



Forest Hill Church
presbyterian

The Tower Newsletter

July 2026



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Cover photo of members of the Presbytery of the Western Reserve at Pride in the CLE. For more pictures of the Pride Parade, see pages 8–9.

PASTOR'S COLUMN: FAITHFULNESS IN ORDINARY TIME

The longest single season in the church's calendar is Ordinary Time.

This year, 33 Sundays will be designated as "the Xth Sunday in Ordinary Time," beginning with the six Sundays after the Epiphany and picking up again after Pentecost. God must love ordinary time because God made so much of it!

The liturgical color for this season is green, designating growth — the spiritual growth we hope and pray for in ourselves, reflecting the agricultural growth we see in such abundance all around us. Like Advent, Ordinary Time is a season of waiting — waiting for seeds planted by the Spirit to mature into the gifts of that Spirit that we can share with all of God's creation. Ordinary Time stretches before us — long, unadorned, and quietly faithful. There are no dramatic holy days and no sweeping narratives. Instead, we are given time to practice what we believe.

Ordinary Time reminds us that most of life is lived somewhere in the middle. Not at beginnings or endings, but in routines, responsibilities, and relationships that shape us over time. Faith is formed not only in moments of crisis or celebration, but also — and perhaps more regularly — in the steady practice of love.

In a culture that prizes novelty, Ordinary Time affirms consistency. Showing up. Telling the truth. Choosing kindness. Working for justice even when progress is slow. These are not flashy acts of faith, but they are enduring values that give shape and meaning to our lives and relieve suffering in their own, quiet way.

As summer unfolds, many of us experience a change in rhythm. Schedules shift. Travel increases. Worship feels different. This, too, is part of faithfulness — learning how to remain rooted even as our routines change.

Ordinary Time invites us to ask: How do we live our faith when nothing dramatic is happening? How do we embody hope in small, daily choices? How do we remain attentive to God's presence in ordinary places?

Mary Oliver, who grew up in the woods and fields around nearby Maple Heights, has long been my go-to poet for help in answering those kinds of questions, about seeing God at work in the blessed ordinary. Oliver's great poetic gift was not only her ability with words but also her keen, patient, and persistent attentiveness to detail and nuance, along with her ability to combine her observations of the natural world with a profoundly accessible spirituality. One of her most celebrated expressions of that combination is her poem, "The Summer Day." I commend it to you in the hope that it may make you weep.

The good news is that God meets us there, in the ordinary everywhere. In conversations. In service. In rest. In laughter. In the quiet persistence of a community committed to love.

May this season deepen our appreciation for the ordinary ways God shapes us into a people of faith.

Faithfully,



Gene McAfee
Transitional Pastor



SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Vision Statement of Session:

By 2027, Session will courageously embrace the transition by:

*Being spiritually led, more diverse, and more fully prepared to serve
Living into individual gifts
Connecting with and across ministries, and
Communicating openly and actively with congregants, all as a Matthew 25 Church and Beloved Community.*

The session of Forest Hill Church met on Wednesday, May 27, opening with prayer and a spiritual conversation.

Financial Report The financial report for the period ending April 30, 2026, was received.

Endowment Grants A corrected list of 2026 endowment grants was approved.

Funds Available

2026 Allocation Funds Available	\$88,048
<u>Funds reallocated from prior years</u>	<u>\$3,574</u>
Total funds available	\$91,622

Grants

Exterior Maintenance Fund	\$22,012
Justice Ministry	\$22,012
Education Debt Repair	\$10,000
2026 Operating Budget Support	\$35,375
Cultivating the Gift of Preaching	\$1,000
<u>Pastor Nominating Committee</u>	<u>\$1,223</u>
Total Grants	\$91,622

Transitional Pastor Contract Renewal

Session reviewed and approved the renewal of the contract with Pastor McAfee for the position of Transitional Pastor. The period of the contract is July 1–December 31, 2026.

