Introduction to the Bible* was offered to 4th & 5th grade students ahead of the Bible presentation in worship. The same cohort then engaged in a *Bible 2* class in the fall of 2024. We are excited about the growing engagement of our elementary school children in the life of the congregation.

Introduction to Bible Class

Confirmation & Youth Group

Similarly, it has been a joy to see the growing participation of youth in special worship services like Youth Sunday and the Christmas pageant. The Christian Education Committee feels that this participation is due in part to youth engagement in confirmation class and youth group. For the first time in 2024, the youth group experienced a progressive dinner at the homes of congregation members near the church and a pool party at Pastor Ellen's.



Spiritual Practices for Adults

Youth Sunday School

Youth Sunday School continues to evolve, with the goal of increasing youth engagement. We are exploring a new 5th-8th grade Sunday School class beginning in winter or spring 2025.

In Summer 2025, look for information about a new class for adults, where we will explore different spiritual practices including prayer, labyrinths, bible journaling, gratitude exercises, and more.

Passport Kids

Six of our 5th & 6th graders will attend the *Passport Kids* camp at Montreat this summer, from June 30 to July 3rd.



Mission

In addition to the financial support our congregation provides to local partners like Christian Cooperative Ministries, Opportunity House, CVAN, Meals on Wheels, and the Academic Learning Center, the deacons' **Mission Committee** labors throughout the year to meet urgent community needs through the initiatives listed below. In 2024, hunger and housing insecurity were at the heart of the committee's efforts, and in September the deacons led several creative *Minutes for Mission* in worship to invite church members into the many food justice ministries our church takes part in. In 2025, the Mission Committee hopes to dedicate other months to raising support and awareness for other issues like healthcare, education, and disaster relief.



→ Rise Against Hunger

Members of all ages put on gloves and hairnets in September to package 10,170 meal packets with *Rise Against Hunger*. Each packet serves roughly 5 to 6 people, and went directly to communities in need in Madagascar.

→ Love Feast on the Streets

Once every other month, First Presbyterian volunteers join our partners with *Esther's Heart for Transformation Ministry* at St. James Lutheran or Central United Methodist in downtown Concord to serve warm breakfast and distribute clean clothes and underwear to our neighbors in need.

→ Crop Hunger Walk

The Mission Committee organized First Presbyterian's largest *Crop Hunger Walk* contingent in years, with twenty participants including a dachshund named Remi. We raised \$2000 on top of a \$1000 gift from the Deacons' Discretionary Fund to fight hunger through Church World Service's global missions and through local food banks, including those serving Western NC counties hit hard by Hurricane Helene.

→ Habitat for Humanity

The Mission Committee spearheaded our annual fundraiser to support Habitat for Humanity's Cabarrus chapter, which was incredibly successful in raising over \$35,000 to help Habitat purchase land, build homes, and assist with critical repairs for low-income homeowners. The deacons' also organized work days at Habitat sites, and attended a handful of home dedications in 2024.

→ Looking to 2025: W. M. Irvin, Angel Tree, Operation Sandwich, & Helene Response

In addition to the food and housing-related ministries above, the Mission Committee:

- deepened its support for teachers and students in need at *W. M. Irvin Elementary School* through gift cards and book buddies;
- held its largest *Angel Tree Prison Fellowship* drive yet (supporting 35 households and 71 youth with 142 gifts);
- prepared a rapid-response guide after Hurricane Helene that in 2025 will evolve to on-the-ground assistance in Western North Carolina near Black Mountain, and;
- is looking to expand its partnership with *Opportunity House* beyond Operation Sandwich in 2025.



Congregational Care

In addition to organizing ongoing visits to the home-based disciples within our church family and community and serving communion quarterly at Taylor Glen and Morningside, the deacons on our **Congregational Care Committee** invited Kym Motley of the *Gladys Love Project* to speak at our annual Grief Support Luncheon in Davis Hall. In early November, following All Saints' Day, Kym shared Hershey's kisses, thoughtful exercises, and stories about how caregivers can care for themselves or find communities that can support them.

Then in December, the Congregational Care Committee hosted its first Kids' Night In / Parents' Night Out. Volunteers led crafts, games, and a movie while serving hot cocoa and tacos for children between the ages of 3 and 12, so that parents could have a night to relax or get caught up during the busy holiday season.

