



The Banner

First Presbyterian Church
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

December 2023

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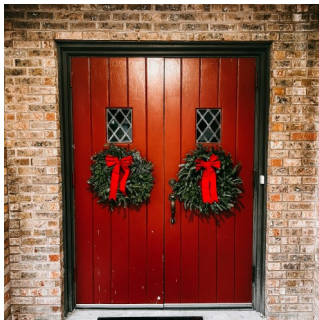
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Congregational meeting called to consider bylaws change

At its November meeting, the Session approved a proposal to reduce the number of elders on Session from 12 to 9 (three 3-year classes of 3 individuals in each class). Because this will be a change to the bylaws, the proposal needs approval by the congregation. Therefore, the Session has called a meeting of the congregation for Sunday, Dec. 3, immediately following the worship service, for the purpose of voting on this proposal.

The proposed change is in bold: *All administrative authority, both spiritual and corporate, shall be lodged in the Session. There shall be ~~12~~ **9** adult elders plus a youth elder when available. The adult elders shall be divided into three equal classes, one class of which shall be elected for a three-year term. If an elder cannot finish a term, the Nominating Committee will nominate a member of the congregation for election as an elder for one year or two years to complete the term.*

Several reasons factor into the Session's recommendation, which revolve around the dynamics of a post-pandemic society in general and church in particular (including and beyond FPCOR), as well as changing demographics. The adjustment will help us to be nimbler and more creative as we head into 2024.



FPCOR to elect new ruling elders

The Session has called a congregational meeting for Sunday, Dec. 10, immediately following the 10:30 a.m. worship service, for the purpose of electing ruling elders to serve on the

Session class of 2026, as well as two additional persons to fill unexpired terms for the class of 2025. The Nominating Committee will present the slate of nominees in the eNews for

the week of Dec. 4, which will be after the meeting of the congregation on Dec. 3 to vote on the proposed change in our bylaws (see related article on this page).

December special worship services

Dec. 17: Carol sing during worship

The 10:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, Dec. 17, will be an adaptation of Lessons and Carols. The focus will be on joy. Our traditional cookie exchange and cider event will take place in the fellowship hall afterward (see p. 5 for details).

Dec. 19: Service of memory and hope

FPC will hold the annual service of memory and hope on Tuesday evening, Dec. 13, 6:30 p.m., in the sanctuary.

The service is designed for all who desire a quiet, reflective worship experience during this bustling holiday season, particularly those for whom this time of year is difficult, for whatever reason.

After the service, all are invited to linger for coffee and conversation in the fellowship hall.

7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service

FPC's Christmas Eve service will take place at 7:00 p.m., in the sanctuary. The service will include the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the traditional lighting of candles and singing of "Silent Night." If you can, please invite a friend or neighbor to join you for the service. Or, how about offering a ride to someone who would rather not drive after dark?

Dec. 31 celebration

With New Year's Eve falling on a Sunday this year, the worship service that morning will be our last time to sing Christmas carols we haven't sung through the Advent/Christmas season—particularly those from different traditions. Wear your PJs if you'd like!

After worship, all are invited to the fellowship hall for refreshments and a toast to 2024, thanks to the Congregational Care and Welcome Committee.

The Banner

From your pastor



Sharon Youngs, pastor

Waiting is tough, isn't it? We wait for water to boil for tea, for the light to turn green, for news about a potential job, for word from the surgeon after a loved one's procedure, and much more.

Waiting for God is also tough—especially in the midst of a “dark night of the soul,” when hope seems dim, and loneliness and despair are in plentiful measure. But one of my favorite authors, Catholic priest Henri Nouwen, offers a helpful insight:

How do we wait for God? We wait with patience. But patience does not mean passivity. Waiting patiently is not like waiting for the bus to come, the rain to stop, or the sun to rise. It is an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full in order to find there the signs of the One we are waiting for.

