

Fall Newsletter

The
FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
WEST CHESTER, PA

The Story

A Journey Through
The Book Of Acts
BEGINS SEPTEMBER 6

September 2026

Dear First Pres,

What a wonderful summer we've had together. From VBS and Music Adventure Camp to youth trips, movie night, our pickleball group, continued support for our neighbors in need, and so much more; it's been a fruitful summer here at First Pres. As summer winds down, I'm looking forward with anticipation to all that God has in store for us this fall and into the new year.

I'm especially excited about our new sermon series, *The Story: A Journey Through the Book of Acts*. Together we'll look at the early church, all that we can learn from it, and how we might apply what we learn to the church in our own modern context. And I'm excited to be taking this journey with you.

There is much to look forward to this season: Kick-Off Sunday, the reinvigoration of our worship and programs, music concerts, and fellowship. But I am especially excited about our new small groups, which we'll be calling Connection Groups. These will be a time to truly engage our faith and our community beyond Sunday morning, to build relationships, grow together, and most of all grow closer to God through conversation, study, prayer, and Christian community. I want to invite every one of you to join us this season as we seek to live out our faith beyond Sunday morning.

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Later in September we'll begin our stewardship campaign, with the theme "*Planting Seeds*". A seed was planted here at First Pres 193 years ago, and it has been cultivated ever since. Now, through our strategic planning and the work of our many ministries, we believe God is calling us to plant new seeds, and we want you to join us in that effort as we seek to love God and our neighbors well.

With so much happening, our hope this fall is that we stay connected: through worship, through our various ministries, and through connection groups. Please know that Caroline and I are always here to connect with you, as is our whole staff. We look forward to breakfasts, lunches, and coffees together as we continue to grow in faith and serve as the hands and feet of God in West Chester and beyond.

Take a look through the newsletter for all the good places to plug in and connect. We will be praying for you, and we ask that you pray for our church as we move into this season, imagining with hope who God is calling us to be and what God is calling us to do.

With anticipation,
Andrew

Stephen Ministry

Are you a good listener with a heart for people who are hurting? Life often brings unexpected challenges, and Stephen Ministry ensures that no one has to go through them alone. Stephen Ministers provide high-quality, confidential, one-on-one Christian care to individuals experiencing things like grief, divorce, job loss, illness, and other difficult life events and circumstances.

We are looking for compassionate individuals to join our next Stephen Minister training class in early 2027. Through this ministry, you will learn to listen, care, and walk alongside someone in need, becoming the hands and feet of Christ.

If you feel called to become a Stephen Minister, or simply want to learn more about Stephen Ministry here at First Pres, we invite you to reach out to Caroline Cupp at ccupp@firstpreswc.com.

Important Dates

Homecoming
OCTOBER 4

Trick Or Treat
OCTOBER 23

State Of The Church
NOVEMBER 8

Deck The Halls
NOVEMBER 29

Candlelight Christmas
Concert
DECEMBER 6

Music Ministry

Music 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 5:15-6:15pm
- Performs in Sunday worship, the Christmas Concert and a spring musical
- Contact: lmoreschi@firstpreswc.com

Chancel Choir

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

Worship Band

- High School +
- Rehearses Wednesdays from 5:30-6:30pm
- 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 or any programs listed here, please reach out to Music Director, Sándor Kádár, at skadar@firstpreswc.com.



Miner Street Bell Connections

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

Miner Street Brass

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

JuBellation Ringers

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

Chancel Ringers

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

Miner Street Stringers

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



Chamber Ensemble

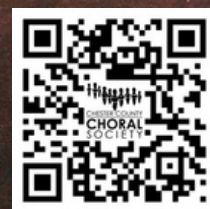
Sunday Concerts at 3:00 PM

October 25, 2026, First Presbyterian, West Chester
November 8, 2026, St. Michael Lutheran, Unionville

Gary P. Garletts, Director

Suggested donation \$12
chescochoral.org

SONGS FOR THE JOURNEY





COLUMN CLASSICS PRESENTS

Candlelight

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 | 4 PM

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

130 W Miner St, West Chester

Congregational Life

Church Picnic

First Pres is going to have our Kick-Off church picnic on Sunday, September 13. After services, we'll have a church picnic outside (in the "backyard" along the alley). The main dish of fried chicken will be provided but you can sign up to bring a dish to share. Please see the sign-up tab at firstpreswc.com or speak to Elizabeth Hess. We hope you can join the fun! Please sign up [here](#).

