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THE VISITOR



New Year Brings Many Opportunities

As the school calendar announces a new season, First Baptist Church is planning for what lies ahead and creating a tone for a new direction. The pastors, Church Coordination Team, and church family are focusing on starting afresh. In this edition of *The Visitor*, we see in **Pastor Jonathan**'s column on page 2 that we are kicking off a 2027–29 "Salt and Light" emphasis using the metaphor that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. This metaphor describes the identity and influence of his followers. Jesus states that this is who followers already are because of their faith, calling them to actively influence the world around them.

As we think about the "new year" beginning at FBCM, we can select how we want to use our time and talents to assist **Pastor Kendall** in teaching and caring for our children and youth. We may want to step up to join the volunteers who provide academic assistance at Muncie Central High School in partnership with Youth for Christ. Or, as we choose those or other ways to serve, we may want to weave that work around participation in a life group where our communication and love for each other can strengthen and encourage us.

Regardless of how each person gives back to the church, Jesus taught that his followers are called to be his witnesses to the whole world: the core is his Great Commission and Great Commandment. We are called to share the message of repentance, forgiveness and God's love through the power of the Holy Spirit, backed by both spoken word and visible acts of love. Those are things we can do in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities, which can strengthen our church even more than what we do inside its walls.

Salt & Light 2029 Unveiled at Vision Lunch

By Co-Pastor **Jonathan Balmer**

The beginning of a new ministry year is a great time to refocus on why we exist. That's the goal of Vision Lunch each year. This year's Vision Lunch took a unique direction. We're looking toward one hundred years in the building (built 1927–1929). As our congregation is in a significant time of transition, we needed to ask a foundational question boldly: How is the Lord calling us to be Salt & Light at the corner of Adams and Jefferson Street today and in the near future? That question gave our plan its name: Salt & Light 2029.

FBCM has been at this important work God has called us to for longer than a century. We've done it for 166 years: spanning a gas boom, the Great Depression, from the time Muncie Mission began in our basement as a soup kitchen to the time Worship Wars rattled our congregation. We've encountered ups and downs: times of great faithfulness and serious trials. But more than being nostalgic about the past, Vision Lunch and Salt & Light 2029 on Sunday, August 30, was an occasion for us to be sent and commissioned. Those in attendance voted to make this work the official focus of the next three years.

Every table at Vision Lunch received two main items. The first was our discipleship track, which summarizes the basic flow of our life together:

> *"Give Praise to the Lord, proclaim his name."*
> *-Isaiah 12:4 (NIV)*

- Worship - Come & See Jesus and his good news
- The Way - Follow Jesus alongside his people —growing in faith
- Witness - Giving away the good news we've received
- Work - Using our gifts to serve both God and neighbor

The second page was Salt & Light itself, which is our congregation's plan for the beginnings of church revitalization. That included multiple sections. We will speak of two:

- **Make room** - We are setting aside, even as we honor, what no longer serves the mission God has called us to. The goal here is to focus on ministry rather than the "machinery" or "spinning plates" to keep things going. Part of this will be a Constitution & Bylaws update which will be brought forward for the whole congregation to consider to simplify our leadership structure and decrease the number of leaders the Church Coordination Team requires.
- **Remember forward** - We are a living church and not a museum. Our history informs our present, but our actions are not frozen in amber. Everything old was once new. God used our fellowship then, and we believe he is doing a new thing to point to the same Savior even now.

None of this is a project of the pastors, or the CCT, or a lecture people are expected to receive. Renewal belongs to the whole church, and every person is indispensable in it.

Expect the calendar to contain new opportunities for life groups, opportunities to serve, moments to invite a friend, or even options to be trained for God's service in new ways.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" and "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:14, 13 NIV). We did not invent the concept of Salt & Light, and the work doesn't begin with us. But, by his grace, Jesus has invited us to participate in his work in this generation and every generation.

FBCM Marks Summer Activities

Two children's events—Water Wars and Grill and Chill experience—were among the highlights of Summer of '26.











Ministry Moments Are Regular Features

At least one Sunday a month is reserved for someone from the church family to share how God is moving in their lives at FBCM. In July, **Sally Butler** spoke about how doing academic advising at Muncie Central High School this past year had blessed her. That opportunity resulted because of the partnership between FBCM and Youth for Christ. New volunteers are plugging into this work as school is starting up, and there is always room for more volunteers to give thirty minutes a week to help get to know students and encourage them in their studies.

In August, **Ed Brzak** shared the testimony that our children are our future, and how his participation in events and storytelling to First Baptist kids has blessed his life.

If you have a testimony you'd like someone to know about, speak with **Cynthia Smith**, worship arts director.

Save the Date for Messiah Sing-In and Carols

On Friday, December 11, at 6:30 p.m., First Baptist Church will host a community concert featuring the Christmas portion of G. F. Handel's *Messiah,* and the "Hallelujah!" chorus followed by seasonal carols and a cookie fellowship.



A historic art presentation, curated by Ball State University's School of Art students, featuring art focusing on the birth of Christ, will be displayed during the performance.

