

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: First Baptist Church of Bluefield  
Other names/site number: Central Baptist Church  
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a


### 2. Location

Street & number: 100 Duhring Street  
City or town: Bluefield State: WV County: Mercer Zip Code: 24701  
Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets  
the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic  
Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.  
In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.  
I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following  
level(s) of significance:

    national          statewide        X   local  
Applicable National Register Criteria:  
  A          B          X   C        D  

	
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer	8/3/2023
<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<u>West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Arts, Culture and History</u>	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
_____	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility=church

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Victorian Eclectic

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: Stone; Walls: Brick; Roof: Asphalt Shingle

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The First Baptist Church is located at 100 Duhring Street, Bluefield, West Virginia. It was constructed between 1907 and 1910 and believed to have been designed by Dr. Harry S. Mabie, who was also the church's pastor.<sup>1</sup> The architectural style of the building is best described as Eclectic. Its distinct features, which include large Tudor arched stained glass windows and doors, octagonal walls, brick corbeling, and a corner tower, draw from multiple early twentieth century styles such as Gothic Revival and Romanesque Revival. The church's interior layout represents a variation of the Akron Plan, an ecclesiastical design of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This design, while appealing in appearance, was also functional, as it resulted in the congregation being closer to the speakers and singers leading the service. The worship space is octagonal in shape with numerous stained-glass windows depicting lilies, the Bible, a dove, and geometric patterns. The altar, baptistry, choir loft, and pulpit were in an interior corner of the sanctuary. Despite some deterioration, the historical architectural integrity of the church building remains intact.

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<sup>1</sup> D. M. Easley, *The Church in the Last Fifty Years*, First Baptist Church of Bluefield, 1939.

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## **Narrative Description**

### Setting

The building is located at the corner of Duhring Street and Mercer Street, adjacent to downtown Bluefield. Three other church buildings, all with active congregations, are adjacent to the structure. Immanuel Lutheran, a red brick structure built in 1908, and First Presbyterian, a large painted-white brick building constructed in 1938, are directly north of the property across Duhring Street. Christ Episcopal is to the east across from a municipal parking lot, on the same side of Duhring Street as the subject property. Christ Episcopal's first sanctuary was built in 1889 and rebuilt as a stone structure on the same site in 1922 after a fire destroyed the original wood-frame building.

In addition to the churches, the immediate neighborhood contains a mix of commercial, government, and residential buildings, as well as numerous parking lots.

From the front of the property, facing north, Bluefield's City Hall is to the northwest, at the opposite corner of Duhring and Mercer Streets. Directly across Duhring Street are the two churches mentioned above, as well as a commercial property housing a local business. To the northeast is a large vacant wood-frame home, painted white. Two parking lots owned by the city are farther to the east on Duhring Street, across from Christ Episcopal.

To the west, across Mercer Street, is a parking lot which is used by city employees and visitors to City Hall. To the south and east of this lot are single-family homes, of different architectural styles, built mostly in the 1940s and 1950s.

The residential nature of the neighborhood continues across Mercer Street to the rear of the subject property, with similar single-family homes. Most of the homes are wood-frame structures, either painted or with siding. The homes are generally in fair to poor condition. The church building is separated from the homes to the south by a parking lot as well as a border of large shade trees. To the east of the church is a flat grassy area, on which once stood a large wood-frame single-family home. This residential property was owned by the church and used as an annex for church programs and offices. The house was demolished sometime in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

There has been no new construction in the adjoining blocks since the 1950s, other than City Hall, which was built in 1975.

### Exterior

The two-story church has an asymmetrical, massed floor plan, consisting of largely square or rectangular forms that are interconnected. From the main or north façade of the church, the building is four bays wide composed of a wide, hipped roof portion on the eastern most bay, a hipped roof tower that extends a story higher on the bay west, followed by another wide, single-story hipped bay west again, and finally a tall hipped roof tower on the western most bay. Behind

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the smaller tower and out of view from the main façade, a gabled roof connects the two shortest hipped roof portions of the building.

From Duhring Street facing the main façade of the church, a dozen concrete steps and a modern pipe railing lead up to a large concrete landing that extends across the parcel and to up to both entrances on the façade. From the landing, several steps with cast stone treads and rock-faced stone support lead up to both the west and east entrances.

The church rests on a rock-faced stone foundation that is topped with a sloped stone water table. The exterior walls are largely comprised of red brick in a running bond combined with tapered brick and stone buttresses and brick corbeling. On the eastern most portion of the building, brick and stone buttresses are most prominent, supporting three different corners of the three-sided front-facing façade. Throughout the building in the form of windows, entryways, and belfry jalousie openings, Tudor arches comprised of rowlock bond brick comprise most openings into the building. Several of these larger arches sit atop rectangular stone imposts and include stone keystones that interrupt the brick arches. The arch designs allow for equal weight distribution, providing function as well as visual appeal.

The building is largely comprised of hipped roofs, most of which have wide eave overhangs with the exception of the tallest bell tower. The roofs are covered with modern three tab asphalt shingle roof. On the two largest portions of the building, modern aluminum soffit closes off the eave overhangs, but on the towers, the eaves and rafter are exposed, an aesthetic suggestive of Italianate architecture. On the main façade, a small, hipped porch held by decorative brackets covers the entryway to the easternmost tower.

