

FIRST *words*

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

MY NEW ROLE

By Joe Frush

What does Senior Adult Ministry look like in our church? As the new Director of Pastoral Care, I will be working closely with C.V. Blake to find answers to this question. In order to thoroughly define our ministry, we will encourage and welcome input to assure we offer a complete program for all maturing adults. It is vital to plan the program with senior adults, not just for them. It is also important senior adults have the opportunity to serve as well as be served.

There were numerous well-qualified candidates for this new position and it is humbling to have been chosen. I want to thank the search committee members who spent a large amount of time in their deliberations and also the personnel committee who created this new ministry position. It will be an honor to serve the many facets of our maturing adults, and I look forward to working closely with C.V.

When I was considering applying for this new position, the job description looked very familiar with what I had done in my previous career. I retired a year ago, January 2018, after working for 45 years in Healthcare and Senior Living. I have been a Hospital Administrator, a Licensed Long-Term Care Administrator, and a Certified Assisted/Independent Living Executive. Working with senior adults has always been my passion and this special ministry was yet another way to serve.

During each of these valuable job experiences, I have learned that the key to success is to establish a strong base of five essentials which when implemented, will result in dynamic programs and services. Planning and considerations will include mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual opportunities. An overall goal in this special ministry is to establish a very positive culture for all of those we serve.

The senior adults in our church are a very diverse group with numerous interests and abilities. It is my hope to provide a new vision of aging which will give affirming purpose, an even stronger connection with God's plentiful grace, and the ability to impact our church and community. This new journey has just begun and I look forward to the many opportunities and blessings that it will bring.

Joe Frush,
Director of Pastoral Care



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

Dr. Kelly Pigott has a new book out, *From Eden to Heaven*. I want to borrow some quotes inviting us to a life-changing journey over the forty days we call, Lent. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "There is meaning in every journey that is unknown to the traveler." We just don't always recognize the gifts awaiting us in every trip. In Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, the Hobbit, Frodo, sings a walking song, "Still around the corner there may wait a new road or a secret gate and though I oft have passed them by, a day will come at last when I shall take the hidden path...." Kelly observes in the song, "...the unsettling desire to break out of the ordinary by leaving the comfortable routine to go exploring."

Let us go exploring for what awaits us the next six weeks. The journey of exploring Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on the Saturday before Easter. It can be dangerous, but this journey can deliver us. It calls us to walk a path we've never tried before, or examine the self-imposed roadblocks to abundant living.

Who came up with the idea of Lent? The short answer is: The Bible, which should please Baptists. The prophet Joel declares, "Return to the Lord with all of your heart, with fasting and mourning." Our Lord began His ministry with the announcement: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." Do I hear an "amen" for Lent and getting serious about kingdom living?

The observance of Ash Wednesday comes from the Bible as we begin the Lenten journey of exploring. As the ashes are imposed on our foreheads in the sign of the cross, we hear the ancient words of Genesis: "From dust you came, to dust you shall return." Those ashes come from the palm fronds of last year's Palm Sunday as Jesus rode into Jerusalem to save us. Ash Wednesday reminds us life is a fragile gift from God. We realize the brevity of life. It is time to choose a new path or discover a gate we have passed by.

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The practice of Lent goes back to the fourth century. The church practiced a forty-day period of preparation for those candidates who would be baptized on Easter Sunday. The time of spiritual preparation was so successful, the church said, "Let all of us during these forty days before Easter grow in understanding what it means to follow Jesus." The church called this time Lent, which was like the first Sunday school.

The word "Lent" comes from the Latin word which means spring. This holy season is the gate and pathway which leads us to the spring of resurrection and new life. Why forty days? Moses was transformed by forty days on Mount Sinai. David was empowered during Goliath's forty-day challenge. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. The forty-day journey of Lent helps us explore in the words of Thomas à Kempis, "There is no other way to life and inner peace, than the way of the Cross."

Lent has been labeled as a time to give something up. No wonder we have reservations about this season. Usually we are giving up something we don't need in the first place. Lent is so much more than the abstinence of chocolate or caffeine. It is making room for God to provide for our cravings or emptiness and depend on Him for everything...everything.

Lent is really about how God wants to fill us. It is making room to receive the good gifts of grace God wants to

Continued from page 2.

give us. It trusts God is always leading us to a new road, discovering the secret gate, or a hidden path we have often passed by in our busyness. Lent is the life-changing journey that God's love never fails, never gives up, or runs out on us. I hope you will take this journey over these forty days. Don't forget, every journey has meaning, which you might not see right now. Lent becomes the spiritual journey to take the "hidden path"

which leads to life you never expected. Go exploring over these forty days. You might find a secret gate of grace you have often passed by. See you on Wednesday, March 6, for our Ash Wednesday service.

