

SEPTEMBER 2020

CONNECTIONS



LIVING WITH
LOVE

T W E N T Y T W E N T Y - O N E

STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

This year stewardship will center on how we are called to live "With Love." We have a team of more than 35 lay people making 260 home deliveries of stewardship packets to the Birmingham Metro Area (with another 25 to be mailed). A second team of individuals, led by PJ Hester, is hand-writing notes of love to all who will receive a package via mail or home delivery. Deana Solfronk is baking 1300 cookies to be delivered with packages going to homes. You should receive your stewardship materials by September 14 either hand delivered by a church member or via mail. While we wish we could deliver every package in person for the chance to offer the loving contact we all need, we acknowledge that due to our very wide geographical reach, as well as COVID-19 precautions, we will have to mail some stewardship material. Whether delivered in person or mailed we hope you receive the package with love as it was prepared with you in mind!



During our stewardship focus this September we will explore how all that we do, say, and believe should be grounded first and foremost in love. We may give, serve, and speak wanting to 'do good' but without love it is impossible to bring life within us or around us to its fullest. In these uncertain times it is paramount that we remember we are called to act from a place of love and to allow that love to empower us to rise above the false security promised by material wealth, tribalism, and our fears. Love is what has the power to unburden us enough to let go of systems of power, engage us in generous living, and give us courage to share the truth that ALL are worthy of acceptance and belonging. Join us as we explore how we are called to live life **WITH LOVE!**

9.13.20 | **WITH LOVE WE SHARE OUR RESOURCES**

John 6:1-14, Acts 4:32-37, Isaiah 58:6-9

9.20.20 | **WITH LOVE WE SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

John 6:1-14, Acts 4:32-37, Isaiah 58:6-9

9.27.20 | **WITH LOVE WE CELEBRATE ALL ARE WORTHY**

John 6:1-14, Acts 4:32-37, Isaiah 58:6-9

S E P T E M B E R 2 7

PLEDGE SUNDAY

We ask that we all commit to turning in our pledge cards by Sunday, September 27. You can either fill your pledge card by clicking [HERE](#) or you may mail your pledge card back to the church.. This enables our finance team and staff to plan our 2021 budget based on the pledges turned in for the coming year. Thank you to our lay leadership and staff for leading the way in submitting their pledge cards early before the congregational deadline!

Stewardship for CHILDREN & YOUTH

Stewardship is not simply for those who already have jobs but is a vital part of becoming a disciple and growing in faith. This year the children and youth are going to take part in a unique opportunity to share in the stewardship journey. We will be partnering with the United Methodist Children's Home, specifically, Babies First, to provide much-needed baby books for teenage mothers and their children. We will give generously out of the means that we have and do so with great love. Please contact Tiffany Dowdy at Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com or Linda Thorne at Linda@firstchurchbhm.com for more information.



POP UP PICNIC

AT KELLY INGRAM PARK

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27 FROM 5:30PM – 7:00PM

AS WE WRAP UP OUR STEWARDSHIP FOCUS “WITH LOVE,” WE WANT TO CELEBRATE OUR CONGREGATION’S GENEROSITY BY SPENDING A LITTLE FACETIME TOGETHER. YOU ARE INVITED TO BRING A BLANKET/CHAIR, ALONG WITH SOMETHING FOR YOU TO EAT AND DRINK, AND JOIN THE FIRST CHURCH FAMILY IN THE PARK FOR A MUCH LONGED FOR CHANCE TO BE TOGETHER OUTSIDE. WE WILL MINIMIZE RISK BY FOLLOWING GUIDELINES OF REGISTERING FOR THE EVENT (TO BE ABLE TO PROVIDE CONTACT TRACING), MAINTAINING SOCIAL DISTANCE OF AT LEAST 6 FEET, HAVING SANITIZER PRESENT, WEARING MASKS, AND TAKING TEMPERATURES OF ANYONE GATHERING. OF COURSE, IF YOU ARE NOT FEELING WELL, HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19, HAVE TESTED POSITIVE, OR THINK YOU HAVE BEEN AROUND SOMEONE WHO HAS TESTED POSITIVE, PLEASE REFRAIN FROM ATTENDING. IF THE DATA FOR OUR AREA SHOWS THAT IT IS TOO RISKY TO GATHER, WE WILL CANCEL THE EVENT WITH NOTIFICATION TO THOSE WHO HAVE REGISTERED.

