

Our History - Grace Baptist Church

From its humble beginnings seventy plus years ago, the ministry and outreach of Grace Baptist Church of Westlake, Ohio has grown and expanded; but the church remains dedicated to the purpose, in principle, stated in its constitution: "to glorify God through the salvation of the lost and the edification of believers."

It was on October 19, 1949, that sixteen believers gathered at the Lakewood home of Howard and Fern Buncher and earnestly prayed for God's guidance in establishing a church on the west side of Cleveland, where the Word of God would be faithfully preached and taught. Only a matter of weeks later, the Lord led them to begin worshipping together, and on February 24, 1950, Grace Baptist Church was officially organized, with 47 members signing the charter.

They called Rev. Kenneth Amsler, President and Dean of Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland, as their interim pastor. Their first official meeting place was a rented upper hall at 15905 Detroit Avenue in Lakewood. Sunday morning services were held at the new location, while evening services and Wednesday prayer meetings continued to be held at the Buncher home. The first baptismal service was held on February 12, 1950, with 14 being baptized.

In November of 1951, they purchased a building at 19147 Eastlook, Rocky River, for \$13,000. When Rev. Amsler resigned, Rev. Donald Douglass was called as interim pastor, and the church held a reception to welcome him on November 30, 1951. In October of 1952, Grace Baptist joined in fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches and the Ohio Association of Regular Baptist Churches. Rev. Douglass, who guided the church in these matters, served until October 30, 1955.

The next pastor called was Rev. Vernon Billington, who served from June 3, 1956, to May 8, 1960. In September of 1962, Grace Baptist joined the Hebron Baptist Association of churches. They called Douglas R. Couch to be Pastor on August 4, 1963. It was under his ministry that the growing church was led by the Lord to relocate.

Ground was officially broken for a new facility on April 17, 1966. The last service of Grace Baptist in Rocky River was on May 29, 1966, and the next Sunday the congregation began meeting in the Hilliard Elementary School (Westlake) until the work was completed on the new building. The cornerstone-laying service was held on November 13, 1966. The congregation began using its new building at the present address (23096 Center Ridge Road in Westlake, Ohio) on July 30, 1967, and the dedication was held on October 29.

Pastor Couch resigned on September 13, 1970 to become a missionary. Rev. Ralph Burns was then extended a call on March 28, 1971, and preached his first official sermon as pastor of Grace Baptist on June 27, 1971. Rev. Burns retired in August of 1985. In September of 1986, Dr. Jack W. Jacobs accepted the call to Grace Baptist Church as the senior pastor. Dr. Jacobs retired in June of 2003.

Steve Strong has served as youth pastor since August of 1999. On January 30, 2005, the people of Grace voted to add to the pastoral staff with Greg Whiting as the lead pastor. In April of 2006, Dr. Jack Jacobs, former Senior Pastor, was added back to the staff as Pastor of Senior Care Ministries. Used by God to build up and encourage the pastoral staff, God took Dr. Jacobs home to be with him in April of 2007. In March of 2012 God led the Whiting family away from Grace and in September 2012, Grace called Steve Strong as lead Pastor.

It is the desire of Grace Baptist Church to add to its rich history, being known as a church that glorifies God by accomplishing His purposes. It is our desire to help every person that attends Grace to know the deep and greater joy that Jesus wants for all his followers.