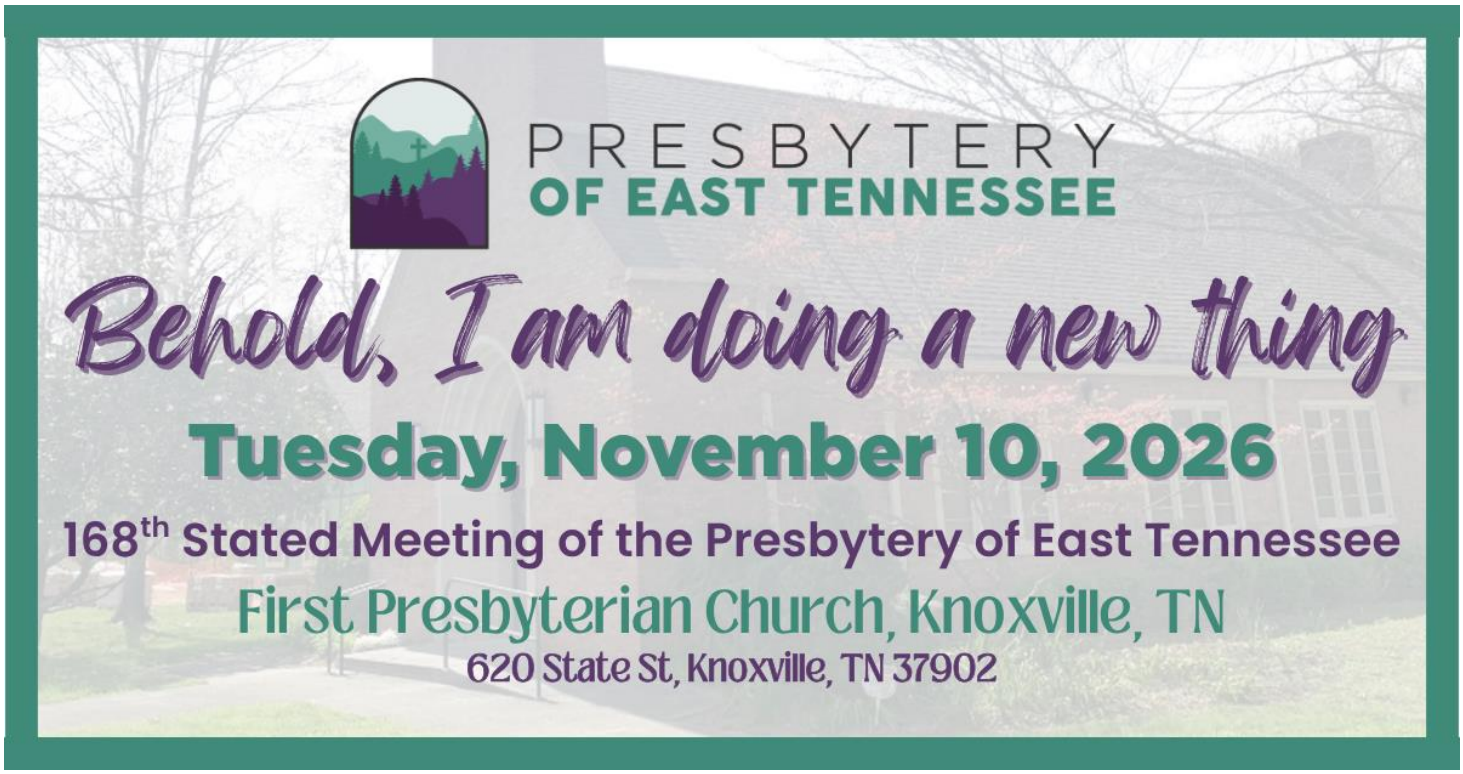


168th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of East Tennessee

Tuesday, November 10, 2026, 10:00am, at First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville
620 State St, Knoxville, TN 37902

Dear Friends,

I look forward to seeing you on November 10 at First Pres in Knoxville for our presbytery meeting. We will receive new ministers and hear a great keynote presentation with the chance to talk about it over lunch. We will hear ministry updates from our partners and learn about an exciting endeavor from one of our churches. We will conclude with worship led by the Vision Task Force which will include communion and the installation of the moderator and vice-moderator for next year. It's going to be a great time of worship, work, resourcing, and fellowship.

Be sure to read the packet ahead of time and ask questions if you have them.

See you all soon. Grace and peace,
Wendy
General Presbyter

PRESBYTERY OF EAST TENNESSEE

WELCOME AND THANK YOU!

Thank you for being a part of the 168th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of East Tennessee.

"The presbytery is responsible for the government of the church throughout its district, and for assisting and supporting the witness of congregations to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that all congregations become communities of faith, hope, love, and witness." — PCUSA Book of Order, G-3.0301

HERE'S THE PACKET

The packet is posted **TWO (2) weeks before the meeting** so you'll have time to read ahead. Our staff works hard on the packet so you'll have time to prepare and ask questions of those bringing motions ahead of time, if necessary. As you read though this docket, we invite you to also consider who we are and why we gather as the Presbytery of East Tennessee.

EMAIL ADDRESSES for presenters are included in the packet. If you have questions before the meeting, email and ask the presenter – usually a committee moderator – during the 2 week prep period.

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION FOR LUNCH AND CHILDCARE IS 3:00PM FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH.

REGISTRATION

https://www.presbyteryeasttn.org/meetings
Deadline for registration is 3:00pm Friday, November 6th for lunch and childcare.
Register by clicking the meeting link at: https://www.presbyteryeasttn.org/meetings.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

https://www.presbyteryeasttn.org/meetings

- Pastors (members of PET or laboring in the bounds of PET),
- Commissioned Pastors (Ruling Elder in service to a PET congregation), and
- Elected church Commissioners (Ruling Elders elected as church representatives)

If you're unable to attend, **request an EXCUSED ABSENCE**. Go to https://www.presbyteryeasttn.org/meetings, click the link for registration for this meeting, click where it says **Excused Absences**.

Meeting Schedule

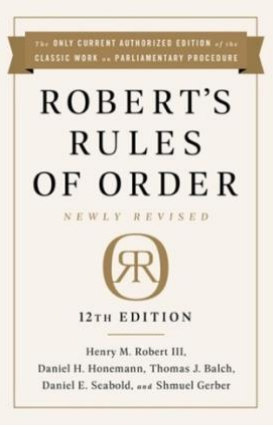
9:30 a.m. Gather
10:00 a.m. Convene

1 Convene

- 10:00 am - Opening Prayer by Moderator Rev. Cathy Meyer (cathy50meyer@yahoo.com)
- Declaration of Quorum
- Welcome from Northside Presbyterian Church
- Introduction of New Commissioners and Guests

2 Rules for In-Person Meetings

The Stated Clerk, Laura Becker moves the following rules for this meeting.



In-person participation is governed by Robert's Rules of Order.

1. Speakers must go to a microphone, as able.
2. Share your name and role at the presbytery meeting.
3. Tell the presbytery whether you're speaking for or against a motion.
4. Speak ONLY to the Moderator.
5. Whenever possible, those speaking will alternate between those speaking for and those speaking against a motion.
6. Presbyters may not rise to speak a second time until all others have had the chance to speak a first time.
7. The Moderator states the motion.
8. The Moderator takes the vote and announces the vote and the results of the vote.
9. The Moderator moves on to the next order of business.

3 Land Acknowledgement

As we gather today at First Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, we pause to acknowledge the land on which we meet.

Long before Knoxville or this church existed, Indigenous people lived, hunted, farmed, worshiped, and built communities throughout East Tennessee. This region holds deep ancestral connections to the Cherokee and other Indigenous people who have cared for and called this land home for generations.

In 1791, the Treaty of Holston was signed here in Knoxville between the United States and Cherokee leaders. Though presented as a treaty of peace, it opened the way for further white settlement and the loss of Cherokee lands. The growth of our city came at a tremendous cost to Indigenous people, through broken promises, dispossession, and forced removal.

