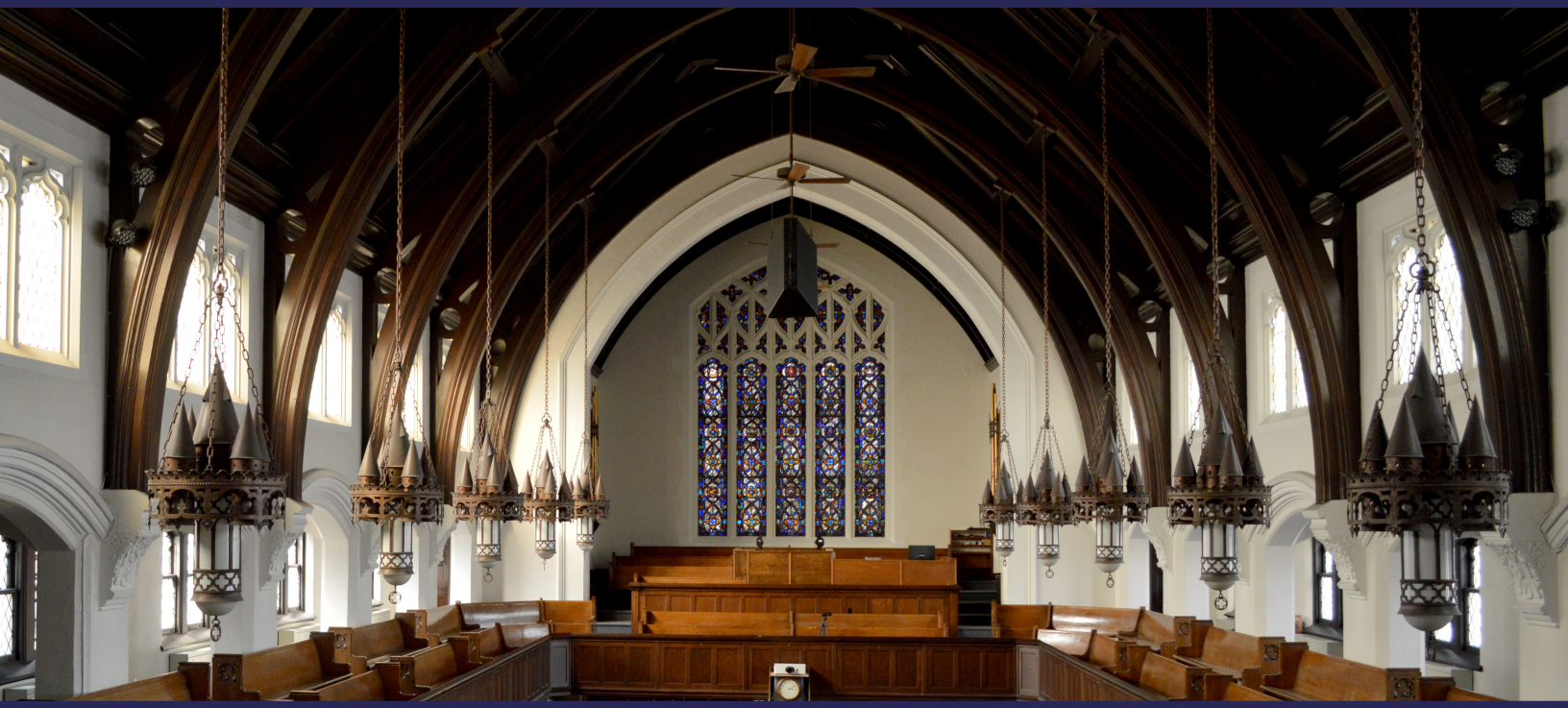
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH MUNCIE // VOLUME 79 // ISSUE 2 // JUNE 2025

THE VISITOR



Church Communications Is a Focus at FBCM

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Opportunities for Service Create a Busy Summer

THE SHARED PULPIT

By Co-Pastor Kendall Ellis

"I thank my God every time I remember you." -Philippians 1:3

We recently heard Rev. Mark Thompson, the executive minister of ABC IN/KY, share a story from his time pastoring a church. He recalled that one Saturday evening, he felt compelled to rewrite his sermon for the morning. His new topic, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was how much he loved his church! That Sunday, Rev. Mark gave thanks to God for the ways the church reflected Christ to their community and prayed for how they would continue to do so.

