



Forest Hill Church
presbyterian

The Tower Newsletter

January 2026



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PASTOR'S COLUMN: THE OTHER R-WORD

January is the traditional time for the R-word – resolutions – when the world often focuses on personal resolutions, setting goals, and trying to improve ourselves.

There are the usual suspects, like losing weight or exercising more or, more recently, spending less time staring at a screen.
[cont'd on p. 3]

Cover photo by Jean Reinholt. For more pictures of the children's Christmas Eve pageant, see page 8.

[cont'd from p. 2]

Sometimes we dig a little deeper and move our hope to reform ourselves – another R-word – inward, by becoming more patient, say, or less judgmental.

While these goals are good, they often focus on external behaviors or outcomes, and they tend to be piecemeal.

There is another R-word I'd like to raise up as we prepare to start a new year in the civil calendar, and that's the word **repentance**.

Why Talk About Repentance a Month Before Ash Wednesday?

Every year, Lent arrives with its familiar summons: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." That bracing reminder will arrive early in 2026, on February 18, when we will gather for worship on Ash Wednesday. Please mark your calendar now to participate in this evening service — one of the few times in our church year when we gather after daylight for worship. The decor of the sanctuary will be different, the atmosphere will be different, the mood will be different, the tone will be different, and the contents of the service will be different — all different from typical morning worship. Please try to make it, in person if possible, because much of the difference is not conveyable online. Again, February 18, 2026, 7:00 p.m., in the sanctuary.

Back to **repentance**.

Many people hear the language of **repentance** as something negative, and quite naturally want to delay that less-than-good news for as long as possible. So it's reasonable to ask why a pastor would begin speaking about **repentance** weeks before the liturgical

calendar instructs us to. Why not wait?

The short answer is that genuine **repentance** cannot be rushed. It is not a mood that descends on us the moment ashes touch our skin; it is a spiritual practice of sustained attentiveness to God's transforming grace. Starting early is not about manufacturing guilt or extending the season of self-denial. It is about preparing the spiritual ground in us and around us so that Lent — that time of sustained attention and reflection — can do its deeper work.

The biblical words for **repentance** both mean "turning," a turning of one's mind and a turning of one's entire self from one thing to a better thing. **Repentance**, as the Bible and our tradition (at its best) understand it, is not essentially negative; in its essence, **repentance** is about change, positive change — redirecting our lives, in their entirety, toward a loving God who waits patiently for us to join a profoundly loving, creative, joyful, and life-affirming relationship. In other words, God is waiting for us to be in the kind of relationship with God that God wants for us and is offering us every day of our lives. If **repentance** helps us enter into that relationship, why would we delay?

Faithfully,



Gene McAfee
Transitional
Pastor



FAMILY, YOUTH, AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Gingerbread Joy!

Fellowship Hall was filled with frosting, candy, and JOY as over 100 people of all ages gathered to decorate gingerbread houses for Christmas. Thank you to our gingerbread bakers, the Family, Youth, and Children's Ministry team, FHC staff, and volunteers who make this annual event possible. Special thanks to everyone who purchased houses to decorate. With your donations, we raised \$1,500 for Family Promise of Greater Cleveland — an organization that provides a safe place for families facing homelessness, as well as services to guide them toward a future where they feel empowered to control the course of their lives.









CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS EVE PAGEANT

Twenty-six children participated in the pageant as narrators, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, and animals. Violet Majot, one of our 7th graders, had a vision for this children's pageant and brought it to life! Laurie Logan and Kylie Evans supported Violet in her role as coordinator. Katherine, Cora, and Eden Bissett, along with Katherine Wheatley, helped with rehearsals and the performance. Music was provided by Julie Minder, QinYing Tan, and Kurt Haas. Twanda Patterson was the voice of God! Thanks to everyone who helped tell this wonderful Christmas story. [Photos by Jean Reinhold]





MUSIC MINISTRY

Tracing Traditions

On January 6, we celebrate the season of Epiphany—a time that symbolizes revelation, light, and the manifestation of hope for the world. At Forest Hill Church, it is our tradition to honor this meaningful day with a procession of the three kings, who journey forth to offer their gifts to the newborn baby, Jesus, who represents hope for all people.

