

DECEMBER 2025/JANUARY 2026

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



Sunday Worship: 9:30 a.m.
Faith and Fellowship: 11:00 a.m.



**CHRISTMAS EVE
CANDLELIGHT
SERVICE**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24,
2025
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 candle lighting service closes our time together. We 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.

AT FIRST BAPTIST

Senior Pastor
James Balson, Jr.
Minister of Music
Sue Neely VanBrunt
Admin/Finance Secretary
Brandie Nichols

Keyboards
Penny Sorokes
Audio Visual Specialist
Casey Sage
Custodian
Rachel Green

PHONE: 716- 372-5151

EMAIL: ofbc133@gmail.com

WEBSITE: oleanfirstbaptist.com

FACEBOOK: [oleanfirstbaptistchurch](https://www.facebook.com/oleanfirstbaptistchurch)



NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETINGS

THE ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL/CORPORATE MEETING OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF OLEAN WILL BE HELD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING WORSHIP ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING IS TO APPROVE THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT FOR CANDIDATES TO BOARDS AND COMMITTEES FOR 2026 – 2028 AND TO ELECT CANDIDATES TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR 2026-2028 AS WELL AS APPROVE A TENTATIVE 2026 BUDGET. ACTIVE MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE IN THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING; ACTIVE 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!

Allegany Alumni & Friends Band to offer concert at FBC

The Allegany Alumni & Friends Band will present a concert in our sanctuary on Tuesday, December 16 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.



The music department, directed by Sue Neely VanBrunt, our Minister of Music, kicked off the holiday season at the Giving Thanks dinner on Sunday, Nov. 2, with the senior choir, kids bells, special music and readings. How great it is to have TWO trumpeters heralding the season's celebrations with Dave Taylor and Pastor Jim sounding out the joy together!

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT & BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS

Join Us for Our Christmas Celebration!



This wonderful time of year is filled with joy and excitement as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birthday together! Our celebration will take

place on Sunday, December 14.

The day begins with our All-Church Christmas Pageant during worship—a special time to share the story of Jesus' birth through word and song. Afterward, we'll gather in Fellowship Hall for a delicious lunch and festive fun provided by the Board of Education. Everyone is welcome!

At the celebration, we invite you to bring a special gift for Jesus by supporting two local organizations that serve those in need: Trinity UMC Helping Hands Outreach Center and Operation Warm Hearts.

- *Trinity UMC Helping Hands Outreach Center* is collecting clothing items up to size 4T.
- *Operation Warm Hearts* is in need of towels, washcloths, loofahs, and shower toiletries.

Detailed donation lists can be found on the Board of Education bulletin board. Together, let's celebrate the joy of Christmas and share that joy with others!

Hot Dog and Hot Cocoa Outreach Success

On October 25, the Board of Education hosted a Hot Dog and Hot Cocoa Outreach event. The evening coincided with a Trick-or-Treat event on Union Street, bringing out many families and young community members in costume. It was a great opportunity to connect with our neighbors and share some warmth on a fun fall night. We were excited to engage with approximately 110 community members throughout the event. Thank you to all of our volunteers and church members that stopped by to join in!





*** ANNUAL REPORTS DUE***

Please note that all annual reports from staff members, boards and committees are due in the church office by **DECEMBER 19** to allow adequate time to prepare the annual report.

Electronic submissions are appreciated.



Donations for the flowers and decorations for the sanctuary will be received in the church office until December 12. 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.



FBC WOMEN'S MINISTRY EXTENDS HOLIDAY LUNCH INVITATION

The FBC Women's Ministry extends an invitation to every woman age 13+ in our church family to attend the annual Ladies Christmas Party on Saturday, December 13. The lunch will be held at noon on Saturday at Brothers Bistro on North Union Street with ordering from the menu; dessert will be provided. Parking is limited so we encourage carpooling. Those who wish to participate (no obligation) may bring a \$10 gift for an exchange. Previous events have been fun with good turnouts so please plan to join us this year! The registration deadline is Sunday, December 7. See Penny Sorokes or Donna DeLong for more information.

