

Greenville Baptist Church, RI



A People of Faith

We are a people who believe in God the Father, creator of all; in Jesus his son, who died for our salvation; in the Holy Spirit, our comforter, and a present help, who fills us with what we need to love and serve the Lord. We believe God gives us His word in the Holy Bible to be a guide through this life. He gives us faith to take away fear and anxiety, to bring us to a better place when we die. We are grateful for the love and encouragement received through the church and its members, their concern and willingness to help in so many ways. We are a people who love, because we were first loved by God, a people who hope to share that love with others. We are a people with varied economic, political and life experiences, yet we are tied in bonds of love by a shared faith.

Introduction

Greenville Baptist Church is in the heart of the town of Smithfield, Rhode Island. Standing prominently in the village of Greenville for more than 200 years, the beautiful New England traditional church steeple greets all driving into the village from any direction. This vibrant church is one where a well-prepared Biblical sermon is appreciated and acted upon by congregants. The multi-generational congregation is mission and service-minded, and always on the lookout for ways to help the community, whether it be in our town, state, around the country or even internationally.

Established as the First Freewill Baptist Church of Smithfield in 1820, and now part of the American Baptist Churches of RI, we feel strongly that all are welcome in this church and that each person contributes uniquely to the church community. The church is led by the pastor and leadership boards, making sure that all voices are heard, and needs are met. Sunday morning services have been held without interruption, even through Covid times by the addition of Facebook Live and YouTube streaming. In-person Sunday services average from 60–70 people, with more attending our special services and on holidays. Attendance is once again growing! Streamed services have about 25-30 people watching live, and even more view posted services at their convenience throughout the week. A link to view services on YouTube at any time is available on our webpage.

The vision statement of the Greenville Baptist Church states:

As a community of faith, we desire to teach people of all ages about the Christian faith while we all continually seek to better understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Therefore, as members and participants of the church we commit to becoming and encouraging others to become disciples who live their lives according to what Jesus said are the greatest commandments.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27

Our mission statement follows:

Greenville Baptist Church, as a congregation affirms that we will:

- Praise and worship the Lord in community. (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25)
- Welcome the stranger. (Deuteronomy 10: 19; Hebrews 13: 1)
- Continually be in God's Word to become and encourage others to become disciples as commanded in The Great Commission. (Psalm 119:105; Matthew 28:19-20)
- Put our faith into action. (1 John 3:18; James 2:14-16)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

History

Greenville Baptist Church was born out of an eighteen-month revival outside of Providence lead by Clarissa Danforth. In April of 1820, Clarissa was joined by evangelist Joseph White from Maine, and through their work, the Greenville Baptist Church was founded on May 16, 1820 as the second of the Freewill Baptist churches in Rhode Island.

In the 1820's and 1830's, Greenville Baptist Church was the mother church to churches in Mendon, Massachusetts, Chepachet, RI, North Scituate, RI and an African American church in Providence, RI. This church planting continues even into today where we are building and supporting churches in Honduras and Uganda.

A parsonage was acquired in 1899. It is now used for Sunday School classes, meetings, and our quilting/sewing ministry.

In the mid-1900's, the population grew and the church grew, too. The Educational wing was built to house an auditorium/gymnasium and multiple classrooms. This addition helps to really keep our church a part of the community and today helps us financially as it is now and has been leased by the Greenville Nursery School for over 50 years. The church has been expanded, renovated, and improvements to accessibility have been made such as a Lift, ramps, and restrooms so that ALL are welcome.

In 2020, the church quietly celebrated its 200th anniversary as the pandemic caused churches to close around the country. Greenville Baptist Church swiftly moved to online services. Since that time, our online presence has grown with Facebook Live, YouTube and online giving and our in-person attendance is on the up-swing.

For further information on our history, you can find *A History of the First Freewill Baptist Church of Smithfield in Greenville, Rhode Island* and *Don't Forget to Remember* at www.greenvillebaptistri.org.



