

Olympia First Baptist Church

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The Thin Place: Where the Sacred and the Ordinary Collide

As hard as it is to imagine, we find ourselves in the latter half of 2026. In four short months, we will turn the page on this year and say howdy to 2027. Amazing how quickly time, life, and being Christ's community here on the corner of 9th and Washington, goes by. The beginning of a new school year is just around the corner and soon the leaves will start to change color as the autumn season settles in on us. Again, amazing!

It's as good a time as any to remind us that one of our goals as a church body for 2026 was our spiritual renewal. For a church our size, and given our overall age, the number of ministries we have our fingers in and the type of ministries they are, speaks volumes to how God has spoken into our collective hearts as followers of the Risen One, Jesus Christ! Our focus on spiritual renewal, building up ourselves and others in the way of Christ, ensures that our foundation for mission and ministry continues to be sound, relational, dynamic and growing. Just as there are stages of human development, so too are we as Christ followers, expected to grow in our faith. Sure, there will be side-trips and times of stagnation and/or even taking a break. However, God's story is clear that we are to grow and mature in our faith; that we are not to get stuck in one place for too long. I think that means that the old book title: **"All I need to know, I learned in Kindergarten,"** is inaccurate when it comes to yours and mine, faith development.

Last month in the August Edition of the Windows, we asked folks to give us an idea about what topics, studies, subjects, etc., around faith and formation that you might be interested in. The response, so far, is, um, honestly? underwhelming. I don't say that to give you those old feelings of guilt and shame, but that I understand that when it comes to faith, our personal faith, we sometimes are hesitant to talk about it. Sometimes, because we might be private people, or more introverted than others. Other times, it might be because we're just not that interested. But mostly, it's because we feel crunched for time and, again, if we're honest, we have a hard time articulating the areas, questions, topics, that make us go, hmmm?

Let's try this another way! **What are you curious about?** When it comes to faith, God, Jesus, the church, etc., **what makes you go or say: WHY?** Why does the bible say that? Why does God seem one way over there and completely different over here? Why does John's gospel story seem so different from the other 3 gospel accounts? Are we supposed to take the entire bible, literally? Why or Why not? How should we read the bible? How does one pray? Privately or out loud, in front of others? Well, you get the idea now. No one is ever too old to ask why? Your curiosity will open doors of discovery, a-ha moments, insight, and even revelation(s), that God has for you.

We are, once again, providing the survey article from last month here in this edition of the Windows. It's another opportunity for you to share with us the

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things you are curious about...your Why's? Who knows where any of this may lead? Perhaps it will lead to having a once a month Saturday morning gathering of Why Questions? Whatever shakes out, we want to provide opportunities for spiritual growth and renewal. That growth, the curiosity of wanting to discover more about God, God's story, etc., is the foundation of why we do, what we do, when it comes to mission and ministry.

Let me close with an example.

Luke 4:16-19, finds Jesus having returned to his home town, and being a faithful and observant Jew, he goes to the synagogue, where he reads from the prophet Isaiah, these words found in verses 18 & 19 of Luke's gospel account:

The Spirit of our God is upon me:

because the Most High has anointed me to bring Good News to those who are poor.

God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those held captive,

Recovery of sight to those who are blind, and release to those in prison –

to proclaim the year of our God's favor.

(Inclusive Bible)

Those words, Isaiah's words but now through the lens and actions of Jesus is why we do:

Feed people, body, soul and spirit at Table Grace – why we deal with folks who are houseless, addicted, mentally challenged and/or ill or just on the margins of those things. Those words above are why we say things like:

You are made in God's image; enough in God's eyes; deeply, deeply loved.

It's why we walk humbly, love completely, live differently.

It's why we engage with people who were previously incarcerated and now are looking to live a new life as they re-enter that life, through One Parish-One Prisoner.

It's why we support and partner with World Relief as they resettle refugees and asylum seekers who are displaced and fleeing unsafe, dangerous, homelands and refugee camps.

It's why we say to whomever we meet:

COME AND SEE!

Here, you too can experience Jubilee – the year of God's favor!

Blessings and Joy! – Pastor Mark (Rev)

It's been three years since my wife, Joan Friesen, retired from her role as Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis and we moved back/to Carlyon Beach, in northwest Olympia. For Joan it was a "moved back" as she lived here from 1995 until a few months after we got married in 2000. For me it is a "moved to," although I grew up from 1st grade thru Junior High in West Seattle.

