


NOVEMBER 2020

CONNECTIONS



GIVING THANKS FOR OUR
COMMUNITY

The background is a textured teal color. On the left side, there are several dark, vertical, brush-stroke-like trees. In the lower right area, there are clusters of small, bright red flowers. The title is written in a white, elegant script font, with the words 'TO' and 'IN THE' in a smaller, simpler font.

Learning TO Walk IN THE Dark

More often than not darkness has been equated with evil and fear. From a young age we are taught that bad things happen in the dark. As a result, we have worked hard to eliminate the darkness in physical spaces like our homes and our cities as well as in less tangible spaces like our emotions and our faith. In her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Barbara Brown Taylor proposes that our obsession with getting rid of the darkness has damaged our understanding of an important rhythm of our lives. What if there is something that the dark, and only the dark, can teach us? In our biblical narrative some of the most important and holy moments take place in the cover of darkness. Join us on this three week journey as we work to overcome our fear and find the beauty and importance of darkness in our lives.

November 8 | **Are you afraid of the dark?**

GENESIS 1:1-5, PSALM 19:2

November 15 | **Dark Night of the Soul**

EXODUS 19:16-25, ISAIAH 45:3

November 22 | **The Dark as a Teacher**

JONAH 2:1-10, ACTS 9:1-19

“I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.”

– Barbara Brown Taylor

During the month of November we will use Barbara Brown Taylor’s *Learning to Walk in the Dark* as a guide for our worship together. As we move into a season where the literal darkness in our days grows longer and the figurative darkness of the times we are living in continues, we will consider the ways that the dark can teach us more than we can ever learn in the light alone. With this opportunity you will be invited to choose from two different small group options.

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Tuesdays, November 10, 17, & 24 at 6:00pm

LED BY REV. KATIE GILBERT

WE WILL MEET ONLINE VIA ZOOM

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Thursdays, November 5, 12, & 19 at 6:00pm

LED BY REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD

SOCIALLY DISTANCED IN-PERSON WITH MASKS ON

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IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN EITHER ONE OF THESE SMALL GROUP GATHERINGS PLEASE REGISTER **[HERE](#)** AND SELECT YOUR PREFERENCE.

Seeking SANCTUARY

{ TIMES OF PRAYER }

This month we continue to offer you the opportunity to schedule time to pray in our beautiful and beloved Sanctuary. While we are doing all, we can to minimize risk for exposure to COVID 19 we know we cannot eliminate all risk. We ask that if you are in a vulnerable population whether that is due to age, pre-existing medical conditions, or any other reason, please do not sign up for this opportunity. We love you too much for you to risk greater exposure at this time. Likewise, if you have or have reason to believe you may have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 please do not sign up or come so that you do not inadvertently expose others. Anyone seeking to participate must adhere to the guidelines agreed upon by our staff and lay leadership. The Sanctuary will be open for prayer at the following times:

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3 | 12:30PM – 1:00PM

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4 | 12:30PM – 1:00PM

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11 | 12:30PM – 1:00PM

In order to attend you **MUST** sign up via [SIGNUP GENIUS](#). Signing up is necessary to limit space and to collect necessary information for contact tracing in the event that we learn there has been possible COVID-19 exposure. We will not allow entry to anyone walking up without prior registration.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

WORSHIP CALENDAR

As we continue to navigate our way through a global pandemic we are preparing to offer additional ways for us to build connection and worship together. All of our virtual worship experiences will continue throughout the remainder of this year so that anyone needing as minimal risk as possible can have meaningful ways to worship. However, knowing how important space is to many people during the holy season of Advent, we plan to additionally offer in-person worship opportunities. These worship opportunities will vary in style. The Loft and Sanctuary worship spaces will have a maximum capacity of worship attenders and sign-ups will be required to attend. The services will be about 30 minutes in length. Masks will be required at all times and there will be no indoor congregational singing or congregational liturgy to minimize the spread of airborne droplets. Additional churchwide communication will be provided prior to the beginning of Advent. We are looking forward to worshipping both virtually and in-person during the Advent season. (The calendar below is subject to change based upon our community's spread of COVID-19.)

