

1st Pres NEWS VIEWS

November/December 2025

First Presbyterian Church • Cedar Rapids • Iowa



11 | 23 Deck the Halls | 4-6:00 pm

11 | 30 First Sunday in Advent | 10:00am

12 | 12 Vespers with Washington Madrigals | 6:00 pm

12 | 14 Cantata Sunday | 10:00am

12 | 18 Blue Christmas | 6:00 pm

12 | 21 Christmas Pageant | 10:00 am

12 | 24 Christmas Eve

5:00 & 10:30 Christmas Eve Recital

Ted Cronbaugh, Organist

5:30 Family Friendly Candlelight Worship

11:00 Candlelight Service of Nine Lessons
& Carols with Chancel Choir

Sermons in November & December

November 2nd | All Saints' Sunday
Mark 15:40-16:8 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8 |

Called to Care at Life's End
The women who cared for Jesus' body and Paul's confident facing of death show us two sides of faithful stewardship at life's end. We're called to care tenderly for others and face our own mortality with resurrection hope.

November 9th
Guest Preacher: Reverend Anni Thorn

November 16
1 Peter 4:10-11
Called to Care as One Body
Our journey concludes where it began—with 1 Peter 4:10 and the call to use our gifts as faithful stewards. Every dimension of life we've explored comes together as we pledge our whole selves in grateful response to God's abundant grace.

November 23
Luke 23:33-43 & Colossians 11:15-20
Our Kind of King
This week we close out the Christian year with Christ the King Sunday and explore the tension between the divinity and power of Christ and how it is expressed in humility, care for others and sacrifice.

Advent & Christmas 2025: Do Not Be Afraid
Every Advent, we light candles, sing carols, and pray for Christ's coming because we believe God entered a frightened world to bring good news. We hold onto hope because we believe that Christ did come—that's the promise of the season. Our hope is not flimsy or fleeting. It's gritty, resilient, and can endure—no matter what we fear or face. This season, let us insist on hope and trust that good news is greater than fear.

November 30 | Advent 1
Luke 1:5-13 | Lamentations 3:55-57
We Long For God To Break In
In times of occupation, exile, and personal heartache, we cry out to God with our deepest longings—for justice, for healing, for hope. Like Zechariah and the writer of Lamentations, we learn that naming our fears and longings before God is the first step toward encountering the God who draws near.

December 7 | Advent 2
Matthew 11:1-11 | Isaiah 43:19-21
God Is At Work Even Now
Even John the Baptist, from his prison cell, questioned whether his life's work mattered—asking Jesus, "Are you the one?" We learn that hope doesn't depend on seeing results or proof of success, but on trusting that God is at work in ways we cannot always see.

December 14 | Advent 3
Cantata Sunday
Luke 1:26-39 | Jeremiah 1:4-10
We Are Called Forward
Mary and Jeremiah teach us that saying "yes" to God's call doesn't mean our fears disappear—Mary hurries to Elizabeth's home even as the Magnificat forms on her lips. Courage isn't the absence of fear, but stepping forward in faith even when our voices tremble.

December 21 | Advent 4
Christmas Pageant
Matthew 1:18-25 | Isaiah 41:5-10
Give Me Your Hand
Joseph could have turned away in fear and shame, but instead he reaches out his hand to Mary, standing in solidarity with her and shielding her from harm. Fear often isolates us, but when we reach for one another—offering and accepting help—our connection becomes a source of courage and strength.

December 24
Christmas Eve
Luke 2:1-20
Good News Is Loud
The angels don't whisper the good news—they shout it to the skies, and the shepherds run through the streets proclaiming what they've seen. Let us be disruptive with our joy, amplifying the hope of Christ's birth with unruly, overflowing celebration.

December 28
Matthew 2:13-23
Finding Safety, Protecting Hope
The Holy Family flees to Egypt as refugees, fearing for their child's life under Herod's violent reign—a reality shared by countless families around the world today. Rather than letting fear paralyze us, what if we harnessed it as fuel to fight for a world where no one has to fear for their safety?



LIBRARY @ FIRST PRES

Library Spotlight

Enrich your holiday season with a good book. We've added several new books to our collection for the Advent season. Find them on display "under the butterfly".

A Child is Born

Discover the fascinating connections between ancient birth stories and the Nativity of Jesus. The book discusses the births of Isaac, Ishmael, Samson and Samuel to foreshadow and enrich the timeless Christmas story as the final chapter.

Not a Silent Night

Imagine Jesus from Mary's point of view – proud of her son, in awe of his gifts and mission, guided by love for him as a person. This book begins at the end with Mary at the crucifixion and resurrection; travels back in time as she witnesses his life and ministry; and ends at the beginning with the Christ child born in a stable, Mary's beautiful baby.

These are just two of several new books for the Advent season. Stop by the library and check them out.

Children's Library

Did you know that First Pres has a children's library for book check-out? The Young Disciples Library is located in the Sunday School hall next to the Nursery. You will find hundreds of books for baby to teens to be checked out and enjoyed at home. Watch for the Christmas display out in a few weeks. Enrich your young one's holiday season with a book!



