

DECEMBER 2024/JANUARY 2025

"Striving to be the church of Jesus Christ Where Every Member is a Minister"



Sharing the faith, hope and redeeming love of Jesus Christ with all people.

Sunday Worship: 9:30 a.m.
Sunday School for All Ages: 11:00 a.m.



**CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT
SERVICE
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2024
SPECIAL TIME: 4 P.M.**

Please note the special time that we will be holding this year's traditional FBC Christmas Eve Candlelight service—and pass the word!

Although it is an earlier service time than we've traditionally enjoyed, it will be a wonderful time for families (especially those with small children) to come together with their church family for worship. Children, who will be receiving gift bags from the church given by the Board of Christian Education, will have their own sermon.

The message will be presented through scripture and music in the form of Lessons and Carols. Other special music selections will enhance the worship. As the winter skies darken, our traditional candlelighting service closes our time together. We

AT FIRST BAPTIST

Interim Pastor
Ivan Crossno
Minister of Music
Sue Neely VanBrunt
Secretary
Penny Sorokes

Organist
Robert Faulds
Audio Visual Specialist
Casey Sage
Custodian
Rachel Green

PHONE: 716- 372-5151
EMAIL: oleanfbc@outlook.com
WEBSITE: oleanfirstbaptist.com
FACEBOOK: [oleanfirstbaptistchurch](https://www.facebook.com/oleanfirstbaptistchurch)

will light the Christ Candle and share our individual candlelight as we pass it to those around us. The singing of "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World" ends the service as we look forward to Christmas Day! Remember the starting time change when you invite others to join you for this service.



**THE ANNUAL
CONGREGATIONAL/CORPORATE
MEETING OF THE FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH OF OLEAN WILL BE HELD
IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
WORSHIP ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1,
2024. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING
IS TO RECEIVE AND ACT ON THE
NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT
FOR CANDIDATES TO BOARDS AND
COMMITTEES FOR 2024 – 2026 AND TO
ELECT CANDIDATES TO THE BOARD
OF TRUSTEES FOR 2024-2026.
THE ANNUAL CORPORATE MEETING
WILL BE HELD AFTER WORSHIP ON
SUNDAY, JANUARY 19, 2025 TO
APPROVE THE FINAL 2025 BUDGET.
VOTING MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO
VOTE IN THE CONGREGATIONAL
MEETING; VOTING MEMBERS AGE 18
AND OVER ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE IN
THE CORPORATE MEETING.**



In addition to our traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, be sure

to note several other important dates and times for FBC Advent events and holiday services!

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT & BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS

During worship on Sunday, Dec. 15, our chancel will transform to a living nativity scene as part of the annual Christmas Pageant. Everyone is invited to take part in this intergenerational service as adults come alongside our children and youth in this experience. Would you like to be part of the scene? Maybe an angel? Shepherd? Wise King? An onlooker witnessing this miracle (from the pew)? Regardless, everyone can experience the blessed event of Christ's birth in a fresh new way!

Immediately following the service, we will move to Fellowship Hall for a 'Birthday Party for Jesus.' Everyone is invited to come and enjoy a light luncheon, complete with birthday cake! Folks are welcome to bring a gift to the party for the We Are His Hands Hygiene Program to use as they serve the needs of our community. Gift suggestions include men's & women's toiletries, wash cloths and laundry soap. In addition to a time of fellowship, there will be games and crafts to take part in or to watch. Please sign up so we will have plenty of food and places set for all!

Allegany Alumni & Friends Band to offer concert at FBC

The Allegany Alumni & Friends Band will present a concert in our sanctuary on Tuesday, December 17 at 7 p.m. AAFB is a community concert band consisting of volunteer musicians. The band is comprised of alumni from Allegany Central Schools as well as many local friends who also share a passion for music. FBC member David Taylor plays trumpet in the band. The concert is free and open to the public and will include seasonal music. Come and enjoy their music as you relax during this busy time of year.

