

ALUM LEADS DOWNTOWN CHURCH, A MISSION OUTPOST IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

"I am thrilled to be a city center pastor in one of the most vibrant and growing downtowns in the country!" So says the Rev. Tom Hall '08, pastor of the historic First Presbyterian Church in downtown Pittsburgh. After a 30-year career in the U.S. Air Force, Tom's passion is reaching busy professionals with the gospel, and that's FPC's passion, too. "There are billions of dollars being invested in new jobs, offices, hotels, and living spaces within a few blocks of our church," says Tom. "Downtown is growing with young professionals and empty nesters, so we have an enormous opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be part of the civic conversation, and to add value and vibrancy to the city."



The founders of FPC had mission in their DNA. In the 1830s, the Western Foreign Mission Society held its meetings there. Today, Hunter Farrell, director of world mission for the PCUSA, estimates that nearly 285 million living Christians can trace their faith to mission efforts that began at FPC. "Our challenge now is to be a mission outpost in the heart of the city," Tom notes.

And the church is doing just that in a number of ways. For example, it partners with four other downtown churches in the Walk-In Ministry, which provides more than 100 needy people each week with food from a common Food Bank and with other necessities, along with prayer and help connecting to outside agencies. Known as "the church with the cafeteria," FPC also shows the love of Jesus Christ by offering "good food at a great value" for upwards of 200 people who eat lunch there every weekday. This ministry, called Daily Bread, is on its way to becoming FPC's signature outreach to the city.

In addition to Sunday services, the 80-year-running, half-hour Tuesday Boost service takes place every Tuesday at 12:25 p.m. Meant to give busy downtown workers a mid-week lift, the service got a new twist this year, thanks to a jazz format with pianist Rick Gallagher. "In addition to enjoying the music, we pray and read scripture, and I give a short message," says Tom. "We've been averaging over 40 in attendance. Folks love it. They tell us it's inspiring and a great stress reliever."

Under Tom's leadership, FPC is reaching out to the city of Pittsburgh in all kinds of new ways. Recently, on Light Up Night, they welcomed hundreds of visitors to the church. As members of the Pittsburgh 2030 District, they are taking measures to reduce energy use and pollution—all in the name of sharing the love of Jesus Christ, of bridging the Word and the world. "Whenever I start to doubt that I'm on the right track," notes Tom, "I think back on the amazing way God brought a new seminary grad to this historic church. It was God's doing, no doubt about it."

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