

VOLUME 68, ISSUE 12

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WACO

# THE DECEMBER TOWER



[www.jakebaddeley.com](http://www.jakebaddeley.com)

**Jake Baddeley - Out of the Box - oil on canvas**

# LETTER FROM A PASTOR

So many boxes. Maybe they are recycled and stored in your home for that next time you need to collect a few things together. Maybe they are the boxes that arrive by delivery for Christmas gifts. Maybe the boxes are already full and tucked away for the generations, full of keepsakes and memories. So many boxes to hold, organize, and anticipate our lives.

Civilizations like Egypt, Rome, and Greece used wooden storage boxes. The Chinese invented cardboard in the 1500s, but it was not until 1817 that the first paperboard box was made in England. In 1879 the foldable cardboard box was invented. From wood to cardboard to plastics in the 1950s and 1960s and continuing to today, the intent to store, keep, and share has often required this invention...the box.

Boxes may also be metaphorical. The identity boxes we live in can be packaged tight and sealed. The urge to open our identities to something different can feel like betrayal to what has been treasured. Even so, what is a box if it is not occasionally opened, rummaged, celebrated, sorted, and rearranged? Who we think we "should be" could be likened to a sort of boxing-in by others' expectations. Who we long to be might be likened to the flattened box that waits for the right or maybe even perfect moment...ever stored and sometimes never used. The shame we feel can be boxed. In its gentle uncovering and brushing away residue, we can see it is less shame and more vulnerability. The honor we feel can be boxed as well. Breaking the seal and revisiting the honorable experiences unfurls a whole landscape of memories of those who participated in our experience of honor.

For all the gifts you will unbox this season, I pray it is not only around a Christmas tree. I am reminded of the wisemen of scripture who presented inspirational gifts with lids opened as if to remind us, "Don't box the baby!" That baby would one day and still does remind us not to box ourselves in. Out of the box this December and on into 2026!



*Faithfully, Leslie King*

# DECEMBER CALENDAR

**Wednesday, December 3rd**  
Youth Christmas Party, 6:00pm – Cooper House  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00pm  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00pm

**Thursday, December 4th**  
Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00am – Choir Room  
Finance Committee Meeting, 12:00pm

**Friday December 5th**  
Reel Spirituality, 6:00pm – Pinewood  
2223 Austin Ave Suite D

**Saturday, December 6th**  
Lessons & Carols, 7:00pm – Sanctuary

**Sunday, December 7th**  
Worship, 8:30am – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15am  
Worship, 10:30am – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30am

**Monday, December 8th**  
Presbyterian Women, 1:00pm – Fellowship Hall  
Joint S&D Meeting, 5:30pm – Fellowship Hall

**Tuesday, December 9th**  
Faith on Tap, 6:00pm – One Day Bar  
618 Columbus Ave STE B, Waco, TX 76701

**Wednesday, December 10th**  
Forman Fund Meeting, 11:00am – Zoom  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00pm  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00pm

**Thursday, December 11th**  
Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00am – Choir Room

**Sunday, December 14th**  
Worship, 8:30am – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15am  
Worship, 10:30am – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30am  
Posada, 5:00pm

**Wednesday, December 17th**  
Bell Choir Christmas Party, 7:00pm  
Choir Christmas Party, 7:00pm

**Thursday, December 18th**  
Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00am – Choir Room

**Friday, December 19th**  
Men's Breakfast, 7:30am – Fellowship Hall

**Saturday, December 20th**  
Soup & Caroling, 3:00pm

**Sunday, December 21st**  
Worship, 8:30am – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15am  
Worship, 10:30am – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30am

**Monday, December 22nd**  
Power of the Pen, 7:00pm – Zoom

**Wednesday, December 24th (Christmas Eve)**  
Office Holiday, All Day  
Communion Service, 5:00pm – Hybrid  
Worship, 7:00pm – Hybrid

**Thursday, December 25th (Christmas)**  
Office Holiday, All Day

**Friday, December 26th**  
Office Holiday, All Day

**Sunday, December 28th**  
Worship, 8:30am – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15am  
Worship, 10:30am – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30am



## BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

**2** Emily Cox, Ken & Ruth Kuhns **3** Bob Lott, Rock McNair **4** Christine Dennis **5** Milly Walker **6** Carol Barrett **8** Wes Boss, Peggy Graham **10** Mackie Ferretter **11** Jamie Karney, Nicky Percivill **12** Lory Latimer **14** Helen Kovacs **15** J.D. Smith, Susan Johnsen, Luke Ferretter, Makenzie Goodman **16** John & Amy Goodman, Linda Bogusch, Holly Joyner **17** Ryan Montoya, Matthew & Karenn Malavanti **18** Elouise Frazier **19** Kitty Huneke **20** Todd & Katherine Elhers, Nancy Grayson, Pat McCorkle, Claire Risinger **21** Larry & Amanda Lassetter **22** Mary Lynn Klingman, Carol McHaney **25** Evie Preddy **27** Cathy McPhee, Jonathan Olivarez **28** Mike Harper & Callie Carruth-Harper, Arianna Patterson **29** Lillian Goodman, Ryan Joyner, Taylor Holleyman **31** Lee Ann Priebe

# OUTREACH

## Christmas Offering

Our 2025 Christmas offering will go toward continuing flood relief efforts in Kerr County. We are partnering with the Kerr County Flood Relief Fund which is managed by The Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country. The Kerr County Flood Relief Fund supports long-term rebuilding through providing funds to vetted local organizations. Read more about their work at [Rebuildkerr.org](https://Rebuildkerr.org).



## Cove Celebration



Thank you to everyone who donated Hygiene Items to The Cove during October. The Cove does amazing work to support teens in our community experiencing homelessness. They were very grateful for all that we gave.

## Service Saturday Celebration



For our November Service Saturday, a strong crew of volunteers assisted with yard work and light maintenance at Naomi House. Naomi House is a hospitality home for asylum seekers and a ministry of DaySpring Baptist Church. Thank you to everyone who participated!

## 2026 Outreach Partners



[View All Partners Here](#)



First Presbyterian commits 10% of its tithes toward outreach and missions. During November, the Outreach Committee received applications from potential outreach partners for 2026. Chosen partners are non-profit organizations in our community who will receive quarterly financial support from First Pres. In December, the Outreach Committee will review applications and select our 2026 partners.

# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## Church Retreat

Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Church Retreat. We had a wonderful time together at Mo-Ranch. Attendees enjoyed games, hiking, art, worship, and the beauty of the Texas Hill Country. Special thanks to Dr. Jackson Griggs, CEO of Waco Family Medicine, for being with us as our guest speaker. We look forward to being back next year and hope that many of you can join us November 6-8 of 2026.



## Art Show

We are excited for First Presbyterian's 2026 Art Show which will run during February and March of 2026. We are excited to feature a wide range of art from all generations and experience levels. The Art Show is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the creative talents of our community. Please consider submitting an art piece for display. Thanks to Esther Lee and Ben McNamee for helping to coordinate.

- Submissions due to the office by Feb. 13th
- Artwork will be on display outside the Sanctuary from Feb 22nd – March 22nd.

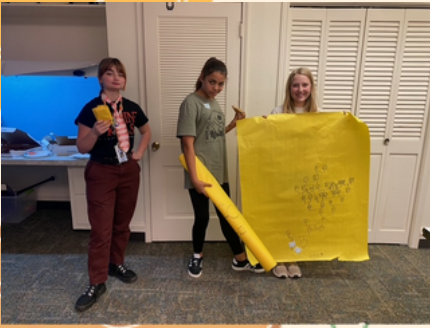


## Hosting Coffee Fellowship

We are so grateful for everyone who hosted Coffee Fellowship during 2025. With a new year approaching, we are accepting sign-ups for 2026. Please consider hosting next year. Hosts provide snacks in Foundation Parlor following the 10:30 service on their chosen date. Please scan the QR code to the right to register for 2026.



