

the Messenger

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July/August 2026

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Vacation Bible School





Above: "Summer in Shorts" Picnic after worship on Sunday, June 7.

Below: An Evening of Music, Community, and Reflection: Patriotic Concert and Fried Chicken Dinner on Sunday, June 28.



From Your Pastor

Brian Lays

Dear Riversiders:

What a delightful summer of worship we've had so far! The series on Riverside's most beloved hymns, which we are calling "Then Sings My Soul," has been even more enjoyable than I'd imagined. Singing the hymns we voted as our favorites in the middle of each service has been a powerful crescendo in worship each week, and an interesting segue into the reading and proclamation of the scriptures that undergird the theology contained in the hymns themselves.



The stories behind the hymns have left a profound impression on me, from British Pastor Robert Robinson's honest admission that he is "prone to wander" his faith making him a "debtor" to grace, to Horatio Spafford's faithful proclamation, "it is well with my soul," despite suffering enormous personal tragedies. People are sometimes quick to dismiss hymns that from centuries ago as old and stuffy, or perhaps even out of touch, but in fact, so many things are "from age to age the same," as people of all generations search for words by which to proclaim the faith they know and experience as they navigate their way through life. When the words they find are poetic and put to melody, they have even more lasting power, as they become the sung faith of the church for generations to come.

All three hymns in each service this summer were nominated by someone at Riverside as a favorite, so even if your favorite hymn isn't a topic for a sermon, we'll still sing it. The hymnody, coupled with the come-one-come-all choir this summer, have given summer worship a unique feel. I hope you'll continue to join us every week you're in town, or tune in online if you're away!

Summers are an important season in the life of our church. Though programming slows down a little bit, Sunday mornings remain vibrant. As we've noticed in prior years, there seems to be an uptick in visitors—people seem to "church shop" in the summer. So, we've continued to emphasize our visitor outreach, with a new booth next to the Cookies & Lemonade table with information about our church and how to get involved. When you come to church this summer, keep your eyes open for new faces, and greet them warmly—people who have joined our church recently often mention the warm welcome they first received when they walked through our doors. Being a welcoming, hospitable place that embodies the love of Jesus is the one proven church growth strategy!

So, invite your friends to join you for church this summer, and come sing with us as we continue our most beloved hymns series all the way until Rally Day kicks off our fall season on September 13th! And if you're out and about, may God keep you safe and well in all your comings and goings!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Brian

A "Summer in the City" Ministry

Janet Novick



For the week of June 1-5, our 3-5th graders stepped out of the comfort of their routines and into the heart of Jacksonville for our annual Summer in the City program. It was an incredible week of service, community building, and spiritual growth, with 15 fantastic kids dedicating their time and energy to being the hands and feet of Jesus in our local community at:

UCOM Jax & Trinity Lutheran Food Pantry: The group helped tackle local food insecurity by sorting donations, packing bags, and learning about the critical networks that feed our neighbors.

Fort Caroline National Memorial Park & Tillie K. Fowler Regional Park: Showing love for our city's history and green spaces, the youth worked hard on trail cleanup, keeping creation safe and looking great!

After a rewarding week of hard work, the final day was dedicated to reflection, rest, and celebration. The kids spent the day at Tree Hill Nature Center, immersing themselves in the beauty and wonder of God's creation together.

An impactful week like this doesn't just happen on its own. We owe a massive debt of gratitude to the incredible leadership team who guided our youth through this journey:

Karen Smith & Caitlyn Armstrong

A huge shoutout and thank you to our main leaders for their tireless dedication to making this week a resounding success.

Molly Davidson

Thank you for centering our hearts and minds by presenting a beautiful, grounding devotional for the group.

Emily Heeg, Rev. Dana Riley, and Rev. Lauren Scott

We are so grateful for your exceptional chaperoning skills, keeping everyone safe, energized, and inspired throughout the week. Thank you for driving the van!

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." — 1 Peter 4:10

Thank you to our congregation for your continued prayers and support of our children's ministry. Because of you, our kiddos are learning what it truly means to love their neighbor and care for the world around them!



Celebrating Vacation Bible School!

Janet Novick

What a joy-filled, high-energy week we shared at Riverside Presbyterian Church! From June 1-5, our hallways were buzzing with excitement, laughter, and the beautiful sound of children learning about God's strength during our annual Vacation Bible School.

