

FIRSTwords

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

GIVE HOPE UPDATE

The Hope Center Committee has been working with the architectural firm PSC in developing drawings for the two different areas of focus at the Give Hope Campus. The drawings for the City Light portion are approaching completion. The rendering on page 7 will give you an idea of what the completed building might look like. The committee is not ready to give a complete presentation, but wanted to at least give the church an update on the progress.

The drawings for the GLO portion of the campus are not ready for presentation as the architects and committee continue to work to develop final designs.

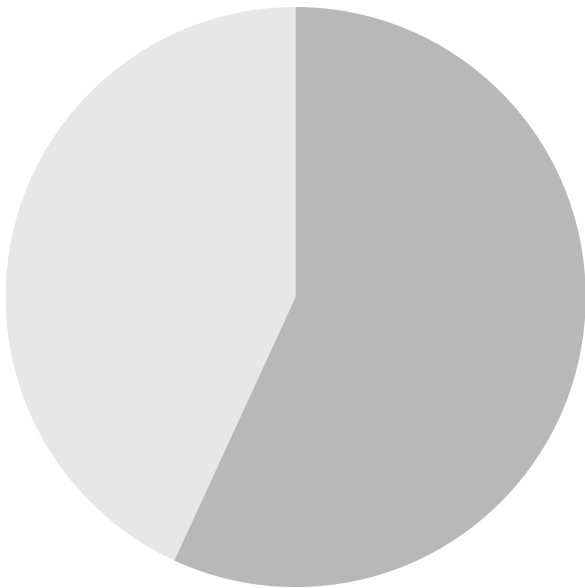
There has been good progress made in renovating the three-story building, known as The Perry Center, where BOBS volunteers continue to serve breakfast. The second floor will have new restrooms, ceilings, lighting, paint and floor coverings throughout to allow for satellite offices for additional counselors in the Ministry of Counseling.

The third floor restrooms and break room space have been remodeled, and we will have potential space for development of non-profit offices in the future. The first of April is our tentative goal for having renovation of these two floors completed.

GIVE HOPE

Financially, the Give Hope Campaign is doing great.
**We have received \$3,414,343
of the \$6 million goal.**

Please continue to pray for the committee as they oversee this project and for the ministries who will occupy this campus and continue to expand the Kingdom work we are doing as a church.



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

Let me first tell you a story which changed my understanding of the church and ministry. I was fourteen years old, a member of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio. Hurricane Carla had devastated the south Texas coast. Our Family Life Center became a relief center for those who had been displaced. On a Sunday morning, I was on my usual way through the Family Life Center for Sunday school. I was surprised to see this large group of strangers, and the cots which had been set up. But, I saw something else. I saw a Catholic priest conducting a worship service.

Those sheltering in our church were primarily Hispanics of the Catholic faith. I watched for a moment. I had never seen the way they worshiped God. I now realize they were not strangers, but hurting and displaced brothers and sisters in Christ in need of community.

We have our prejudices. They were Catholics, not Baptists. Shouldn't we try to convert them or avoid cooperating with them? How could a Baptist church host a Catholic service?

It was later I understood what was happening. Our pastor understood those families needed the familiar experience of their faith tradition. They had lost everything. Our pastor called a friend, a Catholic priest, to come and bring them the assurance of hope. He came to help them worship God during a time when they felt so lost and needed God and the familiar.

I will always be grateful for that walk through our Family Life Center. I learned it isn't just attending church, but being the church. It taught me about ministry to hurting people. I learned there are no denominational boundaries in the Kingdom of God in reaching people for Christ. I learned the message of Ephesians, Christ came to break down the dividing walls which separate us, especially as believers. I experienced Galatians 3:28: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male or female, for you are one in Christ Jesus. If*

you belong to Christ you are of Abraham's seed."

In these challenging days, like those early believers, we need each other as the Christian community. I certainly am a Baptist, but we need to join together as followers of Jesus. Instead of competing, we need cooperation. I'm grateful the Abilene faith community has discovered our unity as the Body of Christ. I pray we will continue to model this spirit as our city looks to our church for leadership of breaking down the walls.

*The six-week period of
"Lent" will begin on Ash
Wednesday, February 17.*

Lent is a period of preparation for the miracle of Easter. The word "*Lent*" even means "*spring*." It is a sacred time of confession and repentance to open us up to the spring of new life. Baptists should love this holy season - it is like a six-week revival.