The word patience comes from the Latin verb patior, which means “to suffer.” Waiting patiently is suffering through the present moment, tasting it to the full, and letting the seeds that are sown in the ground on which we stand grow into strong plants. Waiting patiently always means paying attention to what is happening right before our eyes and seeing there the first rays of God's glorious coming. (Bread for the Journey, HarperOne, 1996)

Active waiting. Paying attention to what is happening right before our eyes. That is what the season of Advent is all about, and it is why we have the theme “What Won't Wait.” Truth be told, some things won't wait, and shouldn't wait, until the end of time to happen. We're talking about some of those in worship this month, e.g., climate change and making amends, but they're just for starters.

Someone once said, “The world won't wait for you to change, not ever. You either take a chance or you stay in one place while everything else goes on.” True words, to be sure.

What's on your list of things that won't wait?

With a grateful heart,
Sharon



Congratulations to custodian Omer Breeden—employee of the year at Norwood Elementary School



The November Welcome Table



The popular dessert table at the FPCOR Thanksgiving feast

FPCOR Spotlight: Valerie Blickhahn and Erynn Yant

At the Nov. 19 worship service, Valerie Blickhahn and Erynn Yant were recognized as new members of our congregation. They have lived together as partners since 2012.

Erynn was born and raised in Greenville, S.C., and Valerie grew up in her native Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y. Erynn graduated from Pellissippi State Community College, and Valerie is a graduate of Greenville Technical College, a community college in Greenville. They met in a neighborhood they both lived in and later moved to Knoxville in 2017 and Oak Ridge in 2021.

Concerning their jobs, Erynn said, "I've mainly worked in customer service. I'm currently a customer service manager at the software company One, Inc."

"I've been in logistics for almost 10 years," Valerie stated. "I am currently the logistics manager for Legend Fitness, the top commercial gym equipment manufacturer in the United States."

The two women enjoy their two pups, Clover and Rowan. Erynn is skilled in cooking and baking, and Valerie said that she is "good at puzzles and music trivia." Erynn's hobbies also include home renovation, and hiking. Valerie enjoys traveling, spending days on the lake, and listening to music. They have traveled together to Alaska and to Europe, specifically Volendam, Netherlands.

Why did they decide to join the church family of First Presbyterian? "We joined because of the community," Erynn said. "The people at the church are loving and accepting. It is a safe environment to grow in my love and faith in God."

"FPCOR has been welcoming since we stepped in the doors," Valerie said. "It felt like coming home. This is a group of people I want to grow in my faith journey with."

Already the women have participated in FPCOR's service activities, helping with the Welcome Table community meal ministry and church workday. They expressed interest in becoming more involved with the church groups.



Valerie (left) and Erynn at a Carolina Panthers football game.

Christmas Joy offering received on Christmas Eve

We will receive the annual Christmas Joy special offering during the 7:00 p.m. worship service on Christmas Eve. The offering has been a Presbyterian tradition for nearly 100 years.

Money received for the offering supports the Assistance Program of the PC(USA) Board of Pensions (50%) and Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color (50%). Jesus' example as a child born to be among us and lead us to eternal life provides a pattern for us to follow as we celebrate those who have led us in the past and will lead us into the future.

The Assistance Program provides critical financial support to church workers and their families. This program honors and celebrates leaders like retired pastors, church workers and their families who have faithfully guided and led us but who now find themselves in critical financial need.

Presbyterian-related schools and colleges provide education and leadership development while nurturing racial and ethnic heritage. The PC(USA), with its historic commitment to higher learning, has long promoted education and leadership development through the establishment and support of Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. Our future church leaders of color can receive much-needed assistance while they discover and pursue their professional goals at these schools and colleges.

You can contribute to the offering in person on Christmas Eve or online (between now and Dec. 24)

—Sherrie Fairchild-Keyes, Social Concerns Committee



Opportunities for Sunday volunteers are plentiful

Have you been welcomed to FPCOR on a Sunday morning? Appreciated the worship leadership and the work of the A/V team? Enjoyed refreshments and conversation? We have a cadre of dedicated volunteers who make it all possible and who invite you to join them! The opportunities for service include the following (training provided for each):

Usher—one Sunday a month (welcome folks, distribute worship bulletins, and more)

Liturgist—3-4 times a year (read prepared worship liturgy)

Choir—weekly rehearsals on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings

A/V team—rotation frequency depends on number of volunteers (operate audio/visual system for in-person and online worship services)

Time with the Children—rotation frequency depends on number of volunteers (lead a brief, prepared lesson for kiddos younger than third grade)

Refreshment and Conversation—rotation frequency depends on number of volunteers (make coffee, tea, and lemonade; set out donuts for post-worship fellowship)

Substitutions in the rotation for any of these opportunities can be made when scheduling conflicts arise. Obviously, the more folks in the rotations, the easier it is for everyone. And, conversely, if we do not have enough volunteers for an activity, such as helping with refreshments after worship, we will need to rethink how we do things.