A Letter from our Interim Transitional Pastor



Dear friends,

I have served as Interim Pastor of Greenville Baptist Church since September, 2022. I followed a very successful long-term pastorate of Wendy Kiefer-O'Brien, whose ministry was greatly appreciated by this congregation and who retired in 2022. The church is not beset with controversy or acrimony.

One of the many assets of this congregation is its dedicated leadership which has maintained its many ministries throughout the interim period. Attendance has been good after the Covid restrictions were lifted. Committees have continued to function smoothly, and financial stewardship has been exemplary. I consider this church to be a very healthy congregation and a wonderful opportunity to have a long and fruitful ministry.

Thomas R. McKibbens, Interim Pastor

In a sermon on *Giving*, Rev. McKibbens described Greenville Baptist Church. Below is an excerpt from the pastor's sermon.

"We give with joy to people and institutions we love. There is a genuine happiness, a holy hilarity to it. Here are some good reasons to love this church:

- It's a place that tries to keep the story of Jesus alive and contemporary in a world that largely ignores Him.
- It's a place that welcomes all because love is greater than legalism and openness is greater than exclusion.
- It's a place where children are loved and nurtured, and youth are valued.
- It's a place that honors the beauty of holiness as well as doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.
- It is a place that honors Baptist tradition of freedom and practices the priesthood of all believers.
- It's a place that has the freedom to choose its own pastor by prayerfully voting and not by denominational or priestly choice.
- It's a place that engages community concerns and takes mission work seriously.
- It's a place where sacred promises are made, holy tears are shed, hallowed memories are kept alive, godly decisions are encouraged, sainted wisdom is honored, powerful ceremonies are upheld, sacred scripture is studied, compassion is lived, justice is esteemed, forgiveness is practiced, strengths are celebrated, embraces are free, differences are respected, laughter is sincere, talents are offered, integrity is expected, kindness is open-hearted, faithfulness is a virtue, testimonies are worthy, accomplishments are celebrated, courage is in abundance, and stewardship is joyful."

A Letter from our Associate Executive Minister

Over my years of working with congregations, I have come to believe that the congregations I would describe as extraordinary rarely would think of themselves in such a way. Instead, they simply see themselves as ordinary communities of faith attempting to live out their love of God and others.

Greenville Baptist Church is one of the congregations I would describe as extraordinary. By that I do not mean a huge church filled with bells and whistles or one that attempts to follow the most recent fads or trends.

Instead, let me offer several examples to explain what I do mean.

Greenville Baptist responded to the COVID pandemic with courage and creativity. The congregation's leadership developed a process that guided when in-person gatherings should or should not take place. Other leaders took the leap of offering virtual worship services early in the pandemic and worked to expand the quality and quantity of the church's online offerings. The congregation also paid attention to providing pastoral care in new and innovative ways during the months that so many of its members faced isolation.

While many congregations highlight their lay leadership, Greenville Baptist lives out such leadership in all aspects of its life together. The congregation's recently retired pastor devoted attention to helping the congregation develop healthy decision-making processes and a strong leadership structure. That foundation has allowed the congregation to meet challenges, make sound decisions, and engage a diversity of leaders.

The people of Greenville Baptist demonstrate an openness to embracing new possibilities for their future together. While there is a respect for the congregation's past, the focus is on discerning who God is calling this community of faith to become and how that may look in terms of ministries and programs in the months and years ahead.

My prayer is that an extraordinary candidate will emerge to help this extraordinary congregation live into the future to which God is calling them in an extraordinary way.

Rev. Kathryn Palen
Associate Executive Minister
American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island

What Makes Us Unique?

There are dozens of American Baptist churches in Rhode Island and hundreds across the US. What makes Greenville Baptist RI stand out? We are a church that tries to be like that church Paul wrote about in Macedonia, "They gave themselves first to the Lord, then by the will of God to us." We are a church who prays – individually and communally. There has been a growth in prayer with many people previously uncomfortable praying out loud, now praying for friends and family and even strangers. We are a church of joy, not with loud shouts, but a quiet peace and joy found in God's presence.

