



## AT FIRST BAPTIST

**JASON HLADIK**  
Senior Pastor

**SUE NEELY VANBRUNT**  
Minister of Music

**DEB WUETHRICH**  
Church Secretary

**BONNIE KETTLE**  
Financial Secretary

**ROBERT FAULDS**  
Organist

**CASEY DEGROFF**/  
Social Media Specialist  
Audio-Visual Technician

**RACHEL GREEN**  
Custodian



## FBC Festive for Advent Season

Doesn't our sanctuary look beautiful? Many hands may make light work, as the saying goes, but there was a lot to be done on "Hanging of the Greens" day at FBC. First, everything had to be hauled upstairs from the storage room. Some of our youth stepped up to help with that!

FBC Boards were responsible for different areas of the church, such as the Diaconate trimming the lobby tree and Board of Christian Education the tree and Manger in Fellowship Hall, among other tasks.

These days, we have fewer individuals who are capable of climbing a ladder, but a few men boldly went up the rungs to hang our stars and such. Later in the week, Penny Sorokes and Pam Nutt put a new design into place adding small trees at the front of the sanctuary next to a white draped cross. Pastor Jason says it's a peaceful scene that reminds him of trees on a snowy hilltop.

Our sanctuary with its special stained-glass windows is always a good place to sit and reflect, meditate on God and his many gifts and on the scripture He left for us. There is, however,

something very special about this time of year at First Baptist. From Advent candle-lighting to holiday music, to the Children's Pageant and Birthday Party for Jesus and our well-known traditional Christmas Eve service, FBC can be a serene and peaceful place to contemplate the season and its reason: Jesus Christ.



People were busy throughout the church to make FBC shine for the Advent season.



## Not Too Late!

Since this issue of AFB is scheduled to go out a little ahead of the New Year, there's still time to make note of some events happening at or around the church. While the sudden mask mandate has thrown everyone off once again, our leadership via the Advisory Council met Sunday, Dec. 12 after services. Everyone is working hard to make adjustments so we will still be able to enjoy special in-person holiday programs to the extent permitted, with masks, while in the church. ***Please be patient as things are once again changing with little notice.***

### Children's Program & Birthday Party for Jesus

The FBC Kids Choir will share Christmas joy through music on Sunday, Dec. 19, in morning worship. They will be joined by some Sr. Choir members to sing *Christmas Lullaby*, *Away in a Manger*, *Silent Night*, *We Three Kings* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. Pastor Jason will have a story time with the children as a birthday cake is brought into the sanctuary. The congregation will be invited to join in singing (masked and seated), "Happy Birthday" to Jesus, along with the carols. We will celebrate together, then enjoy the delicious cake and cupcakes during Fellowship time. The children will go on to a party in Fellowship Hall (feel free to drop in and join the fun!) as the adults continue the Andy Stanley Advent Study in the Sanctuary. All are invited to bring an unwrapped gift for the GENESIS HOUSE and place it under the Fellowship Hall tree. Their wish list includes: dish & laundry soap/gelpacs, paper towels/tissues/toilet tissue, personal hygiene products for men & women; baby & toddler diapers; coffee, spices. Guest departure list: cleaning supplies, bedding, kitchen cloths, dishes, silverware, pots & pans.

### Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service is being adjusted at this time, without the planned full Cantata, due to the masked mandate. Our In-One-A-Chord Bell Choir will be a part of the service, along with other musical offerings. It all begins with an instrumental prelude at 6:45 pm. This time provides an opportunity to relax in the beautifully decorated sanctuary, as you enjoy Christmas music after the busyness of holiday preparations. The 7 pm family

service includes congregational singing (masked and seated), and a children's story with Pastor Jason. At the beginning of the service, we will light the final candle in the Advent wreath, the Christ Candle. Then, at the close of the service, we'll share that light by passing it to all individuals throughout the sanctuary while we sing "Silent Night" with family and friends!

### New Year's Eve Concert—Stay Tuned

Leadership is still considering whether we can still hold the Annual New Year's Eve Concert originally scheduled for Dec. 31st at 7 pm in our sanctuary. Current mandates are being monitored. We will announce a decision soon, likely through announcement time prior to worship and in our Sunday bulletin.



### UN-HANGING THE GREENS

We'll be un-decorating the church on Sunday, January 9, following Sunday School. Please plan to stay and help us put away the decorations that have made the Christmas season so festive.



