

First Presbyterian News



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Pastor's Column

Valentine's Day

Here is a column from the Reverend Galen Smith who was, at the time of this writing, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Greene Iowa:

There are many ways we express our love. Like the elderly couple I knew. Though they had been married many years, it seemed that they were still very much enamored with one another. One day after church I remarked what an inspiration they were. "You act just like teenagers in love!" I said. "You even hold hands all the time." The wife gave me one of those exasperated looks and retorted, "That's not love pastor. It's the only way I can keep him from cracking his knuckles."

As we approach Valentine's Day, those of us who are married start to think, "What can I get my spouse?" It's not just married couples who ask ourselves that question. Parents wonder what they can get for their children, students wonder what they can get for teachers and their friends and classmates.

In the coming weeks red roses will be a highly sought gift, so will be the heart-shaped cardboard boxes filled with chocolates. Cards are a big seller at this time of year, the kind that say, "Roses are red, violets are blue...." These are some of the more traditional gifts we get to give to others.

There are other ways we show our love. We may spend some extra time with them or do something unexpected for them. Little things like saying, "I love you," or "I'm sorry." We might show our love by listening as they tell us what is on their mind.

When we give a gift, that is an expression of our love. A gift represents our time and effort and usually has some meaning either to a giver or to the recipient. Often the best gifts are not the most expensive. In fact, they may not even be something we buy, but ones that took special effort and sacrifice for the giver. That's what makes God's love so special.

John 3:16 is arguably the best known verse in all of scripture: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." That gift of Jesus Christ took special effort and sacrifice on God's part.

One of the saddest images I can think of was portrayed by cartoonist Charles Schultz. Charlie Brown is stricken with a case of puppy love for a little red-haired girl at school. He is often sitting by a tree wondering if she even knows he exists. When Valentine's Day comes, Charlie

Continued on the next page

Upcoming Events in February

Sunday, February 1

The first day of February will be a busy day. Because it is the first Sunday of the month, we will have communion during worship.

Following worship, we will have our annual congregational meeting. That's when we elect new officers to replace those whose terms are completed, review the annual reports that have been available in the back of the sanctuary since January 25 and officially approve or disapprove the pastor's compensation package. This meeting takes some time, although in the last several years it has not lasted more than 20 to 30 minutes. However, to make that time go more quickly, the Church Life Committee will be hosting a "Souper Bowl" potluck at the same time. The meeting will take place downstairs in the Fellowship Hall, so we can eat and hold our business meeting concurrently. The idea of the potluck is to share various types of soup and items to go along with the soup and/or football snacks or appetizer type dishes.

Yes, we know the football Super Bowl will be held the following Sunday. However, we moved our event from February 8 to avoid conflicting with a pancake fundraiser that day held by the Lions Club.

Souper Bowl of Caring Offering: Sunday, February 8

The Super Bowl of Caring Offering is traditionally accepted on the day of the National Football League's championship game, the Super Bowl. We have collected this offering for more than 10 years. Those who take part in this offering are encouraged to donate the gifts that they receive to a local hunger fighting charity. Therefore, our offering has always been given to the Galena Food Pantry.

As has been our custom in the past, we will set out two large soup pots in the back of the church. Each one will be labeled with one of the teams in the Super Bowl so you can vote for your favorite team or for the one you think will win.

February Lectionary

- 2/1: Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12
- 2/8: Isaiah 58:1-9a, (9b-12)
Psalm 112:1-9 (10)
1 Corinthians 2:1-12,
(13-16)
Matthew 5:13-20
- 2/15: Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 2
or Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9
- 2/22: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

News of the Family

The New Year's Eve edition of the *Gazette* ran a full-page ad listing all those who had ornaments hung on the Tree of Life in their name. That list of names included Carol Northcraft along with all the following people who were honored in memory: Jerry Grant, Shirley Jahncke, Brian Lenstra, Julie Musich, Stephen Musich, Dr. Gregg Painter, Carl B. Schoenhard, Jr., Erin Schoenhard, Cletus & Sharon Tranel and Otto Wrabl.

The Galena Elementary and Middle School first semester Gold Honor Roll included Aurora O'Neill (8th grade), while the Bronze Honor Roll included her sister Jocelyn O'Neill. Congratulations to you both!

Per Capita

The Presbyterian Church (USA) is a connectional denomination. By

that we mean no local church is an island off by itself. We are a community of congregations united in serving Christ in a variety of ways.

