

THE VISITOR




First Baptist Church's Building Turns 95

This year the First Baptist Church of Muncie building turns 95. If walls could talk, what stories they could tell!

They could tell of professions of faith, baptisms, weddings, baby dedications, funerals, and thousands of services. They could speak of congregational music and choir selections, dramatic presentations and community gatherings, and spreads of food in the fellowship hall. They could also look back at many pastors, hundreds of volunteers, and dozens of missionaries.

Likely, the walls could tell stories about the saints who served as church council leaders, the diaconate, Sunday School teachers, ushers, soloists, and nursery workers, all of whom are pillars of the church's ministry, though sometimes less visible than the arches of the Gothic-revival style building.

Most of all, First Baptist Church of Muncie has been and is a place to worship; to bring adoration, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; to pray in the quiet moments; to break bread; and to rejoice. As the old hymn says: "O worship the King, all glorious above, and gratefully sing his power and his love." For 95 years, the worshiping has brought honor and praise to our Heavenly Father in the building on the corner of Jefferson and Adams Streets. 

Holy Week & Easter Events

March 23

- ◆ Community Egg Hunt at Ross Community Center 2 p.m.

March 29

- ◆ Christian Ministries Community Good Friday Service 12 p.m.
- ◆ Good Friday Service of Shadows 7 p.m.

March 31 Easter Sunday

- ◆ Sunrise Prayer 6:15 a.m.
- ◆ Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
- ◆ Easter Brunch 10:15 a.m.
- ◆ Easter Worship 10:45 a.m.

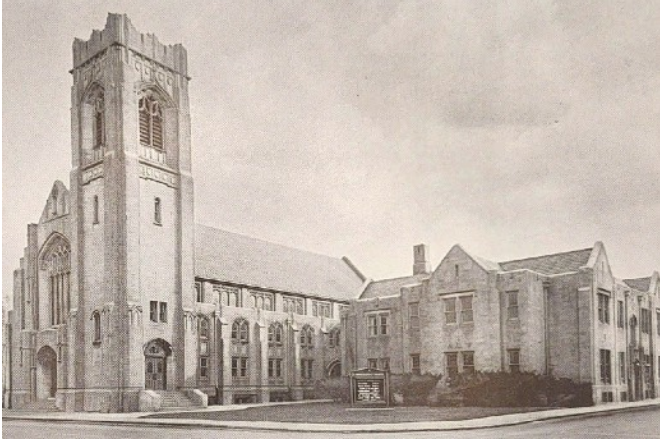
April 13

- ◆ Easter Open House at the Pastors' Home

Great Depression Realities Cause Near-Loss of Church Building

By William G. Eidson

On May 12, 1929, the entire church family, some 1,200 strong, marched from their old smaller church building at the southwest corner of Charles and Jefferson Street. In a spirit of celebration, they headed around and through downtown and back toward the present church.



Class by class, all were marching to occupy the new much larger church building. The celebration among the First Baptist Church family was great, and there was gratitude toward Rev. William G. Everson who had led them as the idea of a new church and the actual building took shape. There was also pride at how the congregation had raised nearly 50% of the \$338,000 total cost.

Just a year later, the congregation owed \$166,299 on the building, but assuming the membership would continue paying \$20,000 to \$30,000 each year on the loan, the indebtedness seemed manageable. What few could anticipate was the havoc the Great Depression would place on workers' incomes.

In two years, the church's income dropped by sixty percent and remained that low for six more years. Building fund contributions were only about \$3,000 per year, far short of the anticipated \$20,000.

Most of the church's debt was owed to the Mercantile Trust Company of St. Louis. By May 1938, First Baptist had lowered the principal owed the St. Louis company to \$110,500, but because the congregation's payments had been insufficient, the church owed the loan company an additional \$39,112 in interest and court costs.

Mercantile Trust had been patient with First Baptist, but by 1938 it made financial demands that the church could not meet. As a result, Mercantile Trust put the building up for sale at an auction on July 21, 1938. Only one bid was made at the auction: Mercantile Trust bid \$55,250 and thus bought the building for half the principal bonded indebtedness. The loan company became owners of the building and gave First Baptist exactly one year to settle the loan or evacuate the new building.



