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THE SPIRE

First Baptist Church in America Newsletter March 2024

Last month, members of our community gathered on a Saturday for a leadership workshop led by the Rev. Dr. Courtney Davis Olds, the Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of RI. During this time, we worked together to clarify our identity, core purpose, and values that guide our congregational life. We began the day by sharing our favorite memories of First Baptist and times when we felt we were at our best. Our stories revealed our shared hopes and sense of self, which was confirmed in our subsequent small group and collective discussions. The notes from our discussion are displayed in the fellowship hall, as well as transcribed here (thanks Ruth Marris Macaulay!). We agreed that we desired to be a people of service and a safe place of haven for all to deepen their relationship with God and one another. We value the dignity of all people and seek to foster a non-judgmental community of worship and care. We concluded by identifying practical, actionable, and realistic ways to continue to live into our shared aims.

A number of these aims are currently being put into action. Some named objectives we already practice, but can be more intentional about articulating. Newcomers observed that once they entered the Meeting House and met the church they found us hospitable and welcoming, however many are reluctant to cross our threshold. Part of the work we recognized is to make our internal practices more evident to those outside. In keeping with our desire to expand our welcome, we began serving gluten-free bread during communion and announced that the communion cups hold grape juice, not wine. We hope to update our statement of welcome to reflect our actual practice of inclusion. Recently, we voted to install an ADA accessible toilet and wheelchair lift; we recently submitted an application for a grant that would help fund this project.

If you were not able to join us for the workshop, don't worry! These efforts are ongoing. Church is never static, we are continually forming and reforming over time. What a grace! We will continue to discern how to be and become the congregation God calls us to be in this moment. This requires the efforts, prayers, and participation of each one of us. As always, to be continued...

Peace,

Pastor Jamie

WHO ARE WE? WHY ARE WE HERE

Courtney Davis Olds, Executive Minister ABCORI



DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

1. Speak only for yourself.
2. Listen without judgment.
3. Set aside preconceived notions.
4. Respect differences of opinion, perspective and experience.
5. Discuss, don't debate.
6. Assume the best of each other.
7. Take only your share of the allotted time.
8. Define your terms.

FIRST SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

1. Share one of your fondest memories of FBCIA.
2. Share a story from a time when you experienced FBCIA to be at its very best.

SECOND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Given what you have heard and shared, work as a group to identify:

1. What the stories reveal about FBCIA's sense of itself (identity)

IDENTITY RESPONSES

Acceptance/inclusion

Legacy is living – History (and building) are gifts in service of mission to people within and beyond congregation.

History & Traditions

Love and care for all people

Caring Community

Worship

Love for the variety of music.

2. What the stories reveal about FBCIA's reason for being (purpose)

PURPOSE RESPONSES

Making a kinder world.

Service.

Services serve to inspire living and build a community of belonging and service.

A haven for all.

Fostering safe space of sanctuary for soul liberty to thrive.

Worship.

Deepen our relationship with God.

Foster and deepen relationships with each other.

3. What the stories reveal about the principles FBCIA holds most dear (core values)

CORE VALUES RESPONSES

Respect.

Non-judgmental.

Importance of community.

Diverse people united in Christ.

Each person is valued.

What Would Jesus Do/Reflective of God's will.

Cultivating personal and corporate faith in beloved community.

Care

Importance of worship.

Soul liberty.

Soul liberty.

TERMS

COMMUNITY

People who care about each other.

Internal community and external community.

Interaction of individuals coming together as a whole.

SOUL LIBERTY

See the board in the back and have more conversation about this.

ACCEPTANCE

Knowing it is okay to ask questions.

CARE

Meeting practical needs

Having an awareness (of others, situations etc.)

Being present

Prayer

Meeting emotional needs.

Affirming/creating a safe space.

SAFE SPACE

People can be who they are.

Okay to ask questions.

SURPRISES/AH-HA MOMENTS

What we can learn from each other's stories

"One size doesn't fit all" especially with communication and hospitality.

Encouraging to hear stories of welcome and affirmation.

Church has changed over time.

PATTERNS/COMMONALITIES

Community is in all 3.

Worship is in all 3.

Overall theme of how we treat people.

History of the congregation is woven through.

Faith component.

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE LISTS

Explicit faith beliefs.

Joy/celebration (is it assumed?)

Issues of mobility and access.

THIRD GROUP ACTIVITY

- 1. How might the identity, purpose, and core values identified today guide or find expression in the work of the community on which you serve?**
- 2. How might the identity, purpose and core values identified today guide or find expression in the larger life of the congregation and ministry of FBCIA?**

FINAL THOUGHTS

Disconnect between who FBCIA knows itself to be and the church's reputation/perception as only a historical building.

Are there ways to influence the narrative?

What can we do in our messaging/website?

