

First Presbyterian News



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Gwen Benson

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Jaycob Benson

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Marion Roberts

Marty Rosenthal

TRUSTEES

Lehn DuHack

Eric Einsweiler

Jeff Finley

Cathy Harms

Rachel Lenstra

Lara Rosenthal-Levens

Pastor's Column

Original Play Premiere: June 28

Certain stories in the Bible are incredibly difficult to understand — sometimes to the point that they make you wonder why they were included in scripture at all. More often than not, the problem with them lies in our modern misunderstanding of the ancient culture during which those stories are written. But inevitably, those stories will reward us if we research them to recover the meaning that was intended by the original author.

One of those stories is known as the Binding of Isaac or the Sacrifice of Isaac as told in Genesis 22:1-14.

When we read this story in modern times our obvious immediate concern come when we read that God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Clearly, that doesn't sound like the God we love and worship. So what's really going on in this passage and what can it possibly teach us?

With those questions sounding in my mind, I decided to write a play to explain what I think is going on in the binding of Isaac passage.

Yes, there are other potential interpretations — including one that offers a bit of linguistic sleight of hand to imply that the “god” who demands the sacrifice isn't the God who makes sure that sacrifice doesn't happen. That's interesting theory that might be worth exploring some

time in the future. However, I have a different theory — one that I believe makes sense of the story and, therefore, forms the core of the play.

It will premiere on Sunday, June 28 in our sanctuary.

There are five parts:

- Narrator
- Abraham
- Sarah
- Voice of God
- Isaac

I'm happy to say that Jaycob Benson — the only person in the congregation who is really age appropriate to play Isaac — has graciously agreed to take on that role. Cathy Harms will play Sarah; Lara Rosenthal-Levens will be the Voice of God; Nan Colin will be the Narrator and the play's author will take on the role of Abraham.

Meanwhile, if you're curious about my interpretation of that unusual biblical story, you'll have to come to church that day to see the play. If that proves not to be feasible for any reason, you can watch the live stream of that service or see the video-on-demand version on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/firstpresgalena.org/> or YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7Qr2POEpl491q1vlDKDPbg>.

Upcoming Events in June

Christian Association of Retired Persons meets

The CARP group will gather for a noon lunch on Wednesday, June 3 at Happy's Place, 2323 Rockdale Road in Dubuque. If you would like to attend, please tell Helen Carroll in advance so she can contact the restaurant and let them know how many people are coming.

The United Churches of Galena

The United Churches will have their last meeting until September on Thursday, June 4 at 10 am. The location will once again be the community meeting room at the First Community Bank on Exchange Street, beginning at 10 o'clock.

Pub Theology will become a pre-teen

Our Pub Theology program will celebrate its 11th birthday on Wednesday, June 10. The group will meet in person in our Fellowship Hall starting at 5:30 pm. The Session voted to purchase two pizzas for the group's anniversary celebration. So this should be a delicious gathering.

Picnic Food Potluck

The Church Life Committee will sponsor a Picnic Food Potluck after worship on Sunday, June 14.

Magic Show at the Center for the Arts

The Tri-State Magic Club will perform a show at the Galena Center for the Arts on Saturday, June 17, starting at 2 pm. For the record, it's quite possible you may know one of the performers. Tickets: \$5 kids under 12, \$15 for adults, \$30 for family.

June Lectionary

6/7: Genesis 12:1-9
Hosea 5:15-6:6
Romans 4:13-25
Matthew 9:9-13 18-26

6/14: Genesis 18:1-15
(21:1-7)
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
Romans 5:1-8
Matthew 9:35-10:8,
(9-23)

6/21: Genesis 21:8-21
Psalm 86:1-10
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

6/28: Genesis 22:1-14
Psalm 13
Romans 6:12-23
Matthew 10:40-42

News of the Family

Jaycob Benson continues to appear in the *Gazette* for his baseball prowess. He pitched 2 1/3 innings against Morrison, allowing only one run with three strikeouts. A later edition reported that he got a hit in the Dakota game and pitched three innings against Fulton, allowing four runs with four strikeouts. That same edition noted that he earned an honorable mention in the Euleila Art & Poetry contest. He also got a hit against in the first game against West Carroll and two more hits in the second game, along with three RBIs and two runs, along with an RBI against East Dubuque, and was the winning pitcher against River Ridge/ Scales Mound in one game with three hits, an RBI and a run against them in a second game two days later. Jaycob also earned the win pitching in relief against Foreston,

helping himself with a run and an RBI. That wasn't all. Jaycob also earned a run against Eastland and a hit along with two innings of relief pitching against Pearl City.

