

# the Messenger

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*Breathe & Be Retreat for High School Juniors and Seniors*



*Come as you are. Hope awaits.*

# HOLY WEEK

RIVERSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**Palm Sunday (March 29)**

8:30 AM • 10:30 AM

Procession at 10:30 AM

Lunch and Easter Egg Hunt at 11:40 AM

**Maundy Thursday (April 2)**

7 PM

**Good Friday (April 3)**

7 PM

**Easter Sunday (April 5)**

8:30 AM • 10:30 AM

Butterfly Release at 9:45 AM

Cookies and Lemonade after both services



**Riverside Presbyterian Church**

849 Park St. Jacksonville, FL 32204

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For details, please visit  
[www.rpcjax.org/holyweek](http://www.rpcjax.org/holyweek)

# From Your Pastor

Brian Lays

Dear Riversiders,

At our retreat in February, the session reflected extensively on the information and data gathered throughout the Be the Church Campaign we conducted last year. Our remarkable Be the Church committee compiled a final report, which drew attention to the major observations to be gleaned from the data. One general theme emerged most clearly: Riversiders are longing for a deeper sense of spiritual transformation.



As you may recall, the conversations engaged throughout Be the Church centered on Riverside's three core values: Connecting, Belonging, and Transforming. Our biggest strength as a church is clearly the realm of fellowship. Our members feel a strong sense of belonging and connection at Riverside, and readily speak about the community, the sense of "home," and the love and care they feel as a part of our church. What a wonderful thing!

The third core value, Transforming, was more difficult to discuss. This may have something to do with the more personal nature of the subject—it's not always easy to discuss the ways we've been transformed. Still, many people expressed some uncertainty regarding the subject: What does it even mean to be transformed? How do I know if I'm growing in my faith? What does a mature Christian look like?

Given this feedback, the session and staff are actively looking for ways to engage our whole congregation more deliberately in spiritual formation practices. Since nothing is more foundational to the spiritual life than prayer, we've begun with a simple idea: what if we rallied our whole congregation to pray for the same things together?

The new Riverside Prayer Picture is our attempt to broadly engage our congregation's prayer life. Each month, you'll receive a card in your bulletin that offers three prayer prompts for the month: one from our church, one from our community, and one from around the world. The idea is to get us all praying together, to offer a basic structure in which to pray, and to keep it simple and straightforward.

For those who wish to engage prayer more deeply, there will also be a monthly prayer practice offered on the back of the prayer picture card. Each prayer practice invites you to engage prayer in a new way, and we hope it expands the tools you have at your disposal as you seek to engage God in new ways and deepen your life of prayer.

Prayer Picture cards will be available in the narthex throughout each month, and will also be linked in our weekly emails. We hope you'll take them home with you, and keep them in a place you'll remember to use them.

Whenever we resolve to seek the transformation of spiritual growth, we must begin with prayer. So please join us in praying with and for our church, for our community, and for the coming of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. God loves to hear our prayers!

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Brian

# A Joyful Beginning at Riverside

Jared Stellmacher

What a wonderful first month it has been at Riverside Presbyterian! Jared and I are so incredibly grateful for the extravagant welcome, kindness, and hospitality you have shown us. From the very first Sunday, we felt embraced by this congregation and staff in a way that has made this transition joyful and smooth. The generous welcome basket on my first Sunday was such a thoughtful surprise — filled with coffee, restaurant gift cards, books, even cat toys and treats for Christian and Lillian, and beach chairs that have already seen the sand! We truly feel cared for, celebrated, and at home.

I am so excited to serve as your Director of Music Ministries and Organist. Music is such an essential part of worship, and Riverside has a long-standing tradition of excellence in its music ministry. It is a privilege to step into that history and help shape what comes next alongside all of you.

On my first Sunday, the choir sang one of my very favorite anthems, “Draw the Circle Wide” by Mark Miller — a joyful and powerful call to the Church to “draw the circle wide, draw it wider still; no one stands alone, we’ll stand side by side.” The song continues, “Draw the circle wide, draw it wider still; let this be our song, no one stands alone.” What a fitting beginning! This anthem beautifully reflects who we are striving to be: a community of radical welcome, generous hospitality, and deep inclusion. We believe there is room at God’s table for everyone — and that every voice is a vital part of the song.