Getting connected to a local church family was a high priority for us. Since both of us are life-long American Baptists we knew we wanted to find a church home that reflected the Baptist values that we grew up with. Oly First came with people we already knew. Gary and Mylinda Baits were seminary classmates of Joan's and long-time friends. Pastor Mark worked with me and Joan on a Region-wide Youth Event in Spokane in 1999. Beginning our church shopping at Oly First was a no brainer. After just a few Sundays it was clear that this would be a place where we could fully engage in community and impactful ministry.

I enjoy serving as a worship leader, especially the "Gifts of the People" also known as the Offering. I do so gladly because one of the biggest areas of growth for me as a follower of Jesus, is in my giving. The first 20 years of my adulthood would be a playbook of what NOT to do with your resources. Not having any clues about saving, living at least within my means if not below my means, being intentional in what I gave to the church (if anything to be honest), and racking up credit card debt left me embarrassed, shamed, and feeling like a hypocrite as a Christian.

At age 39, with God's help and patience, Joan's encouragement, and intentional changes in my lifestyle and faith I slowly began the process of turning my financial life around. There was no magic pill, no silver bullet, no winning lottery ticket. It took a commitment to live below my means, to begin to be intentional in giving back to my church what God had freely given me, and to come up with a plan on how to eliminate credit card debt starting with the account with the highest interest rate. As each account was paid off, there was a celebration including thanking God for His faithfulness along my journey.

As my financial reality began to align with my faith and values, this area of my life also began to reflect the integrity that was so important to me and my understanding of what God expects in my response to His abundance and generosity.

Financially you might be more like the 19–39-year-old me...OR...you might be more like the 46–66-year-old me...OR...somewhere in between. Let me tell you that the greatest joy in my life now is that God continues to help Joan and me find ways to be even more generous. When we write our giving checks to the church we think of it as our part in supporting the incredible work and ministry our church is doing locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. We never think of writing a check to the church as "paying one of our bills."

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It's been 3 years continued...

Friends, we realize that when our gift is combined with your gift, and another person's gift, and everyone else's gifts there is this synergy of giving that makes an impact with countless people thru Block Party's and Intergenerational Community Gathering, thru worship services and Bible Studies, thru Table Grace, thru our support of our missionaries, Evergreen Association, World Relief and much more. Thoughts and Things updates us on the prayer needs within and connected to our church family. Hospital visits, phone calls and cards touch people hurting, people healing, people celebrating, and people longing for connection. All these ministries and more are worthy of our support.

Please consider joining us in increasing your generosity to support the important and meaningful ministry of our church...your church family. I'll end with one of my favorite inspirational Bible verses about giving, Malachi 3:10.

"Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

-Jay Nordgaard, one of the ragamuffins that calls Oly First his home church since September 2023.

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Intergenerational Community Gathering (ICG)

Our next ICG get-together will be Saturday, October 3^d, from 4:00 to 6:00 in the Fireside Room at Olympia First Baptist.

Menu has not yet been determined, though there is a strong possibility we will have one last potluck! We are Baptists, after all!

These times of intergenerational sharing; of worship and building both relational connections as well as spiritual nurturing opportunities are a vital piece of our spiritual formation as a congregation. The things that we do together, form us spiritually, as much as our individual rhythms and practices like prayer, reading scripture, journaling, serving others, etc.

We hope you'll put this on your calendar and join us on October 3rd!

If you haven't been to one as of yet, well:

Come and See!

Grief Observed

One of the hardest parts of being a community is saying goodbye to those within our congregation who have graduated into God's eternal and loving presence. It's this odd mix of emotions – grateful that pain, suffering and the aches of life are no longer part of their life. Celebrative in their life on the other side of this existence with God, forever. Sadness, loss, and grief for their absence and the light they shared with so many. So, we gather, to celebrate, to grieve, to acknowledge their life amongst us and to provide our presence of comfort, care and hospitality.

