

FIRSTwords

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

REOPENING THE CHURCH?!?!

According to the new executive order issued by Governor Abbott on Monday, April 27, 2020, the plan is to start opening Texas back up for business on Friday, May 1. So, what does that mean for us as a church? Well, we are not “reopening” the church, because the church has not closed. Yes, we have been meeting in a new format, but ministry has continued during this time and in some ways, it has increased!

Before we look at the answer to the reopening question, let’s talk about what Governor Abbott’s Open Texas Report suggests churches do. The first and foremost request is that all Texans help each other through this process. He emphasized numerous times that we must use common sense and caution with those who would fall into the high-risk categories and maintain social distances. At-risk population are those who are 65 or older, especially those with chronic lung disease; moderate to severe asthma; chronic heart disease; severe obesity; diabetes; chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; liver disease; or weakened immune system. During Phase One, businesses must limit occupancy to 25% of their maximum occupancy. While this does not necessarily apply to church, it should be used as a guide as we want to “be a good neighbor” to those in our city.

With that in mind, Dr. Christopher is gathering a “Ingathering Team” to look at how we as a church should proceed. The team is an ad hoc group which will be comprised of: Randy Lloyd, Chair, Dr. Barry Moak, Dr. John Cole, Mark Edwards, Dick Dansby, John Weeks, Ruth Anna Driggers, Jill Gossett, Jane Todd, Richard Vandever, Margaret Henslee, and Keely Gaddis.

This group will help the staff develop a plan for the church which we will share in the coming weeks. But for now, our plan is to continue doing church as we have for the past 7 weeks. As much as we would like to simply open the doors and have everyone back together, it is just not prudent at this stage. We could have some people in the sanctuary on Sundays, but we must carefully determine who those people would be and how to ensure distancing. So for now, we will continue to worship electronically and will share any change in that method as soon as we know anything.

So, please continue to pray: for our city, for church members, for the staff, and for this team as they seek to help us all move forward.

On Sunday, remember that many of our Sunday school classes continue to meet via Zoom and then we can all gather electronically for worship by watching live on KRBC, stream the service by going to the church website (www.fbcabilene.org), or on Facebook live.



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

The preacher, Gardner Taylor, tells about a trip he took by car from New York to Birmingham, Alabama, way before GPS. It was late one night when he stopped for gas at a convenient store, somewhere in Tennessee. After paying, he asked the clerk, *"Can you tell me where I am? What's the name of this place?"* The clerk asked, *"Are you lost, do you know where you are going?"* Gardner said, *"I'm not lost. I know where I came from and I know where I am going...I just wondered where I am...."*

We know, at least I pray we know as the people of God, from where we have come. No matter what we face, we come from the empty tomb, the risen Lord and the gift of Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit and Power. Even though there is major uncertainty filled with fear about the future and especially finances, we are not lost as a child of God.

But where are we in these difficult days, at least as the Church? Some say, we are in the "new normal." So many changes. Six weeks without gathering in the sanctuary. Small businesses are struggling to stay afloat. But, here is a word of hope, according to Tod Bolsinger, *"The Church is at this opportunity to express more clearly what it means to follow Jesus and serve God who is King of the whole world.... The church has always been a small band of people willingly to head into uncharted territory with a mission worth our devotion."*

Tod's statement captures where we are as the Church, as well as where are headed. We're off the map in uncharted territory making us anxious about the future. Some will understandably want to go back to the way things were, which isn't bad, but we have another choice in making the most of this crisis. We can learn what it means for Christians to lead when we are off the map and the old no longer works. As much as COVID-19 has created a crisis, the Church has been in a crisis for some time where Sundays are more about soccer and Starbucks, than the Sabbath.

An analogy from Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains*, might help us see what we are facing, not only in the COVID-19 crisis, but in our changing culture. Lewis and Clark, the great American explorers, expected to find the Northwest Passage, or the cherished water way of the Columbia River, connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Mississippi River and then the Gulf of Mexico. Such a discovery would be like owning the internet today. But, what they encountered were the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains stretching out for miles and miles. They could not have been more disappointed, but they were not discouraged as they adapted to the challenge.

