



THE HISTORY OF THE SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH

1951 - Present

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WE LIFT UP CHRIST: OUR HOPE, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

On February 4, 1951, seven residents of Springfield met with Dr. Gustave Gabelman, Executive Secretary of the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention (Northern Baptist Convention) to discuss the possibility of starting a Baptist Church. They were Alvin & Florence Dunbrack, Leonard & Gaye Eikner, Sophia Filing, and Richard & Eleanor Rohrer. After that meeting, they drafted a letter to Dr. Gabelman explaining the need and opportunity for a Baptist congregation in Springfield.

Their letter and its appeal were heard. Late in February, the leaders of the Baptist Convention decided to help these Springfield lay people organize a church. They scheduled an organizational meeting for Palm Sunday, March 18, 1951 at the Dunbrack's home. To create interest they distributed notices throughout the community and placed advertisements in the local newspaper. Forty persons were present, and decided that action should be taken to start a Baptist church. Temporary officers were elected to initiate action.

After several months of bimonthly meetings in private homes, the first regular Sunday Worship Service, with twenty-five persons present, was held at the Scenic Hills School on September 9, 1951. The following Sunday, the first Sunday Church School session was held with ten children attending. Within a month the Women's Missionary Society was formed. The first Vacation Bible School was held in June 1952.



A seven room Parsonage, to be used as an interim church, was built with the aid of the Pennsylvania



Baptist Convention. It still stands on the corner of N. Norwinden Drive and Larchwood Road. The basement of the building was specially built for use as a temporary sanctuary. The first floor was devoted to the Church School. Developers Edward J. Walsh and Maynard Poole, with the purchase of one of their homes, donated an adjoining, two-acre tract of land for an expanded church site. The first service in the new building was held on December 23, 1951.

In those days, Springfield Township did not have public Kindergarten classes. To meet the need, the fledgling church made plans for a weekday Kindergarten. Florence Dunbrack served as the Registrar and Business Manager. Doris Myers became the first teacher, later followed by Eleanor Rohrer, and finally Barbara Ebersole. They met in the Parsonage Basement. When a second session was added to the Kindergarten, Betty Van Gunten, and later Mabel Robson and Dorothy Johnson were the afternoon teachers. By this time the Kindergarten had moved to the church building. Over all the Kindergarten served more than eight hundred children during the seventeen years it was in operation.

The Reverend William Morgan, Director of Cities Work for the Pennsylvania Convention, agreed to serve as Interim Pastor. However, after serving two Sundays, illness forced him to resign. The services of The Reverend John Thomas, faculty member of the Eastern Baptist College, were secured. He was formerly pastor at Ashtabula, Ohio and a Navy Chaplain. Rev. Thomas was also then a student at Eastern Baptist College.

The new church closed its Charter on February 17, 1952 with 64 members. The new church held its first Baptismal Service on May 11, 1952 at The Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary Chapel. Early that same year, the Springfield Baptist Church became a member of the Riverside Baptist Association.

In the meantime, a Pulpit Committee and alternates were elected on November 11, 1951. In due time they presented to the Church the name of The Reverend Norman Kerr. Previously, he pastored a Methodist Church in New Jersey. Rev. Kerr was invited to preach to the new congregation. He then accepted the invitation of the congregation to become its first Pastor in May, and began his ministry on July 1, 1952. Rev. Kerr lived in one of the upstairs rooms at the Parsonage.



Programs and activities moved ahead. Baptisms were held in a family swimming pool, family suppers began, a Junior Choir was started as the church continued to grow. Weekday Kindergarten sessions moved to the basement of the Parsonage (Fellowship Hall), Boy Scout meetings were held there also. The church began a monthly newsletter, *The Scribbler*.

On March 15, 1952, a Building Committee, which later included Trustees, was appointed. The



Committee selected Mr. Charles L. Bolton as their architect. Financing was arranged with the assistance of the Baptist Home Mission Society and the Pennsylvania State Convention. The church then awarded the contract for construction to the Bowden Construction Company of Drexel Hill. Ground was broken on April 4, 1954 and the cornerstone laid on October 10th. The first church building was dedicated on November 7, 1954. The sanctuary seating capacity of one hundred sixty, just about matched the membership roll.

Rev. Kerr resigned as pastor in October 1956 leaving Springfield Baptist to pastor an Episcopal Church in Clifton Heights.

In early 1957, the Pulpit Committee invited **The Reverend Manuel C. Avila, Jr.**, who was the Pastor of The Brandywine Baptist Church for eight years, to preach. He accepted the call to become our pastor and was installed on **March 25, 1957**. Pastor Avila, ordained in 1950, held a B.A. from Gordon College, the Bachelor of Divinity from The Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Master of Sacred Theology from Temple University. In 1948, while he was a student at Eastern Seminary, Rev. Avila assumed his first pastorate at the historic Brandywine Baptist Church in Chadds Ford. He was ordained there June 1, 1950. In March, 1957 he became pastor of Springfield Baptist Church, which was five years old at the time.



Since the Parsonage was still being used for meetings, it was not adequate for Manny and Madelyn Avila's family of four young children (Paul, Ruben, Deborah, and Betti), so a nearby home at 342 Valley View Road was rented.

By now the membership was around two hundred. The renamed newsletter, The Beacon, was begun. Church services were further expanded with the addition of a Sunday evening Fellowship Hour and a midweek Hour of Power meeting. Annual Missionary Conferences began in 1958. Membership reached a point where facilities were not sufficient, so in 1958 an Early Worship Service (8:30 am) was begun. After a three-month trial period, it was made permanent. Easter attendance in 1959 reached the four hundred mark.

Soon a Study and three Educational Rooms (now the garage) were added to the church's house on the corner of Larchwood Road, so that it could be used as a Parsonage. The members of the church undertook this construction themselves, saving the church thousands of dollars in builder's fees. This addition was dedicated in January 1960.

Student Assistant Richard Green, a student at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, began his ministry with us in the fall of 1960. He was licensed to preach in 1962, and ordained in June 1963. Springfield Baptist celebrated its Tenth Anniversary in March 1961. The Rev. John Thomas was the special guest of the day. At the end of ten years, the membership of 284 supported a budget of \$25,000.

Pastor Avila initiated a regular program of debt reduction early in his ministry. In May 1957 our indebtedness, including assessment by the Township and interest in arrears on mortgages exceeded \$61,000. After only three years, the new church paid off its first mortgage, for the Parsonage, and held a mortgage burning in November 1960. It took another three more years, Nov. 1963, before the church burned the mortgage on the original church building, called 'The Chapel.' Springfield Baptist was now 330 members

Additional activity and increased attendance made the need for expanded facilities urgent. In September 1961, a Church Expansion Program was launched. A committee was appointed and later a Building Committee was formed. Plans for the new building progressed. Architects Ripple & Burroughs

were selected, and Builder E. Aaron Fesmire awarded the contract. The church broke ground again in May 1964, laid the cornerstone in September, and dedicated the new building the week of Sept. 12-17th, 1965. Dr. Norman W. Paulin, Professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, was the guest speaker. There were now 373 members. A Library was started in one of the classrooms in the Parsonage annex. In 1969, the church purchased and installed and dedicated a new Rogers, three manual organ in the new sanctuary.

Generous giving on the part of the congregation made it possible to retire the debt on the new building sooner than expected – on December 31, 1973, only eight years after its dedication. A grateful congregation held a Mortgage Burning Service, again! With no outstanding debt, the church increased its Missions giving to 51% of the total budget by 1975.

Mission Trips became important outreaches of the church. We began building trips to construct three sister churches in Central America. In 1975, a team of seven members went all the way to First Baptist Church of Cojutepeque, El Salvador for the dedication of the church building which we had financed. Seventeen members of Springfield Baptist traveled to San Salvador to work on the Getsemani Baptist church in March, 1979. Then a fifteen-member work group flew to Alajuela, Costa Rica in March 1985 to help build Emanuel Baptist Church. Other foreign trips took work parties to The Iglesia Bautista Fuente de Luz, Los Lagos Costa Rica (1988) and la Nueva Iglesia Bautiste, Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico (1991). Locally, in 1974, a youth work team from the church spent a week in Saxton, Pennsylvania. In 1975, '76, and '77, the church also sent a youth work team to Man, West Virginia to help in a flood-ravaged and depressed area. Youth work teams traveled to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1979 and '80.

The need for a staff person to coordinate efforts in Christian Education became apparent and Rob Andrews began as a part-time Christian Education Coordinator and served from 1977-1980. In 1983, The Rev. Gregory Bruce was installed as Minister of Christian Education and Youth and served through 1987. The Rev. Mark Frazee began his duties as Minister of Christian Education in January 1989 serving until September 1992. The Rev. Jamie Dries began service here first as a Pastoral Intern, then in September 1995 became the Minister of Christian Education until leaving for another position in September 1996.

Pastor Avila was honored by Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in May of 1981 with an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity. He was given this degree for a lifetime of service to the Seminary. Over the years, Dr Avila held many volunteer positions that furthered the cause of Christ. He was the President of the Portuguese Baptist Convention of New England, President of ABCOPAD, President of Alumni Association of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and served as the Secretary to the DELCO Fundamental Ministerium.

In 1988, renovations on the Chapel, provided five additional rooms for church activities. The Church Library, Choir Rehearsal Room, Nursery (toddler and infant), and Adult Classrooms moved into this newly renovated space. Five hundred and eighty three members were now on the rolls.

Many young people among the membership of the church were called by God into full-time Christian vocations: Paul Avila, Andrew Kane, Stephen Smith, Jeffrey McCleary, Louis Spyes, Jr, James & Sally Moran, Jamie Dries, and Richard J. Edwards. We were blessed with a number of Students-in-Training who were ordained by the church: Richard Green (1963), Robert Haines (1966), George Habel (1967), Duane Johnson (1972), Andrew Kane (1974), Allen Watkins (1975), Stephen Smith (1981), Gabriel Camargo Gonzalez (1984), Gregory G. Bruce (1984), Louis E. Spyes, Jr. (1985), Robert G. Andrews, Jr. (1985), and Jeffrey D. McCleary (1984).

Dr. Avila retired on November 17th, 1991 after a full and successful pastorate of 34 years, and eight months. Certainly, God had richly blessed and prospered Springfield Baptist under his leadership. The church had a solid reputation for its faithfulness to the Word of God and for its giving to world wide missions. Six months after his retirement, the congregation of Springfield Baptist named Dr. Avila, Pastor Emeritus, so recognizing that although retired he was still a Pastor of this church.

Three Interim Pastors successively led the church, Dr. Alan Short (Dec. 91 – Aug. 92), Dr. John Vanderbeck (Sept. 92 – Dec. 92), and Dr. Randall Corkern (Mar. 93 – May 94) until a new Pastor was found. The Pulpit Committee, after a long search, recommended Rev. Alan Pulkkinen to be the new pastor and the congregation accepted that recommendation.

Rev. Alan Pulkkinen, ordained since 1979, began his pastorate in June of 1994. The Pulkkinens (Al, Susan, Jason and Jamie) came to Springfield from a four and a half year pastorate at The Church Of The Master in Providence, Rhode Island. Prior to that, Al had served for four years as the Pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairfield, Maine; and for four years as Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church of York, PA. Pastor Al's education included a BA (History) from the University of Maine, a Masters of Divinity from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Indiana State University. They quickly settled into the church parsonage.



The most significant advances made during the years that he was with us involved the youth programming. In April 1995, the church purchased a 15 passenger van for use by the Baptist Youth Fellowship and other ministries of the church. Yearly, large groups attended youth camp together and there were several excellent musical programs presented to the church and the community. We joined with the Riverside Churches, beginning in October 1995, working to plant New Hope Church in Southwestern Delaware County. Also, under the leadership of Dr. Duncan MacIntosh, from Valley Forge, the congregation took a fresh look at the way we were doing worship and some changes were made. Times change, many churches around the country were seeing attendance in evening services decline. And so it was during Pastor Pulkkinen's ministry that our Evening Service was cancelled. We still maintained two Sunday morning services at 8:30 am and 11 am.

Pastor Pulkkinen resigned in June 96 and left for a pastorate in Michigan. Two more Interim Pastors followed – Dr. Wesley Evans (Jul. 96- Sept. 96), and Dr. Kenneth Maahs (Sept. 96 – Apr. 97).



The Rev. Wylie W. Johnson accepted the call to pastor, and began his ministry in May 1997, and was installed the following month. Pastor Wylie came to the church after ten years as a Missionary-Evangelist to the US military where he ministered as an U.S. Army Chaplain. Prior to that ministry, he served five years as the Assistant Pastor of First Baptist Church of Metuchen, New Jersey. Pastor Wylie, ordained since 1982, had a B.A. in Psychology from The King's College, and a Masters of Divinity from Denver Seminary. He continued his military ministry as the Group Chaplain for the 338th Medical Group, US Army Reserve, in Chester, PA. The Johnsons moved into the Parsonage.

After Jamie Dries departed we had a series of part time, Interim Youth Directors – Melissa Doyle-Wald (1996), Nancy Harding (1996-97), and James Bosma (1998-2000). Mrs. Nancy Harding worked with the BYF directing musical stage productions. Mr. Jim Bosma led two youth Mission Trips during the summers of 1998 and '99. The BYF worked diligently repairing the homes of the rural poor and elderly in St. Mary's, West Virginian and Greenville, Michigan.

Since Pastor Johnson arrived, the congregation has been busy fixing and upgrading God's House. We installed air conditioning in January 1998. Also that year, broken sidewalks were replaced and the church exterior trim was painted. After a year of study, prayer, and discussion, the church voted in May 1999 to do a major renovation of the existing facility. Construction began in September when the stage, back hall, and a storage room adjacent to the Fellowship Hall were converted to a new Nursery. The Kitchen was enlarged and a food preparation island installed. The first floor of the Chapel became the new Office Suite and Choir-Lounge. The old offices and Church Lounge were remodeled into four spacious classrooms. A small balcony for sound equipment and two windows were installed in the rear of the sanctuary. The Narthex was remodeled, and the old kitchen became the new Sunday School Office. This face-lift is part of a larger vision to reach the surrounding communities for Christ in the new millennium.

On July 9, 2000 the congregation extended a call to Mr. Daniel R. Krulan to become our full time Youth Pastor. Pastor Dan and his wife, Heather, moved in the following week. Pastor Dan has a B.A. in Youth Ministry from Nyack College, and two more years of graduate study at the Alliance Seminary in Nyack, New York. The Youth Pastor complement the ministry here by reaching and training students in the Christian faith, and motivating them to serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.



Pastor Dan immediately began planning a Youth Mission Trip to Long Island, NY for July 2001. The Youth Group repaired the homes and churches of the urban poor and elderly along with 400 other youths from around the nation.

2001 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Springfield Baptist Church. We spent the whole year rejoicing about God's faithfulness. The Anniversary theme was GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS. March 24-25, 2001 was the 50th Anniversary celebration of The Springfield Baptist Church and we gathered at the Drexelbrook Inn for the event. Dr. William Dunn, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lansdowne, was the speaker for that night and a full weekend of events. Our 50th Anniversary challenge was to raise \$10,000 for evangelistic ministry in the former Soviet Union. Praising God, we gave the gift of \$13,110 to Russian Missions in January 2002. Russians Missions immediately funded a number of evangelists and ministries around Russia.

In the Fall of 2001 Mr. Robert Guldenschuh, a student at Eastern College, became the volunteer Senior Ministry Intern at SBC. Bob soon began developing the O.W.L.S. [Older Wiser Loving Seniors] program which ministered to older adults in the congregation. Soon the OWLS were meeting monthly for luncheons, and planning excursions to various locations like Longwood Gardens, the Sight and Sound theaters for dramatic Bible theater, concerts, Delaware River Dinner Cruise, and other events.

Responding to a need to help people get up and down the many stairs in the church, the congregation had begun an elevator fund in 2000 and the funds were completely received by the spring of 2001.

Many of our men worked hard building the elevator shaft. We hired a contractor to do some concrete work, and the elevator company finally had it installed and in operation by Thanksgiving 2001.

During these years we made several technological advances beginning with networking the church office computers and copier. Next, we launched the church's web site [www.springfieldbaptist.net] in April 2002. It contains informative pages on the life of the church, directions, photos, and of course, our ministries. We hope that this becomes a productive advertisement for SBC. Web masters have been Joyce Welsh, Dan Baker, and Pastor Johnson. Also, responding to an ongoing problem of how to get information out quickly and accurately to the congregation, we purchased a telephone message device in May 2002. With this electronic tool we could record a prayer or informational message and it would telephone every family in the church in just a few hours.

The US Army recalled Pastor Johnson for a year of military ministry in April 2003. During this Mobilization Tour, our Pastor served with Special Operations Forces in Kentucky and Georgia [Operation Noble Eagle], Afghanistan [Operation Enduring Freedom] and Iraq [Operation Iraqi Freedom]. In his absence, the Rev. Dr. Jerry Anderson served as Interim Pastor May 2003 through March 2004.

SBC ordained Robert Guldenschuh on June 22, 2003. The Rev. Robert Guldenschuh served part-time as the Church Administrator in Pastor Johnson's absence, and then at the request of the Deacon Board he took on the temporary but full time position of Associate Pastor, a position which he filled until the end of August 2004. In the blessings of God's leading, Bob was called to become the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Whitesboro, NY beginning his ministry there on January 1, 2005.

Pastor Johnson, now promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, returned from his military ministry and resumed pastoring on April 1, 2004. He received numerous invitations to speak around the area concerning his military experiences. Best of all, Pastor returned with a fresh zeal for the ministry at Springfield Baptist. At his urging, the church began working toward a 40 DAYS OF PURPOSE campaign in the fall, and beginning an AWANA program as soon as was practical.

We all joined in the 40 DAYS OF PURPOSE campaign in the months of October and November 2004. During this effort we reaped a rich harvest of spiritual and numerical growth. It was during this effort that Pastor Johnson began to regularly project sermon notes during worship. We began our AWANA program on January 7, 2005. This exciting national program, for children from Kindergarten through fifth grade, focuses upon scripture memorization. Within three weeks the AWANA program already had more than twenty children participating. During the 40 Days of Purpose campaign we began to regularly project announcements and sermon notes during worship.

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We began an AWANA program on January 7, 2005. There were four enthusiastic children for that first meeting. Within a few months the group had grown to nineteen children in attendance with over thirty

different children who attended one or more times. By the fall of 2005 the AWANA clubs had grown to thirty children and an delighted intensity and excitement.

Also in the Fall of 2005 three Pastoral Interns from Palmer Seminary (formerly Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary) joined our staff. Mr. Marcos Almonte [Intern to Young Adults, later serving as the Seniors Ministry Intern] was the first to seek a ministry with us. Then at the beginning of the summer of 2005 Rev. Robert Barone [Seniors Ministry Intern] sought a ministry at SBC. Mr. Clark Read rounded out our compliment as the Missions Intern (later serving as the Youth Intern), arriving at the end of August 2005. Both Bob Barone and Clark Read graduated from Palmer Seminary in 2006; Clark stayed on to complete an additional S.T.M. degree. Bob continued to minister at Springfield Baptist through the end of the year until he received a call to pastor the First Baptist Church, Carthage, New York. We bid a loving farewell to Bob and Sharon as they journeyed North to their new calling.

Youth Pastor Daniel Krulan, after a truly blessed six and a half years of ministry followed God's call, in February 2007, to another youth position at the First Baptist Church of Linesville, PA. The people of Springfield Baptist gathered around the Krulans on Sunday, January 28th and held a worship service of memories, gratefulness to God for His provision of a gifted and faithful minister, and a tearful farewell. At the end of worship, our Deacons gathered around the Krulans and prayed a prayer of commissioning - sending them in God's name to their new mission. A Search Committee was formed of persons who are actively working with our youth.

In August 2007, following a wonderful week of Vacation Bible School, our Youth Group ventured to Cincinnati, OH to join in with six other churches to minister to inner-city elderly, poor, and churches. This trip was entirely led by adult volunteers Mike & Holly Kerins and Susan Read.



Easter came early in 2008, and it was at that time of year that the congregation called a new Youth Pastor, Mr. Robert Davalt to join the ministry team. Pastor Bob and his wife Dena came to us on the 15th of March 2008. Davalt, a very successful businessman experienced God's call to ministry with students. After a year of prayer, counsel and spiritual clarification he sold his business and entered to Bible College. He is a 2006 graduate of Grace Bible College (Wyoming, MI) with a B.S. in Youth Ministry. The Davalts came to us in mid-life, with a long and stable marriage, and are proud of their three grown sons.

The SBC youth group spent a week of their summer, July 14 – 19th, 2009, ministering in two Lynchburg Virginia women's shelters last week. They provided a labor of love cleaning out storage rooms, painting kitchens and fences for the local YWCA and a Domestic Violence Intervention House. The women and their children residing at these facilities are attempting to break free from severely abusive lifestyles. At the end of each day the eight SBC teens with their three adult leaders attended a large youth rally of 1,400 teenagers on mission led by Student life teen ministry organization based in Alabama. Each teen had to raise their own financial support and participate in special meetings in preparation for their week of service. Groundwork for this trip began in March and included a Spaghetti Dinner & Movie event seeking support from the congregation. Each teen successfully raised three hundred dollars for their mission week. At the end of the Mission the SBC Youth Group celebrated by going white water rafting on Pennsylvania's Lehigh River.

The congregation ordained both Pastoral Interns in the summer of 2008. Pastor Johnson and the Deacon Board called an Ordination Council for the morning of June 25th. Each of the candidates would be

examined for their preparation, fitness, and ability during a 90 minute oral examination before numerous invited clergy as well interested members and friends of the congregation. Both men received the approval and blessings of the Council. The church invited all to an afternoon Ordination Service for Clark Read on Sunday, June 29th. Intern Marcos Almonte's Ordination Service was held a month later on July 27th. These faithful and gifted men follow in a long line of Interns at SBC who were called to ministry, tested by our congregation and ordained to the Gospel ministry. Clark and family are now fully engaged in ministry at Grace Baptist of Nanuet NY where he is the Sr. pastor.

The end of the year 2009 brought a major blessing - in a year of constrained finances, we received a very generous grant that enabled us to re-roof the church and the chapel in the spring of 2010. This was the year that Youth Pastor Bob Davalt began his M.Div. studies at Philadelphia Biblical University Pastor Wylie Johnson graduated in May from Lutheran Seminary of Philadelphia with a Doctor of Ministry and in July from the US Army War College with a Masters in Strategic Studies. Pastor Wylie also was invited to become the first Springfield Police Chaplain, and after a period of training and preparation began ministry to Springfield's finest.

2010 continued a time of constrained resources for the church, but we continued to give 20% of our giving for the support of home and foreign missions. Our youth took a mission trip to Puerto Rico in August. During this year the congregation prayed its way through 31 Days of Prayer in April and 31 Days of Praise in October. We were pleased to License Youth Pastor Robert Davalt to the Gospel ministry in September.

And so the adventure of serving our Savior continues.

THE SPRINGFIELD BAPTIST CHURCH
SERVING THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS
UPON THIS EARTH UNTIL JESUS RETURNS FOR HIS CHURCH.