FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH MUNCIE // VOLUME 80 // ISSUE 2 // JUNE 2026

THE VISITOR



Church Realities Call for Action and Resolve

First Baptist Church of Muncie has experienced some tough realities in the past several months resulting in budget cuts, changed personnel hours, and, for some, fears about the future. This edition examines those realities along with lots of good news about members, projects and programs, volunteerism, and our hardworking pastors. This challenging time is a moment when prayer and perseverance are required, and the need to "praise and proclaim" to others, as the church watchword bids, is ever stronger to show that First Baptist Church of Muncie is moving into the future.



Congregants came forward at the end of the Easter service to place their flower donations on the cross built by Aaron Smith.

Paul persevered in following the Lord's leading, in spite of many obstacles. In Philippians 3:13–14, he wrote, "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (NIV). He boldly followed Jesus with a deep passion and refused to settle for second best.

A strong vision for the future, prayer, discernment, and a strong faith in God is carrying many churches through difficult days. The current journey toward a more financially stable future will allow FBCM to go the distance.

Jesus Is the Vine

THE SHARED PULPIT

By Co-Pastor **Kendall Ellis**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." *–John 15:1–2 (NIV)*

Some passages of Scripture we love to quote all the time: Psalm 23, Jeremiah 29:11, John 3:16, and Philippians 4:13 are readily quoted by folks in every season. Other Bible verses seem seasonal. We almost forget about these verses until the Holy Spirit brings them back to our minds at just the needed time.

For me, John 15 is somehow both of these types of Scripture for me. I regularly use John 15:5 as a breath prayer throughout the day. I breathe in and pray, "Jesus is the vine." I breathe out and pray, "I am the branch." Sometimes I repeat this basic prayer repeatedly for several moments while I am completing a task—at work and at home. This prayer is one that comforts me everyday, keeping me rooted in Christ no matter what the agenda is.

But before we read the comforting words of John 15:5, there are two "pesky" little verses that are more seasonal. They are verses I try not to think too much about because they can be quite uncomfortable. Painful even. Those verses are John 15:1–2.

In these two verses, Jesus begins the same way. He reminds us that he is the vine and the Father is the gardener. All seems well until Jesus reminds us what good gardeners do: they prune their plants to keep them healthy. Any backyard gardener knows when you remove a dead bloom, a plant is able to put more energy into making new buds. It seems easy for us to snip off those dead branches with our sharp trimmers and watch the new buds pop up in the weeks ahead. But is it quite as easy when we find parts of our lives feeling the pressure of closing sheers around them?

Of course it's not! We feel the pain of what is cut off, even if we trust the Good Gardener's expertise in creation. This is why John 15:1–2 are seasonal verses for me. They are important Scriptures that I cling to each spring and summer as I do yardwork, both metaphorically and literally. They are verses that show God's faithful promise to work all things out for his glory and our good. What is pruned will always be more fruitful than before. Even if the plant looks different than how we imagined.

Summer Events

- Church Camp experiences at Indian Creek Baptist Camp in June

Grow
INDIAN CREEK BAPTIST CAMP
Connect Refresh

- Family Fun Days
  Second Saturday:
  July 11–Water Wars Day Camp
  August 8–Construction Day Camp
- Father's Day, Sunday, June 21- Family/Individual photo makeup sessions in the Circle Drive during donut hour
- Baseball Road Trip to see Indianapolis Indians game Saturday, August 22- Stay tuned for more information.
- Vision Lunch– Sunday, August 30

Academic Coaching at Muncie Central Begins



Bill Eidson and Sally Butler, academic advisors in the MCHS program, complete the training from Youth for Christ officials.

Eight academic coaches got off to a strong start in April. This initiative, a partnership with Youth for Christ, already existed at the two Muncie middle schools. FBCM's participation at Muncie Central was funded through the American Baptist denominational Palmer Grant, which was won by the church last October.

"It took time for the program to be fully approved by leadership at both Muncie Central and the Muncie Community Schools office," said co-pastor Kendall Ellis. "But when the district was finally ready for us to begin volunteering in April, our team of eight academic coaches was excited and ready. This City Life soft launch included twelve academic coaching days over six weeks. In that short amount of time, we were able to mentor twenty-four freshman students!"

