Vision Plan 2026



First Presbyterian Church Libertyville

First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville

Autumn, 2026

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our Vision Plan 2026 is launching a powerful new spiritual chapter in our Christian life together and for our community. It is the fruit of several months of intentional spiritual discernment as our congregation sought God's wisdom to strengthen our ministry. I invite you to read this document prayerfully and imagine the ways your life can join in the joy of opportunity before us.

The plan is structured to guide our reflection and our ministry. It examines our context, the opportunities before us, and where we believe God is calling us. Beyond all of that, it points toward how we can step forward with confidence into the God-sized dreams the congregation has identified.

The plan was developed by a Leadership Team of 14 diverse members of the congregation. We cannot thank them enough for the time, effort, prayer, and care they devoted to this work. Along the way, the team benefited from the insight of the Rev. Ellen Baxter, a Presbyterian minister who has equipped congregations such as ours to discern and prepare for important seasons in their life together. The Leadership Team researched, prepared, gathered the congregation in conversation, and prayerfully considered the voices, hopes, and dreams shared throughout the process.

Our Session carefully reviewed and approved the Vision Plan. Now it belongs to all of us—Session, staff, and every member—as a compass to shape our shared ministry over the next three to five years. I invite each of you to join this adventure: to pray, to participate, and to open your imagination to all God can accomplish through our lives together.

God is so good. God has been good to us in the past, and we trust God to guide our path into the future. Thank you for your prayerful discernment and your partnership in ministry.

In faith,

Brian R. Paulson, D.Min.
Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville

September 24, 2026

Dear Friends,

We would like to express our deep gratitude to every one who entrusted us with the privilege of serving on the Vision Leadership Team. Fourteen members were called to discern the path First Pres will follow over the next three to five years, and it has truly been an honor to share this work together.

When we first gathered with Ellen Baxter from PneuMatrix, we were asked to develop a Vision Plan – yet none of us knew exactly where to begin. What unfolded was remarkable. We watched this team listen, brainstorm, pray, and gradually shape a thoughtful and Spirit-led plan for the future of First Pres.

We hosted three Congregational Gathering Sessions to hear directly from you – why you came to First Pres, why you stayed, and your hope for the future of our Church. Hearing your stories, your faith journeys, and your dreams was both humbling and inspiring. Your voices became the foundation of this Vision Plan.

As we reviewed all the input and conducted additional research, three clear themes emerged: Christ Centered Worship, Lifelong Spiritual Growth, and Community & Shared Experiences. Along side these three themes, two core values stood out consistently – **relationships and celebration.** These are the heartbeat of First Pres.

This Vision Plan could not have been created without every step of this journey – your participation, your honesty, your prayers, and your hope for what God is doing in this place. This plan now serves as a compass to guide First Pres into the future, helping us to live out our values and remain centered on the themes that define who we are and who we aspire to be.

Thank you for the honor of serving as co-chairmen of the Vision Leadership Team. It has been a blessing to walk alongside you in this meaningful work.

Yours in Christ,

Martin Frey & Susie Lawson

Leadership Team Co-Chairs

First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville

Vision Plan 2026

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I. Introduction

First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville (First Pres) has long sought to be a community where people encounter God's transformative love through worship, discipleship, service, and authentic relationships. Throughout our 157-year history, each generation has been called to discern how Christ is inviting His church to live out its mission in changing circumstances. It is now our time to discern and respond. This Vision Plan is part of that ongoing work of discernment, providing a shared sense of direction as we seek to respond faithfully to God's call in this particular season of our life together.

Over the course of 2026, the Vision Planning Leadership Team listened to the congregation, reflected on our history, examined the community and spiritual landscape around us, and engaged in prayerful discernment about the future of First Pres. As we listened and observed, **three** themes surfaced. Together, they form the framework for this Vision Plan and describe what both we and the congregation believe God is calling First Pres to emphasize in the years ahead:

1. **Christ-Centered Worship:** Worship is the heart of our congregational life. It is where we encounter the living God, are formed as disciples, and are sent into the world to love and serve our neighbors.
2. **Lifelong Spiritual Formation:** Faith is a lifelong journey. We seek to create pathways that help people of every age and stage deepen their relationship with Christ, connect faith to everyday life, and grow as disciples.

3. **Community and Shared Experiences:** God forms us not only as individuals, but as a people. Through relationships, service, hospitality, fellowship, and celebration, we seek to cultivate a community where people experience belonging, purpose, and the love of Christ.

As we listened, **two key values** repeatedly surfaced: relationships and celebration. Relationships are central to Christian discipleship and community, and celebration is a faithful response to God's grace, a joyful expression of gratitude, belonging, hope, and shared life together. These values shaped how we have worshiped, grown, served, and engaged with one another and the wider community in the past, and are even more critical as we move forward into where God is leading us.

This Vision Plan is rooted in and guided by our mission statement:

"We joyfully embrace the transformative love of Christ, fostering connections that transcend barriers. We are a community of hope and discipleship that strives to celebrate and empower every person to flourish in the light of God's love."

