

THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter January 2025



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Welcome to 2025, beloved Church !

Receive this liturgy for the new year from Cole Arthur Riley as a blessing.

Liturgy for the New Year

Hope is tethered to remembrance.
We don't move forward by forgetting.

Hold space for every joy and every sorrow of the year.

We have known loss.
Steady your body. Say their names.
And we have known healing.
Honor your becoming.

"They ask me to remember,
but they want me to remember
their memories,
and I keep remembering mine."

- Lucille Clifton

As we look toward the new year, may we
hold in holy tension the God who begs us
toward practices of remembrance and
also says, *Behold, I am doing a new thing.*

We can honor the past
and not be in bondage to it.

INHALE:
As it ends, I'll hold memory.

EXHALE:
As we go, I'll hold hope.

Affirmations of becoming
Who you are is not broken, but you are
free to become.
Love is not predicated on change.

Who you are is not broken, but you are
free to become.
Love is not predicated on change.

Who you are is not broken, but you are
free to become.
Love is not predicated on change.

*I remember my suffering and my wandering, the bitterness, and the death.
I remember it all, and my soul is downcast within me.
Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:*

*Because of God's profound love, we are not consumed.
It is an unending compassion that renews each morning.*

Sunday Forums for January

Sunday January 5th

New Beginnings – Ruth Marris-Macaulay

A look at how to begin a new year of spiritual commitments and meaningful actions.

Sunday January 12th

Lectio divina

Luke 6:27-30

27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them.

Sunday January 19th

A presentation on new book by Jonathan Rauch: *Cross Purposes: Christianity’s Broken Bargain With Democracy* (it will be published in February 4th) – Ruth Marris-Macaulay.

This will be based on a conversation between the author, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and a Jewish atheist, and David French, *New York Times* columnist, an evangelical Christian and political conservative.

Sunday January 26th

Documentary

Myanmar: The Rebel Army

We pray regularly for the people of Myanmar. This documentary will give us more context about their situation and sufferings. After the coup d'état on 1 February 2021, which brought the ten-year transition to democracy in Myanmar to an abrupt end, thousands of young urbanites, both men and women, gave up their lives to join the resistance against the ruling junta.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmLBNCfXC34&t=478s>)

The Importance of Becoming a Welcoming and Affirming Church

Nearly 6 years ago, I got a phone call from one of my oldest and dearest friends. At the age of 41, he was calling me to come out. He finally realized he wasn't straight and was newly dating a man. I told him how happy I was for him, how much I loved him, and that I couldn't wait to meet the new boyfriend. He then told me with a sigh of relief that I was his last phone call to come out. Not all his friends and family were as receptive, but he wasn't worried about telling me. I was so overcome by that sentiment that I began to cry both tears of joy and frustration, simultaneously aware of how proud I was of him and imagining how difficult those other conversations were.

A few months later we had dinner, and my friend said that he was often asked why it took him so long to come out, or how he didn't realize he wasn't straight earlier in his life. He looked at me and said quietly, "but you know how we were raised." My friend comes from two prominent southern families with generations of physicians, conservative politicians, ministers, and high-ranking military officers. The expectations with which he was raised were something I only saw from the outside looking in. I left the south and the church as a young adult with no intention to return, so I knew his situation was vastly more complicated.

I first learned about the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists (AWAB) in 2006 at FBCIA in a Sunday morning forum presentation. At that time, our congregation was not ready to join AWAB. As I recall, the arguments against joining included the tired "love the sin, hate the sinner" line of thought, while others felt that we could be welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community, but not affirming. The least offensive opposition was that at FBCIA, we don't officially affiliate with other organizations. As it seemed a bridge too far for our collective body, I joined AWAB as an individual member. It would be nearly 18 more years before a Rhode

Island Baptist church officially joined AWAB. I am heartened by the Board of Deacons unanimous proposal that FBCIA should be next. At the 2025 annual meeting, I hope you will join me in voting to join AWAB as a congregation.

The AWAB website states that "[s]ince 1993 AWAB has been supporting churches in being and becoming Welcoming and Affirming of all people regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. We work as individuals, congregations, regional groupings and as a national body to advance the Radical Welcome and Love of God in Jesus Christ through being the Ministry of Reconciliation and building up the Beloved Community where all will be one." In reading this I can't help to be reminded of our own recently adopted welcome statement, which states in part, "[w]e welcome all people of every age, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cultural background, socio-economic status, mental or physical ability, marital status, and any other distinctions of society. We are diverse people united in Christ. We remain a safe harbor."

