

# THE SPIRE



*Your Church Magazine*

July / August 2026



# NURTURE FAITH

**by Dr. Doug Hood**

Pastor

## STANDING UP TO LIFE

*“I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.”*

Philippians 4:13 (Common English Bible)

Joan Burns, a friend for over eleven years, recently gave me one of the most honest compliments I have received—“What I enjoy best about our friendship is watching you try to be funny!” That comment demonstrates that Joan is the one in our relationship who is genuinely funny. More importantly, the comment demonstrates the strength of our friendship. She doesn’t fear damaging our friendship with her candor. That strength of friendship is what we all seek—and need. It is the strength that defines my relationship with my daughter. I will make a silly comment to Rachael, followed by the self-aggrandizement, “I’m so funny!” Rachael’s simple response is, “No, you’re not!” Naturally, that has become a clever riposte between my daughter and me. Yet, Joan’s quip, “What I enjoy best about our friendship is watching you try to be funny,” has theological depth: Joan acknowledges, in her humor, that I am actually “trying!”

“I can,” begins Paul’s remark to the church in Philippi. The emphasis is not on our dependence upon God. We do not expect God to do everything for us—or we shouldn’t! There are things that we can do and ought to do. There are things we can endure, though they may not be pleasant. A runner understands this. The first mile is unpleasant for every runner, regardless of physical condition. The first mile is a liar. The first mile will plead with us to stop, that this should be a rest day. Or the lie is that we are not strong enough, or the weather isn’t ideal for running. Runners are familiar with the lies of the first mile. So, runners endure the lies and continue into the second mile, where the lies are eventually silenced. Our Christian faith calls forth the same endurance. Our faith does not release us from making the best effort within us. We can face difficulties and obstacles that find their way into our lives. It is simply a decision to stand up to life.

But there is more in Paul’s comment to the Philippian Church. The “I can” is matched by the strength from God. First comes the resolve that we will stand up to life and make every effort within us to do so. Obstacles, setbacks, and losses will be met with our determination to move through them. That determination will then realize a surge of power that comes from without—the power of the one who gives uncommon strength, the risen Christ. Just as a runner endures the lies of the first mile, the second

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## THE SPIRE MAGAZINE

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**If you or a family member are hospitalized, please notify the church office. Even if you give the name of the church upon admission, the hospital will NOT notify us.**

mile presents new strength for the road ahead. God's strength always comes alongside our effort, the "I can." But our own effort comes first. The first mile must be endured. As we approach the end of that first figurative mile of difficulty, a new spiritual confidence emerges that touches every area of one's manner, disposition, and attitude toward life. The notion of "I can" is not a hope or wishful thinking. It is established upon God's promise of strength.

**T**he stiffest challenge of life is not questioning God's presence when we need God. It isn't asking God to rescue us from difficulty or straighten things out for our family. The stiffest challenge of life is to stop viewing God as a blue genie available to grant our wishes or as a cosmic servant who makes the rough places smooth. God is available to pull us together when we fall into despair and to build upon our own determination to instill courage, strength, and guidance for where we place our next step. God's desire is that we stand up to life with the confidence that we don't stand alone. Every success, every accomplishment, every step into the second mile of our life will be through the power of the one who gives strength. Paul's words here, "I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength," renew courage when life becomes difficult. Repeated often, these words will become a vital part of surviving that first mile. ●

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**by Nancy Fine**

*Business Administrator*

## PRAYER: AN ACT OF LOVE AND TRUST

**P**rayer is one of the most meaningful ways we can care for one another. When we pray for someone, we offer more than words—we offer an act of love. Through prayer, we bring the joys, struggles, hopes, and needs of others before God, trusting in his presence and care. Whether praying for healing, comfort, guidance, or thanksgiving, we demonstrate that another person's life matters to us. Prayer reminds us that we are connected as a community of faith, carrying one another's burdens and celebrating one another's blessings.

**A**sking for prayer is also a sacred act, one rooted in trust. When we share our needs and invite others to pray for us, we open our hearts and allow others to walk alongside us in faith. It takes humility and courage to admit that we need support, encouragement, or strength. In doing so, we create opportunities for deeper relationships and stronger bonds within the church family. Together, praying for one another and requesting prayer become powerful expressions of God's love at work among his people.

**P**rayer is both a gift we give and a gift we receive. Through prayer, we become partners in God's work of caring for his people, offering love to those in need and finding strength when we ourselves need it. As we continue to pray for one another and share our prayer concerns, we build a stronger, more compassionate community of faith. In a world that often feels divided and uncertain, prayer reminds us that we are never alone—we are held together by God's love and by the prayers of his people.

**Y**ou are invited to join the First Delray Prayer Team by contacting me in the church office or at the Welcome Center on Sunday mornings. Prayers are emailed each week and are kept confidential. ●

**by Dick Falk**



## OUT OF SIGHT, BUT NOT OUT OF MIND . . .

**A**s many of you travel this summer, don't forget that you can stay connected to First Delray by tuning in to the live stream every Sunday to enjoy Doug Hood's messages, the wonderful music, and time with children, in addition to seeing your friends as they attend in person.

And while you are thinking about your church home in Delray Beach, you can maintain your stewardship by contributing online.

**H**ave a blessed summer, whatever your plans.

The Generosity Team ●

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**by Fred McNaboe**

## MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Welcome to The Men's Breakfast Gathering  
Most Thursdays at 8:30 a.m.

