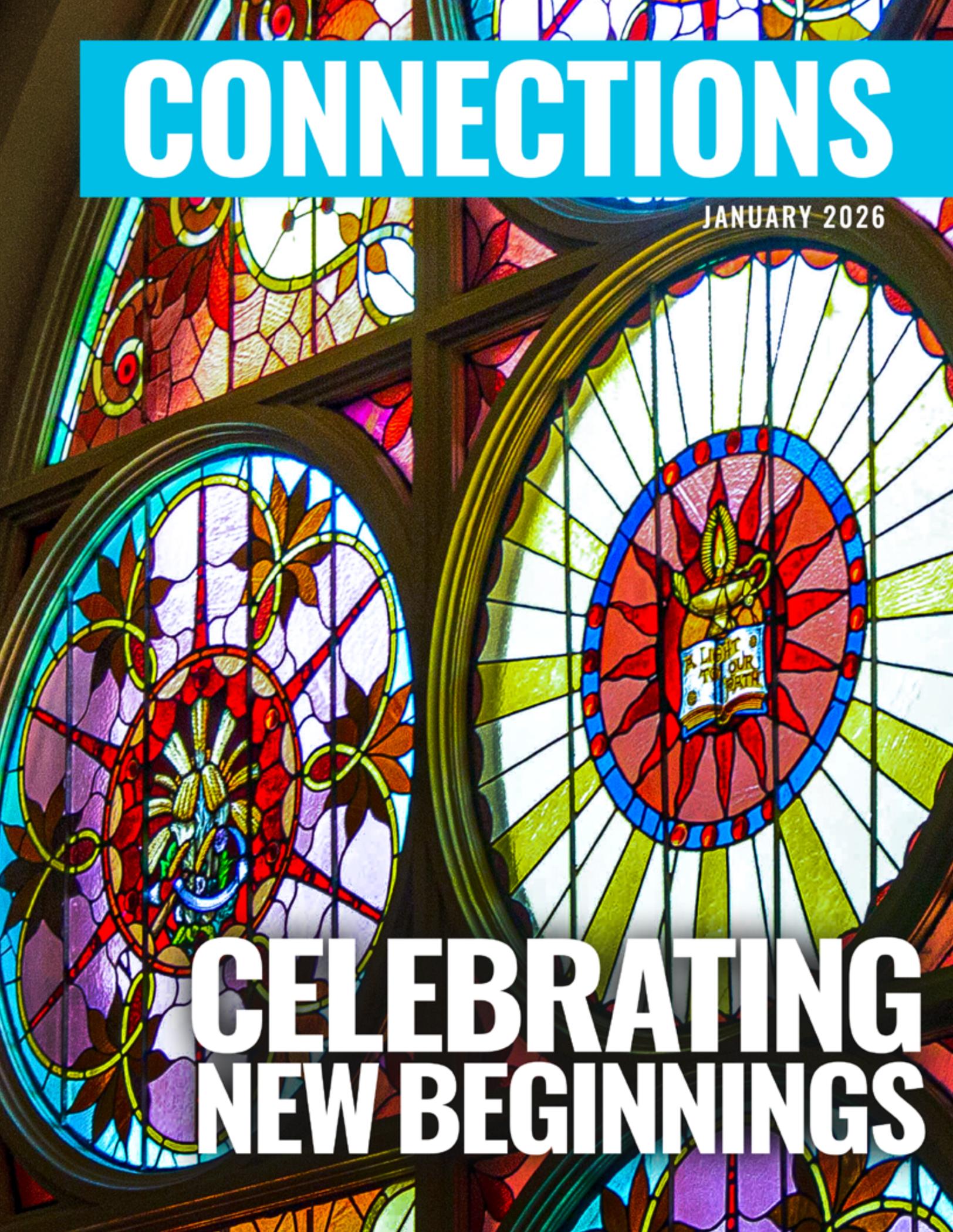


# CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 2026

The background of the cover is a close-up of several stained glass windows. The windows feature various religious symbols, including a dove, a chalice, and a book. The colors are vibrant, with reds, blues, yellows, and greens. The windows are set in dark wooden frames.

