

First Press

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OCEAN CITY, NEW JERSEY

REFLECTIONS ON THE LAST YEAR & HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Dear Church Family,

As I sit down to write this, I'm struck by how many meaningful moments this past year has held. Our family has now lived in Ocean City for one full year, and this October, First Presbyterian Church will celebrate 130 years of ministry. These anniversaries invite us to pause and look back with gratitude and look forward with hope. My aim in this letter is simply that: to remember God's faithfulness and to fix our eyes on the future with confidence in the Spirit's continued work among us.

Looking Back: A Year of Joys and Trials

When I think about our first year together, I feel deep gratitude. On July 19, 2025, I stood before the presbytery, affirmed my call, and stepped into this role with excitement. I had already sat in your living rooms, shared meals, and sensed the warmth of this congregation. I couldn't wait to see what God would do.

The very next day, we worshiped with you for the first time as your new pastor. It was a joyful beginning. However, the next week threatened to change everything. I spent our first week at CHOP (Children's Hospital of Philadelphia) with Matthias, learning to navigate his new reality after his sudden diabetes diagnosis. What could have been a season of fear became a testimony to God's kindness through His people. Before our boxes were unpacked, you surrounded us with prayer, meals, encouragement, and love. You became our family overnight.

And we weren't the only ones walking through hardship. This past year brought grief and heavy burdens for many in our church. We mourned the deaths of Robbie Dye, Al Halliday, and Gary Griffith, along with others dearly loved by members of our congregation. We faced illnesses, injuries, and difficult diagnoses. These moments raised honest questions about what God was doing. What is God doing? Is He working against us? But I am convinced that in every sorrow, God was working for us. He used these trials to knit us together, to deepen our trust, and to strengthen our dependence on Him.

(CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE)



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- pg. 1 - A Note from Pastor Luke
- pg. 2 - A Note from Pastor Luke cont.
- pg. 3 - VBS / New App & Website
- pg. 4 - Birthdays, Births & Membership
- pg. 5 - Athletes In Action
- pg. 6 - College & Career Update
- pg. 7 - Fall Events

OC Ecumenical Food Cupboard Expanding Hours

The food cupboard will continue their regular hours throughout the fall / winter:
Monday / Wednesday: 1:00 - 3:00pm
Friday: 10:00am - 12:00pm

They will be adding hours this fall / winter:
September 8th & 22nd
October 6th
5:00pm - 7:00pm



October 17th
November 7th & 21st
10:00am - 12:00pm

The cupboard is located in St. Peter's United Methodist Church, 501 E 8th St. Ocean City. The entrance is on the alley off of 8th St. Please call (609) 398-3191 with any questions.

And in the midst of hardship, God poured out blessings. We welcomed new visitors and saw familiar faces returning. We celebrated six baptisms and received even more new members. Our worship has grown in joy and unity. Communion Sundays and fellowship times have become one of my favorite rhythms of our life together. And how wonderful it was to run out of bulletins on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday because so many people came to worship.

There is so much to be grateful for. Above all, I am grateful for you. Your love, your faithfulness, your perseverance, and your care for one another have been a living testimony to Christ. From the bottom of my heart, I praise God for you.

Looking Forward: A Season of Celebration and Calling

The joy of the past year naturally leads us to hope for the year ahead. October will be a special month for our church. In God's providence, October 20th is a shared anniversary: nine years since my ordination and two years since First Pres joined the PCA. You stood firm on the Word of God. You did not give up the fight but counted the cost and chose faithfulness. I am honored to serve a church with such conviction.

October also marks our church's birthday; on October 23, 1896, 32 charter members marked the birth of a new church. The first meeting was two months earlier. Dr. Alexander Sproul led a Wednesday night Bible study with 18 people. Dr. Sproul's first official sermon was on Acts 2:42, "they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine." One hundred and thirty years later, fellowship and faithfulness to God's Word remain central pillars of our church. This October, we will celebrate God's enduring faithfulness to First Presbyterian Church.

So where do we go from here? We go wherever the Spirit leads, and the Spirit leads through the Word. For 130 years, our church has been shaped by Sunday worship, Sunday School, Bible studies, and midweek fellowship. These aren't just traditions; they're the ways God forms His people. We will continue in them because we want to be faithful.

God has already worked in our church. In December 2023, the mission study committee identified several goals. We met all of them.

- Leave the PCUSA and join a new denomination (Joined the PCA on October 20th, 2024)
- Call a new pastor (Called Pastor Luke on July 19th, 2024)
- Start a small group ministry and Sunday fellowship (We began small groups and a monthly Sunday fellowship)
- Create a leadership development program (We now have four elders and five deacons)
- Plan evangelism events (We had harvest fest last October and are actively pursuing outreach)
- Grow membership by 20% within two years (membership increased from 82 to 106)

But we also want to ask: What else might God be calling us to do? Other types of small groups? Outreach events? Church retreats? A young adult's ministry? Evangelism? A ministry to surfers? Something entirely new?

