

March 2026



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

The events of Holy Week
leading up to
Easter Sunday



March 29 Palm Sunday

9 AM Worship with distribution of Palms

April 2 Maundy Thursday

6 PM Soup Supper and Communion Service in Centennial Hall

April 3 Good Friday

7 PM Combined Worship Service with First Methodist Church in our Sanctuary. Choirs from both churches will present special music.

April 5 Easter Sunday

9:30 AM Worship/Easter Offering
Special music will include selections from Handel's *Messiah* with string quartet and soloists

Let's shower our new food pantry with staples and canned goods as an Easter offering. A shopping list with items needed (bring only these items) will be available early in March. Items can be placed on the donation table in Westminster Hall. Look for the shopping cart!



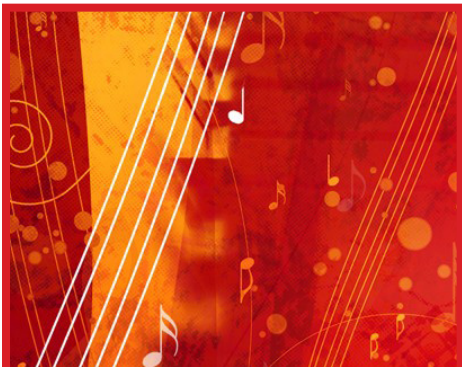
2nd Sunday Brunch March 8th

**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.**



Upcoming Special Music Events

Our Choir will combine with the Choir of First Presbyterian Church of Urbana to present the *Faure Requiem*

April 12 9:30 AM Worship at First Presbyterian Church Champaign

April 26 9:30 AM Worship at First Presbyterian Church Urbana



Coffee with Beth in March

Tuesdays, 1 - 3 pm

Mad Goat Coffee downtown Champaign

Enjoy coffee and conversation

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.

Technology Frustration

Bring your frustrations and devices to the church library at 10:15 Sundays. Phones, i-pads, lap tops, our grad students will do their best to send you away unburdened.

We are once again celebrating Maundy Thursday with a soup supper. The service will be in Centennial Hall at 6 PM on Thursday, April 2. We will be remembering the last meal Christ shared with his disciples before his death. This Holy Week observance will lead us into the Good Friday service the following day.

Times Are Changing!

Effective Sunday April 5 (Easter), Sunday morning worship time will move to 9:30 AM



The Heart of Mission

One Great Hour of Sharing

The annual **One Great Hour of Sharing** offering will be received on Easter Sunday, April 5.

Join with Presbyterians worldwide in responding to Christ's call to ministries of compassion for the most vulnerable around the world. One Great Hour of Sharing currently supports projects in over 100 countries.

God unites all gifts to create big impact. Presbyterians have a history of working to build a more just, resilient and sustainable future. When you give to One Great Hour of Sharing, you are supporting the gifts and talents of people and communities all over the world and offering opportunities for partnership, learning and witness that profoundly affect the life of the church as a collective witness to Jesus Christ's love for the whole church.

Use the envelope provided on Easter or mark your check "OGHS". Please give generously, if we all do a little, it adds up to a lot!

To learn more about how your gift to One Great Hour of Sharing makes a difference, visit pcusa.org/oghs



Interfaith Alliance Build Kick-off Blessing

Sunday, March 29th - 3pm
1112 W. Church St. Urbana

Join us as we gather in unity to bless the home, the future homeowners, and the many hands that will build together. This Interfaith Kick-Off Blessing will bring together faith traditions from across our community to celebrate partnership, shared purpose, and the spirit of service and connection.

Let's begin this build grounded in hope, compassion, and the joy of building together.



Interfaith Alliance Build

From Interfaith Alliance.. *We are so grateful for the way our faith communities continue to show up in partnership and shared purpose.*

As we plan upcoming build days with Habitat for Humanity of Champaign County, our goal is to intentionally create opportunities for multiple faith groups to serve side by side. Rather than having a single congregation fill an entire day, we hope to model interfaith collaboration by bringing different communities together on each build date.

To help us do this well, we're asking individuals to sign up for several dates on this interest form (<https://forms.gle/DW94kaLs49wvPZQF6>). The deadline for response is Wednesday, March 25th. We will assign volunteers based on preferences and overall needs to ensure each day reflects a mix of faith communities.

Because contractor timelines can shift, we're asking every volunteer to indicate multiple dates they are available. This flexibility helps us adjust as needed while still ensuring each build day reflects a strong interfaith partnership.

This approach allows us to:

- *Build relationships across traditions*
- *Strengthen the spirit of unity within the Interfaith Alliance*
- *Share the experience more broadly across congregations*
- *See above for details of the build kick-off blessing. All are welcome to join a short service for the work, the land and the family whose home we are helping build.*

Thank you for being part of this meaningful work!

