

Regular Meeting of the Congregation

Annual Report, April 27th, 2025

AGENDA

Call to Order	Anne Sprague
Opening Prayer	Rev. David T. Hill
Report of the 2025 Nominating Committee	Linda Gates
Approval of additional expenditure for Entryway Project	Anne Sprague
Agenda Items from the Floor	
Shalom	

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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2025 Report from the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee (Linda Gates (Chair), Linda Gwinn (Record Keeper), Mike Schmid, Nancy Garver, Ardith Hayes, Carl Whitehouse) met weekly via Zoom on Monday evenings in February and March to complete the slate of nominees for Officers, Executive Council, Standing Committees, and Conference and Association Representative of First Church in Oberlin UCC.

We are profoundly grateful to those who have served in these positions in the past, 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 those 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 that term expires.

The Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following slate of nominees (**in bold**) to the congregation for approval:

OFFICE	NOMINEE	TERM OF SERVICE (# of years)	Year(s)
OFFICERS: Clerk Treasurer Moderator	Prue Richards Mike Schmid Anne Sprague	2 1	2025-27 2025-26 2026*
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL	Ken Cheek Anne Conway Ruth Ann Clark Linda Gates Gene Matthews David Kelley	3 3	2025-28* 2025-28 2026* 2026 2027* 2027
STANDING COMMITTEES:			
Christian Education/Faith Formation	Anne McCormick Sarah Colson Anjanette Hignett Carl Whitehouse Marlene Caldwell Kim Preston	1 2 3 3	2025-26 2025-27 2025-28 2025-28 2026 2027
Facilities	Linda Slocum Erik Andrews Steve Gwinn Martin Buck Bill Jindra Andrew Garver	2 3 3	2025-27 2025-28* 2025-28 2026 2026 2027*
Fellowship	Karla Sanderson Lori Taylor Sandy Matthews Denise Scotch Alana Kelley Margaret Gueulette	3 3	2025-28 2025-28 2026* 2026* 2027 2027*
Finance	Bill Hamilton Pete Richards Tom Konkoly	3	2025-28* 2026 2027

	Ken Cheek (EC) Mike Schmid (Treas) Gene Matthews (EC)		
Outreach and Service	David Grayson Marci Peterson Carol Burke John Gates Becky Thompson Kathleen Bradley	3 3	2025-28 2025-28 2026* 2026 2027 2027
Stewardship	Bill Long Dana Parsons Kristin Peterson Bob Longworth Ralph Thompson Barbara Blodgett	1 3 3	2025-26 2025-28 2025-28* 2026 2027 2027
Witness and Membership	Barbara Brecht Linda Gwinn Nancy McRae Jan Heron Harold Slocum Nancy Garver	1 3 3	2025-26 2025-28 2025-28 2026 2027 2027*
Worship	Scott Reed Jeanne McKibben Tom Riis Tina Zwegat Frankie Long Peter Thomas	2 3 3	2025-27 2025-28* 2025-28 2026 2026 2027
CONFERENCE & ASSOCIATION REP	Carol Burke	1	2025-26

*term limited

2025 Nominating Committee: Linda Gates (Chair), Linda Gwinn (Record Keeper), Mike Schmid, Nancy Garver, Ardith Hayes, Carl Whitehouse.

Report of the Moderator

Anne Sprague
2024 - 2025

It has been a busy time, with varied and exciting experiences that illustrate what a vibrant and lively place First Church is! So much has happened in the past year. We have added congregation members who have quickly become integral parts of our family. We have welcomed new organizations into our building, increasing our rental income and expanding our outreach in the community. A new version of our Wednesday night suppers has returned and blossomed into fabulous and crowded evenings of fellowship, food, music, and community.

