

Easter 2025 Family Update

View all posts by Jonathan Balmer : 4/15/2025



“For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

– Romans 6:5 (NIV).

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What’s an Easter Letter?

"We're too busy around Christmas, when other people send out their Christmas cards and end-of-year family updates. We should just write an Easter Letter instead. Ancient Christian bishops wrote Easter letters, after all. Athanasius wrote Easter letters, and [one of them has the earliest list of all the canonical New Testament books we have!](#)"

That's something I (Jonathan) doubtlessly said to Kendall when coming up with this idea of writing an Easter update letter for our family.

Of course, that overwrought historical and ecclesiastical excuse for waiting four months to write a family update letter has one pesky catch: it's not quite true. "Easter letters" were indeed written by early Christian bishops. But they weren't written just before, or on, Easter.

To my dismay, I recently learned such Easter letters were written around *Christmas*, in part to **announce** the date of Easter that year. Even Christians 1,700 years ago were writing special update letters sometime around Christmas. Kendall and I are not just out-of-step with modern trends; we're out of step with tested tradition.

Oh well, we're still doing this.

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Each year, we invite our immediate neighbors, friends, and our whole church family to our home. You're invited! For up-to-date information and registration, see the web address below:

RSVP.ellisbalmer.net

But we also know we've had the privilege of making friends who live in faraway places, who could not possibly attend. Therefore, a letter seemed a great way to update you on what our family has been up to. (Not to mention, some people just want to see cute pictures of our daughter, Moira Jane).

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Last Easter And This Easter

A quick photographic comparison





Swipe to compare Easter Day 2024 & 2025 for our family.

Having a small child really raises your consciousness of how much can happen in one year. It seems fitting to begin with a picture of our family compared to this Easter: 2024 v. 2025.

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Looking back

Our first full year as a family of three. One could say we did a few things!

2024

April

Muncie experienced a once-in-multiple-lifetimes event in the solar eclipse April 2024. A friend from college, Leannndra, and her family stayed with us as Muncie was in the famed "path of totality."





We viewed the event at Delaware County fairgrounds and Minnetrista. The darkness in the middle of the day was astounding. MJ had no idea what was going on, but we got the pictures to prove she was there!



<https://youtu.be/Hf58pqDyJSE>

We welcomed more visitors to our guest room in April. [Mayra Giovanetti, an International Ministries Global Servant](#) (missionary) came to visit our church – First Baptist Church, Muncie, Indiana. She stayed with us at our house during her visit, and it was a blessing to have her visit. MJ loved napping with her.

That same weekend, we all went to see Muncie Civic Theater's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. MJ sat through the whole thing, and she enjoyed it! Now that she's walking and doesn't so much as want to sit while eating *anything*, this seems astounding in retrospect.



May

Kendall was unfortunately sick a lot during this month. We have a health update in the [in sickness & in health section](#).

A happier event: was that Moira Jane began her lifelong indoctrination into the ways of her Cincinnati father.

(Do not be alarmed, there are ways her mother indoctrinates her into the ways of Kentucky, and plenty of methods her Hoosier surrogate church grandparents pass on their own Indiana folkways – we **did** visit Indiana's own [Conner Prairie](#) as well!).





Not only did Moira Jane try her first food at our local Skyline Chili, but we also took Moira Jane to her first baseball game, rooting (of course) for her hometown Cincinnati Reds!

~ Spring Memories ~



<https://youtu.be/Jh7UAJ3fjVw>



In fact, we saw two baseball games in one week. The first was with some pastors in our denominational region (American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky) seeing the AAA level Indians play in Indianapolis. The Reds game, with my folks, shortly followed.

June

For the first, and so far only, time both of our families were in Muncie at the same time! The special occasion was Moira Jane's dedication at church.

Clif Davis, our Worship Pastor, did the honors. It was a beautiful way to welcome MJ to the church community which has already loved watching her grow, and helped their Pastors, new-to-parenthood, tremendously.

Oh, and this was the one month that we opened our pool and the bouncy seat was, briefly, MJ's *favorite thing ever*. Fifteen dollars well spent. Thank you, person selling it used.



July

The Summer can be a particularly full month when it comes to our work as [Co-Pastors at FBCM](#). This can feel counter-intuitive, because it's also when some of our church members see us the least.

Kendall and Jonathan were both at Indian Creek Baptist Camp as cabin leaders, alongside several of our students (Kendall had also served an additional week in June). MJ's granddad and Mimi (Kendall's parents) watched her while we were enjoying camp with the students.

