



**First Presbyterian
Church
of Pittsburgh**

New Member Discussion Guide

2026

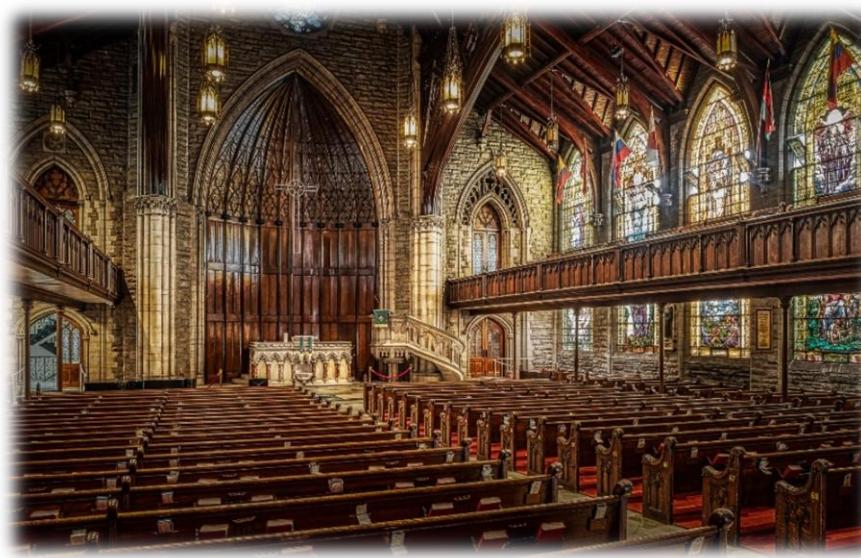


We're thrilled that you're considering membership in this great old church!

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus gave his impetuous disciple Simon a new name, saying, “*You are Peter* (from the Greek word *petras*, meaning rock) *and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.*”

God's purpose for the church is to put hell out of business! Jesus loved the church so much that he called it his “bride,” and he died so the church might live. To be a member of a church is to grow, together with others, into the image of Jesus Christ and be part of what he is doing in the world.

At a time when membership in clubs, unions, and nearly everything else is declining, belonging to a church is countercultural. Most organizations are about serving the needs of their members; the church exists to serve the needs of others.



You don't have to have it all figured out

New church buildings today are often designed to be inviting to the unchurched, and to take away as many barriers to church attendance as possible. Our church building was designed, like the great cathedrals of Europe, to invite awe and wonder, and to lift our thoughts above the everyday.

Visitors from around the world tell us our building is a “thin

place,” that is, a place where heaven and earth seem to intersect, where the presence of the Holy Spirit can be felt. We trust you will find that the people inside warm and welcoming. We were all once new to church too, and we know that everyone is at a different place on his or her life journey. We know that no two people will ever agree on every aspect of the Christian faith. ***The most important thing is a desire to know Jesus Christ.***



What it means to be a member

- You become a member of a church by *trusting in God's grace in Jesus Christ and desiring to become part of the fellowship and ministry of his church.*
- You enter into membership by:
 - *Publicly professing your faith* in Jesus Christ.
 - *Being Baptized* (if you've never been baptized before).
- Membership in the church is a joy and a privilege. It means committing to be part of Christ's mission in the world, sharing in the life and work of the church, and desiring to grow as a disciple (a close follower) of Jesus Christ.
- Members of a Presbyterian church share in the governing of the church by voting for church officers (elders, deacons, and trustees), and serving when asked.

What our time together will cover

- † Getting acquainted.
- † What God is doing at First Church.
- † Central beliefs of the Christian faith.
- † How you can get involved.
- † How to become a member.

What to expect

To become a member of the church, you need to:

- Take part in conversations with a pastor or an elder.
- Meet with some of the spiritual leaders of the church (the session) and share a bit about yourself and what you believe.
- Attend a 10:45am worship service and answer "yes" to three questions:
 - "Do you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?"
 - "Do you renounce evil and all the ways of sin that separate you from God's love?"
 - "Do you promise to be a faithful disciple, taking part in the life and mission of the church?"

"Do you promise to be a faithful disciple, taking part in the life and mission of the church?"