### ANNUAL CORPORATE MEETING TO BE HELD JANUARY 16

As required by our Constitution and By-Laws, the congregation will gather after worship on Sunday, January 16 to go over the reports of all the church staff members as well as our boards and committees and to pass a budget for 2022. A quorum of 40 active members is required to carry out these procedures and we need your input, so please make your best effort to join us.



## 15 Travel from FBC to Family Life Women's Luncheon

It's always fun to take a little trip and it's especially true when we can be a part of a Family Life Network event.

On November 18, fifteen women shared rides from our parking lot to Bath for the annual FLN Women's Luncheon. Always a popular occasion, the event hall was full to the brim for a fantastic meal of turkey or glazed ham and choices of their specialty sweet desserts.

We were treated to a live scene from an upcoming Christmas play as well as a program presented in testimony, stories and song from singer, bi-lingual conference speaker/missionary, teacher and author Damaris Carbaugh.

She had the crowd laughing several times with her unique humor, including when she shared she had learned that her unusual name is Greek for "heifer!" Damaris said she can no longer hit the high notes she once could (she has performed with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir), but we found her voice was rich and beautiful, especially on her low notes. Everyone who went had a wonderful time.



The FBC entourage filled two tables at Family Life



## Family of God



We extend our **LOVE AND SYMPATHY** to Rita Wymer on the passing of her sister Clara; Keim family on the passing of Stephanie's aunt; Marilyn Voorhees, on the

passing of her son, Cy Levia; Paul and Lindsay Cummings on the passing of Paul's mother, Geraldine; Melinda Normandin on the loss of her brother Jeff Wion; and to Nan Norton and family on the passing of Ted Norton.

### Thank You

Lindsay Cummings would like to extend thanks on behalf of Paul and herself for the cards and phone calls received during her own illness and upon the news of Paul's mother, Geraldine, passing.

### BIRTHDAYS

#### JANUARY

#### FEBRUARY

4	Cheri O'Dell	9	Darlene Selph
	Okey Taylor	12	Dana Boser
11	Cari Matejka		Nan Norton
15	John Samuelson	16	Katrina DeGroff
17	Violet Butler	24	Brian Sanders
20	Pam Nutt	27	Terri McDowell
22	Gaylord Sage	28	Elizabeth Spiller
24	Gloria Spiller		
27	Larry Firth		
30	Lylah Butler		

### JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

3 Dave & Nan Torrey



of beloved members of our church family who went home to be with their Lord in late 2020-21:

Mary Ellen Olson – 12/25/21

Gordon Olson – 1/9/21

Diane Buckley – 1/29/21

Larry Nenno – 2/9/21

Ted Norton – 12/2/21

(Apologies for any church members' names missed.)



## Literacy of Love Update

I am thrilled to be traveling to Uganda for Christmas, not only to spend time with my Family of the Heart, but also because we have a monumental event taking place! We were blessed with giving and finalized the payment to our NEW PERMANENT HOME! We currently have 45 sponsored children, and the influx in our children caused us to buy some new decker beds, sheets, and blankets. The Lord blessed us more than we could have imagined in our new property. There is a small house for girls and a small house for the boys. We never expected to have a finished property complete with fence, gate, and living quarters, so this is beyond our dreams, and we are so thankful. To top it off, by the generosity of His faithful servants, we had a donation to buy 1 acre of farmland and fenced it. WOW! Those are pretty awesome blessings.

At the end of November, we sent emergency food money for many of the families we've helped support through the crisis of lockdown. Now, villages are experiencing drought, so food will be more scarce and prices will rise. During the holidays, prices increase, too, so we made sure to send them assistance in time!

Upcoming, we have three big projects we are focusing on. One, we put a down payment on shops in the village on the main street. It is walking distance from our new home, and we already started one graduate as our first business owner. These shops are a huge part of our long-term goals and will be a huge asset to the sustainability of LoL and for employing our own graduates by creating jobs. To finish this project, we are raising 45k to pay off those buildings. Second, we are developing our farmland with pigpens, a garden and a small room for the caretaker. To finish our land, we will need 8k. Lastly, we want to build a common room between the boys' and girls' dwellings. We will have meetings, a common place for entertainment, and room for gatherings. We can accomplish this with 5k.

We are thrilled with the blessings God has bestowed on Literacy of Love, and we are so very thankful for all of our supporters and advocates! We know that each blessing is a responsibility that we are bestowed, and we take that role seriously! Together, we are changing lives and the cycle of poverty. These aren't just earthly children—they are souls the Lord has entrusted to our care and help. We ask for your continued prayer support, and we want you to know that every action—big or small—makes a ripple that extends and grows more than we know.

