



FIRST WORDS

BREATHE

What happens when 115 women, ranging in ages from late teens to 90's, gather for almost 16 hours over a Friday evening and a full day on Saturday? The answer is, you get rooms full of beauty, talent, love, encouragement, laughter, and sometimes even some tears!

I had the opportunity to witness and be a part of something this wonderful during our annual Women's Retreat held here at our church, February 23 – 24. During the weekend, we sang, prayed, read scripture, breathed, and heard encouraging words from our own Jill Hudson. There were opportunities to participate in sessions where one could learn to do yoga, bake bread, pot plants, create beautiful art, or learn to be creative while Bible journaling. Some also learned about both our PrayerWorks and Healing Hearts ministries.

Throughout the weekend, whether we were worshiping or creating, we were encouraged to breathe, to be still and focus on God.

(Continued on Page 4).

BECKY TUCKER
Pastor for Children



THE WEEK CALLED HOLY

Our theme for the season of Lent, Refining: A Journey to the Cross, began on February 14 with the celebration together of Ash Wednesday. As we received the ashes on our foreheads (or hands), we heard the words "Remember who you are; remember Whose you are." That identity is what guides us through our journey of faith, not only in the season of Lent but in all of the days we seek to follow Jesus.

We belong to God (Whose we are) and are His beloved children. We are to be imitators of Christ (who we are), bearing our crosses in imitation of the One who has shown us the way in which to walk, offers us the salvation, and empowers us to walk in His footsteps.

During the season of Lent, we are intentional (and hopefully more than just this season) of seeking to walk in the way Jesus walked. We are intentional about seeking to be transformed by the love of God into people who more fully mirror Christ's love into the world. We are, even as we are beloved, being refined into more perfect imitators of Jesus.

One of the ways we can seek to be more perfect imitators of Jesus is through remembering His life, passion, death, and resurrection. We spend the season of Easter remembering His resurrection, we spend the season of Lent remembering

His temptation and life, and spend Holy Week remembering His passion and death. This week, while not always practiced by Baptist churches, is a week of power, darkness, and transformation. In a world which doesn't want to spend too much time pondering the darker aspects of our life or our faith, it is a week we need to remember, to ponder, and to spend time in worship.

At First Baptist, we will have several opportunities to remember that week well. We will begin by marking the Triumphal Entry on **Palm Sunday (March 24)** during morning worship. Our children will wave palm branches and we will sing and study scripture as we remember the entrance of our One True King into Jerusalem and what it means for Jesus to be our King. Next, we will celebrate Jesus' act of washing feet and sharing communion with His disciples as we observe a service of worship on **Maundy Thursday (March 28 – 6:00 p.m.)**.

Everyone is encouraged to attend this service (you will not be made to wash feet) as we remember the servant's heart of our Lord and Savior. During the day on Friday, we will have a self-guided meditation on the **Stations of the Cross on Good Friday (March 29 – 11 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.)** in the Sanctuary. That evening, our choir and orchestra will perform a **Requiem on Good Friday (March 29 – 7 p.m.)** written by Heather Sorenson (who

will be with us to talk about the requiem) in honor of those who died during COVID. This will be an opportunity for us as a church and Abilene as a community to hold space for the corporate grief we have experienced over the last few years, deeply appropriate on the darkest day in the Christian calendar.

Additionally, during Holy Week, FBC partners with St. Paul United Methodist, First Central Presbyterian, and Highland Church of Christ to hold our Holy Week Lunches. These brown bag meals, bring your own lunches (drinks and desserts provided) are an opportunity for us to worship together with our brothers and sisters from other local churches as we remember this year's **Holy Week Luncheon theme – 24: The Last Day of Jesus**. These lunches will begin at 11:45 a.m. (doors open), begin programming at 12:10 p.m. (speaker and singing), and conclude in time to get back to work (if you have to!). The schedule is as follows:

These lunches are always filled with insight and a healthy dose of humor as we spend time learning alongside our brothers and sisters from other traditions.

