



Pastor's Reflections by Stacey Simpson Duke

December 11, 2019

This past Sunday, my family and I went to a local Christmas tree farm to get our pictures taken. I felt a swirl of emotions. In my experience, trauma (in my case, cancer and its ongoing treatment) and grief (in my case, over the loss of my dad) make it difficult to approach the holidays with the straightforward, pure celebration we tend to associate with the season. Going to get family photos, I felt fragile. I don't look the way I looked in previous Christmas pictures. I don't feel the way I used to feel, either.

As we drove up, our photographer was just finishing with another family. They looked so handsome and happy in their coordinated outfits, the two younger children laughing and running ahead of the parents and older brother. Watching them, I felt wistful. My mind and heart pitched backwards into my own family's younger years, before we had sustained so much trauma and loss. I envied the seeming innocence of that young family.

On our way towards the photographer, the four of us walked by the five of them, and the mother and I briefly made eye contact. She was beautiful, and I was surprised to see something soft and almost vulnerable in her eyes. A few minutes later, as my family and I walked through the trees, our photographer talked about the sweet family she had just been working with. She told me that several years ago, they had lost a son, and that they had brought a photo of him to be in the pictures with them. She mentioned the little boy's first name, and I suddenly realized who the family was. I've never met them, but they have good friends in our church. Our congregation prayed for their little boy for months after he was diagnosed with cancer; he died almost six years ago, at the age of two-and-a-half.

Watching them from a distance, not realizing who they were or what they'd been through, all I could see was their beauty, their happiness, their seeming innocence, the liveliness of their children. I didn't see that they were moving towards the holidays with a child-sized hole in their hearts and in their family. I didn't see that they had sustained a shattering, life-altering loss. I didn't see how that loss had changed them, and how it hurts them still.

Most of the time, we have no idea what other people are carrying or how hard they may be struggling just to cope. Even when we have some idea of what another person is going through, we don't often truly understand the extent of another person's sadness or stress or anxiety or exhaustion. We only know each other from the outside in, and the outside is only ever a small part of reality. If we truly saw and understood each other's pain, would we treat others with more gentleness and compassion? Knowing that we don't fully see and understand each other's pain, can we just decide to treat others with gentleness and compassion?

Could we extend that same gentleness and compassion towards ourselves? Some of you are grieving fresh and staggering losses. Some of you have grief that may not be fresh but may be provoked in fresh ways by the holidays. Some of you are carrying nearly unbearable stress or anxiety. Some of you have burdens the rest of us know nothing about. The relentless pressure at this time of year, to be upbeat and optimistic, can amplify our burdens and the feeling of isolation. But the gifts of this season - hope, wonder, peace, love - do not depend on our cheerfulness or our ability to manufacture the "Christmas spirit." The gifts of Christmas come to us wrapped in baby flesh - is there anything more vulnerable, more helpless? The gifts of Christmas are especially for those who know their neediness, for those who feel fragile, for those who are ready to receive.

'Tis the season to be jolly? Well, sure, if that's how you feel. But more importantly, 'tis the season to be kind and tender towards ourselves and others, to see each other and ourselves with soft eyes and gentle hearts, to recognize that our weakness and pain connects us rather than separates us, and to make ourselves ready to receive the gifts of God, who, in the form of powerlessness, will be born among us.

# FBC News & Happenings



## AB Women's Ministries Christmas Celebration

Join us for a Christmas Celebration on December 15th. The ABWM ladies gratefully accept any donations of gently-used holiday decorations; crafted pieces for the Accessory Boutique, such as scarves, hats, gloves, etc.; items for the Kitchen Boutique, like towels, dishcloths, gently-used recipe books; reading materials for the Book Boutique, including bookmarks, unused journals and address books, etc. Please price the donations where possible, as you know the value of the items and can mark them appropriately.

The Bake Shoppe is a popular area to shop for cakes, cookies, breads, pies, candies, muffins, or scones, to name a few of the delicious treats available. The ABWM ladies welcome other bakers to join in the fun by donating their baked goodies. Each item should be labeled with name of item, special content (such as nuts) and the price of the baked goods. Since you know the value of the ingredients, it is more helpful to have you set the price. Please remember that the baked goods should not need any refrigeration.

