



The Outlook

First Baptist Church Clayton

Show • Tell
Grow • Serve

February 22, 2026

Volume 49 Number 7

Be more receptive to God's wishes

By Dr. Len Keever
Pastor

Outside the window a neighbor is trimming one of his trees. Late winter and early spring are good times to prune certain trees. It is true for people too.

In John 15:1-2 Jesus uses the image of pruning to teach the disciples about God's work in them. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit."

Years ago, when Cathy and I were serving a church near Charlottesville, Virginia, we lived near several apple orchards. Each year between late February and early March, apple growers would prune their trees by cutting away branches that put too much strain on the tree.

You could always tell a well-maintained orchard by how the trees were shaped. On the other hand, trees that were left to themselves looked straggly; in the fall their apples were not as plump and juicy because the tree just couldn't support too many apples. The best apples were from trees that

were pruned, nurtured and cared for.

As we begin the season of Lent, I realize I need to do some pruning. With God's help I am hoping to identify things in my life that put a strain on me. This is the time of year to evaluate to make sure I have the right balance in my life so I can give my faith the attention it deserves.

For example, if I am so tired from the day's tasks that I don't have the energy to take a few moments to reflect on the day and where I have sensed God's presence, my fruit may also fail to mature.

I often wonder if the obsession many of us have about losing weight and getting in shape during late winter and early spring isn't really a reflection of something deeper percolating inside of us. I wonder if what is really going on is that the Spirit is urging us to prune, to declutter, to tend to the soil of our hearts so that we are more receptive to the things God wants to grow in us.

I wonder if the longing to shed a few pounds isn't really a spiritual hint that we need to shed some bad habits and to develop healthier habits to grow in our relationship with God.

Lent is a season of contrition, a season to lament our failures and seek a better rela

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Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

– 1st Timothy 4:12



Emily Carole Farmer, Barrett Long to sing February 28

Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 28 at 5 p.m. Barrett Long and Emily Carole Farmer will represent First Baptist Church Clayton in a Community Church Youth Choir concert at Wake Forest Baptist Church

They will sing “Crown Him Lord of All,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Noel,” “Sing

a Jubilant Song,” and “Be Thou My Vision” all in three and four part harmony. We look forward to this wonderful concert and hope you will join us to support our youth musicians.

Wake Forest Baptist Church is located at 107 East South Ave., Wake Forest, NC 27587.

Blood drive set for Friday Feb. 27

The American Red Cross and First Baptist Church Clayton will hold their third annual Blood Drive on Friday, February 27 from 12 noon to 5 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

According to the Red Cross, local blood supplies are severely low. Since Thanksgiving, supplies have been depleted by 35% due to historic levels of flu cases, the Christmas holiday and weather. Please consider donating blood. It could save a life.

If you haven't signed up, please call Terry in the church office at 919-553-4161 to make an appointment to give blood. You may also use the link or the QR code to sign up.

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?order=DATE&range=10&zip-Sponsor=FirstBaptistClayton>



?? Prison Ministry, Anyone ??

“When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Mt. 25:39-40

The Gladys Creech Long Termer Social Ministry visits the NCCIW Canary Unit on State Street in Raleigh and we need some new faces

to keep this group going for another 45 years.

We typically visit the prison on the 2nd Monday of the month from 4:40 to 6:00 pm for a time of devotion, prayer, fellowship with food, and some fun (game, art, puzzle, craft, music, etc.)

Mainly we try to shine the light and love of Jesus.

If interested contact Susan Parker at: sgjp54183@gmail.com or 919-333-8394

Dear Church Family,

We would like to thank you for your prayers, food, cards and gifts during this difficult time. We are so fortunate to have a loving and caring church family that supports us. We felt every prayer throughout this journey.

We know Betty Matthews is with our Lord and Savior and is at peace.



Love, Tim and Lynn Matthews and Family

Ministry Team Focus: Prayer and Visitor/New Member

At First Baptist Church Clayton there are eight Ministry teams dedicated to loving and supporting our church family. These teams function under the auspices of the Deacons and are led by active Deacons. They are Prayer, Bereavement, Casserole, Celebration, Homebound, Hospital Visitation, Transportation and Visitor/New Member. This week our focus is on the Hospital Visitation and Transportation ministry teams.

