



ILLINOIS FREE WILL BAPTIST FEBRUARY 2025
NEWSLETTER

A monthly publication for Illinois Free Will Baptist families

Christ-Followers United in Thanksgiving

by Ivan Ryan, Promotional Director

Too often we fail to realize how thankful we are for something until we no longer have it. This is not true in every situation in life, but when something we hold dear is no longer available, it may require self-examination. Extreme situations give us all pause.

A vehicle careens out of control into a busy street filled with pedestrians, taking innocent lives and causing much suffering. Lives have been lost, loved ones torn away in an abrupt tragedy.

A ruinous wall of rushing water unexpectedly sweeps through an area changing the way of life for countless communities. Livelihoods are lost, destroyed by the flood.

Perhaps a raging fire burns out of control destroying entire cities. Businesses, establishments, and homes are lost in the fire, the flames taking every sentimental materialistic possession with a vengeance.

In all these situations—beyond even the lost possessions, the livelihoods, and the innocent lives—we also lose something else. Something that, whether or not you are directly involved in the catastrophes, pierces each of our hearts.

We lose the sense of safety and comfort in our lives and surroundings as we realize that we are not immune to the unforeseen; we are not exempt to the disasters of the world.

Winter storms have gripped much of our home state of Illinois and our adjacent neighbors as we have started the new year. The weather conditions have affected each of our district associations. Whether your church is Upstate, Midstate, Metro East, or Downstate Illinois, we have had to adjust service schedules and, in many cases, deal with dangerous conditions or power outages. Perhaps some of us too have felt the tension that comes with unnerving circumstances.

What's the point? The point is that no matter the situations of life, we can see the hand of God. In a fallen world, it's imperative for God's children to stick together, love God and others, and look to expand His kingdom. We must be vigilant, seeking the Lord and His ways, fleeing from temptation and darkness. But Jesus also commands us in John 16:33 to "Take heart!" because He has overcome the world. Through Him, we too can overcome every trying, unexpected, disastrous event. His presence in our lives assures us of His care and the promise of a better day.

Amid life's terrible situations, we see people—strangers or not—jumping to aid other people. I'm reminded of how God calls us to do His work; as Christ-followers, we are the hands and feet of Jesus. Let us not fail to recognize the safety, comfort, and joy we have in Christ; give thanks for God's provision and praise Him in both the highs and the lows. In all times—especially the difficult—it's important to follow our example in Christ and be leaders who encourage the discouraged, help the helpless, and pray for one another without ceasing.



"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Editor's Note: I consider it an honor to serve the Free Will Baptists of Illinois as the Promotional Director. The job also includes serving as editor of The Illinois Newsletter. You would not be wrong if you said that, in my writing, I lack confidence. I have a talented granddaughter, Claire, who works with D6 which used to be known as Randall House. I normally send her my comments, and she checks for punctuation, spelling, etc. This month the need was greater, and she was able to put into words exactly what I wanted to say. Also, I want to give a shout-out to Josh Colson, who helps with layout, adding pictures, formatting ads, etc. Special thanks to **Claire Ryan** and **Josh Colson** for their valuable assistance, both of whom would prefer their names not be mentioned.

Hoopeston Pastor Paul Schreiner Reporter Phyllis Schreiner

On December 22nd, our people worked together with singers Richard and LaDonna Hicks to put on a great Christmas program followed by a dinner and "Birthday Party for Jesus!" The children and adults acted out scriptures. It was tough, but, we were even able to find three wise men, though one had to study and cram to qualify! It was very well attended, as one of our Bible Club students had 11 family members and friends to support him (all 1st time visitors!).

On December 8th, we had a good service and gave gifts to the nursing home residents, too!

Some elderly shut-in folks enjoyed our fruit baskets and some carols!

Sunday, January 5th, a young man got saved during the invitation! Praise the Lord!

Our Sunday morning preaching services are on Facebook, and may be views any time of the day.

