

The Baptist Church in the Great Valley 2024 Pastoral Search Profile

Introduction and Mission Statement

The Baptist Church in the Great Valley was founded by sixteen Welsh Baptists on April 22, 1711, and we are proud of our more than 300 years of continuous Christian service in Tredyffrin Township, about two miles south of Valley Forge National Historical Park. We worship and study on ground rich in American history; our church's own history is described later in this article. While we strive to revere and learn from the past, we endeavor to have a creative program that meets the needs of the present.

This commitment is reflected in our Mission Statement, which states that we seek to “provide an open expression of Christian worship for all sincere persons of every age, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, cultural background, and socio-economic status without regard to religious backgrounds or beliefs; to assist persons in the development of a Christian lifestyle consistent with our historic traditions; to maintain a program of religious education based upon the teachings of the Scriptures; to encourage our membership to join together in the spreading of the gospel to all nations, beginning with our own community; to develop a sense of community into which all persons will be welcome, and to offer opportunities in Christian Service to all of our members.”

Worship, Education, Service, and Fellowship at BCGV

We have two worship services each Sunday – a shorter service at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom and a traditional worship service in our Meeting House at 10:30.

Sunday School is held during the 10:30 worship service. Children attend the beginning of the service with their parents and leave with their teachers part way through to attend age-appropriate lessons. During Advent and Lent, we frequently offer an evening or after-church adult class, usually six weeks long, designed by our pastor.

We have several activities designed to serve our community. Our primary responsibility to the general population of Chester County is the Great Valley Food Cupboard, headquartered in a large room in our church school basement and run by church member Carol Claypoole. Carol and a group of dedicated volunteers distribute pre-packaged grocery bags to dozens of clients who drive through the church school parking lot each week. Several other churches, youth groups, restaurants, and hundreds of individuals support the Cupboard's efforts. We celebrated the Food Cupboard's tenth anniversary in February 2022.



Carol Claypoole with donations
to the Great Valley Food Cupboard

A second mission is our support of workers and their families at the Parx Racetrack in Bensalem. Several times each year we donate sheets, towels, shoes, and clothing to these needy people, and last August church members filled 26 backpacks with school supplies for middle- and high-school students who live at the track.



Packing the backpacks

Our Christian Education program serves not only our Sunday School and adult education programs but also the community. For instance, our annual Easter Egg Hunt, held in the east end of our cemetery, attracts over seventy children and their parents from the community.



Easter Egg Hunt

We benefit from a unique location on North Valley Forge Road in that both the Chabad Lubavitch of Chester County synagogue and the Islamic Society of Greater Valley Forge mosque are located just across the street from our property. We are honored to participate in occasional interfaith activities with these friends, such as evening prayers and the breaking of the fast during Ramadan.

We enjoy an active music program led by Charles Confer, our director of music. Our choir is small but dedicated, and at times we feature children as instrumental soloists or as part of a bell choir.



Some members of the Choir preparing for Christmas Eve

For decades, we have welcomed military veterans on the Sunday before Memorial Day. After the service, these men and women hold a short memorial observance in our cemetery, which includes a rifle salute and a bugler playing "Taps."



Veterans on Memorial Day

We enjoy times of fellowship, including "Lemonade on the Lawn" on Sundays following worship (weather permitting), along with more formal times of celebration as occasions arise.



"Lemonade on the Lawn" following the 10:30 a.m. worship service



The congregation in January 2020 celebrating the 10th anniversary of our last installed pastor, Rev. John Loring. Pastor Loring served BCGV for a little over 13 years before his retirement in May 2023.

Our Facilities



BCGV meeting house and part of the surrounding cemetery

Our meeting house, constructed in 1805 of valley limestone, is a historic structure, adorned with a steeple containing a 628-pound bell and topped by a gold-leaf covered weathervane. The meeting house is air-conditioned and has undergone major renovations in 1871, 1949, 1960, and 1970. Seating capacity is 200 people on the ground floor and 50 in the balcony.



Interior of the Meeting House

The organ was updated and completely refurbished in 2000. The Walker-Moeller Organ is a hybrid instrument of pipes, chimes and digital electronic sounds.



