

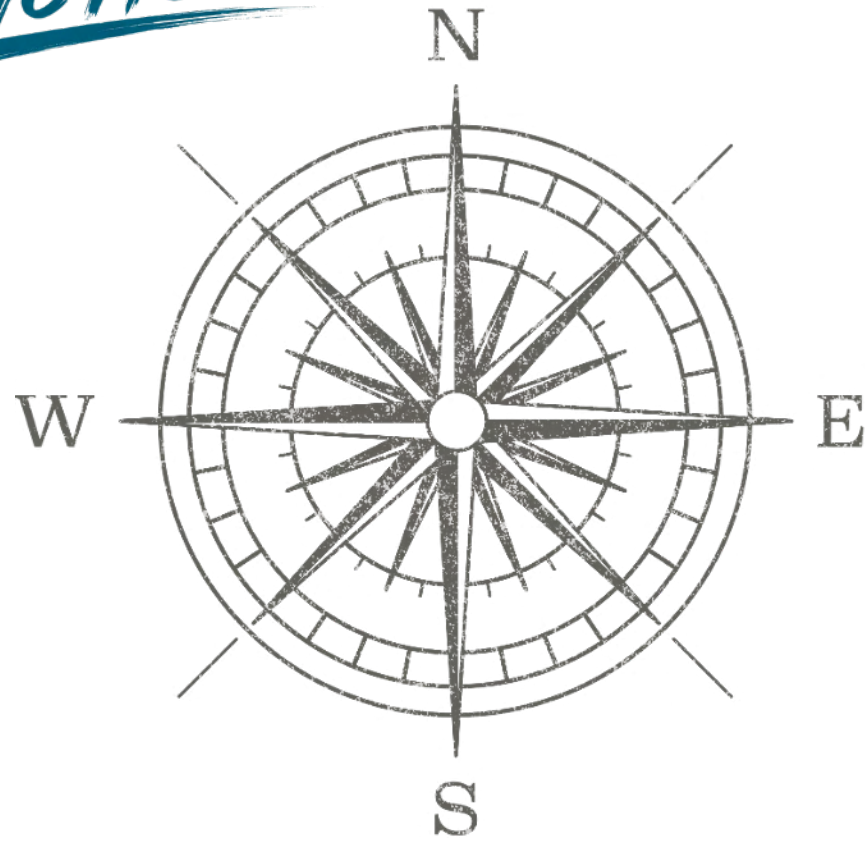
the HERALD

PEORIA FIRST UMC | AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER 2026

A CHURCH IN *MOTION*



A CHURCH IN MOTION



Welcome to this edition of The Herald! As you flip through these pages, you'll see that *A Church in Motion* is more than just a theme—it's a picture of who we are. Every week, God is at work through worship, missions, discipleship, fellowship, and countless acts of service. This newsletter is filled with stories, updates, and opportunities that show how lives are being changed and how our church continues to move forward together in faith.

Whether you have been part of our church family for years or you are just getting connected, we hope these pages encourage you, keep you informed, and inspire you to take your next step in the life of our church. Thank you for being part of what God is doing as we continue moving together in His mission.

If you see a ministry, group, or opportunity you'd like to learn more about, we'd love to help you get connected. Contact Julie at the church office, and she'll be happy to point you in the right direction. There's a place for everyone to be part of what God is doing as we continue moving together in His mission.



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DISCLAIMER: The information represented here is for the purpose of informing the FUMC-Peoria congregation of the change of events for a quarter. They are however subject to change. For more up-to-date information, refer to us online at www.peoria1.com, via social media platforms (@fumcpeoria), or via our weekly email newsletter, eHighlights.

DEADLINES: Contact Julie Bell at jbelle@fumcpeoria.org for information on upcoming deadlines and publication dates. In the subject line of your email submission, type, "HERALD." All submissions are subject to editing and style standards, and their use is solely at the discretion of the editor. Picture submissions are encouraged to accompany your submission. Focus on individuals and smaller numbers of people who help tell the story.



