



2025
Annual Reports
of Ministries & Committees
Congregational Meeting
February 1, 2026

Updated, 1/21/2026

Table of Contents

AGENDA – ST. JOHN UCC CONGREGATIONAL MEETING.....	1
STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR 2025	2
CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES	3
ST. JOHN CHURCH ENDOWMENT REPORT.....	5
MINISTRY TEAM REPORT.....	7
Senior Pastor.....	7
Visitation Pastor.....	9
Director of Congregational Life.....	10
Creative and Administrative Assistant	11
Music Director.....	12
CHURCH COUNCIL	13
Treasurer's Report	14
Human Resources Team.....	15
Property Management Team	16
Imagination Team	17
CARE & COMMUNITY MINISTRY	19
Wellness Ministry Team	20
WORSHIP & EDUCATION MINISTRY	21
Helix Youth Outreach.....	22
MISSION & OUTREACH MINISTRY	23
PRIDE Team	24
CHURCH COUNCIL AND LEADERSHIP TEAM ROSTERS.....	

Financial Reports are contained in a separate publication.

Notes Page

AGENDA – ST. JOHN UCC CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

CALL TO ORDER

BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH

Receipt of Congregational Meeting Minutes

Receipt of 2025 Annual Ministry Reports

Verbal Reports (as needed)

Church Council Officers & Executive Team
Ministry Staff Team
Care & Community Leadership Team
Mission & Outreach Leadership Team
Worship & Education Leadership Team

Receipt of Nominations for Leadership Teams and Election of Officers

Report from Property Management Team on Sanctuary Renovations

Motion to Approve Organ Renewal Plan
Motion to Approve Installation of Sanctuary Projector
Motion to Authorize Capital Campaign for Sanctuary Renewal
Motion to Approve “Curb Appeal” Projects

Report from Worship & Education Leadership Team on
Safe Church/Safe Conduct Policy Revision

Report from Mission & Outreach Leadership Team on
Peace Pole Installation and Motion to Authorize

Receipt of 2025 Financial Reports

Presentation of the 2026 Annual Budget

BUSINESS OF THE ST. JOHN CHURCH ENDOWMENT

Receipt of the Financial Report

Election of Trustees for the St. John Church Endowment

ADJOURNMENT

STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR 2025

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP 2024 ADDITIONS

January 1, 2024	506
New Member/Transfer	3
Confirmation	0
Total	509

2024 LOSSES

Deaths	9
Removal	0
Transfers	2
Total	11

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP

December 31, 2024	498
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BAPTISMS

Infants	2
Youth/Adults	0

WEDDINGS

Members	0
Non-members	0

FUNERALS

Members	7
Non-Members	1

IN-PERSON WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

MORNING SERVICES (52)

In-person Attendance, 3404	Average, 65
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COMMUNION SERVICES (12)

Average Communing/Service	63
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SPECIAL SERVICES

Ash Wednesday, 7:00 pm	24
Maundy Thursday, 7:00 pm	60
Christmas Eve, 5:00 pm	147
Easter Sunrise, 6:00 am	11
Easter Sunday Celebration, 10:00 am	130

ONLINE WORSHIP REACH

Due to a mid-year change in Facebook's viewer metrics, Online Worship statistics appear in a different range versus previous years.

Average Morning Worship Service Reach	149
Average Special Service Reach	144

FAITH FORMATION

January-December (49) in house	Average Attendance (weekly)	
	Adults	12
	Children	5

HELIX OUTREACH YOUTH MINISTRY

Active Participants	5th-8th Grade	18
Average Attendance	5th-8th Grade	9

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES

January 26, 2025

The meeting was called to order by Church Council President Lisa Ebbers.

There were 60 in attendance in person and online, resulting in a quorum.

The Minutes of the two Congregational Meetings held in 2024 as printed in the Annual Ministry Report booklet were presented. Diane Jochum moved that the Minutes be accepted as official record, with a second by Terri Musser. There being no discussion, the motion passed by unanimous vote, and the Minutes were accepted.

The written Reports from the Church Council, Ministry Staff Team and Leadership Teams as printed in the booklet were presented. Bonnie Gennusa moved that the Reports be accepted as official record, with a second by Shawn Killingbeck. There being no discussion, the motion passed by unanimous vote, and the Reports were accepted.

Lisa Ebbers, Chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the six positions of the Executive Committee. The three positions open to election this year are: Treasurer - Jeff Williams (term expiring 2027), Clerk/Secretary - Jill Gastel (term expiring 2027), and Member at large - vacant (term expiring 2027). The three officers remaining as elected last year are: President - Lisa Ebbers (term expiring 2026), Vice President - vacant (term expiring 2026), Member at large - Cindy Price (term expiring 2025, extended to 2026). As a motion from the Nominating Committee, no second is required. There being no discussion, the motion passed by unanimous vote, and the nominations were accepted.

Treasurer Blake Musser presented a brief overview of the 2024 Financial Reports, advising that 2024 was actually better than anticipated, partly due to a reduction in staff by the departure of Pastor Rachel Kirk. We benefited from a bequest and also some fundraising, and continued wide use of our building by numerous organizations to help to offset costs. There being no questions, the Financial Reports were received, subject to audit.

The 2025 Annual Budget was presented by Treasurer Blake Musser. He reported that we will have basically a balanced budget this year, although staffing discussions are ongoing which may affect numbers. He advised that the solar project, which was paid off early, has resulted in big utility savings. In addition, our new more efficient boilers have saved an estimated \$2,000 in gas bills already this winter. The annual stewardship drive was very successful, resulting in a total of \$193,500 - an increase of \$21,000 over last year. Dennis Jochum moved that the 2025 Annual Budget be accepted, with a second by Jeff Williams. There being no discussion, the motion was passed by unanimous vote, and the Budget was accepted.

