

FIRSTwords

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

ReLaunch: SUNDAY SCHOOL STARTS BACK OCTOBER 11

Relaunch: VERB--reintroduce or restart.

On October 11, we plan to start Sunday school back with in-person classes here at the church. Sunday school is not a new concept for us, so we are not starting a whole new program. However, we all can see that COVID-19 has changed just about everything, including how we will do Sunday school.

Ask 10 experts about how to do something and you will get 11 different answers! That is pretty much how we as a staff face every decision we make about church programming in light of the virus. We know we are not the experts, so we gather as much information as possible and then make our decisions. Of course, the safety and health of our members and guests are of utmost concern, but we also desperately desire to be back together studying God's Word! So, on October 11, we will relaunch Sunday school with a few new twists:

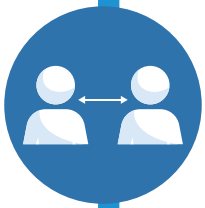


- all participants (unless under the age of 4 and those with health issues which cannot wear one) will be asked to wear a mask



- all participants will have their temperature checked as they enter (anyone with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will be asked to go home and return next week)

- all participants are asked to enter one of three entrances (all others will be closed)
 - North side -- glass doors by the nursery
 - South side -- GLO entrance
 - West side -- entrance by the chapel



- NO coffee, donuts, juice, or water will be provided

- Classes will be relocated based on size and distancing requirements

- Not all classes have chosen to meet in-person, but rather will continue to meet by Zoom. If you are a part of a "zoom" class, but would like to come and participate in one of the classes which are meeting in-person, you are more than welcome to come and be a part of the class of your choosing.

We hope and pray that all will continue to show grace to each other as we journey together through these crazy times. We respect each person's decision about whether or not they will participate and so look forward to the day when masks and distancing are a thing of the past. But until that time, we look forward to this relaunch and our study of God's Word through Sunday school.



words

FOR THE JOURNEY

A number of years ago, I served as Pastor for the Day at Truett Seminary. In addition to preaching in chapel and a lunch seminar, I also met with a class on pastoral ministry. During class, I was asked if seminary prepared me for the challenges of church ministry. Well, that was one of those “yes/no” answers.

The professor, Dr. Robert Creech, offered this insight to the student’s question. He noted the two of us are contemporaries. We studied in seminary in the early seventies. We began our ministries in the mid-seventies when church was more predictable, if church can ever be predictable. Worship was traditional, although you might see a guitar show up now and then. Church-life still had more of a central place in the lives of people. Sunday school was a given. As a whole, people didn’t shop for a church like a good restaurant. Even the names of churches remained with traditional denominational labels. But, in the words of the prophet Bob Dylan, “The Times They Are A-Changin’.”

Dr. Creech went on to observe during our pastoral lifetime of ministry since the seventies, we have faced more cataclysmic changes since the Reformation in 1517. Church began to change for Robert and me...and others. Worship styles – one church sprang up offering five different worship styles. Seemed we were more into choice, than commitment. There were the worship wars and the pastoral casualties from those battles. There was the para-church movement, storefront churches, life-groups, and a variety of Bible study options. While all of this was happening, the church was pushed more and more to the periphery with Sunday being a sports day rather than the “Lord’s Day.”

The flood of change continues with COVID-19. Virtual worship...and we are talking about more than watching your own church. You can watch some of the most dynamic worship services from all over the country in the comfort of your home. Zoom Bible study. I’m not suggesting all of these changes have been bad – God



OUT OF COMPLEXITY,
find simplicity.

-Albert Einstein

has been at work. If we are going to be a healthy church on mission, we need to realize the changing landscape before us. It seems like we are “canoeing the mountains,” when we need hiking boots.

This quote from Einstein, “Out of complexity, find simplicity,” might seem out of place from the person who developed the theory of relativity and quantum physics. Plus, what does it have to do with the church and following Jesus? You ask, what’s the point? Good question.... Out of all of the complexity of our lives and cultural conflict of today, what is the simple mission of the church? We are not talking about being simplistic, minimizing the challenges, and conflicts. To simplify is to discover clarity, alignment, and focus to use words of Thom Rainer.