**CELEBRATING  
NEW BEGINNINGS**

# Blessing Of Our Babies

On **SUNDAY, JANUARY 11** we will hold a special Blessing of the Babies during both the Loft and Sanctuary worship services to celebrate new children brought into our church family in the past year. This meaningful tradition recognizes infants born into our congregation as well as children of any age who joined their families through adoption. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are invited to send their child's full name and a photo to Ashley at [Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com) no later than January 5 so that we may include them in this time of celebration. We look forward to sharing this beautiful moment of gratitude, hope, and community with you and your family.

## ADVENT DECORATIONS

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 4 FOLLOWING WORSHIP**

Please mark your calendars to stay following worship on Sunday, January 4 as we plan to take down all of our Advent decorations and safely store them to be used again next year.

# KIDS SAY THE DARNDEST THINGS

At First Church, one of our priorities is embracing tough questions. So, in preparation for this January, we invited our kids to share their questions and they did not disappoint! Our kids pay more attention than we think and they've been listening to our conversations about the mysteries of our faith. Their time in Sunday School, worship, and other children's activities has stirred their curiosity, and we think their questions matter—and they have some really good questions. "Where did God come from?" "How does God keep up with everything that's going on?" "What happened to the dinosaurs?" Their questions are shaping their faith, and, if we'll take the time to listen, their questions may shape our faith as well. This January First Church's City Kids are taking the lead and we'll see if they're able to stump the pastors along the way.

## **1.11.26 | WHERE DID GOD COME FROM?**

*GENESIS 1:1, ISAIAH 40:28, JOHN 1:1-5*

## **1.18.26 | HOW DOES GOD KEEP UP WITH EVERYTHING?**

*PSALM 145:1-3, LUKE 12:6-7, ROMANS 11:33-36*

## **1.25.26 | IS THE BIBLE EXAGGERATED?**

*ISAIAH 40:8, PSALM 119:105, MATTHEW 4:4*

## **2.1.26 | WAS CREATION REALLY SEVEN DAYS?**

*EXODUS 20:8-11, GENESIS 1*

## **2.8.26 | WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DINOSAURS?**

*PSALM 104:24-26, GENESIS 1:24-31*



# Getting To KNOW US Dinner

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 6:00PM**

If you have been visiting with us at First Church, have recently joined, or are interested in learning more, you are invited to join us for a meal together around the table. We will gather at 6:00pm on Thursday, February 5 in the Large Dining Room for good food and fellowship. Childcare is available with a reservation made by Friday, January 30. Click [HERE](#) to learn more and register to join us.



**FIRST  
CHURCH 101**

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22 – SUNDAY, MARCH 15

As we enter a new year we will offer another First Church 101 series on four consecutive Sunday morning sessions during the Sunday School hour. From 9:45am – 10:45am we will gather in the Parlor to learn more about the United Methodist Church and First Church in particular. We are excited about this opportunity to dive in and learn together. You are welcome to pick one topic to come and learn more or to join us for all four weeks. Here is the list of weeks and topics that will be covered:

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22  
**UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGY & POLITY**

SUNDAY, MARCH 1  
**WAYS TO GET PLUGGED IN**

SUNDAY, MARCH 8  
**FIRST CHURCH TOUR**

SUNDAY, MARCH 15  
**FIRST CHURCH & MEMBERSHIP**

Please click [HERE](#) to let us know you plan to attend.

*While registration is not required, it will help us make sure we have enough snacks and coffee.*

# PANAMA

## LEARN AND SERVE

### EXPERIENCE

SATURDAY, JUNE 27 - SUNDAY, JULY 5

We are thrilled to have the opportunity to return to Panama in 2026 and we are now beginning to build our team. Panama is a beautiful country, with even greater beauty in its people. First Church has been deeply connected to Panama and the people there for over 15 years. Our connection is through United Methodist missionary, Rhett Thompson, who has served in Panama for over 35 years. Rhett has connected us with people in Panama whom we now know by name. It is through these connections that many folks here at First Church have had life-changing experiences in Panama. Click [HERE](#) to read more and sign up now.

## FIRST CHURCH

# COLLEGE

## SCHOLARSHIP

The Finance Team has created a process for First Church college students to apply for and access funds available to help those attending college. The amount and number of scholarships will be determined based on a number of factors, including funds available in the Living Church Fund. The scholarship application window will remain open through February 15, 2025 and award recipients will be notified by mid-March. Click [HERE](#) to apply now.

