

# First Presbyterian News



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Rachel Lenstra

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## Pastor's Column

## Burst of Creativity

A couple of weeks ago I received an email from the director of the Galena Jo Daviess Historical Society informing me that their board had decided to feature the Rev. Aratus Kent, our founding pastor, as one of the people included in this year's Cemetery Walk. Then she asked if I would be willing to play Rev. Kent in that event. The answer to that was very simple. I had to say know because I will be on vacation out of town then. However, I offered to write the Aratus Kent script if she wanted me to. She agreed.

Since I have never attended the Cemetery Walk, I asked her for a sample script, which she provided and then I went to work.

I completed the task and emailed my draft to her about five days later. At the time of this writing, I haven't heard back to see if it's too long, too short or in the Goldilocks zone, or if it needs a some editing, it's good as is or if it needs a totally rewrite.

Whatever her decision may be, Delight thinks I should include my script in a future church newsletter. I wouldn't feel right doing that before the Cemetery Walk, but may do so after the Walk has ended. However, as a five-page manuscript in its current format, if I do include it in the newsletter, that may mean putting it in a special edition by itself.

In the meantime, I was also working not just one sermon — as is typical — but two of them, along with trying to put the finishing touches on the details of items you can see along the route of this year's Road Rally. At this point, it's not totally clear if I'm really ready to start writing the clues or if we should go over the route one more time before I do that. It will probably be the latter.

In any case, the Road Rally will take place in the afternoon and early evening of August 16. We have already started a sign-sheet in the sanctuary. We do that so we can call in a total number of participants to the restaurant about a week in advance, so they'll be ready for us.

As usual, the first car will leave the church at 3:30 pm. And, we will plan to start eating about 5:30. Delight will be at the destination to receive early arrivals and have something for them to do to pass the time before we eat.

Please plan to join us and bring along your friends. The number of people attending doesn't really make a difference, although it can be a problem if there are too many cars. That's because there's a limit to how long we can ask the people who arrive at the destination first to wait for those who will arrive last.

## Upcoming Events in August

### Road Rally

The mostly-annual Road Rally (we had to skip two years) will take place in the afternoon of Sunday, August 16<sup>th</sup>. I *think* this will be the 30<sup>th</sup> Road Rally. I lost track of the *exact* number, although I'm pretty sure that's correct.

As always, participants will draw starting times for the their cars. Then each group is asked to come to the church office a *minimum* of five minutes before that starting time so they can read the rules, get any last minute instructions and then be handed the sealed clue envelope at exactly their starting time.

The first car will leave at 3:30 and each successive car will leave exactly five minutes later to avoid a large line of cars journeying through the countryside together as we had in our very first Road Rally.

Since the pastor is the one who wrote the clues and will be the one handing them out, those times will be based on the pastor's official time. And no one will receive their clues earlier than their given starting time, although adjustments *may be* made on the fly if someone has to drop out or is running unavoidably late. Delight will be waiting at the destination with things to entertain the early arrivers while they await those later arrivals.

We will start ordering our food at 5:30 with the hope that everyone will have arrived at our Top Secret destination by that time so we can all eat together.

### The Fifth Sunday Service

August 30 will be the fifth Sunday in this month. So, once again, we will join with our friends from the Lord of Love and the United Methodist churches to share a worship service in the Lord of Love building. As usual, that service will start at 11 am, an hour later than we are used to. However, it will be preceded by a time of refreshments, starting at 10:30. Rev. Jim McCrea wrote the service for that day.

## August Lectionary

- 8/2: Genesis 32:22-31  
Psalm 17:1-7, 15  
Romans 9:1-5  
Matthew 14:13-21
- 8/9: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28  
Ps. 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b  
Romans 10:5-15  
Matthew 14:22-33
- 8/16: Genesis 45:1-15  
Psalm 133  
Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32  
Matt. 15:(10-20), 21-28
- 8/23: Exodus 1:8-2:10  
Psalm 124  
Romans 12:1-8  
Matthew 16:13-20
- 8/30: Exodus 3:1-15  
Ps. 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c  
Romans 12:9-21  
Matthew 16:21-28

## News of the Family

A *Gazette* article and photo about the election of new officers for the VFW included a mention that Helen Carroll was named Secretary.

