

Heartland Presbyterian Church

2025 Annual Report



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Table of Contents

Pastors Report	Page 3
Parish Associate	Page 4
Children, Youth & Community	Page 5
Congregational Life	Page 8
Heartland Prayer Group	Page 10
Homebound Communion	Page 11
Women of Joy	Page 12
Fellowship Committee	Page 13
Mission Committee	Page 14
Finance & Facilities	Page 24

Pastors Report

Greetings Heartlanders,

2025 was a challenging year for our community in lots of ways. We faced the challenge of an increased interest rate change for our loan; the replacement of many aging air-conditioning units; and a charged social/political atmosphere leading to concerns about our more vulnerable neighbors. All of this as the year unfolded in unanticipated ways.

Heartland responded with faithfulness and compassion. We sought to stand with our refugee families and be responsive to those facing food scarcity. We had a debt reduction campaign that has set us up for success in the coming years. Our session made prophetic statements in solidarity with refugees and immigrants and Palestinians in Gaza. We continued to directly support local food banks and even started a new program to feed children in the summer months. We strived to proclaim the Good News in our words and in our actions to the Way of Jesus.

And we grew! We experienced an influx of new families and children. Our choir has grown in number and voice. Worship continues to be vibrant and meaningful. We engaged more people in our work together and in opportunities for fellowship. God's Grace has not only sustained us but called us to new paths of faithfulness and witness.

My prayers for 2026 are that people find sanctuary in our community to be refreshed and inspired for the very important challenges in front of us. May God bless us as we seek to be the body of Christ in the world!

Grace and Peace,
Alex

Parish Associate

The year 2025 has been filled with a host of different experiences. I with Diane Abell have monitored the implementation of the Officer Handbook with. I also assisted the Refugee Family Ministry and session with the drafting of an overture for the Presbytery of Des Moines. This was approved by the presbytery unanimously.

I led several Heartland Orientations which resulted in our receiving several new members. As a part of these orientations a Mission/Service Opportunities list was revised and shared. This now, thanks to the mission committee, can be found on the bulletin board in the hallway to the church office. It is a document which is shared with all the people that attended and orientation. We are also more intentional about collecting information about these folks for the online directory. The online directory permits us to update in real time. We are still working on getting pictures for some of the people listed.

The most time-consuming part of my work was with the Congregational Life Committee. You can see the annual report of the committee to get a sense of all this entailed. A special effort was made to establish a more complete birthday card list and the committee has also sent letters to people that we haven't seen in worship for a while.

I also worked with the Congregational Care Committee on reviewing the church membership rolls and our Friends of the Church list. These are ever-changing documents which can be difficult to keep up with. While a number of folks were removed from the list, we added almost 30 people to the membership roll and the friends of the church list.

In the spring I taught a class on the “One Anothering” passages. I am also a regular participant in the Prime Timers group, the Heartland Singers, and the TGIF group.

Another interesting ministry that has evolved over time is after worship lunches at the instigation of my wife Thea. This happens on most Sundays after worship and includes anywhere from four to fourteen people that go to a restaurant for lunch and continued fellowship.

Finally, until we find someone more official and technically qualified, I have assumed the roll of church photographer along with some other folks.

The parish associate position is commissioned but without pay. It isn't an associate pastor position, but was designed by the PC(USA) for retired pastors to more officially associate themselves with a congregation.

Christian Education Committee

January

8th – Everything Possible In Christ (EPIC) children / youth programming began. Structure of Wednesday night programming includes dinner at 5:30pm, recreation time inside the fellowship hall following dinner till 6:15pm and finally with age-relevant classroom time or a group community service activity. Middle / High School students learned about various current events relevant to Christian Nationalism and Bible stories and religious factoids about the Lent season. Elementary School students learned various Bible stories using the Spark Year C – Winter curriculum.

22nd – Group Service project for the month was making cards for the Letters of Love organization.

February

2nd - ‘Souper Bowl’ Sunday collections for the New Beginnings Food Closet begin. By the time the collections were tallied on the 9th, we predicted the Eagles to win the Super Bowl. (Go Birds!)

5th – EPIC Cancellation due to weather

12th – EPIC Cancellation due to weather

19th – Group service project of the month included touring Waypoint Services of Waukee and dropping off our collections to the New Beginnings Food Closet.

23rd – A group of seven attended the ‘Faith and Family’ Iowa Wolves event to watch the Wolves play the San Diego Clippers

26th – To help prepare for the youth-lead Ash Wednesday service, palm branches were burned following a review of Lent. Lectionary readings and other roles were assigned for the service.

March

5th – Ash Wednesday service was cancelled due to weather

9th – The first confirmation meeting / class was held before service. Curriculum was based around the kids articulating their scale and statements of belief while additionally learning the Presbyterian Church traditions / beliefs. We had six teens participate in the class. Non-confirmation families helped prep, serve and fundraise during the fellowship hour following service. All youth were invited to attend bowling at Spare Time in the afternoon as an end of the EPIC season celebration.

12th – Last day of EPIC programming which entailed a scavenger hunt. The attendance at its highest across the 10-week programing for K-12th grade was 20 kids and the lowest was 11 kids.