Hospitality

On top of making sure that we have ushers each week for worship, the deacons' **Hospitality Committee** continues to coordinate opportunities for intergenerational fun and fellowship in every season. The Niblock family graciously agreed to host a spring picnic at their farm, and deacons arranged food for 145 guests as well as a performance by *The Danger Tones*, Keane Matthews' barbershop quartet.

Last summer, the committee held several *Sips and Sweets* after worship with drinks and cookies. Then in November, as the Concord Christmas Parade returned to Union St., the Hospitality team again set up tables of refreshments for parade attendees on the Fellowship House lawn. The committee also orchestrated a tree lighting event, where families sang carols, enjoyed popcorn, and decorated our outdoor Christmas tree with eco-friendly adornments.

The Hospitality committee is now exploring the idea of hosting a churchwide retreat in the mountains in 2025, after Pastor Ellen's sabbatical. Stay tuned for more info!



The Commons

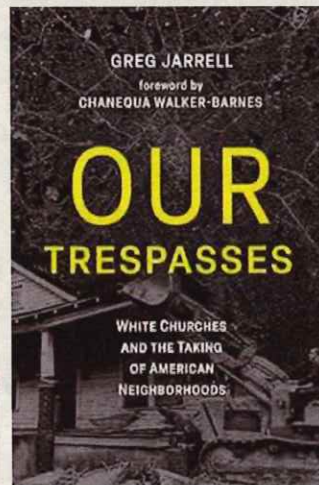


The Commons Prayer Room has continued to serve as a safe space for community groups like NAMI and Alcoholics Anonymous to plan, gather, and reflect. At the same time, 2024 was a year in which the **Commons Committee** began to reimagine how the space can best serve the needs of our neighbors and the mission of this church. In September, the Middle School Sunday School Class began meeting in The Commons and exploring the spiritual disciplines offered at our different prayer stations. In 2024, The Commons also played host to several intimate and well-attended house concerts. Portland, Oregon-based folk-pop artist Bobby Jo Valentine played a moving set in March 2024, and the Rev. Rory Chambers brought good vibes and live, acoustic karaoke to The Commons that same month. Then in October, Louisville-based singer-songwriter Matt Black kicked off his East Coast tour in our space and helped lead contemplative Taizé music for a special prayer service called *Peace Increase* the following morning in The Commons. Each show was free to attend, but raised hundreds of dollars in voluntary donations for nonprofits like NAMI, Roof Above, and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

The committee has purchased a labyrinth that will be available to the community during Lent. In 2025, expect The Commons to continue hosting youth Sunday School, community partners, occasional concerts, and Peace Increase prayer services as we continue to reimagine what this space can and should be.



The **Racial Equity Committee** continues to study how racism and racial injustice shape and limit our present world. In the first half of 2024, the group read James Cone's classic work in theology, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Then, in the second half of the year, the group took on local history by reading Greg Jarrell's recent book, *Our Trespasses* which tells the story of how urban renewal razed a vibrant Black neighborhood to make way for uptown Charlotte. Jarrell will visit First Presbyterian Church in April and the Racial Equity Committee hopes to follow his example in studying the history of Concord's neighborhoods.



Racial
Equity
Reads

Presbyterian Women

Through their Backpack Program, the incredible individuals and circles of

our congregation's **Presbyterian Women** work year-round to turn the loose change and bills you donate during Noisy Offerings into food for low-income students and families at Coltrane-Webb Elementary School.

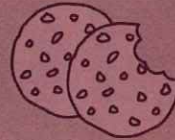
The Presbyterian Women also hosted several memorable events for the congregation in 2024, including:

- a *Fall Spiced Sunday*, where Dr. Natalie Atwell spoke about putting on shoes of peace in daily life, and guests assembled thirty-five wreaths to share with residents at local assisted living homes;
- a traditional *pounding* for Pastor Casey and Jordan after their October wedding;
- and a Joy Gift Dinner, with Ritchie Hill cheese straws, music by Carrie Myers, and a sneak peek at Old Courthouse Theaters' *Miracle on 34th Street*. The dinner raised money for Presbyterian church workers and their families in their time of need as well as education for communities of color at Presbyterian schools and seminaries.

