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## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Rev. Dr. Doug Rehberg



## A Matter of Identity

Three ministers got together for coffee one morning to discuss some problems they were having in their respective churches. After a few minutes of discussion, they all found that they had the same problem - bats in the belfry. One man said, "I got so mad I took a shot gun and fired six rounds at them." The others said, "Did that get rid of them?" "No," he said, "All I got were holes in the plaster."

Another said, "I set traps." The others asked, "Did they work?" "Oh yes," he said, "I caught every one of those bats. But after driving 50 miles and releasing them into a barn, they were back in the church belfry before I arrived." The third man said, "I feel sorry for you guys. I got rid of mine just like that." The others said, "Well, what did you do?" The man said, "I baptized them, and I haven't seen them since."

Now, if you have been around the church very long you know that that's not just true of bats. Parents often come forward in worship to present their infant child for baptism, and then they disappear. And it's not just parents of infants, the same can happen with adults. They come forward full of enthusiasm to present themselves for baptism, and after a while they disappear. It can happen in any denomination. It can happen in any church. It's so prevalent that it prompts the question, "So, what's it all about?" The simple answer is, "It's all about your identity in Christ."

Forty-six months ago, Barb and I came to this church as strangers. We were confident in our identity in Christ, but not in this church. You didn't know us, and we didn't know you. But quickly, everything changed. Soon we had become friends and colleagues in ministry who shared a common purpose - to "Bring the Heart of Jesus to the Heart of Irwin." No longer was this a place to put in time. Personal priorities began to shift. We started to identify with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ who share the joy of working to increase the family of faith.

Evidence of this change was considerable last year. At this time last year, we had never witnessed a "January Thaw." We had no idea that we could raise over \$8,000 to support the ever-growing work of changing lives through Carpenter's Apprentice. Last year at this time, we had no full-time Children's Ministry Leader or Administrative Assistant. Neither had we occupied the new building for more than seven months. We were still getting our feet wet in using it to serve the Kingdom of God.

In the summer of 2025, we experienced weak financial giving and inadequate accounting, leading the Session to propose only a modest increase to the 2026 budget. However, all of that began to change in the fall as giving increased and Karen Crissman came onboard as our full-time treasurer and Administrative Assistant. The fact is, today our financial position is the best it's been in years.

All of us have much for which to be thankful as we enter this new year. The Lord continues to draw people to us to love and serve. For those who see First Presby as a place to attend on Sunday morning out of habit or ritual, we are grateful for their presence. But our deepest longing for them, and for us, is so much more substantial than that. Let's resolve this new year to prayerfully and intentionally live our real identity together and see what the Lord will do.

# WINTER REFRESH CLASSES

JANUARY 11 - MARCH 29, 2026

9:15AM - 10:15AM



We would like a general count for supplies and room arrangement, so call or email the office if you plan on attending. You are always welcome to drop in to any class.

## “The Red Sea Rules: 10 God Given Strategies for Difficult Times”

Location: Room 108

Led by: Diane Johnston & Ruth Sloan

Using the Israelites' story in Exodus 14 as an example bestselling author Robert Morgan offers ten strategies for dealing with hard times and discouragements to move from fear to faith - a divine protocol for handling life.

## “Survey of the Early Centuries of the Church”

Location: Library

Led by: Bill Martin

With the ending of the Book of Acts our inspired historical record of the early church comes to an end. What happened next? How did the church develop? What records do we have to work with? What were the central issues facing the earliest believers? This class will look at these questions and the ongoing history of the church during its first several centuries. Studying church history helps one understand the Bible. Studying the Bible enables us to evaluate church history.

## “A Deep Dive into Being Born Again”

Location: Room 120

Led by: Jerry Detar

One of the most important interactions in history occurs between Jesus and Nicodemus. This nocturnal meeting between the Light of the World and this elderly religious leader brings to light some profound mysteries that are worthy of extensive investigation.



# Barista Brew Works

Hello Church Family!

We're excited to invite you to stop by our Brew Works Barista Cart before and after Sunday services & during Jumpstart and Refresh Bible Studies!

