

# 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



# Tidings

VOL. 69, NO. 1 - SPRING 2024



## Celebrating Together

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” – 1 Chronicles 16:34





## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

### Worship

4 Worship highlights

### Grow

9 Children's ministry

10 Middle & high school ministry

13 UKirk and young adult ministry

14 Adult discipleship

### Serve

17 Member care

18 Mission

20 Affiliate ministries

### Fellowship

22 Congregational life

### Reporting

24 History & Archives

26 Worship statistics

30 Leadership

31 First Church Tulsa Foundation

## BEYOND THE DATA

### 6 Adapting communion

REINSTITUTING THE PRACTICE OF PASSING TRAYS  
by Nick McMillan

### 8 No waiting required

KIDS CAN BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CHURCH RIGHT NOW  
by Gretchen Bashforth, Associate Director of Music

### 11 Building faith, community & inclusivity

INSIDE FIRST CHURCH TULSA'S NEXT GEN YOUTH MINISTRY  
by Nick McMillan and Elizabeth DeVore

### 16 Empowering discipleship

FIRST CHURCH EDUCATES, EQUIPS & ENCOURAGES DISCIPLES  
by Duff Points, Executive Director of Adult Ministries

### 19 Seeds of faith planted in India

PCI OUTREACH IN BHUTAN, ANDHRA PRADESH, BANGLADESH & NEPAL  
by Rev. James Estes

### 21 Cultivating Christ's love in our students

THE LONG GAME OF MASTERWORK ACADEMY  
by Jenette McEntire, Director of Masterwork Academy

### 23 An encouragement toward community

REFLECTIONS ON FELLOWSHIP AT FIRST CHURCH  
by Elizabeth DeVore

### 24 Pipe dream realized

INSTALLATION OF THE MAGNIFICENT NEW KERR CHAPEL ORGAN  
by Ron Pearson, Director of Music Ministries

### 25 With gratitude and celebration

HONORING THE LEGACY OF DR. JAMES D. MILLER  
by Amy Tingleaf

### 27 Parish Register

### 28 A promising future

THOUGHTS ON FIRST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP WITH PATRICIA HALL  
by Mark Brown, Communications Committee Chairman

### 29 The importance of keeping our church roster current

by Kathy Wilson, Ministry Assistant for Pastoral Care



## Letter from the pastor

### ENCOURAGEMENT, APPRECIATION AND A CHALLENGE

By Rev. Dan Hutchinson, Interim pastor

**To say that a lot has happened in the last year would be an understatement.** On October 29, we celebrated the ministry of Dr. Jim Miller and had the opportunity to say thank you for over 31 years of faithful service to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. With this celebration, our church entered a new chapter in its life together.

The fact about new chapters is that you don't know how or when they are going to end – unless you have read the book. But what I have found is that even if you don't know what a particular chapter holds, if you know the author of the book, then you can be confident that whatever might happen in the middle, the story will end in joy.

I feel a bit like this is where we are right now in our life together. As we look back with gratitude and ahead with expectation, I want to offer a word of encouragement, a word of appreciation, and a word of challenge.

**Here is the encouragement:** Simply put, it is the reminder that God is on the throne, and that God is faithful. The prophet Jeremiah puts it this way: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." God is faithful. I hope that as you read through this annual report, you will be reminded of all that God has done this past year and for the past generations of this church. The same God is with us today. He does not change. He does not waver.

I love a story from our own Ron Pearson about Charles-Marie Widor – most famous around here for the Toccata that sends us out into the world with joy and elation on Easter Sunday. Widor served at the same church for 60 years, but he was never more than an interim. As Ron puts it, we are all interims. Pastors come and go. Sessions change. Congregants join and move...But God is unchanging. He is the one who has held us, and we rejoice in his great faithfulness that is new each day and sufficient for every new challenge.

**Now, a word of appreciation:** I am so grateful for this congregation. As we approached the transition, I had friends and colleagues asking me how the church was doing, how the congregation was going to respond, and wondering what the challenges would be moving ahead.

It has been an absolute joy to see the way this congregation has stepped forward and taken seriously the reality that each of us is called into ministry. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4: that there is "one body and one Spirit" and that this same Lord gave some to be apostles, teachers and shepherds, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." As teachers and preachers, we are not here to do the ministry, we are here to equip the saints! We are here to unleash the gifts and the callings of the congregation. And I know I speak for each of my colleagues on staff when I say what a privilege it is to be part of a community that takes this call seriously.

**Finally, my challenge:** Pursue Christ in everything. As the author of Hebrews puts it, "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..." In this season, let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us be known as a community that exalts Jesus, that delights in Jesus, that proclaims Jesus in word and deed. Let us be a community that is so enamored with Jesus that others stop to say, "Who is this man that has captured the hearts and minds of this community?" All for glory of God.

C.S. Lewis writes in Mere Christianity, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."

Friends, we are in a new chapter. We do not know exactly what this chapter will hold or when or how it will end, but we do know the author of the story. We know the One who holds us in His hands. And He is faithful. So we have every reason to move forward with confidence, knowing that God will carry us through into the next chapter with goodness and love!

In Christ  
Rev. Dan Hutchinson





# Worship

## Worship 2023 highlights

- The church continued to offer five **worship services** on Sunday morning including traditional, contemporary and Tulsa International Fellowship (TIF).
- A special sunrise service was held at **Camp Loughridge** on Easter in addition to the five services held at the church on that day.
- **Tulsa International Fellowship** celebrated its 14th anniversary during the summer and hosted special worship nights on Good Friday and New Year's Eve.
- Children's **First Church Choristers** and the youth **Celebration Singers** led worship with voices and chimes on Palm Sunday, Summer Ring and Sing, World Communion Sunday and Christmas Music Sunday.
- The Christmas Eve **Children's Live Nativity** was presented by the largest cast of children and youth since 2019.
- The **Youth Praise Band** focused on advancing their skills and led all youth worship events.
- The **Chancel Choir** presented two concerts: "Singing the Life of Christ, from Prophecy to Resurrection," including the Celebration Singers and First Church Choristers; and "Hymns and Anthems to Lift Your Soul," presented in honor of Dr. Jim Miller for his service as pastor for 31 years.
- The **Overtones Bells** and **Gloria Women's Choir** led worship on several occasions.
- Ron Pearson's **50th Annual Organ Concert** included The University of Tulsa Chamber Orchestra and was broadcast on YouTube and Facebook.
- The **new organ** for Kerr Chapel, built by Foley-Baker Inc. of Tolland, Connecticut, was installed in December; the project will be completed in early 2024.
- **Keith and Kristyn Getty's Sing: An Irish Christmas** concert filled the Sanctuary with guests and with beautiful Christmas worship. The Chancel Choir and the children's and youth choirs served as accompaniment to the concert.







# Adapting communion

## REINSTITUTING THE PRACTICE OF PASSING TRAYS

by Nick McMillan

Congregants who took communion in the Sanctuary before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic will remember it as an occasion of passing trays containing wafers and cups of juice.

With the COVID pandemic officially declared over in 2023, **Gary Mathews**, former clerk of session and co-chair of Communion, reports congregants ask when the passing trays communion practice will resume.

After the initial switch to using sealed communion packets to prevent COVID transmission, communion resumed in the Sanctuary via intinction instead of passing trays. After the pandemic subsided, attendance at the Sanctuary services did not immediately increase enough to make passing the communion trays feasible.

Also known as “come forward” communion, intinction is the process by which congregants stand, walk down the aisles to the front of the Sanctuary, tear a piece of bread from a communion loaf (representing the Body of Christ), and dip it in a cup containing juice (representing the Blood of Christ) while the words of institution are spoken by an elder or pastor.

The words of institution remind us how Christ gave his body and shed his blood for us and our salvation. “This is the Body of Christ, broken for you in love,” is uttered upon receiving the bread and, “This is the Blood of Christ, shed for you in love,” when receiving the juice.

As attested by the two candles placed on either side of the communion table, communion is one of two sacraments, along with baptism, recognized by the Presbyterian Church.

John Calvin maintained that the sacrament of communion is a sign and seal in which bread and juice symbolize how Christ is “continually supplying to us the food to sustain and preserve us in that life into which he has begotten us by his Word.”

In 1 Corinthians 10:17, apostle Paul affirms that by partaking in this shared feast together, disciples of Christ who are many become one body.

