

2025 – 2026

Annual Reports



First Congregational Church of Webster Groves
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Moderator

Greetings fellow congregants!

It is my pleasure to present this annual report to you for your consideration. It takes a great deal of work from many hands to make all of the things that we both need and want to do happen. I wish to thank all of *you* who work so hard to make sure that we are able to maintain our traditions, outreach programs, aesthetics, ongoing learning and curiosity, and our relationships with community resources.

I was inspired by Jan Barnes' recent sermon and in particular how she used, "I am not the Church and You are not the Church." It is the "We" that will make us or break us (much like Jan's analogy of the Blues hockey team. No matter how great the goaltender is, without the rest of the team, he may as well go home.)

This community was able to accomplish a great deal over the past year, and although I'm sure the chairs will shine a light on their own accomplishments in detail, I'd like to highlight just a few:

We welcomed a new Office Administrator, Adam Levin. The By-Laws Committee completed their revision of the by-laws which was approved by the congregation. Brown Baggers delivered 720 meals to Gateway 180. In April, the Church hosted the "Good Vibrations" bell choir from Crystal Lake, IL, for a concert. Some members also hosted these bell choir members in their homes for the night. We welcomed new members in April and November of 2025. In August, the Church held its first youth lock-in in several years, and it was a great success! In November, the church initiated intruder training, led by WGPS Captain Jillian McCoy. The church presented the Field for Humanity Uganda Water Project, led by Peter Kalulu, a check for \$6,100 to continue its work. Also in November, after much hard work, the Peace and Justice team hosted the first Jesus Has Left the Building event, during which, some congregants stayed at the church to make bags for the unhoused, and others visited St. John's Church – The Beloved Community, UCC.

It takes many hands and hearts to build and keep a Church such as ours going and growing and I'm so proud to call you my community. Over the years, we have worked together to make hard decisions, celebrate one another's life events, and mourn our losses. We pray not just for ourselves, but for one another, the wider community and the world at large. Our love for Christ is demonstrated every day in how we love one another, our neighbors, and yes, even our enemies. I look forward to continuing to serve with you in the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris von Weise, Moderator

Treasurer's Report

Below are the church operating results for calendar year 2025. Items to note:

- For Operating Revenue:
 - Pledges and gifts were approximately \$15k more than last year's amount received and budget.
 - Endowment transfers used by church operations were \$256k, which was \$55k less than the full year budget but \$54k more than prior year transfers. The additional transfers were to pay for the balance of the roof replacement.
 - Use of space income was higher than budget by \$22k this year but \$7k less than prior year income.
- Operating Expenses, primarily building maintenance expenses, outpaced revenue resulting in a net decrease in assets.

Statement of Financial Activities					
	A	B	C	A-B	A-C
	Actual Thru 12/31/2025	Actual Thru 12/31/2024	Budget Thru 12/31/2025	2025 vs 2024	Variance to Budget
Income					
Pledges and Gifts	\$ 345,380	\$ 329,813	\$ 330,000	\$ 15,567	\$ 15,380
Transfer from Endowment	241,000	187,000	296,000	54,000	(55,000)
Use of Space and Miscellaneous Income	109,050	116,009	87,000	(6,959)	22,050
Interest Income	24,180	21,412	21,500	2,768	2,680
Total Operating Revenue	719,610	654,234	734,500	65,376	(14,890)
Expenses					
Human Resources Expense	507,225	490,863	511,355	(16,363)	4,129
Facilities and Finance Expense	266,068	205,391	197,935	(60,677)	(68,133)
Christian Education Ministry Expense	3,005	1,928	3,650	(1,076)	646
Parish Life Ministry Expense	8,201	8,573	14,150	372	5,949
Executive Ministry Expense	5,158	5,492	7,200	334	2,042
Total Operating Expenses	789,657	712,247	734,290	(77,410)	(55,367)
Net Increase (Decrease) in Operating Assets	(70,048)	(58,013)	210	(12,035)	(70,258)
Benevolence Gifts	27,943	40,285	17,000	(12,342)	10,943
Transfer from Endowment	15,000	15,000	15,000	-	-
Benevolence Expense	(42,943)	(55,285)	(32,000)	12,342	(10,943)
Benevolence, Net	-	-	-	-	-
Net Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	\$ (70,048)	\$ (58,013)	\$ 210	\$ (12,035)	\$ (70,258)

The statement of cash flow shows a net decrease in cash of \$82k this year.

Statement of Cash Flows	
Decrease due to church operations	\$ (70,048)
Adjustments to reconcile Net Income to Net Cash	
2025 pledges received in 2024, net of 2026 pledges received in 2025	(988)
Sample Chapel carpeting purchased to be reimbursed by Sts. F&C	(5,250)
Amounts disbursed from church memorial, unrestricted and restricted funds, net of receipts	(6,530)
Credit card transactions pending payment	1,041
Total disbursements outside of current church operations	(11,726)
NET CASH DECREASE FOR PERIOD	(81,773)
Cash at beginning of period	129,680
CASH AT END OF PERIOD	\$ 47,906

Below is a roll forward of the Endowment from December 31, 2024. While the endowment had positive unrealized gains year to date, the church transfers to operations were greater than the increase in market value for the year. The Endowment decreased by almost \$100k in calendar year 2025.