CHRISTMAS CANTATA AND WORSHIP DEC. 21—9:30 am



Whenever we hear the Christmas story we can't help but wonder how young Mary felt about the coming of her baby. "Mary, Did You Know?", a dramatic song written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene, asks many questions about the miraculous story of the birth of our Savior. This song is the theme for this year's Christmas Cantata to be presented by our Senior Choir as our sermon-in-song during 9:30 am worship on Sunday Dec 21st. Through stirring narration, traditional carols and Christmas favorites, we will be transported to the Bethlehem hillside and to the manger. Here we renew our joy that Jesus, our Messiah was born to save us. You will want to be present in the sanctuary to fully experience this musical. And...what a wonderful time to invite family and friends to join you for worship that includes lighting the Advent candle of Love, prayers, congregational singing and a special children's sermon.

MAKE YOUR NEW YEAR'S EVE PLANS EARLY!!

On Wed 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 a wide variety of 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.



2025 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 on Tuesday, December 2nd from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Sign up in the lobby if you are interested in assisting.



GENESIS HOUSE PROJECT



December 21st is the longest night of the year. To the homeless person, it can be lonely and scary. Please consider donating to the cost of the luminaries and volunteering to light the park. Questions, see Judy Wightman.



Christmas Offering

The Board of Trustees has designated the 2025 Christmas offering to the Genesis House and the Olean Food Pantry. The Board also designated the Thanksgiving offering to the Olean Food Pantry.

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.



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

--Eliza



A DELAYED FLIGHT

During the end of October, I was scheduled to fly from Buffalo to Tennessee for our house closing and move. My flight was scheduled to depart at noon, but due to mechanical issues I ended up sitting in the airport until nearly 8:00 pm. During this time, I had plenty of time to observe the operations of the airport and it reminded me a lot of Jesus' church.

The first thing I noticed was how the jet, when fueled and ready to depart, was not able to back up from the terminal, but relied on a little, chunky "tug" vehicle which would push the airplane to where it needed to be in order to taxi to the runway. When we think of flying, we often think how important the pilot is and are thankful for the flight attendants, but have we ever considered the tug driver? Yet, the flight couldn't happen without that driver.

In fact, as I considered, there are a whole host of individuals needed for any flight to be successful. The guys on the tarmac directing the plane, the baggage handlers moving the luggage and driving the baggage trucks, the folks refueling the planes, and the mechanics making sure everything is working properly and safely. Entering the airport, we meet with the smiling airline representatives issuing tickets, checking baggage, and solving problems. The TSA officers work hard to ensure the safety of the airport and flights. Air marshals do the same, invisible to most eyes. In recent days, with the government shutdown, we have been reminded of the air traffic controllers who sit in their towers, watching their radar screens, and communicating critical information to the pilots. When too many are absent, flights have to be cancelled. Everyone is important.

The same is true for the church. Perhaps, when thinking of the ministry of the church, one first thinks of a pastor or a worship leader or perhaps some office-bearer, but if "the flight" is to be successful - if we are going to help people get to heaven via the gospel, and reflect the love of Christ to our generation, then every single church member is critically important.

You may serve invisibly. You might be driving the chunky "tug". Maybe you serve "out on the tarmac, directing others." Or perhaps, invisible to all, in "the tower" praying fervently for the lost and the ministry of the Word. Maybe, like the airline representatives, you are busy greeting folks and solving problems. Wherever Christ has gifted you and called you to serve is important. YOU are important.

Together, let's be sure we don't have any "delays." Together, let's be sure we are doing what each one of us is called to do, so that God will be glorified, the lost will be saved, and the children of God will grow in Christ-likeness.

Rev. James P. Balson, Jr.
Senior Pastor



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD FINISHING UP FOR 2025

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 will soon be on the way with thousands of shoeboxes!

Sharon Anthony, who serves as a coordinator for the project, is pleased with all the participation, donations and volunteering. The week of Nov. 17-24, volunteers from our church and elsewhere



gather for shifts at midday and late afternoons to receive boxes as a Central Collection Site for our region and to load

trailers. Shoeboxes are 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.



The Assistant Moderator's Musings



Once again, I am again writing this article while on the Outer Banks! And this house in Nags Head is looking more and more like home as three truckloads of our belongings are now here... instead of in Olean... which brings me back to the

end of my last article. Borrowing Jim Kelsey's theme, I have been spending a lot of time thinking about "last times." We hope to be living on the Outer Banks full-time shortly after the holiday, so I know that sometime in the next two months, I will walk out of our soon-to-be former home at 805 Main Street for the last time. I will eat at some of my favorite Olean restaurants one last time. I have already played my last round of golf as a member of THE Monday Night Golf League. And 3:16 will play together one last time (or maybe that has already happened???). And I know I will likely be saying goodbye to some very good friends one last time... on this earth! Thankfully, because of Jesus' sacrifice, I know I will be seeing many of them again someday. Which brings me to my point. Yes, I do face many last times. We all do. And someday we will all take our last breath in this world. Ah, but if we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and if we truly believe that He has cleansed us of our sins, we have an incredible new beginning waiting for us when God calls us home! So, have you accepted God's gift? Have you accepted Jesus Christ?? I sincerely hope you have... and then that ultimate last time won't be a last time at all. It will just be one door closing while another opens. There will be no "last times" in the eternity that we'll spend worshipping God in Heaven.

