

February 2025



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

## Dancing the Transitional Dance

BY BETH WAGNER; BETH@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

We have had seven months of being dance partners in the transitional dance we find ourselves in. And where are we in that dance? Well, I'm glad you asked. We have spent some time getting to know each other, discovering strengths and weaknesses, passions, and those things that aren't exciting to each other.

Part of my job as a transitional interim is listening, watching, and waiting until the church settles into a joint ministry with me. We have done that. Now, we begin the next step of doing a mission study to help us understand who we are, what gifts we have, and what we are enthusiastic about in doing ministry at First Presbyterian Church.

I have begun forming a transition team that will help us move to the next step. This transition team's job is to select and help guide a church-wide mission study this spring. Once the church has completed the study and had a chance to review the results, we will begin to move towards electing a Pastor Nominating Committee and begin the search for a new pastor.

All of this is extremely exciting. So, let's keep dancing as we keep looking and listening for what God has planned next.

Blessings,  
Pastor Beth



*Beginning February 13*  
*Coffeeshop Hours in February*  
*Thursdays 10-12 noon*

Beth is headed to Bakelab at Lodgic (1807 South Neil Street) on Thursdays. Enjoy a coffee or tea and join her for conversation.

On Monday February 3, join Beth at Good Judy's, 2740 S. Philo Road, Suite D, Urbana.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Brunch**  
**February 9<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 Carol Ann Green,**  
**(cadgreen@comcast.net), Gary**  
**Peterson (amer\_swede@yahoo.**  
**com) or the church office.**

**While work continues on replacing the elevator to the Sanctuary, other improvements/replacements have been going on as well.**

**The sign at the corner of Hill & State Streets is being replaced following an auto accident which knocked it down.**

**The Sanctuary is being repaired/repainted/cleaned before our return this Spring.**





**We're Here to Learn and to Teach  
Face to Face**

Each of these young people teaches Easy English Fellowship on Sundays. Kayodke also sings in our choir. All of them have asked how they can help the people of the church to repay the love we have shown them. "We are good at lifting and moving things. We want to do this and will be insulted if you ask to pay us money." Graduate students worshiping with us were each asked the same questions. Here are their responses.



**Dennis Amoako Arthur**

**Tell us about yourself and your family.**

I am thirty years old, the youngest of five boys raised in Accra, Ghana. I graduated from the university in Accra in Climate Science.

**How did you get to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana?**

I got connected to Champaign-Urbana from a University of Illinois webinar I attended. They offered an opportunity to apply, and I was accepted on a full scholarship. I am pursuing a master's degree in urban planning. I am interested in how transportation and housing must change to prepare for our accelerating climate crisis.

**What is your life's goal?**

My goal immediate goal is to obtain a PhD here and then return to Ghana to help my people.

**Describe your experience in the United States.**

I have been warmly welcomed by both the university and our church. My biggest crisis so far is arriving without knowing that I needed to pay a one-month deposit as well as the first month rent. I was in a panic fearing life on the streets, but I was able to reach out to multiple friends who together gave me the loan I needed. I would love to meet more Americans and learn more about the culture. I am grateful for my friends who live near me and for those at First Pres.

**Tell us about your faith journey.**

I grew up in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. I was active in the youth club and taught Sunday school to the children. The worship service here is very similar. Many of the hymns are the same. The biggest difference is that our Ghana worship lasts two hours and in Ghana we don't get a brunch.

**What else would you like people to know about you?**

I try to respect all people. I don't have a lot of leisure time now but when I do I follow professional soccer, read and enjoy laughing with friends.



**Obed Antwi Boamah**

**Tell us about yourself and your family.**

Ok. I am 35 years old, born in Accra, Ghana. I am an only child raised by mom and grandma. When my aunt died of ovarian cancer, I felt she did not receive modern treatment, and I was determined to become a physician. I graduated from medical school, studied abroad in Ukraine and practiced general hospital medicine for ten years.

**How did you get to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana?**

I was deeply troubled by the lack of resources in my country. We do not have a cardiac defibrillator in the hospital yet at the University of Illinois there seems to be one on every

floor of every building where most people are young and healthy. We do not have enough C-PAP machines to help newly born babies breathe and so we have to improvise with oxygen tubes and water bottles. A continuous blood glucose monitor and automatic insulin pump are so rare that they draw a crowd in awe. So, I came here in allied health for a master's degree in health technology which closely collaborates with engineering. It is a compressed one-year program and so very challenging.

