

CHRONICLE

2026 First Congregational Church of Akron

PASTOR'S COLUMN

By Rev. R Brooke Baker

"Why so many services?" This might be the question you are asking yourself as we enter Lent. "I come on Sunday, why do I need to come on Wednesday and Thursday and Friday?" Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. A time to remember that we are God's beloved dust. We are not a project that needs to be worked on. We are not broken in need of fixing. It is not a "reset." Kate Bowler, an associate professor of American religious history at Duke Divinity School, reminds us that our finitude is not a problem that needs to be fixed. She says, "the ache is not a failure, it is just a part of being alive." Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are dust.



Holy Week is my most favorite time of the church year. But I should also tell you that it is incomprehensible to me how one can show up on Palm Sunday waving palms and then the next time they show up in church is to shout alleluia! We cannot arrive at Easter morning without betrayal and crucifixion. If we do, we have cheapened Easter; Easter becomes performative rather than transformative. Easter requires us to remember the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples and friends on the night he was betrayed. Easter requires us to witness the crucifixion, just like Jesus' own mother did. Before the alleluias we have to grieve. We live in a society that doesn't do public grieving very well; but Jesus tells us to create a new society or realm. That realm requires discomfort. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday are just as important as Easter morning.

I hope as we walk through the urban wilderness together during this Lenten season, you will consider approaching it as a way to work towards creating a new realm or kingdom. I also hope that as Holy Week arrives at the beginning of next month that you will clear your calendar so that you can be present for all of the parts of Holy Week – from "hosanna" to "alleluia" and everything in between!

Blessings,

Pastor Brooke

Pastor Brooke Baker



HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Palm Sunday - March 29, 2026 | 10:00 AM | Meetinghouse

We begin Holy Week together with a combined worship gathering, remembering Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem and preparing our hearts for the journey to the cross.

Maundy Thursday | April 2, 2026 | 6:00 PM | Upper Room

We gather in an intimate setting to remember the night Jesus shared the table with his friends. A very light repast—bread, cheese, and simple fare—will be served as we reflect on the meal before the cross.

Good Friday | April 3, 2026 | 7:00 PM | Chapel | Tenebrae Service

Through Scripture, silence, and the gradual dimming of the lights, we contemplate the depth and meaning of Christ's sacrifice.

Easter Sunday Sunrise Service | April 5, 2026 | 6:15 AM | Worship in the Garden

We greet the dawn with a simple celebration of the Resurrection.

Easter Sunday 10:00 AM | Worship in the Meetinghouse

A joyful Easter celebration followed by an Easter egg hunt in the garden for children and families.

GIVING WITH A PURPOSE: STRENGTHENING OUR MINISTRIES TOGETHER

By Finance and Operations Manager,
Janis Worley

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give... for God loves a cheerful giver."

– 2 Corinthians 9:7



In every season of the church's life, generosity has been at the heart of who we are. Faithful giving has allowed God's work to flourish in powerful and practical ways. As we look ahead to the coming months, we invite you to prayerfully consider supporting the ministries that make a daily difference in the lives of so many.

Financial giving is more than meeting a budget—it is an act of worship. It is a tangible expression of gratitude for God's blessings and a way to participate in the ongoing work. When you give, you are not simply making a donation; you are feeding the hungry, nurturing faith, supporting worship, and extending Christ's love beyond our walls.

Designate Your Gift Where Your Heart Leads

We are pleased to offer you the opportunity to designate your gift to a ministry that is especially meaningful to you:

Food Pantry Ministry

Our Food Pantry provides essential groceries and household items to individuals and families facing food insecurity. Rising costs have made it increasingly difficult for many in our community to make ends meet. Your financial support allows us to:

- Purchase fresh and nutritious food
- Restock shelves consistently
- Serve more families with dignity and compassion

PB & J Ministry

The PB & J Ministry distributes weekly bags of food to students at Mason CLC who are facing food insecurity on weekends in the home. Every bag is a powerful reminder that someone cares. Your donation helps provide:

- Bread, peanut butter, canned meals and snack items
- Shopping Bags

Music Fund

Music enriches our worship and draws hearts closer to God. The Music Fund supports:

- Musical equipment
- Special program resources
- Guest musicians and seasonal worship enhancements

