



ILLINOIS FREE WILL BAPTIST February 2024  
**NEWSLETTER**

A monthly publication for Illinois Free Will Baptist families

Note from the Editor:

We are enjoying the process of visiting our churches, attending associational meetings, and being with other groups among our folks to represent and promote our various ministries. We have a diverse and busy group of people. I know that our denomination is small, and our state work is insignificant in the eyes of many but make no mistake about this—we are making a difference when we attempt something for the glory of Christ.

I listened to the director of our Illinois Disaster Relief Ministry, Kevin Woolbright, as he shared about their recent trip to the Clarksville, Tennessee area. He shared some pictures and told some heart touching stories of helping the victims of a recent devastating tornado. He shared about some heartfelt hugs, tears, and prayers with some very grateful folks. Your giving, going, and prayers are making a difference.

With great excitement we will soon have the opportunity to welcome back to the state of Illinois Darren and Dana Portell. After serving with IM several years ago and then teaching in Taiwan, they will be coming to Champaign to work alongside Tyler and Kellie Penn with IM to minister to the 12,500 foreign exchange students at the University of Illinois. Let's continue to support both the Portells and the Penns and the kingdom work they are doing with our prayers and financial giving.

As we make our plans to come see you in your churches, we are anxious to see many of you in O'Fallon at the Victory Church when we meet there on March 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> for our State Association Meeting. Pastor Cannon and his people will roll out the welcome mat for us at their beautiful campus.

The three pastors who have been invited to preach will remind us that God has placed us in our place of ministry **For Such a Time as This**. I look forward to hearing from Pastors Paul Boyer, Kevin McNeely, and Sam Ramdial. On Thursday evening we will hear from TN State Director of CEF, Jeff Nichols. Several of our churches have a ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship Bible Clubs.

Opportunities abound for anyone who has a desire to serve. Don't allow yourself to become overwhelmed. Do what you can do and remember, *We are Better Together*.

Many of you will, no doubt, remember the story called *The Star Thrower*:

*An old man came upon a boy on a beach who was surrounded by thousands of starfish washed up by the high tide. He would pick one up and toss it back into the water because when the sun was at its strongest, the starfish would die.*

*The old man said, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."*

*The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one."*

You all have opportunities to be difference-makers in your homes, churches, places of work, and everyday living. I pray the Lord blesses you in your work for His kingdom.

Ivan & Diane Ryan

Thank you for your patience and understanding as the new guy gets accustomed to the process of editing *The Newsletter*. A special Thank You to the church reporters who send in your monthly news. Remember to send it in by the 15<sup>th</sup> to [iryan1970@gmail.com](mailto:iryan1970@gmail.com) I can also be reached at 10667 Route 166 Marion IL 62959 or by phone at (618) 922-2634.



**Benton Church Pastor: Phillip Kennedy**

Hope everyone had a good start to the New Year! On December 20th, we had a candlelight service this is one of the most special services we do each year and it was a blessing! In our Christmas Eve service James Kennedy and Joshua Kennedy did a Charlie Brown skit. On December 31st, we had a Potluck meal for our birthdays and Anniversaries. A man in our church named Dale Baumgarten recently went through and redid all the lights in our church building and Gym. It looks a lot better and brighter and should be cheaper!

We had our first open gym night of the year on January 5th. Our Student Hangouts have continued to grow as well! Pastor Phillip Kennedy attended the Pastors breakfast on January 8th. At the time of writing this Newsletter James Kennedy after a month of fundraising for Truth and Peace is 76% funded. We are very thankful for all who have given thus far and all who are praying. Please pray for James.

Our most Exciting news is we had a little girl named Skye get saved in December so we are all Rejoicing over this! We were able to baptize her on January 14th! Keep praying for souls to be saved and converts to be discipled.

