



First Presbyterian Church of San Bernardino

First Press

January 2026



Even with the rain, we gathered in a circle, lit our candles, and sang "Silent Night" to end our Christmas Eve Worship.

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Words from Christmas Eve Worship:

the innkeeper:

"No child should be without a place to be safe."

Joseph:

"No woman should be shamed in these days when too many men cast them aside as nothing."

Mary:

"Every creature, every person, is precious in God's sight. Every being deserves love."

a shepherd:

"No matter who you are, everyone should be able to be fed and safe."

an angel:

"You do not need to be afraid. It isn't that bad things won't happen. It's just that I have it on good authority that you are never alone. Especially when times are scary. You are never alone."

As we begin a new year, let us continue to ask, What child IS this and what is that child calling us to do?

2026 Companions on the Inner Way Retreat Opportunity

First Pres San Bernardino has a long history of supporting and attending Companions on the Inner Way Retreats. Early this spring, Companions on the Inner Way will once again offer a safe communal place to explore deep longings for the Holy. Grounded in the Christian tradition, the guided retreats incorporate body, mind, and soul through presentations, dialogue, spiritual practices, art, music, movement, and worship with Eucharist. The retreats strive to create an environment that is theologically curious, radically welcoming, and liturgically vibrant.

This year's retreat speaker will be Dr. Wendy Farley. She is Rice Family Chair of Spirituality at San Francisco Theological Seminary, part of the Graduate School of Theology at Redlands University. She is the author of several books of theology and wisdom, and is a celebrated speaker and teacher. She has studied many forms of contemplative practice within Christianity, Buddhism, and yoga, including chant, energy work, meditation, centering prayer, visualization, and lectio divina.

The retreat will take place from Sunday, March 8, 2026 to Friday, March 13, 2026 at Serra Retreat Center in Malibu, California.

Registration information can be accessed at www.cotiway.org

Please contact Christa Wallis chriwallis@aol.com if you'd like to apply for a scholarship to help defray the cost of attending.



A Faithful Response to an Ongoing Need

by Rick Rodriguez

On Sunday, December 7, 2025, during the Moment of Mission, I shared that our Food Ministry has been unable to obtain canned goods from Feeding America, our primary food source for the Tuesday and Thursday distributions. Since then, our church family has responded with remarkable generosity.

In the ten days following that announcement, dozens of canned items were donated. These gifts have allowed us to continue providing well-balanced food bags that include vegetables, beans, and other essential canned goods. We asked, and our church family responded — for that, we are deeply grateful.

Thank you to everyone who has brought in food or contributed in other ways to help us through this challenge. While this immediate response has been a tremendous encouragement, the situation is ongoing. We are still unable to receive canned goods from Feeding America. On average, we distribute 75 cooking bags every Tuesday and Thursday, each containing at least two—and often three—canned items. As a result, our canned food inventory continues to decline.

The Food Ministry team is actively seeking additional sources where we can purchase or obtain canned and other needed food items to supplement what is currently unavailable through Feeding America.

We are thankful for the First Pres family, who consistently and compassionately respond when needs are made known. Your support makes it possible for this ministry to serve our neighbors with care.

In Memoriam

August 2025

Beverly Kristoffersen

January 20, 1930-August 17, 2025

"In life and in death we belong to God."



Notes

The *First Press*, the newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of San Bernardino, is edited by member Wendy Lamb. Please submit content to Wendy at newsletter@fpcsb.net.

The deadline for the February newsletter is Thursday, January 22.

Financial Notes

Financial Report as of November 30, 2025.

General Fund

	Actual	Budgeted	Over/(Under)
Pledges	\$310,708.85	302,401.00	8,307.85
Other Income*	\$193,682.32	157,728.58	35,633.74
Expense	\$426,240.32	495,067.84	(68,827.52)
Net Income	78,150.85	(34,938.26)	113,089.11

Division Consolidation

	November	Year to date
General Fund Net Income (Expense)	(1,066.80)	78,150.85
Deacons Net Income (Expense)	6,783.04	2,621.12
Net Operating Income (Expense)	5,716.24	80,771.97

Thank You!

Thank you for all the notes, phone calls, hugs, prayers, and acts of kindness that were received during Jim's hospital stays this summer and in November...and at his passing. Love felt in great abundance.

Blessings to all,

Helen Babcock and Family

Leonard Scholarship Applications

for Fall 2026 are available in the church office and on the church website. All applications must be in the church office by February 28, 2026. Any questions can be emailed to Lynda Savage. LKSavage3@gmail.com



Snow, friends, and a faith that grows! Come join us for a camp weekend program where you will step away from the noise and step into God's presence.