We acknowledge that we gather on land taken from Indigenous people. We honor their history, their stewardship of this land, and their continuing presence today. As people of faith, may we move beyond acknowledgment toward action, committing ourselves to truth-telling, justice, respect, and reconciliation.

4 Setting the Agenda

Vice Moderator (Barry Simmons, blsimmons37721@yahoo.com) moves the Agenda

Table of Contents

1 Convene 3
2 Rules for In-Person Meetings 3
3 Land Acknowledgement 3
4 Setting the Agenda 4
5 Consent Agenda 4
6 New Covenant Administrative Commission 5
7 Houston Memorial Administrative Commission 6
8 John Knox Center 6
9 Campus Ministry 6
10 Youth Committee 7
11 Keynote: Rev. DeEtte Decker, PCUSA Office of Innovation 8
12 Lunch – Order of the Day 8
13 Committee Reports 8
13.1 Committee on Ministry 8
13.2 Leadership Council 16
14 Elizabeth Deibert, Presbyterian Association of Musicians 25
15 Presbyterian Homes for Children 25
16 New Business 29
17 Stated Clerk's Report 29
18 General Presbyter's Report 29
19 Unfinished Business 29
20 Worship and Installation of Moderator and Vice Moderator 30
21 Closing Prayer and Adjournment 30
22 Announcements 30

5 Consent Agenda

The Moderator, Rev. Cathy Meyer, presents the Consent Agenda to stand approved if no objection. Any Presbyter may ask that an item be removed from the Consent Agenda for debate and vote.

For Action:

Motion: The Nominating Committee nominates the following for service in the Presbytery of East Tennessee:

Committee on Ministry

Class of 2029

Meredith Loftis, TE, First Knoxville
Bruce Wilson, RE, Farragut
Russ Parise, RE, Mars Hill
Ben Garris, TE, Sequoyah Hills
Samantha Hudson, TE, At-Large

Class of 2028
Tripp Harvey, RE, Northside

Class of 2027
Matt Nieman, TE, Farragut

Committee on Preparation for Ministry
Class of 2029
Gayle Burns, CP, First Sevierville
Katina Sharp, TE, Powell
Joseph Taber, TE, Erin

Class of 2027
Richard Coble, TE, Westminster

Leadership Council at Large Members for One Year
Tim Reynolds, TE, Second Knoxville
Mary Boyd, RE, Westminster
Sherree Read, RE, Mars Hill
Benny Daigle, RE, First Cleveland

Permanent Judicial Committee
Class of 2032
John Goins, RE, Mars Hill
Joe Clarke, RE, Second Knoxville

6 New Covenant Administrative Commission

Per the actions of the PET Leadership Council, as reported at PET's August 8, 2026 Stated Meeting, an Administrative Commission has been formed regarding New Covenant Presbyterian Church.

That Commission consists of:

- Katina Sharp, Teaching Elder and Administrative Commission Moderator
- Bruce Wilson, Ruling Elder and Administrative Commission Clerk
- MaryJo Mann, Ruling Elder
- Tim Reynolds, Teaching Elder

The commission met on October 7 at Farragut Presbyterian Church, and October 21 at Second Presbyterian Church. We reviewed all of the available materials regarding New Covenant Presbyterian Church and made another set of attempts to contact its Session.

At the October 21 meeting, the following motion was unanimously approved by the Commission:

> *Given that multiple people have attempted, using phone, email, and letters, to contact the Session of New Covenant Presbyterian Church and given the lack of direct response from that Session, the Commission finds that 1) a thorough investigation with full opportunity to be heard has been accorded to that Session, and 2) the Session of New Covenant is unwilling or unable to wisely manage its affairs. Per section G-3.0303(e) of the Book of Order and the appointment passed by the Presbytery of East Tennessee's Leadership Council, the Administrative Commission must assume original jurisdiction for the Session of New Covenant Presbyterian Church until such time as the Presbytery of East Tennessee shall otherwise direct.*

The Commission is sending letters to the New Covenant Session members and representatives of the congregation occupying the building to inform them of this action and asking to meet to discuss next steps.

7 Houston Memorial Administrative Commission

A Place to Stay, who had hoped to buy the Houston Memorial property for their ministry with unhoused people, as approved at the May presbytery meeting, was not able to get a zoning exemption. As noted in the August presbytery packet, they had asked for an extension to keep working but realized in September that the zoning exemption would not be approved and so they reluctantly rescinded their offer.
The Administrative commission decided to contact a realtor about listing the property for sale, but before that happened, the Foothills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Blount County expressed interest in purchasing the building so that they may have a permanent space for their community of faith. They subsequently submitted an offer to purchase. At the time of writing this report, the Administrative Commission is considering that offer but no agreements have been signed.

8 John Knox Center

Camp Manager: Ryan Hughes, ryan@johnknoxcenter.org

For Information:

- Summer Camp returns for 2027 and dates are live on our website at johnknoxcenter.org & listed below, registration begins for NEW campers December 1st. Campers from 2025 get a head start by registering starting November 1!
- Please encourage the young adults in your congregation to apply to serve on Summer Camp Staff. The digital application is available on our website. We are looking to fill several positions: Counselors, Social Media Specialist, Nurse, & Lifeguards. We want the young adults who mean so much to our campers to be from our congregations. Help us find the best staff possible!
- Crafting on the River is coming to the banks of the Tennessee River! Whether its scrapbooking, knitting, or quilting grab your unfinished projects and join us for crafting and fellowship. Dates are January 24-29! More information to come out on our social media and website soon.

John Knox Center Consulting Committee:
On October 9th and 10th the committee met at John Knox Center for the last meeting with Run River. During this meeting, the members of the committee began to lay the ground work for the future of John Knox Center. The next steps of the committee are to work with Run River to finish the report, then present their report to the Leadership Council of the Presbytery for any intermediate decisions, and pending the approval it will then move to the Vision Task Force to review and incorporate into the Presbytery's consultation process.

9 Campus Ministry

UKirk UT Knoxville Campus Minister: Rev. Rachel Penmore, revrachel@ukirkutk.org

College is a lot to carry right now. The world feels heavy, classes and assignments never seem to let up, and anxiety and depression are at an all-time high. For students at UTK, this semester has brought plenty of challenges, and there is a lot I could say about what that has looked like at UKirk.

But as I looked through photos for this report, something else stood out. I saw students finding joy in community, laughing together, and showing up at UKirk in the evening simply to sit on the porch and watch the sunset. In the midst of everything they are carrying, they are finding connection, belonging, and moments of peace.

We are growing because students need what UKirk offers. And we want to keep saying yes to every student who walks through our doors. Something meaningful is happening at UKirk UTK, and if you aren't a part of this story…what are you waiting for?

10 Youth Committee

Moderator: Rev. Paul Earheart-Brown, paul.earheartbrown@maryvillecollege.edu

For Information:

We had a wonderful Middle School Retreat in September! We had a small but engaged group of middle schoolers and high school Youth Council members who learned all about the parable of the Good Samaritan and God's commandment to "go and do likewise." We have begun planning for Youth Summit, our high school retreat, which will take place February 26th-28th at the John Knox Center. Please help us promote this event to your high schoolers, and look for registration info to be published next month!

Small and Mighty Youth Group is also continuing strong! In October, we held our 4th annual Board Game Olympics at Farragut Presbyterian Church, and welcomed 21 youth from 5 churches for food and games. If your church is interested in attending Small and Mighty, please reach out to me, and I will get your church connected to our program! Our next and final event of the year will be a Thanksgiving dinner on Sunday, November 15th at Farragut Presbyterian Church from 4:00-6:30. All youth in the Presbytery are welcome!

In addition to our programming, the Youth Committee has begun visioning and brainstorming conversations alongside the Presbytery's visioning efforts. We will be sending out a brief survey to the Presbytery and youth leaders to help us assess where our youth ministry efforts need to be directed in the next iteration of PET, so if you or anyone in your church who works with youth has feedback for the Youth Committee, we'd love to hear it. If you have any other feedback or questions, please feel free to reach out to me. Thank you so much for your continual support of the young people in our Presbytery! Blessings to you and the work you are doing!

