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# ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

ERIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH VISION STATEMENT

*Unified in Christ, we actively seek to create harmony in a  
diverse community through compassion, mutual respect, and love.*

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## MESSAGE FROM REV. JOSEPH W. TABER IV

Hey folks!

It has been a **while** since I've written an annual report for the congregation! I think it's a wonderful practice to help the congregation know what's going on from my perspective, and from my role as Moderator of the Session.

First of all, it's important to note that our congregation is still in a season of transition. That season did not end with my installation last November. Entering a new system takes time. I will grow and change as I interact with y'all, and the congregation will grow and change as it adapts to my leadership. The mutual encouragement of one another's faith that Paul references in Romans 1:12 can be immediate, but grafting on to one another to become one body takes time. If you're feeling anxious about the church, that's a totally normal part of the process, and I invite you to come talk with me about those feelings so I can support you pastorally.

I told the Session back in August that the trend following a long term pastoral relationship following the one y'all had with Rev. Stuart is have a series of three to four shorter-term pastorates over the following ten years. I would like for us to buck that trend, and to be able to have a long and fruitful pastorate here. Part of my work with the Session is in addressing the emotional processes of the congregation head on. They have history and context that I lack, and as I navigate this season of transition for our community, their leadership has been a blessing beyond words. Your Session is faithful, wise, and easy to love.

Over the past year, in addition to receiving committee reports and managing the various details of life together, the Session has studied large-scale church trends, reviewed our vision and mission statements, and begun the process of wrestling with the differences between the 2018 strategy report and the realities of church life in 2025/2026. One of the biggest differences y'all will have seen over the past year is the monthly Session summary in the newsletter, which helps inform the congregation about the various details of Session meetings.

The ancient Israelites would stack stones in places where God had done amazing things (Joshua 4:19-24). We Erin-ites stack reports.

***"This document is so much more than record keeping. It is a signpost of our journey of faith. It is a testimony to what God has done through us over the past year."***

It has passed through many hands to come to you, so that as we wrestle with God you will know that the LORD is our God, the LORD alone, and you will love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. So read on, and may God fill your heart with love, your mind with wisdom, and your body with strength so that you can love the LORD your God with your whole self, and your neighbor as yourself.

Your Brother in Christ,  
Pastor Joseph

## DISCIPLESHIP

**Submitted by Joy Bornhoeft, Convener**

**Team Members: Brooks Eggers, Chloe Levering, Don Quinley, Kellan Sarles, Ann Snodgrass, and Joseph Taber**

Rally Day, the kickoff to a new year of Sunday School classes, was held in August with the theme *Live in Community*. Using the multi-age “Follow Me” curriculum of the same name, the theme was explored in depth across all Sunday School classes throughout August. Adults, children, and youth participated in a group art project representing the theme. For the remainder of the year, classes used a variety of curriculums. Several classes were offered across all age groups – two adult classes, a combined middle and high school youth class, and an elementary class. The adult Hard Sayings class studied the book “The Hard Sayings of Jesus” by F. F. Bruce and the Foundations class used the *Feasting on the Word* curriculum. Pastor Joseph taught two special series for the Foundations Class: an Advent series on the book “Sabbath as Resistance: Saying ‘No’ to the Culture of Now” by Walter Brueggemann and a Lent series on “Wisdom.” Children and youth classes used lessons from *Feasting on the Word*. Nursery care for children 4 years and younger was provided for Sunday School and Worship throughout the year.

Numerous children and youth programs were active this year. In August, 2 children and 1 chaperone attended the PET Preteen Retreat at the John Knox Center and learned how to “Shine Bright!” Planet Worship met twice a month during the school year and studied a variety of topics: living in community, books of the bible, the Lord’s Supper, thankful living, the Erin Church Vision Statement, season of Lent, and lectionary lessons following the Sunday readings. Pioneer Club was held monthly for 4-7 elementary kids with a variety of activities and crafts based on classic Dr. Seuss books.

A combined middle-high Youth Group met regularly on Sundays throughout the school year. In October, 3 youth and 2 chaperones went on a Mission Trip to Jonesville, VA with the Appalachia Service Project. For several days, they learned about construction safety and helped to make repairs on a local home. For months, the Discipleship Team worked with Creative Expressions on the Gifts of Children and Youth Worship Service held in February. Sixteen youth and children participated by planning, writing, and leading the worship service on *Living in Courage*.

