



Pastor's Perspective by Paul Simpson Duke

April 25, 2018

We are now two weeks into a discussion of our church's stance and practice with reference to sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ). There is more to come, and it will be of a somewhat different character. The first two sessions involved information (Bible content and context, the history and current state of relationship between churches and gay persons, what it means to be a welcoming and fully including church, and why our church is talking about it now), and also words of clear advocacy for taking a positive stance on the issue. The conversation will now expand to include a greater number of voices, and will become more individually personal. On May 6, we will have a session of a number of people sharing their stories and perspectives. On May 20, we will have a town-hall style meeting in which anyone and everyone can express feelings, convictions, and concerns. Then on June 3, we will meet in facilitated small groups, where in a more intimate way we can all express what we need to express.

Now I have something to ask of you. If you were not present at either or both of the sessions, please listen to a recording of them, or read what was said. Written and audio versions of my April 15 presentation are available on the church website (go to "Past Events"), as is an audio and partial transcript of what was offered by our panel on April 22. You will also find Marissa Alaniz' remarks from that panel in this newsletter. The primary reason I ask that everyone be familiar with what was said is that a healthy process toward decision-making will more likely happen if we are all aware of what has been said so far. There will be differences among us as to what our final decision should be, but we should come to the decision on at least the common ground of having heard or read what has been offered into the whole conversation.

In the space that remains for me here, I'd like to respond to some concerns that typically arise when a church is having this kind of discussion. Sometime it will be asked, though to my knowledge it hasn't been asked here: "If the church votes to have a statement, will we become a 'gay church'?" I think such a question reflects worry that we might become a church *defined* by this issue, that it would be a central and constantly, prominently accented celebration-point in our church, and that people of the LGBTQ community will swell our numbers and take over the church's agenda. I can say with confidence that none of this would be the case. In the church of Jesus, no one is elevated to special treatment, no group of people is celebrated more than any other, and no ministry is made superior to others. In fact, the purpose of the kind of statement under consideration is to make clear that no one is treated differently than the rest, that all are welcomed and included the same. As to what might be the makeup of new members if such a statement is adopted, I was interested to learn from another pastor in town that the growth that took place in his church after they became publically welcoming was proportionately the same as in the population at large. Many of those who join are family members, friends, and others who are supportive of LGBTQ people and the gay or transgender persons who join are simply not afraid to be who they are, and they feel at home, loved, and encouraged.

Some people will ask: "But isn't this just going along with society?" The truth is that throughout history, parts of the church and parts of secular society have joined together to stop "going along" with other parts of the church and society for the sake of what is right. This happened in putting an end to child-labor abuses, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, racial desegregation and civil rights, and more. On this issue, as with so many others, we would not be taking the path of acquiescence, but of witness; and the root and goal of our witness would be unashamedly the gospel of Christ.

I hope you will honor your own convictions by stating them, and that you will honor your questions by asking them, and that we will all honor each other by listening, learning, and reflecting. It's a church conversation worthy having, and I'm glad we're having it. Let's make it a great one.

Children's Christian Education and Music



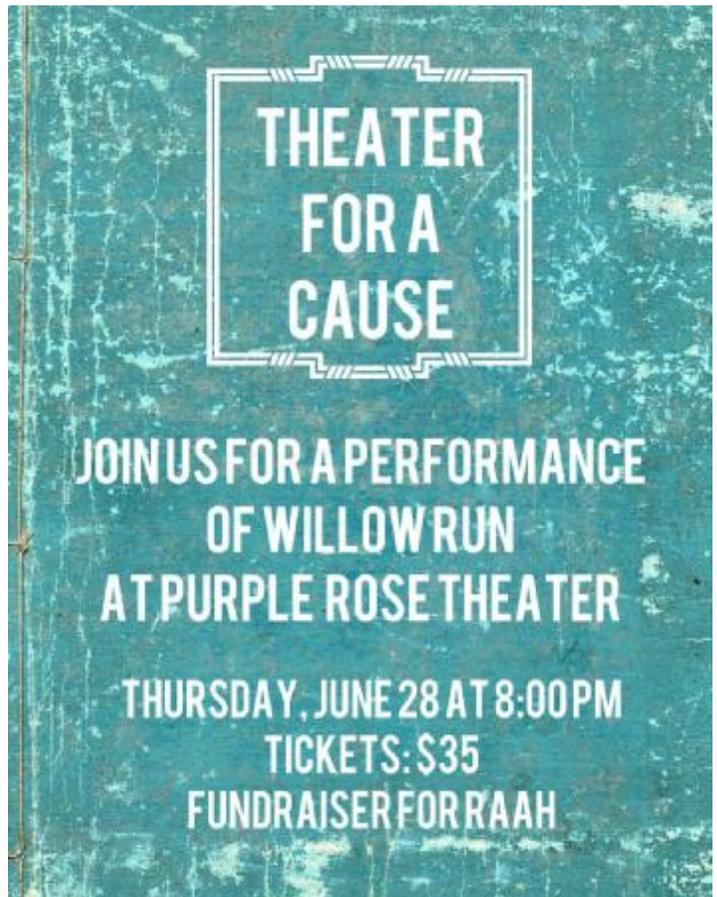
Vacation Bible School Scoop: We partner with other area churches to provide an powerful experience for our kids of what it would be like to live in Jesus' time. The kids will experience traditional family prayer rituals, a busy marketplace of crafts and snacks and short dramas of the stories of Jesus. **Please mark your calendars now for the mornings (9:30-12:15 pm) of Tuesday-Thursday, June 19-21.** If the half day schedule makes it difficult for your children to attend, connect with me and we'll do our best to make a plan. You can register online [here](#). **We are looking for VBS volunteers - teens and adults!** Please let Xan know if you are able to help serve God and our kids this way. Thanks!