We do that through the work of our local churches, our presbyteries (which are groups of local churches — roughly 56 of them in Blackhawk Presbytery), our synods (which are groupings of presbyteries in a geographic region — Illinois and Indiana for our Lincoln Trails Synod) and the national General Assembly.

The cost of paying for those higher bodies comes from our per capita. The cost for each is divided by the number of people on the Active Membership rolls of the churches in their grouping. Each church is responsible for forwarding their designated amount to Presbytery. Many people choose to reimburse the church for their amount. The 2026 per capital total is \$45.

Pastor's Column Continued

Brown is anxiously waiting for the mailman to deliver all his Valentines. After the postman makes his rounds, we see Snoopy walking from the mailbox with his paw full of Valentines. Anxiously, Charlie Brown opens the door of the mailbox and peers inside. All he sees is the back of the box. Sometimes we all feel like Charlie Brown. We wonder if anyone cares about us. We begin to feel useless. The good news to us is that God does care about you. God doesn't say, "You blockhead!" or "You aren't good enough." In Christ's death on the cross, God signed, sealed and mailed a Valentine's Day card for you that says, "I love you!!" What a comfort when we are feeling a little little lonely, a little low or even unloved to know that God loves us.

Thank you Letters

The following Christmas cards arrived in the mail after the publication of the January newsletter:

Dec 2025

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year, dear friends!

As we celebrate this season of hope, peace, joy, and love, we give thanks for our year of adventure and change, and for what is to come. We enjoyed our first trip back to Bolivia, after four years, to visit family and catch up on all the food we missed. We had a fun vacation to Lake Erie with more family. We bought a home and invite you to visit us if you're ever in the Cleveland area. Leandro will be eight in January, is in second grade, and is completely in love with all things soccer.

The world is in our thoughts and prayers and so are each of you. With love, José, Chenoa, and Leandro (2025)

Christmas blessings, First Presbyterian Church of Galena, We hope you have a blessed, peaceful Christmas and New Year. We are grateful for your mission in God's world. With love and peace.

First Presbyterian Church

Hope you holidays are filled with the joys that the season brings.

Thanks for your support!

Riverview Center

Dear friends of First Presbyterian Church,

Disasters often strike without warning, but thanks to your generous contribution, Church World Service will be better prepared to provide emergency assistance when and where it is needed.

Your support and your foresight mean that we can quickly and effectively get supplies into the hands of the people who need them after a crisis. These supplies include:

- CWS Blankets
- CWS Emergency Cleanup Buckets
- CWS Hygiene Kits
- CWS School Kits
- Emergency Food Packages

Your gift also helps to:

- provide long-term recovery assistance
- assist communities to rebuild and to mitigate future disasters

Rebuilding from a disaster is tough, but we have repeatedly witnessed the resilience and strength of the women, men and children who rise in the wake of an emergency. I am so moved by your generosity as you join us in standing with them and providing hope. Thank you.

May God bless you for your support,

Rick Santos

President and CEO

Church World Service

Minute for Mission January 18, 2026

Each year the third Sunday in January is designated as Criminal Justice Sunday. Since 2002, the PCUSA has intended to draw our attention to remembering those who are incarcerated and being restored.

There are many resources available on the PCUSA website. Another resource is the Prison Fellowship website. It has been fifty years since Charles Colson started Prison Fellowship giving support to prisoners and their families as they restore their lives and prepare for a positive future upon their release.

No life is beyond the reach of Jesus. He doesn't forget or write off men and women serving time —and neither should we. In fact, we believe that God is going to use those behind bars to help spark a revival that brings justice, mercy, and hope to our culture!

So what can we do to help those who are incarcerated? We can pray for them, asking God to restore their lives and their families. We can advocate for justice and human dignity.

Micah 6:8 says "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (NRSV)

Nan Colin for Mission & Stewardship

Money

- It can buy a house but not a home.
- It can buy a bed but not sleep.
- It can buy a clock but not time.
- It can buy a book but not knowledge.
- It can buy a position but not respect.
- It can buy medicine but not health.
- It can buy blood but not life.
- It can buy sex but not love.

So you see, money isn't everything and it often causes pain and suffering.

I tell you all this because I am your friend, and as your friend I want to take away your pain and suffering...

So send me all your money and I will suffer for you.

David McCreath



Letter from Doug Tilton

3 January 2026

Dear friends:

The past year was marked by enormous transition both for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and for me and many of my colleagues on the PC(USA) staff. The changes have often been unsettling and bewildering, but there is also an exciting sense that God is inviting us to consider new possibilities and new patterns of service that demand creativity and growth.