Experiencing together the darkness and difficulty of Holy Week can help us anticipate with greater joy the coming of **Easter Sunday (March 31 – 10:30 a.m.)**. Seeing the cross in its darkest moments makes the flowered cross all the brighter, and acknowledging the moments when our Lord was in the tomb makes its emptiness all the more powerful. I hope you (and invite those who don't have a church community as well) will be able to join us for both Holy Week and Easter.

Thanks be to God that we serve a living Lord. I am blessed to be able to follow Jesus with you and thankful to be your pastor. I look forward to our continued journey as we walk farther together in Lent, work together during Holy Week, and celebrate the resurrection Easter Sunday!

Monday at Highland Church of Christ

Cliff Stewart, *Pastor of First Central Presbyterian*

Tuesday at First Baptist Church

Benji VanFleet, *Pastor of St. Paul United Methodist*

Wednesday at St. Paul United Methodist

Brandon Hudson, *Pastor of FBC*

Thursday at First Central Presbyterian

Shane Hughes, *Pastor of Highland Church of Christ*

Love,

Brandon

BRANDON HUDSON
Senior Pastor



(Continued from Cover).

I asked some of our women to write their thoughts about our weekend:



The simple word “Breathe” was the theme of our annual Women’s Retreat. We learned many new interpretations of what the word breathe can mean.

We heard an inspiring testimony from Nancy Haddox, who took us on her cancer journey and how she claimed hope from her experience. Her family and friends formed a team to breathe prayers over her.

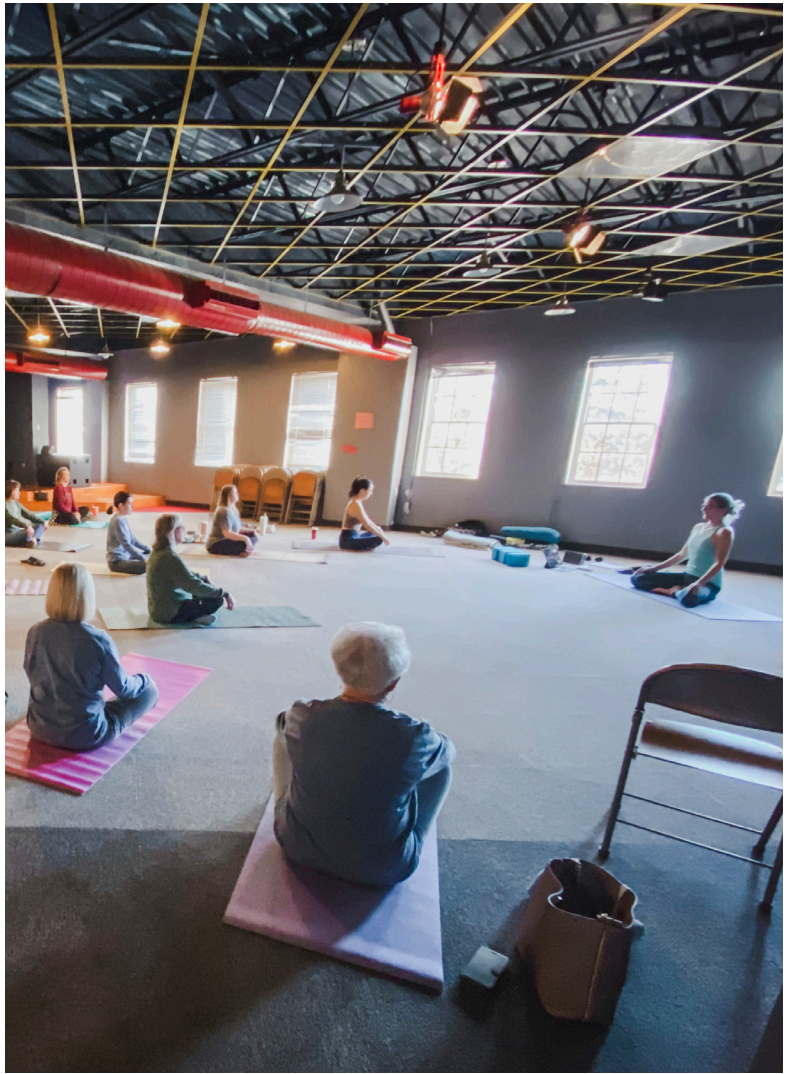
Jill Hudson led a session on Holy Breath. She spoke of three significant breaths of God.

