



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

WORSHIP AT NINE
JULY 26, 2026
NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

WELCOME TO FIRST CHURCH!

You are welcomed, affirmed, and loved here; our faith informs us that you are a child of a loving God. Your characteristics and gifts will enrich our congregation. In this community, you will be celebrated, embraced, and honored, no matter how you identify or how your identity may evolve. Wherever you are on your faith journey, we invite you to join us in our diverse yet united experience.

GATHERING

PRELUDE

RINGING OF THE BELL

*GATHERING SONG

Twin Oaks, Marty Haugen, 1994

"Let us build a house" v. 1

Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safe-ly live, a
place where saints and chil - dren tell how hearts learn to for - give. Built of
hopes and dreams and vi-sions, rock of faith and vault of grace; here the
love of Christ shall end di - vi - sions: all are wel - come;
all are wel - come; all are wel - come in this place.

*INVOCATION

Barbara Mason

Leader: Loving God,
we are Yours.

People: **We come as we are,
with our cares and concerns.
We long to touch You
and find healing in Your embrace.
Strengthen our faith and heal our brokenness,
that we may worship You with joy. Amen.**

During the sermon time, our young children are welcome to participate in "Sunday Stories."

CHILDREN'S HYMN

God is So Good, Traditional African

"God is so good"

Paul Makai, tr. Marilyn Foulkes, ca. 1970, rev.

1. God is so good, God is so good,
 2. God cares for me, God cares for me,
 3. God's all I need, God's all I need,

God is so good, God's so good to me.
 God cares for me, God's so good to me.
 God's all I need, God's so good to me.

LISTENING

THE FIRST READING

Romans 8:26-39

Barbara Mason

Leader: A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans, the eighth chapter.

The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness. For we don't know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit expresses our plea with groanings too deep for words. And God, who knows everything in our hearts, knows perfectly well what the Spirit is saying, because her intercessions for God's holy people are made according to the mind of God. We know that God makes everything work together for the good of those who love God and have been called according to God's purpose. They are the ones God chose long ago, predestined to share the image of the Only Begotten, in order that Christ might be the firstborn of many. Those God predestined have likewise been called; those God called have also been justified; and those God justified have, in turn, been glorified. What should be our response? Simply this: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Since God did not spare the Only Begotten, but gave Christ up for the sake of us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that God will freely give us everything. Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? Since God is the One who justifies, who has the power to condemn? Only Christ Jesus, who died—or rather, was raised—and sits at the right hand of God, and who now intercedes for us! What will separate us from the love of Christ? Trouble? Calamity? Persecution? Hunger? Nakedness? Danger? Violence? As scripture says, "For your sake, we're being killed all day long; we're looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered." Yet in all this we are more than conquerors because of God who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, neither heights nor depths—nor anything else in all creation—will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

The congregation joins in singing the entirety of the Psalm.

Each measure of the chant corresponds to one half-verse of the Psalm, with notes changing at the | symbol.



129. Your decrees are | wonderful;
therefore I obey them with all my | heart.
130. When your word goes forth it gives | light;
it gives understanding to the | simple.
131. I open my mouth and | pant;
I long for your com- | mandments.
132. Turn to me in | mercy,
as you always do to those who love your | Name.
133. Steady my footsteps in your | word;
let no iniquity have dominion | over me.
134. Rescue me from those who op- | press me,
and I will keep your com- | mandments.
135. Let your countenance shine upon your | servant
and teach me your | statutes.
136. My eyes shed streams of | tears,
because people do not keep your | law.

THE GOSPEL

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Rev. jess

Leader: A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew, the thirteenth chapter.

Jesus presented another parable to the crowds: “The kingdom of heaven is like the mustard seed which a farmer sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all—it becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come to perch in its branches.” Jesus offered them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a baker took and mixed in with three measures of flour until it was leavened all through.” “The kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure found in a field. The ones who discovered it hid it again, and, rejoicing at the discovery, went and sold all their possessions and bought that field. “Or again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant’s search for fine pearls. When one pearl of great value was found, the merchant went back and sold everything else and bought it. “Or again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collected all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishers hauled it ashore. Then, sitting down, they collected the good ones in a basket and threw away those that were of no use. This is how it will be at the end of time. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the just and throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth. “Have you understood all this?” “Yes,” they answered. To this Jesus replied, “Every religious scholar who has become a student of the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who can bring from the storeroom both the new and the old.”