Similarly, Paul famously begins each of his New Testament letters with a greeting. And with one notable exception (sorry, Galatians!), Paul is overwhelmingly grateful for the churches to which he writes! Even when life and faith were not perfect, Paul often remembers his siblings in Christ. He loves who they are. He loves teaching them. He loves serving them.

Do you remember the old franchise *Where in the World Is Carmen San Diego?* This summer, it may feel a bit like you're playing that game with your pastors—without the theft schemes, of course. You will see us during Sunday gatherings as normal. But throughout the week, we will often be traveling. By God's grace, in *one* summer, your pastors have the opportunity to attend a Gen Z preaching conference in Green Lake, Wisconsin; to serve two weeks at Indian Creek Baptist Camp; and to celebrate extended family during vacations to Michigan and Kentucky. Oh, and don't forget about Messy Camp adventures with our kids here in Muncie!

As our church wraps up the 2024–25 ministry year focusing on our Mark 10:45 watchword "Not to be served, but to serve," we are so excited to be able to serve our FBCM family—especially children and youth—in such a variety of places. We are also excited for each of you, who we know will be using your own gifts and talents to serve throughout this summer. Whether you are joining our region on the disaster relief mission trip in North Carolina or staying home to care for and disciple your children for the summer vacation, each day is a gift from God. We trust that you will use it well, looking for ways to serve *and* rest.

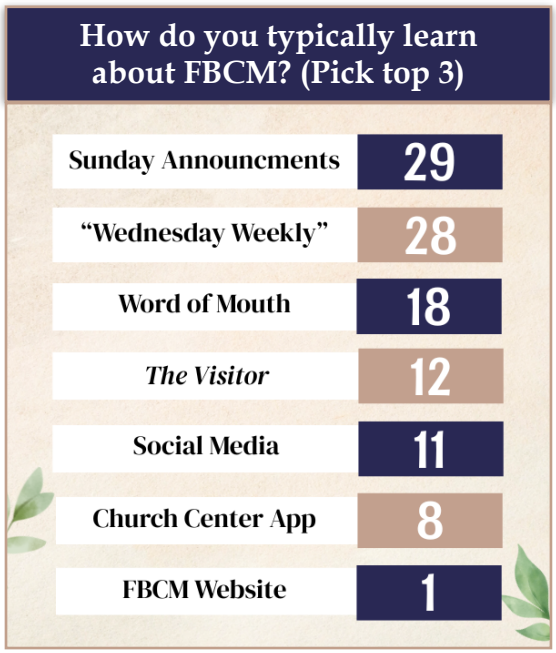
If you need us or any pastoral care throughout the summer, we encourage you to call our cell phones or the church office. The church office has a calendar that marks where the pastors will be each week. On the weeks we are serving in ministry out of town, a designated deacon will be on call, ready to provide pastoral care.

While we are apart more than usual during this summer season, know that your pastors give thanks to God for you always. We look forward to hearing testimonies of what God does in and through you this summer. As we say often during our benedictions, "May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you. May He bring you home rejoicing, once again, into our doors."

Fifty-Eight Churchgoers Evaluate Church Communication Channels

This spring, when the communications survey team worked to create, distribute, and collect surveys, primarily about communication channels and reader preferences, there were some surprises. In general, the feedback was good, although positive, negative, and constructive comments have helped the team begin to analyze the information and determine how to improve communications.

Members of the team are: **Molly Flodder**, team leader; **Julie Davis**, Michelle Heimlich, **Jenny Durke**, **Cheryl Flaherty**, and co-pastors **Jonathan Balmer** and **Kendall Ellis**.