Several adult study groups met during the year. Bridgebuilders, our on-line group, met for eight weeks in the fall to discuss *Immigration and the Christian Response: Understanding People, Policy, and Principles*. Thirty-five people from Erin and several other congregations registered to participate. A Women’s Bible Study was offered in both the fall and spring for a daytime and evening group of ladies. In the fall, 16 women attended a six-week series on the devotional “Unraveled: Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart” by a *Sanctified Art*. During Lent, 9 women attended a five-week study on “Dying His Death, Living His Life.” Pub Theology met once a month at Abridged Brewery, with an average of 12 people, to share a meal and discuss life and faith issues.

A walk-through worship experience took place in the sanctuary on Ash Wednesday for all ages. Six prayer stations were set up to explore the theme of “Wisdom’s Call” with scripture readings and hands-on activities. Around 20 people completed the walk through.

Special events included a children’s scavenger hunt on Easter morning and teacher appreciation and graduate recognition in May. Ten teachers were recognized and two graduates celebrated.

Vacation Bible School was held over four days in July 2026. Ten kids attended the Jungle Safari VBS and collected \$107 for our mission project: Malaria No More.

## WORSHIP

The past twelve months have seen new leadership in our committee as Pastor Joseph stepped into his role as convener of the Worship Committee. He brought new ideas for worship, and an opportunity to examine longstanding practices.

The past year has also seen an expansion of the team of prayer writers. Each week, a different member of that prayer writing team faithfully composes the prayers and responsive liturgy for our shared worship. We also welcomed new members to the Audio-Visual team, which produces our live-streamed worship each week, and facilitates the sound system needs of our in-person service as well.

We've added a new way of celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (communion) together, Intinction, which alternates with our traditional plate passing. Overall the congregation has seemed receptive to this new practice, which will continue to stand alongside the plate passing.

During Advent, we welcomed members of the Knoxville Community Band, as well as some of our own members, to provide a brass choir to accompany our handbell choir. We hope to expand our instrumental offerings in worship, knowing that we have at least one flute, clarinet, and trumpet player in the congregation, as well as two trombones. If you have instrumental gifts you'd like to offer, please reach out to any member of our team!

Holy Week this past year saw one of Pastor Joseph's new (to us) ideas: the Good Friday Prophecy and Fulfillment service, which was a moving experience of scripture and sacred songs to move through the crucifixion story together. 60 people attended that service, the largest for a Good Friday service in recent memory.

We also organized a trip to the Montreat Worship and Music Conference. Ten people traveled to Montreat, and five participated in the conference, which filled our souls with music, and gave us new ideas for worship and discipleship. We are currently in the early stages of planning our return to that conference in the summer of 2027. Please let us know if you would like to be kept in the loop for that.

With the rise of large-language models, commonly referred to as "AI," our committee composed and published a statement emphasizing that we believe that worship is about authentic connection with God and with one another, and that we choose not to use AI in worship preparation, because it can hamper those authentic connections.

Worship is the work of all of God's children, and each of us have gifts to offer. We'd like to especially thank all the many volunteers who have offered their gifts in worship leadership over the past year: The adult choir, the AV team, our worship guides and scripture readers, greeters, ushers, instrumentalists, soloists, bell ringers (both handbells and the bell outside!), prayer writers, hymn selectors, and anyone else who has stepped up to support the worshipping work of our family of faith. Thank you, truly, for helping us experience the presence of God in worship.

The Worship team has had a full and faithful year. If you would like to join us in equipping our congregation for faithful, authentic, and meaningful worship, our committee meets on the second Thursday of each month via Zoom. We would love to have you join us!

