

For our 153rd birthday celebration, we asked a few people to share about God's enduring love, as they've experienced it with and through this community. They come to you this morning with memory and hope, gratitude and love, for FBC McMinnville; with stories about who this church has been and with calls for our communal future. Here they are -

GEORGINE BENNER:

Happy Birthday, FBC, we are 153 years old! You look great. You don't look a day over 50.

The writer Margaret Minnicks tells us "Your birthday is a transition from what was, to what is to be." She shares that a birthday is a time to celebrate birth itself. It is an expression of thanks to God for being born and still being alive. It is also an occasion to rethink your life. It is a great time to reflect on the past, evaluate your present and make plans for your future. So will you join me in reflecting on the past, present and future of FBC?

Birthday ... our birth was the beginning of our life and you may say that God created us, to serve a purpose in this world. Every time when we have a birthday, it is an indication that we still have work to do for the Kin-dom of God. The Kin-dom that we gave thanks to in this morning's scripture reading of Psalm 136. Our birthday is a sign that we have another chance to fulfill our unique mission.

And we know at First Baptist Church we are very good at fulfilling our unique mission. As we reflect on the past, we know of the many stories of all the great things happening here at the church, in the community and the world. Stories about the STAR Room, Family Place, all the AA meetings in the building, hosting the Warming Shelter, supporting our International Missionaries and trips to Nicaragua and Mexico. All of this is wonderful work and helping bring the kin-dom of God alive. But today I want to focus more specifically on how we as a congregation know how to celebrate.

Because birthdays are about celebration and fellowship, right? And we do that very well! I have fond memories of many Harvest Parties. Over the years we have gathered at Pam & Cliff Watts' farm, Ray & Barbara Kauer's farm and then the Yamhill Valley Heritage Center. Like all good FBC gatherings, they were potlucks with endless tables of food. As Kent Harrop said, the desserts made your ears wiggle. At the harvest parties, we had classic games of eating donuts hanging from a string. Susan chambers a couple of times brought a huge variety of apples and we had apple tastings. There was pumpkin carving and hayrides. Kids bobbing for apples and coming up with dripping wet hair. Mary Baker taught us how to line dance and friends played their fiddle. Fun was had by all. I believe God's kin-dom is a fun place.

I was very involved for a few years with the Baptist Boogie Banquet. I was really into alliterations hence the name Baptist Boogie Banquet. We decorated the Social Hall all fancy with candlelit tables. Peggy Lilly, Laura Kushner and I would bake lasagnas. The youth going on the YAHOO Mexico Mission trip would help serve the food and sparkling pinot noir juice. There was a silent auction where many of you brought your creations, talents

and treasures. A unique auction item was a pickup truck of horse manure for your garden. All to help raise money for the church. One year we even had a magician provide entertainment. And the best part was the Nancy McCann band would rock the house. I loved watching the kids dancing with their parents. We would twist and shout, twisting way low down to the floor. We Baptists know how to have a good time. In Psalm 149, verses 3 through 4, we are told to praise God's name in dance; to strike up the band and make great music. Why? Because God delights in his people. I am delighted to be a part of this kin-dom living through dance.

Worship is also a time of celebration. The times we are at Worship in the Park or at the Church camp outs have brought me great joy. I like that I feel more connected with you when we gather around a campfire or picnic table. JP, Chris Lay and folks bring their guitars and we sing along. Kids are digging in the sand or running through the grass. And afterward there is food. There seems to be a theme here doesn't there? All good celebrations involve food. How many years has Steve Howard made us his famous French toast at the campout? At the Worship in the Park, for a couple of years we had a 5-gallon ice cream maker that I think Wendall Martin got working. It had a big red handle that all the kids would take turns cranking, eager with anticipation for the ice cream cones. There were three legged races and frisbee golf. When we come together to sing, and play and eat we create joy. A joy like I imagine kin-dom living would be.

As we reflect on the last 153 years we have had many opportunities to be in fellowship. We have had many reasons to celebrate. As our mission states, we have come together to respond to the call of the Spirit and the teachings of Jesus to learn, love, serve and seek justice and joy for all. I know we have done that in the past, we are doing it now and we will continue to do it in the future. Happy Birthday FBC and may you seek joy for all.

THE JAMES FAMILY:

JIM:

When we started attending First Baptist we knew almost nothing about American Baptist Denomination. The friendly atmosphere, diversity, inclusivity - and Ken Harrop's weekly personal warm welcome and inspiring sermons kept us coming back. Ken introduced us to a class about The American Baptist Philosophy of not only welcoming different perspectives but embracing the gift we give when we share our perspective with each other.

Over the past nine years we have been able to live the mission of FBC individually, as a family, and in partnership with you all.

One of the first ways our family was able to fully engage in the mission was by attending Camp Arrah Wanna.

My first experience with Arrah Wanna was at the same time as my three daughters. As soon as they were registered as campers, somebody leaked that I worked in the medical

field. This resulted in passionate requests for me to help by being the camp Medic. I tried to say that I couldn't because I had to take care of Eliana, since she wasn't old enough to be a camper and Tai was slated to be a counselor. That was unilaterally resolved in executive fashion by Barbara saying "just bring her along." With my very small sidekick in tow, I set off to be the Arrah Wanna Winter Camp Medic. It was great. Unlike being a camp counselor where you are primarily with the same group of campers, I interacted with everyone... from campers to counselors, to volunteers, to camp staff. All from different backgrounds, all with the same goal. To celebrate with the children joining in fellowship. Most kids were repeat campers, where this is one of the major highlights of their year. Those that were new, were enthusiastically welcomed into the group. If it was too expensive, FBC provided scholarships so children would not be left out. It's hard to summarize this event in a minute and 20 seconds. There was singing, laughing, crying, dancing, and games all in the name of inclusive fellowship. I knew I had been a part of something that was good.

