

the Messenger

VOLUME 31 ISSUE 4
JULY 17, 2025

July/August 2025

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SAVE THE DATE! RALLY DAY IS ON SEPTEMBER 7



Recently at Riverside



Above: Open house at Riverside Tradition House on May 18, 2025. Below: Pentecost worship. Bottom Middle and Left: Pentecost liturgical art preparation. Bottom Right: Lunch Bunch gathering at The Cummer Café on June 19, 2025.



The next 65+ Lunch Bunch is scheduled for August 21 at 11:30 am at Blue Fish Restaurant in Avondale.

From Your Pastor

Brian Lays

Dear Riversiders:

We received a remarkable amount of useful feedback from the Be the Church initiative and have been working diligently to process that data. The Session, in conversation with the HR committee, has made some additional investments in our staffing as a response to the opportunities and desires expressed in the Be the Church data.



First, we moved our Director of Community Life position from part-time to full-time. (To avoid confusion with "Community Outreach," the title has been adjusted to "Director of Congregational Life.") We have hired Jaimie Smith to serve in the role, and her ministry is off to a wonderful start. The Be the Church feedback suggests that our members desire additional regular fellowship programming for all ages. Jaimie will work to develop more regular offerings for older adults, young adults, and those in-between. Her position will also work more closely with visitors and new members, shepherding people from their first visit into the life of our congregation. Volunteer recruitment will also be an additional emphasis in this position; this role was first recommended to the Session two years ago by a consultant at a Session retreat, and our overall engagement with volunteers could certainly become more streamlined. Jaimie will work in all these areas of ministry, in addition to overseeing congregation-wide fellowship events and memorial service receptions.

The Session also responded to clear data showing a desire for more educational opportunities by approving the formation of a part-time Director of Children's Ministry. Over the past year, over 20 new children have become regularly engaged in the life of our church, and we have added *Grow in Grace* and *Worship and Wonder* as additional children's programs. In an effort to continue to expand our children's offerings, this new position helps equip us to meet the growing needs of our young families. It also allows Emily Heeg to put additional time into growing our small group and adult education offerings, both of which have seen additional engagement over the past couple of years. Opportunity knocks in the areas of education and fellowship, and we are working to staff the church accordingly.

Finally, as Christy Lane transitions into the Sexton position, we have decided not to hire another custodian to replace her, but instead, to contract out our custodial services. Director of Facilities, Sam Myhre has worked to include the church on RPDS's custodial contracts, so we will be able to keep our spaces clean with considerable savings over and against what it would cost to have our own contract. This is just one example of how Sam is helping RPC and RPDS maximize resources by aligning contracts and services that both entities rely on.

There is never a dull moment at Riverside as we work to provide opportunities for each of our members to engage in their faith in meaningful ways. Thanks for your support as we work to serve you faithfully, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Brian

SUMMER OF *Gratitude*

June 1

1
week

A/V Team
Worship Ushers
Communion Prep Team
Unsung Heroes of Worship Logistics

June 8

2
week

Flower Arranging Team
Flower Delivery Team

June 15

3
week

Chancel Choir
Handbell Choir

June 22

4
week

Children's Ministry

June 29

5
week

Deacon and Care Ministries

July 6

6
week

Church Officers (Elders, Deacons, Trustees)
Church Committees

July 13

7
week

Community Missions Volunteers
Part 1: Lunch Buddies, Trinity Lutheran Food Pantry Volunteers and Food Drive Contributors, Neighboring Collaborative Members, DESC Volunteers, Alternative Gift Market Planning Team, and Five Points Association Members

July 20

8
week

Memorial Reception Volunteers
Cookies and Lemonade Hosts
Be the Church Volunteers

Each week of the summer, we are taking time to say
THANK YOU
to all of the people who help make ministry happen at Riverside.

Check the bulletin, weekly email, and social media each week of the summer!

Belonging, Connecting, Transforming

Heather Campbell

This summer we have been exploring our core values of belonging, connecting and transforming during Sunday School. Members have been sharing their experiences of these values in their lives. Heather Campbell shared a little bit about her experience attending the class and what the class has meant to her.

