

Regular Meeting of the Congregation Annual Report, April 26th, 2026

AGENDA

Call to Order	Anne Sprague
Opening Prayer	Rev. David T. Hill
Approval of Constitutional Change	Anne Sprague
Report of the 2026 Nominating Committee	Ardith Hayes
Agenda Items from the Floor	
Shalom	

Constitution Language Change:

Section 3. Associate membership shall be available for those who wish to retain membership in a home church in another community while affirming their relationship with First Church. Such associate membership in no way disturbs the membership elsewhere but confers the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership in this Church, with the exception of serving as an Officer ~~or on the Executive Council~~. Associate members shall not be counted on the denomination rolls, and moving from the Oberlin area shall in itself constitute the termination of associate membership.

Shalom

*Shalom, my friends, shalom my friends. Shalom, shalom!
May peace be with you, may peace be with you. Shalom, shalom!*

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2026 Report from the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee met weekly via Zoom on Wednesday afternoons in February, March, and early April to complete the slate of nominees for Officers, Executive Council, Standing Committees, and Conference and Association Representatives of First Church in Oberlin UCC.

Between meetings, committee members made contacts and enjoyed good conversations with many of the church's members and friends to discern their interests, gifts, and availability for service in some area of the mission and ministry of First Church. We have learned how many of us already are fully engaged in ministry and mission via community service and/or ministries of care (including family), and are unable to commit to an extended term of committee service. We encourage committees, especially those with fewer members, to consider how their work might be carried out in the form of tasks or projects and to look to these individuals for help in time limited ways.

We are profoundly grateful to the following persons who have completed their service as officers and in committee positions: Executive Council: Anne Sprague, Ruth Ann Clark, Linda Gates, Ken Cheek; Faith Formation: Carl Whitehouse; Fellowship: Sandy Matthews, Denise Scotch, Margaret Gueulette; Nominations: Linda Gates, Mike Schmid; Outreach and Service: Carol Burke; Stewardship: Robert Longworth, Barbara Blodgett, Bill Long; Witness and Membership: Nancy Garver, Harold Slocum; Worship: Scott Reed.

We are equally grateful to those who are continuing, and those who have agreed to be nominated for the coming terms of service. In the chart below **names and terms of nominees are in bold**. Continuing officers and committee members are listed beneath the candidates. The term of continuing members expires in May of the year listed. An asterisk indicates a term limit: that person is not eligible for reelection to that committee or office when their term expires.

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following slate of nominees (in bold) to the congregation for approval. **2026 Nominating Committee:** Ardith Hayes (Chair), Anne Sprague (Record Keeper), Rollin Conway, Nancy Garver, David Orr, Carl Whitehouse.

OFFICE	NOMINEE	TERM OF SERVICE (# of years)	Year(s)
OFFICERS:			
Moderator	Anne Conway	2	2026-28
Treasurer	Mike Schmid	1	2026-27
Clerk	Prue Richards		2027
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL	Carol Burke	3	2026-29
	Bill Long	3	2026-29
	Scott Reed	2	2026-28
	Nancy Garver	2	2026-28
	Gene Matthews		2027*
	David Kelley		2027
STANDING COMMITTEES:			

Christian Education/Faith Formation	Denise Scotch	2	2026-28
	Rebecca Bandy	2	2026-28
	Sandy Matthews	3	2026-29
	Marleen Caldwell	3	2026-29*
	Kim Preston Sarah Colson		2027 2027
Facilities	Martin Buck	3	2026-29*
	Bill Jindra	3	2026-29*
	Erik Andrews		2028*
	Steve Gwinn		2028
	Linda Slocum Andrew Garver		2027 2027*
Fellowship	Denise Capers	3	2026-29
	Rhys Price Jones	3	2026-29
	Anne McCormick	1	2026-27
	Alana Kelley		2027
	Karla Sanderson Lori Taylor		2028 2028
Finance	Pete Richards	3	2026-29*
	Bill Hamilton		2028*
	Tom Konkoly		2027
	Mike Schmid (Treas)		
	EC Member EC Member		
Outreach and Service	Ellen Broadwell	3	2026-29
	John Gates	3	2026-29*
	Becky Thompson		2027
	Kathleen Bradley		2027
	David Grayson Marci Peterson		2028 2028
Stewardship	Marian Thomas	3	2026-29
	Anne Schaum	3	2026-29
	Dana Parsons		2028
	Kristin Peterson		2028
	Ralph Thompson Open		2027 2027
Witness and Membership	Bill Capers	1	2026-27
	Jan Heron	3	2026-29*
	Barbara Brecht	3	2026-29
	Linda Gwinn		2028
	Nancy MacRae Open		2028 2027
Worship	Adelaide Bandy	2	2026-28
	Tina Zwegat	3	2026-29*
	Frankie Long	3	2026-29*
	Barbara Reed	1	2026-27
	Peter Thomas Thomas Riis		2027 2028

