



FALL 2025

FIRST PRESS

First Presbyterian Church of West Chester, PA

What's Your
ROCK?

BEGINS SEPTEMBER 7

What Will God Do This Year?

Hi First Pres! This is the question I have been asking myself for the duration of the summer. I've had some down time, some really busy weeks, I went to a church leadership conference, and I've been thinking along with our church members and church leadership about what God is calling us to this year. More specifically, I've been dreaming about not what we will do, but what God will do with our church and community.

This year I think God is calling us to explore, to be open not to what we think we can do, but to what is possible with God's help. Who can we help in our community? Who can we better care for? How can we be better leaders in our community, homes, and places of work? What and whom are we missing? And, how can we be a light into the lives of people who need to hear the good news of God's love? These are general questions that with God's help we can answer. Not questions to be left unanswered, but rather questions that can only be answered through our commitment to worshipping together, praying together, serving together, reading scripture together, building community together, and seeking God's will in our personal lives and in our community.

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As part of this we are beginning the process of creating a strategic plan that will help us live into God's mission for our church and the world. As we progress in this endeavor we will keep you apprised, and I ask you to join in prayer for God's guidance in this season.

I am so excited for this year, and I am so thankful for our community of faith who truly seeks to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

It's an honor and a gift to be your Senior Pastor, to work alongside an incredible staff, and to partner with you in ministry in service to God and our neighbors. I look forward to another incredible year together!

With Hope,
Pastor Andrew

Welcome to Fall! The weather may still be summer-like, but our church and family calendars are shifting as we return to the normal rhythms of the year and start new projects. My husband, son and I traveled with the choir this summer and it was such a gift getting that concentrated time with our church family. In particular I loved seeing my 8-year-old get to know more deeply the many First Pres aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins that he, along with all our young people, have here. The gift of life in this community is one that continues to delight and surprise me season after season at First Pres.

A few of you have shared that you feel a powerful amount of energy in our church right now, and I feel it too. The building is hopping as we study, feed, make music, teach, learn, and worship together. Phones are buzzing, food is cooking, clothing and meals are distributed, and each season it feels like the boundary between the building and the community gets more and more porous, even as the connections between us as First Pres members deepen. I can't wait to see what these next months bring, and look forward to another year of worship, learning, and service with you all.

In Christ,
Pastor Caroline

Important Dates

Homecoming & World
Communion Sunday
OCTOBER 5

State of the Church
OCTOBER 19

Trick or Treat
OCTOBER 24

Deck the Halls
NOVEMBER 30

Candlelight Christmas
Concert
DECEMBER 7

Music Ministry

How does a twelve-day European choir tour become a reality? The planning process started about eighteen months before take-off, with selecting the destination countries. By August 2024, fifty-five people had committed to this trip, including choir singers, brass players, and their families and friends. Participants ranged in age from 8 to 80, and it was a special gift getting to share this part of the year with music students from West Chester University.



We performed at three wonderful churches, each providing a completely different experience. The Church of St. James in Ljubljana was built in 1613 in the Baroque style. It had excellent acoustics, which was a huge help for both the rehearsal and the concert. The Church of Saint Blaise in Zagreb was built in 1915 and featured a beautiful interior but somewhat challenging acoustics. We will remember that church as the hottest performance venue due to the lack of air conditioning and the 95-degree weather.

"Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. The gift of language combined with the gift of song was given to humans that we should proclaim the Word of God through music."

MARTIN LUTHER



Music Ministry

The Church of St. John Paul II in Trogir was proof of how modern architecture can be stunning, practical, and yet have great acoustics. This was the only concert venue with air conditioning, but unfortunately, the whole town lost power about 1.5 hours before our concert, so the building was not as cool as expected. We were in the middle of eating dinner at a local restaurant when the power outage happened, and had to leave Pastor Andrew behind, who would take care of the check when the power came back (fortunately he made it back in time for the concert!). The church and the parish center were consecrated in 2021 and were situated right next to a bay. Seeing the crystal-clear blue sea after leaving the church will remain in our memories and in many photographs for years to come.



