

January 2026



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

STAR WORDS from Sunday's Service

BY BETH WAGNER; BETH@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

"Star words" refer to a popular spiritual practice, especially in Christian churches during Epiphany, where individuals receive a single guiding word (like "Joy," "Peace," or "Courage") for the new year, inspired by the star guiding the Magi to Jesus, to reflect on and use for spiritual guidance.

You might recall that last year, my star word was "sing," and I will admit that I was curious about how that might guide me. It turned out that meant that I was to "sing" out. Whether in music or voice, God was asking me to "sing." I will admit I was reluctant to sing out until I figured this out.

I had the honor of drawing a star word at my husband's church last Sunday. It is another word that I find myself pondering "respect." I will let you know what I figure out as we journey into 2026.

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 We no longer provide a printed Church Directory as soon as we print it, it is usually already out-of-date since information changes on a regular basis.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 and a link will be sent to you to set up a password for your account.



2nd Sunday Brunch January 11th

**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.**

The Heart of Mission

With Deep Gratitude

Thank you everyone for your overwhelming support of the Angel Tree this year!

It is truly heartwarming to know we made life a little brighter for the clients of Courage Connection. Please read Matthew Fletcher's note below.

*Blessings,
Your Community Mission Deacons*

From Matthew Fletcher:

Just moments ago, my colleagues and I finished distributing the gifts that First Presbyterian Church so graciously donated to our clients. Words cannot fully capture how meaningful it was to witness the surprise and joy as they received such an abundance of thoughtful, unexpected gifts. I only wish that members of your congregation could have been present to share in that truly special moment.

Because of the steadfast support and humbling generosity of your church, Courage Connection was able this year to provide multiple presents and gift cards to 21 adults and 22 children, including a few families who joined us over the weekend.

With more than 150 years of service to this community, it comes as no surprise that First Presbyterian Church of Champaign continues to play such an outsized role in easing the suffering of those during their time of need. On behalf of the entire Courage Connection family, please accept our heartfelt thanks for all that you have

given to our organization and, most importantly, to the survivors we serve.

With deep gratitude,

Matthew Fletcher
Interim Executive Director
Courage Connection

Ripe Fruits

James 5:7-10

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

James 5:7 (NIV)

One of the most important virtues a human being can possess is patience, and at the same time, one of the most difficult. We may say we are patient, but many of us struggle with it, especially when it comes to something we eagerly anticipate.

We become impatient because of life's hectic pace, because of excitement or anxiety, and also when we pray to God and don't receive an answer.

Just as we wait to harvest in due season, we too must give things time, for God has a precious plan for each of us. If the farmer were impatient and picked the unripe fruit, it would never ripen and eating it could harm his health.

Let us remember that if the Lord's plans haven't yet reached our lives, it's because they are still ripening. Similarly, if oranges fall from the tree, let's not ignore them because we are waiting for apples.

Prayer: God, grant me patience so that I may enjoy life without rushing. I trust that your plans for me are for my well-being, even though the path may sometimes become difficult. Thank you for another day in which my eyes open to see the sun and close contemplating the moon. Amen.

This devotion was written for us by our sister church in Cuba. You can subscribe to a daily early morning email with similar messages to begin your day. <https://www.cubapartnersnetwork.org/home>



“So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” – *Romans 12:5*

There's a “polycrisis” in Cuba right now, a simultaneous occurrence of several catastrophic events:

- frequent prolonged power outages
- food insecurity
- illnesses sweeping the country
- significant decrease in production due to emigration
- lack of medicines
- severe damage from Hurricane Melissa

Conditions are dire and are not expected to improve anytime soon. In addition, President Trump issued immigration orders which will

impact Cubans in the United States. These include a freeze on asylum applications, a hold on all pending immigration benefits and a re-review of all Cubans who arrived in the US after January of 2021. This imposes further suffering on our Cuban siblings in Christ whose members rely on support from their families in America.