Sharing Your Faith

Part of becoming a member is sharing a bit about yourself and what you believe in a relaxed setting with one or more of the spiritual leaders of the church.

Since popular culture today tends to push faith out of public life, you might never have been asked to articulate what you believe. Don't worry! Consider this an opportunity to reflect on the "ultimate questions" of life.

Sometimes the newest believers share their faith in a very compelling way because they're excited about what God is doing in their lives and aren't weighed down by the idea that they have to use "church language." We just ask that you reflect on who Jesus Christ is; what he means to you; and how you might respond to his love.

Please just talk about what you believe. You might also include:

- What led you to the church.
- How the church can support you.
- What God is doing in your life.
- The difference your faith has made to you.



A Sample of What's Happening at First Church

1. **The Cellar.** Our afterschool program continues to make a Kingdom impact with downtown teens each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 3-6 pm. If you have a heart for teens, please consider joining The Cellar volunteer team, as your schedule permits.
2. **Outreached Arms Meals.** We partner with a Christian non-profit called Outreached Arms to provide evening meals and build relationships with people in the community. These meals are served every Tuesday at 6:30 PM in the cafeteria.
3. **Walk-In Ministry.** Shared on a weekly rotating basis with three other downtown churches, the “Walk-In Ministry” operates a food bank and cares for the homeless and disadvantaged. People who are willing to get to know and walk with hurting people are always needed.
4. **Ligonier Camp and Conference Center.** The church owns one of the great Gospel-centered camps in the country. Founded by the church in 1914, this year-round ministry reaches nearly 1,900 campers and 6,000 retreat goers annually. The camp is on over 500 acres in the beautiful Laurel Highlands about an hour east of Pittsburgh.
5. **Bible Studies.** Numerous study groups take advantage of the church's central location and welcoming atmosphere to meet and share and grow in their faith.
6. **PRISM.** Based in Oakland, the Pittsburgh Region International Student Ministry welcomes the thousands of international students who study here with hospitality, meals, tours, and English classes. The hope is that students may come to know Jesus Christ and take him home with them.
7. **Music.** Let us know if you like to sing or play an instrument. Music is one of the best ways God has given us to praise God.
8. **Mission.** FPCP supports about two dozen mission partners here in Pittsburgh and around the world.
9. **Refuge for Women/Garden Home Ministries** are two new mission partners who care for women escaping the horrors of sex trafficking.

Becoming Part of Church Life

- ⊕ Getting involved in church—especially in an old, historic one—can seem a bit daunting. This is especially true if you travel a great distance to get downtown and have to overcome the challenge of finding a parking space. But the reward for getting involved is that you can make a difference in the heart of the city. Jesus and his disciples were very purposeful to teach in cities. Cities are where you go to reach the culture. From the city, the Gospel can go out in all directions.
- ⊕ One of the first ways to get involved is to come **regularly to worship**. We were created to be in a relationship with God. We were created for worship. But worship doesn't end on Sunday. Worship sends us into the world to serve.
- ⊕ You don't need to wait for someone from the church to ask you to get involved. Please note the suggested contacts below. If you have an interest that doesn't appear on the list, contact Office Manager, Carly Noel Black at 412-471-3436 (x 213) or cblack@fpcp.org.



