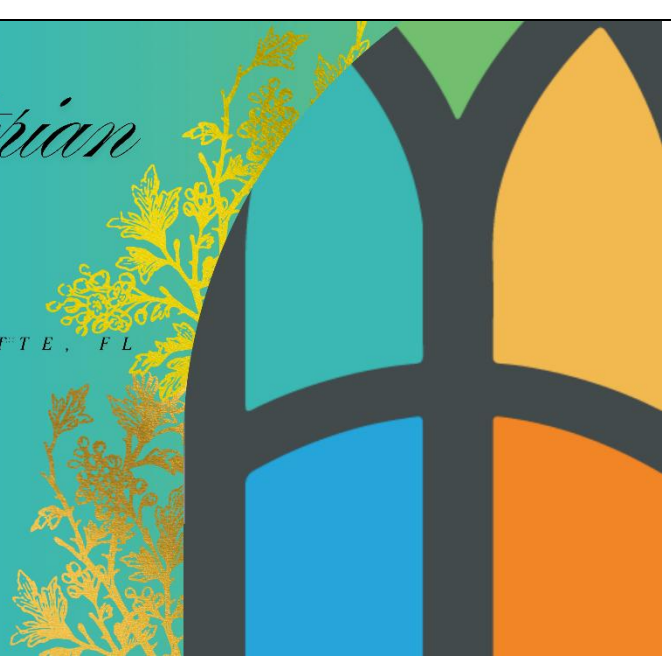


First Presbyterian Church

PORT CHARLOTTE, FL

2230 HARIET ST
PORT CHARLOTTE, FL 33952
941-625-5025
WWW.FPCPC.COM



July/2026 E-GRAM



From the

Pastor's Desk

Hello, **Everyone**, peace be with you!

July invites us to think about freedom. As our nation celebrates its 250th anniversary, we give thanks to God for the many blessings we enjoy.

We are grateful for the freedoms that allow us to gather for worship, speak openly about our faith, gift Bibles, and even serve our neighbors openly. These are gifts worth cherishing and protecting. At the same time, our faith reminds us that there is a freedom no nation can grant and no government can take away.

On the first Sunday of this month, the lectionary brings us to a passage in which the Apostle Paul honestly describes the struggle that lives within every believer: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19). In a simpler way, have you ever

thought, said, or done something you knew was wrong, only to ask yourself later, “Why do I keep doing this when I know better?” If so, you are not alone. I surely asked myself that more than once.

What is refreshing about this passage is the fact that even the great apostle wrestled with that same question. In Romans 7, Paul does not pretend that following Christ makes every temptation disappear or every decision easy. He knew the tension between the life he desired to live and the choices he sometimes found himself making.

Several centuries later, Martin Luther captured this reality with a simple Latin phrase: *Simul justus et peccator*, meaning “at the same time righteous and a sinner.” It may sound like a contradiction, but it describes the Christian life remarkably well.

Luther meant that through Christ, God declares us righteous. We are forgiven. We are adopted into God's family. We belong to Christ completely. Yet we still wrestle with old habits, selfishness, fear, pride, impatience, and doubt.

Until Christ makes all things new, both realities remain true. That is why we do not have to hide our struggles from God or from one another. We do not have to pretend we have everything together. Our hope has never rested on our ability to achieve perfection. Our hope rests on the faithfulness of Christ.

Paul ends this part of his letter with gratitude instead of despair: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” That is where our confidence lies. The struggle is real, but it does not have the final word. Grace does.

As we move through this summer month, may we celebrate every good gift with thankful hearts. May we cherish the freedoms we enjoy as citizens and residents, while remembering the greater freedom we have received in Christ: the freedom to confess our sins without fear, receive God's mercy with joy, and live each day trusting that the One who has begun a good work in us will continue to shape us into the likeness of Christ.

Whether we are traveling, spending time with family, or gathering for worship each Sunday, we remain one family in Christ. We continue to gather around the Holy Table, encouraging one another as fellow travelers who – despite continuing to be sinners – by God's grace, are renewed and held securely in Christ.

God bless you and your family!

Pastor Syl





What's Happening at First Pres

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS – please read

- PEP (People Enjoying People) Group and Men's Breakfast Group will not be meeting during the summer months but will resume in September. Details to come.
- Choir rehearsal will not be meeting in July and August, but will resume in September.
- Deacons will not meet in July or August.

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays – 9 AM to 2 PM

Wednesdays and Fridays – Office is Closed

Wednesday, July 1

- 12:00 PM – Prayer Group Meeting.

Sunday, July 5

- 7:45 AM – Coffee & Pastries.
- 8:00 AM – Adult Sunday School (On Zoom at 8:05 AM).
- 9:00 AM – Lord's Supper Service.
- ~9:20 AM – Children's Sunday School (after Children's Blessing).

Monday, July 6

- 8:00 AM – *Lectio-Divina* with Wintergarden Pres on Zoom.

Tuesday, July 7

- 8:00 – 11:00 AM – Food Pantry.

Wednesday, July 8

- 12:00 PM – Prayer Group Meeting.
- 4:00 – 6:30 PM – Food Pantry.

