

FALL

COVENANT NEWS

2026

A publication of Covenant Presbyterian Church • Charlotte, North Carolina



A Note from Bob Henderson



Dear friends:

As summer days begin to shorten and turn toward fall, the programmatic dimension of Covenant shifts into full gear with new life groups, mid-week meals, children's choirs and programming, and the return of our four weekly

worship services.

I hope you will read this newsletter thoroughly with a prayerful eye about how you might engage in the many opportunities to cultivate faith and friendship. There is much about which to be excited.

Let me also take this opportunity to reiterate my gratitude for the Transition Team and Personnel Committee which have spent the last three (plus) months working diligently to ensure that Covenant continues to thrive during the upcoming time of transition. They have spent countless hours clarifying roles, recruiting, and interviewing candidates, and re-aligning job responsibilities so that the church can carry on the vital work that is Covenant's to do. When you see them, I invite you to pause and articulate your gratitude as well.

One effort, in particular, has been to create a "Featured Preachers" series for the fall while we await the naming of an Interim Senior Minister. In addition to hearing from our strong team of ordained pastors, we will welcome several uniquely gifted preachers and worship leaders who will preach and participate in worship throughout the season. We'll share more details and the full schedule in the weeks

ahead. I'm grateful for these friends and the ways they will enhance Covenant's worship life.

Finally, we'll have plenty of time in the next few weeks to articulate gratitude for the richness of our shared journey. But as my time as your pastor draws to a conclusion, I find these scripture passages coming to mind with joyful frequency. I hope and trust you share the sentiment:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6)

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:7-8)

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

With profound gratitude,

Bob

Celebrating Bob Henderson's Ministry

September 13 | 12:20 p.m. in the Sanctuary

Join us for a special celebration beginning in the Sanctuary at 12:20 p.m. on Bob's last Sunday at Covenant. Through special music, speakers, photos, and videos, we'll reflect on Bob's ministry and his years at Covenant. Afterward, the celebration will continue with lunch, activities for children, and a few other surprises on the Green and throughout campus. While RSVPs are not required, they will help us plan accurately. Visit covenantpresby.org/transition to RSVP.

Wednesdays: Education & Fellowship



Dinner, prepared by Chef Johnny, is served 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. Gluten-free options available. Cost is \$10 for adults and youth in the sixth grade and above, \$6 for children two years old through the fifth grade, with a family maximum of \$38. RSVP by prepaying on covenantpresby.org/wednesdays.



Join Your Friends and Family at Open Table!

Enjoy a delicious meal and stay for a variety of programs and classes for all ages.

Wednesdays Through November

Children's Programs

5:15-5:45 p.m.

Choir for preK/kindergarten

5:45-6:30 p.m.

Choir for 1-3 grades

BLAST for 4-5 graders

6:30-7:30 p.m.

Choir for 4-5 grades

BLAST for K-3 graders

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Middle & High School Youth

5:15-6:00 p.m.

Youth Handbell Ensemble

Dinner 6:00 p.m.

Program 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Meet in Fellowship Hall for dinner then gather for programming.

Life Groups

Wednesday Nights (and More)

What are you building your life on? This fall, Life Groups are launching again with our six-week series, Building What Matters. Together we'll explore what it means to build lives, relationships, and communities rooted in God's love, discovering that the things which endure are often formed through everyday acts of faith, meaningful conversations, and the people who walk alongside us. Whether you're looking for a group in a similar season of life or hoping to broaden your circle by connecting with people of different ages and experiences, there's a place for you. Meeting throughout our church and across the city, Life Groups offer a welcoming space to explore Scripture, share life's joys and challenges, ask honest questions, and be shaped by God and one another. Groups begin the first Wednesday of Open Table on September 9.

The majority of Life Groups will meet on Wednesday evenings, following Open Table. Visit our website to learn more and sign up: covenantpresby.org/wednesdays.



CARE • LEARN • GROW

COVENANT LIFE GROUPS

For more information, contact Mary Kate Sykes
marykate.sykes@covenantpresby.org

Wednesdays: Education & Fellowship for Adults

Expressions of Faith: Creating as a Spiritual Practice



“Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not other people.” -Colossians 3:23

Come join with others as we experience creative pursuits through a lens of faith. We will practice creative pursuits as we talk about and consider how our faith and our creative selves are interconnected.

