



Ramapo Baptist Church, Oakland

Church Profile 2015-2016

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Ramapo Valley Baptist Church

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Ramapo Valley Baptist Church

A Brief History

In 1958, a local group united to form the second protestant congregation in Oakland. After much debate, they decided to unite with the American Baptist Churches denomination, and were adopted as an outgrowth project by well-established churches in the association. Within three years, the congregation had grown into more than 90 members, and the Sunday school had 150 attending—and they had constructed a church building.

From 1963 through 1971, RVBC showed signs of great potential under the leadership of two energetic, charismatic pastors, Reverends Harry Sink and Bill Griffith. Under Sink's leadership, the congregation canvassed homes in the community, drawing in many unchurched families. As RVBC grew, Sink launched an inspired financial program, "Doors to Tomorrow," which paid off more than 40% of the church's mortgage. Evening programs flourished, including special services and activities for adults, youths, and children. Pastor Sink passed away tragically; he was succeeded by Pastor Griffith, who had come to Oakland during Sink's illness. He instituted several small group gatherings to explore the needs and wishes of the Christian community, while encouraging members to know each other better. His experience as a youth pastor made him a valuable asset to the burgeoning BYF programs.



During the late '60's and early '70's, the church population reflected the fact that Bergen County was a highly transient area. Literally scores of people joined the church while similar numbers departed. Two short-term pastorates between 1972 and 1976 were troubled, as demonstrated by sharp declines in attendance and giving. One of the pastors had suffered a severe heart attack and was unable to maintain his position; the other pastor and the church membership had difficulties communicating. At this time, the church, close to financial collapse, determined it would have to seek a new arrangement.

The interim pastorate of Rev. Stanley Nodder helped the church change direction. Dr. Nodder had served as a dean at a local university, but during a sabbatical leave, chose to enter the field of securities, while serving as a part-time pastor. So successful was his ministry at RVBC that he and the church agreed to have him stay as a bi-vocational pastor. The church built a parsonage specifically for Nodder and his family. A proposed merger with Broadway Baptist Church of Paterson failed to materialize, disappointing Dr. Nodder greatly; RVBC members feared the loss of the church's identity as a relatively small, family-oriented fellowship.

Believing that the church was ready to support a full-time minister after having thrived under the part-time pastorate for 12 years, RVBC hired Rev. Joe Gratzel, a relatively new pastor with much experience with youth ministry. His five years at RVBC were marked by energy and enthusiastic outreach, particularly in support of Camp Lebanon, in assisting in a homeless shelter, in developing innovative worship services, and in hosting creative gatherings for families.

In 1996, Rev. Leo Thorne came as an interim pastor and quickly became a part of the church family. Having served as a Fairleigh Dickenson University's liaison with the minority community in Teaneck, NJ, Dr. Thorne was experienced in keeping groups on an even keel. He proved to be invaluable to ABCNJ in assisting churches in crisis. His meetings with Oakland officials regarding perceptions of racial discrimination led to the establishment of a community-wide Martin Luther King service. The church grew in numbers and diversity as Pastor Thorne—as a bi-vocational minister--led the congregation in the focusing upon a church vision, including the establishment of long-term goals.

Rev. Dick Sharber followed Rev. Thorne in 2002, as RVBC returned to a full-time ministry. His analytical mind and insightful handling of special services were exceptional. He worked to develop small group studies, beginning with "40 Days of Purpose." He worked diligently to help the church's three boards consolidate into a single-board, resulting in better communication among leaders and much more efficiency in the handling of important projects. After Pastor Sharber had served for five years, financial difficulties forced the church to return to a part-time pastorate.

Pastor Herb Dorfman came to RVBC in 2007 as an interim, Pastor, but agreed to stay on as part-time minister. His many years of Christian leadership have been extremely helpful in keeping the church focused and motivated to undertake large projects, even though membership and attendance have gradually declined. He has kept the church in close contact with other area churches in the FLOW area (Franklin Lakes, Oakland, Wyckoff); he has organized "Night of Sacred Music," gatherings of local choirs and soloists sharing their message through song. The church's mission support expanded through our support of OASIS (a support center for individuals and families in dire circumstances); the Center for Food Action (collections of non-perishable items as well as produce grown in a garden created by one of our young men as an Eagle Scout project); the undertaking of several projects to enhance the church building. Through the generosity of the Harry Sink Memorial Fund, we have been able to upgrade our electrical service. Including a new breaker box and several new lines of service; we have also added a new double-door main entrance and a coordinated (in material and design) side door. Other additions have included the gift of a stained glass divider between the altar and the baptistery. When the parsonage had been unoccupied for several years, it became clear that selling it would be the best thing for the church in terms of stewardship. Most of the proceeds of the sale were invested with ABF.

