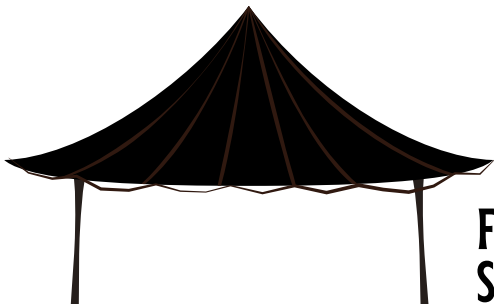


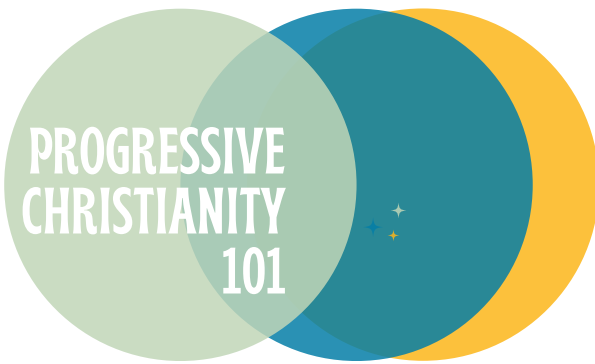
# The Bell



**PLYMOUTH CHURCH**  
FORT WAYNE + UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



**FOSTERING  
SMALL GROUPS**



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# Progressive Christianity 101

## Rev. Dr. Timothy Murphy



Allow me to let you in on a little secret: Plymouth does things a little different. Now, you are probably already aware of this. There are hundreds of various Christian congregations in the Fort Wayne region. We are in fellowship with many of them and partner with others where our values and priorities align.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are not many (probably fewer than a dozen in town) that would identify as a group of progressive Christians. With that in mind, some might be tempted to call us unique. However, I would disagree. We at Plymouth are certainly distinctive, true. But unique implies that there are not others who are like us.

From personal experience, I can attest to the reality that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other progressive Christian congregations in the United States and beyond (I met a few individuals during my recent trip to Scotland, for instance!). Over the past several decades, different non-profit organizations have sought to organize and provide resources for progressive Christians. These include ProgressiveChristianity.org as well as Progressive Christians Uniting, the latter of which I served as their Executive Director for three years.

However, most people who find their way to Plymouth have limited, if any, exposure to other progressive Christian communities. They may not be familiar with what progressive Christianity is all about and how it differs in certain theological respects from more culturally dominant forms of Christianity.

This is why Rev. Ofner-Seals and I are going to start offering a series called “Progressive Christianity 101.” We think this can be particularly beneficial to those who have come from more evangelical or fundamentalist traditions, those for whom this is their first church community, and those who would just appreciate a refresher.

While we are going to schedule these sessions around Welcoming Groups and the reception of new members, it is neither a requirement for new members nor exclusively geared to them. Anyone who is part of this community is welcome to attend and be in conversation with other Plymouth folks on what we believe and what progressive Christianity is all about.

The first upcoming series will be on Wednesday evenings once Wednesday Night Live concludes for the program year, beginning May 28 at 6:00 pm. We will meet for one hour on May 28, June 11, 18, and 25 in the Chapel.

We will be focusing on the following topics: 1) the authority of the Bible and experience, 2) images of Jesus and what salvation is, 3) different conceptions of God, and the truth of other religious traditions, and 4) the connection of social justice with our understanding of the gospel. It’s a lot to cover in four weeks, but we are looking forward to it! If you think you would like to be part of this, please let either myself or Rev. Ofner-Seals know in advance. Thank you!

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Murphy

# We Can Only Be Human Together

from the associate pastor



We have entered a difficult season. The political atmosphere has become so toxic; it can feel for some of us that there are potential landmines everywhere we step. At the same time, we cannot stay silent in the face of so much injustice and suffering. For many of us, the task before us at this moment is equal parts overwhelming and threatening. Amidst all of that, it can be difficult to keep our attention on parts of the world that seem far away from us, but it is also essential. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” We cannot ignore what is happening to our siblings in other parts of the world, because their humanity is directly tied to our own, and as Desmond Tutu was fond of saying, we can only be human together.

