

MAY 2026

“Striving to be the Church of Jesus Christ Where Every Member is a Minister”



AT FIRST BAPTIST

Senior Pastor
James Balson, Jr.
Secretary-OBX Div.
Penny Sorokes
Audio Visual Specialist
Casey Sage

Minister of Music
Sue Neely VanBrunt
Organist
Jeanne Gross
Custodian
Rachel Green

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Sunday Worship: 9:30 a.m.
Faith & Fellowship for All Ages: 11:00 a.m.



Our Board of Trustees is asking all of those who would like to offer some of their time and talents to help with our annual property and facilities clean-up. **“Clean-Up Day will take place on May 2.** Work will begin at or around 9:00 am. In the event of inclement weather, we will work indoors. If the weather cooperates, we’ll have teams working both indoors and outdoors. There is a lot of work to be done so we need a large number of volunteers.

NOTE: Even if you cannot do manual labor, you might be able to help with delivering drinks or arranging food or getting tools, etc., so don’t assume you can’t help! Hope to see you then!

FAITH & FELLOWSHIP LUNCHEON MAY 3TH AT 12 PM



On Sunday, May 3, the Diaconate will be sponsoring the monthly Fellowship Luncheon following Sunday school. The theme will include Mexican fare, including a

Taco Salad with fixings each person may choose; chicken enchiladas; chips and dips and other offerings. We will also have hot dogs since not everyone enjoys Mexican food. Contributions of dishes to pass are welcomed and do not have to adhere to the theme. We hope you’ll join us!



Church World Blanket Program

“And don’t forget to do good and share with those in need.” (Hebrews 13:16)

For over 75 years, Church World Service has been helping people of faith bring God’s hope and healing to people in the U.S. and around the world. When difficult times happen, a kind and loving response can make all the difference. That’s why the CWS Blankets program was created—to give a kind, loving and tangible response to someone facing a difficult time, reminding them that they are not alone. Join other generous donors and provide comfort and warmth to our neighbors in need. Over the decades, the specifics of their programs have shifted and evolved. The CWS family has grown. And their foundation of collaboration and welcome has remained unshakable. We proudly serve as the toolbox that our neighbors near and far use to build healthy, dignified and safe lives. Here are a few examples: Our congregation is actively involved with the Church World Blanket Program. For many years, our church has been helping to keep their neighbors warm by providing blankets to families here in the United States. Our church will be taking special donation offerings on May 3 and May 10 (Mother’s Day) to help provide blankets and other emergency items to the families who are devastated. Please stop by the table in the foyer and make a donation.

MOTHER'S DAY MAY 10



Mother's Day is always a special occasion at First Baptist. The Board of Christian Education will have gifts for all of the mothers in our congregation. We're hoping for a special refreshment following services, too!



Memorial Day is a time to remember and honor military personnel who died in the service of our country, especially those who died in battle or as a result of wounds sustained in battle. The first "Decoration Day" was celebrated on May 30, 1868 at Arlington Cemetery. Join with us on Sunday, May 24, as we honor the brave men and women from our country who have given the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms. The Diaconate has planned a special tribute.



Reminder, we are accepting pictures for our Military Wall of Honor. If someone in your family or circle of friends is currently serving in a branch of the US Military, please bring a picture (up to 5x7) and address for the bulletin board in the lobby so that we can put a name with a face to offer a more personal prayer for safety and send a card or note of thanks to them. It is important that we don't forget those who are allowing us the freedoms that we enjoy every day.



Jeanne Gross has been hired as our permanent Church Organist after several months of substitute service. Jeanne has played the organ for years 55 years at a variety of churches in the greater Bradford/Olean area. You have probably noticed in worship that her selections are skillful and thoughtful. Her desire to give of her best to the Lord and his people is evident in all that she does. She joyfully accompanies the Sr. Choir, soloists and instrumentalists as well. Jeanne has become a member of our church, a faithful part of the Seekers Faith and Fellowship Class and a participant in Women's Fellowship activities and First Sunday luncheons. If you've not yet made her acquaintance, please take time to introduce yourself and welcome her!

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION EVENTS:



IT'S ALMOST CAMP TIME!

Are you in **grades K-12 this fall**? Looking for a week full of **faith, fun, and friendship**? Join us for an unforgettable experience at **Camp JYC** in Franklinville, NY! Each week is packed with Bible learning, outdoor adventure, and time to grow closer to Jesus — and to each other!

