

February 2026



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

†  
**Ash Wednesday Service**  
**Wednesday, February 18**

**4 pm**

**Sanctuary**



**Worship with  
imposition  
of ashes**

Ash Wednesday will kick off our Lenten series, Gifts of the Darkwood. In this series we will be looking into the uncertainty, doubt, and failure in our lives to see what God has for us in those places.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season, a season in which we await the death, and resurrection of our Lord. In this season, it is important to spend time doing self examination, to see how we might better follow the example of our God who was willing to become human and die for us.

Ash Wednesday begins the season with the reminder that we too will die, but in Christ, death does not mark the end.



**God's love is in the air!**

**Special  
Valentine Brunch  
Sunday, February 15**

**Come, enjoy brunch  
and games  
Centennial Hall**

**Nurture invites you to a special  
buffet with table games for  
all of us to share immediately  
following the Annual Meeting.**

**Please come and be ready for  
some good food and fun.**

**This will replace the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday  
Brunch this month ONLY.**

## Worship Attendance Improves Health Outcomes

BY J.P. CONWAY

“Religious service attendance is associated with greater longevity, less depression, less suicide, less smoking, less substance abuse, better cancer and cardiovascular disease survival, less divorce, greater social support, greater meaning in life, greater life satisfaction, more volunteering, and greater civic engagement. Compared to those who never attend religious service, they have found that regular attenders have a 29% reduced risk of depression, 33% reduced risk of death, 50% reduced risk of divorce, and 84% reduced risk of suicide. I find that last statistic to be staggering due to the massive increase in suicide in recent decades. Incredibly, they have found that declining religious service attendance accounts for about 40 percent of the rise in suicide over the last 15 years.

What’s going on here? Why does going to church enhance your health? The benefit appears to come in three ways. First, religious communities broaden your social support system. You have access to more people to give you rides to the doctor, bring you food when you’re sick, and check on you when you don’t seem to be doing well. Second, religious teaching on themes ranging from forgiveness and reconciliation to abstaining from vices contributes to health. It probably seems obvious, but obedience to standard, mainstream religious teaching about taking care of yourself and others leads to good outcomes. Third, religious participation leads to higher experiences of meaning and purpose. As humans, we’re meaning making creatures who long for purpose. When we find it, it shapes our outlook and puts a healthy spring in our steps. Personally, I have found all three of these to be true. I have seen them at play through the broken but beautiful churches of my life.”

See you in the pews this Sunday.

See complete article at <https://www.jpconway.org/blog/surprisinghealthoutcomes>

The church uses Church Community Builder (CCB) as the church database which gives individuals access to addresses, emails, and their own individual records of giving. We no longer provide a printed Church Directory as soon as we print it, it is usually already out-of-date since information changes on a regular basis.

To gain access to the church database, email [info@firstpres.church](mailto:info@firstpres.church) and a link will be sent to you to set up a password for your account.

# The Heart of Mission

## Sing to Jehovah...

Sing to Jehovah, all the earth  
*Psalm 96:1-6; 11-12*  
Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to  
the Lord, all the earth.  
*Psalm 96:1 (NIV)*

This verse is a profound invitation to praise God with joy and constant renewal. In such a changing and often chaotic world, this call to sing a “new song” continues to have a powerful and relevant significance.

*Today we sing a new song,  
Renewing our joy,  
Lifting our voices to heaven,  
Resounding loudly across the cold  
earth.  
In every note, faith and hope,  
A living echo of love and truth,  
May praise never tire,  
And hearts find peace.*

*Psalm 96:1* remains a powerful exhortation to keep hope and praise alive in our lives, encouraging us to express our faith with renewed passion and to cultivate a spirit of unity and reconciliation in a world that needs it. This call invites us to look beyond our difficulties and find a source of hope in praise. Let the whole earth sing reminds us that we are not alone on this journey, and that unity and faith can light our way to a better future.

**Prayer:** May our praise reach all the earth, and may we always live in unity and faith. Guide us so that, with joy, we may reflect your love in every step we take. Amen.

This devotion was written by a friend in our sister church at Luyanó in Havana Cuba. You can subscribe to a daily free devotion at <https://www.cubapartnersnetwork.org/>, then scroll down.

## Evicting America

Evicting America is a four-part PC-USA zoom study on the homeless crisis in our country. It is presented by our Presbyterian Hunger Program. Participants are asked to view a short segment of an online documentary and then gather for prayer and discussion. One hundred and eighty Presbyterians attended the first session on February 2. Registration will continue to be open for three remaining studies Mondays at 6:30 PM. The next session is “Redlined” Register at : <https://zoom.us/join/zoom.us/meeting/register/-MkTwcSBSUqT2p7F24TaWg#/registration>. The film is also available on Amazon Prime. See more at [pcusa.org/evicting](http://pcusa.org/evicting).

