

May 2026



# FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

## Trust God to Make Things Work!

BY BETH WAGNER, INTERIM PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF  
BETH@FIRSTPRES.CHURCH

So we made it through the storm, or so the song goes. We have indeed made it through some major changes in a very short time. If you are feeling a bit tired or wondering where you fit, you are not alone. In less than two years, you have said goodbye to your called and installed pastor, seen several staff members depart. The church installed a new elevator, a new roof, solar panels, and refurbished the Sanctuary. We have also cleaned the rolls, participated in a major mission study, and all with the continual reminder that we are not what we used to be.

Christian life is actually all about change. We read about Abraham and Sarah, a well establish couple in their middle age (Abraham was 75 years old). They were settled in the community of Haran when Abraham had a dream from God, and everything changed. He loaded up his wife, Sarah, some servants (roughly 914 people), and livestock (mostly sheep), and his nephew Lot, with Lot's family, servants, and livestock, and began a journey of about 800 miles. It was like moving a small town. It must have been overwhelming, a bit depressing, and disorienting for everyone.

I remember standing in the middle of boxes and stuff a couple of days after my family and I moved to our home in Normal, IL. We had lived in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago for 23 years, and we moved so I could take my first call at a church in Bloomington, IL. I stood in my new living room, and I remember thinking that this was the absolute worst idea I had ever had. I was overwhelmed, depressed, disoriented, and to be honest, scared. Now, almost 25 years later, I can report it was actually God's plan, and I am glad I went through that crazy roller coaster of change.

It took a lot of patience and trust for Abraham to lead this group of people, animals, and their belongings to a new location that God had promised. I think that it has also taken a lot of patience and trust to elect a PNC and charge them with prayerfully discerning who your next pastor will be. Trusting that they will be able to hear God's directions about who will lead you next.



**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday Brunch  
May 10<sup>th</sup>**


**Celebrate Mom!  
Come, enjoy brunch  
Centennial Hall**

**We will have a special  
brunch on Mother's Day.  
Enjoy food and fellowship  
right after the 9:30 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.**

continued on the next page



So, if you are feeling a little unsure about this transitional time, I am sure that Abraham, or perhaps Sarah, would counsel us to wait and trust God to make things work. For in the end, it is God who is the author of this new relationship between church and pastor, and if we keep reminding ourselves that it is God's plan, not ours, then we will be ready to greet the new pastor with open arms.

It has been a true blessing to serve such a wonderful congregation over the past twenty-four months. You will remain in my heart forever, and I will pray for the health and well-being of each member and the future of this church under the leadership of your new pastor. As we travel these last few weeks together, let us hold each other up in prayer and affection.

After I depart, I ask you to respect the professional boundaries of ministry and not ask me to officiate for weddings, funerals, baptisms, make pastoral calls, or provide counsel regarding personal situations or the life of the congregation. I want only the best for this congregation and will do all that I can to ensure the future health of your ministry and not to weaken the ministry of your new pastor. Please continue to honor our respect and affection for one another by honoring these guidelines.

Blessings,  
Pastor Beth

## Spring Finds Endowment Funds In Action

**Louise Zilly** (1886-1977) bequeathed funds to First Presbyterian Church of Champaign for "the maintenance and improvement of the Mae Chapin Parlor and related rooms." Responding to requests from the congregation for suitable chairs with arms, the Finance Committee recommended and Session approved the purchase of 6 Parlor chairs with proceeds from the Zilly Endowment Fund.

**Fred E Berger** (1890-1973) designated funds for Building Maintenance. Deteriorating pavement at both accessible doors on the north side of the Sanctuary building was addressed by Building and Grounds with Finance and the recommendation for resurfacing was approved by Session from the proceeds of the Berger Fund.

The Zilly and Berger families are connected by the 1916 marriage of **Fred Berger and Agnes Zilly**, sister of donor Louise. The families are related to **Pastor George McKinley** (pastor from 1858-1870) by the marriage of **Helen Louise McKinley**, daughter of his brother James, to **Charles Zilly** on February 12, 1874.