Opportunities. Not Interruptions.

Over the past few weeks, our church has been studying the book of Acts through our sermon series, *A Church in Motion*. As we looked at the lives of the first believers, one truth became very clear: the early church was always moving because the Holy Spirit was leading them.

The book of Acts reminds us that the church was never meant to stay comfortable. It was called to move, to grow, to serve, and to share the good news of Jesus wherever God opened a door. Even when the believers faced persecution, uncertainty, or unexpected changes, God used every situation to advance His Kingdom.

One of the greatest lessons from this series is that God often works through interruptions. Philip did not plan to leave Samaria, but God led him to one person who was searching for the truth. Saul certainly did not expect to meet Jesus on the road to Damascus, yet one encounter completely changed his life and his

future. What looked like interruptions were actually opportunities for God to accomplish His purpose.

The same is true for us today. Sometimes God changes our plans, opens unexpected doors, or places people in our path who need hope. Instead of asking, "Why is this happening?" we can begin asking, "Lord, what do You want to do through this moment?"

We also learned that the church in Antioch was a church that worshiped, prayed, listened to the Holy Spirit, and was willing to send people wherever God called them. A healthy church is not only a place where people gather; it is a place where people are equipped and sent to live on mission every day.

Today, our community still needs the hope of Jesus. Our neighbors, our schools, our workplaces, and our families need to see believers who live with compassion, courage, and faith.

We do not need to travel across the world to begin making a difference. God has already placed each of us in places where we can reflect His love and share His truth.

My prayer is that God would make us a church in motion once again. May we depend on the Holy Spirit every day, remain faithful when life is difficult, and be ready to follow wherever God leads us. As we continue moving forward together, may our church become known not only for what happens inside our building, but for the way we love, serve, and impact our community in the name of Jesus.

The mission of the church has never changed. The Holy Spirit is still working, Jesus is still building His church, and God is still calling ordinary people to do extraordinary things for His glory. May we answer that call with willing hearts and continue to be a church in motion.



REV. MIGUEL RIOS

Associate Pastor & Director of Contemporary Music,
Peoria First United Methodist Church

**WE DO NOT NEED TO TRAVEL
ACROSS THE WORLD TO
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**



More than Weathering the Storm

As summer reaches its halfway point, we find ourselves enduring another season of record-breaking heat. Across the country and around the world, thunderstorms, wildfires, earthquakes, and even tsunamis seem to have become all too familiar. It is easy to wonder what tomorrow will bring or to feel overwhelmed by events that remind us how little control we really have.

Yet Jesus offers these reassuring words: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

We often pray because so many things are beyond our control. We also pray because we believe that God can use the little influence we do have to lighten the burden of a neighbor and, in the process, lighten our own burden as we share one another's load. We pray because when we are uncertain about what lies ahead, we know that God is never uncertain. God is always faithful and still at work.

It is no secret that Peoria First has faced its own share of challenges over the past several years; and, truthfully, over the past several decades. There have been seasons that felt like storms and others that felt like earthquakes beneath our feet. Yet by God's grace we are still here. More importantly, we are not content simply to survive.

There is a line from *The Shawshank Redemption* that has stayed with me over the years: "Get busy living or get busy dying." While those words are not Scripture, they remind me of an important spiritual truth. God has not called the Church merely to preserve itself. He has called us to live: to love boldly, serve generously, and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

That conviction is guiding an important step in our church's future. In the coming weeks, our Church Council and Staff-Parish Relations Committee will ask the Peoria First Foundation to partner with us by supporting our efforts to hire a Director of Young Adult and Adult Discipleship Ministries. We are praying for someone with a passion for helping adults, especially those between the ages of 18 and 35ish, to discover the saving grace of Jesus Christ and grow into healthy-faithful disciples. We envision disciples who worship faithfully, serve joyfully, build authentic Christian community, study God's Word, and cultivate daily spiritual practices.