December 31, 2024 balance	1,950,450
Donations to the Endowment Fund	-
Restricted earnings	5,752
General endowment earnings	36,701
Unrealized gains/losses	132,948
Total Revenue	175,402
Custodian fees	(12,175)
Interest paid to FCCWG for funds whose principal is held by Endowment	(5,752)
Distributions to FCCWG operations	(256,000)
Total Expenses	(273,928)
Decrease in Endowment	(98,526)
December 31, 2025 balance	\$1,851,924

Respectfully submitted,
Jenny Jones, Treasurer

Clerk of the Church

The Clerk of the Church is the record-keeper for the life of the Church. The Clerk serves as an ex officio member of the Parish Life Ministry and maintains the Records of the Church as defined by the By-Laws.

Membership Records are kept for all active and associate members including numbers of new members, births, weddings, deaths and transfers of membership. Individuals who embrace the principles of the Church are welcomed into one of the two types of Membership as defined in the Bylaws:

Section I. Types of Membership

- A. Member: one who has been welcomed into membership in the Church, and who actively participates in the spiritual life and financial support of the Church. Members enjoy voting privileges and eligibility for elected position in the Church. Members who are physically unable to participate in Church activities but who continue to actively participate in the spiritual and financial support of the Church shall continue as Members and shall retain voting privileges.*
- B. Associate Member: a person who requests to be connected with the Church but need not formally join. Associate Members do not enjoy voting privileges or eligibility for elected positions in the Church.*

The Clerk serves as secretary for all Executive Ministry and Congregational meetings, supervises the permanent storage of all Ministry minutes and reports, arranges for the counting of all votes, issues letters of transfer and submits a report of changes in the Membership Records each year. During the 2025-2026 Church year we welcomed seven new members through Reaffirmation of Faith or Baptism, and goodbyes were said to two beloved members who had been stalwart participants in the life of the Church for decades. Membership records were reviewed and updated during 2025 and as of May 1, 2026 the Membership of the Church is comprised of the following:

Active Members 144, Associate Members 26

Cherished Members parted by Death

Phillip Roush and Carol Mallette

New Members Since the Last Annual Meeting

Braeden Hood, Anne Gerst, Peter Kalulu, Alex Schubert
Esmerelda Castelblanco, Chelsea Hoganson, Daniel M. Smith

Sacrament of Baptism

Alayna Lynn Hoganson

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Romeis, Clerk of the Church

Parish Life Ministry

Beginning in May 2025 the Parish Life Ministry accepted the challenges presented by the reduction of the ministry to six members and continued to faithfully fulfill its responsibilities to provide meaningful worship experiences as well as see to the well-being of the congregation. Ministry members each accepted responsibility for the various worship, outreach and hospitality tasks of the ministry. The individual in charge then sought help from willing members of our church community in carrying out their respective tasks. We are deeply grateful to the many volunteers who help, many of whom are named and thanked in this report.

The Parish Life Ministry supports the Sunday morning worship experience through the leadership of Sharon Love and Amy Byrne. Sharon accepted leadership of our **First Friends Teams**. Her report will be offered elsewhere in this report. Amy Byrne coordinates the **Communion Stewards** who serve Communion on the first Sunday of each month and, as required, on special services.

Decorating the sanctuary for the church seasons and special services enhances the worship experience. The Ministry is blessed by volunteers who take on this responsibility. Dana Romeis coordinates the changing of the central hangings in the sanctuary. She is helped by Elaine Coe, Carolyn Woodsmall, Mary Edwards, Jane Brader, Sandy Hoffsten and Nancy Rudolph. Our Facilities Manager, Chip Isringhaus is essential to this activity. In addition, special flowers are brought in to decorate the sanctuary for Christmas and Easter. Dana's team oversees their placement. The cost of these is part of the Parish Life budget. That cost is offset by donations by individuals who wish to dedicate flowers in celebration of, or in memory of loved ones or special occasions.

The Music Ministry, also a responsibility of Parish Life, is essential to the total Sunday morning worship experience. Our Director of Music, Dr. Leon Burke, III, directs the Canterbury Bell Choir and the Chancel Choir and periodically enlists special musicians to enhance the services. Be aware that special music, such as those hired for our spectacular Easter Service, is an example of your pledge dollars at work. For more details, read Dr. Burke's report elsewhere in this Annual Report.

Our responsibilities for the members of our Christian Community are varied. We place great value on our service to our members who are no longer able to attend worship. In addition to periodic visits by the Pastor, the **Friend to Friend** program was led this year by Cathy Buerk. Friend to Friend volunteers visit the residences of seven of our members. The visitors are: Jane Brader, Laura Cooper, Phil Shoulberg, Rosemary Hensley, Carolyn Woodsmall, Cathy Buerk and Faye Dyer. Keeping members in touch even though away, is a highly important ministry.

Others volunteer to help Parish Life fulfill the mission of supporting our members. Although not permanently homebound, members and friends of our church often experience difficulties that benefit from knowing their church cares. With that in mind, **We Care Cards** are available to be signed, and send messages to, individuals in time of need. Shared personal experiences attest to the benefit of receiving these cards. This ministry is shared by Faye Dyer,

Mary Edwards, Barb Moore and Rosemary Hensley. Many members also receive cards from the congregation on special occasions such as Valentines Day and Easter. For those wishing to attend worship, but no longer able to drive, the **Church Office** coordinates volunteers to provide transportation. Also, on occasions when members need short time support providing meals for their family, the Church Office coordinates this service through a **Care Calendar**.

When the life of a church member moves into the next phase, those left with us can benefit from support as they experience grief. With that in mind, a **Grief Care Team** was established to serve members recently experiencing the loss of a loved one. This year those members providing this service are: BJ Kaul, Dana Romeis, Phil Shoulberg and Nancy Rudolph. Our Ministry wishes to acknowledge their work and thank them for this service. In addition, when a Memorial Service is held at the church, an elegant **Coffee and Cookies Reception** is provided by church members. This initiative is ably led by Rosemary Hensley.

