



# First Connect

January 2026

# Letter from Sarah



Happy New Year, First Baptist Church Family!

Thank you for a wonderful 2025. Thank you for all the ways you gave of yourself to the church in the past year. Thank you for the long hours of volunteering at CareForOKC and the hours spent preparing to teach Bible Study. Thank you for all the hospital and homebound visits you made. Thank you for all the nights spent at committee meetings and the Sundays you spent holding babies. Thank you for the quiet ways you supported the staff as we cared for those in our community through funerals and graveside services. Thank you for the hours spent running sound and streaming to connect our congregation around the world. Thank you for the hours spent in the kitchen and decorating for feasts. Thank you for the time spent caring for your neighbors and friends.

You are an incredible church family. You are focused on loving God, loving others, and making disciples. In the past year, as I met with our visitors, I heard the same thing from almost all of them. They all felt so welcome in our church and like they could breathe. They felt peace the moment they walked through our doors. Thank you for creating such a sacred community of believers.

I am so excited to see what God will do through you in the coming year. Will you join me in a month of prayer for our church? Pray specific prayers for areas of ministry you hope to see grow and thrive. Pray for God to open our hearts more to the needs around us. Pray for new believers to find their way to our church. Pray for the people in your life who have been hurt by church experiences in the past. Pray for healing and for them to find our church to be a safe place to find community once more. Pray for new leaders to rise up and for seasoned saints to offer their wisdom and encouragement along the way.

Then I want you to pray a more personal prayer. Will you pray for God to show you how he wants to use you this coming year? We will be focusing on missions in the coming year. Will you ask God how he wants to include you in his mission for the world? Maybe this year you will start a small group in your home for your neighbors. Maybe this is the year you begin volunteering in CareForOKC on one Monday a month. Maybe this is the year you ask your coworker if they are looking for a place to go to church. Maybe this is the year you begin to tithe, trusting God to provide for you and your family. Maybe this is the year God is asking you to trust him enough to say yes to his calling on your life.

I pray for you every single day. I pray that God will work through us and in us and among us. Let us enter this new year on our knees before the Lord, with hearts wide open for his redemptive plan for our lives.

May God be with you now and always.

# November Membership



My name is Kyndal Johnson. I grew up in San Antonio, Texas. Chance and I met in college at Oklahoma City University. After getting married I moved back to OKC. I have an entertainment background and currently work as the Company Manager/Production Stage Manager at Oklahoma City University. However, if you really want to get me talking ask me anything about animals! I love all creatures and used to be zookeeper!

Chance introduced me to FBCOKC and it was different than my previous church experiences. Sarah was inviting and everyone was friendly! I've enjoyed getting to know this beautiful community and can't wait for what lies ahead.

My name is Chance Johnson. I grew up in Southeastern Oklahoma attending various Assemblies of God and nondenominational churches. I am an attorney for the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, where I help administer the State Park System and promote Oklahoma around the world. I love CrossFit and Thunder basketball. I started attending FBCOKC in 2021, after being invited by my friends, CJ and Lauren Capraro. My wife, Kyndal, and I have since come to know this place as our church home, and we look forward to learning, growing, and serving alongside you all.



My name is Rilda Smith. I grew up in East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) where my parents served as Southern Baptist missionaries. I live in Shawnee and over the course of the last 46 years, I owned a couple of small businesses before changing careers and becoming a licensed marital and family therapist 23 years ago. As a therapist, I work as an independent contractor with two different organizations. I also serve on a team that conducts re-entry seminars for TCKs (Third Culture Kids) moving to the US after growing up overseas. I attended FBC, Shawnee for 40 years and after church hopping for the past several years, I decided to visit FBCOKC and for the first time in several years, from my first Sunday here, I feel I have truly experienced worship each week.

# Upcoming Events

## Rick's Cafe - Sunday, January 11 at 6:00pm

Rick Johnson, a seminary professor and member of FBCOKC, will be hosting "Rick's Cafe" in the Parlor on Sunday, January 11 at 6:00pm. Come with your questions for Rick as we learn and grow together in faith! Childcare available.