Please let Madison Green know if you are interested in serving. We look forward to welcoming you as one of our valued volunteers!



Folks get their assignments at the November workday.

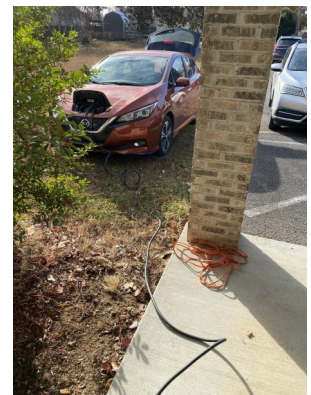


The view from above

Session news

At its stated meeting on Nov. 16, the Session:

- approved the June 8, 2024, wedding of Shauntina Phillips and David Collins.
- received a report from Dan Terpstra, who, along with Judy Greeson, served as FPCOR's commissioner to the November meeting of the Presbytery of East Tennessee.
- approved Aid to Distressed Families of Appalachian Counties (ADFAC)'s request to move their offices from their current locations in the Activities building to the office space previously used by FPCOR staff in the same building. The move will help ADFAC staff to be more centrally located. The agreement is for one year. A memorandum of understanding will be developed that details the agreement.
- held a lengthy discussion (which will continue) about the changing nature of the larger church and its impact on FPCOR.



Dan Terpstra charges his Leaf at the Nov. PET meeting in Chattanooga.

Cookie exchange & cider festivity Dec. 17

FPCOR's annual Cookie Exchange & Cider Festivity will be held on Sunday, Dec. 17, in the fellowship hall after the worship service. Please bring your favorite cookies to share with members and guests of the congregation.

To minimize handling, please bag two or three cookies together and drop off the bags on tables in the fellowship hall before the service. If the cookies contain nuts and/or are gluten free, please attach that information to the bag. —*Patty Barlow, Congregational Care and Welcome Committee chair*



Bring Angel Tree gifts for kids to FPCOR by Dec. 10

The Social Concerns Committee thanks everyone who is supporting the Angel Tree project to benefit the young children of Early Head Start of Anderson County, which provides its services in our Education building.

On Sunday, Nov. 19, a Christmas tree was set up in the fellowship hall. It was decorated with tags, each with the name of a child and the types of Christmas gifts the child needs or wants. Each tag indicates the child's favorite color, interests, and clothing sizes. All of the tags were taken from the tree by generous volunteers interested in shopping for gifts for the children.

Each child's gifts should be wrapped, tagged, and returned to the fellowship hall on Sunday, Dec. 3, or Sunday, Dec. 10. Large holiday bags will be available to consolidate gift packages for each child. The gifts will be distributed to the children on Monday, Dec. 11.

—*Darlene Sanders, Angel Tree project leader*



SUNDAY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH

Let's Talk About It

For adults and older youth, 8:45 a.m., in person (room 102, Activities building) and via Zoom

Dec. 3: Discussion of documentary of Bill McKibben's first big climate march in 2006: <https://www.jancannonphotography.com/Climate-March>

Dec. 10: "The Palestinian Problem"—with in-person guest Ann Brunger, retired Presbyterian pastor and daughter of Middle East mission co-workers

Dec. 17: Summary of COP-28 in Dubai by one (or more) of our previous guests

Dec. 24: Merry Christmas!

Dec. 31: Happy New Year!

