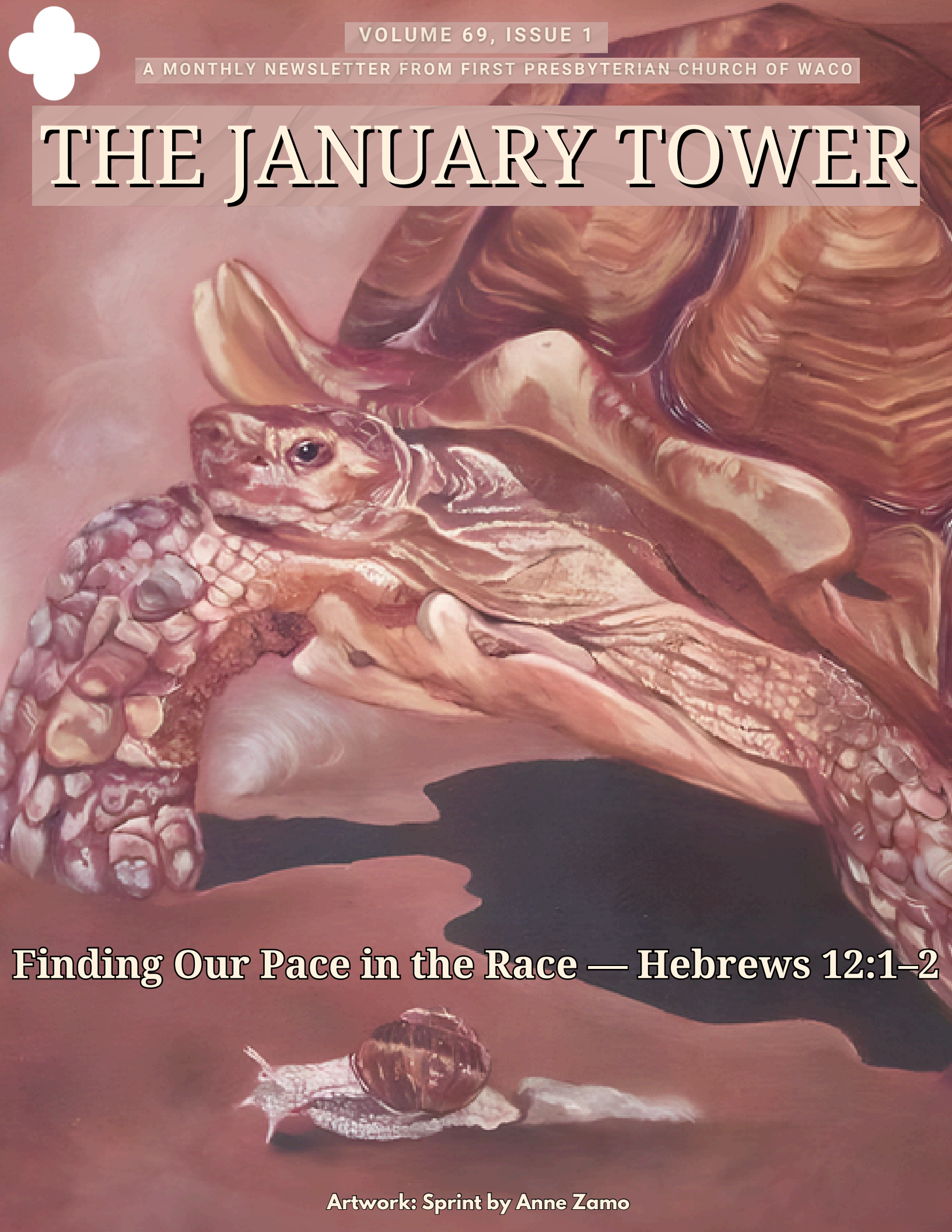




VOLUME 69, ISSUE 1

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WACO

# THE JANUARY TOWER



**Finding Our Pace in the Race — Hebrews 12:1–2**

Artwork: Sprint by Anne Zamo

# LETTER FROM A PASTOR

At the beginning of each new season and circumstance, we get a chance to set the pace for how we will manage the experiences that follow. The pressure and desire to get off on the right foot causes the beginning of each year to feel particularly consequential. We aim to set an appropriate and manageable pace for ourselves, one which can propel us into productivity without deteriorating our long-term health and stamina. Finding the right balance is precarious.

In my twenties, I was more ambitious and had more free time than I do today. For several years, I devoted my excess ambition and time to competing in off-road triathlons around Texas.

