

Blessing Gratitude Generosity (BGG)

BGG Mission: We are here to inspire and celebrate the spiritual growth that comes from recognizing our Blessings, responding with Gratitude and Generosity by giving of our time, talent, and treasure.

FreedUp Financial Stewardship: The FreedUp financial stewardship program has been the top priority initiative for the BGG circle group in 2024. The cost to participate was reduced from \$99 to \$19 per household thanks to a subsidy provided by the church for 2024. We do not plan to continue that next year, but anyone can take the program at full cost.

- 24 households, 38 individuals participated in January-March and October-November groups
- Feedback has been very positive
 - “FreedUp helps us be intentional about how we manage our money based on spiritual principles. It helps us focus on what we value.”
 - “FreedUp encouraged me to think seriously about finances again - the need for a plan (long and short term!) in order to not worry about money.”
 - “Each week the topics and the exercises we did together helped us become more knowledgeable, and we loved learning these financial principles right as we are starting out.”

Talent Connection Idea: Utilizing our time and talents according to the gifts that God has granted us is good stewardship. We would like to help parishioners identify and engage with the church in a way that uses their strengths and passions and meets a need of the church and community. We are exploring ideas to implement in 2025.

Annual Giving: Based on good stewardship practices (TENS – The Episcopal Network for Stewardship), BGG helps to inform Annual Giving about stewardship beliefs and practices. However, Annual Giving is focused on financial pledges and is run by a separate team and leadership.

Eucharistic Visitors

Thus far in 2024, we have made 59 Eucharistic Visits. We are also planning visits for the remainder of this year.

First Tuesday Dinner

First Tuesday Dinner is a fellowship of younger adults for support, engagement, and discernment. Originally called Books+Beverages and focused on book studies, the group evolved over the pandemic period to focus on prompted dialog, connection to Charlotte and church, and discernment around decisions common to the decade of the twenties (career, relationships, etc.). The group meets monthly for dinner, facilitated by Diana Smith, Karen Moseley, Beth Hardin and occasionally by Geoff McLaughlin and recently by Rev. Daisy and

Ramon Colon. Most participants have some connection to Holy Comforter, but we welcome non-members. (It is non-members that become members.)

First Tuesday Dinner has seen notable growth in 2024, adding nineteen (19) newcomers to the regular group emails that now reach forty-four (44) people (40 younger adults). The group now meets at Holy Comforter as attendance is typically 10-18.

HCBG: Holy Comforter Book Group

The Holy Comforter Book Group (HCBG) was established in the summer of 2016, in response to the Dr. Raj Chetty (Harvard, Opportunity Insights) report indicating that Charlotte was 50th out of the 50 largest US cities in socioeconomic mobility. Using a framework of “Know-Believe-Do” inspired by the story of the centurion (Matthew 9, Luke 7), the HCBG studies issues related to socioeconomic mobility, and race as race differences surface rapidly. It typically studies 1-3 books each summer and maintains contact during the academic year (occasionally conducting studies during that time).

In the summer of 2024, the Rev. Greg Jarrell led three sessions in discussion of his book, *Our Trespasses: White Churches and the Taking of American Neighborhoods*. Attendance for these difficult discussions was about 80 people at each session.

The book group will mark its tenth summer season in 2025; robust programming is in design. There are 300 people on the distribution list for HCBG; most of them have participated in one or more book studies. More than half of the participants are not members of Holy Comforter. The HCBG is supported by grants from the John M. Belk Endowment.

HCBG has deepened Holy Comforter’s engagement in critical issues facing Charlotte, strengthening a network that includes Crisis Assistance Ministry, Roof Above, Loaves & Fishes/NourishUp, multiple foundations, and elected and community leaders.

Holy Comforter at Home

A ministry to sustain a caring relationship with our homebound parishioners. It is one of the seven ministries under the Holy Comforter Pastoral Care umbrella.

Led by Mary Monahan since its inception a few years ago, Holy Comforter at Home has attempted to reach out to about 20 of our members through visits and phone calls. In January of 2024, there were 16 homebound parishioners at our church. Over the course of this year, we have lost 7 of these dear souls.

Mary has recently stepped away from Holy Comforter at Home. If you are interested in learning more or being part of this wonderful ministry, please contact Edie Livingstone.

Lazarus Team

Thus far in 2024, the Lazarus Team provided support to families and the clergy for nine funeral services.

Pathfinders Circle Group

Our primary purpose remains “to guide the parish in discerning how Holy Comforter is calling to be church in these new times,” and we are often called upon for work that cuts across multiple ministry areas.

This past year, we continued to engaged the parish in Genesis activities, such as Advent caroling at Merrywood, Adult Forums at Holy Comforter (on Spiritual Listening and Thoughtful Seekers book studies,) this summer’s Friday Films discussion series, and “Go Hike!” contemplative nature walks. Following the “Go West” imperative revealed last fall, we reached out to the Sedgefield neighborhood with a fun, kindness-centered rock-painting activity at the neighborhood’s annual festival and by joining Darrow-Owens Guild members at the YWCA’s Juneteenth celebration.

Pathfinders also provides logistical support for the quarterly Leaders Summit meetings of ministry group leaders. Finally, we facilitated the 2024 Parish Survey and prepared the summary and detailed reports that many ministry groups are using to shape their work for the coming months. (See the reports at www.holycomfortercharlotte.org/parish-survey.)

