

December 2023



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN



Dates in December

Sunday, December 3

3 pm Group attending Carol Concert at Krannert

Thursday, December 7

12 noon Christmas Gathering hosted by Presbyterian Women

Sunday, December 10

9 am Christmas Music Sunday with Chancel Choir and Upper Room Ringers

10 am Christmas Charcuterie Brunch immediately following worship

3 pm Blue Christmas (An advent service for those experiencing grief or for whom this season is a time of grieving. It offers a space to express those feelings, but also to experience the hope we find in Christ.)

Sunday, December 17

3 pm Caroling to the Community (gather at church at 2:30)

Sunday, December 24

9 am Worship

4 pm Family Christmas Eve Service

8 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

More information in this issue.



Sunday, December 3

Carol Concert at Krannert Center 3 pm

Pastor Matt will drive the church van to avoid parking difficulties and no long walk. You may already have a ticket, if not you can get it online at krannertcenter.com. To reserve a seat on the van, contact the church office.

Thursday, December 7

Christmas Gathering hosted by Presbyterian Women 12 noon

Uni High Madrigals will be performing during the program. A delicious lunch will follow. Please RSVP to church office.

Sunday, December 10

Christmas Music Sunday 9 am

We'll feature the Chancel Choir and Upper Room Ringers this year, but unfortunately, no chamber orchestra. With the space restrictions of Westminster, we needed to cut back a bit on the number of participants but we'll feature quality music that will hopefully fill your hearts with Christmas love and reflection.

Christmas Charcuterie Buffet immediately following worship

Blue Christmas Worship Service 3 pm

An advent service for those experiencing grief or for whom this season is a time of grieving. It offers a space to express those feelings, but also to experience the hope we find in Christ.

Sunday, December 17

Caroling to the Community (gather at church at 2:30)

3-5 pm followed by hot chocolate and cookies in Westminster Hall.

Sunday, December 24

9 am Worship

4 pm Family Christmas Eve Service

8 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

The Nurture/Outreach Team wishes all a Merry Christmas and a BIG thank you for your involvement and help in our many different activities this past year!!

Snippets from Your Pastor

BY MATT MATTHEWS
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On every December 16th, I think of my dad.

On this day in 1944, Hitler's army launched what we call the Battle of the Bulge. My father was there in 1944. My family was there in 2011 walking those ridges on the German side of the Belgian border, looking around on a warm June day, trying to imagine war in winter snow a long time ago. My mind drifts back to that spot every December.

And it still breaks my heart.

I am Billy Boy's boy.

To the tax man, my dad was Mr. Matthews. Friends at church and work called him Bill. But those who knew him when he was a child—and there are not many left—called him Billy Boy.

When I phoned Bobby Barton, one of Dad's friends from his early teens, and told him that I was writing about my father, it took him a while to pin down who I was talking about. Barton had become reacquainted with Dad only after he happened on an article I had written about Dad's World War II experience for a Memorial Day feature in the Virginian-Pilot. Barton thought that both Dad's name and his army mug shot, which appeared with the story, looked familiar. He called Dad, they swapped enough Petersburg stories to realize that if they didn't know each other, they should, and

Barton and his wife Hettie drove across the Hampton Roads harbor from Chesapeake to Hampton to see my dad and to meet my mom. It had been over sixty years since Bobby Barton and my dad palled around together. It was old home week.

When Dad's family lived in Petersburg from 1934 to 1939, Bobby's house was down the street on Chuckatuck Avenue. The Matthews, who lived next door to the Doyles, stayed only five years while Joe Matthews, my grandfather, completed his stint as commander of the CCC Camp that transformed the Civil War battlefield at Petersburg into a National Park. That was enough time for Bobby and Dad to become friends. Together they learned how to set camp fires and tie a dozen kinds of knots in Cap Sailor's Boy Scout Troop. Dad played lots of tennis. A small kid for his age, the young Billy Matthews managed to smooth the clay courts near Wilcox Lake with a weighted roller in exchange for a few free sets. Maintaining tennis courts was the beginning of a lifetime of neighborly bartering that my dad was so good at. I'll set the forms for your driveway if your concrete man will share his leftovers for my sidewalk. It was a legitimate you-scratch-my-back, I'll-scratch-yours that got floor tiles laid, roofs shingled, and backyard gardens tilled.

"You're writing about your father," Bobby repeated politely. "And do I know him?"

"Yes, sir," I said. I had never met Barton. I wasn't sure if he was having difficulty hearing, understanding,

or both. My phone call must have seemed wildly and very much out of the blue. "My mom tells me that you and your wife came to visit Dad in Hampton a few months before he died," I explained. "I got your name from the phone book."

"His name is Bill what?" Barton asked again.

"Matthews," I said again. "Bill Matthews. You knew him in Petersburg. Growing up."

"Oh," he blurted. "Billy Boy!"