Like most hobbies, technology plays an increasingly significant role in the ways people train for and compete in these events. Of all the data that I tracked on heart monitors, power meters, and smart watches, I quickly learned that the most important metric was my heart rate. Fluid intake, power output, time, distance, and average pace were all important, but heart rate was the single best metric for monitoring and managing my overall levels of exertion.

Naturally, poor management of one's efforts – i.e., going out too fast when swimming, cycling, and running – can spike your heart rate to levels that make it difficult for your body to recover and continue with your effort. Keeping a close eye on my heart rate, I noticed that other factors, like adrenaline pumping on the start line and inadvertent shallow breathing, also contributed to elevated heart rates. Understanding the relation between my heart rate and aerobic thresholds for sustainable, unsustainable, and maximum efforts was the key to managing my overall pace and output.

I wonder what measures and metrics we will use to track our efforts and determine our pacing in the new year. What heartbeats should we monitor to determine when there is more energy we can give and when our output is unsustainable?

The health of our relationships might be one of the heartbeats that slows and quickens relative to our many efforts. I was confronted by the wisdom and love of my wife when she said to me, "I can see when you are stressed because you do not act like yourself. You get frantic, and it causes me to feel stress also".

These words were a warning that my exertion level was too high for too long. I needed to control my pace because the whole system was being affected. Trusted loved ones can be a heartbeat in this way: vessels that pump life into our bodies, and a central metric for monitoring and measuring our energy.

As we set the pace for the year ahead, may we be a heartbeat for one another, a sacred community measuring our output by the standards of faith, hope, and love. And may we anchor all our efforts in Christ – the One who steadies our breathing, strengthens our stride, and teaches us when to press on and when to rest.

*Most Gratefully, Taylor Holleyman*

# JANUARY CALENDAR

## Thursday, January 1 (New Years Day)

Office Holiday, All Day

## Friday, January 2nd

Rolling into the New Year, 6:00p.m. – Main Event

## Sunday, January 4th

Worship, 8:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15a.m.  
Worship, 10:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30a.m.

## Tuesday, January 6th

Congregational Life Meeting, 5:30p.m.

## Wednesday, January 7th

Jesus and John Wayne Book Review, 9:30a.m.  
In the Wings Youth Programming, 6:00p.m.  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00p.m.  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00p.m.

## Sunday, January 11th

Worship, 8:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15a.m.  
Worship, 10:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Taking down Christmas decorations, 11:30a.m.  
Our Hybrid House, 5:00p.m. – Zoom

## Monday, January 12th

Presbyterian Women, 1:00p.m. – Fellowship Hall  
Administration Meeting, 5:30p.m. – Zoom  
Outreach Committee Meeting, 5:30p.m.

## Tuesday, January 13th

Faith on Tap, 6:00p.m. – One Day Bar  
618 Columbus Ave STE B, Waco, TX 76701

## Wednesday, January 14th

Jesus and John Wayne Book Review, 9:30a.m.  
In the Wings Youth Programming, 6:00p.m.  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00p.m.  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00p.m.

## Thursday, January 15th

Finance Committee Meeting, 12:00pm – Zoom  
Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00a.m. – Choir Room

## Friday, January 16th

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

## Sunday, January 18th

### (Officer Ordination and Installation)

Worship, 8:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15a.m.  
Worship, 10:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30a.m.

## Monday, January 19th

Session Meeting, 5:30p.m.

## Tuesday, January 20th

First Pres Book Club, 6:30p.m. – Lott's Home

## Wednesday, January 21st

In the Wings Youth Programming, 6:00p.m.  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00p.m.  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00p.m.

## Thursday, January 22nd

Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00a.m. – Choir Room

## Sunday, January 25th

Worship, 8:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Christian Formation, 9:15a.m.  
Worship, 10:30a.m. – Hybrid  
Coffee Fellowship, 11:30a.m.

## Monday, January 26th

Power of the Pen, 7:00p.m. – Zoom

## Tuesday, January 27th

Christian Formation Committee Meeting, 5:30p.m.

## Wednesday, January 28th

Facilitates Committee Meeting, 12:00p.m.  
Worship Committee Meeting, 1:30p.m.  
In the Wings Youth Programming, 6:00p.m.  
Bell Choir Rehearsal, 6:00p.m.  
Choir Rehearsal, 7:00p.m.

