

THE EVANGEL – MAY 2025

News and Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR:



Christos Anesti!

Christos Anesti is Greek for “Christ is risen.” If you're a fan of movie quotes, you might recall that it's repeated throughout the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. The expected response is **Alithos Anesti**, which means “He has risen indeed.”

But the question remains: what's the big deal about Jesus' resurrection? Does it really matter whether this man, Jesus—who lived and was executed 2,000 years ago on a Roman cross—actually came back to life? That's a fair question, and one that demands an answer. In fact, everything hinges on how we respond to it.

The Apostle Paul puts it bluntly in 1 Corinthians 15:17: “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.*” Just a few verses later, he adds that if the resurrection didn't happen, then Christians are “of all people most to be pitied.” He's right. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead three days after His execution, then I've devoted my life to a lie. Not only that—I've spent years teaching others a falsehood. And there's far more at stake than just my pride.

I have hope because I believe I am part of a greater plan. The life of a believer has been set apart by God Himself and redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. In His resurrection, Jesus defeated death and took His place—not merely as a prophet or a teacher, but as God incarnate. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, everything else falls apart.

So—did He rise?

I believe He did. And let me be clear: I don't believe in the resurrection because I'm a pastor. I became a pastor because I believe in the resurrection. It was at the top of my list of things I needed to be sure of before stepping into ministry.

Something profound happened 2,000 years ago. There isn't a credible historian who will deny that. Overnight, a new religious movement was born, built on one bold claim: “**Jesus has risen from the grave.**” What began with a few hundred believers grew into thousands—and today, more than 2.18 billion people worldwide identify as Christians. So, what happened?

Some claim it wasn't Jesus who died on the cross. The Quran, for instance, asserts that a substitute died in His place. But that introduces a critical point: either Christianity or Islam

is right on this matter—they can't both be. Either Jesus died on the cross and the Quran is wrong, or He didn't and Christianity is false. It's worth noting that Muhammad made this claim about 600 years after the event.

Others argue that Jesus didn't actually die, but was only severely wounded and later revived. But consider what He endured: arrested in the night, subjected to six trials, mocked, beaten, scourged with a lead-tipped whip, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross, pierced by a spear, then buried, wrapped in grave clothes, and sealed in a tomb. Even if He survived all of that—a massive “if”—He would then have to escape His bindings, roll away the heavy stone, and slip past armed guards. I can barely sneak downstairs for a midnight snack with an ingrown toenail—much less pull off something like that after being crucified.

This theory doesn't even dispute the resurrection outright—it tries to explain it away. But the historical evidence is overwhelming: Jesus lived, and He died. That part is well-documented, even outside of Scripture.

Then there's the “wrong tomb” theory—that everyone simply went to the wrong location. But this would mean not only Jesus' followers, but also the guards and the religious leaders—who were determined to quash any resurrection rumors—all consistently visited the wrong place. That stretches credibility.

Another theory is that the disciples stole Jesus' body and fabricated the resurrection. But the Gospels paint a different picture of these men. After the crucifixion, they were terrified, scattered, and in hiding. Peter, when confronted, couldn't even admit he knew Jesus. How would these same men suddenly muster the courage to outwit Roman guards, steal the body, and sustain a lie for the rest of their lives?

Beyond that, a resurrected Jesus would have conflicted with both Greco-Roman and Jewish worldviews. Greek thought valued the liberation of the soul from the body; resurrection into a physical body would have seemed foolish. In Jewish thought, the idea of one man rising from the dead in the middle of history, rather than at the end of time, was just as radical. And yet, that's exactly what they claimed—because it's what they saw.

The disciples said they saw Jesus alive. They spoke with Him, ate with Him, and even touched Him. Paul, in the same chapter of 1 Corinthians, writes that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people—most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote, essentially inviting skeptics to go verify the facts for themselves.

And the disciples didn't just say it—they died for it. Blaise Pascal once wrote, “*I believe those witnesses who get their throats cut.*” The disciples endured torture and execution, one by one, not as a group but individually, with plenty of opportunities to recant. None did. If it had been a hoax, someone would have cracked. But no one did.

As N.T. Wright put it: *“The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb and the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus. Nobody was expecting this kind of thing... To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and enter into a fantasy world of our own.”*

Jesus died. And Jesus rose. Not figuratively—literally. That reality is the cornerstone of Christianity. It's what makes the faith both astonishing and hard to accept. We've never seen anything like it. It defies biology, logic, and nature itself.

And that's the point.

This is the supernatural. This is God.

That's why I have hope in tomorrow and confidence in my calling today. If God can become man, suffer, die, and rise again—then anything He wills is possible. More than that, this God loves us and transforms lives.