Memorial for Becky Nash

Saturday, September 19th, 2:00 p.m. – Sanctuary
Reception to follow immediately afterwards – Fellowship Hall

***Memorial for Mike Cooper**

Saturday, September 26th, 2:00 p.m. – Sanctuary
Reception to follow immediately afterwards – Fellowship Hall

*Mike had a long career as a civil servant through his career as a Fire Fighter, Politician, Union Leader, Wrestling/Soccer Coach, and American Baptist layperson. We expect a large gathering of folks from those different parts of Mike's life. All of that to say that we will need to be flexible and adaptable to accommodate folks this day.

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Spiritual Formation Survey

As we start putting together opportunities and studies for spiritual formation growth, the Community Engagement and Formation ministry team would like to get some feedback from the congregation about topics, issues, and/or specific books of the Bible, that you all are interested in. We want to be sure that whatever we offer has a good biblical foundation to it. Your input and interest goes a long way in helping us put things together that are beneficial and aligns with your spiritual interests.

For the most part, we are looking at smaller time commitments, 4–6 weeks, maybe a few more weeks, if the topic warrants it. We want to be flexible, but also realize that we have folks that are retired who have a bit more flexibility about where and when as well as people who are working (a variety of hours) and do not have as much flex as others. All we ask is that if you want to see us provide specific study/conversation/Q & A opportunities, that you also make a commitment to participate in those offerings.

Top 3 Topics/Studies of Interest:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Please indicate Day(s) and Time(s) that you would prefer, below.
We will do our best to take the info provided for scheduling purposes.
If you could also share your name with us, that would be helpful as well.

[Topics that have been kicked around so far (to give you an idea) has been Christian Nationalism; Baptist Distinctives (What makes a Baptist, a Baptist) and; Character of God. Again, if one of these is of interest or in your top 3, please include them above.]

A month or so ago, Pastor Mark asked for volunteers to share about their sacred spaces. Several volunteers told of where they encounter the Sacred, where they find solace and peace. Sacred spaces should be defined broadly: it's where we can escape the chaos and find a center for our being, a space where we can find calm in times of distress.

When I first visited Washington, my daughter, Karen, took us to Staircase, the closest entry point to Olympic National Park. It is such a beautiful place of tall trees, rapids and a place to commune with Nature.

A year ago fires closed the area; Bear Gulch and Staircase burned for most of the summer. Because of the ruggedness of the terrain and the dry conditions, efforts were made by the firefighters to contain the fire with no hope of putting the fires out until the fall rains came. They were able to wrap the structures in fireproof material.

After being closed to the public for over a year, Staircase reopened in early July. I decided it was time for Emily and me to see the damage firsthand. The drive was uneventful; there was no damage along the way and at Lake Cushman. The road was actually in great shape, with no potholes. Usually, the road is pocked with numerous potholes, but on this day, not one.

The structures and the campground were not damaged at all. I had already learned that the two bridges were intact. After crossing the bridge, fire damage became apparent. The first side trail was closed, but skeletons of trees were visible up the mountainside. Trees were strewn on the ground; others were standing but scorched with the blackness of burned wood. There were undamaged trees, which were able to withstand the fires. I was overcome with a sense of angst and sadness..

Then I noticed that it was not all death and destruction. The forest continues to live! Without the canopy, the undergrowth was flourishing; there were even saplings that were undamaged. Fireweed, the first plant to appear after a fire, was scattered along the trail. The forest was still alive, and it was replenishing itself.

My mood changed from the grief I felt to a sense of joy and hope. I was witness to the cycle of death and resurrection. I loved the forest as I had experienced it, but to renew itself, it had to go through what John of the Cross called the dark night of the soul. To push the metaphor a bit further, to encounter the renewing presence of the sacred, we must discard old ways of perception and find new ways to connect with the Ground of our Being. Growth is not possible without change.

God is good, all the time.

All the time, God is good.

A friend once told me, after hearing parts of my story, that I had chosen to use all the crayons in the box when coloring my life. I can't disagree. Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether I truly had a choice about some of the colors that appear in my past. Nevertheless, I can recognize this: God is good. All the time.

I was not raised in the church.

My parents divorced when I was two. My mother and older sister left, and I stayed behind to be raised by my father.

Dad refused to set foot in a church, though I eventually came to understand it was not because he lacked belief. He never objected when my Aunt Sheryl took me to Sunday School, and he never teased me when he found me praying or reading the Bible. I yearned for God from an early age. Dad never discouraged my faith.