The coaches focused on getting to know the students and learning and addressing the barriers that had created the struggles and produced the grades they had attained in certain classes.

Commonway Church, a neighbor of First Baptist, has expressed interest in joining FBCM during the next academic year. According to Kendall, "Commonway's youth pastor, Tyler Crandall, has joined our group on Mondays to get a sense of the work before beginning volunteer recruitment in his congregation."

At least two other coaches from FBCM plan to start in coaching positions in the fall. Having several more congregants in this role would be such an asset to the work. See the pastors, Kendall or Jonathan, if you are interested in being trained this summer to help.



Just before school was out, FBCM team members **Larry Fouch** and **Janis Wright** helped show appreciation to teachers, especially those who sent students to advise to FBCM volunteers. The meal was from Chipotle and funded by the church's Palmer Grant.

Meet the Summer Congregational Intern

Christina Veatch, who will become Christina Heffron at her wedding at First Baptist this weekend, is completing a master's in social work and is doing a congregational internship with Pastor Kendall as her supervisor. She will serve until the end of July and is working on a variety of church projects.

"Ministry Moments" Testimonials Beginning

As summer begins, FBCM congregants will begin sharing how they feel the power of God is moving in the church. According to **Cynthia Smith**, worship arts director, "Ministry Moments are an opportunity for people to share how God is moving in the lives within the church."

Opportunities: Life Groups Begin in Summer and Fall

Life groups create a space for people to intentionally share their lives with others, grow spiritually together, and encourage each other through the highs and lows of life.

Pam Kistler, a member of the Snowbirds group, loves being part of a life group. "Membership has helped me develop friendships and feel closer to people. Participation in a group broadens how you think and gives you God- and faith-related topics to focus on."

Now is the perfect time to join a life group. The Faithful Fellowship group is beginning on Sunday, June 7. Snowbirds start their summer season on June 11. The other two life groups will begin again in the fall life group season. See Cheryl, adult ministries coordinator, with questions about how to be part of one of these close-knit groups of Christians.

Four life groups have operated as part of the church in the past year. FBCM life groups meet in seasons: fall, spring, and summer. Between life group seasons, all life groups are encouraged to come together for a one-month study during All-Church Discipleship. Two life groups will meet during the summer season, while two life groups will take a summer break and resume in the fall. Life groups typically meet two nights a month on Sunday nights, although one has Thursday night gatherings.

The "Davis Life Group" began meeting in 2016. Their intergenerational membership has ranged from people in their twenties to their eldest, the late Patti Warner. Julie Davis, wife of the former worship arts pastor, has led the group, which ranged from nine to fourteen people, through the study of a number of books of the Bible. When Dr. Clif Davis, her husband, left the church staff last July to pursue a full-time position with Taylor University, Julie agreed to stay on to finish their in-depth study of Romans, which they'd begun in the fall of 2022. **Pastor Jonathan** and Adult Coordinator **Cheryl Flaherty** are working with the remaining life group members to plan what's next for this group.

Another life group is "**Jane Patton**'s Group." This group has met biweekly and completed some service projects together. Now that Jane has been moved to assisted living, their gathering is rethinking how they will move forward.

The third life group is the youngest. James and Michelle Heimlich started the group before James became pastor of Riverside Avenue Baptist Church. Members, who are primarily in their thirties and forties, gathered together at the pastors' house in April for a potluck meal, fellowship, and a time of planning. The group, now calling themselves the "Faithful Fellowship," has decided to resume meeting on the first and third Sundays at 5:30 p.m. at the church beginning in June. Instead of electing one person to teach, the group agreed to take turns teaching one chapter from a book/video-based series. At their first meeting in June, they will decide together which series they will study for the summer.

The final of the four groups is the "Snowbirds." When they started eight years ago, some of their recently retired group members were still going away each winter, so they met from spring through fall, but not in the winter. The group is led by **Joe Songer** with **Molly Flodder** assisting. They have primarily studied Christian books, ranging from offerings provided by Seminary Now to the upcoming study this season on the fruit of the Spirit. That assembly consists of six couples in their seventies and eighties. They are starting their new season next week, and will meet through October. The group welcomes anyone who would like to join.

