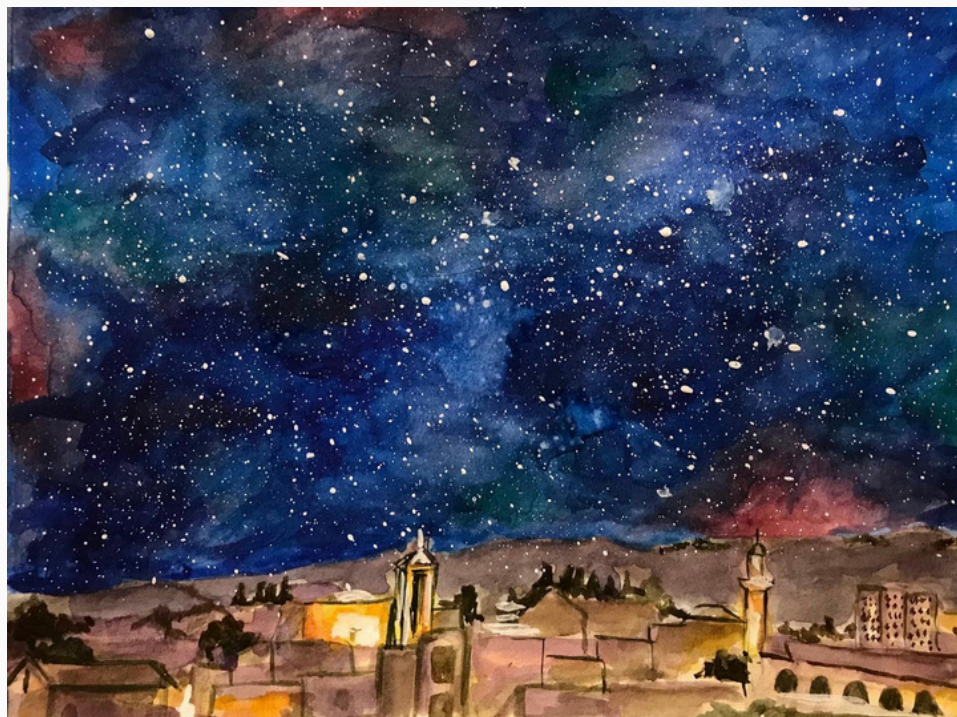


VOL. 66 NUMBER 9 · ADVENT 2024

THE AMBASSADOR

A publication of First Presbyterian Church of Stillwater

*Join Us
for Advent*



"Starry Bethlehem" by Rebekah Krevens

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CHURCH OF STILLWATER

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New Free Little Pantry Installed and Restocked!

A big thank you to Deacon Aaron Stoutzenberger for building the brand new Little Free Pantry! This one has a different design and location to help it better withstand our Oklahoma weather. It was installed just in time for Asher and Jacob from Cub Pack 3842 to host a food drive to get it stocked for Thanksgiving. This was their Arrow of Light project so they can cross over into a troop. Thank you for your support of this project to help provide for our neighbors.

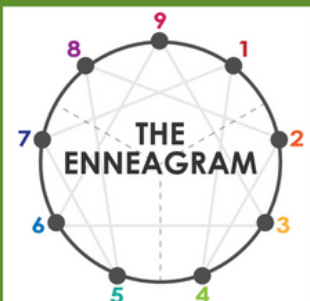


Enneagram Study in February

Wednesdays, February 5, 12, & 19, at 6:30 pm on Zoom

Jenna Campbell, Director of Children's & Youth Ministry, and Sharon Bennett, Pastoral Care Associate, are excited to be offering an Enneagram study in February. The Enneagram is a personality theory that is a map for self-discovery and personal growth based on nine basic personality types. The value in studying the Enneagram is not to restrict you to a certain personality type, but to learn how you operate in the world, and interact with the world in a more healthy way. These sessions will be both for those who participated in our Enneagram study in 2021, as well as those interested in taking part for the first time. If you are new to the Enneagram, we do ask that you do some work on your own before you join. For those who participated in the past, we also ask you "freshen up" on your Enneagram knowledge. To register, please visit our website, www.stillwaterfpc.org and sign up via the link on the Adult Ministry page - in order to gauge interest for this free study, we ask that anyone wanting to take part register ahead of time.

Please contact Sharon Bennett at sharon.bennett@stillwaterfpc.org to learn more, and for suggested resources to read before you join the study!



