

October 2025



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHAMPAIGN

CELEBRATE **175 YEARS** OF WORSHIP AND SERVICE

October 5th

**World Communion Sunday
with music from other cultures
during our regular 9 AM service.**

October 12th

**Welcome former pastors and guests
with bagpipes, mini tours and
light refreshments
as we wrap up our
175th celebration.**



Princeton Tigertones in Concert

**Monday, October 13
5:30 PM
Sanctuary**

**The Princeton Tigertones
is an all-male acapella choir
including our own
Henry Laufenberg.**

**They will be performing
in our church sanctuary
at 5:30 PM October 13.**

No charge; free will offering.

It Has Been Quite the Party!



Celebratory Letters for the 175th Anniversary of FPC Champaign, Illinois

**From former Associate/Interim
Head of Staff Chuck Carlson...**

As I write this reflection, I am taken back to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3:1: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." My season to be with you all was from March 2006 through October 2017. It was a season of change and challenge.

We hired Scott Keeble and assigned him to lead a new worshipping community at Barkstall Elementary School. That outreach ultimately became Copper Creek Presbyterian Church. We began a fruitful partnership relationship with Luyano Presbyterian Church in Havana, Cuba.

We welcomed and embraced the immigrating French speaking Congolese Community, offering space for their worshipping community Saturday evenings. We sought to incorporate them into FPC, share worship and fellowship, experimenting with different forms of ministry together.

There is not enough time and space to list all of the ministry we engaged together, but what we sought to accomplish, and you continue to do is serve the community of Champaign and world which now embraces nearly two centuries. You work hard to nourish spiritual growth, pastoral ministry, mission, fostering a legacy of those who have come before, building on the sacrifice and foundation continuing to be laid for the vibrant

congregation you obediently seek to be as you follow the Holy Spirit into new forms and applications of ministry.

Many pastors, leaders, volunteers, and members whose commitment keeps the ministry moving forward is a gift of your response to God's grace and call. Each chapter of your story has been marked by resilience, compassion, and a deep devotion to serving God, one another, and the wider community of Champaign and the world. May all you do continue to be striving for unity, hope and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

I pray that this anniversary will be both a celebration of your rich heritage and a call to embrace God's future with faith and courage. Build upon your established traditions that have shaped you, keep welcoming new members, reach out to neighbors in love and continue to be a beacon of light in Champaign for generations to come.

On a personal note, I was deeply touched by your cards and prayers for my healing after open heart surgery last May 9th. I cherish the season God gave me to share ministry with you, all a living expression of God's love in action.

I wish that Betty and I could be there to celebrate with you but may this special occasion fill your hearts with joy and renew your commitment to Christ and the journey ahead.

Chuck

**From the Copper Creek Church in
Champaign...**

Wow! What an amazing milestone you've reached. Thank you for all the ways you've cared for the people of Champaign. Champaign wouldn't be what it is today without your presence.

May God bless this time of reflection and celebration!

*Sincerely,
Copper Creek Church*

Nominating Committee

has begun their work to find church officers for those whose terms expire.

Submit your suggestion(s) for Elders and/or Deacons for the coming year to:
info@firstpres.church

(You may also nominate yourself!)

Honoring the Past Discerning the Future 2015 Outreach & Church Growth

On a late afternoon in late summer Pastor Cesar Mnyampara arrived in the alley with seven displaced people from the Democratic Republic of Congo. “They have no place to live, no money and no legal status. They need our help”, he said.

The group was a popular professional Christian musical ensemble from Congo named “Jean René Balekita and Bomoyi.” Bomoyi means “life” in the native language of Lingala. They had toured ten years in several European countries as well as throughout Congo. Their lyrics, however, were seen as seditious by the government and they fled.

The people of First Pres welcomed them, responding with friendship, shelter, food, transportation and introducing them to others in the community who later became loyal fans and supporters. Early supporters and advocates included **Joe Grant, Chuck Carlson, Sandy Carr, Sallie Hutton, Peter Yau.** There were many others.

