

TBD

First Regular Baptist Church and Society of Birmingham, Michigan.

That's the name we have registered with the state of Michigan. The name we began with, when the "Regular" part of our name signaled something to the community about the new Church's theology.

First Baptist. FBC. The B'Jazz church. The pretty gray stone Gothic church one block north of Lulu Lemon.

That's how we may call ourselves now, or how others who are new in the community around us might know us. And perhaps, to some in the community, the "Baptist" part of our name causes them to draw inaccurate conclusions about our theology and what we stand for.

First Baptist 2.0. Our intentional restart, with a renewed focus on engagement with our local community.

What we are aiming for. Starting something new, within what we already have, without pre-conceived ideas as to place or style or even as to music. But a clear vision as to our purpose.

Target group? TBD.

Worship time and place? TBD.

Organ, guitar, saxophone, drums, lute (lute?!)? TBD.

Purpose?

That's easy to define. To love our neighbors, near and far. To share the love of Jesus. To live our lives authentically, faithfully, prayerfully. To understand our personal obligation --- and freedom --- to figure out what the Bible has to teach us, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To serve and share God's love with those who are on the margins of our community, for whatever reason.

And how are we going to get where we want to be?

We are looking for a seminary-trained, entrepreneurial leader who is willing to take this journey with us.

Someone who enjoys people... and attracts people.

Someone who can compassionately draw out the hard, hidden stories of people who lead their daily lives in the camouflage offered by this leafy, affluent enclave so near and yet sometimes so far from the heartbeat of Detroit.

Someone who can speak compellingly of the message of God's love told through the life of Jesus.

Someone who defines our mission field as the Starbucks around the corner or the streets of Bangkok. Who knows that love can be expressed through offering clean water or a clean bed, funding a truck in the Congo or a food pantry a few miles down the road, cutting bandages from sheets, providing a backpack filled with school supplies, or training peacemakers.

Someone who is comfortable with crossing the social divides that seek to box us into ever narrower - and more divisive --- identities. In person. Digitally.

Someone who strives to live their faith, with a vibrant prayer life, and who knows what it is like to feel lost, tested, out of touch with God, but who found a way forward with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And in return? We have a team, a budget, and a blank screen.

We'd love to talk.

Finding our way to this point (and no thanks to Google Earth...)

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there."
- Lewis Carroll

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else."
- Yogi Berra

In 2015, our then current senior pastor retired after twelve years of service. Like any church of any history, we knew the next steps: form a Pastoral Search Committee, and in due time, a new pastor will be called.

Only it didn't work out that way, this time. Not exactly. God works in mysterious ways, especially with Pastoral Search Committees that think they know the road forward. This team kept finding that when they looked down the path marked "Tradition," a fog kept arising and their vision was obscured. A God-given confusion. In fact, one startling question kept nagging at the team: Do we think God wants the mission and ministry of FBC to continue? So, working with a consultant, and conducting a number of prayer and discernment sessions with small groups of congregational members and regular attenders, the PSC moved forward with that question, and more than a few more. And in the process, two strong themes kept emerging:

First, we need to **do** something different. Really different. A different way that enables our community to know Jesus. Not just smoke and mirrors, or a new front page. Not just "Bring in the guitars" or "Go get the Millennials." (As if...)

Second, we may need to look in a different direction for our mission and ministry focus. Who is the neighbor God wants us to reach? What are the unmet needs that we are called to address?

And as to the question about whether God wanted FBC to stay as part of the working out of God's purpose? "Yes," the congregation said, "we believe God wants us to keep going." "YES," we said! And again, "yes," quietly and with determination and faith.

The intentional restart idea was starting to form.

As the Search Committee struggled with what to do with those two themes, another concern kept emerging. We have many who have been members for well over 30 years. Over 50 years. Who have faithfully served this Church, and while immensely supportive of the idea of something new, loved what First Baptist had been and continued to be in their lives. Maybe they had been raised here, or married here, brought their children here, formed the central friendships of their life here. What about the FBC they knew and loved? Where did that fit with the idea of the Intentional Restart?

And so the Pastoral Search Committee was led to advocate for a two-pastor model. One pastor who would care for the existing congregation, and one pastor who would work to create and to build new relationships in the community - the intentional restart. Unconventional. Perhaps a bit scary. But the congregation got behind the idea.

We called Scott Runyon as our Senior Pastor in June 2017 and he quickly began working with that concept. We engaged the Center for Progressive Renewal to coach Pastor

Scott as we moved towards this intentional restart. In addition, a small team attended the “(Still) Reforming” conference in Atlanta, hosted by the Center for Progressive Renewal, in order to learn more about guiding the development of the intentional restart. The congregation approved a new Church governance model, smaller and more flexible, designed to enable FBC to make decisions in a more nimble and coordinated fashion. An intentional restart team was formed to support the new efforts, and the 2018 Church budget was approved by the congregation that undergirds the intentional restart. While the Coordinator of the team reports to Church Council, and is directed to keep the congregation informed of the team’s efforts, the goal is to allow, encourage, and challenge the team to find its way forward in partnership with the Holy Spirit. To be informed by our Church’s past and by our traditional mission and focus areas --- but not to be bound by that past or those traditions. As time moved on, though, the idea of the “intentional restart” began to change once again. The team chose to re-name themselves the Community Engagement Team, a reflection of a new spirit that had begun moving among us around the idea that perhaps our mission field begins right where we are. Not at all the idea that we expected to come to us! After all, FBC calls home a city where almost 30% of adults hold advanced degrees. In one of the most affluent counties in America. Where the public schools are not only among the tops in Michigan, but routinely show up on lists of the Top 100 high schools in America. Where there are already large Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic churches right down the road. Where some of the top business leaders in America live. And yet...