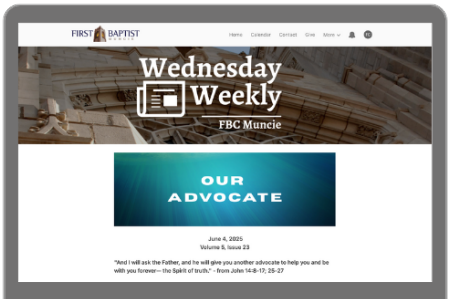


A total of 58 in attendance at the May 4 and May 18 services, and one shut-in who received a survey in the mail participated. Completed surveys were submitted by people who have attended the church for a few months to those who have been a part of FBCM for 15+ years. Age ranges of participants was 16-90+, with slightly more than half of the respondents aged 65 and over.

"We were heartened to see positive responses to our general communication questions," said Molly Flodder, team leader. A total 76 percent of the respondents felt they were "quite informed" and "very informed." The other 24 percent marked "informed". Even more participants felt that it is vitally important to stay well-versed about the church and its events.

Several of the survey questions were focused on how people receive information. In terms of social media, Facebook was the most used platform, with 27 users. YouTube and Instagram were other social media mentioned with a combined total of 25. Several other respondents did not mark that they use any social media.

"Wednesday Weekly" Is Major Communication Means



The "Wednesday Weekly" electronic newsletter is widely read by many survey participants who are aware that they receive it. A total of 38 say they receive it, and of those, 28 report reading it. Comments such as liking the brief format and ease of use came from most people. One said, "I like being informed about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities." The few who don't read it say it is due to "time constraints" and not wanting to find all the links and click on them. One even said that "too much email comes from the church." Most said they spend less than 9 minutes looking at the publication.

A total of 20 people said they didn't receive the publication. A few do not use computers, and a few were not able to follow the paths to find the publications through email, the church app, or the church website. Six people marked that they picked up printed copies at the Welcome Center.

A question asked in the survey was "When reading the 'Wednesday Weekly', on which contents do you focus? Top answers in order of their preference to people were upcoming events/news, prayer requests, birthday list, and sermon blogs.

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The Visitor Offers the Most Detailed Information

The Visitor, an 80-year-old FBCM monthly publication, was created in a new format in 2021. The publication is now quarterly, contains feature stories about the church and Christian life, congregational people, and volunteer opportunities. It also features color photographs. It has been distributed electronically to parishioners with email and mailed to shut-ins (15-19 at any one time) all at home or in long-term care facilities.


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The team learned that 26 survey participants have seen *The Visitor* regularly, 10 occasionally, and 24 not at all. Of those who saw it, 4 did not read it.

Of particular concern to the team, several who do not see the quarterly publication also said they were not aware that we continued *The Visitor* after the monthly mailed version stopped coming in early 2021.

Again, a lack of electronic devices or a lack of knowledge about how to use them were issues, particularly with older survey contributors.

A congregational favorite in *The Visitor* is "Get to Know," a feature that focuses on a person, couple, or family and more about them than might be typically known via church acquaintanceship. In its four-year run, featured congregants have included Louise Head, the Chris and Janis Wright family, Bill Eidson, Chloe Durke, and the Aaron and Cynthia Smith family, to name a few. Respondents were asked to mark articles and segments they remembered in the past year.

A final segment in the survey queried how people wanted to receive their copy of *The Visitor*. A total of 27 wanted to continue receiving the free electronic edition. Seven would prefer to pick up a printed copy at church on a first-come/first-served basis, leaving a love gift to help with expenses. A final 7 would prefer to pay a $10 per year subscription fee to have a copy mailed to their homes.

What Happens Next?

The team has identified improvements that could be made in helping people find the publications and clarify links and the pathways to open them. They are looking into ways to provide bite-sized information on social media that would create reminders when publications are available and ready to review.

There is also some discussion about making "how to" printed information for people who don't know how to get to the publications and, perhaps later, small group/one-on-one assistance.

As for people's interest in purchasing a $10 annual subscription to the quarterly issues of *The Visitor*, the group will determine whether, how, and when that process might be rolled out later in the year.

