

January 2024



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

Snippets from Your Pastor

BY MATT MATTHEWS

MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Every Christmas I find myself reaching to understand what God did at Bethlehem. During these January days of Epiphany (which means to reveal, or to make manifest), we ponder still. With the Magi, the whole known world joins that small throng of original supplicants at the manger. This is Good News for everybody.

Language fails me.

Understanding the Trinity is a thorny part of the conundrum. The unity and distinction of the godhead? That's heady stuff. He was born? A son?

The way God insists on turning things upside down always poses a challenge. The mighty becoming vulnerable? Light in darkness, but only a flicker? Christus Victor beginning his work in a manger in diapers?

Like Mary, I do a lot of pondering this time of year.

That's part of the blessing of this season for me. I hope it is for you, too. I'm amazed by, perplexed, enthralled, and grateful for God's incarnation. Even as my head seeks understanding, my heart swells in awe and appreciation. My response of gratitude is one service.

The words "king of kings" rise during this season. My role as liege creeps into my mind, too. Other words do like messiah, Christ, wonder, inbreaking, glory creep in. Cosmic kings, angels, shepherds, and virgins spin in my brain.

I find these words (below) from the Confession of 1967 useful to frame nativity. They don't say it all, but they go a long way of giving me words to explore as I find myself kneeling at the manger. You might also find them interesting, if not useful.

PEACE,
Matt

continued on the next page

2nd SUNDAY BRUNCH
January 14th
10:10 AM

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.**

* * *

In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful people. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them, he took upon himself the judgment under which all people stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all people.

God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called
 the sacrifice of a lamb,
 a shepherd's life given for his sheep,
 atonement by a priest;
 again it is
 ransom of a slave,
 payment of debt,
 vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and
 victory over the powers of evil.

These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for man. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work.

The risen Christ is the Savior for all people. Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as his reconciling community. Christ is head of this community, the church, which began with the apostles and continues through all generations.

We enjoyed a caroling party and our English Language Learner's Christmas story in December. Participants all had a great time.



Input Needed

BY JOE LUNDY

JOSEPH@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Hi everyone!

I hope all of you have had a great Christmas and New Year. As we look into next year I am very excited to see what the future holds for all of us here at First Pres.

In the next month the newly formed CYF and Outreach committees will be meeting, so if you have any input or questions for those groups let me know!

It has been a wonderful time being with y'all the past few months and I am looking forward to being with y'all this year.

Blessings,
Joe Lundy

Youth Bible Club Tentative Start Date of January 24

Plans are coming together for a weekly Bible Club on Wednesdays in Centennial Hall from 3 to 5 PM. We have a tentative start date of January 24. DREAAM middle school youth and staff on our campus will join us. Between opening and closing rituals, we will have a fun activity related to a bible story and eat a meal together. We will share stories, open our lives to each other and be glad.

Will you join a list of people interested in serving? Can you help out on our kitchen team or serve as a table partner? Table partners greet guests

and facilitate conversation while eating with DREAAM tweens and staff.

Contact **Gary Peterson** (amer-swede@yahoo.com or 217-398-8504) or **Bob Kirby** (rwk3213@gmail.com or 217-621-5915) for more information or to sign up.

Peace

by Linda Peterson

shared at the December Blue Christmas Service

The God who set a glowing orb in the dark of night, who throws crystals about to shimmer and sparkle in the evening sky, did he place the Christmas Star to guide the way or did a multitude of tiny angels gently lower it below the heavens?

Do the saints, whose souls have flown high for centuries to meet God, stand in formation, the sign of the cross, singing, cheering and laughing as the smallest of the winged cherubim carefully work together?

Does the Heavenly Father breathe a gentle wind of hope, love and good will to swirl around us; and do we capture it in our hearts and hold it close?

Will we let the peace of Christ fill us with tranquility, stamp out hatred, and help us to comfort those in need? Will we care for the widow, the orphan, the sick and the prisoner?

The God who hears every whisper, who sees every bowed head, who sent his Son in order to accept us into His family, be remembered in this Holy season as we love one another?

May the peace that Jesus brings and the promise of eternity be the reward for faithfulness. Let us continue to praise and adore Him all year, not just in the Christmas season.

