



REV. DR. TODD BUURSTRA
Pastor of Worship and Witness

REV. MARK SWART
Pastor of Discipleship

203 Route 28
Bridgewater, New Jersey 08807
Phone (908) 725-2313, Fax (908) 725-5682

February 2021

History of the North Branch Reformed Church (NBRC) Updated - 1999 to 2020

The rich 195-year history of the NBRC has been made possible thanks to caring, committed and generous parishioners.

Pastors of North Branch Reformed Church

- Dr. Todd Buurstra - Pastor of Worship & Witness – 1999-2021
- Mark Swart - Pastor of Discipleship - Installed 2007
- Edward Staats – Seminary Intern – Engaged 2013
- Joy Carroll - Pastor of Discipleship - 2003-2007
- Lou LaFazia – Pastor of Discipleship - 1993-2001
- Peter Paulsen - 1997-1999
- Everitt L. Zabriske, III - Interim Pastor – 1995 -1996
- Peter Nordstorm - 1987 - 1994
- Bert E. Van Soest - 1982 – 1987
- Dr. Vernon Kooy – Interim Pastor – 1981 - 1982
- Robert Henniges - 1955 - 1981
- Dr. Gerrit D. Van Peursen - 1947 - 1955
- Herbert J. Guth and Richard Vos - Student Ministers - 1940-1947
- Albert J. Knoll - Weekend Pastor - 1936 - 1940
- Lewis F. Sauerbrunn - 1916 - 1933 (No designated pastor from 1934 to 1936)
- Charles Corwin - 1907 - 1915
- Dr. Philip M. Doolittle - 1856 to 1906 (Fifty years as pastor)
- James K. Campbell – 1838 to 1854
- Dr. Abraham D. Wilson - ~1832 - ~1838
- George Fisher - 1825 - ~1836

On September 10, 1825 the Committee of the Classis of New Brunswick organized the Reformed Dutch Church of North Branch, ordaining its first Elders and Deacons. Source: "North Branch Village and Its Church at the Millennium" by Wayne Daniels

NBRC Fun Facts from September 1999 to Present

"Joy to our NBRC World!"

- Active membership in 1999 was 479, and 438 in 2020.
- There have been 215 baptisms.
- 86 member wedding ceremonies, along with many more non-member weddings.
- 72 births have been reported since 2004, the year this statistic was first recorded.

NBRC's Call, Vision and Mission Statement

- 2014 The church released updated statements on its Vision and Mission.
- 2018 The church added a call statement:

Call Statement: God calls North Branch to lift up the poor and poor in spirit in Bridgewater and beyond.

Vision Statement: Overflowing with God's blessings, our hearts and hands reach out to the world.



The North Branch Reformed Church is committed to live out God's vision through:

Vibrant Worship that glorifies God by inspiring praise, generosity, and service through biblical teaching, prayer, and music.

Warm Community that reflects Jesus' love and embraces all people in an expanding diverse fellowship.

Grateful Service that reaches outward so our neighbors know us as the church that serves in Jesus' name.

Family Centered Ministry that supports individuals and families of all ages through prayer, education, and community as they navigate the demands of life in an ever-changing world.

Empowering Leadership that promotes a culture where young and old are mentored and encouraged to develop and utilize their gifts to the glory of God.

A Brief History

Building and Grounds and Cemetery

- **1825** - The lot on which our present church stands was purchased for \$1 by Andrew Van Pelt and his wife. The original church was brick and measured 46' x 52'.

Congregation Size: 25 active members, including members of the DuMont and Staats families. Some of their descendants are still active in the church today.

Note: John Quincy Adams was the 6th President of the United States.

- **1827** - The family graveyard of Jacob Ten Eyck was acquired, becoming the North Branch Reformed Church Cemetery.
- **1856** - The mortgage of \$1,000 was retired, and more property was purchased to provide a horse shed.
- **1863 to 1865** - the old church was demolished and a new, second church was built, costing \$5,250 and measuring 46' by 78'. A 1,000 pound iron bell was purchased for the steeple.
- **1874** - Major structural improvements were completed to the second church at a cost of \$6,765.
- **1885** - The church cemetery was enlarged.
- **1898** - Through an anonymous donation a new chapel was added at a cost of \$1,500, with an organ, heat, lighting and pulpit. This historic addition is noted with a cornerstone by the preschool office entrance.
- **1918** - The 1863 church steeple toppled in a violent storm and was replaced with a belfry.
- **1959** - A one-story Christian education wing was added at a cost of \$70,000.
- **1983** - A reproduction of the 1863 spire was built and installed in honor of Kathryn Greenway, a descendant of original church founders. The belfry became the church gazebo.
- **1984** – The church acquired Kirkside to house NBRC's senior ministry, which was one of only three shared housing facilities in New Jersey.
- **1990** - A second story was added to the Christian education wing. During a two year period, the cemetery plots of the Ten Eyck family and the reverends Campbell and Doolittle were restored.

