

The Visitor

December 2009

What does the Lord require of you?
To do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:8

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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As we enter the season of Advent, in anticipation of Christmas, it is certainly worth noting that many Christians use this time to actively anticipate the “second coming of Jesus”. The Revised Common Lectionary, the three-year cycle of a selection of biblical texts from which I preach, often schedules apocalyptic texts during this season. Although difficult to interpret and understand, these texts often use fantastic language to speak to the political and social conditions of their day. In his book *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome Then and Now* John Dominic Crossan cautions Christians against literal readings of apocalyptic texts for in doing so we are in danger of “waiting for God to act violently...” Crossan goes on to contend that the true hope of the text is realized when we discover that, “...God is waiting for us to act nonviolently.” He then addresses the notion of the anticipated Second Coming of Christ as such: “The Second Coming of Christ is not an event that we should expect to happen *soon*. The Second Coming of Christ is not an event that we should expect to happen *violently*. The Second Coming of Christ is not an event that we should expect to happen *literally*. The Second Coming of Christ is what will happen when we Christians finally accept that the First Coming was the *only Coming* and start to cooperate with its divine presence.” Now there’s a thought we can consider taking literally!

Renee, Owen, Emerson and I wish you the warmest and brightest holiday season. May your Christmas be filled with love and joy!

Peace,
Rich

Bible Study focuses on God on the Small Screen

Based on the success of our recent viewing of the Thanksgiving episode of the 1990’s TV show *Party of Five*, you are invited to join the Monday evening Bible study where we will discover the voice of God, biblical themes and life lessons evident in recent TV shows and current films. This series will begin on Monday November 30th at 7:00 PM in the church library. Bring your Bibles, an open heart and a desire to expand your definition of sacred texts. Popcorn will be provided!

Dinner/Discussion Group meets monthly on first Fridays at 6:00 pm . This month we will meet on Friday, January 8th. This group contains members coming together for as many as 20 years and each year anticipates and welcomes new members. We will enjoy a planned dish-to-share dinner and at the home of Sue Eymann and Tony Lister. Please speak to them for details. Discussion is not planned, but always enthusiastic and fun. We enjoy individual exchange as well as full table discussions. Your interest is encouraged.

Music Notes:

Music for Advent and Christmas

Sunday, December 6th -

Mark Lawrence, tenor "Comfort Ye" from Handel's Messiah

Sunday, December 13th

FBC Choir - Of the Father's Love Begotten
Guest Soloist

Sunday, December 20th

FBC Christmas Pageant and Choir Sunday
Featuring many beautiful anthems, hymns and a narrated slideshow

Christmas Eve

Family Friendly evening service with anthems, hymns and readings

Sunday, December 27th

Casual service in the Community Room

Sunday, January 3rd

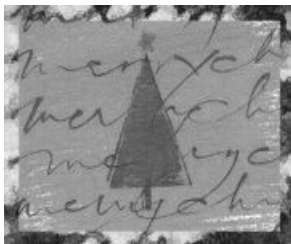
Labyrinth based service
Music about journeys

FBC Community Christmas Caroling - Wednesday, December 23rd - 5:30 to 6:30 PM

FBC sanctuary or outside in Dewitt Park if weather permits
Hot chocolate to follow afterwards in FBC community room

We are planning a FBC and community Christmas carol sing-along with a variety of Christmas songs. The lyrics will be provided. Everyone is welcome to join in, so please invite your friends and neighbors. Please contact Chris and Ande Romano Schmitt if you have any questions. Phone: 319-5335 or Email: andechris.family@gmail.com

GIVING TREE PROJECT



We will again be partnering with Enfield School around the holidays. The Giving Tree will be in the sanctuary the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Tags for clothing, toys and personal care items will be collected. We will also be doing mom/dad/grandparent bags. Extra mittens and hats are always needed at the school so keep an eye out for sales! More information will be coming during November. If you'd like to help with this project contact Sue Hemsath at 272-8619 or Tina Hilsdorf at 273-5440.

