



FIRST WORDS

LOOKING AHEAD AT 2026

2026 has arrived and here at First Baptist Church, we are looking forward to an exciting year. 2025 brought us Pastor Ray and we are looking forward to his leadership during this coming year.

There are several exciting events coming up in the new year that you need to know about. On Sunday evening, January 11, we will have an ordination service for the newly elected deacons who have not been previously ordained. Those who will be ordained are: Megan Butler, Stefanie Easterling, Tiffany Hammer, Katy Hendrix, Brian Miller, Scott Woodard, and DeAnn Yeilding.

Wednesday nights will feature some new adult small groups as well as activities for preschoolers, children, and youth. For the first five weeks, there will be a new series focusing on Financial Planning/Financial Literacy. Dr. McGraw will continue to teach a Bible study which will be streamed each week as well. All these offerings follow a wonderful meal and time of fellowship in the dining room. So, starting back on January 7, Wednesday night at FBC is the place to be!

Our second annual Community Weekend will be January 31-February 1 and will feature Dr. Steve Bezner, along with several breakout sessions. You can read more about that weekend here in First Words.

2026 looks to be amazing and can hardly wait to see what God has in store for First Baptist!

Dear FBC Family,

Happy New Year! I am so grateful to have spent the back half of 2025 with you. We experienced Round Up, Thanksgiving Dinner, FBC Night at the Zoo, Trunk-or-Treat, Carry the Light, and of course Christmas Eve together. Each event and each Sunday have been a joy to get to know you and I hope it has been a joy for you as well as we have become each other's family.

The most used metaphor for church in the New Testament is family. Paul consistently calls the churches he is writing to "brothers and sisters." He uses the language of adoption to describe how God has grafted us into His family. Jesus himself said that those who do the will of the Father are His brothers and sisters. While today that evokes genuine feelings of affection, it was even more so in the ancient world. Actually, that was pretty radical language for the ancient world.

Family meant everything to both the Jewish and Roman contexts. Siblings often had tighter bonds than those who were married. People would do anything for their siblings in the ancient world and to honor their family. Then for Paul to call someone his brother or sister, Paul is summoning the church to a brand-new family, revolving not around the paterfamilias, but rather the person of Jesus Christ. The churches: shared their possessions in order to take care of one another and the poor among them, prayed together, worshipped together, served together, and of course shared in common meals together. And like any family, they had major disagreements (which ironically is why we have most of our New Testament letters). Yet they worked through them as a family seeking to do the will of God together.

At the end of this month, we will be having our Community Weekend with the topic "The Family of God." Before that weekend, we will be exploring that topic each Sunday morning culminating with Community Weekend. My prayer is that God draws us together as family, uniting us in God's love, and seeking to do His will in Abilene as it is in Heaven.

Grace and Peace,

RAY P. MILLER, DMIN
Pastor, FBC Abilene, Tx

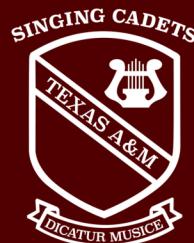


THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SINGING CADETS



ABILENE

First Baptist Abilene
January 7th 2026
7:00 P.M.





COMMUNITY WEEKEND

January 31–February 1, 2026

After a very successful event last year, we are excited about our Second Annual Community Weekend which will be held January 31–February 1. Dr. Steve Bezner will be our guest speaker, and the weekend will focus on the Family of God. As we did last year, we will have several breakout sessions on Saturday afternoon focused on “habits of the family of God.”

- **Worship** – Why we worship and why we worship the way we do.
- **Generosity** – Building generous lives as a body of Christ.
- **Mission** – Joining with God in His mission around the world and here in Abilene.
- **Discipleship** – What does it mean to be an apprentice of Jesus?
How do we build character?
- **Fellowship** – Why do we gather?

Besides worship and breakout sessions, the weekend will include a missions’ fair, dinner together on Saturday evening, our annual Intergenerational Breakfast where we come together with our Sunday school classes across the generations, and a new opportunity at noon on Sunday for a Q&A time with Dr. Bezner. Childcare will be provided for infants and preschool. Children and youth will also have things to do!

***So, mark your calendar now for January 31–February 1
for our Community Weekend.***



Dr. Steve Bezner

Steve Bezner is a longtime pastor who currently serves as Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Theology at Truett Seminary at Baylor University. He is the author of *Your Jesus Is Too American: Calling the Church to Reclaim Kingdom Values over the American Dream*.

He most recently served as Senior Pastor of Houston Northwest Church from 2013 until 2025. His passion is to see the world—become more like Heaven as people become more like Jesus.