**What is your life's goal?**

I want to return to my country to help my people. Hopefully we will be able to develop lifesaving technology as I see here. I would love to learn more and help to build some of these machines at home.

**Describe your experience in the United States.**

I am amazed at the number of services for the poor here – food banks, shelters, discount clothing stores. Also, all the services for the elderly. I am doing a project at Clark Lindsey. Places like this are beyond the imagination in Africa. They say, “necessity is the mother of invention”. My people have a lot of necessity. They need more invention.

**Tell us about your faith journey.**

I am Presbyterian which is the big church in Ghana. Our hymns are similar. I was interested in the inclusiveness of people here at First Pres. In Ghana we are not as progressive. And I prefer the quieter worship without all the noise.

**What else would you like people to know about you?**

I work in a U of I dining room to defray costs and I hope to find work at Carle if I can qualify. My dream in this country would be to see the Grand Canyon or perhaps Area 51, some of the major bridges and a hydroelectric and nuclear power plant. My final word is to express my gratitude for the people at First Pres who have accepted us, loved us and cared for us. You have welcomed us into your community and your homes, a gift received by few international students.



**Kayode Ebenezer Oke**

**Tell us about yourself and your family.**

Well, I am 29 years old, the youngest of four children born in Akure, Nigeria. My family has little money, but I was able to complete my education through law school by loans from my parents and working construction.

**How did you get to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana?**

I have always dreamed about living in the United States. I worked as an attorney to get just enough money to attend the University of Illinois College of Law in corporate law.

**What is your life's goal?**

My immediate goal is to complete my year of study and remain in the United States. I would ultimately like to have my own business and find financial freedom.

**Describe your experience in the United States.**

The people here are friendly. Even in the airport people talked to me and smiled and laughed with me. My surprises are the long hours of darkness in the winter and the cost of living. My biggest challenge has been financial in that I did not understand the costs of school and living here.

**Tell us about your faith journey.**

My family was active in the Christ Apostolic Church. I sang in the children's choir and served as an usher. The similarities with First Pres are that we sang some of the same hymns. Differences are that in Nigeria we have more musical instruments, worship lasts two hours for sure and sometimes up to five hours. We have more prayer, bible studies and even overnight prayer. Currently I am appreciating only two hours of worship. I feel welcome at First Pres.

**What else would you like people to know about you?**

I like to talk with people, laugh with friends and play video games. I am a soccer fan and watch international teams when I can. I loved drawing in the past and was good at it, but recently I have set that aside for my academic work.



## Anna Siju

### Tell us about yourself and your family.

I am from Bangalore India, 25 years old and blessed by loving parents and a seventeen-year-old brother. I say blessed with the latter despite our back and forth bantering with each other. Actually, he is a scholar and an athlete be it soccer, basketball, handball or anything else with a ball. Dad is a mechanical engineer and works with three partners in a machine manufacturing operation. Mom's college degree was in commerce but then she went back for a degree in education and teaches math and English to first through fourth grade. She loves her students and tells us stories every day about her beloved children.

### How did you get to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana?

I talked with a university senior in India who said that Illinois was a comfortable place for international students and that has been true. My undergraduate degree was in Architecture, and I am in my second and final year in a masters program in Urban Planning with an interest in transportation. Since here I have been given many opportunities on campus including a teaching assistant position in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture departments, and an internship with Education Justice Project where my primary role is graphic design. I also serve as vice-president of the Indian Student Graduate Association.

### What is your life's goal?

I want my education to open opportunities to help others. How can planning communities around new transportation systems improve quality of life in under sourced communities? How will climate change alter transportation options? I am still open minded and contemplating many things.

### Describe your experience in the United States.

People here are welcoming, friendly and open. In my country acknowledging strangers is not common but here people smile and greet you. Americans in the classroom and in church are curious about my culture and want to learn about it which is something I've always admired.

### Tell us about your faith journey.

My mother is a constant presence for God in our family. She attributes to God all the good things and assures us that he will have an answer for all our problems. Church was always a priority. We are Jacobites which is a Christian faith similar to Greek Orthodox. Our services are formal and are the same each week. First Pres is much less formal, and the message and music are different each week. People at First are very welcoming.

