Olean First Baptist Church
Since 1830
Sharing the faith, hope and redeeming love of Jesus Christ with all people.

9:30 AM: Sunday Worship
11:00 AM: Faith & Fellowship for All Ages

AT FIRST BAPTIST

Senior Pastor
James P. Balson, Jr.
Secretary
Clarissa Spiller Ivan
Audio Visual Specialist
Casey Sage
Minister of Music
Sue Neely VanBrunt
Organist
Jeanne Gross
Custodian
Rachel Green

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NOVEMBER BOARD MEETINGS

Sunday, November 8 @ 12 PM	**- Diaconate**
Sunday, November 8 @ 12 PM	**- Christian Mis.**
Monday, November 9 @ 5:30 PM	**- Christian Ed.**
Tuesday, November 10 @ 6:30 PM	**- Trustees**
January 2027	**- Advisory Council**

Church Office Closings

- Wednesday, November 11, for Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving Thursday & Friday, November 26–27

Books That Shape a Life



Recently, I was listening to a podcast interview in which the interviewer asked the guest which books had made the greatest impact on his life. I could not help but ask myself the same question.

Some of you may be familiar with the television show *The Middle* and its youngest character, Brick. In one episode, Brick says something to the effect that books have been his constant friends. He is seen with his nose in a book in nearly every episode. If you have seen my library, you can probably guess that I identify with Brick.

If I were listing only my favorite books through the years, I would certainly include *The Chronicles of Narnia*. During middle school, I devoured science-fiction works by Harry Harrison, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Larry Niven, Robert Heinlein, and Poul Anderson. In high school, I remember getting lost in all the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.

However, when I consider books that have changed and shaped my life, the list is different. Obviously, the Bible is far and away the most important and life-changing book!

The earliest theology book I remember reading was *The Sovereignty of God* by A.W. Pink. I read it in high school. Pink examines many biblical passages about the truth that God is the sovereign King over all creation.

In college, the first book I purchased from the bookstore that was not on a required reading list was *Lectures to My Students* by C.H. Spurgeon. Through that book, Spurgeon became my mentor and hero. Other significant books I encountered later included *The Journals of George Whitefield*, *The Power of the Pulpit* by Gardiner Spring, and *Holiness* by J.C. Ryle.

I have read many books about theology, philosophy, history, biblical commentary, and devotional life. While all have value, one particular genre has been especially important in my journey: biography.

God has used the examples of Christians from past centuries to help me grow in faith. The life stories of

Charles Spurgeon, George Müller, Derek Prince, Leonard Ravenhill, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, David Brainerd, John G. Paton, and many others have been tools in God's hands to shape and mold me.

I strongly encourage others to read biographies as well. In Hebrews 11, God reminds us of the many people who lived by faith. Hebrews 12:1 then exhorts us:

"Therefore, we also, being 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."

Learning about those who lived by faith helps us do likewise.

What books have most influenced you? What biographies have shaped your life? Whose life story has affected your own?

I strongly encourage you to read Christian biographies. God can use these life stories to encourage, strengthen, bless, and mature you.

And perhaps God would have you write down your own life story. Even if it is never published, your biography may one day shape the lives of your grandchildren and future generations.

From Pastor Jim

PASTOR APPRECIATION MONTH

October was Pastor Appreciation Month. On October 11, Donna DeLong presented Pastor Jim with a gift on behalf of the congregation in appreciation for his faithful service to Olean First Baptist Church.

Thank you, Pastor Jim, for your leadership, prayerful care, biblical teaching, and the many visible and quiet ways you serve our church family and community.



Our monthly worship ministry at The Pines continues to go well. Pastor Jim welcomes adults and children who would like to participate by reading Scripture, sharing why a passage is meaningful, or offering a brief devotional or message.

OFBC worships at The Pines on the last Sunday of each month. New large-print hymn packets have been delivered for residents.

Arrive by 1:45 PM; the service begins at 2:00 PM.

MUSIC NOTES

Calling All Singers!

