FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH MUNCIE // VOLUME 78 // ISSUE 2 // JUNE 2024

THE VISITOR



Summer Season and Service

Despite the busyness of vacations, family obligations, and sports, First Baptist Church's summer calendar historically remains full of opportunities that bind our congregation together in fellowship and service.

Some happen annually and some are rare. For example, during FBCM's 150th anniversary in 2009, congregants came to Beech Grove Cemetery where they met "charter members" of the church dressed in period costumes to share their experiences in founding a church.

This issue looks ahead at what makes this summer at FBCM special.

In the US, October, September, and June are the top months for weddings. An interview with FBCM's wedding coordinator shows one way our church serves couples in our community.

We'll have our traditional combined summer picnic with our sister congregation Riverside Avenue Baptist Church on June 9.

FBCM families already ushered in summer with a trip to the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo. Life group activities, church camp, and VBS are coming highlights and standouts of summer for youth, children, and volunteers.

As it turns out, we can live "not to be served, but to serve" even while having fun this season!

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Wedding Ministry is Growing Strong

Ella Mae Lemen has a notebook chock full of details on weddings: contracts, information sheets, financial transactions, and very specific wishes for ceremonies. Since FBCM's former pastor's wife, wedding coordinator Christy Allen, moved away in 2021, Ella Mae has helped brides and grooms prepare for and experience their special days. As wedding coordinator, she sees firsthand why people want their weddings in the church and helps facilitate the fine-tuning of the ceremonies that vary from couple to couple.

"Most of the people who come to visit the church have not seen it," said Ella Mae, "although a few of them have attended someone else's wedding." The first reaction is 'Awww! It is so beautiful!" According to her, many couples are looking for a traditional-looking sanctuary and they, their parents, and members of the bridal party are amazed by the Gothic Revival architecture, the dark woodwork, and the stained-glass windows. Most come back to sign a contract.

> *Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10 (NIV)*



Ella Mae Lemen

Sometimes wedding parties will host rehearsal dinners in FBCM's fellowship hall. On a few occasions the fellowship hall has been used for wedding receptions.

Throughout the building's 95-year history, there have been hundreds of weddings, and Christian weddings are still a major service of the church.

In recent years, a significant refundable damage deposit and a fee for the wedding coordinator were the main costs of holding a ceremony at FBCM, but now there are those fees plus a fee of $300 for building rental.

"Building rentals for this purpose is something we do to share our building with sisters and brothers in Christ in the area so they might celebrate at a reasonable cost," said **Jonathan Balmer**, co-pastor. "Any associated fees are used exclusively for the cost of utilities, maintaining our building, and accounting for the time of our wedding coordinator, and others, who help make wedding ceremonies possible." The "others" who are remunerated a la carte include sound technicians; musicians such as soloists, organists, or pianists; plus, custodial assistants and, occasionally, pastors.



Many couples use their own pastor or officiant, but occasionally FBCM pastors have been called on to counsel and officiate weddings for those who do not have a pastor or officiant.

While weddings for the most part are traditional in style, there are little nuances that make many unique. Mothers lighting family candles before the couple lights their unity candles is still done, and more and more couples are sharing in communion, finding it a sacred and meaningful start to their marriage. On rare occasions, the bride and/or the groom have sung to each other, one even singing his wedding vows as a surprise for his bride.

"Recently I have seen 'Flower Grannies,' instead of flower girls," said Ella Mae, describing that the couple's grandmothers walk down the aisle carrying flowers preceding the bride's entrance. "It is a wonderful way for the couple to honor and appreciate their grandmothers."

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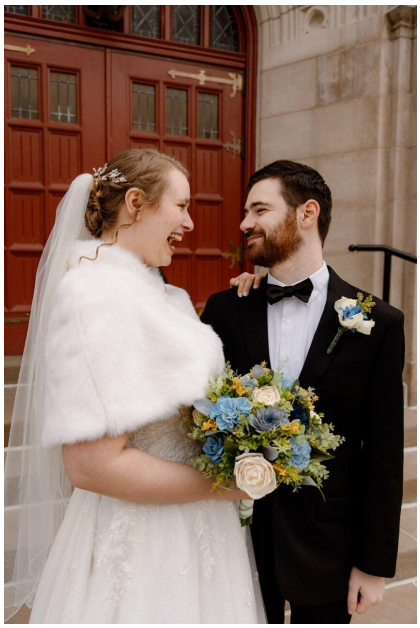
A recent wedding included "Bible bearers," instead of ring bearers. The little boys presented a Bible to the groom and to the bride, and each read scripture to the other.

Ella Mae assists her husband, **Dan Lemen**, FBCM treasurer, with paying bills for the church and has done dozens of volunteer jobs over their 50 years as members. However, her current ministry and the 2024 list of wedding couples already at 13, keep her busiest. "This is hard work, but I love being a part of this joyous and sacred day. I also love being able to get to know and establish a relationship with the couples," said Ella Mae.