Hoopeston FWB will host the Fox River Association Meeting on February 1, and all are invited.

Benton First Pastor Phillip Kennedy

Hope everyone has had a good beginning to the New Year! It sure has been interesting with all the snow and ice.

On December 18th we had our Candlelight service at the church. It was good to hear testimony from those in the church, especially those we saw come to Christ this last year. On the Sunday before Christmas we celebrated Communion and passed out Christmas cards and treats. December 29th we had a fellowship meal celebrating the holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. James Kennedy also shared with us about his upcoming E-TEAM and Truth and Peace trips during morning worship. Like most people we were unable to have in person worship on the first Sunday of 2025 which was disappointing . . . but we were glad to be able to gather again on January 12th. We are looking forward to the new year and all that God has in store!

Blue Point Pastor Ernie Lewis Reporter Suzanne Lewis

During the Christmas season, we set up a large nativity scene in the Cisne Park. A couple of the youth Sunday school classes went to an assisted living facility in Flora where they sang Christmas carols and presented readings for the residents.

The Junior Church under director Christal Lewis presented the program, "Christmas Cookies: Ingredients of a Sweet Christmas". We held our Annual Candlelight Service on a Sunday evening. All ages participated with musical numbers and various readings. Afterwards a large crowd stayed around for our fellowship in the Link.

We offer sympathy to the family of Linda Spicer in the passing of her brother, Laverne Block. We also offer sympathy to the family of Howard Block, our oldest member, who recently passed away at the age of 102. We served meals to both families in the Link after the funeral services.

On January 5th due to all the ice and snow, we did not meet in person, but had an online service. On the 12th the rural roads were still in poor condition, but a large crowd gathered to meet in person. The monthly Pastor's Breakfast held at the Bonnie Café at the Mt. Vernon airport also had to be delayed a week because of the winter storm.

Decatur Pastor Stephen Cantrell Reporter Cathie DeCicco

In Decatur, we are continuing to go through the book of Ecclesiastes, thinking about what a life given to living each day for Christ as if it was our last would look like. Had a fantastic December enjoying the exchanging of cards, singing about the birth of our Lord and Savior, and enjoying the fellowship of church.

We are looking forward to a 'birthday' potluck in the beginning of February and more fellowship as well as continued support and love for each other through our outreaches and different meetings. May the beginning of February be a time of evaluation and reenergized devotion to what the church is. Not a collection of bricks and wood, but the body, the people, and our common love and devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hazel Dell Pastor: Curtis Smith Reporter: Diana Kirk

We went Christmas caroling to some of our senior on Wednesday, December 18th. A group of nineteen visited seven homes to share Christmas joy. At the end of the caroling Bro. Larry and Sis. Len Jones invited us into their home for hot chocolate and cookies. A good time of fellowship enjoyed by all.

Our children's Christmas program was on Sunday, December 22nd. They did an excellent delivering the Christmas story. In addition to the program several of the youth delivered specials. We have a very talented youth.

Due to the inclement weather, we have not been able to hold normal services at the church, but Bro. Curtis has delivered the Sunday messages through his Facebook page.

Wishing all of you a very happy New Year!

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom 5:1

Arnold View Pastor: Adam Brown Youth Leaders: River & Danielle Doss Reporter: Jodi Tanner

God's creation and design was on display in a magnificent way in the icy scenes of January. That glistening led to some of our January plans being rearranged. The church membership class commenced on January 12th when we were able to resume services. At the end of the month and to start February, we had several teen girls attend the Shine conference held in Nashville at Donelson Fellowship.

Hearts seem to be the trademark for February. Our hope during this month is to focus our hearts to show our love for Christ along with sharing with others how much He loves and cares for them. On February 2nd, we'll celebrate with our Valentine Banquet in the evening. The men have a breakfast and devotion planned for February 8th. Our youth plan to attend the Fire-Up Conference, which will focus on discipleship, February 21-23 in Troy, IL. Throughout the month, let's pray and work so that others may know the truth of John 3:16.