Steve loves to preach, teach, write, and speak about the Bible in a way that is easy to understand, but also challenges people to live the life God has designed for each of them.

Throughout his life, Steve has worked to foster collaboration between local churches, serving on the board of the Houston Church Planting Network (to start new churches locally) and Houston Pastors United We Stand (to foster racial reconciliation). He works with Glocalnet to build bridges with other faiths, notably Jews and Muslims. Steve is also passionate about training other pastors. He has worked with World Hope Ministries International—helping both write curriculum and occasionally traveling to train pastors in remote global locations.

Steve loves the local church and finds perhaps his greatest professional joy in training, teaching, and coaching pastors and church leaders.

He is married to Joy and has two adult sons—Ben and Andrew. He holds his B.A. and M.A. from Hardin-Simmons University and his Ph.D. from Baylor University.

commUNITY WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Saturday, January 31

3:00 p.m. – Worship

3:30 p.m. – Breakout Session 1

4:25 p.m. – Breakout Session 2

5:30 p.m. – Dinner

6:15 p.m. – Worship

Sunday, February 1

9:00 a.m. – Intergenerational Breakfast

10:30 a.m. – Worship

Noon – Lunch and Q&A with
Steve Bezner

Counselor Spotlight:

ELYA WHITTEN, MA, LPC, LMFT, RPT

Director, Ministry of Counseling & Enrichment



Happy New Year!

January 1, 2026, marks a meaningful milestone for both my life and the Ministry of Counseling & Enrichment. After serving the past 18 months as Interim Director, I am honored to share that the interim portion of my title has officially been removed by the Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment Board. I am deeply grateful to the MOCE Board and to First Baptist Church for entrusting me with the role of Director of this ministry. It is a privilege to continue serving and leading MOCE into this next season.

My journey with MOCE began in 2009 as a graduate intern, where I completed my graduate counseling hours and later my LPC and LMFT hours under the supervision of Jennifer Smothermon. In 2013, shortly after our first son, Samuel, was born, I took the step of building a private practice through the Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment.

I have always loved listening to people's stories. As the oldest of five children, I experienced my parents' separation at a young age, a season which shaped my understanding of identity and self-worth. During that time, God remained near and placed a faith community around me that helped bring healing. By high school, I sensed God preparing me for a vocation which would allow me to walk alongside others in their healing journeys. Although I explored several majors in college, I consistently returned to the desire to listen, encourage, and help people find healing. I completed much of my clinical training at Serenity House, where I learned that pain and struggle are not limited by age, background, or circumstance, and later completed my LMFT hours while building a practice at MOCE.

In my clinical work, I believe deeply that everyone is capable of growth and change. I enjoy working with children, adults, couples, families, and those navigating substance abuse and recovery. I am a Registered Play Therapist and am also trained in EMDR. I value integrating clinical approaches to meet each client's unique needs. One of the greatest privileges of being a therapist is the trust clients place in me with their stories.

Growth requires vulnerability, courage, and resilience, and I am continually grateful to walk alongside individuals and families as they move toward healing.

MOCE has long been a dream workplace for me. Its mission to provide counseling to anyone, regardless of background or ability to pay, aligns closely with my personal calling. I have deep respect for the counselors who serve here and am grateful to work within a collaborative group practice grounded in care, integrity, and faith.

Outside the counseling room, I am wife to Dr. John Whitten, Senior Pastor of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church and mom to four incredible children - Sam, Sarah, Savannah, and Simon. I enjoy teaching 2nd-grade Sunday school and 6th-grade Merge on Wednesday evenings. I also serve as Past President on the board of the Big Country Counseling Association, supporting continuing education and advocacy for the counseling profession.

Life can be very hard and very serious, but my grandfather often reminded me, "You have to have a little fun every day." My hope is that through the counseling process, individuals and families experience healing which allows space for joy, hope, and even a little more fun each day.

THANK YOU

FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

Thank you so much First Baptist youth for your incredible generosity and hard work in organizing and participating in the canned goods drive! Your donations have already and will continue to help City Light feed and serve our neighbors. You truly made a difference. Your compassion and servant hearts genuinely reflect the love of Christ in action. Each can collected represents hope, dignity, and care for someone who is in need. Thank you for stepping up and showing what it means to serve others selflessly. We are so proud of you and grateful for the difference you continue to make.



Ministry Update: FRIENDSHIP HOUSE

What a crazy busy 5 months it has been.

When my family and I moved back into the Friendship House, we knew that we didn't need to start all over because we already knew many neighbors, but in some ways, we were brand new to the neighborhood. The past 5 months we have been primarily reestablishing ourselves in the area and meeting many new neighbors. I have been happy with the response I get from my neighbors when I am in the neighborhood now.