God is always just around the corner,

Phil

DISCIPLE NOW 2019

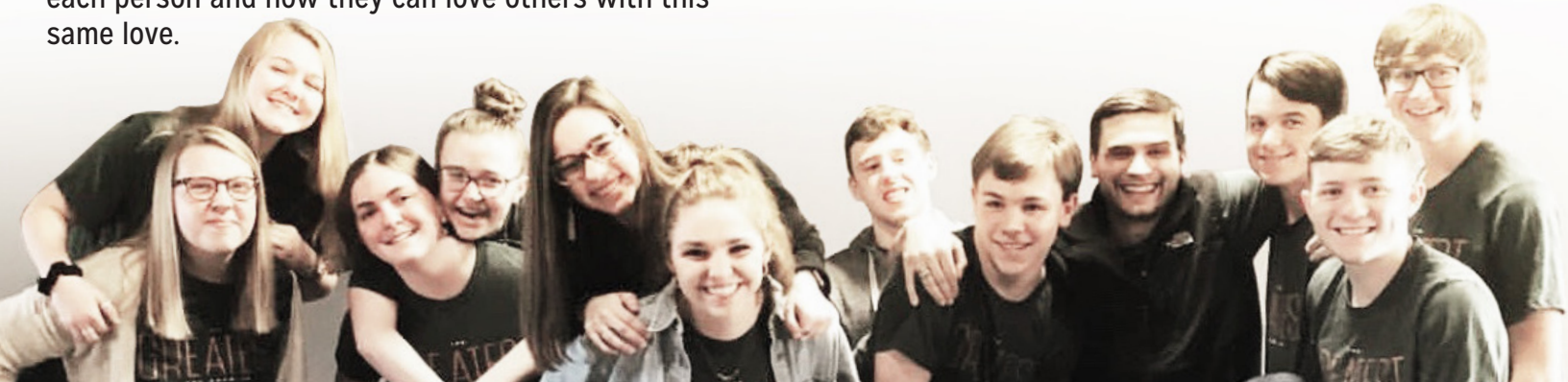
by Kelsey Higbee, Interim Student Minister

Disciple Now was held for the high schoolers in the student ministry February 15-17. This weekend exists for students to be able to be in an environment where they can bond with one another while growing in their spiritual formation and learning what it means to be true disciples of Christ. This is an event the students look forward to every year and it always ends up being an extremely formative weekend for the students and volunteers involved.

The theme of this year's Disciple Now was "The Greatest" based on 1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." The students spent the weekend talking about these three ideas and how to truly live them out in their everyday lives. Through the Bible studies, the students and their leaders walked through why Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, the importance of faith, hope, and love working together, and why love is the greatest of these. The final session of the Bible study from this weekend says, "It is one thing to say that we should live out the love of God as followers of Jesus, but it is a whole different thing to actually understand and live out the love of God. The love of God - the greatest of these - is expressed differently by each person as we follow Jesus and grow in our relationship with Him." Students learned how God loves each person and how they can love others with this same love.

We had around 30 high school students attend DNOW this year and countless volunteers which allowed this weekend to be successful. Adults led small groups, let teenagers stay in their homes, served meals, bought food, facilitated stations during our own version of the Amazing Race, and gave their time to make sure students had a great weekend. I am so grateful for the number of ways FBC Abilene shows students they matter. While it may not seem like a lot, helping out with events like this lets students know they are important to the life of the church and their parents, Sunday school teachers, and mentors care about them. By just showing up, students feel valued. Thank you so much to everyone who helped make this weekend a success. Thank you also to those of you who prayed for the weekend and for the students. It is evident the students truly experienced God during the weekend. Whether during the worship services, Bible studies, jam sessions which happened in the living room of a host home, or hanging out with their peers, students experienced God. I am continually blown away by these students and their faith.

The student ministry at FBC Abilene is a special place. These students are wise beyond their years and actively seek to be faithful in all they do. Thank you for continuing to pray and support the students during this time of interim. My prayer is for the students to know they are loved and they matter, both in the life of the church and to the God who created them.



LADIES' RETREAT 2019

by Angela Lewis



NO, I'm NOT going on the Ladies' Retreat!!! From the first mention of the retreat, I had no intention of attending. When asked, I always had "something" going on that weekend. As it turned out, Monty and I were going to be in Wisconsin helping our kids move to Minnesota that weekend. The car was packed, reservations made, boarding for pets arranged, and we were heading out in 18 hours...UNTIL, we received a call from our son saying the weather didn't look conducive to moving! I was ANGRY!!! I wanted to see our kids and granddaughter AND now, I had NO reason nor excuse not to go to the retreat!