We have updated our Constitution, Financial Policies & Procedures document, Personnel Policy, and Abuse Prevention Policy. Our new heating system is up and running, having kept us warm through the first winter on our own. We have begun the process of updating the main doors and entryway into our building and are in the earliest phases of looking into a kitchen renovation. The sound system in the Meeting House and a mobile unit for the Fellowship Hall and Terrace have improved hearing experiences in the building.

Our facility continues to be one of our greatest assets, offering a home to organizations that need space, for the good of the Oberlin community. We have respectfully discussed how we can best care for our Undercroft guests, and how to face the current political climate. We have hosted concerts and meetings, lectures and guest speakers. The excitement in each of these encounters is palpable! They reflect the passion, talents, and generosity of our members, the respect and love we have for one another, and our commitment to our ministry to the community.

Anne Sprague

2025 Annual Report from the Clerk

2024 again confirmed that First Church is a vibrant, flourishing place to be. As part of our ministry we have welcomed kittens and worshiped with jazz. We celebrated our mission with a successful second annual Spring Festival, inaugurating a new sound system. Thanks to a number of generous donors, we began planning for an updated sidewalk entryway and kitchen. We continued to embrace new members, and discovered fresh ways to live into our vision. God is still speaking indeed!

Resolutions May 2024 – March 2025

(2024-6) Resolved May 5, 2024, to accept the slate of candidates put forth by the Nominating Committee. Motion: Jody Kerchner. Second: Jeanne McKibben. The motion passed unanimously.

(2024-7) Resolved September 15, 2024, to accept changes to the Constitution as presented by the Moderator. Motion: Jody Kerchner. Second: Ruth Ann Clark. The motion passed unanimously.

(2024-8) Resolved September 15, 2024, to approve the additional expenses for the boiler project, not to exceed \$130,000, to replace or rehabilitate the existing chimney. Motion: Linda Gates. Second: Peter Thomas. The motion passed unanimously.

(2024-9) Resolved September 15, 2024, to approve expenses, not to exceed \$60,000, for replacing the rear doors and repair to or replacing the sidewalk entryway. Motion: Jody Kerchner. Second: Steve Johnson. The motion passed unanimously.

(2024-10) Resolved November 20, 2024, to approve the Pastor's housing allowance according to Conference Guidelines, to total \$24,000, for the year 2025. Motion: Ruth Ann Clark. Second: Carol Longworth.

(2025-1) Resolved January 26, 2025, to accept the slate of candidates put forth by the Nominating Committee. Motion: Ruth Ann Clark. Second: Anne Schaum. The motion passed unanimously.

(2025-2) Resolved January 26, 2025, to accept the budget as proposed by the Finance Committee and recommended by the Executive Council. Motion passed with one abstention.

(2025-3) Resolved January 26, 2025, to reaffirm Resolution (2018-11) Resolved April 22, 2018, in a meeting of the Congregation, that First Church become a "Sanctuary Church." Motion: Margaret Gueulette. Second: David Kelley. The motion passed unanimously.

The Facilities Committee has been busy with tasks both large and small. This year's most significant effort: seeing the new boiler project through to completion. A special thanks to Gene Matthews for spearheading the effort. Committee members Dennis Flood, Jim Heron, Andrew Garver, Marty Buck and Bill Jindra have risen to meet each task as it appears. A big thank you to this fine team. – Erik Andrews

Fellowship Committee Annual Report 2024 - 2025

This year we hosted some fun events. We enjoyed a church outing to a Guardians baseball game on what had to have been the hottest day of the year! In September the committee hosted a "Welcome Back" coffee hour and in October we had fun with pumpkin carving. In January we did an "Epiphany King's Cake" coffee hour. We celebrated everyone's birthday in February with a soup/salad Birthday Luncheon. The cakes were beautiful and delicious! We also did several impromptu coffee hours. In April we are hosting a "Dinner and Conversation" at Bella Luna's. For the "Spring Fling" in May we will be baking cookies for our visitors to enjoy.

