

Beneath the Surface

Lent and Easter 2026



Pastors' Letters

I love this season. From Lent through Easter, Christians everywhere reflect on Jesus's temptation in the desert and our utter reliance upon God; we celebrate the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, and Christ's sacrifice on the cross on Good Friday. And it all culminates with Easter which marks Christ's resurrection and the good news that we too will rise with Christ. In many ways this season takes us through the motions of faith: prayer, lament, praise, fasting, examination, joy, and many more. This is all for a reason: to reorient our lives so that they more faithfully reflect what God has done for us in Jesus, and then to live it out.

Our theme through Lent is "Beneath the Surface". There is so much that we hold and carry that feels as though it is deep down, beneath the surface of our lives. In order to fully engage in this Lenten season of repentance and examination, together we're going to challenge ourselves to deeply examine who we are in the face of a broken world and an unconditionally loving God.

Throughout the newsletter you'll see various events, groups, and worship services. I want to challenge you to truly engage this season, to experience the motions and not simply wait for Easter. Be a dinner group host, or join a dinner group, participate in our Lenten study, use the Lenten devotional, and worship with us.

This Lent we will dig beneath the surface so that we might truly prepare ourselves to worship the resurrected Christ.

-Rev. Andrew Esqueda, Senior Pastor



Lately, I've been reading about early Christian women, historically called the ammas (mothers) of the church. They lived in the first centuries after Jesus was born, and served variously as scholars, translators, caregivers, worship-leaders, and monastics. They were complex figures who lived in a disagreeable and violent period of history, and, in the midst of the turbulence of that era, devoted their entire lives to seeking God. Though we live centuries apart, the lessons from their ministry feel contemporary and important, especially during this season. Their priorities included asceticism (re-ordering priorities to elevate God above all), obedience (to the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture and prayer), fasting (removing things that drain away life), and profound generosity. They accepted that the life of faith is a struggle, but also saw that struggle as our most important work, and a pathway to deep joy. As we head into Lent, I am hoping that the spirit of these early Christians guides us to reconnect with God and re-orient us toward a new path. In the words of Amma Syncletia, "The workings of love, in fact, are not concealed."

-Rev. Caroline Cupp, Assoc. Pastor

Lent and Easter at First Pres

Ash Wednesday

FEB 18 | 6:30PM

A contemplative service with the distribution of ashes

Maundy Thursday

APRIL 2 | 7PM

Worship and communion

Good Friday

APRIL 3 | 7PM

A reflective service of contemplation

Easter

APRIL 5 |
6:30AM

Sunrise Service at the Abbott family's barn (315 N. Creek Rd, West Chester)

9:00AM
Traditional service with choir and brass

10:45AM
Contemporary service led by the worship band





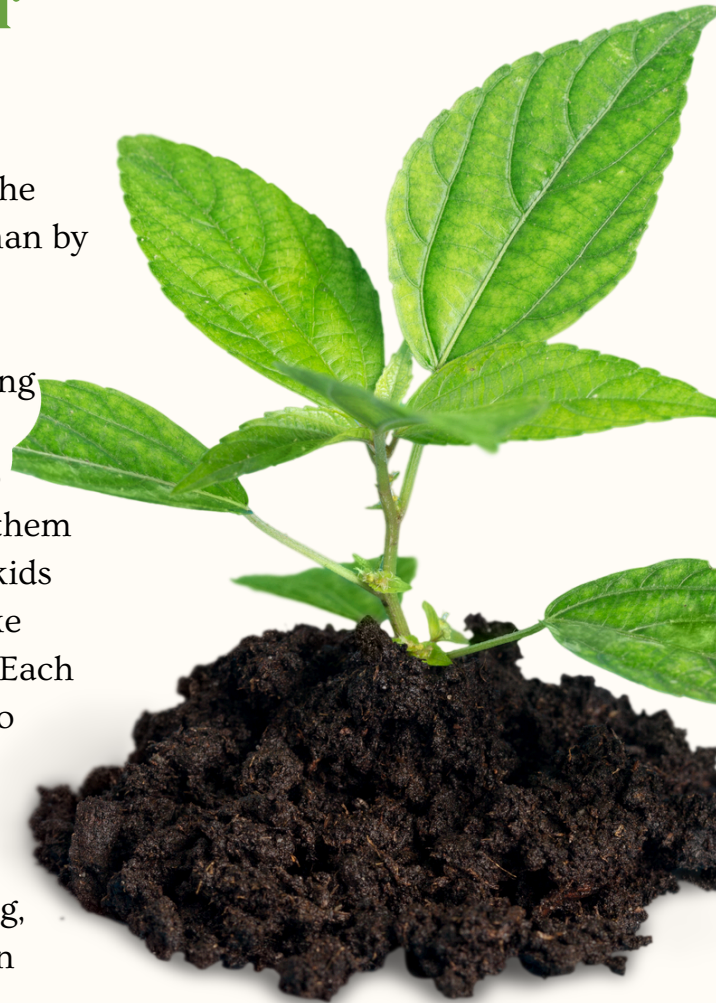
All First Pres families and friends are invited to join us for a fun-filled Family Music Bingo Night! This exciting event will feature tunes your kids will recognize and love, and the whole family can get in on the bingo-yelling fun. Pizza dinner, music, laughter, and friendly competition - what could be better?! This event will take place on Friday, March 13 with dinner starting at 6 pm in Fellowship Hall. Sign-ups will be available closer to the date. Save the date now for this awesome night of family fun!

