



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

### Church News (2-6)

Arnold View,  
Bakerville,  
Blue Point,  
Crossroads,  
Harmony,  
Ina,  
Johnston City,  
Mt. Vernon,  
Oak Valley,  
Pleasant View,  
Hazel Dell,  
Pittsburg

### Events and More (7)

*Marriage Retreat Rescheduled*

*An Excerpt from E.L. St. Claire's  
Classic Sermon: What Free Will  
Baptists Believe and Why*

### Upcoming Events

Pastors Breakfast: February 2  
PFWBC Women's Forum: Feb. 7  
Shine Conference: Feb 21  
Welch College Rally: March 1  
ILFWB State Meeting: Mar. 19-20  
Marriage Retreat: Apr. 10 - 11  
FWB Convention: July 19-22



Find us on the web at  
[www.ilfwb.org](http://www.ilfwb.org)

# ILFWB NEWSLETTER

Feb. 2026

A monthly publication for Illinois Free Will Baptist Families

## Notes from the Promotional Director

*by Ivan Ryan, Promotional Director of the ILFWB State Association*

Good morning to all! I use the term "morning" because it is relatively early in the calendar year. You may be reading this as we are in the latter days of January, but it is already late enough to realize that time continues to move quickly. The pages of the church calendar move as rapidly as the rest of our lives. Many of us have already had our first associational, or Quarterly Meeting, for the year.

Now the focus is on our upcoming state association when we will gather at the Ina Church on Thursday evening, March 19. Moderator Curtis Smith will gavel us to order at 6:00 p.m. for preliminary business. This will be the tenth year that Bro. Smith has served as the moderator for our association. Following a time for the necessary business, we will hear from Pastor Barry Raper who will speak for the Christian Education sponsored seminar and will be a keynote speaker on Friday morning. Some of our churches have studied Bro. Raper's book, *A Life Pleasing to God*. Copies will be available for sale at the state meeting. The meeting will conclude on Friday, March 20.

It is also Welch Rally time again! Last year, we had our first Illinois Rally for Welch. The rally is set for Sunday evening, March 1 at 5:00 p.m. at the Ina Church. The service will be evangelistic with robust music and enthusiastic preaching by Dr. Todd Parrish. All churches are urged to consider a healthy offering for the school. Pastors who will, lead your churches to be actively involved in special efforts like the Illinois Rally. All are welcome to the monthly pastor and leader breakfast on the first Monday of each month at the Bonnie Café in the Mt. Vernon airport. Bro. Tim Owen plans on being with us on February 2 at 8:30 a.m.

We still have a number of churches actively praying for new pastors. At the publish date of this newsletter, we are aware of this need at Pleasant View, Bear Point, Calvary, and Pittsburg. If you have further questions, I have contact information for each of these congregations.

Special thanks to each church and reporter for submitting news from your congregation to the monthly newsletter. Our readers read your reports. We rejoice with your victories and pray over your concerns. Your participation is necessary and very much appreciated.

**Arnold View****Pastor: Adam Brown**

We're just getting into the new year & can hardly wait to see what's in store for the rest of it. In January, a new adult Sunday School class called Elevate began. We've also enjoyed some Sunday School attendance we haven't seen in a while. More than the numbers, we're grateful for the opportunities to connect and grow together in the Lord. We've also been blessed to see some decisions made to follow Christ in this new year. Those joys have been wonderful, but we also want to extend sympathy to Bundren and Richey families.

Love, a common theme for February, will be celebrated as we "Savor the Savior" and His love for us at the Love Banquet in February. The youth ladies have the opportunity to participate in the Shine simulcast that Ina is hosting. There's a Men's Breakfast for Feb. 7 that will include delicious breakfast food, pleasant fellowship, and a short devotion. Plans are also underway to begin a Men's Bible Study. Throughout the month, let's strive to truly love others like Jesus loves. *-Jodie Tanner*

**Bakerville****Pastor: Robert Craig**

Greetings to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ and Happy New Year!

Our New Year resolution is to Praise God More. Psalms 22:3 says "GOD inhabits the praise of his people". We could never praise him enough!!!

Jan 1st (Wed night) we started a new activity. We have a preachers panel. It is made up of Rev. Robert Craig, Rev. Luke Ganienay and Rev. Bob Davis. We are to write our questions on a piece of paper and place them in the offering plate, then they will pick one each week to be answered and explained. Our first session was a huge success! Sis. Pat Little also hands out trivia question sheets for us to work and we discuss it the next Wednesday night. It is enjoyed by all. Who says learning can't be fun!

