



## The Importance of Ritual

There is absolutely nothing new for me to say about Advent or Christmas.

Seriously.

And yet, I think we'll do it all again.

The repetition is what gives it meaning.

I've been watching *The Crown* on Netflix. One of the recurring themes of this season has been how the queen represents constancy, year-in and year-out. The rituals become the means by which that very constancy is sustained.

The constancy of our faith also relies on repeated ritual. The beauty of the Lord's Supper comes in the repetition of familiar words. The language is notably similar to what has been going on for years and years. We learn these words young and we keep them with us our whole lives long. That's one of the reasons we use very repetitive liturgy for

the Celebration service, so that young worshippers can learn the words of faith.

We have rituals at First Church that tell us that we are in the season of Advent. We have things we do, and things we do *not* do, so that we create a sense of sustained purpose this time of year. We sing the carols of Advent (and we do *not* sing the carols of Christmas until it is Christmas). It's not that we are *Scroogey* on Christmas Carols, it is because we know that doing things a certain way orients our minds and our practices to prepare us to receive Jesus Christ.

There are, of course, other rituals that we will embrace this time of year... colors in worship, for instance, matter. The language of our prayers shifts. It matters that we do these things this time of year, and that we do them again and again every year.

My friend Jane Arant, retired Organist/Choirmaster of Trinity Church, Charlotte once said something about the building of the Sanctuary that has stayed with me ever since. She said, "First we build our buildings. Then, they build us." That is certainly true of our wonderful building, emerging newly restored from her scaffolding.

That is also true of our worship. First, we offer our worship, then our worship builds us.

May the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be and abide with us, and those we love, this Advent and Christmas.

—Baron Mullis

### Congregational Recommendations for Church Officers

The Nominating Committee requests recommendations of those church members who should be considered for the ordained offices of Ruling Elder and Deacon. Please use the form provided in worship or the form on our website ([fpcphila.org/recommendations-for-church-officers](http://fpcphila.org/recommendations-for-church-officers)) to recommend members who should be considered for these offices. Recommendations should be received no later than December 15, 2019.

—Cynthia Decrucq, Chair of Nominating Committee



DECEMBER 1	DECEMBER 8	DECEMBER 15	DECEMBER 22	DECEMBER 24	DECEMBER 29
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	CHRISTMAS EVE	FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS
Isaiah 2:1-5	Isaiah 11:1-10	Isaiah 35:1-10	Isaiah 7:10-16	Isaiah 9:2-7	Isaiah 63:7-9
Psalms 122	Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19	Psalms 146:5-10	Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19	Psalms 96	Psalms 148
Romans 13:11-14	Romans 15:4-13	James 5:7-10	Romans 1:1-7	Titus 2:11-14	Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 24:36-44	Matthew 3:1-12	Matthew 11:2-11	Matthew 1:18-25	Luke 2:1-20	Matthew 2:13-23

## December 2019 at a Glance

### Sunday, December 1 - First Sunday of Advent

9:00 am Celebration! Worship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 9:45 am Children's Sunday School (Cochran Room)  
 Adult CE (MacColl Room)  
 11:00 am Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
 12:15 pm Fellowship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 12:30 pm T&T First Sunday Brunch  
 12:30 pm GenX Brunch  
 5:00 pm *First@Five* Choral Evensong

### Monday, December 2

11:00 am Congregational Care Team

### Tuesday, December 3

10:00 am Women of Wit & Wisdom  
*Coffee, Conversation & Card-writing*  
 11:00 am Planned Giving Tour of MANNA  
 7:00 pm Women's Bible Study

### Wednesday, December 4

7:30 pm T&T Group

### Thursday, December 5

6:30 pm Trustees

### Saturday, December 7

5:00 pm First Church Families Holiday Potluck

### Sunday, December 8 - Second Sunday of Advent

9:00 am Celebration! Worship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 9:45 am Children's Sunday School (Cochran Room)  
 Adult CE (MacColl Room)  
 11:00 am Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
 12:15 pm Advent Lunch (Old Buttonwood Hall)

### Wednesday, December 11

7:00 pm fpcQ Christmas Party  
 7:30 pm T&T Group

### Friday, December 13

7:00 pm Band of Boomers Christmas Party

### Saturday, December 14

9:30 am Men's Breakfast Group

### Sunday, December 15 - Third Sunday of Advent

9:00 am Celebration! Worship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 9:45 am Children's Sunday School (Cochran Room)  
 Adult CE (MacColl Room)  
 11:00 am Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
*Caroling after worship on Walnut Street*  
 12:30 pm Fellowship (Old Buttonwood Hall)

