



*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,

What a joy it has been to celebrate the bicentennial of First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, NJ during 2023! The mere fact that a church has existed for 200 years is something to celebrate. As part of our bicentennial observance and in recognition that the Christian church exists to share the love of Christ with neighbors near and far, the Session has made a commitment to support a special mission project this year.

Since a number of First Pres members immigrated to the United States from Syria and Lebanon, a mission project within the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (Presbyterian) was a natural choice. And the project chosen is the construction of The Aleppo Christian Center.

In 2012, the sanctuary of the National Presbyterian Church of Aleppo was destroyed by radical Islamist groups in two explosions which reduced the church building to rubble. Once Aleppo was liberated by the government of Syria, and relative peace had returned to the city, a new worship center for the congregation was constructed in another part of the city.

Because the church's original site is located in the historic center of the old city, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon has made the commitment to re-establish its presence with a new structure on the site of the destroyed building. The Aleppo Christian Center will be a place for outreach to the community, theological training, ecumenical conferences, and interfaith dialogue. Construction has already begun, but more funds are needed to complete the project.

Follow this link to an Outreach Foundation video which describes the project: <https://youtu.be/EIKBiuPTbYE>

In support of the Aleppo Christian Center Project, the First Pres Mission, Peace and Social Righteousness Team has allocated funds from its Mission/Benevolence budget, and the Session has approved a special offering to take place during the month of September. Soon you will receive a special offering envelope in the mail along with an invitation to support this important project. In addition, a Middle Eastern Fundraiser Dinner will take place at the church at 5:00 p.m. Saturday, September 30. Please plan to come and celebrate the successful conclusion of this campaign and help us raise additional funds.

May we give generously in order that the Christians in Aleppo and throughout Syria might be encouraged and the church there might continue to thrive!

Yours in Christ's service, Bruce



The Presbyterian Church of Aleppo, Syria, was organized in 1853.

# Mission



**Team 200 is holding a fall MUM sale to benefit our Bicentennial events.**

Mums will decorate the Sanctuary on Sunday, September 24th, you can pick them up after Worship. See flyer in bulletin.

Mums sell for \$15.00 each. To order email [jessicatrader@gmail.com](mailto:jessicatrader@gmail.com) or Dana Feeny in the church office at [office@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:office@firstpresridgewood.org).

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Our Produce Mission continues into the fall on Sundays at the Ridgewood Train Station!

Meet at the station at 1:45 and help box up food and transport to the church for pick up the next day by Table to Table.

Any questions email Sandy Santangelo at [gssantangelo6@gmail.com](mailto:gssantangelo6@gmail.com)

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On June 24<sup>th</sup> members & friends volunteered at Passaic County Habitat for Humanity!



Giving of their time and talents ~Patrick and Kaitlyn Edelbach, Isabella Burger with friends Katarina and Lyndsey, Joe Unger, Heather Halm, Donna Flagg, Richard and Joan Davies



On Sunday, June 4, the McDevitt family delivered dinner to the men at St. Paul's shelter, provided by volunteers from First Pres. On the menu for the evening was macaroni and cheese made by Marjorie Vanacore, BBQ baked chicken made by Dana Feeney, sausage and peppers made by Joan Davies, roasted mixed veggies made by Suzy, a tray of rice and beans leftover and frozen from a Lenten dinner, and fruit bowls and dinner rolls provided by Li Towt (a first time St. Paul's participant!). Li also brought some leftover party food from the previous day: a small tray of sandwiches, some fried chicken, chocolates, cookies and more.



On Sunday, July 2, the Torielli family delivered dinner to the men at St. Paul's shelter, provided by volunteers from First Pres. On the menu for the evening was sausage and peppers made by Dante and CJ Torielli, hot dogs and toppings by Sue Dickinson, chicken lasagna made by Li Towt, ratatouille made by Fay Reid, and fruit and bread provided by Rebecca Burger.

On Sunday, August 6, the McDevitt family delivered dinner to the men at St. Paul's shelter, provided by volunteers from First Pres. On the menu for the evening was fruit and bread provided by Bobbe Kutcha (a first time volunteer!), a zucchini, tomato and cheese casserole made by Janis Ax, chicken and stuffing made by Joanne Bonwick, and grilled burgers with all the fixings and Dominos pizzas made/provided by Suzy McDevitt.

