



A Message from Christian

June 2026

United in Christ: Celebrating Our First Year of Shared Ministry By Rev. Christian Johnson, Shared Pastor

When my wife and I moved from the Jersey Shore to Arizona in January 2024, shared pastoral ministry between two congregations was nowhere on my radar. Yet here we are, approaching the one-year mark of a beautiful partnership between First Presbyterian Church of Mesa and Gilbert Presbyterian Church—and I could not be more grateful for the way God has led us.

This shared ministry has been a gift to both congregations. From where I stand, both churches are stronger, more vibrant, and more deeply rooted in their shared life in Christ because of this covenant. We have discovered that when we pool our gifts, energy, and resources, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the purest joys of this past year has been our joint worship services. There is a special grace when the people of Mesa and Gilbert gather as one to sing, pray, hear the Word, and celebrate the sacraments together. These moments feel like a glimpse of the heavenly worship we will one day share—when every nation, tribe, and tongue will stand before the throne of the Lamb in perfect unity. It is a foretaste of the kingdom, and it fills me with hope every time.

This arrangement is also a living witness to one of the deepest convictions of our Presbyterian tradition: that we are a *connectional* church. We do not stand alone. We belong to one another. By sharing a pastor, by coordinating ministries, and by supporting each other's mission, we are living out the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17. In a fragmented world, this partnership stands as a quiet but powerful testimony that Christ's body is one.

This shared ministry has also placed us in the role of pioneers within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As far as we are aware, this particular model of shared pastoral leadership between two established congregations is new ground for our denomination. We are the first to walk this path in this way, and already others—even here in the Presbytery of the Grand Canyon—are looking to our covenant as a template and seeking to learn from our experience.

Of course, any new arrangement brings adjustments and growing pains. Yet we are learning to remember that each congregation has always been Jesus' church, not ours. We long to hold both First Mesa and Gilbert with open hands, trusting that the Lord of the church will add and subtract as he sees fit for the sake of his kingdom.

A wonderful example of what this collaboration makes possible is the calling of Damian Martin as our shared Director of Music. Damian's exceptional gifts, pastoral heart, and leadership have blessed both congregations in ways that

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simply would not have been possible if we had remained separate. His presence among us is a direct fruit of our decision to walk this road together, and both churches are richer for it.

As we look to the future, I am genuinely excited about what more God has in store. There are new opportunities for joint mission, shared discipleship, combined fellowship, and collaborative outreach that we are only beginning to imagine. This covenant has opened doors we didn't know existed, and I believe the best is yet to come.

To the members of both First Mesa and Gilbert: thank you. Thank you for your openness, your trust, your patience, and your partnership in the Gospel. You have embraced this shared ministry with grace and enthusiasm, and it shows in the life of both congregations. May we continue to grow together in faith, hope, and love as we seek to bear witness to the love of Christ in the East Valley and beyond.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Christian Johnson

Shared Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Mesa & Gilbert Presbyterian Church

Free Community Dinner



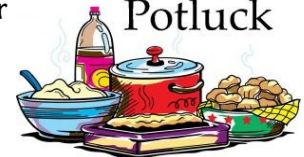
Mission

Cool off at the community dinner on Wednesday, June 3rd, at 5:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. We will be having chicken salad croissants, along with a variety of salads and a nice cool dessert. This will be the last dinner for the summer.

Fellowship

Because summer worship happens in Fellowship Hall through Labor Day, there will be no potlucks until September 27th. See you then!

Monthly Potluck



Join in the celebration of Dennis and Darlene Sitzler's 50th wedding anniversary on June 28th (really this time!). Cake will be provided! Congratulations Dennis and Darlene!



FROM THE CLERK'S DESK

Stated Session Meeting May 17, 2026

APRIL STATISTICS

Membership: 146

April 2026 Avg. Attendance: $90 + 58 = 148$

April 2025 Avg. Attendance: $107 + 57 = 164$

APRIL FINANCE NUMBERS

Actual Income \$30,001	Budgeted Income \$45,396
Actual Expense \$42,863	Budgeted Expense \$45,396
YTD Actual Income \$155,863	YTD Budgeted Income \$181,583
YTD Actual Expense \$163,813	YTD Budgeted Expense \$181,583
YTD Capital Income \$35,199	YTD Budgeted Capital Income \$17,066

2026 Per Capita

\$42.11 per member (based on our 12/31/2024 membership of 182) (\$25.85 to GC Presbytery, \$5.00 to Synod of the Southwest, \$11.26 for General Assembly)