- At creation – God breathed life into the soil of the earth and with that breath we became living souls.
- At the incarnation – Jesus as a baby took His first breath.
- At the crucifixion – Jesus took His last breath and declared “it is finished.”

We learned that the name of God – “Yahweh” contains the actual breath of God. We speak His name – (inhale) “Yh” (exhale) “Wh”.

Yes, “breathe” is a simple word, but we learned that God’s breath gives us life, calmness, knowledge, peace, and hope.

–Sandy McGraw







As one of the younger members at the FBC Women's Retreat, my favorite part was worshipping with all ages. The Bible journaling worship taught me a new way to BE STILL in God's presence.

- Ali Cole

I enjoyed the retreat so much. I have been to several retreats at the off-site facility, but I liked having it here at the church, in a place we are familiar with and where we have a personal connection. I enjoyed the variety of activities we were given the option of choosing to participate in. I did yoga and art. Probably my most enjoyable part of the weekend was getting to visit with other ladies in the church who I know, but never get to sit and just chat with. The meals were fabulous, and the "together time" in the dining room was a very special time for me. I enjoyed the worship time and singing the songs (most of which I did know). Nancy's testimony was very moving and heartfelt. Everyone involved in organizing, preparing, and orchestrating the weekend deserves a huge round of applause. I hope we are able to have the retreat at FBC again next year, and I am already looking forward to 2025.

- Jeannie Wesley



Such a great time this weekend with so many fun, interesting women and such a great span of ages! Would do it again!

- Connie Peacock

We were very blessed with wonderful food throughout the weekend. Several of our women brought delicious snacks and breakfast items. However, our dinners and lunch on Saturday were fabulous! Mike Greenfield led a group of men in providing these meals. The men who helped him were John Moore, Eddie Rains, David Hall, and John Weeks. We are very grateful that each of these men took time during the weekend to help prepare, serve, and clean up!

Our workshop leaders put so much thought, prayer, and preparation into each session and we are grateful for each of them. Thank you so much to: Jessica Pietsek (Yoga); Cherry Curry, Aletta Allred, Marylan Bacon, Pam Bingham, Sandi McDorman (Healing Hearts); Jill Harris & Brenda Stuteville (Culinary); Amy McAdams (Bible Journaling); Jecilly Varghese & Sarah Martin-Werntz (Gardening); Marsha Lovelady (Art); Trina Fink, Louise Gray, D'Anna Smith (Prayer Walking).

We were also blessed to have Jill Hudson as our speaker as well as Britney Tucker and Bridgett Gann lead us while we worshiped through singing.

This weekend went so smoothly because of a wonderful team of planners! Thank you to Marci Cole, Bridgett Gann, Callie Harris, Jill Hudson, Amy McAdams, Jennifer Miller, D'Anna Smith, Jecilly Varghese, Jennifer Woodard, & Beth Young.

What a blessing it is to be a part of a church who supports such wonderful events! We are already looking forward to next year, but we are all going to take some time and BREATHE!



CITY LIGHT CULINARY ACADEMY UPDATES

We are halfway through our Spring session of the City Light Culinary Academy. We are seeing growth in each of our students mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually, which brings us great joy. Our current students are committed to putting in the hard work to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom.