Lectionary Readings

First Sunday of Advent ~ November 29, 2009

Jeremiah 33:14-16 ~ Psalm 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 ~ Luke 21:25-36

Second Sunday of Advent ~ December 6, 2009

Malachi 3:1-4 **or** Baruch 5:1-9

Luke 1:68-79 ~ Philippians 1:3-11 ~ Luke 3:1-6

Third Sunday of Advent ~ December 13, 2009

Zephaniah 3:14-20 ~ Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7 ~ Luke 3:7-18

Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ December 20, 2009

Micah 5:2-5a ~ Luke 1:46b-55 **or** Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5-10 ~ Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

Christmas ~ December 24 & 25, 2010

Isaiah 52:7-10 ~ Psalm 98

Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12) ~ John 1:1-14

First Sunday after Christmas Day ~ December

26/Isaiah 63:7-9 ~ Psalm 148

Hebrews 2:10-18 ~ Matthew 2:13-23

January 1

Numbers 6:22-27 ~ Psalm 8

Galatians 4:4-7 **or** Philippians 2:5-11 ~ Luke 2:15-21

December 2009 Calendar

Tues	Dec 1	5:30pm 7:00pm 7:00pm	Sufi Meditation ACT Meeting Ithaca Gay Men's Chorus	Tues	Dec 15	5:30pm 6:00pm	Sufi Meditation Ithaca Community Chorus Board Meeting
Wed	Dec 2	4:30pm	Suicide Prevention Crisis Center Dinner			7:00pm	Ithaca Gay Men's Chorus
		5:30pm 7:00pm	Banner Committee Women's Spirituality	Wed	Dec 16	5:30pm 7:00pm	Banner Committee Women's Spirituality
Thurs	Dec 3	7:00pm	Choir Rehearsal	Thurs	Dec 17	7:00pm	Choir Rehearsal
Fri	Dec 4	8:15am	Meditation	Fri	Dec 18	8:15am	Meditation
Sat	Dec 5	3:00pm	Parent CoOp 3-7pm	Sat	Dec 19	10:00am	Choir Rehearsal if needed
Sun	Dec 6	10:00am	WORSHIP- Communion			3:00pm	Parent CoOp 3-7pm
		11:30am	Church School	Sun	Dec 20	9:30am	Choir Rehearsal
		11:30am	Coffee and Conversation			10:00am	WORSHIP
		2:00pm	Sacred Harp Singers			11:30am	Church School
Mon	Dec 7	6:00pm	PTSD Group			11:30am	Coffee and Conversation
		7:00pm	Bible Study	Mon	Dec 21	6:00pm	PTSD Group
Tues	Dec 8	5:30pm	Sufi Meditation			7:00pm	Bible Study
		7:00pm	Ithaca Gay Men's Chorus	Tues	Dec 22	5:30pm	Sufi Meditation
Wed	Dec 9	5:30pm	Banner Committee			7:00pm	Ithaca Gay Men's Chorus
		7:00pm	Women's Spirituality	Wed	Dec 23	5:30pm	Banner Committee
Thurs	Dec 10	7:00pm	Choir Rehearsal			7:00pm	Women's Spirituality
Fri	Dec 11	8:15am	Meditation	Thurs	Dec 24	7:00pm	Choir Rehearsal
		5:00pm	Ithaca Community			7:00pm	Christmas Eve Service
		10:00am	Orchestra Rehearsal	Fri	Dec 25	8:15am	Meditation
Sat	Dec 12	1:00pm	Choir Rehearsal	Sat	Dec 26	3:00pm	Parent CoOp 3-7pm
			Ithaca Community	Sun	Dec 27	10:00am	WORSHIP- in the FBC
			Orchestra Rehearsal and			11:30am	Community Room
			Concert			11:30am	Coffee and Conversation
		3:00pm	Parent CoOp 3-7pm	Mon	Dec 28	6:00pm	PTSD Group
Sun	Dec 13	9:30am	Choir Rehearsal			7:00pm	Bible Study
		10:00am	WORSHIP	Tues	Dec 29	5:30pm	Sufi Meditation
		11:30am	Board Meetings			7:00pm	Ithaca Gay
		11:30am	Various Men's	Wed	Dec 30	5:30pm	Men's Chorus
			Pancake Breakfast			7:00pm	Banner Committee
Mon	Dec 14	5:30pm	Cabinet Meeting				Women's Spirituality
		6:00pm	PTSD Group				
		7:00pm	Bible Study				