CAMP DATES:

- Little Squirrels Day Camp:** July 8-10 | 10 AM – 2:30 PM (For students finishing grades K-2)
- Teen Camp:** July 12-17
(For students finishing grades 7-11)
- Discovery Camp:** July 19-24
(For students finishing grades 3-6)
- Adventure Camp:** July 26-31
(For students finishing grades 5-11)

The cost to our campers is just \$25. The rest is generously covered by **First Baptist Church**. Payment is due at registration. **Registration Deadline: June 1st** Sign-up info is available outside the Board of Education office. **Scholarships are available!**

Want to Sponsor a Camper? You can help send one of our young people to camp! Contact any member of the **Board of Education** for details.

THE FAMILY OF GOD



We extend our **LOVE AND SYMPATHY** to **Vi Pettigrew** on the recent loss of her nephew, Butch; to **Jim and Carol Molyneaux** on the passing of their niece, Laurie; to

Dale and Ann Anderson on the loss of their daughter, Shaylea Anderson, on March 31; and to **Karen Woodring** on the passing of her son, Bill Woodring, on April 15.



Join other FBC men at Perkins Restaurant in Olean at 11:45 am on Tuesdays for a weekly men's lunch.



On Friday June 5th, you are invited to an Open House from 2:30 - 4 pm at Olean FBC in Memory of Ed VanBrunt, who passed into Glory on Dec 23rd. There will be a light luncheon, time to reminisce and share with family and friends.

Newsletter Deadline

Information and articles for the **JUNE** edition of At First Baptist are due to the church office by **THURSDAY, MAY 14**
If possible, please send info to ofbc133@gmail.com

REMINDER: FOOD PANTRY DONATIONS ARE ACCEPTED MONTHLY IN THE COLLECTION BIN LOCATED IN THE LOBBY. YOUR GENEROUS OFFERINGS ARE APPRECIATED.



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 2026 dates. This is such a nice way to honor or remember someone on a special occasion.

MAY BIRTHDAYS

- 2 Terry Schnell
Sue Neely VanBrunt
Jack Crowley
- 4 Frank Snyder
- 9 Sue Keim
Nancy Taylor
- 10 Jim Sorokes
- 11 Gwen Tyler
- 12 Mike Schultz
- 19 Elsa Porcello
- 21 Paul Cummings
Dawn Snyder
- 23 Nan Torrey
- 24 Faith Boyce
- 27 Abby Rust
- 30 Jerry Nutt Jr.
Fiora Porcello



MAY ANNIVERSARIES

- 16 Jim & Penny Sorokes
- 27 Mike & Lori Funden
- 29 Dan & Terri McDowell



Linda Kennemuth is the contact person for our church **PRAYER CHAIN**. If you would like to be included in the circulation or if you have a prayer concern to share, please contact Linda at chico.lindy@gmail.com or 716-904-0860.



MAY BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

Monday, May 11

@ 5:30 pm - Board of Christian Education

Tuesday, May 12

@ 6:30 pm - Board of Trustees

Sunday, May 17 @ Noon

Board of Christian Missions
Diaconate



Recently we studied the Beatitudes in our Sunday morning services. We came to understand that Jesus was painting a portrait, detail by detail, of a genuine Christian.

Over several weeks we saw that a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is poor in spirit, mourns over sin, is meek, hungers & thirsts for righteousness, is merciful, and pure in heart and highly prizes peace with God, both for himself and for others.

There is one other beatitude which is startling and seems more paradoxical than the rest. For three verses (as opposed to just one for each of the other beatitudes), Jesus proclaims the blessedness of those who are *persecuted* for righteousness' sake.

The persecution of God's people is as old as Genesis chapter 4 when Cain murdered his brother because Abel's worship was acceptable and his own wasn't. Then, throughout the Bible, we see the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, Daniel in a lions' den, Isaiah in a pit, Elijah on the lam, Stephen stoned, James killed, the Jerusalem Christians fleeing and John banished. Church history itself is replete with heart-wrenching descriptions of every kind of persecution depraved imaginations could invent (every Christian would do well to read Fox's Book of Martyrs at least once), and even today, in the 21st century, persecution is very real around the globe.

