

# FIRST NEWS

Revs. Josh and Lara Musser Gritter, Co-Senior Pastors

January 2022



## Rededicating For 200 More

One church leadership book I recently read argues that vital and flourishing congregations continually ask themselves one question, “who will we now be before God and to others?” As simple as the question may seem, it’s not easy to live. We are often distracted by other questions, questions about numerical growth, the vitality of programs, or our attraction of new members. Now, of course, all of these are important questions, too; they just aren’t the main question we need to ask ourselves again and again.

This fall, we’ve remembered a myriad of ways in which First Pres has answered this question the last 200 years. We saw the ways that we’ve been a place of grace, of meeting and experiencing God, of mission, of fellowship with neighbor and stranger. We learned, too, how we have not always lived up to the fullness of this question—after all, we are a reformed people always being reformed by a forming God.

On Sunday, October 17, we ran our history through the organ pipes, we heard it from the mouths of new Co-Pastors, and we experienced it through the liturgy of old Saints. It was a day to behold, a day that pastor Lara and I feel immensely honored and proud to have been a part of. After all, how many pastors get

to preach and lead a 200<sup>th</sup>-anniversary service in their lifetime? Not many.

On Sunday, January 9, we will mark the end of our 200<sup>th</sup> celebration. But rather than say goodbye to 200 years, rather than put our history in the rearview mirror, we will gaze toward the horizon of the future God has for us. On this Sunday, we will rededicate ourselves, our church, our facilities, our budget—all of us—to God’s ministry in the next 200 years. We will ask loudly before one another and before God, “Who will we now be before God and others?” The answer? You’ll have to join us in the next 200 years to find out.

– Rev. Josh Musser Gritter

## Epiphany: Following the Star

We tend to rush too quickly to Epiphany Sunday. Most of our modern nativities include the so-called wise men, but biblically, these star-gazers weren’t there on Christmas morn. If we read Matthew’s account of these star-followers closely, we’ll discover some things about the wise men that will surprise us. First, there weren’t three. We’ve learned from that traditional hymn, “We Three Kings,” that there were three wise men who were of royal descent. Matthew makes no mention of a kingly line, nor does he tell us the number of wise ones who traveled

to Bethlehem.

The word Matthew uses is *magoi*, which simply translated means “magi.” Magi were a blend of an ancient religious scholar, astronomer, and astrologer—I know at least one of those three makes us uncomfortable. It was not uncommon to consider the stars to hold divine properties in the ancient world. They were the “heavens,” and even scripture says that these celestial bodies declare the glory of God. Even more surprising than their identity as star-lovers is the fact that they were foreigners—“From the East” is the directional marker Matthew gives us. That is to say, the Magi we “not from around here,” and the prospect of foreign astronomers asking Jerusalemites about a new Jewish king would have been scandalous in its own right

(continued on next page).

**January 2022**  
**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**  
[Inside This Newsletter](#)

- All In Groups
- Lewis Preaching Series
- RTF Study Series
- Dr. Randy Kirby
- Member News
- And much more!

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# JANUARY 2022

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## Congratulations To:

- John Messinger and Liz Williamson who were married here at First Presbyterian Church yesterday. John is the son of Dyke and Deborah Messinger.

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## Our Deepest Sympathy To:

- † Betty MacLean and family on the death of her husband, Jerry MacLean, on November 26
- † Rachel Culler and Rosa Burwell and family on the death of their brother-in-law, Charles Timothy Walters
- † John Drye and family on the death of his sister, Lynn Trester
- † John Stafford and family on the death of his cousin, Kenny Wright
- † Angela Galloway and family on the death of her aunt
- † Angela Galloway and family on the death of her friend, Charles Nettles

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## Notes Of Appreciation

Dear First Presbyterian Family,

Thank you for your continued prayers on the passing of Kendall's father, Reid. It was/is difficult, but your thoughtfulness is making it easier. We really appreciate the flowers that were brought to our home shortly after his passing. It is those gestures that help us feel a part of the church community.