**“Just as bread and wine sustain physical life, so are souls fed by Christ.”**

– John Calvin



### How often is communion served?

The Presbyterian Book of Order prescribes the serving of communion at least once a quarter. At First Church, the schedule for communion in the Sanctuary service is prepared in the Worship and Music committee and then authorized by the Session. Communion may be served at other services as well, including the Presbyterian Leader’s Conference, All Saint’s Day, First Church retreats, UKirk services, and weddings.

Kerr Chapel and Contemporary worship services include communion every Sunday and TIF includes communion on the first Sunday of the month. Deacons and Elders serve home communion matching the schedule of the Sunday Sanctuary service, and home communion can be served by a pastor at their discretion at any time.



Intinction, also known as “come forward” communion

### Home communion

First Church has a rich history of providing home communion. There are various means of conveying communion elements in homes. Delivery sets used by pastors for home communion contain single-serving flagon and cups, whereas the deacons and elders carry the elements in packets. Reverend Charles Kerr, First Church pastor from 1900 to 1941, used a home communion kit that is now on display in Miller Library.



### Benefits to each communion style

Passing trays works best when people are sitting close to one another in the pews. Where there is a significant distance from one person to another, someone has to stand up and carry the tray to the next person. This can be a challenge for people who find it difficult to stand up and walk in the narrow space between pews while balancing a tray with several cups of juice or bread.

Some congregants prefer communion by intinction. **Joan Hoar**, First Church historian emerita, finds that coming forward to take communion in a procession provides more opportunity to reflect on the meaning of communion. Additionally, intinction communion is more personal when pastors include a person’s name in the words of institution.

At the same time, “a lot of symbolism is lost by intinction,” says **Steve Wilson**, director of high school youth ministry, who prefers the contrasting emphases of taking the bread and the wine separately. Also, the expectation that each person repeats the words of institution when passing trays affirms the priesthood of all believers.

Reinstituting the practice of passing trays, however, requires more steps before, during, and after the service than intinction. Although the serving time remains roughly the same, preparing separate cups of juice and bread takes significantly more time than serving communion by intinction. Further, whereas intinction requires a combined 16 elders and pastors to serve, it takes more elders than actually serve on session to pass trays, with an elder is stationed at every fourth pew to pass the trays back and forth.

Previously, the first session meeting of every year included training on passing trays and uttering the words of institution. Elders and pastors may need to encourage congregants to learn to repeat these words as we once again pass trays.

In preparation for Pentecost communion, the Presbyterian Women have selflessly volunteered to polish the set of silver serving trays that have tarnished since last used a few years ago.

Receiving communion through passing trays resumes this year when services are combined in the Sanctuary for Pentecost and on World Communion Sunday. This schedule will likely continue for the foreseeable future.

Whether you prefer to take communion by intinction or by passing trays, you will be able to find spiritual nourishment at a Sanctuary service.



Reverend Charles Kerr, First Church pastor from 1900 to 1941, used this home communion kit which is now on display in Miller Library.

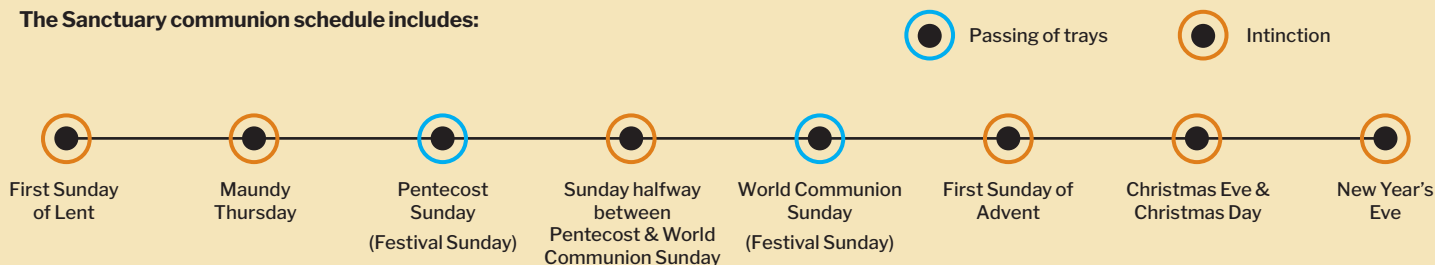


Now preserved by History & Archives, this communion tray was used at First Church in the early 1900s.



The current communion set.

### The Sanctuary communion schedule includes:







Keith and Kristyn Getty invited the children's and youth choirs to perform with them at their Christmas concert in the Sanctuary.

# No waiting required

KIDS CAN BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE CHURCH RIGHT NOW.

by Gretchen Bashforth, Associate Director of Music Ministries

It has been said that you can gauge the health of a church by how well it sings. First Church members sing well, from the congregation to the choirs, and the oldest down to the youngest in our children's choirs. The recent surge in participation in the youth and children's choir programs is a reminder that by singing in the choir, children can be an integral part of the church right now.

Kids' participation in choir at First Church is currently surging. This hasn't always been the case, but recently the attitude of participation is improving. Several church members who grew up singing in the choir are now bringing their own children to be part of the choir. We are grateful that there is now a strong generational tradition of singing in the children's choir.

## The church is one of the few places where children still have an opportunity to sing in a choir.

Many schools have eliminated children's music programs, leaving the church as one of the few places where children can sing in a choir. First Church offers children's and youth music programs catering to different levels of commitment.

The annual Christmas Eve Nativity is open to all kids who want to participate in November and December. Children and youth tell the story of Jesus' birth with songs, scenes and scripture, all in Biblical costumes. Even our youngest disciples can participate as sheep and Bethlehem stars. The two-month commitment gives families an introduction to our children's and youth programs.

On the other hand, year-round choir groups like the Choristers and Celebration Singers require a commitment of attendance, practice and discipline. These choirs teach kids skills in tone, rhythm, dynamics, posture, breathing and diction. With support from their parents, kids in these choirs also learn how to have discipline, meet expectations and how to collectively follow a director.

Choir participation also serves as a creative way to connect new families into the church community. Kids bringing their friends to choir can result in entire families becoming members once they are exposed to First Church.

2023 saw one of the highest numbers of kids participating in the Christmas Eve Nativity performance. It is a major draw for participation



### Singing is one of the best ways to memorize scripture.

Singing makes it easier to memorize God's Word, and it imprints scripture on our hearts. Singing is mentioned over 400 times in the Bible, for example, Ephesians 5:19 says, "Speak to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing joyfully to the Lord."

### Singing in the choir is accessible to every age.

Participating in the choir is accessible to everyone, especially children. No prerequisites, musical talent or equipment needed, just use your voice and sing to the Lord.

### Churches need children's and youth choirs.

When kids participate in choir, it has a profound effect. As children contribute to worship by singing, it helps them to realize that, even though they're kids, they are a valuable part the church.

if kids learn they will get to perform at the Christmas Eve Nativity, or sing in a concert with Keith and Kristyn Getty or the Chancel Choir. All the time, we see kids eager to sign up for choir after seeing their friends in the annual Christmas Eve Nativity performance. Also, the eight-week summer Ring & Sing program is another activity that draws kids to join the choir.

Inviting children to engage in worship yields significant results. As children actively contribute to worship through singing, it fosters their understanding that despite their youth, they are an integral part of the church right now.



# Grow

DISCIPLESHIP AT FIRST CHURCH TULSA

## Children's Ministry 2023 highlights

- **Little Lambs** celebrated six years and met in Wiseman Hall.
- Our **Sunday morning programming** continued to be the cornerstone of Children's Ministries using "The Beginners Gospel Storybook" curriculum for nursery/Preschool and "The Gospel Project" for kids' curriculum for elementary children.
- **AWANA** on Wednesday evenings helped children grow spiritually through memorizing scripture in a fun environment while their parents attended classes and Bible studies.
- First Church Kids hosted **Spring Festival, Summer Swim, Kindergarten Blessing, Fourth Grade Bible Presentation, Advent Workshop, Christmas AWANA and Carols, Cookies & Cocoa.**
- **VBS, VBX and WeeBS** were held in June for children age 3-12. 165 participants including HI Helpers and volunteers came together for one week of Bible stories, games, songs, crafts and other fun activities.
- Through the curriculum "The Gospel Project for Kids," children assisted in collecting toiletry donations for Helping Hand Ministry, as well as school supplies donations with the Presbyterian Women.
- We offered **parenting book studies and discussions** on Thursdays at lunch.
- Sunday school and K groups targeting parents of young children started and were well attended.





