

The Spire



JANUARY 2026

Letter From The Pastor

Dear Church,

As a new year begins, both excitement and anxiety can be in the air. Such is the nature of beginnings in my experience. Whether it's a new job, a new school year, a new commitment of any sort, there is much joy at the possibilities before us. But there can also be much worry about whether we have what it takes to meet faithfully those new opportunities and challenges.

It is providential, then, during Sunday Worship in January, we will be continuing our Advent Journey through the first chapters of Luke's Gospel. In the beginning of Jesus' life and ministry, we will discover many similarities to our own experiences of new beginnings. Additionally, we will hear once more the truth of God's steadfast love that always holds us fast.

Here is a brief glimpse of how God's presence will meet us during the month:

January 4 is a celebration of **Epiphany**, when we reflect upon Jesus' revelation to the world. Typically, we read Matthew's Gospel on this Sunday. However, we will instead read about Jesus' dedication in the temple in **Luke 2:21-38**. Worship this day will remind us once more of the "North Star" that guides our journey as Christ's disciples.

January 11 is **Ordination and Installation Sunday**. Our scripture focus will be **Luke 2:41-52** which depicts a teenage Jesus in the temple. As we affirm the call of new elders and deacons, we will all discover how God is growing faith constantly in each of us.

January 18th will be a time to **Welcome New Members!** As these new friends begin a new season of Christian discipleship with us, we will hear about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in **Luke 4:14-30**. This passage guides us on how to engage with the conflicts of the world with purpose and with peace.

January 25th, as of now, has no specific celebration planned; however, Jesus will take a breath with us as we see him, after healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law, depart for a "deserted place" in **Luke 4:38-44**. May we learn together from Jesus how saying "no" sometimes is just as faithful as saying "yes."

Another year unfolds before us, friends! Let us go forward with courage and hope, as God leads us to welcome, care for, and inspire all God's people—no labels, no exceptions—to make a positive difference in the world God loves!

The Lord Bless and Keep You,

Rev. Ben



Worship News

January Worship Notes: New

We begin the new year moving through the early chapters of Luke's Gospel. Here are the scriptures and hymns currently planned for the month ahead.

January 4: Epiphany and Ordination

Holy Communion

Scripture: Luke 2:21-38

Hymns: We Three Kings; God Be The Love To Search and Keep Me

There will be a congregational meeting after worship on January 4 to 1) share the budget as information, 2) act on the Session's recommendation to approve changes to the minister's terms of call.

January 11 Ordination and Installation

Scripture: Psalm 1, Luke 2:41-52

Hymns: Holy, Holy, Holy; Here I Am Lord

January 18: Welcome of New Members

Scripture: Luke 4:14-30

Hymns: When Morning Gilds the Skies; There Is a Widthness to God's Mercy; Seek Ye First

3rd Sunday Sing: Join the choir at 10:15am to help sing the anthem for the day!

January 25

Scripture: Luke 4:38-44

Hymns: For the Beauty of the Earth, What a Friend We Have In Jesus; Lord I Want to be a Christian

As always join us for Sunday worship at 11:00am

Participants can attend in-person or online livestream via Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/firstpresbyterianchurchofgarner>

2026 Flower Chart

The 2026 Flower Chart is up! The flower chart is posted in the hallway and ready for sign-ups. The cost of the flowers for the coming year is \$60.00.

Earth Care Corner

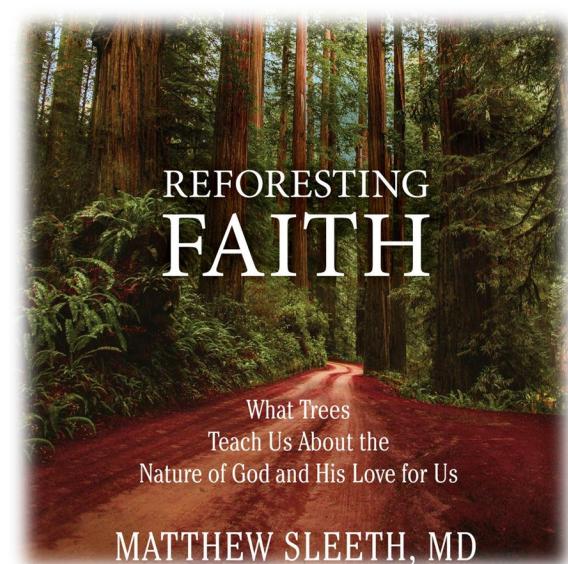
“Reforesting Faith”