For nearly the entire history of this Church, members of this family group have been active at First Pres. **James B McKinley** was a trustee when his brother was called to be Pastor and served as an elder beginning in 1860.

**Fred Berger** and his son **Tom** were both architects who served on the Education Building committee, 1958-59.

**Tom Berger**, 1968, and his wife **Bertha Jean Berger**, 1963, served as elders and their son **Jim Berger** has been a choir member for many years.

Endowments of funds keep on giving but active participation is essential to ongoing activities of First Pres.



## Spring Concert

**Saturday, May 2 3 PM**  
 Piano and Classical Guitar  
 featuring **Yuxi Chen** and  
**Yuan Cao**

**FREE open to the public**  
**Sanctuary**

## A Sacred Space of Space of Music

“An afternoon of chamber music with **Gary Winder** and friends” enlivened our sanctuary with youth and master teachers on April 19.

Our good friend **Gary Winder** and **Mitchell Estrin**, professor emeritus with the clarinet studio of the University of Illinois directed, filling our space with diverse young musicians and unforgettable joy.

Among the artists present were our own **Yuxi Chen** on piano and **Claudia Espinoza**, soprano, whose voice shook the rafters with Franz Schubert’s, *The Sheperd on the Rock*.

**Finn Chellino**, soloist and winner of the 2026 clarinet studio concerto competition of 2026, completed the concert with the incredible concerto for clarinet *No. 1 in F minor, Op 73* by C.M. von Weber.

We were promised a similar concert in our space again in November with saxophones. Thanks to **Samuel Stephenson** and others for connecting us with such remarkable musicians.



**May Coffee with Beth**

**Wednesdays, 10-12 noon**

**Espresso Royale**  
**Champaign**

*Enjoy coffee and conversation*

## We Have NEW Nametags

Nametags are provided for members of the church. It’s important with a new minister coming in the near future, that you wear your nametag to help our staff get acquainted.

If you cannot find your nametag, please contact the church office ([info@firstpres.church](mailto:info@firstpres.church); 217.356.7238).

The cost for your first nametag is provided by the church. If you should lose your nametag, you will be responsible for the \$10 expense to replace it.

## Pastor Nominating Committee Update

The Pastoral Nominating Committee is meeting regularly and continues to make steady progress towards completing the Ministry Discernment Profile. Continued prayers are appreciated.

Updates will be shared in the upcoming newsletters.

## Help Us Tell the First Pres Story – One Photo At a Time

Our website refresh team is working on a warmer, more vibrant picture of our church family, and your candid photos can make a big difference. Photos communicate quickly and beautifully, and the camera in your phone is more than capable of capturing great moments.

As you're at small groups, committee meetings, Bible studies, fellowships, and other church activities, snap unposed moments of people connecting, serving, learning, laughing, welcoming, praying, and worshipping. The more you share, the more we can highlight the life of our church.

Soon we'll provide access to an upload location so you can send photos easily using a link or QR code—but for now, begin accumulating photos. We'll review what comes in and select images that best support the stories and content on the site.

Need help or have questions? Please reach out to any member of the website refresh team: **Anne Craig, Melinda Miller, Camille James, or Joe Lundy.**

## PCUSA Church Growth Network

*A learning community dedicated to fostering church growth in size, vitality, and missions impact*

BY PAT TARR  
PAT.TARR@ICLOUD.COM

**Bob Kirby** and **Pat Tarr** attended this one day leadership meeting held at Copper Creek Church. This new group has been working less than a year and of the 33 participants at this meeting they were from Illinois, and Indiana with one from South Dakota. Most were pastors.

Interesting discussion focusing on reaching the de-churched people in our communities. Those are the people who are skeptical of traditional worship and intimidating buildings and may have had bad experiences in past church settings. Suggestions were made for more casual worship, pastors and choirs not in robes, more contemporary music and emphasis for small groups outside of typical church setting. Focus on target audience.

