

# First Presbyterian News



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## Pastor's Column

### Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

According to the 27th chapter of John, during the Last Supper Jesus prayed for his disciples that “they may be one so that the world may believe.”

With that in mind, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was created 100 years ago. Here’s how Wikipedia describes it: “The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an ecumenical Christian observance in the Christian calendar that is celebrated internationally. It is kept annually [...] between 18 January and 25 January in the Northern Hemisphere. It is an octave, that is, an observance lasting eight days.”

In early December, Grace Episcopal Church invited our congregation, along with those of the Galena United Methodist Church and the Lord of Love Lutheran Church to join them for a shared worship service in honor of this event on Sunday, January 25 at 10:30 am in the Grace sanctuary.

Our Session debated the invitation with their only concern being that whenever we worship somewhere other than our own building, our attendance tends to fall down. But they ultimately felt that the goal of cooperating across denominations was important enough for them to decide that those who would be interested in attending

should have the opportunity to do so during an officially-sanctioned worship service.

The United Methodists looked at the same issue and chose not to participate, while the Lord of Love council came to a third conclusion based on their past history. It seems that not many years ago, a group who was visiting a resident in the nursing home on a Sunday morning came to their church expecting to attend worship. However, they happened to be worshipping somewhere other than in their building that day. When they heard about that group’s disappointment, their council voted to always have a worship service in their building on Sunday mornings. However, they voted to also send official emissaries to this shared service.

Mother Paula Harris has created the service, based on an Armenian celebration of the Prayer for Christian Unity. I have written the sermon and will preach. In addition, Grace’s choir has invited members of our church choir to join them in singing that day’s anthem — and maybe more? I know of two of our choir members who are planning to take part in that combined choir. Grace has also asked us to provide one person to help serve refreshments after worship.

## Upcoming Events in January

### 2026 Begins

We will enter the year 2026 on January 1st as we turn the page from the last day of 2025. I pray that 2026 will be a year filled with inspiring and rewarding adventures for each of us and a year of growth and joy for the First Presbyterian congregation as a whole.

### Epiphany

Epiphany is always commemorated on January 6th. However, sometimes churches shift their celebration of that day to the Sunday closest to January 6th rather than hold a special service. We won't hold a special service either, but we will discuss the Epiphany story a bit on December 28.

Epiphany remembers the visit of the wise men to the baby Jesus. Because they were both foreigners and educated people from the upper class of their country, their homage to Jesus recognizes his appeal to people of all races and cultures. Also, by adding the story of their search for Jesus to that of the shepherds, who were probably uneducated and came from the lowest realms of society, together they represent Jesus' appeal across all levels of human reputation and achievement.

### United Churches of Galena

The United Churches of Galena will meet in a familiar place on Thursday, January 8th. Whomever was scheduled to host the United Churches the day had a conflict develop, so I volunteered our church to serve as host. The group will meet at 10 am in our Fellowship Hall.

### Noisy Offering

The Noisy Offering returns on Sunday, January 18th.

## January Lectionary

1/4: Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 147:12-20

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:(1-9), 10-18

1/11: Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

1/18: Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

1/25: 1Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

## News of the Family

Emily Painter was one of the featured performers in the "Woman of Courage and Commitment's December 7<sup>th</sup> presentation of women who were firsts in their profession. Emily portrayed Mary Patten.

Before Christmas, the *Gazette* featured a photo of Santa and Mrs. Claus going down Main Street in the Jeep Jingle parade. That photo provided clear evidence that Mrs. Claus (whatever her first name may be) is obviously related to Ruth Montgomery — perhaps a sister or? Whomever she was, she and Santa were smiling even though they were being driven down Main Street in a Jeep-horse open sleigh as it snowed on them.

## The Room

17-year-old Brian Moore had only a short time to write something

for a class. The subject was what Heaven was like.

"I wowed 'em," he later told his father, Bruce. "It's a killer. It's the bomb. It's the best thing I ever wrote."

It also was the last. Brian's parents had forgotten about the essay when a cousin found it while cleaning out the teenager's locker at Teary Valley High School. Brian had been dead only hours, but his parents desperately wanted every piece of his life near them — notes from classmates and teachers, his homework.

Only two months before, he had handwritten the essay about encountering Jesus in a file room full of cards detailing every moment of the teen's life. But it was only after Brian's death that Beth and Bruce Moore realized that their son had described his view of heaven.

"It makes such an impact that people want to share it. You feel like you are there." Mr. Moore said.

