

# FIRSTwords

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

## 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! December 3 will feature a favorite for many, the parade of flags as we sing Carry the Light. In addition to the flags, this year we will also be dedicating the Hope Center as we near completion and get ready to move in and continue the wonderful work City Light, Counseling, and GLO does in our community. December 10 will feature our Sanctuary Choir and Celebration Orchestra as they present a service of Christmas music. Both the 18 and 24 will continue our journey to Bethlehem during the morning services, with the additional Christmas Eve services on the night of the December 24. The 6:00 p.m. service is more family friendly, while the 11:00 p.m. service will mark the 55th year we have worshiped 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, Abilene High Orchestra, ACU Vespers, Abilene Christian Elementary Choir, Abilene High School Choir, and Clack Orchestra.

Add the Organ Concert on December 15, featuring Bradley Hunter Welch, resident organist for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, as he will play a program of Advent & Christmas Organ Music.

On December 21, we will have a Longest Night Service in the sanctuary. 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 just over \$320,000 behind in anticipated budget receipts and so finishing strong is really important this 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 2024 on a solid financial base.



# PEACE, DIRECTION, HOPE – The Light of the World

During this season of Advent (which begins on Sunday, December 3), we will turn our attention to the third part of our focus on becoming fully formed followers of Christ – Hope for the Hungry. There is no better theme to guide us in our time of preparation for Christmas than focusing on the hope we have in Christ and, therefore, the hope we have been entrusted to offer to the world.

We'll kick off this season of Hope with Carry the Light Sunday on December 3. During that service, we will also participate in a special time of dedication for the Hope Center. Immediately follow the worship service and dedication, there will be a time of fellowship and gathering at the Hope Center as we anticipate the opening of this important piece of ministry to and with the community of Abilene. I hope you will make plans to be a part of this important service.

On December 10, we will celebrate Hope through hearing the Christmas selections from our choir and orchestra. I know we will be blessed by this experience.

On the evening of December 21, we will hold a Longest Night service. This service, held on the shortest day and longest night of the year, will hold space for the complicated feelings that many of us experience during the holidays as we deal with loss, grief, and sorrow. During this time together, we will express our sorrows and ultimately turn together to the One Who Offers Hope.

On December 24, we will have our regular service of worship in the morning followed by our annual Christmas Eve services at 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

I hope to see you at these communal worship experiences. I pray that we will feel the hope of God in this season as we celebrate the Incarnation! I am thrilled to experience our first Advent season together and look forward, in hope, to many to come.

Love,

Brandon



# Healing Hearts

by Cherry Curry



Healing Hearts Ministry officially began their 12th year of ministry in September. We have been fortunate to grow in the last several months. It is so exciting to have some new members! Several of our members entered their creations in the West Texas Fair and won quite a few ribbons for their work. We even have one young lady, age 16, who received “Best in Show” award for her creation. Could this be a new place for you to get involved at FBC?

For those of you who don't know about this ministry, Healing Hearts Ministry is a Prayer Shawl Ministry in which members create and make tangible items such as shawls, throws, “no-sew” fleece blankets, angels, and prayer cloths to give to people who need prayer, as a reminder that prayers are being lifted up for them. We also make hats and scarves for City Light Ministry to keep the “homeless” warm during bad weather. Materials are furnished, or you are welcome to provide your own materials, for the gifts you make.

There are several jobs in this ministry which don't require crocheting or knitting ability. One being the “no-sew” fleece blankets. We would be happy to teach you how to make these blankets. It is possible that one person could cut the strips for the blanket, and a different person could pull the strips through to complete the edging for the blanket. If you are interested in learning to do this and being a part of Healing Hearts Ministry, please contact Cherry Curry @ 325-864-1897.

If you enjoy scrapbooking, your skills are needed to document this ministry. We will provide the necessary materials you would need to help in this area. This is something you can do from home, if you prefer. It wouldn't require being present for meetings, unless you wish to attend.

Another way to serve in Healing Hearts Ministry is as a courier who delivers the gifts going to those in need of prayer. These people are very important to our ministry because of the personal encouragement they offer when delivering the gifts.

Our meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month in Room 6 of University Place from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. Sometimes, we have a “knit along” on the 2nd Thursday of the month during which time we work on knitting, crocheting, or cutting out “no-sew” fleece blankets. If there is enough interest, we possibly we could extend this to a 4th Thursday, if there is enough interest.

Please consider joining us. If you don't feel led to be a part of our ministry, we would appreciate your prayers for us as we continue to try to encourage those in need of prayer.

# CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

The annual celebration of the birth of our Savior—God's word become flesh—is a joyous time for all people. This is especially true for the First Baptist Church Family as we gather for worship during the month of December.

The poinsettia plants will adorn and decorate the worship center during the celebration of Advent. Advent consists of the four Sundays before Christmas during which we prepare ourselves for the coming Christ. The flowers in their design symbolize the star that guided the wise men to the stable. Your gift of a poinsettia will help in our spiritual preparation.