## Committee Kickoff, January 18 after service

We will serve a light lunch and then have our meeting. Committees will have their first meeting of the year as part of this kickoff. Committee chairs will also be chosen. Hope to see you there!

## Kid's Night Out, January 23<sup>rd</sup>

Join us for an evening of clashing clothes and fun! January 23<sup>rd</sup> is National Clashing Clothes Day, so wear your best clashing patterns/colors! We will start in the gym at 6pm with dinner and end in the kid's area with a movie 9pm! All are welcome from birth to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I hope to see you all there! Please let Ariel know if you plan on bringing your kid(s).

## CareForOKC Open House - Sunday, January 25 After Worship

All are welcome to join us for an open house hosted by the CareForOKC Team! The open house will take place Sunday, January 25 immediately following the worship service in CareForOKC (located on the ground floor of FBCOKC). Come take a tour of our food pantry and clothes closet and learn more about how you can volunteer to help us be the presence of Jesus to our neighbors!

## Youth Hangout, January 30<sup>th</sup>

*"Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?"* – J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

The youth will be watching and discussing the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings movies throughout 2026. Join us for our first movie, The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey. We will meet in the youth center from 6-9pm for the movie (extended edition of course) and discussion. Snacks and drink will be provided.

## Disciple Now, February 20-22

I hope your youth will join me in the Disciple Now Weekend. We will dive into God's word, have fun fellowship time, time to serve others, and grow as a youth group. The cost is \$30 and this will cover a shirt and food for the weekend. I'll get you more information as we get closer. The theme is Outcast.

## **Outsiders welcome.**

*We see outcasts everyday*—people who fit under a different stereotype, don't look like us, like what we like, or believe the same things. It's easy to walk away from the outcast, leaving them forever in that category, but Jesus never did. Instead, he walked into the difficulty of their lives to bring them the ultimate insider experience—belonging in his family.

## Kid's Night Out, February 27<sup>th</sup>

Gotta Catch'em All! Did you know February 27<sup>th</sup> is National Pokémon Day? We will be celebrating with a Pokémon themed Kid's Night Out! Wear any Pokémon gear you might have or bring any Pokémon plush! We will start in the gym at 6pm with dinner and end in the kid's area with a movie at 9pm! Can't wait to see your kid(s) there!



# Kids and Youth

Brad and Sarah challenged us to look back on 2025, and I've been doing that a lot recently. 2025, personally, was a year of ups and downs. In January, I got the joy to travel to North Carolina with my Baptist Women in Ministry cohort and spend a few days relaxing on the beach and resting with other youth and children's ministers. February came and my dad was in and out of hospitals and skilled nursing centers and I felt I spent more time in the emergency room than I did my own home. March came and I got the joy of going to London with my sister to see her favorite band perform. It started out rocky with our original flight being cancelled due to Heathrow being on fire, but we got there eventually and had a grand time. April came and we lost my Nannie. She was one of my people and I miss her dearly. Then the summer came and I was busy with Kids Off Broadway and camps. Those were life giving to me. Kid's Off Broadway, though it is stressful, it always a wonderful time. Youth camp was very fun this year, getting to see the youth work on houses in Mississippi was amazing. They were exhausted by the end, but they loved the experience. Kid's camp was so much fun! Getting to praise God with kid's and see the love of Jesus through their eyes is something I will never take for granted. The end of the summer brought promotion Sunday where we now have 8 in our youth group. That is amazing! Those kids have really gelled this year and they are their own little community and support one another well. At the end of August, I ended up having an ovarian cyst rupture, which was not fun in the slightest. It has caused me to pause and think about my health more. September brought the elementary retreat where the kids asked great questions and grew in their faith. October brought Trunk-or-Treat, and we saw so many people come into our building that day. I heard several parents say they were thankful to have a safe place they could bring their kids to enjoy the holiday. November came and the youth went on their retreat weekend, and we learned about how God's grace continues to find us even when we don't deserve it. My father also got to come home for a few days at Thanksgiving and spend it with the family. It was a hard time being without my Nannie, but my sister and I split up her usual foods she would make, and we attempted to make them for Thanksgiving. December is always a busy month, but a great month, nonetheless. It brought Christmas parties and lock-ins. I did get pretty sick, but it came and went quickly. December also had Christmas Eve which is one of my favorite nights of the year, seeing the kids do the live nativity scene. One kid was worried because they didn't get to practice beforehand. I told him, "Mary and Joseph didn't get to practice either", and he accepted that. He knew that not everything needs to be planned out. As 2026 begins, I am thankful for 2025. 2025 caused me to grow in several ways; mentally, spiritually, physically. It brought me closer to God and closer to my family. It made me think hard about my life and about the children's and youth ministries. I am truly thankful for 2025 and all it has done for me, and I look forward to 2026. It will be a great year for the Children's and Youth Ministries at FBCOKC.