CONFERENCE & ASSOCIATION REP	Carol Burke	1	2026-27
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*term limited

Report of the Moderator

Anne Sprague

2025 – 2026

“Fight for the things you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”
- Ruth Bader Ginsburg

First Church and its members can be seen everywhere in Oberlin! We embody the spirit of RBG by being welcoming and inclusive, making our facility available to the community, and leading our neighbors in things that are good. We “minister to one another, our community, and the world.” It has been a great privilege for me to be a part of that ministry over the past four years. The manner in which this group of people works - with passion, respect, and love for one another - has been impressive, as are the things we have done and continue to do for our community.

Our facility has been improved with new boilers, heat pumps, doors, and parking areas. We have numerous visitors who visit the kittens who live upstairs, and visitors who eat pizza and popcorn, play games, meet their neighbors, and listen to the music at our annual Spring Festival! More and more renters use our rooms, agencies and organizations meet in our church spaces, concerts, programs, and parties fill the Meeting House and the Fellowship Hall regularly.

The future looks bright and busy as well. A task force is well on its way in the design and planning for a much needed kitchen renovation. Better workflow, energy efficiency, and a clean design will enhance our fellowship activities that include food preparation. The solar panels approved by the congregation are scheduled to be installed by the time of this meeting. Typical red tape and bureaucracy delayed the process, but our journey toward being a greener congregation persists. The repair and maintenance of our Caufield Organ is scheduled for next winter, with only limited disruption anticipated in the Meeting House. Those improvements will continue to enrich our relationship with the Conservatory. Our Faith Formation program has changed and continues to evolve as we learn about the gifts and needs of our families and other members.

I am enormously grateful for the group of people with whom I have worked here at First Church. Your empathy and understanding, your willingness to step up and do what needs to be done, your thoughtfulness in difficult times, and your support and help to me has been extraordinary. You are what feeds my soul.

Anne Sprague

2025 - 2026 Annual Report from the Clerk

2025 has been a high energy year full of completed projects and new commitments. New heat pumps are keeping us warm and newly replaced air conditioners are keeping us cool. Our

updated sidewalk entryway and parking lot are safer and inviting. New kitchen design has commenced and restoration work on our organ will begin this year. But perhaps most important is what we learned about ourselves during Pastor David's sabbatical last summer—that we have a strong congregation, with strong leaders, and we are nourished by worshipping together.

Resolutions May 2025 – March 2026

(2025-06) Resolved May 27, 2025: To rename and repurpose budget item #3.40.017, "Organ Maintenance Reserve" fund, to "Keyboard Maintenance Reserve" fund.

Motion: Gene Matthews Second: David Kelley Passed

(2025-07) Resolved June 24, 2025: "To approve the increased preliminary expense, not to exceed \$16,000, to engage Ron Cocco in the design of the First Church kitchen renovation."

Motion: Ken Cheek Second: Anne Conway Passed

(2025-08) Resolved June 29, 2025: To authorize the expense, not to exceed \$140,000, to purchase and install two (2) Heat Pumps, one (1) Humidifier and one (1) set of controls for the Meeting House. Also, one (1) Heat Pump for Fellowship Hall and a PV Array for James Brand House.

Motion: Peter Thomas Second: Elaine Orr Passed

(2025-09) Resolved September 23, 2025: To approve the hiring of Elizabeth Huettig as Faith Formation Coordinator for Young Children, and Carisma Jones as Faith Formation Coordinator for Youth. Each will receive a stipend of \$625/mo. for 8 months, for a total of \$10,000.