Emily Painter appeared in another *Gazette* photo in her role as Mata Hari for the Women of Courage.

The *Gazette* also ran an article noting a performance by the Tri-State Magic Club at the Center for the Arts on a late June Saturday afternoon. Among the performers was a certain local Presbyterian pastor.

Jaycob Benson appeared in a *Gazette* photo showing students involved in the American Exchange Program.

A full page in the *Gazette* entitled "Hallelujah! Religion Comes to Galena," noted portions of our church history and even included a

quote from our founding pastor whom they mistakenly called "Rev. Arastus Kent." (For the record, there is no "s" in his first name.)

An article about programs sponsored by the Galena Public Library mentioned one led by Clinton Stockwell on July 9<sup>th</sup> entitled "250 Year After: Re-Reading the Declaration of Independence." Oddly, the article said that presentation would run from 5 to 1:30 pm. I hope he had plenty of throat lozenges after taking that long! That same article mentioned that anyone wanting more information on children's programs should contact Rachel Lenstra.

A *Gazette* article called "There's Magic in Galena" focused on the work of the Tri-State Magic Club and its current president, a Galena resident who serves as pastor of a church in town.

Cathy Harms appeared in a Facebook action photo, showing her in character for her part in the Galena Center for the Arts production of Six for Six. That was a collection of six roughly 10-minute plays. Cathy had the role of Diane in the fifth of those plays, which was called *Buying a Brassiere* written by Rebecca Ritchie.

The United Churches Vacation Bible School program, "SCUBA: Diving into Friendship with God," received advanced publicity in the *Gazette*. It was held September 13-17 at the Galena United Methodist Church. Among the First Presbyterian Church people volunteering their time to help lead the program were Gwen Benson, Nan Colin, Karen Lenstra, Jim McCrea and Carolyn Simmons. The program had an attendance of 9 or 10 kids each day.

## Waiting as a Sacrament and Symbol

I hate to be kept waiting. It's a grace I lack.

When I sit in the car at the traffic lights that won't turn green or behind a slow driver, I grip the wheel, muttering dire threats... as if it were always a matter of urgency that I get to my destination in the shortest possible time! Waiting makes me feel out of control of my life.

I become angry when I'm kept in a waiting room. Who does he/she think they are, making me wait like this? Waiting makes me feel unimportant.

Late visitors annoy me. I'm surprised they dare to walk through my door! But then I'm good at putting on a smile and pretending it's all right. Waiting makes me feel unwanted.

There's the kind of waiting connected with illness when the only cure is to rest. I have to try to relax and trust God for the future. Waiting makes me feel helpless.

Sometimes I have to wait in uncomfortable situations, where I'd like to opt for the easy answer in order to get out. Then my prayer has to be like T.S. Eliot's "Teach me to sit still, even among these rocks." [from "Ash Wednesday" by T. S. Eliot.]

Now and then I catch glimpses of a different kind of waiting. There are moments in prayer when I am contemplative, allowing God and life to just be. It feels safe to be out of control. And the stillness doesn't feel like inactivity because I am aware of divine activity within me.

And sometimes when I'm listening to someone (really listening) I have the feeling that my words

could get in the way of the marvelous thing God is doing. So I have to wait and pray with them, even though we'd both feel more comfortable if I could give advice.

Waiting doesn't come easy in an instant society.

Waiting offers me a choice. I can wait reluctantly, with anger and frustration welling up inside me. I can struggle against my circumstance and try to manipulate them. I can blame others for "making me feel unimportant" and I can feel frightened at being out of control.

Of I can try to sit quietly within my soul and wait, knowing that I am held securely in the love of God and ultimately all will be well.

Looking at it in that way, every opportunity for waiting can become a sacrament and a symbol. Perhaps I can use those occasions in this [...] season, to remind me of the great waiting at the turning point of time, when the angels held their breath and wondered who would have eyes to see the Christ.

And the waiting goes on. For the Kingdom is still taking shape and God's way is not to force but to invite.

A prayer: Wait with me, Lord, this [this day and every day]. Wait with me and wait for me and wait upon me. And help my prayers to join in the unceasing stream of prayerful waiting and hoping that has been carried on from generation to generation, and which will continue until Your Kingdom is come in all its fullness. Amen.