I have accomplished this goal in two ways, prayer walking and picking up litter. On many of my prayer walks I have been able to meet new neighbors like Tony who is a retired postal worker and lives a couple blocks away from us. During these meetings, I can talk to them, hear their story, and pray for them. It was another meeting with a neighbor couple that gave me the idea for doing the trash pickup. When I asked them something they would like to see in the neighborhood, they mentioned the trash and wanted the streets to be cleaner. So at least once a week, I take my bucket and grabber and pick up litter around my block.

Another collaboration that has developed in these beginning months is with a neighbor who Trevor had helped. Trevor helped a neighbor named Brett build a care box in their front yard. Brett keeps the box stocked with non-perishable food, sometimes gently used clothes, and

other items that neighbors and others who pass by the box can partake in. One day while visiting with Brett, I learned that he was struggling keeping the box stocked because of the financial burden. After that conservation, I went back to City Light and met with John and Rickey, and we started implementing a plan to help Brett keep the care box stocked with nonperishable food. Brett is extremely grateful for the help.



When I first met with John about moving back into the neighborhood, I had conversations with him about the house being a tool to be used not only by the neighborhood, but by the church and other community groups. The house has seen neighbors come by and visit and meet each other in the front yard or living room, but also has been used

JANUARY FLOUR & SUGAR DRIVE



by others from the community. Just in December, the house was used by BCFS as part of their progressive dinner. Ashley and I treated 20 youth and 5 adults to chicken noodle soup and salad. Then on the 21st the southside 7Brew (where our oldest daughter Abigail works) used the house for their Christmas Party. About 35 employees filled the living room area of the house to share a meal, watch highlights about their stand, and do a white elephant gift exchange.

While the first 5 months have been great, 2026 is shaping up to be a good year. We have several ideals we look forward to implementing which will not only involve our neighbors, but also the church.



DAVID ADAMS
FBC Friendship House

It is time once again for the January Flour & Sugar Drive. The need is growing as the strain of meeting the needs of those less fortunate increases. Our goal is 7,800 lbs. of flour and 6,200 lbs. of sugar. The funds donated to this drive should be designated for the ABA Social Ministries Flour and Sugar Drive. Donations can be made in Sunday School Departments, the church office, or in the boxes located at the church entrances. Funds are preferred as they can be used over the next six months to purchase additional amounts as needed.

FBC FOUNDATION

Grant Request Forms
Are Available

Forms are available in the office.
Deadline to return the form is noon,
Friday, February 6.

City Light Christmas Store: A SEASON OF GENEROSITY

This Christmas season, our church family had the privilege of turning generosity into action through our annual Christmas Store for families in need. What began as an Amazon Wishlist became a beautiful reflection of Christ's love, as our congregation came together to ensure every family could experience the joy of Christmas.



Weeks in advance, our church family faithfully shopped, ordered, and dropped off tons of gifts. From toys and games every item was chosen with care and prayer. The outpouring of generosity was overwhelming and deeply encouraging, a true testimony to hearts willing to serve.

The Christmas Store allowed families to shop for their children in a loving and welcoming environment. Parents were able to select gifts they knew their children would love, restoring not only holiday joy, but also love and compassion. Smiles, grateful tears, and heartfelt thank-yous filled the room as families: single mothers, grandparents raising grandbabies, and parents who lost their jobs, were welcomed, assisted, and reminded that they are valued and loved.

What stood out most to me was the spirit of appreciation shared by the families who came. Many expressed sincere gratitude—not just for gifts, but for the kindness, respect, and warmth they experienced. Several shared how much it meant to know they were not alone during a difficult season.

This ministry would not have been possible without the generosity, prayers, and servant hearts of our church family. Each donated gift and volunteers made a lasting impact far behind Christmas morning. We were so blessed to be able to serve 130 kids from Martinez Elementary with board games, and 68 kids whose family came to shop for them.



As we reflect on this season, we are reminded that Christmas is about more than presents—it is about sharing God's love, meeting needs, and being the hands and feet of Jesus. Thank you to everyone who gave so generously and helped make this Christmas one to remember for so many families.

ASHLEY ADAMS

A REPORT FROM CAMBODIA

Thank you FBC Abilene for being a missional church! I had the privilege of going to Cambodia for three weeks in November to teach at the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS). Thank you, FBC, for praying for me and supporting my trip to that amazing place. While in Cambodia, I taught a course at PPBS on the book of Amos to students in their Master of Arts in Christian Ministry program. I am continuing to work with them through December by means of live sessions over Zoom.

