

40 Days of Outreach - Service Opportunities During Lent

The standard spiritual practices of Lent are prayer, fasting (giving up something), and almsgiving (the giving of yourself/your resources). To assist you with the third practice, our Outreach ministry has arranged several hands-on service opportunities for the Lenten season.

- Help at the Wichita Falls Area Food Bank - Thursday, March 16 (9 am - 12 pm)
- Serve dinner at Faith Refuge - Monday, March 20 (6:15 pm - volunteers must be age 18+)
- FCC Day at Interfaith Outreach - Saturday, March 25 (9 am - 12 pm)
- Help at the Wichita Falls Area Food Bank - April 4 (1 pm - 4 pm)

Sign up to serve at one of these events by calling the Church Office.

Wednesdays At The Table – 2023 Lenten Study Series

This Lenten season, you are invited to the table. On Wednesday evenings from March 1 to April 5, deepen your faith by participating in Lenten electives. Each week, we will gather for a simple soup supper (along with kid-friendly options for our young friends) at 5:30 pm. Then, we will share together in communion before choosing an elective to attend:

- *Walk with Jesus Bible Study* with Sheri Sutton in Room 310.
- *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* with Mark Bender in Fellowship Hall.
- *Understanding Prayer* with Brooke Reid in Room 305.
- *Letters from Jerusalem* (for our young friends) with Claire Baer in Room 402.

So, grow your faith this Lenten series. Plan to join in on *Wednesdays At The Table*.

Young Ages Preschool Open House

Young Ages Preschool cordially invites you to our "Down On the Farm" Open House on Thursday evening, March 23rd, from 5:30-7:30 pm. We will begin the evening with a yummy BBQ dinner; no ticket required, but please scan the QR Code to RSVP. For your entertainment, our amazing students will put on a farm-themed program following dinner!



Are you looking for a preschool for your child/grandchild? Would you like to see what we do? Please come, look around and celebrate our students' accomplishments. Our classrooms will be open and available to tour during the evening.

Our spring fundraiser will be a bake sale during the Open House and a raffle. The raffle items are posted around the church and on the Young Ages Preschool Facebook page. You may purchase raffle tickets from a YAS student, in the YAS office or in the church office.

2023-24 Registration Now Open!!

New for 2023-24 Transitional Kindergarten

Our Transitional Kindergarten is a bridge between Pre-K and Kindergarten and designed for students who would benefit from another year or the 'gift of time' for cognitive and social-emotional development.

Registration packets will be available at Open House. For more information, please call Alisa Gardner at the Young Ages office, 940-692-3640.

Sign up for the 24 Hour Prayer Vigil

You are invited to sign up for a 30-minute time slot between 8:00 pm Thursday evening, April 6, and 8:00 pm Friday evening, April 7. You can pray at home or come to the Chapel to pray, and materials to guide your prayers and reflections will be provided. Register at www.chrch.es/00xmg.

Holy Week 2023

Holy Week is the most powerful and significant week of the church year. In our observance of a historical sequence of events, we remember the story of our salvation. Mark your calendars to participate in the richness of this week:

April 2 - Palm Sunday - Worship at 8:40 am and 10:45 am; Lunch and Easter Egg Hunt at 12:00 pm.

April 5 - *Wednesdays at the Table* Lenten Series - 5:30 pm

April 6 - *An Upper Room Service* - Maundy Thursday Service - 6:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall; 24-hour prayer vigil begins at 8:00 pm and continues to 8:00 pm Friday, April 7.

April 7 - Stations of the Cross - 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall

April 9 - Easter Sunday - Worship at 8:40 am and 10:45 am.

Make Your Mark

Dr. Mark R. Bender
Senior Minister



The Journey to Resurrection

I remember when her parents told me that Dawn and Joe were moving back to Texas. My friends, Dawn & Joe Weeks, had taken a co-pastorate position at First Christian Church in Odessa. I was a little shocked that they were making that move. I knew they were well-thought-of at the church they were serving in the Kansas City area. And, frankly, in 2014, First Christian Church in Odessa was not the church it once was. They would definitely have their work cut out for them.