Finally, more familiarity with these "just-seen" responses will help the team consider other ways to improve and streamline the content and distribution of all kinds of messages at FBCM. In the meantime, if you have any ideas that you believe ought to be considered by this survey team, reach out to team members or email your ideas to info@fbcm.com.

Get to Know: Ed and Sandi Brzak



Ed and Sandi Brzak

Sandi Lemen Brzak grew up at First Baptist Church. After meeting her husband, **Ed Brzak,** at Ball State and getting married, they lived in Texas and then Colorado. Although they were away for just over twenty-five years, they are back and both filling important leadership roles.

The Brzaks are both members of the praise band. Sandi is a vocalist singing lead, and Ed plays box drum and ukulele. Less visible are their church leadership roles. Sandi was elected church treasurer at the beginning of the year, and Ed serves as the at-large member of the Church Coordination Team (CCT), representing the congregation. Sandi also teaches youth Sunday School in rotation.



Ed Brzak

In addition, Ed uses his sense of humor and experience as a clown to serve youth and children at FBCM. He has been in charge of kids' activities at Bible School and sometimes shares a children's activity with the children during monthly intergenerational Sundays.

Ed, who grew up in Greenfield, Indiana, got involved in clowning and mime work starting at junior high church camp. Later, when the couple was living in Colorado, he was in a clown troupe and started doing magic tricks.

"We were married in 1991 when Ed was serving in the Army, and we lived in Texas," said Sandi. "He stayed in the military for two years after his four-year term and spent the last part of his service in South Korea and then back in Colorado."

During his time in the Army, their son, Jacob, was born. Today, Jacob lives and works in Indianapolis, just a few blocks from the Indianapolis Speedway.

Before Sandi met Ed, she used her musical background and talent to be part of a traveling group, the New Light Singers. For three summers, starting at the end of high school, she traveled all over the country with this Colorado-based show choir. Before that, she was involved in the school choir and First Baptist's Good News Singers ensemble.

The Brzaks enjoyed Colorado and lived there for twenty-four years, but they didn't like being so far from home and family.

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They headed back to Indiana in 2019. Sandi was able to spend time with her grandma, **Ella Mae Lemen**'s mom, before she passed away, and both spent time catching up with their families: Ed's parents in Greenfield and his sister and brothers (LeAnn, Dan, and Mike) and Sandi's sister and brother (Shari and Jeff).

But just as Sandi was preparing to get a job and establish a new home, she got a new doctor and, in a checkup, learned she had breast cancer.

"My family and Ed were such great support for me during my cancer diagnosis and treatment. Ed continued to work hard to support us and helped me smile and laugh in spite of what I was going through. With him," said Sandi, "I never have to doubt that I am loved."

Today the Brzaks live and work in McCordsville, a forty-five-minute commute from church. Ed works for the post office as he has for twenty-nine years. (Their son Jacob is also a postal worker.) As a window clerk, Ed does many tasks in a day's time but has primary responsibility for helping people apply for passports.

Sandi is employed at a bank as a customer service representative. She has held several jobs over the years. In Colorado, she worked in payday loan organizations and did payroll for a hotel for several years, finally working in a bank for her last nine years there.

"Whenever we visited home, coming to First Baptist was a wonderful experience," said Sandi. "It just felt like home." Today, since the loss of her dad (**Dan Lemen**), belonging to the church is a bittersweet experience for her.

Ed also loves the church and loves that it is his home church, even if it is a long drive.

Of his role in CCT, Ed said, "I'm the one who is designated to be a link to our church leadership team. If someone has a comment, a concern or an idea, I can take that to the CCT and make sure everyone knows about that point of view."

Church Vision Lunch

Last August, the CCT hosted an inaugural Vision Lunch—a time following worship to launch FBCM's watchword of the year and vision for ministry. According to the pastors, "The event was a huge success. The event set our church up for a full year of faithful service as we learned 'not to be served, but to serve.'"