Without dedicated leadership, we risk continuing to talk about what we hope to do without ever accomplishing it. We believe God is calling us to move forward in faith, investing in the next generation and trust God with the results.

In addition, a small team of Peoria First leaders has been asked to be a part of a "Next Step" cohort. This team will meet monthly with other churches across the conference and discover what God is doing among us and prayerfully calling us to do. We hope to answer the question, "What is the next step for Peoria First?"

Will you join us in praying? Pray for this team to hear God's voice clearly. Pray that God will provide the right young-adult leader our church needs. Pray that hearts will be prepared across our congregation and our community. And pray that the Holy Spirit will breathe new life into our church as we continue the mission Christ has entrusted to us. Together, let us not simply weather the storms, but let us live faithfully the life God has called us to share.

LOVE BOLDLY.
SERVE GENEROUSLY.
MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST.



PASTOR TIM OZMENT

*Directing Pastor,
Peoria First United Methodist Church*

“Be The Logo They’ll See All Day”

by Christina Aldroubi
Director of Youth and AV Ministries

If your email is anything like mine, you leave it alone for a few days and you come back to a few hundred (or thousand) emails. Some are important, but most are junk. Although the email attached was an advertisement and not needed, the subject caught my eye. “Be the logo they’ll see.” This is exactly what we are called to do as followers of Christ – be the logo they’ll see. The purpose of a logo is to identify and represent a brand, business, or product. Although God is not a product, we are called to be his representatives here on earth.

If you read 1 John 4:7-21, John reminds us that we are called to love one another, because love comes from God. No one has seen God, but through our love others get a glimpse of God. If that isn’t a logo, then I don’t know what is.

When are we supposed to be a logo for God? In the midst of everything. This whirlwind of a summer has definitely reminded me of that. Amid getting married, Beulah Youth Camp, 6 Ways 2 Praise Arts Camp, Vacation Bible School, Destino Juvenil Camp, the youth mission trip, Six Flags, health concerns, and trying to move, I have found that I can either dwell in the human/physical tiredness of it all, or I can focus on God and reflecting His love. My hope is that I have been a true logo of Christ and not a picture of anything else.



VBS 2026 : GOD IS FAITHFUL

With hearts full of gratitude, we give thanks to God for allowing us to once again hold our Vacation Bible School (VBS) after four years without this wonderful ministry in our church. Seeing God open the doors for us to restart this ministry has been a beautiful reminder of His faithfulness and His love for the children and families in our community.

This year's theme, Illumination Station, reminded us that Jesus is the Light of the World and that we are called to reflect His light in everything we do. Throughout the week, 41 children enthusiastically participated in Bible lessons, worship, games, crafts, and a variety of activities that helped them grow in their knowledge of God's love and in their faith.

It was especially encouraging to watch the children build friendships with other kids from our church, their schools, and our community. Throughout the week they laughed together, learned together, and created lasting memories. Seeing them leave each day with joyful smiles was a blessing to everyone involved. As a church, we rejoice knowing that God's Word was planted in their hearts at an early age. We trust in God's promise that the seeds sown during this week will grow and bear fruit in their lives for His glory.



This year's VBS was a tremendous undertaking, but it also became a beautiful testimony of God's faithfulness. None of this would have been possible without the dedication of 32 volunteers who faithfully served before, during, and after the event. Every hour of preparation, every prayer, every activity, and every act of service reflected Christ's love for our children and their families.

We were also blessed to have four young adults from Mexico serving alongside us throughout the week. They generously gave their time and talents by helping with decorations, teaching, organizing activities, and supporting every area of the ministry. Their ability to serve bilingually was especially valuable, allowing them to connect with many of our children and families. We thank God for their willing hearts and for the blessing they were to both our children and our church family.

We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the parents who entrusted us with their children and partnered with us in this ministry. Thank you for your support and for allowing your children to be part of this unforgettable week. It is our prayer that what they learned during VBS will continue to strengthen their faith and encourage meaningful conversations about Jesus in their homes.