Enjoy fresh, handcrafted coffee, tea & hot chocolate served with a smile—it's a great way to connect, relax, and start (or end) your Sunday!

*Want to get involved?*

We're also looking for friendly volunteers to join our Barista Team! If you're age 16 or older, we'd love to have you. No experience needed—we'll provide training. It's a fun way to serve, meet new people, and be part of a welcoming ministry.

Stop by for a cup, or ask us how you can join the Barista Team - we can't wait to see you there!



Interested in joining our church community?  
We warmly invite you to attend

## NEW MEMBER CLASS

**Sunday, January 18th**

9:30am in the Owens Room



*Prayer is communication with God. When practiced in community, it becomes a powerful experience that strengthens faith, builds unity, and multiplies hope.*





# January Thaw

A Fundraiser Benefitting  
The Carpenter's Apprentice

January 25, 2026 | 11:30 am - 3:00pm  
First Presby Irwin, 617 Main Street, Irwin, PA  
LUNCH | RAFFLE | GAMES | PRIZES

It's time again for the January Thaw fundraiser to help fund The Carpenter's Apprentice's next "Spring Fix-Up" weekend. Last year's event was such a smashing success, we thought it would be fun to smash a car this year in tribute... yes, you read that right... this year, you will be able to purchase an opportunity to take a swing at a car!! There will also be a display of The Carpenter's Apprentice team's handy work and testimonials from those served during the "Fall Fix-Up" weekend. We will have spaghetti and meatballs, rolls, salad, and dessert. There will be face painting and several different chances to win a prize including a basket raffle, 50/50, and "Guess How Many" games. There will be an auction for a golf outing for 4. You may even be fortunate enough to win the grand prize from Iceburgh's Bistro: 1 FREE salad each month for the next YEAR!! Tickets are available NOW at the Gift Card Desk in the Brenzia Room on Sundays or in the church office during the week: \$10 for adults and \$5 for kids under 12. You can participate by helping with setup, decoration, cooking, serving meals, or be part of the cleanup and tear down crew. Contact Lori Bertani 724-561-7341 or [l.bertani@comcast.net](mailto:l.bertani@comcast.net) or Heather Duckett 404-414-6794 or [heather@firstpresbyirwin.org](mailto:heather@firstpresbyirwin.org).



## About The Carpenter's Apprentice

The Carpenter's Apprentice exists to improve the quality of life for those needing home repair or adaptation in the Irwin area. These projects are to improve the level of safety and/or make the home more habitable and will be directed to those in need as defined by local churches. Local volunteers will accomplish all work out of love and respect for those needing assistance. *For more information or to volunteer and join us in the mission, please visit our website at [thecarpentersapprentice.org](http://thecarpentersapprentice.org).*



[Link to Signup Genius](#)

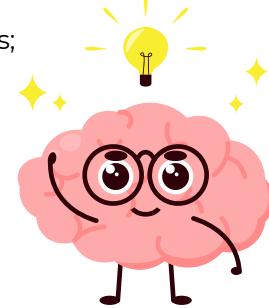
Use the QR code or click the link above to see how you can help make this year's January Thaw a successful event!

# CREATURES

The creatures God made were often used to teach important lessons. Fill in the blanks with the name of the proper creature.

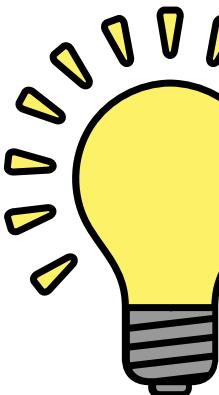
1. Jesus cautioned people; not to "cast ye your pearls before \_\_\_\_\_, least they trample them under their feet," Matthew 7:6.
2. The writer of Proverbs tells us, "Go to the \_\_\_\_\_, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise," Proverbs 6:6.
3. God used the foolishness of an \_\_\_\_\_ which lays her eggs on the earth where they may be stepped on to convince Job of God's mighty works, Job 39:13-17.
4. Jesus illustrated God's care for mankind by these words, "Are not two \_\_\_\_\_ sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father," Matthew 10:29.
5. Jesus likened his love for Jerusalem to a \_\_\_\_\_ which gathered her little ones under her wing, Matthew 23:37.
6. Isaiah likened the person who waited upon the Lord to \_\_\_\_\_ which soar above the earth, Isaiah 40:31.
7. The psalmist used the "\_\_\_\_\_ upon a thousand hills" to show God's ownership of everything, Psalm 50:10.
8. The psalmist advised, "Be ye not as the \_\_\_\_\_,...which have no understanding" whose mouth must be held in with bit," Psalm 32:9.
9. Luke described Jesus as being "led as a \_\_\_\_\_ to the slaughter," Acts 8:32.
10. Solomon said, "The righteous are bold as a \_\_\_\_\_," Proverbs 28:1.

