

In Celebration of 275 Years of Service to God

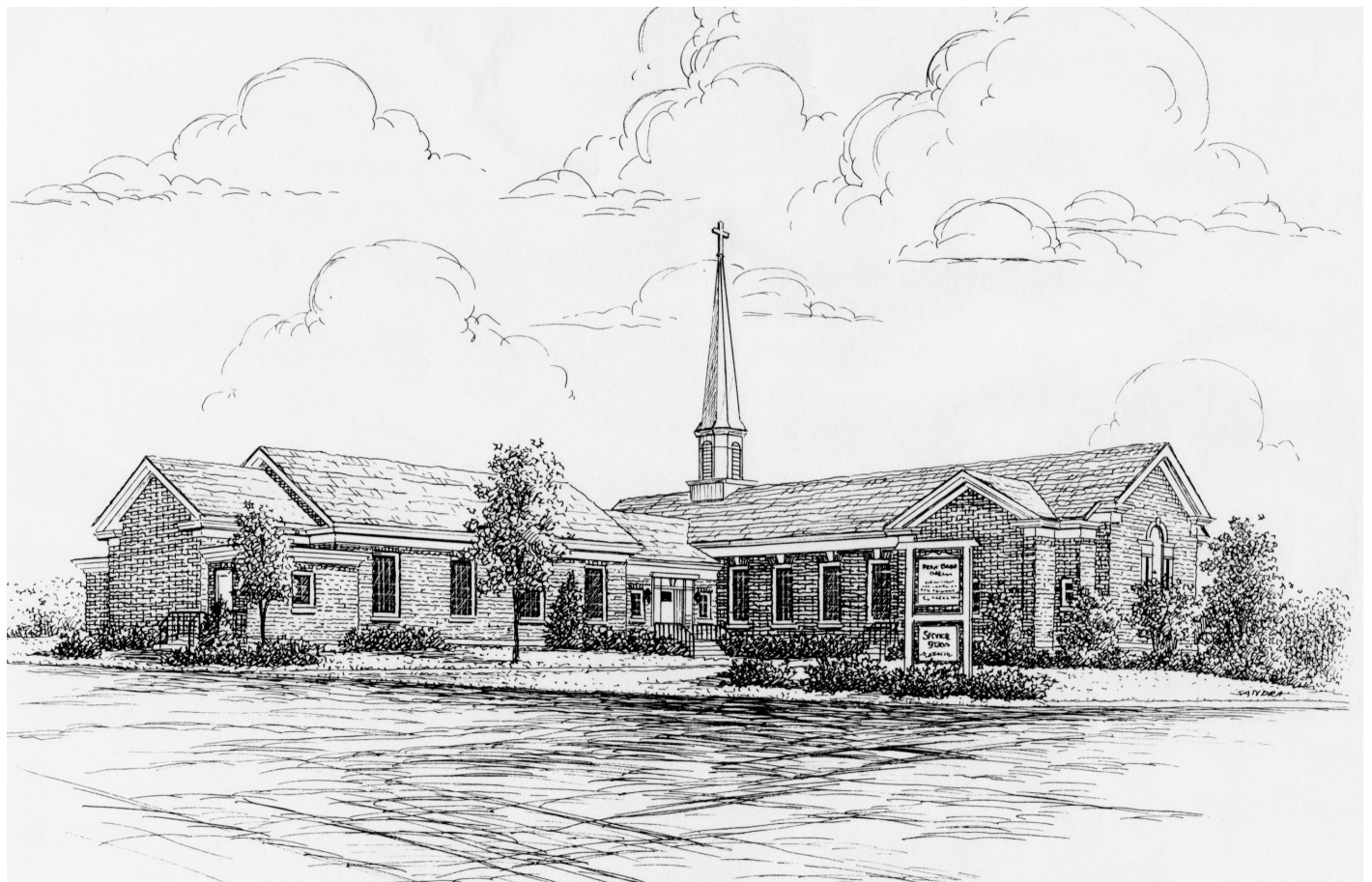
1738-2013

Our Bicenterquasquigenary

First Baptist Church of Southington

*581 Meriden Avenue,
Southington, CT 06489*

(860) 628-8121 · www.firstbaptistsouthington.org



Vision statement

First Baptist Church of Southington will lead individuals into a deeper experience of God through worship, education and fellowship, so that every person will be equipped for his or her ministry in the Church and world, and that we may carry out the full potential of the mission of Christ to which we are called locally, nationally and worldwide.



"I Am With You Always"

An Anniversary Message from Our Pastor



Rev. Holt

On January 21, 1738, a child destined to become an American hero was born, his name was Ethan Allen. A few months later, on June 4, 1738 a future English monarch was born, George III. As early as 1738, the stage was being set for the explosive events that culminated in the American Revolution and the formation of a new nation.

During the winter of 1738, in the British colony of Connecticut, a few settlers in an area called Panthorne, several miles south of Farmington, petitioned to be allowed to hold worship services closer to home. Church attendance was mandated by law, so the settlers traveled to Farmington every Sunday to attend services. Permission was granted, and those settlers became the founders and first members of what eventually became known as the First Baptist Church of Southington.

Through 275 years, the First Baptist Church of Southington has been a center of faithful worship and service in the name of God. Its members have remained faithful through wars and natural disasters; they have prayed and labored for justice and human rights for all people. In the course of its history, this faith community has lived through times of financial need, at one point almost ceasing to exist for lack of funds to pay a preacher.

The members of the First Baptist Church were also witnesses, as well as participants, in great victories for freedom and human rights: the American Revolution, the War Between the States known as the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and currently, the war on terrorism. Its members have been witness to the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, and the movement for equal rights for all people regardless of sexual orientation.

While Baptists have a fierce belief in the separation of church and state, it does not mean we separate ourselves from the struggle for human rights and dignity at home and abroad. Our members were not silent or inactive during these monumental historical events; many served with distinction in our armed forces, while others risked their lives in the quest for equal rights for all.

In 1812, a young Congregational minister and his new wife, Adoniram Judson and Ann Hasseltine Judson, sailed from Salem, Massachusetts to serve as missionaries in Burma. While studying the scripture en route, Adoniram became convicted that infant baptism was not a legitimate profession of faith; that one should only be baptized when able to make a conscious, thoughtful, and prayerful commitment to Jesus Christ, an act known as believer's baptism. When the young couple arrived in Calcutta, Ann and Adoniram were baptized by immersion and then departed for Burma. Word soon reached the Baptists of the United States that they had a missionary couple abroad who needed support, thus began the Baptist missionary movement in the United States.

