



# FIRSTWORDS

## DECEMBER AT FIRST

Traditionally, December has been a busy month here at First Baptist Church, and this year is no exception! Between the regular schedule of events and all the additional Christmas events, the calendar is full! To highlight a few of the events, we must start with Advent and the wonderful worship services, each planned to help prepare us for the celebration of the Coming of the Christ Child! Advent began on November 30 this year, so we have already decorated the Sanctuary and the church has all the Christmas Lights shining brightly. On Sunday December 7, our Sanctuary Choir and Celebration Orchestra will present a service of Christmas music entitled, One Day. This Cinematic Musical Experience will feature the choir, soloists, and narration all focused on telling the Christmas story. On December 14, we have a service which has become a favorite for many as the parade of flags enter the sanctuary and we sing Carry the Light. We will continue our journey to Bethlehem during the morning service on December 21 as we will hear an update from Jana Lee, one of the missionaries we support, as she serves in Cyprus. Then on Christmas Eve, December 24, we will have the 6:00 p.m. service, which is designed to be more family friendly, while the 11:00 p.m. service will mark the 57th year we have worshipped together and shared in the Lord's Supper as a part of the service.

Musically, FBC is the place to be as we will host: Craig Choir, Abilene Christian High School Choir, ACU Vespers, Abilene Christian Elementary Choir, Abilene High School Choir, and Clack Orchestra.

*(Continued from Cover)*

On December 21, we will have a Grief and Hope Service in the chapel. This service is designed to help those who have experienced the grief and pain associated with the death of a loved one in light of the holiday season. It will be a time of reflection and will end focusing on the hope we have because of the coming of the Christ Child.

December also is a very important month financially for the church. We traditionally have counted on end-of-year gifts to offset the budget deficit and this year is no different. We are currently on track to meet our anticipated budget receipts, but can only do so by finishing strong at the end of the year. The finance committee has done a great job in keeping expenses down, but the needs are great and the financial resources needed to allow all of the ministries to function as they planned requires the budget to be met. So, let's finish strong and head into 2026 on a solid financial base.

# one day

GOD'S GREAT STORY OF REDEMPTION

**A Cinematic Musical Experience  
presented by Sanctuary Choir, Soloists, and Narrator**

**Sunday morning, December 7, 10:30 am**

COMPOSED & ARRANGED BY

**JOHN BOLIN**



# The Sisters' Table

## November Gathering

Our November Sister's Table was filled with encouragement, gratitude, and a whole lot of joy. We began our time together with the beautiful story of an acorn—reminding us that even the smallest seed must pass through dark, hidden seasons before it can break through the soil and grow into a mighty oak. Just like that little acorn, we are reminded that God uses every stage of our lives, even the difficult ones, to help us grow strong and steady in Him.

After our devotion, the ladies created Thanksgiving bracelets. With each bead we added, we paused to name something we were thankful for. It was a simple, but powerful, way to reflect on God's blessings and the many ways He is at work in our lives.

We wrapped up our gathering with a lively game of bingo—made even more fun by the wonderful John Moore, who graciously served as our caller for the afternoon.

It was a sweet day of fellowship, laughter, gratitude, and the gentle reminder that we are all growing toward something beautiful. We are so thankful for each woman who joins us at the Sister's Table.



## CHRISTMAS EVE GOOD CHEER OFFERING

The Good Cheer Fund of First Baptist Church, Abilene is used by City Light Community Ministries and our pastoral staff to meet special needs (often in crisis situations) of our church and community.

Lights stay on in homes, water is not cut off, heat stays on, and senior adults will be able to make that important doctor's appointment because of the gas voucher they received through this Good Cheer ministry of FBC. In addition, rent assistance, utility bill assistance, bus passes, identification cards, birth certificates, and a night or two in a motel on a very cold night and you can see why this is a very important ministry. All this is made possible through the generosity of our church members who contribute to the Good Cheer Fund on a regular basis, but especially during the Christmas Eve services. Abilene is a better place to live because of this offering and how FBC Abilene uses these funds. Please pray about how you can give to this important offering at our Christmas Eve Services. Thank you for being a church who loves our city and is willing to help people, even if they never join our church.