The original costumes for our procession were improvised from bedsheets, bathrobes, and paper crowns. This sometimes created humorous situations in the past: one

particularly memorable year saw a king with an animal skin draped over his shoulders, alongside the old sheets and bathrobes! Kris Fay recalls that her father, William C. Tapié, a bass who sang in the choir for 50 years, felt that Forest Hill Church should obtain a more regal set of costumes. When William passed away, the family commissioned a fine set in remembrance.

Kris found an opera costume designer, Terry Peritz, who researched and crafted authentic garments for our kings. And now, every Epiphany, she has faithfully hemmed and prepared the costumes for the kings.



Original sketches of design



*First year displaying
procession of the kings*

Voices of Joy: Caroling through the Forest Hill Neighborhood

On Saturday, December 6, a group of around 14 folks from Forest Hill Church went caroling around the Forest Hill neighborhood. Some came dressed up in Christmas sweaters and hats, and we had great fun singing familiar hymns to several of our members living nearby!

We were greeted with surprised smiles. The cold evening air added to the sense of togetherness as voices blended in harmony—young, old, and everyone in between.

After our final stop, the group gathered back at the church for pizza and cookies



and shared stories from the night. It was a simple but meaningful reminder of the joy of community, the power of music, and the blessing of showing up for one another during this season of light.

We look forward to making this a tradition for years to come!

MEMORIAL RECEPTION COMMITTEE

Are you looking to volunteer, but you don't have a lot of time?

Join the Memorial Reception Committee!

The committee helps with receptions after memorial services: set up/take down, arrange table linens, flowers, plate refreshments, make punch or serve coffee.

You will be notified when the committee is needed, and you let us know if you're available at that time. Volunteers can choose to help set up the day before or serve on the day of the reception.

This is a meaningful way to show love to our church members and their families during a difficult time. For more information contact Cindy Newton at 216-401-9835.



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 met on November 19, 2025, in a Stated Meeting. Pastor Gene McAfee served as moderator. The following is a summary of the meeting.

The Financial Report for the period ending October 31, 2025, was received.

Session approved a recommendation from the Deacons to remove Audrey Kellermeyer from the membership roll after receiving her request to do so.

Session approved continued support for More Light Presbyterians and the Covenant Network. These two PC(USA) organizations focus on helping local congregations become more welcoming and inclusive for LGBTQIA+ people as well as address policy issues.

Trustees reported that a hearing assistive system will be installed in the sanctuary to improve the worship experience for those who use T-coil hearing aids. This installation is possible because of a generous gift.

An ad hoc team was set up to bring a proposal on an inclusivity task force which will focus on important aspects of being welcoming and inclusive in our worship and programming as well as buildings and grounds.

Session continues to work on the following:

- Operational budget for 2026
- Policy revisions for the ecclesiastical by-laws and the operations manual
- Guidelines for communications with external audiences

The meeting closed with prayer by Elder Jean Reinhold.

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. The next meeting will be Wed., Jan. 14, 2025, 7:00–9:00 p.m. in South Hall.

ADULT SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Power of Choice as We Age **Sundays, March 1, 15, and 29,** **after the worship service**

The Deacons and Adult Spiritual Growth are collaborating on a three-part series coming in March 2026. Three professionals will help us understand the choices we have as we age. Mark your calendars now!

- March 1: Senior care, senior communities and skilled care facilities with Linn Obery
- March 15: End-of-life care organizing with Bill Finn
- March 29: Interactive workshop on aging, faith, grief, vocation, and purpose with Sally Wile

Watch for more information in next month's *Tower* newsletter!

ADULT SPIRITUAL GROWTH (ASG)

The Winter Sunday morning educational hour begins January 4 with two offerings.

Rereading Paul: Examining Our Relationship with Paul and His Message

Sundays, January 4–March 22,
9:15–10:15 a.m. Meet in South Hall.

