

June 2024



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

## Pentecost 2024

BY MATT MATTHEWS

MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

To Members and Friends of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to tell you Rachel and I have accepted a call to become co-pastors at the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina. My body aches at the thought of leaving you and the ministry of First Pres Champaign. At the same time, I'm elated to be moving about an hour drive away from our sons Joseph, in Asheville, and Benjamin, in Charlotte. A direct flight from Charlotte gets us to John Mark in Washington, D.C., in 86-minutes.

Before I took my ordination vows, Rachel and I exchanged marriage vows. Family has always been our first call. While the churches I've served have always been part of my core family (you really are my brothers and sisters), the sudden death of our son's father-in-law this winter, which rocked our world, reminded us we are watching our sons' interesting lives unfold at a great distance. After many conversations with our boys and their significant others, we all agreed we wanted to get the band back together, so to speak. When Rachel and I were asked to apply for this position in Valdese, we felt we were being welcomed home. And so, with both heavy hearts and joyful hearts, we are going.

I cannot thank you enough for calling me to serve alongside of you these six-and-a-half-years. Working and dreaming with you and our faithful staff has been a means of profound grace for me. I've learned so much. Our church's international focus has broadened my mind and reformed my heart; I've loved getting to know our mission partners around the globe. Our music program has veritably soared these years. Small groups love each other. Local mission thrives, and this church has proven nimble in building ever-morphing partnerships. Strides have been made in upgrading our campus—a brand new kitchen has served hundreds of meals, the new lift to Centennial Hall allows full access for our community, the new HVAC in the sanctuary building has slashed our natural gas bills, and a soon-to-be-installed elevator will return us to our beloved sanctuary. Besides brick and mortar and steady budgets, lives are being transformed. People are finding safe haven and welcome at First Pres. Grieving families find respite, food, and hope here. People from around the world and down the street are being welcomed home. To the glory of God, First Pres remains both sanctuary and launch pad.

continued on the next page



**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Brunch**  
**June 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, Gary  
Peterson or the church office.**



I've been thinking about the prophet Jonah lately. God had a job for him in Ninevah, but Jonah went to Tarshish instead. A storm at sea got Jonah's attention, and a big fish spat Jonah on a beach at the trailhead to Ninevah. In my ministry, I've attempted to go where God points. Sometimes I've heard God wrong. Sometimes I've been accurate and more or less faithful. Sometimes I've flat failed. And sometimes I've run in the opposite direction. In all my years, I never imagined my Ninevah would be a small town named Valdese settled by Waldensian immigrants 130-years ago. I'm no prophet, and Valdese is no wretched city of sinners, and yet here I am readying to set sail.

I travel as a mariner making passage from one safe port to another, leaving the hearth of beloved family here and setting out into the distant arms of cousins in another land. I go with a Compass named Jesus who reminds me the light of God's love steadies and guides. Grace abounds. We're in good hands. God is good.

Your Session has been apprised of our new call, and they and our presbytery's Commission on Ministry will parse the next steps for First Pres. They'll keep you in the loop. My last Sunday in the pulpit will be June 23. I'm eager to see as many of you as want to share a cup of tea.

Your Session called a meeting of the congregation on Sunday, 26 May, where the congregation voted to concur with my desire to dissolve our pastoral relationship in order for me and Rachel to accept this new call.

PEACE,

Matt Matthews  
864.386.9138  
Matt@FirstPres.Church

## Next Steps: Progress!

BY MATT MATTHEWS  
MATT@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

Dear Friends,

I promised to keep you abreast of next steps for First Pres in light of my and Rachel's upcoming move to accept the call to serve as co-pastors at Waldensian Presbyterian Church, Valdese, NC.

The following note from our Clerk of Session, **Trenna Thomas**, lists the motions your Session has recently approved. Sometimes the wheels of progress move slowly. These actions couldn't be more timely.

The big piece of good news is that the Session hired an interim pastor (see below) who has tons of experience in transitional ministry and who will ably guide First Pres through this next chapter. **Rev. Beth Wagner** will be here later this month. She is eager to partner with **Rev. Joe Lundy** and your Session and other leaders.

Remember, an "interim" or "transitional" minister is not your next "called and installed" pastor. Beth will help you do a mission study and think through transition matters that will lead to your selection/election of a Pastor Nominating Committee who will conduct the search for your next installed pastor.