Answers: 1. Swine; 2. Ant; 3. Ostrich; 4. Sparrows; 5. Hen; 6. Eagles;  
7. Cattle; 8. Horse; 9. Sheep; 10. Lion



# DENIALS

The following people each denied something. Match the person with what he or she denied.



1. Abraham, Genesis 20:2
2. Peter, Matthew 26:69-70
3. Jonathan, 1 Samuel 20:9
4. Adam, Genesis 3:12
5. Job, Job 13:14-18
6. Sarah, Genesis 18:15
7. The crowd around Jesus, Luke 8:45
8. Barnabas, Acts 14:12-15
9. Pilate, Luke 23:4
10. Chief Priests, John 19:21
11. Eliphaz, Job 4:1,7

- A. That the innocent perish
- B. That he was a god
- C. That Jesus was guilty
- D. That Jesus was the King of the Jews
- E. That he would not tell David of his father's intentions
- F. That his wife was his wife
- G. That he was being punished for sin
- H. That she laughed at an angel's message
- I. That he was responsible for eating the forbidden fruit
- J. That anyone had touched Jesus
- K. That he knew Jesus

Answers: 1. F; 2. K; 3. E; 4. I; 5. G; 6. H; 7. J; 8. B; 9. C; 10. D; 11. A

# Lent 2026



Easter Sunday is early this year: April 5th. This means that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18th and continues to Easter day. While Lent began as a time of commemorating Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness, at the beginning of His earthly ministry, for centuries Christians have used it as a time for deep reflection on the work of Christ especially in the last weeks before the cross. Lent is a wonderful time to prepare ourselves for a wide-eyed celebration of Jesus' victory over sin and death.

This year, we will again be offering a 40-day Lenten devotional to aid you in your time of preparation. Conveniently, in our series on the Book of Exodus, we will also be focusing our attention on the remarkable foreshadowing of Jesus in the Tabernacle. For the six Sunday of Lent, as well as Easter Sunday morning, we will be examining each piece of divine appointed furniture that tells the essence of Jesus' redemptive work on our behalf. Please make every effort to be with us!

## Love & Sympathy

Love and sympathy to  
Becky & Ron Jadlocki and family  
on the death of her mother,  
Phyllis Adams,  
November 29, 2025.

Love and sympathy to  
Lois and Dick Bennett,  
on the passing of her sister,  
Amber Stanko,  
December 9, 2025

Love and sympathy to  
the Lenhart family  
on the death of  
Maxine Lenhart,  
December 20, 2025.

Love and sympathy to  
daughters, Amy Karaffa and  
Susan Lobur, on the death of  
Lois Karaffa,  
December 23, 2025.

Love and sympathy to  
Richard Ray,  
on the death of his wife,  
Jean Ray,  
December 27, 2025.



Dear Friends of the Blessing Board,

Because of you, this year's "Share the Burden and Spread the Blessing" Giving Tuesday campaign was a tremendous success—and a \$50,000 match—we raised \$103,395!

Your gift didn't just furnish homes. It restored dignity, comfort, and hope for families starting over. Every day, we see parents and children walk into our showroom relieved to finally have a bed, a table, and a place that feels like home—made possible by your kindness.

The Blessing Board exists to serve, but its people like you who make this ministry thrive. Thank you for sharing the burden, spreading the blessing, and changing lives through your generosity.