WINTER REVIVAL IS HERE

RENEWED. REKINDLED. RESTORED.

Winter camp will take place on the weekend of March 13th - 15th!

The time is now... Registration begins now for winter camp designed for grades 6th through 12th.

WARM HEARTS, RENEWED SPIRITS

Ready to take a break from school, homework, and the freezing weather?

We're inviting you to an awesome winter camp weekend designed just for 6th - 12th graders! our theme this year is "Warm Hearts, Renewed Spirits," and it's all about experiencing God's life-giving warmth in the middle of a cold, crazy season. Here's what you can look forward to:

- * Powerful Worship and Messages
- * Winter Fun and Chill Time
- * Real Community and much more

Register for \$165 per camper today!

Meet Pastor Brian

By Margaret Doane

From all indications, our new pastor Brian Symonds will provide remarkable leadership for First Pres, continuing the excellence in ministry offered by recent pastors Jim Huffstutler, Sandy Tice, and Wendy Lamb. I talked with Pastor Brian, when he had been here for a mere five weeks, to find out more about his life, as well as his first impressions and tentative plans for First Pres.

Pastor Brian has deep Presbyterian roots: his parents met when both sang in the choir at Downey Presbyterian Church. The original family included his parents (Dennis and Bonnie) and Brian and his brother, Rob; much later, while not biologically related, they welcomed sister Candy into the family in early college. Growing up, Brian was very active in the Church, attending youth groups, Vacation Bible School, and just altogether spending major amounts of time and energy in Church life. He graduated from Warren High School in Downey; briefly attended Texas Lutheran University, and then returned to California to attend Cerritos College. He went on to Cal State Fullerton, where

he was a Communications major and was active in student government, and also worked at Disneyland. He enrolled at San Francisco Theological Seminary but "didn't go to become a pastor" but rather because he "had lots of questions of faith." He realized he was called to parish ministry because of a meaningful comment, someone telling him they "saw something" in him and would like to "see him on the other side of the Communion table," extending Communion rather than simply receiving it.

Pastor Brian has ministered to many in a variety of capacities. Before he was ordained, he served as a chaplain resident at Children's Hospital in the neonatal intensive care unit. He was ordained at United University Church at USC where he was Minister for Campus Engagement. He then worked at the Claremont Presbyterian Church in Outreach from 2018-2024; then at All Peoples in Cathedral City from 2024-2025; and now he is -- happily, we hope -- here at First Pres.

Pastor Brian adopted biological brothers Victor, Nathan, and Axel in 2016. Victor returned to biological family members "after a couple of years." Nathan, now 21, is studying Biology at Citrus College and works at Dutch Bros Coffee. Axel is 14, attends Claremont High School, and plays basketball and soccer, as well as being a dog walker. Brian lists eating as a hobby and enjoys trying new restaurants, and he also enjoys watching movies, both at home and in theatres. What little free time he has left after being a dad and a minister he spends as a student, working towards completing a Doctor of Ministry degree this coming Spring at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, with a dissertation on discerning missional vocation.

Pastor Brian lists his personal strengths as his love of preaching and "being an engaged pastor." He says he is "an extrovert" and loves "getting out in the community and meeting new people." He says others say he "is charismatic," someone "others trust and come to," and that he "plays well with others." He "likes to be in the know," and plans to go to all committee meetings. He has spoken to Laurie about partnering in pastoral care and visitations.

Pastor Brian says he was attracted to First Pres because we are a stable congregation with faithful volunteers, a congregation that is "alive and well." The neighborhood and city offer a positive challenge; he believes we can "meet people where Christ met people," among the "poor and disenfranchised." We have a "place to be relevant" in real and genuine ways. He believes we can build on the strengths we have rather than going in entirely new directions and wants to see how music, our relationship with San Bernardino High School, and food might be extended and developed. As an example, he cited our strong High Church music and said we might develop it by inviting musicians for services and concerts. He wants to "discern our relevancy" and work at extending what we have so that "God can continue to speak and be revealed" in our lives and the lives of our neighbors.

Pastor Brian brings a rich and varied background, exciting ideas, and a great enthusiasm for us and our Church and city. We are delighted he has joined us!



Pastor Brian with lectors Rachel Garvin and Valentina Valenzuela on the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Save the Date: Sunday, January 25, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. for the installation service for Pastor Brian. The Presbytery of Riverside will install Rev. Brian S. Symonds as Minister of Word and Sacrament for First Presbyterian Church of San Bernardino. Reception to follow.

