

# Tidings

VOL. 68, NO. 2 - SUMMER 2023



“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

—Isaiah 40:8 NRSV

2022 VBS students at Camp Loughridge including Jacob Case, Sammy Hand and Joel Nsereko.

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# First Church is serious about being a teaching church

By Dr. Jim Miller

Who will ever forget **Professor James Tour**, an elite chemist from Rice University, who came telling his story of meeting Jesus at Syracuse University when he was 18 years old? Dr. Tour continues to teach Sunday school every week in downtown Houston and opens his home for students to share a Sunday brunch together. I still receive his weekly emails sharing stories of folks coming to Christ both on and off the university campus.



Who will forget the compelling presence of **Dr. Ivan and Luda Rusyn** from the Ukraine? We heard their stories of courage and hope amid the Russian war and our hearts were opened. We were blessed to pray over them as they knelt in the Sanctuary worship service, preparing to return to war-torn Ukraine.



**Dr. Wes Vander Lugt** came in from Charlotte, bringing his beautiful family with him, and served as our theologian-in-residence for an entire academic year. He brought his love for the arts and theology with him. Who will forget his reminder to us of John the Baptist's teaching, "I am not the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah. He must increase; I must decrease?"



Most recently, we welcomed the internationally known author, speaker and pastor, **Dr. John Ortberg**. The Stephenson Hall was packed to hear his spirited description of how the Gospel and spiritual formation are profoundly intertwined. His sermon on the theme, "Who is this Man?" gifted us with a stirring proclamation of the good news of Jesus.



This coming September we look forward (finally!) to welcoming one of the most gifted young writers, **Rebecca McLaughlin**, whose books address the Gospel and cultural issues in powerful ways. Check out her text, "12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion." Her books are worthy of a place on our reading list.



Second from left, Apollos was "an eloquent man, fervent in spirit, well-versed in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord."

The first century Church in Ephesus was blessed with the arrival of a powerful and eloquent preacher by the name of Apollos. Martin Luther believed him to be the author of the book of Hebrews and perhaps he's right.

Apollos was a Jew, native to Alexandria, Egypt, and according to Acts 18, he was "an eloquent man, fervent in spirit, well-versed in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord. He spoke and taught accurately about Jesus, powerfully refuting his fellow Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah."

What a blessing for those in Ephesus - to share a few days with a gifted man like Apollos. He brought his gifts, shared them with the local church, and went on his way to share with others.

First Church takes her role as a teaching church seriously and it's not just for adults.

Not long ago 9-year-old Caleb Shelton came to me and said, "Guess what, Dr. Miller? I've memorized the Eastertide Affirmation of Faith! 'What?' I said. 'You have not!' Really, I did," he said. "Mr. Inhofe, my Sunday school teacher, invited our whole class to try to memorize it. And I did."

The very next Sunday, Caleb stood up at our time for the young disciples and recited it before the entire Sanctuary congregation. It was beautiful ... moving even. I'm so thankful for teachers like Mr. Jim Inhofe! This is the teaching ministry of the Church at its finest. And it's all around us.



Caleb Shelton reciting the Eastertide Affirmation of Faith on Sunday, April 27, 2023.

Or, how about this?

We were having breakfast at Dilly Diner on 2nd Street. My friend, who works in the warehouse at the Holly Refinery in West Tulsa, pulled out three neatly typed pages and handed them to me. "Here," he said. "I'd like you to read these and tell me what you think."

I read them. They're brilliant. Three pages of devotional reflections intended for individuals and families - the first pages of what will soon be a book of daily devotional reflections.

My friend, Dan McDonald, is using his gifts, writing out his thoughts on faith and life, offering it to a congregation that appreciates the teachers among us.

Honor those who teach. Honor those who give of their efforts to share the good news, creatively, courageously, inspirationally.

We honor them. Each and all.





# What is an acolyte?

By Elizabeth DeVore



Acolyte Lucy Gingerich prepares to light the candles for the 2023 Palm Sunday worship service.



Acolytes Sam, Lucy and James Donohue with Rev. James Estes.



Acolyte Lyle Bristow serving during worship.



"I like lighting the candle because it reminds me that God is the light."

– Abigail Kanyeki



Kathryn Pickereel instructing acolyte Sky Kenneth before a worship service.



Jacob Case serving as an acolyte in the 2022 Easter worship service.

Sitting in the 11 a.m. Sanctuary service at First Church, you may notice youth in white and black robes lighting candles and carrying in the Bible at the beginning of each service. These young participants in our worship service are called acolytes. The word acolyte in Greek can mean "to follow" or assist in a service or procession. Students in fourth-grade through middle school help us prepare for worship each week by ushering in the Light of Christ and Word of God.



Kathryn Pickereel

Light is symbolic in Scripture as seen in Genesis 1:3, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it," and John 8:12, "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

Two of the acolytes carry in brass candle lighters and light the tower candles on each side of the communion table.

"This is my way of giving back and I enjoy being with the kids and preparing them for this important part of worship."

– Kathryn Pickereel

They are each lit to represent the two natures of Jesus as the light of the world, both human and divine. The flames also represent the presence of the Holy Spirit as it came on Pentecost. Only through the presence of the Holy Spirit may we understand and come to know the mystery of worship. The third acolyte carries in the Bible to the eagle lectern. This reminds us that the Scriptures are God's Word to us. The acolytes' role is to bring in the full visual representation of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. On special occasions such as Palm Sunday, Easter and Christ the King Sunday, a fourth acolyte carries in a crucifer.

Dr. Jim Miller said this tradition was brought to First Church over 20 years ago as a way to help include children in worship. **Kathryn Pickereel**, queen of the acolytes, has faithfully served behind the scenes of this ministry since its beginning. Every Sunday she meets the acolytes in the Sacristy and helps them get dressed, and reminds them of their specific jobs in the service.

Fourth-grade acolyte, Abigail Kanyeki, says, "I like lightning the candle because it reminds me that God is the light." Fourth-graders attending Worship 101 class, with Associate Director of Music Ministries Gretchen Bashforth, get a chance to learn about the role of an acolyte and its significance in worship once a month. They then can be selected to serve that morning and once they are in Pathfinders in fifth-grade, they can sign up to be part of the monthly rotation.

Director of Middle School Ministries, **Jackson Seibert**, helps to train the acolytes each year. James Donohue, a seventh-grade student who serves as an acolyte says, "It's a lot of fun because we get to light the candles and set up the Bible and it's great to be a part of the service and help out." Next time you see these youth lighting the candle and bringing in the Bible, be reminded that Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, is in our midst, and through the Holy Spirit we may come to know and love the living God.



**About the author:**

Elizabeth DeVore is a lifelong member of First Church Tulsa. She loves being engaged in the body of Christ and growing with her church family. She currently serves as an elder, is involved in Pathfinder middle school ministries, and a Young Adult K Group leader.