Emily Painter was a cast member in the Center for the Arts production of "Moriarity: A Sherlock Holmes Adventure." In addition, being the versatile actor she is, she also portrayed Mata Hari in a production of Women of Courage and Commitment.

Pat Halstead was listed as one of the April winners in the Northwest Illinois Daily Drawing.

Sam and Natasha Ray purchased a home in Galena from the estate of John and Nancy Ray, who were Sam's grandparents.

Samuel Murphy had his picture in the *Gazette* when he helped collect litter on Franklin Street.

Anna Felt, a long-time member of First Pres and co-founder of the Galena Library, was the subject of a biographical play, sponsored by the Library. For those who don't know, Anna's parents, Benjamin and Anna, are among those honored on one of our stained glass windows — their's is the middle one on the south side of the sanctuary.

Ms. Rachel and her alias, Rachel Lenstra, appeared several times in an article about the various programs put on by the Galena Library.

Thank You!

On behalf of the congregation, I want to thank Karen and Rachel Lenstra for volunteering their time to serve as teachers for our children's Sunday school this past school year, as well as to all those who were willing to volunteer as teaching assistants for them.

Thank you Letters

Dear Partners in God's Ministry,

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen!
Christ is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!
Alleluia!...

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church(USA) thank you for your congregation's commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ through Presbyterian mission and ministry. Your gift makes a difference in the lives of people here in the United States and abroad. We are encouraged by God's faithfulness, signaled by the recent support we have received from you. Because of you, the world is encountering new possibilities through the good news of resurrection.

Thank you for your generous gifts that we received during the month of March which are listed on the attached sheet. [The gift referenced was \$350 given in honor of our mission partner, Doug Tilton.]

Thank you for your commitment and partnership in furthering God's mission around the world. Please let me know how I can support your efforts. Easter blessings to you and your congregation.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Lemuel García-Arroyo
Stewardship Officer

Office of Stewardship and Funds
Development

Dear First Presbyterian Church.

On behalf of the men, women, and children we serve here at the Dubuque Rescue Mission, we say: "Thank you!" Your gift will assist us in easing the burden of the poor and homeless of the tri-state area.

This year, we celebrate 94 years of service. Each day, over two hundred men, women and children

enter our doors to receive housing, a hot meal and warm clothes. We are only able to offer these services because women and men like you are out there supporting us through prayer, volunteer hours, and financial assistance. We are truly grateful.

Thank you and may God bless you.

Rev. Samuel Felderman
Executive Director
Dubuque Rescue Mission

Updating the Church Pictorial Directory

Several years ago we updated our in-house pictorial directory and relied on people sending in their information and photos or allowing us to take pictures of them.

For whatever reason or reasons, some of our members never chose to take part in that process, so that edition of the directory was always incomplete.

In addition, with the passage of a little bit of time, there may be certain portions of that directory that need to be updated. Therefore, we are currently working on doing a full revision of the directory.

Since we had an incomplete response last time, I am asking Gwen to call or email every member to see if their info is up to date and/or needs to be added in the first time. Please respond even if no changes are needed for you or your family.

You may check your own listing by going to https://5616b97b-df18-4aae-bf9b-6db4da98f2cb.usrfiles.com/ugd/5616b9_faa5d612412449f990c68dd73abb4946.pdf

Please note that because this is posted online, it is password protected. If you don't know that word, please ask either Gwen or me in person and we will tell you. We will *not* email the password since that makes it too easy for someone to steal that password.

Please help us make this directory a valuable, living tool.

