



*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,

Early this year, I was invited by The Outreach Foundation to make a second trip to Lebanon and Syria. Not long after that, the first earthquake hit Syria, and I wasn't sure the trip would take place. Eventually, however, I received word that the trip is on. Sensing a call to say "yes" to the invitation, I consulted with the First Pres Mission, Peace and Social Righteousness Team and was given the green light to make plans to travel to Lebanon and Syria in May. Session has given its blessing as well.

During our bicentennial year, it has been our goal to become more engaged in worldwide mission. I believe that my participation in this trip will strengthen our relationship with the Presbyterian churches of Syria and Lebanon, a part of the world from which a number of our members immigrated. And my participation will give me first-hand knowledge of the challenges and needs of the people there, which of course, I plan to share with our congregation. On a personal level, it will give me an opportunity to reconnect with people I met in October, hear their stories and pray with them, letting them know they have not been forgotten.

The first few days of the trip will be spent in Lebanon attending a conference hosted by the National Evangelical (Presbyterian) Synod of Syria and Lebanon. Attendees will include pastors of the Synod, the Synod's European partners, representatives of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance [both from the Presbyterian Church (USA)], and representatives of The Outreach Foundation.

I am especially looking forward to spending time with Rev. Ibrahim Nseir, who is one of the conference presenters. Ibrahim is Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Aleppo, and I hope to learn from him about the church's role in earthquake recovery and, more specifically, what the most pressing needs of the people of Aleppo are at this time.

Originally, the second leg of the trip was to be spent in Syria, visiting the Presbyterian congregations in Aleppo and Latakia, the two major Syrian cities most affected by the earthquakes. However, the process for obtaining a visa to Syria has recently been changed, and it is virtually impossible for an American to travel to Syria at this time. Therefore, following the conference, I will visit ministry stations and churches in Lebanon. As I did last October, I will provide the congregation with regular reports and reflections via Facebook and email.

The trip is scheduled for May 12-22. And I am pleased that Rev. Susan Friedl has agreed to preach in my absence! Please keep me in your prayers while I'm away. Thank you!

Grace and peace,

Bruce

## Endowment Corner



Spring is always a time of renewal for nature as weather warms and trees and flowers bloom with new growth. Those of us on the Endowment Committee are ever hopeful that spring will inspire new growth for our “Tree of Life” as well. With that thought in mind we are delighted to share with you the arrival of two new leaves on our “Tree”. In honoring the fifth Commandment to “Honor your mother and your father”, found in Exodus 20: 1-17, Dave and Mary Shaw have gifted our “Tree” with two leaves in memory of their respective parents.



As our “Tree of Life “grows, so grows our Endowment Fund. We are thankful for the many names that grace our church family tree . Who might you like to honor or remember in this special way? Engraved Leaves are \$500 engraved stones are \$2000.

For more information on ways to give to Endowment take a brochure on tables in the hallway or call Laura Magrath (201) 214-3499 or Joanne Bonwick (201) 652-7520

**Endowment is the gift that keeps on giving!**

# MISSION WORK



On Sunday, April 2, 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 lasagna made by Jessica Strader; individual meatloaves made by Joan Davies; chicken, rice, broccoli and cheddar casserole made by Suzy; corn casserole made by Lynn Malyso and apples and dinner rolls provided by Janis Ax.

A big thank you goes out to these ladies for their generosity and talent in providing these dishes, and for helping to keep the mission going. Lynn recently became a member of First Pres and reached out to Suzy wanting to get involved with this mission. Thank you, Lynn, for becoming our newest cook!

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 [suzyjmc2@yahoo.com](mailto:suzyjmc2@yahoo.com) or by text at 201-315-2063. We are thrilled to be able to say that the schedule of volunteers for the months of May - August have been completed, thanks to amazing support!

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The Mission, Peace and Social Righteousness Team would like to thank everyone who participated in the OGHS Fish and Chips sale! We raised \$730.00 for One Great Hour of Sharing!



Special thanks to Pastor Bruce, Dana Feeney, Joe Unger, Richard and Joan Davies, Steven Paz and Jessica Strader Paz!  
  
And to Sandy Santangelo for letting us once again borrow her tents!







Lenten stations in the Sanctuary thanks to the Worship and Arts Committee.

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Maundy Thursday in the Chapel with Trinity and First Pres.

Sermon by Rev. Sam Stone "You Have Greatness Thrust Upon You"



Linda Sweetman Waters on piano ☺

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Palm Sunday parade led by chancel bells with palm waving.



Donna Flagg shared in 200 seconds what 1<sup>ST</sup> Pres means to her.







Sami Eliya shares in 200 seconds what 1<sup>st</sup> Pres means to him.

The Day Everything Changed by Pastor Bruce.

