



WELCOMING
EVERYONE TO A
BIGGER TABLE.

THE CORNER

uhbc.org  

SUNDAY MORNING LIFE GROUPS - 9:15AM
SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP - 10:30AM
WEDNESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY - 6:30PM

NEWS FROM UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH

(a CBF/ABC Church)

CRITER

Jan 2026

Looking Ahead with Hope, Courage, and Faith

A new year always feels a little like standing at the edge of a road we haven't yet traveled. Like we've got one foot in a new world and the other foot in the old. We bring with us the stories of last year. Joy we celebrated, losses we experienced, prayers answered, and some prayers still hanging in the air. January invites us to pause, to look back with gratitude, and lift our eyes toward what God might be doing next.

As we begin this new year together, I want to share some of the dreams I carry for our church family, not as a checklist, a ten step system, or a pressure-filled plan, but as a hopeful vision for who we already are and who we are becoming. None of these dreams mean that we aren't already doing and being these things, but in the way of Jesus there is always room to grow and always more depth in which to dive.

My first dream is that we would grow deeper in spirit.

Not busier. Not louder. Deeper.

I pray this is a year when worship feels more honest, prayer feels less rushed, and faith feels more lived-in and experienced, not just talked about. A year when we take God seriously, but never ourselves too seriously. A year when we make space for questions, doubts, laughter, and tears, trusting that God meets us in all of it.

A year grounded in prayer, Scripture, worship, and trust. Not shallow faith that collapses under pressure or built on slim superstitions, but resilient faith that can hold joy and grief at the same time. A community that takes discipleship seriously, not as perfection, but as practice as we learn together how to love God and love people in the middle of real, complicated lives.

My second dream is that we would grow wider in love and welcome.

That we would continue to be a thoughtful, gentle church in a loud and anxious world. A place where people feel seen instead of sorted, known instead of judged. A place where hospitality isn't a program but a posture. A place where we keep making room at the table for neighbors, newcomers, and those who aren't sure what they believe yet. A church known not for who we exclude, but for who we welcome. A place where skeptics, saints, doubters, and dreamers find space to belong. A church that continues to be thoughtful and gentle in a harsh world. A church that's curious instead of defensive, compassionate instead of fearful, and always anchored in grace.

My third dream is that we would grow bolder in service and mission.

That we would keep showing up for our city and beyond; not because it looks good, but because love drives us. I dream of a church that refuses to separate worship from service, prayer from action, or faith from daily life. A church that continues to partner, serve, give, and love in ways that matter.

Pastor's
Corner

Continued on Page 3

Youth Ministry

December was a meaningful and joy-filled month in our youth group, marked by fellowship, fun, and intentional time in God's Word. One of the highlights of the season was our annual Youth Christmas Party on December 10th. Students enjoyed pizza, Christmas cookies and cakes, along with a hot chocolate bar featuring a variety of festive toppings.

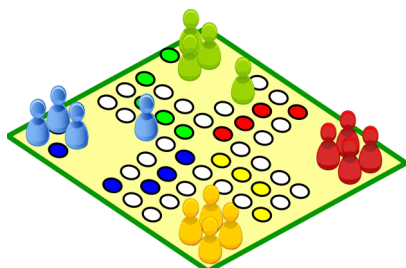
The evening centered around Friendly Feud, one of our students' favorite games. The friendly competition brought lots of laughter and energy, creating an atmosphere where students could relax, connect, and enjoy being together.

Throughout the rest of the month, our Sunday morning and Wednesday night gatherings included additional Christmas-themed games and activities. These moments—such as unwrapping gifts while wearing kitchen mitts and tossing ornaments into Santa hats—added joy to the season while continuing to strengthen relationships within the group.

Alongside the fun, our students continued studying the book of Luke, walking through the Christmas story and reflecting on what it reveals about the character of God. We discussed how God cares deeply about even the smallest details of our lives, how He possesses infinite knowledge and power, and how He often works through the humble and seemingly powerless to reveal His plans. These conversations have helped students see the Christmas story not only as a historical event, but as a reminder of God's intentional and personal involvement in their own lives.



As we look ahead to January, we are planning a Youth/Mentor Game Night. This will be a special evening where students are invited to bring their mentors to join them for a night of board games and community. We hope this will be a meaningful opportunity to strengthen those relationships in a relaxed and fun setting. On that note, we are always looking for mentors. If you have felt called to work with students in any capacity, this could be an incredible opportunity to pour into the life of a student at UHBC in a meaningful and powerful way. We would love for you to consider joining us.



We are also continuing conversations about Passport Camp for the summer of 2026. A 20% deposit is due by January 18th (Sunday). If

you have not yet reached out to me regarding your student's interest in camp, please do so as soon as possible—we want to make sure every student who would like to attend has the opportunity to do so.