Senior Choir Christmas cantata rehearsals are open to anyone who would like to participate in the musical What Child Is This? The cantata will be presented during our 9:30 a.m. worship service on Sunday, December 20.

We welcome seasonal singers who may not be able to sing with the choir at other times. If you enjoy singing melody or harmony and would like to give it a try, please join us!

Rehearsals are held Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. The fellowship and Prayer and Share time are also a midweek blessing. If you have questions, please speak with Sue Neely VanBrunt or any Senior Choir member.

Giving Thanks Sunday Is This Week!

Join Us for Worship, Music, and Dinner

This Sunday, November 1, we will gather to thank the Lord during our Stewardship Commitment and Giving Thanks Sunday.

The Trustees will update us on our stewardship commitments for 2027. Pastor Jim will bring the message, "Ready or Not," based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8. We will also gather at the Lord's Table to celebrate Holy Communion. What a wonderful morning of worship it will be!

Following the service, everyone will move to Fellowship Hall for coffee, juice, and a few moments of fellowship before the Giving Thanks Music Program.

The program will include seasonal group singing, a trumpet duet by Pastor Jim and Dave Taylor, and selections by the Kids' Bell Choir and Senior Choir.

At 11:30 a.m., we will enjoy the Giving Thanks Dinner, prepared by the Hospitality Committee and Diaconate. Turkey, stuffing, gravy, and beverages will be provided. Those who are able may bring a side dish or dessert to complete the meal or make a small monetary donation.

Do not worry if you did not make a reservation. There will be an extra place set just for you!

Please plan to join us for this special day of worship, thanksgiving, music, and fellowship with our church family and friends.

Sing'cerely,
Sue Neely VanBrunt, Minister of Music

FROM THE CHURCH OFFICE

MAKING ROOM FOR THE NEXT SEASON



Last month, I wrote about how autumn makes me want to create room for the next season. I want to continue that theme in November.

Making room is not just about clearing unneeded belongings before winter. It can mean releasing old habits, expectations, or fears. It can also mean taking a gift we have stored away and finally putting it to use.

Changing seasons mean changing playlists. As soon as November 1 arrives, A Charlie Brown Christmas by the Vince Guaraldi Trio begins playing on my internal radio! Lately, I have also been singing more. After years away from performing regularly, I am joining a band again and adding my voice to the joyful chorus of the Christmas cantata. It feels like reopening a gift God gave me long ago.

We often think of treasure as money or possessions. Yet we carry many other treasures: our time, voices, compassion, and faith. Many of these were committed during our Stewardship Campaign, which culminated on Commitment Sunday. God gives us treasures that can bless others when we are willing to use them.

Those treasures also come in the form of Bible verses that sit on your shoulder at just the right moment: Jesus says:

"Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
Matthew 6:19-21 CSB

Those words feel especially meaningful as Christmas approaches.

I am not a naturally gifted gift giver. Trying to choose the "perfect" present often leaves me feeling inadequate. I enjoy making gifts by hand because they feel personal, but even then, I wonder, "Is this enough?"

I am also not a fan of wrapping gifts on Christmas Eve. Every year, I promise myself I will start sooner. Then I find myself wrapping presents at two o'clock on Christmas morning. **Nothing says "peace on earth" quite like wrestling with tape and wrapping paper while everyone else sleeps!**

Years ago, I read about the "snowman box" tradition for gift giving. Each child receives four boxes filled with:

- **Something they want**
- **Something they need**
- **Something to wear**
- **Something to read**

The boxes are stacked and decorated like a snowman, complete with a hat, scarf, and carrot-like nose. Every Christmas, I intend to use this idea to keep gift giving thoughtful and manageable. Then, before I know it, our home is flooded with abundance!

November invites us to pause in gratitude for all we already have. Then December advertising arrives to assure us that we still need more stuff!

I am grateful that so many people love our family. Still, I want my children to understand that joy does not depend on having "all the things." I want them to value experiences, creativity, generosity, time together, and the gifts God has placed within them.