A recent Bible study book, “Reforesting Faith” by Matthew Sleeth, gave me pause because of its subtitle ‘what trees teach us about the nature of God and His love for us.’ Matthew Sleeth was a practicing physician in the Emergency Room of a local hospital when he first read the Bible, which resulted in his conversion to Christianity and a full-blown belief in Jesus as his savior. He left the medical field and began his journey as a preacher in the effort to reverse the destruction of our earth and save what he could save.

His emphasis was on trees, which he learned marked every major occurrence in the bible from the Garden of Eden to the Crucifixion (trees, bushes, the three crosses on Calvary, [wood in any form]). It is not difficult to support his love of trees – we have a wooded area behind our house which gives deer passage through our neighborhood (including fawns, does, and bucks); plenty of birds, woodpeckers, and hummingbirds; the rare fox; towering pine trees I worry about falling during severe rain/wind, and, of course, invasive species that I don’t love! However, to add some color to all the green, we planted a redbud and dogwood, which bloom every spring and add to the colorful fall each year.

My current concern is developers who mow down wooded areas and remove all topsoil in preparation for building homes or other structures (makes their job easier), and then they plant a few trees (saplings) to help improve the landscape. WHY do they do this? (Notice the acres of tree destruction along Timber Dr. south of Rt. 70.) This makes no sense to me and certainly does not promote the love of trees. There are far too many examples of this type of wanton destruction. Can there be local ordinances to prevent this loss? Not sure.

Signed, A Tree Hugger



**“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” — Dr. Seuss**

Men's Breakfast

The Men of the Church will meet on the first Sunday of the month, January 4th, for breakfast. All men are welcome to join us in the Fellowship Hall at 8:45 am for coffee, juice, donuts, and fellowship.



Congregational Care



Thanks Be To God

This month, please join us in giving thanks to God for...

- ✿ **David Pease** for installing the new wooden railing in the chancel area.
- ✿ **Our Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team and the entire faith community of FPCoG** for a faithful Stewardship season that included the offering of pledges for the 2026 Budget and Time and Talent.
- ✿ **Deacons and volunteers** across the congregation for delicious refreshments after worship on **December 21st**, and organizing the **Christmas Card Drop-Off**
- ✿ **New officers-elect!** For Elder: **Kim Brown, Komivi Ekuole, Parks Icenhour, and Christy Turpin**; For Deacon: **Rachel Acton, Ann Bagwell, Amy Conner, and Jeanne Conner**
- ✿ **Outgoing officers who have served faithfully and well:** Elders: **Mike Koenig, Lucy Paradies, and Roxann Porter**; Deacons: **Sandra Hodge and Mary Minor Shulby**
- ✿ **Presbyterian Women, Worship Ministry, and all volunteers** who put up and took down Christmas decorations!
- ✿ **All** who purchased and helped distribute **Angel Tree Gifts**
- ✿ **The choir, handbells, instrumentalists, Gloria, and Bill, and all others** who shared such wonderful music in December, particularly at our **December 21st choral service**.
- ✿ **ALL involved in worship during December:** our liturgists, the leaders of our "Young At Heart" messages, choir and musicians, staff, ushers and greeters, AV operators, church staff, and all who worshipped in person and online
- ✿ **Many silent and anonymous members, friends, and guests** of our church who share acts of love and service "sight unseen" in so many ways

Prayer: *God, as a new year begins, our prayer remains an old, faithful one: Thank you for your many blessings and help us use the joy they bring to serve others in need. Amen.*

Have someone you think needs a specific thank you?

Please call or email Rev Acton at pastor@firstpresbyterianchurchgarner.com to share!