11 Keynote: Rev. DeEtte Decker, PCUSA Office of Innovation

12 Lunch – Order of the Day

13 Committee Reports

13.1 Committee on Ministry

Moderator: Matt Nieman, matt@fpctn.org

For Information:

Moderator: Matt Nieman, matt@fpctn.org

2026 COM members: Jake Horton, Rev. Sarah Morgan, Rev. Scott Rollins, Rev. Stephen Yates, Rev. Pete Ullmann, Rev. Mark Curtis, Daryl Fansler, Melissa Goins, Phil “Tripp” Harvey, Rev. Matt Nieman, Barry Simmons, Rev. John Stuart, Tom Burns, Sharon Koch, Rev. Rachel Parsons-Wells, William Rock, Rev. Candace Worth, Mary Overstreet

For Information:

Business conducted by COM since the last presbytery meeting:

- Approved Rev. John Stuart extending his interim ministry at First-Oak Ridge through December 2026.
- Approved the commissioning service commission for CP Gail Hardy to serve as volunteer chaplain at Fort Loudon Medical Center through First-Lenoir City.
- Approved the presbytery membership transfer of Rev. Julie Thompson to Florida Presbytery.
- Approved Rev. Karen Russell as interim pastor of First-Lenoir City beginning Nov. 1, 2026.
- Accepted the covenant renewals between First-Lafollette and Rev. Dennis Falasco, First-Sevierville and CPs Tom and Gayle Burns, Rocky Springs and CP Doris Thomas, and Bakers Creek and Rev. Ford King.
- Approved the installation commission of Rev. Nolan Chilton as associate pastor of Westminster.

For Presbytery Action:

MOTION: Recommend to presbytery the 2027 Minimum Terms of Call for 2027 for pastors (2.5% increase - *see attached*) and a 2.5% increase for certified Christian educators.

MOTION: Recommend that presbytery 1. Approve alternatives for the Bible Content and Exegesis exams for Paul Earhart-Brown, who seeks ordination in the PCUSA. And 2. Waive the required Worship and Sacraments exam. (The Theology and Polity exams will be required.) *see rationale below*

MOTION: That presbytery receive the Rev. Margorie Landwehr as a retired member of presbytery from Northern Plains Presbytery.

MOTION: That presbytery receive the Rev. Karen Russell as a minister member from Holston Presbytery.

2027 Minimum Terms of Call: Minimum $80,000 total Compensation**
What is *required* in "Terms of Call"?
Effective Salary: combination of salary and housing; represents a 2.5% cola increase over 2026
SECA: 7.65% of effective salary
Continuing Education: $2,000 required minimum for all terms of call
Congregational Pastor's Package (CPP) at 19.75% for 2027
Covenant Package (CP) at 10% for 2027 *(includes pension, death and disability, temporary disability, and Employee Assistance Programs)*

2027 BOP Congregational & Covenant Package	29.75%
Optional Additions:	*At a flat rate:*
FULL Family	*$19752 (inc 50% kids subsidy)*
Spouse ONLY	*$14,052*
Children ONLY	*$5700 (includes 50% subsidy)*
Transitional (includes FULL family coverage)	52.25%

Reimbursables: mileage, professional account, etc…

	2026		**2026**		**2026**
Eff. Salary	$49645	**Eff. Salary**	$49645	**Eff. Salary**	$49645
SECA	$3798	**SECA**	$3,798	**SECA**	$3,798
Con. Ed.	$2,000	**Con. Ed.**	$2,000	**Con. Ed.**	$2,000
BOP (CPP + CP) **29.75%**	$14770	***BOP** (Transitional) **52.25%**	$25940	**BOP** (CPP + CP & Full Family Coverage)	$34522
Bal. to be negotiated	$9787				
Reimbursables		**Reimbursables**		**Reimbursables**	
****Total**	**$80,000**	****Total**	**$81383**	****Total**	**$89965**

**BOP transitional program 2027 cost is 52.25%*
***Final Total for Compensation will be more than $80,000 when the reimbursable cost particular to the congregation is added.*

Rationale for the Recommendation for Paul Earheart-Brown

The Committee on Ministry brings this recommendation with gratitude for the ministry Paul Earheart-Brown is already offering among us and with recognition of his prior education, ordination, and ministry experience in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Paul holds a Master of Divinity degree from Memphis Theological Seminary, has served for more than five years in ordained ministry, and currently serves as Associate Chaplain and MAST Director at Maryville College. He has also recently completed two semesters of biblical Hebrew at Union Presbyterian Seminary in preparation for the process of joining the PC(USA). Nothing in this recommendation is meant to question the quality of Paul's theological education, the validity of his ordination, or the faithfulness of his ministry.

This recommendation has grown out of an ongoing conversation with Paul. Members of the Examinations and Validation Subcommittee met with Paul to hear about his education, ministry, sense of call, and his desire to move his ordination and become a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA). We asked for his thoughts about the different paths available, listened to his preferences and concerns, and have remained in conversation with him as the recommendation has taken shape. Paul has approached the process with openness, patience, cooperation, sincerity, and a genuine desire to understand and serve within the PC(USA).

The Book of Order gives each presbytery the responsibility for receiving ministers from other denominations. G-2.0505 asks the presbytery to be satisfied that a minister possesses the "character and scholarship" expected of those serving in the PC(USA), guided by the standards described in G-2.0607 and the accommodations permitted by G-2.0610. Because Paul comes from another Reformed church and has been ordained for more than five years, G-2.0505a(2) allows the presbytery to exempt him from some or all of the standard ordination examinations. The question before us was never whether Paul must begin his preparation again; the question is how we can honor the education and experience he brings while also helping him become fully prepared for ministry and participation in the life of the denomination.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the PC(USA) share deep roots in the Reformed tradition, but there are some meaningful differences in theology, confessional emphasis, polity, and practice. Our presbytery's own history has shown us that those differences matter and that both the minister and the presbytery are better served when they are addressed openly during the transfer process. We have also recently welcomed ministers from other denominations and asked them to follow similar paths of preparation and assessment. We want to treat Paul fairly while also following a process that is consistent with what we have asked of others and can use responsibly with those who may come before us in the future.

The recommendation that Paul take the Theological Competence and Church Polity examinations reflects the areas in which the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the PC(USA) may differ most. Both these examinations will give Paul an opportunity to demonstrate his growing understanding of the theology, confessions, and system of government of the PC(USA). They are not intended as a judgment on his prior education, experience, or his general fitness for ministry. Paul is already working with the Rev. Dr. LindaJo McKim, who is helping him explore these areas and prepare for this part of the process.

The recommendation for alternative means of examination for demonstrating competency in Bible Content and Biblical Exegesis recognizes Paul's studies at Memphis Theological Seminary, his years of preaching, teaching, and leading in congregations, and his recent completion of two semesters of Hebrew at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Rather than asking him to repeat work he has already done, we hope to provide meaningful alternatives through which he can demonstrate the knowledge and skills he has and that are expected in these areas.

In the same spirit, the recommendation to waive the Worship and Sacraments examination recognizes that Paul's theological education and years of ordained pastoral ministry already provide substantial evidence of his preparation and experience in worship and sacramental practice.

We believe this recommendation offers a faithful and balanced way forward. It honors Paul's ordination, his education, and years of congregational ministry while taking seriously the presbytery's responsibility to discern readiness for service within the PC(USA). It also reflects the thoughtful conversations we have had with Paul throughout our discernment. Our hope is not simply that Paul will complete a set of requirements, but that this process will support his transition into ministry in the PC(USA) and help prepare him to participate fully in the life and work of the Presbytery of East Tennessee.

Spiritual Journey of Rev. Marjorie Landwehr

I was baptized as an infant in the Westminster Presbyterian church in Trenton, NJ. I attended Sunday School and sang in the children/youth choir. At age 13 I became a member of Morrisville Presbyterian Church in Morrisville, PA. I continued attending this church until I left for college.