# Wonderfully MADE RETREAT

FEBRUARY 6-8, 2026

All 5th–7th graders are invited to join us at Camp Sumatanga for our Wonderfully Made Retreat, February 6–8, 2026. Using the United Methodist Wonderfully Made curriculum, this weekend offers pre-teens an age-appropriate opportunity to learn about their bodies, human growth, sexuality, and relationships from a Christian perspective.

As a church, we approach this conversation in a progressive, inclusive way—striving to create a space where every student is valued, affirmed, and free to ask honest questions. This retreat is not a “True Love Waits”-style event, rather a thoughtful and caring environment for students to explore what it means to be wonderfully made by God.

Interested in your student attending or want to know more?  
Please contact Ashley Hess at [Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com).

# CITY KIDS

## SUMMER SAVE THE DATES

We are already looking ahead and planning for summer 2026. Please mark your calendars to join us for the following dates and be on the lookout for more information about how to sign up in the coming months.

### CREATION CAMP

(TRUSSVILLE)

MONDAY, JUNE 1 - THURSDAY, JUNE 4 | GRADES: COMPLETED K - 5TH

### ELEMENTARY 1

(CAMP SUMATANGA)

SUNDAY, JUNE 7 - FRIDAY, JUNE 12 | GRADES: COMPLETED 3RD - 5TH

### ARTS CAMP

(FIRST CHURCH)

MONDAY, JULY 13 - THURSDAY, JULY 16 | GRADES: COMPLETED K - 5TH

### CONNECT SERVE WEEK

(CANTERBURY UMC)

MONDAY, JULY 27 - THURSDAY, JULY 30 | GRADES: COMPLETED 3RD - 5TH

# Wednesday Night **DINNER & PROGRAMMING**

We are gearing up for another round of Wednesday Night Dinner and Programming beginning January 21. Our first three Wednesdays in 2026 will consist of three different trainings in the Loft covering important topics for us to better understand in the coming year. On January 21 we will be led by Rachel Spates in a training on Hidden Disabilities to help spread awareness and offer tools for being in ministry and community with our neurodivergent population. On January 28 we will learn how to be Good Neighbors to gain a deeper understanding of our relationship to the unhoused community and offer practical ideas and tools on best practices led by Jackson Dean and First Church Staff. Lastly, on February 4, we will be led by our ministry partner, One Place, in a training on Domestic Violence, a training which we are committed to holding regularly as we continue to listen and learn. We hope you will make plans to attend one or all of these important trainings. While we hope most people will join in person, we will also offer a virtual option so that as many people can participate as possible.

As a reminder, dinner will begin at 5:15pm on Wednesdays followed by programming at 6:15pm. The nursery will open at 5:45pm and programming for children will begin at 6:00pm. Dinner reservations are due every week by Monday at 12:00pm. Please note that we are no longer able to issue refunds. However we are able to move reservations before Monday's deadline but we ask you not to make this a regular occurrence. You can sign up for dinners [HERE](#). Our spring small groups will begin in February at the conclusion of our trainings and Ash Wednesday. Click [HERE](#) to read more about our spring small group offerings and sign up now.

2026 CHURCHWIDE RETREAT

# R&R

## REST AND RESIST

Mark your calendars for our 2026 Churchwide Retreat! We will be returning to Camp McDowell from Friday, February 13 through Sunday, February 15, 2026 for our annual churchwide retreat.

This retreat will offer us the opportunity to come together as a community and learn more about how we can move through these anxious times together. We will build connection and friendship through study, play, singing, and sharing together. The cost for the retreat is \$225 for individuals, \$425 for couples, and \$450 for families. Families in need of an extra room can reserve one for an additional \$100.

We are excited to share that we will begin offering payment plans this year for our retreat. When you sign up, feel free to select the amount that you would like to pay and at which frequency (\$100 a month, \$50 a month, etc). All registrations must be paid in full by February 1, 2026. For questions about registration or scholarship opportunities, please email [Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com). A deposit of \$50 is due upon registration.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO REGISTER TODAY.

# JUSTICE & MERCY

As you consider how you want to share your talents in 2026, please consider our First Church ministry partners who offer hands-on opportunities for service.

## WE HAVE TWO NEW OFFICIAL PARTNERS FOR 2026!

The first is the medical clinic at M-Power Ministries in Avondale. M-Power offers one of the only free clinics in the Birmingham area, as well as a well-stocked pharmacy with free medications. In addition to needing medical personnel, they provide a robust GED preparation program and need tutors. Contact Anne-Laura Cook, First Church member who volunteers monthly, at [annelaura.cook@gmail.com](mailto:annelaura.cook@gmail.com) or (205)504-3398.