Possessions require our time and attention. If we are not careful, what we own can begin to own us. Living with less is a constant battle for me, but it is okay to release what no longer serves the next season. It is okay to make room.

As Advent approaches, I want to make room to hear God, enjoy my family, serve others, and use the gifts I have stored away too long. Perhaps preparing for Christmas means loosening our grip on temporary treasures so our hands and hearts are free to receive the gift that truly lasts: Jesus Christ.

Maybe this year, my boys will wake up on Christmas morning to gift-wrapped snowmen "rocking" around the Christmas tree and a well-rested mother!

Clarissa Spiller Ivan
Church Secretary

THE ASSISTANT MODERATOR'S VIEW



The Greatest Gift

As I'm surrounded by the splendors of a crisp, colorful autumn, the deadline for the November *At First Baptist* reminds me how quickly we will be into another Advent season.

All is well with the in-house production of the *2026 Advent Testimonies* publication. The covers are printed. Copying continues on the internal pages. Soon, assembly will take place with readiness for distribution right around Thanksgiving.

I think you will enjoy the stories and witness of God's love and action in the lives of people you know. The Board of Christian Education members also chose a few testimonies from past editions as well. It was a joy to edit the devotional. Thank you everyone who contributed.

Having read these submissions in advance several times with the preparation and proofreading, I'll still take time each day as Advent unfolds to read and enjoy them again. The booklets will be in a little different format than we're used to. The devotional is a full-page size and I'll share why we went that direction.

For one thing, many within our congregation are older and welcome printed material that is of a size and format they can more easily read, which would not have been as easy for them if scrunched into a small booklet. (We're even finding in our senior Builder's class that since Lifeway publishes a large print version, we will be ordering those in the future to benefit all of us.)

Another reason is that several of the devotion writers tend to write in longer form, myself among them. With my newspaper work, I've learned some good editing skills I often apply to my own work. At newspapers if you write long, it gets chopped off in the middle if there isn't enough space. This taught me to write tighter in general, but sometimes my thoughts still go on a bit, as did those of some of the other writers.

Therefore, a small booklet would have meant some devotions would have to spread over multiple pages. We could have used a little tiny font, but again, some still would have spilled over to other pages and have been difficult for some to read. With the larger format, we were able to tuck in a few graphic elements as well, so hopefully you'll soon be enjoying this special project!

On another note, I was fortunate this year to have had a submission selected for a book by Grace Publishing called, *The Greatest Gift*. It is an anthology similar to a devotional, full of Christmas-themed stories by multiple writers and the publisher gives every cent of the proceeds to Samaritan's Purse. My story is one FBC regulars have seen a version of in earlier newsletters. It is called "Night of Miracles" about a visit here on Christmas Eve with our daughter when she was around six or seven. So, First Baptist made the book as well! It is available on the Grace Publishing website. If there's space with this column, we'll print what the cover looks like as other books also have this title.



Through it all, as this special season comes upon us, remember the true greatest gift is Jesus Christ and his Amazing Grace!

Deb Wuethrich
Assistant Moderator

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2026



This year's Advent devotional booklets will be placed in church mailboxes on Sunday, November 22. Children's Advent calendars will be distributed on Sunday, November 29, with one calendar available for each family. We hope these resources will help our church family prepare our hearts and homes for the celebration of Christ's birth.

BICENTENNIAL PLANNING



OFBC will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2030. No one has signed up for the planning committee yet. If you enjoy history, storytelling, hospitality, worship, community outreach, or event planning, please consider helping. A sign-up sheet is posted at the office window.

MISSION NEWS

Updates from Literacy of Love – October 2026

Thank you for your continued prayers, care and support of Literacy of Love. We are so grateful for everyone who continues to walk this journey with us.

I was in Uganda for July and August, and I had a lovely visit with our children and their families.

During my time there, we hosted two mission teams who spent meaningful time with our children. They taught lessons, played games, shared their faith, and simply enjoyed being together. The children received new clothes and had special time at The Heart home enjoying good food and time together.

