



The First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood

First Press Newsletter

722 E Ridgewood Ave, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
(201) 652-2504

March 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,

One of my favorite verses of Scripture is **Psalm 119:105**, which reads: "**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**" (NRSV)

The lamp and light metaphor is easy to understand. One doesn't need a lamp or a light unless one is actually doing something. You can sit in the dark quite comfortably without any light whatsoever. But if you're going to venture outside at night, hike a wooded trail in the darkness, or go downstairs to a dark basement, you need a light.



Thus, the question becomes: "In such situations, what light source is available to me?" I might consider the light of emotion, the light of education, the light of reason, or perhaps the light of experience. Certainly, each of these is capable of providing glimmers of light. But the psalmist suggests that the light that will most fully illuminate the path is the light of Scripture.

Scripture will serve as our most dependable guide as we make our way through the sometimes complicated, sometimes confusing, sometimes discouraging days of our lives. Scripture will light the way and help us make good decisions as we encounter forks in the road. Scripture will remind us of our sinful nature, while at the same time assuring us of God's love and forgiveness. Scripture will remind us of God's presence and encourage us when we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders. Scripture will remind us of our call to love God and love others as we love ourselves.

Thy Word, a song written by Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith and released in 1984, says it well:

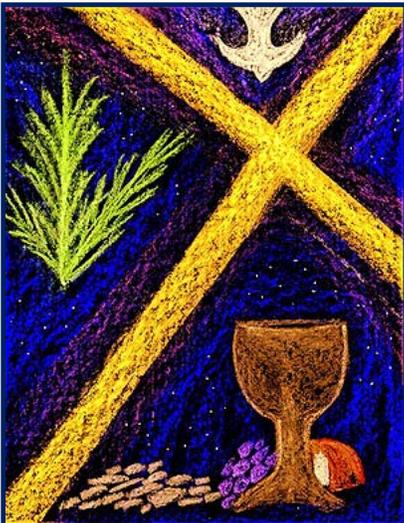
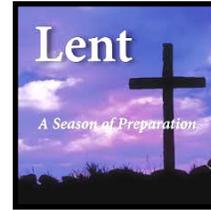
*I will not forget Your love for me, and yet My heart forever is wandering
Jesus, be my guide And hold me to Your side And I will love You to the end
Nothing will I fear As long as You are near Please, be near me to the end
Thy word Is a lamp unto my feet And a light unto my path*

So, my friends, I encourage you to immerse yourself in Scripture! During this Lenten Season, pick up a copy and begin reading *Lifted Up in Love*, the Lenten devotional, which includes a Bible verse and a reading for each day during Lent. You will find **copies** on the table in the Cloister. Or, read through the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of John, from which I will be preaching during this 40-day season.

May God's word guide each of us as we make our Lenten journey!

**Grace and peace,
Bruce**

Lenten supper and worship continues **March 6th** and **13th** at **6:00pm** on **Wednesdays**. During worship, members and friends will share a portion of their faith journey. The evening will conclude at **7:00pm**. All Lenten Suppers will take place in the Auditorium. Watch the Interest Items for additional information. And one more thing: **Bring a friend!**



Holy Week Services

Sunday, March 24 ~ Palm/Passion Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary

Thursday, March 28 ~ Maundy Thursday Worship at 6:30 p.m. in the Chapel

Friday, March 29 ~ Good Friday Worship at 1:00 p.m. in the Chapel

Sunday, March 31 ~ Easter Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Followed by the ~Easter Egg Hunt at 11:15 a.m. at the Manse
Join us and invite a friend!

~ Experience Lent in a New and Deeper Way ~

Pastor Bruce and the **Worship and Arts Committee** invite you to attend **the Maundy Thursday Service with Communion** on **March 28** in the **Chapel** and to **visit seven interactive prayer stations** that will be set up in the auditorium. It is a wonderful opportunity to take time to reflect on our spiritual and faith journey as we prepare our hearts and minds for Easter.

What are the Lenten prayer stations?

There will be seven interactive stations that we hope will facilitate a unique prayer experience for you. Each station has a theme and takes you through a guided activity with instructions and all the materials needed that will help you pray creatively.

