

THE VISITOR



Changes in the Church Highlight New Beginnings

It's been a fall full of changes and new beginnings here at First Baptist Church Muncie! Many of us have mixed reactions to change. We welcome something fresh, wonder how it will work, and worry about what happens if the change isn't for the better. As we approach the new year—both Advent in the church calendar and January in the 2026 calendar—the spirit of reflection and new beginnings is certainly upon us!

No matter how you feel about change, we hope that this edition of *The Visitor* will inspire encouragement for you. Each story is designed to highlight a major area of change that our congregation has experienced these past three months and, more importantly, highlight how God has been “creating a new thing” as we journey with him. As you read, let us all praise and proclaim God for one thing that never changes: his faithful presence along the way.

Coming Holiday Season Events

Saturday, Dec. 6: Family Day Out, “The Christmas Star” at Brown Planetarium

Sunday, Dec. 14: “Invite a Friend Sunday” for morning worship

Friday, Dec. 19: Youth Progressive Dinner
(read the “Moose’s Message” for more information)

Sunday, Dec. 21: Annual Business Meeting at noon after morning service

Dr. Cynthia Smith Becomes New Worship Arts Director

The leadership and congregation of First Baptist Church are delighted to welcome **Dr. Cynthia Smith**, Doctor of Arts, MM, BM, as our new Worship Arts Director, affirmed by a super-majority vote at the business meeting on October 26.

“Cynthia brings a spirit of creativity and a heart for inclusive worship to our church’s professional staff team,” said Pastor Kendall Ellis. “We look forward to working alongside her thoughtful worship leadership, which inspires, engages, and draws us closer to God together.”



Cynthia, Aaron, Elinore, and Adrian

The team that served as the Worship Search Committee after Worship Arts Pastor Clif Davis left his post in mid-July consisted of **Loraine Garrett**, chair; **Dana Davis**; **Molly Flodder**; **Jane Patton**; **Robin Rybolt**; **Aaron Smith**; and **Chris Wright**. Both **Jonathan Balmer** and **Kendall Ellis**, pastors, were also part of the search team.

Because Cynthia’s talents do not include keyboard proficiency, a pianist/organist will be hired in the coming year.

Cynthia, her husband **Aaron**, and their daughter **Elinore**, 9, are members of the church. Their family also includes **Adrian**, 4. Aaron is the coordinator of the weekly live-streaming of FBCM’s Sunday morning worship.

The Smiths have been back at First Baptist for the past four years. In 2010, they came to Muncie, where Cynthia pursued her doctorate in music education at BSU. During those three years, Cynthia served as an intern, sang in the Sanctuary Choir along with Aaron, and also directed the choir. At the same time, she led music at Riverside Avenue Baptist across town. After they left Muncie, Cynthia did research in Switzerland and taught in India. Elinore was born during their tenure in India.

Aaron and Cynthia run a home that is full of music. Recorded classical music playing during dinner is frequent, and singing—lots of singing at all sorts of times—is a consistent activity.

Cynthia is part of BSU’s music education department. “It is the largest department in the school of music,” said Cynthia, “and I teach voice to students pursuing BS and BA degrees as well as occasional master’s students.” In addition, using an internet platform, she has a private studio at home, instructing students online—a convenient undertaking for those students in places like California, because she can teach after her children are in bed due to the time difference.

In reflecting on her years of involvement in church music, Cynthia said, “I believe that a good church music program is one that is Christ-centered and inclusive. An inclusive program gives people the chance to participate in music and liturgy.”

According to Molly Flodder, Worship Ministry representative to the Church Coordination Team (CCT), “Cynthia is already up and running and leading worship that includes a mix of contemporary and traditional music, as well as responsive readings.”



Arise! Your Light Has Come

By Pastor Jonathan Balmer

“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” - Romans 13:12 (NIV)

Advent is upon us: the great time of anticipation and preparation. Get ready! No, not in the sense of hurry: the frantic pace of the adverts and the expectations placed upon us by the digital, algorithmically-powered twenty-first-century equivalent of the Madison Avenue advertisers and influencers pushing us to buy, spend, and consume. Rather, let's prepare ourselves for the light: for Christ is the light of the world.