They thought the most challenging obstacle was behind them as they canoed to the head waters of the Missouri River. They expected to descend down a gentle slope to the Pacific, but surprisingly they got the Rockies which were not on any map. In that moment, everything changed. They had planned on exploring by canoe. Now they would have to become climbers. They had to adapt to see new possibilities. They couldn't canoe the mountains. If they wanted to go forward, they had to change their plan and adapt. They kept on course - their mission didn't change. "But they adapted from river-rafters to mountain climbers," according to Bolsinger.

We are off the map in uncharted territory with COVID-19. However, we have been off the map as the Church has become one of many options. The fastest growing religious affiliation among young adults is "none." The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us we are facing our Rocky Mountains as surely as Lewis and Clark. Bolsinger says, *"We are canoers who have run out of water.... So, what is needed? A spirit of adventure...and to keep going no matter what."* He goes on to counsel *"This is an opportunity to become true learners who stay the course of our mission, but who are ready to adapt to whatever is before us."* It is time to ditch the "canoes" which got us safely this far and put on our hiking boots to reach a broken world hungry for God like never before.

Continued from Page 2.

We are at an exciting crossroads. It's more than deciding when we will be back together for worship - and one day we will be. Can you imagine that celebration? We are on a life-changing journey in facing the mountains and exploring new frontiers. Perhaps our prayer doesn't need to be to go back to the "normal." Instead, God transform us, keep us on course through this uncharted territory, give us new life and a renewed passion for Your mission as we trade our "canoes" for hiking boots. By the way, even though Lewis and Clark did not discover that "waterway," they did make it over the Rockies to the Pacific...and then back home.

See you at the top...don't miss the view,

Phil

Hello, FBC Abilene Family!

When classes went online, the workload of our college students increased dramatically because class discussion turned into more online writing assignments. Because of their busyness, I've tried to be helpful in not overloading them with things to do. So, the primary connecting point with them is maintaining our Wednesday night Bible study together via Zoom. This has been a huge bright spot for me as I get to see the faces of these students as well as read scripture and discuss the questions, struggles, and implications which go along with it. You'd be proud of the types of discussions these students hold. They make our church and the Kingdom of God more impactful in our world.

Our young adult classes have continued to meet for Sunday school via Zoom, as have many other classes. I want you to be encouraged, church, about the future. We have a tremendous group of young adults who are serving our church by serving our community. In these moments of crisis, it's more evident than ever. Our church and our community are and will continue to be better because of the young adults who claim FBC as their church home.

One of my favorite things I've been able to do is to have virtual coffee with students and young adults. We'll either use FaceTime or Zoom and have one-on-one conversations. It's not the same as sitting across the table with one another, but I'm grateful these conversations still happen.

I've also been meeting with other local college ministers, as well as a college and young adult cohort through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Having other ministers who are experiencing similar things in similar positions has helped me tremendously in this time. Working together and sharing ideas has allowed our ministries to thrive in these uncertain times.

If you haven't joined the FBC Facebook page, I encourage you to do so for many reasons. One in particular is that each day a pastor reads a children's book on Facebook Live. It's been a fun and creative way to share the fun and joy which comes with children's books, as well as the deep truths existing within them. Make sure you go back and check all of them out!

I also want to give a special shout-out to Candy and Becky and all they're doing for our children. Every time I talk to young adults with children, they mention how thankful they are for these two who are pastoring our children so well. For that, I'm grateful.

As we continue to live one day at a time during this pandemic, remember that hope in Christ means the worst things are never the last things. Stay encouraged. Keep reflecting. Keep resting. Keep learning. Most of all, remember you are loved.