Confirmation Lucas Ryman, a youth, was introduced to Session by Amy Wheatley. He is the sole youth in the confirmation program this year. Session elders shared their own faith journeys. They then examined Lucas about his experiences during confirmation and his own faith. Session approved that Lucas be baptized and confirmed as a member of the church on July 26.

Report of the Pastor Pastor McAfee reported that he will be on vacation June 9–22, 2026. The preachers in his absence will be the Rev. Eric Dillenbeck on June 14 and the Rev. Susi Kawolics on June 21. He also provided an update on plans for Pride Month.

Submitted by Elizabeth J. Shaw,
Clerk of Session.

Congregants are invited to observe meetings of Session. While observers are not able to actively participate in discussions or decision-making, they can see firsthand how Session coordinates the work of the church. Session will not meet in July and August. The next regular meeting will be Wednesday, September 23, 2026, 6–8 p.m. in South Hall.

PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

In our pastor search, we have had virtual interviews with two candidates, and we want to invite one of them for a second interview.

To get to this point, we first got a group of 25 candidates from the Presbytery. Everyone on the committee reviewed the profiles and put comments on a spreadsheet. Then, we reached a consensus of who we liked as candidates.

Before the interviews, we conducted a mock interview with a retired pastor, who gave us feedback on preparation and highlighted the warmth of FHC. We interviewed four

more candidates in June.

Keep us in your prayers that we stay on the right path to finding our new pastor. Advisor Arvid Whitmore is very helpful with his observations.

Co-chairs Kurt Haas and Mark Wedell, Chris Bell, Bader Boland, Antoinette Franklin, Katie Fay Hall, Rayba Johnson, Chiq Montgomery, Dean Sieck, and Peg Weissbrod, along with Presbytery Advisor Arvid Whitmore.



TRANSITIONAL PASTOR EXTENDED TO END OF YEAR

Pastor Gene McAfee and the Session have agreed to renew the contract for his role as Transitional Pastor through the end of this year. Gene has served as Transitional Pastor since January of 2025. In that position he has helped the congregation celebrate the past, embrace where we are now, and be excited for where God is leading us. He has preached, taught, walked with us on a pilgrimage, shared our joys and lamented our sorrows. He has encouraged the work of our leaders and volunteers as they carry on the mission and ministries.

While the Pastor Nominating Committee works to seek and call an Installed Pastor, Gene will continue to provide for the vision, spiritual growth and ongoing work of the church.

Submitted by Elizabeth J. Shaw,
Clerk of Session

SERMON ON THE AMOUNTS

Each month we will publish year-to-date financial data showing congregation support versus the budget to keep members updated on the financial status of our church.

We are thankful for your support.

Marina Grant and Mary McMillan,
Co-Treasurers

As of June 17, 2026

Congregation Support:	\$398,612
Budget for Period Ending:	\$375,904
Annual Budget:	\$713,777
Per Capita:	\$3,400
Budget for Period:	\$1,646
Annual Budget:	\$3,544

THE RON REGISTER SCHOLARSHIP FUND

In 2017, Forest Hill Church member Doris Allen proposed the creation of the Ron Register Scholarship Fund (RRSF) to the Black Caucus of FHC. Doris wanted to honor Ron's long-term commitment to the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Board of Education and his loving dedication to the students. Doris wanted to be sure that students continue to be touched by Ron for years to come.

Ron Register was born in Tennessee. He moved here, where he raised his five children in the Heights school system. He was the first Black man elected to the school board where he served for sixteen years. He was elected president for six terms. Ron strove to ensure that this racially diverse district would be a model of racial equity and excellence in education.

Each year, since 2019, the RRSF has provided financial support to two exemplary seniors of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights schools who are enrolled in college and show strong leadership and community service commitments. This year, we, the new committee of the fund, granted the award

to Jayla Scruggs and Chelsea Gibson. We are so excited to support them in reaching their dreams to provide pharmacological and technical access, especially to under-resourced individuals and communities.