## Thursday, January 28th

Classic Voice Ensemble, 9:00a.m. – Choir Room

*Please join us in congratulating Katie Plaskett on her December graduation. We celebrate this accomplishment and wish her every success moving forward.*

# BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

2 Mike Farr, Danna & Bill Beaty 4 Claire King 5 Mary Helen George 6 John Davis 8 Katie Plaskett 9 Toni Percivill  
11 Don Barrett, Alesha Summers 12 Julie Ivey Hatz 13 Jacob Goodman, Kris Olson 14 John Kerley 15 Elaine  
Morris 16 Mark Anderson, Morgan Lacy 17 Donna Fitzpatrick, James Karney 18 Keri Knight, Joe Sudderth 20  
Rebecca Melton 22 Henry Wright, Maddie Lacy 24 Jill Cook, Chelley Breemes 25 Barry Shank, Shannon & Wes  
Field 26 David Priebe, Jackie & Bob Lott 27 Dwana Nesbitt, Dana Williams 29 Jordan Ochel



# OUTREACH

## Family Abuse Center Christmas Collection

We are thrilled to have collected more than 100 items for the Family Abuse Center's Christmas collection. These gifts, toys, and household items were a blessing for deserving families in difficult circumstances. Thank you to everyone who took part.



## Christmas Offering

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Christmas Offering. We look forward to sharing the total amount raised in the February Tower. All gifts will support ongoing recovery efforts in Kerr County through the Rebuild Kerr Fund, managed by the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country. You can follow the recovery efforts at [rebuildkerr.org](http://rebuildkerr.org).



## January Blood Drive

We are hosting a blood drive in partnership with Carter BloodCare. Please consider taking time to give back in this important way. The Carter BloodCare bus will be in the Franklin parking lot on Saturday, January 10, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. Scan the QR code below to reserve your spot!





# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## Soup and Caroling

Thank you to everyone who participated in Soup and Caroling. We had a wonderful time together, visiting a few of our homebound and assisted-living members. Special thanks to members of the Choir for their leadership and to those who provided soup and desserts.



## 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 Ben McNamee for their leadership with this event.



## Dinners for 8

Please look out in January for a save - the - date and sign-up sheet for our spring Dinners for 8. We will host our next Dinners for 8 in March 2026, and ask you to consider hosting or attending a dinner. Dinners for 8 is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy time around the table and get to know other folks in the First Pres community.



## Rolling into the New Year

We invite all young adults and young families to join us as we Roll into the New Year with an evening of Bowling at Main Event on Friday, January 2nd, at 6:00 p.m. Cost for bowling will be covered by the church. Please RSVP on Realm.



# CHRISTIAN FORMATION

## Weaving Science and Faith:

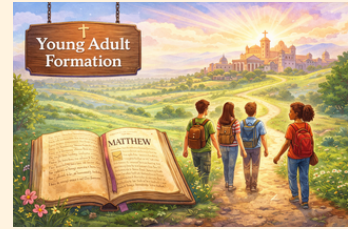
Beginning on January 4th, Dr. Chuck Weaver will help us understand more about the development of the theory of the mind and consciousness. There is a hybrid option for this class. Leslie King facilitates. Looking forward to Dr. Esther Lee in the ensuing months.



## Young Adults Formation:

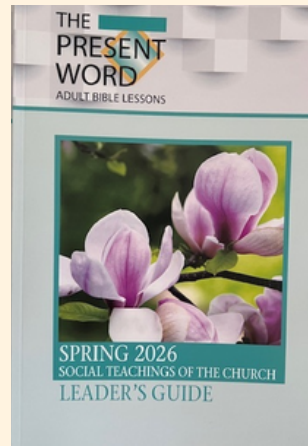
### A Journey Through Matthew

Our Young Adults formation class is led by Taylor and meets Sunday Mornings in room C202. The Young Adults class will begin a series on the gospel of Matthew in January. This class will travel through Matthew each week as we move toward the season of Lent.



## Covenant Class

The Covenant Class will continue its series on "Enduring Beliefs of the Christian Faith" in January and February. This class uses The Present Word curriculum. They meet in person in C203 and on Zoom.



## Family Matters

This spring, Family Matters will review and discuss a video by Richard Rohr based on his book *The Universal Christ*, which explores what it means to recognize Christ as God's ongoing presence in the world. Drawing on scripture and spiritual practice, Rohr offers a hopeful and transformative vision of faith that invites us to see God's presence in all people and throughout creation. Meets in room F105