Spring Service Project for Families

This Lent, we'll be considering what happens Beneath the Surface. What better way to share that idea with kids than by helping them plant seeds and watch them grow?

On Sunday, March 22, we will hold a Spring Seed Planting Party for families. We'll provide everything you need to plant flower seeds to take home, including directions to nurture them as they grow inside and eventually plant them outside. We'll also provide a fun resource to help your kids keep track of caring for the seeds as they grow and make some connections between this activity and their faith. Each child will be encouraged to make at least 2 containers to bring home, in hopes of sharing one with a friend or neighbor.

We are looking forward to celebrating the start of spring, the coming of Easter, and all the joy and hope we find in this season of growth together!



VBS 2026



Plans are underway for another great Vacation Bible School this summer! Preschool and elementary aged kids - save the week of July 20 – 24 for some wintry, faith filled fun!

Snowball Mountain Challenge invites kids to an exciting winter sports event where they become Challengers, gearing up for frosty games, snowy surprises, and hands-on lessons about resilience and faith.

As children face their challenges and discover their strength in God, you'll hear them say, "Challenge accepted – with God I am strong."

More information on registering children will be available soon. If you know that you are willing to volunteer, those sign-ups start now! Talk to Sara Pantazes for more information.

AGES 5-12

JULY 6-10 2026 9-12

MUSIC

SUMMER

CAMP

CONTACT:
LMORESCHI@FIRSTPRESWC.COM

REGISTRATION:
\$100
SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

ACTIVITIES:

- GAMES
- SINGING
- CRAFTS
- SUNDAY PERFORMANCE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
130 W MINER ST.
WEST CHESTER, PA 19382

Adult Lenten Study: Citizenship in the Kingdom of God



The world feels like a lot these days. Some are more tuned into it than others, some feel more urgency to respond than others. Yet all of us know that this is not the way God intended the world to be. Our Christian faith can be a strong foundation to stand on no matter what is happening in the world or in our lives, so this Lent we invite you to return to that foundation, to remember who our ultimate allegiance belongs to and consider how that can shape us.

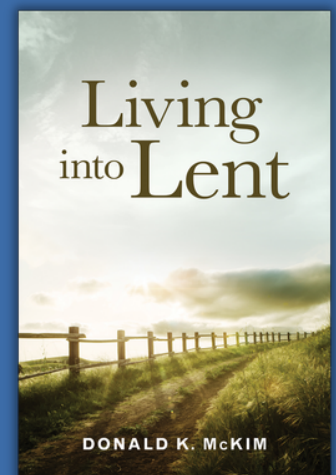
Join us on Wednesday nights this Lent to learn more about Citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Over the course of 5 weeks, Sara and Andrew will lead us to consider what the Kingdom of God is, what it means to be a citizen of God's Kingdom, how we can live out that citizenship in the other communities we are part of, and how our Kingdom of God citizenship overlaps with our national citizenship. These are sure to be fruitful conversations that will encourage, challenge, and build your faith.

This Lenten study will be offered in a hybrid format so that people can attend in person or online. The sessions will take place starting on Wednesday, February 25 at 6:30 pm and go through March 25. Talk to Sara Pantazes with any questions.

Lenten Devotional

Set aside time during this Lenten season to reflect on your Christian identity, listen to God's Word and will, and engage in practices that deepen the Christian experience. Each daily reading of *Living into Lent* contains Scripture, devotion, a theological quote, response, and prayer.

Books will be available for \$10 in Fellowship Hall in the coming weeks. Talk to Sara Pantazes with any questions.



YOUTH GROUP – SUNDAYS @4PM BIBLE STUDY – WEDNESDAYS @7PM

youth ministry

Join us at First Presbyterian as we grow in faith, service, and community. Whether it's a deep dive into Scripture or a high-energy night of laser tag, there is a place for you here!

The Youth at First Presbyterian will continue to meet every Sunday at 4 pm for Youth Group and every Wednesday at 7 pm for High School and Middle School Bible Study.