We are encouraging folks to sign up for hosting coffee hours. We truly appreciate those who have taken 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 2024-2025

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 2024 with projected income of \$400,000 and projected expenses of \$530,000, based on anticipated income and needs as reported by staff and committees. This budget was presented to Executive Council, who recommended it to the congregation. It was approved at the annual meeting on February 11, 2024. At the end of the year, lower expenses and greater income than budgeted led to an essentially balanced budget, a deficit of less than \$4,000 - a much better outcome than the anticipated deficit of \$130,000. No extraordinary withdrawal from our assets was required.

Our investments enjoyed a very good year; funds in which we are invested returned an average increase of 18%. \$83,000 was taken as the usual 4½% draw in support of the church operations budget, \$100,000 was used to match congregational contributions to the boiler project, and \$153,000 was retained as an increase in the church's invested assets.

2024 was marked by the installation of new boilers for our heating system, necessitated by Oberlin College's transition to a geothermal system, which would have been prohibitively expensive for us to participate in. This capital project is not yet complete, but a combination of contributions, funds taken from our asset returns, and other factors have resulted in a loan to finance the project of about \$130,000 by the close of 2024, with final payments of approximately \$170,000 to be added this spring. The final loan balance should be substantially less than the \$450,000 for which we had received approval. This will be reflected in much lower monthly payments against the loan than anticipated, for as long as it takes to repay the loan.

A major revision of the church's primary financial guidance document, Financial Policies and Procedures, was undertaken to clarify areas of ambiguity in the old document and to better align our financial principles with our current practices and guidelines contained in the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles for non-profits. This revision was made primarily by the Chair and the Treasurer, vetted and approved by the full committee in summer 2024, and approved by Executive Council in August 2024.

Social and political uncertainties have been reflected in uncertainties and divergent views among committee members about the best strategy for managing our assets. To help address these uncertainties, we convened an Investment Committee (members listed below) in late 2024, as specified in the Financial P & P document. This committee met in early 2025 and re-affirmed our investment strategy: to keep approximately three years of financial needs in cash or equivalents, and invest the rest in the market for moderate growth.

The work of the Finance Committee is reliant upon contributions from a host of workers, mostly volunteers. I offer profound thanks to committee members Ruth Anne Clark, Bill Hamilton, Tom Konkoly, Gene Matthews, Mike Schmid (Treasurer,); to our Moderator, Anne Sprague, who regularly attended our meetings; to members of the Investment Committee, Bill Hamilton, Pearl Lin, Steve Gwinn, Mike Schmid, and Anne Schaum; to our Financial Secretary, Miranda Schaum; and to our Bookkeeper, Tom Taylor.

Respectfully submitted,
Pete Richards

Green Team Report 2024-2025

The Green Team appreciates all the small, everyday actions individuals in our congregation are making. Reusing – recycling-reducing, conserving energy, switching to more sustainable transportation have a big impact when multiplied throughout our community and world.

The mission of the First Church "Green Team," which is composed of members, youth and friends of our congregation, is to educate ourselves on issues of environmental sustainability and to encourage actions at the individual, congregational and denominational levels and in the wider Oberlin community to foster environmental sustainability.

In 2024 First Church hosted (for the 7th year!) two Oberlin Green Group Vegetarian Pot-Luck Gatherings - an Earth Day Gathering on April 19 and a Harvest Gathering on November 15 - at which members of many of some two dozen Oberlin College and community groups concerned with environmental sustainability shared their priority activities. At the April gathering City of Oberlin Storm Water Coordinator Jennifer Reeves reported on our community's storm water plan. The November gathering concluded with a discussion of the feasibility of forming a city-wide "green team."

The Green Team, since 2014, has met to fulfill this mission and reduce our own campus' carbon footprint and impact on the environment. Please join us on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 4:30 pm and help make an impact.

Respectfully submitted,
Martin Buck

Outreach and Service Committee 2024 – 2025 Annual Report

First Church contributed \$29,504.48 (based on 10% of the money pledged by congregational members) to organizations and individuals engaged in progressive social action endeavors.