NOVEMBER 29

11:00am – Loft and Sanctuary worship services online
3:00pm – Sanctuary in-person worship

DECEMBER 21

6:00pm – Longest Night communion service
in-person on the rooftop *(Virtual Option Available)*

DECEMBER 6

11:00am – Loft and Sanctuary worship services online
6:00pm – Outdoor Christmas Movie Night
** COMMUNION SUNDAY **

DECEMBER 24

3:30pm/5:30pm/11:00pm – Christmas Eve
communion in-person worship services
in the Sanctuary *(Virtual Option Available)*

DECEMBER 13

11:00am – Loft and Sanctuary worship services online
3:00pm – Loft in-person worship

DECEMBER 27

11:00am Sunday morning virtual worship
led by Sanctuary worship team

DECEMBER 20

11:00am – Loft and Sanctuary worship services online
3:00pm – Loft and Sanctuary in-person worship

JANUARY 3

11:00am Sunday morning virtual worship
led by Loft worship team



ADVENT SMALL GROUP

This Advent season you are invited to join us for a small group based on our lectionary texts each week. You will be led through Scripture and discussion by a variety of different voices in our community to help you engage and experience Advent in a meaningful way. We will meet on Wednesday evenings for 4 weeks in the month of December from 6:00pm – 7:00pm via Zoom. We hope you will make plans to join us in the journey toward Christmas. Register to join us by clicking [HERE](#).

12.2.20 – Rev. Sarah Smoot, Co-Pastor at Church of the Reconciler

12.9.20 – Allison Dearing, Executive Director at One Place

12.16.20 – Rev. Rick Owen, Central District Superintendent

12.23.20 – Rev. Charles Alexander, Retired Clergy

ADVENT DELIVERIES

With the Advent season just around the corner we are excited to share that once again the staff and lay volunteers will be making home deliveries in an effort to share love and connection. If you would like to help package Advent goodie bags or make deliveries to neighbors at your convenience during the weekend of November 19-22, please contact Katie Gilbert at Katie@firstchurchbhm.com to sign-up to help. We look forward to offering you a small gift to help you enter the Advent season with the spirit of anticipation and hope.



**WACKY
TACKY**
Christmas

Outdoor
**MOVIE
NIGHT**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 AT 6:00 PM

The Halloween Outdoor Movie Night was such a big hit that we are holding a Christmas version! On Sunday, December 6, grab your tackiest Christmas sweater, costume, or Christmas mask and join the First Church family for the hilarious movie ELF on a 30 foot outdoor movie screen. Bring your chairs and soft drinks, we will provide popcorn and treats, and all will enjoy the awesome First Church community! The Fun Team will be greeting and taking temperatures. Masks and registration are required. You can register now by clicking [HERE](#).

THE MOVIE WILL BEGIN PROMPTLY AT 6:00PM.

COME EARLY TO CHECK IN, SET UP, AND GET YOUR TREATS!

CONTACT LINDA THORNE AT LINDA@FIRSTCHURCHBHM.COM FOR MORE INFORMATION.



PROJECT 12.25

Project 12/25 holds a special place within our church's heart. This year we are expanding to incorporate different opportunities for giving and relationship building. We are one community that lives and serves within a much wider community. As we expand the avenues in which God has called us to generously give and intentionally build relationships, our hope is that each individual will find an area that challenges them to build a deeper connection to expand beyond the very needed purchases of gifts and food.

This expansion includes support for systemic change, for our community partners, and support for our First Church family.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE | URBAN MINISTRY - WE BUILD

We are thrilled to support a new, exciting, and life-giving program at Urban Ministry called WE Build. Urban Ministry believes the most significant resources in West End are her people and they want to invest in their people with homeownership. Through working with the Birmingham Land Bank, Urban Ministry will buy neglected houses in West End and work with local residents who want to own a home. By expanding their current house-painting ministry into a home remodeling service, they will teach young adults carpentry and repair skills. Once the homes are repaired, Urban will offer the young adults an interest-free path to homeownership. Not only will this ministry allow low-income residents to own homes and build wealth, but it will also renovate neglected houses in West End while patronizing black-owned local businesses. West End residents will pay a monthly rent based on a percentage of their income. When their rent covers the cost of the house, Urban Ministry will deed the house into their name. It's that simple. The rent money collected from each tenant will be saved in a designated account that will be used to buy and renovate more homes. It is a ministry that multiplies.

