

**Setting the Context of The First Baptist Church of Gardiner
and the Teaching of "Church History 101"
by David J. Wood**

Gardiner is a town of around 6,000 situated on the banks of the Kennebec River, about an hour off the central coast of Maine. The State capitol of Augusta is five miles to our north and the junior Ivy League colleges of Bates, Bowdoin, & Colby are each about a 30 minute drive—north, south, and east. Gardiner is a former mill town with a large middle to lower middle class population.

First Baptist was founded in the 1880's when the current building was erected. It is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, USA. Average attendance for worship hovers around 80 with the typical spikes in attendance on Christmas and Easter. Not much has changed in this congregation. Those who have been coming here all their lives (and we have a number of folks in this category) cannot remember any significant change in the space or the order of worship. The previous two pastors' combined tenure is over 35 years. Someone who joined 15 years ago is still considered a "new member." There are few professionals in the congregation. There is one medical doctor, one college professor, no lawyers. We have public school teachers, health care workers, clerical workers, a few business owners (a fence company, an excavating company, etc), a number of farmers, a significant number of retirees, some factory workers, and some state employees. The majority of the congregation did not attend college. There are two ordained pastors in the membership—one retired the other a chaplain.

In many ways, this is a congregation deeply embedded in rural, Maine culture. They have experienced little change and most have been quite content with that. Family ties have by and large defined the unity & disunity that has characterized this congregation over the years. I came on the scene two years ago. I figured, there was no better place to engage the realities of ecclesial life than in a congregation so deeply embedded in time and place! It has been an interesting ride. I have broken all the rules I was taught in Seminary about not changing anything for the first year. Through it all we have held together, we have come to hold on to one another in love, and, most importantly, we are seeing more and more signs that something beyond us is breaking in and breaking through. Last Sunday, the congregation voted (just shy of a unanimous vote) to undertake a two phased renovation of its entire building. Phase One will involve a complete renovation of the Sanctuary. Construction is set to begin by February 1 and should be complete by Easter. This was a turning point in the history of this church and its self understanding.

For years I have wanted to teach a course on Church History in the context of a local congregation. I have done it piecemeal here and there, but never in a single course extended over a program year. Finding myself in a congregation that has never studied church history, dealing with so many people who have not ever encountered the study of history beyond high school, and feeling strongly the need to set a new level of engagement with theology and the Christian life in the church, I decided this would be the time and place to teach such a course. Furthermore, teaching such a course would discipline my reading and study in ways that were not internal to this congregation's existing expectations of their pastor.

I announced the class, ordered fifteen books and waited to see what would happen. I had to order more books. Throughout the entire year we had between twenty and thirty folks out to the Church on a Wednesday night from 7:00 – 8:45. It was one of the most demanding teaching tasks I have ever encountered. When we are together in February, I will talk more about what I learned through this experience about teaching and being a teacher. I will talk more than about what I think the participants learned through this course and how it is impacting our life as a congregation.

What follows is a brief introduction and overview of the course. My intent with this material is to give you some sense for the content and flow of the course.

A Course in Church History for Everyone: Church History 101

Course Description: This course is designed for the person who has never studied Church History as well as for the person who has some background in the subject. It is intended to provide an overview and exploration of the major movements and developments of the Church from its first day until now. Major events, places, people, and theological developments will be identified and discussed in the context of world history. How all this history connects to the shape, conduct, and identity of the Church and of Christians today will be a key question that will be front and center throughout the entire course.

Course Schedule: Wednesday Nights: 7:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m. @ FBC, Gardiner
The course will be taught in three parts. It is best, but not necessary, to do all three parts in sequence.

- **Part I:** The Ancient Church (AD 30 - 600)
 - 8 weeks (October 2 - November 20)

- **Part II:** The Medieval Church (600 - 1550)
 - 7 weeks (January 15 - February 26)

- **Part III:** The Modern Church (1550 - 2002)
 - 6 weeks (May 7 - June 11)

Course Teacher: Rev. David J. Wood, Pastor of First Baptist Church.

Course Materials:

- **Text Book:** Dowley, Tim, et. al., editors, Introduction to the History of Christianity, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Readings from this text will be assigned weekly and will provide essential background and preparation for our class sessions. Furthermore, this book will be a useful reference to have on one's shelf for years to come.

- **Optional Books:**
 - Michael Collins & Matthew Price, The Story of Christianity: A Celebration of 2,000 Years of Faith, (New York : DK Publishing, 1990)
 - Mark Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997)

Course Cost: \$25 for purchase of Textbook

TO REGISTER: Please detach the form below and place in the offering plate or mail to the church.