**C**ome for a warm breakfast, meaningful conversation, and fellowship. All are welcome.

**H**ope to see you all and continue this comfortable men's gathering each week. ●

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**by Dolores McNaboe**

## WOMEN'S LUNCH BY THE SEA

**J**oin hosts Dolores McNaboe and Kathy Wilsher for Women's Lunch by the Sea, a monthly lunch where you can meet new women and catch up with old friends. Held on the second Tuesday of each month at noon at Boheme Bistro on Atlantic Ave, just a short walk from the church, this casual, no-pressure gathering is designed for women seeking a warm, inclusive environment lunch. Separate checks are provided. Contact Dolores (561-702-4142) or Kathy (561-252-0709) for more information. ●

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## SESSION REPORT

During April and May, the Session approved two baptisms and received four new members. ●



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## GIFTS TO OUR CHURCH

**Concert Series** from Dick and DoAnn Falk, in loving memory of Dave Ferguson.

**Memorial Garden Fund** from Karen and Don Carter, in loving memory of John and Janet Loennecker.

**Remembrance Fund** from her family, in loving memory of Barbara J. Evans. ●



## ETERNAL LIVES

Our Deepest Sympathies as a congregation are extended to the families of the following member upon the death of their loved one:

– Paul Bierly –  
May 18, 2026



## NEW MEMBERS

Catherine Coombs

Sharon O'Connor

Cindy Thornton

Tom Thornton

# WELCOME

# MEET THE FIRST DELRAY *Ringers*

by Penny Johnson



**J**im Poch, a former hand bell director at First Delray, always said that the nicest people in the church were in the hand bell choir. I'm not sure that is 100% true, but I do know that the current ringers are very nice, dedicated, and a very interesting group. Having served as the interim director of the Ringers for the past several months, I'd like to introduce them to you.



## OUR SNOWBIRDS

*Here for the season, part of our year-round family.*

**GAIL CARPENTER** is our most experienced ringer, having begun 32 years ago at First Presbyterian Church of Boca Raton (now Grace Community Church). Her bell choir there toured Europe three times. Gail also plays piano and sings, and when you don't see her at church, she can be found in Highlands, North Carolina.

**DOROTHY DENAULT** started her adventure in music with a violin. She especially loved playing carols for her family at Christmas. She joined the bell choir here 15 years ago and has the distinction of playing under all three directors so far. She is currently enjoying cooler weather in Jamestown, RI.

**JOE SHELDON** one of our newest members, has been playing bells for 27 years at Parkminster United Church. Besides his musical talent with the bells, he has also studied piano and sings in a men's chorus in Waterloo, Ontario. A most appreciated ability of Joe is that he can fix bells. Yes, bells have several parts that sometimes need fixing. Joe is the guy with the lovely head of white hair.

**HOLLY ANDERSON** I'm not sure if I should call her a snowbird or not. She is here for most of the year and then escapes to Michigan for the summer. Holly started piano lessons at 10, and then in Jr. High School she joined the bell choir. In 1984, she began singing in church choirs. She decided just a couple of years ago that she would like to try her hand at ringing again. We're glad she did!

*"I have SO enjoyed my time directing the bells.*

*It has been pure joy, and I want to thank those who made it possible for me to do this, as well as the ringers who have been*

*totally supportive of my efforts. Even after the most challenging of rehearsals, I have always gone home happy and exhilarated. Music has a way of doing that."*



**THE DONSKYIS**

**OLEKSANDR** whom we lovingly call Sasha, began studying the “bayan” (button accordion) at eight years old. He has played very difficult pieces by classical composers as well as folksongs. For the past 25 years, he has sung bass in many choirs, both amateur and professional, including our Chancel Choir. Before coming to the U.S., he was part of the Kyiv Symphony Choir and Orchestra, which was directed by Roger McMurrin—who had been the director at Coral Ridge Presbyterian.

**OLENA** his wife, studied piano for seven years. She was a school administrator and the Ukrainian President of the International Music Camp for several years. During her presidency, she would recruit 300 children per year from Ukraine, Romania, and the U.S. to participate in the camp. Sasha and Olena are ballroom dancers. If you’ve been to concerts, you’ve surely seen them dancing in the foyer or even in the aisles!

Now we’ll move through the bells by pitch (how high or low the note is that they make).

**THE NAZIPOVS**

**RAIS NAZIPOV** is from Tashkent, which is currently the capital of Uzbekistan. While working on his four-year degree, he studied trombone. He also played guitar in a local band. Rais plays the smallest and highest bells by both ringing and using a “bell tree”—a challenging new addition to the Ringers’ equipment which allows him to play many bells.

**DIANA** earned her four-year degree in the art of teaching piano. She taught piano lessons for 12 years in the Soviet Union. She was also certified in orchestral conducting. In addition, Diana is a fabulous dancer.



**BELL SPOTLIGHTS**

*Talented individuals. Unique gifts. One joyful sound.*

**DONNA VAN HORN** began piano lessons at age five and then added bassoon in 7th grade. Her senior year in high school, she was the student band conductor. She received a scholarship to play bassoon at Moravian College. Donna played bells for 20 years at Doylestown Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania. She plays high bells and does what is called “four in hand”: she typically has two bells in each hand, and the way she turns her hand determines which bell rings. She is currently determined to master three in each hand. Pretty amazing!

**MARSHA BIRD** studied piano, voice, and violin starting at age seven. She earned a bachelor’s degree in music education. While she lived in Ohio, she played the violin in the Chamber Ensemble and, for 18 years, sang in a jazz show group. Marsha is a first soprano in the Chancel Choir. She brings her many skills to use as the Chair of the very successful First Delray Concert Team.