Brian Moore died May 27, 1997, the day after Memorial Day. He was driving home from a friend's house when his car went off Bulen-Pierce Road in Pickaway County and struck a utility pole. He emerged from the wreck unharmed but stepped on a downed power line and was electrocuted.

The Moores framed a copy of Brian's essay and hung it among the family portraits in the living room. "I think God used him to make a point. I think we were meant to find it and make something out of it," Mrs. Moore said of the essay.

She and her husband want to share their son's vision of life after death. "I'm happy for Brian. I know he's in heaven. I know I'll see him."

## Presbytery of Blackhawk: News from Liaison Areas:

*Greetings to all of you. We pray that your church has enjoyed many summer activities and is excited about this fall season. For many of you, it's the start-up of Sunday School and other activities of the season. We share with you some of the things that our churches did this summer and some that they are planning for fall. Please contact me with any news you and your church would like to share with everyone in our presbytery.*

*Wishing you blessings,*

*Kathy Pearson, Liaison Chair*

### AREA 1: Kathy Pearson

Galena First: We had several long-standing activities this summer, including Sundae Sunday (in which our Church Life Committee provides ice cream and various toppings to enjoy during a time of fellowship) and Pastor Jim McCrea's "Road Rally" (which finds us following his poetic clues that lead to a surprise restaurant where we enjoy a meal together.)

Prairie Dell: Kathy and her husband took part in worship in July, with Kathy giving a minute for mission on "Liaisons and How We Can Help Your Church." What a lovely country church they have.

Schapville Zion: Pastor Dottie reports that their Annual Homecoming Celebration was a success. On July 27th they invited current and past members for an indoor picnic — without ants! They gathered at 10 am for worship in the fellowship hall. Following worship, they enjoyed a potluck lunch together. As always, Dan and Pastor Dottie provided the meats, buns, and condiments. Guests provided either a salad or dessert and were asked to

invite a friend. They shared favorite music and church memorabilia.

### AREA 2: Temporarily: Barbara D'Souza and Kathy Pearson

*NOTE: We give thanks for all of the work done with Area 2 churches by their very first liaison, David Jones. David has retired from Presbytery activities. We wish him many blessings in this new stage of life.*

Winnebago First: Kathy was privileged to meet the welcoming people of this church and to be able to share a minute for mission with them about liaisons. A delightful part of their worship service has the older youth presenting a puppet play (this time on sharing) for the younger children. Might this be a good idea for your church?



### AREA 3: Claire Brennicka

McHenry is happy to report that it has two members interested in going to Kenya!

Introducing Barbara D'Souza: I grew up in Missouri, first in St. Louis and then Columbia, and am a BNR (born and raised) Presbyterian. I attended the University of Missouri and graduated in 1975. My husband, Tony, and I moved to Rockford with our baby daughter in 1982. When my children were young, I stayed home raising them, and served the community as a member of the Winnebago County Medical Society Alliance and the Jr. League of Rockford. I joined Westminster Presbyterian/Rockford in 1985 and enjoyed serving there in several volunteer positions. In 2001 I was

hired as the Christian Education Coordinator for Westminster. I later attended Dubuque Theological Seminary and received my CRE certificate. I had a variety of job titles in my 23 years working at Westminster; my final one was Pastor of Family Ministries. I retired in April 2024 and now enjoy serving as a Westminster Deacon and on Blackhawk Presbytery's Liaison Committee. I was widowed in 2023, and the Westminster staff and congregation have been a huge support to me.

I enjoy horseback riding (I have 3 horses), time with family, gardening, hiking, traveling and hanging out with friends. Every sunny day is a good one!

### AREA 4:

First Presbyterian of Dixon ordained their new pastor, Nikelle Johnson, on September 21, 2025. I look forward to working with Nikelle.

I enjoyed meeting and working with 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian's interim pastor, Cheyenna Losey; prayers for her as she continues her life of service.

Dixon First announces that the Habitat for Humanity House on which it is working is near completion. The finishing touches have been done, and the Mission/Witness Committee, in collaboration with several Dixon Churches, will be throwing a Housewarming Shower for their newest Habitat Family. Each church will shower one room with needed items.