REPORTS / MOTIONS PASSED

Approved the Minutes of the April Session Meeting and the Called Congregational Meeting of May 3.
Approved Worship Commission's motion to have a joint service at Gilbert PC on October 4 for World Communion Sunday at 9 a.m.
Incoming Officers will be ordained and/or installed in worship on Sunday, May 31. Cheryl Gregory, Worship Elder; Jan Montgomery, Stewardship & Finance Elder; Dennis Sitzler, Property Elder will be installed. Matthew Sweeney will be ordained and installed as a Deacon. Darlene Sitzler will be installed as a Deacon and Deb Rosen and Barbara Walker are re-upping and installed as Deacons.
Departing Elders Dave Frederick and Brent Gregory, having been on Session for six years, were recognized for their service and Jo Wilson was thanked for her work, along with the Gilbert Personnel Elder, in the writing of all the procedures for Pastor Christian to be the first Arizona Pastor to serve two churches.

My term as Clerk ends May 31, 2027. I cannot re-up. I'm looking for someone who knows how to take meeting minutes and would like to talk to me about being a Clerk in training. There is more to being Clerk than just taking minutes and anyone who is interested in doing it would need to attend Session meetings well in advance of June 2027.

REACH UP AND OUT IN FAITH AND LOVE
(Mission statement approved by Session 8/25/2024)

Carol Gerlach, Clerk



2026 Camp Dates - Overnight Camp in Greer

- 10-12th Grades* | June 7 – 12
- 8-10th Grades* | June 14 – 19
- 7-8th Grades* | June 21 – 26
- 5-6th Grades* | June 28 – July 3
- 4-6th Grades* | July 6 – 10

Register at Montlure.org
 *Grades are for Fall 2026



PW ladies ended the 2025-26 season with a combined luncheon on May 12, 2026. The last lesson in the Bible study was completed, and the study was enjoyed by all; such quality productions. Next year's study is United Through Christ, Bound to Each Other, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians by Rhonda Mawhood Lee. All women are invited to join us as we meet the second Tuesday of each month at 11:00 a.m. for a combined meeting starting in September.



PW has acquired some **colorful** round and rectangular cloth tablecloths with matching cloth napkins. **Everyone is invited to use them** from the hall cupboards! No permission is needed to use them, just please wash them and return them to their proper bins! This applies to all the linens.

As a result, we are purging the super-short white cloths that barely cover the top of the tables, so they are 60 inches. If you could use one (or 2 or 3), leave a message or text for Carol Anderson at (480) 272-5517 soon before we dispose of them. They are free, of course, and we hope people can use them at their homes.

Until fall, peace of Christ be with each of you!

In the Wilderness: Where God Meets Us

A Word from Pastor Christian • Summer 2026

Dear Friends,

In just two weeks I will have the joy of serving as chaplain and speaker at Montlure Camp with our high school campers. As I prepare, I find myself thinking not only about those young people but about all of us here in the Valley this summer. The camp theme, “In the Wilderness,” holds a powerful word for every one of us—no matter our age or circumstances.

Throughout Scripture the wilderness is never a place of abandonment. It is a place of encounter. It is where God guides, provides, reveals, calls, and restores. The six daily movements at camp are designed to help campers notice God’s presence in fresh ways. I want to share them with you because these same movements can shape our discipleship right here at home.

Wilderness Awes (Psalm 8)

We begin with wonder. The wilderness reminds us how small we are—yet how deeply known and loved by God. This summer, I invite you to notice the beauty around you, even in the desert heat, and remember that you belong to God and to this family of faith.

Wilderness Leads (1 Kings 19)

God met exhausted Elijah not with pressure but with food, rest, and a gentle whisper. God’s leadership is compassionate and attentive. I invite you to notice the quiet ways God is caring for you and leading you—one step, one provision at a time.

Wilderness Reveals (Luke 10)

On a dangerous road, a Samaritan shows us that neighborliness is revealed in how we respond to someone’s need. The wilderness can expose what really matters. Who might God be inviting you to see and care for this summer?

Wilderness Rests (Exodus 16)

God taught the Israelites to gather daily manna and to rest on the Sabbath. Rest is a gift rooted in trust that God is enough. I hope you’ll practice small, intentional pauses this summer—moments to receive rather than strive.