YOU CAN SIGN UP NOW TO ATTEND BY CLICKING [HERE](#).



COFFEE & CONVERSATION

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 9:00AM

Grab a cup of coffee and join us as we get to know one another. If you have been visiting with us at First Church or joined in recent months, you are invited to join us for Coffee and Conversation on Sunday, September 13 at 9:00am. This is an opportunity for us to get to learn more about you and what brought you to First Church as well as an opportunity for you to connect with one another. Our gathering will take place via Zoom and last for approximately one hour. Each participant will receive a Starbucks gift card so that you can treat yourself to a cup of coffee on us! If you are interested in joining us click [HERE](#).



FIRST CHURCH 101

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 9:00AM

You are invited to join us for First Church 101 on Sunday, September 20 at 9:00am on Zoom. This opportunity is open to anyone who is interested whether you are new here or have been around for years. Together we will discuss United Methodist teachings on theology, polity, and the Social Principles as well as introduce you to the membership commitments of First Church. Please let us know if you plan to attend by registering [HERE](#).

FALL SMALL GROUPS

We hope you will take the opportunity to engage in one of our fall small groups as an opportunity to learn together and connect with one another on a deeper level. All of our fall small groups will be held via Zoom. You are invited to register [HERE](#).

Shameless: Deconstructing Purity Culture **by Nadia Bolz-Weber**

A book study for women facilitated by Melissa Scott-Dixon
Mondays for 4 weeks beginning October 5, 6:00-7:30

Hosted by the Women's Book Study Group, we will use *Shameless* as a jumping off point. We will discuss the messages we have received about sexuality from church, family, and society as well as how to develop a healthy, body-positive, life-giving sexual ethic at any point in life. Participants will want to purchase or borrow a copy of Nadia Bolz-Weber's book.

The Bible Tells me So...

***Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* by Peter Enns**

A book study for men led by Rev. Herb Robertson and Dr. John Draper
Tuesdays for 6 weeks beginning September 29, 7:00pm

This is a six-week book study for men who want to have honest and open discussion about the Bible. What if God is actually fine with the Bible just as it is? Not the well-behaved version we struggle to create, but the messy, troubling, strange and ancient Bible that we actually have? Maybe this Bible has something to show us about our own sacred journey of faith. What if the Bible's raw messiness isn't a problem to be solved—it's an invitation to a deeper faith? This class will involve purchase of Enns' intriguing book, reading one chapter each week (30-40 pages), possibly listening to a podcast, and participating in weekly Zoom meetings for discussion.

Howard Thurman: Pastor to the Civil Rights Movement

Led by Rev. Matt Lacey

Tuesdays for 4 weeks beginning October 6, 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Besides a Bible, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is rumored to have carried one other book in his briefcase at all times: a worn copy of *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman. This small group will examine why Thurman was an inspiration to the Civil Rights movement leaders, and why he is still inspirational and relevant to the world, and to us at First Church, today. Over the weeks we will watch the PBS documentary “Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story” (an hour long film available free online), read some of his most essential writings, including from *Jesus and the Disinherited* and his autobiography.

Participants will be asked to purchase *Howard Thurman: Essential Writings* by Luther Smith, Jr., and encouraged (but not required) to read his autobiography *With Head and Heart and Jesus and the Disinherited*. If you would like to know more about Thurman before signing up, you can watch a short clip from the documentary here: <https://youtu.be/mdjLfORZ7Jo>

***How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi**

A book study led by Rev. Katie Gilbert

Wednesdays for 4 weeks beginning

October 7 from 6:30pm – 8:00pm

In 2019 Ibram X. Kendi released *How to be an Antiracist*, a book which asks us to consider what an antiracist society might look like and how we can play an active role in building it. In our reading and discussion together we hope to move beyond an awareness of racism and move toward a consideration of how to form a more just and equitable society. Participants will be asked to purchase or borrow a copy of Kendi’s book to help guide our discussion. You are invited to join us on the journey.

JOURNEY *with* GRIEF

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Facilitated by Dr. Catherine Clayton Prince & Rev. Stephanie York Arnold
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WEDNESDAYS FOR 5 WEEKS BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 16 FROM 5:30PM – 7:00PM
OUTSIDE IN FIRST CHURCH'S COURTYARD OR IN THE LARGE DINING ROOM DEPENDING ON WEATHER
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When we lose someone or something we love, or even something we look forward to or hope for, it is normal to experience grief. 2020 has brought much for us to grieve as individuals, families, and as a global community. Many have experienced the death of a loved one without the traditional rituals of celebrating their lives, which means our grief is often absent of in person contact from our support network including hugs and opportunities to cry on and be held up by the shoulders of those we love. Some of us are isolated from friends and family as we seek to stay healthy which leaves us grieving the loss of companionship. All of us have experienced future plans being canceled or put on hold leaving us grieving what should have been. Our grief may be specific or ambiguous, but all grief must be acknowledged and honored in order to breathe through it with grace to allow healing to occur.

