

STAYING TOGETHER

IN WORSHIP

fall 2026 prevue

Dear First Church Family,

Throughout the summer, we have worshiped together in one unified Sunday service. What began as a seasonal schedule has given us an opportunity to experience something more: the energy, joy, and deeper sense of connection that emerge when the whole congregation gathers in one place.

After reviewing the worship survey, listening to conversations within the congregation, considering our attendance patterns, and consulting with church leadership, **we have decided to stay the course and continue with one unified Sunday worship service at 11:00 AM into the future.**

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the worship survey and share your thoughts with us. Your feedback has helped us better understand what our congregation values and the concerns we need to continue hearing.



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Forty-five people responded to the two survey questions concerning the number of services. Thirty respondents preferred one unified service, while fifteen preferred two services. Because participation was entirely voluntary, this cannot be treated as a scientific measure of the congregation as a whole. People with especially strong feelings may have been more inclined to respond, while many who were generally content may not have felt a need to do so. Nevertheless, the responses provide an important picture of what many within our congregation value and what concerns we need to continue hearing.

Those favoring one service repeatedly described a greater sense of unity, community, and vitality:

"It feels like we are all together, celebrating as one."

"The more people, the more energy and spirit we can draw from one another."

"We feel more connected to all the members of our congregation."



Others noted the practical realities of sustaining two services, including the demands placed upon our pastors, musicians, childcare workers, greeters, audiovisual team, and other volunteers. One respondent expressed concern about our "amazing part-time staff" experiencing burnout. Several also observed that attendance at the earlier service had become quite small.

Our actual attendance patterns reinforce the wisdom of continuing together. Summer worship attendance has remained robust. On many Sundays, attendance at the unified service has matched—and sometimes exceeded—the combined attendance we previously counted across two services. Worshiping together has not diminished participation. Instead, it has often made the sanctuary feel fuller, more welcoming, and more alive.

We also heard the voices of those who preferred two services. Some value an earlier worship time, while others are concerned about whether their preferred music and worship practices will be represented. These concerns matter, and we receive them with care.

Our August 29 workshop and August 30 worship leadership with the Rev. Mary Dicken helped us place these questions within a larger understanding of Christian worship. She reminded us that worship practices have always changed. Even hymns—now cherished as traditional—were once considered scandalous by Christians who believed that only biblical psalms should be sung.

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That history invites all of us to approach worship with humility, curiosity, and openness. Gathered worship is not designed primarily to preserve every personal preference or entertain us with the particular style we enjoy most. We gather to encounter God, to become a community formed by grace, and to be sent into the world for lives of love, justice, service, and mission.

We have been encouraged to hear that some who initially voiced reservations came away from that weekend with a greater sense of possibility and openness. That movement of heart does not require anyone to abandon what they love. It asks all of us to make room for one another and to discover how God may meet us through something new.

Continuing with one service does not mean that every question has been settled or that every concern has disappeared. Your pastors, staff, and church leadership will continue listening and learning. We will strive to value every voice, including those whose hopes or requests do not ultimately determine the decision we make. Listening faithfully does not always mean choosing what each person asks of us; it means receiving one another honestly, treating disagreement with grace, and allowing every voice to help us lead more thoughtfully.

We will continue working to make our unified worship welcoming, participatory, varied, and deeply rooted in our calling as followers of Jesus. We will honor the rich gifts within our congregation while remaining open to the new thing God may be doing among us.

There is something powerful about seeing the whole First Church family gathered together—different generations, histories, preferences, and experiences becoming one worshiping community. I am hopeful about where this path will lead us. Together, may we worship with generous hearts, grow in love for one another, and leave each Sunday ready to embody God's grace in the world.

**With gratitude and hope,
Pastor Duane Carlisle (he/him)**



Celebrating Freedom School 2026 at First Church



This summer, we celebrated another incredible season of Purdue CDF Freedom School at First Church! From June 15 to July 24, 2026, our scholars experienced a summer filled with learning, growth, friendship, and joy. From engaging lessons and meaningful conversations to enriching activities and celebrations, this year's program created memories that will last long after summer ends.

We are deeply grateful to our scholars, families, staff, volunteers, and supporters who made this year's Freedom School such a meaningful experience. Your time, energy, and encouragement helped create a welcoming environment where every scholar could learn, grow, and thrive.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to our partners at Purdue CDF for four years of incredible collaboration. Their partnership has made a lasting impact on both our church and the greater community, and we are thankful for the opportunity to continue this important ministry together.

That work is continuing to grow. On September 10, First Church hosted a Community Town Hall to discuss the expansion of Purdue-First Church Freedom School, including a new after-school literacy enrichment program launching in January 2027. Scholars, families, volunteers, and community partners gathered to learn more and share ideas about whom the program will serve and how it will work.