Of this, 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 (\$3,994.57), Strengthen the Church (\$1,973.30), Neighbors in Need (2,375.85), and the Christmas Fund (\$3,159.83), for a total of \$11,503.55. 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.

Outreach and Service Committee partnered with Worship Committee during Advent to give the option to parishioners of donating extra money towards the poinsettias. An additional \$638 was collected and given to the Christmas Fund.

Locally, recipients of benevolences included Oberlin Community Services, Ruby N. Jones Scholarship Fund, and Oberlin Weekday Community Meals. At the county level donations included El Centro, HOLA, Lorain County Free Clinic, Neighborhood Alliance, Good Knights of Lorain County, Genesis House, Second Harvest, League of Women Voters, and sending our youth to summer camp at Temple Hills. State and international entities included Americans Making Immigrants Safe, SEPA Guatemala and E. Palestine Emergency Aid through the UCC. We also sent a gift of \$200 to Andy and Miranda Lacefield, thanking them for their work at Temple Hills and wishing them happiness in their future endeavors.

We sent a letter to those organizations we partner with, explaining that we were not able to give our usual amounts this year (having 10% of pledge money instead of the 20% we have had in previous years), that we hoped this was a temporary situation, and were there any non-monetary ways that we could be benevolent towards their organizations.

In the summer of 2022, Outreach and Service was asked to make a pledge to Oberlin Community Services for their capital campaign. This was a difficult decision that only came from multiple meetings. The committee gave a recommendation to the Executive Council, who then approved our recommendation. Our plan was that we would give \$10,000 towards their campaign, in addition to our regular donations to them in 2022, and then \$4,000 for the four years afterwards (2023 – 2026) with the stipulation that whatever money we have “extra” at the end of our fiscal year, we will also donate towards their capital campaign. This is for a total of \$26,000, minimum. In 2024-25, we were able to continue with this promise, giving an extra \$1,449.85.

This year, we organized the creation of six Church World Service Cleanup Buckets. These buckets were full of essential home recovery supplies that are needed after disaster strikes. Supplies were purchased by congregation members and a donation of \$ 455.63 from the Service and Outreach Committee. We have more buckets that we can use to make more kits, should the congregation wish to do this project again.

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 each family with a \$100 OBP Gift Certificate, which is useable at many businesses in Oberlin. We were able to provide gifts and certificates for sixteen families.

We also were able to provide several organizations and individuals with reduced, or in many cases, completely waived fees for the rental of the facility. Some of these included the AARP Tax Aides, the various 12 Step Groups that meet here, and now, the second-floor CATSS facility. We estimate this to be over \$40,000 for 2024.

In addition, we promoted and hosted various fund raisers this year including the Back-to-School Drive for Oberlin Community Services, the Oberlin Weekday Community Meals Concert, and the Empty Mugs concert for Oberlin Community Services. On October 13, 2024, First Church and Christ Episcopal Church co-sponsored a concert performed by the Theodicy Jazz Collective. The money collected through donations was given to the UCC Hurricane Relief Project.

On December 22, we helped with sponsoring the Ecumenical Carol-Sing, choosing the event date and times, planning the logistics and structure for the Peace Community Church Sanctuary Service. We supplied Peace Community Church with a donation of \$50 to help with refreshments and cleanup, but they give our donation to their Free Store for Kids.

We 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 opportunities.

Even though the Service and Outreach Committee did the promoting, the members of the 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 Pledging totals for 2025

Members of the Stewardship Committee include Ralph Thompson, Chair, Bob Longworth, Scribe, Barbara Blodgett, Kristin Peterson, Linda Gates, Executive Council Liaison, and Miranda Schaum, Financial Secretary.

The committee chose the theme, "Honoring Our Mission", inspired by the new Mission Statement of our church.

