

the Messenger

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Join the Summer Choir



Congratulations to RPC's graduating high school seniors! We celebrated them in worship on Sunday, April 26, 2026.

Robert Adams, Jack Blanks, Kate Campen, Harrison Cavendish, Anne Craig Charnley, Haiden Christian, Thomas Green, Caroline Harrell, Bryce Heeg, Jesse Huber, Sadie Hunt, Aleydis Lockwood, Cooper Matson, Jude McDonald, Caden Spohr, and Emily Stevenson.

From Your Pastor

Brian Lays

Dear Riversiders:

Our favorite music has a way of leaving a deep impression on us. Certain song lyrics become so well known that they become everyday cultural parlance: “All you need is love” comes to mind, or “the answer is blowin’ in the wind.” Music can evoke distant memories even after falling off our everyday playlists. I won’t ever forget the lyrics to Taylor Swift’s Love Story, which my college tennis team never failed to collectively belt out at the top of our lungs on our long van rides to away matches! Music has a way of making our memories particularly vivid.



In the church, hymns serve a similarly powerful purpose in the memories and meaning we draw from our faith. Long before coming to Riverside, where Here I am, Lord seems to be our most beloved hymn, I remember singing the same hymn on the Sunday I was confirmed at the church where I grew up. I have cherished memories singing Praise to the Lord, the Almighty at my grandmother’s bedside (it was her favorite hymn), and Morning Has Broken to my son James as he falls asleep. I remember singing How Great Thou Art at the graveside with a family who had just lost their good-humored patriarch who loved the hymn, in no small part because his name happened to be Art! Who doesn’t get chills just thinking about those first couple of notes of O Come, All Ye Faithful on Christmas Eve, or Jesus Christ is Risen Today on Easter?

This summer, we are going to celebrate the hymnody of the church with a sermon series based on Riversiders’ favorite hymns. For three weeks this Spring, we received your votes of three hymns each, and we’ve tallied the results. Over 80 hymns were nominated, and over 40 received more than one vote! I won’t spoil all the results here, but I will note that some of the winners surprised me (A Mighty Fortress is our God, On Eagles’ Wings) while some did not (Be Thou My Vision, Amazing Grace).

Over the 14 weeks of our summer schedule, we will sing the hymns you’ve submitted, and our sermons will expound on the theology, scripture, and history behind the lyrics of these hymns. Hymns are powerful not merely because of the nostalgia they evoke, but also the faith they proclaim. The Gospel is articulated not only through scripture and sermon, but also through the words we sing. After all, is there any better summary of grace than “I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see”? Any better summary of Christian virtue than “riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise; thou mine inheritance, now and always”? Any better summary of the hope of glory than “through gates of pearl stream in the countless host; singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Alleluia”?

How often, making music, we have found a new dimension in the world of sound, as worship moved us to a more profound alleluia! I hope you’ll join us for worship this summer with your vocal cords warm, ready to gain even deeper meaning and insight into the faith we sing and proclaim!

Grace and peace,

Pastor Brian

Summer Choir at Riverside

Jared Stellmacher

Summer is a wonderful time to try something new—why not join in the music ministry at Riverside?

Riverside's choir leads worship each week, and during the program year the choir rehearses Thursday evenings, but for the summer months we simplify things. Beginning June 7, you're invited to be part of the Summer Choir, meeting only on Sunday mornings at 9:30 am—no weekday rehearsals required.

Made up of volunteers and supported by professional singers, the choir is a group of people who come together to sing, build community, support each other, and have fun. Whether you've sung in choirs for years, are returning after some time away, or are simply curious to give it a try, you are warmly welcome.

At Riverside, music is a vital part of our worship life: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6). The requirements are simple—enthusiasm, energy, and effort. We work together to develop a unity, both musically and spiritually, that enables us to share God's love through music.

If you've ever thought about singing in the choir, this is the perfect time. **Just show up on Sunday mornings, or reach out to Jared Stellmacher for more information.** We'd love to have you join us this summer!

—Jared



Sunday, June 28

An Evening of Music, Community, and Reflection

As our nation commemorates 250 years of American history, Riverside Presbyterian Church invites the community to a special Patriotic Concert and Dinner on Sunday, June 28. In a time when many people are longing for connection, understanding, and hope, this evening offers a chance to gather across generations and backgrounds through the shared gift of music and fellowship.

Patriotic Concert, 5:00 pm | Sanctuary

Enjoy an inspiring, family-friendly performance by Bold City Brass featuring patriotic favorites, American classics, and music celebrating the spirit and diversity of our nation. Bold City Brass carries forward the tradition of one of Florida's oldest historic brass bands and is known for energetic performances that connect audiences of all ages.