Independent Baptist churches across the nation came together to support their new missionaries, others joined them, and the flow of missionaries to remote parts of our planet continues to this day. Although every Baptist church is autonomous, they found common ground in the missionary movement and a denomination emerged. That new denomination split in 1845 over the issue of slavery. The Home Mission Society refused to commission slave holders as missionaries. The denomination split into what came to be known as the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches of the United States of America.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

The faith community at the First Baptist Church in Southington has remained deeply committed to supporting mission projects at home and abroad throughout their history. We currently support American Baptist missions in the Dominican Republic, including sending work crews to La Romana, making clothes for children, and sending needed supplies. Our members support missionaries in Mexico, the Congo and South Africa, among other places. At home we have a deep commitment to serving in our area through our work at Bread for Life, Southington's soup kitchen, assisting in stocking the shelves at the food pantry of Southington Community Services, and our continuing faithfulness in serving the elderly at the Connecticut Baptist Homes, which was founded by members of our church.

For two hundred and seventy five years we have kept the faith and served God to the best of our ability. We have faced many challenges, but God is faithful, He has never left us. The words above our baptistery have served as a reminder, consolation and assurance to generations of our church family, "I am with you always." God is the same yesterday, today and forever. We serve in His name and embrace the future as we remember the past.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rev. Sharon R. Holt".

The Rev. Sharon R. Holt

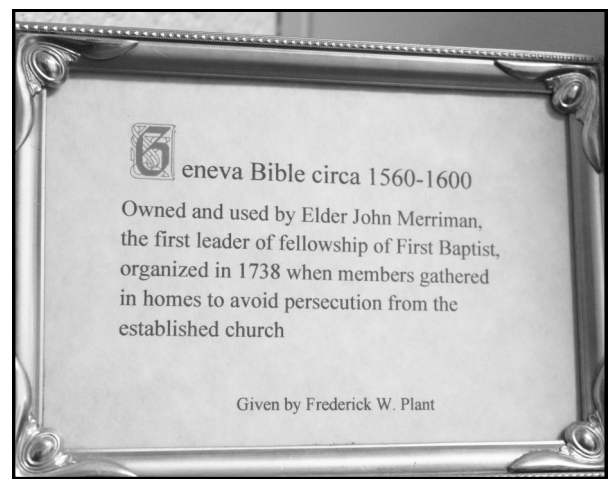
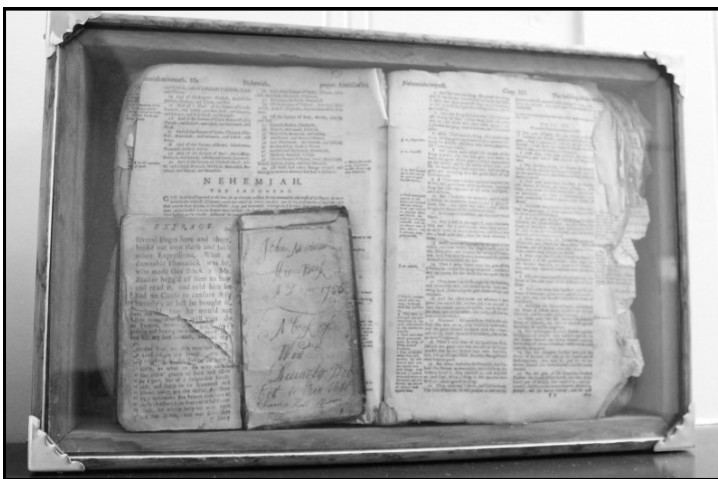
'In the Beginning': 1738 – 1787

History from this time is a bit scarce; however it is believed that in early 1738 a group of people were 'leaning toward the Baptist faith' and they gathered in homes for home worship. This however was contrary to the law of the land where in the Colony Law Book page 139, it is written: 'Nor shall any person neglect the public worship of God in some *lawful* Congregation, and form themselves into separate companies in private houses, on penalty of Ten Shillings for every such offense each person shall be guilty of...'



The first real leader recorded was John Merriman. In 1740, he was the pastor of the Wallingford Baptist Church; however, after inviting his friend, the Congregational minister, to appear in the Baptist pulpit at an evangelistic service, his congregation was extremely unhappy. So as not to cause any more trouble, Merriman began thinking of where else he may be able to go.

In 1750 he was welcomed into this community by old Wallingford friends, now living in Southington-



Our Nation, Our World 1738 - 1787

1738: Ethan Allen, future Revolutionary War hero and key founder of the Republic of Vermont, is born in Litchfield, Conn.

1741: A boulder in Plymouth Harbor, Mass. is identified as the exact spot the Pilgrims landed 121 years before.

1743: Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third U.S. president, is born.

1750s: The earliest systematic instruction of guide dogs, as helpers of the visually impaired, takes place in a Paris hospital for the blind.

1755: A devastating earthquake hits Lisbon, Portugal, killing as many as 50,000 people. The city has to

be rebuilt.

1760: New York City, with a population of 18,000, surpasses Boston to become the second-largest city in the American colonies. Fifty years later the population is 202,589.

1765: American colonists refuse to pay the Stamp Act tax.

1772: Great Britain abolishes the slave trade.

1778: The English explorer Captain James Cook becomes the first European to discover the Hawaiian Islands when he sails past the island of Oahu.

1784: John Wesley charts the first Methodist Church in the United States.

Farmington area. He sold his home in Wallingford and in March of 1751 purchased property in Southington. Although in poor health, it is believed that he may have held services in his own home. Elder Merri-
man died in 1784 and was buried in a cemetery in the southwest part of town, near where he lived.
[Editorial comment: Known as the Merriman Cemetery, located on Marion Avenue, is the current site of
our Easter Sunrise service.]

John Wightman came to Southington from the Groton Baptist Church in the 1770s purchasing a home on September 26, 1770 for 195 pounds of 'lawful money' for 151 acres. He probably preached occasionally in the Merriman home and led the small congregation. He was in poor health and died at the age of 58 on April 4, 1781. [Editorial comment: The grave of the Rev. John Wightman can be seen in the Wightman Cemetery located on West Center Street Extension. A marble monument detailing the Baptist presence and role in local history was placed at this cemetery in 2008 by the Baptist History Preservation Society on Oct. 18, 2008.]

Wright and Merriman laid the firm foundation for the church.