I had the privilege of counseling the children, teaching lessons about faith and virtues, and sharing life with them. These simple moments—talking, laughing, learning, praying, and being together—are the most valuable time of all.

We have also introduced an exciting new role at our home – a social worker. He will serve as a liaison between the children, their families, schools, the government, and LoL. We are very excited about the care and consistency he will bring to our program.

We also made home visits to every family, traveling deep into the villages to check on the guardians and better understand their current situations. Because the areas they live vary widely across Uganda, it took us half a week to visit them all. These visits are important because they allow us to see firsthand how families are doing and build relationships with them.

Uganda has been experiencing a very challenging drought. Basically, missing a rainy season, it is now just starting to rain in some places around Uganda. They are praying for more substantial water so their crops will grow. Many of our families are peasant farmers, and they depend on what they grow to eat. Additionally, Ugandans depend on village farmers for their food supply.

Just like we are seeing, food prices have gone up, and gas is even more costly there than here. Inflation of the shilling is substantial. It's a difficult time for families.

We continue to pray, seek the Lord's wisdom, and work diligently to raise up Godly children and honorable stewards of what we've been entrusted with. We are planning both the long-term and short-term future, and we in the works of developing our "Legacy Plan."

Aside from sponsoring children to secure stable education, we are working hard to build sustainability through projects that will both reach the wider community to help vulnerable Ugandans in addition to developing a strong foundation for income earning employment and small businesses.

If you are interested in joining us on a mission trip, please reach out for information about the July 2027 Mission trip.

If it's on your heart to contribute to LoL, please consider lending a hand with a few exciting opportunities. Next on the docket, we plan on updating and remediating the littles' and boys' dorm rooms. Then, we'll enhance our structure to make a community center where we'll offer free learning programs for vulnerable young adults in our community – many skills and classes taught by our own graduates. We're thrilled about this next project and have big hopes in reaching a wider community.

Lastly, if I am capable, I will travel to Uganda for the one week I have off during Christmas. Clearly, transporting our members from the expansive villages, providing food, and increased expenses is a challenge. If you feel compelled to give, we appreciate any contribution.

Literacy of Love has overcome many challenges, and far beyond that, we have witnessed and received more miracles than we can count. Our praise and thanks go to the Lord.

Cari Matejka & the Literacy of Love Family of the Heart

Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. -1 John 3:18

MISSIONARY UPDATE

Missionary Roscoe Snell asks for continued prayer for his ministry in Southeast Asia. Please pray for his Bible studies, discipleship work, relationships with Thai, Chinese, and Burmese friends, and preparation of a Christmas message.

OFBC also supports Gary and Valerie Maloney, David and Joyce Reed, and Joan Schmitz. Pastor Jim and David Torrey attended the ABCNYS Biennial, October 9-10 at Kenmore Baptist Church.

WORLD MISSION OFFERING EXTENDS

The World Mission Offering has been extended through November 30. Offering envelopes are available in the lobby mailboxes and pews. Gifts support International Ministries' work in global health, freedom from slavery, community development, and Christian ministry around the world.

THOSE LITTLE PINK ENVELOPES



Donations made through the pink pew envelopes help church members facing urgent needs, such as groceries, utilities, or medical costs.

WE ARE HIS HANDS



We Are His Hands prepared hygiene bags: eight for men, eight for women, and three for families. The report listed $267.93 in purchases, plus many donated supplies. These bags offer practical care to neighbors who come to the church for help.

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The Board of Christian Missions reported that **38 hygiene bags were distributed during September.**

Local Help During Cold Weather

The HOPE Center, located at 315 W. State Street, provides daytime support, emergency supplies, case management, and winter weekend warming services. Genesis House operates the local Code Blue shelter at 107 S. Barry Street when qualifying cold-weather conditions are declared.

