

# THE VISITOR



## *New Senior Pastors Bring Co-Pastoring Model to FBC*

Husband-and-wife team **Jonathan Balmer** and **Kendall Ellis** have been elected co-senior pastors at First Baptist Church Muncie after a nearly unanimous vote on May 22. Jonathan comes from a role as senior pastor at Mt. Hermon Baptist Church of Moseley, Virginia (near Richmond). In May, Kendall completed her graduate work at Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. The two have followed God's call and will begin their roles at FBC on Sunday, July 10.

During the time Dr. David Hinson has been serving as our interim senior pastor, the church undertook a fundraising campaign called Vision 2022 and raised over \$75,000, some of which was intended to fund a youth leader position for a couple of years.

Both of them will preach and serve youth, sharing almost all pastoral and ministry roles yet using their strengths to take on particular tasks. Both have extensive experience in leading youth.

Kendall also has sizable experience in serving people in a variety of community nonprofits and received a master's degree in social work to accompany her master of divinity degree. "We feel such joy about God's directing us in our move to Muncie," said Kendall, "and about our opportunity to share the senior pastor and youth pastor roles at FBC."

Jonathan and Kendall were in Muncie the weekend of May 21-22 to meet with the Church Coordination Team, to have a "meet and greet" with members of the congregation, to preach at the morning worship service on Sunday, and to hear the outcome of the vote during a called business meeting after the service.



# Greetings from Jonathan & Kendall

*"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 1:3 (NIV 2011)

What struck us most about First Baptist Church in Muncie is not the beautiful building (though it is stunning), nor the rich history (though the history we read was fascinating), or even the hospitality we received (though we are incredibly grateful for it), but the prayers you have offered us, and which continue to encourage us today.

Paul, when he writes to the Thessalonians, remembers before God their work and the love which prompted it, their endurance and the hope in our Lord which grounded it. And we're struck by the same. We're thankful for your prayers.



In the future, it's our hope that remembering before our God the faithfulness we find in Christ Jesus would continue to spur on good work in our community to witness to the great hope of the Gospel. We're encouraged to hear so many of your desires to continue and deepen FBC Muncie's relationship with the community.



We're also delighted to share in the work which is spurred on and united in love by coming alongside children, students, and families—so that people of all generations can know the life-changing power of Christ.



And, finally, we hope to be coworkers in Christ who can endure in the race. We cannot wait to know you and Muncie better as we begin a life in ministry together—and not just *together* meaning Jonathan and Kendall together—but together with all of you as Christ's body.

Serving as Christ's undershepherds means being, among other things, "eager to serve" (1 Peter 5:2). And we are eager to begin growing in grace, love, and appreciation for Christ with the church at Muncie.

*Faithfully yours,  
Pastors Jon & Kendall*

*"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

ROMANS 8:17, NIV

—KENDALL'S FAVORITE VERSE

# God's Hand Was Firmly on the Search Committee

BY **BRIAN GREEN**, SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR

Pastors often keep résumés on file, even when they are not seeking a new position. Jonathan hadn't been actively looking, but Kendall was graduating and needed a job. In the midst of reviewing résumés, talking to pastors and listening to them preach online, the search team was focusing on a few candidates. With ongoing assistance from our regional resource minister, Rev. Bruce Cochran, at the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, we learned that two of the candidates whose résumés were on file belonged to a married couple. When we spoke with Jonathan and Kendall, we learned their ultimate goal was to work together in a co-pastoring model.

Little by little, God kept us coming back to them, and they eventually felt the same pull toward us. Our interim pastor and our former senior pastor both spoke with Jonathan and Kendall on several occasions and were impressed with all they had to offer.

When I first called Wade (Dr. Wade Allen, FBC pastor from 2009–2021) about them, an astounding thing happened! I told him we had potential candidates that we were considering as co-pastors. The line went silent, and I thought I had lost him. When I called his name, he finally said, "I'm covered in chills." He proceeded to tell me that late in 2020 when he told retiring leader Soozie Ford at the Indiana-Kentucky district office that he would be leaving FBC Muncie, she had told him she believed the church might be ready for a co-pastoring model!

One "sign" after another came to the search team as we learned more about this model and investigated the backgrounds of this couple. Our team was struck by God's presence as we moved along during these months. (Other team members are **Emily Anderson, Ella Mae Lemen, Jane Patton, and Janis Wright.**)

Upon meeting the candidates and bringing them to Muncie for a look at our church and community, Jonathan and Kendall were feeling the same way. As groups—like the Facebook Live prayer group—and individuals prayed, we felt God's leadership.

