

# Oakleaves

## A note from Pastor Ben

Let me tell you about two dark, forgotten corners of our church building that tell two very different stories.

The first dark corner is in the corner of our church's foyer, squeezed between the women's bathroom and the sound board. There hangs a bulletin board displaying photographs and information about the missionaries our church supports. Though this bulletin board is up to date and tells of the amazing work our five missionaries are carrying out across the globe, it's something we tend to walk past on our way to find our seats for worship.

The second dark corner of our church is far more hidden. Travel down the back hallway, past the church office, and pull the string leading up to our attic. Then unfold and climb the aluminum ladder. Finally, if you're particularly flexible, crawl to the southwest corner. There you will find boxes full of newsletters, bulletins, annual reports, and business meeting minutes going all the way back to 1915. You'll find announcements from the 1940s inviting our people to attend a missions conference where we, along with other churches, would learn about and pray for missions. You'll find reports from the missions committee telling about our correspondence with missionaries. You'll find reports about trips we took to visit a sister church we once had in Mexico, and even read letters sent to our church from missionaries on the field.

***What we find when we sift through the annals of our church's history is that global missions has never been peripheral to who we are and what we're about. For over a century, we have prayed for missions, participated in missions, and provided generously for missions. Missions is not only central to what our church has been — it's central to what a church is.***

### ***What exactly is missions?***

You would imagine that if missions is as central to the church as I claim, the question "what is missions?" would be a rather straightforward one to answer. However, a clear definition is oddly elusive. Ask ten pastors, theologians, and missiologists for a simple definition of missions, and you'll likely get ten different answers. Should everything a church does be considered missions? Is it accurate to call every Christian a "missionary"? Does the service we render to the Lord only count as missions if we cross a border? Are we doing missions when we provide a meal for the homeless? Are we being missionaries when we share the gospel with our neighbors across the street over coffee?

While one simple newsletter doesn't allow the space to answer all these questions in depth, let me speak to the work of missions, the location of missions, and who does missions.

("A note..." continued p. 9)



*This past December, we lost our good friend Harry Hunt. Harry was a longtime member of FBCO, serving as an elder along the way. We miss seeing him on Sunday mornings, but rejoice that he is with the Savior he loved so well.*

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### Upcoming Events

- **May 24**—Vote on church name
- **May 31**—Taco Bar Fundraiser at The Well for Homes of Hope
- **June**—Missions Month

## Youth and Family Ministry

Hello Church,

Summer fun in the sun, bring it on! We have a lot of fun events planned for both youth and children. Last year, the youth had such a fun time at our beach day, they kept asking to do another one. We were only able to do one, so this year we are planning on doing three beach days. One in June, July, and August. Our goal for our beach days is for our youth to continue to grow in community with each other as well as invite new people to the group.

The youth will continue to have our midweek program on Tuesday nights. We will be finishing our year-long series titled, "Cover to Cover." We have been going through the entire Bible in 45 weeks. We have broken it up into smaller chunks, focusing on different elements of each section of the Bible while helping students recognize that the Bible has an overarching narrative: Perfection, Rebellion, Restoration, Sanctification. This summer we are focusing on Christ's Return and New Creation as seen in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. The goal is that students will understand

that our Christian hope isn't only for this life. We will suffer for the truth of the Gospel but our hope is in the return of Jesus Christ. Christ will return and will establish in full His kingdom on earth, restoring creation to its right relationship with its Creator.

Children's Church is partnering with Redemption Church once again to put on a Vacation Bible School! The dates for that will be July 20-24. For the last two years the VBS theme has been a spin on Marvel's Avengers. This year we will be concluding our finale of this series! It is going to take a village to put on the VBS this summer so start praying now about volunteering your time to serve. There are many different ways one can serve, so please bless the children by serving. To add incentive, I will be reprising my role as "The Incredible Bulk." On top of that, in the Children's Church they will be in the "History" portion of the Old Testament; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. I am excited for what God is going to do in and for our youth and children this coming summer!