By individual giving and sharing resources of time, of spiritual gifts, and of money, this church community has been able to help many visions become reality. (See www.greenvillebaptistri.org for examples.) God uses the ordinary people of Greenville Baptist Church to accomplish extraordinary things. We may not always agree, we may not all have the same vision, but we are united in seeking God first, and trying to follow His leading. We were able to support one past pastor in getting a doctorate degree, and another in taking a sabbatical. A new pastor may have a dream or vision that aligns with one of our mission, worship, teaching, or service projects. Or they may have their own vision that God is calling them to. We are praying that God clearly shows us that person whose ministry and vision meshes with what God is calling us at Greenville Baptist to do. Is He calling you?

Worship

At the very core of this church is the commitment to love God and love our neighbors. This all begins in worship. Sundays at 10:00 am each week we hold our traditional American Baptist Church service which typically includes pre-service music, a responsive “call to worship,” the Lord’s Prayer, scripture readings, a children’s chat, prayer time that includes our joys and concerns, and a thought-provoking sermon by our pastor. We include time-honored and contemporary hymns as well as an anthem sung by the choir under the direction of our choir director and organist. We often have special music provided by members of the congregation including vocal soloists, a brass ensemble, and the handbell choir.

Sunday services are streamed on Facebook Live and YouTube for our online congregation and those unable to attend in person. Easy-to-use tablets are available to shut-ins and those unable to attend in-person services, so that they will be able to view our services and feel our church continuing to reach out to them. We continue to look for opportunities to utilize technology in creative ways.

Greenville Baptist is proud of a long history of open membership and how all are welcome to attend. Many members and attendees are from different denominational backgrounds. Membership can be obtained by immersion baptism, profession of faith, experience, letter, or restoration of a previous membership.



On the first Sunday of each month, we observe the “Lord’s Supper.” Our communion table is open to all, and that open invitation is stated monthly.

As a more casual service option, a Thursday evening Dinner Church “Scripture, Song, & a Simple Supper” was started in 2018. Each week began with a welcome gathering, some contemporary songs to set the tone for worship, and sharing of a weekly theme. Communion is shared by serving each other. There are prayers for one another, those we know in need, our church, community, and the world. After blessing the meal, a simple plant-based supper is shared. Questions are posed for thoughtful dinner conversation, encouraging all to grow together. The service is closed by sharing the cup, singing a closing song, then cleaning up together, family-style. Experiencing worship around the dinner table, as Christ did years ago with his disciples, is a moving experience. Dinner Church is resuming with some post-Covid changes, and we are eager to meet the needs of those who are more comfortable in a more non-traditional setting for church.



For decades, the men of Greenville Baptist have paused mid-week in prayer and fellowship. The Men's Prayer Breakfast meets weekly on Wednesday mornings and is equal parts food and prayer.

When exiting our church parking lot, a sign declares that we are now entering our mission field. The Ministry of Christian Caregiving, trained in Stephen's Ministry protocols, encompasses many active committees and projects: visitation and prayer with the sick or hurting, a card-writing ministry, phone calls, the prayer team, food ministry, and prayer shawls that are made, dedicated and given for comfort. These several ministries are ongoing and crucial to our church's living being.

Mission Outreach at Greenville Baptist Church

The heart's desire of our church has always been to reach out and serve one another – those in our local communities, nationwide and globally. Service to others is not limited to a single board or a few interested people, instead mission service includes and is supported by almost all members and friends in one way or another by active participation, giving, and prayer.