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
Galena CHURCH Illinois

*An outpost of God's grace
in northwest Illinois
since 1829*



Significant Recent Session Decisions

A discussion was held during the April Session meeting about the number of people who are still on our Active Membership roll who haven't attended in a long time, many of whom have moved away from Galena.

So it was decided to contact each of these people to encourage them to become involved in our congregation once again or to become involved in a congregation in the area where they now live.

During that discussion, it was also noted how difficult it is becoming for the Nominating Committee to obtain willing volunteers to serve on the Session and Trustees.

As a result, a letter was written to go out to those who haven't been involved with our church for a while. They were each given several options to contact the church if they wished to remain on the Active roll. Otherwise, they could simply do nothing at all and we would assume that they were willing to be shifted from the Active to the Inactive roll.

That letter drew only two responses and those were from people willing to go on Inactive, although they wanted to express how much they missed our church after their respective moves.

Prior to sending those letters out, we received a request from Jerry and Kimberly Howard to transfer their membership to Gracepoint Presbyterian Church in Dubuque. So that was done during the May Session meeting.

In addition, each of the following was moved to the Inactive roll: Nancy Campbell, Sebastian Fleming, Wendy Holman, Myra Linton, Matt

Lundh, Nancy Mangrum, Amy & Mike O'Neill, Elizabeth Painter, Natasha & Sam Ray, and John & Karen Stephens.

Each of these actions taken together bring our official Active Membership roll down to 45.

For the record, this type of dwindling membership is happening in congregations throughout the country regardless of denomination.

However, it also says something important about our church's recent lack of growth in membership numbers. It also leads us into discussion of the struggles that the Nominating Committee is having filling the open positions in our Session and Trustees.

To try to deal with that the Session is recommending that the best solution would be to reduce the number of members in each group. Their plan is to step down from the current six members each to five members in 2027 and four members in 2028.

To be clear, making that change would require an official vote by the congregation. It is not something the Session can decide on its own.

Therefore, they passed two important resolutions at their May meeting.

The first one says:

"Due to the difficulties in recruiting potential members for our Session and Trustees given our shrinking membership, the Session is recommending that the congregation reduce the number on each board from six in 2026 to five in 2027 and to four in 2028 and in following



years. Should this recommendation be adopted by the congregation, then when a pair of terms for each group end in January 2027 and also January 2028, those two terms would only be filled by a single nominee, so we can step down to the revised membership numbers. Once we have reached four members per group, two of each three years just one person would be elected, while two people would be elected the remaining year."

That is the official recommendation which will be presented to the congregation.

In order to discuss and vote on that recommendation, the Session also passed the following:

"The Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Galena has called a special congregational meeting to follow worship on Sunday, September 13, 2026 for the sole purpose of discussing the possible reduction of the membership of the Session and Trustees."

The Session decided to delay that congregational meeting until September to avoid having the decision being made while a number of our members may be on vacation. The delay will also allow the members to think about this issue and perhaps offer suggestions. This special congregational meeting will be held during our annual Kickoff Potluck.

Pentecost and World Communion Offerings

For a number of years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has received four special offerings throughout the year. However this year that total has been reduced to three. That's due to having the Pentecost Offering folded into the World Communion Offering, which is normally accepted in October.



WORLD COMMUNION

This change was announced throughout the denomination last year, so it comes as no surprise to most people. However, apparently the word either didn't get sent to the company which prints our offering envelopes or the change was announced after the 2026 envelopes were printed since a Pentecost Offering envelope still appears in the boxes of envelopes we distributed to our members.

For the record, the 2026 envelopes were printed in January or February 2025, so that may have been before the decision to combine the two offerings was made by the denominational headquarters.

In any case, we have received a few donations to the Pentecost Offering, so we are offering those donors the following options:

- Roll their donation over the World Communion Offering in the Fall or

- Return it to the donor

If you are one who gave to the Pentecost Offering and have a preference, let us know.

The World Communion Offering will be accepted between September 6 and October 4 of this year.

Transitions

In recent months, I have made it abundantly clear as I advance further and further into geezerdom that the time will be coming at some point in the not-too-distant future when I will retire and this congregation will enter an era of transition toward whatever future God may have in mind for you.