Keeping track of our **Membership** is essential to serving our membership and assessing the health of the church. With that in mind, the membership rolls of the church are updated annually. Current numbers, along with new members and those who have passed away, are found in the Clerks report.

Benevolence fundraising as well as allocation of the resulting Benevolence Fund is also a responsibility of the Parish Life Ministry. The 2026 fund raising event will happen the night before you receive the printed Annual Report, so its success cannot be reported here. What can be reported is that this year's event is about two months later than has been customary. Also, the organization of the event has devolved to the Parish Life Ministry as a whole, as Rebecca Novak, chair of our two most recent and highly successful events, is no longer able to chair. Co-Leaders of this year's event are Cathy Buerk and Rosemary Hensley. Individuals who have helped organize special parts of the fund raising, such as the Giving Tree, have again stepped up to continue with these responsibilities. Since the date of May 2 coincides with the date of the Kentucky Derby, Parish Life has determined that a Debry Day theme will be joyous and entertaining. Hopefully, it will also raise significant funds for us to give to the thirteen charitable organizations that rely on First Congregational for support.

Activities in the past year sponsored by Parish Life have followed a pattern that has come to be expected. In September the membership is welcomed back from summer vacations by the **Fall Potluck**, this year ably chaired by Cathy Buerk. Patrick Byrne deserves praise for providing delicious pulled pork as a main feature. Rosemary Hensley chaired the **Sweet and Savory** after the popular Hanging of the Greens, this year coordinated by Cathy Buerk. In January our **Mid-Winter-Heritage Sunday Potluck** had to be postponed because of a snow storm, but was highly successful when it did occur on February 8. Chaired by Joan Musbach, members brought a delicious assortment of main dish casseroles and sides providing abundant dining for all. The weather delay of this event meant a fast turn-around for our customary **Chocolate Sunday** on Valentines weekend. The entire Parish Life Ministry swung into action to make this happen. The expert bakers of the church also fed us. In January Amy Byrne made her excellent **King Cakes** to celebrate Epiphany. Annie Sampath coordinated the annual **Easter**

Coffee Cake repast after our triumphant Easter worship. Throughout all of these special events, we appreciate the help of our members who willingly answered the call to cook, set up, serve and clean-up to make these events enjoyable for all.

Given the financial challenges faced by First Congregational, the Parish Life Ministry seeks to be good stewards of the dollars allocated to them. Therefore, many of the activities are supported financially by the ministry members. For other expenses such as special occasion flowers, we hope for additional financial support from our members.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joan Musbach, Chair of Parish Life Ministry

Along with Rosemary Hensley, Cathy Buerk, Annie Sampath, Rebecca Novak, and Amy Byrne.

We also appreciate the assistance of Doug Barton as Secretary.

Facility & Finance Ministry

This year has been both rewarding and challenging for F&F. Larger projects completed this year include the installation of new vents on our new roof, running a dedicated 110 electric line for a lessee air conditioner and removing a large tree near our electronic sign. Not listed are the innumerable repairs and replacements required to keep our older facility going. Slated for the next few months is the resurfacing and striping the east parking lot.

Our 10 West Lockwood endeavor added \$49,500 to the budget. We have eleven tenants using our building week to week. The Persuaded Pooch in the Dickens Room was new in 2025. In addition to these lessees, we have countless groups renting space on a single use basis. This was the first year our 10 West income showed a decline from the previous year. We are working to reverse that trend in 2026. One way to do that would be to get a permanent weekly lessee in the kitchen. In order to do so, a County Inspection was necessary. Several violations required updates, the major one being the removal of existing ceiling tiles. All have now been rectified. Members of F&F painted the kitchen last fall. Brighter lighting and new molding around fixtures was added.

New equipment purchased include the aforementioned roof vents, three monitors in the sanctuary and a new PC and monitor used as a network drive and for printing bulletins.

After the major outlay last year for our roof, we are facing another big expense. The chiller that provides cool air in the summer months is reaching the end of its functional life. We are looking at potential ways to fund this project.

Maintenance of the Churchyard continues. New names added were Phil Roush and Chlorine Michaels.

We are very fortunate to have Chip Isringhaus in the Facility Manager position. After 24 years in his position, he well knows the various systems in our building and can often perform repairs himself that would normally require professional service.

We thank Roger Barnes for his service to F&F and welcome Bob Borutta back to the group.

The congregation is fortunate that the experienced and knowledgeable group of Dan Claggett, Lynn Hoganson, Neil Hoffsten and Keith Moore are continuing their term on F&F.

Respectfully submitted,
Phil Shoulberg, Chair of Facilities & Finance Ministry

Christian Education Ministry (CEM) & Faith Formation

This year has been a year of growth in strategizing for the future of Kids Church. We are taking a closer look at curricula to find a better fit for our youth and looking to remodel the rooms in ways that are inviting to the all the wide range of children we serve and to prospective new families considering joining First Church.

In the fall we had our annual events such as backpack blessing and the Vehicle fair. The Vehicle Fair included attractions such as face-painting and Santa's Train, as well as delicious baked goods from Troop 301. The weather was beautiful and we had a steady stream of attendees all morning. This December we saw a phenomenal performance from Kids Church in their acting, singing, and posing! Kids Church looks forward to our upcoming Easter Egg Hunt that is small but mighty, our planting of vegetables and herbs in the soon-to-be refurbished vegetable garden, and our Confirmation class this fall.