Mason CLC Ministry

The Mason CLC Ministry supports the students at Mason CLC in many ways. Financial support allows us to:

- Provide warm coats each fall
- Support programming and events
- Offer assistance when needed

If you feel led to give, you may designate your offering to the ministry closest to your heart or give to the general fund to support the church's overall mission. Thank you for your continued faithfulness, prayers, and generosity. For questions or more information, contact Finance & Operations Manager Janis Worley at finance@akronfcc.org or 330.253.5109 x111

MINISTRY FOCUS: NOMINATING BOARD

By Nominating Board Chair,
Sarah Vradenburg

Please Say Yes!

You don't hear much about the Nominating Board most of the year. As members, we see you in church each Sunday. We worship together

and serve our various ministries. As a board, we do our work quietly. However, if we don't do our job well, the congregation won't have the lay leadership it needs to carry out God's work.

AkronFCC UCC needs you. We are actively seeking fellow members of the congregation to serve on various boards. In particular, we need people willing to step into the roles of Vice Moderator and Treasurer. The Vice Moderator spends a year learning the workings of the church and then takes over as Moderator the second year. While the Treasurer reports to the Governing Board on church finances, Janis Worley does the work. She handles all the financial information and gives the



Treasurer the information needed to report to the Governing Board each month.

These are important leadership positions. They don't need special training, because our wonderful staff does the heavy lifting. This work does need people who love AkronFCC UCC and are willing to help it move forward.

The other boards that need members are Building and Grounds, Endowment, Human Resources, Membership, Stewardship and Finance, and of course, Nominating.

It's easy to believe someone else will step up, but if everyone assumes that, the congregation couldn't function. There are many opportunities in our church. All it takes is a willingness to serve. If you want to talk about any position, please contact one of us.

Committee members: Sarah Vradenburg, chair; Terri Cook; Chris Godard; Margaret Maurer; and Susanne Shoffner.

FINANCE REPORT

Stewardship/Finance Report (unaudited)

Actual Thru January, 2026

	January	January YTD	YTD Budget	Percent to Budget YTD
INCOME				
Offerings Income	\$23,289	\$110,108	\$100,000	110.1%
Unrestricted Grant Income	\$0	\$3,625	\$3,332	108.8%
Designated Income	\$2,083	\$16,667	\$82,096	20.3%
Endowment, Sprowls Trust, Pollock	\$59,796	\$516,257	\$497,574	103.8%
Rental and Food Service Income	\$2,687	\$17,794	\$26,664	66.7%
Other Income	\$105	\$16,345	\$3,582	456.3%
TOTAL	\$87,961	\$680,796	\$713,248	95.5%
EXPENSES				
Loan Expense	\$2,617	\$21,091	\$21,000	100.4%
Membership Board	\$421	\$463	\$1,402	33.0%
Governing Board	\$500	\$4,045	\$6,000	67.4%
Food Pantry	\$5,584	\$41,478	\$36,668	113.1%
Congregational Care	\$1,188	\$10,916	\$11,967	91.2%
Worship & Music	\$2,414	\$16,240	\$16,758	96.9%
Christian Education	\$0	\$402	\$3,796	10.6%
Development Team	\$30	\$316	\$250	126.3%
Food Service Expense	\$4,668	\$18,663	\$8,668	215.3%
Personnel	\$51,213	\$322,769	\$401,745	80.3%
Other Admin Expense	\$2,069	\$37,925	\$39,574	95.8%
Media Relations/Marketing	\$1,743	\$9,924	\$10,240	96.9%
Maintenance/Insurance/Utilities	\$26,655	\$166,453	\$158,015	105.3%
TOTAL	\$99,100	\$650,685	\$716,083	90.9%
Net Income/Loss	-\$11,140	\$30,110	-\$2,835	-1062.1%

BEHIND THE MUSIC: A WORD FROM THE PRAISE BAND

By Praise Band Co-Leader, Hannah Pyett

Welcome back to Meet the Praise Band, our monthly series highlighting the gifted musicians who lead us in worship. This month, we're thrilled to feature one of our lead singers, Kellie Ramirez! Beyond the praise band, Kellie serves faithfully across our church, co-chairing the Membership Board, organizing volunteers for the Monday night food pantry, and so much more!