Remembering the Saints Among Us Sunday, November 2nd

On All Saints' Day, we pause to honor those who have shaped our faith journey, the saints who walked before us and those who walk alongside us still. In the Presbyterian tradition, this sacred day reminds us that we are part of an unbroken chain: blessed by those who came before, and called to bless those who will follow. At First Presbyterian, we mark this day with a service of remembrance and hope. We speak aloud the names of beloved members who have died in the past year, lighting candles as we hold each one in prayer. The service culminates in communion, where we gather as one body, past, present, and future, united in Christ. This year, we remember with thanksgiving: Gloria Walko, George Meaney, Marcia Jepsen, Fred Johnson, Pat Lusted, Karen Wernimont, Allen Armbrrecht, Doug Schoff. This is a deeply meaningful service for our congregation, and we invite you to join us as we celebrate the lives of these faithful saints and the legacy of love they leave behind.

Youth Events

On Saturday night Saturday **November 15th**, I encourage all students in middle school and high school students who are interested to join us for another Nerf War night at First Presbyterian Church. This will be from 6-7:30 pm. Grab your favorite Nerf gun and bring a friend to this wild event.

On Wednesday **November 19th** each age group will be working together as we box our care packages to send off to our college students. Plan for a night of serving, packing and writing encouraging notes to include in our packages to be shipped out to our college students who are away from home and keeping busy with classes.

Middle school & High school Lock-In will be taking place on Friday evening **November 21st** starting at 7 pm and ending at 8 am on Saturday morning November 22.

There will be no youth activities Wednesday **November 26th** due to Thanksgiving break.

On **December 3rd**, both middle & high school students are invited to join us for our annual Star Tree shopping night. We will meet at church at 6 pm and each student is asked to bring \$20 to donate in helping buy the suggested donation items and additional money for dinner. We will be shopping again at Walmart and will go to Freddy's for dinner after our shopping is all finished.

Parents, Stan will need additional drivers for this event and if you are free this night and can help transport students, please contact Stan.

On **December 10th** we will have regular Wednesday evening programming for both groups.

On **December 17th**, middle & high school students please join us for our annual dinner and white elephant gift exchange hosted by Pastor Heather at her home (370 34th St. SE, Cedar Rapids, 52403) Middle school students will meet at our usual time from 5:30-6:30 pm Dinner will be served from 6:30-7 pm and high school students are encouraged to join us for dinner and stay following dinner for your gift exchange and gathering time from 7-8:30 pm.



Welcome, Anna! What Happens Next?

On Sunday, October 26th, we were thrilled to meet, hear from, and elect our new Associate Pastor, Anna Sheetz! It was a morning full of welcome, joy, and excitement as we took this important step forward together. But we're not quite done yet - there are a few more steps before Anna officially begins her ministry at First Presbyterian.

Examination by Presbytery: November 20th

Anna is not yet ordained as a Teaching Elder (PCUSA pastor), and ordination is an action of the presbytery. She will go before the Presbytery of East Iowa for examination on November 20th. As it happens, we're hosting that meeting here at First Presbyterian!

Ordination: December 28th

After being successfully examined, Anna plans to be ordained at First Presbyterian Church of Iowa City on December 28th. This timing allows her to say her goodbyes and finish her ministry at Iowa City well during the season of Advent and Christmas.

Installation and Beginning Ministry: January 2026

Following her ordination, Anna will be installed and begin her ministry here at First Presbyterian in January. We'll share more details about her installation service as we get closer to that date. We're grateful for Anna's "yes" to this call, and we look forward to the ministry we'll share together in the months and years ahead!

Middle School Youth

Middle school students, please join us Wednesdays from 5:30-6:30 pm for games, connection time and a chance to dig into God's Word as we explore topics that are relevant to your life.

Nov 5th our theme will be "Masked Communication." Join us as we will discuss the communication barriers presented by our cell phones and as we explore the barriers we have between each other and other Christians.

Nov 12th our theme will be "Be The One." We will consider whether our thankfulness is sincere, sarcastic, or non-existent as we explore how we express our thankfulness to God.

Join us on **November 19th** as we box up our care packages for our First Presbyterian College students. This will take place during our regular group time.

There will be no youth programming on Wednesday November 26th (Happy Thanksgiving)

Dec 3rd, Star Tree Shopping & dinner from 6-8 pm.

Dec 10th, we will be discussing the significance of names and will view a video about the different names for Santa Claus that are represented from around the world.

Dec 17th, Join us for our annual dinner and Christmas gift exchange party at Pastor Heather's home (370 34th St SE, Cedar Rapids)

Gift exchange will be from 5:30-6:30 pm with dinner from 6:30-7 pm.

No Wednesday Youth Dec 24th & 31st.

(Merry Christmas and Happy New Year)



If you'd like to contribute you may drop off items anytime during the week to the front office or place them in the box in the Gathering Space.