I attended Tusculum College, a Presbyterian college in Greeneville, TN. While there I attended the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and sang in the choir (The choir director was also the choir director at Tusculum College). After graduating I taught briefly, then worked for my father, who owned a restaurant in Trenton, NJ. I did not attend church from my late twenties until I turned forty when I moved to Texas to be closer to some of my family. I began to attend Hackberry Creek Presbyterian Church in Irving, Texas with my brother and his family. This is where I really started to understand my faith.

It was at Hackberry Creek Church that my faith matured. I began reading and studying the Bible, and later helped to lead a Bible study. I joined the choir there, which has always been my go-to place in any church. I was invited to go on a mission trip to Jaurez, Mexico, and loved it so much that I returned the following year. I served a two-year term on the Worship committee and then I became a deacon and served for three years. My last year as deacon I was moderator.

I started at Fuller Theological Seminary in January 2006 at the age of 53, pursuing a two-year degree in Worship, Theology and the Arts. Near the end of this degree, two of my prayer partners at Fuller told me that they had been praying for me to see that God really wanted me to pursue an MDiv. So, with the counsel of the session at La Canada Presbyterian Church, where I attended while in seminary, as well as several conversations with two of my professors at school, I started a Master of Divinity degree in May of 2008. I served two internships at Shadow Hills Presbyterian Church where I taught Bible studies and led a group through a Spiritual Autobiography class. I also helped with mission work in the surrounding community.

Shortly after graduation I was ordained at Shadow Hills Presbyterian Church in June of 2010. While I waited for a call I worked in the church office and led a group from the church on a trip to Israel that year (the pastor was physically unable to take the group due to a health problem). I received my call in 2012 to First Presbyterian Church in Hallock, MN and moved there in March of 2012.

I retired in September 2025 and moved to Knoxville Tennessee. And to my delight, friends I left 50 years before, I found again when I returned!

Statement of Faith – Rev. Marjorie Landwehr

God is the Creator, sustainer of all life, who created all things out of nothing. I believe God is one yet triune as Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, three in one in unity of purpose & plan; the sovereign power of a loving God who called me before I was able to respond. By wisdom & insight God made known to me the mystery of his will which is in Christ. Actively, lovingly God works in & through my life to guide me in the way that he has designed & purposed for me.

God desires us to be in a constant relationship with him but our sinfulness affects the totality of our whole existence. From Adam and Eve, we inherited a sinful nature which we continue to confirm with our sinful

actions by refusing to recognize that God is Lord, Creator, the Lord who orders all human life. In sinning we turn away from God fracturing the human/divine relationship, failing to be the people God wants & calls us to be. We need a savior. God's love for us is so great that in his mercy he initiated a covenant of grace with his people, by this covenant we are redeemed & reconciled in Jesus Christ.

I believe in Christ's humanity; that he lived and walked on earth. I believe in his divinity; that he was sent from God, the Father, and by the Holy Spirit was born of a virgin, Mary. Jesus suffered and died taking on the sins of the world. In his resurrection he saved us from punishment; triumphing over death, he granted us the gift of eternal life.

In grateful response to God for the redeeming work in Jesus Christ we in thankfulness promise to live our lives with a grateful attitude toward all of God's creation. In this we are to be involved and diligent in promoting peace, justice, and healing by which we show God's love to the world. We must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens, guides, &and teaches us how to live out our lives as good stewards of God's creation.

I accept as true, the Old and New Testaments as the written Word of God pointing us to the person of Jesus Christ. Scripture is our rule of faith and practice, the grounding for our creeds and theology. Scripture is inspired by God, written by humans who wrote in their own historical time and cultural contexts; God still speaks to us today through Scripture.

We are called to be in a covenantal relationship with God in community. Hearing the Word of God proclaimed in worship and celebrating the sacraments, we are connected with the church universal, empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit to go into the world as the Body of Christ. In the sacrament of Baptism, I have been sealed and engrafted into Christ. In celebration of the Lord's Supper, Christ is spiritually present; through sharing of the elements, I am spiritually nourished and drawn into the fellowship of the worshiping community. Awaiting Christ's final judgment, I must be vigilant in living out my faith as a new creation in Christ. When Christ comes again, I will be raised to a glorious new life, which began at Christ's resurrection and will be brought to completion with Christ's return.

PC(USA) polity shapes my ministry by providing a structured form of governance. As a Minister of Word and Sacrament I share leadership and resources within and outside the church. The Book of Order and Book of Confessions gives me the resources I need to serve the church particular, as well as to serve in other levels of government within the PC(USA). Having participated in presbytery and the Synod during my ministry, I experienced the decision-making process that goes beyond the church particular, and gained a new understanding of the larger church and how I am a part of it.

Being a connectional church means I belong to a wider regional and global body. It means that I must reach beyond the walls of the church and experience new ways of connecting with people. It means building relationships by participating in all levels of the PC(USA) government and the community in which I live. As a leader in the church, I want to invite people in, not only encouraging them to come to worship, but by looking to our culture today and finding new ways to present that invitation.

One of the things I experienced in my ministry was worshiping with the different congregations in the community. Together we planned worship services, special events, and outreach to each other's congregations and the broader community. I joined with other pastors in the community each week over coffee to talk about things going on in each of our churches. I visited the local nursing home each week and spent time with the folks there visiting and eventually learning some history of the area I was ministering to, which helped me to understand the culture of that community. This helped me minister to my congregation and surrounding community. I will always be thankful to those wonderful folks.

Rev. Karen Russell – Statement of Faith Journey

My journey of faith literally started before I was born. My father, who was already a Baptist pastor by the time I was born, and mother took me to church within a few days of my birth. Regular church attendance was part of my life until college, when like many (most?) preachers' kids, I took the chance to find out what life without church was like. This experiment lasted until I had a child of my own, when I realized it was all fine and good to allow a person to choose whether or not to attend church, but that choice should at least be an informed one. If I did not take my son to church, how could he actually make a choice when he was older?

This return to church awakened in me a longing for something I was unaware I missed. I became heavily involved in my local Baptist church – teaching Sunday School classes, Children's Church, women's groups, etc. When my son was in middle school, I went back to work full time, at the Seamen's Church Institute of New York and New Jersey, an Episcopal maritime ministry dating back to before the Spanish-American War. In 1998, SCI began a ministry to "brown water" mariners who work on towboats that push barges on the inland river system. This ministry also served the families of crew members. I took that job to be (I thought) an administrator, but it was made clear to me fairly quickly that my supervisor understood all the work we did as "ministry" and she expected me to understand it that way as well. This led to me making hospital visits, bereavement calls, boat visits, creating family support programs, leading chapel services, preaching in local churches – a myriad of things I had never seen myself doing.

Slowly, I began to see myself – and my faith – a bit differently. Rather than faith being something that was lodged in a particular church and my service there, faith was becoming something I lived in and with every day; something that formed my professional identity as well as my personal identity.

In 2000, my husband suffered a massive stroke. He survived, but life was altered radically, and I found myself both caretaker to a disabled person and the primary breadwinner for my family. In an effort to boost my income, I began taking seminary classes by extension and found this fed a need to love God "with my mind." Five years later, I found myself in seminary full time, learning the true meaning of dependency on God, the providence of God, and the peace that passes understanding. Health challenges during those years brought new ways of experiencing both the providence of God and the love of (from) others. I had expected my seminary challenges to be academic, but those three years were a crucible of learning about myself, about God, and the true value of a community of faith. It was during this time I truly learned to love the church in all of its iterations, as well as all its flaws. Faith became less about a series of beliefs and actions and became an integral part of my sense of self. I moved from being a person with faith to a person of faith. The outward difference might have been unnoticeable, but the inward difference was substantial.