In 2025, circles will conclude their study of Patricia Tull's Bible study on justice and creation care. And they will continue to organize events that further both the fellowship of Presbyterian Women in Concord and serve our community.



Scouts



Our local Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops once again helped us lead worship on special "Scout Sundays," and were active on our campus and in our community year-round. Girl Scout Troop 3631 supported the Cabarrus County Animal Shelter, learned how to rock climb, and so much more. Meanwhile, in December 2024, we had the added privilege of celebrating Leland Bishop, John Morrison, and Miller Peterson of Boy Scout Troop 3, each of whom completed all of the requirements to receive the prestigious Eagle Scout Award.



Market for Mission

While our biennial *Market for Mission* in Davis Hall and on Church Street, which supports our mission partners in Bayonnais, Haiti, will be back in 2025, donations began to accumulate in the Will Young Building not long after the Fall 2023 sale. Meanwhile, the need in Haiti has not diminished. The incredible volunteers behind the Market for Mission decided to get creative, organizing a “Soup and Shop” mini-sale to clear out some of this year’s inventory and still support Friends Empowering Haiti in 2024. The event was a massive success, and raised \$4,500 to support education, food distribution, and a health clinic in Bayonnais.



New Directory



We are blessed to be a part of a congregation with so many new faces that have joined in recent years, and last year many new and old members alike expressed interest in a new church directory. Jonathan Ewart and Bob Underwood spearheaded an effort to vet directory and photography companies, organize time slots and volunteers, and lay out a number of other pages so that in early 2025 we will enjoy our first new directory in almost a decade, which will be available both in booklet and digital app formats.

Library Revitalization



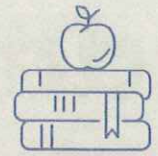
After surveying church membership in the second half of 2023, the **Church Library Revitalization Committee** spent countless hours in 2024 following through on your suggestions for how to improve the library. Volunteers

updated the shelves, removing books that had not been put to use or no longer fit the profile of what this community is looking for from its library. It also meant cataloging and organizing new additions, including the books on death, dying, grief, and care shown to the left, donated by Circle 3 of the Presbyterian Women in memory of recently deceased members of their Circle. The

revitalized library has literary classics and young adult fiction in addition to books on theology, pastoral care, social and environmental justice, and more. Make sure to visit and check out a book in 2025!



First Kids Preschool



First Kids Preschool continued to bless our community in 2024. After Hurricane Helene, preschool families held a donation drive that helped to fill a relief plane to Western North Carolina. Annual events like last February's *Doughnuts with Daddy* breakfast or the Fall field trip to Almond Farm were memorable and well attended, as was the *Trunk or Treat* organized in our roundabout. Day in and day out, the joyful sounds of preschool students on our playground brought life to our campus, and Pastors Ellen and Casey both treasured the time they spent each month reading children's books to our First Kids in the Fellowship House Chapel.



Lunch Bunch



Lunch Bunch continued to grow in 2024, traveling off site to historic homes and hosting speakers that ranged from Concord's new City Arborist and Urban Forester Robert Stroud and Senior Deputy Claudette Camille of the Cabarrus County Sherriff's Office to Michael Hanson of the Antique Road Show and guests from the local Salvation Army's Tucker Center of Hope. Lunch Bunch programs were both entertaining and educational, but it was the fellowship that made Lunch Bunch a highlight for so many of our members last year.



Earth Care

The **Earth Care Committee** assisted with liturgy at a service Pastor Casey and the Rev. Dave True led at Memorial Garden in November on the eve of the 2024 election, as a way to remind members of the beauty and peace we encounter in nature. The committee is excited by the opportunity for more outdoor services, in addition to the progress our congregation made in 2024 to transition away from single-use plastic communion cups and the upgrades made to our facilities to make them more sustainable. In 2025, the team hopes to carry this momentum forward by reducing our plastic use and waste even more, and expanding our compost system to collect food waste from Davis Hall.