If you would like to provide one or more of the poinsettias in honor of a special person or as a memorial to someone dear to you, please fill in the attached form.

Bring the completed form to the church office or mail it in to the church office with a check to cover the cost of the flowers you plan to provide. NOTE: Please make your check payable to First Baptist Church and designate the money for poinsettias.

**The deadline for ordering is Wednesday, December 13.**

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

I will provide \_\_\_\_\_ poinsettia(s) @ \$15.00 each.

NOTE: Please print the name or names as you wish to have them listed and indicate whether they are given in honor or in memory of.

( ) In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

( ) In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Given by: \_\_\_\_\_

- ( ) I will pick up my poinsettia(s) after the Christmas Eve service.
- ( ) I will pick up my poinsettia(s) after Christmas Day.
- ( ) Please use my poinsettia(s) for hospital or homebound ministry.





## OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD FINAL TALLY

Wow, what a year for Operation Christmas Child! As a collection center, we were able to collect 5,226 shoeboxes, 577 more than last year! We loaded 351 cartons into the trailer and they are now on their way to Dallas to the processing center. All of this was made possible because of the generous giving of each person who filled a box, manned the collection center, and by the 11 people who helped load the trailer on Monday. Those include: Alan Wartes, Sandy Utey, Kelly Utey, Roy Jones, Dick Dansby, Jim Barlow, Steve Davis, Jim Jones, Steve Clemmer, Matthew Broyles, Jerry Hendrix, and Mike Brady. Because we had such a great turnout, we were able to load the trailer in just under 15 minutes!

But, the whole process would not have worked without the excellent and hard work done by Debra Clemmer, who as always kept everything running smoothly and accurately. So, thanks again for making Christmas a joyful experience for 5,226 children around the world.

# Breathe

## WOMEN'S RETREAT 2024

FBC Women's Retreat is 12-weeks away!!! We hope you have made plans to attend and are ready to register for this fabulously new formatted weekend, February 23 - 24, here in our own building. Our theme is Breathe, and it's hard to imagine that any of us do not need to take time to focus on slowing down and taking some good deep breaths.

Here are some of the great things you can look forward to at our upcoming Women's Retreat. Worship sessions much like those of our Women's Nights of Praise, complete with songs, testimonies, prayer, and Scripture reading. A speaker, one of our very own, Jill Hudson. Many of you may know Jill, but this will be a wonderful way to get to know her even better.

Workshops led by women on a variety of topics like yoga, painting, culinary arts, prayer walking, and artistic Bible note-taking. A missions' activity which will directly benefit the Abilene community. We will have four opportunities to have delicious meals together as we have extended our time to conclude Saturday evening.

If you feel nostalgic for the opportunity to stay in a hotel on Friday night, we've reserved a block of rooms, under First Baptist Church Women's Retreat, at the brand-new Doubletree hotel in downtown Abilene!! There is a special rate if you let them know you are in that block of rooms. Of course, if you'd rather sleep in your own bed, that's an excellent option too.

It is our hope that each woman of FBC will mark her calendar right now to make time and space for this important time of fellowship, worship, and sacred space. You are important to our community and you need to take time to retreat and breath. Just a thought, if Jesus retreated, we should too!





## YOUTH MINISTRY IN ACTION

On November 20, the FBC youth group had a great Lunch Bunch gathering at Wing Stop and then continued on to City Light to set up and decorate for the Thanksgiving breakfast on Wednesday. They had a great time together serving the staff and patrons at City Light.



# REPORT FOR THE COLLEGE RETREAT

A few weeks ago, the college group went on our annual fall retreat. The topic this year was Christian sexual ethics. We had great conversations about sex and our bodies which helped us on our journeys to move from shame to grace, from anxiety to beauty, and from fear to freedom. As the students said, "This weekend helped us break the ice on the topic and makes it easier to talk about with others because it definitely needs to be talked about."

What about you? What comes to mind when you think about sex and your body? Young or old, we all think about it. When you do, my prayer is that you know your body is a beautiful gift from God. May we all find freedom from shame which comes with internal and external pressures to be anything other than who God created us to be. Always remember, you are created in the image of God and worthy of love.

Press on,

Matthew





*November  
2023*



### **5,605 MEALS SERVED**

Includes: Sunday Breakfast, Community Breakfast, Community Lunch (both dine-in and take out), and Produce from the City Light Market



### **478 VOLUNTEER HOURS**

#### **PERSONAL ASSISTANCE:**



### **23 HOUSEHOLDS**

helped with rent and utilities



### **599 PHONE CALLS**

for assistance



### **270 MAIL**

Delivered and checked



### **91 SHOWERS**

## **CLCM UPDATE**

City Light recently hosted Volunteer Trainings for our church and community members who are essential to our ministry. We had a total of 34 people in attendance! It was a delight to have so many of our faithful volunteers in the same place and time to share our experiences of loving our neighbors well through the work at City Light. We had some volunteers who have just begun serving here and some who have been serving since City Light was founded in 1997. What a joy to remember our collective history at 336 Hickory Street as we prepare to move very soon to 1441 N. 4th Street to continue this ministry. Our volunteers were equipped with information regarding front desk processes and procedures, alongside food safety and food handling regulations.

