

1930-1985



History of

THE FIRST LATIN-AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

6205 West Fort St.
Detroit, Michigan 48209

THE FIRST LATIN-AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY

In the year of 1924 Mr and Mrs Francisco Esquivel came to Detroit to visit some brothers who lived in this community.

Seeing that there were no evangelistic work for the Mexicans in this area, only services held at various homes, they became concerned. They in turn met with the Pastor of Woodward Ave. Baptist Church, and they all decided to meet with and ask financial aid for this group from Dr H.C. Gliess, who was the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Association of Detroit.

Seeing the importance and the great opportunity that existed, Dr. Gliess wasted no time and immediatly took the job to help this small group. He then granted them the use of an empty temple on the corner of 25th and Magnolia Sts. in Detroit. But because of a lack of leadership, this first attempt failed.

Yet the brothers did not lose faith nor were they dismayed under these circumstances. And six months later tried again to establish this mission for the Mexican baptists in Detroit. This time they were meeting in a rented building on Jones St. Again it failed for the same reason.

But these few brethern continued with their gigantic faith. A short time later they were meeting at 2667 Baker St under the name of "The Mexican Baptist Mission". In May 1926 the Baptist Missionary Association called Rev. W.G. Birch to come to Detroit to take charge of this missionary work.

The Lord richly blessed the efforts of these brethern, and immediatly the mission was elevated by the Holy Spirit with the addition of new believers. Under the wise direction of Rev. Birch this group grew considerably. In July of 1927 they relocated to the temple at 3606 25th to fit this now large group. On January 27, 1930 this mission was recognized as a church and was admitted into the American Baptist Association under the name of "The First Mexican Baptist Church of Detroit".

Since the coming of Rev. Birch until after the organization, there were 81 professions of faith and 53 baptisms. On October 12, 1930 Rev. Birch presented his resignation as pastor after having made a glorious work of permanent value of which we all appreciate!
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Thus so the church was left without a pastor. But this group had tremendous faith and continued to do the work of the Lord. Then Dr. Gliess suggested to invite as pastor, the Rev. Antonio Orozco who was a recent graduate of the Hispanic American Baptist Seminary of Los Angeles, California. Rev. Orozco arrived in January 1931. But in January 1932 he was forced to submit his resignation because his wife, Mrs Esther Orozco, was inflicted by the climate in this area. The short time he was here, his ministry was constructive and efficient.

This period without a pastor was difficult and full of suffering, for there was now a large number of believers who needed spiritual attention and growth. But with the Lord's help, these brothers were full of faith and perseverance. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they continued to meet regularly without being discouraged.

During these three years without a pastor, the church named Bro. Juan Buzo (a fellow member of our church) to be director of this group. Rev. Ramon A. Tolosa, pastor of the First Mexican Baptist Church in Saginaw, agreed to help out one or two times a month.

In August 1932, the ladies of our church joined together to form the Women's Missionary Society. And in May 1935 we hosted the Hispanic American Baptist Convention. After these reunions we saw a greater need to have a full time pastor to guide this flock. We made arrangements to look for a pastor, making use of the joyous liberties of being a Baptist church.

Then later that month, in an extraordinary Business meeting, the church unanimously agreed to invite Rev. Florencio M. Santiago, pastor of the First Mexican Baptist Church of Wichita, Kansas, to take charge of this church. He accepted our invitation with pleasure and on July 7, 1935 he was installed as pastor.

With the arrival of this servant of God we began to rejoice in the blessings we had hoped for. During his pastorate the church finances were free of its debts and was able to become self-sufficient (up to this time the Baptist Union had been helping us). We were able to increase the pastor's salary, for Rev. Santiago had taught us well in the area of tithing. We were also able to support a missionary in Yucatan, Mexico and later one in Vera Cruz.

In the year of 1942, we received great blessings from our heavenly Father. We had servants of God who were giving beautiful and inspirational messages. Such as Rev. Artemio Vasquez of New York; Rev. Benjamin R. Morales; Professor A.B. Howell of Los Angeles and Rev. Tomas Montemayor of Chicago, Illinois.