Prayer List



Members: Georgia Morrison, Edith Conyers, John Watkins, Anne Hopkins, Rose Gurkin, Carl Miller, Rosemary Carmichael, JB Slaughter (MP in Germany), Jean Smith, Ruby Miller-Ousley, Barbara Turpin, Andy Cook, Bruce and Gloria Oelke, Trish and Dave Holmes, Audrey Denton, Judy Hudson, Peggy Wilkins, Mary Jo Atkinson, Sandy Lee, Jeff Holland, Helen Losada, Tonya Boykin, Martha Long, Mary Minor Shulby

Members' Families: Michael Regester (Losada's grandson), Jim Cole (Trish Holmes), Aleena Conner (Jeanne Conner), Wes Smith (Sandy Lee's Brother-in-law), Charlie Merritt (Emily Lee's cousin), Candice Davis (Cheryle Prater), Linda Register (Cheryle Prater), Pat Cook (Andy Cook), Pat Ballew (Reggie Foster), Vio Tapu (Regina Alexander), Sandra Wilkins Luther (Peggy Wilkins' sister-in-law), Cheryl Weber (Jeanne Conner's sister), Jonah Ekoule (Komivi Ekoule's father), Rebekah Brewer (Trish and David Holmes' daughter), Chris Chao (Jeanne Conner), Bob Dickerson (Amy Conner's father), Tommy Davis (Sandra Hodge's brother), Betty Mitchell (Harold Bagwell's sister), Lynn Hobby (Ann Bagwell's sister-in-law), Donna Smith (Sandy Lee), Eric Lee (David Pease's son-in-law), Richard Lee (Bill Lee's brother), Todd Lee (Sandy Lee), Lennon Fisher (Parks & Lorrie Icenhour's niece), Reagan Bagwell (Ann Bagwell's grandson), Lucy Noles (Nancy Waldrop's sister-in-law), Martha Morgan (Emily Lee's sister), Kristin Shulby (Mary Minor Shulby), Barbara Wilkins (Linda Monroe's sister), Mitchell Coats (Wilda Prince's nephew), Keeley Ray (Cheryle Prater's niece), Gary Foust (Regina Ekoule), Kristin, Brooklyn Hunt (Mary Minor Shulby), Mike Carmichael (Rosemary Carmichael's son), Kaye Ratliff (Reggie Foster's cousin), David Taylor (Carrie Dixon-Cash's uncle), Al Knabe (Neal Knabe's father), Kimberly Collins (Bonnie Bowling's niece), Paul vanDoornewaald (Wanda vanDoornewaald), Nancy Light (Carrie Dixon-Cash)

Members' Friends: Bruce and Myra McNellie (Jeanne Conner), The Barry's (Bill and Emily Lee), Ann Myhre (Peggy Wilkins), Jerry Godwin (Connie Boykin), Betty Peterson (Deb Wallace), Julie Prevoznik (Reggie & Dee Foster), Kenneth Ennis (Donna Gould), Pete & Pam Harris (Emily Lee), Joyce Blackwood, John Ryan & family (The Lee family), Nancy Whalen (Kathy Blue), Whitney Wolfgang (The Oriel family), Kathy Schumacher (Nancy Waldrop), Bruce Carper (David Pease), Beth Catlette (Donna Gould), Nikki Little (Kian Miley), Richard Guy (Kevin Wallace), Barbara Porter (Regina Alexander), Marvin and Suzi Perkins, Steve and Debbie Woliki, Cynthia Sanders (Ruby Miller-Ousley), Edward Pistola (Komivi Ekoule), Laura Earp (Joe and Cheryle Prater), Jerry Hart (Bruce & Gloria Oelke), Dan & Judy Huddleston (Bruce & Gloria Oelke), Jim Johnson (Sandy Lee)

For the World: Neighbors near and far affected by storms, flooding, and fire; War and loss of innocent life in Israel and Gaza; Victims of gun violence across our nation; War in Ukraine; refugees; the food-insecure and economically vulnerable and all affected by the rise of food costs; the mentally, physically, and spiritually overwhelmed; renewal for creation, the ill, dying, and grieving

Please contact the church office if anyone should be added or removed from the prayer list

"**THANK YOU TO ALL! I have been blessed with prayers, cards and love from everyone this year. Hopefully this is a year which is over.**
Thank you all so much for the love, cards and prayers.. Sandy Lee"



Presbyterian Women

Thank you to all members that participated in this year's Poinsettia Sale. The Presbyterian Women placed their largest order of ninety-six regular poinsettias and three large ones. The narthex and sanctuary looked so beautiful. Special thank you to Cheryle Prater for coordinating the Poinsettia Sale and Karen & Gary Lovering for the Poinsettia Tree set-up and delivery of the poinsettias. Please join us and the Worship Committee on Saturday January 3rd at 10 am, to take the Christmas decorations down. A big thank you to all that donated to the Christmas Joy Offering, a final total will be provided in the February Spire.

