

## We Love Our History

Becoming a committed member or friend of a church should be based upon knowing what a church has believed and represented in the past as well as what it is doing in the present.

This booklet introduces those interested in more serious involvement in the life of Valley Park an introduction to the history of the Baptist tradition, the history of American Baptists and the History of Valley Park.

Additionally, it offers an overview of how Valley Park functions as a “congregationally led” and “autonomous” church while “voluntarily” working with other like-minded churches to do things in the world we can do better together.

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# ***We Love Our History***

by

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# I. Baptist Origins and Distinctives

## Baptist Origins

**16<sup>th</sup> Century: A Time of Reformation-** Baptist beliefs, though based solely on the Bible, were not documented throughout the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages the Bible was not translated into languages that the average person could read. Long established churches (Roman Catholic, Syrian and Greek Orthodox) informed Christian teachings with a greater emphasis many times upon traditions than the Bible. When the Bible was translated into English and the average person began to read it, traditions not based on the Bible were scrutinized. This resulted in what is known as the “Reformation” (16th century).

**Translations of the Bible into English provided the foundation for the reformation efforts: John Wycliffe (1382), John Tyndale (1525), The Great English Bible (1539) and The King James Version (1611).**

***Baptist Roots-*** The earliest Baptist beliefs represented a sincere effort to return to the “Authority of Scripture” alone as it related to matters of belief and practice.

Earliest Baptist teachings were influenced by “Puritanism” (those seeking a pure church and thus reformation of the Church of England), “Separatism” (those seeking to separate from the Church of England) and “Anabaptism” (those who advocated re-baptism for believers who were baptized as infants). Each of these movements represented the common desire to honor what God’s Word alone taught. The earliest Baptist teachings reflect this desire of many Christians to practice the clear teachings of the Bible without submission to the traditions that had come to dominate Church practices during the middle ages (up to 1500 AD).

**17th Century: Baptist Documents-** The 17th century offers our first textual evidence for typical Baptist practices and beliefs.

1609 A.D. Baptism is only for adults

1640 A.D. Baptism by immersion

There were two confessions which revealed well articulated beliefs as never previously shared and expounded by any one distinct group. It is helpful to realize that these beliefs were based upon Scriptural arguments challenging the compromises witnessed in the organized church of the 17th century.

1678 A.D. The Orthodox Creed (General Baptists)

1677 and 1689 A.D. The Second London Confession

(Particular Baptists)

## Early Baptist Distinctives

The following are key Baptist beliefs as expressed in the creeds of the 17th century and other Baptist writings.

**1. *Salvation by grace through faith-*** This belief sought to recognize the responsibility of every individual to be personally active in accepting and walking in God's grace through faith.

It opposed the teaching that church membership or sacraments could effectively accomplish anything in the life of an individual who is not sincerely following Jesus.

Texts: *John 3:16-17; Romans 3:22-24; Ephesians 2:8.*

**2. *The Gathered Church-*** This belief sought a church composed of believers whose membership was voluntary and based upon evidence of conversion.

It opposed the teaching that superficial commitment to Christ based upon receiving Church dispersed graces qualified one to be a member of the Body of Christ.

Texts: *John 13:34-35; Romans 12:1-13; 1 Corinthians 12:1-10; Ephesians 2:10; 4:11-16; Hebrews 6:9-12; 1 John 3:11.*

**3. *Believers Baptism by Immersion-*** This belief sought to recognize baptism as the response of those who are old enough to repent and appeal to God for cleansing grace. It further recognizes immersion as the only expression that represents the total cleansing work of Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross.

It opposed the teaching that the sprinkling of infants could accomplish the salvation of a child who is not capable of repenting or believing. This does not mean children will not be saved but rather that a ritual cannot accomplish it.

Texts: *Romans 6:1-11; John 3:23; Luke 3:21-23; Acts 2:38.*

**4. *Authority of Scripture-*** This belief sought to respect the final authority of Scripture in all matters related to belief and practice.

It opposed the teaching that traditions and the teachings of church leadership had authoritative value on par with the teachings of Scripture.

Texts: *II Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12-13*

**5. *Religious Liberty-*** This belief sought to uphold individual religious freedom as essential to the pursuit of undistracted devotion to God.

It opposed the teaching that people needed church hierarchies and state involvement to direct Christian expression.

Texts: *Galatians 2:28-29; 5:1-2, 13-14; I Peter 2:9-10.*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Baptist Distinctives

There are over 110 million Baptists worldwide represented in over 220,000 churches ([Wikipedia](#)). Baptists are considered the largest world communion of evangelical Protestants with an estimated 38 million members in North America. According to a 1990's poll, about one in five Christians in the United States claims to be Baptist. Ninety-two percent of Baptists are found in five of these bodies:

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC);  
The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC);  
The National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. (NBCA);  
The American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABC); and  
The Baptist Bible Fellowship International (BBFI).

All Baptists adhere to beliefs and practices founded upon the Baptist Distinctives. Some of the typical expressions of Baptist distinctives include:

- A voluntary fellowship united by faith, mission and the need for mutual support.
- No church hierarchy.
- No official creeds.
- No authority other than Jesus Christ as represented in Scripture.
- Commitment to practicing two formal ordinances
  - Believer's baptism and
  - Communion

## II. American Baptist Origins and Distinctives

### Historical Development and Facts

**Original Cooperation-** The earliest Baptists in the United States realized that there were things they could do more efficiently if they cooperated with other churches who shared their basic commitments. The earliest American cooperation between churches with Baptist convictions involved the formation of three societies.

- In 1814 the “Foreign Missions Society” was formed to pool resources for the support of foreign missions.
- In 1824 the “Tracts and Publications Society” was formed to print materials needed for ministry.
- In 1832 The “Home Missions Society” was formed to support evangelism and church planting efforts within the United States.

Independent churches (autonomous) supported these societies according to their own discretion. Support was based upon commitment to what the society served.

**Subsequent Developments** The independence believed in and practiced by Baptists (typically called “autonomy of the local church”) naturally led to dissociation where agreement on issues could not be established between churches. Churches consequently would choose to withdraw support of the “societies” and pool resources with others of like mind.

The following dates represent only a sample of things that have happened since the original cooperative efforts.

### **Facts of Interest**

- ***In 1845 Baptists split into Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists*** over the commitment of southern churches to the slave trade. Northern Baptists refused to support missionaries who owned slaves. The southern churches decided to organize their own cooperative efforts.
- ***In 1908 the Northern Baptist Convention*** was formed which distinguished in name the northern Baptist churches from the Southern Baptist Churches.
- ***In 1922 Northern Baptists refused to make normative any creedal statements.*** There has, throughout the history of American Baptists, been efforts to adopt a creedal statement to preserve faithfulness to the fundamental Christian beliefs. American Baptists have traditionally resisted the acceptance of any secondary authoritative statements outside of Scripture itself.
- ***In 1933 the General Association of Regular Baptists split from Northern Baptists*** over a protest against liberalism in the Northern Baptist Convention and their policy of Affiliation with the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. The General Baptists adopted the “New Hampshire Confession of Faith” to solidify their basic convictions.
- ***In 1946 Northern Baptists again refused to adopt a confession of faith.***
- ***In 1947 “Conservative Baptists” of America*** (formerly the Fundamental Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention) ***split from the Northern Baptists*** over theological review of foreign missionaries. There was concern that some missionaries had denied the virgin birth of Jesus.
- ***In 1950 Northern Baptists renamed themselves “American Baptists.”***
- ***In 1972 “American Baptists” renamed themselves “American Baptist Churches, USA.”***

**Present Day Facts-** There are 5,800 congregations and 1.6 million American Baptists in the United States. They are composed of approximately 37% Black, 3% Asian, Hispanic and Native American and 60% White. American Baptists are one of 25 different Baptist groups in our country, about one-tenth the size of the Southern Baptist Convention and about sixth in size among the largest Baptist bodies.

**Present Day Beliefs-** The following represent commonly held American Baptist beliefs that can be traced historically to Baptist beginnings.

1. **The Authority of Scripture Alone-** It is the rich heritage of American Baptists to preach God's Word.
2. **Baptism for Believers by Immersion-** Believer's baptism by immersion unites American Baptists with a majority of non-denominational churches in our country.
3. **The Priesthood of all Believers-** It is a fundamental teaching of Scripture that every believer has access to God the Father through the priestly work of God the Son. No follower of Jesus needs human representation in order to come to God.
4. **Autonomy of the Local Church-** The local church is directed by God through the Holy Spirit working in the lives of its members instead of a hierarchical form of denominational government.
5. **Voluntary Cooperation of Independent Churches-** There is value in cooperative efforts with other churches though it is not required.

**Present Day Denominational Structure-** Because of difficulties in cooperating at the national level before the advent of high speed travel, phones and the internet, American Baptists formed 34 regions including the United States and Puerto Rico. Each region has Staff committed to serving the churches in six primary areas:

- ***Pulpit Support***- preaching help when the pastor is absent.
- ***Church Support***- resources such as counsel or financial relief.
- ***Education***- providing educational resources and opportunities.
- ***Camping***- facilities and retreat opportunities.
- ***Facilitation of Communication***- denominational community.
- ***Resources***- anything that serves the local church.

At the national level, American Baptists are organized into four distinct boards with a General Secretary who oversees the vision of their cooperation. The present day boards are as follows:

- *Board of Educational Ministries*
- *Board of International Ministries*
- *Board of National Ministries*
- *Minister's and Missionary's Benefit Board*

The correspondence to the three societies in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (page 7) is clear by comparison. The addition of the “*Minister’s and Missionaries Benefit Board*” occurred in 1913 to meet the medical, insurance and pension needs of ordained and lay church workers based upon a donation by John D. Rockefeller, Sr. He is remembered for a gift of \$40,000 in 1911 that made the addition of this board possible.

American Baptists have one of the best-managed benefit systems in the world. It has supported those who have Christ full-time into retirement. It supported the wife of Dr. Martin Luther King, one of our most remembered American Baptists pastor, until she passed away in 2006.

### III. Valley Park's History and Purpose

#### Historical Highlights

- 1957** Twenty-six people from Panorama Baptist Church, Van Nuys, establish VPC as a mission church. The Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society (now “American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles, Southwest, and Hawaii” ABCOFLASH) supported the effort with a \$60,000 loan. The original 5-acre lot was purchased with the ranch house as our original sanctuary. There was a charter membership of 76 people by the end of the first year.
- 1959** A 200-seat chapel (Frank Bush Hall) was built with an additional loan of \$41,000 from the LABCMS.
- 1962** The Elementary school was established.
- 1964** The Main Sanctuary and School were completed as they presently stand with an additional loan of \$300,000.
- 1987** A Korean-speaking congregation established.
- 1995** The Spanish congregation established.
- 2006** The Filipino congregation established.

#### Pastors Who Have Served

<b>1957-1967</b>	William E. Yeager
<b>1968-1971</b>	Howard R. Stewart
<b>1972-1973</b>	Edwin F. Hall, Jr.
<b>1974-1977</b>	Jonathan R. Glover
<b>1978-1984</b>	Basel J. Rafeedy
<b>1985-1992</b>	John L. Hiigel
<b>1993-present</b>	Kevyn D. Jones

# **Valley Park's Organizational Structure**

## **Congregational Authority**

The traditional Baptist understanding of the “priesthood of all believers” (meaning every Christian as a child of God has access to God as a priest able to petition God for others) is honored at VP through congregational rule. Members of VP are empowered to share authority in decision-making by forming and approving the annual budget, appointing leaders annually to oversee the ministries, and being the final voice in any significant adjustments in spending or ministry. Every leader of Valley Park is accountable to the membership.

## **Congregational Meetings**

In order to manage the budget and ministries of the church, leaders are chosen by the congregation and approved annually at a meeting held on the first Sunday of May in each year. These annually appointed leaders include deacons, chair of the Board of Deacons and a moderator overseeing all meetings. Concerns regarding staffing can be addressed at any meeting of the members of the church.