# Attending the National Prayer Breakfast

By Rev. Julia Metcalf

On the first Thursday in February, over 1,500 guests gathered in Washington, D.C., for the National Prayer Breakfast. This is an event that has been occurring since the 1930s and formalized by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1953. This year, I had the privilege and honor of being invited and attending, and I joined brothers and sisters from over 100 countries in prayer.



Rev. Julia Metcalf with other Oklahoma attendees of the 2023 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C. on February 2, 2023.

Although a distinctly Christian event, attendees come from all different faith backgrounds, but are united around the person and work of Jesus Christ. The hope and desire is to find unity in diversity (a principle stated in our PC(USA) Book of Order, in fact), and to build relationships across place, position, power and politics in order to walk hand in hand into a future filled with hope, love, peace and faith.

The event began on Wednesday evening with a welcome dinner and a slate of speakers. Jim Slattery, a former United States representative opened the evening with the words of Abraham Lincoln who said, "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." Kathy McMorris-Rogers, a current U.S. representative, reminded us that, "only a house built by God will stand," and to submit all that we are facing in our lives, country, and world into the hands of God.

The next morning at the prayer breakfast, President Joe Biden encouraged us that

there is much hope to be had through our faith and to stand firm in that hope. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, through a recorded presentation, gave a moving speech on the importance of faith in times of immense challenge and loss. This particular prayer breakfast had a record attendance of congressional members, and Senator Amy Klobuchar shared that, "faith is alive and well on the hill."

At the international lunch later that day, we had the privilege of hearing from Queen Rania Al Abdullah, queen consort of Jordan. She and her husband, King Abdullah, are both Muslim and yet spoke with respect and admiration for Jesus Christ. Queen Rania left the crowd speechless after a moving presentation on finding a way forward that is not divisive, but rather joins hands across the divide, through which we find a way forward together that is full of possibility and hope.

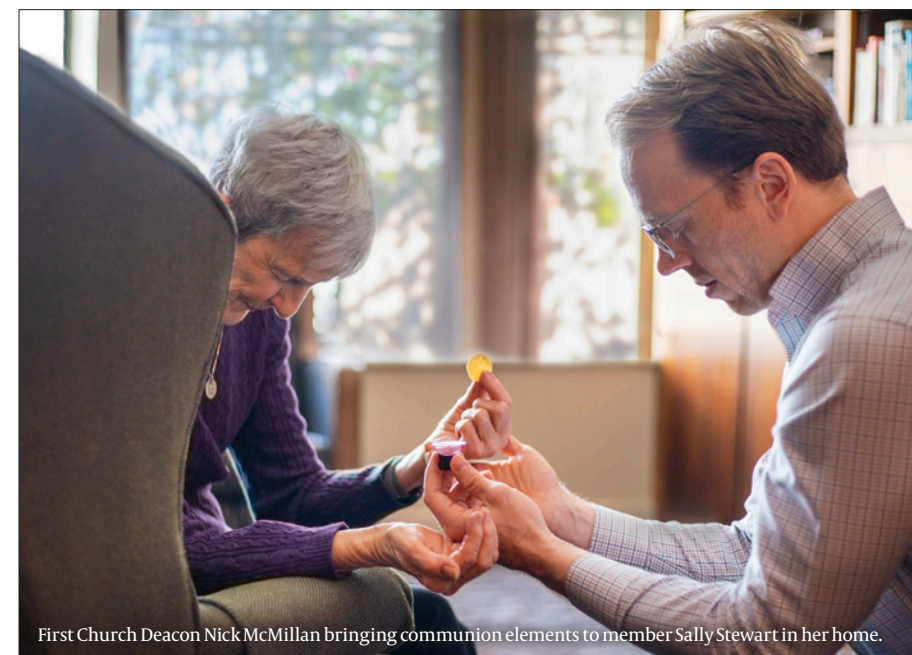
Other speakers from the event included Dr. David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme for the UN, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Dr. David Anderson, Benazir Bhutto, and various former and current congress people.

Every single person that took the stage stood in a love for Jesus and shared about the importance of prayer. The collective encouragement was that there is more that unites us than divides us. The collective hope for not only those in attendance, but for all of us, is to climb into this way of seeing one another with more in common than we have in difference. It is with this posture that we can cultivate radical compassion for one another, open-handedness to listen and learn, and a desire to find a "third way" that is not about winning or losing but about justice and peace. All of this we must do with a humble stance of prayer and surrender to the God who shows us how to love our neighbor as ourselves.

#### About the author:

Rev. Julia Metcalf oversees the Next Generation Ministry. She is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary where she received a Master of Divinity in 2020.

She is very interested in the spiritual disciplines and how they can enrich our faith journeys, as well as what a personal relationship with Jesus Christ looks like for both young and old. Julia serves on the board of directors of Camp Loughridge and serves as a mentor to the Oklahoma Student Leadership Forum.



First Church Deacon Nick McMillan bringing communion elements to member Sally Stewart in her home.

# Communion in the farthest pews

Serving members unable to attend church who want to share in the Lord's Supper.

By Kathy Wilson

Communion is a word that has two definitions: "a common participation in a mental, emotional, or spiritual experience;" and, "when consecrated bread and wine are shared in remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death." Both of those definitions are an important part of the Lord's Supper, as it is meant to be shared within a Christian community. Some of our First Church members are no longer able to physically attend church, yet they still want to share in the Lord's Supper. Home communion is the ministry of the church that serves those members.

The pandemic presented some real challenges when it came to communion, but church leadership was determined to continue to make it available to members. To make that happen, elders and deacons made over 100 phone calls to members before each Communion Sunday to ask if they wanted to pick up elements or have them delivered to their home.



The covered entrance became a drive-through element pick-up location on the Saturdays before Communion Sundays, manned by those same elders and deacons. Packets of elements were also dropped off on front porches, handed off through front doors or taken to retirement homes. Members were encouraged to partake of the elements at the same time communion was served during the televised or streamed worship service to provide a feeling of sharing communion within the community.

As time went on and the grip of the pandemic loosened, the drive-through pick up was discontinued. Members who weren't able or ready to attend in person were invited to pick elements up at the reception desk. Elders and deacons continued to deliver packets of elements to those who preferred that option.

Finally, in June of 2022, the decision was made to return to the traditional model of home communion, when teams of elders and deacons visit members' homes. For me, it was a little nerve-racking, as that was the first normal home communion I had ever coordinated. I am so grateful to Mariesa Worman, who has been involved with home communion for many years, and to Dionna Schooley, who provided valuable insight and encouragement. The heartwarming reports I received afterwards describing how grateful and happy recipients were to have the elements served to them personally after such a long period of isolation showed the importance of members being in communion in every sense of the word.

