



# Fernwood Baptist

Church Profile  
Spring 2025

Spartanburg, SC





# Table of Contents

Introduction to Fernwood	3
Fernwood History	4
Our Core Values	8
Who We Are	9
Where We Are	14
Where We Want to Go	18

**You are welcome here,  
just the way you are.**

*“For me, Fernwood is unique in that it is a safe place for those that have been cast aside by other churches and made to feel they don’t belong. Fernwood gives us a place to belong where we can worship and feel loved by God with a church family that accepts us without hesitation.”*





# Welcome to Fernwood

An introduction to our church family



## Who are we?

Fernwood Baptist Church is more than just a place of worship - it's a dynamic and welcoming community where faith is nurtured, relationships are strengthened, and service to those around us is a way of life. Our vibrant, meaningful worship services challenge and inspire, and our Sunday School and Bible Study classes give us a place to get to know one another and grow in our faith.

As a welcoming and affirming church, Fernwood is deeply committed to serving our community. Our mission goes beyond the walls of the church as we actively seek opportunities to extend

love, compassion, and support to those in need. The heart of Fernwood is its people - loving, generous, and devoted individuals who have invested their lives into something they believe is bigger than themselves.

What makes Fernwood stand out from the many churches in Spartanburg is our unwavering commitment to inclusivity and acceptance. In a religious landscape where inclusivity may not always be the norm, especially in Baptist traditions, Fernwood proudly embraces all people just as they are.



# Our History

## Pastoral Leadership

1960-1976	1977-1983	1984-2006	2009-2014	2015-2017	2019-2024	2025 and beyond
Rev. Dr. William Ball	Rev. Dr. David DeBord	Rev. Dr. P. Randall Wright	Revs. Drs. Dean and Lisa Allen	Rev. Bailey Nelson	Rev. Matt Johnson	

### 1960-1976 - Church Founding and Early Years

The origins of Fernwood Baptist Church date back to the late 1950s when Spartanburg was experiencing rapid growth. During a pivotal meeting in 1958, a group began planting ideas for a six-acre tract of land on the city's east side in what was then known as Fernwood Farms.

On January 11, 1959, 107 charter members met and gave birth to Fernwood Baptist Church. Houston Elementary School served as the church's first home, with a series of interim pastors leading worship. A little more than a year after its founding, Fernwood called Rev. Dr. William L. Ball, Jr., to serve as its first pastor.

Dr. Ball rallied the church to raise funds, and on Sunday, July 29, 1962, the congregation assembled for its first service in what is now known as The William L. Ball, Jr. Chapel.





## **1967- 1983 - Rev. Dr. DeBord**

After Dr. Ball's retirement in 1967, Fernwood called Rev. Dr. David DeBord as its pastor. During his tenure, Rev. Jean S. Pruett was called as Fernwood's Minister of Education and Youth, making her the first woman in this role and the first ordained woman to serve on staff. Fernwood had already affirmed a place for women in ministry by being one of the first churches in the area to ordain a woman when charter member Iva Mae Hendley was ordained as a deacon. Later, after earning her doctorate, Rev. Dr. Pruett was named Minister of Education and Discipleship.

## **1984-2006 - Rev. Dr. P. Randall Wright**

After Dr. DeBord's resignation, Rev. Dr. P. Randall Wright became Fernwood's third pastor. With wisdom and insight, he guided the church during the great upheaval in the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1991, Fernwood's Stewardship Ministry launched "Continuing the Vision," a two-year fundraising campaign for a new Sanctuary, and a dedication was held on May 7, 1995. A key element of the new sanctuary was the faceted-glass window bays designed by Jane Collins of Willet Stained Glass Studio in Philadelphia. The windows depict themes such as the beginning of time and the life of Christ. The window depicting Pentecost and the Acts of the Apostles was designated as the "Billy and Bessie Ball Window."



In the next years, many dedicated leaders were called to serve, including the Rev. Stuart L. Jones, who served as Minister to Students from 2001 until 2008, when he became Associate Pastor/Minister to Youth. He served in this position until 2016.

On April 21, 2002, Fernwood celebrated more growth with the dedication of the Easley Family Life Center, named in memory of Mary Barber and Genatus "Red" Easley. Recognizing the positive role that family and sports activities play in molding the lives of young people, the facility was designed with a gymnasium, kitchen, dining room and stage for hosting a variety of activities.

