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THE VISITOR



Church Family Works to Spread Holiday Cheer



Churches have their eyes wide open to serving others at holiday time.

Volunteers of all ages prepared boxes for Operation Christmas Child and Thanksgiving baskets.

Our Watchword for 2024-2025: "Not to be served, but to serve."

The shoeboxes were packed with gifts for the national organization *Samaritan's Purse* which sends holiday packages to children around the world, along with the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Thanksgiving baskets were filled with cards, fruit, bread, and cookies that congregation members baked. Volunteers delivered the baskets to shut-ins that are part of our church family and our pastors.

The process of joining hands and working together is often the heart of serving others. At the same time, reaching across generations to serve others creates strong relationships in Christ's church.



Charis Offers a Home for International Students to Find Networking, Support, and God's Love

A couple that calls Texas their home had the opportunity for him to serve as American Baptist part-time campus pastor at Ball State University, so **Daniel and Lydia Harris** and their family moved to Muncie in August. Daniel has since launched the student ministry initiative *Charis* (a Greek word meaning *grace*).

Charis has a "come as you are" sort of mentality. Daniel has been moving around the campus building relationships with other campus organizations and trying to meet students where they are. He is particularly focusing on international students, concentrating on the mission of the current Baptist campus ministry board who believes that international ministries, a key component of the work in recent years, is an area ripe with opportunities to introduce students to Christ.

"It's harder than it was some time ago to strike up conversations with students who are wearing earbuds and involved in their technology as they walk around campus or sit in the Student Center," he admits.



The Harris Family at Riverside Avenue Baptist Church following Daniel's installation service.

While introductory discussion meetings are beginning, Daniel shares that there are issues that make it difficult for international students to be involved in the work. Most do not have transportation, and their welcoming location at Riverside Avenue Baptist Church for conversation and Bible study is a long walk from campus. Meeting on campus property cannot occur until the group is officially "recognized" with a regular core of five people, including a signatory leader and a group of 10–15 attendees. In spite of having a long historical link with Ball State University, the Baptist campus initiative has always had to supply this "recognition documentation" annually. Currently, a few students from Ghana make up the initial participation in the work.

Did You Know?

Three FBC members lived in Baptist housing during their college years. They are **Julie Davis, Carolyn Harke,** and **Janis Wright.**

Daniel and Lydia met at Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, where both played French horn in the band. Eventually, Daniel matriculated to Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco. As musicians, they both play guitar and have worked with youth music groups in previous churches.

Their earlier plan was to work for the Wycliffe Translation organization in Papua New Guinea, but they decided that their daughters—**Junia**, 4½, **Eloise**, turning 3 in December, and **Eowyn "Winnie,"** 13 months—are not ideal ages for that long-distance move to another culture.

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Lydia has expertise in graphic design, especially in designing brands and websites. Not long before coming to Muncie, she started a second business working with mothers to enable them to find more fulfillment in their small businesses by rediscovering who they are created to be and aligning their offerings with their giftings and passions. In her work helping moms bring their business visions to life through design, she is helping people build a business as a means to an end so they can be home with their children. “My business,” she says, “provides one-on-one mentorship sharing what I know about integrating our many facets as mothers, strategic business knowledge, and spiritual practices for a holistic approach to business building for mothers.”

Daniel emphasizes that she is great at this work and that the work is enhanced by her experience, compassion, and gift of hospitality, which helps people feel warmly welcomed.

The couple believes that BSU is a good place to be. Daniel sometimes shares some of his life struggles with others but doesn’t find them liabilities. “Some of my past experiences enable me to meet people where they are,” said Daniel, “and to proclaim the gospel in a way that speaks to them. I am a person of peace, and I find that people are looking for that in this complex world.”

“He has a depth of understanding of what people are going through,” said Lydia. “He has a rich understanding of God’s love and a theological understanding of the Bible. Coupled with his, ‘I know because I’ve lived it,’ he has much to offer to students.”

As the second semester begins, logistical barriers smooth out, numbers grow, and university recognition is established, *Charis* will build a solid foundation to help Ball State international students learn the depth and breadth of God’s love.

Highlights of Baptist Campus Ministry at BSU

- FBCM pastor Dr. Ray Johnson and members started the work in 1954.
- In 1960, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Ball gave their former large and stately residence on Petty Road to serve as the home for six students and meetings, Bible study, and fellowship. Rev. Richard Fears was a campus minister for several years during that time.
- In 2005, the Baptist House had to be sold, and in 2006, the group purchased a house on Abbott Street.
- Rev. David Jones became part-time campus minister, replacing retiring Rev. Charlie Gilbert in 2009.
- In 2014, the ministry was renamed “Oasis” after the ministry was moved to Abbott Street. It became a home for international students and a place for Bible Study and discussion.
- The Oasis house on Abbott Street was sold to the University in 2019.
- The board of Baptist Campus Ministries was restructured and, in 2024, the new board hired Daniel Harris, as a part-time pastor, to focus on international students.

The Weary World Rejoices

By Pastor Jonathan Balmer, Co-Pastor



Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
"O Holy Night," Adolphe Adam

It's nearly impossible to think of a more Christmassy Christmas hymn than "O Holy Night." The song is *about* the night itself, the first Christmas. And yet, the stage from which the triumphant chorus bursts is undeniably "Advent."

The first stanza speaks of the long pining of the world: pining, that is, "until he appeared" bringing with him "the thrill of hope." It is *then,* "The weary world rejoices."

That is the title of our focus this Advent. Before we can get to the new and glorious morn, we should recognize the world that waits is tired, weary, and in need. When Christ arrives, and this will be true in his second advent (coming) just as it was his first, he does not come to a world full of light, warmly expecting his visit as friends. Christ's light, life, and freedom come not to a world all accustomed to that reality (and just needing a bit of a refill of it), but a world filled with darkness, death, and bondage—aching in expectation for a long, long time.