A drone photo of the church today

Thus began a year of negotiations between the loan company and the First Baptist congregation. Three times during the next ten months, Mercantile Trust offered to settle the debt at a fraction of the principal owed them. First Mercantile Trust was willing to settle for 80% (\$88,400), then 75% (\$82,875), and, finally, \$75,000. Each time, First Baptist believed it was unable to accept the offer.

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The congregation offered to settle for \$60,000; the loan company said “No.”

Eventually on July 29, 1939 (eight days past the deadline) the two sides agreed to settle for \$70,000. During the previous few months, finally realizing that evacuation could happen, the congregation launched a major financial campaign that with the help of both members and non-members raised \$40,000 by July. The remaining \$30,000 came from a loan with Mutual Home and Savings Company. In the end, the church members were not forced to relocate and celebrated that they were now the new owners of a beautiful ten-year-old building.

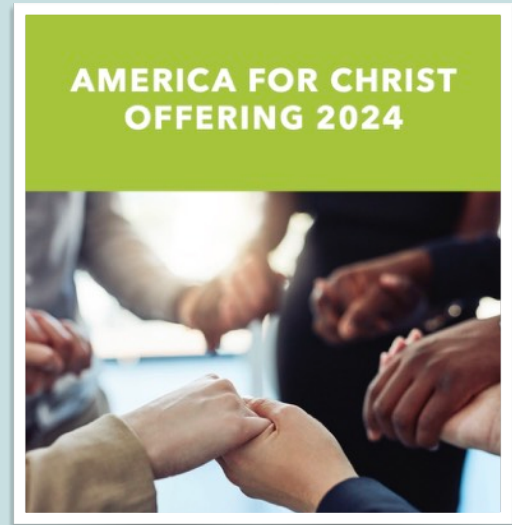
Editor’s note: Dr. Eidson, a retired Ball State University history professor, is the author of *Journey Down Jefferson Street* and serves as FBCM’s archivist. Everyone has been concerned about the finances during the 2023 budget year. The financial situation during the early days of our building shows us that financial barriers can be overcome! 🏠

Mission Giving Is Reduced

As most people know, the last year of giving vs. expenses was down, resulting in 2024 decreased budget line items including missions.

According to **Dan Lemen**, treasurer, “Our giving to missions in recent years has been 10 or 11 percent of the total budget. When we have to squeeze the budget to meet the realities of reduced contributions, it affects what we can give to our local, national, and international missions.

“We pray that our church family will continue to support our church so that we may keep up with the expenses of staffing our operation and maintaining our building. As we are able, let us focus on God’s work here and beyond as we support valuable services and the missionaries who lead important mission work.” 🏠



Each Sunday in March you may provide your annual gift to “America for Christ” in the envelopes near the offering box.

With donations from churches all across America, the American Baptist Home Mission societies have supported communities distressed by the devastation of COVID-19 across the United States and in Puerto Rico. They also helped families who lost homes to floods, wildfires, and such. In addition the money has been given to seminarians preparing to devote their lives to sharing the Good News.

Global Servants Coming to FBCM

Our church supports American Baptist Global Servants Carlos Bonilla and Mayra Giovanetti who will visit FBCM on April 28



The BG's, Carlos & Mayra

to share about their work during lunch following worship. They serve in Colombia through UNIBAUTISTA and their outreach includes Chile, Spain, Nicaragua, and the wider regional context of Iberoamerica and the Caribbean. 🏠

Our Limestone Ebenezer

By Rev. Kendall Ellis

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us.’” -1 Samuel 7:12

“They just don’t make [it] how they used to.” You’ve likely heard this expression about whatever “it” may be: furniture, food, clothes. I reckon it may be true. After all, how many things can you name that are still standing and functional after 95 years?!

This is part of what makes our church building’s 95th birthday so incredible! However, our building isn’t merely beloved because it’s historic or pretty. There’s also something to be said about the power of physical things that God uses to remind us of our faithful covenant with God.

You may have even sung about such things without realizing it! The second verse of the popular hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” proclaims, “Here I raise my ‘Ebenezer.’ Here by Thy great help, I’ve come.” In another more contemporary worship song called “Just As Good,” Chris Renzema & Ellie Holcomb sing, “And I will build an altar. Stack it stone by stone. ‘Cause every ebenezer says I’ve never been alone.”