----- *Fold, Tear & Detach Here* -----

Please sign me up for Church History 101: Part 1

Please order a textbook for me and I will plan to pick it up and pay for it (\$25) at our first session on Wednesday, October 2.

Name(s) _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Church History 101

Part 1: The Ancient Church (30-600)

Text book: *Introduction to the History of Christianity*

Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m. - 8:45 p.m. at FBC Gardiner

Instructor: David J. Wood

October 2 – Session #1: An Introduction to the Introduction to the History of Christianity

- WHY this Course?
 - There is no better way to learn theology or to gain an introduction to the Christian than by seeing how this way of life has been lived IN time and OVER time.
 - Reminds us of the irreducibly historical and dynamic character of Christianity:
 - Gives us a perspective on the Interpretation of Scripture: the diversity of how Scripture has been read and interpreted over the ages is stunning – both in terms of the continuity and discontinuity.
 - We come to see how Christianity is a profound cultural force and at the same time subject forces of culture. It helps us to discern how this is true in and of our own time as well.
 - We will come to see how human the church is – and, at the same time, how its existence and persistence in and over time reveals how God is at work in, through, and even beyond its diversely unified life. Yet through all its breakdowns, breakups, there is an unmistakable of God breaks in and breaks through, and something transformative breaks out into the world that says ‘God is with us’ ...in time, over time.
- Provide an broad overview of the Origins & History of Christianity: from Genesis to the Present day

October 9 – Session #2: The Early Church (pp. 56-81)

An overview of the birth and earliest developments of the church – focusing on the New Testament and other historical and cultural material.

October 16 – Session #3: The Persecution and Expansion of the Church (pp. 82-95)

Focus on the centuries immediately following the New Testament era – the dispersion and phenomenal growth of the church through adversity.

October 23 – Session #4: The Development of Heresy and of Doctrine (pp. 96-136)

An extended review of how the Bible (as we know it) came to be...and how Christian doctrine developed in these earliest centuries

October 30 – Session #5: “The Rise of Christian Empire” (pp. 137-163)

We have talked, in passing, about the struggle between the emerging Christian communities and the Roman Empire. The tensions between Church and State are nothing new! In this session we will dwell more deeply on what happened when Christianity and Empire ceased their fighting and were wed. In this session we will also take some time to look at these other developments in the Early Church: the role of women & the practice of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

November 6 – Session #6: “Councils, Creeds, & Controversy” (pp. 164-186)

The way the Early Church engaged controversy after the rise of Constantine in the early 300’s was very different than the previous two+ centuries. We will explore this development more deeply (from 325 - 600) and try to get a better handle on the major doctrinal disputes of that day and how those decisions that resulted have shaped the Church from then until now. (I’ll do my best to come

up with a helpful chart to keep all these controversies straight!)

November 13 – Session #7: “Rise of Clergy, Bishops, and Popes” (pp. 187-211)

It is clear from the New Testament, that leaders were very important in the formation of the early Church...however, leadership was also very local and held by those who were contemporaries of Jesus (or connected to those who were). How would authority and leadership be determined once that first generation of Apostles passed on? As the church grew in number and in age, so did the need for form and structure. A more hierarchical (top-down) practice of leadership evolved in a very short time. Leadership in the Christian community has remained one of the most enduring points of conflict for the Church through the centuries.

November 20 – Session #8 “The Beginnings and Rise of Monasticism” (pp. 212-225)

From the earliest days of the Church, there has been a struggle to live out the command of Jesus that his followers be ‘IN’ but not ‘OF’ the world. Monks and monasteries became the chief expressions of a movement within the church (Monasticism) to withdraw from the world (and the Church, for that matter)...for the sake of the world (and the Church). The impact of this tradition on both ‘church’ and ‘world’ cannot be over-estimated. In many ways it is the counter-movement to the Church’s identification with the Empires and powers of this world.

Church History 101

Part 2: The Medieval Church (600-1550)

Text book: *Introduction to the History of Christianity*

Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m. at FBC Gardiner

Instructor: David J. Wood

This course is designed for those who have some or NO background in Church History. Most of us have only a vague understanding of the history of the Church and how the church changed and developed over two thousand years. In our first session this past Fall (covering the years 30-600AD), we learned how the church began as a small band of followers of Jesus, become a persecuted religious minority in the Roman Empire, and eventually became established as the official religion of the Roman Empire. With that incredible triumph came many challenges. Following the teachings of Jesus and ruling and Empire are not easy to reconcile. Furthermore, the explosive growth of the church created the problem of conflicting beliefs about what it meant to be a Christian. The twists and turns of the church's story through these years is fascinating and incredibly relevant to many of the issues we face today.