High School Youth

High school students are encouraged to join us on Wednesday evenings, meal is served from 6:30-7 pm and we meet from 7-8:30 pm following dinner for a time of games, connection and digging into God's Word as we explore topics that are relevant in the lives of these students.

Nov 5th we continue with our study on The Simpsons as we focus on the theme of "How We See the Bible." We will look at an episode of the Simpsons that views various stories from the Bible and the students will explore at how they see and view God's Word.

Nov12th we conclude our study series on The Simpsons. The theme will be "Knowing God and being part of a faith community." We will be viewing an episode of the Simpsons that explores Homer skipping church and indulging in a series of fun activities at home enjoying his freedom from his family. We will explore specific themes of faith and family and the consequences of neglecting family. We will discuss the importance of balancing personal obligations and the obligations we have to our faith.

Nov19th, students are invited to join us as we will be packing our boxes to be shipped out to our First Presbyterian College students during our annual College Care Box packing night.

No Youth Programming Wednesday November 26th. (Happy Thanksgiving)

Dec 3rd, both age groups will be participating in Star Tree shopping and dinner from 6-8 pm. We will meet at church at 6 pm, please bring \$20 as a donation to help with purchasing the Star Tree items. Please bring additional money for dinner as we will head to Freddy's for some food and fellowship after our shopping is done.

Dec 10th we will gather together for a regular youth programming evening. Join us as we discuss the season of Christmas, but focus in on what's truly important during this time of year--celebrating the birth of Jesus and understanding the birth of Jesus and what it means to all humanity. We will be reminded that Christmas is all about the incredible love that God has for us.

Dec 17th please join us for our annual dinner and gift exchange gathering hosted by Pastor Heather at her home (370 34th St SE, Cedar Rapids) Join us for dinner from 6:30-7 pm and then stay from 7-8:30 pm for our gift exchange and other fun activities.

No Youth Programs Dec 24 & 31st. (Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!)

5 STEPS TO STAR TREE SUCCESS!



- 1 FIND TREE IN FELLOWSHIP HALL NOV 2, 9, 16 & 23
- 2 PICK A STAR OFF THE TREE
- 3 LET MARY OR CARRIE KNOW WHICH STAR YOU CHOSE
- 4 BRING YOUR GIFT TO CHURCH WEEK OF NOV 23
- 5 DONATE MONEY INSTEAD OF A GIFT IF IT'S EASIER FOR YOU

Star Tree – Since 2002!
Stars available Nov 2, 9, 16 & 23

Each Advent our church works with a non-profit organization to provide Christmas gifts to their clients. We will be supporting Foundation 2 Crisis Services again this year. Foundation 2 is a nonprofit human service agency offering crisis prevention and intervention programs to people of all ages.

If you have not participated in our Star Tree before, it is a great opportunity to spread cheer and give gifts to young adults who most likely will not receive any Christmas gifts. Two of our members, Mary Noland-Houtz and Carrie Bryner, will be working with Foundation 2 staff to gather the wish lists from their clients. Once the lists are compiled, the gift requests will be transferred to stars and hung on the Star Tree that will be located in the Gathering Space.

Now the fun part begins. Just select a star(s) from the Star Tree, go shopping for the items listed and return the gifts along with your star(s) to the church, unwrapped and in a gift bag, by **November 23rd**. Financial donations will also be accepted, if that is your preference. Mary and Carrie would be happy to purchase the gifts on your behalf. Someone will be available each Sunday to answer questions or provide more information for you.

Bridge to Opportunities Group
Mondays & Thursdays 1:30-3:30pm

Monday, Nov 3 | Tech Advice, Home Security Systems: Wired vs. Wireless: Join CJ Flynn with Technically Easier for a group discussion on modern home safety and security options. We'll explore the pros and cons of wired and wireless camera systems, and talk about choosing equipment.

Thursday, Nov 6 | Game Day: Join us to play Phase 10 (a rummy-like card game), Hand and Foot (card game), Mexican Trains (a version of Dominos), Euchre or Scrabble. Or bring a favorite board game. These games can be played by anyone!

Monday, Nov 10 | Riding the City Bus: Join at the Bridge Senior Center as we take a group bus ride to the Ground Transportation Center. You'll receive a hands-on overview of how to read a bus schedule, ride the city bus, and use the Express 380 service to Iowa City. Participants age 65 plus will have the opportunity to obtain their **Free Fare Bus Pass I.D.**

Thursday, Nov 13 | Chair Yoga: Tammy Bayer will be leading a beginner level chair yoga class. She will adapt the class as needed to fit your needs and mobility levels. Chair yoga uses a chair for support with seated and (occasional) standing postures.

Monday, Nov 17 | Bingo & Celebrating 3rd Anniversary of the Bridge: A social game of chance, bingo, is growing in popularity and is enjoyed by people of all ages!