ZORISSA:

A few months over a year ago, I, along with a van-full of FBC-ers, and another van and a bus full of people from other churches, road-tripped down to Mexico and built some houses. But the YAHOO Mexico Mission trip is more than serving god through helping our neighbors. It is a chance to learn and grow as a human, to meet new people and make new friends, and to have a fantabulous spring break. Last year was the best spring break of my life. I was a part of something bigger than myself. I helped change someone's life, I helped give three families a home. One of the more lighthearted YAHOO traditions is to pass the time driving by making friendship bracelets. I still have this one [point to bracelet] from one of my tent-mates. I had planned on replacing it this year on the way home, but I guess I will have to hope it will last until the next year that I am able to go. FBC is unique in that we, out of all the churches the precipitate, do the most group fundraising, this year money raised by the wall of money, the benefit concert, and flock-a-friend as well as plain old donations would have helped pay half of what each of us should have raised on our own, but FBC is a Family and we help each other with things like this.

TAI:

We have all heard the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child." I am incredibly thankful that my daughters have been able to learn and grow within this community. The mission of FBC aligns with our family's values. Over the years we have had countless opportunities to see THIS faith community respond to needs locally and worldwide. A Family Place needed space to start the relief nursery and FBC volunteers; our neighbors are hungry and FBC provides meals; our homeless neighbors are freezing at night and FBC opens their doors. These are just three examples out of hundreds. My daughters understand that A Family Place works with families at high risk for child abuse and every time they go to church that connection is reinforced. They see that their church is seeking justice for the most vulnerable children in our community. My daughters have been able to help bundle diapers for the diaper bank, they have made meals for the Star Room and the warming shelter. They have learned what it means to respond to the call of the Spirit and the teachings of Jesus by watching you, and serving with you, and personally witnessing FBC standing in the gap so the most vulnerable in McMinnville can access justice and joy. And when we were

vulnerable you have stood in the gap for our family - we have received meals and prayers that buoyed our spirits.

We are so thankful to be here to help FBC celebrate. It means so much to be a part of a faith community that allows such a variety of ways to learn and live in faith together. We are excited to see FBC continue to seek justice in McMinnville and worldwide!

STEWART STOUT:

What keeps me coming to FBC is the food.

When my kids were younger, they looked forward to the cheese and fruit snacks and goldfish crackers (which later become gluten free crackers) in Sunday School classes. Then, while raising funds to help build houses on the border with YAHOO, we all enjoyed the weeks when we could come home from church with fresh batches of Armenian lentil soup and chicken enchiladas. Simple. Satisfying. A few years later, my son and I, while building and testing the water filtration systems, ate some of the best beans and rice under a huge ceiba tree in a Nicaraguan village.

Yet the food we eat at FBC is not just to fill our bellies until the next meal. The psalmist says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Week in, week out, FBC gives us a chance to do just that. Last year, Pastor Erika asked us to consider who was at the table where we were eating. Were we surrounded mostly by people who looked like us or held the same ideals or beliefs (political, spiritual, you name it)? Had I shared a "common cup" of coffee at AA meetings or warmed my hands around a cup of soup with friends who came to the warming shelter? Essential questions. Essential challenges.

Week after week, for many years, I have been "fed" spiritually by scholarly, practical, honest, and sometimes hard-hitting preaching and prayers. So in this FBC community, food both comforts and challenges me.

Several years ago, we found a biblical theme that helped us focus our vision. That passage was Matthew 25. We announced ourselves as a Matthew 25 congregation. Yet, as I looked around, I noticed we had been practicing the vision of Matthew 25 long before we decided to use that language to describe ourselves. We were already beginning to clothe the naked, visit the sick, feed the hungry. What changed, it seems to me, is that we now knew who we wanted to become even more fully. We committed to living into that communal vision. So... for those who seek a community that challenges you to try out new and unexpected flavors and textures, and chew on how your faith impacts your actions, welcome. And always...always bring your appetite.

Wrapping Up - Erika

And to get just a few more voices in - last week Tim Marsh, one of FBC's archivists, challenged church members and friends to share what FBC means to them in 280

characters or less. Maybe some of you did that; maybe some of you posted your responses on the Facebook thread already this morning. Here are some responses that came in earlier in the week, to add to our celebration:

--Tim & Diane Marsh wrote, "FBC = friends who are people of faith."

--Judee & Neil Kunze wrote, "FBC is important to us in so many ways. This community provides us with local 'family,' challenges our intellect, nourishes our spirit, encourages and provides opportunities to serve, and gives us a social life with amazing people, who share our same values and keep us humble."

--And Anne Engen wrote, "First Baptist is my safe harbor where I can unload my worries. When I step ashore, I'm embraced by my FBC family. We share meals, laughs, sermons, prayers, and tears. Our abundance of gifts we share with others. Then I box up my joys and faith to set sail for another week."

If you've written something, please post it on Facebook in the thread from 9 o'clock this morning, or send it to me. What better way to celebrate this place than to name its gifts?

This is my response to the homework prompt, in 279 characters:

--I am grateful for friends and mentors to sing and celebrate and laugh and cry and learn with, people of faith who model every day what it means to love God by loving our neighbors. I am grateful that some of the abundant love of this place rests on me and my family. What a gift.