Matthew Broyles

ACTING IN *love*

FAMILY FOOD BOXES

City Light started the Family Food Boxes program in late March to respond to hunger needs related to COVID-19. To date over 330 boxes of food have been picked up or delivered to our Abilene Community. FBC members are providing boxes from one family to another each week as a family ministry opportunity. Church members are delivering these boxes to those who have no ability to get out during this crisis. Many of the families who receive assistance with a utility bill will also have a food box delivered to their front door. These family food boxes have helped Templo Bautista, AISD, Connecting Caring Communities, Primera Baptist, Abilene-Callahan Baptist Association, First Baptist families, and our City Light families each week. City Light is so very thankful for the partnership with the Food Bank of West Central Texas to help us feed families during these times.



Thank You Abilene United Way and Abilene Community Foundation

City Light Community Ministries is so very thankful to the United Way of Abilene and the Community Foundation of Abilene for their contributions to help our Abilene neighbors. These gifts will keep lights on, water running, and evictions from happening to our friends who live all around us. This is a direct COVID-19 virus response for utility assistance, rent assistance, and other crisis related needs. These gifts, along with the FBC Good Cheer fund, have allowed City Light to be a beacon in our city during dark days. This little light on the corner of 4th and Hickory has been shining brightly, bringing hope to all who come to its doors: those who are hungry, people in crisis calling for help, and folks who receive a box of food delivered on their front porch. Thank you FBC Abilene for setting up City Light to shine bright!



HEY EVERYONE!

As you know, we have entered unprecedented times for our youth ministry here at FBC Abilene. Because of COVID-19, the church has been closed for weeks now. Even though it is sad that we cannot meet, we are still reaching out to others and doing everything we can to minister to your students during this time.

I sent this "schedule" out to our students and their parents to simply let them know of some ways we will be doing ministry during the time of self-quarantine.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Free day	"Game Night" via social media	Video Bible Lesson by Austen via social media	Student led Devo (video/ written) via social media	Lunch Bunch via Zoom	Talk Show "Live with Austen" via social media	Corporate Worship with FBC Abilene on KRBC or Livestream Written Devo by Austen via social media

It is vitally important to follow us on social media if you would like to stay connected to our youth ministry at this time! Below are all the different social media accounts, as well as apps, we use to stay connected. Hope this helps you out. Every announcement will be posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Remind. These are our 3 most important apps. I also post all of our devotionals and Bible Studies through these 3 apps. See why I'm stressing how important they are!

REMIND- FBC Abilene Youth Ministry



(This one is incredibly important. This is how I announce anything we do in our youth ministry, as well as conduct our voting for our March Madness polls.) If you can't figure out how to join our Remind, please contact me!

MARCO POLO-



Marco Polo is essentially a video answering machine. Everyone who is a part of our group can post videos for everyone to see. Just a fun way to stay in touch.

FACEBOOK-



First Baptist Abilene Student Ministry

GROUPME-



Our Senior group chat is on our GroupMe. If you are a senior and want to join the conversation about senior stuff, please let me know and I'll sign you up.

ZOOM-



We use Zoom for lunch bunch, as well as other types of meetings. We will send our Zoom information out through Remind and NOT on social media so we can keep our Zoom chats as safe as possible.

INSTAGRAM- fbcabi



I will continue to update you with any news I have pertaining to our youth ministry. With summer quickly approaching, we will most likely have to adjust some things. I will do everything I can to keep you informed.

Finally, I leave you with this. I understand this is an incredibly tough time for students and parents. This is hard, but we can persevere through this if we stick together. I am praying for all of you. Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you. I'd love to do it.

I miss you all. Thank you for all the support you have given Holly and me during our time here at First Baptist Church, Abilene.

Grace and Peace,

Austen

PRESCHOOL AND CHILDREN'S UPDATE

As we maneuver through these days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we wanted to provide you with an update on how we are trying to creatively minister to the preschoolers and children of our church. It has been a challenge, but we have tried very hard to keep in touch with the kiddos, especially through videos and mail-outs.