When?	Maundy Thursday, March 28
	5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Lenten Prayer Stations
	6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday Service
	7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Lenten Prayer Stations
	Good Friday, March 29 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Lenten Prayer Stations

The Lenten Prayer Stations Explained:



Fountain of Grace-Our burdens weigh us down and separate us from our loving God who invites us to lay them down. Place a small rock in the water to let go your burden. Feel the peace of God as you lay down your burden to Him.

Lenten Prayer Stations (Con't)



Light a Candle of Concern - for Yourself or for Someone You Love

Throughout the world, lighting candles is a sacred ritual. Candles have always been a symbol of the Christian life - a 'light' in the midst of the world's 'darkness.' Light a candle to represent you and your life, and another candle to represent a person who may need 'your light' and pray for them.



Reflect on Psalm 51 ~ God's Forgiveness - Lent is a season of self-reflection where we are called to examine ourselves in the light of Christ. To reflect on our own weakness and frailty and our utter lost-ness outside of the grace of God. As you reflect on the words in Psalm 51, think about your need for deep grace from God. Our prayer tonight is that God will give each one of us the courage we need to look within ourselves and attend to what we see and develop a sense of 'deep knowing' so that we can be confronted by our weakness, sinfulness and frailty and eventually experience the joy of reconciliation with God.



The Fruit of the Spirit - The Fruit of the Spirit is a phrase found in the Bible in Galatians 5:22-23. It refers to nine attributes of a Christian life inspired by the Holy Spirit living within them. These attributes are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Each of these qualities is important for living a life that is pleasing to God. When we seek the presence of God with humility and faith, we can experience true joy and peace from living according to God's will.



The Light of God's Love Shines Through Others - Be Still. Take a couple of deep cleansing breaths. Slowly-in and out. Blessings to those persons who have had an impact on your faith life. Take a moment, hold those persons in God's light, write their names and place them in the Blessings jar.



Praying with Scripture ~ Lectio Divina - The phrase "Be still and know that I am God" calls us to take time to pause and reflect. It reminds us that God is still in control no matter what happens in our lives. By taking time to be still and connect with our faith, we can find peace even amidst the chaos of life. We can take a moment to be thankful for what we have and remember that our trials are part of God's plan. We can also use this time to pray and ask God for guidance and strength. Being still isn't always easy, but it can be enriching if we take time to be thankful and remember that God is always with us.



God's Spiritual Gifts to Us - As Christians, we have all been blessed with an abundance of spiritual gifts from Holy Spirit, Christ and Our Father. These gifts are meant to serve each other and empower us in our daily lives. The Bible encourages Christians to be "faithful stewards" of our God-given gifts. Using your talents for God can help you find purposeful work and share God's love. Depending on what your gifts are, you will most likely be using those talents in different ways. Look for opportunities to serve God and use your gifts in your daily life.

Mission



**Fish (or Chicken) and Chips Dinner
provided
by Tastefully British
A Mission Fundraiser for
One Great Hour of Sharing**



Date: Wednesday, March 20th (rain or shine)

Time: 5 PM to 7 PM

Where: Food truck will be in the front church lot (unless you require handicap parking please park in the back parking lot or on Circle Avenue)

Cost: \$20.00 for Fish or Chicken, French fries and Coleslaw

ALL fish or chicken orders must be received by Sunday, March 17th

To order email joandavies916@gmail.com or jessicastrader@gmail.com

Text your order to **Jess** at **551-404-7345** or call the church office at **201-652-2504**

You can pre pay by **Venmo** (memo **Fish and Chips**) or **pay at pick up**.

Please note: Once you place an **order** we are **obligated** to **pay** for your dinner!

All meals are cooked to order once you arrive & will take about 5 minutes.

You can **dine in** the auditorium or take your food **home!**

If you are picking up more than one meal to go, **please bring a bag**.

The **three programs** supported by **One Great Hour of Sharing - Presbyterian Disaster Assistance**, the **Presbyterian Hunger Program**, and **Self-Development of People** - all work in different ways to serve individuals and communities in need. From initial disaster response to ongoing community development, their work fits together to provide people with safety, sustenance, and hope.

The need is great and so is our calling, please support this cause!



Sunday School Lenten lessons in March include: Prayers & Psalms.