-- Cari Matejka, CEO, Literacy of Love, Inc.



## Dedicate a Service

If you would like to be a part of this important ministry at Olean First Baptist by dedicating a service in memory or honor of someone, a sign-up sheet is posted on the window for 2022 dates. This is such a nice way to honor or remember someone on a special occasion.



During Worship on January 23, our Trustees are considering a celebration for the dedication and ministries

of our non-pastoral and ministry support staff members. If approved, our Fellowship Committee will provide a special fellowship time following worship in honor of our staff. Please be sure to join us in worship that morning and take this opportunity to thank each of them for their service to our church and God's Kingdom.

More than 30 years ago, the **SOUPER BOWL OF CARING** began with a simple prayer. "Lord, as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us to be mindful of those without even a bowl of soup to eat." Our teens will partner with the Mission Board to promote this and place labeled boxes in the church foyer. Super Bowl Day is Sunday, February 13, but watch bulletins for collection



dates. Thank you for sharing your blessing by your continued support of this important project. Proceeds will go to the Olean Food Pantry.



**Just a reminder: JOIN PASTOR MILLARD AT PERKINS RESTAURANT IN OLEAN AT NOON ON THURSDAYS FOR A WEEKLY MEN'S LUNCHEON**



# Committed

To His Purpose...For His Glory

We would like to thank the 2022 Nominating Committee members and all who stepped up to fill open positions on FBC Boards and Committees for 2022 and terms beyond. A few open spots still remain and it's not too late to offer to serve. This is one way to make a difference at your church and in your community, sharing in the work of First Baptist and the family of God. See any board chairperson, Moderator Jim Sorokes or Pastor Jason if you would like more information about how to include your time and talents as part of your church giving.

## FAMILY GAME NIGHTS COMING SOON?



FBC is considering holding a Family Game Night in the coming months. Senior Pastor Jason Hladik has been approached about holding game nights approximately once a month, likely on a Friday or Monday. Games would be “appropriate” and for all age ranges. Diaconate members are in favor of the idea, as are others who have been learning of it. When presented before Advisory Council on Nov. 30, Moderator Jim Sorokes suggested that Pastor Jason pin down some details and submit the idea to the FBC Board of Trustees. Stay tuned for more, but if you have suggestions to go along with this, let Pastor Jason know!

## Coming Board Meetings

Jan. 9, Noon	Board of Christian Missions
Jan. 11, 6:30	Board of Christian Education
	Diaconate
7:00	Board of Trustees
Jan. 25, 6:30	Advisory Council
Feb. 13, Noon	Board of Christian Missions
Feb. 15, 6:30	Board of Christian Education
	Diaconate
7:00	Board of Trustees

## RETIRED MINISTERS AND MISSIONARIES OFFERING

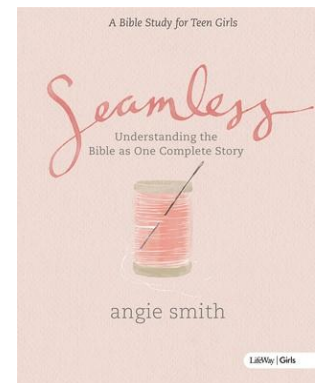
“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

The Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering is being collected in January this year. Envelopes for this purpose will be available in the pew racks. Mission Board members remind us that ministers, missionaries and their spouses dedicate their lives as full time servants of our Lord. Think back over your lifetime of these special people who influenced your life. Many live on small pensions because the churches they served were not able to pay their retirement. This extra gift to them means more than just money – it means they are not forgotten! Let us remember some of the ones who served this church all around the world and are now retired with our prayers and offerings.

## New Study Coming

Beginning soon, the Women’s Ministry plans to offer “Seamless: A Bible Study for Teen Girls” as a seven-session study that covers major events from the Bible, tying them together into the greatest story of Scripture. Several have enjoyed the adult Seamless study and this version is available for teens as well as adult women. The goal is to lead girls ages 12-28 to a complete understanding of God’s story as seen from Genesis to Revelation and to foster relationship between our teen and adult members, so we encourage those who have used this study in the past to join us again as we encourage our teens. Angie Smith is the author of *I Will Carry You*, *What Women Fear*, and *Mended*. She is one of the most popular speakers and blog writers in the country. She holds a Master’s degree in Developmental Psychology from Vanderbilt University and lives with her husband and daughters in Nashville, TN. Stay tuned for more details and a sign-up.





