



*“Remember when...and now
we offer our first fruits.”*

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

Letter from the Pastor

Remember when...and now we offer our first fruits.

Dear friends and members of First United Methodist Church,

In Deuteronomy 26:5-11, the people of God confess, *“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, little in number and there he became a great nation. I cried out to the Lord when the Egyptians afflicted me. The Lord heard my voice; brought me out of Egypt and here I am in that land offering my first fruits to God in thanksgiving”*. This passage is an example of one of the earliest Hebrew creedal statements and gives the Israelite’s history of dislocation in foreign lands and wandering in the wilderness, being able to live in a land long enough to plant, harvest, and enjoy the fruits of their labor signifies a tremendous blessing. Moses reminds them that when the time of stability comes, they are to remember God’s faithfulness to them. The act of offering thanks thus becomes an act of sharing the first fruits and the best of what they have. Those who can remember their faith history will remember God’s inclusive and generous nature and act with corresponding generosity.

This passage models acts of praise and thanksgiving to God, the Giver. It guides our practice of the spiritual discipline of giving thanks. It provides guidance on cultivating a spirit of gratitude. It reveals that our act of sharing the first and the best of what we have, both as an individual and as a communal practice, binds us together into closer relationships of interconnectedness with one another/cosmos (remember our learnings from Season of Creation, from the book *The Serviceberry!*) and with our Provider and Sustainer.

I, too, have a story in my heart that I’m confessing both in word and deed (creed), and I am learning to love to tell and witness. I witness to the challenges, the choices, and the actions we live out and how God is active and present in that process. My life speaks something like this, *“My parents immigrated to this country, as foreigners and without speaking English. We started our new lives in poverty, and yet we did not journey alone. In times of living between countries, in between classes, in between states of powerlessness, in between identities...we learned God is pervasively present in these gaps, these in-between places, in these liminal spaces. God stands with and for us in these thresholds. We experienced the faithfulness of God and God’s mercies that are new every morning. The church was a community of faithful, imperfect as it was/is that was a light for us. In spite of experiences of injustices, we did trust that God was not silent nor absent. In my struggles, I asked where is God in the sufferings? And where is justice? How does God love both the just and the unjust? God was silent but not absent from the silence I experienced. In these silences of God, God does reveal Godself, and I was able to listen. God called and I responded, ‘Is it I, Lord? Here I am Lord, send me.’”*

This is my story, and it is not separate from how I see my role, gifts, motives and commitments in the United Methodist Church. It is with a spirit of gratitude that we are called to respond with our first fruits and the best of what we have to offer, including with God’s tithes, our gifts, presence, prayers, service and witness. After the pandemic lockdown and in these days of growing fascism in our democratic nation and white Christian nationalism, where much has gone wrong, we turn to the wisdom of God, God’s people, and all of creation to remember anew-like the people of Israel- that in every great struggle, there is the gift of milk and honey flowing throughout the land and in our lives.

I invite you to read Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and reflect on how God has blessed you. What stories about God and God’s love will you remember to pass on? Scroll through family photos and share family stories, starting with **“Remember when ...”** and give thanks for God’s loving presence through the years. Let us **give of our first fruits and the best of what we have**. The people in the biblical story were invited, and every faithful and new generation, we are invited to bring our first fruits of the harvest, the best of what we have to offer as an act of thanksgiving. This helps us remember that God was with our biblical ancestors, and best of all, that God is with us still and always. God asks that we share from our first fruits and the best of what we have, not from what is left over. May it be so, Amen.

Faithfully,

Rev. Wongee Joh (she/her)

Dear members & friends of First Church –

As the 2026 Stewardship Campaign gets underway, it is with a spirit of gratitude that we offer our first fruits and the best of what we have.

This year's campaign kicks off on Sunday October 26th. Over 4 Sundays, different speakers will offer a "stewardship moment," about their involvement in the life of the church.

In addition to Pastor Wongee's letter, enclosed is another page on which you will see the remarkable diversity of First Church life, divided into four ministry areas:

**Creating Sacred Experiences
Transforming The World
Preserving Our Spaces
Connecting Our Communities**

Under each ministry area is a list of activities and events that occurred in 2025, programing that was made possible by the inspiring gifts of time, talent and treasure of the First Church congregation.

On the back of the same page, you will how the church's expenses are allocated to different ministry areas. The purpose behind the charts is to provide a sense of how our financial contributions make all the programing come to life.

The final item in the packet is a pledge card.

Sunday November 16th is Consecration Sunday, a day of celebration of our "first fruits" and all that we have to offer. We ask all members and friends to bring their pledge card with them to worship and include it as part of the offering. If you are not able to attend the service that day, please mail your pledge card to the church by that date.

