

1837-  
2016

# Crooked Creek Baptist Church



A brief history of the church  
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## A Brief History of Crooked Creek Baptist Church 1837-2016

Today, Crooked Creek Baptist Church is located at 5540 N. Michigan Road in Indianapolis, Indiana. It is a historic, long-established congregation in a stable urban neighborhood. The church is attended by people who travel less than a mile, and who travel more than ten, to reach the building, but with the majority living 2-5 miles away. The church is diverse ethnically and in terms of the age of members, as well as socio-economically, theologically, politically, in members' musical preferences, and in a variety of other ways. While this makes it a challenging congregation to lead, our strong sense of unity in our love of and service for God in Christ, and our willingness to listen to and learn from one another, cause us to regard the fact that we embody this aspect of the American Baptist denomination as a whole as a strength rather than a weakness. The church regards its pastor as one who leads above all by teaching the congregation (above all from the Scriptures through preaching), providing vision, and who provides visitation and counselling to those with special needs such as illnesses.

Crooked Creek Baptist Church has been in existence since June 10<sup>th</sup> 1837, when the fourteen founding members came together in a small log schoolhouse to establish a new church in the area which, at the time, was six miles north of Indianapolis. Madison Hume, one of those original members, was chosen to serve as the first pastor, and (with some breaks) he served in that role until 1861. The other founding members were Joseph Watts, Patrick, Jane, and Esther Hume, David and Eliza Stoops, John and Asah Kinsley, John and Rachel Dunn, Samuel and Martha Hutchinson, and Morley Stewart. The last named individual was African-American, and the church has remained a multicultural and diverse community ever since. In 1840, the congregation purchased a plot of ground north of the schoolhouse and built a frame structure for the church to meet in. A second building, erected in 1856, was built across the road (to the north of the present building). This structure was altered and enlarged many times and in numerous ways. In 1887, the church called W. H. Craig as their minister, who was then a student at Franklin College and a licensed minister, and who served the church in a bivocational capacity. Over the course of the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seats, a belfry, and a furnace were added to the church building. By 1909 the church had grown to 133 members, and over the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the church membership would increase further still.



In June of 1935 Franklin Crutchlow, a student at Franklin College, accepted the call to pastor the church and was ordained in the church in September 1937. Our Centennial anniversary was celebrated June 12 and 13 of 1937 and it was determined that it was the appropriate time to consider a larger building for the growing congregation. Ground was purchased south of the old church (where our present church stands) for a price of \$982.50. World War II then stopped all construction, so the new building had to be delayed. A ground breaking ceremony for the new building was held in August 1950 under the leadership of Pastor Louis G. Crafton. Construction started in August 1951 and the cornerstone was laid. On July 19, 1954, a farewell service was held in the old church and on July 25, 1954 the first service was held in the new building with Pastor Crafton delivering the message. The new building was dedicated in October 1954 in a service that remembered the fourteen founders. In March 1955, Rev. Orval Sutton accepted the call to become our pastor. Over the course of the 1960s, an extensive education wing was added to the building, in which at present Sunday school classes meet before worship services, and which during the week houses the Bright Promises preschool, which the church established in 1991.



Rev. Sutton served as pastor across many decades and the church flourished under his leadership. In 1981 Michael Snow came to Crooked Creek as Associate Pastor and Youth Director. Rev. Snow was ordained in the Church on May 16, 1982. In June of 1987, we observed our sesquicentennial, celebrating 150 years of heritage. Crooked Creek Baptist Church is the third oldest church in Marion County, as was noted by mayor William H. Hudnut III when he proclaimed June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1987 as Crooked Creek Baptist Church Sesquicentennial Day. In March 1995, Rev. Orval Sutton retired after 40 years of ministry at Crooked Creek. In April, 1995, Rev. Michael Snow became our new Senior Pastor after serving 14 years as our associate. Under the leadership of Rev. Snow, the church continued to grow and prosper. In January of 1996, Rev. David Brown was called to be Associate Pastor. In 1999, David and his wife Susan felt the call to the foreign mission field. They were commissioned in June of 1999, and served four years as our special missionaries at the Kodiakanal International School in India. The church has also sent out several other missionary families, and supports and retains a close relationship with many more. In 1998 we ranked in the top 50 of over 5,500 American Baptist Churches in the nation in our support of United Missions.