Adult education also had an exciting year with presentations discussing the Webster Groves Community Land Trust, Gateway ONA, the *Churches Together for Justice Home Repair Program*, a congregation-wide conversation about security updates for the church, and *Immigration Law and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Activities*. CEM also supported a Book Club adventure examining *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again* by Rachel Held Evans. We look forward to more programming this church year.

The Peace and Justice (P&J) team, which reports to and is considered part of CEM, sponsored participation in the national *CROP Hunger Walk* in the fall and a number of beneficiary Collection Drives (food, books, diapers, personal hygiene items, etc.) throughout the year; a blood and food drive was sponsored by CEM proper. The P&J team also designed a Jesus Has Left the Building (JHLtB) program for First Church and conducted the first JHLtB Day of Service in November; two separate group activities were robustly supported by congregational participation: (a) assembling and distributing winter gift bags for unhoused persons and (b) a visit to a majority black church. The team is planning a couple of JHLtB days of service per year going forward.

Submitted by Johari Hunt, Christian Education & Faith Formation Coordinator
Doug Miller, Chair of Christian Education Ministry

Endowment Counselors

This is the final report for the calendar year 2025 from the Endowment Trust, under the stewardship of the Endowment Counselors, Church Treasurer Jenny Jones, Pastor David Denoon, Moderator Doug Barton, and Moderator Elect Chris von Weise. The church's portfolio has been competently managed by The Moneta Group Investment Advisors, LLC through our contacts Logan Finerty and Thatcher Crawford. The Endowment Counselors met

quarterly with Moneta throughout 2025.

2025 marked the third consecutive year of strong stock market gains and the best year for bonds since 2020. On December 31, 2024, the Trust's portfolio balance was \$1,896,513. On December 31, 2025, the balance was \$1,799,424, a decrease of \$97,089. The total withdrawals from the Trust between January 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, amounted to \$258,717, representing 14.4% of the Trust's funds. There were no contributions made to the endowment in 2025. The overall investment philosophy remained at 75% stocks and 25% bonds.

Moneta reminded the counselors that the yearly withdrawal should be between 4-5%, which would be between \$75k to \$93k. The current standard distribution of \$15,000/mo would be the annual equivalent of 10% of the portfolio at 12/31/2025. However, the annual spending rate for 2025 was 14.4% based on total withdrawals of \$258,717. With a strong year of gains in 2025, the portfolio was almost able to cover the distributions made in 2025.

The Endowment Trust of the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves was set up in 1968. It started with a gift from Herman Bowmar of 90 shares of Ralston Purina stock worth \$10,000 designed to care for the financial needs of the church when income does not meet the operating expenses, or a major financial expense is incurred. The Endowment Counselors recognize that building the endowment fund should not depend solely on investment growth, especially during times of market instability. Moneta Group provided a Charitable Giving Strategy handout to explain the different ways church members can contribute to the endowment fund. A concerted effort is being made to encourage legacy gifts and direct gifts to the Endowment Trust.

Respectfully submitted,
The Endowment Counselors,
Mark Edwards (Chair), Rod Cooper, Val Paci, Neil Hofsten, & Kedra Tolsen

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee continues to meet monthly in order to assess and develop ways to communicate within our church and with the community. The team is composed of members from each of the Ministries, staff members and members at large representing a cross section of the congregation.

The Covenant News continues to be our primary communication tool. It has evolved to a weekly online-only publication struggles continue. Problem solving and support to those working on each issue remain a focus for this group.

Event planning for church events and meetings was addressed, and an event planning worksheet was devised, and remains a work in process.

For a number of years this Committee along with the Facility and Finance Ministry have grappled with the idea of adding video monitors to the Sanctuary. This was resisted by some,

saying it would detract from the worshipful feeling of the space; others were more positive regarding the move as forward thinking and increasing the engagement of the Congregation. A portable screen was used through half of 2025 in an attempt to try the concept, and in June, with almost all of the funding in place, the equipment was purchased and installed.

In another attempt to engage the Congregation, tools for electronic signups were talked about with staff, and those using these tools were encouraged to use one company consistently in order to improve the learning process and thus the engagement. Google Docs and Sheets appeared to be the most used. In the end paper signups on Sunday mornings remained the most successful for gaining volunteers across the generations.

While we continue to participate in the Old Webster Trade Assoc., and many of its events, our largest outreach is the Vehicle Fair each year on the last Saturday in September. This event draws a large number of families, and is looked at as a service to the Community and a chance to enhance community awareness of our presence. (Due to the large investment of volunteer time and labor, the Committee elected to set aside the Vehicle Fair in 2026 and resume in 2027.)

The Communications Committee hopes our efforts to discover, assess, and address communication needs leads to creative and affective avenues to enhance the church's mission.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Edwards, Temporary Chair of Communications Committee

First Friends

Greetings,

It is a joy and privilege to serve as First Friends coordinator and leader (I accepted this position around May 2025.). I have a great team of members and team leaders that are supportive of each other. We are the eyes and ears of the church on Sunday morning who help to keep things moving smoothly, and we are primary providers of hospitality too.

Below are some of the accomplishments First Friends have achieved and our future goals.

