

# First Press

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
OCEAN CITY, NEW JERSEY



## A NOTE FROM PASTOR LUKE

Hey Church Family,

2026 has been an adventurous year so far. We have seen record-breaking weather. We have also seen many of our church family members endure significant trials. For many people in our church, this has been a very difficult few months. And yet, in all this, God is faithful. During this time, the words of Psalm 94:18-19 have been a great encouragement to me.

*When I thought, "My foot slips,"  
your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up.  
When the cares of my heart are many,  
your consolations cheer my soul.*

No matter how many cares you have, you know that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Remember, winter is coming to an end, and spring is around the corner. Set your mind on the many blessings that God has given us. Last year, we had 18 people join our church, and in only two months of 2026, 5 more have joined, with a few more considering joining soon. God is at work at FPC. Whatever the next few months bring, know that God is in control. His steadfast love holds us up.

-Pastor Luke Bert

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### FIND FEN!

The Bert Family dog is hidden somewhere in the newsletter, can you find him?



## KRISTI AND OUR JOURNEY FOR OC PRESBYTERIAN

This has been a part of our family journey that we never would have welcomed on our own...few would. Our first inclination, 5+ years ago when our dear daughter, Kristi, mother of 5 boys and wife of a pastor, was diagnosed with breast cancer, was to dive deep into God's Word, His character, and His promises. We sought to find encouragement from multiple authors and those who had walked this path before us. And, of course, we earnestly sought to understand all we could, medically. This was the beginning of yet another part of His continuing work in all our lives.

Well-meaning friends who genuinely sought to console Kristi, soon were saying, "Why you? This is not fair!" But, God had already solidified in her heart and mind the *"I am the potter, you are the clay"* (Isaiah 64:8) surrender of her life. Her response? "Why NOT me? The hard truth is, we live in a fallen world. None of us are exempt from that aspect of life and reality." She had irrevocably and wholeheartedly given her life to Him, for His eternal purposes, for His glory. Such steady and assured faith was humbling for us.

As the months turned into years, with the ebb and flow of weakness, pain, MRIs, chemo, radiation, and the unknown, Kristi persevered with a strength that only God can provide. Her motto became, "Today I choose joy"—joy in the Lord, a thankfulness for yet another day to love and serve her family, her church family, the people God would put in her life and to tell others about His great love and forgiveness offered to them. Another day, another opportunity, another moment. Washing dishes, which had not been her 'favorite' became a true joy, as did other not so favorite aspects of daily life. Why? Because she was actively "choosing joy"—the joy of the Lord. "Choose Joy" tee shirts, sunflowers, jewelry, and wall hangings were ways to tangibly remind her daily of that choice, especially in the midst of suffering. She continued to live life to the fullest.

I have some of those same reminders in my home now. Sometimes they feel like unwelcome reminders. To be honest, the fragile chords of my grieving heart still cry out to God and the tears flow in my weakness as I process this grief. Kristi's life speaks volumes to me—to us all. Her steadfast desire was for her life to honor God. Her hope was in Jesus—His love, His promises, His faithfulness. She held Him fast. . . He held her fast. God lovingly gives special grace when we need it. I am so very grateful for that. But there are also significant choices we make to keep our hearts, our eyes, our minds on the Scriptures every day that reveal truths of Who He is, was, and always will be.



During the final weeks in the hospital, Kristi "lost". The cancer had spread from her brain to her spinal fluid, though no one knew that was the case until her last week with us. She first lost her voice, then the ability to swallow. Rapid deterioration led to the loss of her ability to communicate by writing, and eventually she could no longer walk or reposition herself on her own. And yet, in the quieter late hours of the night, she would have her sister play the worship music that had purposefully been a part of her daily devotionals in the months, if not the years previously. (Some of the worship songs are listed at the end if you want your own heart to be challenged and

encouraged through worship music). Michelle said it was apparent to any who entered the room that she was worshipping. It was a "holy" place. Though I have always found great encouragement through worship, it was extremely hard at first. The tears would flow uncontrollably. Over time, the words and music have become somewhat of a "healing balm" that help to usher me into a place of peace, comfort and the presence of My God.