**IVAN LYPOVYK** studied music at the National Music Academy of Ukraine and is a professional French Horn player. While living in Ukraine, he toured in Europe, Japan, and the United States. Ivan has performed in classical concerts, Broadway productions, and ballets. While Ivan was touring the U.S., the war began in Ukraine; Ivan has been here since. In 2023, Ivan began sharing in our music ministry by playing preludes, accompanying the Chancel Choir, and playing with a chamber orchestra on Easter and with the bell choir. We very much appreciate his involvement in our music program.

**MARCUS PLIENINGER** is our newest member. His debut with the bell choir was July 5. Marcus comes from a musical family—his grandmother was a piano teacher, and his father played in a Swing Band in Germany. Marcus began studying piano at age 5 and continued for 13 years. When he left home for college, he had to leave his piano behind, but found that if he hung out at the Peabody Conservatory, he might get some practice time. Now he can hang out at First Presbyterian. Yay! Marcus also sings in the Chancel Choir and has played a Mozart piano duet prelude with Don. We hope he enjoys a long and happy musical journey with us.

**GLENN BARTON** plays the largest and heaviest bells. A bass hand bell can weigh as much as 15 pounds. Check out his biceps. Glenn started piano lessons as a young teenager. In high school, he joined his church’s hand bell choir. As a young adult, he bought a guitar and taught himself to play. Glenn says, “Now I am happy to be in the First Delray Ringers and to be a part of the First Delray music ministry. I love the ensemble teamwork, and it helps me with timing and sight-reading for piano, which I still enjoy playing.” Glenn, we are happy to have you with us to do the “heavy lifting.” ●



by **Grace Cameron Hood**

*Director of Children and Family Ministry*

What a blessing it was to welcome 45 children to participate in our annual VBS. 40 Volunteers, youth and adults, worked together to share the wonderful news that God’s love is a free gift to the world. We have been asked to share that love just as Paul did from his prison cell in Rome. The children saw Paul’s Roman Guard learn about God’s love. The children visited an underground church and a Roman marketplace. They made aqueducts, created scrolls, tried on togas, and planted an orchard. The carpentry, metalworking, and wreath-making shops were very popular. They sang, ate wonderful food, played games, and experienced the love of God! They also collected food for CROS Ministries.





Our First Families are going bowling on Sunday, August 2 at 2 pm. Reservations can be made at the Welcome Center in the church lobby.



On August 2, we will have the annual Blessing of the Backpacks and Move Up Day at the 10 am Worship Service. We invite our students returning to school to bring their backpacks for a congregational blessing!

We will also recognize all the children as they move up into new Sunday School Classes. The God Squad will welcome students entering 5th grade with a Bible.

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## *Deacons' Corner*

The Deacons invite you to a Summer Picnic on Sunday, July 26th following worship. This fellowship event is a wonderful opportunity for our church family to connect, share a meal, and enjoy time together. Please bring your favorite picnic dish to share with others. Reservations are encouraged to help with planning and may be made at the Welcome Center in the Lobby, on the website under upcoming events, or by calling the church office. ●

**by Connie Timmons**

School is out for the summer, but Holly House is in session. Our crafters are working on coastal creations, wreaths, jewelry, and hand-sewn items to add to your décor. As temperatures heat up, we will begin focusing on fall decorations and projects. There is always something new to see at Holly House. Check out our Facebook page! <https://www.facebook.com/CleverCrafter>. Come see us! We are open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 am to noon. We are a mission of our church, and all proceeds go toward that ministry. ●



***Holly House is a mission of our church, and all proceeds go to the support of the church.***



# Capital Campaign Projects Update

*Renew & Rejoice Capital Campaign Progress Report*

BY NANCY FINE, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR



RENEW  
&  
REJOICE  
BUILDING FOR  
GOD'S FUTURE

Things are progressing behind the scenes as we move forward with our *Renew & Rejoice* Capital Campaign projects.

The air conditioning vendor is still working through the permitting process with the city. The good news is that all of the equipment has been staged and is ready for installation as soon as the permit is received. We appreciate your patience as we work through this important step.

With Vacation Bible School now completed, attention can turn to several interior improvement projects. Upcoming work includes painting the interior of the Sanctuary and installing new flooring in the Sanctuary, Lobby, and Auxiliary Rooms. These enhancements will help refresh and beautify our worship and gathering spaces for years to come.

Our focus will also be shifting to renovations in Fellowship Hall, including updates to the kitchen and flooring. These improvements will enhance the functionality and appearance of one of our most frequently used ministry spaces.

We are pleased to report that the Holly House has been painted, giving the building a fresh new look. In addition, Aaron has dedicated many hours to refurbishing the former Courtyard light fixtures, which will soon be installed on the building's exterior. We are grateful for his hard work and commitment to this project.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the *Renew & Rejoice* Campaign. Because we are completing these projects on a cash basis, your continued support is essential to maintaining our momentum. If you have an outstanding pledge, now is an excellent time to consider completing it so we can continue making steady forward progress.

If you have not yet pledged to the campaign, we invite you to consider doing so prayerfully. Pledge forms are available on our website through the Capital Campaign page, or you may complete a form located in the Lobby.

Together, we are renewing our facilities and rejoicing in all that God is accomplishing through our church family. ●

# Meet Our 2026 Deacons

*Our deacons are called to a life of service, compassion, and faith.*

*We are grateful for these faithful members  
who answer God's call to love and serve others.*



## **LAURIE ALEMANY-HLAVATY**

Laurie is originally from Eastern Long Island, NY, and relocated to Ft. Lauderdale in 2003 to escape the daily work commute to Manhattan. After college, Laurie traveled frequently, working for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company for 18 years, then made a career change to the Financial Industry in 1998 to present. Laurie worshipped at Christ Church in Ft. Lauderdale for many years; after moving to Delray, she joined First Delray in 2024. As a little girl, her father was a Deacon at the First Reformed Church of Jamaica, Queens, and she knows he would be very proud that she's following in his footsteps. Laurie has a special bond with her nieces and nephews and enjoys the beach, biking, and spending time with her boyfriend, John (JB), in her free time.