As we continue to work through the Sermon on the Mount for Bible Study, we will be turning our attention toward Lent for Youth Group. For Lent, we will be asking questions about fasting, prayer, and celebration. Lent is a time of highs and lows, as we anticipate the highs and lows of our faith, and reflect on the life of Jesus and his journey to the cross and the empty tomb. Please join us for these exciting and life-changing conversations.

The Youth Leaders have decided to return to The Philly Project this summer, which offers a meaningful way to serve and connect with our neighbors and community. We are responding to the summer survey and deciding on an ideal time. Stay tuned for more information, dates, and sign-ups!

On March 27th, 2026, the Friday before Palm Sunday, we are planning a fun night of Wipeout and Ninja Warrior obstacle courses, plus pizza, at Thrillz High Flying Adventure Park in King of Prussia. Stay tuned for details coming soon! Lent can sometimes be thought to be a dreary time of fasting and quiet, but the Christian tradition tells us that Lent reflects a story of community and celebration, which we inherit from the Gospel.

As we continue to grow together, stay tuned to our newsletter for fun events and community building. We are still working on a fun and faith filled schedule for the Summer as we look forward to the next year of Youth Ministry at First Presbyterian!

March 6 - 8, 2026

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH'S 19TH

weekend with the arts

gallery | concert

Friday, March 6

6:30 pm - 9 pm
Art Show Gala Opening

Saturday, March 7

Gallery Open
9:30 am - 8 pm

Best of Dvorák Concert

6:30 pm
featuring
Vocal Soloists,
First Pres Chancel Choir,
Chamber Orchestra,
Miner Street Stringers

Sunday, March 8

Gallery Open
8:30am - 4 pm

*All events are free
and open to the public*



130 W Miner St, West Chester
610.696.0554

www.firstpreswc.com

COLUMN CLASSICS PRESENTS

Antonín Dvořák

Mass in D Major & other works

Saturday, March 7, 2026 | 6:30 PM

First Presbyterian Chancel Choir

Vocal Soloists

Chamber Orchestra

Miner Street Stringers



First Presbyterian Church of West Chester
130 W Miner St, West Chester PA

Lenten Dinner Groups

There may be no better way to get to know someone then over a shared meal.

We are looking for hosts to open their homes for our Lenten Dinner Group Gatherings, which will take place in late February and March. You'll pick the date and time, provide the main dish and your home, and then FPC members can sign up to attend and bring a dish to share. Your dinner group can be a simple supper, a fancy spread, just appetizers, desserts, delivered pizzas, it is up to you! And you also choose how many people you'd like to host.



The hope is to have lots of us mix and mingle with one another in many homes throughout the Lenten season. If interested in hosting, please sign up via the church website Sign-up tab or clicking [here](#).

Sign ups to attend the dinner groups will begin in late February. Keep an eye on the weekly email and the sign up tab of the church website to sign up!

Save the Date: All-Church Potluck Dinner on Palm Sunday

Sunday, March 29 at 5:30 pm in Fellowship Hall
A simple Lenten supper of soup and salad. More details to come.

Matthew 25 Campaign

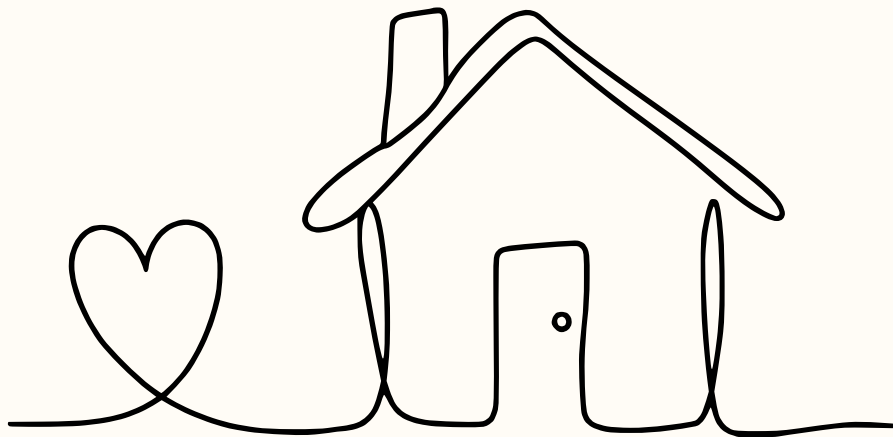
Showing his followers what faith looks like, Jesus said, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.” For nearly a decade, our congregation has made these words from Matthew’s gospel a central part of how we live out our belief in Christ.

