Highland Baptist Church Congregational Profile

Who We Are

Highland Baptist Church is a Thinking, Feeling, Healing Community of Faith. While our church has used this phrase as a tagline in our literature and publicity for many years, these words are much more than a marketing phrase. “Thinking, feeling and healing” captures much of who we are and how we see ourselves. The following offers some context around what these words mean to us.

Thinking

We ask uncomfortable questions of our faith. We believe honest questioning reflects reverence for God’s ineffability, confidence in God’s love for us, and devotion to comprehending with increasing clarity God’s dream for our lives, not only our own but as lived collectively. This outlook arises at least in part from having a well-educated congregation, including many seminary graduates. We value sincere seeking of truth, respecting each member’s right to respond to ultimate questions in his or her own way. This general orientation leads to thoughtful, often lively discussions in Sunday Bible Study groups, and during the educational programs we offer on a wide variety of topics.

When we make decisions, we are “process-oriented,” especially when our congregation faces momentous, potentially divisive decisions. That is, we insist on processes--plentiful congregational gatherings for discussion and voting, for example--that allow everyone who wants to be heard, the chance to be heard.

Feeling

Highland Baptist Church cares for communities through acts of social justice, which are central to who we are. Our missions work locally, regionally, and internationally to build empathetic connections with other organizations and people. We believe in being doers of the word and not
hearers only by providing a nurturing and caring community of faith. We’re surrounded by a cloud of witnesses and saints in progress who encourage us to persevere and run the race of life’s journey together. We believe that church is a place for people across the full spectrum of life’s span. We have listening ears and caring hearts for all of our members and make space for the noise of infants, the passion of the young, the questioning of the adult, and the wisdom of the experienced. We are a church devoted to and lifted by our hymnody and music ministry that expresses our beautiful traditions and the fervor of our souls. We invite people to express God’s call on their lives and share their gifts. With empathy we bear witness to the pain and struggles of others. We believe in the power of divine love over our lives which inspires our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion as a crucial component of what we do and who we are.

Healing

Highland Baptist Church is a healing community; we believe doing the work of love through service is healing, both for those we serve and for our church community. Healing is embodied by our commitment to fostering safe spaces such as Alcoholic Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Divorce Recovery and multiple other groups where people find community.

This healing work is also carried out by our Friday Church Ministry as well as partnerships with many local organizations including Habitat for Humanity, LaCasita, and Kentucky Refugee Ministries. We also partner with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, in particular with the Affirming Network led by our own member Bojangles Blanchard.

For many church members, Highland Baptist Church is a theological refuge, a restorative place to heal from everything from the take-over at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the traumatizing theology many faced in previous faith communities. Our Associate Pastor of Faith Formation and Congregational Engagement did her D. Min Thesis on *Traumatizing Theology and the Healing Church* and presented her findings in a two part presentation that in and of itself was a source of healing.

We believe in the power of God’s healing and transformative love which helps us heal from our wounds and return to a life of service to others.

What We Believe

Our Mission

God’s Love compels us to cultivate a safe, welcoming community of faith where all are challenged to discover, grow, and serve, as together we boldly live out the worship that is our very lives.
Our Vision

We dream of being an engaging, vibrant Christian church, where transformed people are joining the work of God, creating a world where justice and Love are abundant.

Our Values

- We value a **deeply spiritual, Christ-centered faith** that opens us to life, equips us to serve, and calls us to action.
- We value a **courageous, progressive theology** whose relevance extends from the pew to the street, that engages both the mind and the heart, and that welcomes everyone from the skeptic to the devoted.
- We value **all people**, not in spite of, but precisely because of all that makes each one unique.
- We value **being doers of the word**, living out what Jesus taught: showing hospitality to strangers, confronting injustice, giving voice to those who have been silenced.
- We value a **healthy community**, where honest relationships provide all people safety, encouragement, acceptance, and healing, and challenge all people to practice gentleness, forgiveness, and continued growth.
- We value **embracing challenge and change**: naming hard things, asking questions, and leaning into tensions and ambiguity.
- We value **growing together across the lifespan**, through multi-generational and intergenerational relationships and ministries.
- We value being rooted in our **distinct and radical heritage** that compels us to breathe new life into bedrock Baptist principles.
- We value **broad and deep worship** that invites us into the mystery of a loving God.
- We value **being good stewards** of all we have been given, discerning together how best to use our financial, physical, human, and spiritual gifts to follow Jesus and carry out our mission.