Thursday, Nov 20 | 11:00am-1:00pm: Friendsgiving Potluck @ Indian Creek Nature Center
Amazing Space : 5300 Otis Rd SE, Cedar Rapids.
Time: Note the time is adjusted to **11a-1p** to be over the lunch hour.

Menu: Turkey will be provided. Bring your favorite side dish, dessert, or appetizer to add to the feast. We look forward to celebrating with you!
RSVP: Sign up at Bridge or call 319-640-5357.

Monday, Nov 24 | Wisdom Circle: a heartfelt gathering where we come together to share life experiences. Through conversation and connection, we'll honor the wisdom that comes with age while also discussing the challenges that may arise — and the strategies that help us navigate them.

Thursday, Nov 27 | CLOSED: Happy Thanksgiving!



was ~~AMERICAN~~ founded as a CHRISTIAN nation?
10/26/25 : 11/2/25 : 11/9/25



RACE ISSUES in Cedar Rapids
11/16/25 to 12/14/25



INSIGHT
1/4/26: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL EUROPE
9:00 • am • Sundays
Wernimont Room Lower Level

WAS AMERICA FOUNDED AS A CHRISTIAN NATION?

10/26/25

Religion in the British Colonies

11/2/25

The American Revolution and the US Constitution

11/9/25

Why Does This Matter?

Peter Jauhiainen, professor of Religion & Humanities, Kirkwood Community College

RACE ISSUES IN CEDAR RAPIDS

11/16/25

African American Men – Slaves, Civil War Soldiers, & Veterans in Cedar Rapids

Brie Swenson Arnold, Professor, Coe Department of History

11/23/25

Understanding Racism

Dave Markward, former Superintendent, Cedar Rapids Public School System and Author

11/30/25

No Insight, Thanksgiving Weekend

12/7/25

Race Struggles in C.R. in the 1960s & 1970s

12/14/25

C.R. Outreach to Mississippi in the 1960s & 1970s
Mark Stoffer Hunter

1/4/26

The Development of Democracy in Central Europe
Dalibor Mikulas, PhD, Vice-President, National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library



Christmas Poinsettias

On Christmas Eve, the Sanctuary will be adorned with poinsettias. Now is the time to get your order in. These may be ordered In Memory of or In Honor of loved ones.

Your order should be turned in to the office by **Sunday, November 30, 2025. The cost is \$10.**

Checks should be made out to First Presbyterian Church.

I wish to provide a poinsettia for December 24 and have attached \$10 in payment.

_____ Please deliver the poinsettia to a shut-in after the 11:00 p.m. service

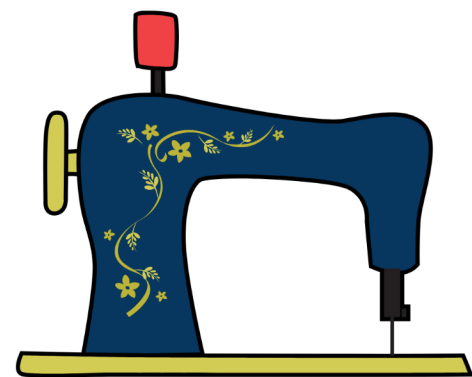
_____ I plan to pick up the poinsettia after the 11:00 p.m. service

Donor's name (please print) _____

Poinsettia given in memory of _____

Poinsettia given in honor of _____





Ties that Bind FPC Quilters

Ties That Bind - FPC Quilters

Participants will make a variety of items! Last May we created lap quilts for all of our high school graduates and we look forward to share our talents again this year.

Martha Booth and Cindy Monroe, Organizers

Mark your calendars and join us in the basement quilting room from 1:00 to 3:00 on:

Nov 4 & 11 – Learn to make half-square

blocks & the multitude of designs you can create.

Jan 6 & 13 – Pick your own pattern block & project.

Feb 3 & 10 – Make quilts for Deacons to distribute.

March 3 & 10 – Learn to make cat & dog blocks.

April 7 – Shop Hop – Travel to area quilt shops.

April 14 – Make a crazy quilt block.

May 5 & 12 – Pick your own pattern & project.

ALL CHURCH

Christmas Pageant



All-Church Christmas Pageant: You're Part of the Story!

This isn't a pageant you watch, it's a pageant you're in!

On Sunday, December 21st at 10 a.m., we invite the entire congregation to participate in our beloved Whole Church Christmas Pageant. We'll have costumes for everyone—angels, shepherds, magi, townspeople, and animals (yes, animals!)—or feel free to wear your own nativity-themed costume from home.

During worship, our Agape kids and youth will share the Christmas story with us, inviting us all to come forward and add ourselves to the living nativity scene. It's chaotic, it's joyful, and it's a beautiful reminder that we're all part of God's story.

For Children (Preschool–5th Grade)

Kids will share simple songs during the pageant. Music practice will take place:

Sundays starting November 9th from 11:00–11:15 a.m. in the Children's Chapel (*following Sunday School*)

Sunday, Dec 15th after worship in the sanctuary

For Pageant Readers: If you'd like to read a part in the pageant, practice will be:

Sunday, Dec 14th after worship

Sunday, Dec 21st at 9:00 a.m. (*just before service*)

Come one, come all! Whether you're four or ninety-four, there's a place for you in the story of God's love breaking into our world.