Dream big! How might God build his kingdom in us?

A Final Word

I am excited for the future. God has been faithful for 130 years. He will continue to be faithful. Let's step forward with hope, trusting that the Spirit will guide us as we seek to glorify Christ in Ocean City.

With love and gratitude, Pastor Luke



FIND FEN!

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



Thank You, VBS Volunteers! 🌟💚

A huge thank you to our amazing VBS volunteers from both First Pres OCNJ and Hope Community Church! Emerald Crossing would not have been possible without their servant hearts, hard work, and dedication.

With their help, the children dug into Psalm 23 and learned that God is their shepherd, guide, comforter, provider, and king! As always, our prayer is that the Lord will be glorified through our Bible school and that the children will grow in their faith.

In His Service,

Connie Young & Gretchen Murphy - VBS Co-Directors



NEW APP AND WEBSITE!

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

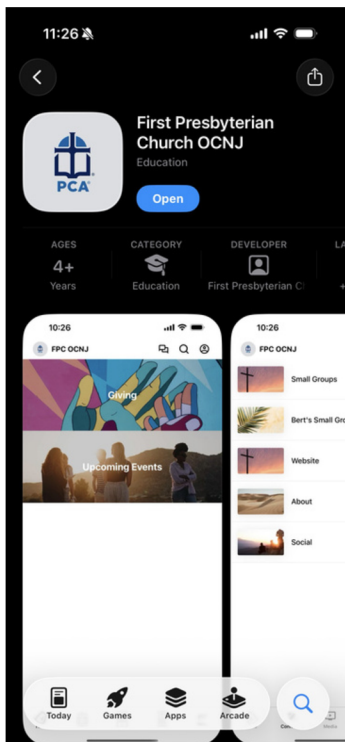
Share and respond to prayer requests in real time

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

Church App!

Have you downloaded our church app yet?

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



September October November

2. Linda Matthews
3. John Sheldon, Jr.
6. Rob Dye
6. Bruce Breunig Jr.
8. Breeanna Colvin
9. Rowlee Murphy
10. Charles Wagner
12. Elijah Murphy
15. Andy Halliday
16. Etienne Bert
18. Ben Weisberg
22. Alice O'Connell
24. Bekka Olandt
27. Peg Wallace

5. Davon (DJ) Bennett
6. Toni Williams
6. Renee Laielli
8. Bryan Weisberg
8. Emily Kraye
11. Fran Woolery
13. Chris Olandt
13. Micah Laielli
16. Linda Lewis
17. Sarah Olandt
18. Carol Evans
19. Kevin Olandt
22. Elinore Carlstrom
28. Stella Laielli
30. Tom Martinson
30. Lisa Newsome

6. Zachary Williams
7. Joshua Olandt
9. Gretchen Murphy
12. Annette Bennett
13. Laurie Sheldon
14. Matt Newsome
14. Sue Bretherick
15. Dave Laielli
17. Rick Carmona
19. Bruce Bennett
21. Pastor John Sheldon
22. Mary Wilson
22. Phyllis Martinson
23. Bob Kraye
26. Amanda Colvin
28. Dianne Brandt
29. Larry Lamkin



Crusoe John Levy
Born: July 13, 2026
Son of
Paul and Lexi Levy
Great-Grandson of
Barbara Grill

Stella Stacey Twigg
Born: August 7, 2026
Daughter of
Colin and Georgette Twigg
Granddaughter of
Bruce and Char Twigg

Silas James White
Born: August 10, 2026
Son of
Christian and Tessa White
Grandson of
Maria White

Davis Richard Newsome
Born: August 12, 2026
Son of
Jacob and Annie Newsome
Grandson of
David and Lisa Newsome



Why should you become a **member** of the church? While the phrase church member is not used in the Bible, the reality of committed belonging to Christ's church is found throughout Scripture. Church membership matters because the Christian life is meant to be lived in **community**. Christ gathers his people into a body, a family, and a flock. To join a local church is more than simply attending worship. It is a way of saying, **"This is the people of God with whom I will worship, grow, serve, and share life."**

Here are a few reasons membership is important: Scripture calls us to gather faithfully with God's people (Heb. 10:25). The church is where we use our gifts to serve one another (1 Cor. 12:12–20).

The teaching ministry of the church helps us grow in truth and guards us from error (Eph. 4:9–16).