Theologically, this means we take full inventory of the darkness, within and without. We recognize the fallenness in the world and ourselves for what it is. But this leads us not to despair or to cynicism. Because we do not end there. We put on the armor of light, trusting: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” That means that we live as Christ lived, and not according to the ways of sin and the world, often, so powerful.

Pragmatically, preparation means being vigilant. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, there are some wise and some foolish. The wise made sure to show up with plenty of oil, waiting through the long night. As a community of faith, we recently had our Stewardship Sunday: we took a special offering for the church and food goods for the needy in our community. We look toward the future, not knowing what it holds but trusting in the one who is its author: the Lord. To be prepared, we need a 7–10 percent increase in giving to make up a nearly \$16,000 gap between our financial responsibilities this year and our normal giving. Please prayerfully consider what you can give.

Personally, it is the prayer of your pastors that the light and warmth of awaiting Christ be palpably present to each of you this season.

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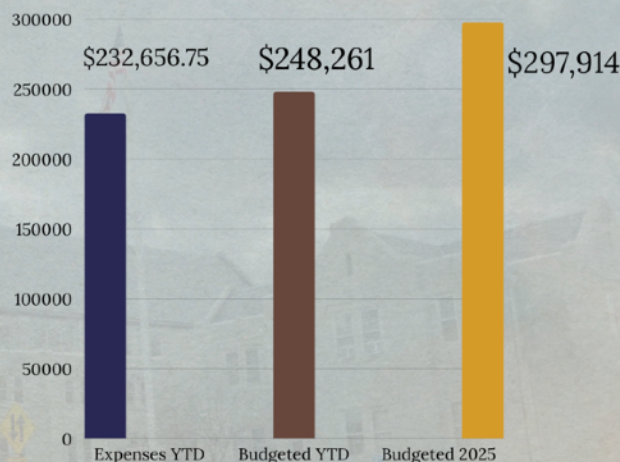


Budget Updates

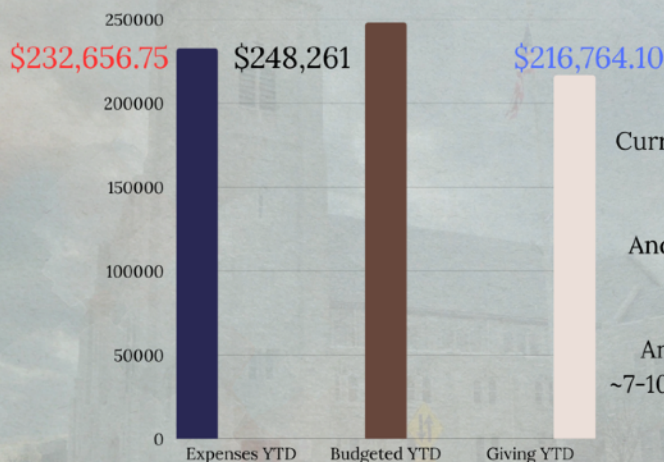
Expenses so far this year are down compared to what we budgeted
Year To Date (YTD) = End of October 2025

We have spent **\$15,604** less than we have budgeted for at this time of year.

However...



...But our REGULAR giving (no special gifts included) is still below our expenses by ~(\$15,892.65)



Current Giving covers 93% of what we have spent.

And 87% of what we've budgeted year-to-date.

An overall increase of giving of ~7-10% would keep us “in the black.”

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While we might rightly take inventory of the darkness during Advent, and while it is wise to guard against the compulsion to turn the season into one that is only about new gadgets and fancy gifts, none of this should suggest dreariness.

There is great joy to be found in the waiting, the preparation, and the promise of the once and future coming of Jesus Christ. As Christmas arrives, take joy, eat, gather with family and loved ones new and old, sing songs, and laugh deeply. And do not let the darkness of the world rob you of joy.