Approved by Session in April 2024, this mission statement reflects our identity as a Matthew 25 congregation and our commitment to build congregational vitality, dismantle structural racism, and work toward the eradication of systemic poverty. It also reflects lessons learned through the pandemic, which renewed our appreciation for worship, relationships, community, service, and hope.

In this new season, the mission statement serves as a touchstone for an expanded identity and direction. It challenges us to consider whether our ministries, programs, relationships, and decisions are aligned with the life to which God is calling us now.

This Vision Plan does not *replace* our mission; it seeks to help us live more fully into it. We offer this plan as a compass that helps us recognize where God is already at work among us and points us toward the future to which we are being called.

The pages that follow explore our present context, how we listened to the congregation, what we heard and discerned, and the priorities we believe God is inviting us to pursue together.

II. Understanding Our Community and Context

Listening Beyond Our Walls

As part of the Vision Planning process, the Leadership Team sought to better understand the community in which First Pres is called to minister. In addition to listening to our congregation, we reviewed demographic, social, and religious data provided through MissionInsite, a research platform used by churches and nonprofit organizations throughout the country. Because First Pres draws members from well beyond Libertyville itself, the data reflects communities located within approximately a 20-mile drive of the church, including Waukegan, Antioch, Grayslake, Mundelein, Wauconda, Lake Zurich, Buffalo Grove, Deerfield, Highland Park, Lake Forest, and Lake Bluff.

Statistics alone cannot fully describe the people who live around us, but they can illuminate important trends, needs, opportunities, and realities that shape our ministry context. The information below reflects the most significant findings from that research. More detailed data and supporting tables can be found in the appendices.

A Community in Transition

Our First Pres Community Snapshot

- Population growth has remained relatively stable over the past fifteen years.
- The median age of the community continues to rise, from 37.6 in 2010 to 42.27 in 2025.
- Educational attainment is significantly above state averages.
- Household income remains strong and is projected to increase.
- Family structures are becoming increasingly diverse.
- Single-parent households are growing faster than married-couple households.

One of the most significant demographic trends cited is the aging of the population, as many adults opt to live in the area after children have left home and well into retirement. There has been a modest decline in the proportion of younger children relative to older adults. This is not unique to Libertyville or Lake County but reflects broader shifts occurring in many suburban communities as birth rates decline.

The data also points to better educated and economically healthy communities. Nearly 50% of adults hold bachelor's and/or advanced degrees and household income levels are projected to continue growing over the coming decade.

Family life, however, is becoming more diverse. While traditional family structures remain common, single-parent households are growing at a faster rate than married-couple households. This suggests a community experiencing a broader range of family experiences, responsibilities, and support needs than may have existed in previous generations.

For churches, demographic changes are neither good nor bad; they simply shape the context in which ministry occurs. Understanding these trends helps us better recognize who our neighbors are and how God is calling First Pres to continue to serve them faithfully.

A Changing Spiritual Landscape

While demographics help us understand who our neighbors are, religious data provides insight into what they believe, what they value, and how they engage with faith communities.

The encouraging news is that spiritual interest remains high. Many people in our surrounding community continue to express openness toward faith and a desire to explore spiritual questions. At the same time, participation in organized religion no longer follows patterns that previous generations may have assumed.

Spiritual Landscape Snapshot

- Most residents remain open to learning more about God and Jesus.
- Christian affiliation remains the dominant religious identity in the area.
- Fewer than half of residents actively participate in a religious community.
- Spiritual curiosity remains higher than religious participation.
- Relationships, hospitality, meaningful worship, and service opportunities rank among the most desired characteristics of faith communities.

The data suggests that many people continue to value faith, but fewer see regular church participation as a necessary part of their spiritual journey. While a majority still identify with some form of Christian tradition, active engagement in congregational life is much lower.

Increasing numbers of people describe themselves as unaffiliated, agnostic, or spiritually independent.

Perhaps most revealing are the reasons people give for distancing themselves from religious communities. Among individuals who are not actively involved in a congregation, many cite concerns about judgmental attitudes, distrust of organized religion, disappointment with religious leadership, or a failure to find meaningful spiritual connection. Others simply report that participation no longer feels relevant to their daily lives.

The data paints a picture of a community that remains spiritually interested, but increasingly selective about where it places its trust, time, and commitment.

Why This Matters for First Pres

Taken together, the demographic and religious data presents both opportunities and challenges for churches like First Pres.

Our community remains highly educated, financially stable, and spiritually interested. Many people continue to express openness to learning about God, Jesus, and matters of faith. Yet participation in religious communities no longer follows patterns that could once be taken for granted. More people are approaching faith as seekers, explorers, or spiritual consumers rather than lifelong members of a single congregation.

The data also suggests that people continue to long for what churches have historically provided: meaningful relationships, opportunities to serve, support during life's challenges, thoughtful engagement with faith, tradition, and communities that foster belonging. The strongest preferences identified in the MissionInsite data are not centered on programs or facilities, but on authentic relationships, quality worship, personal connections, and opportunities to make a difference in the world.