How We Got Here

Brief statement of identity:

Highland Baptist Church is a historic Baptist congregation embodying a progressive theology. We are inclusive and welcoming of all and strive to stand with marginalized individuals and communities both near and far. Four weekly worship services occur in our sanctuary, described as a “jewel box” by Dr. Bill Leonard, former Dean at Wake Forest Divinity School and former interim pastor of HBC. While our sanctuary of stone, wood and stained glass is classic, almost all of our building has been renovated in recent years providing contemporary and efficient spaces to meet the needs of our growing congregation.
With deep roots and historic connections to Southern Baptists and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, today Highland supports and aligns itself with a variety of Baptist, Christian, interfaith, and non-profit organizations and ministries. Highland was an early and remains a current supporter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. While we relate to many external bodies, none define us.

**Our Past (and Present)**

From our beginnings, Highland was shaped by, and in turn helped shape, generations of Baptist leaders. As Peter Smith, author of *The Cloud of Witness* (our church history) observed:

Highland was home to three Southern Baptist Convention presidents (John R. Sampey, W. J. McGlothlin and Herschel Hobbs), two seminary presidents (Sampey and Duke McCall), four Baptist college presidents (Basil Manly, McGlothlin, Henry Noble Sherwood and Morgan Patterson, a president of the Baptist World Alliance (McCall), prominent Baptist theologians (J.B. Weatherspoon and Frank Stagg), and a woman for whom a Baptist mission offering is named (Asenath Brewster). (p. xvi).

From our beginnings, an emphasis on theological education runs through our history and is evident in a significant number of current members with theological degrees. In recent years our congregation has heard from well-known speakers and teachers such as Walter Brueggemann, Brian McLaren, Tony Campolo, Amy Jill-Levine, Aidsand Wright-Riggins and others both inside and outside the Baptist and Christian traditions. Ecumenical and interfaith cooperation have become important markers in our identity.

Equally a hallmark of our history is a long tradition of lay-member involvement in local community missions: ministry to orphans and other at-risk youth, a second monetary collection on communion Sundays dedicated to helping those in need, and members serving in downtown missions such as Jefferson Street Baptist Community at Liberty. Highland has been committed to such endeavors for decades, and in some cases for over a century. From Louise Tucker’s arrival in Shanghai China in 1911, Highland members have scattered around the world for both career and short-term mission work. In recent decades, our international partners have served Albanians in Macedonia and the Protestant Church of Morocco and their work with migrants and refugees. In additional to international work, Highland has started several local churches, and today’s ministry partners include organizations focused on creation care, anti-racism, immigration, housing, justice system reform, and ecumenical and interfaith social ministries.

The style of worship at Highland has changed and evolved over the years. Service bulletins from 1913 and 1915 indicate deep roots in both gospel and classical music traditions. “High church” worship styles dominated the 1930s and 1940s but gave way to more traditional gospel hymns in the 1950s, a decade of growth for Southern Baptists nationally and for Highland.

During the 1970s Highland experienced both a physical and liturgical transformation. This included the creation of our current sanctuary windows featuring our cloud of witnesses and significant liturgical changes. A more formal style, seen in earlier decades of the congregation, returned and such a style continues to
characterize our church now, including additional services during Holy Week and the wearing of ministerial robes with stoles provided by members for special occasions. Highland values our worship and especially our strong music program, which includes graded choirs from preschool through youth and adult. Members often say our music program attracted them to Highland and continues to be a primary avenue for their personal worship. Some of our bible study classes use literature featuring the weekly lectionary readings as an additional way to connect to the liturgical traditions that shape our corporate worship.

