

# This Week @ First

## Save the Date: Sunday, June 2

Please stay after worship on June 2 to enjoy lunch, music, and fellowship, and to celebrate Anne and Jim Apple! Bring a card or letter to be collected that morning, or bring one to the church office ahead of time. A signup to help with refreshments is available [here](#).

Sunday, June 2 will also be **First Food Collection Sunday**. Bring your non-perishable food donations to the narthex on Sunday morning to be collected and shared with Second Harvest or Elder Services.

## Worship & Music

To watch our Sunday worship at 11 AM, connect with us on [YouTube](#) (find the bulletin [here](#)!)

## Spiritual Formation

The Inquirers will continue meeting in the Westminster Room and on [Zoom](#) through June 2 to complete the Peaceful Practices series. This week will be devoted to dignity: considering power dynamics. Please remember to bring your notebooks for journaling. Childcare will be available. The class on June 2 will be an intergenerational class reflecting on the theme of "Transformation."

The children's class will meet in Room 306 at 9:30.

## Welcome Kelby Yoder



Our new part-time Communications and Administrative Coordinator, Kelby Yoder, started this week. Kelby is working towards a Master's degree in Opera at FSU. He will be managing our social media accounts and website, and creating the newsletter and bulletin, among other things.

Please have patience as Kelby gets up to speed — and if you have the opportunity, stop by and say hello! The staff schedule for the summer months is available [here](#) and on the church calendar.

## Compassion & Social Justice

Please consider signing up to help with a **Sunday meal at Grace Mission** over the summer months. You can sign up [here](#).

We will be offering **laundry services** to our unhoused neighbors during the summer. For more information on this, the **Snack Pack ministry**, or other activities of the Compassion & Social Justice team, please contact Debbie Gibson.

**CAJM Celebration June 18:** The Capital Area Justice Ministry will hold its last event of the 2023-2024 year on Tuesday, June 18 from 6-8 PM at Temple Israel. This is a Justice Ministry Celebration celebrating what happened during the year and outlining next steps for the coming year. Food will be provided. RVSP [here](#).

Register here to volunteer for English Conversation Circles  
Sundays, 3 PM — 4 PM  
June 2 — July 28, 2024

Volunteer Training this Sunday, May 26 after worship



15 MINUTES OF GUIDED MEDITATION BEFORE WORSHIP

*Explore the Ancient Christian Spiritual Practice of Meditation*

*Sunday Mornings @ 10:30 AM  
Starting May 19th, John Calvin Room*

*BEGINNERS WELCOME—NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED!*

To submit information to be included in the newsletter and/or the Sunday bulletin (as space permits), please use [this new link](#), which will take you to an online form. You can access the form directly through Breeze, as well. Thank you!

### First Presbyterian Church

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## Pastor's Note



*Only the love-softened heart  
can absorb the pain of others,  
because love is the gift  
that shows us how  
its ingress and egress flow  
only through our wounds.*

—Todd Jenkins

This quote is from my friend, and colleague, Todd Jenkins. We didn't go to school at the same time, but we went to the same seminary. He is a pastor and a poet. I came to know him through serving on the Alumni Council at Columbia Theological Seminary. And I am grateful. He shares a poem each week and this one hooked my heart. Hooked because it resonates with what I know about the ministry in Christ's love that we have shared at First Presbyterian and because this is my next-to-last Pastor's note. My heart is softened by the necessary ending we will share.

Virginia Wolfe said, "If you don't tell the truth about yourself, then you can't tell it to others."

The truth is I came to you a pastor well acquainted with, and needing to process, grief. And I will leave having moved through much of that grief in healthy ways alongside you. We have done some of the hard work of making meaning in the midst of more change than anyone could ever have imagined at First Presbyterian.

One of my pastoral mentors, Reverend Dr. Steve Montgomery, retired after twenty years of service at Idlewild. Steve had given the church an 18-month notice that he was retiring. I had served as one of three associates with Steve. We served together with ease and great respect. I had seen associates come and go, and witnessed APNCs (associate pastor nominating committees) do their work. After Steve's retirement in May, the PNC for the Head of Staff position said to the Session, "We think we'll have someone by September." It seemed a reasonable and practical plan that as a PNC went about wrapping up their search for a candidate, I could serve as the acting head of staff for several months.

Then, the two other associates left for other calls. I was lonely because of my colleagues departing. All of them. And, when September came, the PNC did not have a candidate. So, the church pivoted, shifted gears, and made a new plan. We adapted. What was to be several months turned into two years. And I knew a bit of the wound of grief in a season of loneliness and intensity of focused leadership.

The season of change I found myself leading through at Idlewild, as an acting Head of Staff, didn't just include the radical transition of staff and the end of a capital and building campaign. It also included the deaths of the pastor emeritus, Reverend Dr. Henry Strock, and the recently retired, beloved head of staff — my mentor, Steve — in a traumatic bike accident. And if that wasn't enough, it also included the death of the beloved "mother of the church," our Kitchen and Hospitality Director, Miss Faye Reddoch Smith. Faye had a heart attack on her front porch on her way to church one morning.

And, oh yes, if that wasn't enough loss, all these deaths happened in that thing called COVID-19, as a global pandemic settled into our reality. You can't make this stuff up. There was much to grieve in this season of the church.

We adapted, pivoted, and shifted gears as the Session, the Clerk, the congregation, and the remaining staff. We set goals that were honest; we found ways to support the staff, the congregation, and the community for the tsunami of change and grief we were living through. A grief expert gathered with the staff and Session. We offered to share our worship platform with other local Presbyterian Churches as we had the technology in place needed for virtual worship. That meant we had seven pastors, musicians, and bulletin producers working collaboratively overnight. Our entire worship framework changed in the name of outrageous hospitality, and service, with our Presbytery colleagues. We created a shared community outdoor art project that made space for individualized, yet communal, expressions of grief and partnered with the local food pantry to use our parking lot as a mobile food pantry. One day could give immeasurable frustration and indescribable joy. Psalm 30's text, "Weeping may linger for the night but joy comes in the morning" resonated more for time's moment-by-moment. We were the church with resilience, joy, curiosity, compassion, and an awakened sense of our complicity in the brokenness of the world. We continued to make our song, "Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia."

It was through the living of those days that I began to hear this refrain, "We are the body of Christ, broken, yet whole." Some who interviewed me at First Presbyterian shared a common thread in the honest confession, "We are broken and wounded." Certain choices made by the church and presbytery led to consequences that could never have been anticipated and harm had been felt across the congregation, the previous staff members, the elders of the church, and I'd even dare say, the Presbytery.

I knew God's call to First Presbyterian like Mary. "Here I am." Humbly I would say, here we are, having done hard work and having made some meaning in the midst of grief and loss. And maybe we have learned, and been grown in how to trust the ingress and egress of Christ's love. It isn't free from pain and suffering. We are the body of Christ, broken, yet miraculously whole. As Jim and I come to take our leave, my greatest hope is that awareness will continue to grow in the healing work; the work of administration; and the exploration of how God is calling this church to be shaped in worship and program moving forward in faith for a new season of leadership.

God's peace, God's presence.

Anne