"Everyone and anyone is welcome to 'sing-in' in the choir for the Messiah choruses," said Cynthia Smith, FBCM worship arts director. "Bring your score, download a score, or borrow a score. The audience is invited to join the singing of the choruses." Admission is free, with donations accepted for the upkeep and preservation of the historic building.

Dr. Cynthia Smith will direct and sing the alto solos. Guest musicians and soloists are Dr. John Emert (organ), Dana Wilson (tenor), and Dr. Jon Truitt (bass). Stay tuned for the soprano soloist announcement.

Our church family or anyone in the community may sponsor the guest musicians to pay their honoraria.

More details will be released as the date approaches. If you have questions, contact Cynthia.

In Memoriam

Our sympathy goes out to the family of Barbara Turner, who passed away in August after a long illness. She and her late husband, Bill Turner, were long-time members of First Baptist.

Registration Deadline: September 13 Community Food Experience"

The deadline to be part of the Second Harvest Food Bank's Community Food Experience is Tuesday, September 8, at noon. Use the QR code on the fliers in the sanctuary or call the church office at 284-7749 to reserve spaces.

This simulation, set for Sunday, September 13, from 1:00–2:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall, will be attended by churches, nonprofits, Ball State classes, community guests, and FBCM congregants.

"You will step into the shoes of a neighbor facing a health challenge in this dynamic ninety-minute simulation. You will navigate a tight budget, meet nutritional needs, and see firsthand how food insecurity shapes daily life," said **Molly Flodder**, who brought another kind of poverty simulation to the church several years ago.

According to **Bill Eidson**, a participant in the May discipleship classes on poverty, most of those who attended that study will attend this event. Still, it is an important opportunity for anyone in the church to learn more about people who struggle.

Pastor **Kendall Ellis** said, "This important exercise comes to us by way of the American Baptist grant we received last fall."

Because this event occurs shortly after church, attendees may grab a meal nearby or bring a lunch (labeled in a bag or lunch box) to eat between service and the 1:00 p.m. program.

Calendar Events Leading Up to Christmas

September 6-November 14
Fall Discipleship Season

September 6-27
8:30 a.m. Sunday morning prayer

Sunday, **September 13**
1:00–2:30 p.m. at the church–Community Food Experience simulation: Congregants may bring lunch or go out for a quick lunch prior

Monday, **September 14**
Leadership Table begins (Monday evenings)

Sundays, **October 11, 25,** and **November 1**
New Membership Class

Saturday, **October 17**
10:00–11:30 a.m.—Women's breakfast:
Fresh Brewed Life

Sunday, **October 18**
After worship—Special Congregational Meeting: Vote on simplifying FBCM leadership structure

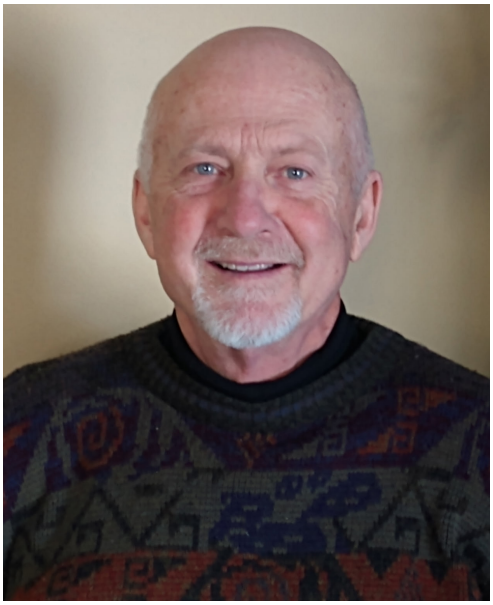
Monday, **October 26**
Cynthia Smith's anniversary as Worship Arts Director

Sunday, **November 8**
After worship—Fall gathering: Pizza with the Pastors

Sunday, **November 22**
- Life Groups' commissioning
- After worship service—Harvest Dinner: meat and drinks furnished with carry-in sides

Sunday, **December 6**
Second Sunday of Advent—Soup Lunch and completion of hanging of the greens

Get to Know: Larry Fouch



Anyone who has ever had a donut during the Sunday morning 10:15–10:45 semi-hour is likely to be acquainted with **Larry and Donna Fouch**. Every Sunday for approximately twenty years, the Fouches have purchased donuts and drinks, made coffee, and served the spread to attendees in the Fellowship Hall. In the past few months, they have even delivered leftovers to ladies at the YWCA next door. "It's our ministry," says Larry with a grin, and Donna's love of the weekly opportunity is quickly evident too.

Larry can also be seen volunteering around the church, grilling hot dogs at children's events or helping property ministry's Joe Songer with the facilities—especially after leaks from a rainstorm.

An opportunity to look closer at his life, career, and current inspirations paints a more complete picture of who Larry is and what has brought him to this point in his life.