Early Birds

For adults and older youth, 9:00 a.m., in person (parlor) and via Zoom

Studying the Old Testament book of Daniel

Leaders: Anne Backus, Gene and Rosalyn McKeown-Ice

Rise 'n' Shine

For adults, 9:00 a.m., in room 6 (with the comfy chairs just inside the main church entrance)

Currently finishing John Bunyan's book *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Refreshments provided.

Leaders: Sue Byrne, Cheryl Barr, Hannah Tippet

Why you should ask local legislators to back Medicaid expansion

Members of our congregation will be encouraged this month to ask state legislators to support Medicaid expansion to help meet the medical needs of 300,000 low-income Tennesseans who lack health insurance. An announcement will be made on this resolution in a “moment for mission” during a worship service.

At the October monthly meeting, Session approved the following resolution in response to the Social Concerns Committee’s request: “The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Oak Ridge resolves to support the expansion of Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the State of Tennessee and encourages congregations within the Presbytery of East Tennessee to do likewise.”

FPCOR’s Dan Terpstra, former member of the Serve Committee of the Presbytery of East Tennessee, suggested to Katina Sharp, the committee chair, that letter writing to members of the Tennessee General Assembly pushing for Medicaid expansion might be a good Matthew 25 project for PET, which has embraced the Matthew 25 mission. Katina agreed. Social Concerns Committee Co-chair Sherrie Fairchild-Keyes said that the FPCOR resolution to encourage PET congregations to support Medicaid expansion will be presented on Jan. 24 to the Serve Committee.

The Matthew 25 invitation focuses on Matthew 25:31-46, which suggests that, according to the www.presbyterianmission.org website, “we are called to serve Jesus by contributing to the well-being of the most vulnerable in all societies.”

A compelling case for Medicaid expansion in Tennessee was presented to the Social Concerns Committee on Sept. 10 by Dale Hadden, a nurse practitioner who serves the Free Medical Clinic of Oak Ridge, and Carolyn Dipboye, president of the League of Women Voters of Oak Ridge, which has hosted two forums on the need for Medicaid expansion.

Here is the rationale that the two FPCOR members shared with the committee and that the Social Concerns Committee co-chairs shared with Session:

“The Affordable Care ACT (ACA) supports purchasing health insurance for individuals and families under the health care marketplace. The federal government pays part or all of the health insurance premium for persons whose income exceeds 100% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; the higher the income the less the federal government contributes to the health care premium.

“Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2023 are \$14,580 for a single person and \$30,000 for a family of four. The proposal for those who were below 100% of the

federal poverty guidelines was the expansion of Medicaid to cover these families and individuals.

“Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia expanded Medicaid in 2010. Since that time an additional six states have expanded Medicaid, many by ballot box initiative. No states have withdrawn from the program.

“The State of Tennessee has refused several times to expand Medicaid for its citizens under the Affordable Health Care Act. If Tennessee extends Medicaid, it will receive \$1.9 billion in federal dollars each year to fund this program.

“The money that supports Medicaid expansion in the 34 states comes partly from your federal income tax payments. Tennessee must contribute only \$250 million each year to fund its part of the program. The additional \$1.9 billion will fund multiple jobs within the state of Tennessee. It will help to keep open rural hospitals, which are vital for the health of rural communities. It will help to reduce medical bankruptcy in the state. Most important of all, it will provide health care for some of the most vulnerable of Tennessee’s citizens and extend their lives.

“Tennessee’s version of Medicaid is TennCare. Currently, Tennessee enrolls into TennCare only pregnant women, custodial parents of children on TennCare, those receiving Social Security

Disability payments, some whom Tennessee deems disabled, those on renal dialysis, and people diagnosed with some types of cancer. If a person makes less than 100% of the federal poverty guidelines they are ineligible for state or federally supported health care and insurance unless they meet the above criteria.

“Whether it was the intent of the state legislature to restrict health care to Black, brown, and poor residents of Tennessee, that has been the result. In Tennessee the poorest of the poor are excluded from health care and a larger percentage of them are not white. Health care research has shown that the wide discrepancy in health care services by income has been reduced in those states that expanded Medicaid.