Holy God, by your grace, make it so.

The Heart of Mission

Knowing Cuba



Cubans are proud of their free education which is compulsory for children ages 6-16. A literacy rate of 99.8% is one of the highest in the world. Cuba invests 13% of its budget in education. Children wear uniforms which indicate their grade.



Pastor Daniel Izquierdo, Anaitza and Isaac

Merry Christmas from Iglesia Presbiteriana en Luyanó



Dear First Presbyterian Friends,

THANK YOU for your time, care and energy given to DREAAM earlier this month! (See pictures below.) The food was delicious, the activities were both fun and engaging and the table conversation was lovely. Our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and warm memories! Here are some photos, courtesy of Luther, of our time together.

May you all have a blessed Christmas season (lasts till Epiphany in my house) and feel the loving presence of Jesus in special, tangible ways this year. May this incoming year hold oodles of joy, connection with loved ones and fresh beginnings wherever you need them.

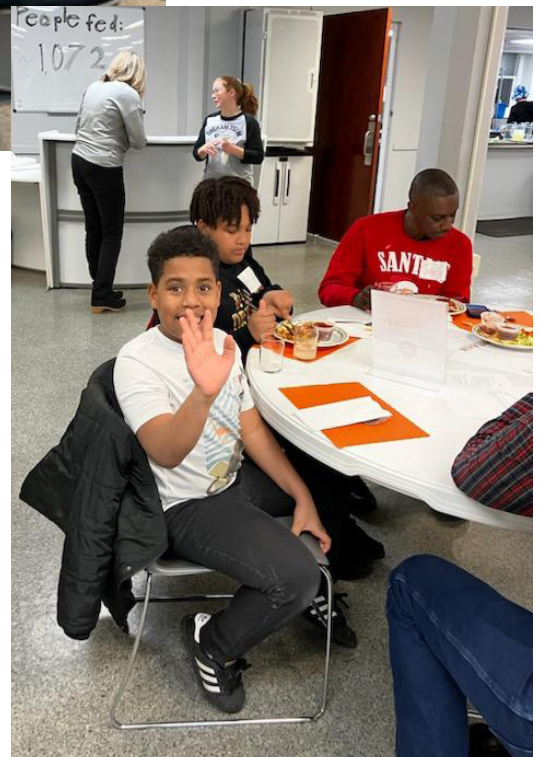
In joyful gratitude,

Shannon Morber

Coordinator of Volunteer & Donor Relations

DREAAM - Driven to Reach Excellence & Academic Achievement for Males

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Thank You for Your Generosity

Angel Tree/Advent Offering Report

Thank you so much for your generosity this past Advent. The Community Mission Deacon Angel Tree collected household items for the refugee/immigrant families coming to a strange place called Champaign with no family and no place to stay.

You helped set up households with

- 3 pack and plays with sheet
- 4 box sets of Corelle wear
- 1 china set of dishes
- 1 blanket
- 12 sets of sheets (full and twin)
- 2 sets of silverware
- 4 can openers
- 7 sets of kitchen utensils
- 2 set of kitchen towels
- A large kitchen trash can with trash bags
- a small trash can
- \$40 gift card for toiletries
- a \$40 bag of toiletries

The Advent Offering collected \$2870 for the Refugee Center to put toward the first month's rent for families. Security and safety is the first need for children and all people.

You provided "room in the inn" for the Christ child. I hope you enjoyed the angel ornaments; you were the best angel of all.

Year-end reports from groups and committees are now due. You can see a copy of last year's Annual Report at

<https://firstpres.church/newsletters-reports/>

Scroll to the bottom of the page on the website for the 2022 Annual Report.

Reports should be emailed to marcia@firstpres.church by January 22, 2024.



You can sign up to donate flowers for the coming year on the flower calendar on the bulletin board just outside Westminster Hall. Donate flowers in honor, memory or for a celebration on a Sunday morning.

Face to Face with Sora and Matthew Shepard



Sora is our church musician and is at the piano most Sunday mornings. Matthew is at the University of Illinois studying choral conducting.

Tell me about your family? Your work?