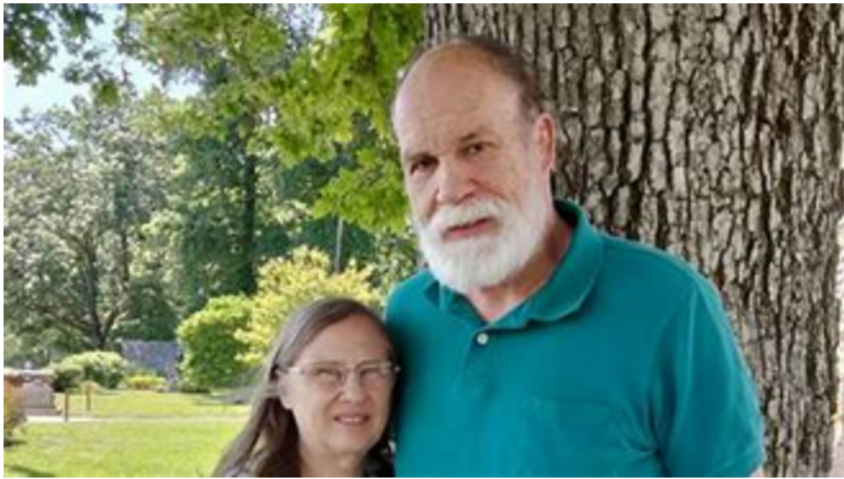
New Member Class This Fall! - Contact Pastor Luke to get involved!

Sunday, September 27th - Sunday, November 22nd @ 9:00am
New Member Welcome - Sunday, December 6th @ 10:30am

God calls his people to live under the loving care of shepherds (1 Pet. 5:1–4). If you believe God may be calling you to make **First Pres your church home**, I warmly encourage you to consider the **new members class**. Membership is a meaningful commitment to Christ and to his people here. It is one way we say that we belong to one another in the Lord. This class is open not only to those ready to pursue membership, but also to anyone who would like to learn more about First Pres and the PCA. Whether you are new or have been attending for some time, **you are very welcome to come**.

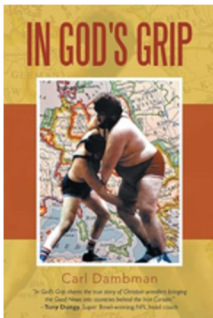
CARL AND NOREEN DAMBMAN

With Athletes In Action, the sports ministry of Cru



Carl joined the Athletes In Action Wrestling Team in January 1975. Noreen and Carl met in the summer of 1975 at Campus Crusade's Institute of Biblical Studies and were married in 1977. They moved to Europe in 1979 with a small group of AIA wrestlers training for the 1980 Moscow Olympics. They helped start sport ministry behind the iron curtain. All three of their children were born in Vienna, attended Kindergarten and

elementary school in Germany and finished high school in Russia. After more than a decade of covert ministry in Eastern Europe and Russia, the Dambmans lived in Moscow from 1990 to 2010 pioneering the AIA ministry and developing sport ministry partnerships in the former Soviet Union. AIA has grown and sport ministry has developed across the eleven time zones of Russia and Eurasia. AIA has staff and trained volunteers in most of the former Soviet republics. Carl traveled extensively in the former USSR encouraging sport ministry workers and helping pioneer ministry and develop partnerships. He was on the USA Olympic Wrestling Team at Montreal 1976 and has ministered at 20 Olympics, serving as an official chaplain at nine Olympics. His passion is to reach elite athletes with the gospel, train them and equip the church to use the platform of sport to reach their communities. In the role of "shepherd" Carl led devotions and mentored students from across the globe.



During the Pandemic of 2020 Carl used Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, Telegram and even Facebook to stay connected with sports leaders he is mentoring. Zoom has helped Carl stay connected locally as well as across the globe with AIA staff, sports chaplains, and wrestling coaches. During the Covid 19 travel restrictions Carl was able to write a Memoir called "In God's Grip" that is published by WestBow Press and available on Amazon. It tells the story of AIA wrestlers pioneering sports ministry in the former Soviet Bloc.

Since returning from Moscow Carl and Noreen have lived near Seattle, WA and are part of AIA Global In Sport Ministry, part of the Global Events Team. They travel extensively for various World-wide sporting events serving as mentors/shepherds to athletes and coaches. This team partnered with churches and other ministries for evangelism and discipleship during the recent FIFA World Cup games in North America.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership in using sport to share the good news of Jesus and make multiplying disciples.



COLLEGE AND CAREER UPDATES



ANDREW ARIAS IS TRAINING TO BECOME AN ELECTRICIAN AT THE PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY.

BRIANNA ARIAS IS PURSUING BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AT ACCC, ATLANTIC CAPE COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

DJ BENNETT IS STARTING HIS SOPHOMORE YEAR IN THE CAREER AND COMMUNITY STUDIES PROGRAM AT TCNJ, THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY.

HANNAH BREUNIG IS AT RUTGERS COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, MAJORING IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING.