# YOUTH CHRISTIAN FORMATION



Wednesday nights are baaaack! Your youth programming team of Leslie, Taylor, Amy Goodman, Jeremy Mercer, Scott Wagner, Katherine Ehlers and Rebecca Melton have worked hard to provide 8 weeks of programming this Fall! The youth worked hard after busy school days to get back into the heart of Waco and attend to scripture and life. We are looking forward to the spring semester which will begin on January 8th. Our theme will be In the Wings!



Join us for the Youth Christmas Party at the Cooper House at 6:00 p.m. on December 3rd! Together, we will walk from the church to the Cooper House on 18th and Austin. Once there, we will tour the house and learn about the Presbyterian, Madison Cooper who established a benevolent foundation for the Waco Community. Bring a white elephant gift to exchange and be ready for a delicious holiday meal.

Save the date January 10 Noon! – Youth Sunday planning lunch – Join Leslie and Taylor and Malorie for a planning session. We will meet up at Torchy's Tacos

**SHYC Senior High Youth Connection**  
January 30 – February 1 2026  
Grades 9 – 12  
More details on registration to follow.  
Speak to Malorie if you are interested!



# CHRISTIAN FORMATION

## Celebrating Fall of 2026

Thanks to parents, teachers, children, and youth. Everyone is pulling together and doing their part to build communities for youth and children at First Pres. We are excited that weekly we are seeing 2-4 children in PreK-K. We are seeing 1-2 in 1st-3rd. Our preteen class is consistently 2-4 and youth 1-2. On the whole, these are increases from last year, sometimes as much as 50%.

## Save the Date: Sunday, January 3 – Morning Volunteer Breakfast

Join us at Café Cappuccino in downtown Waco (601 Franklin Ave, Waco, TX 76701) for a special breakfast honoring our dedicated volunteers. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect, celebrate all that you do, and look ahead to the exciting events and opportunities of the spring semester. RSVP to Malorie Montoya at [dcf@firstpreswaco.org](mailto:dcf@firstpreswaco.org) so we can save you a seat. We can't wait to share a morning of gratitude, fellowship, and good food with you!



Welcome to Malorie Montoya who will be working with the First Pres staff for 10 hours a week to provide Christian Formation support. Look for her on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights or email her at [dcf@firstpreswaco.org](mailto:dcf@firstpreswaco.org).

# CAREGIVING, CARETAKING, CARING

There are concepts that are both very simple and very complex. Caregiving is one of those. We at First Pres Waco have been remarkably blessed for years by the reflections of a caregiver who understood both the simplicity and the complexity. Larry Kinard provided care for his beloved Marty over a period of years. He gave us regular glimpses into the painful and love-filled insights of a caregiver experience and what it means to live the vows "in sickness and in health" with equal devotion and tenderness. He did not sugar coat or obviate the painful truths of devastating illness, the impact on a marriage, and the discoveries of the depth of love that spans "til death do us part." We were privy to their humanity and struggles and inspired by their courage and devotion to each other. Some of us have saved Larry's words of wisdom and transparency of pain that we may live up to the possibilities in our own lives, starting with his admonition to "Do love."

As Larry transitions now to a new chapter in his life, Letter from a Caregiver transitions to Caregiving, Caretaking, and Caring. So many seasons of our lives include caregiving. We will explore together the challenges and the opportunities, the insights and the search for meaning, the experiences of change and the gifts of presence. I will share with you stories of caregiving that have been shared with me through the years of social work practice, hospice visits, and life transitions. We can learn from each other the deep well of courage that grows when we share it with one another.

There are times as well when we engage in Caretaking as we "take care" of and for each other. Many of us have engaged in raising our children in the role of caregivers and then watched them leave to make their way, create their own families, engage in their own lives and live in their own homes. We discover as the parents of adults and as grandparents of their children that there remains opportunity to take care, to provide care, to make a difference in our new roles. Perhaps most important, we have the opportunity to return care to our parents, to be there for them in the years when they need care. I'm not sure there is any more honorable caregiving/caretaking. And here at First Pres, caretaking sometimes extends to friends, to neighbors, to members of our church. I'm thinking of Meal Trains, stork markers planted in yards of homes with new babies, sitting with friends and neighbors in hospital waiting rooms, and showing up at piano recitals and one act plays and so much more.