Our worship music is wonderful! Sis. Jo Ann Craig is on the piano, Bro. Wes Lampp on the lead guitar, and Bro. Larry Little on the bass guitar. Sis. Debi Morgan

(Bakerville cont.) leads the worship songs. Bro John Millner does a great job working our sound system and power point. Bro Sid Milliner and his precious wife Darla are doing a great job with our bulletin. Bro Charlie Morgan teaches the adult Sunday School class with Sis Janice Daniel and Sis Pat Little teaching our youth. Thank you for your service.

Sis Jo Ann Craig, Sis Sue Beaty and Sis Ann Orrick decorated the church so nice for the New Year.

We are blessed with a wonderful pastor and his wife. They are always there for everything their church family needs. I don't know how they do everything they do. It has to be by the Grace of God! Praise God for his Wonderful Gift!

Sis Debi Morgan had back surgery on January 5th. Sunday night before her surgery she had the church to anoint her with oil and lay hands on her and pray. The surgery was a great success. She is home and doing Great! To God Be The glory!

Sunday, January 11th following the morning worship service, our Sunday School teachers are taking our youth to see the movie "David" (the animated version).

Our church hosted the Rend Lake Quarterly Meeting on Saturday, January 17th. That afternoon we had a bowling and pizza party for our youth at the Nu Bowl lanes in Mt. Vernon from 1-3 pm. We had one last November and it was a huge success.

The last Sunday of the month is our congregational night beginning at 6:00 pm. It is a night of music and people singing specials, followed by great food and fellowship in the fellowship hall. Everyone is welcome.

Until next month, may God bless everyone as we labor together for the Kingdom of God. *-Janice Daniel*



**Blue Point****Pastor: Ernie Lewis**

Our Junior Church director, Christal Lewis, wrote and directed the Christmas program this year. Titled "His Way's Better: A Journey to Bethlehem and Beyond", it incorporated songs, scripture and speaking parts in blessing all those in attendance with the Christmas story. Treat bags of candy, oranges, gum, candy, and nuts were passed out to everyone there. We also enjoyed a wonderful Candlelight Service, followed by a fellowship in the Link.

We recently had Josh Bennett speaking in our morning service and sharing about the Awaken Church. Josh Detherage of Campbellsville University spoke on another Sunday and shared about upcoming mission trips that he will be leading. Both men are married to women raised here at Blue Point.

On New Year's Eve, Kevin and Jana Henry and Bryce and Grace Henry hosted a New Year's Game Night in the Link. There was also tons of delicious food.

Brother Ernie was able to attend the January pastor's breakfast held in Mt. Vernon. We hosted the East Central District's quarterly meeting in January. Stephen Cantrell of the Decatur Church was the speaker. -*Suzanne Lewis*

**Crossroads****Pastor: Jeff Pope**

Greetings from Crossroads FWBC The growing Church with a big heart for God.

God has been blessing us financially and we have seen several visitors lately. God is good all the time.

Every year Pastor puts up a new theme, this year is Each One Can Reach One in 2026.

Praying for our Pastor as he has started a new men's Bible study on Tuesday nights. Pray God uses this to reach lost souls.

WNAC fundraiser will be Bear Hug Sunday on February 15th. Some of our youth dress in Bear costumes and go around the Church hugging people. It cost a dollar per hug. The money will go to support missions. A meal will follow.

(*Crossroads Cont.*) Thankful for sister Kim helping the kids by letting them know who to go hug.

We are going to be blessed with a new member this month, Sister Tammy Schroeder is going to become a new member. She has been faithfully attending for over a year now.

Thankful for all our new visitors. Hope they keep coming and that we all keep inviting new friends and family to Church, it's always a blessing to see new faces.

Pastor made the remark that he is blessed to be our Pastor. It is we who are truly blessed to have him as our Pastor as well as his wife and daughter.

May God Bless everyone, all of our Churches and all of our Missionaries.

Thankful for all those who serve in our Church. They are a big blessing to our Church. -*Tammy Boster*

**Harmony****Pastor: Ben Eldridge**

A long-time member of over 70 years, LaDonna Blades, went home to be with the Lord on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. LaDonna had been ill for some time but came to church when she could, especially for special times like Homecoming. LaDonna was a volunteer at Marion Memorial Hospital for over 20 years and used her gift of love and stories to console many families during their times of need as she registered them for same-day surgery. As well as God, church and family, LaDonna loved gospel music and was able to attend many concerts before her illness. LaDonna will be missed by many people and we extend our sympathy to her family.