What's your favorite food?

In general: Mexican.

In particular: my family's tamales.



What's your favorite song to lead in worship?

WayMaker, Come As You Are, The Blessing, Goodness of God

What instruments do you play and what's your role in the praise band?

I played clarinet from 4th grade through college, and can still get an acceptable sound out on most woodwind and brass instruments. I sing in the Praise Band, and have sung in various ensembles since middle school!

What does worship mean to you personally?

It's a time to express appreciation for my relationship with God/our community and refill my spiritual cup.

How long have you been a part of the praise band?

7ish years

Do you have a favorite pastime or hobby outside of music?

I love going to concerts and comedy shows, spending time with family and friends, reading, and cooking.

What do you hope the congregation experiences during worship?

I really hope people feel uplifted and cared for, and a sense of connectedness - be it with God, their spirituality, each other, or even better, all of the above.

INSTALLATION OF REV. R. BROOKE BAKER

On Sunday, February 8, 2026, the congregation of First Congregational Church of Akron UCC gathered for a milestone moment—the installation of Rev. R. Brooke Baker as our 21st Senior Minister. The sanctuary was filled with clergy colleagues, members, visitors, friends, and family, all united in gratitude and anticipation for this new chapter in the life of the church.



The service was both reverent and radiant. Clergy processed with dignity, prayers were offered with intention, and the congregation affirmed the sacred covenant between pastor and people. The liturgy was led by Rev. Dr. Elena Larssen, Transitional Association General Minister of the Living Water Association, whose leadership grounded the morning in the wider ministry of the United Church of Christ. The act of installation reminded us that while a congregation issues a call, it is God who sustains it.

Longtime friend and colleague, Rev. Dr. Paul Barbins, delivered a compelling and heartfelt sermon. With warmth, wisdom, and a touch of well-earned humor, he reflected on Pastor Brooke's gifts for ministry and the trust required in answering a call. His message resonated deeply, encouraging the congregation to walk boldly into the future together.

Pastor Brooke was surrounded by extraordinary support. Her family traveled by plane to be present for this significant day—a visible sign of love and encouragement. Among the clergy participants was Rev. Kim Nagy, former Associate Pastor alongside Pastor Brooke and now Senior Minister at Church of the Redeemer UCC in Westlake. Their shared history in ministry added a meaningful layer to the celebration.



Rev. Dr. George Graham



Rev. Melinda Quellhorst

Tevin Tietje, Liturgist



Rev. Dr. Paul J. Barbins



Rev. Dr. Elena Larssen



Rev. Kim Nagy



Judy Young & Elaine Roberts made the beautiful stole presented to Pastor Brooke

Rev. Charlie Woodward

Perhaps most moving was the palpable sense of affection from the congregation who called her to serve. The laying on of hands, the promises exchanged, and the collective “We will” spoken by the people were not mere formalities—they were heartfelt commitments.

Following the service, the celebration continued with a joyful reception. Laughter echoed through Fellowship Hall, hugs were abundant, and conversations carried the hopeful energy of a community confident in its leadership and future.

The congregation and staff are grateful beyond words that Pastor Brooke is now firmly rooted in the AkronFCC UCC family. As the 21st Senior Minister of this historic congregation, she begins her ministry here surrounded by love, trust, and shared purpose.

It was a beautiful day—one that honored our past, celebrated our present, and pointed faithfully toward the future.



Tori White, Moderator



Pastor Brooke & Family



ASSOCIATE PASTOR SEARCH UNDERWAY

Calling an Associate Pastor is not simply filling a position—it is discerning who will help shape the next season of ministry alongside Pastor Brooke at AkronFCC. Our Search Committee has stepped forward to guide this work with prayer, care, and a deep love for our congregation. We thank them for their faithful leadership and ask the church to surround them in prayer as they move through this process.

- DeAnn Clemons
- Elizabeth Wilson
- Matt Kalgreen
- Judy Young
- Mickey Shah

FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP, COMMUNITY IMPACT

The annual Girl Scouts of North East Ohio (GSNEO) Women of Distinction Awards Event was established in 2012 to celebrate and recognize women in Northeast Ohio who go above and beyond to make our communities better places to live and work.



