

First Baptist Church Profile



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OBJECTIVE:

This document provides an overview of First Baptist Church, High Point, North Carolina, so that prospective ministers may learn about the mission, history, people, current environment, opportunities, and aspirations of the church members to be God's faithful servants.

Mission Statement Of First Baptist High Point

Living the Gospel: Everyday, Everywhere, to Everyone

History

The rich history of First Baptist Church, High Point's oldest established church, began in Jamestown, North Carolina. A group of Baptists, living in what is now the Old Jamestown area in the early 1800s, traveled to Abbott's Creek Baptist Church in what is now Davidson County for worship since no Baptist church was nearby. This was a round-trip journey of about 20 miles and could be an all-day trip.

Many early settlers did not have the resources to own a wagon, much less horses. A story goes that the early Jamestown Baptists used a system called "riding and tying" to make the long trip to Abbott's Creek Church. If a family of four was on their way to Abbott's Creek and only had one horse, two members would ride ahead for a set distance, dismount, and leave the horse for the other two. The second two would walk to the horse, ride for another distance, passing the first two, then dismount and tie up the horse for the first riders to take up again. This went on until they arrived at their destination, having rested the travelers as well as the horse.

Around 1800, this small band of believers were tired of the long trip. They were granted permission to start a mission of Abbott's Creek in Jamestown. By 1825, the number of worshippers had grown to about 25, and they decided to form their own church. In June of that year, they applied to Abbott's Creek to leave its fellowship and establish a new church and on September 3, 1825, the Jamestown Baptist Church was constituted. They worshipped at this time in a small building (which stood until 1875) on a half-acre lot under a walnut tree on Federal Street in the heart of town.

All did not go well for the church. Dissension arose in 1832 over missions, with most of the church being against missions. Records show that even though a small band

of perhaps five mission-minded believers were in the minority, they won out. State elders William Dowd and Eli Phillips were called to examine the church.

“The majority is in a state of disorder and have forfeited their rights as members of the Church by their opinion and unchristian conduct and we believe the minority were commanded to withdraw from them as disorderly brethren,” they wrote. “Consequently, we are bound to view the minority properly speaking as the Jamestown Church, the majority having by their disorderly Conduct forfeited their right to Church membership and cannot in the eye of the gospel be considered as a church at all but the minority as we believe being orderly in their Conduct and orthodox in their principals have remained on the old ground and is clearly the old Jamestown Church.”

So, in this case, the majority did not rule. Nothing is known of what happened to the anti-mission group.

With the construction of the North Carolina Railroad from Goldsboro to Greensboro around 1859, many people in Jamestown saw the potential for growth and development where the new railroad intersected the Old Fayetteville to Salem Plank Road and moved to the new town of High Point. The Jamestown church also moved to High Point and changed its name to High Point Missionary Baptist Church. The church’s name later became the Salem Street Baptist Church to correspond to the street location several blocks north of the railroad. By the early 1900s, Salem Street became Main Street, and the church became known as the First Baptist Church High Point. The current sanctuary was built in 1941. Church growth continued through the late 1950s when there were 1,000 members.

In the 1970s, First Baptist purchased additional land for a parking lot and chose to remain downtown to minister to the community and continue being centrally located for members who lived in Guilford, Randolph, Forsyth, and Davidson counties. Leadership roles in the church expanded when women were elected to serve as deacons by 1978. A family life center was built in the early 1990s, along with an expanded dining room and kitchen. During 2001, the church embarked on its largest building project ever to create a new youth center, expanded fitness center, children’s playground, and to completely renovate the sanctuary, the 1929 wing, and the children’s classrooms.

By 2000, First Baptist Church voted to sever ties with the Southern Baptist Convention while maintaining our relationship with the North Carolina Baptist State Convention. Shortly thereafter, the church became affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of thousands of individuals and churches who celebrate and value historic Baptist principles.