FROM THE CHURCH OFFICE

Church Office Holiday Closure

The Church Office will close at 11:00 a.m. Tuesday, December 24 and reopen at 10:00 a.m. Thursday, January 2.

Completing Our Annual Giving

2024 donations may be hand delivered by 11:00 a.m. Tuesday, December 24 (before the office closes for the holiday) OR postmarked no later than December 31, 2024 except for those placed in the Sunday offering plate on December 29, 2024. Any donations **NOT** postmarked 2024 must be considered a 2025 contribution by the church.

What is a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)?

A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a direct transfer from an IRA to a qualified charity, and FPC is a qualified charity. Only individuals who are 70 ½ or older may make QCDs. QCDs count toward the required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year in which the QCD is made. Unlike withdrawals from an IRA, a QCD is not taxable income to you and unlike other contributions to the church, a QCD is not tax-deductible for you. Nevertheless, a QCD can be advantageous for a charitably-minded IRA owner and the charity they select.

To execute a QCD to First Presbyterian Church, instruct your IRA trustee or custodian to make a transfer from your IRA directly to FPC. You can use a QCD to pay your pledge to the operating budget, the capital campaign, and/or make a special gift. **In any case, please alert Mary Beth at the church office that a QCD is coming and supply any special instructions.** If you have further questions, please contact Cathy Fairbanks, Church Treasurer cathy.fairbanks@stillwaterfpc.org. Thank you for your generosity.

OCTOBER 31, 2024 INCOME/EXPENSE REPORT

	OCTOBER	YEAR TO DATE	% OF BUDGET
Giving	\$50,308	\$508,242	80.1%
Other Income	\$5,028	\$63,158	94.4%
Total Income	\$55,336	\$571,400	82.8%
Expenditures	\$52,216	\$608,233	85%
Net	\$3,120	\$(36,833)	--

Stewardship Update

Thank you for being a part of the life and work of this faith family. With the successful conclusion of the commitment phase of our From Strength To Strength Capital Campaign, the Stewardship Committee is focusing on our annual giving for 2025. In January, please watch for a mailing from the Committee inquiring about your intentions regarding financial support of 2025 day-to-day/operating expenses for our congregation's programs, outreach, and facilities.

~TIm Krehbiel, Finance Committee chair

Team Neurodiversity Update

First Presbyterian's Team Neurodiversity has been very busy over the past 3-4 months, and we are excited to share our work with you all! The team is addressing the needs of our congregation on a new front.



Science has shown that people process information in a variety of ways along a spectrum of behaviors. Neurodiversity is the concept that it is normal and expected for people to have brains that function differently from one another. 15-20% of the population are neurodivergent and have brains that function differently from their neurotypical peers.

The first-floor library is being transformed into a low-sensory space that allows families in our congregation to meet the needs of their neurodivergent children who find the environment in the sanctuary overwhelming. The space is being modified to lessen the external stimulation of worship and will include LED lighting (softer lighting without the fluorescent buzz), light-diffusing shades, and alternative seating along with other neuroaffirming equipment and tools. A monitor will be in the space that allows those who want to participate in the service to view it electronically. The east entrance from the front lawn will allow those who will use this space to avoid the overstimulating environment of the narthex but provide close proximity to the sanctuary as well as the Children and Worship space and to have access to those options should they choose to engage, which will allow those who use this room to feel included as a valued part of our community.

There will also be a Liturgical Library located on a new shelving unit located on the east side of the narthex. We envision the ready availability of tools that can assist with regulating the worship service such as noise-canceling headphones, fidget devices, coloring pages and more. Some items will allow movement during the service for those who find being still for an extended period incredibly difficult. These items aren't toys but devices that allow for sensory input and can be used by adults and children worshiping in the main sanctuary or the low-sensory space.

More information will be coming, but if you have questions or are interested in this new ministry within our church, do not hesitate to contact any of the team members.

Ashley Kirven-Bobier—Team Leader

Kim Leffingwell, Judy Farrell, Phyllis Taylor, Bekah Bowman, Margaux Melancon, Erin Lawson, Rusty Rex, Amy Hardin, Jenna Campbell, Director of Children's and Youth Ministry

First Friday Peace Jam

Friday, December 6

6 PM Potluck Supper, 7-8:30 PM Music Jam



This is for all ages – invite friends, bring the kids, and come and go as you like. We provide maracas, triangles, djembe, tambourines, and a keyboard for anyone to play. Bring a little food to share, then play, sing, or just listen and tap your feet! You'll meet some wonderful musicians from the community, too!