In this group we will meet to listen to one another and honor one another's grief in whatever form it takes. We welcome anyone 19 and older who is grieving any of the above mentioned losses and wants to courageously come together for community, connection, closeness, and compassion. We plan to meet in person (if we are able) following First Church guidelines which include temperature checks, masks, social distancing, etc. (When we are not able to gather in person, we will gather via Zoom.) To register to join us, please click **HERE**.



OCTOBER 4, 2020 FROM 1:00 - 2:30 PM

SAFE | SANCTUARY

zoom TRAINING

ARE YOU PLANNING TO VOLUNTEER OR WORK WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH IN A ZOOM MEETING OR SOCIAL DISTANCE GATHERING? ARE YOU HOPING TO WORK IN OTHER WAYS WITH OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN 2020/2021? THIS TRAINING IS FOR YOU! WE NEED ALL OF THOSE THAT CAN POSSIBLY ATTEND THIS TRAINING TO PLEASE REGISTER AND BE PRESENT ON OCTOBER 4, 2020 TO HELP US ABIDE BY OUR SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A SAFE SANCTUARY CHURCH? FIRST CHURCH, IN COVENANT WITH ALL UNITED METHODIST CONGREGATIONS, FOLLOWS A POLICY THAT SETS STANDARDS FOR THE SUPERVISION OF FIRST CHURCH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS IN OUR CARE. OUR NEXT TRAINING WILL BE ON OCTOBER 4 FROM 1:00 – 2:30 PM VIA ZOOM.

PLEASE REGISTER BY CLICKING **HERE**. YOU WILL RECEIVE PAPERWORK AND BACKGROUND CHECK INSTRUCTIONS VIA EMAIL TO COMPLETE PRIOR TO OUR ZOOM MEETING. AFTER THE ZOOM MEETING, YOU WILL HAVE A SHORT ONLINE QUIZ TO COMPLETE THE TRAINING PROCESS.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT
LINDA THORNE AT LINDA@FIRSTCHURCHBHM.COM OR
TIFFANY DOWDY AT TIFFANY@FIRSTCHURCHBHM.COM.

City Kids Fabulous Fall

First Church Children's Ministry started off our Fall season family activities with our Back to School event. Keeping socially distant we had a great time playing games, percussion, giving Bibles to new 3rd graders, and saying goodbye to those moving to Youth. We held 3 events to include everyone and enjoyed time together.

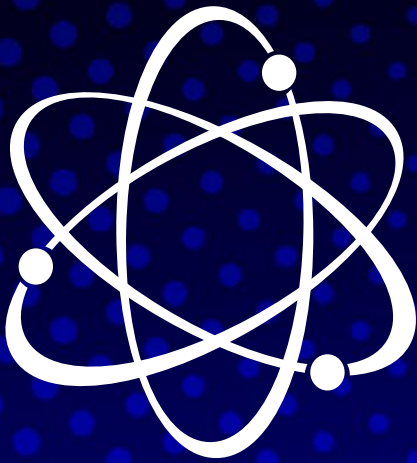


The Children's ministry will continue to offer virtual Sunday School for all ages through the Fall. Beginning in September we will use a new curriculum. The elementary age children will experience Building Faith Brick by Brick by Emily Given. Knowing how much Lego® continues to (may always?!) be popular with children, this program uses creativity and those little plastic building bricks to meld together a new way of teaching the stories of God.

Preschool Sunday School will also change in September. Linda Thorne will teach age appropriate Bible Stories with corresponding crafts, games, and music. Linda will create a video each week which will be sent directly to preschool parents for the family to enjoy when it best fits into their schedule.

First Church Children's Ministry continues to grow and thrive in these virtual times. In addition to on-line children get-togethers and outside social distancing events, the Children's Council continues to welcome all newborns with a Bible and a meal. As Baptisms are scheduled, the Council provides a book of welcome.

We will continue finding new, creative ways to remain connected with our church friends and continue growing in our faith, together, in the months ahead.