* * *

On the January afternoon after Dad's funeral service in 2002, an elderly woman offered me her hand during the reception. She spoke as if I should have known who she was, though, thankfully, she then introduced herself. Mary Virginia Peake grew up on Cherokee Road in Hampton's Wythe neighborhood. Dad lived at number 68, across the street from Dr. Berlin, who bought his house plans from the Sears catalogue.

"We really loved Billy Boy," she said. "We worried about all the neighborhood boys going off to war."

The room was bright and loud as hungry mourners clattered around tables the church ladies had laden with meatballs and chunks of out-of-season melon from Chile. Sue Johnson had contributed a platter of her homemade eggrolls. Mary Lane and a dozen other women had decorated the room with flowers and framed pictures of Dad. Pimento cheese sandwiches

were cut into triangles. Crab dip and crackers. A vegetable tray of radishes, carrots, and celery. It was a Tidewater, Virginia, spread of church food.

The one o'clock funeral had not run long, but the gathered had most probably missed lunch. I was starving. We had prayed, listened, remembered, and wept. We had sung the traditional For All the Saints, and one of Dad's favorite hymns, a relatively new one from the 1980's, that I also loved. I opened my mouth but the words would not come. The people packed in the pews around me sang, though. They stood in the aisles and spilled out the back doors. Their voices were a strong, solid thing. I the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry . . .

Afflicted by hunger, we were now ready to eat. Clotted in small groups in the fellowship hall, family friends and strangers balanced tiny plastic plates mounded with Virginia ham biscuits in one hand and sweet iced tea in the other. Old people like Uncle Jim were seated like Roosevelt at Yalta where they received visitors who leaned over them and shook their hands. Everyone chewed and talked at the same time, shouting to be heard. The crowd milled

around visiting, and they laughed and laughed. It was like a dance. Dad would have loved it.

I wanted to ask this gentle woman with the halo of wispy white hair to speak up, but I didn't dare. I held her frail hand. She either couldn't speak very loudly, or couldn't say this very loudly. Some memories have to be whispered, or, like birds easily spooked, they scatter in a feathery blur. She had dreamed of my father the night before she learned he was missing in action. A Western Union telegram from the Adjutant General of the US Army delivered news to Dad's folks in Hampton, and the Matthews had gotten word to Dad's sisters, including Angeline at Madison College where she and Mary Virginia Peake were learning to be teachers.

Newspaper reports came later, days behind, with bannered headlines and pages blackened with wired reports of what would be Hitler's last offensive. Only days before, Dad's army infantry regiment—the 422nd of the 106th Division—was trapped behind the lines. Cy Peterman of the Philadelphia Inquirer would report that the 106th was “the worst-smacked and

heaviest loser of all American units in front of Field Marshal von Rundstedt's counter-offensive in Belgium.”[i]

Dad and some 3,000 other bewildered men were lost tramping through deep snow in a dense forest of firs, low on ammunition, hope waning. Radio communications were spotty, late, confused, and finally down. Westbound German Panzer and Tiger tanks and flak wagons clogged the narrow roads. Volksgrenadiers seethed through the woods from every direction. The 106th had come fresh to the front on the Belgium-German border, never having fired a shot except in training drills state-side and in England. Their average age may have been 21-years-old. Dad was 20. The war, they had been told, appeared to be grinding to a close.

On December 16th, they were the first to learn that Germany wasn't ready to give up. Dad was near the unfortunate center of what the papers were beginning to call the Battle of the Bulge. Stars & Stripes later reported that it had been Belgium's coldest winter in forty years.[ii] Men practically froze in foxholes. To the south, outside of Bastogne, snow drifted over fences and erased the narrow



roads. A month after the battle began, with the Germans on the run, some 90,000 Allied men had been captured, wounded, or killed. Frostbite was as prolific as shrapnel wounds.

It was cold in the Shenandoah Valley, too, but a lot warmer in college dorms with steam heat and down-filled quilts. For Mary Virginia and everyone else stateside, the names of all the obscure towns and rivers must have seemed incomprehensibly foreign, as did the battle maps that eventually made it into newspapers marking troop movements and clashes by so many insistent arrows. "Over there," is what Mary Virginia Peake called it on the day of the funeral. St. Vith, Monschau, Namur, Malmedy, the Roer, the Muese. Over there.

"Yes, ma'am," I said. My voice was suddenly catching. "It was a long way away. A long time ago."

But it wasn't a distant and dim memory for her. The faces and scenes were fresh. She was three years behind Dad at George Wythe Junior High School. She played flute in the school band. Her friend Angeline was president of the Girl's Service Club. A semester behind them, a quiet girl named Barbara Ann Burriss served as an usher at the Wythe production of Booth Tarkington's play *Seventeen*. One day, Barbara Ann would star in a drama involving a young man home from the war named Bill Matthews.

Boys from Wythe would marry girls from Southampton, Downtown, and Foxhill. Children would be born to these newlyweds. When Al Knight, president of Wythe's 9th grade class, declined his homeroom teacher

Margaret Lane's request to write a graduation speech, vice president Barbara Ann assumed the duty. "I was better in sports in those days," Knight said at his men's clothing store in May of 2011. "I wasn't so good at writing themes."

