

THE EVANGEL – MAY 2026

News and Ministry of the First Presbyterian Church

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PASTOR



My first job was at a Taco Bell Express tucked inside a gas station. It wasn't glamorous. In fact, some days it was downright awful. By the end of my time there, I had cleaned and painted just about every Kwik Fill bathroom from North East to Warren and if you've ever been in a gas station restroom, you know that's not exactly a highlight reel kind of job.

But something surprising happened. Because I was willing to take on the work no one else wanted, I became the person my boss trusted. I was sent wherever help was needed. Over time, I became the go to guy across multiple locations. What started as scrubbing floors and hauling trash turned into something more, not because the work changed, but because my approach to it did.

Looking back, it is clear that God was doing something deeper. He was shaping humility, endurance, and a willingness to serve, things that would matter far beyond a gas station. It turns out that even the most unpleasant work is not wasted when it is done with the right heart.

That opens the door to a bigger question. What does it really mean to serve?

Scripture gives us a vision that is both simple and profound. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men... You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24). That means service is not confined to a church building or a specific role. It stretches across your whole life, your work, your home, your relationships, your everyday responsibilities.

And yet, when it comes to church, many of us quietly drift to the edges. Not out of resistance, but out of busyness, uncertainty, or the sense that someone else will step in. It becomes easy to think of church as something we attend rather than something we belong to and help shape.

But the life God calls us into is much richer than that.

"Church volunteers" is an oxymoronic term because it reduces a living, breathing member of the body to what they can do for the church. When we think only in terms of volunteering, we can miss the bigger picture. This is not about filling slots or keeping programs running. This is about being the church, about sharing life, carrying one another's burdens, and stepping into the kind of community where God is actively at work.

And here is the surprising part. Those moments of serving often become the very places where we experience God most clearly. They become the stories we tell later, the relationships that matter, the quiet ways we saw God move, the unexpected joy that came from simply showing up.

Jesus himself set the pattern. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). And he showed us that the path to a full and meaningful life is not found in holding back, but in giving ourselves away. We are reminded that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). That is not just a nice idea, it is something we begin to understand when we step into it.

So what might this look like?

It might look like choosing to encourage someone on a Sunday morning instead of slipping out quickly. It might mean helping in a ministry that feels small or unnoticed. It might be offering your time, your skills, or simply your presence where it is needed. It might even mean stepping into something new that God has been quietly placing on your heart.

And it is not just about Sundays. Serving God happens in the ordinary rhythms of life, in your workplace, your neighborhood, your family. When done with a heart for the Lord, even the smallest acts take on eternal significance.

The truth is, the church becomes vibrant not when a few people do everything, but when many people each take a step forward. Not perfectly. Not all at once. Just faithfully.

As you consider where God may be inviting you to step in, remember that there are many ways to serve within the life of our church. You can lend your voice in the choir or with the bells, invest in the next generation by teaching Sunday school or helping with the youth group, support worship through the tech team, or come alongside the trustees as they care for our building. There are opportunities to serve on committees that help shape our ministry and outreach, and even space to bring new ideas and ministries to life. Some of the most meaningful and lasting ministries have not come from pastors, but from people who saw a need, felt a burden, and stepped forward in faith. This is how we become the fellowship God is calling us to be, not just attending together, but building something together.

Because in the end, nothing offered to God is ever wasted. Not the visible things, not the hidden things, not even cleaning the worst gas station bathroom you can imagine. God has a way of taking what seems small, ordinary, or even unpleasant and using it to shape us, bless others, and bring life in ways we never expected. So if you have been on the fringes, consider this a gentle invitation to step in. Offer what you have. You may just find that in serving, you discover more of the life God has been inviting you into all along.

Pastor Ben



ELEVATOR PROGRESS REPORT

If all goes as planned, the elevator should be back in service by Sunday, May 10th. Check our website and our Facebook page for updates.



JASON GRAY CONCERT

First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 10 (Mother's Day!)
6:00 PM in the Sanctuary

Tickets are \$15 and are for sale in the church office, in the foyer

between worship services and via our church website.



COME CELEBRATE SUMMER AND WOMEN.

Have Lunch at Venango Valley Inn with other church women: Wednesday, June

10th at 12:00 p.m. More info coming in June.