This year, over 50 incredible VBS kids joined us for an unforgettable journey. Together, we explored what it truly means to rely on God. Through the power of storytelling, our children saw God's strength come alive in scripture. They learned about the brave faith of Queen Esther, discovered how God worked through Joseph as he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and the sacrificial giving found in the story of the widow's mite.



An incredible week like this is only possible because of the heartbeat of our church: our people. I want to extend my deepest, most sincere appreciation to all of our faithful volunteers. Both youth and adults gave their time and energy to share the love of Christ. Thank you to all who served including:

Kathy Stanley
Norma Farnell
Bud Para
Kathy Para
Jared Stellmacher

Rev. Jessica Means
Pat Setzer
Margee Michaelis
Penny Cunningham
Arden Brugger

Bess Goff
Lauren Fitzharris
Jen Edwards
Pat Setzer
Cheryl Neder Sapora

Rev. Dr. Brian Lays
Rev. Lauren Scott
Breanna Sooter



A special thank you goes to our incredible youth who stepped up to support our VBS kids this summer! RPC would not be able to have this program without your leadership and faithful service. Thank you for being amazing role models and for sharing your time and big hearts with our kids. We are so proud of you! Thank you, Riverside Presbyterian Church for investing so beautifully in the next generation!

Will Fackler
Leighton Edwards
Caroline Edwards
Palmer Edwards
Ellie Chambliss

Kimbrough Chambliss
Sofia Buckner
Peyton Travis
Akery Paing
Lily McDonald



Sacred Ground

Julie Kellogg, RPC Member

On a rainy December evening, a group of 13 people, including myself, began an 11-session journey on the campus of RPC. The journey was Sacred Ground, “a film- and readings-based dialogue series on race, grounded in faith,” which was facilitated by Pastor Dana Riley and Mr. Paul Arrington. With prayer, devotion and some snacks, we set out to learn.

Prior to each session, we completed homework that focused on a different aspect of our nation’s history. We explored Indigenous, Black, Latino and Asian/Pacific American histories, and how they relate to European American histories. We were invited to discuss our experiences, our blind spots and what we were learning in Sacred Ground. We wrestled with many difficult truths.

I have realized over the past years how important it is for me, as a white person in the United States, to inform myself about the full history of our nation. However, I was struck by the amount of information and education that Sacred Ground presented, and my recognition that I still have so much to learn and do. I did not anticipate the close bond that formed between our group members, and the rich discussions that ensued.

The days lengthened, we moved into Spring, and our time together came to an end in April. As part of our final session we were each charged to craft a lament, which named the sorrowful things that we had learned, confessed our role in it, asked God to bring about healing and repair, and finally ended with Thanksgiving. Tears were shed as each person shared their lament. My personal lament includes the prayer “Please stir among our nation to open hearts to learn about our history, and begin to repair...I ask especially that Christians and our churches would lead the way. Please help me to see each person for what they are: created in the image of God. May your Kingdom come to Earth.”



Thank you, Dave and Angie!

Riverside Presbyterian Church celebrates and gives thanks for Dave Tuttle as he concludes 15 years of faithful service as director of our handbell choir. Through his thoughtful leadership, careful preparation, and humble spirit, Dave has enriched our worship and nurtured a community of



fellowship among our ringers. He welcomed new members, selected beautiful music, and provided a steady, faithful presence in our music ministry.

Though he never sought recognition, we are deeply grateful for Dave's years of dedicated leadership. We thank God for his ministry among us and wish him every blessing in this new season. Thank you, Dave, for your faithful service to Riverside.

On Sunday, June 14, Riverside Presbyterian Church recognized and celebrated Angie Acedera as she concluded her ministry with us as a staff singer. For nearly a year, Angie faithfully shared her musical gifts, enriching our worship through her beautiful singing, professionalism, gracious spirit, and support of the music ministry.

As Angie begins an exciting new chapter in Atlanta, we offer our heartfelt thanks for all she has shared with Riverside. Her talents, dedication, and friendship have blessed our congregation. We send her with our love and prayers, asking God's continued guidance and blessings in the days ahead. Thank you, Angie, for your faithful ministry. Godspeed!



A Summer Filled with Song... and More to Come!