For First Pres, these findings reinforce the importance of remaining the congregation we have always been: deeply relational, spiritually authentic, intergenerational, and engaged with the wider community. They also highlight the importance of creating pathways where newcomers, young families, seekers, long-time members, and those seeking refuge alike can find belonging, purpose, and spiritual growth.

The vision recommendations that follow should be understood in light of these realities. The opportunities before us emerge not only from our own hopes and dreams, but also from the needs, expectations, and spiritual longings of the community we are called to serve.

III. A Faithful Legacy and Present Opportunity

Where We Have Been

For more than 150 years, First Pres has sought to follow Christ while adapting to the changing needs of its community. Since its founding in 1869, generations of members have faithfully responded to new opportunities, challenges, and calls to ministry while remaining grounded in worship, discipleship, fellowship, and service.

The history of First Pres is marked by resilience and vision. The congregation rebuilt after the destruction of the church building by fire in 1927. During seasons of rapid community growth, the congregation expanded ministries and facilities, investing heavily in Christian Education, music programs, children and youth programs, and congregational life. Through changing demographics, shifting cultural expectations, and multiple generations of leadership, the congregation continued to adapt while remaining rooted in its faith and mission.

Throughout that history, several themes emerge again and again.

- **A Commitment to Worship:** From its earliest years through the construction of multiple sanctuaries and the continued investment in music and worship leadership, First Pres has consistently understood worship as the center of congregational life.
- **Investment in Children and Future Generations:** Whether through Sunday School, Christian education facilities, youth programming, or leadership development, First Pres has repeatedly invested in helping younger generations grow in faith.
- **Strong Community Connections:** The church has long served as a gathering place within Libertyville. Its commitment to community partnerships and civic engagement can be traced throughout its history, including support for organizations such as Scouting America Troop 71 and numerous community activities hosted on church property.
- **A Willingness to Grow and Adapt:** Major building projects, program expansions, and ministry innovations reflect a congregation that has consistently responded to changing circumstances rather than remaining fixed in past successes. This is rooted in courage, humility and curiosity to listen to where God is calling us.

What Our History Reveals

Understanding our history is important because it reminds us that the Vision Plan is not an effort to become a different church. Rather, it is an effort to build upon the strengths and values that have shaped First Pres throughout its history.

The congregation we are today did not emerge by accident. It was shaped by generations of faithful people who valued worship, nurturing relationships, Christian Education, service, music,

and community engagement. Those commitments continue to be visible in our congregation today.

IV. Understanding the Vision Planning Process

Why We Undertook This Journey

Inheriting this rich tradition, our congregation has embarked on a process to remain relevant to our community and our foundation. Every five years at First Pres, we ask a simple but important question: **Who is God calling First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville to be at this time?**

We have a rich history of faithful worship, meaningful relationships, service to the wider community, and a commitment to following Jesus Christ. That history is a gift, but it is not a place to remain. As the world around us changes and as our own congregation continues to change, we have a responsibility to look prayerfully and honestly at where we are, what God is already doing among us, and how we are being called to respond. Five years ago, we were emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic disruptions it brought to worship, fellowship, service, and congregational life. Today, we are in a different situation, but the same question remains before us: how do we continue becoming a vibrant, welcoming congregation ready to meet the needs of a world seeking Christian fellowship, hope, and community?

As we approached this next chapter of our congregation's life together, Session commissioned a Vision Planning Leadership Team to help guide a period of prayerful discernment and direction for what comes next. The purpose of this process was not to create a new mission statement, reinvent the church, or simply produce another strategic planning document; rather it was an opportunity to listen to God, to each other, and to the community around us, so that we might better understand how we are being called to live out our mission in this time and place.

Throughout this process, we sought to answer:

- **What has shaped us and brought us to this point?**
- **What is God already doing among us?**
- **What opportunities and challenges are emerging around us?**
- **What future is God inviting us to embrace?**

The resulting Vision Plan is not intended to predict the future. Instead, it serves as a compass that can help guide decisions, priorities, and opportunities in the years ahead.

How We Listened

The Vision Planning process began with the formation of a fourteen-member Leadership Team in early 2026, comprised of a representative cross-section of our congregation. The team worked in partnership with facilitator Ellen Baxter from PneuMatrix and used an Appreciative Inquiry model of discernment. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on identifying strengths, listening for possibility, and building upon what is already healthy and life-giving within an organization.

Over the course of the process, the team met regularly, reviewed demographic and community data, and coordinated three congregation-wide listening sessions designed to explore our past, present, and future. These gatherings invited broad participation from the congregation and created opportunities for members to share stories, observations, concerns, hopes, and dreams. The process was intentionally designed to be collaborative. Rather than relying solely on surveys or leadership opinions, members gathered around tables, listened deeply to one another, and contributed hundreds of comments, observations, and ideas that informed the work of the Leadership Team.

What We Heard

Looking Back: What Brought Us Here?

The first congregational conversation focused on our shared history and identity. Members reflected on questions such as:

- What brought you to First Presbyterian Church?
- When did First Pres become church for you?
- Why have you remained here?