### What else would you like people to know about you?

My visa is for three more years so I am hoping to get more experiences in the U.S. I am fascinated by New York City from what I have seen in movies. I spent time in Orange, California which I liked a lot. I have many ideas.

## Ash Wednesday Service

Wednesday, March 5 5 PM

*Begin your Lenten journey with a contemplative Ash Wednesday service featuring Taizé music and the solemn disposition of ashes. This important service invites worshippers into a sacred space of prayer and introspection, focusing on themes of repentance, humility, and renewal. Meditative chants and moments of quiet reflection provide a deeply spiritual atmosphere, helping us center our hearts on God's mercy and prepare for the season of Lent. Join us for this meaningful and peaceful start to a season of growth and transformation.*



Presbyterian Women of  
Synod of Lincoln Trails  
invites you to our

# 2025 LENTEN SERIES

## Women of Courage

Four Part Zoom Session at 6:30pm  
CST Tuesdays During Lent

### March 11

**Midwives Shiphrah and Puah**  
Rev. Lisa Lopez-Meyer  
First Presbyterian Church  
of Winnebago, IL



### March 18

**Abigail**  
Pastor Karen Williams  
Westminster Presbyterian  
Church of Joliet, IL



### March 25

**Esther**  
Rev. Jerusha Van Camp  
Presbytery of Ohio Valley,  
southern Indiana



### April 1

**Syrophenian Woman**  
Rev. Beth Wagner  
First Presbyterian Church  
of Champaign, IL



## Register

Internet access is needed for Zoom sessions. There is no cost, but registration is required for one or all sessions.

To register, visit  
<https://tinyurl.com/pwlenen>



[facebook.com/pwsei](https://facebook.com/pwsei)



From *The Confession of 1967*

With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat.

In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

### Adult Discussions – Winter/Spring 2025

February 2 – Peter Yau talks about addiction

February 9 – No Discussion/Second Sunday Brunch

February 16 – Parables

February 23 – Guest speaker from Salt & Light

March 2 – Parables

March 9 – No Discussion/Second Sunday Brunch

March 16, 23, 30, April 5 – Lenten Study

### *Jays & Concerns*

#### We express sympathy to...

- the family and friends of **John Lammers** who died January 9, 2025. A Celebration of Life will be held later this Spring.
- **Kayode Oke** and his family in the death of his brother in Nigeria.
- the family and friends of **Ginny Tutje** who died January 26, 2025. A Celebration of Life will be held in late March or early April.
- the family and friends of **Mary Twardock** who died January 6, 2025. The Celebration of Life was held January 25, 2025.

**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. Blest be the tie that binds.**

# The Heart of Mission

Dear First Presbyterian Church of Champaign,

On behalf of DREAAM, I am writing to extend heartfelt gratitude for your generous donation of \$575! First Presbyterian Church has been a champion of DREAAM since its inception, and we appreciate your ongoing support of DREAAM's mission to engage and empower boys in young men in Champaign County.

As several grants expire in 2025, DREAAM will increasingly count on the support of our local community to further its mission to strengthen the school-to-college/career pipeline for boys and young men in Champaign County. We are grateful for your continued partnership as we adapt to these evolving circumstances, and are determined as ever to answer the call to serve as God's hands and feet in supporting DREAAM boys and their families as they strive for brighter futures.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Sarah Laufenberg,  
Director of Development

\* \* \* \* \*

On behalf of the entire DREAAM team, I wish you a happy and healthy new year! In 2024, DREAAM worked daily to engage and inspire boys and young men in our community and support their parents and caregivers. Our donors have been instrumental in helping us achieve our mission and make a tangible impact in Champaign County. With your investment in DREAAM, we can continue our vital work and look forward to even greater accomplishments in the year ahead.

Wishing you a joyful and prosperous 2025 filled with health, happiness, and new opportunities. Together, let's make the coming year another remarkable one!