Session Highlights

by Amy Smith, Clerk of Session

Session met in November and December and welcomed new faces and bid adieu to some familiar ones. Our new pastor, Brian, joined the November meeting and was informed that Presbytery had appointed him moderator, even before his installation. We shared our appreciation for the work Steve Smith has done these past two plus years in moderating Session.

Frances Lin, our Presbytery Leader, joined us to explain that the Presbytery Committee on Ministry has determined that Wendy would step out of leadership at First Pres for the next year and hopes that she can use her many gifts to serve other churches in the Presbytery.

Brian invited the elders to share their hopes and dreams for the church in the near future, explaining that we need to dare and ask in order for those ideas to even be considered.

In December we welcomed two of our three new elders, Lynda Savage, and Robin Edwards, and said goodbye to Lily Bolaños, Phyllis Hough, and Margaret Doane. Lily has continued to serve as the chair of Nurture for almost two years following her move to Chicago, and we appreciate her dedication. Phyllis has served on Stewardship and chaired the Nominating Committee this year as well as helping with yearly financial reviews. Margaret finished six years serving on Stewardship, chairing for a number of those years. Her quiet dedication and devotion to this church is unwavering.

We removed twenty-one people from our active rolls, those who have not participated in the life of the church for several years. The 2026 budget was approved with the smallest projected deficit in years! In addition, Session approved funds to repave the parking lot which will make our grounds safer for the many who use our property daily.

We look forward to working with Brian to discover what God is leading us to in the coming year.

January Celebrations

Jan 1	Jeremy Allen
Jan 2	Carol Wright
Jan 3	Alex Smith
Jan 4	Alex Rueda
Jan 5	Sheila Cimino
Jan 6	Rachel Garvin
Jan 9	Cole Charles Jones
Jan 11	Jean-Luc Nicks
	Dawn Morris
Jan 13	Zane Preciado
	Stephani Congdon
Jan 14	Patrick Morris
Jan 16	Esther Olsen
	Deon & Patrick Garcia
Jan 17	Lynette DuClos-Adelson
	Mark Munz
Jan 23	Dan & Cheryl Direen
Jan 25	First Presbyterian Church
Jan 28	Linda McCarl
Jan 29	Brenda Frederick

The class of 2028 Session members will be installed in worship on January 18:
Robin Edwards, John-Paul Fletcher, Jon Horstmann, Lynda Savage

Session 2025

Brian S. Symonds, Moderator; Amy Smith, Clerk of Session

Class of 2025: Lily Bolaños, Margaret Doane, Jonathan Horstmann, Phyllis Hough

Class of 2026: Sue Alexander, Jeanne Clarke, Kathy Showman, Norm Wallis

Class of 2027: Patrick Morris, Susan Skoglund, Katie Smith, Neal Williams

Keep Military Members in Your Prayers

Sgt Jacob Allen,

US Marines, MFR Band, New Orleans, Louisiana

Lt. Alejandro J. Balandran,

US Navy, Yokosuka, Japan

Corporal Ethan Gano,

US Marines, Yuma, Arizona

Seaman Mark Munz,

US Navy, San Diego, California

Lt. Junior Grade Wade Phillip Preciado,

US Navy, Groton, Connecticut

Petty Officer First Class Robert Sandoval,

US Navy, Jacksonville, Florida

Petty Officer First Class Noah L. Wierenga,

U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Diego

CW3 James Bentley Wilson,

US Army, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington

Life Skillz Christmas Party by Rick Rodriguez

The Life Skillz Circle Program had our annual Christmas Party at Bobbi Cummings home on Wednesday, December 17, 2025. Everyone had a great time, with conversation, laughs, games and great food and drinks. There was a large group of current Life Skillz members, freshmen to seniors, who had finals earlier in the day at San Bernardino High School. There was also a large group of SBHS alumni, some who graduated earlier this year and some who graduated back in 2016 and several years in between. In addition to Bobbi, the other Life Skillz leaders were there, Pat Morris, Brooke Dvorak, Stephani Congdon and Sam Roberts. Everyone was also blessed by having Pastor Brian at the party.

We got to hear how some of our alumni are doing now. Angel Galindo graduated this past summer with a bachelor's degree in computer science. He was part of the 2021 SBHS graduating class. He gave himself a reward and took a solo trip to Japan over the summer. His sister Laura was part of the 2022 SBHS graduating class. She is now in her senior year at CSUSB with a major in Business Administration with a concentration on Entrepreneurship. Laura designs and makes clothing for herself and others. She has been doing this for many years and everything she makes is beautiful. This has been a source of income for Laura and she expects to have this and other business ventures to be what is in her future.