Fifteen years ago, our congregation added a Friday evening service. Friday Church’s non-formal style offers prayer, song, and scripture presented in a way that feels safe to those who have been wounded by toxic church experiences. It’s also comforting and inclusive for those in recovery programs and engaging to “non-church” folks who take a skeptical approach to religion in general. The Friday Church Band is known for a wide variety of traditional, original and modern songs and styles that encourage open expression and response from the congregation.

Highland has a history of tackling difficult social and theological issues, though not always as timely as might be expected. While social ministry to those in need has not been controversial, other issues have seen the congregation struggle to find its voice and align its actions with its ideals. Racial integration, beginning in the 1960s was embraced with little opposition but there is scant evidence of Highland members being publicly engaged in the broader civil rights struggles of the era. Recent decades have seen the congregation begin a journey towards true inclusion for all. While women have served in many essential roles throughout our history, it was in the mid-1980s that women began to be ordained as deacons and the church called women to serve on the ministerial staff. Over that same time frame the church began a journey towards full LGBTQ inclusion in all areas of congregational life. The past 20 years have seen LGBTQ persons ordained as deacons, serving as teachers and lay leaders, including staff ministers, ordaining LGBTQ persons to the ministry, and recognizing that marriage is for all. Our call to inclusion also leads us to minister to immigrants and refugees in Louisville where we partner with local advocacy and service organizations and Morocco where we partner with the Protestant Church of Morocco in their work with persons from all over the continent of Africa. Standing with victims of violence, specifically homicide, has led us to an annual observance where crosses are placed on the front lawn in the name of those killed in Louisville that year.

Our Future

Recent years have seen additional changes in our culture and in our congregation. In 2018 our congregation said goodbye to two long-time ministers as both our pastor, Rev. Joe Phelps and associate pastor Rev. Nina Maples, retired. Both served our community for over 20 years and led us through many challenges and built a strong foundation for our future. During their tenure, Highland became a refuge for those who have experienced traumatizing theology and we honed our prophetic voice regarding a range of issues facing our society. Like all communities of faith, we face challenges. Our culture has seen the rise of the “nones,” those who do not identify with any institutional religion or even a belief in God. Highland is a place where some who struggle to articulate
faith find a community; where social justice is not seen as optional; where we continually remind ourselves that we cannot be hearers only, but must be “doers of the Word” a biblical phrase carved in stone above our main sanctuary door and which serves as a weekly reminder of our calling as followers of Jesus.

Much more of our history can be found in *The Cloud of Witness, 110 Years of Faith, Highland Baptist Church*, by Peter Smith.

**General Information**

**Our Membership**

Highland Baptist Church has 954 active members and 607 people enrolled in Bible Study classes from infants to adults.

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<th>Age Range</th>
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<td>13-17</td>
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<th>Years of Attendance</th>
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Our membership is spread out, with members living in over forty different zip codes, including a few from Indiana.

**Our Structure**

Highland Baptist Church is congregational in its polity as the membership has final say over all matters of faith and practice. Over two dozen ministry groups are empowered to engage in the work to which we are called. These ministry groups support the work of the body, from building maintenance and worship support to serving others by meeting the needs of our broader community and supporting our partners around the world. Over two decades ago, our deacon body began to transition away from being the primary decision-making body of the congregation to its current function of pastoral care and support of the community. While ourdeacons are still invited to assist with discernment on matters of importance to the congregation, the primary
group tasked with guiding the church’s business and planning needs is the Ministry Council. The Ministry Council is made up of our ministers, select ministry group chairs, and at-large-members selected for this role by the congregation. Among their tasks are to function as a strategic planning forum and the ministry coordinating group for the church.

**Our Staff**

Jim England, Interim Proclaimer

Jim began his role as Interim Proclaimer in January of 2018. Over the years, Jim has served as pastor of several churches and as Interim Pastor for many congregations, including a past tenure as Interim at Highland. Jim also served as a pediatric chaplain with Hosparus, where he specialized in offering care to children and their families. Jim’s primary responsibilities involve preaching and participating in worship planning. Jim and his wife Mary Helen have two grown children and four grandchildren.