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A special thank you to Elliot Daniel Warden for creating a recap video, which beautifully captures the spirit of this summer and the many unforgettable moments shared by our scholars and staff.

To learn more about Freedom School at First Church, visit our website or scan the QR code.

**LEARN
MORE**



**WATCH
VIDEO**



Worship with Purdue Heart & Soul



First Church was delighted to welcome nearly 50 members of Purdue Heart & Soul on Sunday, August 23, 2026, for a special morning of fellowship and worship. The morning began with brunch in the Narthex, followed by worship where Heart & Soul shared their music with our congregation.

Established in 2004, Heart & Soul is Purdue Musical Organizations' mixed-voice vocal jazz ensemble, known for gospel and contemporary Christian music with influences of soul and R&B. The group performs throughout the year at university and community events and has been part of Purdue's annual Christmas Show since 2005.

Thank you to everyone who brought food, helped welcome our guests, and made the morning such a meaningful time together!



Building a Stronger Digital Home for First Church

September 2026 Update

Earlier this year, First Church shared plans for a new website designed to better serve our congregation and community. Since our last update in July, the project has continued to move forward behind the scenes.

Our partners at SmallBox have now built the new site in Squarespace, bringing the approved structure and design to life. Evergreen Strategic Communications is now adding and refining content throughout the site, with input from First Church staff and leadership, as well as feedback from our congregant survey and listening sessions this spring.

We look forward to launching the new website this fall! It will be a fresh, welcoming, and easier-to-navigate online home for First Church. Thank you for your continued support and patience as we complete this important project.



First Church Community Garden Continues to Grow

The First Church Community Garden continues to thrive, thanks to the care and dedication of Talitha, Greg, the Young Nature Lovers Club, and many dedicated volunteers.

This summer, we were especially excited to welcome Freedom School scholars and their families into the garden. It has been wonderful to see the space continue to grow not only as a garden, but also as a place for learning and connection.

Talitha has been documenting the garden's journey along the way. You can follow the progress and revisit highlights from the season on our YouTube playlist.

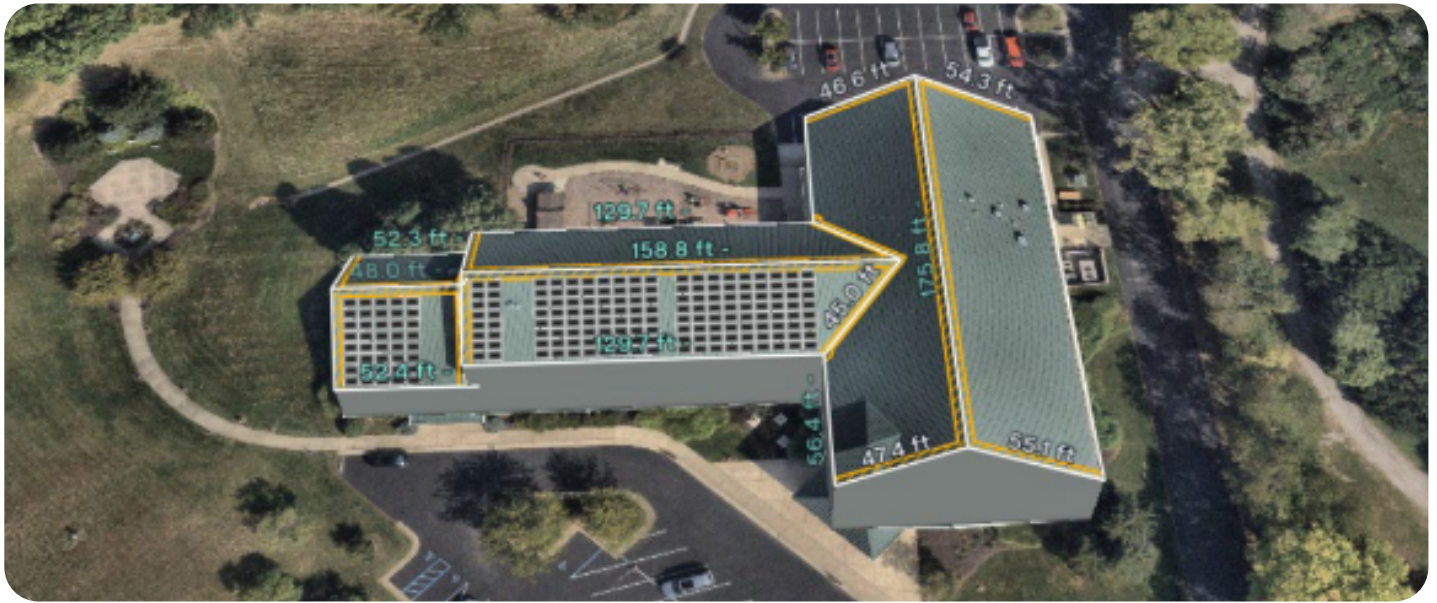
Thank you to everyone who has helped bring the garden to life and continues to care for it.