On July 7, 1942, we celebrated the seventh anniversary of our Pastor. On this occasion we had a guest speaker, Bro Lucio Avila of Indiana Harbor. We also had a special service celebrating the 25th wedding anniversary of our Brothers Iamas. Also in June we had a beautiful farewell reunion for the missionary Miss Edith Jones who left for the neighboring Republic of Cuba. Two sisters left for Their heavenly home: Marcelina Ortiz and Miss Lupe Armas.

In a business meeting our pastor told us of the need to meet \$4,000 to pay off the mortgage of the temple. He named Bro Alfonso Ramirez treasurer of this fund. There was \$86 in the Anniversary offering designated for this purpose. Our pastor wanted to establish a pro-radio fund as soon as possible to give the message of salvation. The treasurer of this fund was Bro Augustine Ramos.

Many changes were made in the temple. The basement was enlarged to make it more efficient, we had many conviences after. Besides having a fine Bible school, youth sodiety, ladies society and men's society; we recieved 280 members during Rev. Santiago's ministry, the majority of these from baptisms. The church had an annual budget of \$10,000. These are some of the blessings that the Lord has given to us. But the most valuable was the beautiful harmony that prevailed among the members and pastor of this church. For this we sincerely give thanks to God.

But our pastor was called to another location, the Second Hispanic Baptist Church in New York. He presented his resignation in Decmeber 1955 after serving us more than 20 years. Though not accepted by our church, we knew we had to let him go. Leaving us again without a pastor.

A Pulpit Committee was quickly formed, in which the very enthusiastic Bro A.V. Ramirez was named president. After considering various candidates to take charge of this church, and after being elected, the church called Rev Francisco Lemus. He accepted our invitation and was installed as pastor on March 31, 1956.

His pastorate continued for four years, and on March 27, 1960 he presented his resignation. Another Pulpit Committee was formed and its president was Bro Alejandro Ramirez, who was very active in this post, guided by the Holy Spirit. By way of this committee we invited many ministers and laymen to present the Gospel to this charch in its time of need.

Bro. Alejandro Ramirez was forced to leave his post because of his failing health. After much prayer seeking the Lord's guidance on who should fill this post, the young Bro Alfonso Salazar was elected (being a deacon and a faithful servant of God). The Lord was to send us many more young people like him who were willing to give some of their time to serve the Lord in this church.

In June 1960 we were to host the Hispanic American Baptist Convention, its president being Rev. E.L. Balderas, pastor of the Iglesia Bautista de Indiana Harbor. This was one of the best conventions ever. The Spirit of the Lord was greatly felt in all the services, we rejoiced continuously. We had as guest speaker the enthusiastic Rev. Roberto Porrás, Maynes; executive secretary of the Mexican National Convention. A young man with great potential and unlimited talents which have put him in the Lord's work. The servicés were truely spiritual banquets.

The Sociedad Varonil was and is active doing many marvelous works for the Lords, having services in many homes. This society feels the need and is willing to share the Good News of Salvation. The Sociedad Femenil has done wondrous work; having distinct activities. They have help modernized the kitchen with a new stove, réfrigerator and other untensiles. We were also able to buy new

carpeting for our temple. The major part of these activities were accomplished without having a visible leader, but by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Being a long time without a pastor, our church then formed a prayer week asking the Lord to send us a servant to take charge of this beloved church. Invitations were sent out to several ministers. Finally, the Lord showed us which would be the one to come to this place.

Rev. Felix Galindo, pastor of the First Mexican Baptist Church of Los Angeles, answered the call to our church. Sacrificing the beautiful Los Angeles climate to the rough Midwest winters. On November 11, 1961 he was installed as pastor of our church. Rev. E.L. Balderas was the guest speaker for this occasion. The service was beautiful with so many people attending there was hardly room to walk through the aisle.

We invited all the pastors and laymen who ministered unto us during our time without a pastor. Rev. Isaias Hernandez Loera helped us out the first Sunday of every month, ministering the Lord's Supper. We are also grateful to him. God has poured his blessings upon us again.

With the presence of our new Pastor, we felt the blessings of our heavenly Father. Having many plans to fulfill under the direction of this servant of God. We had no doubt he would lead us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Rev. Galindo presented his resignation in January of 1964, due to his failing health. Immediately another Pulpit Committee was formed and extended invitations to several ministers to occupy the pastorate of this church. Never doubting that the Lord had someone already chosen for the job.