As you may recall, 2024 ended with the implementation of the decision of the 225th General Assembly (2022) to merge the former Office of the General Assembly and the former Presbyterian Mission Agency into a single agency, preliminarily dubbed the Interim Unified Agency (IUA). Substantial changes in staffing and program occurred in November 2024, but we were told to expect more in early 2025.

In February, the IUA announced that from the end of March, the PC(USA) would conclude the

practice of sending mission co-workers to live and work with global partners, bringing this chapter to a close after 188 years. At the same time, the IUA would continue many of the functions formerly carried out by World Mission through a new office: Global Ecumenical Partnerships (GEP).

All 79 World Mission staff positions were phased out in this restructuring, generating a great deal of sadness among the staff and across the church. I was one of roughly two dozen former World Mission staff who were invited to take up posts in GEP.

At present, I am serving as a member of a team of eight Global Ecumenical Liaisons

(GELs) working alongside four Young Adult Volunteer site supervisors to relate to global partners. Currently, I am the only member of this team working with

partners in Africa.

There is also a second team, comprised of four former World Mission staff and the six Intercultural Congregational Associates who were previously part of Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries



Former Mission Co-Workers at New Wilmington

(RE&WIM), working primarily with constituencies in the USA.

Rooted in the PC(USA)'s longstanding commitment to partnership, GEP accompanies PC(USA) constituents—mid councils, congregations, new worshipping and diaspora communities, ethnic caucuses, and mission networks—and partners beyond the PC(USA), working side by side so that shared witness follows relationships and local discernment.

As a denomination in the Reformed tradition, we are “always Reforming” so this new structure is undergoing periodic refinement and adjustment in response to new circumstances. But for the last three quarters of 2025, we have been living into this new configuration and discerning fresh ways of collaborating with colleagues and partners so that we may continue to be a part of God's mission in a posture of learning and humility.

I was privileged to have an opportunity to spend some time in the USA in the middle of 2025. The organizers of the New Wilmington Mission Conference

generously invited the members of the final cohort of PC(USA)



Signing the partnership covenant in Denver

mission personnel to attend the conference which takes place annually on the campus of Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA, in late July. This was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and to learn some of the creative strategies that some former Former Mission Co-Workers at New Wilmington mission personnel have explored to enable them to continue their ministries through PC(USA) mid-councils, sibling denominations, or independent mission sending agencies.

Afterwards, I participated in the Malawi Mission Network conference in Loveland, CO, allowing me to engage with Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) leaders and to learn more about the ways that PC(USA) congregations around the USA have been partnering with the CCAP in Malawi. I was also grateful to South Highland PC in Birmingham, AL, for making it possible for me to visit to talk about the changes taking place in the PC(USA).

A highlight of the journey was the opportunity to join friends from the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa Presbytery of Zimbabwe and the PC(USA) Presbytery of Denver as they celebrated 20 years of partnership and renewed their partnership covenant. In February, I had the pleasure of joining a delegation from the Presbytery of Denver in Harare as the covenant was signed at a Presbytery of Zimbabwe meeting, and I was honored to be asked to preach at the August 16th Denver Presbytery meeting at which a reciprocal signing ceremony took

place. It is inspiring to see the multiplicity of faithful relationships that have emerged from this partnership over the past two decades.

In October, I was able to attend the 27th General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The meeting, which takes place every seven years, had representation from roughly half of the WCRC's 230 member churches, so it was an excellent opportunity to



The WCRC General Council meeting

meet African church leaders and discuss matters of mutual concern. The WCRC's predecessor, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, had inspired my deepening involvement in the anti-apartheid movement in 1982 when it declared the theological defense of apartheid a heresy and elected South African theologian Prof. Allan Boesak as its President. So it was a great thrill to take part in the meeting, to share a table for part of the time with Prof. Boesak, and to hear him speak prophetically on current topics, including justice in the Middle East. (For more on the WCRC General Council, please see my article

beginning on p. 6 of the ZZMUSA November 2025 newsletter.)

On my return, I took part virtually in annual meetings of the Congo Mission Network and the Ghana Mission Network as well as the October Presbyterian Advocacy Hour on LGBTQIA+ justice. I also continue regular participation in the Madagascar Mission Network and the Zambia-Zimbabwe-Mozambique-USA Network. During the first week of December, the GEP team came together in Louisville for

its first in-person meeting. It was a rich time of "reading the signs of the times" and discerning new ways of working together. As I look ahead to the coming year, I am excited about the prospects of collaborating with colleagues from the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the

Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations and other ministries to support African partners as they advocate for economic justice, climate justice, health justice, peace, reconciliation and inclusion in church and society. Thank you for your faithful prayers and support over the past decades. I invite you to continue to be a "co-conspirator" in working for a world in which all experience life in fullness by supporting the work of Global Ecumenical Partnerships.