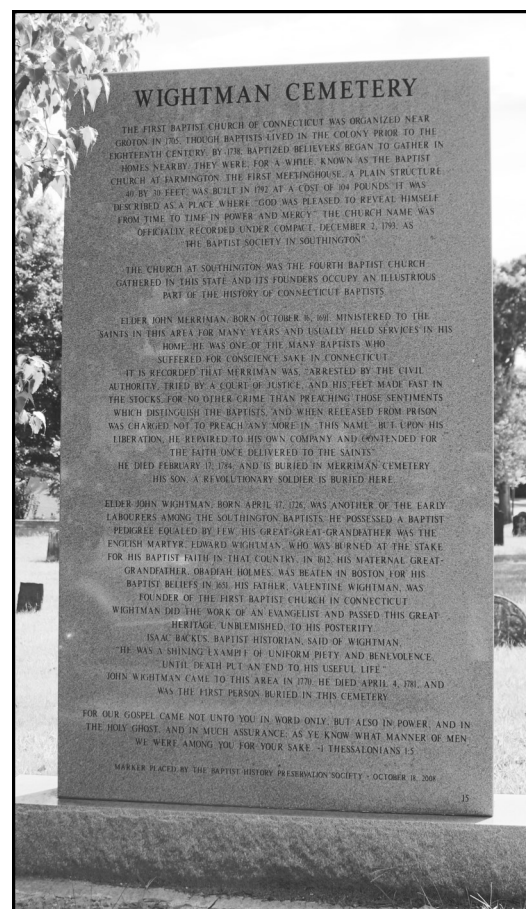
Stephen Gorton, the pastor of the New London Church, left his church (in disgrace) and moved to Southington in 1779. Gordon conducted meetings in the Merriman home and began a visitation program that drew a larger following. The first Baptism was said to have been that of John Neal in 1781 by Stephen Gorton. Based on information written by Timlow, Gorton used his influence in circulating very erroneous views and was proficient in the art of deceit.



After being exposed by Rev. Hurlburt, a

Left: Rev. Wightman's grave

pastor in Berlin, he was deserted by his followers and the location of his burial is unknown.



Our Nation, Our World 1738 - 1787

1738: Ethan Allen, future Revolutionary War hero and key founder of the Republic of Vermont, is born in Litchfield, Conn.

1741: A boulder in Plymouth Harbor, Mass. is identified as the exact spot the Pilgrims landed 121 years before.

1743: Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and the third U.S. president, is born.

1750s: The earliest systematic instruction of guide dogs, as helpers of the visually impaired, takes place in a Paris hospital for the blind.

1755: A devastating earthquake hits Lisbon, Portugal, kill-

ing as many as 50,000 people. The city has to be rebuilt.

1760: New York City, with a population of 18,000, surpasses Boston to become the second-largest city in the American colonies. Fifty years later the population is 202,589.

1765: American colonists refuse to pay the Stamp Act tax.

1772: Great Britain abolishes the slave trade.

1778: The English explorer Captain James Cook becomes the first European to discover the Hawaiian Islands when he sails past the island of Oahu.

1784: John Wesley charts the first Methodist Church in the United States.

During this 50-year time period, industry was growing. By 1790, Southington had a button factory, saw mills, a brass foundry, and potash works.

1788 – 1837

It was only a little more than 50 years after our founding that Baptists were able to enjoy religious liberty with the passage of the First Amendment to the Constitution (Dec. 15, 1791).

According to the American Baptist Church history, “By 1790 there were 35 Baptist associations, and approximately 560 ministers, 750 churches and 60,000 members in the United States.”

In 1792, our first meetinghouse was built on a small hill on the corner of what is now the intersection of Center Place and Center Street. The following year, a formal compact was written and signed by 25 men and incorporated by the General Assembly as the Baptist Society of Southington. From 1790 to 1795, membership increased from 25 to 61 people.

By the early 1800s, the Baptist presence in Southington weakened. There are limited records available from a 60-year period. Few worship services were held, church members were too poor to be able to afford a minister and the condition of the meetinghouse deteriorated and it became unusable.

From 1800 to 1816, the church went by several names including the Farmington and Southington Church and in 1816 became the Southington Baptist Church. It is not known if there was a seated pastor for a period of 12 years until 1815 when Rev. David Wright took that post. He preached in Southington and also at a Kensington church. There is no record of a pastor from 1819 to 1827.

The Rev. Irenus Atkins seemed to revive interest in the Baptist denomination in town. A new meetinghouse was built in 1833 on North Main Street across the street from the Center Street end of the town green. Another site located four miles north had also been proposed but the location downtown was ultimately selected. In spite of fluctuations in membership and activity, the church maintained its presence. By this time members numbered 186. There were also some years where it appears there were no pastors serving the church in Southington.

Our Second Century Begins: 1838 – 1887

During this 50-year span, the church had 19 pastors. After Elder Irenus Atkins resigned in 1839, “the church entered upon a period of trial that thoroughly tested and sifted it – that it escaped utter dissolution was owing to Divine Protection,” according to “Timlow’s Sketches of Southington.”

Our Nation, Our World 1788-1737

1789: On September 25, 1789, the first Congress of the United States adopts 12 amendments to the U.S. Constitution - the Bill of Rights.. Ten of these amendments, including the First Amendment declaring freedom to exercise religion, are ratified in 1791.

1796: On May 14, 1796, Jenner takes fluid from a cowpox blister and scratches it into the skin of James Phipps, an 8-year-old boy. The first vaccine ultimately is a success.

1800: The Library of Congress is established and opens in 1802 with 964 volumes and nine maps.

1804: Meriwether Lewis and William Clark lead the Corps of Discovery, traveling nearly 8,000 miles over three

years to reach the Pacific Ocean.

1811: Born in 1811, Harriet Beecher Stowe, an abolitionist, is best known for her novel, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which depicts the life of enslaved African Americans. She lived in Hartford, a neighbor of Mark Twain.

1818: Born a slave in 1818, Frederick Douglass escapes at age 20 and went on to become a prominent American abolitionist, author and orator.

1824: Frenchman Joseph Nicephore Niepce is the first to succeed in photographing an image in 1826. Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre claims the credit for himself.

1825: After two years of work, the Erie Canal opens,

(Continued on next page)

From 1839 to 1848 the church had six pastors, with a membership of 186. During the pastorate of the Rev. Edward C. Rogers (1839-1840), the church became fractured and the minister and followers met in the Episcopal Church and later built a Unitarian meetinghouse.

In 1849 - without a pastor - there were serious inquiries as to whether the meetinghouse should be closed, however the decision was made to make one more effort to keep it going. The Rev. Daniel Robinson became the new pastor, and during his time 87 new members joined the church and debt was removed.