What is this ebenezer everyone keeps singing about? Ebenezer translates to “God is our stone of help.” The term references the Old Testament when the Philistines were threatening Israel. Samuel the priest leads Israel in worship and encourages the people to trust that God will keep His promises to them. In the end, God protects Israel during the battle at Mizpah. So Samuel puts a stone there to mark the physical place of God’s victory so that whenever someone passes by, they may be reminded to praise the Lord who has sustained them.

I wonder if our 95-year-old limestone building can be an ebenezer for our congregation at the corner of Adams and Jefferson? What if every time we drive under the shadow of the tower we pause to give God gratitude for how he looks out for us? Perhaps there’s something sacred about this physical space that gives witness to how the Lord has helped us so far and gives our community hope that God will continue to do so according to his abundant grace. 🏰

THE
SHARED
PULPIT

“Fresh Brewed Life” Offers a New Option



On Saturday, April 6, the twice-yearly Fresh Brewed Life session for girls and women ages 12-90 will be an art afternoon session from 1:00-3:30 p.m. Meghan Songer Frey, an art teacher at Delta Middle School, will help attendees make a hanging wooden plaque that focuses on a verse from Psalms. The event will include a break for beverages, desserts and snacks.

Registration will be available on March 10. A free-will donation from those participating will help defray the cost of the materials. 🏰

CCT Retreats Focus on Church Culture

Members of the Church Coordination Team (CCT) are immersed in the study of *Soul Culture: Stewarding the Five Ingredients of our Common Life*, by Matt Snowden and Joshua Hays. The two half-day retreat are helping equip the leadership team as FBCM does the work of ministry.

According to **Emily Anderson**, church moderator, “Our individual readings, group prayer, and discussions are helping us identify our church’s beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, and practices.” 🏰

FBCM Supports Cadence International Missionaries

When Lt. Col. Matt Snell retired from his 22 years in the Army, he and his wife, Meredith, found a mission that was already near and dear to their hearts. Two-and-a-half years ago, they went to work for Cadence International, and their first assignment was Fort Drum in northern New York, a place where he was stationed at the beginning of their marriage.

Cadence International is an evangelical mission agency dedicated to reaching the military communities of the United States and the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Snells are the fifth house directors in the ministry house where they found fellowship and comfort in 1999 during their first assignment to Fort Drum. Their participation in the Cadence work created connections for them in an unfamiliar new community: they found fellowship and links with people around the Lord's work.



The Snell family (left to right): Caleb, Anna, Matt, Grace, Meredith, Emma, Jacob & Chloe

Matt and Meredith host two major events each week. "Our main ministry is on Friday, and we have a potluck and Bible study with 70 adults and teens and 15-25 children," said Meredith. One other night each week is dedicated to a meal and Bible study for men. Another family hosts a Bible study for women on a different evening.

A variety of other programming happens on an ongoing basis. There are all kinds of ways for military families and singles to connect. For example, there are one-on-one situations, small group coffee sessions, and play dates for the kids. The Snells have hosted special outings or get-togethers such as a Valentine's event, parenting workshops, family game nights, or hiking in the beautiful rugged countryside, to name a few.

The biggest challenges—food, house, property—are also the biggest joys, according to



Sharing a meal at the hospitality house

Meredith. To fit everyone in, an attached garage has to be used. In the past year, another space issue was addressed as an annex was readied on the property that has become the meeting place for the youth. Ben Sprague, who was a summer intern in 2022, has graduated from Moody Bible Institute and now leads the youth portion of the Cadence ministry at Fort Drum.

"A difficult thing about this work," said Matt, "is that we know we are going to be 'left.' The soldiers and their families are transient. Every 1-3 years, assignments can change. They get deployed or get orders to move, but we stay, at least for five years." (That is the length of their current contract with Cadence.)

"This work gives us great joy," said Matt. "We are constantly learning as we trust the Lord and seek advice from others."

