

The History of McLean Baptist Church

The Baptists of Northern Virginia trace their beginnings to the mid-18th century in a tiny community west of Leesburg at a time when Northern Virginia was almost entirely rural and McLean didn't exist. In 1906 the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railway came to the area, and a small station was built between the communities of Langley and Lewinsville, in an area then called Ingleside. The location was named McLean, in honor of John R. McLean, publisher of The Washington Post and one of the owners of the new railroad.

At that time local Baptists were meeting in homes and in a one-room schoolhouse on the Georgetown Pike. In late 1916, they joined together to start an afternoon Sunday school, which soon developed into McLean Baptist Church. In January 1917, a meeting was held to organize a congregation, a constitution was drawn up, and, on February 28, 1917, the church was officially established. Nine families formed the initial congregation, which was admitted into the Potomac Baptist Association in 1919. The church held a series of revival services in 1922, and its membership increased to 63. Groundbreaking for a church building occurred on February 11, 1923, and, almost two years later, with a membership of 102, the church held its first service in a white frame building on Emerson Street.



Original church building, circa 1925

World War II brought an influx of new residents to the Washington area, and between 1940 and 1950, MBC's membership doubled, and the church outgrew its small building. Groundbreaking for a new church building on Calder Road occurred in October 1952, and, with the new facilities came an enlarged church staff and expanded programs.

For most of its first half-century, McLean Baptist Church remained a small-town congregation and was led by a succession of pastors, each serving between one and four years. MBC's second half-century, however, was marked by the leadership of two long-tenured pastors, Rev. Tom Jackson, who served from 1965 until 1986, and Rev. Michael Catlett, serving from 1990 until 2012. On the eve of the church's 50th anniversary, the church, acknowledging the need to reexamine its self-image and reconsider its ministries in what was now a suburb of the nation's capital, chose to cast its theme for year in the form of a question, "What exactly is a church?"

New programs were added to meet the needs of the church's growing congregation. Wednesday "family night" dinners were begun, in order to offer "an opportunity for the entire family to come to church one evening a week for a broad program of coordinated activities." A bus was donated, enabling formation of

a new group, the Adult Adventurers. MBC also began to play a greater role in the McLean community by starting to address local needs. Most notably, Share, Inc., an ecumenical community service organization, was begun in 1969. Primarily housed at MBC, Share continues to provide food, clothing, furniture, transportation and financial assistance to those in need.

The School for Contemporary Education leased space from the church at a minimal cost to teach children with disabilities. A Mother's Day Out day care program benefited families with small children. A quilting class evolved into a conversational English program for internationals in the fall of 1980. That program expanded rapidly and, in recent years, approximately 120 students representing more than 20 nations have registered each fall. Church members serve as teachers, providing instruction in English as well as a Bible class for those who wish to learn about the Christian faith.

The 1960s and '70s saw increased growth for the church, with membership surpassing 500. This led to yet another building campaign beginning in 1983 and the dedication of the enlarged and refurbished facilities in June 1988.

MBC first ordained women as deacons and hired its first woman minister in the 1980s, bringing the church into increasing dis-harmony with the changes occurring in the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2000, the church formally withdrew from the SBC—in large part as official affirmation of women in ministerial and leadership roles.

Other changes at this time included further expansion of staff, with the addition of a full-time pastor for Christian Education in 1992, and a third full-time pastor, for ministries to and with Children and Youth, in 2003. In the early 2000s, the church offered summer internships to seminary students. And the deacons' leadership role took on an increased emphasis on family ministry.

MBC supports and assists with ongoing ministries, including projects in Liberia, Zambia, Cameroon, Ukraine, Papua New Guinea, and India. *Building Bridges: A History of Missions Work at McLean Baptist Church*, compiled in 2007, the year of the church's 90th anniversary, chronicles some of this work. Today, MBC cooperates with other Baptist churches near and far through its membership in the Baptist World Alliance, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, and the NorthStar Church Network of Northern Virginia.

Four themes have developed at MBC over the past quarter-century: service, inclusiveness, music, and Christian education. One theme is service, demonstrated in the church's dedication to missions work and the passion with which we pursue it. A second theme is inclusiveness, which is seen in the programs offered to all age groups from children to youth and seniors, in the variety of nationalities represented in our church congregation, and in the theological diversity heard in discussions throughout the church. Our aspirations toward service and inclusion are expressed in the church's mission statement: "Seeking to be a loving and inclusive community that celebrates Christ through worship and service to our world." A third emphasis is the importance of music at MBC. The church highly values its music ministry, which includes an adult choir, handbell choir, two children's ensembles, a number of instrumentalists, and the Liya Music Academy, a ministry of the church that offers musical instruction to area students. MBC dedicated its Austin pipe organ in 2011. A fourth emphasis is Christian education. MBC offers Sunday School classes for all ages and groups—Bible study classes as well as short-term topical classes, on such subjects as parenting, grief, and Christian faith—both on Sunday mornings and at other times during the week.

McLean Baptist Church's first one hundred years have seen growth in membership, discipleship, ministries and missions. But MBC now faces new challenges as it enters its second century. How can we identify and meet the needs of our congregation as well as those others who live in our area? What can we do and what should we do to advance the Kingdom of God in Virginia and around the world? Our history tells us that we can rise to these challenges. And our Savior commands us to do so.