The Cellar



Music Ministry



Walk-In Ministry

Ministry Contacts

Walk-In Ministry	Provides for the poor and homeless: Carly Noel Black, 412-471-3436 (x 213) or at cblack@fpcp.org
The Cellar	Provides a safe place for urban youth to hang out and have a meal, Joanne Galinowski at jgalinowski@fpcp.org or 412-952-2972
Technology	Gives us the ability to stream our services online: Carly Noel Black, 412-471-3436 (x 213) or at cblack@fpcp.org .
Deacons	Provides compassionate care for shut-ins and those in need: Denice Claudon, deniceclaudon@gmail.com
Hospitality	Helps plan events to care for members and provide a warm welcome for guests: Check with the servers on Sunday.
Nursery	Christian nurture for little ones: Holly Conner, hdconner7124@verizon.net
Missions	Focus for worldwide mission efforts: Judy Shipley, j.shipley.j17@gmail.com
Ligonier Camp	One of the most active and visible ministries of the church, Ligonier is a nationally recognized Christian camp in the Laurel Highlands. Volunteers of all kinds are always needed. 724-238-6428.
Music Ministry	Glorify God through music as a member of the choir, soloist, or instrumentalist. Contact Music Minister Alaine Fink, afink@fpcp.org
Historical Society	Preserve the heritage of one of America's historic churches. Develop strategies to help preserve our building. Jesse Belfast, 412-761-0260.
Building	We love it when folks volunteer their time to help paint, clean, and generally spruce up the building. There are always things to do. Call Office Manager Carly Noel Black, at 412-471-3436 (x 213).
Administration	Help in the church office by greeting, answering the phone, preparing church mailings, and more. Contact Church Office Manager, Carly Noel Black, at 412-471-3436 (x 213), or email at cblack@fpcp.org .

The Most Important Thing

Many people, even committed Christians, don't understand there is a difference between "religion" and the "gospel." But the gospel is what makes the Christian faith distinct from every other religion on earth. It is the heart of everything we do.



The "gospel" is not a set of performance standards we follow to hopefully please God. The gospel is the news of what God has done for us. The Greek word for gospel, *euangelion*, where we get the word "evangelism," literally means announcement of good news. The news is that God sent his one and only son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus became one of us. He lived the life we were meant to live and died the death we deserved. On the cross, Jesus overcame the sin and brokenness that separates us from God and each other. But death did not have the final say. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and he returned to God in heaven.

In breaking the barrier between heaven and earth, Jesus Christ became one of us, identifying with us in our humanity. But in raising Jesus out of the tomb and then to heaven, our humanity became part of the Godhead. Can you begin to imagine how much God loves us, identifies with us, and wants the best for us?

What this means is that when we believe in Jesus Christ, God accepts us on his behalf, forgives us our sins and invites us to live a new life in Christ.

The more you understand the gospel, the more you will be astonished by it. The truth will begin shaping you, making you more confident and humbler *at the same time*. You will want to respond by growing in faith and becoming more like Jesus. You'll be able to serve others and be generous with your time and money, not because you *have* to, but out of *gratitude* for what Jesus has done. The purpose of the Christian faith is *not* just to go to heaven when we die, but to be brought into a relationship with the creator, and become more like him, here and now.

**With religion you say, "I obey; therefore, I'm accepted."
With the Gospel you say, "I'm accepted; therefore, I obey."**

What Do Presbyterians Believe?



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1. Presbyterians believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and the head of the church.

- Each particular church in the PCUSA is governed by the constitution (Book of Order and Book of Confessions) and led by officers. The officers are: Ministers of Word and Sacrament (sometimes known as teaching elders), ruling elders, and deacons.
- The government of each church is the responsibility of the session.
- The session is composed of ministers and elders. Ruling elders are elected by the congregation for three-year terms. A ruling elder is one who “discerns and measures,” not one who “lords it over” others.
- The Presbyterian Church is named after its form of government. The word “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* which means “elder.”

2. What makes Presbyterians unique?

- Presbyterians trace their history to the strand of the 16th century protestant reformation that started in Geneva, Switzerland under the leadership of John Calvin.
- Presbyterians have a high view of God’s sovereignty. They believe that God created us to reflect a bit of his goodness and glory back to God and out into the world.
- Presbyterians understand that faith is a gift. That’s right, if faith is a gift, there is nothing we can do to work our way to God. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more (or less). We are totally dependent on God’s grace.
- Presbyterians have a high view of scripture. This means that God inspired ancient authors to use their own language to convey God’s truth. Everything we do has a foundation in scripture.

3. Presbyterians believe in two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

- Baptism
 - The Baptism of children witnesses to the truth that God’s love claims us before we are able to respond in faith.
 - Baptism of adults who profess their faith, or of children who are presented by their parents, is one and the same Sacrament.
 - Baptism is received only once.
 - As we participate in another person’s Baptism, we reaffirm the commitments made at our own Baptism and our ongoing need for God’s grace.
- Lord’s Supper
 - All people who desire a relationship with Jesus Christ are welcome.
 - The believing community joins with the faithful in heaven and on earth in offering thanksgiving to the triune God.
 - At the table, God’s people renew the vows taken at Baptism.