Thank you so much to these dedicated volunteers who provided this delicious dinner for the men! There is no doubt the men enjoyed the feasts!

If you are interested in helping out with First Pres's mission at St. Paul's or just have questions, please contact Suzy McDevitt by email at [suzymcd2@yahoo.com](mailto:suzymcd2@yahoo.com) or by text at 201-315-2063. We are currently scheduling for the fall months.

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The Mission Peace and Social Righteousness Team donated \$250.00 to the Maui Food Bank to assist in providing meals to people displaced by the recent wild fires.

Since there are no PC(USA) congregations on the island, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has been in touch with the Presbytery of the Pacific to discuss ways PDA can support those impacted by the devastating fires. "Our best response is prayer. We pray that through the responses of the faith community, survivors and those offering assistance will be reminded of the hope that is found in Christ."

Please continue to pray for the people in the Maui community affected by fires who have lost loved ones and their homes and for the congregation of Grace Church in Montclair that lost their cherished place of worship in a recent fire.

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Yan is once again enrolled in the "Toddler and Me" class at The Cooperative Nursery School of Ridgewood, located on Dayton Street in Ridgewood. He will attend twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. along with his mother, Kateryna.

Since they live in Garfield, about 20 minutes away from Ridgewood, they need transportation to and from on both days.

Donna Flagg, Barbara Dunn and Sandy Santangelo volunteered this past school year to drive them. We would welcome and be grateful for any additional volunteers to drive as well. Ivan and Kateryna would appreciate your help!



**Please contact Donna at [flaggbda@gmail.com](mailto:flaggbda@gmail.com) or 201.819.2327 if you can volunteer!**

## ENDOWMENT CORNER

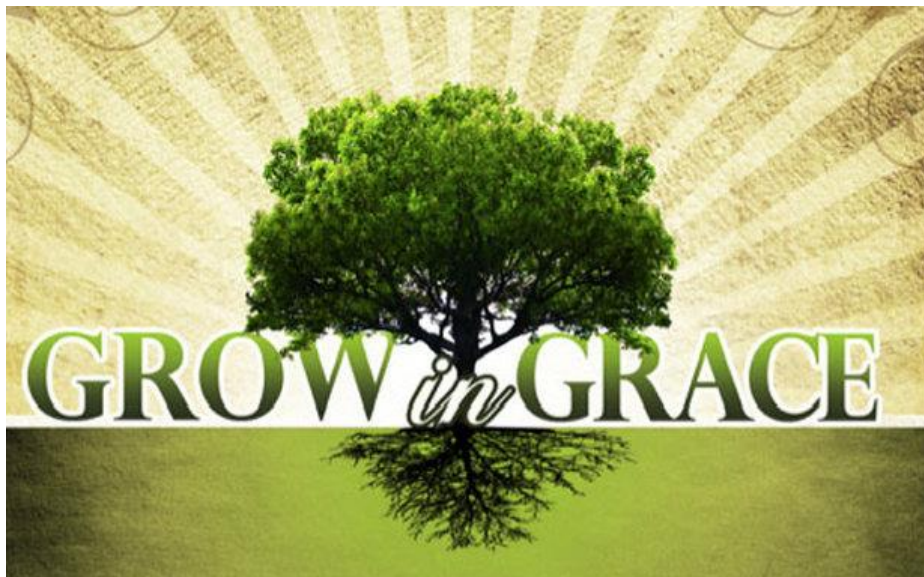
If Grace is so amazing ...  
why is there not more of it?

The above question was penned by the editor of Presbyterian Today as she wrote her next to the last column for the popular Presbyterian magazine. Donna Frischknecht Jackson was not likely thinking about Endowment Committee wishes when she asked the question but those of us on the First Pres Endowment Committee are continually amazed at what the fund has enabled us to do for mission and unbudgeted church projects. It is surely Grace "squared". Grace is what we feel as members continue to support the growth of this fund that ensures a 'grace-filled' future for spreading the good news of God's word today and tomorrow.

Whether you choose to donate through our Tree of Life program, Green Umbrella Note Cards, outright cash donations or include First Pres in your Will, your continued gracious giving ensures the future of the Endowment Fund. We look forward to keeping you informed of our progress each month.