September 9 | Join Amber Brown for Faith on a String – an evening of bracelet making and honest conversations about life and faith.

September 16 | Join Organist and Music Therapist Mark Glaeser for Music and Faith – making and experiencing music is an integral part of the human experience of faith.

September 23 | Join Michelle McDevitt-Askew, NCLMFT, for SoulCollage – an intuitive, expressive arts practice using simple materials like 5x8-inch mat boards, magazines, scissors, and glue.

Sunday Mornings for Children and Families



One of the joys of Family Worship is watching children learn worship by participating in it.

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Rather than simply talking about prayer, Scripture, Communion, and baptism, children experience these gifts alongside their parents, grandparents, and church family in a service designed just for them.

In this 35-minute service, children worship with all their senses. They sing, place their hands in the baptismal font to remember they belong to God, and come forward for Communion, receiving a generous

piece of bread that reminds us of the abundance of God's grace. During the Sermon on the Mat, they wonder together, ask questions, and build friendships that extend beyond Sunday morning.

Children don't wait until they're old enough to worship. They learn the same way they learn to love, pray, and belong: by practicing alongside people who love them. Week by week, these simple practices shape a faith that continues to grow throughout a lifetime while giving families the joy of worshipping together.

Family Worship resumes Sunday, September 13, at 11:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. Questions? Contact Mary Sutton at mary.sutton@covenantpresby.org.

Upcoming Milestones: 1st graders will learn about Communion September 13, 20, and 27, followed by participation in World Communion Sunday on October 4.

3rd graders will gather for a Bible-focused community night on November 20 and receive their own Bibles during 11 a.m. worship on November 22.

Sunday Mornings for Adults

Ethic of Embrace: Faithful Responses to Immigration

This fall, Covenant welcomes two thoughtful Christian voices to help us understand immigration through the lens of faith. Together, we'll move beyond headlines to listen to scripture, learn from immigrant neighbors, and consider how our faith shapes the way we welcome and respond to one another. Join us for these important conversations and invite friends and neighbors from across the Charlotte community.

October 25 | Rev. Isaac Villegas is a pastor, writer, and theologian whose work explores migration, belonging, and justice. He is the author of *Migrant God: A Christian Vision for Immigrant Justice*, which brings scripture and the stories of immigrant communities into conversation.

November 1 | Matthew Soerens serves as Vice President of Advocacy and Policy at World Relief and National Coordinator of the Evangelical Immigration Table. He is co-author of *Welcoming the Stranger* and has spent years helping churches understand immigration through scripture, public policy, and the experiences of immigrant neighbors.

Upcoming Events and Gatherings

Surviving Our Spouses (SOS) Kick-Off Luncheon



September 12 | 12:30 p.m.
Red Rocks Café

If you've experienced the loss of a spouse or partner, you're warmly invited to join SOS as we kick off a new year of fellowship and support.

RSVP to Susan Murphy at susanmurphy400@gmail.com by September 9. Separate checks will be provided.

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Pet Remembrance Gathering

October 11, 10:30 a.m. - 10:55 a.m. | Chapel

Join us for a special time of remembrance as we honor the beloved pets who remain forever in our hearts. Bring a favorite photo to display as we gather for a brief time of reflection, prayer, and gratitude for the joy our animal companions brought to our lives.

Covenant Men's Getaway, 2027



No matter your age, life stage or years at Covenant, you're invited to an **informational men's breakfast on Sunday, September 27 from 8:30–9:15 a.m.** where you'll hear more about our annual Men's Getaway event. You'll learn about our new event venue at Lake Junaluska, hear from past members about what the Getaway means to them, share your ideas and hopes for the weekend, and begin to witness the beauty and importance of intergenerational men's fellowship. Come enjoy breakfast, reconnect with friends, and see what God has in store for you.

Please save the date for the next Men's Getaway - March 12–14, 2027 at the Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center. Questions or interested in helping with the planning? Contact Doug Bacon (doug@throwingwords.com) or Grayson Blair (Grayson.blair@gmail.com).

Upcoming Events and Gatherings



Young Adult Retreat

October 9 – 11 | The YA Retreat will be in Rutherfordton, N.C., at Dreaming Stone Arts and Ecology Center. We'll enjoy the gift of fellowship, cooking and sharing meals, playing games, and sharing in conversation. We'd love for you to join us!

