

# First Press 2024



*We are a welcoming community formed in Christ, committed to sharing his love with others – with feet that carry us out into the world, with hands that serve, and with hearts in fellowship and faith.*

Dear Friends,

The year 2023 was a wonderful year at First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood NJ as we celebrated *200 Years of God's Grace and Glory!*

The date of our 200th anniversary was January 11, 2023, and our year-long bicentennial celebration began with a kick-off worship service on January 15. On that day, Rev. Steve Huston brought greetings from the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey; we sang our 200th Anniversary Hymn, written by Dr. Edward Schmiedecke; and the sermon *The Once and Future Church* included a brief look at our history. Trinity Presbyterian Church joined us for worship and gifted us with a beautiful bicentennial banner.

Also on that day, Joan Davies offered the first *200 Seconds* moment during worship, sharing briefly what First Pres means to her. And I must say that each Sunday thereafter, as a different person has offered the *200 Seconds* moment, I have been struck by the variety of perspectives and impressed by the common themes, such as the congregation's welcoming nature, inspirational worship, meaningful congregational care, and a strong commitment to mission.

During the weekend of June 9-11, we held a picnic on Friday, a hymn sing in the Memorial Garden on Saturday, and on Sunday a celebration worship service, during which Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Co-Moderator of the 225th General Assembly of the PC(USA), preached about the importance of Christians reflecting the light of Christ in a world that is at times dark. Afterward, we enjoyed a delicious banquet outdoors under a tent. Former pastors either participated in the service or sent video greetings, which were played during the banquet.

On Sunday, June 25, as a gift to the community, First Pres offered *A Community Conversation with Jim and Ali Stroker*, and more than 170 people attended.

During the course of the year, children, under the direction of MaryEllen Castaldo, created a time capsule and planted the lovely Bicentennial Memorial Garden. And our high school youth offered their *200 Seconds* moments during a Youth Sunday Service.

The year included great exposure in the community, with two beautiful First Pres displays in the Ridgewood Library and a First Pres bicentennial article by Sue Dickinson and Peggy Norris in *Ridgewood Living*.

During the month of September, the congregation conducted a fundraising campaign to support the construction of the Aleppo Christian Center in Aleppo, Syria, raising more than \$26,000 for that important project.

Yes, by God's grace, it's been a wonderful year at First Pres!

*Continued on Page 2*

## Bicentennial Wrap-Up: Sunday, January 14, 2024 ~ Worship, Luncheon & Pic! Join us!

### Worship

We will conclude our year-long bicentennial celebration on Sunday, January 14. Worship will include 200 Seconds by a long-time member, two anniversary hymns, and a sermon entitled *The Next Chapter*.

### Luncheon

Following worship, we will enjoy a covered dish luncheon in the Auditorium! Sandwiches and beverages will be provided by the church. Bring a side dish to share. During the luncheon, members and friends can check out a display of photographs from years gone by. Bring yours to share, but be sure to write your name on the back so they can be returned.

### Group Photo

Also on January 14, we plan to take a group photograph of the entire congregation, which won't be complete without you. So, be sure to join us on Sunday, January 14!

### Our History ~ 1973-2023

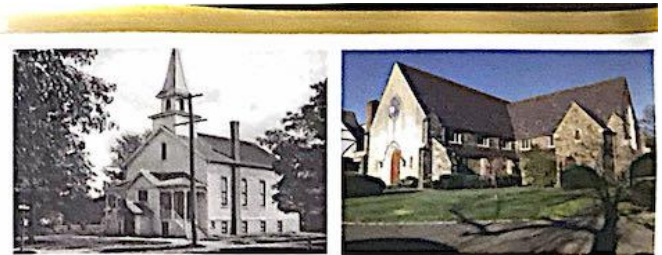
Finally, several members of Team 200 have been working for months to write the next volume of our church history ~ 1973 - 2023. We anticipate copies will be available for distribution in the spring.