## **2006-2009 Interim Period**

Following Dr. Wright's retirement in 2006, Rev. Dr. Jim Langford, Rev. Jones and ordained members guided the church. During this time, Fernwood voted to be identified as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship church and to continue accepting the baptism of persons who transferred from other denominations.



## 2009-2014 - Revs. Drs. Dean and Lisa Allen

In April 2009, Drs. Lisa Wimberly Allen and Larry Dean Allen II jointly became Fernwood's pastors. As the first pastor-couple to serve Fernwood, the Allens complemented each other's preaching style and shepherding of the congregation. They also led in establishing a digital member directory and sponsoring the daughter of church members who was serving in Costa Rica. The Allens would lead the church until 2014, when they resigned to move closer to family.



## 2015-2017 - Rev. Bailey Nelson

Rev. Bailey Edwards Nelson, a gifted preacher, led us for two years following the Allens' departure.



## 2017-2019 Interim Period

Following Rev. Nelson's resignation, Fernwood was led by two interim pastors – Rev. Dr. Dan R. Vincent and Rev. Eric Coleman. During this time, the Fernwood congregation chose to become an affirming church and welcome LGBTQIA members in leadership roles. In 2018, Fernwood began hosting a space at the annual Upstate Pride Festival. Then, in August of 2019, the church became the physical home of Uplift Outreach Center, an organization for LGBTQIA youth in Spartanburg.





## 2019-2024 - Rev. Matt Johnson

In June of 2019, Rev. Matthew K. Johnson became Fernwood's pastor. Within months, he was faced with leading the church through the tumultuous times of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the congregation was no longer meeting in person, Fernwood began streaming worship services on Facebook. The church also struggled with the passing of several integral members during this time. Despite the challenges, Fernwood grew, attracting many young families and establishing The Gap Sunday School class, comprised of young adults.

## 2025 and beyond

Following Rev. Johnson's departure in June of 2024, Fernwood began an intentional interim transition process. Led by Rev. Michael Tutterow, the process affirmed Fernwood's identity as a progressive congregation and identified several ministry priorities for its future.



# Our Core Values

## At Fernwood,

We serve our neighbors and our city, and invite our members to invest in something bigger than ourselves. We believe the greatest commandment is to love God and love others, and so we are called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

## We love God by loving our neighbors

Many members of our congregation have started or serve on many non-profit organizations in our community. (For a full list of non-profits we serve in our community, see p. 15-16). Here are some things our community partners have to say about us.

*"From the very beginning of our partnership, Fernwood Baptist has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, hospitality, and affirming care.... We could not ask for a more compassionate and supportive partner than Fernwood Baptist Church.... their support has been nothing short of transformative."*

Raymond Valazquez,  
Executive Director  
Uplift LGBTQA+ Outreach Center

*"Having this home has provided me with peace and stability. I now live in a safe, stable home surrounded by wonderful neighbors and a sense of belonging."*

Casey Lattimore  
Proud Homeowner  
Habitat for Humanity

***Fernwood is an open-minded, inclusive, and affirming church in which all are welcome and encouraged to be their vulnerable, authentic selves. We are a prayerful community, working out the hope of Christ's justice-centered message.***

***Below are some quotes from our very own church members about what they value about our church and what they think makes Fernwood unique.***

“ Our acceptance of many forms of diversity ”

“ A genuinely warm, inviting church family ”

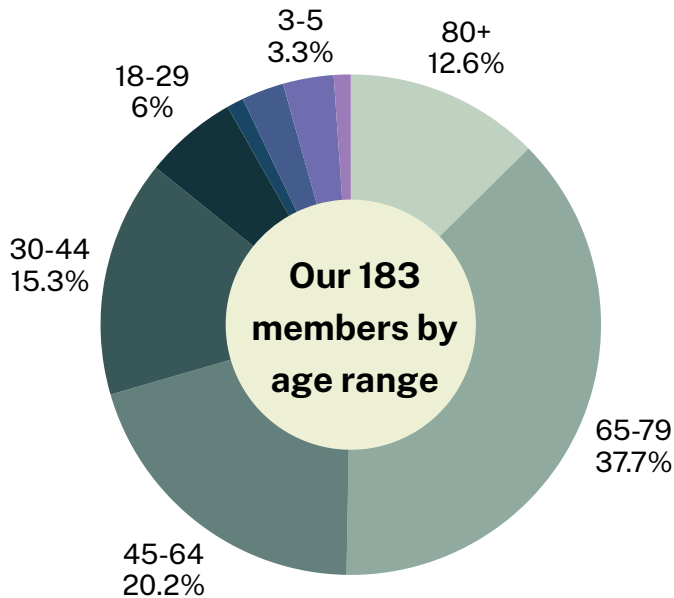
“ We love you and meet you where you are without judging you ”

