



First Baptist Church in Ithaca

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



See page 8.

## First Baptist Supports and Applauds The Opening of Maimouna's Cuisine

Maimouna Phelan has applied for and received permission from the FBC Council to rent the FBC kitchen to kick-start her new food business, Maimouna's Cuisine. The business model of Maimouna's Cuisine includes cooking classes, catering, and a once-a-week pick-up food service.



Maimouna Phelan

Maimouna plans to open the business between mid-January to mid-February, 2025. To prepare for her opening, Maimouna has secured and paid for the annual Health Department Certification to cook the food it sells in the FBC Certified Commissary Kitchen; has acquired liability insurance coverage; will assure clean-up of the kitchen with trash/recycled item removed any days that it rents the facility.

Meal pick-ups will be on Fridays from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm. A team member will deliver orders directly to a customer's car through the south door of the church. If someone picks up their food by foot in the winter, then a team member will wait with them inside the south door while a second team member will bring the food order to them. The church's south door will remain locked during pick-up as clients can use the bell or the business' phone to summon their order.

Our Best Wishes to Maimouna's Cuisine for a successful launch and prosperous business venture.



The FBC choir, directed by Belinda Adams and accompanied by Christopher Morgan Loy, offered superb music during the Advent and Christmas season that enhanced each worship service. The choir, pictured from left to right, includes Bill Fry (partially hidden), Tina Hilsdorf, Jim Evans, Marlene Sack, Bruce Chandler, Meg Gillard, Joy Rutt, and Shella Chace. Missing from the picture are David Caughey, Rich Barron, Beth Wolfer, Anne Farrell, Tony Lister, and Andrea Staffeld. During Christmas Eve worship, the music included a guitar solo by David Caughey, Tony Lister accompanying the choir on his sax, and Mark Lawrence capping off the annual service with his gorgeous rendition of "O Holy Night"!

Photo by Judy Kennison



Santa (Bruce Chandler) is hard at work in the FBC kitchen during the Christmas brunch on Sunday, December 22nd.

Photo by Tony Lister

## FBC Annual Meeting, January 26th

The annual meeting of First Baptist Church is set for after worship on January 26th. The agenda of the meeting is the receipt of annual reports from the Treasurer and Financial Secretary, adoption of the current fiscal year's budget, and assignment of extra monies from the 2024 budget as recommended by the Finance Committee.



Amy Doyle, Barb Fry, Carrie Stearns and Bill Fry decorate the hallway.

## Our Value Statement

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 & Religious Freedoms.



Meg Gillard and friend set up a manger scene.

## From Your Pastor Debbie Bennett Reynolds



Rev. Debbie Bennett Reynolds

Dear Friends,

We had a meaningful and joyful season of observing Advent and celebrating Christmas together! Thank you to everyone who gave of their time, energy, and skills! Through beautiful decorations, wonderful music, great food, and meaningful times of worship and learning together, we celebrated God's love for us shown in the birth of Jesus the Christ. In these winter days of January 2025, we are blessed with the assurance in Christ that is God is always with us and for us. Emmanuel!

The new year is here with its possibilities, its uncertainties and its challenges. Together, we continue to love God, love one another, and love all our neighbors. In the midst of so much news in our world of disasters and wars and political turmoil, we support and encourage each other through our life together to grow spiritually, live faithfully, and work for peace and justice.

We have had to spend a lot of money on our building and its heating the past couple of years. It's great to remember that doesn't just serve us but also serves our Ithaca community. Many other groups use our building - from the Tweens Homeschool group that meets here on Mondays and Tuesdays to Transpose: Ithaca Queer Singers Alliance and Rock Voices Ithaca that rehearse here. Other groups use our space for concerts and auditions and other activities. Just last week, we learned that the Jewelry Sale for Ithaca Welcomes Refugees that used our space raised \$10,200. The eight Red Cross blood drives held in our building in 2024 brought in 207 donations, which may have saved up to 621 lives.

