

CELEBRATING

Our History

152 YEARS AND COUNTING...



PURPOSE CHURCH

EVERYONE EVERYWHERE FOLLOWING JESUS

ESTABLISHED 1870

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| BCR Consulting LLC | Research and Historical Context |
| Dave & Renee Milbrandt | Contributors |
| Gregg Svalstad | Editor |
| Holli Tubbs | Editor |
| Laura Coronado | Editor |
| Chanel De Los Reyes | Creative Director |
| Adrian Pichay | Creative Design |

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Purpose Church
586 N Main St
Pomona, CA 91768

Purpose Church History

Introduction

In 1870, just five years after the end of the Civil War, the can opener, soda fountain, and asphalt were invented, the first trans-US rail service began, Napoleon Bonaparte was captured and surrendered to the Prussian army, Rome became the capital of Italy – and the population of California surged to 560,000 people. In California, the area known as Spadra, now the western part of the City of Pomona, was the home of three stores, two blacksmith shops, railroad warehouses, a post office, and a school. In that same year, a small dedicated group of five Christ followers began the Spadra Baptist Church in the home of Pastor Richard C. Fryer, who led the congregation through its first nine years.

This is the story of how, over the next 150 years, Purpose Church grew from five members into the church it is today. Each generation faithfully built the church and passed the baton to the generations that followed.



Spanish and Mexican Eras of Pomona Valley

The Gabrielino-Tongva people occupied the Pomona area with its abundant natural resources prior to the arrival of Spanish missionaries in 1769. Mexican independence from Spain in 1834 led to secularization of the missions and distribution of mission lands to large landowners. Ygnacio Palomares and Ricardo Vejar were sons of Spanish loyalists and explorers who managed cattle and horses at Rancho de las Aguas. In 1837, Mexican Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted 22,430 acres of former Mission San Gabriel grazing lands (encompassing much of the present-day territories of Claremont, Covina, Glendora, Pomona and Walnut) to Palomares and Vejar, who named the territory Rancho San Jose. As California transitioned to American statehood following the Mexican-American War in 1850, the region began a process of dynamic changes. The development of two roads running from San Bernardino through this area, one directed west toward Los Angeles and another south toward Temecula, previewed Pomona's future as a commercial hub.

Pomona Beginnings

The 1860s brought a decline in prosperity on the ranch lands, due to persistent flooding, economic depression, and a smallpox epidemic among the local indigenous population who made up most of the workforce. The decline particularly impacted Vejar, and in 1864, he transferred his holdings of Rancho San Jose de Abajo to Isaac Schlesinger and Hyman Tischler, who employed Louis Phillips to administer and manage the lands. It was on this newly acquired land that Spadra (southwest of present-day Pomona) was established as the first American community in the Pomona Valley. By the 1860s, Phillips had begun selling small portions of approximately 10,000 acres of ranch lands to prospective settlers. Spadra was a stage coach stop for the Butterfield Overland Mail line. The influx of new settlers increased as stagecoaches gave way to railroad travel in the 1870s, allowing building materials, consumer goods, and horses to flow into the area.



Formation: San Jose Missionary Baptist Church of Spadra/Spadra Baptist Church, 1870 - 1883

Purpose Church was founded by a small group of Pioneer Baptists. The Baptist faith originated in the 17th century, when European Christians began attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church. One of the most obvious practices advocated by the reformers who became Baptists was the full-immersion baptism of adults. Baptists were well-established in North America by the time the United States declared its independence from England, and were among the first American settlers in Southern California. Purpose Church was founded as the San Jose Missionary Baptist Church of Spadra and changed its name to Spadra Baptist Church before moving to Pomona, becoming the First Baptist Church of Pomona.



Spadra School House, meeting place of Spadra First Baptist Church, c1886.

It was in this growing community that R.C. Fryer, the founding member and pastor of the San Jose Missionary Baptist Church, established his congregation. Fryer, a former farmer, and his family moved to Southern California from Arkansas in 1853 and founded the area's first Baptist church. By 1870, a number of Baptists had arrived in Spadra and plans were set in motion to officially organize a local Baptist church. On May 14, R.C. and Caroline Fryer hosted Ezra Kerfoot, A.S. Harris of, I.C. Curtis, and G.H. Brockman; these men then drafted a covenant, articles of faith, rules of decorum, and orders of business for the establishment of the San Jose Missionary Baptist Church of Spadra (the name would be changed to Spadra Baptist Church in 1881 to avoid confusion with the San Jose Baptist Church located in Northern California). Two of Fryers' adult sons were among the twelve charter members. The congregation met in the San Jose School House, then located near the intersection of Pomona and Valley Boulevards. This was the first church organized by residents of Pomona Valley. Fryer was elected as the church's pastor, duties he carried out only briefly before taking leave to serve in the California State Legislature later in 1870.



After 1870, the congregation was without a pastor and did not grow, but managed to hold weekly prayer meetings as well as a joint children and youth ministry program with other Christian groups. In 1877, they decided to join with other local Christian congregations to organize a three-week “meeting of days” (alternately a Revival) in order to reach the community with the gospel. The Spadra Baptist Church gained 27 members from this effort, including a charismatic young ordained minister, M.M. Hall. Hall was a talented orator who had a drinking problem, and the congregation soon let him go.

Dr. J.B. Tombes (1825-1899) was called as the first salaried pastor for Spadra Baptist in January 1879, earning \$100 annually. He concurrently pastored churches in Duarte and Placentia during the early 1880s while preaching at Spadra on Saturdays, Sunday mornings, and sometimes even Sunday nights. Tombes was unable to provide much pastoral work given his other responsibilities and the distance of his residence, and he would resign in March 1883.

The first clergy and charter members of the congregation like Fryer and Tombes were socially prominent, wealthy, and politically active. Fryer and Tombes participated in regional Baptist conventions (which also included delegates from Black congregations). Spadra was one of a dozen churches represented at an 1882 Baptist meeting in which the delegates affirmed their fervent devotion to the “Christian Sabbath” and the duty of “all people” to observe it.



R.C. Fryer, c1850s.

