

FIRST *words*

TO REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST & TOGETHER BECOME MORE LIKE HIM

Flowering OF THE CROSS

For many years, we have had a tradition on Easter morning of the children coming forward and Flowering the Cross during the morning service. We had to take a break last year, but we are excited we will be able to bring this wonderful tradition back even if it looks a little different.

This year, we will be asking the children, along with their families, to come and put flowers on the cross. We will be asking for families to take turns with only one family on the platform at a time to allow for social distancing. We will provide more instruction about this during the “Children’s Time” early in the service. Our preschoolers will also be able to participate as we will have a smaller cross in the Welcome Center for them to flower.

We will also have the cross outside on the front porch of the sanctuary to allow people to bring their own flowers to decorate. We ask that you bring flowers, bought or from your own garden, to help depict the beauty of Easter in the transforming of the cross. We do recommend the stems be cut 4” – 6” prior to bringing them.

The Flowering of the Cross is such a beautiful depiction of the resurrection and the beauty it brings to our lives and we hope this is a blessing to each of you.



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

What Got Released on Easter...Hope

Before we get to Easter, here is a report on Palm Sunday. We had in-person Sunday school. Some classes offered a creative hybrid option of in-person and by Zoom. Some are still just “Zooming” and grateful for that continued connection. The encouraging thing was to greet people we had not seen in a long time. We saw such a hunger to be together as the church.

Worship in the sanctuary was amazing. The Spirit was present. The empty sanctuary we have endured over this past year was alive. The Palm Sunday Processional of children and families was thrilling. As I stood in the pulpit, I was moved to tears as I looked out over the congregation and saw the church gathered. It looked normal with pews filled and a large number of visitors who had been watching us on-line and TV over these months. One person texted me: “God is working.”

Before we get to Easter, let me share how we got to here. The gut-wrenching decision of suspending in-person worship last March, discovering creative ways to communicate, working to stay in contact with people, budget issues, the missional needs during COVID-19 in our community, and the suspension of in-person worship once again during Thanksgiving into the New Year were demanding. The difficult decision to not have our traditional Christmas Eve services prompted us to search for an alternative. Our revised Christmas Eve service in the south parking lot with car lights flashing and horns honking turned out better than we could have imagined.

Then the damage from the winter storm affected our church and entire community. I am grateful for the ways our church reached out providing a warming center,

meals, grocery cards, and funds for utility bills when the community turned to FBC. The United Way of Abilene gave \$30,000 in grants to our church to assist in meeting the needs of our neighbors in need. Our missional purpose has never been stronger, both locally and globally.



*Could it be we
find ourselves
hungrier this year
for Easter hope,
even like those
first disciples?*

I am extremely proud of our staff in the ways they have met the enormous challenges and I hope you are. The staff has worked overtime in adapting their ministries. One example was on-line Vacation Bible School last summer that reached over 2,500 families.

We have “survived.” Now is the time to “thrive” like never before. What provided the power and promise during this last year...to keep on keeping on? We find hope knowing “*Sunday is Coming....*” Last year on Easter, the sanctuary was empty - never could have imagined. This year, we will be back together. Could it be we find ourselves hungrier this year for Easter hope, even like those first disciples?

On Easter, hope got released into the world and nothing can defeat it. Those frightened disciples encountered that hope. Jesus says to His followers, “*The cross does not stick*” or could we add, a pandemic or any problem? Nothing can stop the movement of Jesus. Jesus gives them, and us, a future when He says on Easter, “*Meet me in Galilee....*” There is work to do. Hope to bring. Grudges, selfishness, and fear to die so something greater might be born.

William Willimon served as the Methodist Bishop overseeing churches and working with pastors in Alabama. The teenage son of one of his pastors took his life just before Holy Week. Trying to offer comfort to the

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pastor and his family, Willimon asked, *"Is there anything I can do for you?"* The pastor replied, *"Would you come to my church and preach the Easter sermon? I'll be in no condition to preach it myself."*

Willimon says, *"My first reaction to his request was a huge sense of inadequacy - is it possible to speak a good word in the face of such horror and grief?"* He wondered if any preacher is in a condition to preach it by himself or herself. Willimon says, *"As I thought about it, I realized Easter is always preaching to a hurting congregation who think death and pain have the last word."* So, on that Easter Sunday he told the story. He preached defiantly against defeat, the devil, disbelief, and declaring in the tragedies of life, **"Christ is risen."**

I pray on Sunday you will come to be with the community of the church to hear that message of hope which got released on Easter.

Never give up hope,

Phil

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS

Hello everyone! Here are some upcoming important dates for our youth ministry:

- **Disciple Now 2021 "Lead with Love"** - April 23-24 - Open to Middle and High School students!
- **Middle School "Horizon" Youth Camp**
Heart of Texas Baptist Encampment - Brownwood, TX - June 16-20
- **High School Youth Camp** - YMCA of the Rockies - Estes Park, CO
Leaving late June 27-July 2



LINK FOR GOOGLE FORM
DNOW SIGN-UP BELOW:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScycEl5HKHutSgS6w6RmP7CX0nYhUGdBVyCzBu9SZbplin-uQ/viewform?usp=pp_url

This year's DNOW is modified for COVID-19, so no sleep-over at host homes this year.
Cost is \$40 + (bring some canned goods for City Light) per student.
If you have questions about any of these events, please let Austen know!