Update on Handicap Accessibility at FBC

Handicap accessibility to First Baptist Church has long concerned the three boards and members of the congregation. The ramp up to the sanctuary level from outside the portico door and the removable track ramp from the sanctuary level to the community room level were made available within the memory of many of our members. The removable track ramp was viewed as an expedient and affordable solution when it was put in place. It was what we could afford at the time until a better and more permanent solution could be identified and funded.

Within the last eight years, Bob Rodgers, Jud Kilgore, Liz Wilkinson, and others worked to gather information and solution possibilities. A Lift Fund was established to accumulate funds for the chosen accessibility solution. In May 2002 Bob Rodgers and Jud Kilgore surveyed local churches about their experience with providing wheelchair accessibility. The Trustees also hired an architect to study and make drawings for an ADA compliant ramp providing access to the Community Room and also for an ADA compliant lavatory. At the same time the Trustees contracted to replace the north-facing half of the church roof and all the flat roofing, depleting the Building Fund in the process and borrowing \$32,000 from members of the congregation to complete the project.

In July of 2006 the last of the loan to the Building Fund was paid off and at the end of that year the Building Fund stood at \$15,932 and the Lift Fund at \$9,755. However, starting in September 2006, FBC received monies that eventually totaled \$256,169 from the Nell Mondy Estate. The Finance Committee recommended to the Trustees that the bequest be used for something tangible.

Continued...

The Trustees sought ideas from the Church Council (all the boards and officers) and the consensus was to continue work on accessibility.

In August of 2008 an Accessibility Committee was formed consisting of Bill Abeles, Rich Barron, Lou Carlucci, Steve Hillsdorf, Judy Kennison, and Curt Ufford. After considering elevators, vertical lifts, inclined lifts and ramps, the committee decided that a ramp and lavatory was the best solution to making the Sanctuary and Community Room accessible and ADA compliant. The ramp would blend in with the church structure and be less intrusive than the other options. Although it has a high initial cost, it is less expensive than an elevator, and requires no maintenance. Classes or meetings scheduled on other floors could be moved to the accessible levels if necessary, flexibility being a part of the accessibility concept in older buildings. The Accessibility Committee estimated that the ramp would cost in the neighborhood of \$75K, and the lavatory about \$10K.

In compliance with Article V,B,2,b,iii of the FBC Constitution, and at the Annual Business Meeting on January 25, 2009, the Trustees placed the following resolutions before the congregation for their approval or disapproval:

1. Resolved, that an ADA compliant permanent ramp, similar to Dwg. A101 Schedule L of Egner Architect Associates, be installed in FBC.
2. Resolved, that an ADA compliant unisex lavatory, similar to Dwg. A101 Schedule L of Egner Architect Associates, be installed in FBC on the level of the Community Room and opening into the hallway.

Both resolutions were approved by the congregation and it was determined that the project would be paid for with a combination of the Lift Fund and Mondy Bequest monies. In June 2009 the Board of Trustees contracted with John Snyder Architects to oversee and administer the project. A committee chaired by Steve Hillsdorf and including Frank Mudrak, Curt Ufford, Judy Kennison, Rich Rose, and Kris Scott was appointed to work with the architect.