4. Responsibilities of members include:

- Taking part in the life and worship of the church. Building relationships with others and sharing your faith.
- Praying; studying Scripture.
- Supporting the church through the giving of your time, talents, and money.
- Demonstrating a new quality of life; serving others; and taking part in church government. Living responsibly; working for peace, justice, and freedom.
- Saying “yes” when called to serve as an officer of the church.

Presbyterian Belief Quiz			
Item	True	False	Belief
1			God calls us to live the Christian life in order to be saved.
2			Presbyterians interpret the Bible literally.
3			Presbyterians need a priest too.
4			Presbyterians believe that the Gospel is a set of rules to follow to please God.
5			Presbyterians believe that until a child is baptized, he/she cannot go to heaven.
6			Presbyterians believe that once we are saved we are always saved.
7			Presbyterians understand that we worship so that we can get more blessing from God.
8			Presbyterians do not put much emphasis on the reality of human sin.
9			Presbyterians require people coming from other denominational backgrounds to be re-baptized.
10			Presbyterians see the juice and bread in communion as symbolic of Jesus' blood and body instead of being literally his blood and body.
11			In the Presbyterian tradition, baptism is administered only once.
12			Presbyterians believe that God accepts us totally on the basis of our belief in Christ's death for us on the cross and that there is absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation.
13			Presbyterians believe that once we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior we are assured of heaven and the Christian life consists of simply waiting until we get to heaven, rejoicing in God's goodness in saving us.
14			The major difference between Presbyterians and other Protestant denominations is in the area of beliefs rather than government and style of worship.

Answer Key - Presbyterian Belief Quiz

Item	True	False	Belief
1		F	We live out our lives in response to God's love and saving work in Jesus.
2		F	Presbyterians say that the bible is the "unique and authoritative witness" to who God is. The bible is full of literary forms, such as poetry and metaphor, which reveal God's truth but are not necessarily literally true. (Ex: God is my rock.)
3		F	Presbyterians hold that Jesus is our great high priest who serves as our savior and intermediary with God. Jesus is the priest who is also the sacrifice. Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrifice has done away with the need for altars.
4		F	Gospel is <u>not</u> a set of rules to follow to please God. The Gospel is news of what God has done in Jesus Christ.
5		F	Presbyterians believe that a child belongs to God long before the child is conscious of God's love. Infant baptism emphasizes the understanding of our total dependence on God's grace.
6	T		Presbyterians believe that if we confess our sins and accept Jesus as Lord of our lives, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.
7		F	Presbyterians understand that we were created to reflect back to God his glory and perfection. We were made to worship God, and if we don't' something is missing in our lives. Nothing we can do can make God love us any more.
8		F	The Christian doctrine of sin is vital to understanding our need for God and a savior. The world tells us that we are "pretty good" and to love ourselves the way we are. Sin explains why we all fall short of who we were meant to be.
9		F	Presbyterians accept all baptisms in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
10	T		Presbyterians believe that, in Communion, the juice and bread remain just that. However, we believe that at the Lord's Table, Jesus is present by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that we are raised up to be with him.
11	T		Since baptism is more about God than it is about us, Presbyterians believe that we only need to be baptized once.
12	T		Presbyterians believe that God accepts us totally on the basis of our belief in Christ's death for us on the cross and that there is absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation.
13		F	Once we accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we are meant to live the rest of our lives as his disciples, telling others about him, growing in his love, living a changed life, and caring for the hurting people of the world.
14		F	One of the distinctives of the Presbyterian Church is its form of government, in which ministers and lay leaders (teaching and ruling elders) share responsibility for leadership and together discern God's will.

A Brief History

Overview

In the 1750's, Great Britain and France were engaged in the first great world war, known to Americans as the French and Indian War. These great powers of Europe were vying for control and influence in North America. The nation that controlled the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers joined to form the Ohio River would have control over much of North America. On November 25, 1758, British forces under General John Forbes succeeded in taking control of Fort Duquesne from the French, who burned the fort while escaping under the cover of darkness. The next day, a Presbyterian minister serving as chaplain to General Forces named Charles Beatty, held the first protestant Thanksgiving service in the smoldering ruins of Fort Duquesne. Some of the soldiers at that service later helped found First Presbyterian Church.