William Maxwell Scott Church School Building

A short walk through the cemetery from the meeting house is The William Maxwell Scott Church School Building, constructed in 1954, with major additions completed in 1960 and 2010. It contains meeting rooms and classrooms, a large assembly hall with baptistry, a kitchen, and offices. Among its many uses, the Scott Building houses the Great Valley Food Cupboard and rents space to Ballet 180, a dance school. In addition to the Scott Building and the meeting house, the present grounds consist of approximately 15 acres containing a single-family dwelling, which was once the parsonage and could be again, a garage, and an active cemetery and cremains garden.

History

After the families that founded our church arrived from Rhydwylym, Wales in 1711, they worshipped in their homes until 1722, when a 28-foot-square log Meeting House was erected on land that is now the northwest section of the cemetery. Our most famous eighteenth-century pastor was the Rev. David Jones, a revolutionary firebrand who was granted a leave of absence in 1776 to join the Continental Army and serve as Chaplain to General Anthony Wayne. He survived not only the so-called Paoli Massacre the next year, during which British troops mercilessly attacked Wayne's forces after the Battle of Brandywine, but also General Washington's winter encampment at Valley Forge in 1777-'78. Some of these same British soldiers plundered the Meeting House in 1778, making off with a communion service, baptismal garb, and sexton's tools.

The early nineteenth century witnessed both strong evangelical activity and abolitionist causes. In 1821, a few members left the congregation to become medical missionaries to the Cherokee Indians in Tennessee. During the Second Great Awakening and its attendant social reform, church membership soared, and our pastor fought to abolish slavery as one of the founders of the Wilberforce Society in Chester County and welcomed at least ten African Americans into membership during his pastorate.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the log cabin was no longer adequate for the church's expanding congregation, and the present stone Meeting House was constructed in 1805. It was completely renovated in 1871 and became essentially the building we know today. To better serve the growing population along the Pennsylvania Railroad's Main Line, a chapel was built "up the hill" in Berwyn in 1886. This new building served the congregation during colder months as the old Meeting House's heating system was deficient. However, it was decided by 1949 to

renovate the Meeting House once again with new lighting fixtures and a central heating system. Thus, the center of congregational activities returned to “the Valley.”

The Great Valley was experiencing a growth spurt in the 1950s and '60s as housing developments like Valley Forge Estates, Glenhardie Farm, and Chesterbrook were constructed. Our church expanded too; a new parsonage and church school building were constructed, and the old parsonage and chapel in Berwyn were sold. The Meeting House was updated and expanded in 1970. These worship, meeting, and learning spaces served us well until the new millennium, when we added a new wing of classrooms, meeting spaces, and offices to the church school building, completing construction in 2010.

In 2011, we celebrated our 300th anniversary with many activities, including a Colonial Fair to which the community was invited.



Reenactors from our Colonial Fair

In January of 2023, we voted unanimously at our Annual Congregational Meeting to become a “welcoming and affirming” congregation. We were accepted as members of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists later that year.



Display of Pride Flag in front of the meeting house in April 2023

Over the last years, we have experienced a decline in membership and attendance, as so many mainline Protestant churches have. Nonetheless, we look forward to a bright future where we hope to find new ways to be of service and to offer opportunities for fellowship, education, and worship to those living in “the Valley.” We seek a new pastor who will help us attain that future.

Demographics

Location

The Baptist Church in the Great Valley is located in Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania. It is about 22 miles from Philadelphia and is part of the Tredyffrin/Easttown School District, which serves the townships of Tredyffrin and Easttown, encompassing 38 square miles in eastern Chester County. The school district area includes the communities of Paoli, Devon, Berwyn, Daylesford, Chesterbrook, Strafford, and Wayne.

According to the Township's website,¹ as of the 2020 census, Tredyffrin had approximately 32,000 residents. Here is some additional statistical information:

Median Age: 42.9

Race: 77.3% White, 3.1% African American, 16.4% Asian

High School Graduate or Higher (of those 25 and older): 98.2%

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (of those 25 and older): 79.3%

Married: 58%

In Labor Force (of those 16 and older): 66.1%

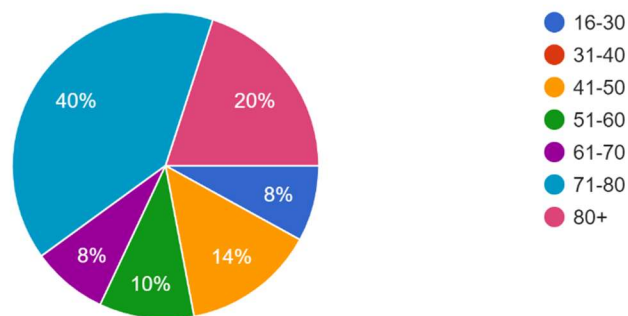
Median Household Income: \$136,429

Current Membership

Our current membership might be described as "small but mighty." We are also an older congregation, mostly retired, who primarily identify as white. A recent survey of members generated 50 responses. Below are some helpful statistics from that survey.

