

From the Pastor

For a wide variety of reasons, I have lately been asked to respond to various questions about what it means to be Presbyterian. It's very important to be clear that what we treasure about our Presbyterian tradition is usually not unique to us, though it shows up in particular ways. For example, I have yet to come across a protestant church that doesn't take communal discernment seriously in one way or another. It shows up for us Presbyterians in our governance: we are constantly checking in and making decisions together.

Well, when things work as they should! In addition to our strengths, we also have weaknesses when it comes to being human. Our systems aren't perfect because we're not perfect. Indeed, it's our imperfections in addition to our strengths that requires shared discernment.

In a congregation, the session and the pastor work together to lead the church in their different responsibilities through mutual discernment. Communal discernment is vital for sessions themselves: they are "chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life." This is their first and most important task according to the *Book of Order*.

So communal discernment is important for decisions and accountability, but also, clearly, for our spiritual growth, well-being, and faithfulness to God. And part of this is the work of the session and the congregation to discern one another's gifts.

When I became Presbyterian, I was delighted to hear about what sessions are and what

their work was. My pastor at the time, G. Daniel Little V¹, was an excellent teacher and mentor in helping me to try out and discern my gifts and skills, as he did for many people. He *noticed* people and affirmed them. Without his pastoral work and the presence of that congregation at First Presbyterian in Ithaca, NY, I'm not sure I would have honed those gifts, or perceived the various forms of God's call to me over the years.

The thing is, I'm sure the vast majority of the people who helped me grow in the faith and steward my gifts have no idea that they were part of that.

Calling, or vocation, is something we hear all our lives as disciples of Christ. By that I mean, as we listen to God, we continually hear what God is calling us to do. That can change over the months and years, or deepen in ways we don't expect. But as we read in scripture, we never hear God's call apart from community. The community discerns and helps us discern.

You have had just such an impact on David DeLauro, whom I have never met in person, but whom many of you have known and loved for years. I am delighted to share with you a letter he wrote to us and for us upon the completion of his Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible. It is included in this newsletter.

We cannot possibly know how far out into the world the ripple effects of community support go. It is a gift to hear back from one of those folks. But whether we hear back or not, we love and serve others anyway, helping them to see their gifts and use them for the community, even as we are good stewards of our own gifts.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,

Pastor Michelle

1. Yes, he was not only the fifth generation of G. Daniel Little's, but also the fifth generation of Presbyterian Rev. G. Daniel Little's in the USA!

Dear Friends at First Presbyterian Rensselaer,

It's hard to believe that over two decades have passed since I first walked through the doors of our church as a college student at Saint Joseph's College. What began as a young man seeking community and a place to sing in the choir has become a lifelong journey of faith, learning, and service that has now culminated in earning my PhD in Hebrew Bible and Its Interpretation from The Jewish Theological Seminary.

This past January, I successfully defended my dissertation titled "The Sub Loco Notes in the Latter Prophets of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia." While that title might sound intimidating, the work examines how ancient Hebrew manuscripts were carefully preserved and transmitted through the centuries—a testament to the dedication of countless scribes who saw their work as sacred service.

None of this would have been possible without the foundation laid right here at First Presbyterian. When I joined the choir all those years ago, I found more than beautiful music—I discovered a community that nurtured my calling to ministry and scholarship. The patient guidance of pastors, the encouragement of fellow members, and the opportunity to serve in various capacities helped shape my understanding of what it means to live faithfully.

My journey took me from computer science at Saint Joe's to seminary at McCormick Theological Seminary, where I earned my Master of Divinity in 2006. Even then, First Presbyterian remained my spiritual home and the place where I first learned to preach. The congregation's willingness to listen to a nervous seminarian fumble through early sermons was a gift of grace I'll never forget.

The path to the PhD was long and sometimes challenging, requiring years of studying ancient Hebrew texts, learning from brilliant scholars, and developing the technological tools needed for modern biblical research. But throughout it all, the lessons learned in our sanctuary sustained me: the importance of patience, the value of community, and the conviction that scholarship can be a form of worship when it helps us better understand God's word.

As I look ahead, I'm grateful for how this congregation has been part of my story. You've celebrated my progression to a "certified ready" candidate for ministry, supported my academic pursuits, and reminded me that all learning should serve the greater purpose of building up the body of Christ. Whether in the pulpit, the classroom, or the library, the foundation of faith you helped provide continues to guide my work.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your prayers, encouragement, and fellowship have meant more than you know. I'm excited to see how God will use this next chapter to serve the Church and expand our understanding of the biblical text that continues to speak across the centuries.

In gratitude and faith,
David DeLauro, PhD

Romans 12:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**



Prairie Arts Council Presents: Art Camp 2025

July 14-18

Registration May 1- July 1st.

To register, go to

<https://www.prairieartscouncil.net/events/artcamp-2025>

What happened at Session?

Session did not meet in the month of June.

Look for session updates in the
August newsletter.

VBS 2025

VBS took on the Theme "Won't you be my Neighbor?" Mr. Fred Rogers the creator of a Children's Educational Show *"Mr. Roger's Neighborhood"* that aired 1968-2001 was also a Presbyterian Minister, ordained in 1963, was our inspiration.

Pastor Michelle shared **lessons** based on Love, Hope, and being a good neighbor to everyone. **Crafts** were a very enjoyable part of VBS this year. Each night the youth created little houses, buildings, and other things that made their neighborhood. **Music** was fun as we sang popular Mr. Roger's songs and two popular youth songs from our FPC hymnal.

VBS dates were June 3, 4 & 5 from 5-7pm. The Adult helpers and cooks included: Linda Comingore, Julie Williams, Carol Hoover, Kathy Staddon, Suzi Jordan, Dezi Wanda, Tony Butler, Bethany Dodge, Stephanie Davisson & Pastor Michelle Bartel. A special thanks goes out to Bethany who found all the craft materials and provided so much extra communication to the adult crew listed and to Tony Butler-our VBS Mr. Rogers.

This is the 14th VBS I have attended here at First Presbyterian Church in Rensselaer and will be one I never forget. Mr. Fred Rogers was such an inspirational person and a great example of being a Christian in our world today.

-Stephanie Davisson



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CALENDAR



2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3 Bridge Club 12:00pm	4 	5 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
6 Worship 9:30 am Communion	7 Book Club 4:00pm	8 Bible Study 4:00 pm	9	10 Bridge Club 12:00pm Session 3:00pm Forestry Council 5:00pm	11	12 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
13 Worship 9:30 am	14	15 Bible Study 4:00 pm	16	17 Bridge Club 12:00pm	18	19 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
20 Worship 9:30 am	21	22 Bible Study 4:00 pm	23	24 Bridge Club 12:00pm	25	26 AA-Alcoholics Anonymous 7:00 pm
27 Worship 9:30 am	28	29 Bible Study 4:00 pm	30	31 Bridge Club 12:00pm		



First Presbyterian Church
220 North Cullen Street
Rensselaer, Indiana 47978

Presbyterian Youth Triennium 2025



In July 2025, the Presbyterian Church (USA) will welcome thousands of its high school age youth and their adult youth workers to Louisville, Kentucky for four days of worship, recreation, bible study, outreach, and faith formation all around the theme of "As If We Were Dreaming". Most programming and meals will be held at the Kentucky International Convention Center (KICC) with all participants housed at nearby Triennium hotels. Visit <https://presbyterianyouthtriennium.org/> for more details about the event, theme, leadership, fees, deadlines, and more.

 Jul. 28 - Jul. 31, 2025

 3:00 PM - 12:30 PM EDT

 Louisville, KY
United States