COMMUNITY HELP GUIDE UPDATED

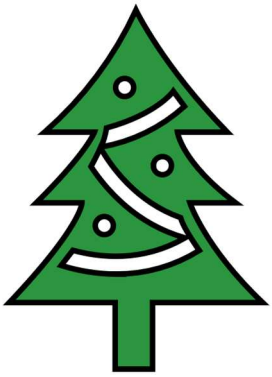
OFBC has updated its Community Help Guide with information on food, meals, shelter, transportation, health and recovery services, clothing, jobs, senior services, and other basic needs. Copies are available through the church. Need another resource? Dial 211.



We Are His Hands offers limited food and hygiene help Thursdays from 9:30-11:45 AM.
Photo identification is required.



INTERFAITH CAREGIVERS GIFT TREE PROGRAM



Interfaith Caregivers' Gift Tree Program is now open. The program connects generous community members with local seniors, veterans, and adults with disabilities who could use extra care during the holiday season. To adopt a participant and provide holiday gifts, please contact Interfaith Caregivers.

NEWS FROM THE DIACONATE

Veterans Day Recognition

Olean First Baptist Church will recognize and thank our veterans during worship on Sunday, **November 8.** We are grateful for all who have served our country and for the sacrifices made by them and their families.

Guest Speaker November 15

Laurie MacNeill will bring the morning message on Sunday, **November 15**, while Pastor Jim is away. Her message will focus on the "thanks" in Thanksgiving.

Hanging of the Greens

The Hanging of the Greens will take place on Sunday, **November 22.** The Diaconate will decorate the lobby, and other boards will decorate their assigned areas as we prepare the church for Advent and Christmas.



Holiday Care

The Diaconate will prepare holiday cards and gifts for our shut-ins. If you know someone in the congregation who may need additional care or assistance during the holidays, please speak with a deacon.

Scripture Readers Needed

Pastor Jim welcomes adults and children who would be willing to read Scripture during Sunday worship. Please speak with Pastor Jim if you would like to participate.

Santa Claus Lane Parade Outreach



OFBC plans to offer free hot chocolate following the Santa Claus Lane Parade on Friday, **November 27.** Volunteers are needed to donate supplies, prepare the cocoa, and help serve after the parade. Watch the bulletin for volunteer times and specific donation needs.

Ladies Christmas Lunch

The Ladies Christmas Lunch will be held at noon on Saturday, December 5, at the Bistro. Those who wish to participate in the gift exchange may bring a wrapped gift valued at $10 or less.

Christmas Cookies for Community Helpers

Women of the church are invited to help prepare cookie trays for local emergency-services personnel on Saturday, December 12. Homemade cookies may be brought to the church Friday afternoon, December 11, or Saturday morning. A light lunch will be shared while the trays are assembled.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NEWS

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Our children will shop for Operation Christmas Child supplies at Dollar Tree on Saturday, November 14. Each child will receive $20 from the Youth Fund to help select items for the shoeboxes.

The children will pack the shoeboxes during the church hour on Sunday, November 15. Please continue to pray for the children who will receive these gifts and hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Donation barrels will continue to remain in the lobby. The cost is $10 per shoebox. Fall sales are a good time to purchase useful items. **This year's OCC 2026 collection week dates are November 16-23, 2026.**



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Our children will present "Christmas Tech Support: Trouble with the Star" on **Sunday, December 13**. Watch the bulletin for the program time, rehearsal information, and other details.

A Birthday Party for Jesus

The Birthday Party for Jesus will be held Sunday, **December 20.** This year's gifts will benefit Genesis House. See the Genesis House Wish List in this newsletter for suggested donations.

Fellowship Luncheons

Christian Education welcomes help from other church boards and groups with upcoming fellowship luncheons. Sharing the planning and preparation will help this ministry continue throughout the year.

Christian Education Needs You



The Board of Christian Education needs at least two additional members for 2027. Board members help plan Sunday and seasonal celebrations.

Please speak with a Christian Education member if you would like to learn more. Many hands make lighter work and stronger ministry.