We can ease these burdens and lift spirits through prayerful expressions of solidarity and love, and commitments to additional financial support.

Hope in the midst of crisis



“We believe that in the midst of all the current difficulties, there’s space within our churches for hope; there’s a space within our churches for that spirit of persistence, that spirit of a space where reality can be made a little more beautiful.

The churches are creating those spaces, trying to strengthen those community spaces...not only for people who participate in the life of the church, but also for the communities where the churches are located, which can look to the churches today as a space of healing, a space of support, and a space of hope.”

Pastor Dora Arce Valentín
IPRC General Secretary

Information here is selected from that published by the Cuba Partners Network of our PC(USA). See a short video of the life in our sister church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaAN-UGBsgk> Cuba Partners Network <https://www.cubapartnersnetwork.org/>. Enjoy Cuban music and film from our blog at <https://cubapartnersfirstchurch.blogspot.com/> .

Cuban Cake Recipe

from Mati Stone after several requests

Make a white cake using Duncan Hines or Betty Crocker mix

Let the cake cool.

In a pot combine,
2 cups water
4 cups sugar
1 cinnamon stick
a few drops of one lemon

Boil for approximately 5 minutes stirring constantly.

Remove from burner.

Add 2 tsp. vanilla and let it cool.

Cut the cake into desired size serving pieces.

Pour the sauce over cake.

It is possible to add sweet wine to the “sauce” before pouring it over the cake. I personally do not use alcohol.

English Language Ministry

Why do we offer English language ministries. Watch this [short video](#), then decide if you might want to participate. Contact us at info@firstpres.church.



Church Office Hours

The church office is open:

Mon-Thurs 8:30 AM - 2 PM
Friday 8:30 AM - noon

Contact the church office during these hours at 217.356.7238.

You can also send an email to info@firstpres.church.



God in whom we live and move and have our being, You make us a community. You gather us and knit us together with grace and mercy. In your presence, there is fullness of love, joy, hope, and peace. Thank you for being among us this day and with us in every moment of our being. Help us live every day seeking your way and moving on your path. Help us commit to extravagant love and resolve to extend the abundant grace and mercy we receive from you to our neighbors. Make us new.

Holy One, may we learn to see the lives of all beings—human and other—as just as important as our own. May we find the strength and courage to always seek the light in each other. May we have clear vision to see those who need food, clothing, and shelter that we may supply their need.

So many around the world need help—may we imagine just one person in need—where they live, where they sleep, where and what they fear, and pray for that person with all our hearts. Amen.

Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois

Called to Serve

As Christians we are called to worship God together and to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus. First Champaign has many opportunities to use your talent on behalf of the kingdom. Contact us at info@firstpres.church to learn with whom you can speak about sharing your gifts of service.

Some Examples

- **Join people serving periodically:** childcare, clerical, hospitality table, kitchen team, graphic design, greeter, library, liturgist, office assistant, Sunday School teacher or assistant teacher, usher, website update
- **Join people serving more regularly:** choir, English language tutors, Presbyterian women
- **Join our groups:** adult education, buildings and grounds, compassion peace and justice, Cuba team, environmental stewardship, finance, human relations, mission, nurture, outreach, prayer groups, small groups, worship committee.....


Jays & Concerns

We extend sympathy to the families and friends of:

- **Mary Jane Kelley** who died December 6, 2025;
- **Elnor Lammers** who died January 5, 2026;
- **Kathryn Emery** sister of **George Johnston** who died recently in California.

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.



Coffee with Beth in January

Mondays, 10 am - Noon

**Espresso Royale,
2401 Village Green Place Champaign**

Face to Face with Marcia Franks, Office Administrator, First Pres Church



Tell us a bit about yourself.

I grew up in Philo Illinois in a Catholic family and attended St. Thomas Catholic School and Parkland College. I married, divorced, raised two daughters and now have five grandchildren. I live with a daughter in Savoy where I am an “uber mom”, meaning I do transportation duty for the grandchildren. I relax by gardening, painting and sewing.