The Annual Budget is distributed to the members in the month of June and approved at the Annual Business Meeting (last Sunday of June). Other congregational meetings are scheduled as needed by the Board of Deacons or can be requested by any group of ten members.

## **Church Membership**

The privilege of membership is sharing responsibility in the decision-making processes of the church along with the other members of the church. This responsibility is expressed by voting at congregational meetings as well as involvement in the leadership structure or ministries of the church. Our hope is that every member will be involved in at least one of the ministries of Valley Park and that every attendee will seriously consider becoming a member.

## Valley Park's Commitments

Valley Park's commitment is to obey the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:18-20) and the "New Commandment" (John 13:34-35). In these passages Jesus commands us to:

1. Make disciples of all men and women, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has told us to do.
2. Love the brethren to the depth of commitment displayed by Jesus on the cross.

## Our Commitments in Detail

*"... to encourage all people  
to become sincere followers of Jesus Christ"*

### We are committed to...

1. **Teaching God's Word** so that people will understand God's commands and counsel for life and be fully equipped in order to love and serve God.
2. **Equipping people to grow spiritually and live as responsible children of God** so that they will utilize all that they possess (time, gifts, energy and money) for the purpose of serving the interests of Jesus Christ.
3. **Building a healthy and united family of God** so that healthy Christian relationships are formed and every member experiences the fullness of Christ's love and grace in serving God, the Father, as a family.
4. **Sharing the love of Jesus Christ** with those who do not know Him so that they might receive salvation, become children of God and members of the family of God.

## **Biblically Informed Worship**

We are truly “**worshipping God**” when we are working toward the accomplishment of these commitments. As a church, each one of us has something to contribute that adds to the work Jesus laid before us.

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

**I Corinthians 12:4-7**

We invite you to come alongside of us and work with us to promote Jesus and the Family of God in our community in the year to come. We believe God is working in new ways among us and that we are growing in relevance to people who have been isolated and are in need of community. We need your help and your prayers.

## **Is Membership Necessary at VP**

No. You are a member of the Body of Christ because of your commitment to loving and serving Jesus. Your choice to serve and give at Valley Park is a blessing to us and when you do you celebrate the fact that we are brethren.

That said, membership typically represents a decision to share ownership for the life of the church “in sickness and in health.” It gives you a voice in the things we are doing and a vote in church business meetings when decisions of significance sometimes need to be made. We encourage you to become a member.

## **Pastor's Encouragement to the Brethren**

*The spiritual health of the church is the product of the spiritual health of its members and friends. The strength of our church witness is the product of the degree to which our church family reflects the commitment of Jesus to loving and serving others. My hope and prayer is that our church family matures as a result of the following habits.*

*Habits that build maturity in Christ"*

- ✓ *Actively pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ through devotions where prayer and Bible study become habits. Will you commit to regular devotions?*
- ✓ *Actively pursuing relationships with members of the Body of Christ where the Holy Spirit can work in your life through the gifts of others. This will require some commitment to gather with others to study, pray, or serve in addition to church attendance. Will you prioritize some degree of "gathering" in order to build meaningful relationships*
- ✓ *Actively giving of time, talent and money to serve the interests of Jesus Christ through the ministries of Valley Park. Biblical stewardship requires recognizing that everything we have or own has been entrusted to us by God so that we might produce something of eternal value for Him. Will you commit to investing what you are able in the life of Valley Park?*

*I believe strongly that a commitment to these three practices will lay a foundation upon which God will continue to transform your life and the life of Valley Park*

*It is by God's design that the church, as a gathering of Christ followers, will grow into a holy temple where God will manifest Himself more completely.*

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,  
but you are fellow citizens with the saints,  
and are of God’s household,  
having been built on the foundation of the apostles  
and prophets,  
Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,  
in whom the whole building,  
being fitted together,  
is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,  
in whom you also are **being built together** into a dwelling of  
God in the Spirit.”*

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

*It is an amazing truth taught in the Word of God that the church is the environment where Christians experience the presence of God and real transformation. I hope and pray God will transform you as you learn to embrace the family in whom He dwells.*

*Pastor Kevin*