A full 13 of the 27 books of the Christian Testament are attributed to Paul. Those works have had and continue to have a profound effect on our faith, our church and our concept of God. This winter we will study three of those books: First Thessalonians (perhaps the oldest work in our Christian canon), Second Thessalonians, and Titus.

We will dive into Paul's messages to an early church and the instruction of an early companion, examine Paul's evangelism, and crack open the question of how each of us takes in and incorporates Paul's words into our present life. We also will explore the authorship of these works and what that means to our understanding of Scripture. All are welcome! Facilitated by Tom Zych and Kathryn Eloff.

Register here: <https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/abba6c>



Studying Hope

Sundays, January 4–25, 9:15–10:15 a.m.
Meet in Fellowship Hall.

When chaos imposes fear on our unsuspecting lives, it is hope that pulls us up and guides us forward. We will consider the expansive contours of hope, as we follow Jesus with four practices for cultivating hope in our lives:

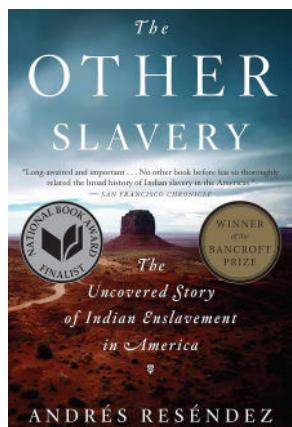
- Hear Hope
- See Hope
- Offer and Receive Hope
- Proclaim Hope

Classes will be built around discussions that involve no preparation ahead of time. A short reading will be provided each week at class time. Bring your Bible. Come when you can.

Register here: <https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/548992>



RACIAL EQUITY BOOK CLUB



**Saturday,
January 10,
10:30 a.m.–
12:00 p.m.
via Zoom**

***The Other Slavery:
The Uncovered Story
of Indian Enslavement
in America***
by Andrés Reséndez

Persons interested in reading and discussing books that further individual and collective knowledge about racial equity issues are invited to join the discussions. For more information, or the Zoom links, email racialequitybuddies@fhcpresb.org.

The First Congregational Church of Hudson (UCC) and the Ministry of Adult Spiritual Growth of Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian are sponsors of the Racial Equity Book Club and Racial Equity Buddies program.

HAT DONATIONS

Thank you to all those who have knit hats to donate this year! We are most appreciative of all the contributions that have been made.

This year we are donating the hats locally to North Church and to the street outreach program coordinated by Jack Breisch. The need is real.

We will continue to collect hats – they can be placed in the volunteer office for Carol Gifford to pick up.



WORSHIP



To contribute flowers for Sunday worship, use this form: <https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/Flowers>. If you are interested in being a co-leader for worship, please contact Linda Martin at martin3386@ameritech.net or (216) 280-4049. If you wish to assist in serving communion, contact Jeanette Nemcek at jet0830@aol.com or (216) 789-6740.

Co-Leaders for January

January 4: Lia Clement and Mya Foster
January 11: Madelaine Matej MacQueen
January 18: John Dugard
January 25: Ann Donkin

IMMIGRATION TASK FORCE (ITF)

Immigration Task Force invites FHC to visit *El Sueño Americano/The American Dream*

The Immigration Task Force invites all members and friends of Forest Hill Church to join us for a unique inspiring exhibit at the Maltz Museum on Saturday, January 17, from 1:00–3:00 p.m. Titled “*El Sueño Americano/The American Dream*,” the exhibit features the work of two artists, Tom Kiefer and Elizabeth Z. Pineda, who examine dimensions of the immigrant experience at the U.S./Mexico border in creative, compelling, and profoundly moving ways.

Kiefer’s still-life photographs of countless items confiscated from migrants that were deemed “non-essential” or “potentially lethal” bring humanity to the viewer. Kiefer photographed confiscated personal items he collected as a janitor at a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol processing facility in Southwest Arizona.