Ann Siddall

## CPR/AED Training

In response to multiple churches reaching out, on Sunday, August

2nd beginning at 1pm, Galena Area EMS will be hosting a no cost CPR/AED Awareness and Stop the Bleed training. The class will be held in our facility at 217 Summit Street.

The CPR/AED portion will not provide certification to those attending, but will break down the basic steps to follow to perform CPR and how to properly use an AED. We're expecting this training to take 1.5 hours, ending around 2:30pm.

Following this, we will transition into a Stop the Bleed class. Stop the Bleed is an international bleeding control curriculum started by the American College of Surgeons in collaboration with the Department of Defense. This class is designed to train and equip the public to treat traumatic injuries involving severe bleeding until the first responders arrive. Depending on the number of participants, this course usually takes 1-1.5 hours.

Those interested are welcome to participate in one or both of these trainings. If anyone is interested, but cannot make it, there will likely be additional opportunities this fall to attend.

If there are any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out!

Christian Gronewold  
Galena Area EMS



## Voice of the Martyrs: Christian Persecution in Uganda

Uganda is a majority-Christian nation with many active churches. However, Uganda's history has made it particularly vulnerable to the influence of Islam. During the 1970s, Uganda was ruled by the dictator Idi Amin, who was inspired by Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi to join the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and to begin Islamization of the country. Many of Amin's policies continue to influence society and government today. Uganda's parliament has passed Islamic banking laws, which favor Islamic projects. Arab countries also continue to invest significant resources into furthering Muslim interests in the country. Radical Islam's influence has grown steadily, and many Christians within the majority-Muslim border regions are

facing severe persecution, especially those who convert from Islam. Despite the risks, many churches in Uganda have responded by reaching out to their neighbors; many churches are training leaders how to share the gospel with Muslims and care for those who are persecuted after they become Christians.

### MAJOR RELIGION

84 percent of Ugandans are Christians, and 14 percent are Muslims.

### PERSECUTOR

Local Islamists persecute Christians, especially along the eastern, southwestern and northern borders, where radicals have been steadily encroaching.

### WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN UGANDA

Christian converts from Islam face pressure from family members and harassment in Muslim communities. Several young people who converted to Christianity have been severely beaten and injured by their parents or community members. Pastors and churches have been attacked, and some converts have been killed after their faith became known. The children of families who leave Islam are no longer welcome at school. In some areas, local laws are passed to limit the spread of Christianity or seize church land.

### ACCESS TO BIBLES

Bibles are available in urban areas, but most people in rural areas do not have access to them or cannot afford them. In addition, many tribal dialects are spoken in rural areas of Uganda, and literacy rates are low among older members of the population.

### VOM WORK

VOM supports the distribution of print and audio Bibles in areas with a heavy Muslim influence and helps believers who have been attacked, threatened or ostracized because of their Christian faith. VOM is also sponsoring conferences in central Uganda to inform Christians of encroaching Islamization and to empower churches and pastors to continue standing for Christ in the face of radical Islamic activity while caring for Christian converts from Islam.



# THE 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ROAD RALLY

There is no cost for the journey there – other than having to deal with those wretched clues! – but participants buy their own meals. All you need to do is sign-up in advance so we can report the proper number of reservations to the restaurant and then have someone in your group draw a starting time for your car. The first car leaves at 3:30.

## General Assembly 2026 Summary

The General Assembly is the ruling body for our denomination which meets once every two years to provide guidance on issues of importance to our time. GA is made up of ministers and elders in roughly equal numbers who pray over and discuss issues and then vote what they believe to be God's will. But because it is a human institution, Presbyterians are not required to abide by any GA decisions they believe to be wrong. Therefore, although it functions something like Congress, it is actually very different in intent and in its impact. GA met in Milwaukee from June 22 to July 2. Here are some of the highlights of that meeting:

### Artificial Intelligence

It approved a report designed to provide PCUSA members guidelines for the ethical use of artificial intelligence. It encourages those who use it to label that work as the result of AI and to never use AI "as a substitute for prayerful Biblical exegesis, sermon preparation, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, theological judgment, or core teaching of scripture."

The report treats AI with caution due to its overt and covert biases, the negative impact of data centers on the environment and its frequent misrepresentation of facts.

