

**Annual Congregational Meeting Agenda**  
**Sunday, January 26, 2020**

1. Opening Prayer and Declaration of a Quorum Ryan Baer
2. Appointment of Clerk
3. Approval of the Minutes from the Called Congregational Meeting January 6, 2019, Annual Congregational Meeting January 27, 2019, Called Congregational Meeting September 15, 2019.
4. Vote to dissolve/dismiss the Pastor Nominating Committee
5. Recognition of Ruling Elders, Class of 2019
6. Election of four Members from the Congregation for the 2020 Nominations & Elections Committee
7. Annual Report
8. Approval of 2020 Terms of Call for Senior Pastor, Ryan Baer & Associate Pastor, Carol Strickland
9. Closing Prayer
10. Adjourn

First Presbyterian Church  
Athens, Georgia

**Minutes of the Called Congregational Meeting**

January 6, 2019

The Called Meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church was held immediately after the morning worship service (a single service beginning at 10:00 rather than the traditional two services at 8:45 and 11:00) on Sunday, January 6, 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to act upon the recommendations of the Pastor Nominating Committee that the congregation **extend a call to the Reverend Dr. Ryan J. Baer** to become Senior Pastor and Head of Staff of First Presbyterian Church, Athens, Georgia, and **approve the terms of that call**.

Following the benediction for the worship service and a postlude during which visitors were able to leave if they wished to do so, Interim Senior Pastor Bruce Lancaster called the meeting to order, declared that a quorum was present, and appointed Clerk of the Session Richard Lane to serve as clerk for the Called Congregational Meeting. Dr. Lancaster then explained the purpose and process for the meeting and recognized Lewis Hudgins, Chairperson of the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).

Chairperson Hudgins asked the other six members of the PNC—Ron Bogue, Sarah Bryan, Stephen Covington, Melinda DeMaria, Erika Hermanowicz, and Vice-Chair Fran Lane—to join him at the front of the sanctuary. He then explained the work of the committee in detail, highlighting especially the process of narrowing a list of over 200 applications down to a very few most outstanding candidates for careful review and consideration and ultimately choosing one, Dr. Ryan J. Baer, currently Pastor and Head of Staff at Ridglea Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, Texas, whom the committee **unanimously moved to become the new Senior Pastor and Head of Staff at our church**. The committee also **moved that the terms of call be approved. Both motions were seconded from the floor**.

Before speaking to and answering questions concerning the motions, the PNC members passed out a brochure introducing Dr. Baer and his family; providing information about Dr. Baer's background, education, and experience as a minister; and including a summary of the terms of call. Congregational members were given about ten minutes to study these materials, after which Dr. Lancaster asked whether people needed additional time or were ready to proceed. The consensus being to proceed, committee member Sarah Bryan spoke to the nomination of Dr. Baer, committee member Stephen Covington reviewed the terms of call, and moderator Lancaster asked if there were any questions. Several members of the congregation made observations or asked questions, the most immediately challenging being the what the middle name of Ryan Baer's wife happened to be. (Committee member Melinda DeMaria was able to supply the answer after a quick text-message exchange with Amy Lynn Baer.) Other questions were handled without recourse to technology.

Hearing no further questions, Dr. Lancaster called for **votes to approve the nomination and the terms of call. Both measures passed unanimously**.

Dr. Lancaster next called for a **motion to dismiss the PNC**. When there was a suggestion that the words “with gratitude” be added to the motion, members of the congregation rose to their feet and offered sustained applause as an expression of that gratitude. In accepting this demonstration of respect and appreciation for the work of the PNC, Lewis Hudgins thanked church staff members and several members of the congregation who had supplied exceptional advice and assistance to the committee throughout its two years of service. When in closing he acknowledged especially the support of Dr. Lancaster, the congregation again rose to applaud in acclamation. [Note to any uninitiated reader of these minutes: Standing ovations are not rare in Athens, Georgia; a performer who can’t earn one here need not dream of Broadway or even Atlanta. On the other hand, sustained applause and standing ovations are seldom offered up by the “frozen chosen,” and this was almost surely the first occasion when our sanctuary rang with not one but two such demonstrations of appreciation within a matter of minutes. In short, this was very obviously a special day in the life of First Presbyterian Church!]

The motion to dismiss having passed and the applause having died, the moderator asked for and received a motion and vote to adjourn, and he closed the meeting with a benediction.

Respectfully submitted,

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Bruce Lancaster, Moderator

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Richard Lane, Clerk

First Presbyterian Church  
Athens, Georgia  
**Minutes of the Annual Congregational Meeting**  
January 27, 2019

The Annual Meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia, was held on Sunday, January 27, 2019, in Fellowship Hall. Church members gathered for lunch beginning at noon following the conclusion of the 11:00 worship service, and the meeting began around 12:30 p.m. after everyone had been served.

The meeting was **called to order by the Moderator, Interim Senior Pastor Bruce Lancaster**, who appointed Clerk of the Session Richard Lane to serve as clerk for the Annual Meeting and declared a quorum.

The Moderator called everyone's attention to copies of Minutes for the Annual Congregational Meeting of January 28, 2018, and the Called Congregational Meeting of September 9, 2018, held for the election of elders to the Class of 2021, which were included in the handout packets. After a few minutes, the moderator accepted motions to approve, together with subsequent seconds, both records. Hearing no objections, the Moderator declared the **minutes approved by common consent**.

The Moderator **recognized Elders from the outgoing Class of 2018**—Joe Attaway, David Cole, Jason Doornbos, Sue Gray, Mark Harrison, Denise Horton, Christine Register, Arlene Shirley, Harry Shuford, and Richard Stone—**thanking them for their service and leadership throughout the past three years**.

Dr. Lancaster next moved to the **election of congregational members to serve on the Nominations and Elections Committee for 2019**. Reporting that Ruling Elder Sydney Jackson will chair the committee and that Elder Meghan Bawcum will serve as the second representative from the Session, he opened the floor for nominations. Congregational members Eve Morris, Jo Carol Nasset-Sale, Chuck Toney, and Madeline Van Dyck were nominated. After a move and second to close the nominations, and hearing no further nominations, the Moderator declared **Eve Morris, Jo Carol Nasset-Sale, Chuck Toney, and Madeline Van Dyck elected by acclamation**.

## COMMISSION REPORTS

*NOTE: Reports from all of the commissions were included in the printed 2018 Annual Report, available during the meeting. What follows are merely the highlights that chairmen brought to the attention of congregational members present for the meeting itself:*

Harry Shuford, chairperson of the **Congregational Care Commission**, began by noting that an initial class of 18 Stephen Ministers has completed its training and that most are currently matched with individuals who have asked to meet with a Stephen Ministry partner on an ongoing

basis. Anyone desiring to meet with a partner is urged to contact Associate Pastor Carol Strickland, Dawn Frisch, or Larry Gray, coordinators of the program. Harry next thanked the Congregational Care response teams, who planned, prepared, and served refreshments after an unusually high number of funerals and memorial services last year. He also thanked volunteers who serve in the Flower Ministry, breaking down the arrangements from church services to create smaller arrangements that are then delivered to church members who are unable to come to church.

Chairperson Robbie Bryan of the **Mission & Outreach Commission** began by sharing comments from a few of the thank-you notes he has received from service agencies that receive grants from our church. He then mentioned some of our congregation's giving that is not even reflected in the outreach budget: the use of our building and participation of our members in serving agencies such as IHN, a program through which we gave 376 volunteer hours providing food and shelter to eleven families in 2018; collecting food for the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank each first Sunday or purchasing toys and clothes for needy children through the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program; collecting funds, buying supplies, and packing Christmas food baskets for low-income Latino families served through Casa de Amistad; several special offerings and special programs or events such as the Holiday Benevolence Market. The grand total of budgeted giving plus these various special collections and programs, Robbie reported, was \$277,193 for Missions & Outreach!

Mary Peace, who chaired the **Education & Discipleship Commission** in 2018, reported that FPC had an average of 45 children in Sunday School each week. She also mentioned the fact that youth from our church traveled to Honduras as part of our mission team as well as to the Youth Conference at Montreat. Mary then brought us into the current church year, reminding everyone that next Sunday, February 3, 2019, will be Youth Sunday and that there are twelve ninth graders enrolled in our confirmation class, using the new Presbyterian curriculum entitled "Big God, Big Questions" under the leadership of Kim Ness, Youth Director. Finally, Mary urged church members to avail themselves of the services of our outstanding church library.

Dan Trier, reporting for Lawton Stephens, the chairperson of the **Fellowship & Evangelism Commission** who was recuperating from surgery, mentioned recent "Food & Entertainment" events and invited everyone to attend upcoming events, most especially the welcome reception for our new pastor, Dr. Ryan Baer, and his family immediately following the 11 o'clock worship service on Sunday, February 17.

Bob Burton, chairperson of the **Worship & Music Commission**, urging that everyone look at the commission's written report, reported simply and succinctly that "everything is good."