The women of the church were extremely active, sewing societies were organized and met weekly. They made overalls which were put in factories for sale. All church activities were well attended, missionary societies were set up. There was a service at 10:30 a.m., Bible at noon, 15 minutes for lunch, and then the afternoon service would be held. A prayer service was held at night. Rev. Robinson resigned in 1853

Between 1854 and 1864 there were eight pastors. During the pastorate of Rev. Joshua Fletcher (1857-1862, 100 people were added to the congregation. There is a story told that he was quite long in his prayers. One particular Sunday, a young boy peeked through the front door and whispered to Deacon Cook, in turn he whispered to his wife and so it began within a few minutes everyone had left the church, much to the surprise of Rev. Fletcher when he looked up from his prayer. The news was that the Peck-Smith Factory was on fire and all had fled to help.

It was recorded in a 1976 church history, "There was such a high wind that many nearby buildings were set on fire by the flying sparks and grass fires were kindled way up North Main Street ... The fire raged so furiously that window glass in the factory melted like maple sugar and spun itself in little threads which floated long distances through the air." Some of the men were able to gather up the books and papers in the church office and put them into barrels.

The building burnt to the ground, and this affected nearly everyone in town, as many worked there and others had financially invested in the company. The company promised to rebuild and within a year reopened.

Rev. Andrew Freeman was pastor from 1864 through 1873, and during his time 166 new members were added. In 1865, a baptistery was installed and 23 were baptized the first day of its use. Prior to that baptisms had been performed in Stow's Pond, which was located between Southington and Plantsville, Stow's Pond was created for supplying power to Pexto and was done with some dams and waterways. The dams were later removed to help control mosquitos and the river straightened as a public works project.

In 1868 substantial renovations of the church building were accomplished. Two stories were added to the rear of the building for prayer meetings and Sunday schools. A winding staircase led to the second floor and both

(Continued from previous page)

connecting the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean via the Hudson River.

1830: In 1830, Joseph Smith founds the Church of Christ – later known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – in Fayette Township, N.Y.

1836: The Battle of the Alamo occurs over a 13-day period in San Antonio, Texas. All the Texan defenders – including Davey Crockett – die.

Our Nation, Our World 1838 - 1887

1840: On Jan. 19, 1840, during an exploring expedition, Captain Charles Wilkes sights the coast of eastern Antarctica and claims it for the United States.

1844: Developed in the 1830s and 1840s by Samuel Morse (1791-1872) and other inventors, the telegraph revolutionizes long-distance communication. Morse also develops a code using dots and dashes and sends his first telegraph message in 1844 from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore.

1845: The United States Naval Academy opens in Annapolis, Maryland, with 50 midshipmen students and seven professors.

1849: During the Gold Rush of 1849, tens of thousands of people flocked to California to seek their fortunes mining gold. A local history book states approximately 12 hopeful prospectors were from Southington.

1861: The American Civil War, also known as the War Between the States, begins in 1861 and continues until 1865.

1865: President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated on April 14, five days after the Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrenders.

rooms were heated by pot belly stoves. Renovations were also made to the front entrance and the sanctuary. The building took the form that remained for the next 89 years.

To aid in paying for these improvements, a unique quilt was made with more than 1,100 names and other designs embroidered upon it and was it auctioned off at the annual meeting. A complete description of it is in the notes of the Ladies Aid, written by Eunice Mackenzie who gave it into our keeping. It is treasured and shown on special occasions.

In 1872, 42 members withdrew to form the Plantsville Baptist Church on Grove Street. In the 1900s, Plantsville Baptist closed and some of the members came back to First Baptist. Faith Living Church, a non-denominational church, now occupies the building on Grove Street.

During the pastorate of the Rev. George Nichols (1881-1887) who was ordained at First Baptist, a pipe organ was given by R. A. Neal and installed in the choir loft. This organ had to be pumped by hand and for some years this was done Freeman Judd who was paid \$2 per month. A few years later, a stained glass window was put in this area in Mr. Neal’s memory.

In 1883, there was a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the church building.

1888 – 1937

There is no information recorded during the pastorate of the Rev. E. J. Bosworth (1887–1890).

The Rev. John Breaker (1891–1899) saw the purchase of the first parsonage, located at 176 W. Main St., in 1891. Records show the church rented a parsonage before that time. In 1893 it was reported that all programs were doing well and growing in member ship. Some of the programs were Prayer meeting, preaching service, Bible school, Young People’s Society and the Mission school.

In 1895, a Boys Mission Band and a Girls Mission Band were organized and raised money to support a child at the Kodiak Mission. There was also a Sunday school class raising money to support a Bible teacher in Japan.

During the ministry of the Rev John Stubbett (1899-1902), in 1900, stained glass windows were added to both the north and south sides of the sanctuary, each given in memory of a loved one. The census of the church had declined. Church membership was increasing by 1904 and the church was financially solvent under the Rev. Walter V. Gray (1902–1910).

In 1906, we have a record of the first bill paid for electricity of \$188 for the installation and lighting fixtures.

During the first pastorate of the Rev. Leonard F. Requa Jr. (1912-1917) a mission of Italian families was begun. The preaching was in their native language, and the parents of the many Italian families who have made great contributions to the leadership and spiritual growth of our church were participants in that mission.

Southington resident Marcus H. Holcomb served as governor of Connecticut for three terms from 1915-1921. Their home was located near the town green and is now the Masonic Lodge. Prior to his election as governor, he was a Southington probate judge, attorney general and judge of the state Superior Court. He and his wife Sarah were members of First Baptist Church where he was Sunday School Superintendent. Their only son Marcus H. Holcomb II died in infancy and Sarah died in 1901.

The Rev. Grover Cleveland Laudenslager (later modified to Lauden) (1917–1927) created a strong and aggressive program to missionary endeavor and religious education. He placed special emphasis upon the work

<u>1869:</u> The Central Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroad	can American ever to sit in Congress.
Companies meet at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869, thereby completing the transcontinental railroad.	<u>1878:</u> In 1878, Thomas Alva Edison focuses on inventing a safe, inexpensive electric light to replace the gaslight.
<u>1870:</u> Hiram Rhoades Revels, a Republican from Natchez, Mississippi, is sworn into the U.S. Senate, becoming the first Afri-	<u>1885:</u> Two inventors: Karl Friedrich Benz and Gottlieb Daimler file patents for the first motor vehicles on the same day.

among young people and the Boy Scouts. *[Editor's note: Boy Scout Troop 17 is still affiliated with our church today.]*

In 1917, the church lobbied the state legislature to close all breweries, distilleries and saloons.

The church continued all their programs and remained very active in civic matters. In 1919 there was a Student Aid Fund started to aid those preparing for the ministry. The church was also active in Red Cross work and relief work in many counties around the world.