Lisa Schubert called the St. John Church Endowment members meeting to order, referring the congregation to the Endowment Report in the annual booklet. Blake Musser moved that the

Endowment Report be accepted as official record, with a second by Anita Bicksler. There being no discussion, the motion passed by unanimous vote, and the Report was accepted.

Election of Endowment Officers: On behalf of the Endowment Board, Lisa Schubert nominated Kathryn Ebbers (term expiring 2026), Lisa Schubert (term expiring 2028), Allen Buus (term expiring 2028) and Dale Prieve (term expiring 2029) to serve as Directors for the Endowment. Judi Buus moved to accept the nominations, with a second by Dan King. There being no discussion, the motion passed by unanimous vote, and the nominees were accepted.

The following were acknowledged for their service, as their terms are ending: Blake Musser, Treasurer; Jan Kunkle, Clerk/Secretary; Carla Meyer, Care & Community Representative to Council; and Alex Bertram and Greg Bicksler, Endowment Directors.

Pastor Hank concluded the meeting by thanking our Racial Justice Team for their 3-1/2 years of service, as they stand down: Lisa Schubert, Colin Ebbers, Kathryn Ebbers, Liz Reyes, Carlos Reyes, Rev. Diane Jochum and Rev. Rachel Kirk.

There being no other business, the 2025 Annual Congregational Meeting was adjourned by a consensus motion.

Respectfully submitted, Jan Kunkle, Clerk of Council

ST. JOHN CHURCH ENDOWMENT REPORT

Year Ending 2025

St. John United Church of Christ Endowment, Inc. was established by St. John United Church of Christ as a “vehicle to protect the long-term stability of St. John United Church of Christ.” Under its articles of Incorporation, it is only authorized to disperse funds for the benefit of St. John United Church of Christ.

The board meets quarterly, primarily to review the financial performance of the Endowment Investments, distribute funds requested by the Church Council, and make goal and objective decisions for each Investment fund. 2025 was a quiet year due to only the usual items need to be done by the board as well as having a complete number of board directors.

Board of Directors Term

Kathryn Ebbers	2022-2025 (term complete 2026)
Lisa Schubert	2024-2026 (term complete 2027)
Allen Buus	2024-2027 (term complete 2028)
Albert Skwara	2025-2029
Dale Priewe	2025-2029

2025 Officers

President	Lisa Schubert
Secretary	Kathryn Ebbers
Treasurer	Kathryn Ebbers

There are four separate funds: General/Endowment Account, Janshen Account, Kampmeier Scholarship Account, and the Park Residence Account.

The General/Endowment fund is invested for “Growth” with an allocation of 80% equities, 12% fixed income, and 8% cash equivalents.

The Janshen fund is invested for “Growth” with an allocation of 78% equities, 19% fixed income, and 3% cash equivalents.

The Kampmeier Scholarship fund is invested for “Income and Growth” with an allocation of 39% equities, 58% fixed income, and 3% cash equivalents.

The Park Residence fund is invested for “Growth and Income” with an allocation of 44% equities, 23% fixed income, and 33% cash equivalents. In July a slight adjustment was made to the allocation to increase the income, because of expenses of the property. We have had some fixed income that matured out, so we are sitting in cash. It was decided to invest those funds in a CD for twelve months.

10% of the 12/31/2023 market value of the General/Endowment Account was distributed to the Church’s checking account along with dividends earned in 2024.

The dividends and interest earned in 2024 from the Janshen Account was transferred to the Church’s checking account in May.

\$750 of the income earned in 2024 from the Kampmeier Account was distributed as scholarships.

2024 year-end balances: 12/31/2023

General/Endowment Fund Market Value: \$255,197 (\$14,209)

Janshen Fund Market Value: \$1,308,582 (\$79,028)

Kampmeier Fund Market Value: \$46,851 (\$3,744)

Park Residence Fund Market Value: \$20,699 (-742)

2025 balances: as of 11/30/2025

General/Endowment Fund Market Value: \$251,727 (-\$3,470)

Janshen Fund Market Value: \$1,402,506 (\$93,924)

Kampmeier Fund Market Value: \$49,897 (\$3,046)

Park Residence Fund Market Value: \$25,376 (\$4,677)

Respectfully submitted, Lisa Schubert

MINISTRY TEAM REPORT

Senior Pastor

“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.”

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

Every January, I pause in our post-Christmas glow, and wonder with those most churchy questions,

“What is God calling us to do and to be in this coming year?”

This September marked our ninth anniversary in partnered ministry. But as calendars count, this was our tenth Christmas and new year together (my, how the time as passed!). And I was caught in reflection, like old Ebenezer waking up to the Spirit of New Years Past.

Each year of this decade started with a note in Annual Report like this one:

2017 was a “Bright Hope for Tomorrow,” looking to the beginning of ministry together. Then in 2018, we asked a question, “...and who is my neighbor?”, engaging in our mission and outreach in Freeport and beyond. 2019 looked to the stars, with a prediction of a “sudden, unplanned, and unforeseen change.” Little did we know what was to come in 2020 with the arrival of a global pandemic and disruptive social and political landscape...