Carl Nichols, chairperson of the **Administration Commission**, began his report with a summary of the 2018 church financial picture, pointing out that income exceeded expectations by \$50,580.87 and more than covered operating expenses, leaving a surplus for the year of approximately \$40,000—even after covering both Dr. Lancaster's severance package and Dr. Baer's moving expenses. Carl next reminded everyone of all that we accomplished in the 2010 renovation of our church building, pointing out that the crowd in Fellowship Hall as he spoke could not have gathered for a meal anywhere within our building prior to that renovation, and he

stressed the amount of money already contributed toward paying for the work that was done. We built a \$12-million building, cutting what we owed in half (\$6 million) during our initial Capital Stewardship Campaign, and reducing that to \$4.5 million as a result of the second funding drive. More recently, the Endowment Fund contributed \$420,000, matched by \$80,000 from money held by the Session, to pay down the principal by \$500,000; and recent commitments from within the congregation will reduce the debt by another \$1.35 million, bringing the debt down to (just) \$3 million before the third campaign is launched in the near future. As further evidence of how meaningful our new and expanded facilities are, Carl stated that, according to a variety of records, we feel that our church building serves over 6,000 people each month—or around 75,000 people annually. He also thanked the church staff for its help in making things run smoothly for all of the groups and individuals we serve, all of the programs we support. Carl next recognized Diane Adams, on behalf of the Flower Committee, who called attention to the beautiful flowers in the sanctuary this morning, given in memory of Evan Marshall, pointing out that they were arranged in a pair of handsome brass vases that were used for the first time today. These vases were a gift to the church in honor of Buck and Gwen Griffin from their daughters.

While Carl Nichols at this point would normally have yielded the floor to the moderator for his final report as interim pastor, Carl instead called upon Harry Shuford who, as chairperson of Congregational Care Commission and on behalf of the congregation, thanked Dr. Lancaster for his leadership and support over the past two-plus years—beginning in the fall of 2016 when he met members of the congregation in twenty-four (count them, twenty-four!) in-home meetings as part of the stewardship campaign for 2017 and moving forward with us ever since. Reminding everyone that Bruce collects walking sticks and that we wish him well as he begins the next phase of his spiritual/life's journey, Harry presented Bruce with a token of the congregation's esteem, a walking stick crafted and carved by Bob Glasscock from a unique piece of wood and featuring a miniature of our church building as its handle.

Before Bruce could thank Harry/Bob/church members, Richard Lane, Clerk of the Session, presented Bruce with another gift from the congregation—a check, money having been raised by way of individual contributions from church members. He also read a couple of sentences from the most recent Session Minutes: “Assuring us that First Presbyterian is a ‘remarkable church,’ Bruce said that he plans to return to our church in the future. Indeed, he said he has already committed to volunteer with our Children's Ministry Program, specifically with Godly Play.” Upon hearing this, everyone in the room began to applaud our beloved Interim Pastor Bruce Lancaster.

At this point, Bruce was finally allowed to reclaim the floor. He delivered his final report to the congregation, saying we give generously of our resources and ourselves and that because of its staff and members First Presbyterian Church is very much alive and so will thrive under the new leadership of Dr. Baer. He did, however, have one suggestion that he thought would make us more welcoming to our new pastor as well as all visitors to our church services: wear nametags! Finally, speaking for Cathi as well as himself, Bruce thanked our congregation for allowing them to be part of the life of our church and, pointing out that they had bought a home in Athens, assured us that they would indeed be back with us before too long. Calling for further business

and declaring that he heard none, Dr. Lancaster then adjourned the 2019 Annual Meeting of the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia.

Respectfully submitted,

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Carol Strickland, Associate Pastor  
for Bruce Lancaster, Moderator/Interim Pastor

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Richard Lane, Clerk

First Presbyterian Church  
Athens, Georgia  
**Minutes of Called Meeting of the Congregation**  
September 15, 2019

A called meeting of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia, was held on Sunday, September 15, 2019, at 12:15 p.m. (shortly after conclusion of the 11:00 a.m. worship service) for the purposes of (1) electing ten members to the Session of First Presbyterian Church, Class of 2022, and (2) hearing a report from the Debt Elimination Committee. For this meeting, congregation members sat at tables of eight, each table led by a member of the Session or of the Debt Elimination Committee.

The meeting was called to order and opened with prayer by senior pastor/moderator Ryan Baer, who declared a quorum. He then called upon elder Sydney Jackson, chair of the Nominations and Elections Committee, who recognized and thanked the other committee members—Meghan Bawcum, Eve Morris, Jo Carol Nasset-Sale, Chuck Toney, and Madeline Van Dyck—and presented the following nominees for the Class of 2022:

Karen Burg	Jimbo LaBoon
Jill Crim	Tom Landrum
Kitty Donnan	Beverly Phares
Larry Jones	Courtney Pittman
Andy Jordan	Smith Wilson

Dr. Baer invited nominations from the floor. Hearing none, and following a move and second to close the nominations, he declared the slate to be elected by acclamation.

For the second item of business, the moderator turned the floor over to Carl Nichols of the Debt Elimination Committee, who recognized the other members of that group—Kathy Bangle, Kitty Donnan, Sydney Jackson, Tom Landrum, Keith Oelke, Mixon Robinson, and Chuck Toney. Carl, who had also chaired the Building & Finance Committee during building and renovation of the church between 2007 and 2010, supplied background on what the church had accomplished during that period (addition of the new Fellowship Hall, Atrium, and dedicated Weekday School wing as well as renovations and improvements to the existing building and the Tinsley-Stern House) and funding at that time. Noting that the church is now thriving in its enhanced, expanded facilities, he stated that only one issue remains: retirement of the existing debt. He described the way the debt has in recent months been reduced from almost \$5 million (remaining on the building cost of \$13 million) to just over \$2.4 million and challenged the congregation to pledge toward paying off that amount.

The balance of the meeting would occur at the individual tables, where leaders would pass out materials relating to debt elimination and answer questions anyone might have. The meeting



would conclude when everyone had received the materials and had an opportunity to participate in discussion at the individual tables. Since the collective part of the meeting was therefore concluding, Dr. Baer declared the meeting adjourned and closed with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ryan Baer, Moderator

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Richard Lane, Clerk of Session

*Pastor Nominating Committee*

**Ron Bogue**

**Sarah Bryan**

**Stephen Covington**

**Melinda Demaria**

**Erika Hermanowicz**

**Lewis Hudgins, Chair**

**Fran Lane**

*Ruling Elder Class of 2019*

**Robbie Bryan**

**Greta Covington**

**DeeAnn Cox**

**Bob Glasscock**

**Mary Havick**

**Joe Hermanowicz**

**Richard Lane**

**Mary Peace**

**Lawton Stephens**

**Dan Trier**

## REPORT TO CONGREGATION JANUARY 26, 2020

Income	2019 Budget	Preliminary 2019 Actual	2020 Budget
Pledged Contributions	\$1,246,946.00	\$1,235,633.35	\$1,257,733.35
Non-Pledged Contributions	107,000.00	167,490.76	146,700.00
Plate Offerings	12,000.00	14,887.26	15,100.00
Church School Offerings	800.00	570.60	500.00
<b>Total Contributed Income</b>	<b>1,366,746.00</b>	<b>1,418,581.97</b>	<b>\$1,420,033.35</b>
Other Income	3,000.00	3,289.63	3,200.00
<b>Total Other Income</b>	<b>3,000.00</b>	<b>3,289.63</b>	<b>3,200.00</b>
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$1,369,746.00</b>	<b>\$1,421,871.60</b>	<b>\$1,423,233.35</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
<b>Administration Commission</b>	<b>\$1,074,338.34</b>	<b>\$1,083,870.35</b>	<b>\$1,115,473.35</b>
Congregational Care Commission	7,000.00	5,142.90	7,000.00
Mission & Outreach Commission	218,500.00	214,148.28	218,500.00
Fellowship & Evangelism Commission	15,060.00	36,279.14	16,910.00
Education & Discipleship Commission	34,850.00	30,861.39	34,850.00
Worship & Music Commission	25,500.00	20,074.10	25,500.00
Religious Development	5,000.00	5,542.25	5,000.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,380,248.34</b>	<b>\$1,395,918.41</b>	<b>\$1,423,233.35</b>
<b>Revenue in Excess of (Less Than) Expenditures</b>	<b>\$(10,502.34)</b>	<b>\$25,953.19</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

**CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES**  
**(PRELIMINARY, 2019)**

**Endowment Fund**

<b>Beginning Balance at 1/1/2019</b>		<b>\$332,240.52</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Earnings	3,296.29	
Expense	0.00	
<b>Ending Balance at 12/31/2019</b>		<b>\$335,536.81</b>
<i>Endowment Fund Trustees:</i>		
<i>Keith Oelke, Chair</i>		
<i>Dick Ferguson, Jr., Chair Emeritus</i>		
<i>Jody Corry, Secretary/Treasurer</i>		
<i>Gilbert Milner</i>		
<i>Jeffrey Trapnell</i>		

**Preservation and Restoration Fund**

<b>Beginning Balance in P &amp; R Fund at 1/1/2019</b>		<b>\$71,966.49</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	19,251.73	
<b>Expenses</b>	39,679.92	
<b>Ending Balance in P &amp; R Fund at 12/31/2019</b>		<b>\$51,538.30</b>

**Capital Stewardship Fund**

<b>Revenue</b>		<b>\$1,290,819.90</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Interest Expense	146,131.38	
Debt Reduction	1,258,964.52	
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$1,405,095.90</b>
<b>2019 Expenditures in excess of Revenue</b>		<b>(\$114,276.00)</b>

Church total revenues in 2019 were \$52,125.60 greater than budget primarily because non-pledged contributions were \$60,490.76 greater than budget and pledged contributions were \$11,312.65 less than budget. Our expenses were \$15,670.07 greater than budget because we have accrued \$23,000.00 for expenses we anticipate incurring in connection with our 200th anniversary offset by small savings in a number of other areas.