Questions? Contact Pastor Heather.



FPC BOOK GROUP

The First Presbyterian Evening Book Group

meets on the third Monday of each month except November and December, when there is a combined meeting soon after Thanksgiving. The next meeting will be Monday, Dec. 8, at 6:30 pm at Greenwood Terrace at Meth-Wick Manor NW, hosted by Patty and Jim Powers. The book for that meeting will be *The Tenth Trail Mark* by Joe Looby. This is a work of historical fiction set in northern Italy in the months before the end of World War II and based on the action surrounding the men of the 10th Mountain Division. If you plan to attend the meeting, please contact Patty Powers, 319-329-6723. (Please note that this book is not available at local libraries or bookstores, but can be found on e-readers or ordered from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and fine booksellers everywhere.)

The book for the January meeting is *The Queens of Crime* by Marie Benedict. This meeting will be at Tom and Nancy Lackner's home, 11 Blake Court SE on Jan. 19.



Deck the Halls @ FPC

November 23rd, 4:00-6:00pm

Come join us as we deck the halls and ready ourselves for Advent and the birth of Christ! During our time together there will be opportunities to trim the trees and hang the garlands around the church. We'll also have some activities to help you prepare for the holiday season at home. The evening will conclude with carols in the Gathering Space, the lighting of the big tree, and a simple soup supper.



Stewardship
CALLED TO CARE FOR THE WHOLE OF LIFE

Called to Care: Celebrating Our Pledges

Over these past months, we've been exploring what it means to be faithful stewards of God's grace "in its various forms"—our time, our bodies, our relationships, our witness, our work, and our care for creation. We've discovered that stewardship isn't just about our finances; it's about how we honor God with every dimension of our lives.

Now, as we bring this season of reflection to a close, we return to the support of this community and its vital work as we consider our financial pledges for the coming year.

What to Expect

Members will be receiving a letter with information about our anticipated budget for 2026, along with a pledge card. These cards can be:

Mailed to the church office

Dropped off at the church office during the week Brought to worship on Celebration Sunday, November 16th

Celebration Sunday – November 16th

On this special Sunday, we'll receive and dedicate our pledges during worship, offering them as an act of gratitude for all God has entrusted to us. Following the service, we'll gather for a congregational meal to celebrate our shared commitment to the ministry and mission of First Presbyterian Church.

As the apostle Peter reminds us, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10). Our pledges represent one important way we care for the gifts God has given us and share them with a world in need.

Thank you for your prayerful consideration and your faithful stewardship. We look forward to celebrating together on November 16th!

FOOD GROUP



Breakfast Barn

3980 Center Point Road NE
12/1 @ 6:00 pm

RSVP by 10/12 to Carolyn Horton
899-0255 / horton6902@msn.com



Christmas Cantata December 14


The Chancel choir is singing "Appalachian Winter: A Cantata for Christmas" on December 14 during worship. Composed in the spirit of folk music, the cantata combines traditional sounds with more rustic elements creating a blend that is fresh and pleasing. Popular American carols like "Away In A Manger" and "O Little Town Of Bethlehem" dance with traditional spirituals such as "Children Go Where I Send Thee" and "Go Tell It On The Mountain."

If you're interested in joining the choir for this special occasion, speak with Fred Kiser. Rehearsals are Wednesdays from 7 - 7:45 (for cantata practice) starting November 5.

SOUNDS of the SEASON:

Christmas Eve Prelude
featuring works by
Yon, Callahan, Ore, Bach, Perks, Fey, Rutter, and more.

December 24, 2025
5:00pm & 10:30pm
Ted Cronbaugh | Organist



On Christmas Night All Christians Sing...



The Christmas Joy Offering: Celebrating God's Perfect Gift

When Jesus was born among us, he came as a helpless baby destined to bring joy, peace, and salvation to his people. God's Word made flesh became one of us, in all of our vulnerabilities, struggles, and triumphs, leading us, knowing us, and offering us the gift of eternal life.

The perfect gift.

Through the Christmas Joy Offering, we reflect God's perfect gift with generous support for church leaders among us, past, present, and future, who have pointed us to God.

This offering serves in two vital ways:

First, it honors retired church workers and their families who have faithfully guided and led us but who now find themselves in critical financial need. Thanks to this offering, these servants can receive assistance through life's challenging circumstances.

Second, it supports students at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. These emerging leaders receive much-needed help as they develop leadership skills, pursue their education, and prepare to bring their gifts in service to the world God loves so much.

For nearly 140 years, Presbyterians have sustained this ministry of honoring those who have led us and nurturing those who will lead us into the future.

We will receive the Christmas Joy Offering on December 21, December 28, and Christmas Eve. Please give generously as we celebrate the leaders who have shown us Christ and those who will carry his light forward.