Music was an important topic with all forms of music being used including secular music as appropriate.

Rebranding was another important topic of discussion with less emphasis on "presbyterianism" .

Our last presenter talked about the use of AI and how his company could customize a platform for Presbyterians by including our documents, Book of Order, General Assembly information and so on. Lots of "food for thought" and challenging ideas! Next meeting will be in Cincinnati.

## Leave of Absence

**Samuel Stephenson**, Director of Music, will be on a leave of absence this summer. He will be traveling back to Taiwan starting next Sunday to meet with choral conductors from various ensembles in Taipei and Kaohsiung with his classmate Albert Tay. Then he will be in Washington State during the month of July directing a camp run through his education company, *Beyond Education*. He will be back in Champaign the second week of August with exciting plans for music at First Pres.

### 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](mailto:info@firstpres.church).

# Spiritual Formation

## Easy English Christian Fellowship

The fruits of the spirit have our attention for nine weeks as we meet on both Thursday and Sunday mornings in the Christian Education Building.

Most of our learners are intermediate in English level. Our fellowship includes young adults from China, Brazil, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Korea, Taiwan, Togo and Uruguay.

We sing and pray together, read and discuss scripture and raise a lot of questions that we try to address together. **Anne Craig** and **Bob Kirby** lead.

## Cuba Calling



Join us Sundays at 10:45 in Mae Chapin Parlor for a six-week study of Cuba. We will meet May 17 to June 28 except for our brunch Sunday on June 14.

Our purpose is to understand our relationship with our sister church in Cuba. We will do this through prayer,

scripture and practicing a bit of Spanish language. We will sing some Cuban music and dip a bit into Cuban culture and history. We will not line dance.



## Christ Is Our Hope

1 Peter 1:20-21

Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your trust and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:21 (NRSV)

This passage invites us to reflect on the security and steadfastness of our faith. We don't follow a passing leader or a human idea, but the Son of God. The resurrection and exaltation of Christ are the guarantee that our hope isn't illusory, but real and alive.

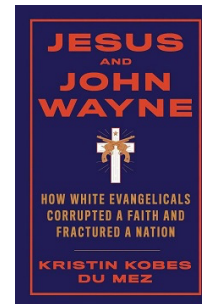
In the context we live in, marked by uncertainty and human frailty, this text reminds us that our trust should not be in systems or possessions that wear out, but in God. Christian faith is not escapism, but a solid foundation for facing life's challenges. Christ is the center of our hope. The Church is called to live with this certainty, showing the world that

true security is not found in the temporary, but in the God who raised Jesus from the dead and gives us new life.

**Prayer:** Lord, may our faith always be placed in you. Strengthen our hearts to be witnesses of your grace in the midst of uncertainty. Amen.

*Su Voz (His Voice)* written by our Presbyterian friends in Cuba

## Jesus and John Wayne



Invite friends to an interesting book review on Sunday, May 3 at 2 PM at Wesley Methodist Church. Located at 1203 W. Green Street, Urbana.

There is parking south of the church building off South Goodwin Avenue.

A New York Times Bestseller, this "paradigm-influencing" book is fundamentally transforming our understanding of white evangelicalism in America.

*Jesus and John Wayne* is a sweeping, revisionist history of the last seventy-five years of white evangelicalism, revealing how evangelicals have worked to replace the Jesus of the Gospels with an idol of rugged masculinity and Christian nationalism—or in the words of one modern chaplain, with "a spiritual badass."



**First Kids – First Youth**

*But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” Luke 18:16*

With our public schools about to close, our children’s program will continue but in a new way. We are grateful for our wonderful teachers this past year.

Our K-5 was staffed by **Lisa Ainsworth, Mary Lou Bauer, Judy Hendrickson, Fiona Leakey, Noni Ledford** and **Blaise Pascal**. Our grade 6-12 class was led by **Stephen Kemboi** and **Pat Tarr**. **Betty Hollister** and **Dave McNattin** taught our confirmation class last fall.