That same spirit shapes our music ministry. There is a place for you here. Whether you sing, ring, play, or simply feel a nudge to explore how you might contribute, you are invited to add your unique voice to the vibrant, growing symphony of sound at Riverside.

I look forward to getting to know you more in the weeks and months ahead and to walking this journey together in this exciting new chapter.

Grace and peace,  
Jared



## Little Hands, Big Hearts

RPC Children’s Ministry



While Mr. Paul was away, the 3rd-5th graders had a hands-on lesson for Stewardship and sharing our treasure and talent. We packed over 80 snack bags for our peers at the Sanctuary on 8th. With food insufficiency being a real problem for families, these snack bags will help hungry tummies during the weekend, when free school breakfast and lunch is not available. During the packing time, we tackled some difficult conversations, which helped these little packers pause and understand what others experience. Big thank you to Keith Davidson for his help with this project.

# Children's Ministry Update

Janet Novick

There's a thundering sound we are enjoying on Sunday mornings during worship. Little feet are springing out of their seats and coming forward to hear about Jesus, and it's a sound we can celebrate. It's a great time for children and adults at RPC!

Our nursery and preschool ministry is full of life. With families enjoying the many ministries RPC offers, there are more little hands to hold, feet to chase, and ears to hear they are beloved children of God. Please share your encouragement with our faithful nursery workers and preschool leaders. They glow with welcoming smiles for these littlest friends.

Not all heroes wear capes, RPC has some great heroes that teach Sunday School! In our K-2nd grade class led by Bookie and Nancy, children enjoy God's word through fun activities and crafts. Lately, they have focused on verses in Mark teaching us to love our neighbor. Paul Heeg does the Lord's work with the 3rd-5th grade crew. They are studying the story of Joseph in the Old Testament through illustration and reenactment. RPC starts these kids off right with discipleship in an engaging and fun manner.

Grow in Grace is a lively time of learning and worship. Through prayer and fun interactive stations, God's word is shared. Music has become an exciting addition to the time. Here is a playlist of some of the beats we enjoy during this time together: <https://bit.ly/playlistrpkids>



Vacation Bible School is a thrilling time that creates memories to last a lifetime. Keith Davidson shared his experiences from growing up in church and how VBS impacted him as a young man. Now he is a faithful deacon who still experiences a walk with Jesus. It really was amazing how he shared that as a child, he began to "feel a hunger" for the word of God. Our goal with providing VBS is to assist families who are striving to set their children on a path to hunger for God as well. Our future deacons, preachers, sextons, music leaders, choir members, and more will be here June 1-5 from 9:00 am-12:00 pm. Registration is filling up fast. I invite you to take part by registering as a volunteer.

I am so grateful for the way this congregation pours into our children. Thank you for being a community that doesn't just tolerate the "joyful noise" of kids, but actively celebrates it.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." — Matthew 19:14



# When God Answers in Unexpected Places

Kamlyn Ammons

The three unforgettable Marys in the Bible were the topic of discussion at the Marywood 2026 Women's Retreat hosted by Reverend Jessica Means on one of the most beautiful properties in Jacksonville, nestled alongside the St. John's River. That alone would have been reason enough to attend, but there was an unexpected blessing in store for me on this particular Saturday.

Most of us are familiar with the three Marys in the Bible, so at first glance the topic may not seem new. But when women of faith gather and immerse themselves in God's Word, something unexpected can happen. That was my experience at the retreat this year—an unforgettable blessing.

It may sound cliché to say that God works in mysterious ways, but on this Saturday, I experienced that truth personally. I had been going through turmoil in my personal life and needed to make a very difficult decision—one that could potentially change the course of my life. I was uncertain and questioned whether the decision I was about to make was the right one. At times, I think we all wonder if God truly hears our prayers or sees what we are going through. On this particular Saturday, my answer became a resounding yes.

As we discussed the final Mary—Jesus's mother—we were asked to share our thoughts and feelings. When it came time for me to speak, two words immediately came to mind, and I shared them with the group: comforting and encouraging.