Contact Mary Kate (marykate.sykes@covenantpresby.org) for more information.

Uptown Bible Study

Tuesdays | 12 p.m. | In the middle of the workday, Uptown Bible Study offers a chance to step away and spend an hour reflecting on Scripture with others. Meeting Tuesdays at noon at the Foundation for the Carolinas, the group reads the Bible, asks honest questions, and considers what God might be saying to us today. Come every week or whenever your schedule allows.

This fall begins with four weeks exploring Jonah, a story about much more than a whale. Together, we'll consider God's mercy, our assumptions, and the call toward compassion. No experience or preparation is needed. Bring your lunch, invite a friend, and join us when you can. To learn more, email Grace Lindvall at grace.lindvall@covenantpresby.org.

Hannah's Heart

Second Wednesday of the Month
6:30 p.m. in Katherine Kerr's Office
A support group for women who desire to become mothers. Contact katherine.kerr@covenantpresby.org.

SOS Annual Picnic

October 24 | 12:30 p.m. | Join the SOS community for our annual picnic featuring Chef Johnny's popular taco bar, generously provided by Covenant's Congregational Care Ministry. RSVP to Kandy Cosper at kandycosper@gmail.com by October 20. We look forward to sharing food, fellowship, and encouragement together.

If you'd like to get help out with future SOS events, contact Kandy Cosper, kandycosper@gmail.com or Susan Murphy, susanmurphy400@gmail.com.

Room in the Inn:

Exciting changes are coming to Room in the Inn this season as we reimagine how our congregation partners with our unhoused neighbors. Whether you're a longtime volunteer or new to the ministry, there will be a place for you to serve. Watch for upcoming information sessions and sign-ups in Windows to learn more and get involved.



Covenant Impacts Charlotte

Sunday, November 15 | Mark your calendar for Covenant Impacts Charlotte, our annual church-wide weekend of service! Following worship and lunch on Sunday, we'll head out across the city to serve our neighbors through projects for all ages and abilities. Additional service opportunities will also take place November 13–15.

Watch your weekly emails, Sunday bulletins, and the Covenant website for volunteer sign-ups. For more information, contact Courtney Shudak at courtney.shudak@covenantpresby.org.

New Initiative from Education

Center for Faith Formation

Covenant is taking an exciting step toward the future of adult discipleship with the creation of a new Center for Faith Formation.

This vision emerged from months of prayer, discernment, and planning by the Adult Education Task Force, which includes Leigh Ann Hall, Meagan Lineberger, Hunter Hoover, Jordan Schriefer, and staff liaison Grace Lindvall. The proposal has now been affirmed by the Education Committee, Planning and Evaluation, and Session.



A New Vision for Adult Faith

The Center for Faith Formation is not a new program, but a hub that will connect people to meaningful opportunities for spiritual growth and community. While Covenant’s existing Sunday School classes, Wednesday night offerings, and speaker events will continue, the Center will expand opportunities for adults to deepen their faith through three primary initiatives: short-term learning cohorts connected to church-wide events, an expanded Life Group ministry, and transformational pilgrimage experiences. Together, these pathways are designed to help people move beyond simply attending church to experiencing deeper belonging, connection, and discipleship.



Looking Ahead

As this vision continues to take shape, Covenant will begin the search for a Dean to help guide and shepherd the Center toward an anticipated launch in early 2027.

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The Center reflects our desire to create welcoming, accessible spaces where both Covenant members and our wider community can explore faith, build relationships, and grow together.

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We invite you to join us in imagining what God might do through this new chapter in Covenant’s life.



An Update from Covenant's Parish Nurse

In Balance, Steady Together



By Karen Willis

As we move into fall, life tends to speed up, schedules fill, routines return, and the slower pace of summer gives way to the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Aren't we all looking to "find balance", balancing work and rest, busyness and stillness? Yet, balance is also physical; it's something that can be strengthened. As we age, muscles weaken and confidence in our own steadiness can silently fade. Falls are one of the leading causes of injury among older adults, and the fear of falling often leads people to move less. This in turn might isolate people and make balance even harder to maintain.

The good news is that gentle, regular movement can direct us to many benefits. Walking is one of the simplest and safest ways to build strength, improve coordination, and restore confidence in our steps. Just as we seek stability in our schedules and our spirits, our bodies need that same steadiness, too.

