



The First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood

First Press Newsletter

722 E Ridgewood Ave, Ridgewood, NJ 07450
(201) 652-2504

January 2025

We are a welcoming community formed in Christ, committed to sharing his love with others – with feet that carry us out into the world, with hands that serve, and with hearts in fellowship and faith.

Dear Friends,

As we prepare to turn the page on 2024 and transition to a new year, I've been thinking a great deal about *time*. Looking back on the year that was, I've been considering whether I used my time wisely. And looking ahead, I've been thinking about how best to use my time in 2025.

To me, the words of the psalmist ring true: *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it* (Psalm 118:24). Each day, and time in general, are gifts, not to be taken for granted.

Theologian Bonnie Thurston has described time as *the creation of a generous God* – an assertion with which I wholly agree. The time I have is a gift from God. And that leads to the question: *How can I be a good steward of this precious gift?*

I believe that as grateful recipients of the time we've been given, an appropriate response is to offer some of our time to God's work through the church.

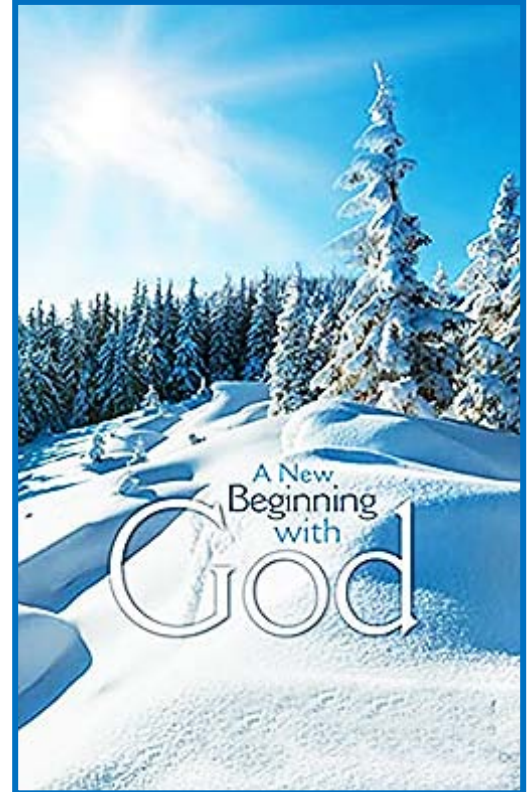
Toward that end, I invite you to take part in Pie Sunday immediately following the worship service on Sunday, January 12. Sponsored by our Matthew 25 Task Force, this event will help each of us identify ways in which we can offer some of our time to serve God and serve others through various ministries and mission opportunities here at First Pres.

Come, take your place at the table after worship on January 12, and enjoy some delicious pie as we learn how we can offer our time and use our skills and talents to serve within the church and in mission to nearby communities!

In the words of Mother Teresa: "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

Let us begin 2025 by renewing our commitment to service within the life of the church. See you on Pie Sunday!

Grace and peace,
Bruce





January Sunday school lessons were the Books of the Bible.
Confirmation classes continue...



Sunday January 26th is DENIM DAY at First Pres!

We invite everyone to come to church in your JEANS! For \$10.00 you can sit in church and the congregational meeting in comfort! The High School class will be at all church entrances collecting money before and after the worship service and congregational meeting. Proceeds will be split to go toward youth activities in 2025 and a mission organization chosen by our youth group!

Thank you to all who donated unwrapped toys for the **Toys for Tots Foundation** sponsored by the First Pres. church school! A very large box of toys was delivered to a local Toys for Tots drop off location. You have brought the joy of Christmas and sent a message of hope to disadvantaged children here in the United States. God Bless each and every one of you!



Thank you to those who donated hats, mittens, scarves and gloves to our Mitten Tree! All items will be donated to the Center for Food Action to be distributed throughout the winter months.

Thank you to all our First Pres. High School students who served as liturgists during our Advent season: Cole Bellorgey, David Edelbach, Maddy Eliya, Luca Torielli and Hudson Wall (our confirmands)!

Thank you, as well, to our First Pres. members who took part in our Advent candle lighting and readings: Emmy, Abed, Gabby and Joseph Eliya, the Torres Family, Robin Byrne, Marcia Unger, Marjorie Vanacore, Jill Critchley, Sue Fischer, Linda Strickland and Jessica and Steve Paz.



Holiday Bake Sale

Our First Pres. Annual Holiday Bake Sale on December 15th was a great success!