Leader: The Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks be to God.

RESPONDING

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Rev. jess

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: **Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.**
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

*HYMN

Slane, Irish melody

"Be thou my vision"

Irish poem; trans. Mary E. Byrne, 1905; vers. Eleanor Hull, 1912, alt.

1 Be thou my vi - sion, O Lord of my heart;
 2 Be thou my wis - dom, and thou my true word;
 3 High King of hea - ven, when vic - tory is won,
 all else be nought to me, save that thou art—
 I ev - er with thee and thou with me, Lord;
 may I reach hea - ven's joys, bright hea - ven's Sun!
 thou my best thought, by day or by night,
 thou my great Fa - ther; thine own may I be;
 Heart of my heart, what - ev - er be - fall,
 wak - ing or sleep - ing, thy pres - ence my light.
 thou in me dwell - ing, and I one with thee.
 still be my vis - ion, O Ru - ler of all.

THE OFFERTORY

Rev. jess

To give online, please scan this QR code, or see additional instructions in Depart to Serve:



"If you have more than enough material possessions and see your neighbors in need yet close your hearts to them, how can the love of God be living in you?"—1 John 3:17

Out of gratitude to God and in keeping with our mission and values, every week our offering goes to support a vanguard humanitarian organization. Cash and designated gifts go to **Bikes for All People**, Bikes for All People, a service of the non-profit Community Development for All People. Bikes for All People provides low cost or free bicycles, parts, accessories, and repairs, and offers volunteer opportunities for people to learn about bicycle care and repair. The shop also accepts donated bikes that they refurbish and offer to low income community members. By connecting cyclists from differing cultures, means, and experience levels, Bikes for All People promotes diversity and helps improve the quality of life on the South Side of Columbus. Thank you for your generosity.

You can use the QR code to donate to both this week's mission and to First Church! If you are giving by cash or check and would also like to give something to First Congregational Church, please ask one of our deacons for an envelope and mark it accordingly. Thank you so much for your consideration and generosity. Any amount significant to you is significant to us.

"Put me to the test, says Yahweh Omnipotent, and see if I do not open windows in the sky and pour so much blessing on you that you cannot contain it!"—Malachi 3:10

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

Felix Mendelssohn, 1836

"Be thou faithful"

Revelation 2:10

Be thou faithful unto death,
and I will give to thee a crown of life
Be not afraid,
my help is near,
be not afraid!

COMMUNION

Rev. Jess

Leader: We, then, are the body of Christ.

**People: We are made one body through the love of Jesus
and the work of the Holy Spirit.**

Leader: Christ's death begins with a meal.

"Eat, drink."

The ask is that we would remember Christ in our bodies.

This is more than mere symbolism. It is not just poetry.

People: The path to liberation is to stay in our bodies.

Leader: In a world that demands strength, power, and might,
In a world that preys on softness, on need, and on struggle,
Christ teaches us to love through the act of closeness,
through touching our vulnerability and treasuring the tenderness of others.

People: The path to liberation is to stay in our bodies.

Leader: As we encircle the table of Christ today,
and use our bodies to remember the miracle,
the miracle of Christ, the miracle of life, the miracle of love,
we take and eat, and we let our lives be changed
by always turning our faces again to God.

People: The path to liberation is to stay in our bodies.

Leader: When the Anointed One gathered with the disciples, before his own body became the portal for love of the world, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it, saying This is my body, broken for you. When you do this, remember me. After supper, Jesus took the cup and blessed it, saying this is the cup of the New Covenant poured out for all. Whenever you drink from it, remember me.

People: **Sacred God, we gather around Your table, thankful for Your gifts. Bless now these elements, so that for us as we receive Your bread and your cup, we receive Your love and presence; when we go from this place, changed by this sacrament, we embody Your love in the world.**

Leader: The gifts of God for the people of God.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

Leader: Come, for all things are ready.

COMMUNION HYMN

"Eat this bread"

Berthier, Jacques Berthier, 1984

Robert J. Batastini and the Taizé Community, 1984, alt.