**Ministry of Pastoral
Solidarity Special Edition**

**Ministerio de Solidaridad
Pastoral Edición Especial**

**Cuba, a look at the current reality
by Pastor Daniel Izquierdo**



Cuba is facing a multifaceted crisis, confronted by aggressive US policies that are exacerbated by an internal situation impoverished also by mismanagement of the economy. The latest of these external measures is a blockade on oil imports to the island, which worsens the already profound energy crisis. For years, this crisis has left large areas of the country without electricity for most of the day, and fuel shortages for transportation and other essential activities are impacting the economy and daily life.

The consequences for the population are evident: deteriorating sanitation and health services; a decline in the standard of living, high percentages of people living in extreme poverty, with a rampant inflation due to the inefficient economic model; and a mass exodus with nearly two million emigrants in the last five years. This is a grim reality, marked by a loss of hope among the population, not only because of the current situation but also due to a lack of confidence in the government's ability to implement the necessary reforms.

In these circumstances, the Cuban Church attempts to alleviate the

suffering of the most vulnerable through various food programs, as well as deliveries of food, medicine, and other supplies. But any effort in this direction is insufficient. The Church continues to proclaim its faith and trust in God, to encourage, sustain, and uplift its communities. In the midst of despair, the light of Christ shines, and many people find comfort and strength to face the harsh realities of today. The Cuban Church calls for international solidarity, mediation in the dispute with the United States, and intervention with the Cuban government authorities to open the country to the urgent improvements needed to prevent total collapse.

Meanwhile, we maintain our prayer and our cries to the God of history, clinging to His promises, and striving to be His instruments.

**Whistle Kit Party
Saturday, March 7
1-4 PM**

We will join hands and hearts with like-minded Christian neighbors at New Covenant Fellowship, 124 White Street, Champaign on Saturday, March 7 from 1-4 PM to assemble whistle kits.

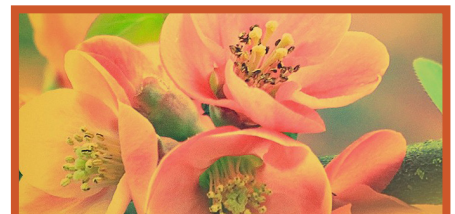
A whistle kit is a small packet assembled by community groups containing a whistle and informational cards to alert people to dangers like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, turning silent threats into loud, visible community warnings with specific whistle codes for different situations nearby.

These kits provide an immediate, recognizable signal for neighbors to

gather, document, and nonviolently resist, turning private abductions into public events. This video shows volunteers assembling whistle kits. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74j-FGkRctw&t=7s>

Bring scissors if you can. Everything else will be provided. We will assemble five hundred kits. The kits will be delivered to churches and workplaces. You can help with delivery if you wish.

A small donation to help this project will be appreciated even if you cannot attend. Please let us know if you will participate by responding to info@firstpres.church or 217-356-7238



Spring flowers will brighten our Sanctuary Easter morning. Plants are \$15 each. If you would like to give a plant in memory or honor of someone, please send your check marked "spring floewrs" along with a note for whom they are given to the church office.



To: First Presbyterian Church of Champaign

We are writing to express our sincere gratitude for your support of our organization especially regarding our pantry and household item programs. The items you donated have had a huge impact and have helped our immigrant community members to live with dignity.

In our pantry program, from May 2025 through January 2026, we distributed 3,499 items to 94 families, including both new and returning households. It is a blessing to see families return and feel comfortable seeking support rather than going without food or necessities. During the summer, we saw firsthand that many families were unable to receive food assistance elsewhere due to exhausted funds or documentation barriers, which made us prioritize keeping our pantry flexible and accessible so that no immigrant family would leave empty-handed. We often pair pantry items with small gift cards, so that families can also shop for themselves. During the winter season, we provided coats and cold-weather clothing to families in need. We distributed 43 donated coats and continue to maintain an emergency supply.

In our household item program, from January 2025 through December 2025, we served 105 families consisting of 80 adults and 205 kids. With your support, we were able to provide these families with 121 sheet sets, 199 blankets/comforters, 87 throw blankets, 195 towel sets, 209 dinnerware sets, and over 50 frying pans, saucepans and other kitchen items along with larger items like 106 beds/mattresses, 26 tables, and 100 chairs.

In total, your support gives clients the dignity to have food in their stomachs, clothes on their backs, a warm place to sleep, a plate to eat off of, kitchenware to cook with, and overall, the ability to turn a house and our community into a home.