In Matthew 5:11, Jesus reveals that the reason Christians are persecuted is because unbelievers hate *Him* ("**for My sake**"). He says that some persecution takes the form of words: "**reviled**" - that is, scorned, mocked, jeered at, and sometimes it is slander - evil things spoken "**falsely**". And He says they will "**persecute**" you.... literally, they will "pursue" you.

To strengthen us in the face of such evil, Jesus reminds us of the reward that is waiting for us in heaven, and he reminds us that we are in good company (**vs. 12**).

It is true that the persecutions we face in our country are miniscule by comparison to what our sisters and brothers endure in some other countries where many are imprisoned, beaten, separated from their families, tortured, forced to hide, and even are put to death because of their faith in Christ. We ought to faithfully pray for our brethren around the world.

Yet, though small by comparison, the cruel words, attitudes, actions, and other forms of persecution which we experience are still painful for us. Jesus

sees, Jesus knows, and Jesus encourages you to be faithful.

Remember.... that which waits for you in glory is so great that nothing in this life can compare! "**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**" **Romans 8:18**

Remember.... that you are in the company of the godliest people! "**They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy...therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.**" **Hebrews 11:37, 38; 12:1**

Remember... all that Jesus endured for you! "**For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.**" **Hebrews 12:3**

Let us pray that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness (**I Timothy 2:2**) but if (and when) persecution comes, may we be faithful and glorify God, whether by life or by death (**Philippians 1:20**).

WHAT'S NEXT AFTER WORSHIP?

Come for the Message — Stay for the Connection.

Looking for a **meaningful way to spend your Sunday morning** after worship? Why not stick around and join one of our **Faith & Fellowship groups**?



We offer something for **everyone**: Engaging small groups for **adults and youth**



Fun and nurturing **Sunday School classes** for our youngest learners

It all begins at **11:00 AM**, giving you plenty of time to **grab a snack or a beverage** (thanks to our amazing Hospitality Committee!) and find a spot to settle in. Not sure which group is the best fit? No worries! Just stop by and chat with a **Board of Education member** — we'd love to help you get connected. Let's grow in faith, build friendships, and walk this journey together.



ASSIST. MODERATOR'S VIEW

Whew and amen! The FBC Member and Friends Photo Directory is done!

We distributed print copies in clear folders on April 12 to those who wanted one. Copies are also available in the church office for those who weren't present. If you are a remote member or friend and would like one, contact me at deborahmarcein@gmail.com or 517-605-4712.

If you're looking for one and can't find more, we will print a few more. Just leave your name in my lobby mailbox and I'll see that you get one.

When Pastor Jim first asked if I might be interested in coordinating photos for this project, I guess I didn't realize it would take so long. Inviting folks into the Café for their poses turned out to be a little trickier than I expected.

But we got it done, thanks to all those willing to be included (some declined, and that's fine); and to Lori Funden for catching some that I just kept missing—and for taking mine. Thanks also to Penny Sorokes for formatting all the photos we sent, and to Casey Sage for forwarding info sheets that turned up in the office mailbox. Thank you, everyone!

As with any such undertaking, we know there will be some corrections and updates that need to be made. Since we expect this color-print run, protected in the plastic folder, to last for quite some time, here's how we plan to go forward. Needed changes or corrections should be submitted to the church email (OFBC133@gmail.com) or put a note in my lobby mailbox, and updates will appear in future At First Baptist editions.

We will also collect these and periodically create an added page, perhaps once or twice a year, that can be slipped into the back of your directory. This way, we don't have to do as many mass directory reprints as we used to do, and as new members and friends

Please do not think this is something you just won't be able to take part in. I've been looking back at older issues, one back as far as 1989, and you'd be surprised at who contributed, folks who did not consider themselves writers but wrote down heartfelt thoughts devoted to God.

I am going to include a sample from the 2021 Reflections issue, a devotion Rita Wymer first wrote in 2015, just to give you an idea, and perhaps another

next month so you can be thinking of what YOU might have to add.

~Deb Wuethrich

SEEK PEACE

Psalm 34:14 "Seek peace and pursue it."

I used to worry and fret over nearly everything: *Will I have enough money to pay all my bills? *Do I have enough time to get everything done? *What gifts can I get everyone?

This fretting and worrying all the time zapped my strength and peace. I was losing my peace! Matthew 6:25 (NKJV) tells us, "Therefore I (Jesus) say to you do not worry!!" Psalm 34:14 tells us,

"Seek peace and pursue it."