Grace and peace,

Bruce



Celebrates Its **200th Anniversary** BY SUE DICKINSON AND PEGGY NORRIS



What a joy it has been for First Presbyterian Church to be part of the Ridgewood community! As we reflect on the past 200 years, we are overwhelmed with gratitude for the kind, generous and dedicated people who have passed through our doors. It all started on January 11, 1823, when fifteen men and twelve women, former members of the Paramus Dutch Reformed Church, signed a request to form a congregation in the newly-established True Reformed Dutch Church, becoming the direct predecessor of the First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood. Their first building was in Waldwick, but as the church grew, they established a new building on the Paramus Plains in what is now Ridgewood. The congregation thrived and when the church burned in 1918, a new one was built at 792 East Ridgewood Avenue where it stands today.

As changes occurred in our country's culture, First Pres made changes, too. The first women elders were elected in 1974 and men who had previously served only as elders, began also serving as deacons in 1982. The weekday First Presbyterian Church Nursery School was established in 1968 and Vacation Bible School in 1989. First Pres became the parent of two other congregations, Westside Presbyterian and Trinity Presbyterian, and currently provides a home for the Living Waters Church, an Arabic-speaking congregation. We are also home to the Hobbyists and Connections, groups for retired men and women, respectively, and Scout troops have been meeting at First Pres for decades.

We are a vital Christian community. Our senior minister, the Rev. Bruce Ballantyne, preaches the Word as it applies to our lives today. Music has always had a central place in our worship with

organ, piano, bells and voices. Our adult choir, led by Dr. Edward Schmiedelke, is supplemented by four professional-section leaders, with Linda Sweetman-Waters playing the three-manual Austin pipe organ. Carol Schmiedelke leads the bell choir and the children's choir and MaryEllen Castaldo is our Director of Children and Family ministries.

2023 has been a year of celebration for us. Each Sunday since our kick-off event last January, a different member of the congregation has taken 200 seconds to share what First Pres means to them. For our Homecoming Weekend in June, we hosted a Friday barbecue to which Westside Pres was invited, a Saturday evening hymn sing, and a glorious Sunday morning worship service and luncheon with the Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Co-Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), preaching,

and baked goods from the Ridgewood Farmers' Market and donate it to Table to Table. (We can always use help with that. Contact us next year to volunteer!) We support other non-profits including Family Promise, Project Heifer, Project Angel Tree and many local food pantries. Globally, First Pres has begun to focus on Lebanon and Syria since a number of our current members immigrated from there. We recently raised funds to support construction of the Aleppo Christian Center in Syria which will provide space for outreach to the community, theological training and interfaith dialogue.

We are dedicated to mission. Since 1986 we have had a long-standing commitment to Passaic County Habitat for Humanity. We provide monthly meals to St. Paul's Shelter in Paterson, and on Sundays we collect unsold

produce and baked goods from the Ridgewood Farmers' Market and donate it to Table to Table. (We can always use help with that. Contact us next year to volunteer!) We support other non-profits including Family Promise, Project Heifer, Project Angel Tree and many local food pantries. Globally, First Pres has begun to focus on Lebanon and Syria since a number of our current members immigrated from there. We recently raised funds to support construction of the Aleppo Christian Center in Syria which will provide space for outreach to the community, theological training and interfaith dialogue.

As First Pres concludes its bicentennial year, we eagerly anticipate what the next century will bring as we continue to serve God by serving our neighbors here in Northern New Jersey and around the world.

Sue Dickinson taught English and social studies for twenty years at George Washington Middle School. She and her husband Lew have two grown sons and four grandchildren, have been members of First Pres for forty-two years and have lived in Ridgewood for fifty-two years.

Peggy W. Norris is a retired librarian who worked at the Ridgewood Public Library. She and her husband, Joe Suplicki, are historians for the Village of Ridgewood.



Jim and Ali Shiner provided inspiration and song in June.