On the rear (south side) of the building, a hipped roof extends out over a secondary entryway. To the east of this entrance, another small, modern pent roof extends out over yet another secondary entrance. Throughout the brick walls of the westernmost side of the church, brick corbelling decorate the top of three projecting tracery windows, one of which faces the north, another the west, and the third the south.

The main entrance to the church is at the base of the bell tower at the corner of Duhring and Mercer Streets. The entryway is formed into a Tudor arch, a motif common throughout the building. This entryway is made unique through a stone crown decorated with three Corinthian pilasters and a band above that reads, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" in projecting font. Within the entrance itself, a stained glass transom that mimics the arch shape sits above heavy French doors with decorative hinges. The smaller brick tower with its covered entryway, serves to mark another entrance to the building. From that similarly styled door without a transom, both the sanctuary and the Sunday School meeting room can be accessed.

Windows are present on each side of the building, originally providing light to all interior areas. (Currently, the Sunday School meeting room is separated from the sanctuary by a wall which is not original to the building. As a result, there is limited natural light to this part of the building.) The large tracery windows throughout the building are stained-glass with decorative patterns,

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mostly in primary colors. Punctured into the sides of the taller tower's two street-facing façades are two long, narrow embrasure windows with stone sills, providing light to the stairwell leading up to the belfry. On each of the four sides of the tower, paired jalousie openings with wooden slats allow sound out of the belfry. The tower is topped with two decorative brick spires on the northeast and southwest corners. On the eastern side of the church, five irregularly spaced tall arched windows, each of which is segmented into a lower operating double-hung sash and an upper set of sash windows separated by a wide wooden mullion.

There is a sidewalk, in poor condition, on both the north and west sides of the property.

Interior

The worship space in the church is eight-sided with a floor sloping upward from the altar space to the main entrance. The pews appeared to have been arranged concentrically in three separate rows with four aisles.

The space contains its original wood entry doors, wood flooring and plaster walls. There is a partial chair rail on three sides of the room, however, much of the railing is missing. All but one of the entry doors remain. The wood flooring is intact. There is significant damage to the plaster in a portion of the ceiling and the north side of the space.

The altar space is still delineated in the eastern corner of the sanctuary. However, any altar pieces which had been in place have been removed with the walls behind it left barren. The original choir loft in the corner of the altar area is intact, although the choir loft railing was removed. The wooden stairs leading to the choir loft are still in place.

The most dramatic design feature in the sanctuary is an octagonal vaulted ceiling with a square wooden ornamental lighting fixture anchoring the top of the room.

The Sunday School space adjacent to the sanctuary is a two-story open space which is consistent with the Akron Plan design feature mentioned below in Section 8. The first floor has retained most of its original wood flooring. The four first floor classrooms evident in the existing layout (and as shown on the floor plan include with this application) which are centered on the space were not part of the initial design of the building. The rooms were partitioned using drywall sometime after 2008. Originally, the first floor Sunday School space extended underneath the second floor. Only the two corner classrooms on the first floor appear to be original as the walls in those spaces are plaster.

The original wooden staircase leads to the second floor. The second floor has a three-sided balcony with the original oak railing, which overlooks the first-floor space. The second-floor railing is solid wood panels around three sides (north, east and south sides).

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### Historical Integrity

In recent years the church has suffered from some neglect. The roof is deteriorating, and shingles are peeling. Holes are present in the roof of the bell tower. Windows are missing on the northeast façade. Vegetation is growing on multiple sides of the exterior, as well as in the bell tower. Some water damage and plaster loss are also evident within the interior. At present, the deterioration has not significantly impacted the building's ability to convey its historic association.

Aside from the deterioration, the most significant alteration to the interior was the construction of a wall between the Sunday School rooms and the worship space, interrupting its Akron Plan layout. Based on photographs of the interior of the space taken in 2008, this partition was built sometime after that date. Drywall was used to build the partition. The original framing for the opening in this space remains intact. As a result, removing the drywall should be possible without damaging the structural integrity of the building. Additionally, the first floor Sunday School room, underneath the second-floor balcony and Sunday School rooms on the upper level, was partitioned into multiple rooms at an unknown date. From the materials used – drywall and plywood – the dividing walls are most certainly not original. All the framing, trim, and doors adjacent to the partitioned section remain intact and would not be damaged from removing the partitions. The newer interior walls do not have a substantially detrimental impact on the church's historic integrity because they are reversible changes. The drywall and plywood partitions can easily and swiftly be removed to restore the interior's original Akron Plan functionality without damaging any original elements of the building.

There have been no changes to the footprint, fenestration, or massing of the building since it was constructed. The only alterations to the exterior are evident at the rear of the building, with a change to the height of the rear entry door, the inclusion of an elevated entranceway connecting the rear parking area to the door, and the addition of a plastic corrugated covering over this entrance. These changes do not materially detract from the integrity of the church's design and could readily be changed or removed to return the rear entrance to its original design. Overall, the church still strongly conveys its historic appearance.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1907-1910  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Designer: Dr. Harry S. Mabie

Builder: Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The First Baptist Church was constructed from 1907-1910 to serve the growing needs of the First Baptist Church of Bluefield congregation. For over four decades the Baptists occupied this building while they organized new churches in the community, supported the establishment of Bluefield College, and expanded their own membership. The church is eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture* for its distinct design, inspired by the Eclectic movement of the early twentieth century. The numerous architectural features present exhibit inspiration from the Gothic Revival, Romanesque Revival, and Italian Renaissance Revival styles. The church also meets *Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties* as it derives its primary significance from its architectural value.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Early History of Bluefield**

To fully understand the significance of the subject property, an appreciation of the history of the local community is required. The work of a Baptist missionary in the late 1880s, the construction of the church's first building in 1890, the construction of its second building in 1907 on the same site, the rapid growth of the congregation during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the eclectic architectural style of the subject property, were a direct result of the booming coal and railroad industries which attracted thousands of people from other regions of the United States and from Europe.