"Two are better than one,
because they have a good
return for their work...A
cord of three strands is not
quickly broken."

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12

Connection Groups - Coming This Fall

This fall we are launching Connection Groups: smaller circles of community that will provide new opportunities to know others and be known by them as we pursue lives of faith. Take a look at the website to read through the groups offered; sign up online and then once the groups are filled, a leader will reach out to you to coordinate meeting dates/times (most will meet monthly from October 2026 – May 2027). Contact Elizabeth Hess or Sara Pantazes with any questions!

Sign up for Connection Groups [here](#).

Bridge Group

One of our Connection Groups will be a bridge group! All are welcome, whether just learning or more experienced, with the emphasis on fun and fellowship. Folks with more experience will help teach or mentor newbies or folks with only a little experience of the game. Talking across the table regarding bidding will be acceptable, unless all participants agree to keep it more formal, and taking time to catch up with one another will be included. Partners will be chosen at random, with the exception that experienced players would need to be paired with newer players, to lessen competitiveness and maximize fun. This group will meet the first Monday of the month, starting October 5, from 1-3pm in Room 217 at the church, led by Ann and David Dickey, and Doug and Beth Congdon-Martin.

Congregational Life

Pickleball

Presbyterian Paddles had a fantastic few weeks learning, playing, and having fun on the pickleball court this summer - while staying out of the kitchen! We may organize a few drop-in play sessions this fall. If you're interested in joining in, reach out to Elizabeth Hess.



First Pres Travelers

The First Pres Travelers group has some great outings planned for this fall!

- The American Revolution program at the Chester County History Center on October 28 has reached the maximum number of visitors. A waiting list is being compiled.
- Join the Travelers to see Joshua at the Sight & Sound Theater in Lancaster, Nov. 12 at 11am. Show ticket price is \$71.70, with an optional Smorgasbord Lunch at the adjacent Hershey Farm Restaurant. Total cost for the lunch is \$30.95 (food, fees, and tip included).
- The White Christmas musical on Dec. 13 at Uptown Theater (sold out)

For additional information or to register, please contact Thom & Irene at psuthom@verizon.net.

**“O Lord, our
Sovereign, how
majestic is your
name in all the
earth!”
Psalm 8:1**

Women’s Fall Bible Study

From the opening chapters of Genesis through the final verses of Revelation, God is known by many names—names that reveal who He is, what He does, and how He relates to His children. All women are invited to an 8-week video and workbook study called *“The Names of God”*, led by six different Bible study authors. This study will meet on Wednesdays from 9:30-11am, and will run for 8 weeks, from Sept. 23-Nov. 11. Sign up [here](#) or online.

Faith Formation

Vacation Bible School and Music Adventure Camp

The week of Vacation Bible School & Music Adventure Camp this summer was a perfect embodiment of the Faith Formation programs at First Pres:



- We had lots of enthusiastic kids learning and playing with the stories of God. I'm still wondering what their biggest memories of the week will be: singing and dancing with Kiana, the igloo, reciting the memory verse 39 times while passing around an ice cube before it melted, a sound wave experiment that sent sprinkles bouncing all over their classroom, playing "world cup" soccer in the yard, or something else I don't have room to list here!
- We had lots of incredible youth and adult volunteers, using their God-given gifts to learn and play with the kids. Not only did they learn the lessons too but also got to know each other and feel more connected to the First Pres community.
- We offered lots of different kinds of activities to give people different ways to connect with God's stories. From music to physical activity to art to service projects to science experiments and more, we tried to offer something that would be special for everyone.
- We had lots of beautiful conversations that displayed how people of all ages understand their connections to God and God's connection to them.



Did you catch the common word in each of those highlights? Lots! With lots of kids and lots of volunteers and lots of opportunities ahead of us, I am excited to see lots of growing and learning continue to happen in the coming year.

To say that God has a lot of love and grace would be an understatement. We worship an awesome God who is always there, patiently waiting for us to notice and respond. So grab an Upper Room devotion booklet from the Welcome Center. Join a new Connection Group. Volunteer with the children or youth programs to learn with and from them. There are so many ways to grow in faith and I hope each of you has or finds a way to keep growing this year. If you aren't sure where to start, give me a call - I'd love to talk with you.



Sara

Faith Formation

Moms Group Is Back

Moms Group is back with a full year of activities planned for all the moms of First Pres! Whether you are parenting a newborn, college kid, or any age in between, this is the place for you to find friendship, encouragement and fun. We have a list of babysitters to share and are also happy to provide childcare upon request so that anyone who wants to attend can do so.