In 2009, Russell Stammer came to RVBC as a "student intern," working on his degree in ministry. After years of service, he joined us as our associate pastor. Complementing the work of Pastor Dorfman, participating in all church activities, and carrying the gospel to the community and beyond as he serves a chaplain to two fire departments.

Music has always been a strong point at RVBC. Our present Minister of Music, Christine Lovette, has carried on this tradition since coming to us in 2001. Under her leadership, the choir has been a source of inspiration in the services. Christine has put together an excellent praise band which leads the praise hymns in our blended service. The playing of John Roy on guitar and J.J. Belle on the bass add greatly to the spirit of our services. The youth choir has been a permanent fixture since 2000, when Laura Belle developed the program. She and Christine have built, with the assistance of some of our choir members, a full-fledged junior chorus, comprised of more than 20 youngsters—both churched and unchurched—from the community. Christine's leadership and courage have been as inspirational as her musical gifts as she has struggled with the effects of Lyme's Disease.

The Ramapo Valley Baptist Church is comprised of a diverse, progressive, family-oriented congregation. Though it may be relatively small in numbers, it is strong in commitment to spiritual growth. It is also dedicated to fostering programs which will help us grow stronger as a congregation, welcoming all believers in Christ.

(Note: Much of the information in this history was borrowed from an informal study written by Rev. Dick Sharber shortly after he began his tenure with RVBC.)

Geographic Area

The Ramapo Valley Baptist Church is located in Oakland, NJ, in northwest Bergen County, approximately 30 miles from midtown New York City. The Borough occupies 8.6 square miles running along the Ramapo Mountains and the Ramapo River. Our community is contiguous to Franklin Lakes and Mahwah in Bergen County and Pompton Lakes, Ringwood, and Wayne in Passaic County. Route I-287 and County Highway 208 provide convenient access to Oakland, and RVBC is within a mile of each of these roads.

While our congregation is predominately from Oakland, we have members/regular attendees from eight nearby communities.

Our community houses four additional Protestant churches: St. Alban's Episcopal, Messiah Lutheran, Ponds Reformed, and the Korean Presbyterian. There are also nearby synagogues. Three Catholic churches--Our Lady of Perpetual Help (in Oakland), St. Mary's (in Pompton Lakes), and Most Blessed Sacrament (in Franklin Lakes) are all quite large and draw heavily from Oakland's population.

Oakland is within easy commuting distance of four state colleges/universities: Ramapo College of New Jersey in Mahwah; William Paterson University in Wayne; Montclair State University in Montclair, and Bergen Community College in Paramus. Fairleigh Dickinson University, a private institution, is located in nearby Teaneck.

Culture

Oakland is a vibrant borough, with three shopping centers in town and several others nearby. There are major malls in Paramus and Wayne, a 15 to 20 minute drive to each. There are several medical practices of many types in and near the community. There are several major hospitals nearby, including Valley Hospital of Ridgewood, St. Joseph's Hospital in Wayne, Hackensack University Medical Center, and Chilton Memorial in Pequannock.

Oakland is blessed with an excellent school system, including three elementary schools and one middle school. Indian Hills High School and Ramapo High School combine to constitute an outstanding regional district; students from Oakland may choose to attend either high school depending upon special courses offered in each.

The borough's recreation offers a wide range of activities for youths and adults. Several sports, crafts, physical training, and musical programs are offered throughout the year.

Recently, Oakland has been recognized twice as an outstanding community: in 2013, New Jersey Monthly Magazine honored Oakland as "Best Place to Live for Young Families." This year, citydescribed.com named this boro #2 among the top 14 small cities in the state.

Accessibility Accommodations

Ramapo Valley Baptist Church has chair lifts which provide access to both our sanctuary and Fellowship Hall. We also have devices for hearing assistance during worship.

