

First ARP Ministries and Church Life – 2023



Mission Statement of First ARP Rock Hill

Inspired by the love of Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit, we serve God through worship, education, and fellowship, that we may proclaim His grace and share His love in the world.

First ARP Rock Hill

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History

First Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Church initially was established as a mission church in July 1895. It was formally organized as First ARP Rock Hill in November 1895 with 26 charter members. Construction of the church building began in June 1897 and was completed in 1898. The debt on the building was retired in 1900, at which time a dedication service was held.

By 1906, there were 150 members and a full range of church organizations, including a Men's Society, Ladies' Aid Society, Sabbath School, and youth groups. In 1911, the rear wall of the sanctuary was moved, providing for the expansion of the sanctuary and choir loft and the addition of several classrooms to the rear. A pipe organ was included in the addition.

In 1929, construction began on the existing Rogers Education Building. A Fellowship Hall was constructed in 1964. Subsequent additions in the 1990s included a new Fellowship Hall and a gymnasium built to the rear of the property, creating a courtyard with a large playground. The old Fellowship Hall area was converted to additional classrooms and nursery spaces.

Since its establishment, the church has experienced a significant expansion in ministries that currently include local outreach ministries, world missions, preschool, music ministry, youth programs, and an athletic program.

Over our 125-year history, five Pastors have served First ARP Rock Hill and our current membership has grown to over 500 with two worship services offered each Sunday.

Originally built on an apple orchard, our church is in the middle of booming downtown Rock Hill with new increased urban growth that presents an exceptional opportunity for ministry and outreach.



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Ministries and Church Life

Worship

Corporate worship of God has been a primary purpose of the congregation from its beginning. Worship is central in the life of the church. Our worship includes the reading of Scripture, the pronouncement of the Word, prayer and music. Through worship, the congregation experiences its praise for God and its closeness as a community, equips itself to work in the world, and proclaims the message of salvation to all those who would hear. Currently, the church schedules an Acoustic Service at 9:00 a.m. and a Traditional Service at 11:00 a.m. Our services are live streamed via our online YouTube channel. We offer a children's church as an introduction of corporate worship for our young people in the congregation. The Music Ministry of the Church greatly enhances public worship. The congregation has an adult choir, a children's choir, and a handbell choir. All participate in the leadership of worship regularly and at certain times and seasons of the year.

Athletics

First ARP Church has a strong athletic program that actively serves as a family outreach through youth inside and outside of our congregation. Members of the congregation are encouraged to participate and support this outreach. In basketball, there are teams typically for boys and girls of all ages. There are at least two adult coaches for each of the teams. First ARP belongs to the York County Christian Basketball Association, and we currently are serving as a host church. On a given weekend, we have hundreds of families entering our walls and participating in our church fellowship. We host games on Friday nights for 9 year-olds and younger. Members of the youth serve as referees during these games on Friday nights. On Saturday mornings, we host games for the older ages, and the youth help to work the scorekeeper's table. In addition to these organized activities, the gym also is used for frequent "pick up" basketball games and other activities.



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Christian Education

We seek to follow the calling of Christ. We do this by following the example of the Great Commission: making disciples of all, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then teaching them to obey all that He has commanded. As such, the mission philosophy for our Christian Education program uses this verse as a guide for its work:

“So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.” Ephesians 4:12-13

This vitally important program functions under the direction of our Christian Education Committee and a staff that includes a full time Director of Christian Education (DCE) and Director of Youth.

Our children’s and youth Sunday School classes currently use the “Show Me Jesus” curriculum with five classes for ages two through high school. Infant and toddler nurseries also are provided. There are six adult classes that offer a variety of studies. Additionally, there is an Inquirer’s Class offered each spring/summer for anyone interested in learning more about First ARP and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian denomination.

Foundations for the Faith is a Wednesday night program for all ages. A time of fellowship is enjoyed during a meal, followed by Children’s Choir and age level classes/activities, as well as adult programs. This evening Bible Study provides supportive study outside of Sunday worship for both youth and adults. Christian Education extends to the summer with activities including an annual weeklong Bible School, age specific activities of care/service for the congregation/community, and a “Mission Possible” program for pre-middle schoolers that serves as an introduction to missions/outreach service.

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Just Joy

The Just Joy ministry reaches out to those with cognitive and physical exceptionalities. Just Joy meets on the third Thursday of every month and has a worship service for families. Many ARP churches from the surrounding areas join us for the evening service. Just Joy sponsors an annual celebration event. With the help of many volunteers, each participant gets a buddy for an afternoon of dancing, crafts, and snacks. Volunteers and participants come from all over our community. All American Athletes, an athletic league for children with special needs, has been an active program within our community and we enjoy working with them to serve our Just Joy families. We participate in their basketball, kickball, and tee ball leagues. With the new addition of Miracle Park in Rock Hill, we are looking forward to a new tradition of hosting a one-day clinic for our Just Joy participants to play sports with a buddy. We are hoping this will become an annual event along with the Just Joy celebration event.