Lent reminds is to "*Keep the main thing the main thing*." We are fighting a deadly virus. People are hurting and grieving. We are also in another deadly fight. The Apostle Paul says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of darkness and against the spiritual forces of evil...."* The enemy is not others with whom we disagree. It is with the powers of darkness, the thief, who comes to divide, rob, destroy, and bring disunity.

I close with these words of Jim Cymbala that he shared with his church. He said, *"I charge you that if you ever hear another church member speak an unkind word of criticism or slander against anyone - myself, another pastor, a deacon, a choir member or anyone else - you have the authority to stop the person in midsentence and say, 'Excuse me, who hurt you? Who ignored you?"*

Continued from page 2.

Who slighted you? Was it Pastor Cymbala. Let's go to his office right now. He will get on his knees and apologize to you, and then we'll pray together, so God can restore peace to this body. But we will not let you talk critically about people who are not present to defend themselves."

Lent is the season to look into our own hearts. Please know I am looking at the "log" of selfishness, greed, and narrowness in my own eye and heart. Let us work to keep the "Main thing the main thing" of "Reaching people for Jesus Christ and together becoming more like Him."

Prayerfully,

Phil

HELLO FROM PHNOM PENH!

Shortly after we sent our last newsletter, in which we said things were getting back to normal in Phnom Penh, things shut down again. We had our first clusters of COVID-19 community transmission in many months. When one cluster faded, another came. Churches have been closed and opened and closed again. We worried the closures would drag on as they did through most of last year, but thankfully, we were able to get back to worshiping in person last Sunday.

This leads to our exciting news: While we are very aware anything could happen in the next two weeks; these re-openings also mean that our long-awaited first pastor training seminar is set for Saturday, January 30. Praise God! As we make all the final preparations, we feel way in over our heads, and yet God's provision has been sustaining us. Encouragement to keep moving forward has come from unexpected corners. Please pray for us.

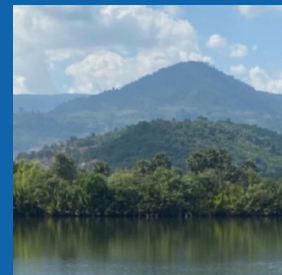
We've asked you many times to pray for us as we hit speed bump after speed bump over the last year. From car problems and plumbing issues to illnesses and floods, from small annoyances to big distractions, and of course lots of government mandated closures, we have felt constantly pushed away from this work. The more we've prayed against this lately, the more we have seen God answer us, meet us, and push back the opposition and distraction. We would love to have you join us in praying against all of these things, especially in the lead up to these seminars. Your prayers mean so much to us.

As we finished 2020 and began to lean into what is in store for us in 2021, we spent some time looking back over the last year. Despite the many very difficult aspects, the most dominant thread to us was, by far, God's faithfulness. In the big and small and the near and far, God continued to show up for us time and time again, and we pray you can look back over the last year and see the same thing, too. We look forward to this new journey to see where God will continue to show up!

With gratitude,

David, Lauren, and Chloe

With no tourists, we sometimes let Chloe chase the birds around the royal palace's empty open spaces. Between Christmas and New Year's Day, we took a few days to get out of town and go down to Kampot City, the capital of Kampot province. It had been 5 years since we'd been, and we enjoyed poking around its old train station, restaurants and, especially, its quiet riverside. While the drive was a couple hours longer than predicted, it was a lovely time away and we hope to be able to spend more time in the city as we are in Kampot Province more.



Becoming More Like Him...

The First Baptist Church mission statement reads, “To Reach People for Jesus Christ and Together Become More Like Him.” The statement has both an outward focus on “reaching” and an inward focus on “becoming.” This year, 2021, we are going to focus on the “becoming” portion of the mission statement as we strive to grow as disciples. We will be offering online and zoom style classes, and hopefully very soon, in-person group discussion and teaching times. Our desire is to help each of us “become more like Him.”

So, what does that look like? What are the characteristics or qualities of a disciple of Jesus Christ? How do you know when you have achieved it, or better yet, can you ultimately achieve being like Him? I think those are valid questions and ones which make us a bit nervous as I know in my case, I am a long way from being like Him! At times I think I am making progress, and then at other times I wonder if I have grown at all.

Obviously, discipleship is made up of numerous different components: prayer, study of scripture, sharing the gospel with others, helping those in need, giving, and the list goes on. Jesus mentions three things in which He assumed the people in His day and time were already participating because of their relationship to God: Giving, Praying, and Fasting. (Matthew 6:1-18) Jesus did not say, IF you give, pray, and fast, but rather WHEN. He assumed they were already doing those three basic things, so He talked about the how to do them, not the IF you do them.