We are a Matthew 25 church. Two of our three pillars are dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty. Both of these pillars are addressed in this study.

## Faith, Purpose and Perseverance in Graduate Life

**A weekly meeting of graduate student men begins Saturday, February 7, at 6 PM.**

**The group name is Faith, Purpose and Perseverance in Graduate life. The group plans to convene on Saturday evenings from 6-8 PM at the church.**

**“We want to connect, encourage one another, and engage in meaningful discussion around Christian life, academic pressures, vocation and personal growth” says organizer Dennis Arthur.**

## Historic Church Teaches About the Past and Engages the Present

The [oldest Black congregation](#) in Chicago restores its historic building while reaching out as history is made in the city today.



## Coffee with Beth in February

**Wednesdays, 10 am - Noon**

**Good Judy’s Bagels  
2740 South Philo Road, Urbana**

**Enjoy coffee and conversation**

## University YMCA Friday Forum and Conversation Cafe

University YMCA, 1001 S. Wright Street, Champaign



Friday Forum is a free weekly lecture series held during the fall and spring semesters that strives to raise awareness about national and international trends and events. It has been continuously running for 97 years at the University YMCA, adapting to the times while remaining committed to providing talks that address topics of relevance and urgency in our society.

Beginning at noon, a free Thai lunch is provided as the community gathers to learn, meet others and prepare to serve. Our congregation partners with University YMCA as a sponsor, by collaborating with their New American Welcome Center through our annual International Family Game Time. Their

Office of Civic Life has been a path for engaging students in our Trunk N Treat and has potential to bring more youth to our space.

We will gather at Hill and State by 11:30 AM for an 11:37 departure on the MTD Brown bus and then leave the YMCA at 1:32 returning to Hill and Randolph. There will be no walking for more than a block. Seniors may obtain an MTD pass free at the Illinois Terminal or pay \$1.00 to ride.

Date	Topic	Speaker(s)	Affiliation
Feb 6	Justice Lives in Community	DeShawn Williams	City of Urbana Mayor
Feb 13	Liberating Abortion	Renee Bracey Sherman, Reproductive Justice Organizer/Author/Advocate	Diversity + Social Justice Education
Feb 20	Advancing Community + Legacy	Moderated by Kellie Blanden	Interfaith Organizing for Democracy in Chicago
Feb 27	Faith Over Fear:		International Education
Mar 6	Women/Communit/Success	Moderated by Rebecca Hodson	Graduate Employees' Organization
Mar 27	Labor Unions and Immigration	-	Public Citizen
Apr 3	People v. Power	Nick Sansone	The Nature Conservancy
Apr 10	Indian Boundary Prairies	Debra Williams	-
Apr 17	Where History Lives	Natalie Beck + Antonio Burton	

### Living Out One's Faith in Difficult Times

**Senator Chris Coons** addressed an audience at New York Avenue Presbyterian church asking how we find “ways to witness that are concrete and local, that touch people and improve their lives. Find ways to witness that are more about hope and love and optimism than they are about anger. Connect with each other. Find a moment of awe and then help someone.”

View his inspiring talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz7RIT1JgZk&t=1712s> (12:06-44:28).



**Verse of the day**

Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. - Jeremiah 22:3

**Voice of the day**

If an act of injustice doesn't provoke anger in me, it could be seen as indifference, passivity. It's injustice that motivates us to do something, to take risks, knowing that if we don't, things will remain the same. - Digna Ochoa

**Prayer of the day**

God who abides in righteousness, let any initial lack of motivation to act against injustice quickly yield to an outpour of defiance and deliverance. - Sojourners

**Sharing Our Lives Together**

We have wonderful fellowship at First Pres. Sharing important life events we lift each other in voice and prayer.

We are grateful for **Fiona and Hazel Leakey**. With the guidance of their parents, **Andrew Leakey and Lisa Ainsworth**, they have been confirmed and baptized into membership of our congregation.

We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of **Jim Bell** who died January 28 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

We mourn with **Raquel Celina Kasa** on the death of her father. We pray for **Linda Alexander's** speedy recovery from illness.

Congratulations to **Dennis Arthur** who has received multiple offers to pursue his PhD on full scholarship at prestigious universities.

A big thank you to **Bill Marble** for his many years facilitating our men's bible study. We understand his need for a break, but we will not be the same without his leadership.

Congratulations to **Ruffin Mangele** who will enter the MBA program at Eastern Illinois in May. He was coached by a very generous and humble person in our congregation.

