

April 2024



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

## Easter Snippets from Your Pastor

BY MATT MATTHEWS

MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

*Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east.*— Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Wreck of the Deutschland”

\* \* \*

I’ve been pondering that line from Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east.”

The poem is Hopkin’s masterpiece, his 36-stanza, 288-line telling of “The Wreck of the Duetschland.” But it’s only this one line, the fourth from the last that has transfixed me: “Let him easter in us . . .”

Strictly and archaically, to “easter” means to turn towards or travel to the east. Hopkins may have that secular definition partly in mind. But he’s playing with the reader. East is the direction from which the morning light gathers and the sun dawns. Resurrection is thought of as coming from the east. Many old graveyards are laid out in such a way that the feet of the buried face east. So that, when Christ comes again, the dead will figuratively sit up and come face to face with our Lord.

But Hopkins isn’t talking mainly about a direction—the east. He’s talking about the risen Lord working within us, “eastering” within us. Jesus brightens the darkness within us, as a “dayspring to the dimness of us.” Jesus is like a crimson torch leading through the darkness of the night before resurrection dawn. Jesus is the one who shines a light upon our path. He “easterns” within us, leading us, guiding our steps, directing us—through the storm, through the night, through, even, the valley of the shadow of death, about which Jesus knows intimately.

He ‘easterns’ in us. Jesus rubs off on us. Jesus quickens our pulse to the tune of Holy, holy, holy, LORD God almighty, early in the morning, our song shall rise to thee.



**2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY BRUNCH**  
**April 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Come, enjoy brunch**  
**Centennial Hall**

**We will have a variety of  
brunch items along with some  
special sweet treats. Enjoy  
food and fellowship right  
after the 9 AM service.**

**Donations appreciated!**

**Volunteers are needed to help with  
the brunches. If interested, please  
contact Jan Wittler, Gary Peterson  
or the church office**

## Join Us Sunday April 7

**Jean René Balekita** will be our guest musician at the 9 AM worship service on Sunday, April 7. He will share his faith journey that same morning at the 10 AM **Adult Ed** class *Faith in the Real World*.

He 'easters' in us. He trains our ear to hear birdsong and the trickle of nature's song. And he helps us hear the longing in our brother and sister. He helps us hear the cries of distress from those who have been forsaken—as he was forsaken on a cross.

He 'easters' in us. Jesus orients us to the wonder and awe of creation, the glory of God's love passed from hand to human hand.

He 'easters' in us. He shapes and sharpens our intellect. He stiffens our resolve to do good in the world, to stand up against apathy and evil.

He 'easters' in us. His Spirit works within our flesh. He orients our thinking, our passions, and energy, our conscience. He walks with us. His voice is in our voice, his touch is in our touch, his thoughts are in our thoughts. He whispers and sings and cries out. He won't let go. He 'easters' in us.

"I will build you," says the prophet (*Jeremiah 31:4*), "and you shall be built." Jesus is the builder, the cornerstone, the co-worker, and sweating, spiritual friend, the one swinging the hammer, the one making all things new.

He 'easters' in us.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love," God says in *Jeremiah*. Jesus is the lover, the one who said as he was dying on the cross, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He was giving us the benefit of doubt, which we did not deserve then or now. But, from the foundation of time and even from the dizzying height of the

cross, he was eastering in us. "You shall take your tambourines," says *Jeremiah*, "and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers." Jesus is the LORD of the dance. He easters in us.

"And you shall plant vineyards...and enjoy the fruit." Jesus is true vine; his sacrifice is our cup of salvation.

He easters in us.

"O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good," the Psalmist proclaims (*118:1*). "God's steadfast love endures forever!" Jesus is the forever for us. Jesus is the love in us that spoils unless we share it. Jesus begs and equips us to use our hands and our energies to bear God's love to others. He easters in us, forever dawning on and in us.

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." She fetched Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. Many believe this is John. They ran to the tomb. John arrived first, but waited for Peter, who blustered in and saw it was empty, saw the funeral clothes lying there. Then John went in, and scripture says John believed.