And then there is Caring as we follow the admonition of Jesus who asked us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and to understand that everyone is our neighbor. It is caring that forgives when we are hurt. It is caring that gives the benefit of the doubt. It is caring that feels the pain of another and treats them the way we would like to be treated when trouble threatens. It is caring that offers a smile to a sad stranger on the bus. It is caring that forgives the "idiot", I mean person, who cut me off in traffic. (yes...there is a story there.) Caring shows up as grace without asking if it has been earned or deserved.

In the three plus years I have been part of First Pres, I have received significant caring from so many of you. And I have observed love and caring across generations. I have experienced caring in the zoom room and heard caring in the passing of peace, participation in communion, the leadership of children, and the celebration of confirmands. I have felt caring in the waving of adults and children as they greet us in the zoom room. I have known the gift of being fully present in meetings while safely settled at my computer. "See" you each month with caregiving, caretaking, and care insights.

Together,

*Helen Wilson Harris*

# ADVENT

## Lessons & Carols



Join us on Saturday, December 6, at 7:00 p.m. for a beautiful service of Lessons and Carols celebrating the Advent season. Through scripture, music, and poetry, we'll reflect on the promise and wonder of Christ's coming. Come and share in this inspiring evening of worship and anticipation.

## Posada



Join us for Posada at First Presbyterian on Sunday, December 14, at 5:00 p.m. This beloved tradition brings the Christmas story to life as we share a meal, then join Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem in a candlelit procession led by an angel's trumpet. The evening concludes in the sanctuary with prayer and reflection—a joyful celebration of hope, welcome, and the coming of Christ.

## Soup & Caroling



This year's Soup and Caroling will take place on Saturday, December 20, at 3:00 p.m. Join us as we spread Christmas cheer to our homebound members and those in assisted living through joyful afternoon caroling. Afterward, we'll gather back at the church at 5:00 p.m. to enjoy warm soups and delicious desserts together. A special thanks to our church choir for lending their voices and helping lead the singing in each of our caroling teams!

## Christmas Eve

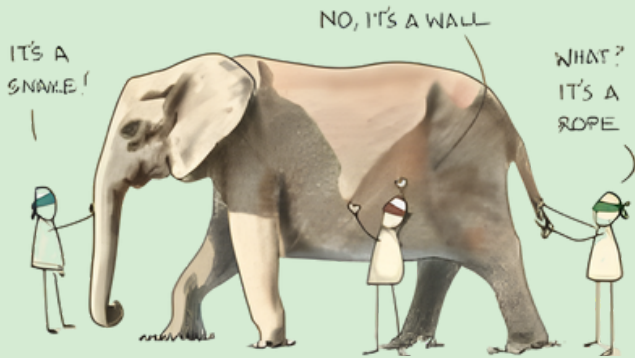


Join us on Christmas Eve, December 24, for worship at 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. The 5:00 p.m. service includes communion, candlelight, and carols, while the 7:00 p.m. service features candlelight and carols. Both services will also be available on Zoom.

# ISRAEL PALESTINE CLASS

The Israel Palestine discussion group had a rich 5-week experience in October. Here are some of our reflections.

OUR OWN EXPERIENCE IS GARELY THE WHOLE TRUTH



Munther Isaac writes a provocative collection of books that can be found in the church library: *The Other Side of the Wall*, *Promised Land* or *Land of Promise* and *Christ in the Rubble*.

Munther Isaac hopes that his books will raise awareness among Christians that there are Christians in Palestine who live as second class members of society. They cannot move about the country freely, and are treated as "less than" the Jewish people in Israel.