Knight would finish high school and spend a lifetime running his upscale store. Charles Wornom would retire from a pharmacy also bearing his name. Men would take jobs at the yards in Newport News building a Navy for a short-lived peace, then a Cold War; they'd pass down their jobs as welders, electricians, and draftsmen to their sons and daughters who would take seats at the apprentice school. They'd develop space craft and test wing designs in the wind tunnels at the NACA, the predecessor of NASA. They'd harvest oysters from the Chesapeake, walk beats as city cops, coach ball, teach school. All of the faces. All of the good times, war's disfiguring scars, kids growing up and up, friends growing gray and weary and old.

Hadn't we just sung about what she was seeing through watery, blue eyes?

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Mary Virginia and I stood together unmoved as my former Sunday school teachers with rolled up sleeves busily streamed back and forth from the kitchen to the tables of disappearing food. I tried to follow her far-off gaze. I'd bet this is what she saw: her old friends were young, she wasn't frail,

and Dad wasn't dead. Many of the boys, she whispered, didn't come home from the war. She was looking out the fellowship hall windows into even, afternoon light, into their gone-but-not-forgotten young faces, I suppose. I still held her hand—a smooth, velvet bag of bones. "Many more," she said, "came home not knowing what hit them."

Billy Boy was one of those young men.

* * *

Every Christmas I count my blessings.

I wonder what it was like for my dad and thousands of other men that year as a POW. I wonder about the travails others in our world face this Christmas, what they remember, what they bear, the metrics one might use to measure that weight. I ponder these things from the safety of my warm life, my circle of friends, the decorated halls of my church.

This is the world into which God comes. Each Christmas. Every day. This is the darkness into which God's light floods and flickers.

May the people who hurt the most be the ones who first hear angel song. May we welcome them on the path we share to the manger. And may we all, by God's grace, study war no more.

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[i] Joseph F. Littell, *A Lifetime In Every Moment: A Memoir* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 158.

[ii] Roscoe C. Blunt, Jr, *Foot Soldier: A Combat Infantryman's War in Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Da Capo Press, 2002), 124.

The Rockwell Plates

BY GALE BRANDNER

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The first one was an employee gift received at the company Christmas party in 1982. In presenting one to each staff member, the vice president said it was the 2nd issue in a series of Norman Rockwell collector plates launched the previous year. This new line of plates was called The Heritage Series and was based on Rockwell's artwork originally created for advertising campaigns of various companies such as Johnson Wax, General Electric, Bell Telephone, etc.

Each year a new plate would feature an adult – usually an elderly adult – and a child or much younger adult, bringing to mind a grandparent and grandchild engaged in some familiar activity. The Johnson Wax-inspired image captures a painter taking time out from waxing a hardwood floor in order to apply fresh wax to a little girl's doll bed, for example. The General Electric ad shows an elderly couple playing bridge with a much younger man and woman under the soft light of G.E light bulbs encased by an ornate lamp shade. And that first plate in the series, called "The Shipbuilder," depicts an old sailor building a miniature sailing vessel under the watchful eye of an enthralled young boy. Bringing the viewer's imagination into play, one can almost hear the boy's questions and the builder's replies as the ship slowly takes shape.

But we didn't know quite what to do with that first plate. I asked a co-worker what she planned to do with hers, and she said "take it up to the

attic and put it in an old trunk." Well we could surely think of something better to do with our plate than carry it up to the attic. But we put it in the closet and before we knew it the next Christmas was upon us – and the new 3rd issue of Rockwell collector plates in the Heritage Series hit the gift shops. We decided to buy one as a mutual wedding anniversary gift since our anniversary came 4 days before Christmas.

And so it began. Year after year we bought the next plate in the series. The collection grew rapidly. Three plates – four – seven – nine. Before we knew it we had enough plates to line the dining room wall. That first plate had been out of the closet and on the dining room wall for some time now. With each of Bob's job transfers to a new state or a new town we boxed up the plates and brought them with us, displaying them on new dining room walls. The images of those older ladies and gentlemen with the children we thought of as their grandkids became to us imaginary family members as we now lived so far from living loved ones with real flesh. Real bones. The Rockwell plates moved with us to 10 different houses, and with each move the collection got larger. And more precious.

But our feelings for them changed over time. They no longer brought us comfort. After several years of marriage it became apparent that there would be no children to transform us from being a couple into being a family. No children. No grandchildren. And the affectionate familiarity of those Rockwell images were now bitter reminders of what

would never be. No grandsons for whom to build model ships. No granddaughters for whom to wax a little doll bed.

We still bought a new plate each year – still took down the collection from the walls when we moved out of one house and into another. But they were only reminders of an unresolved grief that would never fully heal.