On our church campus they sang in our café, on our patio and in our sanctuary. They were escorted to other Presbyterian churches to participate in worship including Tolono, Philo, Monticello and Urbana.

Today the members of the group have gone their separate ways. But, many still remember that summer evening in 2015 when Jean René Balekita and Bomoyi opened a door revealing the compassion and caring of the people of First Church.



In the café left to right are Victor Matondo, Guelord Malanda, Laetitia Kyungu, Jean René Balekita and Joyce Nkama. Ensemble members not pictured were Christian Nsumba and Bos Makengo.



Jean René Balekita & Bomoyi

**African rhythm with a touch of Blues, a
flavor of Rumba, and a taste of Gospel**

Music ensemble **Jean René Balekita and Bomoyi** are
available for performances for any size group.






Trunk & Treat

Join the happy ghosts and goblins at Trunk & Treat Sunday, October 26 from 3:30-5 PM in the church parking lot. Warm your tummy with yummy soup in Centennial Hall. Meet and greet friends. Stop, laugh and “boo” at decorated trunks. No one is too young or too old to enjoy this event and support our church.

Please let us know if you can help prepare and serve the soup. You can dress up if you wish. Tell us that you will decorate a trunk. Let’s fill the lot.

We also seek donations of treats. These could be candy or small gift toys or anything safe for young children. Best yet, donate a children’s book. We hope each child will take a book home. Please respond to info@firstpres.church.



Face to Face with Dick & Carol Arnould

What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?

We had been Presbyterians before we came to Champaign, and we knew we wanted to stay Presbyterians. We shopped the local congregations and felt our best fit was at First Champaign.

What has been the highlight of your church experience?

Our time leading our senior high students and participating in our mission trips called "Go and Serve." These were transformative for us.

Tell me about your family? Your work?

We have two married daughters. Debbie and her husband work for Boeing in St. Louis and Laurie is a pre-school director in Indianapolis where her husband is in the bridge construction business. Between them we have five grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

We are now retired. Dick was a professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Illinois and Carol's work was in interior design. Carol designed Mae Chapin Parlor more than two decades ago and selected the paint colors in the sanctuary including the color "pearly gates".

What do you do in your free time?

Carol's favorite pastime is making Sailor's Valentines. She also loves to paint in watercolors and acrylic and she likes reading. For Dick it is golf and gardening. Both of us love to travel.

What are your favorite Bible characters?

We both find significant meaning in James and his bringing faith and works together.

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

Accept everyone. Remain centered on God's word.



Dick serves the church as a ruling Elder and chairs our Human Resources Committee. Carol serves as a Community Care Deacon.



This six inch Sailor's Valentine was created by Carol.

The Heart of Mission

Interior Transformation

But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. *Luke 5:38 (NRSV)*

This teaching invites us to reflect on the novelty that Jesus brings to the world. His message and his work don't fit into the rigid religious and traditional structures which only sought to maintain the establishment. He brings a Realm of grace, joy and renewal which demands hearts open to and prepared to change.

Clinging to old ways that impede the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in us is not a help. We must be new wineskins ready to receive the new wine of life in Christ, which renews, gives joy and hope.

The call is to not resist the invitation that Jesus gives us to transform our lives, to not prefer the "old" out of habit or fear, but to embrace with faith the novelty of the Gospel. In this way our lives will be a living testimony to the joy and freedom which only He can give.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to be a new wineskin, ready to receive your new wine, to leave behind the old which ties me down and to live joyfully your presence in my life. Renew my heart every day to reflect your love and grace. Amen.

A devotion written by our partners in ministry in Cuba.

Presbyterians – How We Serve



Migrant Accompaniment Ministries (MAM) is housed in Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA). Legal service providers bring heart and compassion to serving immigrants through a new online series that provides insight into serving newcomers during a challenging period for our nation.

See related PC (USA) ministry areas and resources [here](#).

Environmental Update

BY PAT PHILLIPS, ENVIRONMENTAL TEAM
P.PHILLIPS42@SBCGLOBALCOM

Did you know?