OLIVIA CESARI IS ATTENDING CAMDEN COUNTY COLLEGE AND WILL BE STUDYING HOSPITALITY & TOURISM.

ROBERT CESARI IS STARTING HIS FRESHMAN YEAR AT LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IN LYNCHBURG VIRGINIA. HE IS MAJORING IN BUSINESS.

SPENCER GOHERRING IS DOING FOOD PREP IN THE KITCHEN AT GREGORY'S IN SOMERS POINT AND WILL BE PURSUING CULINARY ARTS AT ACCC.

SYDNEY HALLIDAY IS IN HER SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL LOOKING TOWARD A COLLEGE DEGREE IN ECONOMICS AND THEN HOPES TO GO ON TO LAW SCHOOL.

REBEKAH MESCAVAGE IS ALSO BEGINNING HER SENIOR YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL. SHE IS HOME SCHOOLED AND IS BEGINNING GENERAL STUDIES AT WARREN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE THIS YEAR. SHE HAS TWO MAIN LONG RANGE PLANS AT THIS TIME: TO BECOME A COUNSELOR OR THERAPIST AND THEN TO USE THAT TO BECOME A TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE ANALYST FOR THE FBI.

ROWLEE MURPHY IS WORKING AT TUCKAHOE INN AND PURSUING A DEGREE AND EMT CERTIFICATION AT ACCC TO BETTER EQUIP HIM IN HIS PURSUIT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT.

NATALIE MURPHY IS VOLUNTEERING AT THE OCEAN CITY SENIOR CENTER.

AIDEN SEALS IS OUT OF THE MILITARY AND NOW STUDYING JAZZ AT THE NEW SCHOOL IN NYC.

AUDREY SEALS IS CONTINUING HER PURSUIT OF A REGISTERED NURSING (RN) DEGREE AND IS BEGINNING HER JUNIOR YEAR AT THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY (TCNJ). SHE LOOKS FORWARD TO GAINING VALUABLE CLINICAL EXPERIENCE IN WOMEN'S AND NEW BORN CARE, AS WELL AS ON A PSYCHIATRIC UNIT AT HOSPITALS IN THE LOCAL EWING, NEW JERSEY, AREA.



September

Sunday, September 20th - Joint Service with First Pres, New City Fellowship & Hope Presbyterian

Join us at 4:00pm with a potluck to follow

Sunday, September 27th - Communion and After Worship Refreshments

October



Wednesday Night Dinners - October 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th! Youth will be working on this year's Christmas Coffee House as well as Bible studies and game times through the Fall Season

Friday - Sunday, October 2nd - 4th: Belleplain State Forest Family Weekend

-Picnic Saturday, October 3rd at 12:30 PM

-Details and sign-up sheets are on the Welcome Center Bulletin Board (area inside parking lot door)

-Make your own camping reservations 609-861-2404 or online at

NJ Parks/Camping Reservations/Belleplain State Forest

(several people will be camping in the CCC area at Water/Electric sites 111, 114, and 115)

-Worship service at the lake or lake pavilion depending on weather at 11 am Sunday October 4th

Saturday, October 10th - Bike & Ferry Day

- Cape May Ferry Bike Trip to Henlopen State Park

- 6th Grade and under must have parent/guardian

- Adult (14-61) \$20, (6-13) \$5 & Under 6 is free

Seniors (62+) and Military \$16

- Leaving church 8 AM (come early with bike)

- Pack your own lunch for a picnic together - Bring spending \$ for Ferry or while waiting for Ferry.

There is also a camp store at Henlopen for drinks and desert.

Tuesday, October 20th: Anniversary of Pastor Luke's Ordination and when First Pres joined the PCA!

Friday, October 23rd: 130th Anniversary of First Presbyterian Church OCNJ

Sunday, October 25th - Communion and After Worship Refreshments

Friday, October 30th - Harvest Party

- Sign-up and details TBA

First Pres Church Parking Lot from 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm. Bonfire / Tiki torches /

Food / Games / Special bags for trick-or-treaters... More details to come



November

Wednesday Night Dinners - November 4th, 11th, 18th!

Friday, November 13th - Deadline for December, January, February Newsletter

Please have all articles and important dates to Breanna - hello@firstpresocnj.net

Sunday, November 22nd - Communion and After Worship Refreshments

Upcoming for December:

Wednesday Night Dinner - December 2nd

If you are in sports: please mark your name, home game dates, time, and where the game will play, on the calendar outside of Mr. Murphy's office!

If you are in any kind of production: please invite Mr. Murphy to come to your performance! Also, please mark these dates, time, and location on the calendar outside of Mr. Murphy's office.

Other Upcoming Youth Activities: will be posted on the bulletin board in the welcome center as they are planned.

First Presbyterian Church
701 Wesley Ave
Ocean City, NJ 08226

To:

First Press
September / October / November
2026 Newsletter