In this next session of the course, we will see how the church dealt with a rapidly changing world – expanding in all directions at once: intellectually, religiously, culturally, geographically, and technologically. This episode of the church's story is no less fascinating or relevant to our own time of cultural transformation and turmoil.

January 15– Session #1: Introduction to the Church of the Middle Ages (600-800)

Reading: pp. 228-245

- The evolution of Papacy
- The Church as East and West
- Missions
- Rise and Spread of Islam

January 22– Session #2: Christianity in the Middle Ages: The Church Takes Hold but Cannot Hold it Together (800-1073)

Reading: pp. 247-259 (East. Ch), 316-319 (Russia)

- Establishment of Christian Culture and the Coronation of Charlemagne
- Invasion of the Vikings
- The Founding of Cluny
- Missions to the Slavs & the Russians
- Schism of East from West

January 29 – Session #3: The Crusades: The Church Goes to War Against Islam (1095-1229)

Reading: pp. 276-281, 320-329

- The Church wars against its enemies
- How has the Church lived with war? Crusade, Just War, Pacifism.
- Inquisition

February 3 – Session #4: The Golden Age of the Church in the Middle Ages – The Flourishing of Devotion, Learning, and Architecture (1100-1300)

Reading: pp. 260-275, 307-315, 281-306

- The Significance of Monasticism
- The Rise of Scholasticism – intellectual developments
- Art and Architecture

February 10—Session #5: The Church Struggles with Division, Decline, & Reform (1300-1500)

Reading: pp. 330-350

- Babylonian Captivity of the Church
- Forerunners of the Reformation: Wycliffe, Hus, Savonarola, Kempis
- Fall of Constantinople

February 17-- Session #6: The Renaissance: Transformation of Culture and of the Church (1300-1600)

Reading: pp. 352-365

- Gutenberg
- Michelangelo, DaVinci & Co.
- Erasmus
- The Voyages of Discovery

February 26—Session #7: The Birth of the Reformation (introduction) (1400 -1550)

Reading: pp. 366-428

- Martin Luther—Germany
- John Calvin; U. Zwingli—Switzerland
- The Anabaptists
- Thomas Cranmer—England
- John Knox—Scotland
- Loyola—Roman Catholic (The Jesuits)
- The Council of Trent: 1545

Church History 101: Part 3
The Modern Church (1550 – 2000)
6 weeks (May 7 – June 11)
Wednesday Evenings @ FBC
7:00 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.

In the remaining sessions we will exploring the following developments: the origins of the Baptist tradition to which we are indebted, the impact Christianity has on the New World and particularly in what came to be the USA, the how the rise of science impacted Christianity and vice versa, the various theological developments that resulted in a proliferation of denominations, the political and social revolutions and their impact on the church, and the wars of the 20th Century. History is an action-packed drama! And this is especially true with the history of Christianity.

May 7 – Session #1: The Reformation...continued

- Review of the cultural, political, social, and religious factors generating Reformation
- The story of the principal leaders of the Reformation

May 14 – Session #2: The Reformation...continues

- The long term impact of the Reformation in Europe
- the roots of the Baptist tradition
- the impact Christianity has on the New World in the Americas.
- Reformation in the Roman Catholic Church.

May 21 – Session #3: Christianity and the New & Emerging World

- the beginnings of Christianity in America
- the rise of reason and science and its impact on the church
- the revival in England that gave birth to Methodism.

May 28 – Session #4: Revolution and Revival

- the political, social, intellectual and religious upheavals of the 18th & 19th Centuries.
- Great Awakenings, Slavery, & Civil War
- the missionary movement that transformed Christianity into a worldwide movement.

June 4 – Session #5: Missions and Movements

- continuing discussion of the worldwide missions movement that took place in the 1800's.
- the developments in theology in the late 1800's and early 1900's that gave rise to the movements known as "liberalism" and "fundamentalism" and how those movements shape the life of the church and society today.

June 11 – Session #6: The Twentieth Century

- The impact of technology on society and church
- The church encounters modern warfare
- The principal theological/intellectual developments (and figures) of the 20th Century
- Challenges facing the church at the dawn of a new millennium.