- The First Friends Handbook has been updated.
- Junior First Friends has been created. They work with all FF teams.
- Kristy and I set up a meeting with WGPB's Capt. McCoy last year to educate our members about church security. And this will be an annual review.
- Team Leader Kristy has worked with Adam to set up a "heads up" email to the FF Team serving, informing them of any special requirements for that Sunday they serve.
- First Friends are actively working to help update our church Emergency Plan.
- We have enacted a new policy to secure the exterior doors during Sunday Church service.
- First Friends has taken steps to help our church become a "green" church by switching from plastic creamers to fresh cream for coffee during Coffee Hour.

I look to the coming months to address these goals.

- I plan to restructure the Teams by reducing our teams to 5 teams with each team having 7 to 8 members. This will make it easier for the teams to serve the membership.
- We are looking to create an Emergency Response Team (ERT) to assist First Friends in the event of a medical emergency requiring first aid or CPR. The ERT team will also lead evacuation in the event of fire or inclement weather.
- I plan to continue to improve communication between First Friends and our other committees, groups and ministerial staff.

I will be happy to answer any questions or entertain any responses, comments or suggestions.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Love, First Friends Coordinator

MICA (Ministry of Imagination, Creativity, and the Arts)

2025 was a busy year for MICA. Last year the Oïkos Ensemble performed at:

1. 7 Sunday morning worship services
2. Jazz Noel Christmas Concert
3. The Kid's Jazz Noel worship service
4. Good Friday Blues worship service
5. Solstice Earth Walk performance
6. The Gala of Grace (annual benevolence event)

2025 Oïkos highlights:

1. Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worship service
2. Good Friday Blues blending evocative jazz, Logos Readers, and artistic imagery
3. Earth Walk featuring presenters: geophysicist Dr. Michael Wyssession, and botanist Dr. Kathryn Haydon.
4. Jazz Noel featuring painter Michael Anderson, the shepherd Josaiah (Dave Denoon), Logos Readers, and the Terra Nova Early Music consort.

As part of my three-way covenant with the church and the Association I shared my ministry in several ways:

1. Assisting weekly in worship planning, and staff meetings
2. Supporting the Logos Readers
3. Preaching in place of the vacationing pastor
4. Sharing the Not for Children Only message in worship on several Sundays
5. Leading the post-Christmas "carol sing" worship

Special thanks to:

1. Oïkos members Kim Fuller Barnes, Carolbeth True, Glen Smith, David True, Tim Osiek, and Arianna Aerie for sharing their creative talents.
2. Artist Michael Anderson whose painting created during Jazz Noel now hangs in the church office.

3. The members of the Terra Nova Early Music Consort: Bruce Carvel, Carl Serbel, Michael Wyssession, and Mark Lucas.
4. Jan Barnes and all the members of the Logos Readers.
5. Rev. Dave Denoon, Dr. Leon Berke III, Johari Hunt, and the rest of our great staff for their creative collaboration and support.
6. With gratitude for the wonderful financial support and encouragement of MICA by so many of our church members.

Respectfully submitted,
Cliff Aerie, Minister of MICA

Habitat for Humanity

Completing a Habitat workday is a great feeling! Although it can be fatiguing, one has the satisfaction of a hands-on contribution to the construction of a new home for a deserving family, and maybe learning a new skill.

In past years Habitat has asked us for five volunteers. In 2025, the request doubled. Our work site was on October 11 was in the neighborhood east of the Cardinal Glennon Hospital. As things turned out we were combined with a corporate group. In addition to installing insulation panels, caulking and framing, we were able to raise two second story walls that spanned the length of the house.

Many thanks to Andrea Welnick, Doug Barton, Amy Patrick and Francis Byrne, Pat Doyle-Grace, Neil Hoffsten and Gus Aimquist (Francis' friend).

This year the request is back to five workers, but we are working two dates. Volunteers are needed for May 16 and October 3. Signup sheets are in the office.

This year, Habitat intends to build a minimum of 35 homes for hard-working families of modest means. STL Habitat for Humanity is celebrating their 40th Anniversary this year. Planned is a late September block party in one of their neighborhoods.

In addition to the member sweat equity contributed on our workday, the First Church Benevolence Fund contributed \$1,000 to the St Louis UCC effort. Also, members attended the St. Pat's Dinner held at Sammuell UCC. Watch for another exciting Habitat Fundraiser taking place at First Church in October.

Respectfully submitted,
Phil Shoulberg, Habitat for Humanity Coordinator

Director of Music

I continue to be proud of our ensembles, Canterbury Bells and Chancel Choir, and their continuing musical improvement! Also, our Brass Quintet continues to deliver wonderful music for Easter. It has been a successful year for our music department. I will be away for a week or

so to guest conduct in Paraguay before Labor Day and this summer I will be conducting the Gateway Festival Orchestra in 3 free concerts in July.

My cataract surgeries last June were successful but even now each day brings its own unique photosensitivity. (I am advised that this is normal.) Finally, our sanctuary piano is 72 years old this year and is showing its age. I have several piano technicians coming to evaluate what can be done and the projected costs.

Respectfully Submitted,
Leon Burke, Music Director

Brown Baggers

Since the late 1980s, our church has helped support the people who have sought food and shelter at the building at 19th and Cole streets in St Louis city.

The shelter has operated under several different names. Now it is known as GATEWAY 180. Their focus is on helping people (mostly women and children) in desperate situations turn their lives around through education, job training and finding housing. Our congregation has helped with monetary gifts, in leadership rolls, and directly with food.

In 1988 Joy Bennett began recruiting several of us to make sandwiches to be used at the shelter and also for the people (mostly men) who knock on the door hungry, but for security reasons, can't be housed at the shelter. We delivered 300 sandwiches twice a month. As more churches joined the effort, we made less sandwiches and dropped to once a month. Later, Gateway 180 asked if we could provide 60 bag lunches once a month.