As we look back on our process, we must admit it was hard work, but we feel the intense peace and joy of trying to live within God's will. I am humbled by how the Holy Spirit has impacted all of us. I personally have felt my walk with the Lord greatly strengthened by this effort, and I will never be the same.



## *Youth Pastor, Teaching Experience to Benefit FBC*

Both Kendall and Jonathan bring youth leadership to their new positions because both have on-staff experience. Kendall was an assistant youth pastor for four years during college and Jonathan was a youth pastor at 7th and James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, during his years at seminary. Most of their experience is with students from sixth or seventh grade to twelfth grade. They have also worked with children, too, especially in Sunday School settings.

Some of their work has been at camps, such as when Jonathan was at Camp Crestwood in Kentucky, and when Kendall helped run a sports camp for First Baptist Church of Waco.

In one church camp role, Kendall was praying with male and female students who needed someone to pray with. "I remember God placing on my heart that He would open the door for me to do youth ministry, and within a week, the pastor had approached me to fill a new

position as youth minister to work with females," said Kendall. "That was a huge part of how I got started in ministry." This past academic year, Kendall served as the resident chaplain of the largest residence hall at Baylor University. She provided pastoral care to freshman women.

Kendall and Jonathan believe that adolescence is a formative time in students' faith. They know young people are wrestling with big decisions about life, career, and faith. CONT. ON PAGE 4

Jonathan said, “I have found if we allow them the opportunity to explore and ask hard questions, and we struggle with them, then it’s rewarding both for them and for us as we wrestle together as the body of Christ.”

When speaking about his background, Jonathan is quick to point out that his personal walk with Jesus began with the inspiration, leadership, and friendship of “Terry,” a youth leader in his home church.

In addition to their roles working with youth in churches, the couple has experience teaching outside the church. Jonathan taught English as a Second Language in Korea for a year and English and journalism in Frankfort, Kentucky. Kendall taught science to middle and high schoolers at an alternative school in Waco, TX.



## *Education Prepares Pastors for Ministry*

Jonathan Balmer’s Education	Kendall Ellis’s Education
<p><b>High School</b>—William Mason High School, Mason, Ohio: 2010</p> <p><b>College</b>—Georgetown (Kentucky) College, including studying abroad at University of Oxford, Oxford, England (majors in English and History): 2014</p> <p><b>Graduate work</b>—Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Master of Divinity): 2020</p>	<p><b>High School</b>—Western Hills High School, Frankfort, Kentucky: 2012</p> <p><b>College</b>—Georgetown (Kentucky) College, including studying abroad at University of Oxford, Oxford, England (major in French, minor in biology): 2016</p> <p><b>Graduate work</b>—Truett Theological Seminary and Garland School of Social Work, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work): 2022</p>

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.  
In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

JOHN 16:33, NIV

—JONATHAN'S FAVORITE VERSE

## *Operation Light in the Darkness Shares Appreciation with Emergency Department Employees*

In February, March, and April, First Baptist Church showed their appreciation to the IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital emergency department. Snacks, drinks, and notes of gratitude and prayers were carried to the employees for their hard work and often thankless efforts as they care for the sick and injured.

“We may not do this indefinitely,” said **Gayle Songer**, chair of Outreach Ministries for the Church Coordination Team, “but this is something we can do now, especially in light of the difficult environment during the most crucial days of the pandemic.”

The team plans to do another appreciation day in June or July and asks the church family to bring in single-serving size chips and/or soft drinks or energy drinks as well as written notes of appreciation or written prayers. A work day to assemble and deliver the items will be announced in the “Wednesday Weekly,” said Gayle.



# Get to Know...

**Elizabeth Shreves** is a Ball State University junior who has attended FBC since middle school, having first come to church with her grandfather. Before that her family attended Shawnee Heights Baptist Church. She is from the Muncie/Delaware County area and graduated from Cowan High School.

Her major in early childhood education helps in her leadership role in Children's Church. "When we were opening back up after a COVID break—late summer of 2020, I think—I was asked if I'd take over the Children's Church task, and I've been doing it ever since," said Elizabeth. This was a natural transition, since she had been helping with the FBC children since her early high school days.

Elizabeth reports loving to come up with illustrations that the children understand. "We talked about fears and how focusing on Jesus can help keep the fears away," she said. "We wrote different fears on the outside of a circle with 'Jesus' written in the middle.