2021 made a statement: “What a year for a New Year,” owning the strangeness of nine months of the COVID pandemic. And just as auspicious, 2022 marked a celebration: The return of from the pandemic’s liminality. And of course 2023 brought us into our “einhundertfünfundsiebzig jahre,” our 175th anniversary year, followed by our 2024 Sabbatical Year. And 2025 brought us back to beginning, again, resetting our mission and ministry with some big, hairy, audacious goals of being the church in our time and place. But, that’s what we do. We keep coming back, knowing that God’s love abides in us, and in our community through our ministry.

We sing an old, old, song, knowing that even in the longest of nights, God’s light of hope, peace, love, and joy burns away the weighty shadows of the world. Only in God’s light can we find Christmas, and in that light, honor Christ’s way in our hearts, and “try to keep it all the year.”

If we were to tell our congregation’s *Christmas Carol* tale, we certainly have a lot to look back to in 2025. Just keep reading these reports! The witness of our congregation’s living our faith out loud would raise the eyebrows of any spirit worth a night’s visit!

As I said last year, *“We are, and will be, a Renewing Church for the next five to ten years, focusing on our physical plant and resource development in tandem with our community connections, our spiritual engagement, and our faith formation.”* And you can see it truth as you keep reading!

Find out what Council is doing to ensure that our history lives through the present and into the future: Consider their discussions on staffing, discerning just the right kind of support our ministries need,

to fundraising the necessary fiscal resources to strengthen our engagement. Welcome their holding our “big, hairy, audacious goals” in tension with the resources and talents entrusted to our congregation. I celebrate their agile work in creative and flexible ministry.

Take a moment to review the Property Management Team’s report. It is always surprising to me how much our church campus matters in the “business” of being that church. Each of those repairs, every moment of preventive maintenance, and the hours of planning and researching adds to the ministry of hospitality we share with ourselves and our neighbors. And take inspiration from their thoughtful and thorough planning for the many upcoming projects in 2026 and beyond.

Look over the reflections in the Finance and Development Team’s report. Funding a half-million dollar nonprofit is a tricky thing to do in our world today. Add to that that the intricacies of developing the assets for a RELIGIOUS nonprofit, and working to inspire sources of funding beyond our checkbooks – That’s some serious evangelism! They will be doing some serious five-year forecasting this year, with the hope of better understanding why people and institutions trust St. John UCC to be their “charity of choice” and agent for helping heal the world’s wounded places.

Check out what our three Leadership Teams are talking about: Care & Community’s continued commitment to our members, friends, and visitors; Mission & Outreach’s passion for, and hands-on work to bring, a more just and loving world; and Worship & Education’s ongoing joy of sharing the Gospel in song, story, praise, and faith formation.

Witness the impact of our Wellness Ministry. Along with visiting our seniors, they took on a year of understanding grief and loss. And are beginning to widen their impact, addressing mental and spiritual health, and tending to our physical bodies as well.

I give thanks daily for the strength of the staff team that supports our congregation. I honor the three years of music ministry with Judi Buus as she enters “another” time of retirement, and the blessings she shared in her time with the congregation. I celebrate Pam Wessel and her continued presence and organizational knowledge. I celebrate the Rev. Ted Michalsen’s gifts in pastoral care and preaching. I celebrate Karla Hardersen, and her thorough planning and strong attention to details. I celebrate our music ministry with Randy Cook and Carl and Dianna Cole. I celebrate our HELIX staff: Madison Riddell, Kendra Koning, and Tay Flint. I celebrate our Audio/Video Staff, Max Gibson (and promise to add another member or two to the team this year!). I rejoice in the continued partnership with Brigit Monson Stevens, who maintains our financial records with ease and grace. And with joyful song, I welcome Britney Kiesselhorst to our team as our Music Director.

No matter which year it is for you in the community at St. John UCC, remember this: No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, God’s never-ending love reaches out across the years, and welcomes you to celebrate the rising of each sun! May we each count our days in 2026, and may they lead us to learn, serve, worship, and gather with like-spirited people. Truly, a Happy New Year to each of us!

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Hank Fairman

Visitation Pastor

The main function within my job description is ensuring that our members and friends in long term or rehabilitation care receive monthly pastoral visits. Each month I sought out people of St. John UCC who are aging in place or receiving care at one of the several long term and rehabilitation communities in Freeport. During these visits I shared conversations, learned about people's stories, participated in games hosted by activities departments, toned my arms and legs in at least two sessions of chair exercise programs, heard Howie Mandel report that the banker has adjusted their offer, and seen Walker Texas Ranger roundhouse kick the bad guys. All this along with regularly assumed opportunities for prayer, devotion, and communion. I would like to close this section of my report with an invitation to contact me on behalf of yourself or your loved ones should you wish to establish a regular pastoral visit.

The second aspect of my work is to prepare worship and preach once a month and as needed. Aside from time with Sanctified Art in Lent/Easter and Advent, our lectionary guided us through the Gospel of Luke. Together in worship we explored the widely open sharing of Jesus' message, remembered the call to be concerned for the plight of the marginalized and oppressed, and were made witnesses to the power of the Spirit.

I look forward to the new and renewed opportunities to serve in the new year.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Ted Michalsen

Director of Congregational Life

Wow! Another year gone by, and I celebrated my 30th year of employment at St. John UCC. I want to thank everyone for the 30th Anniversary Celebration, all the cards, gifts, and kind words. In that time, I have worked for 3 different pastors and interims, numerous front desk personnel, seen a lot of people come and go, but continue to enjoy the work that I am called to do. The changes to my job have been numerous throughout the years and I continue to learn new things each year. The staff and congregation have been very supportive over the years and have become my family. With that said, I'm not leaving yet!

Working with the congregation entails many things. I keep track of all the membership records, new and old, as well as updating any changes. I also enter participation for Sunday services and Sunday School on a weekly basis and keep track of visits to our Living Facility and homebound friends.