If you are interested, I'll attempt to answer the question "What do we do now?" in this Sunday's sermon. I think the answer is simple, so come and hear, then decide for yourself.

Below are the motions your Session has approved.

PEACE to you all,  
Matt Matthews  
864.386.9138

This is a list of the motions that have been made as of 5/30/24 regarding the resignation of **Pastor Matt Matthews** from First Presbyterian Church of Champaign.

- This is the motion from the special called meeting of May 19, 2024 in which **Ann Webbink** served as clerk in my absence.

Matt moved and it was approved unanimously that the Session of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, call a meeting of the Congregation for Sunday, May 26 immediately following morning worship for the purpose of concurring with Matt Matthews' desire to dissolve the pastoral relationship in order that he can assume the duties of co-pastor with Rachel Matthews of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, North Carolina. Matt's last Sunday in the pulpit will be June 23. His last day on the payroll will be the last day of June.

The motion was passed unanimously.

- This is the motion Pastor Matt made at the congregational meeting of May 26, 2024

The Pastor's motion was made as follows:  
That the First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, concur with Rev. Matt Matthews' desire to dissolve the sacred pastoral relationship that church and pastor have treasured these six-and-a-half years in order that he can assume the duties of co-pastor (with Rev. Dr. Rachel Matthews) of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church, Valdese, North Carolina.

The motion was seconded and passed by the congregation.

•This is the motion from the special called meeting of May 29, 2024. (Motion was made by David Oliver-Holder)

The moderator presented the motion for Session to act on the employment contract for Beth Wagner to serve as interim pastor at First Presbyterian Church and it was seconded. The moderator asked if there were questions or a need for further discussion. In as much discussion and questions had already transpired, and no need was found for more, the Session voted to approve the contract and the motion carried.

Beth Wagner's contract would have a start date of June 24, 2024 and last for one year with the option of renewal.

## Endings and Beginnings

BY ALLEN HUFF

When one door closes, another one opens, says the old adage. And it seems as true as it does trite. Mostly. "In my end is my beginning," writes T. S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets*.

"If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his," says Paul to the Romans. (Romans 6:5)

They're all saying something similar. And this wisdom isn't limited to our own spiritual tradition. Throughout the ages, humankind has shared the experience that endings and beginnings hold much in common.

From the cross, as death engulfs him, Jesus says, "It is finished." And with that, the earthly Jesus dies. His limp corpse is removed from the cross and placed in a tomb, which is then sealed

with a huge rock. He is only thirty-ish. Not that old by first-century standards, and not old at all by today's. So, it would seem that his life is cut short. But is it?

Scripture and the witness of 2000 years of disciples would argue that as short as Jesus' life may have been, it is complete. And when something reaches completion, the implication points toward a deeper level of significance than if something is simply declared to be over. That's why a given semester may be over, while one completes a degree.

When Jesus says, "It is finished," both his ministry and his life are complete. His tomb, then, becomes a kind of cul-de-sac, a place of turning around. Or as one person said, Jesus didn't come out of the tomb so much as he went slap through it. (I honestly don't recall who said that, but it was likely Richard Rohr.) So again, Jesus' end and his new beginning are, simultaneously, distinct and indistinct.

With a fatalistic, tongue-in-cheek snort, some folks like to say that the only certain things in life are death and taxes. In matters of faith, we can't claim much in the way of certainties, but with the fullest of trust, we call Resurrection our "sure and certain hope." When making that affirmation of faith, we're declaring that, finally, regardless of circumstances, the goodness, justice, and love of God will prevail. And this hope empowers us for living in the here-and-now according to those resurrecting attributes of God. They allow us to see in all endings, unexpected changes, or turns of events possibilities for God to reveal some new aspect of God's realm of grace.

While these are uncertain times, hasn't every era been rife with its own triggers for grief, suspicion, and doubt? And through them all, the proclamations of Incarnation and Resurrection remain our sustaining hope. If God Incarnate overcomes death, we can overcome whatever painful realities life throws at us. For there is no end that God cannot transform into a new beginning.