The moment I spoke those words; I was overwhelmed with emotion. In that instant, deep in my spirit, I felt that I had received the answer I had been praying for. I knew that the decision before me was the right one.

God often shows up when we least expect Him, and sometimes in the most unexpected places.

I am grateful for the opportunity to attend this women's retreat. If you have never attended one, I encourage you to put it on your calendar for next year. It was truly a blessing for me, and I hope it will be a blessing for you as well.



# Breathe & Be Retreat

*Beach Retreat for High School Juniors and Seniors*

Riverside values caring for our whole beings - our minds, our bodies, and our souls. Our bi-annual “Breathe and Be” beach retreat for RPC high school juniors and seniors is one way of recognizing and practicing that belief. During this retreat, we talked about mental health, we went for walks on the beach to spend uninterrupted time with God, with ourselves, and one another; we laughed and we played; we discovered our core values; we tried different spiritual practices; we discerned who God is calling us to be. This trip is so meaningful for our youth as they reflect on who they were, remember who they are now, and ruminate on who they might become. Thank you, Riverside, for loving our youth so well!

Blessings,  
Lauren



Questions asked to our youth:

What is your favorite memory from this weekend? and What are you taking with you from this retreat?

## **Bryce Heeg**

My favorite memory from the weekend was getting to make stress relieving playdoh.

Something I discovered this weekend is how much my actions are a product of my values in ways I don't even realize I am taking with me the goal of finding little “sabbaths” throughout the day and remembering to take breaks even if they're small.

## **Haiden Christian**

Playing flip 7 was a good time

Something new I discovered - writing/typing down how I feel/answering questions about mental health is beneficial to me. What I'm taking from the retreat is to make sure to give myself time to rest.

## **Emily Stevenson**

I loved getting to spend 30 minutes to spend our time how we want to just quite literally “breathe and be.” I chose to color and then walk on the beach.

I realized relationships are the center of a lot of my core values. I am taking with me the importance of taking time out of your day, distraction-free, to prioritize God!

## **Anne Craig Charnley**

My favorite memory was making dinner on the last night, having everyone in the kitchen helping was so fun!

I realized that taking a moment to be by myself is not as scary as I tell myself it is, we all deserve rest and find it in such different ways. I will take home a new perspective on what Sabbath means, it can be 5 minutes or a whole weekend, regardless of the length it is just find peace and calmness in the wake of a chaotic world.

## **Thomas Green**

My favorite memory from this weekend was hanging out with everyone and being able to remove myself from the busyness of the real world and not have any worries about what was going on outside the house.

I really liked going on a walk on the beach by myself for 20 minutes. It just felt nice to talk to God during that time and really loved the presence of his nature. I liked reading different versions of the same verse and see the different meanings each one had and how we can interpret them individually.



# Matthew 25 Lending Library

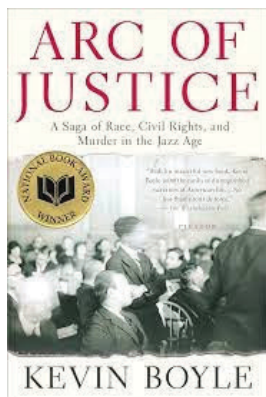
... focusing on matters of justice and equality



MATTHEW 25

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 one of Carl's reviews below.



## *Arc of Justice*

*A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in 'Detroit'*

by Kevin Boyle, Associate Professor of History, Ohio State University.

This is the story of a young man of color growing up in the South in the early 20's. At the age of 13 he was sent (with no money) North to a Negro college to get a good education. After a multitude of hardship he succeeded in becoming a doctor, spending time in Europe furthering his education. In the mid-twenties he returned to the U.S. and selected Detroit known as a growing city to begin his practice. He married well and they selected a home to buy in the white section of Detroit. The major part of the story is how they fought the whites, the city, the KKK, and the establishment for the right to purchase the house. Ultimately Clarence Darrow was brought in to defend the doctor. I will not tell you how it came out. But remember this is a true story.