Do you have similar things to share? Contact [marcia@firstpres.church](mailto:marcia@firstpres.church)

**Men of the Church**

We have enjoyed a weekly Bible study for decades. We are now on pause to think how we might better serve more men. Think about what you are looking for in a small group study and share your ideas. When you tell us you are interested we will plan a gathering to get moving again. You can respond to **Bob Kirby** at [rwk3213@gmail.com](mailto:rwk3213@gmail.com) or 217-621-5915.

**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.**

**Face to Face with Bonnie Ward, Director of English Language Learners****Tell us about yourself and your family?**

I grew up with two sisters in Connecticut, California and Washington. My husband works with Intervarsity. We have two sons and two daughters and five grandkids. We moved from Washington DC to Champaign in 2005.

Cultures and languages have always been a passion. I learned Spanish and German in high school, then Greek at Moody Bible Institute. After finishing college I spent a semester at Summer Institute of Linguistics in Texas, hoping to become a Bible translator. That didn't work out, but I did teach English in Japan for six months before coming home to get married. I began volunteering as a tutor in the ELL program in 2015 before becoming the director.

**Describe your role at First Pres:**

Along with 21 volunteers and an advisory committee from the congregation, I lead the English Language Learners program. I report monthly to the Mission Team.

**What else would you like us to know?**

Many of our learners are international visitors connected with the University of Illinois. Our largest groups are from Brazil and Korea. We have one hundred and four learners enrolled and a waiting list of twelve.

**A final word?**

I love leading your language program. I am inspired each day by our learners and our competent compassionate volunteers.

If you want to meet some wonderful people who are hungry to meet Americans please talk to me about ways you can make a difference. Email me at [bonnie@firstpres.church](mailto:bonnie@firstpres.church)

# Annual Meeting of the Congregation Sunday, February 15

at the conclusion of Worship in the Sanctuary  
followed by a special Valentine's Celebration  
with brunch and table games in Centennial Hall.

**The Transition Team  
will be presenting their report.**

A copy will be included in the printed Annual Report

**Watch email for zoom link for meeting if unable to attend.**

# Finance

## Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM  
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

### Contributions

Total December contributions: \$92.3K from plate and pledge plus \$7.9K from prepaid = \$100.2K. This is \$11.5k less than last year and \$35.1k over budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$762.1 K which is \$8.6k less than last year and \$18.9K under budget. At 100% of the year, we have 97.6% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

### Expenses

December expenses were \$84.6 K, which is \$5.4k more than last year and \$5.6k over budget. Expenses YTD are \$925.1K, which is \$40.4 less than last year and \$22.3K under budget. At 100% of the year, we have spent 97.7% of the budget.