**Join us**  
**Farewell Celebration**  
honoring Matt and Rachel  
**Sunday, June 23**  
**Centennial Hall**  
immediately following the 9 am service

**We will have an array of fruit,  
pastries, cake and coffee!**



## Tres Nopales For the Win!

BY BRANDI LOWE

BRANDISCRAPBOOK@YAHOO.COM



Pictured are Chino Reynoso, co-owner, and Brandi Lowe, church member

Our Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry Team encourages our church to support restaurants owned by People of Color (POC) and Immigrants in our community. From time to time, you will see a review of one of these restaurants. The diversity of our cities brings excitement and interest to our lives. We are very lucky to live in a place with such diversity, not only in our people, but our music, stores, festivals, and food. Our church is proud of our ties to the Immigrant and Black community and this is just one way in which we can support them.

Tres Nopales means Three Prickly Pears in Spanish. But there wasn't anything prickly about my experience at this Mexican restaurant in Urbana. It's located at 114 S. Race St. and you can park in the end of the Busey Bank

parking lot across the street. This location was previously Sitara, but there was a fire and it never reopened.

The owners are the Reynoso Brothers from Guatemala. Chino manages the front of the restaurant while Walfre is the cook in the back. Together, they serve Mexican food with a Guatemalan flare. They came here about 15 years ago from Guatemala along with another brother who also lives in town. Chino had a smile on his face from the moment I walked in and was so nice. I was meeting a friend there who has known Chino since he worked at Casa del Mar, another Mexican restaurant in Urbana. He opened Tres Nopales about 2.5 years ago now and business is booming. We had a pretty quiet lunch on a Tuesday, but from what I hear, it's packed on Friday nights and many other nights too. My friend loves the music videos they play which are all in Spanish. She told me that they show soccer games during the soccer season which is a big attraction. Chino also plays soccer in town when he has the time.

I hope you can stop in soon to taste their wonderful food. I had three types of tacos: Nopal (cactus), fish, and mushroom (my favorite). My friend loves the al pastor tacos. I tasted her margarita and it was delicious. They use the good stuff here. You can also get a margarita flight with all sorts of flavors, including blueberry, strawberry, piña colada, watermelon, peach, banana, mango, and raspberry. If you are looking for beer, they have several styles in bottles and also

Tecate and Corona Light on draught, but expect to add two more draught beers soon.

Regardless of what you order, you won't be disappointed with how welcome they will make you feel. Tell them you read about the restaurant from the church newsletter and I'm sure Chino will give you the same big smile he did me when I told him I'd like to write this article.



### Church Office Hours

Office hours have been adjusted.

The church office is now open:

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

## Face to Face with Jerry Jahn & Carol Ann Green



Jerry and Carol Ann were married January 20, 2024. Their families had been neighbors and friends for fifty years. Carol Ann is an elder and leads our nurture committee.

### What has been the highlight of your church experience?

For Jerry it is having been married here. For me, I think raising our children in the church and making many lasting friendships.

### Tell me about your family? Your work?

Our families grew up in the same neighborhood and have been close for decades. Jerry has two children and two grandchildren, and I have three children and nine grandchildren with a great grandchild on the way. I taught elementary school. Jerry has practiced law for fifty-seven years. His office is just across the alley at Meyer Capel.

### What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?

I have been Presbyterian all my life. When my first husband, a Methodist, and I moved to Champaign we found a welcome home at First Pres. Jerry is an active member at Faith United Methodist Church.

### What do you do in your free time?

Well, we both enjoy golf, card games as well as college football and basketball. Jerry's granddaughter plays softball at Eastern Illinois University, so we encourage her by attending her games.

### What are your favorite Bible characters?

It's hard to pick just one. As a woman I've always been interested in all the women in the Bible. For Jerry, it's Paul because of his hard work on behalf of the early church.

### What advice can you give on how to be the church? Or, how can the church best be the church?

For Jerry it is to build strong relationships in the congregation and then to spread the good news in the community. Carol Ann wants to serve our nurture committee's work in building friendships through education and communication.

## Library News



### Free Book Exchange

Check out the book cart in Westminster Hall. Donate a book for others to enjoy and take some for yourself.



**It's time to celebrate graduates!**  
**We will recognize ALL grads**  
**Sunday, June 9 during worship and**  
**the brunch following the service.**



## Hang On

A THOUGHT FROM LINDA PETERSON

Thunder and lightning might be chasing each other around you. The wind could be blowing unexpected or unpleasant circumstances in your life. All is dark, nothing looks promising.

Where is the light?