Spadra Founders Biographies

Fryer Family

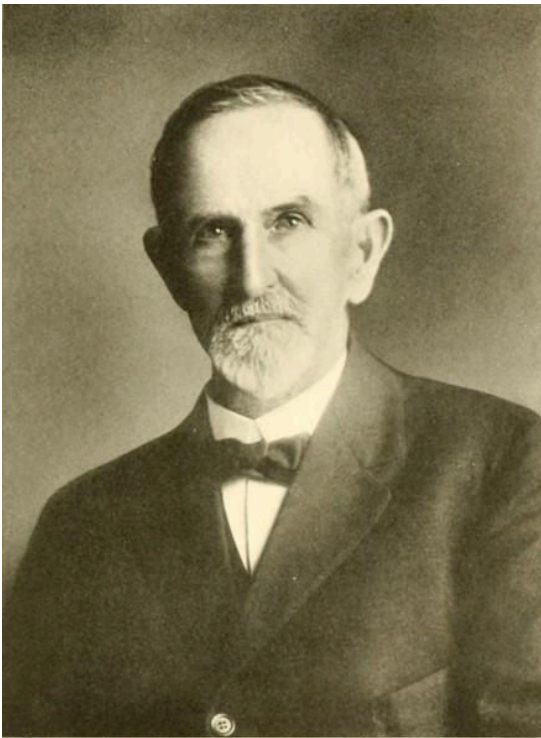
RICHARD C. FRYER (1821 – 1879)

Richard Chamberlain Fryer was born in Alabama in 1821. He married Caroline Veazey in October 1839 before moving to Arkansas, where they were farmers. Five children were born to the couple in Alabama and Arkansas, among them, John William and James Montgomery. In 1851, the family set off from Arkansas to Southern California by way of a team of oxen, arriving in El Monte in October 1852. Six more children were born in Southern California.



Raised as a devout Baptist, Fryer established a farm and began organizing the first Baptist church in Southern California in 1853; he began preaching the following year. The early assembly held meetings for a scant number of congregants in a small schoolhouse, and faced with the threat of bandits and ruffians seeking to break up the meetings; Fryer gained renown for his tendency to preach while openly brandishing his pistol.

In 1853 the El Monte Baptist Church was formally chartered and Fryer was titled as among the founding members of its Board of Trustees. After becoming the first Baptist ordained in California, Reverend Fryer remained with the El Monte clergy as its chief minister from 1854 until he departed in 1867 to move to Spadra. Fryer purchased a 250-acre tract in Spadra from Louis Phillips to build a home for Caroline and their many children. Fryer had presided over Phillips' wedding to Esther Blake, and the two became so familiar that Phillips' pond was used for Reverend Fryer's early baptisms and his cemetery for burials that Fryer solemnized. Never educated at a seminary or formally trained as clergy, Fryer listed his occupation as "farmer" on official documents throughout his life. He served as a Los Angeles County supervisor in the late 1850s. In 1869, Reverend Fryer ran on the Democratic ticket to be Los Angeles County's representative in the State Legislature; he was elected and served for two years. He also continued his evangelization by organizing a new Baptist church in Santa Ana in 1870. He died in 1888, and was buried in the Spadra Cemetery.



J. M. Fryer, 1920 History of Pomona.

JAMES MONTGOMERY FRYER (1847 – 1921)

J. M. Fryer, the second son of R.C and Caroline, traveled with his family to California as a small child. He married Isabel Arnett in 1870, a daughter of pioneer and co-founder of the congregation, Robert Arnett. Along with his brother John, he was a trustee of the original congregation, serving as clerk from 1870 to 1884. In 1884, he became a member of the Pomona congregation's first board of trustees; he would continue to serve in that capacity for decades. He served as Postmaster and for forty years was on the school board, earning the title the "father of the Spadra School." The 1920 history of Pomona described him as a leader in civic, intellectual, and spiritual matters and as the last living charter member of the congregation. He remained an active member of the congregation until his death in 1921.



ALVAN T. CURRIER (1840 – 1920)

Alvan Tyler Currier was born in Franklin County, Maine in April 1840, where he obtained his education and engaged in teaching as a young adult. He arrived in the Pomona Valley in the spring of 1869. He purchased a 2,400-acre ranch bordering the San Jose Creek to the east of Spadra, established a permanent home there, and married Susan Glenn Rubottom in 1881. Dr. J. B. Tombes officiated at the wedding. When the church was officially chartered, he was among the members designated to the Board of Trustees. Currier, the son of a Republican State Senator in Maine, also engaged in local civic affairs and politics. In 1881, he was appointed as the Los Angeles County Sheriff. Currier followed in his father's footsteps when he was elected to the California state senate in 1898, representing the thirty-eighth district of California. Following his term as a state senator, he would join the Board of Trustees for the University of Redlands, and later donated \$15,000 toward the building of a new Y.M.C.A. in Pomona.



Alvan T. Currier, 1920 History of Pomona.

R.S. ARNETT (1816-1905)

Robert Shanes Arnett was among the earliest settlers of the Pomona Valley, a founding member of Spadra Baptist Church, and an active clergyman following the church's relocation to Pomona. Arnett was born in Tennessee in 1816 before moving to Missouri and later Mississippi. The family arrived in San Pedro and journeyed further inland to the small community of Spadra in 1868. At Spadra, Arnett purchased fifty acres of land for cattle ranching and grain farming. A year after settling in Spadra, Mrs. Arnett died and was the first person to be interred at Spadra Cemetery. In 1870, Arnett was among the first ten people who convened at the home of Richard C. Fryer to formally organize the San Jose Missionary Baptist Church of Spadra. Arnett served as a deacon alongside J. W. Fryer and would serve in this capacity for the following 35 years, until his death in 1905. The intertwined legacy of Spadra Baptist's founders would extend further than just church membership, as two of the Arnett daughters would ultimately marry two of Reverend Fryer's sons.



Relocation & Growth: First Baptist Church of Pomona, 1883 - 1909

The Los Angeles Immigration and Land Cooperative Association laid out the town of Pomona in 1875, grading streets and constructing a hotel near the intersection of Fifth Street and Garey Avenue. By early 1876, lots were advertised for sale in the new town and a few years later Pomona had 500 residents. Arrival of the railroads in the 1880s facilitated the emigration of newcomers to Pomona and stimulated growth in the emerging citrus industry.

Booming land speculation and organized residential settlements led to the formal incorporation of Pomona (named after the Roman goddess of fruitful abundance) in 1888. Incorporation allowed the city fathers to hire a constable and promote temperance, one of the leading political issues of the day. Visiting saloons became illegal (there were about 15 saloons in the 1870s when Pomona had only 500 residents). By 1890, the city had a population of 3,634. Just seven years later, that number had more than doubled to 7,500 and Pomona had 18 churches (including a Black Baptist congregation). By this time, the proliferation of citrus orchards and packing houses as well as the proximity to transportation had made Pomona a wealthy town.

State Missionary W.H. Latourette assumed interim leadership of the Spadra Baptist Church after Tombes' 1883 resignation. Latourette immediately began conferring with a growing number of Baptists in the neighboring town of Pomona about uniting the congregations. After an October visit to Spadra Baptist Church where a committee of Pomona Baptists made their appeal for congregational consolidation, Spadra's congregation voted to move eastward.