We were informed by the plight of Palestinian Christians. These inequities have been unfair, painful, and discriminatory since 1948 with no recognition or movement toward change. Isaac is appealing to American Christians to acknowledge Palestinian Christians and support their equitable treatment in what is also their homeland.

Current events were raging as we read Isaac's books together: The anniversary of the October 7 Hamas atrocities; the relentless bombing of Gaza—including hospitals; the hunger, injury and death of children; the displaced families in tent cities for shelter; the negotiations and periodic releasing of hostages, the eventual declaration of a cease fire; the return to bombing, the inability to get food into Gaza and the subsequent starvation of children. We examined U.S. attitudes toward Israel as informed by scripture and the interpretation of scripture.

One of our members noted the timeless story of blindfolded people trying to understand what they were experiencing from multiple perspectives or experiences.

Collectively, we felt this way over our five weeks of discussion. We thought, how often have we heard one perspective or part of a whole story and accepted the part as defining truth? We all grew in awareness that none of us had been told or were aware of the whole story about the complexities in Gaza, Israel and Palestine. One member of the group noted, "I might not have had the stamina to keep reading the books unless we were in a small group together."

In reading Munther Isaac's books we felt we had a good understanding of his concerns but we wished for a greater education on the evolution of Hamas, on other experiences or perspectives that offered possible solutions or hope, and even what Isaac saw as possible fair and equitable next steps. Even as Israel and Palestine is a complex, trauma-filled problem without a clear cut solution, we felt that we came to a better understanding of how to check our assumptions and continue prayerful information seeking.

Melanie Cook, Marilyn Harren, Helen Harris, Kathy Jones, Leslie King, Lory Latimer,  
Shane Montoya, Meg Parrish

# PRAYERS AND SERMONS

During the government shutdown, we are grateful for organizations stepping up to support our community. Here in Waco, Texas Life shares:

***"We understand that the ongoing federal government shutdown may be impacting many individuals and families across the country. If you are impacted and need flexible payment options, please contact our customer service team at 1-800-283-9233."***

We also want to highlight Caritas of Waco, a local resource providing critical assistance to families during this time. Through their Emergency Services program, Caritas offers food assistance, utility and rent support, prescriptions, and case management. Their team also helps individuals apply for federal programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, and TANF. As one client shared:

***"I had reached out to another local agency for help ... I was able to connect with a Caritas case manager the day I called ... it was amazing what Caritas was able to do for my family."***

If you need help, Caritas can be reached at (254) 753-4593 or at 300 S. 15th Street, Waco. For additional information and resources, online guidance can also be helpful during this time.



**Caritas Link**



**Texas Life Link**



## January 2026 Sermon Series

**Creator Culture: Trending with the Apostle Paul.** Together we will explore the book of Galatians as informed by the recently published work of Dr. Bruce Longnecker of Baylor University, *The Theology of the Letter to the Galatians*.

**January 11 – Creator Culture and Faith**

**January 18 – Rebranding**

**January 25 – Fruity Emojis**

**February 1 – Influencers – Then & Now**



**The Tower**  
**1100 Austin Avenue**  
**Waco, TX 76701**  
**(254) 752-1665**  
**[www.firstpreswaco.org](http://www.firstpreswaco.org)**

**Office Hours**  
**Monday – Friday**  
**9 AM – 12 PM & 1 PM – 4 PM**



**Want to stay up-to-date with what's going on at First Pres from week to week? Sign up to receive "Ministry on Monday," our weekly newsletter. Each Monday afternoon, you'll receive a note from Leslie, or Taylor as well as updates about some events that are quickly approaching. Sign up using the QR code above!**

## **STEWARDSHIP**

Thanks to all who have turned in a stewardship card. As of November 16, Stewardship Sunday, we have received 72 cards. This compares with 84 cards at this time last year. If you have not yet submitted a pledge card, please consider doing so. Next steps for your Session include: December 8, meeting to finalize the budget in light of pledges and gifts. We are committed to moving into the New Year with a fiscally conservative budget with the intent to continue to develop ministry. Thanks for your help toward this end.