## OUTREACH

The Outreach team directs the allocation of Erin's mission budget, which in recent years has been approximately ten percent of the overall church budget. For the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2026, Erin distributed \$40,000 to the following mission partners:

|                                               |                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Presbyterian Disaster Assistance              | Volunteer Ministry Center   |
| Dan and Elizabeth Turk, Madagascar            | McNabb Center               |
| UKirk at UT Knoxville                         | Compassion Coalition        |
| Hope House at UT Chattanooga                  | Mobile Meals                |
| Maryville College                             | Compassion Closet           |
| Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon | FISH Hospitality Pantries   |
| New Hope for Guatemala                        | Sunset Gap Community Center |
| Morgan Scott Project                          | John Knox Center            |
| Florence Crittenton                           | Interfaith Health Clinic    |
| Serenity Center Ministries                    | Fig Tree Ministries         |
| KUB Project Help                              | Justice Knox                |

We also offer opportunities for congregation members to participate in God's work by highlighting how they can support specific missions each month. Here are some of the things we did last year.

**Serving at FISH Pantry:** One Saturday each quarter a dozen or so volunteers from Erin spent the morning at FISH Pantry in North Knoxville packaging donated food and helping neighbors select groceries for their families. At least four Erin members also serve regularly at FISH Pantry during the week and on other Saturdays.

**Learning about current and potential ministry partners:** In March 2026 we held a lunch after church and over 30 members heard David Lovett of FISH Pantry summarize their ministry and answer questions. He also talked to Erin's men's breakfast group.

**Gathering items to share:** In September of 2025 we collected baby items for recently arrived refugees sponsored by Bridge Refugee Services, including more than 600 diapers, over 30 onesies and other articles of clothing, and several dozen packages of baby wipes. We sponsored an angel tree in November and early December for Sunset Gap Community Center. Erin members purchased Christmas gifts for 15 children—65 gifts total—and our youth group wrapped them all! In May we gathered personal hygiene items and laundry supplies for Serenity Center Ministries, and Outreach team members toured the home that houses approximately ten women and their children and learned how they help women get back on their feet after dealing with domestic violence, addiction, or housing insecurity.

**Contributing to PCUSA Offerings:** Erin members donated over \$3,500 to our denomination's annual offerings: the Peace and Global Witness Offering in October, for peace and justice efforts in the U.S. and around the world; the Christmas Joy Offering, which helps retired church staff facing financial difficulties and supports colleges that develop leaders among students of color; and the One Great Hour of Sharing on Easter Sunday, which supports Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and the Program for the Self-development of People.

**Supporting emerging and time-critical needs:** Part of our budget is for needs that arise during the year. We contributed additional funds to KUB's Project Help for residents who aren't able to pay their electric bills each month and to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and we sent money to UKirk at UT Knoxville to pay for a

## OUTREACH ...continued

dinner one Wednesday night before their weekly worship service.

**Advocating for all residents of our community through Justice Knox:** Again this year, Erin Presbyterian was an active partner in Justice Knox. Along with other faith communities—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Universalist—Erin team members served on committees, participated in information-gathering meetings, studied issues and discussed potential solutions, attended city council meetings, wrote letters, and financially supported a ministry of peace and justice among our neighbors.

We brought 111% of our average weekly worship attendance to the Nehemiah Action Assembly at the Civic Auditorium in April—an achievement for which we were publicly commended at the June celebration. Congregations from all over the city and county faithfully brought their members, friends, and neighbors, and the assembly—with more than 1,650 attendees—was the largest civic gathering in Knoxville’s history. Seeing the overwhelming support, our city and county officials agreed to take the actions Justice Knox proposed to increase housing opportunities, reduce the number of unhoused families, and expand public transit options through a micro transit program.

In other good news, the number of participating faith communities has grown to 26 and, with that increase, Justice Knox was able to hire a third organizer. Almost 100% of our investment dollars go toward justice and leadership training for our organizers, volunteer leaders, and participants. It truly is an investment in giving people a voice for justice in our community!

## STEWARDSHIP

Team Members: John House (Convener), Kim Pennington, Neill Murphy, Craig Strand

The Stewardship Committee monitors the Accounting and Finance functions of the Church. We assist with the budget process as well as conduct the annual pledge campaign.

This year’s pledge campaign theme was “Sustaining Grace” to recognize our transition to our new Pastor, Joseph W. Taber, IV. Thanks to an increase in pledging households, we were able to develop a budget to fully cover the various needs of the church. The actual giving even exceeded the pledged giving! Thank you!

Erin is in a strong financial position thanks to The Lord’s blessings! May it continue to be so.