Carrying on the legacy that Doris began, the scholarship committee seeks to keep the Ron Register Scholarship Fund alive for at least a generation in order to continue supporting our city and our future leaders. Please help us reach our goals by making a tax-deductible contribution. You may donate on the church website (<https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/RonRegisterScholarship>) or send a check payable to Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian, 3031 Monticello Blvd., Cleveland Heights, OH 44118. In the memo line of the check, indicate that the contribution is for the Ron Register Scholarship.



We thank the prior members of the RRSF committee who successfully created and nurtured the fund for the past five years. These members are: Doris Allen, Quentin Smith, Diana Woodbridge, Susie Kaeser, Louisa Oliver, Reggie Evans, and Ajah Hales. The current RRSF committee includes Akwasi Register, Allen Register, Anna Register, Rhonda Register Ajani, Joseph Register, Julie Lustic, Ajah Hales, and Jennifer Blakeney. Reggie Evans has agreed to remain an advisor to the committee.

Chelsea Gibson

Chelsea is a well-rounded, strong student with a passion to “educate my peers about the injustices faced in our community and history that is overshadowed.” She is willing to speak [cont'd on p. 7]



From left: Joe Register, Jayla Scruggs, Ron Register, and Chelsea Gibson

[cont'd from p. 6]

up for herself and others while working for solutions. Chelsea is a leading member in the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) at Cleveland Heights High School. Her AP English teacher describes her as intuitive and analytical. She is a member of AVID and highly engaged in the community. She was wrestling team captain where she worked with the head coach to improve the experience for the other members of the team.

She plans to study Pharmaceutical Science on the PharmD track at The Ohio State University.

Jayla Scruggs

Jayla is an alumna of the Cleveland Leadership Center Look Up to Cleveland and a current Teen Lift Program participant. She was an intern with Cleveland Heights City Council President Tony Cuda and a member of MSAN at Heights High School. Jayla is a member of the Superintendent's Cadre where she organized initiatives to improve academic equity and student engagement. Jayla is a varsity volleyball player for Heights High School and a frequent volunteer at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. She was inducted into Cleveland Heights High School's National Honor Society with a GPA of 4.48.

Jayla plans to study technological access to under resourced communities at Howard University.

HOBY YOUTH LEADERSHIP

On June 6, a group of 12 students provided service to our congregation by cleaning all the pews in the sanctuary and all the chairs in the Fellowship Hall. The group was from Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership (HOBY).

HOBY's mission is to inspire and develop our global community of youth and volunteers to a life dedicated to leadership, service, and innovation. They called to ask us if we had a service project available, as they have brought groups to FHC before. The Trustees and Ann Donkin were able to accommodate their request.

This was an energetic and delightful group of students. They attacked the task with enthusiasm. They broke into teams and worked together to "get it done!", wiping down the pews and vacuuming all the cushions.

They finished the sanctuary more quickly than expected, so we scrambled to find another project — hence, the chairs in Fellowship Hall. They tackled those and took a short break until the bus arrived and they were gone!

See more information about the organization at hoby.org.



JUSTICE MINISTRY

Pride in the CLE March

Forest Hill participants joined members of other churches from the Presbytery of the Western Reserve in the Pride in the CLE march on June 6. Carrying a banner that has been used for many years, we shared the message, “Forest Hill Church: Faith in the Heights,” with the crowds gathered downtown. It was a beautiful day spent celebrating love and inclusion for all of God’s beloved community.





MUSIC MINISTRY

Choral Scholars Fundraising Update

On May 24, 2026, we announced the launch of our Choral Scholars Fund, an initiative designed to support and strengthen our music ministry by providing stipends for talented student and young adult singers who enrich our worship services throughout the year. We are looking to raise \$4,999, and since May 24, we have raised \$2,490.68.

We are grateful for the enthusiastic response from our congregation and community. Since the announcement, generous contributions have begun to build a strong foundation for this important program. Our helpful lemonade sellers have diligently poured lemonade every Sunday. Jim Hogg, Brennen Taggart, and QinYing Tan have contributed by playing the jukebox piano, adding to the festivities of the lemonade sale. In addition, the choir put on a bake sale on June 14, an event which raised \$353.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has already contributed. Your generosity demonstrates a shared commitment to nurturing young musicians and sustaining a vibrant musical tradition at Forest Hill Church.