So, if someone greets you with “Christos Anesti,” I pray you'll be ready to respond: **“Alithos Anesti”—He is risen indeed.** Because that is the truth of Easter.

Alithos Anesti.

Happy Easter

-Ben



Notes from the Director of Music

Before I say anything else, I want to express my deep gratitude to all those whose combined efforts made our Holy Week and Easter celebrations so meaningful. Choral singers, instrumentalists, cantors, livestream operators, and many others: THANK YOU!



With Easter over, we can turn our attention to the church's 225th anniversary celebrations, which launch with a special service at 11:00 AM on May 4th. (*By decision of the Session, there will be no 8:30 service that morning.*) Music from our Presbyterian heritage will be the focus, and we'll also use the occasion to recognize those people who have been church members for 60+ years. That day will also be our last with the choir before they disperse for the summer. A reception with cake will follow the service: please plan to join us!

Additionally, the Worship & Music Committee has decided that the time has come to clean up the music storage area, located off the choir room. This area has become a repository for various items donated to us over the years, as well as equipment and sheet music we haven't used in decades and will surely never need again. The committee and I will soon begin sorting through to decide what's worth keeping. Much of it will end up in the dumpster, unfortunately: there's simply no demand out there for 200 copies of the *Vesper Chimes* hymnal, published in 1930 and now yellowed with age. We also have vinyl records, percussion instruments, posters, and too many other things to list! Before we start loading up the dumpster, though, the congregation is invited to take items for their own personal use. If there's a particular piece of music that's meaningful to you, or an old hymnal you'd like a copy of for sentimental reasons, I encourage you to stop by soon and claim it.

Until next time,

Kevin

Christian Education News

May 2025



May Sunday School Schedule

- May 4th – What's Her Story
Lydia's Conversion
- May 11th – Mother's Day Breakfast
(No Sunday School)
- May 18th – Let's Get This Straight
Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos



Breakfast

Sunday May 11, 2025

All women of the church are invited!

9:30-10:30 a.m.
Fellowship Hall

RSVP by May 5, 2025 to Church Office

Sponsored by Christian Education Committee



- Eva Fischer – May 4
- Anatasia Bilka – May 12



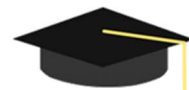
May 25, 2025

Senior Recognition Sunday



June 1, 2025

Parents of the Class of 2025 high school and college seniors,
PLEASE, contact the church office by May 15th.





The celebrations for our church's 225th anniversary officially begin with a special heritage worship service on Sunday, May 4 at 11:00 AM. On this occasion music from our Presbyterian tradition will take center stage, and we'll recognize those people who have been members of the church for 60+ years. A reception with cake will be held afterwards in the foyer: please plan on joining us! (By decision of the Session, there will be no 8:30 service that morning.)

SAVE THE DATES:

Sunday, May 18: The Rev. Dr. Daniel Corll is guest preacher.
Thursday, May 22: LUNCH AT FIRST 12 PM – 1:15 PM. A HISTORY OF FPC STAINED GLASS WINDOWS. Lunch and Program (Lunch will be provided). Cost is \$10.00/per person. Limited to 80 patrons. All proceeds will be given to the cleaning and preservation of our beautiful windows. For reservations, please call the church office (814) 333-2161 or Charlotte Thomas (814) 724-6939 and leave a message. Reservations are due by May 19th. Please plan to attend and invite some friends. This will be a very special presentation.



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL:
May 4, 11 & 18
SOUL KEEPING by John Ortberg
 In *Soul Keeping*, John Ortberg helps Christians rediscover their soul—the best connection to God there is—and find out why it's hurting and why neglecting it has set so many believers back spiritually.

In this video-based Bible study, John Ortberg takes us on an exploration of the soul from the perspective of someone who has struggled to understand and care for his own soul. Ortberg highlights his relationship with Dallas Willard, “a professor of the soul,” and what he learned from this wise guide amid his own struggles and hardships. Ortberg shares his honest, funny, moving, insightful, and tender journey with us so that we can better care for our own soul. Join the Adult Sunday School in the Culbertson Theater Room on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m.



Our next Soulstice gathering will be on Wednesday, May 7 at 7:15 p.m.



Hope Bible Study will meet the second Thursday of each month (except June, July and August) in the library at 1:30 PM. All women of the church are invited to attend.



THE ANNUAL WOMEN'S SUMMER PICNIC will be held at Venango Valley Inn on Thursday, June 12th. More details will be in the bulletin and the June Evangel. Looking forward to seeing you there!



The Mission Committee is taking over PW'S monthly mission projects.

