

# FIRSTwords

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

## A NOTE FROM THE INGATHERING TEAM

*By Margaret Henslee*

As we have all been navigating the uncharted waters of COVID-19, your Ingathering Team has been meeting weekly to determine the safest and quickest way for us to return to group worship. We recognize that while we are all experiencing various levels of uncertainty in our daily lives, a return to “in-person” church has been at the forefront of many of our minds.

The Ingathering Team was assembled to provide diverse perspectives from within our church body and is made up of members from many different ages and backgrounds. The team is comprised of: Randy Lloyd, chair, John Cole, Dick Dansby, Ruth Anna Driggers, Mark Edwards, Keeley Gaddis, Jill Gossett, Margaret Henslee, Barry Moak, Jane Todd, Richard Vandever, and John Weeks. We have met throughout the month of May and attempted to examine our return to our church building from many different angles. We have taken into account state and local conditions, government mandates, and the specific needs of our church. We have also relied heavily on guidance from the medical professionals on the committee.

Please know that while we eagerly await the day when we can all worship together in person, the safety of our entire church family is of paramount importance.

After much deliberation, the team has targeted June 14 for our return to corporate worship. Over the coming weeks, our church staff will be providing greater detail on the specifics of what this will look like. We understand that other organizations and churches in our community are planning earlier returns. Please know these decisions were made prayerfully and with all of our safety and unique needs in mind.

We understand church will look a little different in the immediate future. In Mark 12, Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We pray this unique time will provide us with an opportunity to do just that, especially for those members of our congregation who are considered “at-risk” for contracting COVID-19. We do hope many of the measures taken will be temporary, and our team is committed to evaluating current data and information continually to adjust and adapt as needed.

Over the past months, we have been incredibly fortunate to be able to continue church through not only our established platforms, but also in new and creative ways. We pray as we step back into worshiping together, we would find new ways to love and serve each other as members of the body of Christ.



# words

## FOR THE JOURNEY

We have been out of the sanctuary for twelve weeks. In some ways, it seems like twelve months. We have worked diligently to bring worship into your homes and lives, which has its challenges. This adventure has been a total team effort. The end, or really “a new beginning,” is in sight on June 14. The Ingathering Team set this date contingent upon the continued flattening of positive cases of COVID-19.

If you think you're ready to return, I'm eager for you to be back. Even though I think of you while looking into the camera, I'm weary of preaching to empty pews.

The members of the Ingathering Team have been remarkable in considering so many issues. They were in uncharted territory with no map. The team has been thoughtful and prayerful in seeking God's guidance. In their four meetings, they examined what is the loving decision based on the safety of our members and being a “good neighbor” and witness to our community.

We are exploring what worship will look like on that Sunday. It will be different. Circumstances change, but God's worth and our need for worship never changes. Matt Redman writes: “Too often my worship is tamed by complications and struggles.... But I long to be in a place where my fire for God cannot be quenched..., even by the mightiest rivers of opposition – I long for a worship that can never be extinguished.” Matt called us to come back to the heart of worship and confessed he was sorry for all he had made it, where it was all about him.

I shared the challenge of preaching to empty pews. The real challenge comes in preaching to people in pews with no hunger for the heart to worship. I struggle when people leave saying, “Didn't get anything out of worship today.” Jim Cymbala says, “God will manifest Himself in direct proportion to our passion for Him.”

We celebrated Pentecost last Sunday. What a gift as we prepare to return to the sanctuary. On that day, God

poured out His Spirit and created the Church. I'll resist a lengthy history lesson on Pentecost. It would be helpful to know Pentecost broke out fifty-days (“pente”) after the resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that the Father would send “another” providing the same presence of Jesus in us and walking alongside of us.

Pentecost erupted with rushing wind and tongues of fire as the Spirit was poured out. “All heaven broke loose” as people found a fresh way to hear God's word and worship together. There was now a “new normal” as God's fresh wind and fresh fire were released. People couldn't just go back to the way things were.

Earlier, I said that returning to in-person worship was more than the end of being apart. It represents a “new beginning” if we will seize the moment. More than just returning to “the normal,” Pentecost brings the opportunity for the new. Peter quoted the prophet Joel in his Pentecost sermon “young to see visions and the old to dream dreams.” Can you imagine what would happen if the Spirit touched our hearts?