Donations to the Choral Scholars Fund are still being accepted. If you would like to support this ministry, please contact the church office or indicate “Choral Scholars Fund” with your contribution.



MI PUEBLO CULTURE CAMP

“Mi Pueblo” in Spanish means – my nation, my people, or my village. Mi Pueblo is a nonprofit Latin American Culture Camp designed for children of Latino heritage and their allies with special outreach to Latino adoptees and their children. Visit their website here: mipueblotcamp.org.

For more than 30 years, Mi Pueblo has brought families together for a fun and educational experience to learn about Latino culture through music, dance, cooking, games, crafts and more.

The pictures from this year’s camp are only a small part of the joy that fills FHC during the third week of June!



EARTH CARE CONGREGATIONS



The Energy Dilemma

There are about 350 million people in the U.S., and nearly seven billion worldwide. Existence in our modern world requires energy derived primarily from the Earth's natural resources. We began with burning whale oil for heat and firelight. The whales suffered... Then came the discovery of oil in the ground, and the coal to fuel the industrial revolution. The land suffered...

In the modern era today, it is the people, plants, and animal life who are suffering from the exploitation and extraction of fossil fuels for production of electrical generation to use or produce nearly in one way or another in modern living.

Today the wealthy nations of the world require immense amounts of electricity for many uses, including lighting, heating, air conditioning, and manufacturing. Now with the emergence of "data" centers, we require even more extensive electricity and water. Such data centers govern our use of all knowledge for controlling everything we do or might do. An increase in electrical generation requires sourcing more energy through the use of fossil fuels, solar, wind, nuclear, or geothermal sources. We have spent the past one and a half centuries depleting many of our earth's natural resources to harvest coal, oil, and more recently, natural gas to generate electricity. This has led to the degradation of land and the pollution of water sources in the process. This degradation and pollution has decreased the condition of human health

through lowered air and water quality and disease for many people living in proximity to extractive industry mining, oil drilling and refineries, and oil-derivative petrochemical plants.

The current government administration has turned its back on regulatory bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA). It has expanded permits for continued fossil fuel extraction on public lands and seas, and then has undermined support for alternative natural wind and solar energy initiatives. Of course, we know that continued usage of fossil fuel energy sources accelerates global warming through increased emissions as we burn coal and oil and, to a somewhat lesser extent, even natural gas.

While we can do our part to conserve our own energy usage of fossil fuels as much as possible, to make a greater reduction in dependency on fossil fuels for electrical needs, we need the government to act and to regulate energy sourcing and production. Important non-governmental organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Earth Justice, and many others continue to lead the fight much more effectively than we can as individual citizens. They engage the powers in Washington through legislative and judicial means to oppose drilling expansion throughout the country's land and territorial waters.

I encourage our continued awareness and support of these important organizations.

David Neff
FHC Earth Care Leader



SCHOOL SUPPLY COLLECTION



North Church, our partner church downtown (Labre Ministry), is sponsoring a school supply collection for children in the Superior neighborhood, and Forest Hill Church will be the collector of pens and pencils! Please put **packs of new black and/or blue pens and #2 pencils** in the designated box in the Hunter Wing (near the door to the playground). This collection will run through July. Thank you!



SUMMER WORSHIP

Our summer worship schedule began on June 7. Worship will be at 10 a.m. during the summer.

Weather permitting, we will have worship outdoors on June 28, July 12 and 26, and August 9 and 23.

Worship at 11 a.m. will resume on September 13, the day of our fall kickoff.

