



125 Sedgefield Street  
BRISTOL, VIRGINIA 24201

## THE FIRST WORD

May 2021

First Baptist Family,

Two recent articles have grabbed my attention, articles that I think are worth sharing with you. The first came out about a month ago. Gallup, the polling and analytics firm, found that for the first time since they began tracking it in 1937 adult church membership in the United States has fallen below 50%. Gallup's definition of church membership is people who belong to a Christian Church, Jewish Synagogue, or Islamic Mosque. In 2020, 47% of American adults claimed church membership. For reference, in 1999, 70% of American adults claimed church membership. It has fallen 23% in 21 years! Our country and our world are changing rapidly.

This article has caused quite a bit of anxiety among clergy. And I know that it's caused quite a bit of anxiety among church members because several of you have mentioned this article to me also.

What increases the anxiety, I think, is not only the disturbing downward trend, but the fact that COVID appears to be a paradigm-shifting event. The world was already changing, and this pandemic seems to have sped that up even more. Many of the past ways of doing things no longer seem to work in this present pandemic. We find ourselves in this liminal space between a comforting, known past and undefined, unclear future.

Consequently, we are unsure of how to move forward confidently. And that brings me to the second article that grabbed my attention.

Earlier this past week, I read an article in Baptist News written by Bill Wilson. Many of you will know Bill because he helped the Pastor Search Committee prior to my arrival. In fact, it was Bill who first shared my name with the committee. Bill tells a story about Gregg Neel, the co-pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Portland, Oregon. Gregg was a recent guest on a panel that Bill led, and he shared how Westminster Presbyterian has decided to move forward out of the pandemic. The church is looking to accelerate opportunities outside of the church rather than trying to move back into former patterns that call for a retreat into the church. Sharing what he told the members of his church, Neel said, "We simply told them that we're done educating you; now we want you to put into practice what you've learned."

Now, to be clear, Neel isn't saying that Christian education isn't important anymore. Actually, he went on to add that his church would continue to provide continuing education and community opportunities. What he is saying is that the people already know enough to **do something**. In trying to find Sunday School teachers, small group or Bible study leaders, volunteers for the Children or Youth Ministries, you name it, one of the common refrains ministers hear in every church is "I just don't think I know enough to do that." Somehow, over the years, people began to think that they needed a sufficient amount of knowledge before taking an active role of service in the church. Neel clearly, and I think rightly, points out that this isn't true by telling people that that they know

Enough to **do something**. I was encouraged in reading Bill's article because I think he and Gregg Neel are right. I was even more encouraged, however, because it's exactly the sort of thing we've been discussing in our Long-Range Planning Committee meetings for months now. If we want to reverse the tide of declining church membership, we cannot passively sit back and expect people to show up at First Baptist out of the blue. Shocking to some of you, there are a lot of people in our community that don't even know where we're located. We have to go out to them. As a congregation, we have to be more intentional about going beyond the walls of the church and being active in the community. We have to be more intentional about inviting others to join us at church. We have to be more intentional about attending ourselves. We have to be more intentional about giving of our time, talents, and treasure. We have to be more intentional about serving. As Gregg Neel states, we have to **do something**.

And that is exactly what we're currently working on. The Long-Range Planning Committee is in general agreement on a few things that I want to share with you. The details are still being worked out and they will be shared with the entire congregation in December, but they agree that we need to renovate some of our current space. We don't need to renovate things just to make them look nice and pretty. We need to renovate them to better enable us to use them for worship, missions, and ministries. That's why the Institutional Team is working towards figuring out how much things will cost and putting these projects in an order that reflects our congregational values and vision. The Committee also agrees that we need to have more discipleship opportunities for people outside of Sunday School and Wednesday Night Bible Study.

While some new opportunities were started pre-COVID, they were naturally put on pause because of the pandemic. Post-COVID, we're not only going to need to resume those efforts, but we're going to need to start new ones. And while some of those groups will meet at the church, many others won't. They'll meet out in the community in coffee shops and restaurants, and some will meet in people's homes. That's why the Spiritual Team is examining this very issue while also exploring ministry budgets. If we want to reach more teenagers and young families with children, we need to look for ways to increase the budgets to our Youth and Children's ministries rather than them having to rely primarily on gifts outside of the budget. The people of this church have been and are very generous in supporting the Youth and Children's ministries through gifts, but increasing those budget items is a statement not only to ourselves but to others, some of the very people we need to reach, that we value the spiritual formation of children, teenagers, and their families. And finally, the Committee agrees that we need to be more active in local and regional mission efforts.

