



Advent - A Time to Prepare

Advent marks the beginning of Western Christianity's liturgical year. During this season we observe a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day.

Worship services, lighting the candles each week on an Advent wreath, having an Advent calendar, daily devotional readings, contemplation, praying, putting up a Christmas tree, hanging greens, sending cards, family and social gatherings are expressions of how we prepare to welcome the Prince of Peace during Advent.



Steve Farrell adjusts the top Christmas tree in the sanctuary

Contents

• Advent - A Time to Prepare	1
• Message from Your Pastor	2
• A Discipline by Wendell Barry	2
• Advent/Christmas Calendar	3
• All-church Retreat Photos	3
• Letter from Kenya	4
• Eloy Alfaro, Educadorian anthropologist speaks	5
• Ithaca Sanctuary Fundraiser ...	5
• Heart Meditation at Retreat	6
• Broken Heart Syndrome	6
• Richard Rohr on Faith	6
• Photos: Haunted Church, All Saints, Thanksgiving Communion Table	7
• Highlights of the Dec 11th Council Meeting	7
• Keep in Our Prayers	8
• FBC Organization	8



Biz Pia-Miller & Tina Hilsdorf decorate the hallway.



A creche is found atop the cairn.

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

Micah 6:8



Lily Adams lights the first Advent candle as sister Elena and mom Belinda look on Sunday, Dec. 3rd.



Louise Mudrak instructs Jan Butler on fixing the swags in the sanctuary.



Christmas cards to our out-of-towners are signed

First Baptist Church in Ithaca is a nurturing and inclusive community. Guided by Jesus' Teachings, we strive for Social & Ecological Justice and embrace the Baptist tradition of Bible, Soul, Church and Religious Freedoms.

A Discipline

By Wendell Barry
from *New Collected Poems*, p 110.

Turn toward the Holocaust, it approaches on every side, there is no other place to turn. Dawning in your veins is the light of the blast that will print your shadow on stone in a last antic of despair to survive you in the dark.

Man has put his history to sleep in the engine of doom. It flies over his dreams in the night, a blazing cocoon.

O gaze into the fire and be consumed with man's despair, and be still, and wait.

And then see the world go on with the patient work of seasons, embroidering birdsong upon itself as for a wedding, and feel your heart set out in the morning like a young traveler, arguing the world from the kiss of a pretty girl.

It is the time's discipline to think of the death of all living, and yet live.

Leslie Schultz shared this poem at the November 13th meeting of the FBC Council.



The Hospitality and Nurture Committee, inspired and led by the vision of Anne Farrell, transformed the Community Room into a beautiful holiday setting for our annual Holiday Brunch. Good conversation accompanied by good food was enjoyed by all.

From Your Pastor Debbie Bennett Reynolds

Dear Friends,

I am hoping and praying for each of you to experience Advent Blessings and Christmas Joy! In the midst of all that is happening in our larger world these days may we keep finding moments to notice the beauty around us in God's creation and to pay attention to the love and care of people in our lives. In these challenging times we live in, with much that may make our hearts heavy, I find myself needing to be reminded to pay attention to all that's good. As we pray for peace and justice and reconciliation to come, let's not miss what is already here in our daily lives. There is so much beauty, goodness, kindness and love all around us!

In this season we are urged to watch for the coming of Christ – to look for God's presence in our everyday, ordinary, embodied lives. God's our Creator in winter landscapes, in sunlight and snowfall, in night skies and crisp, cold air. God's love in family and friends and church community. God's Spirit moving in and among us – and among people in all sorts of places and situations who keep on doing what is right, working for good, seeking justice, sharing mercy. God is here with us. May our faith be renewed this Christmas. May we know the deep joy that transcends our struggles and our sorrows!