I had no idea how true that was. Last year, Dawn wrote a book about their experience in coming to Odessa titled *Breakthrough: Trusting God for Big Change in Your Church*. While they were perfectly content at the church they were serving in Kansas City, a persistent search committee from Odessa finally got them to make a visit. The people in Odessa, Dawn said, couldn't be beat. And as they traveled around the city, they began to "see ourselves in Odessa, more so than we would have guessed." That was, until they saw the church. It made their hearts sink, Dawn remembered.

The frog in the kettle adage never seemed truer. This congregation was trying to be the church on a dusty corner one block off success. In fact, the story goes that a beloved pastor during the 1950s once regretted that a lightning bolt struck the Methodist church nearby, causing a fire. "If only it had struck us," he lamented. "We so badly needed a new location." Sixty years later, downtown Odessa still was not a happening place. But it was especially not happening in this off-the-beaten-path spot. Maybe they had already waited too long to make radical changes to save this church's ministry. The deferred maintenance on these beloved old buildings was daunting.

Especially damning to the health of the church was the alley that ran between the two buildings. Since the construction of the "new" sanctuary building during the church's heyday in the 1960s, parents had been expected to carry their babies across the alley to the nursery in the 1940s-era building. Then they would return to worship in the 1960s era building, leaving their children two decades behind across the alley. Very few families were active in the church anymore. Most worrisome of all, the church was living off its endowment fund, drawing it down more each year, and still not able to maintain the buildings.

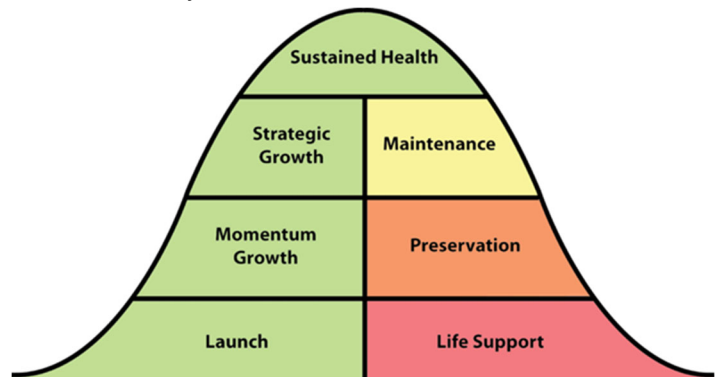
At the end of their visit, Dawn said the search committee told them that they wanted Joe and Dawn to be their pastors. After a lot of discussion about the risk involved in making this move, they didn't mince words in their reply to the search committee. "We think this church needs to move to a new location," they said. And, they would agree to come, but only if the congregation was willing to consider relocating, because that is where they were going to lead. Surprisingly, the church voted nearly unanimously to call Joe and Dawn.

When Dawn and Joe arrived, they found 45 people in worship across two services. They were no longer worshipping in the Sanctuary - it was too vacuous for the

number of people attending. Plus, it didn't have a functional air conditioner or heater, nor did the baptistery work.

Once, a couple accidentally came to worship at our downtown church, intending to go to the church next door. As they were hastily leaving after the service was over, I rushed out to greet them. "We're so glad you came!" I [Dawn] gushed. "What brought you here today?" The man hesitated, but the woman told it like it was. "We meant to visit the Baptist church. We just didn't want to be rude and leave when we realized we were in the wrong place. This church is dead!"

I've shared the image of a church life cycle in this column before. On the left side of the bell curve, there are lots of positive signs of health, growth, and innovation. But once a church "crests the hill" and begins to become more inwardly focused on things like bureaucracy and sustainability, there is work to be done. If caught early, a redefinition of the vision or a redevelopment of a ministry program may be all that's needed to resume growth. But if a church finds itself so far down the curve that they are in the life support phase, the only hope for returning to a healthy state is one beyond their control: resurrection.



First Christian Church in Odessa found themselves on life support. But, long story short, God did a resurrection work in that church. Today, they are a vital congregation - one serving as a model for many churches who also find themselves deep on the right side of the life cycle bell curve. Connection Christian Church, as they are now known, worships in a new building (a former medical office building) and they are home to multiple non-profits who do community work in their space. Their worship attendance has more than tripled since 2014 and their outreach to the community is exponentially greater than it was before. When the City Manager, or the school district, or the food bank needs help, they call Connection.