Your tears shed, not from weakness or fear, but from deep truths being silently spoken. With a simple utterance, one word, the calm to disperse the chaos, to settle the climate of your mind is all that Jesus needs to hear.

The next time you suffer, pay attention. You may be getting closer to the extended, pierced hand. Grab it. Hold on tight. Follow. Let Him lead you out of the darkness.

## Summer Adult Education Wednesday Evenings

There will be no Adult Sunday School after Worship Services in June, July or August. Many of our small groups take Summer breaks as well so check with your leader about summer plans for your small group.

During the Summer, we will be having Adult Bible Lessons and Christian Discussions on Wednesday evenings.

Our first series of discussions is a three-part lesson from PCUSA on: "What it Means to be 'A Matthew 25 Congregation'".

**Joe Lundy** is our primary leader with help from other volunteers.

The time for our gatherings is Wednesdays at 7 - 8 PM in the Mae Chapin Parlor and by Zoom on June 19, 26 and July 10. (No discussion on July 3.)

We plan on having a second series on July 17, 24, 31 and August 7, 14, 21 & maybe the 28, but the details are not yet firm regarding the content of those lessons.

**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.**

## Jays & Concerns

### We celebrate...

- the birth of **Moses Kamenga** on March 15. Moses joins parents Paty and Juliana and sisters Olivia, and Victoria.

### We express sympathy...

- to the family and friends of **Doug Mills** who died May 14, 2024.
- to the family and friends of **Joyce Wittler** who died May 19, 2024. A Memorial Service will be held Friday, June 28, at 12 noon at the church. Visitation will be held 10-12 before the service in Centennial Hall.



# The Heart of Mission

## Pentecost Offering to DREAAM

BY HOLLY NORDHEDEN  
HNORDHEDEN@GMAIL.COM

DREAAM, an acronym for Driven to Reach Excellence and Academic Achievement for Males. The program is designed to reach, teach and invest in African American boys at risk and to walk alongside them and their families beginning at the early age of 3 until they reach age 24.

DREAAM is the brainchild of **Tracy Dace**, an educator and advocate for at-risk youth who left his doctoral studies program to become DREAAM's founder and chief executive officer nine years ago. DREAAM is a ministry of our church and operates in partnership with our congregation and members as a separate 501(c)3 organization.

Since the program's inception, Dace has never once stopped "DREAMing." "Creativity is one of the core values of DREAAM," said Dace. "Our impact is inspired by the Kwanzaa principle of 'Kumba' [creativity], which means to always do as much as we can to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. We reach, teach and empower through building creative partnerships with area congregations to achieve our program's goals."

We've hosted DREAMER's for a Bible study and meal on Wednesday afternoons since last fall. Our last time together was last week. I hope

the DREAMER's have enjoyed it as much as I have. The conversation starter questions provided by Trace have elicited lots of interesting stories from both DREAMER's and FirstPres participants

Close to my librarian's heart was last summer's six-week initiative called "Around the World in 30 Books," which served more than 150 DREAMers, ages 5 to 16, through two churches that provided both space and volunteers.

But the program also went on the road for five days to Niagara Falls and New York City, actively exposing young DREAMers to the unlimited potential and life opportunities that await them. Trace was able to connect with The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, where the church staff designed a mission project focused on homelessness for the DREAMERs.

I'm hoping Trace will tell us about some upcoming events like the opening of the DREAAM Center for Community Excellence and the van that will be helping with food insecurity in the "desert" areas of CU. And maybe talk about this year's DREAMERs road trips to Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Malawi to visit colleges, engage in collaborative mission projects with Presbyterian churches, and to continue building hope and dreams through travel and cultural experiences.

If you have time be sure to look up and read the complete article

called "Pentecost Offering helps young DREAMers dream big" on the PCUSA website <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pentecost-offering-helps-young-dreamers-dream-big/> or check out DREAAM's website <https://www.dreaam.org/>

\$260 was raised for this year's Pentecost Offering.

## Environmental Events Coming Up

BY PAT PHILLIPS  
P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBAL.NET

On Saturday June 22, participants will gather at 8:30 for the next Adopt-a-Highway. There have been unexpected improvements on Randolph Street near the formerly trash-laden railroad tracks area—very little trash. Someone has purchased some properties, put up wrought iron fencing, picks up trash, plants sunflowers and plans a community garden! Sign up to help with the pickup on June 9.