Each year during Lent we seek to raise \$25,000 to support urgent housing, hunger, and transportation needs among our neighbors in Chester County. The funds raised go toward rental payments, utilities, and car repairs for people who can’t be served by other nonprofit or government programs. Most of those assisted are parents working for hourly wages who have lost work due to a health issue. Many are veterans, immigrants, seniors, or domestic violence survivors. Over the years, we’ve seen people impacted by this program go from homelessness to stable housing and full-time employment. Others are able to avoid eviction or access a car repair that allows them to keep their job. The dollars this congregation gives make an extraordinary impact in people’s lives.

Our goal this year is the same as it’s always been: \$25,000 for urgent needs.

Those who wish to do so can give [online](#) (select Matthew 25 Lent), or write a check to First Pres with “Matt 25” in the memo line. We’ll begin accepting donations in February, and announce the total collected on Easter Sunday. Along the way, you’ll hear from some of our partner organizations what your gifts have meant to those they serve.

Our hope is that each person connected to our church decides to contribute what they can – every dollar makes a difference, and we would love to celebrate every First Pres member taking part in this initiative. Thank you for your generous support of this ministry, and we look forward to another wonderful year of Matthew 25.



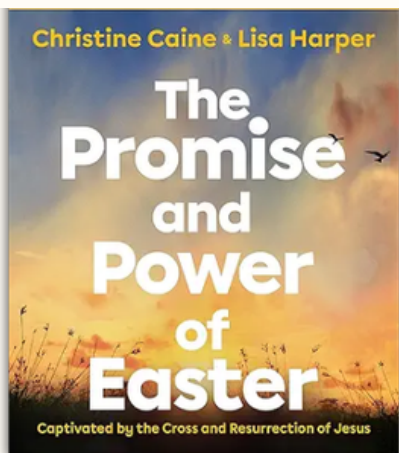
Women's Retreat

Join us for a day of rest, renewal, and connection at our Women's Retreat on Saturday, February 28, 2026 from 8 am to 4 pm at Downingtown Country Club.



In the sanctuary of women, you'll find welcome, rest, and encouragement. We'll explore the wisdom of biblical women and other mothers of our faith, discovering practices that can draw us closer to God—no matter what season of life we're in. Expect meaningful fellowship, inspiring worship, time to recharge, and fun goodies to take home!

Register through the Sign-up tab of the church's website. We can't wait to see you there!
Cost: \$100 per person. Scholarships available – please speak with Pastor Caroline.



Women's Bible Study

All women are invited to a four-week Bible study from March 18 – April 8. We'll study *The Promise and Power of Easter* by Lisa Harper and Christine Caine (video and workbook format). We'll meet in the Chapel on Wednesday mornings from 9:30-11 am. Sign up on the sign up tab of the church website or click [here](#) – we would love to have you join us!

Men's Retreat

Calling all men of the church to mark your calendars and join us for an impactful weekend of food, fellowship, and growing in our faith, [March 27-28](#). Together we will grow in relationship with one another and our relationship with Christ. Join us as we grow in faith, and friendship.

To register click: [HERE](#)



HOLY WEEK



Palm Sunday
9am & 10:45am
Sanctuary



Maundy Thursday
7pm
Sanctuary



Good Friday
7pm
Sanctuary

First Presbyterian Church | West Chester, PA | 130 W. Miner Street | www.firstpreswc.com

6:30AM Sunrise Service

The Barn @ 315 N. Creek Rd

9AM Traditional Service

10:45AM Contemporary Service

First Pres, 130 W. Miner Street

You're
Invited!

Easter
Sunclay

First Presbyterian Church | West Chester, PA | 130 W. Miner Street | www.firstpreswc.com

Recent Membership Notes

Births

Lachlan Coast Turner, born December 23, 2025, child of Bailey Claeys and Bailey Turner,
and grandchild of Brian and Julie Claeys

Caroline Jean Sellers, born January 14, 2026, child of Samantha and Jeremy Sellers,
and grandchild of Gail Rader

Quincy Clara Abbott, born January 29, 2026, child of Tres and Rachel Abbott,
and grandchild of Franny and Franny Abbott

Baptisms

Francis Harry Abbott IV, born January 11, 2020, child of Tres and Rachel Abbott

Emery James Abbott, born August 19, 2021, child of Tres and Rachel Abbott

Miller Frances Abbott, born February 16, 2021, child of Cody and Liza Abbott

Clifton Edward Abbott, born February 28, 2022, child of Cody and Liza Abbott

Wyatt Owen Abbott, born August 25, 2022, child of Max and Adele Abbott

Rockwell Smith Abbott, born November 8, 2024, child of Max and Adele Abbott

Rachel Abbott (adult baptism)

Deaths

Fay R. Leary, March 16, 2025

Kay S. Leto, November 1, 2025

Faye S. Whiteman, December 1, 2025

George O. Thompson, December 10, 2025

Betty Sue Spilman, December 12, 2025

John Green Jr., February 3, 2026

Sally Hall, February 9, 2026

We Welcome New Members