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

We celebrate this prophecy on Christmas Day as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the message of HOPE that He brought to the world. At Bear Point we also celebrated the birth and dedication of a precious little boy this year – Woods William Thompson, son of Luke and Maddie Kate Thompson. He was dedicated to the Lord on October 29<sup>th</sup> with several church and family members in attendance - Grandparents George and Jana Thompson, Johnny and Jessica Hollis, Great Grandparents, John and Vickie Hollis, and Mark and Carol Payne. GREAT- GREAT GRANDMA Sister Jean Ragland was also a part of the service as she prayed a very special pray over him. FIVE generations in one church. What a SPEICAL BLESSING and we know that God has great things in store for Woods.

November is a month of special Thanksgiving and we certainly had a lot to be thankful for. Two young ladies followed the Lord in Baptism. Kayla Woodcock, who started coming at the invite of Tiffany Powell, was baptized on November 11<sup>th</sup>. She has fit right in with our church and has many best friends! Also Emerson Zsido, daughter of John and Heidi Zsido was baptized on November 26<sup>th</sup> by Brother Gowdy. The pews were full of family there to support Emerson, who has grown up at Bear Point and we know that Grandpa Jerome and Grandma Patty Kopec are extremely proud of her.

The WAC put on their annul Country Store this year on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. There were several vendors, and of course the BEST home-made soups and desserts were served to the hungry shoppers. Over a \$1,000 was raised to support the various missions, which include- SV CAP program, Giving Tree, and our own Truth and Peace, and ETEAM kids.

The YOUTH have been having their monthly bake sales after church on Sundays, and they spent much time practicing to prepare for the Christmas play which was performed in the evening service on December 17<sup>th</sup>.

The church did Secret Santa for about 20 children in foster care at CARITAS Family Solutions in Mt. Vernon again this year. We pray that this outreach helped to make the holidays a little brighter for these foster kids and their families. There was also the annual caroling to the widows, and with Brother Gowdy's series of messages called Music Under the Microscope, we have learned a lot about the Biblical basis for many of our beloved Christmas hymns.

We will host a joint service on Sunday December 31<sup>st</sup> with Luke Thompson as the speaker. What better way to start the NEW YEAR than getting together with God's people to worship and hear from His Word! COME JOIN US! For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun!...(Isaiah 43:19)

*(Editor's Note: This item was sent in for the Jan issue and was overlooked. My apologies to Mrs. Lappin and to the Bear Point Church.)*

**Oak Valley News Reporter: Marie Rutger**

We pray everyone is having a nice New 2024 Year.

We are still looking for a pastor, and having fill-ins each Sunday bring us good messages.

We had a nice 11/19/23 celebrating Thanksgiving/Christmas when Bro. David Shores was with us.

Bros. David Shores, Zach Paul, Jerry Thompson, Josh Barbre, Ethan Keyser, Brian Spradlin, Bryan Peters, Rex Owen, Deven Bradwyn, Matthew Parker and Vic Ackerson are among those filling in so far, and we appreciate their helping us. We keep praying the Lord will send us someone to pastor and I'm sure He will in due time.

Winter weather may influence our attendance some, but Spring and Summer will come about April. We would be glad to have visitors anytime and ask that you keep is in your prayers.

**Pittsburg News Pastors: Eddie Donelson, Keith McDannel Reporter: Heather Phillips**

Wow the year is already flying by! We have had a slight slow down after the Christmas and holiday season here at PFWBC. It is allowing us to catch our breath.

At our Youth Group's lock in, during the youth lead church service the Spirit was moving on all in attendance. As a result, there were 4 young ladies who gave their lives to Jesus! Praise the Lamb for His power to save! Four more have been added to His Kingdom!

The choir's Christmas Cantata and all the children's plays went off without a hitch. The day was capped with a time of fellowship in the Life Center with pizza and dessert. It was a wonderful day to spend in God's house.

On Christmas Eve we opened the doors of the Life Center to the community for our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Christmas Eve Lunch. We served approximately 150 in house and provided over 75 take out meals to shut ins, the elderly, and various ministries in the area. We had around 25 workers that took time out of their busy Christmas preparations to serve those around them. What a blessing they were. Jesus was definitely in our midst

! on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Pastor Eddie started a 3 part sermon on 3M Evangelism. The 3M stands for MPact, MPower, and Mprove. The sermons are challenging the congregation, our leadership, and all of those who pass through our doors to reevaluate how we take the Good News to those around us. If desired, these can be viewed on our website [www.pittsburgfwb.org](http://www.pittsburgfwb.org).