News from the Trustees

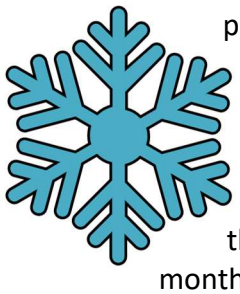
Stewardship Commitment Sunday

"But seek first the kingdom of God…"- Matthew 6:33

Our 2026 Stewardship Campaign concluded on Sunday, November 1. Commitment cards help the Trustees prepare the church's operating budget for 2027. If you have not yet returned your card, you may place it in the offering plate or send it to the church office. Thank you for prayerfully supporting the worship, mission, care, and ministry of Olean First Baptist Church.

Thank You, Fall Workday Volunteers!

Thank you to everyone who helped care for the church property during the fall workday. Special thanks go to **Dale Anderson and Dave Torrey** for trimming the bushes. Your time and effort helped prepare our church grounds for winter.



Preparing the Church for Winter

The Trustees continue to prepare the church property for the colder months. Current work includes planning for window replacement, winterizing ceiling vents, installing sidewalk lights, arranging snowplowing, and addressing needed roof work.



November Anniversaries!

9th Dave & Linda Anderson
15th Matt & Jeanette Butler
25th Harley & Donna DeLong

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

4 Marilyn Piepho
6 Eden Butler
9 Jeff Nutt
Dan Sorokes
11 Julie Barnes
Mark Taylor
12 Josh Keim
15 Michele Cone
16 Carol Walker
17 Travis Buckley
20 Bob Ketchner II
21 Chris Rosel
23 Carol Mahoney
24 Ashley Sage
26 Josh Anderson
27 Lori Funden
Eli Rust
30 Linda Anderson
Stephanie Keim
Cheyenne Rust



GENESIS HOUSE: WISH LIST

Volunteers!
Gently Used Towels
Adult Sweatshirts
Adult Sweatpants
Winter Jackets & Parkas
New Sport Bras
Women's & Men's Underwear
Women's & Men's Socks
Lunchmeat
Milk
Store-Bought Eggs
Fresh Fruit
Condiments
Mayonnaise
Ketchup
Salt & Pepper
Onion Powder
Garlic Powder
Taco Seasoning
Cheese
Butter
Taco Shells
Taco Sauce
Ground Beef
Bacon

SNOWBIRDS



Newsletters are emailed to reduce costs, placed in lobby mailboxes for those without email, and mailed to shut-ins and long-distance members. Guest copies are on the entry table.

HELP KEEP THE PRAYER LIST CURRENT



If a prayer need you submitted has been resolved, mark the name and return your copy in the Secretary's mailbox or Sunday collection plate.

SANCTUARY FLOWERS SERVICE DEDICATIONS



Flower arrangements & service dedications may be provided for worship. Notify the office by Tuesday so the dedication can be included in the bulletin.

STAY CONNECTED AT OFBC

Check your Church Family Mailbox outside the office for newsletters and other communications. The information tower near the office window holds board minutes, forms, applications, and church materials. Questions may be placed **in the Secretary's mailbox or email** ofbc133@gmail.com.

THE FAMILY OF GOD

DIRECTORY UPDATES

The non-photo church directory has been updated as of October 2026.

The church office will continue updating the master directory as changes are received. Please make these changes in your own copy.





WORSHIP & STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

SUNDAYS

Worship - 9:30 AM

Faith & Fellowship for All Ages - 11:00 AM

Worship at The Pines - November 29 at 2:00 PM

MONDAYS

Morning Bible Study - 9:30 AM

TUESDAYS

Ladies' Breakfast at Perkins – 1st Tuesday at 9:30 AM

Ladies' Breakfast at Friendly's - 3rd Tuesday at 9:30 AM

Prayer with the Pastor - 11:00 AM

Men's Lunch at Perkins - 11:30 AM

WEDNESDAYS

Bible Study - 9:30 AM

Pause for Power - 5:30 PM

In One A-Chord Handbell Choir - 7:00 PM

THURSDAYS

Senior Choir - 6:30 PM

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19