Jared Stellmacher

As we've been singing our congregation's favorite hymns each Sunday, the choir has complemented those beloved songs with some new and favorite choral anthems of its own. I've especially enjoyed our relaxed summer format, which has created a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for making music together. It has been a wonderful way to lead worship, build community, and share the joy of singing. We've also welcomed several new singers this summer, and there's always room for one more! If you've ever thought about singing with the choir, there's still time! Our summer schedule continues through Labor Day weekend, and all you have to do is show up at **9:30 am in the sanctuary**.

In September, we'll begin another exciting season of music. **Handbell Choir rehearsals** will meet on **Thursdays from 5:30–6:30 pm**, followed by **Choir rehearsals from 6:30–8:00 pm**. One of the things I love most about music ministry is that it is about so much more than making music. It is about building friendships, growing in faith, encouraging one another, and offering our gifts to God together. Whether you've sung your whole life, haven't sung in years, have never rung a handbell, or are simply looking for a place to connect, I'd love to invite you to join us.

Both groups are open to everyone. There are no auditions or special requirements—just bring enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and a willingness to learn. I'll help with the rest! I truly believe there is a place for everyone in Riverside's music ministry, and I'd love to help you find yours. Come make music with us this fall—I think you'll discover it's about much more than singing or ringing bells. **It's about belonging.**



Star Wall Status!

Arden Brugger

RPC made the Salvation Army Volunteer Star Wall for raising \$2,353.34 during the December 2025 Red Kettle drive. All of the money raised through the Red Kettle drive stays local.

Thanks to our star bell ringers: The Cunningham, Davidson, and Fackler families; John Meux, Karen Stiltz, Mattox Hair,

Maggie Means, Christy Lane, Jane Pollock, Sadie Hunt, Kate Campen, Arden Brugger, Susie Morrow, Joe Eberly, Agnes Fredericks, Bud and Kathy Para, Dan and Nancy

Warner, Fran Aenchbacher and Gary Bowers, Frank and Kathy Shuke, Karen Weaver, Bill and Susan Schilling, Pat Mason, Dave Tuttle, Sally Ragsdale, Janet Novick, Anne Mattia, Norma Farnell, Carol Platt, Elizabeth Niebrugge, Bill Proctor, Joel and Debra McEachin, John and Susan Humes, Patty Knight, Jean Grant-Dooley, Elaine and Tim Akin, and Joan Madison.



"Peace-ing Together, Peace by Piece"

Massanetta Middle School Conference in Harrisonburg, Virginia



WHAT IS ONE MEMORY THAT YOU HAVE FROM THE MASSANETTA TRIP?
One memory I have is during lawn rec when we all splashed each other and went down the slide. — Will Fackler

WHAT DOES THE CONFERENCE THEME "PEACE-ING TOGETHER, PEACE BY PIECE" MEAN TO YOU?

Peace-ing together peace by piece to me means finding inner peace through small steps. Each step gets you closer to peace. Finding peace doesn't always mean quiet. Peace can be found anywhere. I find peace at Massanetta. In the loud environment during energizers. Or during vespers in the quiet and the dark. Peace is different for each person. — Leighton Edwards

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU ARE TAKING AWAY FROM WORSHIP/KEYNOTE?

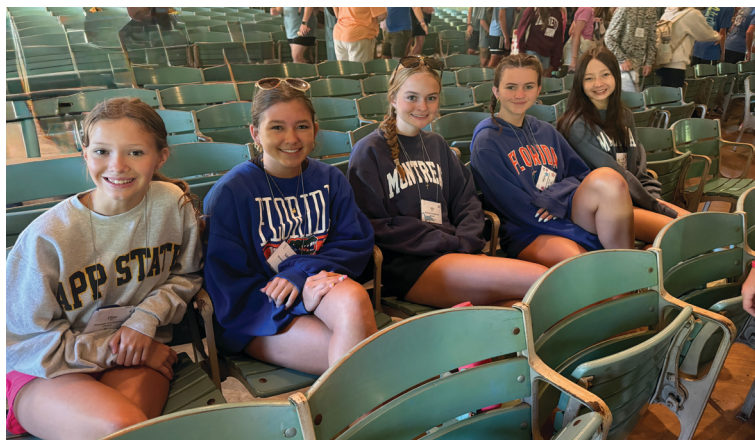
Peace doesn't mean there is silence. — Olivia Davis

WHAT DOES PEACE MEAN TO YOU?

Peace to me means to be at comfort with your current self and to be in a metaphorical place in your mind where you are relaxed and free of worry.
— Will Fackler

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU LOVED ABOUT YOUR ENCOUNTER GROUP?

