



First  
Presbyterian  
Church

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New Bern, North Carolina



# Faith Formation

*Adult Education Classes &  
Peer Groups  
Summer 2026*

*Times and locations are correct as of 5/21/2026, but can change due to holidays, health, and group needs. We'll do our best to keep you updated through the website, newsletter, and worship bulletins*

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# A Quick Glance at this Summer's Faith Formation Sunday Morning Schedule

*Join one of our Faith Formation classes from 9:40-10:40 am. All are welcome!*

*June 7-July 5 Session House*

*Led by Anna Pinckney Straight*

Shall We Long Endure? The American Experiment  
and the Christian Faith

See class description for details.

*July 12-September 6 Owl Room*

*Led by various facilitators*

Voices of Faith: A Multimedia Summer

See class description for details.

*June 7-September 6 Session House Parlor*

*Led by George Evans*

The Present Word

See class description for details.

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# Sunday Morning Classes

*Every Sunday from June 7-July 5 from 8:40am-9:40am*

## Shall We Long Endure? The American Experiment and the Christian Faith

*Led by Anna Pinckney Straight*

*Session House*

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, many are asking: *What sustains a people—and what helps us endure?* This five-week class invites us into that question through the lens of Christian faith.

Using a sermon series from Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, we'll explore the intersection of scripture and some of the foundational texts of our common life—engaging themes like dignity, justice, responsibility, and belonging. Each week, we'll watch a sermon together and then enter into conversation.

This class is open to all—whether you come with strong convictions, honest questions, or simply a desire to listen more deeply. Come for one week or for the whole series—and come ready to think, to listen, and to wonder together what it might mean to live faithfully in this moment of our shared life.

### **Weekly Themes:**

**June 7** – *Endowed By Their Creator* (Genesis 1:24–27 & The Declaration of Independence)

**June 14** – *Perfecting the Union* (Matthew 25:31–46 & The U.S. Constitution)

**June 21** – *Remember Egypt, Remember England* (Deuteronomy 24:17–22; Romans 13:8–12 & The Bill of Rights)

**June 28** – *The Unfinished Work of the Living* (Ephesians 2:19–22 & The Gettysburg Address)

**July 5** – *The Virtues and Vices of Moderates* (Revelation 3:14–20; Philippians 4:4–9 & Letter from Birmingham Jail)

*Every Sunday from July 12-September 6 from 8:40am-9:40am*

## Voices of Faith: A Multimedia Summer

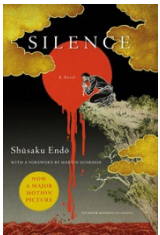
*Owl Room*

*Led by various facilitators*

This summer, we're offering a relaxed, come-as-you-are class built around thoughtful books and conversations that brush up against faith and everyday life. Each week, a facilitator will share something they've been reading or listening to—a book, an interview, an idea—and open up space for reflection and conversation together.

There's no preparation needed, and no pressure to attend every session. Each gathering stands on its own, offering something meaningful whether it's your first time or one of many. It's a simple way to stay connected, to be curious, and to explore where faith meets the world around us.

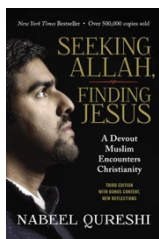
*July 12 – Wendy Moeller presents*



### ***Silence: A Novel by Shusaku Endo and film adaptation by Martin Scorsese***

This haunting novel by a Japanese author is a piece of historical fiction about Portuguese Catholic missionary priests to Japan in the 17th century. And what does that have to do with 21st century, American Presbyterians in New Bern, North Carolina? Their issues writ large are our issues also: Where is God in the silence of suffering? And where do we go looking for Him in the testing that God's silence brings? Are there times when right actions trump right beliefs? Those questions will be explored as we alternate back and forth between short readings from the novel and clips from Martin Scorsese's provocative film.

*July 19 – Kim Avolis presents*

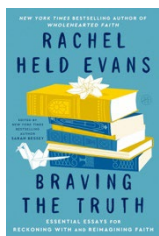


## ***Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi**

A once-devout Muslim who later converted to Christianity, author Nabeel Qureshi invites readers into his family's Muslim practices, conveying his deep love, respect, and conviction for his Islamic faith, community, and family. The narrative then shifts to the thoughtful conversations and debates he shares with

his close friend, David Wood, a Christian apologist. Over time, Qureshi devotes countless hours to carefully examining evidence, questioning beliefs, and wrestling with difficult ideas. This is a powerful account of his personal journey, in which his search for truth unfolds on both intellectual and emotional levels.

*July 26 – Carole duBois presents*



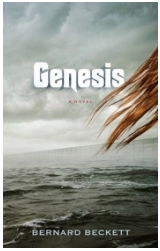
## ***Braving the Truth: Essential Essays for Reckoning with and Reimagining Faith* by Rachel Held Evans**

For a generation finding their footing in life after evangelicalism, Rachel Held Evans was one of the most trusted and beloved voices of our time. Stubborn in her hope, courageous in her questions, and devoted to inclusivity, her online writing was a sanctuary to the

millions who read her words daily. Her death to a sudden illness in 2019 invoked a global outpouring of stories of her legacy and influence.