First Baptist Church of Pomona's original thirty members initially held services in an existing building at the southeast corner of Fourth Street and Park Avenue. By January 1884, plans for the congregation's own building garnered \$2,500 in pledges, well exceeding the target of \$2,000, and in February the First Baptist Church of Pomona was officially incorporated. Reverend J.F. Moody was selected as the congregation's third pastor and the first to take on the role full-time. His first services were held in a local blacksmith



shop while construction of the new church was underway. The wood-frame Gothic Revival building was dedicated in September 1884. In 1891, the church voted to fund a \$3,000 addition for their church building which included a tower with a bell donated by Dr. John Osgoodby.



First Baptist Church of Pomona building at Fourth Street and Park Avenue, c1900.

Housed in their first purpose-built sanctuary, the First Baptist Church of Pomona flourished. Under Moody's leadership from 1884 to 1889, 146 new members were brought into the church, and two divisions of Young People's Society of Christian Endeavors (Y.P.S.C.E.) groups were established for the church youth. Women congregants organized domestic and foreign missionary ventures under the Ladies' Social Union (Ladies' Aid). In addition to hosting social events for the congregation, this women's society would support the congregation in concrete ways over the decades, from planting trees on the church grounds to at times paying part of the pastor's salary through their fundraising efforts.



Sunday School Classroom at Fourth Street and Park Avenue



The congregation's missionary tradition stretches back to its early days. In the 1880s, the congregation sponsored a missionary working in India. Then, the First Baptist Church of Pomona donated \$300 to Reverend C. Howard Ross, a church member and missionary active in Japan, for a bell at the North Star Church in Sendai. Ross was a graduate of Pomona College and was ordained in 1910 before marrying Sadie Twinting. Shortly after, the two set off for Japan on their missionary trip to represent the First Baptist Church of Pomona.



Interior of Fourth Street and Park Avenue church building, 1915.

In early 1889, Reverend E.R. Bennett took over for Moody as pastor. By 1896, 382 members had been added to the church rolls and the Board of Deacons had been expanded from four to eight. That year, Bennett resigned to be the Missions Superintendent for California and Nevada.

The next four ministers would serve no more than three years each before accepting a call to a new congregation. Reverend Phillip J. Ward served from 1897 to 1900, the first year that women were appointed as deaconesses. Reverend W.C. Clatworthy served from 1900 to 1902. Reverend T.H. Cornish succeeded him; at 26 he was the youngest in the church's history and served the congregation until October 1906. Cornish was particularly popular with the local youth, even joining them on church camping trips. By the time that Dr. J.F. Watson was appointed as the church's eighth pastor in December 1906, the congregation had grown exponentially. To accommodate church activities, the lot adjacent to the church building and the house situated on it were purchased. The rooms of the house were utilized for children and youth ministry programs.



In May 1907, the first Advisory Board was organized, consisting of clergy members, members of the Board of Trustees, and chairmen and representatives from the various church committees and organizations. In February 1908, the Advisory Board voted to provide the pastor with his own assistant 2½ days a week at a salary of \$10 per month. Congregant Blossom Gaskill, who was previously the chair of the Devotional Committee and a stenographer, would serve this position for the first time under Watson.



First Baptist Church of Pomona postcard, c1910.

Recognizing the congregation had outgrown its existing facilities, the church began collecting pledges for a new building in the fall of 1908. In February 1909, a special meeting was called to vote on the purchasing of lots at the northwest corner of Holt and Garey Avenues at a cost of \$17,500. Tom B. Stone (“Tombstone”), a citrus grower and church trustee, mortgaged his orange grove to secure the down payment. The majority of the church voted to approve these measures, while 106 congregants were less enthusiastic about the move northward (although less than a mile northeast of its original location, the new site was across the railroad tracks from downtown Pomona and the neighborhood was still mostly agricultural). They believed that Pomona could use another Baptist church and decided to plant a new church. In June, they formed Calvary Baptist Church of Pomona. While 1,022 members had joined the First Baptist Church of Pomona in 1883, natural attrition and the exodus of those forming Calvary Baptist left the active membership at 380.



Pomona Builders Biographies

J.F. MOODY (1856 – 1919)

James Franklin Moody was born in Andrew County, Missouri and graduated from William Jewell College, where he was ordained in the late 1870s. He married Susan Enna Brasher in 1882 and the couple had four children. When Moody became the third pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pomona in August 1884, he was the first to hold the position full-time; the congregation numbered only forty-eight members. He lived on a thirteen-acre ranch near Claremont, at the corner of San Antonio and Central Avenues.



James Franklin Moody, c1886.

DR. G.S. BAILEY (1812-1891)

Gilbert Stephen Bailey was an active member of the First Baptist church who filled in for Moody in his absence. A native of Pennsylvania, he married Sarah Bunnell, a teacher, in 1845. He was chaplain to the Illinois state legislature in the 1840s and a founder of the Divinity School of Chicago University. For a while, he and his wife were neighbors with Abraham Lincoln in Illinois. The Bailey's, like Lincoln, were anti-slavery and gave speeches on the matter.

The Baileys came to California in the 1880s and Bailey left Sarah a widow in 1891. She gifted the First Baptist Church a window in memory of her husband. At the age of 90, she was speaking at Baptist business meetings on the subject of the calling of a pastor. She was 92 years old when she died in 1912, the oldest woman in Pomona Valley.



JOHN OSGOODBY (1819 – 1908)

The unification of early Pomona Baptists and the Spadra Baptist congregation is often credited to John Osgoodby. Osgoodby was born in Lincolnshire, England in 1819 and his family moved to Rochester, New York in 1825. He married Mary Ann Dagworthy in 1852. Two sons and a daughter were born to the Osgoodbys by 1860. He was a devoted lifelong Abolitionist and member of the Whig party until 1860, when he cast his ballot for the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln.

In 1878, Osgoodby purchased forty acres from Louis Phillips in an area two miles south of the burgeoning town of Pomona. By 1887, increasing population induced him to sell this land, and it was ultimately subdivided. It was during this time that Osgoodby led a contingency of Pomona Baptists who approached Spadra Baptist Church to implore them to move their congregation to Pomona. He contributed to the church's original building at the corner of Fourth Street and Park Avenue by donating a large, cast iron bell.

BLOSSOM GASKILL (1889-1962)

Blossom Gaskill was given the position of assistant to the pastor in 1908 and served under Dr. J. F. Watson. She also served as head of the Devotional Committee. Born in 1889 in Indiana, she was a teacher of the First Baptist Bible school when she was in her twenties. She was also active in regional Baptist organizations, volunteering to represent the First Baptist Church of Pomona at Baptist Young People's Union rallies, and eventually becoming vice-president of the BYPU.