Fried Chicken Dinner, 6:00 pm | Following the Concert

After the concert, stay for a fried chicken dinner and conversation with friends old and new. Admission is free, and donation bread baskets will be available on each dinner table for those who would like to help support the evening and Riverside's ongoing ministry and community outreach.

As we recognize America's 250th anniversary, Riverside seeks to celebrate not only our nation's history, but also the values that continue to call us forward — compassion, community, justice, freedom, and care for one another. This event is an opportunity to come together with gratitude for the past while praying and working for a more hopeful future for all people. Whether you are part of Riverside, new to the area, or simply looking for a meaningful community event, you are warmly welcome. Admission is free. Donations are appreciated. Bring your family, invite your neighbors, and join us for this memorable evening together.

Seeing God's Hands in Every Creature

Janet Novick

On Sunday, April 26, Riverside Presbyterian Church gathered to celebrate Earth Care Sunday, a time dedicated to reflecting on our role as stewards of God's magnificent creation. While we often think of "nature" as sweeping landscapes or majestic animals, our Faith Sharing with Children took a much smaller—and buzzier—approach.

All Creatures Great & Small

Kathy Stark captured the kids' (and the congregation's) attention by discussing the value of all creatures—even the ones we usually try to shoo away. It can be easy to appreciate a butterfly or a songbird, but Kathy reminded the children that every living thing has a purpose in God's intricate design.



The Scary "Skeeter"

In a particularly memorable moment, Kathy tackled one of our least favorite neighbors: the mosquito. While most of us see them as a nuisance, she informed the children of their vital role in the ecosystem. Did you know that mosquitoes are a primary food source for many of our beloved birds?

By reframing these pests as provisions, Kathy helped the kids understand that caring for creation means respecting the entire web of life, not just the parts we find convenient or cute.

Thank you, Kathy, for your insight, your creativity, and your passion for teaching our children how to love God by loving all of God's creatures!



Restoring the Land, Rethinking Burial

Sarah Leuthold, RPC Member

On a lovely spring Saturday morning, Dana, Ileana, and I traveled a little over an hour to the Prairie Creek Conservation Cemetery (PCCC), just outside of Gainesville. After turning off of 301, we found our way onto small backroads traversing the Old Florida landscape reminiscent of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings homestead which just happens to be down the road. The aim of our trip was to engage our curiosity regarding a different way to think about our final resting place when the time comes.



PCCC is a natural, or green, burial cemetery which uses biodegradable containers (caskets, shrouds) and prohibits toxic embalming and wasteful vaults. It has 93 acres dedicated to burial sites, set within the forever-protected land of the 606-acre Prairie Creek Preserve that is part of the Alachua Conservation Trust. PCCC was founded in 2007 by a group of community members and opened in time to fulfill the last wishes for a green burial of a beloved Gainesville physician, environmentalist, and community member, Dr. Kathy Cantwell.

As our guide, April, (a passionate and extremely knowledgeable graduate of the UF Forestry Program) led us through the Old Florida meadow and lush forest sites available for burials, she explained how the burial process works. In addition to overseeing and

facilitating the burials, the PCCC staff and volunteers are continually taking care to restore and preserve the land.

Envisioning the butterflies, birds and wildlife frolicking through the meadow among the native plant life as April had described to us, an increasing sense of peace convinced me - this is the place for my final rest, as well as a final contribution to the earth, that gift of Creation that sustains us.

For more information about our trip, please contact any of us, we would be happy to share our experience with you. You may also want to visit the PCCC website – www.PrairieCreekConservationCemetery.org

“April, a beautiful soul, guided us gently through the woods and meadow of Prairie Creek Conservative Cemetery, passionately sharing stories behind this sacred burial site. With goosebumps and a few quiet tears,

I can say this was one of the most moving experiences of my life and I hope others feel called to explore green burial with curiosity.”

–Ileana Perez Diaz, RPC Member



RPC's Little Free Library

Joyce Cailor

The Little Free Library movement is alive and well in the Riverside-Avondale neighborhoods. Over thirty-five, all different, can be spotted throughout the historic district. Our church joined this movement when Dave Tuttle decided to build one that he positioned on Post Street facing the side of the sanctuary. It's accessible to people walking by enroute to our church, Riverside Park and Five Points. The concept of a Little Free Library is to take a book and leave a book. Sounds simple but Dave discovered after stocking it with books initially, they were soon all gone. People weren't leaving books! It was not self-sustaining as Dave assumed it would be. Something needed to be done.