The bridal suite at FBCM is located in the southwest corner of the basement. The groom and groomsmen get ready on the second floor in the current library/conference room.

Taylor University Praise Band Couple Has FBCM Ceremony



When Taylor student James Brads started singing and playing percussion with the First Baptist Church praise band, little did he know the church would become the place where he and his girlfriend Aubri Skaggs would pledge their marriage vows. He spent most of his four years in the band, and Aubri participated for three semesters.

"Early on we knew we wanted to use the church because we wanted a church that was meaningful for us," said Aubri. "That church was First Baptist of Muncie."

"It was good to be where we had spent time," said James. "The familiarity was meaningful and the gravity of the occasion strengthened the commitment we were making to God."

Dr. Clif Davis, pastor of worship arts, their mentor while in the worship group, played a significant role in their wedding. He played piano and even designed flower arrangements for the sanctuary.



Aubri Skaggs-Brads and James Brads

"We also loved working with Ella Mae Lemen. She was just very welcoming," said Aubri.

The couple shared that they also received "tons of compliments" from guests about the beautiful sanctuary.

James Brads and Aubrianna Skaggs-Brads came to Taylor from Dayton, Ohio, and Cairo, Egypt, respectively. They are now living in Beverly, Mass working and pursuing masters' degrees in industrial and organizational psychology and library science at Salem State University and Simmons University.

They look back on their March 9 wedding with fondness and reverence. "The day at First Baptist helped us set the right tone as we were breaking new ground for the start of our marriage," said James.

Take Opportunity to Serve at Fall ABC Conference

First Baptist Church Muncie will host the American Baptist Churches of Indiana/Kentucky's Biennial Conference on Friday afternoon and Saturday, September 27-28. With up to 200 people in attendance–both pastors and church members alike–we will need many volunteers to help welcome, register, direct traffic, cook, serve, and participate. The elders say, "Many hands make light work," and that statement is true for the Biennial.

According to Pastors Jonathan and Kendall our church family does not have to lead the conference sessions or pay expenses for the event, but we want to make sure guests feel welcomed so that they have the best learning and fellowship experiences possible.

Youth Head to Indian Creek Baptist Church Camp

The week of June 16 one of our youth will attend Senior High Camp in Bedford, Indiana. From June 22-26, two children are planning to be at the Girls Camp for 4th-6th graders and possibly five youth will go to Focus Camp for youth in 7th-9th grade on July 20-July 26.

According to Loraine Garrett and Jennifer Durke, youth and children's ministry representatives to the CCT, this is the first summer that FBCM will be sending youth to Indian Creek Baptist Church Camp. Camp Tippecanoe Baptist Camp was closed and for sale last summer and was sold last year due to extreme challenges in maintaining funding and keeping it open.

Grow
INDIAN CREEK BAPTIST CAMP
Connect
Refresh

Indian Creek Camp Director Jordan Morris preached on April 21 and delivered a sermon on this year's theme, "Always," sharing how God always has and always will love us. During their first visit to First Baptist Muncie, he and his wife Mindy, also shared camp information and photographs, the camp's history and its role in American Baptist ministries in Indiana.

CCT Learns about Church Culture



The Church Coordination Team (CCT) attended two Saturday retreats using the book, *Soul Culture*, by Matt Snowden and Joshua Hays. They learned about the ingredients of a culture shaped by the good news of Jesus Christ which reflects its community—its unique beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, and practices. As an exercise, prayer activity, and for lunch, the CCT literally worked the dough as they made their own pizzas.

In Memoriam

We remember Nova Jarvis and Shirley Pittenger who passed away recently. Both were long-time members and servants in the church. In addition, former member Louise Eddington also passed away.








Worship Ministry Hosts Second Quarterly Hymn Sing

Call to Worship:

Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord,

Praise Him,
O you servants of the Lord!

Praise the Lord,
for the Lord is good;
We will sing praises to
His name,
it is pleasant.

Psalm 135:1, 3. (NKJV)

"People who miss our traditional service, which ended during the Covid pandemic, really miss the old hymns," said **Molly Flodder**, worship coordinator to the Church Coordination Team. We now sing occasional hymns and contemporary praise music in our blended services.

On May 19 the agenda of favorite hymns included selections performed by "Chords of Friendship" from New Castle. Among those playing their folk art strings instruments such as dulcimers, is FBCM member, **Cheryl Flaherty**.

Others requested favorite hymns ranging from, "God of our Fathers" to "Love Lifted Me," and several shared why their favorite was meaningful.

Anyone who was brought up in the church can enjoy remembering the old hymns. All are welcome to join. The next hymn sing is tentatively planned for late August.

Kingdom Family Vacation

THE SHARED PULPIT

By Pastors Kendall Ellis & Jonathan Balmer

Summer is here! We have many calendars in our life, and for those in school and teachers alike, June marks the end of the calendar. Some families will be going on a Family Vacation: road trips, siblings arguing in the back seat, and unforgettable memories.