### Monday, December 16

7:00 pm A Service of Light in the Darkness (Sanctuary)

### Tuesday, December 17

9:30 am WiseRetirees  
 7:00 pm Women's Bible Study

### Wednesday, December 18

7:00 pm Riverside Christmas Party

### Thursday, December 19

6:30 pm Session  
 7:15 pm Parish Choir Rehearsal

### Friday, December 20

6:00 pm Twenties & Thirties Christmas Party

### Sunday, December 22

9:00 am Celebration! Worship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 9:45 am Children's Sunday School (Cochran Room)  
 Adult CE (MacColl Room)  
 11:00 am Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
 12:15 pm Fellowship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 4:00 pm Service of Lessons & Carols

### Tuesday, December 24

4:00 & 11 pm Christmas Eve Worship

### Thursday & Friday, December 26 & 27

Church office closed.

### Sunday, December 29

9:00 am Celebration! Worship (Old Buttonwood Hall)  
 11:00 am Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
 12:15 pm Fellowship (Old Buttonwood Hall)



## Riverside Christmas Party

All are invited to join First Church in bringing holiday cheer to the residents of Riverside Presbyterian Apartments (23<sup>rd</sup> & Race Streets) on **Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm**. Volunteers are needed for entertainment — singing, playing an instrument, reading a story or poem, or being a song leader. We also need help to provide food (baked goods, hummus/pita, crudités, pretzels or crackers). If you are interested in helping out, please contact Jordana Woodford ([jordana.woodford@fpcphila.org](mailto:jordana.woodford@fpcphila.org) or 443-608-2548) or contact the church office ([office@fpcphila.org](mailto:office@fpcphila.org)).

—Jordana Woodford



## Governance Changes Approved at November Congregational Meeting

A “Governance Task Force” was convened in early 2019 to discern whether or not the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia’s three-board governance structure—Session, Deacons, and Trustees—would be the best structure as the church looks towards its future. After a period of research and discussion, in August 2019 the Task Force recommended to Session that the church transition to a two-board structure, comprised of the Session and Board of Deacons. This proposed modification to our governance structure is authorized by the

Book of Order, which notes that “the ruling elders on the session of a congregation, who are eligible under the civil law, shall be the trustees of the corporation.” The two-board structure is common in comparable congregations across the United States.

A meeting of the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was held on Sunday, November 17, 2019, for the purpose of voting on the proposed amendments to the church’s congregational bylaws to implement the change.

The following motion was presented and was approved by a majority of the members of the congregation present.

“That the congregational bylaws be amended to (a) reflect the unification of the functions of the Session and the Board of Trustees through elimination of a separate Board of Trustees, (b) increase the maximum number of ruling elders serving on the Session from fifteen to eighteen, and (c) reflect other minor changes in style and wording, all as reflected in the proposed revised version of the bylaws that had been posted on the church’s website and discussed in information sessions during the preceding weeks.”

The complete report of the Governance Task Force with FAQs about the changes to the governance structure and church bylaws are available on the First Church website ([fpcphila.org/governance-task-force-recommendation](http://fpcphila.org/governance-task-force-recommendation)).

—*Cynthia Decrucq*  
Chair, Governance Task Force



## First Church Families Christmas Potluck

Saturday, December 7, 5-8 pm

Join us for an evening of First Church Fun! All are welcome to a family-friendly evening with warm drinks, carol singing, and a good old fashioned cookie swap! There will be activities for the kids and socializing for the grown ups! If you would like to participate in the cookie swap, plan to bring three dozen of your favorite family treats to share, and a tin to take some home in. If you would rather not participate in the swap, let us know if you would like to bring a side dish to share.



## Masonry Project Update

The masonry and roofing projects are both substantially complete and only minor items remain. The scaffolding has been taken down on the west gable, exposing a view of beautifully repaired stone and new pointing. The chimney has been removed and the stones to cap off the hole that was left will be installed in the next couple of weeks. Work at the tower is complete and soon we will see the results that are now hidden by the black scrim. The intent is to have the scaffolding removed just in time for Christmas.



Our design and construction team has worked hard to do the best for our building, and we are all grateful that the building envelope is now more

watertight. Thanks to the congregation for their patience with this project and thank you to everyone who helped with the planning and budgeting in order to get us to this point. A special thanks to our Church Administrator, Sue Riemann, for helping to coordinate this effort and for staying calm and composed while doing so. A big thanks to Sue for carefully protecting the gargoyle that fell off at the beginning of the project. It is now reinstalled, just as it should be. None of this is a Christmas miracle, but it does feel like a Christmas blessing!