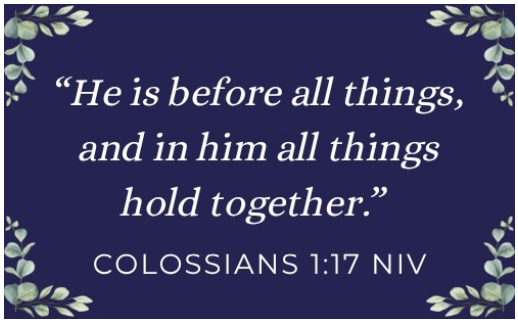
Church Adopts Belt-Tightening Strategies

In spite of a smaller budget for 2026, First Baptist Church started the year experiencing a shortfall in revenue that will likely extend the gap between income and expenditures as the year progresses. Attrition such as congregant deaths, a few leaving the church, a major elevator repair, and increasing utility charges, have contributed to the financial difficulties.

After much discussion and recommendations from the pastors and **Sandi Brzak**, treasurer, the Church Coordination Team approved two options for cutting the budget mid-year.

On April 26 and May 3, back-to-back business meetings allowed people to understand the two belt-tightening scenarios and then, the next week, to vote on their choices. More of the congregation selected Amendment A, the less stringent of the cuts. The key points of that plan include:

- Pastor Kendall (the first of the two to find other employment) is now working in an administrative leadership position at Ball State University and will only be serving at the church around ten hours per week. This move allowed the pastors' salary and health insurance costs to be reduced.
- A cut in the missions budget is being made, giving our American Baptist field personnel and Muncie area service providers slightly less in our donations.
- Reductions to the ministries budget will reduce the income available for a variety of FBC ministries, ranging from adult ministries to worship.
- The paid part-time pianist position was eliminated.



The maintenance dollars budget remained the same, as did the cleaning service budget. A reality for the church is that FBCM's beautiful ninety-six-year-old building is very costly to maintain.

"As the church family prays and steps forward with their monetary gifts, this difficult time will be less painful," said **Jim Butler**, chairman of the FBCM Deacons.

What Can You Personally Do to Facilitate Church Growth?

Duane Davis–"I just need to show up, even when I am not feeling the best. I try to do whatever I can to help around church, and I try to keep a positive attitude. That attitude is important for visitors to see among members of our church family."

Loraine Garrett–"I try to share social media information coming from the church's Facebook account whenever I can. In addition, I share with people at work about my church and the volunteering I do with worship leading, on the greeters' team, and working with the youth."

Andy Heimlich–"I can represent the church to those on the outside and make certain people know that it is a healthy, loving congregation where you can be yourself and be willing to learn and grow."

Mark Flodder– I make sure my friends and the people I do odd jobs for are aware of the church and of the volunteer work I'm doing with my Baptist friends."

Get to Know: Rowan Hollin



Rowan just turned eighteen, is a graduating senior from Blackford County High School, and is beginning a busy summer before starting college. In the fall, she will begin working toward a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Ball State University.

One time-consuming job for Rowan is helping transport her sisters to their various activities. Her parents, **Robin Rybolt** and **Steve Roberts**, have a blended family of seven girls. Rowan is the oldest, then Makayla, 16; Addison, 15; Kinsey, 13; Ellie, 12; Charlotte, 9; and Josie, almost 7. Although not all the girls live with the family all the time, they are there a lot and their activities are a priority too. For Rowan, being part of this group of girls is a usually-positive experience. "We get to bond with each other in a way that is very important to all of us."



One activity for the older girls is coming to FBCM's youth group, City Life Club Night, at 7:17 on Wednesday nights. The four older girls—sometimes five—are there most weeks. Church is important to Rowan because "it's where I get to worship and be closer to my faith."

One person Rowan is particularly close to at church is Ella Mae Lemen. Ella Mae helps with the youth group and is warm and caring in her many roles in the church, according to Rowan.

A big part of Rowan's life for ten years has been participating in competitive cheerleading. Her cheer studio is Champion Force in Anderson. Her favorite trick is Full-Up Inversion: when the flyer person in the air does a full spin at the beginning of the stunt, in transition from the load-in before hitting the final position.



She is a football fanatic and is particularly fond of Indiana University. The chance to back them as they won the college national championships made 2025–26 a great season for her. She looks forward to watching the Colts and other pro and college teams during the upcoming season, as she always does.