The responses revealed remarkable consistency. People most often described being drawn to First Pres because of its music ministry, children's and youth programs, pastors and staff, welcoming congregation, educational opportunities, and thoughtful worship experiences. Many spoke about finding a church family that was intellectually engaging, spiritually nourishing, and aligned with their values. Others highlighted our Presbyterian heritage, commitment to social justice, and opportunities for service.

During this conversation, something deeper emerged beyond just our programs and activities. Members repeatedly described:

- A sense of belonging
- Meaningful relationships

- A welcoming and accepting environment
- A willingness to wrestle honestly with difficult issues
- A church committed to learning, growing, and serving together.
- A Matthew 25 congregation striving to love God and our neighbors through our words and actions.

One consistent theme throughout this session tied back to the relationships our members have with each other, with pastors and staff, to our denomination, and to our neighbors. While music, programs, worship, theology, or a sincere welcome may have initially attracted people to First Pres, they stayed because this church became their family through committed relationships, shared belonging, and a sense of family.

Looking Around: Where Are We Now?

Our second congregational conversation focused on understanding the church in its current reality.

Participants celebrated many aspects of congregational life that continue to inspire pride and gratitude. Members identified strong worship, excellent music programs, children's ministry, pastoral leadership, Christian education opportunities, Matthew 25 engagement, social justice ministries, community outreach, volunteerism, online worship, and care for one another as significant strengths. Many expressed pride that First Pres is viewed as welcoming, inclusive, flexible, and willing to adapt as circumstances change. The congregation also demonstrated a willingness to engage honestly with challenges.

We also named realities that require honest attention as we consider both our current life and our future. Members voiced concerns about church participation and declining membership trends that mirror local and national patterns.

Many also expressed concern about staffing and pastoral needs, financial capacity, and the volunteer energy and numbers required to sustain the excellent programs, activities, and care we value. We heard concerns about the need to do more to engage younger generations and families to become part of our congregational family, with a strong desire to see more attention and resources directed to youth and family ministries. Questions also arose about how we are using our facilities, as well as opportunities we may have with recent land-sale proceeds. We also heard that while we have connections across our ministries, there is a strong desire to deepen our relationships with one another and build an even stronger sense of family within our congregation. Participants recognized tensions that are common throughout many

churches today: how to maintain traditions while remaining responsive to changing realities and the challenges of today; how to deepen belonging in a large congregation; and how to balance internal ministry with outward-facing mission.

At the same time, members expressed unwavering hope. They imagined opportunities to build stronger community connections, expand ministry partnerships, enhance visibility in the broader community, strengthen ministry with children and young families, and create new ways for people to connect with one another and grow spiritually.

Looking Forward: What Are Our God-Sized Dreams?

The third congregational conversation challenged participants to imagine the future. Using a "Rip Van Winkle" exercise, members were asked to imagine waking up twenty years from now and describing the story they hoped God would be telling through the First Presbyterian Church. The dreams that emerged were ambitious, hopeful, and remarkably consistent.

Members envisioned a church that is increasingly:

Intergenerational: Participants repeatedly described a congregation where children, youth, adults, and older members are deeply connected. They imagined stronger relationships, more shared experiences across generations, and a church in which every child is known, supported, and nurtured by the entire congregation.

Growing and Vibrant: Members expressed a desire for a growing congregation marked by energy, joy, diversity, and active participation. They envisioned a church that welcomes people from many backgrounds and life experiences while remaining rooted in faith and community.

A Community of Lifelong Discipleship: A recurring theme was spiritual growth. Participants hoped First Pres would become known as a place where people are equipped to deepen their faith, connect faith with daily life, and continue growing as disciples throughout every stage of life.

Engaged Beyond Our Walls: Many dreams centered on expanding the church's role in the wider community and beyond. Participants imagined First Pres serving as a visible leader in Libertyville and Lake County through partnerships, advocacy, and service. They repeatedly spoke about moving beyond the walls of the church building and becoming known as a source of hope, compassion, justice, and connection.

A Community Hub: Another recurring theme was the desire to see the church's campus serving the community throughout the week. Members imagined facilities bustling with activity,

hosting programs, partnerships, arts events, community groups, educational opportunities, childcare, fellowship opportunities, and outreach efforts.

Rooted in Relationships: Above all, participants hoped First Pres would continue to be known as a place where relationships flourish. They envisioned a congregation where fellowship, spiritual growth, mutual support, and shared purpose strengthen both individuals and the community as a whole.

How to Read the Rest of This Plan

The pages that follow are not a collection of independent ideas developed by the Leadership Team. They are the result of months of prayer, listening, conversation, analysis, reflection, and discernment. The themes and priorities that appear throughout this Vision Plan emerged because they were repeatedly voiced by the congregation itself. As the Leadership Team reviewed the stories of our past, observations about our present, and dreams for our future, several themes consistently surfaced:

- Christ-centered worship
- Lifelong spiritual formation
- Intergenerational relationships
- Community and belonging
- Warm welcome and inclusion
- Service beyond our walls
- Celebration, joy, and shared experience

These themes became the foundation for the vision that follows. The recommendations and initiatives described in later sections should not be understood as fixed programs or rigid directives. Rather, they are an invitation for the First Presbyterian Church to continue discerning together how God is calling us to live more fully into the congregation we believe we are becoming.