We are deeply grateful to every volunteer, teacher, leader, parent, donor, and participant who made this ministry possible. Each person played an important role in what God accomplished throughout the week, and we believe the impact of this VBS will continue long after the event has ended.

Our prayer is that this is only the beginning of a new season for Vacation Bible School in our church and that, year after year, more children will come to know Jesus Christ, grow in His love, and become lights that shine for Him in their homes, schools, and communities.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

Report on Illinois Great Rivers 2026 Annual Conference

by Amy George
President, Church Council

Pastor Tim and Pastor Miguel were joined by lay members Louis Milot, Lisa Wilson, and Amy George at the Illinois Great Rivers Conference Annual Conference June 4- 6, 2026. Several important decisions were made, and there were many highlights to celebrate.

- ▶ The Conference voted to reduce the number of districts from five to four as a cost-saving measure and to make the most effective use of available clergy leadership. As a result, Peoria First UMC will be part of the Northwest District. Effective January 1, our new District Superintendent will be the Rev. Dr. James Fielder.
- ▶ The Conference also recognized the closing of 67 churches throughout the Conference. These closures occurred for a variety of reasons, including congregations reforming as new ministries, church mergers, and churches that have faithfully completed their mission but no longer have the resources necessary to continue ministry.

- ▶ A total of \$300,000 was allocated for the continued redevelopment of Little Grassy Camp in southern Illinois. Improvements to the camp include facility upgrades and expanded programming designed to provide opportunities beyond the traditional summer camping season.
- ▶ Delegates approved a slight reduction in the Conference operating budget as part of an ongoing effort to decrease the amount of apportionments requested from local congregations.
- ▶ The Conference celebrated the 70th anniversary of the formal extension of ordination rights to women, recognizing this important milestone in the life of the church.
- ▶ Finally, Peoria First UMC was recognized for its leadership gift of \$5,000 to Miracle Sunday, a campaign that provides endowed scholarship support for clergy candidates in developing countries.

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the work of the wider church and to share these updates with our congregation.



Supporting Our Legacy

by Greg Gaa
President, Peoria First UMC Foundation

Dear Members and Friends of Peoria First UMC,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to share our Mid-Year 2026 update on the Foundation's activities.

During the first half of 2026, the Board continued to focus on initiatives that strengthen the Foundation's ability to support the ministries of First United Methodist Church. These efforts help ensure the Foundation remains well-positioned to serve the church, protect the gifts entrusted to its care, and support the ministry opportunities of today and tomorrow.

During the first half of the year, the Board updated the Foundation's grant application and continued work on the Foundation's informational brochure and Policy and Procedures Manual. The Board also began gathering resources to share with members about planned giving and the many ways they can support the ministries of First United Methodist Church.

During the first half of 2026, the Board reviewed and approved grants through several Foundation funds supporting the mission and ministries of First United Methodist Church.

The Warren & Marie Engle Music Endowment Fund supported sanctuary sound system improvements, Holy Week and Easter music, and continuing education for Dr. John Orfe.

The Thomas S. Foster Endowment for Christianity and the Fine Arts Fund supported Six Ways to Praise.

The Jeanne Skewes Children's Ministry Fund supported VBS.

The Hediger Trustee Fund supported sealcoating and landscape improvements.

The Adrian and Lilly Garcia Latino Ministry Endowment supported the Renuevo Couples Conference and Hispanic Youth Camp.

The General Fund supported the sanctuary sound system replacement, a new interior key system, and an external audit of FUMC and the Foundation.

This Mid-Year Update highlights grants approved during the first half of 2026. The Foundation also includes additional funds that support other ministries and purposes within the church. If you would like to learn more about the Foundation or any of its funds, please contact me through the Church Office.

Thank you for your continued support of the Foundation and the ministries of First United Methodist Church. Together, we are helping ensure today's ministry and tomorrow's opportunities continue to grow.