Our sympathy also goes out to our Pastor's wife, Stephanie and her family. Her grandmother, who lives in Ohio, became ill and passed away on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Bro. Ted Cunningham preached for Bro. Ben during his absence and we thank him so much.

We also want to thank Janet McClerren for playing the piano for us during the absence of Rose Fields, who is recovering from surgery.

Skating once again at Emery Brothers on January 5<sup>th</sup> and on the first Monday of the month.

We look forward to hosting the Quarterly on January 24<sup>th</sup>. Hope to see many of you then. -*Alice Barron*

**Ina**

**Pastor: Brad Ryan**

Hello everyone! Hope the New Year finds you well! This past month has been full as we finished up the Christmas season and began the new year. On December 21st, we handed out our Christmas treat bags to all in attendance. It has been a tradition for many years to have a little bag of fruit and candy. That evening, we had a Candlelight Communion service, and Bro. Brad told his annual Christmas story. It was a special time of celebration of our Savior's birth.

We had several baptisms this past month. On December 28th, Eli Amato, Justin Shaputis, and Kenny Diez made their public professions of faith. On January 4th, Alyssa Kash was also baptized. Some of these are new in Christ, and some have been believers for years but wanted to make sure and take that next step. We are thankful for the Holy Spirit moving in hearts and drawing people to Him.

On New Year's Eve, we hosted a Family Game Night. Everyone brought snacks and games and we enjoyed good fellowship. The teens stayed for a lock-in and had a lot of fun with Bro. Jason. The Junior Church also had a fun outing that week going to see the movie David, about David of the Bible.

Our Ladies Friendship Circle is continuing their monthly meetings, doing a Bible study on women of the Bible. Many of our people are also doing Bro. Gowdy Cannon's Bible reading plan, "The Canon Connected". We are looking forward to God's blessings this year as we strive to bring glory to Him!

*-Katie Williams*



**JCity**

**Pastor: Randy Carney**

We are so excited for the upcoming year here at JCity Church! Pastor Randy led us into the new year with a sermon encouraging us to live a life of assurance, awareness, trust, and strength. We know all of those things are found in God! With that in mind, we move forward this year renewed and hopeful for what God can do through our little church.

We continue to provide hot meals for the community each Saturday evening. As always, God continues to provide what is needed each and every week. Our monthly ladies group, Prime Timers, met on the 11th with ten women in attendance. The topic was "Renewing our desire to work heartily for The Lord." The monthly Christian movie night continues on this year with our movie for January being 90 Minutes in Heaven.

We have several classes this year with two new ones beginning soon! We will be adding a young adult Sunday school class. We are also going to offer a Sunday School class in the auditorium for our visitors, taught by Pastor Randy, called JCity 101! We are praying God will send people our way to fill these classes!

Our regular classes also continue on with the men's Sunday school class studying through the book of Luke, while the ladies study the women of the Old Testament. Our teenage classes are still fairly new but are going great! The boys are studying 1 Samuel and the girls are learning about spiritual discernment. Our children in Sunday school are continuing their way through the books of the Bible while they learn about the fruits of the spirit in Jr. Church.

With the holidays behind us, we can now continue our 4th Friday Fun night for the kiddos. We have certainly missed them the last couple of months! January is all about how to train their emotions. The kids certainly enjoy the creative ways our teachers present the lessons, with this lesson involving activities with dragons!

We continue to pray God will lead the lost and those searching for a church to us according to His will, and that He continues to bless the ministries of our church.

*-Michelle Palmer*

**Mt. Vernon**

**Pastor: Craig Smith**

Happy 2026 as we are already working our way through January! May each church be filled with God's many blessings as we serve Him!

Illness has taken its toll on our attendance, but things seem to be getting back to normal.

In December our WAC ladies enjoyed a joyous and fun-filled Christmas party. As we again gathered around Sister Sandy's welcoming table, gifts were exchanged and laughter filled her home.

Our watch night service was small in attendance, but those who were able to come enjoyed a good movie, great food, prayer and worship.

On January 11, James Kennedy from First Free Will Baptist Church of Benton spoke to us about his 2025 Truth and Peace and E-team, St. Croix experiences. He also told us about his 2026 E-team, El Salvador, plans. We always look forward to hearing and seeing James since we watched him grow up in our church!

January 16<sup>th</sup> we will be serving lunch to the Mt. Vernon Police Department. What an honor to reach out to these brave men and women who risk their lives serving their community each day! We are blessed to have them as our church neighbors. Please pray for them daily.

