

First Baptist Church of San Francisco

Located at Market & Octavia Streets

Mailing Address: 22 Waller Street

San Francisco, California 94102

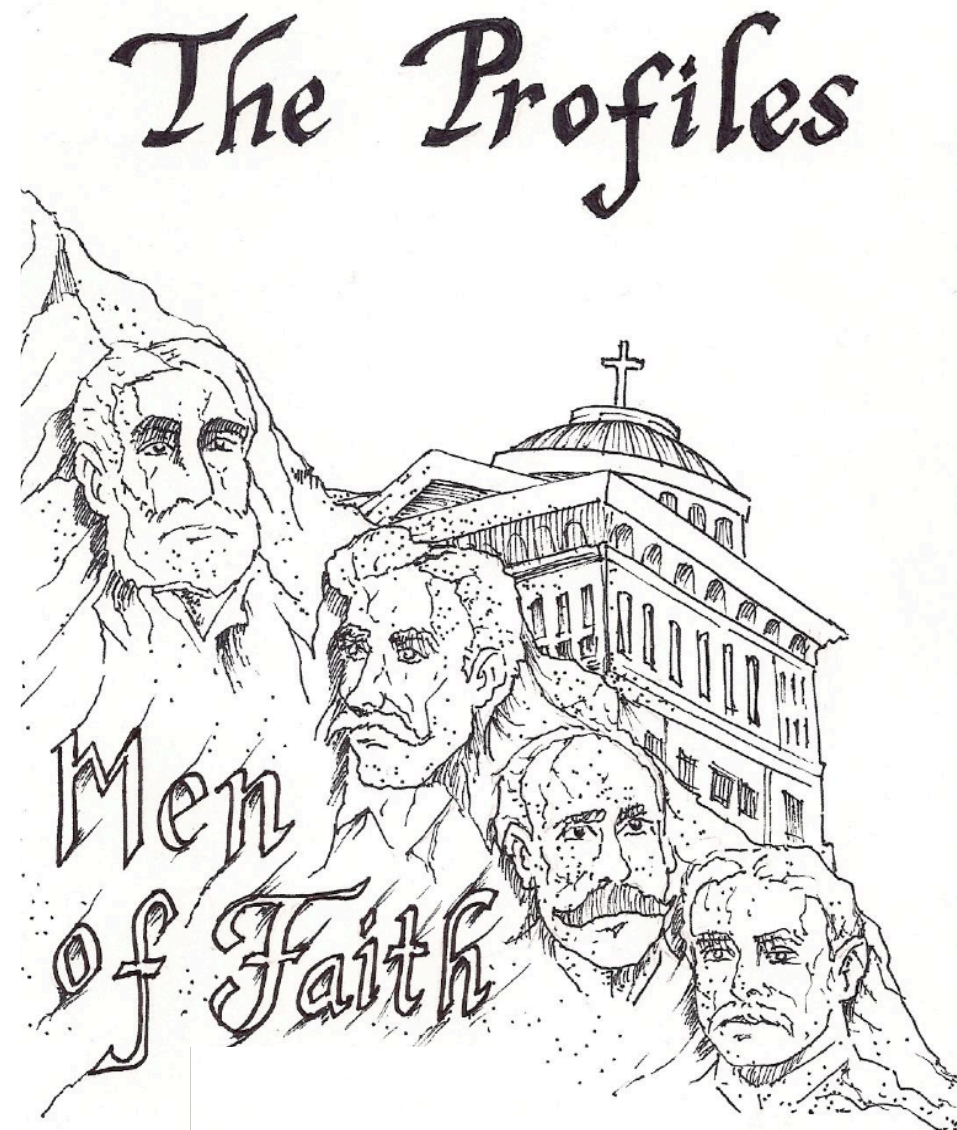
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Affiliated:

American Baptist Church since 1849

Southern Baptist Convention since 1985



First Baptist Church
of San Francisco
1849-2010

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**“Profiles” is dedicated to the
men of faith who have blessed
California’s First Baptist Church
For 161 years**

The Called Pastors of First Baptist Church of California

March 1849 – November 1851	Osgood C. Wheeler
May 1852 – May 1858	Benjamin Brierly
June 1859 – July 1867	David B. Cheney
February 1868 – November 1868	Jesse B. Thomas
September 1870 – February 1872	A. R. Medbury
September 1873 – December 1873	T. Mulcahy
August 1874 – November 1877	Eri B. Hulbert
December 1877 – December 1878	Granvill S. Abbott
October 1879 – July 1880	E. H. Gray
March 1881 – November 1889	William M. Kincaid
February 1890 – December 1895	John Q. Adams Henry
January 1896 – August 1897	Melbourne P. Boynton
March 1898 – November 1902	E. A. Wood
April 1906 – January 1917	George E. Burlingame
November 1922 – July 1933	James S. West
August 1933 - October 1936	David M. Dawson
November 1936 – February 1959	Lewis J. Julianel
August 1959 – January 1962	Curtis Nims
January 1965 – January 1977	John B. Streater
January 1980 – January 1998	James L. Higgs
June 1999 – June 2009	Phillip D. Busbee

Other staff would be released in the coming months. Pastor Swift came into a challenge. But he reminded us, “We serve a great God. We firmly believe in Him and persevere in the hope He has for our church and this city.”

1849-2010

...PROFILES

In the Steps of Nehemiah

*The God of Heaven will give us success.
We his servants will start rebuilding,...*
Nehemiah 2:20 (NIV)

Compiled under the auspices:
San Francisco's First Baptist Church Historical Commission
August 2010

A History of First Baptist Church of San Francisco

Introduction

According to scripture, God established the church as the bride of Christ for the purpose of reaching the “nations” with the Gospel. For First Baptist Church of San Francisco, the “nations” are at the doorstep of 22 Waller Street.

First Baptist Church of San Francisco was established over 161 years ago out of a vision to plant a church in a city desperately in need of Christ, the city of San Francisco. As a church, we celebrate the Senior Pastors who have served our church sacrificially over these many years. Ironically, we are in the process now of looking for our next Senior Pastor. It is our hope and expectation that God will bring him to lead us to be a church that can reach our city for Christ.

Throughout the history of First Baptist Church of San Francisco there have been many pastors who have come to lead this congregation, each with his own strengths, gifts and passions. However, none could do

small groups which met around the city during the week.

But by the end of 2005 a number of things began to affect the church. There were several staff transitions within a short time for various reasons, and mid-2006 was the beginning of Pastor’s long-term medical problems. From June 2006 until he passed away in June 2009, he was in and out of the hospital with ongoing infections in his foot and knee and ensuing surgeries. During this time, when he was out of the hospital, he could be found at the church working on sermons, counseling, and working with staff and the leadership team. To the end, his heart continued to be for the work of the Lord, the city and His people.

The church asked Pastor Bob Swift to be Interim Pastor in September 2009. By this time, the church membership was 249 and Sunday average attendance was 203.

Because the offerings were also down, staff adjustments were deemed necessary. The church secretary had already been released in November 2008.

asked all those who were born in another country to stand and give their place of birth. Thirty-seven countries were represented with people of many racial backgrounds.

Drs. Rick Melick and Don Simmons of Golden Gate Seminary worked together as interim pastors while the Pastor Search Team prayerfully considered candidates after Pastor Higgs left.

On June 13, 1999 the church unanimously voted to call Phillip Busbee to be Pastor. He came with two immediate burdens for the church: a conviction that the members were to be “salt shakers” going out to reach the city for Christ, and a heart to lead the church in prayer in many areas both personally and collectively.



Rev. Phillip Busbee

Pastor Busbee also was strong in worship and gifted in counseling and preaching. He had a great concern for missions both at home at overseas. During the first five years the church grew to an average of 380 in Sunday services and 250 in the

the work of the church without the love, support, encouragement and care of the congregation.

If a ballpark can help turn around a neighborhood in San Francisco, imagine the impact of a loving, spirit-guided, Bible-centered church. That's who we must strive to be and trust God to provide the next Senior Pastor to lead us toward that goal.

On behalf of our entire church, thank you to the History Team that has captured the history of our Senior Pastors in this booklet. I know that God can use us to accomplish much more as we unite in love to follow Him and as we unite to pray for our Pastor and the leadership of this church for the years to come.

- Bobby Evans, June 2010

As Nehemiah told the people,
“The God of Heaven will give us success.”

1849-2009

Along with having had 21 full-time pastors, four buildings and one tent, First Baptist Church of San Francisco has several “firsts”:

- The first Baptist church in California
- The first protestant church building in San Francisco
- The first free public school in California used in the church’s building

1849 – 1905

When the Home Mission Society of what became the American Baptist Churches determined that they needed to open a ministry in San Francisco in the 1840s, they called Osgood Wheeler, a young pastor in New Jersey. Dr. Cone, President of that mission, “wooded” him by saying, “But do you know where you are going, my brother? I would rather go as a missionary to China or Cochinchina than to San Francisco.



Rev. Osgood Wheeler

a beautiful sacred concert by Jeffery Wells of the Metropolitan Opera Company.

In January 1997, David Stone had been hired as the Church Administrator, a much needed position in the church. His hard work and conscientious attention to detail was shown in the loveliness of the completely renovated building.

Dr. Higgs resigned from the church in January 1998 to accept a position with the ABCW as a mentor to pastors in smaller churches in the area. His vision and work left behind a much stronger church in leadership and membership than when he arrived.

One thing to be mentioned as affecting the “numbers” in the church is the transiency of the city population. At one time, Pastor Higgs said that it seemed as if he had a new congregation every three years or so because of the turnover in membership that had little to do with the church itself. Yet in 1997 the church honored 11 people who had 50-plus years each of membership at First Baptist.

A factor that the people in the church delight in is the large ethnic mix. At one time Pastor Streater had

at large in society at the time. Many small private schools across the city were closing during this period.

In 1989 the Loma Prieta earthquake damaged the church along with many areas in the city. God's wonderful timing showed itself once again. In 1979 a member had willed to the church her Victorian house. After investigating the many possibilities, the house was put up for sale. The house sold in 1989 just in time to provide one half of the considerable cost of retrofitting the church!

Thanks to a very generous gift, the kitchen was completely gutted and a new commercial kitchen was installed. This was celebrated at the first dinner using the new kitchen in December 1996. The downstairs facilities were also greatly improved with new carpeting, freshly painted walls and new sliding partitions to separate the main area for classrooms as needed. Next, a rebuilding and remodeling of the sanctuary was instituted with pledges from the membership. On November 16, 1997 a dinner was given in celebration of the mostly completed work downstairs and upstairs. The dinner was followed by

Don't you stir a step, my brother, unless you are prepared to go to the darkest spot on earth."

After all night in prayer, Rev. Wheeler and his wife believed that God was leading them to take that step. They left New Jersey three days before gold was discovered in California, arriving on February 28, 1849.

Regular Sunday morning and evening meetings and Sunday School began May 27, 1849. There were six adults and one child that first Sunday. Four weeks later, the house was filled and had 40 in Sunday School.

On July 6, 1849, at the Ross' house, six people presented letters from sister churches. These were recognized as the constituent members of the new church. On July 10 they began building on the north side of Washington Street near Stockton Street. The first baptism "in the waters of North Beach" was performed on October 21, 1849. The whole town, the mayor, other churches, state and federal officials, the Marines, Army, Navy and even the Prime Minister of the Hawaiian Kingdom attended.

In 1851 fire destroyed the business district taking the church and the businesses of many of its members and leaving the church in a very difficult financial condition. In November 1851, Pastor Wheeler resigned.

A discouraging year followed before a new pastor was called. Rev. Benjamin Brierly was pastor for six years. He began plans for a new building that was completed in September 1857. When he closed his work in May 1858, membership was 131.

In 1859, after a 14-month period, Dr. D.B. Cheney came. During his ministry the church grew and prospered. In 1867, with regrets, Dr. Cheney resigned due to ill health.

In February 1868, Dr. Jesse B. Thomas took the pastorate. Large congregations filled the church, and many were saved. But in nine months Dr. Thomas resigned due to ill health. For the next 19 months, Rev. B.S. McLafferty (three months) and Rev. John Matthews filled the pulpit on a temporary basis. It was said that during this time there was a “tendency toward disintegration” and a feeling of

Facelift was begun. As the church family worked and prayed together, it was a healing time for them. The Sunday School grew from a low of 80 to about 150. The congregation began to unite, another aspect of healing which was needed. Dr. Betts’ loving and reconciling ways were of significant aid here – another instance of God’s right man in the right place at the right time.

In 1980 the church voted unanimously to call



Dr. James L. Higgs

Dr. James L. Higgs to the pastorate. The church continued to grow in many areas. In 1984, FBC voted to become dually aligned with the American Baptist Convention (80%) and Southern Baptist Convention (20%). Over the years, these figures were gradually adjusted until 1997 when it was voted to have a 50% / 50% alignment with the Conventions.

In the early 80’s the International Christian School closed its doors due to the financial crunch felt

expressed need of the community. It grew to include Grades K-8 in the International Christian School.

In the mid-70s, the church voted to go from a traditional organization to a one-Board setup. The congregation's largest groups were the young people (high school/ college age) and senior citizens. There were not too many people in the middle age group, and this affected the church in two areas: limited lay leadership and low financial support.

The World Baptist Alliance leaders spoke in the church in 1973 and 1979: Dr. Talbot, the President of Liberia; and Dr. Goulding, General Secretary, respectively.

Dr. Streater resigned in 1977, and Dr. Betts came as interim pastor. On February 6, 1979 a fire set by an arsonist did \$250,000 worth of damage. The congregation took a deep (albeit smoky) breath and met the challenge head on. The sanctuary had not been destroyed, but the downstairs was completely gutted. The bomb had been set in the library, and many irreplaceable books were burned. With the encouragement of Dr. Betts, an ambitious Operation

discouragement. Even so, a Sunday School class for Chinese was begun; the first convert, Dong Gong, was baptized. This work continued to grow.

Rev. A. R. Medbury came as the next pastor in 1870 and stayed 19 months. This was a difficult time. There seemed to be a "luke-warmness" among the people. Many people were dropped from the membership, and financial problems were acute. In February 1872, Rev. Medbury's resignation was accepted with regrets and appreciation for the hard work, courage and cheerfulness.

Shortly after, Rev. Joseph Freeman, who was on his way to Washington Territory, agreed to fill in as pulpit supply. The church responded to his leadership with increased attendance and interest. In September 1873, Rev. T. Mulcahy was called. The church was encouraged; but after only two months of service, Rev. Mulcahy's health failed and he died.

In 1874 Dr. Eri Hulbert came as pastor. In 1875 the Washington Street property was sold; on October 13 the cornerstone of the new building was laid on Eddy Street between Jones and Leavenworth. The



Dr. Eri Hulbert

building was finally dedicated on July 29, 1877. Four months later, Dr. Hulbert resigned. Before he left, he recommended to the church Rev. Granville S. Abbot who had experience in raising

needed funds. Rev. Abbot resigned in a year, however, because of the heavy financial burden. Among the more outstanding debts were the taxes, insurance and balance due on Dr. Abbott's salary. At the suggestion of Deacon Pope who had been with the church almost from the beginning, an envelope system of giving was begun.

Dr. E.H. Gray came as acting pastor on April 20, 1879. In October, he was called for one year. He was particularly effective in reducing the debt. By the end of the year, all current expenses were met, floating indebtedness was paid and



Dr. E.H. Gray

One method tried was to completely clear the roll and to have those who wanted to be members sign a renewal of membership each year. The church quickly voted this down. There were probably several factors to account for the drop in membership. The church's high point was in the 1940s. During World War II, churches across America found people thronging to them with the uncertainty and agony of the times. When the war was won and its threat no longer a concern, the country's attention seemed to turn to more materialistic goals. By the time Dr. Streater came to First Baptist, families were fleeing to the suburbs, and the area around the church had changed considerably. It was now known across the country as the locale of the flower children and the growing drug scene. The ministry of the church made some adjustments to reach out to growing needs in the community. In 1974 Dr. Day, assistant pastor, listed 17 avenues of outreach that were being made in addition to the usual activities of the church. During this time, a preschool day care center was established at the

time was the Director of Christian Education, and the Board of Trustees, which had the financial responsibilities for the church, carried through on the incorporation. On July 25, 1959 the Articles of Incorporation of First Baptist Church of San Francisco was filed with the Secretary of State [of California]. This included the FBC Constitution. These are legal documents.

1960 – 2010

Dr. Curtis Nims was called and served for three years at which time he resigned to enter the evangelistic ministry. Dr. Howard Day stepped in as interim pastor until John B. Streater was called in 1964.



Dr. J. B. Streater

It appears that the rolls had not been evaluated for quite a long period of time. While the roll count numbered in the thousands, the body count on Sundays was less than 300. The diaconate made a concerted effort to establish what the

actual membership was.

\$300 was paid on the mortgage. During this time, it was resolved “that the six deacons to be elected consist of four deacons and two lady helpers,” apparently the first time that women served as deacons in the church.

On July 25, 1880 Dr. William Kincaid preached, and he was later called to the pastorate. He accepted



Dr. William Kincaid

but could not leave the New York church for four months. In the interim, Rev. J.Q.A. Henry stepped in. At this time, Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey held two meetings here. Spiritual revival ensued; and when Dr. Kincaid came on March 27, 1881, the church had a membership of 300 and was in good condition spiritually and financially. Baptisms continued, and many were restored to fellowship. This was a period of quiet and steady growth. Membership came to 539 with a Sunday School of 282 and a large group of active and interested young people. Dr. Kincaid resigned on November 10, 1889 feeling that a new pastor would best serve the church.

Dr. J. Q. A. Henry, who had supplied the pulpit as interim pastor earlier, was called and came on February 6, 1890. The church was doing well. There were many additions and baptisms, the church debt was substantially reduced, prayer



Dr. J Q A Henry

meetings had a large attendance and other missions and Sunday Schools were established. Rev. Henry was also active in the affairs of the city. In 1895 Dr. Henry took a leave of absence and several months later resigned for health reasons. Dr. M. P. Boyton became acting pastor.