Wilderness Calls (Matthew 14)

Peter stepped out in fear and began to sink, yet Jesus reached out immediately. Fear is real, but grace gets the last word. What gentle (or bold) step might God be inviting you to take? Remember—we never face the wilderness alone.

Wilderness Awaits (Jeremiah 29)

God has plans for peace and hope. When we seek God with our whole heart, we find God. The wilderness changes us. We never enter any season alone, and good things await.

A Companion on the Journey

Our summer worship series through the Psalms—“A Playlist for the Roadtrip of Life”—can be a helpful companion to these themes. The Psalms give us words to pray, lament, give thanks, and trust as we walk through our own wilderness seasons. Together, the camp movements and the Psalms can deepen our sense of God’s presence with us all summer long.



As a church family we are called to create space where everyone belongs, to practice welcome and care, to rest together, to step out in mission, and to hold hope for one another. I invite you to journey with these wilderness movements this summer. You might choose one each week to pray about or talk over with a friend. If you have a camper in your life, ask them what they're noticing. We'll also create simple resources, including a shared worship playlist, so we can carry these gifts together.

While the summer heat can tempt us to go dormant, my prayer is that God will send refreshing "monsoon rains" of grace into our lives and our life together—deep renewal we can carry into the fall. May what we encounter in the wilderness shape us as disciples who are sent on mission, rooted in the love of Jesus. Please pray for me and for our campers at Montlure. You are held in prayer as well.

Hit the Road with the Psalms! New Summer Sermon Series Launches This Sunday

Dear Friends,



Summer is the season of roadtrips — windows down, favorite songs playing, and the open road stretching ahead. This year we're bringing that spirit into worship with a brand-new sermon series: **"Psalms: A Playlist for the Roadtrip of Life."**

Launching **this Sunday, May 31**, and running through September 6, we'll journey through the Psalms as the original soundtrack for every season of the soul. These ancient songs of praise, lament, thanksgiving, and trust have been the church's companion for thousands of years — and every track ultimately points us to Jesus, the One who prayed, wept, and rejoiced through them. As we sing these ancient songs together, we'll discover how they find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus and how the risen Lord makes them real in our lives today.

This Sunday – Week 1: Psalm 1 | "The Blessed Life – Two Ways, One Tree"

The series opens with a beautiful picture: the person who delights in God's Word is like a tree planted by streams of water. Jesus is the truly blessed Man who perfectly fulfilled the law and became the Tree of Life for us.

We will also celebrate the installation of new officers during worship — a joyful moment of recognizing God's call on leaders in our congregation.

Whether you're cruising through a season of joy, walking through lament, learning to give thanks in every circumstance, or growing in steady trust, the Psalms have a song for you — and every song leads us to Jesus.

Join us this summer as we sing these ancient words together. Bring a friend, a neighbor, or someone who needs to hear that God meets us on every mile of the journey. Let's hit the road together in the Psalms!

With gratitude and hope in Christ,
Rev. Christian Johnson

June Birthdays



Heather McKee	1st
Renita Jurgensen	2nd
Ines McGrath	2nd
Ellen Hickey	3rd
Victoria Martin	3rd
Gretchen Frederick	7th
Zoe Garlin	8th
Shirley Martz	9th
Rosie Mills	9th
Ellen Gillespie	10th
Jack Oliver	12th
Todd Ramsey	12th
Grace Martin	14th
Joan White	14th
Bert Lanstra	16th
Kristen Johnson	17th
Cheryl Gregory	18th
Gail Soderquist	18th
Jack Gunter	25th
Ann Harbin	28th
Carol Anderson	29th

Editor's Note: If your birthday is missing or we have the wrong date, please call the office so we can update our records. We wish a special day to anyone we have missed.

Calendar Notes

June

Worship every Sunday at 11:00 a.m.
in the Fellowship Hall or online

Adult Christian Education at 9:30 a.m., Parlor

Food donations taken every Sunday

Clothing Closet donations taken every Sunday
Mesa Mercy Market open every Friday between
8:00 and 9:00 a.m.

June 3

Community Dinner

June 6

Music Ministries Joint Potluck

June 7

Deacons meet

June 7—12

Senior High I at Montlure

June 8—12

Montlure Camp in the City

June 14—19

Senior High II at Montlure

June 21

Father's Day
Session meets

June 21—26

Junior High at Montlure

June 28—July 3

Juniors I at Montlure

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LA PALABRA

A publication for members and friends, published monthly.

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Linda Reeves, Office Manager/Publications
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