Our church extended an invitation to Rev. Ismael R. Gomez, pastor of "La Iglesia El Buen Pastor" in Kansas City, Missouri. He was installed on June 13, 1964. On the arrival of our new pastor, our church was to reach new and glorious heights as never before in its history, guided by the Holy Spirit.

We saw the need to sell our present temple located on 25th St. because the building had become too small for our congregational needs. Once the temple was sold we had to leave its location, which was on May 5, 1966. Not having anywhere to go, we were led to the annex building of the Immanuel Baptist Church, which was located at 6205 W. Fort in Detroit. Unknowingly its pastor, Rev. Charles W. Masemoore, and his church were to be instruments under which the Lord was to unfold his plans for our church.

For ten long months the church met week after week in the Immanuel Baptist Church annex building, suffering many inconveniences. At the same time seeking a new location for our church. To our surprise, one evening the Immanuel Baptist Church voted to sell us its beautiful temple and annex building for the sum of \$50,000.

Which we considered a great blessing from the Lord. We had a great service of dedication for this beautiful temple on May 20, 1967.

In July of 1967 we had a special service to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of our Brothers Lamas. A short time later Bro. Salvador Lamas left for his heavenly home. The Lord has blessed this church to have among us the inspiring presence of this lovely couple whom have been members of this church since 1931.

Under the direction of Rev. Gomez the church reached heights both spiritually and materially. During this time the church also changed its name to "The First Latin American Baptist Church" in order to include our brethren of the Central and South American Heritage.

In May of 1969 Rev Gomez presented his resignation in order to accept the pastorate at the church "El Salvador" in Los Angeles. The pastorate of Rev Gomez was terminated on July 27, 1969. Leaving the church once again without a pastor.

Immediately the church named a Pulpit Committee composed of the following people: Olga Sosa, representing the B.Y.F.; Lupe Gutierrez, representing the Sociedad Femenil; David Buentello; Dennis Aguirre, Jose Gutierrez, Raul Ramos, Julio Perazza, Sr., Pedro Vasquez Sr., Francisco Guerrero, Gregorio Ballester and named its president Bro. A.V. Ramirez.

The last week of July 1969 the church authorized a week of prayer asking the Lord's guidance in our church's ministry. Our church continued to receive blessings from the Lord, we were able to repay the mortgage on the parsonage which was bought in 1956.

Each department was working together in unity and love to continue the Lord's work. The Sociedad Femenil continued to meet with energetic services. The Sociedad Varonil by way of meeting on Saturdays in different homes (with many prayers in the homes of unbelievers). The Young People have continued to be a spiritual blessing among us. We are sad to say that a large number of our young men were called to Combat duty; we continually have them in our prayers. Our choir under the direction of Bro Raul Ramos presented a beautiful cantata "La Roche Milagrosa" at the Stratford Theater on December 28, 1969 and the following day at our church. This choir was organized on April 2, 1956 with the help of Rev. Francisco Lemus.

After many years, through the help of the Femenil and the Evangelism/Missions committee our church was able to totally support Rev Antonio Aparicio, a missionary in Mexico. Our first missionary was Rev Aurelio Mandujando during the years 1954-56.

On November 27, 1969, Thanksgiving day, our church invited all the Spanish speaking Christian churches of our city to celebrate a united service here in our temple. The service was well represented by many church. Rev F.M. Santiago was the guest speaker for this occasion. We received many blessings that evening.

The Pulpit Committee continued to look for a minister to guide this church. The year 1970 brought us 16 new members, of these 13 were by baptisms. Two sisters left for their heavenly homes: Maria Martinez and Lorenza Hernandez. During this year a group of brethren left our church but we continued to seek the Lord's guidance.

Effective November 1, 1970 the church named Rev Gilbert Santiago as pastor-interim. On Thanksgiving day we again had a United Service with the Spanish speaking Christian churches in our city. We continued to thank the Lord for his rich blessings both spiritual and financially.