Lithium batteries power so many things on which we rely; phones, laptops and tablets, cordless power tools, electric vehicles and more. Research continues to make them safer and efficient.

BUT—we're aware that explosions and fires have happened when they overheat. SO: *Do not overcharge; it's best to charge when you're present to stop at 100% charge (overnight is not recommended).

*Do not store together; if one explodes, there will likely be a chain reaction, and smoldering fires may continue for a long time.

*Do not use water to extinguish a fire; there are special dry chemical extinguishers for this. *Do not leave in the sun or in a hot car.

*If you'll not be using a device for a while, it's best to remove the batteries. It's time to be aware of how best to use Lithium; it's a part of all our lives.

Outreach

Reaching Out to Welcome In



New American Welcome Center staff pose for photo. This agency located in Lincoln Square, works under the umbrella of University YMCA and organizes Welcoming Week in Champaign County. Its moto is "Welcoming"

International Family Game time, an event held on September 16 in annual Welcoming Week, was an opportunity to invite young families into our space. Telling Stories and playing games brought laughter and built trust and friendships.

Fourteen community groups providing welcome and information were

- Campus Community
- Compact-Office of Public Engagement-University of Illinois,
- Champaign Co. League of Women Voters,
- Champaign Co. Regional Planning Commission-Head Start, Champaign
- Urbana Public Health District
- DREAM
- CU-Early-USD 116
- Hessel Park Church
- Immigration Services of C-U
- Leslie Kimble-Artist
- Michael Hogue ReMax Team
- New American Welcome Center,

Parkland College Project Read
The Refugee Center
Val and Tim Smith-ESL (First Baptist Savoy).

First Church of course had a presence hosting the event and providing a resource table for guests.

Games inside and out provided a point of gathering for strangers who soon became friends. Flags of twenty-seven nations added

color and represented those enrolled in our ELL program and attending worship with us. Gary's meat balls were a big hit. Jenga and Loopin Louie were game favorites.

Thanks to a huge team of those serving from First Church from planning to set up to clean up and all in between.

Comments from attendees include: Well organized and fun. Lots of good energy. The community partners seemed to have a good time and engaged with folks. The food was delicious and got a lot of good comments. I had a lot of fun. We had a good crowd. It was a wonderful time for getting acquainted with others who have the same programs and services for the international community. A definite repeat.

See photos at [game night](#).



Immigration Services of Champaign-Urbana (ISCU) staff, Sofia and Chris, relax at International Family Game Time. ISCU offers a unique service of collecting and then delivering furniture and other household items to new immigrants in need. These were services previously offered by First Pres. See their website at is-cu.org for lists of items most needed and those they cannot receive and to schedule a donation pick up at your home.

Letter Writing Ministry Endures

WhatsApp, text, email, Zoom, Doodle, Dropbox, Blogger and ChatGPT are good. A few of us, however, prefer to write cards and letters licking an envelope and a stamp and walking the resultant product to a mailbox. This is the way our parents and grandparents shared messages of care, joy, encouragement and love and we are continuing that tradition.

First Church is blessed by a group of letter writers who set aside time to pick up pen and card to comfort others and celebrate joys in our congregation. Thank you notes are written to those who give memorial donations to the church. Others write to our incarcerated brothers, to the ill, the bereaved and our men in the military.

Writing groups include a women's Bible study group and your nurture committee.

Telephone calls are made to those at their 80th birthday. And many in the congregation communicate privately as well.

A special thanks to **Beth Hutchens, Betty Meissner, Gwen Pollard, Naomi Rempe, Jane Seiler, Jane Tock, Ginny Waaler** and others unknown.



Looking for Free Books?

Browse our collection of donated books at our Little Book Exchange located between our Sunday hospitality table and library.

Looking for a space on your book shelves? Give some books you no longer want to keep. Here are a few adult and children's books that were recently available: "Jesus and His Times", "What Would Jesus Do?" "The Treasure Tree", "The Purpose Driven Life", "Building a Healthy Multi-Cultural Church" and six books by C.S. Lewis.