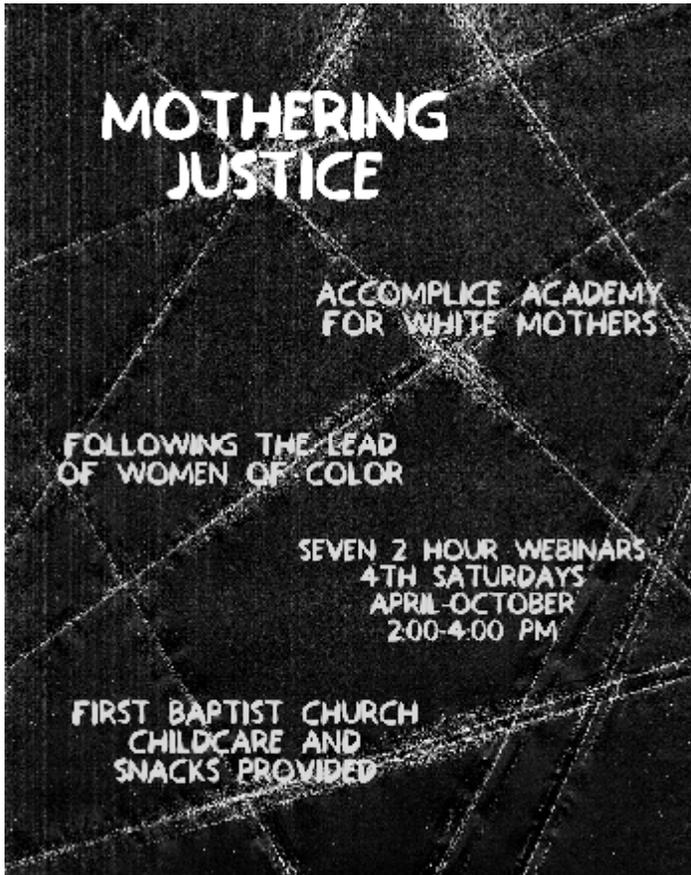
Our Faith and Family Small Group met this past Friday to serve together. The families worked together to prepare RAAH's (Religious Action for Affordable Housing) spring newsletter. We're committed to learning, praying, laughing and serving together.

Join us for an evening performance of *Willow Run* at the Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea on **Thursday, June 28** to support RAAH, Religious Action for Affordable Housing. Your purchase contributes towards our new campaign to assist local residents with housing. Tickets are \$35 and a check can be made out to RAAH and given to Xan or Edie. If using PayPal (paypal.me/RAAHfundraiser), tickets are \$37 to cover the transaction fee.

RAAH is supported by local congregations, including FBC and by their members. Edie Hurst and Xan Morgan both sit on the RAAH board.

A bit about the play:
During WWII the Willow Run Bomber Plant near Ypsilanti was the largest factory under one roof in the world. Some 40,000 employees, mostly women, turned out a B-24 Bomber every 55 minutes. *Willow Run* follows the journey of four women who migrated from all over America to find new lives at the plant. Along the way they overcome a multitude of challenges, learn to endure new sorrows, overcome deep-seated prejudices and forge new friendships. Winner of the 2017 Edgerton Foundation New Play Award. Original music by Ben and Jeff Daniels.