—Heather Coyne

## Sunday School “Journey to Bethlehem”

This Advent we continue to explore and wonder about the stories of the Bible as we make the Journey to Bethlehem together. This season, however, we have a special treat: Barbara Chaapel will be leading a complementary program for adults who would like to journey alongside their children during the Sunday School hour (see “Companions” piece below). Each week, children and adults will explore the themes of the Advent story. We hope that this will provide opportunities for families to talk and connect over a shared faith outside of worship.

—Sarah Weisiger

### Companions Through Advent: A Spiritual Journey to Bethlehem

First Church members and guests are warmly invited to gather for a time of spiritual direction on the four Sundays in Advent—December 1, 8, 15, and 22 at 9:45 in the Whitefield Room on the lower level. Led by Barbara Chaapel, the sessions will focus on our Advent journey in preparation for the celebration of Christmas as we share scripture, music, prayer, meditation, and silence. Parents of Sunday school children are especially invited to join us while their children attend their own Advent class about the Journey to Bethlehem.

We are indeed companions in the community of First Church. Join us for this opportunity to share our Advent journey of faith.

Contact Barbara ([barbara.chaapel@fpcphila.org](mailto:barbara.chaapel@fpcphila.org)) if you have questions.

## A Service of Light in the Darkness

Monday, December 16<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 pm



On Monday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, at 7 pm, there will be a Service of Light in the Darkness in the church sanctuary. This is a winter service of hope and healing that encourages those going through times of sorrow and grief during the holidays. It is also for those who may be discouraged, depressed, or hopeless, or may be reliving past memories of holidays spent with loved ones or family—for better or worse. Inspired by the solstice, winter’s longest night, this service will have special music and liturgy while allowing you space “to be.” We hope you will join us as we worship God during this special time.

—Rev. Jerry K. Foote  
Minister for Congregational Care



## Twenties & Thirties Group

The T&Ts have had a very eventful fall and November. As has been the case in recent years, Christmas festivities began early for the T&Ts. We are once again sponsoring the "Giving Tree" and spent a Wednesday night in November decorating the ornaments for the tree. We had 11 join us for the CA's Quizzo Fundraiser (the T&Ts playing just for fun team won!), a nice hike up in the Wissahickon, and 15 of us gathered at Friendsgiving in mid-November. In December, our Wednesday night discussion will be geared around the different "names" of Christ. We will continue our tradition of baking and attending the Riverside Christmas Party in mid-December. Dave Hutting has graciously agreed to once again host the T&T Christmas Party on December 20<sup>th</sup>. For more information or to get involved with any of our activities, email [youngadults@fpcphila.org](mailto:youngadults@fpcphila.org) and join our Twenties and Thirties Fellowship Group on Facebook.

— Annie LeCluyse



The Giving Tree, sponsored by the Twenties & Thirties Group of First Presbyterian Church, supports multiple programs at the Valley Youth House.

### The Giving Tree

The Twenties & Thirties (T&T) Group is sponsoring a "Giving Tree" again this year, supporting multiple programs of the Valley Youth House (VYH), including housing assistance programs for teens and young adults experiencing homelessness, foster care, or coming out of care. We invite everyone to select an ornament from the tree in Old Buttonwood Hall. Each ornament has a card attached, describing the item to be given, so that you can select which gift(s) you would like to give. Please bring all gifts (new, unwrapped, with the original card attached) to the church on or before Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to participate but cannot shop for an item, monetary donations will be accepted. Please contact Annie LeCluyse ([youngadults@fpcphila.org](mailto:youngadults@fpcphila.org)).



## CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

We celebrate the Christmas season with the annual tradition of decorating First Church. At this time, we are requesting donations to cover the expense of flowers and greens. Please complete this form and place it with your donation in the box located in the church office marked "Christmas Flowers." There is no designated amount. However, PLEASE DO NOT ENCLOSE CASH! Please make checks payable to First Presbyterian Church and note "Christmas Flowers" in the memo line.

The deadline for responses is **December 15**.

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

Phone/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dedication (Please select: In Memory / In Honor):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



Questions can be referred to Anita McLarin ([anita.mclarin@gmail.com](mailto:anita.mclarin@gmail.com)).

## Member News

### Deaths

**Frank B. Baldwin** died on Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, from complications from Parkinson's disease at Bryn Mawr Extended Care Center. Mr. Baldwin was a corporate lawyer and educator. He also served as Clerk of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. An ordained ruling elder, Frank was a member of Bryn Mawr Presbyterian church before moving to Center City, when he became a member of First Presbyterian Church. He was active in Adult Education and Mission and Outreach. He loved to sing, to cook, to seek justice through his vocation, and to be with his friends and family. The church gave thanks for his life at a memorial service at First Church on November 16<sup>th</sup>.