William Penn

The land on which the church is built was originally a burying ground. It was granted to the church by the heirs of William Penn.

First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh began to meet in 1773. *It is the “oldest anything” in Pittsburgh, predating any school, newspaper, business, or institution.*

The neo-gothic structure is the fourth building in the history of the church. It was designed by Philadelphia architect Theophilus Chandler and completed in 1905. It is built on the site of what was once “one of the one of the most interesting revolutionary war cemeteries in the country.” The small cemetery to the left, part of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral next door, is all that remains of the 4,000 graves which

were once on this site. Many of the famous founders of this church, who went on to found the city, were once buried here. Names like Herron, Denny, Wilkins, Irwin, Gibson, and Neville, just to name a few, are also remembered in the names of streets and towns around the region.

In the early 1900's, downtown Pittsburgh was smoky and gritty, dominated by steel mills, railroads, and river boats. Downtown residents were fleeing the city for quieter and cleaner suburbs, and many downtown churches had done the same. The leaders of this church could not imagine Pittsburgh without its First Presbyterian Church. The church's young minister, the Reverend Doctor Maitland Alexander, convinced the trustees to tear down the third church building, which formerly faced Wood Street to the right, dig up the cemetery, and build the larger building you see today. It was an enormous risk, since it would require parishioners to come back to the church from the suburbs to serve and worship.

That commitment to the city, and to the Good News of Jesus Christ, are the hallmarks of the church to this day.

Also, please take note of the unique outdoor pulpit, symbolizing the Word of God going out to a city and a world which still needs to hear it.



Our unique outdoor pulpit

The impact of the church through the years

First Church was prominently featured in the 2018 book by Dr Gary Clark Smith, *A History of Christianity in Pittsburgh*. Dr. Smith calls First Church “the city’s first and arguably most important congregation.” It is “Pittsburgh’s oldest institution, predating any newspaper, school, or business.” The church helped found some of the city’s enduring institutions, and the impact of its missions continues to be felt worldwide. Dr Smith calls us, “Pittsburgh’s orthodox center of faith.”

Everything we do comes out of our relationship with the God who came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

The University of Pittsburgh, Allegheny General Hospital, and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary all had their beginnings in the leadership and ministries of the church.

There are 95 million people worldwide living today whose faith can be traced to the mission efforts that began here.

The impact of the church across the nation and around the world cannot be overestimated. Speaking at the church’s 200th anniversary celebration in 1973, the Rev. Billy Graham called First Church “One of the two or three great churches in America.”

The Foreign Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church (USA) was born out of the Western Missionary Society which met here in the 1830’s. *There are 95 million people worldwide living today whose faith can be traced to the mission efforts that began here.*

Other national-level entities began here. For example, in 1866, the denomination’s “Committee on Freedmen” was formed and first met at First Church. Pittsburgh later became the national headquarters for this group, as well as its women’s auxiliary.

Four of the fifteen senior pastors of First Church served as Moderators of the General Assembly for the entire denomination.

When schisms tore at the fabric of the Presbyterian Church in the mid-1800s and early-1900s, First Church was a national voice, holding fast to God’s Word and to the church’s love for the city and its people.

Remaining true to our heritage

First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh still reaches out to Pittsburgh and the world. The church remains committed to the mission of proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and caring for the hungry and hurting. It is both a destination church and a neighborhood church for downtown residents. Members come from over 50 zip codes and represent all strata of society.

Our compassion ministries care for hundreds of guests, provide thousands of meals, and deliver tons of food each year.

The breathtaking sanctuary, with its unique collection of Tiffany windows and magnificent pipe organ, continues to amaze visitors from around the world.

The church continues a significant percentage of its budget on mission and services to the disadvantaged. The 24 international flags in the sanctuary represent the countries where First Church supports mission workers.



Our amazing pipe organ

Today: Where would you put a church?