Want to make a difference together? Join Xan and other women to participate in Mothering Justice's Accomplice Academy webinar on 4th Saturdays of the month (beginning in April) from 2:00-4:00 pm here at church. Childcare will be provided as needed. This is a training for white women to follow the lead of women-of-color, organizing in the 2018 election and beyond. White women will learn about the historical division between women-of-color and white women organizing, and how we move forward to build successful coalitions for activism and co-liberation. We'll receive voter engagement techniques and coaching, fellows will have actionable ways to create meaningful change in their communities. Special guest collaborators include Confront White Womanhood, Allies for Change, 482Forward and Mamademics. Please sign up online at www.fbca2.events/motheringjustice or email Xan (xan@fbca2.org).



On Wednesday, April 11, some members of The Gathering campus fellowship gathered for their end-of-year party at Knight's. Pictured: Marissa Alaniz, Dan Stevers, Alicia Stevers, Paul Simpson Duke, Hayley Heaton, Emmett Stevers, Theona White, Chance Stine, Anjali Nemorin, and Stacey Simpson Duke (not pictured but in attendance: Christina Alaniz, Julien Heidt, and Sam Kidd). We have a break in our official program for the summer, but we hope to have some casual gatherings when people are in town.

FBC News & Happenings

Our Annual Program Meeting will be held after fellowship time (11:15) on April 29. After the business meeting we will enjoy a potluck lunch. Please plan to attend. There will be a sign-up sheet at the information desk and in the church office during the week. The Board of Care and Community will provide chicken, rolls, and beverages.

AB Women's Ministries Collection

Ahead of our May 3rd Salad Luncheon, we would like our church family to help us with the following project: We are collecting used purses and would like to fill them with tissues, lip moisturizer, hand lotion, nail clippers, note pads, pens, etc. The filled bags will go to a local women's shelter. Any questions, ask Roberta. Thank you, in advance, for helping us.

Thank you

Marilyn wrote "Thank you to Revs. Paul and Stacey and all the church members who assisted in Ed's Remembrance Service, and thank you to the choir for the flowers. Marilyn Marsh."

The Board of Care and Community and your congregation want to be available to help in life's difficulties and transitions, but we can only do that if we know you are experiencing them. We can offer visits, help with food, transportation and possibly other needs. If you or your family lets the church office know, we will contact you by your preferred method to see how we can help.

Emergency Contact Forms

There may be times when the church office or staff needs to contact a family member of someone in our congregation. If the family member does not attend FBC, we will not have the information we need. We would appreciate each family in the congregation completing an emergency contact form (to be used only by the staff) and leaving it in the offering plate, at the Information Counter, or mailing it to the church office. Forms can be found at the Information Counter or in the church office.

FBC e-Connection and Newsletter Email Distribution

From time to time, we hear from folks that they didn't get word of various events. Here is a quick summary of how to get your email added to one or both of the distribution lists...

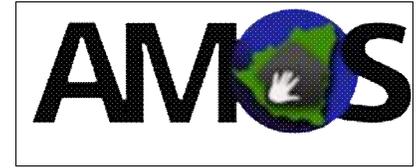
The church office sends out two communications electronically:

- **FBC e-Connections** are sent out with important news about immediate happenings at the church and the concerns of church members, such as prayer requests, birth and death announcements.
- **FBC Newsletter** for distribution of the twice-monthly church newsletter for those who want to receive it electronically (it helps save on paper and postage, besides arriving at your computer on date of publication!)

If you aren't currently subscribed to either list and wish to be, please email the church office at office@fbca2.org and we will send out an invitation to subscribe to either or both lists. When you get the email invitation, click on the link to finish the subscription process. ***In order to prevent complaints about spam, the distribution program doesn't allow us to simply add an email address to the list.***



To all of our AMOS Friends,



We're writing to you because, as you may know, following an announcement by the Nicaraguan government of a significant hike in the social security taxes, Nicaragua has had 5 days of unrest with university students and opposition groups taking to the streets to protest the reforms. Unfortunately, during protests there have been clashes between them and the police and government supporters, leading to violence and deaths on both sides. Buildings and vehicles have been burned and looting of several supermarkets and stores also occurred on Saturday and Sunday. The loss of human lives is the worst of it all, as these are irreplaceable and are the cause for pain and sorrow for their families, their loved ones, and the nation.