THE LOCAL MISSION FOCUS FOR MAY IS WOMEN'S SERVICES.

They need paper products, laundry detergent, dish liquid, and hygiene products. Please place your donation in the mission bin in the church office.



HOPE BIBLE STUDY will meet at 1:00

p.m. on May 14. We will continue our study of the book of John, Lesson 7 including Chapters 13:1-38 & 14:1-31. If you want a copy of the study questions let Mary Truran know.



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



Notes from the Director of Music

Inevitably, it's that time of year again when a few of the students in our choir will finish their studies at Allegheny College and set out on the next chapter of their lives. This year we have four graduating choral scholars: Evelyn Olson, Olivia Alexander, Graham Carr, and Nolan Kons. It's been an enormous pleasure for me to welcome them into our church community, and to watch them not only grow as singers but also mature as human beings. At the 11:00 AM service on April 26th we

had an opportunity to say farewell to these students and to thank them for sharing their talents with us week by week. [I don't want to make it sound like you'll *never* see them again, though: many of our former choral scholars do return to Meadville for the college's triennial choir reunions, so take note of when those happen!]

Sunday, May 10th is a date you'll want to remember, for two reasons. Firstly, with the upgrades to our elevator expected to be complete, May 10th is when we'll switch to our new worship hour. As you'll recall, the congregation voted at our annual meeting in February to consolidate our Sunday worship into a single service at 10:00 AM. This not only eliminates any confusion regarding our schedule (no more need to remember whether there's one or two services this coming Sunday!), but we also hope that combining the two 'congregations' will make our church a more vibrant, inviting place for visitors when they step through our doors for the first time.

Secondly, May 10th is also the evening of Christian singer/songwriter Jason Gray's performance in our sanctuary. You've probably seen the advertisements by now: the good news is that it's not too late to purchase a ticket! You can do so by using the link on our website, or by contacting the church office.

Until next time,

Kevin



An Invitation to Serve: Welcoming the Next Generation

"Let brotherly love continue... Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers" (Hebrews 13:1-2). These words are simple, but they carry a quiet challenge for the life of the church. Hospitality is not just about greeting someone at the door or sharing a meal—it is about making space in our lives for others to be known, loved, and formed in Christ. In many ways, there is no clearer place this calling comes to life than in our ministry to children and youth.

Right now, we have a real need. Not a small or passing need, but a meaningful opportunity for members of our church family to step forward and serve. This is not about filling slots on a schedule; it is about stepping into the kind of ministry where God often does far more than we expect.

At one level, the value of serving in youth ministry is easy to see. Children hear the gospel. They build friendships. They begin to understand Scripture and develop a sense that church is a place where they belong. Volunteers grow too—relationships deepen, faith is exercised, and the work itself draws us out of routine into something purposeful.

But there is more happening beneath the surface.

Every child who walks through our doors comes from a story we only partially see. Some come from homes filled with joy; others carry burdens they don't yet have words for. There may be families quietly struggling—financial strain, illness, loneliness, or simply the exhaustion of trying to hold everything together. There may be parents unsure of their own faith but hopeful their children will find something real and lasting.

We may never know all the details. But we are given a role nonetheless.

In a very real sense, serving in youth ministry is an act of steady, faithful hospitality. It is showing up with patience and care. It is learning a child's name and remembering it the next week. It is offering a smile, a listening ear, and a consistent presence that says, "You matter. You belong here." These small acts carry more weight than we often realize. They create an environment where truth can take root.

And that truth is simple and powerful: that Jesus knows them, loves them, and walks with them. That there is hope—not vague or distant, but certain and personal. That whatever they are facing, they are not alone.

This ministry rests on a few essential practices: welcoming, teaching, discipling, and participating in God's mission. None of these require perfection or expertise. What they require is willingness.

You do not need to be a Bible scholar or a polished teacher. Faithful ministry to children often begins with asking a few straightforward questions of any Bible story:

- Who needs good news here?
- What is God doing for His people?
- How does this point us to what God has done for us in Jesus?
- How does this good news shape the way we live?

That's it. From there, conversation begins. Truth becomes accessible. And over time, hearts are formed.

The reality is, children and adults are not as different as we sometimes assume. We all bear God's image. We all share the same need for grace. We are all being shaped, day by day, by what we believe is true. In that sense, serving our youth is not just about investing in them—it is about being reminded of the gospel ourselves. It has a way of strengthening and stretching our own faith.