Motion: Gene Matthews Second: Ruth Ann Clark Passed

(2025-10) Resolved October 19, 2025: To accept the Patrick Fischer Proposal for restoration of the First Church organ. Also, to approve the expenditure of up to \$120,000 for that purpose.

Motion: Executive Council Second: Steve Johnson **Passed with one abstention**

(2025-11) Resolved December 16, 2025: That \$24,000 of the minister's salary for 2026 be designated as a housing allowance.

Motion: Ruth Ann Clark Second: Linda Gates Passed

(2026-01) Resolved January 12, 2026: That Executive Council accept the 2026 Budget as submitted by the Finance Committee and the Treasurer.

Motion: Ruth Ann Clark Second: Linda Gates Passed

(2026-02) Resolved February 1, 2026: That the slate proposed for Nominating Committee by the Executive Council be approved as presented.

Motion: Anne Conway Second: Jody Kerchner Passed

(2026-03) Resolved February 1, 2026: To approve the 2026 Budget as submitted by the Finance Committee and accepted by the Executive Council.

Motion: Steve Gwinn Second: Steve Johnson Passed, 2 abstentions

(2026-04) Resolved February 24, 2026: To provide Office Manager, Miranda Schaum, with a 3% retirement benefit consistent with UCC recommendations.

Motion: Linda Gates

Second: David Kelley

Passed

(Congregational vote to approve will be taken at this Meeting)

(2026-05) Resolved March 24, 2026: That Section 3 of the Constitution shall read: Associate membership shall be available for those who wish to retain membership in a home church in another community while affirming their relationship with First Church. Such associate membership in no way disturbs the membership elsewhere but confers the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership in this Church, with the exception of serving as an Officer. Associate members shall not be counted on the denomination rolls, and moving from the Oberlin area shall in itself constitute the termination of associate membership.

Motion: Ruth Ann Clark

Second: Linda Gates

Passed

Facilities Committee Annual Report 2025 - 2026

Over the past year, the Facilities Committee (**Martin Buck, Andrew Garver, Steve Gwinn, Bill Jindra, Linda Slocum, Erik Andrews**) has focused on significant infrastructure upgrades, routine maintenance, and long-term planning to improve the church's energy efficiency & accessibility.

Major Projects & Infrastructure

- **HVAC & Boiler Management:** The transition to a more modern heating and cooling strategy continues to be a primary focus. New heat pumps (heat and cool) were installed to meet needs in the Meeting House (MH), Fellowship Hall (FH), and John Frederick Oberlin (JFO) Rooms. While the boiler systems remain critical for the JBH building heat, the upgrades successfully shifted much of the MH heating load to more efficient heat pumps. Ongoing maintenance of Boiler #2, including persistent pressure switch issues, and a new annual maintenance contract remain top priorities.
- **Solar Energy:** The solar installation on the JBH South roof faced several delays due to city permitting and redesign requirements (notably a 4-foot setback for fire access). As of April 2026, the project is completed with a few panels on the East and West facing roofs.
- **Doors & Entry Project:** A long-term project to modernize the building's main entrance reached completion in early 2026. Planning for the door and entryway project commenced in early 2025. Following several revisions to the project scope, the concrete and paving phase was completed in September. Subsequently, the project experienced supply chain delays that extended over several months. Installation of the new doors was successfully completed in February 2026. A big thank you to the Door/Entry Project team members: **Martin Buck, Mike Schmid, Anne Sprague, Ken Cheek** (team lead), and **Gene Matthews**.
- **Kitchen Renovations:** In the spring of 2025, the Executive Council formed a task force to oversee the renovation of the church kitchen. Chaired by **Lori Taylor**, the team includes **Martin Buck, Sandy Matthews, Karla Sanderson, Linda Slocum, and Janet Kelsey Werner**. Both Martin and Linda provide additional coordination through their roles on the Facilities Committee. Working with the architect, the task force has analyzed ways to improve preparation space and traffic flow while identifying essential equipment replacements. The architect is currently finalizing detailed blueprints and cost estimates.

Once complete, these plans will be presented to the congregation for review & approval. We look forward to a modern facility that will serve our community for decades to come.

