

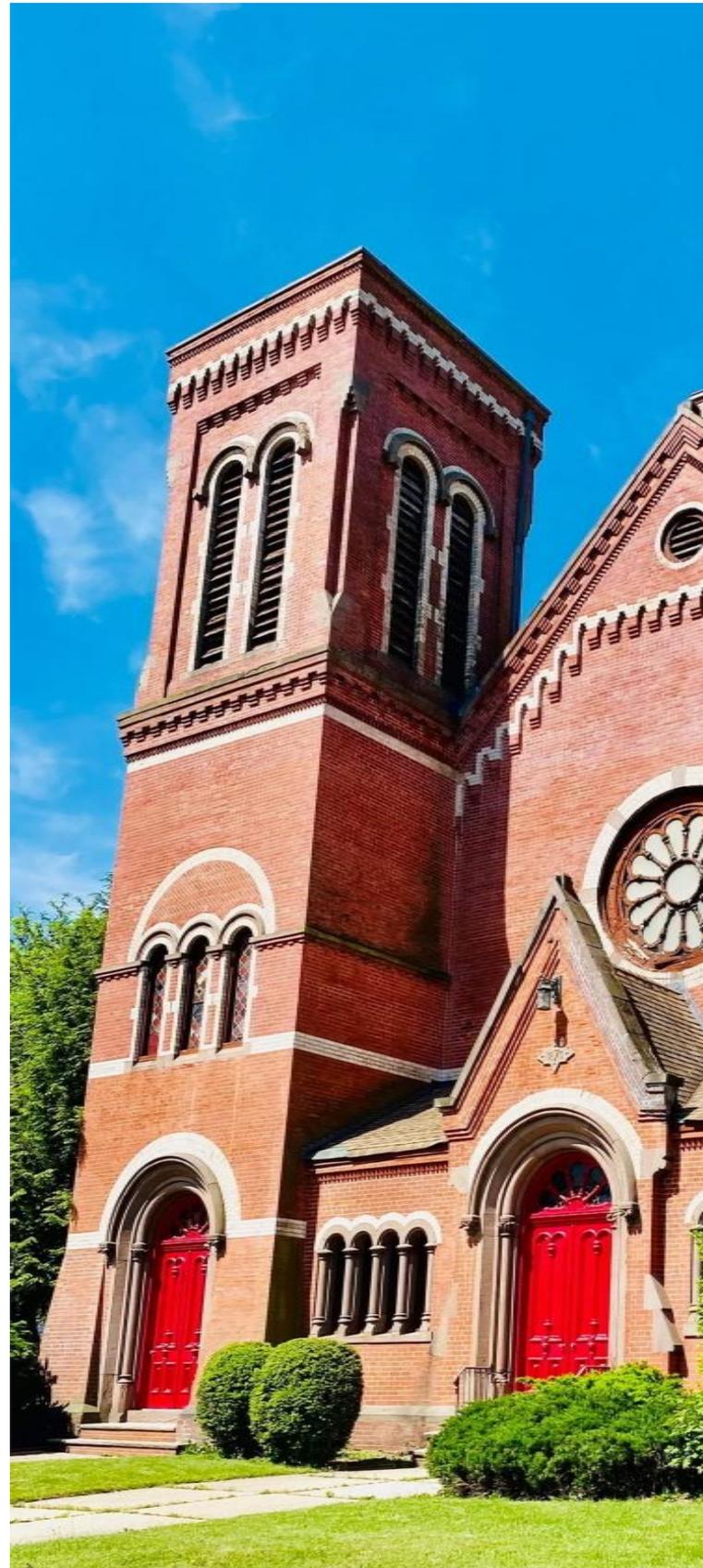
Annual Report



2025

JANUARY 24

First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth
402 Union Ave,
Elizabeth, NJ 07208





Annual Report 2025

Faith Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth (FBCCE) Annual Report 2025

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A Message from the Senior Pastor

Beloved Members and Friends of First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth,

Grace and peace to you.



As we look back over 2025, my heart is full—full of gratitude, full of reverence, and full of awe at the ways God has carried us.

At the start of the year, we declared that we would *Thrive in 2025*, not knowing what challenges, surprises, or blessings would meet us along the way. Yet through every high moment and every heavy one, God proved faithful. He allowed us to gain strength, deepen our fellowship, expand our ministries, and witness new life in our congregation. And through it all, we learned that thriving is not the absence of hardship; it is the presence of God’s sustaining grace during it—to the praise of His glory.