## Serving with Heart

*Cooking at the I.M. Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless by John Kosakowski*

For more information visit

[www.rpcjax.org/serve](http://www.rpcjax.org/serve)

In the spring of 1999, I was given a meaningful opportunity that would become a lasting part of my life. Peggy Scheu asked if I would help serve meals at the I.M. Sulzbacher Center for the Homeless. What began as a simple act of service quickly grew into a commitment that has brought both purpose and joy.

Several years later, in the fall of 2003, I asked Jo Pratt-Dannels if I could become more involved by helping cook the meals instead of only serving them. Cooking for others felt like a natural way to contribute and care for those in need.

By January 2004, I officially became a member of the cooking team that prepares and serves meals every second Thursday from October through April. Each time we gather, the kitchen fills with the sounds and smells of food being prepared with kindness and dedication. The experience is more than just making meals—it is about sharing compassion, community, and dignity with those we serve.

Volunteering at the Sulzbacher Center has been a deeply rewarding experience. It reminds me that even small acts of service can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Simply put, volunteering is good for the soul.



# Recently at Riverside



Above: On a cold and cloudy Thursday morning in February, seven people from RPC gathered for lunch and a tour at the Sanctuary on 8th Street. Executive Director, Rick Cartlidge, shared the rich history of the after school program and presented impressive plans for the future.



Below: On February 19, the Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) Awards were held at Riverside Church at Park and King. The awards honor residents as well as organizations for service, preservation, craftsmanship, community partner awards, and more. This year, Riverside Presbyterian Church was honored to receive a Community Partner Award!

Pastor Dana Riley received the award on behalf of RPC along with Jim Riley, Kathy Para, and Elaine Akin.



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Left: On February 6-7, 2026, six members of our church handbell choir attended the 2026 New Ebenezer Handbell Clinic at the New Ebenezer Retreat & Conference Center near Rincon, Georgia.



Elisabeth Day, Judy Ratcliffe, Katie Eberly, Mary Jeanette Howle, Bridgette Ware, and Dave Tuttle attended combined intermediate and advanced 60-member group to study and practice for a concert with Clinician Mitchell Eithun. Eithun is an accomplished composer and handbell choir director in North Carolina. Our bell choir looks forward to sharing some of the music we learned in worship.



# A Note of Thanks

Dear Riverside Friends,

A big thank you to everyone in the congregation for the wonderful send-off you gave me upon my retirement as your Interim Director of Music/Organist. I received so many lovely notes and letters from folks, full of kind and appreciative comments! The reception you gave me on my last Sunday (January 25, 2026) was absolutely beautiful! Thanks for attending and sharing in it!

There are a few thanks that need a special mention: Dave Tuttle (pictured right), where did you ever come up with that wonderful design for the pipe organ wall hanging you made for me? Many thanks! I love it! The splendid orchid that came from the choir is doing beautifully in my piano room. There were also many chocolates and small yummy treats that were given to me that can now be viewed on my hips!

I need to also thank the staff for helping me during my time at Riverside! They were all warm and welcoming and proved themselves to be great colleagues. A special thanks to Brian Lays for being such a great preacher and ministerial role model.

I have to say a special "thank you" to Dave and Debbie Pierson who worked consistently behind the scenes to help me achieve success when my

communication and office skills needed some updating. They gave me lots of great help and advice!

Most of all, I wish to thank everyone who contributed to the financial love offering that I received. I was overwhelmed with your generosity and want you all to know that this year spent with the Riverside congregation has been a blessing to me that I can never fully adequately express. I pray that God will continue to bless Riverside Presbyterian in all its future endeavors. May God continue to bless your witness in this community!

With appreciation and love,  
Jean Spyksma



# A Glimpse into the Neighboring Collaborative

*A subcommittee of RPC's Community Outreach Committee*

RPC's commitment to the PCUSA's Matthew 25 initiative provides inspiration and support for our work. The Neighboring Collaborative seeks to cultivate a welcoming environment where all can thrive within Historic Five Points by providing sustainable resources, meaningful partnerships, and assistance, when possible. As a good neighbor, the Collaborative supports a healthy community, a vibrant small business economy, and the respect of human dignity through purposeful relationships with merchants and individuals who live in, work in, or visit the neighborhood, including but not limited to the Five Points Association.