After Kristi passed into glory at the hospital, I was getting drinks for her boys when God put two nurses that had been caring for Kristi, in my path. They needed to ask a question they hadn't been able to answer. They softly spoke of something being very different as they entered her room—every time. Different than anything they had experienced in other rooms. Holy, peace, love? They spoke these words as a question. Nothing seemed to capture what they felt. To God be the glory! Even in her final weeks, God was glorified in her body as she held fast to her hope in Jesus. It was a moment, an unexpected opportunity, for me to share the hope of the Gospel with them.

In times of our greatest challenges, the upheavals, the times of great loss, it is a choice to hold fast to what is true — God’s unfailing love, His faithfulness, His purposes, His sovereignty, His presence with us. These are what remain when all else fails. My natural self wants to have it all make sense. Oh, if only it would make sense! There are questions that will remain unanswered. It can be so hard sometimes to surrender, to trust in God’s sovereignty, that His ways are not my way. *(Isaiah 55:8,9)* But His ways ARE higher and beyond my ability to comprehend. His ways are part of a much, much larger tapestry, where I can only see the knots and intertwined threads on the back, BUT He sees the bigger, complete, more beautiful masterpiece. I find I need to repeatedly surrender to these truths...surrender, surrender, surrender.

Grief is complex. It is BIG, layered, not linear, and can unfold differently for everyone. When we are grieving or with others that may grieve differently, we need to remember that we all need “space and grace”. There are painful moments—those “sneak attacks” that grip our hearts and emotions in an instant by some trigger, memory, photo, or something shared. I suspect everyone experiences these moments. The life we had before, with Kristi as such a vibrant part, is no longer possible. And that is a hard, harsh reality—one not easily grasped. How do we speak to God in our pain? The Psalms and Lamentations repeatedly give us insights into honest prayers, talking to God in our pain. But then, like David, we can choose to move to a place of trust, remembering what we know to be true— His steadfast love and faithfulness to us. Remembering to keep our eyes “**fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our lives and our faith, (Hebrews 12:2)** in all of His attributes, choosing joy through the journey, holding steadfast to what we have learned and know to be true—that we belong to the Lord, that we desire to honor Him in all of life and even in death...this is where we need to continually find our focus. Otherwise, I fear the enemy of our souls will find a crack, tiny as it may be, to enter and cause us to lose our way, become bitter, lose our joy, our purpose.

The experiences we have of great loss and separation in this life are hope filled because of Jesus! We grieve and can grieve deeply even as Jesus did at the grave of Lazarus. But the Scriptures remind us that we do not grieve as the world grieves. We have a great hope--hope that ushers us into glory and has victory over death. Kristi is now free of the suffering and pain she endured with such strong and sure faith. And she is full of unimaginable joy!!! Her faith, and hope in Jesus was a precious gift and great comfort to us. And yet, there remains great grief and pain of separation in this earthly life. She longed for heaven. Her life echoed the profound declaration of Paul in *Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”*. And so, the journey of becoming who God created us to be, the refining process, the continued discovery of who He is and who He wants to be in and through our lives, is still being etched on our lives and in our hearts.

*Psalms 73:26 “My health may fail and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength (my rock, my fortress) of my heart. He is mine forever.”*

Thank you to those of you who faithfully joined with us in in your faith-filled, earnest prayers on this journey. It has been a wonderful source of encouragement to us. We trust Kristi’s journey and walk of faith to the end of this side of glory, and our own continuing vulnerability in our journey will at some point bring you encouragement, renewed perspective, and hope in Our Lord and Savior.

**Even if - Mercy Me**

**The Goodness of God**

**Hymn of Heaven - Phil Wickham**

**Well Done - The Afters**

**Amen - I Am They**

**It Is Well - You Make Me Brave - Kristene DiMarco**

**Christus Victus (Amen) - The Worship Initiative**

**He Will Hold Me Fast + Be Still My Soul instrumental - Keith & Kristen Getty**



Char & Ron Bystrom

Cru - The Every Initiative

# March

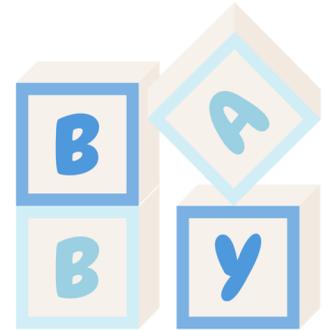
# April

# May

- 1. Steven Lamkin
- 1. Bruce Twiggs
- 4. Joe Laielli
- 5. Olivia Colvin
- 10. Pastor Luke Bert
- 12. Guy Gargan
- 12. Sadie Newsome
- 13. Eileen Kilpatrick
- 13. Peg Miller
- 20. Sharon Griffith
- 20. Allan Matthews
- 21. Hannah Breunig
- 22. Al Halliday
- 23. Barbara Grill
- 26. Dorothy S. White
- 29. Bob Woolery
- 30. Noah Laielli