## THE PASTOR'S PAGE

When I was in Seminary, the most challenging class I had to take was CPE, Clinical Pastoral Education. Each Master of Divinity student was required to take at least one semester of CPE. This class was broken into three requirements. First each student had a twelve hour shift as a chaplain in the hospital. Second we would meet as a class and discuss what we had experienced. And finally, we would have a one hour counseling session each week with the Chaplaincy Director who led the class.

One of my classmates joked that there was always one CPE student a semester who was cursed with death. We laughed and I wondered if it would be me. Now I don't believe in curses, but within the first few weeks I had dealt with more death than anyone else in the class. Most of the students talked with patients, held their hands as they were going through illness or injury. I held the hands of people who had just lost their loved ones. I was the only one in my class who had to walk family members to the morgue and I had to do it twice. I was the only one who had to hold a stillborn baby and pray with the grieving parents and I had to do it three times. I heard the terrible sound of people wailing over the death of their father, husband and friend who was supposed to have to have gone home from routine surgery that day, but didn't make it.

I was in my mid thirties at the time and I had been blessed with a family with good health. I had been to funerals before, but not of someone close to me. I had never dealt with death. The truth is, I did not look forward to my twelve hour shifts, but I dreaded going to our three hour classes even more because I would have to process what I had experienced that week. I didn't want to go to the counseling sessions because our Chaplaincy Director, in a Godly and loving way, cut to the depth of issues I had never dealt with before.

Then one afternoon I was called to a room with a pair of sisters, one in a bed, agitated but not

conscious and the other holding her hand in tears. The two sisters had chosen to live with each other as adults. They had no living spouses and no children between them. I was told the situation, the sick sister was declining and the doctors expected her to pass within a day or two.

As I listened, I felt defeated. What could I do? I couldn't restore her sister's health. I didn't have words that could make everything okay; that could prevent the grieving sister from having to face life alone.

So I did the only thing I could, I prayed for the sick woman. She had been tossing, moaning, unconscious, but struggling to hold on to life. She was in pain and great discomfort. As I prayed, her heart rate calmed and her moaning stopped. I prayed for God to comfort her, to support her sister as she showed her love and to bring His peace to both of them.

I walked in the room feeling I had the curse of death upon me, feeling hopeless and powerless. I walked out of the room with one of the greatest lessons for ministry. I am not the one with the power of life and death. I am a servant of God, and I will pray, no matter how I am feeling at the time. I will pray because it is effective and brings peace in situations where there is no hope. An unconscious woman felt the calming presence of God's Spirit upon her, and her sister felt a moment of peace. She was not alone.

The truth is, we are all cursed with death, and we can choose to live in despair, but I will always choose to pray, even when I am the one in grief or on death's bed. God has given these precious moments to hold each other's hands and support one another in prayer. He is the one working through us and teaching us along the way.



*Just a reminder, Bible studies led by  
Pastor Jason include:  
Bible Study Café on Thursdays  
Resumes Dec. 30  
Wednesday Online Bible Study  
Resumes Jan. 5*



## MIDWEEK PAUSE FOR POWER CONTINUES!

On Wednesday evenings at 5:30, Dave Torrey continues to lead “Pause for Power,” a Midweek Prayer and Worship opportunity. Attendees gather for a special time of sharing the cares and joys of their hearts, followed by prayer, hymn sing and Bible study. With all the things going on in the country and our world, this might be a good time to invite others who might be looking for a midweek worship/study opportunity to join in as well!

**ARTICLES WILL BE DUE FOR THE MARCH  
ISSUE OF AFB ON THURSDAY, FEB. 10. WE  
NEED AND WELCOME THE ASSISTANCE OF  
BOARD CHAIRS AND OTHERS TO HELP US  
STAY UP-TO-DATE ON EVENTS AND  
HAPPENINGS AT FBC.**

### CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

MONDAY thru FRIDAY

9:00 a.m. – Noon

Pastor: 9 am to 3 pm (Mon.-Thur.)

Morning Devotions approximately 9:00-9:30

(Note: The pastoral staff’s schedule can sometimes be unpredictable due to visitations, emergencies, etc. If you stop by and find “nobody home,” we ask for your patience and understanding. We will do our best to be here during posted office hours.)

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Sunday Worship: 9:30 a.m.

Sunday School: 11:00 a.m.

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## FBC Women Enjoyed Festive Christmas Event

FBC Women’s Ministry sponsored a fun-filled Women’s Christmas gathering on Saturday, Dec. 4. The ladies were treated to a delicious brunch that included hash brown casserole, French toast bakes, Christmas fruit salad and an intriguing punch. (Some of the recipes are available under lobby mailboxes). Jodie Martin took things to a visual level when she delivered a message about how Daniel not only chose not to obey King Nebuchadnezzar’s order to bow down to him, but prayed to the One True God near an open window! We should all be so bold with our faith!