Sincerely, Jon, Kendall, and Mattie Nagy

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Dear Church family:

I sincerely thank my church family for the many cards, blue cards, flowers and meals during my surgery and recovery. It meant so much to me. --Jennifer Hands



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY – November 30, 2021

### OPERATING

YTD Income	964,992.76
YTD Expenses	<u>924,540.92</u>
Cash Flow - Positive	<u>40,451.84</u>
Budgeted Income	976,944.83
Actual Income	<u>964,992.76</u>
Under	<u>11,952.07</u>
Budgeted Expenses	1,068,456.58

Actual Expenses	924,540.92
Under	<u>143,915.66</u>
<b>DAY SCHOOL</b>	
YTD Gain	<u>13,111.58</u>
<b>GIVING</b>	
YTD Budget	956,655.33
YTD Actual Giving	<u>917,592.07</u>
Under	<u>39,063.26</u>
Total Pledges	897,988.67
Pledge Payments	<u>846,469.06</u>
Under	<u>51,519.61</u>

## 2022 Online/Automated Giving Information

If your pledge is changing in 2022 and you currently have a recurring gift set up, either through our giving portal or through your bank, don't forget to log in or notify your bank to make that change to ensure a smooth transition.

Interested in online giving? Visit our giving page ([www.salisburyfirstpres.org/give](http://www.salisburyfirstpres.org/give)) and click the Give Online button to make a one-time gift or create an account. For any questions about editing your recurring gift or creating an account, please contact Christina Lewis at the church office.

## Follow The Star...

(continued from front page)

What is most memorable to me about the Magi is not where they're from or who they are, but what they do when they find Jesus. The Greek suggests that they "lay prostrate" before him, but a more vigorous translation would imagine that "they worship him." Without any Sunday school lesson, sermon, small group, confirmation, baptism, or communion, the Magi somehow know that this child is to not be merely admired but *worshiped*. And in that little old room with toddler Jesus, father Joseph, and Mother Mary, we witness the first worship service in the New Testament.



If we're honest, we are more like the magi than anyone else when it comes to the Christmas story. Each year we begin the journey toward the star again, hoping against hope that we will be met with God's grace and presence at the journey's end.

We've engrafted this "magi mentality" into our church through the practice of "Epiphany Stars." On Sunday, January 9, we will hand out these stars. Each star has a word on the front—for example, my word was "mercy" my first year. Our hope is that this word might come to be a way you encounter God in the coming year. The name of a person, couple, or family is on the back of the star for you to pray for in the coming year. We are all on this journey together, and we need others to lift us up. We hope you'll join us for worship on Sunday, January 9. We hope, too, that you will grab a star—may it guide you in the coming year. Above all, we hope that in all your searching for God, you might see that God seeks and finds you. --Rev. Laura Musser Gritter

## Annual Lewis Preaching Series Slated for Sunday, January 30

The annual Lewis Preaching Series at First Presbyterian Church will feature the Rev. Shannon Johnson Kershner, a noted preacher and worship leader from Chicago, IL.

Rev. Kershner will join us for morning worship on Sunday, January 30. She will then meet with our congregation for a dinner gathering that evening at 5 pm in Lewis Hall. To make reservations for dinner, please notify the church office by January 21, 2022.

After growing up living in the manse of First Presbyterian Church of Waco, Texas, Shannon graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity University in San Antonio. In addition, she received a Master of Divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, where she was awarded the Columbia Leadership Award for demonstrating the greatest potential for future leadership within the Presbyterian Church (USA).



Her sermons have been published in the *Journal for Preachers* and *Lectioary Homiletics*, and she has been a preacher and worship leader at various worship and preaching conferences.

Shannon is married to Greg Kershner, a financial advisor who, like Shannon, has a Masters of Divinity degree from Columbia Seminary. They have two children, Hannah and Ryan. Shannon is currently the pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago.

**From Pastor Randy...**

### Reading in the New Year!

I always look for something new to be reading as the New Year arrives. This year's choice is both obvious and odd. It is a book of poems when one was published in the *Christian Century*.