*Emmanuel!
Debbie*



Rev. Debbie Bennett Reynolds

2023 Advent & Christmas: First Baptist Church in Ithaca

ADVENT

1st Sunday Worship - HOPE - Dec. 3rd, 10 am

Bible Study (Zoom) — Tues., Dec. 5th, 6:30 pm
Decorating the Sanctuary — Sat., Dec. 9th, 10 am

2nd Sunday Worship - PEACE - Dec. 10th, 10 am

Advent/Christmas Brunch: 11:30 am
Tim Hembrooke Dinner — Sat., Dec. 16th, 5 pm

3rd Sunday Worship - JOY - Dec. 17th, 10 am

Adult Ed: Advent Reflections; Youth & Children's Classes
Bible Study (Zoom) — Tues., Dec. 19th, 6:30 pm

4th Sunday Worship - LOVE - Dec. 24th, 10 am

Caroling and Live Nativity, 6 pm

**Christmas Eve Candlelight
Worship Service, 7 pm**

CHRISTMAS

Sunday Worship: Dec. 31st, 10 am

EPIPHANY

Sunday Worship: Jan. 7th, 10 am



Friends conversing.



Working on craft projects supplied by Leslie Schultz was popular throughout the retreat.



Bill Fry, Tina Hilsdorf and Carolyn Young walking in the woods.

All-Church Retreat: Camp Casowasco Nov. 18-19.

Photos by Amy Bean Stowell, Barb Fry



Amanda Ufford, Sara Schenk and Bronwyn Evans having fun.



Pastor Debbie led "Laughing Yoga."



Altar created for worship service in the chapel.



Again this year line dancing Saturday evening was a big hit.



Pastor Debbie, Barbara Pease and Jan McCarrick



Peter Lenox



Sisters Phenny, Mary, Mum and Dad



Rolex and Peter during a 2-day school visit



The family's house on the island in Lake Victoria

Letter from Kenya

Dear Adrienne and Josie,

I hope you're doing well. It's truly heartwarming to reflect on the impact of the connection with The First Baptist Church. Thanks to this connection, Mary and I have been able to join high school, something that seemed impossible before. I want to express my deepest gratitude to you and Josie for making this possible.

Interestingly, just two days before our father's passing, he shared his hopes and dreams with us. He spoke at length, expressing his desire for one of his children to study abroad and to build a big permanent house for our mother it is evident that my father knew he had few days left to live. At that time, we were uncertain about our future, unaware of Rolex's connection with Josie and the church. When we spoke with Rolex, he encouraged us to focus on our studies and assured us that our education was his priority.

True to Rolex's words, we managed to join high school through the help of FBC. I can tell you that the first one year in high school has been good, I want to take you and the church through my first year in high school. The first year in high school has changed me a lot I've been exposed to a wider range of subjects and concepts, including more advanced mathematics, sciences, and humanities. This has broadened my knowledge and perspectives significantly.

I have also had the opportunity to meet fellow learners from different communities and religions, many of whom speak first languages different from mine. As a result, I've become more accustomed to speaking in English and Swahili, which has been a rewarding experience.

In addition, I've learned how to manage the resources I have more responsibly. For instance, I've been given pocket money by my brother Rolex, and I've had to ensure that I use it wisely to last me through the term. This has taught me valuable lessons in financial responsibility.

High school has also introduced a more rigorous academic curriculum, requiring me to manage my time and workload more independently compared to primary school. This has been a challenge, but I've been working hard to adapt and improve in this area.

I have gained new life skills that I didn't have before. I can now travel to and from school alone, and I've learned how to take care of my own belongings, such as cleaning my clothes, my bedding and cleaning the cube that I share with 10 other students.

During my first year in high school, I also got the opportunity to be my class governor! It was a competitive process - I had to write an application letter to the principal, to qualify one must have scored an A plain in the first term exams. After being shortlisted with five other students, I went through an interview where I had to make a brief speech and answer questions from a panel of teachers. Two days later, I was thrilled to hear my name announced during the assembly as the selected class governor. I'll be holding this position until next year's second term, and I'm already planning to contest again.

I really miss my mother a lot. It was tough at first, but I'm adapting well and focusing on my studies so that together with my siblings, we can change our situation at home. Rolex, my brother, has been incredibly supportive during this time. I make sure to talk to my mother almost every day during the term breaks, and we're planning to go home for the Christmas and New Year celebrations on 15th December. I'm looking forward to it.