The CCT is looking forward to continuing this new tradition! According to Moderator **Emily Anderson**, "Everyone should make every effort to attend the Vision Lunch on ***Sunday, August 31,*** following worship. There will be details in the 'Wednesday Weekly' in August about how to register for a meal. During this meal, we will officially launch the new watchword and ministry plans for the 2025–26 ministry year."

The pastors strongly believe that if you are someone who passionately loves Jesus, loves Muncie, and wants to see our FBCM family grow, then ***Vision Lunch on August 31*** is the must-attend event of the year for you!



In Memoriam

Deepest sympathies
to the family
and friends
of Harold Gill,
who passed away
in May.

Who Is Filling Dan's Shoes?

By Molly Flodder, Editor, *The Visitor*

When Dan Lemen, treasurer and volunteer extraordinaire, passed away suddenly last August 28, it left many people grieving and praying for peace for his family, but also thinking about the loss of his work and expertise at the church.



Dan Lemen

Dan and Ella Mae Lemen joined the church in 1970 when their daughters Shari and Sandi were small. Over the years, Dan shared his musical gifts in choir and men's quartets. He and Ella Mae were also involved for years in helping with youth activities and teaching the Seekers Class, a group of young married couples.

In the 1990s, Dan became involved in treasury work at the church and, ultimately, was elected as treasurer, a job he held until his death.

He retired from his final job working for Quality Mill in 2017. This allowed him to devote even more hours to the church. In fact, it was not unusual for him to work 30–35 hours every week. Even in retirement, his efforts toiling away at the financials—with Ella Mae as his volunteer accounts payable clerk—expanded to cover many more needs. He became the expert about the building and its equipment and upkeep, working alongside whoever was elected property coordinator for the Church Coordination Team. Area vendors who turned to him when they came to work on the boiler or the alarm system or whatever else was needed and always knew Dan could give them the information and direction they required.

There were several stumbles immediately following his death. However, Dan had taught James Heimlich about the church's accounting, which was extremely helpful before a new treasurer was elected. He had provided detailed information about computers, electronically unlocking doors, building maintenance, and relationships with repair companies and vendors with his son, **Jeff Lemen**. And, of course, Pastors Jonathan and Kendall (who had been with the church exactly two years) knew some of what was needed.

Dan's daughter, Sandi Brzak, was elected treasurer in January 2025, and her banking expertise is coming in handy on topics such as the church credit card and how we are doing on our "expenses to budget." An example of the progress is her putting together the profit and loss statement and other reports each month as she becomes more and more adept in QuickBooks.

Long-time member **Larry Fouch**, an accountant, has been able to step in from time to time to provide assistance. **Joe Songer** was elected CCT property coordinator for the third time in recent years, and the fact that he can fill this role with some familiarity has been a great help for building maintenance and upkeep.

A few people, knowing Dan's depth of knowledge, have wondered how the church is faring without him. He is greatly missed in every way, and people still say, "Dan would have known that," or "Dan would be able to explain that." In spite of those realities, many of the gaps are being filled, and life is moving forward.

Serve Your City Day



Bright and early on Saturday, March 8, twenty-five people aged one to eighty-seven gathered together to love and serve Muncie. There were three teams, each serving with a different Christian nonprofit organization. The Muncie Mission team gathered at the Liberty Street Restore location to sort through donated items. The Christian Ministries team put on their rubber gloves to clean and prepare the family shelter in preparation for a new family to move in. The final team welcomed the Isaiah 117 House to Muncie by organizing children's clothing donations for foster children and setting up an office space at their temporary location. The Isaiah 117 House for foster children is under construction on South Tillotson and is expected to be completed in Fall 2025.

The day was a wonderful inaugural event as FBCM lived out our watchword, "Not to be served, but to serve." Co-pastor Kendall Ellis said, "Next year, we hope to have even more teams serving with even more community partners." If there's a community partner you'd like to see FBCM serve during Serve Your City Day 2026, let Outreach Coordinator Dana Davis know!

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Rev. Jonathan Balmer
jonathan@fbcmuncie.org

Worship Arts Pastor
Dr. Clifton Davis

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