## **GLENN BARTON**

Glenn and his wife, Catherine, moved to Florida from New York in 2018 and found a home at First Delray in 2000. Their daughter Casey married last summer and lives in South Carolina, where she is pursuing her PhD and conducting research on breast cancer. Glenn also plays in the First Delray Ringers bell choir and is involved with the Welcome Team. He enjoys golf, pickleball, and music.



## **DANA BATHURST**

Dana has been blessed to call Delray her hometown for her entire life. Family means everything to her, and she is deeply grateful for the love they share. Dana works in the nonprofit arena, where it is a privilege to support her community. And she does truly believe that a life of faith, kindness, and service is a life well lived, and she is grateful each day for the chance to make a positive difference in the lives of others.



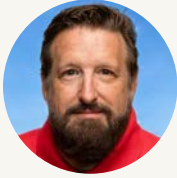
## **ROCKY BOULDIN**

Rocky is a fourth-generation Presbyterian. His father served as a Presbyterian minister for 39 years before retiring, and his mother was a Christian Education Director. Rocky earned his degree from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. At his previous church, he served faithfully as a Deacon and participated in several mission trips, including one to Israel. In 2019, Rocky relocated from Wisconsin to South Florida and soon began attending First Delray regularly. He is honored and enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve the church community. Recently, he joined the Welcome Team.



## **EDDIE BREMAN**

Eddie was the last person baptized in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Leechburg, PA, before it merged with Gray Stone Presbyterian. He grew up in the church community; his parents and grandparents served as Elders and Deacons. He attended Davidson College, a small Presbyterian school in North Carolina. Eddie has worked and lived overseas for much of his life; he is pleased for the opportunity to be part of the Lord's community here at First Delray.



### **WIL BROWN**

Wil, his wife, Melissa, and son, Ian, have lived in Delray Beach since 2008. Wil is from North Carolina, where he graduated from NC State University. He moved to Florida in 1995 and obtained a Master of Public Administration degree from FAU. Wil recently retired as the Internal Auditor for the City of Lake Worth Beach. He enjoys golf, attending sporting events, listening to live music, and the beautiful South Florida weather.



### **DAISY CHIN-LOR**

Daisy Chin-Lor is honored to be ordained as a Deacon and Stephen Minister at First Delray. A lifelong woman of faith, Daisy was baptized in the Presbyterian church in Yonkers and married at Riverdale Presbyterian Church in New York. Following the loss of her beloved, she found renewed purpose through faith, healing, and service to others. A global business executive, Daisy has lived in seven countries and worked in more than 25, shaping her perspective as both a leader and citizen of the world. She later devoted herself to leading a nonprofit think tank in Washington, DC. Daisy lives in Highland Beach and treasures time with her loving family, especially her son Jonathan, daughter-in-law Ase, and granddaughter Kaya, who live in Bangkok, Thailand. One of her greatest joys is a FaceTime call each night hearing Kaya's sweet voice whisper, "Love you, Pou Pou" (Chinese for grandmother).



### **SUSAN HAUGHT**

Susan is married to Steve Haught, another First Delray Deacon. She lived in Oklahoma City, where she practiced law for 31 years before moving to Delray Beach. Susan enjoys traveling with Steve, scuba diving, and other outdoor activities in beautiful Delray Beach.



### **DOROTHY DENAULT**

Dorothy has been a church member for over 25 years and is very happy to be a Deacon. She has five children, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren who love to visit Delray Beach in the winter. In the summer, she joins her family in Jamestown, Rhode Island. Dorothy enjoys gardening, needlepointing, traveling, and playing in the First Delray Ringers bell choir.



### **CHIP DICKSON**

Chip Dickson - Originally from Michigan, Chip and his late wife Ellen moved to Delray Beach from New Jersey in 2018. A graduate of Babson College's BSBA and MBA program, Chip had a 30+ year career in commercial banking and on Wall Street. His three children live in the Northeast US with their families. Chip has been a supporter of the First Delray Concert Series since its inception. He enjoys music, reading, golf, tennis, sailing and being near the shore.



### **PREGI FEDRIANI**

As a mother of 3 children, ages 17-11, Pregi is blessed to call First Delray her second home and family. She earned her hospitality degree in Switzerland and an MBA in New Hampshire, gaining the confidence to own a small family restaurant (Furin) with her husband (Rod) in Delray Beach.



### **LORI HACKENBERG**

Lori and her husband, Ray, moved to South Florida in 2011 from Strongsville, Ohio, where they raised their three daughters. Lori is a retired teacher, having taught half of her career in Ohio and half in Palm Beach County schools. Ray and Lori live in Boca Greens in West Boca with their little dog, Millie. They are both now retired and enjoy golf and spending time with their three grandchildren, Lexi, Garrett, and Calvin.



### STEVE HAUGHT

Steve and his wife, Susan, moved from Oklahoma City to Delray Beach in 2020 and immediately started attending First Delray. Before retiring, Steve practiced civil litigation law for 40 years and also served as a judge and arbitrator. He and Susan enjoy walking the beach and Atlantic Avenue, as well as frequent international travel



### BEN JOELLA

Benjamin and his wife Laura have lived in South Florida for 20 years. Father to Grace and Luca Joella, Ben spends his working hours performing on the double bass with professional orchestras in South Florida. He also operates Joella Basses, building handmade double basses as well as repairing and restoring vintage instruments. As a first-time Deacon, Ben is enthused to learn the ways of First Delray and to meet and grow more familiar with the church's membership.