GSNEO's Women of Distinction embody the core values of Girl Scouts and provide girls with positive role models.

We are proud to share that our own Janis Worley, Finance and Operations Manager, is among this year's honorees. Janis' steady leadership, integrity, and tireless dedication help ensure that our ministries are supported with care and excellence.

Her behind-the-scenes faithfulness strengthens not only our church but the wider community, and this recognition is richly deserved.



DAYLIGHT SAVINGS

Daylight Saving Time begins March 8. Turn your clocks ahead one hour Saturday night. We promise to save you a seat—but we can't promise to start over if you arrive at the old time!



SUPPORT AKRONFCC

Supporting AkronFCC through pledge donations or Sunday offerings help to offset the annual operating costs of the church. Consider making a donation, or setting up a recurring donation, to support a ministry that is near and dear to your heart.



AT LONG LAST—OUR CHURCH COOKBOOK IS ALMOST READY TO SERVE

Remember that church cookbook that was started back in September 2021—you know, around the time “Tiger King” was still a thing and we were all just trying to remember how to unmute on Zoom? Well, it's finally happening!

After a long simmer (okay, maybe a slow-cooker situation), we're pulling this project off the back burner and getting it ready for publication. Pastor Brooke will be adding a fresh new foreword, and we're doing one final call for any new recipes you'd like to include.

If you already submitted a recipe before—don't worry, we still have it! But if you've joined AkronFCC since then, or you've discovered a dish so good it deserves its own hymn, now's your chance to add it to the AkronFCC Cookbook before we serve up the final edition.

Please send any new recipes to Jen at admin@akronfcc.org by March 9. We can't wait to see what you've been cooking up—literally.

FRIDAY FISH FRY IS BACK



The Friday Lenten Fish Fry by Ernie's Catering has returned! It will be held every Friday during Lent from 4pm - 7pm through March 29.

This year, you may choose either dine-in or carryout. Payment accepted:

Cash, credit, debit, Apple Pay, Cashapp - \$Hertistine, and Venmo - @Hertistine-Price.

Two meal options are available:

- \$11 Meal - Chips, coleslaw, and two pieces of fried swai on a bun
- \$14 Meal - French fries, coleslaw, dessert, and two pieces of fried swai on a bun

A La Carte options:

- \$2 French fries
- \$3 Single piece of fish

We're also offering meal vouchers



for anyone who would like to provide a hot meal for someone in need. If you're here on Sunday for worship, simply grab an envelope marked “Fish Fry Meal Voucher” located outside the church office and the entrances to the Meetinghouse, place your payment inside and drop it in one of the donation boxes near the exits. You can also contact the church office to make arrangements. We will distribute vouchers to a neighbor who could use it. It's a simple way to share both food and kindness this season.

MOMENT WITH THE MODERATOR: SHARING OUR GIFTS

As we move into the Lenten season, I am reminded of the immense joy we share within this community. I am consistently humbled to learn from such a passionate and devoted group of people.

While we are all busy, I want to encourage everyone to share their unique gifts and talents. Our community offers many wonderful opportunities to share our love and grow in our faith. I invite you to reflect on when you last challenged yourself or researched how your specific skills could be utilized.

There are many ways to get involved, including serving as Sunday bakers, supporting the food pantry, or participating in communion, greeting, and ushering. You can serve as a liturgist or join the bell and voice choirs to literally let your voice be heard. Additionally, our boards and committees are in need of your talents.

This is an exciting time as we shape the life of our church and community. We have phenomenal opportunities ahead, such as exploring the potential of our recent property purchase and working with neighborhood partners through Living the Legacy.

I look forward to seeing what this next year brings. Pastor Brooke provides a wealth of knowledge and experience, and her vision and passion for our future are truly inspiring.

Best regards,

Victoria E. White

Tori White



UA JAZZ IN THE UPPER ROOM – MARCH 20



Join us at 7:30 pm on March 20 for an evening of live jazz as UA musicians bring their talent to the Upper Room. The space will be set café-style, creating a relaxed and intimate setting perfect for enjoying great music up close. Expect an engaging mix of classic jazz standards and fresh interpretations—an evening filled with both energy and atmosphere.