*"Not that I have already grasped it all or have already become perfect, but I press on if I may also take hold of that for which I was even taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

-Philippians 3: 12-14

# Missions



## **EVERYBODY can do SOMETHING for the KINGDOM**

When I served as youth minister at FBCOKC, I scheduled an opportunity for our students to go volunteer at the Regional Foodbank of Oklahoma. If you've never had the chance to volunteer there, you need to go experience it! It's incredible how much they do to feed individuals and families in Oklahoma. When we arrived, we were all given a brief orientation and specific roles for the afternoon. Our task was to pack bags of frozen corn and put them into boxes to be shipped out. Each of us had a different job on the assembly line:

- A few people were tasked with breaking up the frozen corn inside a gigantic container.
- After the corn was broken up, a few others were tasked with scooping the corn into plastic bags.
- After the corn was bagged, it was handed to a different set of volunteers who would weigh the bags on a scale to make sure they had the proper amount.
- After the bags of corn were weighed, they were handed to different volunteers who would use a machine to seal the bags shut.
- The sealed bags were handed to another set of volunteers who packed the finished bags into boxes and loaded them onto the truck.

After we finished packing corn for four hours, the kids were tired! I don't think any of them ate corn for a while after that. Ha ha! But we had a debriefing session where I asked them a question: What was THE most essential job on the assembly line? What job was so important that we couldn't have completed our task without it?

The students gave various answers until one of the girls caught on to where I was headed and answered me by saying, "All of them were essential. We needed all of them to get the job done." She was exactly right. If you remove even just one of the roles, the whole assembly line falls apart. Can you imagine the scene if we had 20 people trying to all scoop the corn into the bags, but no one to weigh and seal them? Or what if we had everyone ready to pack the boxes and put them on the truck, but no one to do the scoop, weigh, and seal?

The Kingdom of God is kind of like that. All of us are uniquely gifted to contribute to the work God has to put this world back together again. We ALL have a role, a job, a mission. No matter what seasons of life we find ourselves in. God is NOT through with us until we breathe our last breath.

Maybe you have physical limitations that prevent you from being able to serve in the ways in which you have in the past. The Church (and our church specifically) needs encouragers, note writers, prayer warriors, and wise sages to mentor younger generations.

Maybe you speak a different language, play a sport or an instrument, or have knowledge in a particular school subject (Math, Reading, Science, etc.)? How could any of those skills be used to glorify God in this world?

Maybe you're really gifted at working with your hands as an artist or making household repairs. Maybe you love watching movies and showing others how God is present in those stories.

The possibilities are endless. The bottom line is that **EVERYBODY can do SOMETHING for the KINGDOM OF GOD**. Pay attention to how God is speaking to you right now in this very season of your life.

Over the course of 2026, I am going to share lots of different opportunities for you to serve in various ways at our church, in our community, and in our world. I can't wait to serve alongside you this coming year as we discover where God is calling us to be His presence.



# Serving Opportunities

## What is CareForOKC?

CareForOKC is our church's community ministry. It's located on the Ground Floor of FBCOKC and serves clients on Monday afternoons from 4-6pm. We have a food pantry which is like a tiny grocery store. Canned vegetables, meats, produce, milk, eggs, pastas, bread, desserts, and a lot more. Clients get to shop for groceries. We also have a clothes closet that has clothes for women, men, and children. If you've never been to CareForOKC, we'd love for you to come down and take a tour. We serve over 75 families every single week.

