

# First Presbyterian Church

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U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 212  
DIXON, IL 61021

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## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/01 Phil Devers  
12/03 Bev Weber  
12/04 Ruth Miles  
12/07 LeRoy Kreger  
12/07 Bill Shaw  
12/10 Tom Wadsworth  
12/11 Ernie Topping  
12/12 Janet Ferger  
12/13 Wendy Clevenger

12/14 Gordon Nicklaus  
12/17 Phil Vella  
12/17 Alyssa Schaefer  
12/19 Jock Heaton  
12/21 Darin Longtin  
12/22 Don Montague  
12/25 Roger Landreth

12/26 Jan Hartman  
12/29 Carolyn McBride  
12/29 KatelynKatner  
12/30 Addison Hoyle  
12/30 Shirley Katner  
12/31 Bob McBride

## DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/02 David & Becky Hage  
12/17 Don & Sheri Hill

12/20 Wendell & Linda Ebbens  
12/21 Craig & Missy Shurson

12/25 Roger & Jane Landreth  
12/30 Bob & Carolyn McBride

# The Belltower

A Monthly Publication of

**First Presbyterian Church  
Dixon, IL 61021**



One calm summer evening as I was riding my bike along a country road I experienced an explosive blowout of my bike's front tire. After a sudden swerve to the left, followed by a violent over-correction to the right, I went down. It's the worst spill I can remember in all my years of riding. Thankfully I had the presence of mind to get completely off the road, and when I was able to examine myself I discovered that I had skinned an elbow and both knees—one so completely that it still bears the marks months later. But taking that fall reminds me of the old saying that after you fall off your bike it's important to get right back on the cycle again.

That's at best a bad pun that may not even make any sense, but I've been thinking about the beginning of Advent which marks the beginning of the new "cycle" of the church year. So every Advent we "get back on the cycle again"—get it?

In our daily lives time moves in basically one direction—forward. But the cycle of the church year—the movement from Advent, through Christmas and Epiphany, Lent and Easter, to Pentecost—brings us back over and over again to the events that are central to our faith. So every year as we "get back on the cycle" we listen to the stories that tell us who are as God's people. As the world goes rushing headlong into the future, we are reminded of eternal realities of God's love for the world, sin and grace, death and resurrection.

During Advent, we re-enact the world's waiting for the birth of Jesus as we read the stories of John the Baptist, and Mary and Joseph. But the theme for the Scripture readings for the first Sunday is always Christ's return. In this way, our Advent traditions call us back to remember that waiting, longing, expecting, and hoping are always part of the Christian life. We live between the "already" of Christmas and Easter, and the "not yet" of the fullness of God's reign of wholeness, justice and peace, and all that is caught up in that wonderful Hebrew word "shalom."

So may this Advent be for you a time of remembering the wonder of the Incarnation, of Emmanuel, "God with us," of how "the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his

glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16) And may Advent also be time of vision and hope, of leaning forward into God's promised future, of the lion lying down with the lamb, or swords beaten into plowshares, of God wiping every tear from their eyes.

As we remember Christ's coming in this season, may our remembering rekindle hope, and may hope lead us forward in grace and love.

In Christ,  
David

### **Greetings from Chaplain Spaulding:**

Along with my more seasonal note, I wanted to share with you about a new venture in ministry for me. It may have been reported somewhere else by the time this newsletter comes out. On November 19, I was appointed as a volunteer chaplain to Dixon Police Department.

The police chaplaincy is the fulfillment of a dream of Chief Dan Langloss, Officer Ryan Bivins, and KSB Chaplain Vinnie Marrandino. Along with Vinnie, who serves as the Chaplain Supervisor, the initial group includes Rev. Mike Jones from First United Methodist Church, Rev. Bunyan Cocar of First Baptist Church, and me. We have all been through a screening and interview process along with some initial orientation and training, and were recently approved by the department.

The chaplaincy is a non-denominational, ecumenical volunteer ministry intended to provide spiritual and emotional support to members of the police department, their families, and members of the public. We will work in two basic ways. The first will be regular ride-alongs with officers, about one four-hour shift per month. These ride-alongs will enable us to understand more fully the day-to-day work of the officers, allow us to begin to form relationships of mutual trust and understanding, and make us available as needed to support the officers in their work. The second dimension is to be on call one week per month, being available to join the officers in places where we might be of assistance—for example, supporting victims at accident scenes, or accompanying an officer who needs to notify family members of a death.

When Vinnie first approached me about considering this, I was a bit hesitant. My experience with law enforcement is practically non-existence. Do I really have the gifts this ministry calls for? But at the same time, I heard it as an invitation to get outside the walls of the church and into the community, and to interact with people that I would not usually cross paths with. All of us have been discovering that there's a lot for us to learn, and we will be receiving ongoing supervision and training.

Also—please note that we will be in uniform when we are on duty. So don't be surprised if you see someone who looks like me out there in the passenger seat of a police cruiser. Yes, that really is your pastor!