Love 442 Ministries. A group of men from our church have launched this new outreach to serve those in need. We are looking forward to seeing what great and amazing ways the Lord uses this ministry to impact our community. The ministry's mission is to put into practice Ephesians 3:20-21 and do immeasurably more through supporting those in need spiritually, physically, financially, etc. They have a Facebook page-Love 442 Ministries-, check it out!

We have been asked to mention two special events for women coming soon:  
A Ladies Conference at Pittsburg Feb 3 from 1-4 pm and a Ladies Seminar on  
Mar 2 beginning at 9:00 am at Grange Hall. Call the churches for information.

**Hazel Dell News Pastor: Curtis Smith Reporter: Diana Kirk**

Blessings to all of you from all of us at Hazel Dell!

The Master's Men group met for their monthly meeting on Dec. 10. There were 9 in attendance. Bro. Justin Miller delivered the devotion.

Sis. Emilee Smith and Sis. Diana Harrison directed our youth in the Christmas presentation of "Manger Tales" on Sunday, December 17th.

Our annual Christmas caroling was on Wednesday evening, December 20th. Bro. Larry and Sis. Len Jones hosted the group following caroling for some hot chocolate and cookies,

On December 31st., we hosted a New Year's Eve Watch Night Service in conjunction with the Celebrate Recovery group. There were 40 in attendance for an evening of message, singing, food, fellowship and games. Thank you to all who participated in this special evening.

We were blessed on Christmas morning by specials presented by several of our church family. Those participating were Jackie Gulley, Sadie Phillips, Diana Harrison, and Rusty Miller, Walker LeVault playing guitar, Zach Harrison, Molly Harrison and Titus Smith playing piano solos, and a special by Sydney Lewis. What talent God has given to those who participated. Also, Sis. Diana Harrison read the Christmas Story.

*"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." 1 Peter 3:8*

**Arnold View News. Pastor: Adam Brown Reporter: Jodi Tanner**

It's hard to believe, but we're already one month into this new year. In this short time, we've definitely experienced the feels of winter. However, we are so grateful that God's love is warm in our hearts. In 2024, our focus is to be a beacon of God's love throughout the community. Throughout this year we (from the youngest to the oldest) are striving to be His hands and feet to our neighbors. We're praying for the Good News team and the students at Crab Orchard school that have and could attend in preparation for our upcoming spring sessions. Our prayers are also for our youth to be Christlike role models for their peers. Some adult classes are collecting and distributing supplies to the homeless in our area. We're also looking forward to the opportunity to reach out with a banquet celebrating Christ's gift of love on the eighteenth of this month.

*"But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8*

**Blue Point News      Pastor: Ernie Lewis    Reporter: Suzanne Lewis**

In December there was a ceremony at the Cisne Cemetery by 'Wreaths Across America'. Wreaths were placed on the graves of veterans and several who were honored were from Blue Point Church. Our church always donates to and participates in this special ceremony.

The Junior Church Christmas program, "5G", was a tremendous blessing. Directors Bill and Christal Lewis do a wonderful job each year. We also had a tremendous Candlelight Service in December with a fellowship afterwards. Hayden Byars played the guitar and sang a very special song written by his wife, Amelia. We also had a Senior Grocery Giveaway toward the end of the month.

In January several of the men took down our nativity from the Cisne park. The women took down the Christmas décor in the church and the link and replaced it with winter decorations. Brother Ernie was able to attend the Pastor's Breakfast held at the Bonnie Café held in Mt. Vernon.

Joe and Katie Matthews have returned from their mission trip to Bulgaria. They worked under Josh Provow, visiting many villages and distributing Operation Christmas Child boxes. We hosted the East Central District quarterly meeting on a very cold day in January.

Despite the wintery weather the work on our new pavilion has continued and it is almost completed. Our prayer is that it will be used as we continue to share Jesus with our community.