POST WINTER STORM UPDATE

Spring is here and we are completely thawed out, (ok, not like in Alaska where they cannot dig in the ground because it is frozen and then finally thaws!). But we have seen some of the results of the freeze and then the thaw. The Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment building received the worst of the storm, but progress is being made on the repairs and hopefully they will be back in by the end of April. The Hope Center did receive more damage than we initially thought, but the areas which were affected were scheduled to be remodeled already, so this just started that process a little bit earlier.

Speaking of the Hope Center, progress continues to be made on the drawings for City Light and GLO. Much of the work right now is in the hands of the architects and it is a hurry up and wait process. Of course, the storm slowed down everything and so some of the project is in catch up mode.

The second and third floors of the Perry Center (BOBS Building) (or whatever name we can come up with to describe this building) is almost ready for the Ministry of Counseling to move some of their counselors into that space and they are already hosting the BIPP Group Meetings there.



Encourager
Church

Did you know that First Baptist Church, Abilene is an Encourager Church through Cooperative Baptist Fellowship?

Encourager Churches come alongside field personnel in partnership in order to build bridges in mission engagement. In a hyper-connected and socially networked world, close partnerships with specific field personnel unleash the power of personal relationships to transform lives. The Spirit works in and among our relationships for the mutual transformation of our congregations, field personnel, and those whom we seek to serve. CBF Encourager Churches are an important component to the work of CBF field personnel around the world. Such relationships invite the church into a unique and intimate role in missions. FBC has a covenant with field personnel for mutual support in areas such as prayer, programming, short-term engagement, and financial support. Each area unites this church with the ongoing mission work of field personnel around the world.

First Baptist partners as an Encourager Church for these missionaries/field personnel below. Please feel free to ask for additional information on these missionaries and being an Encourager Church through CBF by calling the Missions' office (325-675-8112).

Leslie-Ann Hix Tommey, New York City...serving with RMM (Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries) in Hell's Kitchen. Part of her story is in this month's First Words.

Jeff and Alicia Lee, Macedonia...Most of you may know the Lee family. Ethan is their son. You can find great updates with Jeff on Facebook. We have participated in the "cow" program, which is growing and they are now in the process of building greenhouses and there are great updates to watch on Facebook.

Hunter and Mary, Thailand...Hunter and Mary are currently in Abilene with some health issues and we are honored to be able to give back and help them through this time in their journey. They have been faithful servants in Thailand for many years.

David and Lauren Bass, Cambodia...This young couple has a one-year-old daughter and have been in Cambodia since 2015 and work with the Cambodia Baptist Union. They help the Cambodian pastors engage in their communities.

To read more about other CBF field personnel, visit:
<http://www.cbfevents.org/field-personnel-list>

GIVING OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

In the fast paced, highly technological world we live in, writing a check and putting it in an envelope seems totally foreign to many of us now. But here at the church, we have used the same tried and true system of offering envelopes for folks to have an easy way to give their tithes and offerings for the support of the ministry budget. So as technology changes, so should the church change to keep up with what folks are doing in other areas of their lives.

Online giving has grown as the preferred way many of our folks now give. On the church website, www.fbcabilene.org, there is a link on the top row of options that takes you to the giving page for the church. The link is in a green box and says "Give". Simply click on this link and it will walk you through the process. There are now in the pew racks in the sanctuary information cards with a QR code which will take you straight to the giving platform. Of course, by using this method it requires a credit or debit card, both of which have a 2.2% fee associated with it and are hoping that folks will include that in their thinking as they use this method.

Another option is to set up a bank draft that would take a set amount out of your account and put in the church account on a set time frame. This option does not have any associated fees with it and also takes out the "remember to do it" factor. Jeannie Jowers in the finance office can help you set this up or answer questions you might have. This is really convenient when you are travelling or want to simplify your life.

GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

Regular gifts of tithes and offerings to the church are the most important forms of giving. These gifts make it possible for the church to continue to carry out the ministries of Jesus Christ at home and around the world.

However, you may have a desire to do something special and make a gift which bears fruit year after year. If so, the First Baptist Church Foundation can help you accomplish that desire. As a result of the interest expressed by some church members for a means to make possible long-term, deferred, or special gifts for the future ministries of the church, the Foundation was established by the church in 1993.

The Foundation is an entity through which you may make a special or deferred gift for the church or specific ministries of the church. The Foundation is administered by an eleven member board comprised of the five church trustees and six lay members nominated by the Committee on Committees and elected by the church on a three-year rotating basis. The investment and management of the funds of the Foundation is performed by HighGround Advisors (formally the Baptist Foundation of Texas). The corpus or principal of any gift is used for whatever purpose the donor designates. The interest earned by the total amount in the Foundation can be used for various church ministries as agreed upon by the Foundation Board and the Finance Committee, or it can be rolled back into the total assets.