We bought them because it had become a wedding anniversary tradition. And because they held interest for the stories we told ourselves about what those old people and their grandchildren might have been saying to one another at the moment they were captured in porcelain. The grandfather bound for the fishing hole with fishing rod in hand was accompanied by his 10 year old grandson racing along in great excitement. The little girl enthralled by her grandfather's stories as together they unpacked a trunk filled with family treasures. We bought those plates because they told amusing tales and because they had become part of our anniversary celebration.

So the number of plates in our collection grew. Fourteen. Twenty two. Thirty seven.

And then Bob got sick. And the plates were removed from the dining room walls one last time as we prepared to give up our home and move into a retirement community. Limited living space demanded that we give up so many of the possessions we'd collected over the years, as had everyone who's ever downsized. Still, we couldn't muster the courage to dispose of the Rockwell plates. So

they came with us to The Windsor and spent the next 16 months in the tiny first floor storage cubby that was assigned to our apartment.

And then Bob died. When The Windsor administrator asked me what the staff could do to help during those awful first days, I said "you could help by accepting our Rockwell plates as a donation. I think they would look quite nice above the Library bookshelves." I did not have the heart to keep them. Now they only brought sadness. Reminders of relationships that would never be. She graciously accepted my offer; but as a maintenance staff person helped remove the plates from our storage unit he said "Are you sure you want to give these up? They are probably worth some money . . . and here they'll just be put in a storage garage and sold at a rummage sale."

But our administrator assured me that would not happen, which gave me

some peace of mind. A little of my history and maybe a twinge of my soul were glazed into those plates, and nobody wants those aspects of life sold off in a rummage sale. But the administrator was right. The plates weren't relegated to a sale table.

That's why there are 34 Norman Rockwell Heritage Series collector plates crowning the Library's bookcases. When I see them there I like to believe those grandparent figures captured on plates are having a wonderful time regaling family stories and carrying on family traditions. They may also be re-living their childhood pastimes with the grandchildren who are heir to whatever values and virtues these grandparents cherish. Sometimes late in the evenings when the library is very quiet I go there to visit these dear old porcelain friends. I hear their stories. I see the children's excitement. I guess at what

might be said. I predict what might happen next. They no longer bring me sadness. The plates bring me joy in hoping they are of worth to others. That the plates will elicit the same sense of wonder, happiness and hope that they brought out in me.

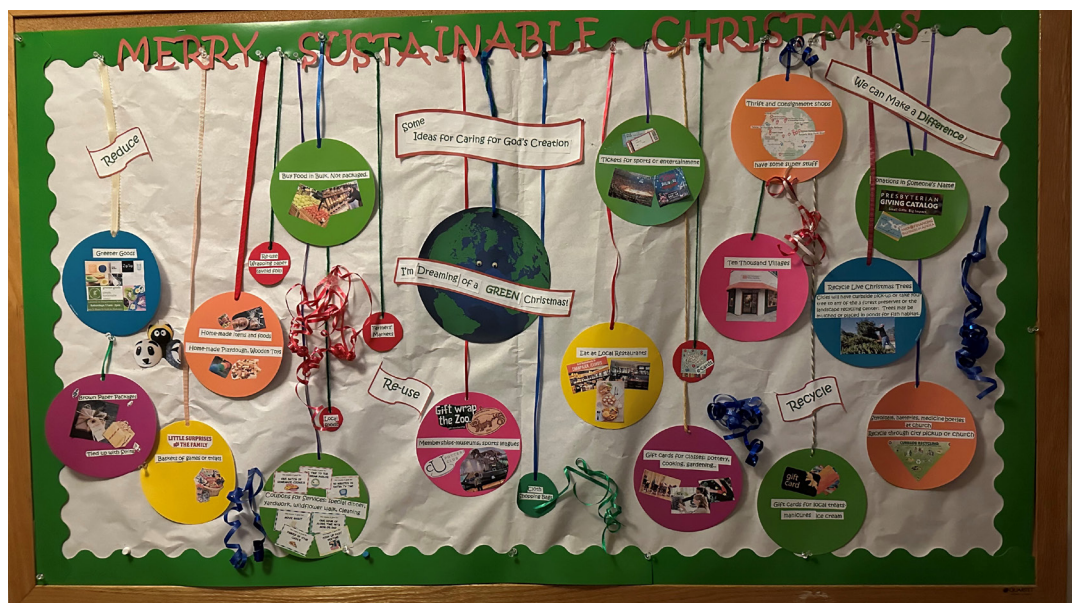
And when I leave the library after these visits I take with me happy memories of the time each one came into our hearts and our home, and I celebrate the fact that they escaped disposal in a rummage sale and now have a permanent home at The Windsor of Savoy.

I hope you think of those grandparents kindly as they kindle your own treasured memories and bring a peaceful warmth to your soul, as they do to mine.

10-12-22 rev. 4-5-23/10-30-23

Merry Sustainable Christmas

Check out the Environmental bulletin board created by Clemmie Ackermann, Nancy Brombaugh and Pat Phillips located in the northwest hall (across from kitchen) in Westminster Hall.