John believed. We don't know what Peter made of the scene.

And Mary did not. Mary did not believe. Not yet.

She mistook Jesus for the gardener.

"Woman why are weeping?" he asked. "For whom are you looking?"

"Sir," she said, "if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

And that's when Mary believed. He said her name. She knew she was known. The one who had promised to love forever and to never abandon his friends, had not left her. He had not left those disciples. He had been eastering in them. Jesus has been kindling a holy light to dawn in the graveyard dark, a dayspring to the dimness of us all, a crimson-cresseted east.

Jesus easters in us still, especially in the dark times we think we may not survive. Jesus easters in us, kindling perfect light at the edge of every dawn.

The Lord is Risen./The Lord is risen, indeed.

## Sunday, May 5, Will Be Special

Please highlight 9 AM, Sunday, May 5 on your calendar! This is the date for our Spring Music and Cuba Emphasis Sunday.

Special music will include a mix of old and new anthems as well as featuring our bell choir.

Hope to see you there!



Almighty God, you raised Jesus from the grave and You have shattered the power of sin and death. We confess that we remain captive to doubt and fear, bound by the ways that lead to death. Save us from the worry that paralyzes us. Wash away our sins of pride and self-centeredness. Redeem us for service in the manner of your Holy Son, our Risen Lord. AMEN.

### Installation Service

The **Installation Service for Associate Pastor of Discipleship Joe Lundy** will be held Sunday afternoon, April 14, at 3 PM. A reception will follow in Centennial Hall.

### *Jays & Concerns*

#### Thanks for...

- the safe return of our emissaries from Cuba. (Read more about their trip on page 5 of this issue.)

### Men's Prayer Group

Men of the church have gathered each week in prayer for decades. We continue this practice each Friday at 8:15 am on Zoom. We pray in turn, in our own way and in the language of our choice. We praise God and ask forgiveness. We pray for our world, our nation, our congregation, and finally for the people we love. [Join us this week.](#)



### Church Office Hours

Office hours have been adjusted.

The church office is now open:

Mon-Thurs 8:30 AM - 2 PM

Friday 8:30 AM - noon

Please note these new times.

**If you or a loved one is in the hospital or in need of a pastoral visit, please let the church office know. Our pastor, staff, and hospital visitors keep this information confidential.**

**Your church wants to be in touch. Bless be the tie that binds.**



# The Heart of Mission

## Feeding the Habitat Build Volunteers



Community Mission Deacons are planning a way for the congregation to participate in feeding lunch to Habitat for Humanity Build participants (20 people) on the third Saturdays for May, June and July.

Watch for sign-up sheets and think about whether you would like to provide a main dish (sharing with another person), side or dessert for 20 people on one of those Saturdays. Sign-up sheets will be in Westminster beginning April 28.

### Possible menus

1. Sloppy Joes or Veggie Joes, fruit, and brownies.
2. Chicken and Rice casserole or Macaroni and Cheese, Fruit salad, and cupcakes,
3. Sub sandwiches (turkey and veggie), chips or whole fruit and pound cake. We will be using paper products so they can be composted.

## Green Team

BY PAT PHILLIPS  
P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET

**Adopt a Highway** is Saturday, April 20, starting about 8:30. Things are picking up, and you can help. Wearing an orange vest while enjoying the company of others is a great way to greet spring. Look for sign-up sheets April 7 and 14.



**Earth Day** Sunday, April 21: Another reminder of a wonderful morning with **Cyndy Ash**, minister and farmer, lover of alpacas and sheep and founder of a "Farm Church" near Clinton. The 2 ½ acres of vegetables are in the community supported agriculture program, like Solo Gratia, and the prized wool from the 40 sheep is sold—Merino & Leicester Longwool.



