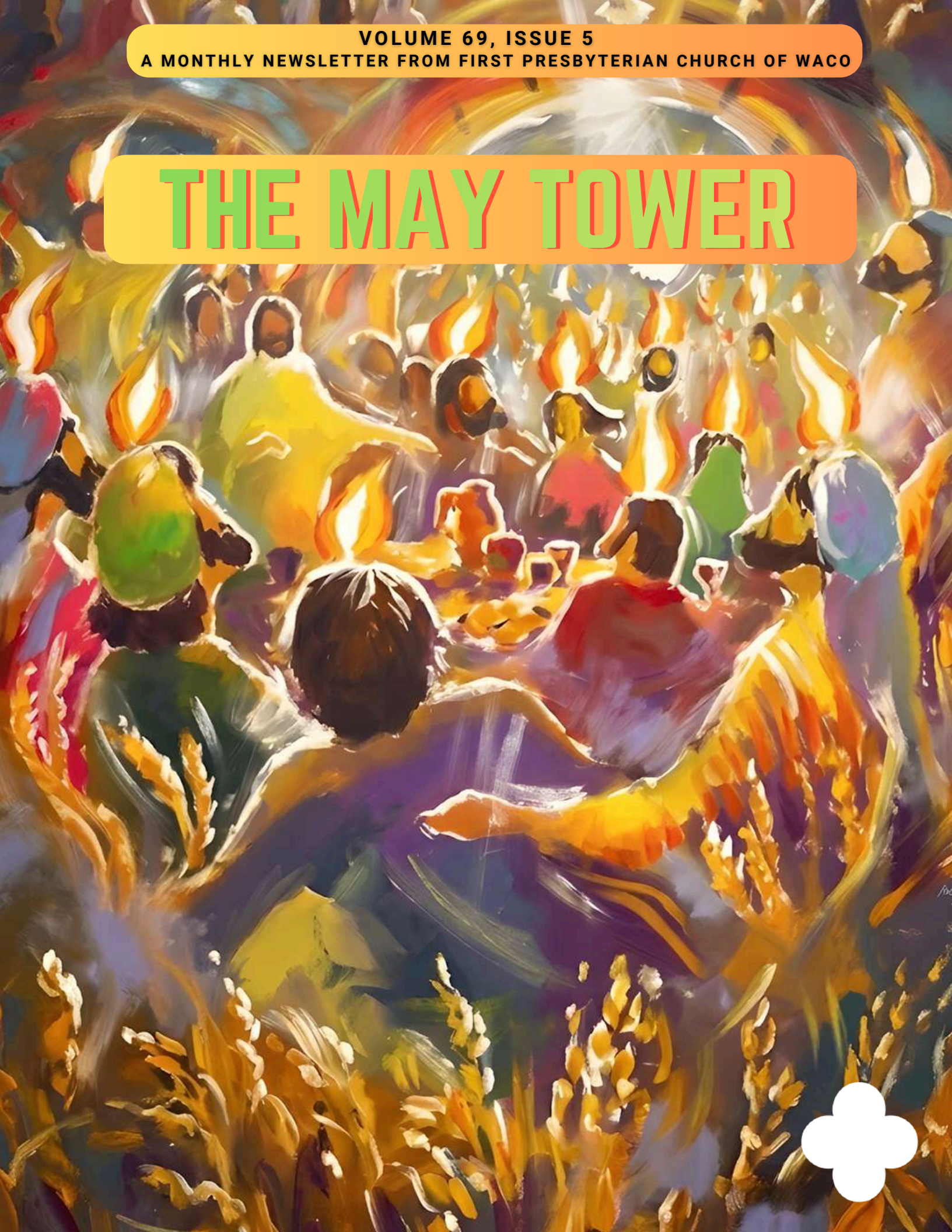


VOLUME 69, ISSUE 5
A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WACO

THE MAY TOWER



LETTER FROM A PASTOR

Power from on High

In April and May, our liturgical calendar moves us through the Easter season (there are actually seven weeks of Easter that follow Lent!). As we approach the end of May, we'll arrive at a celebration of the Day of Pentecost, which falls on May 24th this year. This arrangement follows the narrative of the New Testament canon, where the resurrection and ascension of Jesus are followed by the events at Pentecost in Acts 2.