COLLISION

student ministries

THIS FALL WE ARE KICKING OFF YOUTH GROUP WITH A COMBINATION OF ONLINE AND IN-PERSON EVENTS. OUR IN-PERSON EVENTS, FIRST NIGHTS, WILL MEET EVERY OTHER SUNDAY NIGHT IN OUTDOOR SPACES, MOSTLY PARKS, WHERE WE CAN PLAY GAMES, GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER, AND GROW SPIRITUALLY. WE HAVE TWO ONLINE PROGRAMMING TIMES AS WELL. ON THE SUNDAY NIGHTS WE ARE NOT IN PERSON, WE WILL BE MEETING ONLINE FOR YOUTH GROUP. DURING THIS TIME WE PLAY ONLINE GAMES, ENGAGE IN SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS, AND CHECK-IN WITH EACH OTHER. ON WEDNESDAYS, WE JOIN TOGETHER FOR AN ONLINE BIBLE STUDY OVER THE BOOK OF JAMES.

SEPT. 2 - BIBLE STUDY // ZOOM // 6:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 9 - BIBLE STUDY // 6:00PM - 7:00PM *IN PERSON*****

SEPT. 13 - YOUTH GROUP // ZOOM // 5:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 16 - BIBLE STUDY // ZOOM // 6:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 20 - FIRST NIGHTS // 6:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 23 - BIBLE STUDY // ZOOM // 6:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 27 - YOUTH GROUP // ZOOM // 5:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 30 - BIBLE STUDY // ZOOM // 6:00PM - 7:00PM

SEPT. 6 - NO FIRST NIGHTS

FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM

PRAYER *Partners*

Right now the world is a little crazy for everyone but especially for our students heading back to school. Middle School and High School can be challenging all on its own. Now add a pandemic, social unrest, an environmental crisis, tons of homework, and navigating your faith. All of this can be extremely overwhelming for anyone. Part of being the church is uplifting one another. We are starting a new opportunity to support our youth through prayer.

As a prayer partner, you would be saying “yes” and “I will” to praying for our students and their families. You will be partnered with one of our awesome youth, simply to be in prayer for them. While prayer is a simple ask, it has a major impact on a youth’s life. You are not volunteering to show up for programs, lock-in, or buy them stuff. We are inviting you to take the time to pray for one specific student each day. We will update you on any prayer request they share in youth group, a major test they have coming up, things that are stressing them out, and overall questions they are wrestling with in their faith. This is a chance to ensure that each student feels loved, seen, and known by name. If you are interested in taking on the challenge of praying for one of our students, email Tiffany at Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com.



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GLEN IRIS

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GRACE

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Glen Iris Grace began its fourth year of weekend backpack food service this August. By the time you read this we will have packed and delivered 4,025 bags of non-perishable food during its third year. Of course this would not be possible without your generosity and our wonderful volunteers.

Our current plans will be to serve Midfield Elementary until the Birmingham City System opens for in-person learning at Glen Iris Elementary. Midfield is having virtual only learning for the first nine weeks, but they continue to feed their students with our donations. We delivered over 1,000 bags to Midfield during April, May, and June of this year alone. The school counselor says that when she drove the bus into the neighborhoods all the children, including toddlers, came running as though she was the ice cream truck!

Thank you for making this program of feeding hungry children a success. When one considers that in Alabama 1 in 4 children live in poverty and go to bed hungry, it really calls to mind the book of Luke 12:48, "For unto whomever much is given, of him much shall be required."

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If you would like to be part of the Glen Iris Grace ministry you may contact:
Cathy Ivey at 205-903-9311, cathycivey@gmail.com. or
Andrea Whitehead at 205-531-6231, andrea.whitehead1024@gmail.com

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NEW MEMBER PRAYERS FOR FIRST CHURCH

AS WE SEEK TO BE
AN OPEN PLACE FOR ALL
MY PRAYER FOR FIRST CHURCH IS:

That is continues to be a beacon of hope and light to the Birmingham community. That even though we cannot physically be present in the walls of the church, that we continue to grow in our faith and relationship with Jesus Christ and feel His love as we worship remotely, and in our daily lives.

- Kassi Webster

That First Church continues to provide an open and inclusive place for all to grow in their faith and relationship with God, to do justice, and to love and serve others in our community and beyond.

- Kaylee Beauchamp

A prayer of thankfulness for the good work already being done through First Church in the areas of social justice and grace for all. We pray that God will continue to grow and strengthen First Church so that it can continue to be a beacon of light for His love.