Mexican American artist Elizabeth Pineda beautifully explores themes of identity, displacement, and migrant deaths in the Arizona desert. The exhibition features her

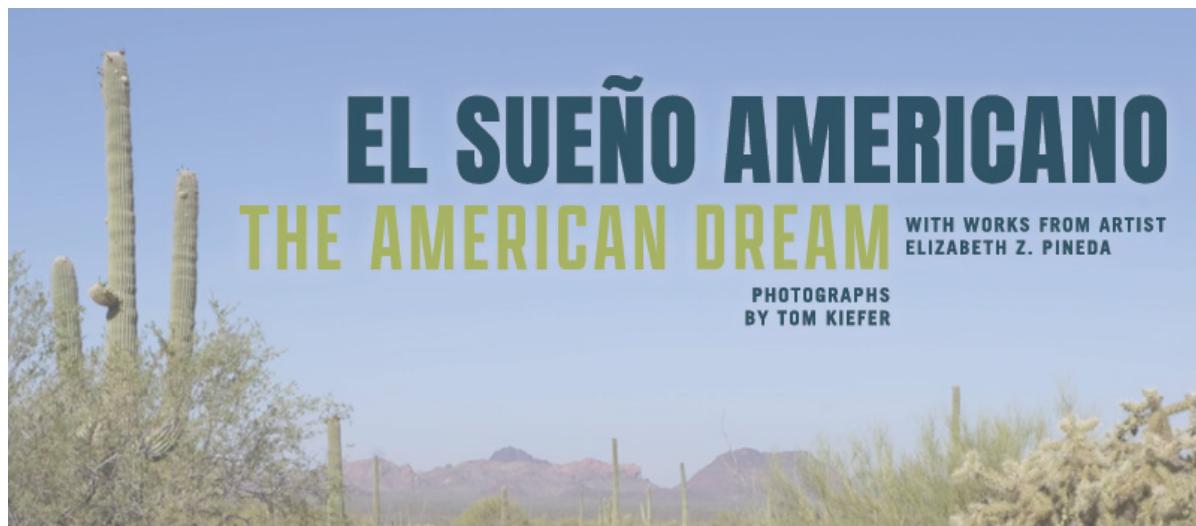
film, *Ceremonia*, from the *Sin Nombre en Esta Tierra Sagrada* series, which honors the thousands of migrant lives lost in the Sonoran Desert. The film is shown alongside artworks from Pineda’s Maíz series of cyanotype prints on corn husks and the Reverencia series of printed silk banners, documenting confirmed migrant deaths.

A carpool will leave the church for the museum at 12:30 p.m., weather permitting. If you prefer to drive on your own, the address of the Maltz Museum is 2929 Richmond Road, Beachwood. Parking is free. The tour will begin at 1:00 p.m.

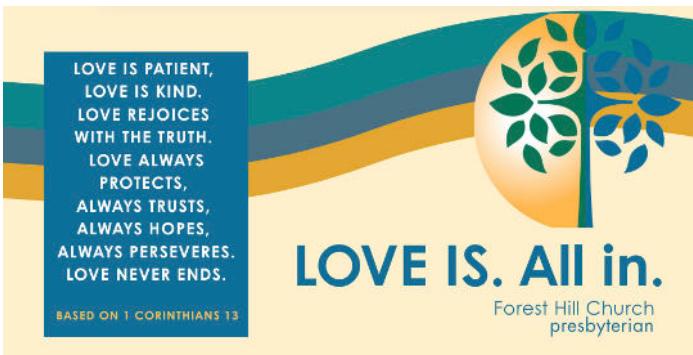
Great interest is expected so please register soon here: <https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/ElSuenoAmericano>. For additional questions, contact Stephen Sedam at Goldens101@aol.com.

The Immigration Task Force will host a brief meeting for those interested in attending on Sunday, January 11, right after service. More details on this will be forthcoming.

Submitted by Stephen Sedam for the Immigration Task Force.



STEWARDSHIP



The pledges for 2026 are rolling in. At the time of this writing, a bit over half of the active households in the congregation have made a commitment. Thank you!

If you have yet to make a pledge, remember that ANY AMOUNT COUNTS! We're aiming for ALL IN. Consider promising an amount you can afford to support our faithful work, and play, and love together.