29th – Confirmation class took a trip out to Brown’s Woods to find God in creation.

April

17th – Preparation of eggs for the Easter Egg hunt preceded the Maundy Thursday service; around 300 eggs were filled.

20th – Our Easter Egg hunt got rained out so instead of the North lawn, kids scavenged in the classrooms and around the youth hallway.

May

5th – 10th – Mary attends the Arts and Recreation Worship Conference in Montreat, North Carolina which served as a springboard for youth activity ideas, spiritual formation information and familiarity with the campus pre-Montreat.

18th – Our first annual ‘Youth May Day’ was held during service. Flossie J. and Pieter D., our two seniors, received their gifts and our 5th grader Wren D. received her Action Bible.

June

7th-14th – Group of three adults and four teens participated in the Montreat Youth Conference: Light Our Path. The group road tripped both ways and while in North Carolina, enjoyed worship, small group workshops, outdoor recreation, hiking, and living in the VRBO housing together. Gemma & Flossie J. participated in the talent show and performed the instrumental and vocals to Celine Dion’s *My Heart Will Go On*, respectively.

8th – Confirmation class is celebrated in worship and gifts went out to participants.

17th – 24th – One youth and four adults went on the El Salvador delegation. Time was spent learning about the local history, creating and delivering food / medicinal packages, home visits, taking census information, shopping and celebrating a covenant between Heartland and the communities of Cerna and Centro.

July

20th – 25th – Mary and several dozen others from Heartland attended Synod School in Storm Lake, Iowa. Worship, interest-based classes, and social gatherings made for a constructive week.

27th – Heartland hosted their first ever pre-Triennium lock-in for participants filled with comradery, burnt pizza and intense games of Sardines.

28th – 31st – 13 youth and five adults across Heartland, Central and First Arabic Churches attended Triennium in Louisville, Kentucky. Amidst conference services, workshops and social activities, the youth also attended the Mahammad Ali Museum sponsored by the Des Moines Presbytery.

August

4th & 6th – Vacation Bible School (VBS) preparation meetings. Schedules and assignments went out to the seven teen/adult volunteers. Decorations for our ‘Waves of Wonder’ theme were distributed.

8th – 9th – VBS programming from morning to early afternoon. Kids participated in Bible story beach, seaside outdoor games, creator crafting coast and learning songs which they showcased and taught to the congregation on the 10th.

September

7th – 3 High School Youth participated at the Middle/High School Youth Outing at Smask Park.

10th – EPIC programming begins; the expectations and schedule for the year were communicated. Youth helped organize Heartland Youth shirts and the worship activity bags.

24th - Group service project of the month included shopping & creating ‘Dollar Tree Meal Kits’ and dropping them off to the New Beginnings Food Closet.

October

1st – Planning begins for the youth-lead Montreat Sunday Service. The theme from the summer programming was ‘Light Our Path’. Assignments for the liturgy and mini sermons were given and choreography for the energizer was practiced.

15th – Kids and Youth practice the Montreat service elements: the procession, the energizer choreography, the liturgy and sermons.

19th – Official Montreat Service date. The kids and congregation had a good time!

22nd - Group service project of the month included creating and mailing cards for the Letters of Love organization.

November

1st – Script chosen for the Children Christmas Pageant: *A Christmas Paws*

12th – Classroom programming ends with a scavenger hunt review around the church.

19th – Group service project of the month included helping the Mission Committee set up the Blessing Tree. Pageant script read through practice. Role assignments for a cast of 20 were chosen and announced shortly following this first practice.

30th – Pageant practice cancelled due to weather

December

3rd – First play practice

7th – Second play practice – stage entrances and exits

10th – Third play practice – dress rehearsal and microphone tests. Last Wednesday night, the programming date for the year. Scheduled to return January 22nd.

14th – Performance day – costumes looked great, cues were met and all had a good time!

24th – Children received treat bags at the Family Friendly Christmas Eve service following the Children's Sermon.

Congregational Life Committee

The group life of the church remains much the same as in past years. Presbyterian Women continue to meet and serve at funeral services. The book club meets the second Sunday of each month. The Millennial group continues to meet approximately once a month. Prime Timers meets the last Wednesday of each month except during the holiday season. They have between 12 and 24 participants. TGIF coffee meets nearly every Friday morning with between eight and 15 participants.

Carol Ferrell continues to organize the Extended table groups. A new group is created twice a year. Lisa Kilian organized the annual golf outing. Melissa Schnucker has organized the fellowship coffee following worship. The number of people who stay seems to be growing. Melissa Schnucker with the help of the committee and Jodi Espe hosted two significant potluck meals this past year. The first was the Easter Brunch and most recently the Thanksgiving Dinner the Sunday before Thanksgiving. There were enough leftovers from the Thanksgiving meal to assist some of our refugee families, which was an added blessing. There was no Youth Dessert Auction, but we expect there to be one in 2026. The annual Pupusa lunch was again a success and there were changes in the Worship in the Park lunch as the worship and lunch were held at Heartland.

Laura Schieber assists us with posts on Facebook and Instagram. This promotion ministry is much appreciated. Laura often assists us with other technical issues as well. Bob Houser and Erica Button keep the creation of new name tags up to date. Thea Houser provided second time worshipers with welcome bags. Thanks to a donation by Lynn Dennis and Jolene DeBruijn we are now giving bags to children as well. We continue to track visitors via the pew pads. We provided several orientation sessions for those new to Heartland. This was one of the biggest years yet (adding nearly 30 people through membership, confirmation or the friends list) for receiving new members as well as adding several people to the Friends of the Church list. The committee has made an extra effort to get pictures for people in the on-line church directory. This seems to be gaining in use by several people at Heartland. If you aren't connected with the directory, Erica in the church office will help you do so.

With the help of the mission committee and the property and finance we continue to highlight a wide variety of volunteer and mission opportunities here at Heartland. The committee also tries to connect with those who have been absent from worship for a while.

We ordered new T-shirts for the congregation. For those who didn't get their shirt ordered there are some extras that are still available for \$15.00.

Through the efforts of Fred and Connie Crawford we continue to maintain the flower bed in the circle drive in front of the church doors. Jolene DeBruijn and the committee were able to recruit usher/leaders for each month of 2025. Job descriptions for ushers and usher leaders are provided.

Thanks to the efforts of Diane Abell and others we continue to provide communion for shut-ins and those at Independence Village. Communion at the Independence Village is provided once a month and to others as it can be scheduled. Rachel Smith helps keep the homebound list up to date as it assists with the communion and gifting of plants during the Easter and Christmas season.

Linda Phillips has been sending birthday cards to members and friends of Heartland. In 2025 a special effort was made to update this list. There is still progress to be made but the list is more complete than it has ever been. Linda will also send cards to shut-ins during holidays and those who are in long term recovery from health issues.

Annual Report –2025

Heartland Presbyterian Church

Melissa Schnucker (would love a replacement) continues to organize Meals from the Heart which go to people who are recovering from surgery, childbirth, or hospitalization.

Diane Abell continues to coordinate the prayer chain and offers wonderfully crafted prayers to assist with this ministry.

Respectfully Submitted by

Jolene DeBruijn chairperson

And the Congregational Life Committee

Rachel Smith

Lana Dahl

Joanne DeLong

Larry Hassman

Dotta Hassman

Thea Houser

Melissa Schnucker

Beverly Lytle

Heartland Prayer Group

Our Heartland Prayer Group began 7 years ago in July 2018. Currently, we have 18 members including Susan Beblawi, Connie Carroll, Carol Ferrell, Sharon Gumm, Jan Harken, Dotta Hassman, Joyce Hoffman, Bob and Thea Houser, Beverly Lytle, Moira Nash, Julie Olson, Linda Phillips, Donna Rice, Melissa Schnucker, LuAnn Smith, Rachel Smith, and Diane Abell.

With the help of Alex and Steve Dressel, the Heartland Prayer Group was launched. Initially, we met in person at Heartland and began lifting prayers. During Covid, Diane began emailing prayers of thanks and prayer requests and includes poems, scripture, and/or a short reading. Our group commits to praying regularly whenever there is a prayer request. We ensure the person gives permission for us to share information.

Group prayer is discussed throughout the Bible. God is present when believers gather in His name. This ministry helps us carry out God's work together.

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 ...pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

1 Timothy 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

Our group prayer strengthens the collective spiritual effort. We pray in unity with shared intentions. Please join us as we lift prayer together virtually. We would love to have you!

Diane Abell

Homebound Communion

Homebound communion at Heartland began 11 years ago. Our first teams began serving in April of 2014 thanks to Barb Nish's encouragement and Dick Harken's training. A few members have served homebound communion through the years, with Joyce Hoffman, Jeff Kaman, Rachel Smith, Melissa and Chris Schnucker, Alex, and Diane Abell currently serving in this ministry.

We usually have teams of two people, one of which is an elder, who visit and serve communion to an individual or a couple once a month. Whether the person is in their home, hospital, rehabilitation center, or care facility, we are there. We enjoy visiting and serving in this way.

If you would like to be a part of this team, you would be welcome to go along with us and visit and/or help in the serving of the elements on an as-needed basis or a regular basis.

Please let the office or Diane Abell know if you would like to become involved in this ministry.

Diane Abell

Women of Joy

This daytime women's group is open to members and friends of the church. Several regulars come from other churches and have become valued friends. The group meets the first and third Thursdays at 10 a.m. at the church. The women discuss topics of spirituality and faith using a different study guide each year. Connie Carroll served as the coordinator this year and Rachel Smith will coordinate in 2026.

Women of Joy is currently using the book, *Unafraid, Living with Courage and Hope in Uncertain Times* by Adam Hamilton, as a basis for our discussions.

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Sunday, September 7th, 2025

**10th Annual Heartland Church Golf Outing at
Sugar Creek Golf Course in Waukee**

Organized by Lisa Kilian

Lisa coordinated with staff at Sugar Creek ahead of time to set the date and secure the tee times. We advertised and organized sign-ups at the church throughout the months of August and early September.

24 golfers played this year, which is 2 or 3 more golfers than we have been averaging each year.

Heartland Presbyterian personalized Koozies were given to all participants.

Dozens of free golf balls were available (since Kilian's have extras);

Light dinner of sloppy joes, salad, chips, water and brownies were provided.

8 prizes were provided.

Tee times beginning at 2:50 pm (not shotgun start).

Best Ball event at Sugar Creek,

Golfers paid the 9-hole fee of \$31 to course directly and this included golf cart.

After golf Fellowship with light dinner.

Prizes: first place team (4 prizes), longest drive female, longest drive male (2 prizes), longest putt on two holes (2 prizes).

Prizes included: a pumpkin, a large mum, apples and caramel, plant in a fall basket (3), fresh flowers in a fall themed vase, etc.

Several kids, families and individuals played.

It was a great event!

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Norbury Kilian

Mission Committee

Our Mission Committee members include Kathy Bassett, Jude Conway, Connie Crawford, Jane Crawford, Deb Hansen, Chad Hope, Laura Juliano, Mary MacKenzie, Doug Olson, Julie Olson, Eden Pearson, LuAnn Smith, Mary Vander Velden, Natalie Wulfsen, and Diane Abell as chair for 2024. Alex attended our meetings. AMOS, the Blessing Tree, Feed the Children, El Salvador, the Heartland Family Refugee ministry, Inclusivity, Justice in Action, Palestine, and the WayPoint Resources and the New Beginnings Food Closet were focuses, with several other important missions.

LOCAL MISSION (submitted by Diane Abell)

We have four special offerings each year and we are pleased to report the following:

*One Great Hour of Sharing in April - \$3494.18

*Pentecost in June – \$695.00 (this is the 40% of the offering which we keep locally)

*Peace and Global Witness in October -\$530.00 (this is the 25% of the offering which we keep locally)

*Christmas Joy Offering in December - \$1525.00

We budgeted for and donated \$1000 this summer to First Arabic Church with an additional \$1000 to be paid for 2025. This is the second year of a 3-year One pledge of \$2000 each year to help with their stability.

We will be sending the remainder of budgeted funds (end-of-the-year funds) to local organizations including CROSS Outreach, DMARC and WayPoint Resources.

We continue to accept donations of food and cash for the WayPoint Resources food pantry and the New Beginnings Christian Church Food Closet. We deliver these donations shortly after the first Sunday of each month.

Alex is a member of the Rainbow Coalition of Greater Des Moines and advocates for this community. As a part of PRIDEFEST in Des Moines in June, Greg Smith, Kathy Bassett, and Eden Pearson assisted with the PRIDE worship in East Village. We provided \$250 to help with this worship service. Heartland members and friends participated in the PRIDE parade again this year.

"We also handled the coordination of tours to and presentations by several metro area nonprofits that serve area residents. These tours proved to be interesting and educational activities."

AMOS

Heartland joined AMOS (A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy) in 2023 as one of our Strategic Plan initiatives. AMOS seeks to channel individual action into a responsible and powerfully organized force for the common good. Jude Conway has been active in AMOS trainings and participated in numerous meetings. He has been involved in the Central Iowa Community Land Trust which will help provide affordable home ownership. Several other members have attended AMOS sponsored meetings at partner churches as well as worked with members in our Western Suburb Cluster. We budgeted \$3000 to AMOS for Heartland's annual dues.

Please find more details about AMOS accomplishments at this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kRpEFGDJwBBXfGsqJiyjfPsh94E--btw/view> A new initiative, the We

the People campaign has been launched. AMOS leaders will organize 2000+ Iowans in small group listening sessions. The 30th Anniversary *We The People* convention will be held on 8/30/26.

BLESSING TREE

Our Blessing Tree ministry was again successful. We provided 2 gifts to each of 40 children who were identified by WayPoint Resources as a part of their annual ministry at Christmas. WayPoint delivered 1400 gifts in total, with our share being 80. WayPoint sent a thank you and is very appreciative of our support. Heartland families and friends donated \$850 in cash and \$90 in gift cards to CROSS Outreach as apart of this Blessing Tree ministry. We are very thankful to Jane and Chad who led this effort with other committee members and volunteers helping.

APARTHEID FREE COMMUNITY PLEDGE AND PALESTINE (submitted by Julie Olson)

The Mission Committee recommended to Session that Heartland sign the Apartheid Free Community pledge. After several months of study, the Session voted unanimously to do so. Information about Apartheid Free Communities and the pledge was shared by committee members during the fall Mission Fair and in the Heartland Happenings. Updates regarding the living conditions of and possible actions to take for our brothers and sisters living under apartheid have been provided during worship and through postings on bulletin boards. In October, Heartland participated in sales of items from the Holy Land sponsored by the Des Moines Presbytery to support Palestinian Christians, raising \$1000.

INTERNATIONAL MISSION (submitted by LuAnn Smith and Kathy Bassett)

Heartland maintains a partnership / friendship with 58 partner households (213 men, women, and children) in two rural cantons (small villages) in Tablón Centro and Cerna, located in the municipality of Berlin, El Salvador. In addition to prayers, we support this covenant by donating funds to help their food, medical, education, and fertilizer needs.

Agricultural Assistance

Heartland provided \$3640 for fertilizer and \$809 for bean seeds for each household in Cerna and the Centro Milagro committee households. Agricultural assistance is an ongoing need due to soil depleted of nutrients through centuries of abuse.

Pupusa Fundraiser Dinner

Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025

Helen Martinez donated her time and food supplies to create a pupusa fundraiser lunch. \$1400+ was raised through free will donations.

Medical Assistance

Supported 14 families with medical needs (exams, medicine, transportation to hospital) for a total of \$381.

Heartland also assisted families when a household member died: 3 families for a total of \$180.

Education

Scholarships – 2 high school students: Each scholarship is \$150 annually paid in two installments. One student had to drop out to care for his ailing mother. Total educational support for 2025 was \$225.

Food Relief baskets:

Provided a food relief basket with basic items to each of our families for a total of \$2,574.

Spring Supply Drive

The congregation generously donated supplies (i.e. acetaminophen, hydrocortisone cream, band aids, school supplies, etc.) for delegates to take to El Salvador.

Delegation

A Heartland delegation traveled to El Salvador in June 2025. Delegates began by visiting important historical sites to better understand El Salvador's current culture and life struggles. Heartland delegates spent several days in door-to-door visits with families in Tablón Cerna and Centro. Getting to know the families personally provided a meaningful partnership and familial bond. Delegates helped the pastoral team deliver food baskets and health kits to each family. The recipients were grateful for the supplies and the personal visits. 2025 Heartland delegates included: Flossie Juliano, Mary Vander Velden, Natalie Wulfson, LuAnn Smith, OSP Mission Co-Worker, Kathy Basset, along with two OSP board members. The goal is to have a Heartland delegation visit every 18 months to foster our partnership.

Our Sister Parish

Our Sister Parish (OSP) is the governing body of the Presbytery's mission in El Salvador. Kathy Bassett is serving as the temporary mission co-worker while OSP continues to search for a replacement. OSP supports the work of the six Pastoral team members in El Salvador who work with the partner communities. Kathy Bassett & LuAnn Smith serve as the Heartland representatives of OSP. Heartland hosted Our Sister Parish Bingo Bonanza Fundraiser November 9, 2025, raising \$4,000+ to help fund a medical delegation to El Salvador in April 2026. Approximately 120 participated in this event, including many Heartlanders, family and friends from sister OSP churches.

Don Justo Coffee with Dignity

Heartland continues to support OSP's coffee mission by serving and selling Don Justo Coffee, which is produced exclusively for the Our Sister Parish mission. The coffee is organically grown on the hillsides of the mountain that is home to the cantons of Berlín, El Salvador. All profits from the sale of Don Justo Coffee are sent to the Pastoral Team in Berlín to support mission projects.

Christmas Basket Sales

\$250 profit was raised for IMC to help purchase emergency food relief baskets. In addition, the Deacon's funds were reimbursed \$154.00 for the Don Justo Coffee used in the holiday baskets.

COVENANT NETWORK OF PRESBYTERIANS, CNP is an organization engaging churches to invite all of God's children into safe and welcoming spaces. (This report was submitted by Mary Vander Velden, Director of Youth, Family and Community and summarizes when Heartland joined CNP as well as a number of mission activities with youth involvement)

January

17th – 18th – Attended the AMOS house-training training at Walnut Hills United Methodist Church.

30th – Heartland joins the Covenant Network of Presbyterians (CNP), the first church to do so in the Des Moines metro.

February

2nd - 'Souper Bowl' Sunday collections for the New Beginnings Food Closet begin. By the time the collections were tallied on the 9th, we predicted the Eagles to win the Super Bowl. (Go Birds!)

8th – Attended the AMOS Relational Training at New Beginnings Church.

19th – Children / youth group service project of the month included touring Waypoint Services of Waukee and dropping off our collections to the New Beginnings Food Closet.

March

13th – Attended AMOS Community Land Trust Power Analysis meeting.

April

2nd – Alex T., Deb H., and Mary visited with Dr. Lindsey Law, Waukee schools, Director of Student Equity. Established connection and foundation that we're a safe space / organization for the youth and the community.

May

1st – Joins the Rainbow Faith Coalition social media team.

June

17th – 24th – One youth and four adults went on the El Salvador delegation. Time was spent learning about the local history, creating and delivering food / medicinal packages, home visits, taking census information, shopping and celebrating a covenant between Heartland and the communities of Cerna and Centro.

July

29th – Connected with Brian Ellison, Executive Director of CNP, for the first time in-person at Triennium in Louisville, Kentucky.

August

24th - Group service project of the month included shopping & creating 'Dollar Tree Meal Kits' and dropping them off to the New Beginnings Food Closet.

September

24th - Group service project of the month included shopping & creating 'Dollar Tree Meal Kits' and dropping them off to the New Beginnings Food Closet.

October

22nd - Group service project of the month included creating and mailing cards for the Letters of Love organization. Also repackaged 198 pounds of dog and cat food into 1 gallon bags of dog food and 1 quart bags of cat food. There were 12 youth from 1st grade through high school and 3 adults helping.

November

19th – Group service project of the month included helping the Mission Committee set up the Blessing Tree.

December

21st – Participated in Sunday School for First Arabic Presbyterian to celebrate Advent and the Christmas season.

FEED THE HUNGRY (submitted by Jane Crawford and Connie Crawford)

Our first attempt at helping feed children in the summer was, in my opinion, a success. We provided 143 food boxes to families in the Crestview School District. Each box contained approximately \$50 worth of groceries. Some of the ingredients were items kids could make on their own, plus additional items for several family meals. Additionally, we gave away an assortment of books, games and puzzles, along with cookies. The congregation helped provide food items, along with cash donations. We also had monetary donations from non-members, along with volunteers, both members and non-members of our church. While we made some mistakes, we learned a lot and feel we can be successful in 2026 if we have the support of our congregation.

HEARTLAND FAMILY REFUGEE MINISTRY (submitted by Deb Hansen)**Collaboration with Other Agencies**

Throughout 2025, HRFM team members actively engaged with community partners by attending workshops, webinars, and prayer vigils hosted by Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice (IMMJ), USCRI Des Moines (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants), Refugee Alliance of Central Iowa (RACI), Des Moines Refugee Support, and other organizations. These collaborations enabled HRFM to:

- Learn about *Know Your Rights*, ICE preparedness, and immigration issues,
- Network with agency leaders,
- Identify community resources, and
- Increase Heartland’s visibility and impact.

Key Activities:

1. **Rapid Response Planning**
Deb and LuAnn attended IMMJ Rapid Response Planning Meetings. As a result, Heartland will now receive email alerts from the IMMJ Faith-Based Volunteer Team in the event of ICE activity that may endanger families.
2. **School District Collaboration**
Alex, Diane, Deb, and Mary met with a Waukee School District administrator to discuss the needs of immigrant and refugee students, including concerns related to ICE events. Additionally, strategies for supporting LGBTQ+ students were considered.

Global Neighbors Welcome Center: In August, Alex Thornburg, Joyce Hoffman, Jude Conway, LuAnn Smith, and Diane Abell met with Mak Sucasca, Manager of Operations of Global Neighbors in September. They toured the building which is being renovated for the Global Neighbors Welcome Center.

In December, Mak met with Alex Thornburg, Joyce Hoffman, Jude Conway, Deb Hansen, and Diane Abell to discuss possible volunteer opportunities as they are planning to open a multi-cultural food pantry to address some of the challenges our immigrant community is facing. It will be the first project under the Global Neighbors umbrella. They have a few ethnic community-based organizations already lined up and a space to implement the project. Mak will keep us informed as the food pantry project progresses.

Family Support

Moneer Family: HRFM supported the Moneer family as they grieved the loss of Salman. Fazal expressed deep appreciation for the congregation’s support over the past three years. He presented his book at a signing event on November 16th and attended the Mission Fair on October 19th.

Cano-Reyes Family: Both Mathilde and Pedro work part-time at McAlister’s deli, but struggle to make ends meet. They are in the process of seeking better employment. Elizabeth, Cata, and Lucia are healthy and doing well in school. Mathilde obtained her driver’s license, and with support from Jane Conway and others, the family will receive a car soon. HRFM enabled the Cano-Reyes family to participate in numerous social and church events. Examples:

- Cata and Lucia’s baptism.
- Easter egg hunt and Bingo at Heartland.

- Birthday celebrations.
- School concert.
- Christmas craft event.

Additional support included:

- Help in accessing food – trips to food pantries and Walmart.
- Assistance with job applications.
- Referral to Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families.
- English language instruction. (Judy Kading).
- Transportation to medical appointments, parent conferences, job interviews, and school events.
- Assistance in accessing dental care.
- Emergency rent assistance
- Donation of furniture and household items by congregants.

Lunganga Family: This year HRFM team members made routine check-ins to make sure all was well with the Lunganga family. Tshama moved from Sam’s Club to Amazon. He has four shifts a week and always takes additional shifts when offered. Nadine is now working seven days a week – Monday-Thursday in the mornings at the central kitchen for Des Moines schools and Friday-Sunday for Amazon. Riphana has picked up some part-time work in between school and soccer. Olfine is thriving and is a happy chatterbox. Anastasia and Sabu are really enjoying school. The family is saving money to buy a house – potentially in Pleasant Hill or Altoona. They have become increasingly independent but continue to benefit from support from HRFM. HRFM enabled the Lunganga family to participate in and benefit from numerous forms of support, including:

- Assistance with updated lease and rent benefit paperwork.
- Coaching in responding to utility providers and their landlord.
- Coordination with Cross Ministries to access final help for utility bills.
- Help with mowing while their lawnmower was broken.
- Assistance with moving furniture.
- Encouragement and support for the teenagers in soccer.
- Conversations with Tshama about a potential move and educational opportunities for the teens.

Sebambe Family: HRFM assisted Peter with employment searches, enrollment in job counseling at the Evelyn Davis Center, access to job postings, and completion of job applications. (HRFM does not sponsor the Sebambe family, but offers help on request.)

Know Your Rights: The Cano-Reyes, Lunganga, and Sebambe families received updated *Know Your Rights* information and support in developing Family Plans in the context of increasing risk of ICE activity in Des Moines.