**"Home communion is often referred to as 'communion in the farthest pews.'"**

— Kathy Wilson

First Church's connection with members who can't physically attend worship needs to be intentionally nurtured, and this ministry is an important part of helping that happen. Every Communion Sunday, teams comprised of 10 elders, 10 deacons and the pastors, set out to serve the elements to these dear members to honor Jesus' commandment to, "do this in remembrance of Me." While doing so, they also pray with and for the members, reinforce their connection to the church, and listen to their stories, joys and concerns.

Members of the church who are unable to physically come to the church and participate in communion are encouraged to become part of our home communion ministry. If you would like to be added to the list, please contact **Kathy Wilson** at 918-301-1029 or [kwilson@firstchurchtulsa.org](mailto:kwilson@firstchurchtulsa.org).



#### About the author:

Kathy Wilson has been a member of First Church since joining as a confirmant in 1972 and has been on staff since 2018. One of her responsibilities is coordinating memorial services.





# Preparation for ministry

By Nick McMillan

God is faithful to the church, providing pastoral leadership in whatever circumstances. And God may call us to ministry at any time in our lives, whether we feel overwhelmed with all that's on our plates, have other plans, or are unsure of our abilities. By tracking the steps inquirers and candidates take to discern their call, the preparation for ministry process bears witness to the varied paths prospective pastors take to ministry and reveals how God guides the church to build faithful community throughout changing circumstances.

**Rev. Tim Blodgett**, general presbyter for Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery, resources and supports the work of the Presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry. Blodgett completed the process himself in 2007 and has seen the need for pastoral leadership in churches change since then. As he states, "With the boomer generation retiring and even before the deaths resulting from complications due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have not been enough seminary-trained pastors to fill all pulpits. Increasingly roles are being fulfilled by commissioned pastors."

Also known as commissioned ruling elder, the role of commissioned pastor builds on a rich history of what is commonly called a "lay preacher," an entirely capable preacher who does not typically have the formal education to pursue the role of teaching elder/minister of word and sacrament and instead brings a wealth of experience from other vocational backgrounds.



General Presbyter Rev. Tim Blodgett and Zach Rivers.



Zach Rivers after delivering his first practica for the Lord's Day service at Austin Theological Seminary.

Other denominations, including other Presbyterian denominations, have admitted such a role previously, and this path to ministry has become increasingly popular in our denomination within the last three decades. This certification process further builds on the traditional expectation for all elders to be available to preach in their home congregations.

Until recently, a small church in the Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery was led in worship largely by its elders for over two years. Certification becomes a requirement only when an elder is called on to preach before another congregation. Blodgett maintains that while we may see churches shrinking or closing and some rural churches going years without a full-time minister, God is at work doing something new and is good and faithful to the church. The preparation process is one way God prepares us to minister to the church among many others including roles as disciples, mentors, musicians, and K Group leaders.

**"If you are seeking to discern a call in your own life, talk to a pastor or call the Presbytery office and I'll talk to you. You can respond to the call at any age."**

– Tim Blodgett

**Zach Rivers** is a current candidate for teaching elder in the preparation for ministry process under the care of First Church, and he first heard God's call to ministry over two

decades ago. After a number of false starts and changes in academics and employment, and after establishing a career and family, he has entered the preparation for ministry process just in the past year.

When he was first called to ministry, Zach was a recent Booker T. Washington graduate enrolled to study fire protection at Oklahoma State University. He instead matriculated at Oklahoma Baptist University to pursue ministry and found himself in his faith, as he describes it, "like in a canoe with a hole and no paddle." Zach returned to Tulsa and completed TCC's Fire Protection Program just before the city went into a hiring freeze. After completing a bachelor's degree at The University of Tulsa, Zach entered professional life, ultimately pursuing a career in banking while always keeping his call to ministry in mind. When his employer offered to fund his completion of an MBA, Zach discussed the offer with his wife, and she helped him recognize the time was right for him to attend seminary.

In order to attend Austin Theological Seminary, Zach has changed his life dramatically, leaving his full-time job, moving away from his home, and living apart from his wife and 6-year-old son. Yet he finds strength in the tight-knit community he has formed with his fellow congregants at First Presbyterian. His K Group offered him and his family support when his wife suffered a traumatic brain injury and could not work, changing their lives forever.



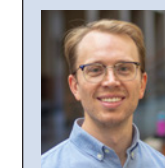
Zach Rivers studying in the library at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas.

**"Presbyterianism is a denomination of education and growth."**

– Zach Rivers

Zach believes that Christ-centered community is the bedrock of the church, and he sees strengthening the community of the church at the center of his ministry. For him, it is important that community is authentic, meeting people where they are in all walks of life in order to "do life together." In this pursuit, Zach considers Dr. Ryan Moore, former associate pastor of First Presbyterian, a role model and feels better prepared for ministry than he did 20 years ago.

Presbyterianism is "a denomination of education and growth," says Zach, and he is more solid in his faith, knowing why he believes what he believes. He will complete his seminary education over the next two years, and in addition to prayers for discernment, Zach asks for prayers for his family. The goodbye following the last holiday season was the hardest yet, and they will need prayers until they reunite under one roof in Austin in May of 2023.



**About the author:** Nick McMillan joined First Church in June 2021. He enjoys teaching and leading small group discussions for Exodus high school Sunday school and is a frequent participant in the Before the Rooster Crows Bible study. He is grateful for this opportunity to learn more about the preparation process and current candidates.



Zach Rivers attends Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Texas.



# Mentoring the next generation

By Tom Hillis

Recently, a group of third-grade Anderson students were having lunch with their lunch buddies, and the third-graders began a discussion about lunch buddies. Each of the five third graders had very common descriptions of his or her lunch buddy including that the lunch buddy was nice. They also each affirmed that they look forward to having lunch with their lunch buddy weekly and sharing their experiences from the prior week. Each child expressed their feelings differently, but it was clear that each child placed great value on the relationship with their lunch buddy.

This mentoring program is one facet of First Church's outreach mission to the Anderson Elementary community. First Church's outreach mission has grown and morphed over the years. This mission started very small, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has now impacted hundreds of lives and continues to grow.

## Brief history of First Church's school mission

First Church's current school mission had its genesis about 12 years ago when a group of church members began a mentoring program at Emerson Elementary. First Church patterned its program on First Methodist's highly successful outreach to Eugene Fields Elementary. We started with three mentors going to Emerson to have lunch with a designated student.

This mentoring program grew over the years. At one point, First Church had approximately 80 mentors having lunch at Emerson. First Church also added monthly community nights to this mission grilling hot dogs and playing Bingo with families in the school neighborhood.

Approximately six years ago, First Church started the highly successful Masterwork Academy. Tulsa Public Schools decided that Emerson was not a good fit for the program and First Church elected to partner with Anderson Elementary for Masterwork Academy.