Since his West Virginia accent comes out in his speaking, few people know that he was actually born in Muncie. After coming here to work, his family went back to Huntington, West Virginia, when Larry was just an infant. As a young man, he learned about a work opportunity from an uncle who lived in Muncie, and he came back as an X-ray technician and worked at Ball Memorial Hospital. It was there in 1969 that he met Donna, who worked in the front office, and they were married the same year. He served in that radiology position for over six years.



As a student at Ball State University, Larry studied accounting. He started preparing tax returns for people and liked it so much that he moved from being a novice into a new related career. He became a CPA in 1978. That work led him back to Ball State University, where he served twenty-one years as a manager of accounting before retiring at age fifty to do tax prep as his vocation.

Until about twenty years ago, the call of West Virginia helped color his leisure time throughout his adult life. Camping trips to the southwestern part of the state and whitewater rafting adventures on the Gauley River were included on visits to his parents, and he returned even after they were gone. In spite of the Gauley having Level 5 rapids, FBCM friends have joined Larry in his adventures. "**Mark Flodder, Jim and Irene Hiatt, Joe and Mike Songer** and many other friends made trips to the Gauley with me," said Larry, who admits that the activity is too intense for all of them now!

In the early 90s, Larry became interested in King Midget cars. The King Midget was a micro car produced between 1946 and 1970 by the Midget Motors Corporation. Larry owns two now, 1955 and 1964 models, and recently his 1964 was named in the top 15 of a large car show in Muncie. "My interest in these cars was shared by the late **Archie Mutter** and, later, his widow **Sue Mutter**," said Larry.

Two of Larry's greatest passions lie in group studies with other Christians. "Since about 2004, I have been part of a men's study group called Renovare at High Street Methodist Church," said Larry. "Woody Noblitt and I first went there when he was pastor of our church."

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Over the years, there have been twelve to twenty-five men who meet weekly to study and discuss a book and encourage each other in living through life's challenges.

Larry and Donna are also active in the FBCM Snowbirds Life Group. Snowbirds is a group of twelve men and women in their seventies and eighties who meet bi-weekly for at least five months each year.

Larry is a strong advocate for the benefits of being in a small group. "You can be lost by yourself," he said. "When you meet with others and share life and the love of Christ, it strengthens a person." He talks about the Hebrews Bible verse that encourages believers to keep meeting and supporting one another. The camaraderie and encouragement, according to Larry, are very important. "Even if you have different perspectives," he said, "life and the love of Christ draw you together. That's so important these days."

The hardest year of Larry's life was 2020. Besides the pandemic-related issues, he and Donna moved from their large home and 6-plus-acre property in the country to a small house in Muncie. Although it was a good move, it took some getting used to. Larry had a couple of serious health problems and hospitalizations that year.

The largest tragedy of Larry and Donna's life was the 2020 death of their adult son, Neal, who passed away in September of that year.

Neal's death forced Larry to lean into his favorite Bible verse, Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (KJV). This verse assures us that God works through people's pain. Larry and Donna, whose struggle with Neal's death was intense, are learning to have comfort in God's sovereignty.

Larry recently facilitated an FBCM small group lesson focusing on the spiritual gift of joy, which he testified is a part of who he is. According to members of the group, his comments were "jubilant." He even shared his signature statement: "Praise the Lord!"

Church Picnic with Riverside Avenue Baptist Church

A picnic was held with our sister American Baptist church on Sunday, August 23.









Co-Pastor Selected for Leadership Program

Pastor Jonathan Balmer has been selected for a two-year pastoral leadership opportunity for 2027–28 via the Wabash College Pastoral Leadership Program. The program is funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., so there will be no financial obligation to him or the church. To be considered, Jonathan had to create a video introducing Muncie and explaining why people should take an interest in our town.



The purpose of the program, according to the sponsors, is to "foster rich imaginative conversation around pastoral leaders engaging civic leaders in Indiana."

The program pays particular attention to the dynamics by which a group of pastors transforms itself into an effective learning and support community. "As we're witnesses to the Kingdom of God, we can't be absent from our communities," Pastor Jonathan said. "As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, '"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:13 NIV). This is not an advertising campaign. It's a character of the Kingdom of God which is present in the world and works its way throughout all the world. Jesus said the Kingdom is like a little bit of yeast in a lot of flour, and even though it starts as a small thing it works its way and permeates every part of the dough (Luke 13:21 NIV).

The one-day program orientation is set for November 5 at the college in Crawfordsville. The sustained conversations and quality of community begin with the opening meeting. Later sessions in the 2027–28 calendar require pastors to attend a Monday afternoon through Wednesday noon session every other month.

The two most time-consuming components of the program are a Year One week-long study tour to the Texas/Mexico border next October and a two-week International Study Tour to Ghana in October of 2028.

Pastor Jonathan noted that these trips provide unique opportunities. "These trips are designed to have pastors speak to people with all sorts of interests on complex and contested topics. I'm excited to see the ways we will listen and learn for the benefit of our churches and cities."

Participants will be required to complete online evaluations and assess the impact of the current programming on early-career pastors.
FBCM congregants will hear more about this opportunity as time passes. In the meantime, Pastor Jonathan welcomes questions about his participation in this program.

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