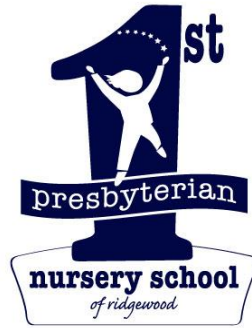
Special music provided by John Luckenbill, Marcus Ryen, Emma Schmeidecke, Don Dexter, Linda Sweetman Waters and our amazing chancel choir!











The Weekday Nursery School is bustling with activity!

In celebration of Oral Health Day, classes enjoyed a visit from the hygienist from the Pediatric Dental Associates of Ridgewood, explaining how to keep our teeth clean and healthy.

The children celebrated a special day by sharing a morning at school with a special guest for Special Person Visitation Day. Everyone participated in an activity-filled morning of gym, music, and classroom projects.



We are accepting applications for our popular Summer Camp 2023. Our themes this year are 'Preschool Process Art' & 'Preschool Stem'. Students can sign up for fun-filled weeks of interactive & engaging educational activities. These activities include creative arts & crafts, science & discovery, stories & songs all based on our themes.

Registration for the 2023-2024 school year is underway! We offer programs for children 2 ½ years - 5 years, 5 days/week. Please contact Julia Bolt, Director, at 201-445-2552 for more information and a tour of our preschool. Church members receive a tuition discount. We offer a fun, nurturing environment, while preparing our children for kindergarten. We look forward to hearing from you!



In Sunday school we learned about Palm Sunday, Easter, doubting Thomas, the Road to Emmaus, and early believers in the Book of Acts.

During Lent students were encouraged to send a card to a chosen First Pres. church member to let them know they are being thought of and prayed for! It is so important to pray for one another and for the youth of our church to get to know our church's members. They also decorated bookmarks that were mailed to First Pres Members.



Thank you to all who donated so generously to our Lenten food non-food drive to support Helping Hands Pantry in Hillsdale, NJ. It was greatly appreciated!

Thank you to all who *GENEROUSLY* donated candy/chocolate for our egg hunt!  
You are all such a blessing!



Thank you to the Pavao family and the Reade family who attended the First Families gathering on Sunday April 16<sup>th</sup>. We had a lovely conversation and refreshments. It was Shane's first time at First Pres. He attended the Worship service, then Sunday school with his Mom (Debra) and his Aunt Kristi! Welcome Shane, it was so nice to get to know you!

### First Pres. Annual Easter Egg Hunt 2023





# VBS 2023



Monday, August 7th - Thursday, August 10th, 2023

Time: 9:00AM-11:30AM

We NEED Volunteers to help with Shepherding, Crafts/Experiments, Snacks, Music and Activities.

Please prayerfully consider helping with this amazing children's program to make this a great success.

Contact: MaryEllen Castaldo

email at [marecmt@aol.com](mailto:marecmt@aol.com). Text or call: cell#862-686-8956



CHRISTIAN  
EDUCATION

## You Don't Know What You're Missing - Join the Christian Education Committee!

We're a dynamic group working to make the church a more engaging place for children, youth, families and adults of all ages to learn and grow as followers of Jesus. Please consider joining us to contribute your ideas for new, creative activities, sharing your gifts with our church community in this way. We only meet every other month, and on Zoom, so it's easy to participate. If you might be interested, or for more information please speak to one of the co-chairs at coffee hour or by phone:

Dawn Murdock (201-281-0515) and Sue Fischer (201-670-6735) or our Director, MaryEllen Castaldo (862-686-8956).

## Congregational Meeting Sunday, May 7

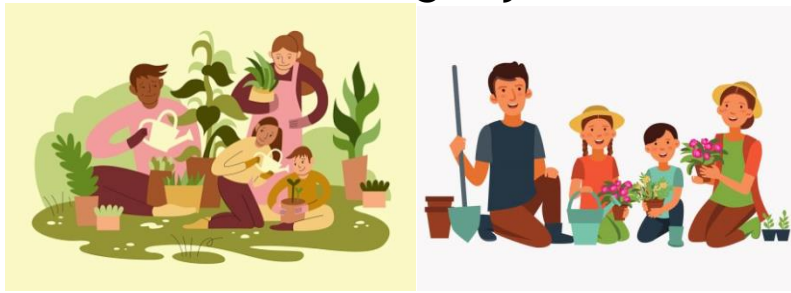


The Session has called a Congregational Meeting for Sunday, May 7, 2023, following the worship service for the purpose of:

1. Electing Elders, Deacons and Members of the Nominating Committee, and
2. Voting on a proposed change to the church by-laws to reduce the size of the Session from 15 to 12 elected Elders and to reduce the size of the Board of Deacons from 18 to 15 elected Deacons.

The meeting will take place in person in the Sanctuary. All members are encouraged to attend.