We want you to know that at this moment we (AMOS staff and health promoters) are all safe and have felt safe at AMOS and our homes because the violence has all been in the streets where the protests are, in neighborhoods far from AMOS. We all know someone who has been affected directly by the conflict, but so far we have all been ok. Nationally tensions have been rising, but yesterday President Daniel Ortega announced that the reforms have been revoked and called for a national dialogue. We hope that in the coming days a dialogue will begin that will lead Nicaragua in the direction of peace. Tensions remain high and the next few days will be critical to the outcome of this situation, depending on the dialogue between the government and the opposition. We are so grateful for all your love and prayers and ask for more prayers as this critical week unfolds, not only for AMOS but also for all of the involved groups. We believe in peaceful approaches to resolve this crisis and are praying that peace will come to Nicaragua soon through a constructive and inclusive democratic dialogue process and solution where the needs of the nation are prioritized.

We are deeply saddened by the deaths that have occurred and the other forms of violence, destruction and human injury that have occurred. We ask that you join us in prayer for the families of those who have died and for the people of Nicaragua. We pray that this situation may be resolved as Jesus would have done, with peace, understanding and love.

We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will keep all of you posted. Those of you who have an upcoming mission team or volunteer experience with AMOS, please contact John Carroll at johncaroll@amoshealth.org to make decisions related to your team here in Nicaragua. We are hoping that normal activities will resume soon, but this will depend on the outcomes of this week.

Thank you for supporting AMOS and the work we do. In the midst of situations like these you give us hope and life-giving resources to continue our work to help those in need in our communities and in this crisis. Through you we continue to do our best to save lives and promote peace, health and hope. Thank you for understanding, your prayers and your love for our beloved Nicaragua.

With much love,

Roberto Martinez (AMOS Board President)
David Parajon (AMOS Executive Director)
Laura Parajon (Medical Director)
Alejandra Medrano (Operations Director)
Christine Lafferty (Development Director)
Gabriela Woo (Program Director)
John Carroll (Delegations and Volunteer Manager)

On behalf of the AMOS team

Follow us on Facebook! If you aren't already a fan of FBCA2 on Facebook, come on over and "Like" our page: facebook.com/fbca2. We post regular updates there about what's going on around here, along with the occasional devotional thought. You can post on our wall as well. If you are already a fan, did you know that you can easily share certain FBCA2 posts with your own Facebook friends? Events and links that can be shared will have a "Share" button (in addition to the usual "Like" and "Comment" buttons). Click "share" and the event or link will show up on your own Facebook page for all your friends to see. It's a great way to get the word out about special happenings at our church.



Welcoming and Inclusion Words from Marissa Alaniz

As the chair of the Board of Outreach, I share with you the three goals that constitute our committee's vision.

One: Neighborliness - Reaching out to our neighborhood and our neighbors.

One of the reasons I am so passionate about this church is because this community - you people - have changed my life. You have helped me discover purpose. You have helped me develop my talents - in teaching kids, in leadership, in fundraising, in mission work to help others.

Did you know we have a Core Purpose Statement? It's found on our website: "We are an American Baptist Church in Ann Arbor that provides a welcoming, inspiring place for seekers, believers, doers, and dreamers of all ages who want to find meaning and community during a time of changing social, political, and cultural tides."

Meaning and community. You people have given me meaning and community. A supportive youth ministry, a campus ministry community, at times when I was lost or stressed or struggling. You have given me mentors, peers, friends, family.

Did you know that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are almost five times more likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth? Did you know that 40% of transgender adults report having made a suicide attempt? Someone else may be seeking this meaning and community, these mentors, these peers, these friends, this family. Are we reaching that person?

Two: Hospitality - Responding with Christ's warmth and grace to all who enter this building.

I had my 16th birthday party in the Fellowship Hall of this church, and my best friend at the time, who was gay, joked that he wouldn't be able to come to my party because it would be held in a church. *This* is religion for many people in the LGBTQ+ community. It is unwelcoming. It is scary. It has preached to people that their identity is wrong.

Why? Why do we feel so uncomfortable around people who are different than ourselves? The answer is long, and I'd argue that it's not something that's inevitable. It *is* socially constructed. It *is* institutionalized. I once read this: "The first thought that goes through your mind is what you have been conditioned to think. What you think next defines who you are." We all stereotype. We all make assumptions. Yes, you, and me, too. It is the natural way that our brain jumps to and draws conclusions. But we are reflections of our upbringings, our culture, our experiences, and our surroundings.