CHRISTMAS CANTATA AND WORSHIP DEC. 22—9:30 am



Bethlehem. We merely say the name and our minds are flooded with images. We may never have been there, but it's our backdrop for the story of Christmas year after year. Bethlehem Morning tells the miraculous story of Christmas through traditional carols and Christmas favorites, but

also reminds us that the story of God's love didn't stop there. 1 John 4:10 says, 'This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' Jesus came for us when He was born in Bethlehem, and it was for us He went to Calvary."

These moving words were written by the authors of the cantata to be presented by our Sr. Choir during worship on Sunday, Dec. 22. Please invite others to this special service that includes lighting the Advent candle of Love, a children's sermon, congregational singing and prayers.

MAKE YOUR NEW YEAR'S EVE PLANS EARLY!!

On Tuesday evening, December 31st, a long-standing tradition continues as the community joins us for the Annual New Year's Eve Concert at 7 pm in our sanctuary. Each year the music varies, but the outcome remains the same...a thoroughly enjoyable evening filled with the beauty of music. Although the entire line-up has not yet been confirmed, we will

enjoy vocal and instrumental selections by some of the area's finest musicians. A free-will love offering will be received to continue the



community mission of the Olean Area Food Pantry. You'll want to plan your dinner or other celebrations around this event, because it's an evening you will not want to miss.

2024 Red Kettle Campaign

In 1891, Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee was distraught because so many poor individuals in San Francisco were going hungry. During the holiday season, he resolved to provide a free Christmas dinner for the destitute and poverty-stricken. He only had one major hurdle to overcome—funding the project. Where would the money come from, he wondered. He lay awake nights, worrying, thinking, praying about how he could find the funds to fulfill his commitment of feeding 1,000 of the city's poorest individuals on Christmas Day. As he pondered the issue, his thoughts drifted back to his sailor days in Liverpool, England. He remembered how at Stage Landing, where the boats came in, there was a large, iron kettle called "Simpson's Pot" into which passers-by tossed a coin or two to help the poor. The next day Captain McFee placed a similar pot at the Oakland Ferry Landing at the foot of Market Street. Beside the pot, he placed a sign that read, "Keep the Pot Boiling." He soon had the money to see that the needy people were properly fed at Christmas.



First Baptist Church volunteers are scheduled to help with the "Red Kettle" campaign this season at Olean Food Barn's main entrance. Shifts are from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 1-3 and from 3-5 p.m. on **Tuesday, December 3**, Sign up in the lobby if you are interested in assisting.



Donations for the flowers and decorations for the sanctuary will be received in the church office until December 11.

Please indicate, along with your check, who you would like to have honored or remembered. **Let the office know if you plan to take your plant after the Christmas Eve service.** A donation of \$10 per plant is suggested.

Our homebound and shut-in members appreciate hearing from their church family, especially at this time of year. Mailing labels are available in the church office for your convenience in sending cards or notes - truly a blessing to those who can't be here with us on Sunday mornings.



Christmas Offering

The Board of Trustees has designated the 2024 Christmas offering to the repair of the sanctuary windows. The Board also designated the Thanksgiving offering to the Olean Food Pantry.

GENESIS HOUSE PROJECT



December 21st is the longest night of the year. To the homeless person, it can be lonely and scary. Please help brighten our area by joining the Annual Genesis House project, purchasing luminaries and ornaments to help Boy Scouts and volunteers light up Lincoln Park on Dec. 21. Questions, see Judy Wightman.



**** ANNUAL REPORTS DUE****

Please note that all annual reports from staff members, boards and committees are due in the church office by **DECEMBER 27** to allow adequate time to prepare the annual report. Electronic submissions are appreciated.

MOVIE NIGHT RETURNS IN JANUARY

During the months of January through April, the FBC Women's Ministry is sponsoring an evening of movies on the third Friday of each month. We'll begin each event at 5:30 pm with a pot-luck supper and fellowship. At 6:00 (or so) movies will be offered.