How have you responded to the news of Jesus? Have you embraced Him and His gospel? Do you live a life worthy of His love? -*Mary Ann Levitt*

**Oak Valley**

**Pastor: Marty Smith**

In October. Oak Valley Blessed Pastor Marty with gifts and a dinner for Pastor Appreciation Day. Later in the month Pastor Marty, went and helped at a Christian Concert sponsored by 5150 Ministries, in Fairfield. Then at the end of October, we were blessed to be able to serve one of our parishioners, as her husband passed away. We love her dearly and she is such a blessing. We were also able to set up for Trunk-or-Treat in our wonderful little town of Cisne! Pastor Marty also has been able to open up the White County Jail. He has been able to go into the jail and speak with the inmates, and officers. Which is a first in over 5 years! He is able to

(Oak Valley cont.) go to speak with 3-6 inmates, 15 minutes each, each week, after working a full-time job through the day.

Then in November we were able to host a wonderful Soup dinner for the community. It was such a blessing! A Few of our church members also helped with the Johnsonville Pumpkin Fest. Pastor Marty was blessed by being able to go on a 2-day Christian Motorcyclist, Motorcycle Ride down in Southern Illinois and in Missouri, and pray together, as well as pray over others. What a blessing for him!

December was crazy busy with all the holidays of family, and friends. Pastor Marty Smith and his wife Tonya, participated with the Christian Motorcyclist Association, in the Fairfield Christmas Parade. Then the next weekend, many from Oak Valley were blessed to helped with Christmas with a Biker. Sponsored by 41st Ministries and Warriors of the Way they blessed almost 100 less fortunate kids ranging from Newborn to 18 years old, with clothes and needs. It was such a blessing! We were even able to squeeze in a Church dinner after service one Sunday.

We have been keeping up with our Facebook page, and we are still having many views. Pastor Marty is working on getting things set up to where he can start doing a pod cast as well. We are also in the process of finding a bible study to be held on Tuesday evenings. -*Tonya Smith*

**REGISTRATION IS OPEN!**

shine simulcast

FREE IN THE  
Light

February 21, 2026 8:30am

Ina FWB Church  
Girls ages 12-18

**Pleasant View**

Pleasant View FWB Church is still without a pastor, but we continue to worship the Living Christ. While we search for a pastor, our deacons and Sunday School teachers faithfully preach and teach God’s Word. God has also spoken through some of the young men in our congregation as they fill the pulpit occasionally. This fall we had visits from Avant Missionaries Cesar and Luz Quiroz and IM Missionaries Dennis and Carol Teague and Osam and Emily Sakamoto.

In October, we hosted the East Central Quarterly Meeting. It was a blessing to see and worship with brothers and sisters in Christ. Our church building received a new ‘crown’ late this fall. Last year’s strong storms revealed some weak spots in the shingle roof over the sanctuary, so a new metal roof was put on and new trim and gutters were installed. We are thankful for the way God provides our every need.

The children presented the Nativity in the morning service December 21<sup>st</sup>. A shepherd, two lambs, an angel, Joseph, Mary, and 8-month-old baby Jesus acted out the Scripture as it was read. The young characters concluded by singing Psalm 23. Everyone enjoyed this special presentation. While the children were out of school for the holiday, a group of all ages enjoyed an evening at the movie theater. They went to see the animated movie, *David*. What a treat!!

The Calvary group joined us on the 28<sup>th</sup> for a devotion, food, and fellowship. It was encouraging to us all to meet and share with each other. Let us pray for one another, lifting up our joys and concerns to the God who hears and answers prayer. -Paula Hayes

**Hazel Dell**

**Pastor: Curtis Smith**

Happy New Year, All. Trusting your New Year is off to a good start.

Our Christmas program was on the morning of December 21<sup>st</sup>. Our youth did an excellent job presenting the Christmas story. Thank you Sis. Emilee and others who worked so hard helping the children in the presentation. We had a New Year’s Eve Service with a devotion, finger foods, and games. A fun time was had by all.

The Master’s Men group met for their monthly meeting on January 11th. Eight men were in attendance. Bro. Rusty Miller gave the devotion.

Our condolences to the family of Bro. Jim Robbins who passed away on January 15<sup>th</sup>. -Diana Kirk

**Pittsburg**

PFWBC is excited to announce we will be hosting the third annual Praying Women Forum | 2026, Let Your Light Shine. Join with Christian sisters on Saturday, February 7 from 1pm-5:30pm to enjoy a renewal of spirit. This year, we are shining a light on our personal purposes related to doing God’s good works. Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Your “little light of mine” is powerful. But it must be shone in order to benefit others. Your Father has made good works for you to do just that! You are carrying everything you need to fulfil God’s purpose in your life. The glory is not for you, but HIM. Admission is free and you can register now at [www.pittsburgfwb.org/praying-women-forum](http://www.pittsburgfwb.org/praying-women-forum) or by scanning the QR Code on the ad below.

