

First Baptist Church

Fairbanks, Alaska

Date Begun: September 17, 1944

Date Constituted: April 14, 1946

Sponsoring Church: First Baptist Church, Lafayette, LA

Born Out of Prayer

Mrs. Ethel Cromer, a widow of a Southern Baptist minister, came from Oklahoma to live in Fairbanks in the early 40s. When she found no Baptist church, she began attending First Presbyterian Church while she longed and prayed for a Southern Baptist church. She wanted to write the Home Mission Board but didn't have an address. She prayed.

Down in Louisiana, God was working in the heart of C.O. Dunkin a businessman and a student at Acadia Baptist Academy. Brother Dunkin had learned of the beginning of Baptist work in Anchorage through Chaplain Aubrey Halsell. Through correspondence with Chaplain Halsell, Brother Dunkin had learned of the need for establishing a Baptist work in Fairbanks. Brother Dunkin and his wife Alma headed north and arrived in Fairbanks in 1944. He found employment with the Fairbanks Fire Department and began searching for any person of Baptist faith. In two weeks, he found the first person of like faith. Brother Dunkin advertised that Baptist services would be conducted September 17, 1944, at the Masonic Temple. Five persons attended: the Dunkin's, Frank Reynolds, Ethel Cromer, and her grandson, Glen Comet.

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Within a year and half, property was bought by the Dunkin's at 6th and Wickersham and a basement 32x50 feet was erected with volunteer help by the members. Since there was no Baptist church in Fairbanks, C.O. Dunkin's church back in Louisiana, First Baptist Church, Lafayette, Louisiana, extended a hand of support to the new Baptist mission.

A Place of Worship

The first service in the new building was on Thanksgiving Day in 1945. Prayers of thanksgiving were offered to God for their very own place of worship. Mrs. Dunkin became ill, and it became necessary for the Dunkin's to resign. Before his departure, the mission constituted at First Baptist Church, Fairbanks. on April 14, 1946. The new church asked Pastor Felton Griffin, First Baptist Church, Anchorage, for help in securing a new pastor. Orland (Mabel) Cary was called. They drove the Alcan Highway and arrived in Fairbanks on July 8, 1946. When the Cary's arrived, the church had only 13 adult members and five children. God blessed and the church embarked on a building program in 1947.

The new church building was a two-story, concrete block, L-shaped building which was completed in 1950. The church purchased additional property adjacent to the new building. This building project was made possible by the sacrificial gifts of labor and money given by the members and the sale of Broadway Church Bonds. The church also received a \$5,000 gift from a former member, Mrs. Minnie Veal, and a \$10,000 gift from the Home Mission Board, along with gifts from many other Southern Baptists.

Church Growth and Outreach Ministries

Souls were saved and added to the church through baptism; many more joined the church by transfer of letter. A radio ministry was carried over KFRB in the early years and in later years over KJNP. Jail services and Rescue Mission ministries have been provided by First Baptist Fairbanks. Men and women were called into Christian service, and some were licensed and others ordained to preach. Among those who were ordained and later served in Alaska were: Gene Medaris, Keith Foster, Charles Less, Carl Elder, Lloyd Elder, Donald Davis, and Andy Euler. Orland Cary's pastorate concluded in November 1958.

Today, First Baptist Fairbanks, is actively supporting local ministries provided by Love, INC, Fairbanks Rescue Mission, CareNet Pregnancy Center, JP Jones Center, and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Fairbanks (IMAF). FBC continues to serve as the Interior Collection Center for Operation Christmas Child (OCC) and the home of the Tanana Valley Baptist Association. First Baptist has a heart that reaches throughout the Interior and across the world.

Other Pastors Who Served

Donald Davis (Elizabeth) was called as pastor, and he served into early 1961. In February 1960, a fire destroyed the church building. The present edifice was erected and dedicated on December 11, 1960. Pastor Davis was followed by Oliver Marson (Ellie) who had served in Juneau and Fort Yukon before coming to First Fairbanks. During his pastorate from 1961-68, the church loan with the Home Mission Board was refinanced and the church went through the devastating flood of August 1967. First Fairbanks became a refuge for stranded flood victims and the headquarters for the volunteers who came from churches across the Lower 48 to help clean-up and rebuild all the churches damaged in the Fairbanks area.

Don Davis was called for a second time, and he served the church from 1968-1977 at which time he resigned for health reasons. During his pastorate, the sanctuary was carpeted, oak pews and pulpit furniture were installed, a Steinway grand piano was purchased, and a sprinkler system installed in the basement. The church also purchased a new parsonage and celebrated its 25th anniversary on April 18, 1971.

John Jeffcoat served as interim pastor for about a year until Robert Eason (Connie) came to serve in 1978. The church installed some decorative paneling in the front of the sanctuary as well as reorganized the office space to allow for the office of the Director of Missions of Tanana Baptist Association. The Home Mission Board loan on the building was paid off in October 1982 and a note-burning service was held in conjunction with the 37th anniversary celebration in April 1983.

Denver Copeland served as interim pastor from 1988-1990 and as pastor from 1990-91. Horace Burns (Elizabeth) served as interim pastor from 1991-1992.

Jerry Taylor (Bonnie) became pastor in July 1992. First Baptist Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1994. Members from all five of the missions begun by First Baptist Church shared in the celebration.

Paul Wells (Sharon), Associational Director of Missions (DOM), led the church as the interim pastor upon Jerry's retirement after serving more than 10 years at FBC. Pastor Al Thomerson (Heidi) was called as the next pastor and served a couple of years before Pastor John Bills (Cindy) was called to lead the flock at FBC.

Pastor Mark Howdeshell (Jo) was called in August 2007 and has led the church to partner with the Oklahoma Baptist University Woman's Soccer team, Operation Christmas Child, Fairbanks Hispanic Foursquare Church, Frontier Baptist Church, the IMAF, and several other works. First Baptist commissioned the painting of the baptistery mural and celebrated its 75th Anniversary in 2021.

Missions Begun

First Baptist Church, Fairbanks, has begun and sponsored five missions in its history. They are:

North Pole Baptist Mission (also known as Davis Mission or 14 Mile Mission) which was begun in 1951 and constituted as First Baptist Church, North Pole, September 6, 1953.

Big Delta Mission was started in a tent in the summer of 1952 and constituted as First Baptist Church, Big Delta, on September 1, 1954.

St. John Mission was an outgrowth of black people who were members of First Baptist Church who asked to have their own services on Sunday afternoon. St. John was constituted as St. John Baptist Church in February 1954.

During the years of 1952-53, First Baptist Church was responsible for services and construction supervision of the Native Baptist Mission. The Native Mission was constituted as Friendship Baptist Church on April 24, 1988.

In June 1964, First Baptist Church began the Tok Mission and continued sponsoring it until 1984 when First Baptist Church, Delta Junction assumed sponsorship.

Today, First Baptist Church is actively supporting missions throughout the Interior and is the home for the TVBA, OCC, Fairbanks Hispanic Foursquare Church, and Frontier Baptist Church. First Baptist reaches a myriad of different cultural communities within the Interior, providing opportunities for sister churches and fellow ministries to serve the King of Glory.