What is your age group?

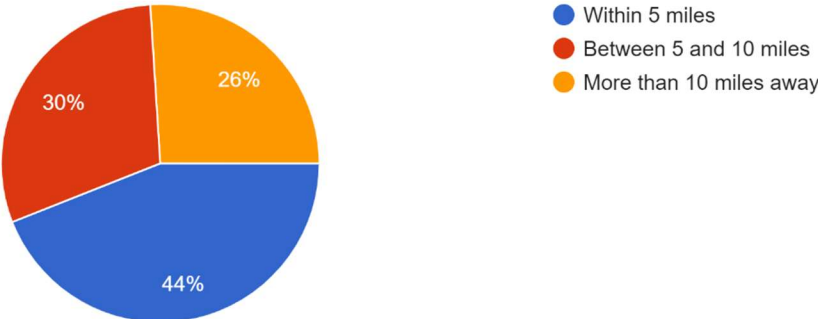
50 responses



¹<https://www.tredyffrin.org/about-us/facts-and-figures>

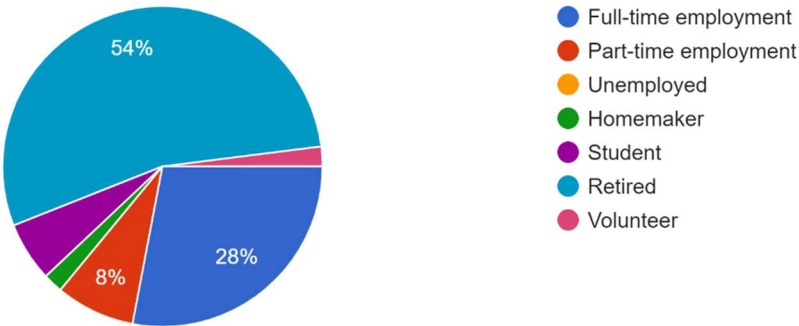
How close do you live to The Baptist Church in the Great Valley?

50 responses



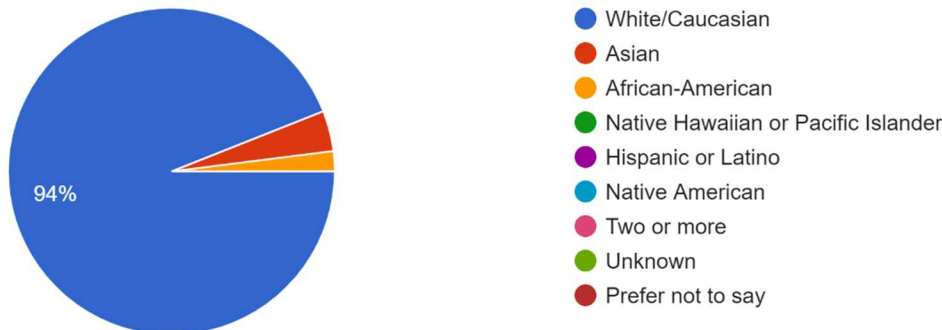
What is your current employment status?

50 responses



What ethnicity best describes you?

50 responses



The survey also asked about household makeup. Forty-two percent of respondents indicated they were *married with no children at home*; 16% were *married with one or more children at home*; 14% were *single adults living on their own*; 12% indicated they were *widowed and living alone*. The ages of children living with parents who responded to the survey ranged from 4 to 21. There were also a few respondents from *multi-generational households*.

Members who are currently employed and those who have retired worked in a variety of areas, like education, sales and retail work, car repair, engineering, finance, advertising, etc. Members also engage in a wide range of hobbies, like playing music, sewing, quilting, crafting, antique collecting, creating art, attending theater and concerts, playing and watching sports, etc.

Demographics aside, we are a friendly congregation, and we welcome all those who are seeking a place to explore their faith and worship in community. Many years ago, we adopted the slogan of “Sharing our Open Tradition of Christian Faith,” by which we hope to communicate our enduring commitment to the Baptist tradition of individual freedom.

More Information

To learn more, follow us on Facebook and Instagram (bcgvdevon) or visit our website at www.bcgv.org.