City Information and Downtown Redevelopment

High Point is located in central North Carolina's Piedmont region, and is one of three Triad cities, along with Greensboro and Winston-Salem. High Point's population totals 111,035. Females are 52.9% of the population, with 47.1% male. The average age is 36 years old. Senior citizens make up 13.9% of the population.

Furniture and textile manufacturing were the city's major industries for decades. Known as the Furniture Capital of the World, High Point hosts two major furniture trade markets annually during April and October attended by 75,000 vendor representatives and furniture buyers from all 50 states and approximately 100 countries. The local economy is transitioning to education, healthcare, aviation maintenance, highly specialized manufacturing, and technology. An expanding employer for the city is High Point University, which now has almost 5,000 students and offers 47 undergraduate majors and 12 graduate programs. Atrium Wake Forest Baptist's High Point facility is another major foundational business in the local economy.

A multi-million-dollar, multi-year High Point downtown redevelopment plan started over two years ago with the construction of a minor league baseball stadium across the street from First Baptist. Baseball fans have parked in the church's parking lot for a small fee, which assists in the church's mission activities and other church functions. Office spaces, two hotels, condominium and apartment buildings, restaurants, a convention center, and a children's museum are all part of the planned development.

Quality entertainment and recreational facilities are available in the Triad, including the grand opening this year of the brand-new Tanger Center for the Performing Arts in Greensboro, which will host major nationally known entertainers and touring Broadway productions. Two major coliseums are located in Winston-Salem and Greensboro. Excellent greenways for walking and biking are available in all three Triad cities. Hiking is available at the Piedmont Environment Center in Jamestown, close to High Point. The mountains are about 2 hours away to the west, while the closest beach is about 4 hours to the southeast. The North Carolina Zoo, the world's largest natural habitat zoo, is located in Randolph County and only 30 minutes from High Point. Outstanding parks can also be found in High Point for soccer, pickleball, tennis, baseball, basketball, disc golf, and boating. Golf courses abound in the area. The mild climate allows outdoor recreation to continue throughout much of the year, including snow skiing, which is available in the nearby N.C. mountains.

Missions

First Baptist Church High Point was established nearly 200 years ago with a specific mission focus and remains active in serving others locally and internationally. With a rich heritage of supporting mission activities on the foreign field, First Baptist was pleased to partner with a Vietnamese Church in High Point for about 25 years, providing financial support and building space until the Vietnamese Church purchased their own building a few years ago.

In recent years, we strive to assist our neighbors in High Point, where food insecurity has been an unfortunate reality for too many people. Our members prepare meals and serve food at High Point's nearby homeless shelter, *Open Door Ministries*, and deliver hot, nutritious meals to homebound seniors through *Meals on Wheels*. On a bimonthly basis, many church members fill a green shopping bag with canned and boxed food from their own pantries for donation to *A Simple Gesture*, an organization that stocks food banks and other distribution sites to end childhood hunger in the county. First Baptist is also host to an on campus non-profit project known as *Cover the City* that provides blankets and other resources to local homeless individuals and provides rental space to *Communities in Schools*, a dropout prevention organization committed to empowering students to stay in school.

In 2016 and 2017, adults and youth traveled to New York City to lead one-week summer children's programs in two Baptist churches, one located in Hell's Kitchen and the other located in Brooklyn. These churches depend on volunteers from outside churches to plan Bible studies and activities for one week of a six-week children's daycare that teaches life skills while sharing the love of Christ with them. During a week in July 2018, adults and youth traveled to Shelby, North Carolina, for a week of service projects. The missionaries from First Baptist visited nursing homes; sorted and organized canned goods at the Salvation Army food pantry; cleaned, organized, and set-up a new Salvation Army retail store in preparation for its grand opening; led children's crafts and activities at a daycare; built wheelchair ramps; participated in home repair projects; and did lawn work for seniors and cancer patients.

Our church supports Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, which serves abused, abandoned, and neglected children, as well as families and vulnerable adults in need. Over the years, several members have served on the Board or worked as staff for the Baptist Children's Homes.