It was during seminary that I discovered the true gift of grace and forgiveness: hope. During those years I learned what Paul meant when he said that "we have such a hope," and that true hope is knowing that even if our own situation may not change, we know that the way the world is now is not the way the world will be. That understanding of hope, which comes only from the love and faith demonstrated in the life and person of Jesus, is to me the way the gift of grace is lived out in the lives of Christ's followers. This embrace of hope forms the foundation of my faith. I believe that Paul's words that at the end, only three things remain – faith, hope, and love – reflect an understanding that these things are inextricably linked and should frame and inform how we live out our faith. This belief has led me to a deepening of that faith and belief, and led to a call to help others discover a way to live out their own faith.

At this point in my life, my faith is wound into my daily life in such a way I would have believed impossible when I was in my 20's and 30's. I often struggle with daily disciplines of faith, but am "tuned in" to the mysteries of the faith, and see evidence of God's presence in the day to day messiness of life.

All of this to say that my journey of faith has not been straightforward but has been a journey of deepening assurance that I am a beloved child of God regardless of what else I may be.

Rev. Karen Russell – Statement of Faith

I believe in God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I believe the triune God transcends these labels (and any others we might choose to use), as well as our ability to understand the three persons of the Trinity and how best to articulate that understanding.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. My understanding of the Church has been bubbling under the surface of my articulated beliefs most of my life. This "unseen" church is not confined by buildings, denominational structures or programs, or by doctrinal issues that seem to consume us. I believe the Church was called into being with the Great Commission, when Jesus told his followers to go out into the world teaching, preaching, baptizing, and making disciples. Far too often, we have confused the making of disciples with the making of converts, and this confusion has polarized us on one side or the other when it comes to evangelism. Converts tend to gather in safe places we call "sanctuaries." An apostolic Church is sent out into a fear-filled world. A catholic Church is not confined to one group (or set of groups). A holy Church is the church of Christ – not "our" church. A unified Church is unified under the saving grace of Christ, and the transforming love of God, not under doctrine or dogma (or even polity).

I believe in the communion of saints. One of the greatest gifts the Reformed Tradition has given me is the understanding of a "community of faith." I understand this to be both the local church community, and the wider universal church. This community of faith (ideally) teaches us to love as we are loved and gives us the framework to live out those teachings. It is one of the paradoxes of faith that we are individually redeemed, yet are called to live out the reality of redemption in community. Without the communion of saints and the fellowship of believers, living out our faith is difficult (if not impossible).

I believe in the authority of scripture. I believe that scripture is a living document, originally written to an audience in their own context, but through the Spirit-led reading of the text, also has a message for 21st century Christians in our own context.

I believe that we are all sinners and in need of the transforming and redeeming grace of God. I believe that God provides this grace to all. I believe that when we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us our sins in love and mercy. The disconnect between "whosoever will" and redemption of all creation is one of the mysteries I embrace even while I cannot explain it.

I believe the sacraments are visible ways we portray our faith and God's faithfulness. I am awed by the realization that in the celebration of the sacraments, we are joined to believers in a communion of saints that transcends both time and space.

I believe in a life to come. What that life will be like, or how that life will be given to us, I cannot explain. But the same God who has promised (and delivered) grace and redemption, healing and wholeness, has also promised a life eternal, where God will be all in all.

I believe I will be part of that eternal life of and with God and this assurance frames the way I live this mortal life.

All of these beliefs are congruent with the polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA). I am Presbyterian by choice because I believe that our polity provides a framework in which to live faithfully as the body of Christ on earth. As a denomination, we are not perfect, but our individual congregations are invited into a way of being and living that frames how we worship, how we organize ourselves, and how we hold one another accountable in love. At our best, this framework allows us to love God and love others, which Jesus says sums up all law and all prophets. At the most basic, I believe this sums up what and who we are called to be.

13.2 Leadership Council

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Wendy Neff, wendy@presbyteryeasttn.org

The Leadership Council met by zoom on August 26 and in person on September 23

For Information:

1. Approved the minutes of the August 8, 2026 PET meeting.
2. Approved the creation of the Blankenship Building Grant. This is an annual grant for building repairs and maintenance. The Corpus of the Blankenship Fund is held with the Presbyterian Foundation, and the Presbytery may spend the interest income annually. For this first round of grants, applications are due By Oct 31, 2026. They have been advertised in the presbytery weekly newsletter and letters have been sent to pastors and clerks. In Dec, the Leadership Council will review applications and grant 2-3 awards of up to $5000 each. The number and amount of grants may change annually due to available funds.
3. Approved allocations of the Matthew 25 funds in the budget as follows:
    a. $1000 to the Peacemaking Committee for the Indigenous Peacemaker events that promote understanding historic harms and contribute to dismantling systemic racism
    b. $2000 to Renaissance Presbyterian Church for their efforts towards church vitality
    c. $2000 to Center Presbyterian Church's Shelter My Sheep ministry which contributes to the eradication of poverty
4. Approved a Presbytery of East Tennessee Anti- Racism policy. The policy is attached. Please use it as a model for your own congregation if you have not yet approved your own policy.
5. Approved the Presbytery application for a World Communion Grant of up to $5000 for the creation of a Presbyterian Museum focusing on the history of Presbyterians in East Tennessee with particular attention to the history of Black Presbyterians. This grant would allow us to collect and curate stories and artifacts, continue our witness and work of anti-racism as a Matthew 25 presbytery, and help all of us understand and tell the unique story of Presbyterians in this area for nearly 250 years.
6. Approved a preliminary lease agreement between Renaissance Presbyterian Church and Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises, Inc. for the development of a new worship space for the congregation, new space for Newton Child Development Center, and housing in the West Side of Chattanooga. We will share more about this possibility at the meeting. Any final approval of a lease will come to the Presbytery for approval.
7. Approved the allocation of the $30,000 set aside for mission in this year's budget. That money is the difference between what we would have sent GA under per capita and what we sent them in the Funding Model Development Pilot Project where we sent a percentage of our income. This is a one year project, and we will return to per capita assessments next year. The allocation is as follows:
    a. $5,000 to Synod Unified Giving in support of the Synod Missional Incubator program beginning in 2027.
    b. $10,000 to PCUSA shared mission
    c. $15,000 to PET mission – TBA
8. Approved the following locations and dates for the 2027 PET Meetings:
    a. February 13 Rivermont Presbyterian Church
    b. May 11 Bethel Presbyterian Church
    c. August 14 Fountain City Presbyterian Church
    d. November 9 Rocky Springs Presbyterian Church
9. Reviewed financial reports for the first two quarters of 2026.
10. The Administrative Commissioned for New Covenant church approved by the Leadership Council was appointed. Tim Reynolds, TE Second Knoxville; Katina Sharp, TE Powell; Bruce Wilson, RE Farragut; and Mary Jo Mann, RE Westminster were appointed. They held their first meeting on Oct 7, 2026.

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Budget vs. Actuals: FY2026 - FY26 P&L

