

First Baptist to celebrate 125th, new church facility

Written by Darci Tomky

First Baptist Church of Holyoke is set to celebrate its 125th anniversary and a new church facility during a month-long celebration. Four Sundays in March will feature a 10:30 a.m. service followed by a meal and fellowship at the new church location at 1000 E. Johnson St.

Pastor Gordon Penfold, Associate Pastor Chad Rozelle, Pastor Ismael Lopez and the congregation are excited to see old friends as well as meet new acquaintances from the community.

Sunday, March 3 will celebrate the church's 125th anniversary. Pastor Joe Stewart, who served First Baptist in the 1970s and '80s, will give the message during the morning service. Following the noon meal, a special afternoon program will allow the congregation and visitors to hear memories and stories from the church's 125-year history.



A month-long celebration is planned at First Baptist Church, beginning with the 125th anniversary Sunday, March 3 and ending with the building dedication Sunday, March 24 at the new facility at 1000 E. Johnson St.

The celebration continues Sunday, March 10, when the church will honor first responders and medical professionals, and Sunday, March 17, a day to honor local educators.

The building dedication is set for Sunday, March 24, with special guests including the contractors for the new facility and Holyoke/Phillips County officials and employees. The morning's message will be given by Dr. Paul Borden, director of the Rocky Mountain Church Network.

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In order for everyone to fellowship together on those four Sunday mornings, Saturday night Vintage and Sunday night Vida Abundante will not meet.

Church organized in 1888

Feb. 4, 1888, a small group met at 2 p.m. in the parlor of the Sawyer House (later known as the Sears Hotel) in Holyoke for the purpose of organizing a missionary Baptist church. James H. Turner, Mrs. Sarah Turner, Mrs. Minnie Buel and Rev. D.B. Jacobus offered their names to form the new organization, adopting the New Hampshire Articles of Faith.



The original church structure at 343 S. Baxter Ave. was built in 1893, five years after First Baptist Church was organized in Holyoke.

The church slowly grew, holding their meetings in school rooms, residences, the Methodist church, Grand Army of Republic Hall and Sherman Hall.

Sunday school was first organized Feb. 22, 1891 with George W. Garland elected

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superintendent, a role he served for nearly 40 consecutive years until his death in 1930.

In 1893, according to church records, Pastor J.A. Price said, with hammer saw and plane in hand, “Come, let us arise and build.” After 10 short months, First Baptist’s first real “house of worship,” located at 343 S. Baxter Ave., was dedicated to the Lord, free of debt. The congregation was generous with their money and was not afraid to work.



First Baptist’s second church building was raised on the original site at 343 S. Baxter Ave. in 1928. An education wing was later added in 1961.

This first church structure had four small classrooms while the other classes met in the main room.

In 1894, in what could be the driest year in the history of northeast Colorado, many of the church’s members fell on hard times and were scattered, but the church did not give up and seemed only to be “fired with greater zeal,” according to church records.

A large bell, approximately 36 inches in diameter, was installed in the belfry of the church in 1898. It is still the same bell in the church on Baxter Avenue, and it will soon be moved to the new church on Johnson Street.

During J.T. Jenkins’ pastorate from 1902-10, the congregation no longer had to sit on wooden chairs but now had pews installed—the same pews in the balcony of the Baxter Avenue church

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used up until this year. Also during Jenkins' time, the church was given its first communion set, and a parsonage and barn were built next to the church in 1907.



Rev. J.T. Jenkins served the church from 1902-10, at which time the church purchased pews, the same pews that were used in the former church balcony through this year.

Beginning in February 1928, the old church was torn down and a new one built in its place, with services first held there Oct. 14, 1928. Locals donated a great deal of time, supplies, labor and

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financial support for the 60-by-60-foot Kellastone stucco building with a full basement, 10 classrooms and a sanctuary. It was built at a cost of \$16,000.

After building the new church, many people fell on hard times in the 1930s. Around 1940, the church was left free of all indebtedness by the cancellation of two notes held by Mrs. A.M. Garland and Mrs. Cora Shafer, in what was said to be a note burning party at the church.

During special meetings held at the church in June 1938, young artist John Drawz painted the verse Acts 16:31 on the wall in the front of the sanctuary. Members will also remember the impressive paintings for the background of the church baptistry.

In 1961, First Baptist celebrated a groundbreaking ceremony for the new educational wing, later known as the Fellowship Hall, completed for \$24,500. At this time they also received new padded pews.

In 1974, the church voted to leave the American Baptist Association and join the fellowship of the Conservative Baptist of America and to become part of the Rocky Mountain Conservative Baptist Association.



Members of the congregation at First Baptist Church gather for a picture in the church sanctuary in the late 1940s.

AWANA, or Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed, began in 1983, as a Wednesday night children's program where kids memorize verses, sing songs, play games and hear a short

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message. Jim Pfau served as commander for many years.

October 2007 First Baptist kicked off their contemporary Saturday night Vintage Faith and Worship service.

Vida Abundante, a Spanish-speaking church established in Holyoke in 1997, joined First Baptist in March 2009, meeting Sunday evenings with Pastor Ismael Lopez.

Major ministries over the years have included youth groups, women's ministries, men's studies, vacation Bible school, Christmas programs and Mothers of Preschoolers or MOPS ministry, just to name a few.

First Baptist broke ground July 2011 on a new debt-free \$1.6 million facility at 1000 E. Johnson St. on the southeast edge of Holyoke. The 14,000-square-foot building has spacious rooms with an auditorium that seats 240, fellowship hall, multi-purpose/youth room, classrooms, offices, nursery and kitchen. The first services were held there a month ago, the weekend of Sunday, Jan. 20.

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