Twentieth Century Growth and Prosperity in Pomona

The high value of citrus production and promotion of the region's desirable climate allowed Pomona to continue its growth after the turn of the twentieth century. By 1911, the city had 12,280 residents, with an additional 30,000 people living nearby. Agricultural processing facilities included a cannery, a sugar-beet factory, and twenty fruit packing houses. Pomona's expanding population included Chinese, Japanese, and Latino laborers into what had been a majority white town. While Japanese immigrants were the largest minority group in Pomona until the 1920s, state legislation restricted their numbers in subsequent years so that Latinos became the predominant demographic of citrus industry workers. Flooding concerns



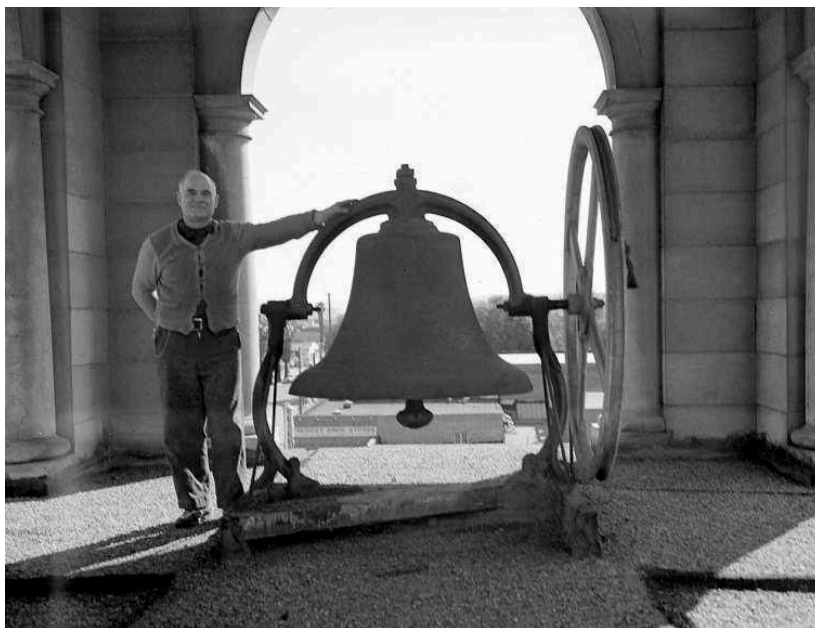
necessitated the 1924 construction of Puddingstone Dam northwest of Pomona, simultaneously creating a 250-acre lake for the region's recreational usage.

By the early 1930s, Pomona had more than 20,000 residents. Pomona's agricultural character was capitalized upon with the inauguration of the Los Angeles County Fair in October 1922. The Fox Theater in downtown Pomona opened in 1931 as a premier cinematic venue. Pomona solicited volunteer services to aid defense preparation during World War II, and one in every ten residents received some form of defense training. Over 3,000 men between ages 21 and 36 registered for the draft from Pomona and neighboring cities. The Los Angeles County Fairgrounds were appropriated for use as a Japanese detention center during the war, then as an army training center.

A New House of Worship: First Baptist Church of Pomona, 1883 - 1909

In 1910 Dr. W.F. Harper was appointed as minister. Also that year a building committee for overseeing construction of the new facilities was formed. The committee initially estimated the new edifice to cost more than \$40,000. On November 4, 1910, amid celebration and festivities, the cornerstone of the new building was laid by J.W. Fryer, the only surviving member of the Spadra Baptist Church and eldest son of its founder R.C. Fryer. Copies of the New Testament, a Baptist Manual, a history of the church, membership rolls, a list of clergy members and various church committees and organizations, and copies of the Pacific Baptist and Pomona newspapers were placed within the cornerstone.

Significant progress had been made on construction by February 1911, and the first service was held in the building on February 22 for 150 church members using folding chairs. With construction completed by early June, a farewell service was hosted at the original Fourth Street church the week prior to the new building's dedication. Costs had risen to \$87,000 and Reverend Harper called on his congregation to cover the outstanding balance of \$30,000. Within an hour, tens, hundreds, and thousands of dollars were enthusiastically donated allowing the congregation to move to their new house of worship debt-free. A dedication celebration and two services were held on June 11, 1911. Congregants met at the Fourth Street church and paraded toward the new building while singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." Most walked while horse-drawn vehicles carried the elderly and very young. The march was a spectacle for the City of Pomona, and more than 2,000 people of all denominations convened at Holt and Garey Avenues to attend the dedicatory ceremonies.



Church bell, date unknown.

The original church bell gifted by John Osgoodby was moved to the new building's south tower, and an organ and a large, ornate oak table used for Communion Service. Congregants and visitors alike expressed awe of the building's grand exterior and elegant interior design. In the immediate years following its move to Holt and Garey Avenues, the First Baptist Church of Pomona welcomed 815 new members to its church rolls. A substantial institution, the church could no longer operate with a single pastor and a part-time assistant. The church called prominent evangelistic singer W. Earle Smith to be the pastor's assistant and its first director of music in 1911.

After moving to its magnificent new house of worship, the Pomona First Baptist congregation continued to flourish over subsequent decades. During this era, the congregation added at least one hundred new members a year. One of its outstanding members was Mrs. Mary Baker, daughter of a Baptist minister and an active member of the Baptist Women's Mission Society. Beginning in 1912, Mary Baker gathered local Japanese boys at the church where she taught them to read English through Bible studies. Some of the boys, previously unfamiliar with the Christian Faith, chose to follow Jesus shortly thereafter, and by 1914 the church was offering regular Japanese Bible study classes.

Dr. J. Harvey Deere served as pastor from 1918 to 1922, and presided over the congregation's 50th anniversary celebrations in 1920. A two day program consisting of services, a picnic, and a reunion was held at Ganesha Park, and Baptist congregations from Chino, Ontario, San Dimas, and the Calvary Baptist Church of Pomona joined the festivities.



The auditorium, seated hundreds, making it the largest in Pomona and the church became the host of many Baptist conventions and interdenominational meetings. In 1949, various denominations held joint services every night for a week in a revival crusade that featured celebrity speakers including Louis Zamperini, whose life was chronicled in the film *Unbroken*.

The Pomona congregation was left without a pastor for a year before Dr. Floyd I. Beckwith was called in 1923. After Beckwith stepped down in 1928, Dr. Gordon Palmer served until 1936. Under his pastorate, the Pomona First Baptist Church established an employment agency and engaged in city-wide evangelism campaigns.

In the 1930s, First Baptist Church of Pomona managed to retain its dynamism during the Great Depression as local growth slowed. Reverend Kiyoshi Shiraishi joined the clergy, becoming the church's first Japanese minister. Shiraishi was not the only prominent Japanese figure in the church. Komezo Arita (1883-1939) was an active member of the congregation after coming to Pomona in 1910. The church choir was expanded, and the youth basketball program attracted young men to the congregation. During this era, the north tower of the church building required demolition; a leak had developed that compromised its structural integrity and endangered the building as a whole. Realizing the forthcoming needs to expand its facilities, the church also purchased two large lots adjoining church property for \$14,000. Palmer resigned as pastor in 1936. Over the course of his leadership, active membership had grown to 650.