The trip was not only a reminder of the extraordinary beauty of God's creation, but a chance for our church members and friends to connect with one another in a way that only the shared experiences and rigors of travel can provide.

We marveled at the extraordinary beauty of crystal-clear Alpine lakes, shared meals of fresh seafood and homemade strudel, climbed a truly unholy number of steps, and supported each other through hikes that the guidebooks assured us were “easy” but were in reality anything but. Sandor put together a program that mixed pieces familiar to us with those commonly sung in our host countries, which increased our appreciation for one another's culture and history. We found the spirit of hospitality and commitment to mutual care we found in Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro to be inspiring and something to bring home with us. It was an unforgettable trip, and we thank our parish associates for their help and the congregation for allowing our worship leaders to accompany our choir on this adventure.

This fall we look forward to welcoming back our choir into worship as they enjoyed a much needed break over the summer. Music is one of the hearts of First Pres as we seek to worship God together through sound and words. Our Contemporary Worship Band will continue this fall with incredible worship music at our 10:45AM service. Look out for information about the Fall Worship Night. We again look forward to special music from our Chancel Choir and our beloved Christmas Concert. Our Children's Choir will be back in full swing, and we look forward to being led in worship by our young musicians.

Musical Groups

First Pres has opportunities for everyone to get involved in music, from beginners through professionals:

Celebration Singers

- Ages 4-Grade 6
- Rehearses Wednesdays from 5:15-6:15 PM
- Performs in Sunday worship, the Christmas Concert and a spring musical
- Contact: aerno@firstpreswc.com

Chancel Choir

- Age 14+
- Rehearses Thursdays from 7:30-9:00 PM
- Sings in the 9:00 AM service and performs two concerts per season
- Contact: skadar@firstpreswc.com

Worship Band

- High School +
- Rehearses Wednesdays from 5:30-6:30 PM
- Participants should have prior singing or instrumental experience; auditions are required
- Contact: krivera@firstpreswc.com

If you enjoy listening to music, please consider joining our AV team. This group of volunteers supports our Sunday worship and concerts throughout the year by running the live stream.

To learn more about music at First Pres, please reach out to Music Director, Sandor Kadar, at skadar@firstpreswc.com.



Miner Street Bell Connections

- Ages 4+; most children play with a parent or grandparent
- Rehearses Sundays from 10:30-11 AM

Miner Street Brass

- High School+
- Rehearses alternate Tuesdays from 6:30-7:30 PM
- Participants should be proficient in a brass instrument

JuBellation Ringers

- High School +
- Rehearses Thursdays from 6:30-7:20 PM

Chancel Ringers

- High School +
- Rehearses Wednesdays from 7:30-9:00 PM
- Participants should have prior bell experience in bell ringing; auditions are required

Miner Street Stringers

- Middle School +
- Play 3-4 times during worship and at concerts
- Participants should have at least one year of experience on a string instrument.
- Contact: teachvln@aol.com



COLUMN CLASSICS PRESENTS

Candlelight

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 | 4 PM

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

130 W Miner St, West Chester

Congregational Life

**“To follow
Jesus is to be
a disciple,
and to be a
disciple is to
be in
fellowship
with other
Christians.”**

Kick-Off Picnic

First Pres is going to kick off fall with a church picnic on Sunday, September 7! We'll meet outside (in the “backyard” along the alley) from 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM. We'll have a bouncy house for kids, face painting, sand art, and lawn games! Bring a friend to the fun. The main dish (fried chicken) will be provided but we'd love to have contributions of your favorite side dish, salad or dessert. We would welcome a lot of hands to help with setting up tents, tables and chairs, as well as clean-up.