Renee Kenley Purtlebaugh, Associate Pastor to Children & Their Families

If any parent has ever worried about leaving their child with another adult, it is simply because they have not yet met Renee. Renee joined the Highland clergy in June 2007 after finishing her Master of Divinity degree at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond where she received the Addie Davis Award for Outstanding Pastoral Leadership.

Prior to Highland, she used her biology degree from Georgetown College to work as a physical therapy technician for a few years. She has also directed camps for Passport, Inc. and worked with children in a myriad of settings.

An expert at making sure kids feel welcomed, Renee feels privileged to consider how each experience your children may have at camp or in classes here at church can uplift and empower them to be their vibrant, wonderful selves. By introducing the church to Godly Play, guiding a team of over 130 volunteer teachers, upholding our safe-church policies, and continually preparing our children’s areas with intentionality and care, Renee affirms that we are all children of a loving God.

Renee also offers genuine care to families—as we all embrace the difficulties, mysteries and joys of life. Beyond Highland, Renee served as the leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Children’s Ministry Network to help them re envision their purpose and as a member of the team for a season. She continues as a member of this team.

Renee and her husband Tyler have a daughter, Eliza (3). Renee’s from-scratch-baking leaves most Pinterest cupcake efforts in the dust. Seriously, her icing creations are spectacular.

Naming just one thing to love about Highland is next to impossible! But one of the things Renee loves most is journeying through life alongside the incredible people of all ages – from the youngest child to the eldest among us - who make up this sacred community.
Lauren Jones Mayfield, Associate Pastor to Young Adults & Missions

Prior to Lauren joining the Highland family in July 2016 she interned at a Mennonite Church in Pasadena, CA; served as Director of Worship at The Riverside Church in New York City; Director of Caldwell Chapel at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, and Pastor of Lynnhurst United Church of Christ in Louisville, KY.

With degrees from Samford University, Fuller Theological Seminary, and graduate coursework at Yale Divinity School, Lauren believes that when the Church engages culture prophetically, compassionately, and relevantly, it will be a place where our lives are transformed.

So, leading the Young Adults for Lauren is about offering space for Millennials to push back on authority while engaging the necessity of organic and sincere community. While paying close attention to the intersections of spirituality, politics, and culture, Lauren also works with our seven social justice teams to help congregants put belief and love into action.

Ordained in the United Church of Christ, Lauren recently served on a local denominational oversight committee, as well as the board of Uspritus, a residential treatment facility for children victimized by trauma. She currently serves on the board of Planned Parenthood Votes and chairs the Planned Parenthood Advocates of KY PAC. She travels with church folk to our state capitol and Washington, D.C. as often as possible to rally and lobby.

In her free-time Lauren enjoys jogging and dreams of owning a free-of-charge yoga studio that serves fair-trade, organic tea by day and (red) wine (only) by night. She and her husband Tyler have three children, Livia (13), Jude (11), and Taft (7).

One of the things Lauren loves most about serving at Highland is the congregation’s active, care-filled intention behind the church’s motto: thinking, feeling, healing.

Perry Dixon, Associate Pastor to Youth & Their Families

Perry joined the staff in his current role in February 2017 after serving at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC, and in various roles at Highland prior. New approaches to youth ministry inspire his work. Like, how do we adapt project-based learning to effectuate spiritual development techniques? And what do teenagers have to teach us about faith-informing-leadership as they so readily integrate inclusivity, social engagement, social media, and community?

A Louisville native, Perry graduated from the Brown School in 2007 before going to Georgetown College where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy in 2011. Perry graduated from Wake Forest University School of Divinity with a Master of Divinity degree in 2013 and was ordained here at Highland. Perry is the sponsor for the Men of Quality at the Brown School and an active volunteer in the local community.

Perry is passionate about youth ministry, social justice and life in general. If he isn’t at church you might find him running half-marathons, reading philosophy, politics and history, or enjoying Louisville’s vibrant food culture.
Perry says what he loves most about Highland is life together alongside each of our youth, their families, and every other church member with whom he finds himself as a part of our church community.