The Heart of Mission

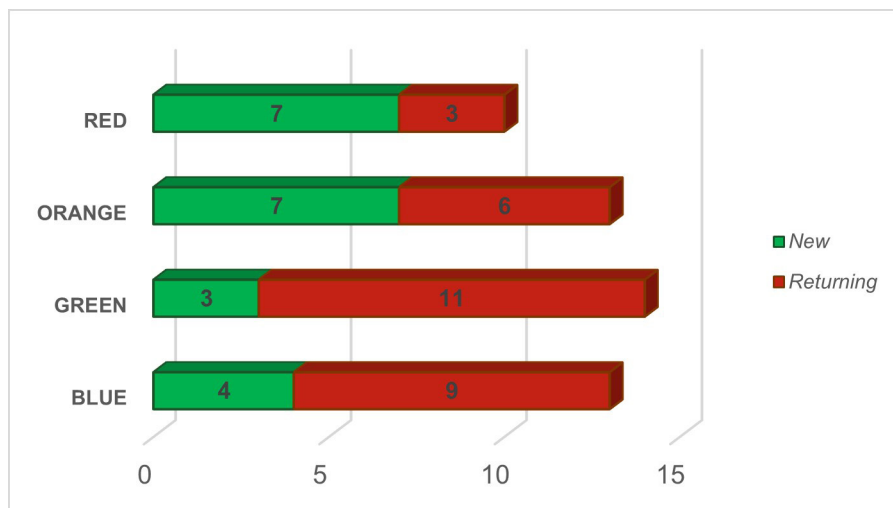
English Language Learners

BY BONNIE WARD, DIRECTOR

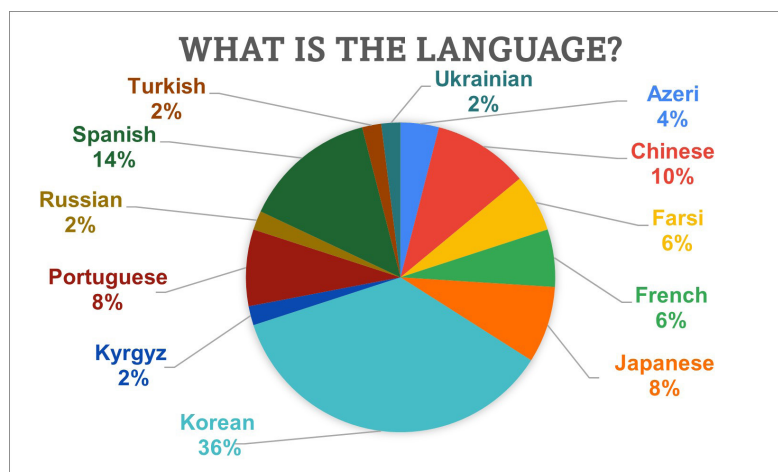
BONNIE@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

The fall semester has been a good one. It has been great to be able to welcome newcomers to our community with a learning “family” and supportive, helpful teachers. I am grateful for all of the dedicated volunteers who make this program such a success. It is thrilling to watch a new, timid, nervous student be welcomed into the circle at Café Time, and quickly feel at ease enough to try out their English and begin to communicate.

We have students from many countries and languages in our program.

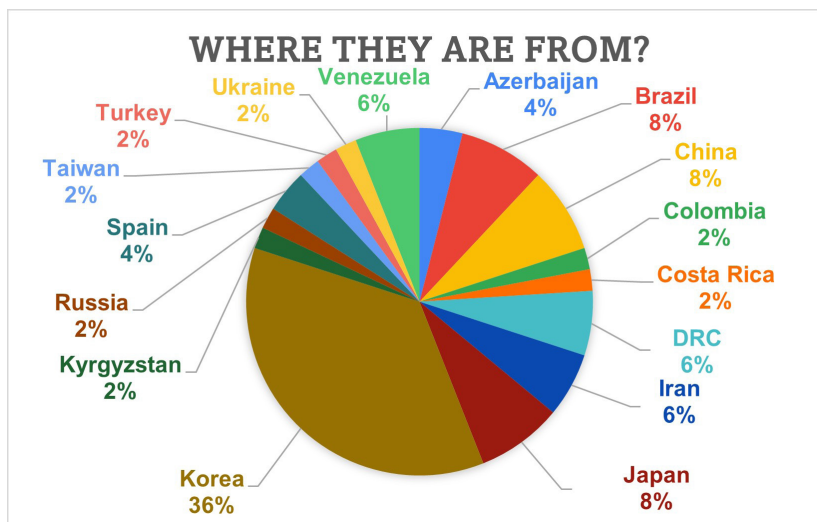


Many speak more than one language, and several, despite their age, come every day to work on improving their language abilities. The community is supportive and encouraging to everyone.