In many ways, the story of Connection's journey over the last nine years mirrors the journey of Lent for us individually. These 40 days are designed to prepare us for the enormity of Easter. Not just the enormity of a full Sanctuary. Not just the enormity of a full day of celebration. The enormity of God's love made known in Jesus Christ and in his victory over sin, evil, and death. That enormous action of resurrection is proof that God can bring life to that which seems to be beyond hope - whether it is a church...or you and me.

Lent is a season for us to reflect on where our own leading has moved us away from God. It's a time for recognizing where we've become inwardly focused, thinking we can manage life on our own. It's a time for realizing that our hope doesn't lie in what we do. It's a time for realizing our need for a savior. And when we do, we can begin to see the good work that God is doing. That was true for Connection Christian Church. And it's true for us, too.

Mark

FCC MINISTRY NEWS AND CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

The **Challenger** is biweekly, with the next publication on March 22! FCC Ministry News is sent by email every Tuesday.

Men's Breakfast & Bible Study! Bring a friend and attend the FCC Men's Breakfast & Bible Study on Friday morning, March 10th, from 7:00-8:00 am, at the Hwy Café, 2808 Jacksboro Hwy.

Christian Women's Fellowship: The **March CWF Luncheon** will be Monday, March 13th, at 11:45 am in the Fellowship Hall. This year's theme for our luncheons is "Faith In Our Neighborhoods," and the speaker in March will be Jeri Lynn Hutchinson speaking on "Judeo-Christian Life". Reservations are not required and guests are welcome. Cost is \$5.00 per person. The CWF Board will meet at 10:30 am in Room 310 prior to the luncheon.

Pantry Sunday for Interfaith Outreach Services: The **March** items are cans of chili (15 oz.) and canned pasta like Spaghettios. Interfaith is always in regular need of regular size paper grocery sacks. You may drop off any of the monthly requested items or paper sacks at any time in the large box on the porch by the Chapel entrance.

You can continue to help keep the pantry shelves filled by: Donating the monthly items or any type of food items directly anytime into the large box on the porch by the Chapel entrance. To support Interfaith with a financial gift, you may mail your donation to Interfaith (1101 11th St., Wichita Falls, TX 76301), or donate on their website.

College Bible Study - Monday Afternoons: Join Brooke and fellow students on Monday afternoons for fellowship and Bible Study in our college classroom, Room 305, at 2:00 pm. For more information contact Brooke Reid at 940-692-2282 or brooke@firstchristianwf.com or follow the **FCC Wichita Falls College Ministry** on Instagram (@fccwf_college).

Electric Scooter Available in Sanctuary: First Christian now has available an electric scooter in the Sanctuary Narthex for congregational use. Inquire at the Welcome Center in the Sanctuary Narthex if you need to use it.

Member News:

♥**Hospitalized:** No one. Released and back home is Lou Murdock.

♥Our sympathies are extended to Genie Ratliff & Family on learning of the death of her husband, Jeff Ratliff, on February 24th. Services will be this Saturday, March 11th, at 11:00 am in the Sanctuary.

♥We extend our sympathies to Colleen James & Family on learning of the death of her mother, Jeanie Belcher, on February 25th. Services will be at a future date in California.

♥Our condolences are extended to Diana Costello & Family on learning of the death of her brother, Al Croix, on February 26th. Services were held on March 7th in Denton TX.

♥Our sympathies are extended to Cora Tucker & Family on learning of the death of her sister, Doris Weingartner, on March 4th. Services will be held on March 25th in Hutchison KS.



Wednesdays
AT THE TABLE
2023 LENTEN STUDY SERIES

Wednesdays
5:30 - 7:00 pm
March 1 to April 6



Spring Forward!
Get your clocks ready! Move your clocks forward 1 hour this Saturday night, March 11th, for Daylight Savings Time!

Take advantage of and enjoy your First Christian Church Library and its contents any time the church building is open.

Registration for Summer Camp is Open!

Summer is right around the corner and registration for camps at Disciples Crossing is now open. If you have a 1st-12th grade student who is interested in going to summer camp, please be sure and register them at: disciplescrossing.org/summer2023

DC Family Camp	May 26-28
DC Grand Camp	June 2-4
DC Youth Camp (6 th -12 th grade)	June 19-24
Imago Dei (6 th -7 th grade)	June 25 - July 1
DC Kids Camp 1 (1 st - 5 th grade)	June 26-30
DC Kids Camp 2 (1 st - 5 th grade)	July 31 - August 4

Time To Order Easter Flowers!