With all of the complex changes which have occurred over the last 50 years, with none impacting us more than the changes over the last seven months, we need a revolution of simplicity. In our complex and complicated world, people are hungry for the simple. One of the positives out of COVID-19 is to examine and clarify the purpose of the church – to simplify, clarify, align, and focus.

We are excited about “relaunching” Bible study on Sunday October 11. As we come back together, our simple mission

will be to make disciples and followers of Jesus. More than how many people are present, the clarifying questions will be: are people in our church being transformed and are we making the kind of disciples Jesus made? As we undertake this process, we will have to decide what to keep and what is unnecessary – some things have changed. Hans Hoffman wrote: “The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” Yet, the one thing, the simple thing, is that we are here to make disciples who live with the values of Jesus.

This journey is still a work in progress. Yet, we are taking the first step as we return to simplify and clarify. We are coming back together to design the process and programs to make disciples whose lives are being transformed by the call of Christ. Simplify – love God – love others – serve God.

Simply said...

Phil

2020 UNIFIED MISSIONS OFFERING

We can change the world one community at a time!

GIVEN TO DATE: \$14,700 OF OUR \$80,000 GOAL FOR 2020

Seven Mission Offerings Combined Into One



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is just one of the seven Mission offerings the Unified Missions Offering funds.

In this issue of First Words, the missionaries have provided updates and photos of the ministries your giving helps support!

If you would like more information on these missionaries or how to contact them, please call the Missions' Office at 325-675-8112.

PRESCHOOL

NEWS FOR OCTOBER 11

FINALLY...we get to see you for Sunday school on OCTOBER 11!! We are so excited to be back and we want you to know we are doing everything we can to keep your child safe. We want your kiddo to have the best experience learning about Jesus while seeing their new teachers and friends.

Since we have a finalized date now, here are a few things you need to know when coming that Sunday:

- 1. We really need to know you're coming so, we will require reservations in order for you to have childcare on Sunday mornings for Sunday school & worship. Reservations can be made through our website or by calling Jennifer at the church office, 675-8105. This will be a very strict policy and we will need reservations by Wednesday at 5 p.m. I may have to limit how many spots we have in some classrooms and it will be on a first come, first served basis.**
- 2. We will require temperature checks outside the glass doors of the preschool department on each child & parent along with using hand sanitizer upon entering.**
- 3. I will allow one parent to enter the preschool department, but older siblings are not allowed to enter or pick up preschoolers. I realize older siblings have been able to do this in the past, but we just can't do it at this time.**
- 4. We will not be able to social distance preschool children...so our families need to realize this before bringing their kids to the nursery. We will do our best to keep everything clean and sanitized so your kiddo is safe.**
- 5. Our volunteers/teachers will need to wear a mask just like you would if going to church.**
- 6. I'll have my cell number available to you if you need to contact me anytime that morning.**

I know it's a lot of information, but we will have a great time and I know kids are ready to be back!

Candy Rains



FBC CHILDREN

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL RELAUNCHING OCTOBER 11

I am so excited we are going to be gathering together for Sunday school on October 11. We will be requiring masks and, before coming to the fourth floor, everyone will need to have their temperature taken at one of the only 3 entrances which will be open. These entrances are the west door to the education building (chapel/youth side), south doors (GLO entrance on N. 2nd), and the north doors to the education building (glassed doors on N. 3rd).

We will begin at 9:00 a.m. with an extended PrepTime (room 408) and then divide into smaller classes. Our classes will be broken into groups consisting of Kindergarten - 2nd grade and 3rd - 5th grade. Classes will be determined when we see how many children we have, as we will need to keep our numbers small in order to provide proper space for social distancing during crafts and such. We will be providing each child with their own craft supplies.

