

FIRST NEWS

Reverends Josh and Lara Musser Gritter, Co-Senior Pastors

February 2022



Do You Have The Time?

As I write this, the captain has just informed my oddly empty American Airlines flight that we are currently cruising at 35,000 feet. Anyone who's flown knows that this statement means one is now given permission to whip out whatever form of technology suits their fancy—especially laptops. As I entered the plane just a half-hour ago, I noticed a young woman in first-class who had in her lap a MacBook, an iPad, and two iPhones. Wow, I thought, all that tech must've gotten her that cushy first-class seat.

It occurs to me now as I type how utterly ridiculous it is that these two things are not shocking realities to me. To most of the people of humanity's history, it would be unfathomable that a human being could be moving 500 miles an hour, leapfrogging from Chicago to Charlotte in a blistering hour and 45 minutes—about the time it would take a premodern person walking to gather water for dinner. Perhaps even more unbelievable would be the power I have at my disposal, just one scroll or click away. Within seconds, I can become a part-owner of a worldwide tech organization whose current valuation is greater than the GDP of the US 120 years ago. Heck, in a manner of moments, I could be on the line with New Zealand, purchase a couch from Sweden, and book another flight that would allow me to match Magellan's circumnavigation in the time it takes me to watch all three Lord of the Rings movies on my inflight movie screen.



All this has got me thinking of a great line from one of the great movies, *Shawshank Redemption*. Red, a prisoner, played by Morgan Freeman (and my dog's namesake, yes, we did that), is paroled from Shawshank prison after serving 50 years. He finds on the outside that the world moves faster than he could ever have imagined. Just after he's almost hit by a speeding

car, he remarks, "The world went and got itself in a big dang hurry."

When's the last time someone asked you how you and your family were doing, and you didn't answer, "busy?" When's the last time you woke up on a Monday morning and thought, "huh, there's just nothing going on this week." Even in Seminary, the time when future pastors are supposed to become accustomed to the movements and pace of God, future clergy wore their heavy class-loads and

constant busyness as some kind of twisted divine merit badge. More and more, social media content creators are making millions of dollars selling we busy people "life-hacks," which are essentially ways to help busy people stay busy while also cooking dinner after work. I even read recently that Facebook's original motto was "hack."

The above probably resonates with you because you are a person alive in the modern world. Since the 18th century, we moderns have lived—whether we know it or not—in a culture that is shaped by speed. Andy Root, a theologian and church-thinker, has thoroughly convinced Lara and me of the significance of this reality.

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February 2022 **Inside This Newsletter**

- All In Groups
- Pastor Randy Kirby
- Women's Bible Study
- News for Our Youth
- Member News
- And much more!

Do You Have The Time?

(Continued from front page)

To be alive in today's world is to breathe in the air of acceleration. To be busy is to be better; to be better is to be a good person. If you're reading this and not tracking, just ask a parent of one of our Middle or High school students. They will tell you, while likely yawning, that their children are far busier than they were at their age.

One of Root's most fascinating and scary observations is that a culture's deepest challenges can be detected by tracing a culture's most common mental health issues. For example, in the 19th century, hysteria was the most commonly diagnosed mental illness. While the 19th century was marked by much death and suffering, western culture espoused privacy, secrecy, decorum, and steadiness as its highest goods. So, what happens when people who profoundly suffer are asked to pretend everything is fine? They explode—*literally become hysterical*.

One of the mental health issues you have heard a lot about recently is depression. To be depressed is, in a way, to be forced to slow the world down. The Great Depression happened when our economy slowed to a screeching halt, and more people—young people included—were more depressed than they've ever been before. Were people depressed in the 19th century? Well, likely some were, but you'd be interested to know that it was not at that time a common medical diagnosis.

The world has literally sped up, and the faster it accelerates, the faster we are made to move. Technology doubles its capacity for speed every two years, which means this train isn't slowing any time soon. In the last year, I've heard many people say of the 2020 pandemic lockdown, "it was hard and so sad, but to be honest, I really enjoyed staying home and slowing my life down." I've had the thought myself. I've even had friends who've thought out loud to me, "it'd be so nice just to get sick and slow down for a week." What does it say about our culture if we need to be sick in order to live how we want to?