What We Believe

Church Mission Statement

Having been led by God to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, the people of the Ramapo Valley Baptist Church believe that we are called into a loving and caring community to glorify God and to reflect the life of Christ in our lives. We are a diverse, family-oriented church committed to spiritual and personal growth through the application of biblical truths. We seek to live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit and dedicated to sharing God's love with others.

Church Covenant

Having been led by the Spirit of God to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and having been baptized according to the command of Christ, we solemnly enter in covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We agree, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to forsake the ways of sin, to walk together in Christian love, to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to refrain from unkind words, and from anything that may bring reproach upon the Christian name.

We pledge ourselves to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, purity of life, and efficiency of service; to work for its prosperity, harmony, and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, and means, as God prospers us, for the support of our Church's ministry in this community and around the world, and to give Christ's church a sacred preeminence over all institutions of human origin.

We also agree to maintain private and family devotions; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further agree to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and, mindful of the rules of our Savior, to secure it without delay.

We moreover agree that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

Our Church Life

Looking at the activities of each of the committees on our single-board will show that while we are a relatively small fellowship, we are very active and productive.

Worship

We are open to varied approaches to worship, both traditional and more modern. Our upgraded sound system allows for extra microphone and instrument inputs. We have purchased a hearing assistance system with wireless headphones. We have shared special services with fire department and EMT volunteers.

Discipleship

Sunday school for pre-K through 5th grade meets during the worship hour. Middle school and adult small classes meet before the worship service. Youth choir is growing each year, reaching out to youngsters in the community. Special music/drama programs are staged for Easter, Christmas, and Rally Day. We participate with local churches in Vacation Bible School. A Bible men's study group meets most Tuesday evenings. Social gatherings for youths (pre-high school) feature pizza and a movie.



Fellowship

We have coffee hours following worship service-- usually once a month. We provide lunch for kids and parents after an Easter egg hunt. We have a Memorial Day picnic on church grounds each year. We celebrate "Dads and Grads" each June. We picnic with members of Paterson's Good Shepherd Mission at least once each year. Pot luck dinners/luncheons are among our specialties. Great cooks make great meals.

Mission Projects

- America for Christ; Cedars of Lebanon 2020
- Retired Ministers and Missionaries
- United Missions
- World Mission Offering (This year we sent money to a missionary family in Nicaragua)
- Good Shepherd Mission
- Oakland Volunteer Fire Department
- Oasis Haven for families in crisis.

Additionally, we donate non-perishable items and canned goods to the Center for Food Action. We also have donated fruits and vegetables to a local food pantry. We also assist members and friends of the church monetarily through our Fellowship Fund; we have recently formed a "Care Team," which provides support for members in need of assistance.

Stewardship

Most of the maintenance in the church is done by volunteers. Through special gifts, we have been able to make several improvements to our building and grounds. Beautiful stained glass panels were installed in front of the baptistery. The electrical system was upgraded, with a new breaker panel and more circuits. A new fire alarm system was installed throughout the building. A Knox box was installed. New emergency signs have been installed. We added chair lifts so that physically challenged members can access all floors. New exterior doors have been installed (more decorative ones for the front of the building, and more utilitarian ones for the kitchen and boiler room entries).

Our Worship Life

Our worship service includes both pastoral and lay participation. A lay person handles the duties of the worship leader, and another lay person delivers the children's message. Our pastor and associate pastor have generally been "moderate" in terms of their sermon content, addressing the divergent religious backgrounds in our congregation. We have always expected the messages to be both biblically based and reflecting upon the spiritual, social, and emotional issues that challenge Christians every day. We look to be guided in our thinking and inspired to spread the word of Christ's boundless love.

We celebrate through music in a "blended service." Following a piano prelude that promotes prayerful preparation for worship, we sing contemporary praise songs, led by our 3-piece praise band and singers. Our adult choir performs an anthem from a wide variety of genres. Occasionally our youth choir, comprised of youngsters from both our church family and the community, will sing in special services.

