

Congregational Profile

Our History

Calvary Baptist Church was founded in 1862 as a Sunday school class that wanted to pray for the Union during the Civil War. It became a leading Baptist church in Washington, DC and in national Baptist life. In 1907, the Northern Baptist Convention was formed in its sanctuary, headed by Calvary member Charles Evans Hughes. During World War I and World War II, the church topped 3,000 members, driven by substantial Sunday school programs.

Washington, DC's changing demographics have impacted Calvary over the years. In 1952, Calvary's membership reached its apex at 3,595. In the years to follow, Calvary began a slow decline in membership going beneath 2000 in 1969. Membership continued to decline and went below 1,000 in 1985. In 2007, a significant number of inactive members were removed from the membership rolls. The current membership figure of 288 is a more accurate reflection of committed and involved members.

In the early 1970's, the congregation voted to stay in downtown Washington, committing to be an urban congregation and urban ministry. During the following years, Calvary ran several outreach programs for neighborhood children, youth and new immigrants, programs for working poor and people without homes. In 1983, Calvary opened its doors to a women's homeless shelter in its Kendall Hall, in the space underneath the sanctuary. Many of the outreach programs ended as the neighborhood was transformed after 2000 with the arrival of the Washington Convention Center and the Verizon Center. Now Calvary's neighborhood is dominated by office buildings, expensive condos and expensive rental units.

Calvary has long had a diverse congregation, including admitting its first African-American in 1955. A Burmese Sunday School that was started in the 1990's grew into the Calvary Baptist Burmese Church that now meets on Sunday afternoons in our sanctuary. Participants in a Latino Sunday School, also organized in the 1990's, decided to be part of Calvary Baptist congregation. Worship services now include readings and hymns in both English and Spanish.

The Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Churches – USA) was formed at Calvary in 1907. For many years, Calvary was dually aligned with ABC and SBC. In 2012, Calvary formally left the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) explained in [The Washington Post here](#). Calvary had not sent delegates to the Convention for over thirty years. In 1984, Calvary Baptist adopted a resolution denouncing the SBC resolution which said women should not be in ministry or leadership roles in the church. In 1988, Calvary diminished its gifts to SBC and instead directed the bulk of the usual budgeted money to the Alliance of Baptists, Baptist Women in Ministry, Baptist Joint Committee, Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA, and other similar groups.

Calvary Baptist affiliates with the District of Columbia Convention locally. In addition to ABC-USA, Calvary supports other national or international Baptist organizations such as Alliance of Baptists, Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, Baptist Joint Committee, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Baptist World Alliance and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In 1993, Calvary became a sister church with Shalom Baptist Church in El Salvador. In 1999, we began Shalom Scholarship, providing funding scholarships for Baptist students in El Salvador. In 2009, we sent our first delegation to visit our sister church and learn the context of their ministry and life. Since then we have had three other adult delegations travel to El Salvador and one youth delegation as well as one summer visit by two of the Shalom scholars. In addition, over the years

we have provided support for many programs our sister congregation offers to children and youth in San Salvador. We have learned much from this relationship over the years and this is one ministry around which our congregation unites in love and commitment.

Our Church Information

We are a historic congregation in Washington DC, located in the center city of an urban area of around 6 million residents. Members are scattered over this geographic area, with approximately 20% some living within two miles of the church, 20% living 2 – 5 miles from the church, 20% living 5 – 10 miles from the church and 20% living more than 10 miles from the church.

Members cover all age ranges. We have active and involved members from ages 19 through 75 as well as a several active members in their 80's and 90's. We have 17 children on our nursery/preschool class list, 14 children on our grade school class list and 8 youth on your youth class list. Calvary members include different racial/ethnic identities. We have members who are widowed, never married, married with or without children, divorced/separated and home bound. Most adult members are employed full-time with some employed part-time, some retired and some students. Calvary households are diverse in income levels and diverse in employment including clerical/administrative, laborers, professionals, service industry workers and educators. In addition, Calvary members work for the federal government, for private companies, for local governments and for non-profit associations and service providers.

Church Governance

Our church's ideas and plans are made by the responsible board, committee or task force. In making decisions, our church is governed by the Church Board and the congregation. Decisions are communicated formally through worship, bulletins and our weekly electronic newsletter.

Calvary Baptist Church is led by a single governing Board, which is voted on by church members at the Annual Business Meeting. In addition to the Board, the members of the church also elect the members of the Diaconate, whose chair serves as a member of the Board.

All staff members ultimately report to the congregation through the Church Board and the Personnel Committee, but day-to-day supervision of pastoral staff and the Church Administrator is provided by the Senior Pastor. The Church Administrator provides day-to-day supervision for church office, facilities and other staff.

In addition, each pastoral staff member is assigned a Pastoral Relations Committee, which provides mentorship, spiritual support and feedback, though it does not provide formal supervision or review.