If we're not careful, the church will become yet another place where busyness becomes virtuous. We'll get busy people to busy ourselves with more busyness that we will call church business. But if we give way to modernity's speed limit, where and when will we make time for God to transform our lives? Jesus never said that the Kingdom of God was like a busy church doing a million things. He said the Kingdom was like a tiny mustard seed; he said it was like a woman kneading dough. What might be the church's counter-cultural witness to a world that has gotten itself in a big dang hurry? What if committee meetings were less about "getting agenda items done" in a timely fashion and more about opening ourselves to the presence of God? What if rather than focus on offering more and more programs, we saw ourselves as offering more and more instances for people to *be still and know that God is God*. Perhaps stillness, slowing down, is a prerequisite to the knowledge of the divine.

For me, the slowest hour of the week has become our worship hour. Sure, it's hard not to be concerned about going too long. I would watch the clock when I was young, just hoping worship would get out early. But where else in our world are we given a moment to silently listen to God's voice

as we confess our brokenness? Where else do we pause to eat bread and drink juice, calling to mind an event 2000 years old? Where else does the wisdom of children precede the wisdom of the seminary-trained adult? Where else are we blessed not for our production value but for our existence, plain and simple? I don't pretend to have the solution to these expeditious times in which we find ourselves. Most days, it feels we are swept up in a white-water current, and the prospect of swimming against it seems naïve and ridiculous. Nevertheless, I recall that Jesus' greatest miracles came after he had withdrawn into slowness before God.

--Pastor Josh Musser Gritter

From Pastor Randy...

The Gratitude Exercise

I taught a class at Hood Theological Seminary in January. In the process, I was reminded of "the gratitude exercise." The short version is: at the end of the day, we pause long enough to ask the question, "What am I most grateful for today?" It is most effective to think of three things you feel genuine appreciation for. Then say to yourself, "I am grateful for that." Maybe even write it down in a journal (see Ezra Bayda, *Aging for Beginners*, 201).

It came up in class because we discussed an article on positive psychology by Martin Seligman. As a psychology professor doing research in the area of education, he once consulted with a university about why some students overachieved while others underachieved. They began studying disposition, that is, whether the students were predisposed before arriving on campus. What they found was that those who scored high in optimism outperformed their high school test scores, while those who appeared pessimistic underperformed at the university level.

The question was whether they could build optimism. One of the simplest and most helpful exercises was asking students to do "the gratitude exercise" for one week. Those who wrote down three things for which they were grateful raised their optimism score. The increase was still testable six months later.

The conclusion is that gratitude contributes to resilience. Which is nothing new to people of faith. The same basic practice appears in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in 1548. He called it the examen. Basically, examining your day and your life for the blessings of God. When we take the time, we are more likely to live grateful lives. Grateful lives are more positive and optimistic. They contribute to our well-being and resilience in the difficult times of life, whether we are college students or simply making our way through a pandemic.

During 2021, our church celebrated our 200th anniversary and took the time to name some of the things we are grateful for. At the beginning of 2022, I am particularly grateful that we have come to the beginning of a new year by God's grace. I am also grateful for the continuing commitment of our congregation. We finished the last year with generous giving and commitments to continue to support the church in the year to come. There is much for which to be grateful! God's blessings are abundant. Thanks be to God!

--Dr. Randy Kirby



Going All in!

It's confession time, this pastor used to play poker with his friends in High School. Another confession, it didn't make me rich. For anyone who's played poker before, perhaps the most exhilarating words one can say while sitting at the green felt is "I'm all-in." Usually, these words are accompanied by a stirring action—the player pushing all of their chips to the middle.

Going all-in means holding nothing back, but it also means taking a risk. To echo the words said by my Uncle Doug at my grandfather's funeral just a week ago, "to love is risky, and if you haven't loved, you haven't risked." This risk is as true in poker as it is in the Christian community. So what might it mean to go all-in?