The Session has approved the 2020 budget for total revenue amounting to \$1,423,233.35 based upon pledges in hand.

Our Endowment Fund continued to receive relatively small returns on its investment.

The expenses incurred by the Preservation and Restoration Fund related to several projects identified as being necessary.

Our Capital Stewardship Fund brought in \$1,290,819.90 related to the debt elimination campaign, all of which has been used to pay down the debt. The interest expense was covered by funds accumulated in earlier capital campaigns.

**Carl Nichols**  
*Administration Commission Chair*

**Personnel Committee: 2020 Changes in Terms of Call**

The Personnel Committee moves the following Changes in Terms of Call:

**Associate Pastor, Carol Strickland**

Salary: \$52,920 to \$56,920

Housing: \$20,249 to \$22,449

Benefits (unchanged):

Continuing Education \$2,400

Travel Expenses, etc. \$2,400

Dental Insurance \$1,633

**TOTAL CHANGE \$74,802 to \$81,002**

**Senior Pastor, Ryan Baer**

Salary: \$69,900 to \$71,700

Housing: \$43,000

Benefits (unchanged):

Continuing Education \$4,000

Travel Expenses, etc. \$4,800

Dental Insurance \$1,633

Supplemental Life Insurance \$435

**TOTAL CHANGE \$114,968 to \$116,768**



# First Presbyterian Church of Athens

## 2019 Annual Report

# 2019 Annual Report

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In response to God's grace, the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Athens is to create a community where people seek the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world!



## Senior Pastor

You and I have not quite yet completed one year together as pastor and congregation. As I have come to know you over these months, I remain more convinced than ever that though we will have much to celebrate during our bicentennial year, the best is yet to come for the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia. Thank you for the countless ways in which you have welcomed my family and me into your hearts and homes.



Within the pages of this report, you will find many important details about the institutional life of the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, Georgia. For example, thanks to the initiative of several dedicated leaders, in a little more than a year's time, the church's outstanding mortgage balance has been reduced by over \$1.2 million, and we are within striking distance of our goal of becoming a completely debt-free congregation. You'll read about ongoing efforts to maintain and enhance our historic campus that is enjoyed by more than 2,000 people per week. You'll read about the makeup of our congregation's commissions and committees and the outstanding work that they have accomplished in 2019.

As you read, remember that the First Presbyterian Church of Athens is not only an institution - it's a movement where, in response to God's grace, we create a community where people seek the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world. As an old camp song says, "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people!" Within these pages, you will also read about the ways in which we have been the church together in 2019. It is a joy and a privilege to be your pastor.

Very truly yours,

Dr. Ryan Baer, *Senior Pastor*

## Associate Pastor

Dear Congregation,

Here are two stories from my ministry in 2019. The first comes from our Stephen Ministry program. Recalling that one of our Stephen Ministers remarked in a meeting last fall that it was the most important spiritual experience of his life, I asked him to tell me why. This is what he sent me:



*When our church first began talking about Stephen Ministry, and I read and heard about what was involved, I thought, "That's great. And it sounds like a lot to take on." And when the letter came from Carol, I read it and thought, "That's a really great thing for the church to do. And it sounds like a lot." And on the day that my wife and I brought our Ways to Serve forms to church in the summer of 2017, Carol stopped by our pew and asked if we had considered going through the 50 hours of Stephen Ministry training because she thought we would be good at it, I thanked her and thought, "That's a great thing for the church to do. And it sounds like a lot." Then Bruce preached a sermon that day whose theme was "You say you love Jesus. What are you doing about it?" we looked at each other, took out our Ways to Serve forms, and checked off Stephen Ministry.*

*It has been the most profound sustained spiritual experience of my life.*

*It is indeed a commitment, but well worth it. Going through the 20 weeks of training with the other members of the inaugural class of Stephen Ministers challenged me, pushed me and stretched my faith in ways had it had not been and will not be stretched again – all for the good. Committing to the core principle of simply being consistently present with a care receiver and thereby acting on the Biblical directive to bear one another's burdens has equally stretched and strengthened my faith.*

The second is a snapshot from March 3, 2019. The occasion was the Mardi Gras Mission Gala. The Fellowship Hall was festively decorated with purple, green, and gold. Members ate a beans-and-rice lunch served by the youth and mingled among the silent auction displays which filled the breakout area. Items ranged from artwork by members to a custom cake baked by one of our children. The "Treasure Island" end of the room represented many items from members' closets and attics seeking new homes. The live auction featured everything from ten pounds of homemade barbeque to a concert by our new pastor and the PNC Pips. Dozens of people contributed to make the event a success. We raised over \$14,000 for our next mission trip, which will be to Puerto Rico in June 2020. Seen through theological lenses, it was fellowship in action, where the whole church feasted and had fun together. It was stewardship in action, where members offered their talents and gifts in a spirit of generosity. It was mission in action, where we looked beyond ourselves to share Christ's love with a corner of the world that desperately needs it. I shall long remember that day as a coming together of so many people of goodwill to make a difference.

I am grateful to share in ministry with this congregation.

Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

## Parish Associate

When my husband Ben and I formally joined First Presbyterian Church of Athens in 2016, I hoped to take a “mommy break” from full time ministry to help us prepare to welcome children into our family. Bringing a child into the world took quite a bit longer than I had anticipated, and I found myself with too much time on my hands. Naturally, as many of our members do so beautifully, I looked to the church for meaningful ways to serve and fill my time. I joined the lay callers and helped run the Benevolence Market. I led what is now the Living on a Prayer class for a year and led some Weekday School moms through a Lenten study. I got trained to be a storyteller for Godly Play with the Children’s Ministry. I would pinch hit when needed for worship leadership, preaching, or hospital visitation, particularly in the transition between Dr. Glenn Doak’s retirement and Dr. Bruce Lancaster’s arrival. I took on a role as the Ministry Associate at the Presbyterian Student Center at UGA, helping out as needed. I loved serving in all of these ad hoc ways, but the truth is that, especially as our son Robby got older and his health stabilized, I greatly missed having a larger call to ordained ministry in a congregational setting.



So, it was with great joy that I accepted the call to serve as Parish Associate here, beginning my role formally in the end of August. Of course, the call was tinged with sadness because of the accelerated retirement of our blessed pastor Dr. John Kipp, due to a rapidly advancing, terminal illness. However, in many ways, that tragic circumstance charged me. I felt a deep responsibility to pick up the mantle that John had passed and to serve with the same energy, imagination, intelligence, and most importantly, the love that John had. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and for the ways that you have opened your doors and hearts to receiving my pastoral care, even as we all continue grieving John’s loss. I cannot tell you what a blessing this call has been to me personally and to my family, as well. I love that Robby will grow up watching me fulfill my call formally and knowing how important it is to me. But the best part, is that I know that I am doing vital ministry each day to touch the lives of many of our beloved members, many of whom I did not have the privilege of knowing well before.

In the five months, I have been serving in this particular call, I have had so many wonderful opportunities to share the love of Christ with our members that are homebound, in senior care facilities, in the hospital, or just going through difficult times. Accompanying people via pastoral care was a central part of Jesus’ ministry. As a full-time pastor, there are often so many varied demands on one’s time, and pastors often carry deep guilt that they are not able to visit people as much as they would like. Having visitation as my primary means of serving here is a huge luxury to me as a pastor. Much of my work is confidential, but I want to give you a sense of the scope of the ministry that this congregation provides to its members and the larger community through my role.

In just five months, I have had the privilege of:

- caring for over 40 members who are homebound or in senior care facilities
- making over 500 visits or calls to our members, including over 1600 miles of driving
- visiting a hospital more than 60 times to care for any members who may be there
- co-officiating worship for 4 Sundays
- co-officiating 6 funerals for members of the church
- serving on the Congregational Care commission
- serving as a Confirmation Mentor with the Youth Ministry
- teaching as a Godly Play Storyteller with the Children’s ministry
- teaching as needed and attending the Living on a Prayer Sunday School class
- advocating for new ways to keep our seniors connected to the life of the church

Our church is so fortunate to be able to designate a Parish Associate to serve in this way. Many of the members I visit have not been to church regularly in years, even decades, as some were caregivers for others before they themselves faced the difficulties of limited mobility. In my visits, I get to personally share news of the church and other members. I extend a hug to represent the congregation and Christ's love for them. I set up links to our worship services on tablets to help folks stay connected. I get tapped to perform wellness checks on vulnerable folks for whom the congregation has love and concern. I coordinate care with extended family members, the rest of our staff, and support services, such as getting folks to appointments or investigating options for navigating tricky situations. I lend an ear to what they are feeling and what questions or concerns with which they wrestle. Some bring theological questions. Others seek counsel on adjusting to this phase in life and the many transitions it brings, including how it shifts interpersonal familial relations. We share the emotional burdens they may carry. We keep each other company in conversation and genuine care for one another, as many of those I visit struggle with loneliness and isolation. I offer a hand in holy prayer to God with these members. I read them scripture, bring church bulletins, and order devotionals. When asked, I sit by their hospital and death beds and offer their families the consolation that we have received from God. We celebrate their lives with funerals that give witness to the hope we have for a life beyond this life, through Christ's resurrection. As all our members lives intersect through the varied ministries of the church, it is also helpful that I have been able to connect with the larger congregation by occasionally helping lead worship and serving through congregational care, adult education, and the children's, youth, and preschool ministries.