As we prepare to return together for worship, let us realize we need more than masks and sanitizer. Let us pray for the wind and fire of the Spirit to revive us again. Let us come with an unquenchable thirst for the Spirit to move in us and through the church.

I'm not sure of all that will happen on June 14. Yet, let us pray for what happens when God's Spirit invades the hearts of His people. The passage from Acts 2 about Pentecost says the people were “amazed.” I pray you will come with open hearts to be amazed. Amazed not by a worship service, a feeling, the songs we sing, the message preached, or even being back together, but amazed at what happens when we come asking for fresh wind and fresh fire.

Phil



## LETTER FROM AUSTEN TO THE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

Dear Students and Parents of Students,

It is with sadness I have to announce that both Middle School Camp in June (Horizon camps/Brownwood) as well as High School Camp in July (Student Life Camps/Estes Park) have been cancelled by the camp providers. Student Life Camps had cancelled their June camps relatively early on, but we got the news this last week that July has now also been cancelled for all camps nationwide. Horizon Camps at the Heart of Texas Baptist Encampment in Brownwood cancelled our June session, but is working on having the July session available. Unfortunately, with the social distancing observances that would need to be taken, it is almost impossible to have a camp experience for our students. Camp would definitely not be what is usually is. Therefore, I (with consideration from the church staff) have decided to go ahead and cancel both of our student camps for our church this summer.

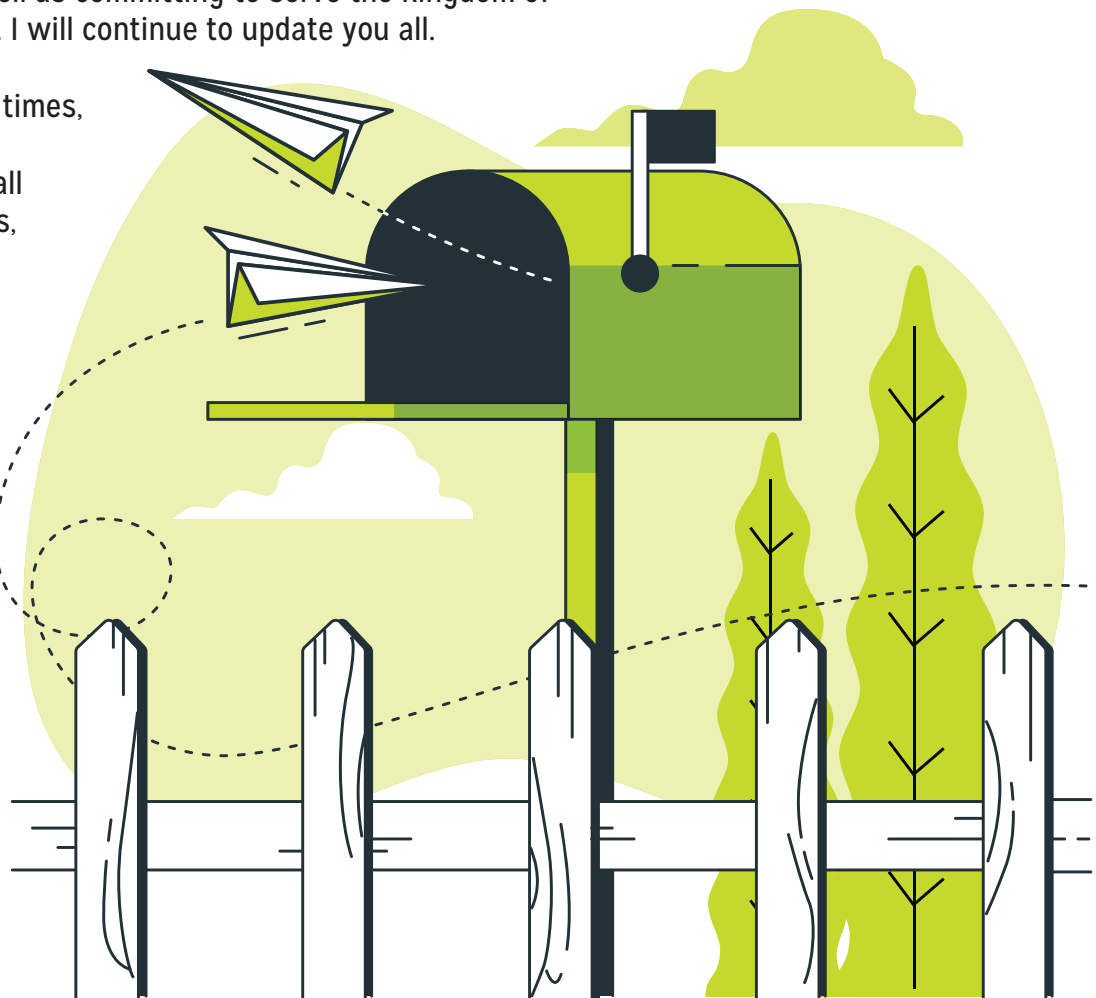
It gives me no pleasure to inform you of these events being cancelled. Youth Camp is a wonderful tradition which goes back many years and is a big part of our student ministry here at First Baptist Abilene. I personally want to inform you that we waited as long as we could before a decision was made about summer camps (and a lot of decisions were made for us). The health of our students and our families at the church are very important to us as a church staff. Health of campers was the number one reason why camp providers decided to cancel camps. Since we are so unsure of the timetable of COVID-19, these decisions had to be made. This is a hard thing for me to announce since I know the news is disheartening to so many. I cannot fix COVID-19 though and I cannot force camps to open. I hope all of you understand this situation is really out of my hands.