- 10. Bob Dye
- 12. Justin Colvin
- 15. Peg Davis
- 15. Alex Weisberg
- 16. Wendy Krayer
- 17. Will Evans
- 19. Joann Cioeta Orgovan
- 20. Daniel Colvin
- 22. Carol Ann Olandt
- 27. Jac Young
- 27. Andrew Newsome
- 29. Amy Patsch Jordan

- 2. Christian Twiggs
- 4. Rita Stauffer
- 4. Maura Cook
- 5. Saranna Bert
- 8. Jack Shea
- 9. Ruth Halliday
- 11. Rachael Colvin Manning
- 18. Cate Szalku
- 19. Brianna Arias
- 20. Myrtle Young
- 25. Ami Breunig
- 25. Toni Esposito



**National Day of Prayer** May 7th, 2026  
 First Pres will have a special time of pray  
 after Wed Night Dinner on May 6th.  
 Be on the lookout National Day of Prayer  
 Events on May 7th.  
[www.nationaldayofprayer.org](http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org)

*Finian Sean Colvin*  
 Born: February 6, 2026  
 Son of  
 Daniel & Amanda Colvin  
 Grandson of  
 Rich & Beth Colvin  
 and  
 John & Toini Williams

# Vacation Bible School

**VBS will be held Monday through  
 Friday**

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

9:00am - 12:15pm | Ages 4 - 6<sup>th</sup> Grade  
 If you are interested in helping with  
 this years VBS,  
 please contact Connie Young or  
 Gretchen Murphy!



**Art Nights**

May 27  
 June 3, June 17  
 July 1, July 15, July 29  
 August 2 - VBS Set Up

# NEW APP AND WEBSITE!



## A NEW WAY TO STAY CONNECTED!

We're thrilled to share that a brand-new church website and app are going live anyday! This exciting tool will make it easier than ever to:



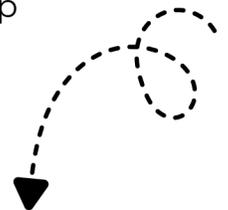
Find contact info for fellow members and church leadership



View a full calendar of church events and gatherings



Share and respond to prayer requests in real time



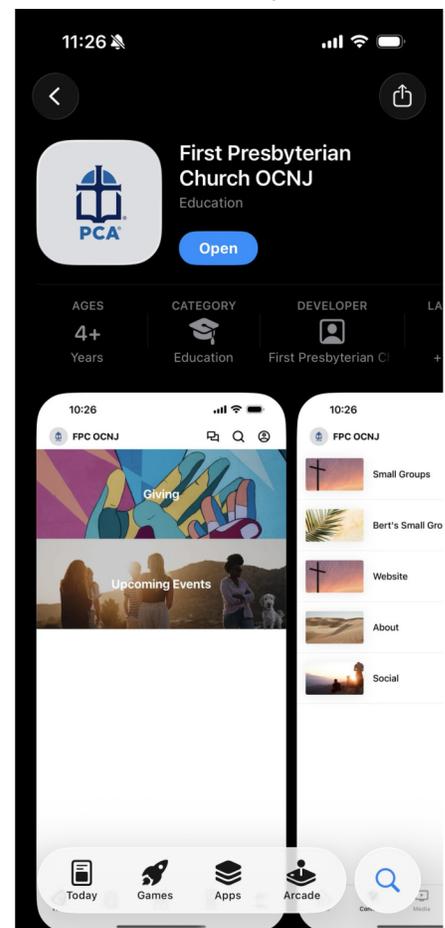
It's designed to help us grow closer as a church family, stay informed, lift one another up, and deepen our fellowship.

## TO DOWNLOAD THE APP:

- Go to your Google or Apple App Store
- Search "First Presbyterian Church OCNJ"
- Download
- Create Account
- Here you will be able to watch sermons, make prayer requests, connect, read the bible and have access to online giving.

## THE WEBSITE:

[www.firstpresocnj.net](http://www.firstpresocnj.net) will continue to be our website! It will just have a new and improved look to it in the coming weeks!