Two of our Fall graduates, who were experiencing homelessness while in class, are now housed in their own apartments! Both men are working, paying their bills, and still finding time to give back by volunteering with our community meals as their work schedules permit. We are so proud of these two men who are continuing to use the valuable skills they learned in the Culinary Academy to bring about transformation in their personal lives.



STEPHANIE STEWART
City Light

FLOWERING OF THE CROSS

MARCH 31

Easter is such a beautiful Sunday as we celebrate our risen Savior. One way we celebrate the beauty of the resurrection is through the flowering of the cross. For the past couple of years, we have asked the families of our children to help us as we flower the cross during the worship service. Families will be able to meet their child/ren immediately following the "Children's Time" on the west side (organ side) of the sanctuary.

Our preschoolers will also be able to participate as we will have a smaller cross in the Welcome Center for them to flower.

It has also become a tradition to have a cross on the front porch of the sanctuary to allow people to bring their own flowers to decorate. We do recommend the stems be cut 4" – 6" prior to bringing them. This is one more way to help depict the beauty of Easter in the transforming of the cross.

The Flowering of the Cross is such a beautiful depiction of the resurrection and the beauty it brings to our lives and we hope this will be a blessing to each of you.

DISCIPLE NOW 2024

This year's Disciple Now was a blast! The students got to spend the weekend of February 9-11 learning what it means to OVERFLOW by the Spirit of God with hope, joy, peace, and love in all things. The speaker and band did an amazing job leading our youth during worship, the breakout session leaders wonderfully led the students in Bible study and game time, and our host homes made sure to open up their hospitality for the youth to get some much-needed rest.

If you ask any of the students what their favorite part of the weekend was, you will probably hear a few of them mention their adventures during the scavenger hunt or playing the team-games. Each year, our youth split into 4 teams (Orange, Blue, Yellow, and Green) to challenge one another in friendly competition and fellowship. If you ask someone on the Orange Team about DNow, they will probably brag about winning the competition this year. Hopefully, many students will also tell you about the joys they had this weekend learning about God and spending time together as the Body of Christ. My personal highlight for the weekend included seeing our students and their families fellowship with one another for our Parent/Student breakfast on Sunday morning. This hour was a wonderful glimpse into the intergenerational ministry of our church.

A very huge thank you to everyone who helped make this weekend possible. Thank you to the kitchen crew for your work making our delicious meals. Thank you to the deacons for providing the food for our Sunday breakfast. Thank you to the host homes for opening your house for our students to gather together. Thank you to our leaders and volunteers who kept Disciple Now running. Thank you to the other members of the staff for your assistance and constant encouragement. This year ended up being amazing because of you. I am looking forward to next year and I even have some things planned already for what is to come.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may

OVERFLOW

with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

- Romans 15:13 -



HUNTER BROWN
Pastor for Youth



DNOW YOUTH AT CITY LIGHT

On February 10, City Light was excited to host the DNow students for part of their morning. Our goal was to help them understand why and what we do here. One way we did this was with a game that our director, Stephanie Stewart, adapted from Mission Waco. While the game seems simple, it challenges the players to escape homelessness despite their limited access to resources (food, shelter, money) and limited decisions they can make. Students had to earn tokens which represented the various resources people need to survive and to succeed: dignity, mental and physical health, social support systems, and money. At the end of the game, we asked the students to reflect on their experience and feelings. Several students expressed empathy for our neighbors, as well as concern for their situations. One student explained that they realized “life is hard and sometimes you still struggle no matter how hard you try,” and another recognized that “[doing] things that will benefit you can still be draining.” Other students acknowledged how luck and unfairness are involved with homelessness and poverty; some students felt sympathy for our neighbors and others were more frustrated with the systems this game worked to explain. In the end, several students expressed their fears of homelessness happening to them or others they know. While this was just a game, we are glad that the students gained a better understanding of the situations our neighbors face, and developed more empathy for their fellow humans made in God’s image.



