

# the **HERALD**

PEORIA FIRST UMC | AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER 2025

It Begins with a Question







# Update and Request Regarding the Liberia Library Project

Thank you again for your generous gift during the missions Pie Auction, primarily for the Korsein School project in Liberia. In November 2024, our church family raised a little over \$16,000 with the goal of building a library at a United Methodist grade school in Korsein, Liberia—a school operated as a ministry of that local UMC congregation and sponsored by the Liberian UM Conference.

Since that time, unexpected and unfortunate developments have made it impossible to move forward with this project as planned. The church in Korsein, along with several other congregations, remain in a state of uncertainty— entangled in a potential disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church that lacks authorization from the Liberia Annual Conference and violates the Discipline. There is now a legal dispute over several properties, and the matter is now in the Liberian court system. Bishop Samuel Quire of the Liberian UMC has requested that all funds related to disputed properties be paused until court proceedings are complete. Realistically, the legal process could take several years, and even upon resolution, the outcome of the Korsein church and ministries remains uncertain.

Our intention is to use the funds for Korsein should an appropriate pathway come into view that ensures that funds donated will reach their destination and be utilized for their intended purpose. However, we also feel that with such great needs in Liberia it is more appropriate to not hold these funds for years while other important needs go unmet. Therefore, out of a desire to remain faithful to your original generosity—we are exploring whether it would be reasonable to redirect the funds toward a similar mission in Liberia, still aligned with our commitment to education, empowerment, and United Methodist partnerships.

Possibilities include (but are not limited to):

Scholarships for nursing students at the United Methodist University School of Nursing in Ganta, Liberia. Or assistance for another Liberian kindergarten through twelfth grade school in need of infrastructure, learning materials, or scholarship support.

We are writing to ask for your permission to repurpose your donation toward one of these, or similar, alternative projects, all of which directly benefit communities in Liberia under the guidance and accountability of our local Peoria First congregation and the United Methodist Church in Liberia.

If you are comfortable with this redirection, no action is required. If you would prefer your donation to be returned, or if you have a strong preference for a particular alternative ministry or outreach effort of Peoria First UMC, let us know by August 15, 2025; you can send an email to [info@fumcpeoria.org](mailto:info@fumcpeoria.org) or speak with Julie Rolffs our Missions Team Chair.

Our goal is to honor the spirit of your gift while being faithful stewards in ever-changing circumstances. If we do not hear from you by that date, we will assume your consent to redirect the funds to an alternate Liberian mission(s) suggested by our Missions Team and approved by our Church Council will be acceptable.

Thank you for your continued trust, prayers, and support for this important work.

Grace & Blessings,

Rev. Dr. Timothy Ozment  
Directing Pastor, Peoria First UMC

Julie Rolffs  
Missions Team Chair

VOLUME 92, NUMBER 3  
Aug, Sept, Oct 2025

Publisher  
*Peoria First UMC*

Editor  
*Julie Bell*

Directing Pastor  
*Tim Ozment*

Associate Pastor  
*Miguel Rios*

Copy Editing  
*Sandi Fell*

Other Contributors  
*Christina Koepfel  
Eugene Maison  
Julie Rolffs  
Andrew Sanchez  
Kirsten Tharp  
Chanel Withers*

Contact

*116 NE Perry Ave.  
Peoria, IL 61603  
309.673.3641  
[info@fumcpeoria.org](mailto:info@fumcpeoria.org)  
[www.peoria1.com](http://www.peoria1.com)*

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](http://www.peoria1.com), via social media platforms (@fumcpeoria), or via our weekly email newsletter, eHighlights.

DEADLINES: Contact Julie Bell at [jbell@fumcpeoria.org](mailto:jbell@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.

# Keys to the Kingdom

by Pastor Tim Ozment  
Directing Pastor

Over the years, when it comes to leadership, I’ve often spoken about the importance of handing over the “keys to the kingdom.” But what does that really mean? It’s more than just passing on responsibility, it’s about granting access to the deeper “why” behind our ministry. These keys don’t just open doors to tasks and programs; they unlock understanding, purpose, and vision.