For our church, too, Summer presents new opportunities and a build up to a sort of new year of our own: looking forward to where God is leading us as a congregation. While we'll talk more about what this Vision is in August (be on the lookout!), this Summer gives us an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a church family.

Throughout June, we'll be discussing what that means in a series entitled "Kingdom Family Vacation."

"Family-Friendly" or "Family Values" have been used by some Christians as synonyms for "Christian teaching." But what if Jesus doesn't always sound "pro-family?" There is a man who says he wants to follow Jesus, but asks Jesus to allow him time to bury his father. Jesus responds: "Let the dead bury the dead." (Luke 9:60). Elsewhere in Luke, Jesus says:"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, even their own life — such a person cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26).

Harsh words!

How do we understand these hard sayings?

Kingdom family values cannot simply be matched up with our ideas of "family values" as we might imagine them. Jesus points us to his Kingdom, which cuts through what we imagine the good of (biological) family to be and offers us something even greater.

We hope you'll join us in reflecting on themes such as the cost of following Jesus, singleness, marriage, and being spiritual fathers and mothers to others, as we look forward to how God is calling us to take up our cross and follow him this season.

What Makes a Strong Church?

By Molly Flodder

In a session in June 2022 I first interviewed pastors Jonathan and Kendall for their first issue of *The Visitor.* As well as describing them and their ideas about ministry in Muncie, I was especially interested in what they had to say as I queried them about their views on what a strong church is. I reviewed my notes, and I decided to share these important observations with you.

Pastor Kendall: Faith is a head, heart and hands prospect. In a strong church, people are thinking deeply, reading scriptures critically, and reaching out to help those in our fellowship as well as those in the community.

Pastor Jonathan: One of my favorite benedictions from one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians says, "May the love of God, the father, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. "Our faith is found and rooted in the love of Jesus Christ and His grace which He freely gives." So, we need to be a church founded on love. We need to be a church which has grace not only for our own lives but extends grace to others. Fellowship of the Holy Spirit tells us that faith and church are not individual efforts. They are a fellowship, a family of God which embraces the world around it and witnesses to the love, which is God, which is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Fresh Brewed Life: Art Afternoon













Fresh Brewed Life Hosts Altered Format

In a bit of a twist on the regular women's "Fresh Brewed Life" breakfasts, women met to craft wooden signs after a devotional focusing on their sign verse: "Renew a right Spirit in me." Psalm 51:10.

Meghan Songer Frey, a local art teacher, led the devotional and provided the craft, offering instructions and encouragement through the whole process.

Women who attended reported that the opportunity for fellowship–an ongoing favorite reason for attending FBL events–was their top takeaway from the event. They also liked the craft itself and the sweet and salty snacks brought in by the planning team.

The date of our next event or breakfast has not been set. It is likely to be hosted in October. Read the Wednesday Weekly for updates!

April Marks All Church Discipleship

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- Galatians 2:20 (NIV)

During three weeks in April, FBCM life groups paused so our whole church could gather for All Church Discipleship.

Pastor Jonathan led the group through a discussion of Paul's letters, aided by Grant Macaskill's book, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity.*

Exploring Paul's letters, we discovered how when Paul talked about moral issues he returned again and again to our participation in Christ. Sin isn't *only* breaking a holy commandment, but for the Christian, sin becomes a violation of who we are. The Christian life is a life inseparably connected to Jesus. We are clothed with Christ in Baptism (Galatians 3:27), and participate as the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16).

It is not only Christ who saves us and forgives us, but Christ who makes us holy.

As Grant Macaskill wisely notes: "We cannot render obedience to Jesus the king unless we clothe ourselves with Jesus the servant."

July Dates Set for Vacation Bible School

Growing spiritually doesn't have to be an unsolved mystery! Take a five-day journey with kid detectives as they dig into a few of Jesus' parables to solve the mysteries of how to grow their faith, how to care for, serve, and love others. They'll discover that the answers have been there all along: spend time with God, spend time with others, use your gifts, and share your story. It takes many workers to make VBS a success! Please let Jenny Durke or Pastor Kendall know if you would like to volunteer! VBS dates are July 14-18.



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LEADERS

Senior Co-Pastors
Rev. Kendall Ellis
kendall@fbcmuncie.org

Rev. Jonathan Balmer
jonathan@fbcmuncie.org

Worship Arts Pastor
Dr. Clifton Davis
clif@fbcmuncie.org

Church Coordination Team
Moderator–Emily Anderson
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

The Visitor is a quarterly publication of ©First Baptist Church Muncie
309 E. Adams, Muncie, IN 47305
PHONE: 765-284-7749 I EMAIL: info@fbcmuncie.org
WEBSITE: www.fbcmuncie.org
Produced by Molly Flodder, Editor;
Michelle Heimlich, Graphic Designer/Photographer;
Joe Songer, Proofreader