Neighbors together—connecting, engaging, thriving

### Penn's Village is About Relationships – Part IV

Meet Emily, a participant since the early days of Penn's Village. Participant doesn't quite cover it; Emily acts as a volunteer, a donor, a member, and, most recently, a user of services.

Emily is at a point in her life where health and fitness are crucial to her well-being. Needing to be more conscientious, she reached out to Penn's Village about an "exercise buddy," someone who could keep her active and aid in her fitness routines. The Executive Director was able to find someone for her rather quickly, and they hit it off immediately. Feeling a bit too embarrassed to ask family for help, Emily feels grateful that she has Penn's Village to help her.

Becoming involved with Penn's Village in its infancy, Emily admits she is "pleased and gratified at how well-functioning the group is now, with outstanding programs, services, and outreach." After receiving help with an exercise buddy, Emily finds herself thinking about other helpers she may need, such as a someone to help her use her smartphone, to which she "seems to be allergic," in hopes she may one day come to like it. She has since learned that Penn's Village offers smartphone workshops, as well as individual assistance to members.

Most striking about Emily's interactions with Penn's Village is the spirit of the group. "There's so much mutual helpfulness and caring. People's dedication and commitment are evident."

Emily's story is a good example of how the mission of Penn's Village comes to life: you help others and then later you receive help.

## MISSIONS UPDATE

Our quarterly focus has been on aiding our local population, including The Arc, Zia, MANNA, and, in this month, Wintershelter. As we welcome the Advent season and shift towards our international focus for the next quarter, we appreciate the many seasonal giving solicitations we all receive through various mailings, and that many of us are in positions to contribute more. So, while the Missions Committee provides yearly grants to many worthy organizations, local and international, we encourage you to consider seasonal giving opportunities—starting with the Twenties & Thirties Group's "Giving Tree" (details in the T&T News) and perhaps extend on to some of the following worthy initiatives. These are but a few options; we know that there are many more! Visit [charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org) for information on other giving opportunities with online donation options.

- ▶ **Presbyterian Giving Catalogue** ([presbyteriangifts.org](http://presbyteriangifts.org))—A wide variety of gifts that provide real and positive impact around the world, including aid for refugees, access to clean water and helping to end hunger
- ▶ **Covenant House** ([covenanthouse.org](http://covenanthouse.org))—Helping young people facing homelessness
- ▶ **Strawberry Mansion Learning Center** ([strawberrymansionlearningcenter.com](http://strawberrymansionlearningcenter.com))—Critical programming for youth & adults in the Strawberry Mansion community impacted by poverty and violence
- ▶ **Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission** ([sundaybreakfast.org](http://sundaybreakfast.org))—Exists to minister in the name of Jesus Christ to the physical and spiritual needs of homeless and disadvantaged people in the Philadelphia area
- ▶ **Heifer International** ([heifer.org/gift-catalog/](http://heifer.org/gift-catalog/))—Supports futures for farmers and communities through training and marketplace connections, to end hunger, poverty, and empower women

—Andrea Bowman, Chair  
The Missions Committee





# Urban Mosaic Mission Trip

In mid-October, three members of First Church joined with members of the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church to spend a rewarding week in a tough neighborhood of Mexico City building a retaining wall at a community center/church that is under construction. At first blush, you might think no big deal, but if you had the opportunity to see the neighborhood's extreme poverty, you would then see the faith journey of learning and serving that we were on.

Our heads and hearts were trying to take in everything. It seemed at first that all we were doing was moving dirt around and packing it down, but by the end of our week we had built a retaining wall and steps that will make the new building



usable and more easily accessible. The work was physically exhausting, but everyone's commitment filled all of us with the required energy to complete the project.

Sometimes while catching my breath, I would look around the site and the hillsides around us, and I realized that all I could see were impoverished neighborhoods for miles. Poverty is different in various places around the world. In the neighborhood where we were working there was no running water, no sewage pipes, and really no public facilities including churches, community centers, or schools.

Urban Mosaic does not come into these neighborhoods to take over; rather, they come in to help build community with



seed money for some construction projects, and programs to develop community leadership and develop belonging. Our role was to connect with the Mexican people in

these neighborhoods by helping them establish a gathering place for children and adults.