On Friday nights and Saturday mornings, the AA groups meeting in our Church are filled to overflowing.

Neighbors have not escaped the opioid crisis.

Friends down the street have lost their homes due to gambling problems.

Maybe there is a need for a prophetic word about economic responsibility. Or a willingness to work with those with spiritual doubts and a yearning for a real faith. No easy, dogmatic answers. No prosperity gospel. But keeping it real in a region poised for re-birth, where the scars from decades of decline and job loss and racial tension still remain. Maybe there are people with unmet needs right here that God intends to use us to reach.

The re-named Community Engagement Team began reaching out to our closest neighbors, such as the AA groups that meet here and the Gateway Montessori School that has been a long-term tenant, and found ways to offer support and build relationships. The Team visited worship services of other faith traditions to learn and observe. Coaching sessions for the pastor and key team leaders continued with an external consultant. The Outreach Team co-sponsored a series of public concerts in the city park during the summer of 2018, offering organic lemonade and conversation to music lovers. Our monthly communion offerings for missions began to focus on local groups, such as those providing support for LGBTQ teens, for clean water initiatives for Detroit and for an interfaith creative arts outreach effort --- and congregational backing soared. An initial congregational “listening session” was held on the topic of re-naming the Church. The Foundations of Faith team offered a series of classes on “Grace-Filled Conversations” to learn about having conversations that enable us to move beyond divisions into relationships. We have entered into a contract with the Unstuck Group to enable us to start to establish concrete plans for moving forward.

We are laying the foundation for our future. The future we believe God is moving us towards.

Love your neighbor, Jesus taught.

And who is my neighbor, you ask?

We believe our neighbors are asylum-seekers.
Immigrants. Corporate executives. Retired
teachers. Homeless families. Children.

Our neighbors live here, in the Congo, Thailand,
Haiti, Nagaland.

Look around.

We all have a wound to be healed, a daily
challenge to face, a gift to offer, a question to ask,
a story to share. Neighbors all.

Every day we learn to listen more, to love more.

Check us out.

We're where we've always been: the English
Gothic Church at the corner of Willits and Bates in
downtown Birmingham. Sundays, 10:30 am.

A description of FBC used with the Summer 2018 Concerts in the Park

We have been at crossroads before

The experience of the 2015-2017 Pastoral Search Committee was not, in fact, atypical for First Baptist Church. We have been in that place before. The crossroads. When faith or the times or discord push a church congregation past the familiar waystations of Making Do or Compromising or Accepting the Status Quo or Hoping Something Will Change. Pushing a perhaps reluctant congregation to a crossroads where a decision has to be made. And once at a crossroad, this Church has often chosen a path of daring faith.

We feel it is important to share how First Baptist has faced crossroads in our 147-year history because it provides an understanding of why, when we came to *this* crossroad, we chose to do something unexpected, to step out in faith that God still had a purpose for this Church at the corner of Willits and Bates in downtown Birmingham, Michigan. It is part of our DNA.

So, let's look at some of the decisions at the crossroads that have defined First Baptist in the past. That give us confidence that we can meet this crossroad with God-given direction.

Start with a key decision of **denominational affiliation**. The fledgling Church chose to become associated with the Northern Baptist Convention, now called the American Baptist Churches-USA. The Convention was the result of a split with Baptists in southern states over the issue of slavery. This decision set the stage for the Church's continued growth in its understanding of social justice, but it was an evolving process that has played out over the years.

And then there was the **resolute, sacrificial steadfastness** in the face of the stock market crash of October 1929, just six months after the cornerstone was laid for our current beautiful English Gothic building. Three years after its founding in June 1870, the Church's members had built their first wooden church building. As the membership steadily increased, especially during the 1920s, two visionary pastors were called, one following the other, who energized this growing congregation. Coupled with the prosperity of that decade, their vision for the future led the congregation to build a permanent structure. After the crash, the Church survived on faith and credit. Sometimes, members sold parcels of land to meet the Church's mortgage payments. Today, that 1929 sanctuary with its striking stained glass windows, as well as the 1959 education wing, is an architectural landmark in Birmingham.