May the joy and hope of Christ's birth abide with you and inspire you throughout 2026.

Peace,
Doug Tilton



Pastor Luis Guillermo Borjas and his wife, Roxana Rojas, were persecuted for appealing to God for justice in a Cuban court.

Voice of the Martyrs Cuba: Subtle Ways to Silence Churches

Unlike the overt violence Christians faced during the Communist Cuban Revolution and the heyday of Fidel Castro's rule, more subtle methods of persecution are now used by the Cuban government. Recent examples include the house arrest of Pastor Dizzis Ramos, who is accused of falsifying receipts and does not have access to a lawyer; the secret imprisonment of Pastor Luis Guillermo Borjas, who invoked the name of God during a military tribunal for his disabled son; and the harassment and slander of another pastor (name withheld), whose church is opposed for its "social work" that is supposed to be done by government agencies.

In these cases, the Communist Cuban government has tried to

reframe its position not as opposing the Christian faith but as maintaining law and order. "These actions aim to create a hostile environment that hinders the operation of the church and the pastors' community activities," a

front-line worker said.

Faced with official hostilities and attacks on their reputations, Christian leaders in Cuba continue to depend on God to uphold their work. "If we are here today, it has been by God's strength," a Cuban pastor said. "It is time to trust in God, to surrender to him, to let him always be the center of our life. Our fuel is God. If he is not here, we can't do it."

Calendar of Fellowship Events for 2026

February 8th: Super Bowl Potluck (soup and football snacks/appetizer type dishes).

March 15th: Pot O' Gold Potluck (Irish stew by committee with salads or desserts from participants).

April 12th: Potato Bar (Committee will furnish the potatoes and toppings and participants will be asked to bring salad or desserts).

May 17th: Salad Bar (bring any type of salad or dessert).

June 14th: Picnic Food Potluck with red, white, blue theme (Details to be determined and announced closer to that date).

July 12th: Sundae Sunday.

August 16th: Road Rally for those who have wanderlust and a strong stomach for bad poetry.

September 13th: Kickoff Potluck (bring a main dish, salad or dessert).

October 18th: Chili meal (the committee will provide the chili and participants may bring salads or desserts).

November 8th: Thanksgiving Dinner (the committee will provide the turkey and participants may bring side dishes or desserts).

December 13th: Christmas celebration with cookies, coffee, and hot chocolate.

Souper Bowl of Caring Offering

Our congregation has supported the Souper Bowl of Caring Offering for many years, always giving our donations of both food and finances to the Galena Food Pantry.

As usual, we will accept that offering on the day of the National Football League's Super Bowl championship game.

You will find a little more information about it on the following page.

Please understand that the enclosed "Tackle Hunger" poster concerns the Souper Bowl of Caring Offering, even though, for whatever reason, that name does not appear on the poster anywhere. I'm writing this short notice to help avoid confusion.

Take the **TACKLE HUNGER CHALLENGE**

What if every person
watching the game

DONATES

Just \$1
or
1 can of food?

Be a GAMECHANGER!



Caring for Kids



**TACKLE
HUNGER**

Date: Sunday, February 8, 2026

Time: during 10 am worship

Collection Location: First Presbyterian Church

Benefiting Charity: Galena Food Pantry

Needed Items: Canned goods, paper products & financial donations

Winter's prophet

The lowly groundhog assumes the role of weather forecaster for one day each year. According to legend, on February 2, the dozing animal shakes himself from his winter sleep and ventures out, but if he sees his shadow, he retreats for a further six weeks of winter.

The Groundhog Day tradition, however, has a more prosaic explanation than the one which gives the animal prophetic powers. Sunny, clear skies in February usually indicate continuing cold weather, and that counts for the notion that the sight of his shadow prompts the groundhog to head back to the warmth of his winter hideout.

The animal's break from his winter sleep is a fact. Hibernating animals periodically rouse themselves to take a look at the outside world.

The groundhog is not alone in indulging in a long winter sleep. Hedgehogs, bats, and squirrels do the same.

The Barrow ground squirrels of Alaska take the prize as the all-time sleepyhead. Their period of hibernation extends from late August to May — then three months of frenzied activity!

Bears content themselves with a six month dose!