### Racial Justice

Asked for the creation of a centralized system to track progress on racial equality within the church from 1983 to the present. It also called for an archive of anti-racism, DEI, white Christian nationalism, and racial justice resources and contact information for support staff.

Required anti-racism training for all PCUSA minister, elders and staff. One commissioner proposed an amendment to delete the phrase white Christian nationalism, saying that it was unnecessarily divisive. However, that amendment was defeated by a 92% vote. The final vote on the racial justice report passed by a 95% majority.

### Nationalism

Two other reports condemning Christian nationalism also passed overwhelmingly.

The text of one reads in part: "The church affirms its calling to bear faithful witness in public life, speaking and acting from the example and teachings of Jesus Christ for justice, peace, mercy, and the dignity of all people. The church rejects any ideology that seeks to establish Christianity as a privileged or dominant force through the power of the state, or that conflates religious identity with national, racial, or ethnic supremacy. Such ideologies, in all their forms, are incompatible with

the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, constitute a theological error, undermine the church's faithful witness, and are contrary to the church." The other report disputes the claim "that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and should continue to be governed according to what its proponents see as Christian values or biblical principles."

In keeping with church tradition, the report suggests that churches consider the avoid using national symbols or patriotic hymns during worship so we can make prophetic announcements about our nation when that is called for.

### Global Missions

As many of you know, since the last GA meeting a decision was made at the denominational headquarters to terminate all missionary posts in favor of a greatly reduced number of liaisons who will work with local groups in various counties. That was largely intended as a cost-cutting measure; however, both the decision and the way it was carried out proved to be very controversial.

So GA created a commission to review the procedure used, investigate charges of harassment of former mission co-workers or other staff in mission oversight positions, call for new missionaries to be trained and placed in the field and determine what impact the current situation had on the use of restricted donations.

GA also called for development of a new policy statement on PCUSA missions.

### Israel & Palestine

By a massive majority, GA voted to condemn Israel's policy of



genocide in Gaza and urge PCUSA members to contact members of Congress and the President, urging them to block military sales to and from Israel until that nation ends its violation of international laws.

GA also voted to “Affirm that criticism of the government of Israel is not inherently Antisemitic.” And to “Condemn unequivocally the Israeli military’s targeting of Palestinian children in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank.”

### Gender and Sexuality

GA approved the creation of theological statements on gender and human sexuality, along with the impact of each of those on interpersonal power, marriage, accountability, consent, and family structures, as well as creating a denominational stance on “the Christian vocation of family.” These items are to be accompanied by study guides for future use in congregational ministry.

An overture entitled “On Requiring Ministers of Word and Sacrament to Be Monogamous” was not voted on because constitutional authorities determined that the stated concern is already addressed in the church’s constitution. That overture was co-authored by Richard Ackerman, a board member of Presbyterians for the Kingdom (PftK), a staunchly conservative faction in the PCUSA with a stated goal of reunifying American Presbyterians. Meanwhile, the behavior of PftK was so disruptive and division that a number of complaints alleging hostile behavior were filed against the group.

GA affirmed a declaration supporting access by all people to

medically necessary gender-affirming healthcare.

In addition, GA voted to permit churches that are searching for pastoral leadership the option of adding a statement about their congregation’s commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

### Ordination

The report of the Ordination Task Force led to a great deal of debate. In the end, GA adopted the several changes to the ordination procedure for candidates hoping to become a Minister of Word and Sacrament, along with policies that will impact the training of commissioned ruling elders.

Those changes include allowing presbyteries the option of assessing candidates through the demonstration of ministry skills rather than uniformly requiring written examinations; creating nationwide minimal standards for preparing commissioned ruling elders; and permitting the commissioning of certified Christian educators who have been ordained as a ruling elder and who meet all the necessary educational standards.

### Other Items

GA authorized the process needed to generate a new confession for our modern world.

Formally regretted the deaths of those who have died in the custody of or through interactions with our national Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agencies.

Associated with that was a condemnation of certain current enforcement practices, such as mass deportations without due process, detention in facilities with inhumane living conditions, forced family separations, and immigration arrests in places of worship.

The 2028 GA will be held in Puerto Rico. Sadly, when that suggestion was proposed, it led to racist statements by certain commissioners during the debate.