Nothing much was done for a period. Passersby were leaving empty coffee cups, NOT BOOKS! When I started volunteering at the receptionist desk a few years ago, I noticed the little library was not functioning as intended. I've always been an avid reader and library supporter, so I gladly offered to try to get it back on track. Dave made some necessary repairs and gave it a fresh coat of paint. I stocked it with books that I solicited from friends or bought at thrift stores. I put a gentle reminder inside that says, "Please share – take a book and leave a book". It took a while, but now the library has steady patrons who are sharing after selecting a book and are good stewards of our little treasure. No more empty coffee cups to dispose of!

I know there are members of our RPC family who now leave books regularly. Thank you! Your donations keep the offerings varied and the shelves stocked. I straighten up the books a few times a week, but fortunately, I no longer need to beg friends to give me their books. Please check out our Little Free Library; take a book or just leave one to share. By encouraging reading we're offering a wonderful resource to our neighborhood. A free map of all the Little Free Libraries in Riverside-Avondale was compiled by Friends of Willowbranch Library and is available at the library on Park Street. RPC's Little Free Library is #2 on the map.



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.



MATTHEW 25



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.

On Juneteenth, by Annette Gordon-Reed

"Combining personal anecdotes with poignant facts gleaned from the annals of American history, Gordon-Reed shows how, from the earliest presence of Black people in Texas to the day in Galveston on June 19, 1865, when Major General Gordon Granger announced the end of legalized slavery in the state, African-Americans played an integral role in the Texas story."

College Secret Pals Revealed!

A reception was held in Bittering Hall on Sunday, May 17

Many thanks to all the congregants who served as a College Secret Pal this year, keeping in touch with a student.

Kate Adams	Lauren Fitzharris
Emmanuella Althuis	Heather Campbell
Louie Body	Mike Crumpler
Durham Branch	John & Cheryl Sapora
Evelyn Brown	Kristin Swiercek
Jacob Campen	Teddy Powell
Caroline Cavendish	Nancy Schneider
J.P. Coll	Mary Eliz Ballentine
Pru Davis	Julie Handley
Coral Day	Anne Mattia
Josh Dryden	Raymond Yudain
Parker Fluhr	Emily Heeg
Robert Elrod	Norma Farnell
Grady Gillam	Bud Para
Patrick Green	Maggie Means
William Green	Leigh Rosenbloom
Jane Gray Hager	Jean Grant-Dooley
Megan Halkovitch	Carol Proctor
Lilly Hall	Lisa Taylor
Jacob Huber	Carol Hasselblad
Catherine Hunt	Tripp Means
Avery Jenkins	Mary Eliz Ballentine
Adrian Kronic	Dave & Debbie Pierson
Reagan Lane	Maggie Means
Quentin Lockwood	Norma Farnell



J.D. Matson	Marilyn Noon
Noah McDonald	Don Ward
Davis Meux	Anne Mesrobian
Olivia Meux	Nancy Schneider
Evan Raynor	Rebecca McNeil
Jack Raynor	Judy Wingate
William Rosenberg	Heather Campbell
Mia Saenz	Mary Coxe
Ben Sandlin	Tripp Means
Lindsay Schoenberger	Arden Brugger
Lukas Schoenberger	Heather Campbell
Jessica Shipp	Jane Goodwin
Robert Shipp	Jean Grant-Dooley
Eli Stevenson	Sarah Cotchaleovitch
Andy Swiercek	Randy Parks
Julia Swiercek	John Humes
Frances Thoburn	Betsy Dunlap
Lilly Thoburn	Molly Davidson
Lila Todd	Mary Eliz Ballentine
Salley Todd	Sherry McDonald
Tyler Twilley	Bookie Zeigler
Mac Verlander	Mary Elizabeth Lott
Ryan Walker	Lisa Taylor
Will Walker	Kathy Shuke



Recently at Riverside

During Aging True's National Volunteer Week, RPC's Meals on Wheels program was spotlighted. Thank you to all of our fantastic Meals on Wheels volunteers!

See some excerpts below:

Nancy Carlton, Drop Site Coordinator at Riverside Presbyterian Church, would like to recognize...