Now, more than ever, LGBTQ+ folks will be wary that a religious institution will welcome them, much less affirm them. The current political climate could bring about the removal of federal anti-discrimination policies that protect the LGBTQ+ community, reversal of policies allowing transgender people to serve in the military, blocking gender-affirming care, reversing bans on so-called conversion therapy, and threats to marriage equality. So many hard-fought freedoms are on the line, and that doesn't include concerns about their physical safety and mental wellbeing. A welcoming and affirming church home would be invaluable. (continued on page 3)

AWAB Continued from page 2

Matthew 5:14-16 says, “[y]ou are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” If we are to truly remain a safe harbor for all of God’s people, now is the time to put our lamp on the stand for all to see. We should let our LGBTQ+ siblings know who we are, along with their families and allies seeking a community of faith. We can make an official declaration outside the walls of the meeting house for the world to see at a time when the world seems depressingly dark for so many.

As for my friend, he and his then-boyfriend are now married. His husband is also a man of deep and abiding faith, and together they are very involved in their local church. At their rehearsal dinner, my friend told me to get to the church early the next day because he wanted to make sure we got seats. Space was an issue because every single family member he invited from his large, prominent family had RSVP’d yes. The day was full of love and joy and laughter, with no caveats--simply love and acceptance, which every person deserves. Joining AWAB would make a resounding and definitive declaration that FBCIA is not just a safe harbor, but a place of unity in Christ’s teachings for all God’s children, exactly as they are created.

--Betsy Shealy

Congregational Partnership

This year we plan to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. weekend in partnership with Congregation Beth Shalom. Rabbi Barry Dolinger and Rabbi Emily Goldberg Winer invite our congregation to join with theirs on Saturday, January 18th, and then their congregation is invited to join with us on Sunday, January 19th. That weekend, we will launch a joint reading group delving into selected works of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In February, we will gather together for a discussion around the readings and their relevance to this moment.

PLEASE NOTE THIS IMPORTANT CHANGE OF DATE.

The Annual Meeting will be held on the 9th of February. Several of our members, including the clerk, will be away on the mission trip La Romana on the 4th Sunday of January, our usual meeting date.

FBCIA NEWS



Rev. Kelsey Stillwell was the guest minister on the second Sunday of Advent, December 8th. She is greeting Karen Bell and Larry Whelpley is next in line.



In honor and appreciation of Holly Edwards, who has served the church as secretary and office manager for 25 years, David Coon, Moderator of the church, presented her with a gift of money from the members of the church on Sunday, December 15.

Thank You

Thank you to all for the generous gift,
it was much appreciated.

I also want to thank Pastor Jamie, Stephen, Anne,
Tony and Ary, who make working here a delight.



On Friday, December 20th, Stephen Martorella and Greg Abate were rehearsing Winter Wonderland for the concert on Sunday, December 22nd. It just so happened it was snowing outside.



Esperanza Tannehill (reader) and Heidi Toppel (lighter) lit the Advent candle on December 22nd.



While Pastor Jamie was away Rev. Jim Miller, retired American Baptist pastor and former 35th minister of this congregation, filled the pulpit on December 29.



Sarah Dunn provided the special music on December 29, singing "Wasn't That a Mighty Day."



Jim Miller is greeting David McVicker after the service.

Missions and Outreach

Frozen Meals Ministry: We are always in need of more frozen meals to distribute. Please pick up containers and labels from the deacon's welcome table, prepare and freeze your meals, then return them to the church freezer for distribution. Thanks for being a part of this timely and fulfilling ministry.

The Blessing Bag Station in Fellowship Hall is always in need of socks, crackers, granola and water, hand sanitizer or body wipes that folks can give to needy individuals.

Basic Needs Pantry Drive

WISH LIST - Nothing opened or expired, please

- ◆ Milk of all types (shelf stable-cow, almond, oat, etc.)
- ◆ Band-aids
- ◆ Dish Soap, sponges, disinfectant sprays, and other cleaning supplies
- ◆ Kitchen supplies (cling wrap, plastic bags, tin foil, etc.)
- ◆ Office, school, and crafting supplies
- ◆ Sanitary pads (no tampons)
- ◆ Shampoo and conditioner (for all hair types)
- ◆ Single-load laundry detergent packets
- ◆ Soaps, toothpaste, deodorant, travel-size mouthwash, and other hygiene products
- ◆ Pasta sauce, Peanut butter, Ramen, Rice, Snack mixes, Soups, cake mix and frosting, canned fruit, any variety, Canned/shelf-stable proteins



Trip to La Romana

On Saturday, January 25, nine individuals from FBCIA and fellow travelers from Allendale and Phillips Baptist Churches in Rhode Island will join individuals from 3 churches in Maine on a mission trip to LaRomana, Dominican Republic.