In addition to monthly events, this year the Moms Group will be doing a slow read of *“Love like a Mother: How the Sacred Work of Motherhood Reveals the Maternal Heart of God”* by Elizabeth Berget. Moms who wish to participate are encouraged to acquire their own copy of the book, read one chapter a month, and we'll discuss the whole book at our March gathering. If you need assistance getting the book, talk to Sara Pantazes.

We would love to see all First Pres moms for any or all of the events below! Call the church office to be connected with Mary Hambleton or Liz Single with any questions.

- September 27: Catch Up & Games - 4 - 5:30pm at church
- October 18: Trick or Treat Decorating & Lunch Out (restaurant to be decided) - 12pm at church
- November 15: Holiday Decor Service Project from 4-5:30pm at church
- December 13: Annual Gift Exchange & Christmas Party - 4pm off site

Faith Formation

Sight Squad: A Children's Stewardship Project

This October, First Pres kids are invited to participate in a new program that will encourage them to serve and love others! Participants in the Sight Squad will be responsible for completing tasks at home that contribute to family life, helping them learn that loving their neighbors starts with loving those closest to them. In exchange for their completed tasks, kids will earn money that they can bring into church to contribute to a meaningful fundraising goal - raising \$300 to pay for a surgery that will restore someone's eyesight. More information will be shared with families soon, along with lots of logistical support to make this easy to add into family life. We are excited to see how Jesus' invitation to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength comes to life in our kids this fall!

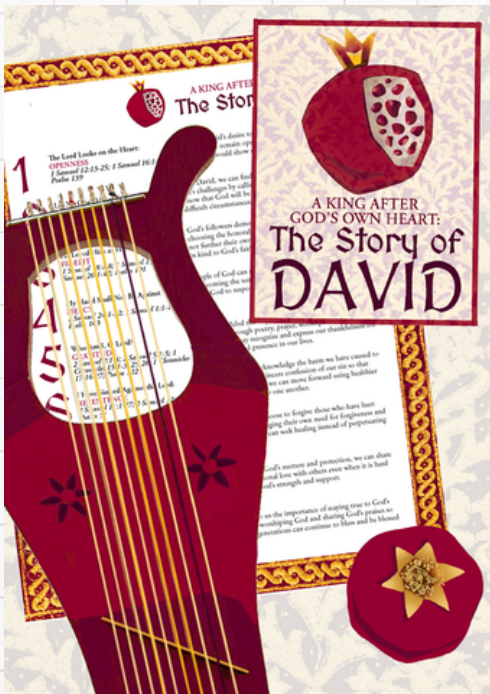


Midweek Journeys Study

Remember David of the David and Goliath story? Any idea what happened to him next? The Bible actually gives us quite a lot of David's story, making him one of the few individuals in the Bible we get to follow from childhood until the end of his life.

Over 9 weeks this fall, the Midweek Journeys study group will do a deep dive into the life of King David, examining the qualities held up by the ancient authors as important markers of our identity as faithful children of God. We will explore the accounts of David's life and consider what his story teaches about the responsibilities and expectations for living as God's people.

Midweek Journeys meets on Wednesday nights from 6:30-7:30pm on Zoom, beginning Wednesday, September 16. Contact Sara Pantazes at spantazes@firstpreswc.com to be added to the email list. Participants will be sent a short essay to read each week, but no other books are required.



Faith Formation

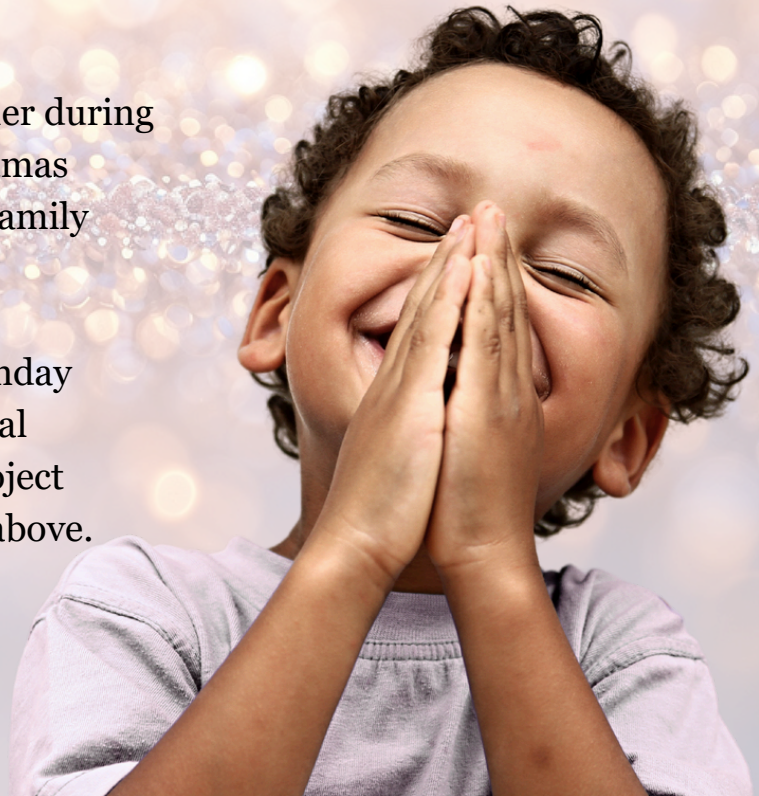
New Sunday School Year

The new Sunday School year begins on Sunday, September 13! We are looking forward to another great year of learning and playing together as we grow in faith. The weekly schedule is below - contact Sara with any questions.

- **9:00 service:** Children attend the start of worship with their parents then meet their Sunday School teachers after the children's message. We offer three classes: 4 year olds - 1st graders, 2nd - 3rd graders and 4th-5th graders.
- **10:45 service:** Children attend most of worship with their families. The Kids Connect program is offered during the sermon, featuring a short lesson for 4 year olds - 5th graders.

Sunday School Extras:

- On the first Sunday of every month, we hold a shorter Sunday School program during the 9am service so that children can participate in communion.
- During Advent, all the classes will work together during their weekly meeting times to prepare a Christmas message that will be shared during the 10am family Christmas Eve worship service.
- Children are invited to bring an offering to Sunday School every week in order to learn the spiritual practice of giving. We have a special giving project planned for this fall, see the Sight Squad info above.



Youth Ministry

Dear Youth and Families,

We have had such an incredible summer, and we are so excited to carry this momentum into the new 2026-2027 program year of Youth Ministry! Not only have we grown in maturity through service projects, Bible Studies, and fellowship, but we also had so much fun. That is how we do it at First Pres Youth; not only do we tackle the serious aspects of faith and community, but we also experience the great joy of the Gospel together. Our service trip to the Philadelphia Project was an example of this great joy. We served local churches in the Philadelphia area and made a meaningful impact on those communities, but we also made friends and strengthened our connections with each other and the local church. While this weeklong trip was the center point of our time together, we also had a pool party, a trip to Hershey Park, regular Guys and Girls groups, and not too long ago, we spent the day at the beach!

As we move into Fall Kick-Off, we are praying for God to multiply His work in us! We have so much to learn, so much to do, and so many memories to create. From our Fall Retreat, *“Back to the Beach”*, to the return of the White Elephant Christmas Party, and so much more, we want each and every one of you to join us for an exciting New Year. Pray with us as we prepare for this wonderful season ahead!



Youth Ministry

Ongoing Programs

- Youth Group — Sunday 4 - 5:30 PM — Weekly Check-Ins, Games, and Topical Teachings!
- Bible Study — Wednesday 7 - 8:30 PM — We will be working through the Gospel of John, with a fellowship meal and games included

Upcoming Events & Activities

Sept. 18-20: Back to the Beach Youth Retreat at Bethany Retreat Center. Join us for our weekend fall retreat where we will discuss the importance of devotions and learn how to incorporate it in our lives!

Oct 25: Halloween Glow in the dark party. You bring the costume, we will supply the glow in the dark apparel! We will play some themed Halloween games as well!

Nov 13-14: Friendsgiving Pot-Lock-In. What do you get when you mix a Potluck Friendsgiving Dinner with an overnight lock in? A Pot-Lock-In! Sign-ups for potluck incoming!

Dec 20: Christmas Party and White Elephant. Bring a gift to youth group on the last Sunday of Advent and steal your friends' gifts in a classic game of White Elephant. Come celebrate Christmas with our youth family!

Mission

Matthew 25

Over June, July, and August, First Pres members supported 89 households with emergency housing and transportation needs. In total, \$28,800 was paid to landlords and utility companies, with average disbursements of about \$325 per family.

Your gifts supported a homeless nursing student whose goal is to get her MSN and practice in urban communities; a senior couple with chronic health conditions whose social security check was delayed; a young adult who aged out of foster care struggling with rent; and a domestic violence survivor getting on her feet as a newly single mom. Many of those supported are hourly wage earners who lost income due to hospitalization or a child's illness.

We work closely with other churches and agencies, and all are finding that the volume of calls has risen sharply this summer. Many families are struggling to make ends meet. Thank you for participating in a ministry that makes such a real and profound impact in the life of our neighbors.



Food Pantry

Hunger is a growing epidemic for families in Chester County. While we have excellent resources to support people who lack access to healthy food, we know that too many people still fall through the cracks. In response to the growing need, the West Chester Food Cupboard has opened a mini-cupboard in First Pres's library filled with non-perishable food items. People who are in need of groceries can get them here as often as they need to. We have found that this service is especially valued by agency case managers who go to visit families who lack both groceries and transportation to get to larger food cupboards. If you know someone in need of food, they can come to church library any time we're open and take what they can use. If you have unexpired, non-perishable items to donate, you can leave them on the table in the library and they'll be gratefully accepted. And if this is a ministry where you would like to volunteer by sorting and arranging items, please reach out to Pastor Caroline.

Mission



Summer Spanish

Over July and August First Pres hosted our first Summer Spanish class. Given our relationship with our sister church in Guatemala and the many West Chester residents who speak Spanish as their first language, many church members wanted to learn basic conversational skills or brush up on what they had studied years before. The twice-weekly sessions were run by Crosslands resident and retired Spanish teacher Margaret Chen. A fun time was had by all, and we hope to have similar opportunities in the future!

Wednesday Lunch

Wednesday Lunches continue this fall each week at 11:15 in Fellowship Hall. The main course is catered by Mistral, and volunteers serve and/or bring a side or dessert to share. Once the meal is served, we all eat lunch together. This is a joyful ministry and wonderful way to meet new people. Most volunteers come once or twice per month, others try to make it every week. We would love to have you join us this fall. Show up any Wednesday or contact Pastor Caroline for more information.



Getsemani Trip

This November four First Pres members will visit our sister church, Iglesia Getsemani, in Villa Nueva, Guatemala to continue a partnership that has lasted nearly 25 years. During this time they'll continue to build on relationships that have spanned generations, visit a local orphanage, and worship together. Please keep travelers Joyce Chester, Suzy DeGeorge, Emily McClure, and Nancy Paist-Riches in your prayers for a safe and productive trip.



Mission

Gave the Dates

Fabric Mission Sale

Please mark your calendars for our upcoming Fabric Missions Sweet Dreams Sales on Sunday, October 11, and Sunday, December 6. The sales will be in Fellowship hall from 8:30am to 12 noon.

Sweet Dreams provides a quilt to all babies baptized in our church. We also provide cat beds to the local SPCA. We are extremely grateful for the past support from our parish members and hope that you will, once again, consider supporting this valuable mission. Thank you!



The Giving Tree

The Giving Tree will go up on November 15 – plan to make a difference this holiday season by purchasing a gift card or present for a local child or senior.

Community Thanksgiving

Our annual Community Thanksgiving will take place during Wednesday Lunch on November 25. Mark your calendar for a delicious and wonderful day of community ministry!



Deacons

Freshmen Care Packages

Each fall the deacons send care packages to first year college and trade school students connected to First Pres. The boxes contain treats and messages from the youth group that show up to their new address. These gifts remind our young adults that while they're off on new adventures, they always have the support of their church family. To confirm your graduate's contact information, please email Karin Khan at kkhan@firstpreswc.com.



Home Communion - 9/27



The deacons will bring communion to our members and their friends who cannot physically attend church. This ministry is deeply meaningful for all involved, and a wonderful way of connecting with longtime, faithful First Pres members. Those who live in senior living communities often invite their neighbors to participate. If you would like to accompany a deacon in this vital ministry, please email Richard Blessing (rich7b655@gmail.com).

Homecoming - 10/4

On Sunday, October 4, First Pres's deacon board will host a homecoming luncheon for all those who have been members of the congregation for fifty or more years. Guests will be celebrated with a catered lunch and share memories of First Pres and hopes for the future. Invitations will be sent to all those whose membership dates we have on file, but recognizing our records are incomplete, please contact Pastor Caroline if you are a fifty-year member and do not receive an invitation in the mail by mid-September.



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The
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