The First Baptist Church of Pomona was again left without formal leadership for a prolonged period after Dr. Palmer's resignation. In the interim, congregants Howard E. Hauser and Dr. Gilbert N. Brink admirably took charge of leading church affairs. In January 1937, Reverend Frank M. Kepner undertook his first pastorate at Pomona First Baptist. This marked the arrival of another youthful pastor, as Kepner had only served as a pastor's assistant in San Diego before and was not yet 30-years-old when appointed. Like Cornish before him, Kepner



First Baptist Church of Pomona Board of Deacons, 1935.



particularly appealed to the youth of the congregation and helped to develop the High School, College, and Young Adult Departments.

With the outbreak of World War II, the church hosted a convention of Southern California Baptist congregations to confer on the wartime duties required of the Baptist Church at large. More than 500 people



Mary Baker
1874-1970

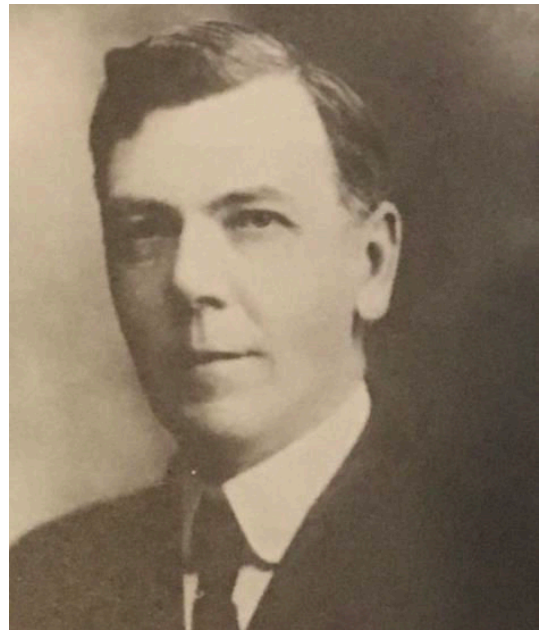
from 140 to 150 churches converged on Pomona in August 1942, where a five-day program featured various speakers and meetings among inter congregational committees. All parties agreed that the turbulent days of war mandated that the Baptist Church increase its evangelism at a time in which people were especially receptive to it. The Japanese internment policy during the war greatly diminished the number of the Pomona First Baptist's Japanese congregants, and many did not return to Pomona after being released. As the war neared its end, members of the First Baptist Church of Pomona hand-illustrated booklets filled with Christmas greetings to be mailed to congregants who were serving in the armed forces. Within the sanctuary, two Honor Scrolls were posted listing the men and women in service.



20th Century Expanders Biographies

DR. W.F. HARPER (1854 – 1930)

Dr. William F. Harper arrived to Pomona in January 1910 to serve as the congregation's ninth pastor. A native of Indiana, he married Margaret Tincer in 1874; the couple would have four children. In Pomona, Harper oversaw the construction and dedication of the new church facilities at Garey and Holt Avenues. He also served the Southern California Baptist Convention as its President. He resigned in 1918 after an eight-year tenure in Pomona.



W.F. Harper, First Baptist Church of Pomona.



*Gordon Palmer,
First Baptist Church of Pomona.*

DR. GORDON PALMER (1888 – 1976)

Dr. Gordon Palmer was the twelfth pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pomona. Palmer was born in England and immigrated to America as a young man, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1913. In 1919 he married Mila Treat and the couple had three children over the next decade.

In 1928, he accepted the pastorate in Pomona. His time in Pomona included the establishment of a church employment bureau, which secured jobs for scores of congregants and community members, as well as a church commissary. He was elected as the President

of the Southern California Baptist Convention from 1935 to 1936 and served as the vice president of the larger and national Northern Baptist Convention beginning in 1934. His eight-year stay in Pomona ended in 1936 when he became the president of the Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



KIYOSHI THOMAS SHIRAISHI (1889 – 1977)

Kiyoshi T. Shiraishi served as Pomona First Baptist's minister briefly during the period after Palmer's resignation in 1936. Born in Japan in 1889, Shiraishi immigrated to the US in 1917. Shiraishi graduated from a Baptist theological seminary in Japan in 1914, and was already an ordained Baptist minister when he moved to the US. Shiraishi worked as a clergyman in San Pedro, the Long Beach area, and Garden Grove. His wife Yoshiko Hasegawa Shiraishi came to the US in 1927, worked as a teacher at a Japanese school. They had four daughters between 1928 and 1932 while living in Los Angeles. By 1933, he was a part-time pastor in Pomona while continuing to serve in Garden Grove. The family moved to Pomona in the late 1930s. During World War II, the family was interned at the Rohwer camp for Japanese-Americans in Arkansas. Shiraishi and his wife returned to Los Angeles after the war, where he pastored another Baptist Church. They became US citizens in 1954.

MARY BAKER (1874-1970)

Mary Baker continued her work in the Baptist community for decades, going on mission trips around the world into her 80s. She died in 1970 at the age of 95, and taught in the children and youth ministry until the end of her life (81 years total). The commemorative booklet produced for the Centennial celebration of the congregation was dedicated to her. In fact, she was recognized by the American Baptist Convention as the person who had taught children and youth the longest in any Baptist church. Her funeral was officiated by Rev. Edward Cole of the First Baptist Church of Pomona. She was buried in the Pomona Cemetery.

Postwar Pomona

After the war, Pomona saw increased commercial, civic, and infrastructural development as the economy shifted away from agriculture. Returning war veterans, continued immigration to California, rising land values from commercial development, and construction of new residences changed the landscape of the city. Its population expanded to 67,157 residents in 1960.

Construction of Interstate 10 through the heart of Pomona brought a substantial transformation of the community. Of the 22,000 new residents who moved to Pomona between 1960 and 1966, 17,000 were African American (up from only eight families at the start of the decade).



In recent decades, Pomona's evolution into a modern city was driven by expansive development and further diversification. City residences and business began to spread toward the north and east, toward neighboring La Verne and Claremont. Construction of the 60 Freeway cut through the southern part of the city, offering new routes of transportation to the east and west and, consequently, new business opportunities along the route. Major institutions such as Cal Poly Pomona and Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center also saw significant improvements paralleling the city's growth. Meanwhile, the Latino population became the majority demographic, and many Latinos have held prominent political positions. Social welfare groups like the Pomona chapter of the Urban League also worked to provide food, shelter, and civil rights activist support to improve living conditions for African Americans in the city. Today, Pomona is home to over 151,000 diverse residents, making up the seventh largest city in Los Angeles County.