(Wikipedia page is all about the history)

Make sure what is inside is perceptible on the outside (the sign, the garden etc.)

Identify the church's goals and objectives so we can contribute – but also know what we are not doing.

Ask questions: What would be meaningful engagement for younger folks?

What will have the best impact?

What are we willing to let go of?

How do we use our resources best?

Continue sharing our stories.

Experiment with different solutions.

Sunday Forums in March

Sunday March 3rd

Ruth Marris-Macaulay: Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Part 1 1948-1981

After teaching a course Tradition and Modernism in the Middle East for five years during the time of the Arab Spring, I am familiar with the complexities, challenges, and context of what some have called “the never-ending war.” My class included Jewish, Muslim, and Christian students and they learned how to listen to different perspectives without demonizing each other. I hope we can do the same, and that we can end up reflecting on how the current situation emerged rather than just reacting to it. We will discuss past peace proposals and why they did not ultimately solve the fundamental problems, and what might lie in the future.

Sunday March 10th

Ruth Marris-Macaulay: Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Part 2 1981-2024

Sunday March 17th

Ruth Marris- Macaulay will lead a discussion of the current war between Israel and Gaza and US policy in the region.

How do we respond to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and efforts to seek peace in the region?

How do we respond to threats to both Jewish and Palestinian students on college campuses in the United States?

How can we, as people of faith, evaluate our nation’s policies toward both sides of this conflict?

Sunday March 24th

Ric Wild: An Update on Crossroads

Sunday March 31st

Easter Breakfast

Sunday April 7th

Steve Martorella: Singing the Lord’s Song in a Post-Covid World

◇ 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 subcommittee, 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.

◇ A Place at the Table

Are you looking for an opportunity to get to know your fellow churchgoers in way that goes beyond Sunday morning? Sign up for one of our home dinners! In April we have two dinners planned; one will take place at Nancy Wake's home in Portsmouth and another at Ruth Marris Macaulay's in Riverside. Sign up sheets will be coming soon to the bulletin board in the fellowship hall. The host will provide the main course and the guests will help to provide side dishes, appetizers, dessert, etc. This is a great way to get to know people and enjoy a wonderful meal. Dietary restrictions need to be shared with host. Want to host? Great! Let Pastor Jamie know. The number of guests you are able to accommodate is up to you (and the capacity of your dinner table.) We would love to offer dinners in all corners of Rhode Island.

◇ Missions Offerings

America for Christ Offering Grace upon Grace

Carry on the legacy of good works with a monetary gift!

Thanks to a history of generous donations to the America for Christ (AFC) Offering, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has provided financial support to American Baptist churches and affiliated organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico year over year. Some examples of the positive impact your dollars have had on our beloved communities:

- Funding direct assistance to the residents of Youngstown, Ohio, that included food boxes, meals for children, clothing banks and distribution of commodities such as diapers, school supplies, clothing, and housewares.
 - Funding youth education and enrichment programs as well as senior services that delivered lunches, health education and socialization opportunities, and groceries in bulk through a food pantry, among other things, to communities in and around Kansas City, Kansas.
 - Funding Rainbow Acres, a faith-based residential community with a wide range of programs for developmentally disabled adults from more than 15 states and representing an array of faith backgrounds including American Baptists.
- These are just a few of the ways your dollars provide aid and comfort to those in need; there are many more. Please help us continue to bring healing and hope to communities, families, children and Jesus' disciples in 2024 by supporting this year's America for Christ Offering.

We have collected \$268 dollars to date for the America for Christ Offering. We will continue to collect for this offering through the month of March.

The Church World Service (CWS) blanket the world in Love offering for the month of February we collected \$510 dollars towards 40 blankets.

Sowams Heritage Area Project
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<https://sowams.org>
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Written on the Landscape: The Sowams Heritage Area Project Hosts the Next Round of Community Conversations

The Sowams Heritage Area Project invites members of the community to participate in a community conversation to discuss the significance of Sowams, the ancestral homeland of the Massasoit Ousamequin who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621, and the extraordinary array of resources that can be found on its landscape.

Free to the public, the conversation will be held twice: Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 3:30pm at the Seekonk Public Library, 410 Newman Avenue, Seekonk, MA and Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at 7:00pm at Mt. Hope Farm, 250 Metacom Avenue, Bristol, RI. Seats can be reserved online at [Sowams.org/community-conversations-march-2024/](https://sowams.org/community-conversations-march-2024/).

Sowams is the setting of one of America's origin stories, the critical alliance that established 50 years of peace between the Indigenous Tribes that had fished, farm and hunted the region for millennia and the English settlers arriving on the Mayflower. Sowams is also ground zero for the fracturing of that alliance during the devastating King Philip's War (1675/76). At the heart of that conflict lay divergent worldviews of law, land ownership, and personal freedom. In Sowams, the legacy of those differences has shaped the region's complex history from prehistory to the present.

