First Baptist Church In Newton

A Welcoming Church

Thinking Critically and Growing Spiritually
Loving and Supporting Each Other
Living Out Our Faith

Prepared for the Senior Minister Search
Fall 2021
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A WELCOMING CHURCH: THINKING CRITICALLY, GROWING SPIRITUALLY, LOVING AND SUPPORTING EACH OTHER & LIVING OUT OUR FAITH

First Baptist Church in Newton ("FBCN") is a progressive American Baptist Church that strives to support all members in their journeys to explore and live out God’s calling in their lives. We do this by:

- **WELCOMING:** We are a PROGRESSIVE church that believes in inviting, welcoming and respecting ALL those seeking to grow in their relationship with God and experience our community of faith. This means we are an open and DIVERSE church, whose members speak different languages and represent different cultural, political and religious backgrounds and sexual orientations. We welcome the diversity of opinion that accommodates our diverse backgrounds and learn from each other’s experiences and ideas. We are members of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, American Baptist Churches USA and the Alliance of Baptists.

- **THINKING CRITICALLY AND GROWING SPIRITUALLY:** We are an EDUCATIONALLY-ORIENTED church that believes we can deepen our faith and understanding of God as we thoughtfully and intelligently question, study and explore the Bible and other spiritual writings. We take the scriptures as holy guidance from God, only truly understood through prayer and contemplation, and not necessarily through literal interpretation. We rely on the teachings and loving example of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, to challenge us to grow in our faith and to put our faith into action.

- **LOVING AND SUPPORTIVE CHURCH COMMUNITY:** We are a church whose members care about and take care of one another. In times of joy and trouble, we are a loving and supportive church community. Fellowship is something we do particularly well, with regular fellowship hours following worship, as well as occasional social events and casual get-togethers. HOSPITALITY and joyful FELLOWSHIP are found in abundance here.

- **LIVING OUT OUR FAITH:** We believe that living a faith-full life means putting that faith into action by serving God’s people and the world. We value OUTREACH & MISSION work, in our church, in Greater Boston, around the country, and throughout the world. We strive, through the example of Jesus Christ, and in the tradition of American Baptist leaders such as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to seek JUSTICE, PEACE & LOVE for all people and to serve as a voice of OPENNESS within our denomination, community and world.

We support organizations in NEWTON & GREATER BOSTON, including the Newton Food Pantry, More Than Words (serving young people who have aged out of the foster care system), Common Cathedral (an outdoor church for people experiencing homelessness and their friends), the New England Center and Home for Veterans, and several more.

As we look beyond Newton and Greater Boston, to our WORLD, we strive to support those in need around the globe. FBC is a member of the Newton-Brookline Asylum Resettlement Coalition (NBARC), an interfaith group of congregations working together to assist asylum seekers. For several years, we have provided food, shelter and performance space for the Matsiko World Orphan Choir. And, we help support a small church and school in the Amazon region of Peru.
FBCN is among the more liberal and educationally-oriented congregations within the denomination of the American Baptist Churches USA, strongly supporting women in ministry, ecumenical relations, Christian involvement in social issues, and free theological inquiry whenever these questions have been in contention in the wider denomination. The congregation has much in common with other liberal Protestant churches in its area, but it differs from many in its focus on Christ, and in its bedrock commitment to scripture as the touchstone for worship and church life. We take the Bible seriously, but not literally. This joint focus on Christ and scripture positions us at the progressive end of the Baptist world and at the more Christ-centered end of the liberal Protestant world.

The congregation includes many with deep roots in Baptist tradition, for whom denominational life and identity are very important. Others come from diverse religious backgrounds (including Catholic, Jewish, Episcopalian, Methodist, Unitarian Universalist and a wide range of other Protestant denominations), and their primary concern is the life of this local church. The congregation unites in commitment to certain key Baptist principles: religious freedom (separation of church and state), local church autonomy (with democratic polity), and soul liberty (the responsibility of each person to interpret scripture independently). These shared convictions are formative for the congregation’s life in governance and ethos and are part of what has attracted current members, whether the label “Baptist” was important or not.

“FBC has taught me that God is not in a box. There is an openness as to how God works.”
—FBC Member
The Challenge: The 2020-2021 pandemic has certainly been a challenging time. Early in 2020, our Senior Minister resigned, just as the pandemic was first flaring up in the Boston area. In the summer of 2020, our Office Manager moved out of state when her husband was relocated. In late 2020 our first Interim Senior Minister (who had formerly been our Minister for Community Life and Christian Education) left for a seminary teaching job in Canada. Early in 2021, our Sexton resigned due to health problems, and our interim music leader left for a permanent job at another church. And, due to the pandemic, we did not worship together in person for well over a year.