Questions? Jim Beckstrom: james@beckstromgroup.com

CHRISTMAS JOY OFFERING:

SUPPORTING OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE LEADERS THROUGH OUR PC(USA) SPECIAL OFFERING

This Advent Season, our congregation will participate with congregations all across the country in the annual Christmas Joy Offering which has been a cherished Presbyterian tradition since the 1930s. The Offering distributes gifts equally to the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions and to Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The Assistance Program provides critical financial support to church workers and their families. Presbyterian-related schools and colleges provide education and leadership development while nurturing racial and ethnic heritage. This has been a Presbyterian commitment for nearly 140 years.

Last year, the Christmas Joy Offering was distributed as follows:

- \$1.1 million of gifts from the 2023 Offering are being used to provide critical financial support and grants for current and retired Presbyterian church workers in their times of need.
- Income supplements from the Board of Pensions (BOP) helped nearly 275 individual recipients, assisting retired church workers and surviving spouses with the means to provide for themselves.
- Housing supplements from the BOP helped more than 218 individual recipients remain in their homes, or afford assisted living or long-term care.
- Emergency Assistance Grants from the BOP helped more than 215 individual recipients facing times of great financial need or uncertainty due to unforeseen circumstances.
- More than \$800,000 of gifts from 2023 are being used to provide education and leadership development skills at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color.
- Many of the students attending Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color are the first in their families to enroll in higher education.

Envelopes for receiving the Christmas Joy Offering will be in the pews on December 15 and December 22, though we welcome gifts throughout Advent. You may place your offering in the plates on Sunday, give at the church website, or send a check. If you give a check, please indicate "Special" on the memo line.



Preschool Connections

Christmas is a special time around FPC, especially at Presbyterian Preschool! December offers many opportunities for us as a church to connect with our Presbyterian Preschool children and families. During Preschool Christmas, the children come to the Sanctuary to meet our church staff, hear the Christmas story, and sing Christmas carols. This year's Preschool Christmas will take place at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 10 and Wednesday, December 11.



Advent Devotionals for All Ages

Are Now Available in the Narthex

For families with children - Advent at Home Candlelighting & Psalms of Wonder

Journey through Advent with the simple rituals of Advent candlelighting, remembering, listening, reflecting, praying, and blessing. Each week's guide goes with a Psalm in the accompanying Psalms of Wonder book that is our gift to you for use this Advent season and beyond!



For families with youth - From the Manger Advent Calendar & Activity Cards

From the Manger invites us to consider how the baby born in a feeding trough in a bread town (Bethlehem means "House of Bread") continues to feed a hungry world today. The *From the Manger* Advent Calendar offers simple, meaningful daily activities for families, keeping the focus on quality family time. This devotional includes an Advent Calendar and 25 Advent Activity Cards.

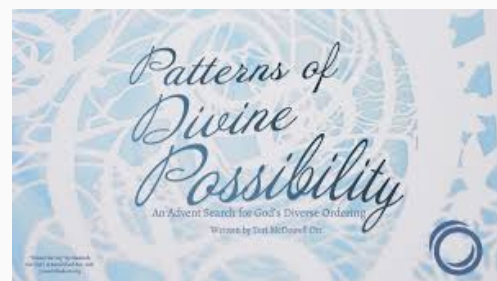


For adults - *From the Manger*

This complement to the youth *From the Manger* Advent Calendar gives a prayer and reflection for each week of Advent and for Christmas Day.

For adults and older youth - *Patterns of Divine Possibility:* An Advent Search for God's Diverse Ordering

This daily devotional from *The Presbyterian Outlook* challenges us to see beyond familiar binaries and embrace the complex natural patterns of our Creator in the world. We will be invited to open your eyes to the intricate designs of God's creation that often go unnoticed.



Praying with Holy Images

We are invited to practice an ancient form of Christian Prayer known as *Visio Divina*. Translated as "sacred seeing" it is a practice where we allow our hearts and imaginations to enter, in silence, into a sacred image, to see what God might have to say to us. These images will be from the Christmas Story, some of which were created long ago, while others are more contemporary and reflect different points of perspective of the arrival of Jesus. Images will be displayed in the Worship Center area beginning Dec 1st, and simple guides for participation will be available. All are welcome to come to view the images anytime the Worship Center is not in use. Please contact Sharon Bennett, Pastoral Care Associate with any questions at sharon.bennett@stillwaterfpc.org.