Change and Continuity: First Baptist Church of Pomona, 1945 – 1983

1945 not only brought the end of WWII but also celebrations of the congregation's seventy-fifth anniversary. Morning, afternoon, and evening services were held on May 27, 1945 and featuring special music and guest speakers from Baptist congregations in Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon. Church members and the public celebrated at an afternoon picnic held between church services. The end of the war allowed the congregation to focus on the future. The parcel and building north of the sanctuary, at the corner of Garey and Pasadena Avenues, was purchased that year for \$15,000 for the use of the growing children and youth ministries. Sunday morning services began to be broadcast on local radio. In 1946, after nearly a decade of service in Pomona, Reverend Kepner accepted a position as Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention. Reverend Wayne Murphy, a lay congregant who had been ordained in 1944, shouldered much of the spiritual leadership until Dr. Hubert A. Davidson was selected in November 1946.

*First Baptist Church of Pomona advertisement,
January 1, 1955, Pomona Progress Bulletin.*



When Kepner left the First Baptist Church of Pomona, its church rolls well exceeded 1,900 members. Davidson was a very active figure in Baptist associations during his tenure with Pomona First Baptist. By the time he resigned in 1950 to serve the Tenth Avenue Baptist Church of Los Angeles, Pomona First Baptist had established its first mission church in the neighboring city of Claremont.

Dr. Harold L. Fickett would replace Davidson, serving the congregation until 1954. In that time, Pomona First Baptist continued its characteristic growth expanding membership by over 1,500. In need of additional space, the church built a wedding chapel and a church school adjacent to the existing facilities in 1950. The West Education Building was added in February 1952, located to the northwest of the auditorium and sanctuary. Membership increased again by 1,547 people as the First Baptist Church of Pomona rose to be among the top American Baptist Convention congregations in missionary offerings, children's ministry attendance, budgetary donations, and youth ministry programs. The growth in day-to-day operations of the church necessitated a part-time business manager, and Monroe Marlowe became the first in church history.



F-Building under construction, 1951.

Dr. Edward B. Cole became the sixteenth pastor of Pomona First Baptist in 1955. The dynamic young minister ushered in an extended era of expansion and change that coincided with California's postwar population boom. Cole oversaw much progress and many expansions in the congregation over the ensuing years. From 1956 to 1957, Pomona's congregation led all other Baptist churches in membership additions and baptisms, as well as ranking among the leading congregations in missionary donations. By 1958, church membership had risen to 3,520 with enrollment in children, youth, and adult groups numbering 2,240. Many church members were ordained during the mid-1950s into the 1960s. In 1956, newly ordained Reverend William Tipton would be called to pastor the First Baptist Church of Honolulu. In 1957, Reverends James Metzger and Douglas Jones were appointed to part-time Pomona First Baptist positions as Minister of Membership and Visitation and Minister of Week Day Activities, respectively. In 1959, five more congregants were ordained and through the 1960s, eight young men were ordained; many would go on to serve as pastors of their own churches or join Pomona's clergy. Under Cole, Pomona



*First Baptist Church of Pomona,
interior of Holt and Garey church building during a service, 1956.*

First Baptist also continued to forward the growth of Baptist churches throughout Southern California. In 1957, Pomona's second mission church, the Bethany Baptist Church of Montclair, was established. In 1958, Pomona sponsored the formation of the First Baptist Church of Hacienda Heights, and the following year it did the same for the South Shore Baptist Church of Laguna Beach.

During the 1960s, five additional mission churches were established: Conejo Valley Baptist in Thousand Oaks (1960), American Baptist Church of Fallbrook (1964), First Baptist Church of Layton in Utah (1965), the First Baptist Church of Walnut (1966), and the Bouquet Canyon Baptist Church in Santa Clarita (1969). Pomona First Baptist's continual growth was not limited to its membership or initiatives. As the clergy and number of ministerial positions had increased in previous decades, by 1959 there was a pressing need for additional office space. In September 1960, an administration building was constructed and dedicated near the southwest corner of Garey Avenue and Philadelphia Street. The building provided offices, conference rooms, a print shop, and extra storage space for church materials.



The mid-1960s saw the Pomona First Baptist congregation again engage in outreach efforts to current and former members serving in the armed forces during the Vietnam War. Reverend Cole and the church's Service Men's Committee sent personal letters and boxes of cookies to them for Easter and Christmas. Mrs. Edwin Hall and Walter Sterk, both Pomona congregants and members of the Pomona Civil Defense Aide organization, gathered over 1,000 pounds of gifts as part of the Christmas Star Project and sent them to congregant servicemen as well. By the summer of 1967, the First Baptist Church of Pomona received its 5,000th member, marking it as the largest congregation in the American Baptist Convention. In 1968, the church felt empowered to expand its local ministry. Reverend Keith Korstjens, who previously had served the church as an Associate Minister of Christian Education and principal of the church elementary school, began the work of the Family Life and Community Services. Later reprogrammed as the F.I.S.H. Program, it enabled church outreach to local schools and community organizations around Pomona. The same year saw the beginning of much-needed renovations to the sanctuary. Completed in 1969, the renovations included the relocation of the church organ, re-carpeting, and the addition of seating along its western balcony. By 1970, the church had a ministerial staff of nine and a clerical staff of ten.

In addition to the vibrant children, youth, and adult ministries, two morning services were offered, as well as an evening service, evening youth group meetings, and Wednesday evening prayer meetings. In 1976, services in Vietnamese and Cantonese were added to serve new arrivals to Pomona. Translation into Vietnamese was offered at the 11 AM service and there was a Cantonese-language Sunday school class.

Growing membership necessitated creative means to accommodate attendees, and by 1977 three services were held every Sunday morning. Also in 1977, 235 acres of former quarry land near Cal Poly Pomona in San Dimas were donated to the church by the CalPortland Cement Company. The acquisition prompted officials to consider relocating to the new property, which could easily meet the needs of the expanding congregation. Difficulties with permitting ultimately prompted church officials to sell the property to developers for \$3,000,000 in 1979. The sale was used as seed money for a new sanctuary planned near Holt and Garey, and in 1981, the "Together We Build" campaign was launched to carry out that mission. Dr. Cole resigned in 1983, after 28 years of service to the congregation. By that time, Pomona First Baptist had 7,500 members.



First Baptist School Building (E-Building), 1969.

First Baptist School of Pomona

As the First Baptist Church of Pomona grew to be among Pomona's most substantial institutions and one of the largest denominational congregations in the country, it sought to engage in a larger educational initiative as well. In 1961, Dr. Edward B. Cole, proposed the establishment of an elementary school on the church property and plans began to be put into motion. Upon the school's opening, the school would include kindergarten, first, and second grade classes, with one additional grade being added each subsequent year. The base curriculum would combine traditional lesson studies with interdenominational, biblically-based religious instruction. The school days for all classes (with the exception of those in kindergarten) would run for 240 minutes, with twenty of those minutes being dedicated to Bible studies. The purported mission of the school was to provide an educational program based on sound academic disciplines administered within a Christian environment.

