

### Loving Our Neighbors in a Volatile Season

WRITTEN BY PEN PEERY

As I write this, we're close to 60 days away from the next presidential election. I've actually been through four presidential elections in my tenure as senior pastor of this church, and I've learned a few things along the way. The one thing I've learned is that it is not the job of a church or a pastor to tell our members who to vote for; that is a decision that is intensely personal, and to presume that I could tell you who to vote for would, quite frankly, be arrogant.

On the other hand, I have learned that voting is an important way that we express our faith. Like it or not, the elected officials we vote for have an impact on what happens to us, and to our neighbors, whom Christ calls us to love. In that way, participating in the voting and election process is an important part of what it means to express our faith.

What I want to say ahead of this election is that rather than making the pulpit an editorial page where we express our opinions,

*“At times like these, the church allows us to claim a better way.”*

what you will hear from me will focus on preparing the community for how we will be together in this season. This is especially important in a time of division, hyper-partisanship, anger, and angst.

In August, you may remember that we preached through the letters of Paul, and saw how the communities that were Paul's churches managed their differences and their conflicts, and how they managed to live together as the body of Christ.

This month, we will look at the Old Testament and think about the ways that God claims us and makes our identity in God much higher and more important than any other label that we might be asked to wear in this election season.

I hope you'll make it a point to come to church this month to remember who and whose you are, and to ground yourselves in hope!

### In the Footsteps of Paul 2025 GREECE TRIP PREVIEW

Members of First Presbyterian Church are invited to walk in the Apostle Paul's footsteps and see the history of the New Testament come alive as we explore the ruins of the cities where he traveled, including Thessaloniki, Philippi, Ephesus, Corinth, and Athens. A cruise of the Aegean Sea will take us to Patmos and other Greek Isles.



Temple of Apollo, Rhodes

Pre-trip reading will prepare us to see how Paul shared the good news of Jesus Christ as he journeyed. We will return with new insights into how we, too, can spread the Gospel message back home.

There will be an information session on October 20 at 12:15 p.m. in S203 and on Zoom. Registration for members opens on October 24 at 8 a.m. at this link:

[fpc.tiny.us/greecetrip](https://fpc.tiny.us/greecetrip)

### Christ in the Heart of Children CHILDREN'S MINISTRY PODCAST

Senior Pastor Pen Peery and Chaplain for Children and Schools Delilah



Rev. Delilah Jane Phillips and Rev. Pen Peery

Jane Phillips, who are both parents themselves, sat down to kindle a conversation amongst parents about how to prioritize our role in the faith formation of our children. This podcast series is a perfect listen for parents of children looking for ways they can connect their children with Christ and the church community.

In part one of this three-part podcast series, which was released in August, Pen and Delilah Jane explore the choice to raise our children in church because of our own commitment to faith. They argue that the faith of one's parents shapes the way a child encounters God in the world.

In part two, released in early September, the pastors discuss how important it is to build a foundation of faith for children at their beginning of their lives, arming them against all that life will throw at them. Using examples of the adults who tutored them in faith in their own lives, the pastors discuss how they take those lessons and pass them on to the next generation.

Part three, which will be released the first week of October, will explore the importance of having the larger church family in the lives of children. Scan the QR code for the church podcast hub or visit [fpcclt.libsyn.com](https://fpcclt.libsyn.com).



## Heart Math Tutoring BE A TUTOR, MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Volunteer Suzy Nurkin with students at Lansdowne Elementary School

Heart Math Tutoring (HMT) is on a mission to transform young lives through math education. This innovative program

offers elementary school students, particularly those in first–fifth grades who are performing below grade level, the opportunity to develop a strong foundation in math. Through one-on-one tutoring

sessions delivered by volunteers, HMT not only strengthens students' math skills but builds their enthusiasm for academics, laying the groundwork for long-term success.

Since its inception as an independent nonprofit in 2013, Heart Math Tutoring has grown significantly. From its humble beginnings, serving just 105 students across two schools, the program now reaches nearly 1,300 students across 31 schools, including new initiatives in Winston-Salem and Charleston. This expansion would not be possible without the dedication of over 1,400 volunteer tutors who commit their time each week to make a difference.

First Presbyterian members have been involved in founding and leading Heart Math Tutoring throughout its history. FPC Members Minna Elliott, Catherine Fischer, Susan Daniel, Reid Leggett, and Martha Eubank were all part of the original pilot program in 2010. Eric Eubank, Connie Carlson, and Anne Leggett have served as Board Chair of Heart Math Tutoring during the past decade, with Connie Carlson serving

most recently for the past three years. Over 30 FPC members volunteered in 2023-24!

Anyone who wants to help children increase their confidence and knowledge in math is encouraged to become a tutor. No prior experience in math or teaching is required. Volunteers come from all walks of life—college students, working professionals, and retirees—all united by the common goal of helping children succeed. The program ensures that every volunteer is well-prepared through mandatory training sessions, ongoing support from an onsite program coordinator, and access to an extensive library of resources.

*“We tell tutors that 50% of their role is to be a math tutor, and 50% is to be a mentor. One student shared, ‘Tutoring makes me feel smart and hardworking, like I can actually do something I’m good at.’”*

*Emily Gaffney, Executive Director, Heart Math Tutoring*

The impact of HMT on students is profound. Over 97% of the program's more than 6,400 students have shown measurable growth in their math skills, as assessed by

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and UNC-Charlotte. Beyond academics, students also experience a boost in confidence and enthusiasm for learning, with many attributing their newfound love for math to the personalized attention and encouragement they receive from their tutors.

Heart Math Tutoring continues to innovate in response to challenges. The program adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic by developing a virtual tutoring model and has recently introduced an extended learning model to provide even more comprehensive support. As HMT prepares to launch this new initiative at seven schools, the need for volunteers and financial support is greater than ever.



Rev. Chuck Williamson with a student at Westerly Hills Academy

Members of the church community are encouraged to get involved by signing up to tutor or attending a virtual information session on Wednesday, September 18, at 12 p.m. Visit [fpc.tiny.us/HeartMath918](https://fpc.tiny.us/HeartMath918) to RSVP. Whether you have an hour to spare or a desire to support the program financially, your involvement can make a lasting impact on a child's life. Visit the Heart Math Tutoring website to learn more at [heartmathtutoring.org/volunteers/become-a-volunteer/](https://heartmathtutoring.org/volunteers/become-a-volunteer/).

### Announcing the 2025 Willard Speaker

First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte is proud to announce our 2025 Willard Lecturer, Kate Bowler! A four-time New York Times bestselling author, award-winning podcast host, and professor at Duke University, Kate Bowler, Ph.D., studies the cultural stories we tell ourselves about success, suffering, and whether (or not) we're capable of change. She wrote the first and only history of the American prosperity gospel—the belief that God wants to give you health, wealth, and happiness—before being unexpectedly diagnosed with stage IV cancer at age 35. While she was in treatment and not expected to survive, she wrote two New York Times bestselling memoirs, “Everything Happens for a Reason (and Other Lies I’ve Loved)” and “No Cure For Being Human (and Other Truths I Need to Hear).” After years of being told she was incurable, she was declared cancer-free. But she was forever changed by what she discovered: life is so beautiful and life is so hard. For everyone.

Kate is determined to create a gentler world for everyone who wants to admit that they are not “living their best life.” She hosts the “Everything Happens” podcast where, in warm, insightful, often funny conversations, she talks with people like Malcolm Gladwell, Tig Notaro, and Archbishop Justin Welby about what they've learned in difficult times. She lives in Durham, North Carolina.