Image credit: Indigenous Mother and Child (North American) by Fr. John Giuliani

Advent 2024: Highlights

Nursery Christmas Schedule

In order to provide our nursery workers the opportunity to spend Christmas break with their families, our nursery will not be staffed on Sundays December 22nd and December 29th as well as Christmas Eve. We invite younger children to remain in the sanctuary for worship (with all of their wiggles and noises!) or feel free to use the nursery if you are in need of a quiet place or a changing table (the nursery doors will be open, just not staffed). Changing tables are also available in both first floor restrooms in the south hallway.

The nursery will not be staffed on December 22, 24, and 29

Service of Lessons & Carols - Sunday, Dec. 8th

Worship at 11:00 am including anthems and solos from the Chancel Choir, congregational carols, and the traditional Scripture readings telling the history of Jesus' family and preparing us for his birth. Our SpiritLink kids will also sing in worship.

Blue Christmas Service - Wednesday, Dec. 11th

This special service makes space for some of the more somber experiences people encounter in the holiday season. We come together in worship seeking peace in our hearts and in our world. This service will be begin at 6:30pm in the Worship Center.

Christmas Eve Nativity Rehearsal - Sunday, Dec. 22nd

Children ages 3years-5th grade wishing to take part in the telling of the Christmas story at the Christmas Eve 4:00pm service are asked to attend a **rehearsal in the Sanctuary on Sunday, Dec. 22nd immediately after worship!** See below for details.

Christmas Eve Family Candlelight Service - Tuesday, Dec. 24th at 4:00pm

All are invited to this family-friendly service which includes Christmas carols, an interactive telling of the Christmas story, Communion, and candle-lighting. Join us as we raise a joyful noise to celebrate the Incarnation.

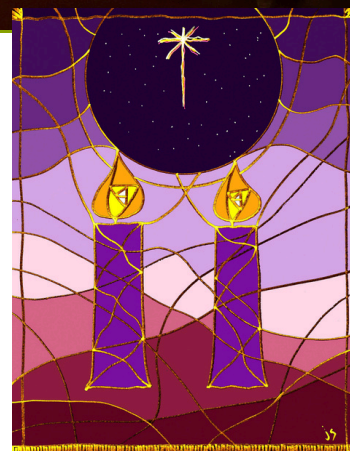
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - Tuesday, Dec. 24th at 11:00pm

Join us for our traditional candlelight service which includes Communion and choir.

Calling All Characters!

Do you have a kiddo who would like to be a character in the Nativity during the 4:00pm Family Service on Christmas Eve? We have speaking and non-speaking parts for all kids ages 3yrs to 5th grade. Mark your calendars now for a nativity character rehearsal on December 22 in the Sanctuary immediately following worship, and look for the character signup in a Children & Youth Parent email in December!

Questions? Contact Courtney Savage (Children's Ministry Chair), Melody Reavis, Virginia Charter, or Bekah Bowman (Children's Ministry Assistant) for more details. Or simply ask one of our kids to share their experience re-telling the Christmas story!



Scout Updates

- Over the past month, **Troop 820** participated in Spook-O-Ree, a Scout Council event at Will Rogers Scout Reservation. While there, the Troop volunteered to help all weekend in the kitchen to provide meals for the whole camp for the event. Along with this, the Troop also built and staffed a part of the haunted spook trail for Cub Scouts and their parents. These activities provided an opportunity for teamwork and camaraderie for our Scouts. The Troop welcomed two new scouts into the Order of the Arrow, a service-oriented group within Scouting. To become part of the Order of the Arrow, these two new members were voted by their peers as a Scout who best exemplifies Scouting principles. In November, the Troop hosted our Cub-O-Ree which is a campout with Cub Scouts that are the Arrow of Light rank. It was a great experience to recruit future scouts to the Troop along with our Scouts being able to teach what they know. Our final highlight of the Troop in November was that one of our Scouts has received his Eagle Scout rank. Congratulations Saxon for his hard work and dedication in receiving his Eagle!
- Scouts Troop 888** has had a very busy schedule of events and activities this past month. Three of our Scouts and our amazing Scoutmaster, Melissa Huber, showed what they were made of and successfully completed the Order of the Arrow Ordeal. The Ordeal is a safe induction ceremony that candidates complete to become members of Scouting's National Honor Society. Later in the month, we traveled to Spook-O-Ree, which is a family Halloween event organized by Cimarron Council. Our troop taught fun STEAM activities and staffed the spook trail! Our troop members have also been busy with football and Homecoming parking. Our major activity this month has been working toward the Archery Merit Badge. During our meetings, Mr Scott Wilson taught the troop all about archery and Mrs. Elisabeth Szabo taught us about leatherwork. We then put all of our learning into practice in our November campout at Will Rogers Scout Reservation with an archery shoot. It was a great experience for the whole troop and we thank Mr Wilson for all his guidance. If you would like to keep up with Troop 888's scouting journey, feel free to visit our Facebook page: BSA Troop 888 Stillwater OK. If you know a girl aged 11-17 years old who is interested in joining us, please contact our Scoutmaster Melissa Huber at troop888gbsa@gmail.com.



