



## History of First Baptist Church of Geneva

The roots of First Baptist Church of Geneva go back to the nineteenth century when the "free thinkers" or "non-conformists" were banished from Sweden for not conforming to the rules of the State Lutheran Church. As a result, some emigrated to America and started four churches in 1852. That was the beginning of the Baptist General Conference with which FBCG is affiliated.

### Founding and First Building(1894 – 1904)

The First Swedish Baptist Church of Geneva was started in 1894 by members of the First Swedish Baptist Church of Batavia who lived in Geneva and felt that the distance was too great to travel. For a few years, they met in homes and rented halls. In 1904, a frame building was erected on the corner of Anderson Boulevard and Hamilton Streets.

### Swedish Years (1904 – 1933)

During the early years of the church, all the services and the Sunday school were conducted in the Swedish language. There was a strong Swedish immigrant population at that time in Geneva, and the Lutheran and Methodist churches were also Swedish then. Growth and progress were slow during these years because of the continued use of the Swedish language and the inability to retain full-time pastoral leadership. In 1933, the church decided to use only the English language, though it kept the name First Swedish Baptist Church.



Our church on Anderson Blvd. (1904 - 1962)

### Years of Transition (1934 – 1960)

In 1939, the men of the church added a basement for the growing Sunday school. From the beginning, Christian Education and training in the Bible has always been an integral part of the ministry of the church. Women's ministries were also important. The Women's Sewing Society met in the homes to sew articles for yearly auction sales that were often the source of financial relief for the struggling congregation. As time passed the name to the "Ladies Aid Society" and still later to the "Women's Missionary Society" as the sewing auctions were abandoned.

In the 1950s, a new era of growth began. An attempt was made in 1955 to secure permission to enlarge the church building but this request was denied.

### Years of Growth (1960 – 1984)

With only \$8,000.00 in the building fund, the church decided to relocate and started to look for land to purchase. In 1961, four lots on the church's current site at South Street and Kaneville Road were purchased and the old church on Hamilton Street was sold.



Our church building from 1963 - 1983

It was a joyous occasion on June 9, 1963 when our white brick

colonial house of worship, with a sanctuary seating 250, was dedicated to the glory of God. The new building, which cost a total of \$171,000, came into being through countless hours of manual labor and prayer by church members. It was a gigantic step of faith for a small congregation.

In 1965, the church called Rev. Donald G. Peterson as pastor. Believing in the future growth of the church, the congregation purchased a lot east of their property to assure sufficient land for foreseeable expansion. By this time the congregation numbered 150 members.

In 1972 Jay Kesler, President of Youth for Christ, International, became the church's "Minister of the Word," filling the pulpit forty Sundays a year, while Rev. David Kastelein and later Rev. Robert Gray served as "Minister of Administration and Family Life." Throughout the '70s, steady growth prompted the church to begin holding two worship services and to move some youth and Sunday school classes to off-site locations to meet space needs. Plans for a new sanctuary and Christian education wing were approved in 1983.

### **Years of Building and Maturity (1984-1993)**

With our congregation pitching in to do all the interior finishing and exterior painting, the new sanctuary and Christian education wing was dedicated in 1984, with most of our former pastors participating in the first worship service and Dr. Charles Colson delivering the dedication message.

During this decade, our youth ministries blossomed. Led by Youth Pastor Brian Coffey, Senior High young people began their annual YES! (Youth Experience Service) mission trip – first to Mexico to work with Food for the Hungry and in subsequent years to the Dominican Republic to help build a Christian orphanage. Students were also involved in local outreach through backyard YES! missions in Aurora, St. Charles, and Chicago.



Other outreach ministries grew as well. Attendance at weekly Awana Club meetings in 1987 topped 100, with 40% from non-church families. The women of our church invited their friends to the Women's Bible Study, which started on Tuesday mornings and later expanded to Wednesday evenings for working women. In addition to supporting many career missionaries, FBCG encouraged and supported members who went out for short-term service in the United States, Europe, and Africa as well as volunteering locally at Riverwoods Christian Center, Wayside Cross Rescue Mission, Valley View Correctional Facility, and other local organizations.

The congregation continued to grow under the preaching ministries of Rev. Michael Nelson, who joined the church team in 1987, and Rev. J. Daniel Baumann, who came to FBCG as senior pastor in 1990.

Music has always been a major part of the church's ministry. Our worship was enhanced in 1988 by the installation of the Kimball Pipe Organ, after it was purchased from Northwestern University and completely rebuilt over four years. Supplementing the anthems presented each week by our Sanctuary Choir, the Cherub and Sonshine Choirs began making Sunday morning appearances in 1991.