Below is a description for the positions that serve as members of the Calvary Board. No member of the Board may serve in the same position for more than three consecutive years.

- **Moderator** The Moderator will serve as the Chair of the Board and Pastoral Relations Committee, presides at all Business Meetings, and coordinate the activities of the Board with the staff. The Moderator serves a two-year term.
- **Secretary** The Secretary will record the minutes of the meetings of the Board and the Business Meetings and maintain membership records.

- **Treasurer** The Treasurer will maintain the financial records of the church and prepare reports for the Board and at Business Meetings.
- **Diaconate** The Diaconate Chair will represent the Diaconate on the Board and coordinate between them.
- **Christian Formation** The Christian Formation Chair will recruit leaders and coordinate education and congregational life programming.
- **Latino Fellowship** The Latino Fellowship Chair will serve as liaison for mission and outreach plans of the Latino Fellowship and Calvary.
- **Missions** The Missions Chair will oversee Missions programs and make recommendations to the Board regarding financial support, affiliation with Baptist and other denominational organizations, and resident partners.
- **Nominations** The Nominations Chair will make annual recommendations to the Board regarding the Committees of the Board and make recommendations to the Board and Congregation to fill the Board and Diaconate.
- **Finance** The Finance Chair will coordinate the Budget process of the church, oversee the investments, and oversee the annual review of the church finances.
- **Facilities** The Facilities Chair will oversee the maintenance of the facilities of the church including Camp Fraser.
- **Personnel** The Personnel Committee chair will oversee the human resources functions of the church including personnel policies and review of staff compensation.
- **Stewardship** The Stewardship Chair will plan and coordinate the stewardship programs of the church.
- **Membership Development** The Membership Development Chair will plan and coordinate programs to grow the membership of the church including external communications, the website, social media, and other tools.
- **Music and Arts Chair** will work with the Director of Music and staff to coordinate programming; facilitate planning; recruit volunteers; engage the congregation, Resident Partners and the broader DC community.

Latino Community – The Latino Community is the community of believers from various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (currently most are Salvadorans). Calvary opened its doors to the Latino community in 1998 under the leadership of Pastor Edgar Palacios. Since then, these brothers and sisters have participated as members of the Church with full rights and responsibilities. The work of the Latino Community is considered a missions focus of Calvary.

Latino Community contributes to Calvary's multi-racial and multi-ethnic make-up. This is expressed during worship, in programs for children and youth, in Spanish Bible Study groups, and through various mission programs. For example, the Calmecac-Shalom Scholarship Program is a missionary project of Calvary that focuses on awarding college scholarships to low-income Baptist students in El Salvador. Another example is our partnership with our sister church, Shalom Baptist Church. Shalom Baptist Church actively reaches out to youth in gang-controlled neighborhoods in San Salvador. Calvary has periodically sent members to El Salvador to build homes or churches, to meet the scholarship recipients, to learn about the sociopolitical and economic reality of the country, and to hear first-hand accounts of the life of faith and testimony of members of our sister church and other churches in the area. The Latino Community has provided support, leadership, participation and commitment to these mission projects.

For the large Latino community in Washington, the Calvary Latino Community also offers prophetic ministry providing support and participation in projects from NGOs that focus on immigrant rights, women issues and children welfare. Additionally they offer outreach opportunities through

programs such as Latino breakfasts every first Sunday of the month, the Holistic Health Program, in which the body is exercised and the mind and spiritual dimensions are incorporated, and bilingual Vacation Bible School.

Our Church Life –

Calvary Baptist, as an urban congregation in 2016 does not fit into the “usual” list of church programs. We offer Church School for all ages every week at 10:00 a.m. There are two adult classes (one of which is tailored to the Latino Community, which sometimes is a worship experience in Spanish during the “Church School hour”). Many of our children arrive at 11 a.m. when their parents come for worship, so they do not participate in the first hour of Church School.

Currently, Calvary Baptist has small groups that meet weekly in the evenings--some are book/Bible study and some are issues-focused study. These address needs of certain groups such as young adults or an LGBT support/Bible study. We would like to start short-term neighborhood study groups that would involve a larger segment of our congregation (during Lent for example) which we have done occasionally in the past.

“Community service opportunities” is a category we would like to expand. We have noted that although members say they want to participate in more service oriented mission projects, we sometimes have problems getting members to sign up for various activities. We also realize that our congregation is composed of many full-time and even two-job workers who have problems fitting church events into very busy and full lives. In addition, our membership is spread over a large metro area making it difficult for some members to commute to community service activities.

We value our times of fellowship and community gathering. As an urban congregation that is spread across many geographic entities, we value times together.

Calvary occasionally offers “Calvary Presents”, music programs to which the public is invited.