Mark your calendars for January 17 (movie: "Unsung Hero") and plan to join in the fun.

Details will be coming soon....we look forward to seeing you there!!



FBC WOMEN'S MINISTRY EXTENDS HOLIDAY LUNCH INVITATION

Reminder of a December change for the Women's Breakfast Group that meets regularly every second Thursday at 9 a.m. For December, however, the group is moving to a lunch hour gathering, for any woman at FBC who wants to come join the fun. The lunch will be held on a Saturday this year (Dec. 14 at Noon) to enable some who have weekday jobs to attend. It will be at Brothers Bistro with ordering off the menu; dessert will be provided. Those who wish to participate (no obligation) may bring a \$10 gift for an exchange. Previous events have been fun with good turnouts of women who attend the breakfasts. Registration deadline is Sunday, December 8. See Penny Sorokes or Donna DeLong for more information.

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

This is a special Thank You for ministers and missionaries and their spouses who dedicated their life as full-time servants of our Lord. Think back over your lifetime of these special people who influenced your life. What a wonderful memory of a special talk or many sermons heard by you that influenced your life by one or more retired ministers or missionaries. Many of them 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 your prayers and offerings. FBC now focuses on this special offering throughout January.



**CHRISTMAS IS NOT SO MUCH
ABOUT OPENING PRESENTS BUT
OPENING HEARTS.**



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD FINISHING UP FOR 2024

Operation Christmas Child has been a staple in our lobby for several weeks now, but our FBC role in the Samaritan's Purse shoebox collection is concluding for this year. Trailers are on the way with thousands of shoeboxes! Sharon Anthony, who served as a coordinator for the project, was pleased with all the participation, donations and volunteering. The week of Nov. 18-24, volunteers from our church and elsewhere gathered for shifts at midday and late afternoons to receive boxes as a Central Collection Site for our region and to load trailers. By the time AFB goes to press, shoeboxes were prayed over, counted, stacked and loaded up for distribution. The project is also a way for our children and youth to participate in the ministry project that helps children across the world.

MISSION MESSAGE FOR CATTARAUGUS GIVES

Have you dreamed of making history? Of course, we all have. And now we have a chance to be a part of Cattaraugus Region's Day of Giving—an opportunity to unite our community around causes in which we truly believe and help nonprofit organizations connect to the larger community. We need your help! Please join our campaign and help us reach our goal of \$1,000 and 50 donors! We need you to tell your friends and family members about the important work we do and ask them to join us in helping to make a difference. Get ready to give! On December 3, visit cattaraugusgives.org and make a donation to us and/or to any of the great participating nonprofit organizations in Cattaraugus Region. All giving will end at 11:59 pm on Dec. 3, so make sure to get your gift in on time! Questions? Contact We Are His Hands program at Olean First Baptist Church, 716-372-5151. Thank you in advance for your generosity to our organization!

--Sharon Anthony, Missions Chair



GETTING HONEST ABOUT CHRISTMAS

When you read this newsletter, we will be in the Advent Season leading up to Christmas. The church will be decorated to remind us of the splendor of this season, and we will be lighting Advent Candles each week leading up to the great white Christ Candle. We will ooh and ahh as children share in our church's services and our superb Senior Choir leads us in music of the season culminating in the Cantata on the Sunday before Christmas. Christmas gifts are being purchased and family gatherings are being planned with all the trimmings of the season. I look forward to our family traditions at this time of year. We will gather on Christmas Eve following the Christmas Eve service and have hors d'oeuvres consisting of all kinds of cheese, crackers and, because Beverly is of Swedish descent, the unique Swedish sausage called korv. Our tree will be decorated standing by the dining room table with various incredible lights (including my maligned bubbling lights from the past) and ornaments that remind us of the past and those who have shared it with us. My Dallas Cowboy ornaments would be normally right on the front of the tree, but this year I have decided to put them on the back of the tree where they can barely be seen. I will leave it to you to figure out why I'm doing that.