[SIGN UP HERE!](#)



Moms Group

All moms of babies through high schoolers are invited to our monthly moms' gatherings! We'll meet up at the church picnic on Sunday, Sept. 7 (11:30am-1:30pm) as our fall kickoff, and then starting in October we'll meet the first Sunday of every month from 4-5:30 at the church. If you're not already on the email list, reach out to Mary Hambleton (emham@verizon.net) to get the reminders each month. We'd love for you to join us!



Congregational Life



Dads Group

All dads of babies through college are invited to our monthly dads gatherings! Dads need community, and dads need other dads. Carve out the time, put it on your schedule and come join us for fellowship. We meet at various locations throughout the year from breweries and restaurants to houses and backyards. The schedule for Dads group will be out shortly. If you're not already on the email list please email aesqueda@firstpreswc.com.

Women's Bible Study



All women are invited to take part in a seven week study that will take place on Wednesdays from 9:30-11am, beginning October 1. We'll be doing a workbook and video study by Megan Fate Marshmann called "Relaxed: Letting Go of Self-Reliance and Trusting God". People describe Jesus in a lot of different ways, but have you ever thought of Him as relaxed? This doesn't mean that Jesus didn't grieve or become angry, but the Gospels portray Him as never in a hurry to be anywhere other than where He was, trusting and obeying His Father. We long to know peace, purpose, and contentment, but life's stresses, the world's discouragements, and our own striving for growth often get in the way. [SIGN UP HERE](#) or on the church website, or contact Elizabeth Hess (ehess@firstpreswc.com).

Name Tag Sunday

Our fall kickoff is Sunday, September 7 and we'll make it a nametag Sunday! Be sure to fill out a tag for yourself as you arrive for worship that day.

Faith Formation

Vacation Bible School and Music Camp

First Pres came alive this summer during a fantastic week of Vacation Bible School. A great mix of First Pres kids and community kids came together to learn about how God is with us on the journey, playing and singing their way through stories such as Abraham and Sarah, the Israelites wandering through the desert and the apostle Paul. As a bonus, the week provided many opportunities for youth and adult volunteers to get to know the kids and vice versa, building relationships that will grow and strengthen our community and their faiths in the months and years to come. This year we added a Music Camp to the second half of the day during VBS. Amanda Erno, our Children's Music Director, did an incredible job working with our children, guiding them in games, musical education, and helping them grow in using the gift of music that God has given them. From VBS to Music Camp, our children had a blast! Thank you again to all who contributed to this wonderful week!



"What if we invite our kids to play their way towards God? What if our conversations and story times were marked by laughter and levity?"

MEREDITH ANNE MILLER

Faith Formation

A New Sunday School Year

The new Sunday School year begins on September 7th – we can't wait to welcome back your kids!

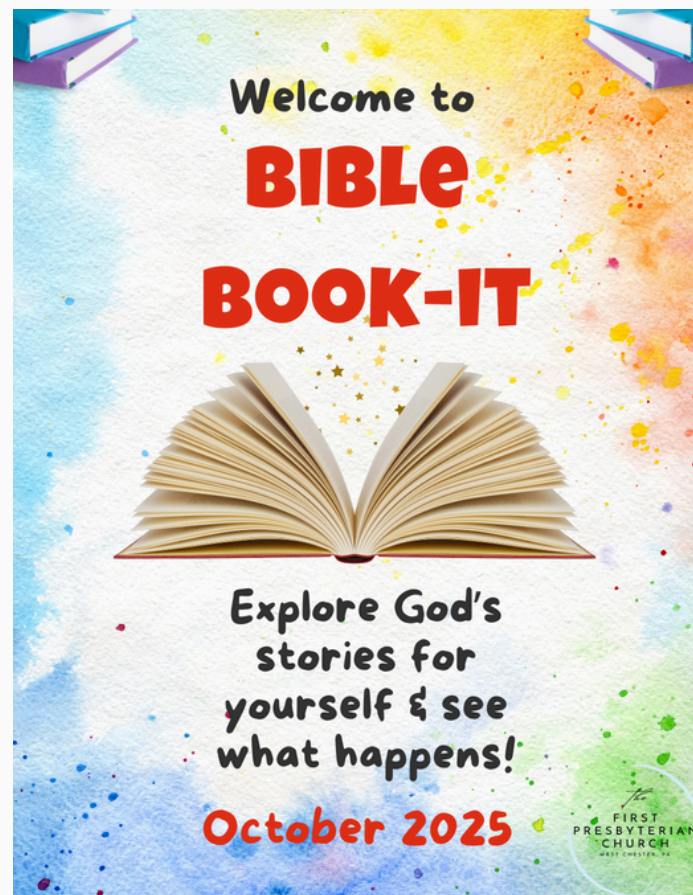
- Who: 4-year-old Preschool kids – 5th graders (divided among 3 classes by age)
- When: Every Sunday during the 9 AM service
- Why: Learning the stories of God while building relationships with peers in their church community is a vital part of growing to be a person of faith