# Grow

DISCIPLESHIP AT  
FIRST CHURCH TULSA

## Middle School and High School Ministry 2023 highlights

- On Wednesday nights, all youth met in the Powerhouse. Grades 5-8 gathered for P.O.W., grades 10-12 for Amass Exodus and grade 9 for Confirmation.
- For their Summer Mission trips the Pathfinders served at Voice of Hope in West Dallas and Exodus served at several locations in St. Louis.
- We had 21 students go through the confirmation process and become members of First Church.
- Pathfinders Fall Retreat returned to New Life Ranch, Frontier Cove and the Exodus Retreat returned to New Life Ranch, Flint Valley.
- The 2023 Ignite interns were Jacob Hand and Morgan McIntosh and the Heather Davis Intern was Emma Woodard.



# Building faith, community & inclusivity

INSIDE FIRST CHURCH TULSA'S NEXT GEN YOUTH MINISTRY

by Nick McMillan and Elizabeth DeVore

First Church's Next Gen youth ministry is dedicated to nurturing faith and community, leading students to spiritual growth and inclusivity among its members. It reflects the church's mission to equip youth as ambassadors of Christ's love and light.

**Pathfinders** is First Church Tulsa's middle school ministry for students 5th to 8th grade and includes weekly programming, Wednesday nights (POW), Sunday school, Fall Retreat, summer Mission Trip, and the Pathfinder Tournament of Awesomeness. The youth group serves 45-60 kids each week.

**Jackson Seibert**, director of middle school ministries, says, "The best part of Pathfinders is not the numbers of students involved, but it is the depth of faith and curiosity of the students. Our youth group will always have students at various levels of their faith journey, but I observe that the average Pathfinder is seeking to deepen their relationship with God."

Jackson emphasizes that first God needs the glory for what He is doing in these students' lives. Parents are highly engaged in their children's faith journeys, which is a huge factor.

**"The best part of Pathfinders is not the numbers of students involved, but it is the depth of faith and curiosity of the students."**

— Jackson Seibert, director of middle school ministries

"Much of 'our success' is due to the volunteers that have invested their time and hearts into the ministry along with the students" says Jackson. We have the best volunteers in the church!"

He adds, "My favorite activity is the mission trips because they are fun and you get to do different things you wouldn't

normally do." Since 2014, Pathfinders have served at Voice of Hope in Dallas, helping run the children's VBS among other projects. Eighth grader **Sarina Smith** says, "we get to hang out with the kids [on mission trips] and make them happy. And I like going back and seeing their smiles."

Pathfinders on Wednesdays (POW) is a midweek program of worship, small groups, and games. Fifth grader **Sophia John-Bowman** says, "I really like the worship and I think it's cool that we have our own praise band." It is a great place to build community and walk in faith together.

Jackson says, "As we gather, Jesus' presence is indeed felt on Wednesday nights. Small group conversations allow us to dig deeper into our faith. Wednesdays are also just a lot of fun." Pathfinders have been increasing their Biblical literacy through the Discovery Bible Study curriculum.





# Inside Next Gen Youth Ministry cont.

What is the current state of high school youth ministry at First Church? Quoting Francis Chen, **Steve Wilson**, director of high school youth ministry, says, "Whether you're serving two hundred or two, the question is, 'How is God moving in your group?'"

In 2023, Steve saw God moving in our youth ministry when high schoolers took responsibility for living faithfully and building a community of faith. On a St. Louis mission trip, youth members made the conscious and visible effort to be inclusive. Steve reports, "On mission trips, people spend a lot of time together, and their personalities come out. This doesn't always make it easy for everyone to be inclusive of each other.

You could see how the youth made deliberate efforts to keep people together in activities throughout the day so no one was left out."

During weekly Wednesday night programming known as AMASS Exodus, many youth members brought friends from outside the church. "Since the disruption and isolation of the COVID pandemic, many high schoolers are happy to be in community," Steve says, "they are actively building community and taking responsibility for bringing friends in. This is a new thing." Oftentimes, this visiting is reciprocal, and First Church youth visited their friends' churches in return.

God has blessed our youth ministry with an active and full youth praise band. Excelling in contemporary worship music and featuring multiple guitarists, vocalists, and percussionists, the youth praise band practices and leads worship every Wednesday. The youth praise band's members also lead worship in contemporary and TIF services on Sundays and in the sanctuary when services are combined.

In the fall, Youth Ministry led a retreat at New Life Ranch, Flint Valley, near the Arkansas border in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. Youth were provided structured group worship and outdoor activities and the chance to offer devotion to God in the glories of nature. A youth member attending the retreat, **Kelsey Wilberforce**, reports, "With the retreat I was able to draw closer to God without any distractions of media. The retreat allowed us to have spiritual-focused activities, which really helped me learn more ways to include God more in my life."

Giving up phones is a requirement of the mission trips and retreats, and the youth are increasingly happy to comply. "Nobody complains they won't have phones," Steve says in relief. "At first, there was pushback both by youth and parents with the no-phones rule. They're starting to realize the impact phones have on them in terms of actually being present." The God-centered nature of these retreats is described by youth member, **Gloria Shelton**: "It really allowed me to glorify God in community with my friends, which is a huge gift. Being able to share in the joy of our Lord with one another is always my favorite part."

In addition to the community-minded leadership and musicality of current members, Steve notices the intention to take the Gospel seriously and finds youth actively making it part of their lives. "Several youth are engaging the Bible. Students are getting into scripture because they want to. They want to know how to incorporate God into everything they do, their television, music, and reading. They're seeking to answer what does Christian living look like for a young person in this day and age?" Our youth ministry supports youth as they draw closer to Christ, that they may be salt and light to the world.

**"The students are actively building community and taking responsibility for bringing friends in."**

— Steve Wilson, director of high school youth ministry



# Grow

## DISCIPLESHIP AT FIRST CHURCH TULSA

### UKirk College Ministry

UKirk seeks to serve college-aged students (18-24) who have a touchpoint with First Church. This touchpoint can occur through membership, attendance, events on campus and beyond. UKirk's mission is to walk alongside these students in a way that furthers their relationship with Jesus Christ and draws them into the love God has for them, others and the world. This ministry provides Bible study, worship, service, fellowship and one-on-one mentorship. Our hope is that they would find a space that grows and deepens their relationship and connection with the Lord, the church and the community around them while they walk through these transitional years.

### 2023 highlights

- Engaged in weekly one-on-one Bible study
- Enjoyed fellowship at events like Christmas Break Game Night
- Hosted summer Bible study with dinner in the Courtyard for students home for the summer
- UKirk students participated in various summer ministries and volunteer opportunities

### Young Adults Ministry

Young Adults Ministry serves 20s and 30s in whatever stage of life and seeks to connect them with one another and with the larger church. These connection points happen through opportunities tailored to this age, including **Sunday School**, **K Groups** and fellowship events. It also includes intergenerational opportunities such as worship, service, **Seasons Women's Gatherings**, men's Bible studies, and one-on-one mentorship. Our commitment is to nurture connections and help cultivate meaningful relationships with one another with a sense of belonging. In this, our hope is that these connections would point back to Christ and bring strength and growth in relationship with Him.

### 2023 highlights

- Young Adult Sunday School led by Rev. Metcalf
- Intergenerational Sunday School led by Rev. Hutchinson
- Weekly K-Groups
- Monthly fellowship events