You may return a book, pass it on to another or add to your home collection. Both secular and faith informed books are welcome.



Coffee with Beth
Thursdays, 10 - 12 noon
Good Judy's Bagels
2740 S. Philo Rd, Urbana

**Come enjoy conversation
coffee and bagels.**

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 Patty Farthing (patty@firstpres.church). She can purchase using the church's account that has both tax exemption and Prime (free shipping).



God, we humbly come before you, realizing that you have given us your word. That in this word you have taught us how to live, and how to care for one another. In this word you reveal your intentions for us. That we love you, and love one another. Yet so often we forget those words as soon as your word isn't in front of us.

As soon as we return to the world, we allow ourselves to behave in the way that the world expects. Forgive us God. Help us to keep your word in our hearts and minds. Help us to follow you in all we do, both in our holy spaces, and out in the greater community. Amen.

Sharing Our Lives Together

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

Jean René Balekita and **Laetitia Kyungu** will return to us with their music on Sunday, October 5. They are the residual of a seven-member musical ensemble called **Jean René Balekita and Bomoyi** which traveled from Congo in 2015 and blessed our congregation with "African rhythms, a touch of blues, a flavor of rumba and a taste of gospel."

Jean René will soon complete his PhD at U of I in ethnomusicology. He lives in Urbana with his wife Yvette and children Teri a sophomore at the U of I, René a sophomore at Urbana High and Kiese in seventh grade at Urbana Middle School.

Keep us informed by contacting us at info@firstpres.church.

First Pres Mission Study – New Beginnings

Friday, October 3, at 7 PM ALL are encouraged to join us in the Sanctuary when we will meet our transition coach and further learn about the preliminary findings from the recent mission study conducted by New Beginnings. Watch your email for the zoom link if unable to attend in person. The small groups for this study meet in October and the first week of November. Dates and times were recently mailed to those that signed up.

This study will provide valuable information in our journey toward our next pastor.

Jays & Concerns

Congratulations to...

- **Marty and Darrell Carlson** who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on October 4, 2025.

We extend sympathy to...

- The family and friends of **Gary Bowen** who died September 30. Arrangements are pending.
- The family and friends of **Judy Gamble** who died September 14.
- The family and friends of **Carole Ann Hunter** who died September 27. A Memorial Service will be held at the church on Sunday, October 12, at 2 PM.

Finance

Financial Update

by ANN WEBBINK, FINANCE TEAM
ANWEB2@YAHOO.COM

Contributions

Total August contributions: \$58.3K from plate and pledge plus \$7.9K from prepaid= \$66.2K This is \$33.1k more than last year and \$1.1K over budget. Total contributions YTD, including prorated prepaid pledges: \$ 518.5 K which is \$1.2k more than last year and \$2.3K under budget. At 66.7% of the year, we have 70.4% of the budgeted contributions, including all prepaid contributions.

Expenses

August expenses were \$54.2 K, which is \$16.1K less than last year and \$24.8K under budget. Expenses YTD are \$635.2K, which is \$17.1K less than last year and \$3.2K over budget. At 66.7% of the year, we have spent 67.1% of the budget.

