

# **Ten Suggestions for Celebrating the 400th Anniversary of Baptist Beginnings**

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Baptists will celebrate their 400th birthday in 2009. Consider leading your church to adopt some of the suggested anniversary projects described below. See the Baptist History and Heritage Society's website ([www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org)) for resources that your church can use to enhance its celebration.

1. ***Plan a special Baptist Heritage Sunday.*** This day of celebration could include the following:
  1. Scripture readings that serve as the basis for historic Baptist values, such as believer's baptism (Matt. 3:13-17; Rom. 6:3-4), religious liberty (John 8:32, 36; Rom. 6:17-18, 22; 1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13), and the priesthood of all believers (Matt. 27:45-51; 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9-10)
  2. Hymns that reflect on the past, present, and future, such as "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and "Come, Holy Spirit, Dove Divine"
  3. A Baptist heritage-based sermon (see examples of such sermons on the website [www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org))
  4. Prayers of gratitude for the sacrifices of Baptist ancestors
  5. Quotes on the values of Baptist history, such as
    - a) "We meet as Baptists. We have a great history. We are trustees for great principles. We face great opportunities. We are not sufficiently conscious of our history and the notable contribution we have made to the cause of individual liberty, civil and religious" (Helen Barrett Montgomery, 1922).
    - b) "The occasional backward look should give us poise and patience and courage and faith" (George W. Truett, 1936).
    - c) "History is more than a description of what is finished. It can be a resource for the present and a guide for the future" (Penrose St. Amant, 1972).
  6. Audiovisuals depicting Baptist founders and shapers in your church
  7. A special hymn commissioned to be sung on the occasion.
2. ***Involve youth and older children in your celebration.*** Organize a birthday party for the Baptist tradition. Sponsor a 250-word essay contest for children and one for youth on Baptist heroes (let the winners read their stories in public worship). Order for youth and older children copies of the brief new book (May 2008), *Portraits of Courage: Stories of Baptist Heroes*, by Julie Whidden Long, minister to children at First Baptist Church, Macon, Georgia. Available from the Baptist History and Heritage Society, this book was written specifically to support the involvement of youth and older children in celebrating Baptists' 400th anniversary. Youth and older children will thoroughly enjoy this illustration-filled publication.
3. ***Write, produce, and present a play, pageant, or historical monologue that focuses on Baptist origins in 1609 and on your church's origins.*** Present this on Baptist Heritage Sunday or on another special occasion. Identify the key individuals, locations, times, and

circumstances surrounding Baptist beginnings and your church's beginnings. Show the similarities and differences between the two beginnings. Help your church understand the importance of origins for contemporary Baptist life.

4. ***Prepare, publish, and share with all church members a series of two pamphlets:***
  1. A summary of your church's history and values
  2. A list and description of the top 10 Baptist values across 400 years (examples follow):
    - Lordship of Christ
    - Authority of Scripture
    - Passion for liberty
    - Necessity of personal faith
    - Believer's baptism, Lord's Supper, and general worship
    - Regenerate church membership
    - Priesthood of all believers
    - Voluntarism
    - Congregational/associational spirit
    - Evangelistic and missionary imperative
5. ***Display and exhibit your church's history.*** Give the exhibit a theme. Include photographs, artifacts, hymnbooks, church-related quilts, sermon manuscripts, a timeline to show how your church's history fits into the 400 years of Baptists, and other items. Label all items in the display so that it is clear what they are. Use a formal exhibit unit, a wall display, a table display—or a combination of these. Make the display/exhibit as prominent as possible by placing it in your church's foyer or other highly-visible area. Use a committee to coordinate this effort. Promote the exhibit through church media. Leave it up at least a month.
6. ***Develop a plan for capturing the oral history memoirs of your oldest church members.*** Assign this project to your Church History Committee—or to a special oral history committee. Select the interviewers and interviewees. Provide questions in advance to the interviewees. Tape-record or video-tape the interviews. Transcribe tape-recorded interviews. Consider including some of these recorded memoirs in the special worship service on Baptist Heritage Sunday in 2009, or create a separate worship service in which selected memoirs are presented.
7. ***Create a plan for locating and preserving your church's records.*** Assign this plan to your Church History Committee. Identify which records should be located and preserved (church minutes, deacons' meeting minutes, associational minutes, membership books, legal papers, financial records, church bulletins, newsletters, directories, brochures, scrapbooks, newspaper articles, plaques, objects of historical value, and other items). Secure complete records. Gather, organize, label, and file materials collected. Preserve all records using high standards of preservation. Consult your local history program for guidelines. Make records available for church displays and research.
8. ***Launch the publication of a new or updated book-length history of your church.*** Such a publication can have many potential values for your church. It can acquaint new and prospective members with the church's story, clarify the church's identity and mission, and help members bear a knowledgeable witness in behalf of the church. Plan the project carefully: Coordinate through the church's History Committee, secure church approval for the project and its funding, select a competent writer, and choose a good publisher or printer. Conduct the research. Write the story. Use editorial readers. Include many photographs and

other visuals. Print a copy for every church family—and for every family projected to join in the next five years. Dedicate the published history on a Sunday morning. Promote the distribution of the history. Use the history to create a series of history-based articles for the church newsletter.

9. **Secure key resources for your church library or media center.** All these items are available from the Baptist History and Heritage Society.

*The Baptist Origins Series* of 8 pamphlets (\$1.75 per set)

*The Baptist Style for a New Century Series* of 9 pamphlets (\$2.25 per set)

*The Baptist Heritage Library Series* of 15 booklets (\$33.00 per set)

*The Story of Baptists in the United States* (\$29.00 each)

*A How-to Manual for Your Church's History* (\$10.00 each)

10. **Join the Baptist History and Heritage Society.** You or your church will receive three annual issues each of the journal, *Baptist History and Heritage*, and the newsletter, *Baptist Heritage Update* (see the Society's website, [www.baptisthistory.org](http://www.baptisthistory.org), for a membership form). Membership will help you and your church keep current with major developments in Baptist history.