Thank you to all the bakers who made the most amazing yummy desserts! We appreciate your time and talents that went into our Bake sale. We raised over \$1,800.00 for Family Promise! What a blessing! Heartfelt appreciation goes out to Pete Castaldo, Jill Critchley, Sue Fischer, Dawn Murdock, Jessica Paz and Sandy Santangelo for all your help in making this event so successful. A very special Thank You to SANTA, for coming all the way from the North Pole during such a busy time to visit all the children and families at First Pres Church!



Happy Birthday, Jesus!



Everyone had a fun time in the auditorium making crafts, enjoying cupcakes and coffee hour treats. We sang **Happy Birthday to Jesus!** Additionally, the youth at First Pres. had an opportunity to shop at our **Christmas Mart!**





Christmas Pageant

Thank you to all who made our 10:00am worship service/Christmas Eve Pageant “The 12 Symbols of Christmas” a wonderful success. Thank you to Carol & Ed Schmiedecke, Linda Sweetman Waters, Emma Schmiedecke and Samuel Hothem and our FP choir for sharing your extraordinary gift of music!

Thank you to all of our Youth at First Pres. who are all so amazing and talented. Thank you to our **Sunday school choir** and to **Olivia Davis, Cole Bellorgey and Luke Eliya** for sharing their gifts with us and in helping to create a beautiful and meaningful service.

A special Thank you to Jill Critchley and Sue Fischer for all your help with the Pageant!

Worship Service and Pageant Roles

Opening Prayer: Lucy Dickinson

Call to Worship: Hudson Feeney

Welcome & Announcements: Hadley & Darvin Wall

Prayer of Confession: Luca Torielli

Passing of the Peace: Charlotte Pavao

Offering Invitation: Luca Torielli

Prayer of Dedication: Cole Bellorgey

Benediction: Andrew Dickinson

Pageant:

Mom: Olivia Davis

Maddy: Maddy Eliya

Luke: Luke Eliya

Speaker 1: David Edelbach **Speaker 2:** Dante Torielli **Speaker 3:** CJ Torielli

Mary: Hadley Wall

Joseph: Darvin Wall

The Star: Shane Reade

Three Kings: Johnny Eliya, Jack Morris & Luca Torielli







Happy New Year from the Weekday Nursery School! We hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful Christmas & Happy New Year spent with friends and loved ones!

We are welcoming in 2025 and are enjoying getting back into the swing of things! This month we will be meeting with our parents for our annual Parent/Teacher conferences during the last week of January. The staff has prepared a Developmental Checklist and Student Portfolio for each child to share with parents during their conference time.

Students in our Afternoon Extended Learning Classes enjoyed a unit all about building. Using different sizes of wooden blocks, the children built houses using different techniques such as brick patterns, symmetry, and stacking with horizontal and vertical bricks. The children listened to the story of “The three Billy Goats Gruff” and then used popsicle sticks, Jenga blocks, toothpicks, and mini marshmallows to build their own bridges. They also used their imagination by building creations using cardboard boxes.



Registration for the 2025-2026 school year is underway! If you are looking for a quality, nurturing preschool for your 2 ½ - 5-year-old child, or know of someone who is, please call us to arrange a tour of our school. Please contact Julia Bolt, Director, at 201-445-2552 for more information. We offer a fun, nurturing environment, while preparing our children for kindergarten and beyond. We look forward to hearing from you!





First Wednesdays January 2025

Ladies, join us for an evening of food, conversation, and spiritual inspiration. It's a wonderful opportunity for women of all ages to gather together with church friends and make new ones, as we discover fresh ways to connect with one another and with God. Each gathering will include a brief spiritual inspiration with most of the time for people to enjoy fellowship over food.

What: January Hostess –Lindsay Wall

Lindsay will be providing the meal -Lasagna, salad, bread and King Cake for dessert. Please come and enjoy!

Spiritual Inspiration for the Month –Lindsay Wall

Star Words: A Spiritual Practice for Epiphany

Gather for a "Twelfth Night Feast" to celebrate Epiphany and choose your star word to guide you spiritually in the coming year just as that celestial ball of fire shining in the sky did for the Magi so many years ago.

Date: Wednesday, January 8, 2024.

Time: 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Place: First Presbyterian Church, Minnema Room

Please RSVP by Friday, January 3rd to Donna Flagg

Email: flagbda@gmail.com

Phone: **201-819-2327**

Save the Date and Join us on January 12, 2025 for

Pie Sunday!

