

# The Gazette

## Summer Edition 2025



Laurel Presbyterian Church

*Enter to Worship. Depart to Serve*



### Life is Hello, Life is Goodbye

“Life is Hello, Life is Goodbye” is a quick way of collapsing and seeing all our moments in God—whom we live and move and locate our being. It also happens to be the title of a book about the same. David’s last Sunday was May 25. It was a bittersweet day.

We said hello to David two years ago in June of 2023. We commissioned him in that service to try new things and to live out of his rootedness as God’s beloved one. He followed Hannah Miller as our summer seminary intern. We were delighted and enchanted by him. Last June, we welcomed him back as our summer seminary resident. Thanks to the three grants we received from the Presbytery of the James for the length of his time with us, we were able to extend David’s time for the 2024-25 academic year. This fall he began the study of the small church and its role in the sea of church change. While with us, he married Sarah Anderson, and they became The McDowells. And on May 24 this year, David graduated from Union Presbyterian Seminary with a dual degree—Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Public Theology. Also, this past May, David was called to Fondren Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MI as the Head of Staff and Pastor. This is the very same church where God called David from the fold to prepare to serve God’s people. David had been thinking he was called to be an attorney to address the wounds of the oppressed. But God had other plans. David’s time with us has been impactful in so many ways. Our liturgy of blessing on May 25 tried to lift up those ways in gratitude to God for his life among us. The Member Care and Missions team hosted a beautiful farewell party to honor Christ in him. Nancy Owens gave the MCM team a precious quilt she made to give to David. Beverley Shepherd collected our yellow pieces of paper chronicling how David has touched our lives and put together a lovely scrapbook, so he never forgets his impact of speaking Laurel Love. The Fellowship Hall was decorated with beautiful large tissue flowers that the MCM Team created under the tutelage of Mary Jane Bowlin. And all of you brought side dishes to compliment David’s favorite food – Southern Fried Chicken. It was a beautiful goodbye. We came to deeply love David and Sarah, we became attached, and so it is with bittersweet emotions that we send them off to continue to follow Jesus and tend to God’s sheep.

Our capacity to love deeply is framed by how well we welcome strangers (Matthew 25). Every “good hello” happens because we have said a “heartfelt goodbye.” We can welcome the stranger without apprehension because we have seen how that stranger becomes a friend in Christ to us. Even though our hearts become heavy saying “the goodbyes” it shows us that our capacity to love has again ripened and deepened. Just look at how our love for David grew and grew over the two years. This gift from God only strengthens our ability to speak Laurel Love and “say hello” to the next visitor who walks through our doors. This sequence of meeting and befriending the stranger is held together by God who is in all our moments—not just some of them. And it is in God that all our moments make sense and have meaning. Yes, it is hard to say “goodbye” because we don’t want to lose our connection with someone we have loved. At the same time, it is an affirmation of love that God is revealing something more of the heart of God, and something more of who we are as beloved ones in God, and in relationship. Henri Nouwen writes in *The Inner Voice of Love* (1996):

“True love between two human beings puts us more in touch with *our* deepest self. It is a love in God. God’s love . . . reveals to *us* the love of God in the other. So, the God in you can speak to the God in the other. This is deep speaking to deep, a mutuality in the heart of God, who embraces both of you.”

Our goodbyes “or absence does not end or even diminish the love of God that brought *us* to the other person. It calls *us* to take a new step into the mystery of God’s inexhaustible love. This process is painful . . . because the other person has become a true revelation of God’s love for *us*. “Nouwen goes on to say that the more we enter into relationships and discover this revelation of God, “the more we are called to love God for God’s sake. This is an awesome and dreadful

love, but it is the love that offers eternal life.”

So, we can say our “goodbyes” to David (and others we have loved) trusting that our love for him and his love for us, “became a true revelation of God’s love for us.” For this love emboldens us to welcome the stranger and to love deeply again. It may still surprise us that God is revealed and known in each one of us—even the stranger—but that is where we also find a mirror of God inexhaustible love for us. Yes, it is hard to let go, we must forgive the rhythms of life, at the same time thanking God for the opportunity to know ourselves as God knows us through these precious relationships, these precious people. But we can rest at ease knowing that we have “loved one another” and loved well and this is what it means to be an authentic disciple of Christ.