Blue Christmas: A Service for the Weary-Hearted

The holiday season arrives with its glittering lights, cheerful music, and calls to celebrate, but not everyone feels ready to join the festivities. For those carrying the weight of grief, facing illness, navigating loss, or simply finding this season harder than joyful, the pressure to be merry can feel isolating.

If Christmas feels heavy this year, you are not alone, and there is a place for you here.

On Thursday, December 18th at 6:00 p.m., we invite you to our Blue Christmas service, a quiet space for wholeness and healing. This is a service without pretense, where sorrow and hope can sit side by side, and where God meets us exactly as we are.

Following the service, light refreshments will be available for those who wish to stay and connect with others.

Please extend this invitation to friends, neighbors, or family members who might need this gentle refuge during a difficult season. Sometimes the most loving gift we can offer is simply to say: It's okay not to be okay right now.

Advent Devotionals for All Ages

In the midst of the December holiday bustle it can be easy to feel overwhelmed and scattered. To help you find your peace and center yourself on the true gift of Jesus this season, First Presbyterian will have several Advent devotional options that you can find in the Gathering Space.

~Do Not Be Afraid: This booklet devotional includes reflections written by our members and others alongside scripture and prayer for the season.

-Children's Advent Calendar: This single sheet coloring page has a daily coloring prompt and at the conclusion (Christmas Eve) can be shaped into a lantern to hold a small Christ Candle.

~Advent Online: Check out our posts online by following us on the church's Facebook page facebook.com/FirstPresCedarRapids or Instagram feed instagram.com/firstprescr/

An Evening of Song and Light: Vespers with the Washington Madrigals December 12th at 6:00pm

As December's early darkness settles in, we invite you to gather for an evening that will lift your spirits and warm your heart. On Friday, December 12th, First Presbyterian will host a special Vespers service featuring the Washington High School Madrigal Singers.

These talented young voices will fill our sanctuary with the beauty of choral music, offering a moment of peace and reflection during the busy Advent season. Following the service, join us in the Fellowship Hall—aglow with lights and decorated for the season—for sweets, beverages, and warm conversation.

Can You Help Make It Sweet?

We're hoping to fill our dessert tables with homemade treats! If you're able, please prepare three dozen "finger food" desserts to share with our guests and congregation. Drop off your contributions at the church anytime between December 8th and 12th—just give them to Stormy, who will keep them fresh until the big night.

Mark your calendars for this special evening of music, fellowship, and the simple joy of being together during Advent.

Pastor Heather's Sabbatical

April 2026- October 2026

FAQs: Pastor Heather's Sabbatical

What is a sabbatical?

A sabbatical is an extended time of rest, renewal, and spiritual refreshment for pastors. The concept comes from the biblical practice of Sabbath—setting aside time to step away from regular work, reconnect with God, and return renewed and reenergized for ministry. Our congregation received a Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Grant to make this sabbatical possible.

When will Pastor Heather be on sabbatical?

The sabbatical begins April 12, 2026 (the Sunday after Easter) and continues through September, with a return to ministry in early October. We'll celebrate with a congregational bon voyage dinner on April 12th.

What will she be doing during her sabbatical?

Pastor Heather will be thru-hiking the Continental Divide Trail, a 3,000+ mile route stretching from the Mexican border in New Mexico to the Canadian border in Montana. The trail crosses through New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, passing through Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks.

This may sound like quite an adventure (and it is!), but it's also a deeply spiritual journey. Pastor Heather will be embracing regular rhythms of daily hiking interspersed with times of meditation and prayer, finding renewal in what she considers one of the most beautiful places in the world—the mountains that have always spoken to her soul.

How long will she be walking each day?

Heather will begin by walking 12-15 miles per day and work up to around 18-22 miles. The route typically passes through or near a town every five to seven days, where she will rest, resupply, and prepare for the next section. She's also building in a full "zero day" (a complete rest day on trail) every 10-12 days. This isn't a race—it's a journey of physical challenge and deep spiritual renewal.

What about her safety?

We know some of you are concerned about safety, and we appreciate that care! Pastor Heather is taking this seriously. While this is her first long-distance thru-hike, she is:

Training physically before departure

Mapping routes carefully to avoid dangerous conditions like late-season snow

Carrying bear spray for wildlife encounters

Using a satellite GPS device that tracks her exact location, allows limited communication, and—most importantly—has an SOS button that alerts local search and rescue with her precise coordinates in case of emergency

Learning from experienced hikers and studying the trail extensively

Her family will be able to track her location throughout the journey, and the church office will have general information about where she is on any given day.

Who will take care of the congregation while Pastor Heather is away?

Our new Associate Pastor, Anna Sheetz, will begin in January 2026. This gives Pastor Heather and Anna several months to work together, allowing Anna to get to know our congregation before the sabbatical begins. During the sabbatical, Anna will handle preaching, pastoral care, committee work, and Session meetings. In addition, we've already begun the process of assessing needs of the congregation's programs and events and creating teams that will make sure our congregational life moves forward without a hiccup.