Blessings,
Gregory A. Gaa
President, Board of Directors, First United Methodist Church of Peoria Foundation



Accreditation for the Ganta School of Nursing!

by Julie Rolffs
Chairperson, Missions Team

“Hello, Julie! We are re-accredited! Thanks for your support!!!” - Clinton Zeantoe, Dean of Students, United Methodist University, Winifred J. Harley College of Health Sciences, School of Nursing at Ganta, Liberia

Church, you’ve honored me (Julie) with the role of Missions Team Chair for several years now, and you’ve probably heard me share in the past: the Missions Team is the best team in the church! To be on the receiving end of a message like Clinton’s to me above is such a blessing in my life!

Of course, this role has its challenges as well ... navigating cultural differences and expectations can be tricky. I will never understand how the Liberian Board for Nursing and Midwifery can hold their institutions to such high standards in a country with such deep poverty, particularly regarding infrastructure. All that said, Clinton is a great partner to our Peoria First UMC Missions Team, and he patiently helps us understand the expectations and the best ways for us to continue to support the School of Nursing.

Starting in October 2025, Clinton began sharing with me the financial needs that the School of Nursing would have in order to prepare for their triennial accreditation visit by the Liberian Board for Nursing and Midwifery. Some of the needs included a computer lab, upgrades to the Skills Lab, and infrastructure improvements to the Library, the Girls Dorm, the Boys Dorm, the Administration Building, and the student center (named for Sue Porter, a missionary who visited Peoria First UMC in 2008). The total for all these improvements was over \$85,000!

With the proceeds from our 2024 and 2025 Pie Auctions and support from our GIC (missions-support) fund, the Missions Team voted in November 2025 to support the School of Nursing’s re-accreditation efforts with a \$62,000 gift. The “punch list” of tasks was long, but Clinton and his staff, along with several reliable contractors, were able to complete the list in time for the April 2026 Accreditation Assessment.

Thanks to our support and the dedication of Clinton and his staff, the School of Nursing attained 89% compliance and was awarded Full Accreditation Status! This achievement reflects our collective effort and makes us proud to see our support making a real difference in Liberia.

In addition to supporting these regular re-accreditation assessments, our church also supports the School of Nursing with a scholarship program that dates back to 2012. Through the nursing scholarship program, our church has supported over 125 Liberian students with \$95,000!!

These nursing students are men and women in pursuit of a degree that not only provides a valuable medical service to their communities and their country but also equips them to provide for their families and send their own children to school. A “full scholarship” supports a student for five semesters with \$2500, while other “discretionary scholarships” are discerned by Clinton and his team in order to help students who find themselves a little short of funds for a semester or in arrears with the university and unable to take their final semester exams.

It all makes me wonder ... when we have our 5th Annual Pie Auction for Liberian Scholarships on November 13, 2026 ... will I be able to send a similar message ... “Hello, Clinton! I can’t wait to share with you the good news! At our Pie Auction for Nursing Scholarships, we sold enough pies and baked goods that we can provide full scholarships for 8 new scholarship students!!”



by Julie Bell
Director of Communications

Moving the Message Forward

A Church in Motion isn't just a church that's busy. It's a church that's growing closer to Christ while reaching out to others with His love. And one of the most important things that keeps us moving together is good communication.

God has always communicated with His people. He spoke creation into existence, called His people through the prophets, and ultimately showed us His love through Jesus Christ. As His followers, we're called to communicate with that same love, grace, and purpose.

It all starts with listening. We listen to God through His Word, but we also listen to one another. When we take time to hear someone's story, celebrate their joys, or walk with them through difficult times, we strengthen the relationships that make our church family so special.

Good communication also helps us stay connected to the life of our church. Our weekly newsletter, announcements, website, emails, and social media aren't just ways to share information—they're invitations to worship, serve, grow, and be part of what God is doing at Peoria First. Taking a few minutes to stay informed helps all of us stay engaged.