Bids were obtained from contractors for the two resolutions above and also included Alternative 1*, leveling the floor in the Community Room and coat rack area and installing new flooring. After interviewing three of the contractors, ASI Renovations was chosen. The costs for Resolutions 1 and 2 are \$94,600.00, and for Alternate 1 (community room floor) \$14, 600.00. *Alternative 1 for new flooring in the community room and coat rack room was approved by the Board of Trustees on Sunday, November 8, 2009.

ASI Renovations is a relatively new and fast growing home and commercial remodeling company in Tompkins County. It is an environmentally-conscious construction company using local labor and local vendors whenever possible and a certified Livable Wage Employer with the Tompkins County Worker's Rights Center. Their philosophy is to serve the best interests of the clients, employees, and community, with an emphasis on green construction and sustainability.

ASI was founded by Herb Dwyer and Anthony Guarneri who met in the United States Marine Corps. Herb is an active board member for several local organizations whose mission is to improve the quality of life in Ithaca, including the Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative, the Stewart Park Revitalization Action Program, and the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce. Anthony is involved in organizations such as the Green Resource Hub and Habitat for Humanity. We are pleased to be working with them.

The construction is scheduled to begin in early January and will take approximately two months. During the week of November 30 the church office will be relocated to the basement with access available through the basement fire door during a short period of time that the South Door will be unusable. The IACC Day Care will relocate temporarily to the Presbyterian Church. During the construction the sanctuary will be available for Sunday services. ASI is developing a construction timeline which will indicate times that different work will be taking place and the congregation will be kept informed. The church will remain open during the entire project with alternate meeting spaces provided as construction dictates.

Based on previously identified needs, the Board of Trustees also approved additional work to be done during the construction. This work includes:

- 1) The two exterior windows in the church office will be replaced with double-glazed, historically appropriate windows.
- 2) An additional radiator in the Community Room to improve heating

In order to have enough room to meet ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements for the ramp, part of the front office space is needed. The current church office and program associate's office will be combined into one office. This office will be smaller than the two existing offices.

For anyone interested detailed architectural drawings by Egner and/or Snyder are available for perusal in the Church Office.

For the Board of Trustees
Judy Kennison

A thank you from the child development council

After the annual Garage Sale, a large number of baby clothes were rewashed and delivered to the Child Development Council. Their thank you read as follows: "Thank you for your contribution of baby clothing to the Family Support Services Program and the Teen Pregnancy Parenting Program. Your donation will help many families in need."

A Brueggemann Experience

By Susan Eymann

During the weekend of November 7-8, some of us from First Baptist had the rare privilege of experiencing Old Testament Scholar and Professor Walter Brueggemann expound on his understanding of the Psalms. Co-sponsored by the First Presbyterian and First Baptist Churches of Ithaca on DeWitt Park, the two-day event day included morning and afternoon lectures on Saturday, a combined Sunday service, and a final reflection by Brueggemann on his favorite Psalm 73.

I had heard of Walt Brueggemann for years as one of the high points of my husband Tony Lister's years at Eden Seminary in Saint Louis where Brueggemann was his Old Testament professor. Tony tells of auditing an 8 am course just to hear Brueggemann. He characterized him as a modern prophet who brought the Old Testament to life in each of his lectures.

Would this larger than life figure of my imagination disappoint? He didn't. It was simply thrilling to sit listening to a sage so knowledgeable about the Old Testament, someone who had struggled with, reflected on and internalized its stories and narratives over the course of a lifetime. The stimulating, provocative, dramatic series of lectures and dialogues that ensued reflected Brueggemann's synthesis of his lifelong study. His hypothesis is that the psalms move from places of comfortable "orientation" to uncomfortable "disorientation" to "reorientation" in a new life.

