

VOLUME 69, ISSUE 2
A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WACO

THE FEBRUARY TOWER



Gethsemane by Adam Abram Inspired by Mark 14:35



LETTER FROM A PASTOR

Lent is a season when we explore anxieties. We listen-in to the gospel stories' anxieties of those in administrative power. They worry about the power of the people. We listen-in to the anxieties of those with questions about the meaning of life and their strength within it. We listen-in to the worries about the emerging power of the disciples. Can they advance what they believe is essential to their faith in Jesus? We listen-in to the anxieties of Jesus.

As we listen-in we also see grounding activities.

Water is drawn from a well and poured out in order to quench thirst. Water is very grounding. We see Jesus and the disciples put themselves in nature among the roots and under the trees. Nature is very grounding.

We see wine and bread shared at the table. Eating in community can be very grounding. As we take on the deep and often anxiety provoking questions of life this Lent, there is also an invitation to ground down into calm clarity.

When we ask ourselves how long people with strength and power will scapegoat people with less power – we can take our thoughts to the kitchen sink, filling the sink with warm dish water. We can allow some time to simply wash a couple of dishes as we pray for those who are in need of more power.

When we ask ourselves how we will come into new power for a more faithful response to the life around us – we can take our thoughts to the base of a tree. We can allow some time to appreciate how long growth takes....to reach down and to stretch up.

When we ask ourselves what difference it makes that we are alive – we can take our thoughts to a table with a few friends. In the breaking of bread and pouring into cups there is a grounding promised. As we chew the bread and sip from the cup, grounding is actualized...comfort and confidence.

Together at the Table will be a grounding event during Lent on February 28. It will be an opportunity to come up the walk of our hosts' home – a walk perhaps flanked by roots and trees. It will be an opportunity for chewing, sipping, laughing and holding space. Warm running water will follow for hard working hands. Those that arrive to the hybrid Together at the Table, will also be grounded across distance with special practices for the evening.

Here is to lent and our opportunity to take on the important questions and stay grounded in the practices of Jesus Christ.



Faithfully, Leslie

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Sunday, February 1 (Communion Sunday)

8:30a.m. Early Service
9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, February 2

5:30p.m. Diaconate Meeting

Tuesday, February 3

5:30p.m. Congregational Life Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 4

6:00p.m. Youth in the Wings
6:00p.m. Bell Choir Practice
7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Thursday, February 5

9:00a.m. Classic Voice Ensemble (Choir Room)
12:00p.m. Personnel Committee Meeting (Zoom)

Friday, February 6

6:00p.m. Reel Spirituality – Pinewood Public House
2223 Austin Ave Suite D, Waco, TX 76701

Sunday, February 8 (Youth Sunday)

8:30a.m. Early Service
9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30a.m. Morning Worship
5:00p.m. Our Hybrid House (Zoom)

Monday, February 9

1:00p.m. Presbyterian Women (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, February 10

6:00p.m. Faith on Tap

Wednesday, February 11

6:00p.m. Youth in the Wings
6:00p.m. Bell Choir Practice
7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Thursday, February 12

9:00a.m. Classic Voice Ensemble (Choir Room)
12:00p.m. Finance Committee Meeting (Zoom)
6:30p.m. Build a Mug – Black Oak Art
1619 Franklin Ave, Waco, TX 76701

Sunday, February 15

8:30a.m. Early Service
9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, February 16

5:30p.m. Session Meeting (Hybrid)

Tuesday, February 17

12:00p.m. Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon
(Chapel Parlor)

Wednesday, February 18 (Ash Wednesday)

6:00p.m. Youth in the Wings
6:00p.m. Ash Wednesday Worship Service

Thursday, February 19

9:00a.m. Classic Voice Ensemble (Choir Room)

Friday, February 20

7:30a.m. Men's Breakfast (Fellowship Hall)

Sunday, February 22

8:30a.m. Early Service
9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, February 23

7:00p.m. Power of the Pen

Wednesday, February 25

12:00p.m. Facilities Committee Meeting
1:30p.m. Worship Committee Meeting
6:00p.m. Youth in the Wings
6:00p.m. Bell Choir Practice
7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Thursday, February 26

9:00a.m. Classic Voice Ensemble (Choir Room)

Saturday, February 28

Together at the Table (Times Vary)