On the surface, what we do may seem straightforward. We teach through Sunday school classes, small groups, and Bible studies. We serve by feeding the hungry through mission projects and ministries like Loaves & Fish and engage children through our Lincon School ministries and Morton Square Park Summer Soccer. We reach beyond our borders by supporting missionaries in the Czech Republic, Honduras, Liberia, and other parts of the world. From time to time, we even go on the mission field ourselves by sending mission teams to work with and strengthen our partnerships.

But the why behind these actions, that’s where the real “keys of the kingdom” make a difference. We do these things because Jesus calls us to make disciples—not just converts, not just churchgoers, but healthy, growing disciples.

In Matthew 28, the Great Commission reminds us that our mission is rooted in Christ’s own command. This calling shapes how we help people grow:

- Higher in worship, connecting authentically with God.
- Wider in outreach, serving others with compassion and purpose.
- Closer in community, building authentic relationships of love and fellowship with one another.
- Deeper in the Word, anchoring our lives in Scripture and spiritual practices.



**PASTOR TIM OZMENT**  
*Directing Pastor,  
Peoria First United Methodist Church*

The why matters because we are Christian disciples who believe that following Jesus is the way to true life, purpose, and transformation. As disciples, we are responding to Jesus’ call to “Come, follow me,” choosing to learn from his teachings, imitate his example, and live by God’s love. We don’t follow out of obligation but out of a desire to grow closer to God, to be changed from the inside out, and to become agents of God’s grace in the world. Being a disciple means continually surrendering our lives to the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to shape our character, our choices, and our mission — so that in all we do, we reflect God’s light and share God’s hope with others.

Giving away the keys to the kingdom means inviting others into this understanding. It means developing leaders who don’t just know how to do ministry—but who also know why it matters. Because when people understand the why, they don’t just show up... they lead, they grow, and they multiply the mission.

An upcoming sermon series is going to focus not only on what we’re doing at Peoria First, but why we’re engaged in the work we’re doing. Prayerfully, we’ll all get on the same page, with the same vision, and answer the same call of God to make healthy disciples here and around the world.





# Activity in the Community

by Chanel Withers  
Director of Community Ministries

Summer is always a great time to connect with friends and neighbors. Peoria First did just that as many families gathered on Tuesday evenings for soccer at Morton Square Park. This partnership between the Peoria Park District and Peoria First is 25 years old and going strong. Morton Square Park soccer had over 170 participants aged five to twelve. This created a wonderful family atmosphere every Tuesday evening at the park. Each week, at least five food vendors came to the park and sold cold treats such as fresh fruit with lime juice, tatin, and hot sauce. Some weeks neighborhood families sold tacos and quesadillas for the spectators to enjoy.

It wasn't just about soccer. We noticed the park became a safe gathering place for many young people who would connect with their school friends and wander from field to field to see who they knew. We ended the season with a hot dog dinner celebration in Wesley Hall where players received a medal and were congratulated for their participation. Overall, it was a great opportunity to reach out to our neighborhood friends and build relationships and invite them to church. This community ministry was successful because of the many volunteers from the congregation and the collaboration of the staff to provide a fun, outdoor activity for the summer.

Looking forward to fall, we have several exciting ministry opportunities at Lincoln K-8 School.

*School supply drive:* School supplies for the students and teachers were collected in July. The supplies were blessed and prayed over before delivering them to the school. In addition to the donated supplies, we collected over \$1600 in monetary donations to purchase more. A huge thank you to all who donated!

*Special Meals for Teachers and Staff:* We plan to welcome the teachers and staff back to school in their second week with a coffee and donut breakfast. We are also looking forward to providing lunch during the fall parent/teacher conferences in late September.

*Lincoln School Staff and Teacher Appreciation Sunday:* Personal invitations will be made to the staff at Lincoln to attend worship at Peoria First for prayer and appreciation on Sunday, August 24 at all three services.

