

CHRONICLE

2026

First Congregational Church of Akron

As I sit down to write this, my heart is heavy with what is happening in our world. My heart is heavy not because of what letter is behind my name on my voter registration, but because I am a follower of Jesus. I am a follower of the One who taught to care for the oppressed; that includes our black and brown-skinned neighbors. I am a follower of the One who taught peace; peace is different than complicity. I am a follower of the One who taught justice; justice for all not just for some. I am a follower of the One who not only taught these things but lived by example. It is that reason that I hope you too are feeling the weight of the situation in our country, and specifically in Minnesota.



The question is what we will **do** with our heavy hearts. One of the things I have learned from watching the people in Minneapolis and hearing from UCC colleagues there as well, is the importance of community. Despite their neighborhoods being occupied by ICE agents, they have come together in unity. It is why, when a member suggested that we hold a prayer vigil at First Congregational Church of Akron UCC, I embraced the idea. If we create community now, then we are not left scrambling if similar things begin happening in Akron. I do not say that as a scare tactic, but rather as something constructive we can do. We can learn from our fellow UCC members and clergy how best to combat attempts

to silence the truth. This is in the very early stages, as I need to reach out to other faith leaders – within our denomination and other faiths. While I feel a sense of urgency, I know that doing it well is far more important. If you are interested in helping with it, please contact me.

While it is easy to say that we have never experienced something like this, our Black siblings tell a different story. This type of violence from state-sanctioned groups is not new to them. We need to be careful that we acknowledge the history of our country and the damage that has been done and is still being done to the Black community.

You may be engaging in your own ways of creating community and I commend you for that. But know that this congregation has a record of being on the right side of history and it will not stop in this current situation. I am holding all of us in prayer and I welcome your prayers as I seek to be a faithful follower of Jesus.



For those who wish to reflect further or learn more about how our wider United Church of Christ is responding, the following resources from the UCC offer statements, prayers, and avenues for faithful engagement around racial justice and immigration. Those reading a printed copy may use the QR code to access all three links, while those reading digitally can click the links directly.

[UCC General Minister and President/CEO special statement and prayer .](#)

[UCC Racial Justice Ministries](#)

[UCC Justice and Immigration](#)

Blessings,

Pastor Brooke

Pastor Brooke Baker



*Taken from the UCC website.

BEHIND THE MUSIC: A WORD FROM THE PRAISE BAND

By Praise Band Co-Leader, Hannah Pyett

Welcome back to our Meet the Praise Band series, where we take time each month to introduce the talented musicians who help lead us in worship. This month, we're excited to spotlight the steady heartbeat of our team: our drummer, Michael!

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

In the praise band, I primarily play piano and sing, and I serve as a co-leader. I also enjoy playing acoustic guitar and ukulele whenever I get the chance.

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

About 2 years

What's your favorite song to lead in worship?

The Blessing

What's your favorite food?

Pizza and donuts



What does worship mean to you personally?

For me it's feeling grounded, being grateful for the life I've been given and reminding myself of that.

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

Honestly not really, I do like to teach music when I'm not performing!

What do you hope the congregation experiences during worship?

I hope that everybody enjoys our music and feels included in the making of it. There wouldn't be a band if people didn't show up!

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.



STAYING CONNECTED WITH OUR STAFF

Below you'll find our current staff directory, including titles, email addresses, and phone extensions. Please use this listing as your primary reference when contacting the church office.



Senior Minister
Rev. R. Brooke Baker
pastor@akronfcc.org
x100



Finance & Operations Manager
Janis Worley
finance@akronfcc.org
x111



Communications & Events Manager
Alex Morris
events@akronfcc.org
x123



Administrative Assistant
Jen Barcus
admin@akronfcc.org
x112



Facility Maintenance
Dave Snell
facility@akronfcc.org
x115



Maintenance
Robert Wright
facility@akronfcc.org
x115



Custodial & Hospitality
Joy Wright
facility@akronfcc.org
x115

When calling the church if you know your party's extension you can bypass the recording by entering it as soon as the recording begins.