**New Hope News    Pastor: Larry Cook    Reporters: Kaitlyn Catron/Jackie Capps**

Here is the news about what we have done in the last few months. In October an appreciation dinner was held for Bro Larry and Sis Linda. Of course, fried chicken was served. Gift cards and candy was our way of saying "Thanks".

A four-day revival was also in October. Each evening was a different speaker. It was a pleasure to have other churches join us in our services.

We are over-joyed to announce Thyus Lea, Norah Fowler and Reid Catron have all accepted the Lord as their Savior. Thyus's baptism was in October as well and will always be remembered by Bro Larry. If you want to know why, just ask him!

In November several people collected shoe boxes for Operation Christmas Child. The youth group decided to help pack and also make some up with the youth fund money. In total New Hope made up 39 boxes.

We went to Mt. Vernon Countryside Manor and Heritage Woods in December for our annual Christmas Caroling. The residents always enjoy when we come share with them.

Our Christmas Program was put on by our youth this year. Samuel Fowler, our newest youth member played Baby Jesus for our "Bright Star" Christmas play. They did a great presentation.

On New Year's Eve we had a couple members help make up some homemade donuts for us to enjoy during our fellowship that evening. Several people there until midnight playing games and ringing in the new year at church. Hope you are having a great start to 2024. God Bless.

**JCity Church    Pastor: Randy Carney    Reporter: Doug Handcock**

It sure was a cold January...sure hope that all our sister churches incurred no frozen pipes or damage. We rejoice that our quarterly report shows an increase in SS and church attendance. We said our goodbyes to the Rusty Carney family as Pastor Randy and Rhonda drove the kids (and grandkids) St. Louis on the 16th for their flight back to Japan as Rusty and Brenda return to the mission field. # On the 23rd was Senior Day, a monthly ministry, inviting senior citizens throughout the community to meet for an afternoon of food, fellowship and music. Roger LeGendre strums his guitar as he leads folks in the hymns of old. And now that the holidays and bad weather are past (hopefully)... our Saturday community meals have resumed. Several of our regulars deliver meals to shut-ins...so the blessings are distributed even further. And the food is delicious! # Following the quarterly meeting on Saturday the 27th, several of us joined other JC churches on the 28th for our 5th Sunday Sing ... enjoying music, fellowship ...plus soup and sandwiches. # Finally...a friendly reminder to the guys that Valentine's Day is almost here. You have been warned.

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 Illinois Newsletter is February 15

***Illinois State Association Thursday-Friday March 14-15***

***Victory Free Will Baptist Church***  
***223 Scott-Troy Road, O'Fallon, IL 62269***  
***Pastor. Jon Cannon Associate, Paul Boyer***

***Lodging Suggestions:***

<i>Hilton Garden Inn</i>	<i>\$59.00</i>	<i>360 Regency Park, O'Fallon, IL 62269</i>	<i>(618)624-4499</i>
<i>Hampton Inn</i>	<i>\$66.00</i>	<i>150 Ludwig Dr, Fairview Heights, IL 62208</i>	<i>397-3275</i>
<i>Holiday Inn Express</i>	<i>\$92.00</i>	<i>3396 Green Mt Crossing Dr, Shiloh IL 62269</i>	<i>589-9848</i>
<i>Candlewood Suites</i>	<i>\$83.00</i>	<i>3396 Green Mt Crossing Dr, Shiloh, IL 62269</i>	<i>589-9848</i>
<i>Drury Inn &amp; Suites</i>	<i>98.00</i>	<i>12 Ludwig Dr, Fairview Heights, IL 62208</i>	<i>398-8530</i>

***Speaking Thursday – Jeff Nichols Friday – Paul Boyer, Kevin McNeely & Sam Ramdial***

***Welch College Annual Offering***  
***Ignite the Flame Dinner at the Ina FWB Church***  
***Monday evening March 25, 2024 6:00 pm***  
***Planning Meeting at the Bonnie Café Mt Vernon Airport***  
***Monday, February 26, 2024 also at 6:00 pm***