~Rita Wymer



A Few of My Favorite Things....

As some will know from memory, the psalmist says/sings these words in Psalm 150.

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord!

For many of us, music and psalms hold a special place in our hearts and minds. We love the melody, the harmony and the meaningful lyrics. This summer at Olean FBC, we would like for you to have some of your favorites sung by the congregation, or special music presenters! So, later in May we will be asking you to list just a couple of your favorite hymns or praise songs and we'll try our best to include them in summer worship services. What a great season of musical praise & worship we will share!

'Sing'cerely, Sue Neely VanBrunt, Minister of Music

MUSINGS FROM THE OUTER BANKS

Greetings from the Outer Banks of North Carolina. I thought some of you might be interested in reading about what's been going on in our lives since we left Olean. I also want you to know we enjoyed our surprise visit to Olean to participate in the Easter Cantata. It was especially enjoyable for me because, for the first time, my seat in the choir was not on the end of the risers. As a result, I experienced "surround sound" ... hearing all the parts and voices blending as one. It was awesome!! Thanks to Sue Neely VanBrunt for the opportunity to sing a cantata one more time. Maybe we'll do it again someday?

During our visit, a few asked us if we've found a new church home. My answer at the time was, "Not yet, but we're looking." The same answer is true as of this writing, although we have ruled out a few and have been to one church twice (Still Waters Baptist Church) and attended Sunday School during our most recent visit. The senior pastor led the class. It was a little like a blend of the Seekers and Builders Classes. The folks in the class ranged in ages from the mid-20s up to the 70s. I realized partway through the session that I might have been one of the oldest in the room, at least in calendar years. Maturity is another story!

In many regards, their worship service reminded me of Olean First Baptist. They have a choir (led by the senior pastor) that might be slightly larger, and the order of worship is very similar. They have an equivalent of children's church for the younger kids, but they don't have a children's sermon during the service. Their average attendance is slightly over 100. Like their Sunday School classes, the congregation has a wide range of ages and there are several families with young children. They do not have an organ or a praise team. The music is accompanied by one of two pianos, and they use a very different hymnal... Penny and I didn't know most of the songs we sang. And our late Pastor Millard would love their service because they use the original King James Bible. Curiously, their church covenant is VERY similar to Olean First Baptist Church's, some items being worded exactly the same. Two significant differences... the number of men and women at the worship service was about equal and, from what we've seen so far, most of the leadership positions are held by men.

Regarding other churches in our area, we have been checking them out on-line before attending a service in person. We have ruled out several denominational

churches because their belief systems do not align with ours, i.e., Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, etc. Many of the non-denominational churches' worship services consist of 20 to 30 minutes of praise music, a prayer, a reading from Scripture, a sermon, and a closing praise song. The messages are OK and most are Biblical, but they tend to focus on the "soft side" of scripture, i.e., love, acceptance, kindness, and ignore the consequences of not adhering to God's Word or living up to God's expectations for our lives. Watching the on-line or recorded services in our search process also made me realize how important it is for a church to offer a quality and attractive "production." Like it or not, the on-line presentation impacts a viewer's impression of the church. And while it might seem superficial, it does make a big difference when deciding whether to continue watching... and whether one might want to attend a service in person. Now able to speak from personal experience, several candidate churches were crossed off my list based on what I viewed on-line. Short-sighted? Maybe, but true, nonetheless.

Turning the page, Penny and I have been watching the on-line broadcast of America Reads The Bible on Pure Flix. It runs from 9AM to 9PM every day this week. It is a fascinating endeavor and the commitment of the folks doing the reading is inspirational. I was very impressed by and felt a bit sorry for those who diligently read all those Old Testament names in Deuteronomy, Chronicles, etc. One day I hope God will explain why all those details of lineage were included. As I write this, they are in the book of Job and plan to finish the remainder of the Bible by the end of the week. I know it will be over by the time you read this, but the videos will apparently all be available on Pure Flix for viewing at your leisure.

In closing, we have not had any luck selling our home in Olean but hope the market will improve as we approach the end of the school year. We love our new home and are gradually finding places for all the possessions we brought South... or are donating them to local charities. God provided us with many blessings... maybe a few too many???

May God bless you appropriately!!!

-Jim Sorokes