The next Presbyterian Women Coordinating Team Meeting is on Sunday, January 18th after church. Jane Knabe will be providing a light lunch.

Happy New Year Blessings from Lillie Circle!

We are looking forward to 2026 and all the mission activities it will bring. Our focus in January will be helping with the HOPE meal on January 31 at Garner United Methodist Church. We will also be preparing for our "Spring Fling Raffle" on Saturday, April 18 in the fellowship hall. Watch for more details on acceptable items to donate and where to leave them.

Our January 12 meeting will be held at the home of Helen Stephens at 7pm. If you need additional information about Lillie Circle, please contact Sibyl Pedziwiatr at 919-539-0874 or sunnydays4ever87@gmail.com.

Prayer Shawls

The Prayer Shawl Ministry gave its first shawl in December 2007. Since then, many hands have come together to knit and crochet shawls. Heart-felt thanks are expressed to those who make the shawls and help send warm wishes and prayers to those who receive them.

On December 14, five prayer shawls and three prayer crosses were given. A shawl was given to Jerry Cook, a friend of Kevin Wallace, who is undergoing treatments for colon cancer. A shawl was given to Tommy Tunstall, who is a long-time resident of Garner and a friend to many in our church. Tommy is also having cancer treatment. A shawl was given to Christy Renshaw, who is a cousin of Sibyl Pedziwiatr. Christy has inoperable cancer. Another prayer shawl was given to Jim Johnson, who is Sandy Lee's next-door neighbor. Jim suffered a stroke and has no use of his left side. He will require considerable therapy for recovery. A prayer shawl was given to the Jackson family, following the death of wife and mother, Lynne Jackson. We send prayers of love and support to Joe, Lisa, and Glen during this difficult time. A prayer cross was given to Sandy Lee for her heart valve surgery. A prayer cross was given to Candice Davis, who is a niece of Cheryle Prater. Candice is having several surgical procedures. A prayer cross was given to Trish Holmes. Trish had a stroke and is undergoing therapy. She will also have surgery to replace a heart valve.

Friendship Circle

The Friendship Circle held our annual Christmas "meeting" at Lucy Paradies' home. It was a festive affair especially when Lucy entertained us with playing carols on her piano. We swapped stories and toasted the memory of our dear sweet friend, Lynne Jackson. Sibyl Pedziwiatr and Betty Hamilton joined our luncheon which made the afternoon extra special. We had a fun time especially with the Sneaky Santa gift exchange.

Our January meeting will be on Sunday, January 4 at 2:00 pm. **This will be a ZOOM meeting.** Jane will be running the meeting as well as sending out the Zoom invite. We will be discussing the Souper Bowl Luncheon plans, and the January Lesson is Chapter 3: Opportunities Lost from the No-Homework Women's Bible Study: Group Hug VI. If you need a copy of the book, please contact Jane Knabe at jrknbabe66@gmail.com or 919-389-0462 (cell).

Souper Bowl Luncheon will be on Sunday, February 8th. See flyer for details, but don't worry, Confederate Bean and She Crab Soup are rumored to be on the list!!! We are also adding a little twist to the event. We are including a can food drive for Garner Area Ministries. VOTE for the team that you want to win, by placing your donations on their TEAM TABLE. The more cans and food items that you bring the more votes your team gets.

Faith Formation

Ida Joy Bible Study

Please join us on January 13th at 10am in the Ogburn classroom when we will be studying Sarah and her impact on Christianity and especially to women even today. We hope you will join us as we continue this wonderful, insightful journey of the women of the Bible and how we are still influenced by their story today! (All ages are welcome) The women truly have a beautiful tapestry to share and it is exciting to see how we can apply this to our everyday walk with God. Ida Joy meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 10am in the Ogburn classroom. It is a wonderful time spent together as Christian women as we discover these women and ourselves! All you have to do is sit back and listen as Cheryle Prater leads you in this very special study!