- **2000** - The 1990 mortgage for the Christian education building was burned during ceremonies celebrating the 175th Anniversary of NBRC.
- **2002** - The church acquired the Sunrise House property - the house and 1.8 acres for \$350,000. Sunrise House is now home to NBRC's ministry to homeless women and children. The sanctuary was restored at a cost of \$330,000 and included new windows, pews, lighting, carpeting and paint.

Congregation Size: 480 active members

- **2008** - The church acquired the Hope House property: the house and three acres for \$450,000. The majority of the funding was provided by private donations from church members. The roof of Fellowship Hall was replaced, and the cemetery grew by an acre through a donation of land from Arthur & James Sutton.

Congregation Size: 524 active members

- **2009** - New playground equipment was purchased & installed.
- **2010** - The church began the process to change to an alternative electrical energy provider with significant cost savings, and entered into the New Jersey Clean Energy program (paid for in part with a \$47,000 NJ Clean Energy Grant), allowing the church to upgrade to high efficiency lighting, install room occupancy switches, and replace HVAC units. Kirkside was redecorated through contractor and volunteer efforts with purchased and donated materials.
- **2012** - Roofs were replaced on the church's main building and two bell towers.
- **2013** - An improved security system was installed for the church and preschool with cameras at key locations. Door entrance codes and keys were changed. The resurfacing of all paved areas around the church with new pavement markings was completed.
- **2014 – 2015** - The main focus has been the Church's Parking Lot. Old railroad ties were removed, a new underground electrical conduit system was installed, and a survey was obtained to establish a grading, curb, and sidewalk plan for the parking lot. Paving of the parking lot with the initial two inches of blacktop was completed, and the church worked with Bridgewater Township to pave Church Road from Route 28 to the parking lot.
- **2015** – Replaced all windows in the Education Building with new Energy Star compliant windows while receiving a NJ Clean Energy grant to replace our 5 large HVAC units for a saving of about \$70,000.
- **2016** – Managed a \$45,000 grant from Somerset County for a new furnace and hot water heater, bathroom improvements and the insulation at the Sunrise House, all the while finishing the second coat on the church parking lot.
- **2017** – Managed a \$22,500 grant from Somerset County for new windows and doors at the Sunrise House.

- **2018** – Obtained a NJ Clean Energy grant to pay 60% of new LED lighting at the church.
- **2019** – Managed a \$22,500 grant from Somerset County to install new siding on the Sunrise House, along with \$13,000 to install a whole house emergency generator at Sunrise.
- **2020** – Implemented the Church Security focus with Perimeter Greeters, secure entry/exit, etc. Then readjusted church for pandemic with one-point entry, mask wearing, temperature checking, etc.

Christian Education

Christian Education is responsible for Rally Day and Graduation Sunday celebrations, outreach programs and special seminars for church and community families, and for oversight of the church school, preschool, Vacation Bible School, youth groups including Surveyors, and small groups.

- **1956** - The Preschool began with 12 children with the parsonage backyard serving as the playground.

Congregation size: 157 active members

- **1976** - The nursery school served 180 children as it celebrated its 20th year. Shortly after, it became known as the North Branch Reformed Church Preschool.
- **1999** – This was the 43rd year that NBRC offered one of the few preschool programs in Somerset County, serving 254 youngsters with a staff of 30. This continues to be one of the largest and most visible missions of the church. Volunteers finished cataloging all the adult books in the church library and the new children’s library was opened. For adult education there were five to seven active groups studying Christian topics promoting spiritual growth and the mission of the church.
- **2006** – The preschool celebrated its 50th year of service to children and their families, serving 131 children with a staff of 14 state certified professionals.
- **2001** – Small groups were initiated, allowing attendees to connect in a deeper way outside of Sunday morning with increased emphasis on Bible study, short-term groups, inviting neighbors, and serving those from outside the church.
- **2014** - The number of small groups grew to 18. An average of 63 children attended church school. Over 170 children from the community attended Vacation Bible School. The preschool served over 100 children with a staff of 17 down from 250 with a waiting list in 1999, due to a significant number of new preschool / child day care programs, and an overall decline in the number of children in our area.
- **2015** – A One Room Schoolhouse was initiated for children sixth grade and younger during the later worship service. The main church school program remains aligned with the earlier contemporary worship service.