“ We are unique among Baptists for ordaining women and accepting the baptism of members from other denominations ”

“ There is a sincere desire by the membership to follow Christ ”

# Who We Are

## Membership & Attendance



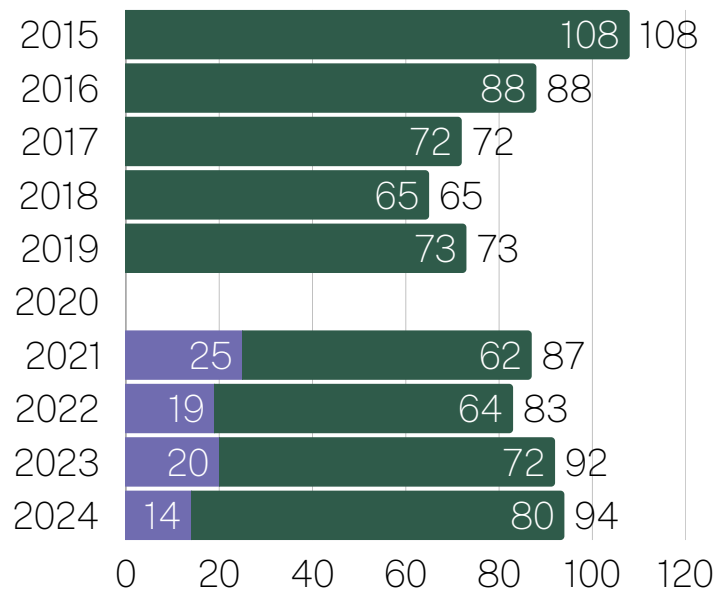
Our congregation is a blend of the old and the new, both the ages of our population and in membership tenure.

Almost half of our congregation is at or above retirement age. Simultaneously, we have a growing population of young families with children, which helps keep our faith community vibrant.

On an average Sunday, we can expect about 80 people in attendance for in-person worship.

We also welcome online attendance from our brothers/sisters/siblings who are unable to attend in person.

