

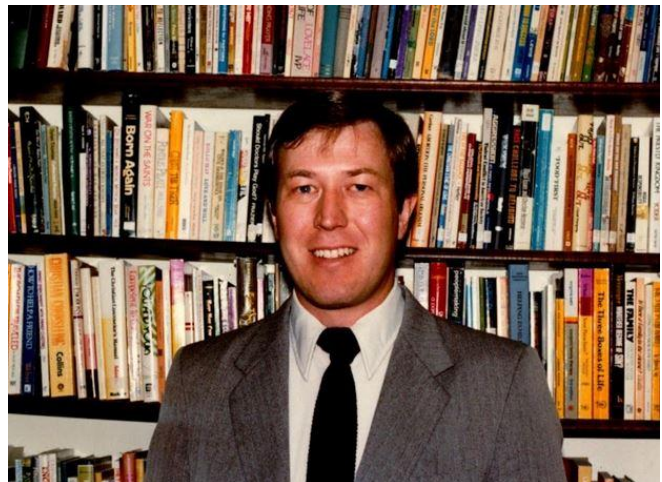
## Remembrances of First Baptist, 1986 - 1991

Members of the Pastoral Search Committee of First Baptist Church of Ames, Iowa, visited the worship hour of Valley View Baptist Church, Cedar Falls, during Advent, 1985. Pastor David Nethercott had served Valley View for the previous five years. He had come to Valley View from Bloomington Baptist Church, Bloomington, Minnesota with his wife, Diane. Their daughter, Elisa, was five years old.

Both David and Diane had recently completed work on Masters in Agency Counseling degrees from the University of Northern Iowa. Pastor Nethercott had established active roles in Association, Region and Ministers Council responsibilities. His ministry in Cedar Falls had been marked by an extensive ministry with the unemployed members of the Cedar Falls-Waterloo communities. With great joy and anticipation, Rev. Nethercott and his family arrived in Ames for the first Sunday of February, 1987.

First Baptist of Ames was considerate in making the attached manse suitable for the Nethercott family. This manse would be a novel location for family life. The front and back doors of the manse a few steps from the Church Office. A side door off the living room across a lounge leading to the Pastor's Office. A small side yard surrounded by a wood fence and high honeysuckle shrubs. ISU's Student Union and Lake La Verne about one block to the north. Finally, a large parking lot behind the house and church with upwards of 50 fraternities and sororities in the near neighborhood.

It was not long before the church agreed to cut short the massive growth of honeysuckle hedge overgrowth around the manse's yard, and install a new wood fence around that yard. This provided for a measure of privacy as well as safety for the family in light of the many surrounding fraternities and sororities. Then, it was not long before the Nethercotts traveled back to Cedar Falls where Elisa's backyard swing set was dug up and brought to Ames and placed in the yard for Elisa to continue to enjoy.



*Rev. David Nethercott*

In a somewhat unusual arrangement, the prior interim pastor, Rev. Fritz Bogart, an ordained PCUSA clergy, stayed on for two full weeks in order to facilitate the new pastor's assimilation into the congregation and the larger ISU related community. Pastor Dave gladly accepted this arrangement and went on to enjoy a positive relationship with Fritz and his spouse, Rev. Ann Adams, over the next six years. Ann served in the United Ministry in Higher Education ministry just off the ISU campus. Pastor Dave kept close ties with Ann and other campus clergy including an annual Spring Retreat aimed mainly for fun and frivolity.

About one year after arriving in Ames, the Nethercott family welcomed a new member, Joel (Dae Han), who arrived at the Des Moines Airport from a flight that began in Seoul, South Korea. Joel was two and one-half. The family was happy and complete.

The initial presenting congregational challenge was to work together to move beyond a felt sense of uncertainty as to the identity and the viability of the congregation. One feature of this presenting challenge was a more or less complete loss of confidence in the brand name 'Baptist' due to negative associations generated by the Baptist label in the University setting, and in media across the nation. First Baptist had been using a print add, for example, that referred to it as an 'Un-Baptist' church. Members were able to lay this issue at least partly to rest after determining that uniting with another congregation in Ames was not going to be an option. The primary consideration for uniting was with Northminster Presbyterian Church, a PCUSA congregation.

The first major programmatic action, carried out through the Board of Education and the Church Council, was to close the Ames Nursery School that had been in the church basement for the previous 25 years. The matter was studied carefully. The decision was carried out in an orderly and non-divisive manner. Then, several of the rooms in question were carpeted, play equipment was sold, and further steps were taken to clear out the entire church basement. This turned out to be a significant evacuation of accumulated stuff, including old furniture that had been left on the stage by ISU students who had been allowed to drop off furniture for summer months.