Erin Stewardship Team

## PROPERTY TEAM

Team Members: Michael Cate (convener), Kim Jaynes, and Philip Watkins.

### General Activities

This year we held monthly team meetings and discussed numerous issues. We replaced many older HVAC units with more efficient systems. The congregation assisted with two workdays including landscaping and interior cleanup. We assisted in negotiating an agreement with the Beacon Academy allowing them to use the Family Life Center for their special need's day-school. With the church administrator's assistance, we managed weekly maintenance issues including HVAC maintenance, landscape irrigation, plumbing, and electrical challenges. Our annual budget includes mostly utility expenses except for occasional maintenance items.

### **The following are other actions performed over the past year...**

- Continued to manage door security during Sunday Church services.
- We developed a prioritized Project List with estimated costs to assist the Session decision process.
- Kim Janes arranged to have a landscape firm install several shrubs and a couple of trees on the Lockett Road side of the church.
- Removed non-working ice maker in the kitchen and sealed the adjacent floor drain.

We are still in the process of developing an overall property assessment which will identify projects requiring repair or maintenance.

Submitted by Michael Cate  
Property Team Convener

## FELLOWSHIP TEAM

- At the beginning of the month of June 2025, we took a meal to the Rogers/Fellers family after the passing of Jenny's mother.
- Breadbreakers met at the Gibbs home on June 7.
- Annual summer potluck picnic on July 6 after worship.
- On Sunday, July 27, after worship, we had a Farewell reception for Anne McKee.
- On Sunday, August 10, after worship, we held a Welcome reception for the Taber family.
- On Saturday, August 23, we threw a new take on an old fashioned Pounding for Leah Taber.
- After worship on October 26, we had our annual Chili Cook off with proceeds going to the Blessing Box Fund.
- We provided a reception for Joseph's Installation on Sunday, November 2.
- We hosted a Veteran's Day reception after worship on November 9.
- Hanging of the Greens was after worship on November 23 with a light lunch served for those participating.
- Our annual Christmas Potluck was held on Sunday, December 7, at 5:30.
- Monday, January 5, we had the Unhanging of the Greens.
- Breadbreakers was held on Saturday, February 21, at the Cates home.
- Meals were provided during Randy Sarles' illness.

- On Friday, January 27, we had a reception for the Celebration of Life for Randy Sarles.
- The Brandon Breakfast was held on Easter morning, April 5. We served approximately 95.
- July 19 was the annual summer potluck picnic after worship.

Throughout the year we have provided meals for various members for various reasons. We are also looking into setting up a more structured visitation team for our homebound members and in case of surgery, illness, etc.

Diana Brandon  
Convener of the Fellowship Team

## CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

The Creative Expressions Ministry focused on four programs this year.

### **The Erin Youth Writing Collaborative**

Beginning in May of 2025, a group of 9 middle schoolers began meeting to learn the skills of play writing and to use these skills to write the Sonshine Company show that would be produced during the 25-26 season. The primary instructor for the collaborative was Cynthia House, assisted by Kelly Boyd. The collaborative met most Sunday afternoons for three hours from May until the end of September and two Sundays in October. In addition to learning the process for writing a musical and gaining the skills required to do so, the group gained the interpersonal skills necessary to function as a collaborative and work as a team to construct the musical. The message they chose for the musical was “your family history/legacy doesn’t determine who you are.” To deliver this message, they developed a treatment, then an expanded plot summary of three acts with three scenes in each act, character profiles for 14 characters, and finally composed dialogue that created the script. In addition, they choose the music and placed it in the appropriate spots in the script, designed the set, developed the costume plot and designed all the marketing materials. Music for the script was ordered in August. Finally in September and October, they edited the script to match the actual members who enrolled in Sonshine the first week of September. Composing a musical for 12 young actors and 2 adults is not small task. These six young people, succeeded. The scripts were reproduced in the church office and put into notebooks.