At the time of this writing, I am preparing to leave for Palestine in just a few days. As you read this, I will have just returned. I don’t yet know what is in store for our group, but I do know from experience that the trip will be impactful, and I anticipate that I will hear from many Palestinians there that they need our prayers, action, and solidarity now more than ever before. If ever there was a time to engage on the issue of justice for Palestine, it is now.

I recently finished reading the book “Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza,” by Palestinian Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac. Probably the most heartbreaking aspect of the book is reading about how Palestinian Christians feel betrayed by the western Church. We recently celebrated Easter Sunday with joyful music, lots of beautiful spring flowers, and delicious food. In Palestine, celebrations were muted while a genocide continues in Gaza and Christians in the West Bank continue to face attempts at ethnic cleansing and vicious attacks by illegal settlers. If we are indeed all tied together in a single garment of destiny, these attacks on Palestinian Christians are a direct attack on the Body of Christ as a whole, and that we cannot abide.

Yes, there is much injustice and suffering to attend to right here in the United States, but it is all connected. Consider how the detention and threats of deportation to student activists is related to the immigration debate. Consider how state violence here is tied to training that American police officers receive from the Israeli military overseas. Or consider how the current administration, amidst drastic cuts to essential programs and services at home, continues to send billions of dollars in military aid to a genocidal Israeli government. Isaac writes in his book that Gaza is the moral compass of our time. I agree, for if we can’t muster the courage to speak out on behalf of children in Gaza, who face relentless bombing and starvation every single day, our moral voice is collectively compromised and loses its integrity to speak on other issues as well. To be “progressive except for Palestine” is no longer an acceptable stance. Palestinian solidarity is deeply tied to our solidarity with Black Americans, indigenous Americans, LGBTQ Americans and immigrants. All these justice struggles are interconnected and intersectional.

We cannot ignore injustice in our own country, but neither can we ignore it on distant shores. We must attend to all of it. I know that feels overwhelming, but we must remember that we do not do this work alone. Remember that we are a body that is grounded in radical love and divine hope. Remember that while the powers that be may try to bury us, along with all other voices of dissent and resistance, we are seeds, and we are a resurrection people. Therefore, even if they attempt to bury us, we will surely rise again. So, take heart, and take a deep breath. God has work for us to do.

# Peace Symbol Liturgical Linen

## Lucy Hess

My guess is that few of you know the history of the liturgical linens or communion table covers. I will share the story of one of the covers. In the late summer of 2012, the Peace and Justice Committee (PJs) received cloth peace symbols in different languages from Bill and Betty Deans. They attended the American Baptist retreat at Green Lake, WI that July. In a third-world type shop on the grounds, they found the peace symbols and brought them to Fort Wayne. The PJs decided that these would be ideal on a communion table cover to be used when Plymouth celebrates Just Peace. The women who make these linens, primarily Anne Hughes, were asked to use the symbols for a new table linen. Because I was going to Israel, specifically to the West Bank and Bethlehem on a humanitarian project in Spring 2013, I was encouraged to bring back cloth for the cover. The liturgical linen makers thought it would be special if the cloth came from Bethlehem. Measurements were given and I found paint samples that matched the wall color in the sanctuary.

Since I was delivering Arabic language development tests to the elementary schools in Bethlehem, there would be luggage space for the cloth on my return. Once in Bethlehem, there was little time for shopping and the stores near our hotel did not sell cloth. There was no JoAnn's there! On the last day we were in Bethlehem, I tried to make the young man at the hotel desk understand I wanted to find a cloth store. I was not sure if there was one and if there was, I had no transportation to get to it. Finally, he called his mother, who spoke some English, to see if she could direct me to a store with cloth. Hurrah, there was one just a block or so down the hill from our hotel!

Accompanied by a colleague, I arrived at a tiny shop with bolts of fabric stacked to the ceiling. Most of it was black and it had colors more appropriate for clothing of the area and other uses. After some searching and negotiating, I spotted a couple of bolts in the back near the top. The clerk got them down and we began to compare paint samples. Luckily one did come close to a match. It was nice material that should work well for the liturgical cover. I asked for 5 yards showing the clerk how much 5 yards would be. When he measured it out, there was another yard left. He asked if I would buy the rest and of it and of course I did. A little extra cloth doesn't hurt when you are designing and sewing something new. The 6 yards of cloth barely fit into my suitcase and added some weight. When I returned, I brought the cloth to the liturgical linen makers who then created the lovely peace cover which graces the communion table a few weeks each year.