Exterior & Grounds

- **Landscaping & Trees:** The committee managed the planting of trees to replace those removed during the OC Carbon Neutral utility work. Coordination with Oberlin College (OC) for watering and tree care has been established.
- **Seasonal Maintenance:** The "Storms to Screens" tradition was evaluated; due to new cooling systems, the committee recommended keeping storm windows in place year-round to save on the \$1,000 annual labor cost.
- Snow removal (winter) and yard maintenance (mowing) was handled effectively through a mix of volunteer effort (**Bill Jindra**) and professional services (Orange Blossom).

Interior & Operations

- **Safety & Security:** Gilmore Security addressed "trouble alarms" and corrected notification sequences following a dust-triggered fire alarm incident. Minor repairs, such as fixing "spalling" in the basement Rocket Room and addressing ant issues in the JFO, were completed.
- **Financial & Personnel:** The 2026 budget reflects a significant increase in cleaning costs, which nearly doubled. The change in cleaning team has been very well received.
- **Energy Resilience:** In early 2026, the committee began exploring backup power systems (batteries/generators) to ensure the building can function during outages, potentially serving as a community "warming or cooling center."

2025 - 2026 Annual Report of the Faith Formation Committee

Active Members:

Carl Whitehouse
Marleen Caldwell
Sarah Colson
Kim Preston

The Faith Formation Committee has been in a transition year. In the past the committee could rely on a paid staff person responsible for youth ministry. This person provided the ideas, resources, and coordination for our small and constantly changing youth population. We decided to recruit two part-time, paid college students as group leaders/teachers.

These two young women are great with the youth, but without the trained staff person's deep knowledge of the church and community resources, the committee members themselves have had to learn new roles to fill this vacuum.

For the 3-4 elementary and pre-elementary youth the program has continued successfully in a well-organized, weekly Sunday School format. However, the social, educational, and family demands of our 8-10 middle and high school students has made a regularly scheduled program difficult to administer, and we have struggled to find stimulating and meaningful activities for this group that fit their schedules.

We unfortunately lost committee members almost immediately in the year due to illness and transfer, and at times only two or three members were available to keep activities going. Everyone was learning what we needed to do, but this has taken some time. We were able to organize a successful Pumpkin Bread Sale and a very enjoyable Christmas pageant.

As of our April meeting, things are really starting to fall into place. With the addition of Rev. Alana Kelley as an advisor and two other new members with knowledge of our church and community resources, we are optimistic that the committee can finalize a program that is both faith developing and enjoyable.

Respectfully submitted,
Carl Whitehouse

Fellowship Committee Annual Report 2025 - 2026

This year we enjoyed hosting many events. In May we participated in the Spring Fling event by providing home baked goodies for our visitors and we also hosted a coffee hour for Music Sunday. We enjoyed an outing at a Crushers Baseball Team Faith and Family Night. In September we had a Welcome Back Coffee Hour and then in November we hosted a coffee hour for Consecration Sunday. On the first day of Advent, we had a special coffee hour where we handed out a packet of Advent Daily Bible verses. We started the New Year with an Epiphany Coffee Hour enjoying cupcakes with special trinkets in them. February was our soup/salad Birthday luncheon. The cakes were beautiful and delicious! We distributed Easter Eggs, which contained Bible verses and candy, to the congregation on Easter Sunday. We sponsored a "Dinner and Conversation" evening at Bella Luna's which was a success so we're repeating it this year on April 26th. In addition to our other duties, several members of the Fellowship Committee are actively participating in the church kitchen renovation project.

We want to say "Thank You" to everyone who hosted coffee hours. We truly appreciate you taking this on. We will help anyone who would like to do coffee hour but doesn't know the routine.

Submitted by Sandy Matthews, Fellowship Committee Chair

Finance Committee Report 2025-2026

Major roles of the finance committee include preparation of the annual budget for church operations, tracking expenditures in comparison with the budget and reporting to Executive Council, and considering current financial policy and recommending changes as necessary.

The committee developed a deficit budget for the church operations fund in 2025 with projected income of \$460,000* and projected expenses of \$562,000, based on anticipated income and needs as reported by staff and committees. This budget was reviewed by Executive Council, recommended to the congregation, and approved at the annual meeting in January 2025. Lower expenses and higher income than budgeted led to a final deficit of \$67,000.