One of the biggest changes our children will see is that we will not be providing donuts when we return. I know that will be disappointing, but we feel it is best at this time. We will however, have individual bags of snack things such as Goldfish, Granola Snacks, etc....

I am super excited about getting back together and hope each of you will be able to join us October 11. For those unable to join us in person, we will continue to post SS lessons on our First Baptist Abilene Children & Preschool Ministries Facebook page. If you are not a member of that page, please send a request as this is a private page. The SS lessons will not be posted until Sunday afternoon as we will video during the Sunday school time.

Looking forward to seeing everyone October 11!

Becky Tucker



City Light Community Ministries is launching a **CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Program Purpose:

To work with neighbors in crisis, helping them find stability and hope in a loving Christian environment.

Paired with a caring volunteer, neighbors experiencing crisis will find:

- stability through relief of their immediate needs
- hope for a more secure future by working on goals to improve self-sufficiency.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY!!

Have you been looking for a way to get more involved in the community? We will be training lay case managers to walk alongside our neighbors as a support and advocate and to share hope with those experiencing crisis. If you would be interested in finding out more, contact the Missions' Office at 325-675-8112. Watch for more details on this opportunity!



Dear friends,

Hello from New York City! My name is Lesley-Ann, and I serve in ministry alongside those experiencing homelessness in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of Manhattan.

I am so grateful for CBF's commitment to long-term presence. The Offering for Global Missions funds my presence—my salary, housing and benefits—making it possible for me to be here long-term. Trusting relationships take time and intentional care, and sometimes they take years to develop, but the reward in collaboration, mutuality, and community change is exponential. Long, deep relationships are what change the world, and it's how I as field personnel best catch onto what God is up to in my neighborhood and how I can join in. Thank you for your gifts to the offering, making life-changing ministry all over the world possible. And thank you for your specific support of my ministry in NYC. Your monthly financial gifts to my ministry fund the Living Well program as well as all our homelessness work in the neighborhood. I'm grateful to be on this Encourager Church journey with you. I look forward to learning from you, growing together, and joining in God's transformational work as partners.

Peace and grace,

Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey

SOUTHEAST ASIA UPDATE

Hello FBC Abilene church family. While we have been a part of FBC for many years, you may not know us that well as our attendance is rather spotty. We are Hunter and Mary and have served as field personnel in Southeast Asia with CBF since December of 1996. Caleb is our 24-year-old son who was baptized at FBC Abilene, and Hannah is our 21-year-old daughter who was baptized in the South China Sea. CBF Global Missions has three mission commitments: Cultivating Beloved Communities; Bearing Witness to Jesus Christ; and Seeking Transformational Development. (For more detailed information on CBF mission commitments and context, please go to https://cbf.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CBF_Mission_Distinctives_Low-Res.pdf) We thought we would share with you aspects of our ministry that reflect these commitments.

Cultivating Beloved Communities:

One of the most rewarding ministries we helped establish in the past few years has been the creation of a Bible study for young adults in our hometown. Our city has many NGOs where young adults volunteer for varied amounts of time. Our group has ranged from 8 – 25 individuals from at least 12 different countries. We study the Bible once a week and have a wide array of social events which have included events such as game nights, camping trips, American Thanksgiving, and an indoor Easter egg hunt. This group of young people has created authentic community in which we love, encourage, and support one another. It is a joy to see the vitality and spiritual growth.

Bearing Witness to Jesus Christ:

The mission commitments we mentioned earlier – cultivating beloved community, bearing witness to Jesus Christ, and seeking transformational development – flow naturally from our relationships with Christ. We have had wonderful opportunities to share our relationship with Christ through the young adult Bible study as well as through our development work. We also walk alongside a national couple, J and B, who focus upon church planting and training among an unreached people group. We provide support and encouragement. Their work is difficult, and they often need a listening ear. They also foster children who are at risk in their community of becoming victims of human trafficking and sex and drug trades. They work closely with their parents to provide a safe place for the children to live while they are in school. In doing so, J and B have opportunities to share the good news of grace and forgiveness of Christ with

these families. We also work with a group of national pastors and church leaders to provide mobilization of the local church to reach out to this unreached people group. We help provide a bridge between the national church and expat workers who are working among this unreached people group. Mary and I also have close relationships within one village. We continue to share our faith and lives with several families who are very dear to us.