Currently GA committee meetings are conducted by Zoom, while meeting of the entire GA (plenary sessions) are held in person. However, the group voted to hold all GA gatherings in person, at least for the year 2030.

GA’s portion of per capita was tentatively set to \$13.04 in 2027.



### Thank you Letter

*The following comes from a recipient of the Mission & Stewardship Committee’s Cup of Cold Water fund:*

I would like to thank you for the gift of \$200.00 from your church. I have many uses for it. You don’t even know me but here you are helping me. I am very grateful.

Thank you again.  
Sally Beyer

## Minute for Mission and Stewardship July 12, 2026:

### Presbyterian Gifts Catalog

The mission of Presbyterian Gifts is...

To connect people as neighbors with others experiencing needs, supporting projects and friendships that grow gardens and generations, bring water and watch for corruption, share education, tools and training, and link each of us more closely with one another and with God.

The picture on the page below resonates with me. The reason is that I learned to sew on my grandmother Alice's machine that was just like the one in this picture! Yes, it had a foot pedal – not a motor to do the sewing! It now belongs to our daughter, Alice, the fourth generation to have Grandmother Alice's machine.

So... I chose to share with you today the story of one woman whose life was changed by the gift of a sewing machine:

In the conflict-scarred villages of Leer County, South Sudan, where families live with the daily burden of hunger and uncertainty, a single sewing machine helped open a new path for Nyalong Riak and her four children.

Like many women in her community, the 28-year-old mother had few safe or sustainable ways to earn a living. Without access to land or opportunities for formal training, she was forced to gather firewood in remote areas to sell at local markets, a backbreaking task that exposed her to harassment, health risks and long walks home carrying heavy bundles. "Every day was a struggle

for survival," she says.

Everything changed for Nyalong when she joined a community-based vocational training program led by Hope Restoration South Sudan, a partner of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that focuses on empowering women. Through this program she gained practical skills like tailoring, bead-making, and climate-smart farming. Along with training and starter materials, Nyalong received a sewing machine which became a turning point in her journey.

With it, she began transforming fabric into dresses, income and opportunity.

Nyalong now sells handmade clothing at a local market and surplus produce from her garden. The income she now earns allows her to purchase food, school supplies for her children — and even to start saving for the future.

But the impact this one sewing machine and training has had goes far beyond economics. Now, with a steady income, Nyalong no longer faces the dangers collecting firewood

in remote areas poses, and she's gained freedom and independence in innumerable ways. She's also paying it forward by being a mentor and training other women in tailoring, encouraging them to believe in their own potential. "I want every woman to know she has value and options," she says.

Inspired by her journey, 15 women in her village have already followed her lead. And now, Nyalong dreams of expanding her work by opening a small tailoring workshop to train and employ many others in her community.

When you give sewing machines through the Giving Catalog, you're supporting the mission and ministry of the Church, helping create lasting change for women like Nyalong, who are building their own futures with resilience and dignity.

May God bless our offerings to brighten and sustain the future for women such as Nyalong.

Amen!

Kathy Pearson for Mission & Stewardship





### Only the Church...

Although distinguished scientist Albert Einstein was not a Christian himself, he learned to appreciate the moral courage of the church during the early years of the Nazi regime in Germany. Einstein said:

“Having always been an ardent partisan of freedom, I turned to the universities, as soon as the revolution broke out in Germany, to find there the defenders of freedom. I did not find them. Very soon the universities took refuge in silence.

“I then turned to the editors of powerful newspapers who, but lately in flowing articles, had claimed to be the faithful champions of liberty. These men, as well as the universities, were reduced to silence within a few weeks.

“I then addressed myself to the authors individually, to those who passed themselves off as the intellectual guides of Germany, and among whom many had frequently discussed the question of freedom and its place in modern life. They were in their turn silent.

“Only the Church opposed the fight which Hitler was waging against liberty. Till then I had no interest in the Church, but now I feel great admiration and am truly attracted to the Church which had the persistent courage to fight for spiritual truth and moral freedom.

“I feel obliged to confess that I now admire what I used to consider of little value.”

From *The Silent Church: The Problem of the German Confessional Witness*

by Julius Rieger