With gratitude,  
Rick Garland  
Executive Director, The Blessing Board

# REFUEL

## 2026 KICK OFF RALLIES

January 4<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm  
Cherry Tree Alliance Church, Uniontown

January 7<sup>th</sup>, 7-8:30pm  
Pennsville Baptist Church, Mt. Pleasant

January 11<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm  
Calvary Assembly of God, Irwin



featuring guest speaker  
**Carl Blunt**  
author of The Life Book



featuring guest speaker  
**Carl Blunt**  
author of The Life Book

**ATTENTION:**  
Youth Fellowship is taking a trip to  
“REFUEL”  
held at Calvary Assembly Church  
on January 11.  
We will meet at 5:30pm and all ride  
together. We will then return to First  
Presby around 8:30pm.

**Refreshed and on fire for Jesus!**

All are welcome (6-12 grade) you do not need to  
be a youth fellowship participant to attend.

## ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION

Sunday, February 22nd is the first Sunday of Lent and Communion Sunday at First Presby. This year, it will also be a meeting of the congregation in which the 2025 Annual Report will be made available to all.

Unlike previous years, we will assemble an annual report in the style of our devotional guides. Included in the report will be financial facts and figures from the end of December 2025, along with the 2026 Budget and accompanying priorities.

The meeting will be held, along with a light lunch, immediately following the 10:30 service and will include a brief survey of the Annual Report document and a high-level presentation of where we stand financially. As you may have heard, it's all good news!

*Please make every effort to make it a full morning with us!!*



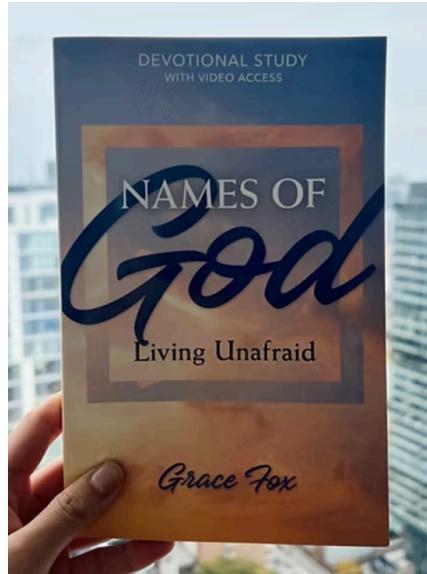
### Mark Your Calendars!!

## “The Chosen” Season 5

The eight week “The Chosen” study will begin Wednesday, January 14 at 1:00 PM



# January Event Highlights



## The Brick Squad

**FREE Community Lego Build**  
**Saturday, January 31**  
**1:00 - 2:00PM**

In The Downstairs Social Hall  
 ALL ages are welcome!

Theme: Create, Build, Inspire!

Join us for a fun afternoon of building... We provide the Legos!

## BROOKS BURKETT

son of Jon & Jacqueline Burkett  
 was baptized on November 9, 2025



## Phone Directory Update



We are currently updating our phone directory, and we need your help to ensure that it is accurate.

If your contact information has changed or needs correction, please let us know.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated!

Please send all corrections to:  
 dan@firstpresbyirwin.org

## January Events

- 1/1 - HAPPY NEW YEAR!**
- 1/5 - Worship & Sacrament
- 1/6 - **EPIPHANY; M TEAM;**  
 Stewardship & Finance
- 1/7 - Carpenter's Apprentice Meeting
- 1/8 - **D TEAM**
- 1/10 - HME Distribution
- 1/11 - **Memorial Sunday;**  
**Youth Fellowship Refuel @ Calvary**
- 1/12 - Christian Ed
- 1/14 - "The Chosen" Study begins
- 1/15 - Joint Meeting of Session & Deacons
- 1/18 - **Communion;** New Members' Class;  
 Deacons' Meeting
- 1/19 - January Thaw Meeting
- 1/20 - Circle 1; Women's Study Group Starts
- 1/24 - Care Team Meeting;  
 Pickups for the Blessing Board;  
 Pinewood Derby;  
**January Thaw Setup**
- 1/25 - **JANUARY THAW Spaghetti Dinner**
- 1/27 - Circle 3
- 1/28 - HME Distribution
- 1/31 - The Brick Squad Lego Event

## A Few Photos from Last Month!



# Pine Springs Summer Camp

Pine Springs Camp strives to provide each camper with a vital encounter with Jesus Christ that leads to growth in the Christian faith and true discipleship.