But communication isn't only about receiving information ~ it's about sharing it. Invite a neighbor to worship. Tell a friend about an upcoming event. Share a post on social media or let someone know how God has been working in your life. Sometimes a simple invitation or personal story is exactly what someone needs to take the next step toward Christ.

Communication also helps us care for one another. If your

contact information changes, let us know. If someone is in the hospital, has experienced a loss, or could use prayer, don't assume someone else has already called the church. When we share those needs, we give our church family the opportunity to love, pray, and serve one another well.

Of course, we're not perfect. Misunderstandings happen in every church. That's why Scripture reminds us to "speak the truth in love." When questions arise, let's choose grace over assumptions and kindness over criticism. Healthy communication builds healthy relationships, and healthy relationships help our church grow stronger.

Today, our conversations reach far beyond Sunday mornings. For many people, our website, livestream, podcast, or social media is their very first introduction to our church. Every time you share a post, leave an encouraging comment, or invite someone to worship, you're helping extend our witness beyond our walls and into our community.

As we continue this journey together, let's remember that communication is more than simply passing along information ~ it's a ministry. Every conversation, every invitation, every encouraging word, and every act of kindness has the opportunity to point someone toward Christ.

Communication is not simply sharing information—it is a ministry entrusted to every believer. When we listen well, speak graciously, stay connected, and faithfully share the hope of Christ, we become a stronger church—truly *A Church in Motion*, following wherever God leads.

A Church in Motion:

Fine Arts Ministry

by Eugene Maison
Director, Fine Arts



The Fine Arts Ministry continues to contribute to the church in motion, sharing God's love through creativity, education, and community.



This spring, our Lincoln K-8 After-School Arts Program concluded another successful year, serving 14 enrolled students with an average weekly attendance of 12. Throughout the school term, students explored a variety of artistic techniques, culminating in an exhibition of their work at the Foster Gallery in May. We are grateful to instructors Shari Pittenger and Jewel Lacey, as well as volunteers Joan Coleman and Sue Koeppel, whose dedication made the program possible.

The Lincoln Children's Choir concluded the school year with a joyful performance at the Gerald M. Brookhart Arts in Education Spring Celebration at the Peoria Riverfront Museum. Fifty-nine students enrolled at the beginning of the school term and 40 remained committed through the final performances. The choir is under the leadership of Ms. Nichole Fauser, Choir Director and Ms. Aleta Hoff the piano accompanist. We are especially grateful to our choir volunteers, Ms. Sue Koeppel, Ms. Pam Mormann, and David Giffin, whose faithful encouragement and support helped make the program a success.



This summer, we were delighted to host a full Six Ways to Praise (6W2P) Arts Camp and Podcraft & AV Arts Camp. Campers explored visual arts, music, photography, culinary arts, media, and missions while discovering new ways to express their faith through creativity. We are thankful for every camper, volunteer, instructor, and family who made this year's camp such a meaningful experience.

As we look ahead to another school year, we thank God for everyone who keeps our Fine Arts Ministry in motion, using the arts to inspire creativity, strengthen faith, and build community.



Thank you to FUMC foundation, camp instructors, and volunteers.



2026 AGO National Convention

by John Orfe
Organist

The American Guild of Organists (AGO) is a national professional association operating since 1896. Its approximately 250 chapters comprise seven geographic regions for over 10,000 members. The AGO's purposes include advancing the cause of organ and choral music, improving the proficiency of its members, providing opportunities to meet, share knowledge, discussing topics relevant to the field at large, and inspiring passion for the organ, its history, literature, and future.

AGO National and Regional Conventions alternate biennially. Four full days of performances, workshops, worship services, clinics, lectures, panel discussions on issues affecting the profession, and exhibitions take place from 8AM until 12 midnight, bookended by ancillary events like "organ crawls" – visits to multiple area organs around a theme (historic, an organ builder, etc.) In 2026, the AGO National Convention was held in St. Louis, and I attended thanks to gracious support from the Peoria First UMC Foundation.