The book of Acts is written as a sequel to Luke's gospel. The scholarly consensus is that the two texts have the same author. At the end of Luke, the resurrected Jesus instructs his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait until they have been "clothed with power from on high" as the Father has promised (Luke 24:49).

This is where Acts picks up the story. The disciples are in Jerusalem waiting for a promised empowerment that will equip them to be witnesses of the resurrection "in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). For Christians, Pentecost refers to the events that take place in Act 2, when the disciples "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages" (Acts 2:4).

This reference, however, is a reappropriation of a preexisting Jewish tradition. Pentecost is a Jewish festival that occurs fifty days after Passover and is a celebration of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Christians use the term because the events in Acts 2 are said to have happened on the day of Pentecost. This festival setting provides important context. It offers some explanation for why "devout Jews from every nation under heaven were living in Jerusalem" at that time (Acts 2:5). Pentecost was one of three pilgrimage festivals in which all of Israel traveled to Jerusalem for the celebration.

With Jews from every nation in Jerusalem, the empowerment of speaking in previously unknown languages hardly seems accidental. When the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, a crowd quickly formed, bewildered and amazed that Galileans – notorious for a lack of linguistic sophistication – could be understood in the native language of all who were gathered. This empowerment was appropriate to its context.

It was also fitting for the work that the disciples were called to do. In the biblical text, it is not clear how far beyond Acts 2 this linguistic miracle extends. However, we can easily imagine that omnilinguistic abilities would be especially useful to those who are called to preach the gospel "to the ends of the earth."

All of this can help us make sense of the hope and promises that we celebrate at Pentecost. We emerge from the Easter season as people who are called to be witnesses of the risen Jesus. We trust that God will empower us for this work, and we expect that, however miraculous, it will occur in ways appropriate to our setting.

I pray that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered with the miraculous solidarity of Pentecost. That God would grant us the capacity to see people as they are, to reach across boundaries that divide us and, for the sake of God's mercy, to speak in ways that are understood as a native language.

Taylor Holleyman

Director of Congregational Life

MAY CALENDAR

Friday, May 1

6:00p.m. Reel Spirituality – Pinewood

Saturday, May 2

9:00a.m. Church Work Day

Sunday, May 3

8:30a.m. Early Service

9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages

10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, May 4

5:30p.m. Diaconate Meeting

Wednesday, May 6

6:00p.m. Bell Choir Practice – Sanctuary

7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Sunday, May 10

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, May 11

11:30a.m. Presbyterian Women – Hybrid

5:30p.m. Chet Edwards Separation of Church & State
– Fellowship Hall

5:30p.m. Outreach Meeting – Zoom

Tuesday, May 12

6:00p.m. Faith on Tap – Woodway Slowrise

Wednesday, May 13

6:00p.m. Bell Choir Practice – Sanctuary

7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Thursday, May 14

9:00a.m. Personnel Committee Meeting – Zoom

12:00p.m. Finance Committee meeting – Zoom

Friday, May 15

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

Saturday, May 16

10:00a.m. Summer Teacher Orientation

Sunday, May 17

8:30a.m. Early Service

9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages

10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, May 18

2:00p.m. Worship Committee Meeting – Zoom

5:30p.m. Session Meeting – Hybrid

Wednesday, May 20

7:00p.m. Choir Practice

Sunday, May 24

8:30a.m. Early Service

9:15a.m. Sunday School for All Ages

10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Monday, May 25 (Office Holiday)

Tuesday, May 26

5:30p.m. Christian Formation Committee Meeting &
Youth Advisory Board – Zoom

Wednesday, May 27

12:00p.m. Facilities Committee Meeting

Sunday, May 31

8:30a.m. Early Service

9:15a.m. Summer Christian Formation Kickoff –
Fellowship Hall

10:30a.m. Morning Worship

Wedding

Christine Dennis & Scott Huston



4/10/2026

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

1 Carter Lacy **2** Joyce McCall, Theo Stahl-Wright **3** DJ King **5** Sue Young, Lee Percivill, **6** Rena Bonem, Ruth Kuhns **7** Allison Black **9** April Wagner, Hillary Burgess, Callie Carruth-Harper, Kelly Preddy **11** Gina Hiraoka **12** Bob Grayson, Lorra Hinote, Dave Reagan **13** Candy Swenke **19** Josh Delk **20** Kimberlee Patterson, Parker Adamson **21** Cynthia Perry, Tom Fergus & Gina Hiraoka **22** Jeremy Mercer **24** Kellie Clarkson, Adam Redmer, Mike & Nancy Morrison **25** Mandi DuPuy, Laura Munn, Sue & Mike Jacobson **26** Katherine Melton, Kathy & Mike Jones **27** Jan Bodine **28** Teresa Gingles **29** Paul Hicks, Chip & Susan Somerville **31** Olivia Henderson, Gretchen Wieckowski