# CITY LIGHT THANKSGIVING BREAKFAST: A MORNING OF GRATITUDE AND GRACE

This year's City Light Thanksgiving Breakfast was a beautiful reminder of what can happen when a community comes together with open hands and open hearts. From the first cup of coffee poured to the last table wiped down, the spirit of generosity filled every corner of the building.

We are deeply grateful for the many volunteers who showed up ready to cook, serve, bus tables, refill drinks, and most importantly, visit with our neighbors. Your smiles, kindness, and willingness to listen made every guest feel seen and valued.

A special thank-you goes to those who arrived early to help prepare the meal. Your behind-the-scenes work set the tone for a warm and welcoming morning. We are also incredibly thankful for our church members who supplied dozens of breakfast casseroles—each one made with love and shared with joy.

In moments like these, we are reminded of the sacred calling to walk alongside our neighbors, whether they are celebrating, struggling, or even facing the final chapters of life. Helping our neighbors dine with dignity is one of the greatest gifts we can offer, and your presence made that possible.



None of this could have happened without the faithful dedication of our amazing City Light staff. Their leadership, compassion, and steady hands ensured that every detail was cared for and every neighbor welcomed.

Thank you to everyone who played a part. Together, we made Thanksgiving breakfast a little brighter for those who needed it most.

**BETH YOUNG**







# **BACKGROUND ON “JESUS LOVES THE LITTLE CHILDREN”**

Pastor, gospel songwriter, and sleight-of-hand magician Clarence Woolston composed the hymn “Jesus Loves the Little Children” in 1881—the same year First Baptist Church, Abilene began its ministry. Over his lifetime, Rev. Woolston’s passion for children led him to speak to more than one million young people. He served as pastor of East Baptist Church in Philadelphia, PA, and was known for using sleight-of-hand tricks to illustrate sermon points for children.

The hymn was originally written with three stanzas and a refrain, and the refrain was published in 1913. While the original verses have faded from use, the refrain remains widely sung in churches today. Hymnologist Michael Hawn notes that this refrain likely ranks second in popularity in the United States, just behind “Jesus Loves Me.” The phrase “all the children of the world” reflected the fervor of the foreign missions movement and expressed the author’s desire for inclusivity at a time when children of diverse racial backgrounds were often excluded from evangelical circles.

However, as the hymn gained popularity, racial and ethnic barriers persisted in American society. Black children in the Jim Crow South faced poverty and discrimination. “Red” Native American children were removed from their families and placed in boarding schools. “Yellow” Asian American children and their families endured prejudice and, later, internment during World War II. The hymn’s references to skin color were intended to help excluded children feel included in the Gospel message. Yet, language which once signaled Gospel inclusion can, in today’s culture, be perceived as divisive.

As people of God who carry the Gospel, we sing these words in a world that continues to wrestle with issues of race and inclusion. This calls us to reflect carefully on how we use this hymn today. We wish to honor its original intent while embracing language which communicates God’s love for all people in ways that unite rather than divide.

Over the past few weeks, our staff has wrestled with that very reflection. A couple years ago, under previous pastoral leadership, the words were changed at the last minute before the service when we sang Carry the Light. Rather than reflection, the words were just changed without context. Last year, we went back to the original words of the refrain.

However, a few of our families came to staff to ask us to consider further reflection upon the lyrics as they were worried about prolonging racial stereotypes in an increasingly diverse world (and church).

So together our staff, through wrestling in prayer and over a series of three conversations during staff meeting, reflected not only the song's history, but the history of Jesus Loves the Little Children as used in our church's context. We went through our own emotional attachments and fears. We used our five staff values to see the song and our usage through the lens of those values. We asked, "what would love require of us?" A couple on staff reached out to people of different races to ask about their experience.

Then, together, we decided to make the decision to change five words in the song. Instead of singing, "red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight" we are singing "every day and every night they are precious in his sight." Our youth minister Hunter Brown suggested those lyrics (and there are many revisions of the lyrics through a simple google search) as he reads those to his son in a book they have each day.

This decision was not taken lightly, but rather reflectively and prayerfully. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Pastor Ray or Pastor Todd.