Balance isn't something we have to find alone. On the road to Emmaus, two disciples walked together after the resurrection, and a stranger fell into step beside them (Luke 24:13-35). They didn't yet know it was Christ, but as they walked and talked, something in them began to stir. Only later, once they'd invited him in and shared a meal, were their eyes opened. Looking back, they remembered, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road?" (Luke 24:32) The walking and conversation had prepared their hearts for what came next.

There's something about walking together that opens people up. Conversation flows more easily, and friendships form naturally. A walking group isn't just good for our balance, it's good for belonging. Walking with others is a simple way to build connection and genuine fellowship within our congregation and community.



This fall, I'll be leading "Walk With Ease", a program developed by the Arthritis Foundation. Despite the name, it's appropriate for anyone who wants to move more. It's a gentle, evidence-based program shown to reduce pain, improve balance and strength, and help build a sustainable walking routine.

I hope you'll join us this fall, not just to build a walking routine, but to build community along the way.

Be on the lookout in the coming weeks for the schedule and how to sign up. Come find your balance, and some walking companions this fall.

If you are interested in this program, please call or email your Parish Nurse, Karen Willis at 704.804.7561, karen.willis@covenantpresby.org.

Faith & Friendship in Reynosa, Mexico



By Ella Floyd, Summer Intern for Christian Education and Discipleship

Throughout my internship this summer, I was reminded of one of the ways I see God at work most clearly: in young people.

I learned more than I can fully articulate on a week-long mission trip with 19 high schoolers to Reynosa, Mexico.

On my way to the airport Saturday morning at 3:00 a.m., anxieties flooded over me. Will this group accept me? How can I be helpful? I don't speak much Spanish, and I can barely lift a suitcase. If I'm not sure what I believe, how am I supposed to help young people with their faith? Why was I called to be here?



My anxieties were eased by the love and openness the youth showed me and our new friends in Mexico. Every day we had the opportunity to eat and worship alongside Mexican volunteers. The women prepared the most delicious beans, rice, and corn tortillas. But the best part of the meals wasn't the food—it was the fellowship. I watched the youth step out of

their comfort zones, trying to connect with broken sentences and the few words of Spanish they knew. Sometimes they simply sat together in silence, enjoying the company of people from completely different walks of life.

After sharing a meal, we walked to the chapel to worship together. The service was translated into English and Spanish, and we sang while holding hands with our neighbors. One song we sang every day, Dame la Mano, invited everyone to wander the room and shake each person's hand. The expectation was that we would look one another in the eye and shake hands, rather than simply smiling or waving from a distance.

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Watching the youth eagerly circle the room, looking for hands to shake and new friends to meet, honestly inspired me.

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I wasn't expecting high schoolers to do such meaningful things. And I certainly wasn't expecting them to help me discover what I believe.

But Jane gave the women who cooked for us a letter expressing her gratitude for the food. Hal became best friends with Miguel, and they were constantly joking around. Breiten received a bracelet from a new friend, Karla. The youth wrote letters that brought Juan Carlos, the owner of Casa #13, and Patricia, the owner of Casa #14, to tears.

The youth crossed boundaries, formed new friendships, and worked for something bigger than themselves. If that isn't God at work, I don't know what is!

To learn more about our High School Youth Program contact Martin Pruitt at martin.pruitt@covenantpresby.org.

Growing in Faith Together

By Ariel McBryde-Gritter
& Sabrina Baldwin-Frost

One of the greatest gifts of Covenant’s Quest program is the opportunity to build meaningful relationships across generations by having a Quest mentor.

Throughout the year, Quest mentor Ariel McBryde-Gritter and Quester Sabrina Baldwin-Frost met about once a month before school at Starbucks to share coffee, tea, and conversation. Those mornings became a time to grow in faith, learn from one another, and build a lasting friendship.

During our monthly meetings, we talked about Ariel’s faith experience as a child until now. We also talked a lot about family and shared experiences.

As Sabrina reflected on the year, she shared, “It helped me grow in my faith.”

One of the highlights of the year for both of us was the Quest beach retreat. We got to spend time together, and we realized we both experience God in nature and especially at the beach.

Sabrina spent time collecting shells and was one of the bravest ones that went in the freezing ocean. We spent some time walking and talking on the beach with our small group about God’s promises and when we felt most connected with God. We were able to work on Sabrina’s faith statement and had great conversations with the mentors and Andy.