## Cuba Celebration

We celebrated our sister relationship with our congregation at Luyanó on May 5. If you missed the presentation by our March travelers you may get a taste of their experience in this [slide show](#).



## First Presbyterian Hot Lunch a Success!



On Saturday, May 18, **Rachel Matthews** and **Jane Alsberg** delivered a hot lunch prepared by Jane, **Naomi Rempe**, **Sallie Hutton**, and **Holly Nordheden**



Conversation flowed easily as both Habitat and First Presbyterian folks spent an hour getting to know each other. The thanks given was heart felt.

First Presbyterian's next hot lunch for Habitat is June 15.

to 1308 W Dublin in Urbana where a Habitat house is being built. The crew that Saturday consisted of Habitat's board members.



It was a great opportunity for church members to meet and share a meal with them.



**JUNE 23, 2024****URBANA, ILLINOIS USA** 🇺🇸**MUSIC  
ART EXHIBITION  
CUISINE  
FASHION**

## Ngoma African Arts Festival

Celebrate our African friends as they honor our community with a festival of music, photography, public dance, food and fashion on Sunday, June 23. Our friend **Jean René Balekita** is coordinating this community wide event. Donations are still accepted now at First Presbyterian Church (memo “Ngoma”) and at Community Center for the Arts , 202 West Main Street, Urbana IL 61801.

- 10:30 – 11:30 AM Music for kids with drumming at the Community Center for the Arts
- 12 – 2 PM Fashion show and speech by King HRH Togbi Nyaho Tamakloe VI, Mafiaga of Anlo kingdom- Volta region, Ghana at Lincoln Square Mall.
- 3 – 4 PM Public Dance at Urbana Free Library
- 4 – 7 PM African cuisine for sale and music with Congolese guest artist Jose Nzita on Gregory Street between Krannert Center and Spurlock museum.

## What Is Our Matthew 25 Commitment?



Learn more [here](#).

# Finance

## Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM  
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

### Contributions

Total April contributions: \$53.8K from plate and pledge plus \$10.3K from prepaid= \$64.1K  
This is \$48.8K less than last year and \$1.3k under budget.  
Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$ 315.2 K which is \$1.4K more than last year and \$53.6 K over budget.  
At 33.3% of the year, we have 50.7% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

### Expenses

April expenses were \$71.4 K, which is \$11.3k less than last year and \$8.6K under budget. Expenses YTD are \$320.8K which is \$10.6K less than last year and \$0.8K over budget.  
At 33.3% of the year, we have spent 33.4% of the budget.