Emerson Elementary went through numerous changes during First Church's outreach mission. Emerson entirely reworked the school and changed to a Montessori curriculum. The change in curriculum changed the demographics drastically at the school.

As a result of the changes at Emerson Elementary, First Church's school missions team decided that First Church could have a greater impact at Anderson Elementary. This allowed both of our school outreaches to be coordinated. The combination of these missions created strong relationships and combined our activities to do the most good. We currently have a wonderful relationship with the staff at Anderson and the Anderson families.



First Church volunteers gathered to sing Christmas carols to the kids.



Louann Buhlinger, First Church communications director, reads a book with her lunch buddy in the library at Anderson Elementary.



First Church member Anita Ewing with her Anderson Elementary lunch buddy.

## Importance of mentoring

God repeatedly stressed the importance of adults in children's lives throughout the Bible. Children occupied a special place in Jesus' heart, and he often reached out to include children. This Biblical guidance is absolutely true, and the impacts of our faithfulness cannot be denied.

At-risk children are particularly benefited by having a faithful mentor. The available data proves a child's future can be greatly positively impacted by having a mentor.

## Positive impacts of mentorship

- ✓ Better performance in school and better school attendance.
- ✓ Much higher chance of continued academic progress and college attendance.
- ✓ Much lower discipline issues and involvement with the criminal justice system.
- ✓ Improved self-esteem in children with a mentor.
- ✓ Much higher likelihood that a mentored child will participate in volunteer activities.

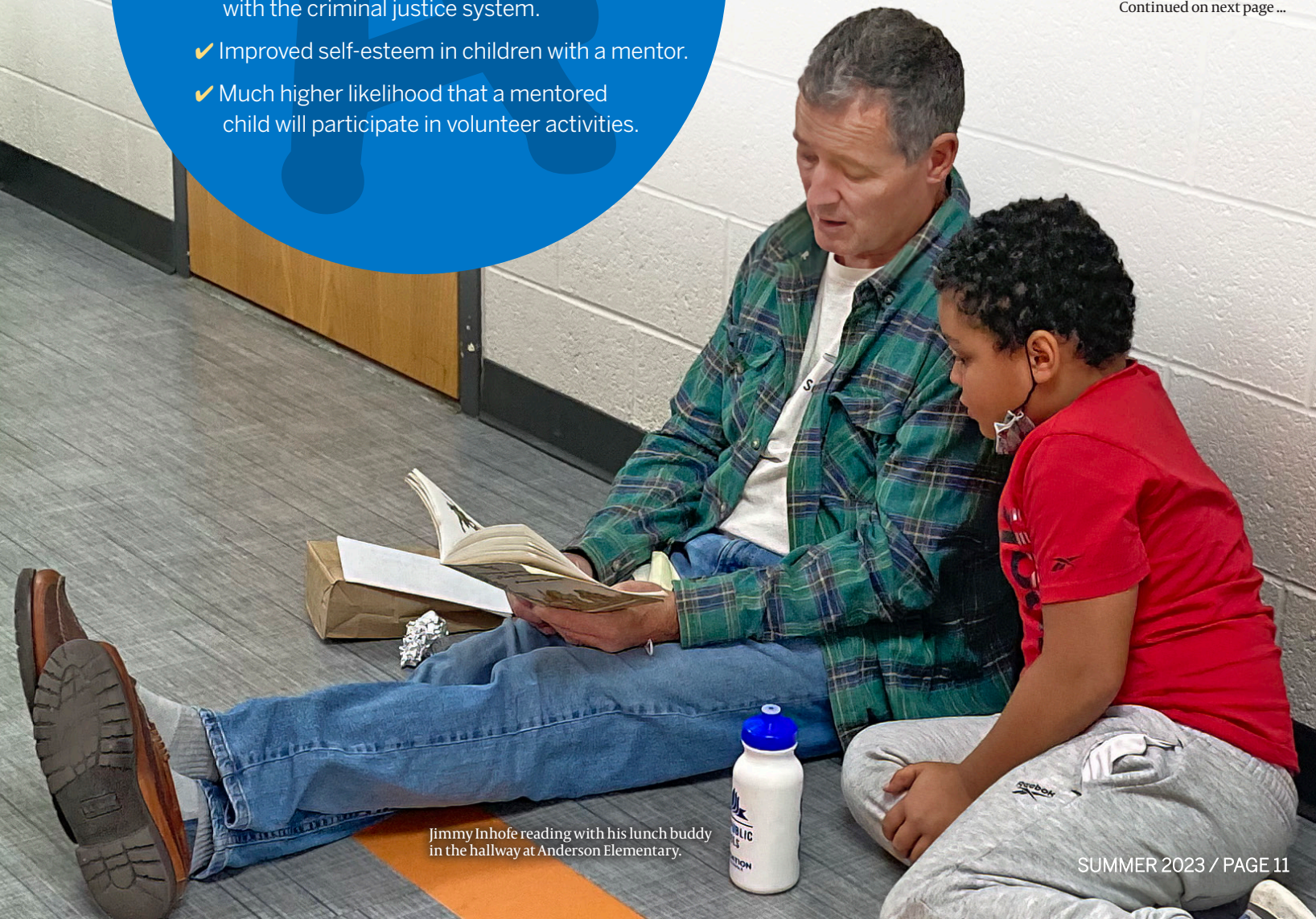
Not only does following God's commands help the children, but the mentors also benefit. Mentors have a higher sense of self-worth and better feelings about themselves. The mentors also build relationships that become part of the fabric of their lives.

Mentoring also shows the parents, teachers and staff at the school that we care about them. Teachers and staff have very difficult jobs and are woefully under-resourced. Seeing mentors at the school each week conveys our love to them and shows them we are willing to assist them with their very difficult calling.

One story illustrates the impact of mentoring. One of our mentors had consistently mentored a wonderful child but was wondering if the mentoring was having any impact. The student was an average student and a very shy and quiet kid. About two years into the relationship, the mentor noticed the child's name on the Principal's Honor Roll for receiving straight A's. The mentor was overjoyed and congratulated the child on the great accomplishment. The child looked right into the mentor's eyes and said, "I didn't want to have to tell you I got a B."

Obviously, this student's reserved nature masked his feelings for his mentor and the relationship was critical to the student. The hyperbolic comment from the child made the mentor feel great. The parents and teachers appreciated the academic progress of the student. Obeying God improved the lives of each of these people.

Continued on next page ...



Jimmy Inhofe reading with his lunch buddy in the hallway at Anderson Elementary.



# Mentoring the next generation

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## First Church's current mentoring program

First Church is now in its second year partnering with Anderson Elementary in its mentoring program. We have approximately 30 mentors meeting weekly with students at Anderson. These mentors eat lunch with the students each week. These sessions also include reading, games or other social activities. The mentoring time is organized around the students' lunch and recess period. This allows the mentors approximately 45 minutes per visit with the student.

