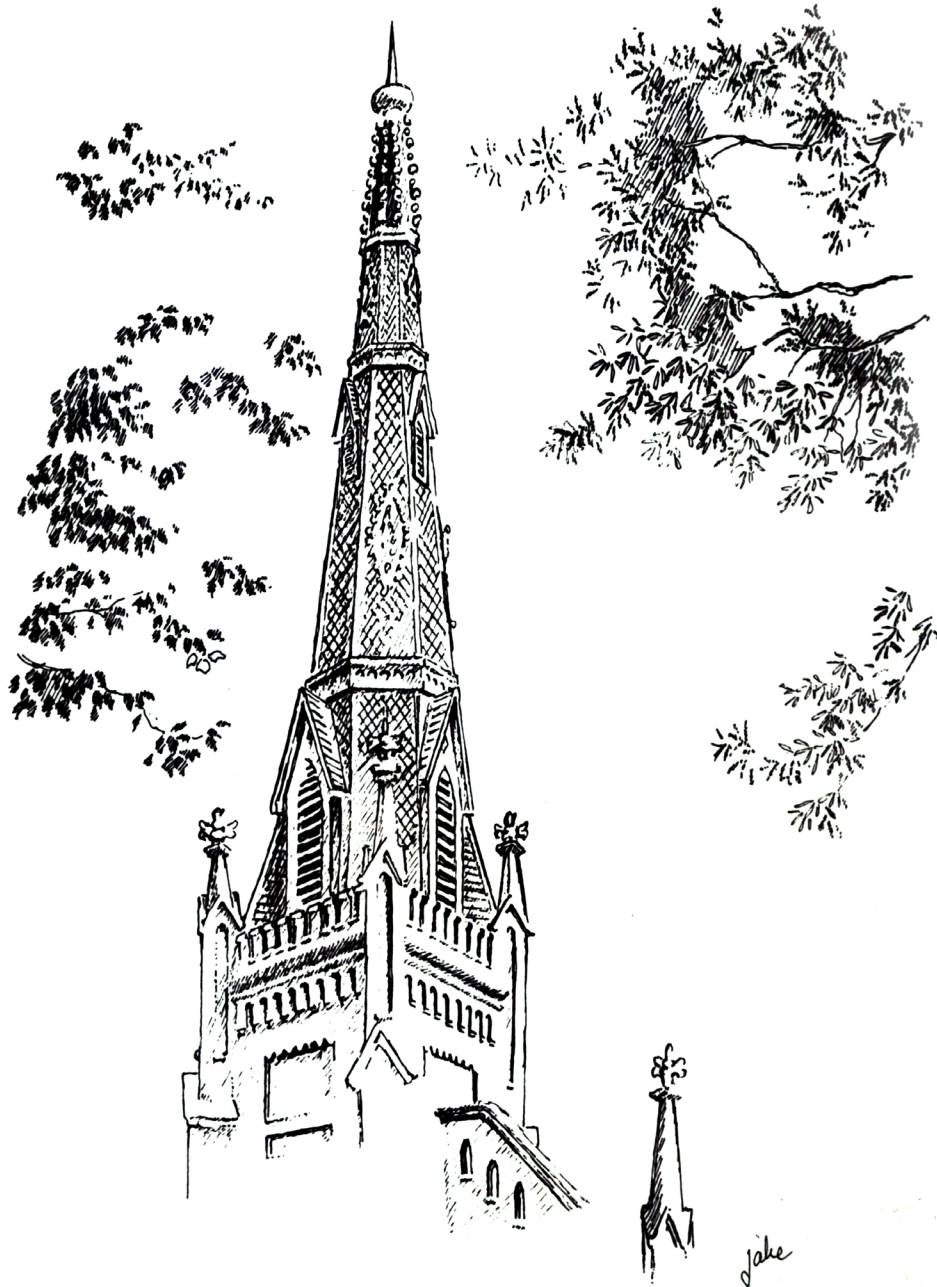


First Presbyterian Church

CONTEMPLATIVE WORSHIP | 9 AM | DECEMBER 28, 2025
FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS



We invite you, whoever you are and whoever God is helping you to become, to join First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte in our journey of faith. God is love, and that love is for you. You belong as a child of God, and we welcome you. Come experience how that belonging might change you and our world as we seek to be for Christ in the heart of Charlotte.



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, "Give me light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied,
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."
So I went forth and, finding the hand of God, trod gladly into the night.
- Minnie Louise Haskins, "God Knows"*

Time of Quiet Meditation and Reflection | Silence begins in the Chapel at 8:50 a.m.

Words of Welcome | Reverend Mary Bowman

Opening Prayer

O gracious and holy God, as we stand at the close of this year, we are mindful that you have elected to create time and yet you are not bound by time. As we mark the passing of one year and the arrival of another, we long to sit at this intersection in your presence, your wisdom, and your grace.

As we pray reflectively, help us to see how you have been at work in the last year. Help us to release what needs to be left behind as we cross the threshold into the new year and help us to hold dear what is still ours to carry.