Grace and Peace,

**RAY AND TODD**





## HENDRICK HEALTH FLU SHOT CLINIC AT CITY LIGHT

On October 24, I had the privilege of joining my colleagues from Hendrick Health at City Light Community Ministries for a free flu shot clinic. Together we provided flu vaccinations to 37 neighbors. Alongside the clinic, our chaplains served lunch to our neighbors, offering not only nourishment but kindness and conversation to everyone who came through the doors.



As we served together, I couldn't help but think about the long and meaningful relationship between Hendrick Health and First Baptist Church, Abilene. Our story is deeply intertwined. In 1924, First Baptist's pastor, Rev. Millard A. Jenkins, dreamed of opening a hospital that would extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ to all in need. Through his leadership and the faith of this congregation, that dream became reality with the founding of West Texas Baptist Sanitarium, what we now know as Hendrick Health.



Over a century later, that same spirit of service and compassion continues to connect us. I'm deeply grateful for the continued partnership between Hendrick Health and First Baptist. Together, we're not only honoring our shared history, but building on it.

With gratitude,

**DYLLON DAULTON**

Coordinator, Community Initiatives  
Hendrick Health

325-670-6401 | [ddaulton@hendrickhealth.org](mailto:ddaulton@hendrickhealth.org)



# CHRISTMAS EVE 2025

On Christmas Eve, we will have our two different services like in years past. The 6:00 p.m. service is designed to be very family friendly and includes the lighting of candles and singing Silent Night. The 11:00 p.m. service follows a much more traditional approach and includes communion as well as candles and singing Silent Night.

The biggest difference is with our TV audience. By way of reminder, due to the damage at KTXS by the storm back in May, we have not been "live" since then. We are live on the streaming service, but a week delayed on TV with a 30-min slot on KTXS and an hour on CW.

So, how will this affect Christmas Eve? Traditionally we have been "live" at 11:00 p.m. on KTXS, but since they cannot handle live events right now that is still not an option. What we are planning is to have a pre-recorded Christmas Special which will include stories about several ministry areas of the church, as well as music by our Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra and a special message by Pastor Ray.

I hope you will make plans to attend one of the two Christmas Eve services and be sure to set your recording device so you will not miss this special presentation.

## WEDNESDAY NIGHT ADULT CLASSES SPRING 2026

In January, we will add new classes to our regular schedule which includes DivorceCare, GriefShare, and Wednesday Bible Study.

### FINANCIAL PLANNING/FINANCIAL LITERACY DEVELOPING A FINANCIAL PLAN

<b>January 7</b>	Budgeting, Saving, and Tithing	Paul Schnitman
<b>January 14</b>	Dealing with Credit and Debt	Paul Schnitman
<b>January 21</b>	Long-Term Financial Planning & Goal Setting	Matt Preston
<b>January 28</b>	Estate Planning	Katie Gore
<b>February 4</b>	Life Insurance and Risk Management	Bryan Blake

There will be additional studies continuing through the spring semester designed to help us deal with life in a family.

# MINISTRY OF COUNSELING AND ENRICHMENT

December is officially upon us, and as I look back on this year, my heart is filled with deep gratitude for all the Lord has done through MOCE. I want to begin by offering a resounding thank you to the MOCE Board, whose leadership and encouragement have carried us through both mountains and valleys. Their wisdom and support have truly kept us steady. Every board member's contribution is deeply valued; especially that of our board chair, Jill Harris. I want to extend a special thank you to Jill, who has faithfully served as Board Chair for the past two years. I will always remember this season with gratitude for Jill's steadfast presence; someone who, in so many ways, held us up as we navigated the sacred work of offering therapy to a hurting world. If you have the opportunity, please thank Jill for her unwavering commitment to ensuring that MOCE remains a vital part of First Baptist's mission to provide counseling to our community.

I would also like to express sincere appreciation to the Community Foundation of Abilene. Their generous grant allowed MOCE to provide 596 counseling sessions in 2025, including 144 sessions for children and their families. Without this support, our mission to offer counseling regardless of background or ability to pay would be impossible.