Grace and Peace be with you.

Your Endowment Committee,  
Laura Magrath, Chairperson, Joanne Bonwick,  
Richard Davies, Don Dexter, Dave Shaw





We had good attendance at Summer Sunday school this year and we learned many lessons including the parables of Jesus! Lessons we covered: Jesus Feeds 5000, Matthew 10:40-42, Parables of the Mustard Seed, the Sower, Wheat and the Weeds, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

### **WELCOME BACK STUDENTS!**

Sunday, September 10, 2023, begins our return to Sunday school. We will have The ðBlessing of the Backpacks, school supplies, students and teachers during our children's message. Bring your Backpacks, book bags, and school supplies to church! We will gather in the Minnema Room after the message ALL GRADES are invited. We will have an interactive lesson and special treats during class!



**Sunday, September 17, 2023 at 9:45AM!** We invite you to join us for our church school kick off program. It will be held in our church auditorium. Program begins at **10:00 AM sharp!** **HIGH VOLUME HIGH TECH** a program

that features a hand's on science made for children all ages! You will make volcano eruptions, gummy candies, space mud and you will go ice cube fishing!

**YOU MUST RSVP to MaryEllen Castaldo [marecmt@aol.com](mailto:marecmt@aol.com) and let her know how many are attending...the presenter needs to bring enough materials! Or else someone will not be able to participate!**

**There is NO children's message that Sunday! Please come on time the presenter cannot wait for latecomers!**



### **Calling All Sunday school teachers!**

Our church school is growing. Please prayerfully consider teaching one or two Sundays during the school year! The children are the future of our church. We would appreciate any time you can give us! So please help us to make this new school year a successful and joyful one for the children at First Pres! Please Contact MaryEllen Castaldo at [marecmt@aol.com](mailto:marecmt@aol.com). Thank you!

# Vacation Bible School

We had a great time at Vacation Bible School. Our theme was "Operation Restoration" (mending God's world). We had 38 children registered this year! They learned bible stories, made fun crafts, learned wonderful songs, enjoyed snacks, had fun with outside and inside activities and as always they made new friends!

Thank you to all who donated snacks to Vacation Bible School, it was appreciated! God bless you!

**A VERY BIG THANK YOU** to the following angels who helped make our Vacation Bible School run so smoothly! It couldn't happen without the time and talents you all contributed to our program!

Carol Davidson

Olivia Davis

Ava Delmonico

Maddie Eliya

Johnny Eliya

Dana Feeney

Kyle Feltmann

Jeanine Jamieson

Evelyn Kender

Chrissy Reade

Caroline Rusch

Linda Strickland

Rev. Christine Park

Kenia Valdes

Rodger Yaden

A special thank you to Emma Schmeidecke for leading music!

We all enjoyed the songs and learning to sign!





THANK YOU MaryEllen Castaldo for Youth Sunday Worship, Sunday Sundaes, Bicentennial displays at the Ridgewood Library and for all the countless ways you serve our children and our congregation!

We are blessed by the gifts of your ministry!



**LOVE** God.  
Others.

1 THESSALONIANS 4



Blessed  
Thankful  
Grateful



# Our Bicentennial Weekend Celebration was full of God's Grace and Glory!



Friday, June 9<sup>th</sup> a picnic with lots of activities & a band from Westside!







It was a picture perfect if not a pitch perfect evening at our Saturday Hymn sing in the Memorial Garden. Thanks to the Schmiedeckes and Donna Burdick for keeping us in tune & Susan Lafever for playing the keyboard!



# Sunday, June 11<sup>th</sup> Bicentennial Worship Service



200 Seconds



"Remember Who You Are"



## ~CELEBRATION PARTICIPANTS ~

- Rev. Bruce Ballantine, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood NJ
- Rev. Steve Huston, Organizing Co-Leader & Resource Presbyter, The Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey
- Rev. Christine Davies, Director of Pastoral Care at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital
- Rev. Sam Stone, Pastor, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ridgewood, NJ
- Ms. MaryEllen Castaldo, Director of Children & Family Ministries, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood NJ
- Rev. Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Co-Moderator of the 225th General Assembly, PC(USA)
- Rev. Bert Watkins, Pastor, Honorably Retired, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood NJ
- Rev. William Chapman, Former Parish Associate, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood NJ



A MIGHTY  
*fortress*  
IS OUR  
*God*





A wonderful day full of faith, food and fellowship was enjoyed by over 150 people!





