

North American Baptist Heritage Commission

Church Histories



Bethel Baptist – St Clair Shores (web -Nov 2014)

Bethel Baptist, St. Clair Shores, Michigan Ministering to Detroit's Eastside Since 1864

The beginnings of our Bethel Baptist Church can be traced back to 1862 when Karl and Emilie Bock emigrated from Germany to Detroit. The Bocks, who were zealous witnesses for their Lord, established fellowship with other German immigrants who were Baptists. On June 23, 1864, the group of nine believers was formally organized as a church, meeting in homes until 1870 when a chapel was built at St. Aubin and Mullett. The church was known as the “First Regular German Baptist Church” of Detroit.

The Lord added to the church (membership was 43 in 1866; 104 in 1874; 218 in 1886; 421 in 1894) and with a continuing influx of immigrants, the need existed for larger facilities. A site was chosen at Joseph Campau and Arndt Streets where a new house of worship was dedicated on Christmas Day, 1888. In 1894, the name of the church was changed to “First German American Baptist Church.” Large groups were dismissed on three occasions between 1896 and 1920 to start new assemblies as the church continued to grow.

The World War I period was one of transition. Although organizations with German constituencies were viewed with suspicion, the church was blessed to have a pastor, C. A. Daniel, who was born in the United States and could serve equally well in German and English. Bilingual services were inaugurated and, beginning in 1926, church minutes appeared in English rather than German. On June 29, 1922, the name of the church was changed to “Bethel Baptist Church of Detroit.” The last German service was in 1934.

With the membership moving to newer sections of the city, the decision was made to relocate. In 1925 the building on Joseph Campau was sold and a new site was purchased at Mack and Iroquois. At a cost of \$187,604, a new English gothic structure was dedicated on May 15, 1927. The trying years of the Great Depression, followed by World War II, brought financial

1864

problems, but with the Lord's guidance the church persevered. Membership continued to rise (700 in 1944) and many chose to serve God in ministry vocations.

As the population of Detroit began shifting to new areas, in 1955 the church again voted to relocate. A site of 5-1/2 acres was purchased on Little Mack in St. Clair Shores. In 1957 the Mack and Iroquois building was shared with the new owners until the Little Mack structure was completed. Formally dedicated on June 12, 1962, the Little Mack facility cost \$339,500 for site, building, and furnishings. For nearly ten years, worship services were conducted in what is today known as the Fellowship Hall. The church sanctuary was started in 1971 and dedicated on April 30, 1972. The cost was approximately \$270,000, including a new organ and furnishings.

Bethel Baptist Church has been affiliated with the North American Baptist (NAB) Conference since the early 1960s. In 1964 the church celebrated its centennial. Of more importance and significance is the number of missionaries and pastors the church has sent and supported.

The history of Bethel Baptist Church spans parts of three centuries, four buildings, two languages and several periods of social change. The message has remained constant: Salvation in Jesus Christ alone. As long as the Bible continues to be preached and believers remain faithful in serving their Lord, the history pages that are written tomorrow will tell an exciting tale.

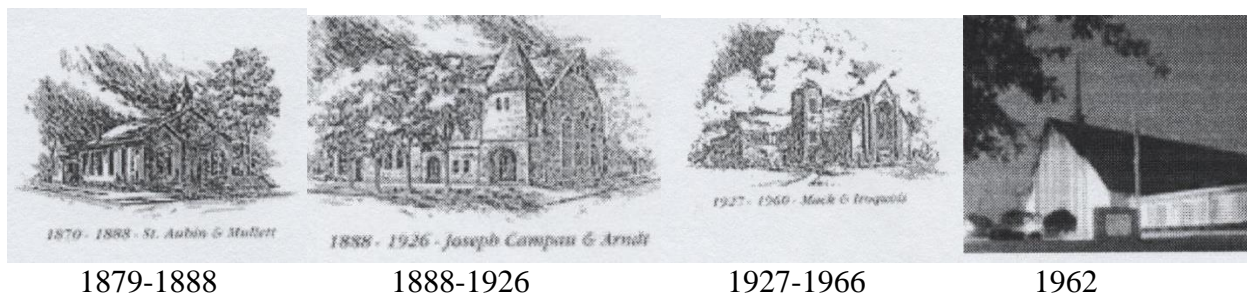
[Written by Luci Lengefeld, August, 2015]

Bibliographical sources: [Published articles]

“Fifty of the Oldest North American Baptist Churches: Brief sketches of the oldest churches in each of the nine conferences” *Annual* 1947, p 53.

Archival sources in North American Baptist Heritage Center:

Bethelbaptistscs.org/about web site. Printed 21/21/2007



1879-1888

1888-1926

1927-1966

1962