But, when in my adolescence, my first act of rebellion was to join a youth group at the local Assembly of God, he refused to attend my baptism. "You're far more likely to find the devil in church than anywhere else," he told me.

Dad was right, at least about that particular church.

Before long, I was driven away by the hypocrisy of the adults around me. My faith, however, had already found a permanent home within me. That same faith guides me today, and is what eventually brought me to Olympia First Baptist Church.

I never lost my faith, but I did lose my way.

I took the long way home. I got lost a time or two along the way. No matter. Every step brought me to where I am today, and this is a good place. I have no doubt that somehow, no matter which path I followed, God was leading me here.

I came to OFBC looking for a place to belong.

I have struggled with belonging for most of my life. It began in my family. After my mother and sister left, my mother went on to have two more children. I always felt as though I were on the outside of the family they created together. I never felt like I belonged.

That feeling followed me into school and social life. I desperately wanted to belong, but I felt as though I was missing something essential, something everyone else seemed to have. That feeling kept me on the outside, and it also drove me to try to fit into places I was never meant to be.

It led to bad decisions and made me vulnerable to the exploitation that is all too common in the lives of young girls.

Eventually, the road led to deep addiction, domestic violence, separation from my children, homelessness, and ultimately, prison. It was there that I learned that when Jesus is all you have, you discover that He is all you need. I was driven to my knees, which turned out to be the best place for me.

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I spent 11 years incarcerated at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. There, I learned many things and unlearned some others. I surrendered. I experienced forgiveness, and I learned to forgive.

God patiently taught me, as a parent teaches a child, what it means to be made in God's image, and that God's image is not what I had imagined. God did not expect perfection from me. God only expected devotion, and God gave it in return. I could never have learned to love God, if God had not loved me first.

God poured love over me in a way that changed everything. In doing so, God made one thing clear: All that is asked in return is that I trust God and extend that same love to my neighbor. I spent years in study. I practiced love. And I allowed myself to be changed.

When I released and came to Olympia in 2017, I got to work. Although I did not immediately find a church, I found that I had been prepared with purpose and I lived that purpose to the best of my understanding and ability.

My footsteps were ordered both by faith, and oftentimes, by my folly. But I have learned that God can work through that, too. I went back to school, earning first a bachelor's then a master's degree. I broke barriers, built bridges, and broke a few ceilings along the way.

Still, I longed for a community of like-minded believers. It seemed almost impossible to find. In all honesty, I was afraid. I was afraid I would be rejected for my past, for my crimes, for who and how I love. I was afraid I would encounter the same hypocrisy I had experienced at the Assembly of God. My heart could not bear the thought of going through that again.

It took me nearly ten years to begin searching for a place where I could truly belong. It took one service at Oly First to know that I had found it.

I found a community that welcomed me. I found people who made room for me and my story. And, perhaps most importantly, I found a place where I could continue doing what God has been teaching me all along: to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with my God; to love God, to love my neighbor, and make room for the change that only such love can bring about.

When I look back now at all the colors of my life—the beautiful ones, the painful ones, and the ones I wish I could erase, I can see that God was always there. God was there in the wilderness, in the prison, on my knees. God was with my children, in my recovery, in my education, in my work, in my relationship, and God is here. And this is good place. God is good, all the time.

All the time, God is good.

A Letter from the Stewardship Team

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” — Galatians 6:9

Grace and peace to you. As we find ourselves about two-thirds of the way through the year, I write with gratitude for the many ways God has been at work among us and through us. Our congregation continues to be blessed by the gifts of time, talent, prayer, service, and financial support that each person brings to our shared ministry.

As some of you may remember from our July “State of the Church” meeting; Stewardship is more than meeting a budget. It is a faithful response to God’s generosity and an invitation to participate in the mission and values we share: Hospitality, Relational Connection, Spiritual Nurturing, worshiping together, caring for one another, serving our neighbors, and offering hope in Christ’s name.

At this point in the year, here are a few things that have been buzzing around the Stewardship Team meeting table:

- A working building and maintenance program. Creating an editable document that can continue to be revised as needed.
- Building Use and Rental Space Agreements
- Safety and Security. To include adding security cameras in the future.
- Creating Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) for Memorial Services.