I loved the bond that was created through encounter groups. We all got super close and always enjoyed spending time together. We created so many inside jokes. It was easier being around them. You felt like you never had to try hard to fit in. — Leighton Edwards



WHAT IS A MOMENT WHEN YOU EXPERIENCED PEACE WHILE BEING AT MASSANETTA?

I experienced peace at Massanetta when sitting by the spring.
— Olivia Davis



Recently at Riverside

CONGRATS, GRADS! For the past several years, we have been blessed with several nursery workers who are Physical Therapy students at the University of North Florida. Some have been working at the nursery for over 4 years and others have been there for only the last school year. No matter the length of their employment, they are all incredible assets to RPC and loved dearly by RPC children and their families. We congratulate the 4 women who have recently graduated and celebrate their incredible accomplishments. Pictured: Ginger Tidwell, Morgan Landen, Julia Fletcher, and Leila Trom



15 YEARS! Breanna Sooter celebrated 15 years at Riverside in July! After worship on July 12, there was a special cake to commemorate the milestone anniversary.



SUMMER IN THE FAMILY LIFE CENTER Have you been wondering how the new Family Life Center is being used this

summer? There is a lot going on in this new facility! We have had many groups renting the FLC. In June, Chip Stroud hosted 3 weeks of basketball camp in the mornings. Chip wears many hats, one of them being the director of the Riverside Presbyterian Basketball League! We have several basketball teams that are regularly renting the FLC in the evenings and on some Saturdays for their basketball practices. We also have community groups such as the Sanctuary on 8th Street, which use the FLC on a weekly basis for recreational purposes.

Riverside Presbyterian Day School's Camp Riverside is using the FLC almost daily for a variety of activities, including basketball, hula hoops, parachute games, and volleyball. The church hosts Wednesday night pickleball throughout June and July. Whether you are an experienced player or brand new to the game, you are invited to join us from 5:00-7:00 pm.

It is exciting to see the FLC filled with activity and being used in so many different ways to serve our church, school, and community. If you have questions about the FLC, or about its use, please reach out to emily.heeg@rpcjax.org.

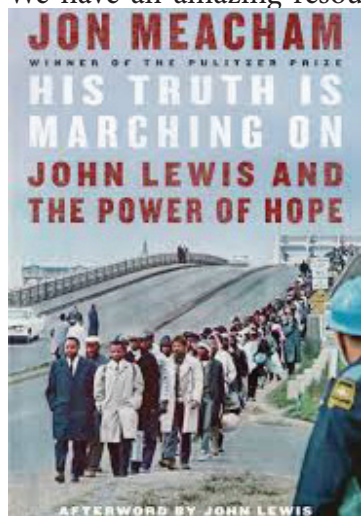


Matthew 25 Lending Library

... 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 the second floor hallway outside of the Church Office. 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.



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.



MATTHEW 25

Register Now: Pilgrimage to Montgomery

Riverside Presbyterian Church is hosting a trip to Montgomery, Alabama, November 10–12, 2026, facilitated by Paul Arrington. We will stop in Selma, Alabama to visit The National Voting Rights Museum and walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. In Montgomery we will tour The Legacy Museum, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and the Freedom Sculpture Park. Through this pilgrimage, we hope to promote a more hopeful commitment to racial equality and just treatment of all people. Limited scholarships available upon request. <https://bit.ly/montgomeryrpctrip>

Double occupancy: \$550/pp or Single occupancy: \$750/pp

Cost includes:

Transportation: Annett Bus Lines

Lodging: Two nights at Home2 Suites in Montgomery, Alabama, complete with breakfast

Site tickets

Bus driver gratuity

Cost does not include:

Lunches and dinners

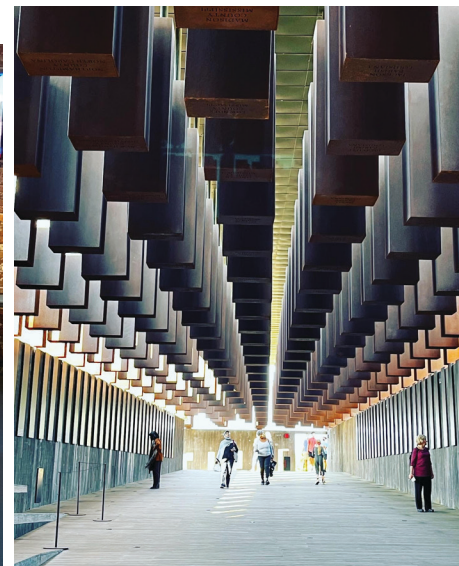
Hotel/housekeeping gratuity

Hotel incidentals

Need more information?