Children's & Youth Ministry

Children's Sunday School

Sundays, 9:45-10:45 a.m. for children 4yrs - 5th grade

Gathering Time:

- Children are invited to start the Sunday school hour at 9:45am in the Worship Center. Parents can pick up children at 10:45am in the Worship Center.

Faith Kid-nection Class (Pre-K to Kindergarten)

SpiritLink (1st-5th graders)

SpiritLink Room Highlight:

The Bread of Life Café is where we explore Bible stories through cooking and our sense of taste! In this room, children decorate cookies as nativity characters and then use them to tell the Christmas story, or they might make bread to share as they reflect on the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Taste and see that the Lord is good!

PRESBYTERIAN • YOUTH • GROUP



For ALL 6th-12th graders

Sunday evenings

PYG is a time for connection, fellowship, discipleship, and living our faith. At PYG, we play, laugh, pray, study scripture, serve, ask big questions, and grow as faithful disciples. Join us!

December

- 1 - No PYG - Happy Thanksgiving!
- 8 - PYG Christmas Party @ the Savage's (5:00 - 7:00 pm)
- 15 - A Night in Bethlehem (5:30-7:45pm)
Youth arrive at 4:30 pm
- 22/29 - No PYG

January

- 5 - No PYG
- 12 - PYG (5:00 - 6:30pm)
- 19 - PYG (5:00 - 6:30pm)
- 24-25 - PYG Lock-IN
- 26 - No PYG

Children & Worship

- December 8 - last Children & Worship for 2024
- January 12 - Children & Worship resumes



SpiritLink Singers

Our SpiritLink Singers will sing in worship during the 11:00 am worship service on Sunday, December 8th as part of our special service of Lessons & Carols!

Christmas Sunday School Schedule

Both Children's and Youth Sunday school classes will end for the semester on Sunday, December 8th and resume on Sunday, January 12th.



PYG Christmas Party - Dec. 8th from 5:00-7:00pm

Come and celebrate! You're invited to bring a cash donation for an organization (the youth group will choose the recipient!) as we spread God's light during this Christmas season.

Session Accepts Bid for HVAC Upgrade

At their called meeting of November 19, our Session received a report from the Trustees which provided a detailed update on their research into options for our facility's heating and cooling needs over the past 12-18 months. This report culminated with a recommendation to upgrade an integral component of our current system, the heat exchanger. Replacing our current "small" heat exchanger with a significantly larger unit will create greater efficiency throughout the system and allow its other components to perform better, extending their usefulness, even though those components (heat pumps in particular) are also on the back end of their expected lifespan. Smaller system upgrades have been made throughout 2024 to adjust issues like sediment in the pipes and water quality/corrosion-prevention in the cooling tower. A bid for \$177,500 (components and their skilled installation, including significant pipe work in the Fellowship Hall mechanical area) was accepted by Session. We will move forward with the upgrade immediately, utilizing From Strength To Strength gifts.

Trustees Update

Most of you are familiar by now with the efforts of Trustees to define and pursue long-term solutions for our struggling HVAC system. Efforts over the past few months involved a lot of research and recommendations from an engineering contractor. Our first step will be to trade out our heat exchanger. That should improve efficiency and allow us to monitor the health of the system. We also have a chemical drip system installed that has "cleaned up" corrosion in our cooling tower and geothermal lines. There's also an effort to improve operational efficiency of the system moving forward.

For those of you who struggle with our automatic doors, we contacted a company in Tulsa recently that will be here soon to ensure the doors are adjusted and working properly. The Fellowship Hall west side doors have been especially problematic and user "unfriendly".