MAKENZIE MORRISON

Clerical Assistant
at City Light

THE WEDNESDAY THING SPRING '24

Continuing with our theme, Aging: It Takes Awhile, The Wednesday Thing will feature the following:

MARCH 6 – Teresa Baucom (yes, she is kin to Lon) is employed by Hamil Family Funeral Home. She will be here to visit with us about Planning Your Funeral. This is one of those things we will be glad we did.

MARCH 20 – Jermaine Watkins will speak on the topic of The Physiology of Aging. Jermaine has served in the United States Army and retired from the United States Air Force. He is a Licensed Trainer and works at West Texas Rehab.

APRIL 3 – Joe Hancock, Vice President and General Counsel for HighGround Advisors, formerly The Baptist Foundation of Texas, will be here to visit with us about End of Life Giving and Before, Pathways to Stewardship Beyond Giving. We have wanted to have Joe come for quite a while. He will also be available for individual appointments.

APRIL 10 – Chuck Rodgers, Vice President of Development for West Texas Rehab Foundation, will come to share about From Loss to Living and Moving Forward. Chuck and Cindy had been married for 30 years before her death in April of 2017. You might remember him as the Area Director of Young Life in Abilene for many years.

APRIL 17 & 24 – Pastor Brandon Hudson will speak to us about The Spiritual Side of Aging.

The Wednesday Thing meets each week at 4:00 p.m. in the chapel.

Due to Spring Break and Holy Week, there will not be a Wednesday Thing on March 13 and 27.

MEXICO CITY MISSION TRIP 2024

Join us for an unforgettable mission trip to Mexico City from May 18-25, 2024! Calling all young adults and college students to be part of this meaningful journey.

For more information or sign up, contact Beth Young (Beth.young@fbcabilene.org or 325-675-8112). Don't miss this chance to make a difference and experience the beauty of serving others firsthand!

SPREADING LOVE

In the heart of our community, love blossomed as the fifth-grade Sunday school class, under the guidance of their teachers, came together to assemble Valentine treats for our neighbors at City Light.

Each package was adorned with heart messages, reminding those who would receive them that they are cherished members of our community.

Through this simple act of giving, they learned that love knows no boundaries and even the smallest gesture can brighten someone's day. I pray a lesson will be carried out with this young class long after the treats have been delivered, reminding them that love is in the air when people come together to spread kindness and joy to others.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."
- John 13:34-35



BETH YOUNG
Ministry Assistant to
Pastor for Missions



MISSIONS UPDATE

FBC is excited to partner with Elket Rodriguez as an encourager church through CBF.

Elket Rodriguez serves as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel, dedicated to supporting migrant communities along the U.S.-Mexico border, spanning four U.S. states (Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California) and six Mexican states. Rodriguez works tirelessly to encourage churches on both sides of the border to engage with migrants and asylum seekers, providing pastoral care and support.

His ministry goals center on connecting migrant families with essential resources such as shelter, food, medical and legal assistance, job opportunities, and transportation. Additionally, Rodriguez advocates in Washington D.C. and Mexico for the implementation of sensible immigration policies which prioritize both the safety of border communities and the humanitarian needs of migrants.



Elket Rodriguez

New Mission Opportunities Coming Soon

Please begin to pray how you can be involved in any or all these opportunities!
Watch for more details coming soon!



Macedonia
June 2024



Friendship House
Backyard Bible Club
June 17–20
9:00–11:00 a.m.