Since there will be no camps this year, I have already been imagining ways we can have some sort of “substitute events” for our students as soon as we can safely do so. Surely, we cannot replace camp, but we can work the best we can to give our students different opportunities to grow their relationship with Jesus, grow deep friendships with one another, as well as committing to serve the Kingdom of God in Abilene as well as the world. I will continue to update you all.

Even though we are living in tough times, continue to be encouraged. Your students are still living out God’s call on their lives. They are still gracious, loving, and are finding new ways to serve one another even among the weirdest of circumstances. I have been blessed by our students during our many Zoom small groups, Student Devotions, Game Nights, and Zoom Lunch gatherings. I am thankful to be serving and be a part of such a wonderful church.

If you have any questions, I would love to talk to you. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you out. Once again, I’m sorry about this.

*Austen*



# ACTING IN *love*

## FAMILY FOOD BOXES TO CONTINUE THROUGH JUNE

Thank you FBC Abilene for providing 665 food boxes to our friends and neighbors here in Abilene and surrounding communities. Many of those boxes have been delivered by faithful people who love God and love our neighbors. You truly have been the presence of Christ to our community. 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. City Light put to work Rand Jenkins from Texas Baptist Men and their very generous donation to help get food out to our community on May 14.



Texas Baptist Men

May 14

What a tremendous day at First Baptist Church, Abilene, TX!



Like



Comment



Share

*"What a tremendous day at First Baptist Church, Abilene, TX! We are honored to partner with a church who continually finds innovative ways to meet community needs in the name of Jesus. Hot meals out one door and groceries out another for those who have lost their jobs during the COVID-19 crisis."*



**Thank you!**

LETISHA helped with water bill - KAYLA helped with rent - GENO helped with electric bill - FELIX helped with gas bill - MELISSA helped with water bill - PEB helped with water bill - DORTHY helped with rent - ELIZABETH helped with electric bill - LES helped with electric bill - YOLDA helped with electric bill - WINNIE helped with internet bill to keep kids going to school - JESSICA helped with rent - CAROL helped with rent - ROSE helped with rent - NATASHA helped with rent - MARY helped with rent - DEBBIE helped with electric bill - KELLY helped with rent - PAT helped with rent - SHERRY helped with bus pass to get to work - CAROL helped with rent - FR helped with water bill - MARY helped with electric bill - ANNE helped with electric bill - KARRI helped with electric bill - TONY helped with rent - RAYMOND helped with electric bill - ERE helped with electric bill - AMANDA helped with rent - GLORIA helped with electric bill - LISA helped with electric bill - CHARLES helped with water bill - HENRIETTA helped with water bill - LARRY helped with water bill - BLANCA helped with rent - MARIA helped with electric bill - LEIGH helped with water bill - SHERRY helped with water bill - SONIA helped with water bill - TERESA helped with electric bill - JOY helped with rent - RODNEY helped with rent - MOLLIE helped with gas bill - HELEN helped with electric bill - DEONE helped with rent - YVONNE helped with electric bill - RAMONA helped with electric bill - TONYA helped with electric bill - MELISSA helped with rent - DEMETRIUS helped with electric bill - RICKY helped with electric bill - BRENDA helped with rent - VIC helped with water bill - NASHA helped with rent - MELISSA helped with rent - CONNIE helped with water bill - GAYON helped with rent - TIONA helped with rent - MARIA helped with water bill - MELISSA helped with electric bill - BONNIE helped with water bill - GRACIE helped with water bill - CRYSTAL helped with electric bill - LESLIE helped with rent - WENDOL helped with rent - PRISCILLA helped with electric bill - CHEY helped with rent - JET helped with rent - SOFIA helped with rent - NINFA helped with rent - JASMIN helped with electric bill - KATRINA helped with electric bill