Of course, there was plenty of fun mixed in as well.



We headed into town for a game of putt-putt, where we were on the same team and Ariel nearly broke the course record for holes-in-one! The day ended with ice cream and time together at the park.

Thank you, Andy, for creating such a meaningful experience for both of us!

Get Involved

Quest mentors play an important role in helping students explore their faith through conversation, encouragement, and shared experiences. If you’re interested in walking alongside a young person as they grow in their relationship with Christ, consider serving as a Quest mentor.

To learn more, contact Middle School Youth Director Andy Wertz at andy.wertz@covenantpresby.org

Covenant Visitors Bring Church to Members at Home

By Lilli Gerardi



For many of us, church is a place we go – a building filled with familiar faces, shared hymns, warm hugs, and handshakes.

But what happens when you can no longer walk through those doors?

For Covenant members who spend much of their time at home, the physical distance from the sanctuary can sometimes lead to a quiet sense of isolation. That is exactly where the Covenant Visitors ministry steps in, ensuring that no member of our church family feels forgotten.



Connection Over Distance

The core mission of this ministry is simple yet profound: to be the hands and feet of Covenant by taking the church to those who cannot come to it. Currently, we have 20 dedicated visitors who actively step out to bring companionship, and connection to members at home.

These visits are a powerful lifeline. As one volunteer shares, “There’s no question that this is a vital ministry. Nothing beats the delight seen in someone’s face when we show up for a visit. Our visits are a welcome break from the mostly solitary environment of some of our members.”

Another volunteer emphasizes the deep importance of this consistency, especially for those facing health challenges, “We need to let members of our Covenant family know they are not forgotten and especially those whose memory may be failing.”

A Two-Way Blessing

While the ministry was created to support our homebound members, the volunteers will be the first to tell you that the visits are never a one-way street. Spending quality time with our long-standing members offers an incredible wealth of wisdom, faith, and history, “It’s a privilege to spend time with them, listen to their stories and learn from their experiences. I always leave these visits feeling just as blessed as they may feel, because their faith, wisdom, and gratitude inspire me.”

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“You discover that you may be giving in your time and care, but you get much more in return by learning about this amazing person you are visiting. It’s wonderful to hear of the richness of experiences of members who have been members for over 50 years. It’s truly a blessing to be a blessing.”

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How You Can Get Involved

We are always looking for fresh faces and warm hearts (men and women of all ages) to expand this vital ministry. You don’t need a degree in theology or an overwhelming amount of free time to make a difference – just a willingness to pull up a chair and listen.

By committing to visit a homebound member once or twice a quarter, send a card, or make a call, you can help ensure our entire church family stays connected.

If you are interested in serving as a visitor, please reach out to Lilli Gerardi at lillirun@hotmail.com or 704-654-6611 or contact Katherine Kerr at katherine.kerr@covenantpresbyby.org.

Introducing the Committee on Sacred Relationships



By Ariel McBryde-Gritter

Covenant’s work in the community has long been a vital and core aspect of our ministry.

The newly formed Committee on Sacred Relationships: Build, Connect, Transform, part of the Congregational Life Ministry, will continue this focus by forming relationships outside our walls and increasing our own awareness of how issues of faith and society are perceived differently depending on one’s perspective.

The committee is comprised of Sandra Boozer, Ellen Holloway, Rachel Humphries, John McAlister, Elizabeth McHenry, and Ariel McBryde-Gritter. Serenity Taylor and Aisha Council serve as staff liaisons.



The committee has adopted the following guiding principles:

“Guided by the Spirit, we bravely work toward Covenant Presbyterian Church’s vision of a whole and just world. We do this through three practices: reflecting personally and communally; cultivating authentic, loving, and healing relationships across racial and cultural differences; and taking courageous action to uproot prejudice and systemic oppression in all its forms.”

Building Relationships and Learning Together

Some examples of the work we will be doing, or have already begun, include:

- Supporting the initiatives of the anti-racism ministry cohort of Charlotte Presbytery.
- Attending the Homecoming Service at St. Paul Presbyterian Church.
- Hosting a speaker series, in conjunction with Meck Roots, highlighting various perspectives on Charlotte’s history and present, including Chaplain Daniel Heath discussing his family’s historical connection to Davidson College.
- Hosting celebrated author, poet, and Davidson alumnus Clint Smith in January 2027.
- Arranging a series of pilgrimages to Civil Rights-related sites across North Carolina in conjunction with Smallwood Presbyterian Church and Covenant’s Center for Faith Formation.
- Engaging in self-reflection to better understand our own relationship to race and how that informs the relationships and connections we aspire to build.