"As followers of Jesus Christ, we aspire to minister to our church, our community and the world."

On the third Sunday prior to Consecration Sunday, we highlighted the ways in which we minister to one another within our church family. Church members were asked to write on a colored leaf one of the ways in which we minister to one another. Leaves were then attached to the branches of a bare tree located in the gallery outside of the sanctuary.

The second week we focused on the ways in which we minister to our local community. Once again, people were asked to write on a colored paper leaf, a way in which our church ministers to our Oberlin community.

On the final Sunday, colored leaves were added to the tree once more, this time with examples of how our local church and/or its members support needs beyond us to others around the world.

On Consecration Sunday, members chose a leaf from a large bowl during their reception of Holy Communion. The leaf served as a reminder to them of what an anonymous person wrote about honoring our commitment to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ.

In the weeks following Consecration Sunday, a large decorative leaf was drawn on our "white board" (Thanks Tacie Hampton!) and the remaining leaves were attached within the larger leaf for people to see and celebrate the ways in which we honor our mission.

All in all, we had 84 pledging units representing \$317,686.00 in pledges for 2025!

Ralph Thompson, Chair of Stewardship

Year	Amount Pledged	# of Pledges	# of New Pledges	# of Increased Pledges	# of Same as Previous Year Pledges	# of Decreased Pledges
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
2017	\$303,859	103	6	50	35	12

**Witness & Membership
Annual Report April 6, 2025**

Membership: Harold Slocum, Chair; Linda Gwinn, Secretary; Jan Heron, Nancy Garver, Nancy MacRae; Linda Gates, Executive Council; David Hill. Pastor

Through the year the committee has continued to staff the Welcome Table and intermittently arranged for Greeters. Volunteers to assist in these activities are needed. We have hosted New Member Inquiry sessions and welcomed new members reported elsewhere. We continue to support the Call to Care program under Marcy Peterson and the First Church Directory under Shirley Taylor with assistance of Gene McKibben for photography.

New programs include resumption of a monthly Wednesday evening dinner under leadership of Linda Slocum with help from many others. This has been very successful with attendance exceeding ninety individuals. Many thanks to all who have contributed in many ways.

Another new program involves small groups activities of a wide variety led by Jan Heron, Linda Slocum and Becky Thompson. These have included building tours, cooking lessons by Jan Heron and our immigrant guests, and an Allen Art Museum tour. New suggestions are welcome.

Subjects under discussion include ways to reach out to the community such as billboards or activities at the May festival and additional ways to serve members of the congregation. The committee continues to make available UCC resources including Christmas and Lenten devotionals.

Each meeting includes a review of known needs and concerns among members and associates. Please keep us informed.

Meetings are in the JFO room at 4:00 pm on the second Wednesday monthly and are open to all. Suggestions are welcome.

Sincerely,
Harold Slocum, chair

**WORSHIP COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025**

Worship Committee: David Hill (Pastor), Thomas Bandy (Organist and Director of Music), Ardith Hayes (2024 Chair), Alana Kelley (Secretary), David Kelley, Frankie Long, Jeanne McKibben, Peter Thomas (2025 Chair), Tina Zwegat.

The committee expresses its gratitude to all those who contribute to the worship experience, including: Jen Bertoni (Director of Faith Formation) for supporting worship in myriad ways, including through the weekly children’s moment; to Prue Richards for taking care of the chancel and meeting house arrangements, maintaining the choir library, and keeping the meeting house beautiful and vibrant especially for Advent, Christmas, and Easter; to Becky Thompson for organizing the liturgists and Jody Kerchner for mentoring them, to Karla Sanderson for overseeing communion arrangements; Sandy Matthews and Joann Dakos for preparing the communion elements and Margaret Anne Ellis for baking the communion bread; and to Anne Sprague for organizing the ushers; to everyone in the choir, to all the liturgists and ushers, and to all who provided special music throughout the year.

