

First Baptist Church of Reading Church and Community Profile

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Our Affirmation of Faith

1. The Bible: We affirm that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God in its original manuscripts. It is true and trustworthy and the final authority for every generation on all matters of faith and right living. All of the Bible is God-breathed, written down by human agents under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is the record of God's disclosure of Himself in history culminating in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Bible is intended by God to serve as a living testimony of his nature, character and plans for history.

2. God: We affirm that there is one living God, the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of the universe. He is all powerful, loving, knowing and wise. His holiness is infinite and perfect and He exists solely for His own glory. He is therefore worthy of our complete reverence, respect, obedience, and love, and our deepest satisfaction is in Him alone. He reveals Himself to humanity as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but without any division in nature or purpose.

3. God the Father: We affirm that God the Father is sovereign over the universe and that He exercises His sovereignty and providence over creation in ways that are perfectly loving, wise and just. His plan for the redemption of the world is revealed fully in His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

4. God the Son (Jesus Christ): We affirm that Jesus is God's eternal Son, fully God and fully man. He is the divine Word. In His incarnation He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to a virgin named Mary. By taking on flesh Jesus became fully human, but without sin, living a life of perfect obedience to God. He died on a cross according to God's plan, making Himself our substitutionary atonement for sin, completely satisfying God's demand for justice. When we surrender to Him in faith His righteousness is imputed (or given over to us) and our sin is imputed (or given over to Him) making intimacy with a just, holy and loving God possible forever. Jesus was raised from the dead in a physical yet glorified body and appeared to his disciples in a completely recognizable way. He ascended bodily into heaven where He now reigns with God as the Lord of history, interceding continuously with the heavenly Father on behalf of those who are His children by faith. Jesus is the only Mediator between God and humanity, i.e., the only way to eternal salvation. One day He will return in power and glory at which time all the world will see and recognize Him for who he is. He will then judge the living and dead and consummate history according to God's holy and eternal plan.

5. God the Holy Spirit: We affirm that the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. He was from the beginning, but He came into the world in a new and dynamic way on the day of Pentecost to glorify Christ. He convicts us of sin, calls us to repentance, invites us to faith, saves us by grace and transforms us over time, while we

are still sinners, into the spiritual likeness of Christ. From the beginning the Holy Spirit inspired men to write the Bible and He illumines the minds and hearts of men and women of faith so they can understand and apply Biblical truth to their lives. He literally lives within believers, lovingly conveying the comfort and power of Christ. The Holy Spirit also gives certain gifts or abilities to believers so they can honor Christ by effectively building God's Kingdom on earth. His residence in the believer is the ongoing inner assurance that he or she is an adopted child of God.

6. Humankind: We affirm that man was created in the image of God by a distinct act and is not merely the culmination of an evolutionary process. Man was created to glorify God by worshiping and serving Him and in so doing to live in perfect relational harmony with Him. However, man in his willful rebellion (original sin) against God irreparably damaged this relationship for all time bringing physical and spiritual death down upon himself, i.e., he succumbed to Satan's temptation and paid the ultimate price. Man's nature is now corrupted, a condition the Bible describes as being "dead in trespasses and sins" and because of this corruption his longing for relational restoration with the heavenly Father cannot be satisfied by his own merit or effort, no matter how zealously applied, but solely by the grace of Jesus.

7. Salvation: We affirm that the Bible teaches there can be no atonement for sin apart from the sacrificial shedding of blood and that the only perfect sacrifice for sin was Jesus Christ whose shed blood on the cross is sufficient to cover all sin for all persons who truly submit to Him in faith. This submission begins with an honest recognition of man's sinful condition and is characterized by repentance, a deliberate turning away from sin in the direction of Christ. The Bible refers to this turning as being "born again". Theologians call it spiritual regeneration and it is a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. A born again believer is justified before God because Christ's righteousness covers his sin. In this way the sinner is saved, i.e., his relationship with the Father is rescued or restored. Once a believer is saved the Holy Spirit gradually transforms his inner character into the likeness of Christ's character, a lifelong progression called sanctification and a process the Bible refers to as "working out one's salvation". Glorification is the culmination of the salvation process. It is the final, complete and perfect makeover of the believer into the spiritual likeness of Jesus. It is the indescribable blessing that awaits all believers in heaven.

8. The Local Church: We affirm that the local church is a gathering of women and men who are committed to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and who are bonded to each other by His love into a covenant community. In the New Testament the church is described metaphorically as the body of Christ with Jesus as the head. Its purpose in the world is to serve as Jesus served when he physically dwelled on earth, declaring and demonstrating the rescuing nature of God to all who are lost in sin and suffering. The church does this with the hope, prayer and expectation that those who don't know Him, i.e., the lost, will see in their efforts the exquisiteness of God's transforming love and

through the power of the Holy Spirit be drawn to saving faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The church is more than an organization. It is a living organism, a spiritual family comprised of persons who have promised God that they will work diligently to worship together, love each other, grow in faith, serve their neighbors in the name of Jesus and proclaim the good news around the world.