Are you discriminated against because of your skin color? Have you had to "come out"? Do you identify as a different gender than the sex you were assigned at birth? Have you been catcalled, or sexually harassed, or sexually assaulted? Do you go to bed hungry? Do you have to hide, or distance yourself, or be self-conscious about any of your identities? Do you have to feel the pressures or balance the weight of multiple of these identities? I'm guessing most of your answers are "no." Because we are any of these things: white, a man, financially stable, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender - meaning the same gender as the sex we were assigned at birth, we have more power than we may know. It is called privilege. It is real.

Privilege is being said to have "leadership skills" versus being labeled as "bossy." It is not having our sexual assault blamed on what we were wearing.

Privilege is being pulled out of line in airport security and knowing we haven't been singled out due to our race. It is being able to sit and wait for a friend in a Starbucks coffee shop without being arrested for it. It is being able to ask for directions in an unfamiliar neighborhood without being shot.

Privilege is not having to worry that our decision to use a restroom will upset others. It is having people call us by the pronouns by which we want to be called. It is being able to be called as a pastor or marry the person we love, without any hesitation, in any church.

Privilege does not discount hard work. It does not discount accomplishments. But it does mean that in this society, our identities determine *opportunities* for hard work and *potential barriers* to accomplishments.

I challenge us not to feel guilty, but to maintain awareness of the privileges from which we benefit. In order to progress, to be more equitable, more just, we must commit ourselves to unlearning. By unlearning, I mean being open and willing to listen to others' perspectives, change our minds, and not get defensive or offended. Considering the privilege we have - the real benefits that society affords us by placing value on certain aspects of our identity - is a start. **But moreover, we can use this privilege - this power for good. To advocate for others who cannot effectively or safely advocate on their own. Is this not what Jesus did?**

When my friend expressed discomfort at the mere notion of visiting a church building, I responded to him, "oh no, my church is not like that." But those words feel empty. They are not enough. If we are truly open to others, to diversity, to all people - they are not enough. How are we not "like that," unless we actively advocate for historically oppressed, currently marginalized groups, people for whom society has not afforded the same privileges it has afforded us? How are we not "like that," unless we state, advertise, and shout from the rooftops what we are like?

That friend, and many other friends, taught me that people of a different sexual orientation or gender identity than my own experience the same happiness, the same heartbreak, the same spirituality, the same love. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or any other identity is not a choice. It is not a phase. It is not a lifestyle. It is natural, it is God-given, and it is beautiful.

Three: visibility - Raising awareness of our congregation within our community, as a way of raising awareness of the love of God for our world.

I share with you that Ann Arbor's non-discrimination ordinance was put into place in 1972. Ann Arbor was one of the first communities in the country to add protections that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. And yet, 40 years later, these protections have not expanded statewide or nationwide, and certainly not to the institution of the church.

I do not want to live in a culture where this is the norm. I do not want people to be able to blame intolerance on their religion. If I had not grown up in this church and grown to know the intellectual progressivism that is preached, the openness of the people here, and the ambitious women in leadership, I can tell you that I may not have come here. When someone asks me what church I go to, I immediately supplement the name "First Baptist Church" with a description of our faith community.

Our church is regarded for welcoming in other avenues. We serve a meal in this building to anyone in need every week. We helped start the Groundcover newspaper. We let people who are cold take shelter in our building and on our property. These things do not go unnoticed. But by not taking this next step, we close ourselves off to potential newcomers, to diversity.

Diversity creates thriving communities. It brings together creative and driven minds, a collaboration of different perspectives, skills, and abilities. It inspires, motivates, and celebrates. It increases productivity and vitality, and enhances our understanding of the world. **Diversity means nothing without, not just tolerance, but full acceptance and inclusion. The future of our church community depends on this.**

I grew up knowing that equality, equity, and justice was right. It is right! It is no secret that I am an advocate for this process. I have mentioned it from the pulpit every time I've gotten the chance. Were you listening? Are you listening? You will get a chance next month to listen further, as we center the voices of those that have dealt with this fight firsthand. I want this for our church. It will make a difference in the lives of others. It will place value on each person who enters our doors as an individual worth loving fully and faithfully. It will create truly radical hospitality.