Celebration of Life & Faith

Leonard Slamcik

December 21, 1945 – January 6, 2026



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

1 Dwana & Bill Nesbitt **2** Becky Ward, David Summers **3** Don Risinger, Shane Montoya **6** Stephen Lacy, Noah Diaz-Granados, David Young **9** Mike Morrison, Eleanor Goodman **10** Susan Somerville **11** Courtney Priebe **12** Donna Black, Ocoee Morgan, Helen Harris **14** Hutson Harper, Abby & Hunter Harren **15** Claire Drew, Monica & Mark Anderson **16** Meredith Palm **18** Virginia DuPuy, Barry & Laura Shank **20** Mae Ehlers, Carolyn Maxwell, Greg Palm, Amanda Lassetter, David Gray **21** Pam Holmes, Dick Kettler, Harvey Harmon **22** Lisa Weaver, Lanie Lynn Tucker **23** Nancy Lacy **28** Nancy Risinger, Cary DuPuy, Gabe Field, Sandra LeFevre, J.P & Elinor Davis

OUTREACH

Blood Drive

Thank you to everyone who participated in our January blood drive with Carter Blood Care. We had 15 people arrive to donate and we collected 12 units in total. We will look forward to hosting another Blood Drive in July.



Sudderth Fund

Each third Sunday of the month is recognized as Sudderth Sunday in honor of the life of Amelia Sudderth. Designated offerings made on Sudderth Sunday's go to support medical missions in the Congo. Our 2025 goal was to raise \$2,000 for the Sudderth fund. We are please to announce that we exceeded our goal, collecting \$2,387.40 in 2025. In response to your generosity, the Outreach Committee has set a Sudderth goal of \$2,500 for 2026.



Christmas Giving

Our 2025 Christmas offering has been sent to the Kerr County Flood Relief Fund to support Rebuild Kerr, a coordinated multi-year recovery effort organized by the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country. \$6,712.36 was raised, surpassing our stated goal of \$5,000. Thank you to everyone that contributed! We are grateful to support the continuing recovery work in Kerr County.



February Service Project

For our February outreach service, we will be collecting items for Caritas of Waco. Caritas is a food pantry that began its work in our building. Today Caritas provides food, and emergency services help to the community. Scan the QR code to view the full list of needed items.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Together at the Table

Twice a year, we invite folks to gather in small groups for a shared meal—a simple way to build community and make new connections. Formerly known as Dinners for 8, this gathering is now called Together at the Table. The event will take place on February 28. Please register by February 18 using Realm or the QR code, and indicate any preferences such as Zoom participation, transportation support, time of day, or willingness to host.



Coffee Fellowship

Thank you to everyone who has signed up to host Coffee Fellowship in 2026. There are still spots remaining, and we would love to fill the calendar. Hosts provide light refreshments in Foundation Parlor following the 10:30 service on their chosen date. Sign up using the QR code.



Rolling into The New Year

We had a wonderful time "Rolling" into the New Year with some of our families and young adults. Thanks to everyone who came to Main Event to join in the fun! We were especially excited that some participants invited a friend. Did you know guests are always welcome? Why not invite a friend to our next church event of gathering?



Build-A-Mug outing for College and Grad Students

Calling all college and graduate students! You are invited to join Taylor for a Build-A-Mug workshop at Black Oak Art on Thursday, February 12th, from 6:00–7:00. Because we have two Sunday services and many different ways to engage in the life of the church, people's involvement does not always overlap, even those in similar life stages can miss the chance to connect. This is a great opportunity to enjoy some pottery and meet folks in a similar life stage. RSVP to Taylor (tholleyman@firstpreswaco.org) by February 10th.



CHRISTIAN FORMATION

A Neurodiversity Book Review by: Hannah Gingles (9 year old)

January 8, 2026

All My Stripes

Written by Shaina Rudolph and Danielle Royer

Illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin

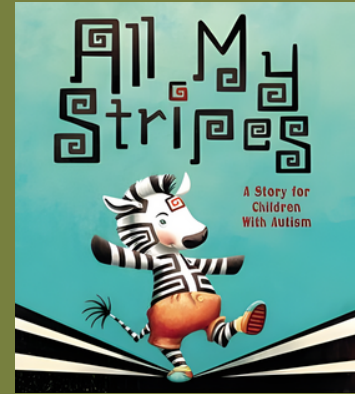
I was asked to write a book review of *All My Stripes* for the church after I gave Pastor Leslie a picture. She asked for my opinion of the book and whether I thought it would be a good fit for our church library.