The needs and ambitions of the First Baptist School meant that a new facility would be necessary to host its prospective students and staff. In January 1963, ground was broken for the construction of an approximately 30,000 square-foot, \$400,000 educational facility designed by Everett Tozier. The building was designed



to be three stories tall and blend in with the adjacent single-story, mid-century church administration building built in 1960, located north of the existing sanctuary. The building was paid for through “Operation Faith,” a massive fundraising campaign led by Cole that pooled together \$300,000 among the church’s 4,500 congregants. The building would not be dedicated and put into use until March of 1964.

While construction of new school facilities was underway, the First Baptist School of Pomona was opened to the public on September 10, 1963. Welcoming in an inaugural group of ninety students, classes were initially held in the West Education Building located on Main Street, which had been remodeled, had a portion of its parking lot fenced in, and had playground equipment, tables, and benches installed. The church’s Board of Christian Education developed a sub-committee as the elementary school board, which appointed Pomona First Baptist clergyman Reverend Houston M. Burnside as the school’s first principal and Priscilla Tompkins as the school secretary. The school originally featured only three teachers for its classrooms: kindergarten’s Mrs. Eleanor (Lindley) Dean, a children’s ministry teacher and former deaconess at Pomona First Baptist; first grade’s Ms. Antonie Slaman, a member of the First Baptist Church of Alhambra; and second grade’s Mrs. Bess Speer, a member of La Verne’s Church of the Brethren and an experienced educator from St. Paul’s Episcopal Day School in Pomona.

Upon its opening, the First Baptist School of Pomona promoted a number of offerings and amenities to prospective enrollees. In addition to the full-day school sessions, credentialed Christian teachers, and a non-denominational approach, the school provided student health services, bus transportation, a reasonable tuition, foreign language courses, and small classes offering individualized attention. Following its inaugural year, the First Baptist School saw sustained growth. Burnside left Pomona First Baptist in 1965 and was replaced as principal of the First Baptist School by Nancy Salverda. By 1970, the school included classes for kindergarten through sixth grade, as well as a pre-school for three and four-year-olds. By the 1971-1972 school year, junior high school classes for seventh and eighth graders had been incorporated into the school, bringing its enrollment to 350 students. Junior high students began taking physical education classes, which were held at the nearby Y.M.C.A. building due to its recreational offerings. By 1975, the school was comprised of 475 students and forty staff members, with classrooms consisting of as many as thirty students each.



Postwar Modernizers Biographies

HAROLD L. FICKETT, JR.

Harold L. Fickett, Jr. became the fifteenth pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pomona when called to the position in 1950. Reverend Fickett was born in Galveston, Texas in March 1918 as the son of a Baptist preacher. He took classes at Baylor University before enrolling at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Kentucky, where he was ordained. He married Miss Mary Frances in 1940 and assumed his first pastorate at the First Baptist Church of Mission (located in Mission, Texas) in late 1941. Following the outbreak of World War II, he was commissioned as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps. The Reverend remained entrenched in ministerial work across the Northeast until being called by Pomona in the summer of 1950 to replace Dr. Hubert A. Davidson as the church's pastor.



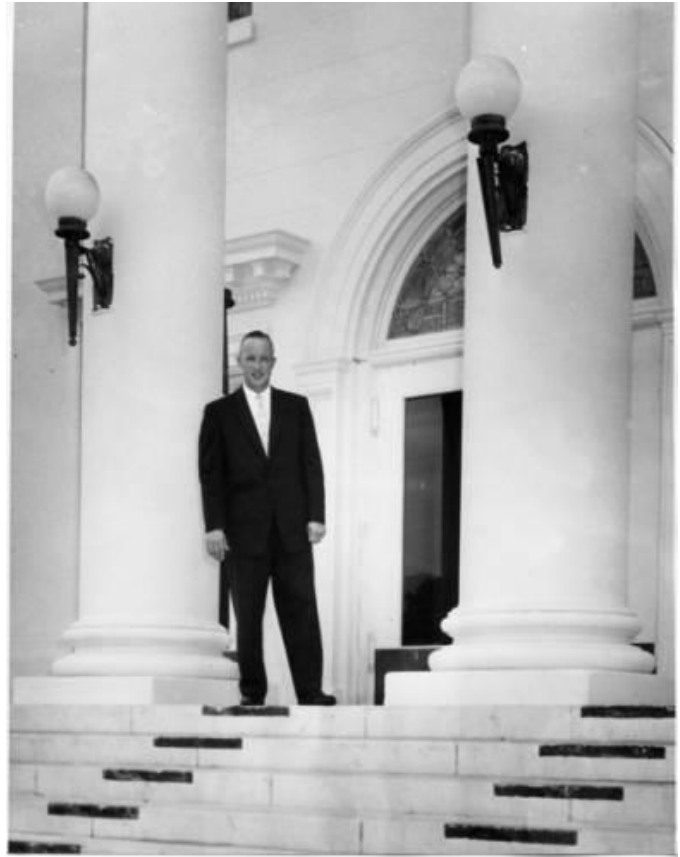
Harold L. Fickett, Jr., c1950s.

Between 1950 and 1954, membership at Pomona First Baptist increased by approximately 350 people per year to number more than 3,000. Dr. Fickett's tenure in Pomona ended in October 1954 when he took a position at Tremont Temple Baptist Church of Boston, the largest Protestant church in New England.

DR. EDWARD "TED" B. COLE

Edward B. Cole, or "Ted" as he was known more familiarly became Pomona First Baptist's sixteenth pastor in 1955. He was born in San Diego in 1923 before moving to the Los Angeles area, where he was raised. He attended Eagle Rock High School before undergraduate studies at UCLA and Santa Barbara State College (now UC Santa Barbara). In 1942, he married Dorothy Blake, a Beverly Hills resident he had met at Hermosa Beach the year before when both were seventeen-year old high school students. The couple went on to have four children.

The Coles relocated to Pennsylvania, where Cole attended and graduated from the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. They returned to Burbank, California in 1945 for Edward's ordination at the First Baptist Church. The proceedings were overseen by Edward's older brother Donald, then the pastor of Linden Baptist Church in Camden, New Jersey and the future president of the California Baptist Seminary. After a brief stay in Burbank, the Coles returned to Pennsylvania and Edward assumed the pastorate of Northwest Memorial Church in Philadelphia. During this time, he engaged in radio evangelism and also completed additional graduate work at Temple University to earn his doctorate degree. In early 1950, the Coles returned to Southern California where he served as pastor for the North Park Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego. At the same time, he was appointed as the associate director in the Christian Education Department of the Los Angeles Baptist Mission Society.