The mentoring program has also allowed First Church to expand our relationship with First Baptist Church North Tulsa. Our churches have a long history of partnering on mission endeavors. First Baptist Church North Tulsa is a crucial partner in our mentoring program and a wonderful ministry partner for First Church.

We have also continued our community nights at Anderson Elementary. We invite the school and the surrounding neighbors to join us once a month for a hot dog cookout and bingo games. Community nights provide an opportunity to meet parents and other members of the neighborhood. They are also a great way for other First Church members to participate when they are unable to commit to being a part of the mentoring program.

The deacons also host Celebrate Christmas Together each Christmas season at the school including a Christmas party where each student is given a gift bag with a sweatshirt, game, book, Bible and socks. The Anderson students love the party and greatly appreciate the deacons' efforts.

First Church also assists with various other aspects at Anderson. We regularly provide meals for the teachers and supplies for the classrooms. We provide some uniforms for the children and have assisted with scholarships for Anderson children to attend summer camp at Camp Loughridge.

The mentoring program also sponsors the fundraising and recruiting events each year at the church with a ping pong tournament in the summer and a chili cookoff in the winter. These are fun events that raise awareness of our Anderson ministries, as well as raise valuable money to assist the mission.

## Masterwork Academy

Masterwork Academy celebrated five years of ministry on July 27, 2022. In June, Dr. Malcolm McGuire joined the team, taking on the role of principal. His experience in educational leadership and the arts, combined with his deeply rooted faith, make him a perfect fit for this leadership role.

Enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year has been between 45-57 with an average daily attendance of 33 students. In the spring, we transitioned to a block schedule and added theater to our core set of artistic disciplines. Student groups now rotate through Masterwork Academy's four disciplines (theater, music, dance and visual art) in two-week blocks. Students and teachers, alike, have enjoyed the change. The focus on a single art form for two weeks has enabled students to develop their technique as they pursue mastery. Students still have Bible class one day every week, dividing that time between Bible and faith and fitness.



Masterwork students expressing musical creativity.

Masterwork needs champions for our children! If you are available any afternoon between 3 p.m. - 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, we'd love to welcome you to the team. Email Laura Voth at [lvoth@masterworkacademy.org](mailto:lvoth@masterworkacademy.org) or call 918-954-1103.

## Encouragement to get involved

We have numerous ways for you to become involved at Anderson. If you are available in the afternoon, Masterwork always needs people to help with the children. If you can come to a lunch once a week, you can build a relationship with one of the wonderful Anderson students. Even going to a Community Night is a great opportunity to get to know the people in the Anderson community.

If you'd like to volunteer to be a lunch buddy, please contact **Hannah Damron** at [hdamron@firstchurchtulsa.org](mailto:hdamron@firstchurchtulsa.org) or call 918-584-4701. If you need any additional information, please contact Cindy DeVore, Jimmy Inhofe, DD Blackman, Susan Huffman, Malcom McGuire or Jenette McEntire.



**About the author:**  
Tom is Pam's husband, Erin's and Kathryn's dad, and Kate's and James' grandfather. He has been worshipping at First Church for over 10 years. He is a former deacon and elder of First Church.



Volunteers Sarah Wright and Tim Clement serving at the Anderson Elementary Community Night.



# Building fellowship at Summer Swim

Swim-ship ... it's a new way of building fellowship and kinship through gathering every Sunday for Summer Swim at Camp Loughridge.

Summer Swim is one of the longest running activities conducted by First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa. For more than 50 years, people of all ages have filled their tote bags packed with sunscreen, water wings, beach towels and goggles, and made their way to the pool on Sunday afternoons to have some fun in the sun with other church families.

The act of fellowship is one of the major ways we connect at the church. The goal of First Church Kids, who coordinates Summer Swim, is to create an amazing community beginning with our children and carrying through all ages.

According to Acts 2:46-47, "Every day they continued to gather by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to

house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved."

This time of fellowship and coming together as common believers is part of how the early church developed and grew. Taking time beyond teaching by surrounding ourselves with other followers is the core of how we support, love and grow our church community.

"Summer Swim a great way for our children and families to be in community with each other," said Sarah Savage, director of Children's Ministries. "It's also a great way for church families to stay in touch over a very busy summer." This year, Sarah and her team have several surprises in store. And the fun isn't just for the kiddos because people of all ages and stages in life are invited to share this time together.

## Summer Swim

**Sunday, May 28 – Sunday, Sept. 3**  
**1:30 p.m. – 5 p.m.; Camp Loughridge**

Join us for fun in the sun with fellow church family members.



## Family Grill Nights

**Sundays, June 18, July 16 and August 20, 1:30 p.m. – 7 p.m.**  
**Camp Loughridge**

Plan to stay for extended hours until 7 p.m. for Family Grill Nights. Just bring your fixings, charcoal and chef hat and grill away!

Camp Loughridge  
4900 W Oak Leaf Dr, Tulsa, OK 74131





# Happy campers

Camp Loughridge, First Church's beloved urban retreat, comes back into the fold.

By Mark Brown



Photos courtesy Camp Loughridge

Those closest in spirit to Camp Loughridge will remember Wyatt.

There's summer camp, then there's endless summer. Wyatt and his sister did multiple sessions at Camp Loughridge for years. He did seven weeks of camp in a row one year. For some, summer camp acts as a surrogate daycare. Wyatt was one of those kids.

But kids grow up. Two years ago, Wyatt got in touch with the folks at Loughridge who, in addition to hosting summer camp, also book weddings. He was about to get engaged and wanted to propose to his fiancé in the Kirkland Chapel.

**Jacob McIntosh**, executive director of Camp Loughridge, was thinking, "Wyatt?"

"He texted me, 'Hey, she loves it! We want to get married out here.' This kid, who was the thorn in our side for years was now a fully functioning adult. There's enough history out here now that stuff like that is happening."

Jacob's career at Loughridge began in 2006 when he served as associate program director, a post he held until 2013. With a master's degree in Christian education, he went to Augustine Christian Academy, on Sheridan Road, across 30th Street from the Shriners. That's where he was when Vince King called.

Vince, Jacob said, told him things had gone haywire with the camp, so much that shutting it wasn't off the table. Then, in an attempt to bring the camp and church more in union, they made changes in leadership and board makeup. The church offered financial relief. This was part of the pitch.

"Vince said, 'This is where we're going.' So, in 2019, I went back."

In the four years since his return, he's been witness to a transformation, a dynamic shift he attributes to "random corrections and God."

"I've been around it for 16 years and it's a different level of energy and excitement I'm feeling," Jacob said. "From the board to other organizations we rub shoulders with, Camp Loughridge is more visible and connected than it has been in a long time."

Steve Welch would agree.

"Earlier boards had made equally concerted efforts to put distance between Camp and First Pres.," he said.

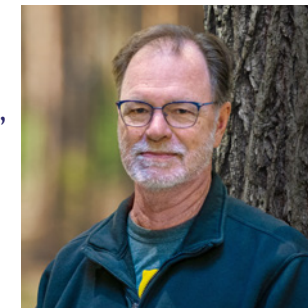
"The current Board, with its strong First Church representation, is fully committed to re-establishing bonds and channeling efforts towards the same mission."

The Welch Family Foundation is annually the single largest contributor to Camp Loughridge, but Steve's efforts don't end there. Alongside Kyle Rahnenfuehrer, the onsite property manager, he mows, paints, builds, plumbs, "just about anything else that you can think of."

Since his retirement and subsequent board membership, he's donated 30-plus hours a week in sweat equity.

**"My primary goal has expanded to include general beautification of the grounds, enhancement of existing structures and venues, and raising awareness and funds to those ends."**

—Steve Welch



To achieve that end, Camp Loughridge is preparing to launch its first capital campaign in 20 years, with the goal of raising \$5-10 million for two projects: overnight housing and offices. All in an effort, Jacob said, to deliver on the camp's three-prong ministry of hosting summer camp, retreats and rentals.

"Like what New Life's got," he said of the spiritual retreat on Lake Hudson. "Rather than go there, they can come here."

With only 70 "youth-friendly" beds, they've been turning away such groups, or jumping through hoops. "We slept 130 people last fall for a youth retreat of two churches," Jacob said, "by getting very creative."

The camp staff currently offices out of two trailers purchased in 2005 as temporary fixes. A successful campaign would inject new life into an environment that has served First Church through generations.

"I grew up out there and it has always been a very special place for me and members of my family," Steve Welch said. "To this point, being involved in the activities at Loughridge and getting to be involved in sustaining Camp's success has been the most rewarding work of my life."

## Meet Jacob McIntosh

Executive Director  
Camp Loughridge



**Origins:** Grew up on a dairy farm outside Niagara Falls.

**Education:** Undergrad in physics, master's in Christian education.

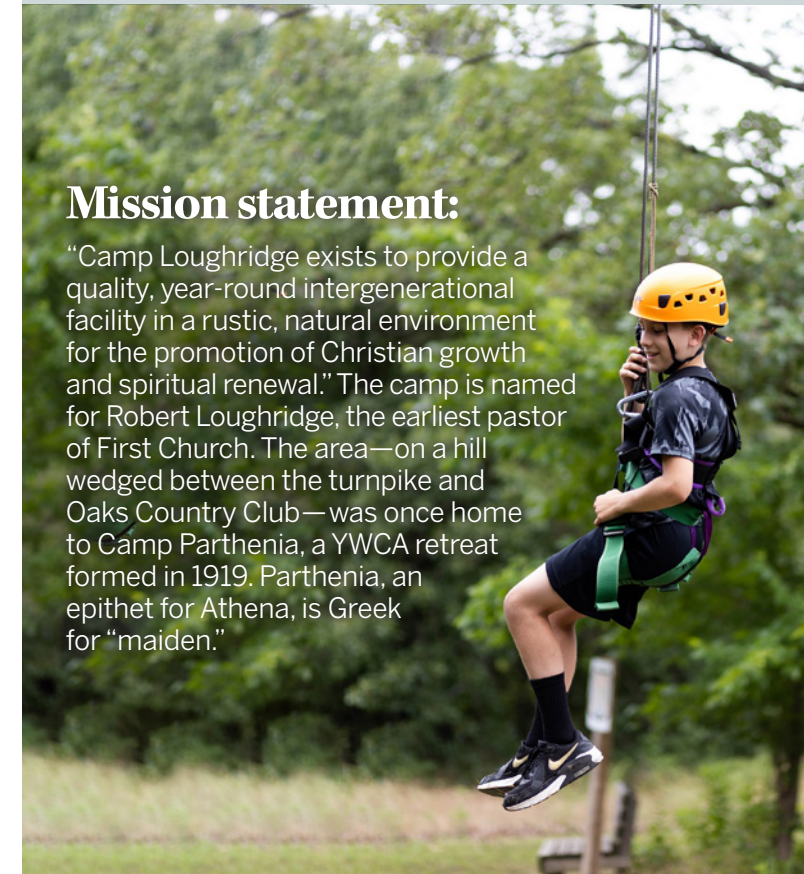
**Wife:** Breana, who sings in the choir at First Church and books weddings for Camp Loughridge.

**Children:** Two boys, Morgan (17) and Justice (12), and a girl, Maeven, born in January of this year.

**Family life:** "Surreal and weird and great."

## Mission statement:

"Camp Loughridge exists to provide a quality, year-round intergenerational facility in a rustic, natural environment for the promotion of Christian growth and spiritual renewal." The camp is named for Robert Loughridge, the earliest pastor of First Church. The area—on a hill wedged between the turnpike and Oaks Country Club—was once home to Camp Parthenia, a YWCA retreat formed in 1919. Parthenia, an epithet for Athena, is Greek for "maiden."



### About the author:

Mark and his wife Kelly attended First Church a full decade before becoming members in 2008. They are now regulars at the 8:30 a.m. service with their sons, Lucas and Jonas, and are members of the Covenanters class. Mark enjoys fishing (versus catching fish) in Lake Parthenia and attending the Easter sunrise service in Kirkland Chapel. His last story for Tidings magazine profiled the many crosses of artist Tim Clement.



# Pastors' Top 10 to read

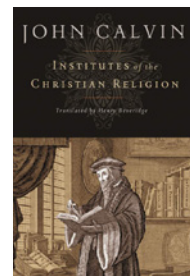


By Dr. Jim Miller

The booklist that follows is not offered as the 10 best books of all time. Not at all. I present these to you as 10 books that are both rich and spiritually nourishing, and especially relevant within our current cultural challenges.

I'm confident of this ... if you give 15 minutes a day to reading the Bible and 15 minutes to say, "Calvin's Institutes," your health will improve in every direction: spiritually, emotionally, relationally, mentally and physically. Countless studies confirm this, as do even more autobiographies.

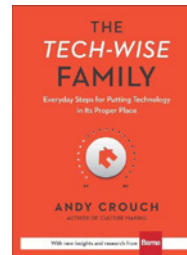
My pastoral colleagues have added many books that I would eagerly add to my all-time favorite list. Anything by C.S. Lewis, for example, or John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." But here are books that will not disappoint and should be included on this beautiful smorgasbord table known as our Top 10 to read! This summer, why not "Tolle Lege," take up and read?



## The Institutes of the Christian Religion

By John Calvin

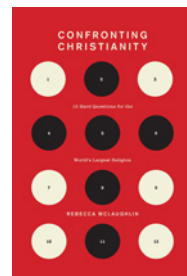
First published in Latin in 1536 and French in 1541, Calvin wrote the book to defend and support his fellow reformers and critics of the Catholic Church, who were facing persecution and death during the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Calvin helped create a new theology that placed absolute importance on the sovereignty of God in matters of salvation and justified its doctrine by faith alone.



## The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in its Proper Place

By Andy Crouch

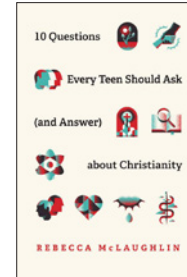
Making good choices about technology in our families is more than just using internet filters and determining screen-time limits for our children. It's about building character, wisdom and courage. Crouch takes parents beyond the typical questions of what, where and when to show us that in a world full of devices, there's a way to choose a better life than we've imagined.



## Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion

By Rebecca McLaughlin

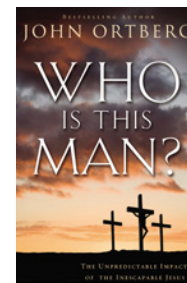
Addressing 12 controversial issues about Christianity including the Bible's teaching on gender and sexuality, the reality of heaven and hell, and more. This book shows how current psychological and scientific research aligns with teaching from the Bible.



## 10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask and Answer about Christianity

By Rebecca McLaughlin

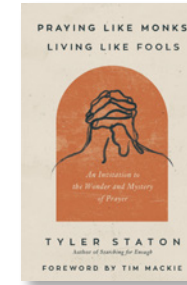
This book equips teenagers to understand and verbalize what they believe. Using teen-friendly illustrations and biblical truth, McLaughlin invites readers to dig deep into 10 common queries about scriptural reliability, sexuality, diversity and other topics.



## Who is this Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus

By John Ortberg

This book traces Jesus' incredible life and legacy from his days on Earth to the present moment, showing us how his vision of life continues to haunt and challenge humanity; the ways his influence has inspired movements in art, science, government, medicine and education; and how his lessons about dignity, compassion, forgiveness and hope continue to influence humanity.



## Praying like Monks; Living Like Fools

By Tyler Staton

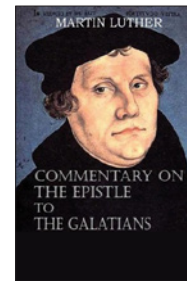
Staton addresses common roadblocks to prayer and gives you the confidence to come to God just as you are. He gives you the tools you need to express your doubts and disappointments about prayer; discover and practice multiple postures of prayer, including silence, persistence and confession; understand and embrace the wonder and mystery of prayer in everyday life; and open or reopen the line of communication with your Creator and experience afresh his divine power on earth.



## Commentary on Matthew (two volumes)

By F. Dale Bruner

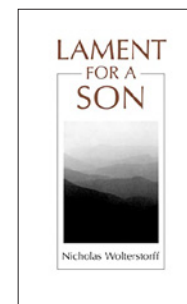
Recognized as a masterly commentary when it first appeared, this study of Matthew is available as an expanded two-volume work. It is at once broadly historical and deeply theological. It is historical in drawing extensively on great church teachers through the centuries and on the classical Christian creeds and confessions. It is theological in that it unpacks the doctrines in each passage, chapter and section of the Gospel.



## Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians

By Martin Luther

Martin Luther became pastor of the congregation at Wittenberg in 1515. He used this opportunity to enlighten his congregation on faith and works. Luther challenged the Pope by saying that the Bible was the ultimate authority, not the Pope. Luther preached his conviction that faith alone not good works is our salvation. Of all of Luther's writings he felt that this was his favorite.



## Lament for a Son

By Nicholas Wolterstorff

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff writes not as a scholar but as a loving father grieving the loss of his son. In brief vignettes he explores with a moving honesty and intensity, all the facets of his experience of this irreversible loss. A profoundly faith-affirming book, this book gives eloquent expression to a grief that is at once unique and universal - a grief for an individual, irreplaceable person.



## Wherever You Go, I Want You to Know ...

By Melissa Kruger

Kids love to dream about what they might do when they grow up - jobs they might have, places they might go, people they might meet. As children embark on life's journey with all their potential and aspirations, use this beautifully illustrated, rhyming storybook to tell them your biggest dream - that whatever they do and wherever they go, they will love and follow Jesus.



# Parish Register

Welcome new members February 2023



Rachel Berkhouse



Greg Berkhouse



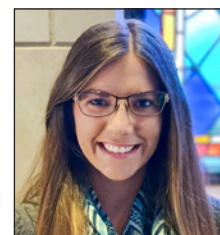
Charlotte Callis



Richard Dericks



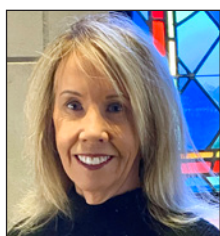
April Dericks



Britani Di Santi



Robert Parker



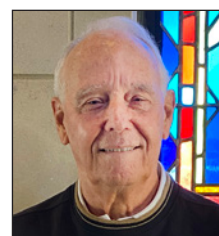
Carol Parker



Mary Peacher



William "Bill" Peacher



Fred Swanda



Linda Swanda

## The joy of new life! We welcome:

**Elanor Louise Fredericka Hutchinson** and **Rosewyn Elizabeth Georgiana Hutchinson**, daughters of Hanna and Dan Hutchinson, were born on December 26.  
**Maeven James McIntosh**, daughter of Breana and Jacob McIntosh, was born on January 10.  
**Charlotte Sutton Powers**, daughter of Barrett and Carly Powers, was born on January 10.  
**Robert Clayton Holk, III**, son of Clay and Jennifer Holk, was born on Jan. 30.

## The sacrament of baptism

**Obadiah Emmanuel Estes**, son of **Lindsey and James Estes**, was baptized on January 15.  
**Annabelle Kay Dericks**, daughter of **April and Richard Dericks**, was baptized on March 9.  
**Elanor Louise Fredericka Hutchinson** and **Rosewyn Elizabeth Georgiana Hutchinson**, daughters of **Dan and Hanna Hutchinson**, was baptized on April 16.

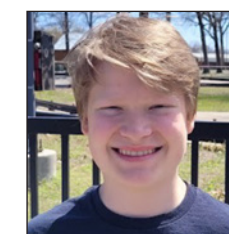
## The celebration of Christian marriage

**George DeShurley** and **Lara Davis** were married on January 7.  
**Britani Di Santi** and **Tyler Bird** were married on April 22.

## With gratitude for the resurrection

**Ron Griswold**, a member since 1995, died December 31.  
**Becky Lankford**, a member since 2013, died January 21.  
**JoAnn Gilbert**, a member since 1997, died on January 26.  
**Jane Mulkey**, a member since 2021, died on February 4.  
**Dambisa Hara**, a member since 2022, died on February 13.  
**Paul Dick**, a member since 2003, died on February 18.  
**Ruby Graff**, a member since 2019, died in February 12.  
**Susan Shults**, a member since 2001, died on March 1.  
**Pamela Kraemer Neumann**, a member since 1966, died on March 22.  
**Robin Hawkins**, a member since 1977, died on April 3.  
**Catherine (Cat) Thompson**, a member since 2017, died on April 8.  
**Anne Nunnelee**, a member since 2018, died on April 13.

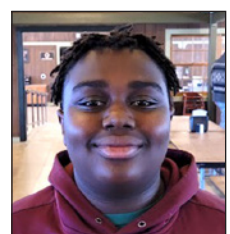
## Welcome new confirmand members



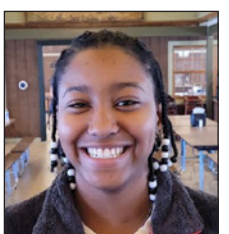
Alex Philp



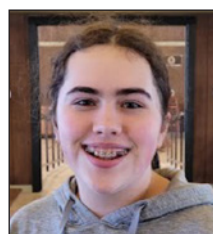
Carol Gitau



David Masaku



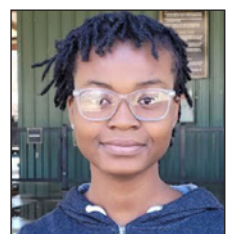
Devyne Ramey



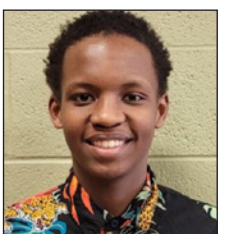
Gloria Shelton



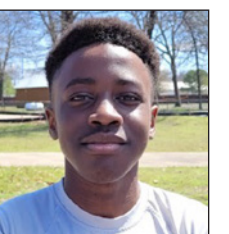
Hope Thompson



Ife Aruna



Jarrett Kamande



Joshua Nsereko



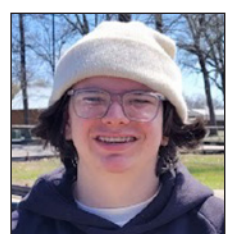
Laurencia Masabarakiza



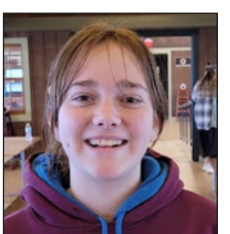
Liam Cavin



Lucy Donohue



Morgan McIntosh



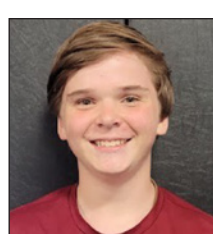
Naomi DeSpain



Nelly Nghtila



Phoebe Stoeppelwerth



Rupert Winton



Sheila Atkinson



Taylor Farris



Vivienne Fravel



Zoe Gingerich



Ready for the next steps to membership?

## Inquirers' Class

Join us for our next Inquirers' Class. For more information, contact **Patricia Hall**, director of new member outreach at 918-301-1028 or email [phall@firstchurchtulsa.org](mailto:phall@firstchurchtulsa.org).



## Pastoral care

For pastoral needs, prayer requests, important family news or a change in contact information, please call 918-584-4701 or email **Kathy Wilson** at [kwilson@firstchurchtulsa.org](mailto:kwilson@firstchurchtulsa.org). To directly request prayer by the **Guild of Intercessors**, call **Paula Peterson** at 918-296-5548 or text 918-688-2163.

## Tidings: The Holy Spirit at work in and through the members of the First Presbyterian Church

**Tidings** is a quarterly publication of First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa, 709 South Boston Avenue, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74119. Read past issues of **Tidings** on our website at [FirstChurchTulsa.org/Tidings](http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/Tidings). If you would like to write an article or take photos for the magazine, please contact Louann Buhlinger at [lbuhlinger@FirstChurchTulsa.org](mailto:lbuhlinger@FirstChurchTulsa.org) or call 918-301-1032.

**Editorial Team:** Louann Buhlinger, Patricia Hall, Kathy Wilson  
**Contributors:** Mark Brown, Louann Buhlinger, Elizabeth DeVore, Patricia Hall, Tom Hillis, Nick McMillan, Rev. Julia Metcalf, Dr. Jim Miller, Katie Williams and Kathy Wilson.

Thank you to the members of the Communications Committee for reviewing and selecting editorial for inclusion.

**Designer:** Paul Marsh  
**Editor:** Louann Buhlinger



## First Church Tulsa online resources

Website	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org">FirstChurchTulsa.org</a>
YouTube channel	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/YouTube">FirstChurchTulsa.org/YouTube</a>
Event calendar	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/Events">FirstChurchTulsa.org/Events</a>
Read and subscribe to E-News	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/E-News">FirstChurchTulsa.org/E-News</a>
Tidings magazine	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/Tidings">FirstChurchTulsa.org/Tidings</a>
Sunday bulletins	<a href="http://FirstChurchTulsa.org/Bulletins">FirstChurchTulsa.org/Bulletins</a>
First Church merchandise	<a href="http://CafePress.com/FirstChurchTulsa">CafePress.com/FirstChurchTulsa</a>



# God's limitless blessings

By Katie Williams

Think of all the blessings God has given us! There are so many it would be impossible to list them all, family, faith, and always knowing in the good and the bad he is walking with us. Blessings big or small are given to us and come with the responsibility of sharing them. We are asked to help those in need like feeding and clothing others and blessing them with hospitality, and in doing so, we also bless Him. Gifts we share with others include our time, our talents and being good stewards with financial blessings.

**"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me ... that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."** –John 15:1-2

Whether we have a little or a lot, we should make financial investments that magnify God and His Kingdom. One way is to steward our assets to provide for future generations. It tells our descendants that, in the same way that God cares for our needs, we have also considered their needs. Supporting the First Presbyterian Foundation is how generations of the past have made sure to care for the children of God of today.

God gives blessings personal to us, the founders and supporters of the foundation have a personal connection to First Presbyterian Church, the community and their faith journey.

Hand in hand and sharing blessing by blessing, the foundation has grown to be able to offer support to our next generation. We must also be willing to commit to sharing God's blessings with the next generations, like those who came before us. Whether time, talent or financial gifts, how do you want to share your blessings?

To learn more about how to share your blessings with the First Presbyterian Foundation call Katie Williams at 918-292-9063.



#### About the author:

Katie Williams is a child of the church and currently serving as the Foundation Director for First Presbyterian. She loves to tell your story.



## Worship with us.

- 8:00 a.m. Chapel, traditional worship
- 8:30 a.m. Stephenson Hall, contemporary worship
- 11:00 a.m. Sanctuary, traditional worship
- 11:00 a.m. Stephenson Hall, contemporary worship
- 11:00 a.m. Great Hall, Tulsa International Fellowship (TIF) worship



First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa  
[FirstChurchTulsa.org](http://FirstChurchTulsa.org)