### PAUL LUDWIG

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Paul graduated from Valparaiso University in economics. Paul earned a master's degree in ministry from Palm Beach Atlantic University. He has been a member of the church for ten years and serves on the Mission Outreach Team. Paul has lived in Delray nearly 40 years and enjoys swimming, surfing, snorkeling, snowboarding, and horse trail riding. Currently, Paul is journeying through the entire Bible in a year for the sixth time. Ask Paul how; it takes less than 25 minutes a day.



### CRAIG MATTHEWS

Originally from West Virginia, Craig moved to Florida almost 50 years ago and retired after teaching science for over 30 years. Craig and Jean have been married 40 years, and they have one son, Craig Jr., who lives nearby. Craig enjoys gardening, birdwatching at his bird feeders, reading, traveling, and walking his dog Chester, an amazing Goldendoodle, many times a day.



### JEAN MATTHEWS

Recently retired from the Palm Beach County Parks and Recreation Department —enjoys gardening, hiking, and travel. Jean is an avid reader and incorporates yoga into her regular exercise.



### SANDY & TYLER MCGILVRAY

Sandy commented, "What a privilege it is to serve as a Deacon with my son, Tyler. Tyler has been blessed with a servant's heart. He loves helping Aaron Strippel work around the church and learning how to tackle new jobs. Tyler was a member of the Navy ROTC at Boca High. Through this organization, he further developed his love for country and God. He also developed many friendships through Special Olympics growing up in South Florida. If you ever need anything . . . prayers, friendship, or a hand with anything, Tyler is your guy." Sandy is blessed to be a Sunday School teacher at First Delray under the leadership of Grace Hood.





### SONIA POZZI

Originally from São Paulo, Brazil, Sonia was a psychologist for over 16 years. Here, in the USA, she has a Master's degree and a license as a Mental Health Counselor. She is working with the Military population, offering Psychotherapy, either virtually or in person, in Boca Raton. First Delray has been a blessing to her; the church feels like family, and she's happy and proud to be part of it.



### GINA RODEBERG

Gina is the fifth of five daughters born and raised in the "Venice of America" (Fort Lauderdale, Florida). She attended Nova from Kindergarten through High School, then the University of South Florida (Fine Arts). She met her husband, Stephen, while constructing sets for a local theatre/musical production company in South Florida. She and her husband are the blessed parents of Sarah Michelle, Joy Nadean, and Rebecca Marie (Steve's request for only daughters . . . God does answer most prayers; ask Steve!). Gina and Steve have been married for almost 34 years. Gina's current career is with Brightline Trains Company as a Train Attendant. She enjoys gardening, fitness, and searching for more beautiful lighthouses to explore.



### STEPHEN RODEBERG

Born and raised in Minnesota, Stephen attended Western Wisconsin Technical Institute after high school and received his Associate Degree in Audio-Visual. He traveled to South Florida in 1981 after securing a job on a cruise ship sailing out of Miami. After leaving the cruise industry, he applied for an Audio-Visual Specialist position with Broward County and has been in that position for 35 years. He married his wife Gina 33 years ago and raised three girls together. He currently lives in Boynton Beach.



### CONNIE SMITH

Connie joined First Delray when formal sanctuary services were suspended in her former Boca Raton church. She is a lifelong Presbyterian, mother to two grown married children, and grandmother to four well-traveled teens who have lived abroad with their respective families. In her active career in metropolitan Chicago, she was a science teacher and a college-level Biology instructor. After moving to SOFLA in 1985, she devoted her time to listing and selling 320 residential properties and helping her children prepare for their respective careers. Her volunteer work has centered around church activities and raising scholarship funds as an active Skidmore College alumna. She is very grateful for the opportunity to make new friends and serve at First Delray.



### JANE WHITE

Jane was born in Kentucky to A.D and Deana Cowgell. She grew up as the youngest of four sisters. After college, Jane enjoyed being an elementary school teacher. She moved to Florida in 2001, after raising her two sons. Jane enjoys Pilates, golf, traveling, and, of course, her two grandchildren who live in Nashville. Jane shares that interest with her husband, Pat, whom she met in Florida.



## Thank you to our 2026 Deacons

*Your willingness to serve is an inspiration to our church family.*

*We are grateful for your faith, your hearts, and your dedication to God's work.*



# MILAGRO CENTER

On behalf of all of us at Milagro Center, I want to express our heartfelt thanks to First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach for your generous support and long-standing partnership. We are truly blessed to count you among our most faithful friends, and your continued commitment has brought joy, hope, and opportunity to our children and teens.

Over the years, our relationship with First Presbyterian Church of Delray Beach has been so much more than just financial gifts. We remember when our students had the honor of performing at your church with the Club Singers of the Palm Beaches in both 2018 and 2020, both unforgettable experiences that gave our kids a chance to shine in front of a loving and supportive community. In April 2024, your church donated pajamas and books, wrapping our students in both comfort and care. You have also given the joy of Christmas gifts to our children who might not otherwise receive them, making the holidays truly awesome. One of our own mentors, Ms. Merrill, is a proud member of your congregation and this is surely a beautiful reminder of how deeply our communities are connected.