So, on the first Sunday of the month several of us gather to assemble Brown Bag lunches. The lunches consist of meat, cheese, bread, fruit, cookies and a drink. This year we started rotating among the team for the jobs of procuring the food and delivering the lunches. We are on a very tight budget and some of the food is donated. Those working currently are Pat Doyle-Grace, BJ Kaul, Chris von Weise, Elyse von Weise, Dana Romeis, Elaine Coe, Marshall and Faye Dyer. Sometimes family and friends join us.

This Program is supported by our Benevolence Fund.

Respectfully submitted,
Faye Dyer, Chair of Brown Baggers

Benevolence (2025)

The Benevolence Committee met on June 17, 2025 to determine how to distribute over \$15,000 raised through our Gala of Grace on March 29, 2025. The following organizations received funds:

Beyond Housing
CHADS Coalition for Mental Health
Emmaus Homes
Gateway 180
Gateway ONA Coalition
Habitat For Humanity

Interfaith Partnership of Greater St. Louis
Lydia's House
FCCWG - Minister's Discretionary Fund
Operation Food Search
PREVENT ED (National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Chapter
Provident Behavioral Health (formerly Care & Counseling)
Room At The Inn
FCCWG - Brown Baggers
Shepherd's Center Webster-Kirkwood
UCC - Our Church's Wider Mission
UCC - St. Louis Association
Unleashing Potential
Webster-Rock Hill Ministries
Uganda Water Project / Field For Humanity

In addition to these, our annual budget provides for a \$15,000 contribution to Our Church's Wider Mission, which supports ministries of the Missouri Mid-South Conference and the national setting of the UCC.

Lady Elect

Lady Elect is a women's fellowship group within the church and averages 15-20 members per meeting. Membership is open to all women of the church and guests. Meetings are held monthly from September through May. This year the group held two evening potluck dinners, one in September and one in May. Lady Elect also took two field trips, one to the Holocaust Museum and one to the St. Louis Genealogical Society. In addition, the group participated in a chair yoga session, pie-baking for the Stewardship Consecration Sunday, a Christmas cookie exchange, and a game day. While fellowship is important to Lady Elect, members stand ready to support all aspects of the church life and congregation.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Barton, Chairperson of Lady Elect
BJ Kaul, Treasurer of Lady Elect

Scouting America (Boy Scouts of America) Troop 301 F

Last year Troop 301 B and Troop 301 G were in a BSA pilot program working as a combined troop. The pilot program has ended and we are now registered as a Family troop. This designation is the replacement for pilot program, but the troop will function the same way. We continue to accept boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 17.

All of our adult leaders have completed leadership training and youth protection training. We use two deep leadership at all times including meetings, activities, camping, all communication and online activities. That is to say, two leaders or one leader and a parent are present for all of these activities. This is to protect everyone. We follow all rules as set by our national and local councils.

We rechartered with five scouts including three boys and two girls. Two of our scouts became Eagle Scouts in the spring/summer of 2025. We have had several scouts age out since last year.

Four of our former scouts are registered as college reserve and join us for activities and meetings when they are home from college. Ann O'Halloran staffed at S Bar F Scout Ranch, Swift base, this past summer. John Posey staffed at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico this past summer. John Posey and Therese Schuster will both be working at Philmont this summer. Our activities in the past 12 months have included weekly meetings, camping, fundraising (two rummage sales), merit badges, leadership training, and many hikes. Troop 301 loves community service including volunteering for Larson Park Cub Scout Camp, and Scouting for Food. We also hosted a Pinewood Derby "Build a Car" night for local Webster Groves and Brentwood cub scouts. Recently the troop took an Amtrak train trip to Washington, MO. We hiked and visited a museum. This was a very successful activity that we hope to include in our schedule next year too!

Betsy O'Halloran joined the local council membership committee (New Horizons, GSLAC) in August 2025. During the fall, the committee worked on increasing cub scout membership which decreased during Covid. In December the committee began working on recruitment specifically for Troop 301. Paul Mack, another member of the committee, agreed to work as a liaison between Troop 301 and cub scout packs in the nearby area. Troop 301 is one of the few troops in our area with no designated feeder cub scout pack. The committee is working hard to increase our membership. Their help is invaluable. Denise Lee has been working with Pack 656, and she is also working on recruitment.

While our numbers are smaller than we would like, we are hopeful that we will bring in new scouts. We have dedicated adult leaders, enthusiastic college reserves, and five amazing scouts who bring energy and the scout spirit to everything that they attempt. We are proud to be the oldest existing troop west of the Mississippi and chartered with an amazing historic church, First Congregational Church of Webster Groves.

Respectfully submitted,
Tracey Legg, Scoutmaster
Denise Lee, Assistant Scoutmaster
Betsy O'Halloran, Committee Chair

Journeyman

The purpose of Journeyman is to discuss personal matters relating to our thoughts, our experiences, spirituality, and a wide-ranging variety of issues. We try to come up with a topic in advance so we can prepare for the discussion. Occasionally one of us tells his "Life Story," an autobiographical account of growing up and the experiences and developments that got them to where they are now. We will also discuss careers, recent trips, hobbies and interests, or whatever else we agree upon, with the focus on personal matters and ideas so we can further get to know one another's thoughts and backgrounds. Our meetings are limited in time to one hour so that the discussion moves at a rapid pace and stays interesting.

Journeymen has led to greater friendship and closeness among its members. We will occasionally continue our Journeymen talks at Fellowship time after service on Sundays. The Journeymen group is always welcoming and encouraging of new members.