The Belonging, Connecting, Transforming Adult Sunday School Class was an unexpected revelation for me. I expected that I would hear my fellow Riversiders share stories of their faith journeys and that, in doing so, I would learn more about them individually and that somehow their stories would be tied into Riverside Presbyterian Church's core values of Belonging, Connecting, and Transforming. What I didn't expect is how much hearing those sometimes deeply personal stories and faith journey experiences would deepen my own understanding of those core values.



I'm grateful for this time when current members, new members, or those considering membership have a unique opportunity to learn about these representatives of the church congregation—who they are as individuals. We came to realize what we have in common as well as how our various experiences enrich what we “bring to the table.” We were also able to unpack what the core values truly mean. They aren't merely words in a mission statement but are words calling us to action, influencing our behaviors, and demonstrating that “they will know we are Christians by our love.” This class challenges us not only to explore who we are—singularly and as a church—and what we believe, but to explore, imagine, and motivate ourselves to convert those words into action.

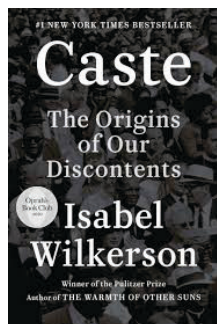
Matthew 25 Lending Library

... focusing on matters of justice and equality



RPC is a Matthew 25 (M25) congregation of the PC(USA). In Matthew 25, Jesus makes clear that what we do and how we treat others matters to God. Matthew 25 provides the foundation and framework for the missions of RPC. The three focus areas of the Matthew 25 initiative include: building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating poverty. Responding with wisdom and discernment, we educate ourselves and work together to make our community more compassionate, more inclusive, and more just.

We have an amazing resource that informs and challenges us in our work: the Matthew 25 Lending Library. It is located in Bittinger Hall, inviting us all to sit, browse the collection, and check out a book! Our Lending Library was established because of the generous donation of Carl and Barbara Zacheis of a very comprehensive collection of books focusing on historical issues of race and inequality and our responses to racism today. Read Carl's reviews of the books below.



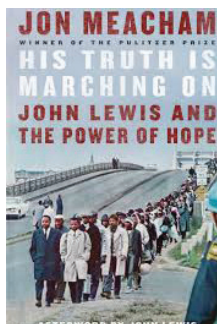
Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents

by Isabel Wilkerson

Chicago Tribune: “It should be at the top of every American’s reading list.” A deeply researched narrative and story about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, and a rigid hierarchy of human rankings. Wilkerson documents

how the Nazis studied the racial systems in America to plan their outcasting of the Jews. This book is an eye-opener.

Check out a book from the Matthew 25 Lending Library TODAY! If you'd like more information about the work of the Matthew 25 and the Community Outreach Committee, please contact dana.riley@rpcjax.org.



His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope

by Jon Meacham

This author covers the relatively limited portion of John Lewis' life when he was actively on the scene of the Freedom Riders, Voting Rights Act, etc. What really is memorable about John Lewis and this book was the entire subject

of Passive Resistance. Lewis and his supporters literally practiced and trained for passive resistance. Then the reports of attacks and resistance became very real as described by Meacham. This description had a big impact on me because passive resistance is precisely what Christ did.

The UN's Status of Women Conference

Elaine Akin

Back in March of this spring, I had the extraordinary honor of attending the 69th annual NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York (NGO CSW) at the United Nations (UN). With the theme of “Beijing +30,” this year’s conference marked the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—a landmark document adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 outlining a global agenda for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (source: www.archive.unescwa.org)—and considered its recommended policies and their progress over the last three decades. I was inspired to attend after learning about the global advocacy of our denomination through the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness last year and with the support of many caring women in our faith community here at RPC. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity.

The NGO CSW conference typically lasts two weeks, and I was fortunate to have attended three days. It was action-packed! Historically, official delegates attend a simultaneous conference occurring in the UN headquarters in Midtown Manhattan, and the rest of us meet for sessions across the street in the Church Center for the UN (commonly known as CCUN), a privately-owned interfaith space operated by the United Women in Faith, housing the offices of various NGOs and religions, including our very own Presbyterian Ministry at the UN. Every room was full for nearly every session with standing and floor-sitting room only.