Despite these challenges, church members stepped forward to organize and lead on-line worship services, to keep some of our programs going, and to help our tenants keep their operations running smoothly. As is true for many mainline Protestant churches, FBCN has gotten smaller in number in recent decades, and has been unable to accomplish all that we would like to. We are embracing the future with determination, faith and resilience. We appreciate and care for each other, and have the support of a capable, experienced Interim Senior Minister. We are looking forward enthusiastically to calling a new permanent Senior Minister to help lead us and travel with us.

Meeting the Challenge:

We are working steadily to prepare ourselves for the next phase in our church community's life together.

People: In the early months of 2021 we rebuilt our staff, calling an intentional Interim Minister, and hiring a new office manager and a new sexton. We also elected a new Moderator and Treasurer. These capable individuals are all continuing to learn and grow into their roles and responsibilities, and are working together effectively.

Following the unanticipated resignation of our Senior minister, Sean Witty, early in 2020, Rev. Dr. John Boopalan, an ordained Baptist minister who had been our Minister of Christian Education and Formation, took over the Senior Minister responsibilities on an interim basis. Though not an Intentional Interim Minister, much of his work with us was preparation for the next chapter of our church community’s life together. Rev. John’s career goals are in academia, and he resigned in October 2020 to take a position as a Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at a seminary in Canada.

Following Rev. John’s departure, we called the Rev. Dr. Norman Bendroth as our intentional Interim Minister. Rev. Norm has provided much needed stability during this very unusual time in the life of the church, and brings significant expertise and experience with churches in transition.

Self-Study: With Rev. Norm’s pastoral guidance and help, we have engaged in “Appreciative Inquiry” conversations with most (32) of our 53 members, as well as 9 others who regularly attend our worship services or Sunday School classes. Over a few months we conducted a set of small group discussions to listen to each other’s hopes, concerns and feelings about styles of worship, music, Christian Education, social action, community life, and more. We held 1 on 1 discussions with those who preferred them. The Resources Section at the end of this Profile provides more details about our “Appreciative Inquiry” process.

The Search Committee and the congregation are working together through this process, using what we’ve learned to identify the core values of our church community and to articulate what kind of church community we aspire to be. Our self-study efforts will help us call a minister well suited to travel with us on our spiritual journey.

“Being from another country, I thought I would find a church with my people, but I came to FBC and stayed.”
—FBC Member
Worship and Music:  In August 2021, FBC transitioned to a “hybrid” form of worship. Some of our members now attend in person, and others attend virtually (online) through the use of Zoom. Those who attend in person are asked to conform to all Massachusetts, City of Newton, and CDC safety guidelines regarding social distancing and mask wearing. It has been challenging to create a satisfying on-line music experience in worship services, and we continue to experiment and adapt. We are not currently looking for a Minister of Music. We believe that the new Senior Minister should be very involved in the hiring process for this position, so we will wait for a Senior Minister to be called before we try to fill this position.

Social Action: Many in-person activities are on hold due to the pandemic, but we have adopted, and continue to support, “Compassion in Action” goals. We donate money to various organizations in need, including One Great Hour of Sharing. We also continue our support of asylum seekers here in Massachusetts through our membership in the Newton-Brookline Asylum Resettlement Coalition. NBARC is an interfaith group of congregations that provides community-based assistance to asylum seekers. In concert with the other NBARC congregations, we have helped several asylum seekers with food, clothing, housing, job training, child care and job placement. We hope to work with some of the many hundreds of Afghan refugee families that are expected to come into the Boston area by the end of 2021. We have been, and continue to be, committed to address local, national and international needs.

By-laws Amendment:

The Church Council is drafting Amended and Restated Church By-Laws that are expected to accomplish the following:

• Impose a more flexible quorum requirement for Congregational meetings that will vary with the size of our congregation
• Provide for the size of the Search Committee to vary with the size of the Congregation
• Permit Council and Congregational meetings to continue to be held via Zoom after the pandemic ends
• Permit the Church’s fiscal year to be changed from the current calendar year basis to a fiscal year more in keeping with the Church’s programmatic year
• Clarify that Roberts Rules of Order cannot override the provisions of the By-Laws
• Shift the responsibility for the distribution of charitable funds from the Deacons to the Social Action Ministry (Compassion in Action)
• Clarify the wording of various other provisions of the By-Laws
It is intended that the updated By-Laws will be approved by the Council and the Congregation at a Fall, 2021 Business Meeting, and will go into effect once approved by the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

**Searching for a New Minister:** We are enthusiastically engaged in the important work of searching for, finding, and calling a new Senior Minister. We hope for a leader who is energized by the opportunity to work with a small but committed band of folks with heart, intellect, and creativity, and who will help us draw on the best of all of our resources. We know that we have the good news of God’s love to share in our congregation, in the city of Newton and beyond, and we long to have a committed pastor to join us in this journey.
Our Membership:

FBCN has 53 active members as of the beginning of 2021. Additionally, there are approximately 28 people who regularly attend our worship services, but have not officially joined the congregation. No new members have been added since the commencement of the Covid-19 pandemic, but we expect to add eight members during the Fall of 2021, including two through baptisms of youth who are part of our church family. Worship service attendance generally ranged from 20 – 35 persons while the church was conducting virtual worship services. The combined attendance is roughly 25-35 persons now that we are holding hybrid worship services, including about 5 teachers and students in our children’s Sunday School. Our adult Sunday School attendance generally ranges from 5 - 10 people, whether it is virtual or hybrid.

The Financial Outlook:

FBC has about 25 pledging units who contributed $65,869.16 against a pledge budget of $60,000 in 2020. Operating income currently balances operating expenses, and is supported by pledges, building rents of $234,000, and a portion of income of generated by the endowment, $60,000 in 2021. Our endowment of restricted and unrestricted funds stood at $2.9 million at the end of 2020.

In 2021, we budgeted about $375,000 in Operating Income and in Operating Expenses. The FBC budget has been effectively balanced over the last few years after many prior years of substantial deficit spending. However, the financial outlook for the next few years is uncertain, as the pandemic has had serious impact on performing arts groups and other community-oriented groups who have dissolved or who are not currently meeting in person, resulting in a loss of rental revenue to the church.

High Priorities for Attention:

Our new minister will join a small but enthusiastic and committed church membership. We are looking for leadership from him/her/them in addressing the following timely issues:

- Help our church, which has suffered declining membership and the trauma of the pandemic, find renewal and a sustainable direction going forward
- Strengthen support for families, especially for youth and Sunday School for younger children
- Facilitate the repair, maintenance and improvement of our historic church buildings
- Hire a Music Director or Minister to add joy to our worship services in a range of musical styles
- Create connections between FBCN and the wider community

“I like being invited to say the Lord’s Prayer together, and to say it in my native language.” —FBC Member
The members of FBCN are seeking a Senior Minister who will lead and inspire a church in transition, engage with our neighbors, and strengthen our church family, especially our efforts to serve children, youth and their families. This minister will:

1. **Provide Leadership to a Church in Transition**
   - Help the church to understand, articulate and live out our vision
   - Nurture our spiritual growth, strengthen our programs and increase our membership
   - Recognize skills and talents of church members; empower and encourage members to exercise their spiritual gifts for the benefit of all
   - Provide effective management of staff, volunteers, finances and property
   - Teach and learn along with a congregation with varied and educated points of view
   - Embrace appropriate technology to more effectively communicate and connect, and better enable us to live out God’s calling

2. **Be Welcoming and Open**
   - Extend God’s love and grace to all, embracing people of every age, race, sexual orientation, denomination, cultural or political background or economic means as vital and integral members of God’s family
   - Foster the church’s sense of community and our ability to care for one another
   - Encourage intergenerational participation in worship, social events, work activities, and other initiatives
   - Have a sense of humor and a playful spirit

3. **Nurture Community Connections**
   - Encourage and support efforts to become more engaged with and open to the wider community through activities and programs that welcome our neighbors into our space
   - Participate in the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association
   - Build personal connections to other FBCN stakeholders, such as our tenants, local arts and civic organizations, and other churches

4. **Be a Spiritual Guide**
   - Preach the Gospel in a way that allows for Spirit-led and varying individual interpretations
   - Encourage and support the spiritual development of all members through Christian education, joyful worship, and opportunities for prayer and spiritual practice
   - Be a living example of spiritual health and self care, regularly taking time for renewal and communion with God

5. **Provide Pastoral Support**
   - Visit and support congregants in need
   - Mentor deacons and other church members to help with visitations
   - Help make the church a welcoming place for children, youth and their parents
   - Build and nurture relationships among church members and friends
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Adult Sunday School

Our Adult Sunday School class meets every Sunday morning before the worship service, both in person and via Zoom. The Zoom meetings were originally adopted as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the class is continuing to include Zoom access now that live worship services have resumed in order to reach Church members who are traveling, as well as friends living across the country who have become members of the class.

The class consists of multi-month ecumenical courses using textbooks written by leading scholars, including manuscript expert Christopher de Hamel (Cambridge University), archaeologist/Biblical historian Israel Finkelstein (Tel Aviv University), Hebrew scholar Shaye Cohen (Harvard), New Testament scholar/orthodox Jew Amy-Jill Levine (Vanderbilt), theologian/biophysicist Alister McGrath (Oxford), geneticist Francis Collins (NIH), Biblical scholar Bart Ehrman (UNC-CH), Church historian Kevin Madigan (Harvard), comparative religion historian Robert Gregg (Stanford), and Islamic historian/theologian Gabriel Said Reynolds (Notre Dame).

The courses have included:

- History of the Bible as a Book
- Biblical Archaeology
- Second Temple Judaism
- Science and Religion
- Early Christian Writings
- Medieval Christianity
- Shared Stories, Rival Tellings (the Jewish, Christian and Muslim versions of five Biblical stories)
- The Qur’an and Its Biblical Subtext

There are no lectures. Rather, class members come prepared to discuss the current reading assignment.

Children’s Christian Education and Formation

In recent years, before the pandemic, Christian Education and Formation for children and young people included a staffed nursery and classes for elementary school aged children. For several years, we used the Narrative Lectionary in those classes and in Sunday morning worship. This has helped families come together around the same scripture passage each Sunday. Prior to the pandemic, we have had many “in person” activities for families. Red Wagon Sunday comes once a month, when children roll the Red Wagon through the congregation, collecting canned goods. The families then meet the following Saturday and roll the Red Wagon through Newton Centre to deliver the goods to a local food pantry. For “Back to School” in September, we hold a Blessing of Backpacks. We had a St. Francis Day visit from a kangaroo and other exotic animals, and we’ve held Christmas pageants featuring the children.
Approximately monthly, parents of kids met after church for a catered lunch and conversation, while kids were cared for in the nursery and Sunday School classrooms. The lawn outside the church, on the corner of Beacon and Centre Streets, has been the site of Easter Egg hunts, picnics, art tables, bouncy houses, and Movie Nights. The lawn has also served as an outside classroom on Sunday mornings, and the kids have run free lemonade and water stands during the Walk for Hunger and other community events, illustrating the Biblical principle of hospitality to passersby. On Pentecost Sunday, kids have run outside with streamers, experiencing the wind.

Second Hour

We often stay after the worship service for a “Second Hour” gathering. We use this time in a variety of ways: for learning, self-reflection, and discussions of pragmatic matters. Second Hour topics vary widely and have included: a budget tutorial discussion, hosting a speaker from a refugee support organization, playing Bible charades, sharing our hopes and dreams as a church family, updates on our “Compassion in Action” initiatives, and a book group discussion on “Underground Railroad”, by Colson Whitehead. We have held interfaith discussions on Christianity, Judaism and Islam, hosted a discussion with “Beguiled” author Karma Kitaj on the status of women, and much more.

Not Just on Sundays

All are welcome and invited to participate in our mid-week Biblical exploration that we call Just One Hour, Just One Scripture. A different volunteer brings a scripture text to each JOHJOS meeting, and leads a discussion beginning with what they find pleasing, confusing or upsetting about the text.

COMMUNITY LIFE

“Our worshiping together, we need to have fun together.”
— FBC Member

apple picking, and miniature golfing together, and we even went as a group on a tour of a local brewery. We opened up to the community for our Open and Affirming Mic Nights, which drew people of all ages, members of the community and the church, to come and share themselves through poetry readings, musical performance, and displays of visual art. These activities have connected us to each other and brought us joy.

MISSIONS AND SOCIAL ACTION

Although our Ministry of Missions and Social Action has had different names over the years, support for missions has always been at the heart of the people of FBCN. We believe that living a faith-full life means
putting faith into action, so we usually refer to our missions ministry as “Compassion in Action”. Current and recent “Compassion in Action” activities include:

In Newton and Greater Boston

- **Newton Food Pantry**: We collect non-perishable food once a month on “Red Wagon Sunday” and deliver it to the Newton Food Pantry.

- **Boston Walk for Hunger**: In many of the last 10 years we have assembled a team to join in the Boston “Walk for Hunger” and have staffed a water station on the church lawn for all walkers.

- **Common Cathedral**: We have served lunch at Common Cathedral on the Boston Commons and hosted Common Art pop-up shop for homeless artists to display and sell their creations.

- **More Than Words**: We collect used books for More Than Words in Waltham, an organization that hires and trains young people who have aged out of the foster care system.

- **Martin Luther King Day**: We host the City of Newton’s Annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration in our sanctuary.

- **MLK Memorial March for Peace**: We marched from Boston’s Government Center to our church in the “Memorial March for Peace” to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, then hosted an interfaith gathering for justice and peace in our Sanctuary, which featured a keynote speech by Susannah Heschel and musical leadership by Pete Seeger.

- **Christmas**: At Christmas we shop for and wrap gifts and give money to various causes, including veterans served by the New England Center and Home for Veterans and residents of Waltham House, a group home for LGBTQ homeless youth.

- **Christmas and Easter collections**: These are designated to be passed on to a charity doing work anywhere in the world, chosen by the Church Council with input from the minister and our membership.

In Our World

- **Mission Trips**: FBCN members have made several trips to repair homes outside of our local community. We helped rebuild in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and worked with Habitat for Humanity here in Massachusetts. We’ve traveled to Appalachia and Maine to repair roofs, replace drywall, paint and do other renovations for low income residents.

- **Matsiko Orphan Children’s Choir**: We provide accommodation, meals and performance space. Under the care of their adult chaperones the children have shared their culture in music and dance to raise funds for their education. The mission of Matsiko Children International is to transform the lives of our world’s most vulnerable children through a complete education and help them grow in wisdom, character, and opportunity.

- **Disaster relief**: We hosted a “Concert for Venezuela” to benefit the non-profit Cardiology Institute in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, which provides medical services to the people of that shattered country.

- **Peru**: we support the Little Readers School in Chaclacayo, Peru, by fundraising for the school building and donating educational materials.

“**Our guiding questions are:** ‘What does love require?’ and ‘Who is my neighbor?’” — FBC Member
• **Asylum Seeker Support:** We are one of the founding members of the Newton-Brookline Asylum Resettlement Coalition. NBARC is an interfaith group of congregations that provides community-based assistance to asylum seekers who are here in Massachusetts. In concert with other NBARC congregations, we have helped several asylum seekers with food, clothing, housing, job training, child care and job placement. We expect to work with some of the many hundreds of Afghan refugee families coming in to the Boston area by the end of 2021.

Inspired by Dick Simon, Founder of the “kNOw THEM” initiative. ([www.dicksimon.com](http://www.dicksimon.com))

**Our dream for the future**

The Covid-19 pandemic put many of our mission endeavors on pause. However, we have continued to donate money to various organizations in need. We are committed to supporting local, national and international causes. We want to do more than donate money, so we strive to identify mission opportunities that are appropriate for our small but determined congregation. We also hope to grow in numbers so we can do more to feed the hungry, and serve the needy and follow Christ’s example. We have heart and commitment, but congregational growth is needed to help make our dream a reality.

“We need to look like the Kingdom of God!”
— FBC Member
Beginning in 2011, our music was provided primarily by the Senior Minister and his wife, both professional musicians. Rev. Sean played the guitar, and often performed with hired musicians on a bass guitar, piano and drums, while his wife led the singing and served as a soloist. The style was very lively and upbeat, and probably best described as contemporary worship music. This was a sudden, and to some, a painful break from the traditional organ music and robed choir that was the practice at FBC before Rev. Sean was called. On the other hand, during Rev. Sean’s time with us, many new people joined the church, in part because of the contemporary nature of worship services. After the Senior Minister’s resignation, we hired a temporary pianist to provide worship music. Our musical style became a little more traditional, as we sang more hymns from the hymnal, but continued to include some contemporary music, as well. The pianist left to take a permanent position as a music director at another church in May of 2021. Since then, we have had supply organists and pianists, and the worship music has become slower and more traditional. Although church members have a wide variety of music preferences, we are flexible and in general support music in a range of styles, drawn from many sources.
Church Officers

Moderator: Eunice Wilson
Secretary: Richard A. Ransom
Treasurer: Wendy Sheehan

Council, Ministries and Committees

The Church Council, which is the primary governing body of the church, generally meets monthly. The other committees and ministries meet as needed.

- **Church Council:** Comprises the three officers, the chairs of the four ministries, three at-large members, and the Senior Minister.
- **Ministry of Congregational Life:** This ministry has traditionally been responsible for oversight of church life and members (including care of members in need), worship and fellowship.
- **Ministry of Properties:** Responsible for the general care of the financial affairs of the Church (other than the Endowment Fund), and for building use policies and practices, and it contracts for the maintenance of the building and grounds.
- **Ministry of Education:** Guides the Christian Education efforts of all age groups of the church. It works with and supports the Minister of Christian Education and Formation or the Sunday School Director, as applicable.
- **Ministry of Social Action:** This ministry, which we call “Compassion in Action”, leads the church on issues of humanitarian concern and Christian outreach in our community and around the world.
- **Human Resources Committee:** Oversees the church’s contractual relations with the Senior Minister and all other members of the church staff.
- **Finance Committee:** Develops, in concurrence with the Church Council, the general financial policy of the church, and prepares the preliminary operating budget.
- **Pastoral Relations Committee:** Serves as liaison between the congregation and the Senior Minister.
- **Stewardship Committee:** Manages the annual stewardship campaign for pledges of support for the upcoming year.
- **Nominating Committee:** Nominates people to serve as officers on the church’s Council, ministries and committees.
- **Search Committee:** Searches for, and recommends the calling of, a Senior Minister.
- **Trustees of the Endowment Fund:** Oversees the investment of gifts and bequests given to the endowment fund.
Staff

Rev. Dr. Norman Bendroth – Interim Senior Minister

Rev. Dr. Norman B. Bendroth is a Professional Transitional Specialist trained by the Interim Ministry Network and serves on their faculty. He has served as a settled pastor in two United Church of Christ congregations and as an Interim Minister at 11 churches. Norman is editor of Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors (Rowman and Littlefield, Dec. 2014) and Interim Ministry in Action: A Handbook for Churches in Transition, also with Rowman and Littlefield. Norman is a Board-Certified coach and consultant. He received his D.Min. from Andover Newton Theological School, where he studied theology and family systems theory.

Robin Bevilacqua – Office Manager

Roger Matson – Sexton

Brenda Resch - Bookkeeper

Magda Lopez - Nursery Director
THE EARLY YEARS

July 5, 1780: First Baptist Church in Newton was formed by a special act of the Massachusetts legislature, and met for the first time along the shores of nearby Crystal Lake (then known as Baptist Pond).

1788-1836: A Foundation of Growth and Openness. During Rev. Joseph Grafton’s 48-year tenure at FBCN, he led the church through nearly half a century of growth – not only in number of members, but also of Spirit and dedication to missionary causes and social ministries. Churches in Framingham, Weston, Cambridgeport, Arlington, Roxbury, Lowell, Watertown and Brookline all trace their roots to FBCN. Rev. Grafton also helped to found the new Newton Theological Institute (now Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School).

May 25, 1825: Histories Intertwined from the Start – FBCN and Andover Newton Theological School. Rev. Grafton was one of the leaders of the assembly who, on this date, voted to form Newton Theological Institute to service the Baptist community in New England. Influential in choosing the school’s location, he also served as the first president of its Board of Trustees. Irah Chase, the Institute’s first instructor, was also an active member of FBCN. The affiliation between the Theological School and FBCN continued through its history and into present day as many ministers and lay leaders in the church have also studied at or served the School.

1842-1854: From Farming Community to Boston Suburb: Rev. Samuel F. Smith, served as minister at FBCN as the town of Newton grew from a farming community into an inner suburb of Boston. He wrote the lyrics to “My Country ’Tis of Thee”, which he titled “America”. In 1899, the eleven-bell chimes were added to the church’s stone tower in his memory.

1888: The Corner of Beacon and Centre. The current meeting house was completed thanks to a bequest left by Deacon Garner Colby (philanthropist and namesake of Colby College). Familiar to all who pass through Newton Centre, the church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a classic example of American Late Victorian “Richardson Romanesque” architecture, designed by the young Boston architect John Lyman Faxon.

THE 20th CENTURY AND BEYOND:

1919-1948: One Minister, Two Wars. Charles Nathaniel Arbuckle, a gifted preacher and professor of Homiletics at Andover Newton, was a much-loved minister who led the church through World Wars I and II. In addition to leading efforts to aid servicemen and a country at war, Dr. Arbuckle expanded the church’s ministries to college students, youth and children.

1950’s and 60’s: As Cultures Shifted, FBCN Marched Forward: As the nation struggled with the cultural opening of the 1960s, and the world questioned religious institutions as never before, FBCN enjoyed strong leadership under Dr. Russell Hawley Bishop and Rev. Hal Malmborg. While attendance levels dropped during this time, the church remained engaged, expanding its education programs, building the John J. Fogg Educational Building onto the Church, and, in 1965, commissioning Rev. Malmborg to represent the congregation at the Civil Rights march in Selma, Alabama.

1970-1990: The 200th Anniversary and the Lawn Ministry Years: FBCN had much to celebrate on its 200th Birthday. Under the strong, decade-long leadership of Dr. Gene Bartlett, the church faced and met many challenges, completing needed repairs – including building a ramp to make the sanctuary and chapel accessible to people with mobility challenges, making FBCN the first barrier-free church in Newton – and reinvigorating the church’s commitment to outreach and service work. Among other missions, the church began its Lawn Ministry during this time, to engage a group of youth, many homeless or troubled, that congregated on the church steps. Dr. Norman De Puy continued the Lawn
Ministry through the 1980s and also significantly expanded the Adult Education programs. Both Dr. Bartlett and Dr. De Puy brought considerable expertise and scholarship to the church and continued – with Dr. Bartlett serving as a member of the faculty – the church’s tradition of relationship with Andover Newton Theological School.

1990-2010: Forging Our Identity in a Changing World: Building on FBCN’s strengths of openness, commitment to education and learning, and engagement in mission and outreach work, the church developed a new Mission Statement during the 1990s. The statement calls for a Welcoming Spirit of Mission and Ministry that emphasizes mutual respect for all people, and speaks out against discrimination in our society.

FBCN’s ministers during this time, Rev. Tom McKibbens and Rev. Charley Eastman, both made living out this mission statement a priority, working to set a course of openness and engagement for FBCN’s future.

2011-Present: A Community in Transition: Rev. Sean Witty was called to be the new pastor in 2011. After his arrival, he made significant changes in worship and music style. A congregation accustomed to worshipping in the Sanctuary, singing from the hymnal, accompanied by organ music and a robed choir, began worshipping in the chapel, with contemporary worship music performed by Rev. Sean on guitar, his wife as soloist, and a small band. Not surprisingly, many of those committed to more traditional worship styles left FBCN. However, a new, younger and more diverse community took their place. The diversity is reflected by people of varied religious backgrounds, sexual orientation, and countries of origin who now attend FBCN.

In 2017 Andover Newton Theological School formally affiliated with Yale Divinity School and moved its operations from the ANTS Newton campus to New Haven, CT. Unfortunately, this has weakened the long and fruitful relationship between ANTS and FBCN.

Also in 2017, the Rev. Dr. John Boopalan joined FBCN as Minister of Christian Education and Formation. Rev. John coordinated the Sunday school program for all ages, and created new programs that helped engage us with each other and with our community. He took on interim Senior Minister responsibilities upon Rev. Sean’s departure. In October 2020 he resigned to teach at a seminary in Canada. We are grateful for his joyful spirit and for the work he did with us during this challenging time.
FBCN is blessed with a rich collection of property, supportive members, and an endowment.

**Property**

The church buildings are located at the corner of Beacon Street and Centre Street in Newton Center, MA. This busy corner is near restaurants, a bookstore, other shopping, and the Newton Centre T stop on Boston’s Green Line subway. The buildings, including the Sanctuary, Chapel, and Fogg Building, are used by the church for its activities. Those buildings, as well as the adjacent Grafton House (also owned by the church), are also used by various organizations that provide the church with stable rental income. Of course, the buildings also impose significant maintenance responsibilities. The lawn is a wonderful resource for supporting community engagement. It has hosted a variety of events and activities, including: a kids’ bouncy house at the Newton Harvest Fair, Easter Egg hunts, church-wide picnics, and outdoor movie nights. The picnic tables are also used by the local community, and the Sunday school children occasionally use the lawn for fun and learning activities.

**Church Building**

The main building of the church includes the 600-seat sanctuary and a 100-seat chapel. Beneath the chapel is Fellowship Hall, including a large commercial-style kitchen which is unusable now, and in need of renovation. The building also includes a library, meeting rooms, and two offices. Both the Sanctuary and the Chapel are used to host Sunday services. Coffee hour and post-worship fellowship is generally held in the Chapel or outside on the porch overlooking the lawn. Rooms used for adult and children’s Sunday school, and the office of the Minister of Music, are located in rooms adjacent to the chapel. The children’s Sunday School room is also used from time to time as an art gallery. Fellowship Hall is below the Chapel and available as well. In addition to its use by FBCN, the sanctuary has been used by the Newton Philharmonic Orchestra for rehearsals and concerts, and by other performance groups over the last three decades. Concerns about large gatherings have prevented most outside groups from using the Sanctuary and Chapel since the pandemic began.

The main building, completed in 1888, is on the National Historic Register and is a fine example of Late Victorian architecture. The Tower, dedicated as the “America” Tower in 1932, contains an 11-bell Meneely chime. In the past this was played on Sundays to welcome people to services, but it is currently non-operational pending the repair of the tower.