Nawal Hussein and Nada Omar Hassan: HRFM suspended our mission to sponsor the resettlement of these women, when the Welcome Corps Program stopped the intake of all applicants under an executive order that paused the entire U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Donations and Fundraising

Heartland congregants donated **\$1,700** to HRFM in 2025. A portion of these funds were collected during a fundraising drive held in June (seeking gift cards for food).

The team chose not to sponsor a fourth family this year. Instead, HRFM continued supporting the Cano-Reyes family with winter clothing, emergency rent assistance, and other needs. Gift cards were provided to the Cano-Reyes and Lunganga families at Christmas, and a condolence gift was given to the Moneer family.

Recognizing reduced services among local refugee agencies due to funding cuts and policy changes, HRFM allocated resources to support the following organizations:

USCRI:

\$500 to assist with emergency needs following suspension of federal support.

\$200 to address food insecurity among immigrants and refugees.

Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice:

\$250 to expand free and low-cost legal clinics.

\$1,000 to the IMMJ Direct Relief Fund for filing fees and urgent client needs.

Des Moines Refugee Support:

\$250 to support families affected by federal funding cuts.

\$250 to address food insecurity.

Arabic Outreach Center:

\$1,000 to establish a *Pastor's Fund* for Rev. Kachu to support families facing urgent needs.

Our ending balance for the year is \$1,831.14.

Grant Application: HRFM submitted a proposal to the Living Legacy Grant Fund for Congregational Mission and Revitalization to establish an emergency fund for refugee families in crisis.

Promoting Positive and Accurate Information About Immigrants and Refugees

A core priority of HRFM is shifting the narrative toward human-centered, factual understanding of immigrants and refugees. In 2025, HRFM engaged in the following activities:

- HRFM prepared a statement reaffirming Heartland's commitment to welcoming migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. This statement was adopted by Session on March 27, 2025. Following a presentation by Deb, Diane, Darca, and Alex, the Des Moines Presbytery also unanimously adopted this statement on May 20, 2025.
- Hosted *Immigration 101* with Jodi Mashek (April 9).
- Hosted *Know Your Rights for Congregations* with Tom Rendon (June 29).
- Participated in an interfaith prayer vigil.
- Encouraged congregants to attend workshops, webinars, and vigils.
- Disseminated publications and announcements pertaining to immigration issues.
- Diane presented at the Iowa Presbyterian Gathering (August 23).

- Deb presented to the Women of Joy.
- Mission Fair display (October 19) featuring photos of HRFM activities.

Keeping church leaders and the congregation informed about HRFM actions and priorities is an important function. In 2025, HRFM implemented the following routines:

- HRFM Chair attended most monthly Mission Committee meetings.
- Regular articles submitted to *Heartland Happenings*.
- Bulletin board updates maintained.
- HRFM webpages revised.
- Five HRFM team meetings held (in-person and Zoom).
- Monthly updates sent to the HRFM email group.

Advocacy Efforts

HRFM volunteers engage in advocacy work to ensure that immigrants and refugees are treated with dignity, fairness, and compassion. Advocacy efforts include:

- Lobbying against harmful immigration legislation at the state and national level.
- Letters and calls to legislators.
- Legislative updates for congregants.
- Encouraging congregants to contact legislators.
- Meeting with lobbyists to learn advocacy strategies.
- Visiting the Iowa State Capitol to speak with legislators and attend hearings.

Additionally, Julie and Doug joined Amgad Beblawi on a trip to the U.S.–Mexico border in November. They will share their experiences with the congregation in 2026.

First Arabic Presbyterian Church – Sunday School Partnership

HRFM provides Sunday School programming at First Arabic Presbyterian Church on the third Sunday of each month, in collaboration with Grinnell Presbyterian Church (which covers the fourth Sunday). Susan Beblawi played a leading role in lesson planning and preparation.

Key accomplishments:

- Offered monthly Sunday school lessons for six months.
- Participated in Sunday services at First Arabic.
- Purchased supplies including musical instruments, art materials, and fidget toys.
- Worked with Rev. Ekram Kachu to identify needs and volunteer roles.
- Established a volunteer sign-up protocol.
- Communicated with the Grinnell team.
- HRFM also assisted with the October 11th Arabic Outreach Center Fundraiser, hosted at Heartland.
- Deb Hansen routinely participated in First Arabic Partnership Meetings this year.

First Arabic Volunteers included:

Susan Beblawi, Amgad Beblawi, Deb Hansen, Doug Olson, Julie Olson, Natalie Wulfsen, LuAnn Smith, Mary Van der Linden, Judy Kading, Eden Pearson, Micah Rayner, Diane Abell, and Moira Nash.

JUSTICE IN ACTION (submitted by Deb Hansen)

As Heartlanders, we are committed to issues that impact the larger world and our community, such as immigration, gender equity, climate change, social justice, and Palestinian rights. During 2025 Justice in Action's focused on:

- staying informed on these critical concerns;
- sharing strategies for effective advocacy;
- advancing causes that matter to our congregation, friends, and neighbors;
- facilitating lobbying efforts, and
- bringing more people into Heartland's movement for justice.