I appreciate your prayers. And please pray for the members of the Dixon Police Department as they perform their vital and challenging work for the community. Pray for their safety, their emotional and spiritual well-being, and for their families.

In Christ,  
David



Remember Newsletter information to be turned into the office by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.

## **OUR MISSION STATEMENT**

As Presbyterians, we embrace the Reformed tradition as we strive to support Christ's mission within our church, our community, and worldwide, celebrating the life of Christ by reaching out to all people.

### **Church World Service Kits**

Thank you to everyone that donated items for the Church World Service school kits and the cleaning bucket. With your help we have passed our goal and delivered 38 school kits and one cleaning bucket to Stronghold on November 11. A big thank you to Sue Coers, Evelyn Thomas and Bonnie Cumberland for sewing the cloth school bags, to Betty Russell and Mary Ann Hill for helping pack the kits for delivery and to Rev. Spaulding for taking all the packed kits and cleaning bucket to Presbytery at Stronghold. We greatly appreciate everyone's help. Without the help of the congregation and printed information by Betty Mayfield, our church Administrative Assistant, we would not be able to take part in such world mission projects. Thank you again to each of you.

Mission/ Witness Committee & Presbyterian Women (PW)

The middle Youth Sunday School class needs your help. We are collecting money to go towards Heifer International. We have made and placed a coin collection box in the narthex, on the table nearest the kitchen. Please join us in donating to this worthy cause. Depending on how much is collected, we will help purchase some ducks, a goat, or some rabbits to help people in other countries. The collection will continue until December 14<sup>th</sup>. Thank you.

## Children and Youth Christmas Play and Special Music

On Sunday, December 14, 2014, we are planning to have the children and youth participate in a Christmas play, sing a song, and have the younger youth and children play the chime bells. Lorri will be handing out scripts on Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup> and emailing the rest. If your child or youth would like to do some special music or help read scriptures or the call to worship, please let Lorri or David know. If your child cannot participate, please let Lorri know as soon as possible. We plan on practicing on December 7<sup>th</sup> during Sunday School. Thank you.

## Per Capita

We have heard quite a bit about the “per capita” payment request to each of us in the last few years, from the mention of it at pledge time, to the issuing of the blue envelope with pledge envelopes each year, to a plea or two from the Finance Committee later in the year when the per capita payments are not being received as hoped for.

This is one of those pleas for 2014. Per capita is the amount apportioned to each church member to pay to fund our larger church. First Presbyterian, Dixon, pays the full amount requested each year by the congregation’s presbytery, synod and the General Assembly, most of which goes to Blackhawk Presbytery (whose budget is extremely tight again this year). Most of us realize and have experienced the many benefits Blackhawk and Stronghold provide us. This amount requested, whether fully funded by your response to the per capita payment or not, comes straight from our congregation’s budget.

The line expense item for per capita in our budget is \$ 5,862 for 2014 and is being paid quarter by quarter to our church government, but just \$ 2,594 has been received from the congregation through October. That is a potential shortfall of nearly \$3,300.

It has always been rewarding to me to know that our congregation does its part in sustaining not just our presbytery and its wonderful activities center, but our larger church beyond Illinois that leads us in “being Presbyterians”, and you probably feel the same way. It seems to me important to us that we do that.

Thank you to those of you who have paid the per capita. If you have not, please consider submitting a per capita payment this year, either with your normal contributions or by using the blue envelopes now in the pews. And consider (hopefully not too aggressive here) combining your per capita share for next year (2015) with your early contributions after the first of the year. And thank you for listening to one more monetary plea!

**Per capita amount for 2014 = \$35.41**  
**for 2015 = \$35.62**

In Christ’s service,  
Chuck Jones, Finance Committee

## Worship Committee

The poinsettia order deadline was November 26. The plants will be delivered to the church for December 7.

The church decorations were brought down November 30 (the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent) after church. Committees can decorate the first week in December.

The choir will have music as part of the Advent readings. Thank you to all who have agreed to participate. December 14 will be the Children's Play. We plan to have some "Holly Jolly Coffee" during the coffee hour that Sunday.

We hope this will be a joyful Christmas season. This year we will still have two Christmas Eve services. The time for the first service is still being determined, the second service will be at 11 p.m.. There will be no choir or AV slides on December 28. Enjoy your family celebrations.

### *Meals on Wheels*

A sign up sheet for volunteers to serve **Meals on Wheels**, December 15 – 26, 2014 is in the narthex. We encourage you to sign up for 1 or 2 times or more if you can. Mondays we have 3 routes and Tuesday through Friday, 4 routes. We meet at the east side of KSB Hospital at 11:15 am. It will take just about an hour depending on how many meals you have to deliver.

**Meals on Wheels** is one of the local missions of **Presbyterian Women**. The meals are prepared by KSB Hospital and delivered by church volunteers. Your assistance and support for this program is appreciated.

## Notes from the Session - November 2014

The Session met for its regular meeting on November 18. Here are some highlights of the meeting:

**Buildings and Grounds** reported on routine maintenance and repairs. They are working on replacing the snow blower with a smaller, more maneuverable one.