The Care and Community Leadership Team is one of my main focuses. This ministry team is responsible for Fellowship events, including potlucks, dinners and memorial luncheons. Our ministry team is still challenged to bring new ways to worship and engage our members in the fellowship of St. John UCC. We also have the task of going over membership records, advertising within the community and being liaison to the PRISM group.

The Care and Community Leadership Team was able to host the Ice Cream Social, Thanksgiving Pie Baking, and Bake Sale as our primary fundraisers. These are successful with the help of great coordinators and the support of the church. Our social events are geared towards including our members and guests in different fun/work activities. If you have an idea you would like to present, just send an email to the church, or talk with one of the members of the ministry team. This year we were able to participate in The Bunny Trail and Trick or Treat Trail at Krape Park and hand out candy plus information about the church. We also participated in Paint the Port, a community hosted event.

Another main responsibility I hold is that of the Financial Secretary. I take care of contributions, pledges, and weekly offerings. I am responsible for quarterly giving statements and year end reports. We have seen our ACH giving increased. I record ACH gifts, weekly and monthly. If you are interested in ACH giving, please give me a call. Thank you for your continued support of the church and its activities.

Our Wellness Ministry has been in action for 1 year. We have 5 committed visitors currently. We lost our team leader, Cindy Price this summer. We can always use more visitors, especially men. We welcomed Pastor Ted as pastoral support with his visits to serve communion.

Church life is changing. We look at what new things we can do and how we can involve more people. If you have any suggestions or questions on how you can be a part of St. John UCC, please give me a call or email. Helpers are always needed for ushering, coffee hours and various things that pop up. Thank you for another year here at St. John UCC.

Respectfully submitted, Pam Wessel

Creative and Administrative Assistant

I started at the position of Creative and Administrative Assistant at St. John UCC on December 9th, 2024 on a limited, part-time basis, as I recovered from my knee replacement surgery. Starting after the New Year (on January 6, 2025), I began my current hours of MWF, 9-3 pm.

After onboarding and learning the ins and outs of the normal weekly workflow in the St. John UCC office, my position began for the first many months of my hiring with the “Administrative Assistant” portion of my job description. This includes, but is not limited to: weekly bulletin creation and printing; weekly announcements and hymn inserts; worship announcements for the sanctuary projector screen and Narthex televisions; copyright reporting; the weekly e-news Friday Blast; editing and printing of the monthly Tidings newsletter; the upkeep of the St. John UCC online calendar, including coordinating rooms and time slots for the various ministries and outside groups looking for meeting locations; various editing, compiling, and printing of supplemental materials for additional services, small groups, etc.; and finally, compiling the Annual Report.

By spring 2025, I started with the “Creative” portion of my job description. These additional tasks to my weekly workflow included, but are not limited to: maximizing our social media presence by creating, organizing, and scheduling daily Facebook and Instagram posts; learning how to use Adobe In Design and Photoshop; designing posters and flyers for church events; learning the software and creating advertisements for the outdoor digital sign on Park Blvd; publicizing and marketing church events; creating the outdoor digital sign at the Stephenson County Fairgrounds; and taking photos of the goings-on at St. John UCC for posterity’s sake and for social media usage. I am also, on exceedingly blessed days, able to pick the occasional peach from the garden and sample food from the CareerTec students.

Through all of the above tasks, I have been learning and growing in my position, making the more-than-occasional error(s), and enjoying working not only with the staff members at St. John UCC, but also the visitors that I am fortunate to greet in the office. In 2026, I hope to continue developing my skills and (hopefully) make fewer mistakes. I am also hoping to complete the following: produce a series of brochures for St. John UCC (rather than the originally intended “Welcome Packet”); figuring out the future of our Tidings newsletter (Suggestions, anyone? How does it fit into our ministry? What information would you like to see in Tidings?); learning how our Imagination Team can better serve the community at St. John UCC; and how to reach new audiences in Freeport and beyond with the “social media manager-esque” tasks of my position.

I thank each of you for the honor and many blessings of serving the St. John UCC community in my position here. I look forward to watching 2026 unfold!

Respectfully submitted, Karla Hardersen

Music Director

The Music Ministry team is dedicated to enriching our Sunday services and supporting special events at St. John UCC through music. I began my role this past September, so I've only been here about four months, but in that short time I've been truly moved by this congregation and the generosity with which so many share their musical gifts.

I am incredibly grateful to Randy Cook, our principal musician, for his hard work, talent, and dedication to the Music Ministry. I truly could not do this work without him. I would also like to thank Pastor Hank Fairman for encouraging me to come to St. John UCC and for the opportunity to work with such wonderful ensembles. My sincere thanks also go to the many musicians who generously give their time and talents to this ministry.

My hope is that we continue to reinvigorate both our Music Ministry and our congregation through music that uplifts, inspires, and speaks to the world we live in. Music has the power to bring hope and encourage change, and it is my hope that our ministry shares that spirit with the St. John UCC community and beyond.

In just these first few months, we have already experienced many meaningful moments together. The “12 Songs of Christmas” event brought musicians from across Freeport together to support our community through donations to the FSD Shoe Fund. Each Sunday, music has been shared through Bell Choir, Chancel Choir, special music, Sounds of the Spirit, and our wonderful guest musicians, the Coles. We also celebrated a beautiful Christmas Eve service, with Randy and both choirs offering their gifts, and we look forward to continuing to support important liturgical services such as Ash Wednesday and Easter.

I am excited to continue this work alongside the St. John UCC community. I feel truly blessed to serve in this role and deeply thankful for the support and encouragement I've received. Thank you!