Oak Valley Pastor: Marty Smith Reporter: Tonya Smith

This past month Oak Valley participated in Shop with a Biker. Pastor Marty, his wife Tonya and Deacon Lawrence Pennington, helped the local CMA (Christian Motorcyclist Association) chapter, by bringing and taking less fortunate kids around shopping for necessities that they needed and a little something they wanted. The CMA, Oak Valley and many other people and organizations were able to bless 25 total kids this Christmas.

Christmas Eve, Brother Marty and Sister Tonya were invited to a reading of the Christmas Story in a barn. There was family, kids, puppies and cows. It was a totally different experience than it is sitting and reading it. It was such a blessing to be a part of that!

Earlier this month we lost a cornerstone of Oak Valley, Marie Rutger. She had been a member at Oak Valley since she was a little girl. She passed away January 3rd at the age of 92, surrounded by her family. Marie was more than just a long-standing member. She was very active in the church as the piano player, secretary and reporter, I am certain that in her past years at Oak Valley there were many others positions that she held. When Pastor Marty came and filled in in late

August, Marie spoke with Brother Marty like she had known him all her life. When she found out that Brother Marty rode a motorcycle and was a Member of the Christian Motorcyclist Association, she told him, "You just bring them biker guys to church with you! We will welcome them in"! Marie was such a gift and joy to be around. Oak Valley was blessed to serve as host for her visitation, funeral and fellowship afterwards. Where she will be greatly missed, we are all so blessed to have known her.



Sis. Marie Rutger

Crossroads Pastor: Jeff Pope Reporter: Tammy Boster

Happy New Year's greetings, everyone!

We are doing 40 days of prayer for our upcoming Revival with Brother David Crowe starting on January 26th going through the 29th.

Every year our Pastor chooses a theme for the year, and this year's theme is Faithful Stewards in 2025. Looking forward to what God has in-store for us.

We Praise God for answering prayers, we have been fervently praying for two members of our Church family, Bro. Roy Bartels and Sis. Wendy Matlock. God has blessed them both by bringing them back to us. Wendy had a major heart-attack and was given 5 weeks. Roy spent a lengthy time at Barnes hospital. Continuing prayers for both them and their families.

We were blessed with a great message by Bro. John Hollis on the morning of the 29th of December. Always a blessing to have him and Vicky join us.

Due to the weather, Church was canceled. Bro. Mike Crabtree and his wife Robin taught Sunday School from their home, and Pastor Pope preached two wonderful messages from his home for both services, thanking God for these wonderful servants of God.

Pastor Pope worked hard to shovel our Church parking lot so we could be able to have Church Wednesday night, and again on the weekend. Then God blessed us with an angel of mercy, someone came and plowed the parking lot. May God bless whoever it was.

*Let every day be
"A Chance"
A Chance to be a better person.
A Chance to enjoy life to its fullest
A Chance to forgive and ask for forgiveness
A Chance to love and be love
Don't miss the chance
You received from God
As you wake up this day.*

Harmony Interim Pastor: Kent Dunford Reporter: Alice Barron

We were kept very busy during the months of November and December. We honored our Veterans that are still with us and those that have lost their lives.

We would like for you to keep Faith Simpson in your prayers as she had a big decision to make and has decided to go to Japan for 3 months to work with the Carneys. Also, we have so many church members who have been out due to illness. However, we have seen prayer requests answered. God is so good.

Bro. Russell Hall oversaw a collection drive for items to be given to Knights Shield. This is an organization that teens go to for shelter, food, etc. Harmony has collected money and items such as diapers and wipes for Clarita thanks to Sherry Stewart. We also made gifts of love and gave to neighbors, friends and family members and reminded them of God's gift of love. The adults had their Christmas party with lots of food, games and fellowship. This is always something looked forward to. It is time once again to start roller skating. This is not just for the young but for all ages.