LIFE-LONG STEWARDSHIP

Just as we are to be good stewards of what God has entrusted us with while we are alive, we should also be just as involved in being a good steward of our estate as well. If each of us were to tithe of our estate as we have tithed of our weekly income, the foundation would be able to support many new and exciting missional opportunities and ministries for decades to come.

However, statistics show that 70% of us will die without a well-designed Will or Trust. Inadequately designed estate plans leaves the state in charge of the distribution of your assets and will diminish the effect of your stewardship and limit the eternal impact you could have.

For more information about the FBC Foundation, please contact Mike Greenfield in the church offices.

FBC MISSIONS: **ACTING IN** *love*



An Urban Immersion group gets an in-person tour of the rooftop farm of Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries before the pandemic made it necessary to move these experiences to a virtual format.



Farmer Kay gives a virtual video tour of the rooftop farm at Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries in New York City.

Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey is one of our newest missionaries in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan, New York

In the midst of the global pandemic, many things were pushed aside to make room for other priorities. Lesley-Ann and her team had to get creative to continue the ministry in Hell's Kitchen.

When the world went digital in March of 2020, CBF field personnel **Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey**, serving with Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries (RMM) in NYC, had to get creative in the ways they serve local survivors of domestic violence, food insecurity, and homelessness. This was also true of connecting with youth and college groups who visit the city through the RMM Urban Immersion program, which is designed to provide a holistic experience of missions for visiting groups through a combination of work, prayer, and play in the city.

CLUE Camp, RMM's summer camp that utilizes CBF's Student.Go internship program to run the camp, wasn't operating either. And there were no groups meeting at the church, since not much of anything was happening face-to-face. Without any of that, would they even need a student this year?

Dual-degree graduate student Kathleen Post was asking similar questions from the other side of the fence. Post, who is studying at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary and the Diana Garland School of Social Work, wondered what she would do during the summer too.

"Working with Lesley-Ann was already at the top of my list," said Post, a former high school theater teacher. "It would be a perfect pairing of what I want to do, blending the church and social work. Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries does a really beautiful job of serving people where they are. I was excited about the prospect of joining them."

In a normal year, the program provides deep learning experiences through immersion into the work at RMM (serving in the food pantry, clothes closet, after-school program, etc.) as well as working with other service providers around the city for volunteer experiences.

"We realized that the best use of Kay's skills would be to create something which would provide those groups with a connection to NYC at a time when they can't come visit us, but could still have the same kind of learning experience," said Hix Tommey. "She wrote a virtual version of the program they could do on their own, in their hometowns."

The result was incredibly creative content like videos spotlighting Kay, one of their lead farmers, giving a tour of the rooftop garden, or performers of all experience levels from RMM congregation adding to the learning.

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"We were hoping this curriculum would help people see that this work can be done right where they are, from their pew, from the corner of their house. It doesn't have to be done in a big city, far away. That was really special to discover and share."

Post stated, "Lesley-Ann really helped me put a boogie in my step—that's the best way I can describe it. She reminded me that my skills are still really useful right now, even if I am sad. There is still much work to be done and it's possible to get it done. There's something special about being connected with people from different places who are all seeking the same things. I definitely think it prepared me to go back into another semester of grad school in a way that I am not sure would have been possible otherwise."

It has prepared Hix Tommey and her team at RMM for a brighter future, too.

"There have been so many things we started doing because we were suddenly only able to do certain things," Leslie-Ann said. "Having to muster creativity and reach out in new ways, noticing how important community is and that it is more than just an in-person group—that's what we've learned. I keep catching myself when I say I'm ready to return to normal. Certainly, I want to hug my people and visit my family; but I don't want to go back to our cultures being so independent. We need to carry on while clinging to each other. Our salvation and healing, our hope, peace, and joy are bound up in each other. We need each other. That's what we have to have to participate in creating the world again."



Thank
YOU!

Thank You
UNITED WAY!

United Way of Abilene has awarded
City Light Community Ministries a grant for

\$30,000

to assist our community with higher utility
bills due to the winter storm in February.
What a blessing this has been to so many in
our area!

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

April 1, 25 years
Mike Greenfield
Pastor for Administration
& Spiritual Development

April 5, 15 years
Jeannie Wesley
Ministry Assistant to the Pastor for
Adults & Director of Pastoral Care

April 9, 14 years
Paul Irby
Counselor

April 17, 4 years
Mike Brady
Director of FLC

April 22, 11 years
Candy Rains
Pastor for Preschool



Thank you!

We would like to thank all those who helped
with City Light during the winter storm!
We could not have done it without you!!

Charles "Jersey" Diramondi

Lynn Martin

Maura dela Cruz

Mike and Vicki Brady

Becky Tucker

Rob Fink

Holly and Austen Winfrey

Britney Tucker

Kayleen Mills

Caitlin Wallace

Multiple deacons and church members
who supplied drinking water.



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ABILENE, TX**

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STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

March 2021

Budget	March	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 263,000	\$ 823,680
Given	\$ 276,273	\$ 781,292

*God continues to bless our faithfulness through
the tithes and offerings given to His Kingdom work.*



FIRST BAPTIST
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