We will be using a variety of Spring flowers to decorate the Sanctuary for Easter. If you would like to furnish one in memory or honor of a loved one, please fill out the form below and return it with your check to the church office. The Easter flowers are \$13.00 each and the deadline to order is April 2nd.

Donor _____

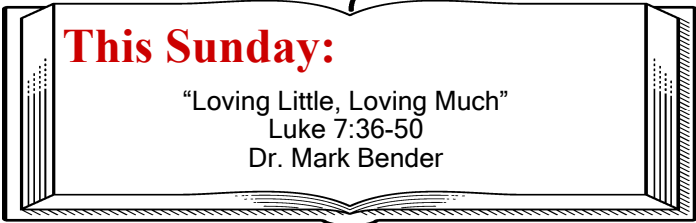
In memory/honor of _____
(circle one)

In memory/honor of _____
(circle one)

In memory/honor of _____
(circle one)

For Office use only: date received _____ # ordered _____

Total paid _____ Cash / Check # _____



This Sunday:

"Loving Little, Loving Much"
Luke 7:36-50
Dr. Mark Bender

OPPORTUNITIES

Sunday, March 12, 2023

8:40 Worship (Chapel)
9:30 Sunday School / Journey Through Scripture (Parlor)
10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Join the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

12:00 Pastor's Class (Rm 402)
NO Chancel Ringers (High School-Adults) (Stratten Hall)
NO Young Disciples Choir (Grades K-5) (Stratten Hall)
5:00 Youth Fellowship (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)
5:00 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402/405)

Monday, March 13, 2023

7:30-6:00 Children Come First "CCF" (M-F)
Young Ages Preschool "YAS" Closed This Week for Spring Break
9:00 CCF Chapel (Chapel)
10:00 College Group leaves for Six Flags (Arlington TX)
10:30 Christian Women's Fellowship "CWF" Board Meeting (Rm 310)
11:45 CWF Luncheon (Fellowship Hall)
7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310)
5:30 Outreach Ministry Meeting (Rm 305)
6:00 Faith Formation Ministry Meeting (Parlor)
6:00 Membership Ministry Meeting (Rm 222)
6:00 Property Ministry Meeting (Rm 310)
NO Common Ground Recovery Ministries "CGRM" Support Groups
7:00 Worship Ministry Meeting (Rm 200)

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Rm 405)
9:00 CCF Spanish (Rm 300)
10:30 Sheri Sutton's Lenten Bible Study (Rm 310)
1:00 Stretch Class (Parlor)
5:30 At the Table: Soup Supper & Communion (Fellowship Hall)
6:00 Lenten Electives:
Walk with Jesus Bible Study with Sheri Sutton (Rm 310)
How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth with Mark Bender (FH)
Understanding Prayer with Brooke Reid (Rm 305)
Letters from Jerusalem with Claire Baer (Rm 402)
7:00 Youth Fellowship (Grades 6-12) (Rm 402/Gym)
NO Chancel Choir (Grades 9-Adults) (Stratten Hall)
Thursday, March 16, 2023
9:00-12:00 40 Days of Outreach: Assist at Wichita Falls Area Food Bank (1230 Midwestern Pkwy)

Friday, March 17, 2023

9:00 CCF Music (Rm 300)

Sunday, March 19, 2023

8:40 Worship (Chapel)
9:30 Sunday School / Journey Through Scripture (Parlor)
10:45 Worship (Sanctuary or Join the Livestream on YouTube or Facebook.com/FCCWF)

12:00 Pastor's Class (Rm 402)
3:45 Chancel Ringers (High School-Adults) (Stratten Hall)
5:00 Young Disciples Choir (Grades K-5) (Stratten Hall)
5:00 Youth Fellowship (Grades 6-12) (Rm 403/Gym)
5:45 Young Disciples (Grades K-5) (Rm 402/405)

Monday, March 20, 2023

7:30-6:00 Children Come First "CCF" (M-F)
9:00-12:00 Young Ages Preschool "YAS" (M-F)
9:00 CCF Chapel (Chapel)
10:00 YAS Music (Fellowship Hall) (M-Th)
1:00 CWF Group 1 (2410 Farington)
2:00 College Bible Study (Rm 305)
6:15 40 Days of Outreach: Serve Dinner at Faith Refuge (710 E Hatton Rd)
7:30 Boy Scouts Troop 15 (Fellowship Hall)