Baptist Ministries at Greenville Baptist Church:

- Support for ABCUSA via United Missions, American for Christ, One Great Hour of Sharing, Retired Ministers and Missionaries.
- ABCORI – support for women's ministries, conferences, Canonicus Dam Project, Love Gifts

Local and State Ministries:

- Meals for the sick or others, soup always available
- Veterans groups – food donations, support to Women Veterans shelter, gift bags to veterans in nursing homes, support for Operation Stand Down programs
- Homeless shelters – Visits and support with toiletries, pillows and other necessities
- Lunch with Friends – a monthly free lunch for members and friends
- Food pantries – in-house weekly, plus food support for neighboring communities.
- Holiday food baskets; gift cards for food or gas
- Mitten tree with hats, gloves, scarves, socks or boots given away
- Thrift shop accepting donations, selling, and giving items to those in crisis
- Support to an inner-city middle school – mentoring, audiovisual needs, resource help
- Home Habilitation projects - small home repairs or chores for people struggling
- Emergency assistance during times of crisis, locally or nationally
- GBC members have been certified emergency management Community Emergency Response Team
- Hosting visiting missionaries
- Mentoring and providing home goods for refugees coming to Rhode Island
- Welcome bags, a prayer tent and hot cocoa have been provided for community events, such as the town Christmas tree lighting
- Charter organization for an active Scout troop and Cub Scout pack



International Mission Support:

- Recent medical/construction mission trip by several church members to Dominican Republic, helping provide medication and treatment to 500 sugar cane workers and hundreds of children. (See power point link.)
- Ongoing financial support to pastors and churches in Honduras, and past mission trips there. A teen who went there on several mission trips was inspired to raise money to build a church in Cofradia. With the church's full support, \$35,000 was raised in 5 years and the church was built.
- Support to a Christian school in Mutufu, Uganda, to obtain computers, sewing machines and improvements to their facility and church.



Some ministries have slowed or changed during the recent pandemic, others have remained constant, while others are expanding. There are opportunities for everyone to serve wherever they are called.

Christian Education:

The church supports life-long learning, for all ages, and was able to provide on-line Sunday school classes, some outdoor events and drop-off activities during the pandemic. Sunday school classes are currently held during the later part of the Sunday church service, following a Children's Chat, led by a minister or lay people. Currently the approach is a "one room schoolhouse" with a mixed class where older students learn alongside and help teach and work with younger learners. Although the absence of in-person classes for over a year had its effect, there has been a slow but steady increase in children, youth and teens studying the Bible, and learning about the Christ who loves them.



The church typically plans and organizes a Vacation Bible School program during the summer, with fun, games, snacks, and a curriculum geared to bring children to a closer relationship with Christ. Teens and older youth are often involved as co-leaders, and benefit from the lessons by helping to share in the teaching. There is multigenerational support for the VBS program.



Adult learning options are available, including a very well attended pastoral Bible study during the week. A women's book club meets weekly in the evening providing fellowship and a shared look at a number of books by such authors as Max Lucado or Priscilla Shirer. A men's Bible study has been active for many years, although working to recover from the move of several key members. A women's home Bible study is also available on a bi-weekly basis.

Greenville Baptist church has provided Bibles for anyone who comes and would like one. Spanish, as well as English Bibles have been given to inner-city churches, for their members. Large-print Bibles have also been made available for those who need them in the community. Children's Bibles are available and given to the youth.

Church Leadership



Greenville Baptist Church has been governed by a set of Bylaws, that have served the church well for many years. These Bylaws are reviewed on a five-year cycle by an elected Bylaws Committee to determine if any revisions are necessary. The Bylaws Committee report is then presented to the membership and voted on at the Annual Meeting.

Members of the church share leadership responsibilities with the pastor. There are dedicated lay leaders who believe everyone has unique spiritual gifts. Through prayer and use of these gifts, leaders work in collaboration with the pastor to best serve the mission of our church, its members, and the community.

Members have the opportunity to volunteer to serve as an officer or on a number of boards and committees to maintain the operation of the church. Nominations are made on an annual basis with varied terms and installed by a vote of the membership at the business meeting.

The Executive Board consists of the Pastor, Moderator, Assistant Moderator, and the chairpersons of the Diaconate, Trustees, Christian Education, and Mission Boards. The Executive Board meets monthly and provides an opportunity for direct communication, coordination, and planning between the boards and pastor.

Our Pastors

During the last thirty-four years, our church has been served by three full-time pastors and three part-time transition pastors.

Reverend Wendy Kiefer-O'Brien retired after an almost thirteen-year tenure as the beloved, settled pastor of Greenville Baptist Church in April of 2022. She was the first pastor of this church to be given a sabbatical for independent study and travel. Even prior to the pandemic, Rev. Kiefer-O'Brien had us investigating streaming the service to the community. When it became a necessity, the church was ready and transitioned speedily.

Rev. Russell Arnold served as our full-time pastor for about 4 years, then left for personal reasons. Prior to that time, he had also served as one of our part-time associates until called by a church in Charlestown, Rhode Island. Rev. Arnold had attended Greenville Baptist as a child.

The Rev. Dr. Lynne Holden received her doctorate while serving as Greenville Baptist Church's pastor. She was with us for twelve years and was known for her accomplished preaching and writing.

Greenville Baptist Church has had many members who have attended seminary and become ordained as American Baptist pastors. We have recently had a student intern go on to be ordained and called to pastor two churches in southern Rhode Island. Additionally, a member was locally ordained by Greenville Baptist Church in 2019 after completing her studies at Andover Newton Theological School. She has led a nursing home ministry for several years.

An historical list of pastors from 1820 to the present is available on our website.

The Community

Greenville is one of several villages in the town of Smithfield, which is a middle-class, suburban town in north-central Rhode Island. The town is about 20 minutes from Providence, and less than an hour from a number of ocean beaches. The area, sometimes known as Apple Valley, has orchards, lakes and ponds, hiking trails and a well-respected public-school system. Demographics are changing, with a bit more low-income housing and a homeless shelter recently opening in town. Learn more about our town at <https://www.smithfieldri.com/>.

Building and Grounds



The First Freewill Baptist Church of Smithfield has stood at its current location on the corner of Putnam Pike and Church Street since it was built in 1822. Over this time the church members have been vigilant in caring for, maintaining, and adapting the building to the needs of the congregation that continue to present day.

The seating capacity of the sanctuary, including the balcony, is approximately 275. In 2013 a lift was built and has greatly improved accessibility between the sanctuary, lower vestry, and the parking lot. The lower vestry

is a split-level meeting room that is used for fellowship following the service, church business meetings, and other community gatherings.

A two-story educational building is located at the rear of the church. The lower level has several small classrooms that are used by Greenville Nursery School, an independently owned and operated nursery school and day-care facility since 1975. The upper level has a large hall with a stage that is used by a variety of organizations in the community.

The parsonage, which is now referred to as the Church House and the prayer labyrinth sit on our side lot. A small Thrift shop is located near our large parking lot.

A unique part of the church property is a small parcel of land known as Greenville Common. Because Greenville Baptist Church owns this property, it is possible for the community to display a nativity scene and Christmas lights during the holiday season. A Firemen's Memorial is also located on the common.

Who We are Looking For

We are looking for someone who can see us for who we are – a mix of people coming together to serve God during our time on earth. We are looking for someone who has a heart for any of the diverse ministries we are doing and can help encourage us and enable us to do more, serve better and reach more people for Christ. We are looking for someone who can embrace the many various backgrounds and ideologies within this congregation and continue to unify us as one body. Someone who puts Christ first in their life and takes time for personal growth and prayer, so they can then be refreshed and help others grow. Someone who has compassion for the elderly, the sick, the distressed, and can walk through difficult and dark valleys alongside those who are frightened or anxious. Someone who can clearly communicate and face challenges openly and humbly. Someone who can teach and inspire through sermons or lessons. We are looking for someone, who like us is imperfect, but who is looking to Christ for the hope of things to come.



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