Rowan is looking forward to preparing herself to become a teacher. "I've known for a while that I want to teach," she said. "Babysitting, playing games with children, and just being around them have been important to me. I hope I can change lives in my role as a teacher."

Grant-Funded Poverty Study Offered This Spring

In the American Baptist Palmer Grant application awarded to First Baptist last fall, there was a request that, in preparation for potential student involvement with FBCM, there be training for congregants to learn additional information about people living in poverty.

Eye-Opening Dinner

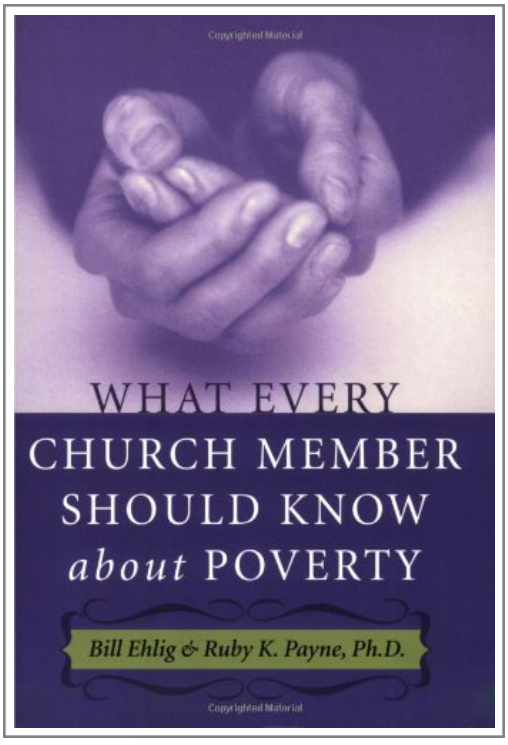


On April 30, a disparity dinner was hosted. “The Platinum Seat” was marketed as a conversation event with dinner as a component. When people arrived, they were given colored tickets pointing them toward platinum-, gold-, silver-, or bronze-covered tables. The tickets divided the attendees so that the number at each table corresponded with the percentages of people living at varying income levels in Delaware County. Food ranged from the platinum offering of roast chicken and all the trimmings served by a waitress at a deluxe table to the bronze table that featured food pantry offerings and no can opener. Discussion after the meal, and a speaker, Jasmine Taylor, helped reinforce the focus on the food disparities among families and the struggles some people experience on a daily basis.



Marlena Wolfe, a congregational intern from Indiana Wesleyan this spring, along with **Brandi Carden**, an intern from Ball State University, coordinated the planning and hosting of the dinner, as well as the program.

Poverty Book Study



During a four-week discipleship series, FBC congregants and a few members of City Hope Fellowship Church studied *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty* by Bill Ehlig and Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D in four Wednesday evening sessions. Molly Flodder, previously certified to teach the Dr. Payne material, and intern Brandi Carden led the sessions. They shared information, formed discussion groups, and helped attendees learn about the resources people in poverty need; the hidden rules of poverty, the middle class, and wealth; developing relationships with people in poverty; and integrating struggling families into the church.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Donna Fouch, who attended the sessions, said, "This was a very interesting study, and I learned a great deal about the subject. I was especially touched to learn what children living in poverty experience and how they feel about their difficulties."



The Pastors hosted their spring Open House on May 16. Cynthia Smith and Ella Mae Lemen were among the attendees.

Watch for the Date

In the late summer or early fall, the church will sponsor a food simulation, which guides the church family through the struggles of trying to get food that people living in poverty have to navigate.



Senior Co-Pastors

Rev. Jonathan Balmer
jonathan@fbcmuncie.org

Rev. Kendall Ellis
kendall@fbcmuncie.org

Worship Arts Director
Dr. Cynthia Smith

The Visitor is a quarterly publication of ©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

Church Coordination Team Members

Lay Moderator-**Andy Heimlich**
Treasurer-**Sandi Brzak**
Clerk-**Nina Oisten**

Adult-**Cheryl Flaherty**
At Large-**Ed Brzak**
Children-**Jaden Johnson**
Member Care-**Sally Butler**

Outreach-**Dana Davis**
Property-**Joseph Songer**
Worship-**Molly Flodder**
Youth-**Loraine Garrett**