In 1971 the church celebrated its 41st Anniversary with a week of services, the guest speaker was Rev Jose D. Rivera of New York. The word of God was presented each evening and resulted in many lives being brought to the Lord. AMEN!

After two years our prayers were answered with the coming of Rev Pedro S. Alvarez, from Kansas City, Missouri. He was installed as pastor on October 2, 1971. Under his leadership the church continued to grow spiritually and financially. We took on the project of extending the stage of the Sanctuary and when this work was completed we were able to buy new carpeting.

We were also able to open communications with those brethren who had left our church the year before. Although we were not able to regain them into our membership, we established a new friendship with those brothers who now form the Third Latin American Baptist Church. In this year one brother left for his heavenly home: Francisco Guerrero, who has served 40 years in this church.

Due to the rising cost of fuel and utilities, the church decided to sell the parsonage on Lafayette St. In September 1973, Rev Alvarez presented his resignation as full time pastor but stayed on as pastor-interim until March 16, 1975.

In September 1973 we had the privilege of an Intern-missionary Miss Sandra Solomon. The Lord was to send her to Columbia and she needed to learn the Spanish language and customs. She worked faithfully with the Sociedad Femenil and also organized many programs for our youth. We had her with us for eight months then her time here expired and she was sent to Columbia.

In the Fall of 1973 a group of young men from our church joined their voices to form the group "God's Harvest". The members being Raul Ramos, Steve Gutierrez, Elias Ballestero, Wayne Gutierrez and their accompanying pianist was Irma Ballestero. They became ambassadors of our church taking the Good News of Salvation in song and testimony throughout Michigan and some midwestern states.

Our departments continued to work under the Lord's guidance. The Femenil continued to support missionaries along with their White Cross work. The Varonil with their evangelism work, the B.Y.F. continued to grow spiritually. It was at that time the young adults of our church saw the need to form a society of their own; being too mature for the B.Y.F. and not knowing enough Spanish to join the

the Femenil or Varonil. And on May 10, 1975 the church recognized the Young Adults Department as a permanent department of our church.

Our Pulpit Committee continued to extend invitations to many prospective ministers. In 1975 Rev Isaac Siprian from San Antonio, Texas was called. He was installed as pastor of our church on January 24, 1976. Under his pastorate our church was to experience many high and low points.

During his time here, Rev. Siprian emphasized a bilingual ministry to include our younger generation. This proved to be very beneficial. A rising membership had lead to a larger hudget. Our church then decided to buy another parsonage located in the city of Dearborn.

Seeing the declining building structure and the need for more efficient equipment in the temple, our church approved a \$150,000 renovation program in 1978. These funds were brought by a loan from the American Baptist Churches and in the years to follow we suffered many inconveniences due to construction. With the help of our members we were able to complete many stages before our 50th Anniversary celebration.

Looking forward to this celebration a special committee was formed in 1979 to take charge of all arrangements for this occasion. Invitations were sent to all our previous members: and pastors. The members of this committee were Rachel Saldana, Petra Siprian, A.V. Ramirez, Gregorio Ballesteros, Augustine Rodriguez Jr. and Rev Siprian.

Then in 1980 our church celebrated its Golden Anniversary with a week of services on January 21-27. We were honored to have as guest speakers all of our former pastors (with the exception of Rev Birch who could not be contacted). These services were very uplifting and Spirit of the Lord was felt throughout the week. These services were very well attended. The Lord has truly blessed the 50 years of this church's ministry.

Fifty years as a church also brought 50 years of service from a few of our members. We had a special recognition service in honor of Lupe Guerrero in February 1981; in October 1981 for Elena Ramirez; and in October 1982 for Lupe Ramos. We praise the Lord for the faithful service of these sisters.

In 1982 the Sociedad Femenil celebrated their 50th anniversary of service unto the Lord, with a special service and banquet. The Femenil has continued to serve the Lord by supporting missionaries and with their ministry of White Cross and Love Offerings. May the Lord continue to use this society for His glory.

The national economic recession and declining membership brought on many inconveniences due to the heavy burden of the large loan. Our church began to suffer financially. But the Lord always provided each and every one of our necessities.