Jessica Flores graduated from SBHS this past June and is now attending the University of La Verne. She runs for their Cross Country team and her major is Political Science with a minor in Criminology. Jessica goes out running every day and frequently runs into the girls from Bonita High School when they are out on runs. She found out that the Bonita HS does not have a girl's long distance running coach. Bonita's track coaches found out about her from the girls who met Jessica when they were out running and the high school has now offered her a girl's track coaching position. She is currently considering whether to take the job, because she has a full load of classes at La Verne. These are just three of the updates we got to hear about at the party.

The Life Skillz Program has been a blessing to all the students who take part in the program, all of us, as the leaders of the Life Skillz Program and the whole First Pres church family. In a wider sense, I believe our entire community and the world will benefit from the wonderful minds and kind hearts these young people have shown us throughout the time we have known them.



The class of 2028 Deacons will be installed in worship on January 18:
Rebecca Allen, Brent Nord, Chris Wright-Thomas, Dave Thomas

Board of Deacons 2025

Mindy Rueda, Moderator; Brian Symonds, Pastor; Steve Smith, Pastoral Support

Class of 2025: Rebecca Allen, Brad Smith, Dave Thomas, Chris Wright-Thomas

Class of 2026: Kristine French, Joyce Lyons, Joanna Nord, Mindy Rueda

Class of 2027: Richard Rodriguez, Jim Siegmund, Kyle Smith, Christian Usher

First Presbyterian Church

January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 8:45am Choir Practice 9:30am Adult Bible Study 10:30am Worship Service	29	30 9:00am Food Distribution	31 Church Office closes at Noon	1 Church Office Closed	2 9:30am Kerygma	3 10:00am Straight Up AA
4 Communion Sunday 8:45am Choir Practice 9:30am Adult Bible Study 10:30am Worship Service	5 5:00pm PW Coordinating Team	6 9:00am Food Distribution 12:00pm Circle of Faith 7:00pm Mensch Group	7 4:00pm Worship Committee	8 9:00am Food Distribution	9 9:30am Kerygma	10 9:00am Symphonie Jeunesse 10:00am Straight Up AA
11 8:45am Choir Practice 9:30am Adult Bible Study 10:30am Worship Service	12 5:00pm Nurture Committee	13 9:00am Food Distribution	14 12:00pm Staff Meeting	15 9:00am Food Distribution 9:00am Friendship Circle 6:30pm Sanctuary Choir	16 Annual Reports Due 9:30am Kerygma 10:30am Food Bagging	17 9:00am Deacon Food Distribution 10:00am Straight Up AA 1:00pm Symphonie Jeunesse
18 Ordination & Installation of Officers 8:45am Choir Practice 9:30am Adult Bible Study 10:30am Worship Service 12:00pm Deacons	19 First Press Deadline	20 9:00am Food Distribution 1:00pm Buildings & Grounds Committee 1:00pm Circle of Grace and Hope	21 1:00pm Stewardship Committee	22 9:00am Food Distribution	23 9:30am Kerygma	24 9:00am Symphonie Jeunesse 10:00am Straight Up AA
25 8:45am Choir Practice 9:30am Adult Bible Study 10:30am Worship Service 3:00pm Pastoral Installation Service	26 7:00pm Circle of Kindness	27 9:00am Food Distribution	28 12:00pm Staff Meeting 5:15pm SESSION Dinner 6:00pm SESSION Meeting	29 9:00am Food Distribution	30 9:30am Kerygma	31 9:00am Symphonie Jeunesse 10:00am Straight Up AA

Please check the calendar on the website for the most up-to-date information for January.
https://fpcsb.net/events_links/calendar



Do you follow us on Facebook? This is the collage Abby has put together for our Facebook page. You can find us on Facebook and Instagram as well as our website, FPCSB.net.

First Presbyterian Church of San Bernardino

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Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday
8:00 am to 4:00 pm

The Rev. Brian S. Symonds

Pastor

Head of Staff

The Rev. Dr. Stephen W. Smith

Pastoral Support

Laurie Stafford

Ministry of Visitation

Our Mission Statement

Moved by the Spirit, we strive to create an open and inclusive community embodying the love, forgiveness, and grace of Christ which we extend to ourselves, each other, our neighbors, and our world through nurturing relationships, creative celebrations, continuous learning, and transformational service.