

THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter
August 2023



75 North Main Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: 401.454.3418
Website: fbcia.org
Email: fbcia1638@gmail.com

First Baptist has long practiced a ministry of hospitality and welcome. From our inception, welcoming in the stranger has been central to who we are as a congregation. Were it not for the hospitality of the Narragansetts, Roger Williams might not have survived to gather our church. Over the years, we enfolded immigrants and refugees from around the globe into our fold. We continue to be a haven for those distressed of conscience. More recently, we continue to look for ways to open ourselves to all people.

While this pastor still dreams of the day when we have a one-seater-gender-neutral accessible toilet, we work to make what we have more dignified for our community while in the Meeting House. We modified toilet seats to raise their height and added grab bars to the adjacent walls. Each week, the chair lift carries people between levels; sometimes there is even a wait to use it.

During my sabbatical, members continued to meet to talk about our accessibility and welcome. Conversation about our being more explicit around our welcome to LGBTQ people continues. Our church has long included members of this community. Now we are considering how we can take this insider knowledge to the outside. Not all people will believe themselves fully welcome in a Baptist church. Due to the history of exclusion of queer Christians, our welcome needs to be explicit. How might we more fully live into this aspect of our faith and witness at this moment?

God has a way of surprising us, and moving us beyond our expectations and comfort zones. When God says everyone, it really means everyone. As a Christian, I believe God calls us to lives of extravagant grace, radical inclusion, and relentless compassion. Everyone has a place in the family of God, and we are responsible for making this vision a living truth on the ground. It will require some effort, and it will be worth it. We must act, not just in our own self-interest, but on behalf of others, because we truly believe, as Jesus did, that what diminishes one of us, diminishes us all.

In John's gospel Jesus declares, "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly." Whatever diminishes life and does not make it more abundant must be transformed. As my teacher John Shelby Spong wrote, one's

"orientation is not a choice; but something to which one awakens. It is like the dawning realization that one is male or female, part of a particular race or nation or even right or left-handed. A just and moral society cannot be erected on a premise that some human beings are [lesser], not on the basis of their doing but on the basis of their being. It matters not what any source of ancient wisdom has previously declared. The Bible, for example, was once quoted to support slavery, to oppose science and to prevent women from achieving equality. On every one of those issues the Bible was quite simply wrong. To quote it now to uphold the evil of homophobia is no less wrong. These efforts will fail as they always do. ... Not to bear corporate witness to those who still languish in the dying definitions of the past is to turn one's back on the very meaning of the Christ. Do we imagine that Jesus' invitation was, 'Come unto me, some of ye.' instead of 'Come unto me, all ye?' Can any Church discriminate against any child of God and still sing?"

Love is love, and justice and equality are basic tenets of faith. May we be emboldened to live into our witness in tangible ways.

God has enough love for all of us. May we also.

¹John Shelby Spong, "Homophobia: No Compromise Possible"

◇ **Worship at FBCIA**



Sarah Dunn, the soprano soloist and section leader in the church choir, provided the special music on the first Sunday of July.

◇ **Worship through Fellowship**



The Mission Committee's dine-out program is up and running again. A group of ten had dinner at Aleppo Sweets on Ives Street in Providence. The plan is to gather about once a month at a restaurant run by immigrants and refugees.



We held our first outdoor service of 2023 on July 30th. The weather was glorious and there were 45 in attendance.

The Garden of Earthly Delights

The garden is growing and producing lots of good eats. Folks have harvested herbs, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers (hot and sweet), turnips, radishes, and swiss chard. Make sure you visit next time you are at church.



Upcoming Work Days:

Saturday, August 19 | 9 - 12

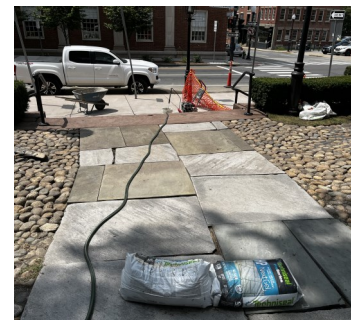
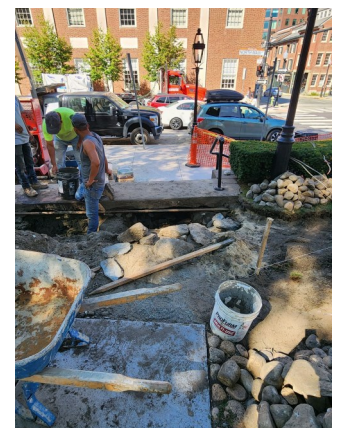
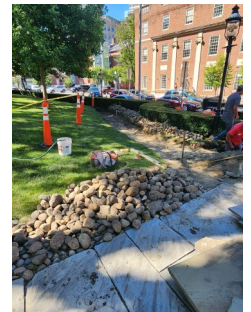
◆ Properties and Sexton Committee

Fence on Benefit Street



In the wee hours of Sunday morning a driver went over the wall in the back garden of the church. He was not hurt and his car was towed away. Unfortunately, there was damage to our fence. Luckily he missed the Garden of Earthly Delights.

Front Walk on North Main



When it rains it pours. Literally that is what happened to the front walk of the church. The water was pooling by the front steps when we had those torrential rain storms in July, which created a small sink hole. The masonry company dug a trench and pulled up the old stones that had been buried over time, cemented them in to create a culvert diverting the water into the drains. This was all done in less than a week.

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E-Mail: fbcia1638@gmail.com
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Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam, Pastor
Stephen Martorella, Minister of Music
Holly Edwards, Administrative Assistant
Anne Gagan, Bookkeeper
Tony Zambarano, Sexton
Ary Peralta, Sunday Sexton

◆ **Camp Canonicus**

Boating and making a foil dinner.



By the Campfire