Transitions are rarely anticipated with eager excitement — partially because of anxiety caused by the uncertainty about what the future may hold and partially because transitions are rarely easy to manage with grace.

The latter reason is why I have been spending so much time trying to prepare you all in advance for my retirement. I want you all to be comfortable with the idea that presbytery has people experienced in assisting with transitions who can help guide you through the processes while still making sure that you are the ones to make all the decisions which you come to believe that God is guiding you to.

Speaking of presbytery, they have gone through a transition of their own recently.

Formed as Blackhawk Presbytery in January 1972, it was discovered that the use of his name — probably chosen to honor Blackhawk, a Native American leader in this area — was not considered to be an honor by his

descendants. In fact, it was considered to be offensive and hurtful.

Clearly that was never anyone's intention, so a group was formed by the presbytery to study this area's Native American culture and to develop a process that would create a new name for the presbytery. Our own Kathy Pearson was an important member of that group.

The name that was ultimately selected was Illinois Prairie Presbytery. That vote was driven by the large number of presbytery members who wished to have some sort of geographical component to the new name.

Once all the i's were dotted and t's crossed on the legal paperwork, the presbytery completed its transition to its new name and the group held its first meeting under that name on May 19th.

Another presbytery transition looms in the future. Eric Heinekamp, the General Presbyter, has announced that he will retire on July 31, 2027.

So a General Presbyter Nominating Committee will be formed this summer consisting of five to seven people representing the diversity of the presbytery's membership. As I write this, only one of those members has been recruited: me. Given the I'm chair of the committee that looks for those people, that may be considered a bit of self-dealing, but I've been assured self-nominating is perfectly acceptable.

If you happen to know of other people who might be good folks to help in that search — remembering they would have to come from other regions and perhaps even different theological understandings — please let me know.

Voice of the Martyrs — Malaysia: Islamization Countered with Biblical Discipleship

Pastors in Malaysia report that Islamization efforts among tribal groups have led to a “silent persecution” of Christians in the country.

Under Malaysian law, it is illegal for Malays or any Muslims to convert to another religion or to own a Bible. While 9% of Malaysians identify as Christians, many of the Christians come from socially and economically disadvantaged tribal minority groups. Government agencies and Muslim organizations are pressuring the Christian minority groups in various ways — through financial incentives, offers of scholarships and better schools, and promises of better

infrastructure for their communities — to change the religion shown on their official identification cards. Once this change takes place, they are officially and almost irrevocably “Muslim,” which means they cannot legally attend church, own a Bible, marry a Christian or raise their children in the Christian faith.

Henry, a pastor serving tribal Christians in a remote part of Malaysia, described these Islamization efforts as a “silent persecution” of the church. “The Islam associations come and they enter a village,” he explained. “They offer a prize, and the Christians give them their IDs [to claim the prize, and the Muslims] give it back to them already changed. It is actually a scam.”

The allure of these offers is the promise of economic improvements

that often never materialize. “The people are very poor,” he said, “so money is a big temptation for them.” The best answer to the challenge, he said, is sound biblical discipleship.

“The Bible tells us to be prepared, because the temptation is everywhere,” Henry said. “We have to teach them discipleship from the Bible.”

Henry said that Village Outreach Kits and study Bibles for pastors have had a profound effect in helping pastors shepherd their congregations better to stand firm against Islamization. “I use [my study Bible] for my sermon preparation,” he said. “Here it is very expensive; I could not buy it, so it is a blessing for me to have this Bible. It helps a lot. When we have good discipleship, the church will grow and we will increase the leadership of the church.”



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Illinois Prairie Presbytery Meeting May 19, 2026

The learning opportunity

was “Theology & Technology: Imago Dei and Artificial Intelligence” led by Rev. Lauren Patrus-Betzel (Caledonia-Willow Creek Pres.) Highlights included:

A history of A.I.’s development. We were challenged to think of all the ways we already use A.I., many times without realizing it.

Consideration of machine learning. Whose works were used to train A.I.?

Consideration of Large Language Models (LLMs), which are trained on vast amounts of text data to understand, process, and generate language.