Administration & Personnel

In January 2024, the **Administration and Personnel Committee** recognized Jeff Price, our phenomenal choirmaster, for *twenty years* of faithful service to First Presbyterian Church. You know how talented and kind Jeff is, and the committee knows how rare it is for churches to retain “longtime employees.” We are blessed to have multiple members of our staff who have committed decades to this congregation, and are developing an exciting tradition of celebrating exceptional work anniversaries during worship. Additionally, in 2024 René Prager, our Director of Christian Education, graduated with her Master of Christian Education from Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, and we were thrilled to celebrate her accomplishment on top of all the hard work she does for this community. The Administration Committee also made it possible for all six worship leaders to spend a relaxing planning retreat on beautiful Badin Lake in Albemarle. In order to prepare for Pastor Ellen’s summer 2025 sabbatical, that retreat will happen earlier this year, in March 2025.



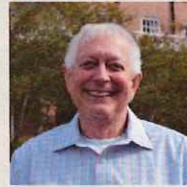
Rev. Ellen Crawford True
Senior Pastor / Head of Staff



Rev. Casey Aldridge
Associate Pastor



René Prager
Director of Christian Education



Rev. Bryan Hovey
Parish Associate



Dr. Jacqueline Yost
Director of Music / Organist



Dr. Jeffrey Price
Choirmaster



Suzanne Russell
Church Administrator



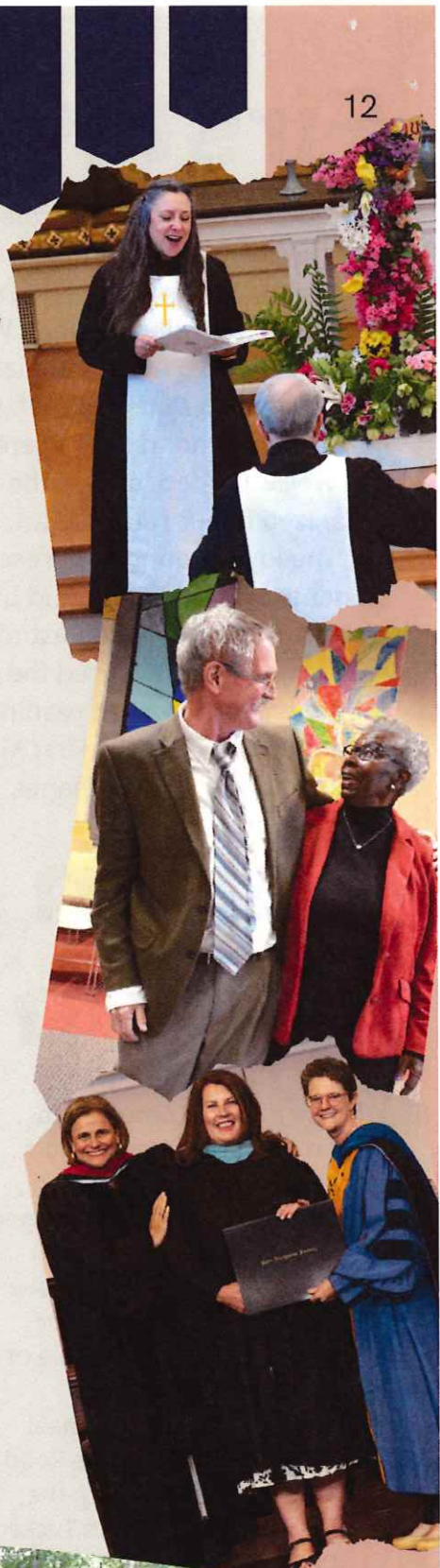
Kim Mazzola
Financial Administrative Assistant



Heath Ritchie
Maintenance Superintendent



Maureen O'Bryan
Director of First Kids Preschool



A note from the staff:

Dear friends,

2024 was a turbulent year. Conflicts continued to rage in various corners of the world. Disasters devastated communities near and far. Another election reminded us how divided our society remains. There was turbulence that hit closer to home, too—losses and turmoil that may not have made headlines, yet which kept you up at night or made it difficult to move forward.