We got to visit successful Urban Mosaic sites late in the afternoons after our work was complete. We visited a school filled with 150 smiling students and only two toilets. Urban Mosaic, working with parents, was installing eight more toilets. Another day we stood by a soccer field developed by Urban Mosaic, and watched teenagers laughing and running while stray dogs foraged for food on the sidelines, and homes that needed all kinds of improvements surrounded the field.

Hope and faith were alive in these neighborhoods, enabling residents to come together to make more possibilities come alive for a better way of life for these people. Improvements in schools, medical access, and faith communities have sprung up due to Urban Mosaic's impact.



On our last full day at the work site, the local people and their minister gathered to give thanks to us through an interpreter. This was without doubt one of the most meaningful moments of the trip. We could easily understand that this work would have taken a long, long time to get done without us, but more importantly that our faith binds all of us around God's world.

I am hopeful that more of us will want to go on another rewarding and satisfying mission trip with Urban Mosaic in the future.

—Dave Huting with Beverly Cowart and Hardy von Auenmueller



# Volunteer Opportunities

**The University City Hospitality Coalition (UCHC)** provides hot meals to anyone in need on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and, during the academic year, Sundays, at sites in the University City area. Volunteers to serve meals are needed during the summer and academic breaks, when students are not available. In addition, First Church sponsors quarterly casserole "blitzes," in which we prepare 30-40 casseroles to be served at UCHC meals.

**The Arc of Philadelphia** advocates with and for all children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, to promote active citizenship, self-determination, and full inclusion.

**Reading Buddies** is a program pairing elementary school students with adult volunteers for an hour of reading together each week. Reading Buddies meets Monday mornings at 10 AM at First Church during the school year. If you're interested in volunteering, please contact Jeannie Boehner (jeannie.boehner@fpcphila.org).

**Zia** is a non-profit whose mission is to provide balanced and nutritious food for Philadelphia children. Volunteers are needed for a number of activities. For more information please contact Paula Gross (paulajgross@gmail.com).

**Habitat/West Philadelphia Repair Initiative (WPRI)** is an urban ministry that assists homeowners in West Philadelphia with repairs to their homes. The organization needs volunteers. Work can involve painting, installing sheetrock, windows, flooring, carpentry, etc. Volunteers do not need any experience. First Church volunteers several Saturdays a year; specific dates will be announced.

**MANNA**, an organization founded by First Church, provides assistance to those at nutritional risk due to critical illness. MANNA relies on volunteers to assist in the kitchen, cooking and baking, prepping and packaging, and delivering meals to clients. To learn more, contact Taylor Perkins (tperkins@mannapa.org) or visit [www.mannapa.org/volunteer/](http://www.mannapa.org/volunteer/).

**Wintershelter**, a small homeless shelter for about 20 men, located in the basement of Trinity Memorial Church (22nd & Spruce Streets), is seeking new helpers for the cooking and/or serving of dinners on Monday evening, from November through April. Please contact Terry Hirshorn (tnewirth@haverford.edu) for more details.

FOR INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES  
CONTACT [missions@fpcphila.org](mailto:missions@fpcphila.org).

Celebrate the Joy!  
Christmas Eve Worship  
4 & 11 pm

Conversations Worth Having  
Race & Racism  
SAVE THE DATE:  
January 18-19, 2020

PLANNED GIVING  
*Planting Seeds for the Future*  
**Become a member of the Buttonwood Circle!**  
[www.fpcphila.org/planned-giving/](http://www.fpcphila.org/planned-giving/)

First Church Facebook Page

Please submit all information for the January issue of The Messenger to [communications@fpcphila.org](mailto:communications@fpcphila.org) by **Wednesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**.

## The First Presbyterian Church IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

201 SOUTH 21<sup>ST</sup> STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103 • 215-567-0532 • [FPCPHILA.ORG](http://FPCPHILA.ORG)

### Church Staff

- The Rev. Dr. Baron Mullis, Minister
- The Rev. Megan LeCluyse, Celebration Team Leader
- Mr. Andrew Senn, Director of Music & Organist
- Ms. Sue Riemann, Church Administrator
- The Rev. Jerry K. Foote, Minister for Congregational Care
- The Rev. Sarah Weisiger, Minister for Membership and Faith Formation
- Mrs. Patti Sassoli, Director of Communications
- Ms. Annie LeCluyse, Young Adult Leader
- The Rev. Barbara A. Chaapel, Parish Associate
- The Rev. Kenneth J. Ross, Parish Associate
- The Rev. Herbert D. Valentine, Parish Associate

### the Messenger

- Patti Sassoli, Executive Editor
- Owen Robbins, Layout Design

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