This year LOVE IS. All in.

Submit your pledge here:

<https://fhc.breezechms.com/form/7c646691>

We are, as always, honored to work alongside you,

Your Stewardship Team

Keith Logan and Jean Reinhold, Elders
Carol Gifford, Kim Hill, Jenny Himmelman,
and Peter Williams
stewardship@fhcpresb.org

PACESETTERS

2025 was a busy year for the Pacesetters! We gathered for hikes, picnics, visits to museums, and cooking together for Labre ministry, to name just a few of the monthly activities.

**Now it's time
to plan for
2026!**



All are welcome to the 2026 Pacesetters Planning Party, hosted by Scott and Sue Lafferty, on Saturday, January 24, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. The address is 1969 Bromton Drive in Lyndhurst.

Bring ideas of activities you would like to do with the Pacesetters in 2026! Also bring an appetizer, salad, or dessert to share. BYOB. Soft drinks and juices will be provided.

No RSVP necessary! Long-time Pacesetters, invite a new member or visitor and bring them along with you! New members and visitors to Forest Hill, take a chance and come and see what the fellowship of this group looks like! You won't be disappointed!

For questions or directions, call Sue (440-669-4885) or Scott (440-429-2937) or email salaff@sbcglobal.net.

What is a Pacesetter?

Pacesetters began 40+ years ago as a social group of 20- to 30-year-olds at Forest Hill. Pacesetters, now 50- to 80-somethings, include a mix of long-time and brand-new members and visitors, singles, and couples who gather throughout the year for a variety of activities, both social and service-related.

EARTH CARE CONGREGATIONS



A Wetlands Environmental Success Story

Following up on last month's article regarding the importance of maintaining wetlands environments, here is a success story from California — the kelp seaweed forests.

These seaweed forests of California are starting to return, teeming with life, cleaning the water and the atmosphere as wetlands do, and bringing new hope for the future with new discoveries.

Previous destruction of these kelp forests occurred because of the hunting of the sea otters for their fur. Sea otters controlled the sea urchins which fed on and destroyed the kelp. The offshore oil drilling with numerous well leaks and spills further decimated this vegetation, and thus the entire ecosystem was compromised.

Thanks to modern environmental awareness, legislation, support of indigenous peoples, and cleanup actions from environmental groups, the kelp eco-system around the Channel Islands and Monterey Bay in particular has shown excellent resilience and maintained eco-balance when cleaned up and left alone.

As reported in the December issue of *Smithsonian* magazine, kelp forests have been grown and "farmed" in protected clean water environments at the correct temperature to manage climate variance. (Healthy kelp needs a specific temperature range.) This farmed kelp has then been transplanted into other areas where kelp had once flourished.

Furthermore, successful kelp forestation could benefit the economy. Kelp can be processed into a liquid bio-stimulant and could be used as an alternative to nitrogen-based fertilizer which emits nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas which traps 300 times per pound as much as the CO₂ associated with the kelp product. This kelp product is now being evaluated to potentially boost yields and reduce the amount of water needed for cash crops ranging from almonds and avocados to strawberries and grapes.

Additionally, it is reported that kelp forests give off biogenic aerosols — tiny airborne particles that help clouds form. Coastal cloud cover reflects sunlight, keeping seas and soils cooler, which results in keeping adjacent land less prone to moisture evaporation and more resistant to wildfires.

Finally, research is underway to utilize kelp as an ingredient in biodegradable biopolymers which can be used as a replacement for petroleum-based plastics in thin-film plastic packaging.

Who knows? If successful, such discoveries of the benefits of maintaining wetlands might also be applied to our own local areas and around the state.

David Neff,
Earth Care Leader

SOCIAL MEDIA

Did you know that Forest Hill Church is on social media? If you are also on social media, please follow us! We post on Facebook and Instagram, and our livestreamed worship services are on YouTube.