The little volume came out in June of 2021. Written by Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, a professor of literature and Catholic Studies, *Love in the Time of Coronavirus: A Pandemic Pilgrimage* is a collection of poems about life in the pandemic. Beginning with the lockdown in March 2020 and concluding with her vaccination, the poems tell of "a private pilgrimage to nowhere—from the chair to the couch, the couch to the chair (5)." When everything else was taken away, O'Donnell discovered the gift of time. Daily she wrote about her days.

She lives just outside of New York City. She watched the streets empty. The city that never sleeps enters a time of hibernation. She talks about the closings of schools, churches, restaurants, and theaters. We all

know these stories, but it is striking to read them in poetry. "Symphony of the garbage truck, the birds chirp, the radiator. New York City awakens to the day in the season of pandemic (16)." Was it a year ago, or twenty?

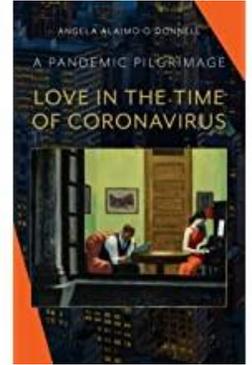
In the poem, "Covid has made me stupid," she declares she will never write a poem again. But the next day, she does. It becomes a spiritual discipline and a pilgrimage to hope and healing.

She gets sick. She recovers. She despairs. She finds new hope. She writes about Easter and Advent. "Today is just another day. Christ dies and loves us anyway (32)." She misses her children, who are just a few miles away. She longs to return to "our city of love (60), while imaging that the magi will have to quarantine when they finally get to Bethlehem on Epiphany (72)."

Perhaps the most striking observation she offers is in the introduction and not in one of her poems. It is the lesson we need as we continue into 2022 without a clear end to the pandemic in sight. "My hope is that readers might find in this book, despite the trials and privations of this pandemic year, some consolations, some moments of joy, some brief reminders that though the virus has robbed us of much, it cannot destroy the human capacity for love. To the contrary—miracle of miracles—it has enlarged it (9)." Amen!

And may God bless us in the New Year!

--Rev. Randy Kirby



### Special Thanks

**THREE WIDE Foundation** (Steve & Donna Thomas) would like to thank you for your prayers, donations (money or time), and volunteering for this year's Christmas dinner and coat giveaway. Especially Martha, Maria, Susan, Trish, Ebbie, Richard, Rip and Debbie, who gave so much time on the day of the event.

### Newsletter Deadlines for 2022

<u>Edition</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
February	January 19
March	February 16
April	March 16
May	April 20
June	May 18
July	June 15
August	July 20
September	August 17
October	September 21
November	October 19
December	November 14 (Monday)
January 2023	December 19 (Monday)

## Special January Series: Learn and talk about "Race: The Power of an Illusion"

Our Race Task Force plans to offer a three-night study based on the fascinating PBS series, "Race: The Power of an Illusion," on January 12, 19, and 26. Participants will watch and discuss excerpts from each episode. Facilitators Michelle Strong and Krista Hill will lead the discussion. Episodes are:

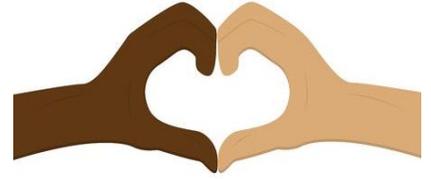
**January 12:** "The Difference Between Us" examines the contemporary science, including genetics, that challenges our assumptions about race.

**January 19:** "The Story We Tell" uncovers the roots of the race concept in North America.

**January 26:** "The House We Live In" asks if race is not biology, what is it?

Each evening will begin with a light supper at 5:15 pm (cost, \$5), followed by the program from 6:00 - 7:30. The January 12 meal will be a baked potato bar. Please make reservations at the church office.

The sessions are open to the public. So, pass the word and bring a friend!