If you feel led to help a student attend Passport Camp, we would be incredibly grateful. Sponsorships can be full or partial, and every gift helps remove barriers for students who want to go. To give, you may place a check in the Sunday morning offering and note in the memo that it is for "Passport Camp—Student Sponsorship." Thank you for partnering with us in investing in our students.



Thank you for your continued prayers and support of our youth ministry. We are grateful for the opportunity to invest in the lives of these students and walk alongside them in their faith journey.

With gratitude and joy,

Heather Twibell



What a wonderful month celebrating the “Good News” of Jesus’ birth. We spent much of our time together preparing for the Live Nativity and it was worth the effort! The kids did an amazing job narrating the story, acting out all of the parts, and singing with Ms. Lauren!

This year our very own Harlow Porter as Mary, and Preston Hake played Joseph. Of course, we couldn’t have a live nativity without baby Jesus, and Kieran Roarke really to to heart the lyrics “no crying he makes” and was picture perfect!

Children’s Ministry



We had a host of heavenly angels — Adeline Jennings, Liliana Minor, and Loraine Roarke. The shepherds, Liam Twibell, Arthur Goodson, and Winston Goodson, did an excellent job tending to their little lambs, played by Bear Boyts and Penelope Goodson. We also had a very sweet camel played by Suzana Boyts, and our donkey was played by Harrison Minor. Bringing the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were our wise ones, King Archer Edwards, Queen Brooklyn Twibell, and Queen Elliot Miller. Great job, everyone!



We celebrated our Christmas party in the Treehouse with a movie, hot cocoa and treats! As one year ends and another begins, I’m ever thankful for the opportunity to spend time with our youngest church members. I am blessed to watch them grow and shine their lights into the world around them. May you have a blessed New Years and I pray you find your true joy in the Lord in 2026!

**Joyfully yours,
Alicyn Jennings**

Continued from Page 1

A church that believes worship doesn’t end with a benediction, but spills out into classrooms, neighborhoods, shelters, hospital rooms, dinner tables, and streets. I dream of us continuing to align our time, resources, and energy with the places where hope feels most needed.

And yes, I dream that we would grow in number.

Not for the sake of growth itself, but because every new person represents a story God is still writing. Not for ego or image, but because every person matters. Because growth means more stories, more lives changed, more chances to embody the love of Christ. I believe there are people in our community who are searching for a place like University Heights Baptist Church.

Above all, my deepest dream is that everything we do this year would point us, and others, back to Jesus. Where we don’t confuse activity with faithfulness, or tradition with transformation. A church that keeps asking, “How do we make everything about Jesus?” and “How can we help make the lives of our neighbors better?” My prayer is that in our worship, our service, our words, our reputation, our actions, our message, and our celebrations, people would encounter grace, hope, and love.

In the weeks ahead we’ll continue a new sermon series called On the Road Again, where we’ll take time to reflect on where we’ve been, name the mile markers that have shaped us, and look honestly at where God might be leading us next. It’s a season to tell the truth about our journey, to celebrate what God has done, to grieve what hasn’t been easy, and to dream boldly about what’s ahead.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Thank you for your faithfulness, your generosity, your patience, and your trust. I am genuinely excited about what’s ahead; not because the road will be easy, but because we don’t walk it alone.

Here’s to a new year.

Here’s to new mercies.

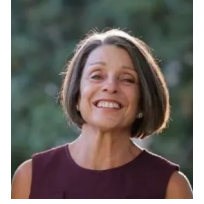
Here’s to trusting God with the road ahead.

Happy New Year!

-Pastor Nolan

Road Work

*This month we're introducing a new feature, "Road Work," sharing stories of personal faith journeys...where we came from, how we got here, where we hope to go. This month we're honored to share some reflections from **Gail Smart** about her faith story.*



I did not grow up in the church. While my mom was a Christian, my dad was not a believer. My mother and my grandmother, however, made sure that I had a faith foundation. I asked the Lord into my heart and life at a neighborhood vacation Bible school in 5th grade. Christian friends were critical in my growth. They invited me to go to church with them or join the youth group or a Bible study with them.

As I grew older and my relationship with the Lord deepened, I knew that I wanted my marriage to reflect this as well. It was important for me to marry someone who had the same desire to be in church and raise our family in church. Marrying into Cliff's family introduced me to what it looks like to have a marriage and a family committed to following Christ.

I haven't always been successful, but I have tried to live a life that is reflective of my Christian beliefs and values by being kind, caring, open, and generous, and making sure that people felt welcome in our home. That included our friends, our sons' friends, and people in the community. This spirit was really tested when Cliff became the president of MSU and we hosted over 100 events at our house during the 13 years he was president.