The summer camp program runs for nine weeks throughout the summer and welcomes campers ages 3 to adults. Each week hosts a different combination of age groups including: Grandmas, Moms & Tots (ages 3-7), Discovery (grades K-2), Exploration (grades 3-5), Journey (grades 6-8) and Expedition (grades 9-12). Week 4 is Family Camp. Visit their website to see each week's schedule and read what experiences are available to each age group.

Throughout the years the youth and adults of First Presby have utilized the rich tradition and unmatched facilities to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

There is currently an early bird registration discount available until March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Please let us know if you have any questions. We can let you know what weeks other kids in the congregation are attending so they can be cabin mates, or if a teen or an adult from the congregation is volunteering on campus that week. Camper scholarships are available. Let us know how we might help you in registering for a great summer experience.



Providing Vital  
Encounters with  
Christ since 1948

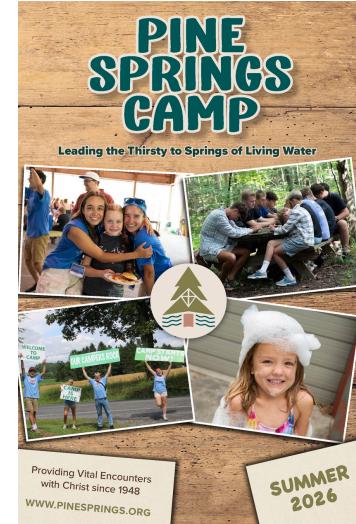
[www.pinesprings.org](http://www.pinesprings.org)  
814-629-9834

## Teen/Young Adults: Pine Springs Summer Staff/Leadership Info

PSC is looking for student leaders who are committed to following Jesus and sharing His love with our campers. Our summer staff have a unique opportunity to encourage campers to challenge themselves physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally through outdoor adventure activities, crazy camp games and daily Bible instruction.

Use the link on our website to submit an application or fill out a staff inquiry for more information.

Male and Female Counselors	Staff Application
Adventure Staff	Photographer/Videographer
Lifeguards	Maintenance Assistant
Leadership Staff	Camp Store/Office
Timothy Team (High School Position - 5 week commitment)	
Day Camp Counselor	



## Pine Springs Traveling Day Camp

Again this year we are excited to be an active participating church in the Pine Springs Day Camp hosted at New Hope Presbyterian Church.

It's a wonderful way to experience camp life for a week. This traveling day camp is perfect for first time campers and camp veterans alike. All campers will participate in traditional PSC activities such as Bible Studies, Arts & Crafts, Nature Activities, Sports, Camp Songs and Slip-N-Slide, and will also choose an elective for each week.

**When:** Monday, June 15 thru Friday, June 19

9am - 3pm You provide a pack lunch, we provide a snack & all the fun!

**Where:** New Hope Presbyterian Church Campus

**Cost:** \$80 for the week. Completed grades: K-5<sup>th</sup>

PS. There are PSC Traveling Day Camps held at other church locations throughout the summer. Please visit their website for more information.



Visit [our website](#) for the most up-to-date calendar information!

## Prayer Requests

Marge Anke, John Anker, Jan Antos, Jan Batchelor, Jacqueline Chandler, Betty Comer, Lanny Conley, Scott Diffenderfer, Kristin, John Duncan, Selma Duncan, Betsy Frye, Gerry, Bob Hahn, Megen Harmon, June Hart, Richard Himler, Hudson, Inna & family, Becky Jadlocki, Joey, Ellen & Menna Jordan, Joy Kalina, Larry & Sharon Kramer, Bill Martin, JoAnn Martz, Kate McCorkle, JoAnn McKnight, Katie Miller, J. Alan Minteer, Isobel Nelson, Bryce Matthew Patrick, Howard Pence, Marge Ryan, Sara, Connie Steck Schade, Shirley Schmidtke, John Smith, Bev Sowash, Larry Stamford, Juanita Stromer, Tom & Carol, Bob Vaughn, Dane Wakeman, Bernice Waller, Stella Waltemire, Ian Welch, Mary Louise Whitehead, and Jeff Youell