Well, it's Matthew, Sora, and our cat Minsey. We came to Champaign so Matthew could continue his studies in choral conducting. That's his job. Sora's job is her teaching and accompaniment at Knox College and her work at church.

What do you do in your free time?

Sora likes physical fitness be it running, lifting weights or playing sports. Matthew has little free time but when he can he relaxes with Kansas City Chiefs football on TV. We went to State Farm Center to see the Illinois Kansas basketball exhibition game. We will not reveal what colors we wore.

What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?

We were connected through the choral department at the U of I when Matthew enrolled in the doctoral program. We also had attended music events here. We loved the venue with the stained glass and the great acoustics.

What has been the highlight of your church experience?

When we moved from Kansas City, we gave up most of our musical contributions there. So, we are very happy to share the gift of music God has given us here at First Pres.

Who are your favorite Bible characters?

For Matt it's Mary for her unimaginable courage and faith. For Sora, it's Jonah. "Like me he was not perfect but he gave his best".

How can the church best be the church?

People come before tradition. My best example of that at First Church was the decision to move worship to Westminster rather than splitting the congregation into two spaces. The worship is more intimate and relaxed now and most important, we are together. We both appreciate how welcoming and nurturing this church has been.

Faith Story

A Presbyterian in the Senate Shares [His Story](#).

Jays & Concerns

We celebrate...

- the wedding of **Mia McDonald** and **Thomas McLaughlin** on December 31, 2023 at our church with the **Rev. Scott Keeble** officiating;
- the citizenship of **Solange Bosamba** and **Gabriel Mboyo** and daughter **Goelle** and **Parfait Lukau** and wife **Nadeige Lumbu**.

We extend sympathy to...

- the family and friends of **Jim Andrews** who died December 15, 2023. A Memorial Service is planned for February 10, 2024.
- the family and friends of **David Hunter** who died January 1, 2024. Arrangements are pending.
- the family and friends of **Dorothy Pearson** who died December 5, 2023.
- the family and friends of **Marjorie Sodemann** who died December 10, 2023.
- **Ann and Rick Wampler** on the death of Rick's father Joseph Wampler December 14, 2023.



Gracious and loving God, as we stand on the threshold of a new year, we look back and recognize the many ways we have fallen short of your glory: missed opportunities to share your love; times when we were silent when we could have spoken up for what was right; indifference to your claim on our whole lives through Jesus Christ; and a lack of gratitude for your amazing grace by which you save us and call us to be your people.

Lord, forgive us.

As we look ahead to a new year, free us from thinking we can save ourselves. Help us to follow where you lead. Show us how to be your children and your heirs, forgiven and freed to live for our God and for one another in love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Phillip Gladden from *The Presbyterian Outlook*

We Pledge Allegiance

Congratulations to two of our families who swore the Oath of Allegiance and became citizens of the United States last month.



Parfait Lukau and wife Nadeige Lumbu. They are the parents of Parclat, Kermelis and Omraam.



Solange Bosamba and husband Gabriel Mboyo with daughter, Goelle.

Finance

Financial Update

by ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

Contributions

Total November contributions: \$33K from plate and pledge plus \$9.3K from prepaid= \$42.3K This is \$18.2 K less than last year and \$27.5K under budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$710.5K which is \$102.9K less than last year and \$57.3K under budget. At 91.7% of the year, we have 85.9% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

Expenses

November expenses were \$62.5 K, which is \$2.9 K more than last year and \$20.2K under budget. Expenses YTD were \$855.1k, which is \$26.2K less than last year and \$54.6K under budget. At 91.7% of the year, we have spent 86.2% of the budget.