# Benevolence Committee

## 2025 Benevolence Grants Program & Denominational Support

The Benevolence Committee met on February 11, 2025 for our regular meeting and to evaluate the applications for the 2025 Benevolence Grants Program. Award winners and the amount awarded are shown in the adjacent table.

Under Denominational Support, giving to Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM)/ Indiana/Kentucky Conference was increased by \$3000 for 2025. Giving to the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition remained the same at \$5000 while giving to CUE Seminaries was reduced by \$2000.

Benevolence Grants are limited to \$2000 per application. For 2025 we received 34 applications requesting a total of \$62,737.50. After presentation by the reviewing committee member and much discussion and deliberation by the group, we provided all or partial funding to 26 agencies and organizations.

Only one Capacity Building Grant is awarded each year for up to a maximum of \$20,000. As the name indicates, a Capacity Building Grant is designed to assist an agency or organization significantly increase its capacity to provide greater service to those they serve. Often this is in the form of a major piece of equipment. Wellspring is the 2025 recipient and will be using the funds to increase their refrigeration and freezer capacity for their food assistance program.

Applications for the Benevolence Grants Program are mailed to applicants the end of October each year with a deadline for submission in early January. If you know of an agency or organization you think might be interested, or you have questions about the grants program or the Benevolence Committee, please reach out to one of the members. We look forward to visiting with you!

Organization	Amount Awarded
<b>Denominational Support</b>	
OCWM-IN/KY Conference (UCC)	\$40,000.00
Open and Affirming (UCC)	\$5,000.00
CUE Seminaries (UCC)	\$3,000.00
<b>Denominational Support Total</b>	<b>\$48,000.00</b>

<b>Benevolence Grants</b>	
Allen Co. D&A Consortium/ Brave Alliance	\$1,000.00
Amani Family Services	\$2,000.00
Blue Jacket	\$1,000.00
Center for Nonviolence	\$2,000.00
Children's Autism Center, Inc.	\$1,000.00
Chill, Inc.	\$1,000.00
Creative Women of the World	\$2,000.00
Crossroad	\$1,000.00
Fort Wayne Dance Collective	\$1,000.00
Foster Grandparents Program	\$1,000.00
Give Hear	\$1,500.00
Growing Hope Globally	\$1,000.00
Homebound Meals	\$2,000.00
Indiana Center for Middle East Peace	\$1,018.00
Just Neighbors (IHN)	\$2,000.00
Long Term Care Ombudsman	\$2,000.00
Matthew 25	\$1,000.00
Mustard Seed	\$1,500.00
Pilgrims of Ibillin	\$2,000.00
Positive Resource Connection	\$2,000.00
Shepherd's House	\$1,000.00
St. Joseph Missions	\$2,000.00
Thirteenth Step House	\$1,000.00
Turnstone	\$1,600.00
USF Jesters	\$1,500.00
Vincent Village	\$1,000.00
<b>Benevolence Grants Total</b>	<b>\$37,118.00</b>

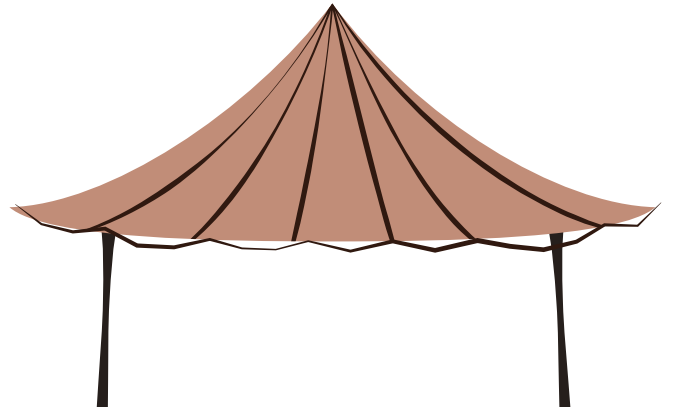
<b>Capacity Grant</b>	
Wellspring	\$20,000.00
<b>Capacity Grant Total</b>	<b>\$20,000.00</b>

<b>Grand Total 2025</b>	<b>\$105,118.00</b>
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Current members: Cher Jackson, Beth Walker, Wayne Peterson-Stephan, Allen Haynes, Susan Bolinger, Mark Fiskney, and Daveana Schieler.