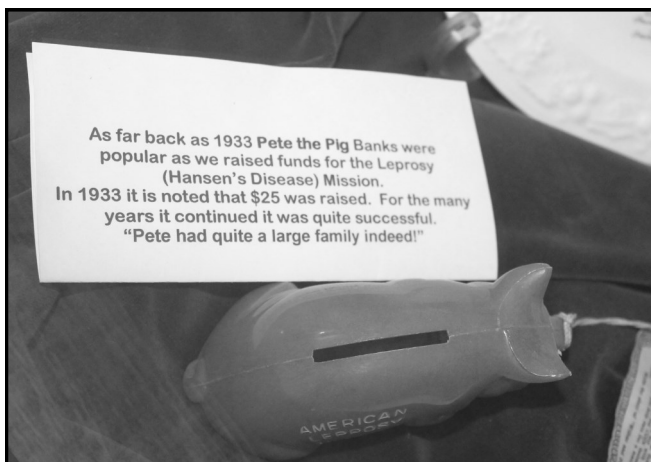
In 1921 a new addition was added to the church which provided much needed facilities. There were two weeks of Evangelistic services held during 1923. This brought many persons to Christ. Twenty six were baptized on Easter Sunday 1924.

Rev. Requa Jr. was recalled for the years 1927 –1940. The church continued to grow and support the community and missions. Then starting in the 1930s, the church was feeling the effects of the Great Depression and

things became more difficult, caring for local needs and missionary giving. But with the leadership of the minister, everyone pulled together and they were able to fulfill their commitments. They also managed to do some much needed renovations to the church building.

Former governor Holcomb died in 1932 and the funeral service was held at First Baptist Church, conducted by Rev. Requa. The funeral was attended by numerous state dignitaries. He was buried beside his wife and child in

A Pete the Pig bank is on display in the case in the narthex near the church office.



Our Nation, Our World 1888 – 1937

1888: The National Geographic Society is founded in Washington, D.C.

1901: Connecticut becomes the first state to pass a speed limit law, which limits the speed of motor vehicles to 12 mph in cities and 15 mph in the country.

1910: William D. Boyce founds the Boy Scouts of America.

1914: World War I begins on July 28 and continues until

November 11, 1918.

1921: On July 29, Adolf Hitler becomes the Fuhrer of the Nazi Party.

1925: In May, John T. Scopes is indicted for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution.

1929: The U.S. Stock Market crashes, triggering the Great Depression.

1932: On March 25, *Tarzan the Ape Man* opens with Olympic gold medal swimmer Johnny Weissmuller in the title role.

Oak Hill Cemetery.

In 1933, in spite of the hardships caused by the Great Depression, a new carpet was laid in the sanctuary among other enhancements.

A memorable all-day celebration was held in October 1933 to mark the 100th anniversary of the church meetinghouse.

In March of 1935, the church sent a letter to Gov. Wilbur Cross opposing the Pari-Mutual Gambling bill. So much opposition was voiced by the Christian Community the governor did not sign the bill.

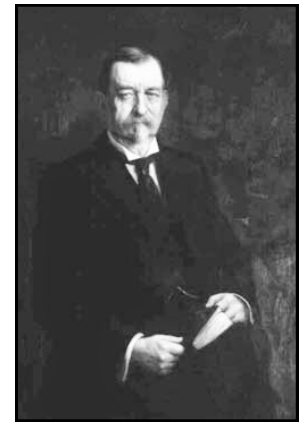
We Enter Our Third Century: 1938 – 1987

These were momentous years – both for our country and for the world.

The country participated in three wars – WWII, the Korean War and the War in Vietnam, recovered from the Depression, saw a resurgence in civil rights for African Americans and women, experienced the assassinations of three national leaders, and grew with the baby boomers through significant social changes.

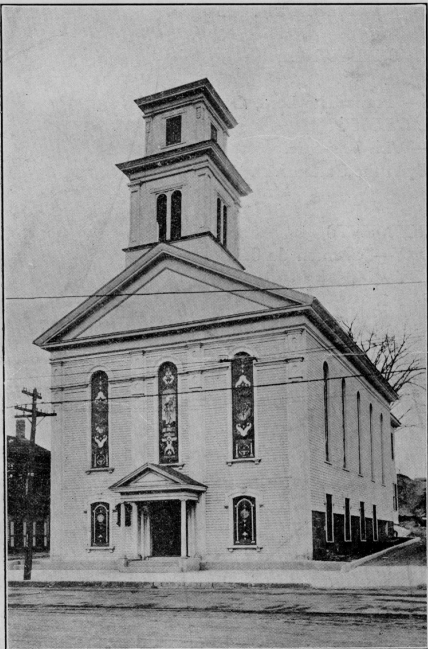
In 1939, deaconesses were elected for the first time for one-year time terms. This action made headlines in the newspapers. The following year, Rev. Requa resigned and retired. The resolution read in part, “Mr. Requa was not only loved by this church, he was respected in our community. Our townspeople will feel they have lost a man of God, one whose presence upon our streets was an inspiration to all who met him.”

On October 2, 1941, the efforts to incorporate



Governor Holcomb

The One Hundredth Anniversary
Of The
Dedication Of The Present Meeting House
Of The



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
Southington Connecticut

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 1933
WEDNESDAY, NOV. 1, 1933

“I will come into Thy House in the Multitude of Thy Mercy, and in Thy Fear will I worship toward Thy Holy Temple.”—Psalm 5:7

Historic Notes
Baptist Church, Southington

Constituted	1738
First House of Worship Built	1792
Present House of Worship Built	1833
Conference Room and Ladies' Parlor added.....	1869
Auditorium remodeled and Memorial windows given	1900
Kitchen remodeled and two Sunday School rooms added.....	1922

✠

One Hundredth Anniversary Committee

General Chairman	Rev. L. F. Requa
Clerk	Freeman M. Judd

Special Committees

Sunday Services Rev. Leonard F. Requa	Exhibits Mrs. Lindsay Hutton
Music for Banquet and Reception Mr. and Mrs. Walter Tanner	Flowers World Wide Guild
Sunday Evening Reception Ladies' Aid Society, Mrs. Harry Oxley, Chairman	Church Supper Friendly Circle Mrs. Garfield Jones, Chairman
Publicity and Invitation Miss Marion Hutton Miss Helen Wood Fremont Jones	Pageant Miss Eunice MacKenzie Mrs. Howard Smith Miss Eleanore MacKenzie Mr. Louis Wood Mrs. Samuel Cook
Transportation Mr. Lindsay Hutton Mr. Frederick Fuhrman	

Other Members of General Committee

S. H. MacKenzie	Mrs. Thomas Hartson
Miss Fanny MacKenzie	Mr. Harry Wallace
Miss Viola Hurlburt	Miss Elizabeth Angelone
Miss Charlotte Duchene	Miss Cora Billington
Miss Evelyn Fergusson	Miss Elizabeth Atkins
Mr. Bruce Lindsay	

“Every house is builded by some builder; but he that built all things is God.” — Hebrews III:4

Left and above, a portion of the 100th anniversary booklet for the dedication of the downtown meeting house.

and consolidate the work of the Society and the Church were finally consummated after 20 years of discussions. The Rev. Theodore Koester (1941-1943) as the pastor was authorized to write the Church Constitution and Bylaws.