YOU CAN SUPPORT THIS OPPORTUNITY BY SELECTING ONE OF THE GIVING CATEGORIES BELOW:

- \$1000 OR More:** EXTERIOR REMODEL: ROOF, FOUNDATION, AND WINDOWS
- \$500:** KITCHEN REMODEL: APPLIANCES, COUNTERTOPS, AND CABINETS
- \$200:** BATHROOM REMODEL: PLUMBING, COUNTERTOPS, AND CABINETS
- \$100:** BEDROOM AND LIVING ROOM REMODEL: DRYWALL AND FLOORING
- \$50:** HOME AESTHETICS: PAINT, HARDWARE, AND LIGHTING
- \$25:** BUILDING BASICS: LUMBER, SCREWS, AND NAILS

CLICK [HERE](#) TO MAKE YOUR GIFT NOW!

COMMUNITY PARTNER | MAGIC CITY ACCEPTANCE CENTER

This year we have chosen to once again support the work of Magic City Acceptance Center, one of our community partners. The Magic City Acceptance Center is a safe and affirming space for LGBTQAI+ individuals of all ages where everyone is celebrated for who they are! We believe the amazing work that they are doing within the LGBTQAI+ community aligns with our calling to be an OPEN place for ALL. We will be supporting the Magic City Acceptance Center by helping them purchase supplies from their Amazon Wish List.

Click [HERE](#) to purchase from the Magic City Acceptance Center list.

Please let us know if you donate off the MCAC Wish List by emailing Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com.

FIRST CHURCH FAMILY | FOOD & CHRISTMAS GIFTS

The people within our community are of the utmost importance to us. Just like in years past, we have collected names of individuals and families who have shared with us that they are in need of additional support this Christmas season. If you wish to help support these families, please email Tiffany at Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com for additional information.

We are excited for you to join us in these various ways of sharing during this Advent season.

If you have any questions please contact Tiffany Dowdy at Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

As we continue to follow up on our With Love stewardship campaign we have collected 204 pledges for a total of \$1,073,544.20. This goes a long way in helping fulfill our 2021 operating budget. As a reminder, our 2020 operating budget was 1.3 million dollars. While we have not yet reached our goal we are well on our way. If you have not submitted your 2021 pledge we invite you to do so by clicking [HERE](#). Your individual gifts help us achieve our collective goals for ministry.

Even though we have been in a global pandemic that has brought much uncertainty and struggle First Church has continued to do well budgetarily in 2020. Through the month of September:

- **Our net income year to date was \$89,118 better than budget**
- **Congregational giving was up \$35,986 or 4.1% better than budget year to date**
- **We received \$22,072 from the Chalker Trust, as directed by trust agreement**
- **Total expenses were \$96,328 under budget**
- **Conference payments: clergy benefits paid through September; apportionment payments made through August**
- **\$20,000 designated apportionment payment made to North Annual Conference**
- **Plant Operation & Maintenance was \$50,621 under budget**



Thanks to your faithfulness and generosity 2020 has been hard but not insurmountable. We are maintaining our budget commitments and growing in our giving thanks to each of you. It is our prayer that as we move into the final months of the year we will be able to finish the year strong. Thank you for your generosity!



CONGREGATIONAL CARE TEAM

AT FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM

During the last year, we have come to understand and value the love and support that our congregational care team offers our church through their support and prayers. They are a vital and life-giving ministry here at First Church. We have also learned how important information is during a season of being away from one another due to the pandemic. Each week the congregational care team receives an email with prayer requests from our church family. Along with that weekly email the team receives any death notices as well as any urgent or pressing concerns from our congregation. All of the concerns shared are only done so with permission from those individuals involved. There are confidential prayer concerns that our clergy and staff respect and keep private. I wanted to take time to invite those of you that might be interested in joining the congregational care team to please let me know by simply emailing me at Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com. Please know that you can always opt-out of this email list if you feel so led.

STUDENT MINISTRY

AT FIRST CHURCH



Join us this month for our new series: Stretch. If your faith were a muscle, how flexible would it be? Could it stretch to your knees? Your shins? Your toes? Or are you not sure you even have any faith to stretch in the first place? Just like your body, if you want a faith that is strong, growing, and capable of carrying you through difficult challenges, you're going to need to stretch it. It might be fun. It might be challenging. But it will definitely

be worthwhile. In this series, we'll discover four ways we can stretch our faith from Paul, the author of the book of Romans, and a man whose life was completely transformed by Jesus. Thanks to Paul's words, we know we can stretch our faith by making a commitment, by starting something new, and by letting something go. We can even stretch our faith when we feel like we've failed.