Our overall financial assets increased by \$166,000, but this was largely balanced by an increase in our loan for the boiler project by \$136,000, for a net year-end increase of just \$30,000. Along

the way, \$82,000 was taken as the usual 4½% draw in support of the church operations budget, and about \$70,000 was used to cover final expenses for the boiler project (in lieu of further increasing the loan principal). Capital projects to update the main entryway and adjacent driveway and parking lot, to replace failing air conditioners with heat pumps, and to add a photovoltaic array to the James Brand house were initiated and largely completed, and were financed entirely by dedicated contributions, and are consequently not reflected in the annual investment report.

In summary, 2025 saw substantial improvements and added value in our physical assets, an important deficit in our operating budget, and slight increase in our non-physical assets.

My thanks to committee members Ruth Ann Clark, Bill Hamilton, Tom Konkoly, Gene Matthews, Mike Schmid (Treasurer), and to our Moderator, Anne Sprague, who regularly attended our meetings, for their careful attention to financial details and thoughtful contributions to discussions of more general issues. Thanks also to our Financial Secretary, Miranda Schaum; and to our Bookkeeper, Tom Taylor, who handle many of the day-to-day details of the church's finances.

Respectfully submitted,
Pete Richards

*All amounts cited in this report are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Green Team Report 2025 - 2026

The First Church Green Team remained engaged throughout the reporting period, continuing its regular meetings, usually on the third Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. These meetings supported ongoing planning, education, and collaboration focused on environmental stewardship.

March 2 we were devastated to learn that the Green Team lost Jeanne McKibben, a long time active member of the team who inspired us by her examples on her property in Oberlin for planting native plants and supporting birds and pollinators.

In November 2025, the Green Team hosted its 8th Harvest Vegetarian Potluck Gathering. The event featured a presentation by members of Sustainable Berea, including Erika Coble, who also serves on the Berea City Council, and Clara Aguilar. Their contributions highlighted local sustainability initiatives and strengthened community partnerships. Over 25 people from the community attended. Several organizations gave short reports on their community activities.

The Green Team hosted members of Nature in My Backyard, a subsidiary of Greater Cleveland Audubon Society, who visited the grounds of First Church on November 15 and made suggestions for plantings on the property to benefit nature and the greater environment.

On Earth Day 2026, the Green Team hosted the 9th Annual Oberlin Green Group Earth Day Vegetarian Potluck, using 100% compostable dinnerware. The program was presented by John Petersen, the *Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Biology*, and Rumi Shammin, the *David Orr Professor of Environmental Studies*, on the topic of "Eco-Industrial Parks."

The Earth Day gathering also marked a significant milestone for the newly formed Oberlin Community Green Team, celebrating the First Church Green Team's long-standing goal of fostering broader community collaboration around environmental action. Members of the Oberlin Community Green Team were active in formation of the Oberlin 2026 Climate Action Plan, which was endorsed by Oberlin City Council on March 16.

Respectfully submitted,
Martin L. Buck, acting committee chair

Outreach and Service Committee 2025 – 2026 Annual Report

First Church contributed \$10,000 to the UCC's Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM). In addition, special offerings were promoted and collected and made to One Great Hour of Sharing (\$3,793.50, excluding the April Vanco amount), Strengthen the Church (\$1,255), Neighbors in Need (\$4,035), and the Christmas Fund (\$2,763), for a total of \$22,489. Because of our participation in these offerings, First Church is given the distinction by the United Church of Christ to be a 5 for 5 Congregation.

First Church contributed \$29,888, based on 10% of the money pledged by congregational members. Of this, Locally, recipients of benevolences included Oberlin Community Services (\$4000 for our capital campaign pledge and \$1000 for general use), Ruby N. Jones Scholarship Fund (\$1000), Oberlin Community Supporting Immigrants (\$1950), SEPA Guatemala (\$1500), and Oberlin Weekday Community Meals (\$1500). At the county level donations included El Centro (\$1500), Lorain County Free Clinic (\$1950), Good Knights of Lorain County (\$1000), Genesis House (\$1950), Second Harvest (\$1978).