In early 2020, we hosted "Night to Shine," an annual event sponsored worldwide by the Tim Tebow Foundation. It was a tremendously successful event that brought together volunteers from area churches, community agencies, and service groups to provide a wonderful prom night experience for 75 people with special needs. We hosted Crop Walk For a number of years and have served local children and families through our annual Vacation Bible School program, in which we have partnered in recent years with the neighboring YWCA. Because of this partnership, First Baptist received the YWCA's Good Friend of the Community Award in 2015. John's Totes has provided thousands of useful and well-made bags to incoming patients at our local hospital, and our Prayer Shawl Ministry has encouraged many who have faced illness, isolation, or other challenges. First Baptist Church High Point

is a family who loves to love others and fosters opportunities for all members to serve God's kingdom, enabling us to fulfill our Mission Statement.

Worship and Bible Study

As a church, we value reverent, meaningful, organized, and scriptural worship experiences. While a traditional worship-style has been most prevalent in the past, we have introduced contemporary and blended worship elements on occasion and often include traditional African-American spirituals, hymns from other Christian denominational traditions, and contemporary Christian music as a part of our worship experience. We are open to change and at one time offered a second contemporary worship service to foster participation and inclusion. Our intention is to continue to look for ways to best meet the worship needs of our congregants in the future.

Members enjoy Bible study and a variety of sermon types, including expository, pastoral, and topical sermons. While our worship format typically follows the Lectionary, we recognize the need at times to have services outside of the Lectionary. During the pandemic, we have adopted new ways to worship and connect, as Wednesday night prayer meetings, Sunday School lessons, Sunday worship, and even “conversations in the parking lot” occurred for months via online technologies.

We strive to grow in Christ and to follow the Holy Spirit’s leadership. Prayer plays an important part in our relationship with God. Through prayer and meditation, we praise God, share our hurts and sorrows, and intercede for others.

Congregation

Several members’ family trees intersect for generations at First Baptist. One member noted that she is a second-generation member and now has an infant great granddaughter who represents the fifth generation learning about Jesus at First Baptist. Other members have joined in the past few years as new arrivals to the community from other states and countries. One of the most senior Sunday School classes has continued to have new members join as the need for connectedness, friendships, and purpose seems to be strongest in that age group. During the first two years of the last pastorate, the church grew by 34 members, and we celebrated four baptisms.

Demographically the members tend to be over 50 years of age, with women slightly outnumbering men. Several active and enthusiastic workers in our fellowship may even admit to being over 85. Because our pastor and children’s minister were called elsewhere at the start of the pandemic, our long-time minister of music retired in 2020, and our members were physically separated from on-site worship for many months, the younger church members, as well as the most senior church members, have not re-engaged. Attendance and giving both have been in decline. We certainly need to grow children, youth, and young adult ministries, while continuing to care for homebound and those facing illness or hardships.

Children and Youth

Over the years First Baptist Church and our Missionary Vietnamese Church enjoyed an active youth program. The building behind the church was renovated and dedicated to the youth. There were weekly mission meetings on Wednesday evenings, Trunk or Treat at Halloween, sleepovers, day excursions, camps, ski trips, and mission trips both near and far. The “Night to Shine” event through the Tim Tebow Foundation was the idea of one of our young people for her Senior Project. As described in our Missions section, it brought together church and community and was a huge success. Our youth and church, as well as other volunteers in the community, planned and hosted the memorable “Night to Shine” for people with special needs.

Our church hosted Vacation Bible School every year for kids three years old through the fifth grade and averaged around 100 kids. This included the partnership with the YWCA located nearby, allowing non-church member campers the opportunity to participate in spiritual growth opportunities. We also had Junior Church on Sundays for ages five through the second grade.

Unfortunately, because of the departure of our ministerial staff along with the outset of the Pandemic, our youth and children have “disappeared.” There are currently two teenagers who attend our church and no small children. In the past, the Vietnamese Church’s children and youth participated in First Baptist’s programs for children and youth, but there are no functioning children’s or youth programs at this time. After sharing our space for 25 years with the Vietnamese mission, the Vietnamese Baptist Church now has its own facilities and programming.

We pray that our church grows again with young families. There are many volunteers who stand ready to serve and work with children and youth. Our congregation and youth shone the most whenever mission opportunities occurred within and outside our community.

Music Program

First Baptist Church has a long, rich history of worshiping exuberantly through music. Over the years, talented musicians in our congregation have shared their gifts in numerous ways. Our Adult Choir was known to be one of the best in High Point. Other groups who have led in worship include an Adult Ensemble, Adult Handbell Choir, Youth Choir, Youth Handbell Choir, Youth Praise Band, Children's Choir, Children's Handbell Choir, preschool choir, and instrumental ensemble. Our last Minister of Music retired in 2020 with 39 years of service to First Baptist. Due to COVID safety concerns, we suspended our choirs for over a year. However, music continues to be an important part of our church, and our intention is to restart as many of these groups as possible when appropriate.

Music has always been an opportunity for missions at First Baptist. We have used music as an outreach and a service to the community in many ways such as the following:

- Church-wide Christmas Caroling and Ring and Sing at various locations throughout the city, such as nursing facilities, the hospital, retail shopping centers, and doughnut shops

- Christmas for the City (two years in a row), where we partnered with other local churches to put on a top-notch Christmas program for the community
- Advent Concerts, which involved a musical program at noon followed by lunch afterwards, specifically targeted to downtown area workers
- Adult Ensemble sang at the North Carolina Baptist State Convention in Winston-Salem
- Community Concert Series on multiple occasions

Our Adult Choir has also been a part of many wonderful cantatas and programs that were open to the community. Some examples include the following:

- The Singing Christmas Tree
- Amahl and the Night Visitors
- Love Feasts served by the choir
- Vivaldi Gloria
- Service of Lessons and Carols
- Stearns and Company, a musical that celebrates the roots of First Baptist Church
- Seven Last Words
- Tenebrae: A Service of Darkness
- Come, Touch the Robe
- Celebrate Life

We use music to celebrate within our congregation. Numerous church-wide Christmas banquets often included a musical program and once hosted a dinner theater-style radio show that highlighted our members' talents.

Music has also played an important part in our Youth and Children's Ministries. We have had Youth Choirs, Youth Handbell Choirs, and a Youth Praise Band throughout the years. Children have also had the opportunity to participate in a strong music program which not only taught them the basics of reading music and singing but gave them opportunities to be worship leaders through their musicianship. Listed below are some of the musical programs in which children have participated.

- The Sailor's Bible
- Radio Joy
- It's Cool in the Furnace
- The Story Tellin' Man
- Singing the National Anthem at local ballparks

First Baptist Church has also been truly fortunate to sponsor concerts by professionally known musicians like the following:

- North Carolina Brass Band
- Market Street Brass

- Opera Star Anthony Dean Griffey , known as “Tony” to all of us within the First Baptist Family, where he started singing in the Children’s choir and learning to read music in the handbell choir
- Pepper Choplin
- The Vienna Boys' Choir
- Kyle Matthews
- Ken Medema
- Hale & Wilder
- North Carolina Baptist Singers
- Handbell performer Christine Anderson with Anna Laura Page, well-known composer, and accompanist

As evidenced from the types of musical programs we have performed or hosted, one can see that First Baptist enjoys a blend of musical styles, although we tend to lean more towards traditional church music. Our hymn book has been recently updated to the Celebrating Grace hymnal, which also offers a variety of hymn styles. We have a 43-rank Schantz pipe organ but are currently without a church organist. In addition, we have a digital carillon that rings the quarter hour, Westminster chimes, and three hymns at noon and 5:00 pm.

Clearly, music is a priority for our church. While we may not currently be able to have all the components that we have had in the past, we continue to use music as an important part of our worship.

Congregational Fellowship

The members of First Baptist enjoy fellowship. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. Our church is one of the friendliest churches in North Carolina.