**WATCH
PLAYLIST**



Solar Panels Moving Forward at First Church



First Church is moving forward with plans to install solar panels on the education building, an investment expected to provide both long-term financial savings and environmental benefits for the church.

Earlier this summer, the Governance Board requested support for the project from the FUMC Foundation. On July 21, the Foundation Board approved funding for the solar panel installation, allowing the project to move into its next phase. A contract with Houston Electric has now been executed, marking another important step toward bringing the project to life.

The financial impact is expected to be significant. After a 30 percent investment tax credit, the projected cost to First Church is \$162,624. The church is expected to recoup that investment in approximately 11.8 years, with an estimated net cash gain of \$176,713 over 20 years. Annual electric costs are projected to decrease from approximately \$29,509 to \$18,807 once the system is operating.

The solar panels are expected to have a lifespan of more than 30 years, providing long-term energy savings while also reducing First Church's environmental impact. Financial gains from the use of solar will be designated for additional church programming, allowing the project to support ministry well into the future.

Houston Electric is now working on project plans, with the goal of having installation underway before the end of the calendar year. Stay tuned for additional updates as the project moves forward.

Community Vigil to End ICE Detention

Members of First Church joined community members in downtown Lafayette on Saturday, August 29, for the Community Vigil to End ICE Detention at Miami Correctional Facility.

The gathering was part of a broader statewide effort and included prayers, litanies, and a butterfly release ceremony. Together, participants gathered in grief and solidarity with immigrants experiencing detention and violence and reflected on the call to compassion, dignity, and justice for all people.

Thank you to the Indiana Organizing Project, local organizations, and community members who organized the vigil and brought our community together for this public witness.



A Small Gesture, A Lasting Impact

Each August, First Church opens its doors to nearly 200 new international graduate students arriving at Purdue University. Through the leadership of church member John Norberg and the generosity of dozens of volunteers from our congregation, partner churches, the Wesley Foundation, and the wider community, we offer a warm meal, practical information, and a heartfelt welcome to students who are beginning a new chapter far from home.



One of the most meaningful parts of the evening is something many people never see again: four handmade encouragement cards created by Carol Smith. Each student receives a set of cards with instructions to open them at different points during the semester—one upon arrival, another after settling in, a third as coursework intensifies, and a final card during finals week, offering hope and encouragement when it is often needed most.

Recently, church member and Purdue graduate program advisor Karen Hull shared a beautiful glimpse of what those cards mean.

At a luncheon celebrating students who graduated in August, one student smiled as she received a handwritten note and said, “I’m going to keep this with the cards from the church.” She shared that she had opened each card at the appointed time, had carried them with her through a co-op on the West Coast and back to West Lafayette, and still treasured them. Another student quickly added, “Oh yes, I still have all of the cards from the church.”

It’s easy to wonder whether small acts of kindness make a difference. Stories like this remind us that they do. A welcoming meal, a friendly conversation, and a few handwritten words of encouragement can become lasting reminders that someone cared—and that, even far from home, these students were welcomed into a community that saw them, valued them, and wished them well.

As we reflect on another year of welcoming incoming graduate students to West Lafayette, we want to thank everyone whose time, gifts, and prayers make this ministry possible.

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Welcome Dinner for International Graduate Students



On August 16, 2026, First Church welcomed new Purdue international graduate students with a warm meal and hospitality made possible by volunteers from across our church and community. Thank you to everyone who helped make the evening so welcoming!



Celebrating a New Chapter for Wesley Foundation



Members of First Church were glad to join Wesley Foundation at Purdue University on Saturday, August 29, 2026, for the consecration and ribbon cutting of its beautiful new Wesley Foundation Student Center at 122 N. Waldron Street.

Our own Pastor Kory Pritchett helped lead worship music with the alumni band, and Rebecca Pritchett spoke throughout the event as president of the Wesley Foundation Board. Both Kory and Rebecca are Wesley alums.



We are grateful for our long-standing partnership with Wesley. Through a major gift from the First Church Foundation, made possible by the Losey-Patterson family and the estate of Mary Losey, First Church helped fund the building's elevator. We are also honored to have donated stained glass from our former church building to the new Great Hall.