The musical score is written for a four-part setting (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of staves. The lyrics are: "Eat this bread; drink this cup; come to me and nev - er be hun - gry. Eat this bread; drink this cup; trust in me and you will not thirst."

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

by Mary Luti

Rev. jess

Leader: Who is like You, Gracious One?

People: **There is no one like You,
Our feast and our song,
Our safety and our story,
Our hope and our peace.
There is no one like You.
Thank You now and always. Amen.**

SENDING

COMMUNITY NOTICES - DEPART TO SERVE

Melissa Kulwicki

Leader: Let us depart with a heart to serve.

People: Thanks be to God.

*CLOSING HYMN

"Lead us from death to life"

World Peace Prayer, Marty Haugen, 1984

Satish Kumar, 1981



Lead us from death to life, from false-hood to
truth, from des - pair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead us from hate to love, from war to
peace; let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our
world, let peace fill our u - ni - verse.

*BENEDICTION

Rev. Jess

Thank you for attending worship this morning. We hope that you have found peace and grace here and invite you to return often. If you would like more information or have any questions about First Church, please ask anyone wearing a name tag. We would be delighted to assist you.

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All scripture reading used in today's service are from *The Inclusive Bible*.

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"Eat this bread." Words: Robert Batastini and the Taizé Community. Music: Jacques Berthier; ©1984 Less Presses de Taizé (admin. GIA Publications, Inc.) All rights reserved.

"Lead us from death to life." Marty Haugen, 1985. © 1985 GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

LEADERSHIP IN TODAY'S LITURGY

The Rev. jessica young chang, *preacher*

Barbara Mason, *liturgist*

Leslie Fulford, *worship leader*

Melissa Kulwicki, *worship leader*

Geoffrey Gear, *soloist*

Joshua Stafford, *pianist*

Geoffrey Dean, *livestream ministry*



Enter to Worship Depart to Serve

July 26, 2026

This Week at First Church

Sunday, July 26

- 9 a.m. Worship Service and
 Holy Communion (Parish Hall)
- 10 a.m. Adult Faith Formation (Classroom C)
 Sunday School Chat with Leslie (Playground)
 Family Playground Time (Playground)
- 11 a.m. Worship Service (Sanctuary)
- 12:15 p.m. Coffee Hour (Parish Hall)

Monday, July 27

- 6 p.m. Campanelle Rehearsal (Bell Rm)

Tuesday, July 28

- 5 p.m. Laundry Love (Wash Land, 1469 W. Broad St.)
- 7 p.m. Deacons Mtg (Zoom)

Saturday, August 1

- 10:30 a.m. Sacred Earth Mtg (Library)

Sunday, August 2

- 9 a.m. Worship Service and
 Holy Communion (Parish Hall)
- 10 a.m. Family Playground Time (Playground)
- 11 a.m. Worship Service (Sanctuary)
- 12:15 p.m. Coffee Hour & Sales (Parish Hall)

Sacred Earth Eco Tip for a 'Plastic-Free Month'

How much Plastic does it take to kill ocean animals?

Ocean Conservancy scientists along with University of Toronto researchers studied this question. The results are alarming.

It takes SIX small pieces the size of a pea to kill a seabird. For sea turtles, less than half a baseball's worth of plastic. For a sperm whale it takes 28 pieces of plastic smaller than the size of a tennis ball to kill a whale. These results underscore the importance of interventions like beach cleanups and better management of plastic waste to protect marine life.

**THINK BEFORE YOU TOSS THAT PLASTIC BOTTLE
IN THE TRASH—REUSE OR RECYCLE!!**

To learn more information visit oceanconservancy.org.

Adult Faith Formation Today at 10 a.m. in Classroom C

Alejandro Rodriguez will share information about the Washington Gladden Social Justice Park. Come learn about the Park's history, its plans, and why it's so important now as we strive for a more just society for all.

Family Playground Time! Today at 10 a.m. on the Sam Gordon Playground

Join the First Church playground gang between services having outdoor fun while parents catch up. We'll be outside playing every Sunday this summer, weather permitting.

Come to the Table: Care & Share Kitchen Ministry Meeting

Congregational Care is hosting an informational and brainstorming meeting for the Care & Share Kitchen Ministry. We are planning a discussion on past practices and looking ahead for new ways to grow this important ministry. We would love your input and your enthusiasm!