*Volunteering at Lincoln School:* Opportunities include reading with the students, adopting a class (similar to a room parent role), tutoring help, packing birthday treats once a month, delivering food weekly to the school food pantry and possibly leading a small group book/bible study for the teachers and staff.

Lastly, please watch for a new Mission Moment about our past involvement with Lincoln School including Pastor Tim, Julie Bell, and an interview with Mike Illuzzi, previously the principal at Irving School, and why this ministry is so important to Peoria First.

Please contact Chanel at [cwithers@fumcpeoria.org](mailto:cwithers@fumcpeoria.org) if you are interested in volunteering for any of the opportunities at Lincoln School. We look forward to a fabulous 2025/2026 school year for the Lincoln Mustangs.



*Yes! You Can Sing!*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is such a gift to have the opportunity to share worship and music with you and such a joy to see people singing in the congregation. I often hear the words “I can’t sing.” Why do so many people say, “I can’t sing?”

We have all grown up surrounded by CDs, playlists, Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora Radio, (ok and even mix tapes and vinyl). All these polished recordings create a sound that none of us can produce. Never mind all the autotune, and average 100-plus edits per five minutes of music! We can’t be perfect. We also hear the voice qualities of our favorite opera or pop singer, be it Beyoncé, George Strait, Pavarotti, or anyone on your current playlist. They are all truly one in a million singers. We can’t do that, but we can sing.

I am stubbornly attached to the notion that everyone can sing. As I listen to stadiums full of soccer fans singing together, baseball fans singing at the seventh inning stretch, football fans screaming in unison, or all of us at the climax of the soloist singing “and the land of the freeeee” hooting and hollering—I hear that everyone can sing. Be it a tune, a hoot or holler, or merely an inspired yell; it is all singing. I have never met a person that can’t sing the right note given the right amount of time to try.

When we sing for God, singing is not performing, it is not judged, it is not good or bad. A few of my favorite verses on singing and worshipping are Psalm 33:1-3, Psalm 100:1-2, Psalm 101:1, and Psalm 105:1-2. I will let you look them up! For God, singing is an opportunity to participate in praise, beauty, creation, and open ourselves through vulnerability to be the most human we can be. But to do this, we have to face two challenges of our humanity—performance and vulnerability. Though we love to clap for music provided by our worship band, the bells, the choir, and especially our children’s choir, none of this music is created for performance! This music is all created by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ offering music to enhance the spirit and message of the service. We aren’t perfect, and sometimes we laugh together as we just make a “joyful noise.” All of us quiet our voices inside telling us that we aren’t good enough and we learn that it is a joy to sing the best we can and not worry. It is then that the text starts to sink in, deeper than just reading them, speaking them, and deeper than even the words themselves!

by Andrew Sanchez  
Director of Traditional Music and Worship

A second challenge is that of spiritual vulnerability. In our culture, being expressive with emotions in public seems only to be safe at sporting events! Why is it that we can sing and cheer, and high five strangers there? After the Cubs, Cardinals, or White Sox hit a homerun (depending on who your team is), I know that everyone in that stadium feels as excited as the other—so it feels safe to stand and cheer and jump and high five, and not worry about how one is acting. Would I do that in church? Nope. But I think God would be delighted if I did. Singing opens up emotions and creates deeper meaning to words we hear and words we sing. The vibrations of our voices are a sort of massage from the inside out and touch our deepest thoughts and feelings. Our brain knows this, and that vulnerability can be a bit scary. But when we risk that vocal high five with God as we sing, we begin to recognize that vulnerability is not uncomfortable, it becomes a feeling of strength, truth, knowing, and of sharing. We recognize how similar we are to each other and that, like at the stadium, we are safe to express the most important things - love and faith.

God made us benefit from singing. Singing positively affects our body health and mental health. It draws people to sing together! Hearts begin to beat at the same time, breathing starts to unify, and then so do hearts and minds and voices. As I stand in front during hymns, I see the shining eyes and hearts reflected more.