FBCM also held Vacation Bible school, and a very successful community VBS carnival (a block party where all our church's neighbors were invited). It also involved plenty of preparation for the fall.





August

Early in the month, we helped Daniel Harris move in with his wife Lydia and their three daughters. They moved all the way from Texas to relaunch the American Baptist Student Ministry, now redubbed Charis ([see their linktree here](#)). Daniel attended Truett seminary alongside us. We don't have pictures of this event, but our FBC crew did an amazing job unloading the moving truck!

We also visited another friend we met during our days at [Truett Seminary](#), Matthew. He lives in Missouri, we live in Indiana, so naturally the place to meet was Springfield, Illinois: the capital of Illinois and final resting place of Abraham Lincoln ([after several exhumations](#)). We got a flat tire, but the Firestone fixed it surprisingly fast! If it had to happen, it's good it happened when we were with a friend.



Having lived in Kentucky, currently living in Indiana, and traveling to Illinois is always funny, as every state with a plausible connection to the 16th US president strains to claim it. Look at the signs as you enter, Kentucky: "Birthplace of Lincoln," Illinois: "Land of Lincoln," Indiana: ... "Lincoln's Boyhood home."



After this visit to Illinois, we left all the Lincoln road signs behind. Kendall, MJ, and Jonathan went to enjoy some time at Green Lake, Wisconsin, at the retreat center there.



MJ wanted to eat sand by the lake in Green Lake Wisconsin



Family hike time!

Our vacation was cut short by an unexpected death in our church family. The news hit us hard. At the same time, it was a true honor to preside at the funeral and speak a message of Gospel hope. Dan Lemen, who passed, loved Moira Jane, and he and his wife Ella Mae were the first outside Kendall and I (Jonathan), and medical staff, to hold her in the hospital after she was born. We miss him, dearly, even as we trust his life is hidden with Christ in God.



Dan & Ella Mae Lemen with MJ at Cane's Chicken.

September

Our church held the biennial meeting of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky. Many people worked hard to host churches from around our region, and it was amazing to see it all come together.



Moira Jane playing happily in the church during a biennial service.

We were able to baptize the first three people to be baptized at FBCM since our tenure as Pastors began! And we have three more baptisms this Easter. Praise God for what he's doing in the lives of the people in our community. The day-in-day-out being Christ's undershepherds is the heart of the work. And seeing people grow in grace, and come to know God as their salvation, is always going to be the one of the great joys of our calling.





After delaying the trip two (maybe three?) times, due to sickness, and other unexpected events, we finally went on a weekend trip to Michigan with our friends, the Hoffmans. They have a son who is one day older than MJ, and are members of our church. It was a welcome reprieve from a full season, and a way to say goodbye to the Summer months and hello to the Fall.

October

We took a long weekend trip to Nashville and ate lunch in front of the country music hall of fame, since they have a huge lawn and MJ wanted to crawl everywhere at this time. Johnny Cash museum, the children's area at the Tennessee State Museum, hot chicken, and a visit with Jonathan's cousin, Cassie.



MJ picked out a lemon toy.



Nashville hot chicken.



Lunch outside for MJ.



Tennessee state museum kids area.



Dinner with cousin Cassie!

Moir Jane, by this point, had begun to say her first words. “Dog” may have not been the first, but it was definitely in the first five. When we visited the Cincinnati zoo with her Nonni and Avô (Jonathan’s parents), MJ called every animal “Dog” from elephants to peacocks – except the African painted dogs for which she was dutifully silent.



Petting the goat



Pumpkins!



Looking at the giraffe.



MJ & Dad!



MJ with Nonni & cousins!



<https://youtu.be/f8O2aGmkzcl>

As a November baby born right before Thanksgiving, MJ's "last first" holiday was Halloween. She loved visiting all of our neighbors, even if she could eat precisely zero candy (after MJ's insistence, we relented and let her put a whole

dum dum in her mouth, supervised, wrapper-and-all, for about two minutes).



Alpha protects his little alien.



Downtown creature crawl.

MJ was our little (Toy Story) Alien, as we wore X-Files “I WANT TO BELIEVE” shirts, as we’ve been watching that series. I think we’re some of the only families who still check out DVDs. When we did the “creature crawl,” with Downtown Muncie, however, Kendall and Jonathan were historic Baptist preachers [Frances Townsley](#) and [Charles Spurgeon](#).