## Who does CareForOKC serve?

CareForOKC serves the working poor, those experiencing homelessness, immigrants and refugees new to Oklahoma City, folks who may have lost their jobs or are in another life transition, victims of domestic violence, the disabled, and many more.

## How does CareForOKC provide this service to the community?

We have an incredible lay team of volunteers that serve clients on Monday nights. Volunteers check in clients, assist them in the food pantry and clothes closet, and help people get their food/clothes loaded into their vehicles. In addition to Monday afternoons, we have drivers who pick up food donated from Wal-Mart and bring it to CareForOKC, we have other volunteers who come up during the week and restock the food pantry shelves or process clothes in the closet.

## Where Does the Food Come From at CareForOKC?

CareForOKC has partnerships with a local Wal-Mart where we pick up donated food twice a week and deliver it to the church. We also have a partnership with the Regional Foodbank of Oklahoma that enables us to buy bulk food items at a discounted cost. Occasionally, we will receive free items from the foodbank in addition to the goods we buy. In addition to Wal-Mart and the Regional Foodbank, we receive food and monetary donations from our FBCOKC church family and the community.

## How can I pray for and support this ministry?

You may noticed that your grocery bill is more expensive these days. Items that we purchase from the Regional Foodbank for our food pantry, which are often heavily discounted, are becoming more expensive or even not available. Due to the recent cuts to federal aid, our CareForOKC team is spending more money purchasing food to help keep our shelves stocked each week. Our reality is not unique. Community ministries in our area and across the nation are working to find creative ways to continue serving folks despite the effects of inflation and budget cuts. God has been so faithful in providing for our needs and we trust that God will continue to be faithful as we love our neighbors as ourselves. We can't express how thankful we are for your prayers, countless volunteer hours, food and clothes donations, financial gifts, and so much more. See the link below to learn more about giving to CareForOKC! You are testifying to the goodness of God in a world that sometimes feels hopeless. Jesus is our hope and we are His people.

<https://app.aplos.com/aws/give/FirstBaptistChurchOklahomaCity/GiveNow>

# Senior Adults & Discipleship



## \*\*Looking Ahead: Embracing the Future with Faith and Optimism\*\*

"If you can't fly, then run; if you can't run, then walk; if you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward." – Martin Luther King Jr.

## \*\*What Does Looking Ahead Mean to Me?\*\*

Looking ahead is more than just refraining from dwelling on the past or constantly anticipating the next setback. At times, I find myself caught in these patterns, fixating on what has already happened or anxiously waiting for the next challenge to arise. However, as this new year begins, I am determined to shift my perspective. I want to focus on the broader vision of what God has prepared for me.

## \*\*Transforming Pain into Purpose\*\*

When I was a child, and my parents scolded me, I frequently found myself caught in a loop of regret and questioning my own actions. I would dwell in those emotions, allowing them to overwhelm me, and convince myself that I was unloved if my parents viewed me negatively. Those moments became opportunities for self-pity, but unfortunately, I was the only one attending those pity parties. This way of thinking robbed me of genuine joy and happiness, making it challenging to move forward and embrace new possibilities.

## \*\*Choosing to See the Glass Half Full\*\*

Over time, I have come to realize that viewing life through a lens of negativity serves no one. This year, I want to pause and acknowledge that God understands the bigger picture, and that knowledge helps me see the glass as half full. With this new perspective, it is up to me to choose how I respond to the truth that God knows my past, present, and future. Rather than living in constant fear of what might go wrong, I want to reflect with gratitude on the challenges that have taught me to trust in someone greater than myself. Those valleys in my life have shown me that God is always with me, guiding and protecting me.

I am choosing to approach my journey with anticipation, eager to discover what God has in store for me next. Whether it's a new opportunity to gain experience, a chance to grow, or a challenge that stretches beyond my comfort zone, I want to embrace change. Growth often means facing the unknown, which can be intimidating and lead to doubts about my abilities. However, when I consider the alternative, I realize that moving forward, crossing finish lines, climbing stairs, and reaching new destinations requires looking ahead and believing that something greater awaits beyond what is familiar.