Last fall, the Sowams Steering Committee introduced the Sowams Project to the public at events in Swansea, MA and Warren, RI. These next Community Conversations will focus on the natural, historic and cultural resources in the region and the themes that flow from that watershed period in our nation's history. "The story of Sowams is really many stories," says Project Advisor, Andrea Rounds. "Not only is it about a time and place where two worlds met, but Sowams is also about colonization, war, religious toleration, enslavement, and commerce—each is defined by the landscape where land meets the water."

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are living, working, landscapes, which are designated by Congress to honor the important role of a region in our country's development and celebrate its contributions to American history and culture. The Community Conversations are part of a comprehensive and inclusive feasibility study required by the National Park Service for NHA designation, and are being conducted under the auspices of the Sowams Heritage Area Project Steering Committee.

The participants will discuss what the needs are in their own communities and how a National Heritage Area could benefit them. Says Rounds, "This is an opportunity to leverage the national significance of Sowams to showcase all the different communities in the region, each in its own way, with its own voice."

About the Sowams Heritage Area Project:

Led by a regional coalition of town planners, tourism entities, historical societies, environmentalists, Tribal leaders, and other volunteers, the Sowams Heritage Area Project is undertaking an initiative to develop a National Heritage Area (NHA) in Sowams, the ancestral homeland of the Massasoit Ousamequin who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621. Today the Sowams region comprises Barrington, Bristol, East Providence, a portion of Providence, and Warren, RI, as well as Rehoboth, Seekonk, Somerset, and Swansea, MA. NHAs protect and promote a region's history, heritage and culture and use those assets to advance local economies through tourism, recreation and community development. For more information, go to sowams.org.

◇ Around FBCIA

Picture of the sewing school c. 1910

One of the antique benches that once was used for Sunday school, the Sewing school, and seating for assemblies in the Vestry (now the Fellowship Hall) back about 1910 has returned to the Meeting House.



The church held a baby shower for Georgette Munyampirwa on Sunday afternoon February 25. The group gift to her was a baby carriage, and she had a lot of help from the children to tear open the box. Pictured with her are [clockwise to her left] Matendo Walenga, Ella Mercy Teta, the hand and white sleeve of Olivia Jarbadan, Jideobi Washam Unaka, Cindy Martorella, Ruth Maris Macaulay, and Eleanor Shealy.

On Sunday March 3, Stephen Martorella and the choir joined with the choir of the Newman Congregational Church in a concert of "Let Justice Roll." The program was originally sung at FBCIA, but the immediate return to Newman was prevented by the Covid shutdown. Finally, four years and three weeks later, the promised performance was done.



2024 EASTER MEMORIALS

If you would like to have a plant in Church on Easter Sunday,
Please fill out this form and return it to the church office
on or before, but **no later than Monday, March 25, 2024**

IN MEMORY OF: _____

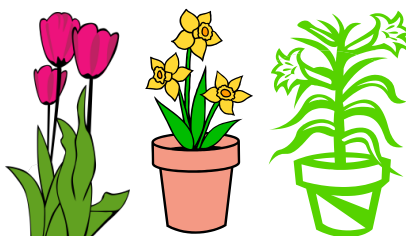
GIVEN BY: _____

Number of **Daffodils**: _____ Cost: \$12.50 each

Number of **Tulips** _____ Cost: \$12.50 each

Number of **Hyacinths** _____ Cost: \$12.50 each

Number of **Lilies**: _____ \$13.50 each



Check or Cash please!

Checks payable to:

The First Baptist Church in America

Please note Flowers on the memo line

Payment must accompany order form!

The First Baptist Church in America
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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

♦ Holy Week Services

Thursday, March 28th at 6:30 PM Taizé service

Easter Sunday, 9:30 AM breakfast

10:15 AM Easter egg hunt

11:00 AM Worship

♦ From the Minister of Music

The music for Sunday March 10 will be a part of the celebrations for Women's Composer Day being observed in the US and the UK.



Garden of Earthy Delights

Garden work will begin on Sunday, March 17 immediately following the Worship service with the planting of peas. It won't take long and you won't need to get dirty.

The real work will begin in April when we have sod to remove, beds to build and fill and mulch to spread. I promise, we won't be moving a lot of sod.

♦ Announcement

At the Annual Meeting of the First Baptist Church in America / Charitable Baptist Society on January 28, 2024, the ad-hoc "*Anniversary Committee*" was organized to begin planning the celebrations for two upcoming anniversaries:

Short Term (May 2025): a weekend celebration of the 250th anniversary of the building of the Meeting House

Long Term (2038): a year-long celebration of the 400th anniversary of the founding of the First Baptist Church in America

If you are interested in being a part of the committee or have suggestions, please contact Ken Long.