During the WWII years, the congregation reached out to the community by opening its sanctuary to the Italian Mission which it had participated in establishing a few years earlier, and by opening its Assembly Hall as a 'Home Away from Home' for any in the community who might need daytime respite. The congregation also sent care packages and letters to soldiers from the community who were serving overseas. A Special Appeals Fund supported various good works and causes including the Grenfell Mission, the American Mission to Lepers, The American Bible Society, the Southington Council of Churches and "a young Burmese boy who was studying for Christian Work."

In January 1946, a call was made to dedicate a Service Honor Roll "for those from the fellowship who answered the call of our country in her hour of emergency." On Sept. 29, 1946, there was a service for the rededication of the church.

A most significant event for our church in these 50 years, as noted in our written histories and as recollected by current church members, was the destruction of the 'old' church on Main Street by fire, and the rebuilding of the 'new' church on Meriden Avenue. The inferno on Jan. 29, 1953 that destroyed 120-year-old First Baptist Church on Main Street is still in the memories of many people who witnessed it.

"I remember that night so very well. It is something that is ingrained in my memory," said Barbara Kitchen Robertson, who was a teenager. "My father had driven me down to the church for our weekly youth choir rehearsal. As we drove up the street, we could see the smoke coming out of the building. Many of my choir mates were across the street. We watched for a while and then the church belfry crashed through the roof into the sanctuary. I just burst into tears and my father took me home."

John Galayda Sr. and his wife Margaret were members of the church, where they had been married. Mr. Galayda, a Southington police officer, and a firefighter ran up the rear fire escape and were able to save some items before the heat forced them from the building.

Most of the beautiful stained glass memorial windows crashed except for two windows, which were recovered and stored in the cellars of two members but they were never seen again.

[Editor's note: The church still has in its possession the Geneva Bible by Elder Merriman in the 1750s, a wooden pillar, a silver pitcher and the great brass bell, all from the downtown church.]

The Main Street Church had seen many marriages, dedications and baptisms. It had had an active choir and supported many social and mission activities. Its sunny upstairs Sunday School rooms had introduced many children to the love of Jesus. The following Sunday and for the next 38 months members worshipped at the YMCA on High Street, setting up the chairs and putting them away again. The Rev. Gordon Deer, our pastor from 1949 to 1955, held youth group gatherings in his parsonage on Oak Street, boards and committees met at

Our Nation, Our World 1938-1987

1938: In April, Action Comics #1 introduces Superman.

1939: World War II begins and continues until 1945.

1947: In April, Jackie Robinson, the first African American in Major League Baseball since the 1880s, signs a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

1950: The Diners Club card, the first credit card, is introduced in New York City.

1958: On January 4, Sputnik 1 falls from orbit and burns up in the atmosphere.

1963: On November 22, President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

1970: The first Earth Day in the United States is celebrated on April 22.

1976: Apple Computer Company is formed by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak in March.

1982: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C., after a march to its site by thousands of Vietnam War veterans.

1986: Space Shuttle *Challenger* disintegrates 73 seconds after launch, killing the crew of seven astronauts.

members' homes while the choir met at the Lewis's, and fundraising for a new church began in earnest. Church member Dick Hutton remembers with gratitude that nearly all the churches in town, as well as town civic groups, contributed money for the new building.

A building fund campaign was organized. Individuals, organizations and churches from throughout the town and state were generous with their assistance and gifts. The Friendly Circle sold plates depicting the old church, strawberry festivals were held, the youth groups had work days, an auction was held as well as other events.

The Lewis family generously donated a tract of land on Meriden Avenue near the intersection of Bellevue Avenue where the new brick church was built in two phases, the last project being the sanctuary. A prayer meeting was held at the new site on New Year's Day 1954.

Groundbreaking for the building took place on February 13, 1955 - a bitterly cold day, according to written accounts - for the first building phase, which included the fellowship hall, kitchen and office, and Sunday School rooms in the basement of the yet-to-be constructed sanctuary. The oldest and youngest members present were among those who took a turn with the ceremonial shovel.

The cornerstone was laid on Nov. 13, 1955 into which were placed letters from several previous members, photos of the former church, a bound copy of the members from 1873, the 1955 Constitution and other items of interest.

The last service at the YMCA was on March 25, 1956. The first worship service at the new church was held in the hall on Easter Sunday, April 1, 1956. The building project continued.



Above, a newspaper clipping from the Meriden Record shows the extensive damage the church sustained. Right, the sign board on the front of the church proved to be prophetic.

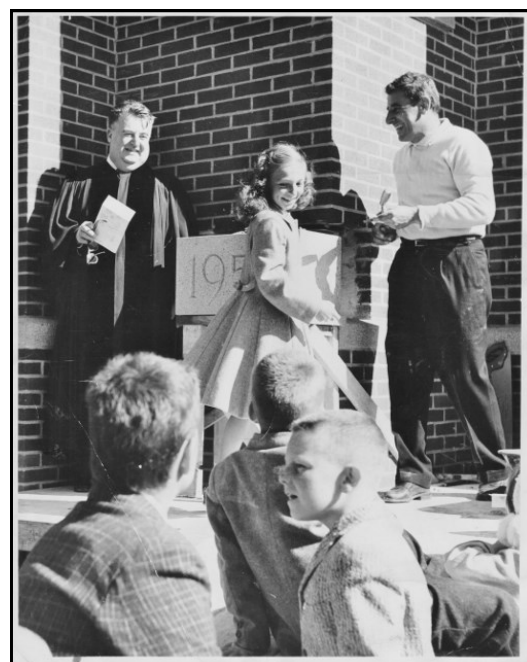


What members remember about those years was the strong sense of community as the congregation both made do with what we had and worked together toward a common goal. Both the Fellowship Hall and the Sanctuary were built with funds and with much 'sweat equity.' Then, as now, this congregation contributed significantly out of its resources, both labor and money. Members sanded and painted the new structures, and then scraped and painted again when ever ceilings, windows or walls needed refurbishing.