Yet 2024 was also a year in which the Spirit was on the move at First Presbyterian Church. In the thirty-eighth chapter of Job, God answers Job's prayers "from the whirlwind," and this year we heard God call to us from the chaos. With violence impeding our ability to visit friends in Haiti, the Holy Spirit moved members of our community both to pray for peace in The Commons and to get creative, modifying our Market for Mission to support students in Bayonnais. When Hurricanes Helene and Milton pummeled the southeast United States, our congregation participated in relief efforts, packed Presbyterian Disaster Assistance clean-up buckets during Sunday School, and raised money for Western North Carolina food banks through the Crop Hunger Walk. With election anxiety on our minds in early November, we gathered in Memorial Garden to pray for justice and reconciliation, and to remind ourselves of the beauty that exists within God's creation.

Last year in Lent we gathered in small groups to consider where we stand at the cross. Do we see ourselves in the women who remain by Jesus' side, the soldiers who suddenly recognize Jesus' innocence, or the "beloved disciple" Jesus charges with new responsibility? Maybe you still have more questions than answers about where you stand or who you are. That is perfectly normal. But let us just say—you are a beloved child of God, just like everyone else, and we are so glad that you are walking here, with us, as we strive to follow Jesus.

In 2025, we will continue to walk with you, literally and figuratively. This Lent we will get outdoors, and in the year ahead we hope to travel to the mountains in our backyard and abroad to serve and forge new relationships. We will invite guests to join our collective walk and teach us about Our Trespasses or God's radical Love Without Limits. We will walk at different paces, learning new spiritual disciplines, reading new additions to our church library, and slowing down for a season of renewal when Pastor Ellen takes her well-earned sabbatical this summer.

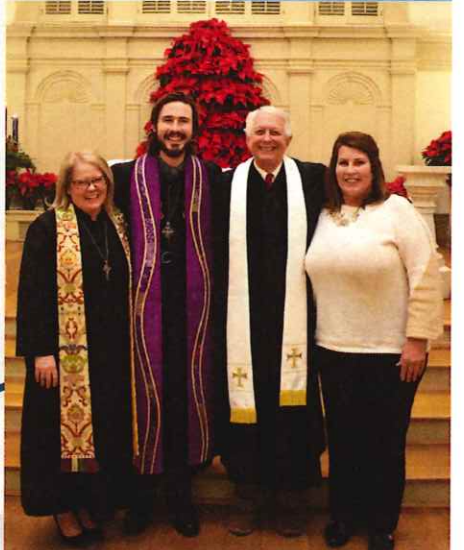
We cannot know what storms may be on the horizon, but we know that we will not weather them alone. No matter where we go in 2025 or what comes our way, we will have each other. And those of us who are lucky enough to serve you week in and week out will be sure to remind you that Jesus joins us in the journey we take together. Let us continue to serve, sing, break bread, pray, weep, celebrate walk, dance, give, embrace, and listen in 2025. We promise that God will still be speaking from the whirlwind.



HOW TO HELP AFTER HELENE, FROM CONCORD, NC



A RESOURCE FOR MEMBERS AND NEIGHBORS OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH





By the Numbers

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

- 4 youth professions of faith at confirmation;
- 5 adult professions or reaffirmations of faith.

BAPTISMS

- 6 baptisms of individuals presented by others;
- 1 baptism at confirmation.

LOSSES

- 2 certificate losses;
- 9 deaths within the congregation.

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

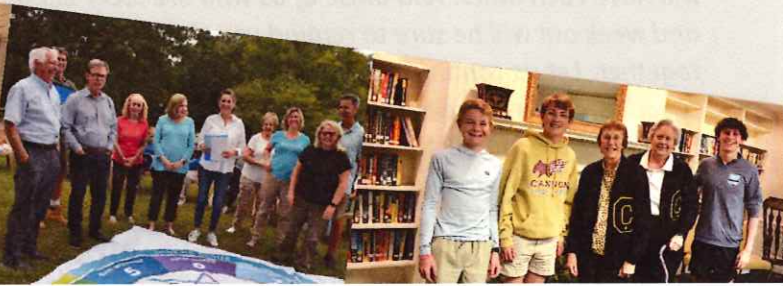
- 792 active members as of December 31, 2024;
- Average weekly worship attendance of 148.