Kids Connect, the kids program offered during the 10:45 service, also resumes on September 7. Talk to Director of Faith Formation, Sara Pantazes, with any questions: spantazes@firstpreswc.com

Bible Book-It

This October, First Pres is offering a fun program to encourage people of all ages to read their Bibles! Modeled after the BOOK IT! program that Pizza Hut has sponsored for decades to encourage elementary school children to read, our Bible Book-It program will ask participants to set weekly Bible reading goals, get a small prize for meeting their goals at a weekly check-in and conclude with a celebratory party!

The church is offering this program to specifically encourage children, youth and families to dig into their Bibles but will provide resources for adults as well who want to participate. More information will be shared in the coming weeks so stay tuned (and let us know if you need a Bible!).



Faith Formation

Midweek Journeys

For many years, First Pres held programs for all ages on Wednesday nights, which collectively was referred to as “Bridge.” This fall, we’re re-naming the Wednesday night adult study group, which will now be called Midweek Journeys. Studies will change every 4-8 weeks, and people are welcome to attend every week or come and go based on the study. If you have questions, reach out to the Director of Faith Formation, Sara Pantazes.

This fall all are invited to join a new Midweek Journeys study titled “The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently.” Bible scholars and teachers Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler will lead us on a tour of the most popular Hebrew Bible passages quoted in the New Testament to show what the texts meant in their original contexts and then how Jews and Christians, over time, understood those same texts. This study and its discussions will be led by Sara Pantazes and Pastor Andrew.

This study will be offered in a hybrid format, meaning participants can attend in person or via Zoom, on Wednesdays from 6:30 – 8 PM beginning October 8 and concluding on November 12. More information and study books will be available in coming weeks.

Fall School’s Off Day Camps

First Pres is excited to offer two School's Off Day Camps this fall to provide a fun, safe place for elementary aged children to go when schools are closed. This fall's camps will take place on Tuesday, September 23 (this day's theme will be games!) and Monday October 20 (this day's theme will be dinosaurs!) from 9 - 3:30 pm. The registration form can be found on the church's website under the Sign-up tab. Talk to Sara Pantazes with any questions.

GRADES K-5

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WEST CHESTER, PA

**SCHOOL'S OFF
DAY CAMP**

SEPT. 23

OCT. 20

9 AM -
3:30 PM

REGISTER AT
WWW.FIRSTPRESWC.COM

Faith Formation

Adult Groups This Fall

What are adult groups discussing this fall?

HOW JEWS & CHRISTIANS
UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE
DIFFERENTLY

GOSPEL OF LUKE

RESILIENCE AND JOY

EACH WEEK'S SERMON

TRUSTING GOD

FRIENDSHIP

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

*Find more
information
on each
group at
[firstpreswc.
com/small-
groups](http://firstpreswc.com/small-groups)*

Youth Ministry

“Our young people are not the future of the church, they are the church”

We had an awesome summer with our youth! We had weekly small groups, a guys' group and a girls' group, we had pool parties, gelato and fellowship at Gemelli, a great time at Hershey Park, and an incredible week of mission serving with the Philadelphia Project.