Our Worship Life

Our worship service is liturgical in style. Children participate regularly in worship through children’s stories and as acolytes. The Children’s Choir occasionally shares in worship. Lay leaders currently participate in limited roles in worship by making announcements, telling the Children’s Story and offering the Invitation to Give and Serve. Our service includes both Spanish and English bible readings, prayers, and hymns.

Passing of the Peace is an important moment in our worship service and lasts for several minutes. Our worship includes responsive readings and litanies and unison prayers. Communion has been served by intinction in recent years.

A choir shares in worship each week during the “school year” and special music is included in worship services in the summer. The worship service includes both organ and piano music. A handbell choir shares in worship on occasion. We do not use praise songs, but we do sing informal or contemporary hymns on occasion. Our hymnal is the *Chalice Hymnal* which utilizes inclusive language. In recent years we have worshiped more informally through “Calvary Unplugged” in July and August, meeting in Woodward Hall rather than the sanctuary, using the electric keyboard and other instruments for more informal music.

We appreciate preaching by all our pastoral staff and have also opened our pulpit up to seminary student interns and members. We appreciate sermons with a biblical focus, on contemporary

issues facing us as individuals, on social issues, on discipleship and on stewardship. We appreciate shared worship leadership with laity.

What We Believe

Our Mission Statement (crafted in 2000): *We strive to be an ecumenical, multi-racial, multi-ethnic Christian body that reaches out to the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. To that end, we strive to be welcoming, responsive, trusting and prayerful in everything we do.*

On Being Baptist, Our Theology and Our Beliefs:

We cherish the diverse Baptist expression as Calvary Baptist Church. Here are a few of the Baptist distinctives that we hold dear:

Priesthood of all believers

Being Baptist means practicing a faith that affirms and encourages the priesthood of all believers. That is, we're tenacious about the fact that God speaks freely to us all, and that each one of us has an individual and direct relationship with God that is not brokered by an institution or a member of the clergy.

Autonomy of the local church

A great gift of being a Baptist is the autonomy of the local church. Much like our individual belief in the responsibility of each person to cultivate a relationship with God, our church community has that responsibility, too. As Baptists, we are constantly asking where it is that God is leading us as a community of faith and how we will respond to that lead. No larger entity or denominational body dictates whom we hire, who is accepted into membership, where our money goes, or what polity statements we adopt.

Separation of church and state and religious liberty

As Baptists in Washington, DC we are particularly conscious of yet another critical Baptist distinctive: the separation of church and state. Our faith informs our individual politics, of course. But the church is never a forum for promoting the state. Rather, we strive to be a church community that is a voice and a challenge to the state and our culture on many issues of justice.

Scripture

We have a high regard for the Bible. We affirm the freedom of the individual, led by God's spirit within the family of faith, to read and interpret the Scriptures, relying on the historical understanding by the church and on the best methods of modern biblical study. We include weekly reading of four passages from scripture in worship. We offer many opportunities to study and grapple with the Bible and other sources of wisdom.

Discipleship

We at Calvary Baptist affirm our commitment to follow Jesus. We strive individually and as a community, with the help of God's ongoing presence and leadership, to live the two greatest commandments Jesus taught us: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' Matthew 22:37-40

Calvary Baptist Practices

In addition to these Baptist distinctives, Calvary has additional important practices:

Open Membership

Membership in Calvary Baptist Church is open to all by baptism, by letter or by experience. We accept for membership those who may have been baptized in another Christian tradition that does not practice Baptism by immersion or those who share with us an expression of faith.

Open Communion

Communion is served at Calvary on the first Sunday of each month, as well as on other occasions. Communion at Calvary Baptist Church is open to all people, regardless of their membership in the church or beliefs. The Communion table is not the table of Calvary, but of God, and we believe strongly that God turns no one away from God's table.

Ministry Priorities – 2016

Worship: *Worship is an important moment each week for our community of faith. Worship inspires and equips us to go into the world to do our part to make God's will present here on earth, to bring about God's justice and to make God's love present to our family, friends, neighbors and strangers.*

Building Community within the Church: *Calvary Baptist celebrates our community of faith. Our church family encourages and supports us in our journey of faith. For many of our members who are far from their childhood home, members of the church are an important circle of support.*

Latino Community: *Calvary members value the Latino Community whose members are an integral part of our congregation.*

Spiritual Development & Christian Education: *Growth in the spirit of God is an important part of our church membership. We value Calvary Baptist Church as a place where we can ask hard questions and struggle with various issues of daily living along our journey of faith.*

A Voice for Social Justice in our City, in our Nation and in our World: *Many members have expressed the importance of Calvary Baptist lifting a prophetic voice on issues of social justice from a faith perspective.*

We acknowledge our church family is dependent upon the gifts of all its members. We commit to prayerful support of these ministries, our church, its staff and members. We affirm our desire and will to live together as a community and work in partnership, fostering God's beloved community on earth.