### Balance YTD

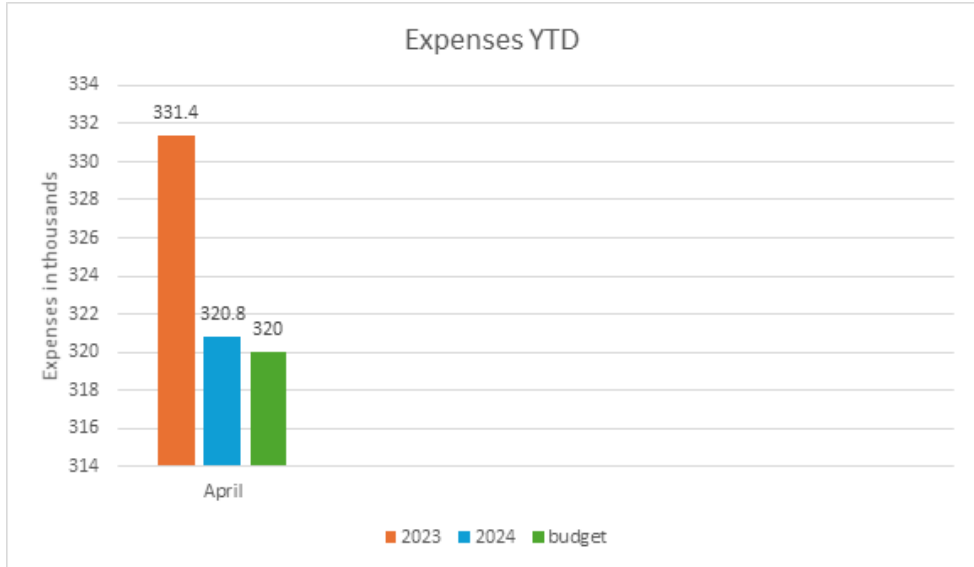
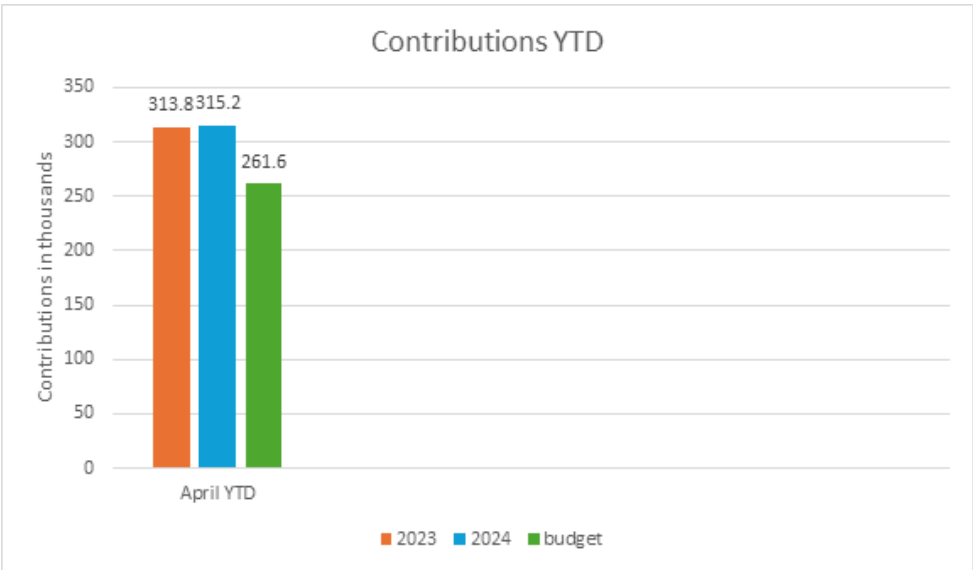
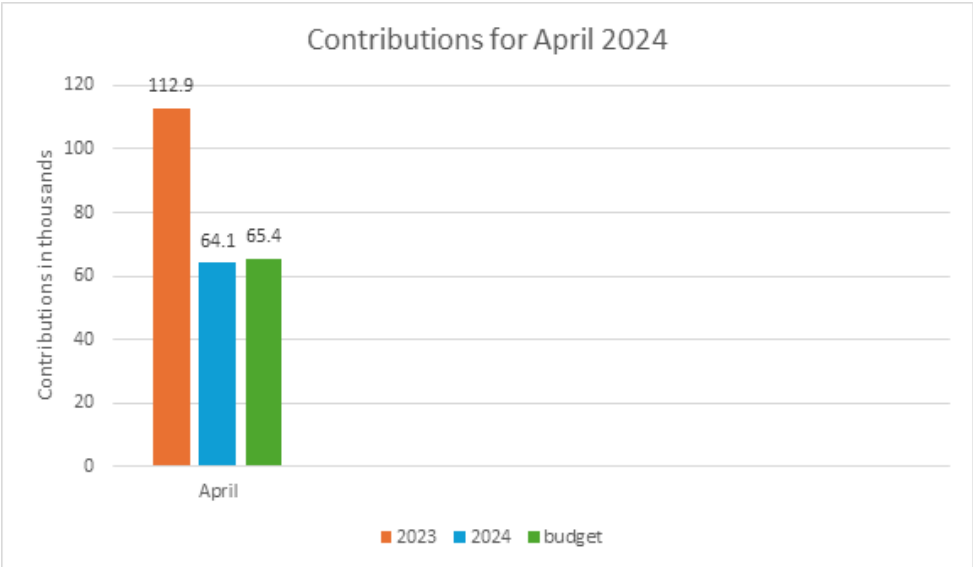
Revenue, including prepaid, exceeded expenses by \$105.9K, which is \$20.3K more than last year at the same time.

### Session Designated Funds

\$1,614,406 which is \$61,486 less than last month.

### Summary of Restricted Accounts

Among other donations, \$4330 was given to missions, including \$2025 to mission possible, and an additional \$913 to OGHS, and \$3100 to the elevator fund was given.





**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH** OF CHAMPAIGN

302 West Church Street  
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Change Service Requested



**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
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**Sunday:**

9 AM Worship

10 AM Coffee and Fellowship

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:**

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

**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).