● Online Service  
● In Person Service





# Who We Are

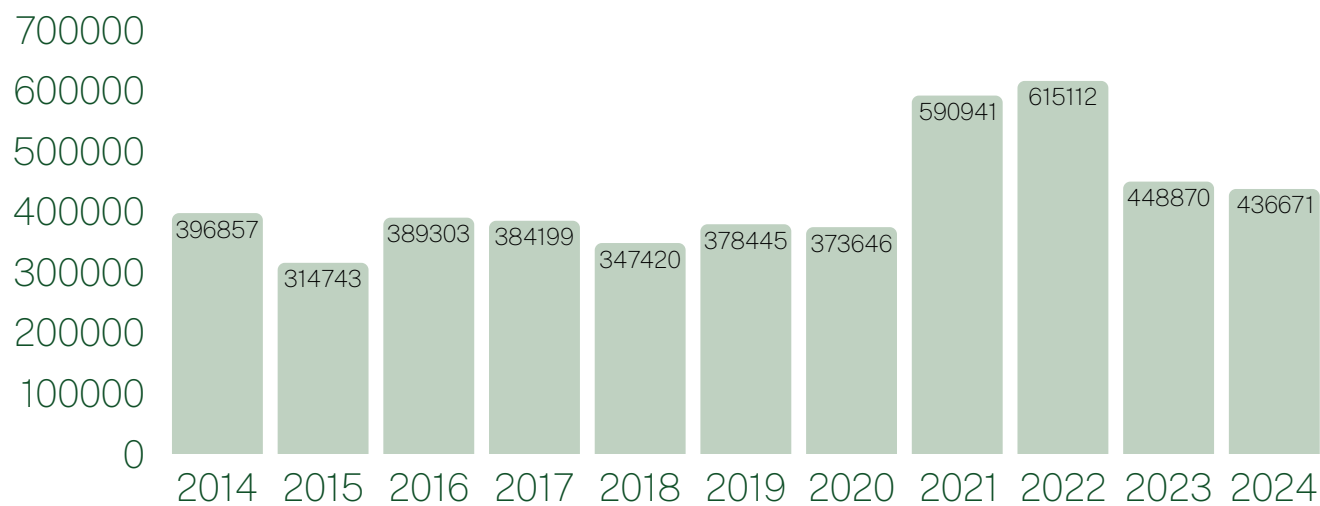
## What We Give

### Fernwood Finances

Fernwood is a debt-free congregation. Our 68,000-sq.-ft. campus (constructed over the course of 41 years) offers wonderful possibilities for creative partnerships with community non-profits that need meeting space.

ORIGINAL CHAPEL AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE	NEW SANCTUARY AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE	GYMNASIUM AND NEW KITCHEN
BUILT 1960	BUILT 1990	BUILT 2001
35,011 SQ. FT.	15,170 SQ. FT.	17,766 SQ. FT.
PAID OFF PRIOR TO 1984	PAID OFF CIRCA 2005	PAID FOR AT TIME OF BUILD

Our annual giving for our ministry budget averages approximately \$400,000, a figure we saw spike during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members also share generously for other community causes.



# Who We Are

## Ministries and Programming



Michael Tutterow  
Interim Pastor



Stafford Turner  
Director of Music Ministry



Lee Anne Bailie, Director  
of Communication Ministries



Mary Helen Wessinger  
Financial Administrator



Marcia Harris  
Assistant Music Associate



Rebecca Turner  
Music Associate



Don Williams  
Custodian

## Adult Sunday School

### Footprints and Gap Classes

Our Footprints class is a lecture-based Sunday school class oriented toward the 45+ crowd. Our Gap class is discussion-based and oriented toward the 20+ crowd. All members are welcome at both! Each class enjoys fellowship at church on Sunday mornings and off-campus events throughout the year.

## Wednesday Nights

### Dinner, Prayer, and Study

Wednesday nights, we gather together for a delicious catered meal to share good food and friendship. After dinner, we share prayers and then engage in a topical study. This year, we are studying world religions.

## Childrens' Ministries

### Nursery, Pre-School, Elementary, and Youth

We have two paid nursery worker positions to assist in caring for our youngest members. Additionally, we have programming for pre-school, elementary, and middle and high school students during the Sunday School hour. Children 5+ are encouraged to join their families in worship.

## Other Events and Gatherings

### Member-led

Our church also hosts multiple member-led events and gatherings for the congregation, including a monthly book club, an Out and About Fernwood group for our LGBTQIA+ members and allies, and a monthly game night.



# Who We Are

## Ministries and Programming



## Music Ministry

### Sanctuary Choir and Fernwood Ringers

Music expresses our love for God, communicates our faith and understanding, and provides ministry to others. At Fernwood, there are a number of opportunities to worship God and to serve our neighbor through music by being a part of our ensembles. Our primary desire is to glorify God as we continue to build a ministry featuring music that is diverse, vital, and faithful; to take care of the artists God sends our way; and to promote musical and spiritual growth in all people.

**The Fernwood Sanctuary Choir** leads the congregation in worship through music each Sunday. They share music in a variety of styles — traditional anthems, sacred masterworks, spirituals, contemporary gospel, and hymn arrangements. Although our roots are firmly anchored in traditional anthems and sacred masterworks, we enjoy worshiping and performing music in all of these styles. Membership in the Sanctuary Choir is open to adults of any age.

**Fernwood Ringers** is a dedicated group of musicians who rehearse weekly and share their music in worship services, generally once a month. The Fernwood Ringers have also participated in state, regional, and denominational handbell festivals. Membership in the Fernwood Ringers is open to adults and high school youth who know how to read music and are interested in ringing.