Overall, high school has been a transformative experience for me, and I'm excited to continue growing and learning in the future.

Sending love,

Peter Lenox

To help Peter and his sister Mary continue their educations, please make a check payable to First Baptist Church with African Education Fund on the note line and place in the plate or send to Marlene Sack, 222 Tareyton Dr., Ithaca, NY.



Ithaca Sanctuary Fundraiser Is Huge Success

The Dec. 2nd Migrant Sanctuary fundraiser for the Ithaca Sanctuary Alliance to support the Peruvian family currently in sanctuary at First Congregational Church (FCC) was a huge success. Well over 100 people attending the event held at the FCC and more than \$15,000 was raised.

After a dinner that featured agudito de pollo and quinoa soups accompanied by bread donated by Wake Awake Bakery and arroz con leche for dessert, folks convened in the FCC sanctuary for a program that included poetry by poet activist Barbara Regenspan and Ruth Yarrow, performances by a Ithaca College musical theater ensemble, a short update on the state of immigration policy, present and future by Jaelyn Kelly-Widner teacher of immigration law at Cornell School of Law, testimonials by Drucila Francisco who had previously been in sanctuary at FCC, and Edgar and Jenny, the couple who are now in sanctuary. The program closed with a screening of "Promised Land" - compiled by Joseph Rayle.

Music for the event was provided by Carlos Gutiérrez and 6 Mile Craic.

If you would like to join others from FBC in supporting the family, please contact Anne Horst (ahorst611@gmail.com).

Eloy Alfaro, Ecuadorian Anthropologist, Speaks at FBC

By Josie Zanfordino

On October 13, Eloy Alfaro, an anthropologist from Quito, Ecuador spoke at FBC about the activist spirit of his indigenous people concerning climate crisis. He was introduced by the Reverend Jen Lessard, Pastor of York Baptist Church. She came to us sponsored by our Eco-Justice Committee.

Eloy focused on the Rio Blanco region and the complex problems facing mining in Ecuador: inadequate public consultations; fraught questions of indigenous identities and rights; local versus state power; and the protection of scarce natural resources. Ecuador relies heavily on the income gained from exploiting its natural resources. The country's largest export, crude petroleum, represents 29% of Ecuador's GDP, coming in with a total value of \$5.63 billion. This has caused the country to suffer from vast deforestation in the Amazon, contaminated water and widespread illness.

In 1996 a movement started in which people asked that if they have rights why not the land too. After historically being excluded from the political process, at least 8 indigenous groups, especially concerned about the worsening environmental devastation of the extraction business and global climate change, started social movements aimed at creating a new approach to development that would protect the environment and harmonize its relationship with people.

In late 2006, the election of leftist, Rafael Correa, who ran on an anti-neoliberal platform, showed the emergence of a new political era for Ecuador.

Eloy told us that in 2008 Nature's Rights were put in Ecuador's constitution. With the adoption of a new constitution under President Rafael Correa, Ecuador became the first country in the world to enshrine a set of codified Rights of Nature and to inform a more clarified content to those rights. Articles 10 and 71-74 of the Ecuadorian Constitution recognize the inalienable rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish, give people the authority to petition on the behalf of nature, and requires the government to remedy violations of these rights. In simple and clear language they said. "Nature is our mom."

Eloy informed us that in 2019 when water became scarce in Rio Blanco in the Ecuadorian Andes highlands Elizabeth Durazno of Rio Blanco village and many others stopped a Chinese Mining Company. Women took a stand and took back land from predatory mining. They said "Water is more precious than gold." The Chinese mining company left.

He spoke with respect for the women who created the Resort Sinchi Warmi in the Ecuadorian rain forest. Their resort was created when determined women took up the great economic concerns of their community and ignored the men who refused to help support their families. Growing more determined as time went by the women created a great resort to welcome travelers to Ecuador. When men saw the success these women were having they came around and supported the cause.

In 2023 there was a referendum involving the Amazon Jungle and Yasuni Choco arguing for Bio Diversity. They wanted to protect these places. Indigenous women from the Amazon Jungle got involved. They set a goal to rebuild community, and created a healthy space.