In addition, we have become actively involved in preparing meals for the Code Blue Shelter which is being run this winter by DSS. Many of you have stepped up to help prepare hot meals and deliver them to homeless individuals in shelter across the parking lot in the old Key Bank building. We're sharing our kitchen with volunteers from Temple Beth-El and First Unitarian, so that between the three groups most Wednesday and Saturday meals are coming from our kitchen. And, as you see in this Visitor, Maimouna and Bill Phelan will soon be using our kitchen for the start-up of Mai's Cuisine.

There are so many other ways we share God's love through our giving. We raised \$1400 to send to Mirindo "Rolex" Duwa for schooling costs for his brother and sister, Peter and Mary, as they continue in high school in Kenya. This will meet about half of their needs for 2025. We have given \$400/quarter in 2024 to the Interfaith Assistance Fund, being administered by Catholic Charities on the behalf of our church and several other faith communities. This money from our Pastor's Fund is used to meet needs they can't normally support - everything from car repairs to toiletries for students in a local school to rental assistance and phone bills. Our Pastor's Fund also helps us respond to other folks who call or come to our door in need of help. Thank you for your generous support of this Fund, over and beyond your giving to our budgeted program needs.

Our faith and hope in God's love empower us to live beyond anxiety and fear. We can move into this coming year together, confident that God is with us, and animated to live with love, joy, and generosity. You are a wonderful community of people, and I thank God for each of you!

With love and blessings,

Debbie Bennett Reynolds

# First Baptist Prepares for Christmas



Louise Mudrak joined a phalanx of elves on December 7th who gathered to prepare First Baptist for Christmas with decorations throughout the building!



Christmas trees, wreaths, poinsettias and swags transformed First Baptist's sanctuary into Christmas wonder.



Indispensable Resource Chairperson Bill Fry was on the ladder again this year hanging the wreaths, stringing the lights on the Christmas trees and being an all-around jolly good fellow.



Debbie Allen and Carrie Stearns unpack crafts.



Cindi Zorokong, Barb Fry and Amanda Ufford get to work helping to decorate the sanctuary for the Christmas/Advent season.



There to tackle the tough jobs are Tina Hilsdorf and Steve Farrell who figure out how to hang a wreath in the south side entrance way of First Baptist welcoming all who walk by daily on their way to work.

## *The Fincher Legacy* Excerpt from *Historic Ithaca*

On International Day of Veterinary Medicine Dec. 9th, Historic Ithaca celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Myron Gustin Fincher, a Cornell veterinarian who dedicated nearly 45 years to animal and human health. Dr. Fincher was the father of our own Myra Fincher who Historic Ithaca is proud to call a Preservation Champion and friend.

Their journey began with a query from Myra. After seeing Historic Ithaca's post about "The Home," she reached out, curious about her childhood residence at 118 Delaware Avenue. This inquiry opened up a delightful dialogue about her life in Ithaca and her family's deep connections to the community and Cornell University.

Myron and Evelyn Fincher purchased the house at 118 Delaware Avenue in 1930 for \$9,000. The property, previously owned by retired Professor Brew of the Dairy Department, became their home for the next 45 years. It was a hub of activity, warmth, and education in the Bryant Park Neighborhood.

Myra painted a vivid picture of her childhood home:  
"My parent's home was always welcoming. The neighbors visited. Holidays and birthdays were celebrated. Dad invited students to meals, visiting in our friendly home environment. Mother and I stayed in the kitchen when veterinary talk took over."  
The Finchers, embracing the spirit of education that permeated their lives, often rented rooms to Cornell students. This practice not only supplemented their income, but also created a vibrant, multi-generational household.

In 1953, the small kitchen in the 7-room home underwent a significant transformation. ... but the renovation didn't stop there. In 1954, a "fine sturdy addition" was added to the house, featuring grand Anderson windows on the west side and a small half-bath. This new room became the heart of family gatherings, with the west dining room window transformed into a playful passageway for grandchildren to enter the house. ...