In 1777, the families of John Davidson and Richard Bailey established the first settlement in the region, which would later become Bluefield. They built a church, school, mill and fort. Both families and subsequent settlers lived off the land. The region includes the East River Mountain Range as well as headwaters of the Bluestone and East rivers. The hillsides and meadows in the area were covered with blue chicory flowers and some historians believe the flowers were the inspiration for naming the city Bluefield.<sup>2</sup> Bluefield was incorporated in 1889 and grew rapidly as part of the broader economic development of southern West Virginia's coalfields.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the richest deposit of bituminous coal in the northern hemisphere was discovered beneath the land of the Davidsons and Baileys.<sup>4</sup> This land became known as the Pocahontas Coalfield. In 1881, the Norfolk and Western Railroad (N&W) line was constructed through the area to transport coal to northern cities to produce steel and support the nation's Industrial Revolution. The N&W built its regional headquarters in Bluefield and established engine and repair shops near the tracks.

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<sup>2</sup> Bluefield Beautification Committee and Bluefield Historical Society, *Beautiful Bluefield*, 2020, 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> C. Stuart McGehee, "Bluefield," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, February 10, 2023, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/562>.

<sup>4</sup> *Beautiful Bluefield*, 4.

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This created the need for banks and utility companies as well as warehouses that stocked items for local coal company stores associated with the Pocahontas Coalfield.<sup>5</sup>

By the turn of the 20th century, Bluefield's economic health was tied entirely to coal. A vast amount of wealth was accumulated by local coal barons, bankers, railroad executives and other professionals associated with the coal and railway industries, as evidenced by Bluefield being nicknamed "Little New York" due to its vibrant nightlife and commercial activity. The city became a regional hub of industry, finance, real estate, law, retail and entertainment for the coalfield region of southern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia. A tremendous influx of immigrant workers from Eastern Europe and Blacks from the Deep South came to Bluefield and nearby coal fields in search of industrial work. Service professionals in retail, medical, law, and finance were also attracted by the growing economy. The city's population grew rapidly from 1,775 in 1890 to more than 11,000 by 1910.<sup>6</sup> Although the Great Depression and a series of devastating downtown fires nearly destroyed Bluefield in the 1930s, the demand for coal rose with the outbreak of World War II. In 1950, Bluefield hit its peak population of 21,506.<sup>7</sup>

### **First Baptist Church of Bluefield History**

In 1889, the Virginia Baptist Association assigned a traveling preacher – a missionary – to the Bluefield area. The first meeting to organize the church was held in April 1889 in an unfinished storefront, which later became Taylor's Drug Store, on the corner of Princeton Avenue and Russell Street in Bluefield. Charter members of the congregation were Mr. and Mrs. A. Loehr, Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Elliott, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Surface, Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Samuels, Mr. and Mrs. W.T. Payne, O.C. Jenkins, Harvey Wilson, and W.C. Easley.

With the founding of the church in 1889 – the same year Bluefield was incorporated as a city – the congregation planned to construct a building at 100 Duhring Street. When the first church was built in 1890 – a one-room, frame building with two towers<sup>8</sup> - there was little development in this part of Bluefield. Nonetheless, as the new city grew, the church thrived. In the earliest surviving report of membership, the church had 176 congregants in 1893, evidenced by a letter sent to the Valley Baptist Association in August 1894 for its annual meeting in Pulaski, Virginia.

By the early part of the twentieth century, the congregation had outgrown its first home. In 1904, Rev. S. R. Thompson assumed the pastorship and quickly began pushing for a larger sanctuary.<sup>9</sup> In 1907, the old church building was torn down and construction began on a much larger, brick and stone structure at the same site.<sup>10</sup> In 1910, Rev. Thompson resigned due to illness and was succeeded by Rev. Harry S. Mabie. The new church was completed around this

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<sup>5</sup> McGehee, "Bluefield."

<sup>6</sup> *Beautiful Bluefield*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> "Population of Bluefield, WV," accessed February 17, 2023, <https://population.us/wv/bluefield/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Together We Build*, First Baptist Church of Bluefield, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> "Our History," First Baptist Church of Bluefield, accessed March 7, 2023, [http://firstbaptistbluefield.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=9&Itemid=114](http://firstbaptistbluefield.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=9&Itemid=114).

<sup>10</sup> *Together We Build*.

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time. Reportedly, Rev. Mabie designed the building himself and supervised its construction.<sup>11</sup> W. C. Easley's 1939 history of the First Baptist Church stated that "under his strong leadership, together with his architectural ability and experience, our new church was completed."<sup>12</sup> The date on the building's cornerstone indicates that construction first began in 1907; it is unclear why three years elapsed before the structure was completed.