Today, her words still speak, and now for the first time, fans old and new can experience her most viral and enduring essays in print— from those tackling patriarchy, white supremacy, and religious nationalism to those offering new interpretations of Scripture, freeing perspectives on doubt, and a better way forward. *Braving the Truth* is an anthology and keepsake collection letting readers borrow the bravery Rachel was best known for.

*August 2 – Ken Wilkins presents*



### ***Genesis: A Novel by Bernard Beckett***

Anax thinks she knows history. Her grueling all-day Examination has just begun, and if she passes, she'll be admitted into the Academy—the elite governing institution of her utopian society. But Anax is about to discover that for all her learning, the history she's been taught isn't the whole story. And the Academy isn't

what she believes it to be.

In this brilliant novel of dazzling ingenuity, Anax's examination leads us into a future where we are confronted with unresolved questions raised by science and philosophy. Centuries old, these questions have gained new urgency in the face of rapidly developing technology. What is consciousness? What makes us human? If artificial intelligence were developed to a high enough capability, what special status could humanity still claim? Outstanding and original, Beckett's dramatic narrative comes to a shocking conclusion.

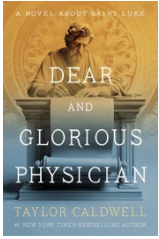
*August 9 – Phil Smith presents*



### ***Truth: What it Is, How to Find It and Why it Still Matters by Michael Shermer***

In this book, Michael Shermer defends objective truth against relativism and misinformation. He offers practical tools—Bayesian reasoning, evidence evaluation, and open inquiry—to discern facts in science, history, and daily life. Interestingly, Shermer (a non-believer) thoughtfully engages the claims about God, miracles, morality, and mystical experiences. He suggests that authentic faith, rooted in the God of truth (John 14:6), grows stronger when tested honestly rather than insulated from scrutiny, promoting clearer discernment and deeper trust in Christ amid a confused world.

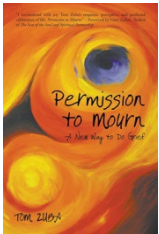
*August 16 – Chris Kelso presents*



### ***Dear and Glorious Physician* by Caldwell Taylor**

A world-famous novel that tells the story of St. Luke—the physician, seeker, and Gospel writer. Known as Lucanus, a Greek raised in Antioch and trained in medicine, he became a renowned healer who traveled widely throughout the ancient world. After encountering the story of Jesus, he set out to understand more, seeking out those who had known Christ—including Mary. From these conversations and his own searching, he gathered the account that would become the Gospel of Luke.

*August 23 – Kim Crum presents*



### ***Permission to Mourn* by Tom Zuba**

Tom is a life coach, author and speaker who works to help people live with and look at grief in an unusual way. The author had many profound experiences, including the death of two of his children and his spouse. This book was given to me by Prudence Wing, shortly after my husband Mason died a little over 3 years ago. Books recommending ways to deal with the death of a loved one are hard to read when you are in the throes of grieving, but this somewhat modest book helped me greatly, and I lean on some of the simple lessons almost every day.

*August 30 – Chris and Allen Fisher present*



***Who is the Greatest? If Jesus selected disciples the way we select our Presidents, a script by Rev. Lisa Degrenia***

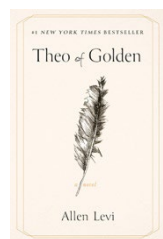
MODERATOR: Good evening, and welcome to tonight's debate. I'm coming to you from the Grand Amphitheater in beautiful downtown Capernaum. Tonight's event is sponsored by the Commission on Messianic Debates, and the rules for the evening have been agreed upon by representatives from each of the candidate's campaigns. Without further introduction, let's welcome tonight's candidates.

[APPLAUSE]

Our first question goes to James, son of Zebedee. James, in a few short days, Jesus of Nazareth will be traveling down to Jerusalem. There is widespread speculation about why he is going there. What makes you qualified to join him?

So begins the script is a short, creative script that reimagines the calling of the disciples through the lens of a modern political campaign. This work explores the world's criteria for greatness versus Jesus' redefinition of it.

*September 6 – Margaret Pritchett presents*



***Theo of Golden: A Novel by Allen Levi***

One spring morning, a stranger named Theo arrives in the small Southern city of Golden. He doesn't explain much about where he came from or why he's there—but when he visits the local coffeehouse, where pencil portraits of the people of Golden hang on the walls, he begins purchasing them, one at a time, and giving each portrait to the person depicted. In exchange, he asks only for the person's story. And so portrait by portrait, person by person, secrets are revealed, regrets are shared, and ordinary lives are profoundly altered.

A story of giving and receiving, of seeing and being seen, *Theo of Golden* is an unforgettable novel about the power of generosity, the importance of connection, and the quiet miracles that happen when we choose kindness and wonder.