...The Fincher family home stands as a testament to a place where veterinary science, family life, and community intersected for nearly half a century. To read full article go to: <https://www.historicithaca.org/post/thefincherfamilyhome>

## Tim Hembrooke Luncheon Held on December 14th



*Baruch Whitehead of the Welcome and Outreach Committee welcomes the visitors.*



*Maimouna Phelan and friend clean up in the kitchen.*



*The annual Tim Hembrooke community feast, organized by the Welcome and Outreach and Hospitality Committees was again a great success. This year the meal was served as a luncheon on Dec. 14th. Again, The Greater Ithaca Activity Center (GIAC) jumpers, pictured on the left, delighted all with their energetic performance..*

## Labyrinth Experience Offered to Community



*Thanks to the dedication and devotion of Kris Scott and her team, the labyrinth was again set up in the FBC sanctuary after Christmas from December 28th until January 2nd to allow anyone from the larger Ithaca community to experience the age-old spiritual practice of reflection and prayer. Drawn from Chartes Cathedral in Chartes, France, one can merge one's body, mind and spirit by intentionally walking the ancient maze.*



*During the Christmas Eve Worship service, the creche on the Communion table was populated by the children in the congregation with the nativity ensemble of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, wisemen, sheep, lambs, cows, and a donkey. The last piece that was added was the baby Jesus who adorable Zephyr McCassey, grandchild of Bud and Rebecca Dolch, placed in the manger.*

*In Memoriam*  
**Father James Callan**  
 1947-2024



*"There are no disposables in the family of God."*

The Rev. James B. Callan was a dissident priest who was excommunicated from the Catholic Church in 1999 after he allowed women to celebrate Mass, blessed same-sex unions and offered communion to non-Catholics.

Under his 22-year tenure at Corpus Christi in east Rochester, the church was transformed from a poor parish doomed for closure into a flourishing multiracial, progressive, and ecumenical parish that grew from less than 200 to nearly 3,000. Several FBC parishioners attended Corpus Christi while living in Rochester. At Corpus Christi, Father Callan abolished bingo games; persuaded members to donate up to 12 percent of weekly collections to the poor, and created a free medical clinic, a homeless shelter, and a residence for former prisoners. A health clinic in Haiti was also founded.

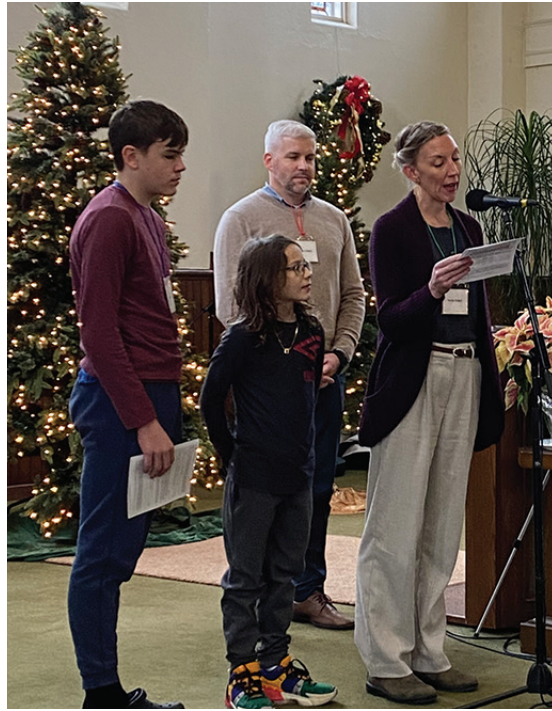
Father Callan felt that his break with the Church was instigated by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who later became Pope Benedict XVI. He regarded his dismissal as less about doctrine than about disciplining unruly priests who did not demonstrate proper obedience to their bishops. In 1976, Father Callan had been suspended from his priestly duties at Rochester's St. Ambrose Church for two months after he refused to move into the church rectory because, he said its amenities were above the normal style of the people he was serving.

After his excommunication, Father Callan joined former Corpus Christi acolytes who had founded a church, later renamed Spiritus Christi, in Rochester, NY. Catholic in spirit but independent of the Vatican, the church is thriving.

Following his passing in December, our former FBC Pastor Wendy Fambro wrote on her Facebook page, "Mourning with so many others the loss of Fr. Jim Callan. He had long been a hero of mine (since I was a teenager!) for his principled insistence on inclusion, commitment to serving the poor, working toward a more just society, and his bold faith. When I came to work alongside him as minister of Immanuel Baptist (in Rochester) we shared a joint weekday worship service. I will admit to some fan girl butterflies when I first met him in person, but he immediately put me at ease with his genuine warmth and sense of humor. ... I am grateful for the gift of his friendship during these past years, and, despite his down-to-earth humility, he never quite managed to undo his hero status in my heart."