In the 1960's, First Church boasted over 2,500 members. In the 1920's and 30's, the sermons of Clarence Macartney, First Church's most famous minister, were reprinted across the country and broadcast on KDKA radio. But today, church attendance is no longer a societal expectation. In many ways, the church is returning to its roots. To walk through the doors of the church is to once again cross-cultural boundaries. First Church finds itself on the frontier once again.

If you could put a church anywhere, you would choose to put one right here, in the middle of the fastest-growing neighborhood in the "most livable city" in the country. But Pittsburgh is not livable for everyone, like those who are homeless, addicted, lost, or alone. We find ourselves on the front lines of some of society's most challenging social issues. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us, we seek to make Pittsburgh "livable" for all.

We have been blessed with one of the most magnificent buildings in the city.

We have been blessed with one of the most magnificent buildings in the city. We seek to preserve its historic beauty. The 13 Tiffany windows, each 27 feet tall, were created using a process the Tiffany studios used here and nowhere else.

With our location on the edge of the cultural district, and within walking distance of numerous schools and colleges, we seek to continue to have a positive impact on the art and culture of the city. We recognize that our building itself is not only of architectural interest and historical importance; it's one of Pittsburgh's greatest art treasures.



What We Believe

God is Creator.



We believe that all creation has its origin in the wisdom, power and love of God. Each person is made in God's image. This means that something of God's character and creativity resides in each of us. God's purpose is for each of us to respond to God's love and to care for all that God made.

Jesus Christ is Lord.

The prophetic, historic, and resurrected presence of Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, is the basis of our faith, and it shapes everything we do. Jesus is Lord of the Universe and Head of the Church. Everything was created through him; everything belongs to him; and everything is sustained by him. Jesus is the ultimate source of God's truth and love, and the only way of salvation. As followers of Jesus, we do our best to let him rule over all aspects of our lives.

The Bible is God's Word.

The Bible is God's own living story and the inspired word of God. In a sense, it's a story full of stories, of who God is, how God works, and how God has always worked, to overcome the brokenness of the world. When we read the Bible, God's own Spirit guides our understanding and allows us to apply God's truth to every aspect of life.

We all fall short of who God intended us to be.

When we compare the reality of our lives with God's creative purpose for us, we easily grasp that we fall short of our potential. This is because of a condition known as sin. Nothing else explains why human beings are capable of so much good and so much evil at the same time. Sin is the condition of being self-directed rather than God-directed. Sin separates us from God, and there is no self-help remedy for the consequences of suffering and death it causes. However, God knows that we are unable to deal with our sin problem. Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserved, so that sin would no longer separate us from God and each other. Because of Jesus' resurrection, sin and death no longer have the last word.

God loves us too much to leave us the way we are.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the father (who represents God) is the one who covered the distance that separated both the irreligious younger son and the overly religious older son from himself. In the parable, Jesus critiques both popular culture (self-discovery) and organized religion (self-righteousness). Ironically, both brothers in the parable made the same mistake—living for themselves instead of God.

No matter who we are or what we've done, Jesus stands ready to be the agent of our transformation. By the power of God's Spirit, we increasingly become whom God intended.

We are made for worship.

God is perfect, all-powerful and lacks nothing. So why are we here? God doesn't need us for anything, but God knows that we need goodness and love in our lives. We are imprinted with the desire to offer praise and worship to God, who alone is only good and only acts for our good. We are created to reflect back to God what is God's exclusive worthiness to be praised. A lot of people don't know this, but when we fail to worship, it leaves a God-sized hole in our lives. Worship impels us to go out in the world to serve. In fact, all of life is meant to be an act of worship.



We are made to live for each other.

The Bible tells us that God created everything and it was "good." Yet even before sin entered creation, there was one thing that was "not good." It was not good for the man to be alone, and so God created woman. God designed man and woman for each other. In the same way, God gave us the church to be a community where all are welcome; where we pray and worship together; where we grow in faith and in love for God and each other; where we care for one another; where everyone's gifts are celebrated; where everyone's creativity is unleashed; and where everyone's spiritual growth is mutually upheld. We grieve when popular culture and even parts of the institutional church elevate human feelings above God's design.