Many thanks to Pastor Bruce and Team 200 ~ MaryEllen Castaldo, Joan Davies, Sue Dickinson, Donna Flagg, Anita Hutton, Peggy Norris, Jessica Strader Paz, Sandy Santangelo, Joe Suplicki and to everyone who helped set up and clean up!



# Baptism Baptism



Michael Alexander Hutton Jr., son of Brianna Hutton and Michael Hutton, and Kipp Hutton Anderson, son of Sarah Hutton and Kent Anderson received the sacrament of baptism on June 18, 2023!

May God bless them always!



On Endowment Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, Laura Magrath, Chair of the Endowment Committee unveiled 2 doves.

One dove honoring the Reitmeier family as an enduring legacy and another dove in memory of Bruce Crocco for having a servant's heart.



Installation of new officers:  
 Elders- Robin Byrne and Jill Critchley  
 Deacons- Janis Ax, Jan Cross, Greta Croucher, Linda Strickland, Rodger Yaden  
**We thank you for heeding the call to serve!**



In 200 Seconds we heard what First Pres has meant to~



*Ivan Mashliakevych*



*Jill Critchley*



*Sarah Hutton Anderson*



*Sue Dickinson*



*Claire Hothem (read by Stu Hothem)*



*Robert Morris*



*Peter Chapas*



*Joanne Bonwick*



*Rodger Yaden*



*Andy Castaldi*



*Katie Pavao*



*Mike Schuil*

About 175 people attended a Community Conversation with Ali & Jim Stroker on Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup> at First Pres.

Thank you Team 200 and especially to Donna Flagg for arranging this wonderful & inspirational community event!



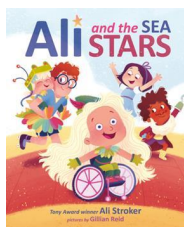
Over \$1500 was given as a free will offering to support Children's Specialized Hospital, an RWJBarnabas Health Facility and Family Promise of Bergen County for Camp Lots of Fun!



**Be a Lion!**



**Thanks to Linda Sweetman Waters for playing the piano!**



**Ali signed copies of her books .....**

**And we enjoyed yummy treats from Team 200 and the Deacons!**



“God Shed His Grace on Thee” .....along with a little rain!



When First Pres participated in Ridgewood’s July 4<sup>th</sup> parade!



Thanks to drivers: Frank Pastor (who owns the historic cars), Steven Paz and Jessica Strader Paz (who drove home in the rain without wipers)!





**“East Meets West” Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup>  
Pastor Bruce preached at Westside!**



Rev. Marc Oehler welcomed First Pres members. Our choir participated and Linda Sweetman Waters played piano!



**Then there was food...**

**Fellowship...**



**And Music from Westside's Praise band!**





designed by freepik

**Walk & Talk @ the Ridgewood Duck Pond:  
Thursdays September 21 & 28; October 5, 12, 19 & 26**

Are you looking for a way to get more exercise and enjoy the beautiful fall weather? Would you like to connect with friends from church during the week? Then Walk & Talk is for you! On the following dates, be sure to join Pastor Bruce and your First Pres friends at 6:00 p.m. for an hour of exercise and lively conversation as we walk the path around the Duck Pond on East Ridgewood Avenue: Thursdays September 21 & 28; October 5, 12, 19 & 26. Put on your walking shoes and meet us at the flag pole (on the west side of the Duck Pond) between 5:45 and 6:00. And one more thing: bring a friend! See you at the Duck Pond!

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***First Pres Supper Club for Those Experiencing Loss***

The dinner hour can be one of the most difficult times of day for widows, widowers and those who have lost a significant other. As one First Pres member, who has experienced such a loss, said recently, "It's hard to eat alone."

In response, we are forming the First Pres Supper Club, an opportunity for those who have experienced loss to gather for a meal and fellowship. Whether you have lost a spouse or significant other due to death, separation, or divorce, you are welcome to join us.