Describe your role at First Pres.

I have been at First for too many years to count as the Office Administrator. I love the job because I have responsibility but also flexibility. Each day is different and challenging in surprising ways. I have come to know many people.

What have you found interesting at First Pres?

I think again the variety of tasks and meeting so many good people. One of my roles is subbing as Wedding Coordinator for the church. I remember helping a young bride prepared to go down the aisle. She was so nervous that she was rocking on her heels; the heel of one of her shoes broke so we just took off both shoes. She walked to the altar barefoot and unnoticed. I could write a book about all the little things here that did not happen as planned.

What questions do you have for us?

I am concerned about the future for the church and particularly about how we can better bring Christ to the youth of our community. I would love to bring my children and grandchildren to church but have not yet succeeded. However, I haven't given up.

What else would you like us to know?

I am thankful for the opportunity to work with our staff and congregation here. I have seen many come and go and have wonderful memories of all of them. My family and my work are two things that give me great joy. I have a lot of years ahead of me and pray they will continue to be rewarding ones.

Work Wanted

Hourly work for people in our congregation wishing to supplement their income. Driving you in your car, shopping, cleaning your garage or home, snow removal and other yard work. Contact: info@firstpres.church or 217-356-7238

Finance

Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

Contributions

Total November contributions: \$29.8K from plate and pledge plus \$7.9K from prepaid= \$37.7K This is \$17.3k less than last year and \$27.4K under budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$604.7 K which is \$58.3k less than last year and \$111.4K under budget. At 91.7% of the year, we have 85.7% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

Expenses

November expenses were \$53.2 K, which is \$49.1 less than last year and \$25.8 under budget. Expenses YTD are \$840.5K, which is \$45.8 less than last year and \$28.5K under budget. At 91.7% of the year, we have spent 88.7% of the budget.