My belief in and my relationship with God has always motivated and given me a purpose in the ways I have chosen to serve at church and spend my time in our community. I think it's important to give back to the community, and that we all have an obligation to serve others. I have taken Matthew 25:35-40 to heart, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

I started small in this effort. I began volunteering in our church's food pantry. That work led to my becoming the co-director of an eight member church food pantry in downtown Springfield which resulted in my co-chairing the Poverty Commission for two years, where we studied poverty's root causes and the best practices to help lift up those experiencing that difficult way of life.

I currently serve on the board of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks and the Springfield Board of Education. These organizations are directly involved in bettering our community and the lives of children in our community. I never would have thought I would be capable of serving in any of these roles when I began volunteering in a small food pantry located in the basement of our church, but my life is proof that God can take that spark and grow it into something really meaningful. I am happy to be a part of a church that is so focused on helping those in our community.

In case you are wondering about my dad, he became a Christian at the age of 67 and became an active member in his church. Never stop praying for others.



MISSIONS & MINISTRY



Mission Group Meeting
Tuesday, Jan 13, 1pm
Speaker: Bob Perry

ALL ARE WELCOME!



Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the

Global Missions Offering

To date, we've received \$4,966. It isn't too late to contribute!

Sarah McCloy, missionary in Sendai, Japan writes:



"Every Tuesday at Shokel Gakuin High School, a small group of students gather during lunch. These students are all part of the high school's religion club. Together we eat our bento lunches and talk about our week—tests, clubs, and whatever has been on their minds. As we finish eating, the conversation shifts to a short devotional study, where we read Scripture and talk through key points together. On days when we have a little extra time, we wrap up with a quick game, often one I bring from my English classes, before everyone hurries off to afternoon lessons.

It might seem like a small, ordinary moment—just a handful of high school students giving up their lunch break to learn more about Jesus. But in Japan, this simple gathering is something uncommon and deeply encouraging. Less than one percent of students nationwide identify as Christian, a reflection of Japan's broader religious landscape. For young people, choosing to follow Jesus can feel lonely and, at times, socially challenging. Many want to blend in, and faith can make them stand out.

And yet, week after week, these students come. They open their Bibles, share their hearts, ask honest questions, and encourage one another. Their quiet courage shines in a place where Christian community is rare, and it is a joy and privilege to walk alongside them."

THANKS

A HUGE THANK YOU to the many people who contributed to our Global Missions Day! This event could not happen without your help in:

- Providing egg casseroles, bread, and fruit
- Children singing, and Eli Roberts beautiful solo
- 40 people who carried flags, and those who prepared the flags, representing the many people around the world who need to hear that God loves them.
- Dr. Toya Richards, who spoke so eloquently about justice and missions.



Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Hebrews 13:3

Please join us for our joint mission group meeting on **Tuesday, January 13, at 1pm**. We'll meet in the fellowship hall and hear from our own **Bob Perry**, who will share with us about his ministry with the ICE detainees being held in the Greene County Jail.

ALL ARE WELCOME!

What's Happening?

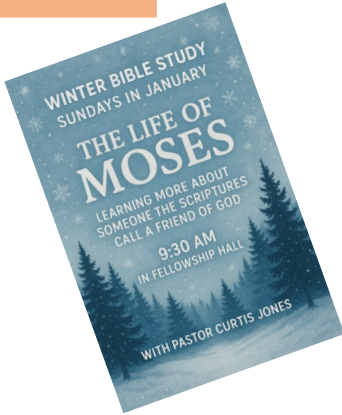
THE B-I-B-L-E

Making sense of the pocket-sized library we call Scripture



Wednesdays at 6:30pm

In these sessions we will cover how we got the Bible (since the Gideons didn't deliver it to us), Old Testament, New Testament, the Bible and relationships, the Bible and science, violence and suffering in the Bible, and we will wrap it up with a session dedicated to your Big Questions!



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 Curtis Jones | 13 Gerre Brown | 20 Carole Fortner |
| 2 Tom Edelman
Carla Kirchner | 14 Harley Snyder | 21 Rebecca Sirb |
| 3 Patrick Twibell | 16 Buanna Beach
Peggy Bush | 23 Phillip Hockensmith |
| 4 Bob Perry | 17 Susan Ang
Sheri Bryan | 24 Leslie Arnold
JC Rainey |
| 6 Adeline Jennings | 18 Becky Donaldson
Nate Schlueter | 25 Renee Grant
Tina Miller |
| 9 Sue Grindstaff
Kim Woody | 19 Marilyn Broaddus
Phillip Jones
Vicky Scott | 28 Mark Arnold |
| 10 Steve Stepp | | 31 Jim Hagan |
| 11 Connie Smith | | |