Looking ahead, Pathfinders is supporting the development of a parish-wide process that will pick up from the Survey results to discern Holy Comforter’s top strategic priorities for 2025.

Our members are: Vicki Bott (leader), Wil Bosbyshell, Natalie Castro (Vestry co-liaison), Mary Lindsay Evans, Elsie Garfield, Beth Hardin, Kirt Hibbitts, Billie Maitland, Elliot McKee, and Diana Smith (Vestry co-liaison).

Women’s Ministries

The Darrow-Owens group, which officially falls under the Women’s Ministries umbrella, welcomes ALL and has a full program year planned for 2024-25. Our evening meetings include a potluck supper.

Deacon Daisy Colon spoke to the group in September about her hopes and plans for Holy Comforter. In October, Joy Mast, author of *Set Free and Satisfied*, inspired us to use scripture and prayer to overcome self-destructive behaviors.

Monthly programs for the remainder of the 2024 - 2025 year are:

- November 18: Kathy Izard, author of *Trust the Whisper*. Talented local writer Kathy Izard shares the remarkable stories of people who allow the Holy Spirit to take the lead in their lives. This is an evening you won’t forget.

- December 15: Our Annual Gingerbread House Construction Party for families in our church and community. We need volunteers as well as supplies.
- January 20: Terry Robertson, “Being Prepared; A Gift for Your Survivors.” This program is full of practical advice and step-by-step instructions for passing on your wishes to your loved ones.
- February 17: YWCA’s Women in Transition Taco/Bingo party (due to the sensitive nature of the women in this program, only women are invited). We need donations of new and/or gently used items for Bingo prizes.
- March 17: Patrick Pope, “A Song to Sing, a Life to Live.” Patrick is an excellent teacher and will share with us his wisdom and talents. You will be entertained and educated.
- April 21: The Rev. Catherine Campbell on her life in the Episcopal Ministry. Catherine has led a rich, full, varied career in the church and will share her stories and experiences. Currently retired, she lives in the Charlotte area.
- May 5: Annual Summer Reading Book Night with Sally Brewster of Park Road Books. This is by far our most popular program. Come to hear what is new and intriguing on Sally’s bookshelves.

Women’s Night Outs (previously Women’s Wine Nights) were offered over the summer because individuals stepped up to host the adult socials. There were three gatherings that happened to all be poolside. Guests took a snack to share and their own beverages. These gatherings are unstructured and relaxed. Anyone wishing to see these easy socials to continue, please reach out to Mary Amos or Jessica Dunlap.

Women’s Retreat 2025

A Women’s Retreat has been scheduled for February 27 – March 2. There are openings available. For more information, reach out to Gail Fennimore.

Youth Ministry and Episcopal Youth Community (EYC)

Youth Ministry encompasses the worship teams (acolyte program, lectors and hosts, and the tech team), Bible study, service, and the Episcopal Youth Community (EYC).

The Episcopal Youth Community, the largest group, meets weekly for fellowship, formation, and service throughout the year. EYC advisors Diana Smith, Drew Kirkland, Tammy Langley, Beth Hardin, and newcomers Ellie and Luke Ivey and Tia Wilson provide guidance to the program. So far in fall 2024, we have seen 37 youth at EYC and/or Bible study, of which 5 were new to youth ministry and 5 were guests or visitors. Most of the youth – 24 – participate regularly. In the 2023-2024 year, 44 youth attended EYC and confirmation events. The Rev. Cat Connolly led this year’s youth confirmation program with seven youth confirmed on September 29, 2024. Twenty-one youth have been confirmed at the most recent three confirmations.

Nancy English Johnson and John Elder lead the acolyte program with twenty youth acolytes, and 4-5 to be trained this year. Four youth are lectors, guided by Heather LaJoie, and additional

youth serve as occasional hosts. Two youth are members of the worship tech team, guided by Tom Cooke.

This year, planning, fundraising, preparing, and experiencing the youth pilgrimage to Costa Rica was an EYC focal point. Eleven youth and three adults conducted numerous fundraisers (Taco & Trivia, bake sales, Parents' Nights Out, etc.), conducted three three-hour preparation classes, and spent eight transformative days in Costa Rica in late June and early July. The spiritual impact of the program, heightened by Father Greg Brown and chaperones Tammy and Gray Langley, suggests that moving pilgrimage to a two-year cycle is worth strong consideration.

In fall 2024, we introduced Second Sunday School, a Bible study using materials from [The Bible Project](#). We meet monthly on the second Sunday prior to EYC, focused entirely on the Sermon on the Mount for the year. Additional materials, including some from [The Chosen](#) and from [The Bible Project](#), will be provided in the intervening weeks. In our first sessions, six youth have participated.

While our vision for youth programming is strong and participation is growing (woo hoo!), there are challenges. Post-pandemic life has further separated many youth from the routines of worship and formation, as many community youth activities (sports, work, etc.) claim time and are scheduled on Sundays, including Sunday mornings. Directionally, formation has grown more important as the community's and world's challenges are more complex. There are real "learning gaps" accelerated by the pandemic. It is also important to find the "fit" for each youth, whether through active worship participation (including as acolytes and lectors), EYC, Bible study, service, and/or confirmation.