Coming February 7.

 Third Annual Praying Women Forum | 2026

let your light shine

 Register now!

Scan the QR code or call Dina at (618) 727-3403.

 Follow us on Facebook "Praying Women Forum"

## Marriage Retreat Rescheduled

by Keith Fletcher

Couples are invited to attend the Hope and Renewal Experiential Marriage Retreat, which has been rescheduled for April 10-11, at Lake Sallateeska near Pinckneyville.

The retreat combines marriage enrichment with rescue and repair, offering encouragement for healthy relationships as well as practical tools for couples facing challenges. Unlike traditional speaker-centered retreats, this experience features interactive and sensory sessions designed to help couples reconnect through guided activities and small-group discussion.

All sessions are conducted using a “no shame” approach in a supportive environment. Optional individual sessions and follow-up opportunities will be available.

Registration begins Friday at 4:00 p.m., with the retreat concluding Saturday evening following a candlelight dinner. Organizers hope the new date and abbreviated schedule will allow more couples to attend. Space is limited.

For more information or to register, contact Keith Fletcher at 618-952-1272 (please leave a message), email [jcitycenter@gmail.com](mailto:jcitycenter@gmail.com), or you may simply visit [jcity.center/marriage/retreat](http://jcity.center/marriage/retreat).

**LOOK AGAIN!**  
*New Date*  
*April 10-11*

**HOPE and RENEWAL**  
 experiential marriage retreat

*For Better...  
 not Worse!*

## An Excerpt from What Free Will Baptists Believe and Why

by E.L. St. Claire, D.D., Ph.D. (1866-1916)

... Free Will Baptists have always believed that man is responsible to God his Creator for his acts; hence man [has] a “free will,” having the power to choose between good and evil. Jesus taught this doctrine when he exclaimed, “Whosoever will may come.” Again our Lord taught the doctrine of free will when He commanded His apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Because all were sinners, all have sinned. All needed redemption—salvation . . . because all, like Adam, had sinned. Calling on all to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, believe on the only begotten Son of God, as the only means of salvation, calling all the world to repentance, not a part of it, calling on all men to repent of their sins—not some of them. Why, Because all have sinned. Not calling on some, but all. Why call if all cannot hear? Why die for all if all cannot be saved? Is not His blood sufficient? Is not the sacrifice of Christ ample?

Anything short of a full, free salvation from sin is anti-Christian [and] savors not of a loving, dying Christ, but smells of the slums of religion. [God is] calling all men to repent—everywhere. Anything short of this is beneath a loving God, and only finds place in the shallow minds of men. Believe and repent! Who? All men everywhere. Why? Because all men everywhere reveal to us the loving nature—the unselfish nature of the Christ and God the Father. Faith in Christ, and repentance toward the Father God. All come—great and small, rich and poor, all come—every man, everywhere. Come, the sacrifice is offered; the sword is removed before the gates of the spiritual Eden, the church. Come in, every kindred, every tribe, every nation, come in! And yet there is room—room for all. Christ died for all. Jesus Christ tasted death for every man. Come on; only devils—demons—would keep you back, keep you away.

**Editor’s Note:** The preceding is an excerpt from a sermon of Dr. E.L. St. Claire, a Free Will Baptist preacher in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was first published by Ayden Free Will Baptist Printing Company. To read more sermons by St. Claire and to find out more about our rich Free Will Baptist heritage, visit [www.fwbhistory.com](http://www.fwbhistory.com).

Illinois Free Will Baptist February 2026

# NEWSLETTER

Illinois State Association of Free Will Baptists  
P.O. Box 1 Bonnie, Illinois 62816-0001

U. S. Postage Paid  
Non-Profit Org.  
Bonnie, Illinois  
Permit Number 1

OR CURRENT RESIDENT

*Reporters, please note: Please send all correspondence for the Illinois Newsletter to [www.iryann1970@gmail.com](mailto:www.iryann1970@gmail.com) The deadline for the March Newsletter is February 15*



**SUNDAY, MARCH 1 | 5:00 P.M.**  
**INA FREE WILL BAPTIST CHURCH**  
Third and Elm Street  
201 West Third Street  
Ina, IL 62846