Plans are being implemented in phases to upgrade audio-visual equipment in the Sanctuary to improve both our in-person experience and what our viewers at home see and hear. We plan to build a coordinated system using off-the-shelf components that are easier to use, troubleshoot and less expensive to repair or replace.

The most recent rains appeared to have not leaked anywhere in the church. But that was the first night. The next few nights revealed several leaks but they were not related to the roof. We've discovered several sources of leaks such as brick mortar, building trim and sidewalk/building interface areas. Our bell tower windows and structure also continue to have leaks.

All of these issues and more are being monitored and will be addressed using annual or capital campaign funds as appropriate.



Session Summary

Highlights of the November stated meeting of Session include:

- approval of the use of reserve funds by our Neurodiversity Team from the Sherar resource account to continue implementation of a sensory room to facilitate broader participation in the life of our faith community.
- acceptance of the Nominating Committee's suggestions for two elders to fill unexpired terms: Sue Dearing and Billy McCollom. A congregational meeting to consider and act upon this nomination, as well as the nomination of MJ Seals to fill an unexpired term as deacon, was called for January 12, at the beginning of worship.
- interviews for the part-time Finance Assistant position are underway by the Personnel Committee, with roughly 30 applicants so far having submitted requests and information for consideration.
- confirmation of the Communication/Mission committee's recommendation to send 25% of the Peace and Global Witness special offering to the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance program, designated for Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton relief.
- updates to signature cards for some of our accounts and consensus to utilize our "savings" accounts as a first vehicle for payment of large campaign expenses as they occur. These accounts are also where we will place gifts received for From Strength To Strength, but when expenses trend ahead of giving in the three-year span, we will utilize our reserves first, replacing those funds from capital campaign giving as it occurs, accessing our line of credit as a last choice on a case by case basis.
- work being done by the Stewardship/Finance committee and this council to create a balanced budget for 2025, based upon the pledged giving level of the 2024 annual budget, since we will not have an annual giving emphasis for 2025 until January. A draft will be considered at the December meeting.
- anticipation of our "A Night in Bethlehem" event, this year in a previous format with a meal in the Fellowship Hall with carol singing, receiving contributions for the Little Pantries, and the living nativity to follow within the porticos.
- choosing to build up our partnership with Our Daily Bread, including shifting some of our benevolence giving to their benevolence processes (that are within longer-term relationships with their clients to progress toward greater stability). This would be in addition to the annual gift currently made to the organization by our Deacons; we will try to increase our in-person participation with Our Daily Bread in the coming years as well.

DEC

SAVE THE DATE

8

OFFICER TRAINING

Training for Incoming & Continuing Officers

Please mark your calendars (if you have not already done so) to attend our officer training on December 8. Incoming officers should plan for 12:00-3:00 p.m. with lunch provided. Currently serving/returning officers will need to arrive no later than 2:00 p.m. and plan to be with us until 3:00 p.m.

Thanks to each of you for your service in leading our congregation. We look forward to seeing you on December 8!

The Ambassador
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405-372-5580
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Join us at First Presbyterian

Sunday Schedule

9:45 am Sunday School
11:00 am Worship

Midweek Prayer

Thursdays 12:00pm via Zoom

Office Closures

Thanksgiving: 11/28 & 11/29
Christmas: 12/25-1/2/25

ADVENT 2024

THE AMBASSADOR

A NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM

Sunday, December 15, 5:30-7:45 pm

Experience the joy of the season and be inspired by the Christmas story - bring your family and friends!

- Chili Supper and Character Dinner (5:30-6:10)
 - During dinner, interact with nativity characters (who will have a special craft for children) and get your picture taken with the nativity characters at our photo booth.
 - Vegetarian dinner option available.
- Carol Sing (6:10-6:45) - with emcee Jim Showalter, sing some of your favorite songs.
- Living Nativity (6:45-7:45)
 - The youth of FPC will present four scenes of Jesus' birth on the front lawn of the church.
 - A conversation guide will be available to engage in the Christmas story while viewing the scenes.
 - Enjoy apple cider and fair trade hot chocolate while viewing along with visits from some live animals.

We invite you to bring donations of non-perishable food or period products for the Little Free/Red Pantries to bless our community during this season.

The Fair Trade store will be open the whole evening and will be a perfect opportunity to purchase Christmas gifts while supporting fair wages, community empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