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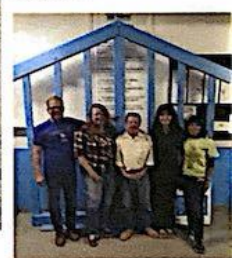
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Clergy came together to celebrate 200 years. Rev. Sam Stone, Pastor Trinity Presbyterian; Rev. Bert Watson, Pastor Emeritus First Pres; Rev. Christine Davies, Director Pastoral Care; Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital who grew up at First Pres; Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Co-Moderator, General Assembly Presbyterian Church (USA); Rev. Bruce Ballantyne, Pastor First Presbyterian Church; Rev. Ed Clydesdale, Presbytery of Northeast N.J.



Volunteering in Paterson since 1986 with Passaic County Habitat for Humanity.



© Lakeshore

**New** year, **new** resolutions, **new** attitude, **new** perspective, **new** insights, **new** understanding, **new** "self"awareness, **new** "other"awareness, **new** promises to keep, **new** grudges to let sleep. What if, under our Christmas trees every gift we opened was one of these? What a glorious year it would be! These gifts are under our trees every year. Do we leave them unopened or do we open them expectantly with gratitude for the possibilities they hold for our re'**new**'ing our lives?

A very Happy New Year from your Endowment Committee!!!

*Laura Magrath (Chairperson), Joanne Bonwick,  
Richard Davies, Don Dexter, David Shaw*

**No gift to Endowment ever goes unopened!!!!**

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
and renew a right spirit within me"*

*Psalm 51:10*

## Mission

### St. Paul's ~

On Dec. 3, the McDevitts delivered dinner provided by First Pres volunteers to the men at St. Paul's shelter. On the menu was baked spaghetti made by Joan Davies, Mexican lasagna made by Suzy, fried chicken breasts by Kate Yates, cole slaw made by Laura Magrath, and apples, clementines and bread provided by Jo-Ann Massey.

Thank you so much to these ladies for their generosity and for their time and skill invested. The men were very thankful for everything.

If you are interested in helping out with this mission, please contact me, Suzy McDevitt, by email at [suzyjmc2@yahoo.com](mailto:suzyjmc2@yahoo.com) or by text at 201-315-2063. Likewise, if you just have questions or are considering helping out, but don't know what to make, reach out. I will be happy to answer all questions and give suggestions. We are still in need of items for the Jan. meal, and are ready to schedule for Feb. and March. (Dinners always take place on the first Sunday of each month.)

As an additional note, after scheduling and delivering the meals for St. Paul's for nearly 4 years now, I am ready to hand off the responsibility to another helping hand in the New Year. Ideally, this would be someone who has been regularly involved in cooking, and has held this mission near and dear to their heart. Please let me know if you would consider, and I will be happy to walk you through how I do things, and to answer any of your questions. And, of course, I'll be at the top of your list of volunteer cooks! Thanks for considering as I prepare to step down!



**Thank you to all who donated hats, mittens, scarves, gloves to our Mitten Tree which will be donated to Center for Food Action to be distributed throughout the winter months.**



Thank you to all who donated unwrapped toys for the Toys 4 Tots Foundation! This drive was sponsored by the First Pres church school. Four full bags of toys were delivered to a local chapter. You have brought the joy of Christmas and have sent a message of hope to disadvantaged children here in the US!

God Bless each and every one of you!

**Our First Pres Annual Holiday Bake Sale was a great success!**

Thank you to all the bakers who made the most amazing yummy desserts! We appreciate your time and talents that went into this bake sale. Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to Janis Ax, Jill Critchley, Sue Fischer, Jessica Paz, and Steve Paz, for all your help and hard work in making this event so successful. A very special Thank You to SANTA, for coming all the way from the North Pole during such a busy time to visit all the children and families at First Pres Church!

What a blessing, we raised over 1,500.00! There is still time to send in a donation. All proceeds will go to Family Promise- Camp Lots of Fun!