When you see these faithful servants, please give them a big smile and a thank you for caring and sharing the message of our Lord with our youth.

Watch for opportunities to assist us going forward with our continuing classes and our vacation Bible school in July. You can reach us any time at [info@firstpres.church](mailto:info@firstpres.church).

*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*  
3 John 1:4.

**Church Officers**

2026

2027

2028

**Session Beth Wagner, Moderator/Joe Lundy** (when Beth retires)

*Ends 12/31/2026*

*Ends 12/31/2027*

*Ends 12/31/2028*

**Carol Ann Green**

**Dick Arnould**

**Darrell Carlson**

**Carol Miles**

**Bob Kirby**

**Soo Choi**

**John Muirhead**

**Audry Kukosama**

**Margaret Noonan**

**Ann Webbink**

**Trenna Thomas**

**Mission Deacons**

**Sallie Hutton**

**Sarah Laufenberg**

**Marty Carlson**

**Kathy Schoeffmann**

**Kurt Ruthmansdorfer**

**Holly Nordheden**

**Linda Tauber-Olson**

**Nancy Whitford**

**Care Deacons Linda Sandquist, Moderator**

**Pam Knox**

**Carol Arnould**

**Marilyn Lamkin**

**Skip Pickering**

**Camille & Jack James**

**Terry Noonan**

**Linda Peterson**

**Gwen Pollard**

**Linda Sandquist**

# The Heart of Mission

## Sister Church Celebrated

Our sister congregation Luyanó in Havana, Cuba celebrated its anniversary on April 25.

**Pastors Anaitza Sanchez and Daniel Izquierdo** praise God with music to a full house.



## Our Church in Cuba Today

**Rev. Jihyun Oh** is the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the **Rev. Jimmie Hawkins** is the Advocacy Director for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), leading the Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. He directs PC(USA) social witness policies, advocating on issues like poverty, racial justice, and gun violence, while supporting the church's Matthew 25 vision.

Read what these two leaders learned on their recent [visit to Cuba](#).

## We Collect and Recycle



We collect plastic medicine bottles for the Humane Society. Place your label free bottles in the mission closet in the hallway off Westminster Hall.

Here are ways to remove labels...

**Heat Method:** Use a hair dryer on high for 30–45 seconds to heat the

label, then slowly peel it off. This helps loosen the adhesive without damaging the plastic.

**Freezer Method:** Place the bottles in the freezer for at least 5 minutes to several hours. The label will often peel off in one piece, including the adhesive.

**Soaking:** Soak the bottles in hot, soapy water for at least 20 minutes to loosen the paper and glue.

**Removing Residue:** If sticky residue remains, use rubbing alcohol, WD-40, cooking oil, mayonnaise, or peanut butter to remove it.

**Specialty Cleaners:** Apply products like Goo Gone or Goof Off to dissolve the adhesive, then wash with soap. We also collect batteries with taped ends and your old eyeglasses.

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



2026

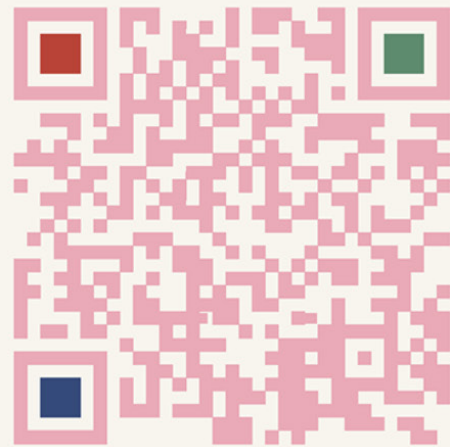
APRIL-MAY

Asian American

# HERITAGE MONTH

*Asian Heritage: Many Cultures, One Community*

SCAN FOR FULL SCHEDULE



[go.illinois.edu/2026AAHM](https://go.illinois.edu/2026AAHM)



*Events are open to all eligible persons regardless of race, color or national origin.*



Student Affairs

Asian American Cultural Center  
[aacc.illinois.edu](https://aacc.illinois.edu)



**Verse of the day**

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

- Luke 12:27

**Voice of the day**

The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.