**The Present Word**



The Present Word is an in-depth Bible study for adults that dives deep into God's Word, studying the Bible over a six-year period and focusing on a specific theme each quarter. Designed by an ecumenical collaborative so that participants in multiple denominations are studying the same passages together, the goals of *The Present*

*Word* curriculum are to engage in a serious study of Scripture to discover its deeper meaning and how it is relevant to our world today.

The summer quarter introduces women and men in the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and through their words and deeds, spread the good news.

Unit I, "Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises"

Unit II, "Faithful Witnesses Say "Yes" to Jesus Christ"

Unit III, "Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News"

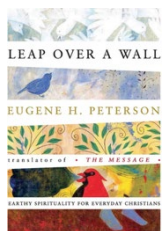
## Sunday Afternoon & Mid-Week Morning

*Every Wednesday from 12:00 pm–1:00 pm*

### Life of Prayer: The Practice of Contemplative Living

*Owl Room and on Zoom*

*Led by Patrick Ryan*



Guided by a seasonal book, this group journeys together along the contemplative pathway that Jesus taught in hopes of nurturing a greater awareness of the spiritual dimension in our lives. Each meeting is spent in moments in silent prayer and conversation; we share how we have seen God at work in our lives, and we discuss a chapter of a book that invites us deeper into

God's being and further into a God-responsive life.

On June 10, we begin an exploration of *Leap Over a Wall*, Eugene Peterson's vibrant and unforgettable exploration of one of the most memorable—and controversial—figures in Scripture: King David. Uncompromisingly honest and remarkably insightful, *Leap Over a Wall* offers the hope that every event in David's life was, and every

moment of our lives can be, a confrontation with God. This book is highly recommended for those of us who find it difficult to identify with Biblical characters.

*Every Thursday from 11:00 am–12:00 pm*

## Sermon Bible Study *Library and on Zoom*

*Led by Anna Pinckney Straight*

Join Anna Pinckney Straight every Thursday at 11:00 am in the Hawkins Library for an hour of conversation to explore the scripture from the previous Sunday's worship and look ahead to the upcoming Sunday's text. Together we'll consider the historical context of these passages and their relevance for our lives today. Each session stands on its own, so you are always welcome. This is an opportunity both to learn more about scripture and preaching.

*Third Sunday of the Month from 4:00 pm–5:00 pm*

## Calvin and Hops (Men's Beer and Theology)

*Brewery 99, 1030 Pollock St.*



Calvin and Hops is a relaxed monthly gathering of men (open to all, not just Presbyterians) who want to think more deeply about faith and life. Each time we meet, we enjoy good conversation, a beer if you'd like (drinking is optional), and some snacks brought by members of the group. Led by Ken Wilkins, our discussions focus on meaningful topics about faith, doubt, hope, and how what we believe makes a difference in the way we live day to day. Whether you're brand new to these kinds of conversations or you've been on the journey for years, there's a place for you around the table.

Each month we discuss a suggested verse or story from the Bible that may lend itself to misunderstanding.

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# Peer Support Groups

## *Mid-Week Opportunities*

*Every other Thursday beginning on January 16 6:30 pm–7:30 pm*

### **Presbyterian Men** *Session House Parlor*

Despite having friends, family, and co-workers around each day, most men don't get to talk about what's on their minds. Men often lack healthy role models to learn from. Imagine having companions that remind you of your commitments, help clarify your vision and provide tools for action. Imagine a circle of men that holds you in prayer and supports and challenges you in your journey toward greater Christlikeness. Presbyterian Men offers this community to all men who wish to join.



*Second Tuesday of the Month, 12 pm–1 pm*

### **Grief Support Group** *Chapel, 1st Floor, Ministry Center*

Grief certainly doesn't work like we expect it to. In so many situations, those who have lost a loved one have to endure awkward and sometimes hurtful conversations, even with those who love them. Grief is one of those things that many who have not endured it do not know how to talk about. With readings each month, the Grief Support Group is a small group and a rare space to share our grief honestly and be heard and understood as we do so.



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# Faithful Feelings Summer Sermon Series

*June 7*

I'm Worried—and Sometimes I'm Scared

*10th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Jonah 1:4-6, 1 John 4:18, Matthew 6:25

*June 14*

I'm Mad and Angry, Angry and Mad

*11th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Exodus 32:19, Mark 3:1-6

*June 21*

Grateful, Inside and Out

*12th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Matthew 15:31-38, Matthew 26:26-30, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

*June 28*

Disappointment: Everything Is Not Fine, But Everything Is Not Finished

*13th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

2 Corinthians 4:7-18, Psalm 13, Psalm 38:8-10

*July 5*

Love of Country, Faithfully

*14th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Jeremiah 29:7, Psalm 33, Philippians 3:20

*July 12*

Hope: More Than a Thing with Feathers?

*15th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Job 17:6-16, Acts 24:10-23, Romans 15:13

*July 19*

I Feel Like I Should Be Doing Something, Doing More. Do We Accept the Things We Cannot Change or Change the Things We Cannot Accept?

*16th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Psalm 46, Luke 18:1-8

*July 26*

Compassion: Growing Stronger Ears

*17th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Psalm 145:8-10, Luke 10:25-37, James 1:19