A few events on the NC's radar: (these are all events open to the public, you are invited!)

**Friday, April 3: Funky First Friday in Five Points**, 4:00–8:00 pm free event in Five Points for all ages!

**Monday, April 13: Five Points Association**, 10:00 am in Bitteringer Hall: Local merchants, residents, etc. gather to share information and engage. If you are interested in learning more about what is going on in Five Points, you are welcome to join us for a breakfast meeting on the second Monday of each month.



<b>April Birthdays</b>	15	28	12	27
	Jesse Geibe	Sarah Boone	Jo Pratt-Dannals	Culver Rice
1	Al Harding			
Keith Davidson	Cliff Huber	29	13	28
Marcy Moody	Dorothy Marsh	Mary Elizabeth Ballentine	Susan Erdelyi	Mary Coxe
Becky Senko	Leigh Rosenbloom	Sofia Buckner	John Hager	Emily Heeg
Beni Tasel			Thomas Hager	
Del Wallace	16	30		29
	Julia Rogers	Gray Creed	14	Phineas Johnston
2		Lily McDonald	Jenny Brumback	Sloane Johnston
David Meyers	17	Roman Silva	Ruby Evert	Betsy Miller
	John Green		Ellen Lotz	
3	Stephanie Rodriguez	<b>May Birthdays</b>	Jeff Meyer	30
Gray Thomas			Don Ward	Caroline Harding
	19	1		Brywn Philips
4	Samantha Lobello	Ellana Parker	16	Brad Thoburn
Parker Fluhr		Hilary Shipp	Janie Day	
Paul Heeg	20		Julia Fallucco	31
	Elliott Phillips	2	Carter Rosenbloom	Jonathan Andrews
5	Karen Stiltz	Will Fackler		Nina Garas
Jack Adams	Nancy Warner	Jake Kerr	17	William Green
Josh Bryan		JoAnn Meyer	Paul Mahoney	
	21	Frances Thoburn	Davis Matson	
6	Sarah Cotchaleovitch		Lawson Nuland	
Thad Eshelman	Coral Day	3	William Rosenberg	
Bizzy Wimberley	Preston Hager	Lucy Milne		
	Tai Tai Scherer		19	
8	Kevin Vagovic	4	Cora Anderson	
Alexis Garas		Fran Aenchbacher	Omar Dajani	
	22		Camp Stoneburner	
10	Caitie Morgan	5		
Maddy Fulinara	Lisa Taylor	Peggy Archambault	20	
Nolan Hoff	Caroline Tousey	Stacy Moseley	Anderson Hall	
Emily Lockwood	Bookie Zeigler	Cecilia Mueller		
Valerie Thomas			21	
	23	6	Sharon Vandiver	
11	Bitsy Body	Lucas Hager		
Elise Fallucco	J.P. Coll	Wallace Hager	22	
Colette Jones		Parker McEachin	Suzanne Felton	
Emily Speckman	25		Charity Fisher	
Tricia Todd	Joyce Cailor	7	Bethany Still	
Raymond Yudain	Jennifer Saenz	Caroline Edwards		
	Shelda Tilus	8	24	
12		Emily Elrod	Deana Green	
John Harrell	26	Katie Stoneburner		
Whit McDuffie	Virginia Hunt		26	
	Scotty Verlander	9	Thomson Farnell	
13		Thomas Green	Sal Goodwin	
James Lambert	27	Peter Michaelis	Debbie Grisnik	
Sumner Lane	Lee Adams		Erin Raynor	
	Shirley Flynn	11		
14	Peggy Freeman	Bentley Forrester		
Palmer Edwards	Carol Proctor	Nicholas Garas		
Alison Schoenberger		Kathy Para		

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

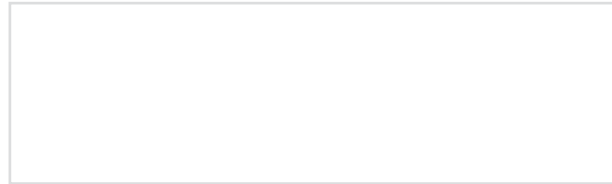


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