But the point of all this is to highlight how we try and create an attitude of Christmas good cheer and suggest that peace on earth and stillness and serenity are all around us. Bev and I surfeit on Hallmark movies which are truly artistic shields to the realities of the world around us. But even in these movies the ever encroaching 'woke' culture of post-modern America has started to become very evident with the attendant reality of the collapse of the nuclear family. So, goes our attempts to make the season something that pushes back on the encroaching darkness.

You are probably now saying "who gave this poor soul permission to write this article?" Here is why I am writing. If you read the Gospel accounts of the first 'Advent' season, it was everything but calm, bright, gentle or merry. It was a world that did not stop being dark, cruel, murderous, and threatening just because of Christmas. In fact, it

was because of that very dark, cruel, murderous and threatening world that we are reminded of why the God-man, the only adequate possible Savior of humankind lost in spiritual darkness was needed. Just think:

- Mary was pregnant with a child before she was finally married to Joseph. A stoning offense in those days.
- Shepherds were visited by the angels, but respectable people would stay clear of them because they were unclean. Social disdain for some people exists even today.
- Herod the Great fully embraced the genocide of infant boys to assuage his maniacal insecurity. This brutality would send Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus fleeing to Egypt.
- The Roman Empire was 'taxing' or more accurately getting a tally of who could serve in their brutal and tyrannical grip on the Mediterranean world.

Now here is my point. For the Good News to be truly good news, it had to find its place in a dark and brutal world that was broken and full of broken people. It was a world then and now that does not stop being broken and fallen just because Advent rolls around culminating in Christmas. As I just read this week: "*...it's precisely that harsh, evil darkness that properly reminds us why a Savior needed to 'advent' ['come'] into our time and space in the firsts place.*"

So, let me challenge you not to fall into some kind of Christmas denial syndrome where we try to hermetically seal ourselves off from the reality of the world. No, indeed. Instead let us as we light the Christmas tree and hang the greens and sing of angels, shepherds, and wise men, let those symbols speak to the radiance of the Gospel Message that was incarnated in a feeding trough in a Bethlehem cave. A radiance that was intentionally meant to confront the real darkness of the real world. Let us with Gospel realism say with Isaiah: *And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.* Spoken indeed in the Living Word that was all God was and became all that we are in order to bring light into our darkness and salvation to our lostness. Soli Deo gloria!

~Pastor Ivan



THE MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over

their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” – Luke 2: 8 – 12.

Each year, we read this section of Scripture during the Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, but do we take the time to seriously consider the ramifications? “... a Savior has been born to you!” God became man! Let me repeat that... God became man!! God, who created the entire universe, humbled himself to come to earth as a man! Let that sink in. The Creator of everything became a helpless infant, totally dependent on his mother for survival. The omnipotent, all-powerful God became a powerless, completely vulnerable human baby! Can you understand why some people think that concept is ridiculous? It seems totally illogical. The infinite becomes finite... the omnipotent becomes helpless... the omnipresent limited by a physical body! It does challenge commonsense. Yet that is exactly what happened! And is it really that unbelievable? I mean, seriously, if God is all powerful... unlimited... able to do anything he wishes, why shouldn't he be able to come to Earth as a child? If we believe he can't then are we not denying his ability to do whatever he pleases? We are putting limits on God! As many have written, we are creating God in OUR image! How incredibly arrogant!!! Natalie Grant's song “King of the World” addresses it very well:

[Verse 1]

I tried to fit you in the walls inside my mind. I try to keep you safely in between the lines.

I try to put you in the box that I've designed. I try to pull you down, so we are eye to eye.

[Chorus]

When did I forget that you've always been the king of the world?

I try to take life back right out of the hands of the king of the world.

How could I make you so small when you're the one who holds it all?

When did I forget that you've always been the king of the world?