# Fostering Discipleship Through Small Groups

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals



Here at Plymouth, we talk a lot about following the way of Jesus. It is a way of compassion, peace, justice, and love, and it is inherently a way that is rooted in community. While everyone certainly has their own individual walk with God, the way of Jesus is rooted in building relationships of care and compassion with those around us. Yet, it can be difficult in a big church to build those relationships, especially if you come to a church not knowing anyone, and especially for the introverts among us!

This is part of the rationale for initiating a small group ministry at Plymouth Church. We recognize there is a need, especially for those who are newer to the church, for more opportunities to build relationships that are rooted in faith formation and discipleship, and in our common values as followers of Jesus. Small groups offer the opportunity to get to know your fellow church members on a deeper level and offer the potential to build deep and lasting friendships that are rooted in something larger than oneself. They also offer opportunities for spiritual growth in a variety of ways, depending on one's interest. One could explore one's faith through film, nature, devotional reading, and more.

Sign-ups for small groups at Plymouth are now open to all adults in the church — one does not have to be a member to join a small group. There are currently five groups available: Devotions, Movies and Discussion, Exploring Faith Journeys, Spirituality and Nature, and Simple Living. Space is limited for each group, so please only sign up for the group you are most interested in. Once groups are full, the leaders will be in touch to schedule your first meeting time.

We hope that many will take advantage of this opportunity for faith formation and relationship building, and we pray that this will be the beginning of a new and thriving ministry at Plymouth Church!



# Afghan Refugee Task Force

## Scott Avery

The Afghan Refugee Task Force was formed to help deal with families displaced from Afghanistan who had been relocated by the U.S. government to Fort Wayne. The first volunteers worked with Catholic Charities to clean and prepare rooms at a facility near Bishop Dwenger High School which housed new arrivals until more permanent housing could be found. Later on, teams of four were matched with families once their help from Catholic Charities ended to assist them with day-to-day challenges.

Some of the work we have done includes helping them go through their mail, registering their kids for school, working to improve their English and helping them learn to take care of their yards. Visits to their homes are frequent and rides to medical appointments plentiful. One father works at Master Spa, one at Amazon and one is a full time dad as he lost both his legs in the war. His wife is cleaning homes for their income. One family has even qualified for a Habitat for Humanity home and is waiting for final approval!

Our walk with these families has been filled with challenges but also with great rewards. It has been a remarkable journey watching these families grow in their use of the English language, negotiating challenges of red tape with government programs, dealing with landlords and connecting with community. To see their progress and growing independence has been inspiring. The members of the task force are Steve and Becky Hollingsworth, Scott Avery and Alan Chambers, Linda Kerr, Lucy Hess, Doug and Abby Powers, Terry Dougherty and Reverend Sara.

A fund has been set up at Plymouth to help these families with special expenses. We also received a grant from the Indiana-Kentucky Conference to help in this way. Donations to the fund are always welcome. We may be hosting a collection of diapers for the families in the near future, so watch your bulletins for details!