Seeking Transformational Development:

We also advise and assist the development arm of a large denomination. These dedicated workers assist minority groups with a wide variety of development programs. Many times, this organization is the voice of the very poor and disenfranchised in our country. There are times when there are disputes between the government and local villagers over land rights. We use GPS mapping to empower these villagers with the knowledge of what land rightfully belongs to them. We also help the villagers and local authorities understand about the educational rights of migrant worker's children. Additionally, this group develops sustainable agricultural projects such as cattle, chicken, pig, and fruit farming, including how to market their products for financial gain. For over 40 years, it has also sponsored a development center in the heart of the largest slum area in the capital city. This center houses a kindergarten school which helps prepare the children in the area for public schools. These children's parents are often very poor and have little or no education themselves. This school has helped to break the cycle of poverty for many families. The center also provides sporting events for the youth and teaches skills to women to help their families meet their financial problems. This center has been a beacon of hope for a segment of the population which in many cases has very little hope.

Borrowing from Paul: "We always thank God for you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3



HELLO FROM PHNOM PENH!

It is undeniable the world is a much different place than it was when we sent our last newsletter. Cambodia has been preparing for a COVID-19 outbreak here, but so far, the disease has not spread widely. The last active case was discharged from the hospital a few days ago. Of course, that does not mean the danger has passed. We continue to practice pretty strict mask wearing and social distancing. Religious gatherings are still temporarily banned. This affects many larger churches like the ones we worship at here in Phnom Penh, but most rural churches are house churches made up of only one or two extended families and are carrying on as normal.

We have worked with the Cambodia Baptist Union to fund rice distributions in areas that are especially hard hit economically. We are considering other ways to be God's blessing to this country we live in during these difficult times. We are also continuing to make progress on preparing for the pastor training seminars in Kampot province. We have no idea when these will be able to start, but we are grateful to have a bit of extra time to work on them.

There have been some lovely personal blessings during this time, also. For example, we have asked for prayer from you multiple times over the last couple of years about finding a new home to move to. We learned about a family who was leaving Cambodia due to various coronavirus-related circumstances and was looking for somebody to take over their lease. We looked at the house and thought it seemed perfect for us. It has more space than our current apartment, including a little concrete "yard" space in front and in back, all for a little less rent than our current place. We plan to move next month. We have felt God's provision and timing!

Chloe recently turned one. We know all parents say this, but we can't believe how fast it went and how much she has grown. She loves standing up, eating with her hands, splashing in water, and trying to say new words. From the Zika virus to the coronavirus, her first year has been marked with some curve balls, but God has been nothing but faithful to us in our parenting journey. Chloe also makes for a pretty great quarantine buddy!

Know that we are thinking of and praying for you as this virus now affects the whole world. If there are ways we can be praying for you specifically, please let us know.

Warmly,

David, Lauren and Chloe



1) We have been trying to find some uncrowded streets for taking a walk or a drive here and there to get a change of scenery. 2) Rice to be distributed to needy families. Your partnership means we were able to contribute funds to the CBU as they distributed rice to over 100 families. 3) It's currently (very) hot season, which at least means there are lots of delicious mangos around. 4) Chloe is definitely enjoying mango season!

PRAYER REQUESTS

We think prayer makes a difference.

Here are some ways you can pray for us:

Please pray Cambodia would not have a coronavirus outbreak. Pray for those who are experiencing economic hardship as a result of closed businesses and closed borders. Pray for those who have received food from the CBU's food distributions, especially that they would know Jesus as the true bread of life.

