

Living
Courageously
Into the Future



**University Baptist & Brethren Church
State College, Pennsylvania**

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UBBC 1997-2022: Living Courageously Into the Future

The quarter century between 1997 and UBBC’s centennial year of 2022 was a period of tumultuous change for all societal institutions including—perhaps especially—Christian churches.

In 1997, Bill Clinton was president. The United States was not yet involved in the “forever wars” that began in 2001. Social media, which has transformed the way many humans perceive and interact with each other, was born in 1997 with a service called Six Degrees. There was a working two-party political system. The polarization that calcified and paralyzed our national government did not really take off until after the turn of the century.

Resorting to cliché, it was a simpler time.

The story of University Baptist and Brethren Church from 1997 to 2022 might be summed up in three words: stability, not tranquility. While American society grew more fractious and unstable, the governance, life, and mission of the church, from the pastorate to the lay people, met the challenges.

The church was fortunate to have robust, effective, compassionate, steady leadership from two pastors: Glenn A. Mitchell and Bonnie Kline Smeltzer. And the lay leadership was strong too, first from the older saints and later, as they passed on, from the next generation inspired by a clear and regularly examined church vision and the examples of those who preceded them.

That solid guidance was critically needed and tested often by the events of the 21st century.

The Late 1990s: Getting Into “Good Trouble”

Our church began 1997 with a dose of good news: The American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware, holders of the church’s mortgage, agreed to waive repayment of any principal and interest owed to them and to deed the church property to UBBC. We marked our 75th anniversary that year with an April 20th luncheon at Tussey Mountain Lodge and a sermon by Rev. Bob Wallace, who served as pastor here from 1965 to 1973.

And in October 1998, the church adopted a new mission statement. It read: “Woven together in love, we seek like Jesus, to serve God’s world, justly, simply, compassionately.”

UBBC’s Mission Statement 1998

*“Woven together in love, we seek like Jesus,
to serve God’s world, justly, simply,
compassionately.”*

A hallmark of the church—and its leadership—always has been a commitment to seek out and articulate a vision for future conduct. Thus, it was in the spring of 1999 that the Sexuality and Faith Committee proposed that UBBC adopt a new welcoming statement:

"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, 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 worship, membership and life of our church." (Note: the welcome statement was, in the second decade of the 21st century, expanded to include "gender identity and expression.")

UBBC's Welcoming & Affirming Statement 1999

"... we embrace persons of every age, race, sexual orientation, ethnic and religious background, and economic means as vital and integral members of God's family."

In May 1999, the congregation approved the statement. Those 60 words were soon to lead to what the late civil rights icon John Lewis called "good trouble" and to a welcomed and beneficial new chapter in UBBC's history, one that shapes the church today, unites its members, and points a path to the future.

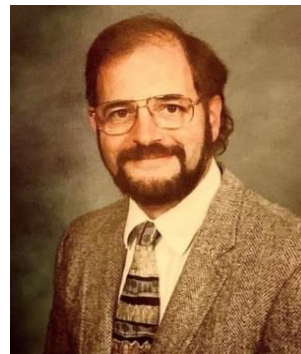
Exactly one year later, the Centre Association of American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware placed on their business agenda a single item: the UBBC revised mission and welcome statement. Over the previous eight months, Pastor Glenn Mitchell and many church members had participated in discussions within the Association about the process by which we developed our statement and our decision to use it. At its May 7, 2000, meeting the Association issued a statement: "It is the position of the Centre Association that homosexuality in any of its forms is not in accordance with Scripture."

Procedural issues about disfellowshipping UBBC followed but the future was clear: UBBC was "out the door" as far as the Centre Association of American Baptists was concerned though it was not until November of 2001 that the separation became official. We began a search for a new home within the American Baptist umbrella and were aided greatly in that effort by the advice and counsel of the Rev. Dr. Larry K. Waltz of Williamsport. An approach was made to the Philadelphia Baptist Association, which had recently accepted into its membership a church in San Jose, CA for reasons similar to ours. The initial response was "no." The PBA was not at that time ready to venture outside its geographical region again. Eventually, however, discussions began with the PBA. Pastor Bonnie and several UBBC members traveled to Philadelphia to meet with the Rev. Dr. James E. McJunkin, Jr., regional executive pastor of the PBA, and successfully made our case. On May 7, 2005, following numerous procedural steps, our affiliation with the Philadelphia Association of American Baptists was formalized.

Our Pastors

In church life, it is hard to overestimate the value of leadership and stability in the pastorate. UBBC has been fortunate in that regard. With the exception of interim clergy during sabbaticals and transitions, the church was guided over nearly 34 years by only two pastors. Both were effective leaders.

In May of 2001 Rev. Glenn Mitchell announced that he would be resigning as UBBC pastor effective August 31 to accept a position as director of training programs for Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development in Camp Hill, PA. Glenn was the first Church of the Brethren pastor to lead UBBC. The previous pastors all had been American Baptists. In 1989 he sought and obtained ordination credentials in the American Baptist Church also. Glenn served nearly 14 years as pastor from January 24, 1988, to August 31, 2001, with the exception of a one-year sabbatical in Nigeria from July 1995 to July 1996.



Rev. Glenn Mitchell

Glenn is a gifted writer and speaker. These talents served UBBC well during his years in the pulpit and the church grew. He led a work camp to Honduras, started spiritual support groups in our congregation and conducted numerous retreats. A robust sense of mission and UBBC's traditional focus on social action (the 1999 Welcoming Statement being an example) characterized his years with us and it was with great regret that his resignation was accepted.

Another element of the ministry during Glenn's tenure deserves mention. His spouse, Kimber, was an integral part of the effort offering clowning, puppetry, dance, children's time stories and delightful and well-produced children's Christmas plays.

In December 2001, Donald Buckley, an American Baptist clergyman, began a 10-month term as interim minister while a search committee looked nationwide for a pastor to lead our flock. We found her in Modesto, California. In September 2002, the Reverend Bonnie Kline Smeltzer was hired, and she preached her first sermon on October 6.

A native of Baltimore, Pastor Bonnie earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in social work from Elizabethtown College in 1976 and then served a year in Brethren Volunteer Service as coordinator of the First Study Action Conference for Youth in McPherson, Kansas. She was graduated from Bethany Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree in 1981 and served as associate pastor of the Highland Ave., Church of the Brethren in Elgin, IL until 1986. She and her husband, Ken Smeltzer, were co-pastors of the Modesto, CA Church of the Brethren from 1986 until her call to UBBC in 2002. She became the first woman to lead the church as pastor and the second person from a Church of the Brethren background.

Pastor Bonnie brought to her calling a commitment to careful planning for high-quality worship services and preaching, believing that the time spent together in worship is fundamental to the life of the church. Her sermons were always highly anticipated, scripturally grounded, and timely. She confessed to not liking to prepare them but loving to deliver them. Sadly, one of her recognized strengths, the ability to conduct healing and meaningful memorial services, was quickly put into practice as a significant number of the old saints died during her first years on

the job. Between 2002 and 2007, there were 26 deaths among our congregants. (By the end of her tenure, Bonnie had conducted 88 memorial services, as she announced in her final sermon!) Yet the church grew as 43 new members joined between 2002 and 2007. Notable was the addition in 2003 of energetic and thoughtful Christians who had been worshipping together since 1966-67 as Diakonia, a United Presbyterian Church. Diakonia met initially in the Forum Building on the Penn State campus and then for many years in the State College Women's Club. Every other Friday night they would meet in each other's houses for House Church—each group organized according to the ages of their children. The addition of this group to UBBC had an immediate and beneficial impact on the church which continues to the present.

In keeping with both American Baptist and Church of the Brethren tradition, Bonnie offered regular education classes for adolescents in the church leading to their baptism ceremonies which were often held on June Sundays in Blue Diamond Lake at Brethren-sponsored Camp Blue Diamond in Huntingdon County. Beyond that, however, she instituted periodic Adult Explorers Classes for persons coming to UBBC from various Christian traditions or no church-related background at all. This reflected the reality that a large number of our congregants—by 2022 a definite plurality—do not have either Baptist or Brethren backgrounds, leading Bonnie to term UBBC a post-denominational church.



Rev. Bonnie Kline Smeltzer

Bonnie's spouse, Ken Smeltzer, also contributed to the success of her pastorate. An ordained Brethren minister and skilled handyman, his behind-the-scenes efforts in maintenance, repairs, painting, singing, occasional preaching, handling the children's story, planning building improvements, and performing "other duties as assigned," deserve recognition and commendation.

Examining the Vision

One of the advantages of the search for a new home under the American Baptist umbrella was the opportunity to examine once more who we were and where we were headed as a congregation. A new visioning process was undertaken in 2002 as a part of the application to affiliate with the Philadelphia Baptist Association.

Out of this effort came a number of objectives for the church, among them: equipping lay leaders to conduct more of the church's ministry, creation of small groups where members could practice part of their worship and study in an intimate setting, and a more robust hospitality effort for new attendees. Other elements included development of a stronger Christian education program for adults and a mentor program for youth. In the area of mission, emphasis was put on race relations and outreach to our internationally diverse community.

It was the first visioning exercise during Pastor Bonnie's tenure and an objective look at UBBC in 2022 must acknowledge that its key aims remain in operation in the activities of today's church.

Sharpening the Vision

Bonnie Kline Smeltzer's pastorate can be described as a continual emphasis on forward-looking self-examination to ensure we know who we are and have some consensus on where we are heading. This was quite intentional and was repeated several times during her tenure.

In 2006, an Empowered Team was created and led by the Rev. Tom Beers, a staff member of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, to help plan the ministry and mission of UBBC. In 2007 the Empowered Team revealed three themes that had emerged from its work; *Connecting With God – deepening our spiritual journey; Connecting With One Another – creating a vibrant caring church community; Connecting With the World – empowering us to serve our world.* At the same time, the Staff Relations Committee developed, distributed, and tabulated the results of a pastoral evaluation to take a careful look at congregational programs and directions.

Tom Beers returned in 2015 to lead another visioning process. In those meetings, church members reviewed the current vision, assessed our assets and positive aspects of UBBC, brainstormed words and phrases that fit UBBC and might lead to a new vision, and discussed the effect of future waves and cultural shifts for the congregation. The result was the development of the following vision themes:

Welcoming to All
Creating Spiritual Growth Together
Confronting Injustice with Strength, Compassion and Grace
Committing to a Sustainable Future

Action ideas were developed for each of these themes and the congregation gave their input on the priorities.

Church Governance

As of 2022, the Church is organized with four active boards: Deacons, Trustees, Missions, and Christian Education. There are also a number of committees, some ad hoc and others standing such as the Staff Relations Committee and the Music and Worship Committee. The Coordinating Council is an umbrella organization with representation from each board and from select committees and from two members of the congregation chosen at large. A church moderator leads the Coordinating Council. There are several paid positions: the pastor, administrative assistant, church administrator, director of Christian education, director of music ministry, pianist/organist, and property manager. Of these, only the pastor is full-time with full benefits.

The Life of the church can be viewed broadly through the work of its governing boards and committees. In 1997, the church bylaws called for very large boards and committees. Since then, board structure has been streamlined. Today, the number of members on boards ranges between five and seven with the exception of the Board of Deacons, which is larger. The streamlining is more in keeping with the realities of the volunteer base available to do the work of the church.

An Emphasis on Mission

One central theme that can be traced from 1922 to 2022 is our church's emphasis on mission work. As previous histories have recounted, the founders began this enterprise, in part, as an outreach effort to serve Penn State students. The mission work has had a decided "progressive" theme. The wars and political tensions of the 20th and 21st centuries have, since the 1970s, resulted in resettlement assistance by our church to refugees from Vietnam, Myanmar, Cuba, Romania, Russia and, in 2022, Afghanistan. UBBC members also have been instrumental in creating several non-profits in the region such as CentrePeace, Centre Helps, Centre Alternatives in Community Justice and Interfaith Human Services. In race relations, it was a barber from this church who first arranged for the hair of Black men to be cut in the 1950s when they were barred from town barbershops. And the church opened its doors in the 1930s to Black men who were in town on temporary construction jobs and found themselves unwelcome in local hotels. More recently, there have been outreach efforts with the Muslim community in State College.

The Alternative Christmas Fair is an activity overseen by the Board of Missions that marked its 40th anniversary in 2022. On the first Sunday of each December, non-profit agencies representing local, national, and international charities, set up booths in Fellowship Hall. "Shoppers" from the church and the community visit these booths, learn more about the work of the charities, and then buy donation gifts to the charities in the names of their friends and loved ones. From the humblest of beginnings, more than \$900,000 had been raised for charity through 2022 by the Alternative Christmas Fair. The growth has been consistent. In 1997, for example, the ACF raised \$10,080 for charity. In 2022, the total was more than \$84,000. Online giving was instituted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic which shut down the in-person fair. Plans are for the fair to have both in-person and on-line giving options for the future. UBBC's Alternative Christmas Fair has inspired churches in Reedsville, Huntingdon, Wellsboro, and Mifflinburg to start their own versions of the ACF.

In 2010 the Missions Board led UBBC to become a member of Interfaith Power and Light, a group of 20,000 churches responding to global warming by promoting energy conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy.

Many in our congregation are actively re-thinking what it means to be a mission-oriented church. Is mission defined by the line-item budget donations to worthy organizations and causes? Or can the mission efforts of the church be more accurately described in other ways?

In its 2018 annual report, the Board of Missions presented a calculation that UBBC mission contributions in that year alone amounted to \$157,945. That sum included the mission line-item budget, the Alternative Christmas Fair, Camp Blue Diamond, special offering for Church World Services/CROP, and the in-kind contribution of our three outreach properties, each of which are used for mission purposes.



Annual CROP Walk

There are “hidden” areas of the budget, also, that are missions-based. One such is the payment by UBBC of the utilities for a house which provides shelter for families who are domestic abuse survivors. A portion of the pastor’s compensation—how much exactly is hard to say—is represented by participation in various community mission activities. The director of Christian education promotes learning that invites people into mission work. And even the director of music ministry inspires people to mission work through the music chosen for worship.

A look at the UBBC Missions budget for 2021 showed expenditures of \$43,000 for 36 beneficiaries including the general funds of the American Baptist and Church of the Brethren denominations, Kenyan Women’s Projects, Centre Volunteers in Medicine, Camp Blue Diamond, Park Forest Pre-School (formerly Park Forest Day Nursery), Interfaith Human Services, (formerly Christian Mission, then Interfaith Mission), Habitat for Humanity, and many others.

But the line-item budget is never the full story and not even most of the story. There are always unexpected emergency needs, and the Board of Missions is agile enough to respond. For example, in 2016, when the Boko Haram group in Nigeria attacked and kidnapped girls and young women, the UBBC Missions Board raised \$2,000 to be sent to EYN-Nigeria, the Brethren Church in Nigeria. And when a devastating hurricane swept through Puerto Rico in 2017, a special offering for hurricane relief netted \$7,650.

In 2020, the Board stated as its core value that it was “committed to serving the least of these by partnering with local non-profits and global and denominational ministries.” Also in 2020, The Board of Missions added grant writing to its portfolio, successfully obtaining a \$9,000 grant from Brethren Disaster Ministries for the local “Out of the Cold” program. “Out of the Cold,” in which UBBC has participated since 2016, provides indoor shelter for the homeless in State College during the colder-weather months. UBBC and other churches have hosted homeless people on a rotating basis. Mission is a core principle for UBBC. It is impossible to imagine this church apart from its outreach work.

Christian Education

Toward the end of 1996, Mary Yahner resigned as our director of Christian education after 10 years in that position. In early 1997, Dean Wenger, the co-administrator of Camp Blue Diamond, was chosen to replace her. Dean stepped down in 1999 and was replaced by Pat Gong who ably and enthusiastically filled the post until she resigned in 2008. Karen Moser was selected at that time and has held the position since.

While Christian education in some churches is limited to children’s Sunday school and summer Bible school, at UBBC it has always been far more than that. In her 2020 annual report, Board of Christian Education Chair Sarah Potter said, “From toddlers to adults, the Board of Christian Ed has something for everyone. We help the director of Christian education coordinate Sunday school, adult forums, youth group events, G2O (intergenerational outdoor) adventures, Lent, and Advent activities, as well as planning and fundraising for work camps and other mission projects.”



Karen Moser



As might be expected in a community where education is not only prized but is an industry unto itself, Christian education is considered a vital part of UBBC's identity. There is and has always been a strong focus on adult and intergenerational learning experiences in addition to an emphasis on learning for children from early childhood through high school.

Connecting the young with the old has been a constant theme of Christian education in the last 25 years. In the 1990s and well into the new century, "Secret Friend" events were held where older people left notes, messages, and small gifts for children who finally learned the identity of their secret friends at a February dinner. More recently, intergenerational outdoor hikes, campouts, cookouts, and other excursions have enabled the generations to learn from each other. The well-attended Thursday night dinners also bring families together for fellowship.

Adult forums have been and continue to be popular elements of UBBC's education program. Usually held between 11 a.m. and noon on Sundays, the forums address topical concerns with an emphasis on how we can respond as Christians. A look at the annual reports over the years reveals recurring adult forum themes: how to recognize and answer racism, welcoming and valuing immigrants, environmental and sustainability concerns, acting as peacemakers in the world, and being advocates for justice.

Sunday instruction for children from toddlers through high school has been a constant presence in the last 25 years. Another staple is the annual Christmas play involving most of the youth either on-stage or behind the scenes.

At various times Bible school was offered in the summer as was a children's choir. A young adult group began in 2008 and flourished for a time, as did a parenting group.

Teaching the value of service to others is a paramount value in the UBBC Christian Education effort.

Annual service work camps for middle-and high school youth offer important opportunities for growth and Christian education. Most of our young people take advantage of them. In 2010, they went to New Orleans for hurricane relief work. Other destinations have included the Caribbean; North Carolina; Texas; Indiana; and Brooklyn, NY. They have served in food banks, homeless shelters, family abuse shelters and a variety of other settings where people are in need.

Closer to home, our youth annually conduct a variety of fund-raisers and events to support local charities such as the State College Food Bank, The Park Forest Day Nursery, and others.

The safety of our children has always been taken seriously. As early as 2006, child abuse prevention policies and procedures were introduced to the adult volunteers who staff the Christian education program. In 2019 a “Safe Church” policy including recognized “best practices” was put into effect.

When the numbers warrant it, explorer’s classes are held to inform middle-and high school youth about the process of joining the church. They learn about God and the Bible, American Baptist, and Church of the Brethren beliefs, and what it means to join the UBBC congregation. A large number of the young people who join have chosen to be baptized in the lake at Camp Blue Diamond.

And the periodic Adult Explorers Classes, initiated by Pastor Bonnie, educate newcomers to the church about its practices, history, and traditions.



Christmas Play presented by UBBC Children

Deacons

In 2005, the deacons’ duties were divided into three categories: congregational caregiving, ordinances, and fellowship/hospitality events. At this time, enhanced training was begun for the deacons to assist with the pastoral care of the congregation.

The caregiving functions include visitation, eldercare, rides for people who need them, arranging for the delivery of dinners to sick and bereaved people, and pastoral assistance and care. Under ordinances, the deacons are responsible for liturgical duties such as communion, anointing of the sick, baptism and the annual Maundy Thursday Love Feast.

Another important element of their service is administration of the Deacons’ Fellowship Fund which provides financial assistance to members of the congregation and the larger community who need it. Requests for funds often come from Centre Helps or from within the UBBC membership. The deacons also maintain an up-to-date list of church members and friends and they grant letters of transfer.

In 2014, the Board of Deacons put in place a weekly “deacon on call” to assist with Christian care situations when the pastor is either away or unable to perform duties. Each week one of the deacons is designated to be “on call” for this responsibility. This was initiated following the tragic accidental death of Elizabeth Smeltzer, the pastor’s daughter, when the pastor was granted emergency leave time. The “deacon on call” system remains in place today. Each week the Sunday church bulletin publishes the name and phone number of the deacon who is available for that upcoming week.

One well-received project of the deacons has been the creation in some years of Advent and Lenten devotionals by the members of the congregation who are asked to contribute writings to them. One devotional item is “published” via e-mail each day during the Advent or Lenten season. The exercise has revealed how many thoughtful and fine writers we have in the congregation.

The Trustees and Our Physical Plant

Built in 1928, with several additions since, our church home and its three campus buildings require constant maintenance and upkeep. The Board of Trustees has primary responsibility for this and in the last 25 years the Board has been kept busy by a physical plant that is showing wear and the limits of its accessibility to those with disabilities and the aging.

A review of the church trustee annual reports of the last quarter century reveals a continual litany of repairs: to roofs, steps, sidewalks, fences, locks, plumbing, electrical wiring, furnaces, peeling paint, asbestos removal, ventilation, lighting, carpets, kitchen appliances, storage spaces, equipment, furniture, signage, and all of the other physical elements of our campus.

The work to accomplish these tasks has been nothing short of heroic and has been accomplished largely through the sweat equity of a small group of loyal, enthusiastic, and skilled church members. Contract work has been done by outside firms when required, of course. In 2014, the Trustees established the position of property manager. Originally this was a volunteer position well filled by church member Charlene Miller. Later it became a paid position and is now held by Phil Jones, another dedicated member of our flock.

From the 2015 Vision for Ministry and Mission process, two themes emerged as action items that related to our UBBC church facilities.

- “Welcoming to All” led to work with an architect to increase access, usability, and hospitality in all areas of our building.
- “Committing to a sustainable future” proposed that a plan be developed for building restoration (sanctuary roof, kitchen, Narthex, ground floor rooms).

Subsequently, the Coordinating Council called out a UBBC Building Committee in May 2016. The committee was charged with “developing a staged plan for future remodeling of the church building to help address access and usability.” It was decided that the services of an architectural firm were needed to study our church building and prepare a feasibility study to guide us for proposed renovations. In 2018, the congregation voted to hire Jay Frost of Brian Lacy and Associates to conduct a readiness survey to see what level of capital campaign support could reasonably be expected of our congregation.

At the September 18, 2019, Coordinating Council meeting, a vote was taken and affirmed to hire APArchitects, LLC, and begin work to develop design options to meet our facility project priorities. The project priorities were:

- Restoration and remodeling of the narthex to provide a bright, spacious, welcoming entrance, with expanded accessibility for those with limited mobility.
- Redesign and rebuild our kitchen to offer a safer and more expansive workspace with modern equipment, improved workflow, and full accessibility.

- Refurbishment of our Fellowship Hall to offer a more pleasant and productive space for convening the multitude of meetings and events held there regularly.
- Construction of an elevator affording full and easy access to all three floors and all programs at UBBC.

Although slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic which closed the church to worship and most activities in March 2020, some work—notably the necessary safe removal of asbestos from the church—has been done as of 2022 and planning is taking place to accomplish the other goals.

A capital campaign committee was formed, and gifts were solicited among members and friends of the church. By December 2021, a total of \$825,136 had been received including \$250,000 from the Palmer Foundation. Barbara Palmer was among the Diakonia members who came to our church in 2003. An additional \$147,858 in pledges were outstanding.

The UBBC Campus and Its Role in Mission

UBBC is not merely a church, it is a campus with three additional buildings focused on serving the community. The Huff Property, a large brick structure built as a home facing Fraser Street, for many years housed the Centre County Youth Service Bureau. The church’s philosophy is to rent space to worthy non-profits at rates far lower than would be expected for similar locations in State College. As of 2022 the Huff Property is home to Centre Helps which, among other services, offers a 24-hour telephone hotline for people needing the assistance of governmental services or non-profit organizations.

In 2006, the UBBC campus expanded as the church purchased a nearby two-story frame house. This enabled a partnership between UBBC, and the organization then known as the Women’s Resource Center and now known as Centre Safe. This house was renovated at considerable expense and with substantial sweat equity by UBBC members and serves as transition housing for families in need. It is constantly occupied.

The Carriage House, a white frame building facing Robin Alley, for years housed Interfaith Human Services and is at present home to Centre Alternatives for Community Justice, a non-profit offering mediation and restorative practices to reduce conflict.

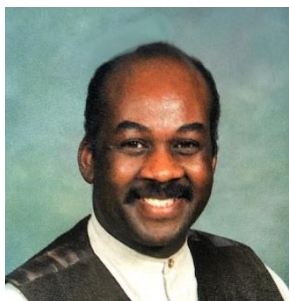
Music Ministry

Music has always played a prominent role in the worship life of UBBC. The music ministry between 1997 and 2022 continually has been led by first-rate musicians and music educators. They set a high standard.

Music at UBBC is done in close collaboration with and support of the worship life of the church. The pastor and the members of the Music and Worship Committee collaborate intimately with the director of music ministry to ensure that the hymns, choir anthems and special music support the worship service.

At times in the last 25 years there have been handbell choirs and children’s choirs, and even a children’s orchestra for a time at UBBC, but the constant has always been a strong Sunday sanctuary choir.

Barbara Paden was choir director in 1997 and she resigned the post in May of that year. Roberta Rowland-Raybold took over the choir in addition to her duties as church organist. In January of 1998, Roberta resigned to go back to college to seek additional education and credentialing. Matt Russell, a Penn State student, filled in until Dr. Tony Leach, professor of music at Penn State, was named minister of music in October 1998.



Dr. Tony Leach

At the same time that he led our music ministry, Tony also was director of the Penn State University Choir. At the university, he founded Essence of Joy, a student group that sings African American compositions, and Tony conveyed to the UBBC choir a new sensibility to and appreciation for that genre. Seemingly indefatigable, Tony brought joy and high standards in equal measure to his work at UBBC. He led our music worship until his resignation in June of 2002 and Matt Russell was named minister of music in September of that year.

Matt is a 2001 graduate of Penn State's School of Music. He led our music worship, with the able help of Erik Clayton, who was named pianist and assistant director of music ministries, until 2005. Matt went on to earn his Doctor of Music Arts degree from Ohio State University and became an assistant professor at Norfolk State University.

Erik, a State College Area High School, and Penn State University graduate, now teaches at the high school and leads the State High choirs. He remained our pianist/organist and accompanist until 2008. Leona Foore, the daughter of a Methodist minister with training from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, then assumed that position until her resignation in 2020. She remained active in our congregation until her death, which greatly saddened the church body, in 2021. Cecilia Sakong, holder of a doctoral degree in piano performance from Penn State and a true virtuoso, holds the post at this writing.

In 2005, UBBC had the great good fortune to retain, as its director of music ministry, Dr. Christopher Kiver, a two-time Grammy Award winner who was joining the Penn State School of Music after earning his Doctor of Music Arts degree at the University of Michigan. Talented, witty and a first-class educator and motivator, Chris made rehearsals fun for 90 minutes on Thursday evenings and turned that practice time into often-memorable performances on Sundays. In addition, he and his spouse, Nicola, and children Grace and Emily, quickly became valued and integral members of the congregation, participating in the full life of the church. Everyone in the Kiver family has a beautiful voice and performances by the four Kivers in church were always highly anticipated. At Penn State, Chris rose to the position of director of choral activities for the School of Music. Several times each year he arranged for Penn State choral groups—including the Glee Club which he directs—to sing religious music selections at UBBC. And he steered numerous wonderful student vocalists into the UBBC Sunday sanctuary choir.

As his Penn State responsibilities grew, and his obligations to state and national choral music organizations expanded, Chris felt it necessary to resign his position with UBBC and he announced his intent to put down the baton after 15 years on May 31, 2020. The COVID-19 crisis, however, made it impractical to hire a new director of music ministry at that time so he graciously agreed to stay on during the pandemic.



Chris, Grace, Emily and Nicola Kiver

The Kiver family provided beautiful vocal music from their living room via Zoom for many weeks. Finally, in 2021 his resignation became official after 16 years. It is a measure of Chris's commitment to UBBC that even following his resignation, he chaired the church's Reopening Committee which provided guidelines for use of the church building as the COVID epidemic waxed and waned.

After a diligent search, the Music and Worship Committee in 2021 selected Dr. Heike Burghart Rice to lead the next chapter of UBBC's music ministry. Holder of master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Cincinnati's Conservatory of Music, Dr. Rice brings to UBBC more than 25 years of professional experience with church music in Maryland, Ohio, and Illinois. "I cannot imagine not being involved with church music," she says. With choral activities hampered by the COVID pandemic, UBBC congregants first experienced her superior talents as an organist and vocalist for worship services. As COVID restrictions eased, the Sunday sanctuary choir again resumed its prominent role in our worship life.

Program and Staffing Changes

In 2008, monthly Sunday evening Taizé services were begun. Taizé' worship involves the singing of distinctive and repeated prayer chants. The repetition is designed to help meditation and prayer. These services continued until 2014. Also in 2008, a 4 p.m. children-friendly Christmas Eve service was created in addition to the traditional 7 p.m. service to benefit families with small children.

In 2009, inspired by the ongoing empowerment process, six Fellowship Teams formed to provide hospitality before and after worship each Sunday, as well as create small groups for fellowship and social activities. The new venture helped the congregation to share hospitality duties (ushering, greeting, serving coffee) and get better acquainted and enjoy each other's company.

In September 2009, UBBC began to offer Thursday evening dinners from 5:30-6:45 pm. Fulfilling one of our congregational goals, the gatherings ranged from 12 to more than 40 attendees and provided a relaxed atmosphere to share a meal and visit together. The Thursday night meals, now done by a number of volunteer cooks, remain a staple of the UBBC weekly fellowship. Though they were interrupted as were so many activities, by the COVID-19 pandemic, they continue, when possible, particularly during the summer when meals can be shared outside.



UBBC's intergenerational volunteer cooks

Also In 2009, our long-time church secretary Nancy Hilliard retired, ushering in a period of instability in that critically important post and ultimately leading to the position's upgrade in pay, responsibilities, and name. Six people held the post between 2009 and 2017. The turnover caused considerable strain on the pastor and church staff due to the need to train new people frequently. A commitment was made to compensate the position—now called administrative assistant—at a higher level and to provide professional development opportunities. At the same time the church recognized that the communications need of the church had expanded to include

digital media. Also, the increase in church activity generally meant a greater workload. Alysia Hockenberry is the current administrative assistant and has been on the job since 2018.

The congregation granted Pastor Bonnie a four-month sabbatical in 2010 during which she and her family traveled in Europe for a part of that time. She returned "...with a renewed sense of calling to pastoral ministry." Paul Gehris of Camp Hill was selected as the interim preaching pastor during that time. It was the second time that Rev. Gehris had served as interim pastor for UBBC, the first being during Glenn Mitchell's sabbatical in 1995-96.

Faith-Based Budgets

The UBBC annual budget has the elements found in any church stewardship such as pledges from members, loose cash offerings on Sundays, special gifts, bequests, and memorial gifts. The budget also has some less traditional components, however, such as rental income from the Huff Property at 410 S. Fraser Street, the house rented to clients of Centre Safe, and the Carriage House facing Robin Alley

The church regards its rental properties as missions in and of themselves. Rental rates are kept well below the market rate and the tenants are always non-profit agencies. In addition to the agencies using our campus facilities, which have been described, the Our Children's Center Montessori Pre-School uses our church Fellowship Hall and several other rooms in the church building on weekdays.

Anyone who has helped to prepare an annual budget for UBBC is familiar with the term "faith-based budgeting." This condition is present when projected revenues fall a bit short of predicted expenditures. Most budgets in the last 25 years have featured faith-based budgeting.

Not unlike the Biblical miracle of the five loaves and the two fishes, funds are usually found somewhere, to make up the deficit. In 2011, for example, following a difficult year financially, a deficit of \$23,700 was projected. But by the end of that year, revenues exceeded spending by \$11,000. The 2018 church annual report stated that between 2010 and 2018 each budget projected a deficit but in seven of those eight years by the end of the year, the church had erased the expected shortfall.

UBBC is no small operation. The 2022 budget calls for expenditures of \$346,866 to realize our goals and objectives.

Membership numbers

UBBC began 1997 with 457 souls on its membership rolls. As of December 31, 2021, the membership stood at 420. During those 25 years, the annual reports show that 125 persons formally joined the church and a slightly larger number either died, moved, or transferred their membership. It is obvious that not all church members are regulars at Sunday worship, but it is also the case that some who worship with us regularly are not members. One of the most faithful persons in that category worshipped with us for more than 30 years before he formally joined!

Attendance at Sunday worship services ranges anywhere between 100 and 130 in the fall, winter, and spring. Summer attendance drops off to 70 or 80 per week, on average. As with many institutions in this area, the rhythm of Penn State's academic calendar plays an outsized role in attendance and scheduling of church activities.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In mid-March of 2020, a memorial service was held for one of our faithful saints, Laura Jester. The sanctuary choir sang. It was the last time the church would be used regularly for worship for nearly two years.

On the fly, the staff and members of UBBC were thrust into the world of electronic worship by the deadly virus that shut down the church and much of public life and eventually killed more than one million Americans. Arguably we were less prepared for dealing with a change in worship protocols than most churches.

While mega churches and even smaller congregations had been building capacity for audio-visual aids to worship and live-streaming their services on social media platforms, UBBC had not taken those steps. Indeed, a UBBC worship service in 2020 would have been entirely familiar to the church founders in 1922—an enhanced sound system being the only obvious technological difference.

The first efforts at conducting church on Zoom were bravely done but awkward. Week by week, however, we got the knack of it and soon, Zoom church, or “Zurch” became technologically solid and a “new normal” emerged. Surprisingly, church attendance did not dip as people worshipped with us from their homes. In fact, it actually grew a bit as people from far away were able to participate.

While Zoom church is a tremendous help, the pandemic inevitably put a strain on our sense of community. One of the casualties was the perennially popular winter Dinner Club whereby small groups of congregants gathered monthly in January, February, and March in homes to share meals and fellowship. Dinner Club is an especially good way for newer and older members of the church to get to know one another and it is hoped that it can be revived soon.

As the pandemic waxed and waned, UBBC formed a re-opening committee that relied upon local, state, and national public health guidelines and its own expertise which included a physician/administrator from the Mt. Nittany Medical Center. When the church re-opened for worship in 2022, first with face masks required and then optional, something had been added. Zoom church became a permanent option. The church purchased good quality video cameras, a sound mixing board, and other equipment to continue to transmit services to remote worshippers. Now services are conducted both in-person and on the Zoom platform and a media technology coordinator position was created in 2022 with some financial compensation provided each Sunday to ensure that all goes smoothly.

The church benefitted greatly, during the worst of the pandemic, from a \$42,300 payroll protection plan loan from the U.S. government. This loan was eventually forgiven.

The Centennial Year

In the summer of 2021, a Centennial Committee was formed to begin plans for marking the 100th anniversary of the church’s founding in 1922. The committee organized a good number of activities and events in 2022 such as the planting of a centennial tree (a sturdy sugar maple) on the church front lawn, the planting of a hundred trees in Walnut Springs Park, and financial support for the New Community Project’s “Million Tree Campaign” to plant trees around the world. Other centennial projects included a centennial logo, a centennial brochure, a banner displayed on the church lawn, a centennial proclamation by State College Borough Council, the digitization and collation of historic photographs, a centennial-themed all-church picnic at Tudek

Park, an adult forum focused on reminiscence by adults who had grown up in the church, the creation and sale of Christmas ornaments by and for the church youth to defray costs of their summer trip to National Youth Conference, planning and conducting a centennial-themed Sunday worship service on November 6, a special music event and reception on November 6, and finally, creation of this history document.

Challenges

UBBC is not immune to societal trends, one of which is a shortage of volunteers to do the work of the church. In more families each adult works a full-time job, leaving less time to help with the church. Also, family activities such as athletic teams, clubs, and music lessons often take priority. This, in turn, creates more pressure on paid staff to do the work of the church. In the future, it is anticipated that these trends will accelerate. UBBC will be challenged to work more efficiently and effectively, taking fuller advantage of technologies such as the church data management system and others, to accomplish its objectives. Another question: will the “faith-based budgeting” of the past and the present, continue to be the answer for the future?

Living Courageously Into the Future

The two signal events in the life of the church in its first half century were its founding in 1922 as an American Baptist institution and the dual affiliation with the Church of the Brethren which began in 1968. Through most of its first century UBBC was a congregation of people with Baptist and Brethren backgrounds.

That is no longer the case.

On November 4, 2018, the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the church’s affiliation with the Church of the Brethren, Pastor Bonnie took an informal poll during the worship service to learn the religious backgrounds of those present. There were 122 people in the sanctuary that Sunday, a slightly better-than-typical number. The results were revealing.

Eighteen of the 122 people had grown up as American Baptists. Another seven had Southern Baptist or other Baptist background. Twenty-one people came from Church of the Brethren backgrounds. The largest number, 23, had been Presbyterians. Fifteen had been Roman Catholics. Another 11 came from the Methodist tradition. Lutheran and Episcopalian backgrounds claimed seven each. Five had come from the Society of Friends (Quakers), three from the United Church of Christ, two from the Disciples of Christ, and three were not raised in any church community.

This caused Bonnie to note in her annual report: “Like 50 years ago, the congregation is at a turning point. Most of our members and active participants have come from other Christian traditions. They bring faith and gifts that enrich congregational life and increase our witness. We are an ecumenical congregation in the broadest sense, or as I’ve been known to say we’re post-denominational. In other words, while our Baptist and Brethren roots have shaped our character, they may no longer direct our future. The Church is facing a wonderful opportunity to continue living courageously into that future.”

Starting Its Second Century

On July 31, 2022, Bonnie Kline Smeltzer preached her final sermon, taking for her scripture text, Ecclesiastes 3:1-9. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” She announced her resignation in January and had been contemplating that move for several years prior. When the COVID pandemic struck in early 2020, however, she realized that she couldn’t say goodbye over a video screen. She had to see it through until we were able to worship in person again. Her resignation was accepted with profound sadness and a sense of deep gratitude and blessing for two decades of superior and compassionate leadership.

Tom Beers, an American Baptist clergyman from Wayne, PA who had helped lead UBBC through two visioning processes, was named interim pastor. The national search for a new permanent pastor began.

Whoever is chosen will find a church committed to Christian hospitality in its broadest sense, and with a level of spirituality deepened by its experience of the last quarter century. In an article in *The Centre Daily Times* on July 22, 2022, about UBBC in its centennial year, Pastor Bonnie said, “The congregation learned that there are consequences for loving deeply and there was a price to be paid. Fortunately, it was just an institutional price. Our congregation was stronger with a deeper resolve to stand by and welcome others.”



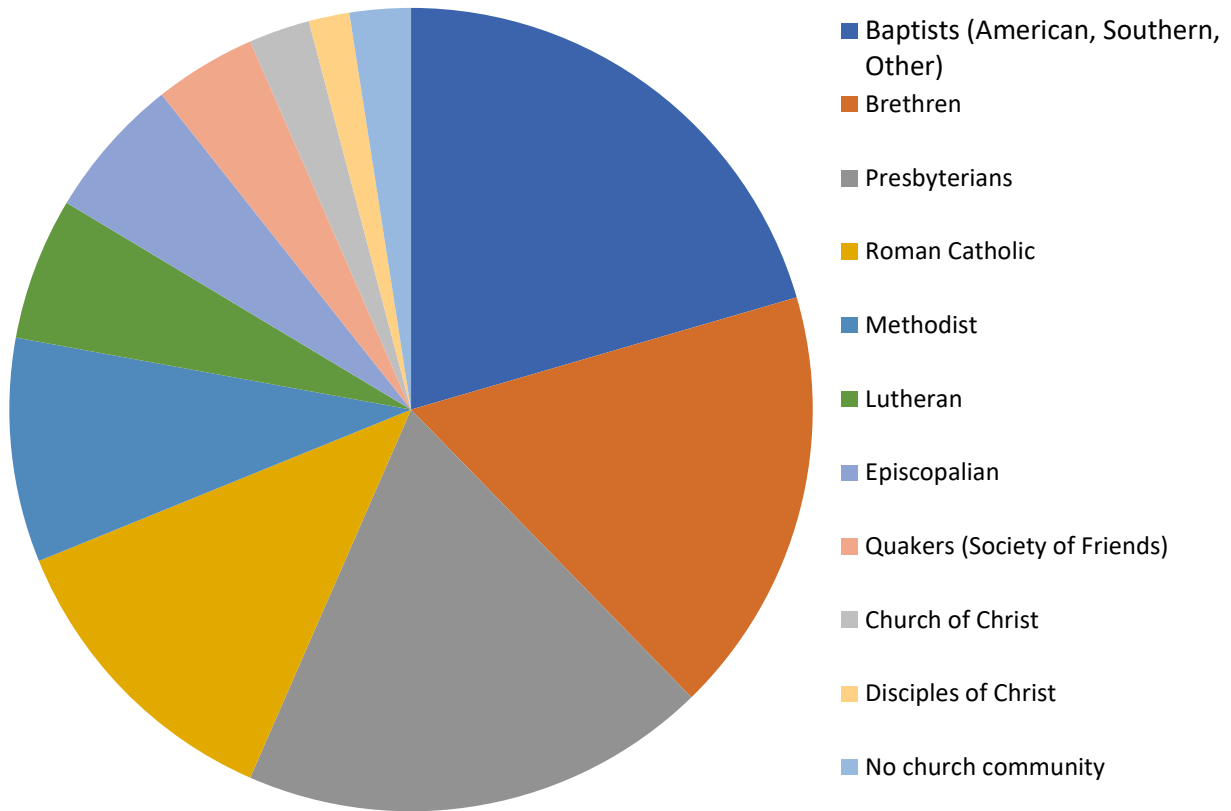
Rev. Tom Beers

As UBBC member John Bellanti said in the same article, “...it is the practice of our faith—living it, not just teaching it—that is a cornerstone of our church.”

What will the future bring? Impossible to say. What *is* possible is to describe how UBBC will meet it:

“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 worship, membership, and life of our church.”

Informal Poll of Religious Backgrounds of Attendees at a UBBC Random Sunday Service in 2018



“We are an ecumenical congregation in the broadest sense, or as I’ve been known to say, we’re post-denominational. In other words, while our Baptist and Brethren roots have shaped our character, they may no longer direct our future. UBBC is facing a wonderful opportunity to continue living into that future.”

Rev. Bonnie Kline Smeltzer
Pastor, University Baptist and Brethren Church
2002-2022



A BRIEF HISTORY OF 100 YEARS OF SERVICE UNIVERSITY BAPTIST & BRETHREN CHURCH STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA

- 1922**
Pastor: Rev. Clarence Adams, a Charter Member of the Church
Membership: 40 Charter Members
Articles of Faith signed on Sept. 16th
Penn State Student Enrollment: 2,000
- 1923**
Baptist Women's Union formed
- 1924**
Baptist Young People's Union formed
- 1926**
Construction of the Church begun
- 1928**
Church construction completed
- 1929**
First Sunday Service in Sanctuary celebrated on January 1st
- 1931**
Pastor: Rev. Robert Selby 1931-1943
- 1932**
Membership: 86
Roger Williams Fellowship organized; 40 to 70 members; met every Sunday; continued until 1966

1939

Pastor Selby conducted Visitation Evangelism Campaign to raise funds for church, led services at local CCC camps, and opened the church "social room" to "colored" minister from Bellefonte so he could conduct "colored" services

1940

Organ donated by Blockley Baptist Church in Philadelphia; Frances "Ginny" Reen, Organist/Pianist; Willa Taylor, Choir Director

1945

Pastor: Robert Eads 1944-1954

Membership: 140

End of WW II caused surge in PSU student activity; Sunday and daily radio devotions broadcast on radio

1946

Church sponsored Child Outreach Program at "Windswept" Trailer Park

1948

Conversation started about including Church of the Brethren in open membership; \$4,100 given to World Mission Crusade for addition to building for student use

1949

Church sponsored displaced European student Michael Bubel, a Japanese American Family from interment camp, and Dutch architect and family from Rotterdam

1952

Rear addition provided education and office space; Hammond Electric Organ: a dedicated gift from Prof. and Mrs. Leland Rhodes

1953 ●

Parsonage purchased at 417 West Hillcrest Avenue

1954 ●

Membership: 197

Two services on Sunday mornings (early service for families and 2nd for adults and students); Members Lenwood and Joy Edge went to Philippines as missionaries

1955 ●

Pastor: Rev. Earl Spencer 1955-1965

Church involved in reducing racial prejudice in community; Pastor Spencer Chairman of Christian Education for State College Council of Churches; Rose Spencer (1955-1965) developed five graded choirs including handbell choir, rhythm group, and initiated State College Junior Choir Festival

1958 ●

Crider family returned to Burma as missionaries; PSU student population continued to grow

1960 ●

Robert Boyer served as Minister to Students 1960-1985 and brought vans of students to worship on Sundays; University Denomination Liaison Board provided mid-week suppers for students and care packages to dorm rooms

1963 ●

Boy Scout Troop #38 formed

1964 ●

Education Wing added

● **1965**

Pastor: Rev. Robert Wallace 1965-1973

Pastor Wallace spoke out on abortion issue;
Church sponsored Tom Shade, first black student from Tuscaloosa AL at State High;
Two more students also sponsored: Sharian White and Jesse Shade

● **1966**

Women's Mission Society became American Baptist Women;
Champ Program started with Chambers Memorial Church in Harlem;
Covenant Group focused on alleviating poverty in community

● **1968**

Dual Affiliation of American Baptist Church and the Church of the Brethren completed

● **1969**

Christian Mission formed: ten congregations pooled resources for meeting human needs in community;
Dorothy Wiggins, Director of Christian Education, introduced new American Baptist Curriculum and encouraged strong adult education program

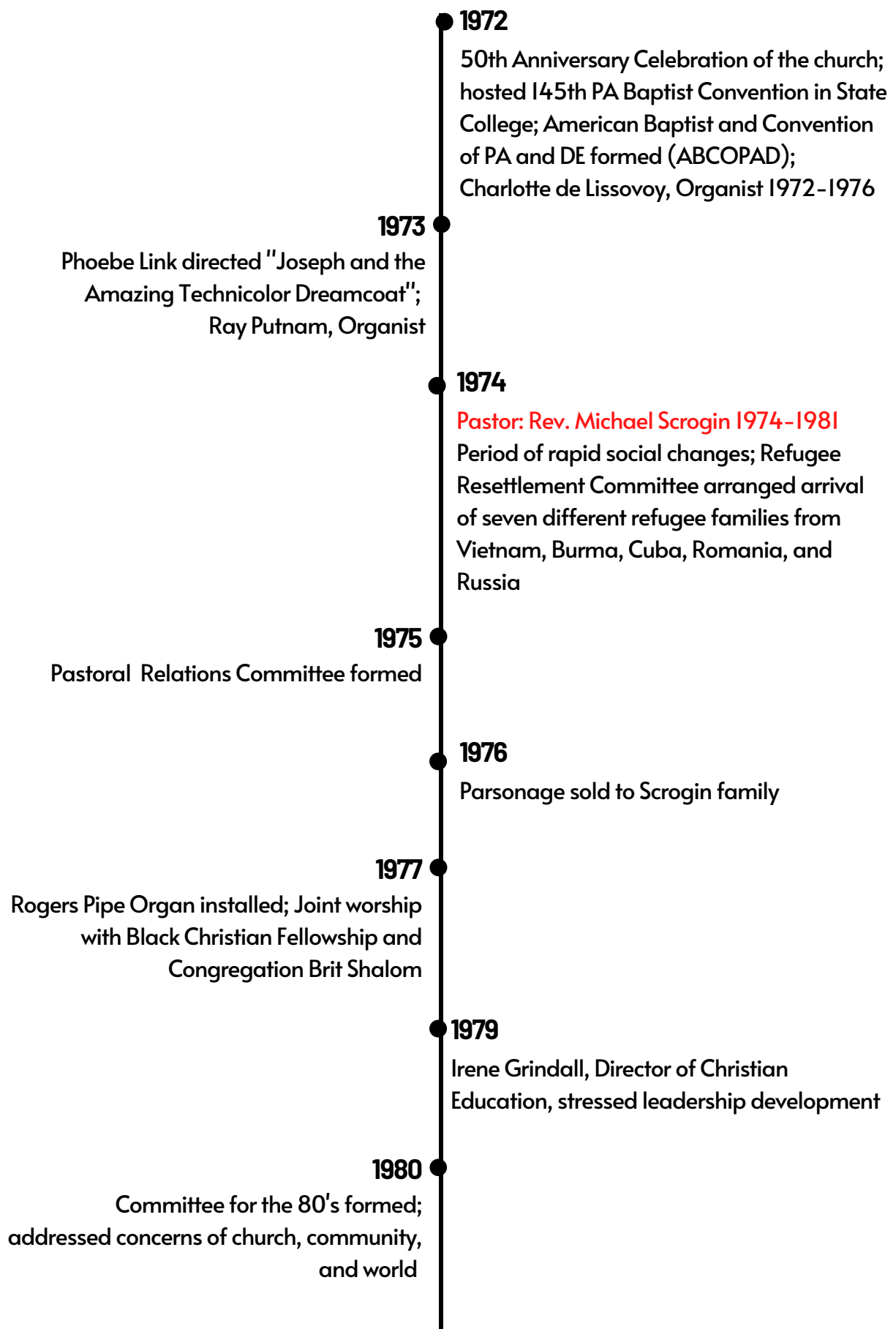
● **1970**

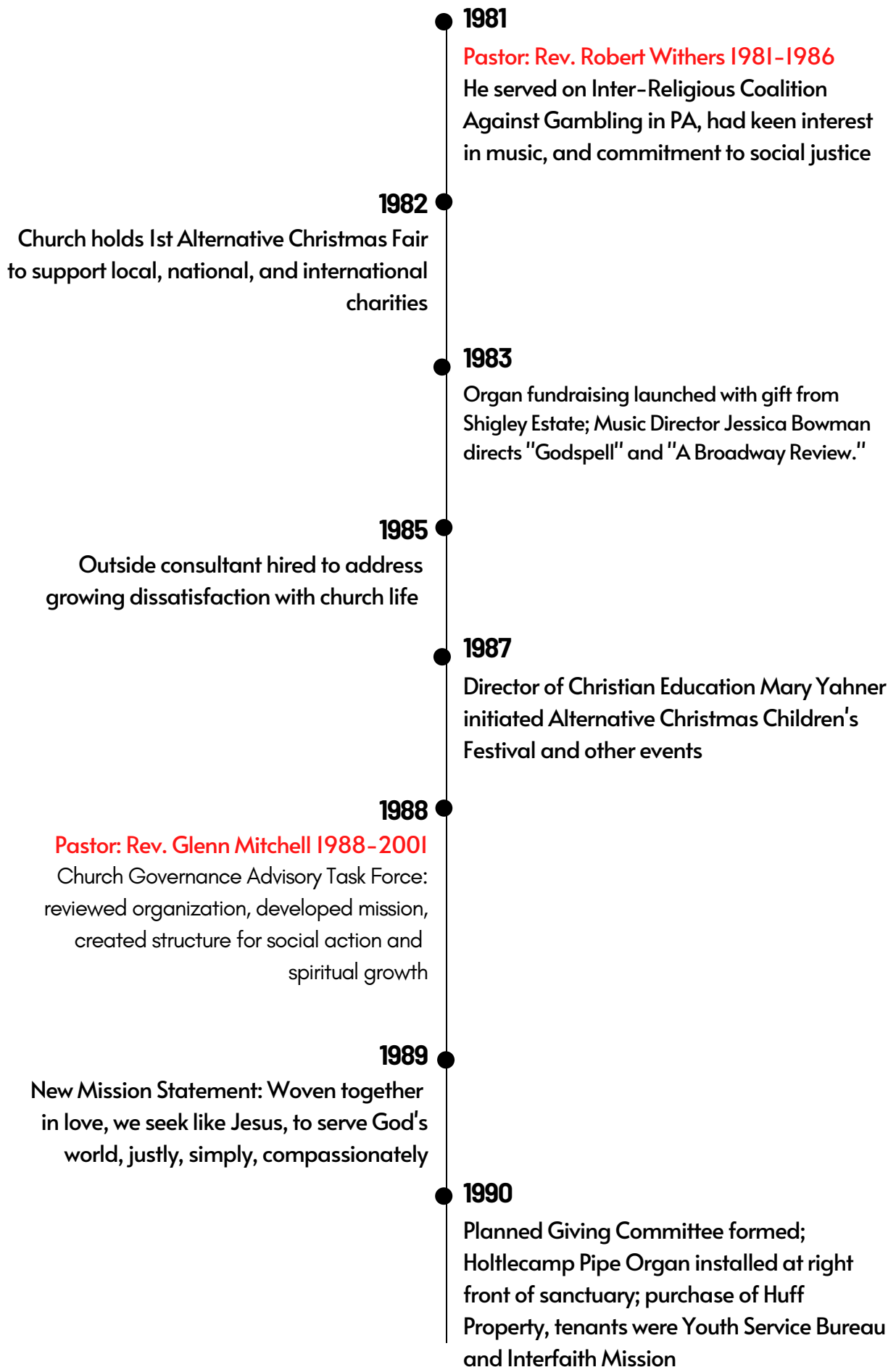
Membership: 410

Fair Housing Inc. and Health Council formed;
Shared Ministry, a covenant of four local congregations worked as a team ministry: Park Forest Methodist, Sycamore Community, Diakonia, and UBBC

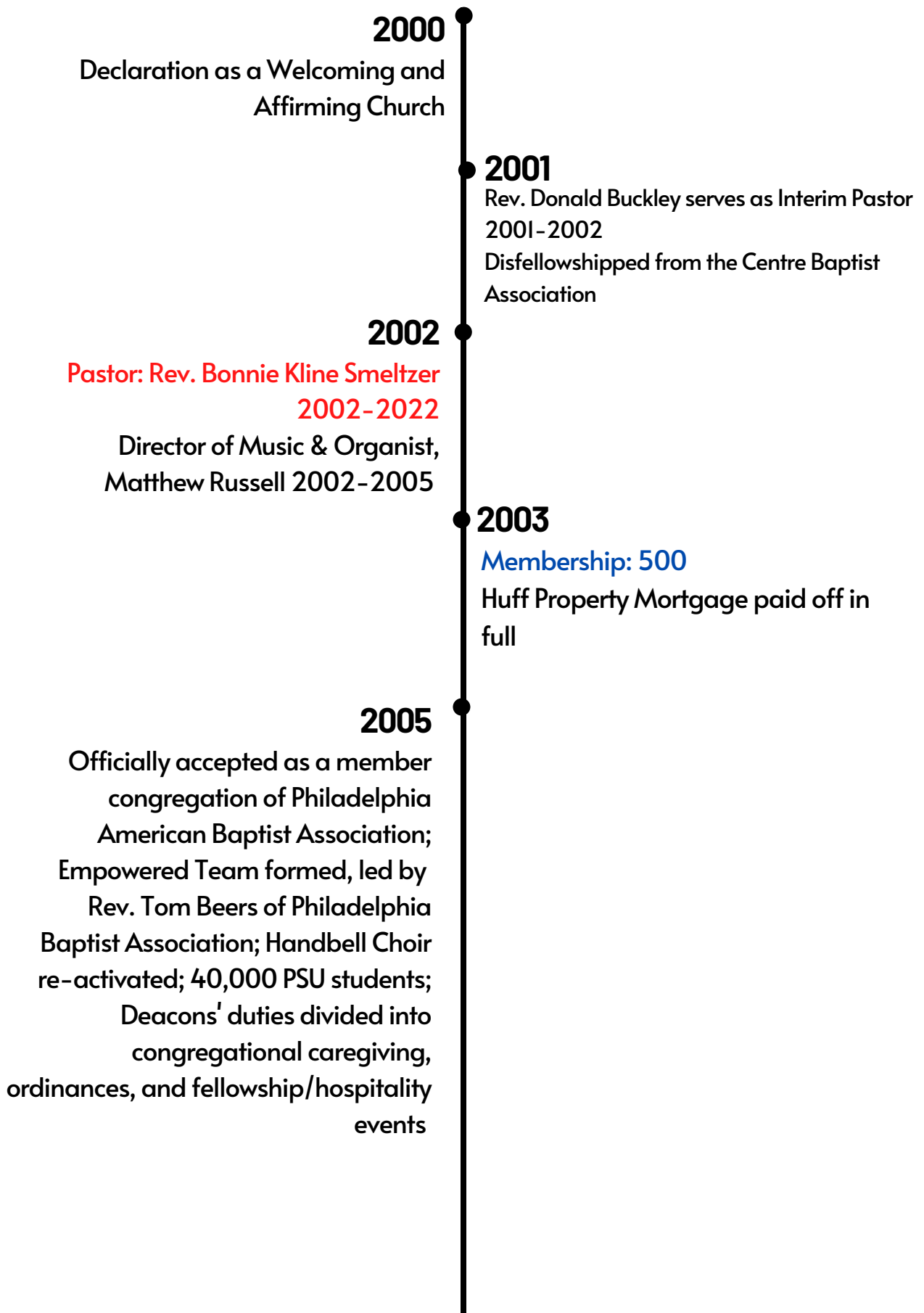
● **1971**

Sanctuary expanded





-
- 1991**
New sound system installed;
Organist Roberta Rowland-Raybold
- 1992**
Seven members traveled to Honduras for
work camp program
- 1993**
Handbell Choir re-activated and new bells
(3 Octaves) purchased
- 1994**
Ministry Team Commissioned for five years;
Mitchell family took Sabbatical Year in
Nigeria and laity step into leadership
- 1995**
Accessibility Project: elevator, entrance, new
bathrooms, renovations to Fellowship Room
- 1996**
Sexuality and Faith Committee formed
- 1997**
75th church Anniversary Celebration;
American Baptists waived repayment of
building loan, deeded church building to
UBBC
- 1998**
Futures Committee formed "Exploring our
Aspirations;" New Mission Statement:
Woven together in love, we seek like Jesus,
to serve God's world, justly, simply,
compassionately; Hallmark Chimes
purchased; Music Director Anthony Leach
1998-2002
- 1999**
Welcoming and Affirming Statement
adopted; Steinway Grand Piano
purchased for Sanctuary



2006

Empowered Team's Plan for Ministry and Mission themes: connecting with God, one another, with world; Christopher Kiver, Director of Music Ministries; Erik Clayton, Assistant Director; purchase of Rogers Property, tenant was Women's Refuge; Child Abuse prevention policies and procedures introduced for adult volunteers; Church purchased nearby home to use as transition for families in need

2008

Monthly Sunday evening Taizé services begun 2008-2014; 4 p.m. Christmas Eve Children's service offered in addition to 7 p.m. candlelight service; Leona Foore, organist 2008-2020

2009

Deacons organize Fellowship Teams to provide hospitality before and after Sunday services; Thursday evening dinners in Fireside Room begun

2010

UBBC joins Interfaith Power and Light responding to global warming; UBBC youth went to work camp in New Orleans for hurricane relief work; Pastor Bonnie takes four-month sabbatical



2014

Deacons begin weekly “Deacon on Call” program to assist when Pastor is not available; Part-time Property Manager position formed

2015

Rev. Tom Beers leads another Visioning Process; committee recommends four themes: welcoming to all, creating spiritual growth together, confronting injustice with strength, compassion and grace

2016

UBBC joins local churches in “Out of the Cold” program providing indoor shelter for the homeless; Building Committee created to plan remodeling to address access and usability

2018

UBBC celebrated 50th Anniversary of the Dual Affiliation of University Baptist Church and Church of the Brethren; consultant hired to survey potential for a successful Capital Campaign

2019

“Safe Church” policy implemented and includes recognized best practices; architect hired to design renovation options

2020

Church closed for worship and most activities due to Covid 19 Pandemic; online worship via Zoom became “new normal,” and amazingly church attendance did not “dip”; Board of Missions received \$9,000 grant from Brethren Ministries for local charity Out of the Cold; Board of Missions formalized a statement of its core mission: “committed to serving the least of these by partnering with local non-profits and global and denominational ministries”

2021

Membership: 420

Capital Campaign Committee reported \$825,000 received as of December 2021; additional \$148,000 in pledges outstanding; Director of Music Ministries and organist Dr. Heike Burghart Rice hired; Cecilia Sakong hired as pianist and organist; Reopening Committee established to plan safe return to in-person worship and activities; Chris Kiver was Chairperson

2022

Pastor Bonnie Kline Smeltzer submitted plan to retire on July 31, 2022 after almost twenty years of leading UBBC; Congregation honored Pastor Bonnie at a dinner at Toftrees celebrating her service; Rev. Tom Beers selected as Interim Minister; Congregational meeting approves final plans and expenses for renovation; builder hired to begin renovations to Narthex and Kitchen starting in January 2023; Alternative Christmas Fair celebrated 40th anniversary by raising \$84,000 for local, national and international charities; in-person church re-opened with face mask requirement; as Covid risk lessened, masks became optional; Sunday services continued online as permanent option



UBBC EASTER SERVICE

University Baptist & Brethren Church
411 South Burrowes Street, State College PA 16801
814-237-2708 www.ubbcwelcome.org
Sunday Service 9:30 a.m.

***A Welcoming Community Woven Together
in Faith, Love and Service***