Balance YTD

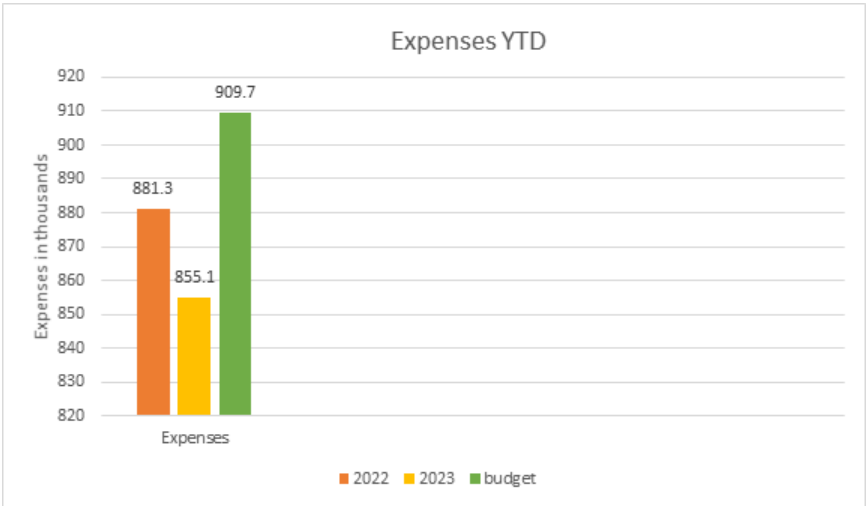
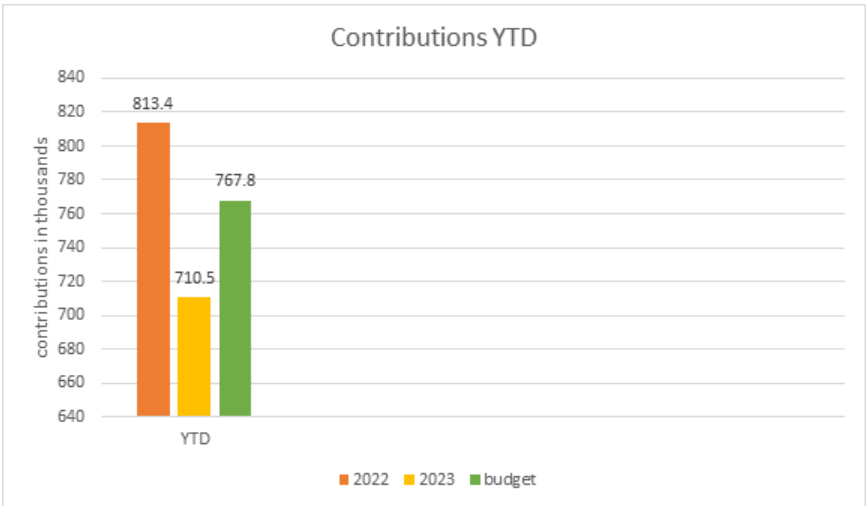
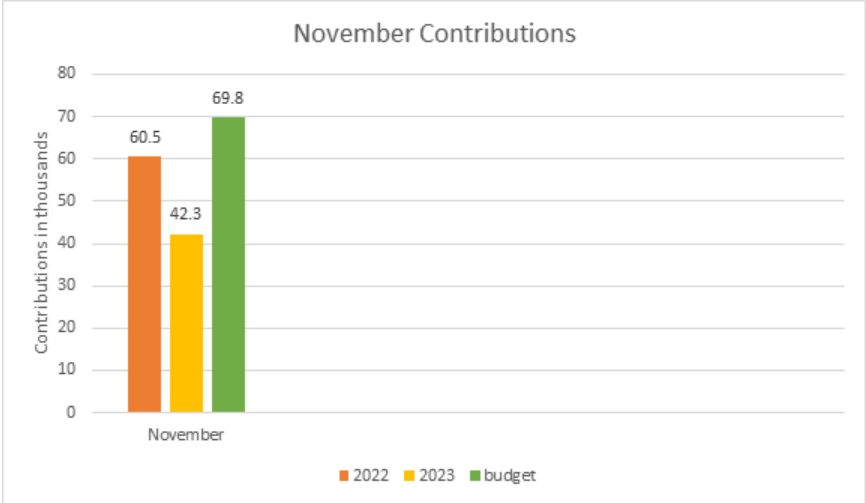
Expenses exceed revenue by \$53K. Last year at this time revenue exceeded expenses by \$43.9K

Session Designated Funds

\$1,567,535 which is \$43,096 less than last month.

Summary of Restricted Accounts

Most were pass through this month but Mission did receive \$928.87 in donations.





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CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street
Champaign, IL 61820

Change Service Requested



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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

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.