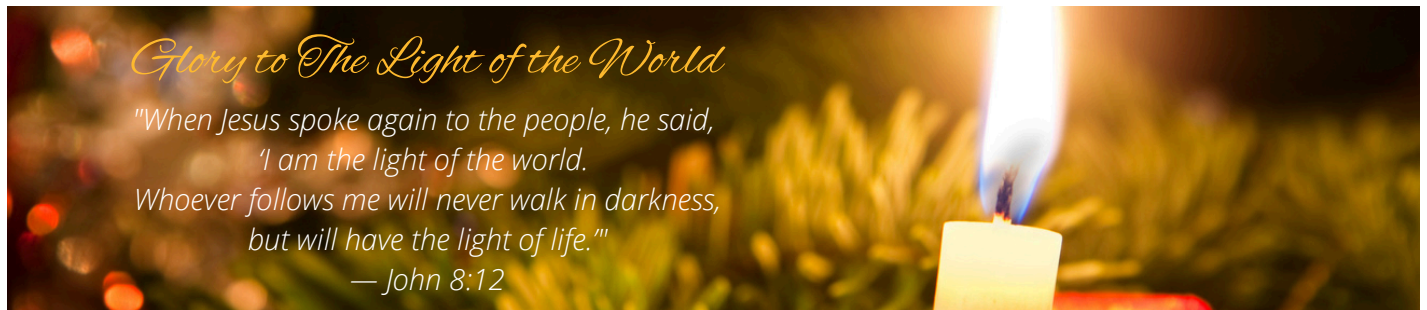


Working together until Metro Richmond is

TRANSFORMED

December 2024



Glory to The Light of the World

*"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said,
'I am the light of the world.*

*Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life."*

— John 8:12

At Christmas, the world is filled with light—twinkling decorations, glowing candles, and shimmering stars. Yet, these lights are only faint reflections of the true light that came into the world over 2,000 years ago. Jesus, the Son of God, entered our dark and broken world, not just to illuminate it, but to bring life, hope, and salvation. In the midst of busyness, traditions, and celebrations, let us pause to remember that the greatest light we celebrate is the One who shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5).

From the moment of creation, light has been a symbol of God's presence and power. God's first act was to declare, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). This same creative and transformative light was revealed in Jesus, who came to dispel spiritual darkness and guide us into the truth. The world often feels shadowed by despair, fear, and uncertainty. Like the shepherds who watched their flocks under a night sky, or the Magi who followed the star through the darkness, we are invited to lift our eyes toward Jesus, the source of unending light. His birth in Bethlehem was the dawn of a new day. His life, death, and resurrection opened the way for us to walk in His light, reflecting it to others.

***How can you reflect Christ's light to those around you?
In what ways can you let His light shine more brightly in your life?***

Lord Jesus,

You are the Light of the World, shining brightly in the darkest places of our hearts and our world. Thank You for leaving heaven's glory to bring us Your hope and salvation. As we celebrate Your birth, may Your light guide our steps, illuminate our hearts, and inspire us to shine Your love to others. Fill us with Your presence, and help us to be Your hands and feet to those in need.

We rejoice in You, the light that never fades. *Amen.*

Spend time in prayer or Scripture reflecting on how Jesus is the light in your life.

Choose one way to "shine your light" this week, whether through kindness, generosity, or encouragement to someone who is struggling.

As we light our candles, string our lights, and sing songs of joy, remember: The true Light of the World has come. Let us rejoice and share His light with others, for it is the gift of life eternal.

***"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."— Isaiah 9:2***



Randolph Macon College Alumna Aims to Boost Literacy in Liberia Through Project for Peace Library

The first time Calvina Birch '24 stepped foot in Liberia—her father's home country—she was there to make a difference. Through a \$10,000 Project for Peace grant, Birch spent the summer after her graduation helping create a library at Leap of Faith Academy, an elementary school in Liberia's capital city of Monrovia.

Projects for Peace is a global program that encourages young adults to develop innovative, community-centered, and scalable responses to the world's most pressing issues. Along the way, these student leaders increase their knowledge, improve skills, and establish identities as peacebuilders and changemakers. This year, the initiative selected 126 student projects, including Birch's.

Birch was inspired to do something for her father's West African homeland. A psychology major at RMC, she had traveled to Africa in 2023 with biology professor Ray Schmidt to conduct research. She knew that Liberia has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. Her hope was to provide young Liberians with the tools for the same quality education she had in the United States, and the crucial building block for that kind of education—the ability to read.

"Reading is a form of education that positively influences and changes society," Birch says in her personal statement in the project's official report.

With the idea to build a library, she worked with her father to find a partner school in Liberia. He connected her with Gaius Rainsbury, the principal of Leap of Faith Academy. From there, she applied for the grant and once the funding was secured, she got to work on the logistics.

Here in Virginia, she collaborated with the Virginia Church Library Association and the River City Faith Network to organize book drives to fill the shelves of the library in Monrovia. She raised additional funds and collected more donations by conducting a bake sale fundraiser on campus through CKI (Circle K International, a student community service and leadership development organization) and presenting the project at the Black Excellence Showcase in the spring.

Birch graduated from RMC in the spring of 2024 with a major in psychology and minors in behavioral neuroscience and biology. In late July, she traveled to Monrovia to witness the renovation of Leap of Faith Academy that she set in motion. While on the ground, she shopped for all the supplies a library needs beyond books (laptops, printers, stationery, etc.) and periodically checked in on the progress of construction happening at the school. She also used grant funds to secure internet access for the library's first six months.