As this pandemic began, leadership within the church felt it necessary to no longer gather as a group, we videoed 10 episodes of "Craft Time with Candy & Becky," which gave ideas of crafts to make during this time of isolation. We also provided craft supplies to any of the kids who may need them. As the time progressed, it was decided, due to the maximum of 10 people in a gathering, we would have a limited amount of staff assigned to the office each day with everyone else working from home. This made it difficult to continue the craft videos, so we have been sending crafts, Sunday school lessons, puzzles/games, the Sunday morning Children's Bulletins, or cards via mail to the children. Also, it has been a lot of fun having children's time each Sunday morning during worship and I hope your kids are enjoying this time as much as I am.

We were able to hand out one of the lessons and games we had for the kids at our "Drive-Thru Wednesday Night" which our staff hosted on March 25. It was wonderful being able to actually SEE some of our kiddos!

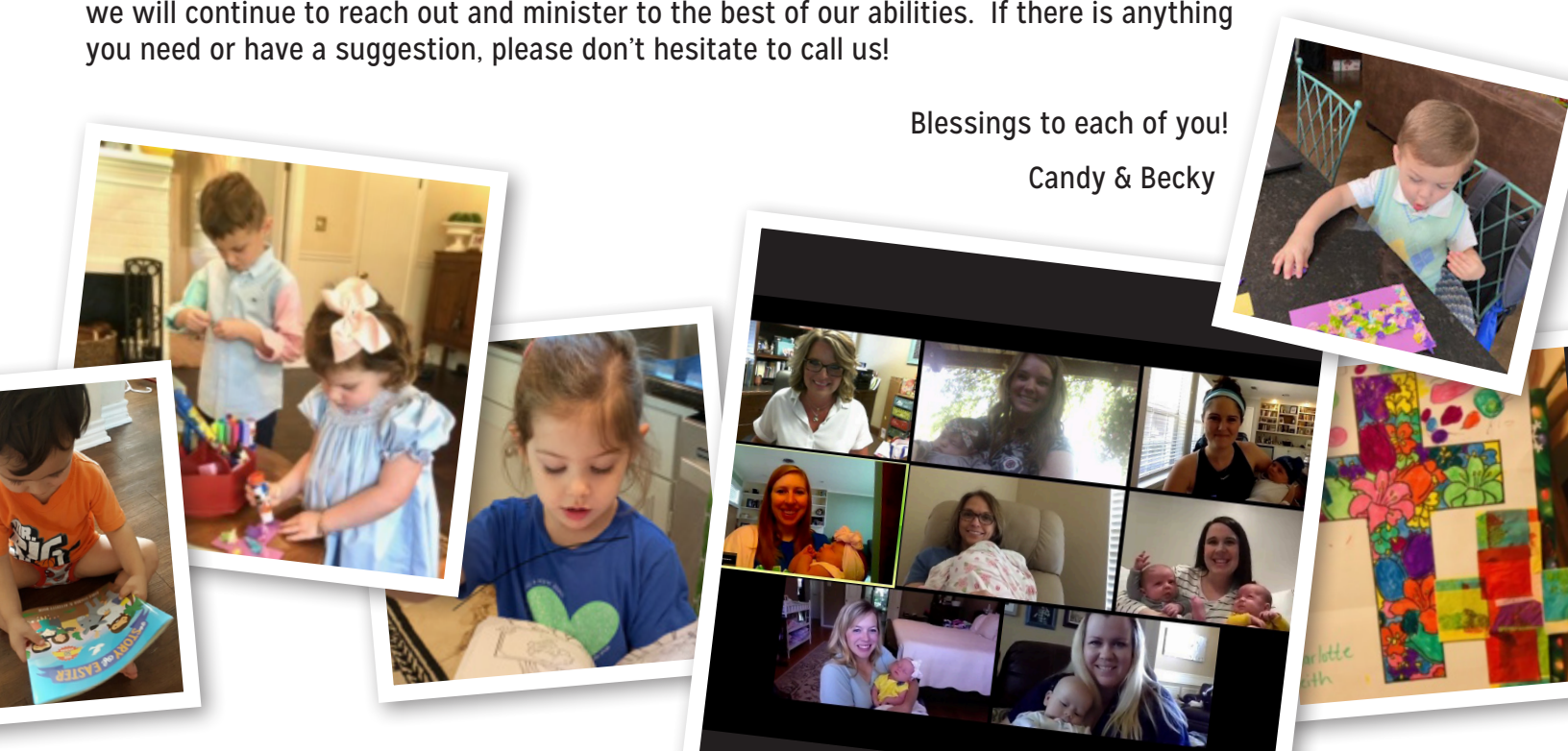
As we know, even midst this pandemic, life continues and we mean that literally! We have had 9 babies born since February with another on the way in May. Because of this, Candy felt it very important to give extra encouragement to the moms of these precious newborns. She has had a Zoom conference call with them so they could see each other and encourage each other.