OUTREACH

Church Work Day

Please join us Saturday, May 2nd, at 9a.m. – 11:00a.m. to invest some sweat equity into our church grounds. We'll have a few small projects for groups to work on. This work will help with the maintenance and upkeep of our beautiful outdoor spaces.



Easter Offering

We are delighted to have surpassed our goal of \$5,500, having raised over \$10,000 for our Easter offering. This money will be held by Refugia Ministries at Lake Shore Baptist Church and distributed at the request of the Heart of Texas Network for Immigrant Rights (HOTNIR). HOTNIR will use these funds to help cover the legal fees for individuals who have applied and been selected to receive assistance. Thank you to everyone who donated!



Summer Service Saturdays

- Saturday, May 2nd, at 9a.m. Church Work Day.
- Saturday, June 13th, 9a.m.–noon volunteering with Habitat for Humanity.
- Saturday, July 25th, 9a.m.–1p.m. The Carter Blood Care Bus will be in the Franklin parking lot to receive blood donations.



Outreach Partnerships

Throughout the year, 10% of the congregation's operations budget goes toward outreach efforts. A significant portion of our outreach funds is used to make quarterly contributions to our selected outreach partners. Local organizations apply each year for our partnerships, and we are delighted to support so much important work in our community. For more information and a complete list of our partners, be sure to visit our outreach webpage.



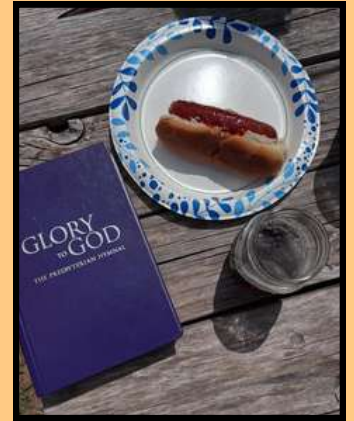
Scan to see all partners



CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Beer & Hymns

Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Beer & Hymns event. We are especially grateful to our friends from St. Matthew Lutheran Church for joining us. This is such a wonderful event to enjoy fellowship and song.



Coffee Fellowship

There are a few coffee fellowship dates still available in the second half of the year. If you have not hosted this year, we'd love for you to sign up for one of the remaining dates. Coffee fellowship hosts provide light refreshments in Foundation Parlor after the 10:30 service. Follow the QR code or contact Taylor (tholleyman@firstpreswaco.org) to sign up.



Church Retreat

Church Retreat sign-ups are live! We hope you can join us at Mo-Ranch, November 6-8. We are excited to have Austin Dickson join us as our guest speaker. Austin is CEO of the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, the organization that has led the Rebuild Kerr efforts following last year's devastating floods. We'll look forward to time together in the Hill Country this November.



Taco Tuesdays with Taylor

Coming to you this summer - Taco Tuesdays with Taylor. Each Tuesday, beginning May 18 and running through the summer months, you can join Taylor for lunch at a different Taco spot around Waco. Reach out to Taylor (tholleyman@firstpreswaco.org) to have your favorite tacos included on our summer tour.



CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Leslie and Taylor have enjoyed helping two young men, Josh Delk and Isaiah Patterson, move through the confirmation process this semester. We look forward to celebrating their completion and welcoming them into membership on Mother's Day, May 10, at 10:30 a.m. worship.

May 31 – Summer Kickoff: Join us for breakfast as our adults are introduced to the depth of our summer theme: displacement. Fresh fruit, yogurt parfaits, quick breads, and casseroles will be served, along with coffee and juice. We will also introduce the youth and children theme of Character in Characters. Fellowship Hall, 9:15 a.m.

Thanks to Amy Goodman and April Wagner, who will be coordinating Character Camp. Character Camp will be held from July 20 – 24 from 8:30a.m. – 12:00p.m.

Summer Teacher Orientation: May 16, 9–11 a.m.