This Vision Plan is best understood not as a destination, but as a compass. It reminds us where we have come from, helps us recognize where God is already at work, and points us toward the future we are called to pursue together.

V. The Church God Is Calling Us To Be At This Time

The themes that emerged throughout this visioning process were remarkable not only for their consistency, but also for their connection to the congregation's history, strengths, and aspirations. Members repeatedly described a church rooted in meaningful worship, deep relationships, lifelong spiritual growth, service beyond its walls, and a commitment to welcoming people from all walks of life. The hopes expressed in our congregation conversations were not calls to become something entirely new. Rather, they were invitations to build upon the gifts that have shaped First Pres for generations while responding faithfully to the opportunities and challenges of this moment.

What emerged from those conversations was a shared vision: a church where worship forms disciples, spirituality deepens faith, and community becomes a powerful witness to Christ's love in the world. These three areas are deeply interconnected. Together they describe the congregation we believe God is calling us to become.

A. Christ-Centered Worship

The Vision: Worship will form people over a lifetime to love God and their neighbor.

Worship is the heart of our congregational life. It is where we gather as the body of Christ, encounter God's presence through Word and Sacrament, and are sent into the world equipped to live out our faith. Everything else in the life of this congregation - discipleship, service, justice, fellowship, celebration, and mission - flows from and returns to worship.

Throughout the visioning process, members consistently named worship as one of First Pres' greatest strengths. They spoke with gratitude about the power of music, the intellectual depth of preaching, the beauty of liturgy, and the ways worship has sustained them through life's joys and challenges. For many, worship was one of the primary reasons they first came to First Pres and one of the primary reasons they remain today.

At the same time, members expressed a desire for worship that continues to form future generations. They envisioned greater participation by children and youth, creative uses of technology to reach beyond our walls, and worship experiences that help people connect faith with everyday life.

Our vision is therefore not centered on a particular worship style. It is centered on the purpose of worship: forming disciples who love God and love their neighbors.

We envision worship that is:

- Grounded in Scripture, prayer, and the sacraments.

- Theologically rich and intellectually engaging.
- Accessible to seekers while remaining deeply rooted in our Reformed tradition.
- Enhanced by a thriving music ministry that continues to be one of the congregation's defining strengths.
- Participatory and intergenerational.
- Connected to everyday discipleship and service.
- Extended beyond our walls through thoughtful use of technology and digital engagement.

We believe that worship should continue to be a place where children, youth, adults, long-time members, seekers, and visitors discover that they belong to God and to one another.

Vision Commitments

To live into this vision, First Pres will:

- Continue investing in worship as the center of congregational life.
- Sustain excellence in music, preaching, liturgy, and sacramental life.
- Increase opportunities for children, youth, and adults of every generation to actively participate in worship leadership as readers, musicians, ushers, greeters, and liturgical leaders.
- Expand digital worship resources to engage homebound members, travelers, seekers, and those exploring faith online.
- Intentionally connect each worship series with opportunities for Bible Study, service, and spiritual practices throughout the week.
- Ensure worship remains meaningful across generations and stages of faith.

Five-Year Aspirational Outcomes

- Worship is widely recognized as one of First Pres's greatest strengths.
- All generations regularly participate in worship leadership.
- Music ministries continue to thrive and attract broad participation.
- Worship is experienced as spiritually transformative, intellectually engaging, and deeply welcoming.

- Online and digital ministries complement and extend the congregation's worship life.

B. Lifelong Spiritual Formation

The Vision: To be a community of lifelong discipleship where every person is invited to grow deeper in faith at every stage of life.

The congregation repeatedly expressed a desire for stronger pathways of spiritual growth. Members dreamed of a church where children, youth, adults, and families are continually nurtured in their faith through worship, education, mentoring, service, and relationships. They spoke about the importance of Christian education, Bible study, meaningful conversations, spiritual practices, and opportunities to wrestle honestly with life's most important questions.

The vision that emerged is one in which spirituality is not confined to Sunday mornings. Rather, faith becomes integrated into everyday life, shaping our relationships, our work, our choices, and our engagement with the world.

We envision a congregation where:

- Every person can identify a pathway for spiritual growth, led by a pastoral staff with a strong foundation in Christian Education.
- Children are nurtured and known by the entire congregation.
- Youth develop a faith capable of carrying them into adulthood.
- Adults continue growing spiritually throughout every stage of life.
- Questions, doubt, and curiosity are welcomed as part of the journey of faith.
- Intergenerational relationships create opportunities for learning, mentoring, and mutual support.
- Members are equipped to identify and use their gifts in service to God and others.

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of investing in children, youth, and adults. They envisioned stronger family ministry, expanded educational opportunities, mentoring relationships, and deeper intergenerational connections. They dreamed of a church where faith formation extends beyond programs and becomes woven into the fabric of congregational life.