Those who attended also had opportunities to do some crafts, such as making homemade cards for our shut-ins as well as a special Christmas ornament. Everyone also brought cookies and candies that were placed on trays and delivered to four of our area first responders’ stations. Thank you, Women’s Ministry, for providing this wonderful day of food, fun and fellowship!



**The FBC Church office will be closed  
on Monday, January 17 in  
commemoration of  
Martin Luther King Jr. Day.  
Also, on Feb. 21 for Presidents’ Day**





## THE MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

I am writing these musings only a short time after learning of the latest mask mandate issued by the governor's office. Those of you who know me well can imagine the thoughts and emotions I am having. I could spend this entire article expressing those... but I won't!! We are deep into the Christmas season, and I have far, far more important topics to address!!

Those who have been attending worship services know that we have been doing a special Advent Sunday School study based on Andy Stanley's "Who Needs Christmas." One of the questions Andy raised during the opening session was if we had any trouble believing the Christmas story... that God became man... that He was born of a virgin... that He was born in Bethlehem... that angels first appeared to shepherds... that magi from the east visited the Christ child, etc. It was interesting to pose those questions to the group of Christians that were in the sanctuary that day. Surprisingly, none of the folks in the room had any issues with any aspects of the story... but I wonder how I would make out if I asked the average person on the street. I'm confident I would get some very different answers from non-believers. Should that be surprising? No! Those who do not believe in God, or any supreme being would scoff at the idea of a virgin birth... or a Christmas star... or angels... and they would be especially skeptical of God becoming man. But we know better!! We who have faith know that a God who can create an entire Universe... create EVERYTHING from NOTHING... has no problem causing a virgin birth... creating angels... putting a brilliant star in the sky to announce the birth of His Son!! And given the cultural and societal issues of Jesus' time and the corruption that was prevalent in the religious hierarchy, it is not surprising that God would first announce the arrival of His Son to common shepherds. He knew they were longing for the arrival of the Messiah. He knew that they believed! He knew they would rejoice at the news!

So... how do we respond to this time of year? Is it a happy time? Is it a sad time? Do we take time to focus on the reason for the season? Or do we, like our secular friends, get caught up in Black Friday sales, trying to buy the perfect gift, stressing over mailing Christmas cards, attending office parties, and dealing with other distractions that divert our attention from

why Christmas exists? In the "hustle and bustle of the holidays", it is very easy to overlook the incredible event that happened some 2000 years ago. How many times has God become man? How many times has the Savior of the world been born of a virgin? How many times has a plan been launched that would lead to the forgiveness of our sins... for eternity? Shouldn't we stand in awe of Christmas?? There was never anything like it before and there will never be anything like it again... except when our Savior returns to take His own home! My prayer for all of you is that you will take some time this season to really, *really* think about what happened that oh-so-holy night in Bethlehem. Emmanuel... God *with* us!!

Changing subjects, I thank all of those who stepped up to fill spots on our Boards, Committees, and to serve as church officers. By the time we closed the congregational/corporate meeting in December, we had filled all but three of the Board openings and all committee openings. We still have one opening each on the Board of Christian Education, the Diaconate, and the Board of Trustees. If anyone is interested in filling those openings, please contact any member of the Nominating Committee (Eli Rust, Cheri O'Dell, Matt Sage, Sharon Anthony, and Dave Torrey) or the Moderator (Jim Sorokes). If qualified candidates are identified, they can be voted onto the Boards at the January Corporate meeting. Note: In the case of any Trustee candidate, the vote will have to be conducted via secret ballot. We will also be ratifying the final 2022 church budget at that meeting as well as dedicating memorial gifts, remembering those who have gone on to their heavenly reward, and considering annual reports from our Boards, Committees, and staff.

Finally, as we embark on yet another new year, it's an appropriate time to take stock of where we've been in our individual spiritual walks and in our journey as a congregation. However, it is very important that we not dwell so much on the past that we don't think about where we are going in the future! Bluntly, there is not much we can do about the past because, well, it is the past, but we can absolutely have a profound impact on our future. Of course, it would help if we knew where we are going! Be watching and listening for more information in that regard in the coming weeks!! After all, how will we know that we've arrived if we don't know our destination?

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!!!

~Jim Sorokes, Moderator