

PROFILE

of the First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C.

Last updated: 7 February 2009

Introduction

Organized in 1802 as “a spiritual home for Baptists moving to the new federal city,” the First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C., has been welcoming believers and seekers from across the country and around the world ever since. While we maintain a steadfast commitment to the historic Baptist principles of individual freedom, congregational autonomy, and religious liberty, our tradition of hospitality has brought us members from a variety of Christian denominations and has resulted in an increasingly ecumenical perspective. In addition, the diversity of the City of Washington is reflected in our congregation: we come from different places, different cultures, and different traditions. Our shared commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord holds us together.

We are a congregationally oriented church working to become -- more and more -- a living, vibrant, bursting-at-the-seams community of Christ in the nation’s capital. Located eight blocks from the White House and just down the street from Dupont Circle, First Baptist has been home to U.S. Supreme Court justices, foreign ambassadors, members of Congress and two presidents – Jimmy Carter and Harry Truman. But the church also reaches out to the city’s international residents and the homeless, who are no farther away from us than our doorstep.

Our Journey

Baptists first met for worship in Washington, D.C. on July 5, 1801, in the Treasury Building at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. Eight months later The First Baptist Church was constituted with six members and four visiting ministers, among them the chaplain of both the House and the Senate, William Parkinson, who also served as the church’s minister for two years.

Our first permanent meeting house was built at 19th and I Streets NW in 1802. It was to this facility that the Rev. Obadiah Brown was called in 1807 as the first regular minister of The First Baptist Church. He became a beloved community leader and took a prominent part in the founding of Columbian College (now George Washington University), serving as the chairman of its first Board of Trustees.

The great missions advocate Luther Rice was a member of First Baptist, and used the church during the early 1800s as his home base during his national travels to organize Baptists in the United States for missions support. Luther Rice and Rev. Brown worked together to establish Columbian College.

The second site of First Baptist was near 10th and E Streets NW. Later this property was sold to a man named Ford, who remodeled the building for a theater. This was the theater

which was the scene of President Lincoln's assassination in 1865.

The church moved to its present location at 16th and O Streets NW in 1890. A Romanesque structure built at that time was demolished in the 1950s to make room for our current Neo-Gothic facility, which was completed in 1955. It is part of the legacy of Dr. Edward Hughes Pruden, who served as First Baptist's senior pastor from 1936 until 1969.

Two U.S. presidents have found a spiritual home at First Baptist while in Washington. President Truman regularly worshiped with us, and President Carter and his family joined First Baptist on their first Sunday in Washington and regularly taught the a well-attended Sunday School class.

Under the committed leadership of its now 17 pastors over more than 206 years, the church has sought to meet the diverse needs of a mobile and growing metropolitan population and to develop new patterns of ministry for the coming times.

Our Mission, Vision and Values Statement (adopted Jan. 6, 2008)

OUR MISSION is to love and worship God, to love and serve others, and to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

OUR VISION is to be a church in which *every member* is engaged in ministry that impacts the neighborhood, the city, the nation, and the world.

OUR VALUES are:

- The *compassion* of Christ, which moves us to feel with others in their joy or sorrow and to act on their behalf.
- The *diversity* of our congregation as it represents God's wholeness.
- The *hospitality* of the church, as we welcome all people in the name of Jesus, and welcome as members all who call Him Lord.
- The *pilgrimage* of Christian formation, as we seek to follow the way of Jesus and teach others to walk in that way.
- The beauty, reverence, and excellence of the *worship* we offer to God and the place in which we do it.

Our Worship Style

First Baptist's style of worship is uncommonly formal in Baptist life, and it reflects both our church's history and its openness to the contributions of the other great traditions of

Christianity. We worship in the inspiring beauty of a Gothic revival sanctuary surrounded by stained glass windows depicting Biblical scenes and Baptist leaders. Our services include such liturgical trappings as candle-lighting acolytes; a processional of robed ministers, readers and choir; the week's readings from the Revised Common Lectionary; and a choir, organist and other musicians who help us experience the beauty of God's presence by performing the great classical and popular sacred music of the last several centuries.

Our People

One of our cherished characteristics is the diversity of our people. We have long had significant ethnic diversity in our congregation -- both among our leadership and among the people who populate our pews every Sunday morning.