**Faith in Place** on May 9 is sending buses to Springfield (with legendary **Cindy Shepherd** snacks) for Environmental Lobby Day. We'll leave the Mennonite church in Urbana at

8, meet with legislators at the State Capitol to advocate for passage of clean energy and transportation policies and be back at 3. All are welcome to join us—register at the Faith in Place website: <http://www.faithinplace.org/>

## Refugee Center Gala

BY JOHN MUIRHEAD  
J.MUIRHEAD@COMCAST.NET

The Refugee Center will hold its first Fundraiser Gala since COVID on Saturday April 6, 2024 at the I-Hotel in Champaign featuring our headline performance by **Ricardo Herrera** of the U of I School of Music. Registration is \$90 per person/\$700 for a table of eight. Doors open at 5:30 and program begins at 6:00.

For updates on how to register for this event please go to the website: [therefugeecenter-cu.org](http://therefugeecenter-cu.org)

The Refugee Center (formerly known as the East Central Illinois Refugee Mutual Assistance Center) is a not-for-profit 501c3 serving the C-U area since 1980.

It was founded by Vietnamese refugees to provide commonly needed services to other newly arrived refugees, and to help them acclimatize to American culture. In its 44 years of service to our community, it has expanded its scope to assist all immigrants, political asylees, and refugees, regardless of country of

origin. Offices are located at 201 West Kenyon Road Suite 4D in Champaign. Phone: 217.344-8455.

Please direct any questions to **Lisa Wilson**, Executive Director at [lisawilson@trc-cu.org](mailto:lisawilson@trc-cu.org) or **John Muirhead**, Board President at [j.muirhead@comcast.net](mailto:j.muirhead@comcast.net)

## Strengthening Our Cuban Relationships

BY BRANDI LOWE  
BRANDISCRAPBOOK@YAHOO.COM

This year's Cuba trip took place March 12-18. **Pastor Matt, Brandi Lowe, Libby Sternhagen, and Andrew Schwenk** loaded the van with our donations for Luyanó on Tuesday and drove to Indianapolis where we met up with Matt's long time friend, **John Warren**.

We took 3 flights to get to Cuba on Wednesday where we were welcomed by **Pastor Daniel and his family**. Over the next 4 days, we had a lot of adventures and got to know the people of Luyanó better. Our activities included helping the sewing/knitting/crocheting group to put together some items for the church's Sunday School room, visiting some home bound members of the church, touring Old Havana, rehearsing with the bell choir, witnessing the traditional cannon shot, swimming in the ocean, shopping at the local San José Fair, and attending a Flamenco performance at the National Theatre.

Sunday was almost entirely spent with the members at the church. We worshipped together, had Sunday School together, ate lunch together, met with their session, and ended the day with a big dance party and a great band. One of the main purposes

of this trip was for our bell choir to play with their bell choir. We were able to rehearse with them twice and then performed *What A Friend We Have In Jesus* together on chimes at the Sunday service. It was a huge success. We were also able to spend an evening cleaning their chimes and making minor adjustments. We were even able to replace two of their chimes which were broken.

Every time we go to Cuba, we strengthen our relationships with the people there and we are always sad to leave. We look forward to going back again soon and we hope that you all will consider making the trip in the near future. We all are better for having gone. If you want to hear more about our travels in Cuba, you can talk to any of us or come to Cuba Sunday (which is also the same day as Music Sunday) on May 5<sup>th</sup> where we will talk more in depth about our trip and show you lots of great pictures.



Pictured here from left to right: Pastor Daniel Izquierdo, his son Isaac, John Warren, Andrew Schwenk, Libby Sternhagen, Anaitza Sanchez (Daniel's wife), her mother Elda, Pastor Matt Matthews, and Brandi Lowe.



## Pray for Lukenye

BY BOB KIRBY

RWK3213@BMAIL.COM

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

Matthew 5:9

About 7,400 miles from Champaign-Urbana, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, deep in Solanga National Park in the rain forest of the Congo River basin lies the tiny village of Lukenye. We would not know about Lukenye were it not for **Gabriel Mboyo**, our French language ministry leader. The Mboyo family established and then led this peaceful village for four generations.



Gabriel leads our Saturday worship.