The first such gathering will take place in the home of Marjorie Vanacore at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, September 20. Marjorie and Pastor Bruce will provide the main dish(es) and beverages and welcome others to bring a side dish.

The evening will consist of the meal and conversation, followed by a time of reflection led by Pastor Bruce.

Please let us know you plan to attend by emailing Marjorie at [vanacore25@yahoo.com](mailto:vanacore25@yahoo.com) or Pastor Bruce at [pastorbruce@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:pastorbruce@firstpresridgewood.org).

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**First Wednesdays ~**



Ladies, join us for an evening of food, conversation, and spiritual inspiration. It's a wonderful opportunity for women of all ages to gather together with church friends and make new ones, as we discover fresh ways to connect with one another and with

God. Each gathering will include a brief spiritual inspiration with most of the time for people to enjoy fellowship over food. You are invited to bring a dish to the potluck dinner.

**Host: Donna Flagg**

**Spiritual Inspiration of the Month – Dawn Murdock** Instruments of God ~ Reflecting on God's love and goodness making music through our lives.

**Wednesday, September 6th**

**from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

**Minnema Room at First Pres**

**Please RSVP by Thursday, August 31 to Donna Flagg**

Email: [flaggbda@gmail.com](mailto:flaggbda@gmail.com) Phone number: 201-819-2327



## Meet for Breakfast

### Get Acquainted Breakfast Gatherings: Sundays September 24, October 1 & 8 @ 8:30 a.m. in the Minnema Room

Are you interested in becoming a member of First Pres? Or would you like to learn more about the church as you consider becoming a member? If so, you are invited to attend a series of three Get Acquainted Breakfast Gatherings on Sundays, September 24 and October 1 & 8, in the Minnema Room (lower level). Sponsored by the Growth Committee, the breakfast gatherings provide a convenient way to get acquainted with the church, some of its members and staff, as well as various First Pres ministry and mission opportunities. Please contact Pastor Bruce (215.337.5623 or [pastorbruce@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:pastorbruce@firstpresridgewood.org)) if you have any questions or if you plan to attend.

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Our guest preacher on Sunday, September 17, will be Rev. Elmarie Parker, who is the PC(USA) Regional Liaison for Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. She is pictured here with Pastor Bruce during a conference this spring in Dhour Schweir, Lebanon.

Please plan to attend church this day to meet Rev. Parker.

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## A Night Out to support the Aleppo Christian Center

Saturday, September 30<sup>th</sup> from 5 PM -8 PM at First Pres

\$50 Ticket Price includes Appetizers, Dinner, & Dessert catered by Nouri Café

Our Presbyterian family in Syria has **persevered through almost nine years of war**. Throughout it all, they continued to **worship joyfully, serve faithfully, and witness boldly**. They have modeled for us, the Church which Paul wrote about in *Romans 5: We rejoice in our suffering because suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope; and hope does not disappoint us...* Your gifts for the Aleppo Christian Center will both **encourage them** and **help equip them** for the ministries to which Christ has called them, even in such a difficult place+. From the [Aleppo Christian Center – The Outreach Foundation](#)

Watch for more information and consider attending and donating to this special church fundraiser!



## July

Brooks Yates, James Yates, Ruth Plucinski, Amanda Schnure, Frankie Feltmann, Diane Amoruso, Diane Eliya, Pam Brady

## August

Evelyn Kender, Jan Ax, Kyle Schnure, Krystina Dickinson, Don Kender

## September

Tom Gibson, Alex Santangelo, Nick Santangelo, Maddy Santangelo, Sam Santangelo, Cole Bellorgey, Will Yates, Abed Eliya, Mike Feeney, Donna Flagg, Jamie Eliya, Carol Davidson, Joan Davies, Don Weyant, Suzy McDevitt, Ryan McDevitt, Sue Dickinson, Luis Ostolozaga, Nancy Walters

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## Church Staff

Pastor	Rev. Bruce Ballantine
Director of Children & Families	MaryEllen Castaldo
Director of Music	Dr. Edward Schmiedecke
Organist	Linda Sweetman Waters
Dir. 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)

**Church Phone** (201) 652-2504

[www.firstpresridgewood.org](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)

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