The First Baptist Church, during its time at the 100 Duhring Street location, became known as a "missionary church." Three other churches were organized by members of First Baptist while the church was located at 100 Duhring Street: Calvary Baptist (1902), Ceres Baptist (1922), and College Avenue Baptist (1922). The church's members gave generously for missionary purposes, providing the largest amount of financial support for missionary work of any Baptist church west of Roanoke. Mission gifts per members were the highest in the region.

In addition to the founding of three other churches, First Baptist Church made another significant contribution to the Baptist community in the Bluefield area. In 1915, the Baptist General Association of Virginia formed a committee to study the advisability of a college in Southwest Virginia and at its annual meeting the following year recommended that such a school be established. In July 1919, the first meeting to organize an effort to bring this Baptist college to the Bluefield area was held at the First Baptist Church. Several church members and other local citizens met with representatives of the Baptist General Association and offered \$75,000 and 65 acres of land in neighboring Bluefield, Virginia to locate the proposed junior college. The 65 acres was contributed by church member Frank S. Easley. The Association accepted this offer, and in 1922 Bluefield College opened as the first Baptist-affiliated junior college in the area.<sup>13</sup> Initially a two-year institution, Bluefield College is now Bluefield University.<sup>14</sup>

During World War II, 96 members of the church, including three women, served in various branches of the United States military. One member, Harold Zimmerman, was killed in action in France in 1944. A scholarship fund was established in his name for Bluefield College, a Baptist school in Bluefield, Virginia. After the end of the war, as service men and women returned home, a Sunday School class was organized just for them.<sup>15</sup>

By 1947, membership at the church had swelled to nearly 900. Because of the growth in the congregation, the 100 Duhring Street building could no longer meet the needs of its members. As a result, a campaign to build a larger church began in 1945, with land for the new church purchased in 1947, culminating in the opening of a new church building in 1956. The last service held by First Baptist Church at the 100 Duhring Street building was on May 6, 1956. At the time of the move to the new location, the church's Sunday School had 600 members in 16 departments offering 31 classes. The church's music programs were also extensive, with four separate choirs.

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<sup>11</sup> "Our History"; *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, May 13, 1956.

<sup>12</sup> W. C. Easley, "The Church in the Last Fifty Years," First Baptist Church of Bluefield, 1939.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Semi-Centennial Anniversary Special Edition, *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 14, 1939.

<sup>15</sup> Easley, *The Church in the Last Fifty Years*.

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Initially after the First Baptist Church relocated to a new facility in 1956, it retained ownership of the 100 Duhring Street sanctuary. The church used this building for what it termed “a mission center.” Plans were announced to repurpose the property to provide a day nursery for working mothers, weekday after-school activities for neighborhood children, and what was characterized as a “mission Sunday School,” to be relocated from the North Side School. Eventually, a new congregation was formed at the site, taking the name Central Baptist Church.<sup>16</sup> This congregation retained ownership of the building until 2012 when it was sold to Living Word Ministries, Inc., an independent non-denominational church. In January 2021, the City of Bluefield acquired title as Living Word had effectively abandoned the property.

## Architecture

The First Baptist Church meets National Register *Criterion C: Architecture* due to its distinct design, which can best be described as Victorian Eclectic. The Eclecticism movement lasted roughly from the 1880s to the 1940s, fitting within the time of the church’s construction. Architects during this period drew inspiration from historical American and European architecture and blended together a wide variety of styles in their designs. Many revivalist styles originated from this movement, including Gothic Revival, Colonial Revival, Spanish Revival, Romanesque Revival, Italian Renaissance Revival, and Neoclassical.

The First Baptist Church does not appear to conform to any one particular architectural style. The massing, the corbeled stone-faced water table, hipped roofs, and prominent square corner tower are strong indicators of the Romanesque Revival style. However, the church’s design also incorporates features of multiple other styles common in the Eclectic period. The large Tudor arched stained glass windows and Tudor arched doors, the vaulted ceilings, and recessed walls reflect the Gothic Revival style. The small, square tower with the overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails in the middle bay also hints at Italian Renaissance Revival. Other notable characteristics of the church include tapered brick buttresses, unique brick corbeling, and octagonal walls.

Additionally, the design of the church appears to have been influenced by the Akron Plan, a popular ecclesiastical style in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>17</sup> First developed at a Methodist church in Akron, Ohio, the Akron Plan of church design was widespread across the country at the time the First Baptist Church was constructed and was particularly common to rural areas of which Bluefield was representative. The concept focused on having Sunday School classrooms clustered around, or immediately adjacent to, the sanctuary such that all in attendance could be addressed from a central point. Typically, in churches designed using the Akron Plan, the Sunday School superintendent or the minister would speak from the pulpit or a central platform about the day’s topic for Sunday School study. Then a partition would be drawn between the sanctuary and the classroom section and attendees would go to separate classes

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<sup>16</sup> Semi-Centennial Anniversary Special Edition.

<sup>17</sup> “Akron Plan,” Preservation Erie, accessed February 17, 2023, <http://www.eriebuildings.info/churches.php?ChurchStyleID=48>.