Birthday Party 4 Jesus

A fun day, searching for the Holy family, building a snowman or at least changing Mr. Castaldo into one! Making crafts, eating treats and enjoying cake!





Thank you to all our First Pres High School students who served as liturgists during our Advent season!

Isabella Burger, Luke Eliya,  
David Edelbach, Patrick Edelbach, Hudson Feeney,  
Frankie Feltmann, Luke Feltmann, CJ Torielli & Dante Torielli

Thank you to our First Pres Church school families who took part in our Advent candle lighting and readings.

The Tunick/Bellorgey family

The Morris family

The England and Infante Family

Kyle, Frankie and Luke Feltmann

Steven Eliya, Helen Eliya, John Vasile



*"Unwrapping the Gift"*

## “Christmas Prayers” Pageant



200 Seconds by Melissa Davis



Thank you to all who made our 10 am Christmas pageant entitled “Christmas Prayers” a wonderful success. To Carol & Ed Schmiedecke, Linda Sweetman Waters, Brian Princing, and Emma Schmiedecke for wonderful music! Thank you to our Sunday school choir and to Olivia Davis, Cole Bellorgey and Luke Eliya for your beautiful solos.

Thank you to all of our youth at First Pres who are all amazing and talented.

A special Thank you to Jill Critchley and Sue Fischer for your continued help with the pageant!

### Worship service and Pageant parts

Opening Prayer [Luke and Maddie Eliya](#) Call to Worship [Kyle Feltmann](#)

Welcome & Announcements [Olivia Davis & Cole Bellorgey](#)

Prayer of Confession [Hudson Feeny](#) Passing of the Peace [Luca Torielli](#)

Offering Invitation [Luke Feltmann](#) The Lord’s Prayer: [Hudson Feeny](#)

Benediction [Maddy Eliya, Axel England, Evelyn Horner, Jack & Hank Morris, Charlotte & Grace Pavao, Lucy & Andrew Dickinson](#)

Speaker 1: [CJ Torielli](#) Speaker 2: [Dante Torielli](#)

Speaker 3: [Frankie Feltmann](#) Speaker 4: [David Edelbach](#)

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: [Olivia Davis](#) 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: [Luca Torielli](#)

3<sup>rd</sup> Reading: [Cole Bellorgey](#) 4<sup>th</sup> Reading: [Luke Feltmann](#)

Mary: [Juliet Horner/ Grace Pavao](#) Joseph: [Shane Reade](#)



On Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup> **First Pres Santa Songsters** entertained residents at Sunrise in Woodcliff Lake & Franklin Lakes. Special thanks to Diane Eliya for organizing this event, Sue Dickinson for leading the carolers and Chris Vehmas for playing the piano!







A joyful noise was made by all who attended the Annual Tree of Light Celebration!

Thanks to Ed and Carol Schmeidecke for leading the singing and to Brian Prancing for playing piano!



And thank you to MaryEllen Castaldo and Jessica Strader Paz for crafts and food!

# Passaic County Habitat for Humanity

Build Day 12/2/2023



Thanks to all the 1<sup>st</sup> Pres volunteers for being the hands of Christ in our community!

## BE A SMART DONOR

At the end of the year many of us make donations to organizations that we believe in including the church. The church and those organizations depend on our generosity to dramatically help and heal people. Besides being generous, we are called to be smart in our giving.

If you are over 70.5 years of age and have an IRA, you can save significantly on your taxes by making your charitable donations directly from your IRA through a Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD). By making a QCD, you avoid paying taxes on that amount as you would normally do if you withdrew money from your IRA. (Check [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) for more details)

If you are more than 73 years of age, you must take a percentage of your IRA- that is your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD). Again that amount is taxable- unless you donate it to a qualified charity.

So donors over 70.5 years of age who have a IRA are very wise to use their IRA as the source for their charitable contributions rather than write a check to a charity. If you are in the 25% tax bracket, this method of making charitable contributions will save you, for example, \$1000 when you donate \$4000.

Be Smart- Be Generous- Be Faithful.