Youth Wednesday Night: Scheduling will be on hiatus in May as we gear up for summer. Summer activities' times and days are to be determined.



Adult Summer Formation – “Finding Our Place”

We hope you will join us for our combined Adult Formation series this summer, “Finding Our Place.” This series draws on our 2026 outreach theme of displacement and invites us to reflect on how we find our place—and help others find theirs—in a world shaped by experiences of displacement.

Together, we will explore these themes through Scripture, consider their theological significance, and hear from guest speakers.

Series begins May 31, with guest speakers on the following dates:

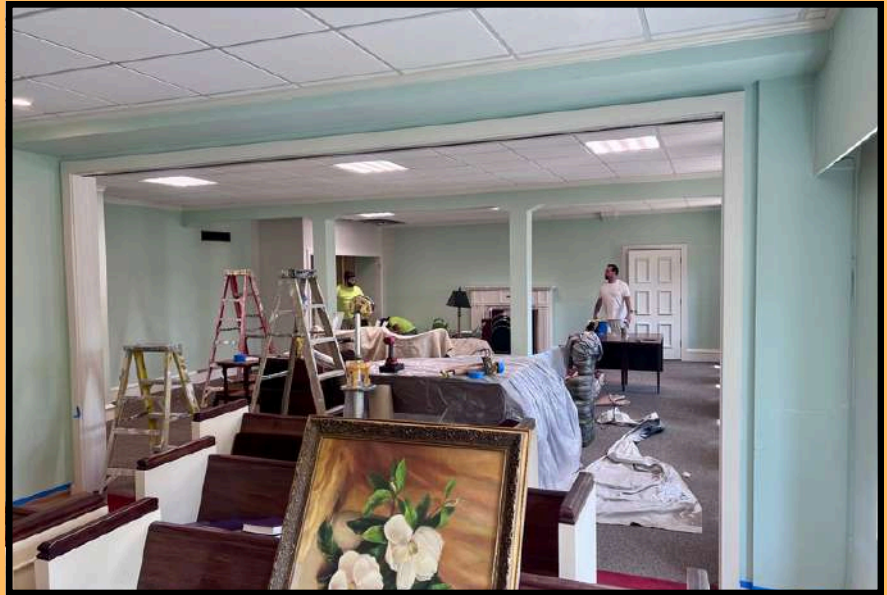
- June 14 – Rev. Ted Foote, Professor and Louis H. and Katherine S. Zbinden Distinguished Chair of Pastoral Ministry and Leadership at Austin Seminary
- July 5 – Panel discussion with leaders from the Heart of Texas Network for Immigrant Rights (HOTNIR)
- August 2 – Rev. Karen Zimmerman, Director of Open Table Collegiate Ministry



CHRISTIAN FORMATION

This is First Pres

Join us on Wednesday, April 29, at 5:30 pm for a guided tour of our church. We will explore the building and share more about our theology of membership and the spiritual journey we walk together. Afterward, please join us for a conversation in the beautifully renovated Chapel Parlor.



Chapel Parlor Renovation 2026

Junior High Jubilee at Mo-Ranch!

We are headed to Junior High Jubilee at Mo-Ranch! If you have completed 6th through 8th grade or would like to attend as an adult sponsor, please register and let us know. SIGN UP DEADLINE IS MAY 5th.

During Jr. High Jubilee, youth who have completed 6th through 8th grade come together to be inspired to grow in their faith by learning and living the words and deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hundreds of youth participants will gather in the Hill Country for an unforgettable Mo-Ranch experience filled with new friends, spiritual enrichment, worship, study, and recreation.

Cost: \$285 = \$75 deposit + \$210 final registration

Scholarships are available, and use the QR code below to sign up.



CAREGIVING, CARETAKING, CARING

Caregiving, Dee, and First Pres

I am learning the incredible depth and breadth of caregiving in our First Pres family. Each time the prayer list is published, I see both the challenges folks are facing and the incredible strength and resilience they bring to the work of recovery. My prayers are both for those who are ill or wounded and for those who are providing the care they need. So many among us are providing caregiving presence and day-to-day care that makes recovery possible. This is tangible caregiving that includes meals, transportation, ambulation, personal care, laundry, driving, picking up groceries, encouragement, and so much more. A number of our First Pres family are caregivers for more than one family member or friend. While the caregiving experience can mean a short-term commitment of weeks or a long-term commitment of years, it is always a gift of love and service.