9. The Christian Life: We affirm that the Christian life is more than simple belief in Jesus and more than moral goodness. It is a loving, joyful and obedient submission to Christ's commands, a demanding challenge that involves the daily surrender of personal comfort and self-preoccupation in the service of others, particularly those with demonstrative need. We affirm what Jesus taught, namely, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." The Christian life can only be carried out faithfully by dependence on the inner strength of the Holy Spirit, the counsel and correctives of the Bible and the support of a believing community of faith. The Christian life is referred to as personal discipleship and is best described as "growing in the spiritual likeness of Christ". It is characterized by prayer, good works and sacrificial acts of kindness directed not just toward the lovable, but also the unlovable, the unloving and the unlovely. The Christian life glorifies Christ, not self and serves as a visible expression of God's transforming love.

10. Baptism and the Lord's Supper: We affirm that Christian baptism is an outward symbolic act representing the inward spiritual cleansing from sin that occurs when a person professes faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Baptism is an ordinance (i.e., a decree) of the Lord and should be carried out subsequent to a profession of faith in Him. Our Lord commanded that Christians "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." Baptism is therefore a matter of obedience, a testimony to the believer's death to sin and resurrection to a new and Godly way of life. We do not practice infant baptism, but we recognize and affirm that many born again, biblical Christians believe in the legitimacy of infant baptism, understanding it not as a sacramental act that effects salvation, but as a sacred act that introduces a child into the covenant community of faith. Jesus himself was baptized, not because of sin, but as an initial public testimony to His complete identification with sinful humanity, culminating in the cross. Because Jesus was baptized publicly baptism ought to take place in the context of a believing community where it serves as a joyous expression of personal witness. Immersion is our preferred mode of baptism since the Gospels suggest that Jesus was baptized in this way.

We affirm that the celebration of the Lord's Supper or Communion is also an act of obedience (i.e., an ordinance or decree) to a command of Christ who said, "...do this in remembrance of me". It is a reminder of the shed blood and broken body of Christ on the cross, a death he endured for the remission of our sins. When believers receive the bread and cup, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit we enter into spiritual union with the Lord and with one another, united as one body by his sacrificial love. The

Lord's Supper is also an earthly preview of the glorious oneness with Christ that will be ours when believers from every nation, tribe and language come together in heaven at the so-called messianic banquet.

11. Evangelism and Missions: We affirm that it is the privilege of every Christian believer and every Christian church to "make disciples of all nations..." Done rightly this is not an act of duty or obligation, but the response of a loving soul that has truly been saved and transformed by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is an overflow of God's love. As the Apostle Peter said to the Jewish Sanhedrin, "...we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard". We also affirm that the work of evangelism and missions is done both by proclamation and example, i.e., by word and deed and that the outcome of this work is completely dependent on the sovereign power of God's Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul declared, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth". Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. We believe all persons need Christ even though they may not be cognizant of their need. Our vision for evangelism and missions emerges from Acts 1:8, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and to the ends of the earth."

12. Last Things: We affirm that history is under the sovereign control of Almighty God and that in the fullness of time He will send Jesus Christ to earth again, in glory, to consummate His redemptive plan for creation. The exact time and full details of this glorious event are a mystery, but we know by the Lord's own word that He "...will come down from heaven...and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." At the end time Jesus will hold all human beings accountable for their sins. Those who haven't been forgiven will be separated from God for eternity to experience what the Bible refers to as "the second death". However, those who have received Christ's forgiveness will be resurrected to eternal life in their glorified bodies, to remain with the Lord forever.

Our Mission at FBC

Our mission at FBC is to CONNECT with each other; WORSHIP God; SERVE in the church; and REACH the lost. We developed this mission statement during the interim period using the model described in *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Rainer and Geiger, 2011). Through this we desire to bring God glory through making disciples.

Our Culture and Values

At FBC we strive to be:

1. A Christ-Centered Church – It is the person of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). This Christ-centered value is at the heart of who we are and who we are becoming.

“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Colossians 1:18

2. A Bible-Based Church – We value sound theology in our teaching and preaching. We seek to teach God's Word with integrity and authority so that unbelievers find Christ; and we, as believers, mature in Him.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3: 16-17.