<sup>33</sup> Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now, I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ <sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 10:33-35) Reverend Ann Cherry

### **Our Summer Shepherds on Call:**

#### **June:**

**Mary Jane Bowlin**  
**804-672-6009**

#### **July:**

**Barbara Rose**  
**804-270- 6978**

#### **August:**

**Carolyn Stinger**  
**804-755-7150**



If you know of someone who could use some extra love with a phone call or visit, please contact the appropriate Shepherd on Call.



**HAPPY SUMMER BIRTHDAYS TO THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF LAUREL. MAY YOU BE ABUNDANTLY BLESSED THIS YEAR!**

#### **JUNE**

MacRae, Pete (1)  
Berger, Chris (3)  
Henderson, Michael (7)  
Joan McArthur (8)  
Sarfo-Kantanka, Nana (10)  
Linda Coulson (17)  
Robin Jones (30)

#### **JULY**

Riley, Sharon (2)  
Scearce, Mary (6)  
Bud Jones (6)

MacRae, Sara Bailey (9)  
Cooper, Katherine (12)  
Fitch, Reggie (13)  
Poff, Bonnie (13)  
Scearce, Steve (22)  
Deisher, Marcia (25)  
Stratton, Trish (25)  
Anderson, Jake (29)  
Carpenter, Carl (31)

#### **AUGUST**

Peter Coulson (1)  
Horigan, Kathy (4)  
Cherry, Reverend Ann (5)  
Rebecca Owen (7)  
Roeder, Laurel (9)  
Cross, Matt (11)  
Berger, Emily (15)  
Bowlin, Mary Jane (16)  
Roy Shore (18)  
Linda Maddy (22)  
Duff, Lorraine (25)  
Susan Dameron (25)  
Scearce, Melanie (27)  
McBane, Meghan (28)  
Anderson, Maureen (30)



### **SUMMER SANCTUARY FLOWERS**

#### **JUNE**

**June 1** – Carolyn Stinger – To the Glory of God and in memory of Sandra Boone.

**June 8** – The Miller /Roeder families – To the Glory of God and in memory of Joe and Nancy Miller.

**June 15** – Brenda & Pete MacRae – To the Glory of

God and in honor of our grandchildren Maeve, Teddy, Avery, and Iris.

**June 22** – Barbara Rose – To the Glory of God and in memory of Pete Rose's birthday June 23.

**June 29** – Sharon Riley – To the Glory of God and in honor of our upcoming United States of America's birthday celebration.

## **JULY**

**July 6** – Mary and Steve Searce – To the Glory of God and in honor of our July birthdays.

**July 13** – Open

**July 20** – Open

**July 27** – Michelle McBane – in memory of her sister Carol Dunbar Miller.

## **AUGUST**

**August 3** – Glenda Miller – To the Glory of God and in honor of my daughter Laurel Miller Roeder's birthday.

**August 10** – Gladys & Marshall Chamberlayne – To the Glory of God and in memory of Sid, Susan & Brad.

**August 17** – Open

**August 24** – Open

**August 31** – Open

### **ELSIE BRADSHAW CIRCLE LUNCHEON...**

The Women's Circle end-of-year luncheon will be held on Wednesday June 11th at 11:30am at Kitchen 33, 13155 Mountain Rd Glen Allen. Please join us!

Beverley Shepherd



### **LAUREL SUMMER READING**

**LITTLE LIBRARY...** We are setting up a summer "little library" in the Parlor for you to pass on books you have enjoyed and choose new ones.

### **FROM THE DESK OF NANA SARFO-KANTANK**

Hello everyone! I am back in the USA!

My travel was peaceful, grand and through the Grace of God, I was able to travel business class. I was so blessed during my travels. I was not sick one day. The Highlight of my trip was when I walked into the Ebenezer Day Care School. I could see my mother sitting there. I broke into sobs; I cried a lot.

My sister, Patricia, took little candies for the children. I am so proud of her. She is not well, but still is able, thus

far, to go to the school. She has accepted a new task. At the present time, there are 74 children. Four children that are autistic have been accepted. They are non-verbal. They are only able to produce limited sounds. It takes a lot of time and patience.

There was much to do. I attended a business meeting shortly after arriving. Parents' concerns were addressed. I listened and observed. The parents did not know me. Patricia's husband introduced me and asked me to speak to them. I told them about how the school got started, and a little bit about my mother and how she funded the school with her own money for years. Some concerns were: 1. The food supply, 2. Uniform policy non-compliance, 3. Children coming to school not properly attired, 4. Money issues.