Imago Dei (created in the image of God) and Theological Anthropology: What does our theology say about being created in the image of God? We are created in the image of the Trinity, which is inherently communal.

Commissioning of General Assembly Commissioners: Rev. Katie Ricks, Ruling Elder Ray Lantz, Rev. Thea Kornelius and Ruling Elder Jeanette Sheehan. We ask for prayers that God will lead them as they study, meet and vote on guidance for our PC(U.S.A.) for the next two years. Rev. Eric Heinekamp, Executive Presbyter, will be attending G.A., in Milwaukee, as a visitor.

With appreciation and sadness, we recognized and dismissed the Central Presbyterian Church of New Lenox, which has now closed.

The Presbytery Council reported that we are now officially the Illinois Prairie Presbytery. All commissioners were given a vote on

the four suggested logos for our new presbytery. We will hear in the future which was chosen.

NOTE: It was a privilege for me to be a part of the Land and Name Acknowledgement Committee that helped to guide our presbytery to this new name through prayer, research and learning opportunities.

Strategic planning is under way for the hiring of a new General Presbyter and Stated Clerk upon Eric’s retirement next year.

Eric explained that discussion is ongoing re: the uses of the Resurrection Fund the goal of which is to increase congregational vitality in our Presbytery through grants.

Mission Committee Report: Committee goals include: Broader awareness of global needs; larger initiatives requiring resources/ coordination beyond single church capacity; and cross-congregation participation. \$5700.00 has already been granted (out of an available \$10,000.00) to five churches for their mission outreach projects.

An intergenerational mission trip (with Chicago Presbytery) is coming June 13-19. Participants will experience a week of shared ministry, relationship and learning in Sisseton, SD with the Wahpeton Sioux.

Visioning Committee and Assembly Committee (newly separated) reported that the members are working on 1) Evaluating some of our current initiatives for connecting leaders and building community; 2) Supporting existing committees in their visioning work; and 3) Continuing collaboration with the Assembly Planning Committee.

Commission on Ministry: Approved a call for Robert Bannan (MWS) to serve Rockford-

Westminster, as well as a number of covenants/contracts.

Somonauk Untied voted to dissolve their church in June.

Boundary training dates for pastors were announced.

Prayers were asked for the following churches: Dakota Community, Fulton, Garden Plain, Hanover United, LaRose Crow Meadow, Manteno Community, Paw Paw First, Shannon-Prairie Dell, St. Anne First, Waterman, Watseka First and Wilmington First.

A Tuition Assistance Policy for Commissioned Pastor Candidates was approved by the assembly.

The Nominating Committee presented a number of names to fill positions on our Council and Committees/Commissions.

Galena First Pres., along with 15 other Illinois Prairie churches, was awarded the annual Six for Six award. (Next year, with the deletion of the Pentecost Offering, the award will be Five for Five.)

Treasurer’s Report: The Presbytery continues to be in very good financial standing. Our current balance is \$2,253,152.00. We are operating with a net income this year-to-date (though our investments have suffered losses.) The Galena Westminster Church’s generosity to Presbytery was noted.

Miscellaneous: Rev. James Friesen announced that he’s part of a group that awards \$4000 grants to organizations that assist unhoused people. I plan to investigate this and bring it to Mission & Stewardship.