In addition to supporting regular workshop activities the committee also worked closely with Pastor Hill and DM Bandy within and between our monthly meetings to prepare themes and special services for the seasons of the liturgical year, including a multilingual celebration of World Communion Sunday, Totenfest, Advent, Lent, Holy Week, and Music Sunday. Other committee work this year included consideration of suggestions arising from the congregation, and approving a pay raise for the choral scholars.

Respectfully submitted,

Ardith Hayes (2024 Chair) and Peter Thomas (2025 Chair)

PASTOR’S REPORT 2024-2025

... in love’s sanctuary thou art with me.

– Eliza Gilkyson, *Sanctuary*

This past year has been a time of finally turning a corner in the post-COVID era. Worship has been rich, vibrant, and meaningful. Fellowship opportunities have expanded and consistently drawn sizable numbers of congregants and community members together for mutual support, conversation, and the simple joy of being with one another. There is renewed energy in the use, maintenance, and improvement of our facility (CATSS, new heating system, main entrance refurbishment, possible kitchen renovation). Membership has grown and both newer and established members have joined together to bring fresh leadership and support to the ministry of the church. There is, indeed, a “sweet, sweet Spirit in this place” where we regularly encounter God’s presence in “love’s sanctuary.”

What a contrast with what is daily playing out across the national stage. Many political leaders appear hell-bent on quashing the sweet, the lovely, the true, and the just. Vulnerable populations are under attack, employees are ousted from their jobs on a whim, and the livelihoods and financial futures of millions are treated as collateral damage in an economic system that privileges the already obscenely wealthy. In the midst of such unmerciful circumstances how are we as followers of Jesus “to minister to one another, our community and the world?”

Confronted with deportation, marginalization, and objectification, we can provide safety, extravagant welcome, and dignity for each person as God’s beloved child. As prestigious law firms, colleges, universities, and governmental agencies concede or collapse from pressure and threats, we can remain resistant and resilient. Where cruelty and hatred are glibly broadcast, we can sow kindness and love. When injustice and oppression seek to reign, we can vigilantly protest. For those overwhelmed with despair and despondence we can provide solace and hope. The harshness of national politics is no match for the persistent power of a people caught up in the Spirit of God.

First Church is first and foremost a place, both physically and metaphorically, where “meeting” occurs. Our congregation inhabits an ethos of connection and relationship. In the year ahead, how might we foster a “ministry of meeting” that strengthens and empowers our beloved community? How might we

extend the sweet, sweet, Spirit within First Church to a world desperately in need of God's companionship and compassion in these troubled times?

Grace and Peace,
David

Community, College and Wider Church Involvement:

Firelands Program District (Lorain County): UCC Clergy Group

Living Water Association: Chair, Committee on Ministry (expanded responsibilities during the interim between association General Ministers); Member; Oversight Working Group; Participant, Community of Practice

Heartland Conference: Pro-Racial Equity Network; Fitness Review Response Team

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

Oberlin Community: Community Connections (college/community relations); Kendal Faith Leader breakfasts (quarterly); planning committee, screening of "Awakening to Justice"; planning committee, Theodicy Jazz Collective Oberlin/Cleveland tour; planning committee, "Who is Man, Who is Human?" community conversation; planning committee, Empty Mugs event; Oberlin Business Partnership, Vice President, Board of Directors.

Annual Report 2025 - Faith Formation Director

Time to bring you up-to-date on the last year in Faith Formation!

Last spring, we finished up the program year with a wonderful Easter Egg Hunt, as well as a celebration of our graduates at a coffee hour in May. Adult Ed included a session on Broadway and the Bible. We also started talks with the CATSS organization, based on a chance conversation I had while handing out flyers to local businesses.

Summer brought our Summer Storytime series - with many added volunteers in the Children's Church space. We were also able to continue our presence at the Lorain County Pride Event. This year the event was held indoors in Hales gymnasium because of the threat of rain. Thanks to all who volunteered, and to all who were able to sub in at the last minute because of accessibility issues for our original volunteers. I hope we're back outdoors this June!