If you still want to say, “I can’t sing,” then I say with a loud voice to you, “speak the words loudly as others sing around you!” Join in singing when the organ or band is playing loud and give it a try. Don’t listen to your sound but pay attention to the vibration and the effort and your connection with the words. You are sharing this moment with so many siblings in Christ that feel just like you. And if your voice just isn’t cooperating, I have a secret...when there are notes that some can’t sing, just mouth the words, think the words, and look like the emotions we are singing about! Try it! Just by thinking about the text and changing your face to look like those singers that we can never be—changes our brain, our heart, and boosts our faith. Let’s go make an even more joyful noise. And please join us in the loft. We are a welcoming bunch of troublemakers and love to sing and shout!



# More than a Sign: A Welcome that is Alive

by Kirsten Tharp  
Director of Congregational Care

The Closer team began meeting a year ago and looked at Peoria First through different eyes. We looked at spaces, signs, and the information available and tried to view the church as though we had never set foot inside. Perhaps you’ve noticed a few changes that have occurred because of this process. The former Information Desk in the Gathering Space is now the Welcome Desk. The word “Welcome” is now in English and Spanish in the Gathering Space and above the stairs at the Perry Street glass doors. Take a look at what you see when you are in the parking lot. These same words are also visible as you look at the church through the windows above the glass doors from outside. The words “Welcome” and “Bienvenido” have been intentionally placed to let everyone know they are invited and wanted here at Peoria First. This is only step one. While signs are helpful, they’re not what makes people feel welcome.

## Welcome



## Bienvenido

A real welcome is not found on a wall or made of wood or metal. A real welcome is made of eye contact, a friendly smile, a genuine “We’re glad you’re here.” It’s made of someone sliding over in the pew to make room. It’s introducing yourself to someone you don’t know. It’s found in the way we remember names, listen to stories, and offer a warm handshake or a heartfelt hug.

Church visitors often say what stands out most to them aren’t the signs, the building, the sanctuary, or the service - it’s the people. The way they were greeted, the way someone helped them find their place, the way they felt seen and not just attended to.

In August, ushers and greeters will have new name tags that ask, “How can I help?” The Welcome Desk will have a small gift for first-time visitors available on Sunday mornings. The “Ministries” board at the Welcome Desk will have up to date information about what is happening at Peoria First. The rest - it’s up to you.

Let’s be reminded that we are the real welcome sign of Peoria First. Our kindness, hospitality, and attentiveness are what make the difference between a visitor and someone who wants to come back. The next time you see someone new, someone you don’t recognize, or even someone who’s been away for a while, remember: YOU are the welcome. Let your heart be the welcome sign they remember.

# Let's Talk. . .

## *Christ Centered Communication*

Peoria First is unique. Being a downtown church, a church with members who speak different languages, and a church with members who drive from other areas outside the city. This diversity is a great blessing . . . and a challenge. To effectively reach and serve, we must adopt an intentional and compassionate communication strategy. Effective communication must be both inclusive of the downtown and Hispanic communities and intentional toward suburban members who choose to stay connected from a distance.

## *Perception and Identity*

Some people view downtown areas as unsafe or secular. Others might assume a downtown church is only for the wealthy or tourists. It is a challenge to clearly communicate our mission to stay true to our identity while reaching a wide community.

Communication in the church is more than exchanging words—it is how we build relationships, encourage spiritual growth, and express the love of Christ. In all honesty, it can be hard to communicate with those not like us. It may be hard. Easy to not engage. But is that God’s call? Communication takes on a deeper importance. We are called to speak in ways that reflect Christ, promote unity, and build up the body.

## *Communication Builds the Church*

Whether through preaching, teaching, singing, or fellowship, communication in the church should aim to strengthen others. In a diverse church like Peoria First, this means we must be intentional with practical ways to ensure that every person feels included.

Effective communication makes people feel seen and valued. When we take time to make our words accessible, we are showing Christ-like love in action.

## *Speak the Truth in Love*

Ephesians 4:15 reminds us to speak the truth—but in love. It’s not enough to be right; we must also be kind.