Among many guests, I was hosted for a reception by the Presbyterian office, where I met the PC(USA) Representative to the UN Sue Rheem and her team, as well as members of the Presbyterian Women delegation. Here, I had the pleasure of running into Ivy Lopedito, who preached here at RPC last year, and Christina Cosby (pictured below), both from the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness. I also volunteered for an afternoon in a series of sessions greeting and seating delegates and passing the microphone during Q&A.

As I reflect now on what still resonates most, I remember the feeling of being the minority as a white American in every single room and realizing the privilege that accompanies that; I quickly understood my role as a listener, holder of space, and yielder of platform. Surrounded by women from all over the world in sessions such as “Powerful Yet Overlooked: African Women, Diversity, and Inclusion,” “Empower Women with Education to Build a Gender-Equal Society” using Japan’s WFWP (Women’s Federation for World Peace) as a case study, and “Centering Feminist Well-being for Healthy Economies, Humanity, and the Planet,” I heard accounts of abject, systemic challenge for women everywhere with a surprisingly common thread—lack of representation in elected positions. Led by highly qualified and experienced moderators and panelists at the top of their professions with the mission of policymaking and progress, however, the 2025 NGO CSW left me with an impression of hope, determination, and perseverance, as not even the slightest sign of defeat or giving up emerged despite women’s many obstacles in the world, agnostic of their country’s third- or first-world status. It was an experience of a lifetime, and I hope to attend again in the future as a member of the Presbyterian Women delegation.



More Than Just Lunch

Mark Rosenberg

To most of us Riversiders, Ed Pratt Dannals is the retired Duval County superintendent, a church leader, and an all-round great guy. To Rowan, a West Riverside elementary fourth grader, Ed is the guy who comes in each week to join him for lunch on Wednesdays. Rowan doesn't know about Ed's distinguished career in education. He just knows that Ed comes to see him every week, asks about what is going on in his life, and sometimes brings him lunch. Today when I arrived at West Riverside, Rowan came running up to me asking me if I knew if Ed was coming. When I said I thought he was coming a different day this week, Rowan's disappointment was visible. A few minutes later, Rowan circled back around just to make sure Ed hadn't arrived late. Rowan knows Ed is coming this week. Ed always comes, but Rowan was sad not to see him today.



It is a small sacrifice to spend 30 minutes at West Riverside Elementary each week during the school year; however, the relationships built are meaningful. There is a buzz in the air when you arrive and see your fellow church members arriving, departing, playing games, laughing, and like Ed, making an impact even on the days they're not present.

Thanks to the dedication of Jean Grant-Dooley and Bud Para, this program has been in existence for many years. Each year students are paired with Riverside volunteers, and the magic begins. Throughout the school year, countless games of Uno, Jenga, Connect 4, Monopoly Junior, and any other game you can imagine are played on a daily basis. The kids don't know whether they're spending time with an executive, a professional, a retiree, or even the former Superintendent of their school district. They just know that someone consistently shows up and takes an interest in their life. I am proud to be part of this program and would encourage anyone who isn't to think about it.

Riverside Tradition House Update

Cliff Huber

The Open House at Riverside Tradition House (RTH) on May 18 attracted the best attendance since the pandemic. The manager, Mark Ragland, will be retiring and was honored for his years of service at the event. Zach Campbell, a former RTH resident currently working in the recovery industry, will be the new manager. He is only the fourth manager of RTH in 54 years! In the coming months, the RTH Board of Directors plans to automate its accounting, update its website, and add a fundraiser to the schedule. There are also plans to make improvements to the transitional housing quadruplex across the street. The mission is blessed with a great location in Avondale, but maintenance and repairs on a 110-year-old historic home and the quadruplex are never-ending.



Cliff Huber, Mark Ragland, and Zach Campbell

RTH is the oldest mission of Riverside Presbyterian Church and benefits greatly from the support of the Church, the Community Outreach Committee, and the congregation. The Rev. Dana Riley attends RTH board meetings and advocates on behalf of the mission. RTH is known as a Sober House, and its mission is to provide a safe and structured living environment for men in recovery from alcoholism and substance abuse, helping them to return to a productive lifestyle. RTH serves around 120 men per year. Two-thirds of the annual budget is paid by residents' rents. Meals are provided by a full-time cook, and two AA meetings are held at the house each week.