Solanga Park is a UNESCO World Heritage wilderness of 14,000 acres. It is home to some of the world's most threatened wildlife. The Congo basin is a part of "the oxygen tank" of the world because of its critical role for the environment.

The Congo basin is rich in valuable minerals violently exploited by guerilla

groups often funded by other nations. Recently Lukenye was overrun by a violent neighboring clan. Gabriel's cousins were imprisoned and the village destroyed.

Pray for peace and justice in Lukenye and throughout our world. Learn more [here](#).

## Face to Face with the Gale Brandner



Gale is an ordained United Methodist pastor.

### What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?

I got connected by attending Pastor Matt's bible study at The Windsor of Savoy.

### What has been the highlight of your church experience?

The worship of God, spiritual formation, and concern for the less fortunate.

### Tell me about your family? Your work?

I am a townie born in Urbana and raised in Mahomet, married my University of Illinois sweetheart and am now a widow living with my sister. My mom still lives in town. My degree was in English. I felt called to ministry at age sixteen but postponed that call until age forty-seven when I graduated from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston. I served nine congregations over twenty-five years until my recent retirement.

### What do you do in your free time?

I write short stories and love to read American history and travel. I am a member of our small writing group.

### Who are your favorite Bible characters?

Jonah. His story is mine. Called to serve God but reluctant he finally followed through.

### How can the church best be the church?

Prepare people to relate to God and then to the needs of humanity. I must add one footnote here. I have been in many churches in my lifetime and the most welcoming one has been First Pres. From the moment I entered the door I felt genuinely welcomed and cared for.



Pastor Matt shares a Bible story activity with DREAMERS and volunteers at Wednesday Youth Club.

## Wednesday Youth Club Join Us Around the Table

Join us Wednesdays from 3:30-5 PM around a table in Centennial Hall with youth from DREAM. Enjoy a meal with middle school boys and girls and their mentors. Feel the energy. Learn their aspirations. Program includes a bible story activity and shared prayer concerns.

You can sign up [here](#) or contact **Bob Kirby** at 217-621-5915 or [rwk3213@gmail.com](mailto:rwk3213@gmail.com)

## We Are Matthew 25

Over the past few years, our congregation has cast a new vision of itself as a church that takes Matthew 25 seriously and lives it out in the world. In so doing we have made a loving commitment to radical and fearless discipleship and to embrace three interrelated pillars of Building Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism and Eradicating Systemic Poverty.



The Matthew 25 logo

The circular shape represents unity and equality. Like God, a circle has no beginning and no end, and it symbolizes our continuing effort to help one another. The shape also suggests a globe that points to our engagement with the world.



## Sunday Hospitality

Many of us enjoy a cup of tea or coffee after Sunday Worship. Some go for the donut holes and lemonade. Setting up and taking down the hospitality table is easy and it is fun. The only requirement is a smile. Directions are posted and someone is there to help when help is needed. Join a list of those who can help from time to time by signing up [here](#).

The three interlocking figures represent the equality of all people without gender or race bias. They have their arms around each other, symbolizing friendship, protection and service. The number three suggests the three focus areas of congregational vitality, structural racism and systematic poverty, as well as the Trinity.

The color palette is bright, lively, friendly and energetic — suggestive of our active commitment.

Finally, the legend "Matthew 25" below the symbol is the literal identification of the mark. We use a handwritten font to make the point that active engagement in the world requires human effort.



**Christie Clinic's Illinois Race  
Weekend Is Back!  
April 25-27**

*2024 Race Weekend*

**Volunteer NOW with  
the church or DREAAM!**

**We will be "ReUnited" as a Community, with the return of the full marathon route!**

This year, the Education Building of the church (corner of State & Church) is on the race route AND DREAAM is one of several Charity Partners participating. YOU can help out in different ways...