We are meeting on Sunday, August 9, at 12:15 p.m. in the parlor. Please let either Susie Loik or Wendy Kennedy know if you plan on attending. We welcome all former, current, and those newly interested to attend this meeting. We hope to look ahead to how we can grow this ministry further and help connect with others through food and fellowship.

Justice & Mercy Missions

Upcoming missions will be:

July 26 - Bikes for All People

August 2 - Gladden Community House

August 9 - Good Samaritan

Joy is an Act of Resistance

Friday, August 14, 2026

The Washington Gladden Social Justice Park and the Human Service Chamber are seeking enthusiastic volunteers to help create a welcoming, joyful morning for the nonprofit professionals, social workers, educators, advocates, healthcare workers, and community leaders who strengthen Central Ohio every day.

Joy is an Act of Resistance is a free community appreciation event celebrating those who dedicate their lives to serving others. Through breakfast, music, games, creative activities, reflection, and connection, we'll create a space for renewal and gratitude—because caring for those who care for our community strengthens the movement for social justice. It runs from 7 to 11 a.m.

Please use the QR Code to volunteer for this event. Should you have questions about becoming a volunteer please email Barb Poppe at Barbara.poppe.77@gmail.com



Good Works!

Engaging with Our Church and Our Community ... January – June 2026

Our church has been busy during 2026. Our church members continue to respond to God's call and serve one another.

Church Vitality

Monthly Time Out Small Group Dinners – each attended by six to 14 people

- February 10 at Starliner Diner in Hilliard
- March 25 at Rusty Bucket in Bexley
- April 29 at Starliner Diner in Hilliard
- May 27 at TAT Ristorante di Famiglia in east Columbus

Monthly Lunch Bunch Small Group Luncheons – each attended by six to 14 people

- February 26 at Delaney's Diner in Westerville
- March 10 at George's Linworth Diner
- May 13 at Chef-O-Nette in Upper Arlington
- June 16 at Over the Counter in Worthington

Easter Brunch – Sunday, April 5

- Served hot cross buns and hot chocolate after the 7 a.m. Easter Sunrise Service
- Served doughnuts, pastries, and juice at 10 a.m. before the 11 a.m. Easter Sunday Service

Women's Retreat – April 18

- Program led by Spiritual Director Jackie Dean
- Snacks and lunch provided by Church Vitality

Coffee Hour – every Sunday (January-June 2026)

- Hosted by commissions, committees, and Neighborhood Care Circles

Special Coffee Hour – May 31

- Celebrating the baptism of Dakotah Saunders during worship

Keep in Prayer

Members Kelly Dodd; Fran Panek; Lynn Wallich; Jane Weddle; Victor John; Mary Day Fewless; Ramona Moenter; Nancy Livingston; Jane Ward; Grace Glaros and family; Beverly Halbe; Francille Firebaugh; Nancy Burba; John Carter; Clinton Brown; Dan Axt.

Family and friends Leslie Fulford's sister, Kim Barth; Pat Patterson's friend, Cindy Shealy; Jenny Provenzano's mother, Joyce Beitzel; Melissa Kulwicki's father, Jack Blandi, and her mother-in-law, Beverly Kulwicki; Rev. Becky David; David Wyatt's uncle, Richard Hendrix Wyatt; Rev. Jess Young Chang's friend Rev. Steve Swisher's mother Barbara Swisher; Annette McCormick's sister, Kathy McCormick; Amy Wagner's great nephew, Brody Wilson; Kathy Reed's cousin, Barbara Works; Malini Peter's friend, Usha Rangarajan; Susan Brooks' friends, Marti and Ned Timmons; Dakotah Saunders' friend, Trisha; Susie Loik's daughter, Kelly and son, Laeric; Janice Taft's cousin, Teri Williams; Shelly Gies' father, Robert Simms and brother, Mike Simms; Kevin Salem's uncle, Harold Allen; Jason Harrell's mother, Sherry Harrell; and Matt Myers' sister, Erin Myers.

Those who mourn Wendy Reber and family on the death of her husband, Robert Reber; Jim Griffin on the death of his friend, Randelle Bowman; and Melva Fisher on the death of her brother-in-law Michael Bittle.