At this time Harmony has had to cancel services due to weather, loss of electricity and now weather again. We pray for all to be careful out there and stay warm.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." John 13:33b

Bear Point**Pastor: Gowdy Cannon****Reporter: Mona Lappin**

Greetings from Bear Point. Due to the snow and ice we had two on-line services January 5th and the 12th. Though the ice kept us from gathering in the building, we were not deterred from meeting via Facebook live and on YouTube. So thankful we have a pastor who can make those things happen and that most of our congregation is able to participate in that way. We concluded our 10 days of prayer and fasting from January 2-11 with an hour of prayer through Facebook live. Praying for better weather and getting back to our normal services and meeting face to face.

In December several members shopped for around 20 Caritas Foster Kids, and some made donations and shopped for our SV CAP kids as well. Our Christmas program was very exciting thanks to Heidi and Paulette who led the kids in performing the Christmas story complete with costumes from the sheep to the wise men, all kids were included and the older youth did a great job of narrating passages from the Bible.

Our most exciting news happened on November 19th, 2024 with the birth of Maverick Anthem McGovern. He was born at 8:08am, weighed 9.9 pounds and was 22 inches long. His parents are Seth and Sara (Hicks). He has already made his debut at church where he was proudly shown off by his mom. Great Grandma Barbara Loucks, Grandparents Alan and Kelley Hicks, and LOTS of Aunts, Uncles and cousins were also there to see him on his first official Sunday. I know the entire family is so proud to have this new little guy in their family and we are happy to have him in our Bear Point family too!

Plans are to go to Love Packages on January the 25th with the leadership of Brother Shawn Mygatt. This is always such a good trip and a huge BLESSING for those who go and work. Please pray for this mission and those who will help package literature and Bibles to be sent all over the world.

You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in pockets with holes in them. This is what the Lord Almighty says: "GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO YOUR WAYS." Haggai 1:6-7

Pittsburg**Pastor: Eddie Donelson****Pastor: Keith McDannel****Reporter: Heather Phillips**

PFWBC is excited to announce we will be hosting the Praying Women Forum | 2025, JESUS *Everywhere!* The event will take place on Saturday, February 1 from 1pm-5:30pm. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." As sisters in Christ, we can walk our faith courageously! In both good times and trying ones, God's Word says He is with us always, every moment, every place. Come and seek more about this aspect of Him. For He is truly *Jesus Everywhere!* Come listen to motivating speaker, **Kim McDannel** who inspires others by reflecting God's glory within life's triumphs and adversities. **Malinda Edgell**, who is an encourager of all women who are seeking a deeper knowledge of how they are seen through the eyes of God. And don't miss a special testimony from **Brynne Settle** whose trials have brought her family closer to God. There will also be three learning sessions, contemporary and quartet-style music, a skit, door prizes, and....women praying. Registration is required to attend the event. Deadline to register is January 30, and admission is FREE. Register now by visiting www.pittsburgfwb.org/praying-women-forum or by scanning the QR Code at the very back of this Newsletter.

And just a reminder as we go through the next few months of winter that you are precious to God, and HE loves you!! *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs"* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

WELCH COLLEGE

FORUM25

March 9-11, 2025

welch.edu/forum

FORUM25 IS A FREE EVENT



DR. CARL HARGROVE



ELIZA HUIE



NICOLÁS SERRANO



JOSH BAER



DR. MATTHEW MCAFFEE

Pittsburg Free Will Baptist Church *hosts*



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Forum | 2025

JESUS
Everywhere!

Saturday,
February 1
1– 5:30 p.m.



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Free admission.



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or “*Praying Women Forum*” on pittsburgFWB.org.

CROSSROADS FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH

Revival

JANUARY 26 AT 5:00PM
JANUARY 27-29 AT 6:00PM



Evangelist: Dr. David Crowe



CROSSROADS FWBC
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EFFINGHAM, IL 62401

MORE INFO: CONTACT PASTOR JEFF POPE AT 252-267-2420

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