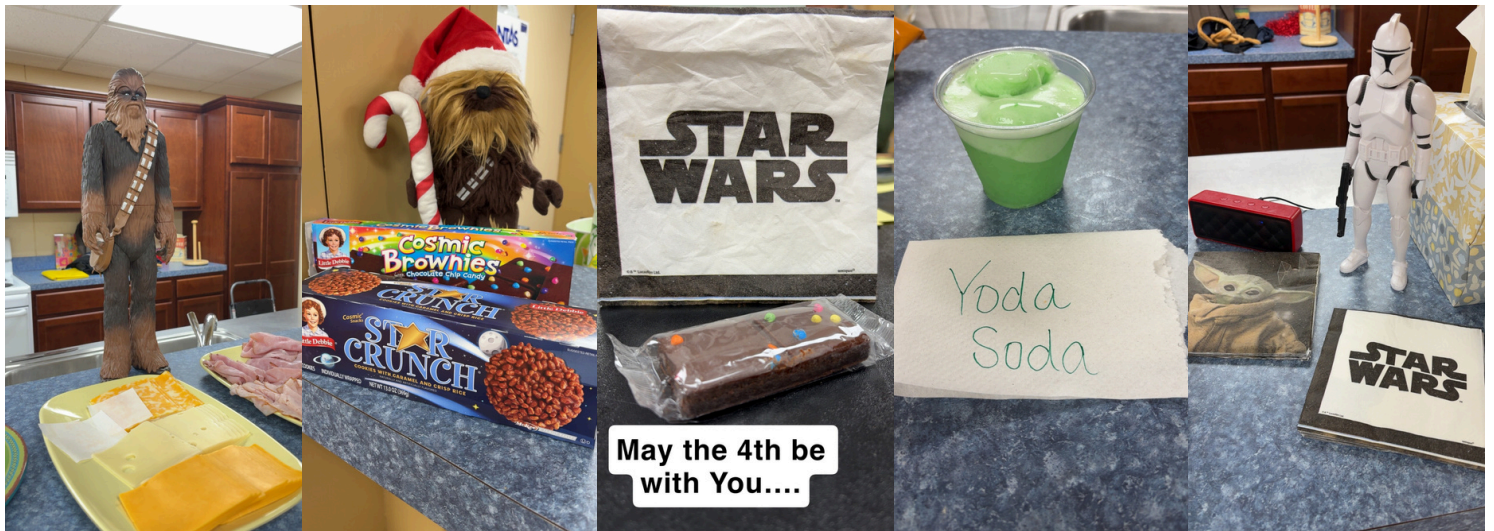


*Kabul, Afghanistan*



*Fort Wayne, Indiana*

# Youth Group Star Wars Day Party



## Study Connection Concludes 13<sup>th</sup> Year

This May, Plymouth celebrated the 13<sup>th</sup> year of a successful Study Connection with nine children, grades 1-5, who attend Fairfield Elementary School. Nine tutors and five substitutes were faithful to each child's needs academically as well as socially and emotionally. We celebrate the growth we see and the relationships we make with these wonderful students. Each year we give a tour of the church because sometimes the children wonder who lives here.

If you are interested in being a tutor for the next academic year, please fill out the form in the digital bulletin and contact Lucy Hess, [lrh22@frontier.com](mailto:lrh22@frontier.com) or Nancy Kilduski, [nckilduski@frontier.com](mailto:nckilduski@frontier.com). It is a wonderful way to make a difference in a young child's life.