# Sunday Setlist



## Shine into Our Night

Sovereign Grace Music

## We Will Feast in the House of Zion

Sandra McCracken

## Appalachian Wine

EleventySeven

## Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

Norton Hall Band

## Psalm 118 (This is the Day)

Shane & Shane



FIND ON OUR WEBSITE @  
[WWW.FIRSTPRESOCNJ.NET](http://WWW.FIRSTPRESOCNJ.NET)

## Easter Bird's Nest Cookies

- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup peanut butter chips
- 1 5-ounce can chow mein noodles
- 1 cup Cadbury speckled eggs



### Instructions:

- Line a large sheet pan with parchment paper.
- Pour the chocolate chips and peanut butter cups in a microwave-safe bowl, microwave the chocolate for 1 minute, and then stir. Keep microwaving in 10-second intervals, stirring in between, until all of the chocolate is melted.
- Mix the chow mein noodles with the melted chocolate and combine.
- Use a spoon to drop the mixture onto the sheet pan to form cookies. Use the spoon to press down to form a nest shape.
- Press 2 to 3 candy eggs into each nest. Let stand until firm or refrigerate for about 10 minutes. Store in a tightly covered container.

# Márch

**Every Sunday:  
9:00 am - Sunday School  
10:30 am - Worship**

Please remove from the newsletter and put on your fridge at home so you don't miss any of the exciting things happening at First Pres!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4 	5	6	7
8	9	10	11 	12	13 	14
15	16	17 	18 	19	20	21
22	23	24	25 	26	27 	28
29 	30	31				

**Wednesdays, March 4, 11, 18, 25 - Lounge Study & Games**  
6:00pm Dinner Nights | 6:45pm - 8:00pm Non-Dinner Nights  
High School - Church Lounge | Grades 4-8 - Church Youth Room

**Friday, March 13 - Gymnasium Game Night**  
6:00pm - 8:00pm | Grades 4 - 12 | Bring a snack to share

**Friday, March 27 - Volleyball Mania**  
6:30pm - 9:30pm | Grade 7 - adult | Refreshments provided  
Hope Community Church and New City Fellowship are invited!

**Sunday, March 29 - Palm Sunday Service @ 10:30am**

# April

**Every Sunday:  
9:00 am - Sunday School  
10:30 am - Worship**

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>April 2 @ 7:00pm - Maundy Thursday</b> <b>April 3 @ 5:30pm - Good Friday</b> <b>(Joint Service)</b> <b>April 5 @ 10:30am - Easter Sunday</b>			1	2 	3 	4
5 	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15 	16	17 	18
19	20	21	22 	23	24	25
26	27	28 	29 	30		

**Wednesdays, April 15, 22, 29 - Lounge Study & Games**

6:00pm Dinner Nights | 6:45pm - 8:00pm Non-Dinner Nights  
High School - Church Lounge | Grades 4-8 - Church Youth Room

**Friday, April 17 - Fire Pit & Games**

6:00pm - 9:00pm | Grades 4 - 12 Bring your friends! | Church Parking Lot (Gym if it rains)  
Hot Dogs, Snacks, and Soda! | Sign Up in Welcome Center

**Tuesday, April 28 - Service Project**

6:30pm - 8:00pm | All are welcome | Meet in Church Kitchen  
Make Sandwiches for homeless in Philadelphia and deliver to EHT  
WAWA or Ice Cream stop, cost is on your own



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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	<p><b>Wednesday, May 6 - Lounge Study &amp; Games</b> 6:00pm Dinner Nights   6:45pm - 8:00pm Non-Dinner Nights High School - Church Lounge   Grades 4-8 - Church Youth Room</p> <p><b>Wednesday, May 13 - Shuffle Board &amp; Ice Cream</b> 6:00pm - 8:00pm   All are welcome   Meet at Church</p> <p><b>Wednesday, May 27 - VBS Art Night</b> 6:00pm - 8:00pm   All are welcome   Fellowship Hall Drawing, painting, puppets and constructing! Wear your painting clothes!</p>					

**THIS SUMMER**

Weekend Camping & Tubing Trip TBA

Vacation Bible School | August 3 - 7 Mornings | Set Up August 2

First Presbyterian Church  
701 Wesley Ave  
Ocean City, NJ 08226

To:

**First Press**  
**March/April/May**  
**2026 Newsletter**