A favorite Scripture in describing this work according to Matt is Ephesians 4:11-12: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (NIV)

The biggest personal change for the Snells is the change in their own family. At the beginning of their tenure, three of their six children were still at home and now only their youngest, Caleb, who is a sophomore in high school, is with them. "We have one in the military, one working in North Carolina, and three in college," said Meredith, who is the daughter of FBCM's **Joe and Gayle Songer** and grew up in the Muncie church.



The Snells are grateful to First Baptist Church Muncie for the financial and prayer support that they receive. 🏰

Get to Know . . . **NATALIE GREEN**



Natalie Green

Eleven-year-old **Natalie Green** is a fifth grader at Yorktown Elementary who likes school, has enjoyed all her teachers, and likes reading and writing. She enjoys writing essays and feels she did pretty well on a recent essay about integrity. As far as integrity goes, she likes to think she is kind and helpful and knows if she stays that way, it will help her be a good adult.


Right now, volleyball is taking up a great deal of her time. She likes volleyball and enjoys the club team of 10- and 11-year-olds whom she plays with. Next year, in middle school, she will be eligible to try out for the 6th grade Yorktown Middle School team.

Natalie's parents are **Brian and Deena Green** and her sister is 13-year-old, **Olivia**. Brian is chairman of the diaconate and her mom is on the CCT as the Member Care ministry representative. Brian, who is a busy and capable "Mr. Mom," keeps the household running and community and church tasks going, along with her mom, the managing pharmacist at the IU Health pharmacy in Yorktown.

Brian has assumed the duties of keeping the sanctuary decorated, and his cooking is a real asset to the church. Natalie likes to cook and has helped him in his volunteer cooking responsibilities for Fresh Brewed Life women's breakfasts. She especially likes to bake. "I also enjoy cooking breakfast at home, like eggs, sausage, and potatoes. I've even made sorbet. That was fun."

Natalie feels fortunate to have the support of good parents. "They help me through tough things, and they give me and my sister what we need and care for us with their hearts. "They are easy to talk to, and we don't get frustrated with each other too often," said Natalie.

Natalie has attended First Baptist Church since she was four years old. The Green's home is down the street from the house where former pastor Wade Allen lived, one of the reasons the family first tried the church. She enjoys the fact that the church is intergenerational and people like long-time member **Patti Warner** are her special friends.

One does not expect to see pop music icon Taylor Swift and FBC church member **Ella Mae Lemen** in the same sentence, but Natalie admires both of them: Taylor for her singing, her songwriting, and her showmanship; Ella Mae for being her buddy. She says that Ella Mae, who is in the same small group as her parents, is "like a grandma." 

Save the Dates



All Church Discipleship will be on Sundays April 7, 14, & 21 at 5:30 p.m.


Special Guest Speakers

- ◆ April 21 - Jordan Morris, Indian Creek Baptist Camp Director
- ◆ April 28 - Worship and Lunch - the Bonilla-Giovanettis, International Ministries Global Servants

Children, Youth, & Families

- ◆ May 5 - Recognition of Graduates during Worship
- ◆ May 11 - Family Outing to Fort Wayne Zoo
- ◆ July 14-18 - Vacation Bible School

In Memoriam

Our hearts go out to the family of **Melanie Clark**, a long-term member of FBCM, who passed away in January. 

Clif Davis, Composer and Arranger, is Making His Mark

There's much more to **Dr. Clifton Davis**, part-time worship arts pastor at First Baptist Church for the past ten years than first meets the eye. He prepares and leads Sunday morning worship, but he is also a member of the music faculty at Taylor University, he is assistant director of Muncie's Masterworks Chorale, and he is an arranger and composer. With increasing regularity, his music is meeting needs for special services and occasions. He has composed over 100 pieces published and performed locally and in other countries as well.

The most recent gift of composition at First Baptist Church came for the November ordination of co-pastor, Rev. Kendall Ellis and the ordination recognition of her husband, co-pastor Rev. Jonathan Balmer. Set to a text of a poem "Called As Partners" by Jane Huber Parker, the music was composed for a choir of the FBCM family that presented the special music during the service.