Our advocacy work through this faith-based effort at Heartland is based on Jesus' teachings. Jesus consistently advocated for the poor and vulnerable, urging His followers to care for those in need. In Matthew 25:31-46, He speaks about the importance of feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, and caring for the sick and imprisoned. The principle of treating others as we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12) is a cornerstone of Jesus's teachings. This principle can be applied to advocating for fair and just legislation that benefits everyone.

In 2025 the Justice in Action team:

Capacity Building:

- Developed print resources to build skills in advocating
- Offered a workshop to Heartland congregants on how to advocate
- Deb and Diane met with Phil Jeneary, lobbyist for Iowa Food Bank Association. Deb and LuAnn met with Cyndi Pederson, lobbyist for Iowa Firefighters Association (IFA) and others. Both lobbyists gave us advice on how to effectively use our voices to persuade legislators.
- Deb met with Connie Ryan of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa to explore ways congregations can advocate for social justice and consider how Heartland might network with IFA.
- Developed and disseminated a list of resources for networking and conducting advocacy efforts.
- Shared sources for receiving alerts about proposals and changes to state and federal policies and legislation
- Disseminated information about **Presbyterian Advocacy Hour and other actions of PCUSA** Presbyterian Office of Public Witness (OPW)
- JIA members attended the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa meetings and banquet.

Advocacy Strategies:

- Organized participation in rallies (Two No Kings events)
- Hosted sign making and letter writing events

- Encouraged congregants to contact their legislators by providing contact information and sample messages
- Encouraged congregants to vote and participate in get-out-the vote activities
- Routinely informed congregants about policies and proposed legislation relating to social justice and issues that affect the public
 - Email messages
 - Submissions to Heartland Happenings

Palm Sunday Path: This is a movement of faith leaders from across many denominations and states that are united in our alarm at the rise of authoritarianism and white Christian nationalism. Alex has been involved from the beginning in this initiative and team members recently participated in initial planning about Palm Sunday Path events across the state. Actions are planned at County Boards in February and March, Palm Sunday afternoon marches, and a pilgrimage to Philadelphia on July 3rd.

THANK YOU, MARY! Mary MacKenzie has served on this committee and helped in many ways through the years. We thank her for her work. Although this is her last year on our committee, her impact will be felt for a long time to come.

We saw and experienced many blessings while working with others at Heartland and in our community in 2025. If you would like to join the Mission Committee's activities, please reach out to the office or me!

Diane Abell, Chair

Finance & Facilities Committee

The Finance and Facilities Committee (FFC) focused on three items this year: mortgage refinancing, building repairs, and the operating budget.

Mortgage refinancing

The long-scheduled mortgage refinancing took place in September. Because interest rates have risen significantly, we needed to raise funds to avoid a large impact on the operating budget. The Mission Possible campaign took place in the summer and was a huge success thanks to the generosity of Heartland's members and friends. In August our loan balance was \$767,205. In September we refinanced the mortgage at \$633,551, at a rate of 6.5% for a 15-year term. The terms included an interest-only payment schedule for the first two years with the provision that we will retire \$75,000 in principle during that period, which we have already done as additional campaign gifts were received. The balance is now \$547,000, and when remaining pledges have been paid it will be under \$500,000—that's a reduction of over \$267,000 as the result of the campaign.

The first goal of the campaign—reducing the mortgage to the point that debt service can remain steady despite the higher interest rate—was met in full. The second goal—reducing debt service and freeing up more funds for annual operations, to be used for mission and other expenses as determined by the church—was also met due to the significant reduction in principal but will be realized over time as payments are reset. In the near term, thanks to the campaign gifts we do not have to pay principal on the mortgage for the first two years, producing approximately \$75,000 in available funds.

Building repairs

At its current level, the operating budget is sufficient (barring emergencies) to provide for regular building maintenance. We have accumulated reserves over the past several years in case of significant capital expenses, but we needed to use all of those funds this year due to the failure of multiple furnaces and air conditioners, some of which were original to the first phase of our building (meaning they are 29 years old). We have had an audit of our heating and cooling systems, and multiple units will need to be replaced over the next few years. The FFC is recommending to the Session that we use the \$75,000 in mortgage principal payment relief over the next two years for this purpose.

Operating budget

A committee will begin work on the 2026 budget early in the new year. We need to know the actual revenues and expenses for 2025 (which will be available soon) before we can make budget decisions for next year. We anticipate that we will fall slightly short of our revenue projections for 2025, plus our cash flow has become very tight due to the unexpected building repairs and the payment of some larger obligations associated with restricted liability funds. This caused us to delay payment on many of 2025's expenses for as long as possible, including some mission expenditures. Now that a plan is in place for the two largest variables (the mortgage and the heating and air conditioning expenses), we can turn our attention to the ongoing operating revenues and expenses. In general, unless we see a notable increase in annual pledges, we anticipate that the operating budget will be quite tight in 2026 and 2027, but that we will be able to continue most of Heartland's operations at their current level.

It was a very busy year for the FFC, but thanks to your generous support our outlook is stable in the short term, and we have good reason to be optimistic about Heartland's long-term financial sustainability.