



125 Sedgefield Street  
BRISTOL, VIRGINIA 24201

## THE FIRST WORD

January 2025

First Baptist Family,

Happy New Year! I hope that you found our Advent services as moving and meaningful as I did. And I hope that your Christmas was a restful and recharging one. Like many of you, Clary, the kids, and I did some traveling to visit family – making our annual trip to visit family in Georgia and South Carolina, respectively. While it's always good to see family, the trip has also renewed my excitement for the new year. I'm excited for the things I believe that God has in store for us in 2025, and I want to tell you about a few of them.

First, however, I want to remind you that Christmas is more than just one day. Rather, it is a season. Now, this reminder is important because Christmas Day actually serves as a launching point for the work of the church. Now that the Christ child has been born and entered into the world, our work, our mission, our effort begins anew. And it is my hope that what we as a church have planned for 2025 will help continue the work of Christmas that Christ began so long ago. **In continuing that Christmas work, we're going to ordain and install some new deacons in worship on Sunday, January 19.** That is always a meaningful service, especially for the new deacons being ordained and installed. I know it's also meaningful for their families, too, which is why it's my hope that you will be sure to be present in worship that Sunday. **Then, the next day, on Monday, January 20, the church will host the community-wide Martin Luther King, Jr. Program. As I'm sure many of you will remember, we hosted this program last year. And like last year, the program will be held in the sanctuary and begin at 2 PM with a reception to follow in Rosser Hall.** Any time we can host community events is good, so if you are able to make it, I hope that you'll come for the program that day as well.

One of the things I'm most excited about in 2025, (and honestly, most nervous about, too) is that I've decided to make some changes to the way I preach. Since I'm going to be trying them for the first time, I want to ask for your patience in advance. Now, there are two primary changes that will be most noticeable to you. **The first is that we don't have a yearly theme for 2025. As I'm sure most of you remember, we've had a theme for the year nearly every year I've been here at FBC Bristol, but we're not doing that this year. Rather, I'm going to be doing something I haven't done before – preaching sermon series instead.** Most of these sermon series are going to be 6 weeks long, though some will be as short as 4 weeks. My thought is that it will be easier for all of us to really focus on the theme of a sermon series than it will be to focus on 1 theme that is referred to periodically throughout the year. Our first sermon series in 2025 is *The Mission of Jesus* and it will begin on Sunday, January 26. After all, the work of Christmas IS the mission of Jesus. So, beginning with Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah there in Luke 4, we're going to journey through Luke's Gospel to see what Jesus' mission is all about. This series will lead us all the way up to Lent.

**The other big change I'm making in the way I preach is that I'm going to be incorporating technology in my sermons.** Now that we've improved our video capabilities in the sanctuary, we're going to be using them consistently. **Some of that will include things like having the words to hymns and praise songs on the screen for people or having the text of our Scripture readings up and visible, but I'm also going to use the screens as part of my sermons. Occasionally, you're going to see a picture of some artwork that was inspired by the biblical text I'm preaching on for that Sunday. I'm also going to have slides that include some textual observations - things from the biblical text that I think are especially interesting or important that I want you to know about - and some points to take home – practical, tangible things you can take with you to help you grow in your walk with Christ.**

Now, all of this comes with a bit of a learning curve, both for me and for all of us as a staff as we look for the ways to best and most efficiently use the new capabilities we have while also being true to who we are as a congregation. Like anytime someone learns something new or tries something for the first time, I expect we'll have a few hiccups along the way, especially at first. It's my hope, however, that we'll learn more and get better at it as we go along. Since a new year provides a new beginning, I think this is the perfect time for us to be willing to mix things up a little bit, to be willing to try something new, to be willing to learn and grow – all so that we might see how God is working in us and through us here and now. After all, all of this is for God's glory. So, my dear brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to do something similar. While I know that many of you may have New Year's resolutions (which I hope include faithful church attendance and bringing guests with you to worship), I want to encourage you to try something new and be willing to learn and grow for God's sake. For that is one of the ways in which we grow closer to God, and I'm hard-pressed to come up with a better goal for the new year than that.

As always, it is a joy to be your pastor.