**Pastor Jack Jellison**



*9-Square Pros!*



*FBCO youth and leaders*

# 2026 YOUTH WINTER CAMP



*Above: Julia Johnson and Jared Reynolds at the foosball table*



*Right: Youth leaders David Abe and Lauren Morehead showing them how it's done*

*Below: Playing Hedbanz together*



FOREST HOME OJAI VALLEY IS HIRING

2026 **SUMMER STAFF**

**PERKS**

- Free Housing & Meals
- Beach Days & Island Trip
- Bible Study & Growth
- Epic Fun

**ROLES**

- Recreation Squad
- Hosting Team
- Kitchen Crew

Scan to Apply

Summer Residents

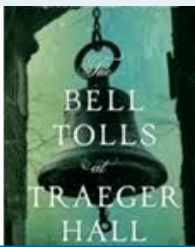
Part-Time Staff

## Now Hiring

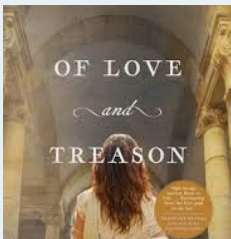
Forest Home Ojai is now hiring for their summer crew. There are a variety of positions available, so if you're interested, please talk to Rick Scott or use the QR code on the flyer in the foyer. Positions available for summer residents or part time staff.

## Women's Book Club

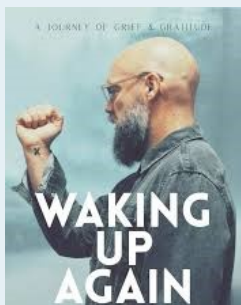
Our Women's Book Club is always open to new women who enjoy reading and fellowship! They meet on the second Saturday of each month (usually!) at 9:30 AM in Smith Hall. Here are the upcoming selections:



*The Bell Tolls at Traeger Hall*  
by Jaime Jo Wright  
May 16



*Of Love and Treason*  
by Jamie Ogle  
June 13



*Waking Up Again*  
by Tim Timmons  
July 11

## Women's Ministry

Greetings First Baptist Family,

Hope this spring draws you closer to God and his beauty that surrounds our beautiful Ojai Valley.

Women's ministry just finished "Sermon on the mount" in March. So we rewarded ourselves with a trip to the Oxnard thrift stores and lunch at BJ's. We bought lots of goodies, laughed, spent quality time getting to know each other better and of course enjoyed dessert (Pizookies) at BJ's!!

I am excited to announce the next Women's Bible study started on April 15th. We meet on Wednesday mornings from 9:30 - 11:30 am in Smith Hall. Our study this April and May is "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13) by Tim Chester.

Mr. Chester informs us that the Lord's Prayer is a short prayer and takes less than 30 seconds to read, without rushing of course. But the Lord's Prayer is not a small prayer. One great way of praying the Lord's

Prayer is to go through it, line by line. Mr. Chester states, if you say it with meaning then this prayer will enlarge your vision, expand your horizons, and transform your life.

Also, before we break for the summer, another fun trip is scheduled to Firefly Ceramics in Ventura. We will get to paint our own pottery and just have fun spending time together. All women are invited. This outing is tentatively scheduled for May 27 at noon.

Women's Ministry would also like to host a couple of beach days after church throughout the summer. Dates TBD. We have so much more in store for our church family this summer. Keep an eye on the bulletin and stay connected as we grow together.

God's Blessings,

**Cyndi Hassien**

**Deacon of Women's Ministry**



*A delicious lunch at BJ's, complete with many pizookies!*

## Thank You From Jan

Thank you so much for the birthday luncheon and the homemade birthday cards. Who knew turning 90 would be so much fun?!

Also, a huge thank you for all the prayers, support, food, and cards after breaking my hip. I'm progressing well and able to walk now without assistance. I am so thankful for my FBCO family!



*Above: Celebrating Jan in her small group*

*Left: A beautiful luncheon in Jan's honor at the Hartenstein home*



*A productive day at the Oxnard thrift stores☺*

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*"Oil and incense bring joy  
to the heart, and the  
sweetness of a friend is  
better than self-counsel."  
Proverbs 27:9*

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## Worship Spotlight



*An icon of the Council of Nicaea, with the Emperor Constantine and the bishops holding a scroll with the words of the Nicene Creed*

Dear Church,

At the start of January, I began the end of my Master's degree in the first steps of drafting my Thesis. Of course this means, since I am still in process, this entry into Oakleaves will reflect where I am!

Although I think the topic of my thesis is interesting, probably the biggest takeaway from the experience of researching through the writings of church leaders from the early era to now is how many of the traditions and sayings we have and hold dear are not directly biblical in origin. As Gavin's book, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, gets at, these traditions can become the things that divide brothers and sisters in Christ from sharing communion (literally breaking bread) with each other. I do not intend to go over specifics here but, as I have shared with some of you, my faith journey has been riddled with the question "why?" (Maybe I did the riddling myself!) Asking this time and time again has led me to some gaping holes in knowledge about traditions and practices that have become bastions to our faith—whether our own, or others'.

This is not meant to bash or demean the church leaders that formed our faith traditions. All of them have very good reasons in their time for reading the Word the way they did. On top of that, many suffered much to preserve the church as they believed scripture intends for us. Some may simply come from a place of trying to better understand scripture. Others may come from a societal issue stemming from war, poor political leadership, or disease. Yet others may have had personal vices they were battling that other leaders wanted to keep their congregants from.

As our church is transitioning to a new denomination, I think this thought process is all the more relevant to us all. What about our beliefs prevents us from fully expressing it? What tenets have we grown up with that might be holding us back from embracing God's beautiful plan for us to enjoy him? If we can raise our hands in worship and awe of our God ("Wow, God") why might we feel embarrassed at doing so? Why might we feel shy to belt out "Amen" when the Word is spoken? Why might our feet be still when the Spirit seems to be asking for a dance? Some of this is personality, of course, but much is tradition that has shaped our individual expressions of faith. The challenge of doubting our doubts and believing our beliefs\* is ever present.

"Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:15-18)

**Agape,**

**Edward White**

\*Yet another Switchfoot reference of course. See "Ode to Chin" for more!

## Easter Egg-Spllosion

FBCO partnered once again with Redemption to put on an amazing afternoon for kids at Libbey Park. The FBCO Youth and Leaders turned out to make the day a huge success.



*The obligatory picture of Jack in costume*



*Working hard...*



*Finley and Jared testing photo ops*



*Left: Jackson and the Easter Bunny*

*Right: Cutie patootie Lauren Morehead having fun*



## Around the Property



*The new toddler play structure*



*Taking down the cry room*



*Foyer Demolition Crew: Deborah Woodall, Lauren and Zack Morehead, Pastor Jack, Rick Scott, and Pastor Ben*



*Prepping for the new foyer ceiling*



*Gorgeous ceiling work!*

## ...continued from page 1 “A note from Pastor Ben”

- **What is the work of missions?** Jesus’s final farewell charge to his disciples makes clear what our ultimate task is as his disciples. We are to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). For a work to be considered “missions,” it must be one that seeks to make and mature followers of Jesus Christ from every corner of creation. This is the primary charge left to the church. Therefore, while ministries like Christian orphanages and digging wells in Africa may be good and commendable, they cannot be considered missions in themselves. The work of missions is to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the gospel.
- **What is the location of missions?** I think the clearest picture of missions we have in Scripture is in Acts 14. There we read about how the Christ-united community in Antioch sacrificially sent two of their five leaders, Paul and Barnabas, out to preach the gospel and plant churches in places where the gospel had not yet been preached and where no local church had yet been established. Though Paul and Barnabas were certainly preaching Christ to the people of Antioch, they became missionaries when they were sent. While all we do to make and mature disciples is glorifying to our Lord, I believe it’s in the best interest of the church to reserve the word “missions” for when we’re speaking about the work of reaching across cultural, religious, ethnic, and geographic barriers — as Paul and Barnabas were sent to do — in order to make and mature (baptize and teach) disciples of Jesus Christ in all corners of creation.
- **Who does missions?** In the introduction to the books *Prioritizing Missions in the Church* and *Prioritizing the Church in Missions*, Jonathan Leeman, Brooks Buser, and Scott Logsdon define missions like this: **“Missions involves churches sending qualified workers across linguistic, geographic, or cultural barriers to start or strengthen churches, especially in places where Christ has not been named.”** Why the emphasis on churches? Why do Leeman, Buser, and Logsdon go out of their way to say that missions comes from churches and aims at starting and strengthening churches? While this is something we’ll give a lot more attention to in a weekly newsletter, here is the simple answer: because God’s way of making and maturing disciples — whether in America, Armenia, or Azerbaijan — is through the faithful work of healthy local churches. If we are going to make disciples in every corner of creation, it must be through the work of healthy churches faithfully functioning in every corner of creation.