Continued from page 1

While we have church members who have faithfully served various ministries of the church for years, the Committee believes that our location as a church enables us to better partner with local organizations, particularly those near downtown. We might be able to use some of our space to better partner with them. We also might be in better position to go out and help other people where they are. All the way back in our training sessions, the Committee dreamed that in the future the church would be a hub of ministry for the entire community, that people would be constantly streaming in and out of the church building throughout the week, and that because we would be seen as a good neighbor and partner, many of those folks would join us for worship on Sunday mornings. All of this to say, the Long-Range Planning Committee is hard at work dreaming, praying, and planning for the future they believe God is leading us towards as a congregation.

The world around us has been sick and hurting for the last 13 months. And whether we realize it or not, we have been gathering information about our own community so that we can be empowered to go out and serve as missionaries. While all of us, myself included, always have more to learn, while all of us need to continue to grow deeper spiritually, we all know enough right now to go out and **do something**. As you continue to pray for the Long-Range Planning Committee while they press on with their work, I pray that you will begin to find ways to become more active. **Because we all need to do something for God's sake, and we can do so much more if we do it together.**

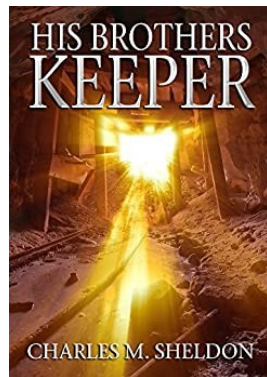
As always, it is an honor, a joy, and a privilege to be your pastor.

Kris

*His Brother's Keeper*, by Charles M. Sheldon author of *In His Steps*, is an Inspirational and gripping novel based on true events that chronicle a town's



battle for justice. In the summer of 1895, when Stuart, the mine owner's son returns from Europe, he finds the town in the midst of a horrible labor dispute because his father and other mine owners had refused to raise the miner's wages and thousands had gone on strike. When Stuart's father dies and he inherits ownership in the mines, he finds himself at odds with Eric, his childhood friend and the charismatic leader of the striking miners. Stuart and Eric are nearly killed by striking miners until they are rescued by the local church's new pastor. Stuart finds himself in a desperate situation when confronted with compassion for the miners and responsibility to the business he inherited. Will he stand firm with his fellow mine owners in the face of vandalism and physical harm or will he give in to the miner's demands and face financial ruin. Stuart was faced with the question with which we are often faced:



**"What would Jesus do?"**

~May Tabor

(proposed changes are written in red)  
**FBC PROPOSED BYLAW CHANGES:**  
(July 25, 2021 Business Meeting)  
**Section 6 - Trustees**

Section 6 – Trustees

The Board of Trustees are to be nominated and elected, to serve a five-year term, **with one member of the board rotating off every year. A Trustee must rotate off a one-year term before accepting a nomination to serve another five-year term.**

If a vacancy occurs, the Ministry Team will nominate a new candidate at the earliest scheduled church business meeting. When elected, the nominee will begin service immediately.

This will be posted again in July.

## Gift Card Shower

We extend congratulations to two special couples in the church. Emma Crussell and Peyton Vance will be getting married in July as will Robbie Love and Grace Ballard in July 2021. In their honor the shower committee is hosting a "Gift Card Shower" for both couples.

During the month of May, drop off your gift cards in the basket located in the main office at First Baptist Bristol.

Peyton and Emma are registered at Target & Bed, Bath, and Beyond.

Robbie and Grace are also registered at Target & Bed, Bath, and Beyond, but all gift cards will be greatly appreciated.



# FBC Youth Ministry

## Getting Together

**"Unidiversity" 2021**  
**Maryville College, Maryville TN**  
**July 20-24**

**\*\*NOTE-The date change\*\***

Dates are **\*\*July 20-24!**  
Registration is open now!  
The total cost is \$180.00.