The Mission Committee's focus for May is the St. James Haven Men's Shelter. We are collecting paper products, laundry detergent, dish soap and bleach. We are also collecting hygiene products including three-in-one or two-in-one liquid shower wash (no bar soap please), oral hygiene products, deodorant and shaving cream. Items can be placed in the Mission Bin (formally the PW Mission Bin) that is in the church office. Thank you for your continued support.



The Mission Committee will continue to collect sample size shampoo, hand sanitizer, bath gel, lotion and toothpaste for the homeless patients at the Free Clinic. Please place your donations in the Mission Committee bin in the church office.



SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE! During the Summer, from Memorial Day Weekend through Labor Day Weekend our worship service is at 10:00 a.m. During the summer, it gives the opportunity for 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worshippers to mingle and become one congregation for our worship and praise. It also provides the privilege of connecting with others who may worship at a time other than your preference.

CLOSED ON SATURDAYS

Please take note that the church will now be closed on Saturdays unless there is a scheduled church event. If you need access to the church on Saturday, please call the church office to make arrangements.



Knit Unto Others

KNIT UNTO OTHERS: Get your needles and yarn out! Knit Unto Others meets on the second Wednesday of every month in the church library. The next gathering is May 14 at 1:00 p.m. Anyone interested in the fellowship of knitting, crocheting or cross stitching is welcome. We make prayer shawls for those in need of the warmth of God's love, and the comfort, prayers, and support from their friends of faith. If you have any questions, you can contact Kandy Davis at ksdavis70@zoominternet.net or 814-807-0156



Praying for Children (momsinprayer.org)

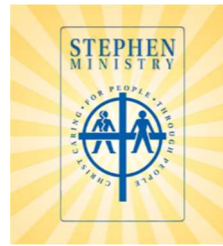
Every Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. in the church library we meet to pray for our children, grandchildren and their schools. You are invited to come and lift your children and their schools in prayer and experience the comfort and power of prayer.



“SWING INTO SPRING” with a few good books from our church library! There are so many books here for you. **COME IN AND CHECK THEM OUT!**



ELIJAH & SHERRY BOYD would like to thank our church family for all of the heartfelt wishes, cards, and gifts. It was a blessing to share this special day with all of you! God is Great....All the Time!



Stephen Ministry based out of First Presbyterian Church is a caring ministry of trained members of the congregation who provide high-quality, one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people in the congregation and the community experiencing life

difficulties. The chapter at First Presbyterian Church is the only unit in Crawford County.

First Presbyterian Church Stephen Ministry is supported by a not-for-profit Christian education organization founded in 1975 that produces training and resources known for their excellence, practicality, psychological integrity, and theological depth. These resources cover topics such as caring ministry, assertive relating, spiritual gifts discovery, grief support, spiritual growth and more.

Congregations use these resources to strengthen and expand ministry. Individuals use them to improve their ability to relate to and care for others, grow in faith, and journey through life crises.

While each chapter conducts regular training and continued education, the parent organization, with a staff of 40 people located in St. Louis, Missouri offers support, updating of resources and materials.

You'll find Stephen Ministry in congregations from more than 180 Christian denominations, across the U.S. and Canada and in 30 other countries. Stephen Ministry is built to last—going strong for decades in hundreds of congregations.

Since Stephen Ministries St. Louis was founded in 1975:

- More than 13,000 congregations have enrolled in Stephen Ministry.
- More than 75,000 pastors and lay leaders from those congregations have been equipped as Stephen Leaders.
- More than 600,000 lay people have received Stephen Minister training.
- More than one-and-a-half-million people have had a Stephen Minister to walk with them, providing one-to-one Christian care during tough times.

Stephen Ministers are available to you for a friendly chat, a troubling concern, a time of stress, or transition in your life. Stephen Ministry can be reached by calling Rev. Ben Black at 814-333-2161.

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2, NRSV)



Here are some of the things that the trustees have been working on over the winter and spring.

- The trustees received three quotes to have mulch put down. They used Petruso Landscaping who had the best price (\$2,170).
- Trustees are getting quotes to trim the two large Locust trees by the dumpster. There are a lot of dead branches that could fall.
- Mike and Joy Jordan donated a new Zoll AED to the church. Chis Wade, the evening custodian, will install it.
- The trustees are looking into the cost of updating the elevator because replacement parts are now hard to find. It will be an expensive project with the cost being over \$100,000.
- A wall heater was installed in the gym for the daycare. In the winter, it is too cold in the gym. According to state regulations, room temperature has to be no lower than 65 degrees for the children.
- Church Mutual, the church insurance, chose not to renew our insurance policy on May 1st due to the claim we had when the gym flooded due to a frozen pipe that burst. The only insurance company that would offer a policy was Brotherhood Mutual. The cost will be \$17,000 for the year (increase of \$3,000). There is unfortunately a \$25,000 property damage deductible, a 1% freeze deductible and we have to install an automatic shutoff/leak detection device on the incoming water line.
- Contributions are coming in much slower than in previous years. The trustees had to take an early endowment withdraw of \$50,000.