Where are you called to serve?

Come and "take a place at the table" after worship to enjoy a slice of pie while we learn how we can use our skills and talents to serve within the church and in mission to nearby communities!

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40



Each of us has been blessed with unique gifts that can make a difference in the lives of others and bring us closer as a faith community. Your skills, talents, and compassion are vital to God's mission, and here at First Pres, we invite you to serve in ways that bring you joy and purpose. Our church offers numerous ways to engage with one another, serve those in need, and grow together in Christ's love. Whether it's sharing your voice in choir, leading a Bible study, welcoming new faces, or organizing events, there's a place here where your presence will be a blessing. Our church community depends on the love and gifts of each person, and there are countless ways to get involved, make connections, and share in the joy of serving. Join us in making a difference both within our church family and in the world beyond.

Serve with love and join us on this journey of faith, connection, and community!

See you on Sunday, January 12, 2025 ~ The Matthew 25 Task Force



The Annual meeting of the Congregation to hear all reports will be held on **January 26, 2025.**

Please remain seated after the Church Service.



We were pleased to welcome the following new members in December.

Matthew Cardona, Susan King, Bing Lu, and Justin and Michelle Torres.

We rejoice with Matthew, Susan, Bing, Justin and Michelle on this meaningful day in their lives.

Christmas Brunch

We were treated to a fabulous Christmas Brunch on Sunday, December 22nd.

The tables were so pretty and the breakfast spread was so delicious!

Many thanks to the team that came together to create this bounty. Thank you to Joe Unger, Laura Magrath, Marjorie Vanacore, Bobbe Kutcha, MaryEllen Castaldo and Joan Davies for a wonderful Christmas brunch!



(And a good time was had by all...)



More Holiday Events

In Mid-December Santa's Songsters spread some Christmas Cheer by visiting and singing with seniors at Sunrise of Franklin Lakes and Sunrise of Woodcliff Lake.



Folks gathered to sing Christmas Carols and enjoy the Tree Lighting



ENDOWMENT CORNER:



Christmas Blessings

A big 'thank you' to the following people who supported our Christmas Blessings project:

Bruce Ballantine Barbara Dunn
Joanne Bonwick Emmy Eliya
Joan Davies Rita Infante
Melissa Davis Laura Magrath
Lindsay Wall

Every gift, in whatever amount, allows the Endowment Fund to increase and further support the needs of our Church and its mission projects with greater impact.

MISSION:



The spirit of giving came alive on December 1st at the homeless shelter, where a delicious array of comfort foods and thoughtful treats warmed both hearts and bellies.

Joan Davies arrived with a hearty pan of baked ziti, accompanied by a treasure trove of snacks lovingly repurposed from the mental health luncheon program—a gesture of both care and resourcefulness. Sue Dickinson brought the perfect cold-weather remedy: a steaming pot of chili paired with fluffy rice, a duo sure to bring smiles. Barbara Dunn followed with a nostalgic classic, hotdogs and beans, evoking memories of simpler, carefree times.

Suzy McDevitt added her touch of nourishment and sweetness, delivering fresh bread and a colorful assortment of fruit. But it was her second gift that truly stole the show: handcrafted, beautifully decorated cookies, each one a tiny edible work of art that reminded everyone of the season's joy and kindness. It was a feast not just for the body but for the soul, as each offering represented the love and dedication of a community coming together to share warmth and care.

Want to join this delicious cause? Click the link to sign up and make a difference.

Thank you! <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0845ACAE2BA7F49-51100449-stpauls>



Calling all Knitters...and Crochet-ers!

Is there interest in starting up a charity knitting/crocheting group to make pocket prayer shawls and other charity projects? We would probably meet twice a month during the day to knit, crochet, chat and have cake and coffee (of course). If you are interested, please see Bobbe at church or text her at 201-410-6461 or email bobbekutcha@gmail.com. Thanks!