Respectfully submitted, Britney Kieselhorst

CHURCH COUNCIL

2025 was a year of community, growth, and meaningful change. To help church members and visitors easily identify leaders, color coded leadership nametags were introduced:

- Council – Blue
- Care & Community – Red
- Mission & Outreach – Yellow
- Worship & Education – Green

Mission & Outreach led the “Bucket Project,” successfully assembling 25 Disaster Buckets for Church World Services. We continued our commitment to feeding the hungry and unhoused by providing weekly hot meals to FACC. Volunteers are always welcome to contribute full meals or individual components such as salads or desserts.

The Hunger Bowl Project was another success, offering beautifully hand painted bowls for purchase at the annual Hunger Luncheon. A special thank you to Pastor Ted for firing each bowl and making them truly spectacular.

On October 18, we hosted our first annual Oktoberfest, featuring kegs of root beer, authentic German food, live music, games, and fellowship—a wonderful start to what we hope will be a cherished tradition.

This year also brought staffing transitions. We said goodbye to Ben Lincoln, our Sunday AV technician, and celebrated Judi Buus, who announced her retirement as Director of Music effective June 8, 2025. We were pleased to welcome Britney Kieselhorst as our new Music Director; she began her role on September 4, 2025. The HELIX Youth Outreach Program continued its important work under the leadership of Madison Riddell. We also celebrated Pam Wessel’s 30 years of dedicated service on October 1, 2025.

Our annual Pride Picnic was held on June 14 on the church lawn, featuring booths from local organizations, food, and activities for all ages. Attendance was once again strong. We also participated in the Trick or Treat Trail at Krape Park, where we connected with hundreds of children and their families.

The church library received a refreshing upgrade this year, including new shelving and donated chairs generously provided by M45 Marketing.

We were profoundly blessed to receive a significant bequest from an individual not known to the congregation. She chose to support several UCC churches because she believed in the mission we serve—a powerful reminder of the impact our work has beyond our walls.

Respectfully submitted, Jill Gastel

Treasurer's Report

As I reflect on the past year, I am deeply grateful for the generosity and faithfulness of our congregation. Your gifts make a tangible difference in the life of St. John UCC. Because of your support, our worship services continue to be vibrant and welcoming, our youth have opportunities to grow in faith and confidence, and our outreach ministries—feeding the hungry, visiting the homebound, and supporting families in crisis—remain a visible expression of God's love in our community. We are truly blessed.

As we review the 2025 financial results and look ahead, the following key points are offered for clarity and reflection.

Revenue Highlights

- **Pledged Contributions and Identified Giving** totaled **\$220,650**, consistent with 2024 levels, but still below the **\$325,000 budgeted amount**. Fundraising Income also fell short of budget and prior year amounts. Additional stewardship efforts will be necessary in the coming year to fully support operating expenses without relying on special or one-time gifts.
- **Facility use by outside groups and programs** continues to be an important source of income, generating over **\$4,000 per month**. This level of activity is expected to continue through 2026.
- **Endowment and Jansen Trust budget support** provided more than **\$61,000**, significantly strengthening our ability to fund ministry and operations.
- We were fortunate to receive the **remaining bequest of \$104,000**, which allowed us to address several identified needs and provided important financial stability during the year.

Expense Highlights

- **Personnel expenses** remained in line with budgeted amounts for 2025. A modest cost-of-living increase is planned for 2026, and additional staff hours may be required to manage an increasing workload.
- St. John UCC continued its commitment to **Our Church's Wider Mission**, contributing **\$10,000** in 2025. A similar level of support is anticipated for 2026.
- **Mission Grants** were not funded again in 2025 as the program ended. Should a reliable funding source become available in the future, this line item may be reconsidered.
- **Technology expenses** exceeded the budget by approximately **\$5,000** due to increased needs for hardware, software, and maintenance. While these investments provide meaningful benefits when fully utilized, future budgets will be adjusted to reflect ongoing costs.
- **Property and liability insurance**, one of our largest single expenses, is expected to see only minimal change from 2025 to 2026. This reflects well on staff efforts to maintain strong policies and procedures that reduce risk exposure.

Overall Financial Perspective

Throughout the year, the church has been diligent in managing operating expenses. From time to time, special projects or unexpected needs arise that may require designated gifts or alternative funding sources. In addition to budgeted expenses, it is important to recognize the countless in-kind donations supporting food pantries, care packages, shoe funds, disaster relief buckets, and other outreach efforts—gifts that greatly extend our ministry beyond what is reflected in financial statements.

The revenue side of the budget will require increased attention in the coming year and beyond. The church has experienced sizable operating deficits over the past two years. We see fewer households making formal pledge commitments, and total pledged amounts have remained flat. In addition, giving from those who do not pledge has declined significantly during the same period.

Conclusion

St. John UCC remains a faithful and active congregation with a strong commitment to worship, service, and mission. At the same time, our financial trends remind us of the importance of intentional stewardship and shared responsibility. As we move forward, prayerful reflection, open communication, and renewed commitment to giving will be essential to sustaining the ministries we value and expanding our witness in the community.

I submit this report in gratitude for your trust and continued support of the mission and ministry of St. John United Church of Christ.

Respectfully submitted, Jeff Williams

Human Resources Team

We extend our sincere gratitude to all our staff for ensuring that our mission and ministry continue to thrive throughout the year. Your commitment and service have a profound impact on our congregation and community.

Senior Paster Hank Fairman continues his leadership and pastoral presence, guiding our weekly worship gatherings that keep us connected and strengthen our faith not only within our church walls, but also throughout the community.