Where to begin? The performances by internationally distinguished recitalists were as truly inspiring as the magnificent instruments on which they played. The Quimby organ at the Basilica of Saint Louis; the Kilgen-Möller-Reuter organ at Third Baptist Church (St. Louis); the Möller-Soer organ at the Cathedral of Saint Peter (Belleville, IL); the Casavant Frères organs at Principia College (Elsah, IL), First Presbyterian

Church (Kirkwood, MO), and Concordia Seminary (St. Louis); and the Colby organ at Manchester UMC were each akin to major symphony orchestras.

Repertory spanned five centuries of European music, two centuries of American music, and an ever-increasing body of new work by Asian, African, and Central and South American composers. Competition laureates in performance and improvisation displayed their prizewinning skills. Organist Chelsea Chen closed her recital with a fearsomely difficult set of chorale variations by Max Reger...then gave an encore of her own medley of Super Mario Bros. themes! Mack Wilberg led an enthralling Tabernacle-style hymn sing with a 150-voice festival choir, orchestra, and the Columbia Handbell Ensemble seamlessly segueing anthems of wonder, petition, consolation, and praise.

Workshops spanned such topics as accompanying chant, improvisation, hymn arranging, vocal health, conducting from the console, choral reading sessions, diversifying repertoire, surveys of life and work by major composers for the organ, and technology in organ building and tablet software. Vendors of sheet music and critical music editions advertised their latest publications (prompting me to buy way too many new releases. I'll learn and share as many with the church as I can!)

An important thing to do at an event like this is to purchase the bus pass. You never know who might sit next to you and become a new friend! In

this fashion, I was able to meet fascinating people who serve in a variety of worship and academic environments. One unexpected joy was reconnecting with a former student of mine, Andrew Johnson, who has gone on to win several organ competitions and is now pursuing his DMA at the Eastman School of Music, my alma mater!

The organ powerfully amplifies worship. It is not the object of worship, nor is music itself – either would be idolatry – but, properly utilized, it enhances hymn-singing, contemplation, and prayer. The knowledge I gleaned from attending the AGO 2026 National Convention will equip me to increase my stewardship. Thank you, Peoria First UMC Foundation, for making it possible for me to experience this special biennial event.



Check Out Our New Library!

by Diane Broe
Director of Administration and Facilities



We spent the last few months refreshing our Library to best serve Peoria First UMC as a Resource Room with study books, materials, and videos for individuals, small groups, and Sunday School classes.

We gifted our young families with the children's books and the Peoria Public Library with the adult fiction books. This increased floor space allowed us to create a seating area between the windows which includes an older two-person pew from our Sanctuary, two end tables, and a side chair. We also hung a framed print of downtown Peoria and hung it above the pew. It is a comfortable space for conversation or reading (especially lovely with the morning sunlight streaming in)! Of course, we still have our library tables with seating for ten inviting for a small study gathering around it.

While sorting through the books, we found many gems including a section on John Wesley and the Wesley family, the history of the church and the Methodist Church in particular, many biographies of Christian leaders, books on other Christian denominations, world religions, devotionals, a variety of books on spiritual, mental, and physical health... and so many more waiting for their pages to be read by you!

Our Library is open Monday through Friday from 9AM to 1PM and on Sundays from 8:30 – 11:30AM. Our staff is happy to accommodate your need for special hours.

We're hosting an Open House within the Library on Sunday, August 9 from 9:30 - 11:15AM.

Plan to come and "check it out!"

peoria1.com



Save
the
date

**Blue on Blue
All church Dinner**

September 18

**Keynote Speaker:
Chief of Police Brad Dixon**



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**2026 PIE AUCTION
NOVEMBER 13**

Our mission is
to make
disciples of
Jesus Christ
for the
transformation
of Peoria and
the World.