I think *All My Stripes* is an amazing book. The artwork on every page is beautiful, especially the illustrations of Zane's mom. The emotions shown are some of the best I have ever seen in a book. The story reminds me of how I am at school with my friends—sometimes I am very smart, and sometimes I am a little different.

I love how Zane the zebra "floats his own boat" (in a good way), just like me, and maybe like some of you too. I appreciate the honesty in the story. Zane is able to talk to his mother with courage and complete honesty, even when the words are hard and the situations are tough.

My favorite part of the book is Zane's creativity. I don't know if he wants to be different, but he keeps trying and finds a way to be himself. That message really stood out to me.

In conclusion, I believe every kid—and grown-up—should read this wonderful book. *All My Stripes* is a meaningful story about understanding, creativity, and embracing who you are. Thank you for loving all of our stripes and differences.



Why Is There Suffering?

Pick Your Own Theological Expedition

Join us for a three-week study of *Why Is There Suffering?* by Bethany N. Sollereder (foreword by Alister E. McGrath). This unique book invites participants to explore different theological perspectives on suffering while reflecting on their own experiences. Class time will focus on conversation and listening together.

The book (2021) is available on Amazon.

Scan the QR code to purchase.

Evening Study (Hybrid)

Wednesdays: Feb. 25, March 4 & 11

5:30–6:45 p.m. | Chapel Parlor

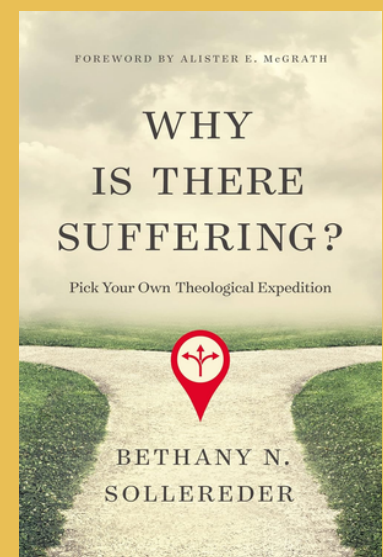
Midweek Study (Hybrid)

Wednesdays: March 11, 18 & 25

12:00–1:15 p.m. | Room C201

(Hybrid)

Led by **Leslie King**



CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Growing Experience & Community

Taylor, Malorie and Leslie are excited to have added up the Christian Formation numbers! While our numbers are modest, we see signs of growth from our 2024-2025 year. Here are some highlights from our four classrooms thus far in 2025-2026 year.

- Pre-K is our highest attended class even with some of our children graduating to the 1-3 grade.
- Attendance in 1-3 grades has grown from 1 to 3 regular attendees. We've had successful retention as young people graduated from pre-k.
- The Preteen class (4-7 grade) has grown from 1 to 4 regular attendees. In part, this is a result of strategic confirmation the prior year.
- Youth (8-12) – no growth on Sunday mornings. A growing cohort (5) on Wednesday evenings, holds possibilities. We hope to build on the Wednesday night strength to grow our Sunday morning community.



Youth "In the Wings" of Wednesday nights, February 2026 (6-8pm):

- 2/4: Cha & Chats -Meet at FPC, then walk together to Cha Community on Franklin.
- 2/11: An evening with guitarist & percussionist, Brian Rainosek
- 2/18: Ash Wednesday– Service begins at 6:00 p.m.
- 2/25: Caring for Our Community & Neighbors with guest speaker and member, Lory Latimer



NEW MEMBERS

Saralyn McKinnon-Crowley, Ph.D. (she/hers) is an Assistant Professor at Baylor University in the School of Education. She is a higher education scholar.

Originally from Indiana, she is a lifelong Presbyterian (PC U.S.A) and joins First Pres after multiple terms serving as a Ruling Elder at Genesis Presbyterian Church in Austin.



My name is Martha du Preez. I am currently a math PhD student at Baylor University, with the goal of eventually being a math professor. I have three adult children and one daughter in high school. Before starting college, I worked as a missionary in South Africa and Switzerland for 15 years. In my spare time, I enjoy ringing bells with the St. Cecilia Handbell choir, running, and walking and chatting with my kids and friends.