Balance YTD

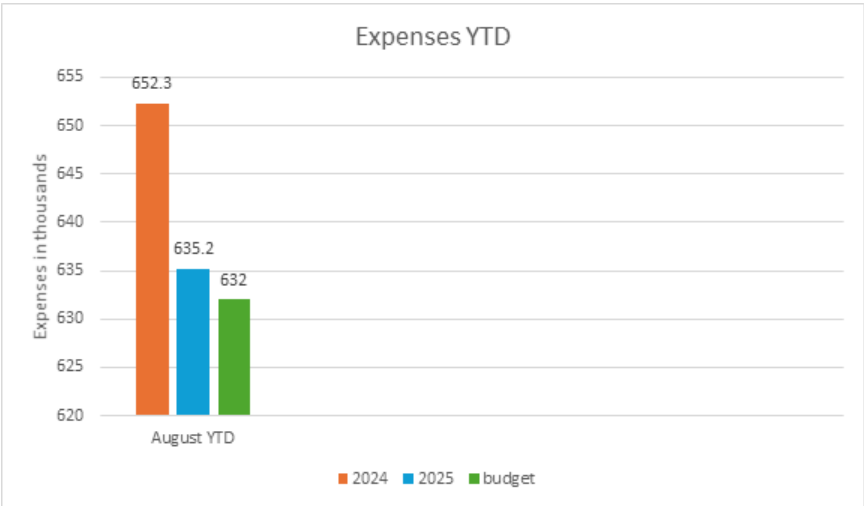
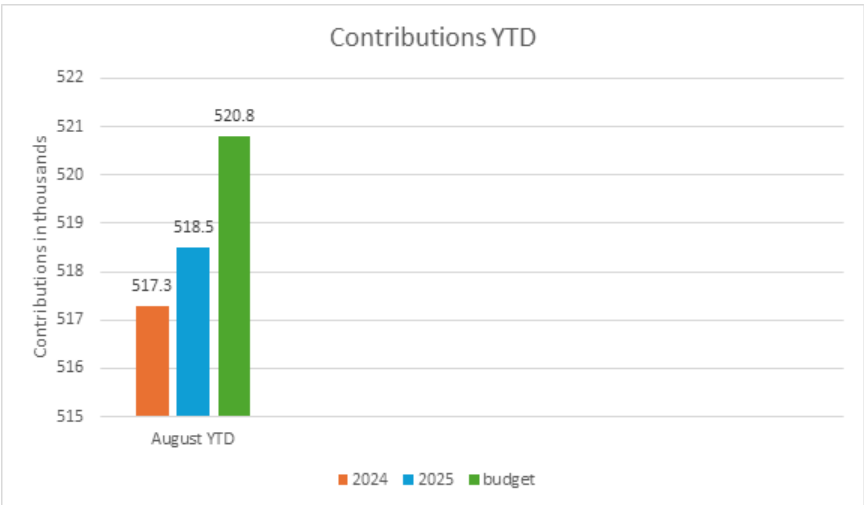
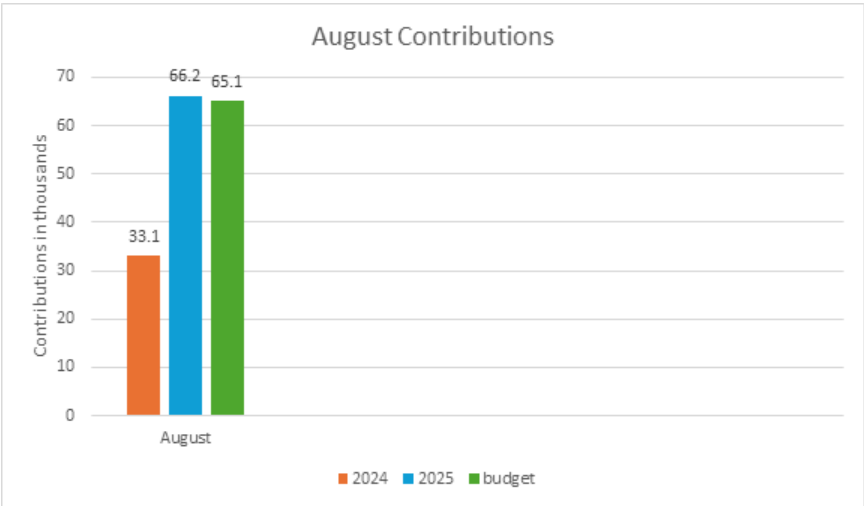
Expenses exceeded revenue from all sources by \$9.9K in August. Last year at this time expenses exceeded revenue by \$36.2K

Session Designated Funds

\$1,071,410 which is \$27.9K more than last month.

Summary of Restricted Accounts

\$750 was given to the Raindrop project, and \$250 to the elevator fund.





**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.