So, let's talk about the first one. When you give. Once again, not IF you give, but when you give. He also made a simple assumption that each of His hearers was also tithing when they gave. He does not talk about what they gave, but rather how they gave what they knew they were to give. You see, tithing was not something they needed to be taught about, it was ingrained into their thinking. They knew 1/10 meant 1/10. They could figure out pretty easily that if they had ten lambs born, then one of them was expected to be given back to God. Sell ten baskets for \$80, then \$8 was expected to be given back to God. You get the idea, pretty simple math, but the results were way beyond simple! God said, “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

You see, to be a disciple of Jesus means we have the basics down pat. The question is not if we are doing them, but rather when we do them, how are we really doing them. What is our motivation? Is it for others to see our acts? But, statistically speaking, those who claim to be followers of Christ statistically give 2.5% of their income to the church (Church Giving Statistics, 2019 Edition - Pushpay).

Which begs the question, are we doing a good job of growing disciples? Do we really believe in tithing? Is that really a part of being a committed follower of Jesus Christ?

So, maybe the question is not do we believe in tithing, but rather why is it so hard to do it? My guess is the answer lies in the statement Jesus made, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” As a society, we have overextended ourselves and have obligations we know we have to take care of, and so if there is anything left after taking care of those obligations, then we might be able to give something. That seems to have the principal of give to God first and then take care of your obligations a bit backwards. That does not mean folks should ignore their debts so they can give to God. The real issue lies in the choices we have made in our lifestyles which prevent us from being able to give to God first. It boils down to a spiritual issue and until we are ready to admit that is the problem, we will never solve it.

There are several great Christian resources available which focus on getting control of debt and setting a budget which then will enable giving to be a reality. But even more important, will be the release of all the stress debt causes. So, as we move forward into 2021, we will offer classes designed to help with debt and budgeting, not so the church will get more money, but so that disciples can grow and be released from worry and stress!



“Also, do good things
for the city I sent you
to. Pray to the LORD for
the city you are living in,
because if there is peace
in that city, you will
have peace also.”
-Jeremiah 29:7 (ERV) 7

Thank you for allowing City Light to “do good things” for our City of Abilene. We are so grateful to be God’s presence with you and with our friends and neighbors here in the town we love. You’ll see that City Light has been busy meeting the needs of our community during these uncharted times and days.

God has called us to:

- **provide hot meals for those who are hungry**
- **make available boxes of food for family meals at home**
- **deliver thank you meals for first responders and those on the front lines**
- **meet the many financial needs and give hope in those conversations**
- **partner with other groups to be His witness in our community.**

This important work could not have been done without the tireless efforts of our reduced number of amazing volunteers. For safety reasons, we cut back on the number of volunteers, and they graciously worked extra hours to accomplish the tasks. Our working Board of Directors who continually support, challenge and encourage our staff and volunteers. City Light is a better ministry because of the work of our Board. Our FBC Abilene family who sees City Light as a crucial ministry of the church. And, to our City Light Staff who were willing to work despite the unknown consequences so the light of Christ and FBC Abilene would continue to shine during these tough days in our community.

The heart of City Light is to represent our loving God moving in the lives of all who enter our doors. Transformation happens when God’s love is extended through the acts of kindness which happen every time our doors are open. It brings salvation, it brings hope, it brings accountability and it reminds our friends of the love the Father has for each one of us. Continue to join us in prayer for our city, friends and neighbors as we continue to seek the peace of the place we love.

Blessings,

John

OUR FOCUS:

*Focused on meeting crisis needs, feeding the hungry,
building biblical community, teaching children,
and helping people move out of poverty.*



MEALS SERVED

2020

44,364*

2019

40,285

2018

35,610



POUNDS OF FOOD from the Food Bank

2020

253,219 lbs

2019

78,611 lbs

2018

57,551 lbs



GOOD CHEER

2020

\$62,537

2019

\$24,312

2018

\$25,789

**2020 meals do not include meals for Big A, Rockin' Moms,
and other weekly programs which were not served because of COVID-19.*