Warm regards,

Tracy D. Dace,  
Founder and CEO, DREAAM

## Royalties to Support DREAAM Choir

BY BRANDI LOWE  
BRANDISCRAPBOOK@YAHOO.COM

In January, we started a new project. Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry Team (CPJMT) has been working on this for the past year and we are very excited to finally be bringing it to you. In the bulletin on Sundays, you may see songs labeled as "Spiritual." This is nothing new, but that doesn't accurately describe them. We will refer to them as "American Negro Spirituals" or "Negro Spirituals" when we talk about them in the service. Why did we choose that term? Well, it is the term that is now widely used to accurately describe this genre of music. It is still a term that is never used to describe a person today, but when it comes to this body of music, it is what is best at this point in time to use.

**Dr. Everett McCorvey**, founder and director of the American Spiritual Ensemble explains why they chose this term and he says it so well that I will use his words. "The term 'American Negro Spirituals' speaks to the history, the suffering, the hope

and the resolve of a people who were able to sing through their suffering and tell and re-tell their heroic stories of triumph and survival through these songs. It is a story and a history that hopefully will never be forgotten. And while the songs were born out of this very dark period in our American History, these songs are now sung, celebrated, and revered all around the world." When we use this term here at First Pres. we use it to accurately place this music and we do so also to honor those who created it.

We have sung or listened to American Negro Spirituals throughout our lives. They have lifted us up in times of trouble and have given us hope for a better tomorrow. They have come to be a part of our services here at 1st Pres and have enriched our lives. And while we are grateful to the original composers and performers, their names have been lost to time. Normally, a composer would collect royalties for their music, but that never happened with these songs. So today, we are starting a new project. Each time we sing one of these songs, it will be labeled as a Spiritual in our bulletin and we hope to tell you a little more about them as we sing them. We will also set out a collection box at the Welcome Center. We will ask anyone who would like to participate to drop in some coins, a dollar bill, or whatever you feel led to put in the box. This is not a one-time donation, but rather an ongoing project to collect the royalties that were never paid to the original composers. The money we are collecting will be given to the DREAAM choir and they are excited



about our program. While it is about the money, it's also about people and relationships. This project is another way that our church is building bridges to the Black community.

We have benefited so much from this body of music. Not only do we hold these American Negro Spirituals dear, but they led to the birth of the blues, gospel music, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, hip-hop, and more. And Black communities continue to make music that inspire, energize, and bring us all together. This project is all about celebrating Black artists and the music that is created that we all benefit from.

## Cuba – The Plans I Have For You

The Republic of Cuba with its eleven million inhabitants sits just 100 miles from the Florida coast, about the same distance as Champaign is from Indianapolis. The native population was exterminated by Spanish colonization, Africans were imported as slaves and Chinese as indentured servants. The people won wars of independence and ultimately established an intercultural society often described as a rich Cuban stew. Today, with an ineffective government, loss of support from Russia and Venezuela and harsh economic sanctions by the United States, the Cuban people suffer more than any time since their independence in 1902. Food, safe water and medicines are scarce. Buildings collapse due to long deferred maintenance; long electrical black outs block refrigeration. A robust tourist industry has collapsed and inflation soars.

Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada en Luyanó located in Havana is our sister church. Since 2012 our sessions have formally committed to stand by each other in unity in Christ, to explore areas of joint mission, share worship services and bible studies, to exchange information about our families, to develop an intentional exchange between pastors and to visit each other as we are able.

The Presbyterian church in Cuba selects a theme for study over two years. The current focus is on *Jeremiah 19:11-13*. "I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for. Then you will call to me. You will come and pray to me, and I will answer you. You will seek me, and you will find me because you will seek me with all your heart."

How is God calling us to respond to the material suffering of our Cuban Presbyterians? Through prayer and with hope may we discern His will.

## Environmental News

BY PAT PHILLIPS  
P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET

The Environmental Stewardship Team members are celebrating the solar panels on the new church roof; through the Inflation Reduction Act, \$66,000 was saved.

Another reason to celebrate is the success of the Adopt-a-Highway program. Church folks have been clearing litter from State Street for over 15 years and now need fewer and fewer collection bags, for residents

have apparently noticed the improved appearance and are doing their own picking up. So it's been decided to discontinue the quarterly Saturday morning Adopt-a-Highway walks.

Collection and recycling of paper, batteries, glasses and other recyclables for the entire church will continue.

Two children's books by local African-American author/poet Janice Harrington, *Buzzing with Questions* and *Rooting for Plants*, both beautifully illustrated, have been put in the Mae Chapin Parlor for children to read during Sunday morning worship.