Grabbing a slightly different gear, I still have difficulty understanding an all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent God being born of a virgin, sleeping in a manger, assisting his carpenter father, living in the primitive world of the day, growing into a man, dealing with all of the challenges we all face, gathering a rag-tag group of fishermen and other common folk and teaching them truths beyond their understanding, challenging the religious hierarchy of his day, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, making the lame walk and the deaf hear, performing miracles that defied comprehension, but allowing himself to be falsely arrested, accused of blasphemy, tortured, beating to within an inch of his life and then nailed to a cross and dying... for me. And on the third day, He raised from the dead... conquering death... and providing all who believe in Him the gift of salvation. Is it any wonder that so many people find all this hard to believe? It

defies reason... it defies logic. Many today claim that only a fool would believe such a story. Well, my friends, I am a fool... because I believe!!

Returning to our impending departure from Olean First Baptist Church, there are so many things that I could write about, and I had seriously considered offering some thought on what our / your church should do to ensure it is viable in the future. But after re-reading the initial thoughts I offered a month or so ago, I realized that I am in no position to suggest anything... if I am not going to be here to help make it happen. "Hey, why don't you do this, while I head out of town!!" It doesn't make much sense, eh? And so, I will keep my thoughts to myself and have faith that God will inspire leaders at OFBC to be His instruments to guide the church into the future. His will be done!!

I will take many great memories with me when I head south, and I will miss so many of you and so many of the happenings at OFBC. I certainly will miss the Seekers Class and the thought-provoking discussions we have had. I will miss singing in the Senior Choir and the spiritual break in my week that our rehearsals provided. And yes, I will miss singing in the cantatas. I will miss being a worship leader and delivering the message now and then (hmmm... another last time...). And I will miss the fellowship, spiritual support, and caring congregation that makes OFBC so special. Penny and I will ultimately find a new church home on the Outer Banks, but we will always treasure our time at Olean First Baptist Church. The church became a huge part of our lives. Oh, it wasn't all "lollipops and roses," but every family has its squabbles, ups and downs. That's what makes life interesting! So, this is farewell... at least for a time... but I'm confident we'll meet again... in this world or the next!

In closing, it has been my honor and privilege to have been part of our congregation. I have also enjoyed writing these "musings" over the past seven plus years. And who knows, maybe there will be an article or two in future newsletters from a former member living in North Carolina. This might not be the last time...

-Jim Sorokes
Former Assistant Moderator



PEACE OF A NATIVITY

By Deb Wuethrich

I can't seem to help myself. I'm always early out of the gate on decorating for Christmas. Some scoff when I tell them, but I know I'm not the only one. A Family Life radio host recently said, "If you like to decorate on November 1 like me..." High five! It's not that I dismiss Thanksgiving. I hold the holiday in the highest regard. Mine is no longer the classic family-gathering-round-the-table occasion of earlier years, but I have my own rituals with prayers of gratitude for blessings and a good life topping the list. I just do it in the glow of lights. It's not an all at once process. Decorations are stored in totes, some in the basement, a few in an upstairs closet. When I'm doing laundry, a couple strings of lights and a few items may come upstairs with me. If I'm upstairs, I'll grab a few special ornaments.

I find I'm not putting out as much as I used to, and that's okay. There isn't a traditional tree anymore. I have cats. These particular two, Tate and Dory, would be climbing it and knocking it over as they conduct their nightly chase through the house. I do keep a small fiber optics tree on an end table, however.

The first items in the living room are my Nativity sets. I have a small collection of them in different styles, something I've put together just in the past few years. The first week of November, the biggest one was assembled under the TV table. I purchased this at one of our church yard sales in the summer. I believe Dave and Linda Anderson once owned it and they were downsizing. It's beautiful, from Holland, with hand-painted details on every piece. Next, on a little smaller scale but still a nice size, is the one I inherited from my Aunt Dora. One time when I visited in Orchard Park, she was compiling lists of items to go to various family members. She asked me what I wanted and I said I couldn't think of anything. But when she took me to her basement, she showed me the Nativity, and I said, "Yes. That!"