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus". Philippians 3:13-14.

## \*\*What past challenges have shaped your faith?\*\*

-Toni

# Connect

## \*\*Embracing Holy Habits in the New Year\*\*

In Sarah's final sermon of the year, she encouraged us to adopt several essential disciplines for 2026—practices she refers to as “holy habits.” These holy habits are designed to guide us as we seek to grow in our faith and move forward with purpose while keeping the bigger picture in mind.

### 1. \*\*Daily Reading of God's Word\*\*

Sarah emphasized the importance of reading God's word every day. She urged us to approach scripture with the lens of God's grace and love, allowing these qualities to shape our understanding. More than just reading, she challenged us to pray that we would truly heed the word—allowing it to influence our actions and attitudes as we strive to walk in faith.

### 2. \*\*Weekly Worship and Community\*\*

Growth in faith rarely happens in isolation. Sarah reminded us of the value of weekly worship, encouraging us to seek out community and accountability. Imagine being part of a small group where each member uplifts and inspires the others, creating a vibrant atmosphere for personal growth. As the saying goes, “iron sharpens iron.” Together, we can challenge each other, share insights, and cultivate a shared commitment to becoming our best selves. She also encouraged us to use our words to bless others in our worship community, whether they are younger or older, recognizing the power of encouragement and shared wisdom.

***If you are interested in joining a small group or would like to find a bible study group for Sunday morning, please contact Toni Adams at [tadams@fbcokc.org](mailto:tadams@fbcokc.org)***

### 3. \*\*Establishing a Rhythm of Prayer\*\*

Prayer is foundational to our relationship with God. Set aside a specific time to meet with the Lord, fostering a consistent prayer rhythm. This discipline deepens our connection with God and nurtures spiritual growth. Keeping a journal to record prayers can help reflect on God's faithfulness over time.

### 4. \*\*Moving Forward by Letting Go\*\*

Alongside these habits, I have added a fourth: intentionally letting go of the past and looking ahead to what lies beyond our current dreams or imagination. By releasing what holds us back and trusting God to take charge, we open ourselves to new possibilities and growth. This act of moving forward allows us to step into the future with faith and anticipation.

What new opportunities might God be preparing for you this year?

# Members



Andrew Konda - 1/1

Christi McConnell - 1/2

Gloria Wagner - 1/2

Jay Gregston - 1/2

Isabella Malony - 1/3

Riley Keiser - 1/6

Sam Kinser - 1/8

Suzanne Swenson - 1/8

Bryan Stephenson - 1/9

Luke Stewart - 1/11

Michael Speer - 1/13

Jarrett Cook - 1/18

Colin Bray - 1/20

Cole Rankin - 1/21

Noah Stewart - 1/26

Brycen McConnell - 1/27

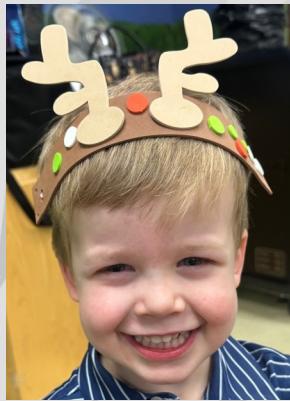
C. Mack Roark - 1/27

Chance Johnson - 1/28

Teri Pennington - 1/28

Parker Speer - 1/31

# December Events



# Love God | Love Other | Make Disciples

## Service Times

### Sunday Mornings

Bible Study at 9:15am  
Worship at 10:30am

### Wednesday Evenings

Small Groups and  
Children's Activities at 5:30pm  
Choir at 7:00pm

### **FBCOKC Ministers and Staff**

Sarah Stewart, Pastor  
Brad Stewart, Missions Minister  
Toni Adams, Minister for Senior Adults & Discipleship  
Ariel Koerner, Minister for Young Families  
Steven McConnell, Minister of Music  
Don Clothier, Pianist  
Justin Keiser, Facilities Manager  
Miranda Fryer, Administrative Assistant

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