I was able to take the monetary donation given by the Laurel Women's Circle, Laurel Church and individuals, and add it to the money which came from the sale of my mother's home. Two new classrooms have started. They are under construction now and are at the roofing level. Graduation day is scheduled for August 22<sup>nd</sup>. We are hoping the new classrooms will be completed so they can be "dedicated." They will be called "The Laurel Block." The new rooms are very modern. The classrooms are not like my mom's. A ceiling fan is in each room and there are tiles on the floor. They are very elite, sweet and so appreciated.

Thank you for your love and support. May God bless you.

### **The Ebenezer Day Care Center**



**The next Session meeting will be held on  
Tuesday June 24 at 3:30pm**

**Special Thank You for David's Celebration:** The Member Care and Missions Team would like to thank everyone for all the love that made David's last Sunday a wonderful occasion.



**Let us keep the following people in our prayers  
sharing in both their joys and needs:**

**\*New additions will be in bold.**

Our First Responders – Police, Fire, Rescue

Our Military Personnel, Healthcare Workers

Mary Jane Bowlin

Kathy Boyce

Reverend Ann Cherry and family

Jean Cole

Marcia Deisher

Carrie and Claude Dickerson

Donna Edwards

Diane and Eugene Jackson

Sherrie Kolb

Mary Lawrence

Eddie Ann Mathewson

**David and Sarah McDowell**

Glenda Miller

LaVerne Miller

Trudy Moolenaar

Muriel-neighbor of Michael Henderson

Eugene Peterson

Laura Jo Pike

**Kathryn Rhoden and family**

Nana Sarfo-Kantanka

Dot and Page Shepherd

Judy and Jim Smith

Autumn Waddell

Prayers for the World

Prayers for Ruling Elders

Prayers for friends and families

Prayers for the hungry and homeless

Prayers for the incarcerated

**If you know of someone in need of prayer, please  
call Gladys Chamberlayne at 755-6172**

#### **A TRIBUTE TO CHRIS RHODEN**

The Rev. Ann D. Cherry, Minister

Chris Rhoden may have only been at Laurel for a brief time, but he had a profound impact on the life of our beloved community. All of this was God-led. All of this was a gift from God. Here is how it all came to be:

In late spring of 2021, Sue Anderson, Chris's mother-in-law, reached out to Rev. Ann to see if he might be able to do a quasi-internship at the church to fulfill some of his VCU requirements for client hours. Sue thought it would be a win-win. Chris could offset some of the heavy pastoral load at Laurel, and Laurel could provide Chris with some clinical hours for his graduate degree in counseling. Rev. Ann met with Chris that summer, and that led to a wonderful friendship that spanned his remaining years. Rev. Ann had already decided in the summer of 2021 to launch a small group

ministry in the fall of 2021 at Laurel. This arose out of her doctoral work at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. They decided that it made sense for Chris to lead the groups and for Rev. Ann to support him so he could receive his clinical hours. Chris also agreed to see people referred to him by Rev. Ann for pastoral care. This expanded our reach to care for people inside the church.

Simultaneously, a grant was written to redo the Parlor and to provide seed money for our small group ministry. The Presbytery generously funded it. Linda Coulson and Brenda MacRae were a big part of making this next phase happen. Chris painted the Parlor and brought in many of the furnishings, transforming our space. Linda and Brenda were our interior decorators. This became his office, and the Parlor became a functional and cozy place for claiming our identity as Beloved children of God. Rev. Ann had charted this direction for the small group ministry, but she and Chris worked together to nurture it.

Chris graduated the next summer from VCU in 2022 and began his clinical work. He retained his office at our church. He found he loved group work and expanded that as the foundation of his practice. You will remember we were offering lots of groups at Laurel, with many joining us from the larger community. Many ideas were also considered. One was to form parachurches in long-term care facilities to facilitate community where there were deserts of isolation. One was to bring pastors together in the community to form a beloved church network on a larger scale. One was to minister to those with memory issues, which we brought to fruition. This last idea found sea legs, and we were able to make notecards, record stories for children, make bread, arrange flowers, paint, and decorate clay pots for Christmas paperwhites that we gave as gifts to Laurel members unable to come to church.

Chris and Rev. Ann met weekly to prepare for the small groups. He worked with both Hannah Miller and David McDowell in his tenure here. Thanks to the help of Trish Stratton, Duane Berger, and Steve Searce, we were able to finally find an appropriate title for Chris, as our "Independent Therapist in Residence" without encumbering liability. We provided scholarships for groups or individual care through our grant. We ended up swapping office space for Chris's time.

In October 2023, Chris was diagnosed with glioblastoma, the most aggressive form of brain cancer, and he stepped away from his work as a therapist. This is when Rev. Ann stepped in to assume the weekly leadership of both Beloved groups. In his last 17 months of life, Chris "loved more" and, through God's grace, lived perhaps his "best life" ever. He was keenly aware and acutely dialed into God's creation. He was steeped in the mystery of God's love and claim of him as a beloved child of God. He lived each day as a "bonus day" or a "snow day." He let fear take a back seat to his adventure with God. He savored every minute. During this time, he camped out in a swamp and on a beach, lived among the monks at a monastery, spent 8 weeks in the mountains, took several trips to spend time with his children and grandchildren, visited his family and college



friends, took trips with Kathryn his sweet wife, made lots of bread, drank excellent coffee, gathered with friends, smelled the flowers, communed with squirrels and deer, and continued three small groups at Hope. He emerged from his first surgery hearing God instruct him to “feed the sheep” and that is what he did. He began a blog on Substack to share his experiences of God in the wild. He was apt at validating and honoring God in us and reminding us of how much God loves us.

His life was celebrated at Hope Church on Friday, May 23rd, and a bench will be placed in Deep Run Park—a place he hiked with his dog Carley most mornings until his second surgery. Chris may have died a physical death, but he is very much alive in Christ, and lucky for us, we live in a Christ-soaked world. I suspect you will see a lot of “Chris sightings” every time you take notice of God in us, or God in creation. Every time you take a moment to savor God in all our moments, I suspect you will draw closer to the people you have loved just like we loved Chris. Chris did not “pass away;” he joined God in the most intimate way possible.

One day we will all be together with all the Saints. We are not lost to God but found as beloved ones by this forever love that passes all understanding. Chris became a mystic these last few months which if we were to yield ourselves to God, we could be transformed, too.

The breadcrumbs are there for us to follow by our biblical cast of characters, including Jesus himself, and the everyday mystics along the way, like Chris. We will be celebrating his life at Laurel by creating an artifact that expresses the give and take of this love relationship for the Parlor. Here is his obituary:

**AUGUST 13, 1965 – APRIL 25, 2025**

Christopher “Chris” Allen Rhoden, Sr. of Richmond, Virginia passed away Friday, April 25th, 2025, at the age of 59. His formative school years were spent in Centerville and Oxford, Ohio, but his real education came from his world travels as a naval officer. His curiosity led him to explore additional careers as a university math professor and as a mental health therapist.



Even though things came easily to Chris, he wasn't about striving. He longed to notice the loveliness in each person and love people for who they are and not who they could be. Nature filled his soul, and he found God there, the birds, the trees, the mountains, the ocean, the solitude, and the flowers of white stock and lilies and peonies. In a writing in October, he referenced a verse from the MSG by noting, “I want to drink God, deep drafts of God. I'm thirsty for God-alive.” Chris was about living well, and he peacefully marveled at the upcoming awe and wonder of the next section of mysterious trail after his passing.

Chris was a loving spouse, father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle, nephew, Ohio State fan, and best friend to so many. Loving without fear put him in a position of affecting anyone who came in contact with him whether it was at Hope Church, Laurel Presbyterian, Cafe espresso, Rare Olde Times, or on Substack. His heart overflowed with gratitude for all those who have loved our family well during his illness. Deep Run Park on Ridgefield Parkway in Richmond, Virginia, a place full of reflection and joy for Chris and his dog, Carley, will have a memorial bench with plaque for remembrance. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation in honor of Chris to First Descents, an organization with which he felt passionate.

## **MEMBER CARE AND MISSIONS TEAM MEETING MINUTES**

May 4, 2025

Mary Jane opened with prayer.

Member concerns discussed.

Ongoing project: Lambs Basket

Old business: We sent Easter cards to those who cannot get to church.

We delivered 19 Easter bags to Coal Pit Learning Center. They were greatly appreciated, and the children made a small Easter remembrance that David put on his desk.