Margaret Julian (pictured below)

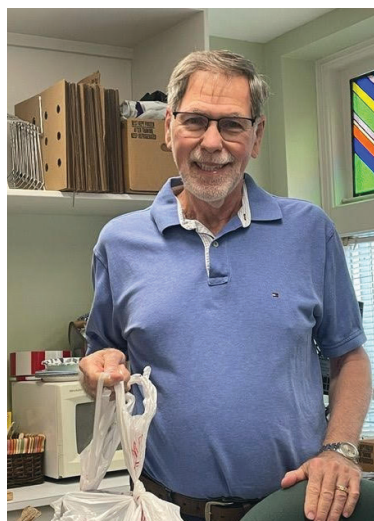
Nancy writes, "Margaret has been volunteering for over 4 years at Riverside. It's a family tradition as her mother drove/delivered MOW for over 30 years. Margaret has a strong desire to help people, especially seniors who are in need. She loves visiting with her seniors on her Wednesday route. If someone asked her about volunteering, she would tell them to do it—it's the most valuable use of your time."

Phil Price

"Phil has been volunteering at Riverside for 4 years now. He feels like he is being helpful to his community by serving the seniors and enjoys checking in with clients." If someone asked him if they should volunteer with Meals on Wheels, Phil would say, "Yes do it! It's a way of connecting with people, not a huge time commitment, and you will be rewarded in your heart."

Dave Pierson (pictured below)

"Dave has been volunteering for over 6 years at Riverside and worked with non-profits during his working years." Dave likes to check in with his seniors and hear their stories. If someone asked him, why should they volunteer, Dave says, "it's a great experience to see people appreciate getting a visit/meal, not a huge time commitment, and it will warm your heart."



On May 6, 2026, Roger Maness was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Awards at the Arts, Recreation, and Worship Conference, organized by re:Create and hosted at Montreat Conference Center each year.

"Through countless years of faithful service, creativity, encouragement, leadership, and behind-the-scenes work, [he has] helped sustain and strengthen the mission of re:Create: 'To spread contagious joy by providing intentional leadership development accomplished by connecting and resourcing people interested in using recreation and arts in settings where groups gather.'" Congratulations, Roger! Pictured left to right: Sophie Maness, Roger Maness, the Rev. Lauren Scott, and the Rev. Michelle Thomas-Bush.



RPC's Middle School youth attended the Presbytery's spring middle school retreat at Camp Montgomery in late April!



Pickleball for the Summer

Every Wednesday in June and July, 5:00-7:00 pm in the Family Life Center

Join us for Pickleball in the Family Life Center on Wednesdays in June and July, whether you're a seasoned player or brand new to the game. Adults, youth, and accompanied children who are 2nd grade and older are welcome.

If you are new to pickleball, there will be people there to introduce you to the game. Please bring a paddle if you have one, but paddles and balls will be provided.

Nursery for 2nd grade and younger is available via advance sign up only. Please email emily.heeg@rpcjax.org by the Sunday before the Wednesday pickleball date you plan to attend.

**SUMMER
PICKLEBALL**

**Every Wednesday
in June and July**



**5:00-7:00 pm
in the Family Life Center**

**CHILDCARE AVAILABLE
WITH ADVANCE SIGN UP**

Aug: Women's Connection

Montreat Women's Connection – Attend with RPC!

August 14-16, 2026, Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC

Book now so you can choose your workshops

Join fellow RPC women for a weekend at Montreat! The 2026 keynote speaker is Kristin Kobes Du Mez, author of the New York Times bestseller *Jesus and John Wayne*. Kristin is a writer, speaker, and scholar who explores the intersection of religion, gender, and politics. RPC has reserved a limited number of spots, and it will be first come first served. www.bit.ly/mwc26rpc



Nov: Pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama

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/montgomeryrptrip>

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

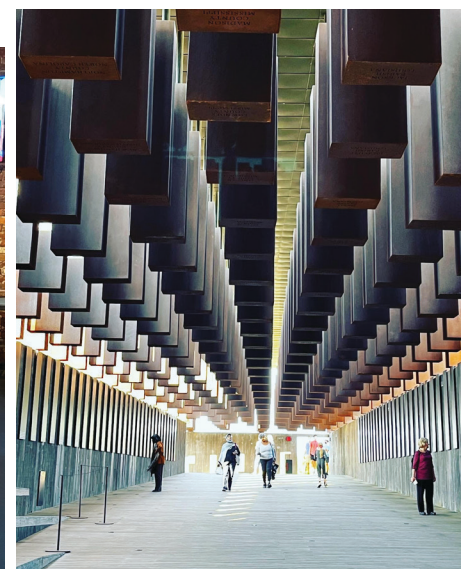
Hotel/housekeeping gratuity

Hotel incidentals

Need more information?