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organized by age group. At the end of the Sunday School classes, the partition would be opened, and everyone would participate in a closing prayer or hymn.<sup>18</sup>

There are multiple features in the church building that follow the Akron Plan of design. These include two tiers of classrooms attached directly to the sanctuary; curved pews situated in concentric rows fanning out from the pulpit; a small chancel area in the corner opposite the main entrance; a sloped floor; and a main entrance located at a street corner and through the base of the bell tower.

### **Other Churches in Bluefield**

The First Baptist Church was just one of several impressive stone churches constructed in Bluefield during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While each are architecturally notable, none match the Victorian Eclectic style of First Baptist Church, and none employ a faithful implementation of the Akron Plan in their designs. Brief descriptions of each church are as follows:

Christ Episcopal Church (200 Duhring Street) was founded in 1891 at its present location, but the original wood-frame church was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day 1919. The existing stone church opened in 1921 on the same site. The structure is Gothic Revival in architectural style with a vaulted ceiling and numerous pointed arches incorporated in doors and windows. The emphasis is more horizontal than vertical – no high bell tower in particular – which is typical of Gothic Revival church architecture in the 1920s. The interior design is a formal cruciform plan with a narthex, a nave, transept, chancel, choir, and altar. The Sunday School space is in a separate wing. As such, no Akron Plan features are evident.

First Presbyterian Church (208 Tazewell Avenue) was built in 1906. The original congregants of FPC worshipped from 1891 to 1905 on Scott Street in Bluefield in a building that is no longer standing. Due to increasing enrollment, the church's members purchased land and built a new church at their current location, a cross street off Duhring Street. The upper level of the building was completed over the next few years and dedicated in 1914. The architectural style of the completed church has elements of Gothic Revival in both doors and windows. Although the interior has some characteristics of the Akron Plan - a corner altar and pulpit, concentric pews, and sloping floor - there are no features which support the function of the plan. There is no adjacent Sunday School space as the original Sunday School rooms were in the lower level of the building and, later, when the church was completed, in rooms behind the rear wall of the worship space, accessible by a single door in the far corner of the structure opposite from the pulpit. As such, the church does not represent a full execution of the Akron Plan.

Immanuel Lutheran Church (103 Duhring Street) was built in 1914, with an addition constructed in 1954. The original building is a small brick structure of simple design, a rectangular worship space with one entrance at the corner of the building with the pulpit and altar

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<sup>18</sup> "Akron Plan Churches and Albright," Friends of Albright, May 3, 2016, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://albrightpgh.com/2016/05/03/akron-plan-churches-and-albright/>.

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV

Name of Property

centered at the rear. Pews are linear with center and side aisles. The addition is at the side of the buildings away from the entrance and is open to the worship space, giving the combined structure an L-shape. The building features Tudor arches and windows and a castellated top to the relatively short bell tower, open to the elements, which rises only a short distance above the ridge of the roof. The addition, a flat-roof two-story brick box, is functional but has no distinguishing architectural features. The interior design shows no elements of the Akron Plan.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church (1003 Wyoming Street) was built in 1924 of sandstone block. An historical marker outside the church labels the architectural style as Spanish Gothic. The bell tower, however, is Mission Revival in style. No Akron Plan features are evident in the interior.

Grace Methodist Episcopal Church (206 Thomas Street) was built in 1896 and was expanded with an addition in 1914. The structure is made of brick and stone. It has a rectangular-shaped worship space with a center aisle leading to the altar area and pulpit. A wide transept cuts through the middle of the space. The altar, organ, and choir space are located behind the pulpit. Sunday School rooms are elsewhere in the building and are not attached to the worship space. No Akron Plan features in the design of the interior are evident.

Scott Street Baptist Church (600 Scott Street) was built in 1912, constructed of brick and stone. The center-hall entrance leads to the worship space, rectangular in shape and on the second floor of the building. The altar and pulpit are centered at the rear of the space with the organ and choir located above the altar in a balcony. Sunday school rooms are on the first floor. The church has characteristics of Colonial Revival architecture given its rectangular shape and symmetry of the windows. The lancet windows and traditional bell tower, however, are more typical of a Gothic Revival style. No Akron Plan features are evident given the design of the interior.

John Stewart Methodist Episcopal Church (102 Jones Street) was built in 1921. The center aisle leads to the altar and pulpit centered at the rear of the building space. The round arches of the doors and windows indicate a Romanesque Revival style. Sunday School rooms are in a separate wing of the church. No Akron Plan features are evident.

College Avenue Baptist Church (1908 Jefferson Street) was built in 1923. The brick building has a center hall entrance that leads to the large worship space which is rectangular in shape. The pulpit and altar are centered in the space. Pews are linear. Sunday School rooms are in a separate wing and on a lower level. No Akron Plan features are evident.

The First Baptist Church of Bluefield bears significance for its striking design, distinct from other churches in the community. It presents an excellent representation of Victorian Eclectic architecture employed on a religious facility in a small growing city during the early twentieth century. It is also the only church constructed in Bluefield during this period to fully utilize the Akron Plan in its interior layout. The presence of the Akron Plan reflects the church's adherence to a popular national design trend that sought to reimagination how ecclesiastical services were formatted.