- **2016** – 12 high schoolers made their confirmation through the Surveyors ministry.
- **2017** – the junior high and senior high youth groups were combined and the Christian Education Team was reconstituted in preparation for a new, denominational learning community on discipleship.
- **2020** – Video Family Devotions, weekly parent emails with at-home Sunday School materials and virtual youth groups and Church School options have been the focus during the pandemic, as NBRC struggles to maintain connection during unprecedented times.

Christian Mission

The Christian Mission Team supports seven ministry teams: Church Plant, Interfaith Hospitality Network, Kirkside, Global Missions, First Step Counseling, Basic Needs, and Local Service Teams.

- **1984** – The church began its continuing ministry to provide affordable housing for seniors in a shared living model emphasizing caring and self-reliance. To date 44 seniors have called Kirkside home.
- **2002** -The church began its ministry to homeless women and children in the Sunrise House in partnership with the Interfaith Hospitality Network.
- **2007 -- 2009** Our church plant, *Ignite Invite* under planter David Mojica, struggled to form, and eventually disbanded. NBRC gave \$70,000 and 14 people to the plant.
- **2008 – 2012** – The church co-sponsored the Peter Mayer holiday concerts at the United Reformed Church in Somerville.
- **2008** – NBRC received a major endowment from the Ethel Kienz Endowment Fund that included a Statement of Intention for an NBRC Counseling Initiative that has become the First Step Counseling Program, which offers affordable counseling to church members and the community. This ministry is based in Hope House, and now includes twelve Somerset County licensed therapists.
- **1999 – 2020** - The church has assisted missionaries in places such as Taiwan, Kenya, Mexico, Arizona, Malawi, Croatia, Jamaica, and the US.
- **2015** – NBRC “adopted” a low-income daycare center Learning Gate as a way to serve the poor and make a difference in our community for Christ.
- **2015-19** – NBRC began young adult mission trips to Taize (‘15), Belize (‘16), Jamaica (‘17-19), and Ghana (‘19). From 2017 the church included more older adults.
- **2017** – Our first church plant organized as the first Latino church in our 300-year classis history as Centro Cristiano Palabra de Fe in Reading PA, worshiping 40 people.

- **2017** – Counting committed benevolences, the Kirkside Administrator salary, monthly mission offerings and other ancillary mission offerings, NBRC gave 20% of her income to missions!
- **2017** – The church committed all of our global missionary funding to Chris Briggs in Jamaica through the Caribbean Christian Centre for the Deaf as one of the RCA’s strategic impact areas which allows NBRC to take annual mission trips there.
- **2019** – Our second church plant organized in Collingswood, NJ as Liberti Collingswood worshipping 150 people.
Kirkside hired Joel Boland to be administrator.
The church assists in programs such as the Somerset County Food Bank, S.H.I.P., the Interfaith Hospitality Network, the CROP Walk, area flood victims, local blood drives, and toys for the children of Somerset County Jail inmates, and many others.
NBRC also gave aid to Gulf Coast victims of Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
- **2020** – Over \$100K was donated to mission during a pandemic, including over \$10K to our low-income adopted day care, Learning Gate, and over 1000 donated hours to the county Food Bank bolstering it during this crisis.

Congregational Care

Christian Care provides assistance to shut-ins, small chore services for the elderly, videos of church services, transportation, greeting cards, Dinner Angels, an eldercare advocate, medical equipment, blood pressure checks, and the prayer chain.

Men’s Ministries provides the opportunity for spiritual growth and fellowship for men in a comfortable atmosphere. The group meets monthly and occasionally has joint meetings with St. Bernard’s men.

Women’s Ministries

Mission Statement: To glorify God, we, as women of the Reformed Church, unite in devoting ourselves to Jesus Christ, disciplining one another in love, and developing a responsibility for mission and ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Congregational Health

Pastor Staff Relations

- **2005** - Pastor Todd Buurstra completed his Doctorate of Ministry at Drew University. The Pastor/Staff committee finalized the formal process of staff performance reviews.
- **2007** – Pastor Mark Swart joined the church as Pastor of Discipleship.