This means when we teach, correct, or encourage one another, our tone and approach matter. Misunderstandings happen all around us. Grace-filled communication — listening patiently, speaking kindly, and avoiding assumptions—creates a space where everyone can grow together.

## *One Spirit, Many Languages*

From the beginning, the church was diverse. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in many tongues so everyone could understand the Gospel (Acts

by Julie Bell

Director of Communications

2:4-6). Later in Revelation 7:9, we see a vision of heaven filled with people from every nation, tribe, and language, all worshipping together.

This is a picture of what the church can be (and quite frankly, should be): united in Christ, even when we come from different places, speak different languages, and live life differently. Communication is not just about clarity - it’s about unity. It’s about ensuring that no one is left out of what God is doing.

## *Living It Out*

Are you practicing Christ-centered communication? Living out Christ-centered communication means reflecting the heart, character, and teachings of Jesus in every interaction—whether spoken, written, or nonverbal. It’s not just about being polite or nice; it’s about communicating in a way that glorifies God, builds up others, and aligns with the truth and grace found in Christ.

Christ-centered communication isn't just about what you say—it’s about how you say it, when you say it, and why you say it. It's about being a vessel of God’s truth and grace in every conversation. Jesus never wasted a word. He knew when to speak, when to teach, and when to be silent. Be intentional with your words. Silence can also be powerful. Sometimes Christ-centered communication means not speaking.

Whether someone walks in off the street or drives 30 minutes to attend, the church’s message should remain steady: hope, love, service, and Jesus at the center. By listening well and valuing every person’s connection to the body of Christ, the church becomes a true spiritual home for all.







BUSY



CRAZY

SUMMER

by Christina Koepfel  
Director of Youth and AV Ministries

If you have sent me an email in the past two months, you would have gotten this as a response, “Crazy Busy Summer” with a list of events and dates. The youth have kept me hopping this summer or really, I’ve been keeping them hopping.

We started June 15 – 22 with Beulah Youth Institute and carpoled with our friends at Crossroads to travel to Eldorado. During camp, we dove into 1 Peter and discovered how we are “Chosen”. Although it rained for the first half of the week and our feet were covered in mud, the Spirit of the Lord worked within our hearts and minds. The faith of many youths was renewed and strengthened.

During the week of June 23-26, Pastor Tim and I led the youth through Podcraft and AV Camp. You may have seen their podcasts in service recently. It was a real joy seeing their creativity and ingenuity when given the task and the knowhow.

Our next adventure took us to South Dakota June 28 – July 4. (Make sure to check out Julie Rolffs’ article on the trip.)

Of course, youth summer includes a trip to Six Flags. This year, we traveled north to Gurnee on July 10. This is really an opportunity for our youth to have fun, get to know each other, and invite friends. Roller coasters were ridden, clothes were soaked, and stomachs were turned, but thankfully no one threw up this year.

The last youth event of the summer was Destino Juvenil at East Bay Camp from July 17-19. The theme this year was “Sobreviviendo en tiempos difíciles” (Surviving in Difficult Times). It was a needed message to remind our youth that they are loved and known by God and that they are never alone. A message we all need to hear.

Yes, this summer was crazy busy, but it was totally worth it. It would have been worth it if just one student had been shown Jesus, but I believe so many more, including myself, than that were impacted by His love and message. It truly was a powerful summer. The growth of so many of our youth is visible. They are on fire for Jesus. My prayer is that the fire doesn’t go out but continues to burn.

It truly was a crazy busy summer, but it was so crazy good!

*Summer by the stats:*

Miles driven: 2685+ (There was that wrong turn on the way to Domino’s)

Youth impacted: 65 (Some of which went to multiple events)

Weeds pulled: 1000s (Daniel pulled one with a 3 ft root!)