On January 1, 1896 the church voted to call Dr. Boyton as pastor even though the committee gave another recommendation. Dr. Boyton had excellent organizing abilities. Eight new Sunday School classes were begun. He also taught classes to young people on Christian doctrine,



Rev. M.P. Boyton

for a strong, spiritual, evangelical church. Upon leaving, he recommended that a call be given to Dr. Lewis J. Julianel.

Dr. Julianel came on November 8, 1936 to a



Dr. L. Julianel

church of 325 members ready for his work. A time of great growth began. In 1949 at the church's Centennial, there were 2,500 members. In 1947-48, the missions giving alone was \$51,500. Steady expansion necessitated building programs

to accommodate the growing Sunday School, youth work, military and other people who came.

Additional church buildings were purchased and later expanded. In 1947 the San Francisco Baptist Bible College was established and housed in the central building. It continued through commencement 1957 at which time financial support was no longer available. Dr. Julianel retired in 1959.

It was at this time that the State told the church it needed to be incorporated because of the change in the State's financial laws. Dr. Howard Day, who at this

pastor. While there was a certain amount of loss during this time, 300 were added to the rolls.

On November 5, 1922, Dr. James West became pastor, and the church revived under his leadership. Finances, however, continued to be a problem. Many members were dissatisfied with the situation and went elsewhere. In 1932 a \$10,000 mortgage was placed on the church property to take care of indebtedness. Dr. West resigned in 1933.

Many people thought the church was dead. It seemed to be a time when people gave up on church. When Dr. D. M. Dawson came in August 1933 to supply the pulpit for six months, he found at his first service 32 people in an auditorium seating 1,200.



Dr. D.M. Dawson

Instead of defeat, Dr. Dawson felt it was his job to do what he could to save the church. He persuaded the Baptist Union and the Northern California Convention to pay his salary so that he could remain and work to change things. He labored for 2 ½ years, laying the foundation

history. But the finances did not do well. The church began 1897 with a debt of \$2,362. It appears to be a factor in Dr. Boyton's resignation, which was effective August 1, 1897.

In March 1898, Dr. E. A. Wood became the next



Dr. E. A. Wood

pastor. The church made two significant decisions early on. It voted that failure to comply with the Biblical and Covenant obligations to contribute regularly to the financial support of the church be treated as a matter for church discipline. There was also a drastic revision of the church roll: 140 names were placed on a suspended list due to inability to contact them, and 35 others were dropped. During Dr. Wood's ministry, 200 joined the church. In 1899 the forerunner of the Northern Baptist Convention met in the church. When Dr. Wood resigned in 1902, the roll contained 512 names.

In 1899 fire once again destroyed the building. This time the insurance took care of the outstanding

financial situation. The basement was made usable for worship. It was used until the earthquake and fire of 1906. Rev. Thomas Baldwin acted as supply pastor from 1902 to early 1906. The Annual Letter in 1905 reports, "Pastorless nearly three years, the congregation sustained and progress made in all departments."

1906 – 1959

Dr. George E. Burlingame accepted the pastorate in 1906. Four months before he arrived, the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed much of San Francisco. Six Baptist churches were completely obliterated, and many church members



Dr. George E. Burlingame

lost their homes and businesses. The church offered to release Dr. Burlingame from his agreement, but he refused their offer. "I count myself honored of God," he wrote, "in being permitted to serve the First Baptist Church at this critical time in its history, and expect large blessings from Him upon His stricken and yet faithful people."

Dr. Burlingame contacted people in Chicago, whom he had just left, making arrangements for them to send a large tent to be used as a temporary place of worship. Later the church was able to use other buildings which had not been severely affected. The California Baptist Relief Committee was formed to send out a plea for help for the needy churches of the city. Assistance came from all across the country including a gift of \$75,000 from John D. Rockefeller. There was much prayer seeking the Lord's guidance for a new site for the church. The Eddy Street lot was sold, and the present-day location was obtained. The church was erected at Market and Octavia and was dedicated on September 14, 1910. Dr. Burlingame continued working there for seven more years. By the time he resigned in 1917, 800 new members had been added, a new building had been built and well-furnished, and the church was recognized as one of the leading churches in the city. It would be five years before a permanent pastor was found. During this time, Dr J. Q. A. Henry, Rev. Bryant Wilson and Dr. Arthur Stevens Phelps succeeded one another as acting