We continue in the work of searching for our new youth minister, but in the meantime our youth have created such an incredible community amongst each other and are committed to fellowship, support for one another, growing in their faith, and building long-lasting relationships!

And, we have some incredible youth leaders who have helped support our youth ministry for many years, and they continue to step up and lead in incredible ways.

We have a ton planned for the fall and can't wait to experience it with you!



Youth Ministry

Fall Highlights

ALL CHURCH KICK-OFF

Date: Sunday September 7

Time: 11:30am

Who: The WHOLE CHURCH

FIRST YOUTH GROUP!!!

Date: Sunday September 14

Time: 4-5:30pm

Who: 6th -12th Graders

You're invited to kick-off youth group this fall on Sunday September 14th! Food! Games! And, all the awesomeness happening this fall! Bring yourself, and bring a friend with you!

FALL PARENT MEETING

Date: Sunday September 14

Time: 4-5:00pm

Who: Parents of 6th -12th Graders

Parents, join Pastor Andrew for a parents meeting talking all things youth group this fall and into 2026. We'll meet in the chapel while your youth are having a blast at Youth Group!

Fall Highlights

REGULAR YOUTH GROUP

Date: Every Sunday Starting Sept. 14

Time: 4-5:30pm

Who: 6th -12th Graders

BIBLE STUDY

Date: Wednesdays Starting Sept. 10

Time: 7-8:30pm

Who: 6th -12th Graders

Location: TBD

FALL RETREATS

Breakaway Middle School Retreat

Date: September 26 - 28

Where: North Bay Adventure Camp in North East, Maryland

Who: 6th - 8th Graders

Ignite High School Retreat

Date: October 10 - 12

Where: Wildwood, NJ

Who: 9th - 12th Graders

Youth Ministry

Date: October 10th - 12th
Where: Wildwood, NJ
Who: 9th - 12th Graders

GENESIS

IGNITE CONFERENCE
2025



BREAKAWAY2025

MIDDLE SCHOOL RETREAT

SEPTEMBER 26-28 NORTH BAY
ADVENTURE



youth

FIRST PRES
GROUP

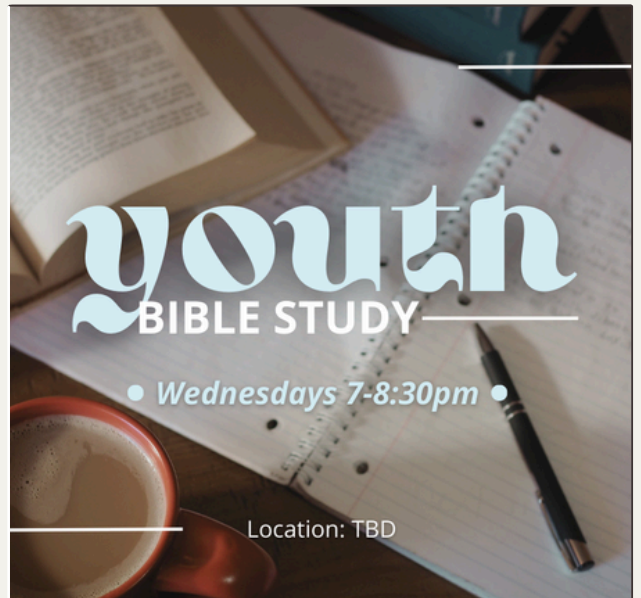
SUNDAYS: 4-5:30PM

youth

BIBLE STUDY

• Wednesdays 7-8:30pm •

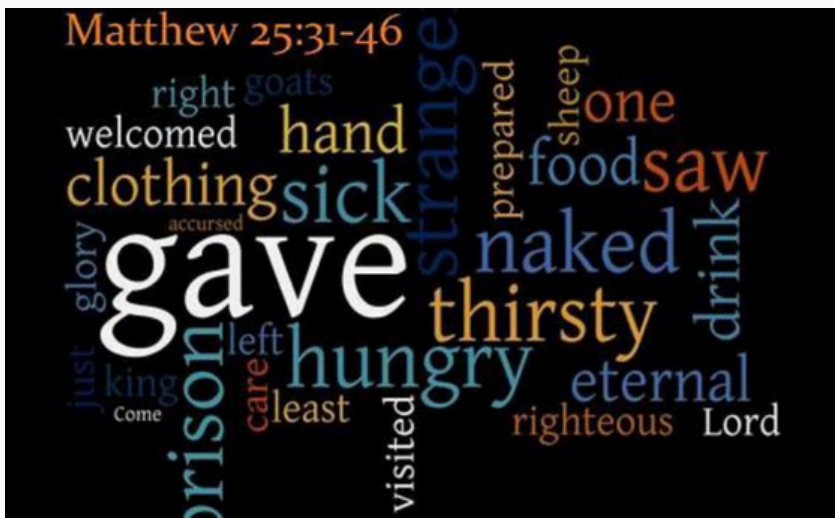
Location: TBD



Mission

During the season of Lent, First Pres members raised \$50,550 to support urgent needs in our community. Since then, your gifts have made a profound difference in the lives of our neighbors:

- A domestic violence survivor needed rental assistance after missing work to care for a critically ill sibling.
- We were able to provide brief respite hotel stays for people who are homeless and working night shifts; shelters are not staffed for daytime sleeping or showers. We also provided emergency hotel stays for disabled veterans waiting for federal housing assistance.
- A phone and short-term data plan were obtained for an unhoused man looking for work; he is now employed full time.



“Truly I tell you,