Preschool

First ARP Preschool is a faith-based morning program offering classes for children 12 months to 4 years. As a key ministry of First ARP Church, our purpose is to demonstrate God's love in Christ by nurturing each child intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally in a safe environment. Our Biblically based curriculum includes age-appropriate exploration and learning activities, weekly Chapel, music, and imaginative play all designed to address early childhood development.

The preschool has been an outreach program of our church for over 25 years. It has been an outlet for many of the members of the church to serve their community, and it is well supported by our congregation.



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Women's Ministries

First ARP has a long history of participation in Women's Ministries on the local and denominational level. The purpose is to provide opportunities for women to learn more fully the teachings of Christ and be strengthened to fulfill His purpose by serving in the home, church, community, and the world. Currently, there are three active circles involving 75 women. Denominational study books are recommended for Bible studies. There are two Women's Ministry Bible studies within the church that are open to the community.

Women's Ministries raises funds during the year through the annual yard sale as well as the sale of church prints, calendars, cookbooks, ornaments, and casseroles during the holidays. The funds help support the following:

- Bi-annual overseas mission trips
- \$100 per child per summer towards camps and conferences at Bonclarken
- Several fellowship events during the year for women in the church
- Outreach to the homebound
- Provision of condolence meals for grieving families as well as meals after health issues and births
- Hosting various receptions such as for new ministers or ordination at the discretion of the minister
- The Preschool as needs arise through scholarship or purchases of needed items

Women's Ministries also selects a Woman of the Year each year and recognizes her with a token of appreciation for her dedication to the church.



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World Missions and Local Outreach

Elders, Deacons, and a Women's Ministries representative serve on the Mission Committee. The committee provides oversight of the church's mission programs. This includes screening all requests for missionary support and outreach opportunities, making appropriate recommendations to the Session, coordinating short-term mission trips, and preparing the annual missions and outreach budget. Additional responsibilities include educating the congregation about world missions and outreach support needs and opportunities.

World Missions

First ARP has historically supported missions throughout the world by generous giving and service. We currently support missionaries in England, Germany, Spain, Wales, Northern Africa, and Pakistan. Also, we support the ministry organizations including the Barnabas Ministry, Mobile Theological Training, Serge, and Children of Rwanda.

Short Term Missions

First ARP has two short-term mission trips to Appalachia and Spain that are planned for 2023.

Local Outreach

First ARP historically has provided local outreach support to various organizations such as Hospice, Pilgrim's Inn, Girls' Home, Boys' Home, Hope (canned goods also are collected), Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen, Habitat for Humanity, the Haven men's shelter, Manna House pantry, and Pathways Community Center. We recently added Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) Winthrop Ministry, The Life House Women's Ministry, United International Ministries (UIM), and Fostering the Family. We also offer the use of our facilities to other ministries in our community. Currently, Grace Covenant meets at our church on Sunday afternoons, and First ARP has been the home church for the Rock Hill Men's Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) group since the spring of 2015. Our Pastor's Discretionary Fund helps people off the street who struggle to find food and shelter. We have a food pantry and children's library on our campus in honor of Noah and Adah Lesslie. This serves many in our community and reminds us of their caring and loving lives.

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Over the last three decades or so, the congregation has experienced a significant number of tragedies resulting in deaths or permanent injuries. The tragedies include accidental deaths of young people, drug overdoses, cancer, spinal cord injuries, COVID, suicide and murders. As a result of the overwhelming bereavement and sorrow, First ARP sponsored a community wide Grief Conference in the Fall of 2022. Subsequently, we now offer a Christian 13-week study, Grief Share, as an ongoing ministry to help support our bereavement community.

Other Outreach

Other outreach includes the establishment of a relationship with Mt. Prospect Baptist Church (an historic African American congregation in Rock Hill). We have worked with them on their Manna House Pantry project, and we have both sponsored the Christmasville Prayer Breakfast which raised funds for the hungry in the community. We also enjoy joint worship services from time to time in each other's houses of worship.

Youth Ministries

The youth are comprised of middle school and high school students. Youth groups meet on Sunday evenings. The Senior High and Middle School groups are led by a team of teachers with guidance from the Youth Director. The youth also participate in gender specific Bible studies (known as Discipleship Groups) on Sunday afternoons.

The youth participate in retreats and conferences at Bonclarken several times every year. They are involved in outreach through several local ministries and mission trips annually. Several members are counselors at Camp Joy, the denomination's camp for mentally and physically challenged children and adults. The youth are encouraged to participate in the leadership of worship. The older youth typically travel to Appalachia each summer and can participate in a major mission trip every other year.

There is a one-year and two-year strategic plan just implemented by our Youth Director. A few of the goals set by this strategic plan are to get plugged into middle and high schools, have 65% of the covenant children in church regularly, and establish a youth ministry council consisting of a couple of parents and students, an elder, and a deacon.



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Opportunities / Areas of Improvement

- Increased focus on community outreach due to urban growth around the church.
- Continued focus on growth of young family demographic.
- Support Youth Director in invigorating youth ministry...Increase the fun stuff -from the Youth.
- Support and motivate the whole congregation to be active in the life of the church.