

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VAN RIPER ELLIS BROADWAY BAPTIST CHURCH

The Broadway Baptist Church traced its roots to May 31, 1868 when the first session of a mission Sunday School was held in the weave shop of Joseph Garlick, in a section of Paterson then known as Weavertown. A year later, a small chapel was completed and dedicated and was home of the Sunday School for the next 20 years. The Fourth Baptist Church also used the chapel for ten years. The name Weavertown Mission Sunday School was changed to the York Avenue Baptist Sunday School and the Sunday School was subsequently assimilated into the Fourth Avenue Baptist Church in 1884.

During the first 50 years, the church grew and flourished and acquired property on Broadway and East 29th Street in Paterson NJ. A new church building was constructed and dedicated on October 4, 1891. The congregation and church membership continued to grow into the twentieth century and its influence was felt throughout the region. A tragic fire destroyed the church building in 1927, however the faith of the people could not be destroyed and plans for a new edifice were begun by early Spring 1927, and by September 1929 a new, larger sanctuary was completed and dedicated on Broadway, spanning 23rd St to 24th St. The church was renamed The Broadway Baptist Church. Dr. Ernest A. Elwell became pastor of the church on August 1, 1930 and remained as the church's spiritual leader until his death on September 10, 1955. Under Pastor Elwell's leadership the church grew in outreach and membership. Dr. Elwell's contributions to the furthering of the Kingdom of God are numerous, including the training of young people to spread the gospel. During his tenure, fourteen young men became pastors, and other men and women became involved in missions and other fulltime Christian work.

At around the same time, just across the Passaic River, in Saddle River Township (now known as the Borough of Fair Lawn), a Sunday School class started in the home of Eleanor Van Riper on the corner of River Road and Mortlot Avenue on March 6, 1870. Five children attended the first session and soon the attendance increased rapidly, so to accommodate the growing Sunday School (known as the Passaic Valley Union Sunday School), Dr. Henry Van Riper donated a plot of ground at the corner of River Road and Bellair Avenue in the community which eventually become known as the Borough of Fair Lawn.

With the support of the Van Ripers and members of the community, a chapel was built on the donated property, but that chapel was destroyed by fire in 1890. A larger building replaced it, and it was expanded in 1908, 1926, 1930, and again in 1942, largely with the financial support of Mrs. R.H. (Ida) Ellis and her husband. Mrs. Ellis served as Sunday School Superintendant after the passing of her mother, Eleanor Van Riper in 1919. By that time, the Sunday School had expanded to include all age groups, from preschoolers to adults. Concurrently, regular preaching services were conducted in the chapel on alternating Sunday afternoons, led by pastors of various churches from Paterson.

In February 1930, the Passaic Valley Union Sunday School evolved into the founding of the Van Riper Ellis Memorial Church, named in honor of the principal benefactors of the church. Shortly after the founding of the Van Riper Ellis Memorial Church, Dr. Edward M Saunier became its pastor after retiring from the pastorate of the Broadway Baptist Church. The church flourished under his able leadership and he served faithfully until 1938, when he had to resign because of illness.

Rev. Richard P. Camp then became the pastor, serving in that position until 1969. During the years of Dr. Camp's pastorate, the church rooted itself into the Fair Lawn community. The growing congregation met in the chapel that originated from the Sunday School building. Land was purchased on Bellair Avenue and after much planning and giving on the part of the people; the present education building was completed in the spring of 1954. Mrs. Ellis passed away in 1955 at the age of 95. Her estate left property on Morlot Avenue and River Road, as well as funds sufficient enough to undertake the planning and construction of a beautiful edifice

on the site of her family's home. This is the present church building, which was dedicated on June 12, 1960.

Under the able, visionary and long-term leadership of Dr. Elwell at Broadway, and Dr. Camp at Van Riper Ellis, both churches grew significantly in outreach and membership during the period of 1930 to 1970. Before and after their ministries, both churches were served well, for shorter terms, by a number of dedicated evangelical ministers, ordained to preach the Gospel and serve their Lord in their respective churches, supported by committed church officers and members.

However, by the mid 1980's the world was changing rapidly. In Fair lawn, Van Riper Ellis and in Paterson, Broadway were both facing declining memberships as people moved away and the new residents moving into the area were not of the same faith. As a result, a merger of the two churches was agreed to, and took place on Easter Sunday, April 7, 1985. The former names of the two churches were consolidated and were replaced with one new name, The Van Riper Ellis Broadway Baptist Church.

The church today reflects the diversity of heaven, with people from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are all equal and precious in God's sight. We stand strong in our traditions, planted with deep roots, and holding a vision to serve and be God's Church, the Lord's people, and His disciples, and messengers. We remember and honor the past; we celebrate the present, and have hope for the future. This is our journey of faith.