# Who We Are

## Ministries and Programming



## Ministry Teams

### How We Serve

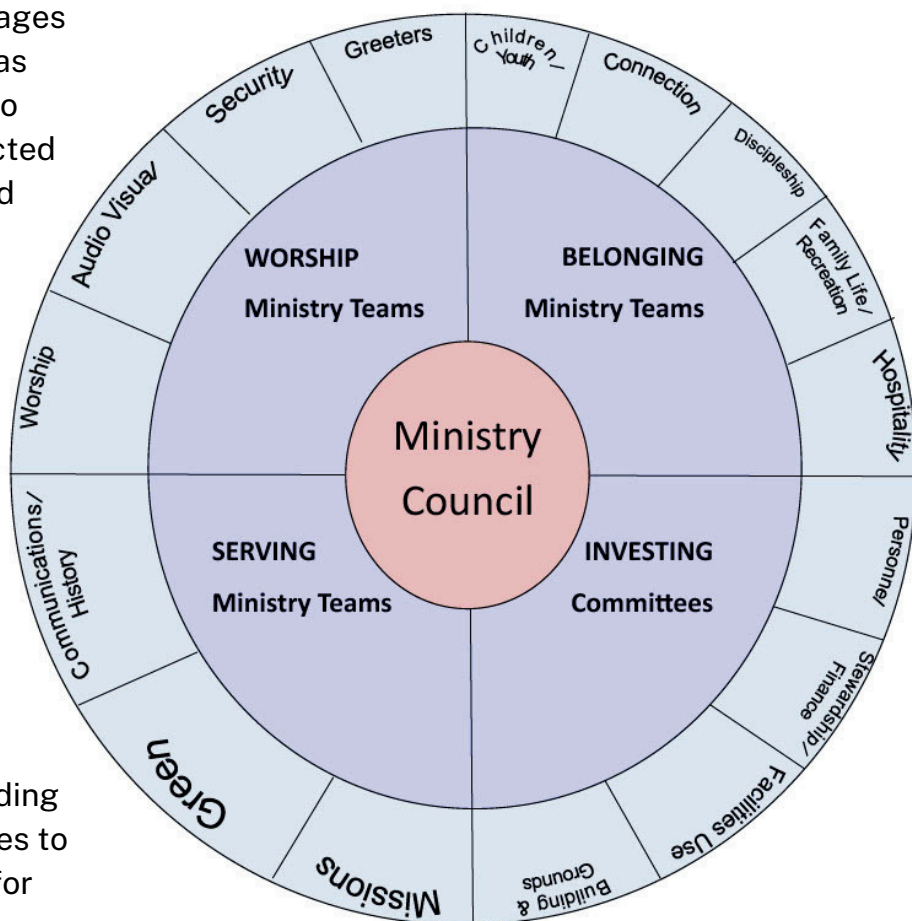
Fernwood believes that God has a purpose for each of us within the context of the local church and beyond. We ask each individual to listen closely for God's call and respond boldly by identifying their talents and passions for ministry. Each ministry team has a facilitator who coordinates the team's activities. Ministry teams are managed by the ministry council, who coordinate activities on the church calendar. These teams are grouped into four focus areas: Worship, Belonging, Investing, and Serving. Participants can choose the teams where they feel called to serve, serve on multiple ministry teams, or even create a team, and can choose their level of involvement in each.

**Worship Ministry Teams** assist the pastor in enriching our worship experiences, welcome all who come onto our campus, and make sure the church is safe for members and guests.

**Belonging Ministry Teams** coordinate activities and opportunities for all ages to connect and grow in their faith, as well as keep members connected to one another and the church connected to our community through tools and technology.

**Investing Ministry Teams** provide oversight and stewardship of our finances, staffing, buildings and grounds, and the use of our facilities.

**Serving Ministry Teams** work within the congregation, the community, and nationally and internationally through missions, providing fellowship and outreach opportunities, educating and providing the body of Christ with opportunities to be the hands and feet and to care for God's children and creation at large.





# Where We Are

## Our Community

### The City of Spartanburg

The city of Spartanburg is the fifth-largest city in the state, and the area is thriving! We're a college town showcasing seven colleges and universities with 15,000 students, and have a current population of 343,000 living in the county. With an average of 11 people per day moving to the area, projections estimate the population of Spartanburg County to boom to 358,000 by the year 2027. The city of Spartanburg, population 40,000, remains an affordable, quiet college town with a thriving arts community, ideal for families, young and old, to call home. Don't ask us - Newsweek magazine has named Spartanburg one of the top three cities in the nation attracting millennials.

