

# One Matters Award, Lake North

## Northern Illinois Conference 2026

*First United Methodist Church*

Evanston, IL – Lake North

For First Church of Evanston, discipleship is relational. Our mission statement asserts that we are “a community of Christians inviting all people.”

This relationality is reflected in recent membership and baptism numbers. Since January 2023, we have welcomed 112 new members (83 adults and 29 youth) and baptized 20 children, youth, and adults.



and include our youngest disciples in all facets of church. Another factor is a staff position specifically dedicated to the work of visitor and member engagement: welcoming new visitors, building relationships with repeat visitors, and leading the membership process.

Through our Inquirers Class, the gateway to membership, we seek to nurture community, engagement, and discernment on whether First Church is a good fit. The past seven Inquirers Classes have averaged 12 prospective members who chose to take membership vows. Of the new adult members referenced here 72% are engaged in an ongoing group, class, service project, or church committee.



Many factors contribute to those numbers; they are, to use other phrases of our mission statement: vibrant opportunities to “grow closer to God” (e.g., Bible study, Christian education and faith formation groups); meaningful ways to “live our faith in the world” (e.g., soup kitchen, sack lunch ministry, Bundled Blessings Diaper Bank, overnight shelter). Also, Children’s Ministry programs nurture curiosity about God



Young adults (19-35) make up 29% of our adult new members. Those in this demographic typically have relocated to the area and are keen to find community. They find it through young adult gatherings, classes, covenant groups, and volunteer opportunities,

Since May 2023, we have welcomed 29 youth confirmands into membership. Our confirmation process meets 7th and 8th graders where they are and then nurtures community through reflection, games, retreats, and simply hanging out. Many of those confirmands will serve with the Appalachia Service Project (ASP) for a week this summer. This trip marks the 28<sup>th</sup> year First Church youth will serve with ASP. We are sending 75 youth and adult leaders in July.



While experiencing program growth and strong numbers, our Membership & Engagement Committee is reaching out to inactive members to mitigate attrition. What happened to those young adults who were confirmed six to ten years ago? Where are the church members who worshipped regularly before COVID and

now are present only on Christmas and Easter? Again, for First Church, it is not all about numbers; what really makes a difference is engagement. And engagement is about nurturing relationships, promoting connection, and building a community where all belong.