Rev. Amarachi (meaning Grace of God) Njoku Joseph is a Nigerian, a covenant child, a mother of two boys (Cyril and Brian), and a visionary pastor with extensive experience in global church leadership, adept at transforming local parishes through teaching, preaching, and strategic community engagement. She is an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, whose dynamic preaching, teaching, faith, and ministry testify to her ministerial journey in the United States.



Amarachi earned a Bachelor of Divinity in Theology from Hugh Goldie Theological Training Institution, a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies from Abia State University, a Master of Science in World Christianity from the University of Edinburgh, a Master of Theology in Religion and Society from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Certificate in Leadership from Anchor Leadership Academy, Lagos, Nigeria. She serves as chaplain of the Boy's Brigade, Nigeria, Abia State Council. Rev. Amarachi has ministered in diverse contexts, including Lagos Presbyterian Church, the Nigerian Army Chaplaincy, and Anchor Presbyterian Church in Wrightstown, Pennsylvania/New Jersey, and holds dual ministerial standing in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria and the Presbyterian Church (USA). She is currently a PhD student in Theology and Ethics in the Religion Department at Baylor University. Her research focuses on embodied religious identity crisis and trauma among clergy in the Reformed tradition, particularly ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.

NEW OFFICER SPOTLIGHTS & OFFICER ORDINATION



Scott has been a member of First Presbyterian Church since 1996. His family donated the church's original organ. He and his wife, April, have three adult daughters—Madison, Gabrielle, and Anslee. April is an active member of the bell choir.

Scott Wagner



Holly and I have been members of First Pres since 2012, and both of our children, Jameson and Lola, were baptized here. After visiting several churches when we moved to Waco, we found ourselves drawn back to First Pres for its strong sense of community, thoughtful sermons, and commitment to serving neighbors. One of the things I love most is our benediction, which beautifully captures how I believe God calls us to live each day: "Go out into the world in peace... love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit." A fun fact about me: I'm a nationally competitive inline speed skater, and after the 10:30 service you'll often find me on the dam, working to get a little faster.

Ryan Joyner



I have been a member since 2020, and one of the things I enjoy most about First Pres is the music. I'm an anthropology professor at Texas Tech, and my husband Ben and I are helping with the art show.

Esther Lee



I began attending FPC in 1990, while dating my present wife Catherine. We married in 1992. I didn't join First Pres until around 2000. I have served fellow parishioners in various ways. After retiring in 2006, I began assisting the First Presbyterian woman's group on the 2nd Monday of the month. (They no longer need me). I Also drove the former church bus "the Lady Jane" to take senior church members on field trips.

Mike McPhee

Officer Ordination and Installation

On January 18th we had the joy of ordaining and installing a new class of deacons and elders. We are grateful for the 2025 nominating committee and for all those who answered the call to lead as officers of our congregation. We look forward to the ways our new officers will serve and guide us.



WORSHIP

Youth Sunday is an annual tradition at First Presbyterian. It is a Sunday of dialogue, musical offering and liturgy written by our youth. This year's Youth Sunday theme is "Building Up" focusing on scripture from Nehemiah and the house built on rock in our gospels. This year we will be led by Josh Delk, Claire Drew, Mae Ehlers, Lucy Ferretter, Eleanor Goodman, and Yaya Patterson. Taylor, Malorie and Leslie have been enjoying the January preparations.



Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent. Lent is a time when we honor the gravity of our humanity. It marks the beginning of the 40 day journey to Easter Sunday.

Here is what to expect the Hybrid Ash Wednesday service beginning at 6:00p.m.

- We will move into the service with some celebratory jazzy energy. The instrumentation is intended to lift our energies.
- Special music both choral and solo.
- The dispensation of Ashes wherein each person gathered can have their Lenten prayer or focus prayed for.



The Tower
1100 Austin Avenue
Waco, TX 76701
(254) 752-1665
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!

ART SHOW

We are excited to host the Bill and Judy Franklin Art Show again in 2026. Please consider submitting a piece to be displayed. We welcome contributions from all ages and experience levels. Entries should be submitted to the church office by February 13th. Items will be on display from February 22nd until March 22nd. Special thanks to Esther Lee and her husband Ben McNamee for their leadership with this event.

Sign up here to submit an entry:

