

JANUARY 2025

# CONNECTIONS

A vibrant indoor celebration, likely a New Year's event, featuring a large group of people gathered in a room decorated with colorful balloons (red, yellow, purple, green) and streamers. Many individuals are holding up their smartphones to take photos or videos, with bright camera flashes visible. The background shows a wall covered in clothing items, possibly a retail store or a community center. The overall atmosphere is festive and social.

**CELEBRATING  
A NEW YEAR**

# Blessing Of Our Babies

Our church is growing and, thankfully, that means we have more and more babies in our nursery! We hope you will join us in worship on **SUNDAY, JANUARY 5** to meet our newest friends with our Blessing of our Babies in both the Loft and Sanctuary services.

## ADVENT DECORATIONS

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 5 FOLLOWING WORSHIP**

Please stay briefly after worship on Sunday, January 5 to help take down our beautiful Advent decorations across our campus as we secure them for next year. Feel free to bring your lunch or grab something after we finish putting everything away.

# 7 DIFFICULT SAYINGS of

Paul

The Apostle Paul is the most important person in the history of our Christian faith after Jesus. In the first half of his life, he was a major persecutor of the early church but following his own miraculous awakening he lived a remarkable life as a Jewish Jesus follower. Over the years, he set up churches in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. As he developed the early church, he would write letters of encouragement and admonishment to keep these churches going. It is these letters containing his thoughts and feelings, however, that have led some to love Paul and others to hate him. In this sermon series we will tackle some of Paul's more difficult topics and sayings through a contextual and historical lens to see whether we find Paul appealing or appalling. We will seek to better understand some of the major theological concepts this Apostle felt compelled to address and look for what we may glean from his life and teaching.

**1.12.25 | DEATH BY COMMUNION?**

I CORINTHIANS 11:27-34

**1.19.25 | SUBMITTING TO GOVERNMENT?**

ROMANS 13:1-7

**1.26.25 | MAN IS THE HEAD OF WOMAN?**

I CORINTHIANS 11:1-16

EPHESIANS 5:22-33

**2.2.25 | ANGRY GOD?**

ROMANS 1:18-23

**2.9.25 | FAREWELL** *(IT IS A DIFFICULT SAYING!)*

PHILIPPIANS 1: 3-11, ACTS 20:22

*COMBINED SERVICE IN THE SANCTUARY*

**2.16.25 | RETREAT WEEKEND**

*VIRTUAL WORSHIP ONLY*

**2.23.25 | WHO INHERITS THE KINGDOM?**

I CORINTHIANS 6:9-11

**3.2.25 | DAMNED BY ONE, SAVED BY ONE?**

ROMANS 1:18-23

# Wednesday Night **DINNER & PROGRAMMING**

We are kicking off Wednesday Nights in 2025 beginning Wednesday, January 15. As a reminder, dinner begins at 5:15pm with adult programming to follow at 6:15pm. The nursery opens at 5:30pm and children's programming will begin at 6:00pm. You can find the menu and register for dinners [HERE](#).

As we move into another round of small groups, we invite you to find a group that fits your interests. Click [HERE](#) to read more detailed information about our offerings and click [HERE](#) to register to participate.

## **PANAMA** **LEARN AND SERVE** E X P E R I E N C E

**JUNE 28 - JULY 6**

First Church is planning on going back to Panama in 2025. We are thrilled to have this opportunity. We are starting now to build a team for our Panama Learn and Serve week in July of 2025. Panama is a beautiful country with even more beauty found in her people. First Church has been deeply connected to Panama and the people there for almost 15 years. Our connection is through a United Methodist missionary, Rhett Thompson, who has served in Panama for over 30 years. Rhett has connected us to folks in Panama that we know by name now. It is through these connections that many folks here at First Church have had life-changing experiences in Panama. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

Click [HERE](#) to register to join our team now.

FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM

# THIS I BELIEVE?

CHURCHWIDE RETREAT 2025

Our “This I Believe” retreat is approaching quickly and we hope you will make plans to join us! Our annual church-wide retreat is one of the most significant times to build community and make connections – not to mention grow spiritually. Childcare and children’s recreational options will be available for kids from preschool through elementary. Youth will also have some of their own programming as well as participation in select larger group sessions.

Please note that we are asking everyone to make sure their balance is paid in full by February 1. Contact Katherine Mullen at [Katherine@first-churchbhm.com](mailto:Katherine@first-churchbhm.com) to inquire about your remaining balance, request scholarship funds, or to find out more information.

Click [HERE](#) to register today.



# Getting To KNOW US Dinner

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 6:00PM**

If you've been visiting with us at First Church in recent weeks or months you are invited to join us for our next Getting to Know Us Dinner on Thursday, January 30 at 6:00pm in the Large Dining Room. This is an opportunity to enjoy a meal around the table and spend time helping us get to know more about you as well as learning more about First Church. Childcare will be available with a reservation. Click [HERE](#) to register now.



On Sunday, February 2 we will host First Church 101 after worship. A light lunch will be offered before we move into our time of learning and conversation. During our time together we will share more about United Methodist theology, polity, and Social Principles as well as what membership means at First Church and ways to find deeper connection and community. Childcare will be available with a reservation.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO REGISTER NOW.

# WESLEY'S SIMPLE RULE & CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 9:00AM - 4:00PM

We're excited to invite all 4th - 6th graders to a special day of learning and exploration alongside other area United Methodist Churches, combining John Wesley's Simple Rule, "Do No Harm," with an unforgettable experience in Birmingham's Civil Rights history. This event will be a unique opportunity for our kids to grow in their faith while also gaining a deeper understanding of our community's history and how we can live out Wesley's teachings in the world today.

Throughout the year, we will continue to partner with other churches in our community to explore John Wesley's Three Simple Rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God.

This day is just the beginning of our journey together as we dive deeper into these life-changing principles. We believe that learning about the struggles and triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement, while applying Wesley's teachings, will inspire our children to make a difference in the world with kindness, empathy, and love for all. We look forward to a day of learning, reflection, and growth, and we can't wait to see what God will do in the hearts of our kids! Click [HERE](#) to register now.

## CONNECT RETREAT WEEKEND

FRIDAY, MARCH 14 - SATURDAY, MARCH 15

We are thrilled to announce the opportunity for a Spring Children's Retreat for 4th - 6th graders at Camp Sumatanga! This retreat is a follow up to the event on Martin Luther King Day and promises to be a fun and faith-filled weekend, focused on Wesley's Simple Rules: "Do No Harm" and "Stay in Love with God." The event will take place from late Friday afternoon through 6:00pm on Saturday. The cost for the weekend is \$125. More information on registration coming soon.

# YOUTH UPDATES

## BIRMINGHAM BULLS GAME FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

GET READY FOR A NIGHT OF FUN AND EXCITEMENT! ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, OUR STUDENTS WILL HEAD OUT FOR AN EVENING OF ADVENTURE, STARTING WITH DINNER AT THE GALLERIA AND FINISHING WITH A THRILLING BIRMINGHAM BULLS HOCKEY GAME AT THE PELHAM CIVIC COMPLEX. WE'LL MEET AT THE CHURCH AT 4:00PM TO TRAVEL TO THE GALLERIA AND THEN TO THE GAME. TICKETS ARE LIMITED SO CLICK [HERE](#) TO SIGN UP NOW.

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## YOUTH SPRING RETREAT AT CAMP CHANDLER FRIDAY, APRIL 4 – SUNDAY, APRIL 6

ALL 6TH THROUGH 12TH GRADERS ARE INVITED TO JOIN US FOR OUR YOUTH SPRING RETREAT AT CAMP CHANDLER ON FRIDAY, APRIL 4 THROUGH SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2025! THIS RETREAT IS GOING TO BE A WEEKEND PACKED WITH FUN, FAITH, AND FELLOWSHIP. THE RETREAT COST IS \$125 WHICH INCLUDES ALL MEALS, ACTIVITIES, AND LODGING FOR TWO NIGHTS. CLICK [HERE](#) TO REGISTER NOW.

## CREATION CARE

A group of committed and passionate individuals in the First Church community have been meeting in recent weeks to consider ways that we can better lean into our desire to care for creation. One of the ways they have helped us to take a step forward is through making small adjustments to our Wednesday night plates and cups (with hopes to make changes to our plastic silverware in the new year). This team has a lot of other exciting projects on the horizon. If you are interested in getting involved, please reach out to Buzzy Brown at [tbrown0719@att.net](mailto:tbrown0719@att.net).





# AS WE SEEK TO BE AN OPEN PLACE FOR ALL

*MY PRAYER FOR FIRST CHURCH IS:*

*Thank you Lord for a place that shows your love so clearly. I pray that this place can continue to serve as a home and safety for all and that you can use me in any way that is needed. Amen.*

*Lily Beck*

*We continue to love like Jesus and bring in more people seeking His love. Thank you Lord for a place I can call home not only on Sunday but every day. Amen.*

*Emily Cameron*

*That we will continue to be the light in our community for marginalized groups to feel truly loved and accepted and to bring their authentic selves.*

*Tiffany Dunlap*

*That as a church we continue to seek ways to be a safe place for all – to learn and grow even when it's difficult or requires hard conversations or reflections.*

*Beth Uhlman*

*Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of this church, a place where Your love is made manifest, a home for all who seek your presence. We pray that this community be a sanctuary of hope, a space where every person, regardless of their story, can find refuge, acceptance, and the warmth of your grace. May our doors always be open wide, not just to those who are like us, but to those who are different, to those who are hurting, to those who are lost, to those who are searching for truth. May we reflect your love, not in words alone, but in our actions, in our kindness, in our listening, in our understanding. Lord, help us to be a church that welcomes all people, regardless of their background, their struggles, or their doubts. May we be a place where the marginalized find a voice, where the broken find healing, and where all are lifted up in your love. Teach us to see each person as You see them, with compassion, dignity, and respect. Give us the wisdom to break down walls of division, and the courage to build bridges of unity. We pray that Your Spirit moves among us, uniting us in our diversity, strengthening us in our faith, and guiding us in our mission to serve the world. As a reflection of Your open and unconditional love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

*Nicole Barbee and Tamie Haithcock*



# UPDATE YOUR **CONTACT** **INFORMATION**

We know a lot can change over time. If you or your family have made any changes to your contact information in the past year, please take a moment to let us know. You may do so by contacting our Office Administrator Peg Thompson at [Peg@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Peg@firstchurchbhm.com).

## 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 January 31, 2025 and award recipients will be notified by March 1. Click [HERE](#) to apply now.

# GIFTS RECEIVED BY THE CHURCH

## TO THE MEMORIAL FUND

**IN MEMORY OF FLETCHER THORINGTON**

From Larry Ward

**IN MEMORY OF EMILY KEITH**

From Larry and Julie Caine

From Aylwin Study Group

**IN MEMORY OF STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD'S GREAT AUNT JANE**

From Joel Godfrey

## TO THE CHOIR SPECIAL FUND

**IN MEMORY OF EMILY KEITH**

FROM BILL MCMULLEN

FROM GEORGE AND BETTY LIKIS

# FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM SUNDAY SCHEDULE

9:00am

**VIRTUAL LIVE STREAM SERVICE**

9:45am

**SUNDAY SCHOOL**

11:00am

**LOFT & SANCTUARY IN PERSON WORSHIP**

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: Stephanie York Arnold ..... Stephanie@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**

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