Thursday, July 9

- 11:00 PM – Finance Meeting.
- 12:00 PM – Session Meeting.

Sunday, July 12

- 7:45 AM – Coffee & Pastries.
- 8:00 AM – Adult Sunday School (On Zoom at 8:05 AM).
- 9:00 AM – Ordinary Service.
- ~9:20 AM – Children's Sunday School (after Children's Blessing).

Monday, July 13

- 8:00 AM – *Lectio-Divina* with Wintergarden Pres on Zoom.

Wednesday, July 15

- 12:00 PM – Prayer Group Meeting.

Thursday, July 16

- 3:00 PM – Worship Arts Committee Meeting.

Sunday, July 19

- 7:45 AM – Coffee & Pastries.
- 8:00 AM – Adult Sunday School (On Zoom at 8:05 AM).
- 9:00 AM – Ordinary Service. Elder Sandy Asaro is preaching.
- ~9:20 AM – Children's Sunday School – (after Children's Blessing).

Monday, July 20

- 8:00 AM – *Lectio-Divina* with Wintergarden Pres on Zoom.

Tuesday, July 21

- 8:00 – 11:00 AM – Food Pantry.

Wednesday, July 22

- 12:00 PM – Prayer Group Meeting.

Sunday, July 26

- 7:45 AM – Coffee & Pastries.
- 8:00 AM – Adult Sunday School (On Zoom at 8:05 AM).
- 9:00 AM – Ordinary Service.
- ~9:20 AM – Children's Sunday School (after Children's Blessing).
- July Birthdays & Anniversaries Celebration following the service.

Monday, July 27

- 8:00 AM – *Lectio-Divina* with Wintergarden Pres on Zoom.

Wednesday, July 29

- 12:00 PM – Prayer Group Meeting.



Last Month's

Recap

Animal Welfare of Charlotte County receives your generous donations



Animal Welfare of Charlotte County received an abundance of items for their sheltered pets, as well as a check to help with their needs, thanks to our Blessing Tree collections in April and May. Thank you to all who participated in donating to a great cause. Pictured here holding the check is Patti Cook of the Animal shelter. Standing next to her are Elders Elaine and Ambrose Woods, along with Elder Nancy Sharpless, who were gracious in delivering the donations to the shelter. Thank you for taking the time to care for the animals in our community.

Elder Sandy Asaro served the Lord's Supper solo for the first time.



For the first time by herself, and while filling as pulpit supply for Pastor Syl, Elder Sandy Asaro served the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the members of First Pres on June 7, 2026. Even though she is not yet an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacraments, Sandy is part of a group of lay leaders authorized by Peace River Presbytery to serve the Holy Supper in their local churches.

We thank God for Sandy, for her willingness to serve First Pres as Ruling Elder, Adult Sunday School leader, and the churches in our Presbytery.

Celebrating May and June Birthdays & Anniversaries.



Our May birthdays were celebrated on Sunday, June 7, 2026. Our birthday ladies, standing with Elder Sandy Asaro, are from left to right, Carol (Jaz) McLennon, Elaine Woods, and Norma Campbell.



Elaine not only got to celebrate her birthday in May, but with her husband, Ambrose Woods, they also celebrated their Anniversary. Congratulations to the wonderful couple.



In the picture above with Pastor Syl, we see our June birthday ladies. They are two of our awesome First Pres Deacons, Sue McConochie and Holly Parkins. And in the picture below, we see Rosemary Barrett, standing solo with Pr. Syl. She is Veronica Walter's sister, another one of our awesome deacons. Happy birthday, ladies.



Celebrating their anniversary in June, we have Carolyn and Charlie Brox (picture below) & Hazel and Jerry Brown (sadly, no recent picture of them), but we wish them all the best.



Look who dropped by!



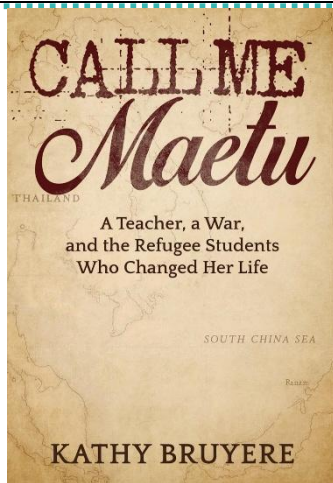
We always love it when long-distance friends come back to visit! On Sunday, June 7, 2026, our congregation caught up with members Steve Goettler and Christine Dutkiewitz, who moved up north last year. It was wonderful to see their smiling faces in person. Even though they live far away now, Steve and Chris still join us online every single week for our adult Sunday school! Pastor Syl was sad to learn he wasn't here to see Steve and Chris, but glad to know they were never really far from us.

Richard Lund & Wendy Rudolph



Talking about moving North, a send-off celebration was held on Sunday, June 14, 2026, to say goodbye to Richard Lund and his daughter, Wendy Rudolph, who will be moving to Illinois to be close to family. Safe travels, and we will miss them both dearly.