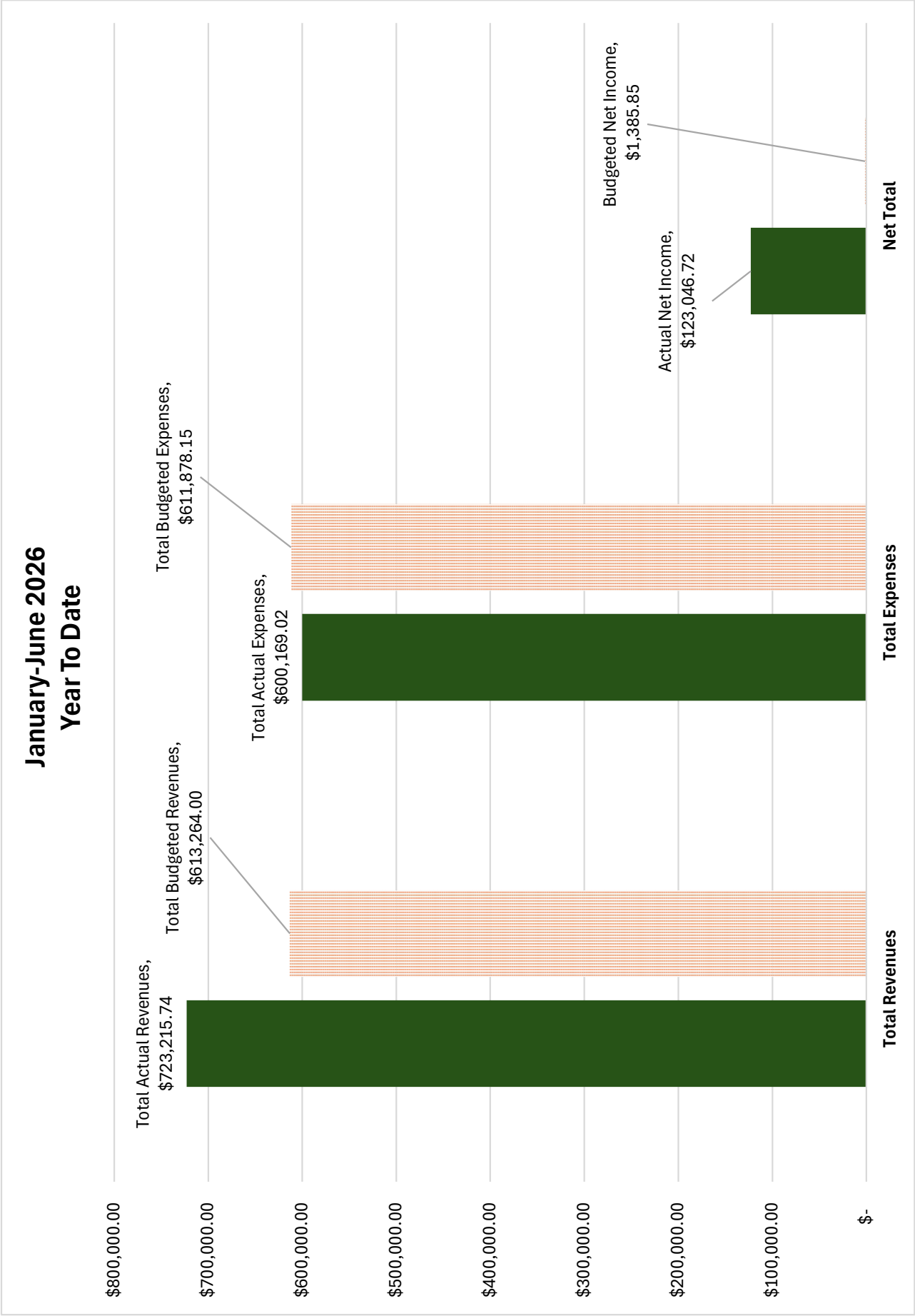
We keep Stephen Ministers in prayer as they care for our church members.

We keep our Search Committee and our Future Pastor in our prayers.

In the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, we pray for the people and churches of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. We also pray for our UCC partner, the Inanda Seminary in South Africa.

The financial picture for First Church shows very good news through the first six months of 2026. Revenue reflects the fact that many members pay their yearly pledge at the beginning of the year. Expenses are in line with budget.