We mailed a big box of snacks to Michael Whitby to enjoy during his exams. He was happy to get them.

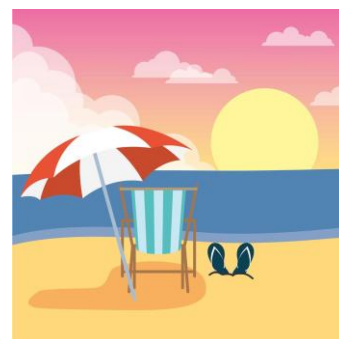
We sent a peace lily to Kathryn Rhoden on behalf of the church.

Several of us volunteered at the Lambs Basket on April 29. We are planning to continue this during the year.

Coming up: We discussed plans for David's going-away reception on May 25.

Carolyn closed with prayer.

Rebecca Owen



**HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!**

## STEWARDSHIP & PROPERTY TEAM MEETING MINUTES

May 4, 2025

### Team Report

Re-set fire protection system

Exterior faucet by bell tower is frozen will try to make it operational.

Obtain information to contact a third-party company that brokers constructing cell phone towers.

### Request from Vision Task Force

Stripe front driveway for individual parking spaces

Obtain a price quote to install an ADA ramp at the entrance of church.

Obtain a price quote to construct a unisex, handicapped accessible bathroom to the right of the ramp that leads into the choir loft. Obtain a cost estimate from a contract to construct this bathroom.

Renovate the sitting area to create a sitting area and create an attractive storage area for collectibles – need more information for this project – what do we do with coat rack?

Install dusk to dawn light bulbs to illuminate the entrance to the church.

Reviewed list of items from Gingerbread Cottage for maintenance and repairs.

### New Business

Meet with Trish Stratton to conduct the 2025 insurance review.

Research installing cell tower on property for a revenue source.

Re-register with State Corporation Commission for 2025

Cut pipe through the floor in the office to boiler room and install thermostat in office.

Our trash collection vendor is no longer available, and we will contact Truman Refuse who is Gingerbread's trash vendor and have them serve as ours also.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tod Balsbaugh  
Recorder

## WORSHIP AND EDUCATION TEAM MEETING MINUTES

MAY 4, 2025

Review of Holy Week - See agenda for details: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday Service, Geraniums, Easter Egg Hunt

April 27 – Hymn Sing / Pancake Breakfast

May 11 – David's last sermon at LPC

May 18 – Pastor Roger Gench is preaching.

May 25 – David's last Sunday

Need communion servers to sign up.

June 8 – Pentecost

Linda Maddy

### VISION TEAM UPDATE

#### Vision in the Wild!

One overdue shout-out to Brenda and Linda C for doing our name tags and Marcie for doing the necklaces to attach them to. Thank you!

Shout out to all the folks involved in new, different and special things during Easter week: Michael, Rudy, Janice, David, Ann C, the WE committee and Marshall for building the cross. We had a last Supper Service, Tenebrae Service and Sins nailed to the cross and then put in the baptismal font. Thank you for your creativity!

Excited to see our child area used on Easter Sunday!

If you see some "Vision in the Wild", let us know so we can give a shout-out!

#### Vision's Focus

Outreach: Starting a Book Club/Conversation Club. Rotating where we do it, and meeting people where they are.

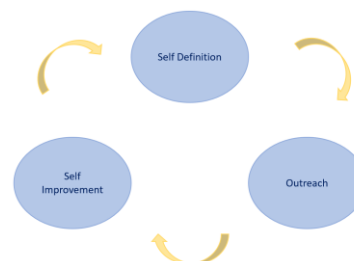
Outreach: Planning for an outdoor event in the fall. Exploring the possibility of having a food truck, music, vendors, s'mores or some combination of those.

Self-Improvement: Looking to improve and beautify our coat/donation/name tag/announcement area to include a sitting area.

If one of these focus areas is interesting to you, we would love your help and support!

Vision meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the month in the parlor. Feel free to drop by, listen in, make suggestions, offer to lead an effort that appeals to you!

Ann Whitby





**FAREWELL AND GOD SPEED DAVID AND SARAH...**



DEADLINE FOR GAZETTE – 19th OF EACH MONTH

Consider going paperless and receiving the Gazette via email. Just send me a message at the address below and I will take care of the rest.

Gazette email: [pamacrae@comcast.net](mailto:pamacrae@comcast.net)

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**SUMMER 2025**