First Church once again partnered with Oberlin Community Services to encourage the congregation to generously provide gifts for children for Christmas through the Holiday Helping Hands program. The church also provided 16 families with \$35 Holiday Hands gift cards, which are usable at many businesses in Oberlin. Also, this year, church members are bringing large-size diapers, shelf-safe food, and egg cartons to church to donate to OCS.

Twice this year, Outreach and Service Committee members worked with the Facilities Committee on the church property, to weed and remove invasive plants from our gardens.

We attended the new Justice and Peace Makers Task Force forum at St Andrews Episcopal Church in Elyria. Its purpose is to learn what different organizations and faith communities in Lorain County are doing and how we can support each other as partners or potential partners.

On December 14, we helped with sponsoring the Ecumenical Carol-Sing. The 17 people who went caroling, plus a few others, came to the reception that was held at our church afterward.

Our collection for Super Bowl Sunday raised \$933 for Oberlin Community Services and Oberlin Weekday Community Meals.

This Lenten Season, church members were encouraged to donate twin-sized sheets and pillowcases, blankets, and pillows to Good Knights of Lorain County. We collected 37 sheet sets, 3 sets of pillowcases, 4 mattress covers, 13 blankets/comforters, and 15 pillows. First Church, we're proud of you!

We are collaborating with other church members to update the Anti-Racism resource list that is on the Church's website.

We will continue to work on updating our Outreach and Service bulletin board down by Fellowship Hall. Throughout the year, we promoted various volunteer and donation opportunities to the congregation and wider community. Also, keep your eye on First Things First (on-line) for notifications of volunteer and donation opportunities.

Even though the Service and Outreach Committee did the promoting, the members of our congregation are the ones who put time and effort into these worthy causes. For that, we thank you!

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Burke

Stewardship Committee Report 2026

Members of the Stewardship Committee for 2025-2026 include: Ralph Thompson, Chairperson, Bob Longworth, Secretary, Barbara Blodgett, Kristin Peterson, Bill Long, Dana Parsons and David Kelley (EC Liaison).

We are very pleased to report and celebrate that 82* pledging units amassed tithes totaling \$341,641.00* for this pledging season.

Our Stewardship theme for this year was, "Here I am Lord". "I will be your light." This theme drew scriptures from the Old and New Testaments. The two scriptures called us to offer ourselves as willing and enthusiastic servants of our Lord, seeking to be God's redeeming light in a world too often obscured by the darkness of human sinfulness.

The Committee utilized some new approaches in calling the congregation to be generous givers. We used personal stories, shared orally during worship and in writing through First Things First. These stories gave true life examples of our responding to God by being the "light" of God to others.

These stories were repeated as part of our worship experience. Then, on Consecration Sunday, the congregation participated in acting out our theme as individuals came forward.... received a blessing.... and recommitted ourselves to be God's light in the world. We ended worship by "candlelight" to symbolize our ongoing commitment to ministry through First Church.

The Stewardship Committee says, "farewell", to Kristin Peterson and Bob Longworth, and thanks them for their faithful service. We look forward, with anticipation, to new members being added to our group of veterans.

Ralph Thompson, Chair of Stewardship

*Updated as of 03/02/2026

Year	Amount Pledged	# of Pledges	# of New Pledges	# of Increased Pledges	# of Same as Previous Year Pledges	# of Decreased Pledges
2026	\$341,641*	82*	11	35*	32	4
2025	\$317,686	84	14	33	30	7
2024	\$291,524	86	9	31	40	6
2023	\$316,429	102	11	41	38	12
2022	\$312,701	93	10	39	23	21
2021	\$272,441	95	17	24	41	13
2020	\$279,776	91	8	36	39	8
2019	\$303,671	100	14	53	25	8
2018	\$294,122	100	14	53	25	8

Witness & Membership Annual Report – April 2026

Committee Members: Pastor David Hill, Chair, Linda Gwinn, Barbara Brecht, Nancy Garver, Jan Heron, Nancy MacRae, and Linda Gates, Executive Council Liaison

This committee meets on the first Wednesday of the month.

