



Profile of the Philadelphia Baptist Association



OVERVIEW

Before the founding of the United States of America, five Baptist congregations joined their labors to form the oldest continuing Baptist association in our nation, the Philadelphia Baptist Association, in 1707.

The PBA is one of 33 regions of the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) located across the United States and Puerto Rico. As an ABCUSA region, PBA remains committed to the associational principle of American Baptists that affirms local church autonomy as they share the Gospel and strengthen the American Baptist witness and mission. The PBA region consists of 112 congregations that worship and serve God together in a 5-county area in southeastern Pennsylvania, State College, PA and in Delaware.

The Philadelphia Baptist Association, the oldest continuous Baptist community in the US (founded 1707), was established by five churches to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Following the Civil War to WWI, PBA churches grew and actively developed Philadelphia. Notably, Grace Baptist Church (now Grace Baptist Church of Blue Bell), led by Dr. Russell H. Conwell, founded Temple University (1886). The 19th century also saw the emergence of PBA-related charitable institutions like *The Baptist Home (1869)*, *Baptist City Mission (1879)*, and *Baptist Orphanage/Children's Services* and the *American Baptist Publication Society* (both 1883).

In the 20th century, PBA championed church-state separation (1901) and the Child Labor Act (1913-1915), supporting the establishment of schools and ministries like Downingtown Industrial School (1905) and Opportunities Industrialization Center (1960s). Today, the diverse PBA serves through a wide array of missions and ministries, reflecting its Baptist emphasis on religious freedom and individual interpretation.

Under the leadership of a Regional Executive Pastor and board of directors, PBA provides support to its congregations and local communities. It also helps to promote a greater understanding of its identity and vision as a region. PBA also provides a vital link among the local congregations, other ABCUSA regions, and ABCUSA.

MINISTRIES

Mission Banquet (Annual)

- Congregations pay tribute to members of their church for outstanding ministries in the areas selected by the PBA each year.
- During the event the PBA promotes American Baptist Mission and outreach to the local community.
- Our ABCUSA National (Program) Boards are invited to make presentations and the ministries of the PBA are highlighted.
- The special features of this festive event are music, dance, and the arts. This is the PBA's major mission promotion event. The average attendance is 500+ people.

Mission Café (Annual)

- The Mission Café has been developed as a PBA wide annual gathering to provide opportunities for local church mission boards, mission committees, outreach workers, and clergy to gather and share strategies for keeping the work of mission in the forefront of the life of our congregations.
- The unique attribute of this initiative is the building of networks of persons with a passion for mission among our congregations.
- A mission focus is selected and experts on the topic are invited to present at the gathering.
- The participants share their expertise and challenges with one another in addressing the concern of the day. Written resources are provided and connections to agencies that can support church initiatives are introduced to encourage ministry development/enhancement by our congregations. We encourage intergenerational conversations and engagement in attendance and ministry development.

PBA Annual Meeting

- The PBA Annual Meeting is held the first Saturday in May.
- Workshops are provided for congregations that are congruent with the theme for the Annual Meeting. Representatives from our congregations are the facilitators and/or presenters for the various workshops.
- Election of the Board of Directors takes place along with the presentation of the Executive Pastor's Annual report.

Missiological Conversation (Annual)

- Clergy gather for a day of training and mutual empowerment in addressing a contemporary issue facing the church. A Steering Committee of PBA clergy is engaged to determine the annual emphasis.
- A panel of experts on the topic is assembled to share their perspective with the clergy participants. Clergy are separated into small groups for discussion of the topic and mutual sharing. Resource materials are provided for use in building churches responses to the concerns being discussed. This initiative is conducted by regional staff with the support of the PBA Ministers Council.

Learning Communities

- Periodically a task force is developed in which volunteers from PBA churches gather to design ministry models that can be utilized by congregations to address contemporary issues facing the church e.g., diversity, church revitalization, Christian education, leader development etc.
- A learning community is developed and resources and/or training is provided for a limited period (3-year average). PBA congregations are encouraged to participate in the Learning Community.

Ministers Council

- The PBA Ministers Council meets four times a year for mutual support and training. In addition, they are co-sponsors with the Region office of the Annual PBA Missiological Conversation.

- The Ministers Council also sponsors clergy intergenerational support groups. PBA consultants with training in spiritual direction lead small groups for mutual support and spiritual reflection.

VISION / MISSIOLOGICAL STATEMENT

- A. Find ways to ensure our future ministry through meaningful and contextually relevant missional engagement with local churches, multicultural ownership, and a passion for American Baptist witness in Metropolitan Philadelphia (Delaware & State College).
- B. Investigate our assumptions in mission promotion and in congregational mission funding patterns, which were largely shaped by the 1940-1970 “successful suburban period” in both receipts and expenditures (mission emphasis). We need to fundamentally change these patterns. We must appreciate the passion for mission and the missional engagements of an increasingly diverse constituent membership to release our congregations for mission that engages next generations.
- C. Engage our pastors and other clergy leaders in processes that build intergenerational relationships. We need our current pastors to share their commitment to our common mission with the new pastors in our congregations. Together they can identify the work needed to engage church leaders in connecting our Baptist legacy with passionate contemporary Baptist witness (e.g., holistic mission education, contextual analysis, spiritual disciplines, evangelism, theological education, clergy placement, etc.).
- D. Counter the natural tendency of autonomous congregations to focus inwardly; this entails continuously encouraging PBA congregations to maintain relationships in the wider Baptist community. We should find ways to emphasize building relationships and a corporate sense of being the body of Christ.
- E. Counter our historic national patterns of separating individual people and congregations by racial, ethnic, cultural, class, gender, and geographic boundaries. We must encourage appreciation of our diversity as a particular passion of our Creator God. In an age of rapid and continuous demographic shifts, we must explore ways to foster deeper multicultural relationships within the Association and within our congregations.
- F. Be respectful of Christ’s mission as expressed in our autonomous Baptist congregations. The Baptist distinctives of “Soul Freedom” and the “Priesthood of All Believers” cause us to hold as sacred our diverse theological perspectives and various missional engagements. They should be perceived as the strength of our Association and not a stumbling block to unity among us. Biblically based diversity management and cultural competency must become hallmarks of our community.
- G. Faith development is enhanced through the sharing of theological perspectives and by building relationships with other believers, beyond the comfort zone of family and one’s local church. We must find ways to create learning communities and educational forums that bring people together for the sharing of ideas and doing the work of missions.

- H. Find ways for PBA Board Members to function as ambassadors for our corporate witness in the life of the congregations in which they hold membership.
- I. Regularly encourage PBA congregations to act as change agents for the healing of their neighborhoods, city, nation, and the world, as Christ's disciples.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PBA MEMBERSHIP (as of March 24, 2025)

112 churches...

- **82 in City of Philadelphia, PA**
- **27 in suburbs**
- **2 in Wilmington, DE**
- **1 in State College, PA**

- **83 African American**
- **19 Caucasian and/or mixed ethnic groups**
- **4 Haitian**
- **2 Hispanic**
- **1 Russian**
- **1 Burmese**
- **1 Chinese**
- **1 Latvian**

HISTORY

The Philadelphia Baptist Association, the first, and, for over fifty years, the only Baptist Association in the country, first met together on July 27, 1707.

“The Philadelphia Baptist Association originated with churches planted by members from Wales. Attracted by the freedom of religious opinion established by (William) Penn, they purchased and settled large tracts of land as early as 1683. Hence, the Welsh names so common in Eastern Pennsylvania, such as Tredyffrin, Uchland, Radnor, Marion, etc.”¹

In the beginning there were five churches on the rolls:

- 1. The Pennepack Baptist Church**
- 2. Welsh Tract Baptist Church**
- 3. Middletown Baptist Church**
- 4. Piscataway Baptist Church**
- 5. Cohansey Baptist Church**

The Association grew to cover a wide geographical range, with churches in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. As other associations were formed however, it became more local.

Throughout its history PBA has been linked with the city. During the Revolutionary War the pastors of three PBA churches served as chaplains. After the Revolution the PBA became active

¹ Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807, Pg. 3-4.

in social reform, namely in the areas of the temperance movement and the crusade against slavery.

In the nineteenth century a wave of charitable enthusiasm resulted in the establishment of several institutions. Among these was The Baptist Home, now Deer Meadows Retirement Community, founded in 1869. Also, in 1869 The Baptist Orphanage of Philadelphia was founded (The Baptist Children's Services). Following the Civil War and up to World War I association churches experienced a period of growth. Many new churches were organized, and many existing congregations became active participants in the development of the city.

One prime example of this was the Grace Baptist Church, (now Grace Baptist Church of Blue Bell) popularly known as the Baptist Temple on North Broad Street under the leadership of Dr. Russell H. Conwell. Through this church Temple University was founded in 1886 to educate underprivileged youths for the ministry and for responsible leadership in society. The church was also instrumental in the founding of what is today Temple University Hospital.

During the twentieth century the emphasis on aiding those in need continued. In the early years of the century, the PBA championed the principle of separation of church and state in the public school system and supported the Child Labor Act.

Beginning in 1920, the Philadelphia Baptist Mission Society began establishing Christian Centers throughout the city. In 1947 the Good Shepherd Ministries (GSM) was founded with the vision for ministry to people living in institutional settings. It grew from the desire of the Association to provide a Baptist witness in institutions in metropolitan Philadelphia which were devoted to the health and well-being of the society. GSM was a front runner in the development of programs enabling lay persons to provide spiritual nurturing and witnessing to residents and patients in correctional and health institutions.

Today, the PBA remains one of the strongest regions within American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) that is based in an urban and/or metropolitan area. The PBA is one of thirty-three regions of the American Baptist Churches USA, serving a five-county area in Southeastern Pennsylvania, Wilmington, Delaware and State College, Pennsylvania, with 112 congregations comprising over fifty thousand members.

The Philadelphia Baptist Association is an interracial, cosmopolitan body with broad ministries. The PBA has a rich history to celebrate and a strong promise for the future.

CHURCH COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHIC OF PHILADELPHIA

There are 2,188 Churches in Philadelphia as of January 23, 2025 - a 1.23% increase from 2023.

- Average age of Churches in Philadelphia is 6 years and 7 months.
- Churches are also establishing a strong digital presence across various platforms:
 - 22 have LinkedIn profiles.
 - 737 have Facebook Pages.
 - 373 are active on Instagram.
 - 206 have X (formerly Twitter) handles.
 - 18 are on TikTok.
 - 499 have YouTube channels.
 - Approximately 1,098 Churches have their own website.

- The remaining 1,102 don't have their own website.

Source: Rentechdigital.com, Smartscrapers

PHILADELPHIA CITY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Population

- **Total Population:** Approximately 1.58 million (as of 2023 estimates).

Racial and Ethnic Composition

- **Black or African American:** 43%
- **White (Non-Hispanic):** 34%
- **Hispanic or Latino:** 15%
- **Asian:** 7%
- **Other Ethnicities:** Includes multiracial and other groups, accounting for the remaining percentage.

Gender Distribution

- **Female:** Approximately 52%
- **Male:** Approximately 48%

Age Demographics

- **Under 18 years:** About 22% of the population
- **18 to 34 years:** Approximately 28%
- **35 to 64 years:** About 36%
- **65 years and older:** Around 14%
- **Median Age:** Approximately 34 years

Household Information

- **Total Households:** Roughly 600,000
- **Average Household Size:** About 2.5 persons
- **Family Households:** Approximately 60% of households
- **Non-Family Households:** About 40%

Socioeconomic Factors

- **Median Household Income:** Approximately \$50,000
- **Poverty Rate:** About 24%, with significant variations by neighborhood.
- **Employment Sectors:**
 - Largest employers include healthcare, education, retail, and service industries.

Education

- **High School Graduate or Higher:** About 85% of residents aged 25 and older
- **Bachelor's Degree or Higher:** Approximately 30% of residents aged 25 and older
- **Major Universities:** University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Drexel University, and others contribute to the educational landscape.

Housing

- **Homeownership Rate:** Approximately 60%
- **Median Home Value:** Around \$240,000
- **Rental Market:** The rental market is diverse, with a significant number of apartments and condos, especially in urban areas.

Language

- **English:** Predominant language spoken at home.
- **Other Languages:** Spanish, Chinese, and various other languages are commonly spoken due to the region's diverse population.

Source: Various internet source compilation