“This is a vital social justice issue. All people need health care, including our rural poor, our service personnel who work in essential low-paying jobs, our single parents struggling to make ends meet, and our invisibly disabled.”—Carolyn Krause

Here’s how to contact your state legislators. Send an email message via the Tennessee Health Care Campaign website <https://tnhealthcarecampaign.org/we-all-benefit/> or go to the Tennessee General Assembly website to search for a particular legislator by address: <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/Apps/fml2022/search.aspx>

Funding status of the FPC rooftop solar panels project

In response to the recent action by Session to approve a project to install solar panels on the roofs of FPC's Sanctuary and Education buildings, donations have been accumulating in the Session-approved Carbon Zero fund for this project. As of this writing, out of the roughly \$51,000 we need, about \$37,000 has been received, with more pledged and in process.

One piece of the finance puzzle for this project is our need for a grant from the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund to meet 20% of the

project cost. We have received verbal confirmation that ASFF's Grant Review Committee met and voted to support both phases of our project, as well as the cost of re-roofing the Education Building. Paperwork has yet to be completed, including a memorandum of understanding between ASFF and First Presbyterian. Once the documents have been signed, we will be eligible for \$20,370 to help fund the solar project and \$3,200 to help pay for a new Education building roof.

If you would like to

participate in bringing solar power to our church, now is the time. Donate to First Presbyterian Church online or by check, marking it *Carbon Zero* or *Solar*.

Several questions have been received about the project, prompting the beginning of a Solar FAQ below. If you have questions, send them to the church office. The Solar Subcommittee of Session's Property and Maintenance Committee will address them in future issues of *The Banner*.
—Dan Terpstra, subcommittee lead

Solar FAQ: Frequently asked questions about FPC's project

• **Is there a provision in the Inflation Reduction Act that ensures that church rooftop solar panels will be partially paid for?** Yes. An article from the [Environmental and Energy Study Institute](#) outlines the provision in the IRA, called Direct Pay, that makes nonprofit organizations such as churches eligible for the 30% tax credit that has long been available to taxpayers.

• **Do we have to apply for the Direct Pay money?** Yes. The mechanics of the refund process are still being worked out. Application for the funds will be made when the solar panels are placed in service. It will likely be processed as a tax refund in the following year. Our solar vendor has a history of helping clients with grant and tax-refund paperwork. The vendor has promised the same

support here.

• **Are we sure we can get the refund?** A qualified yes. This legislation could always change under a new administration. Solar tax credits have a long history of being popular and being supported on both sides of the aisle. As an extension of a popular program, this credit is highly likely to remain available.

• **What is the name of the solar vendor from which the solar panels will be purchased?** [Solar Alliance](#).

• **How reliable is the company?** The Solar Subcommittee carefully evaluated three companies with solid reputations for quality local installations. Solar Alliance has a long track record of quality customer interactions. They installed a system for Chuck and Dale Hadden several years ago; they installed the system on Faith Lutheran

Church in Oak Ridge; they recently completed a [one-megawatt community solar installation](#) for the Knoxville Utility Board, or KUB, in Knoxville.

• **Are the panels made in America or do they come from China or South Korea?** The solar panels specified in the project proposal are CAT panels. Caterpillar is an American company. It remains to be seen what percentage of the panel content is U.S.-produced, and whether it qualifies for an additional 10% project credit for U.S. content. These issues may also be influenced by supply-chain bottlenecks when the panels are actually installed.

• **Will the panels on the Sanctuary Building be seen from Oak Ridge Turnpike?** The panels will

be on the southwest roofs of both buildings. They will be visible from the Turnpike and from Lafayette Drive, but only briefly and in passing. You'll be able to see them if you look quickly and carefully.

• **Is there PR value in this installation?** Yes, but probably indirectly and in ways that may not be expected. An article in [Sojourners](#) magazine from last summer highlights a Presbyterian church in West Virginia that installed solar panels almost a decade ago. It describes what some of the public relations fallout has been. The article states that some 2,500 U.S. houses of worship host solar arrays, influencing some of their communities to accelerate solar adoption.

Last but not least...