From my mother, I have a small set of crystal characters that you place on a round mirror to enhance the figures. Some friends also know I especially enjoy these scenes. Donna DeLong gave me a beautiful crystal set that sits on a wooden manger with a satin blue cloth underneath. Last year, my friend Faith gave me a darling, unique Native American Nativity piece.

While I don't get out a lot of ornaments anymore, I try to include a few from times throughout my family's history, especially items our daughter Michele made. There is also a plastic one-piece Nativity with glitter on the roof and figures with bits of paint chipped off. It was the first thing Gordy and I bought for our first Christmas as a married couple. The simplest is a clothespin attached to a half-clothespin and another small piece representing Joseph, Mary and the holy Babe. In my book, *Dance While the Music Still Plays*, I described a time in Michele's young life when she told me she "liked both parts of Christmas." It was the year I noticed her drawing hovering angels in addition to the typical Santa and snowman figures. The same year, we came to First Baptist as visitors to enjoy the Christmas Eve cantata, "Night of Miracles," a pivotal time in our faith, because we shared the best of the Christmas experience with our little girl as a family.

As I reflect, I've been processing what it represents to me to bring out these special Nativity scenes—and all the memories they evoke. They bring me peace! They remind me of the hope that came to us in an unexpected way, a Baby born in a manger, who would grow up to save us all from sin. A Baby who represents the promise of an everlasting life with Him.



Spreading the joy

FBC is planning a Cookie Distribution for essential workers. We are looking for cookie and candy donations (2-3 dozen each) to be delivered to the church Dec 21st. Volunteers will tray the cookies and distribute Christmas week.

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! 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 2, 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. 2, 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

Directory Photos

Pictures are currently being taken on Sundays in the Hebrew café during fellowship time. Please watch for an opportunity to duck in and get yours done!

2026 Stewardship

If you have not turned in your 2026 pledge cards, please do so promptly. The Trustees need this information for the 2026 budget.



The office will be closed on the following days:

Wednesday, December 24th Christmas Eve
Thursday, December 25th Christmas Day
Thursday, January 1st New Year Day
Monday, January 19th - MLK Day

*A state of mind that sees God in everything
is evidence of growth in grace and a
thankful heart”.*

Charles Grandison Finney

DECEMBER BOARD MEETINGS

Monday, December 8
@5:30 p.m. Board of Christian Education
Tuesday, December 9
@ 6:30 Trustees
Sunday, December 14 @ Noon
Board of Christian Missions
Diaconate

JANUARY BOARD MEETINGS

Sunday, January 11 @ Noon
Board of Christian Missions
Diaconate
Monday, January 12 @ 5:30:
Board of Christian Education
Tuesday, January 13 @ 6:30
Trustees



BIRTHDAYS

8	Dave Taylor	20 Carol Molyneaux
11	Shawn VanBrunt	23 Penny Sorokes
12	Jim Molyneaux	27 Ed Van Brunt
	Marcie Rust	28 Deb Hall
14	Alan Schultz-Cone	30 Matt Sage

ANNIVERSARIES

21	Josh & Stephanie Keim
30	Bob & Maunie Ketchner



BIRTHDAYS

4	Cheri O'Dell	11	Cari Matejka
	Kaitlin Taylor Young	13	Brandyn Delong
	Olivia Taylor	17	Violet Butler
	Okey Taylor	20	Pam Nutt
7	Linda Longo	24	Gloria Spiller
8	Jess Anderson	30	Lylah Butler

ANNIVERSARIES

3	Dave & Nan Torrey
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PLEASE KEEP US INFORMED

If you've had an important event in your life such as a birth, death, wedding, or an accomplishment, or if you can provide an update to a prayer concern, please let us know in the church office. We like to acknowledge everyone's special moments but we need your help to make sure that we have the correct information. It is also imperative that you let us know when you or a loved one is going to be in the hospital and would like to be visited. Current privacy laws make it difficult to know who is hospital.



If you stop by and find “nobody home”, we ask for your patience and understanding. There are times that errands are being done and also occasional work being done remotely. We will do our best to be here during posted office hours.)

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*Merry
Christmas
and
New
Year
Blessings
from the
Church*

*Staff: Pastor Jim, Sue,
Casey, Rachel and Brandie,*