Pray for the pastor training program we are working on for Kampot province. Pray the Holy Spirit would guide our preparations for that. Pray these seminars would be able to start in God's timing.

Please continue to pray for Lauren's dad. He has finished his chemotherapy treatments and is scheduled for surgery. Pray the surgery would go well, pray for a speedy recovery, and pray he would be able to put cancer behind him.

Pray for Chloe as she turns one. Pray for the parents of an up-and-coming toddler.

PARTNERSHIP MACEDONIA

Greetings from
Skopje, North
Macedonia!

We hope this letter finds you and yours healthy and safe in the midst of the pandemic and the continued uncertainty. We have been praying for you during this time!

While the pandemic put a halt to some regular activities like visits to Poraka, coffees with friends, and sports for Ethan; our time has been occupied with an increase of work with the Food Bank, projects at the farm, and lots of counseling services via Zoom. School has resumed for Ethan (online) and for Alicia (online and in-person) as she continues to serve as the part-time counselor for the school. Jeff is busier than ever as he works with the Food Bank and the farm to continue serving the people of Macedonia. We are excited to share more about what God is doing in Macedonia and how your continued support is making a difference in the lives of the people we live and serve among.

Please join us in prayer:

- for the continued health of our friends at Poraka
- for the many families the Food Bank will serve in the coming months
- for one of the workers from the farm whose wife is very ill and awaiting surgery
- for the individuals, families, and students Alicia works with through the counseling ministry
- for our family, especially Ethan, as we balance ministry work and family life with a 6th grade learner at home and as we begin (cautiously) engaging activities like church and the baseball ministry.

Thank you for your prayers and continue partnership!

Gratefully,

Jeff, Alicia and Ethan Lee



The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many lives in Macedonia. Many people are in desperate need. The Food Bank of Macedonia has increased their operations over the past six months. Thanks to the support of local companies and our partners in the USA, the Food Bank has distributed over 20 tons of food this year; and we anticipate the need will continue to grow into the winter. An eight-year partnership between the Food Bank and CBF allows us to meet the needs of thousands of families across the country. At the end of September, we will begin a project to package food boxes for over 1,600 families in every municipality across Macedonia. The boxes will contain enough food to feed a family of four for a week, masks, and hand sanitizer. We have engaged RETO, a local faith-based rehab ministry, to help with the delivery of the food across the country. We work with local organizations in each municipality to build relationships with the recipients of the food. The boxes cost \$25, if you are interested in sponsoring a box for a family, you can give online!



In 2017, we started a program to loan livestock to local farmers. The program focuses on helping local farmers increase their production. Agricultural development is essential to achieve sustainability. One of our first farmers in the program was Daniel. Thanks to the generous support of our partners we were able to give him four young calves. Our relationship with Daniel has grown over the past three years. Daniel takes care of the cows and uses the milk to meet the needs of the people in his community. The program states that recipients of the calves will repay the loan with the first offspring of the original animals. This August, we received four young calves from Daniel to repay the loan! These calves will stay at our farm until another farmer is located for the program. Sixteen farmers are currently engaged in the program and we are hoping to increase the program to engage with another 6 farmers by the end of the year.

ACTING IN *love*

RWANDA UPDATE

Dear Church Family,

Greetings from Rwanda! I hope you are doing well in the middle of this troubling season with COVID-19. My prayers have been and will be with you always. Like everywhere in the world, Rwanda was also affected by the pandemic and ministries have been limited from person to person to online or by phone. My work with the Daughters of Abraham was the most affected because many of the women can't afford phones or internet.

When lockdown was enforced, it was hard to communicate with the ladies until May 15 when some movement was allowed. My team members were able to visit those who were in need and we had to contribute some money to help with food or medicine...we keep on checking on each other, but no meeting is accepted.

The ministry with the Beloved was easier because most of my support groups have WhatsApp groups and we chat regularly. I regularly work with 4 women representing those support groups to discuss serious issues among the groups. My support group meets physically once every two weeks. Yesterday we had a meeting in one of the homes... it is helpful for these women.