The Lilly Endowment Grant also provides funding for additional staff or pastoral support to help Anna balance these responsibilities. The specifics of that support will be determined in conversation with Anna.

What if there's a wedding or funeral during this time?

Pastor Anna will officiate at weddings and funerals during the sabbatical. There is one pre-scheduled wedding that Pastor Heather will return home to officiate, but otherwise all pastoral services will be handled by Pastor Anna.

What if I have a pastoral emergency?

Please contact the church office, and Pastor Anna will respond to all pastoral care needs. Pastor Heather will generally not be reachable during this time—this is by design, to allow for true rest and renewal.

Will we hear from Pastor Heather at all?

Pastor Heather may occasionally check in and share photos or brief updates through social media or the church office, but please don't expect direct communication. We're exploring creative ways to help the congregation follow along—perhaps a map in Fellowship Hall showing her progress, or a "Where in the World is Pastor Heather?" feature.

She's also creating a prayer and meditation resource for herself along the trail that will be available to the congregation, so you can "pray the trail" with her if you'd like.

What will the congregation be doing during this time?

This sabbatical isn't just for Pastor Heather—it's for all of us! The Lilly Endowment Grant includes resources for congregational renewal activities. We're still discerning what those might look like, but stay tuned for opportunities for our own growth, connection, and spiritual deepening during these months.

When will Pastor Heather return?

The anticipated completion date is around October 1-2, 2026, though the exact timing may vary depending on trail conditions and pace. After about a week of rest and re-entry, Pastor Heather will return to full ministry duties. We'll celebrate her return with worship and fellowship!

Why is this important?

Ministry is a calling we treasure, but it can also be demanding and relentless. This sabbatical allows Pastor Heather to step away, rest deeply, reconnect with God in new ways, and return to us refreshed and renewed. It's also an opportunity for our congregation to grow in new ways, to support our pastoral staff, and to discover gifts and strengths we might not otherwise have known we had.

We're grateful for this gift, and we ask for your prayers—for Pastor Heather's journey, for Pastor Anna's leadership, and for our whole congregation during this special season.

Questions?

If you have additional questions about the sabbatical, please feel free to contact the church office or speak with Pastor Heather, Session members, or Pastor Anna (once she arrives in January).

Celebrating Renewal: First Pres Receives Clergy Renewal Grant

We have wonderful news to share! First Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids has been awarded a Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Grant to support Pastor Heather Hayes' upcoming sabbatical.

We are one of just 233 congregations across the United States, and the only one in Iowa, selected to receive this grant in 2025. The Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs recognize that pastoral ministry can be demanding, and these grants are designed to give both pastors and congregations the gift of renewal and revitalization.

What does this mean for us?

The grant will provide funding for Pastor Heather's sabbatical experience, allowing her time away for rest, spiritual refreshment, and personal growth. The grant also includes resources for pastoral leadership support during her absence and special activities for our congregation's own renewal while she's away.

Since the programs began in 1999, more than 4,500 congregations have participated. This is a significant honor and an investment in the long-term health and vitality of our church community. We're grateful for this opportunity and look forward to sharing more details about the sabbatical plans in the months ahead. Thank you for your continued support of Pastor Heather and our shared ministry together.

CALENDAR

Sunday November 2
All Saint's Sunday
Communion Sunday
10:00 am Nursery
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Wednesday November 5
2:00 pm Mahjong
*Wednesday Nights

Sunday November 9
9:00 am Insight & Nursery
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
10:15 am Sunday School
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Tuesday November 11
5:30 pm Deacons
6:30 Care Commission

Wednesday November 12
2:00 pm Mahjong
*Wednesday Nights

Saturday November 15
Youth Nerf War

Sunday November 16
9:00 am Insight & Nursery
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
10:15 am Sunday School
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Tuesday November 18
5:30 Admin Commission

Wednesday November 19
2:00 pm Mahjong
*Wednesday Nights

Thursday November 20
1:00 pm Presbytery Meeting

Saturday November 21
7:00 pm Youth Lock in

Wednesday Night Schedule:
5:30 - 6:30 Agape Kids (3-5th grade)
Middle School Youth (6-8th grade)
6:00-7:00 Bell Choir
6:30 Dinner
7:00-6:00 High School Youth
7:00-8:30 Chancel Choir

Sunday November 23
10:00 am Nursery
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE
4:00-6:00 Deck the Halls

Tuesday November 25
5:30 pm Proclamation
7:00 Session

Thursday November 27
Happy Thanksgiving!
Office Closed

Sunday November 30
9:00 am Insight
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Monday December 1
5:30 pm Discipleship Commission

Wednesday December 3
2:00 pm Mahjong
6:00 pm Youth Star Tree Shopping
Choirs regular schedule

Thursday December 4
6:00 Food Group

Sunday December 7
Communion Sunday
Fill the Cart for Food Bank
9:00 am Nursery
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Monday December 8
6:30 Evening Book Group