Lament Psalms

For me, the first Saturday morning lecture in which Brueggemann tackled the uncomfortable "Lament Psalms," was the most interesting. These Lament Psalms, often overlooked in sermon lectionaries, take the psalmist from a place of comfortable "orientation" in Brueggemann's language to "disorientation." These "descents into candor" are "compulsive ruminations, voices of the night" according to Brueggemann. As he read excerpts, Brueggemann paced the floor, ranting, hissing, growling, snarling and bellowing, as would the psalmist. He became a Shakespearean actor bringing the language of the psalms to life.

The professor then offered nine theses about these psalms distilled over years of study. He characterized them as "out loud truth telling" in "wild, undisciplined, hyperbolic, repressive" language. These psalms reflect our common humanity with feelings of shame, failure, loss, abandonment, pain and anxiety. They have no interest in guilt. "I'm in big trouble, but it's not my fault," Brueggemann shouted. They are "nervy, courageous, not too polished" prayers of truth to God. For the psalmist, they act as a psychological catharsis. Moreover, Brueggemann calls them judicial metaphors accusing God. There are provisional role reversals, with recharacterizations of God. They express acts of resignation, communal outrage, and complaints. They shout out and overstate the case to get God's attention. They cry out to God, who can change everything, to get mobilized.

Reorientation Psalms

After lunch, Brueggemann returned to his main hypothesis that the psalms move from places of orientation to disorientation to reorientation. The reorientation psalms comfort. They are psalms of enthronement, salvation oracles of solidarity where God makes all things new by being present. They take the psalmist from trouble to joy. Brueggemann suggests that the liturgical tradition of churches plays a vital role in this reorientation to newness. He called the psalms "scripts for communities of faith." They produce "fearless people who live freely." The reorientation psalms are expressions of the fullest gratitude. Acting out this gratitude is, according to Brueggemann, the only valid basis for stewardship.

Psalm 73 - Brueggemann's Favorite

After an inspiring Sunday morning service with extraordinary music by the choirs and musicians of the two churches in the First Baptist sanctuary, Brueggemann then brought his lectures full circle with a reading of his favorite Psalm 73. He explained that this psalm captures the essence of the dynamic tension in each of our lives. From verses 2-16 the psalm presents the "seduction of commodity," the attraction of materialism. Then verse 17 begins with "Until." "Underscore that word," commanded Brueggemann. That is when the whole psalm takes a new direction and moves toward an "embrace of communion." This interplay between the seduction of materialism of our society and the embrace of communion with God is the negotiation, the dynamic tension that each of us experience. When asked how he deals with this negotiation, Brueggemann replied that as he has gotten older, he feels more and more the importance of "keeping the Sabbath."

Provocative, captivating, inspiring, Walter Brueggemann's consummate scholarship as he discoursed on the psalms left us not only with a weekend to remember, but a challenge to be faithful expressions of communion, to keep the Sabbath.

“Every Member a Minister” & Ministry Teams: A Trial Year for First Baptist Church

On the back of every week's bulletin, we make a powerful statement that is informed by our Baptist heritage. We say that *every member* of our church is a minister. At a recent meeting of all our church boards we considered our formal church leadership to review how we could more fully live into this principle. Like the "body of Christ", FBC is composed of many members which together work to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. The real test of any structure is whether or not it facilitates functioning which moves us toward this goal. Does our structure help, hinder, or simply hold us together?

After some healthy discussion, we agreed to put this important decision before all of our ministers at the annual congregational meeting in January--that means each of us, and not just the relative few who lead our boards. The proposal of the boards and our Church Cabinet is to suspend our present three board structure (Worship & Christian Concern, Education, and Trustees) for a trial year in order to experiment with ministry teams that will carry out all the functions of our church.

So, you may be wondering, "What's a Ministry Team?" The simple answer is that a Ministry Team is a small group of individuals who are personally committed to a specific area of ministry at FBC. Many of our current ministries already function in this way (Altar/Flower committee, Brunch, etc.) But several of our church boards have so many different ministries to tend to that we don't always give our full attention to the wider picture. The intent of ministry teams is to clarify the focus of each particular area, so that all aspects of our ministries receive the attention they deserve. Communication between the teams will be very important, so everyone knows where they fit in to the body as a whole.