Ted Michalsen continues as our Visitation Pastor to help support our members at home and in long-term care.

We recognize Pam Wessel, Director of Congregational Life, for her many talents. She celebrated 30 years of service this year. We are truly blessed to have someone with experience and knowledge for so many years.

We recognize Judi Buus for her years of dedicated service as Music Director and celebrated her retirement last year.

Britney Kieselhorst was hired as our Music Director after Judi's retirement. She joined us on September 1, 2025, and brings her enthusiasm and many talents to lead our choirs and other special music. We are truly blessed to have found such talent.

Randy Cook continues as our Principal Musician. His music ministry provides coordinated worship music each week, blessing us all. Special thanks also to Carl & Dianna Cole for their uplifting monthly music ministry.

Max Gibson, Digital Media Assistant, along with Tim Ebbers (volunteer), continue to manage our Sunday morning technologies. They not only make in-person worship run efficiently but also allow those who are not able to attend our services the opportunity to worship from wherever they are and be part of the service each week.

Karla Hardersen was hired last year to fill the role of Creative & Administrative Assistant. In addition to her office responsibilities, she regularly volunteers for the other Church activities that is deeply appreciated.

Brigit Monson Stevens has been managing our bookkeeping requirements. She works remotely (now living in Nova Scotia!), and provides timely reporting to the Council.

Madison (Matt) Riddell continues as the HELIX Youth Outreach Director. He fills an important role for the community to help serve after school activities for students. Matt additionally provides oversight for the HELIX Interns and Staff: Kendra Koenig, and Martavia "Tay" Flint; who we thank for their mentoring and caring for the HELIX youth.

A big Thank You to our entire St. John's staff team! We know there is so much that happens behind the scenes that we cannot begin to list them all. However, please know everything you do is appreciated by all.

Respectfully submitted, Jill Gastel

Property Management Team

We must have had a lot of fun last year by the way time flew by! Now that 2025 is gone, we can update you on all of the things Property Management accomplished.

As usual, a big THANK YOU to Bear Outdoor Services (lawn) and Think Snow Removal (parking lot and newly acquired steps and sidewalks) for keeping the campus looking great. Also, a big THANK YOU to the volunteers who helped remove/ trim trees, some serious bushwhacking, and major weed pulling. Everyone is invited to these weed parties council requested 2-3 times a year. Instead of fixing parking lot lights timer (a semi-annual event), we had dusk to dawn sensors installed

on remaining two lights. This should improve security tremendously for all activities that go on way after darkness settles in.

The 922 House Trustees performed a full house inspection at the property to plan for necessary interior/exterior maintenance needs.

Many updates took place inside of the facility. Kitchen and North wing bathrooms all had new faucets installed, as well as a new water softener and water heater to supply the South Wing and kitchen. New chairs were added in library (thank you M45 Marketing Services) as well as new bookshelves. Also we added new chairs in choir-loft, replacing the failing now 10-year old chairs. Both were a long time coming. We hope all enjoyed the new greens purchased which decorated our sanctuary this Christmas season. A big THANK YOU to all who help with the decorating for Christmas time. Installed new ceiling fans in chapel hearth room. We also had to replace the Commercial Refrigerator in the kitchen.

Couple big ticket items remain in our scope of ministry: the Sanctuary projector died, and we are working on insurance claim for replacement. The Bell Carillon CD changer died (installed 1992), and we are reviewing options, including not replacing. We are investigating digital sign replacement, keyless entry for Atrium and front doors; new blinds for south/main wing windows; curtains for fellowship hall; a "facelift" (pews and flooring) for sanctuary; and new, updated thermostat system to work better with new heating equipment. We are hoping the rest of original HVAC equipment keeps us "cool" for another year, through preventive maintenance.

To end on a more positive note, we received word on funding for Organ Rehabilitation Project, and are sending this project to the congregation for final approval. A big THANK YOU to the donor for their generosity.

Respectfully submitted, Jack Gastel

Imagination Team

In June 2025, Rev. Hank Fairman, Pam Wessel, and I had a conversation in the office about how to better organize, publicize, and support the events that take place at St. John UCC. This came out of a discussion on our annual Pride Picnic, and how we can (as both as an office staff and church community) better support events – and the individuals running them – so that so much work does not fall on too few shoulders. This is a vibrant community in which we can work together to lift up one another's ideas, plans, and visions so that we are all actively participating in being church and bringing spirit, vitality, and life into all that we do and to everyone that we serve.

Further, there are so many ideas floating around the community on various events and activities that our members want to see happen at St. John UCC. Events from years past that some want to bring back, new ideas that members want to bring forward, and so much more. While the community at St. John UCC is very good at imagining possibilities, we can sometimes limit ourselves with the follow-through.

In that light, the idea for the Imagination Team came about – a team that would meet to plan and coordinate events, taking visions and launching it into fruition so that we can all enjoy more fellowship time and share in our mission and ministry with the greater Freeport area. (Note: One of the proposed names for this team was The Fun Team – a group that has a passion for hosting events, filled with energy and enthusiasm, gifted at collaboration and love to roll up their sleeves so that the fun part of church can happen!)

Out of this discussion, first meeting for the Imagination Team was planned for 7/20/2025. There was a positive response, and we've had as many as fifteen St. John UCC members attend an Imagination Team meeting at once. The need, desire, and support have been there, and I thank you for your enthusiasm!

