

The Baptist Temple

Through its rich history, the Baptist Temple was a forerunner in race relations and women's rights. In 1841, in a bold and controversial act, the Second Baptist Church allowed whites and blacks to worship together. They allowed women to vote in church elections in 1871 and ordained their first woman in 1935. Here is how it all began...

In 1834, the year in which Rochester received its city charter, 53 members of the First Baptist Church organized themselves as the Second Baptist Church, now called The Baptist Temple. The celebrants began worshipping in a two-story stone meeting house on the corner of Main Street and Clinton Avenue.

David and Sarah Barton were among the earliest members of the Second Baptist Church, hosting the first prayer meetings in their home. The Bartons and many constituent members of the congregation valued high intellectual attainment. As a result, the Baptists established the University of Rochester and the Rochester Theological Seminary in the 1850s.

In 1859, the first meeting house was destroyed by fire. A new church edifice was built in 1860 on North and Achilles Streets, but this was also gutted by fire in 1892. The congregation erected a larger structure at the same location and moved in by 1893.

In 1871, the Second Baptist Church "dismissed" 70 members to create the Park Avenue Church. From 1889 to 1913, the Second Baptist Church founded five more congregations: the Fernwood Church, the Polish Baptist Church, the Parsells Avenue Church, the North Baptist Church, and the Atlantic Avenue Church.

By 1924, this building was razed to make way for the new Temple Building, at which time the congregation was renamed "the Baptist Temple." At a cost of several million dollars, the new fourteen story building was built at North and Franklin. The high rise, one of the first in Rochester, had a church auditorium with seating capacity of 1,600 and had ample space on the second and third floors for all church programs. The remaining space was rented to business firms and to professionals, dentists especially, with the church itself operating a cafeteria for many years as a profit-making enterprise.

By the early 1960s, the congregation voted in favor of selling its downtown property, and as a result purchased property on Clover Street in Brighton. The current facility was completed in 1964. Since then, it has been a home for a day care, service to the poor, a center for cultivation of the arts, and a community for vibrant faith exploration.

In 2015 the congregation voted to expand the mission of their building. They established The Clover Center for Arts and Spirituality as their gift to the community. It's a cultural center with a church at its heart. And it is the living legacy of a congregation with a rich history of community service and cultural cultivation. Concerts, photographic exhibits, dance and musical groups, spirituality workshops are all part of their new mission.

Along with the new mission, The Baptist Temple continues its legacy of community outreach through The Brighton Churches Habitat Coalition, The Rochester Area Interfaith Hospitality Network, Cameron Community Ministries, and Older-Wiser-Learning-Seniors. Never underestimate what a small group of faithful Christians can do is the legacy of the Baptist Temple.