By 1993, the church had grown to 450 members with average Sunday morning attendance well over 700. The congregation voted to build of a Family Life Center that would provide more space for existing ministries as well as new opportunities for outreach through sports programs, dramas, banquets, and musical programs.

## Expanding Vision(1994 to the Present)

Pastor Brian Coffey, who had been our Youth Pastor for 8 years, became Senior Pastor in September 1994 and continues to lead the church today.

FBCG celebrated its Centennial in 1994 with the dedication of the its Family Life Center, which included a multi-purpose room large enough for a full-size basketball court, seating for 500, a large kitchen, a library, and additional staff offices and Sunday school classrooms. The 15-year mortgage for this addition was completely paid off in 1998.



### Valleybrook Community Church



In our continuing efforts to make more disciples for Jesus, FBCG founded its first daughter church in October, 2002. Valleybrook Community Church was started under the leadership of Pastor Brian Smith with about 125 First Baptist Church members. By the next spring, there were 277 in attendance at their Easter Services. The new congregation meets at Blackberry Elementary School, 1122 S. Anderson Road, Elburn, in the Blackberry Creek subdivision. Sunday worship is at 10:00 a.m. More information about Valleybrook can be found on their website.

## Building on Faith

By the late 1990's the average church attendance had grown to more than 1,200. The sanctuary, classrooms and parking lots were overflowing. With no more buildable land available at the church site, a search began again for a new, larger location for the church building. A plot of 22 acres of land was found about 1 mile to the west of the South Street location at the intersection of Peck and Keslinger Roads. The land was purchased for just over \$1.9 million and the mortgage was completely paid off by June of 2002.



In December of 2002, the "Building on Faith" campaign was launched and over \$3 million was pledged during the Celebration Weekend for the first phase of construction. Groundbreaking for "Phase One" took place in June 2003, and the new 50,000 square foot building opened its doors in October, 2004. At a cost of more than \$8M the new building consists of a large gymnasium and stage which serves as the Worship Center, administrative offices for 6 staff members, a large kitchen, 2 classrooms, 13 preschool classrooms and a large, dividable space for elementary and middle school programs with 12 smaller break-out rooms. FBCG continues to occupy the South Street location as well, becoming one church with two campuses.

With the opening of the new "West Campus," FBCG expanded its worship services to a total of five - one on Saturday evening and four on Sunday morning, two at each campus. The 8:45 and 10:15 services at the East Campus feature traditional music with organ accompaniment, sanctuary choir and hymns; the 9:30 and 11:00 services at the West Campus are contemporary in nature and feature vocalists and praise band. The sermon message is the same at both campuses.

In October of 2005, a steeple was erected at a cost of \$400,000. The tower includes a small space for prayer benches at the ground level and carillon bells at the top. It is hoped that the steeple will become a landmark in the community and a defining physical characteristic of the First Baptist campus. It marks the campus as a place

of worship and points to the glory and presence of God in the community. Eventually, "Phase Two" will add a 2,000 seat sanctuary to the Keslinger property, with expanded classrooms and offices.

With a staff that has grown to 38, a membership now topping 700, and weekend worship attendance regularly surpassing 1,500, FBCG's ministries have multiplied rapidly in recent years. There are programs for children and s of all ages - from infants through senior citizens and ministries for a wide array of interests, including the fine arts, sports, and other hobbies and recreational activities. There are also a number of outreach and mission-based ministries, where church members can serve both locally and around the world.

With all the change and growth, there have been some things that have not changed. We remain steadfastly committed to God's word as truth, and to our mission of "making more disciples for Jesus Christ." We remain committed to sharing God's transforming love with the world - by preaching and teaching, through missions and ministries and reaching out to unreached people groups around the world and around the corner, and through prayer. We have learned that what unites a church is not the hour or style of worship, but our common love for Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who fills our worship and fellowship with His presence and love.



## Timeline

### 1894

Founded as First Swedish Baptist Church of Geneva. Purchased 1st lot (corner of Anderson and Hamilton) for \$150 raised by Women's Sewing Society

### 1904

First Building completed

### 1924

Expansion completed

### 1933

Decision made to use only the English language (previously all Swedish)

### 1961

Church purchases 4 lots at South St. and Kaneville (current site).

### 1962

Jim Lemon breaks ground for new facility - building completed in 1963

### 1982

Church votes to expand by building new sanctuary - the campaign theme was as follows:  
To live that we may grow, to grow that we might serve, to serve that others might come to know Christ.

### 1984

Building completed

### 1994

Family Life Center completed.  
Theme of campaign was *Growing to Serve*.

## **2002**

Valleybrook Community Church launched

## **2004**

Pastor of Worship and Music hired

Services begin at the new West Campus building

Five worship services, Four different hours of Sunday School classes