Any youth wanting to go has the opportunity to raise the full amount of the cost between now and youth camp.

Please let Ben know

who all are planning on going.

**YOU MUST REGISTER FOR YOUTH CAMP BEFORE MAY 9 TO HAVE A SPOT!**

We are still working on Youth Mission 2021!

Several details must fall into place before we are able to set the dates and location.

Please be in prayer and know it's coming soon!

Youth Wednesdays and Sunday Events!  
Our youth are invited to Wednesday evening Bible study and games every Wednesday from 6:00-7:30 p.m. We are working within the latest COVID safety guidelines and spending quality time together!!!

On Sunday afternoons, we are either working on a local mission project or having a group building activity.  
Look for details in our weekly emails!!! See you soon!!!

**Registration is opening Sunday, May 2, 2021**

### Vacation Bible School

June 13,14, and 15.

We are having a Fun Filled Three Day VBS

starting on Sunday evening

June 13 from 6:00 p.m. till 8:00 p.m.

Will be in person this year!  
Featuring Bible Study stylings, amazing musical guest, and new games and recreation.

And our wonderful craft specialist!  
Wonderful folks are already working to shape the beautiful minds of our 4 - year olds through our 5th graders  
In "VBS 2021!"

ALMOST ALL OF THE ACTIVITES WILL BE OUTSIDE!  
WE WILL BE OBSERVING THE LOCAL COVID SAFE PROTOCOLS.



### *Notes From Leigh...*

Our season of Lent and Easter was so meaningful. A lot of thought, preparation, and people power went into making everything so beautiful. I am grateful to everyone who helped and participated. I am especially thankful for Jackie and Rob and the sanctuary choir for all your gifts of talent and time.

Pre-pandemic we had a time of welcome in worship. We would greet everyone and then come together singing an uplifting song. Well, I am putting a new twist on that idea. Our first hymn each Sunday is now our Hymn of Praise. It will be an uplifting congregational song. I am working on involving our young people as leaders for this hymn. We have several who have expressed an interest.

**If you or someone you know is interested in singing or playing an instrument, please contact me! I would love to get as many as possible involved.**

I'm excited that my mom and dad and two of my sisters are planning a visit to Bristol Sunday, May 23. It is, of course, conditional because of dad's health. But they are looking forward to meeting all of you and personally thanking you for your prayers and encouragement.

Finally, on a sad note, Rob and Kim Griswell-Lowry will be leaving us at the end of May. They are moving back to Oregon with their family. It has been a tremendous blessing to share music and worship with them. More importantly, they have become my friends and I will miss them very much. I hope you will find an opportunity to express your appreciation for their contributions to our church during their time in Bristol.

Blessings, Leigh

## First Baptist Church of Bristol Staff

Dr. Kris Aaron.....Senior Pastor  
 Rev. Ben Ondrak.....Associate Pastor  
 Rev. Leigh Clark.....Minister of Music  
 Mrs. Jackie Burnette.....Pianist  
 Mr. Rob Griswell-Lowry.....Organist

Ms. Kaitlyn Courtney.....Sexton  
 Mr. Dennis Thomas.....Sexton  
 Ms. Kaitlyn Courtney.....Sexton  
 Mrs. Marcine Robinette.....Parish Nurse  
 Ms. Terri Thomas.....Church Administrator  
 and Financial Secretary  
 Ms. Niki Judy.....Administrative Assistant



**Contact Information:**  
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**Hours:** info@fbcbristol.org  
**Website:** www.fbcbristol.org



### FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

125 Sedgefield Street  
 Bristol, VA 24201

#### FBC Minister On-Call Schedule

May 1-2: Dr. Kris Aaron (803) 225-0795  
 May 8-9: Rev. Ben Ondrak (423) 217-8934  
 May 15-16: Dr. Kris Aaron (803) 225-0795  
 May 22-23: Rev. Ben Ondrak (423) 217-8934  
 May 29-30: Dr. Kris Aaron (803) 225-0795

#### Deacon of the Week for May:

May 2, 2021	Mike Browder
May 9, 2021	Jennifer Rouse
May 16, 2021	Mark Fuller
May 23, 2021	Jeff Burnette
May 30, 2021	Mike Warren