As Fleming Rutledge noted, "The approach of Advent is a reminder to us that we live on a planet that exists precariously under the righteous judgment of God, a bright but threatened globe poised in icy interstellar space, preserved from extinction by one factor and one only: not the 'triumph of the human spirit,' but by the hand of God."

This season, I hope we all will invite people in this precarious (and yet grace-preserved!) world we share to see the reason a weary world might rejoice: the one who is the light of the world that bursts into darkness—that is, Jesus. This is a season that even many skeptics recognize has an undeniable attraction and power. One person who became a Christian as an adult, after a secular childhood, said the weeks leading up to Christmas were the first time she ever perceived something to be "good spooky" (which she later came to know as "holiness").

Those who encountered Christ's coming included shepherds, young and expectant parents unsure what they were getting themselves into, aged and long-waiting prophets in the Temple, and pagan Magi following a star. Christ is the Light of the World for all of them. And he is the Light for all of us, still, today, whoever we might be in this weary world longing for a reason—a real reason—to rejoice.

Christmas Events

1	**First Sunday of Advent**
5	**Light Up Downtown, FBC Caroling at Canon Commons** Meet at church at 5 p.m. to head downtown.
8	**After-service soup lunch,** followed by **Hanging of the Greens** and Kids' Craft
14	**Christmas Parties for Children and Youth** Children Family Day Out Party: 4:30–6:00 p.m. at FBC Youth Progressive Christmas Dinner: 4:30–7:30 start at FBC
16	**CCT Christmas Party** at Pastors' house
24	**Christmas Eve Candlelight Service** at 7:00 p.m.
29	**Intergenerational worship** in the Fellowship Hall

FBCM Hosts Biennial for American Baptist Attendees

On Friday, September 27, and Saturday, September 28, more than a hundred American Baptists convened at First Baptist Church in Muncie to mark the Biennial gathering of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana & Kentucky. This was an important time of worship and training, with a few recognitions, a very brief business session, and shared meals. Related organizations were also present with Ministry Fair displays, which were open during breaks.

A total of fifty-eight people in the FBCM church family worked together as volunteers to decorate the church, set up, tear down, cook and serve food, sing, play handbells, and greet attendees.

Representatives from Fresh Expressions were key presenters in the worship settings on Friday and Saturday. Fresh Expressions is an organization that helps pastors and leaders equip their churches to reach more people for Christ.

According to Mark Thompson, executive director of ABC-IN/KY, "The theme of this year's biennial was 'Called.' We don't need to complicate sharing Christ with people in our lives. Fresh Expressions helped us think about being more organic and how to work witnessing about Jesus into the way we live from day to day."

Molly Flodder and **Emily Anderson** served as co-chairs. "We were amazed at how the church family pulled together to support this important event," said Molly.

Riverside Avenue Baptist Church News

In October, **Rev. Robert Burton** retired from his post as pastor of Riverside Avenue Baptist Church. Robert and his wife, **Lydia**, came to Muncie twenty-five years ago when he became the first chaplain at Ball Memorial Hospital. He was pastor at Riverside for 18 years. He and Lydia have sold their home and are moving to Mississippi to be near family.

In November, FBCM's James Heimlich became the part-time pastor there. James continues to teach Sunday School at First Baptist before going over to lead worship for the Riverside congregation.

Reception Planned

A reception to honor the Burtons will take place at Riverside Avenue Baptist Church on Sunday, December 15, from 2:30–4:30 p.m. The going-away event is being sponsored by the Burtons' FBC Life Group and the Riverside congregation.

Pastor Clif Recognized for Ten Years of Service



In a surprise presentation, FBCM recognized Rev. Dr. **Clifton Davis** for his ten years of service as Worship Arts Pastor. He and his wife, **Julie**, received a cash gift and gift cards, and the church celebrated with a lunch for them after the service, prepared by the SnowBirds Life Group.

Godly Play Brings the Bible to Life for FBCM's Young Learners

How can you learn the Bible when you don't know how to read yet?

In Kickstart Children's Church, preschoolers through second graders engage with the Bible through circle time, reenacting stories, stations filled with tactile ways to learn, and sharing. Godly Play is a Montessori-influenced curriculum Pastor Kendall first learned about from a friend and children's minister during her time in Waco, Texas.

Pastor Kendall reflects on her time using the Godly Play curriculum. "The heart of Godly Play is children's natural desire to wonder. When kids hear the story, they wonder about God's character and actions. When kids work with the props, they wonder what part of the story they find themselves in today. When kids look up at the Sacred Stories shelves, they see the wonder of God's faithfulness played out in front of them."

FBCM's children have found the time engaging. "Sacred Story time is so fun!" **Elinore Smith** said. "My favorite is that we get to use the boxes to reenact the story."

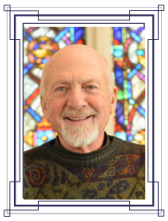
Elinore, now a third grader, participated in a trial of Godly Play before she was promoted to the 3rd–5th grade children's church classroom, which is called The Underground. (As of 2023, FBCM Children's Ministry has expanded to two children's church classrooms.) Now, a completely different group of students is enjoying Godly Play, interacting with Old and New Testament stories and engaging their whole selves with the story of God's love for us.

Outgoing Members of the Church Coordination Team

Five members of the Church Coordination Team will complete their terms in December. We would like to thank the following members for faithfully serving our church family in their leadership roles.







Outreach–**James Heimlich**
Adult Ministries–**Carolyn Harke**
Youth Ministries–**Loraine Garrett**
Property–**Larry Bradburn**
At Large–**Larry Fouch**

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