As I write this column at the beginning of April, I'm remembering someone who embodied caregiving, my friend, our congregant, Dee Blinka Terry. It has been a year since Dee died, leaving behind a legacy of caregiving. Dee was a caregiver in her personal life and her professional life. Much of what she knew about grief, she learned as she responded to the needs and pain of others. I'm not sure when she came to Waco, but I met her when we were forming the first hospice in Waco. The concept was new in the United States, not yet covered by insurance, and a new challenge for health care providers whose jobs had always been to defeat death as long as possible.

I realized that the hospice staff, the first in Waco, were carrying significant caregiver grief, providing care for patients in their last months, weeks, and days of life. The grief that comes with multiple losses began to stack up, and I was looking for someone who could help us manage it. My inquiries about who might help us were answered over and over again with: "I recommend you talk with Dee Blinka." When I called Dee, she immediately agreed to help and refused any payment. She met with the staff, and in her incredibly gentle and competent way, she listened, affirmed, supported, and helped us find balance and healing, honesty in grief, commitment to self-care, and renewed strength. She had those rare gifts of discernment, empathy, wisdom, and compassion. Through the years, her gentle care and dependable friendship were gifts to so many of us in Waco.

Toward the end of her life, Dee knew her body was failing, and her spirit was hungry for preparation for what is next after life in this body. She had lost contact with her church, First Pres in Waco, after she moved to deep West Texas. And serendipitously, I had recently found my church home at First Pres, where the depth of faith exploration was feeding my own hungry spirit. With Dee's permission, I contacted our pastor and introduced Dee and Leslie on the phone and then on Zoom. I had the gift of seeing the mutual wisdom and love of their two spirits greet each other and honor each other. Dee's countenance changed as she received pastoral care and reconnected with her deep faith. A connection was sealed between these two servants of caregiving. In the following months and weeks, I saw in Dee what the scripture calls "peace which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Her daughter's sweet presence, her husband's tender care, her caregiver's faithful attention, and her connection with her faith and with her God were the gifts of love that facilitated her transition.

This woman, who had loved others so well and been a conduit for healing and peace for so many, was receiving the caregiving she had provided to others throughout her life. In those latter days, she became the recipient of body, mind, and soul caregiving from her family, and her pastor, and her church as she moved from this life to the next. Her funeral at First Pres included a Zoom room full of well-known and honored therapists (her colleagues) across Texas, many of whom stayed online for an hour after the service to share stories of her care for others, their love for her, and the difference that caregiving makes. There were tears and laughter, grief and joy. The stories, full of gratitude, are still with me a year later.

Helen Wilson Harris

OUR STAFF AND THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH

A part of the culture of First Presbyterian is to keep learning. Your staff members are striving to understand and stay equipped for the needs of the church today.



- Amy Goodman will attend the Handbell Ringers Association in July.
- Austin Ingalls is enrolled in Princeton Seminary's 24-month online course, Master of Arts in Theology, Justice, and Public Life.
- Becky Ward is on the waiting list for Music in Worship at Montreat and plans to attend one church music conference this summer.
- Leslie King is serving as Vice President of the Presbyterian Association of Science, Technology, and the Christian Faith. Their annual meeting happens at the end of April. You can learn more at pastcf.org. She is also a nominee to the Board of Trustees of Austin Pres. Theological Seminary.
- Shane Montoya will begin coursework in September to obtain his Certificate in Church Management through Villanova University School of Business. This will be an eight-month program that will help build knowledge about the strategic, managerial, and financial aspects of the church.
- Taylor Holleyman is in the ecclesial process of ordination in the PC(USA). Taylor is enrolled as an inquirer in Grace Presbytery and preparing to enter the second and final phase of the process as a candidate for ministry sometime in 2026. In January, Taylor published *Dialectic as Dialogue: Theology After Brunner* with Routledge Publishing.

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity Congregational Event – April 26

9:15–10:15

Fellowship Hall

Our team is excited to welcome Jen Bluestein and Ruth Roman Meza from Grace Presbytery. Over the last few years, Jen and Ruth have led the first Neurodiversity Cohort through its grant challenges.

Breakfast will be served, and we hope our congregation will fill Fellowship Hall to discuss matters of neurodiversity. Our team looks forward to learning from the congregation as we prepare to conclude our work this summer.