# Solar Panels Update

## Solar Panel Production - 2025

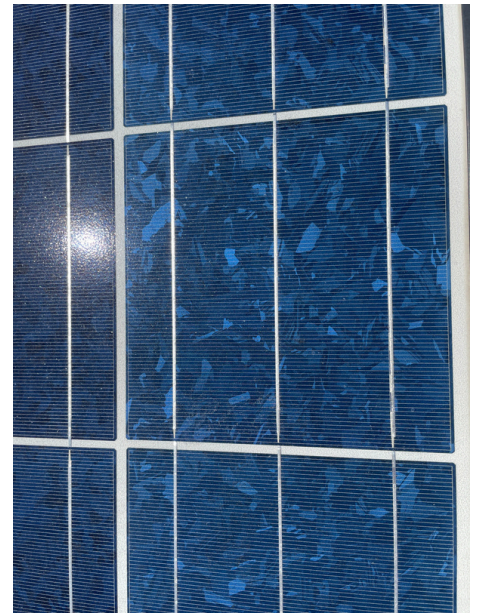
Year to Date: 2,630 kWh

March: 587.74 kWh

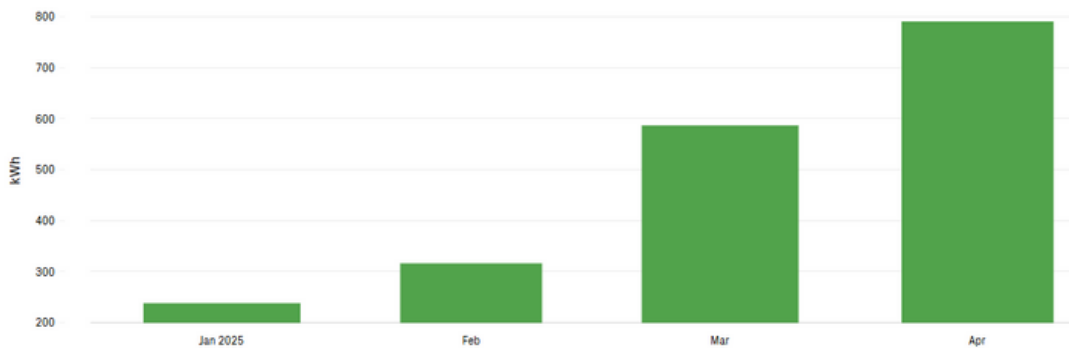
April: 759.26 kWh

May (so far): 830.99 kWh

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the typical American home uses roughly 30 kWh of electricity per day. To date, the church's solar panels have provided enough energy to save over 24 tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.



*A close-up view of one of the church's rooftop solar panels.*



*Rev. Brian Flory leads a discussion about current legislation and local policy during a letter writing event in April to support solar power in Allen County.*



*Bill Balasia, Tony Ray and Paul Smith (Surefire Solar Solutions) inspect the church's solar panels during microinverter recalibrations in March.*

# Growing Hope Globally Speaker from Burkina Faso

**Rev. Valarie Kline, Pastor of Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren, sent an invitation (below) to Plymouth for a July 26 event in nearby Ashley, Indiana. We team with Pleasant Chapel and Peace UCC to contribute to Growing Hope Globally (GHG). – Katie and Charlie Carboneau, Plymouth GHG Task Force**

On Saturday, July 26th, we plan to have a guest, Kinani, staff from the growing program in Burkina Faso to speak at Pleasant Chapel at 11 a.m. After Kinani's sharing, we will have lunch together. Please mark your calendars, plan to join us; invite many others to join us, too. We have always been blessed to hear stories from our international guests, but this is the first time we get to hear from somebody from a growing project we've supported.

GHG staff Rachel Conley confirmed that, since the end of the fiscal year in March, we've raised \$16,471.87. That makes a total of \$295,960.33 raised since 2007. She said, "We are extremely grateful for your faithful & generous support! It is exciting to see three churches & other members of the community working together to make a global difference!"

For the glory of God & our neighbor's good,

- Pastor Val

Our growing partners & programs through the years include:

2007 - Zambia Eastern & Kenya Ngong  
2008 - Zambia Eastern  
2009 - North Korea  
2010 - Bolivia & Guatemala  
2011 - Uganda & Mozambique  
2012 - Uganda Teso, COB & UCC  
2013 - Kenya Ndeiya & Central African Republic Gamboula  
2014 - Bolivia Paraguay Gran Chaco & Guatemala  
2015 - Mozambique Garden & Uganda Teso  
2016 - Uganda Teso & Zambia Choma  
2017 - Haiti Northwest & Guatemala  
2018 - Burkina Faso Gnagha & Honduras Macuelizo  
2019 - Burkina Faso Gnagha & Honduras Macuelizo  
2020 - Honduras Macuelizo  
2021 - Honduras Maceulizo  
2022 - Honduras Maceulizo & Burkina Faso Gnagha  
2023 - Honduras Macuelizo & Burkina Faso Gnagha  
2024 – Burkina Faso Boulkiemde



## ***Learn from Kinani, GHG staff from Burkina Faso***

*You are invited!*

**When:** Saturday, July 26 at 11 a.m.

**Where:** Pleasant Chapel Church of the Brethren,  
1993 CR 8, Ashley, IN 46705

*People from Plymouth bring dessert for the lunch after.  
There is usually a goodwill offering.*

*For meal planning, we'd like to know how many can  
attend.*

**RSVP:** by July 19 to Charlie Carboneau  
(260) 341-1991

# Financial Report

April 2025



	Month Actual	Month Budget	Month Variance		YTD Actual	YTD Budget	YTD Variance
<b>Total Income</b>	\$98,092	\$78,030	\$20,062		\$342,722	\$295,869	\$46,853
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$92,089	\$87,801	\$4,288		\$280,962	\$284,052	(\$3,090)
rounding							(\$1)
<b>Net Income (Loss)</b>	\$6,003	(\$9,771)	\$15,774		\$61,760	\$11,817	\$49,942

## Church Contacts

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### Custodian

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