At 4:20 p.m. Friday afternoon, I was lying on the bed fretting. I got up and put the bare minimum in my bag, the CPAP machine, and a Bible! Maybe that would make me look spiritual!



As I left the house, I told my husband, "You KNOW how much I DON'T want to go!!! He said he did. I told him I was going to get my friend to stop hounding me, once and for all!

When I arrived, I recognized very few ladies - which is not a big deal for me. I rarely meet a stranger. I didn't smile, I didn't introduce myself, just walked around avoiding eye contact and interaction. Anyone who knows me well, knew that I was not a happy camper about being at the retreat.



And so, the evening began: "Abiding and not Striving." Now, what kind of simplistic, unintriguing title was that for a grumpy old soul!!! But, then, Kate began to speak. The Holy Spirit quietly began to move into my cold heart. I left immediately after the final amen and went straight to the room, got ready for bed and was on the couch when my roommates came in. I did NOT want to converse with anyone. Not even my friend!



Saturday morning, Kate opened up - asking for us to pray for ourselves and then her. I complied. And then, she spoke: "The only way to abide is to surrender." She related that to snorkeling! The Holy Spirit knew exactly how to get me hooked! I, Angela Lewis, the fixer, needed to stop striving and start abiding in Him!!! But how? Kate walked us through an activity she wanted us to do alone. She instructed us to "go be alone with God." Oh, my goodness! I do NOT remember such a powerful time with the Lord! I dissected Psalm 46:10 word by word. And when I was finished, my prayer and communion read as follows:

Sit down and relax, Angela. Believe me. I know what is happening. I'm still at the control board. Just let me be in control! Remember, I'm everywhere. I know what is needed. I AM omniscient. I even have the solution! Now, relax. Sit here with me and patiently watch me work. Don't tell me how. Don't think you must help me!



I actually understood and felt the presence of the Spirit. I returned to the conference room enthusiastically and relaxed. I took His yoke and let Him carry my burden.

Matt 11:28-30.

I am practicing abiding in Him!

FINAL NUMBERS FOR 2018 By Mike Greenfield

Last year, I wrote an article in the March edition of First Words explaining how we ended the fiscal year 2017. I finished the article with the phrase, "We ended the year fantastic!" So, the same question comes up again this year and it would seem the word fantastic is just not descriptive enough. Unbelievable may be the best word I can come up with to describe how we ended the year. I believe in fact, it was better than any other year in the history of the church.

So, what happens to the "extra" funds? First of all, we thank God. We must always give credit to where the credit lies and when it comes to the tithes and offerings of the church, the credit goes to God. He provides everything we have and I truly believe when each one of us is in a right relationship with Him concerning our tithing, giving Him 10% of what He has entrusted to us, then unbelievable things happen.

There is a process for handling the finances of the church. The finance committee is tasked with oversight of all the tithes and offerings which come to the church. They meet monthly to ensure we are in a solid financial position and all of our debts are paid in full. They also wait until the February meeting to see how we actually finished the prior year due to bills coming in during January which were from December and were a part of that budget year. So, at the finance committee meeting held on February 19, they looked at the final numbers. There was roughly \$300,000 in over-collected, under-spent funds. So, they had asked various committees in the church if there were things that needed to be done which had not been done due to lack of funding in the regular budget cycle. As most of you know, we have been dealing with some sound system issues for the past year and the current system is 13 years old. Yes it is hard to believe the sanctuary remodeling was done in 2006 and at that time we bought new equipment, but like any electronic equipment, it needs to be replaced. We had two options, replace all that needs replacing or half now and half later. Because of the availability of funds, they chose to replace all that needed to be replaced and it totals right at \$150,000. Seems everything in the sanctuary is expensive and we are not buying the top of the line, but we are getting what we need.

They also were able to fund two small items for the television ministry, engineering station and an updated editing computer. There was a request from First Friends for some new toys, tables, and training which was to go to the foundation, but they funded now from these funds. The personnel committee requested bonuses for the staff based on policies of the church. They also funded the remodeling of the two bathrooms outside the dining room, both of which have not be dealt with for some time. The missions committee requested the shortfall of the Unified Missions Offering be completed and so \$7,429 was given to make the \$80,000 goal.