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

9:30 FCC Staff Meeting / Worship Planning (Rm 310)
6:00 Stewardship Ministry Meeting (Rm 310)
6:30 Common Ground Recovery Ministries "CGRM" Support Groups

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

7:00 Elders' Breakfast (Rm 405)
9:00 CCF Spanish (Rm 300)
10:30 Sheri Sutton's Lenten Bible Study (Rm 310)
12:00 CWF Group 2 (Rm 405)
1:00 Stretch Class (Parlor)
5:30 At the Table: Soup Supper & Communion (Fellowship Hall)
6:00 Lenten Electives:

Walk with Jesus Bible Study with Sheri Sutton (Rm 310)
How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth with Mark Bender (FH)
Understanding Prayer with Brooke Reid (Rm 305)
Letters from Jerusalem with Claire Baer (Rm 402)

7:00 Youth Fellowship (Grades 6-12) (Rm 402/Gym)
7:00 Chancel Choir (Grades 9-Adults) (Stratten Hall)

Thursday, March 23, 2023

5:30 YAS Open House & Bake Sale (Fellowship Hall/Classrooms)

Friday, March 24, 2023

9:00 CCF Music (Rm 300)

Saturday, March 25, 2023

9:00-12:00 FCC Day at Interfaith Outreach Services (1101 11th St)

SERVING SUNDAY ELDERS

3/12: Craig Reynolds, Emily Wilson; Linda Cook, Presiding
3/19: Kim Ballard, Chris Showalter; Fred Gentry, Presiding

MARCH DIACONATE SERVERS

Curtis Sullivan, Captain; Terry Burross, Co-Captain
Curtis Dolberry, Linda Gipson, Becky Looney, Nancy Smith, Karen Burross, Shirley Craft, Martha Elms, Laura & Mark Pease, Mark Vallejo..

DIACONATE SCHEDULED FOR COMMUNION PREPARATION

3/12: Shirley Craft & Martha Elms 3/19: Curtis Sullivan & Linda Gipson

DIACONATE SCHEDULED FOR COMMUNION VISITATION

3/12: Becky Looney, Nancy Smith, Linda Gipson
3/19: Martha Elms, Shirley Craft, Curtis Sullivan

THE CHURCH STAFF . . .

Church Number 940-692-2282 FAX Number 940-696-3085
Web Page: www.firstchristianwf.com Church e-mail: susan@firstchristianwf.com
Dr. Mark Bender, Senior Minister 692-2282
Brooke Reid, Director of Youth & Young Adults 692-2282
Claire Baer, Director of Children's Ministries 692-2282
Jeanette Showalter, Director of Music Ministries 763-8515
Cheryl Appling, Business Administrator 691-7265
Ashli Fischer, Director of Children Come First 687-2231
Alisa Gardner, Director of Young Ages School 692-3640
Elizabeth Ivey, Common Ground Recovery Ministries 337-1712
Susan Marrs, Executive Secretary Tina Williams, Financial Secretary
Karen Watson, Administrative Assistant Debbie Watson, Organist
Tim Williamson, Director of Digital Media

FOR THE RECORD . . .

CGRM: (Tues., Feb. 28)	17
Neighborhood (Wed., March 1)	51
Sunday School (Sun. March 5)	83
Worship (March 5): 8:40am Worship Service	41
10:45am Worship Service	251
Total Worship	343
Sunday Receipts Needed Per Week	\$22,566.58
Sunday Receipts for 3/5/23	\$13,200.07
Through March 6: Income \$221,389.29	Expenses \$218,004.97

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FIRST CHRISTIAN
WICHITA FALLS, TEXAS
CHRISTIAN CHALLENGER
3701 Taft Boulevard | Wichita Falls TX 76308

THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGER
Pub. No. (USPS 559-820) Published
biweekly by First Christian Church, 3701
Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls TX 76308-2315.
Periodical postage paid at Wichita Falls
TX. - POSTMASTER: Send Address
Changes to Christian Challenger, 3701
Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, TX 76308-2315.