## *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**

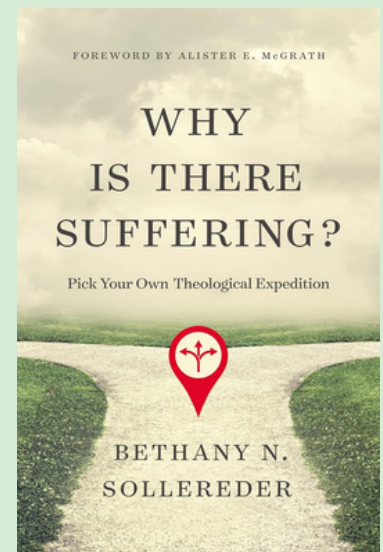
**Midweek Study (Hybrid)**

**Tuesdays: March 11, 18 & 25**

**12:00–1:15 p.m. | Room C201**

**(Daytime option tentative)**

Led by **Leslie King**





# CHRISTIAN FORMATION

## Sunday morning Christian Formation returns January 4!

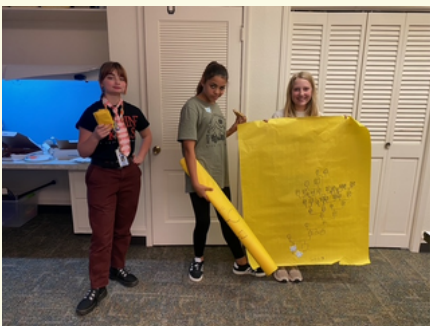
Join us as our children and youth embark on an artistic exploration of the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Our young artists will have the opportunity to enter their work into the 2026 Bill and Judy Franklin Art Show that begins Sunday, March 1, 2026.



## Wednesday Night Programs Begins January 7 – Our theme shifts from the Fall semester's theme of "Into the Heart" to the Spring semester's theme, "It's In the Wings". Join us in January for the following lineup of events:

- January 7 – Cha and Chat 6–7 p.m. – First drink on First Pres – 7 p.m. back to the church for pizza and homework!
- January 14 – Bird Song Quiz in Youth Suite. (Tentative)
- January 21 – Tour of Art Show at Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center 6–7, then back to the church for pizza and homework. (Tentative)
- January 28 – Workshop for Youth Sunday.

Help us build a First Pres playlist by texting your favorite songs to Malorie Montoya @ (254) 239-6442



## Youth Sunday – February 8

Join us for Youth Sunday as our youth lead worship with the theme **"Building on Rock and Sand."** Guided by scripture from Luke and Nehemiah, the service will explore what it means to build our lives on a strong and faithful foundation.





# CAREGIVING, CARETAKING, CARING

I sent last month's offering of the "Caregiving, caretaking, care column" to Leslie the same day Don and I spent at the hospital for a day surgery for him that was necessary for his cancer treatment. We are both "cancer patients" .... which almost seems unfair to say.... because our cancers have been "in monitoring mode" for several years and even now are treatable and manageable, i.e. not currently life - threatening. So, we know both how fortunate and blessed we are and what it is like to live in the shadows of what is next and when? As he makes the trip each day for "radiation therapy", we are aware of the irony of the potential for healing in something with such a terrible name and negative history of death and destruction.

One of the gifts of our cancer journeys has been new awareness of how much evidence there is of goodness in the world. We are learning to recognize the daily gifts of love and kindness around us.

- The nurse who tracked me down in the waiting room with the case for Don's glasses, which I had left behind when they took him to surgery. Her gentle smile when I teared up at her gift of kindness, and my simultaneous relief that the surgery had gone well.
- Watching Jack Watkins Holleyman fist - bump the older adults in the 8:30 service as he moves down the outside of each aisle. Most of all, I am moved by their mutual delight at the engagement.
- The gift of Children's Sunday as the children and youth led service, read scripture, sang, enacted part of the sermon, served communion, took up the offering, and led us in prayer. From the Zoom room, my heart acknowledged: "It is well with my soul."

First Pres provides so much evidence of love and caring and caregiving.

- A pig roast with amazing food and even more full-filling fellowship and relationship building.
- A youth program sustained and nourished by parents and volunteers and young people who take leadership, take care of each other, and laugh and learn together.
- A study of Israel and Palestine that challenges our assumptions, exposes our biases, and dares us to dig deeply into the complexities of war and the possibilities of grace and peace.
- Deacons who show up faithfully to usher, to visit, to take communion to the homebound, and to stock and manage the food closet.
- The opportunity of a master's prepared social work intern who loves the church and offers listening and counseling to those of us negotiating challenging times in life.

And you know so many more examples of caregiving in this body called the church. I would love to hear from you as you consider the caregiving experiences you have received at First Pres and the caregiving opportunities you have engaged in and provided as well. These are the stories that remind us in tumultuous and sometimes fractious times that the Spirit of God in us is activated and active, and each act of love multiplies like loaves and fishes to feed our souls.