The second is Backpack Ministries (formerly Glen Iris Grace). They supply much needed food for the weekends to children living in food insecure situations. Backpack Ministries welcomes specific food donations, assistance in packing bags, and financial support. Contact First Church member, Andrea Whitehead at [Andrea.whitehead1024@gmail.com](mailto:Andrea.whitehead1024@gmail.com) or (205)531-6231.

To learn of other ongoing needs with our continuing ministry partners, please reach out to one of the liaisons listed below:

### CHURCH OF THE RECONCILER

Kim Boyd

[kdrboyd@bellsouth.net](mailto:kdrboyd@bellsouth.net) or (205)925-8090

### COMMUNITY ON THE RISE

Alison Watson

[awatson@afw16.com](mailto:awatson@afw16.com) or (202)277-9234

### URBAN MINISTRIES

Jennifer McCombs Thompson

[Jenmccombs40@gmail.com](mailto:Jenmccombs40@gmail.com) or (205)807-5345

### WEBUILD *(URBAN MINISTRIES)*

Johnny Miller

[jackpias@bellsouth.net](mailto:jackpias@bellsouth.net)

### WEST END COMMUNITY CHURCH/WELEARN

Jay Jessee

[Margaretjayjessee@gmail.com](mailto:Margaretjayjessee@gmail.com) or (205)470-4339

### MAGIC CITY ACCEPTANCE CENTER

Jordan Pitman

[Jordangpittman@gmail.com](mailto:Jordangpittman@gmail.com) or (205)455-1754

### BLACK WARRIOR RIVERKEEPER/CREATION CARE

Buzzy Brown

[tbrown0719@att.net](mailto:tbrown0719@att.net) or (205)746-5738

### ALABAMA COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE

Sonya Pearson

[Sonya.pearson@icloud.com](mailto:Sonya.pearson@icloud.com) or (205)914-0129

# GIFTS RECEIVED BY THE CHURCH

## TO COURTYARD RENOVATIONS

IN MEMORY OF BETTYE WALLACE & NANCY FLEMING  
FROM ANDY WALLACE

## TO THE MEMORIAL FUND

IN MEMORY OF SARAH JOLLY  
FROM MATTHEW MCMILLAN

IN MEMORY OF MONTY HOGWOOD  
FROM STANLEY WOODALL  
FROM HAL & VIRGINIA FERRELL

## FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM SUNDAY SCHEDULE

9:45am

**SUNDAY SCHOOL**

11:00am

**LOFT & SANCTUARY IN PERSON WORSHIP**

11:00am

**LIVE STREAM**

Click [HERE](#) to view our monthly calendar.

# FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM STAFF

YOU MAY REACH OUR STAFF AT 205-254-3186 OR BY EMAIL

|   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Senior Pastor: Kevin Thomas .....                                     | Kevin@firstchurchbhm.com     |
| Pastor: Jonathan Goss .....   | Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com  |
| Executive Pastor: Katie Gilbert .....                                 | Katie@firstchurchbhm.com     |
| Minister of Community Engagement: Katherine Mullen .....              | Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com |
| Minister of Families & Youth: Ashley Hess .....                       | Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com    |
| Organist: Richard Byrd .....  | Richard@firstchurchbhm.com   |
| Design: Blake Hobbs .....   | Blake@firstchurchbhm.com     |
| Minister of Music: Patrick Evans .....                                | Patrick@firstchurchbhm.com   |
| Office Administrator: Peg Thompson .....                              | Peg@firstchurchbhm.com       |
| Business Administrator: Steve Pitts .....                             | Steve@firstchurchbhm.com     |
| Maintenance Supervisor: Coty Smith.....                               | Coty@firstchurchbhm.com      |
| Wedding Director: Betsy Pate .....                                    | Betsy@firstchurchbhm.com     |
| Executive Director of Early Learning Center: Cassandra Copeland ..... | ELC@firstchurchbhm.com       |
| Nursery Coordinator: Natalie Bogart-Pierre .....                      | Natalie@firstchurchbhm.com   |



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

518 North 19th Street • Birmingham AL 35203  
205-254-3186 • [www.firstchurchbhm.com](http://www.firstchurchbhm.com)