- 1) If you are a runner/walker, you can register for one of the Race Weekend events and join the official DREAAM team as a participant! Those who want to "go the extra mile," can also set up a personal page and select DREAAM as a recipient for funds raised.
- 2) Donate directly to The DREAAM team's efforts and amplify their local outreach, throughout the year.
- 3) Volunteer under the DREAAM name April 25-27! DREAAM is specifically seeking more "Course Team" volunteers (must be 18+ years). For each Course Team volunteer shift covered under DREAAM, they receive a small donation. Choose DREAAM from the drop-down menu of Charity Partners on the volunteer registration page!

For the Church...Anyone can participate with us at our booth, which is not an official part of the marathon, if you have already signed up we will be reaching out to you soon with more information. If you want to sign up, either talk to **Bruce Rainey** or **Joe Lundy**, or send an email to [joseph@firstpres.church](mailto:joseph@firstpres.church) and you will be put on the list of volunteers! We look forward to cheering on runners and giving them m&m's as they pass by.

For DREAAM...go to <https://illinoismarathon.com/get-involved/volunteer/volunteer-sign-up/>

**DREAAM is excited to be a Charity Running  
Partner of the  
Christie Clinic Illinois Race Weekend!**

**April 25-27 | #CCIRW2024**



# Finance

## Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM  
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

### Contributions

Total February contributions: \$18K from plate and pledge plus \$10.3K from prepaid= \$28.3K. This is \$21.9 less than last year and \$37.1 under budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$ 113.6 K which is 26.1 less than last year and \$17.2 under budget. At 16.6% of the year, we have 27.6% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

### Expenses

February expenses were \$104.1 K, which is \$14.2 K more than last year and \$24.1K over budget. Expenses YTD are \$174.2 which is \$23.5 K more that last year and \$14.2 K over budget. At 16.6% of the year, we have spent 18.2% of the budget.

### Balance YTD

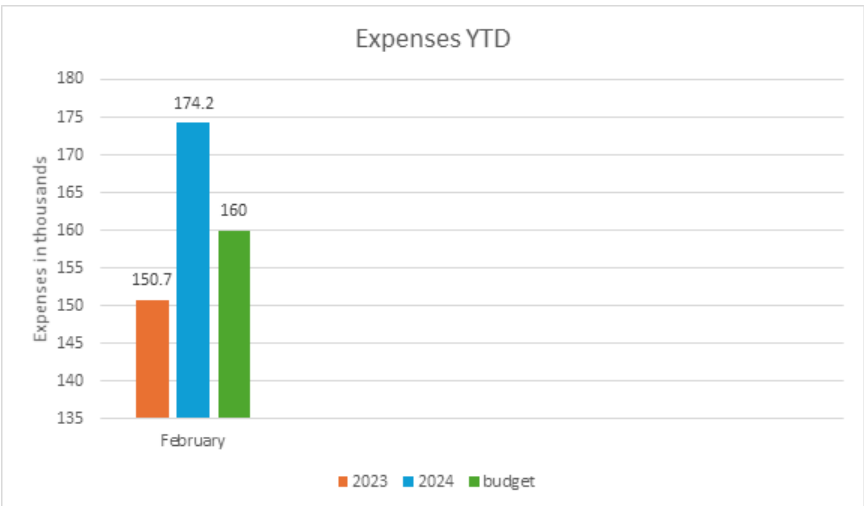
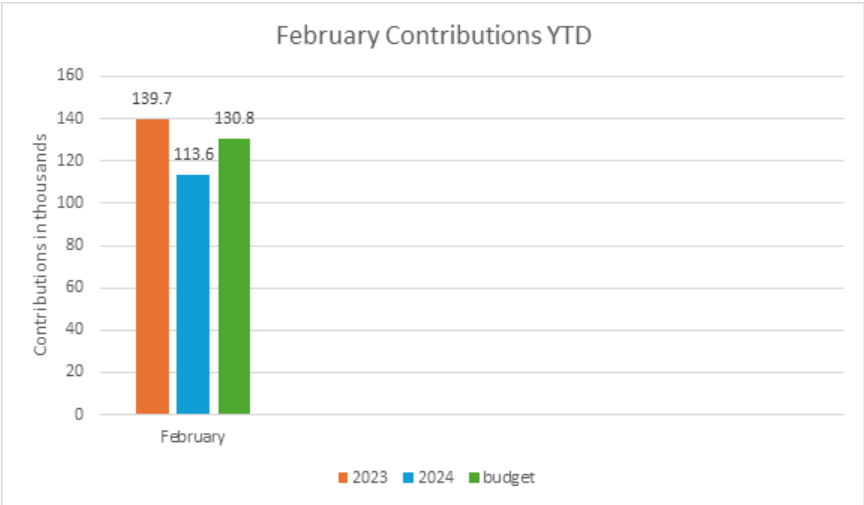
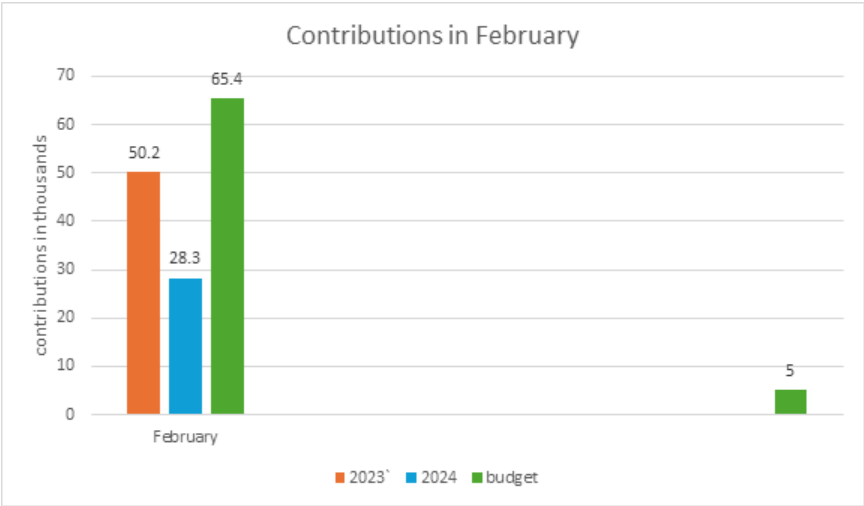
Revenue, including prepaid, exceeded expenses by \$48.1K, which is \$38.6K less than last year at the same time.