YOUTH LEAD WORSHIP AND DENIM DAY

*Thank you to all the youth who participated and led our Worship service on Sunday, January 28th, Great Job! A **BIG THANK YOU** to all who wore their favorite denim/jeans and donated to "Denim Day" to support our youth group for future trips and events. **\$801.00 was raised!** What a blessing!*

*Isabella Burger
Cole Bellorgey
Olivia Davis*

*Patrick Edelbach
David Edelbach
Luke Eliya*

*Hudson Feeney Luca Torielli
CJ Torielli
Dante Torielli*

**A special thank you to Maddie Eliya & Johnny Eliya for your part in the sermon!*



*Photography: Joanne Bonwick

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING

On February 11, Super Bowl Sunday, our Christian Ed committee and youth group sponsored the Souper bowl of caring fundraiser. We would like to thank all our soup, chili & stew makers and those who brought crackers and cornbread and rolls! Susan Castaldi, MaryEllen Castaldo, Jill Critchley, Sue Fischer, Suzy McDevitt, Sandy Santangelo Linda Strickland and Craig Walters!

A special Thank you to Anja Lelescu for her delicious cake & Kataryna Mashliakovich for the chocolate football cupcakes! **A HUGE THANK YOU** to our youth group coordinators Helen Eliya and John Vasile! **YOU BOTH were amazing! Thank you for all your HELP!**

Thank you to our First Pres. Youth who collected donations in soup pots and served soup, chili & stew to our church members! **Luke Eliya, Maddie Eliya, Hudson Feeney, Luke Feltmann, CJ Torielli, Dante Torielli, Luca Torielli, Darvin Wall & Hudson Wall.**

Most of all, thank you to all who purchased soup & chili and who generously donated to this fundraiser. Total proceeds raised in the amount of \$ 1,263.00 will be donated to **Eva's Village in Paterson, N.J.**



*Photography: Joanne Bonwick



Classes for Confirmation begin this **Fall** in **October of 2024** for **8th** and **9th** grade **students**. If your child has not received his or her confirmation or if your child is older than 9th grade, please contact **MaryEllen Castaldo**. Email: marecmt@aol.com or text or call, **862-686-8956** .



One Great Hour of Sharing and our "Sunday School"

On February 18th, our Church school youth have received their Fish banks to fill during our Lenten season.

They will have the opportunity to bring them on Maundy Thursday March 20th 5:00pm to 7:00 pm at our Tastefully British fish/chicken and chips dinner event.

They will place them in a designated box and then have a chance to fish for prizes!



Our Lenten Food and Non Food Drive



Through the month of March we are collecting non perishable food sponsored by First Pres. Church School to support Social Services in Ridgewood, N.J. NO Glass Jars or Containers please! THANK YOU!

What SSA really Needs!

- ♥ Paper towels, Toilet paper, Tissues
- ♥ Cleaning Products (all spray types are greatly needed)
- ♥ Sponges, Hand soap, hand sanitizer
- ♥ Laundry Detergent

- ♥ NEED Diapers (sizes...4,5 & 6) and Baby wipes

Non perishable food items *greatly needed*~

they really need Parmalat milk and dry cereal & Jelly

Canned proteins (chicken & tuna)

*Instant oatmeal *Canned soups *Mac & cheese

*Tomato sauce *Pasta or spaghetti * Peanut butter

*Lenten Devotional booklets for Adults and Lenten calendars for children, will be available and located on the tables outside of the Collentine room and on the table in the Cloister hall!



Our annual **St. Patrick's Day Bingo** sponsored by the **Christian Ed Committee** in the auditorium after worship on Sunday, **March 17th!**

There will be refreshments served!

You are invited to our annual Easter Egg Hunt!

Easter Sunday, March 31st

After our 10:00am worship service children ages 2-8yrs old and their families will meet in the auditorium, we will give each child an Easter bag, then together we will walk to the "church manse"

next door where children will hunt for eggs!

Children 9 years and older will receive an Easter treat bag!

Easter Egg Candy NEEDED!

We are asking for candy donations for our Easter egg Hunt. Small foiled chocolate eggs, jolly ranchers, any small candies that are individually wrapped that will fit in a small plastic egg. NO NUTS PLEASE!

*There will be a designated box in the Cloister Hall!



Easter Egg Hunt





PALM SUNDAY - Procession of the Handbell Choir and Church School Families

On Sunday, **March 24th** church school families are invited to wave palm branches and process behind the Handbell choir at the beginning of worship service, then families will take their seats on their way up the aisle. Children will bring their filled **"FISH BANKS"** with them for the children's message and drop their banks in the designated box.