The Tradition House Board of Directors will certainly be missing Jon Thompson, who sadly passed away recently. He was an active and outstanding board member for many years. Jon had a great heart for mission work and set a great example for others. To learn more about Tradition House, speak with Pastor Dana Riley! See photos from the Open House on page 2.

Recently at Riverside



Riverside's Vacation Bible School was June 2-6, 2025. This year's theme, "On the Go With God" reminded all of us that God is always with us on the journey!



Our rising 3rd and 4th graders served all over the city June 2-6, 2025, with our Summer in the City program. They learned about and served with Downtown Ecumenical Services Council (DESC), United Community Outreach Ministry (UCOM), St. Johns Riverkeeper, Trinity Lutheran Food Pantry, and Meals on Wheels.



RPC Youth served with CROSS Missions in Charlotte, North Carolina, June 8-14, 2025.

Tell us about one of the worksites: what did we do, and why was it meaningful?

Will: Samaritan's Feet

because I know how much of an importance it is to have shoes and how difficult life is without shoes.

Waller: Roof Above because we could see our impact on others.

Ford: The Hospitality House because we were helping people going through a hard time.

What is your favorite memory from CROSS?

Will: The urban walk when we got to see all the paintings.

Waller: Playing Bingo with people who are bouncing back from homelessness.

James: Going to the graduation party.

Ford: At Samaritans Feet we made a strategy to make it extremely efficient and it was fun helping them because of that.

What is one faith-focused idea that you are taking with you (particularly regarding the theme for the week)?

Will: We can't stereotype people, and the situation they are in is not always their fault.

James: How can others' perspectives can be different than yours.

Ford: No matter what, God will always be with you.

What is one way you can make a positive impact while you're back in Jacksonville after the trip?

Will: Find more opportunities to volunteer in town.

Waller: I can smile at people to make them feel welcome.

James: I made homeless people feel like they belonged.

Recently at Riverside: Massanetta Middle School Conference

RPC's trip to Massanetta Middle School Conference was June 22–28, 2025, in Harrisonburg, Virginia. On the way, they stopped at Shandon Presbyterian in Columbia, South Carolina, and at Andy and Rebecca McNeil's farm in Virginia.

What does the theme “Holy Love, Wholly Loved” mean to you?

Olivia: That through God's love we are completely and holy loved.

Lily: That no matter what God loves you unconditionally, and you are enough.

Why is Massanetta special/sacred to you?

Ceci: Massanetta is a safe place to be different and makes us closer to God.

Leighton: It's a place to talk to God and to make new friends.

James: Because there is a spring.

Ryker: It has a cool spring.

What is one memory you're taking away from this week?

Olivia: Swimming in the river at the McNeils' and many more.

Ian: Throwing the talking rock.

Ceci: My encounter group and all the fun and laughter we had.

James: Hiking in the woods.

Lily: Floating down the river or playing 9 Square in the air.

Leighton: Meeting Haddie and swimming in the river at the mountains.

What are three words you'd use to describe this trip?

Ceci: Exciting, tiring, interesting.

James: Party, party, party.

Ian: Tiring, drink water.

Lily: Memorable, constant, laughter.



Recently at Riverside: Montreat Youth Conference

Our high school youth spent a week at Montreat Youth Conference in Montreat, North Carolina, July 5–12, 2025. The conference theme this year was “Light My Path.”

To me, the theme “Light My Path” emphasizes the importance of showing your light everywhere you go and not hiding it. It also means to see the light in others and reflect it on those around you. –Aleydis Lockwood

Montreat is special to me because it’s a great time for community, peace, and worship. One memory I’m taking away from the week is the really powerful sermon about how God doesn’t want an edited version of yourself and to bring everything in your “suitcase.” – Haiden Christian

Montreat has the presence of God surrounding it. The people and community there embody the meaning of being a Christian. I am taking the memory of Pretty Road with me. It was so surreal to see how gorgeous and how carefully the world was created. – Anne Craig Charnley



Montreat is special to me because of the community of people I have established there. I won’t forget meeting new people and hearing from people in my small group. –Emily Stevenson

Montreat is special to me because of the amazing connections you get to form with people from all different places in such a short time. One memory I’m taking away from this week is watching the variety show and getting to see all the different talents at Montreat. –Bryce Heeg