Finally, I cannot fully express my gratitude to First Baptist Church. Your kindness, encouragement, faithful giving, and heart for Jesus have been transformative in my own life. I am humbled and filled with joy as I reflect on the privilege of serving alongside you in this sacred mission. I pray for many more decades of MOCE being a beacon of hope for Abilene and beyond.



Thank you again and Merry Christmas.

**ELYA WHITTEN**

Director of Ministry of  
Counseling and Enrichment



## COUNSELOR SPOTLIGHT: *Margaret Shugart*

This month, we are honored to highlight Margaret Shugart, who has faithfully served MOCE for 34 years. Margaret's path to counseling began when she moved from California to Abilene during a difficult time in her life. Encouraged by a friend, she sought counseling and soon began studies at Hardin-Simmons University, earning an undergraduate degree in criminal justice with coursework in psychology and sociology. While working as a receptionist at Pastoral Care & Counseling, Margaret realized her true purpose was to help others through therapy.

At MOCE, Margaret works primarily with individuals dealing with anxiety, depression, and grief. She loves witnessing clients begin to resolve challenges, grow in self-compassion, and extend forgiveness to themselves and others. Margaret hopes people understand that therapy is a personal journey- one that involves taking responsibility and being open to growth.

Her service at MOCE is deeply meaningful because of her faith and the opportunity to let the Lord work through her. She stays engaged in her profession by attending workshops and trainings, and she remains connected outside of counseling through her church family, Bible study group, and loved ones near and far, including her family in North Carolina. Margaret also enjoys reading, being outdoors, and planting flowers.

Her favorite message to share is simple but powerful:

**“There’s always hope.  
Don’t lose hope.  
This too shall pass.”**



# FBC UNIFIED MISSIONS OFFERING 2025

Please pray about how you can be involved in reaching our FBC Unified Missions offering goal of \$75,000. These offerings bring together four different cooperative efforts that reach around the world:

- **Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions Offering**

Supports the long-term presence of CBF field personnel serving in the United States and around the world. It helps provide for salaries, insurance, and children's education for nearly 60 field personnel serving on the mission field.

- **Texas Baptist World Hunger Offering**

The Texas Baptist Hunger Offering unites the body of Christ to end hunger and poverty and promote holistic transformation in the name of Jesus.

- **Abilene Community Transformation**

Provides resources for responding to specific ministry opportunities and needs right here in Abilene.

- **Baptist World Aid**

Since 1920, Baptist World Aid has networked Baptists around the world to alleviate poverty and hunger, respond when disasters strike, and support sustainable community development projects around the globe.

## VISIT FROM MISSIONARY JANA LEE

We are excited to share that Jana Lee, our missionary serving in Cyprus, will be visiting Abilene on December 21, 2025. This will be a wonderful opportunity to hear updates about her ministry, learn how God is working through her mission, and spend time encouraging her during her visit stateside.

As it gets closer, we will provide more details about how we can meet with Jana. Please be praying for her as she prepares to travel, and join us in welcoming her when she arrives.





# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

## KAREN DANSBY

City Light Community Ministries is grateful for the faithful service of Karen Dansby. Originally from Seminole, Texas, Karen and her husband, Dick, have lived in Abilene and been members of First Baptist Church for 44 years. They raised two sons, Jeremy and John, who also grew up at FBC.



Karen taught school before spending more than 20 years in the nonprofit world. She began volunteering at City Light in 2017. Excited to support the ministry as it prepared for expansion into the new building, she jumped in to help develop programs, and offer support and ensure the ministry was ready to serve even more neighbors in need. Every Monday, Karen faithfully interviews neighbors for rental and utility assistance and connects them with additional resources. Her favorite part of serving is listening to their stories and celebrating with them when a positive outcome is reached.

We are thankful for Karen's compassion, dedication, and the joy she brings to City Light.

# ANNOUNCING THE TRUETT SEMINARY ONLINE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM FBC LOCAL COHORT

*The Online Certificate Program (OCP) at Baylor University's Truett Seminary provides theological education to help church members and leaders grow in their Christian lives and ministries.*

Every servant leader deserves access to excellent theological education, and the Online Certificate Program offers non-credit seminary-based learning for your adult leaders and members. Through a hybrid approach, an OCP Local Church Cohort allows your church to offer in-person meetings utilizing our curriculum delivery and extensive student feedback while you concentrate on relational discipleship and conversation—combining our strengths with yours.