# Grow

## DISCIPLESHIP AT FIRST CHURCH TULSA

### Adult Discipleship & Education 2023 highlights

- In February, First Church hosted **Dr. Ivan Rusyn**, president of the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary, who shared stories of how they are ministering and caring for others amid war and human suffering.
- Throughout the year in the twice-a-week **Pastor's Study classes**, Dr. Jim Miller taught on J.I. Packer's *Knowing Christianity*, C.S. Lewis' selected essays, and then Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin's book *Confronting Christianity*. Participants considered and discussed contemporary concerns and the Christian faith.
- **Rev. Julia Metcalf led three retreats** on the Spiritual Disciplines throughout the year. Participants practiced different forms of prayer, journaled, and spent time drawing near to Jesus Christ.
- **Holy Week Prayer Vigil**: Members maintained a continuous prayer chain from Maundy Thursday to Resurrection Sunday. Laurel Baird also prepared prayer stations from Holy Week through Pentecost.
- **Wednesday Night Downtown Tulsa (WNDT)** provided opportunities for adults to grow in knowledge and faith.
- Rev. Wambugu Gachungi led **Seekers** through a weekly deep dive into the sermon texts.
- **K Groups & Wednesday Nights**: Explored John Ortberg's "From Ashes to Beauty" daily devotionals during Lent and welcomed Dr. Ortberg for preaching and teaching the Sunday after Easter.
- **K Groups**: Over 200 members studied Ortberg's series during Lent and John Mark Cromer's *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* in the fall. Some groups focused on studying scripture by either following the sermon texts or by using Bible study materials.
- Our **16 Sunday School classes** delved into scripture, theology, and church history, including special summer series on Faith & Film. Rev. Hutchinson and Rev. Metcalf wrote and created a church-wide video series for Advent called "The Journey to Bethlehem."
- **Glimpses of Grace**: Testimonies were shared by David Osterholt, Rev. Julia Metcalf, Solomon Tsuma, Anna Milligan about how the Lord works through their lives.
- **Weekday class offerings** included the Men's Monday Bible study, Monday School, Precept Bible study, Pastor's study, Seeker's Bible study, Downtown Theological Roundtable, Parenting book study group, and Before the Rooster Crows class on Saturday morning. Mary Lee Weaver taught a special art course called "Watercolor the Word."
- Rev. Wambugu and Faith Gachungi hosted a **backyard Bible study** during the summer.
- **Seasons Women's Gathering**, hosted by Sarah Savage and Rev. Julia Metcalf, continued to meet monthly on Monday evenings for fellowship, study, and friendship building.
- Dr. Miller and guest pastors addressed **contemporary challenges facing the Church**. Joining Dr. Miller were: Pastor Anthony Scott, Fr. George Eber, Rev. Terry Buxton, Bishop David Konderla, Dr. Jeff Francis.
- During the fall semester, pastors delved into **Orthodoxy, Reformed, and Evangelical themes**.
- **Jerry and Anne McCoy** led couples through conversations and experiences in a class called *6 Great Dates*.
- First Church hosted **Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin** for a community-wide speaker program in September where she spoke on "Four Things Christians Must Reclaim."







# Empowering Discipleship

FIRST CHURCH EDUCATES, EQUIPS & ENCOURAGES DISCIPLES

by Duff Points, Executive Director of Adult Ministries

The gospel accounts tell us that when Jesus called his apostles, he said to them, "Follow me." And they did! Do you suppose their hearts burned in their chests with a clear knowing that their lives were about to change dramatically?

It is important that we know His story, important that we meet the living Lord in the midst of the scriptures, and be open to receiving Him and allowing Him to transform our lives just like He did the apostles' lives 2000 years ago. It is imperative that we encounter Jesus Christ and come to know Him, love Him, and trust Him. In so doing, we join the apostles, and countless believers since then, in whole heartedly choosing to follow our Savior for the rest of our lives.



Therefore, First Church is committed to educating, equipping and encouraging disciples in their calling from Christ. As a family of faith, we pick up our Bibles in our classes and homes and we study the scriptures together; scripture that is God-breathed and trains us in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:15-17). We carve off time for retreats to delve into prayer and spiritual disciplines. Some of us attend Season's monthly gatherings, or a PW Circle, or the Precept Bible study. Others have lunch together and dig into the Word during the Men's Monday

Bible study, or drive downtown at 7 a.m. for an early morning men's K Group. We bring our kids and grandkids to Wednesday night programs while we stay for adult class offerings that educate us and strengthen us as disciples.

Each year the topics and teachers may vary but the commitment to equipping ourselves to serve the Lord as devoted disciples stays the same.

## Follow Jesus, Make New Disciples

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* - Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus calls us to "follow"; he also asks us to "go, make, baptize, and teach." We honor Christ when we care for his lambs, when we serve those that He loves.



Thus, we do well to examine our discipleship efforts as a church and as individuals:

- **How have I shared the Gospel (good news of Jesus Christ) with others who may not have a relationship with Him?**
- **When have I seen a work colleague hurting, worried, or anxious and offered to pray with him or her?**
- **When did I give someone hungry something to eat? Someone thirsty something to drink? When did I invite in a stranger? Or, provide clothes to someone who needed them? When was someone sick and I looked after them? When was someone in prison and I visited them?**
- **When have I invited a neighbor to attend a worship service with my family?**
- **Whom have I routinely met for coffee to talk about Jesus Christ and His overflowing and sacrificial love? Did I give this friend a Bible?**
- **When have I traveled to Africa or Ireland to serve alongside the church there? When have I helped those in need at Masterwork Academy, Anderson Elementary, Helping Hand Ministry, or any of our mission partners?**

And so, as individuals and as a family of faith, we pray for wisdom and direction in our future discipleship endeavors.

Dear Father,

*We come to you with the desire to follow where you lead. Let us be alert to how you strengthen and equip us to fully serve you and your kingdom.*

*Give us undivided hearts as we obey Jesus' teachings and act as His ambassadors of good news. Prompt us when we meet someone who is lost and hurting to share the gospel and the warmth of Christian love with them.*

*Father we thank you that you did not leave us alone and burdened with sin; rather, you sent Jesus to redeem us. With grateful hearts for His sacrifice on our behalf, let us go out and joyfully share His light with our friends, neighbors, community, and the world. In the name of Jesus, we pray.*

Amen.

# Serve

MISSIONS OF FIRST CHURCH TULSA

## Member Care 2023 highlights

- **The Sisterhood**, First Church's ministry to widows, held monthly fellowship activities including luncheons, visiting the Tulsa Botanic Garden, Touring Woolaroc Museum, high tea at Sheri Allen's home, presentation about good health practices by Holly Thompson, a stained glass tour with Joan Hoar, and the annual Christmas luncheon hosted by the First Ladies council.
- The Sisterhood delivered grief support books to widows and widowers after suffering loss.
- Re-activated the **Volunteer Chaplains ministry** for weekly hospital visitations.
- **Faith Partners** provided support and encouragement for those who were struggling with addiction and related family members.
- Entered and maintained **parish register data** used in the weekly bulletin and Tidings magazine.
- Maintained statistics for PCUSA and Rolls & Registers for the church.





# Serve

FIRST CHURCH TULSA'S  
LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

## Mission 2023 highlights

- The 8:10 Committee approved distribution of \$990,650 in **mission funds** to six mission partners to serve the common good in Tulsa.
- Hosted reception to thank and inform **tenants of the 8:10 building** of service rendered because of their occupancy.
- Partnered with **Little Light House** for their Early Intervention Program.
- Relaunched **global service trips** sending 22 mission ambassadors to serve congregations in Ireland and Kenya.
- Sponsored a church mission director in **Bondeni, Kenya**.
- Welcomed **Dr. Ivan Rusyn** and gave more than \$50,000 to support the ministry of the seminary in Kiev.
- Relaunched **Christmas giftback program**.
- Grew the number of **lunch buddies** at Anderson Elementary school.
- Continued **Works of HeArt Program** at the Tulsa Day Center.



## Seeds of faith planted in India

PCI OUTREACH IN BHUTAN, ANDHRA PRADESH, BANGLADESH & NEPAL

by Rev. James Estes

The Presbyterian Church of India (PCI) is making an impact in their country, reaching vast lands from the mountains of Bhutan to the bustling communities of India's Andhra Pradesh province, and plans to reach into Bangladesh and Nepal. Each place, with its unique culture and challenges, is a mission field ripe for hope and transformation through Jesus Christ.

In Bhutan, a country known for its stunning landscapes, the spiritual ground is just as vast. The PCI has welcomed 10 new church planters, making a team of 95 dedicated individuals who are working tirelessly to make the goodness, beauty and lordship of Jesus known.

Then, there's the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, a region rich in history. Here, the PCI's message of love finds its voice among communities, often transforming indifference into curiosity and spiritual awakening. Hundreds of people who live near a PCI church have found a new path in life through faith in Jesus, thanks to the ministry and discipleship of the PCI.

These efforts also extend to Bangladesh and Nepal, where the ground is being prepared for new seeds of faith to be sown. The anticipation of what this new chapter will bring adds to the collective prayer needs of our community.

Speaking of prayers, there are three urgent ones to carry in our hearts.

**First**, for the courage and safety of the PCI church planters, especially in Bhutan, as they navigate their vital work.

**Second**, for the Gospel to flourish in Andhra Pradesh, reaching hearts and transforming lives.

**And third**, for the beginnings of our ministry in Bangladesh and Nepal, that it may grow strong roots and spread wide branches through favor and the Lord opening doors in these areas.

In most of India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, Christianity is a whisper among the masses. And yet, because of the ministry of our partners in the PCI, the light of the gospel is changing lives and giving hope and freedom to many.



Despite challenges and opposition, these believers stand firm in their commitment to Christ, embracing baptism as a symbol of their newfound faith.