In just a few weeks, we are inviting all of you to join what we're calling "All-In Groups." Do you have to buy a book that you'll have to spend hours reading each week? No. Do these

groups require you to have a vast knowledge of the Bible? Nope. What if you haven't been to church in person in months, are you disqualified? Not at all. The purpose of these groups is simple—Christian community that opens our lives up to God's grace. It's this kind of connection many of us have sorely missed in the pandemic, but it's also this type of connection that many of you have told us you've missed at this church in the last years.

So far, we're excited to report that over 60 people have signed up for these groups—what a work of the Spirit! If you're curious about what they entail, here's a brief descriptor: Each group will have a leader who will facilitate discussion. You'll sign up for a time that is convenient for you, and we'll place you in a group.

Over the course of several weeks, you'll meet with this group weekly to discuss questions about the previous week's sermon. Our hope in all of this is that you'll not merely group together with folks you see at your preferred worship service or Sunday school class, but that your definition of community at First Pres will grow as you meet folks you've not known before.

I must admit to you, Christian community does entail some risk—Going all-in always does! There is a risk to vulnerability, to offering your perspective, and to showing up for the first time to a group of people you may not yet know. But let me remind you, where there is risk, there is often love. If you long for community, these groups are for you. If you desire to branch out and meet new people in Christ, these groups are for you.

If you long to further discuss the intersection of God's activity and your life, these groups are for you. And if you feel lost and lonely, these groups are for you, too.

Let's push the chips of our faith into the middle, friends. I think it's safe to say that God will meet us when we do.

--Pastor Josh Musser Gritter



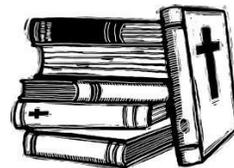
A New Opportunity for Bible Study in 2022

Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) is an in-depth, interdenominational Bible study for people of all ages and backgrounds. BSF began in 1952 with a passion for uniting people through studying the Bible. Bible Study Fellowship encourages you to explore the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and see how God weaves his story and ours through the Old and New Testaments. There are men's groups, women's groups, and classes for children.

Here at First Presbyterian Church, there is a Friday morning women's group. It meets from 9:45-11:00 in Fellowship Hall. There is time for discussion, prayer and a video lecture. This year we are studying the book of Matthew. Our leader is a member of our hometown community, Linda Nickerson. Some of our class members live within our church neighborhood and are members of First Pres.

Although we would love to see you each week, you can pop in and out as your schedule allows. Wherever and whenever you begin your study, there is always a place for you in BSF! Come check us out!

For more information and other class options go to: www.bsfindernational.org or you may contact Karen De Graaf at 704-433-4221.



**WOMEN'S
Bible Study**

Annual Congregational Meeting Called

The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Salisbury has called a Congregational Meeting on Sunday, February 6, at 10:30. The purpose of the meeting is to hear the report of the corporation, adopt the 2022 budget, and to vote on the changes in the pastors' terms of call.

News From Meals On Wheels

Randy Lassiter, who has been a very faithful volunteer with our First Presbyterian MOW Team, was recently honored as an Outstanding 2021 Volunteer for Meals on Wheels. He was awarded this honor at the Annual Meeting of Meals on Wheels Rowan.

In addition to being a volunteer for many years for our First Presbyterian MOW Team, he was an invaluable resource



to Meals on Wheels Rowan during the challenges of the pandemic. He volunteered to deliver meals and recruited new volunteers in the South Rowan

area. Randy's wife, Martha, has also been a loyal volunteer in the past. We extend our congratulations to Randy on receiving this well-deserved honor.

We are pleased to report that at this time, all the FPC routes are covered by our faithful volunteers. Many thanks to our volunteers. We can always add folks to our substitute list, so if you are interested, please give Mary Greene a call at 704-633-4164.