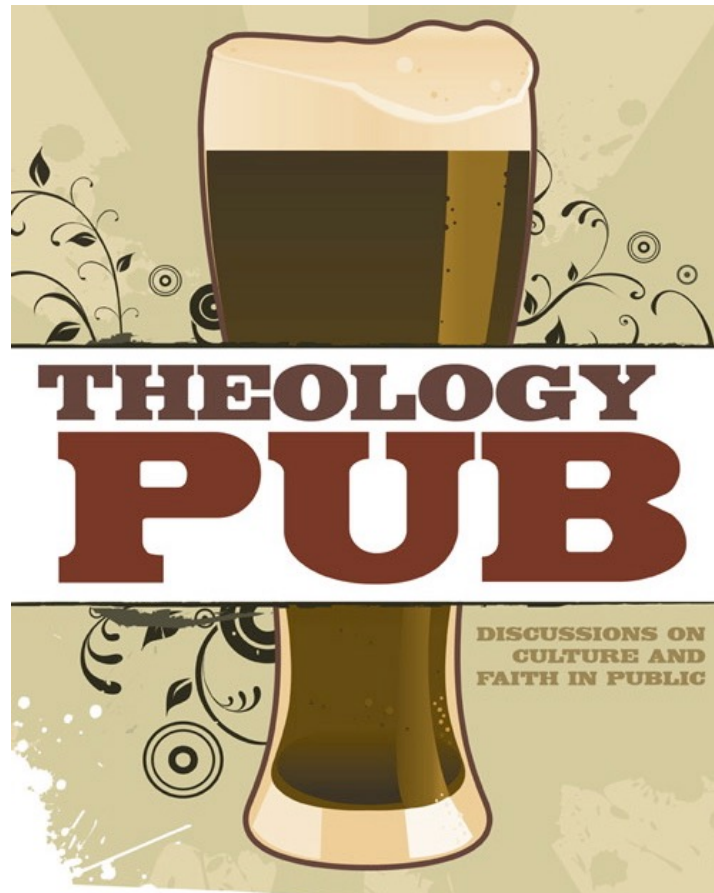
With my gratitude for being able to represent First Presbyterian and encouragement for each ruling elder to attend at least one assembly of Presbytery, Kathy Pearson

Pub Theology's 11th Anniversary

In the Spring of 2015, we began to talk about a potential new community outreach — something that had been pioneered by several churches in the United Kingdom and the United States, including Amber McCrea's congregation in Bettendorf, Iowa.

So I purchased a book on beginning and leading a Pub Theology program and the Session agreed to commit to sponsoring it for a minimum of four weeks to give it a little time to develop. Whether it would go any longer than that was decidedly up in the air. We promoted it and held the first meeting June 10, 2015. The image below is the poster we used. Originally held live in area restaurants, the pandemic shifted us to Zoom, where we remain today.

We are planning an anniversary celebration on June 10 in the church basement and the Session approved the purchase of two Casey's pizzas to go with whatever food items the attendees decide to bring.



Where can you go to have an open, honest and non-judgmental dialogue about religious or spiritual matters these days? Where can you go to find people of any faith or no faith at all who are encouraged to talk together and learn from one another with no hidden agendas?

The answer to both questions is Pub Theology, a group meeting Wednesday nights from 5:30-6:30 p.m. at the Galena Brewery, 227 N Main Street, Galena, Illinois.

The format is simple: beer, conversation, and God. Everything is up for discussion, no assumptions, no barriers to entry.

There are only two simple discussion rules: everyone is expected to share their opinions honestly and to listen respectfully to the opinions of others. In addition, because the group will meet in a pub, everyone will be asked to buy their own food and/or beverages.

For more information, contact the First Presbyterian Church at 815-777-0229.



A Peek Behind the Road Rally Curtain

The event I that believe will be the 29th edition of the Road Rally will take place on August 16. Clearly, that's a long time from now, although you *could* mark that date on your calendar now if you wish.

In any case, the Road Rally typically pops into view fully formed like Athena who was born an adult, springing from the head of Zeus. So, the process we go through to create the Road Rally is often a mystery to all but Delight and me.

So let me give you a slight peek behind the curtain.

The first step is always selecting a destination restaurant. It needs to have seating for 25-40 people, preferably in a private dining room. Plus it has to be located within a 30-45 minute radius of the church.

Once that's selected, I sit down with a bunch of maps — both those of print and digital varieties — to plan a circuitous route to that destination. That task requires imagination, spacial visioning, determination and maybe just a little

touch of outright sneakiness. Then we drive the route once to be sure it works, followed by several more times to pick out landmarks along the way. Only then are the clues written.

This year we've already selected one restaurant and then traded it for an even better one. In the process, I've generated three different routes. Fortunately, the final one that leads to the new destination is by far the most scenic route of all. With all that planning and labor starting months in advance, it would be a shame if you missed our 2026 Rally!