# Serve

## FIRST CHURCH TULSA'S AFFILIATE MINISTRIES



### Masterwork Academy highlights

- Purple bus was acquired for 2023 school year, enhancing ministry with flexible scheduling and expanded event transportation. Public debut at 2023 Tulsa Christmas Parade.
- Summer camp attendance: 16 students at Kids Across America (KAA), 30 students at Camp Loughridge and 18 students for the arts intensive workshop at Masterwork Academy producing the musical, *Dinosaurs Before Dark*.
- Graphic design and computer animation lab launched with summer camp, offering Gimp and Blender software training, thanks to scholarships from The Spark Studio. Fall program included a five-week animation and design lab for sixth and seventh graders.
- Fall semester welcomed new staff: Braden Clapp (Music Instructor), David Lepine (Bible and Piano Lab Instructor), Rita Helwedge (Teaching Assistant), and James Rice (Bus Driver).
- Celebrated Masterwork Academy's sixth anniversary on July 24.



### Helping Hand Ministry

Helping Hand Ministry (HHM) ended the year 2023 disbursing funds in the amount of \$450,443 that assisted 3,613 Tulsa County residents with our "Basic Needs Assistance Program" as follows:

- Provided 19,170 meals to 2,130 family members
- Assisted 1,122 family members avoid a cut-off of utility services
- Helped 289 families avoid an eviction from their landlord
- Helped 72 individuals secure a photo ID necessary for employment

With First Presbyterian Church donating all our overhead expenses and an all volunteer staff, HHM is able to use 100 percent of donated funds towards helping Tulsa County residents through a difficult time in their lives.



### Camp Loughridge

"To provide a quality, year-round, intergenerational facility in a rustic natural environment for the promotion of Christian growth and spiritual renewal."

- 1,021 campers and six weeks of camp (had to cancel one week due to Father's Day storm)
- 228 campers received scholarships
- 278 different events at camp from 159 different organizations around Tulsa
- Hosted multiple youth and children's retreats in the summer and fall with several serving more than our 70-bed capacity
- 31 Campers in our new camp for children with physical and mental disabilities
- Employed summer staff from three different countries<sup>1</sup>



### Scouts BSA Troop 1

- Since 1910, Troop 1 has been providing an opportunity for boys and girls to grow in a family-focused, faith-based program of leadership and service.
- 2023 Eagle Scouts are Henderson Vincent, son of Tom Vincent and Rachel Blue; and Genaro Blake, son of Genaro Blake and Luisa Blake Bravo.
- Monthly campouts and adventure trips including campouts at Oklahoma state parks, Trappers' Rendezvous in January, Camp Hale in June, and a summer high adventure to the Black Hills of South Dakota.
- Served as Fire Watch at the annual Camp Loughridge Epiphany service in January.
- Started First Church's new chapter of Scouting USA Troop for Girls.



## Cultivating Christ's love in our students

### THE LONG GAME OF MASTERWORK ACADEMY

by Jenette McEntire, Executive Director of Masterwork Academy

Five years ago, Alexa breezed into the art studio noisily, along with the rest of the fifth-grade group. Surrounded by friends and eager to share some drama from the school day, she was oblivious to her voice level. Miss Laura, Masterwork Academy's Visual Art Instructor, called the class to attention to begin the afternoon's session. With a bit of sass, Alexa grudgingly followed along as Miss Laura guided the students through the lesson. More than perfection in the product, we work for discipline and mastery of the process. At the end of the day, Alexa and her classmates produced some good work despite ample "I can't's".

This is a glimpse of the everyday. Students come to us from a long school day, not a bubble. We greet them at Masterwork after they have faced academic challenges, social struggles, and many other obstacles. We pray that by interrupting these stressors with truth, goodness, and beauty, we clear the children's vision enough to allow them to see Jesus through the arts.

"That every child will fully embrace his or her identity as a masterwork in Christ" is the stated vision of Masterwork Academy.

**Our vision is a long game—a life of new creation, a lifetime of discipleship, a commitment to the good work God has prepared for each student.**

At our Open House last fall, Alexa (now in 10th grade) attended as the guest of her younger sibling, who is a current Masterwork student. In the art studio, Alexa pulled out her phone to show Miss Laura an album of artwork she had created. Alexa said, "I came tonight specifically to show you my art. Miss Laura, you are the only person who took the time to teach me how to draw, and if it weren't for Masterwork, I wouldn't be pursuing the arts today."

I've heard it said, "If you want to change the story, change the storytellers." There is no more profound change, no more significant alteration than

to be transformed into the image of Christ. Our key verse, Ephesians 2:10, describes God's master stroke in our lives, "For we are God's workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus*, for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Masterwork Academy recognizes we are not the ones who can affect the most significant change in North Tulsa, but we can make a lasting impact on the ones who will. Our students will grow to be the leaders, business owners, families, teachers, and storytellers who will shape our city in the years to come. It's a long game, but God is patient and the work He has prepared for us is good. In the meantime, Masterwork Academy will continue to cultivate Christ's love in our students' lives through excellence in arts education.

Please join us! There are many ways to serve at Masterwork. We are seeking tutors, classroom helpers, administrative support, prayer partners, back-office help, and more! Contact us at [create@masterworkacademy.org](mailto:create@masterworkacademy.org) or call 918-954-1100.



Masterwork students explore the art next door in the art alley just north of the Bernsen.



# Fellowship

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE  
AT FIRST CHURCH TULSA

## Congregational Life 2023 highlights

- We celebrated **Epiphany** with a sunset bonfire by the waters of Lake Parthenia at Camp Loughridge.
- Dr. Wes Vander Lugt and his family returned to Oklahoma as the keynote speaker for our **All-Church Retreat**. The weekend provided time for worship, heartfelt conversations, and fellowship and fun.
- **Breakfast on Boston** served as a time for the congregation to joyfully celebrate the Lord's blessings and to kick off the fall programs.
- First Family dinners were held in the Courtyard on Pentecost Sunday and the Fourth of July.
- Celebrations honoring Dr. Miller continued throughout the fall.
- **Pastors Fun Night** was held during Fall Break in October and offered lively games and activities including egg roulette.
- Once again, Camp Loughridge provided the perfect location for the annual **Fall Festival**. The Pitmasters prepared delicious barbeque and family and friends enjoyed hayrides, music, trunk or treat, and inflatables.



## An encouragement toward community

REFLECTIONS ON FELLOWSHIP AT FIRST CHURCH

by Elizabeth DeVore

Hebrews 10:24–25 says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

2023 brought so many meaningful events into the life of First Church. From plunging into the Camp Loughridge lake at the Epiphany bonfire, the All-Church Retreat, First Family lunches, Breakfast on Boston, Fall Festival, and celebrating the retirement of our beloved Rev. Dr. Jim Miller, it was a wonderful year of togetherness in Christ.

Longtime member, **Judy Brill**, said, “My favorite all-church event is Breakfast on Boston! Being able to see and visit with my fellow worshippers who attend a different service is a delight and blessing.” This year we had a record number of attendees enjoying the beautiful weather, music from Grady Nichols, delicious Chef Joseph food, and the delight of balloons, face painting, and the photo booth.

Several First Church members had the same response when asked what church community meant to them...family! **Pam Hillis** expressed

that she was really reminded how special her long-time friendships were after coming back from being away during the pandemic. “We are really present for each other; with meals during hard times, being vulnerable and loved, being pointed toward Christ in spite of circumstances, having fun together, serving together, and on and on and on.”

**Laura Stockbridge**, who helped chair Breakfast on Boston, expressed that church community for her goes beyond mere friendship. “They’re your prayer partners, encouragers, confidants, and challengers. They sit with you in your trenches and delight with you in your celebrations.”

**Faith Wambugu**, a member of the TIF community who has served on the congregational life committee remarks that church community is a place where three things happen: we belong, we embrace others and we grow each other. She said, “The outcome of these three things is multiplication of believers.”

**Grace Shelton** remarks that, “It feels like I get to link arms with others in raising my kids... My family feels cared for and comforted by this extension of family we call the church. I truly couldn’t imagine doing life without our church family.”

2024 is sure to bring the annual events we all know and love and a chance to gather in new ways as well. Food, fellowship, and fun will be had as we have opportunities for members and guests to grow with one another and strengthen relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It takes a host of volunteers and leaders to help put these events on. If you would like to be involved in helping plan a fellowship activity please reach out to **Elizabeth DeVore**, [eldevore7@gmail.com](mailto:eldevore7@gmail.com) or 918-728-5327.