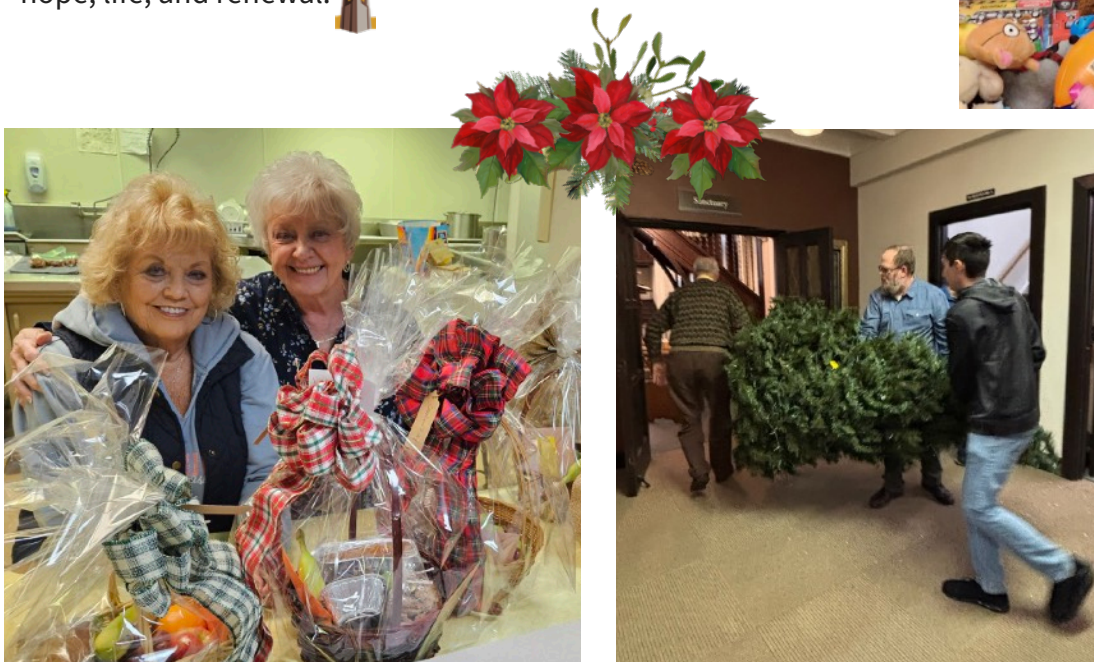
Pre-Season Activities Set the Tone for Holidays

November 8 was a workday that helped adults and children focus on the real meaning of the holidays, as two tasks were performed.

First, people came together to pack Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes with quantities of children's Christmas gifts donated by members of the church family. This program sometimes gives boys and girls around the world their first gift ever. Local churches in more than a hundred nations hand out these gifts of toys, useful toiletries, and other items, and they are distributed worldwide by Samaritan's Purse, which offers international relief and evangelism.

Second, a team of people worked with CCT Member Care representative Deena Green to assemble and deliver fourteen fall baskets loaded with fresh fruits, nuts, and other goodies to help shut-ins and pastors celebrate their Thanksgiving holiday.

The first Sunday of Advent marked the Hanging of the Greens. People brought in their favorite soups for an after-church lunch on Sunday, November 30, and some stayed to hang garland, decorate the sanctuary, and benefit from the traditional purposes of the day: hope, life, and renewal.



First Baptist Church Hosts Veterans Celebration

In an effort to honor local veterans, FBCM provided the venue for a Sunday afternoon, November 9, community program. A total of 130 people attended, nearly half of whom were veterans. The program included church soloists—**Emily Anderson** and **Julie Kirklin**—as well as area performers. Former Worship Arts Pastor Dr. Clif

Davis directed a mass choir that included twelve FBCM singers and Masterworks Chorale members. Other performers playing bugle and organ or representing their branch of service were from all over the community. Brian Wilson, administrator of the Delaware County Veterans Administration, served as emcee. A Ball State University ROTC team presented the colors. **Charlotte Cale, Lila Anderson**, and Sean Tanner were children who shared information about the branches of service.



Pastor Jonathan Balmer made brief remarks on the topic of freedom, and Dr. Keith O'Neal, pastor of Destiny Church, brought additional greetings from the community. Members Loraine Garrett and Chris Wright provided essential roles as stage manager and sound director.



Molly Flodder and Sandra Hoover were co-chairs of the event. Six other members of the church were on the thirteen-person planning team: **Coby Anderson, Susan Burk, Jim Butler, Cheryl Flaherty, Loraine Garrett, and Chris Wright.**



Feedback from attendees emphasized how special the event was to the veterans in attendance. Touches such as a display of six service branch flags—including Space Force—and POW/MIA flags were also noticed and appreciated. (The flags were shared by former members Allen and Carolyn Shelton.)

The team met for a debriefing session and unanimously recommended that the initiative become an annual event. While the event might not have an FBCM venue next time, many FBCM people who attended hope there will continue to be involvement from the church.