July 3 – Mike Cosgrove
July 3 – Dorothy Herd
July 5 – Derry Stauffer
July 6 – Beatrice Ampong
July 6 – Linda Rainey
July 7 – Brett Himes
July 7 – Diane Moyer
July 8 – Nathaniel Martin

July 9 – Sandy Ladebue
July 9 – Susanne Peterjohn
July 11 – Jon Newton (Sr.)
July 12 – Edie Duncan
July 12 – Carolyn Smith
July 13 – John Harmon
July 14 – Peter Williams
July 23 – Ron Polderman

July 23 – Dene Young
July 24 – Don Ghiandoni
July 24 – Jon Newton (Jr.)
July 25 – Mary Ball
July 26 – Consuelo Heineman
July 30 – Lisa Richardson
July 30 – Ying Tan
July 31 – Amy Dillenbeck

BIRTHDAYS

FIBER FELLOWSHIP

A Small Group for Fiber Arts Crafters

Join us for knitting, quilting, basic sewing, and plenty of conversation. Whether you're working on a group project or bringing your own, you'll find encouragement, ideas, and good company.

We love learning from one another, so feel free to teach us your favorite fiber craft, from crochet to punch needle, macramé, and more. Or simply enjoy the fellowship while you catch up with your mending!

Please note that Fiber Fellowship is not meeting in July and August. See you on September 12!



CALENDAR

July 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 7:00pm - Personnel Committee	2	3 Independence Day Observed - Church Closed	4 Independence Day
5	6	7	8 5:00pm - Eastside Citizens' Empowerment Foundation 7:00pm - Ministry Meetings	9 7:00pm - Forest Hills Homeowners Association Meeting	10 5:00pm - Praying with Others	11 11:00am - Memorial Service for Chuck Ishler
12 9:00am - Session Meeting Outdoor Worship	13	14	15	16 Deadline for the August Tower 5:30pm - Finance Committee Meeting	17	18 2:00pm - FHC Connects: Hawaiian Luau
19 11:15am - Canaan Care Group Luncheon	20 7:00pm - Deacons Meeting	21	22	23	24 5:00pm - Praying with Others	25
26 Outdoor Worship - Labre Ministry at North Church 12:15pm - Safety Committee Meeting	27	28	29	30	31	

Regularly scheduled events meet every week unless noted	9:00am - Bulletin and Email Deadline 6:00pm - AA: Progress Not Perfection 7:00pm - Al-Anon: Now There's Hope 7:00pm - Pastor Nominating Committee Meeting 7:30pm - AA: Borton Group	10:30am - 1:00pm Abundance Food Pantry	7:30am - Bible & Bagels (virtual) 12:00pm - Staff Meeting 12:30pm - AA: Wed. Women's Group 6:00pm - AA: Four Absolutes	1:30pm - English Country Dance	10:00am - Al- Anon: Hand in Hand 6:30pm - Scottish Country Dance	
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CONTACT INFORMATION

Rev. Dr. Gene McAfee	Transitional Pastor	pastormcafee@fhcpresb.org	x201
Dr. QinYing Tan	Director of Music/Organist	music@fhcpresb.org	x208
Dr. Amy Wheatley	Director of Family, Youth, and Children	CE@fhcpresb.org	x206
Antoinette Richardson	Community Engagement Manager	office@fhcpresb.org	x202
Laura Schultz	Digital Communications Manager	churchadmin@fhcpresb.org	x200
Darlene Holt	Bookkeeper	finance@fhcpresb.org	x203
Ann Donkin	Building Manager	adonkin@fhcpresb.org	x214
Rev. Carol Wedell	Parish Associate	carolwedell@gmail.com	

**3031 Monticello Blvd.
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118**

Church Office: 216-321-2660

Custodians' cell phone: 216-217-5257

Email: churchadmin@fhcpresb.org

Website: www.fhcpresb.org

Deadline for the August Tower: 9:00 a.m. on July 16, 2026
Deadline for The Week Ahead email: 9:00 a.m. every Monday

Giving Options

Friends of FHC, you may give monetary gifts or donations by texting 216-400-5300, or see the online giving options at fhcpresb.org/give. You may also mail a check to the church bookkeeper (3031 Monticello Blvd., Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118).