Median Household Income	Median Home Value	Average Home Value
\$58,535	\$253,403	\$292,238

### Community Churches

Being in the Bible belt, there is a strong Baptist presence in Spartanburg. However, Fernwood Baptist is unique in that, out of 200 Baptist churches in the county, we are the only one that is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and not dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention. We take pride in our identity as a progressive voice in this community.

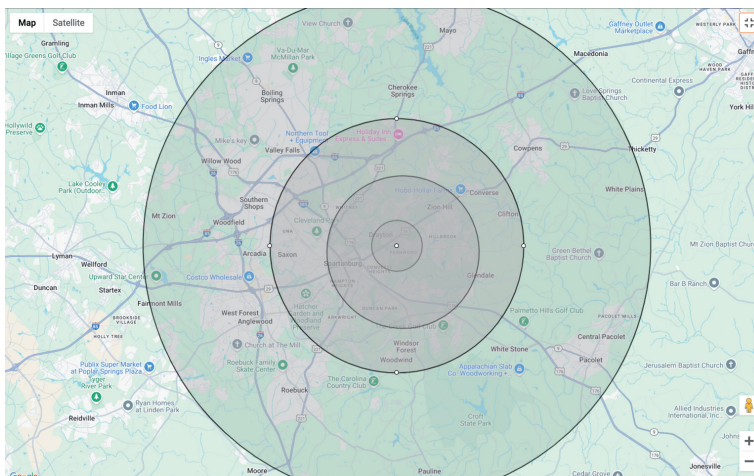


Of the 482 religious congregations in Spartanburg County, 200 of them are Baptist.



Of those 200 Baptist congregations, only three contribute to the CBF. Two of these contributors are also aligned with the SBC.

### Where Our Members Live



The majority of Fernwood's membership lives within a 20-minute or less drive.

# Community Partners



Members of Fernwood serving with Habitat

*Fernwood Baptist Church has been a supporter and partner of Piedmont Care for at least 20 years. Fernwood has hosted our annual focus group, donated Bibles, provided food for our monthly support group, and supplied critical financial resources. The intangible benefits are harder to quantify. Fernwood is known as a caring and open community of faith where our clients have always been welcome. Piedmont Care is marking 30 years of service this year and Fernwood Baptist Church remains a reliable partner.*

Tracey Jackson of Piedmont Care

ORGANIZATION	PURPOSE	INVOLVEMENT
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY	builds homes for Spartanburg families in need	manual labor support in church budget
BLESSINGS BOX	provides free, no-strings attached non-perishable food items to members of our community	owned and stocked by Fernwood Baptist and local community members
PRIDE DAY FESTIVAL	supports and celebrates the LGBTQIA+ community in the Upstate	annual participation with a vendor booth and in the march, providing community outreach, connection, and affirmation
ANGEL TREE	provides Christmas gifts to children in the community who would not normally receive a Christmas gift	congregants and local non-profits identify children to be served; congregants select toys and clothes to purchase
CHARLES LEA CENTER	provides residential and day programs for adults with intellectual disabilities	sponsorship of a "house" at the center, where we provide birthday and Christmas gifts for the residents; support in church budget
VALKYRIE SUPPLY AT CONVERSE	provides basic assistance to Converse College students, including toiletries, non-perishable food items, and professional clothing items students can wear to interviews	annual or bi-annual supply drives at Fernwood
BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS	provides backpacks for school children who do not have one	FBC sponsors a school; church members collect and distribute backpacks
UPLIFT	serves LGBTQIA+ youth of Spartanburg	Fernwood provides a space for Uplift to meet and provides snacks for their youth meetings; support in church budget
PIEDMONT CARE	provides HIV/AIDS care, prevention, and advocacy in Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties of South Carolina	provide refreshments for monthly support group meetings; support in church budget



ORGANIZATION	PURPOSE	INVOLVEMENT
TOTAL MINISTRIES	provides food and financial services to Spartanburg county	preparing groceries for the mobile food pantry; support in church budget
ANNUAL COAT DRIVE AND GIVEAWAY	keeps our neighbors warm during the winter	mission team collects and distributes at the church
HOPE CENTER FOR CHILDREN	builds stable, healthy families and provides children with a safe place from abuse and neglect, provides transitional housing and support for adolescents/young adults aging out of foster care	support in church budget
CBF STATE AND GLOBAL MISSIONS	partners with mission organizations, agencies, and churches to minister to communities locally and around the globe	collect designated offerings with a special emphasis in the month of December, and collect money for disaster relief buckets; support in church budget
ST. LUKE'S FREE MEDICAL CLINIC	provides healthcare to low-income, uninsured residents of Spartanburg	provide meals to staff and volunteers every other month; support in church budget
FAITH INITIATIVE TO END CHILD POVERTY	county initiative to address homelessness in families with children by providing transitional housing while providing case management support to addressing the underlying issues	Fernwood houses approximately 4-6 families two weeks per quarter
ANGELS CHARGE	provides transitional housing and support for formerly incarcerated women in Spartanburg	support in church budget
JUMPSTART	disciples the incarcerated and returning citizens and assists with re-entry to society	support in church budget
H.O.P.E. MINISTRIES	provides a six-month leadership and mentorship program to displaced people in the Upstate	support in church budget
SIDEWALK HOPE	mobile children's church serving low-income housing developments in inner-city Spartanburg	support in church budget
MOBILE MEALS	provides meals, services, and fellowship to the frail and homebound citizens of Spartanburg County	support in church budget
EMERGE FAMILY THERAPY	non-profit therapy provider serving low income families in Spartanburg and Greenville counties	founded by members of Fernwood; support in church budget
SPARTANBURG SOUP KITCHEN	serves 200-350 hungry people/day in the city of Spartanburg	provide food and volunteers to serve on the third Sunday, six times per year support in church budget



*The Soup Kitchen was born when Christians from 2nd Presbyterian Church saw the hungry people in Spartanburg and decided to do something about it. Fernwood began its support at the Soup Kitchen on an irregular basis in these early days. We are especially important to this ministry, now as we were then, because we provide both the food and the volunteers to prepare and serve the food.*

*After more than a decade of being the home for this ministry, the 2nd Presbyterian Church congregation decided to raise funds to build the current location, which has a better layout to meet the needs to serve this population. The people of Fernwood helped with the fundraising, and we committed to regularly support this ministry. We are anticipated, loved and deeply appreciated for our contributions and commitments.*





Fernwood was recently challenged by the Spartanburg Faith Initiative to be a host church for the Spartanburg Emergency Housing Initiative. Since there is no homeless shelter in Spartanburg for women and children, Fernwood serves as a host church for these families, with other support churches providing the manpower to feed and support them during their stay.



Beyond providing us with a physical space, the leadership and congregation of Fernwood Baptist Church have consistently embodied the spirit of true allyship. Their kindness, encouragement, and dedication to creating a welcoming environment have directly contributed to the well-being and empowerment of the young people we serve. Thanks to their generosity and affirmation, our youth are able to access vital support, resources, and community — free from judgment or exclusion.

Raymond Valazquez, Executive Director  
Uplift LGBTQ+ Outreach Center





# Where We Want to Go

## Our Goals for the Future

We aspire to be New Testament Christians whose words and actions will be directed by Christ and will cause others to see and to say that we are following the teachings of Christ because of the love we show to all of God's creation. We, Fernwood, strive to emulate Christ in a holistic manner that not only spotlights our positions on current societal issues but also on basic life issues that bond the weak and the strong to build a better community here on Earth. We will be instruments of God's love that touch the lives of every person within the sphere of influence of each of our members.

Fernwood has identified itself as an accepting, progressive, and community-driven place. Our unique set of values within our area has been referred to as the "best kept secret of Spartanburg". We have decided that we want to let that secret out. Fernwood desires to spread its positive, affirming, and welcoming message to our community by welcoming those who have previously been shunned by Christian groups based on their sexuality, race, or disability and by reaching out to those who are struggling in our area. Our mission is to be Christ-like to one another, and we need a leader who can guide us to fulfill that mission together. Spartanburg is a rapidly growing area, and we have an opportunity to make contact with new people and share our particular brand of welcoming hospitality and good faith Christianity.