Sincerely, ISCU Staff

To see more of our impact of all our services, visit www.isc-u.org/ourworkin2025



University YMCA Friday Forum and Conversation Cafe

University YMCA, 1001 S. Wright Street, Champaign



Bring some friends and gather for a trip to University YMCA for a free Thai lunch. Meet new friends and hear an informing, motivating speech. We gather in the church parking lot by 11:30 AM and walk to the corner of Hill and State for the Brown bus.

We return to Hill and Randolph for a one block walk back to the church. Seniors can get a free pass at Illinois Terminal or ride for \$1 each way.

There are two gatherings in March. On March 6 we will hear “Collective Flourishing for Women, Community and Shared Success” and March 27, “Labor Unions and Immigration”.

Date	Topic	Speaker(s)	Affiliation
Mar 6	Women/Community/Success	Moderated by Rebecca Hodson	International Education
Mar 27	Labor Unions and Immigration	-	Graduate Employees’ Organization
Apr 3	People v. Power	Nick Sansone	Public Citizen
Apr 10	Indian Boundary Prairies	Debra Williams	The Nature Conservancy
Apr 17	Where History Lives	Natalie Beck + Antonio Burton	-

Thirty-Five Reasons to Go to Church

...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:25

Many of us have numerous reasons why we don’t go to church or don’t go weekly. A few times I have slept in and had my coffee in front of my laptop watching online church. But for me, online church lacks many of the reasons listed below. It leaves me feeling a bit wanting when I close my laptop at the end of service. But, I would be the first to say that online church has its place for some.

Have you ever considered the benefits of going to church regularly outweighing the benefits of not going?

Studies have been done that found only twenty percent of Christians in America go to church weekly... so if you don’t go often or only attend once a month, you’re not alone.

Consider and list all the reasons you don’t attend church regularly and ask yourself what the benefits are. Once you have your list, consider these reasons to start regularly attending church: [See more here.](#)

Copies of the 2025 Annual Report can be found in the kiosks at church or on the church website.



Verse of the day

For to this end we toil and suffer reproach, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.
- 1 Timothy 4:10

Voice of the day

God does not require us to achieve any of the good tasks that humanity must pursue. What God requires of us is that we not stop trying.
- Bayard Rustin

Prayer of the day

Eternal Hope, teach us the merits of remaining vigilant toward our efforts, even if they don't seem to initially bear fruit.
- Sojourners

Sharing Our Lives Together

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

Congratulations to **Dennis Arthur** who was accepted into the PhD program at Ohio State University in Urban Planning.

We have young adults and high school youth looking for hourly jobs to supplement family earnings. Cleaning, moving, care giving in the home, driving you in your car on Saturday mornings are among some talents.

Welcome new members **Dennis Amoako, Anne Craig, Stephen Kemboi, Noni Ledford and Kayode Oke.**

We are happy to announce the formation of our **Pastor Nominating Committee** who were approved unanimously at the Congregational Meeting on Sunday, March 1. Committee members include: **Ken Chapman, Sarah Laufenberg, Patt Tarr, Linda Tauber-Olson and Peter Yau.** Please keep the group in your prayers as they begin the final phase in the search for a pastor/head of staff.

We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of former member **Jim Bergman** who died recently out of state. A Memorial Service is planned for Wednesday, March 11, in the afternoon with the time to be announced.

Do you have similar things to share? Contact marcia@firstpres.church

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 Samuel Stephenson, Director of Music, First Presbyterian Church

Tell us about yourself and your family?

Well, I was born in Taiwan to a US dad, (John) and a Taiwanese mom (Meilien). I have a sister, (Halona). They are all in Taiwan. In my early years we spent a lot of time in both China and Taiwan. I attended Morrison Academy, a missionary high school, named after Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China. I was inspired by weekly chapel and fell in love with drums and guitar.

I had always been curious about the US. So, when I was awarded a full-ride scholarship to attend Wabash College in Indiana I decided to leave Taiwan. It was at Wabash that I came to love choral music and joined the glee club. I later had experience at Westminster Choir College, the only choral college in the US. **

Tell us about your faith journey.

My parents are disciples of Christ and do missionary work in Asia. In my younger years in China my family attended a house church. Open worship was not accepted by the government. In Taiwan, freedom of religion is a right. The Presbyterian Church is the largest in Taiwan.***

What has been your experience at First Church?

People have been amazingly inviting. Thank you to all those who have invited me to meals with them.

What suggestions do you have for us?

I have been surprised that there are so few youths at worship. I wonder how we might invite more young families.

What else would you like us to know?

I am grateful for the honor of being your music director. I am dedicated to our music program. I welcome your suggestions.

** Listen to choral music from the Westminster Choir College here: <https://youtu.be/dpu22dPDV1U>

*** The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, founded in 1865, is the largest Christian denomination in the country by a significant margin. It includes 1,200 congregations and approximately 238,000 members.