In February 1983 Rev Siprian gave his resignation to terminate his ministry on August 28, 1983. We was leaving to continue his studies at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois. During his ministry here the Lord brought to us 41 new members of which 27 were from baptisms.

With the resignation of Rev Siprian the church formed another Pulpit Committee. The members were Alberta Orr, representing the Christian education committee; Raul Ramos, representing the Trustee board; Rachel Saldaña, representing the Deaconess Board; Gregorio Ballesteros, Hermelinda Perez, Barbara Ramos and representing the Deacon board, Joseph Gutierrez also chairman of this Committee.

During these past years many of our brothers have left for their heavenly home: 1977, Eulalio Calderon; 1978, Pablo Almanza, Felipa Gutierrez; 1979, Ramon Roman; 1981, Rev Francisco Lemus; 1982, Adela Lamas, A.V. Ramirez and in 1983, Marta ~~Gutierrez~~ Sautural.

The Pulpit Committee called Rev Angel Ojeda of Imay City to be pastor-interim during this time without a pastor. His sermons were a source of uplifting and motivation and filled an important need in the spiritual life of our church. We thank the Lord for this wonderful servant.

In the year of 1983 our church had been slowly decreasing in membership and attendance, but we continued to seek the Lord's guidance and await for the blessings he has instore for us.

After several months of prayer, the Lord sent us Rev Jose Rene Cedillos, Executive Minister of the Missionary Baptist Work in San Salvador, El Salvador. Moving to Detroit was an extreme expense; our church in its economical situation could not carry this load. But the Lord saw our need for this pastor and for the funds to bring him here, then after many calls, the American Baptist Churches agreed to give us aid so we could bring his ministry to this area.

On January 28, 1984 Rev Cedillos was installed as pastor and on this same day we celebrated our 54th anniversary. We had beautiful testimonies from three of our long time members: Elena Ramirez, Lupe Guerrero and Gregorio Ballesteros. The guest speaker for this occasion was Rev Angel Ojeda. This celebration was truly a blessing.

Rev Cedillos also promoted the bilingual ministry knowing the importance of the spiritual growth of our youth and American members. With the coming of our new pastor, we were to experience many spiritual and material blessings.

In February the Young Adults Department sponsored a "Bring A Relative/Friend Day". This turned out to be a great success. We had approximately 110 attending the morning service, which was a blessing to see our empty pews filled once more. A few of these visitors have continued to attend each week. We rejoiced to see a few new faces in our services and Sunday school classes each week.

In this year of 1984 we have continued to try and raise our service attendance; as twice this year we have had more than 150 people attending our Sunday Morning service. Praise the LORD!

On Resurrection Sunday, April 22, we celebrated the baptism of 5 new brethren: George Ramirez, Maribel Perez, Maribel Velasquez, Angel Ballestero, and Victor Perez. The Lord also blessed us with the birth of three infants, which were presented to the Lord in our temple: Joyce and Steve Bosscher presented their daughter, Angela, on May 15; Noemi and Daniel Ramos Jr presented their son, Jacob, on June 3; and Elva and Norman Moore presented their son, Adam, on December 23.

We have also received many material blessings this year. Such as the new Spanish hymnals donated by Elena Ramirez in memory of A.V. Ramirez; the new English hymnals donated by Jesse and Emma Saenz in memory of Paula Saenz and for the renovation of the Nursery donated by Leonor Sosa and daughters in memory of Marta Sautural. And with the help of the men of our church we were able to repair the front landscape of our temple. The Lord has opened to us the windows of heaven and poured out a blessing. (Malachi 3:10)

We continued to raise special offerings and funds, and continue to seek new ideas which will help minimize our loan from the ABEC-American Baptist Expansion Corporation.

Our church has organized many Prayer Circles in which we asked the Lord for his blessings and guidance upon this congregation and its leaders. We have also become more active in the programs of the American Baptist Churches. Sending many of our members to their programs to represent our church.

But the most important thing that has happened this year is that we have continued praising and trusting the Lord in our ministry. Remembering his words: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." AMEN

Guided by the Holy Spirit and with the wise leadership and encouragement of our Pastor, Rev Cedillos, we were able to accomplish all that we have this year.

compiled by - The History Committee of 1984
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