*Former FBC Pastor Wendy Fambro with Father James Callan sharing worship.*



*Fishel Family joins Sarah as she reads in preparation for lighting an Advent candle.*



*Kris Scott decorating screen.*



*Lydia Dolch and daughters lighting Advent candles.*



*Basses, from left to right, Jim Evans, Bruce Chandler, Tony Lister join the chorus.*



*Biz Pia-Miller, Pastor Debbie and Cooper Pia-Miller preparing to light an Advent candle.*



*Soprano Joy Rutt and alto Tina Hilsdorf*

# Hospitality Committee Hosts Memorable Christmas Brunch Dec. 22nd.



*Table settings that take your breath away!*



*Danny Scott reconnects with Shella Chace and Jim Evans*



*A sumptuous feast awaits.*



*Conversations accompanied delicious food.*



## Save These 2025 Dates

**January 19 Brunch:** Hospitality Chairperson Anne Farrell says the brunch is going to be a little different this time. They are asking folks to bring soup and the committee is providing the rest of the meal.

February 9 - Brunch

March 2 - Pancake Day

April 20 - Easter

May 4 - College Student Recognition

June 22 - FBC Picnic at Taughannock



*New FBC sign at corner of Cayuga and Buffalo streets.*



Early on Christmas Eve, the Community Room was filled to view a live nativity (picture on last page) and to sing carols before the 7 pm traditional Christmas Eve worship service.

## Great Fun - Longview Christmas Party

Photos by Debbie Bennett Reynolds



Meg Gillard joins Longview resident in making snow globes at a Longview Christmas party December 22nd sponsored by the FBC Education Committee.

### "Christ Is In the Rubble"

A sermon last year entitled "Christ in the Rubble," about the loss of Palestinian life in Gaza delivered by Reverend Munther Isaac of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem went viral last year. Below are excerpts from an interview he gave with Amy Goodman.

"Never again" should mean never again to all peoples. "Never again" has become "yet again" — yet again to supremacy, yet again to racism and yet again to genocide. And sadly, "never again" has become yet again for the weaponization of the Bible and the silence and complicity of the Western church, yet again for the church siding with power, the church siding with the empire.

And so, today, after all this, of total destruction, annihilation — and Gaza is erased, unfortunately — millions have become refugees and homeless, tens of thousands killed. And why is anyone still debating whether this is a genocide or not? I can't believe it. Yet, even when church leaders simply call for investigating whether this is a genocide, he is called out, and it becomes breaking news. Friends, the evidence is clear. Truth stands plain for all to see. The question is not whether this is a genocide. This is not the debate. The real question is: Why isn't the world and the church calling it a genocide? ...

So, today, let us reflect on the child Jesus, the child of Bethlehem. At the heart of the incarnation, there is a child. And this child, in his weakness, he is our hope. He is our consolation. He is our strength. This child — let us remember, this child shook Herod's throne when he was born. And while there are some who talk about the "Roman Empire" or glorify Herod as "great," we are the ones who think of a child born to refugees escaping a massacre. ...

Yes, it has been 440 days. It is 440 days of Palestinians' resilience, sumud. Indeed, it is 76 years of sumud. But we have not and will not lose hope. Yes, it is 76 years of an ongoing Nakba, but it is also 76 years of Palestinian sumud, clinging to our rights and justice of our cause, 76 years of praying and singing for peace. I was thinking about it. We are stubborn people. We continue to pray for peace year after year after year, and sing about peace, and we will continue to do so. And we will continue to echo the words of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on Earth."

To read the entire interview go to: [https://www.democracynow.org/2023/12/26/christ\\_in\\_the\\_rubble\\_christmas\\_sermon](https://www.democracynow.org/2023/12/26/christ_in_the_rubble_christmas_sermon)



From left to right around the table, Sarah Fishel, Lydia Dolch Jim Evans, Micky Stevens, Shella Chace Jan Butler and Greta Dolch enjoy doing crafts.



Longview resident Joe Haines joins youth making snow globes.