# “Planting Day”



In continuing with our Bicentennial year celebration, we are holding a special “Family Planting Day” event with our church school families on Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. A day of sprucing up our garden! If you would like to help fill our garden with beautiful perennial plants and flowers, you can donate toward the purchase of flowers, plants and materials needed to beautify our Bicentennial Garden located on the East Ridgewood Ave. side of our church building.

The cost of the plants/flowers \$20.00 per flower/plant  
You can purchase one plant or multiple flowers/plants.

To fill our garden nicely we estimate to need approximately 60 flowers/plants.

## Please help us to create a beautiful “Bicentennial Garden”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to contribute to \_\_\_\_\_ plants/flowers to be planted in the garden.  
(how many)

I will send my donation in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_ to the church.

Please make checks payable to: First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood

On your check, please write “garden” in memo:

You can donate using VENMO. Please put “garden” in the comment!

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Rev. Mary Marcus was our guest preacher on April 16<sup>th</sup>, Ed Schmiedecke and Marcia Unger shared what First Pres means to them in 200 seconds! Inspirational words from all!





**First Wednesdays  
May 2023**

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.

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**What: May Hostess – Li Towt**

You are invited to bring a dish to the potluck dinner.

**Spiritual Inspiration of the Month – Donna Flagg**

*God Speaks To Every Human Soul ~ YOU ARE MY BELOVED*

**Date: Wednesday, May 3**

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

**Place: Li's Home**

721 Campbell Place  
Westwood, NJ 07675

**Parking Directions:**

**Li lives in a townhouse development with limited parking, so it is best to park on Boulevard.**

From the Ridgewood area: When on Mill Street make a left onto 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Turn right at the 1<sup>st</sup> cross street onto Boulevard.

You will see two red barns (Bogert's Furniture buildings) on your right.

Park anywhere on the street

***Do not park in the parking lot to the right of the red barns.***

Walk through the parking lot and you will see a small walkway to Li's townhome. Her home is the first one on the left you will see.

**Please RSVP by Friday, April 28 to Donna Flagg**

Email: [flaggbda@gmail.com](mailto:flaggbda@gmail.com)

Phone number: 201-818-6881

# A Community Conversation with **Ali Stroker & Jim Stroker**

An Afternoon of Inspiration, Music, Story-telling and Q & A



~ Book Signing by Ali ~  
**Children's Books: *Chance to Fly*  
*Ali and the Sea Stars***

**First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, New Jersey  
722 East Ridgewood Avenue, Ridgewood  
Sunday, June 25, 2023  
3:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.**

**Free-Will Offering to Benefit  
*Children's Specialized Hospital, an RWJBarnabas Health Facility  
and Family Promise of Bergen County - Camp Lots of Fun*  
~ All Donations Are Appreciated ~**





**WILL YOU SAY YES?**

**PUTTING**

**God's Love In Action**

**Building Hope with Homes with Passaic County Habitat  
(formerly Paterson Habitat)**

**Saturday, May 6 and Saturday, June 24**

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**I SAY YES!!!**



**No previous construction skills or experience are needed,  
just a stewardship heart!**

**Ages 16 and older are welcomed to volunteer!**

***Sign up during coffee hour or email/call***

***Donna Flagg: [flaggbda@gmail.com](mailto:flaggbda@gmail.com)***

***201-818-6881***



PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR BICENTENNIAL

## CELEBRATING 200 YEARS OF GOD'S GRACE AND GLORY

*First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, New Jersey*

**FRIDAY, JUNE 9th, 2023 6:00 PM**

CATERED PICNIC | LIVE MUSIC | ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

**SATURDAY, JUNE 10th, 2023 6:00 PM**

EVENING WORSHIP | HYMN SING REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

**SUNDAY, JUNE 11th, 2023 10:00 AM**

MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE FOLLOWED BY CATERED LUNCHEON

RSVP BY 6/2/23 TO 201-652-2504 or  
[Dana.Feeney@firstpresridgewood.org](mailto:Dana.Feeney@firstpresridgewood.org)

PLEASE LET US KNOW WHICH EVENTS YOU CAN ATTEND





|                         |                        |                       |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Britt Tunick</b>     | <b>Dana Feeney</b>     | <b>Ramzi Eliya</b>    |
| <b>Kirk Lavine</b>      | <b>Gloria Tedeschi</b> | <b>Joanne Bonwick</b> |
| <b>Bruce Ballantine</b> | <b>Lois Morris</b>     | <b>Lew Dickinson</b>  |
| <b>Helen Eliya</b>      | <b>David Schwartz</b>  | <b>Sarah Hutton</b>   |
|                         | <b>Jan Cross</b>       |                       |

### 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) |

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

**Pastor Bruce: (215) 337-5623 please contact him directly for Pastoral Care**  
[www.firstpresridgewood.org](http://www.firstpresridgewood.org)

For the Lord God is our  
sun and our shield. He  
gives us grace and glory.  
The Lord will withhold  
no good thing from  
those who do what is  
right.  
Psalms 84:11 NLT