# January 2022



December '21						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		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	

February '22						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		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					

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary	Church Office Closed	10:30: Staff 5:30: CE 6:00: Personnel, Youth 7:00: All Committee	5:30: Handbells 7:00: Choir	7:00: LCW Rehearsal		9:00: Un-decorating of the Church
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Communion/Epiphany 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary	11:00: PW Bible Study 7:00: Deacons	10:30: Staff 10:30: Prayer Shawl	5:15: RTF Dinner 5:30: Handbells 5:30: Property 6:00: Stephen Ministers 7:00: Choir	MOW Delivery 7:00: LCW Rehearsal		
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
2 Cents a Meal 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary	Church Office Closed	10:30: Staff 10:30: PWCT 5:00: Finance 7:00: Session	Newsletter Due 5:15: RTF Dinner 5:30: Handbells 7:00: Choir	MOW Delivery Witness @ RHM 7:00: LCW Rehearsal		
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:00: Everyman's Breakfast 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 5:00: Jr/1st Kids	10:30: Staff 5:30: RTF	5:15: RTF Dinner 5:30: Handbells 6:00: Stephen Ministers 7:00: Choir	7:00: LCW Rehearsal			
30	31					
Lewis Preaching 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 5:00: Church Dinner						



# All In Groups: coming this Winter, A Chance To Grow Together

As we live through the chronic phase of the COVID pandemic, we are all navigating a strange new world. We feel the pressure to make up for lost time by traveling, making memories, and being with those we love. Not only that, but we also feel drawn to the comfort of home more than ever. Most of us now live dual lives: online and in-person. On top of that, we continue to navigate a tense political climate, an ever-volatile pandemic, and a complex economic landscape. Even as we feel free to pursue what we want, many of us feel more unmoored than ever. All of this makes now a perfect time to invite folks to go “all in” on their relationship with Christ—our one true anchor.

*All In Groups* at First Presbyterian Church are launching this winter to provide people with an opportunity to grow deeper together in their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ. *All In Groups* will meet for 10 weeks from February 7 through Easter. They will be led by members of First Pres who have themselves been nurtured in their faith by small groups. Groups will gather each week in the leader’s home or other off-campus location to have fellowship and study. First Pres will be “all in” on the same material as each group studies Scripture related to that week’s sermon. There is no book. No major homework. Just an encouragement to come having attended church or watched that week’s sermon.



*All In Groups* are in line with our new Mission Priorities in that they support “Friendships Across Difference.” These groups will be comprised of a diverse mix of our congregation’s members. When you sign up for an *All In Group*, you will get to know new people at First Pres who you may not have met before: people from a different generation, attend a different service than you, are in a different Sunday school class, or are new to town.

*All In Groups* create a space to “Embrace the Unchurched.” Each group will have a couple of spaces reserved for people who are unchurched. We encourage you to begin asking God to reveal who you might invite into one of these groups with you. Maybe it’s your friend who is newly single, perhaps it’s your favorite waiter or barista, or perhaps it’s the guy you lift with at the gym. These groups are designed to be an accessible on-ramp for people who might be curious, new, or newly returned to the faith.

Finally, *All In Groups* support “Holy-Spirit Centered Discipleship.” Jesus did not write down any of his teachings himself. He didn’t send his disciples home with a book; he wrote to study it alone. Instead, Christ entrusted his message to a community of people called the Church. The Holy Spirit uses the church to grow us as disciples. Only in that community can we truly understand God’s word. In other words: Christian faith is a team sport. We are called to grow in our faith with the companionship of our siblings in Christ. *All In Groups* will lead to just that—spiritual growth in real community with others.

We will be launching sign-ups for *All In Groups* on January 9 at our Epiphany/Rededication services. Now is the time to go “all in” on your faith in Jesus Christ with your siblings in Christ at First Presbyterian Church.

--Rev. Lara Musser Gritter

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28144**

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## Sunday Worship Schedule

■  
8:30 am Life Center Worship  
Lewis Hall

■  
9:45 am Sunday School

■  
11 am Sanctuary Worship