


FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ♦ ABILENE

Congregational Profile

-JUNE 2022-



*“To reach people for
Jesus Christ and
together become
more like him.”*



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Welcome AND INTRODUCTION

Dear Prospective Senior Pastor,

Thank you for your interest in First Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas. Our church was established in December 1881, only six months after the founding of our city. Since that time, First Baptist has served a major role in shaping the development, character, and soul of Abilene. Over the last 100 years First Baptist has had only seven senior pastors, a clear indication of the stability of the church and the richness of the relationship between pastor and congregation.

Through the years, First Baptist has demonstrated a unique combination of tradition and innovation. Our congregation worships in a beautifully-renovated classical sanctuary and offers traditional programming through Sunday morning Bible classes, Wednesday evening spiritual formation activities, and other weekday ministries. Our gifted choir, full orchestra, and world-class pipe organ, lead the congregation in beautiful arrangements of traditional and modern worship music. Historically, First Baptist is also a congregation who regularly identifies unmet needs in our city and then develops new ways of meeting those needs. As a creative church, we were one of the first to build a family life center, to launch a ministry of counseling, and to pioneer other ministries that have become commonplace in churches, like Disciple Now for youth. At present we are beginning to renovate an entire city block that will be the location of our new Hope Center, which will dramatically expand our capacity to minister to people in our community. The center is currently projected to cost \$8.8 million, an amount we have in hand through contributions and pledges.

The Hope Center is the latest expression of the church's heritage of commitment to missions, going back to 1905 when the congregation sent its first missionary, Blanche Rose Walker, to China. In recent years the church completed a \$5 million campaign for missions to fund a variety of projects, including sending CBF field personnel from our church to five different countries.

Our church is a "big tent" fellowship in the sense of the breadth of theological and social perspectives represented in our congregation. At the same time, we have been historically progressive on several fronts, including the adoption of an anti-racism policy in 1963 and the ordination of women as deacons and ministers since 1996. To expand our missional

footprint, our congregation connects in ministry with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

At present First Baptist Abilene is in a period of transition, with the retirement of Dr. Phil Christopher as our senior pastor in October 2021, after 26 years of service with us. The church prepared well for the interim that followed his retirement, including the election of a nine-member Pastor Search Committee that reflects the breadth of our congregation. The committee engaged the Center for Healthy Churches to assist during this period of transition. Under their leadership we have entered an extensive self-study, involving three congregational conversations and two church-wide surveys. This process has provided the search committee with valuable data about the congregation's understanding of our identity and calling now and for the future, as well as a good sense of the expectations that we have for the person who will serve as our spiritual leader in the years ahead.

The committee is now involved in the search phase of our work, seeking the individual who will become our next senior pastor. We are looking for someone who has the gifts and preparation to become one of us, to help us grow in discipleship, and to lead us in faithful service as the body of Christ. Throughout the transition process the committee and congregation have intentionally and consistently sought the leadership of the Holy Spirit, confident that "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered the heart of anyone the things that God has prepared" for our church as we continue to discover what it means to love God and others in our community and world.

Trusting in God's grace,

The Pastor Search Committee of First Baptist Church Abilene

Contact: PastorSearch@FBCAbilene.org



Back row:

*Bob Ellis (Chair),
Paul Irby (Vice-chair),
Evan Harris,
Marcus Spencer,
Jim Jones*

Front row:

*Debby Brown,
Jecilly Varghese,
Libby Gibson,
Tiffany Hammer*



OUR MISSION AND VALUES

From the beginning, First Baptist Church has balanced an inward focus with an outward vision. Through the generations we have committed ourselves to genuine worship, growth in Christlikeness, and growing relationships. At the same time, we are a people who look beyond our walls to challenges in our community and the world beyond, responding to the needs of others in compassionate and concrete ways.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The long-standing mission statement of our church is ***"To reach people for Jesus Christ and together become more like him."*** This statement expresses our central commitment to Christ and desire to imitate him in all that we are and do. It also captures our missional heart, which propels us, as the recipients of God's good gifts, to share that grace with others, caring for their needs and inviting them to faith and fellowship. Our mission statement also recognizes our own neediness. We do not reach down to others from a position of spiritual superiority, but we reach out to those who are fellow strugglers, all of us pilgrims together on the journey of faith.

OUR CORE VALUES

As a congregation, at various times we have expressed our sense of basic values in light of our current context. In this period of pastoral transition, our church has engaged in a series of congregational conversations in which we shared together our sense of who we are and where we are going. In the first conversation last fall we considered what we value most about our church at this point of our history. The fruitful discussion resulted in five fresh statements of our core values.

First Baptist is a welcoming community who values authentic relationships.

We foster a sense of belonging, as we extend gracious hospitality to newcomers and strive to incorporate everyone in a dynamic community of authentic relationships. Our church is attentive to the needs of one another and generous to help in every way that we can. Our congregation is open to diversity of people in ethnicity and background and to diversity of theological perspectives. We fully affirm God's calling of women in ministry and ordain them to the diaconate and to diverse roles of service as clergy.

Our church is a missional community who values outwardly-focused service.

We actively respond to a wide range of needs in our community through a variety of creative ministries. As a result, we offer diverse opportunities for everyone in our congregation to personally engage in service to others. We also have direct involvement in ministry around the world, and as a congregation we sacrificially support the missional efforts of our church.

We are a spiritual community who values intergenerational, lifelong formation.

As a church we foster growth in Christlikeness through the practices of Bible study and prayer, worship and fellowship, service and stewardship. We offer rich opportunities in age-specific discipleship for lifelong spiritual formation, and we intentionally foster intergenerational relationships.

We are a worshiping community who values depth and reverence in music and worship.

Each week we worship through music that is well-balanced and dynamic, through the reverent reading of scripture, and through prayer and preaching that are thoughtful and spiritually deep. We foster congregational participation in worship and explore creative ways of celebrating our faith together.

We are a traditional community who values heritage, innovation and progress.

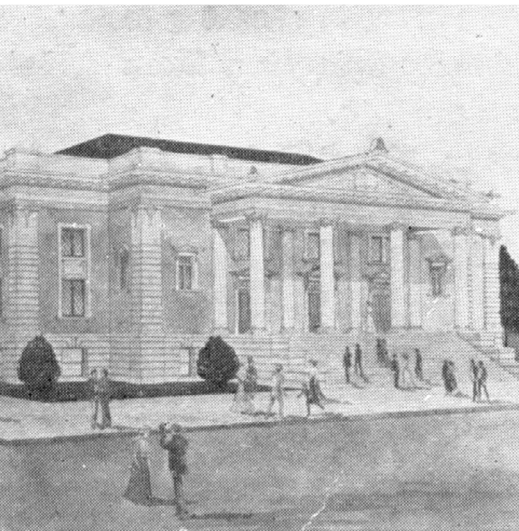
Our congregation is rooted in traditional biblical principles and practices, while at the same time creating innovative ministries to meet community needs. We have also been creative in developing our own distinctive traditions, some of which we have rediscovered from ancient Christian practices and others are celebrations unique to our context.





OUR HISTORY

When you view First Baptist Church Abilene on the downtown corner of North Second and Orange Streets, you might think of a strong oak tree with deep roots, a sturdy trunk and branches spreading out in many different directions. These roots took hold in this West Texas town in 1881. Over the years our church has grown strong, offering its gifts and service to our community. Our vision has been and continues to be actively serving others as we meet the physical and spiritual needs of our congregation and our city.



Owen C. Pope, a traveling missionary, came to the newly established town of Abilene on the T&P Railroad line and decided it needed a Baptist church. A few months later seventeen original members signed the charter for the new church.



As Abilene grew, so did First Baptist Church. In 1883 land was purchased and the church built its first building. From the onset church members were evangelistic and mission-minded, reaching out into the community through Sunday morning worship, socials, and an annual revival.

The late 1800s and early 1900s brought rapid growth and change to First Baptist and Abilene. Faced with the growing number of members, a new larger sanctuary was constructed and dedicated in 1910. Nine years later the first Sunday School Building was erected. Even though attention was given to expanding buildings and grounds, our church remained dedicated to responding to the needs of the city. First Baptist Church played a significant role in founding three important Abilene institutions. FBC helped establish Hardin-Simmons University, Hendrick Medical Center, and Hendrick Home for Children. These community institutions have had a major impact by meeting the educational, spiritual, and physical needs of residents in West Texas.



The concept of service was especially evident in times of crisis. During the World Wars, the Spanish flu, and the Great Depression, First Baptist offered physical and monetary support

to those in need. Special prayer services were also an important contribution during those tumultuous times. As the world evolved from these major events there grew a strong passion for missions in the congregation and ministerial staff. Our church was blessed with strong leaders who served extensive tenures, such as Elwin Skiles, James Flamming, Bill Bruster, and Phil Christopher. Under their leadership over 15 new mission churches were organized across the city. Under God's leadership our church has had and continues to have a vital role in shaping the community of Abilene.

In the early 1950's it became evident that the 1910 sanctuary was not meeting the needs of our large congregation. A third sanctuary was built in 1954 at the location of our present sanctuary. Beginning in 2004 this structure underwent major renovations and was newly dedicated on Palm Sunday in 2006. Today the FBC sanctuary is home to our worship services but also opens its doors to host community events.

While continuing mission efforts locally, First Baptist also looks outward to the nation and the world. These global efforts are still a focus of our church as we support Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel in North Macedonia, Cambodia, and another Southeast Asian country. During the late twentieth century, First Baptist pioneered many new ministries benefiting the greater Abilene community. Seeing a need for affordable day care, GLO was established in 1968. Soon to follow in 1974 was the television ministry which began live broadcasting of the entire hour-long Sunday morning service. The Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment began

in 1977, in order to provide services to meet the emotional needs of church members and the Abilene community. It has served as a model for other churches in Texas and the United States. Another new ministry was established in 1981: the Family Life Center, providing a place for families in the Abilene area to come together for fun community activities. Over the years it became evident that there was a great need to minister to the less fortunate in Abilene. An urban ministry, City Light Community Ministries, officially opened in 1996.

The dedication to missions continues today as we are beginning to create a new Hope Center, allowing for a dramatic expansion of City Light, Ministry of Counseling, and GLO Day Care.

Over the past 140 years First Baptist has weathered many seasons of life, yet its roots remain strong. The emphasis on spiritual growth and mission outreach has continued to be our focus, and it has branched out in new and innovative ways. The rich heritage of First Baptist Church is truly a blessing but is also a challenge to seek and fulfill God's call into the future.

Note: A very special thanks to Rob Fink and Tiffany M. Fink authors of Love Unbounded. Their book on the history of First Baptist Church Abilene was an invaluable resource for this document.



OUR CONGREGATION

First Baptist Church Abilene is a hospitable community. We are a multigenerational church that strives to connect people of all ages. Our church is a tradition-rich community that values its deep-rooted heritage and looks for opportunities for innovation and progress. As a mission-minded congregation, our focus on ministry reaches within our community as well as around the world.



PARTICIPATION

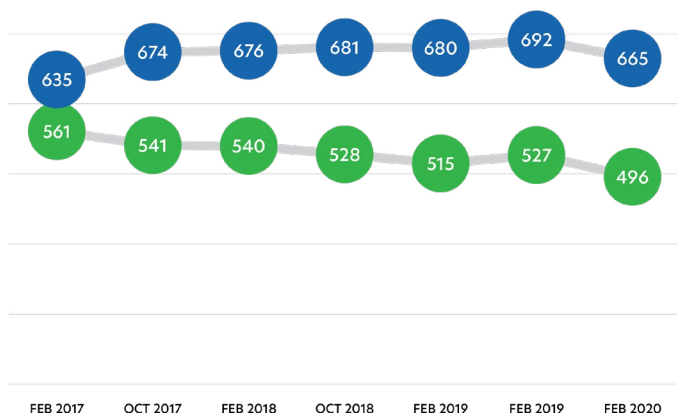
Engaging and involving people in the worship and ministries of First Baptist is very important to our congregation. We have a few different ways of thinking about attendance and involvement. A traditional way is by counting the number who participate weekly on a Sunday morning. In light of lifestyles in our current culture, we also recognize that many activities compete with Sunday church attendance, such as the burgeoning number of weekend activities for children that involve Sundays, visits to family in other cities, and weekend get-a-ways for a brief respite from the work week. As a result, an increasing number of congregants at First Baptist are able only to participate in person one, two, or three times a month, yet they consider themselves core members. Therefore, our Pastor for Administration developed a system some years ago for counting how many attend at least once a month, and this metric has provided some helpful insights.

SUNDAY MORNING PARTICIPATION

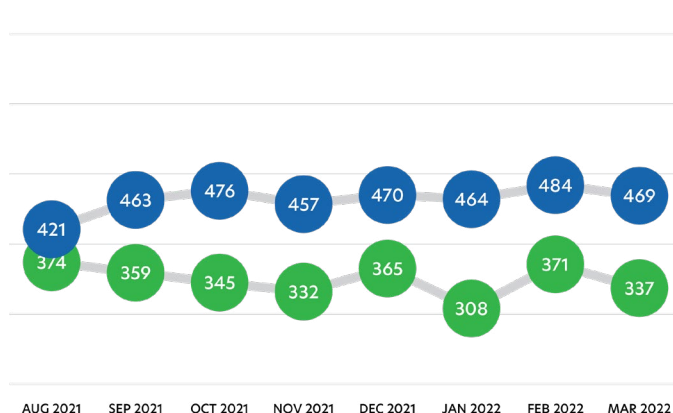
Before the COVID pandemic, our weekly attendance in the representative months of February and October from Oct 2017 through Feb 2020 averaged 530. Over the same years we saw an average of 672 people participating at least once a month. (We use February and October because they are typical fall and spring months.)

PARTICIPATION IN SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY

FEB 2017-FEB 2020 (PRE COVID)



AUG 2021-MARCH 2022



1-4 Times per Month



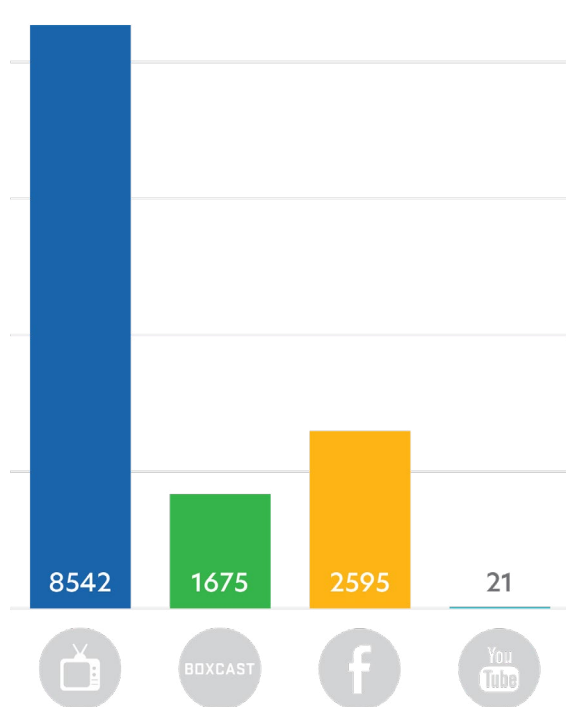
Weekly Average

Of course, the onslaught of COVID beginning in March 2020 has upended normal patterns of church participation. For a period of time in 2020-21, First Baptist canceled or significantly scaled back in-person gatherings. After returning to somewhat normal in-person worship in fall 2021, we have found that attendance is generally running about two-thirds of the numbers we saw pre-COVID, with an average of 349 per week and an average of 463 for once a month or more attendance. According to the Center for Healthy Churches, the one-third decline in attendance now, as compared with pre-COVID numbers, is typical across the country for churches similar to First Baptist. (Note: The numbers for Aug, Dec, and Jan omit some weeks when normal in-person Bible study was not possible.)

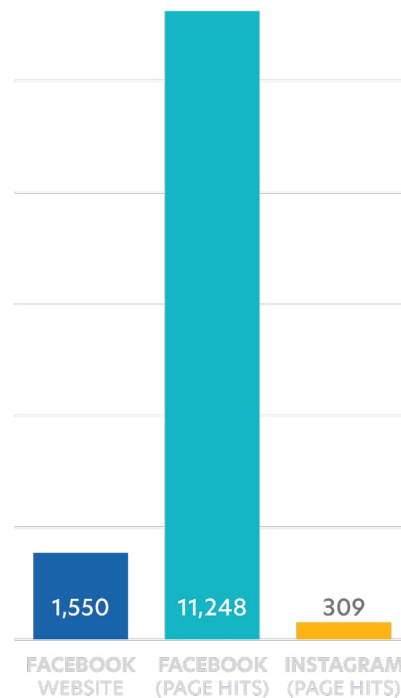
Our church held a second congregational conversation in January, 2022, during which we talked about participation numbers. One conclusion of the discussion was a sense that our worship attendance has maintained fairly well through the COVID era; however, we are still concerned about Sunday morning in-person attendance and hope to grow in the future.

DIGITAL PARTICIPATION

A unique aspect of our church is our long-term media ministry which began broadcasting Sunday morning worship through television in the 1970's and continues to reach viewers in Abilene and around the world. Prior to the COVID pandemic, we had 4,800 consistent weekly TV viewers. The number of viewers dramatically increased during the pandemic, and distance participants further expanded as we increased availability of digital worship and Bible study through Internet streaming and social media. In the era of COVID, monthly participation in Sunday morning worship by some digital means has increased to nearly 13,000 engagements.



MONTHLY DIGITAL PARTICIPATION
ON SUNDAY MORNING SINCE COVID



MONTHLY DIGITAL PARTICIPATION
ON WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

First Baptist Church has many well-established externally-focused ministries, such as GLO Day Care, Ministry of Counseling, Family Life Center, and City Light. Through these ministries, we see over 1,500 individuals or families coming through the doors of our facilities each week.

WEEKLY AVERAGE PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL MISSION PROGRAMS



TOTAL: 1680

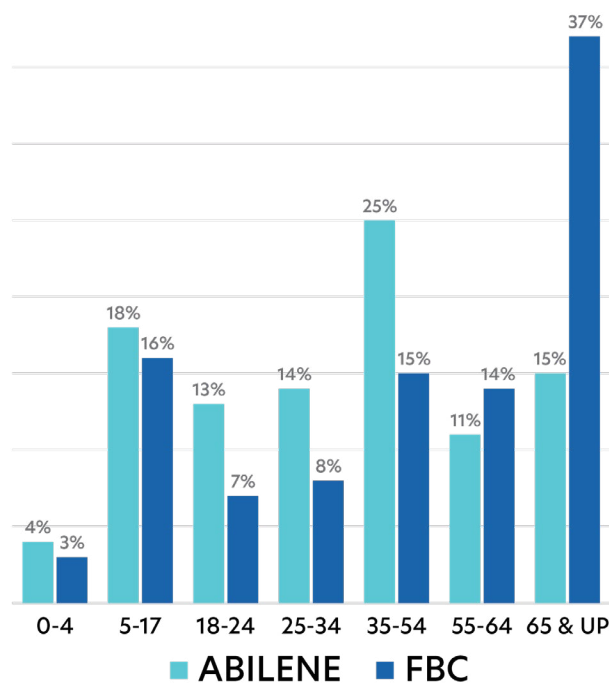
DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics of First Baptist show we are a multigenerational church with a large number of highly educated, professional congregants. Many of our folks have been members for over thirty years, and we tend to be older than the average age in our city. ***When we discussed age brackets in our church during our second congregational conversation, we expressed the hope that we will increase engagement of younger generations in the future, building longevity with them, while maintaining our rich heritage of strong leadership from older congregants.***

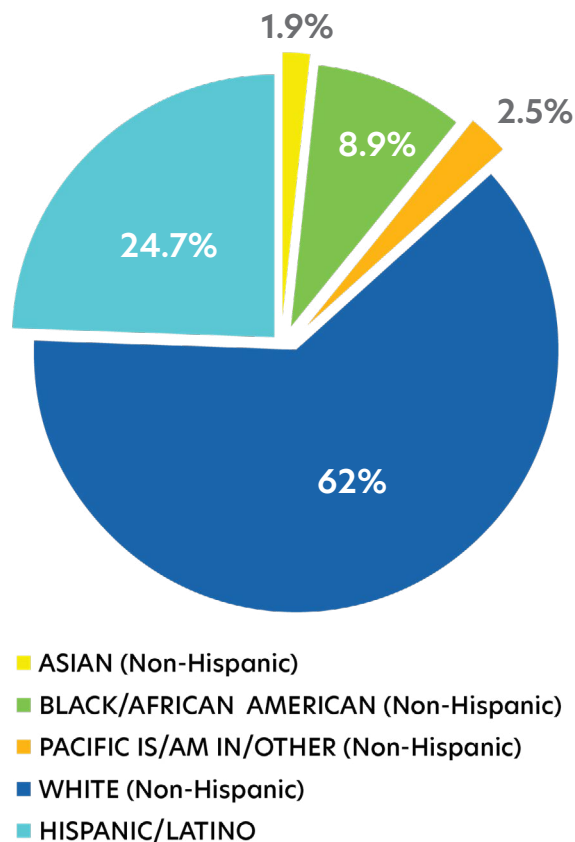
Ethnic demographics for Abilene indicate that 62% of the population is white (non-Hispanic). While First Baptist does not collect ethnic information on congregants, it is clear that we have an even higher percentage of white (non-Hispanic) persons than the city.

Abilene's average median income (based on 2019 statistics) is \$50,659, which is about \$11,000 below the state average; however, our city also has a lower cost of living than the average in the state. Abilene workers are 60% white collar and 40% blue collar. While First Baptist collects no economic data related to congregants, it appears that our average median income would be significantly higher than the Abilene figure, and we estimate the number of white-collar workers in the church at about 80%. Long-term observers of the congregation also estimate that our church has become relatively more diverse in its socio-economic percentages over the last few decades. ***One of the results of the second congregational conversation was the conviction that while City Light, our church's social ministry arm, serves a diverse population, we would like for the rest of our congregation to reflect more of the ethnic, economic, and overall diversity of our city.***

AGE BRACKET COMPARISON OF ABILENE AND FIRST BAPTIST



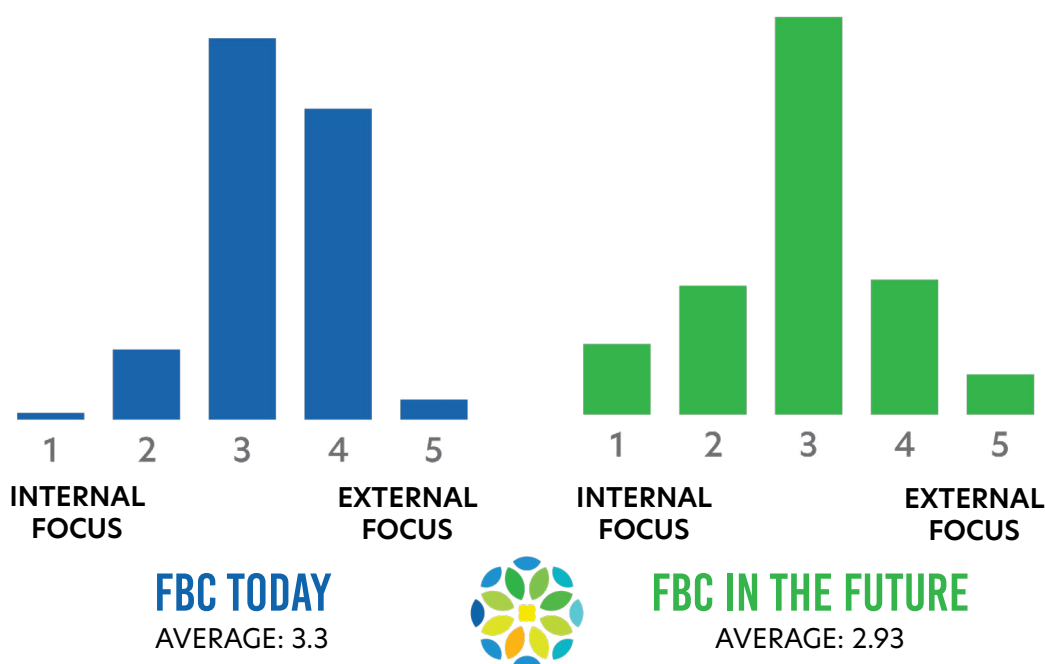
CURRENT YEAR (2022) RACIAL/ETHNIC PERCENTAGES OF ABILENE



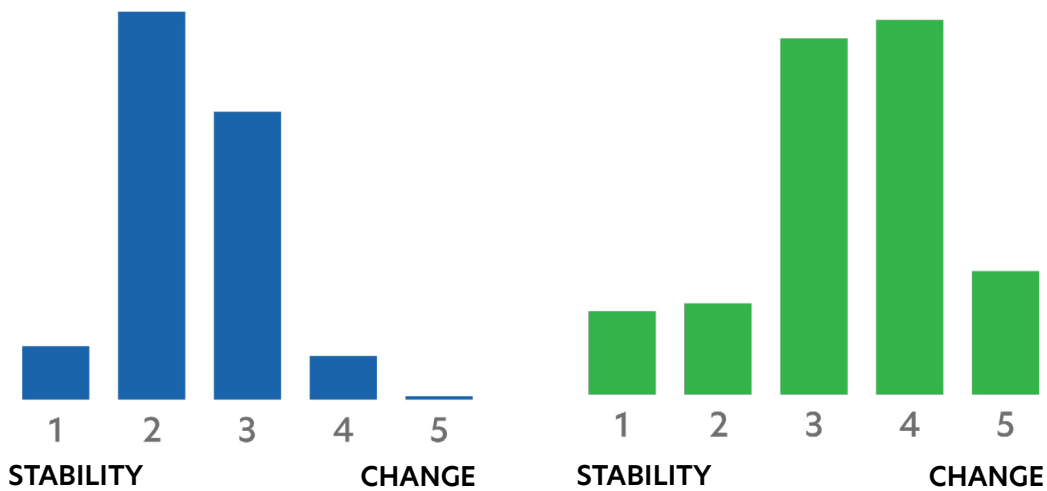


CONGREGATIONAL POLARITIES

In the third Congregational Conversation and the final survey in February 2022, the search committee specifically asked for information about where our church finds itself on a series of polarities that characterize typical congregations. The committee collected data on these polarities at two points: first, regarding where congregants think we are at present, and second, where we would like for our church to go in the future. Overall, congregants expressed that First Baptist presently stands in a generally balanced position within each of these polarities and that such balance should continue in the future, with some slight shifts in a few cases, as indicated in the following charts.



One polarity places our church on a scale between an internal focus (directed toward needs within the congregation) and an external focus (directed toward needs in the larger community). Our church as a whole believes that we presently have a balanced internal and external focus with a lean towards an external emphasis. With regard to the future, ***the church expressed that we should continue to have a balance between the two polarities, but lean toward a somewhat stronger internal focus.***

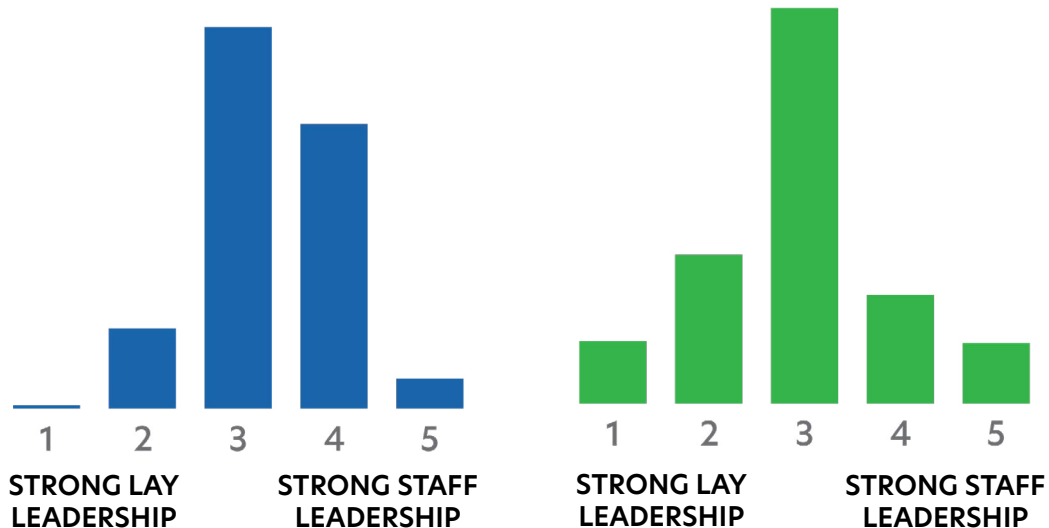


FBC TODAY
AVERAGE: 2.4



FBC IN THE FUTURE
AVERAGE: 3.35

Traditions and heritage are important to our congregation, but we also recognize that change is important to the health of our church. Currently, the majority believe our church has a stronger emphasis on stability than change. With regard to the future, ***we value a better balance between stability and change, with an increased openness to change.*** What such change might look like will be an important consideration for our church in the future.

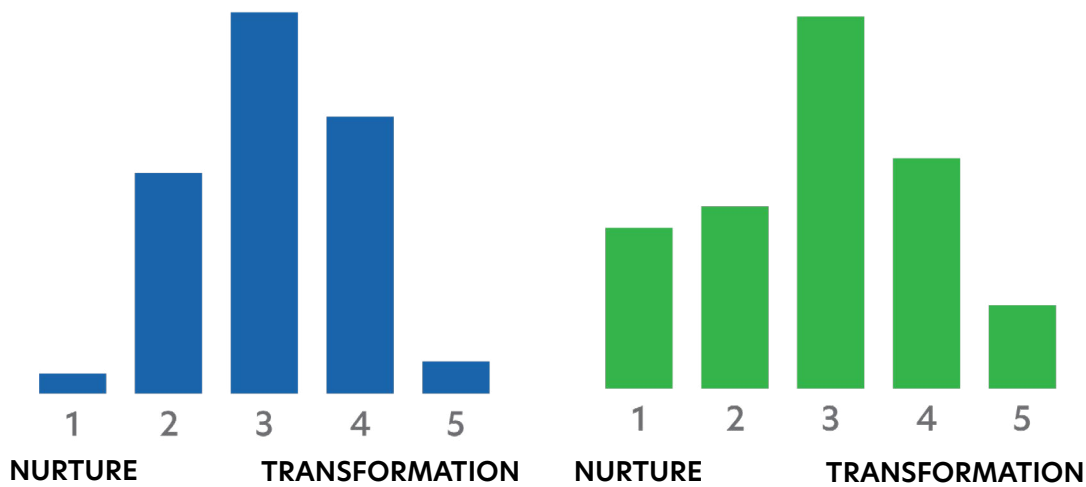


FBC TODAY
AVERAGE: 3.3



FBC IN THE FUTURE
AVERAGE: 2.94

Strong leadership is a priority at First Baptist Church. While the staff leadership is strong, lay leadership plays an important role in the success of our church. Currently, our church believes we have a balance between the polarities of staff and lay leadership with a lean towards strong staff leadership. ***In the future, the congregation would like to continue a healthy balance between strong lay and strong staff leadership with a slight movement toward stronger lay leadership.***

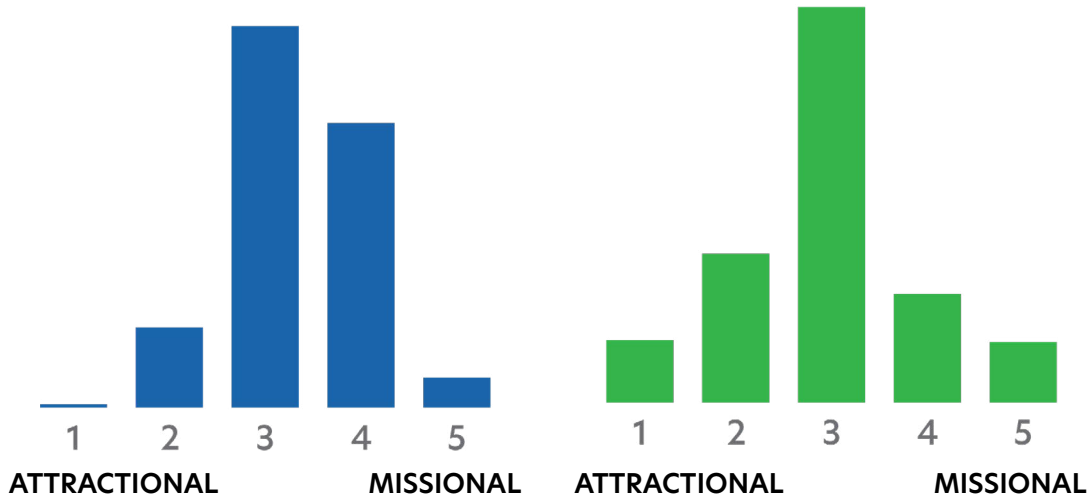


FBC TODAY
AVERAGE: 3.1



FBC IN THE FUTURE
AVERAGE: 2.9

Our congregation views our ministry as providing a good balance between nurture (focusing on accepting people as they are) and transformation (in the sense of encouraging spiritual growth), **and hopes this balance will continue in the future.** Providing nurture, encouragement, and care is important for spiritual development, as is the need to be challenged and transformed.



FBC TODAY
AVERAGE: 3.3



FBC IN THE FUTURE
AVERAGE: 3.16

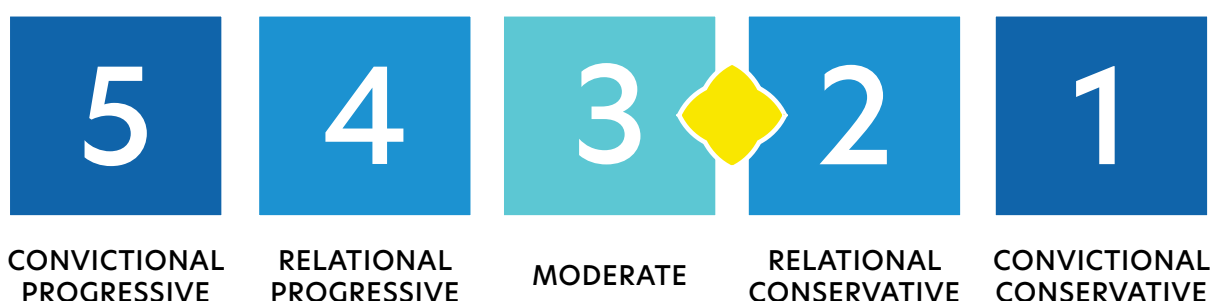
Having an attractive approach focuses on gaining and maintaining membership within the church walls, while a missional mindset directs the church's attention and service to the community and beyond. **The congregation feels that we now have a healthy balance of the two and such balance should be continued in the future.**

CONGREGATIONAL CONVICTIONS

Our church participated in a survey of the convictions of our congregation and how we balance them with relational dynamics. The survey measured where we fall on a five-point scale of 1. Convictional Conservative, where conservative principles take priority; 2. Relational Conservative, where we balance conservative with relational values; 3. Moderate, where relationships are valued most highly and convictions involve a conservative and progressive mix; 4. Relational Progressive, where we balance progressive convictions with relational values; and 5. Convictional Progressive, where progressive principles take priority.

CONVICTIONAL SURVEY OVERVIEW

FBC OVERALL RANKING



The congregational survey asked questions about convictions in matters of faith, biblical beliefs, women in ministry, politics, and hot-button cultural issues in general. Responses indicated that some of our congregation fall into each of the five categories, with the smallest percentages at points 1 and 5 on the scale and the majority of the congregation at points 2-4. ***Overall, the survey indicated the majority of our congregation is just right of center.***

Our congregation was overwhelmingly affirmative of women in ministry, and about half of survey respondents expressed an openness to the idea of a woman serving as a senior pastor in a church. A strong majority of our congregation was comfortable with some differences of opinion, both in matters of faith and politics, so long as they were free to voice their own convictions and have no negative consequences on their relationship with one another or their pastor.

BROADER CONNECTIONS

First Baptist participates in a broad range of external connections. At the local level we engage with the city in cooperative efforts particularly in relation to our urban social ministry, where the city periodically calls on us for assistance with acute human needs. Local foundations have been very supportive of our efforts, providing several significant gifts. First Baptist cooperates closely with downtown congregations of other denominations and with ministries of the Abilene-Callahan Baptist Association, especially through Abilene Baptist Social Ministries.

We provide funding for a wide range of regional ministries, including annual gifts to Hardin-Simmons University, the ministries of the local Baptist association, and the area Baptist encampment. Beyond our region, First Baptist contributes annually to several causes, including the Baptist World Alliance, the Baptist Joint Committee, and graduate theological education in the state.

At the denominational level, a recent study at First Baptist led to an affirmation of our church's ongoing relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), each of which receives 2% of our annual budget. The CBF connection provides a number of important opportunities for us, especially support of global missions. The BGCT offers a means for us to help support a variety of Texas ministries, such as Baptist universities and hospitals.



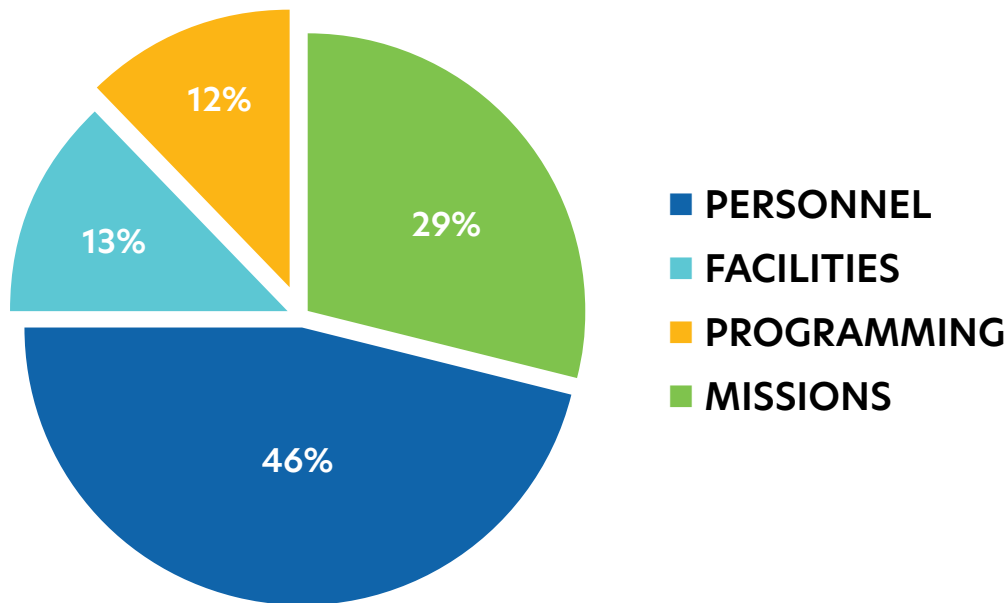


OUR STEWARDSHIP

BUDGET AND GIVING

First Baptist has a revered tradition of devoted and benevolent stewardship. For example, our church budget over the past decade has seen a gradual increase, and we are able to meet budget through giving. ***We have been fortunate to have maintained a healthy financial position over the past two years, despite the COVID pandemic and some reduction in Sunday morning attendance.***

Our church has budgeted to receive just under \$3.5 million in 2022, of which almost 30% supports missions and evangelism activities in the Abilene area and around the world.



The church is free of debt and has been for nearly three decades. First Baptist has also held two capital campaigns in the past twelve years which have raised over \$15 million, including the current Hope Center campaign, which has raised \$8.8 million in contributions and pledges.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH FOUNDATION

Former members of First Baptist had the foresight and philanthropic vision to establish a foundation for the church many years ago. This foundation serves as a way to provide financial security for the congregation to fund capital improvements, support mission work, and assist with unexpected facilities expenditures. The foundation currently holds total assets of over \$10 million, not counting funds earmarked for the Hope Center capital campaign.



OUR LEADERSHIP

First Baptist Church enjoys the leadership of pastors, ministers, and directors, who are well-qualified, experienced, and effective. ***During the congregational conversations of this transition period, many in the church repeatedly expressed their appreciation of and support for our leadership professionals.*** The church has a total of 108 full-time and part-time employees.

LEADERSHIP STAFF

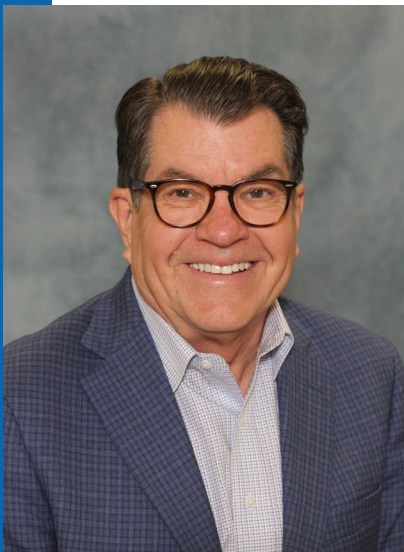
Our church has ten persons on its leadership staff, including the currently vacant position of the senior pastor.



Mike Greenfield

Pastor for Administration and Spiritual Development

Mike joined the staff in 1996 as a Pastor for Young and Median Adults, and in 2004 moved into his current administrative role. Mike oversees technology in the church and communications throughout the week; he works closely with the Building and Grounds superintendent and committee; and he deals with personnel issues and policies. If there is a problem at First Baptist, Mike is the person to go to. He is a graduate of Texas Tech University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Mike and his wife Patti are the parents of three children and 4 grandchildren.



C.V. Blake

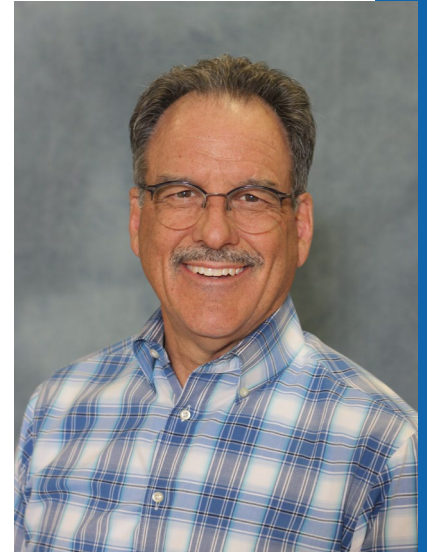
Pastor for Adults/Senior Adults

C.V. came to our church as Pastor for Youth in 1999 and then moved into the position of Pastor for Adults/Senior Adults, covering all programming for those age groups. He also works with the Men's Ministry, including coordination of small group Bible studies for men. CV leads a weekly video Bible study for congregants and provides pre-marital/marital counseling. He also officiates at many of the funerals of FBC members. C.V. and his wife Shelly have 2 children and 4 grandchildren. They have served as Foster Parents for 13 years investing in the lives of 26 babies.

Todd Wilson

Pastor for Worship and Music

Todd came to our church as Pastor for Worship and Music in 2002. In this role, he spends much of his time preparing for our Sunday morning worship services, including leadership of rehearsals for the Sanctuary Choir and Celebration Orchestra. Communication between Todd and the senior pastor brings about coordinated and well-planned worship each Sunday. Todd is a member of the Centurymen and the Singing Men of Texas. He has music degrees from William Jewell College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Todd and his wife Michele have two grown children.



John Moore

Pastor for Missions

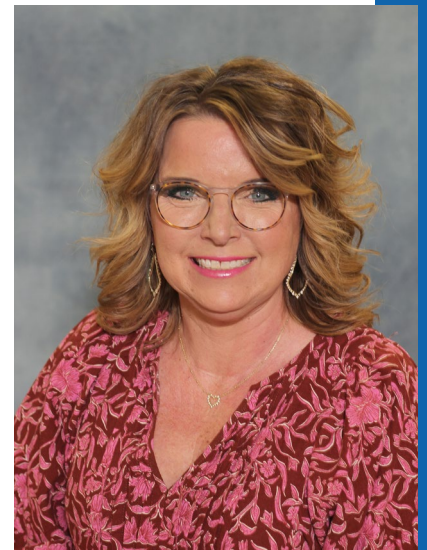
John came to our church at the beginning of 2008 to begin his service as Pastor for Missions. He works closely with vision, planning, stimulating, and facilitating future mission endeavors, as well as serving people through crisis management. Much of John's time involves providing leadership for City Light Community Ministries. Currently, he is leading the vision and planning for the new Hope Center. He also serves as our catalyst for denominational partnerships with groups like CBF and BGCT, and he is part of the CBF Missions Council. John graduated from Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife Beverly have three grown children.



Candy Rains

Pastor for Preschool

Candy started at First Baptist working in the missions' office and moved into the preschool role in 2011. She was ordained in our church as a minister in 2017. First Friends (our parent's-day-out program) fills her Tuesdays and Thursdays. Candy also devotes a lot of time to building personal relationships with preschool families. Candy and her husband Eddie have three grown children and one granddaughter.





Becky Tucker

Pastor for Children and Women's Ministry

Becky joined our church staff in 2011 to lead our children's ministries. Our congregation ordained her as a minister in 2017. Becky's Sunday morning children's sermons are relevant to young and old alike. She facilitates Sunday morning and Wednesday evening classes and activities, and gives leadership to VBS along with Candy. She also provides leadership for our Women's Ministry. Becky is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, and she and her husband Gary have two grown children.



Matthew Broyles

Pastor for College and Young Adults

Matthew began serving as our Pastor for College and Young Adults in 2018. He works with outreach, Bible study, and spiritual formation for this important segment of our congregation. Matthew also routinely provides a weekly video of Wednesday Vespers. He graduated from the University of Texas-Arlington and from Logsdon Seminary. Matthew and his wife Katie are the proud parents of one daughter.



Austen Winfrey

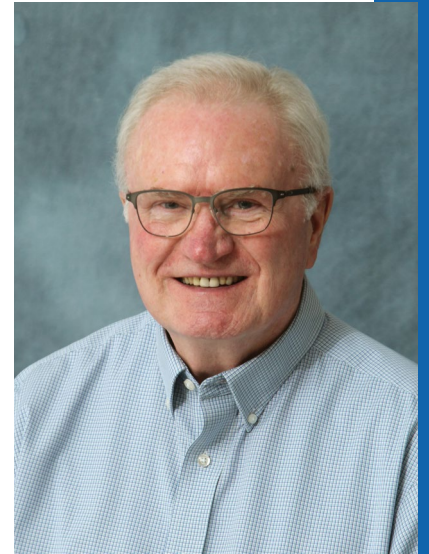
Pastor for Youth

Austen joined the First Baptist staff in 2019 as our Pastor for Youth. He facilitates Bible study and worship on Sundays and Wednesdays and organizes Sunday School lessons for the youth. He builds relationships and encourages youth through service activities, camps, and other youth events. Austen and his wife Holly invest in the lives of the middle school and high school kids of First Baptist by attending many of their extra-curricular activities. He graduated from the University of Texas at Tyler and from Truett Seminary at Baylor.

Joe Frush

Director for Pastoral Care

Joe joined the staff in 2019 as the part-time Director of Pastoral Care. He works closely with CV in serving Senior Adults, having retired from a 45-year career in health care and senior living. Joe does pastoral outreach by visiting hospitals, nursing homes, retirement facilities and homebound members. Making regular phone calls is also a way he maintains communication with FBC senior adults. Joe and his wife Sherry have three grown sons and five grandchildren.



OTHER FIRST BAPTIST STAFF

In addition to the Leadership Staff, our church is served by a number of individuals in other roles.



Ministry Staff: Jeanne Jowers, Church Accountant; and Eric Couvion, Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds.

Directors: Mike Brady, Director of the Family Life Center; Steve Queen, Director of the Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment; and Allie Workman, Director of GLO Day Care. Joe Frush, mentioned above, is also a Director.

Other church employees provide a wide variety of additional services for the effective functioning of First Baptist – for example, ministry assistants, counselors, day care teachers, chefs, custodians, and staff in community mission programs.

LAY LEADERSHIP

On any given day at First Baptist, you can see lay members serving within the church building and beyond its walls. Laity serve as deacons, members of the choir and orchestra, leaders in Bible studies and Wednesday night activities, and as volunteers in various community ministries.

DEACONS

The deacon body at First Baptist consists of sixty active members presided over by a Chair, Vice-Chair, Recording Secretary, and Attendance Secretary. Twenty deacons are elected each year and serve three-year terms. The diaconate exemplifies our church’s belief in the ministry leadership of women as well as men. At present we have twenty-six women and thirty-four men serving as deacons, and a woman is serving as Chair. The deacon body holds monthly meetings, and each deacon serves on one of five deacon ministry teams that directly touch our congregation and extended community. A monthly lunch meeting involving the senior pastor, pastor for administration, and the deacon officers provides opportunity for discussing the business and needs of our church and staff.

The purpose of our deacon body is to be servant leaders involved in the ministry and mission of the church. Working in an advisory role on key decisions with the staff allows for feedback and discussion concerning the work and activities of First Baptist; however, the deacons are not a governing body. The deacons also seek to preserve and promote the spirit of unity and peace within the church and to assist members in every way possible with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

CHURCH COMMITTEES AND MINISTRY TEAMS

First Baptist is also led by eleven committees and five ministry teams. They are charged to carry out various aspects of the mission of our church.

COMMITTEES

Budget & Stewardship

Buildings & Grounds

City Light Board

Constitution, Bylaws & Policies

Counseling & Family Enrichment Board

FBC Foundation

Finance

GLO Day Care Board

Missions Committee

Personnel

Recreation Ministry Board

MINISTRY TEAMS

Bereavement

Hospital Visitation

Healing Hearts

PrayerWorks

TV Ministry



OUR MINISTRIES

INTERNALLY-FOCUSED MINISTRIES

WORSHIP

Our congregation meets for corporate worship on Sunday mornings at 10:30. Worship is an intergenerational experience, involving the entire church and guests, from kindergarteners to senior adults. We believe this is how a diverse community of faith connecting in a downtown church setting achieves a genuine sense of unity.

Our ministers and laity lead in worship that expresses depth and reverence through scripture reading, prayer, music, and preaching. Our congregation values high quality sermons that are biblical, relevant, thoughtful, and dynamic.

Our beautiful sanctuary creates a sacred atmosphere, but it also serves as a place of fellowship for our congregation. While the choir typically wears robes, other worship leaders and most congregants are rather casual in attire. The presence of a full choir, orchestra, and pipe organ appears quite traditional, but the music of our worship comes from a wide variety of styles, encompassing traditional to contemporary. Hymns and spiritual songs are celebrated in a manner that appeals to many tastes within an hour of worship.

The congregation celebrates Communion monthly, and periodic baptisms are performed in Sunday morning worship. Special services occur throughout the church calendar. At Advent we celebrate two candlelight Christmas eve services. In the spring we observe the beginning of Lent with an Ash Wednesday service, and during Holy Week we observe Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, with a climactic celebration of Easter.

MEDIA MINISTRY

First Baptist is fortunate to have a well-established television ministry that began in 1974 and is led by a dedicated, totally volunteer staff who serve weekly. The church has a state-of-the-art production studio to provide broadcast of Sunday morning worship each week over cable television. Worship services, and other special events, are also broadcast over the Internet and through social media. While the church's media ministry serves our members who cannot attend services, it also provides an externally-focused ministry, as thousands participate in our worship digitally every week. ***One of the major outcomes of our second congregational***

conversation was a celebration of the broad reach of our church's media ministry and the desire to use this success as a springboard for even more creative engagement with digital participants.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The Great Commission charges us to share the gospel and make disciples throughout the world. Our primary means of discipleship within the congregation are Sunday morning Bible studies and Wednesday evening formation experiences, all of which are tailored for the various ages in our congregation. We also have other growth opportunities through the week and calendar year designed for the particular groups in the church.

Our preschool ministry is focused on helping children learn about the love of Jesus. We believe each child is a special gift from God, and we help them grow in Christ through Sunday morning classes, Wednesday evening preschool choir, Vacation Bible School (for children aged 4 through the 5th grade), preschool fun days in the summer, and other activities throughout the year. Our First Friends school also offers spiritual development for children ages birth through pre-kindergarten on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For children (kindergarten through grade 5) we provide opportunities to learn about God and what it means to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. In addition to Sunday morning Bible classes, children gather on Wednesday evening for Jesus and Me (JAM), a time of praise, worship, Bible study, missions, crafts, games, and more. We embrace the words of Jesus who said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt 19:14). As a result, children are active participants in Sunday morning worship, coming forward each week to participate in Children's Time, and periodically helping to lead in worship through reading scripture, prayer and singing.

The mission for our youth ministry is to make lifelong disciples who authentically trust God within the context of a Christ-centered community with a kingdom trajectory. Our youth (grades 6-12) meet for worship and Bible study before Sunday morning worship and in small groups on Sunday evenings. They meet again on Wednesday evenings for games, worship, and learning about the love of God through scripture. Each year the youth also participate in Disciple Now, summer camps, and mission engagements.



College students meet for Bible studies on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. We make our delicious Wednesday night meal free for them. Each year college students participate in a fall retreat and a winter ski retreat. These special events focus on practical issues related to the Christian life or on the study of larger Christian topics that warrant more time and discussion, such as money, sexuality and relationships, technology use, and spiritual disciplines. These retreats are also a large part of helping deepen relationships with the students.

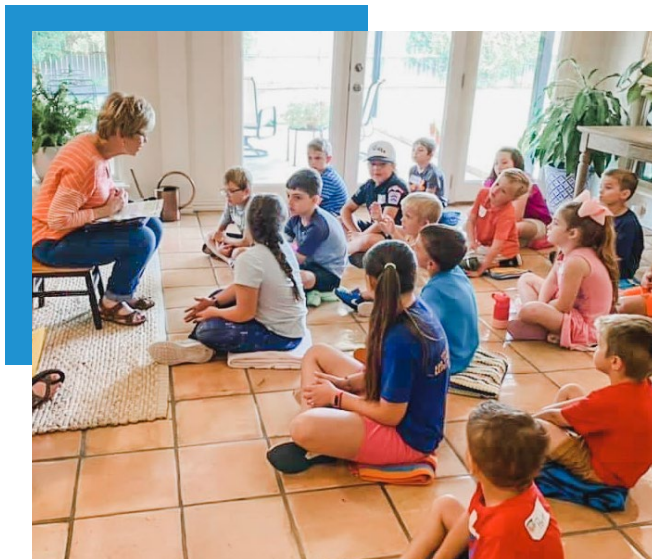


The adult division is made up of Baby Boomers and GenX. On Sunday mornings they have the option of participating in seven different Bible classes with a variety of curricula and teaching styles. Young adults also participate in a Monday evening home group. Senior adults are involved in five different Bible classes on Sunday mornings. Adults and seniors also have several choices for discipleship on Wednesday evenings. For senior adults our church provides day trips, fellowship opportunities, and outreach gatherings for homebound members.



FELLOWSHIP

We have identified the authentic relationships of our community of faith as a core value that we hold tightly, as expressed in the way we love one another and welcome visitors. Many who are new to First Baptist remark how quickly they have found our church a place of acceptance, encouragement, and incorporation into the community.



In addition to Bible study classes and prayer groups, special events also bring us together, such as Roundup Sunday followed by a barbecue lunch, the children's Pancake Supper, and FBC Night at the Zoo. Trunk or Treat and Vacation Bible School engage our congregation with our community every year. In summer there are Wednesday evening fellowships in the Family Life Center or on the lawn with homemade ice cream or watermelon.

Service is another manner in which fellowship grows. For example, ministry groups like Healing Hearts allow team members to deepen relationships by serving those in nursing facilities or the homebound. Volunteers in the City Light ministry work side by side serving food to the needy in our community. Teams travel together delivering groceries through Abilene Social Ministries, cooperating with members of other churches in the Abilene Baptist Association. Additionally, the congregation is blessed to fellowship with members of the other downtown churches during Holy Week luncheons.

NURTURE

Pastoral care and intercession are foundational to life in Christ, and we recognize the importance of prayer for personal spiritual formation. As we pray for one another, for our church and staff, the bereaved, or the sick, we grow closer to the source of our strength, Jesus Christ. Through prayer we are empowered to comfort, show compassion, and be priests to one another. During worship, prayer is integral to the service, and a deacon is scheduled to pray throughout each service in the prayer room. The PrayerWorks ministry prays daily in the prayer room, and multiple morning prayer groups intercede weekly.

Our pastors provide personal care for our congregants and the community beyond, and lay leaders initiate pastoral care for those in need in their relational circles. The Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment provides professional care for interested members of the congregation and community.

In all things our love for one another is the source of our nurturing ministry at First Baptist.

EXTERNALLY-FOCUSED MINISTRIES

The missions ministry of First Baptist Abilene operates from an “Acts 1:8” philosophy of beginning in service to Abilene and the surrounding area (commonly referred to as “the Big Country”) and expanding to our state, nation, and world. Many of our expanded mission efforts are in collaboration with our denominational partners.



MISSION PROGRAMS IN OUR COMMUNITY

A part of our rich heritage and ongoing innovation as a church are four pioneering mission programs in our community, which are God's Little Ones (GLO) Day Care, the Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment (MOCE), the Family Life Center (FLC), and City Light Community Ministries (CLCM). These four ministries seek to live out the gospel by serving in the development, nurturing, and healing of the body, mind, and soul of people in Abilene and the surrounding area. GLO, MOCE, and FLC are incorporated into a single 501c3 non-profit known as Mission Action, Inc., and CLCM is incorporated as a separate 501c3 non-profit.

GOD'S LITTLE ONE'S (GLO) DAY CARE

- GLO was established in 1969 to help fill the void of quality, affordable childcare in Abilene for working families from a variety of backgrounds. GLO exists to provide a nurturing, high quality, safe, and fun learning environment to fit a child's overall growth and development, and to do so in a manner that shares the love of Christ.
- GLO is a state licensed child care program that provides affordable childcare and early education by offering a sliding scale fee.



MINISTRY OF COUNSELING & ENRICHMENT (MOCE)

- MOCE was envisioned in 1977 as a response to the growing number of divorces in the community. First Baptist wanted to be at the forefront of providing help and healing to hurting families. What started in a vacant Sunday School room with a phone and a desk has evolved into a truly comprehensive mental health center.
- The mission of MOCE is to provide Christ-centered services to the people of Abilene and the Big Country regardless of race, religion, or ability to pay. In an effort to fulfill that mission, MOCE provides an income-based scale for those without insurance or ability to meet their current deductible.
- MOCE has eleven fully licensed mental health professionals and two graduate interns providing counseling and therapy to couples, families, children, adolescents, and adults. Included in those clinicians are two doctoral-level Psychologists providing psychological and neuropsychological assessment.





FAMILY LIFE CENTER (FLC)

- FLC was established in 1981 and exists to provide a welcoming and secure facility, offering affordable access to a variety of recreational activities for the Abilene area communities.
- FLC is a place where individuals and families can come together and enjoy skating, bowling, basketball, racquetball, fitness center, fellowship, and games. Many groups such as schools, special needs families, nonprofits, and small businesses in our area come to have fun and relieve stress.



CITY LIGHT COMMUNITY MINISTRIES (CLCM)

- City Light was established in 1996 out of a desire to provide a more comprehensive ministry to some of the more economically disadvantaged people in Abilene. City Light seeks not only to provide for urgent needs but also to come alongside people to assist them in transformational changes that might help prevent these crises in the future and, in the process, honor the dignity of all served.
- City Light serves lunch to all who walk in on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, as well as breakfast on Sunday mornings. City Light friends also have access to City Light Market where they can take home Abilene Food Bank donations of produce, fruit, and other foods.
- The City Light Culinary Academy was recently established to assist people in learning a marketable and employable skill with plans to also add training for wait staff in the future.
- A case management program has been developed for meeting the most immediate critical financial needs (such as rent, utility, fuel, and bus passes) and then progressing into a more comprehensive service to assist in developing more sustainable habits for the future.





GIVE HOPE CAMPAIGN AND CENTER

- The Give Hope Campaign is currently underway in our church. It involves the creation of a Hope Center through the renovation of a recently acquired block of property adjacent to the FBC campus. The new project will dramatically expand the community reach of City Light, GLO Day Care, and Ministry of Counseling and Enrichment. The projected cost of the center is currently at \$8.8 million, and we have raised that amount through contributions and pledges from the congregation along with gifts from foundations.
- City Light will have a new facility including (but not limited to) a state-of-the-art Commercial Kitchen for the Culinary Academy and expanded seating to enable a “dining with dignity” approach to serving meals to more people.
- GLO Day Care will have a large new facility that will expand its capacity from 120 to 182 children and will include indoor and outdoor play areas.
- The Ministry of Counseling expansion provides a second location for their services, in addition to the MOCE building. The new facility has offices for at least four more clinicians, a new and updated meeting room for groups, and a conference room. The MOCE expansion has already been completed and is welcoming clients.

MISSIONS BEYOND OUR CAMPUS

First Baptist is committed to financial support of those called to serve our state, nation, and world. We have an active lay-led Missions Committee that helps in maintaining and expanding our missional reach. In 2006 we entered into a capital campaign known as Faces & Places for the purpose of providing immediate missions funding and establishing an endowment specifically for ongoing missions support. The campaign has raised its initial goal of \$5 million and continues to receive donations. All resources are distributed in accordance with the Acts 1:8 philosophy.

Local support is provided to ministries such as the Eunice-Chambliss House providing lodging for families traveling to visit loved ones in our local prisons, the establishment of a Friendship House which is strategically located in a downtown neighborhood near our church for intentional relationship and ministry, and partnerships with organizations providing low-income and specialized housing that include funding and labor.

State-wide missions occur through denominational partnerships, including but not limited to special funding for BGCT ministries such as Disaster Relief, as well as support for CBF Texas' border ministry. Annually, First Baptist sponsors a family mission trip to McAllen, TX where we serve in partnership with Buckner Baptist Benevolences.



National and international missional support has been provided for individuals serving in New York, Los Angeles, Colorado, South Africa, Rwanda, India, and other places. First Baptist is also committed to a long-term presence in our role as an Encourager Church through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In this role we are currently supporting CBF Field Personnel in North Macedonia and two Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia. Our support includes not only financial sponsorship, but multiple congregational mission trips to North Macedonia and Southeast Asia to encourage their work.



OUR CAMPUS

The location of First Baptist Church in the downtown area of our city places us in a unique position to impact the Abilene community. Our core values directly align with our geographic opportunity. As a church in the heart of the city, we attract people from every quadrant of Abilene for worship and discipleship. As a missional church that has a history of seeking innovative ways to meet the needs of our city, our central location has facilitated the creation of dynamic outreach ministries among our neighbors.

We enjoy a large campus incorporating property on seven city blocks. The various buildings we employ for worship and ministry are available to us through the wise foresight and remarkable generosity of many people through the generations whom God has led to provide for our church's needs. All of the major buildings on our campus have been thoroughly renovated in recent years.

MAIN FACILITY

The main church facility is made up of three sections and occupies a city block. The sanctuary has a seating capacity of 1280, and the choir loft can hold up to 100 people. The adjacent four-story Sunday School Building to the east comprises over 50 current Sunday School classrooms, church offices, and the library. This building extends south to encompass the church kitchen, dining hall, GLO Day Care Center, and the second floor youth ministry area. The area also has several Sunday school class rooms and a chapel, which seats approximately 175. Current plans for this wing of the building include renovation following the move of GLO to its new facility at the Hope Center. The church nursery will transition to this space, and the current nursery will become Sunday School rooms that will be more accessible for our senior adults.

CAMPUS MAP



■ HOPE CENTER (Under Construction)

■ FAMILY LIFE CENTER

■ MINISTRY OF COUNSELING

■ PARKING

■ CITY LIGHT

■ UNIVERSITY PLACE

■ MAIN FACILITY

■ STORAGE BUILDING



OUR BROADER COMMUNITY

Texas is one of the fastest growing states in the US, and Abilene participates in that trend. The city has a population of 125,182, according to the 2020 census, which reflects a 9% growth rate over the last ten years. Currently, the Abilene Metro Area population is 168,774. Abilene sits geographically in the middle of a large region of our state on the eastern edge of West Texas. You have to travel 150 miles from our city to find a larger metropolitan area, making Abilene a regional hub commercially and culturally.

Abilene has three private universities: Hardin-Simmons University (Baptist), Abilene Christian University (Church of Christ), and McMurry University (Methodist). The city also hosts branch campuses of a community college and a technical college, as well as a graduate health sciences campus of Texas Tech University. Within the Abilene city limits are two school districts: Abilene ISD, with 15,420 students, and Wylie ISD, with 5,000 students.

The largest industries in Abilene are healthcare, retail, education, hospitality, and government. Hendrick Medical Center, with two major hospitals in the city, employs about 3,500 people. The largest single employer is Dyess Air Force Base, which hosts the 7th Bomb Wing and has around 5,000 employees.

Our city has a vibrant arts community, anchored by three downtown museums: the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature (NCCIL), the Grace Museum, and the Center for Contemporary Arts. Abilene is known as the Storybook Capital of America, because of the NCCIL, its annual festival, and 25 downtown sculptures celebrating characters from children's literature. Each month the downtown arts centers host an Art Walk for the community. Some other major attractions in the city are the Abilene Zoo, Frontier Texas museum, and our professional orchestra the Abilene Philharmonic.

Because of its low cost of living, Abilene is an attractive place to live for young adults, families, and retired persons. The city is currently experiencing a business boom as new industries are increasingly choosing Abilene as their home.

Abilene is a caring community, having the second highest number of nonprofits per capita in Texas (after Midland). The city also has a large number of churches, with the majority of the population professing to be Christian. First Baptist Church has been at the heart of caring in Abilene since 1881, the year both the city and our church were founded. We are proud of our community and look forward to discovering new ways of serving its citizens and helping to shape its future.





OUR FUTURE

First Baptist Church of Abilene is a dynamic community of faithful Christians committed to ***“reaching others for Jesus Christ and together becoming more like him,”*** as our mission statement says. Our goal is to share the love of Christ in a holistic manner that serves the needs of body, mind, heart, and soul.

As a community of faith our church values authentic relationships that foster a sense of belonging, missional service that is outwardly-focused, spiritual formation that is lifelong and intergenerational, worship that is deep and reverent, and traditions that translate into innovation and progress. We are a “big tent” Baptist fellowship that accepts diversity of people and perspectives, affirms women in ministry, and takes seriously our responsibility to make a difference in a needy world.

We are grateful for the many ways in which God has richly blessed our church with outstanding ministers, engaged and involved laity, superb facilities, and significant financial resources. We are confident that “God who has begun a good work within us” will continue to grow us in faithfulness as a congregation and in service to our world.

As we look to the future we see many rich opportunities ahead, some of which we have identified in congregational conversations as the following.

- We are eager to complete the new Hope Center and to discover all the possibilities it will create for expanded ministry in our community.
- We look forward to growing in our capacity to engage more effectively with younger generations and minister to underserved segments of our community, such as singles, adults without children, and single moms.
- We hope to grow as a congregation and to reflect in the future more of the ethnic, economic, and overall diversity of our city.
- We anticipate learning how the very effective outreach of our media ministry can be a springboard for even more creative engagement in this arena in the future.

Thank you for your interest in First Baptist Church Abilene. As a Pastor Search Committee we look forward to the journey ahead as we seek the senior pastor whom God will bring to our church and who will help us to continue to discover and to become all that God is calling us to be.





FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH ♦ ABILENE

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First Baptist Church,
Abilene, TX



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