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

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- “Akron Plan Churches and Albright.” Friends of Albright. May 3, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2023. <https://albrihtpgh.com/2016/05/03/akron-plan-churches-and-albright/>.
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- “Coronation Services for Girls’ Auxiliary Held at First Baptist Church.” *Mountain Mirror*. November 7, 1952.
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- Easley, W. C. “The Church in the Last Fifty Years.” First Baptist Church of Bluefield. 1939.
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[http://firstbaptistbluefield.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=9&Itemid=114](http://firstbaptistbluefield.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=9&Itemid=114).
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First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

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*Sunset News-Observer.* April 24, 1964.

“Will Lay Corner Stone of Bluefield Church.” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph.* September 14, 1907.

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: First Baptist Church, 1325 August Street, Bluefield, WV 24701;  
Craft Memorial Library, 600 Commerce Street, Bluefield, WV  
24701

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.32

Use either the UTM system or **latitude/longitude coordinates**

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.2637696 | Longitude: -81.2023808 |
| 2. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |
| 3. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |
| 4. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

A 95'x145' parcel at the corner of Duhring and Mercer Streets. Designated as Parcel No. 0486 in Deed Book 1100, Page 646 and described as "PT Lots 1 & 2 Sec 12."

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries selected represent the legal boundaries of the property and fully encompass the church building.

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Brian Tracey and Lise Tracey, principal; Steven Cody Straley and Meredith Dreistadt, WVSHPO  
organization: Bluefield Arts and Revitalization Corporation  
street & number: 500 Bland Street Suite 1  
city or town: Bluefield state: WV zip code: 24701  
e-mail: tracey.brian@outlook.com  
telephone: 304-716-1646  
date: July 31, 2023

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Figure Log

Figure 1: First Baptist Church of Bluefield Postcard, 1914

Figure 2: 1910 Sanborn Map

Figure 3: USGS Map

Figure 4: Satellite Map

Figure 5: First Story Floor Plan

Figure 6: Second Story Floor Plan

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

Name of Property: First Baptist Church

City or Vicinity: Bluefield

County: Mercer

State: West Virginia

Photographer: Brian Tracey

Date Photographed: All photos were taken on September 15, 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera in the file name:

- Photo 1 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0001  
Exterior, bell tower, northeast elevation
- Photo 2 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0002  
Exterior, bell tower from Mercer Street, east elevation
- Photo 3 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0003  
Exterior, bell tower buttresses, south elevation
- Photo 4 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0004  
Exterior, entry door from Duhring Street, south elevation
- Photo 5 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0005  
Exterior, northeast corner of building, southwest elevation
- Photo 6 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0006  
Exterior, buttresses, Tudor arch at entry door, southwest elevation
- Photo 7 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0007  
Exterior, brick corbeling, from Mercer Street, east elevation

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV

Name of Property

- Photo 8 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0008  
Exterior, buttresses, Tudor window arch, northwest elevation
- Photo 9 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0009  
Exterior, buttress at northeast corner, southeast elevation
- Photo 10 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0010  
Exterior, sanctuary entrance at corner of Mercer and Duhring streets, south elevation
- Photo 11 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0011  
Exterior, southeast corner at rear, northwest elevation
- Photo 12 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0012  
Exterior, east side of building, west elevation
- Photo 13 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0013  
Exterior, west side of building, east elevation
- Photo 14 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0014  
Exterior, rear of building, north elevation
- Photo 15 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0015  
Interior, choir loft in sanctuary with baptistry below, southeast elevation
- Photo 16 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0016  
Interior, original light with red bulb above choir loft, southeast elevation
- Photo 17 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0017  
Interior, staircase to choir loft, west elevation
- Photo 18 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0018  
Interior, light fixture in center of ceiling in sanctuary, point at which eight walls meet
- Photo 19 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0019  
Interior, pointed arched stained glass windows in sanctuary, west elevation
- Photo 20 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0020  
Interior, inner door to sanctuary from corner of Duhring and Mercer streets, northwest elevation
- Photo 21 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0021  
Interior, front of sanctuary facing Duhring Street, north elevation

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

- Photo 22 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0022  
Interior, stained glass on south side of sanctuary, south elevation
- Photo 23 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0023  
Interior, inner door to sanctuary from entrance on Duhring Street, northeast elevation
- Photo 24 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0024  
Interior, outer door with Tudor arch, entrance at center of building on Duhring Street, northeast elevation
- Photo 25 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0025  
Interior, classroom on second floor, east elevation
- Photo 26 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0026  
Interior, entrance to restrooms at rear of building, south elevation
- Photo 27 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0027  
Interior, classroom on second floor, east elevation
- Photo 28 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0028  
Interior, wall (not original) separating sanctuary from Sunday School, east elevation
- Photo 29 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0029  
Interior, classroom or office at northeast corner of building on second floor, northeast elevation
- Photo 30 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0030  
Interior, view from second floor across Sunday School, north elevation
- Photo 31 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0031  
Interior, view from first floor Sunday School of second floor walkway and railing, southeast elevation
- Photo 32 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0032  
Exterior, stone foundation at front of church, south elevation
- Photo 33 of 33: WV\_Mercer County\_First Baptist Church of Bluefield\_0033  
Exterior, cornerstone from 1907, south elevation