Left to right: Bill Wiles, Bill Hellen, Ronda Falkensten, Jill Chancellor, Eileen Leonard and Vicky Wilcoxon.

## History & Archives 2023 highlights

- **Mary Anne Marberry** was installed as historian; **Joan William Hoar** was named historian emeritus.
- Obtained digital copy of Meals on Wheels' **Betty Payne** archives through collaboration with MOW staff.
- Supported **PH.D. Candidate Paul Okoruwa's** race relations theology dissertation research.
- Hosted Presbyterian Historical Society Archival Researcher, **Jill Chancellor**, for review of History & Archives operations and **Dwight Mission records**.
- Partnered with **Presbyterian Historical Society** to digitize early 1900s Dwight Mission records for accessibility on PHS website.
- Initiated quarterly **docent-led tours** for church members post-Sunday services, serving 271 individuals with art and architecture tours.
- Participated in "**Capturing the Past: An Oral History Workshop**" by Helmerich Center for American Research.
- Addressed seven **research requests** from members and the public.



# Pipe dream realized

INSTALLATION OF THE MAGNIFICENT NEW KERR CHAPEL ORGAN

*by Ron Pearson, Director of Music Ministries*

Since its dedication in 1955, the Kerr Chapel has been a favored venue for worship services, memorial services, weddings, and other events that fit into a space with a seating capacity of about 110. Thanks to the generous gifts of First Church members and friends, a new organ now fills the room with majestic and inspiring music.

In May 2021 a contract was signed with Foley-Baker, Inc. of Tolland, Connecticut, to furnish a new organ which was custom designed for the Kerr Chapel; this same company carried out a very successful renovation and upgrade of the Sanctuary organ in 2013-2014.

The previous Chapel organ included about 400 pipes; it was manufactured in 1941 and it had served us well for decades but it was living on borrowed time. The new organ has 712 pipes, which provide much more variety and tonal color than the previous instrument. The console shell of the previous organ was retained and refinished; all mechanical, electrical, and pneumatic systems in the console and chambers are new.

A special feature of the new organ will be the installation of a commissioned art project consisting of twenty pipes, ten on each side, which have been painted and decorated with Christian symbols by local artist Ronda Roush. These pipes will be mounted in front of the large wood grilles which face the congregation, and will add color and visual splendor to the appearance of the chancel area.

We are very grateful to all those whose gifts have equipped the Kerr Chapel with a new organ that will serve for many generations. Watch for an announcement of a dedication concert later this year.

As J. S. Bach wrote on his manuscripts: Soli Deo Gloria!



The Kerr Chapel organ installation involved significant construction, mechanical and electrical work, precision carpentry and acoustic expertise.



# With gratitude and celebration

HONORING THE LEGACY OF DR. JAMES D. MILLER

*by Amy Tingleaf*

Dr. James D. Miller retired on October 29, 2023, after 31 years of service to First Presbyterian Church. Arriving in 1992, Dr. Miller brought a wealth of theological knowledge, a passion for community outreach, and an unwavering dedication to his congregations' spiritual growth and care.

Bidding farewell to a pastor who had become integral to our church community was no easy task. The fall Chancel Choir concert was dedicated to Dr. Miller to express gratitude for his 31 years of service. Two weeks before his departure, a history in pictures spotlighting significant church events during his tenure was displayed in the Miller Atrium. Looking back over the years, it was not hard to notice the profound impact Diane and Dr. Miller had on this congregation.

Members of the congregation, community leaders, family, and friends gathered to express their appreciation for his impactful ministry on Sunday, October 29, 2023. After the worship service, Kim Jones served as the emcee, leading us through several speakers and presentations of gifts. Sally Hughes, event chair, presented rocking chairs to Jim and Diane, followed by Beth Pielsticker, who presented a Habitat House to be built in their honor. Speakers

included Charlie Stephenson, Bob and Marcy Lawless, Ron Pearson, Rev. Wambugu Gachungi, Rev. Jonathan Miller, Diane Miller, and his children, David, Courtney, and Jonny Miller. The choir led the congregation in singing The Lord's Prayer to end the service.

Following the service, lunch consisted of chicken sandwiches wrapped in festive paper, vegetables, and chips prepared by Chef Joseph. John McCormack presented Dr. Miller's portrait as congregants finished their lunches in Stephenson Hall. Following the lunch, a skit written by Amy Tingleaf and Bill Savage ensued. Bill, the Lead Retirement Transition Fairy, was joined on stage by Amy (Transition Assistant), Ron Pearson (Lead Fairy in charge of Portal Deliveries and Music), Doug Smith (train delivery), Dan Hutchinson (Fairy Hutch), and The Singing Pastors. Laughter erupted in the

crowd as we traversed through several "Jim-isms" celebrating the fun that Jim brought to the community, including a final "robo call."

Dr. Miller expressed profound gratitude for the privilege of serving the flock at First Presbyterian Church. The festivities concluded with hugs, tears, and congratulations offered to the Miller family.

**Dr. Miller brought a wealth of theological knowledge, a passion for community outreach, and an unwavering dedication to his congregations' spiritual growth and care.**



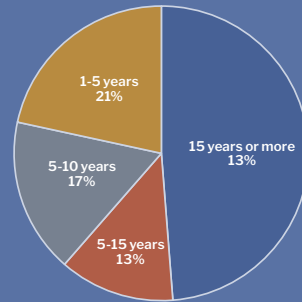


# Worship statistics

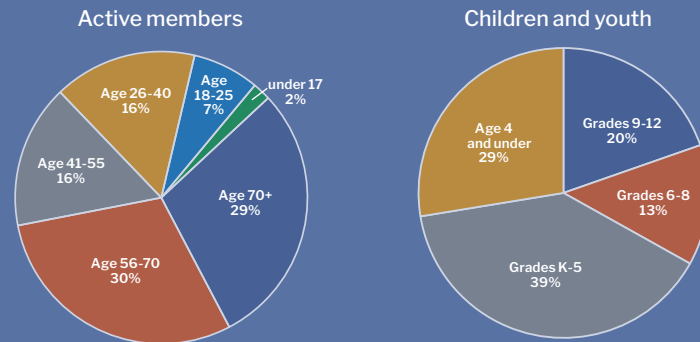
- Membership beginning of 2023: **1,754**
- Total active membership as of December 31, 2023: **1,693**
- We welcomed **84 new members**: 24 by transfer, 35 by reaffirmation of faith, three reinstatements, 22 by confession of faith (20 confirmands, two adults by baptism), seven affiliate members as of 12/31/2023.
- There was a loss of 145 members: 30 deaths and 115 from deletion.
- 32 baptisms were performed including 18 infants, nine youth at confirmation and five adults.
- First Church conducted five weddings, 19 memorial services for members, one graveside only service, five non-member memorial services and 13 inurnments in the Columbarium.

## First Church Tulsa membership facts

- 21% have been members less than 5 years
- 17% have been members for 5-10 years
- 13% have been members for 10-15 years
- 49% have been members for 15+ years

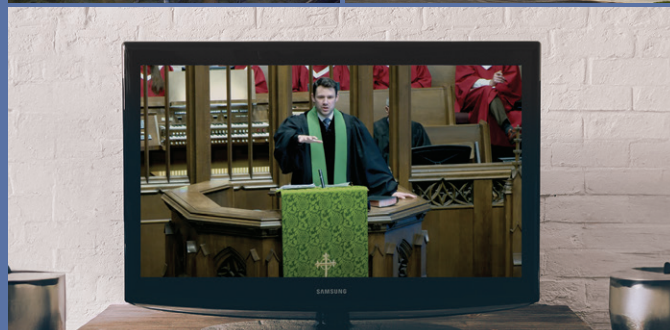
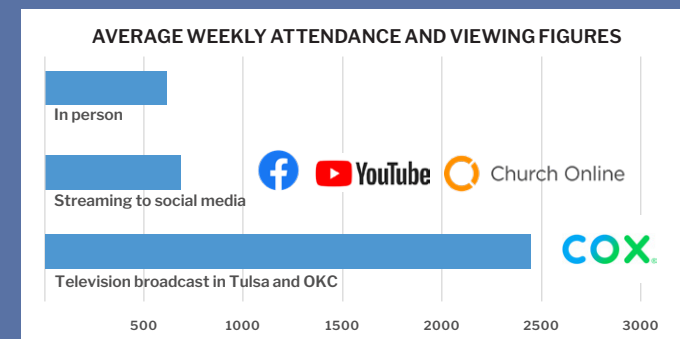


## First Church Tulsa age demographics



## First Church Tulsa attendance and viewing figures

- Attendance for in-person Sunday worship averaged 568 weekly.
- Sunday worship on our online streaming channels reached an average of 683 weekly.
- Sunday worship on the COX television broadcast reached an average of 2448 weekly in the Tulsa and Oklahoma City area.