The next major action was to install a lift between the narthex and the church basement. This was followed by a decision to remodel the church kitchen. Pastor Nethercott worked with the Trustee Board by asking them to develop a set of clear priorities. The church kitchen rose to the top. After spending about \$6,000 there emerged a sparkling new kitchen including lighting, cupboards, appliances, and floor coverings. The transformation was complete for a kitchen that had not been touched since the construction of the facility in 1949. The project was an easy, almost instant improvement that seemed to suggest that further alterations might take place to bring about very positive results.

The most controversial action taken during Pastor Nethercott's six years in Ames had to do with an effort to do undergraduate related student ministry. Graduate students and their family members seemed at ease in relating to our congregation. Members were aware that some ABC/USA churches told their youth to avoid First Baptist because we were deemed to be too liberal. Some in the congregation felt that students were simply not going to be interested in our congregation. But, Pastor Nethercott and others on the Education Board felt strongly that the congregation ought to prepare a student center within the building, specifically, on the second floor where there was a counter area, cupboards, and a sink in place. Preparation included the removal of a wall and the purchase of sturdy furnishings. Subsequently, the area was made open on a regular basis for student use. Sunday evening suppers were offered, as well. The response by students was not overwhelming by any measure, but as a campus related church, the student center served at least as a sign that ISU students were welcome in the congregation.

Another significant action was the formation of Care Circles through our Board of Deacons. These Circles were intended to build relationships within the congregation beyond those relationships already in place through University and work related settings. Also, the church enjoyed a number of international students and their families who would be with us for a relatively short period of time. Connecting with them seemed to be valuable to them and to us. The Care Circles got started about 1989 and continued at least until the time of Pastor Nethercott's departure. Unrelated, one group that emerged was that of retired men who gathered for breakfast on a weekly basis in a local restaurant. This emphasis on caring and friendship strengthened the congregation in the midst of making decisive and implementing those decisions.

A number of other actions and ministries are worthy of mention during the time of Pastor's Nethercott's tenure as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Ames. Here, then, are some of those actions and ministries:

1. Gayle Osterberg came to the Church Office as the new Church Secretary late in 1987. She served the church with joy and great competence throughout this period and beyond.
2. Climbing to the interior top of the church steeple, the pastor identified bullet holes that lined up with a back door and deck from two blocks west in Campustown. No arrests were made, but there was no more damage sustained.
3. A theological presenter was sponsored on an annual basis. Most notable was the presentation made by Rev. Brent Waters who raised the ancient question, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?"
4. Annual Lenten studies were held. Early on Rev. Fritz Bogart assisted Pastor Nethercott in a theological discussion. In a final presentation the subject was "Health and Wholeness," with guest presenters who were well received.
5. Three special events brought First Baptist into cooperation with the larger community. The first was a joint service of baptism and communion with other congregations within the Ames Ministerial Association carrying out the promise of the World Council of Churches' emphasis called 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.' This event was held on Easter Eve with high attendance. The second was a choral concert presented by the Ames Community Chorus, a sacred concert within the Easter season. Pastor Dave was both the host pastor and a member of the choir. The third was a pulpit exchange sponsored by the Council of Churches. The pastor that came to First Baptist reported that he had performed an exorcism of the building prior to the service. Pastor Nethercott was made ever so welcome back with a caution against letting such a thing happen again.
6. A highlight of the year was the Christmas Eve pre-service fellowship time, and our annual church dinner.

7. The church enjoyed both formal and informal ties with Northcrest with a growing number of members purchasing homes there along with those already in assisted living. Pastor Nethercott sat on the Northcrest Board representing the Mid-American Baptist Region while members represented the church. Pastor Nethercott continued the tradition of leading Advent worship there on a Sunday afternoon.
8. Pastor Nethercott maintained a very active role in American Baptist matters, both within Mid-America, and on a national level. He served on the Region Board and as the President of the Mid-America Ministers Council. As President, he traveled to represent Mid-America at annual Senate gatherings held at American Baptist Assembly, Green Lake, Wisconsin. In 1998, Pastor Nethercott was enlisted to represent Mid-America on the General Board of ABC/ USA, with meetings held in June and December. He served in that role for three years until the time of his departure for First Baptist Church of Dayton, Ohio.

The issue of Baptist naming, identity and reputation did not go away during these six years. It was not, however, directly addressed again during this period. There was one moment, however, where there was something of an "aha" that emerged in an unexpected way. This is what happened. The Adult Forum, a group that heard various guest speakers each Sunday, hosted a gentleman from the Ames Unitarian congregation. He told how he was taking his teenage children to church in order to give them religious literacy. It was the late Earl Hammond who then raised the question, "But, do you, yourself, believe in God?" His answer, "No, I do not." There was an audible gasp. It was clear that First Baptist of Ames may not be all that much in love with the label 'Baptist', but the folks of First Baptist would not identify themselves as those who do church without recognizing the existence of God.

Presented by Rev. David C. Nethercott  
Honorably Retired from ABC/USA & PC (USA) Ministry  
Sun Lakes Country Club, Banning, California