Hours in Ministry: 335+ (Not including the nights awoken by sleep talking or snoring)

Adults: 16 (Bless these people for sleeping on air mattresses, drinking way too much caffeine, getting soaked on the log flume, typing closed-captions, and being the hands and feet of Jesus that embraced our youth in the highs and the lows)



# Hear the Children Sing

## Lincoln Children’s Choir

by Eugene Maison  
Director, Fine Arts

*Fall 2024 – Spring 2025*

We are pleased to share that earlier this year, the Peoria Fine Arts Society partnered with us to support the Lincoln Children’s Choir Program, run by Peoria First United Methodist Church. We appreciate their partnership and support and look forward to continued collaboration and growth in the years ahead.

*About the Choir*

The Lincoln Children’s Choir is open to all 2nd through 4th grade students at Lincoln School and is offered free of charge. The program is welcoming and inclusive, with no vocal audition required. The only requirements are enthusiastic participation and respectful behavior that reflects our shared values.

The choir meets once a week for an hour and a half over the course of approximately 26 weeks during the school year. All choir members and their parents or guardians must sign a behavior agreement outlining conduct expectations. Consistent attendance is essential; students who miss three rehearsals become ineligible to participate in performances.

*Fall Semester 2024 – ‘Snow’*

The Fall 2024 semester began with 52 students registered, and we ended the term with an average of 34 participants in performances.

The theme for the semester was ‘Snow.’ The choir learned six winter-themed songs, which they performed at three concert events: Grandparents Day at Lincoln School (November), Peoria Women’s Club Christmas Tea (December), and Lincoln School Christmas Concert (December).

*Spring Semester 2025 – ‘Space’*

The Spring 2025 theme was ‘Space.’ Again, the choir learned and performed six themed pieces for the season.

Spring performances included: Arts in Education Spring Celebration at the Peoria Riverfront Museum and Spring

Concert at Lincoln School (same afternoon).

In support of our performers, we provided lunch for all participating Lincoln K–8 students, which included members from: Lincoln K–8 School Band, Orchestra, Middle School Choir, and Lincoln Children’s Choir

This year, we served approximately 140 students during the event.

*Leadership and Support*

The Lincoln Children’s Choir thrives under the dedicated leadership and support of the following individuals:

- Program Director: Eugene Maison (Peoria First UMC Fine Arts Ministry)
- Choir Director: Ms. Nichole Fauser (Lincoln K-8 Music Teacher)
- Pianist: Ms. Aleta Hoff (Freelance)
- Volunteers from Peoria First UMC: Ms. Sue Koppel, Mr. David Giffin, and Ms. Pamela Mormann
- Snacks Provided by: Chanel Withers (Peoria First UMC Community Ministry)

Ms. Nichole Fauser and Ms. Aleta were awarded monthly honoraria

in appreciation of their valuable contributions to the choir program.

*Looking Ahead*

The Lincoln Children’s Choir remains a joyful, enriching, and character-building experience for our young students. We’re proud of the growth, self-confidence, and sense of community our singers developed this year, and we look forward to exploring new themes, sharing more performances, and reaching new musical milestones in the year ahead.

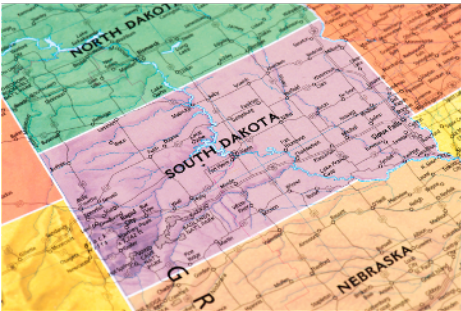
Each year, we bid farewell to our 4th-grade singers as they move on, creating space for new voices. As a result, we focus on recruiting new members, mostly 2nd graders, to continue building the choir and nurturing the next group of young performers.

*Our heartfelt thanks to all our volunteers for their dedication to the Fine Arts Ministry.*

*The Fine Arts Ministry is made possible by the generous support of the First United Methodist Church Foundation through the Foster Endowment.*







# Youth in Mission

by Julie Rolffs  
Mission Team, Chair

From June 28 to July 4, ten youth under the leadership of Youth Director Christina, Pastor Miguel, parent Casey, and I served at the Lake Traverse Dakota Reservation in northeast South Dakota, 680 miles from Peoria. We started with a day of playing together in Wisconsin Dells, then traveled to South Dakota, stopping at the Tri-State Border to place our bodies in 3 states at once: Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota!