### **The Sonshine Company Musical Theatre Workshop**

For the 2025-26 Sonshine season, Sonshine had 12 enrolled members from across the county, including two members from the Writing Collaborative, and two adults. Sonshine met every Wednesday night from 6:30 to 8:00pm and one Saturday a month from the first week of September to the last week of April. The primary director and choreographer for the troupe was Kelly Boyd, assisted by Eliana Jacks and Cynthia House. Rachel Little returned as music director. Cynthia House provided troupe communication, developed the schedule and produced the musical to include sets, costumes, marketing, the program, budgeting, problem solving and scheduling parent assistance. This year we had 3 student interns. Eliana Jacks, the Directing Intern and MacKenzie Flemming and Grace Turner, the production interns. The 12 younger members began workshops in September designed to help them gain the skills necessary to take on a role in the musical. The older members served as coaches and mentors for the younger members during these workshops and later during rehearsals for the musical. Beginning in November the troupe began work on the musical composed by the collaborative, *The Legacy Mystery*.

From late January to the first of April, Cynthia worked with parents of troupe members to build the set, with

## CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS *...continued*

collaborative members to gather costumes and with a member of the collaborative to design and order marketing material while Kelly and Rachel focused on working with actors to learn needed acting, dance & vocal skills and blocked and staged the show. Kathy VanO'strand served as props mistress and stage manager. The show program was designed and laid out the first two weeks of April by April Cyr. The show was staged three times, May 1, 2, 3 and played to a large audience each performance. The season concluded on May 23rd with a pool party and awards ceremony at the home of John & Cynthia House.

### **Journey7 (J7) Advanced Acting Workshop**

J7 is an advanced acting workshop for teens from 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Matt Lyscus served as the teacher, coach and director for this troupe. The goal of this group is to learn advanced acting skills through workshops, role play, improvisation, solo, duo and small group acting, visits to theatre productions, preparation for auditions, and from guest instructors. The troupe also spends time working on theatre resumes needed for auditions and on auditioning skills so that members are equipped to audition for roles in shows in the community.

In addition to acting skills, J7 also provides members with a safe place to discuss happenings in their lives and to understand the connection between their lives and what they bring to the stage. The group this year had 8 active members. The troupe did not stage a show this year due to scheduling conflicts of the members.

### **Erin Express Praise and Worship Band**

In 2025, The Creative Expressions Ministry Team revived the Erin Express Praise and Worship Band. They began practicing after church on Sundays or on Sunday evenings. The band has 5 to 7 members and instruments represented: rhythm guitar, bass guitar, piano, drums and vocalists. They performed during the church service for one service and continued practicing to build a repertoire of praise and worship music that they could do as scheduled during the church worship services.

## NANCY BERRY ORGANIST, ACCOMPANIST, HANDBELLS

### JOYFUL SOUNDS HANDBELL ENSEMBLE REPORT

Joyful Sounds Handbell Ensemble, now in its 20th year, continues to grow with the addition of a fifth octave of hand chimes. This purchase was made possible through the generous support of Cynthia House, an anonymous donation, and additional Memorial Fund contributions.

Because these chimes are quite large, they require a special rack to hold them. John House, our resident craftsman, has graciously designed and built this rack along with a beautifully crafted chime mallet. We look forward to putting them to good use in the Fall. We extend our sincere thanks to John and Cynthia House for their continued support of this music ministry.

In addition to the fifth octave of chimes, Westminster Presbyterian Church graciously loaned us their lower fifth octave of handbells. These bells have added richness and depth to the choir's sound, beautifully enhancing the ensemble's overall sonority. We are deeply grateful to Westminster Church for sharing their bells with us.

While we are excited about the expanded range of bells and chimes, these instruments would remain silent without dedicated ringers. Joyful Sounds has been blessed with committed musicians who faithfully attend rehearsals each Wednesday and eagerly embrace the music placed before them. It is truly a joy to work with them, as we prepare music that glorifies God and enhances our worship service.

#### **A sincere thank you to our 2025-26 Joyful Sounds Handbell Ensemble:**

Rose Armsworth, Stacie Armsworth, Diana Brandon, Joe Jaynes, Mike Jones, Chloe Levering, Anna McKay, Susan Miller, Cathy Van Ostrand, Jenny Rogers, Leah Taber, David Snodgrass and Nicole Waters.

Soli Deo Gloria -To the glory of God alone!