Most importantly, we want to be transparent about the financial state of the church. While spending is staying within budget, giving is down compared to last year. This means that, even as we continue to manage expenses carefully, our ability to sustain ministry through the remainder of the year depends on the faithful and prayerful support of the congregation.

We also recognize that these last few years have brought the loss of many beloved members of our church family. Their presence, service, friendship, and faith helped shape who we are as a congregation. We remember them with deep gratitude, and we carry forward their legacy as we continue caring for one another and nurturing this church home for those who are here now and for those who will come after us.

Even in seasons of change, we believe God is still planting seeds of hope among us. My hope is that, together as a church family, we will continue building a sustainable future for ministry here at the corner of 9th and Washington—a place where people can belong and experience God’s presence in every stage of life.

With gratitude,
The Stewardship Team
Wendy Wilson – Team Leader

Thursday Morning Bible Study:

The Return!

Yes, boys and girls, it's that time once again, when we will offer a Bible study opportunity, both live and in-person while also being streamed lived that one can view in real time or later in the day or week, depending on your life schedule.

Starting Date is Thursday, September 17th, 9:30 a.m.

Subject/Topic:

Parables of Jesus as Subversive Speech

I'm borrowing the title of the book my New Testament teacher and mentor, the late Dr. Bill Herzog, wrote. I/we will use his book as one of our main resources. I hope that we will discover, together, that these often-simple stories taken from everyday life of those living in 1st Century Palestine, have deeper layers that also have subversive elements that run counter to life lived under the presence of the Empire. It's these counter-intuitive elements that make living our faith out loud, even today, challenging and at times, uncomfortable.

Hope you will jump on board when you can!

See you Thursday, September 17th, 9:30 a.m., Room 102 or on our Facebook page.

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2026 Evergreen Annual Gathering

"Reimagining Church" (Isaiah 43:19)

October 8-10, 2026

Join us for a time of fellowship, empowerment, equipping, and holy business at Crosswalk Community Church in Napa, California.

Keynote Speaker:

Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam

Pastor of First Baptist Church of America,
Providence, Rhode Island

If you are interested in attending, in person, or the online options, visit/register on the Evergreen website:

www.ea-abc.org

If you have questions, let Pastor Mark know.

If he doesn't know, he can find someone who does!



Camp Bethel's Fall Family "Fun"draiser

Saturday, September 5th, 2026 • 2pm - 6pm

Hosted by Olympia First Baptist Church

904 Washington St SE, Olympia, WA 98501

Join us for an evening of fall fun for the whole family!

Donations Are
Tax Deductible!

 Dinner - (\$25 Donation)

 Silent Auction

 Games

 Bake Sale

 Bring your dollar bills for games!
BINGO, Left-Right-Center, and more!

RSVP Appreciated

contact@campbethel.net

or

360-289-3444



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Church Staff

Rev. Mark Rambo, Senior Pastor
Jonathan Spatola-Knoll, Director of Music Ministries
Lela DePaolo, Secretary
Aaron Delaney, Interim Campus Maintenance

September Sermons – Ordinary Time – 2026 – Olympia First Baptist Church

Sunday, September 6th – Ordinary Time

Communion Sunday –

Sermon Scripture: Matthew 18:15–20

Sermon/Homily Title: Community Rule

The Written Word: Romans 13:8–14

The Written Word: Psalm 119:33–40

Sunday, September 13th – Ordinary Time

Sermon Scripture: Matthew 18:21–35

Sermon Title: Community Rule, Part 2

The Written Word: Romans 14:1–12

The Written Word: Psalm 103:(1-7) 8–13

Sunday, September 20th – Ordinary Time

The Stories We Tell

God's Story – Jonah 3:10–4:11

Story of God's heart/character vs. our sense of justice/righteousness

God's Story, 2 – Matthew 20:1–16

Story/parable of God's idea of fairness and generosity vs. ours...

September 20th Continued...

The 2 stories for this Sunday, will ask us to be vulnerable, honest about how God may have tempered... softened, us, our hearts, our views, where once we were, um, more rigid and absolute in our convictions and feelings.

Sunday, September 27th – Ordinary Time

Sermon Scripture – Matthew 21:23–32

Sermon Title: The Proof is In the Pudding

The Written Word: Exodus 17:1–7

The Written Word: Psalm 25:1–9