This Annual Report tells the story of a church that dared to grow, dared to hope, and dared to trust God—in real time. As you read it, you will see evidence of a church that kept saying “Yes, Lord,” a church that continued to “Level Up,” and a church that discovered what it means to “THRIVE” with courage, and resilience. FBCCE, we are stronger because of what we endured, wiser because of what we learned, and ready to journey with the Lord in new and exciting ways.

Now, as God calls us forward in 2026 with a new charge of **EXCELLENCE — in Ministry, in Life, and in Legacy**. We reiterate that excellence is not perfection; it is the commitment to offer God our best in all things. After a year that tested resolve, we are ready—to grow deeper in faith, ready to serve with renewed purpose, and ready to build a legacy that honors the generations before us and blesses the generations to come. With hearts open, we embrace this next season with hope and holy expectation.

Thank you for your prayers and generosity. May this Annual Report not only recount what God has done but inspire us toward what God will yet do in and through us—to the praise of His glorious grace.

In Christ’s Love,

Rev. Dr. Malachy M. Williams

The Rev. Dr. Malachy M. Williams, PhD, ThD
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth

Top 5 Highlights of 2025

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY

Since the summer of 2023, under the leadership of Pastor Williams, our church has been diligently pursuing formal recognition from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, seeking to be listed as a historic building worthy of preservation and honor. This effort involved careful research, detailed documentation, and prayerful persistence as we worked to highlight the architectural and spiritual legacy of our sanctuary at 402 Union Avenue. After more than three years of faithful labor, we are proud to share that on October 14, 2025, we received our official Certificate of Eligibility. The letter began, “This letter is in response to your request for a formal certification of eligibility for the First Baptist Church of Elizabeth...” —a quiet but powerful affirmation of the legacy we steward and the future we continue to build. In 2026 we will continue to pursue full recognition.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Our church has been faithfully praying for youth for several years, and in the summer of 2025, God answered that prayer in a beautiful and undeniable way. Today, we are blessed to have eleven young people—from toddler to college-aged students—actively present in our congregation. The arrival of the new children brought new life and new opportunities for ministry, allowing us to participate in a Summer MAD (STEAM) Camp hosted at First Baptist Church Peddie Memorial in Newark in partnership with American Baptist Women’s Ministry. That momentum continued as we joyfully relaunched Sunday School after being on hiatus for nearly six years—welcoming our children back into a space of learning, fellowship, and spiritual formation. We also re-ignited our children’s choir (under the direction of Dr. Jackie Seeger) and dance ministry (under the direction of Miss Acelia Beaubrun) to engage their gifts and interests.

And as a further sign of God’s goodness, we were honored on Christmas Eve to dedicate two young boys—one 14 months old and the other 3 years old—to the Lord, marking a hopeful and prayer-fulfilled chapter in our church’s story. In 2026 we will continue to experience blessings as one of our children will be going down into the waters of baptism next week. To God Be the Glory. Thank you, LORD.

CORNERSTONE CELEBRATION

On Sunday, September 14, 2025, the Cornerstone Celebration was a shining moment in the life of our congregation—a day overflowing with honor, joy, and a deep sense of God’s faithfulness. As we gathered to commemorate the 155-year-old legacy of our historic sanctuary, we were humbled to receive Proclamations and Certificates from Mayor J. Christian Bollwage of Elizabeth, Governor Phil Murphy, the House of Representatives, Mayor Ras J. Baraka of Newark, Mayor Derek Armstead of Linden and many others. Their recognition affirmed not only the architectural significance of our building, but also the enduring impact of our ministry in this region. It was truly a high day—one that lifted our spirits and strengthened our unity. During the celebration, we also paid tribute to four of our former pastors, including

Pastor John Wesley Shipp Sr., and Pastor Diana L. Brown who was the first female and first African American pastor of our church; and whose tenure remains the longest in our history at 19 years. Our Pastors' leadership, sacrifice, and vision were honored with deep gratitude, making the day one we will not soon forget. (Visit our website gallery to view pictures—fbcce.org.)

FRIENDS AND FAMILY FALL FESTIVAL & HOLIDAY FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Our Friends and Family Fall Festival, launched in 2023 alongside our annual holiday food distribution, has quickly become a cherished tradition in our church and community. Across 2023, 2024 and 2025, these combined efforts have allowed us to serve more than 200 of our neighbors with warmth, hospitality, and joy. Each festival weekend brings together games, live music, food, fellowship, and the beautiful sight of families and friends gathering on our grounds.