- David Hill shares pastoral concerns with our committee at each meeting, so that we're in touch with the various needs of our congregation. We also learn of upcoming Adult Ed sessions and other programs. The time he spends at our meetings is greatly appreciated.
- We were delighted to hold an Inquirer's Gathering followed by a Reception of New Members in October of 2025. Currently, we are gearing up for the same very soon with an Inquirer's Gathering on April 19th and the Reception of New Member's on April 26th. This is an exciting time, and preparations are underway.
- Witness and Membership is responsible for staffing the Welcome Table on Sundays. Various handouts are made available, including Prayer Squares, church information, bookmarks, etc. There is also a sign-in book that people who are new (or newer) to the church may use to share their contact information. This information is shared with the office and our committee so that, for example, we may follow up with a phone call and mailing a welcome card. In conjunction with this, the name tag table also receives attention and refreshing as needed.
- Devotional booklets were ordered from Pilgrim Press for both the Advent season and Lent. Copies were available at the Welcome Table or, if preferred, a pdf could be purchased through their website. Copies of each devotional were taken by a committee member to the

care center.

- We participated in our Spring Festival previously with a garden theme (Sowing Seeds of Love). This year we intend to have a Welcome Table near the entrance, which will include some church related handouts and a few fun raffle items.
- Our EC Liaison, Linda Gates, diligently shared highlights from the most recent council meetings, which we always found quite helpful.
- Currently we are discussing some goals and how they might be implemented.
 - Interior church signage/maps to help people navigate the building, especially important when they are new or visiting.
 - Hosting a gathering which focuses on getting to know each other, sharing spiritual journeys, and stories.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Gwinn, chair

WORSHIP COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

Worship Committee: David Hill (Pastor), Thomas Bandy (Organist and Director of Music), Linda Gates (Executive Council), Alana Kelley (Secretary), Frankie Long, Jeanne McKibben, Scott Reed, Tom Riis, Peter Thomas (Chair), Tina Zwegat.

Sadly, we must report that our friend and faithful member of the Worship Committee, Jeanne McKibben, passed away on the second day of March, 2026. She is dearly missed.

The committee expresses its gratitude to all those who contribute to the worship experience, including: to Prue Richards for taking care of the chancel and meeting house arrangements, maintaining the choir library, keeping the meeting house beautiful and vibrant especially for Advent, Christmas, and Easter, and for creating padded covers to protect the altar table and lectern; to Becky Thompson and Scott Reed for organizing the liturgists and Jody Kerchner for mentoring them and to all who served as liturgist; to Karla Sanderson for overseeing communion arrangements and to everyone taking turns baking the bread for communion and serving; to Anne Sprague for organizing the ushers and to everyone who served as an usher; to Tom Bandy for inspiring and uplifting us with wonderful music every Sunday, to everyone in the choir, and to all who provided special music throughout the year; to Marian Thomas for working with Pastor Hill to create a service honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; to the readers who participated in the Palm-Passion Sunday dramatic gospel reading; to the youth and the Christian Education committee who put together the Christmas pageant; to Andrew Garver, Paul Drummond, and our youth volunteers Hiro, Thora, and Patrick who keep the sound running every Sunday. And special thanks to our wonderful guest preachers Rollin Conway, Brian Burke, and Alana Kelley, and to the sabbatical team who coordinated their work during David Hill's sabbatical over the summer of 2025, and to Frankie Long for the summer children's moments.

In addition to supporting regular workshop activities the committee also worked closely with Pastor Hill and Music Director Bandy within and between our monthly meetings to prepare themes and special services for the seasons of the liturgical year, including World Communion Sunday, Totenfest, Advent, Lent, Holy Week, and Music Sunday. The committee designed new prayer request pads that can also serve as announcement forms; they have been placed in pews for congregants to use during the worship service. Pastor Hill reports a large increase in the number of prayers being requested using the new forms. The committee

also organized a special worship service in recognition of National Coming Out Day. This service on Sunday, October 12, 2025, was conceived to reinforce our Open and Affirming (O&A) covenant to the congregation and the community. Since Oberlin students are not present in June when the PRIDE events are held, this event highlights our O&A message at a time when students are in the community and may be seeking the affirmation extended at First Church. The service included a Special Call to Worship; Preaching; Music; and Prayers that were designed to celebrate the unconditional love of Christ for every person, PERIOD. There were several very positive comments received immediately after the service and weeks later, as well. People have asked for this service to become an annual event.