Helen Wilson Harris

# OUTREACH PARTNERS

We are very excited to announce our 2026 Outreach Partners. We aim for 10% of our pledged giving to go toward Missions and Outreach. Each of our partners will receive quarterly financial contributions from First Presbyterian's Outreach budget. Thank you to the Outreach Committee for their work assessing partnership applications, and to everyone whose generous giving allows us to support these organizations. We look forward to finding additional ways we can serve our partners throughout the year.

## 2026 Outreach Partners:

- The Cove
- Mission Waco
- Talitha Koum
- Habitat for Humanity
- Meals on Wheels
- Caritas
- Compassion Waco
- Better at Last
- World Hunger Relief



# NEW OFFICER SPOTLIGHTS

I have been a member at First Presbyterian for 40 years. My favorite thing about our church is that being a member feels like being in a large extended family, which brings a great level of support, friendship, and love.

*Marilyn Harren*



Deacon

I've been a First Pres member for 25 (or 26 years?). I love the people of First Pres: from Pastor Leslie and the dedicated ministry team to the talented staff and the thoughtful congregants. Serving, worshipping, learning, and living faith together—on everyone's own terms—makes for a rich, diverse, and beautiful family.

*Lenore Wright*



Elder

By January, I'll have been a member at First Pres for 1.5 years. My favorite thing about First Pres is that we consider everyone -- children get a moment during each service with the Spirit Box, we're welcomed to stand in body or in spirit (which resonates with me as a disabled individual), the LGBTQIA+ community is welcomed and affirmed, hybrid options are always provided, the church gives back to the local community, and more! When we say "Welcome home, children of God," each week, I know we mean it.

*Katie Valenzuela*



Deacon

We joined the church April 5th, 2009. My favorite thing about the church building is the sanctuary - specifically the gorgeous stained-glass windows. But my favorite thing about the overall church is the people. Kind, welcoming, generous and loving people.

*Melanie Cook*



Deacon

Member since 1989. Favorite thing about First Pres: The genuine sense of caring, affection, and trust among members of the congregation.

*Charles Weaver*



Elder



# NEURODIVERSITY

## Neurodiversity Ministry Update

The Neurodiversity Team continues meeting to explore ways to honor neurodiversity in worship and to review current practices with accessibility and inclusion in mind.

**Sunday, March 1** – The team will visit **Galileo Church in the Metroplex** to learn from their inclusive worship approach.

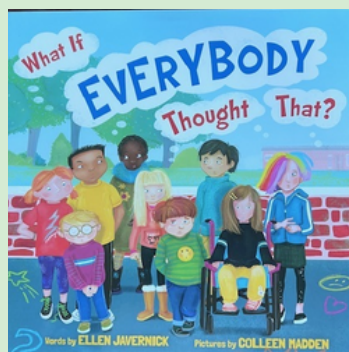
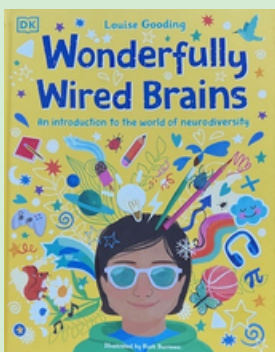
**Sunday, April 26 — After Worship** – Our congregation is invited to a **Neurodiversity Education Event** from 9:15–10:20 a.m. in **Fellowship Hall**. Join us for a time of learning, meaningful conversation, and shared reflection as we grow together in understanding neurodiversity.

## Library Update

Several new books on neurodiversity have been added to our children's library. These selections are now available to the congregation:

- Next Level: A Hymn in Gratitude for Neurodiversity — Samara Cole Doyon
- Masterpiece — Alexandra Hoffman
- What If Everybody Thought That? — Ellen Javernick
- Wonderfully Wired Brains: An Introduction to the World of Neurodiversity — Louise Gooding

We invite you to stop by the library and explore these thoughtful and engaging new resources. Look out for next month's feature—a book review by Hannah Gingles.



**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 UPDATE

Stewardship is a year-long flow of assessment and commitment. We are celebrating the 90 pledge cards we have received so far. We also hold with tenderness, those pledgers who have completed their human pilgrimage and done their part. In their wake, new givers rise up and step into the space, helping us to remain a generous congregation. We are humbled when so many of you give an extra mile for projects or just because you can.

Even though we are still receiving stewardship cards, the session passed an unbalanced budget for 2026. We will look more closely at the stewardship results and the 2026 budget in the early weeks of January. On Ordination and Installation Sunday, we will be able to formally celebrate the results of our campaign and how it impacts the budget/ministry for 2026.

Thanks to all, and keep those cards coming if you have it on your mind and heart to do so.

*- The 2025 Session*