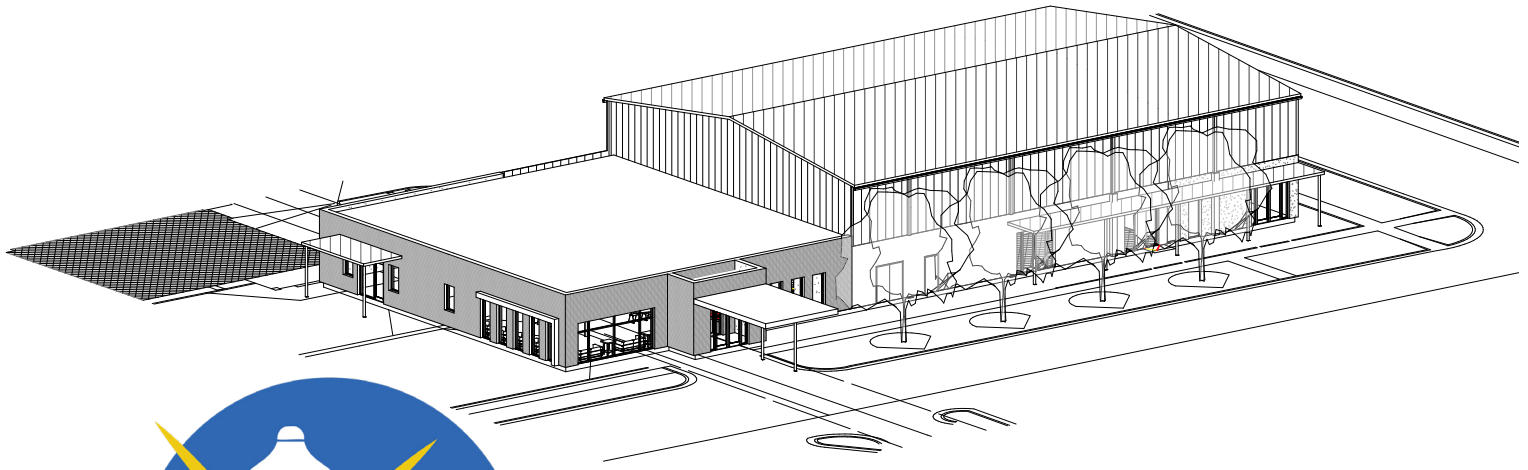
2,000+ FOOD BOXES were given out to families in need.

The boxes contained 35 meals each and totaled **70,000+** meals. We also partnered with other churches such as Templo Bautista, Primera Baptist Church, Pleasant Hills Country Church; and Abilene Baptist Association (Larry Tarver), Connecting Caring Communities, and Abilene Independent School District to serve those in need with family food boxes.

GRANTS AND DONATIONS RECEIVED:

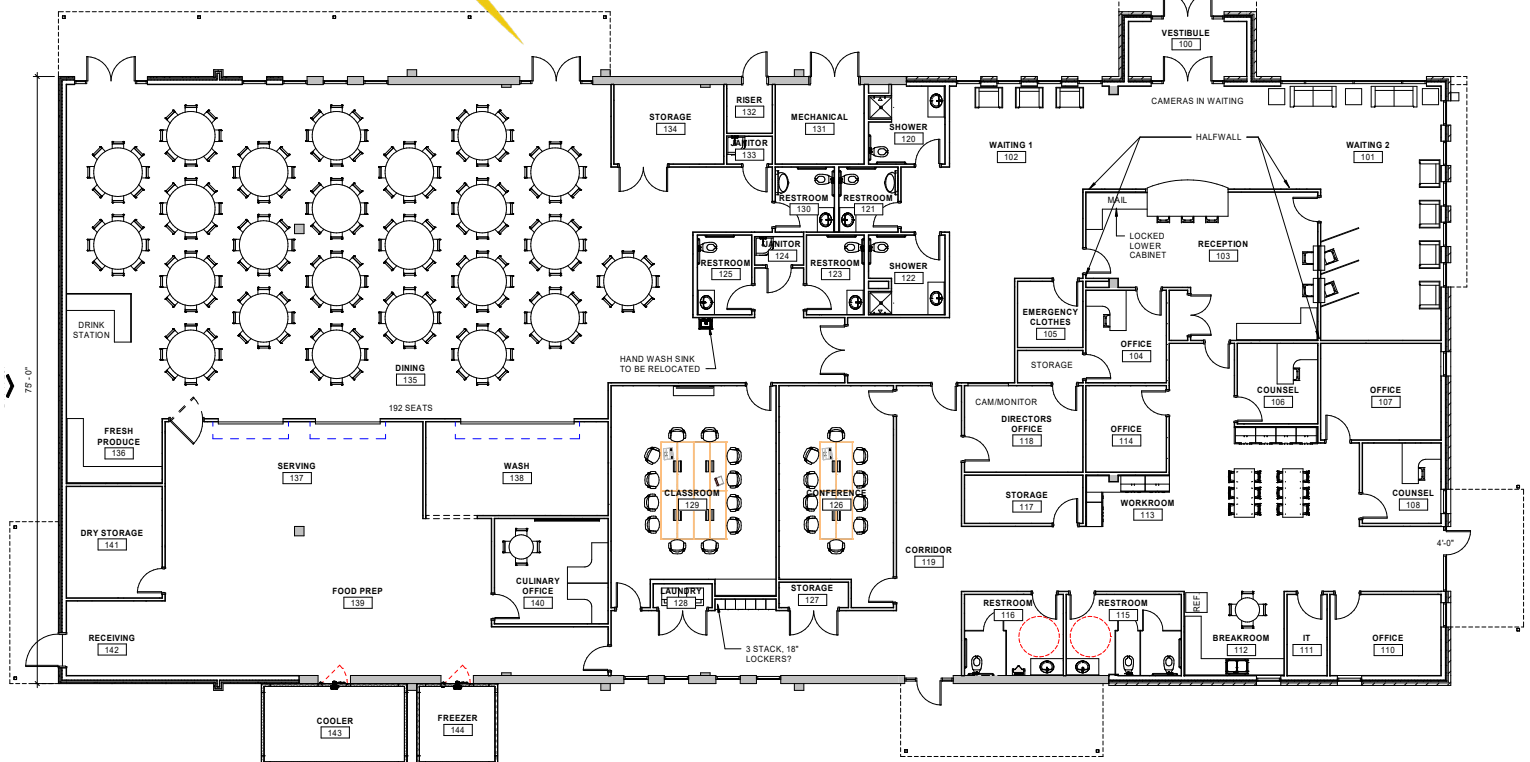
- United Way: \$30,000
- Community Foundation: \$2,500
- Texas Baptist Men: \$1,000
- Catalyst Kitchen: \$10,000
- Multiple Church Members Donations





2021

a year of new beginnings...



CITY LIGHT STAFF:

John Moore, Executive Director

Maura dela Cruz, Associate Director, Personal Assistance

Kayleen Mills, Director of Operations, Chef Trainer

Lynn Martin, Associate Director- Food Services

Melinda Norris, Ministry Assistant

Prayerworks invites you to participate in Prayerworks as an At-Home-Prayerworks Intercessor during this time of COVID-19. Our At-Home-Intercessors receive once a week by regular mail, a large print edition of the church prayer list, edited to go from Friday to Friday. If you would like to receive this list, please let Suzanne know (673-5031 or Suzanne.shaw@fbcabilene.org).

Thank you,
Prayerworks

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

February 1, 22 years

C. V. Blake

Pastor for Adults

February 2, 2 years

Letisia Salcedo

Custodian

February 17, 21 years

Debra Clemmer

Ministry Assistant to Pastor for
Administration & Spiritual Development

February 18, 8 years

Erin Fahlender

Insurance Specialist for Ministry of Counseling

February 18, 2 years

Joe Frush

Director for Pastoral Care

ABA SOCIAL MINISTRIES YEAR-END REPORT

First Baptist Church has been a partner with other Baptist churches here in town to help operate the Abilene Baptist Association Social Ministries located at 618 South Pioneer Drive. The ABA Social Ministries works to help families in need with basic food items.

First Baptist has been the go-to church for Flour and Sugar for a very long time and continues to help supply those items. In addition to the church helping with flour and sugar, the deacon body has a work group dedicated to help staff the ministry on a monthly basis. During COVID-19, that group has been called on to make deliveries of food items to the homes of those who so desperately need the assistance. This past year, Social Ministries was able to help:

1,171 Families

2,356 Individuals

who fell into the following age ranges

0-17 years old - 565 individuals

18-59 years old - 1,136 individuals

60+ years old - 655 individuals

January was our month to collect flour and sugar, but it is not too late to help in that way. Items may be dropped off at the church, or monetary donations are used to purchase flour and sugar over the next several months as supplies dwindle.

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

January 2021

Budget	January	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 226,500	\$ 226,500
Given	\$ 200,115	\$ 200,115

*This does not include the last Sunday of January

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



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH ♦ ABILENE

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