**Thank you FBC Abilene, Abilene United Way, and Abilene Community Foundation for helping our Abilene neighbors in financial need!**

*Thank You*

Appreciation Note for Culinary Academy  
Thank You Meals

Today, Hendrick Hospice Care was the recipient of some of your beautifully prepared food. Unfortunately, I had already eaten lunch so I took mine home for dinner. I'd like to extend my appreciation for the magnificently prepared club wrap I just enjoyed for dinner.

Not only was it delicious, but it warmed my soul and lifted my spirits.

It's a mad world out there right now and we could all use a little culinary masterpiece to get us through the storm. Thank you to the outstanding folks at City Light for the sustenance!

# TOGETHER AGAIN

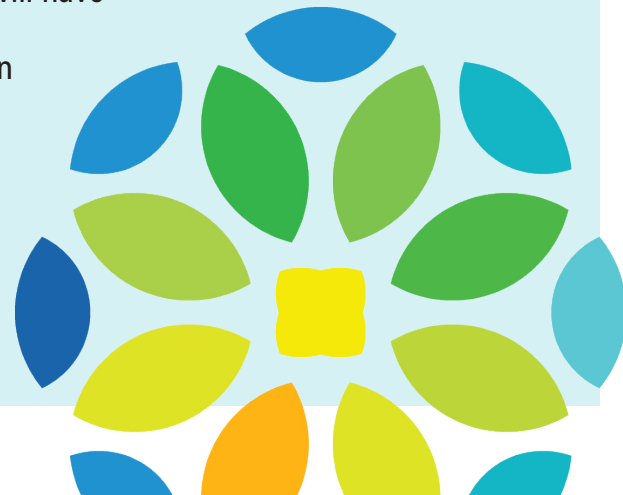
**Church will look a little different, but we're excited to see you on June 14!**

We're working hard to provide a safe environment! As you know, Governor Abbott has announced that houses of worship are welcome to have in-person services again! As we move towards gathering together again, your health and safety are a high priority for us. So, we are cautiously following suggested guidelines and have put some safety precautions in place.

**Here's what you can expect when coming to church in-person.**

## WHAT FIRST BAPTIST IS DOING:

- Most internal doors to the sanctuary will remain open to minimize anyone touching surfaces. The rest of the church will be closed off (i.e. library, nursery, kitchen, etc.)
- We will frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms.
- We will disinfect and sanitize the sanctuary, to the best of our ability.
- Hand sanitizer stations will be provided throughout the church.
- We are limiting the number of available seats to maintain social distancing. We're encouraging family units to sit together.
- Because of our great concern for the safety of our children and families, the nursery will NOT be open. Please make plans to bring your preschoolers and children to the service with you. Please continue to stay updated with our preschool and children's ministry on our Facebook page.
- Becky will continue to do a children's sermon. However, children will remain seated with their parents.
- Overflow seating will be available in the dining room.
- We will not be passing the offering plates, but instead we will have places available throughout the sanctuary and church where you can drop in your tithes and offerings. You can also continue to give online at [fbcabilene.org](http://fbcabilene.org) and through the FBC Abilene app on your smartphone.
- No paper orders of worship or children's pages will be available.
- Drinking fountains will be unavailable.



## WHAT WE'RE ASKING YOU TO DO:

- This is a season for grace towards one other. Let's be loving and kind to each other, knowing that people have diverse perspectives on our current situation and how to navigate it. Let's be intentional in creating an atmosphere both at home and at church of encouragement and hope.
- Wearing a mask is **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED**. We have a deep love and concern for each of our congregation members and want to protect all as best as possible.
- Masks will be available if you do not have your own.
- Please maintain social distancing of six feet between you and other people when on campus.
- Sanitize your hands at our available sanitation stations or by washing your hands in our restrooms.
- Please do not gather in groups while at the worship service. We all love to shake hands and hug, but for now just wave and say hello to others from a distance.
- We would love to see you, but if you... are at risk (or live with someone who is considered at-risk), have a compromised immune system, feel sick, are showing signs of respiratory illness, currently have a fever above 99.6, have been around anyone that's been sick, or are over the age of 65, our Governor has strongly encouraged you to consider enjoying our service from the comfort and safety of your own home. You can do so from our website or on KRBC.