Get to Know: Sisters Who Are Cathedral Bell Ringers

Eliana and Danielle Heimlich are the teens participating in the church's adult bell choir. These girls, along with their sister Isabel, are the "older girls" in the Heimlich family. The family also includes three younger girls, two older boys, and a younger boy.

Their interest in music began with their participation in lessons via the Youth Symphony of East Central Indiana. Early on, the girls were asked to play for an event at the Ross Community Center, where the lessons were given. Eventually, they were part of the orchestra performances for the community. Eliana played cello, and Isabel and Danielle played viola. Today, Danielle still plays with the orchestra.



Eliana and Danielle Heimlich



Isabel, Danielle, and Eliana Heimlich

According to Eliana, participation in YSO helped them learn to read music, a need for being a proficient bell ringer, and, in that setting, they developed the skills needed to stay together with the other ringers: focusing and following the director.

Both Eliana and Danielle especially like being bell ringers because of the opportunity to be in an intergenerational group. While they are the youngest ringers, the other ringers' ages extend into the eighties. The girls enjoy getting to know these "seniors" and developing relationships with them.

Although the girls attend the church where their dad, James Heimlich, pastors—Riverside Avenue Baptist Church—they are still involved at First Baptist. All three, along with their brother Josh are part of the Club Night youth programming at FBC each week. In addition, Danielle helps shoot the livestream of the service on scheduled weeks. Their oldest brother, **John (Andy) Heimlich**, is also still active at FBCM.

The three older girls are very different from each other. Eliana, 17, likes reading, writing, and research. She describes her sister Isabel, 15, as a person who likes to craft and, as a type A personality, who enjoys cleaning and keeping the room they share very neat. On the other hand, Danielle, 13, loves to read, draw, and paint. The three teen girls are homeschooled together and reside in a room in the spacious house where the Heimlichs now live. This is not a liability. According to the girls, they are never lonely. Danielle says it best: "We are built-in best friends, and we enjoy our late-night conversations." 🏠

New Social Work Interns Will Serve FBC

Co-pastor Kendall Ellis received her master of divinity and master of social work from Baylor University's Truett Seminary and Garland School of Social Work in 2022. Because of her enhanced area of expertise, she is eligible to supervise social work practicum students who are interested in doing their internships in congregational social work. Kendall is currently working in partnership with the Indiana Wesleyan and Ball State University social work departments.



Joining her at FBCM this year is Brandi Carden, an Indiana Wesleyan student who began her work in mid-November and will serve through next semester. Marlana Wolfe, from BSU's social work department, will do her full-time practicum experience from January through April in 2026.

Field experience for both of them will include learning about and helping care for elderly homebound members and their families. They will also have learning experiences around social topics such as mental health, food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness.

Brandi will work closely alongside the Member Care coordinator and new deacons, overseeing the Deacon Fund, and City Life youth program at the YMCA. Marlena will work with the Outreach coordinator, the Neighborhood Relations Committee, and the office volunteers as they support those outside of FBCM's congregation. 🏰

Partnership with Youth for Christ Is Unfolding

FBCM leadership and involved members are working to provide links to Muncie Central High School students. Through this partnership with Youth for Christ, participating members can provide friendship, interest, support, and, eventually, perhaps links to the church.

In late September, the church was informed that it would receive a grant of \$11,700 from the American Baptist Home Missions Society's annual Palmer Grant. Co-pastor Kendall Ellis and member Molly Flodder wrote the grant proposal asking for dollars to support a re-launch of youth ministry at FBCM. The new ministry model—called City Life—is a holistic, outreach-driven youth program in conjunction with Youth for Christ and the YMCA. The grant's support will help pay expenses related to feeding students at weekly events, teacher appreciation gifts each semester, upgrades to FBCM's youth facilities, and an educational component designed for the congregation to learn more about the social challenges facing many Muncie families.

Since October, on Tuesday evenings, the pastors, Congregational Social Work Intern Brandi, and Nate Lex of Youth for Christ have been bringing snacks and gathering at the YMCA to lead

games for one hour of the teen open gym night. Each week, they are seeing more students join them, with a record participation of close to twenty students on Nov. 18. This recreation time is foundational to developing mentoring relationships with students in sixth through twelfth grade. As these relationships develop, the YMCA students are being connected with other resources that they may need, and are invited to Wednesday Club Nights at 7:17 p.m. at First Baptist Church.