Carol Harston, Associate Pastor for Faith Formation & Congregational Engagement

While most Baptist ministers hop around to various churches throughout their career, Carol’s life was planted at Highland Baptist Church as an infant and those roots have stayed strong all these years. It is with joy that she continues to serve in ministry alongside the cloud of witnesses at Highland.

Carol received her Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Spanish from Wake Forest University in 2006, her Master of Divinity from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 2010, was ordained by Highland in 2010, and received her Doctor of Ministry from Duke Divinity in 2019.

After serving as a Pastoral Intern for one year, Carol served as Minister to Youth from 2007-2016 where she focused on youth’s community development, pastoral care, faith formation, rites of passage, missional partnerships, and seminary-student internships. Carol began as Associate Pastor of Faith Formation and Congregational Engagement in 2017 after a sabbatical year in Durham, North Carolina.

Outside of Highland, Carol served for three years as Membership Coordinator, President-Elect, and President of the CBF Youth Ministry Network Executive Board. Carol has written summer camp curriculum for Passport Youth Camp and blogs for Baptist Women in Ministry, Youth Ministry Conversations, D365 Devotional, CBF Blog, and CBF on Patheos. Carol’s DMin thesis, “Traumatizing Theology and the Healing Church” explores the impact upon individuals and the local church of an image of a god who threatens to shame, banish, and condemn certain people.

Carol and her husband Drew have three children, James (8), Collier (6), and Walt (2).

The things Carol loves most about serving at Highland are its people - their rich spiritual lives, compassionate care for one another, commitment to walk the journey of faith together, and desire to love all people, even and especially when it is radical to others. It is a joy to serve on staff where there is companionship with colleagues and space for creativity.
Kathy Collier, Minister of Music & Worship

Kathy wins the “longevity-at-Highland” award as she has attended or worked with us since the ’80s. A Paducah, KY native, Kathy earned her Music Education degree from Murray State University and then a Piano Performance degree from the University of Kentucky. After a committed, thirty-year career as a music educator, Kathy felt the pull to join Highland’s staff in 2007.

When Kathy is not at her desk envisioning our next worship event, she is directing the choir or working with the children in ways that liberate even traditionally non-musical folks to experience the joy of worship through the senses. Kathy creates and leads from her own giftedness, equally matched by her devotion to faithful praxis.

Kathy has coordinated a robust amount of musical and choral opportunities reaching from life at Highland to the state-level Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Kentucky, and beyond to our global work in Morocco. This is a metaphor for the expansive ways in which Kathy approaches worship and the beauty of music—inclusive and far-reaching.

A member of the American Choir Directors Association and the National Choristers Guild, Kathy works closely with the local Kentuckiana Choristers Guild planning their yearly Choral Festival for children.

Kathy and her husband Phil have two grown children, Tom (Holly) Collier and Carol (Drew) Harston, and four grandchildren.

One of the things Kathy loves most about serving at Highland is the love and spirit present and palpable in our Sunday morning services. She says she has THE best job in the world – the privilege of encouraging worshipers to sing heartily the hymns of faith during Sunday’s worship services and lead Highland’s Sanctuary Choir in anthems and major choral works during the Advent and Lenten seasons.
Austin Echols, Organist & Music Associate

Austin has served Highland as Organist and Music Associate since 2007. Austin received his Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Louisville and is currently beginning a Master of Music in Choral Conducting with Dr. Kent Hatteberg at UofL. Austin’s compositions have been performed by numerous church, university, and professional ensembles in performances locally as well as festivals in the United States and Asia. In addition to his work as a staff pianist for the UofL School of Music, Austin accompanies numerous school and community ensembles as well as Kentucky All-State Choirs and ACDA events. Austin is a member of the American Choral Directors Association (KY R&R Chair for Music & Worship) and the American Guild of Organists and has served on the boards of directors for the Choral Arts Society of Louisville and the Louisville Chamber Choir.