Balance YTD

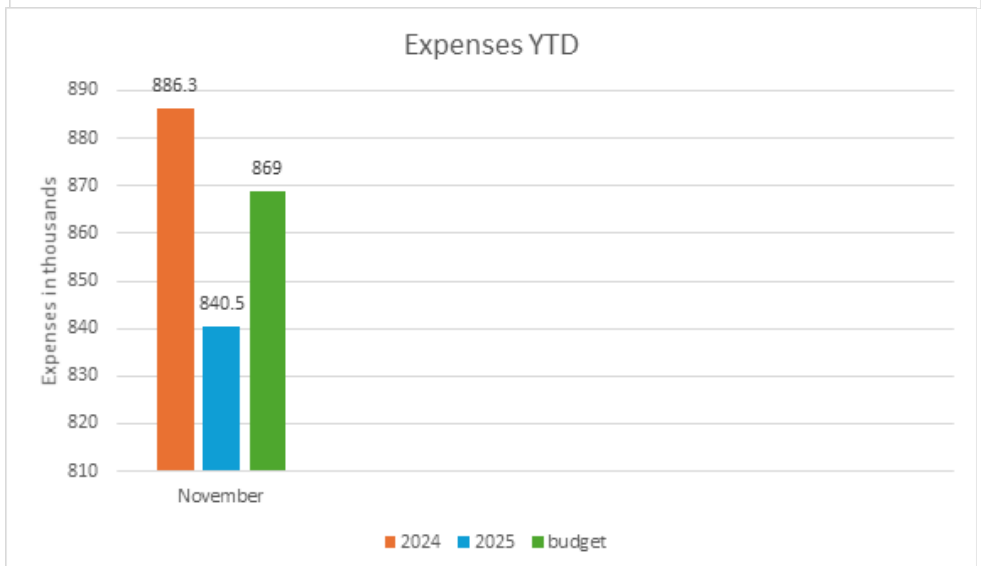
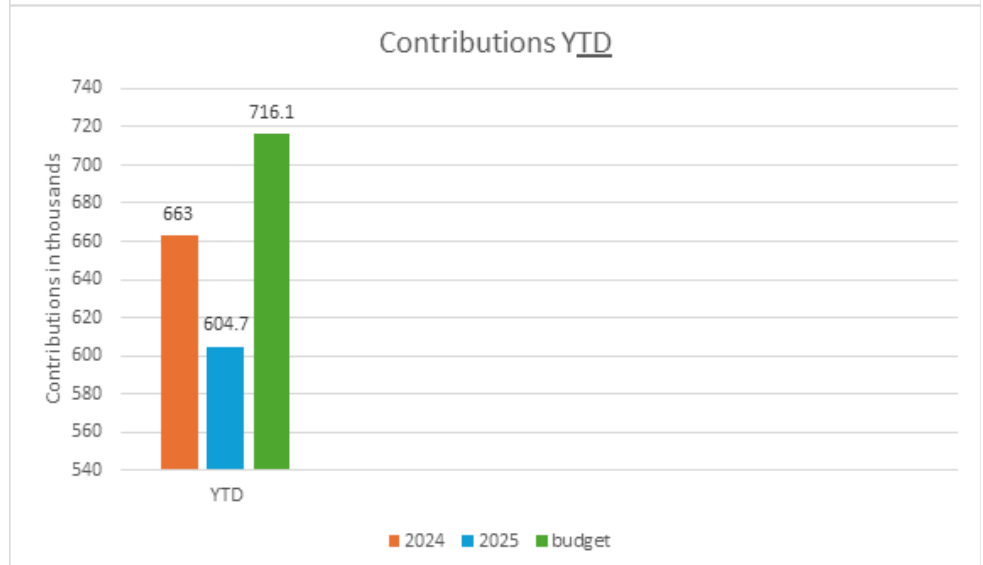
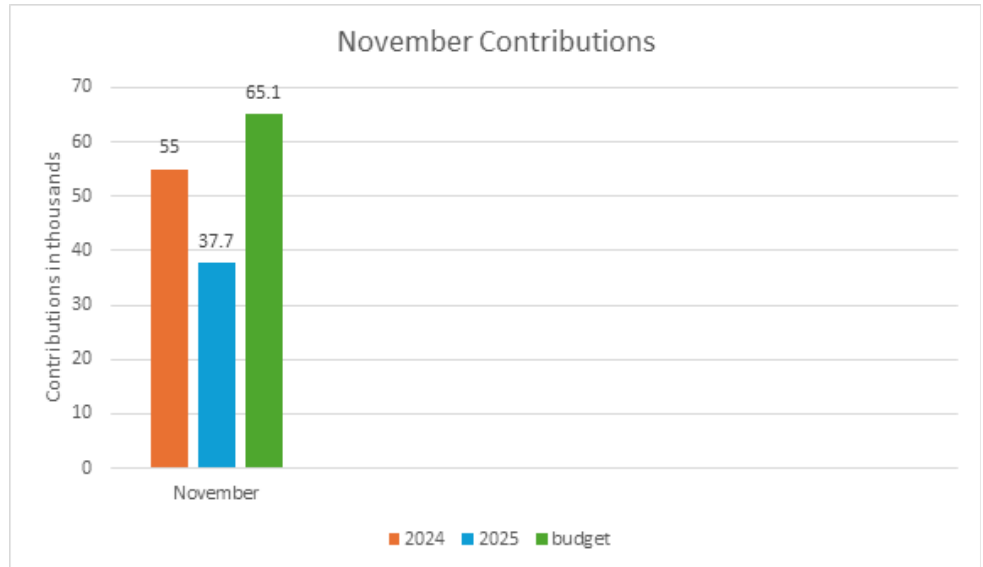
Revenue from all sources exceeded expenses by \$1,290.

Session Designated Funds

\$1,019,117 which is \$10,654 more than last month.

Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$4530 was given to the general memorial fund and \$2,137 was deposited in the South Campus Fund.





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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

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.