January - September, 2026

	TOTAL			
	ACTUAL	BUDGET	OVER BUDGET	% OF BUDGET
Revenue				
41000 PET Income				
41001 PET Contributions/Offerings	372,889.74	402,750.00	-29,860.26	92.59 %
41003 PET Mission and Ministry Fund	118,000.00	88,499.97	29,500.03	133.33 %
Total 41000 PET Income	**490,889.74**	**491,249.97**	**-360.23**	**99.93 %**
Total Revenue	**$490,889.74**	**$491,249.97**	**$ -360.23**	**99.93 %**
GROSS PROFIT	**$490,889.74**	**$491,249.97**	**$ -360.23**	**99.93 %**
Expenditures				
61000 PET Operating Budget				
61100 Committee on Prep for Ministry		375.03	-375.03	
61200 Congregational Development Team	5,041.74	3,750.03	1,291.71	134.45 %
61400 Equip Team				
61401 Childrens Ministry		0.00	0.00	
61402 UTC Campus Ministry	35,000.00	26,250.03	8,749.97	133.33 %
61403 UTK Campus Ministry	35,000.00	26,250.03	8,749.97	133.33 %
61404 MAST	10,000.00	7,499.97	2,500.03	133.33 %
Total 61400 Equip Team	**80,000.00**	**60,000.03**	**19,999.97**	**133.33 %**
61500 Finance & Stewardship				
61501 Accounting Services	14,641.55	18,749.97	-4,108.42	78.09 %
61502 Audit		4,875.03	-4,875.03	
61503 Miscellaneous/Contingency	1,938.31	23,553.81	-21,615.50	8.23 %
Total 61500 Finance & Stewardship	**16,579.86**	**47,178.81**	**-30,598.95**	**35.14 %**
61550 Outdoors Ministry Team				
61551 John Knox Center	100,000.00	74,999.97	25,000.03	133.33 %
Total 61550 Outdoors Ministry Team	**100,000.00**	**74,999.97**	**25,000.03**	**133.33 %**
61600 Per Capita				
61601 Per Capita - GA	29,582.64	44,373.96	-14,791.32	66.67 %
61602 Per Capita - Synod	15,585.68	23,378.49	-7,792.81	66.67 %
Total 61600 Per Capita	**45,168.32**	**67,752.45**	**-22,584.13**	**66.67 %**
61700 Personnel Committee				
61710 General Presbyter				
61711 Presbyter - Salary	45,423.00	46,785.69	-1,362.69	97.09 %
61712 Presbyter - Housing	19,467.00	20,051.01	-584.01	97.09 %
61713 Presbyter - SECA	4,819.50	5,112.99	-293.49	94.26 %
61714 Presbyter - Medical	21,001.82	23,258.25	-2,256.43	90.30 %
61715 Presbyter - Pension	5,267.18	5,681.16	-413.98	92.71 %
61716 Presbyter - Death/Disability	622.41	1,002.51	-380.10	62.09 %
Total 61710 General Presbyter	**96,600.91**	**101,891.61**	**-5,290.70**	**94.81 %**
61720 Presbytery Administrator				
61721 Presbytery Admin - Salary	46,350.00	47,740.50	-1,390.50	97.09 %
61722 Presbytery Admin - Medical		0.00	0.00	
61723 Presbytery Admin - Pension	3,555.28	4,057.92	-502.64	87.61 %

	TOTAL			
	ACTUAL	BUDGET	OVER BUDGET	% OF BUDGET
61724 Presbytery Admin - Death/Disabi	627.42	716.13	-88.71	87.61 %
Total 61720 Presbytery Administrator	**50,532.70**	**52,514.55**	**-1,981.85**	**96.23 %**
61730 Stated Clerk	10,663.47	10,983.51	-320.04	97.09 %
61740 Treasurer	10,788.03	11,111.67	-323.64	97.09 %
61750 PET FICA	9,030.39	5,342.40	3,687.99	169.03 %
61760 Other Personnel Expense				
61761 Continuing Education		1,500.03	-1,500.03	
61762 Professional Expense	12,663.04	12,750.03	-86.99	99.32 %
Total 61760 Other Personnel Expense	**12,663.04**	**14,250.06**	**-1,587.02**	**88.86 %**
Total 61700 Personnel Committee	**190,278.54**	**196,093.80**	**-5,815.26**	**97.03 %**
61800 Property & Office				
61801 Insurance	6,599.56	7,499.97	-900.41	87.99 %
61802 Telephone	890.96	1,350.00	-459.04	66.00 %
61803 Office Supplies	925.76	2,999.97	-2,074.21	30.86 %
61804 IT Infrastructure	3,865.28	7,499.97	-3,634.69	51.54 %
61805 Travel/Meals/Dues	1,184.46	1,874.97	-690.51	63.17 %
Total 61800 Property & Office	**13,466.02**	**21,224.88**	**-7,758.86**	**63.44 %**
61900 Serve				
61901 Morgan Scott	3,000.00	2,250.00	750.00	133.33 %
61902 Newton Center	3,000.00	2,250.00	750.00	133.33 %
61903 Sunset Gap	3,000.00	2,250.00	750.00	133.33 %
61904 Shared Mission	2,500.00	1,874.97	625.03	133.34 %
61905 Matthew 25 Initiative		3,750.03	-3,750.03	
Total 61900 Serve	**11,500.00**	**12,375.00**	**-875.00**	**92.93 %**
61950 Youth Committee (YC)	10,000.00	7,499.97	2,500.03	133.33 %
Total 61000 PET Operating Budget	**472,034.48**	**491,249.97**	**-19,215.49**	**96.09 %**
Total Expenditures	**$472,034.48**	**$491,249.97**	**$ -19,215.49**	**96.09 %**
NET OPERATING REVENUE	**$18,855.26**	**$0.00**	**$18,855.26**	**0.00%**
NET REVENUE	**$18,855.26**	**$0.00**	**$18,855.26**	**0.00%**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position

