

# THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter  
January 2024

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## *Extravagant Darkness*

Welcome to the new year, where we sit with Christmas past, yet its essence still lingering about us. As boxes and bells are packed away again until next year, consider the spirit still in our midst. The call to memory and hospitality, generosity and joy. Winter deepens on, as does our work of this season. Enter into this time as an invitation to inner reflection and stillness. Embrace the extravagant darkness evoked by the poet Jane Kenyon. Her poem, "Taking Down the Tree" considers particular gifts offered by this time of year.

*"Taking Down the Tree"*

*Jane Kenyon*

*"Give me some light!" cries Hamlet's  
uncle midway through the murder  
of Gonzago. "Light! Light!" cry scattering  
courtesans. Here, as in Denmark,  
it's dark at four, and even the moon  
shines with only half a heart.*

*The ornaments go down into the box:  
the silver spaniel, My Darling  
on its collar, from Mother's childhood  
in Illinois; the balsa jumping jack  
my brother and I fought over,  
pulling limb from limb. Mother  
drew it together again with thread  
while I watched, feeling deprived  
at the age of ten.*

*With something more than caution  
I handle them, and the lights, with their  
tin star-shaped reflectors, brought along  
from house to house, their pasteboard  
toy suitcases increasingly flimsy.  
Tick, tick, the desiccated needles drop.*

*By supertime all that remains is the scent  
of balsam fir. If it's darkness  
we're having, let it be extravagant.*



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## Meal Ministry

Calling all cooks! While we have long aimed to nourish and sustain one another in times of need, this month we roll out a new iteration of the practice. Help stock our church freezer with meals to go. Prepare and freeze single portions at home, then bring them to church to be shared with those in need. Freezer safe plastic containers with labels will be available in the fellowship hall on the deacons Welcome Table for those interested in participating. Thanks!

## Winter Weather Announcement

**When there is a parking ban in the city of Providence due to inclement weather, church services and other activities held at the church will be cancelled until the parking ban is lifted. Please tune in to your local television and radio stations.**

## ◇ Around FBCIA



On Saturday, December 9th, Jazz Vespers were held at First Baptist featuring Presbybop.

## Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?



This is the title of a painting by Paul Gauguin created in 1897. In a time of personal crisis of illness and debt, he left his career as a stockbroker to pursue art in what he considered a natural society in Tahiti. He was troubled by the impact of the West on the innocence of Tahitian society. Throughout his life Gauguin was preoccupied with religious themes and he sought mental, physical and spiritual grounding in Tahiti. The questions posed in this painting are important in a broader sense and have inspired a series of Sunday Forums in which we will examine our roots, where they have brought us today and where we should take our soul liberty into the future. These forums are designed as a warm-up to a full day retreat on a Saturday during February. It is important, therefore that as many of you participate in these forums as possible. Gauguin emphasized how contemplative thought combined with simplicity can produce a wide variance of emotion and responses to life's challenges and carry people from innocence to wisdom. By listening to all voices we too can journey toward wisdom. We will begin by setting up some guidelines for productive discussion to ensure all voices are heard – I have some templates for this to which you can add. It is not our job to police and change the opinions of others and we will not necessarily get everyone in alignment, but there are ways to build relationships even when we have differing views. Below is a rough outline of what we will be addressing in the coming Sundays of January.

### Sunday January 7<sup>th</sup>

We will engage in some activities to create guidelines for productive discussion. We will tackle the question “**where do we come from?**” by examining the concept of soul liberty as designated by Roger Williams and consider its relevance and meaning today.

### Sunday January 14<sup>th</sup>

This Sunday will be an opportunity to define how we would like to be today, the “**who are we?**” question. We will list the initiatives that have been successful. We will reflect on our strengths and what we have to offer to each other and the broader community. This will not be a time to talk about improvements or failures ( that will be the following week!)

### Sunday January 21<sup>st</sup>

“**Where are we going?**” is the question for this Sunday. What do we see as our future? What would we like to improve?

### Sunday January 28<sup>th</sup>

On this final Sunday in January, we will assess what we have learned from this process and create some suggestions for the retreat.

Each week I will provide a short introduction to the topic with some Scriptural texts for reflection and guidance but the important part is for you all to share your thoughts and hear the thoughts of others. I will not be here on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but someone will lead the discussion and collect your input.

**Ruth Marris-Macaulay**

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## **DATES TO REMEMBER IN JANUARY**

### **Sunday, January 28th**

#### **Annual Meeting and Potluck Luncheon.**

**Sunday, January 28th after the worship service. We will hold our Annual Meeting along with a Potluck Luncheon. Please bring a dish to share. There will be a signup sheet posted in fellowship Hall. We will need side dishes, rolls or bread for sandwiches, fruit, or a dessert. Meat platters will be supplied. A signup sheet will be posted in fellowship hall on the bulletin board.**

### **Church Directory**

**We will be sending out a church directory. If you would like to have your information updated, please contact the church office by phone or by email at [holly.fbcia@gmail.com](mailto:holly.fbcia@gmail.com).**