I believe this ministry is so important to the life and to the overall health of this congregation, and I feel honored to be called by God and First Presbyterian Church to contribute to the care of Christ's church and her members in this way. Thank you for your trust and welcome, and for your patience and understanding as I continue to grow into this particular call. May God bless you, all our members, and this congregation's ministry and witness in the year to come!

Grace and Peace to you,  
Rev. Margaret Davis, *Parish Associate*

## Director of Music and Organist

2019 was certainly an eventful year at First Presbyterian Church. We started January off with the calling of Dr. Ryan Baer as the new Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. There is always a bit of anxiety that comes with a change of pastors in a church, but I had great faith in our Pastor Nominating Committee, in our congregation, and in God throughout the process. While much information was kept confidential, the one comment made to me by several PNC members was “you are going to be very happy.” I hoped they would be right, and they were. In my thirty years of working in churches, I’ve been through several changes of pastors. I can honestly say that this has been the best. Dr. Baer is supportive, encouraging, appreciative, and he is an outstanding professionally, pastorally, and professionally. I have great faith that First Presbyterian Church has a great future ahead.



Our choirs continue to thrive and grow. Our Chancel Choir continues to work hard preparing for and singing on Sundays and for special services. The Handbell Choir is at full capacity. The Celebration Singers and St. Andrews Choir continue to grow and evolve as choristers graduate up to new choirs. The St. Andrews Choir continues to use the RSCM training program. Charlotte Chromiak is doing a wonderful job with our Cherub Choir. The Mellows continue to take their ministry to senior care facilities in the community, which is very rewarding. The singers and ringers in all of these choirs are a joy to work with. My regular duties of working with pastors and other staff on worship planning, selecting, teaching, and rehearsing music, and leading in services continues.

I have continued to enjoy teaching and working with organ students at UGA, and a few private students. I served as an artist-in-residence (organist) at Piedmont College but made the decision to resign from that position in May. I consider these teaching and performing activities to be sharing the gifts I have been given with others. Most of my organ students are currently serving churches, and they are appreciative of the help. The lessons are given on organ, another example of stewardship and sharing what we have with our community.

Some highlights in 2019 include Youth Sunday on February 3, led in part by our talented youth musicians. I hosted and gave a presentation in our sanctuary to the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) on a new edition of the organ works of Bach. Our own Dr. Martha Thomas presented a piano recital as part of the Wayne F. Middendorf Concert Series. I provided jazz piano music for our Mardi Gras Mission Gala. I accompanied the Piedmont Singers in a concert at Piedmont College. And, I performed a recital at Mulberry Street United Methodist Church in Macon as part of the Cherry Blossom Festival.

April brought Dr. Baer’s installation service, for which I played and the Chancel Choir sang. On Palm Sunday, our St. Andrews and Cherub Choirs sang together. The Chancel Choir and I provided music for our Maundy Thursday service and dramatic presentation, and we participated in the Presbyterian community Good Friday service. On Easter our Chancel Choir was joined by the Celebration Singers, and we were led by a brass ensemble of faculty and students from UGA, organized by Dr. Jean Martin Williams. I played for another doctoral trumpet recital with UGA student Tyler Jones in our sanctuary. Another UGA doctoral euphonium recital also held in our sanctuary in April. The Piedmont Singers performed a concert as part of our Wayne F. Middendorf Concert Series.

May brought our annual Scottish Reformation Sunday, with bagpiper Henry Frantz. Henry was here and plans to continue, but Fran was certainly missed. I attended UGA’s Hugh Hodgson School of Music convocation, played for the Piedmont College baccalaureate ceremony, and played for our Weekday School graduation ceremony.

Over the summer we had a great group attend the Montreat Worship and Music Conference. I also attended the Sewanee Church Music Conference in Tennessee, something I haven't done since my first year at First Presbyterian.

In the fall, I was installed as Dean of the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the AGO. I took on this role to help organists and churches in our community, especially UGA students, to benefit from the educational resources and support the AGO offers, and to unite organists and church musicians by connecting long-time musicians with the next generation of students. Three programs were held in the fall: one at Emmanuel Episcopal Church on summer conferences as continuing education, one at our church on online AGO resources, and one at First Baptist Church on organ design and repairs, led by our organ tuner, Robert Coulter. Also in the fall, I provided music for the annual Ath-half, we celebrated our annual Choir Dedication Sunday, and members of our Chancel Choir participated in the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.

In December, the Mellows sang for the SAM tea, I played for our annual Christmas pageant, the Handbell Choir played for the Live Nativity, and I played for the Weekday School Christmas Program. Our Chancel Choir and Celebration Singers united for our annual Festival of Lessons and Carols. I also played for a new service introduced by Dr. Baer, a Service of the Longest Night.

While 2019 was a great year in many ways, it also brought sadness and loss in our choir family. Our Chancel Choir lost two faithful members and very dear friends, Leita Cobb and John Kipp, our former Parish Associate. Those were difficult and significant losses. John Kipp, especially, was a pastor, teacher, and friend to so many. John's service, which was only two days after Christmas, was possibly the most difficult memorial service I have done, but also the most beautiful and meaningful. Two of the most moving moments of this year were when The Mellows (and special guests) traveled to sing to John and Sara Kipp and their family. As we did so, several commented that John was (and we were) surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. The Chancel Choir had the opportunity to go to Leita Cobb's home to sing to her, not long before she died, and the experience was the same. Though not within the walls of our church, those were special moments of worship when we were all surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

As we celebrate our bicentennial, and look to the future, may we continue to be surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses. I look forward to many more great years of serving First Presbyterian Church.

Soli Deo Gloria (to God alone be the glory).

Dr. John T. Coble, *Director of Music and Organist*

## Director of Youth Ministries

On behalf of the youth of First Presbyterian Church of Athens, thank you. Thank you for believing in them. Thank you for investing in them. Thank you for welcoming them into our church family and for giving them leadership roles in worship. Thank you for providing and subsidizing opportunities for them to serve locally and internationally. Thank you for seeing them as both the future and the present hope for our world. Thank you for helping them to see themselves as precious gifts from God who are loved by so many.



With youth we often don't get to see the impact we've had on their lives. They graduate, go off to college and begin their adult lives. If you trust the numbers out there about the increase in the 'nones,' you might fear that you have had no impact. But I want to assure you that our ministry, youth ministry, does make a difference...

Thirty years ago my family moved from Washington, DC to Pensacola, FL. It was the summer before high school and I knew no one. At one of the first churches we visited, we met a woman whose nephew was also going to be a freshman. 24 hours later he called to invite me to his youth group. One simple phone call altered the course of my life. While baptized in the Presbyterian Church and confirmed Episcopalian, I found my home in the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Pensacola. From Sunday School to youth group to mission trips and Montreat, FPC Pensacola shaped who I am today. It was on a mission trip to Reynosa, Mexico during 9th grade that I first heard a call to ministry – a mission trip I attended on scholarship. That first conference at Montreat was magical and has been matched by the 20+ times I've been back since. When a church member offered to fund my trip to Triennium as a Presbytery delegate, I fell in love with the connectional nature of PCUSA. After college, I returned to FPC to ask for their support during my time as a Young Adult Volunteer in Belfast. They not only fully funded my year of service, but sent me weekly cards and care packages, a constant reminder of God's awesome love. And now, 20 years later, I am here serving as your Director of Youth Ministries. Truly, the impact of investing in our youth is powerful.

Here at FPC Athens, we can already see an impact:

Over 40 youth led a beautiful worship service on Youth Sunday 2019. Through music, meditations and personally written prayers and liturgy, they helped us better understand Jesus' call to welcome ALL to the table.

Maggie DeMaria fell in love with Montreat the first time we drove the church van under the gate. Three years later she was one of two youth who served on the Planning Team for Montreat Youth Conference weeks 1-2, helping to bring the theme Let Love Lead to over 6,000 youth.

Leighton Parker, one of our college interns is in her second year as a Presbyterian Student Center Waddel Fellow. She graduates in May and plans to serve as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer next year as she discerns a call to seminary.

I wonder how writing a personal statement of faith will shape the 13 youth in this year's confirmation class? How will the 33 people signed for the intergenerational mission trip to Puerto Rico be changed? Youth ministry matters and I am so grateful for your continued commitment to our youth, and to me.

- Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*

# Director of Children's Ministries

## Children's Ministry

Godly Play lies at the heart of First Presbyterian's Children's Ministry and is more than just curriculum that we follow during the Sunday school and Children's Church hours. We use the Godly Play philosophy to help us build spiritual foundations in our children as well as plan purposeful and enriching activities and opportunities for the children throughout the year.