After worship on Palm Sunday we will have animals from **Mountainside Stables** (a petting zoo) located on our front lawn of the church facing Ridgewood Ave!

Endowment Corner March 2024



The **'Luck of the Irish'** is a commonly repeated phrase in modern times. But what does it mean? According to several sources, during the gold and silver rush years in the second half of the 19th century, a number of the most famous and successful miners were of Irish and Irish American birth....The phrase, the "Luck of the Irish" was used to imply that the miners were finding success purely based on luck, rather than on intelligence and skill.

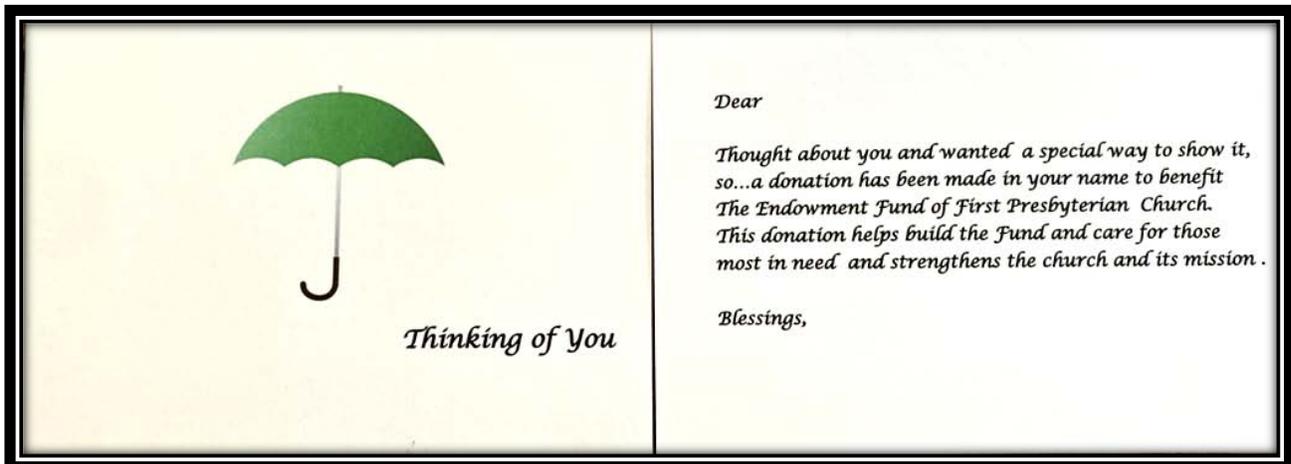
Biblically speaking, 'luck' is not a word found in the Bible. We can find 'good fortune' a number of times and that may come to us not based on intelligence or skill either, but by the grace of God.

But God is not the only one empowered to shed grace on me and thee. We are all empowered by God to follow His example and scatter grace among others. A kinder, gentler world would benefit all of us.

During the month of March consider picking up a Green Umbrella "Thinking of you" Note card to send to someone. For only **\$25** you can **sheda little 'grace'** on someone and support our Endowment Fund.

You can pick up a card packet on the table in the hallway across from the large Bulletin Board. Someone will be glad you did!

For further questions see or call **Laura Magrath (201) 214-3499**
or **Joanne Bonwick (201) 280-6621.**





The Weekday Nursery School has been very busy creating, experimenting, and learning!



The students had so much fun with the hands-on experiments at our in-house "**Scientifically Science**" field trip! Everyone created a storm in a jar, learned what lightning looks like and what thunder sounds like, made an avalanche and experienced the power of ultraviolet rays with bracelets we made. What a very fun time!

Each of our classes celebrated **Valentine's Day** by making special Valentine's for their families and sharing special treats with their classmates. Our dramatic play area was transformed into a post office which included a variety of envelopes, letter writing tools and even a mailbox! The children had fun writing postcards and mailing them all while sharpening their writing and letter skills.



Registration for the **2024-2025 school year** is underway. Feel free to stop by and check out the Nursery School happenings! There are **still openings** for the 24/25 school year. 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!



First Friends

A new opportunity for fellowship

Members and Visitors are Invited to Participate!
Jesus knew that sharing meals is the best way to build community.