We have tried diligently to keep everyone informed of what is happening as we continue to shelter in place. The best method we have found to keep in touch is through Facebook. We have used both the main church Facebook page as well as the Children & Preschool page (which is a private group). If you would like to be included in that page, you need to send a request on FB to the First Baptist Abilene Children & Preschool Ministries page and we will be more than happy to have you join us.

We look forward to the time where we can gather once again together, but until that time, we will continue to reach out and minister to the best of our abilities. If there is anything you need or have a suggestion, please don't hesitate to call us!

Blessings to each of you!

Candy & Becky



Worship and Music COVID-19 Activities

During shelter in place, the Worship and Music Ministry has been busy with the regular, on-going weekly preparations and leadership of the worship services. In addition to that, the Sanctuary Choir and Celebration Orchestra has met weekly for a virtual (non-singing) rehearsal. Each Wednesday evening, during our regular rehearsal time, we have used ZOOM to meet, reconnect, and share with each other the unexpected joys and concerns we have experienced during this time. We have had several special guests join us for these meetings, first with composer, arranger, and orchestrator, Heather Sorenson and then by the Music and Worship Leader for Texas Baptist, Tom Tillman. Other special guests have agreed to join us and we will see them in the coming days.

In the next few weeks, we will record an anthem, THOU, O LORD, which will be a part of a worship service in the month of May.

I also have participated in ZOOM meetings with other Ministers of Music from across the state and a Worship Summit on Thursday, April 24 and will participate in several online anthem reading sessions.



Hot meals, family food boxes, and thank you meals continue to go out on the FBC campus! Here's a thank you from our Abilene Fire Department for meal provided by our City Light food services team.

Thank you for being a church who cares!



ABILENE FIRE DEPARTMENT – OFFICE OF THE FIRE CHIEF

Kayleen Mills
Director of Operations/Chef Trainer
City Light Community Ministries

Kayleen and Chef Kaitlin,

At a time when so many are afraid to even venture outside, you two have gone above and beyond to show support for the Abilene Fire Department.

The meals you provided were greatly appreciated. Your kind gesture also served as a boost to Department morale during a very tense time in our careers.

Thank you for supporting AFD and for being part of the reason that we love serving this City.

Sincerely,

Cande Flores
Fire Chief

STAY HOME STAY *connected*



#fbcabilene

<https://www.instagram.com/fbcabilene/>



@fbcabilene

<https://twitter.com/fbcabilene>



**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
ABILENE, TX**

<https://www.facebook.com/FirstBaptistChurchAbileneTx/>

Remember to join us live for worship each week at 10:30 a.m. on KRBC
or stream the service by going to the church website:

www.fbcabilene.org

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

May 1, 15 years
Daphne Garcia
GLO Teacher

May 1, 1 year
Laura Taff
Counselor

May 5, 6 years
Tina Hoffman
Counseling Receptionist

May 26, 20 years
Teresa Garcia
GLO Cook

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

April 2020

Budget	April	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 235,870	\$ 1,131,179
Given	\$ 211,407	\$ 1,134,906

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



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

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