With the lights turned down and a flashlight shining on 'Jesus' we couldn't see the fears. If we backed up from 'Jesus' and allowed our focus to be on some of the fears as well as His name, the fears became apparent again," she went on. "They really got it!"

Elizabeth has two self-published children's books available on Amazon. One she wrote while a student in AP English. It is about a little girl and all kinds of animals and is called *A Walk with Grace*. The second one, published last year, is about Captain Bible, who is piloting a ship in the bathtub and encounters many adventures.

An inspiration in her life was her great-grandmother, who lived with her for a year. She died in 2014, and Elizabeth still misses her. In her great-grandmother's last years her eyesight was compromised, and Elizabeth fondly remembers reading the Bible to her.

Elizabeth has five siblings, and one of her sisters attends FBC with her.

**Abby Shreves** is in the rotation to livestream the Sunday morning services.



## "Thank You" and "Love Your New Pastors as You Have Loved Me"

BY REV. DR. DAVID K. HINSON, INTERIM SENIOR PASTOR



"Glory, Hallelujah, Amen" immediately identifies VISION 2022. From my first March 14, 2021 sermon—"At Your Corner of the Cot" (Luke 5:19-26)—to my projected final sermon on July 3, 2022—"God's People" (Colossians 1:1-6), you have joined me enthusiastically each week on our journey of faith to become God's people

together. As we all have shouted, "GLORY . . . GLORY," "HALLELUJAH . . . HALLELUJAH," and not long afterwards, "AMEN" and "AMEN," I am so thankful for what God's presence and power have offered us each week through worship, music, baptisms, communions, internships, Bible Study, fellowship, outreach, youth and children's ministries, and so much more. You, the people of God, living in Christ's Spirit, are making a difference in the world!

Words are never adequate for a final note of thanksgiving. However, as best I can, I offer you my most genuine, authentic, and heartfelt "THANK YOU." For your support, your prayers, your kind words of encouragement, and your many acts of love, know you will always have a special place in my heart.

As the torch is soon passed to the next era of leadership at First Baptist Muncie, the greatest honor you could ever leave me is simply "to love your new pastors as you have loved me." Don't compare them to me, or any other pastor, but simply love them for who they are. You are now their new family, and as members of your family, they deserve to be given the benefit of the doubt, the best you have to offer, and the joy of celebrating the future together as faith and family are merged into one. We shall always remember "Glory, Hallelujah, Amen"—but it was only the beginning of God's "VISION 2022 and BEYOND!"

THE BEST IS YET TO COME . . .



# "Monumental" Vacation Bible School Is Coming

On June 27–July 1, "Monumental," a Southwest adventure, will be coming to First Baptist Church. Kids will get to learn a daily Bible point and Bible verse and discover more about our awesome God! We're going to watch for God and see how the desert blooms!



**Michelle Heimlich**, the coordinator of Children's Ministries at FBC, and approximately twenty volunteers will be rolling out the learning and fun from 6:30–8:30 PM each night. According to Michelle, the format will have the kids moving from station to station doing music, playing games, exploring Bible stories, creating fun crafts, having snacks, and watching videos about real kids who love God. During Bible story time, kids will be transported back in time and learn about the life of Old Testament character Joseph.

Children ages 3 to sixth grade are welcome to attend. One parent said, "I'm really happy about Bible School coming and look forward to knowing my kids are having this kind of training and fun instead of sitting in front of the TV, playing video games, or playing with somebody's phone."

Invite your family, your neighbors, and your friends, and bring other children. God's "Monumental" love is for everyone.

## First "Fresh-Brewed Life" Breakfast Meets Team Goals

On April 2, the goals to welcome and provide love and hospitality to women coming together to eat and fellowship were met, according to event evaluations. **Julie Davis**, event team leader, shared that women enjoyed the food, the speaker, and the chance to meet and visit with new friends from other churches. The whole idea for the event came out of recommendations made after FBC's November 6, 2021 Women's Conference, "I Am Enough."

**Deena Green**, Pharm D, a local pharmacist, spoke on women's health. A team of women assisted and most were table captains, welcoming women to their tables and initiating informal conversation.

The event team (**Emily Anderson, Julie Davis, Cheryl Flaherty, Molly Flodder, Loraine Garrett, Deena Green, Michelle Heimlich, Ella Mae Lemen, Nina Oisten, Maggie Sims and Gayle Songer**) met to review evaluations and have tentatively set the next breakfast for an early October date.



**Lydia Burton** (left), **Jane Patton**, and **Barb Eidson** were among the forty FBC women and community guests fellowshiping together at the "Fresh-Brewed Life" women's breakfast.

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