As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
10000 Checking	-$13,130.53
10100 1st TN Checking	94,947.60
Total for 10000 Checking	**$81,817.07**
10700 Brokerage	
10710 Fidelity	$0.00
10710-10 Fidelity - PET	947,828.62
10710-2 Fidelity - Sam Wolfe	45,049.99
10710-3 Fidelity - Spring Place	300,290.24
10710-4 Fidelity - New Prospect	168,375.11
Total for 10710 Fidelity	**$1,461,543.96**
10720 1st TN Brokerage	249,428.36
10730 PILP	298,259.16
10740 Worden, Rechenbach & Brooke	4,151,550.89
10750 Home Federal Bank	0.00
10760 Wells Fargo	0.00
Total for 10700 Brokerage	**$6,160,782.37**
Total Bank Accounts	**$6,242,599.44**
Accounts Receivable	
11000 Accounts Receivable	2,500.00
Total Accounts Receivable	**$2,500.00**
Other Current Assets	
11100 Petty Cash	240.00
11200 Paypal	378.09
12000 Undeposited Funds	0.00
Payroll Refunds	0.00
QuickBooks Tax Holding Account	3,666.32
Repayment	
Payroll YTD Correction	0.00
System Generated 3/20 Overpayment	0.00
Total for Repayment	**$0.00**
Total Other Current Assets	**$4,284.41**
Total Current Assets	**$6,249,383.85**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position
As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
Other Assets	
18000 Church Loans Receivable	
18001 Center	0.00
18002 First Sweetwater	14,880.00
18003 First Lenoir City	0.00
18004 Bethel	0.00
18006 Madisonville	0.00
18008 Emmanuel	0.00
18009 Washington	94,214.97
18010 Graystone	1,250.00
18011 Highland	20,166.47
18012 Northside Chattanooga	10,000.00
18013 First, Rockwood	0.00
Total for 18000 Church Loans Receivable	**$140,511.44**
Total Other Assets	**$140,511.44**
Total Assets	**$6,389,895.29**
Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	
20100 Accounts Payable	6,634.10
Total Accounts Payable	**$6,634.10**
Credit Cards	
20150 Credit Card Payable	
20151 American Express CC	1,418.61
20152 Lowes CC	0.00
20153 First Tennessee CC	0.00
20154 Capital One CC	0.00
20155 20155 Ramp Card	-8,523.10
Total for 20150 Credit Card Payable	**-$7,104.49**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position
As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
Total Credit Cards	**-$7,104.49**
Other Current Liabilities	
24000 Payroll Liabilities	
24002 403B Payable	605.25
24003 Flex Spending Account Payable	3,574.76
24004 Dental Payable	-247.93
AL Income Tax	0.00
CA PIT / SDI	0.00
Dental Pre-tax	0.00
Federal Taxes (941/944)	3,666.32
GA Income Tax	0.00
IL Income Tax	0.00
KS Income Tax	0.00
KY Income Tax	0.00
KY Local Tax	0.00
Medical Insurance	3,799.20
NC Income Tax	0.00
NJ Income Tax	0.00
SC Income Tax	0.00
Supplemental Death	7.23
TN Quarterly Taxes	0.00
VA Income Tax	0.00
Vision Pre-Tax	15.33
Total for 24000 Payroll Liabilities	**$11,420.16**
24100 Donor Restricted Payable	
24101 Donor Benevolences	28,384.78
24102 GA Benevolences	4,287.75
24103 Synod Benevolences	-325.00
24104 Theological Education Fund	0.00
Total for 24100 Donor Restricted Payable	**$32,347.53**
24200 Deposit Escrow	$0.00
24201 Escrow - Retreats	0.00
24202 Escrow - Summer Program	0.00
24203 Escrow - EE Program	1,376.00
24204 Escrow - Guest Group	4,039.00
Total for 24200 Deposit Escrow	**$5,415.00**
Direct Deposit Payable	0.00
Total Other Current Liabilities	**$49,182.69**
Total Current Liabilities	**$48,712.30**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position
As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
Long-term Liabilities	
29000 Notes Payable	
29001 SBA Paycheck Protection Program	0.00
Total for 29000 Notes Payable	**$0.00**
Total Long-term Liabilities	**$0.00**
Total Liabilities	**$48,712.30**
Equity	
30000 General	0.00
30100 Current Year R/E	
30110 JKC Current Year R/E	0.00
30120 PET Current Year R/E	0.00
Total for 30100 Current Year R/E	**$0.00**
30140 PET Retainined Earnings	520,000.00
30141 PET Mission Fund	3,583,032.71
30142 Sam Wolfe Trust	45,049.99
30143 C. A. Jordan Estate	38,282.46
30146 2021 Budget Funds	0.00
30200 Administration	
30201 McCall Technology	1,213.79
30202 Administrative Commission	7,337.92
30203 Synod - Technology Fund	0.00
30205 Zane Scholarship	5,419.48
30206 Loaves & Fishes	14,126.91
30208 Loan Fund	957,556.01
30209 Spring Place Cemetary	542,426.60
30210 Sarah S Blankenship Memorial Fund	15,119.57
30211 New Prospect Cemetery	167,512.61
Total for 30200 Administration	**$1,710,712.89**
30300 Committee on Ministry	-$54.95
30301 Church Discretionary Fund	694.65
30302 Church Professionals	4,360.96
30303 Conflict Managment/Pastor Care	4,007.87
30305 Minister Emergency	484.16
Total for 30300 Committee on Ministry	**$9,492.69**
30350 Committee for Preparation for Ministry	
30304 CLP Program Fund	741.65
Total for 30350 Committee for Preparation for Ministry	**$741.65**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position
As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
30400 Congregational Development Team	-$1,180.00
30404 Syndeo	0.00
30405 Syndeo - Congregation	0.00
Total for 30400 Congregational Development Team	**-$1,180.00**
30500 Equip	
30501 APCE	17.80
30502 Big Tent Scholarships	1,950.00
30503 Continuing Education	746.95
30504 Workshops & Retreats	5,171.32
Total for 30500 Equip	**$7,886.07**
30600 Outdoor Ministry Team	
30601 JKC Renovations	0.00
30602 JKC Waterfront	7,183.28
30603 JKC Etowah Church Fund	185,531.59
30604 JKC Consultant Fund	7,579.98
30605 JKC Restricted Donations	21,986.79
30606 JKC Unrestricted Donations	0.00
30607 JKC Scholarship	2,113.42
30608 JKC Cabin Renovations	0.00
30609 JKC Program Fund	13,731.31
30610 JKC Retained Earnings	0.00
30611 Pavilion Upgrade	0.00
Total for 30600 Outdoor Ministry Team	**$238,126.37**
30700 Serve Team	
30701 PET Disaster Response	22,782.76
30702 Cents-Ability	13,579.28
30703 Peacemaking	3,107.61
30704 Gatlinburg Fire - PET	3,957.63
30705 PET Mission Trips	1,001.89
30706 Carbon Footprint Fund	6,560.24
Total for 30700 Serve Team	**$50,989.41**
30800 Youth Committee	
30801 Youth Ministry	27,216.73
30802 Youth Triennium	6,672.11
30803 E. Jaynes Scholarship	2,607.89
Total for 30800 Youth Committee	**$36,496.73**

Presbytery of East Tennessee

Statement of Financial Position
As of Sep 30, 2026

	Total
30900 Presbyterian Women	
30901 Birthday Offering	492.00
30903 Thank Offering	210.00
30904 Least Coin	247.12
30905 Presbyterian Women Churchwide Mission Pledges	600.00
30906 Presbyterian Women Synod of Living Waters Mission Pledges	125.00
30907 Hunger Fund	0.00
30908 Scholarship	0.00
30909 UKirk UTK	0.00
30910 Columbia Friendship Circle	0.00
30915 Morgan Scott Project	0.00
30916 Newton Child Development Center	0.00
30921 PW Retained Earnings	4,761.21
30922 PW Spring/Fall Gathering	12.00
30923 PW Spring Gathering	0.00
30924 30924 Triennial Synod Gathering	983.32
Total for 30900 Presbyterian Women	**$7,430.65**
33000 Receivable Fund Balances	
33001 Church Loans Receivable	147,679.98
Total for 33000 Receivable Fund Balances	**$147,679.98**
32000 Unrestricted Net Assets	-30,916.01
Net Income	-22,642.60
Total Equity	**$6,341,182.99**
Total Liabilities and Equity	**$6,389,895.29**

14 Elizabeth Deibert, Presbyterian Association of Musicians

15 Presbyterian Homes for Children

Dear Friends in Ministry,

Since 1868, the Presbyterian Home for Children has been a place where children and families facing difficult circumstances can find safety, stability and hope. While our ministry is rooted on our historic campus in Talladega, Alabama, the people we serve—and the Presbyterian community that supports this work—extend far beyond our campus.

In 2024, the Presbyterian Home for Children entered into a covenant relationship with the Synod of Living Waters, opening an important new chapter in our ministry and connecting us more closely with Presbyterian congregations throughout Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. Since then, we have appreciated opportunities to attend Presbytery meetings like yours and introduce more of you to the Home and the work God has entrusted to us.

Because we are still relatively new to many of you in Tennessee, I want to tell you more about who we are and, just as importantly, how we may be able to help a family in your community.

Every day at the Presbyterian Home for Children is centered on helping children and families build stronger futures. Our ministry has evolved tremendously over more than 158 years as the needs of children and families have changed. Today, we provide safe housing and comprehensive support for mothers and children experiencing homelessness or housing instability, help mothers work toward reunification with children in foster care, prepare young women for independent adulthood, provide family support services, and educate children through our accredited, Christ-centered private school, Ascension Leadership Academy.

At the heart of much of this work is a simple belief: families sometimes need more than a temporary solution. They need time, stability, encouragement and people willing to walk alongside them as they build a different future.

Our Secure Dwellings program is a powerful example of that philosophy. Mothers and their children can come to our Talladega campus from Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and beyond. They do not have to be Presbyterian, and they do not have to live in Alabama to seek our help.

Through improvements to our residential cottages, we now have room to serve up to 24 mothers and 40 children on campus. Secure Dwellings gives families something that is often incredibly difficult to find: the gift of time.

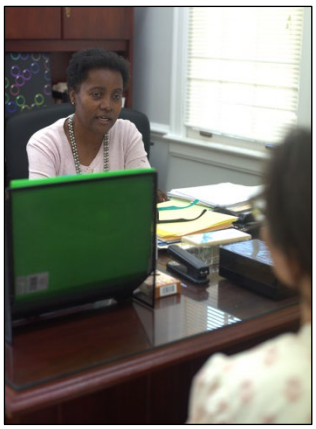
This is not an emergency shelter or a short-term housing program. Mothers and their children can remain with us for up to two years.

For a mother who has spent weeks worrying about where her children will sleep tomorrow night, two years of stability can change everything. It gives her a chance to dream and breathe.

During those two years, our staff walks alongside each mother as she develops a plan for independence. That may mean finding employment, earning a GED, enrolling in college, pursuing a career she once thought was out of reach, strengthening parenting skills, learning to manage finances or accomplishing several of those goals at once.

Our goal is not simply for a family to have a safe place to live while they are with us. We want mothers to leave the Home prepared to live independently, confidently and successfully for years to come.