Respectfully submitted,
John Paci, Chair of Journeymen

Report of the Pastor

Here is my annual report of the twelve months just past, with some projection into the next twelve months.

You may have noticed a more intense focus on my family. Gwen began her studies at American University in August, and Coco and I have been adjusting to the considerably less energetic and time-constrained household. We're not quite empty-nesters, but we're getting a taste of what's to come!

In 2024, I was elected by the Missouri Mid-South Conference to be a Delegate to the upcoming two General Synods, in 2025 and 2028. GS35 took place, last summer. I was in Kansas City, July 10-16, and had the privilege of hearing voices of faithful and faith-filled people from all over the world. I was given the impression that we in the local church may not understand fully the reach and the scope of the United Church of Christ. In fact, at times the resolutions we were considering at Synod, in committees and discussion groups, let alone in plenary, seemed as if we were out of our depth: Should USAID be re-established? Should Voice of America and Public Media be re-funded? Would a more appropriate term for the Israeli attacks in Gaza be "genocide"? But when we prayerfully considered the religious voice we were seeking to lend to the powerless and vulnerable, we found ourselves able to reply. And the worldwide representatives visiting us from other communions and the World Council of Churches were resoundingly grateful for the UCC's stated support.

Probably the most controversial matter for us as a Synod turned out to be the consideration of whether and how to reorganize the national setting of the UCC. You may be aware that something over a decade ago, our national setting in Cleveland was transitioned – mostly for financial reasons – from a Collegium of six officers, each with their own portfolio of responsibilities (General Ministries, Justice & Witness Ministries, Global Ministries, Local Church Ministries, and so on), to a structure more closely resembling a Conference, in this case with a General Minister & President (GMP) and two Associate General Ministers (AGM). At the General Synod in 2023, a working group was tasked by the UCC Executive Council with reconfiguring even this reduced leadership so that it functioned as effectively as possible.

What the working group came up with was a "unitary executive" model which vested a lot of authority in the GMP (some even called the model, "papal," because of how centralized the GMP's authority would be). The GMP would actually be *hiring* the AGMs – who, prior to this proposed reconfiguration, were named by a search process and *called* to service by the General Synod for limited terms of office (as the GMP also is). Suffice it to say, there appears to be

enough Congregationalism left in the UCC that the Executive Council has been sent back to the proverbial drawing board to again reimagine the structure of authority in the national setting. I assume that a new proposal will await us in Cleveland, in 2028, at the next General Synod.

Missouri Mid-South Conference Delegate

These last twelve months have not been an easy time for the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Jane Porchey and I have mentioned in other settings during this time, our disappointment with the Conference over the forced exit of the Rev. Mary Nelson who served for nearly four years as our Transitional Conference Minister and whom Jane and I (and others) fully expected, last summer, would become our settled Conference Minister. It takes too much space and time to say why she is no longer serving in that capacity. Let it suffice, to say that a familiar fault line has opened. Rev. Nelson stepped away from her position in September, and a new Intentional Interim Conference Minister, Rev. Phil Hodson, will begin in June the process of spanning our Conference rift.

Also in 2024, I was elected to serve on the St. Louis Association Mission and Outreach Committee – a group which historically has been very much like our Benevolence Committee in purpose and function. In October 2025, I agreed to serve as a co-chair of the group but in January 2026 learned that my partner would not be able to serve. So, I now am chair of the Mission and Outreach Committee and, by virtue of that office, I am also serving on the Association Council, meeting monthly with other area church leaders to get the business of the Association done.

The Association's Spring Meeting will take place here at First Church on Thursday, May 7! If you would like to welcome and take part in hosting about 100 delegates and representatives from the 48 member churches of the St. Louis Association, please let me know.

Being Your Pastor

It is interesting to consider how my work among you has changed, over the past decade and a half. My first annual report to you offered a detailed explanation of the tasks I had performed, over the previous nine months (I started in August.). I inventoried all my pastoral visits, worship services, sermons, the meetings I attended (congregational, denominational, ministerial, institutional, interfaith...), counseling sessions both marital and pre-marital. My job seemed to be an endless list.

Over the years, as the face and the personality of the church have changed, I have sought to key my reporting to information you would be interested in... and to peer ahead, rather than behind. (I hope you're with me, so far, with this year's report.)

What I can tell you with regard to weekly attendance, looking back, is that we are maintaining a pretty constant number of people on the average Sunday morning – numbering in the 70s. What that might be saying is that we are no longer losing more members than we are gaining annually. But it's also reminding us of how much there is to gain. For example, we had our largest attendance for Easter, this year, since before the covid pandemic. There were 179 in

attendance on April 5. Numbers had been in the 140s, the last few years.

Beyond numbers, though, there is an energy among us, senses of inspiration and compassion extending outward. The Peace and Justice Team continues to foster caring action through connections with Churches Together for Justice and the Open and Affirming Coalition. A recent “Jesus Has Left the Building” event, last fall, generated opportunities for us as a community to connect with people in need and with other Christians, like those at St. John UCC the Beloved Community, in St. Louis.

Many of our members and friends have found common cause in advocacy and protest. Although it hasn’t been organized by the church, carpooling and collectively demonstrating have proven the orders of days in which member of our faith community have together stared into the face of a chaotic world and remained unflinching. I pray that we will find still more causes and outreach for our hearts and hands to answer.