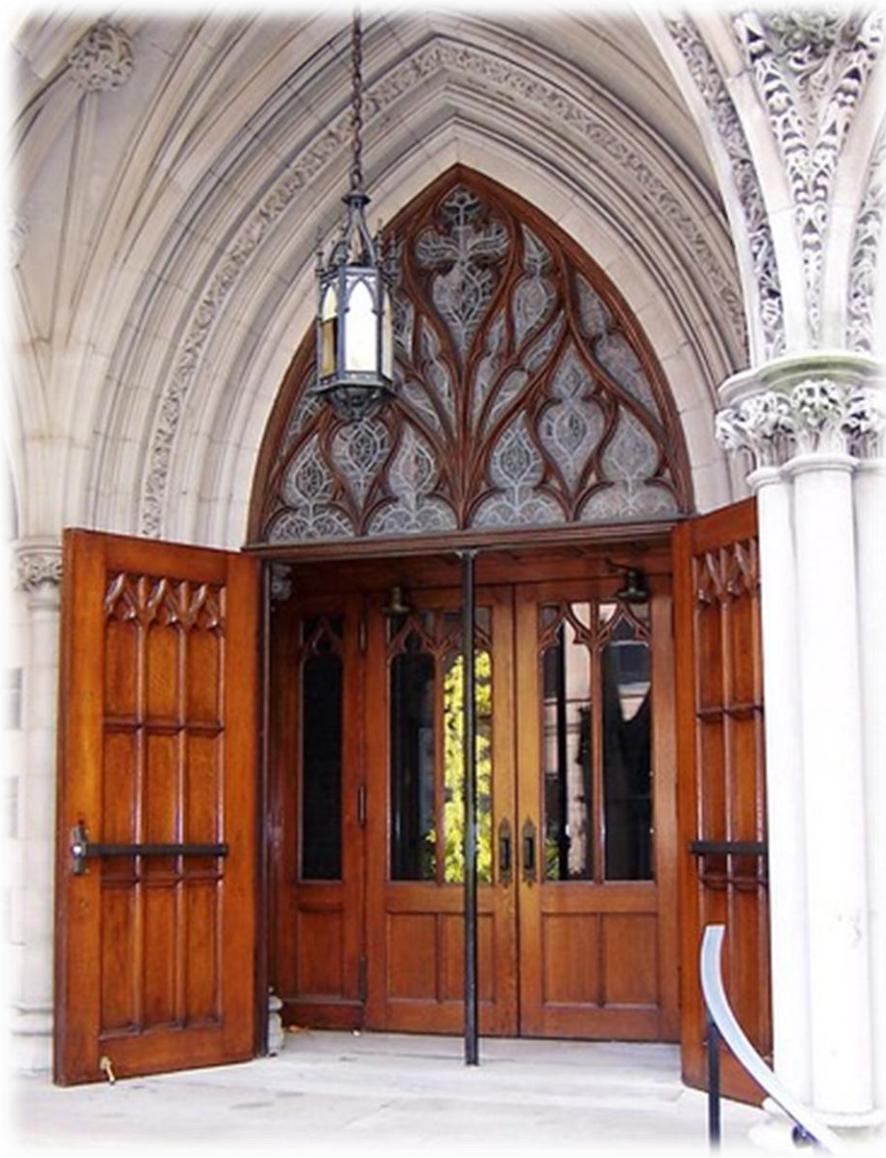


FPPC helped to provide a well in Africa

We live out our faith in the world.

Just as God sent Jesus Christ to a suffering world, and just as Jesus sent out disciples to build his church, so God sends us. God can accomplish Jesus' entire mission without our help, but remarkably chooses to work through us to bring God's transforming power to bear in the world. The Good News of what Jesus has done is meant for all people. Following Jesus means that we tell other people his Good News and make disciples for him. Also, it means that we are to speak peace, advocate justice, and find ways to care for those who are hurting and marginalized.

Note: This short synopsis hardly begins to capture the richness of our theological heritage. We are part of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and so we are in the "Reformed Tradition." Our roots trace back to the 16th century reformer John Calvin. In our third century, First Presbyterian continues to proclaim God's truth in love.



**“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who
welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”**

Matthew 10:40