As we expand the physical space of our ministry at the Hope Center, we need to expand our volunteer base. With more space will come more opportunities for people to join us in doing good things in Abilene. If you are interested in volunteering in the front desk/case management services we offer, please email Stephanie Stewart (Director) [stephanie.stewart@fbcabilene.org](mailto:stephanie.stewart@fbcabilene.org).

If you are interested in volunteering in the kitchen/dining room services we offer, please email Kayleen Mills (Executive Chef)

[kayleen.mills@fbcabilene.org](mailto:kayleen.mills@fbcabilene.org).





## **FAMILY LIFE CENTER**

The Family Life Center opened in 1981. Our mission is to provide family-oriented activities for the church membership & surrounding communities in a Christian atmosphere at an affordable price. Our facility accommodates a variety of groups such as businesses, churches, day care/day camps, private home schools, public schools, individuals with special needs, universities, military, family reunions, residential treatment centers, exercise groups, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes to list a few. We host birthday parties, bridal showers, wedding receptions, and Family Fun Nights. In addition, we have a full fitness center with lockers, showers, and sauna amenities. For those who simply want a place to walk, out of the weather, our track or gym is free to the public.

## **HOSTED GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS IN NOVEMBER**

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**PARTIES- 43 PARTIES**

**FITNESS CENTER USE- 490 INDIVIDUALS**

**FITNESS CLASSES- 17 CLASSES**

**SERENITY HOUSE- 206 INDIVIDUALS**

**FULL BUILDING RENTAL- 6 GROUPS**

**WALK-INS- 462 INDIVIDUALS**

**SCHOOL & HOME SCHOOL GROUPS- 217 INDIVIDUALS**

**SPECIAL NEEDS GROUPS- 242 INDIVIDUALS**



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

## **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 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.

## **PRAYERS FOR OUR MISSIONARIES**

Kindly keep our missionaries in your prayers during this Christmas season as they serve in Cambodia, Cypress, Macedonia, and Southeast Asia.



Pray for God's guidance that they may be instrumental in fulfilling the needs of those they are serving. May the hands of our missionaries be instruments of love and healing. May God's guidance illuminate their path, and may their service bring hope and blessings to all they encounter. May they connect to all their loved ones as they serve abroad.







## FRIENDSHIP HOUSE UPDATE

*by Trevor and Gina*

Our Thanksgiving potluck was intimate this year and deepened friendships we've made since being here as we played games, ate delicious food, and updated each other on life. One fun activity we did was writing down what we're thankful for on slips of paper and guessing who wrote which one. We're very thankful for those who made a dish or brought something and we look forward to the next one!



## CHRISTMAS STORE *Thank You!*

Dear generous church family, heartfelt thanks for your donations of toys, money, and time to our Christmas store.

Your kindness will touch the lives of many families and children this holiday season. Please join us in prayer for each family the store will bless. Excitement fills the air as we prepare to welcome them for shopping this week. Gratitude and warm wishes to all!



# December

- 3 Parade of Flags/  
Hope Center Dedication  
Budget Committee  
Personnel Committee Meeting
- 4 Craig Choir Concert
- 5 Hope Center Grand Opening  
Abilene Christian Schools  
Choir Concert
- 8 Abilene High Orchestra Concert
- 10 Sanctuary Choir and Celebration  
Orchestra Christmas Program  
ACU Vespers Concert
- 12 Abilene Christian Schools  
Elementary Christmas Program
- 13 Grant-in-Aid Ministry Team Meeting  
Buildings & Grounds  
Committee Meeting  
Last Wednesday Evening Meal/  
Activities
- 15 Organ Concert
- 18 Abilene High Choir Concert
- 19 Deacons' Christmas Party  
Clack Orchestra Concert
- 21 Longest Night Service
- 22 Church Offices Closed
- 24 Family Christmas Eve Service  
55th Annual Christmas Eve Service
- 25-26 Church Offices Closed
- 31 NO Sunday School,  
Morning Worship Only

## UNIFIED MISSIONS OFFERING

Reminder, please turn in your Unified Missions Offering envelopes by December 31, 2023. This important offering meets needs here and around the world. If you don't have an envelope yet, you may pick one up in the welcome center or in the missions' office.

## STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

December 16, *21 years*

**Todd Wilson**

Pastor for Music & Worship

December 21, *31 years*

**Tony Martinez**

Custodian

## STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

*November 2023*

Budget	November	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 264,060	\$ 2,969,660
Given	\$ 220,307	\$ 2,647,182

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



**FIRST BAPTIST**  
CHURCH • ABILENE

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