We have had several students give presentations on places like Vladivostok, Japan, Korea and Brazil. We also had a fun Halloween party complete with pumpkin carving, relay races, cookie decorating, and lots of good food. No matter the event, there is always an abundance of great food! Our Thanksgiving Potluck was a fun event that also included lots of good food and fellowship. A big thank you to **Gary Peterson** and his team, as well as all who helped cook, set up, and clean up.

We have had a full house this semester, and have many on our waiting list. My hope is to add another class next semester, once I find a teacher for Wednesday mornings. The need for ELL classes in Champaign Urbana continues to grow, but programs are not able to keep pace.



Last week, **Mayor Deborah Feinen** was presented with a certificate from Welcoming America that designates Champaign as a 2-star welcoming city, only one of 3 cities nationwide, and the first in Illinois. For the First Presbyterian ELL program, it is an honor to be a part of what helps to make our city a welcoming place for immigrants. This program is well-known and well-respected throughout CU. Thank you for your support.

<https://champaignil.gov/2023/11/06/city-of-champaign-designated-as-first-certified-welcoming-place-in-state-of-illinois/>

ELL Classes will end this semester on December 13. We will resume on January 16, 2024. We look forward to a New Year of English Language Learning at First Presbyterian Church.

(Graph work done by volunteer **Lidia Colen** from Brazil)

Mission Updates

BY RACHEL MATTHEWS, COVENANT PASTOR FOR MISSION
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Mission Fact

The Refugee Center is now a Refugee Center Affiliate which will mean that it can receive more refugees than those immigrants who name a person in the community in order to move into the community. The Refugee Center can receive up to 85 refugees a year now.

DREAAM updates

While DREAAM is still using our building for specific projects, they now have their offices at 2009 Fox Drive, Suite C in Champaign.

Deadline to let Rachel know if you are going on the Cuba Spring Trip is December 7. A copy of your passport front page and a solid commitment is needed. The travel dates are sometime between March 9-17 and the cost is somewhere around \$2000 depending on air travel. Two trip meetings will be organized after December 9 and before the trip for planning and orientation. You must have gone through a Cuba Study and be affiliated with First Presbyterian Church in order to travel.

Cuba: The Land, the People, the Culture, the Church

This was the name of an eight-week study of Cuba this year. Eight gathered weekly for consideration of the biennial themes used for study by our church in Cuba. We studied related scripture and prayed together. We reviewed the history and culture from 4,000 years ago to the present and concluded by sharing a fabulous traditional Cuban meal together.

If you have interest in participating more in our partnership in Cuba please contact our **Mission Coordinator Rachel Matthews** at rachel@firstpres.church.

In March, Nothing's Warmer Than a Cuban Smile

We are invited by our sister congregation at Luyanó in Havana, Cuba, to send a delegation next March.

December 7 is the deadline to submit passport information to obtain a travel visa.

Travel Requirements:

- Be a member or staff of a Presbyterian Church.
- Produce a US passport valid until at least September 17, 2024.
- Attend orientation sessions before departure if you have not completed a Cuba Study this year.

If you are interested in traveling, please contact **Rachel Matthews** at rachel@firstpres.church.

Knowing Cuba The Cuban National Tree



The Royal Palm is a large, ornamental species of palm tree, native to the Caribbean.

The Royal Palm's leaves are commonly used in Palm Sunday observances.

Coming in 2024 – Eclipse Event

*You are invited to the Eclipse Event
in the Path of Totality*

Mark your calendars...
April 8, 2024 Camp Carew

**You are invited to join the group to observe
the total solar eclipse that will be visible
from southern Illinois.**

**Visit www.campcarew.org for more details
and to register!**

ANGEL TREE/ADVENT OFFERING

NO ROOM IN THE INN?

The Angel Tree and the December Advent Offering will be combined this year. The monetary offerings will go toward the first month's housing for The Refugee Center's newest refugees. Should you want to give items there is a "ROOM IN THE INN" list of needed items and a box on the mission table to give your gifts.

There Is Room In the Inn

Each time a refugee family arrives in Champaign/Urbana, the Refugee Center helps the family find housing and in collaboration with other agencies in C/U, helps furnish their new homes with basic needs. Since most families come with little or nothing, these "ROOM IN THE INN" items are especially helpful. Our church and other faith based organizations will be collecting these items and Grace Lutheran Church will store them so they can be distributed as needed.

Following are the items you can provide as a part of the Angel Tree project. We will have a collection box in Westminster Hall.

Full sheet set
1 tall trash can + one box of trash bags
2 small waste baskets
1 12+ piece dinnerware set
2 can openers
1 silverware set
\$40 for toiletries for one arrival

Twin sheet set
4 Towel/washcloth sets
1 set of pots and pans
1 kitchen utensil set
1 pack-n-play
4 dish towels



Christmas Joy Offering To Be Received on Christmas Eve and Sunday, December 31

The Christmas Joy Offering will be taken on Christmas Eve and at the Sunday service the following week.