But more than external headwinds buffeted First Baptist as **central questions about identity and polity, faith and practice** challenged the Church and all its members. Like many Protestant churches, from the 1930s through the 1950s, the controversy between the Fundamentalists and the Modernists deeply divided the Church. Ministers with opposing views would alternately be called, each not lasting very long. For a while, two opposing groups even met simultaneously in different locations of the building for worship. After painful soul searching, and self-examination, our Church came to a decision. "Yes" prevailed over "no" and "don't." We said yes to open membership (accepting baptism by means other than immersion). Yes to open communion. Yes to ecumenism. Yes to modern Biblical scholarship, yes to individual liberty in interpreting Scripture, and finally, yes to women in ministry.

On multiple occasions, First Baptist has come to a crossroad where we were asked to reconsider our answer to the question, "**Who is my neighbor?**" Each time, the Church has expanded beyond cultural comfort zones to reach out locally, regionally, and internationally. Following the global turmoil and destruction of World War II, millions of persons were displaced, had become refugees from conflict, seeking peace wherever they could find it.

First Baptist called as our pastor a man of heightened social consciousness due to his experience working with Americans of Japanese descent who had been forced by the U.S. government into internment camps during the War. He inspired the congregation to make a difference in the lives of immigrants, which led over the years to sponsoring four Hungarian couples, a Ukrainian couple, an immigrant family from Germany, and a refugee family from Laos. We have continuously supported outreach efforts in Hamtramck (an area in Detroit) whose residents are increasingly recent immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. We have expanded our mission efforts to now include Freedom House, a unique effort in Detroit that houses those seeking asylum approval. We have entered into a relationship spanning several decades with the historic, predominantly African-American Second Baptist Church of Detroit. A team travelled to Haiti to build a school, in partnership with a team from Second Baptist. Other members have travelled to northeast India, to train pastors or teach economic development skills, as part of peacemaking efforts in an area still involved in a civil war with the government of India. Our homeless neighbors come to live in our Church every year for a week, as we provide up close and personal contact, meals and transportation.

And, we have found that being at the crossroads sometimes means **having to take a stand that challenges and confronts the beliefs of our neighbors, our government, even our denomination.** In the early 1970s, FBC and four other Birmingham churches formed a non-profit housing corporation, Baldwin House, for the purpose of submitting a proposal to build senior housing in Birmingham. However, in order to secure the necessary federal HUD financing approval, housing for persons with low income and members of minority groups were required to be added to the proposal. Over the next 20 years, the effort to build Baldwin House brought civic discord and led to the recall of a mayor, the filing of a lawsuit against the City for racial discrimination that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the laser focus of the investigative news program, Sixty Minutes. Patience and tenacity were finally rewarded when Baldwin House opened for occupancy on August 3, 1994. A different kind of test was posed when some ABC Churches were disfellowshipped by their Region for formally identifying themselves as “welcoming and affirming” churches (meaning the church supported the inclusion of LGBTQ persons). After a deliberate study of both homosexuality and Baptist principles of association, FBC widely distributed a letter to ABC churches, Regions and national staff and boards condemning such disfellowshipping.

Now, we are at another crossroad, one familiar to many mainline Protestant churches. We may not know yet exactly which road to follow, but we have begun the journey.

And that, in itself, is a big step.

Intrigued? Interested?

We have shared a lot about our journey. How we got here. How our past has shaped our approach to this crossroad. What we are looking for in a pastor who will partner with us as we move forward (a job description appears on the next page).

But enough about us! We want to hear about you!

Reach out to Glenn Craig, chair of our Pastoral Search Committee at gfcraig@gmail.com. Tell Glenn about yourself. Ask questions. Maybe even provide some commentary or thoughts about our vision. Feel free to stalk our Church website at <https://www.firstbaptistbirmingham.org>, but keep in mind that depicts our past and present, and we are looking towards our future!

Think about it. Pray for us.

Maybe we should explore if God is moving us in the same direction.

Minister of Community Engagement Job Description

Roles and Relationships

The Minister of Community Engagement will participate in the ministry of the Church as a full-time staff member and shall work in collaboration with the Senior Pastor.

Responsibilities

Gain Community Understanding and Develop Plans for Community Engagement

- Identify and focus activities that relate to the types of local communities, related demographics, and spiritual needs that are most likely to create participation among new people and develop active supporters.
- Utilize any and all means to plan, develop and implement strategies and activities related to community engagement and growth.

Worship Planning

- Collaborate with the Senior Pastor and the Community Engagement Team to creatively envision new worship experiences that resonate for people in the surrounding communities
- Prepare, plan, coordinate and/or lead new worship services and experiences with meaningful content relevant to people who are not yet connected with a faith community
- Communicate with people by generating content for whatever formats are effective including print, email, social media, web-based media, etc.

Leadership

- Provide spiritual leadership related to Community Engagement activities and maintain support for such activities with existing congregation
- Create and execute a plan for mission and faith development in collaboration with the Senior Pastor
- Participate in monthly staff meetings
- Share ministry updates with Church Council
- Share ministry updates during three congregational meetings each year

Minimum Qualifications

- United States citizen or appropriate documents needed to work legally in the US
- Theological degree (M. Div. or equivalent) from an accredited seminary or working toward one
- Strong commitments to areas of social justice and community service