Vision Commitments

To live into this vision, First Pres will:

- Develop a clear pathway for spiritual growth across all ages and stages of life.
- Strengthen Christian education for children, youth, and adults by expanding opportunities for Bible study, prayer, retreats, and spiritual practices.
- Invest intentionally in family ministry and faith formation.
- Regularly assess participation and spiritual formation opportunities to identify gaps and emerging needs.
- Develop mentoring relationships and intergenerational experiences that connect members across life stages.
- Foster a culture of learning, curiosity, and theological reflection.
- Strengthen ministry to adults and emerging professionals.
- Equip members to live out their faith through leadership, vocation, service, and community engagement.

Five-Year Aspirational Outcomes

- Every member understands opportunities for spiritual growth and discipleship.
- Children's, youth, and adult ministries are thriving and growing with appropriate staffing for success.
- Children and youth maintain strong participation and leadership within the church as they grow into young adulthood.
- Participation in Christian education and small groups has increased.
- Intergenerational mentoring relationships are common throughout the congregation.
- Members feel confident connecting faith to work, family, community engagement, and service.
- First Pres is recognized as a community of lifelong discipleship.
- Every child and youth is connected with caring adults beyond their own family.

C. Community and Shared Experiences

The Vision: To be a vibrant hub of Christian community where relationships flourish, people find belonging, and Christ's love is experienced beyond our walls.

Throughout the visioning process, no theme surfaced more consistently than community.

Members repeatedly described First Pres as a place where meaningful relationships are formed, where people feel accepted and supported, and where authentic community becomes a powerful expression of faith. They also expressed a strong desire to deepen those relationships, strengthen intergenerational connections, expand fellowship opportunities, and extend Christ's welcome more visibly into the wider community.

Our vision is rooted in the conviction that God forms us not merely as individuals but as a people. Through worship, fellowship, service, celebration, justice, and hospitality, we learn what it means to live together as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We envision a congregation that:

- Welcomes people from every stage of life and faith.
- Strengthens relationships across generations.
- Serves as a visible expression of Christ's love throughout Libertyville, Lake County, and the world.
- Continues to live out its Matthew 25 commitments through service, advocacy, and partnership.
- Uses its facilities, resources, and gifts to benefit the wider community.
- Creates opportunities for belonging through fellowship, service, learning, and celebration.
- Serves as a trusted community partner and gathering place.

Many members imagined a future in which the church building is active throughout the week, hosting community organizations, arts programs, service initiatives, youth activities, support groups, educational opportunities, and gatherings that help people experience connection and belonging. Others envisioned a church increasingly known throughout the community for compassion, justice, hospitality, and hope.

The congregation also affirmed the importance of celebration. Shared meals, fellowship events, arts programming, music, recreation, service projects, and community gatherings are not

peripheral activities. They are important ways that relationships are formed, faith is strengthened, and newcomers discover belonging.

We believe God is calling First Pres to become not only a congregation that serves its members, but a congregation that increasingly serves the broader community.

Vision Commitments

To live into this vision, First Pres will:

- Create intentional pathways that help first-time visitors become connected through worship, fellowship, service, and membership.
- Strengthen relationships and belonging throughout the congregation.
- Increase opportunities for fellowship, hospitality, and shared experiences.
- Continue expanding its Matthew 25 ministries and partnerships.
- Use church facilities more intentionally to serve community needs, including an assessment of what is needed to expand usage and potentially host a preschool.
- Develop stronger partnerships with schools, nonprofits, community organizations, and neighboring congregations.
- Create new opportunities for individuals and families seeking connection.
- Improve communication, storytelling, and outreach through multiple channels.
- Foster an environment where all people are welcomed with dignity, respect, and love.
- Expand opportunities for intergenerational connection and shared service, encouraging each member to participate annually in at least one ministry serving the broader community.

Five-Year Aspirational Outcomes

- First Pres is widely recognized as a welcoming and inclusive congregation.
- The church campus is actively used throughout the week by both church and community groups.
- Strong partnerships exist between First Pres and key organizations throughout Lake County.
- More young families and new members find pathways into congregational life.

- Intergenerational relationships have become a defining characteristic of the congregation.
- Members experience deeper belonging and stronger connections to one another.
- Visitors to our church consistently want to become active participants in congregational life.
- The church is increasingly known as a source of hope, service, community, and hospitality.

Living Into This Vision

These commitments are not intended to function as a detailed implementation plan or checklist. Rather, they describe the direction toward which we believe God is calling First Pres at this time. Future leaders, staff, Session members, Deacons, ministry teams, and congregation members will continue to discern the specific actions needed to bring this vision to life.

What matters most is that our ministries, programs, resources, relationships, and decisions increasingly reflect these shared aspirations: **worship that forms disciples, spirituality that deepens faith, and community that embodies Christ's love in the world.**

We believe that if we remain faithful to these priorities, First Pres will continue to be a place where people encounter God's transformative love, grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and join together in God's work of hope, justice, and reconciliation for generations to come.