Our church has always desired to be a place where families are known and supported. In a world that pulls people in a thousand directions, we have the unique opportunity to be a steady presence—a community that walks alongside one another through both ordinary days and difficult seasons.

That kind of community does not happen by accident. It is built, week by week, by people who are willing to serve.

The need in our youth ministry is ongoing, but so is the opportunity. When we step into this work, we are participating in something that extends far beyond a single Sunday or lesson. We are helping create a space where children encounter the love of Christ and where families find support and belonging.

We don't always see the full impact. In fact, we rarely do. But we can trust this: God is at work in ways that exceed what we can measure or imagine.

If you have ever wondered where you might serve, or how your presence could make a difference, this is a place to begin. Not because you have everything figured out, but because God uses willing people in ordinary moments to do extraordinary things.

Children's ministry is, at its heart, an expression of love—steady, patient, and enduring. And through it, God is shaping lives, including our own.

Consider stepping forward.

The Challenge of Serving our Youth this Day and Age

As a church, we are called to love one another well—to practice a kind of hospitality that makes room for people to be known, supported, and shaped in Christ. One of the most meaningful places this happens is in our ministry to children and youth.

Right now, we have a real need for volunteers. This is an opportunity to step into the lives of young people and their families in ways that matter more than we often see. Behind every child is a story—families navigating busy

schedules, unexpected hardships, questions of faith, or simply the desire for their children to be part of something good and lasting. When we serve, we help create a space where those children are welcomed, known, and reminded that they are loved by God.

At the same time, it's important to name something upfront: **servicing with our youth comes with a responsibility.** For the safety and well-being of every child, all volunteers working with minors are required by Pennsylvania law to obtain clearances, including background checks. This is not just a formality—it is part of how we care for and protect the young people entrusted to us.

Here's what that process involves in simple terms:

- **Who needs clearances?**
Any adult (18+) who volunteers in a role with direct contact with children.
- **What is required?**
 1. PA Child Abuse History Certification (free)
 2. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Background Check (free)
 3. FBI Fingerprint Background Check (required only if you have not lived in Pennsylvania for the past 10 consecutive years; cost is \$22.95)
If you have lived in PA for 10 years, you may complete a signed disclosure statement instead.
- **How often?**
Clearances must be renewed every 5 years.

We understand that for many people, this process can feel like a hurdle. Paperwork, fingerprints, and forms are not exactly what anyone gets excited about. But we don't want that to be the reason someone holds back from serving.

So we're making it as easy as possible.

Clearance Day, June 14th

On **June 14th**, we will host a "Clearance Day" here at the church. During that time:

- We will walk you step-by-step through the entire process
- Help you complete the applications
- Answer any questions along the way
- And **cover the cost of the clearances** for anyone who attends

Our goal is simple: remove the barriers so that if you feel even a nudge to serve, you can take the next step with confidence.

Serving in youth ministry does not require you to be an expert teacher or to have all the answers. It starts with something much simpler—showing up, learning names, listening well, and being present. It's about helping create an environment where children can hear the good news of Jesus and know they belong.

And along the way, something else happens: your own faith grows. As you invest in the next generation, you are reminded of the same grace, truth, and hope that we all need.

This is an invitation—to step into a meaningful role in the life of our church, to support families in tangible ways, and to be part of something that has lasting impact.

If you've been considering where you might serve, this could be the place. And if the clearance process has held you back, we hope June 14th makes the path forward clear and manageable. We would love for you to be part of it.

More details can be found regarding the legal requirements for volunteering with children in PA at: www.KeepKidsSafe.PA.gov

MAY YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



How to get to know me some!

Hello, my name is Anastasia Bilka, and I am 13 years old. I am in 8th grade, and I go to MAMS (Meadville Area Middle School). I play both softball and violin. For softball, I play for a travel team called Lady Avalanche, and I also play for the middle school team. My main position is catcher, but I also play in the outfield and sometimes at second or third base. For violin, I play in the Erie Jr. Philharmonic, where I am in the chamber section. I have one dog named Zelda, who is a goldendoodle. She loves to play fetch, and she also loves when I go outside to practice softball.

If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?