FPCPC member Kathy Bruyere's new book has been published!



by: Kathy Bruyere

Forty-five years ago, I began writing notes about an unusual teaching assignment that would eventually become my memoir, *Call Me Maetu: A Teacher, a War, and the Refugee Students Who Changed Her Life*.

From 1979 to 1985, I taught refugee students from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia at the Denison Job Corps Center in Iowa. Most arrived speaking little or no English after escaping the hardships of war.

The title of the book comes from the Laotian word *Maetu*, meaning “grandmother.” When my students first called me *Maetu*, I was surprised. I was only thirty years old and thought it was an insult. Instead, they explained it was a term of deep respect because I cared for them as a grandmother would care for her family. From that day on, I proudly accepted the name.

Teaching English often led to humorous moments. American clichés puzzled my students. One asked what his dorm supervisor meant when he said, “Shake a leg.” Another worried when an American friend said he was “all tied up” and could not talk. These misunderstandings became valuable learning opportunities and provided many laughs along the way.

To read more stories about my students, including the details of what they endured to escape their countries, you can find *Call Me Maetu* on Amazon in paperback, hardcover, and Kindle.

Celebrating Freedom: A Look Back at Our Patriotic Concert



On Sunday, June 28th, First Pres PC celebrated America's 250th Birthday with a spectacular Patriotic Concert that was a massive success! The afternoon was filled with music highlighting the beautiful freedom we have in America (a place where we can honor Christ freely and openly). Members and friends of First Pres came together to rejoice and sing along.

A huge thank you to our Music Director, Sue Brembs, as well as Ann and Nick Miceli, for their hard work, talent, and dedication in putting together such a memorable and inspiring event!



Raye Bittinger's contact information

If anyone would like to contact Raye Bittinger, she is at Heritage Oaks of Englewood, 737 San Casa Dr., Englewood, FL 34224. 941-413-2119.



Upcoming Events

MONTHLY EVENTS

Blessing Tree Collection for Kiwanis Shoes for Kids Project



This month, First Presbyterian's Blessing Tree will collect for the **Kiwanis Shoes for Kids Project**. Please donate shoes for school-age children, sizes 3 through adult 12. Thank you for your support.

WEEKLY EVENTS

On Mondays – *Lectio Divina* Online



Join our brothers and sisters of Wintergarden Pres, online, every Monday at 8:00 AM for deep reflection on God's word.

To connect, go to www.zoom.us, and click "Join" in the upper-right-hand corner.

Meeting ID: 878 3208 0869

Passcode: 396015

Prayer Changes Things: Join Us Wednesdays at Noon



They say prayer is the engine room of the church, and we invite you to be part of that movement! **Every Wednesday at 12:00 PM**, we gather in the First Pres Gathering Room to stand in the gap for our community, our loved ones, and our world. We have seen firsthand how prayer makes a tangible difference in people's lives. Whether you are a "prayer warrior" or simply seeking a quiet place to sit in God's presence, you are welcome here.

On Sundays – Bible School

Our Sunday School classes are truly wonderful, thanks to our dedicated Christian Education Committee and our resident Bible expert, Elder Sandy Asaro. Whether you join us in person or online, there is a place for you!



Adult Bible studies begin at 8 AM, while children's classes start right after the Children's Blessing during the service.



Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays

July 2 – Charles Brox
July 9 – Richard Lund
July 20 – Valciana Officer
July 21 – Judy Benson
July 24 – Kathy Alexander

Anniversaries

July 10 – Barbara & John Danalak
July 10 – Sue & Neal McConochie
July 22 – Heather & Weldon DeGroot

Do not see your name here? Call the church office and let us know (941) 625-5045.



Forever in *Our Hearts*

Lucille Veronica Gomez

June 1, 1922 - March 7, 2026



We received notice that Lucille Gomez passed away on March 7, 2026. She was 103 years old. We ask that you keep her family in your prayers.



We are
Praying for...

Betty Belcher – health needs

Cheryl Berlonr – health needs

Eric & Ray Bittinger – health needs

Hazel & Jerry Brown – health needs

Carolyn & Charlie Brox – health needs

Lin Christian – health needs

Carol Dunkak–Dunekirchen – health needs

Barbara Edwards – health needs

Jean Heim – health needs

Marjorie Hill – health needs

Carolanne Hoehle – health needs

Alzie Lee family – strength & comfort

Sue Littrell – health needs

Richard Lund – health needs

Courtenay Mason – health needs

Brad Messick – health needs

George Mothershed – health needs

Amanda Nunez – strength & comfort

Julie Nunez – health needs

Ray Omar – health needs

Mavis Powell – health needs

Amy Rupert – strength & comfort

Sue Thompson – strength & comfort

Danny Webb – strength needs

Debbie Webb – health needs

FPCPC FAMILY – If you know of anyone else who may need our prayers, please call the church office at 941-625-5045. Names will be removed after 3 months. If you wish to keep them on the list, please call the church office.



Our Church's *Affiliations*



First Presbyterian Church
of Port Charlotte



The **First Presbyterian Church of Port Charlotte** is part of the **Presbyterian Church USA**, under the care of the **Peace River Presbytery**. We are also part of the compendium of Reformed and Presbyterian churches worldwide.