Finally, there are several things each of us can do to reduce the administrative burden of handling our pledges. First is to set up an automatic payment from our bank accounts or credit cards using the Breeze system. First Church can also receive gifts of stocks. Second is to make our pledges on a consistent weekly, biweekly or monthly basis so that the church can anticipate a regular flow of funds, which helps to budget expenses accordingly. Lastly, if you are able, consider "tithing up," raising your pledge by 3% - 10%, as church expenses continue to rise.

If you need any assistance with setting up your pledge, gifting stocks, or receiving information about your current pledge level, please contact Melinda Waggoner. Her contact information is on the pledge card. If you are interested in making a bequest or a contribution to our Endowment, please also contact Melinda to discuss.

Thank you for your support of First Church!

With gratitude,
Greg Wallace and Jim Schone
2026 Stewardship Campaign Co-chairs

Creating Sacred Experiences:

Worship, Adult Spirituality (Buddhism, Deep Listening, Who Wrote the Bible, variety of video series, variety of book studies), special services and guest speakers, AV/online presence, accessibility, Ashes to Go, Altar Guild, Sacraments, Baptisms and New Members, New Members gathering, Music Ministries, Sanctuary Choir, Blessing of animals, plants, & pollinators, Lenten Devotionals, Longest Night collaboration with area churches, Season of Creation, St. Sebastian, Children and Youth, Liturgical Dance, Worship Banners, Pride and Faith, Memorial services, Weddings, Visitations at Assisted Living Communities and through transitions with hospice care, Counseling, connecting, and referrals with clients suffering from Mental health and Houselessness needs, Land Acknowledgment, GNW antiracism book study, Guest Preacher series with Dan Wolpert, Guest speakers from community partners, pulpit exchange, Faith Sharing in small groups, Book sharing and signings, Stewardship stories, Testimonials, Lobbying and Legislative work, Clergy (diaconal minister, retired elder, ecumenical ministers) connection



Preserving our Spaces:

Burning of the Mortgage, Energy Efficiency, Revenue from garage use and forthcoming advertisement lease, Emergency Preparation, Maintenance and Repair, Landscaping Quarterly Clean-Up, Admin Board, Endowments/Bequests, Use of Church Building, Church of Mary Magdalene, Shared Breakfast, Music groups, Lunch and Learn Programs, Weddings, Memorials, Blaine Veteran's Center, Faith over Fear Symposium, Detention Lottery theatre group, Seattle Pride Sunday, WAISN and Church Council of Greater Seattle Immigration Town Hall, Third Act, Collaborations with community partners, Afternoon Recitals and Concert Series, Open Mic, Soloists, Saint Sebastian sculpture exhibit, Worship

Transforming the World:

Climate Justice: Climate Church Covenant, Season of Creation, Divesting from Fossil Fuels, Food & Climate Change, Transportation and Climate Change, Human Rights and Climate Change, Rights of Nature, Sun Day, Third Act Washington

Church and Society/Social Justice: Interfaith Advocacy Day in Olympia, Faith Action Network, Meaningful Movies, Genocide in Gaza and Palestinians' struggle under Israeli Occupation, Reclaim our Vote, Housing Equity, Gun Control, Sanctuary Churches (Fairwood UMC/Riverton UMC), Environmental Justice, Furniture Repair Bank, Immigration Justice Justice

Urban Outreach: Shared Breakfast, Blaine Veteran's Center, Meals Partnership Coalition (MPC), Advocacy to City Council, Sione's Closet

Global Mission Global: Shared Breakfast, Blaine Veteran's Center, Meals Partnership Coalition (MPC), Advocacy to City Council, Sione's Closet

Connecting our Communities:

Vintners Game Night, Pub Theology, Pride and Faith Potlucks, Classes with Adult Spirituality, Lenten Lunches, Rally Day, Church Picnic, Ministry Fair, Pride Sunday, Building collaborations for sponsorship of national Trans Activist speaker Gabrielle Claiborne, Congregational Care, Pastoral Care, Prayer Team, Christmas and Easter Deliveries, Camp and Retreat Ministries (All Church Retreat, Women's Retreat, New Year's Retreat, Projects at Camp Indianola), Scholarships, Small Groups, Welcome and Hospitality, Immigration Justice, Anti-Racism (dismantling racism through book studies, worship liturgies, sermons, activism, collaborations, relationships, solidarity, and symposiums), Land Acknowledgment, Archives, Protests and Rallies, Men's Breakfast, Share/Wheel, Arts & Crafts Fair, Prayer Shawl Ministry, CPR Training, Church Council, Building relational partnerships for collaborations, Seattle Clergy/Cohort, Clergy serving on variety of conference ministries (BOM, RIM, Ethnic Caucus, Orders, Clergy Mentors, Earth Keepers, Truth Tellers Project, Environmental Stewardship Commission, Conference Board of Church & Society, Caretaker of God's Creation Coordinators), Staff Appreciation Christmas Party, Leadership Training, Visioning Retreat