We begin Godly Play every Sunday morning with the children building a circle and getting ready to hear and experience a story from the Bible. After the story, the storyteller wonders out loud with the children - "I wonder what part of the story you liked best, I wonder what is the most important part of the story, I wonder where you see yourself in the story, I wonder if there are any parts of the story which we could leave out and still have everything we need?" This "wondering time" is an important part of the Godly Play routine. It provides an opportunity for children to safely explore the story further and to think out loud in a supportive circle of friends about what the story might personally mean to them.

As we begin our third full year of Godly Play, you may be wondering what Godly Play is doing or has done for our children. I would like to share with you a couple of very sweet moments that have happened in Children's Ministry because of Godly Play...

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### Holy Baptism

It was a special Sunday morning in worship, a baby was being baptized. The children were invited to sit up front so that they could see and meet the newest member of the church. After the baptism, we gathered together in the Children's Chapel and got ready for the Godly Play Holy Baptism story. The children listened intently and watched in wonder as the story began.



"We baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... The Holy Spirit goes where it will. It flies on the invisible wind like the dove. The Holy Spirit comes to us when we need comfort and power. It is invisible, like the scent in this oil. It is invisible, but it is there." (Godly Play Story, Holy Baptism)

To better understand this part of the story - the Holy Spirit being with us even though we cannot see it - the children pass a little jar of oil around the circle taking turns smelling the invisible scent. On this particular Sunday morning as the oil was being passed around, it stopped at one very curious five-year-old. He took in a deep breath of the oil and looked up in amazement with his big brown eyes and exclaimed "it's in there, it's in there!" In that moment, it was obvious that this child had made a meaningful connection to the Holy Spirit.

### The Good Shepherd and World Communion

On another Sunday morning, the children watched and listened as the storyteller brought all the people of the world to the table ...

"This is the table of the Good Shepherd. Here is the bread and the juice of the Good Shepherd. Sometimes it seems like we need to have a little statue or something on the table to remind us that this is the table of the Good Shepherd, but the Good Shepherd is in the bread and the juice, so we don't really need anything to remind us. Sometimes someone comes to read the very words of the Good Shepherd, and to give us the bread and the juice. Sometimes the people of the world come to this table, and even the children come."

(Godly Play Story, The Good Shepherd and World Communion)



After Godly Play, a little girl walked with her mother to the sanctuary. As she got ready for worship, she looked around and noticed the trays of bread and juice on the table just like she had seen in the Godly Play story earlier that morning. She leaned over to her mother with a great big smile and said, "This is my favorite part! My favorite part of worship is the BREAD!" Now we all know that children and even us adults don't mind a little snack during worship, especially when we are getting hungry for lunch. However, in that moment, this child knew she was invited to the same table-- the Lord's Table-- that her parents were also invited to. This feast we call Communion and the gift of life that God gave us was for her, a child just as much as it was for the adults.

Godly Play doesn't just tell stories of the Bible or explain the Holy Sacraments through words. Godly Play invites children to truly experience, to see and feel, to smell and taste, and to personally connect to the sacred stories of the Bible. Thank you, First Presbyterian, for continuing to give the gift of Godly Play to our children.

Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

## Director of Weekday School

During the 2018-2019 school year (the last complete school year to date), the Weekday School provided preschool services for 129 children. The Weekday School enjoyed a wonderful teaching staff as follows:



Pre-K/Early Five's (4 or 5 Day)	Carol Norton and Caroline Gravely
Three's (4 or 5 Day)	Cindy Boerma and Diana Maxwell
Three's (3 Day)	Kellye Burks and Suzanne Bowles
Two's (4 or 5 Day)	Jennifer Cummings and Hannah Allen
Two's (2 or 3 Day)	Melissa Miller, Kate Beall, and Jessica Barr
Early Two's (2- 5 Day)	Megan Lewis and Liz Clark
MMO Toddler (2-5 Day)	Mary Grant, Joanna Lawrence, Melinda Miller, and Rebecca Carlton
MMO Baby (2-5 Day)	Cheryl Fields, Melissa Nichols, Mia Lee and Carmen Meadows
Spanish	Melissa Miller
Music	Teresa Granger
Art	Robin Nunan
Admin Asst	Tiffany Greene

The best in early childhood education was provided to the children in the classes listed above by our teachers.

Ballet classes continue to be offered from noon to one for three's and four's through Alice DePass Dance Studios. Kindermusik is also offered during this time, with Jennifer Cummings as teacher. Something new in the spring for "afterschool" was an Art offering by Robin Nunan. It was well received and will be offered in the fall.

Lunch Bunch is offered Monday through Fridays to those at least two years old. Early Birds have been offered again this year, allowing a few children to come as early as 8:00 a.m. to meet parental work schedule needs. The Weekday School succeeded in retaining our accreditation, providing 14 hours of continuing education for our teachers during the year, most of which occurs at our annual early childhood conference in Atlanta.

We are happy to have been able to offer partial scholarships for five Weekday School teacher's children, and eight children from the community. While the school continues to be grateful for church funds covering our need based scholarships in the community, the school itself was able to provide scholarships for the teachers' children.

The Weekday School had a wonderful LIVE NATIVITY for the school and church families, as well as the community in December of 2019. The church members and staff helped in many ways with this. We had over 1200 people enjoy the story of the birth of Jesus in these unique, hands on way. WILDLIFE WONDERS of Cleveland, Georgia brought the animals; we had live music in the courtyard and the Weekday School lobby, Christmas art projects for children in the school classrooms as well as the Children's Ministry Suite. Hot chocolate, courtesy of ESP's Java Joy, and animal crackers were a treat well received outside! It was a well enjoyed event for all! This was our 8th annual Live Nativity!🙏

The Weekday School continues to strive to be the best provider of preschool education in the Athens area.

June 2019 began my 12th year as Weekday School Director. I truly consider it my dream job, as it IS a dream to do what you love and to know you are helping little ones grow and thrive! What a blessing the Weekday School is to me, and to the children of Athens, Georgia!

Elaine Johnson, *Weekday School Director*

## Church Administrator

While a more comprehensive discussion of the church's financial results is contained elsewhere in this report, I am pleased to note that, once again, the staff kept expenses well within 2019 budgeted amounts.



When the renovation was begun in 2008/2010 one of our building goals was to increase the availability of our newly expanded facility to members and the Athens community. In response to that goal, in addition to regular Sunday worship services, Sunday school and Wed@First programs, special dinners and lunches at Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the Annual Meeting/Dinner have been hosted in Fellowship Hall. As we continue to host events for community groups and weddings, every year more than 70 different groups meet in various parts of the church, often within hours of each other in the same space, requiring setting up, taking down, reorganizing and often cleaning! It takes many hands to accomplish this, and thanks to our wonderful staff, reliable cleaning crews, subcontractors, and mostly our members' generosity, we are able to share our facilities.

Some of our community groups meet regularly on a weekly, monthly and/or annual basis, including Alcoholics Anonymous, AIDS Athens Board and Athens Youth Symphony. In particular, the symphony is grateful to have the space for their practice since we can also house their often large instruments. The PIT has been able to provide space for Family Promise (formerly Interfaith Hospitality Network of Athens), by hosting families four times a year for a week. With the AthHalf Marathon in October and the Live Nativity in December we see well over 500 people coming to share our spaces with a service and experience a meaningful expression of the holidays.

As we celebrate our 200th anniversary it is exciting to be a part of this vibrant community and working with this staff and First Pres congregation.

Roger Burbage

*Church Administrator*

## Administration Commission

Commission Members: Chair Carl Nichols, Michelle Clendenin-Shaw, Mixon Robinson, Joe Hermanowicz, Sydney Jackson, Avery McClean, Chris Pope, Senior Pastor Ryan Baer and Church Administrator Roger Burbage.

*The purpose of the Administration Commission is to manage the resources God has entrusted us, maintain our assets with care, and love and nurture our personnel. Four Teams comprise the Administration Commission and each Team is charged with specific responsibilities in Finance, Nominations & Elections, Personnel and Property.*

We viewed the successful administration of all church functions during this year as vital to the ongoing effort to continue our growth as a congregation, the maintenance of our facilities and the faithful management of our financial resources. To that end, the Administration Commission is proud to report:

- We set a realistic operating budget for 2019 and our revenue and expenses were better than budgeted. We are grateful for the efforts of our Church Staff in holding down costs.
- We organized our four standing committees naming active Ruling Elders as committee chairs while trying to get other Church members involved in the committee activities. We believe this will give the opportunity to serve to more members and present a format that will allow members to be involved in various committee activities as a precursor to possibly serving as Elders in the Church.
- The Property Committee was organized with Chris Pope as the Committee Chair, with Richard Stone, Smith Wilson, Diane Adams, Carl Nichols and Roger Burbage constituting the remaining committee members. As you might imagine with a historical building such as ours, this is one of the most active committees in our church! At any given time, repairs and maintenance occur on a regular basis, often going unnoticed – unless the Christmas wreaths have been removed from the front doors during a recent painting! Some recent completed projects, in addition to the replacing and repainting of the doors around the building, include repairing and repainting the porch columns and raising the balcony railing in the sanctuary. We often don't realize how many people sit in the balcony on a regular basis, and when this railing was raised so many commented on how much they appreciated it!
- The Personnel Committee members were Joe Hermanowicz as the Chair, Bill Bushnell, Jimbo LaBoon, Elizabeth Earl, Mary Havick, and Sydney Jackson rounded out the committee. This committee was busy this year due to some staff changes, and their input was invaluable to the support of the staff of First Presbyterian Church.
- In 2019, the Chair of the Finance Committee was Carl Nichols, and the other members were Jim Dove, Michael Earl, Lisa Oelke, Christopher Bruner, Scott Collins, Ryan Baer and Roger Burbage. Launching the campaign to eliminate the remaining renovation debt was the most notable action of this committee. To date, the campaign has already eliminated \$1.7 million in outstanding principal, and we are rapidly approaching our goal of being a debt-free congregation. With the support of the whole congregation pledges and contributions have been and continue to be successful and will continue into 2020. It is exciting to see such great participation by our congregation as we celebrate our 200th anniversary!