Morrison First celebrates and remembers those who have gone to be with God at their Remembrance Sunday on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Following the service they will hold their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Cherished Recipe Potluck; all members are invited to bring a

replica of a cherished recipe of a favorite dish a loved one once made for them.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

AREA 2 (Caledonia, Dakota, Rockford Second Congregational/ First Presbyterian, Rockford Third, Rockford Westminster, Winnebago First and Winnebago Middle Creek, AREA 8 (Earlville and Mendota), and AREA 9 (Bolingbrook, Joliet First, Joliet Westminster, Plainfield, Romeoville and Yorkville) still need liaisons. If you feel called to serve, please contact Kathy Pearson. (katherineap3@yahoo.com )

**Thank You Letters**



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 93 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.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Samuel Felderman  
Executive Director  
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Dear First Presbyterian members,  
We send our thanks for the beautiful white Poinsettia. It was a lovely addition to our celebration of Gregg's life. As I have limited space in our new house, I asked that Jim keep the poinsettia at the church where it can be a symbol of joy and hope in the Advent season.

My thanks also for the prayers and loving notes. Although Gregg and I have had limitations on attending services. The church and the congregation are dear and important part of our lives.

With gratitude,  
Emily & family  
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Dear Pastor Jim,

I am writing this card in good health to you and your church and would like to thank all of you for your prayers and donation. I have made a good and fast recovery. My accident was serious and could have been way worse. Some would call it luck, but there is no doubt God had a better plan. Your kindness will be paid forward down the road. Would like to wish you all a very merry Christmas.

God bless.  
Jared Krug and family  
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Thank you for your generous support of Bread for the World this past year.

You're faithful, giving and active involvement are making a lasting difference in peoples lives!

We greatly appreciate you keeping Bread for the World in your hearts. You mean so much to us!

Wishing you, God's blessing at Christmas and a very healthy and happy new year.

Rev. Eugene, Cho, president and CEO

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Dear friends of First Presbyterian Church,,

I would like to take this time to thank you for your thoughtful donation of \$500.00 (Check #12879). Your generosity is greatly appreciated, and we are so honored to accept this Donation.

Because of the specialized services we offer at Tyler's Justice Center, we are able to help the voices of children who are victims of sexual and serious physical abuse to be heard. We are also able to help that child's family find their footing in a situation that many never thought they would be in. However, we would not be able to provide any of these services (free of charge) to such a vulnerable population of victims and their families, if it wasn't for the extraordinary community support by people like you. Your donation will be used to purchase necessary program supplies and materials, and will go directly towards assisting children and families in our community.

Again, I would like to say thank you for your amazing contribution. We are so grateful your kindness, and you are so appreciated. Thank you for thinking of Tyler's Justice Center for Children.

Happy Holidays!  
Jasmine L. Stower  
Executive Director, Tyler's  
Justice Center for Children

## Christmas cards



To Rev. Jim, Delight & Congregation:

I am at liberty Village in Geneseo, Illinois. I have been here for three months now. I feel pretty content in my small apartment.

I miss my old congregation and church. I am happy with my new pastor. I hope all is well with all of you and the church. May this Christmas bring great joy and much happiness.

Pat Holman

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Wishing you a Christmas filled with love, wonder, and miracles.

Grateful for your ministry.

Merry Christmas from  
Blackhawk Presbytery.

Eric Heinekamp, Jeannette Sheehan, David Spaulding, Alan Willardsen

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"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude (Colossians 2:6-7).

In anticipation of all the good that this season brings and of all the hope that it offers to the world.

FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE, WE SEND THE BLESSINGS of a JOYOUS CHRISTMAS SEASON.

Travis, Tonya, Blake, Ben, and Brody

## Special Thank You's

On behalf of the whole congregation, I want to offer my deepest thanks to several people who gave generously of their time to provide special services to the church.

First, was the crew that came on a Monday in late November to decorate the church for the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

In alphabetical order, they were: Darlene Farrey; Mel and Pat Halstead; Wes Mellskog; Carol Northcraft; and Carl, Pam and Ray Vandenberg, who were taking time out from their Thanksgiving visit with Pam's parents — Bev and Wes — to offer their decorating talents.

The results of that group's efforts beautified and blessed our worship services throughout the month of December.

Before I offer my second group of thanks yous, I need to explain a little bit first.

The faucet in the kitchen sink of the manse was losing its ability to be shut off. Then, the 13 year old microwave suddenly gave up the ghost. So, with permission of the trustees, Delight and I purchased a new microwave and the cartridge needed to fix the faucet. Mel come over and repaired the faucet. He and I then began the labor of installing the new microwave above the stove, which proved to be a much bigger chore than anticipated. Partway through our labors, Marty Rosenthal came over to lend us a needed tool and stayed to help until the job was complete. As Marty said, "How many Presbyterians does it take to change a microwave?" Obviously the answer is three. Thank all of you for your generous sharing of your time!