### **Missions Month**

As I was digging through one of those boxes in the attic, I came across a bulletin from the 60s. In it, the pastor was announcing that January 1964 would be officially designated “missions month” — a time for our church to direct their attention and prayers toward the work of their own missionaries, as well as other faithful workers carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ across the earth.

Today, a little over 50 years later, I want to invite you to join me in the same thing.

This June, as small groups come to an end, our church will offer several opportunities for our members to set their focus on the global work of missions. During this month, we will:

- **Hear three sermons on carefully chosen texts** that will teach, encourage, and challenge us to pray for, participate in, and provide for the ongoing charge of Christ to reach the nations.
- **Hear updates on each of our missionaries** and spend time, together as a community, lifting them up in prayer.
- **Watch films** that will allow us to see some of the amazing work God is doing right now all around the world through faithful missionaries.
- **Have a book discussion** on a book that will help us think biblically about the shape of missions today.
- **Spend a day in fasting and prayer** for the global advance of the gospel before breaking that fast together with a meal.
- Finally, for the ten weeks leading up to missions month, **I will be dedicating our newsletters to the topic of world missions.**

May we ever long and pray that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the seas (Hab. 2:14).

## Pictures



*The FBCO women outdid themselves with a beautiful reception for Harry Hunt's Memorial*



*Turning 90 gets you two cakes!*

### In Remembrance



*Harry Hunt*



*Arlene Lawson*



*Celebrating the Topa Topa staff on Valentine's Day*



*An amazing crown of thorns onstage at Libbey Bowl for the Good Friday service*



*Pastor Jack after just one night of Winter Camp*



## Birthdays

### May

|                |    |                  |    |
|----------------|----|------------------|----|
| Matthew Adams  | 5  | Misha Mathieu    | 12 |
| Elijah Robison | 6  | Jared Reynolds   | 12 |
| Javai Garvin   | 10 | Jackson Reynolds | 12 |
| Kaylie Turner  | 10 | Steve Hassien    | 15 |
| Faith Garvin   | 11 | Bill Handley     | 24 |
| Vesta Hunt     | 11 | Jane Swezey      | 25 |

### June

|              |    |                |    |
|--------------|----|----------------|----|
| Paxton Queen | 4  | Hannah Hassien | 26 |
| Cami Abe     | 16 | Barry Babcock  | 28 |
| Sue Lakes    | 20 | Jenny Owen     | 29 |
| Coral Queen  | 24 |                |    |

### July

|               |   |                 |    |
|---------------|---|-----------------|----|
| Susan Holland | 1 | Derek Swezey    | 15 |
| Rod Owen      | 1 | Ken Hartenstein | 17 |
| Kara Ralston  | 3 | Brian Turner    | 20 |
| Davie Ruhl    | 5 | Jana Fletcher   | 22 |

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*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”*  
*2 Thessalonians 2:16-17*

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## Anniversaries

### May

- 1 Darrel & Kara Ralston
- 2 Jim & Marcia Hall
- 18 Steve & Susan Holland

### June

- 9 Jim & Linda Verkuil
- 10 Philip & Deborah Woodall
- 11 Joe & Debbie Evans
- 20 Derek & Jane Swezey
- 21 Matt & Jan Sommer
- 29 Brian & Sarah Turner
- 30 Jim & Jo Jacobsen

### July

- 11 Jack & Katie Brewer
- 25 Ben & Olivia Ruhl



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## First Baptist Church of Ojai

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### Office Hours:

Tuesday—Friday: 9 AM to 1 PM

Phone: 805-633-9055

Email: [office@fbcojai.org](mailto:office@fbcojai.org)

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## Financial Update

Average monthly offering needed to meet budget: \$27,614

YTD as of March 31, 2026:

Actual Giving: \$75,488

Actual Expenses: **\$80,229**

Budgeted Giving,: **\$82,843**

Budgeted Expenses: **\$81,928**

### GIVING BREAKDOWN for our MISSIONS 2025:

Philip and Corenne Smith: \$2,780

South Omo for Christ: \$2,780

E&K Northwest Africa: \$2,780

LifeBridge: \$2,780

Short-term Missions: \$7,560

ABCO FLASH: \$2,225

Good News Club: \$750

Life Choices: \$1,080

Operation Christmas Child: \$100

Topa Topa School: \$500

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### First Baptist Church of Ojai

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PLEASE  
PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