The committee also wanted to make sure they did not just spend for the sake of spending, so they increased the fund balance of the church from one month of the total budget to six weeks of the budget. The fund balance is what covers the cash flow of the church when the giving does not match the spending. We anticipate that happening each year, the giving comes in somewhat steady all year and then a big chunk comes in late December. However, the spending does not match that pattern, so the fund balance ensures we can pay our bills each month. The increase to the fund balance was around \$65,000 from the overage.

So, once again, it was an unbelievable ending to a fantastic year and I am extremely excited to see what God will continue to do through us in 2019.

ACTING IN *love*

ABILENE DOWNTOWN *community* AND FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, ABILENE

by John Moore

Last year in the mountains of Glorieta, our FBC Staff dreamed about the ways we as a church could engage our downtown community to be a better neighbor to our surrounding community. Staying downtown has always been near and dear to the heart of FBC and rethinking strategies to more effectively engage our neighbors this past year has proven to be so beneficial and meaningful. New significant relationships have started and intentional engagement has taken place.



FBC is joining in the Collective Impact strategy in meeting community needs. Important meetings have been taking place to bring community leaders together in order to meet big needs of our community. This has allowed us to work with 211 Texas, United Way, Abilene Chamber of Commerce, AISD, other nonprofits, and the City of Abilene. Working together allows us to deal with big issues and FBC Abilene is a part of these important discussions.

One new area of engagement which has benefited the church was joining downtown in celebrating the Christmas Season. Christmas lights circled the church buildings facing Hickory. Angels greeted you as you entered our church office and education building. Our sanctuary and bell tower were lit up in green and red, as well as a beautiful lighted cross proclaimed the real reason for Christmas by the front doors of the sanctuary. While all this was a beautiful display, it was an intentional decision to join in with our business neighbors in making downtown a fun place to be during the holidays for all our Abilene neighbors. FBC was able to meet an important financial sponsorship of City Sidewalks when another sponsor dropped their financial support. Your faithfulness in giving and serving allowed FBC to meet this need. FBC is now a member of the Downtown Business Association and looking forward to serving our community together through this important relationship this year. FBC worked together with the Grace Museum to present Christmas Carols with the organ. These are important relationships which allow us to serve and live the difference that comes from our faith in Christ.

Perhaps the most rewarding new connection has been Celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with our country and our city. This holiday was officially celebrated by FBC for the first time ever with the church offices being closed, a community meal being served at City Light, FBC participating in the March across the MLK Bridge, and this great day culminating with the MLK Banquet at the Convention Center. Our own Dr. Christopher led the invocation for this evening and joined our hearts in serving together (get a copy of his prayer for the evening...it was powerful!). Our speaker, Barbara Gervin-Hawkins, State Representative for Texas' 120th House District, challenged us with a new word coined by some students "Staywok" meaning stay involved and engaged. Be a part of people working together to help change our community.

I am thankful to serve at a church who cares beyond our walls and is willing to work together and join where God is moving downtown and in our great city. Thank you FBC Abilene for caring!



celebrating 20 years

OF SERVICE AT FBC ABILENE

Last Sunday, we took time in worship to honor and thank C.V. Blake on his 20th Anniversary with First Baptist Church. Following the service, a reception was held in the dining room for people to be able to individually say thanks. Here are a few pictures of that occasion. Special thanks goes out to the Personnel Committee for arranging the reception. Chair Dana Pearson and her 6th Grade Girls Sunday school class decorated the room and arranged the food items. Laura Grametbaur made all of the wonderful cookies for the event.



CHURCH PICTORIAL *Directory*

The new church directories have arrived will be ready for distribution on Sunday, March 3. As a part of the directory process, each family who had their photo taken for the directory receives a complementary directory. The directories will be in the welcome center with the family name labeled on the back. The directories will be on tables around the welcome center in alphabetical order. You may come by Sunday morning before or after Sunday school, and then following the morning worship service. At this time, we do not have additional directories to be purchased.

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

March 15, 24 years
Phil Christopher
Senior Pastor

March 29, 1 year
Matthew Broyles
Pastor for Emerging Adults

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

February 2019

Budget	February	Year-to-Date
Required	\$245,000	\$604,657
Given	\$386,065	\$741,425

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

EVENT CALENDAR:

MARCH

- 2 Foundation Board Meeting
Personnel Committee
- 6 Ash Wednesday Service
Buildings & Grounds Committee
- 7 CCC Breakfast
- 13 Spring Break - No Activities
- 17 Missions Committee
- 19 Finance Committee
Deacons' Meeting
- 20 GLO Board Meeting
Visionary Team Meeting
- 24 New Members Lunch
FLC Board Meeting
GAP at Play Faire Park
- 31 Parent Event w/Rod Pruitt



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