But our diversity is not only ethnic in nature. We have people from multiple age groups (with particularly strong representations from those on either end of the adult spectrum -- young adults and retired adults). Our members come from a diversity of national origins, including those from Washington's diplomatic community. Our members also come from all over the United States and world, with no one regional background predominant.

Owing to our history as a church for all Baptists coming to the nation's capital, we also have people who hail from multiple denominational backgrounds -- Baptist and otherwise -- as well as multiple theological, ideological and political viewpoints.

The First Baptist congregation's diversity is also professional and educational in nature. Included among our ranks are government and corporate officials, attorneys, graduate students, lobbyists, political staffers, journalists, career military professionals, non-profit advocates, artists, and teachers as well as the poor, homeless and formerly homeless.

The only criterion for membership in The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C., is one's profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Christian baptism (we accept as valid the baptisms of those who have come from other Christian traditions that do not practice believer's baptism). We place no other restrictions on full participation in the life of our congregation.

Like many inner-city mainline Protestant churches in the United States, our membership saw a gradual decline from its peak in the late 1960s. However, under the leadership of our previous pastor, Dr. Jim Somerville, total membership stabilized. In particular, the numbers of young adults attending and getting involved grew significantly -- from a negligible percentage of our active membership in 2000 to a vital part of our congregation in 2008.

Resident and associate members of First Baptist Church live throughout the Washington metropolitan area in the District of Columbia, northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland. In addition, many members maintain second homes in other parts of the country and

attend when they are in the Washington area.

Annual membership and attendance statistics from 1997 through 2007. First Baptist has two types of members, associate and full. However, the vast majority of associate members do not live in the Washington area but wish to maintain their affiliation with First Baptist. Also, as Washington is a transient city, each year we gain and lose a few dozen members as they move to and from the city to pursue various interests.

Year	Avg. Attendance	Add./Del.	Baptisms	Giving*
2006-2007	175	29/26	3	\$698K
2005-2006	184	19/17	1	\$551K
2004-2005	177	29/20	3	\$659K
2003-2004	181	41/15	n/a	\$647K
2002-2003	185	30/20	4	\$645K
2001-2002	193	18/8	3	\$564K
2000-2001	178	15/31	3	\$494K
1999-2000	n/a	9/21	4	\$491K
1998-1999	165	n/a	n/a	\$529K
1997-1998	160	16/12	2	\$558K

* While membership data is based on FBC's church year, which runs from May 1-April 30, the church budget follows the calendar year. "Giving" includes pledge and non-pledge contributions. The figures provided are for contributions and generally do not include income from the FBC Foundation or other foundations, investments, bequests, or sources such as facilities-use fees.

Our Ministries

First Baptist has adopted as its vision a church where every member is engaged in ministry that impacts the neighborhood, the city, the nation, and the world. The church encourages and seeks to equip member to use his or her gifts in compassionate service to others. As a downtown urban church, opportunities for ministry are virtually unlimited, not least the giving of our time, talent, and treasure in partnership with various helping agencies. One such agency, Martha's Table, sends out a mobile soup kitchen daily as a ministry to the hungry homeless. First Baptist volunteers make sandwiches for this ministry twice a month. We also extend the use of church facilities: meeting rooms for self-help recovery groups, the gym for youth basketball groups, the sanctuary at noon during the week for rest and meditation by passers-by; our modest parking lot for outdoor movies and festivals in outreach to the neighborhood; our Fellowship Hall for fellowship gatherings.

Our ministries encompass adult and children's choirs, bell choir, and special concerts open to all without charge; Sunday School at First Baptist as well as at a neighborhood Seniors residence; midweek Bible studies and other special events for spiritual nurturing; Youth "Passport" and other mission trips; the all-church packaging of shoeboxes with needed supplies for Samaritan Purse and the Youth and Kids Teams collections for the international Heifer project (they bought an entire ark one year!); "adoption" of sister churches in other countries and, currently, a medical clinic in Nicaragua. The volunteer Flower Guild makes possible beautiful flowers not only for the worship service, but also in follow up deliveries to those sick and homebound.

A major, on-going ministry of the church is its sponsorship of the Child Development Center housed in our facilities during the week. Established in 1982, the Center offers a loving and safe environment for infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers through a carefully managed program designed to stimulate spiritual, emotional and cognitive development. Some 88 children are currently enrolled.