Get Involved

We welcome all into this work, recognizing that while it will be transformative in many ways, it may not always be easy. If you’re interested in being involved or learning more, please contact Aisha Council at aisha.council@covenantpresby.org.

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The committee also covets your prayers as we discern our way forward and seek to follow Christ’s call toward wholeness and healing for ourselves and our broader community.

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Mission and Outreach



Celebrating 25 Years of Partnership with Highland Renaissance Academy



By Mandy Keith

This school year marks a special milestone as Covenant Presbyterian Church celebrates 25 years of partnership with Highland Renaissance Academy!

For a quarter century, our congregation has walked alongside Highland's students, families, teachers, and staff, supporting education, encouraging children, and strengthening the community.

We love helping Highland start the school year well. Covenant volunteers hosted a Back-to-School Breakfast for faculty and staff, provided backpacks filled with school supplies, and welcomed students on their first day. On Sunday, August 23, Principal Imani Harper joined us for a Minute for Mission, sharing firsthand about Highland and the impact of this special partnership.

Investing in Students

Throughout the year, Covenant members can get involved through Read, Roar, Soar, visiting third-grade classrooms monthly to read with students, help them choose a book to take home, and encourage a love of reading. Contact Mary Gaertner at magaertner@carolina.rr.com to learn more.

Through Kindergarten Reading Buddies, volunteers spend one-on-one time reading, playing literacy games, and practicing sight words while building relationships that help young readers feel seen, encouraged, and capable. Contact Steve Larson at swlarson14@gmail.com to learn more.

Supporting the Whole School Community

Our partnership extends far beyond the classroom. Covenant members stock Highland's Little Free Library, provide monthly Teacher Appreciation Snack Carts, deliver Thanksgiving meal bags, sponsor the Christmas Giving Tree, participate in Covenant Impacts Charlotte projects, celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week, and assist with the monthly Second Harvest Mobile Food Pantry. Contact Sally Harriss at sallyhharriss@gmail.com or Ann Marie Beurle at ambeurle@gmail.com to learn more.

This year, we're also launching a Student Incentive Store, where students can use points earned through Highland's positive behavior program to "shop" each quarter. Covenant members will help stock the store and welcome students while reinforcing positive choices and lessons about saving and budgeting.

During the summer, Covenant continues the partnership through Freedom School, providing literacy and enrichment opportunities for scholars while supporting Highland families and volunteers. Contact Casey Unger at caseycochran.mt@gmail.com to learn more.

Whether you have an hour each month to read with a child, encourage teachers, or help with a one-time service project, there's a place for you.

Watch Windows and the Covenant website for volunteer opportunities, especially Read, Roar, Soar and Kindergarten Reading Buddies, where consistent relationships change lives.

For more information, contact Mandy Keith at mandy.keith@covenantpresby.org.

Mission and Outreach

Avery County Partnership Update



By Jane Freeman

In the months since Hurricane Helene brought devastating damage to mountain communities in western North Carolina, Covenant has remained committed to walking alongside our neighbors in Avery County.

What began as an urgent response has grown into an ongoing partnership of presence, prayer, service, and financial support.

Covenant work groups continue traveling to Avery County twice a month, providing hands-on help while strengthening relationships with families and community partners. From October 2024 through March 2026, Covenant's Hurricane Helene Relief Committee also reviewed and funded more than 100 requests for assistance.

As recovery needs have evolved, Covenant is transitioning from direct assistance to a grants model that puts resources in the hands of trusted local nonprofits. These organizations are deeply rooted in Avery County and understand where support can make the greatest impact. Over the next two years, Covenant will award more than \$200,000 in grants to organizations that also provide opportunities for our members to engage in their work.

Grant recipients include Appalachia Service Project, Crossnore Communities for Children, Feeding Avery Families, High Country Caregivers, Mountain Alliance, NC MedAssist, New Opportunity School for Women at Lees-McRae College, OASIS, Pisgah Legal Services, Quiet Givers, Reaching Avery Ministry, Volunteer Avery, and Western Youth Network.

