

THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter February 2024

“Lent is a wilderness carved out in space and time with prayer. ... There is more than one kind of wilderness. There is the wilderness of the soul, an often lonely, aching place. There is the wilderness of the world, a place where words of love are everywhere yet people hunger for love because the imitations of love that perfuse our society leave us empty, aching, hungry.”

Dr. Wilda C. Gafney

Easter arrives early this year, at the end of March. Accordingly, the season of lent commences this month, on Ash Wednesday, which falls on Valentine’s Day. It may seem incongruous to contemplate love and death together, but the link is natural. Our mortality is tender because of our love for this world and those we share it alongside.

In writing about the solace that liturgical space can offer, Cole Arthur Riley describes a “kind of rest” where we are invited to engage, “speak or not speak” and “let others hold a sacred imagination” for us. Belonging to community allows us to not need to lean on our own understandings, but to lean on God and one another in the presence of God.

During the season of lent, we occupy a kind of wilderness, yet even there we are not isolated. In the midst of wilderness, we still belong. In community we bear witness, we share our sorrows and joys. As community, we act as containers for belief (or disbelief), bewilderment and grace. During these weeks, when we prepare ourselves again for the death and resurrection of Christ, accept the invitation to draw closer to God and one another. As you traverse the liminal spaces between here and there, now and not yet, remember the many wildernesses we occupy and those who accompany you in your wanderings.

Receive this prayer from Cole Arthur Riley as you navigate this time:

God of the Ashes,

Today, let us hold the tension of the story of our making – born of the dirt, beautifully connected to the earth we walk on. And yet, possessing the knowledge of our own mortality – that our common decay cannot be escaped. As we begin Lent, help us to become honest about the ways our societies and selfhoods are marred by injustice, cruelty, neglect, and greed. Help us to see our own role in the degeneration of the world; that as we push back evil around us, we might also admit those secret evils that dwell in us. As we name how we’ve been complicit in the ashes of this world, help us to bear them in solidarity and hope. *Amen.*

Breathe

INHALE: I will carry the ashes.
EXHALE: God, bring rest to the suffering.
INHALE: There is breath in these ashes.
EXHALE: No death is final.

Peace,

Pastor Jamie



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

Wilda C. Gafney, “Love in the Wilderness.” www.wilgafney.com/2022/04/03/love-in-the-wilderness.

Cole Arthur Riley, *Black Liturgies*. New York: Convergent Books, 2024. xiv-xv

Ibid. 247.

◇ FBCIA Welcome

It has been around a decade since our congregation refreshed our statement of welcome. Over the course of 2023, the deacons, along with a sub-committee, crafted the statement printed below to better reflect our current practices of hospitality. We plan to meet on Sunday, March 10th following the service for a discussion of this updated welcome. Please plan to join us.

Roger Williams gathered the First Baptist Church in America in 1638 on the bedrock of religious liberty, with its principles of soul freedom and the separation of church and state. Together, we continue our ministry of welcome and liberation.

This congregation honors its Baptist heritage. Many of our members are lifelong Baptists and others come from varied denominational and religious backgrounds. We welcome all people of every age, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cultural background, socio-economic status, mental or physical ability, marital status, and any other distinctions of society. We are diverse people united in Christ. We welcome you to join us.

◇ Ash Wednesday

February 14, 2024 7 pm

For dust you are and to dust you will return.
Genesis 3:19

Community Church of Providence will join us at the Meeting House on Wednesday, February 14th for a 7 pm Ash Wednesday service. This subdued service begins the Lenten season of reflection.

This day and season call us to reflect on our own mortality and finitude. What might you need to relinquish and release? In this service, we are marked with ashes from last year's palms of praise. Here, we bear our grief visibly on our bodies and remember in the dust of our lives that death does not get the last word.

Casting our Common Vision:

Who Are We and Why Are We Here?

A Workshop for Congregational Leaders

First Baptist Church in America

February 24, 2024

10 am – 2 pm (lunch provided)

From time to time, it can be beneficial for a congregation to pause and consider its identity and purpose. Do we have a shared sense of who we are and why we are here? A common understanding of those things is the starting point for moving together into the future.

On Saturday, February 24, ABCORI executive minister Rev. Dr. Courtney Davis Olds will facilitate a workshop that will help FBCIA consider the church's identity and purpose as a new slate of officers and board members begin their work together. If you agreed to begin or to continue serving on one of our committees, we hope you will make every effort to join us for a day of reflection and finding our common call as we move forward together. (You are welcome to join the conversation, whether you serve on a committee or not.) This conversation is a complement to the one taking place in adult forum on "where do we come from and where are we going together?"

In preparation for this workshop, please spend some time reflecting on the following:

What do I think is the purpose of First Baptist Church in America?

What would I identify as three of the church's core values?

How would I define any terms I used in my responses? (For example, terms such as fellowship, hospitality, or religious liberty.)

Please RSVP by February 18th to the church office or to Pastor Jamie.

◇ Missions



For more than 75 years, Church World Services has worked in partnership with communities in distress, providing resources to build the foundation for a more viable future.

These resources include blankets, tents and food. The CWS Blankets program was created to give a kind, loving and tangible response to people who are facing difficult times. Our most vulnerable neighbors around the world can feel safe and keep warm with fresh linens and clean sleeping quarters.

In 2023, our FCBIA family generously donated 104 blankets. Please join us again this year by supporting this important outreach. We will be collecting donations during the month of February, and every \$10 donation will provide a blanket to someone in need. Please be sure to write "Blankets" on the memo line if you pay by check, or in the notes section if you donate online at FBCIA.org. Thank you for your help once again.

Mission Dinner at Aguardente

12 Governor Street, Providence
Wednesday, February 21 at 5:30

"Aguardente was born out of my longtime dream to share my culture, heritage, and travels with the Providence community. Together with Magda León and Natalia Neves, we've built a place to celebrate our collective upbringings in Portugal, Guatemala, and the Azores through incredible food, meticulously sourced spirits, and Magda's moving art".

There will be a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall so we can make a reservation. If you decide last minute you want to join us, please call Susan Lepore

◇ Sunday Forums in February

Sunday February 4th

What Have We Learned? What Will We Do?

This will be a wrap up of January forums on the questions Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?

Sunday February 11th

Cities of Light: The Rise & Fall of Islamic Spain (2007)

In keeping with our overall theme of hospitality we will spend two weeks watching this well-researched documentary (or perhaps docu-drama) to see how interfaith hospitality among the three Abrahamic faiths once flourished between the 8th and 15th centuries in Spain, and also why it fell apart. Those of you who have been reading *A People's History of Christianity* by Diana Butler Bass in our book clubs will be acquainted with this story from reading chapter 6.

Over a thousand years ago Europe experienced one of its greatest periods of cultural enlightenment in medieval Spain. People of all faiths lived together and prospered in a thriving multicultural civilization. Here remarkable individuals made lasting contributions to poetry, art, architecture, music, science, engineering, navigation, and even hydraulic technology. Eventually it was larger forces interested in conquest, land and power that brought all this to an end and extinguished the shared learning of this era of enlightenment.

The film will take about 2 Sundays to show. A discussion will follow on the third Sunday. It is suitable for the older Sunday School students if they wish to attend.

Sunday February 18th

Cities of Light Part 2

Sunday February 25th

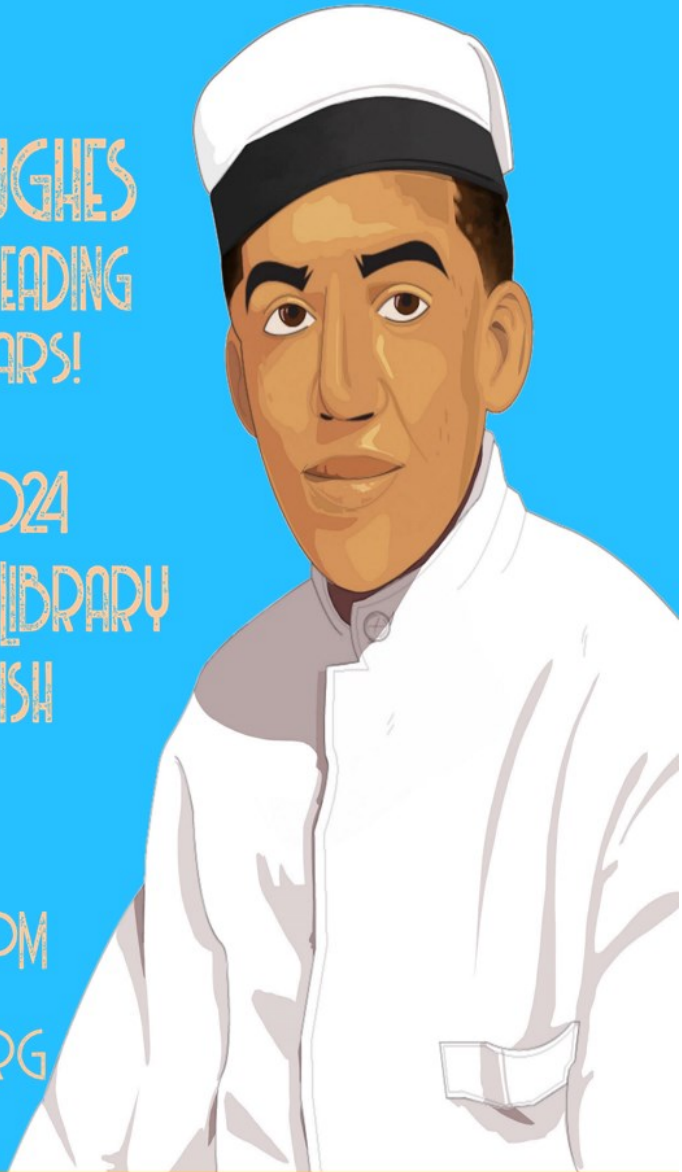
Cities of Light discussion

Led by Ruth Marris-Macaulay

THE OPENING EVENT TO BLACK HISTORY MONTH!

THE LANGSTON HUGHES
COMMUNITY POETRY READING
CELEBRATING 29 YEARS!

FEBRUARY 4, 2024
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The First Baptist Church in America
75 North Main Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: 401-454-3418
E-Mail: fbcia1638@gmail.com
Website: www.fbcia.org

Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam, Pastor
Stephen Martorella, Minister of Music
Holly Edwards, Administrative Assistant
Anne Gagan, Bookkeeper
Tony Zambarano, Sexton
Ary Peralta, Sunday Sexton
Victoria Pfanstiehl, ASL Interpreter

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



A faithful (or insane) cohort of people braved the winter storm on January 7 to attend church and enjoy Communion. Pastor Jamie led the service; Ken Clauser was worship leader; and a musician, Michael Savignac, who happened to attend substituted for Leilani Nixon who was unable to drive from Connecticut to play for the service.

Leilani Nixon accompanied cellist Kate Ritzau on a gavotte by J. S. Bach as part of the prelude to the morning worship on January 14.