*Ted Cole outside
First Baptist Church of Pomona, 1958.*

By late 1954, Dr. Cole became a candidate for the vacant pastorate at the First Baptist Church of Pomona and began his service there in January 1955. Upon taking the pulpit, Pomona led all denominational churches in membership additions and baptisms, comprising one of the largest Baptist churches nationwide. In 1960, he was appointed to the General Council of the American Baptist Convention. Throughout his pastorate, dozens of new ministers were ordained at Pomona First Baptist and even more were sent on ministry missions both nationwide and abroad. He also took part in various speaking engagements for local, regional, and national Baptist conventions, meetings, and revivals. In 1970, Dr. Cole was appointed to be both the president of the Southern California Baptist Convention and a trustee of the California Baptist Theological Seminary. Following his resignation in 1983 from Pomona's congregation, Dr. Cole moved eastward and established the Church of the Woods in Lake Arrowhead, where he also served as its first pastor. By 1991, he had left Lake Arrowhead to serve as the senior pastor at South Shore Baptist Church in Laguna Beach. He died in 2009.



The Latest Chapter

After Dr. Cole resigned in 1983, Willis E. Lucas became the seventeenth Pastor of Pomona First Baptist. Lucas was born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1937. He married Linda L. Weyrauch, also of Terre Haute, in 1967. Lucas graduated from the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Indiana with Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees, and was ordained as a minister of the American Baptist Churches in 1962. He trained in Billy Graham Crusade programs, and spent most of the period from 1962 to 1972 as an evangelist. When Lucas came to Pomona First Baptist in 1983, he took on the work to complete the construction of the Worship Center that had been partially funded by the seed money acquired through the San Dimas land sale in 1979. He launched the “Opportunity of a Lifetime...For Generations to Come” campaign to supplement the initial funding.

The campaign was a success and construction for the new Worship Center commenced north of the North Education Building at 601 North Garey Avenue. At 62,200 square feet, the new building expanded capacity from 1,200 to 1,700 worshipers, plus include a choir loft that sat 200. Construction was finished on November 29, 1987 and its opening was marked by a procession of church members that walked from the old church building to the new sanctuary for the inaugural service. Pastor Lucas led the church until his resignation in 1992.

Although Pastor Lucas was instrumental in the funding and construction of the worship center, an outside study conducted while searching for his successor indicated that the church had experienced a general decline since the 1970s. The research showed short growth periods in 1983, and in 1987 when the Worship Center opened, but emphasized that parking problems and lack of programs for young adults had diminished the church’s ability for meaningful growth. Furthermore, although significant funding had been raised to carry out the expansion, the church had also acquired substantial debt during this period.

A committee assembled to hire a new Senior Pastor determined that Glenn Gunderson possessed the credentials, demeanor, and leadership qualities necessary to lead the church into the new era. Pastor Glenn Gunderson, the eighteenth pastor in church history, assumed the role of Senior Pastor in 1993.



Glenn K. Gunderson Jr. was born in Petersburg, Virginia in 1956 to Glenn K. Gunderson Sr. and Lois N. Gunderson. He attended Prince George High School in Virginia, where he was an honor student and track star. Gunderson attended Wheaton College in Illinois, his parents' alma mater. He earned a bachelor's degree in theology and participated in men's track and field, setting school records that still stand for Distance Medley and Four Mile Relay in 1977. Gunderson earned his Master of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Boston. He married Kimberly Beth Hazard of Tully, New York at Homer First Baptist Church in 1983. Before coming to Pomona First Baptist, Pastor Glenn served as lead pastor for Grace Christian Fellowship -formerly known as Homer First Baptist Church. Glenn and Kimberly have six adult children, and eight grandchildren.

Gunderson's tenure has marked a vibrant era for the church that continues to this day. One of the key changes he made early in his time with the church was changing the worship style in the later of the two services to a contemporary music. As soon as there was a contemporary worship option, people who were considering a move to another church stayed, while some who had left returned. Through his *Journey 2000* fundraising campaign, outstanding debts for the Worship Center were paid off. In 1996 "Come Celebrate Christmas" was launched, an event featuring a Christmas story reenactment accompanied by a festive music program. In subsequent years the event expanded to include Bethlehem Marketplace, now known as Journey to Bethlehem, which has reached tens of thousands of people. Large scale outreach events commenced with the first outdoor Easter Service held at Rancho Cucamonga Quakes stadium, formerly known as the "Epicenter", in 1997. The church began hosting Easter Sunday morning services at the Pomona Fairplex in 1998, drawing 8,000 worshipers, a number that would far exceed the capacity of their existing facilities. By the 2010s, attendance at Pomona First Baptist reached approximately 4,000 people each weekend.

In 2015, the First Baptist Church of Pomona experienced its most far-reaching rebrand yet. Seeking to embrace the modern and nondenominational trends of twenty-first century church life, the church shed the "First Baptist" title and changed its name to Purpose Church. Consultants hired by the church had deemed the "First Baptist Church" name to be limiting to outsiders unfamiliar with specifics of the Baptist tradition. The name Purpose Church was meant to be more relatable, particularly to younger generations, and reflect the purpose which non-believers were searching for in their lives. Despite the change in name, Purpose Church still upheld Baptist tenets of biblically based teachings, the baptism of believers rather than infants, and global mission work. Pastor Glenn's vision has continued the church-planting legacy established early in the church's history.

Although in-person outreach necessarily diminished in 2020 during the pandemic, outreach efforts have grown via virtual services, and the church has reached people online in more than 120 countries.



Looking Forward: 2022 and Beyond

In the early 2020s, Purpose Church has been marked by several distinctives, among them being a racially and generationally diverse church in an urban setting offering both traditional and contemporary worship. the church has expanded and intensified efforts to reach the community in the neighborhoods of Pomona by launching several micro-sites meeting in the city and partnering with community groups to meet the needs of all those living in the city. In addition to providing food and clothing to those in need, ministries such as EveryOne Free helps women rescued from human trafficking, while Celebrate Recovery, aids everyone dealing with addictions, hurts, habits, and hang ups. Along with the English-speaking services, Purpose regularly provides worship experiences in Spanish, Arabic, and Karen (Burmese). These are a few of the many ministries helping share love and grace to those near and far.

Pastor Glenn's vision has been to prepare the pastors, staff, and congregation to continue to preach the Gospel message and meet the needs of the generations to come...for the next 150 years!

More History to come in 2023

This is just a glimpse of the robust history that God has faithfully written for us. Stay tuned for a more complete history book, including more pictures to be published in 2023. For more information, email chaneld@purposechurch.com

EVERYONE EVERYWHERE
FOLLOWING JESUS



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