As it should be, the Prayer Ministry Team is the largest ministry team at First Baptist. All active Deacons and a large number of lay people use the power of collective prayer to help those in need of God's intervention. Prayer requests come to the Prayer Ministry by calls, email or prayer cards (located in the pew racks). Contact with a family member is made to ascertain if it's okay to share the request. All are welcome to join this team and be placed on the email list. Call Rudy Oliver at 919-271-1178, Linda Hester at 919-825-9516 or David Earp at 919-524-4086 if you would like to be a part of this most important and powerful ministry.

The Visitor/New Member Ministry makes sure visitors to First Baptist receive a warm and hearty welcome when they attend worship services and church events. With love and appreciation this ministry makes newcomers aware of worship, service and mission opportunities, and helps them connect with others to form bonding Christian relationships.

Team members put together Visitor Gift Bags and with the help of ushers, distribute them to first-time visitors. When visitors become regulars, this team works to familiarize them with our church and encourages them to become an active part of the church family.

Periodic luncheons, socials and information sessions are held to further educate our newest friends on our mission to Show God's love, Tell the Good News, Grow spiritually and Serve others in our community and world. If you like to meet new people and share God's love, this ministry is for you. Please call Richie Johnson at 919-669-1687 or Stewart McLeod at 919-669-7542 to join.

The Ministry teams at First Baptist Church Clayton are not committees and members are not elected by the church. To participate, all you have to do is volunteer. And you do not have to be an official member of our church to serve on a Ministry team. For more information about the Team Ministry, contact chairman Ann Austin at 919-333-6791 or dddhd@aol.com.

There is a bulletin board with information on all eight Ministry teams in the hallway near the south vestibule to the sanctuary. If the Lord leads you to join a Ministry team, there is a place on the vestibule where you can write down your name and contact information. A team member will be in touch.

Be more receptive

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tionship with God. It is also the season to prune. Just realizing the tree is overgrown doesn't increase its yield in the fall.

Excess must be cut away. The work must be done. The same is to be said in our Spiritual life. The first thing is to examine and determine what is stunting our growth, but then it is to do the work.

Yes, pruning is hard work, often painful work. But it is always good work when it leads us to bear much fruit for Christ.

The verse from Elevation Weekend applies to us all, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." – John 15:5

Memorials and Honorariums

WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR GIFTS TO THE

General Fund in Memory of

- Jackie Fussell, Jean Lee and Emily Morgan by John and Dolores Bagley
- Ricky Dean Barbour and Betty Matthews by Joe and Linda Hester
- Sigrid Harris by Gerald and Glenda Toler
- Jean Lee by Terry and Katherine Parrish
- Bobbie Sue Batts by the Bill O'Neal Mission Group
- Betty Matthews and Bobbie Sue Batts by John and Dolores Bagley
- Emily Morgan by the Faith Sunday School Class
- Helen Ellerbe, Judy Cox and Jean Lee by Doug and Sandra Phillips
- Jean Lee and Betty Matthews by Jerry and Sharon Poole
- Betty Matthews and Jean Lee by Bill and Sarah Brooks
- Jean Lee by Mary Nell Ferguson
- Betty Matthews by Wendy Hansbrough
- Betty Matthews by Martha McCullen
- Betty Matthews by David and Pam Outlaw

Organ Fund in Memory of

- Ricky Dean Barbour, Jean Lee, Jackie Fussell and Betty Matthews by Jo Ann Hardee
- Jean Lee, Jackie Fussell, Betty Matthews, Gardner Temple,
- George Lovering and Ricky Dean Barbour by Anne Abene
- Marie Monsees, John Zullo and Gene Stephenson by Jerry and Dianne Carroll
- Jean Lee by Ronnie and Shay Hahn
- Jean Lee by Jean L. Bryant
- Jean Lee by Ricky and Sherry Smith
- Jean Lee by Martha McCullen

Music Fund in Memory of

- Bobbie Sue Batts by Rudy and Edwina Oliver

Heck Jones Fund in Memory of

- Jean Lee by David and Nancy Turlington
- Betty Matthews by Rudy and Edwina Oliver

First Baptist Church Piecemakers Fund in Honor of

- the Piecemakers by David and Nancy Turlington

Weekly Reports

Worship Attendance

Sunday, February 15.....	188	Sunday, February 8.....	196
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Sunday School Attendance

Sunday, February 15.....	123	Sunday, February 8.....	156
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General Fund Giving

Sunday, February 15.....	\$11,968	Sunday, February 8.....	\$23,971
2026 Weekly Needs.....	\$17,470		