Fifty percent of your gifts make it possible for students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The other fifty percent assists current and retired church workers and their families with critical financial needs.

Please give generously...for when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot!

Rustin – A Film for the Holidays

Presbyterian pastor and film critic **Edward McNulty** [makes the case](#) for the film, "Rustin", now streaming on Netflix.

A Matthew 25 Congregation

We are a Matthew 25 congregation committed to engage others in three objectives-building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty. These three pillars are interrelated as we are called to act on the words of Matthew 25 in the context of the society in which we live. We strive to create a healthy, just and radically inclusive community.

Your Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry Team is focusing on poverty and racism. We are learning, engaging the community and advocating for change. Join us.

Face to Face with Bruce & Patty Farthing



Bruce and Patty Farthing at her desk where she serves the church as our administrative assistant.

What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?

A neighbor invited us to come with them when we first moved to our home in Champaign. We joined the church in 1978.

What has been the highlight of your church experience?

We agree that our opportunity to teach Christian parenting classes was our most meaningful experience. It required us to learn a lot and then to have the joy of sharing with young parents. This was our highlight.

We would add that beyond our own congregation, the Community Bible Study was life changing. Bruce taught it for sixteen years. Patty found the Bible study transformative as she transitioned from the Catholic Church.

Tell me about your family? Your work?

We have four children and nine grandchildren with many grand cats and grand dogs. Two children live in Illinois and two others live in Indiana and Florida. Patty has served twenty-three years as administrative assistant in the church office and loves the work she does.

What do you do in your free time?

For Bruce, it's golf. He has been golfing since he was fourteen. For Patty it is movies with happy endings. We watch both these and sports together.

Who are your favorite Bible characters?

For Bruce it's Jacob. "Jacob's ladder, for me, signifies the small steps we take over our lives to get closer to God. We do it one step at a time." Esther is Patty's favorite. The message that moves her most is in Esther 4:14 telling us that God equips and calls us to a specific work that is unique to us.

How can the church best be the church?

It is best when it finds a balance between equipping and caring for the flock and discerning God's call to reach out to our world. It's in the church that we find love and joy in the good times of life and the good news of the gospel that strengthens and comforts us in the tough and sad times.



Grief During the Holidays

OSF Hospice and OSH HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center would like to invite you to attend a two-hour session on "Grief During the Holidays".

Saturday – December 2, 2023

10 am-12 noon

Sunday – December 10, 2023

2 pm-4 pm

OSF Homecare & Hospice Office
1501 Interstate Drive, Suite C
(last office on the right.)

Registration is required. For more information and to register, please call 217.355.4120 option 7 during business hours (M-F 8 am-4:30 pm).



Hear the good news!

Hope does not disappoint us, for God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us in baptism.

Believe in this goodness and give thanks: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen!**

Brief Overview of the Confession of Belhar and a Little Info about the Book of Confessions

BY JOE LUNDY, ASSOCIATE PASTOR

JOSEPH@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Brief overview of the confession and a little info about the *Book of Confessions*.

Early last month we went through the *Confession of Belhar*, a confession that comes from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa. As Matt said in his message this statement is a great call for equality, and the fact that God is in that call. Though the statement came from a place where racial discrimination was most evident, it is a call for all of us to recognize the image of God (imago Dei) in each and every person.

The confession itself is full of scriptural references, pointing to where in the Bible each of the theological claims is made, like most of our confessions it is quite well sourced. The easiest way to find this is in our *Book of Confessions* (it is one half of our constitution after all), which can be found either at the church or online! Many of you may even have one at home, though if it is a bit older Belhar will be missing.

The confessions offer great insight into how our denomination understands scripture (they do not replace scripture or have authority over it), and each offer snap shots of the time and place they were written, as well as where our denomination was when they were added. If you are looking to deeper dive into the *Confession of Belhar* I highly recommend looking it up and giving it and its accompanying letter a read in the *Book of Confessions* (just google it).



Christmas Decorations

We invite you to donate to the Christmas decor in memory or honor of someone. Because of the change in worship location, we do not have the space for the poinsettias this year. We have purchased new greenery and decor to make our worship space festive throughout the holidays.

If you would like to donate towards the cost, please mark your contribution "greenery" and indicate in a note who it is in honor or memory of. All contributions will be acknowledged in our Christmas Eve bulletin.

Finance

Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

Contributions

Total October contributions: \$44.5K from plate and pledge plus \$9.3K from prepaid= \$53.8K. This is \$44.6 K less than last year and \$16K under budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$668.2K which is \$84.7K less than last year and \$29.8K under budget. At 83.3% of the year, we have 82% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

Expenses

October expenses were \$75.3 K, which is \$18.9 K more than last year and \$7.4K under budget. Expenses YTD were \$792.6k, which is \$29.1K less than last year and \$34.4K under budget. At 83.3% of the year, we have spent 79.9% of the budget.