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

Kae Harding
kaehard@gmail.com



June Birthdays	14	27	Margaret John	22
	Carl Crumpler	Barbara Bath	Randy Parks	Jennifer Branch
1	Genny Reddick	Caroline Gibbs	9	Sarah Duncan
Felix Proia	Glenn Ivie	Dottie Weildlich	Angela Schifanella	
Noah Althuis	Will Taylor	Mike Cotton	Julie Phillips	23
Robbie Eshelman		Nancy Schneider	Lucy Saenz	Cameron Garman
	15		Sam Tousey	Paul Salzer
2	Carol DiGiusto	28	Slayton Morrow	
Rebecca Creed	Charles Alderman	Tony Rodriguez		24
	Cindy Thompson		10	Bruce Sheely
3	Mitzi Kuntz	29	Carter Mixson	Dottie Reddaway
Frank Shuke		Cameron Ward	Cooper Matson	Mary Mesrobian
Lyssa Ball	16	Deborah Stapp	Miles Para	
	Jim Bond	Gardner Davis		25
4			11	Breanna Sooter
Eliza McDuffie	17	30	Arden Brugger	Jared Stellmacher
Martin Harrell	Sarah Lockwood	Ben Wilson		Samuel Phillips
			12	
5	18	July Birthdays	Bolling Cranford	26
Cecilia Cunningham	John Adams		Frances McCurry	Darlene Hampton
Eve Egan		1		
Jessica Means	19	Brenda Alexander	14	27
John Kosakowski	Anne Mattia	Kevin Davis	Brooke Speckman	Brian Shipp
Nancy Powell	Melinda Kramer	Megan Davis	Cindy Thompson	Jane Goodwin
Shelly Cavendish				John Morrow
	20	2	15	Matt Weaver
6	Brent VanTice	Evan Heeg	Alexis Erdelyi	Reid Hampton
Dena Robbins	Jim Riley	Marilyn Noon	Cindy Parker	
Mateo Fulinara	Sam Swiercek	Mark Weaver	Mary Jeanette Howle	28
Michele Harrell		Rebecca Johnson		Georgia Stratton
Susan Burns	21		16	Joe Andrews
	Dan Wolff	3	Eloise Farnell	
7	Kay Manson	David Williams	Jan Carr	30
Thomas John	Rex Setzer		Susan Rosenbloom	Emmaline Means
	Will Harding	4		Jim Caraway
8		Tommy John	17	Luke Jenkins
Jen Edwards	23		Bill Cranford	Tim Grisnik
Josh Dryden	Anna Althuis	5	Lindsey Speckman	
Sally Ragsdale	Fran Root	Allison Walker	Xander VanTice	31
Sarah Leuthold		Art Small		Anne Arden Pomar
	24	William Trice	18	Carol Hasselblad
9	Amelia Lobello		Anne Mesrobian	David Mixson
Barbara Bourgeois	John Lockwood	6	Genevieve Campbell	Kent Zeigler
Betsy Dunlap	Susanna Ball	Brooke McDuffie	Olivia Mueller	
Heidi Brown		Eloise Israel		
Josh Edwards	25	Patterson Israel	19	
	Cullen Kerr		Benjamin Davidson	
11	Kay Holmes	7		
Ben McDonald	Mac Forrester	Dearing Thoburn	20	
		Will Wheeler	Adam Hammond	
13	26			
Waller Trice	Nathaniel Wallace	8	21	
		David Hager	John-Paul Saenz	
		Janet Blackstone	Michael Blackstone	

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

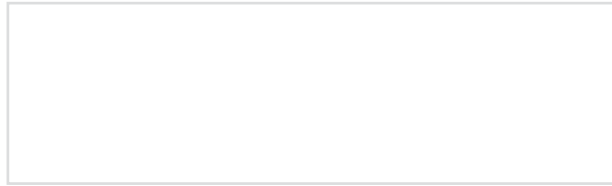


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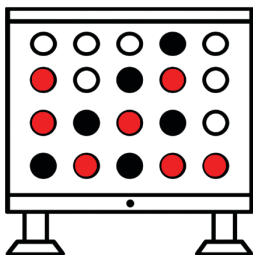


RIVERSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Sunday in Shorts”

PICNIC AT RIVERSIDE

SUNDAY, JUNE 7



Join us right after worship (approx. 11:45 am) for a relaxed and joy-filled picnic! We'll have hot dogs, chips, and drinks, plus games and fun for all ages.

– DETAILS –

- Dress casually (“Sunday in *Shorts*”)
- The field and toddler playground will be open
- For all RPC members and friends plus Vacation Bible School and Summer in the City families
- Donations to help cover the cost of the meal will be accepted