# Parish Register

Welcome new members October 2023



Adam Austin Carly Austin Paul Bradford Margene McKenzie Hannah Damron Sophy Garrett



Bena Jekemei Shilah Jeruto Kenneth Kisitu Gladwell Kisitu Elaine Meek Sandra Hayes



Maina Mugo Veronica Ndirangu Moses Mwangi Rion Rogers Doug Smith Monica Smith

## The sacrament of baptism

- Hannah Joy Damron**, adult, was baptized on Oct. 8, 2023
- Dr. Clio Robertson**, adult, was baptized on Oct. 8, 2023
- Georgia Blake Gerow**, daughter of **Carley and Blake Gerow**, was baptized on Oct. 15, 2023
- Everett Patrick Rhoa**, son of **Laura and Mark Rhoa**, was baptized on Oct. 15, 2023
- Teddi Ann Field**, daughter of **Kara and Andrew Field**, was baptized on Oct. 22, 2023
- Keith Jones**, adult, was baptized on Oct. 22, 2023
- Robert Clayton Holk, III**, son of **Jennifer and Clay Holk**, was baptized on Nov. 12, 2023
- William Martin**, adult, was baptized on Nov. 12, 2023
- Atalia Chisom Ekwempu**, daughter of **Phyllis and Somto Ekwempu**, was baptized on Nov. 26, 2023

## The celebration of Christian marriage:

- Caitlin Russell** married **Nick Conetta** on June 10, 2023
- Courtaney Miller** married **Austin Stember** on Oct. 7, 2023
- Jake King** married **Lydia Chilipamushi** on Nov. 24, 2023

## The joy of new life! We welcome

- Amani Katana Tsuma**, son of **Rachael and Solomon Tsuma**, was born on Oct. 21, 2023
- Adaiah Malaika Kisitu**, daughter of **Gladwell and Kenneth Kisitu**, was born on Dec. 21, 2023
- Zora Ekwempu**, daughter of **Phyllis and Somto Ekwempu**, was born on Jan. 18, 2024
- Augustus Martin Butts**, son of **Olivia and Phillip Butts**, was born on Jan. 25, 2024

## With gratitude for the resurrection

- Frances Patterson**, a member since 1973, died on Nov. 24, 2023
- David Dunning**, a member since 1975, died on Nov. 29, 2023
- Quendy Veatch**, a member since 1975, died on Dec. 5, 2023
- John Scott**, a member since 1985, died on Dec. 5, 2023
- Bill Peacher**, a member since 2023, died on Dec. 20, 2023
- Meg Hubler**, a member since 1999, died on Dec. 31, 2023
- Robert Shaw**, a member since 2003, died on Jan. 3, 2024
- Barbara Reinhardt**, an affiliate member since 2015, died on Feb. 9, 2024
- Jo Carolyn Rushing**, a member since 2013, died on Feb. 11, 2024
- Patricia Morris**, a member since 2006, died on Feb. 12, 2024
- Cherrie Turner**, a member since 1996, died on Feb. 12, 2024
- Cynthia Wiles**, a member since 1989, died on Feb. 22, 2024





# A promising future

THOUGHTS ON FIRST CHURCH MEMBERSHIP WITH PATRICIA HALL

by Mark Brown, Communications Committee Chairman

Patricia Hall, longtime director of New Member Outreach, is retiring after a 13-year run in the position she calls “the welcoming arm of the church.” She said, “I’d been a full-time mom for 20 years when I was called to this job on January 1, 2011, and working in my position has been one of the greatest privileges and honors of my life.”

**Where did you grow up?**

My roots in Tulsa go back to my great, great grandfather, Simon Jones, and his son S.F. Jones, who had five children. My father, George W. Davis Jr., went to Pasadena, California, in the late 1940s for about seven years as his family was growing. So I’m a “little old lady from Pasadena”! He was in the oil business. We came back to Tulsa in 1955 when I was two years old.

**And how long have you been worshipping at First Church?**

We started here in about 1957 and I have been here ever since. We came because of Dr. (Bryant) Kirkland (D.D., 1957-1962). His wife and my mother were in Bible study together. I was baptized here, my husband, Jerry, was baptized here—plus all three of our children, Barrett, Abigail and Trenton, and one grandchild. Our daughter was also married here and Ron Pearson played Widor’s Toccata at both of our weddings! Ours on June 18, 1977 and hers on June 10, 2006.

**How has your involvement in the church shaped your life?**

I spent my formative years here under the leadership of Associate Pastor Dr. Roger Nelson on various mission trips. From those trips to the choir experience, I ended up majoring in music and after college became a junior high and high school choral director.

**Where did you go to college, and where did you teach?**

Oklahoma State. My first job was in Woodward, then I went to Muskogee, and then Sand Springs before we had children. After our first two, I taught in Oologah and Bixby. When I was pregnant with our last, I stopped teaching and stayed home for 20 years.

**Earlier you sang in the choir, right?**

I sang in the children’s choirs and the high school choir under Roy Holman and Laven Sowell. I started singing in the Chancel Choir in my twenties. About eight years into this position, the Lord made it clear to me that I needed to focus on those whom the Lord was bringing to First Church.

**I know you helped start a program for members and families dealing with addiction. Tell us about that.**

A small group of us started the Faith Partners Addiction ministry through a training program offered by Faith Partners, a national nonprofit.

We offer support to the families and to the ones struggling with addiction through educational offerings and informational pamphlets at a table in the atrium once a month. Faith Partners also offers support for our pastors, who get very little training in the field of addiction. It’s the one disease where people don’t bring you a casserole.

**What’s next for you?**

I want to spend more time with my nine grandchildren. We have five in Stillwater and four in Norman.

**What’s the most common question you get from new members?**

That is really a hard question because they are coming from so many different places. But they all want to get connected in a meaningful way. That is one of the most important aspects of the Inquirers class: connection. God created us for connection. Thus, we have the church!



**Based on your experience watching new folks come into the fold, what’s your outlook for the future of First Church?**

Incredible. We have a representation from all age groups joining the church, but an especially strong presence in the young adults and young families. It’s thrilling.

**In the Book of Order, No. 2 of the Six Great Ends of the Church is “The Shelter, Nurture, and Spiritual Fellowship of the Children of God.” Is that fitting to describe your work over the last 13 years?**

Yes, I believe we are all called to open our arms to those the Lord has brought to First Church “for such a time as this.” We should make them feel welcomed, wanted and needed, to nurture them like family. We are to help them connect with others and grow in their faith. More specifically with the Faith Partners Addiction Ministry, we are called to shelter and nurture those who are suffering silently through the disease of addiction.

**The church’s mission statement is “Called to make fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ: Inwardly Strong and Outwardly Focused.” What has this statement meant to you, in terms of your role in this post?**

It’s in the very first word of our mission statement: “Called.” Our guests have been called here. Some heard the bells on Boston or did a search online but a personal invitation is probably one of the most effective ways that guests arrive at our door steps. Then, as they get to know us, hopefully they will have the desire to commit. It’s a dating process. They get to know us better through the Inquirers Class. They are making a covenant with the Lord and His church.

**How, though, can we as a congregation help in this work?**

Every Sunday, sign the Friendship Pad and pass it to the person next to you. Our guests don’t know our process so pass it to them. Introduce yourself to someone you don’t know. I learned from Dr. Miller to say, “I don’t think I know you.” Take the opportunity to meet the new ones that the Lord has brought here. Hebrews 13:2 encourages this: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

# The importance of keeping our church roster current

by Kathy Wilson, Ministry Assistant for Pastoral Care

Over the past four years the church has conducted a major effort to clean up our active membership roll, as directed by the senior pastor, Session and the Book of Order. As the church moves forward with its search for a new senior pastor, it is especially important to continue to update the membership roll so it is as current and accurate as possible when that new person takes the helm.

Without a consistent effort to keep the membership roll current it would soon become very inflated and inaccurate. The challenge is that it is quite common for people to move out of town, join another church, or leave without remembering to inform anyone at the church. The mailings, phone calls, and e-mails the church sends them are then often deleted or thrown away, so our staff may not know for months or years that the person or family has left the church.

