

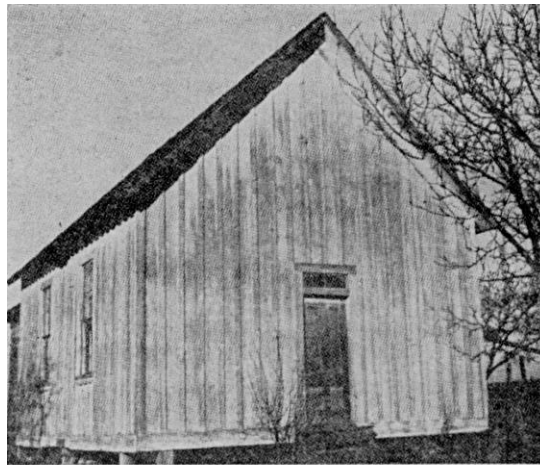
## Bethany Baptist Church

1879-Today

### 141 Years of Ministry

*“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”—Hebrews 13:7-8*

In Switzerland during the late 1800's, a small group of earnest believers began to hold services in private homes. While they still supported the state-sponsored churches (as required by law), they also supported their own pastors and evangelists. Johann Graf was one of these preachers. While traveling his assigned field in Canton Bern, Switzerland, he met a man named Samuel Siegenthaler, in whose home services were being held at the time. Siegenthaler and Graf emigrated to America with their families, and within a short time 10 other families came as well, with the hope of a better economic future and religious freedom.



Original church building, erected 1881.

Most of these families settled in rural Washington County, Oregon. After selecting a piece of land, these “Schweitzers” began literally carving their log houses, barns, and fences from the lush emerald forests, clearing land for their crops, and planting churches. What these families valued most was their freedom and privilege to worship the Lord according to their beliefs. They believed in baptism by immersion, communion, and Bible study in their own language.

On June 22, 1879, some of these Swiss families met in the home of Ulrich Gerber to discuss and pray about establishing a new church. Bethany (German) Baptist Church was officially established on that day with 18

charter members. They secured five acres of land, and on Christmas Day in 1881, the first chapel was dedicated. This simple, one-room structure still stands on the north side of our current sanctuary and is still used for prayer time and Bible studies. In 1890, the church had outgrown this building so they built a second structure.

During World War I, Bethany Baptist Church (BBC) celebrated its 25th anniversary. This was a time that posed a cultural challenge to many at BBC, since they were German-speaking, which was not looked upon favorably. There was even debate concerning the use of the German language and the very title of "German Baptist" at Bethany and other churches in the association. Despite these challenges, men in the church faithfully served in the armed forces during the war, and the church continued to grow. By this time, the second building was in need of repair, so the congregation began another building campaign. First, a parsonage, which currently faces Kaiser Rd., was completed in 1923. The third sanctuary building was dedicated on November 11, 1928, a beautiful building with unique, Spanish-style architecture.

Throughout the first-half of the 20th century, the church continued to grow. During the 50's and 60's, various trends became evident, such as population moves to the suburbs, preoccupation with affluence by many, freer access to higher education, and various other cultural movements. Church attendance would fluctuate during that time, but by 1970, membership was at 269. During these years, the church established home Bible studies and canvassed the community. They also held teacher and leadership training courses. Through the vision of Reverend Bernard Fritzke, a very striking new sanctuary (our current sanctuary) was built and dedicated on June 13, 1976.

In 1991, our gym and classroom structure was completed. This has been a tremendous blessing to Bethany and the surrounding community. It has been used for AWANA, Kid's Town (an indoor play park for young children and a gathering place for moms) and athletic outreach ministries. We are fortunate to have a debt-free campus with great potential for future ministry.

Missions has always been a very central part of BBC. We have sent out many missionaries in our 141-year history, including our own sons and daughters and continue to support missionaries around the world as well as locally. Our campus was once a huge landmark surrounded by farmland.

Today, it is surrounded by an affluent, multi-ethnic community of largely un-churched families. There is a shopping center just to the west where the community gathers; our outreach team has participated in many summer concert gatherings, Christmas tree lightings and other events, passing out Bibles and tracts and inviting people to church.

Our three most recent pastors served for 17, 2, and 9 years. Randall Kinnison served from 1988-2005. Chris Johnson served from 2008-2010, and in September of 2011, Jeff Welch began his ministry at Bethany, which continued until July of 2020.

As in the life cycle of many churches, Bethany has undergone some church-splits in its history. One occurred early on, another in the mid-1980's, and the most recent one in 2006. It was a response to sincere concerns over "post-modern", corporate, humanistic trends, and mystic philosophies, which continue to be popular in some theological circles. During that time, Bethany re-affirmed its commitment to the authority of the Bible. This was emphasized with a new constitution which focuses on expository preaching, congregational form of governance, and solid doctrinal teaching.

Though 2020 started like any other year, it has become a challenge unlike any we have ever faced. COVID-19 has changed the face of our world. It has changed everything and forced us to rely on the Lord in a way we likely never have before. For a time, the church had to "leave the building"—and with many churches, that is still the case. From March 15 through the beginning of June, our services were live-streamed. From June–August, we added parking lot services with a new FM transmitter to the live-stream option. It was during that time, that our pastor answered a call to another church. On September 6, 2020, we were able to re-enter our Sanctuary. Our numbers are limited and safety measures are being taken to comply with state guidelines. It is a blessing to have multiple locations on campus where we can safely gather as well as to continue live-streaming and FM broadcasting to our parking lot.

This difficult time has been compounded by two vacant deacon positions (Children and Outreach) and the departure of our youth director. We are, however, blessed with a committed core of lay leadership and members whose desire is to glorify the Lord and to know Him better. We remain deeply committed to finding the shepherd that the Lord is preparing to lead

us into a new chapter. We prayerfully seek the Lord in eager anticipation of how His plan will unfold, both in our local church, our community, and in the world.

