



Dear New and Returning Deacons,

Welcome to this year of service to our church! Let me start by thanking Charlie Glazener for his excellent leadership during the past year! He capably led us to explore important issues and capitalize on our church's outreach and messaging opportunities. Over a variety of topics, his thoughtful, data driven approach helped us compare where we are now to where we have been and stretch towards where we want to be. Thank you, Charlie!

Let's review where we are. First Baptist is both a haven and a light to our community. In terms of superlatives, we have excellence in worship and music, engaging Bible study, a variety of wonderful programs for all ages, important missions and ministries to the community, and a welcoming, loving, open fellowship focused on *Beautiful Belonging*. The *Center for Faith and Life* programming and *Via Karis* practices provide creative and meaningful ways to nurture our faith, as we face life's joys and challenges. There is a vibrancy to us. That said, our church faces some challenges. We need to take positive steps to manage and lower our debt, bolster our weekly giving, and increase our membership with our primary focus on younger families. As church leaders, our collective wisdom is vital to prayerfully discerning the right approaches for the future. And we need to do this with some urgency.

Where can we go? I feel we are on the cusp of something special; we are primed for future success. We have an excellent, creative, and dedicated staff. Recent pastoral hires have brought positive energy to the team which will be contagious to the congregation in the months ahead. First Baptist's stories of faith and service are exciting. As we share them with the community, like-minded people might be inspired to visit and ultimately join us. In March 2027, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our sanctuary which will build awareness, allow us to make direct connections with the community, and further enhance our message. Enthusiastic support of these opportunities will set in motion the blossoming of a new season in the life of our church. I am hopeful!

Lastly, I am excited to work with you in the coming year! Our Deacon Body is full of talent, wisdom, insight, thoughtfulness, and caring. The church is counting on us! From our Collaborative Ministry Model our tasks are to nurture the spiritual focus of all leaders, guide congregational discernment, outline the church's mission/vision, oversee support and resources, set primary policies/by-laws, create overall accountability measures, and lead the church to greater spiritual maturity. While these are important big picture tasks, the individual actions of each of us will mean much in the year ahead. Let's commit to one another to be present, pray for our church, community and country, offer encouragement, use our gifts faithfully, and be good stewards of the unique mission of First Baptist Asheville.

I am so looking forward to our time ahead!

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carleton Collins".

Carleton Collins
Deacon Chair, 2026-2027

"For when we give ourselves away
In service to our fellowman,
We get back more than we bestow
From the Father's loving hand."

Helen Steiner Rice