FINANCE REPORT

Stewardship/Finance Report (unaudited)

Actual Thru December, 2025

	December	December YTD	YTD Budget	Percent to Budget YTD
<u>INCOME</u>				
Offerings Income	\$16,241	\$86,818	\$87,500	99.2%
Unrestricted Grant Income	\$3,502	\$3,625	\$2,915	124.3%
Designated Income	\$2,083	\$14,584	\$71,834	20.3%
Endowment, Sprowls Trust, Pollock	\$60,946	\$456,461	\$435,378	104.8%
Rental and Food Service Income	\$4,167	\$15,107	\$23,330	64.8%
Other Income	\$285	\$16,240	\$3,165	513.1%
TOTAL	\$87,225	\$592,835	\$624,122	95.0%
<u>EXPENSES</u>				
Loan Expense	\$2,623	\$18,474	\$18,375	100.5%
Membership Board	\$42	\$42	\$1,265	3.3%
Governing Board	\$0	\$3,545	\$5,750	61.7%
Food Pantry	\$5,431	\$35,894	\$32,085	111.9%
Congregational Care	\$1,919	\$9,729	\$10,140	95.9%
Worship & Music	\$4,709	\$13,826	\$14,335	96.5%
Christian Education	\$0	\$402	\$3,320	12.1%
Development Team	\$0	\$286	\$250	114.5%
Food Service Expense	\$4,729	\$13,995	\$7,585	184.5%
Personnel	\$38,064	\$272,349	\$335,942	81.1%
Other Admin Expense	\$2,559	\$35,856	\$36,885	97.2%
Media Relations/Marketing	\$2,190	\$8,133	\$8,442	96.3%
Maintenance/Insurance/Utilities	\$27,145	\$139,798	\$136,630	102.3%
TOTAL	\$89,410	\$552,330	\$611,004	90.4%
Net Income/Loss	-\$2,185	\$40,505	\$13,118	308.8%

GIVING AS PARTICIPATION IN MINISTRY

By Finance and Operations Manager, Janis Worley

Most of you probably think of giving as something you do near the end of worship, after prayer, right before you leave the building. But in truth, generosity is one of the ways you actively participate in the ministry of the church.

Every gift, whether large or small, becomes part of something larger than any one of us. It helps keep our doors open, our lights on, and our staff supported. More importantly, it makes possible the ministries that happen every day and often quietly. Food provided, children taught, music lifted in praise, neighbors helped in times of need, and sacred moments marked with care and compassion all grow from the faithful giving of this congregation.

Financial stewardship is not simply about meeting a budget. It is about aligning our resources with our values and our faith. When you give, you are saying yes to the work God is doing through this church and yes to the call to love, serve, and reach beyond ourselves.

As you reflect on your own giving, consider it not as an obligation, but as an invitation. An invitation to invest in ministry that shapes lives, strengthens community, and bears witness to hope. Some choose to give weekly, others monthly or annually. Some support specific ministries that speak deeply to them, while others give broadly to sustain the whole. Every approach matters, and every gift is received with gratitude. To learn how to set up a recurring, automated donation, please contact me at finance@akronfcc.org or 330.253.5109 x111.

Thank you for the many ways you support the life of this church. Your generosity is a quiet but powerful expression of faith, and it continues to make ministry possible today and into the future.



47TH ANNUAL MLK COALITION CELEBRATION & SCHOLARSHIP EVENT



On January 18, First Congregational Church of Akron UCC was honored to host the 47th annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Day, a nearly 50-year tradition in our community. This year's theme is "Keeping Dr. King's dream alive through advocacy and community growth." Members of Akron's Black community and faith leaders from across the city filled the sanctuary for a joyful and meaningful celebration centered on advocacy, community engagement, and honoring Dr. King's enduring legacy.



Akron FCC UCC Senior Minister - Rev. R. Brooke Baker



Akron Mayor - Shammus Malik

The program featured inspiring messages from local pastors and leaders, including keynote speaker Pastor Vincent Peterson of Providence Baptist Church, powerful choir performances, and the presentation of scholarship awards for area students in partnership with the Akron NAACP. We are grateful to all who helped make this important event possible and for the opportunity to serve as a gathering place for this longstanding and impactful tradition.