VI. How We Will Stay With Our Vision

Living the Vision

A vision only matters if it continues to shape the life of a congregation long after the planning process has ended. During our conversations, many members reflected on previous planning efforts and expressed a desire for this Vision Plan to become a living guide rather than a report that is eventually placed on a shelf. The congregation wants this vision to remain visible, relevant, and connected to the everyday life of First Pres.

For that reason, this Vision Plan should be understood not as a finished product but as an ongoing process of prayer, discernment, action, learning, and adaptation. The purpose of the

plan is not to prescribe every future decision. Rather, it is intended to help the congregation make faithful decisions that align with the priorities we have identified together.

The vision themes described in this document will require continued attention, evaluation, and refinement as circumstances change and new opportunities emerge. The work of discerning God's call is never fully complete.

Shared Ownership

One of the clearest messages that emerged during our discussions was the importance of ownership and accountability. Members expressed a desire for someone to be responsible for keeping the vision visible and ensuring that progress continues over time. Implementation Teams to be established around the major themes identified in the Vision Plan. Each Implementation Team will report to Long Range Planning (LRP) to ensure accountability and oversight. LRP will have the responsibility to provide direction and request additional information from each Implementation Team. LRP will keep the plan in front of Session, Deacons, staff, and the congregation.

In the Presbyterian tradition, Ruling Elders are elected by the congregation to form the Session, providing spiritual leadership, governance, and discernment for the church. Ruling Elders are entrusted to help the congregation discern God's call and take the measure of its faithfulness to that call. This responsibility extends beyond governance and oversight. It includes regularly reflecting on whether our ministries, priorities, resources, and decisions remain aligned with the vision God has placed before us. While the entire congregation shares ownership of this vision, Session has a unique responsibility to help evaluate and guide our progress with wisdom, prayer, and discernment.

While Session retains ultimate responsibility for the ministry and direction of the church, successful implementation of this Vision Plan will require participation throughout the congregation.

We believe implementation should be characterized by:

- Clear ownership and accountability.
- Broad congregational participation.
- Regular communication and transparency.
- Periodic review and adjustment.
- Celebration of progress and learning.

This vision belongs to the entire congregation, not to a committee, a staff member, or Session alone.

Implementation Teams

To support implementation, we propose the creation of time-limited Vision Implementation Teams aligned with the three major focus areas:

- Christ-Centered Worship
- Lifelong Spiritual Formation
- Community and Shared Experiences

These teams should include members from diverse backgrounds, life stages, ministry areas, and perspectives, with continuity from Vision Team members where possible. To fill in gaps, LRP will work with the Congregational Nominating Committee to identify potential members. Their purpose would not be to replace existing committees or ministry teams, but to help translate vision priorities into practical recommendations, initiatives, and measurable outcomes. Teams will be charged by Session with clear responsibilities and governance.

Each Implementation Team will have a defined term of one (1) year and be reviewed by LRP, as defined in the following section, to determine whether the team's work should continue, be revised, or be retired. This approach allows broad congregational participation while encouraging collaboration across existing ministry boundaries while remaining responsive to changing needs and opportunities.

Regular Review and Communication

A vision remains alive only when it is reviewed regularly.

We recommend that Session, through LRP, provide oversight and coordination of the Implementation Teams, establish rhythms of review and reflection at least two to four times each year. These reviews are an important way that the Ruling Elders take the measure of the congregation's faithfulness to the vision, celebrate progress, and discern where adjustment may be needed. These reviews should focus on:

- Progress made toward vision priorities.
- New opportunities that have emerged.
- Initiatives that should be adjusted, expanded, or concluded.
- Resource needs and staffing implications.
- Stories of impact and transformation.

Regular communication with the congregation will also be essential. Members should be able to see how the vision is influencing ministry decisions and where progress is being made. Visible updates, annual reports, worship celebrations, and stories of transformed lives can help keep the vision present throughout congregational life.

Proposed Review and Communication Schedule

Year	Anticipated Outcome
Quarterly	Each team submits a short progress report on a standard one-page form (Goal | Progress | Obstacles | Help Needed | Wins to Celebrate). Celebrate one win each quarter with a fun award and have a church-wide announcement in worship and Parish Life.
Every 6 Months	Conduct a progress review with Session. Every active goal is formally assessed to Continue, Revise, or Retire as our built-in flexibility check, so the plan can evolve naturally.
Annually	A church-wide Vision Plan celebration with a shared meal. The full year progress is reported back to the congregation ("Here was the plan; here's what happened"), and visual progress markers in the building are updated.

A Living Document

This Vision Plan should not be treated as a fixed blueprint.

Instead, it should function as a compass that helps the congregation remain focused on the calling that emerged through this discernment process. Some priorities may be accomplished quickly. Others may take years to realize. New opportunities may emerge that are not currently visible.

- At every quarterly and 6-month review, each goal will be explicitly examined to ensure on-going relevance. No goals will remain if they are no longer applicable.
- Any significant change to goals will be approved by Session and then communicated to the congregation.

Measuring Faithfulness to Our Vision

The measure of success will not be whether every recommendation is completed exactly as imagined. Success will be measured by whether the congregation continues moving faithfully toward the vision God has placed before us. Each Implementation Team will develop and propose to LRP specific metrics most important to their theme and relevant initiatives.