**Pending Repairs to the Roofs and Bell Tower**

We are progressing with necessary repairs to address roof leaks in the Sanctuary and on the Sanctuary porches, and we have hired an engineering firm to evaluate and make recommendations for repairing the bell tower. The immediate roof repairs will be paid out of the current budget and a rainy-day account consisting of funds previously drawn from the endowment. The bell tower is being evaluated and stabilized, and we look forward to receiving a repair proposal soon. We do not expect to pay for
tower repairs from the operating budget. We might apply for grants, tap the endowment, and/or use proceeds from the sale of the Parsonage.

**Fogg Education Building**

In 1964, the Fogg Education Building was constructed. It includes the church office, the office of the Senior Minister, the church archives, and several classrooms and meeting rooms which are used for children’s Sunday school, committee meetings, and youth fellowship. Parts of the Fogg Building are now rented to a nursery school and a daycare center during the week, and to the Beautiful Korean Church and other small organizations occasionally in the evenings or on weekends.

**Grafton House**

The Grafton House is next door to the church at 1301 Center St. It was built by the national American Baptist denomination as a large two-family house for missionaries on furlough. The Church purchased it in 1962 and currently rents it as office space to a non-profit human service agency and a school. We recently finished a significant renovation at Grafton House, replacing the bulkhead, roof and porches, and repainting the entire building.

**Parsonage**

The church co-owns a house in Newton’s Oak Hill neighborhood that has served as the parsonage since 2011. FBCN intends to sell this particular property as soon as is practical.

**Operating Finances**

The 2020 Annual Report, available for review, has more detailed information on the church’s finances, including the approved 2021 budget. The 2021 budgeted revenue is about $375,000. Sources are: about 17% from pledges and loose offerings, 16% from unrestricted endowment funds, 62% from building rentals, with the remainder coming from Restricted “pass through” endowment funds.

Operating income, including building rents, currently balances operating expenses. The 2021 budget shows about $375,000 in Operating income (and Operating Expense). This includes $60,000 generated by our endowment. The FBC budget has been effectively balanced over the last couple of years after many years of substantial deficit spending. However, the financial outlook for the next few years is uncertain, as the pandemic has had a serious impact on performing arts groups and other community-oriented groups who have dissolved or who are not currently meeting in person.

We rely heavily on rental income, and are prioritizing funding of major repairs in order to continue to take in stable rental income. Our rental property essentially constitutes another part of our endowment.

We maintain a “funds account” that includes money that has been set aside by previous generations for future use on capital projects and contingencies. The funds account holds a little over $100,000. In addition to a funds account, a parsonage fund was created with the proceeds from the sale of the Church’s prior parsonage in 2003. A portion of that was used to purchase the current parsonage, a house in Newton. The church intends to sell the parsonage in 2022 and replenish the parsonage account.

**Endowment**

Our church is fortunate to have an Endowment, established in 1980, to receive gifts and bequests intended to provide long-term benefit to the Church and its programs. The Endowment is overseen by the five Trustees of the Endowment Fund, including the Treasurer and four members elected by the Church membership. The Trustees serve four-year (staggered) terms. The Endowment held
approximately $2.9 million at the end of 2020. Income generated by the Endowment Fund is provided to the Church for use in operations and for specific purposes designated by various donors. In 2020 the Church voted to spend an additional $100,000 from the Endowment for exterior renovations to the Grafton House, including a new roof and three new porches.
A selection of resources for additional information on the topics in this report:

- First Baptist Church in Newton Website  [www.fbcnewton.org](http://www.fbcnewton.org)
- Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists  [www.awab.org](http://www.awab.org)
- Alliance of Baptists  [www.allianceofbaptists.org](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org)
- American Baptist Churches USA  [www.abc-usa.org](http://www.abc-usa.org)
- American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts  [www.tabcom.org](http://www.tabcom.org)
- Newton Interfaith Clergy Association  [www.newtonica.org](http://www.newtonica.org)
- About the City of Newton, including demographic data  [www.newtonma.gov/about/demographics](http://www.newtonma.gov/about/demographics)
- Newton Food Pantry  [www.newtonfoodpantry.org](http://www.newtonfoodpantry.org)
- More Than Words  [mtwyouth.org](http://mtwyouth.org)
- “Common Art” of Ecclesia Ministries Common Cathedral, an outdoor church for people experiencing homelessness, and their friends  [commoncathedral.org](http://commoncathedral.org)
- New England Center and Home for Veterans  [www.nechv.org](http://www.nechv.org)
- Matsiko Orphan Children's Choir  [icnchildren.net/about-us](http://icnchildren.net/about-us)