### Balance YTD

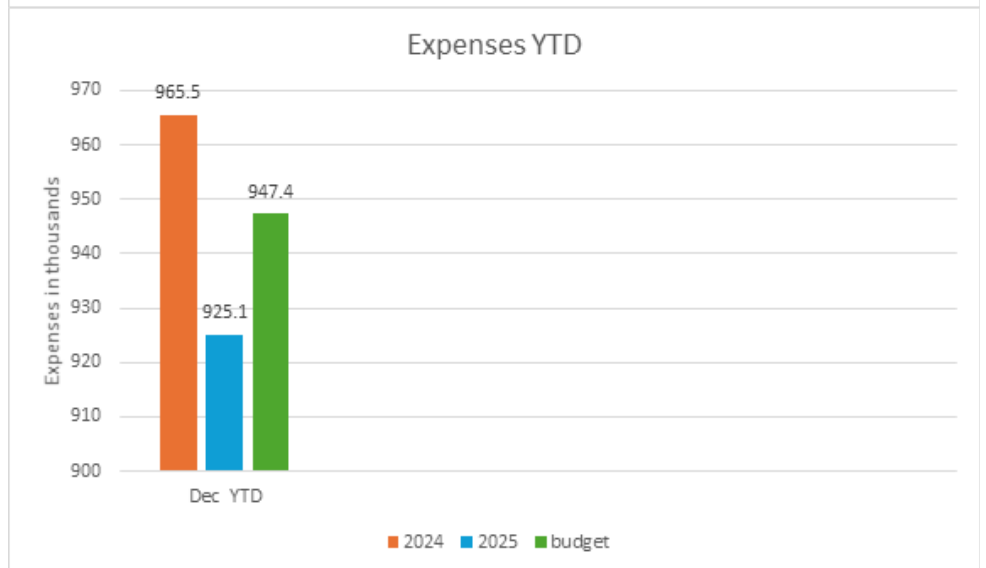
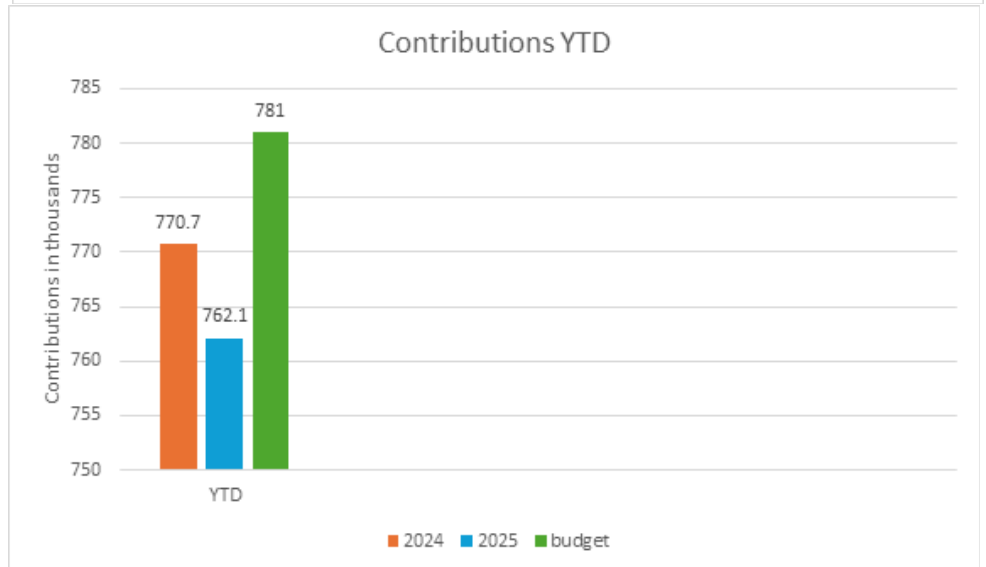
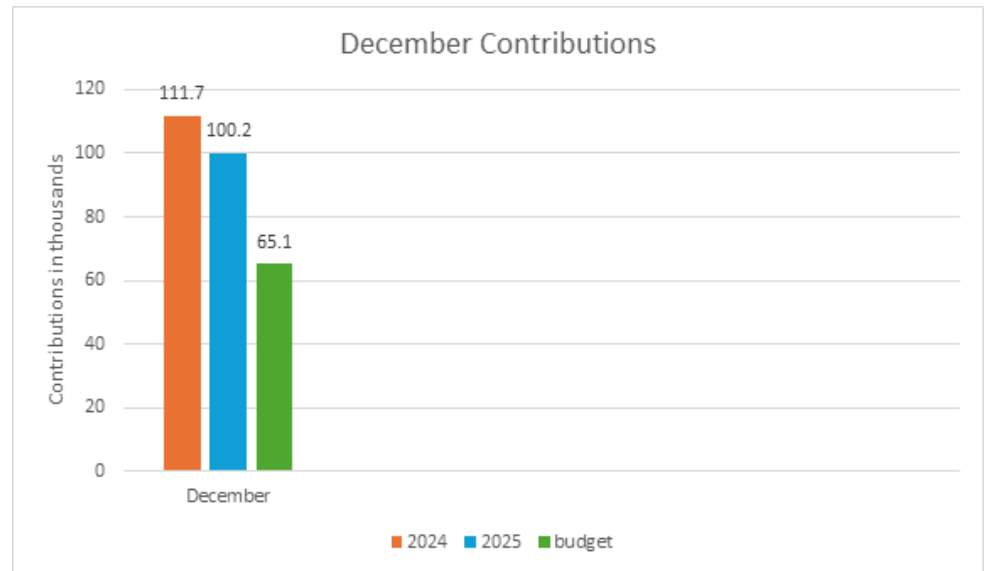
Revenue from all sources exceeded expenses by \$37581.

### Session Designated Funds

\$1,022,407 which is \$3290 more than last month.

### Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$2875 was given to the general memorial fund, \$1430 to the Christmas offering, \$350 to the advent offering, \$3200 to missions, and \$10,000 to a Francophone Bethesda Grant  
Note: Cannon fund was paid \$22,177 this month.





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302 West Church Street  
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



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**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:**

- Yuxi Chen..... Organist/Pianist
- Ritchie Drennen ..... Facility Manager
- Patty Farthing..... Office Assistant
- Robert Ferrer ..... Audio-visual Technician
- Fred Foster ..... Evening Custodian
- Marcia Franks ..... Office Administrator
- Samuel Stephenson..... Director of Music
- Jill Stewart..... Accounting
- 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).