

STAFF AND MINISTRY LEADERS SESSION SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2026

Dear friends,

I want to begin with a very sincere thank you.

When Session met on September 16, we had an opportunity to look back over the summer and ahead to a very full fall. There is a great deal happening at First Pres, and almost all of it depends upon staff and volunteers who faithfully give their time, energy, creativity, and care.

There was much to celebrate.

Summer worship attendance remained strong. Our Sunday School welcomed between 8 and 16 children each week, with 10 or 11 being most common. Eighteen young people attended the summer youth pool party, and Vacation Bible Camp welcomed 114 campers supported by an extraordinary team of 75 volunteers, including 40 youth and 35 adults.

Our Pastoral Care Team reported 73 connections in July and 133 in August through visits, telephone calls, emails, and conversations. Patti has also agreed to begin monthly services at Chartwell and Pretty River.

We are also making encouraging progress with our AV ministry. Approximately 20 people are now part of the developing volunteer pool for sound, EasyWorship, and livestreaming. Training and opportunities to shadow experienced volunteers will continue throughout the fall.

These are not simply numbers. They represent children learning about God, young people finding a place to belong, people receiving care, and volunteers using their gifts. Thank you for the part you have played in all of this.

SOME ENCOURAGING FINANCIAL NEWS

The church is doing well financially compared with our budget.

Through the end of August, contributions to the General Fund were \$12,100 ahead of budget. At the same time, General Fund expenses were \$13,239 below budget. This includes salaries and benefits coming in \$10,333 below budget and property expenses coming in \$2,506 below budget.

We had budgeted for the General Fund to be operating with a deficit of \$60,542 at this point in the year. The actual deficit was \$38,093. In other words, our regular church operations were \$22,449 better than budget.

When all funds are combined, the church was still slightly ahead of plan. The year-to-date operating deficit was \$43,681, compared with a budgeted deficit of \$45,175. The consolidated picture includes significant project income and project expenses, which makes those totals more complicated than the General Fund alone.

August itself was also encouraging. The month ended with an operating surplus of \$1,698. In August 2025, the church recorded an operating deficit of \$13,740.

We are not yet operating with an overall year-to-date surplus, but we are doing better than anticipated. Strong giving and careful management of expenses have put us in a healthy position relative to our budget.

MOBILE SOUP KITCHEN

Session approved the Mobile Soup Kitchen's request to offer breakfasts at First Pres on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from November through the end of April.

We are grateful for this partnership and for the opportunity to help provide meals during the colder months. Because this will significantly increase the weekly use of our building, the final arrangement is subject to scheduling availability and a simple written ministry-use agreement.

That agreement will clarify expectations concerning:

- Access and building security
- Setup and takedown of tables and chairs
- Cleaning the kitchen and work areas
- Garbage and recycling
- Leaving the facilities as they were found

If your ministry regularly uses the church on Tuesday or Thursday mornings, please let Marlene or me know of any possible conflicts.

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

Our New Members Course took place on September 20 with 13 potential new members in attendance. It was wonderful to spend time with people who are finding connection, belonging, and a spiritual home at First Pres.

The names of those wishing to become members will be circulated to Session for an email vote. Those approved will be welcomed during worship on October 18. The email vote will then be formally recorded at the October 20 Session meeting.

Ministry leaders involved in worship, hospitality, administration, and communications can begin planning with October 18 in mind.

NEW BEGINNINGS

New Beginnings remains our most important congregational priority this fall.

The Transformational Ministry Weekend will take place October 23 to 25:

- Friday, October 23 at 7:00 p.m.
Congregational Gathering and introduction to the next phase of New Beginnings

- Saturday, October 24
Training for House Group leaders
- Sunday, October 25
Covenanting Sunday and New Beginnings commissioning, with Rev. Ian Fraser preaching

House Groups will then meet weekly from October 26 through November 22.

These gatherings will give people an opportunity to listen, reflect, learn, and speak honestly about the cultural and church changes we are experiencing before significant decisions are made about our future.

We need approximately 10 to 12 House Group leaders. Please consider whether you might serve, or whether there is someone you could personally encourage. I would also ask you to help invite people to the Friday evening gathering. Broad participation will be very important.

OTHER SESSION DECISIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

Session extended the terms of our co-treasurers, Derek Thompson and Jack Vanderkooy, until the Annual Meeting in the spring of 2027.

Jack was also confirmed as the Primary Trustee of the First and Forever Endowment Fund.

Session confirmed its earlier decision concerning my 2027 Inter-Mission. The church will cover the approved costs, including pulpit supply, rather than deducting those costs from my stipend. This arrangement has also been approved by Presbytery.

We also discussed how we manage the many groups that use our building. There was broad agreement that we need better coordination among Administration, Property, Finance, and Technology. Rev. Alton will explore the possibility of creating a small team drawn from these areas and bring greater clarity to how this might work.

Protecting church equipment and staff workspaces. Session supported two important expectations that will be communicated more clearly to groups using our building.

First, the electronic drum kit in the sanctuary must not be unplugged, disconnected, disassembled, moved, or adjusted by renters. If a group would prefer that it not be visible, it can be covered with black cloth. If additional space is needed an authorized person who understands the equipment can reposition it safely.

Second, staff offices are not available for use by renters. If a group requires an additional dressing room or private space, other suitable rooms may be suggested.

Thank you for helping us care for our shared equipment and respect staff workspaces as we continue welcoming many different groups into our building.

A temporary cleaning contract is now in place with Clean In The Nick Of Time through December 31. The contractor reports directly to the Property Chair. Cleaning concerns or additional requests should therefore be directed through Mark and the Property Team rather than to the contractor.

DATES TO KEEP IN VIEW

- October 4: Communion
- October 17: Chili Cookoff and Dessert Auction supporting Behold Retreat
- October 18: Welcoming new members during worship
- October 20: Session meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Conference Room
- October 23 to 25: Transformational Ministry Weekend
- October 26 to November 22: New Beginnings House Groups
- November 8: Remembrance Day observation
- November 15: Sunday focused on our emerging generations
- November 22: Communion
- November 29: Advent begins with Follow the Star
- December 1: Advent Memorial Gathering
- December 12 to 15: First Christmas Story
- December 20: Christmas Pageant
- December 24 at 5:00 p.m.: Family Friendly Christmas Eve Service
- December 24 at 7:00 p.m.: Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

Thank you again for everything you do.

You prepare rooms, welcome people, teach children, visit those who need care, run technology, serve meals, offer music, organize events, solve problems, pray faithfully, and help our church reach beyond itself. Much of this work happens quietly, but it matters deeply.

As we enter this full and promising fall season, may we continue to Look Up, Lean In, and Reach Out together.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Alton J. Ruff