Join us as we learn to stretch and strengthen our faith in a loving community.

STUDENT MINISTRY SCHEDULE

MIDDLE SCHOOL, 6TH-8TH GRADE, MEET IN-PERSON AT FIRST CHURCH 2:30PM-4:00PM

HIGH SCHOOL, 9TH-12TH GRADE, MEET IN-PERSON AT THE ARNOLD'S HOME 4:30PM-6:30PM

NOVEMBER 1
YOUTH

NOVEMBER 18
CHRISTMAS VIDEO PREP @ 6:30PM

NOVEMBER 8
YOUTH

NOVEMBER 22
NO YOUTH

NOVEMBER 15
YOUTH

NOVEMBER 29
YOUTH

STAY CONNECTED

STAY CONNECTED AND NEVER MISS OUT ON ALL THE THINGS HAPPENING.

EMAIL - tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com

REMINDE - Text: @fcbhmyouth To: 81010 (for students & adults)

INSTAGRAM - @firstchurchbhm.youth

FACEBOOK - @firstchurchbhm.youth or First Church Birmingham - Youth Group



As we approach a season in which many of us will plan to do our shopping online, we want to make sure you are aware that First Church has an Amazon Smile account. When you make a purchase through Amazon Smile 0.5% of that purchase is donated to the charity of your choice. All you need to do is make sure you are shopping at smile.amazon.com (all of the regular Amazon products and prices can be found there) and select Birmingham First United Methodist Church as your charity of choice. We hope you will consider using Amazon Smile as an easy way to make a contribution to First Church!



This year's Charge Conference will be held virtually on Wednesday, November 11 at 6pm. All are invited to attend this time where we will prayerfully offer our 2021 Lay Leadership nominations, set out pastors' salaries, amend our Safe Sanctuary policy, and celebrate our ministry reports for the 2020 year. If you would like to attend please contact Stephanie York Arnold at stephanie@firstchurchbhm.com to receive the Zoom link and password.

THANK YOU

FROM ROBIN PATE

My dear friends,

I was overwhelmed with gratitude and genuinely humbled upon receiving your very generous love gift on the occasion of my retirement. Thank you for remembering me with such kindness. My heart is full of appreciation for you!

I will forever be grateful for the blessing of spending the majority of my career at First Church Early Learning Center. I ask you to please continue to pray for and support the ELC families and staff during these trying times.

*In His love,
Robin Pate*

NEW MEMBER PRAYERS FOR FIRST CHURCH

AS WE SEEK TO BE

AN OPEN PLACE FOR ALL

MY PRAYER FOR FIRST CHURCH IS:

That we are a source of support and joy for one another in the coming months, which are sure to be unusual, given the current social and political climate.

- Lisa Allred

For the church to continue to be a safe and affirming place for the LGBTQ community, that all who come to First Church will feel the welcoming presence of God, and that the church community will continue to embrace and work on tough questions.

- Caroline & Elizabeth Ann Presley



NOVEMBER CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 3

~ Election Day ~
12:30pm - Seeking Sanctuary

NOVEMBER 11

12:30pm - Seeking Sanctuary
6:00pm - Charge Conference

NOVEMBER 25

~ Church Office Closed ~

NOVEMBER 4

12:30pm - Seeking Sanctuary

NOVEMBER 18

6:00pm - Trustees

NOVEMBER 26

~ Church Office Closed ~

NOVEMBER 9

6:00pm - Executive Council

NOVEMBER 24

6:00pm - SPRC

NOVEMBER 29

3:00pm - In Person Worship
(IN SANCTUARY)

WEEKLY CALENDAR

SUNDAY

9:00am - Preschool Bitmoji Classroom Email

10:00am - Elementary Sunday School - Zoom

11:00am - Loft & Sanctary Online Worship

2:30pm - Middle School Youth Group

4:30pm - High School Youth Group

TUESDAY

6:00pm - Learning To Walk in The Dark Small Group

7:00pm - Converge Young Adults

THURSDAY

6:00pm - Learning To Walk in The Dark Small Group

FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM STAFF

Senior Pastor: Stephanie York Arnold	Stephanie@firstchurchbhm.com
Pastor: Jonathan Goss.....	Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive 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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