MEMBERSHIP BY AGE

17 & Under	61
18 to 25	53
26 to 40	195
41 to 55	111
56 to 70	180
71 & Up	183

LAY LEADERSHIP

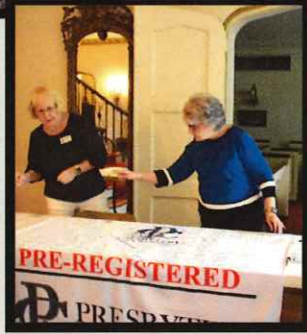
- 21 *Ruling Elders* serving on session and across five committees:
 - Administration & Personnel,
 - Buildings & Grounds,
 - Christian Education & Technology,
 - Finance & Stewardship,
 - Worship & Music.
- 21 *Deacons* serving across five committees:
 - Commons Prayer Room,
 - Congregational Care,
 - Hospitality,
 - Mission,
 - Racial Equity.



2024 Stewardship

By the Numbers

In 2024, the **Stewardship Committee** drew our attention to the *Grace of Giving*. None of the work, worship, or fellowship listed above would be possible without your generous support, and we hope you felt the graces of *place, service, outreach, and gratitude* at First Pres this year.



Did you know?

On top of budgeted benevolences to CCM, Meals on Wheels, Logan Day Care, and others, the Discretionary Fund funds Operation Sandwich, a ministry by which we feed our neighbors in need at Opportunity House. The Fund helped social workers at Irvin procure gift cards for families in need, kept the Blessing Box stocked, made our Rise Against Hunger event possible, and more! At the end of the year, whatever is left in the Fund is sent to partners, and this year we disbursed a large amount of those leftovers to a Presbyterian church in Asheville that is helping pay rent and utilities for families facing eviction after Helene.



BUDGETED INCOME

\$1,300,588

- \$843,190 - regular contributions (*pledges, loose offerings, special offerings*);
- \$264,808 - investment income (*FPC Foundation and Investments*);
- \$232,494 - one-time contributions (*estate gifts or bequests*);
- \$15,453 - other income.

BUDGETED EXPENSE

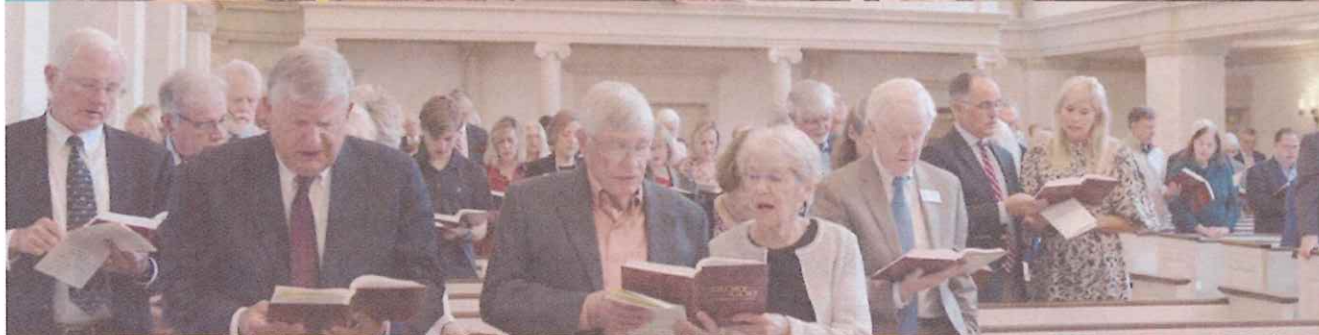
\$1,300,588

- \$1,021,303 - local program (*staff, buildings and grounds, office materials, music, youth, and Christian education programs, etc.*);
- \$163,112 - mission (*benevolences to local nonprofits, Deacons' Discretionary and PW Dunford Funds, mid-council programs, international aid*);
- \$59,324 - capital expenditure and investment expense.

WAYS TO AMPLIFY OUR IMPACT

- Make a pledge: allow the church to plan ahead and maximize our impact in the community by pledging to give in 2025;
- Give now: support the life and work of our church by giving directly via credit card or checking account, or by donating stocks or bonds;
- Plan your giving: ensure that the work of this congregation endures by making a legacy or estate gift through a will or trust to the church or its Foundation.





<https://firstpresconcord.org/>



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MATTHEW 25