McAllen Mission Trip
Construction Team
July 11–14 or longer
Family Team July 14–19



CITY LIGHT

Community Ministries

4,877

MEALS SERVED

Includes: Sunday Breakfast, Community Breakfast, Community Lunch (both dine-in and take out), and Produce from the City Light Market

602

VOLUNTEER HOURS

Personal Assistance:

658

WALK-INS

for assistance

350

MAIL

Delivered and checked

185

SHOWERS



FLC

Family Life Center

34

PARTIES

317

Individuals

FITNESS CENTER USE

16

Classes

FITNESS CLASSES

267

Individuals

SERENITY HOUSE

5

GROUPS

FULL BUILDING RENTAL

764

Individuals

WALK-INS

46

Individuals

SCHOOL & HOME SCHOOL GROUPS

125+

Individuals

BASKETBALL LEAGUE PRACTICES

PAWS FOR PEOPLE



"Wee paws" for this announcement: "Paws for People," FBC's ministry to train dogs so they can visit the sick and shut-ins, recently reached a milestone in its 13th year. Linda Chisholm, the certified trainer who founded the ministry in 2011, said this year's class has a second-generation owner for the first time. Emily Callaway, owner of "Maverick," is the daughter of Troy and Carla Limbaugh. Carla and her Yorkshire Terrier, Ebear, now nearly 17, were in one of the first classes. Carla said she was the one who got the most blessings when she and Ebear, four pounds of love, visited in nursing homes and especially in hospice facilities. One of her favorite memories is visiting a 105-year-old lady in hospice care. The cheerful lady, wearing a pearl necklace and living life to its fullest, had signed up for a pet visit but confessed, "I really don't like dogs." Carla told her Ebear was really good with people and asked if she was sure she didn't want to hold him. "Does he bite?" the woman asked hesitantly. Carla answered, "Oh, Honey, Ebear is 13-years-old. He doesn't even have any biting teeth." "Neither do I!" the woman exclaimed and opened her arms to Ebear. "From then on they had a fast connection," Carla said.

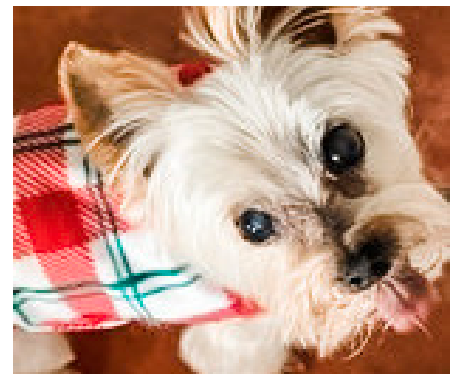
Classes are held in the University Place, usually on Monday evenings, for six weeks. Owners can give their dogs "treats" to reinforce correct behavior in training, but the treats are not allowed in the final "exam." Dogs which successfully complete the course (and nearly 100 percent do, even if it takes a couple of tries for some dogs) receive certification which allows them to visit in hospitals, assisted living centers, nursing homes, and hospice facilities. "Many times, the persons being visited had a dog they were unable to bring with them to the nursing home. Those people are especially appreciative of our visits." Linda said. The current class comprises 10 dogs, ranging from a large Golden Retriever to Linda's own tiny rescue she calls "Hope."



Linda Chisolm teaches "Hope" to "stay" as she walks away.



Karen and Tom Camp, with Goldendoodle, "Murphy" listen to Linda Chisolm's instructions.



Ebear: no biting teeth, but lots of love for 17 years

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

We are so excited to offer you a wonderful ministry opportunity for our church family at GLO. As many of you know, we started having chapel each Wednesday morning for four of the GLO classes, ages two through Pre-K. I kicked it off in February with a focus for the month on love. The kids have a Bible verse they are learning for the month, we are singing songs, and reading a book about the love of Jesus. This has been so much fun and the kids absolutely love it!

So, this is where you come in! We are looking for church members who would be willing to volunteer to do chapel at GLO on Wednesday mornings at 10 a.m. for about 15-20 minutes.

Our staff thought it would be so sweet for the kids to see other church members and build those relationships. Ideally, we would like for you to commit for the month to make scheduling easier, but we are willing to look at all options. Let me say, you will not regret doing this ministry...these kiddos are so sweet and loving. I am happy to help you prepare in any way needed with getting the supplies or anything else you may need. I would like to make this as easy as possible for you and GLO. We will have to do a new background check on each volunteer, but that is very easy.