Your financial contributions have made a lasting impact as well. Your generosity allowed us to maintain a safe, nurturing environment where our children and teens feel welcomed, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential. Your impactful funds were used to maintain our Reading Intervention Specialist for K–5 students with reading delays. This is crucial, as the need for this program is greater now than ever before, and your support allowed us to continue it without interruption. Your financial support extended across all grade levels, helping us to provide tutoring and Language Arts Instruction.

Your financial contributions also helped support the STARS StoryMakers Program, which empowered our economically-challenged, academically at-risk elementary students to become authors. They learned about the process of story writing and character development and had a chance to meet a published children's author and ask them questions. Then they wrote and illustrated their own book!

Every dollar you've donated, every gift of pajamas, books, and Christmas presents, every performance opportunity you've provided for our children, has made a tremendous difference. You've given more than resources, you've given memories, opportunities, and hope. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for walking alongside us, believing in our mission, and embracing our students as part of your church family.

Sincerely,

*Barbara Stark*

President & CEO ●



## *The Welcoming Ministry at First Delray*

*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10*

**F**rom the first day, when the Welcome Team was formed five years ago, it has filled a special purpose—greeting members and visitors at the Lobby doors. Serving on the Welcome Team offers a unique opportunity to be the first person to greet a member or visitor upon arrival. A cheerful welcome into this beautiful house of worship prepares the mind and body to be warmed by Christ’s love, enjoy fellowship, and listen to the word of God.

**M**ary Martínéz says that being a greeter is “being on the front line of caring at First Delray.” In addition to serving on the Welcome Team, you can find Mary busy helping in other ministries such as the Offering Team, the Concert Team, and the Pastor Search Committee. Mary has been an active member since 2010, after moving here from Princeton, NJ. Previously, she served as an Elder, Deacon, Trustee, and even sang in the choir!

“**A**rtsy” Mary, as she is known in the Gmail world, uses her creative gifts and love of the arts in her charity and volunteer work. She is currently a senior docent at the Boca Raton Museum, volunteers at the Palm Beach Watercolor Society, serves on the Board of the History Club where she and her husband live, and still finds time to work on her own art.

**T**he warm, personal contact of greeting people on Sunday mornings brings a unique joy to Mary. And she reflects that joy onto everyone she greets with her bold smile and bright eyes!

**I**n April, we greeted 2,313 worshippers for service, including Easter and Maundy Thursday, and in May, 1,023 people came through our doors for worship. Attendance continues to grow at First Delray, as does the programming and ministries. This is a wonderful and enjoyable way to serve with a small commitment.

**S**chedules are offered one to two months in advance. Greeters usually serve once every four to six weeks, and we are always looking for new people to join the team. This is a wonderful and enjoyable way to serve with a small commitment.

**P**lease contact Carolyn Kettle (recruiting/scheduling for the Welcome Team) to join this ministry—to welcome people warmly and sincerely into this place of worship. Reach out to Carolyn (561-504-9550 or carolynskettle@gmail.com) for more information or to join the team! ●



# First Delray Concert Series

*Music by the Sea*

## DANCING IN THE AISLES? YES!

Psalm 30:11: *“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing...”*

Well, friends, all I can say is that if you weren't there, you missed another fantastic concert on April 19! And, as hard as it is to believe, there was dancing in the aisles of First Delray! Not everyone gets as much joy out of dancing as I do, but if this music didn't inspire even the most quiet and self-conscious among us to move their feet, I don't know what would. If people weren't up, they were certainly “bopping” in their seats to the finale number, “In the Mood,” as audience, soloists, and our Concert Team “cut the rug” down our center aisle. Even the trombone players were on their feet playing and swaying their instruments to the beat.

The April concert, “A Sentimental Journey,” featuring the Matt Calderin Big Band and three of our fantastic soloists, was all that we could have asked for as a Concert Team: Great performers, terrific collaboration of the Big Band with our team, soloists who were perfect for the diverse range of musical offerings that were included, and an audience who were “in the groove”!

Matt Calderin, who leads the band from his drum set, is an incredibly talented musician who has assembled a group of enthusiastic and dedicated band members and sets a high bar for everyone's performances. These musicians love to play and show it. While the group leaned into our desire for numbers that would offer singing opportunities for our soloists, they treated us to several outstanding all-instrumental numbers, including “West Side Story Medley” and “Tribute to the Duke.”

If you heard Neil Nelson's pitch for the concert during the Sunday worship, or have seen him in other concert performances, you know that he was perfect (and perfectly attired in a variety of suits and dashing hats) for the music of the Big Band. As the first soloist on the program, Neil got us all in “the mood” with “Fly Me to the Moon,” an upbeat, rhythmic invitation to let the music carry us beyond any earthly worries we might have brought in with us.

In addition to his solo contributions, Neil paired perfectly with Kathleen Shelton to do two absolutely charming and romantic duets—“Baby It's Cold Outside” and “Cheek to Cheek.” Kathleen, one of our most versatile singers, also shone in her solo numbers, drawing us into the sultry and longing strains of “Misty” and “Come Rain or Come Shine.” And then there was Rachel Castillo – one of our newest regular soloists, who delighted the audience with a range of numbers from “A-Tisket, A-Tasket” to “All of Me,” and including a standout interpretation of “God Bless the Child.” Lest we lose sight of why our Concert Team conceived of its mission, Greg Diaz -- Big Band member, saxophonist and singer—brought us back to our goal of spreading God's love through music with his own composition and performance of “Amazing Grace.” All we could do was say, “Amen.”

Did I mention how much the audience loved this concert? Well, we heard you! We are inviting Matt and the band back for 2027!