June showed a significant drop in revenue as the summer season begins. Don't forget First Church as you enjoy your summer vacation!



CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Interim Senior Minister: Rev. Becky David, M.Div.

Interim Associate Minister: Rev. Jessica Young Chang, M.Div.

Minister of Music: Joshua Stafford, M.M.

Interim Director of Faith Formation: Leslie Fulford

Administrative Manager: Amy Wagner

Communications Manager: Melissa Kulwicki

Office Assistant: Pat Patterson

Business Administrator: Annette McCormick

Building and Grounds Superintendent: Kevin Salem

Custodians: Alexis Wayne, Bill McCabe, Bob O'Brien

Handbell Director: Jennifer Fry

Wedding Coordinators: Amy Wagner, Shelly Gies, Margaret Cipriani, Denise Vogt

Nursery Staff: Miranda Brooks, Shelly Gies, Celecia Smith

Commissioned Minister for Social Justice: Tom Brownfield

Commissioned Minister for Spiritual Formation and Direction: Jacquelyn Dean

Stephen Leader and Stephen Ministry Training Coordinator: Wendy Kennedy

Stephen Leader and Stephen Ministry Referrals Coordinator: Susie Loik

Senior Deacon: Dayna McCrary

Deacons: Fubara Braide, Stella Braide, Camilla Curren, Kelly Dodd, Sandra Geronimo, Dean Hafey, Jason Harrell, Brian Kemp, Allison Lowery, Barbara Mason, Fran Panek, Gary Seigerst, Thomason Smith, Martha Worth

Transition Team: Jacquelyn Dean and Nancy Loy, co-chairpersons, Todd Cunningham, Rev. Becky David, Gregory Halbe, Susie Loik, Allison Lowery, Pavan Peter, Sarah Reed, Joshua Stafford

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Chairperson: Frank Cook

Trustees: Matthew Bendick, David Hogrefe, Victor John, Melody Leidheiser (Secretary), Janet Miller, Sarah Reed, Hugh Schultz, Charlie Weaver

CHURCH COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

Moderator: Sarah Reed

Moderator-elect:

Treasurer: Ramona Moenter

Treasurer-elect:

Secretary: Amanda Butler

Secretary-elect:

Nominating Chair: Gregory Halbe

COMMISSIONERS

Church Stewardship and Church Growth: Stephen Sterrett

Church Stewardship and Church Growth-elect: Kathy Reed

Church Vitality: Antoinette Koolemans-Beynen

Church Vitality-elect:

Communications and Technology Commission: Mike Kennedy

Communications and Technology Commission-elect: Nathaniel Powell

Faith Formation Commission: Mariner Taft

Faith Formation Commission-elect:

House & Grounds: Eric Klintworth

House & Grounds-elect: Fran Panek

Justice & Mercy: James Lowe

Justice & Mercy-elect:

Music, Arts & Heritage: Jim Griffin

Music, Arts & Heritage-elect: Cheryl Hoskinson

Member-at-Large: Martha Wilson

Personnel: Neal Brower

Personnel-elect: Chris Brooks

Youth Member-at-Large:

FIRST CHURCH IS A FAITH COMMUNITY

† Called together by God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life, to worship, pray and serve;

† Led by Jesus Christ, our Teacher and Savior, to learn the faith and welcome all God's children;

† Empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness God's love and justice between ourselves, and throughout the world.

We covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ and one another, and bind ourselves in the presence of God to live together in all God's ways as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit and holy scripture. The church acknowledges that all members have the right of individual interpretation of the principles of the Christian faith and respects them in their honest convictions.

In accordance with the teaching of our Lord, the church recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion.

OPEN AND AFFIRMING STATEMENT

We, the members of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, welcome and affirm all. We believe we are all created in God's image and called to love our neighbors as Jesus loves us. We believe we are many members, but one body in Christ, called to unite all people in God's love. We are a community seeking God's presence and love in our lives. We seek to unite persons of all ages, races, nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, sexes, gender identities and expressions, family structures, mental, intellectual and physical conditions, economic circumstances, political, theological and faith backgrounds. Together in our diversity, and being empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, we will "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

—Adopted September 8, 2002 by the congregation
Revisions adopted January 27, 2019 by the congregation

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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