For more expansive list of our ministries, visit <http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/>.

Our Community¹

First Baptist is located near the heart of the Dupont Circle and Logan Circle communities, one of Washington's most vibrant neighborhoods. We draw many of our members and regular attenders from the immediate neighborhood and those adjacent, but many long-time members come in every week from throughout the metropolitan area. The neighborhood is dense, walkable, accessible to multiple forms of public transportation and contains a mix of commercial and residential properties.

Within the square mile with the church at its center (bordered by T street NW on the north, H Street NW on the south, 22nd Street NW on the west and 9th Street NW on the east), the 2008 population estimate was 19,577.

Those of Caucasian descent make up 58.5 percent of the population; 21.6 percent are of African descent; and 19.5 percent are Hispanic.

The median age of the population is 34.1. The average household size is 1.6 persons. More than 61 percent of residents hold a college degree or higher. Less than 20 percent of the area's households are comprised of "traditional" families, while nearly 82 percent are non-families or non-traditional families, including a significant number of single parents and gay couples, with or without children.

Renters occupy 67.3 percent of households, while 25.7 percent are owned by their residents. The most recent employment figures show an unemployment rate of 4.0 percent, with 74 percent currently employed and 21 percent out of the labor force due to retirement, disability or other factors.

The average person, therefore, in the First Baptist neighborhood is a white male renter between the ages of 25 and 34, is employed making around \$50,000 a year in a white-collar job, gives 1.6 percent of his pre-tax income to religious organizations, spends a third of his food budget on dining out, and doesn't own a car. This person has a college education or higher and lives alone.

Average income level rises dramatically in direct correlation to age range in the neighborhood for those, from under \$10,000 annually for those under age 25 to more than \$200,000 for those 55-65. However, a significant amount of poverty persists for many of

1 Statistics from www.scanus.com 2003/2008 Scan/US Estimates based on the 1990, 2000 US Census..

the neighborhood's oldest residents, the plurality of whom have annual incomes under \$10,000.

Our Denominational Relationships

First Baptist, historically, has been affiliated with both the American Baptist Churches USA (ABC-USA) and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) since both were founded. As the Southern Baptist Convention took a hard turn toward fundamentalism in the 1980s and '90s, our church chose to support the moderate-to-progressive groups born of that controversy: the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists. Locally, we are affiliated with the District of Columbia Baptist Convention -- unique in Baptist life, in that it is a state/regional convention that maintains relationships with the ABC-USA, the SBC, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Many of our members come from and identify with each of these denominational traditions. In addition, our membership supports the Baptist World Alliance.

Our Structure

The church is governed by the congregation at large, which annually elects a moderator, several other officers and members of committees. In addition, the church elects both men and women deacons to provide congregational care and pastoral assistance in programs to strengthen the spiritual health of the church. Deacons in turn elect a chairperson each year.

The Diaconate consists of the number of deacons necessary to maintain a ratio of one deacon for every ten active and resident member households, rounded off to the next higher number, divisible by three. Their term of office is three years, with one-third of those members elected each year. After a deacon completes a three-year term, he or she is not eligible for re-election to the Diaconate for a year. In addition, the Diaconate includes up to four deacons elected by the congregation for life ("Life Deacons").

Committees: The church has 15 standing committees: Audit, Child Development Center, Christian Education, Fellowship, Library/Archives, Media and Technology, Memorials, Missions and Evangelism, Nominating, Personnel, Property Management, Social, Stewardship, Usher, and Worship. The senior pastor serves, *ex officio*, as a member of all church committees.

Church officers: The senior and associate pastors serve, *ex officio*, as officers of the church. The other officers are Moderator, Superintendent of the Church School, President of the Woman's Society, Clerk, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Assistant Financial Secretary, Librarian, Historian and Director of Publicity. With the exception of pastors, candidates for each of these positions are recommended by the Nominating Committee and approved by the membership annually.

Church Council: The chairpersons of all standing committees and officers of the church

comprise the Church Council, which meets on a monthly basis to coordinate the work of the church's ministries. The FBC Moderator serves as the chairperson of the Church Council.