The state of actual hibernation involves a slumber bordering on the sleep of death. But throughout, the the animal's brain and nervous system are still at work. Body temperature drops sharply. In the case of the groundhog, for instance, normal temperature would be from 94° to 104° during its active period. During hibernation, however it dives to as low as 40°.

In addition, a hibernating animal's rate of respiration declines sharply. The whole process is brought on by a built-in bio-clock which is triggered by a drop in air temperature. At the signal, the animal feeds heavily on accumulated hordes of food. The subsequent sleep, deep at first, gradually lightens and the animal moves within the cave or may even go out for a short walk.

Scientist, observing the prolonged winter sleep, have wondered about its feasibility for human beings undertaking a lengthy interplanetary journey.

Humans may yet learn more than the weather outlook from the habits of the lower creation.

From the newsletter of St. Matthew Lutheran Church

A Short Time Here

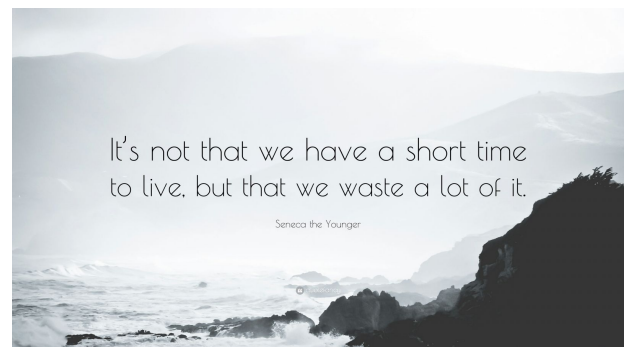
I got a surprise when I looked in the mirror today. It seems that my salt and pepper hair has more salt than pepper in it now. It doesn't seem to need a comb anymore either. I have lost so much of it that a simple hand pat will do. It appears that a few of my hairs have lost their way too and ended up in my ears. I can't really blame them, though. All of those wrinkles on my face must be tough for them to navigate through. Still, I wouldn't give up a single wrinkle or grey hair. I've earned them all. They are the evidence of every laugh and smile I've ever had.

Sometimes, however, I am amazed at how my young soul ended up in this aging body. I surely don't feel like a

forty year old man on the inside. My soul keeps looking at this body in the mirror and wondering what happened. I guess that life here on Earth is just too brief to grasp at times. We were meant for eternity and life here is far too short even if we live 100 years. I can remember once reading the last words of Crowfoot, the great orator of the Blackfoot Nation. He said, "What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the Wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."

Before your shadow loses itself in the sunset of eternity make sure that you live your life here to the fullest. Don't worry so much about your aging body. It is just the vehicle that for a brief time carries your soul. Focus instead on the things that go on forever. Focus on the love you can give, the joy you can spread, the good you can do, and the oneness with God you can share with others. Fill your days with smiles and laughter and let the wrinkles fall where they may. Fill your days with learning and becoming through both dark hair and grey. Fill your days with love and joy and you will be too busy living them to count them. Remember, God only gives us a short time here. It is up to us to make the most of it.

Joseph J. Mazzella



It's not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it.

Seneca the Younger



The Snowfall

As the snow began to fall, I watched it with the guarded apprehension only a mother of seven can have; for when snow falls, it doesn't seem like seven, it seems like seventy — seventy gloves, seventy hats, boots, scarfs, sweatshirts. But it was only when I opened my bedroom drapes and blinds and beheld the complete change of my once familiar world, that for the most part seemed dull and commonplace (one block looking like the next), that I realized the snow had transformed my yard and all the others as far as I could see, into something that lifted my spirit and altered my outlook.

The awesome change in the landscape from hard, green and mushy brown into fluffy white is nothing short of a miracle. The wet snow blanketed everything, covering flaws and scars in the yards around ours, and weighing down branches so they bent over in human-like anguish from the weight they were carrying.

It was then this mother realized the snow is a geographical example of what our Jesus did and does for us. He covers us-with the all-encompassing blanket of total love and forgiveness that comes to us as His precious gift to us. And by doing this for you, for me, for everyone that ever lived, or ever will live. He changes the landscape from many

colors and shapes to one, the same everywhere, forever. And when the burden of our shallow, human lives becomes too much for our hearts and shoulders to bear. He allows us to shake it all off by giving the problems to Him, just as the branches get too heavy with snow and eventually, it falls off and allows the branch to return to normal.

So watching this late in the year, almost Easter snowfall, I realized it was an opportunity to feel my Lord's presence and again remember His sacrifice for us all and give Him thanks. And then go and find another spot to dry another set of gloves, hats, coats....

Kathy Muller