- Rachel Carson

**Prayer of the day**

Wondrous God, fuel our appetite to learn about the natural glories of this world to resist the attempts at its ruination.

Sojourners

**Historic Church Teaches About the Past and Engages the Future**

An historic Chicago church generated new streams of income and increased its impact. Read more [here](#).

**Sales Tax Exemption Reminder...**

Please remember that the church is a non-profit tax exempt organization when purchasing for a church program or event.

The church office can provide you with a copy of the Illinois Sales Tax Exempt Certificate which is acceptable by most vendors.

When purchasing from Sam's Club for an event at the church, you can borrow one of the staff's cards for Sam's which notes the tax exemption. If purchasing from Amazon, send the link(s) to Marcia Franks ([marcia@firstpres.church](mailto:marcia@firstpres.church)). She can purchase using the church's account that has both tax exemption and Prime (free shipping).

**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.**



Ritchie has been employed at First Church on our building and grounds maintenance staff since 2011.

**Face to Face with Ritchie Drennen, Facility Manager**

**Tell us a bit about yourself.**

I live in Urbana. I grew up in Robinson, Illinois with two sisters. My mother lives in Florida. I graduated from Safe House sixteen years ago. That program and support from Canaan Baptist Church changed my life. I am a recent widower and in the process of dealing with loss.

**Describe your role at First Church.**

I am full time staff. Over my sixteen years I have developed a rhythm for my work. But then there are those infrequent surprises that keep me from becoming complacent. Examples of surprises might be a midnight alarm call or a vendor who arrives without notice or a boiler going down in winter. These things challenge me but that is good. I love the work because each day calls for different tasks and I love the people here.

**What have you found interesting?**

Work here is organized. People have their groups and in them they are responsible to each other and dedicated to fulfilling their responsibilities. I have not seen that in other places.

**With your long experience with us can you suggest any changes?**

It might be nice to get more people involved in worship and the many groups here. There is probably a place for everyone in all the things we do. I know there must still be someone waiting for an invitation. New programs like The Gathering (contemporary worship) and the Life Tree Café were exciting to many even though they did not have long lives. Still, we need not be afraid of doing new things or doing old things in different ways.

**Anything else?**

Not now. I need to get to work.



**It's Time to Celebrate Graduates!**

If you have a graduate in your family, whether a church member or not, we would love to recognize them. Contact Brandi Lowe at [brandiscrapbook@yahoo.com](mailto:brandiscrapbook@yahoo.com) with information on where graduating from including degree, relationship, and future plans. Please include a picture. Submissions need to be received by June 3.

# Finance

## Financial Update

BY ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM  
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

### Contributions

Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges are \$216k. This is \$5.2K less than last year and \$ 27.9K over budget. At 25% of the year, we have 38.5% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

### Expenses

Expenses YTD are \$187.4k, which is \$46.2k less than last year and \$46.3k under budget. At 25% of the year, we spent 20.1% of the budget.