The invitation to teach at the school came through David and Lauren (Brewer) Bass, missionaries in Phnom Penh. Our church helped the Basses launch their ministry in Cambodia ten years ago and are continuing to support them. I got to know Lauren several years ago when she was a student at Logsdon Seminary, and since then have continued to stay in contact with her and David as they've been serving in remarkable ways in Phnom Penh. For several years, the Basses worked as CBF missionaries, helping to equip pastors along with the Cambodian Baptist Union. A couple of years ago, they changed the focus of their work, as David accepted a position on the faculty of PPBS, teaching Cambodian students as they prepare for ministry. Lauren also accepted a position at the school as their librarian. As with other missionaries teaching at PPBS, they continue to fully depend on gifts from their home countries for support.

The Phnom Penh Bible School, which has a spacious campus in the northern part of the city, began offering coursework in 1992. They currently have about 85 students preparing for ministry, and they are one of the few schools in SE Asia fully accredited to offer bachelor's and master's degrees.

In the graduate class I'm teaching, I have seven students enrolled, along with two auditors. One student is a pastor, another a youth minister, and most of the rest are currently working with NGOs to serve Cambodians in need. Three of my students are hoping to become Bible teachers, and two are preparing to be counselors. I have loved getting to know them, as they are curious, mature, eager to learn, thoughtful, and committed to serving Christ. We are having some remarkable conversations about how the message of Amos is relevant for Cambodia.

At one point, I asked the students what the most basic purpose of the church is; they offered several responses. One student, who pastors a rural church, gave one of the best answers: "I want the people of my church and community to understand how much God loves them, and I want them to love and serve God with all their hearts." Many years ago this man had given up some of his rice field to build a church. Later he started teaching children under a tree on his property because of the lack of adequate education in his village. Eventually, he took more of his rice field to build a school that now has 300 students.

Cambodia, a country of 17 million people, has suffered a great deal through oppression from outsiders, genocide, and decades of war. Since the early 1990's they have had more stability and in recent years have been very welcoming to foreign investment and NGOs. Today, parts of the capital of Phnom Penh are rapidly growing as an ultra-modern city; however, the majority of the country remains deeply impoverished. Cambodia is 85% Buddhist, but the church, though a small percentage of the population, is growing. It is a land of amazing resources, significant need, and great opportunity.

Currently, Cambodia is engaged in a border war with Thailand, which (as I am writing this) is escalating again. One of my students who works for World Vision has been in the border-region trying to provide basic necessities for the half-million Cambodians who have been displaced by the conflict. Please join me in praying for him and for peace in that part of the world.

Lauren and David Bass, along with their daughters Chloe (age 6) and Lily (age 3), hosted me in their home for the three weeks I was in Cambodia. It was a joy to be included in their remarkable family and to see first-hand the amazing contribution they are making as they serve the Cambodian people.

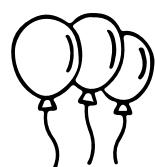
We, the folks of FBC Abilene, have been significant supporters of the ministry of the Basses for a decade now, and I'm sure for many years to come. I am grateful to be part of a church that invests in the gospel on a world-wide scale. I look forward to returning to Cambodia in the future, and I hope you will consider joining a missional engagement in that country, too.

BOB ELLIS

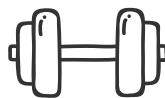


Ministry Spotlight:

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.



35
PARTY
PACKAGES



210
FITNESS
CENTER USE



13
FITNESS
CLASSES



172
SERENITY
HOUSE
INDIVIDUALS



10
FULL BUILDING
RENTALS



218
WALK-INS



18
SPECIAL NEEDS
GROUPS



3
SCHOOL
GROUPS



**SKATING RINK WAS CLOSED FOR ABOUT 2 WEEKS
WHILE IT WAS BEING RE-FINISHED (LOOKS GREAT!)**

JANUARY

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

January 1, 18 years

JOHN MOORE

Pastor for Missions

January 6, 1 year

ANGELICA GONZALES

GLO Teacher

January 7, 30 years

BEVERLY WARREN

Pianist

January 8, 2 years

MARIA TORREZ

GLO Teacher

- 4** Committee Training Lunch
Personnel Committee Meeting
- 11** New Deacon Orientation
Deacon Ordination Service
- 14** Buildings/Grounds Committee Meeting
- 19** Church Offices Closed
- 20** Finance Committee Meeting
Deacons' Meeting
- 25** Lord's Supper
Next Steps Lunch
- 26** MOCE Board Meeting
- 27** GLO Board Meeting
- 31-2/1** Community Weekend

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

December 2025

Budget	December	Year-to-Date
Required	\$630,673	\$3,684,833
Given	\$399,614	\$3,629,815*

*does not include any Dec 29-31 gifts

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



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FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE