

# UNIVERSITY BAPTIST AND BRETHREN CHURCH

## CHURCH PROFILE

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## University Baptist and Brethren Church PROFILE

*Click on any of the links below to advance directly to that section of the profile.*

[Future Story](#)

[Core Values—What We Believe](#)

[Congregational Culture](#)

[Worship Culture](#)

[Who We Are](#)

[Church Organizational Structure](#)

[Visioning Process](#)

[Challenges We Face](#)

[State College Area](#)

### Future Story

University Baptist and Brethren Church (UBBC) is a welcoming and affirming church dually aligned with the American Baptist Churches USA and the Church of the Brethren. We, the congregation, come from various Christian denominations, and each of us is encouraged to grow in our own unique Christian faith journey. UBBC's congregants *live* their faith and this is a cornerstone of our church. Our Sunday worship services reflect both structured tradition, as well as contemporary elements of creativity, openness, and inspiration. UBBC has a deep commitment to putting our faith in action, offering activities for all ages, doing community outreach, attending to civic responsibilities, and having a university presence. As a medium-to-large, intergenerational church in a university community, we face an ongoing challenge of how to grow existing programs and to further explore where the congregation can meet the changing needs of the community at large.

In the next 2-3 years, we envision finding new ways of following Jesus, our Cornerstone, by "Rebuilding Ourselves as a Spiritual House." We would like pastoral support to do the following:

- Develop congregational leadership of local affinity groups (examples like prison ministry group, parenting groups, climate lobby group, etc.) gathering in homes or public spaces for spiritual development and community action around themes that group members are committed to. Affinity group involvement in Sunday worship and other church-wide events and traditions would be optional but welcomed.
- Offer what we do well to other churches and organizations in our area, like teaching conflict resolution, seeking climate justice, or offering the Alternative Christmas Fair in a larger venue. We expect we would learn a great deal from others in doing this outreach, and we would also deepen community ties.
- Widen our welcome by identifying those who are being treated unjustly, educating ourselves about their perspectives, offering and receiving hospitality and refuge, co-sponsoring events with organizations representing them, and partnering with them to show solidarity and take collective action.

[Back to Top of Profile](#)

## **Core Values—What We Believe**

### **Associating with and Affirming the Rejected**

We aspire, like Jesus, to discover new community members among the estranged, including those in prison and anyone shunned or ignored by the powerful as unworthy of full inclusion in society and in the church. Guided by 1 Peter 2: 4-5 and 10, we feel led every decade or so to rebuild ourselves so as to incorporate more of those who are rejected by the world: “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to God—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house....Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” Our most recent efforts have been to create physical spaces that are more welcoming and accessible to people of all abilities. We will continue to do this as our means afford.

Our statement of welcome reflects these ongoing efforts to rebuild ourselves so that more diverse people find in and bring to this spiritual community love, grace, solace, joy, refuge, compassion, and acceptance. Our affirmation would include extending leadership opportunities to all we welcome. Here is our welcome statement, as printed on our website and bulletins:

Believing that God’s unbounded love and grace are offered to all and meant to be shared and celebrated by all, we embrace persons of every age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnic and religious background, and economic means as vital and integral members of God’s family. We welcome EVERYONE to participate in all aspects of the worship, membership, and life of our church.

### **Walking the Talk with Humility**

We aspire to follow the guidance of Micah 6:8: “Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.” This verse is echoed in our mission statement:

Woven Together in love,  
We seek like Jesus  
To serve God’s world  
Justly,  
Simply,  
Compassionately.

### **Respect for and Questioning of Traditions**

We take seriously the core values of our American Baptist Churches USA and Church of the Brethren denominations, like soul freedom and conscientious objection. However, being non-creedal and in a University community, we accept very few values unquestioningly and hold that it is healthy to disagree, discuss, and seek each other’s counsel. We are a “mixed family” with respect to following church traditions because of our various backgrounds; however, we certainly have our cherished traditions at UBBC such as the Maundy Thursday and other seasonal services and programs.

[Back to Top of Profile](#)

## **Spiritual Development**

We are a teaching and learning church, with varying capacities for experiencing the Divine directly and recognizably. Therefore, we need each other for spiritual health and maturity. We need skeptics and believers alike, and we relate to people all along this spectrum. We need people who are close readers and interpreters of scripture, and we need people who are attuned to as well as those surprised by the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Many of us practice political advocacy and nonviolent protest as faithful means of addressing injustices in our community and world. However, we also understand that as members of the body of Christ, we have different gifts and that putting our faith in action can take many valid forms.

### **Church is wherever two or three are gathered.**

We view the Bible and Gospels as living texts that we must interpret and apply to a changing world in the best way we know how, admitting that this will never be perfect. We know that we must go out and work with others rather than expecting them to come find us, and that they will bless us at least as much as we will be a blessing to them. "Church" is volunteering, collaborating with other groups and faith communities, hosting small groups, gathering for meals, etc.

## **Congregational Culture**

How do we relate to each other? What is the community like?

The UBBC community of the beloved is a caring and emotionally intelligent group of people. We put out prayer requests and meal requests when members are facing a challenge. Our people are largely highly educated and financially stable with many being university-affiliated. We are comfortable with questions, comfortable with agnostics, and with those who are unsure. People are of all different ages, but there is little racial diversity, if any, with the congregation being largely White. There are many do-ers in the community. We have several people who have been on the ground level starting important community non-profits. We are highly committed to working with non-profit partners, our partners in mission. Some of the examples of these partners are Out of the Cold (our local organization that supports the housing insecure), Interfaith Human Resources, and the Park Forest Preschool. The church also has strong support for a yearly charity event that supports non-profits far and wide called Alternative Christmas Fair. This event has been running for more than 40 years and last year raised over \$80,000.

People share on Sunday mornings during sharing time, a weekly prayer group, fellowship time after worship, an every other week Thursday night supper, knitting group, and youth events. Church events provide many opportunities for intergenerational connections, which we value. As well, many friendships are built at church that reach outside the events held at church. We support families with children

[Back to Top of Profile](#)

through activities such as in-worship areas and a nursery, Sunday school, as well as youth activities. We have a long tradition of sending youth on mission trips in the summer around the US. We enjoy having a very active group of youth and many young families.

Our community is a place for us to have a culture of faith and think about the spiritual realm in our university-focused town. While there is a large amount of emphasis in town on Saturday college football, we come to church on Sunday to worship and support each other. We focus on compassion and our wish for justice in the world. Our community is a place for us and others to connect to serve the community far and wide. We use our church relationships to strengthen our relationship with God and each other. We have a lot of compassion for the world and each other. We get excited about social justice and helping the community. We often partner with other religious organizations to do more service work.

The university town influences our church culture. People come and go in careers at the university. This leads to a more transient population. The town schedule aligns with the university schedule in that summers can be very quiet and people tend to travel during university breaks. This bleeds into our church calendar and activities as we often have lower attendance in the summer and we plan around home football games.

We seek to stay in an emotionally healthy state of relationship and we have a long history of earnest sharing and working together. We have differing beliefs among us which we work to have in our circle, not alienating anyone, but this can push us to look at where the limits are of things we support. Largely, people's beliefs are fairly aligned but we come from many different religious backgrounds.

We are Christians and we operate with a wide welcome so while the Church teaches about Jesus, there is a lot of variation across the members in how they relate to Jesus. We talk about God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus. For some, Jesus is the center of their Christian experience. For others, Jesus is a teacher. For others, Jesus is a historical figure. Our church home is vibrant and intellectually and emotionally rich. We value warmth and enjoy worshiping and fellowshiping together.



## **Worship Culture**

Sunday 9:30 am worship provides an opportunity to gather and learn about each other's joys and concerns through our active sharing time near the beginning of each service. Although we are a very progressive church, our order of worship and general worship style is relatively traditional. We use the Hymnal Worship Book published by the Church of the Brethren and Mennonites, with organ and/or piano accompaniment.

Each Sunday a different congregation member joins the Pastor in presenting the service with the call to worship, responsive readings, scripture reading, and an invitation to offering. We have a wide variety of members who choose to participate as liturgists, from children up through elders of the church.

The first Sunday of the month the Deacons assist the Pastor in serving communion to the congregation.

We have an active choir that performs regularly.

A group of members decorate the front of the church each week with seasonal flowers and decorations.

Following service, during the children's Sunday school, the adults gather for an adult forum where we learn about various issues related to the church's mission and member's interest on local, national, and international issues.

Our congregation has a unique history and identity, holding dual affiliations with the American Baptist Churches USA and the Church of the Brethren. Both of these faith traditions have a strong emphasis on individual discernment, and this respect for more

[Back to Top of Profile](#)

than one way of “doing church” has also resulted in many members who find a home in our congregation from other denominations, walks of faith, and a variety of backgrounds.

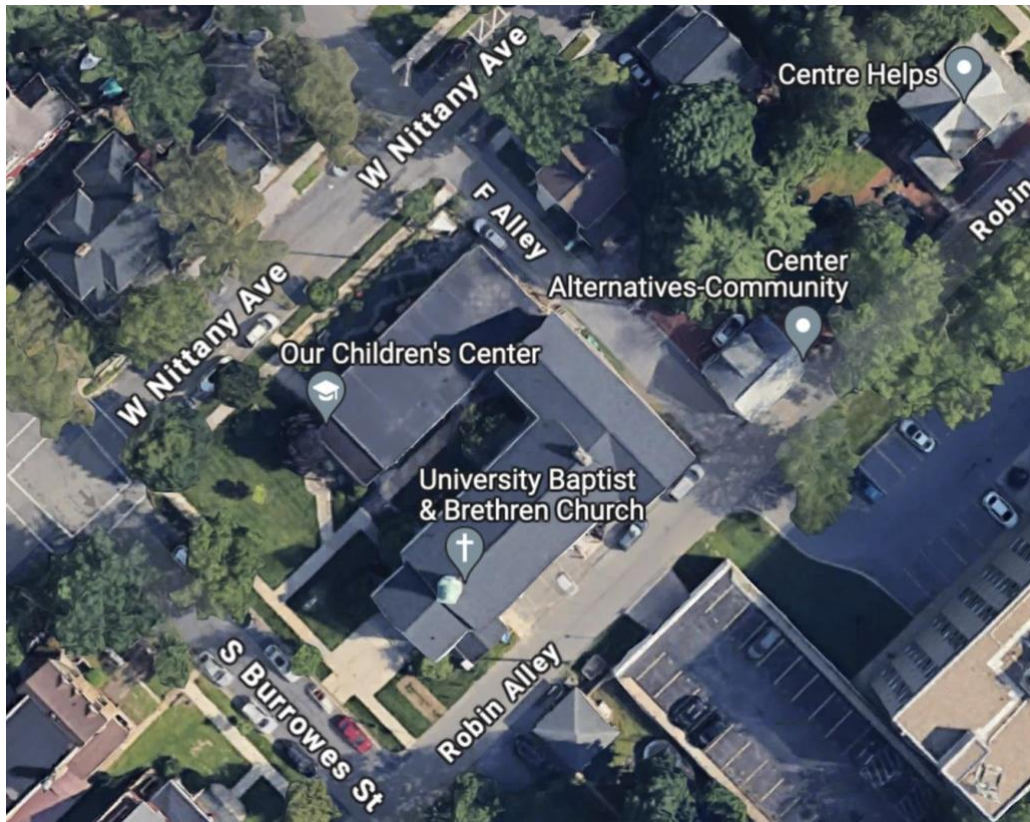
Rooted in anabaptist tradition, our sanctuary is not ornate, but is simple in its beauty. We hold a once annual Lovefeast service with footwashing, meal, and communion on Maundy Thursday. We uphold values of nonviolence, seeking peace and justice. We make decisions with an elected moderator guiding congregational meetings several times a year.

We have a regular group of members who join Sunday service remotely through a Zoom video connection. These members enjoy connecting with one another following the service and often remain online for the adult forum presentation.

## Who We Are

### People

- Active Congregants: 170 \*Data from the current Church Directory
- Denominational backgrounds (estimated)
  - 15%: American Baptist
  - 25%: Church of the Brethren
  - 65%: Other affiliations
- Regular attendees in worship (estimated weekly average)
  - 85: in person
  - 20: via Zoom
- Demographics of active congregants (estimated)
  - Gender/Sex
    - 47%: Female
    - 41%: Male
  - Age
    - Retired 42%
    - Working 49%
    - Young Couples - 25 families
    - Young adults - at least 5 persons
    - College students - around 5 persons
    - Preschool – 4 children
    - Children – K-5th grade – 8 children
    - Middle Schoolers (6th – 8th grade) – 4 youth
    - High Schoolers (9th-12th grade) - 14 youth
- Missional Work: for a look at a cross section of our service work, see a compilation of UBBC SERVES columns from 2021-2023:  
[https://www.ubbcwelcome.org/files/ugd/a09b2d\\_60b01153388c47d797517bbbb3094a05.pdf](https://www.ubbcwelcome.org/files/ugd/a09b2d_60b01153388c47d797517bbbb3094a05.pdf)



### Buildings/Facilities

- Church building – 411 South Burrowes Street
  - Level 1
    - Kitchen (recently renovated)
    - Fellowship Hall
    - Fireside Room
  - Level 2
    - Sanctuary
    - Narthex (recently renovated)
    - Main Office
    - Pastor's Study
    - Library
  - Level 3
    - Directors of Christian Education and Music office
    - Sunday School classrooms (2)
  - Education Wing (2 floors)
    - Rented to [Our Children's Center Montessori Preschool](#)
- Outreach properties: serve our mission interests
  - 215 Robin Alley
    - Rented to [Center for Alternatives in Community Justice](#)
  - 410 South Fraser Street
    - Rented to [Centre Helps](#)
  - 214 West Nittany Avenue

[Back to Top of Profile](#)



- Rented to [Out of the Cold Centre County](#) for transition housing

### **Communications**

- Weekly Sunday Bulletin
- Monthly newsletter
- Weekly email updates, using Constant Contact, on Tuesdays, Fridays, & Sundays
- Sunday Worship and Adult Forum: in person and online via Zoom

### **Programs of the Church**

- Childcare – Sunday mornings 9:00 am-Noon
- Sunday worship – 9:30-10:30 am
- Children’s Time during worship
- Children’s Worship
- Sunday fellowship time – coffee and conversation in Fellowship Hall after worship
- Sunday Adult Forum – Sunday mornings @ 11:00 am
- Children’s Sunday School - @ 11:00 am
- Christmas Play - December
- Wednesday – noon Sharing and Prayer Circle online
- Thursday – Supper in Fellowship Room – 1st & 3rd Thursdays @ 5:30 pm
- Alternative Christmas Fair – December
- Membership classes Adult Explorer’s & Youth Explorer’s classes
- Our Whole Life Classes for youth
- Generation 2 Generation Outings (G<sup>2</sup>O) Group Programs – Monthly
- Youth FaithX summer workcamps (Church of the Brethren)
- Music/choir – Thursdays @ 7:00 pm
- Special study classes, i.e. Reading the Bible
- Maundy Thursday Love Feast and foot washing service
- Rentals in Church
- Community groups as requested (Girl Scouts)
- New Years Eve
  - First Night (State College) performances
  - Soups and sweets fundraiser for youth
- Sanctuary – Local music teacher recitals
- Camp Blue Diamond (Church of the Brethren)
  - Spring/summer outdoor worship, picnic, and baptism in the lake
  - Children & Youth summer campers
  - Young adult summer camp counselors
  - Fall Heritage Fair
  - Children, Youth, & Adult Retreats

### **Financial Operations**

- Annual operating budget in January through December calendar year
- The budget is supported by annual pledges, non-pledge giving, offerings, and rentals.

- The budget is developed in the fall and approved at the January Annual Business meeting.
- The Financial Secretary records all types of giving and deposits to the bank and makes monthly activity reports to the Trustees.
- Treasurer pays all expenditures and makes monthly reports of activities to Trustees.
- Designated Funds receive giving in memory of persons and to specific projects.
- In 2024, there are 45 pledging units and 25 regular giving non-pledging units
- UBBC does not have an endowment that generates income; UBBC's endowment exists in properties and the ministries that take place there
- We do not carry any long-term debt, but short-term borrowing is an option if needed
- We are organized as a 401(3)C under PA law, although this might be understood and not necessary to include

### **Church Organizational Structure**

#### Four Church Officers

- Moderator
- Treasurer
- Financial Secretary
- Clerk

The Church Moderator runs the Coordinating Council.

**Coordinating Council** - Four Church officers, one representative from each board, and two members at large. Functions as a general board to oversee UBBC. While Boards have decision-making power, we make decisions collaboratively. The Coordinating Council oversees the work of the Boards. Many decisions in the church are made through a process of informal consensus-building. We seek to include dissenting voices and keep the work of the church moving together. Boards bring their decisions and challenges to the Coordinating Council for reports, fuller discussion, and consensus-building. Some congregational decisions are brought to the congregation in accordance with our by-laws and constitution, e.g., the annual budget.

#### **UBBC Boards**

- **Board of Christian Education** - spiritual formation
- **Board of Missions** (unofficially called Faith in Action) - manages and guides the missional work of the church with respect to supporting local, denominational, and non-local social and ministerial services; this includes financial stewardship but is more than handling money
- **Deacons** - Congregational care (including on-call support), communion, and spiritual development
- **Trustees** - property and finances

## Salaried Positions

- **Pastor** - full-time
- **Director of Christian Education** - 25 hours per week
- **Administrative Assistant** - 25-30 hours per week
- **Church Administrator** - 0-5 hours per week
- **Director of Music Ministries** - 10 hours per week
- **Accompanist**
- **Nursery worker** - 3 hours per week (Sunday mornings)
- **Building manager** - 15 hours per month
- **Janitorial Services** - contract service
- **Tech Team** - facilitates online church for an honorarium

## Committees

- **Staff Relations Committee**
- **Alternative Christmas Fair Committee**
- **Worship Committee** - *Presently, worship arrangements are being made with the Pastor and volunteers.*
- **Adult Forum Committee**

## Visioning Process

Throughout 2023 the members of the Visioning and Pastoral Search Committee engaged the congregation in a visioning process. The visioning process elucidated some diverse, rich, and compelling stories of people's history, their service, and their passion. The following are some of the reflections and perspectives we learned over the year. The process has been an affirmation of what we know and who we are.

Connecting and small groups seem to be universally valued. People get excited about having more affinity groups. Some folks would like us to do more to connect with each other and the community, and we would need to find ways to facilitate that. We like that we can now connect with people for worship through Zoom and in person. More small groups are an area for us to grow.

Some folks want more offerings for families. There was excitement around more families and more types of people coming into the church, including students. We have some wonderful resources already as a church and we can build from there!

What UBBC claims to stand for was affirmed in the visioning process: a lot of really great things about who we are, what we do, why we come to UBBC, and what we want in our lives. This is a church community that wants to serve the community and is very motivated to do so. We value interfaith cooperation throughout the community to serve others. We have a very inclusive congregation that comes from a variety of backgrounds. We also continue to challenge ourselves on what we mean by 'welcoming'. We have a desire as well to be more engaged with the university than we are presently.

We are very diverse with respect to our use of and comfort with traditional religious language, although our core beliefs and values are fairly consistent. We need a pastor who is a good code-switcher because some people don't feel heard if we never use any of their language. Language is inherently metaphorical, so as long as someone's language does not offend, why not incorporate some of it when talking with them? When someone asks why we shy away from talking about God as Father, for example, it's okay to say that if you had a father who cherished you and an abusive or absent mother, then it's understandable that you would want and need to speak of God that way. But we remember that that's not everyone's experience. The Divine is Creator and Parent of us all and not confined by gender and in a perfect world, we would not be confined by gender either. Many people on the periphery of the church are eager for us to ask them to share their time and talents and don't offer because they are unsure we would value what they have to give. It's important when seeking their input to invite them to share who they really are. The best way to initiate this in others is first to be vulnerable and honest about who we really are.

### **Challenges We Face**

Like so many (or all) congregations, UBBC is striving to figure out what it means, and will mean, to be a church in the post-Covid-19-pandemic context. We survived the necessary changes of shifting to fully remote operations and then easing back to in-person operations. Some attendant affordances—like having a synchronous virtual option for worship—came with this process. Now how do we carry forward when we're not in mere survival mode?

Of course, that question is parallel with our transition from a longtime, beloved pastor to our next pastor. It's also at a time when the congregation recently finished a sizable renovation of the church home, which, given the higher-than-anticipated cost, limited how much the congregation could contribute financially to the local, denominational, and non-local ministries and social services it supports.

Longer-term challenges include: UBBC's relationship with people affiliated with The Penn State University, particularly attracting and serving undergraduate, graduate, staff, and faculty populations; continuing to support the many ministries of the church and its congregants while the congregation ages (e.g., staffing the childcare room and Sunday School classes); lacking racial diversity yet seeking to do antiracist work; attracting and serving families, particularly those with young children; being misunderstood or misperceived because of our 'Baptist' and 'Brethren' names, with people immediately associating Southern Baptist and patriarchy with us; being Baptist and Brethren in foundation and history while, at the same time, increasingly being comprised of congregants whose spiritual/religious backgrounds are neither Baptist nor Brethren.

Another challenge we face—though certainly not a bad one—is better determining and understanding our congregation's welcoming stance. What, *exactly*, does it mean that we are 'welcoming'? Do we truly welcome all people? If so, what does that require of

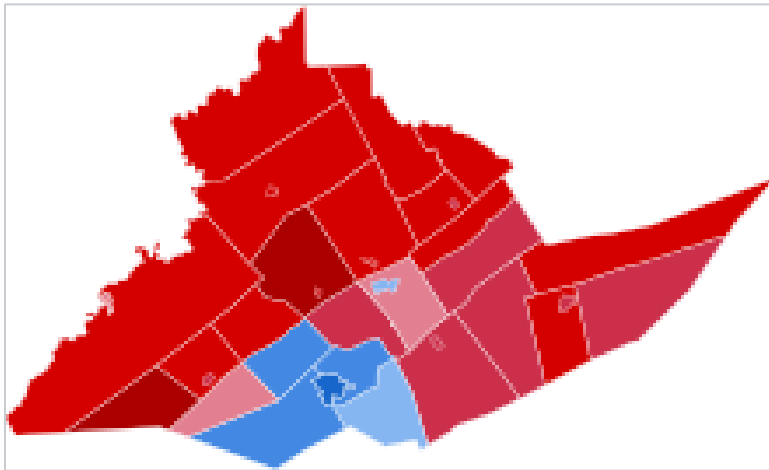
ourselves? And what about actions and stances of people that we find offensive, threatening, violent?

### State College Area

UBBC is in State College, Pennsylvania. State College is a borough in Centre County. It is a home-rule municipality and a college town, dominated economically, culturally, and demographically by the presence of the University Park campus of Penn State.

State College (average of 40,500 population according to 2020 Census) is the largest designated borough in Pennsylvania. It is the principal borough of the six municipalities that make up the State College area, the largest settlement in Centre County, and is often referred to locally as the Centre Region. Many of these Centre Region communities also carry a "State College, PA" address although they are not part of the borough. Happy Valley and Lion Country are also used to identify the State College area, including the borough and the townships of College, Harris, Patton, and Ferguson.

Large tracts of farmland and an expanse of Appalachian Mountain ranges and forests surround it. Its mountains and forests make it attractive for many outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking, fishing, and skiing. The Nittany Mountain is part of Pennsylvania's geologic ridge-and-valley province of the Appalachian Mountains. It is located at the approximate geographic center of Pennsylvania.



State College is a justice-oriented community. This is a map of voter registration in Centre County. The dark blue section is State College borough and the other blue sections are its surrounding townships, College, Harris, Patton, and Ferguson. These areas make up the State College Area School District. We have communities within 15-20 miles that have a more conservative population.

The following are links to information about the State College area. More information is available from any congregation member.

- [Happy Valley Adventure Bureau](#)
- [State College Area School District](#)
- [Rediscover State College](#)