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# BLACKHAWK PRESBYTERY

## What happened in 2025?

### STAFF CHANGES

- Approved New Staffing Model
- Hired David Spaulding as Associate Stated Clerk
- Hired Alan Willadsen as Treasurer
- Said goodbye to Loreen Stravers, Office Administrator who retired
- Hired Jeannette Sheehan as Office Administrator
- Extended contact with Eric Heinekamp, General Presbyter and Stated Clerk, through July 2027

### CHURCH LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

- Rockford 2nd/1<sup>st</sup> called Rev. Martha Langford
- Sterling First called Rev. Katie Ricks
- Dixon First called Rev. Nikelle Johnson
- Ridgefield, Crystal Lake called Rev. Maggie Goodwin
- Utica, Waltham called Rev. Kathleen Luke
- Six congregations actively seeking new pastor
- Retirement of Rev. Co. David Terrinoni
- Retirement of Rev. R. Joel Stevenor

### CONGREGATIONAL CHANGES

- Rockford Korean transferred to Midwest Korean American Presbytery
- Gibson City transferred to Presbytery of Southeastern Illinois
- Sale of Kankakee First





# BLACKHAWK PRESBYTERY

What happened in 2025?

## BROADER CHURCH EVENTS

- Synod COM/CPM gathering
- Wellspring retreat for new pastors
- Confirmation and MS and HS retreats

## ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

- February 11, 2025 via Zoom only
- May 13, 2025 via Hybrid at Elgin First
- September 9, 2025 in person only at Stronghold Camp & Retreat Center
- November 18, 2025 via Hybrid at First Presbyterian Church of DuPage, Bolingbrook

## Outreach

- Through Cares & Shares every Wednesday and Thursday
- Coffee in your Corner throughout the presbytery
- Additional funds granted to food banks

## Name Change

- 59 names were submitted by presbytery members
- Through ranked choice voting, we determined the top four (4) names
- Final name of "Illinois Prairie Presbytery" was approved at the November 18, 2025 Presbytery Assembly meeting



## Voice of the Martyrs — Syria: Refuge amid Ruin



The Nuba Mountains, a contested area in the South Kordofan

region of south-central Sudan, has a majority Christian population. In the 1990s, the Christians there began

facing attacks from the same generals now fighting each other for control of the country. And in 1992, a fatwa, or Islamic legal ruling, was issued against the Nuba people. The Sudanese government dropped thousands of

bombs on communities in the Nuba

Mountains in the 1990s and into the 2000s, until a ceasefire was declared in 2005.

Many who lived in the Nuba Mountains during the government attacks moved to Khartoum seeking work and education. But when the fighting began in 2023, they were forced to return to the Nuba Mountains. An estimated 1 million mostly Christian Sudanese are thought to have fled to the Nuba Mountains to escape the warring factions in the capital. Today some of those who were driven from their homes are helping others in similar circumstances.

Still, resources in the region are limited, and life is a struggle. “We don’t have food,” said a woman with children. “We don’t have anything; we are eating these leaves.”





**Forgiveness**

FORGIVENESS IS TRULY A  
GRACIOUS GIFT

THAT COMES FROM THE  
SOUL BURIED DEEP.

FORGIVENESS AND  
CARING WILL LET YOU LIFT  
YOUR HEART TO GOD'S  
HAND AS YOU WEEP.

TO FORGIVE ANOTHER  
WITHOUT REMORSE  
MAKES THE HEART OF  
THE GIVER GROW COLD.

AS WE LIE TO EACH  
OTHER, THE SIN SEEMS  
WORSE

AND DENIES LOVE AND  
JOY IN OUR SOUL.

OUR GOD ASKS US ONLY  
TO BE TRUE TO HIS WORD  
TO FORGIVE IN FAITH AND  
BE HONEST IN HEART.

FOR THE SAVIOUR GIVES  
HOPE WHEN THE SIN IS  
HEARD

FORGIVENESS WILL TURN  
US AND THE SIN WILL DEPART.

HEAR US, OH LORD, AS WE  
PRAY TO BE FREE

FROM THE CHAINS OF SIN  
IN A HARDENED HEART.

YOUR GRACIOUS  
FORGIVENESS IS A GIFT FROM  
THEE

AND GIVES A BINDING  
LOVE THAT WILL NEVER  
DEPART.

By Lorene E. Colin