### Parking and Building Entry/Exiting

- Enter the church building only through the North (3rd street) doors (Education building entrance, left and right doors on the front of the sanctuary, and handicap entrances on the east and west of the sanctuary. Choir and South entrances will all be closed.
- So, we ask that we keep the north parking lot available to those with limited mobility.
- If able, please park in the south parking lot and walk around the building.
- The Hope Center (formerly First Christian Church) parking lot is available for use.
- As you exit, please do not gather in the building or on the porch. If you would like to talk, please do so outside and well away from the doorways.

### Seating

- Every other pew will remain vacant (Note all signage).
- 6 ft of spacing will be clearly marked on utilized pews.
- Families/households arriving together must remain together.
- Family/households should sit together (No 6 ft spacing).
- Individuals should be seated 6 ft apart and/or 6 ft from the nearest household cluster.

### Sunday School

- For the safety of church family, we will continue Sunday school through Zoom. A list of classes who are gathering by Zoom will be available soon.
- You can also watch C.V. Blake's Bible study lesson on the church's Facebook page (First Baptist Church, Abilene, TX) each week.

***Thank you for your continued love, grace, and understanding as we diligently work to figure out how we can continue to be the body of Christ, bringing peace and hope, in the midst of the fear and chaos of the unknown.***

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE LONE RANGER ABOUT WEARING MASKS

I grew up watching the Lone Ranger in the fifties - loved westerns. Even with his black mask, he used his mask for right. The Lone Ranger at one-time was a Texas Ranger, the sole survivor of a group of Rangers killed in an ambush. He wears a mask to conceal his identity as he travels throughout the West fighting for law and order. Besides the mask protecting his identity, he used it as a way to protect others and the most vulnerable.

We have a chance to defend the most vulnerable. The fourteen person Ingathering Team strongly recommends we wear masks as we return to the sanctuary. They stated: "We want you to wear a mask to protect others and our most vulnerable populations."

As a Pastor responsible for the safety of this beloved flock, I'm struggling to understand the divisiveness over wearing a mask during a deadly pandemic which threatens our community. I realize there are a lot of divergent opinions about the best way to respond. I can appreciate how the emphasis on wearing masks can be unsettling to some - my ears stick out. The great opportunity for the church is to call us to "love our neighbor" and work for unity. We just celebrated Pentecost, when God broke down the walls which can divide us and gave us the language of the Spirit who helps us to understand each other.

As we read the New Testament, the Christian faith isn't much into "my rights" of personal freedom. Jesus talked about being a servant (Mark 10:41-45) and laying down our lives for others (John 10:11; 1st John 3:16). Christ lived a sacrificial life and calls us to this kind of obedience.

The Bible is filled with examples of how a believer in Christ is not an independent individual who makes decisions which only involve himself or herself. Paul believed we are always a part of a community and our behavior affects others.

Take for example, the controversy over whether to eat meat sacrificed to idols. (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) I realize this debate might seem completely irrelevant to the issue of wearing masks or just trying to survive, but Paul wants

us to know as Christians, doing what is "*beneficial*" for others and "*the principle of love*" override any of our personal opinions.

Sure, the Corinthians were free to eat meat. However, the Apostle warned them to not allow their exercise of freedom to become a stumbling block to the weak who were susceptible to believing in those idols. For the vulnerable Christians, eating meat sacrificed

to idols could harm and confuse them in their faith. The Apostle gave them and us a guide, "*We have a right to do anything, but not everything is beneficial or good for you.*" (1 Corinthians 10:23)

This passage goes way beyond what we eat. It applies to what can cause a brother or sister harm. Paul's genuine concern is that we need to be guided by "love of neighbor" to protect us from the misuse of our personal freedom. We are so susceptible to idols. Calvin said, "The mind is a personal idol factory." So, let us not make an idol out of personal freedom.

