



DEC 2025 - JAN 2026

ISSUE 25/11 - 26/1

The Diligent

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ARP LAKE WALES, FL

“...a Christ-centered
fellowship of believers
devoted to glorifying God
through true worship, personal
evangelism, discipleship, and
servanthood.”

AT A GLANCE

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Leadership

SEEING JESUS IN ONE ANOTHER

From Pastor Mackay

We generally think that in order to know someone better, we need more time exclusively with them. That is true to a point. Husbands and wives need time to be together. Long one-on-one conversations deepen and stretch our affection for friends that we have known for a long time. Yet, one-on-one time can't be the only way to live in relationship with someone, can it? Imagine spending a year with only one other person. That sounds more like an unpleasant psychological experiment than a love story!

Something about living in community helps us deepen and understand each other better. I recently shared an excerpt from C.S. Lewis' book *The Four Loves* with our deacons that illustrates the point. I found it in a book about Tim Keller's writings, so my thanks to him as well.

As you may know, Lewis was very good friends with J.R.R. Tolkien (known as "Ronald"), of *Lord of The Rings* fame. With a third friend, Charles Williams, the two famous authors also shared a very close bond. Eventually, Charles died. The two earthbound friends, Lewis and Ronald, were heartbroken, but Lewis took some comfort in the fact that, though Charles was now gone, he would have Ronald to himself. To his surprise, he was mistaken:

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I [need] other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline [Charles-like] joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald.

If we know one another better in the context of community, it makes sense to think that community is also key to knowing the fullness of Jesus. In our Advent series this year, we're going to talk about Union with Christ. All believers are joined to Jesus in a real, mystical,

spiritual union. If this is true (and it is), then in order to know our Savior, does it not make sense that we need to know each other?

So, while we need one-on-one time with Jesus (what a blessing that is!), it's a mistake to think that Jesus is only known in the prayer closet. Jesus is known when we gather together with His body. Each member of the body has different strengths and weaknesses, and learning about each one deepens our knowledge of the whole. As we know each other, then, we see and know and love more of Jesus.

Let's not minimize this truth as we get into this busy time of year. If Jesus is really our focus this year, let us find Him when we gather with the Temple of God: His people where His Spirit dwells.

What a joy it is to seek and savor Jesus alongside each one of you. Rachel and I wish you a very Merry Christmas! ■



LEADERSHIP RETREAT 2026

All active church officers will gather **January 24th** for our annual Leadership Retreat. On this Saturday morning, elders and deacons will gather to discuss the year of church ministry, review committee responsibilities, and begin their committee work.

Hangiing of the Green
Saturday, Dec 29th at 9:00am



CHURCH OFFICE
Christmas & New Years Hours
 The Church Office will be closed
 Dec. 25-26 and Jan 1-2.

*Christmas Eve
 Candlelight Service*

Wednesday, December 24 at 6pm

PRAYER FOCUS

- DEC 7** - Christ's Glory
- DEC 14** - Congregational Meeting/ Officers
- DEC 21** - Christmas - Family and Salvation
- DEC 28** - Keeping Our First Love

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The elders met in session on November 18, 2025.

- The elders divided into small groups to pray for the needs of our congregation.
- A Search Committee was formed to find the next Director of Administration of First Presbyterian Church.
- Officer candidates were interviewed by elder teams, and the nomination slate was certified. (See slate below in Congregational Meeting announcement)
- The Stewardship and Finance Committee reported the following:

Financial Update as of October 31

| YTD INCOME VS EXPENSE (General Fund) | Actual | 2025 Budget | Difference |
|--|---------|-------------|------------|
| Transfer from Escrow | 186,550 | 179,792 | 6,758 |
| Actual Revenues YTD - Actual (Contributions) | 733,252 | 788,171 | (54,919) |
| Actual Expenses YTD - Actual (Ttl Gen. Exp) | 915,108 | 967,964 | 52,856 |
| Excess (Shortfall) YTD - Actual | 4,694 | (2) | 4,696 |

General Fund: \$565771

All Funds: \$839663



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Christmas
& Breakfast
Congregational
Meeting

SUNDAY, DECEMBER, 14
FOLLOWING WORSHIP

THE SESSION HAS CALLED THIS MEETING FOR THE ELECTION OF CHURCH OFFICERS AND THE APPROVAL OF THE 2026 BUDGET. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THE BUDGET SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO DANIEL HUNT (STEWARDSHIP & FINANCE CHAIR), AN ELDER, OR A PASTOR.

OFFICER CANDIDATES:
ELDER CLASS OF 2029: DANIEL HUNT
DEACON CLASS OF 2026: PAT FRANKENBURGER

NEW OFFICERS WILL BE INSTALLED JANUARY 18, 2026

Discipleship

SETTLING THE CHRISTMAS MOVIE DEBATE

From Pastor Myers

One of the great conversation starters at family tables since time immemorial is the question, “What is the best Christmas movie?”

At once, the table is thrust into the familiar tropes of conversation arks and pop-cultural tributaries. Is “Elf” better than “Home Alone”? Do you get nightmares from Jim Carrey’s “Grinch”? Does “Die-Hard” count as a Christmas movie? Which is worse, “The Star Wars Holiday Special” or “Star Wars Episode Eight: The Last Jedi”? And so on and so forth. The conversations are endlessly delightful.

But in my view, and in the view of one of the few great living-novelists, Andrew Klavan, the title of greatest Christmas movie, indeed, the title of greatest Christmas story (second only to the events of Advent) is a title that must be split into two. The two greatest Christmas stories are Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” and Frank Capra’s “It’s a Wonderful Life” starring Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey.

If you haven’t read Dicken’s novella or seen the 1953 film adaption “Scrooge” starring Alastair Sim as Ebenezer Scrooge, I highly recommend you give it a try. Most of us have likely seen “It’s a Wonderful Life” and have perhaps made watching it a part of our Christmas tradition. The staying power and resonance of these two stories is undeniable.

But why?



Why are these stories the two greatest Christmas stories ever told, second only to the real thing? Why have they stood the test of time so well? Why do they hold such a special place in our social imaginary and what is it about them that seems to capture the Christmas spirit so precisely?



Part of the reason these stories are so valuable is because, according to Klavan, they are actually mirror images of each other. Both stories proclaim one message that is told from two equal and opposite perspectives.

Here’s how Klavan puts it in an article he wrote for the Los Angeles Times back in 2003: “In “Scrooge,” [the movie based on “A Christmas Carol”], a man grown rich because of heart-shriveling greed is forced by spirits to view the consequences of his existence. In “It’s a Wonderful Life”, George Bailey, a man in financial trouble because of his large-souled generosity, is forced by an angel to view the consequences of his non-existence: what would’ve happened if he’d never been born.”

Both stories, in other words, have one message to tell but from two equal and opposite perspectives. So what is that one message? Ultimately, it is a message reflected in Christmas itself: of God’s intervention into brokenness leading to repentance and great joy.

And if you look into each of these (three) stories, this is exactly what you’ll find.

Continues on page 6...

Continues from page 7...

In "A Christmas Carol" supernatural forces intervene in Ebenezer Scrooge's life and this leads Scrooge to repentance and joy. In Scrooge's case, he turns away from his greed and becomes generous with his wealth to many, providing for his clerk's family in particular and ensuring that Tiny Tim will not die. "It's a Wonderful Life" a supernatural force intervenes in George Bailey's life and this also leads Bailey to repentance and joy. In Bailey's case, he turns away from his suicidality and happily returns home, still expecting to be arrested for his financial troubles before he learns that the townspeople of Bedford Falls have donated more than enough to cover his troubles.

And, most importantly, in the Bible, God himself intervenes in the womb of a virgin and in the town

of David. In whose life does God intervene? In your life and mine! God intervenes in the lives of his children by himself becoming a child, God the Son taking to himself a full fledged human nature and becoming like us in all ways except for sin.

Why did God do it? Why did God intervene in Bethlehem back then? Why does God intervene now by His Spirit? He intervenes for the same reason that the spirits intervened in Scrooge's life and for the same reason that the angel Clarence intervened in Bailey's life: for our repentance and joy. John the Baptist says "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" with regard to Christ's coming (Matt 3:2-3). And the angels say "I bring you good news that will cause great **joy** for all the people" with regard to Christ's coming (Luke 2:10). ■

ROW stops for Christmas Break, December 10
ROW resumes, January 7

JOIN US!

CHRISTMAS PARADE

Saturday, December 13th, 6pm

This year our community hospitality is hot chocolate and popcorn! Please plan to come enjoy fellowship together.

*The parade comes down
Central Avenue.*



Small Groups

MEN'S 8AM GROUP

LED BY FRANK HUNT
& ANDY HUNT

Standard Lesson
Quarterly Curriculum

OLD CHURCH
LIBRARY

THE UPPER ROOM

LED BY JOHN
DUBOIS & JOHN
STEENSMA

Romans Ch. 12-16

FLC CLASSROOM A

FAITH WORKS

LED BY DOUG PACE

Sermon Review &
Application

FLC CLASSROOM C

THE HUB

ROTATING DAVID
NELSON, VINCE
TREADWAY, MACKAY &
MYERS

Knowing God by
Jl Packer

FELLOWSHIP HALL

THE SEEKERS

LED BY LAURA HUNT
& TONY WOODS

Advent Teaching Series

VINTAGE BUILDING
LECTURE HALL A

EAGLES' WINGS YOUNG ADULTS

LED BY FOX
RAWLINGS

Philippians

VINTAGE BUILDING
ROOM 296

ALL GROUPS MEET FROM 11AM-12PM AFTER SUNDAY WORSHIP,
EXCEPT THE 8AM MEN'S WHICH MEETS BEFORE.

Music Ministry

CHILDREN'S CHOIRS

From Dr. Teresa Irwin

Spring 2026 Theme for Children's Choirs:

The Beatitudes

Our Scripture source for the children this spring will be Matthew 5:3-10, from Jesus' Sermon on

the Mount. In these declarations of blessedness, Jesus teaches us about our spiritual well-being. Covenant children are blessed to learn of the righteous character that Christ brings to those who belong to Him. ■

**A Community
Event!**

A Christmas Festival of Lessons & Carols

Sunday, Dec. 14th at 6pm

First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales

Youth Ministry

WORDS FROM WALKER

From Walker Kirkpatrick

Hey everyone!

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement for our student ministry here at FPCLW! There has been a lot happening in the past few months, and a lot more to come.

Look below for some pictures of our 2nd Annual Costume Contest and our ROW Fellowship Game "Speed Friending".

Some of the things ahead of us include ThanksLiving, Winter Retreats, our Cookies in a Jar Fundraiser, and more. Please be in prayer for our students as they serve with the Care Center here in Lake Wales, but also pray for our students as we return to Ocklawaha FL for our Winter Retreats (Middle School – Early January & High School – Late February).

Lastly please look below for some information about our "Cookies in a Jar" Fundraiser.

This fundraiser is the same one we ran last year with one exception. This year all proceeds and any additional donations will help support the Student Ministries Domestic Mission Trip in 2026. This will not only be helping our students but also a Florida Presbytery Church Plant, as we plan to serve with them this summer!

The jar will contain all of the dry ingredients, and it will have the recipe as well as baking instructions listed on a tag. The price is \$12 per batch (Jar) of 32 cookies.

Please be able to pay the appropriate amount (Cash, Check, or Card) upon pickup.

Orders are due by December 10th

Payment due at Pick Up!

Pick Up Times:

- December 14th between 11:50am-12:20pm (FPCLW Youth Game Room)
- December 15th – 19th between 9am-4pm (FPCLW Youth Game Room)
- December 21st between 11am-12pm (FPCLW Youth Game Room)

Thanks so much for supporting our Student Ministries in this way and God Bless! ■



The graphic features a white three-lobed logo at the top center. Below it, the text "FPCLW Student Ministries" and "Cookies-in-a-Jar Fundraiser" is written in white on a dark red background. A decorative green holly branch with a red bow is positioned below the text. At the bottom, there is a large QR code.



TOP: 2nd Annual Youth Costume Contest
BOTTOM: ROW Speed Friending

MILESTONE CELEBRATIONS

BIRTHDAYS

December 8, Birdie Cockrell
December 8, Frank Hunt III
December 9, Stewart Hurst
December 10, Scottie Smith III
December 10, Joyce McCollum
December 14, Kathe Galloway
December 15, Kay Weaver
December 18, Michelle Hurst
December 19, Elenor Freeland
December 21, Bill Schaffer
December 21, Rachel Smith
December 23, Evelyn Smith
December 26, Cindy Turner
December 29, Patty Falk
December 29, Lily Wunker

January 4, Chandler Crews
January 4, Julie Seay
January 9, Jimmy Kahler
January 10, Darlene Krpata
January 18, Chris Waters
January 19, Mary Campbell
January 19, Barbara Sebring
January 21, Mary Benner
January 22, Cole Hixenbaugh
January 23, Caleb Eckstein
January 25, Wendy Moore
January 27, Audrey Hunt
January 30, Billy Kahler
January 30, Jaclyn Miller
January 31, Laura Hunt

ANNIVERSARIES

Lori & Tony Woods, December 2
Katie & Gerald Lippert, December 3
Beth & Ansel Buhrman, December 3
Christie & Lorin Bice, December 7
Nancy & Jim Ayers, December 12
Donna & Chip Carter, December 22
Debbie & Willard Pearce, December 23
Norma & Bill Schaffer, December 25
Dionne & Kevin Kohl, December 30

Danielle & Dan Miller, January 4

Church Family



Adoration of the Shepherds by Caravaggio (1609)

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2



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 fpclw.org

CHURCH OFFICERS

ELDERS

2025

Tony Woods
 Jim Underwood

2026

Stewart Hurst
 Ed Lamb
 Jimmy Seay

2027

Chuck Loveless
 Willard Pearce
 Fox Rawlings

2028

Frank Hunt
 Scott Crews

DEACONS

2025

June Ullman
 Cindy Turner

2026

Aaron Nelson

2027

Bob Hulen
 John Dubois
 Karen Steverson

Moderator: Rev. Mackay Smith
Clerk of Session: Tony Woods
Chairman of Deacons: Aaron Nelson
Deacon Secretary: June Ullman
Chm. of the Congregation: Jim Weaver
Treasurer: Daniel Hunt
Asst. Treasurer: Michelle Hurst