just as you did it
to one of the
least of these
who are
members of my
family, you did
it to me.”

JESUS

Each day the church receives calls for assistance from neighbors like these and many others. Despite the generosity of our church members and the relatively small amounts we contribute to each household (on average \$342) the funds we allocate for each month are gone within the first few days.

Mission

We make difficult decisions about who receives help, prioritizing those who owe relatively small amounts and folks who can contribute some money toward the total cost of their bills. We also know that even when we can't help financially, we can offer a listening ear, an invitation to Wednesday Lunch, or (thanks to the women of PW) items from the children's clothing closet. This ministry is hard work – it takes the time, resources, and emotional energy of our congregation. And it's good work, because it puts our eyes and our treasure right where Jesus says to place them. On behalf of the hundreds of people who have felt God's grace through your gifts so far this year, the Missions Committee thanks you.

Wednesday Lunch Needs

Our Wednesday Lunch program continues to thrive, providing hot, nourishing meals each week at 11:30am. The main course is prepared by our friends downstairs at Mistral French & Fast; volunteers bring sides and desserts to share, and then we all eat together. If you would like to support this ministry, we would love for you to stop by one week and check it out. Donations of disposable plates and silverware are also greatly appreciated; there is an [Amazon Wishlist](#) if that is helpful. Thank you to all who support this program!

Guatemala Church Partnership

This fall four friends from our sister church, Iglesia Getsemani, in Villa Nueva, Guatemala will be visiting us in West Chester. We will be delighted to welcome them from November 13-18. We look forward to spending meaningful time together in our homes, breaking bread, worshipping, and joining in mission together.

As plans for the November visit develop, there will be several opportunities to spend time with our guests. We invite you to consider how you might join in the activities. We'll have more information to share in the coming weeks.

While the annual visits are a primary expression of our relationship with Iglesia Getsemani, the Partnership Committees at Guatemala and First Pres also nurture our relationship between our visits. The committees meet together over Zoom to share the challenges and celebrations of our ministries and to offer prayer for members of our congregations our countries. We would love for you to be part of this exciting ministry. For more information please contact our partnership chair, Elizabeth Guman: ecguman@gmail.com