Balance YTD

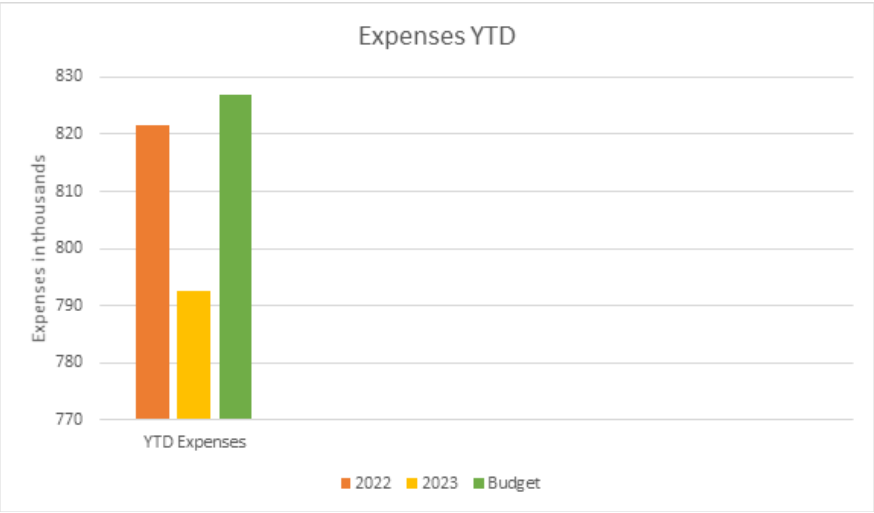
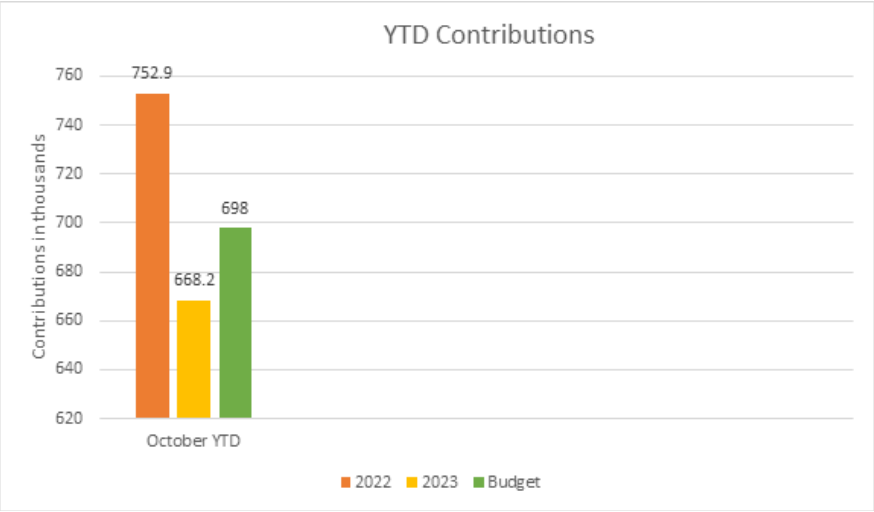
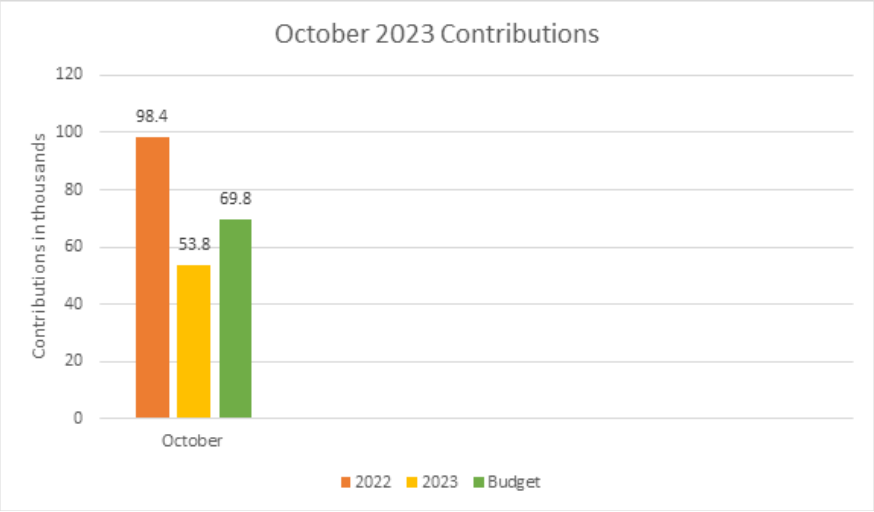
Expenses exceed revenue by \$25.5K, which is \$76.8K more than last year.

Session Designated Funds

\$1,619,632 which is \$67,447 less than last month.

Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$26,402 was given to various funds this month. This includes \$5200 to music programs, \$3000 to the elevator fund, \$15,000 to Cuba partners, \$1200 to CPJMT and \$1080 to DREAAM.





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

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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

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.