

Gretna Baptist Church History

Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

We could begin the history of Gretna Baptist Church in the fall of 1997 when Pastor Roger Ridley, his wife Sheryl, and family moved to Gretna, Nebraska to start their second church plant. But to do so, we would have to ignore all that God did beforehand to make our local church possible. Make no mistake about it, a local church comes into existence because it was **first** in the mind of God and **He** willed it to happen in ways that are beyond us.



None of us will know just how much God has done, but we do know He gave others, before us, the vision for its possibility. In 1958, Ralston Baptist Church felt the need for a Baptist church to be started in Gretna, so they prayed, made a commitment, and sponsored a young college couple, Verlin and Betty Pulver to move here and start church services. They remained here for about three years and had approximately 30 people in attendance before moving on. Sadly, because the church was not able to secure another pastor the work was disbanded. However, Betty was diligent about praying for a Bible believing/teaching church to be planted in Gretna. Betty thought the farm property that she and Verlin rented just outside of town would make the perfect setting for a church. She often prayed for this. Years later, coming back to Gretna, it was discovered the farmhouse they lived in is the house next door to where our church building is today. The very spot she had been praying for – almost 50 years earlier!

In 1996, Pastor Ridley and his wife Sheryl, after twelve years of ministry in Grand Island, Nebraska, were asking God where He wanted them to move next. A friend of theirs **repeatedly** asked them to look at Gretna. She said that for years she had prayed faithfully that God would start a Baptist Church in Gretna. One day to satisfy her requests, Pastor Ridley and Sheryl drove through Gretna with the intent of removing it from their list, **but** God had other plans. As He had already done with others, He caused them to see the potential of a Baptist Church in this community.

Many others were involved in the start of Gretna Baptist Church, such as supporting churches, Baptist Church Planters, and faithful saints from the Omaha Metro area. Before the first service, six area churches promised to send couples for the first six weeks to insure that we would have people present in those very important first services: Temple Baptist of Lincoln, Heartland Baptist of Bellevue, Good Shepherd Baptist, Karen Street Baptist, Park Lane Baptist, and Grace Baptist, all of Omaha.

The first public service of Gretna Baptist Church was September 7, 1997. Services were held at the Community Care Living Center and 43 people were in attendance for that historic first Sunday.



After using the Community Care Living Center for the first nine months the church needed to find a new meeting place. The Superintendent of Gretna Public Schools made the Commons Area of the new Gretna Middle School available for our use. We continued to meet there until our building was constructed. Along with the school, the City Hall was always made available to us when we needed it for special services.

September 24, 2000 was another historic day for us. We formally organized as a church. Dr. David Little, President of Baptist Church Planters, was present and moderated the meeting for us. We had 41 in attendance and 19 people signed the charter.

The year 2001 seemed like a low point for us. Our average morning attendance dropped to just 24, and many weeks were much smaller. However, even though attendance had decreased, our commitment seemed to increase. We visited every home in town twice during the year, we enjoyed a good Vacation Bible School, we started a Junior High Youth Group, and our church families were witnessing to friends and inviting them to our services. **We believed** God wanted Gretna Baptist to continue and **sensed** He was about to bless us with growth.

By the end of 2001, **God did bless** Gretna Baptist Church with some **great** additions **and** eight people were baptized in the spring of 2002, and **all** became members of the church.



The addition of those families was a huge turning point for Gretna Baptist Church. They had a long history in the community; as a result, in the perception of many, they added integrity to our group. They encouraged us, strengthened us, **and they got to work!**

In the fall of 2002, Gretna Baptist Church took a big step of faith purchasing 5.5 acres of land for a future building for worship and ministry. When Pastor Ridley and Sheryl first moved here, with the price of land, this seemed like an impossible dream, yet God's timing was perfect and His goodness amazing! The land cost \$222,500 but God enabled us to pay it off in just one year. What seems impossible for us, God is able to do!

Since 2003, God has continued to add families to Gretna Baptist Church and the church further anchored itself as part of the community. A ministry that has become a big part of Gretna Baptist Church is our Vacation Bible School. Over the years, we have been grateful for the help of youth groups from other churches that have made a huge impact in town with VBS. In 2011, we will have our first fully-staffed evening VBS program.

Another ministry that has been an important part of our church is the Annual Gretna Days. Parade Floats have been **very** effective for us. They have given us the opportunity to get people's attention and distribute thousands of gospel tracts. The church has participated in the Gretna, Ashland, Springfield, and Bennington parades over the past seven years. In 2009, we handed out over 1000 balloons filled with helium and Bible tracts during the parade. The community and fellowship built among our members with our balloon assembly line was inspiring. In 2010, we established our first booth in Peterson Park handing out balloons and prizes for the children.



Another important milestone letting the Gretna community know that a Baptist church was going to be built was the planting of the Church sign in January of 2004. We followed this up with our groundbreaking ceremony Saturday, May 14, 2005. It was an exciting time as we all brought shovels and dug in together. One month later, we officially "broke ground" for the start of the construction of our new building.

We are grateful for the missionary builders with Continental Baptist Missions that came alongside to help us do what we could not have done without them. The missionary building team did an excellent job of managing volunteers, keeping the project on schedule, in budget, and with good workmanship. Month by month excellent progress was made on the building. It is overwhelming to think about all of the individuals and churches that came to help, and all of the businesses and people that gave their time and resources to make it possible.



We enjoyed our first day of services in the building on March 26, 2006 with 137 in attendance. No question about it, that day was an exciting one for everyone present! This was also a joyous time because Bennington Baptist Church was started as a church plant from our church with church members as part of the launch team.



On Saturday, August 19, 2006, a Recognition Council convened, made up of pastors and messengers from eleven fellowshiping churches, to examine the documents of the church. They concluded their Council by recognizing Gretna Baptist Church as a biblically organized Baptist Church and accepted the Church as a member of the Nebraska Association of Regular Baptist Churches.

In June of 2007, Gretna Baptist Church was accepted into the National Association of Regular Baptist Churches and one year later, on Sunday, September 7, 2008, we officially graduated from Missionary status to a self-supporting church. Also at this time, our church started the church plant for Chalco Hills Baptist Church, again with members from the church as part of the launch team.



Our founding pastor, Pastor Roger Ridley, was promoted home to be with the Lord August 8, 2009. He suffered a fatal heart attack while playing in a church softball game.

In late September of 2009, the church called Pastor Bob Sauser to serve as our interim pastor. Pastor Sauser had just retired as the senior pastor of First Baptist



Church of Creston, Iowa. He and his wife Judi were a blessing in helping the church move forward until we called our new senior pastor.

Pastor Bryan Clark started his ministry at Gretna Baptist Church in June, 2010. Pastor Clark had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home. He came to Christ at an early age, and felt God's call into the ministry after he started attending Bob Jones University. It was there that he met his wife, Anita. Their first ministry was in Pikeville, Kentucky at Justiceville Bible Baptist Church where Pastor Clark served as the youth pastor. The Lord moved the Clark family to the Baltimore area where they served for sixteen years at Temple Baptist Church in Glen Burnie, Maryland. Pastor Clark desires a ministry strong in building relationships within the church and community, which creates an atmosphere for people to discover, grow and model their Christian faith.