- **2007** – Pastor Todd took a sabbatical with pastoral travels to Holland, and through a pastoral exchange, Sita Hofstra from the Dutch Reformed Church in Holland served as the guest pastor.
- **2006** - Pastor Joy Carrol left the church after a few years of extraordinary service as Pastor of Discipleship, left NBRC.
- **2011** – Pastor Mark began implementing “Five Fingers of the Hand” Discipleship Goals.
- **2012** – An NBRC Employee Handbook was developed, along with a Child & Youth Abuse Prevention Program.
- **2013** - Consistory developed an Accountable Leadership Vision initiative based on the Carver Policy of Governance model, a process for Consistory and all church committees to follow to become more effective in their respective roles.
- **2017** – NBRC celebrated 10 years of Pastor Mark’s ministry.
- **2019** – Pastor Staff began working on a succession plan with Pastor Todd for his scheduled September 2021 departure, as the church celebrated 20 years of Pastor Todd’s ministry.

Finance

Finance supports stewardship, oversight, and reporting of the financial resources that the church has been blessed with, including the annual operating budget as well as the investment of long-term financial assets. Finance is organized into three teams that focus on Stewardship (giving), Budgeting and Accounting (operating expenses) and Investments (endowments and other long-term investment assets).

- **2000** – Total income was \$378,000, with expenses of \$356,000. Current assets were \$57,000.
- **2001** – 2010 – Income and expenses increased steadily throughout this 10 year period, with current assets fluctuating normally. In 2008, \$74,000 was borrowed from the Reserve to purchase the Lawrence Property (Hope House). In 2009 and 2010, a total of \$33,000 was repaid.
- **2011** – Total income was \$560,000, with expenses of \$574,000. Current assets were \$60,000.
- **2012** – Total income was \$560,000, with expenses of \$564,000. Current assets were \$944,000. The substantial increase in assets in 2012 was due in large part to the generous contribution of nearly \$600,000 by the Ethyl Keinz Endowment. The amount of \$10,000 was borrowed from Pastor Housing to fund Mission giving.
- **2013** – Total income was \$547,000, with expenses of \$545,000. Current assets were \$957,000.
- **2014** – Total Income was \$593,000, with expenses of \$601,000. Current asset were \$845,000.

- **2015** – Total Income was \$603,000, with expenses of \$620,000. Current assets were \$752,600.
- **2016** – Total Income was \$605,700, with expenses of \$600,400. Current assets were \$854,500.
- **2017** – Total Income was \$631,800, with expenses of \$627,000. Current assets were \$904,600. Somerset County purchased the right of way to wetlands on the Hope House property for \$16,200. The funds were used to repay what was borrowed from Reserves to purchase the property.
- **2018** – Total Income was \$615,300, with expenses of \$624,200. Current assets were \$836,900.
- **2019** – Total Income was \$623,400, with expenses of \$614,100. Current assets were \$1,184,000.
- **2020** – Total Income was \$616,800, with expenses of \$593,400. Current assets were \$1,352,600. The \$23,000 profit from the budget was used to repay the amounts borrowed from Reserves to purchase the Hope House and fund Mission giving

Memorial Gifts

NBRC is grateful to receive Memorial Gifts that are used to make important purchases to enhance the ministries, programs and facilities of the Church.

- **2000** - The church Book of Remembrance, started in 1967, was updated.
- **2011** - The Church received a major endowment from the Ethel Kienz Endowment Fund that included a Statement of Intention for an NBRC Counseling Initiative.
- **2012 – 2014** - Significant memorial gifts received were \$33,185 in memory of Benjamin Van Doren and \$10,000 in memory of Grace Meyer.
- **2016 – 2017** – Memorial Gifts received were \$9,800 in memory of Raymond Bateman and \$8,350 in memory of Herbert Vollers.

Worship Team

The Worship Committee provides oversight for all aspects of the weekly services, music and audio-visual services, evaluating weekly services, the music, and church marketing materials.

- **2001** - During Lent a Cross Processional, “Lift High the Cross,” was initiated. For the Epiphany, lighting of the Christ Candle and singing of “Shine, Jesus, Shine” was performed for the first time.
- **2002** - The Worship Committee coordinated a renovation of the Banner Chest, reviewed all banners and had the banners cleaned & repaired.
- **2003** - The Greeters Program to welcome parishioners and guests to Sunday services was enhanced.