- If I had to eat one food for the rest of my life, I would probably eat steak with vegetables and a baked potato.

What's your favorite movie or TV show to re-watch again and again?

- My favorite TV show that I would watch over and over again would probably be Demon Slayer: Infinity Castle Arc.

If you had a whole free day with no school and no chores, how would you spend it?

- If I had a day with no chores or school, I would probably read some, draw some, and play some sort of video game.

If you could instantly learn any skill (like an instrument, sport, or art), what would you choose?

- If I could instantly learn an instrument, it would probably be the viola, cello, or bass, since I already know how to play the violin.

What's your go-to song or artist when you need to cheer yourself up?

- When I am upset, I usually listen to Falling in Reverse, Lilith Max, or game soundtracks.

If you could swap places with a character from a book, show, or movie for one day, who would it be?

- If I could swap places with a character from a book, it would probably be Harry Potter, just because I want to see if I could hunt down Voldemort faster than Harry Potter did.

Who would win in a race: a cheetah on roller skates or an ostrich on a skateboard?

- I personally feel like an ostrich on a skateboard would win the race.

If you could design your own class at school, what would it be about?

- If I designed a class, I would make it a class where it's all about questions. So, let's say someone asks a question like, "What are axolotls?" That's what that class would be about for that period, and every period it would change based on the question.

If you could make one big difference in the world, what problem would you want to help solve?

- I would probably try to help bring world peace.

If your future had a theme song, what do you think it would sound like?

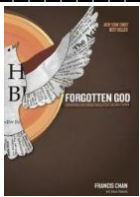
- I feel like my future theme song would be a peaceful lullaby that's calming and gentle.

If you could describe church in three words, which would you choose?

- My three words would be: happiness, peacefulness, and faithfulness.

What do you hope the church will always be known for?

- I hope the church will always be known for its willingness to help people and for being welcoming.



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL We will be finishing our study on *The Forgotten God* by Francis Chan in May. We will be taking the summer off. Class will resume in the fall.



CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL We will continue our study of The Armor of God. "Because Jesus loves me, He equips me with His armor to face any spiritual battle!" We'll talk

about the Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation & Shoes of Peace. Check out the bulletin board by the Youth Room each week we add a new piece of armor. **NOTICE TIME CHANGE:** On May 10 & 17, Sunday school will be from 9:00 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. Our last Sunday School lesson will be on May 17th.



VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY is Sunday, May 17. Our church volunteers invest in shaping the

minds and hearts of our young disciples. This season gives us a chance to thank those who lead, encourage and inspire with patience and care. Let us express gratitude for the seeds of wisdom they plant and trust God to bring growth to our children.



GRADUATES! Do you know someone special graduating this year? Share the good news with the church office.



WE NEED VOLUNTEERS TO WORK AT THE MEADVILLE COMMUNITY SOUP KITCHEN!!

- S**erve on the second Wednesday of the month.
- O**nly 3 hours (10:00 AM to 1:00 PM)
- U**ndeniably rewarding
- P**repare food and serve others
- K**itchen work with other Christians
- I**n Stone United Methodist Church (downstairs)
- T**hankful for opportunity to serve others
- C**ommunity awareness
- H**elping those in need
- E**njoyable working environment
- N**eighborhood and Necessary

Please consider joining our church's list of Soup Kitchen Volunteers. **We especially need men.** Contact Laurel Porter via phone or text at 814-720-0145. Thank You!

Youth and families can volunteer during the summer month. Children should be at least 13 years old.



The last youth group will be on May 17th. We are planning to eat brunch at one of the local restaurants to celebrate another wonderful year of fellowship and growth. A special thank you goes out to Mike and Jamie Krepps for their generous donation for a youth activity.



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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Financial Secretary: Kris Lubomski
Custodian: Chris Wade

Email: firstchurch@meadvillefpc.org
Find us: www.meadvillefpc.org and
www.facebook.com/FPCMeadville



SUNDAY WORSHIP

May 3 - 8:30 & 11:00 AM
Starting May 10 - 10:00 AM

SUNDAY SCHOOL

May 3 - Adult Sunday School 9:30 AM
Children's Sunday School 9:45 AM
Youth Group - 9:45 AM
May 10 - Adult Sunday School, Children's
Sunday School & Youth Group 9:00 AM