The Fellowship Hall will be set up on Saturday, Dec 14, starting at 10am. You can bring in any donations, crafts, decorations, or baked goods to the church kitchen or fellowship hall. If you will be later than 12:30pm on Saturday, please call Roberta Hause or Joyce Robbins. Baked goods can also be brought to the kitchen on Sunday morning before church.

The Christmas Celebration is a major fundraiser for the AB Women's Ministries' many programs, both inside and outside of our church. The past support from our church family has been deeply appreciated.



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.



This January, our Here Anchor Team invites you to join us for the Knowing and Loving Our Neighbors series. Throughout the year a weekly hot meal (Vespers) is served at First Baptist. We also partner with local nonprofits who are providing space for folks to stay during the cold days and nights of winter. Our Knowing and Loving Our Neighbors series will equip us for our work individually and collectively as we follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Please plan to join us!

~ The Here Anchor Team

Pete Stover, Carolyn Grapentine, Mary Davis & Tom Gebhardt

### January 12th: Knowing our Neighbors

Sarah Kruszka, Operations Director for [Shelter Association of Washtenaw County](#), housed at the Delonis Center, will be our Second Hour guest on January 12th. In Washtenaw County, 5000 people are experiencing homelessness. Sarah will help us understand the challenges of being homeless, specifically for our community in the winter. We are one of the sites for the Delonis Center's Rotating Shelter; our week is March 16th through the 23rd. Please join us, and bring your questions as we explore how to better serve these neighbors.

### January 19th: Loving our Neighbors

What a wonderful feeling when a stranger acknowledges our presence by introducing themselves or even just smiling and saying hello. That acknowledgement by another human allows us to see that we are alive, that someone sees us as like themselves. God sees us all, not as rich or poor, black, brown, or white, nice new clothes or old scruffy ones, Christians or not.

Sometimes it is hard for us to act that way, connecting with those who may seem different from us. Are they really different? We have many friends and neighbors on the outside, both physically and metaphorically; they need our help!

On January 19<sup>th</sup> during Second Hour, Sheri Wander, who runs the [M.I.S.S.I.O.N.](#) Warming Center with FBC and a professional in communication, gives a brief workshop on who our neighbors are and how we can connect with them in a meaningful way. Please do come! We will host the Warming Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays in February.

### January 26th: Undie Sunday!

Watch the sales-Undie Sunday is coming! Our goal is to collect 200 pairs of new men's underwear and 100 of women's in January. Any size, style, or brand is useful. Women's feminine hygiene products are all welcome. These sorts of items are rarely donated and are in short supply among our Vespers, Rotating Shelter, and Warming Center guests. So find a good price on those boxers, briefs, hi-cuts, or bras and bring them in January.



# Join us Christmas Eve

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**4:00pm**

**INFORMAL, FAMILY-FRIENDLY**

**free reservations: [tinyurl.com/fbca2Eve1](https://tinyurl.com/fbca2Eve1)**

**7:30pm**

**A FESTIVAL OF LESSONS AND CAROLS**

**free reservations: [tinyurl.com/fbca2LC191](https://tinyurl.com/fbca2LC191)**

# January 2020



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 <i>New Year's Day</i> <i>Church Office &amp; Buildings Closed</i>	2	3	4
5 10:00 Worship	6	7 5:30 Vespers	8 1:00 Bible Study 6:30 Gathering	9 7:30 Choir	10	11
12 10:00 Worship 11:30 2nd Hour	13	14 5:30 Vespers	15 * newsletter * 1:00 Bible Study 6:30 Gathering	16 7:30 Choir	17	18
19 10:00 Worship 11:30 2nd Hour	20	21 5:30 Vespers	22 1:00 Bible Study 6:30 Gathering	23 7:30 Choir	24	25
26 10:00 Worship 11:15 Annual Financial Meeting	27	28 5:30 Vespers	29 1:00 Bible Study 6:30 Gathering	30 5:15 Christian Ed 7:30 Choir	31	



First Baptist Church  
517 E Washington Street  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2015  
734-663-9376  
[www.fbca2.org](http://www.fbca2.org)  
[office@fbca2.org](mailto:office@fbca2.org)

The Reverends Paul & Stacey Simpson Duke, Co-Pastors

Next  
Newsletter  
Deadline:  
*Sunday, Jan 12*