Each year, we celebrate with special services, marking key events in our Christian calendar: Tenebrae; Palm Sunday; Easter; Christmas Eve; Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial; recognition of firefighters, ambulance corps, and scouts; sharing with Good Shepherd Mission of Paterson. In the spring and winter, our youth leaders direct the youth choir members in musical and dramatic productions. We have also hosted "Nights of Sacred Music," bringing together choirs and soloists from various churches. Our Future

What do we need to be a more healthy and faithful church?

- More people / members.
- A loving and open church that welcomes everyone / Multi-cultural / greater diversity.
- A place where young people want to come / More family oriented.
- More participation/dedication to Christ.

What would this church look like if we find a good pastor?

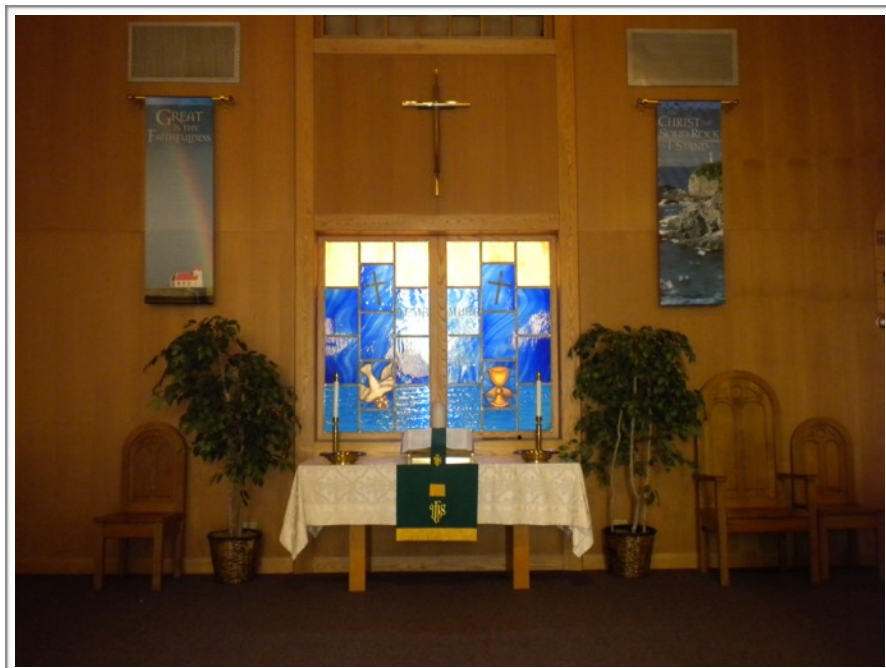
- More members – full attendance at worship services.
- Excited/Enthusiastic/Dynamic/Passionate.
- Church seen as important to the community - Reaching out to community.
- Better Music.
- More friendly and less confrontational.

What ministries do we need to start or strengthen over the next 5 years?

- Build up the youth program.
- Community outreach.
- More family activities.
- Bible studies/Classes exploring spirituality / Women's ministry/clubs / Singles ministry.
- Strengthen the music program.

How does this church decide its vision?

- Prayer.
- Discussion/Sharing to obtain unified visions/consensus.
- Look for opportunities/open doors to witness.



Our Next Pastor

Spirituality

- Knows the Bible
- Strong Prayer Life
- Preaches the Gospel and can apply God's Word to today's issues
- A Pastoral Heart - loves and deeply cares for people
- Spiritually alive – Christ-like, strong faith, genuine, sincere, experienced in sharing the Gospel

Interpersonal Skills

- Friendly / People-Person / Caring and loving personality.
- Sense of Humor / Informal/ Casual/ Approachable.
- Enthusiastic / Outgoing / Self-confident / Optimistic.
- Patient / Compassionate/ Empathetic / Thoughtful / Genuine.
- Great Communicator.

Personal Qualities

- Willing to visit members, shut-ins and people in hospital.
- Administration skills / Organized / Delegates / Maintains office hours / Sets goals / Proactive / Leads by example.
- Great public speaker.
- Experience with youth.
- Good with social media in ministry.
- Clear vision for the church and can articulate it.

Other Qualities

- Bi-vocational/Part-time growing to full-time.
- Dedicated to church growth.

Pastoral Search Committee

- Ruth Barton
- JJ Belle
- Ollie Famiglietti
- Steve Handy
- Christine Lovette
- Ted Odenwald
- Joy Palatucci
- Harry Sink

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