As we look back over this past year, we thank you for your goodness to us—far beyond what we have deserved. May we never presume on your past goodness or forget all your mercies to us. Embolden us to commit anew to making you the foundation and center of our lives in the new year.

Moment of Reflective Prayer

O Christ mend us and forgive us.

O Father, uphold us and care for us.

O Spirit, enliven us and guide us.

So we may walk in your ways and follow your will in the new year ahead. Amen.

Meditative Music

 | "Renew Me, Lord"

O God, I seek safe harbor in this storm,
a place for peace in which my soul can form
the inner strength to follow day by day
Your will for me, unceasingly.
Renew me, Lord, I pray.

O God, I seek new vision clear and strong,
that once again the sign that all along
You held before these eyes, once turned away,
I now may see, more faithfully.
Renew me, Lord, I pray.

O God, I seek to serve but You alone,
for deep within my spirit You have sown
the gift of faith which calls forth bold display:
love unfettered in deed and word.
Renew me, Lord, I pray.

O God, I seek from time to time the joy,
afforded those whose daily deeds imply
the work of love giv'n freely, come what may.
O Charity, come dwell in me.
Renew me, Lord, I pray.

O God, I seek to recommit my life,
to honor the gospel of the Christ
to speak of peace, and only peace obey,
to daily raise my hands in praise.
Renew me, Lord, I pray.

Prayer for Illumination | Kelly Graves

Old Testament Reading | Psalm 103:8-19 | The Message

God is sheer mercy and grace; not easily angered, he's rich in love. He doesn't endlessly nag and scold, nor hold grudges forever. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, nor pay us back in full for our wrongs. As high as heaven is over the earth, so strong is his love to those who fear him. And as far as sunrise is from sunset, he has separated us from our sins. As parents feel for their children, God feels for those who fear him. He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we're made of mud. Men and women don't live very long; like wildflowers they spring up and blossom, but a storm snuffs them out just as quickly, leaving nothing to show they were here. God's love, though, is ever and always, eternally present to all who fear him, making everything right for them and their children as they follow his Covenant ways and remember to do whatever he said.

God has set his throne in heaven; he rules over us all. He's the King! So bless God, you angels, ready and able to fly at his bidding, quick to hear and do what he says. Bless God, all you armies of angels, alert to respond to whatever he wills. Bless God, all creatures, wherever you are—everything and everyone made by God. And you, O my soul, bless God!

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

New Testament Reading | Luke 13:6-9 and Galatians 6:1-10 | The Message | Selina Malherbe

Then Jesus told them a story: A man had an apple tree planted in his front yard. He came to it expecting to find apples, but there weren't any. He said to his gardener, "What's going on here? For three years now I've come to this tree expecting apples and not one apple have I found. Chop it down! Why waste good ground with it any longer?" The gardener said, "Let's give it another year. I'll dig around it and fertilize, and maybe it will produce next year; if it doesn't, then chop it down."

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived. Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life. Be very sure now, you who have been trained to a self-sufficient maturity, that you enter into a generous common life with those who have trained you, sharing all the good things that you have and experience. Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God!—harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life. So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

Moment of Reflection

Meditation | "Cultivating What Has Eternal Value in the New Year" | Mary Bowman

Moment of Reflection**Offering**

The Christian life is marked by the offering of one's self to God to be shaped, empowered, directed, and changed by God. In worship, God presents us with the costly self-offering of Jesus Christ. We are claimed by Christ and set free. In response to God's love in Jesus Christ we offer God our lives, our gifts, our abilities, and our material goods for God's service. The offering plates are located at the back of the chapel if you are interested in giving regularly as a spiritual practice.

Invitation to the Table

Meditative Music | “Spirit of the Living God” | The American Boychoir & Stephen Curtis Chapman

Spirit of the Living God; Fall afresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God; Fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the Living God; Fall afresh on me.

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sacrament of Communion

All are welcome to participate in communion. To receive the gluten-free bread and the cup, come forward, take a piece of bread, and then dip the bread into the cup. It is still communion if you prefer to take only the bread. Please do not drink out of the cup directly. If for any reason you prefer not to come forward, please raise your hand and the officers will be glad to serve you in your pew.

Prayer of Thanksgiving | Adapted from Eric Milner White

Eternal God, in the new year ahead, you call us to ventures, of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown, through joys not yet experienced. Give us faith to go out with courage and trust, not knowing where we go but knowing that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us. May we walk in gratitude and love into the new year. In Christ's holy name. Amen.

Charge and Blessing

We have been fed by the presence of God in the silence, by the Word, and through communion. Please feel free to greet one another in a warm and quiet way that allows an easing out of the silence. The minister is available for prayer or conversation after the service. Sunday School begins at 9:45 a.m. If you would like to visit longer with other members, you are invited to gather in the Welcome Center.

This service is now available via livestream. You can access the recording of the service or an audio or written version of the sermon at: <https://firstpres-charlotte.org/sermons/>



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