### Balance YTD

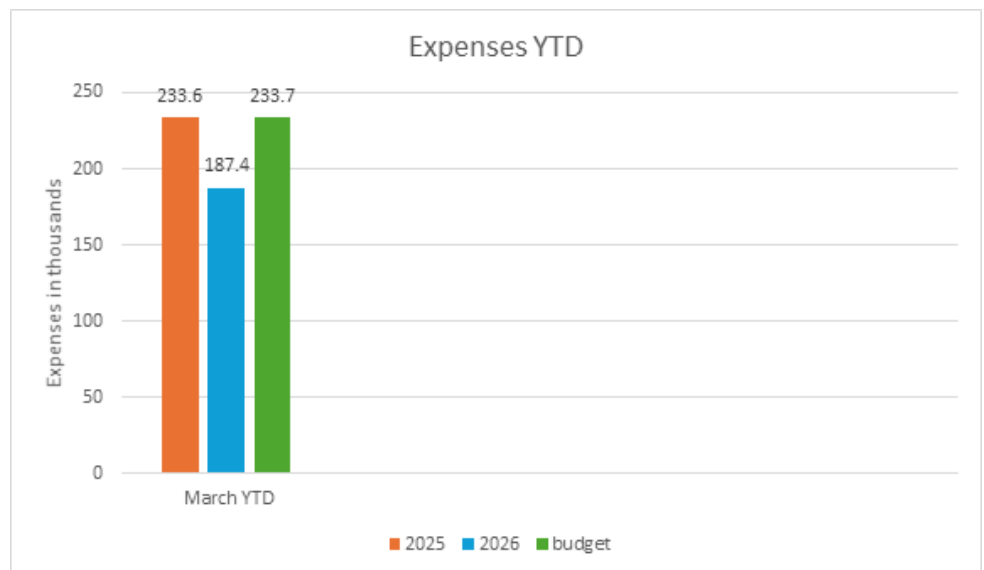
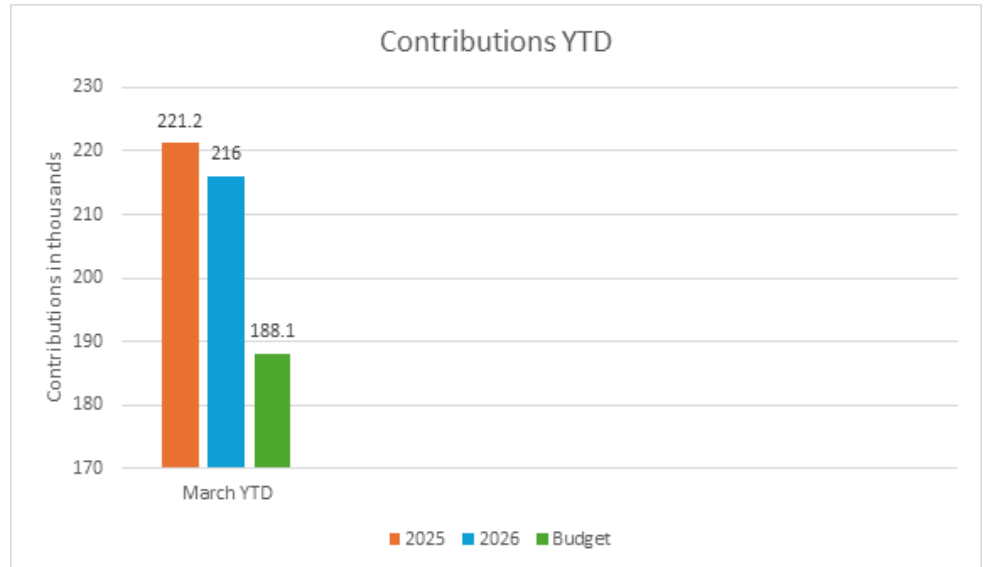
Revenue from all sources exceeded expenses by \$112.8K.

### Session Designated Funds

\$1,019,292 which is \$48K less than last month.

### Summary of Restricted Accounts

Pantry donations were \$1000, \$500 to flowers, and \$330 to OGHS



## Help Fill Our Food Pantry

The first food distribution will be  
**Thursday, June 11, at 12 noon.**  
 A list of items needed  
 can be found in Westminster Hall.



**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](mailto:info@firstpres.church)

[www.firstpres.church](http://www.firstpres.church)

**Sunday:**

- 9:30 AM Worship
- 10:30 AM Coffee and Fellowship
- 10:40 AM Sunday School/Adult Discussions

Online Worship is also available at 9:30 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).