During Club Night, students participate in the four Gs: Grub (share a free meal), Games, Groups (a student-led Christ-centered devotional with small group discussions), and Go (send-off with prayer and a practical life challenge). Club Night has averaged eight to ten students during the fall.

The final phase of student engagement and support through City Life will occur through academic coaching. Academic Coaches are volunteers who commit to forty-five minutes per week to befriend and tutor a student.

Youth For Christ Executive Director Hope Lehmen has been meeting with representatives from the Muncie Community School's board and leadership of Muncie Central

High School to finalize approval and details of the academic coaching program. Meanwhile, Kendall has been working behind the scenes to get additional FBCM volunteers background-checked and trained as academic coaches.

The goal is to have twenty or more academic coaches ready to start engaging with MCHS students as soon as the principal gives the green light. Currently, approximately twelve volunteers have agreed to be academic coaches on their 2025 Vision Lunch commitment card, with about half of them already beginning the application, background check, and the training process.

Volunteers who have not yet begun their application process should expect to hear from Kendall before the new year. Anyone who would still like to become an academic coach can contact Youth Coordinator Loraine Garrett to be added to the list. All youth ministry volunteers will be trained by Hope and Kendall over the next few weeks and given tools to do the same work that has been done for more than a year by other churches volunteering in Muncie's two middle schools. 🏰

Children's Bell Ringer Performance Is Upcoming



While adults and youth have Bible Study during the Sunday School hour, children PreK–5th grade learn about music and its role in worship. At any moment, you may find the children singing or playing piano, rhythm sticks, boom whackers, and their current favorite: the handbells.

Under the direction of Pastor Kendall, the children have already shared what they learned with the congregation at two separate Sunday services. They

will play again on Sunday, December 7, during intergenerational worship service. Children's & Music Intern **Caroline Koby**, a Ball State student, will be directing the children's most complex musical number yet—a responsive song played by the children on both boom whackers and handbells.

Handbells have long been a feature of worship at First Baptist Church. At one time, there were three sets of bell ringers: a senior bell choir, Cathedral bells, and a youth group of bell ringers. Although the late Barbara Eidson led the bells for many years, the director for the past four years has been Dana Davis. "There has been interest in starting a youth choir," said Dana. "I hope that is something we can do at some point."

Meanwhile, the young choir is getting plenty of practice in learning what it requires to be bell ringers! 🏠

Visitor "Subscription" Is 2026 Option

As part of last spring's communications survey, several people indicated they do not receive, see, or read *The Visitor*. Several of the respondents are elderly members who are not part of the digital world, and yet, they want to stay plugged in to FBCM information. While the "Wednesday Weekly" publication is photocopied and at the Visitor's Center every Sunday, the printed quarterly *Visitor* publication is only available to shut-ins due to its printing and mailing expense. Everyone else receives it electronically.

Beginning with the March 2026 issue, people will be able to purchase a one-year subscription to receive a physical copy of the feature publication. The publication, will be \$10 for the year, which covers all four quarters. Stay tuned for more information. 🏠



New 2026 CCT Candidates Will Be Elected

In a business meeting after the service on December 21, four new candidates for the Church Coordination Team will be presented to the congregation for possible election. Watch the "Wednesday Weekly" for nominees for the open roles of Lay Moderator, Children's Ministry, Member Care, and Clerk.

Members of this year's nominating committee are **Sally Butler**, **Jeff Lemen**, and **Nina Oisten**. 🏠

Senior Co-Pastors

Rev. Kendall Ellis
kendall@fbcmuncie.org

Rev. Jonathan Balmer
jonathan@fbcmuncie.org

Worship Arts Director

Dr. Cynthia Smith
cynthia@fbcmuncie.org

Outgoing CCT Members

Lay Moderator-**Emily Anderson**
Clerk-**Janis Wright**
Children-**Jennifer Durke**
Member Care-**Deena Green**

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©First Baptist Church, Muncie
309 E. Adams, Muncie, IN 47305
PHONE: 765-284-7749 | EMAIL:
info@fbcmuncie.org

WEBSITE: www.fbcmuncie.org

Produced by **Molly Flodder**, Editor

Julie Davis, Copy Editor

Michelle Heimlich, Graphic Designer