3. A Safe Church – We are committed to providing a spiritually, emotionally, and physically safe environment where people can care for and love one another as God's truth and grace become a way of life.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all [people],¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.” Titus 2:11-12

4. A Disciple-making Church – We value and are committed to disciple-making through biblical training and authentic modeling of our lives as active, intentional followers of Christ. Disciple-making training and the formation of new disciple-making small groups has been a core initiative throughout the interim transition.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I

have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28: 19-20

5. A Missional and Serving Church -- We are committed to mission, service, and the declaration of God’s worth to those who have yet to experience the amazing grace of God. The Grief Share ministry is a wonderful example of how FBC has faithfully reached our community by developing relationships to share the knowledge and love of Jesus.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.” Luke 4:18

Our Congregants

The Congregation is generationally diverse in age, economic status, and stage of life. We are predominately a Caucasian congregation with a large senior adult population. The median age of our congregants is 56. We do, however, also have several families with children and youth. As in many congregations today, there are few members in the 20's and early 30's range.

The peak attendance over the past decade of 195 came in 2010. There is a slight pattern of increase from 2005 to 2010 (from 178 to 195) and a slight pattern of decrease from 2010 to 2015 (195 to 159). The biggest decline has come over the past eighteen months after the retirement of a long-tenured pastor. Current attendance averages about 130 on Sunday morning.

FBC understands that we need to reach the younger generation if we are to remain viable and relevant as a congregation. We expect the next lead pastor will play a key role in encouraging a young adult resurgence at FBC.

Our Demographics

The town of Reading has a population of 24,747 and there are 997,237 people living within a 10-mile radius of FBC. The communities of North Reading, Middleton and Andover are to the north; Lynnfield, Peabody and Salem are to the east; Wakefield, Stoneham and Woburn are to the south; and Burlington, Wilmington and Billerica are to the west. The greater Reading area has a projected 5 year (2016-2021) growth rate of 4.3 % or 42,765 people (PerceptGroup, Ministry Area Profile, 2016).

Reading tends to present a rather secular climate with 39% having no religious affiliation. 46% are Roman Catholic while only 3% are evangelical. Reading is clearly a mission field from an evangelical standpoint. According to a recent Gallup poll, New Hampshire and Vermont have the lowest level of church attendance in the country with only 24% attending weekly, or almost weekly, services. Massachusetts is not far behind.

The New England region has been and continues to be heavily Roman Catholic, but many Catholics do not attend Mass regularly and are searching. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of Catholics has decreased and the "unclaimed denomination" has increased, both by about 10%. The number of mainline Protestants has decreased while evangelical Protestants have increased slightly.

FBC is largely compatible with the community in terms of types of jobs, income and education. It is well matched to the community and area in the 45 to 64 age range, but is short on younger adults and long on senior adults. The church has twice the percentage of seniors (40%) as the community (19%). The most plentiful group in the community and area are young adults under 45. Forty is both the average and the mean age of the surrounding community.

Our Governance Model

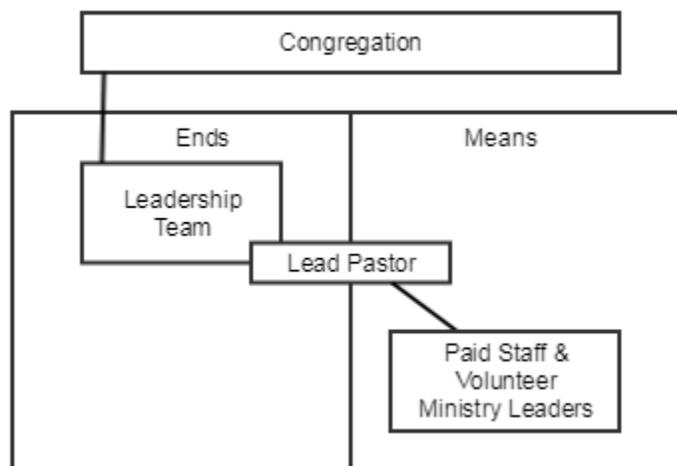
During the interim period, we began to practice a model of governance called policy governance which is adapted from *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* (Malphurs, 2005). This model separates governance from implementation.

Under God’s authority and loving care, the leadership team is responsible for determining the doctrine, direction and discipline in the church. The leadership team sets the vision and policies (called “ends”) that the church is working to achieve. The lead pastor is a voting member of the leadership team, but does not lead it.

The lead pastor is given the responsibility for implementing the vision and policies set by the leaders (called “means”). He does this through the paid staff and volunteer ministry leaders. The pastor can use any reasonable means that are consistent with the policies.

An organizational view of how this works is shown below. Note that the Lead Pastor has the authority to organize the church staff as he deems appropriate.