The Rev. Dana Riley
dana.riley@rpcjax.org
904-355-4585

Kae Harding
kaehard@gmail.com



August Birthdays

1	Ann McDowell
Loughran Andrews	12
Marshall Child	Shane Alexander
Carlisle Morgan	13
Robert Schuster	Win Branch
Ann Smith	Michael Fallucco
Stephanie Verlander	Cole Heeg
2	Elijah Sooter-Poplin
Polly Cleveland	14
Karen Nuland	Margaret Hall
Gresham Stoneburner Sr.	15
3	Harrison Cavendish
Lorraine Dajani	Stacey Halkovitch
Lila Todd	Dave Tuttle
4	16
Ainsley Apple	Jo Caraway
Louie Body	Erin DuChanois
Hannah Davidson	RJ Root
James Hunt	17
5	Alex Mixson
Katherine Forrester	Ileana Perez-Diaz
William Hunt	Landry Schoenberger
Jonathan Mann	Lindsay Schoeberger
James Riley	Lukas Schoeberger
Gresham Stoneburner	18
Marion Wilkinson	Jean Grant-Dooley
6	Laura Jane Powell
Maggie Means	Ted Powell
Karla Newton	Leslie Williams
7	19
Margaret Hartman	Molly Davidson
Betsy Langston	Ronda Doonan
Mary O'Brien	Julie Drew
Jordan Schneider	Glenn McKibbin
8	20
Michael Swiercek	Susan Baker
9	Claudia Calhoun
Bud Para	Carol Platt
10	Charles Sooter-Poplin
Debbie Carswell	21
Loretta Cotton	Jack Davis
Aleydis Lockwood	Jeff Lane
11	Kylie Leuthold
Anna Coddington	22
Gayle Kanak	William Beard

Jack Blanks
Richard Campbell
McGregor Lott

23
Alice Trice

24
Lock Farnell
Saundra Howard

26
Ford Milne

27
Leah McNeil

28
Jonathan Rogers
Charlotte Rosenberg

29
Doug Mehlenbacher
Clay Meux
Lindy Williams

30
Robert Adams
Patrick Green

September Birthdays

1
Michael Fisher
Corena Mixson

3
Joan Madison
Susan Parsons

4
Eli Stevenson

5
Claudia Coley
Denise Judd
Caden Sphor

6
Ron Root
David Wrenn

7
George Armstrong
Cade Cummings
Katie Fackler
Mia Hoff

8
Bill Adams

9
Nancy Cable
Evie Cummings
Bess Goff
Bryce Heeg

10
Debbie Crumpler
Kinga Evert
Michael Fisher
Walker VanTice

11
Joe Clements
Steve Judd

12
Vickie Breedlove
Dr. Konika Schallen
Lindsey Schneider

13
Tyler McKendree
Travis Pittillo
Peggy Schiller

14
Clare Charnley
Catherine Gibbs
Bobbie Gittings
Carolyn Tuttle
Karen Weaver

15
Cory Hodak
Jen Hoff

16
Gardner Davis
Ben Williams

17
Brooke Rice

18
Andrea Hoff
William Michaelis
Lynn Thompson
Lisa Williams

22
Judi Hardwick
Jared McNeil
Virginia Zeigler

23
Eliza Farnell

24
David Alexander
Wilkey Alexander
Robin Campen
Caroline Cavendish
Grady Gillam
Brittany Johnson
Janice Luffey
Will Overton
Elise Polito
Ella Schneider
Charlotte Stratton

25
Carol Peters
Hoyt Rosenbloom

26
Matt Cunningham
Leo King
Susie Morrow
Bob Nichols
Ben Sandlin
Denise Valkema

27
Brandon Campbell
Laura Hahn
Daren Hoffman
Ford McDowell
Nell Trice

28
Georgia Goff
Trent Newton

29
Cindy Fitch
Lauren Fitzharris
Debra McEachin

30
Morgan McEachin

**If we are missing your
birthday, please contact
the Church Office.**

Call (904) 355-4585 or email communication@rpcjax.org



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RIVERSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

Sunday, August 9
During 10:30 am Worship

All students and educators welcome!