My pre-engagement class 4 resumed in August and we study on Saturdays. I have to respect social distancing in the classroom, but it is so good to impact this young generation. I have 3 couples in the premarital class and they will get married in October, November, and December this year.

I thank God for what we are able to do for the Kingdom. I appreciate your support in all this work, without it I don't know how we could have managed. I minister to people in need, and alone I can't be of any help. So, thank you for your prayers and support.

Here are some pictures of my classes, and the women.

Venantie Uwishyaka



RELAUNCHING ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL

C.V. Blake

Greetings church family. As we approach October 11, the day we resume “in-person” Sunday school, Phil has asked the staff to write about a few things we can expect when we return. I recently participated in a webinar for church leaders led by Thom Rainer. He mentioned a few comments about the people we will encounter on that Sunday.

1. The Straggler who is just not ready to come back. Be quick to encourage and show grace.
2. The Digital Only who is comfortable meeting with us online. We are happy to have this newfound opportunity for Bible Study.
3. The digital Transitioning who has found us online and is ready to meet us in person.
4. Your neighbor who may be lonely and looking for a safe place to be with people.
5. The Prayed For to whom God is leading you to reach out. Don't miss the opportunity.
6. The Invited, those to whom God has put in your path and you have the opportunity to say, “Come with me to my church!”

I believe this time in history is offering us more opportunities than setbacks. I am excited about all God is going to do. He has not been asleep or quarantining.

You will notice a few things have changed. Adults, you may find your class is meeting in a different room. We are doing all we can to provide safe places where we can be together and still safely distance. For the next little while, we will not be serving coffee, donuts, or water. Why? You can't shove a donut in your mouth while wearing a mask. Oh, please wear a mask.

We are looking forward to seeing you and others on Sunday, October 11.

YOUTH WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

We are having Wednesday Bible Study on the Youth Floor from 6-7 p.m. All students from grades 6th-12th are invited to participate. Join us for a time of Bible study, worship, and community as we learn how to live out the Kingdom of God with our lives.

Make sure to bring a mask with you and be prepared to social distance during this time (masks are provided to students if needed). If you are not comfortable with your student joining us in-person, there is also a Zoom option for Bible study. The Zoom link is sent out through the FBC Abilene Youth Ministry Remind page.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Austen!
(Austen.winfrey@fbcabilene.org
or 325-675-8161)

STAY *connected*



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ABILENE, TX**

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

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

October 1, 6 years

Maria Veracruz

GLO Teacher

October 1, 2 years

Allie Workman

GLO Director

October 1, 1 year

Raul Garcia

Custodian

October 23, 2 years

Melinda Norris

M. A. to Pastor for Missions

HURRICANE LAURA AND HURRICANE SALLY

Please continue to pray for those affected by Hurricane Laura and now Hurricane Sally and their devastating effects. Our Baptist Partners (Texas Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Disaster Relief and Texas Baptist Men) will be accessing the needs of all counties affected and how its cooperating churches can help. Several ways we can help now:

1. Pray - pray for those affected by the path of these storms, those who are responding to the different areas, and future ways FBC can respond.
2. Give - currently the best way to help is to give financially. Checks can be given to our ministry partners or to First Baptist Church designated for (CBF Texas Disaster Relief, and Texas Baptist Men). The Mission Committee was able to send \$2,500 to Texas Baptist Men and \$2,500 to CBF Texas Disaster Relief because of your generosity.
3. Go - There will be many needs for people to help with clean up and recovery when these disasters move into recovery stage. Begin praying how you can join one of those teams in the future and how those teams can safely respond. If you can help, please contact the FBC Missions office at 325-675-8112 or john.moore@fbcabilene.org.

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

September 2020

Budget	September	Year-to-Date
Required	\$ 232,870	\$ 2,445,529
Given	\$ 160,809	\$ 2,236,155

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



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH ♦ ABILENE

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