FBC Policy-Governance Based Organizational Chart



- **Congregation:** The congregation affirms members of the Leadership Team.
- **Leadership Team:** The Leadership Team, on the left of the figure, is made up of the lead pastor and other leaders from within the congregation.
- **Staff and Volunteer Ministry Leaders:** Those who can recruit, train, deploy, monitor, and nurture teams of ministry personnel are considered “staff” in this model. This

includes paid pastoral staff and any other volunteer ministry leader who oversees ministry within the church. Paid staff are hired by the lead pastor in large part by their ability to train and equip ministry teams (Eph 4:11-12).

This model allows the shepherding, ruling, teaching, and serving functions of church leadership to effectively and efficiently take place in the church where “ends” leadership roles and “means” staff roles are clearly defined and distinguished.

Our History and Future

The church was founded in 1832. The first meeting house was built in 1836, and the church called its first pastor in 1837. The church moved to its present location in 1883. The current building was constructed in 1967 after a fire destroyed the old church.

Since its founding, twenty-seven pastors, several associate pastors and an assistant pastor have served the church. Our long-term pastor Dr. David W. Reid arrived to serve First Baptist Church during the infamous blizzard of '78. After nearly 38 years of service, Dr. Reid retired in June 2016. The church subsequently conferred upon Dr. Reid the honorary title, Pastor Emeritus. In the spring of 2018, the front entrance of the church's narthex will be renovated in honor of Dr. Reid's many years of dedicated service to First Baptist Church.

During Dr. Reid's tenure Dr. Lorrie Comeford came to FBC as a mentored ministry student in 2005. The church hired her as an assistant pastor in 2008 and ordained her to the gospel ministry in 2009.

Since Dr. Reid's retirement, the church has been served by an Intentional Interim Pastor from VitalChurch Ministry. VitalChurch conducted an extensive all church ministry diagnostic assessment in September 2016. The role of the Intentional Interim Pastor has been to aid the church in the implementation of the diagnostic recommendations.

The vision of FBC is to make, encourage, and equip followers of Jesus to share God's grace and love to our larger community through authentic relationships, loving service, and outward focused ministries. We can already see this happening around us in some measure through the building of prayerful, intentional, innovative, and relational bridges to the families served by Grief Share, Awana, VBS, Thanksgiving baskets, Operation Christmas Child, boxes sent in support of military personnel and Reading community services such as the food bank.

Denominational Affiliation

About 10 years ago, the church reassessed our longstanding association with the American Baptist Churches, and concluded that it was no longer aligned with our statement of faith. FBC therefore left the American Baptist Churches in 2010.

We then evaluated several denominations that were active in our area, and affiliated with Converge Worldwide (formerly known as Baptist General Conference) in 2012.

Our Ministry Evaluation

In the summer of 2016, the congregation rated satisfaction across ministry programs as part of an assessment done by the VitalChurch Diagnostic Team. Here are the results:

Ministries	Rating
Vacation Bible School	89%
Music Ministry (worship services)	85%
Children's Ministry	83%
Grief Share	83%
Senior Adult Ministry	81%
AWANA	81%
Youth Ministry	78%
Sunday Worship Service (overall experience)	78%
Sermons	77%
Sunday Greeters/Ushers	77%
Audio/Visual (worship services)	76%
Reading Baptist Day School	74%
Caring Team	74%
Small Groups	74%
Prayer Ministry	73%
Family Event Ministry	71%
Internet Technology (Website, e-News, etc)	70%
Daniel House Services	69%
Newcomers (inclusion of newcomers)	69%
Properties and Operations (Facilities/Church Services Team)	69%
Adult Sunday School	68%
Missions	67%
RCTV broadcast	66%
Church Life Ministry	64%
Men's Ministry	63%
Women's Ministry	58%
Outreach	50%
College Ministry	40%
Average	72%

Our Day School

The Day School was established in 1961 to provide preschoolers from Reading and surrounding towns with a high-quality pre-school education and social development program. The emphasis is on learning in the context of a loving environment. Currently, the school serves approximately 60 children from many cultural and faith traditions, and features a teaching staff of six certified teachers with college degrees. The school is not explicitly Christian, but it does have a strong focus on teaching basic Christian values that are consistent with our statement of faith.

The Day School is an outreach ministry of the church; it is not a separate legal entity.

The Dean of the Day School reports to the Leadership team, and is not the responsibility of the lead pastor.

Our Current Staff

Full Time

Intentional Interim Pastor - Rev. Dave Brooks

Part Time

Assistant Pastor - Rev. Lorrie Comeford

Director of Children's Ministries – Mrs. Jessica Binns

Director of Day School – Mrs. Marjorie Gibson

Director of Music and Worship – Dr. Kellie Tropeano

Director of Senior Adult Ministries – Mrs. Sylvia Peterson

Director of Youth Ministries – Mr. Neil Murphy

Accompanist – Dr. Keun Young Sun

Office Manager – Mrs. Michelle Wager