Wednesday Night Bible Study

On January 7th, the Wednesday Night Bible Study group will finish up our Advent Study. Plan to join us via Zoom each Wednesday at 7:30 pm for a mid-week boost that includes lively discussion and much-needed fellowship. For more information, please contact Karen Lovering or Mike Koenig.



Thursday Morning Bible Study

The Thursday Morning Bible study has its first meeting of 2026 on January 22nd. We meet nearly every week, both in person and online, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Our study for January is TBD as of press time, but please join us for fellowship and to learn just a bit more about the stories of our Christian faith.

Sunday School

The Adult Sunday School class continues the Winter edition of THE PRESENT WORD Bible Study. The winter quarter highlights the essential teachings of the Bible in relation to defining elements of our Christian faith. Our Adult Sunday School class meets every Sunday morning at 9:45 am for enriching discussions and fellowship. Don't miss out on this opportunity to grow in faith together!

For more information, please contact Karen Lovering or Mike Koenig.



Mission Ministries

Angel Tree Thank you!

The Missions Committee would like to thank all who participated in the FPCoG 2025 Angel Tree for Timber Drive Elementary School. Gifts were delivered on December 11. Three vehicles were packed with gifts for the four families that our congregation so generously provided (16 gift recipients). We may have given Santa and Rudolph a little competition!

Can you imagine how surprised and thankful the families were when they received the gifts? Thanks again for your kindness and support in this special mission. Praise be to God!



Garner Area Ministries

Suggested “Item of the Month”: Soup, chili, & crackers

The following items are often in short supply at the GAM Food Pantry:

Cereal, Peanut Butter, Grape or Strawberry Jam, Boxed Pasta, Canned Pasta (i.e. Ravioli, Spaghetti & Meatballs), Boxed Macaroni & Cheese, Tomato Sauce, Diced Tomatoes, Canned Corn/Peas/Green Beans, Tomato Soup/Chicken Noodle Soup, Saltines, Pork and Beans, Canned Beans (i.e., pinto, blackeye peas), Instant Mashed Potatoes, Rice/Rice Mixes, Breakfast items (cereal, protein bars, fruit bars), Canned Meat/Fish (Chicken, Beef Stew, Tuna), Hamburger Helper, Canned Fruit, Bottled Water, Toilet Paper. All donations are appreciated!

“It’s not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.”

~ Mother Teresa

Holiday Swap

The Girl Scout sponsored Holiday Swap filled-up our Fellowship Hall with all kinds of household items for a free shopping experience for the general public. The Girl Scouts received so many donations, that they couldn't get it all in the Fellowship Hall by 8 am on Saturday morning. As the day went on, more donations that were stored off-site were brought in. One shopper was a Middle School Teacher at Dillard Drive. She was picking up items for her prize box. She said that her students don't have much money, and they get excited over the prizes that she has for them. Another shopper was a grandmother that works two jobs and money is very tight. She didn't know how she was going to get her young granddaughters Christmas presents this year, and she was overwhelmed with such gratitude to all that donated items as well as those who organized the event. It was an awesome event. Bravo to the Girl Scouts and their families that worked very hard on this amazing event.





H.O.P.E.

H.O.P.E. is – Homeless Outreach Providing Encouragement

FPCoG ~ Thank you for your generous support in 2025 as well as the past 20 years as a H.O.P.E. Partner!

The end of 2025 is drawing near, and as I sit trying to gather my thoughts about H.O.P.E. to provide a “year in review commentary,” I am very distracted by ALL that H.O.P.E. was/is. How can I possibly sum up the year in a meaningful way to encapsulate all of 2025, or even a portion? Truly, there is no way, but I will share with you the best I can.

The homeless population continues to increase, and the ability to meet their needs is becoming increasingly difficult. Although each week God’s hands continue to reign supreme over this ministry, ensuring the needs of the day are met. Additionally, adjusting the “sails” continually to attempt to control the variables faced and prevent potential issues. I could list all of the things that were initiated and the ways we keep evolving to ensure that the ministry is providing what we can, for as many as we can, while still controlling what we can. Suffice it to say, every week there are challenges and constant tweaking of the procedures.