Once you sign up, we will create groups of 6-8 people. Groups will generally meet in each other's homes for a simple meal and conversation on a Friday evening during the three-month period from April to June. The host for the month provides a main course while members of the group help to round out the meal by bringing side dishes, appetizers or desserts.

While most groups will represent a cross-section of the church, to accommodate families with children, you may opt to be paired with other families so that children may be included in the gatherings. Please note during sign-up whether you'd like to be joined with a Family Group (with children included).

COME be a part of the table fellowship!

Sign up during coffee hour

Or

Email Donna Flagg – flaggbda@gmail.com

~ All Are Welcomed ~

Receiving the **Sacrament of Baptism** on Sunday February 18th is Logan Hugh DeRemer, son of Sean DeRemer and Alisha Bacchus DeRemer. Pictured to the right are Sean, Alisha, Logan and big sister Riley.



Brenda Brunelle, President of **Connections**, a group for active retired women who meet at First Pres and offer a variety of activities . The group also hosted an awesome coffee hour for us!



MISSION:



St. Paul's

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Paterson, New Jersey

workforce training housing and neighborhood development
teach men's shelter **Hope for today** housing healthy living
adult education **Building for tomorrow** outreach
AIDS awareness affordable housing community service

On February 4, the Torielli family delivered dinner provided by First Pres Volunteers to the men at St Paul's shelter. On the menu were **French Dip** provided by **Sandy Santangelo**, **Lemon Chicken Thighs** provided by **Suzy McDevitt**, **Mac and Cheese with Ham** by **Laura McGrath**, **Roasted Veggies** by **Jessica Lee**, and **Fruit and Bread** provided by **Rebecca Burger**. Needless to say, the Torielli minivan *smelled incredible* on the way to Paterson!

Thank you so much to these volunteers for their generosity, time, and skill invested. We were allowed to bring the food into the kitchen and chat with the staff at the Shelter. The men were very thankful for everything.

We're looking for more **volunteers** for this outstanding mission. (We have **slots to fill for March**) You don't need to cook - you can provide fast food chicken or takeout.

Please contact **Joel Torielli** by email: Torielli@hotmail.com or by text at **201-661-1452** if you are interested.



Here's wishing you a great birthday and a wonderful year ahead...

Dennis Ax

Rebecca Burger

Andy Castaldi

Violet Cohen

Steven Dear

Laurie Feltmann

Jeanine Jamieson

Dawn Murdock

CJ Torielli

Dante Torielli

Marjorie Vanacore

Mary Weyant

Spotlight On...

Suzy McDevitt

What do you get when you take **five pounds** of **Royal Icing** and **Cookie dough**, hand painted **hearts** and **flowers**, an **edible** book of love stories complete with wafer thin book pages? Well...You *could* get the **coveted award** for **Best in Show** in "**Ridgewood's Next Great Baker**" contest (held at **Treat Me Sweet Cookies**).

But, right now you *can't* win that honor because..... (Drum roll please....)

Our very own **Suzy McDevitt (Cookie Creations by Suzy)** did just that! In January she was awarded the highest honor of Best in Show edging out all 1st, 2nd and 3rd place cookie *and* cake contest finalists! If you know Suzy, it's easy to see why she achieved this accomplishment. She's not only one of the *sweetest, creative and hard working* members in our congregation; she has shared and created the *sweetest most delectable, beautiful* cookies with us too! As we congratulate Suzy on her well deserved achievement, First Pres thought it would be nice to highlight Suzy, her cookie business and her family, in our newly created column "Spotlight On".



Suzy became a member of First Pres church in 1997. She and her husband Andy were married in the church in 1998. Both of their children, Ryan and Samantha, were baptized and confirmed at First Pres. She is currently in her 3rd term as a Deacon, and is part of a two-woman committee for the new member breakfast gatherings. She has served as an Elder, played in the bell choir, served as the coordinator of St. Paul's mission for 4 years and has contributed meals since the mission's onset. Additionally, she is a Caring Cook, and has served on numerous other committees.

Prior to establishing Cookie Creations by Suzy, she was a Public School teacher and taught at private Montessori schools for a combined 25 years. When the Covid virus arrived and progressed and when returning to work became "safe", Suzy was hesitant to return to the classroom and knew it was time for a change. But, what exactly would the future hold for her?