The Imagination Team's goals were to help coordinate events, publicize events, and to make all these visions, ideas, and possibilities happen. Since launching, the Imagination Team has helped publicize Rally Day and the Empty Bowls Project, held Oktoberfest, and began the planning for Mardi Gras. We've tried to streamline the process from imagination to coordination to making it happen. Integral to this process is coming up with ideas, finding a Leadership Team to take ownership of these ideas, filling out a planning checklist, creating a team of volunteers to help make these visions happen, coordinating with the office staff to create marketing materials for these events, and finding ways to publicize these events in the larger community.

We have not yet mastered the Imagination Team process, and there is still much to do to make this group fully incorporated in our community. We need to fine tune what we want the Imagination Team to be, and have a more defined leadership structure in place. Do any of you want to help lead the Imagination Team into 2026? Please talk to me!

Respectfully submitted, Karla Hardersen

CARE & COMMUNITY MINISTRY

The Care and Community Leadership Team has the responsibility of watching over our congregation. We take care of hospitality which includes overseeing Coffee Hour, preparing food for our Fellowship events, Memorial Services, Lenten dinners, and all activities throughout the year. We oversee visitation to our assisted living facilities, nursing homes and homebound individuals, and PRISM LGBTQ+ Outreach. This ministry is also responsible for looking at membership records yearly.

The Wellness Ministry continues to visit our shut-ins in nursing facilities and home bound. Pastor Ted serves as our Pastoral support person. The teams have been able to visit monthly, making calls as necessary. Pastor Ted has been able to visit and take communion to all.

In 2025, we held 3 fundraising activities: Ice cream social, the Thanksgiving pie sale, and Bake Sale. Other activities and events throughout the year included Lenten Suppers, Rally Day lunch and Hanging of the Greens lunch and potlucks after church service. We continue to coordinate the coffee hour with coffee and treats provided by members. If you can assist with this ministry, there is a sign-up sheet on the church bulletin board.

The church also participated in Paint the Port in downtown Freeport held in August. This was our 7th year of participation. The PRISM group was able to hold a Pride Event in June on the front lawn of the church, which was well attended. We also staffed the Trick or Treat Trail and Bunny Trail at Krape Park, handing out clips and information about our church and programming

Publicity and Advertising are also among our tasks. This year we continued our commitment with our banners at Little Cubs Field and the FHS baseball field. We also sponsored radio ads for Quota Club, had an ad in the Nutcracker program, and started advertising on the sign at Stephenson County Fair Grounds. The membership team continues their work to ensure connection with our long-time members and newest visitors.

Working with our Mission & Outreach Leadership Team, we have continued to provide meals at FACC's Chicago Avenue Mission.

Thank you to our church family and friends for their contributions in helping make our events a success. Your time and help were greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted, Carla Meyer

Wellness Ministry Team

In the Gospel of John, Jesus confesses a desire that people would know life and experience it in abundance (10:10). The Wellness Ministry Team desires to aid folks in knowing a full life by nurturing the social, emotional, and spiritual dimension of wellness. This is accomplished through our monthly visits and check-ins with our nursing care, homebound, and long-term rehabilitation members/friends.

Our team needed to adjust as teammates were pulled away for health reasons or departures, and sadly one of our team supervises our work from the great cloud of witnesses. The doers change but the work remains and between the team and the Pastoral staff, St. John UCC members and friends who are aging in place or being cared for outside of the received an average of two visits each month. In 2025 members of the Wellness Ministry made 250 visits, to 13 people starting in January, totaling approximately 252 hours of care and connection. Due to life's many changes, we now visit with nine people every month. We also call on folks at home to see if they would like to be visited by a Wellness Team Member. At Easter, Midsummer, and Christmas we were able to assemble and deliver seasonal care packages with your helpful donations.

Our second big undertaking was to provide regular opportunities for grief support and care. Attendance at our events hosted in the Spring Summer, and Fall communicated that the people of St. John UCC are finding grief care in other ways or places. At our December team meeting we decided we would table the pursuit of grief care and were challenged to consider other areas of congregational wellness that we could address.

I would like to end my report with a note of thanks for your support at the collection time for the seasonal care packages. Members and friends on our care list who have been the recipient of these gestures of care continue to sing their praises.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Ted Michalsen

WORSHIP & EDUCATION MINISTRY

In 2025, the team prioritized religious education for our youth, focusing on programs such as Godly Play, Kids Worship, and HELIX. We aided in organizing Church camp and helped with confirmations. Additionally, the team discussed worship components related to special events, dramas, and music performances.

The Godly Play and Whirl classes were held every Sunday throughout the school year. Godly Play received new materials, while Whirl switched to an Advent curriculum from Illustrated Ministry. It was decided that everyone, including the children, should be present on the first Sunday of each month to participate in Communion Sunday. Ensuring that there are always two adults in each room on Sundays to comply with our Safe Church policy can be challenging.

Kelly Priebe organized an Easter egg hunt for the children during the Easter worship service, and several of our kids also attend church camp in July. Additionally, the group organized games for Rally Day, ornament-making activities for the Hanging of the Greens, and Safe Church training sessions. The Kid's Art Project was completed and will be conducted again this year.

Adult Formation classes have been going well, covering a variety of engaging topics. One notable session was on Theology in Universal Monster movies, held in October. In February, a Leadership retreat focused on St. John UCC's Values Statements and BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). During this retreat, each Leadership team created its own mission statement, set targets, and defined desired outcomes. Additionally, Safe Church training took place in February, and a member of the Worship and Education team participated in OWL training in Michigan.

The Palm Sunday service featured a children's-led worship, which was very well received. Another children's-led worship service took place on November 2. There was a discussion regarding potential time changes for Sunday School and Adult Education on Sunday mornings. It was decided that Adult Education will continue at 9:00 AM, while Children's Worship will be held during the 10:00 AM service.