In the end Eloy said that Ecuador's goal is to have visitors. Rev Jen Lessard said she is planning to go back. She would enjoy people from our congregation joining her. We were encouraged to speak with Jen and see what can be created for Ecuador.



Conversation and laughter were a staple at the All-church retreat. On the left are Anne Farrell, Linda Nicholson and Bill Abeles; above are Laura Ward and Pastor Debbie.

Broken Heart Syndrome "Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy"

One often hears the phrase "I've got a broken heart," but now we know that the heart can actually break from emotional stress that physically manifests itself as takotsubo cardiomyopathy or Broken Heart Syndrome.

Takotsubo cardiomyopathy occurs when the heart's left ventricle muscle is suddenly stunned or weakened following severe emotional or physical stress such as a sudden illness, the loss of a loved one, a serious accident, or a natural disaster.

First described by cardiologists from Hiroshima, Japan in 1991, takotsubo cardiomyopathy takes its name from the shape of the lower part of the left ventricle during systole. A shock can cause the its apex to balloon out and resemble the round-bottomed, narrow-necked vessel "tako-tsubo" or fishing pot used by the Japanese for trapping octopus.

Most of the abnormalities in function and movement clear up in one to four weeks, and most patients recover fully within two months. Death is rare, but heart failure does occur in about 20% of patients.

Takotsubo symptoms include chest pain and shortness of breath, and electrocardiogram abnormalities that mimic those of a heart attack, and ballooning of and abnormal movement of the left ventricle. The precise cause is not known, but experts conjecture that surging stress hormones such as adrenaline essentially "stun" the heart, triggering changes in heart muscle cells or coronary blood vessels (or both) that prevent the left ventricle from contracting effectively.

Since takotsubo symptoms can be mistaken for a heart attack, clinicians look to angiograms for no evidence of blockages in the coronary arteries that are typical with a heart attack. There is no standard treatment for takotsubo syndrome but clinicians often recommend standard heart failure medications such as beta blockers, ACE inhibitors, and diuretics.

While we now know that the heart can actually break from emotional stress, the good news is that the heart can also mend (heal) and recover from its Broken Heart.

References

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/takotsubo-cardiomyopathy-broken-heart-syndrome>

Cramer MJM et al, Editorial: The 'broken heart' syndrome, What can be learned from the tears and distress? Netherlands Heart Journal, September 2007;15(9).



Attending the Heart Center Meditation small group led by Laura Peters at the All-Church Retreat November 18th were the following: standing from left to right: David Caughey, Bill Abeles, Anne Farrell, Adrienne McNair, Tony Lister, Barb Fry, Josie Zanfordino and Susan Eymann. Sitting left to right, Colin Kerr-Carpenter, Laura Peters. Biz Pia-Miller, Lydia and Bud Dolch.

Heart Center Meditation: Small Group Offering at Retreat

Laura Peters led one of the small group sessions, Heart Centered Meditation, at the First Baptist All-Church Retreat at Casowasco Retreat Center. Drawing on her training in mindfulness meditation informed by nature and neuroscience, Laura offered a heart centered variation of an ancient traditional practice, metta or loving kindness meditation.

Since our hearts produce a much stronger electrical and magnetic signal than our brains, researchers such as the HeartMath group have studied what happens when people visualize breathing in and out through the heart, cultivating a positive emotion like gratitude. This practice can bring the heart and brain into what's called a coherent state where they synch together, improving our overall well-being. When our small group of 17 practiced together in the Wesley Lounge, we were literally better together!

Laura will be offering an online 6-week class, the Mindful Living Toolkit, teaching a set of mindfulness practices, including this one, to strengthen immunity and improve well-being. These practices can be particularly helpful to people healing chronic conditions. The class will run on Zoom on Wednesdays, January 17-February 21, 2024 from 6:00 to 7:30 pm. More information, you are welcome to check out Laura's website goodearthmindfulness.com or email her at laura@goodearthmindfulness.com.