US Congresswoman - Emilia Sykes



MLK Celebration Day Coalition - Minister Peggy Holmes & Rev. Cazzell Smith



2026 Scholarship Recipients



Deliverance Mass Choir, directed by Donnell Phipps

THE LENTEN SEASON

Mardi Gras Sunday

We'll enter the season of Lent together on **Sunday, February 15**, beginning with a joyful Mardi Gras celebration. Traditionally, Mardi Gras—or Fat Tuesday—marks the final day of feasting and celebration before the more reflective season of Lent begins.

We'll gather for **one combined 10:00am worship gathering**, featuring local jazz musicians, followed by a Jambalaya lunch provided by Ernie's Catering. As we prepare to journey through Lent, we invite everyone to wear their best purple, gold, and green and join us for this meaningful—and festive—start to the season.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent, a time of reflection, prayer, and renewal. On **Wednesday, February 18**, we will offer two opportunities for worship in the Chapel at **12:00pm and 7:00pm**. All are welcome to receive ashes and enter this sacred season together.

Into the Wilderness: A Lenten Journey

This Lent, our theme is Into the Wilderness. Throughout the season, we'll explore what it means to walk alongside those who find themselves in wilderness places—those who are unhoused, outcast, living with mental illness, or navigating grief. Each Sunday invites us to reflect on how God meets us in these spaces and how we are called to give of ourselves in care, compassion, and community—for others and for our own healing as well.

Lenten Fish Fry Returns

Ernie's Catering will once again host a Fish Fry **every Friday during Lent**. This year, we're pleased to offer both dine-in seating in the Chapel and carryout options. More details will be shared soon—stay tuned!

JOINING SUNDAY

In December, we joyfully welcomed three new members into the life of the church—Pastor Brooke, her fiancé, Colleen Cusick, and Kevin Norton



On Sunday, February 1, we welcomed two more new members, Sam and Bruce.



At AkronFCC UCC, we don't rush or pressure—membership is always an open invitation. We welcome people at every point in their faith journey. If you are curious about becoming a member, whether for the first time or by transferring from another church, Pastor Brooke would be happy to talk with you.

R. Brooke Baker

Brooke grew up in Lincoln, Nebraska, and proudly claims the University of Kansas as her alma mater. Before entering ministry, she spent more than 25 years as a music therapist, bringing comfort and healing to countless individuals through her work. She later graduated from Lexington Theological Seminary and followed her call to pastoral leadership.

Brooke and her fiancée, Colleen, moved to Akron this past August and will be married in Cleveland in May 2026. Their daughter, Em, is a student at Michigan State University, and their home is happily shared with their dog, Bella, and their cat, Whiskers. Brooke is delighted to serve as Senior Pastor at First Congregational Church of Akron UCC and looks forward to walking alongside this community in faith and hope.

Bruce Summers

Bruce just entered full retirement this year. For the last 25 years he worked for the City of San Francisco as a Systems Engineer. He grew up in Cuyahoga Falls and as a child attended First Christian Church in Cuyahoga Falls. Bruce enjoys hiking, gardening, cooking, and photography. He also likes working on his family genealogy and writing haiku.

Sam Grantham

Sam is a lifelong resident of Summit County and works as a community health worker with the Cleveland Clinic. He came to AkronFCC UCC seeking a way to reconnect with his faith—on his own terms. Sam lives with his partner, Bruce, and their cat, Linda. Outside of work, Sam is an avid amusement park and roller coaster enthusiast, enjoys long walks, listening to audiobooks, musical theater, trivia, pop culture, and (*in his words*) too many other things to list.

Colleen Cusick

Colleen grew up on Cleveland's west side before spending 27 years in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her career has been dedicated to helping others thrive—first in education and then as a psychotherapist in private practice for more than three decades, serving communities in Virginia, Ohio, and Michigan. She comes to AkronFCC alongside her partner, Pastor Brooke, and together they have a 21-year-old daughter who attends Michigan State University. Colleen is grateful to be part of this community.

Kevin Norton

Kevin is originally from Springfield Township, where he shares life with two loyal sidekicks—Hammy the Corgi and Ripley the cat. While searching for an LGBTQ+-affirming church home, he read good things about AkronFCC. After joining us online for worship, he felt a connection and decided to take the next step into our community.