Rev. Brooks Smith, Co-Chair of the Presbytery of Northeast NJ Congregation Ministries



## In 200 Seconds- What First Pres means to:



*Joe Suplicki*



*Bobbe Kutcha*



*Ramzi Eliya*



*Don Weyant*

"The church gives the world a front-row seat to the grace of God" Carey Nieuwhof



Happy New Year from the Weekday Nursery School! We hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful Christmas & Happy New Year spent with friends and loved ones!

The children did a great job in the Sanctuary in their Christmas/Holiday Program, singing some very special Christmas & winter songs.

The Nursery School children participated with two special groups in the church Auditorium. We enjoyed hearing the Ridgewood High School singers along with the Hobbyist. It was fun to see all the different age groups (preschool, high school & seniors) all enjoying the music together! The Connections group invited us to share in a Magic Show! The children were amazed with the magic, the tricks, and the comedy!



Registration for the 2024-2025 school year is underway!

If you are looking for a quality, nurturing preschool for your 2 ½ - 5-year-old child, or know of someone who is, please mark your calendars to attend our Open House on Friday, January 26th, 9:30 – 11 am, or call us to arrange a tour of our school. Please contact Julia Bolt, Director, at 201-445-2552 for more information. We offer a fun, nurturing environment, while preparing our children for kindergarten and beyond. We look forward to hearing from you!



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Sunday January 28<sup>th</sup> Youth Worship Service and



### DENIM DAY at First Pres!

We invite everyone to come to church in your JEANS!

For \$10.00 you can sit in church and the congregational meeting in comfort! The High School class will be at all church entrances collecting money before service and after worship and the congregational meeting! Proceeds will go toward the FPC's Senior High Youth group.

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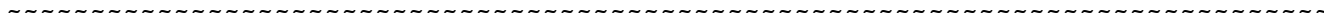


The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held immediately after the Worship Service on Sunday, January 28, 2024.



Welcome *and thank you* to Carrie Werner, who has volunteered to take over as the First Press Newsletter editor.

Please send all future newsletter submissions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month to [Carrielwerner@aol.com](mailto:Carrielwerner@aol.com).



### CANDLELIGHT MEDITATIVE SERVICE

Wednesday, February 7, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Chapel

For the first time First Pres Church will offer a midweek 30-minute contemplative service during this winter season. Join us for an intimate oasis – a time of stillness and centering to calm the mind and open the soul, in the midst of our busy lives.

Gathered as a community, we will pray together in word and song, and rest in silence as we open ourselves to God's loving presence. We will enjoy a night of meditative singing in a candlelight setting, which makes the very words of the songs a prayer. Come and be refreshed and renewed.



**The Bicentennial Team invites you to a 200 Year Celebration Finale! Come to the Worship service on January 14<sup>th</sup> and stay for a Pot Luck Luncheon!**

Sandwiches, beverages, and paper products will be provided. Bring a side dish if you can. Please come and enjoy food and fellowship as we enter our 201<sup>st</sup> year continuing to be blessed by God's Grace and Glory!



## Happy Birthday to members born in January -

Mary Shaw Sami Eliya Chris Feltmann  
Marcia Unger Craig Walters Chet Greenleaf  
Derek Schnure Jordan Kender

And belated Happy Birthday to Peter Chapas who celebrated in December!

### Church Staff

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Edward Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Director of Youth Music and Handbells	Carol Schmiedecke
Administrative Manager	Dana Feeney
Bookkeeper	Lavonne McMillen
Sexton	Tom Carozza
Custodian	George Wood
Director Nursery School	Julia Bolt
Newsletter Editor	Joan Davies (Volunteer)

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**Church Phone (201) 652-2504 [www.firstpresridgewood.org](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)**

**Pastor Bruce: (215) 337-5623 Please contact him directly for Pastoral Care**



The Longest Night Service, December 20, 2023

*Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen*

*And may you shine with the light of Christ in the New Year!*