So how do we top our April success? It's a challenge, but we think you will enjoy our final concert of the year on October 25, "Lights, Camera, Music!" almost as much as the Big Band. Think about your favorite movie, and we will probably have a piece of music from it on this program. If you have attended our previous concerts, you know how well our soloists interpret what we might call "popular" music. It will be a joy to be taken by the music into the familiar worlds and our memories of the afternoons and evenings we have spent in front of the Silver Screen. (Who knows, October may find us swaying in the aisles to the theme song from "The Way We Were" . . . Join us to find out!) Following the concert, the Team will express our thanks to those who generously sponsored our endeavors this year at a reception in the Fellowship Hall.

Tickets for the October 25 concert can be reserved on the First Delray website (\$20 per person) or purchased by calling the church office or visiting the Welcome Center on any Sunday.

And what about 2027? Concert goers have already been looking for the 2027 brochures! We should have these available by the end of the summer. They will be mailed to all congregants and friends of the congregation, as well as to anyone who has asked to be added to our mailing list. It is not too early to become a sponsor for our upcoming season! ●



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**by Laura DeBrita**

*Stephen Ministry Outreach Leader / Coordinator*

## *Stephen Ministry*

Let me introduce myself. My name is Laura DeBrita, and I'm the Stephen Ministries Outreach Coordinator for our newly developed Stephen Ministries here at First Presbyterian.

As Stephen Ministers, our role is to provide confidential companionship and care for those experiencing difficult times in their lives, such as divorce, illness, the loss of a spouse, grief, or other life challenges.

In my role as your Outreach Coordinator, I oversee the conduct and evaluation of care receiver interviews, match them with a Stephen Minister, and coordinate with our pastor and, as needed, other Stephen Minister Leaders throughout the care receiver process.

We are highly trained in the Stephen Ministry protocol and eager to serve any fellow member of the First Presbyterian community.

I'm looking forward to a successful Stephen Ministry here at First Delray Beach. ●

## AFRICA OUTREACH

As members of the First Delray, you may be aware of the many community contributions and charitable works performed through our Mission Outreach Ministry, under the leadership of Team Chair Jeanne Heavilin. These include The Soup Kitchen of Boynton Beach, Campo Alegre at the Farmworker Children's Center, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, Drug Abuse Foundation, Caridad Center, and others.

But did you know that the Outreach Team members are reaching well beyond the boundaries of Delray Beach, Boynton Beach, Boca Raton, and the other municipalities of Palm Beach County to include the country of Lesotho in southern Africa?

Lesotho is a small mountain country completely surrounded by South Africa. Mission Outreach Team member Sally Harwood happens to be president of the Board of Ministry of Hope, Lesotho (MOHL), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides a home for vulnerable infants, children, and youth in Maseru, the capital city. She led a mission trip to Ministry of Hope Lesotho in January and will be leading two more in January 2027. We invite you to read more about this lifesaving ministry—and think about coming with us to Lesotho to see it for yourself.

Ministry of Hope Lesotho was created in 2009 to nurture the quality of life for impoverished and orphaned children, before returning them to their families or placing them with adoptive families. It got its start at the height of an HIV epidemic that was taking the lives of both parents and children. (Lesotho has the second-highest HIV rate in the world.) Over the past 16 years, MOHL has provided nourishment, medical care, education, and Christ's love to some 200 orphaned and neglected children who have gone on to live productive lives, in some cases even earning college degrees. We do all this from a three-bedroom home with a round-the-clock staff of caregivers.

The Ministry is supported primarily by the generous donations and volunteer service of individuals, churches, and other organizations in the U.S. This generous support has never been more vital, given the ongoing war in Ukraine (an important food source for Lesotho), cuts in USAID funding (which supported public health services in the country) and the imposition of U.S. tariffs (the highest in the world, resulting in massive unemployment in Lesotho's textile industry). More recently, the war in Iran has raised fuel prices significantly, which affects not only transportation but also home heating. At Ministry of Hope, as in many local homes, there is no central heating, so residents rely on paraffin heaters and must purchase the fuel to keep them going.

But the country and its children are incredibly resilient. The national government has been able to cover 80% of the cost of the HIV antiretroviral drugs that many of our children rely on. Gifts from local grocers, as well as smart shopping by our staff, are keeping our children fed. Most of our children arrive malnourished (especially the babies) but are quickly nursed and fed back to health, as you can see in the attached pictures. Once they are strong enough, the children go to local schools, where they learn English in addition to the native Sesotho. (They get tested regularly in English, so they love to practice with us when we visit.)

The mission trip organized and led by Sally this past January included 12 volunteers from eight different churches from the southeast, New York City, and California. When they weren't playing with the children, these volunteers worked to refurbish playground equipment, repaired and painted the entire exterior of the home, and painted the kitchen as well. Meanwhile, generous contributions from churches and the business owned by Sally's husband, Ed (also on the Outreach Team) enabled construction of a covered lanai for outside gatherings and meals, as well as a badly needed roof replacement and a working washing machine.

# JANUARY 2026 MISSION TRIP

*Serving. Building. Loving. Together.*



*Volunteers, children, and staff from January 2026 Mission Trip to Ministry of Hope, Lesotho*



*First DeRay church member Ed Rule and team of painter helpers are hard at it!*



*The new tire swing was a hit!*



*Children quickly gather at the arrival of First DeRay church member Sally Harwood and other MOHL Mission volunteers.*



*The little ones love to be held closely*

**JOIN US IN 2027!**  
 Mission trips to  
 Ministry of Hope Lesotho

**JANUARY 13-22, 2027**  
**JANUARY 21-30, 2027**

**INTERESTED?**  
 Contact Sally through the  
 Mission Outreach Team or email  
 at [scharwood2@gmail.com](mailto:scharwood2@gmail.com).