FEBRUARY 2022

Congratulations To:

- Ed and Beffie Cook on the birth of their granddaughter, Elizabeth 'Lilly' Sinnott Dwight, born October 22 to Emily and Chris Dwight of Rocky Mount. Her older brother is Jack
- Eric and Vickie Clark, on the birth of their granddaughter, Anna Katherine Clark, on December 27. Anna's parents are Steven and Lindsey, and her older siblings are William and Macie.

Our Deepest Sympathy To:

- Kathy Sanborn and family on the death of her mother-in-law, Virginia McDuffie
- John Smith and family on the death of his sister, Mary Smith Lassiter
- Steve Thomas and family on the death of his uncle, Richard Thomas
- David Pulliam and family on the death of his aunt, Frances Pullium
- Teen Aron and family on the death of her grandfather, Marvin Pinson
- Rev. Josh Musser Gritter and family on the death of his grandfather, Marvin Gritter
- Carol Worthy and family on the death of her cousin, Dale Boyer



A Letter of Thanks

I would like to thank everyone for their many thoughts and prayers, kind words, flowers and the abundance of love that I have been blessed with in 2021 as I dealt with several serious medical challenges. Acey Worthy

Newsletter Deadlines for 2022

<u>Edition</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
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)



Lost and Found

Did You Lose Something in Church Recently? Here is what we have in the RECEPTION OFFICE lost and found:

One silver hoop earring - Large

One silver earring - Medium

One thermal Yeti glass, green with the initial "L" on it.



Four books for Flora Steck.

They have been here for weeks and the person who put them here needs to pick them up.

PLEASE KNOW THAT WE DO NOT KEEP THINGS BEYOND A MONTH. WE WILL DONATE THEM IF THEY ARE NOT PICKED UP.

FINANCIAL REPORT

December 2021

OPERATING

YTD	
Income	1,145,817.69
YTD Expenses	<u>1,081,717.89</u>
Cash Flow - Positive	<u>64,099.80</u>
Budgeted Income	1,065,758.00
Actual Income	<u>1,145,817.69</u>
Over	<u>80,059.69</u>
Budgeted Expenses	1,165,589.00
Actual Expenses	<u>1,069,888.53</u>
Under	<u>95,700.47</u>

DAY SCHOOL

YTD Gain	<u>16,405.69</u>
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GIVING

YTD Budgeted Giving	1,043,625.00
YTD Actual Giving	<u>1,087,897.13</u>
Over	<u>44,273.13</u>
Total Pledges	979,624.00
Pledge Payments	<u>973,525.12</u>
Under	<u>6,098.88</u>

THANK YOU
for your generosity

Sunday School Offerings This Winter/Spring 2022

The Contemporary Christian Class

Study: What If It's True (a book by Charles Martin). It is a thought-provoking study of Christ and what He brought to the human race during His brief time on earth. Dr. Martin is a novelist, not a theologian.

Led by: Karl Hales

Meets: In Church Conference Room (across from Pastor Lara's office) on 1st floor

The Discovery Class

Study: "THE JOURNEY", by Adam Hamilton.

Led by: David Potts

Meets: On 2nd floor, classroom above Everyman's Classroom at the top of the stairs

The Everyman's Bible Class

Study: This group of men of ALL ages uses "The Present Word" curriculum.

Led by: Rotating teachers and special guests

Meets: In the Everyman's Classroom (across from Pastor Josh's office) on 1st floor

The Martha & Mary Class (Formerly called The Rumble Class)

Study: "Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World" by Joanna Weaver.

Led by: Kathy Tart and Carole Simmons

Meets: In the Rumble Classroom (right across from Fellowship Hall) on 1st floor

The Open Door Class

Study: God's Messy Family (a new study available through Amplified Media). Following, they plan a brief Lenten study and then will dive into the "Truth and the Christian Faith".

Led by: Ames Flynn

Meets: In Middle School Classroom on 2nd floor

The Sisters in Christ Class

Study: How Much More by Lisa Harper. Video and study series for winter/spring. Will break for Everyman's Class Lenten Offering from 3/20-4/10.