In May of 1999, Crooked Creek called Mike Thompson to be Associate Minister for Youth, Young Adults, and Families. Mike grew up at Crooked Creek and felt God's call to ministry. In November 1999, Rev. Kevin Bengtson was called to be Associate Pastor in Music and Worship. Rev. Thompson was later ordained in the church, and Rev. Bengtson served as interim pastor for a period after the departure of Rev. Snow. During the years 2001-2004, Crooked Creek assisted Dr. Thiaawr Bawihrin, a Burmese pastor who came to study in the U.S., resettle over 100 refugees from Burma in Indianapolis. During that time, Dr. Bawihrin established the Chin Baptist Church for these refugees. In 2003, the church felt led to began a Hispanic ministry. In October, 2003, Rev. Gregorio Serrano was called to this ministry and began meeting as Iglesia Bautista Betesda. This ministry has since united with another Hispanic church in a new location, but a new Hispanic congregation has taken its place and continues to meet on our premises.

On Sunday, August 24th, 2008, the church extended the call to Rev. Tom Bartley to become the senior pastor, and he served in that capacity until the beginning of 2016. During Tom's time as pastor, he oversaw the development of a number of new ministries which emerged organically from the desire of members of the congregation to serve our local community. These included the provision of school supplies to the local Crooked Creek Elementary School, and the beginning of the Manna program which provides a free breakfast on Saturday mornings.

In 1998, Crooked Creek established its current Statement of Purpose. It is as follows:

- To be a Loving and Caring Community of Believers
- To Glorify God Through Personal and Public Worship
- To Lead Others to Christ and to His Church
- To Grow in Christ and in the Knowledge of His Word
- To Show God's Love by Serving Others

Our church is now 179 years old. Some members today have third, fourth, fifth, and sixth generations on the church roll. As an example, a member of our church for 82 years (baptized at 9 years of age) joined the chancel choir at age 14 and only retired from singing in it in 2008. He and his wife are still connected to the church.



In addition to its ongoing American congregation, the building also hosts the services of two immigrant congregations. One is Iglesia Evangelica Cristiana Espiritual, a Spanish-speaking congregation; the other is Grace Tabernacle which is made up of Congolese refugees. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a licensing service was held for Pastor Emmanuel Musinga, who had been ministering to the Congolese congregation at the premises of Crooked Creek Baptist Church for two years at that stage. This marked the entrance of a significant number of Kinyarwanda-speaking Christians who were in

the United States as refugees into the American Baptist denomination. At the service, a combined African choir sang, and the speakers included ABC IN/KY Executive Minister, Rev. Soofi Ford, Area Resource Minister, Jim Walters, as well as Dr. Paul Gitwaza, who is the President of the Alliance of Evangelical Churches in Rwanda, and a close and personal friend to Emmanuel. The service was followed by an authentic African meal in the Fellowship Hall.

The membership of the historic English-speaking congregation is itself diverse, including people from different parts of the country and from other countries. Most members self-identify as white, but the congregation includes individuals who self-identify as African-American, Hispanic, and Native American. It includes people all across the economic and political spectrums – there are members who earn less than \$25,000/year, and members who earn more than \$100,000/year. There are members with very

different theological and ethical viewpoints, to say nothing of different musical preferences. In a workshop that was supposed to identify our core values and bedrock beliefs, we found that the one thing that was a universal for all participants was *grace*. While the pastor at that time, Tom Bartley, had hoped we would produce a longer list, there is something beautiful about the fact that we not only identified the thread that united our theologically, socially, and ethnically diverse congregation, but that the unifying thread is *grace*.

In August 2015, the church undertook some much needed renovations to the sanctuary, including the installation of new carpeting, adjustment of the pews to make accessible space for wheelchairs and other electric vehicles, as well as repainting. Our church building is a two-level stone structure on Michigan Road (Highway 421) in Indianapolis. A separate garage with a porch is also located on the property, which was previously used for parking the church van, when we had one. In 1994 the church purchased an additional five acres immediately north of the property for possible future use, part of which was subsequently sold to allow the development of the property across Michigan Road from the church for commercial purposes. Crooked Creek flows through the church property. The land to the west of the creek is a wooded area which at present is undeveloped, but could be included in future plans. We also have a sand volleyball court and a playground for use by our preschool, Sunday School classes, youth, and young adults. The educational wing contains classrooms on both levels. We have a church library, four offices, a large dining/fellowship hall with adjoining kitchen, as well as the fireside room for smaller meetings which also has a kitchen.

Rev. Bob Yount is currently serving as our interim minister. Under his leadership, we continue to be actively involved in our community and seek to minister to the needs of those around us. We are also actively involved in the life of the American Baptist denomination. We look forward to what God is calling us to do in the years ahead.



Crooked Creek Baptist Church in August, 2016.