Fellowship opportunities in the past include the following:

- Picnics at the City Lake Park to kick off the new year of children’s mission and music programs on Wednesdays. We have also utilized a picnic to fellowship when the end of the school year approaches and summer begins.
- Music awards banquets in the dining room
- Thanksgiving and Christmas banquets
- Monthly potluck lunches after the 11:00 a.m. worship hour
- Low Country Boil once a year
- Sunday School class Christmas parties
- Trunk or Treat Fall Festivals which are open to the entire community
- Chili Cook Offs that are both popular and competitive in a friendly way

- Cake and cookie auctions for Missions that have also been known to be competitive
- Radiant Club for senior and adult members as well as non-church members. Our Minister of Music planned monthly lunch fellowships with guest speakers on topics important to seniors and the community. Trips to the coast, the mountains, theaters in Durham and Charlotte, visits to the Billy Graham library, dinner shows, New York City for Broadway Shows and Metropolitan Opera events, which included the chance to see our own Tony Griffey perform.
- Attend baseball games in Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point where our children's choir and our former Minister of Music have performed the National Anthem on many occasions.
- Bowling, skiing, shopping, roller skating, chair volleyball, regular volleyball, square dances, exercise classes in the gym.
- And so much more. . .

Christian fellowship and love are alive and well at First Baptist.

Facilities and Equipment

First Baptist's campus, with 77,000 square feet of space, offers many opportunities for worship, recreation, service, and outreach. Yet, costs to maintain the property and assets represent more of the budget than desired. The facilities include the following:

- Beautiful sanctuary built in 1941, remodeled in the early 2000s and seating nearly 500 people
- Schantz pipe organ
- Recently remodeled children's wing and nursery
- Dining room and operational kitchen
- Meeting room affectionately known as the "Fireside Room"
- Numerous Sunday school classrooms and spaces for small groups and storage
- Modern, functional office space for ministers and staff
- Portico and elevator for easy access to the facilities for seniors and those with disabilities
- Children's outdoor playground
- Gymnasium utilized for recreation, fellowship, square dances, blood drives, community events, and a back-up worship facility. Once church basketball leagues played in the gym. About four years ago, a certified fitness instructor taught exercise classes at no cost to the community. Local, private school teams utilize the gym for a modest fee.
- Walking track above the gymnasium
- Fitness/weight room, which served for a time as a heart rehab facility for the local hospital
- Reception desk in the recreation building
- Parking lot that provides low-cost parking during the local minor-league baseball's home games and during the biannual Furniture Markets. The funds raised support the church and missions.
- Two 15-passenger mini-buses

- Columbarium In the church courtyard
- Separate building that is currently leased to a community non-profit organization
- “Christ’s Little Acorns,” a part-time preschool that utilizes our facilities Monday through Friday

Metrics

First Baptist Church High Point is blessed to be in the heart of a downtown redevelopment project around a two-year old baseball stadium. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we averaged 70 in Sunday School and 110 in the 11:00 worship. As case counts have spiked in North Carolina due to the Delta variant, our in-person Sunday School participation has remained low with 15 to 20 in attendance. The Sunday morning worship attendance has hovered around 55. As stated previously, some senior members are not comfortable returning during the continuing pandemic.

For 2020 we approved a budget of \$471,947 with \$307,178 in expenses (reductions were due to the pandemic and lower personnel costs) and \$340,755 in revenues. In 2021, the budget totals \$388,944, which includes budgeted amounts for a full-time senior minister, part-time music minister, and our interim pastor. Expenses through August 2021 were \$169,767 and revenues were \$190,877. The 2022 budget is projected to be \$343,270. The church is currently debt-free.

Next Steps

We are excited by all of the possibilities that await our church as we seek to revitalize and grow our congregation in the midst of a redeveloping downtown area. The people of First Baptist Church are committed to sharing the love of Christ by ministering to those around us, both locally and beyond. We value our connections with each other, and would like to expand those connections by welcoming new members. We recognize that we need to explore and expand opportunities for members to serve both inside and outside of church. We are looking forward in faith and with hope to work with our next Senior Pastor to implement the vision and mission of First Baptist Church.