Led By: Robin Fisher, Judy Mabe, and Margaret Harris

Meets: Large Classroom beside Pastor Kirby's office on 2nd floor

LENTEN OFFERING

Trevor Eppheimer (from Hood Seminary) will lead a series

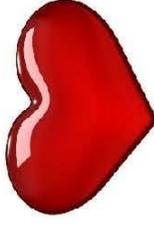
March 20, 27 and April 3, 10.

Topic: "Truth and the Christian Faith"

This will be in Fellowship Hall and open to All.

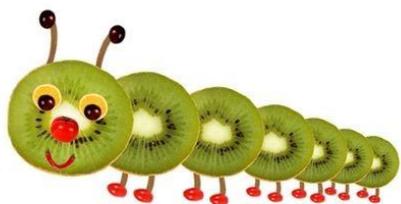


February 2022



January '22							March '22						
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30	31		
30	31												

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
30	31	1 10:30: Staff	2 5:30: Handbells 7:00: Choir	3 7:00: LCW Rehearsal	4	5
6 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 10:30: Cong. Meeting 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 5:00: Jr./1st Kids 5:00: Youth	7 11:00: PW Bible Study 5:30: CE 6:00: Personnel, Youth 7:00: All Committee	8 10:30: Staff	9 5:30: Handbells 6:00: Stephen Ministers 7:00: Choir	10 MOW Delivery 7:00: LCW Rehearsal	11	12 Youth Ski Trip
13 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 5:00: Jr./1st Kids	14 10:30: Prayer Shawl 2:30: Staff	15 Presbytery on Zoom 7:00: Deacons	16 Newsletter Due 5:30: Handbells 5:30: Property 7:00: Choir	17 TWAM @ RHM 7:00: LCW Rehearsal	18	19
20 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 4:00: Wholeness/Healing 5:00: Youth	21 10:30: PWCT 5:00: Finance 7:00: Session	22 10:30: Staff 5:30: RTF	23 5:30: Handbells 6:00: Stephen Ministers 7:00: Choir	24 MOW Delivery 7:00: LCW Rehearsal	25	26
27 8:30: Worship-Lewis Hall 9:45: Sunday School 9:45: Youth Study 11:00: Worship-Sanctuary 5:00: Jr./1st Kids	28	1	2	3	4	5
6	7					



What's Going on With Youth Ministry?

Our Youth had a great fall of 2021, and we anticipate gathering together in the Winter and Spring of 2022. Despite the oddness of this year's beginning, here are some things going on in our Youth Ministry:

1) Breakfast and Bible: Starting on **Sunday, January 30**, our Youth will gather with Josh on the last Sunday of the Month, during the Sunday school hour, to have a time of Bible Study together. We hope that the Youth who study together might also attend worship together before or after the study time. On these Sundays, the congregation will also bear witness to Youth participating in worship in various ways. Bible Study starts at 9:45 am in the HS youth room. While there will be food in the future, we will wait for the COVID numbers to decrease before we do so.

2) Ski Trip, Saturday, February 12. The Ski Trip is back—we hope! Our busy Youth need a day to slow down, get out of dodge, and enjoy God's creation together. What better way than to ski in WV!

3) Service Nights: One of the backbones of First Presbyterian is how we respond to God's grace by serving others in our community. One Sunday a month, our Youth are committed to serving in the community. This January, we packed bags at RHM. We look forward to other opportunities to serve in the future.

4) Youth Sunday: We're excited to have Youth Sunday at First Pres once again! On Sunday, May 1, our Youth will lead us through a service of music and worship. Our seniors will offer us a word of hope. Mark your calendars for Sunday, May 1. We will have a unified service in Lewis Hall that morning.

5) Preparations for TWAM Mission: June feels far away, but in reality, it isn't! Our TWAM mission team is looking forward to a time of preparation for our weeklong trip to Mexico in mid-June. Continue to pray for our Youth and pray that God might form the right team for this time and place.



--Pastor Josh Musser Gritter

**First Presbyterian
Church 308 West Fisher
Street Salisbury, NC
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