I can't wait for future generations to see a little less bigotry and inequality than we've seen, for them to gawk that there was ever a judicial system or broader religious culture so blatantly discriminatory and unjust. This is long overdue, not just here, but across our state, across our denomination, across our culture, and across our country.

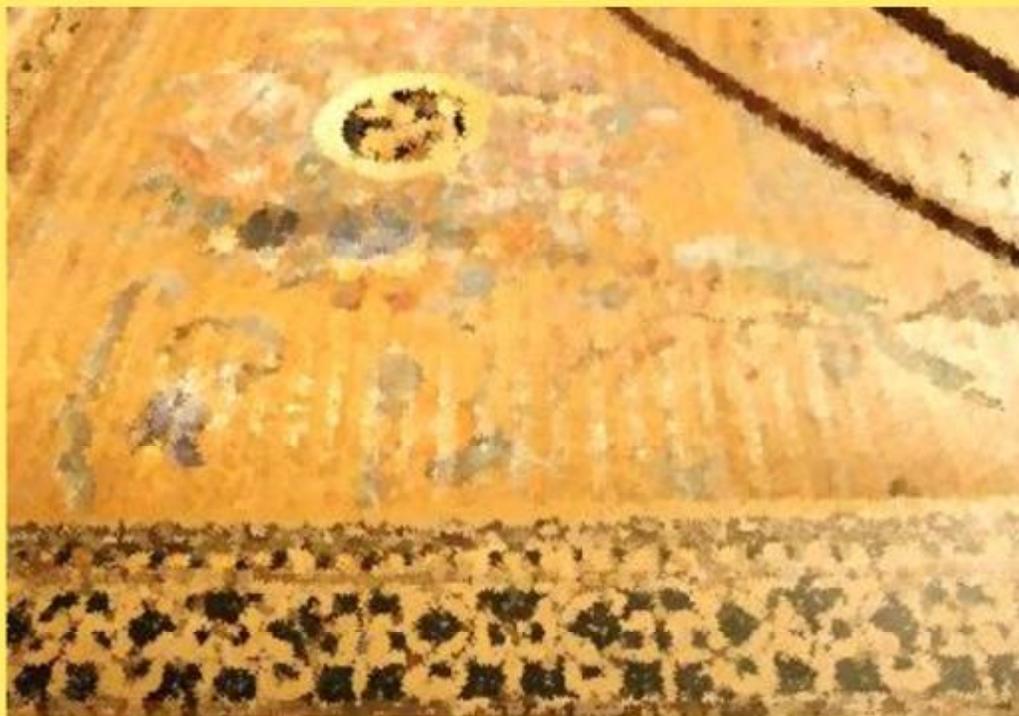
Legalizing same-sex marriage did not end the struggle for the LGBTQ+ community nationwide. Becoming welcoming and fully inclusive will not end the struggle here. That time is still to come. But I believe that change starts with us - in our communities, in our families, in our churches. By showing we care about equality, equity, and justice. **By showing we can and we will advocate for oppressed groups, as Jesus would do. It is bold, it is brave, and it is right.**

First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor
Coffee Break Concert Series, 2017-2018 ⑦
Free Concert and Open to the Public

Bach^{and} Handel

Harpsichord Concert

by Shin-Ae Chun



May 10, 2018
Thursday at 12:15 pm

517 E. Washington St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104
734) 663-9376 / www.fbca2.org

May 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 5:30 Vespers	2 1:30 Bible Study	3 12:00 ABWM Salad Lunch 7:30 Choir	4	5
6 10:00 Worship 11:30 2nd Hour	7	8 1:30 ChristCare 5:30 Vespers	9 1:30 Bible Study	10 12:15 Coffee Break Concert 7:30 Choir	11	12 1:00 C&Y Rehearsal
13 10:00 C&Y Worship 11:30 2nd Hour	14	15 1:00 Beecher- Brewer Cir. 5:30 Vespers	16 1:30 Bible Study	17 1:00 MacGregor- Stitt Circle 7:30 Choir	18 7:00 F&F Small Group	19
20 10:00 Worship 11:00 ABWM Bake Sale 11:30 2nd Hour	21	22 9:30 ABWM Board 5:30 Vespers	23	24 7:30 Choir	25	26
27 10:00 Worship	28 <i>Memorial Day</i> Church Office & Buildings Closed	29 5:30 Vespers	30	31 7:30 Choir		

First Baptist Church
517 E Washington Street
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www.fbca2.org
office@fbca2.org

The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors



**Next
Newsletter
Deadline:**
Sunday, May 6