The intent of this change is to invite everyone in our congregation to consider what their own personal ministry will be. How will each of us live into our role as a minister? What particular program, project, or work do we feel personally called to? By freeing our structure for this trial year, we hope to free up the energy of all our members, and to discern the direction God is taking us as individuals and as a community of faith.

While we try this year of new ministry, some things will remain the same. The budget we will vote on in January will be the familiar budget we use. Each ministry team will be fit into an existing budget line so as to minimize confusion. The existing Cabinet structure will continue but expand to include more of our member/ministers.

After looking at the ministry functions we currently provide, and have identified over 20 different potential ministry teams. The new structure will likely require some people to belong to more than one team. But as these teams may not all require monthly meetings, membership on more than one team may not require more meetings. A complete list will be available at our church-wide dish-to-pass on Sunday December 12. At that time, we'd like everyone to begin to think which team(s) they'd like to give their time and energy to.

One major goal of this project is to invite all of us at FBC – members and friends - to prayerfully and intentionally discern how we want to live out our discipleship in service to our church, community, and the wider world. This project, as well as the health of our church depends, as it always has, on how much each one of us is prepared to participate. Present leadership hasn't got this all figured out. We need your help to pitch in, ask questions, and get involved. At a time of the year when our church is already thinking about financial stewardship, we should take seriously the invitation to the stewardship of time as well. How do we want to live out our identities as ministers in this place? This question is filled with promise, and possibility.

Social Justice Action

You can have an impact! The Tompkins County Religious Coalition for a Living Wage invites you join in urging Barnes and Noble and Borders Bookstores to pay their workers a Living Wage. Autumn Leaves Used Books and Buffalo Street Books, two locally owned bookstores, already do so, as do 66 Tompkins County businesses, non-profits, government agencies and houses of worship. During this shopping season we are asking people to sign a post card, addressed to Barnes and Noble or Borders stating that as a customer who has spent money in their store we urge them to pay their workers a Living Wage. Post cards are available from Rich. They can be mailed to the address printed on the front or left in the office to be collected. They will then be delivered to each store. As consumers this is a chance to influence policy and promote economic justice in the stores we like and patronize. Please join us in this effort. For more information on the Tompkins County Living Wage Movement visit www.TCWorkersCenter.org/employer.

The Visitor

First Baptist Church
Box 254
Ithaca, New York 14851

{ Return Service Requested }

Non-Profit Organization

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Please remember to save your used religious Christmas cards, as we send them to the Weirton Christian Center. Cards are used by the children there to support the purchase of educational items for the center. Please bring your used cards to Naomi Hollister or leave them in the church office. Thank you.

Please save

“Labels and Box Tops for Education”

These are found on soup cans, cereals, baking items, paper products, etc. Please check the South door bulletin board for a list and photos of products with the accepted labels. We send these to Springbrook, our home in Oneonta, where they are redeemed for education materials for the residents. Please put them in the church office or give directly to Naomi Hollister. Thank you.

YOU ARE ALL INVITED TO ATTEND

The Annual FBC Baptist “Various Men” Pancake Breakfast
December 13th following the service (11:30AM) In the Community Room

VARIOUS MEN OF FIRST BAPTIST—HELP WANTED

Our annual pancake breakfast, in lieu of the December monthly brunch, will again be put on by “various men” of the church. All those men able to help set-up, cook, serve (where we need the greatest number), clean-up (also needs a significant number), please contact me, Bill Phelan, @ 279-7218 (cell) or at home, 539- 7258, email: wjp22@cornell.edu or see me in church.

PLEASE HELP

THIS IS AN ANNUAL PARABLE OF THE TALENTS
FUNDRAISING EVENT FOR THE CHURCH.