Grace and Peace,

Kris



## Notes... from Leigh

The January article is always an opportunity to reflect on the past year. It is also a time to dream, hope, and plan for the year ahead.

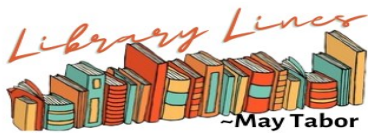
First, allow me to reflect...2024 at First Baptist Bristol was filled with incredible times of worship, reflection, study, missions, growth, fun, service, and fellowship. The sanctuary choir continued to provide wonderful, weekly music. And the recent cantata, "Silent Night, Holy Night", was incredible and inspiring. We saw the growth of our Praise Team to include more youth singing and playing instruments weekly in worship. We had guest musicians and faithful musicians providing instrumental and vocal music. We had baptisms, picnics, a 70th year remembrance of Women in Ministry, and services of remembrance for those we love. And, we had a group of six adults go on a weeklong mission trip to Charleston, SC! These are just a few highlights of our year.

As I look forward to 2025, I am excited about the future of the church. Throughout the congregation there is an excitement and a growing desire for more fellowship and more serving. I'm inspired by the faithfulness and willingness of those in the music ministry to serve as leaders in worship for our congregation. I'm also eager to see what the Lord has in store for our growing youth and children's ministries as well.

On a personal note: 2024 was sort of a roller coaster ride for me and Mark. Mark's job at the college was very demanding while he was serving as Interim Provost. I had a difficult but eventually very successful total knee replacement. We enjoyed a very memorable trip to France! And we also celebrated with both of our adult children their remarkable personal milestones. Finally, December 2024 marked the 5th year anniversary of FBC Bristol calling me as your Minister of Music. Our time here has been wonderfully affirming, and the friendships and relationships are lifelong. The drive to and from Wise is still not great, but we sure do love the people of First Baptist Bristol!

2025 is here! Let's embrace whatever God has in store for us personally and as a congregation. HE has never failed us yet! Amen.

Blessings, Leigh



Historical Fiction readers will want to check out our books by Michael Phillips:

*Dream of Freedom* and *Dream of Life*, American Dreams, Volumes I & II. From the coast of Africa to the turbulent South, *Dream of Freedom* is a sweeping saga of a people longing for freedom. *Dream of Life* explores the destiny of three races from Africa to the Trail of Tears as the country is plunged into civil war. As the slavery issue heats up, neighbors and family members are forced to take sides. Owning property, human and land, had become a right that Southerners would die to protect. Loyalties and families were divided. Every man had to decide for himself the true cost of freedom.

**Sunday, January 05, 2025**

**9:00 a.m.**

**Family Breakfast  
Rosser Hall**

There will be a full or partial breakfast available at no charge.

So, come and enjoy a meal and some fellowship before heading off to Sunday School.




## First Baptist Church of Bristol Staff

Dr. Kris Aaron.....Senior Pastor  
 Rev. Ben Ondrak.....Associate Pastor  
 Rev. Leigh Clark.....Minister of Music  
 Mrs. Jackie Burnette.....Pianist  
 Mrs. Andrea Pennington .....Organist

Ms. Marcine Robinette.....Parish Nurse  
 Mrs. Emma Vance.....Ministry Asst. for Children  
 Ms. Terri Thomas ..... Church Administrator  
 and Financial Secretary  
 Ms. Niki Judy..... Administrative Assistant



**Contact Information:**  
**Church Phone:** (276)669-8191  
**Fax:** (276)669-5082  
**Hours:** [info@fbcbristol.org](mailto:info@fbcbristol.org)  
**Website:** [www.fbcbristol.org](http://www.fbcbristol.org)  
 You can also find us on  
 Facebook. 



### FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

125 Sedgefield Street  
 Bristol, VA 24201

### Deacon of the Week for January

January 05	
January 12	
January 19	
January 26	

### January FBC Minister On-Call Schedule

January 04 & 05	Rev. Ben Ondrak	(423) 217-8934
January 11 & 12	Dr. Kris Aaron	(803) 225-0795
January 18 & 19	Rev. Ben Ondrak	(423) 217-8934
January 25 & 26	Dr. Kris Aaron	(803) 225-0795