A table of residents and visitors enjoy goodies at Longview multi-generational Christmas party.



Please keep in your prayers:

- Lil Barron
- Kris and Danny Scott
- Suzanne Kilgore
- Kendrick Kemp
- Ron Drummond
- Abraham Phelan
- Anthony Halman & family
- James (Nico) Schultz
- Hope Decker
- Joy Weber

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

*"We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."*

*"The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices."*

**PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER**

~ ~ ~ ~ ~



*Christmas Poinsettia*

### The Visitor - January 2025

Editor/publisher: Susan Eymann  
 Proofers: Tony Lister, Shella Chace, Judy Kennison  
 Contributors: Debbie Bennett Reynolds, Bill Phelan, Leslie Schultz, Myra Fincher  
 Photos: Tony Lister, Bill Phelan, Andrea Staffeld, Pastor Debbie, Tina Hilsdorf, Judy Kennison, Barb Fry



*Gas lamps in sanctuary were lit for the Christmas Eve service.*



*Before the 7 pm Christmas Eve worship service, folks gathered in the Community Room for singing of favorite carols, against a tableau of a live nativity complete with camel on the left.*

## FBC Organization (updated January, 2025)

### 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 Specialist: Sarah Zipfel

### Elected Leadership

#### Council Trustees

Moderator: Judy Kennison  
 Vice Moderator: Carolyn Young  
 Clerk: Margie Latham  
 Treasurer: Steve Hilsdorf  
 Assistant Treasurer: David Caughey  
 Ecological Justice: Josie Zanfordino  
 Education: Debbie Allen  
 Hospitality & Nurture: Anne Farrell  
 Resource: Bill Fry  
 Service & Social Justice: Bill Abeles  
 Welcome & Outreach: Steve Farrell  
 Worship, Music & Spiritual Life: Tony Lister  
 Member-at-Large: Susan Eymann

#### Non-Council Officers

Treasurer: Steve Hilsdorf  
 Assistant Treasurer: David Caughey  
 Financial Secretary: Marlene Sack  
 Assistant Financial Secretary: Elizabeth Pia-Miller

#### Nominating Committee

Susan Eymann (chair), Bill Fry, Margie Latham, Louise Mudrak, Josie Zanfordino, Alice Grow

### Pastoral Relations

Judy Kennison (chair), Bill Abeles, Carolyn Young, Lil Barron, Barbara Pease, Barb Fry, Baruch Whitehead.

### Reps to Affiliate Organizations

Two Delegates each for Rochester Genesee Region & ABC-USA  
 Anne & Steve Farrell; Rich & Lil Barron;  
 ACT (Area Congregations Together): Shella Chace  
 AWAB: Shella Chace  
 Baptist Peace Fellowship: Leslie Schultz  
 Cornell Campus Ministry: Mark Lawrence  
 Kitchen Cupboard: Amanda Ufford; Sue Hemsath  
 Sanctuary Alliance: Anne Horst (chair), Bill Abeles; Barb Fry; Anne & Steve Farrell, Tony Lister, Jan Butler

### Council Committees

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

#### Education

Debbie Allen (chair), Debbie Allen, Leslie Schltz, Susan Eymann  
**Christian Ed Teachers:** 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

#### Subgroup

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

### 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

#### Subgroups

**Finance Committee:** Brian Baker, Janet Hansel, Marlene Sack, David Caughey  
**Stewardship:** Janet Hansel, Andrea Mooney, Sarah Fishel, Susan Eymann, Judy Kennison

#### Service & Social Justice

Bill Phelan, Bill Abeles (co-chairs), Amanda Ufford, Shella Chace, Hope Decker, Cindi Zorokong, Bud Dolch

#### Welcome and Outreach

Steve Farrell (co-chairs). Anne Farrell, Alicia Dixon-Garrard, Baruch Whitehead and others.

#### Subgroup: Communications

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

#### Worship, Music & Spiritual Life

Tony Lister, Biz Pia-Miller (Co-chairs); Barb Fry, Kris Scott; Edie Reagan; Debbie Allen, Bronwyn Evans, Tina Hilsdorf, Carrie Stearns, Jim Evans

#### Subgroups

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

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

**Labyrinth:** Kris Scott