November



It was also time for her first birthday in November! We celebrated with her friend who was also turning one and many family members and friends. We even met Kendall's sister's boyfriend, Aaron, for the first time for the occasion.

Moirra Jane had no idea what to do as people sang at her. The cake was an unfathomable mystery, but pie: well, **pie** was worth writing home about as far as our daughter was concerned.



<https://youtu.be/FvnLfBuS2U4>

In fact, as Thanksgiving rolled around she ate so much dessert, it caused her a tummyache that gave everyone a horrible night of sleep. It's funny how that works! We learned we had to make sure our bottomless pit didn't give herself a stomachache with too many desserts by Christmas.

December

Advent perfectly matched up with December this year. Kendall made Advent calendars for the families at church, and Jonathan enjoyed preachign through my favorite biblical themes. (The [Fleming Rutledge book on Advent](#): STILL good).



Christmas Eve Service



Ms. Jaden at Church takes good care of MJ.



One of the most special services of the year.

Moirra Jane had some practice opening gifts at her birthday, but she discovered the joy of unwrapping gifts by Christmas. On New Year's Eve, while visiting family, MJ took her very first unaided steps!

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2025

The new and routine so far this year

The beginning months of the year were a whirlwind where it seemed like Kendall and I were alternating weekends going to Kentucky to see family.

January & February



MJ and her late great grandfather.

For example, take January – February. In subsequent weeks, first, Jonathan went down for my brother Eric's birthday with MJ, Kendall stayed home.

The next week, Kendall went down for her grandfather's funeral with MJ, as Jonathan stayed home.

After that, we all went down together, and MJ went to Nonnie and Avo's house as Kendall and I went to a wedding.

Jonathan had to call in sick the Sunday after. We simply did too much, and when one of us recovered, another of us got sick.

Because what they say is true, daycare will bring home everything. Even if it's a small at-home daycare with a few kids, like the one MJ attends.

March (and our weekly routine)

The beginning of the year may have been unusual, but it's also a good time to mention that we've grown to love quite a few things about what has become our *normal* routine.

By March, our normal routine began to reappear as we emerged from passing around illnesses: Preaching, teaching, visiting the homebound, planning for the year.



Pastoring or being a double PK is our life together.



Visits with family.



Getting into everything at church.

Moir Jane has switched daycares, but does enjoy going (most often Monday – Wednesday). She goes with us to visit the home bound on Thursdays.

People often remark that Moira Jane seems social. We have no response except to say, I think it's just the way we live our lives. She's always around different people.



We go many places on the weekends, like the children's museum, or the library...



Sometimes, MJ is not excited to be still for storytime and pay attention.



Sometimes she is rapt with attention.



But MJ keeps going many different places, like the library, the Khan's house for English lessons, and much, much more.

On Fridays, our day off, are filled with going to the new downtown Muncie YMCA, with the Kidzone, Mother Goose story time at the library, making a lunch run to Skyline in Anderson, and volunteering to teach English to the Khans (a family of refugees from Afghanistan). MJ loves playing with that family's youngest, a boy who is around 8 years old. Sometimes we wonder if she'll pick up any Pashto words.



We have fun with whomever we meet.

Our weekends are Friday and Saturday and are remarkably variable, from trips to the Muncie Children's museum, to our new obsession: outside — or as MJ calls it “**SIDE SIDE!**” On Friday nights or throughout the week, we'll also go to the games or concerts of students from church.



Delta high school football game and band senior night.



Soccer game at Wapahani High School.



Burris Laboratory school volleyball game.



Delta high school football game and band senior night.



Soccer game at Wapahani High School.

Soccer game at Wapahani High School.

Though, occasionally, if MJ is tired or the weather is bad she will not only play inside but will watch television (as long as it is a [Ms. Rachel](#) YouTube video). We're not *always* on-the-go.

Sundays are wonderful marathons for our family, often 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. days, with worship, teaching, preaching, going to lunch meetings, and enjoying being co-Pastors. Meanwhile, MJ is in nursery, passed around to every imaginable church member who adores her. Or she simply runs around and plays (and in the past several months, MJ does not walk, she *runs everywhere*).

While rest, time away, times of reprieve are necessary to any vocation, the line between our personal life and church life is blurry at most. We know we're here to be part of a community of faith, not just a paycheck and we're comfortable with that being our reality.

And, earlier than expected, we recently purchased a new-to-us car. We're now owners of an electric vehicle. It's amazing how quiet it is. We've owned it for a week, and hoping it will serve us well for years to come. It's the first car we purchased from a dealer ourselves (even if it is used). It's a daunting as well as an exciting purchase for us.