We would love for you to like, comment on, and share our posts to further the reach and mission of FHC! Find FHC at the links below.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ForestHillChurch>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/fhcpres/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6KcSBcCKdHobprimEdzICA>



NEW YEAR'S EVE AT FHC!

**TONIGHT, December 31,
7:00 p.m.–Midnight**

Bring your favorite party game, and your favorite dish to share for a Multi-Generational Potluck Game Night here at Forest Hill!

We will gather around 7:00, and starting at 9:00 we will ring in the New Year each hour as it comes to different time zones. This way, if you don't want to stay until midnight, you can still take part in a little bit of Happy New Year Hoopla before you go home to get to bed at a decent hour.

RSVPs are not necessary, but would be helpful. Please email Marcie Denton at marciedenton70@gmail.com.

BIRTHDAYS

January 2 – Betsy Andrews

January 2 – Chris Henry

January 2 – Charity Stock

January 6 – Anne Smith

January 7 – Ethan Gifford

January 8 – Kay Dunlap

January 8 – Jenny Himmelman

January 13 – Megan Allen

January 14 – Nancy Burcham

January 14 – Sandy Moran

January 14 – Katie Reed

January 15 – Peter Eloff

January 15 – Mark Joseph

January 15 – Lisa Vahey

January 16 – Clayton Minder

January 16 – Scott Peters

January 18 – Sally Davis

January 19 – Twanda Patterson

January 20 – Anne Caminiti

January 20 – Zivile Khoury

January 20 – Jean Reinhold

January 21 – Bader Boland

January 22 – Lisa Hamilton

January 23 – Molly Bergman

January 24 – Pat Seeders

January 24 – Caleb Wright

January 25 – Linda Martin

January 25 – Noel Ullom

January 26 – Chris Nau

January 27 – Muriel Dean

January 27 – Diana

Woodbridge

January 28 – Emily Brock

January 28 – Carol Leslie

January 29 – Pat Jeffreys

January 31 – Kylie Evans

January 31 – Robin Mervine

CALENDAR

January 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 New Year's Day - CHURCH CLOSED	2	3 10:30am - Men's Group
4 9:15am - Rereading Paul Class 9:15am - Hope Class	5	6 7:00pm - Church Growth Meeting	7 7:00pm - Personnel Committee 7:00pm - Ministry Meetings	8 7:00pm - Forest Hills Homeowners Association Meeting 6:30pm - Budget Committee Meeting 8:30pm - Finance Committee Meeting	9 5:00pm - Praying with Others	10 10:00am - Fiber Fellowship 10:30am - Racial Equity Book Club
11 9:15am - Rereading Paul Class 9:15am - Hope Class 12:30pm - Family Faith Lunch	12	13 6:00pm - Endowment Committee Meeting	14 5:00pm - Eastside Citizens' Empowerment Foundation 7:00pm - Session Meeting	15 Deadline for the February Tower	16	17 1:00pm - Maltz Museum Visit
18 9:15am - Rereading Paul Class 9:15am - Hope Class	19	20	21	22	23 9:30am - GCC Meeting 5:00pm - Praying with Others	24 6:30pm - Pacesetters Planning Party
25 - Labre Ministry at North Church 9:15am - Rereading Paul Class 9:15am - Hope Class 12:00pm - Annual Congregational Meeting	26	27	28	29	30 6:00pm - AMIS/ OCI SILIO Fundraiser	31 9:00am - Session Retreat
Regularly scheduled events meet every week unless noted	9:00am - Bulletin and email deadline	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	1:00pm - English Country Dance Starting September 11: 6:15pm - Bell Choir Rehearsal 7:30pm - Chancel Choir Rehearsal	10:00am - Al-Anon: Hand in Hand 6:30pm - Scottish Country Dance	
11:00am - Worship service	6:00pm - AA: Progress Not Perfection 7:00pm - Al- Anon: Now There's Hope 7:30pm - AA: Borton Group					

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.
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Custodians' cell phone: 216-217-5257

Email: churchadmin@fhcpresb.org

Website: www.fhcpresb.org

**Deadline for the February Tower: 9:00 a.m. on January 15, 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).