In the Fall, we switched to a new curriculum, which better accommodates our younger Children's Church attendees. Frolic features play-based sessions, with a short Bible story in the middle of the time together. The children have greatly enjoyed these times in the playroom! As always, I couldn't do this without our Childcare workers, Milo Page and Sydney Paunan, who have backup help from some of our older youth.

Our Fall Adult Ed. series occurred during the Wednesday Night Supper, as we learned during a few spring events that it is best to have people here for a meal, rather than expecting them to come up simply for Adult Ed. I created a few short presentations on Cultural Humility, based on the book Heart by Dr. James Knight.

In September, I helped arrange a visit to Avon Lake UCC by a few members of our church who were interested in revitalizing the small groups ministry at our church. It was a fruitful discussion, and plans for cooking classes, visits to museums, and a faith discussion group are now underway thanks to those members! I am thrilled that they were able to learn from our sister congregation, and were inspired by ALUCC's successes.

I was also part of the worship planning team for the Heartland Conference Annual Gathering in late September. (September was a busy month!) The Gathering was held in conjunction with the Disciples of Christ's Regional Assembly for Ohio. The teams for both denominations were able to work across differences and with nationally known speakers and musicians to create two meaningful and beautiful services. I am grateful for the opportunity and thank First Church for its willingness to allow me the time to contribute to the wider church.

In October, Rev. David Hill and I started our Confirmation sessions. We have three students for Confirmation class this year, and planning, writing, and holding the sessions was the main focus of my efforts this fall for the youth. Our three confirmands will finish their journey on May 18th during worship, and are currently collecting supplies for a final "Faith in Action" project. David and I have greatly enjoyed these sessions, and I would call them the highlight of my work this year at First Church.

We were able to hold some of our traditional youth fellowship times as well, with a few twists - our pumpkin roll event featured chocolate chip pumpkin bread this year, and the youth both made bread and shopped for gifts on the same day. Our Advent Workshop was replaced by a Gingerbread House event. We also spent time at Brasee's corn maze, and in the new kitten room.

Our Family Camp/Winter Retreat also underwent a transformation, and became a church "staycation." We had a wonderful group come to First Church for the day, hanging out and playing games. About nine stalwart souls stayed the night, and enjoyed a pancake breakfast in the morning! We hope this re-imagining of the event can continue in the coming years, as it allows for a great time of fellowship at a significantly reduced cost to the church.

I was able to preach a few times during the year: April 7, July 7, August 4th, and November 17th. The last of these sermons was a repeat of the service I created for the Living Water Association's Committee on Ministry, which met on November 7th to interview me, review my ordination paper, and vote. I am happy to say that I am approved for ordination pending a call, and that my profile is currently circulating to area churches. I hope to be able to update the congregation soon on my progress, and thank all of you for your support during all the stages of the discernment process!

Our Christmas pageant was an improvisational event for the whole congregation, with narration by our youth. The youth were also able to provide gifts for three children in the Holiday Helping Hands program, and later, raised money for camp scholarships on Shrove Tuesday at the Pancake Breakfast. The Confirmation Class will be creating CWS Hygiene kits as their final project. I am glad to lead a program where our youth are committed to Faith in Action!

In the early part of 2025, I provided help to the Fellowship group by leading the hunt for the Magi during the Epiphany Coffee Hour, and creating a trivia game and MC-ing for the Birthday Luncheon. I also created an Adult Ed based on the work of Jemar Tisby for those who wanted to strategize about our post-election reality. I am currently planning a session on "Courageous Conversations" for March 23rd.

All in all, it has been a productive year in Faith Formation! My sincere gratitude to all who work and worship at First Church for the opportunity to serve this welcoming faith community and its families!

Respectfully submitted,
Jen Bertoni