- Kevin, Janet, and Sarah Voorhees

I pray that First Church will not only continue to be a welcoming, open site for ALL, but, that our loving witness will be so well received that other United Methodist Churches and even other denominations, will be positively influenced, and will move to adopt our LOVE (for all of God's creatures) message.

- Susan Vines

I continue to pray that my understanding of the Lord's Prayer (Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done – on earth as it is in heaven) will become a mantra for all Christians everywhere which is already included in First Church. I pray that First Church will continue to emphasize the LOVE, GRACE, and FORGIVENESS that is expressed through our Heavenly Father by his Son, Jesus Christ.

- Larry Vines

To actively live by the commitments we have made as members of this church. To actively seek out relationships with individuals who come from different backgrounds. To continue to educate ourselves on individuals who are different from us and to ensure that all feel heard and loved. To build a community and family seeded in faith for all who wish to join. To live out our faith through our daily actions.

- Alex and Laura Kofskey

Our prayer is that all who walk through the doors of First Church feel included and loved.

- Sarah and Matt Jensen



FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM'S

ON CALL SCHEDULE

In an effort to make sure we are providing everyone in our congregation with the pastoral care needed, particularly in crisis situations, we want you to be aware of our on-call schedule going forward. If you have a pastoral care need Monday – Thursday, you can call the church office or email any of our pastors and we will respond promptly. However, if you have a pastoral care need Friday - Sunday, below is the on-call schedule for the month. You can reach the person by email, cell phone, or by clicking the “pastor on-call” option on the church phone.

AUG. 31 – SEPT. 6 | KATIE

SEPT. 7 - SEPT. 13 | STEPHANIE

SEPT. 14 – SEPT. 20 | JONATHAN

SEPT. 21 - SEPT. 27 | KATIE

SEPT. 28 – OCT. 4 | STEPHANIE

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 2

6:00pm – Youth Bible Study

SEPTEMBER 7

Labor Day (*Office Closed*)

SEPTEMBER 8

7:00pm – Converge Young Adults

SEPTEMBER 9

6:00pm – Youth Bible Study

SEPTEMBER 13

9:00am – Coffee & Conversation
5:00pm – Youth Group

SEPTEMBER 14

6:00pm – Executive Council

SEPTEMBER 15

7:00pm – Converge Young Adults

SEPTEMBER 16

5:30pm – Journey with Grief
6:00pm – Trustees Meeting
6:00pm – Youth Bible Study

SEPTEMBER 20

9:00am – First Church 101
6:00pm – Youth First Night

SEPTEMBER 22

6:00pm – Staff Parish Meeting
7:00pm – Converge Young Adults

SEPTEMBER 23

5:30pm – Journey with Grief
6:00pm – Youth Bible Study

SEPTEMBER 26

9:00am – North Alabama Virtual
Annual Conference

SEPTEMBER 27

~ Pledge Sunday ~
5:30pm – Pop Up Picnic
5:00pm – Youth Group

SEPTEMBER 29

7:00pm – Converge Young Adults
7:00pm – Men's Book Study Begins

SEPTEMBER 30

5:30pm – Journey with Grief
6:00pm – Youth Bible Study

FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM STAFF

Senior Pastor: Stephanie York Arnold	Stephanie@firstchurchbhm.com
Pastor: Jonathan Goss.....	Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com
Excutive Pastor: Katie Gilbert	Katie@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Youth: Tiffany Dowdy.....	Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Children & Church Events: Linda Underwood Thorne	Linda@firstchurchbhm.com
Organist: Richard Byrd.....	Richard@firstchurchbhm.com
Design: Blake Hobbs.....	Blake@firstchurchbhm.com
Choir Director: Patrick Evans	Patrick@firstchurchbhm.com
Loft Worship Leader: Katherine Mullen	Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com
Office Administrator: Peg Thompson	Peg@firstchurchbhm.com
Business Administrator: Steve Pitts.....	Steve@firstchurchbhm.com
Maintenance Supervisor: Ron Dates.....	Ron@firstchurchbhm.com
Nursery Director: Ginger Gambill	Ginger@firstchurchbhm.com
Wedding Director: Betsy Pate	Betsy@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive Director of Early Learning Center: Cassandra Copeland.....	ELC@firstchurchbhm.com



an OPEN place for ALL to **WORSHIP, GROW,** and **SERVE**

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