Faith Is More How to Believe Rather Than What to Believe

Richard Rohr

"The Naked Now, Learning to See
as the Mystics See"

Faith is a word that points to an initial opening of the heart space or mind space from our side. Initially and foundationally, this is what faith is, but its effects and implications can be enormous. Faith is our small but necessary offering to any new chance or encounter.



Owasco Lake was the site of Camp Casowasco where the November 18-19 All-Church Retreat was held.

Highlights of the Dec. 11 Council Meeting

The FBC Council met via zoom on December 11th for its last meeting in 2023. The Council welcomed new member-at-large Carolyn Young who was elected by the Council to fill the seat vacated by Meg Gillard.

Treasurer Brian Baker noted that the church's finances look good and asked folks to submit outstanding receipts quickly so FBC can start with a clean slate in January.

Stewardship campaign update from Marlene Sack: 39 pledges are in as of December 11th, totaling \$211,400, or 90% of goal. We are still \$23,000 short of goal.

Pastor Debbie said that she has had follow-up contact with John Gross' family. The family said that they would like to have an Ice cream social and hymn sing in honor of John.

Janice Nigro will be out of the office the week between Christmas and New Year's.

Resource Committee Update:

Bill Fry said that, after he had signed \$19,000 contract with Charles F. Evans to repair the tower roof, he learned that the repairs would be good for only three to five years. To replace the entire roof with slate, would cost \$160,000. Another contractor All State Roofing estimated that replacing the roof with look-alike slate would cost \$29,000. No decision about the roof repair has been made by the committee. The committee has paid for \$140,000 for heat pumps to LaMorte Electric; \$9,400 to NYSEG for a three-phase utility pole, \$7,500 (one third of the estimate) to install platform for heat pump processors. In limbo is the church roof repair because mason Tom Duffy won't work on the roof until the tower is repaired. FBC has also received a \$3,000 bill for a snow removal contract for the parking lot. It's one half of the total \$6,000 bill because we share the parking lot with the Presbyterians. This is considerably higher than was spent in the past. On a positive note, the heat pump project is progressing and LaMorte Electric now have stamped plans to take to city for obtain permits.

Setting Goals for FBC:

Four goals were suggested:

- Grooming Church Leadership:
- Staying Connected/Unified as a church
- Welcoming and Integrating New Folks
- Strengthening Adult Education Program



A haunted church decorated by the youth scared Halloween visitors October 25th.

~ ~ ~ ~
Save the Date
~ ~ ~ ~
Women's Retreat
Light on the Hill
March 15-16, 2024
~ ~ ~ ~



Candles were lit for the saints in our lives by congregants during the November 3rd "All Saints" Sunday worship service.



Thanksgiving Communion Table by Andrea Staffeld



Please keep in your prayers:

- Bill Reynolds
- Kris and Danny Scott & Zeta Pederson
- Suzanne Kilgore
- Kendrick Kemp
- Ron Drummond
- Marge Hansel
- Abraham Phelan
- Anthony Halman & family

Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more.
H. JACKSON BROWN JR.

~~~~~  
*When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.*  
**MAYA ANGELOU**