When asked what his favorite composition was, Clif said, "That's a little like asking who is your favorite child! I usually like my most current piece, but there's a flute and piano work called 'Canção Alegre' (Portuguese for 'Happy Song') that I have always enjoyed. Of course, the procession piece for our daughter's wedding holds a special place in my heart, too!" (Clif is married to **Julie**, and has three children, **Sandy, Heidi, and Ian**. The entire family sings and plays instruments.)

At the age of six, Clif wrote his first piece which he says, "sounded suspiciously like BJ Thomas' 'Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head.' It was published commercially in my 30s." Also in his 30s, Clif wrote music for handbells, published in the Southern Baptist Convention's magazine for handbells. This was his first of several compositions for bells.

Muncie's choir, Masterworks Chorale, has premiered several of his arrangements including "Shine on Harvest Moon," and Dave Brubek's "God's Love Made Visible." In 2022, the Taylor University Sounds premiered "Blessings from Christ" and the Questors Choir (West London, UK) gave the UK premiere of "Now Is the Month of Maying," which was first presented by Masterworks Chorale in Muncie!



Clif's compositions have been published by several different publishers; his commissioned work includes both vocal and instrumental music.

Musical compositions come to Clif in different ways. He sometimes creates a melody on the 10-minute drive from his house in Gas City to Taylor in Upland. If he can't remember it when he has a minute to do notation of the melody, he says that it probably wasn't that strong anyway.



Dr. Clifton Davis playing piano for Kids Choir

His process often involves putting music with an existing text as he did in the piece for the ordination. He also takes a musical idea and adds words. Sometimes he uses the app "Garage Band" as the beat maker and builds the music on that rhythm. Other times he uses other software to pull together the orchestration and voicing direction for a song which he plays onto a keyboard.

Clif uses his expertise in composing to give individual lessons to students and has also taught a choral arranging classes at Taylor University.

Usually, I write for people and groups that I know, so whatever their next concert is inspires me," said Clif. "There is a good marriage between the craft of music and the emotion of music. If the piece is for singers, the text influences that marriage—hopefully in a good way!

"The best advice I've ever received is that my voice, my way of expressing myself, is valuable and nobody else can speak with it." 🏰

Tippecanoe Baptist Camp Realities Necessitate Change

Over the years, hundreds of young people from the FBCM family spent weeks of summer at Tippecanoe Baptist Camp “Camp Tippy” near North Webster, IN. Perhaps the most enthusiastic camper from FBCM was **Shirley Pittenger** who went to camp and also provided decades of leadership for nearly 70 years.

Within the past year the facility has been sold, and the other main Indiana Baptist church camp, Indian Creek Camp and Retreat Center near Bedford, is being readied for an increased group of visitors this summer.

Rev. Mark Thompson, executive minister of American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky, explained the reason that “Tippy” had to be closed down. Usually “In the past few years, we only had 150 campers for the whole summer. With that few campers, income was running at a \$125,000 annual deficit and, in 2022, that deficit rose to \$140,000. In addition, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) asked us to pay toward a new sewage system at the lake at \$200,000-\$300,000, and an ongoing usage fee of \$2,000 per month.”

A task force of American Baptist representatives from across the Indiana/Kentucky region came to the sad reality that the regional office could no longer support the camp. One of the priorities for this leadership group was that the money from the sale of the camp would go toward youth ministry work in the region.

After almost a year of putting the camp up for sale, a developer purchased it, and the regional office group has been told that the hope is to keep some of the key buildings, particularly the newest, the dining hall.

Meanwhile, plans are moving forward to encourage churches in northern Indiana to send campers to the Bedford site. June 16-22, pastors **Jonathan and Kendall** will be taking tenth through twelfth grade youth to the senior high camp. Sixth through ninth grade camp will be July 20-26.

Camp director Jordan Morris will preach during worship on April 21 and will be available to answer questions about Indian Creek Baptist Camp. 🏰



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LEADERS

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Worship Arts Pastor

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Clerk–Janis Wright
Treasurer–Dan Lemen
Outreach–James Heimlich
Worship–Molly Flodder
Member Care–Deena Green
Adult Ministries–Carolyn Harke
Youth Ministries–Loraine Garrett
Children’s Ministry–Jennifer Durke
Property–Larry Bradburn
At Large–Larry Fouch

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