Kevin likes to unwind with a good movie... as long as it's not a western. We're delighted to welcome him into membership and look forward to getting to know him better. **not pictured*



Chronicle

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

AkronFCC

UPCOMING EVENTS- MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Please save the date for a joyful and significant moment in the life of First Congregational Church of Akron UCC. On February 8 at 3pm, we will gather to celebrate the installation of Rev. R. Brooke Baker as our Senior Minister.



Representatives from the Living Water Association, Ohio Northeast, of the Heartland Conference of

the United Church of Christ will join us to officially install Pastor Brooke into this role. This service marks an important milestone in our shared ministry and in the ongoing life of our congregation.

A light reception will follow in Fellowship Hall, and all are warmly invited to attend this special celebration. We hope you will join us for this meaningful and joyful occasion.

The Membership Board is excited to invite everyone to a fun-filled game “night” and chili cookoff on February 21, beginning at 12:00 p.m. Come ready to sample a variety of homemade soups and chilis while enjoying some friendly competition and good company. If you’re bringing a dish, please plan to transport it in a crock pot if possible. We’ll have plenty of power cables available, along with bowls and spoons for serving. While we’ll take care of the essentials, we’re counting on you for the entertainment, so be sure to bring along your favorite party games that are easy

Game Night

to learn and quick to play. It’s a great chance to relax, laugh, and connect with fellow members!



FEBRUARY 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

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>1</p> <p><i>Welcome</i></p> <p>New Member Sunday Upper Room Service 9am Meetinghouse Service 11am Bakers Sunday 12pm</p>	<p>2</p> <p>AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm Staff Meeting 1pm B&G Board 5:15pm Food Pantry 6:30pm</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am BINGO 6pm</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Faith Enrichment 9am AA 12pm Silver Lining Luncheon 12pm PB&J Packing 1:30pm Bell Choir 5:30pm</p>	<p>5</p> <p>BUILDING CLOSED - Electrical Panel Work</p>	<p>6</p> <p>BUILDING CLOSED - Electrical Panel Work</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Food Pantry Load In 8am</p>
<p>8</p> <p></p> <p>Upper Room Service 9am Meetinghouse Service 11am Second Sunday Salad 12pm Pr. Brooke Installation 3pm Pr. Brooke Reception 4pm</p>	<p>9</p> <p>AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm <i>Indivisible Akron</i> 6pm Food Pantry 6:30pm</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm Membership Board 7pm</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Faith Enrichment 9am AA 12pm Bell Choir 5:30pm SSOULE 6pm</p>	<p>12</p> <p>PB&J 11:30am AA 11am MLK Committee 5:30pm</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Foster Grandparents 9am AA 10am</p>	<p>14</p> <p> <i>Valentine's Day</i></p> <p>D.A.R. 8am Food Pantry Load In 8am</p>
<p>15</p> <p><i>Mardi Gras</i></p> <p>Mardi Gras Sunday One Service 10am Mardi Gras Lunch 11am Baker's Sunday 11am LGBTQ+ Mardi Gras Pancake Supper 5pm</p>	<p>16</p> <p>AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm S&F Board 5:30pm Food Pantry 6:30pm</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm HR Board 6pm</p>	<p>18</p> <p> <i>Ash wednesday</i></p> <p>Ash Wed. Service 12pm AA 11am Bell Choir 5:30pm Ash Wed. Service 7pm</p>	<p>19</p> <p><i>Tuff Stuff</i> 8:45am AA 11am Nominating Bd 7pm PFLAG 7pm</p>	<p>20</p> <p>AA 10am PB & J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Food Pantry Load In 8am Game Night & Chili Cookoff 12pm</p>
<p>22</p> <p>Upper Room Service 9am Meetinghouse Service 11am <i>BirthDay Rental</i> 1pm</p>	<p>23</p> <p>AA 12pm Men's Lunch 12pm Governing Bd 6:30pm Food Pantry 6:30pm</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Food Pantry 9am <i>Bible Study</i> 11:30am Staff Meeting 1pm</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Faith Enrichment 9am AA 11am Bell Choir 5:30pm</p>	<p>26</p> <p>AA 11am</p>	<p>27</p> <p>Foster Grandparents 9am AA 10am PB & J 11:30am Fish Fry 4pm - 8pm</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Food Pantry Load In 8am</p>