Some of the things Austin loves most about Highland are the welcoming and affirming atmosphere, the care shown to members and visitors alike, and the power of congregational singing in Highland’s historic sanctuary.

Fred Bogert, Music Director to Friday Church

Fred Bogert has spent the last 45 years as composer, producer and performer of every style of music. Fourteen years ago, he moved to Louisville from Nashville, where he recorded over three thousand songs as proprietor of Historic RCA Studio B and neighboring Studio C. Three of the CD’s he produced were nominated for Grammies.

Fred has performed on many of America’s finest stages, including the Ryman Auditorium and the Fillmore West. He has written for and performed with the Austin Symphony and the Nashville Chamber Orchestra. He is known throughout the American music industry as a powerful multi-instrumentalist and singer.

As director of Friday Church Fred shapes the content and context of each service through music that fosters the energy Friday Church is known for. The attractive variety of styles and sources of Friday Church’s music comes from Fred’s passion and expertise in bringing out the best of each musician and singer he works with. He also serves as Minister of Music at Ridgewood Baptist, where he was ordained in 2013.

One of the things that Fred loves most about serving at HBC is meeting and working with so many “doers of the word” in both the staff and congregation. “It’s humbling and intriguing to be on a path full of such wonderful adventurers.”
Andria Eadens, Publications, Membership, and Office Manager
Andria has made sure that everyone has their head screwed on straight since 1999. She oversees all our printed materials, guides our internal technology ministry with lay leaders, keeps our database and membership records updated (no small feat) and manages the office with the expertise that can only come with years of loyalty.

Deborah Ackerson, Financial Secretary
Deb rejoined the staff in January of 2018. She comes to Highland after a career in management and bookkeeping in veterinary medicine. Deb is a native of the Highland neighborhood and always has a needy dog or two in her family.

Walter McWhorter, Operations Director
Walter was hired November 2017 and has been a member of Highland since 1984. Walter oversees the care and use of the building, works with technology needs within the office, and serves as the staff liaison to the Technology Ministry Group. He also works with the Congregational Safety resource group. Walter is married to Angela Collins, and has one adult child, Anna Kate McWhorter, and 2 grandchildren.

Lauren Blackwell, Administrative Coordinator
Lauren joined the staff in September 2018. She received her MRE degree from Southern Seminary in 1978 and her MSSW from University of Louisville in 1979. Lauren is retired from Seven Counties Services where she was the Division Director for programs serving adults with psychiatric disabilities. Her primary responsibilities include coordinating office volunteers and helping our ministers with administrative work. Lauren and her wife, Diane Brewer, have been members of Highland since 1997.

One of the things Lauren loves most about serving at Highland is the collegial relationship among staff and the inclusivity of the congregation.

Linda Campbell, Children’s Minister Assistant
Linda joined the staff in February 2018. She received her MCM degree from Southern Seminary in 1982. Her primary responsibilities include maintaining and recruiting volunteers to fulfill Highland’s Worship Care schedule, recruiting volunteers to help with childcare for special events, maintaining Highland’s children’s and family ministry spaces, help with preparation and gathering supplies for VBS camp, PASSPORTkids!, Easter Festival, Advent and other events that arise. Linda and her husband Bill have been members at Highland since 1994.

What Linda loves most about serving Highland is getting to know our children and their families, plus the privilege of watching them grow physically and spiritually through the programming we provide.
Jerre Bassett, Full-Time Custodian

It is not uncommon to hear visitors and long-time congregants repeatedly comment on the beauty of Highland’s building. And that attraction is readily noticeable because of its tidiness and cleanliness. Jerre has worked at Highland since 1995, and before that she served at Cathedral of the Assumption. Jerre keeps our space welcoming to all who walk through our doors. She is married to Frank, has two children, three grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

Frank Bassett, Part-Time Custodian

Where We Are

Highland Baptist Church is located in Louisville, Kentucky. The following link offers a wealth of information about our city and what Louisville has to offer for those who make it their home.

https://www.liveinlou.com/why/