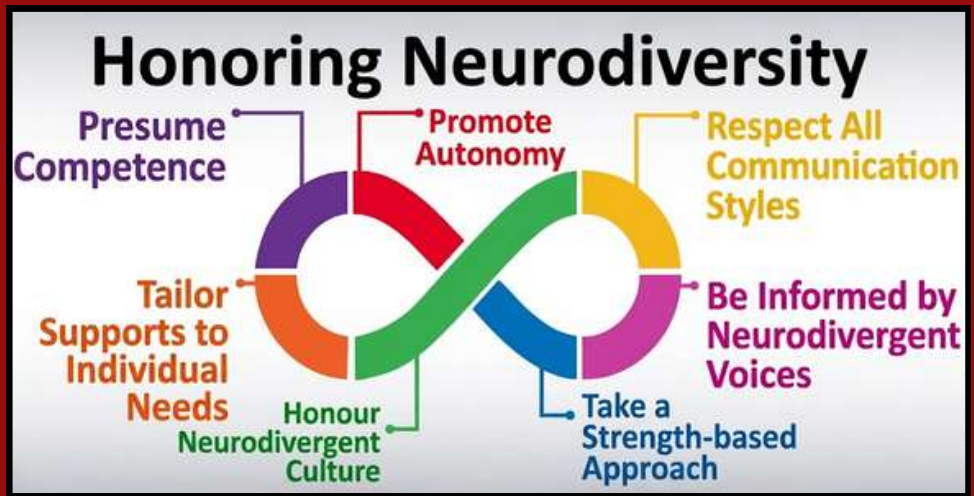
- Lauren Aimone, Chair
- Leslie King
- Malorie Montoya
- Devan Stahl

Neurodiversity defined:

“Neurodiversity describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one ‘right’ way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.”

Origins: The neurodiversity movement emerged during the 1990s, aiming to increase acceptance and inclusion of all people while embracing neurological differences. Through online platforms, more and more autistic people were able to connect and form a self-advocacy movement. At the same time, Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist, coined the term neurodiversity to promote equality and inclusion of "neurological minorities.

Harvard Health Publishing. November 23, 2021



WEBSITE & VITALITY RUBRIC SUMMARY

Check out our updated website pages

- Policy Page
- 1st Visit Page
- Church Life Page
- Outreach Page
- Officer Page



Vitality Report: A Look Back at April. This month, the Session evaluated the core markers of our congregation's health and analyzed recent trends. Here is a preview of the data we've compiled.

Worship Attendance

- During the pandemic (2020–2022), attendance dropped 25%.
- Since 2023, attendance has increased, showing an overall gain of 12.5%.

We see some good trends – as you think about inviting your friends to church and your giving and your participation – we are interested and would welcome your thoughts about how to keep these good trends going and to continue to improve our best practices as a welcoming church.

Congregational Participation

- 45% of active members serve as officers, volunteers, or in other leadership roles (Sanctuary Guild, formation teachers, committee members, etc.). Nearly 10% serve in more than one of these roles.
- 35% of active members attend regularly occurring activities outside of Sunday morning worship (formation classes, Men's Breakfast, Presbyterian Women, Faith on Tap, etc.)

Finances

Total pledged giving represents 64.3% of the total operating budget.

38% of total pledged giving comes from our top 21 givers.

The remaining 35.7% of the total operating budget comes from:

- 14.7% from the FPC Foundation.
- Other Income and transfers represent 10.6% of budgeted revenue.
- 10.4% comes from Unpledged Contributions and Special Offerings.

Total contributions and designated gifts represent 74.7% of the operating budget.

Outreach

Our Outreach efforts support work in the areas of food & housing insecurity, physical & mental health, disaster relief, college ministry, and creation care.

Regular giving, special offerings, donation drives, service Saturdays, as well as local and international partnerships are all part of these efforts.

The Tower
1100 Austin Avenue
Waco, TX 76701
(254) 752-1665
www.firstpreswaco.org

Office Hours
Monday - Friday
9 A.M. - 12 P.M. & 1 P.M. - 4 P.M.



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!

PENTECOST SUNDAY

We invite you to participate in our Pentecost Prayer Ribbon tradition once again. From April 26 through May 24, ribbons will be available for you to scribe your personal prayers. On Pentecost Sunday, we will gather these ribbons at the base of the cross, weaving your individual intentions into the Prayers of the People as we celebrate the gifts of the Spirit together.