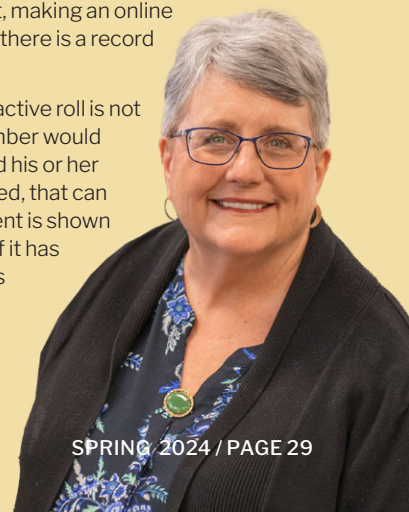
**There are some factors that help staff determine if it’s time to contact a member about their membership status.** These include a member’s recorded attendance in worship, engagement with small groups such as Sunday School classes and/or Bible studies, volunteering to help with a church program or ministry, and any recorded contributions. When a member’s record is flagged as being potentially inactive, the church will attempt to contact that member to ask about his or her membership status. Sometimes no response is received after two or three attempts at making contact, or the member is unable to be located. In those cases, deactivation is recommended to Session.

**Each member has their own situation.** Some are not physically able to attend because they no longer drive or walk well enough to allow attendance, some need or choose to avoid public gatherings because of health concerns, and some do not have any transportation. Once the church is made aware of these situations, that information is added to the member’s record so it can be factored in when determining their membership status in the future.

**Members can help with this process.** Physical or virtual attendance at worship services can be registered to help the staff recognize active membership, which is why signing the friendship pad or registering your online attendance is so important. The same is true for giving. Loose cash contributions placed in the offering plate without providing any way of identifying who gave that gift do not help with identifying active membership. Instead, consider using an envelope that has your name on it, making an online gift or writing a check to ensure that there is a record of some or all of your contributions.

Keep in mind that removal from the active roll is not the end of the world. If a former member would like to re-engage with the church and his or her membership was recently deactivated, that can be done easily if renewed engagement is shown and Session approves reactivation. If it has been many years since he or she was an active member, attending the Inquirer’s Class is generally needed.

Kathy Wilson, Ministry Assistant for Pastoral Care





# 2023 First Church Tulsa Leadership



## 2023 Board of Elders highlights

- **Approved funding** among other, for Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary, Hope is Alive Ministries, Masterwork Academy, Habitat for Humanity, Crossover Preparatory Academy, and Rising Village.
- Formed a **Transition Team** to prepare for the retirement of Rev. Dr. Jim Miller.
- Celebrated the retirement of **Rev. Dr. Jim Miller.**
- Welcomed **Rev. Dan Hutchinson** as Interim Head Pastor.
- Formed a **Mission Study Team** to engage the congregation in describing our shared history and potential future as a community in service to the Lord.

2023 Session	Rev. James Estes	Stephanie Madsen	Eric Olson
Maxwell Asare	Larry Ewing	Elisa Mangesho	Denise Rounds
Laurel Baird	Debbie Favell	Urbanus Masaku	Amy Russell
Allison Biggs	Rev. Wambugu Gachungi	Anne McCoy	Jim Scheiper
Dacia Bird	Rusty Gaddy	Paul McEntire	Jacob Thompson
Mark Brown	John Harper	Jaclyn Metcalf	Solomon Tsuma
Janine Burlin	Rev. Dan Hutchinson	Rev. Julia Metcalf	Faith Wambugu
Brett Crane	Jessica John-Bowman	Steve Metcalf	Karen Woolman
Elizabeth DeVore	Jeanette Kern	Paul Mungai	
Joel Donohue	Patrick Kirunda		



## 2023 Deacons highlights

- Continued **Deacon's Days of Care** with yard and home maintenance projects in May and October. Worked on the grounds at Anderson Elementary School.
- Hosted **Camp Sunshine, Easter Musician's Brunch, All Saints Day** service & lunch, **Thanksgiving Day** service and meal, **Celebrating Christmas Together** party at Anderson Elementary School, meals for **Hope is Alive** addiction recovery program and **receptions** following memorial services.
- Partnered with Elders to serve **Home Communion** to homebound members.
- **Delivered flowers** from Sunday services to assisted living facilities.
- **Delivered Easter lilies and Christmas poinsettias** to homebound members.

2023 Deacons	Bette Cromer	Carter Mathews	Dylan Seibert
Sheri Allen	Sandy Curtis	Clint McQueen	Grace Shelton
Anita Anthony	Brandon Evans	Nick McMillan	Ed Slier
Tina Aruna	Jeremy Foon	Janet Mercer	Cissy Ssettimba
Tyler Bird	Quentin Franklin	Valentine Ndungu	Julie Steiner
Nancy Blocker	Michael Homan	Buddy Neal	Scott Swanson
Beryl Bolo	Cindy Johnson	Gladys Njino	Shannon Thomas
Keith Campbell	Lucy Kamande	Dan Richmond	

# 2023 First Church Tulsa Leadership

## 2023 Board of Trustees

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TULSA FOUNDATION

The Board of Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church Foundation is responsible for oversight, management and growth of the Foundation's endowment. Our investments and assets are held in the form of equities, bonds, mineral interest royalties, cash and most recently an expansion into real estate investments.

The Board of Trustees is made up of nine members of the Church who are elected to three-year terms with three new members elected each year and three members rolling off. The board members are:

Class of 2023	Class of 2024	Class of 2025	Class of 2026
Bill Lawson	Jane Crain	John Frame	Ricky Jones
Todd Schuster	Pam Farris	Ken McQueen	Jennifer Porter
Bob Pielsticker*	Steve Caldwell	Barrett Powers	Bill Lawson

\*Chair - 2023

### 2023 Trustees

- Steve Caldwell
- Jane Crain
- Pam Farris
- John Frame
- Bill Lawson
- Ken McQueen
- Barrett Powers
- Todd Schuster
- Bob Pielsticker - Chair

The Trustees continue to engage Bank of Oklahoma to provide active asset management of the marketable security portfolio of the Foundation. During 2022 the Foundation's marketable securities experienced a decline in market value in line with the overall markets and the metrics established by the Trustees and BOK.

Earnings of the Foundation are an important source of income for the programs and mission of First Church and our goal

among the Trustees is to grow the Foundation to \$50 million under management, at which point First Church will be supported in perpetuity and all tithing of members will be allocated to the missions of our church.

The six broad ministry categories supported by Foundation earnings are:

- Music and Worship
- Operations
- Nurture and Care of Families
- Long Term Facility Maintenance and Repair
- Local and Global Missions
- Scholarship and Education

The Trustees' goal in 2023 was to expand the Legacy Society that recognizes donors to the Foundation by hosting a gathering of



2024 Trustees: Katie Williams, Foundation Director, Jane Crain, Jennifer Porter, Ricky Jones, Pam Farris, Ken McQueen, Steve Caldwell, Bill Lawson, Barrett Powers and John Frame.

Legacy Society members and increasing potential new donors with an art installation located on the second floor elevator lobby. The Legacy Society hosted a lovely evening organized by Jay Lawson and Sally Hughes. The installation of Eric Baker's stain glass sculpture, "I am the Vine" was finished in the Fall of 2022. This installation reflects the first round of names of Legacy Society members with a second round of names to be added in the spring of 2023.

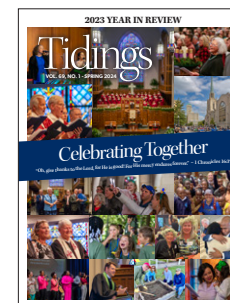
The Trustees hosted Breakfast on Boston in and September announced our Foundation Birthday Club. Members were asked to consider an annual Foundation gift of \$1 per each year of their birthday. We also hosted three Foundation update dinners at FPC for Legacy Members in 2023.

The progress made is testimony to the continued efforts of our committees and the significant contribution of Foundation Director Katie Williams. We are very grateful for Katie's diligence and attentiveness.

We continue to believe that to secure the future of our wonderful facilities and continue our commitment to the necessary programs we must endow First Church. We would encourage our membership to support this initiative with your prayers and personal estate planning! The continuing goal is to have the endowment reach \$50 million.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Pielsticker  
Chairman 2023



## Tidings

**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). Please direct questions or comments to [communications@FirstChurchTulsa.org](mailto:communications@FirstChurchTulsa.org) or call 918-584-4701.

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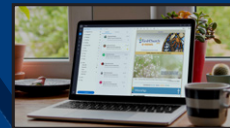
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