On Oct. 18, 1959, a second cornerstone laying



Right: Those involved in the placement of the church cornerstone included the Rev. Alfred R. Bernadt, left, and Diane (Galayda) Gooding, center.



exercise was held and items placed in a box were church documents, photos of the construction and tape recordings of the church choir and the Rev. Alfred R. Bernadt's spoken message.

On March 20, 1960, there were two worship services to dedicate the sanctuary and honor the completion of the church, which was served by the Rev. Bernadt, our pastor from 1956-1973. The sanctuary, including the balcony, was designed to hold approximately 400 people and the choir loft could seat 40 vocalists. The church building, furnishings and parsonage were completed for approximately \$300,000.

In 2010, the Rev. Jerrie Shepard Matney, interim pastor, said on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the sanctuary, "It is always such a joy to celebrate a church's story, even one that comes out of tragedy. While it was a half century ago, First Baptist's identity as a congregation has been in part formed by the fire, and its rebuilding of both the physical plant and the faith community. I think it is one of the reasons that the church today is a strong and faithful witness for Christ. This celebration of past events is a reminder of God's protection in all times, and a source of strength for us as we look to the future."

In the years, since the church has continued to attend to its people and its communities as well as to its building. During this time, the church sponsored a Vietnamese family of nine.

Under the leadership of Rev. Bernadt, the '60s and '70s included many social activities – women's and men's groups, couples clubs and Baptist Youth Fellowship, and even a bowling league. Strong and life-long friendships developed within these congregational activities. The women of the church continued their contributions to Baptist World Missions and Church World Service rolling yards and yards of bandages and knitting baby clothes while they considered wider mission options. Following the death of church member Louise Badgley in 1980, a church library was opened in her memory and it is still in operation.

These years were also years of ecumenical activity and community outreach within the guidance of Rev. Gordon Swan, who was appointed in 1965. Our church participated in the first town-wide ecumenical study groups – studying scripture and their various denominational understandings. Another benefit of these ecumenical interactions was the development of a social action committee, which was the foundation of Bread for Life and the Margaret Griffin Child Development Center. And in the early '70s, a group of ABC Churches began meeting with the goal of establishing a second Baptist nursing home in central CT, and in 1980, Connecticut Baptist Homes was born and a nursing home bought in 1983, a mission we continue to support. Following Rev. Swan, the Rev. Richard Hardy served as interim pastor.

We were blessed by the addition of many members from the Plantsville Baptist Church after that church decided to close in 1986. We have a display of some historical items from the Plantsville church. These faithful

members have greatly enriched our fellowship and our mission in the years that followed. Finally, in the late '80s, the beautiful stained glass window at the front of the sanctuary was installed and dedicated in memory of Mildred Bassett.

The Rev. David C. Strosahl with his young family came to lead First Baptist Church in 1987. He served the church for 23 years, the longest term of any pastor.

1988 - Present

In 1988, the church celebrated its 250th or biquinquagennial anniversary. One of the events was Colonial Sunday when the Rev. Strosahl and church members dressed up in costume. In 1989, the Service of Ordination was held for the Rev. Cynthia Strosahl, wife of the pastor. New red carpeting and matching pew cushions were placed in the sanctuary, courtesy of the Mildred Bassett Memorial Fund.

During 1990, an 8 a.m. worship service was tested in addition to the regular service but was unsuccessful. Rev. Strosahl led a trip to the Holy Land. Church member John Galayda took his first mission trip with First Baptist Church of Wallingford. He subsequently took a total of 18 trips: two to Haiti and 16 to the Dominican Republic. The Rev. Peg Lewis was ordained in our church.

In the 1990s, another time capsule was buried by the Bell Memorial on the front lawn. The carillon was installed, a gift from the Mildred Bassett Memorial Fund in memory of Mildred and Dr. Reuben Thalberg. The Christmas Eve Family Service was cancelled and Candlelight Service cut short because of power outages. In May of 1993, the church covenant was adopted. More than 70 North American Arborvitae were planted on the north and east boundaries of the church property, thanks to several memorial funds. In 1995, First Baptist joined in the community's new Church Softball League with a respectable 8-4 record. A display sign was installed on the front lawn and two new oil tanks were installed under Fellowship Hall.

In 1997, the first Martin Luther King Jr. Community Event was presented. Church member Annett Reid was guest speaker for the event, which was themed, "The Dream Begins with You." A weeknight worship service was tried. "Blue Christmas," a community service for those grieving a loss, was held at Plantsville Congregational Church with the participation of Rev. Strosahl. First Baptist continues to offer the service. Changes were made to the Constitution and the steeple was cleaned and painted thanks to a gift from Al Bassett.

In the late 1990s, a new position of coordinator of Children's and Youth Ministries was instated. The church office and pastor's study were completely renovated. Church members made Chrismons Christ ornaments, which still decorate the sanctuary Christmas tree. The George Nelson memorial gift funded the purchase of a grand piano. Artifacts salvaged from the old church were restored.

Our Nation, Our World 1988 — Present

1988: Pan Am Flight 103 from London to New York explodes in midair over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all on board.

1990: Nelson Mandela, leader of the movement to end South African apartheid, is released from prison after 27 years. In 1994 he was elected South Africa's president.

1995: On April 19, 1995, a truck-bomb explosion outside the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, left 168 people dead and hundreds more injured.

1998: President Bill Clinton was impeached by U.S. Congress. The following year he was acquitted.

2001: On September 11, 2001, 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked four airliners and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. More than 3,000 people died including 400 firefighters and police officers.

2005: Hurricane Katrina makes landfall near New Orleans, Louisiana, as a Category 4 hurricane, the worst natural disaster in the U.S.

2008: Barack Obama, our first African-American president, was elected. As the 44th president he served two terms.

2013: The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous speech is recognized and celebrated.

In the early 2000s, the church's main roof was replaced. Due to a severe storm, worship services were canceled on January 21, 2001, the first time worship was canceled in at least 50 years. A consulting firm headed the development of church strategic plans and a new streamlined organizational structure was set in place. On September 11, 2001, a special evening service was held in response to the attacks on America earlier that day. A prayer group was begun. Ash Wednesday services were also introduced.

Church member Bev Tooley organized the first bus trip to benefit the church in 2003. The trip was to see "The Miracle of Christmas." Profits funded new drapes for the sanctuary, parlor curtains and new shades for the hall. In 2013 the trips were still being offered.