I also recall a sermon I heard several years ago about a father and child who came upon an ant hill that had been severely damaged by an animal or other person. The child watched as ants scurried around trying to salvage whatever they could. It was total chaos with many dead or injured ants. The child asked his father if they could help the ants, “Is there something I can do to show them I care about them and love them?” The father replied, “The ants would not understand you or what it is that you are doing if you try to help the ants. They would see you as just another enemy and try to bite you. The only way that you could help them in a way that they would understand is to become an ant yourself. Then they would see that you can identify with their problem, and they would accept your help. You would be able to be of assistance to them because you would be like them in many ways. But since you cannot become an ant, it is probably best we let them alone.” (excerpts from *The Wonder of Christmas 2 – The Incarnation* by Pastor Mike Partch.) While the child could not become an ant, God became a man... Jesus! And, as a man, Jesus was able to show us “the way, the truth, and the life.” “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” And it is Jesus' arrival that we celebrate on Christmas! Emmanuel... God with us!!

So, as we celebrate Christmas this year, let us all take time to consider the enormity of what happened on that day in Bethlehem and to thank God for the incredible gift he gave us. Improbable, illogical, or impossible to some, but not to those of us who truly believe!

MERRY CHRISTMAS; HAPPY NEW YEAR,
-Jim Sorokes

*P.S. For those who want to read or listen to the “ant hill” sermon, use the following link:
<https://www.longvillebiblechapel.org/22-life-upside-down-deceived-by-self-righteousness>*

The Family of God

We extend our **LOVE AND SYMPATHY** to the Spiller family on the passing of Tim's aunt, Lorna Easley, on October 28.

DIRECTORY CHANGES: Please update your copy of the Members/Friends directory with the following new addresses. Updated directories will be printed in January and June each year.

AVERILL, Rev. Jack and Jo-Ann
250 Nichols Ct. Apt 240
Charlottesville, VA 22901-1653

DE GROFF, Katrina
1053 Wellington Dr.
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

KETCHNER, Maunie and Bob
4115 S. Nine Mile Rd. #112
Allegany, NY 14706

LONGO, Sam and Linda
103 Pine Drive
Crossville, TN 38572

VIER, Rev. Lester and Louise
TerraBella Assisted Living
3851 Howard Gap Rd.
Hendersonville, NC 28792



DECEMBER BOARD MEETINGS

Sunday, December 8 @ Noon

Board of Christian Missions
Diaconate

Monday, December 11

@6:30 p.m. Board of Christian Education

Tuesday, December 12

@ 6:30 Trustees

JANUARY BOARD MEETINGS

Sunday, January 12 @ Noon

Board of Christian Missions
Diaconate

Monday, January 13 @ 5:30:

Board of Christian Education

Tuesday, January 14 @ 6:30

Trustees



BIRTHDAYS

8	Dave Taylor	20 Carol Molyneaux
12	Jim Molyneaux	23 Penny Sorokes
	Marcie Rust	27 Ed Van Brunt
15	Willie Milton	28 Deb Hall
19	Victoria Dennis	30 Matt Sage

ANNIVERSARIES

21	Josh & Stephanie Keim
30	Bob & Maunie Ketchner



BIRTHDAYS

4	Cheri O'Dell	11 Cari Matejka
	Olivia Taylor	17 Violet Butler
	Okey Taylor	20 Pam Nutt
7	Linda Longo	24 Gloria Spiller
		30 Lylah Butler

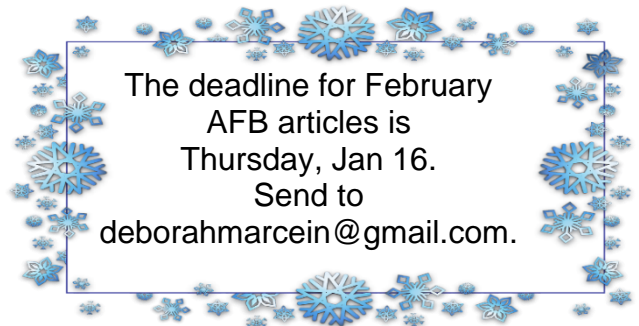
ANNIVERSARIES

3	Dave & Nan Torrey
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*Merry
Christmas
and
New Year
Blessings
from the
Church
Staff:*

*Ivan, Sue, Bob,
Penny, Casey and Rachel*



The Anti-Moderator Writes Again...