Once the physical space for the library had been renovated, Birch joined leaders and constituents of Gracie A. Reeves Baptist Church, the organization that runs Leap of Faith Academy, for an opening ceremony. Before Birch's efforts, the school had never had a library or even computers before. Though the books had not arrived for the library before Birch had to return to the U.S. (they have since arrived and stocked the library), she met with the school's grateful students and held a training session for volunteers to learn how to operate the equipment and properly catalog the library's books.

"It feels very fulfilling seeing it complete," Birch reflected. "I feel like I accomplished something, and I feel like I definitely made some kind of change. Even though it's not significantly large, at least we're starting from somewhere." Birch hopes that her project can inspire the school community to sustain the library and ensure its students unlock the power of reading; and more broadly, hopes that she can inspire others to invest in education in Liberia.



Calvina Birch '24 and dignitaries gather for the opening ceremony of the library at Leap of Faith Academy. Calvina is a member of Lighthouse International Church in the RCFN.



Keeping our Neighbors Warm!

The RCFN Ministry Centers are in need of coats and sweaters for men, women, and children in our city. You may drop off your clean and gently used or new donations of coats beginning December 2nd at the RCFN Offices or contact our center directors for more information.



Christmas JOY

Christmas JOY is underway thanks to your sponsorship of our River City families!

- Dec. 2- 4 Gift drop off SRBC
- Dec. 3-4 Gift drop off CWCWC
- Dec. 4-5 Gift drop-off OHBC
- Dec. 5 Christmas JOY SRBC
- Dec. 6 Christmas JOY CHCWC & OHBC

We are blessed by and grateful for your abundant generosity!!

Remembering the Gift of Gracie's Smile

Beloved friend, mentor, and former camp director, Gracie Kirkpatrick passed away in her sleep on Monday, November 4, 2024. Gracie began her work at Camp Alkulana in 1966, as a swim instructor, and later, program director. In 1978, Gracie became the Camp Director. She provided leadership for the camp for the next thirty years. Gracie considered Camp Alkulana "a very definite calling" in her life, and said her purpose was

"to help children to know that they are loved—by us, and even more so by God—and that they don't have to be anything other than who they are to be loved."

She sought to create "a slice of heaven" for children and staff within the camp community and ended up finding her chosen family there too.

Gracie's dedication and leadership left a clear mark on Camp Alkulana and on the missions work of the Richmond Baptist Association. She worked closely with local churches, including WMU groups, to cultivate a strong sense of shared purpose in serving families in the Richmond area through the camp and community centers. She brought together churches and camp alums to lovingly tend to the camp's historic buildings and grounds and raise funds to continue Camp Alkulana's work. During her tenure she also served on staff at the Hillside Baptist Center and the Oregon Hill Baptist Center.

One of Gracie's life mottos was to "Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing." Her main thing was relationships—genuine, loyal, and affirming relationships. For her, God's love is something that we live out with one another, and showing kindness is the highest virtue we can practice. Gracie's contagious smile reminds us that we are never alone and her joy assures us that we can overcome even the most challenging times.



***A Service of Remembrance
will be held at Richmond's
First Baptist Church
on January 11, 2025
at 11:00 a.m.***

Please let us know if you plan to attend. 804.329.1701 or office@rbaonline.org

Connecting with our River City Faith Network Leadership

Introducing our Board, Committee and Support Team Members

Nancy Campbell King

Oregon Hill Baptist Center Support Team Member



As a lifelong resident of eastern Hanover County, I have a love of God's creation from tiny seeds to fresh vegetables, trees and people. My first 50 years were formed in Black Creek BC and Dover Association fostering a particular passion for Christian Education primarily focused on the preschool age group and resourcing (church library, The Resource Center) all age groups. Beyond my formal education at Westhampton College and some seminary courses, I have participated in multiple conferences and training opportunities and served in leadership for numerous ministries at the church, association and state level as a lay volunteer.

The new century brought my husband Allen and I to Carlisle Avenue BC in the RCFN and new activity and ministry in an urban environment especially through the Centers and Camp Alkulana. After serving on the RCFN Ministry Placement team and Board, I decided to serve with Oregon Hill Center due to my concern for the unhoused and awareness of the shortage of affordable housing. It has been beneficial to me to work with so many devoted and caring Richmond Baptists going back to Bob Perry, Billy Davis and Valerie Carter and continuing to today's "front line workers" - staff, Board and volunteers. May God continue to direct our RCFN work on His behalf in the Greater Richmond community.

Allen and I have been blessed to have 2 daughters, their wonderful husbands and 4 grandchildren living in the Richmond area.

River City Faith Network
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Electronic Service Requested

*Working together until
Metro Richmond is...*

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DECEMBER 2024



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY!
MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

December 3, 2024 is

GIVING TUESDAY

Please consider a gift
to the RCFN Mission
Offering as we meet
the needs of our
Richmond neighbors



Donate online at richmondbaptist.org
or mail your gift to
RCFN
2828 Emerywood Pkwy.
Richmond, VA 23294

www.richmondbaptist.org/givingtuesday

RCFN
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RIVER CITY
FAITH NETWORK

END OF THE YEAR CONTRIBUTIONS

December 31, 2024

- All Cash, Checks & Online Donations must now be completed by or postmarked by 12/31/24 for processing for the 2024 fiscal year.
- All Dafs or Fund Transfers, Please allow 4-5 days to process ahead of 12/31/24.
- Please call 804-329-1701 with any questions.

OUR SINCEREST SYMPATHY TO THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF

Mrs. Carolyn Gregory

Wife to Marvin Gregory, RCFN legal representative and
mother of Michelle Graham, Interim Worship Leader at Huguenot Road BC

Ms. Gracie Kirkpatrick

Retired RCFN Camp Alkulana Director and Associate Center Director.

804-329-1701

www.richmondbaptist.org