The church website was launched in 2005. The pastor's daughter, Sarah Strosahl, was selected to be a member of the American Baptist Church Xtreme Team, the youngest of two 12-person groups selected nationwide. She served in Mexico.

In 2008, the Baptist History Preservation Society placed a commemorative marker at Wightman Cemetery on West Center Street Extension to commemorate the Baptist presence in Connecticut. *(See photo on page 6.)*

The following year, Rev. Strosahl retired and the search for an interim and permanent pastor began. In November 2009, Rev. Matney began her three-plus year term as permanent pastor. In 2011, the church Facebook page was launched. In March 2012, the church celebrated the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the sanctuary. The bell, which dates to 1834, was rung 50 times by church members, including Dick and Virginia Hutton, senior church members.

In summer 2012, five church youth and two adults traveled to the national ABCUSA youth conference "Immerse" to worship and learn with other ABC teenagers. The trip would not have been possible without the support and prayers of our church members.

Also in 2012, church youth Emily Lamy organized Dresses for the Poor, which resulted in sewing more than 50 dresses for girls in the Dominican Republic.

The Rev. Sharon R. Holt was selected as the church's permanent pastor and led her first worship service here on April 7, 2013. She previously was the pastor of First Baptist Church of Methuen, Mass. In late April, First Baptist was recognized by American Baptist Church of Connecticut for its 275th anniversary. Rev. Holt's Service of Installation was celebrated on Sept. 22, 2013.



Five First Baptist Church teenagers and two adults spent five days in Washington, D.C. during the summer of 2012 at an American Baptist Church youth conference, "Immerse."



Rev. Sharon R. Holt during her Service of Installation.

Our Pastors 1751 to Present

The pastors who have served us since our beginning, for whom we have records:

John Merriman (settled in Southington)

	1751
John Wightman	1770-1781
Stephen Gorton	1779-1790
Calvin Hurlburt	1790-1795
Daniel Wildman	1797-1799
Nehemiah Dodge	1799-1802
Eliada Blakeslee	1803
David Wright	1815-1819
Irenus Atkins	1827-1839
Edward Rogers	1839-1840
S.W. Palmer	1841-1842
Andrew Hopper	1842-1843
Samuel Richards	1843-1844
William Pattison	1844-1847
G.W. Dorrance	1847-1848
Daniel Robinson	1849-1853
Judson Clark	1854-1856
A.J. Avery	1856
Julius Bond	1856
Joshua Fletcher	1857-1862
Joseph Barber	1862-1863

N.E. Shailer	1864
Andrew Freeman	1864-1873
A.F. Buell	1874-?
James Wilson	1878-?
George Nichols	1881-1887
E.J. Bosworth	1887-1890
John Breaker	1891-1899
John Stubbert	1899-1902
Walter Gray	1902-1910
Charles Fountain	1910-1912
Leonard Requa	1912-1917
Grover Lauden	1917-1927
Leonard Requa	1927-1940
Theodore Koester	1941-1943
Lewis Hennigar	1944-1949
Gordon Deer	1949-1956
Alfred Bernadt	1956-1973
George Britt	1974-1975
Gordon Swan	1975-1986
Richard Hardy	1986-1987
David C. Strosahl	1987-2009
Jerrie S. Matney	2009-2013
Sharon R. Holt	2013-

Today and the Future

First Baptist Church of Southington remains a vibrant faith community in Southington. As of 2013, we offer Sunday Worship, Sunday School, Baptist Youth Fellowship, Bible Study, the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Event, Mothers Group, Prayer Group, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Breakfast, Penny Auction, Prayer Shawl Ministry and knitting for Special Olympics, support of the Noank Girls Group Home, annual tag sale, Blue Christmas, Penny Auction, Vacation Bible School and Women's Fellowship among many other ministries.

Community groups meet regularly at our church including Boy Scouts, Daughters of the American Revolution and Thursdays Bring Inspiration for people with brain injuries.

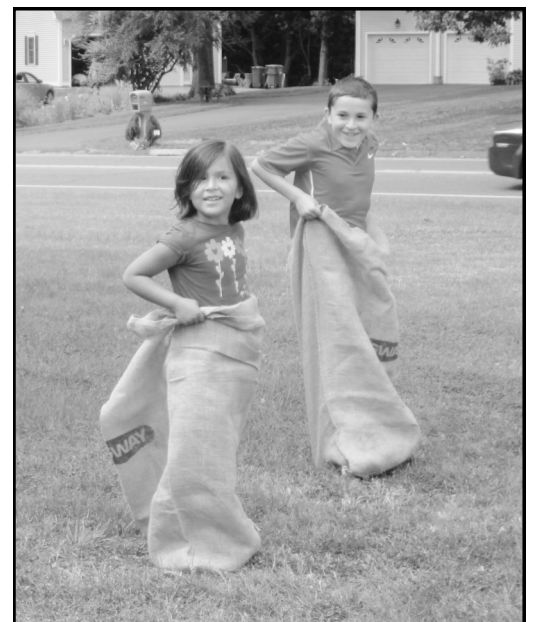
Our ABCUSA offerings include One Great Hour of Sharing, World Mission, America for Christ, and Retired Ministers and Missionaries. We use these annual offerings as a time to educate our congregation on the various purposes to which we are called to support. The church continues to participate in and support community causes such as Apple Harvest Festival, Bells of Hope, Camp Wightman, Church Women United, Church World Service, Crop Walk, Dominican Republic mission trips, Day of Prayer, Interfaith Clergy Association, Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, National Day of Prayer and Good Samaritan Fund among others.

We are excited about the future and know that with the guidance of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, amazing possibilities lie ahead. "With Him, all things are possible."

(Thank you to those many church members who have shared their memories of these years with us and of the special people who have contributed so faithfully to the work of this church community as we have sought to enact the good news of Jesus Christ.)



We extend a special thank you to Connecticut Color in Meriden for their immense role in producing this booklet.



Celebrating 275 Years

September 8, 2013: Rally Day included old-fashioned indoor and outdoor activities, including an intergenerational kickball game, which were organized by the Baptist Youth Fellowship.

September 22, 2013: The Service of Installation was held for the Rev. Sharon R. Holt.

October 2013: The church participated in the 45th annual Southington Apple Harvest Festival by marching in the parade and hosting a booth primarily to let our mission known and share the news of Jesus Christ.

October 20, 2013: Musical History Sunday featured worship songs throughout the 275 years.

November 10, 2013: The 275th Anniversary Banquet was held at the church.