1. Keith Gushard
3. Eeve Fischer
12. Anastasia Bilka
13. Dick Runnels
15. Chris Jordan
17. John Nesbitt
Corey Jordan
19. Ruth Cooper
20. Candy Engels
26. Betty Hallett
29. Carol Deiss
JoLayne Green
30. Sophia Lobdell



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

World Mission has shifted the way they engage in global ministry. There will no longer be **“mission co-workers”**. Instead,

there will be **“global ecumenical liaisons”** – some focused internationally and some focused domestically. These liaisons will facilitate relationships between our global partners and the congregation, networks, and mid councils of the PC(USA). Our mission committee is aware of these changes and is exploring our mission options.



Benjamin D. Haytock
April 10

Frances Margaretta
“Peg” Weymer
April 14

G. Arden Hughes
April 17



Anna Jarvis, the woman who first suggested a national day to honor mothers, had an incredible mother to honor. Her mom, Ann Reeves Jarvis (1832-1905), was a Sunday school teacher and activist who helped lower infant-mortality rates in Appalachia and promoted friendship among families of Civil War soldiers.

At a memorial service for her mother, Anna Jarvis distributed carnations – her mom’s favorite flower – to attendees. Her idea to set apart one day each year for moms gained traction, and in 1914, President Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday of May Mother’s Day. It was customary by then to wear white carnations in honor of departed mothers and red carnations to honor the living.

Of the white flowers, Jarvis said they “symbolize the truth, purity and broad-charity of mother love; its fragrance, her memory, and her prayers. The carnation does not drop its petals, but hugs them to its heart as it dies, and so, too, mothers hug their children to their hearts, their mother love never dying.” - Newsletter Newsletter May 2023



MAY 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER	2	3
4 HERITAGE SUNDAY 9:30 Sunday School, & Choir Rehearsal 11:00 Worship/Recognize Long Standing Church Members/Choral Scholars Senior Recognition 12:00 Reception in the Foyer	5	6 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Liberty Bells Rehearsal	7 7:15 Soulstice	8 1:30 Hope Bible Study	9 Summer Evangel Articles Due: (June, July & August)	10 Peg Weymer's Funeral 2:00 - Visitation 3:00 - Service
11 MOTHER'S DAY 8:30 Worship 9:30 Adult Sunday School & Mother's Day Brunch 11:00 Worship	12 6:30 Deacons Meeting	13 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Liberty Bells Rehearsal	14 1:00 Knit Unto Others 3:45 P.R.A.Y. 5:30 Session	15 3:30 Stephen Ministry Leadership Meeting 4:00 Stephen Ministry Meeting	16 Senior Pictures & Information Due	17
18 8:30 Worship with Rev. Dan Corll 9:30 Sunday School 11:00 Worship	19 5:30 Cornerstone Child Care Board Meeting	20 1:00 Praying for Children 5:30 Liberty Bells Rehearsal 6:30 Presbytery Meeting at Wayside	21 4:00 Mission Committee Meeting 4:15 CE Committee Meeting 7:00 W&M Committee Meeting	22 12:00 Lunch at First 5:00 Trustees Meeting	23	24
25 VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY Summer Worship Schedule Begins 10:00 Worship No Sunday School	26 MEMORIAL DAY Office Closed	27 5:30 Liberty Bells Rehearsal	28	29 ASCENSION OF THE LORD	30	31



First Presbyterian Church
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Meadville PA 16335
(814) 333-2161

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 8:30 AM & 11:00 AM

(11:00 AM service is available on YouTube)

SUNDAY SCHOOL - 9:30 AM

(No Sunday School on Easter)

SOULSTICE - May 7 at 7:15 PM

CHURCH STAFF

Senior Pastor: Rev. Ben Black

Minister of Music: Kevin Dill

Children's Ministry Coordinator: Vickie Fischer

Administrative Assistant: Mary Zahora

Financial Secretary: Kris Lubomski

Custodian: Elijah Boyd

Evening Custodian: Chris Wade

Email: firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org

Find us: www.meadvillefpc.org and

www.facebook.com/FPCMeadville

May 4

HERITAGE DAY

11:00 AM (No 8:30 AM Service)

Reception After Service

May 11

MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH

9:30 AM

Fellowship Hall

May 18

GUEST PREACHER

The Rev. Dr. Dan Corll

Worship 8:30 AM & 11:00 AM

May 22

LUNCH AT FIRST

Stained Glass Window Presentation

12:00 PM

May 25

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

10:00 AM