That is one reason we especially want churches and agencies in Tennessee to know about Secure Dwellings. **You may know a mother who needs us.** Your congregation may encounter a family experiencing housing instability. A school, social worker, nonprofit, community organization or other agency in your community may be searching for a long-term option for a mother and her children. Please reach out to us. A referral or even a telephone call could become the first step toward a very different future for that family.



In 2025, we expanded our family ministry again by opening the **Robinson Family Unity Center**, which serves mothers whose children have entered foster care and who are working toward reunification.
Sometimes the barrier keeping a mother from regaining custody of her children is not a lack of love. It may be housing instability, unemployment or another circumstance she needs help overcoming. The Robinson Family Unity Center provides housing, case management, advocacy and individualized support while mothers work to meet the requirements necessary to bring their children home.

We have already seen what that support can accomplish.

One mother we will call **Laura** came to us after domestic violence and housing instability contributed to the loss of custody of her children. Working with our staff, she began addressing the requirements necessary for reunification and rebuilding the stability her family needed. After being reunited, she was able to continue that journey through Secure Dwellings, where mother and children could move forward together.

Another mother, **Faith**, regained custody of her children this spring after working with our staff to secure employment, establish stability and demonstrate her readiness to provide a safe home.

Faith had someone particularly meaningful standing beside her: PHFC case worker **Shandra Thomas**. More than a decade earlier, Shandra herself had come to the Presbyterian Home for Children with seven children and in need of housing. She rebuilt her life, continued her education and eventually returned to the Home as a social worker helping other mothers do the same.

When Faith's case went before a judge, Shandra advocated for her and testified about the progress she had witnessed. Faith regained custody of her children.

It is difficult to imagine a better picture of this ministry: a mother who once came to the Home needing help standing in a courtroom years later to help another mother bring her children home.

Following reunification, mothers may transition into Secure Dwellings with their children, giving the newly reunited family additional time and support to build toward lasting independence.

The children living on our campus also have access to another important resource: **Ascension Leadership Academy**, our accredited, Christ-centered private school, which also serves students from the surrounding Talladega community.

Some children arrive at the Home having experienced homelessness, family instability or other circumstances that have disrupted their education. Our teachers understand that a child may need both academic instruction and the encouragement that comes from having adults who believe in what he or she can accomplish.

Our goal is to help students who have fallen behind reach grade level and then give them the opportunity to go even further.

The results can be remarkable. In the 2025-26 school year, Ascension celebrated four graduating seniors who collectively earned a school-record **$240,000 in college scholarships**.

Those accomplishments represent much more than numbers. They represent young people looking toward college, careers and futures filled with possibility.

As our programs have grown, we have also been investing in the historic campus that makes much of this ministry possible.

The Presbyterian Home for Children's **$1.7 million Journey Capital Campaign**, which began in 2025 and continues through 2027, is restoring and improving our campus so it can serve children, young adults and families for generations to come.

For decades, our cottages and other campus buildings have been places of healing, hope and transformation. Today, those same facilities are being adapted to meet a new generation of needs.

Through the generosity of Presbyterian churches and faithful supporters, we have completed major renovations to our cottages, added a new playground and pavilion where children can simply enjoy being children, and made important campus sidewalk improvements.

Our future projects include restoring our historic chapel as a center for worship, prayer, Bible study and counseling, as well as continued renovations to Johnson Hall, home to our Transition to Adult Living program for young women up to age 26 without children, many of whom come out of foster care without a strong support system and need additional guidance.

Thanks to the generosity of God's people, the remaining need for the Journey Capital Campaign has been reduced to **$423,600**.

Every improvement has a purpose beyond bricks and mortar. A renovated cottage means another mother and her children can have a safe place to call home. A restored chapel creates a place for worship, counseling and spiritual growth. An improved campus gives the children, mothers and young women entrusted to our care a place where they can begin imagining what comes next.

As we continue building our relationship with Presbyterians throughout the Synod of Living Waters, we hope you will come to know the Presbyterian Home for Children as **your ministry, too** – as a resource you can turn to when you encounter a child or family who needs the kind of help we provide.

Perhaps there is a mother in your congregation who is struggling with housing. Perhaps someone in your church knows a family living in a motel, a car or temporarily with friends or relatives. Perhaps an agency in your community is working with a mother who needs a longer-term path toward independence. Or perhaps you simply feel called to help make this ministry possible through your prayers and financial support.

Whatever brings you to us, we hope you will reach out.

We would be honored to talk with you about our programs, answer questions, accept referrals, visit your Presbytery or congregation, or welcome you to Talladega to see firsthand how God is working through this ministry.

For more than 158 years, the Presbyterian Home for Children has responded when children and families needed a safe place and someone willing to believe in their future. The way we serve has changed with the times, but that calling has not.

We are grateful to now share that calling more closely with our Presbyterian brothers and sisters in the Presbytery of East Tennessee.

Together, we can give more children and families the opportunity not merely to survive a difficult season, but to **live, dream, breathe and build a stronger future.**

In Christ's service,

Doug Marshall
President and CEO
Presbyterian Home for Children

16 New Business

17 Stated Clerk's Report

Rev. Laura Becker, laura@presbyteryeasttn.org

For Information:

1. Thank you to all of our Clerks of Session who have already submitted their 2025 minutes for annual review. If you missed the previously scheduled opportunities, please email your minutes in one PDF document to laura@presbyteryeasttn.org - Make sure your church's name and city are in the subject line.
2. Clerks of Session will complete their **Annual Statistical Reports** at the start of the new year. We will send out information and instructions in January. Be sure to let us know of any changes to who is serving as your congregation's Clerk of Session or their contact information.

18 General Presbyter's Report

Rev. Dr. Wendy Neff, wendy@presbyteryeasttn.org

For Information:

The months since our last meeting have been quite full. The Vision Task Force Listening sessions were fun, informative, and energizing. I'm so excited to watch and be part of what is unfolding in the Presbytery of East Tennessee. I'm also excited to continue to share resources for imaginative and creative ministry, church building use, and more.

I've enjoyed worship in your various spaces, meeting with sessions, committees, and PNCs, visits with pastors and elders, and joining you in big celebrations. I was also grateful to be able to join with you at the memorial services for two of our long time PET ruling elders. Your welcome and hospitality are a joy to me.

The Vision Task Force continues its good work and will sift and sort all that we heard in the listening sessions to discern the best ways for the PET to equip our congregations to be communities of faith, hope, love and witness. You can expect a first report from them at the February meeting.

I was grateful for a week of study leave where I read, organized, and learned more how to serve you most faithfully. I've been part of the Synod's interim ministry training through Transitional Ministry Pathways this Fall. I can say the training has been invigorating for the work we are doing together in PET right now. It has also given me insight into how best to come alongside congregations during transition as well as ways to help all of us think about who we are and what God is calling us to do in ministry and mission today.

I was able to join with other mid council leaders in Louisville the middle of October. That was another great time of learning and gaining new resources. Our denomination has so much to offer us it's hard to share it all. Please if your congregation is looking for resources of any kind, reach out – I bet I can help you find what you need in our own backyard, so to speak.

As always, I consider serving in ministry with you a privilege. I'm grateful for this journey we are on as we seek to love God and our neighbor as we witness to the good news of the Gospel right here in East Tennessee.

19 Unfinished Business

20 Worship and Installation of Moderator and Vice Moderator

21 Closing Prayer and Adjournment

22 Announcements

Would you to help support faith formation in your congregation? Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian of Knoxville invites you to an intergenerational training event to foster faith at home for parents, grandparents, and guardians. Font and Faith Knoxville is led by seminary professor and program director Rev. Dr. Becky Davis of Charlotte, NC. It's a free regional event open to the public. The target audience are elementary children, although accompanying younger children and teen siblings are welcome. Held on Saturday, January 23, 2027. See attachment for details. Questions? Contact Mark Lampley at Mlampley@shpctn.org or (865) 522-9804.