Tuesday December 9
5:30 pm Deacons Party at Pastor Heather's
6:30 pm Care Commission

S.E.M.P.
2:00 SEMP Prep
3:30 SEMP set up, hand out, clean up
4:14 SEMP Greeter & Guide

Food Bank Hospitality M | W | F @ 12:30
Bridge to Opportunities Mon & Thurs 1:30-3:30

Wednesday December 10
2:00 pm Mahjong
*Wednesday Nights

Sunday December 14
9:00 am Insight
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Tuesday December 16
6:00 pm Session party at Pastor Heather's

Wednesday December 17
2:00 pm Mahjong
Youth Christmas Parties at Pastor Heather's
Choirs regular schedule

Thursday December 18
6:00 Blue Christmas Service

Sunday December 21
9:00 am Insight
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

Thursday December 24
Christmas Eve
5:00 Christmas Eve Recital
5:30 pm Family Friendly
Candlelight Worship
10:30 pm Christmas Eve Recital
11:00 Candlelight Service

Thursday December 25
Merry Christmas!

Sunday December 28
9:00 am Nursery & Insight
10:00 Worship & LiveStream
11:00 am Fellowship
SEMP SCHEDULE

BIRTHDAYS

11/1 Joseph Ryder
11/1 Megan Smiley
11/1 Cherie Thompson
11/2 Jim Weems
11/3 Diane Stevenson
11/3 Barbara Wagner
11/5 Connie Proffitt
11/6 Mary Taylor
11/7 Bill Brause
11/13 Harlan LeClere
11/13 Chad Proctor
11/16 Dave Rasmussen
11/16 Steven Stancato
11/17 Julia Luna
11/17 Gretchen Van Heukelom
11/18 Pat Bjorseth
11/18 Isaac Denning
11/18 Karla Goettel
11/18 Gingie Hunstad
11/18 Nancy Parks
11/18 Anna Rohde

11/19 Mickey Meaney
11/19 Jennifer Pettyjohn
11/21 David Horton
11/22 Grace Zimmerman
11/23 Dave Bryner
11/24 Carroll Edmondson
11/26 Kayleigh Bryant
11/26 Gary Ellis
11/27 Mary Snapp
11/29 Diane Hayes
12/1 Pam Reynolds
12/2 Leo Appleby-Sparrow
12/2 Steven Greenlee
12/5 Darlene Elbert
12/5 Julie Vanous
12/6 Amelia Denning
12/6 Mia Frese
12/6 Ron Olson
12/6 Sue Olson
12/7 Susan Swain
12/10 Judy Patterson

12/11 Nathan Hopp
12/14 Dave Knutson
12/16 Todd Shields
12/18 Adjo Obessou
12/19 Nancy Shirk
12/20 Greg Smith
12/21 Koffi Apely
12/21 Bonnie Martin
12/23 Marilynn Musker
12/25 Jette Bounds
12/25 Holly Rasmussen
12/26 DeEtta Andersen
12/27 Catherine Mawusi
12/29 Jaime Weldon
12/30 Kathy Gregory-Fiala
12/31 Ann Balvanz
12/31 Yawa Defly

ANNIVERSARIES

11/11/1977 Steve & Sue White
11/21/1992 Brian & Wendy Frese
11/23/1966 Jim & Patty Powers
11/28/1964 Susie & Michael McDermott
11/28/1998 Chad & JenniferPettyjohn
12/5/1987 Tricia Bowen & Darrel Wridner
12/5/1998 Ann & Bob Schley
12/6/2018 Yatotse Dedo & Charity Adjall

12/27/2014 Komlan Ayewu & Adjo Obessou
12/27/2002 Katie & Ryan Buresh
12/28/1988 Bob Naujoks & Sharon Reilly
12/28/2002 Kristen & Kyle Wilcox
12/29/1971 Denny & Karla Goettel
12/29/2013 Don & Julie Vanous
12/30/1991 Bill & Jill Ryder
12/31/2010 Elizabeth & Matt Mitchell

FELLOWSHIP HOSTS

11/02 Alisa Shields & Judy Isenberg
11/09 Scott & Diane Stevenson & Steve & Sue Stancato
11/16 Karen Carver & Mary Houtz/Deb Sedlacek
11/23 Paula Meyer & HOSTS NEEDED!
11/30 Laura Runkle & Michael Miller

12/07 Mary Snapp & HOSTS NEEDED!
12/14 Karen Carver & HOSTS NEEDED!
12/21 HOSTS NEEDED!
12/28 Paula Meyer & & HOSTS NEEDED!

First Presbyterian Church

310 Fifth Street

Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52401

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November

&

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2025

First Presbyterian Church Staff

Head of Staff

Pastor Heather Hayes

Office Manager

Stormy Garretson

Bookkeeper

Janna Murra

Director of Music Ministries

Fred Kiser

Organist

Ted Cronbaugh

Youth Director

Stan Letscher

Nursery

Lindsay Hopp

Godly Play Teacher

Glenna Houtz

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