If the person you placed on the prayer list has been **removed** or moved to **Praise and Thank You** in error, please contact either Taska Smola at [tsmola@verizon.net](mailto:tsmola@verizon.net) or Ginny Pellis at [Ginny@firstpresbyirwin.org](mailto:Ginny@firstpresbyirwin.org) with updated information. Thank you.



## Praise and Thank You

All God's People, Our newly elected Elders (John Brosnahan, Rick Burdelski, Andy McFarlane) and Deacons (Luke Frye, Keith Harmon, Danae Brentzel-Martina, Deb Miskis, Ellen Morrison, Anna Marie Woodle) and the 2026 nominating Committee (Mary Ann Burdelski, Duane Daniels, Ella Filson, Earl Kiser, Martha Pattullo, Bill Presseau).

## Our Service Personnel

Staff Sgt. Zachary Coleman, SFC James Davis, Vaughn Estepp, Sgt. Luke Frye, Sgt. GY Sgt. Chris Keba, 2nd LT Andy Marlin, CDR Timothy Minor, Sgt. Noah Rady, Dominic Duke, Jeff Cmar and Connor Ramage

## Church Outreach Programs

Carpenter's Apprentice, The Blessing Board, Church Food Pantry, College Outreach project. Prayers for the volunteers and the families supported by these programs.

- To the Deacons for decorating our sanctuary for Christmas.
- To Diane Johnston for putting together the drape for the stained glass window in the balcony, and to Keith
- Johnston, Sam Hensell and Rick Burdelski for hanging it.
- To those who helped make the gingerbread house build a success.
- To all those who adopted children for the Angel Tree. Christmas was a little brighter for them because of you.
- To all those who helped with the Angel tree distribution day! Many parents and grandparents were thankful for the gifts they received for their children and grandchildren.
- To those who continue to pick up furniture each month for the Blessing Board.
- To the children and adults that put the advent buckets together for the homebound. They are always a hit!!! Many have stated they looked forward to their treasures each day.
- To Paula McFarlane and Diane Johnston and their kitchen crew for cooking and serving all the food for the funeral service luncheons. They served above and beyond.
- To all those who memorialized or honored their loved ones by having a poinsettia placed in the chancel area for Christmas. The sanctuary was very pretty as a result.
- To all those who were involved in our Christmas Eve Children's play. The children did a great job of reminding us about what Christmas is about. Cast members were: Owen Baker, Alex Crissman, Aynsley Crissman, Declan Duckett, Wyatt Duckett, Ellie Waslis, Emma Illar, Grace Illar, Luke Messman, Vivienne Messman, Mackenzie Mineweaser, Malaki Mineweaser, Adera Oyatsi, Corinne Rochford, Johnathan Rochford, Louie Snyder. It was directed by Heather Duckett. Accompanied by Judy Baker.
- THANK YOU TO OUR BAKERS AND VOLUNTEERS - We would like to thank all those who so generously baked brownies for Irwin's Light Up Night and cookies for the Cookie Tour. Without your scrumptious baked goods, our church would not be a "must stop at" place for both events. Your delicious, and elegant cookies, have a reputation as being the best on the Cookie Tour. And because of all of you, these events were a big success.
- To all the volunteers who dedicated so much of their time to helping out with both Light Up Night and Cookie Tour. Your assistance was much appreciated and needed to help make these nights so productive.
- Special thanks to Ella Filson who created some special and unique faces on children of all ages during the Cookie Tour. The long and continuous line of children waiting to have their face painted kept her busy all evening!
- To those who have "adopted" a college student for the College Outreach Program. Many of the kids have sent thank you cards and sought Heather out while they were home for break to say how much your support means to them! Keep up the good work of long distance fellowship.