August Birthdays

11	22	Cade Cummings	20
Anna Coddington	William Beard	Katie Fackler	Juno Tran
Gayle Kanak	Jack Blanks	Kyle Gittings	
Ann McDowell	Richard Campbell	Mia Hoff	22
	McGregor Lott		Judi Hardwick
13		8	Jared McNeil
Win Branch	23	Bill Adams	Virginia Zeigler
Michael Fallucco	Alice Trice		
Cole Heeg		9	23
Elijah Sooter-Poplin	24	Nancy Cable	Eliza Farnell
	Lock Farnell	Bess Goff	
14	Saundra Howard	Bryce Heeg	24
Margaret Hall			David Alexander
	26	10	Robin Campen
15	Ford Milne	Debbie Crumpler	Caroline Cavendish
Harrison Cavendish		Kinga Evert	Grady Gillam
Stacey Halkovitch	27	Michael Fisher	Janice Luffey
Dave Tuttle	Leah McNeil		Will Overton
		11	Elise Polito
16	28	Joe Clements	Ella Schneider
Jo Caraway	Jonathan Rogers	Steve Judd	Charlotte Stratton
Erin Du Chanois	Charlotte Rosenberg		
RJ Root		12	25
	29	Vickie Breedlove	Carol Peters
17	Clay Meux	Lindsey Schneider	Hoyt Rosenbloom
Alex Mixson	Lindy Williams		
Landry Schoenberger	30	13	26
Lindsay Schoenberger	Robert Adams	Tyler McKendree	Matt Cunningham
Lukas Schoenberger	Patrick Green		Leo King
		14	Susie Morrow
18	September Birthdays	Clare Charnley	Bob Nichols
Jean Grant-Dooley		Catherine Gibbs	Ben Sandlin
Laura Jane Powell	1	Bobbie Gittings	
Ted Powell	Mike Fisher	Carolyn Tuttle	27
Leslie Williams	Corena Mixson	Karen Weaver	Brandon Campbell
			Jim Crooks
19		15	Laura Hahn
Molly Davidson	3	Cory Hodak	Daren Hoffman
Ronda Doonan	Joan Madison	Jen Hoff	Ford McDowell
Julie Drew	Susan Parsons		Nell Trice
Glenn McKibbin		16	
	4	Vance Chrystal	28
20	Eli Stevenson	Gardner Davis	Georgia Goff
Susan Baker		Ben Williams	Trent Newton
Claudia Calhoun	5		Tee Spanton
Carol Platt	Caden Spohr	17	
Charlie Sooter-Poplin		Brooke Rice	29
	6		Cindy Fitch
21	David Wrenn	18	Lauren Fitzharris
Jack Davis	Ron Root	Andrea Hoff	Debra McEachin
Jeff Lane		William Michaelis	
Kylie Leuthold	7	Lynn Thompson	30
	George Armstrong	Lisa Williams	Morgan McEachin

If we are missing your birthday,
please call the Church Office
(904) 355-4585 or
email communication@rpcjax.org

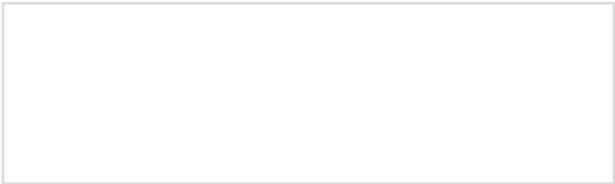


849 Park Street
Jacksonville, FL 32204-3394

Address Service Requested

THE MESSENGER (USPS 466-960) is published bi-monthly by the Riverside Presbyterian Church, 849 Park Street, Jax. FL 32204-3394 (904) 355-4585
Periodicals Postage Paid at Southside Blvd. Business Mail Entry Unit. Jax. FL 32216-9651
POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to THE MESSENGER 849 Park Street; Jax., FL 32204-3394

Periodical Postage Paid



**ONE SERVICE AT 10:30 AM
THROUGH AUGUST 31**

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

8:30 AM Worship
9:00 AM Rally Day
10:30 AM Worship

Summer
WORSHIP SCHEDULE
Riverside Presbyterian Church

Summer Sunday School 9:30–10:15 am