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Thomas (Chairperson)
April 16, 2026

¹ Thanks also to Barbara Reed, who attended meetings in 2025-26 as a non-voting member.

PASTOR'S REPORT 2025-2026

*... take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

Romans 12:17-18 (NRSV)

For the first eleven chapters of the Letter to the Romans, Paul presents theological arguments before pivoting in chapter 12 to practical application. What follows is a series of statements about what a life of faith looks like. While we may think about the Christian life as something one does, Paul urges us to focus on who we are. It's all about growing into and becoming the graced people God has called us to be. The same can be said of the church. While there are things the church is called to do, its most important calling is to be: to be a visible and tangible sign of the world God is calling into being.

We are living in an anxious, cruel, and violent time where social, political, and economic forces are having a dehumanizing effect on all of us. Each morning, we wake up to news of one injustice after another. Politicians, political parties, and social media, reinforce a narrative that we are at war with each other. In this "us vs. them" existence, our subconscious works overtime to "sus out" the folks we encounter as either friend or foe. Once this determination is made, all sorts of assumptions arise before we ever get to truly know someone. The possibility of constructive dialogue vanishes as we prepare our defenses for battle. Is this what it means to live as those created in the image of God?

Amid such divisions, the church can bear witness to a kinder, healthier, more fully human way of being in the world. Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*, offers an alternative translation for "take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" and suggests rather, "discover beauty in everyone."

Discovery begins with curiosity and the ability to allow others enough space to surprise us with grace. The Episcopal resource, *From One, Many: Conversations Across Difference* offers some excellent avenues for engaging others in ways that transcend partisanship and wedge issues. I introduced these questions in a couple of sermons a while back. During my sabbatical this past summer, I made a point of attending conservative evangelical churches in Lorain County and

having conversations with the pastors of these churches. I used the From One, Many questions and found that they consistently led to rich conversations and the discovery of much common ground.

What do you love? (What do you value? What will you struggle to protect?),

What have you lost? (What keeps you up at night? What has been lost in your community? What do you miss?),

Where does it hurt? (Where have you been wounded by life? What makes you angry? How or where do you feel that pain and anger?),

What do you dream? (What do you hope for the future – for yourself, your family, your community, and your nation?)

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi includes the line, “O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek ... to be understood as to understand ...” My sabbatical experience reinforced for me that most people have no interest in hating one another. All of us, however, have a longing to be heard and understood. Divisive forces in our nation insist that we have nothing to learn from one another and our only recourse is to dominate and win the battle over our fellow citizens. God’s realm invites us to rediscover a world that values diversity over conformity, unity over division, understanding over assumptions: to discover beauty in everyone and in every living thing.

The First Church Vision Statement notes that the church is to be, “a central gathering place that is dedicated to healing brokenness in our relationship with God, with each other and the Earth.” A first step in healing is finding out where it hurts. There will always be those who capitalize on the woundedness of others for personal gain. As disciples of Jesus, let us be willing to step out of our comfort zones and across perceived divisions to initiate conversations that are healing rather than hurtful.

One parishioner recently commented to me, “God gifted us with this beautiful facility. It is up to us to use it.” Every time folks gather within First Church there are opportunities for listening, learning, and understanding: occasions for strangers to become friends. This ministry, however, extends beyond the walls of the building. Whether gathered within the church or out in the community, may it be a hallmark of our congregation to approach every encounter with an openness of heart and mind. In discovering beauty in others may we provide an alternative to the ugly rhetoric swirling around us and a pathway to healing, reconciliation, and peace.

Grace and Peace,
David

Community, College and Wider Church Involvement:

Living Water Association: Vice Moderator, Association Council; Member, Committee on Ministry; Chair, Oversight Working Group; Participant, Community of Practice.

Heartland Conference: Pro-Racial Equity Network; Fitness Review Response Team; Design Team (Living Water Association representative for possible conference/region restructure)

Lorain County: Race Forward Planning Committee, Lorain County Racial Equity Center

Oberlin Community: Member, Oberlin Community Services Board and Governance working group; Community Connections (college/community relations); Kendal Faith Leader breakfasts (quarterly); planning committee, Theodicy Jazz Collective Oberlin tour; planning committee, Empty Mugs event.