Reaching out globally, we have participated in fundraising for the Uganda Water Project pioneered by Peter Kalulu’s Field for Humanity, and are busy about making possible the building of many more water and sanitation kiosks across northwest Uganda. As reported recently by Rod Cooper, the Water Project now serves 60,000 of the 90,000 whom Peter had hoped to help.

Looking ahead twelve months, there are programs I am hoping might add yet more inspiration and meaning to our life together. A new Confirmation Class is forming, for students in Grades 7 through 9. An adult Bible Study is set to begin in June – spanning all our scriptures over a few years – with seasonal, specific studies too. If you peruse the other pages of this reports packet, I feel very sure you will find countless opportunities, both new and familiar, that will engage, renew, and even surprise you.

This is the 250th year since our country’s founding. This is also the 160th year since ten people gathered in William and Frances Plant’s home and signed a Covenant written by an eleventh (William’s brother Alfred who was away on a business trip), to inaugurate the First Congregational Church of Webster Groves – this community’s First Church. That said, history is history. I’m looking forward to finding out what the Holy Spirit has waiting for us in the coming twelve months. I hope you are, too!

As a final note, I want to express my sincere thanks to all the staff of our church for their tireless efforts to create the setting in which your ministries take place – Dr. Leon Burke III, Johari Hunt, Adam Levin, and Alicia McMinn in the office; and Chip Isringhaus, Mark Metcalf, and Onyeka Igboanuzue throughout the building. I am honored to lead this wonderful team!

Peace.

Rev. David Denoon, Pastor

Notes

First Congregational Church of Webster Groves

2026-2027 Ballot

Below is the proposed 2026-2027 Slate of Officers, Ministry Members and Committee Members. Voting by members of the Congregation will take place during the Annual Meeting following worship on May 3, 2026. For members unable to attend the Annual Meeting, a completed ballot may be submitted to the church office as a PDF via e-mail, or verbally by phone, no later than 3:00pm on Thursday, April 30. You may also hand your ballot to a member of the First Friends serving on the morning of May 3.

OFFICERS

Moderator (term ends, 2027)		Chris von Weise
Moderator Elect	1 year ____	_____
Chair, Christian Education	1 year ____	Doug Miller
Chair, Parish Life	1 year ____	Joan Musbach
Chair, Facility and Finance	1 year ____	Phil Shoulberg
Clerk	1 year ____	Dana Romeis
Treasurer	1 year ____	Jenny Jones

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION MINISTRY

3 years ____ Rebecca Novak (2029)
3 years ____ Danny Smith (2029)
1 year ____ Laurel Hayes (2027)

Returning Members:

Marilyn Barton (2028)
Mandy Heiser-Fisher (2028)
Doug Miller, chair (2027)

FACILITY AND FINANCE MINISTRY

3 years ____ Keith Moore (2029)
3 years ____ Bob Borutta (2029)

Returning Members:

Neil Hoffsten (2028)
Phil Shoulberg, chair (2028)
Dan Claggett (2027)
Lynn Hoganson (2027)

PARISH LIFE MINISTRY

3 years ____ Esmeralda Castelblanco (2029)
3 years ____ Cindy Matlock (2029)

Returning Members:

Rosemary Hensley (2028)
Joan Musbach, chair (2028)
Amy Byrne (2027)
Annie Sampath (2027)

ENDOWMENT COUNSELORS

5 years ____ Linda Kopetti (2031)

Returning Members:

Neil Hoffsten (2030)
Mark Edwards (2029)
Rod Cooper (2028)
Valerie Paci (2027)

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

3 years ____ Marilyn Claggett (2029)
3 years ____ Sandy Hoffsten (2029)

Returning Members:

Chris Hoeper (2028)
Julie McHugh (2028)
John Paci (2027)
Nancy Rudolph (2027)

DELEGATES TO CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

Rosemary Hensley (2028)
Jane Porchey (2028)

Alternate:

Sharon Love (2028)

TREASURER'S ASSISTANTS

1 year ____ Roger Barnes
1 year ____ Jane Brader
1 year ____ Patrick Byrne
1 year ____ Jeanene Harris
1 year ____ Jane Porchey
1 year ____ Carolyn Woodsmall



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DDenoon@FirstChurchWG.org

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Admin@FirstChurchWG.org

Coordinator of Faith Formation – Johari Hunt
Johari.Hunt@FirstChurchWG.org

Director of Music & Organist – Dr. Leon Burke
Leon.Burke@FirstChurchWG.org

Facilities Manager – Chip Isringhaus
ctil234@FirstChurchWG.org

Events Coordinator – Alicia McMinn
Events@FirstChurchWG.org

Custodian & AV Tech – Mark Metcalf
Mark.Metcalf@FirstChurchWG.org

Weekend & Events Custodian –
Onyeka Igboanuzue

Director of Ministry of Imagination, Creativity
and the Arts (MICA) – Rev. Cliff Aerie
Cliff.Aerie@FirstChurchWG.org

THE VISION of First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, United Church of Christ, is to be a dynamic Christian community expressing God's love, hope, joy, and peace for all people.

OUR MISSION is to provide:

- Worship that praises God
 - ◇ Shows commitment to the teachings of Jesus
 - ◇ Celebrates the Holy Spirit in ways that express the diversity of our experiences
 - ◇ Encourages spiritual growth and commitment
- Educational activities that promote faith and intellectual growth for children and for adults.
- Advocacy and care for those in need in our community and throughout the world.
- Community that seeks justice, loves kindness, and walks humbly.
- Hope, love, and encouragement to all who seek our support.
- Grace and forgiveness for ourselves and all who seek the ministries we share in worship, music, and fellowship with others on life's journey.

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