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

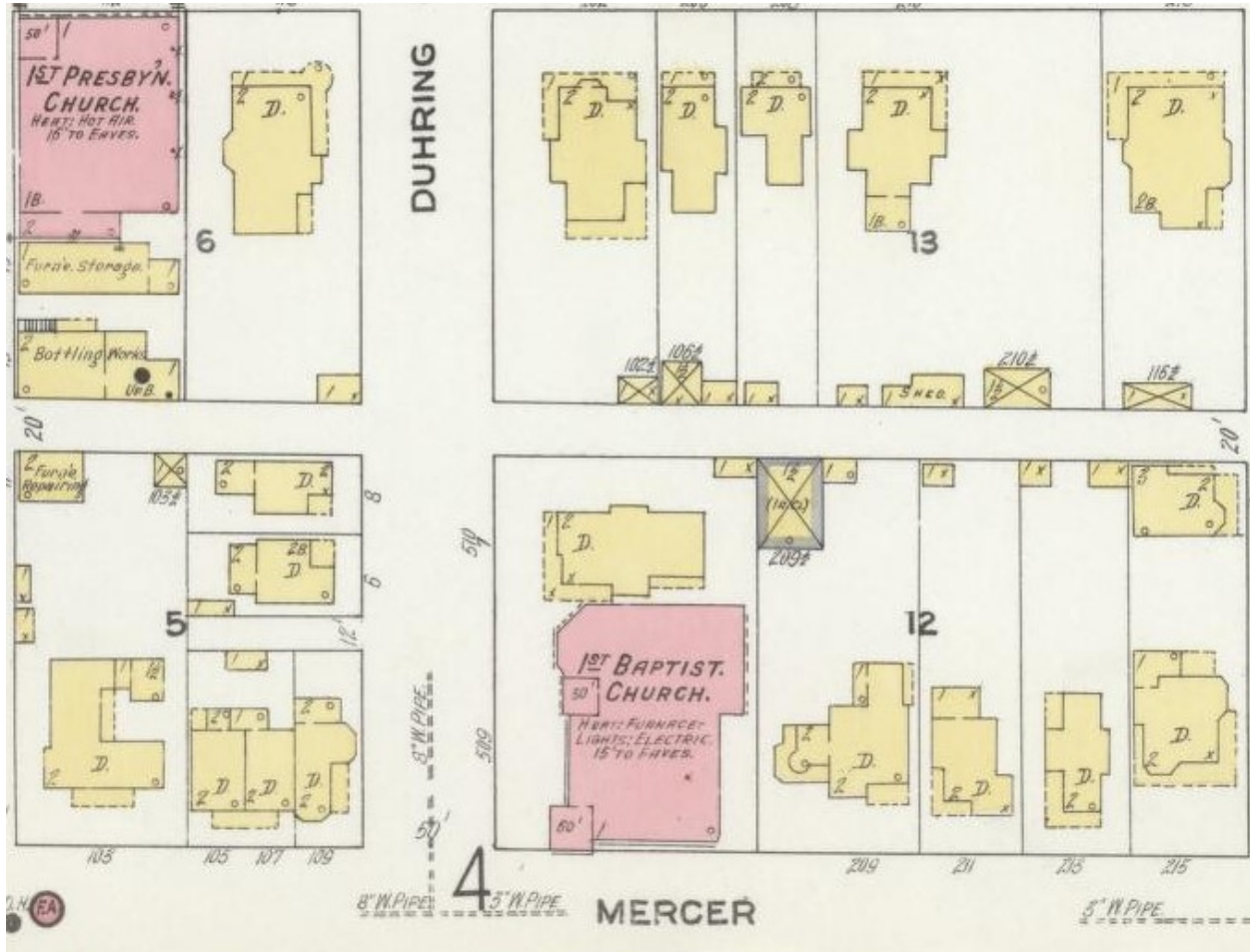
**Figure 1**

**First Baptist Church of Bluefield Postcard, 1914**



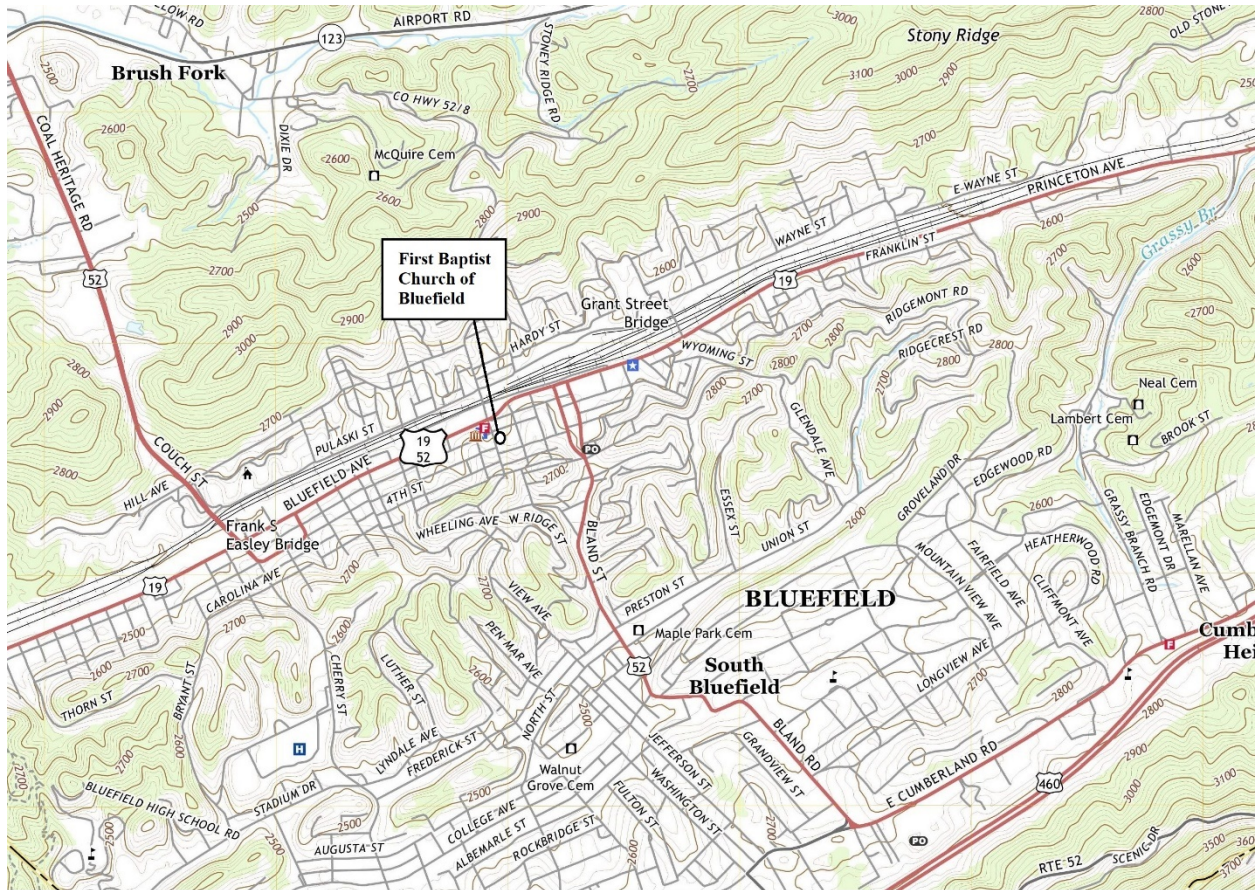
First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

Figure 2  
1910 Sanborn Map



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

Figure 3  
USGS Map



Bluefield Quadrangle

7.5-Minute Series



2019