**Christian Education** shared that 7 attended the Traveling Day Camp training session with Richard Simpson from Stronghold on November 15. The Sunday School is planning a Christmas program on December 14.

**Innermission** has instituted a regular schedule for visiting members in senior residences and nursing homes. They continue to work on updating the membership rolls and have written letters to several who have been inactive in recent years.

**Finance** presented a first look at the proposed 2015 budget. It projects income holding about steady, and an increase in expenses of about 2.5%.

**Mission-Witness** reported that this year's contributions from the local mission budget will go to the following: Food Pantry, Dixon Habitat for Humanity, Emergency Needs Fund, Home of Hope, Serenity House Hospice, PADS, Sinnissippi Center Foundation, and the Volunteer Care Center.

**Worship** reported that we will continue with two Christmas Eve services. The late service will be at 11:00 as in previous years. The time for the early service is being discussed and will be set at the committee's meeting on December 2.

**Nominating Committee** has a slate of candidates for the session and will meet in early December to complete its work.

**Organist Search Committee** has not met since they have no new leads at this point. Pastor Spaulding expressed his appreciation for the organists who have been sharing the services this fall.

**GPS** will have a forum program on November 23 to report on their findings from the listening sessions this summer.

**Presbytery** – Rev. Spaulding reported that a total of 2557 kits were received for the Church World Service Kits Challenge. Rev. John Huff was elected and installed as moderator for 2015. He and Lorri were commissioned for their mission trip to Kenya (with a thank you to Carmen Lago and Mary Ann Hill who were present for the commissioning service).

**Pastor Spaulding** shared that thanks to generous gifts from our church family, Blackhawk Presbytery and congregations from the presbytery they have met their financial goal for the mission trip. On Nov. 19, he will be appointed as a volunteer chaplain to the Dixon Police Department.

**Annual Meeting** – given the positive feedback from having last year's annual meeting on a Sunday morning, session voted to call the **Annual Meeting for Sunday January 25, 2015 following the worship service.**

*The Space Trilogy, Omnibus Edition: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength*, by C.S. Lewis (HarperCollins, 2013)

Most people know C.S. Lewis from his children's books, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but they are really only the tip of the iceberg of his literary output. To begin with, we should remember that Lewis was as a respected scholar in the area of Medieval and Renaissance literature, on the faculty at Oxford University and later at Cambridge. He became a household name in Great Britain during the World War 2 years through a series of radio talks on the BBC, which formed the foundation for his classic *Mere Christianity*. He also produced several other widely read non-fiction books in the area Christian faith and apologetics, including *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, and *The Screwtape Letters*. One of my favorites is his memoir of his journey to faith in Christ, *Surprised by Joy*.

The space trilogy, originally published between 1938 and 1945, is his other major venture into fiction. I first read these books when I was in my twenties, but have returned to them a couple of times, most recently this fall. The idea which drew Lewis into the realm of science fiction/fantasy was essentially, if there is intelligent life on other planets, what sort of relationship would God have with those beings?

The protagonist of the three novels is Dr. Elwin Ransom, a Cambridge scholar, a philologist (a scholar who studies the structure, historical development, and relationships of a language or languages). At the beginning of *Out of the Silent Planet* Ransom stumbles into the clutches of two fellow scholars, Weston and Devine, and wakes up on a spaceship heading to parts unknown. Their destination is Malacandra, which we know as Mars. Malacandra is distinguished from Earth by the fact that it is inhabited by not one, but three intelligent species—and by the fact that the Malacandrans have direct interaction with the spirit-beings known as eldila, ruled by Maleldil, the Creator of all. On Malacandra Earth is known as Thulcandra, the “silent planet,” because the spiritual darkness present here has kept it isolated. The visit by Ransom, and the other, more malevolent travelers, has breached the distance between peaceful Malacandra and Earth, which will have consequences down the road.

In the second installment, Ransom is transported to Perelandra (Venus). Venus is just a young planet, just beginning its history, and its two intelligent beings live in a Garden of Eden-like state of innocence. Ransom is sent there to try to make sure they remain that way. The tempter comes, embodied in the form of Weston, and an epic struggle ensues.

Everything comes to a climax in *That Hideous Strength*, which is set on Earth in the years immediately following World War 2. The story is centered on a young couple, Mark and Jane Studdock, who get caught up in the affairs of a new institution known as the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (NICE) that turns out to be anything but “nice.” Its stated mission is to discover scientifically sound ways to organize human society and solve its problems, but it becomes clear that the institution is a cover for a more sinister spiritual agenda. On the way to resolving the conflict Ransom comes back into the picture as senior leader and spiritual guide, along with Merlin (who Lewis the medieval scholar can't resist bringing into the story), the eldila and the guiding spirits of the planets to challenge the threat posed by the NICE.

Although Lewis sometimes gets bogged down trying to make this grand scheme work, these books remain a rare consciously Christian effort to consider the implications of human exploration of the universe. What would it mean for our faith if we learn that God created intelligent life somewhere else? Maybe someday we'll know!