Proposed Measurable Outcomes for the Vision Plan

Year	Anticipated Outcome
Year 1	Vision Plan Leadership Team formed; standard reporting form created; 4 quarterly reports and 2 six-month reviews completed; first annual celebration held.
Year 2	Full quarterly/6-month review sustained; visual progress display installed and updated in the building; two annual celebrations held; at least one goal formally revised or retired.
Year 3	Three full years of quarterly reports and six-month reviews completed; three annual celebrations held; a congregation survey shows most members can name at least one Vision Plan win.

Potential measures may include:

- Worship participation (in person and online)
- Participation in Christian education, small groups, and spiritual formation opportunities
- Engagement of children, youth, and young adults
- Volunteer participation and leadership development
- Number and depth of community partnerships
- Community use of church facilities
- First time visitor engagement and pathways into congregational life

VII. Stewarding Our Resources for the Vision

A Commitment to Faithful Stewardship

Every vision requires resources. Throughout the planning process, members consistently expressed a desire for First Pres to pursue meaningful ministry while stewarding its financial, physical, and human resources responsibly.

The congregation's vision is ambitious, but it is also grounded in the belief that faithful stewardship and faithful ministry must advance together.

At the time of this Vision Plan, the church's operating budget remains stable, with revenue slightly ahead of budget expectations and expenses slightly below budget. This provides a healthy foundation from which to consider future opportunities.

Financial Stewardship

Implementation of this Vision Plan will necessarily involve decisions about financial priorities.

Some initiatives may be accomplished through existing ministries, volunteers, and operating budgets. Others may require new investments, additional staffing, expanded partnerships, or strategic use of church resources.

Future funding decisions should be evaluated using a consistent question:

Does this investment help move First Pres toward the vision outlined in this document?

Session, working with the Business Affairs Committee and other leadership bodies, will continue to evaluate financial opportunities and priorities in light of the congregation's mission, strategic priorities, and overall financial health.

Stewarding Our Facilities

Throughout the congregation conversations, members frequently identified church facilities as one of First Pres's greatest assets and one of its greatest opportunities. Many participants envisioned expanded community use, stronger partnerships, and increased activity throughout the week.

The facilities entrusted to this congregation should be viewed not simply as buildings to maintain, but as ministry resources that can advance worship, discipleship, hospitality, service, and community engagement.

Future decisions regarding facility usage should be guided by the question:

How can our facilities best support God's work both within and beyond our congregation?

Staffing for the Future

A recurring theme throughout the listening process was the importance of staff leadership and concerns regarding capacity, volunteer burnout, and ministry sustainability. Members expressed appreciation for the dedication of pastors and staff while also acknowledging the challenge of meeting growing ministry expectations with limited resources.

As implementation unfolds, staffing decisions should be viewed through the lens of vision rather than organizational maintenance.

Future staffing conversations should focus on:

- Supporting vibrant worship and music ministries.
- Strengthening children, youth, and family ministries.
- Revitalizing Christian Education, expanding discipleship and spiritual formation opportunities.
- Equipping members for leadership and ministry.
- Supporting outreach, hospitality, and community engagement.

The goal is not simply to preserve existing structures, but to align staff time and responsibilities with the priorities identified through the visioning process.

Strategic Resources

In 2025, the sale of the Maple Avenue property generated resources that present unique opportunities for future ministry investment. The congregation has expressed a strong desire that these resources be used thoughtfully and strategically in ways that advance both the church's Matthew 25 commitments and the priorities identified in this Vision Plan.

We recommend viewing these resources not as a solution to routine operating challenges, but as a potential catalyst for transformational opportunities that may emerge through the implementation of the vision.

The specific use of these resources remains the responsibility of Session and the congregation. However, future decisions should consistently be evaluated against the mission, values, and priorities described throughout this document.

VIII. The Journey Ahead

This Vision Plan began with a simple question:

Who is God calling First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville to be at this time?

Over many months, members listened to one another, reflected on our history, studied our community, examined our present reality, and imagined God's preferred future for our congregation. Through those conversations, a clear picture emerged; not of a different church, but of a church becoming more fully who God has already called it to be.

We believe God is calling First Pres to be:

- A congregation shaped by Christ-centered worship.
- A community committed to lifelong spiritual formation.

- A church where relationships, belonging, and shared experiences reflect the love of Christ.
- A Matthew 25 congregation that serves, advocates, and partners for the good of the wider community.
- A place where people of every generation can flourish in faith.

This vision does not belong to the Vision Planning Team alone. It belongs to the entire congregation.

The future described in these pages will not be created through a single program, a committee structure, a staffing model, or a financial plan. It will emerge through the everyday faithfulness of people who worship together, learn together, serve together, celebrate together, and continue listening for God's call together.

With gratitude for those who came before us, confidence in God's presence among us, and hope for the future before us, we commit ourselves to the next chapter of First Pres's story.

We do not know all that the future holds. But we trust the One who calls us forward.