~~~~~  
To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, every cubic inch of space is a miracle...
WALT WHITMAN

~~~~~  
*Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.*  
**THICH NHAT HANH**



November 25th flowers.

### The Visitor - December 2023

Editor/publisher: Susan Eymann  
Proofers: Tony Lister, Shella Chace, Judy Kennison

Contributors: Laura Peters, Debbie Bennett Reynolds, Josie Zanfordino, Shella Chace, Peter Lenox,  
Photos: Tony Lister, David Caughey, Bill Phelan, Amy Bean Stowell, Barbara Fry



FBC choir, directed by Belinda Adams, singing "Carol of the Birds" by Nobel Cain on Dec. 10th

Photo by Barb Fry

## FBC Organization (updated December, 2023)

### First Baptist Staff

Pastor: Rev. Debbie Bennett Reynolds  
 Office Manager: Janice Nigro  
 Organist: Christopher Morgan Loy  
 Choir Director: Belinda Adams  
 Youth and Children's Ministries Coordinator: Laura Ward  
 Nursery Care Coordinator: Carol Fleming  
 Nursery Care Assistant: Sarah Zipfel  
 Custodian: David Hopkins  
 Native Plants Garden Specialist: Sarah Zipfel

### Elected Leadership

#### Council Trustees

Margie Latham: Moderator  
 Andrea Mooney: Vice Moderator  
 Susan Eymann: Clerk  
 Brian Baker: Treasurer

#### Council Committee Trustees

Josie Zanfordino: Ecological Justice  
 Leslie Schultz: Education  
 Anne Farrell: Hospitality and Nurture  
 Bill Fry: Resource  
 Bill Abeles: Service and Social Justice  
 Steve Farrell: Welcome and Outreach  
 Amy Doyle: Worship, Music and Spiritual Life

#### Council Member-at-Large

Carolyn Young

#### Non-Council Officers

Bill Fry: Assistant Treasurer  
 Marlene Sack: Financial Secretary  
 Elizabeth Pia-Miller: Assistant Financial Secretary

#### Nominating Committee

Andrea Mooney (chair) + 4 open positions

### Pastoral Relations

(2024): Mark Lawrence, Amanda Ufford, Barb Fry; (2025): Judy Kennison (chair)  
 Bill Abeles, Carolyn Young; (2026): Lil Barron, Barbara Pease.

### Reps to Affiliate Organizations

Two Delegates each for **Rochester Genesee Region & ABC-USA**  
 Rich and Lil Barron; Anne & Steve Farrell.

**ACT** (Area Congregations Together): Shella Chace

**AWAB**: Shella Chace

**Baptist Peace Fellowship**: Leslie Schultz

**Cornell Campus Ministry**: Brian Baker

**Kitchen Cupboard**: Amanda Ufford; Sue Hemsath

**Tompkins County Workers Center**: Bill Abeles

**Sanctuary Alliance**: Anne Horst (chair), Bill Abeles; Bill Fry; Leslie Schultz and others

### Council Committees

**Ecological Justice**  
 Josie Zanfordino, Louise Mudrak (Co-chairs); Barbara Pease, Alice Grow, Amanda Ufford

**Education Children's and Youth**:  
 Leslie Schultz (chair), Debbie Allen.

**Christian Ed Teachers**: Baruch Whitehead; Sarah Zipfel; Meg Gillard

#### Hospitality and Nurture

Anne Farrell (chair); Shella Chace; Meg Gillard; Tina Hilsdorf; Bruce Chandler, Andrea Staffeld; Steve Farrell; Alice Grow, Craig Riecke, Laura Peters

#### Resource Committee

Bill Fry (chair); Brian Baker, Rich Barron, Lou Carlucci, Dave Caughey, Steve

Hilsdorf, Mark Lawrence, Bill Phelan, Marlene Sack, Kris Scott, Carolyn Young, Josie Zanfordino

### Service & Social Justice

Bill Abeles (chair); Bill Phelan, Amanda Ufford, Marge Hansel, Shella Chase and others

#### Subgroup

**Circle of Care**: Linda Caughey (chair) Amanda Ufford; Sue Hemsath

### Welcome and Outreach:

Steve Farrell (chair). Anne Farrell, Alicia Dixon-Garrard, Baruch Whitehead, Joe Haines.

#### Subgroup: Communications:

David Caughey; Mark Lawrence; Craig Riecke; Susan Eymann; Amy Bean Stowell; Lisa Kilgore

### Worship, Music & Spiritual Life:

Amy Doyle, Biz Pia-Miller (Co-chairs); Tony Lister; Barb Fry, Kris Scott; Edie Reagan; Alice Grow; Regi Carpenter; Debbie Allen

#### Subgroups

**Flower Committee**: Barbara Fry; Tina Hilsdorf; Andrea Staffeld, Carrie Stern

**Labyrinth**: Kris Scott

**Sound/Audio Ministry**: David Caughey; Curt Ufford; Bill Fry; Bill Phelan; Leslie Schultz

Please contact Susan Eymann (susan.eymann@transonic.com) to make corrections/additions to this list.