We remain deeply grateful for every partner who helps make this ministry possible, and we give special thanks for Boy Scout Troop 23 and their dedicated leadership. Their continued commitment to collecting food donations and supporting our outreach efforts has been a tremendous blessing to our congregation and to the wider community we serve. (Visit our website gallery to view pictures—fbcce.org.)

NEW MEMBERS & NEW MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES & NEW PARTNERSHIPS

With “Worship” as our spiritual principle, our congregation experienced a season of joyful growth in December 2025 as we welcomed three new members into our fellowship. As a result of their coming, our Deacons began leading a Baptism/New Members class for the candidates, preparing them with care and spiritual grounding.

Their upcoming baptism will be especially meaningful, as we will witness three generations—a granddaughter, her grandmother and her aunt—publicly commit their lives to Christ together.

In that same month, we were also blessed to receive an Associate Minister into our church family. Reverend Ronica S. Harris joined us as the Associate Minister of Spiritual Life, offering her gifts to support the pastoral care ministries and deepen the spiritual formation of our congregation.

Alongside these new additions, we also began cultivating partnerships with neighboring organizations and collaborations that will unfold in 2026 and further strengthen our ministry within the community.

Moreover, our Wednesday Night Bible Study continues to thrive with the hope that new learning opportunities will blossom in 2026 as our partnerships and opportunities grow.

Financial Overview

In 2025, our church's financial health remained a significant focus. We faced unexpected challenges that resulted in a serious deficit, prompting us to seek new strategies and to return to biblical principles regarding stewardship. Recognizing that tithing is not merely a suggestion but a requirement from the Lord, as stated in Malachi 3:10, we committed ourselves to renewed teaching on the importance of tithing.

Our efforts included an introduction to tithing envelopes that included a chart to encourage consistent giving, the enlistment of mentors such as Mrs. Montague to assist the Trustee Ministry, and a church retreat centered on stewardship. Moreover, while it has been extremely difficult, the unexpected suspension of the Pastor's salary marked a commitment to the reclaiming the church's financial footing.

In addition, our recovery was made possible through the generous support of donors and a more focused effort on special offerings. Unlike previous years, in 2025 we were especially encouraged by the overwhelming response from partners and even many of you through our special offerings such as the Pentecost Offering, Giving Tuesday, and the Year-Ender. In all, we received significant generosity from organizations like ABCNJ, and private donors who enabled us to raise over \$12,000 from June to the end of the year. This outpouring of support helped stabilize our finances and allowed us to continue our ministries and outreach.

As we reflect on our journey, we thank everyone for their generosity and encourage ongoing support through **tithes and offerings**. Your help sustains our ministries, assists those in need, and keeps our church active in the City of Elizabeth and in God's kingdom.

Looking Ahead: 2026 Vision

As we move into 2026, our vision remains to deepen our spiritual growth through commitment, community engagement, Christian courtesy, and education. Our year's theme is, *"EXCELLENCE: In Ministry. In Life. In Legacy."*

Plans for the upcoming year CONTINUE to include:

- A monthly focus on the practice of Spiritual Disciplines, maturing in discipleship and witness
 - Engaging in fellowship and outreach amongst ourselves and through ABCUSA/ABCNJ
 - Strengthening our Commitment to Child/Youth Development
 - Strengthening all ministries through togetherness, timeliness, tithing and talent
- Bringing to light the rich historicity of our church for development, grants, and funding

We invite all members to join us in prayer—**during our Tuesday Night Prayer Meeting, and around the altar on Sunday Mornings at 10:40a**— as we seek to serve God in Christian **excellence** and welcome everyone to find a home at First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our volunteers, and members for their hard work, dedication, and passion for service. We extend special thanks to Mrs. Sonja Montague for the time and effort that she has made to consult our Trustee Ministry. And as usual, we are grateful to Mr. Lawrence Mason for everything that he does to make our church shine and be a beacon of hope and cleanliness in our community. Moreover, thank you to Adrienne Sherard for coming on as our Lead Pantry Volunteer and all of our pantry volunteers for serving our neighbors with grace and ease.

Again, thank you to **everyone** who assisted in making the Cornerstone Celebration a success (including as special shout out to Cheryl A. Bullock who sent the New York Times article from 1870 that kicked it all off). And to every one of you, your contributions throughout 2025, both large and small, made a profound difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Thank you for being a part of First Baptist Church of Cranford/Elizabeth.

We are so grateful for another year of service, faith, and growth as we make 2026 a year of EXCELLENCE: In Ministry. In Life and In Legacy.



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