Please consider this opportunity and if you would be willing to serve. You may be a lay person who is a retired school teacher, stay at home mom, or just feel the need to minister to God's Little Ones. If this is you, please call or email me and I'll be happy to give you more information.

Blessings,

Candy Rains

Candy.rains@fbcabilene.org | 325-675-8192



REQUIEM

It has long been a practice of the Catholic church to offer a Requiem Mass, or Mass of the Dead. Just as intercessory prayers are offered for friends and family, the Requiem Mass is used in the practice of the Catholic church to intercede on behalf of departed souls as one of the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Since prayers for the dead are not a part of our beliefs, how does the Requiem fit in the theology and practice of the protestant church?

Over the years, the Requiem has come to mean: a Catholic Mass; a secular concert; or a non-Catholic, but Christian service. While the Requiem reflects the profound and mysterious nature of death, this mysterious and sad portrayal is eclipsed by the power of hope we have in the Resurrected Christ! The Requiem we will sing on Good Friday was commissioned for those lost to the COVID epidemic.

In its eight songs, this particular Requiem speaks of eternal rest from their labors (Introit), our desire and need for mercy (Kyrie), this mercy springs from a holy God (Sanctus), this mercy comes to all from a God who became man in Christ (Pie Jesu), this mercy and grace is victoriously brought to us and placed up on us by the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Agnus Dei), we lift our eyes to the hills (Psalmus, Psalm 121), in eternity, all who die in the Lord will eternally shine like the stars on a moonless night (Lux Aeterna), and we are reminded of the perfect peace and rest—quoting the hymn Like a River Glorious—in the conclusion (Benedictus).



REQUIEM

HEATHER SORENSON

We will be joined by the composer, Heather Sorenson, who has written and arranged choral music for the church for many years and has appeared in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Constitution Hall as pianist and conductor. She is a free-lance composer, lecturer, guest artist, and clinician who resides in Dallas, Texas with her beloved beagle, Darla.

March 20, 2024

YOUTH EASTER SERVICE

6:00–7:30 p.m. at
University Place

Students, please
make plans to
attend and let Hunter
know if you can
participate.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

on Good Friday

March 29
11 a.m.– 5:30 p.m. in
the Sanctuary

MARCH

- 3** Personnel Committee Meeting
- 10** Foundation Board Meeting
- 13** No Meal/Activities (Spring Break)
Buildings & Grounds Committee Meeting
- 17** Missions Committee Meeting
- 19** CLCM Board Meeting
Finance Committee Meeting
Deacons' Meeting
- 25** Holy Week Lunch
@ Highland Church of Christ
- 26** Holy Week Lunch @ FBC FLC
- 27** Holy Week Lunch @ St. Paul UMC
No Meal/Activities
- 28** Holy Week Lunch @ First Central Presbyterian
Maundy Thursday Service
- 29** Church Offices Closed (Good Friday)
- 31** Easter

STAY CONNECTED



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**First Baptist Church,
Abilene, TX**

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

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

March 19, 6 years

MATTHEW BROYLES

Pastor for College & Young Adults

The Abilene Young Professionals (AYP), a program of the Abilene Chamber of Commerce, is thrilled to announce 2024's Top 20 Under 40 recipients. The program recognizes 20 young professionals who are outstanding in their field and are making a difference in the Abilene community. Three of the 20 recipients are members of First Baptist Church and we also wanted to congratulate them on this award. Those from FBC include: Keeley Gaddis (Chief Financial Officer at Jacob and Martin), Sean Morgan (Financial Advisor with First Command), and Collin Zalesak (Architect and Associate at Parkhill).

Congrats!



STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

February 2024

Budget	February	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 260,000	\$ 450,060
Given	\$ 181,205	\$ 435,092

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



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

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