Nancy Berry, Director

## CHLOE LEVERING YOUTH DIRECTOR

In September, the Youth Group kicked off meetings, originally starting at the previous time of 6:30-8, but moving to noon in mid-September as the youth voted. Around 2-5 youth were typically present. On fall break, the youth attended a small Mission Trip for three days, where they helped restore houses in rural Virginia with Appalachia Service Project. And in November, the youth attended Small & Mighty, a group where Presbyterian youth groups combine for mission and other fun! Then, in mid-December the youth partnered with the Outreach committee to wrap presents for Sunset Gap's Angel Tree.

Beginning in November and going into February of 2026, the Youth helped pick a theme and plan for the Gifts of Children service.

On February 22nd, 2026, the youth and children hosted the Gifts of Children service for the congregation.

The Youth Group wrapped up for the summer after Knox County Schools were out and resumed again in August.

Chloe Levering  
Youth Director

## JOSEPH JAYNES CHOIR DIRECTOR

The Choir performed throughout the 2025-2026 church year for worship services and special occasions, including the memorial service for Randy Sarles, who we will miss greatly. We also enjoyed the gifts of many soloists, small groups, instrumentalists, and those in the Creative Expressions ministry, particularly during the summer months when the choir is on hiatus. We particularly welcomed the addition of a brass choir for the Easter anthem, and a violin/cello duet for the Pentecost anthem.

The Choir sings, on average, 3 Sundays each month, leaving 1-2 Sundays for other groups like the hand bell ensemble, soloists, small vocal groups, and instrumentalists.

In addition to performing as a vocal group, the Choir takes time each week to strengthen the bonds of fellowship and support that unite us. Each rehearsal provides a time for sharing joys and concerns, and for offering them up to God together in prayer. The Choir has experienced God's answer to prayer on many occasions.

I thank God for providing the resources and gifts that we need to fulfill the ministries to which He calls us. I am constantly encouraged and lifted up by the devotion of each Choir member as we minister together. The Erin congregation offers continual encouragement and support to the music ministry, and I know that everyone involved appreciates that support very much.

***Membership in the Choir is open to everyone, high-school age and older. A basic ability to read music is helpful but not required. The group rehearses Wednesdays, 7:30-8:30 pm, in the Choir room.***

Thanks as always to our Organist, Nancy Berry, whose talent and devotion are great blessings for Erin. It is such a joy to work together with her in Erin's ministry of music.

Joe Jaynes, Choir Director

### **Choir Members (May 2026)**

Stacie Armsworth  
Joy Bornhoeft  
Diana Brandon  
Rob Cameron  
David Eggers  
Cynthia House  
John House  
Kim Jaynes  
Mike Jones  
Chloe Levering  
Susan Miller  
Neill Murphy  
Ann Snodgrass  
David Snodgrass

## APRIL CYR OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

What a year it's been! Another one full of blessings and growth.

The first full year creating the Church Newsletter in Canva has been fun and I hope everyone has enjoyed it. Canva provides a counter on how many people view the newsletter and it looks like most of the congregation keeps up with what's happening each month.

I'm continuing to learn more about advertising and keeping things readable with appropriate font-size and short, concise wording for our new attention spans. Ha! Always trying to make sure things are cohesive and aesthetically pleasing. I love to learn and I love to be creative, so this has been a lot of fun and there's always something new!

I hosted a Fall Coffee Club and Craft event on October 14th, 2025 where we made bookstacks and decorated them with autumn ribbons, flowers, and other décor. Of course we had cinnamon coffee and yummy fall treats, which is a good reason to attend, if nothing else. Everyone had a great time and it's such a fun way to enjoy fellowship.

July 18th of this year I celebrated my 10th anniversary as the Office Administrator here at Erin. I continue to celebrate every milestone with humble wonder that the Lord would allow me to serve Him in His very own house. I'm so grateful for the love and laughter in my life because of all of you, for fulfilling work, and the way we all support one another. Thank you to each person who took the time to celebrate this big anniversary with me!

Beginning October of 2026 Microsoft will close out my favorite software, Publisher, so I've been learning how to make our bulletin in Canva. It looks mostly the same, but we'll see what comes of having so many more options available through this new bulletin platform!

Thank you, as always, for the privilege of serving.

April Cyr

Office Administrator

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