During the July Avery County Mission Trip, Covenant celebrated these partnerships by hosting a dinner for grant recipients at the Volunteer Fire Department in Newland. More than 55 people gathered to share



stories, celebrate the work happening throughout the county, and give thanks for the churches, nonprofits, volunteers, and neighbors making recovery possible.

Covenant's connection to Avery County began about twelve years ago and has grown through mission trips, shared ministry, and prayer. Hurricane Helene brought tremendous challenges, but it also demonstrated the strength of those longstanding relationships. As our work groups continue traveling up the mountain this fall, we remain grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside our Avery County neighbors.



Updates Around Covenant

Meet the Transition Team

The Transition Team is officially underway and making meaningful progress as we prepare for the next chapter in the life of Covenant following Bob Henderson's retirement on September 13. Led by John McAlister, the team includes John Arwood, Deana Cooper, Mary Delk, Mark Folk, Amy Ford, and Stephen Moore. Kim Spivey, Assistant Clerk of Session, serves as the team's liaison to Session, helping foster communication and coordination as the team carries out its important work. We are grateful for the time, wisdom, and commitment each member is bringing to the transition process.



John
McAlister



John
Arwood



Deana
Cooper



Mary
Delk



Mark
Folk



Amy
Ford



Stephen
Moore



Kim
Spivey

Welcome Our New Members



Deborah Barabe &
David Varitimos



Austin Butler &
Kelly Warlich



Tommy Cirino



Richard Whelan



Bailey Ham



Devon & Sean Erni
with Adeline



Alexandra Butler



Christina Goldstein

If you're considering making Covenant your church home, join us any Sunday at 10:30 a.m. in the Parlor, downstairs beneath the Chapel. Our ministers and Engagement Committee members would love to welcome you and help you connect with the life of our church.



1000 East Morehead Street, Charlotte, NC 28204

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Beginning September 13

8:45 a.m.

Worship Service

Intimate worship with traditional hymns and multi-genre chamber music in the Chapel

9:30 a.m.

Worship and Education Hour

Spiritual formation for adults, youth, and children in classrooms and the Sanctuary

Fellowship

Coffee is provided in the Welcome Center

11:00 a.m.

Worship Services

Traditional Worship with Chancel Choir in the Sanctuary. Family Worship for children in the Fellowship Hall

Meet Covenant's Elder Nominees

A Congregational Meeting will be held Sunday, Sept. 20th at 10:30 a.m. in the Sanctuary to elect 10 adult elders to the Session class of 2029, two youth elders to serve a one-year term starting January 2027, and one Elder Emerita.

Members of the Elder Nominating Committee: Janet Delery (chair), Bill Fryling, Betty Graybeal, Phil Koonce, Randy Ripple, Walker Robinson, Erin Weeks, and Sarah Wilson.

The Elder Nominating Committee will nominate the Covenant members listed below. Additional nominations may be made from the floor during the meeting; the nominee must consent and be present.



Lilli Gerardi

Stephen Ministry
Covenant Visitors Ministry
Women's Bible Study



Helen Richards *

Clerk of Session
Room In The Inn Kinship Project
Life Group

*Indicates prior service as an elder



Meagan Lineberger

Missions & Outreach Committee
Jemar Tisby Planning
Young Adult Ministry



Scott Roehrig *

Clerk of Session, Child Development Center (CDC) Advisory Council Vice Chair
Property Committee Chair

YOUTH ELDER NOMINEES



Ann Manning

Stephen Ministry
High School Youth Committee
Associate Pastor Nominating Committee



Mike Smith

Travel, Learn, Connect Planning Team
Small Group Leader
Covenant Pride



Gracie Crockford

Youth Handbell Choir
Reynosa Mission Trip 2026
High School Youth



Alex McKinnon

Pet Ministry Leader
Quest Mentor
Sunday Men's Group



Tricia Smith *

Kenya Global Mission Ministry
Highland Partnership
Stephen Ministry



Lilly Murchison

High School Youth
Sunday School
Room In The Inn



Paul Steffens *

Personnel Committee
Men's Bible Study
Room In The Inn Volunteer



Farah Lisa Walker

MSY Sunday School
MSY Chaperone
Open Table

ELDER EMERITA NOMINEE

Claire Welchman Trexler