The answer came from her daughter, Sam! At Christmas time, they had a tradition of baking treats, and making chocolate covered pretzels. One of the treats was decorated sugar cookies. Sam decided that they needed to step up their game and work on recipes to make better icing, hence decorating better. They were so happy with the results that Sam insisted that her Mom Suzy keep practicing, and attempt to make a go of a small business.

On Valentine's Day 2021, Suzy's small business enterprise began eloquently and aptly named **Cookie Creations by Suzy**. It never would have happened without the urging and encouragement of her daughter and heeding some major God nudges that she was receiving. Her entire family and faith are her biggest supporters and motivators.

Currently, she says that becoming a cookie entrepreneur is not quite as lucrative as teaching and she

misses working with the children. Although her business requires many more hours, she loves working from home, setting her own schedule, and getting to use her creativity in everything she (Spotlight On...Con't)

bakes. (Not to mention not having to do her hair and makeup every morning!) She gets special joy from being a part of her customer's special celebrations, the happiness they express throughout the process of ordering, pictures of completed orders, and finally, pick up and feedback after their event, brings her so much joy. Upon looking back she realizes how much she really needed a change in her life. She says and we quote **"it's amazing how something so lovely came out of the horrible Covid pandemic. God works in so many mysterious ways! So now with 3 years under my belt as Cookie Creations by Suzy, I look forward to each new day, and what new order it may bring. I love doing what I do!"**

The Contest...

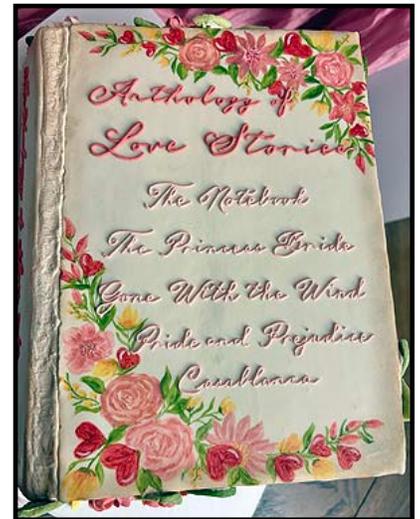
Suzy took inspiration for her submission this year from one of her favorite cookie bakers who had a cookie book of The Secret Garden. Suzy reached out to her and told her of her intention, and she was thrilled.

Thus began the creation of her cookie book — **"Anthology of Love Stories"** it listed the titles of some very well known love stories on the cover. Supporting the cover of the book to stay open was one of the hardest parts of this piece. But it's 100% built and supported with cookies. The pages inside are wafer paper, (also edible) which were airbrushed using handwriting stencil, to look like real book pages. The best part in her opinion was the flowers and hearts spilling out of all 3 sides of the book.

On the day of the contest, the judges named the 3rd, 2nd, and 1st place cookie winners, but she was not one of them. They then went on to name the 3 cake winners. Then came, as they said, **"The most coveted award.... Best in Show"** and announced her name! Such joy and delight! Not to mention that it came with a lovely little monetary prize, as well. Suzy thinks she might retire from this contest now, while she's on top (Ha!) She notes that the contest was really fun, and she doesn't often get to make what she wants to make, but she's rather spend that time in the future, making her customers' themes come to life for their events and celebrations!

You can check out much more of Suzy's work on **Instagram (IG) profile @Cookie Creations by Suzy** or you can search **Suzy McDevitt**. Pictures and/or videos are on her profile page. If you're interested in **ordering**, as some congregation members have already done, you can reach out to her through her **IG account**, **talk to her at Church**, or **email** her at **CookieCreationsbySuzy@gmail.com**

Her small business mostly runs by **word of mouth**, so if you know of someone looking for a cookier, or mentioning that they have an **event** coming up, she would **greatly appreciate your recommendation!**





The Church Mouse:

Thought for the month:

"When we work, we work. When we pray, God works."

... James Hudson Taylor



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 & Handbells: Carol Schmiedecke

Administrative Manager: Dana Feeney

Church Phone: (201) 652-2504

Church Web Site: www.firstpresridgewood.org

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Bookkeeper: Lavonne McMillen

Sexton: Tom Carozza

Custodian: George Wood

Director Nursery School: Julia Bolt

Newsletter Editor: Carrie Werner (Volunte

Photography and Community

Bulletin Board: Joanne Bonwick (Volunteer)