January 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 New Year's Day—Church Office Closed	2	3
4 9:15 Life Groups 10:30 Worship Take Down Christmas Decorations after worship	5	6	7 5:45 Supper 6:30 Bible Study Kids/Youth 6:45 Chancel Choir	8	9	10 10am Christian Writers' Group
11 9:15 Life Groups 10:30 Worship	12	13 M & M Meetings	14 5:45 supper 6:30 Bible Study Kids/Youth 6:45 Chancel Choir	15	16	17
18 9:15 Life Groups 10:30 Worship	19	20	21 5:45 supper 6:30 Bible Study Kids/Youth 6:45 Chancel Choir	22	23	24
25 9:15 Life Groups 10:30 Worship 4pm Board Meetings	26	27	28 5:45 supper 6:30 Bible Study Kids/Youth 6:45 Chancel Choir	29	30	31

***Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but helping the poor honors him.***

Proverbs 14:31



This month I asked Sonja Baldwin to write a bit about her and Randy's experience serving at Eden Village.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

And so the saying goes...

It takes a village—EDEN VILLAGE—

- to house the homeless
- befriend the lonely
- shelter the cold
- feed the hungry
- bring dignity to the downtrodden.

Randy & I have witnessed acts of love and mercy as we have served at Eden Village. Our first opportunities came through our Life Group, Friends for the Journey. We served a meal the last week of the month when (as we have all experienced) there is more month left than money. We would set up a self-serve meal, then we would join with residents of Eden Village in their community room, chatting and getting to know them and their stories and sharing ourselves as well. The next year, Randy & I decided to continue each month. With the help of Ann Willingham, Shannon & Melissa Hall, Rosemarie Prickett and others, we were able to build on those relationships. We appreciate the Missions Groups and individuals who helped with funding.

Last winter, Randy & I cooked and served at a couple of the COLD WEATHER SHELTER nights as well. (I think they had 37 nights below 20 degrees.)

What a privilege and a blessing!

- Cots everywhere but calm prevailed.
- Obvious hunger but patience to wait.
- Great need and grateful hearts.

It was eye-opening and humbling to actually see homelessness in the flesh and be the hands and heart of Jesus for even a few hours.

We would encourage each one of you at UHBC to spend some time serving at Eden Village. Take the tour, hear the vision, see the documentary "Where No One Sleeps Outside."

There is a place for you to serve no matter your age or abilities. You will find acceptance and appreciation, friendship and faith, humor and humility. And as often happens in Jesus' upside-down kingdom, you will leave with more blessing than what you brought.

It takes a village— our UHBC village.

There are several ways you can serve in some way at Eden Village:

1. *Volunteer a Few Hours at the Crisis Cold Weather Shelter.* You don't have to stay all night (unless you want to). You can serve for as long or short as you can. You're not alone, there are others volunteering and there's always an Eden Village staffer present.
2. *Volunteer in the Prayer Room.* This year Eden Village has added a prayer room to their crisis cold weather shelter. You can spend time listening and praying for homeless brothers and sisters.
3. *Help with the evening meal.* This is a great opportunity for a Sunday school class/Life Group to build deeper relationships with one another and serve in a meaningful way.

Let's start 2026 building relationships at the margins while God builds our souls at the same time!

Blessings,

-Joe

***Wake Up
and Smell
the Coffee***

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS BAPTIST CHURCH

(Located at the Corner of Grand & National)

1010 S. National Ave

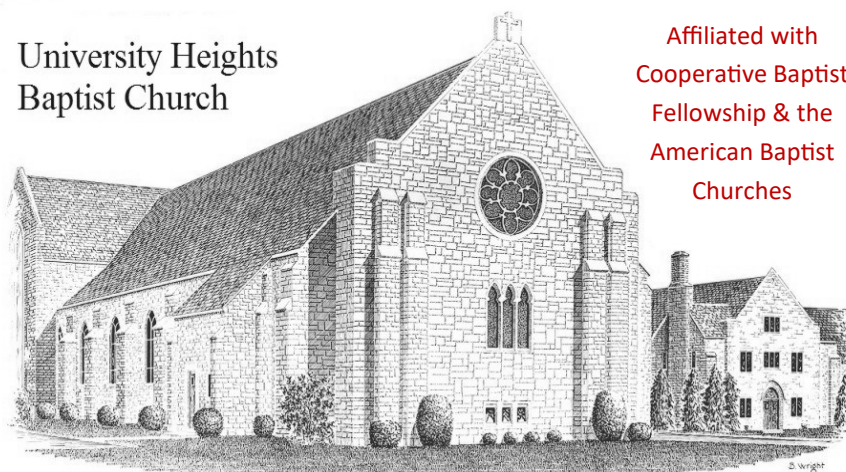
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Senior Pastor,
Dr. Nolan B. Porter

University Heights Baptist Church



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A Church of Thoughtful, Gentle Grace

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