## Salt & Light, our Community Partner, Needs Volunteers

BY GRACE ASHENFELTER  
GRACE-ELYN@COMCAST.NET

It's that time of year again to start preparing for the tax season. Salt & Light partners with the Gies College of Business to bring VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program to the community. VITA lifts thousands of people, many of them children, above the poverty line each year by getting them the tax refunds they are owed. This program helps lower-income households, older adults, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers prepare their tax returns. In 2024, more than 700 households' tax returns were completed and filed for free because of this program.

Salt & Light needs volunteers from January to April to help greet taxpayers, collect taxpayer information, and coach college students working with VITA.

Volunteers will greet clients and ensure taxpayers have the correct documents and information needed for accurate tax filings. In addition, they will coach college students regarding customer relations and information gathering skills. (Volunteers will not complete tax returns.)

For more information or to complete a volunteer interest form, contact **Kathy Sweedler** [vita@business.illinois.edu](mailto:vita@business.illinois.edu).

**Annual Meeting  
of the Congregation**

Sunday, February 16  
immediately following worship

**Where to Donate Gently Used Household Items and Clothing**

In light of Beth’s recent Children’s Message, as well as the hint to the adults to take heed to the message, here is a short list of agencies in Champaign-Urbana that are all VERY HAPPY to accept donations of gently used household items, clothes, etc. Several also include information on new items they like to receive. The websites contain information about the items each agency will accept as well as donation times, availability of drive-up donations, etc.

Check out the websites to see the type of items they will accept and donation times.

**Salt & Light**

[saltandlightministry.org](http://saltandlightministry.org)

**Habitat for Humanity ReStore**

[cuhabitat.org](http://cuhabitat.org)

**Carle Auxiliary Thrift Shop**

google Carle Auxiliary Boutique or email: [resaleboutique@carle.org](mailto:resaleboutique@carle.org)

**Cunningham Children’s Home**

[Cunningham.org](http://Cunningham.org)

**Immigrant Services**

[isc-u.org](http://isc-u.org)

**Lunch and Learn**

Monday’s 12 – 1:30 PM  
Centennial Hall

**Bring a lunch from home and  
come with a mind to learn!**

**February 10** – SPAM: what is it, and how do we spot it?  
**February 17** – Navigating Facebook, Search the Internet- How do we stay safe?  
**February 24** – AI - What is it? And how do we live with it now that it is here?

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual  
Chili Cookoff**

**Sunday,  
February 23  
4 PM  
Centennial Hall**

**Details will be  
coming soon so  
pull out your  
favorite receipt  
and join us for  
food and fun.**

# Finance

## Financial Update from 12.31.2024

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM  
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

### Contributions

Total December contributions: \$101.4K from plate and pledge plus \$10.3K from prepaid= \$111.7K This is \$1K less than last year and \$46.3K over budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$ 770.7 K which is \$52.6K less than last year and \$14.1K under budget. At 100% of the year, we have 98.2% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

### Expenses

December expenses were \$79.2 K, which is \$36.8K less than last year and \$.8K under budget. Expenses YTD are \$965.5K, which is \$5.6K less than last year and \$5.5K over budget. At 100% of the year, we have spent 100.6% of the budget.