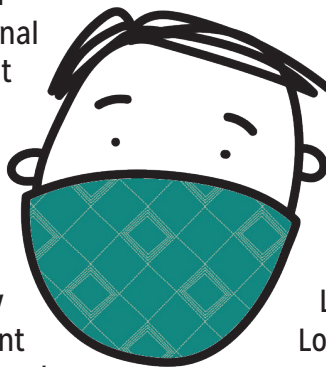
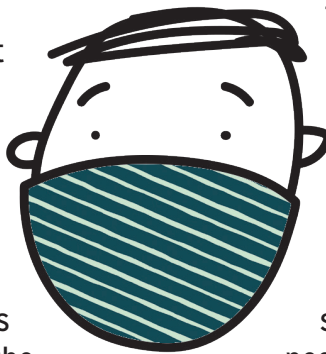
As followers of Jesus, our freedom is limited because we belong to Christ and are slaves to Him. Our freedom is limited because we are a part of a community - our actions affect others.

So, whether to eat meat in Paul's day or wear a mask in our time, our criterion is to determine what is beneficial for others and the ways it impacts the community. The Corinthians were free to eat meat, just as we are free not to wear a mask. The question about masks or any of our actions is not about freedom, but what is beneficial to others? What is the loving thing to do?

Let us wear a mask and be like my hero, the Lone Ranger. The mask is a symbol of love and respect for others. As I watched the Lone Ranger, his mask was never a sign of weakness, but of strength as he came to the rescue of the weak.

Hi-Yo Silver, Away...,

Phil





## WHAT WILL WORSHIP SOUND LIKE ON JUNE 14?

During the COVID-19 crisis, there have been numerous reports, Webinars, and ZOOM meetings regarding how singing or playing an instrument can impact the spread of the virus. This research has been a central resource for the consideration of the use of music in our services of worship and has been balanced against the centrality of music's role in corporate worship. It is our belief that when social distancing is coupled with the use of masks, the risk of spreading the virus is mitigated.

Following consultation with members of the staff and members of the Ingathering Team, when we gather for the worship service on June 14, the following practices will occur:

- The music portion of our worship will be accompanied by the Celebration Orchestra
- The Celebration Orchestra will be appropriately distanced in the choir loft
- Congregational singing will be included in the service
- As an act of love and care for other worshipers, you are encouraged to wear your mask while you sing, as research regarding singing has shown to increase the spread any airborne virus
- There will not be a printed order of worship
- Since we enjoy such an outstanding "congregational choir," you will all be invited to sing, and by singing, give voice to the worship of God.

As our understanding of the virus grows and greater research becomes available, we will continue to utilize vetted and approved musical elements until the Sanctuary Choir will join the Celebration Orchestra in our worship services.

## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

We have made the decision to cancel the "on-site" Vacation Bible School which was to be held the first week of June. Although we have decided it is best to not hold a physical VBS, we have determined we will host a "Virtual VBS" later this summer. The dates have not been determined, but we are thinking it will be held sometime in July.

Our plan, at this time, is for the staff to video a daily skit/Bible study time and to have a craft each day.

As soon as the dates are determined, we will get information out via our website ([fbcabilene.org](http://fbcabilene.org)), on Facebook, and through email. Please be in prayer for VBS and for those who are preparing for the event.



## GIVE HOPE UPDATE

Some have asked what is happening concerning Give Hope, so we thought a brief update would be good. For the most part, we are in the midst of the “waiting” period as the Architectural Firm of Parkhill, Smith, and Cooper continues to work on drawings and gather information of the current buildings at the Hope Center. They have met with City Light and GLO to better understand their needs, requirements, and desires. Due to the virus restrictions, the committee has not met in person and will be scheduling electronic meetings in the near future. Please continue to pray for this project which is moving forward and, in some ways, taking advantage of current situation to be able to do some of the behind scenes work.

GIVE  HOPE

# STAY *connected*

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](http://www.fbcabilene.org)



#fbcabilene

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



@fbcabilene

<https://twitter.com/fbcabilene>



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,  
ABILENE, TX

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

## STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

June 1, 19 years  
Judy Santibanez  
GLO Teacher

June 24, 28 years  
Jeanne Jowers  
Church Accountant

## STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

May 2020

Budget	May	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 301,940	\$ 1,433,049
Given	\$ 245,007	\$ 1,393,600

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



FIRST BAPTIST  
CHURCH • ABILENE

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