Carl Nichols, *Administration Commission Chair*

## Congregational Care Commission Report

Commission Members: Greta Covington, chair, Jeff Bangle, Jane McGown, Jeanne Nadenicek, Bill Patterson, Judy Scanlon, Arlene Shirley, Lawton Stephens, Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*, Madeline Van Dyck, *Parish Nurse*, and Lucy Bell Johnson, *Church Staff Liaison*

*The mission of the Congregational Care Commission is to nurture, care and respond to the needs of the congregation. Our committee and its multitude of volunteers have been hard at work to do just that. From breaking down flowers after Sunday service and delivering them to those who might need a little lift, to providing rides to those who may not otherwise be able to attend church functions, the ministries of the CCC are aimed at sharing God's love with all of our members.*

Major efforts for the committee this year include launching an "At Home Communion" ministry where Elders leave church each communion Sunday and deliver the Lord's Supper to members who can not attend Sunday service. Twenty members have enjoyed sharing communion and a visit with our Session leaders, and many – both Elders and those being served – have commented on how meaningful it has been. Two members who have received the Lord's Supper through this program have passed on to the Church Triumphant. Their families have commented on how grateful they are for this ministry. We are grateful to the members of the Session for their loving and thoughtful participation and to the staff for their expertise and organization for helping initiate this effort.



The Annual Christmas Tea is a favorite of our senior members, and this year did not disappoint. Eighty attendees enjoyed beautiful decorations, delicious tea, fancy finger sandwiches and cookies, a moving message from Ryan, and a fabulous sing-along with The Mellows. Older members enjoyed the beauty of the place and the wonderful fellowship, and the carols brought great joy to all. It took many hands to prepare for the event, and every hostess, baker, caroler and kitchen helper played a part in creating something very special.



When we received the terrible news about Dr. Kipp the members of our congregation were seeking ways to help support and love John and Sara and their family. "Love Notes" were collected weekly, the Mellows delivered the gift of song and members of the congregation prepared and delivered more than sixty meals during his illness. It was only a small way to show John and Sara how our congregation cares, but our members shared and received joy by sharing meals with the Kipps, praying with them and enjoying time together.

Another initiative of the CCC was the launch of a "Grand Connections" ministry that connects older members of our congregation with young families to enjoy time together. Eight pairs have been connected and each has been encouraged to share a meal, sit together at church and attend a church event together. Many in our congregation have families living far away, and there is great hope that these multi-generational relationships will be meaningful and uplifting.

Our Stephen Ministers are providing one-on-one, Christ centered support to congregation members in need. This Fall, ten new Stephen Ministers have been trained to compliment the care and compassion being shared through the existing program. Our Stephen Ministers and the program coordinators are giving countless hours of time to share God's love with our congregants.

Our Lay Callers support our Associate Pastor and Parish Associate by visiting members in the hospital, in senior care facilities and those who are homebound. This ministry of visitation provides an important touch to those who are not able to be with us on Sunday morning.

With firm belief in the power of prayer, we pray for one another both at our Prayers for Healing Services on Wednesdays at 12:30 pm in the sanctuary, and through our Prayer Chain that sends prayer requests out to 173 members. Our Correspondence Team sends cards to members in times of joy and sadness to remind them that their church family cares, and our Response Teams are called into action when members are in need of meals as well as planning receptions to follow funeral services in our church.

The CCC ministries employ a strong and large group of caring members who give of themselves to nurture and share God's love with our church family. This care and compassion is an important part of who we are at First Presbyterian Church of Athens. The efforts of these members coupled with the amazing work of our dedicated and capable staff, remind our members of God's loving presence in the world.

Greta Covington, *Congregational Care Commission Chair*

## Education & Discipleship Commission

Commission Members: Mary Peace, Chair, Kathy Bangle, Meghan Bawcum, Sandy Boyles, Carla Buss, Jill Crim, Elizabeth Earl, Kendall Kookogey, Christine Register, Jerry Rogers, Jim Scanlon, Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*, Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

*The Education and Discipleship Commission is charged with the following responsibilities: Church Nursery, Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School (all ages), Middle School and High School Youth Group, Confirmation Class, Wednesday@First/Fellowship@First programming, Bible studies, small groups, and the Church Library.*



We are fortunate that at First Presbyterian Church our ministers, staff, Session and congregation are so supportive of our mission to “seek the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rejoice in worship, and go forth sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world!” That this begins in the nursery and extends throughout our lives is very evident in our church. We are grateful for our abundance of resources and wonderful facilities that allow us to continue to grow and expand our educational efforts.

### **Adult Education**

The church is our extended family, but our Sunday class is our immediate family (but this time you get to choose your immediate family). It is Sunday school that allows us to get personal while discussing the Bible and Jesus' teachings. We find out that we are not the only ones who question or disagree with the Bible. We discover that those who disagree with us, provide us with good thoughts to ponder and that we can learn something from them. In Sunday school we grow in our understanding of the scriptures, in Christ's love and in how we should live our lives in Athens and the world. We learn that we can disagree and still be friends.

To paraphrase one class member: “my class looks after me in sickness, provides a shoulder(s) to cry/lean on in times of trouble and misses me when I'm not there.”

Below are personal stories from members of First Presbyterian adult Sunday School classes:

*Our first connection with First Presbyterian Church of Athens was through the Weekday School for our youngest son. Thus, it is fitting that we write about Sunday School and the educational aspect of this church.*

*Before we officially joined, we participated in many church activities with our children. We took advantage of the adult Sunday School classes being offered at the same time as the children's Godly Play. Our whole family came to be nourished by the wisdom and intellect of the church community. We felt very fortunate, and we are especially grateful that our path led us to the New Voices Sunday School class. The group respectfully challenges our thinking, encourages us to dig deeper*

*into the analysis of our spiritual selves, and brings comic relief when the many ways to interpret the Bible would otherwise leave us with worrisome contradictions.*

*The mission of our church is to create a community in seeking the truth of the gospels, and we have felt included in this endeavor, encouraged by every interaction we have had with this church. From the Weekday School to Godly Play and the Christmas Pageant, and from our New Voices class to the sermons and singing in the Chancel Choir, we are motivated to inquire and gain a better understanding of Christianity, being surrounded by examples of the love we should have for one another. We are grateful to the New Voices Sunday School class and the wonderful First Presbyterian Church community as a whole for this valuable educational experience.*

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*I've been on the Mission/Outreach Commission for a number of years, so I'm familiar with First Presbyterian's many efforts to aid people outside our church--from those just down or across the street to those thousands of miles away. I also know that individuals in organizations helping "outsiders" often need nurturing from members of their own group. For decades Ginny and I have enjoyed exploring scripture and developing our faith in the Christian Issues Sunday school class. Our fellow members have sustained us throughout the struggle and loss of our beloved son-in-law to cancer. During any of our members' time of need, the class responds with prayers, words of condolence or encouragement, cards, food, and gifts. Sometimes, because of our mission to make the world a better place, we may forget we have to administer to the needs and sufferings of our church family as well. In our Sunday school class--and I'm sure in all the others at First Presbyterian - members gain spiritual strength and fellowship needed to be followers of Christ outside the church.*

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*I am in the W.D. Hooper Sunday School class studying Revelation. Though we are a small group, I think this has benefits. We are at ease expressing our thoughts, have gotten to know one another, and most importantly, have become friends. Sunday School to me means learning from the Bible and sharing Christian love for one another.*

*Mary Peace, Education & Discipleship Commission Chair*



## Fellowship & Evangelism Commission

**Commission Mission Statement:** *The Fellowship and Evangelism Commission provides growth opportunities for our members to connect and build relationships with one another outside of the regular Church and Sunday school time. The commission also welcomes guests to our church, invites them to become part of our family, encourages new members, and communicates about the life of the church with the larger community.*

**Fellowship and Evangelism includes:** Most Church wide dinners and receptions, Fellowship@First Wednesday Night Dinners, Atrium Refreshments, Annual Picnic, Red Coat Band Picnic, First Things (New Member Class) and Reception, Sports Teams, Presbyterian Women, First Friends, Primetime Presbyterians (PTP's), New Member engagement and Evangelism efforts.

**Commission Members:** Grace Lu, Dan Trier, Rosemary Stancil, Chair

The purpose of **Atrium Refreshments** is to invite those who attend the 11 o'clock worship service to linger a few moments to visit with each other and to give a personal welcome to visitors. These light refreshments are provided by volunteers from the congregation. Many thanks to Grace who coordinated and scheduled volunteers and to everyone who helped provide atrium refreshments.

**Fellowship@First (Wednesday night dinners)** has been an example of volunteers coming together to sustain a fellowship opportunity they enjoy and value. After Wednesday night dinners had been discontinued for a while, one church member who missed having the dinners, took on the responsibility of restarting them. She recruited eight others to help. With the Fellowship and Evangelism Commission, they worked to restore our outstanding but neglected kitchen to a functioning purposeful one. They prepared and served 6 Lenten dinners which were so well received that 9 additional dinners were planned for the fall. Many hands make light work. In addition to cooking and serving dinners, many members contributed by setting tables, making tea and coffee, baking desserts, welcoming and checking people in, setting-up and cleaning-up. Approximately 110+ people came to each of the 15 dinners. Wed@First has been a fellowship opportunity for those preparing for the meals as well as for those attending. Join us in Fellowship Hall in 2020! Join the fun in the kitchen!



**The Red Coat Band picnic** in November was clearly an activity many families, about 100 people, enjoyed. It was a casual picnic on UGA ball fields where children ran and played together and adults visited with each other in the backdrop of the UGA Red Coat Band practicing its half time show for Saturday's game. Grace was the most popular person there having thoughtfully brought popsicles for all the children on that warm day. A big thank you to Dan who coordinated this picnic and also recruited Presbyterian Men to help set-up and clean-up for special events.

Three highlight events were **Maundy Thursday Dinner, Easter Brunch and Christmas Dinner** which were made possible by many hands. These were all well attended and added to our corporate and personal celebrations of these great events. Many thanks to all who lent a hand as well, and to those who supported the Church Picnic, Fall Brunch, First Things, Sports Teams, Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Men, First Friends and Primetime Presbyterians (PTP's).

Rosemary Stancil, *Fellowship & Evangelism Commission Chair*

## Mission & Outreach Commission

Commission Members: Robbie Bryan, Chair, Denise Horton, Rob Haire, Julie Hayes, Mary Burton, Bertis Downs, Ann Dunn, Brenda Glasscock, Sydney Jackson, Richard Lane, Joe Neighbors, Tom Reigle, Jerry Rogers, Sally Vandiver, Tom Wilfong, Frank Sherrill, Carol Strickland, Associate Pastor

Many lives were touched by First Presbyterian Church's generous congregation in 2019. Through gifts of money, time, leadership, and commitment we were faithful in our mission of "sharing the love of Christ with Athens and the world."

### VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Volunteer commitment and time are critical to our ministry. First Presbyterian members donated thousands of hours in volunteer work in 2019. This includes those who worked year-round in various endeavors. The **IHNA Team**, headed by Frank Sherrill and Susan Boatwright, together with the dozens who volunteered to serve as overnight hosts, drivers, and meal providers, enabled our congregation to host 11 homeless families (40 guests) at our church for four weeks. For each of those host weeks we filled 94 volunteer tasks for a total of 376 volunteers throughout the year.

Monthly drives on "**Food Sundays**" for the Athens-Area Emergency Food Bank, coordinated by Kitty Donnan, as well the food drive during the Stewardship/ Thanksgiving campaign, tallied to roughly 9,222 cans/items of non-perishable food that the First Presbyterian congregation donated during this year. Carol Robinson led a team (Fran Lane, Judy Howell, and Ann Dunn) who bought, prepared, and served lunch to a crowd of about a hundred at **Our Daily Bread** once a month for much of the year as the organization underwent major reorganization. Six times during the year, members, under the direction of Sydney Jackson, provided meals to approximately 30 students at the **Presbyterian Student Center** at UGA. Volunteers from the church, coordinated by Kitty Donnan, continue to work quarterly at the **Project Safe Thrift Store**. Robbie Bryan is leading the monthly effort to prepare 60 sack meals that are distributed by the **Athens Area Homeless Day Center** to individuals who frequently are unable to obtain food on the weekends.



We are grateful for the volunteer efforts that supported special events during the year. Nearly 30 units of blood were collected during what has now become our church's annual **Red Cross Blood Drive**, held in February and coordinated by Joe Neighbors. First Presbyterian continues to pay for and serve **Meals on Wheels at the holidays** (Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve) coordinated by Sally Vandiver. More than 100 FPC families provided Christmas for Athens area children with the **Salvation Army Christmas Angel project**. In 2019, approximately 120 children "angels" were provided for through this program, as coordinated by Sandy Boyles. In December, with financial gifts from congregation members and the help of several volunteers, we packaged 104 boxes of food valued at \$40 each that were shared with low-income Latino families through a partnership with **Casa de Amistad**. A check for \$148.14 was also sent to Casa de Amistad. **The Holiday Benevolence Market**, was held at our church this year for the 25<sup>th</sup> year. It was an amazing success with the donations of \$23,298 to the 26 participating non-profit organizations.

First Presbyterian Church **youth**, under the leadership of Kim Ness, participated in numerous outreach projects. As part of an ongoing effort to increase interactions between our youth and adults in mission outreach, the planning for traveling

and the funding of a trip to Puerto Rico in June 2020. In March, the first Biennial Mardi Gras Mission Gala (MGMG) was held to raise funds for the Puerto Rico trip. \$14,139 was raised during the MGMG. Our **children**, under the leadership of Natalie Bishop, raised \$362.32 for UNICEF and then raised over \$1000 to purchase animals for Heifer International's Fill the Ark Program. The children also "stuffed" many turkeys offering envelopes full of quarters for Thornwell Homes for Children in November.

### **OUR BUILDING USE**

The church building is available and used by the community often. This year, we opened our Children's Ministry Suite to our neighbors in Bethel Homes as the monthly meeting space for the **Bethel Homes Literary Project**. **Alcoholics Anonymous** and **NAMI** (National Alliance on Mental Illness) meet regularly at the church. **Recitals** are held at the church by community members and we provide rehearsal space for the **Athens Youth Symphony**. From time to time, the **University of Georgia** and other organizations use the church space for classes. The church was again open for **Christmas Parade of Lights** to give parade participants an opportunity to use the restrooms and warm up with hot chocolate. The Mission and Outreach Commission also coordinated our **AthHalf** race worship and water station.

### **MISSION SUPPORT**

As a PC(USA) congregation, we support our denomination's mission. We do this through our contribution to **general benevolences** in addition to our per capita assessment. This supports the ministry of Northeast Georgia Presbytery, the Synod of the Southeast, and the General Assembly Mission Agency. From underwriting mission personnel in more than fifty countries who are focusing on initiatives in reconciliation, evangelism, and global poverty to promoting causes in the United States like child advocacy and education, we are spreading God's love in tangible ways. As a connectional church, we support other Presbyterian ministries such as the **Presbyterian Student Center at UGA**, **Columbia Theological Seminary**, and **Montreat**.

We are also **ecumenical**. In 2019, we gave support to **Greek Intervarsity** and **Young Life**.

Our church has had a commitment for the past fifty years to early childhood education through our **Weekday School**. In addition to housing and providing many support services to our Weekday School, the church awards some partial scholarships for families in need.

Under the rubric of Mission Support, funding for the above ministries totaled \$138,064.

### **OUTREACH GRANTS**

Through the generous support of our members, we are able to offer **grants to organizations** working to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. We especially focus on groups working in the areas of poverty, health, and education. Our grant application now can be filled out online at our website. In 2019 the following groups received a grant:

- **The Ark** – responds to neighbors in need of material and personal support (rent, utilities, prescription medications, etc.)
- **Athens Community Council on Aging/Meals on Wheels** – fosters independent living, good nutrition, and support to home bound adults
- **Athens Emergency Food Bank** – provides emergency food assistance to those in crisis.
- **Athens Neighborhood Health Center** – offers primary health care for indigent, homeless, low-income, and those without insurance
- **Athens Nurses Clinic** – offers safety-net care for acute and chronic medical and dental conditions to uninsured low and no-income residents
- **Athens Tutorial Program** – provides one-on-one tutoring for elementary, middle and high school students
- **Bethlehem Ministry** – aids Terrier Rouge, Haiti's poor with health care, education, jobs and food
- **Casa de Amistad** – identifies and addresses the needs of the under-served Hispanic community.
- **Clarke County Mentor Program** – matches caring adults with children who would benefit from their interaction
- **Extra Special People** – enhances the lives of children with developmental disabilities and their families by focusing on their abilities—not disabilities

- **Food Bank of Northeast Georgia** – A non-profit organization that recovers donated and salvaged surplus food and distributes it to agencies for redistribution to residents in need.
- **Jubilee Partners** – A Christian Service Community that focuses on hosting refugees who have newly arrived in the United States.
- **Family Promise of Athens (IHNA)** – works with congregations to help families without homes, with children under 18, to achieve sustainable independence
- **Project Safe** – works to end domestic violence through crisis intervention, supportive service, prevention and education

We have a fund to be used for **unforeseen needs**. In 2019 we bought supplies for our Family Promise of Athens (formerly IHNA) hospitality, paid for a meal for the Bethel Homes residents, funded hurricane recovery and repair efforts, planned for a future mission trip to Puerto Rico in 2020, and begin planning for a Soul Shop suicide prevention workshop in January 2021.

Under the rubric of Outreach Grants, funding for the above ministries totaled \$80,436.

### **SPECIAL OFFERINGS**

Additional funds were raised by special offerings for:

- Souper Bowl of Caring – \$ 1,304.83
- One Great Hour of Sharing – \$2,049
- Mother’s Day Offering – to help support people who live in Presbyterian Homes and have run out of money or are on Medicare Coverage -- \$1,644
- Pentecost Offering –\$894
- Peace and Global Witness Offering – \$1,082 25% of the offering goes to a local peacemaking effort; –
- Thornwell Home – \$2,920.80
- Christmas Joy Offering – \$ 1,321
- Christmas Eve Offering – 50% went to support Meals on Wheels and 50% was given to the NEGA Food Bank Food to Kids program – \$5,017

These donations add up to \$20,324.

### **TOTAL MISSION AND OUTREACH GIVING**

**The grand total of dollars from mission support, outreach grants, and special offerings amounts to \$238,824 (\$216,111 in 2018).** This is in addition to numerous in-kind gifts and donations for various causes raised by groups in the church such as Sunday school classes, Presbyterian Women, children (e.g. UNICEF), the Holiday Benevolence Market, etc. Thank you for your wonderful generosity!!

Robbie Bryan, *Mission & Outreach Commission Co-Chair*

## Worship & Music Commission

Commission Members: Bob Burton, Chair, DeeAnn Cox, Bob Glasscock, Mary Havick, Dr. Ryan Baer, Senior Pastor, and Dr. John Coble, Director of Music and Organist

Two notable, life changing, experiences of the past year involved taking communion to our homebound members and our participating in the Live Nativity.

Shortly after we resumed taking communion to homebound members, Judy Scanlon and I took communion to Ruby Hodgson, one of our oldest members, who at the time was blind and recently died in January 2020. Ruby had been one of our most faithful members who always sat in the farthest back corner on the Post Office side of the sanctuary. She was often the first person to arrive. Judy and I recall that as choir members we would always look for her, and we told her how much we missed her now that she was unable to be at church. As we served communion, Judy handed her the bread first and then held the cup up to her lips. We were all moved by this simple act of remembrance. I am so glad that we have resumed this meaningful practice.



On December 10, we presented our annual live nativity which is open to the wider Athens community. Different adults read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus about every 15 minutes. Between readings I played Christmas Carols on classical guitar. It was a very chilly night and I could barely keep my fingers warm enough using cycling gloves. After the first hour or so, when it was time for the next reading, I looked toward the microphone and saw young Jimmy Bishop looking longingly at the mic. I noticed that he was dressed in shorts but did not seem to mind the cold. I asked him if he would like to read and he indicated that he would. His father also encouraged him. He stood close to the mic and read beautifully. Every word was clear and distinct; it was one of the best readings of the evening. Jimmy Bishop brought the word of God to parents and children, many of whom are not members of our church.

Bob Burton, *Worship & Music Commission Chair*

## 2020 Communion Schedule

Sunday, January 5	January Communion
Thursday, January 9	Session Worship
Friday, January 31	Session Retreat Communion
Sunday, February 2	February Communion
Thursday, February 13	Session Worship

Wednesday, February 26	Ash Wednesday
Sunday, March 1	March Communion
Thursday, March 12	Session Worship
Sunday, April 5	April Communion
Thursday, April 9	Maundy Thursday Communion
Thursday, April 16	Session Worship
Sunday, May 3	May Communion, Scottish Reformation Sunday
Thursday, May 14	Session Worship
Friday, June 5	Puerto Rico Mission Trip
Sunday, June 7	June Communion
Thursday, June 11	Session Worship
Sunday, July 5	July Communion
Sunday, August 2	August Communion
Thursday, August 13	Session Worship
Sunday, September 6	September Communion
Thursday, September 10	Session Worship
Sunday, October 4	World Communion Sunday
Thursday, October 8	Session Worship
Sunday, November 1	November Communion
Thursday, November 12	Session Worship
Sunday, December 6	December Communion
Thursday, December 10	Session Worship
Thursday, December 24	Christmas Eve (2 services)
Sunday, January 3, 2021	First Sunday of the New Year

## Nominations and Elections Committee

Committee Members: Sydney Jackson, Chair, Meghan Bawcum, Co-Chair, Eve Morris, Jo Carol Nessel-Sale, Chuck Toney, and Madeline Van-Dyck

*“The function of the Nominations and Elections Committee is to nominate congregational members for the Session, the Church Nominating Committee, the Pastor/Associate Pastors Search Committees and any other committees requested by Session.”* (Session Handbook)

In 2019 the Nominations and Elections Committee was tasked with the job of nominating congregational members to the Elder class of 2022. Committee members met with Dr. Ryan Baer to review prospective candidates nominated by the congregation.

Contact was initiated, prayers were offered, and the following ten First Presbyterian members emerged as nominees for the Ruling Elder Class of 2022.

Karen Burg  
Jill Crim  
Kitty Donnan  
Larry Jones  
Andy Jordan  
Jimbo LaBoon  
Tom Landrum  
Beverly Phares  
Courtney Pittman  
Smith Wilson

Elected by acclamation at the September 15, 2019 Called Congregational Meeting. Nine elders-elect were examined by the Session on December 15, 2019 at a Called Session Meeting. One member will be examined at a future date. Along with the entire congregation, the members of the 2019 Nominations and Elections Committee celebrate the confirmation of the Elder Class of 2022.

Sydney Jackson, *Nominations & Elections Committee Chair*

## Congratulations on the Births of:

Nathan Richard Delinsky

Colin Albert Welch

Ansley Elizabeth Boyles

Cora Diane Epting

Sutton Elizabeth Griffeth

Clara Keen Frias

## We welcome our new members in 2019:

Mary and Michael Adams

Judy Anderson

Steve Brooks

Kent Burel

Cathy and Les Crawford

Carson Hill

Carol Jeanne and Coleman Hood

Jill and Mark Hopkins

Angela & Kyle Hunt

Julie & Lance Jagmin

Dottie Kimbrell

Jane Kimbrell

Peggy McGlasson

Tommye O'Brien

Sarah Olney

Jennifer Poole

David Coker and Sharon Price

Susan & Randy Riner

Paulo Santos

Margaret & Adam Sapp

Billy Stone

Johnathan Wilson



In Memoriam:

Leita Pittard Cobb

Bettye Hendrix Fabris

William Robert Hardell, Sr.

Sylvia Brown Jensen

Everett Edward Jones

Judson Carl Kilpatrick

John Lewis Kipp

Jeffie Rowland

Hannah Moore Smith

## Session

Ryan Baer, *Moderator*, Richard Lane, *Clerk of Session*, Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

### Class of 2019

Robbie Bryan  
Greta Terrell Covington  
DeeAnn Cox  
Bob Glasscock  
Mary Havick  
Joe Hermanowicz  
Richard Lane  
Mary Peace  
Lawton Stephens  
Dan Trier

### Class of 2020

Jeff Bangle  
Meghan Bawcum  
Bob Burton  
Julie Hayes  
Sydney Jackson  
Avery McLean  
Jeanne Nadenicek  
Carl Nichols  
Tom Reigle  
Judy Scanlon

### Class of 2021

Jennifer Walden Abbott  
Sandy Boyles  
Michelle Clendenen-Shaw  
Elizabeth Earl  
Ed Ferguson  
Rob Haire  
Grace Lu  
Chris Pope  
Mixon Robinson  
Rosemary Stancil

## Staff

Dr. Ryan Baer, *Senior Pastor*

Dr. Carol Strickland, *Associate Pastor*

The Rev. Margaret Davis, *Parish Associate*

Dr. John Coble, *Director of Music and Organist*

Mrs. Kim Ness, *Director of Youth Ministries*

Mrs. Natalie Bishop, *Director of Children's Ministries*

Mrs. Elaine Johnson, *Director of Weekday School*

Mr. Roger Burbage, *Church Administrator*

Mrs. Lucy Bell Johnson, *Administrative Assistant for Congregational Care & Membership*

Mr. Paulo Santos, *Communications Specialist*

Mrs. Jennifer Sunderlin, *Receptionist/Administrative Assistant*

Ms. Katherine Worsham, *Accountant*

Mrs. Marcy Fabris, *Weekday School Administrative Assistant*

Ms. Rita Raines, *Nursery Coordinator*

Mrs. Charlotte Chromiak, *Children's Music Assistant*

Ms. Rebecca Carlton, *Sunday Morning Manager*

Mrs. Madeline Van Dyck, *Parish Nurse*

### College Interns

Ms. Pavani Gadde, *Website Technician, 2019*

Ms. Kathryn Kent, *Middle School Ministry, 2019*

Ms. Jordan Osborne, *Youth Ministry, 2019-20*

Ms. Natalie Siegman, *High School Ministry, 2019-20*

### Waddel Fellows

Ms. Emmaline Michael, *Mission & Outreach,*  
*2019-20*

Ms. Leighton Parker, *High School Ministry, 2019-20*