Learn more at  
[ministryofhopelesotho.org](http://ministryofhopelesotho.org).

# THE LOCK OUT 2026



*BOWLING. GAMES. NERF WARS.  
SUNRISE AT THE BEACH.*



**by Rachel Therrell**  
Family Ministry Associate

In May, we introduced a new generation of Youth to a fun-filled tradition in the church. The LOCK OUT. Who remembers staying out all night with their church youth group? It is a night of great memories for so many adults.

We started the night with bowling and, of course, food! Then, we moved on to arcade games and won some cool prizes. Next, we made a pit stop at a gas station to fuel up on energy drinks to make it through the night. After, we headed to the Delray Teen Center where two wonderful city employees had a bunch of activities ready to go. We played basketball, Manhunt, had a Nerf War, and played video games. Around 3 a.m., we drove to Taco Bell, where we discovered the dining room was not open, but thankfully they let the group walk up to the drive-thru window! We regrouped at the church for a few hours of rest and TV time. Lastly, we walked to the beach to see the sunrise and pray together. The group is already asking when the next LOCK OUT will be.

The youth group is on break until August. Please contact Rachel Therrell to be added to our email list to be included in all the information about important dates and activities. We are always looking for Adult volunteers. If God is calling you to work with youth-aged children, we would love to have your help. ●



An article on weeds caught my eye last week. The author suggested that we embrace weeds—take advantage of the many already growing for free in our yards that our yards should consist of at least 70% native plants to support pollinators and insects, which feed our beautiful native birds. In fact, our first step should be identification of those so-called weeds in our yards. Now, I know there is an app for that. However, how much more enjoyable is it to explore one of South Florida's many public gardens, where the plants are labeled?

Today I drive to Constitution Park off Hillsboro Boulevard in Deerfield, where the parking is plentiful and free. While my original purpose was to discover Florida native plants that many call weeds, I find that this park houses not a garden, but an arboretum—a tree zoo. Tropical and subtropical trees from all over the world grow here. Not what I originally had in mind, but I decide to explore.

At the entrance to the arboretum, two unusual trees catch my eye: a shaving brush tree with a few remaining hot pink 'brushes' on the end of its limbs and a marigold tree. The name marigold tree puzzles me: the brilliant yellow flowers resemble daisies, rather than marigolds.

Knock. Knock. As a breeze gently sways through the stands of bamboo trees to my left, they play their gentle hollow drum songs. Japanese black bamboo, Chinese tropical blue bamboo, and an unnamed straw-colored bamboo. Staring at the tall woody stems, I can't determine if this latter bamboo is a non-invasive clumping bamboo I would want in my yard or a running invasive bamboo—a woody weed whose underground rhizomes would quickly take over my entire lawn.

Separating desirable plants from weeds. I remember a parable Jesus

related about that (Matthew 13:24-43). Maybe you remember it, too. A man planted wheat in a field. An enemy sneaked in and planted weeds. The owner let the wheat and weeds grow together until harvest, when he separated the two, taking the wheat into his barn and burning the weeds. I was taught (and probably taught others in Sunday school) that this parable was Jesus' way of saying that evil and good exist in the world, but it is not up to us to judge other people. That job belongs to God.

Sitting a minute and reflecting on that parable, I wonder about those weeds. Jesus does say the owner waited until harvest time to separate the wheat from the weeds, because he did not want to mistakenly pull up the wheat when uprooting the weeds. There are days I resemble a weed. Days I would rather forget. Days ending in evenings when I bless the Lord for his saving grace. I would bet that at any given time, many of us resemble weeds. How wonderful it is that we have a God who is patient with us? Who is not quick to judge.

“Look! Look! A rainbow tree!” Two children recall my attention to my immediate surroundings. Ahead is an enormous tree whose smooth bark could pass as a modern art canvas. Streams and rivulets of purple, pink, orange, red, and lime green run down its huge trunk. The children's parent identifies it as a rainbow eucalyptus. Beautiful! However, I might consider it a weed if its sprawling root system destroyed my driveway.

The path curves to my right, and I spy the most ridiculous-looking tree I have ever seen. Halfway up its trunk, dangling on what resembles a large, elongated spring, is a purplish cone. The undersides of the open leaves at the top of the cone are a brilliant red. What

on earth? The answer comes when I see a bunch of small bananas several feet above the hanging cone. Ridiculous looking. Sure. But the fruit is ambrosia.

My walk continues among cashew trees, pansy trees, hydrangea trees, Brazilian rain trees, and others too numerous to mention here. Near the arboretum's exit, Zombie palms and peach palms line the walkway. Ouch! I make the mistake of touching what looked like soft peach fuzz on that latter palm and find instead tiny spikes. Maybe another lesson in judgment.

Weeds and flowers, weeds and grain, weeds and trees all growing together. Diaz De Villegas, in his article, says we should let weeds grow, even suggests it's a good thing to do. And maybe it is, but who am I to make that call?

As my walk ends, I send up a prayer for me and for you. Not for discernment, but for patience and understanding. For the ability to see beyond the obvious, to look for the positives—in plants and trees and people. ●

Diaz De Villegas, Rob. The case for weeds: Our unsung native Florida plants. [https://blog/wfsu.org/blog-coastal-health/2021/01/the\\_case\\_for\\_weeds\\_our\\_unsung\\_native\\_Florida\\_plants/](https://blog/wfsu.org/blog-coastal-health/2021/01/the_case_for_weeds_our_unsung_native_Florida_plants/)



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## Sunday Morning Worship Services

10 a.m.