A FREE LECTURE/Q&A SERIES SPONSORED BY
THE INTERFAITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF RIDGEWOOD

Living Your Best Life:

A series on living
well in our time



*Led by staff from the
West Bergen Mental Healthcare Services of NJ*

Each evening begins with a brief talk followed by time for Q&A,
as well as connecting with one another over refreshments

Dates and Topics:

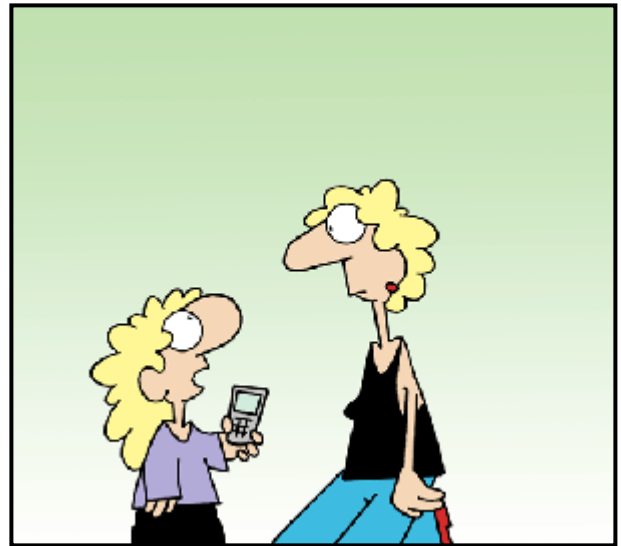
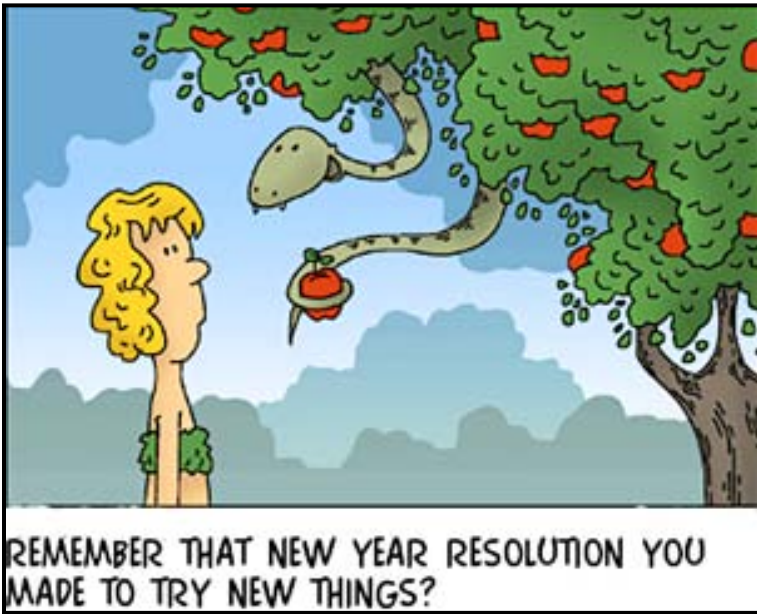
Sunday, January 26th at 5pm
Navigating Relationships with Our Adult Children

Sunday, February 9th at 5pm
Caring Well for Aging Parents

Sunday, February 23rd at 5pm
The Value of Friendship

*Location:
The Unitarian Society of Ridgewood
113 Cottage Place
Ridgewood, NJ 07450*

☺ Just for laughs ☺



Question: What is a spider's resolution for the New Year?

Answer: To spend less time on the *web*!

Question: Why is celebrating the New Year in Times Square overrated?

Answer: Because they drop the ball every year!

Just Sayin'.... I think the proper term for 'senior' women should be **Queen-agers...Just Sayin'**

The Church Mouse:

Thought for the month:

"I have one life and one chance to make it count for something. I'm free to choose that something...my faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I can, whenever I can, for as long as I can."

... Jimmy Carter





Sami Eliya
Chris Feltmann
Chet Greenleaf
Jordan Kender
Derek Schnure
Mary Shaw
Marcia Unger
Craig Walters

Here's Wishing everyone a *great birthday* and a *wonderful year* ahead...

Church Staff

Pastor: Rev. Bruce Ballantine

Director of Children & Families: MaryEllen Castaldo

Director of Music: Dr. Edward Schmiedecke

Organist: Linda Sweetman Waters

Director of Youth Music & Handbells: Carol Schmiedecke

Administrative Manager: Dana Feeney

Church Phone: (201) 652-2504

Church Web Site: www.firstpresridgewood.org

Pastor Bruce: (215) 337-5623 Please contact him directly for Pastoral Care.

Bookkeeper: Lavonne McMillen

Sexton: Tom Carozza

Custodian: George Wood

Director Nursery School: Julia Bolt

Newsletter Editor: Carrie Werner (Volunteer)

Photography and Community

Bulletin Board: Joanne Bonwick (Volunteer)