In November, there was a meeting with the core volunteers who serve every week. The meeting was an opportunity for each to share their involvement, experiences, concerns, reflections, and joys. We discussed how H.O.P.E. has evolved over the 20 years since it began and where we go from here. The bottom line, this ministry is at a crossroads. The small group of individuals that provide the weekly support to run this ministry is wearing thin and out. The assisting churches also feel the strain and challenge to support this ministry that has **quadrupled** since it began 20 years ago. One of the outcomes of the meeting in November was the need to solicit input from the assisting churches for their perspective on H.O.P.E., as well as their continued commitment.

This week, a questionnaire was sent to each of the assisting churches for H.O.P.E. The questionnaire tasks us with providing answers by January 12 regarding our involvement with H.O.P.E. and the direction of where we go from here after 20 years. Can H.O.P.E. continue to thrive with the weekly participation from the assisting churches, as well as provide enough hands each week to meet the demands?

Tom LaMotto, who has been leading the H.O.P.E. Team for approximately ten years, is scheduled for critical heart surgery on December 17, and his recovery will take several months. At the writing of this article, I will have to submit before I know the answer as to who will be leading H.O.P.E. during Tom’s absence, as well as other issues that will impact this ministry. These are certainly tough times, and I believe all of the churches that support this ministry feel the tug of the commitment and, at times, are challenged to meet the needs we face in our service. In stark contrast, this ministry is essential to the guests who depend on H.O.P.E. each week. Shelters continue to close; the homeless population keeps growing, and the needs are endless. We tweak how we are serving each week, so as to remain as best we can be in control of the crowd and the resources we have on hand, but at times it is not enough.

I ask you to please pray especially for Tom LaMotto, that his surgery is successful and for his recovery! Please continue to prayerfully consider our continued support of H.O.P.E., as well as our 5th Saturday Commitment, at least through 2026. I thank FPCoG for the incredible support that we provided for H.O.P.E. in 2025 and throughout the past 20 years. We will never truly know the lives we touched, provided the encouragement for them to make it through the day, and possibly even saved throughout the years of our commitment to H.O.P.E.



FPCoG, your donations to the H.O.P.E. Chest are an ongoing blessing. Please continue to share what you no longer need/want. There is **always** a need that can be met at H.O.P.E. Basically, everything is needed! Also, a reminder, the plastic bags from grocery stores/retail stores are also needed at H.O.P.E. Please place your donations in the H.O.P.E. Chest (The H.O.P.E. Chest is located at the top stairwell landing near the Ogburn classroom.). Anytime you have donations of items of clothing, blankets, jackets, jeans, plastic grocery bags, etc., please consider placing them in the H.O.P.E. Chest to be donated and used to help meet the needs at H.O.P.E. Your ongoing contributions make a big difference to this ministry -- H.O.P.E. is funded solely by donations! **Thank you, FPCoG, for sharing generously and showing your Love!**

FPCoG – Mark your Calendars for our 5th Saturday Commitments for H.O.P.E. in 2026:

✿ January 31 ✿ May 30 ✿ August 29 ✿ October 31 ✿

Star Words Coming on January 4th!

From A Sanctified Art:file:///C:/Users/pasto/Downloads/2025%20Advent/starwordsliturgy_WDYF_SA.pdf

The use of star words, also called “star gifts,” is a prayer practice connected to Epiphany and the new year that has been growing in popularity in Protestant churches for nearly a decade. The idea is that a list of intention words, or guiding words, are written or printed on paper stars.

These paper stars are then arranged, most commonly face down, on the Communion Table or in a large basket. At some point during the Epiphany service, individuals are invited to draw a word from the basket or from the Table and use it as a guiding word throughout the year. Typically, participants are encouraged to trust the word they have drawn and not replace it. However, there is no strong need to be the “star police.” If an individual wants to trade.

Individuals are often encouraged to place their star word somewhere they will see it regularly throughout the year to allow consistent reflection on how God is moving through, around, or in connection to that word.”

We will have “Star Words” available for everyone in worship on January 4, and it will be the focus of “The Conversation With the Young and Young at Heart.” Please contact Rev. Acton with any questions.



ANNUAL FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE SOUP-ER BOWL LUNCHEON FUNDRAISER

SUNDAY, | AFTER
FEBRUARY 8TH | CHURCH

Come down to the Fellowship Hall for all
you can eat Soup, Sandwiches & Desserts

Adults \$12.00 - children 9 & under eat free

ALL PROCEEDS WILL BE DONATED TO
GARNER AREA MINISTRIES.



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