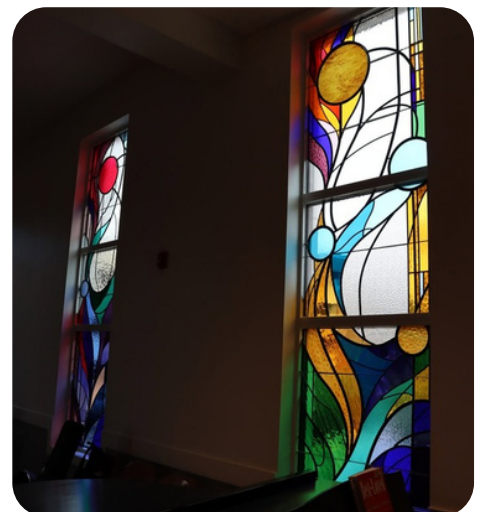
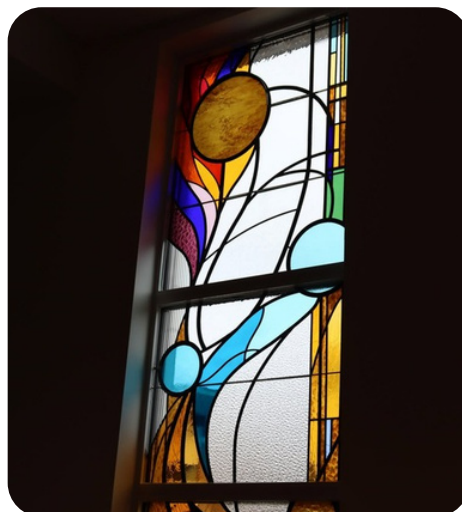
We look forward to all the ways this new home will welcome Purdue students to grow, belong, and explore their faith. Congratulations, Wesley Foundation!

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Wesley Foundation's New Building Consecration



Here's a closer look at Wesley Foundation's new Great Hall, including the stained glass windows donated from First Church's former building.



Fall Family Ministry Picnic



First Church members gathered at Wea Creek Orchard on Sunday, August 30, 2026, for an afternoon of fellowship at the annual Fall Family Ministry Picnic. Here are a few favorite moments from the day. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event possible!



Upcoming Events at First Church

Mark your calendars for these upcoming worship opportunities, classes, and community events. Visit our website or watch the weekly email for more details and registration information.

September 20 | Season of Stewardship & Generosity Begins

Sunday Worship | 11:00 AM | First Church Sanctuary

Our Love One Another worship series begins, inviting us to reflect on loving our neighbors, generosity, and our shared life together.

September 24 | Do We Really Know the Constitution?

We All Belong Event | 6:30-8:00 PM | First Church

Join First Church and We All Belong for an interactive workshop exploring the U.S. Constitution.

October 3 | Democracy Under Siege

We All Belong Event | 2:00-4:00 PM | First Church

Join First Church and We All Belong for a screening and community discussion.

October 4 | World Communion Sunday

Sunday Worship | 11:00 AM | First Church Sanctuary

Join us as we celebrate our connection with Christians around the world through Holy Communion.

October 9-17 | The Importance of Being Earnest

Arts & Culture | Various Times | First Church

Acorn Players of Lafayette present Oscar Wilde's classic comedy at First Church.

October 18 | Consecration Sunday

Sunday Worship & Special Event | Time TBD | First Church

Join us for this important conclusion to our Love One Another series and Season of Stewardship and Generosity. Together, we will celebrate the ministry of First Church and look ahead to another year of living out our mission through our shared generosity.

October 20-29 | The Pastor and the Rabbi Walk in Again

Class | Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:30-11:45 AM

Rev. Duane Carlisle and Rabbi Adam Bellows return for four sessions exploring Christian and Jewish topics.

For more information on upcoming events, visit our website at fumcwl.org.

Welcoming Statement

We, the people of First United Methodist Church West Lafayette, welcome everyone, through all life's stages, with arms that are open, respectful, and loving. And by everyone, we mean regardless of a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, race, ability, bank balance, or background. As a Reconciling Congregation, we welcome you into our church family, for it is by joining hands that we support one another and share our faith journey together. Whoever you are, and wherever you are in your spiritual journey, you are welcome here.



Mission, Vision & Core Values

MISSION: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

VISION:

1. Adopt & Embrace the Families of the Klondike School District in partnership with Klondike Elementary School & Teachers
2. Embrace the Purdue Community in partnership with Wesley Foundation;
3. Ensure our First United Methodist Church Community is connected & growing in their walk with Christ.

CORE VALUES: We are a loving & joyful church committed to celebrating God's love in all that we do. Welcome, Acceptance, & Support; Christ-centered Worship; Spiritual Growth Towards Discipleship; Active Christian Service.