### Session Designated Funds

\$1,641,775 which is \$28,551 more than last month.

### Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$3675 was given to various funds including \$2485 to the general memorial fund and \$500 to Cuba Partners.





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Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



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**E:** [info@firstpres.church](mailto:info@firstpres.church)

[www.firstpres.church](http://www.firstpres.church)

**Sunday:**

9 AM Worship

10 AM Coffee and Fellowship

10 AM Sunday School for Youth & Adults

Online Worship is also available at 9 AM on Sunday mornings thru YouTube, Facebook, and our church website. Go to FirstPres.Live

Contact the church office for more information.

**Pastor:**

Matt Matthews..... Senior Pastor/Head of Staff  
Joseph Lundy..... Associate Pastor for Discipleship

**Staff:**

Martice Chapple..... Facility Assistant  
Ritchie Drennen..... Facility Manager,  
Patty Farthing..... Office Assistant  
Robert Ferrer..... Audio-visual Technician  
Fred Foster..... Evening Custodian  
Marcia Franks..... Office Administrator  
Joe Grant..... Director of Music  
Rachel Matthews..... Covenant Pastor for Mission  
Ann Petry..... Accounting  
Sora Shepard..... Organist/Pianist  
Libby Sternhagen..... Bell Choir Director  
Bonnie Ward..... English Language Learner Director

Staff email addresses are the person's first name followed by  
@firstpres.church For example, matt@firstpres.church

**Church Office hours:**

Mon-Thurs 8:30 AM - 2 PM

Friday 8:30 AM - noon

The newsletter is published monthly.

Deadline is the third Monday of the month for the following month's edition.

Send submissions to [marcia@firstpres.church](mailto:marcia@firstpres.church).