## CORE CURRICULUM SUMMARY:

### **COURSE 1**

#### **Orientation and Formation Required first course—only 8 weeks**

Spiritual practices and content to ground students in God's love and Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God.

### **COURSE 2**

#### **Biblical Interpretation**

How to read, interpret, and apply Scripture with and emphasis on rigorous exegesis. Also continues the spiritual formation content of Course 1.

### **COURSE 3**

#### **Intro. To Church History**

Provides a worshipful and helpful overview of the narrative and figures of Church and Baptist history, appealing to Baptists and non-Baptists alike.

### **COURSE 4**

#### **Introduction to Theology**

Key doctrines of the Christian faith with emphasis on how beliefs influence ethics. Also includes a two-week overview of core elements of Baptist Identity.

### **COURSE 5**

#### **Survey of the Old Testament**

A broad overview of the Old Testament. Key passages and narratives are emphasized to highlight the challenges and blessings of reading faithfully.

### **COURSE 6**

#### **Survey of the New Testament**

A detailed overview of the New Testament, with the goal of teaching students how to read the New Testament like the early church.



## **BETWEEN SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SEMINARY...**

- How do you equip and educate your current leaders who teach and minister?
- Who are you preparing to be the next generation of teachers and church leaders?
- How can we help educate and form your leaders?

## **EDUCATION FOR EVERY SERVANT LEADER**

- Sunday School teachers
- Ministers for youth, children, and families
- Small group leaders
- Ministry volunteers of all varieties

## **ACCESSIBLE LEARNING**

- Coursework is intended to be finished in less than three hours a week.
- Active-learning assignments and weekly critical thinking, reflection, and syntheses questions.
- Students receive personal and detailed feedback from a highly trained ONLINE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM team.
- ONLINE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM goals are subject comprehension, spiritual growth, and ministry effectiveness.

## **AFFORDABLE PRICING**

- \$250 per course. First Baptist is willing to cover \$125. (Cost of books is not included. There is usually one book for each class). Do not let cost prevent you from pursuing this opportunity.
- For three courses a year, the annual costs are \$750 per person.

# **FBC LOCAL COHORT WILL BEGIN JANUARY 2026**

**Local Cohorts Meet for Discussion and Conversation 1-4 times a month. These are conversational rather than instructional meetings. Students work independently and also enjoy a nurturing community of learning.**

**Contact C.V. Blake ([cv.blake@fbcabilene.org](mailto:cv.blake@fbcabilene.org)) for more information.**

## STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

December 16, 23 years

**TODD WILSON**

*Pastor for Music & Worship*

December 18, 2 years

**HUNTER BROWN**

*Pastor for Students*

December 21, 33 years

**TONY MARTINEZ**

*Custodian*

## STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

November 2025

<b>Budget</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>Year-to-Date</b>
Required	\$271,010	\$3,054,160
Given	\$368,273	\$3,224,147

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



**FIRST BAPTIST**  
CHURCH ♦ ABILENE

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## DECEMBER

- 7** Youth/Parent Advent Breakfast  
Personnel Committee Meeting  
ACU Vespers Concert
- 9** FFP Christmas Program/  
Open House  
ACS Choir Christmas Concert
- 10** Preschool Choir Program
- 11** ACS Elementary Choir Program
- 12** MOCE Staff/Board Christmas Party  
Clack M.S. Orchestra Concert
- 15** AHS Choir Christmas Concert
- 16** CLCM Executive Board  
CLCM Full Board  
Finance Committee Meeting  
Deacon Christmas Party  
Craig M.S. Choir Concert
- 17** Grant-in-Aid Ministry Team Meeting
- 18** Men's Ministry Brown Bag Lunch
- 19** GLO Staff/Board Christmas Party
- 21** Missions Committee Meeting  
Grief & Hope Service
- 24** Church Offices Closed  
Family Christmas Eve Service  
57th Annual Christmas Eve Service
- 25-26** Church Offices Closed
- 28** Morning Worship Only –  
NO Sunday School

## JANUARY 1

Church Offices Closed