Prologue: For those confused by the title Anti Moderator, one of the Church Moderator's responsibilities is to "Foster understanding and harmony within the church, providing counsel, and promoting interchange of ideas, plans and procedures." Many believe that the Moderator should not express his or her own opinion but simply act as a mediator, arbitrator, or facilitator to achieve harmony in the church via compromise, concession, or consensus. But there are times when solving a problem requires that someone ruffle feathers, challenge the status quo, and purge some paradigms. That someone is the Anti-Moderator. The Anti-Moderator felt the need to expand on an article that appeared in the October newsletter. That article focused on criticisms aimed at the Board of Trustees. And while it's true that the Trustees are often the target of disapproval, The Anti-Moderator recognizes that ALL church leaders and many volunteers feel the burdens of leadership... including receiving comments like those directed at the Trustees. This can cause any church leader or volunteer to question why they should continue offering their time and talents. But when the critics are given the opportunity to get involved and help correct the issues they raise, they decline... citing their busy schedule, unwillingness to work with certain people, or other similar excuses. So, the burden of leadership remains with the current volunteers, who know that "you can't make everybody happy." Now many do express thanks for the efforts of leaders and volunteers, but the criticisms keep coming. This eventually takes its toll, and the leaders and other volunteers get "burned out." They no longer want to deal with the stress and negativity, and they quit... or worse, they leave the church. Now there is even more pressure on the volunteers who remain. Further, others who are not volunteering see the burden that leadership puts on people, and they become less inclined to get involved. The implications are obvious: fewer and fewer people taking on more responsibilities, spread themselves "too thin," which leads to even further stress and "burn out." Complicating the issue further, they hear complaints like, "Why are they always in charge?" -or- "Why are the same names always in the Nominating Committee report?" -or- "Larry Spivots (fictitious name) has too much power at this church." This second-guessing or "gutter-sniping" adds to their urge to step aside and

let somebody else do the job. But who is "somebody else?" While The Anti-Moderator awaits somebody else, let me change the tone of this article.

The Anti-Moderator and the Moderator were very impressed by Pastor Ivan's sermon in which he spoke of grit or endurance. The Anti-Moderator can see the grit or endurance in so many of our leaders and volunteers. Many felt a call to the positions where they serve. They have God-given gifts and realize that they must use these gifts, or they will disappoint God. James 4:17 says: "Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." And so, they accept the challenges... and do the best they can with what they have to offer. Many take on tasks or perform activities that they never thought they would ever do. As the saying goes, "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." We have so many examples of that in our own congregation. Some who never dreamed they would ever lead a Sunday school class, now do it on a regular basis. Others who never had any intentions of playing their guitar in public have done so often in our sanctuary. Still others who have an intense fear of speaking in public have given several children's sermons or served as a worship leader! The Anti-Moderator heard the following quote recently, "Fearlessness is a lack of fear, while bravery is the ability to confront fear and do what needs to be done even in the face of danger or difficulty. Fearlessness is a passive trait, while bravery is an active one. Fearlessness is a state of being, while bravery is an action taken in spite of fear." (Original source unknown) Suffice it to say, our congregation has many brave folks who have shown grit and overcome their fears to respond to a calling from God to contribute and to lead. While they might not receive accolades for their contributions on earth, they will in the next life! Finally, The Anti-Moderator needs to comment briefly on Pastor Ivan. He continues to set a very high bar with respect to his sermons, his dedication to visitation, and the other gifts he brings to our congregation. We are incredibly, incredibly blessed to have him serving as our interim pastor.

Struggling to adhere to Galatians 5:22-23.

"VOLUNTEERS DO NOT NECESSARILY HAVE THE TIME; THEY JUST HAVE THE HEART."

--Elizabeth Andrew