Our home base for the week was a Lutheran church basement in Sisseton, SD, where our program, organized by YouthWorks, focused on serving the tribe and community in various ways while learning about the Dakota culture.

*“Serving won’t always be easy,” - Allen, after shoveling gravel in 90-degree temperatures and tossing it onto a pile eight feet over his head.*

*“The favorite place I served was at a local garden, and I helped by pulling weeds. This was my favorite because right before we took a lunch break, the owner came to us and she told us how much we had helped and done, even though to us it seemed like we had done nothing.” - Logan*

*“We got to pull weeds and play games with the [nursing home] residents ... I didn’t know I was gonna enjoy pulling weeds, but I enjoyed playing with the residents and making their day” - Nathan, sharing about his favorite place to serve.*

Our youth really seemed to enjoy their serving locations. During the days, they served with youth from a church in Monroe, WI, and another in Lafayette, IN, for a total of about 40 people who traveled to serve in Sisseton that week. YouthWorks provided the staff who ensured we were fed and organized throughout the week.

*“Serving in His name helped me realize, it is another form of worship.” - Diego*

*“I learned that even though you don’t feel the best, you still gotta try your best and help others.” - Daniel, who was under the weather for almost our entire week away, worked hard every day.*

*“The most impactful part of the trip was whenever we went out for our service day. I enjoyed impacting other people and helping them.” - Nyameye*

“This trip to South We do trips like this for many reasons - relationship building, faith growth, experiencing other cultures, and building teamwork and friendships among our youth, just to name a few. Serving is the vehicle to so many giant steps of faith in adults and youth.

*Dakota has impacted my walk with the Lord in many ways. It has opened my eyes to new possibilities, like making myself more open to connect with new people and just listening to what they need. On this trip, I just listened to what God wanted me to do, and I think it was just to listen and be patient.” - Estrella*

YouthWorks does a great job of providing a theme for the week and then making every time of worship, devotions, and small group time work around this theme. The theme for this trip was DUST: Follow Jesus Closely. The introduction in our personal journals includes these words:

*“Long ago, there was a saying that a student should follow their teacher so closely that they would become covered in their teacher’s dust. The point was that the student should commit so fully that they become like their teacher. As we follow our teacher, Jesus, the same goes for us! This week ... think deeply about who you are following, what you are becoming, and why it matters. It could be that starting something new in your life begins with getting a little dusty.” - YouthWorks Journal 2025*

Each evening included a time of worship music, and a brief message built upon this theme. These words from one of our students capture how many of us felt after experiencing this time of worship:

*“The most impactful part of this trip was the worship time. It truly showed how beautiful our religion is with the music and singing. All of the church groups and crews were singing, and once our voices combined as one, we sounded beautiful to the point where it’s emotional because it shows how much God loves us and how much we love God.” - Nathan*

In addition to serving during the day, the team had an opportunity to learn from a few Dakota people while on the reservation.

*“I learned ... that the newer generations of the Dakota people [are] slowly learning their language ... under 1% of people know the Dakota language. Dakota people suffered a lot for dumb reasons ... they also have a great connection with nature. One of the men we heard from is making a bible that has the Dakota language and the English language, which is so cool!” - Jazmin*

*“I learned [that] the Dakota people [faced] many laws that kept them from living a normal life, such as it was illegal to own a drum and that they could not be with more than three other native [people] in public.” - Logan*

*“It is a blessing that I got to go and meet and encounter this [Dakota] culture because it was God’s provision that this community would heal. Always support this ... church, because these reservations truly are a wonder of God’s work being in progress and bearing fruit in the process.” - Diego*

*“I learned a lot of interesting history about the Dakota people and their culture. I also learned the impact the government had on them, which changed the way they lived.” - Nyameye*