Weekly gatherings

Sundays:

8:45 a.m. Let's Talk About It
9:00 a.m. Early Birds;
Rise 'n' Shine;
10:30 a.m. Worship
11:30 a.m. Refreshments

Mondays:

Noon Men's Zoom lunch

Wednesdays:

6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal



Monthly gatherings

- **Piece for Peace Sisters**, first Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m., room 102, Activities building
- **Brewing Questions**, first Thursdays, 7:00 p.m., via Zoom
- **Conversation on Loss**, fourth Sundays, 11:50 a.m., parlor, Sanctuary building
- **Coffee Chat**, last Mondays, 9:30 a.m., room 6 and via Zoom
- **Young Adult Breakfast Club**, last Saturdays, 9:00 a.m., room 102 kitchen, Activities building

(See weekly emails or call the church office for Zoom links and details.)

FPCOR's Welcome Table

Thursday, Dec. 14, 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.

The next dinner of the Welcome Table, our monthly community meal ministry, will be served in the fellowship hall on Thursday, Dec. 14, beginning at 5:00 p.m. To-go dinners will be available between 5:45 and 6:00 p.m., when the meal concludes. All are invited to come, eat, and enjoy the fellowship. Groceries will also be available through FPCOR's food pantry.

If you would like to help, tasks include setting up, cooking, serving meals, and cleaning up. Please let Sharon know if you're interested: fpcpastor@live.com or (865) 771-7178.

Heads up!

The church office will be closed on Monday, Dec. 25 and Tuesday, Dec. 26.

Please send in your year-end contributions before Dec. 31

Final contributions for 2023 must be received by Dec. 31. If you mail in your contributions, please allow plenty of time to account for any holiday-related postal delays. If you contribute online, also allow several days for the transaction to work its way through the system before the end of the year. In addition, if you send in a contribution early for 2024 in order to deduct it from this year's taxes, please note "2024 contribution" on the memo line. Thank you for your faithful giving.—*Dave Mullins, treasurer*

December birthdays

12/2 Diane Krause
12/3 Eric Darko
12/3 Lewis Phillips
12/4 Christine Pietrzak
12/5 Tammy Pietrzak
12/5 Gary Scott Ice
12/6 Mimi Tilley
12/10 Jean Hill
12/10 Jenny Lindsey
12/12 Micah Bostick
12/16 Jennifer Pietrzak
12/18 William Becker
12/18 Jeannie Trowbridge
12/21 Cheryl Kinneberg
12/21 Dan Terpstra
12/27 Jean Bangham
12/28 Jason Goodman
12/30 Stephanie Shipp

Happy birthday!

December Anniversaries

12/1 Phillip & Gail King
12/8 Bill & Debbie Bostick
12/18 Dan & Peggy Terpstra
12/21 Walter & Kate Porter
12/21 Richard Ward & Susan Sharp
12/31 Elizabeth Andrews & Richard Long

Congratulations!

December 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		28	29 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	30	1 Dec	2
3 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Called meeting of the congregation 11:45 a.m. Church Life & Witness Team 3:00 p.m. Messiah Sing-along	4 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	5 9:30 a.m. Piece for Peace Sisters	6 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	7 7:00 p.m. Brewing Questions	8	9
10 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Called meeting of the congregation	11 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	12	13 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	14 5:00 p.m. Welcome Table	15	16
17 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Lessons & Carols 11:30 a.m. Cookie exchange 11:50 a.m. Conversation on loss	18 12:00 p.m. Men's Zoom lunch	19 10:00 a.m. Anna's Book Group 6:30 p.m. Service of Memory & Hope	20 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	21 6:30 p.m. Session Meeting	22	23
24 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Fellowship 7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service	25 Office Closed Christmas Day	26 Office Closed	27 11:30 a.m. Al Anon 6:30 p.m. Choir rehearsal	28	29	30
31 9:00 a.m. Sun. school 9:45 a.m. Choir 10:30 a.m. Worship 11:30 a.m. Fellowship	1 Jan- Office Closed					

Looking ahead:

Jan. 11: Welcome Table

Jan 15: Office Closed

TBD: Annual meeting of the congregation

First Presbyterian Church
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Oak Ridge, Tennessee

December 2023

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**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Embodying Christ's inclusive love through heart, mind, and service



give
today