- **2004** - As part of the Worship Committee's responsibility to oversee special services of the church, a Wedding Assistants Packet of information was completed.
- **2009** - After a five year study, the Worship Committee recommended two distinct worship services.
- **2010** - New choir robes were purchased for the Youth Choir with funding provided from gifts received in memory of Bruce Hartzog.
- **2010 – 2011** - New Sunday services were initiated and a review and evaluation of the Sunday 9:15 AM "Contemporary" and 10:45 AM "Classic" services was conducted. These services have continued.
- **2011**- The Growing in God's Son group served in a mission project in Korea. A pilot program of providing Communion twice a month was initiated, and twice monthly communion has continued.
- **2012** –The Sunday evening Upstream Service was introduced and led by Seminary Intern Ed Staats,. The Worship Committee initiated an effort to improve the NBRC website.
- **2013-2014** – The committee focused on improving the NBRC Sound System.
- **2020** – Given the necessity of online services during the pandemic, donations were received to make online worship permanent. A marketing video was also created to encourage folks to come back to the church either virtually or physically.

Audio-Visual and Music Ministry

- **1987 – 2008** Helene Cantilina is Music Minister
- **1999 – 2015** Church music groups, choirs & ensembles were at times as many as eleven.
- **2003** - A new grand piano was dedicated to the church in memory of Joan Speer Bateman.
- **2008** - After special fundraising efforts, a new digital organ was installed. A concert by Diane Bish, designer of the organ, was held shortly after.
- **2008 – 2010** Brian Katona is Music Minister
- **2011** – The church hosted a performance by the Philadelphia Handbell Ensemble.
- **2011** – **present** Linda Collins Director of Music and Worship Arts
- **2013** – The church hosted a performance by the Wiedensahl German Bell Choir, and the Chancel Choir participated with over 1000 choir members in the Annual Choir Festival in Ocean Grove NJ.
- **2014** - There were six groups, plus special music performances: solos, duets, quartets, fund-raisers etc. A new 32 channel soundboard was installed.
- **2015** – Upgrades to the sound system continue.
- **2020** - \$3,030 was donated for equipment to simulcast the services.

Campaigns

- **1989 – 2000** – The church embarked on a \$1,000,000 “New Millennium” capital campaign to build an education building and to modify and improve the sanctuary building. The final costs for these projects would have been much higher but for the time, talent, and materials donated by church parishioners and members of the community. Over the years loan balances were as high as approximately \$600,000. In 1995 a \$350,000 loan was executed to consolidate existing loans, and in 2000 the loan was paid off with a small grant from the NRBC General Fund.
- **2000** - the Church launched a five year \$700,000 Vision Campaign that was completed in six years and included the purchase of the Sunrise House property (\$350,000 mortgage and \$50,000 down payment), restoration of the Sanctuary (\$350,000) and development of the “Upper Room” for prayer and group meetings. The Church embraced the goal to increase Mission giving to 20%, thanks to the continuing support and generosity of the congregation.
- **2004 – 2009** - Vision II - a second 5-year master plan was launched with goals to increase the passion for spirituality, grow in need-oriented evangelism, develop a physical master plan of property and facilities.
- **2006** – The parking lot was paved.
- **2007** - The mortgage on Sunrise House was reduced to \$40,000.
- **2009** - The mortgage for Sunrise House was retired.
- **2010** - Through generous giving from NBRC parishioners, the surplus of donations were committed to paying down the Hope House mortgage and increasing donations to local and global missions.
- **2012** – Plans were developed for a new capital campaign.
- **2013** - A three-year-capital campaign, “Just Imagine,” was launched with a goal of \$428,672 for projects to improve the church (\$303,922), Sunrise House (\$20,000), Hope House (\$42,250), the parking Lot (\$27,500), the cemetery (\$25,000) and project management (\$10,000). The mortgage on Hope House was reduced to \$40,000.
- **2015** - The “Just Imagine” capital campaign was completed with \$320,900 donated.
- **2018-20** – The Herb and Ray Fund was launched for a capital improvements endowment in memory of Herb Vollers and Ray Bateman. The Bateman and Vollers families seeded the endowment with \$100,000, and the congregation gave \$220,175, for a total of \$320,175 as of March 1, 2021.