Make it a full night out. Start with our Lenten Fish Fry, served from 4:00–8:00 pm in the Chapel, then head upstairs for the free UA Jazz concert. Bring friends, invite family, and turn it into a group outing—dinner downstairs, live music upstairs, all under one roof.

Whether you're a longtime jazz enthusiast or simply looking for a unique night out, this is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy live music in a warm and welcoming space.

A NEW CROSS FOR THE MEETINGHOUSE

We are grateful to share that a new cross now stands in the Meetinghouse, dedicated during our 11:00 am worship gathering on Sunday, February 8.

The cross was created by renowned Ohio artist Don Drumm, whose studio is located right here in Akron. Known for his distinctive metalwork and lasting contributions to the region's artistic landscape, Drumm's work brings both beauty and meaning to sacred spaces.

The handcrafted stand was created by a local artisan and woodworker using poplar wood, offering a simple, natural complement to the cross itself. Together, the pieces reflect both artistic excellence and the strength of local craftsmanship.

We give thanks for this meaningful addition to our worship space—an enduring symbol of faith, rooted in our community and pointing us toward hope.





Chronicle

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF AKRON UCC
292 E Market
Akron, OH 44308
AkronFCC



Easter flowers are available again this year! We will offer pink hyacinths and lilies. Please return the completed form with payment to the church office by March 22.

COST PER PLANT \$15
TOTAL NUMBER OF PLANTS _____
AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

**Please make checks payable to AkronFCC with "Easter Flowers" in the memo line.*

In memory of:

In honor of:

The Easter Sunday bulletins will list the names of those being remembered and honored.
Please be sure to pick up your flowers after the Easter Service on April 5

Your Name:

**Phone
number:**

CASH	
CHECK	
PAYING ONLINE	

March 2026

NOTE: *Italicized events are private rentals by individuals or outside organizations; all other others are church activities, (including worship and meetings) or public events.*

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Lent Week 2 The Wilderness of being Unhoused 1 Upper Room Service 9am Meetinghouse Service 11am Bakers Sunday 12pm <i>Private Bday Rental</i> 1pm	2 AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm Endowment Board 5pm B&G Board 5:15pm Food Pantry 6:30pm	3 Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm	4 Faith Enrichment 9am AA 12pm Bell Choir 5:30pm	5 AA 10am	6 AA 10am PB&J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm	7 Food Pantry Load In 8am <i>Freedom BLOC</i> 11am <i>Phi State Ohio</i> 11am
Lent Week 3 The Wilderness of the Outcast 8  <i>Daylight Savings</i> Spring Forward 1 hour Upper Room Service 9am Meetinghouse Service 11am Second Sunday Salad 12pm LGBTQ+ Comm. Night 5pm	9 AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm <i>Indivisible Akron</i> 6pm Food Pantry 6:30pm	10 Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm BINGO 6pm Membership Board 7pm	11 Faith Enrichment 9am AA 12pm Bell Choir 5:30pm SSOULE 6pm	12 AA 11am MLK Committee 5:30pm	13 AA 10am PB&J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm	14 D.A.R. 8am Food Pantry Load In 8am <i>Beauty for Ashes</i> 4pm
Lent Week 4 The Wilderness of Mental Illness 15	16	 Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm HR Board 6pm	18 Faith Enrichment 9am AA 12pm Bell Choir 5:30pm	19 <i>Tuff Stuff</i> 8:45am AA 11am Nominating Bd 7pm PFLAG 7pm	20 AA 10am PB & J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm Music@AkronFCC Concert Series - UAkron Jazz 7:30pm	21 Food Pantry Load In 8am Breakfast w/ Bunny 9am <i>Freedom BLOC</i> 11am
Lent Week 4 The Wilderness of Grief 22	23	24	25	26	27 <i>Foster Grandparents</i> 9am AA 10am PB & J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm	28 Food Pantry Load In 8am <i>Private Bday Rental</i> 4pm
 Palm SUNDAY 29 One Combined 10am Worship Gethering	30 AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm Governing Bd 6:30pm Food Pantry 6:30pm	31	 Maundy THURSDAY Maundy Thursday Service April 2 @ 6pm	 Good FRIDAY Good Friday Services April 3 @ Noon & 7pm		