### Balance YTD

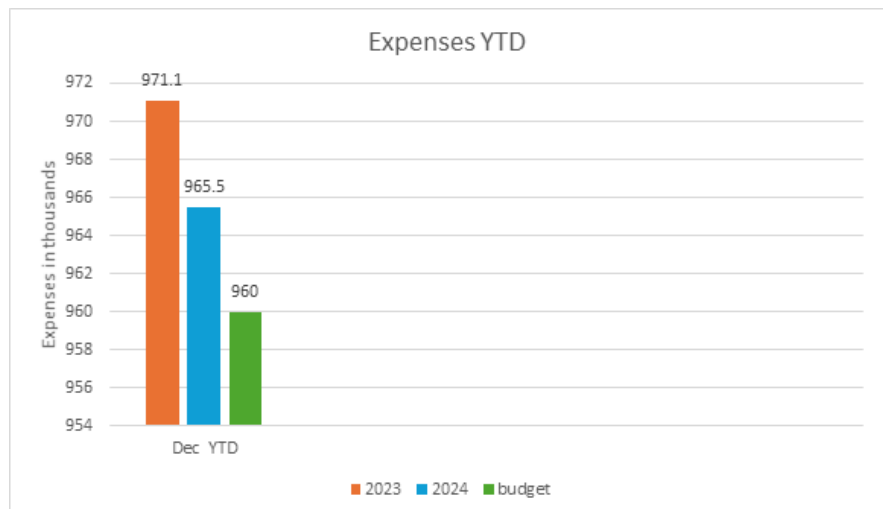
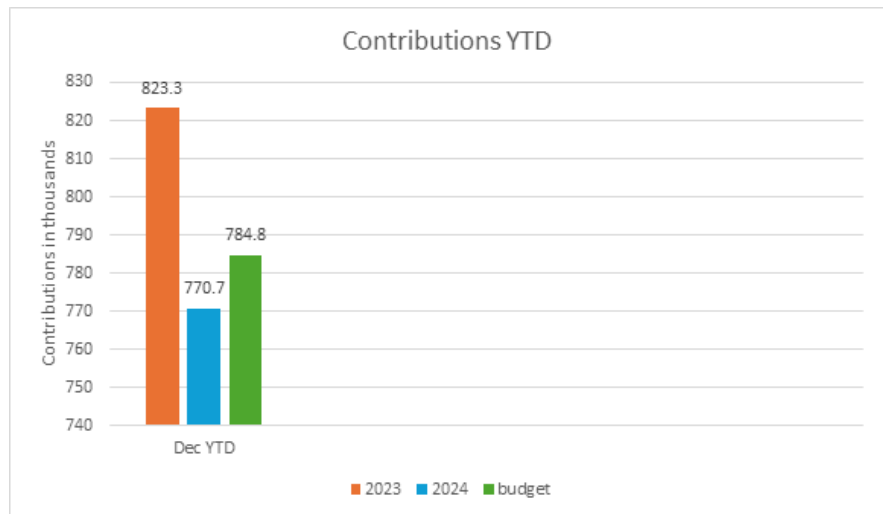
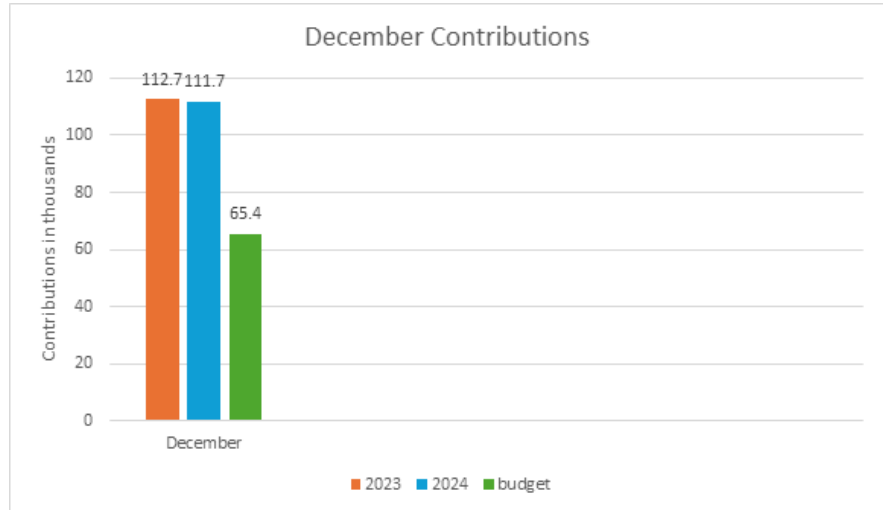
Expenses exceeded revenue from all sources by \$89.4K which is \$42.8K more than last year at the same time.

### Session Designated Funds

\$1,311,532 which is \$60,821 less than last month.

### Summary of Restricted Accounts

The Advent offering totaled \$3827, the Christmas offering was \$1773 and the elevator fund received \$2,000.





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street  
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street  
Champaign, IL 61820

**P:** 217.356.7238

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

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

**Sunday:**

9 AM Worship

10 AM Coffee and Fellowship

10:10 AM Sunday School/Adult Discussions

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.

**Pastors:**

Beth Wagner..... Interim 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  
Ann Petry..... Accounting  
Matthew Shepard ..... Director of Music  
Sora Shepard..... Organist/Pianist  
Bonnie Ward..... English Language Learner Director

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