Additionally, a special "Christmas in July" service was held on July 27 as part of the Summer Stewardship campaign. Rally Day was a great success, highlighted by the Hunger Luncheon where over 60 bowls were painted during a bowl-painting activity.

In 2025, the music ministry underwent several changes. There is an active search for more inclusive hymnals, but the WAR hymnals will continue to be used alongside inserts featuring different hymns. After the retirement of Judi Buss, Randy Cook took over as the director of the Chancel Choir, and Sarah Knapp was appointed interim director of the Bell Choir. Following an extensive search, Brittney Kieselhorst was hired as the new Music Director. The "12 Songs of Christmas" event was highly successful, raising over \$900 to provide shoes for children in need.

In September, we rededicated the Laura Uthlaut Memorial Library. New shelving was installed in the library, along with an updated library policy and a computerized system to catalog our books. Christina Fairman and her team scanned each book and labeled them accordingly.

We are very excited about this year's celebration of worship. We remain committed to live streaming each service to extend our warm welcome to those who cannot attend in person. A big thank you to Max for all his hard work with the audio/visual equipment.

Looking forward to what 2026 brings.

Respectfully submitted, Shawn Killingbeck

Helix Youth Outreach

This year, HELIX served youths between 5th and 8th grades, through meetings that met on Wednesday afternoons 3:00-5:00. Helix focuses on social-emotional learning(SEL), this age level includes lessons like setting goals, being a good friend, understanding each other's perspectives, and conflict resolution.

In conversations with FSD-145 teachers and administrators, we continue to hear that today's youth struggle with SEL skill sets. HELIX reached a total of 18 unique students this year. We are proud to know that our program helps reinforce SEL skills that students are taught in the classroom, while offering a safe, fun place for youth to enjoy our community and mentorship.

This year staffing includes two program assistants, Martavia Flint and Kendra Koning, who serve as mentors to our youth. Their unique perspective and helpful hands have always been a great help to the HELIX program. We hope to continue the internship program with new interns next fall, and that this can be a mutually beneficial arrangement for interested students, giving them real-world job experience and leadership development while they support our youth.

The HELIX youth enjoyed a year of crafts and games with each other, they really enjoyed preparing a meal for FACC, helping with the food bank bags and maintaining the community hygiene box outside the church. Each week, as always, we discussed the highs and lows of life, including many real and heavy topics like mental health struggles, questions of identity, moving homes, conflicts with family members, and the illness of loved ones. Our students learn what it means to be part of a community that bears each other's burdens together and supports one another when life gets tough.

Thank you St. John UCC members and friends who understand the importance of investing in the social and emotional wellbeing of youth, it is greatly appreciated. Once again, thank you for your financial support, your "likes" and "shares" on social media, your words of encouragement, and your prayers.

Respectfully submitted, Madison Riddell

MISSION & OUTREACH MINISTRY

In 2025, St. John UCC Mission and Outreach Ministry continued God's call to provide as much help, relief, and hope for as many people as possible.

This year's projects included:

- Mission and Outreach continued Mission Moments which allow organizations who received benevolences from the congregation. These included Rebuilding Together, Elevated Voices, FACC, and Voices.
- Change for Change in 2025 went to Summer Camp/Outdoor Ministries, Boys and Girls Club, Voices, Northern Illinois Veterans and the FSD #145 Shoe Fund.
- Our second Tea project, held December 6, 2025, under the leadership of Judy Garkey, collected period products for FSD #145.
- We collected items for Head Start which included toys, towels, wash clothes, books, cars, barbies, play dough, action toys, and baby blankets.
- We collected items for the Northern Illinois Veterans group which included household items such as paper towels, toilet paper, and personal items.
- We once again filled Disaster Buckets, 25 for 2025. These buckets were filled with help from the Congregation after a potluck in April.
- We continued to provide meals for FACC every Wednesday night with a little help from our Helix Youth.
- We manned the Stephenson County Fair booths as volunteers. Profits of doing so went directly to FACC.
- In November a plan was made to help stock the FACC Pantry as SNAP benefits were being taken away from those in need. Helix bagged groceries to be taken to the pantry and distributed.
- In June we donated to Elevated Voices, enough money to purchase two tables for their Gala Event. We then donated one table back to Elevated Voices to be used for those who might not be able to afford to attend.
- The Empty Bowl Projected netted a profit of \$1,000 that went to the FACC food pantry. With the help of the congregation and community, we were able to decorate and sell our Empty Bowls at the FACC Hunger Luncheon.

Our God is good. Our Congregation is giving.

Respectfully submitted, Marla Kreeger

PRIDE Team

We're honored to celebrate 2025 of bringing our community together in support of LGBTQIA+ pride and belonging in Freeport and Stephenson County.

We spent months preparing for our annual Pride Month picnic, held on our front lawn as a free event for the community. Last year, over one hundred guests joined us from Freeport and beyond to celebrate their identities and show support for LGBTQ+ friends and family in a welcoming, inclusive space.

We were thrilled to partner with Hilldale Deli again for this year's picnic, offering great food alongside fun activities like a photo booth, bouncy house, face painting, Hot Wheels races, a raffle, and a live DJ. About thirty community organizations and businesses joined us with booths to show their support for LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors.

Thank you to everyone who joined us—and an extra big thank-you to the amazing volunteers who helped make the picnic special! We can't wait to see what the next planning team has in store to celebrate with you again next June at the Freeport PRIDE Picnic!

Respectfully submitted, Shawn Killingbeck

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