For more information

FBC Constitution:

<http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/docs/FBCCONSTITUTIONapprovedJan.2004PDF.pdf>

FBC Bylaws:

<http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/docs/FBCBylawsApril2006.pdf>

FBC Policies and Procedures:

<http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/docs/FBCPoliciesandProceduresDocumentApr06.pdf>

FBC Church Covenant:

<http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/docs/ChurchCovenant.pdf>

FBC Statement of Distinctive Baptist Principles:

<http://www.firstbaptistdc.org/docs/DistinctiveBaptistPrinciples.pdf>

Our Three Most Recent Pastors and Their Tenures

- Dr. James Green Somerville: 2000-2008
- Dr. Charles E. Poole: 1995 - 1997
- Dr. Everett C. Goodwin: 1981-1993

Our Professional Staff

- Rev. Dr. Randall Ashcraft, Pastor in the Interim
- Rev. Deborah Cochran, Associate Pastor
- Dr. Lon Schreiber, Organist-Choirmaster
- Dr. Dennis Lambert, Church Administrator
- Ms. Jean Weber, Administrative Assistant
- Mr. Steve Hunter, Building Engineer
- Ms. Toni Fajemisin, Director of the FBC Child Development Center

Our Church Administrator (Ph.D., University of St. Andrews) and Administrative Assistant (M.R.E., Wesley Theological Seminary) hold advanced theological degrees.

Our Strengths and Challenges

The First Baptist congregation is, in many ways, in a much healthier position than many other historic, urban mainline congregations. Nonetheless, we face challenges typical to such churches -- and we also face challenges unique to our particular ministry setting. Here are some of our strengths and challenges:

Strengths:

- Members of our congregation with diverse ethnicity, national origin, age, denominational background, profession, education level, sexual orientation, theological views, political ideology and place of residence unite as the Body of Christ and participate fully in all facets of congregational life.
- Visitors and members alike appreciate the dignity, reverence and beauty of our distinct worship -- both in setting and content -- which creates a strong sense of fellowship, community, and identity.
- First Baptist has long emphasized solid-yet-sophisticated preaching grounded in a deep respect for the Bible as God's written word and delivered in a context of strong biblical scholarship and respect for listeners' ability to struggle with challenges to their preconceptions.
- Our neighborhood affords many opportunities for ministry to a broad range of people including the residents of the neighborhood, the homeless of the community, visitors to the city, and those who come to Washington, DC to work and study.

Challenges:

- Reaching out to families with school-aged children
- Integrating visitors and new members into the life of the congregation.
- Following through on good ideas for programs at the church
- Maintaining a large, aging facility.

Our Facilities

The main part of our facility dates to 1955. It is comprised of a sanctuary with a seating capacity of 1,200, a chapel, educational space, an industrial kitchen and a large fellowship hall (with stage). An educational wing, office suite, gymnasium and other facilities were added in 1983.

Our facilities are handicapped-accessible and include multiple ramps and elevators to accommodate people in wheelchairs.

Our property's assessed value as of 2008 is **\$22,316,000**. In addition, as of Oct. 31, 2008, the assets in the church's Special Purpose Account -- which includes funds designated for a new pipe organ and other long-term special projects -- were valued at **\$845,294.21**.

Our Budget & Finances

The churches total receipts and budgets from 1998 until 2007 (the most recent year for which figures are available):

<u>Year</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Receipts</u>
2007	\$1,056,053	\$980,750.84
2006	\$943,208	\$1,903,767.86*
2005	\$908,833	\$953,152.55
2004	\$892,157	\$943,134.94
2003	\$822,200	\$879,625.13
2002	\$787,225	\$848,714.72
2001	\$854,473	\$850,700.98
2000	\$826,901	\$812,689.39
1999	\$1,637,412	\$2,352,413.89**
1998	\$754,568	\$793,816.11

* The 2006 receipts include the proceeds from assets bequeathed to the church in the will of a former member, for a total of \$988,961

** The 1999 receipts and budget reflect the sale of a former church parking lot for \$1,650,000.

Our Endowment

An integrated auxiliary of the church is The First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, D.C. Foundation, Inc., an independent 501(C)(3) corporation. It has a board of five to nine elected members, and the senior pastor and church treasurer serves as *ex officio* members. The purpose of the foundation is to receive and disburse funds to support the religious ministries of the church and to provide for the maintenance, improvements to, and/or acquisitions of the church's facilities.