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.

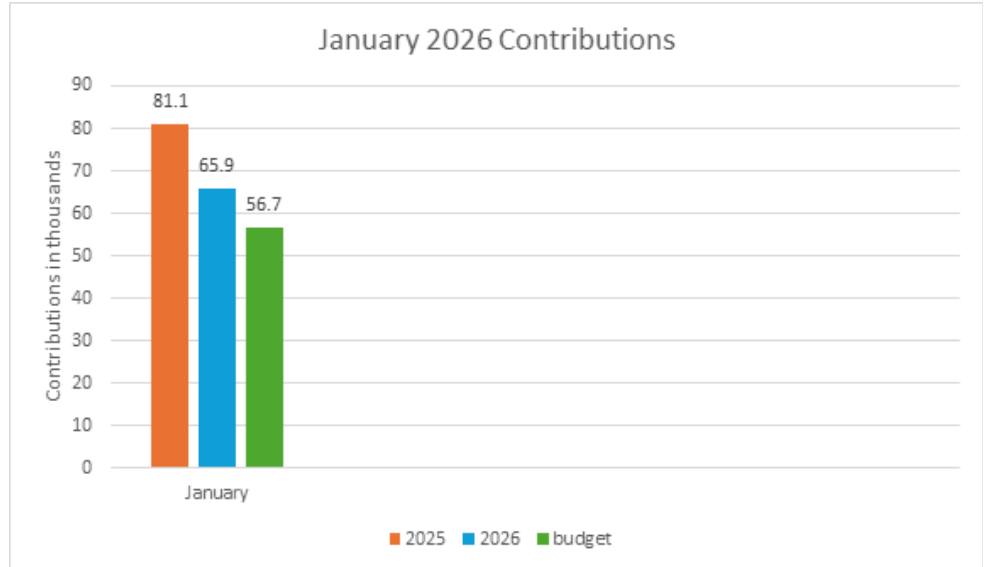
Finance

Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

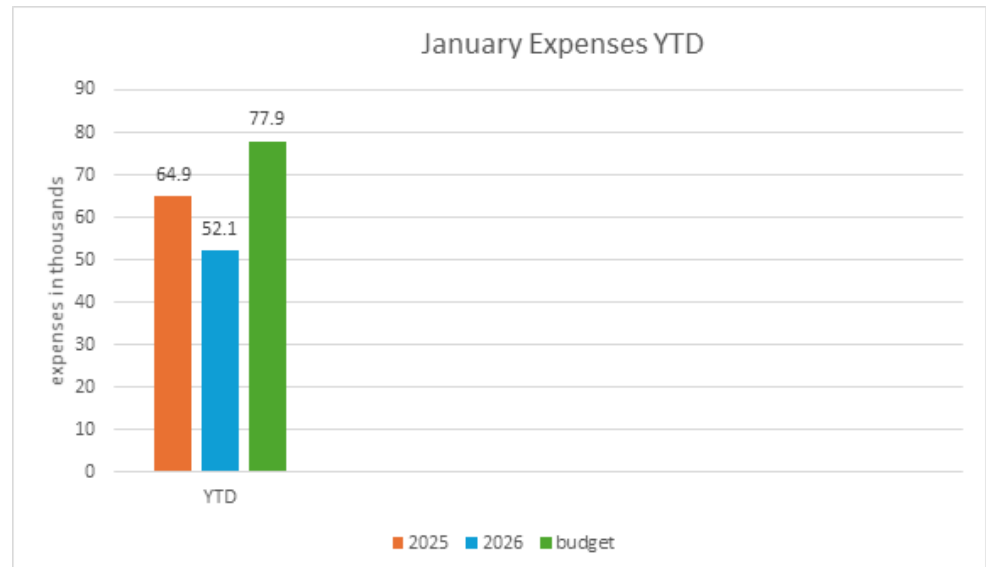
Contributions

Total January contributions: \$156.1k from plate and pledge minus 11x \$8.2K from prepaid= \$65.9K This is \$15.2k less than last year and \$9.2k over budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges are the same as the January contributions. At 8.3% of the year, we have 20.75% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.



Expenses

January expenses were \$52.1 K, which is \$12.8k less than last year and \$25.8k under budget. Expenses YTD are the same as the January expenses. At 8.3% of the year, we have spent 5.6% of the budget.



Balance YTD

Revenue from all sources exceeded expenses by \$52.1K.

Session Designated Funds

\$1,055,740 which is \$33.3K more than last month.

Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$5625 was given to the general memorial fund, \$100 to the Christmas offering, \$200 to flowers, and \$1552 to ELL



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

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.