There will be a construction team continuing work on the Good Samaritan Hospital and a medical team who will provide medical clinics in the batays, small villages in the middle of the sugar cane fields that surround the city.

In addition to your prayers, we can use the following items:

Antacid tablets (generic TUMS)
Acetaminophen tablets
Topical creams (moisturizers, anti-itch, hydrocortisone)
Topical antibiotics (neosporin, polysporin)
Anti-diarrheal (generic Imodium)
Pregnancy tests
Vitamin tablets
ABSOLUTELY NO GUMMIES or GEL CAPS
We can also use toothbrushes, toothpaste and bars of soap.

There is a box in Fellowship Hall, near the LaRomana poster.

Thank you for your ongoing support of this mission project.

Mark your calendar for two upcoming church dinners.

On **Wednesday, January 15** we will be cooking a pot of "stone soup". Stone soup is a community soup. (Check the book out at your local public library if you are not familiar with the story.) If you plan to come at 4:30 and help cook, bring a vegetable (fresh or canned) to add to the soup. If you plan to come at 5:30 and eat, please bring your contribution to the soup on Sunday, January 12. Following dinner those who can stay will clean the kitchen.

Tuesday, March 4 is Shrove Tuesday and we will have a pancake dinner. If you have a favorite pancake recipe, please get it to Susan Lepore by Sunday, March 2 so the ingredients can be purchased. I hope to have 3 or 4 varieties of pancakes. Cooking will begin at 4:30, eating will begin between 5:15 and 5:30. Between eating and cleanup there will be pancake races.

Susan Lepore
susanlepore@gmail.com

RI250 Commission celebrates religious liberty in RI featuring the Meeting House.



Secretary of State Gregg M. Amore, chair of the Rhode Island Semiquincentennial 250th Commission (RI250), announced the release of the 2024 semiquincentennial commemorative holiday ornament.

This year's limited-edition ornament highlights Rhode Island's founding principle of religious freedom, featuring four iconic landmarks: The First Baptist Meetinghouse and the statue of Roger Williams in Prospect Terrace both in Providence, The Great Friends Meeting House and Touro Synagogue both in Newport. These historic sites represent Rhode Island's pioneering role in religious tolerance and the legacy of its founder, Roger Williams.

Ornaments are available for purchase online at rishgiftshop.com/limited-edition-ri-250-birthplace-of-religious-freedom or by visiting the RI State House Visitor Center and Gift Shop.

The Rhode Island Semiquincentennial 250th Commission (RI250) was established in 2021 by the General Assembly to coordinate activities and initiatives in the lead-up to the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026. The agency planning for the anniversary is known by the title Rhode Island Semiquincentennial 250th Commission. (A centennial is a 100th anniversary, and a quincentennial is 500th anniversary, so the "semi" makes it half that, or 250th anniversary.)

The commission encourages all Rhode Islanders to engage in commemorative efforts that highlight the state's significant role in the American Revolution and its contributions to the nation's founding ideals. To learn more about RI250 and upcoming events, visit <https://rhodeisland250.org/>.

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Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam, Pastor
Stephen Martorella, Minister of Music
Holly Edwards, Administrative Assistant
Anne Gagan, Bookkeeper
Tony Zambarano, Sexton
Ary Peralta, Sunday Sexton
Victoria Pfanstiehl, ASL Interpreter
Ashley Muchiri, Nursery Room Assistant

Statement of Welcome

Roger Williams gathered the First Baptist Church in America in 1638 on the bedrock of religious liberty, with its principles of soul freedom and the separation of church and state. Together, we continue our ministry of welcome and liberation.

This congregation honors its Baptist heritage. Many of our members are lifelong Baptists and others come from varied denominational and religious backgrounds. We welcome all people of every age, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cultural background, socio-economic status, mental or physical ability, marital status, and any other distinctions of society. We are diverse people united in Christ. We remain a safe harbor.

Announcements

When there is a parking ban in the city of Providence due to inclement weather, church services and other activities held at the church will be cancelled until the parking ban is lifted. Please tune in to your local television and radio stations.

A gentle reminder that parking in the church driveway on Sunday is reserved for those with mobility issues and small children you do not need a handicap placard. Please try to pull up when parking so others are also able to park there. Thank you.