*“I have yet to meet an indigenous person whose life has not in some way been impacted by the Native American boarding schools’ part of our nation’s history. And very few of those impacts are positive. Broken families, lost languages, lost traditions, and so much more.” - Julie*

*“During one of our cultural learning nights, one of the students asked about how the Dakota people treated people with Autism or ADHD. Darrel Whitefeather said that they would have embraced their gifts and helped them to feel useful. He mentioned that it is believed that many of the warriors, hunters, and leaders of the tribe had different abilities like ADHD and Autism, which helped them to perform their tasks more easily, because they could focus better and think more deeply. I love this! It really celebrates how God creates us with different abilities and learning styles.” - Christina*

It would be unusual for someone to go on a trip like this and not learn something about themselves; I find that true even though this was my 10th youth mission trip since 2009!

*“What I learned about myself was that ... meeting others was really nice, and I really liked how the church staff was really caring as we went on this trip ... and I learned to never be shy to speak up and to get better at my communication.” - Isaias*

*“I learned that patience and commitment go together because once you have the mindset that ‘you got this,’ everything else will follow along.” - Estrella*

*“I learned that I can sleep on an air mattress for 4 nights and still function!” - Casey, parent leader*

*“What I learned about myself on this trip was the many ways I can help others” - Manuel*

*“The unexpected blessing was realizing ... the best gift I can ask God for: being a role model for my little brother in Christ that I never had till now.” - Diego*

Of course, no trip like this is possible without the tremendous support of our congregation, parents, and financial supporters. Hear these words of thanks from our entire team:

*“Thank you to everyone who helped pay for the trip.” - Allen*

*“I am so thankful God has provided financial help from the Church, kept us safe, the prayers from our community, and the wise words of the adult leaders in this trip.” - Diego*

*“Thank you to the church for the financial support and prayer support for our trip.” - Manuel*

*“Thank you to the church for making me feel way better about myself; this seriously meant a lot to me.” - Isaias*

*“Thank you to everyone at the church who helped pay for our trip to South Dakota and attended our fundraising night. This trip really opened my eyes to many things that I had turned a blind eye to. As well, I would like to give thanks for the prayers that everyone at the church has been doing for the past week and thank our parents for allowing us to go and learn about the [Dakota] culture.” - Estrella*

*“I so appreciate the support our church provided the youth and adult leaders to attend this mission trip ... I now can see how important these trips are for connection among our youth with other youth as well as adults that are ultimately together to serve the community and Christ. Not only did we receive your finances, but we also appreciated your prayers for safe travel and just to be impacted in some way this week.” - Casey, parent leader*

And finally, a giant thank you to Ms. Rhonda and the kids in the Children’s Ministry for the fabulous goodie bags they made for each of us, with personalized water bottles and yummy treats! We all felt so loved and supported by our whole church family!







## Jazz Worship Service

"Summertime, and the livin' is easy!" says Brother Gershwin.

Along with ice cream and snow cones, slushies and milkshakes, water slides and playgrounds, and the tumultuous planning of summer vacations comes the time where we relieve the Peoria First choir of their duties in leading us in worship. This is a time of refreshment and rejuvenation for them and an opportunity to bring in other ensembles, instrumentalists, and music to our worship.

On Sunday, August 31 at 9am, we will have a combined worship service in the Sanctuary featuring a small jazz ensemble and jazz music. This service will model after the formal Summer Jazz Vespers, featuring great importance on music, scripture, and other inspiring texts to the glory of our Lord. I pray you will join us for what will be an inspiring and moving service and invite someone with you.

Soli Deo Gloria,  
Andrew Sanchez

## Giving @ First

Your tithes and offerings are very important to the future of our ministry work.

### 3 Ways to Give:

[peoria1.org](https://peoria1.org)

peoria1 App

Text

1.888.364.GIVE  
(4483)

Type '1' in message  
block

Scan below for  
online giving



Save  
the  
date

2025 Pie Auction  
November 7

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