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In Sickness, and In Health

For Richer, and For Poorer



One such hospital visit. This is not when MJ was born. Kendall was admitted months later.



This is one of the earlier ones but we had several in the first half of the year.

The year cannot truly be captured by detailing trips and special events. It's not just that the valleys intersperse the mountains.

There are plains: doldrums and long stretches where something is *not quite* terrible, but also far from right, punctuated by moments which force us to reconsider our current path or strategy.

What began as a middling health year, at best, was interrupted by a few more severe episodes and unexpected hospitalizations. Kendall faced allergic reactions and flare-ups related (as far as we can tell) to Crohn's disease, necessitating emergency room visits and a few nights in a hospital.

Medical bills continue to roll in, and we know we're far from the only ones to face that reality. We're grateful that when we applied for a special medical bill grant given by our denomination's financial service, the Ministers & Missionaries Benefits Board (MMBB).

Without this assistance from MMBB, our finances would not be as secure and our savings would be non-existent— because of the burden of such medical expenses.

We say this only in gratitude, to recognize our dependence on the generosity and legacy of others.

In response to these medical needs, Kendall switched to a new G.I. specialist, [Dr. Douglas Rex](#). He who works out of Carmel and Indianapolis, Indiana, but some of her appointments are virtual / telehealth. One recent appointment confirmed a significant improvement from this time last year!

Dr. Rex has been incredibly attentive to Kendall's needs. Kendall began a new medication and her health has improved and flare-ups have become less common. Pregnancy and post-pregnancy brought with health challenges, and so we are ever-grateful for the careful study and compassionate care of such expert physicians.

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Looking forward

We also have a few exciting things coming up! Here are just a few.



Green Lake Conference Center // Photo Credit: [Northern Pines Camp](#)

Preaching Conference: Kendall and I plan to go back to Green Lake, Wisconsin, for a preaching conference with our denomination this Summer. The week we're attending includes childcare, so MJ is coming with us too!

Summer in general, is filled with *good* things, but also *many things*. Not only do we have trips with either side of the family planned, there are weeks dedicated to camps, Bible school, or simply preparing for the fall. Much of what we have planned *is* work-related, but it is still travel and weeks away from home. Summer is on its way and we're excited, even if we are *not at all* ready. Wisconsin, Michigan, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, here we come!



Punta Cana // Photo credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#).

A Trip for Two: Another minister connected us with an organization which facilitates heavily discounted vacations for ministers and their spouses (I guess we doubly qualify?). So, we've renewed our Passports, and in late October, around Kendall's birthday, we're going to Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic! MJ will certainly be with some grandparent or another (thanks Mom & Dad!).



Muncie Central High School // Photo Credit: [Muncie Community Schools](#)

Ministering to Muncie Central High School (and other!) students: We've begun important conversations with Youth For Christ, our church, and people in our community. We are looking forward to beginning a City Life program at our church, ministering to students especially (though not exclusively) who attend the nearby Muncie Central high school. We ask for your prayers for this holistic ministry seeking to help kids with academic coaching, meals, Christ-sharing relationships, and a warm community.

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Moira Jane: Growth Photos



12 months



0 months



•
1 month



•
2 months



3 months



4 months



6 months



7 months



9 months



9 months



11 months



11 months



11 months



12 months



•
0 months

1 / 13

0 months

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A Good & Final Word

While this letter is perhaps a bit more exhaustive than we intended, we hope you enjoyed scrolling by, stopping to read what interested you and — of course — enjoying plenty of pictures.

It has been our first full year as a family of three. It comes with so many blessings, even amid the challenges.

Our prayers go out to all of you whom God gave us the blessing to have our paths cross.

Wherever and however this letter finds you, know along with it are our prayers and our hope for God's goodness to be palpably present in your lives.

This Eastertide, we hope that for you above all things.

Jesus' resurrection is the sole evidence that love triumphs over death, that beauty outlives horror, that the meek will inherit the earth, that those who mourn will be comforted.

The reason I can continue watching and waiting, even as the world is shrouded in darkness, is because the things I long for are not rooted in wishful thinking or religious ritual but are as solid as a stone rolled away.

— Tish Harrison Warren, [Prayer in the Night](#)

Happy Easter, to you our loved ones.

In the peace of God,

Jonathan Balmer, Kendall Ellis, & Moira Jane Ellis Balmer

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Printable Version of letter

Because of the way it spaces out the pages, it's very long (31 pages), but legible.

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