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

**Figure 4**  
**Vicinity Map with Exterior Photo Points**



**Key**

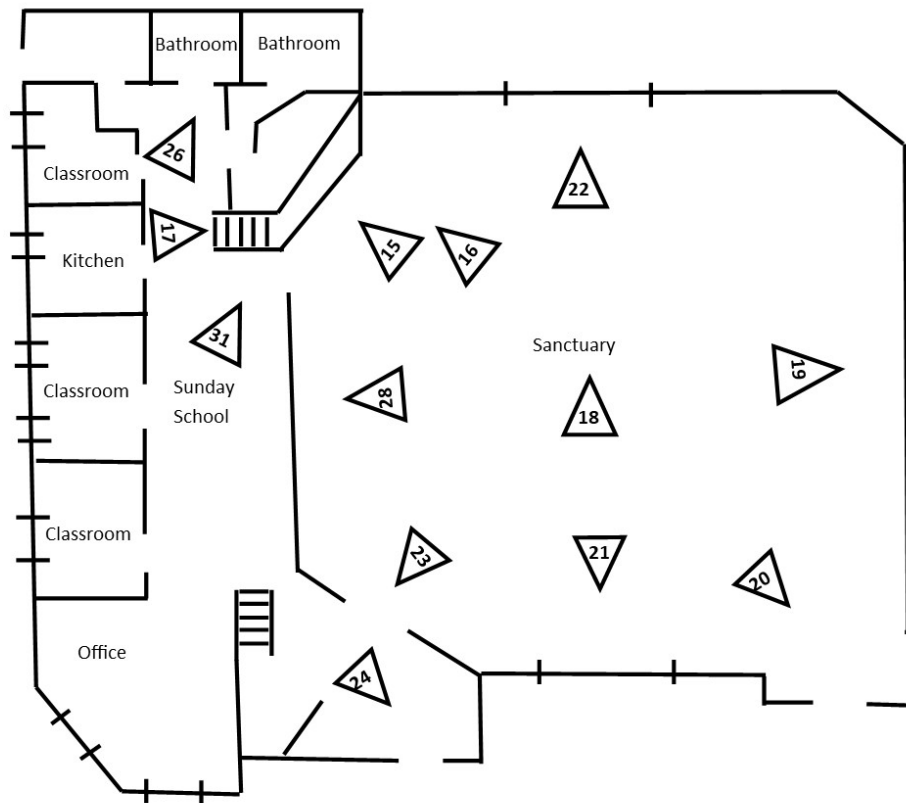
-  = proposed NRHP boundary
-  = photo point



Map by Steven Cody  
Straley, 3/7/2023  
Not to Scale  
WVGISTC, WVSHPO

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

Figure 5  
First Story Floor Plan  
Not to Scale

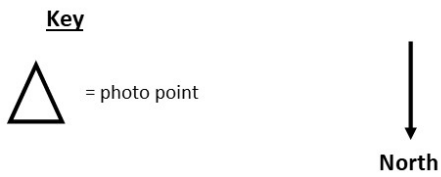
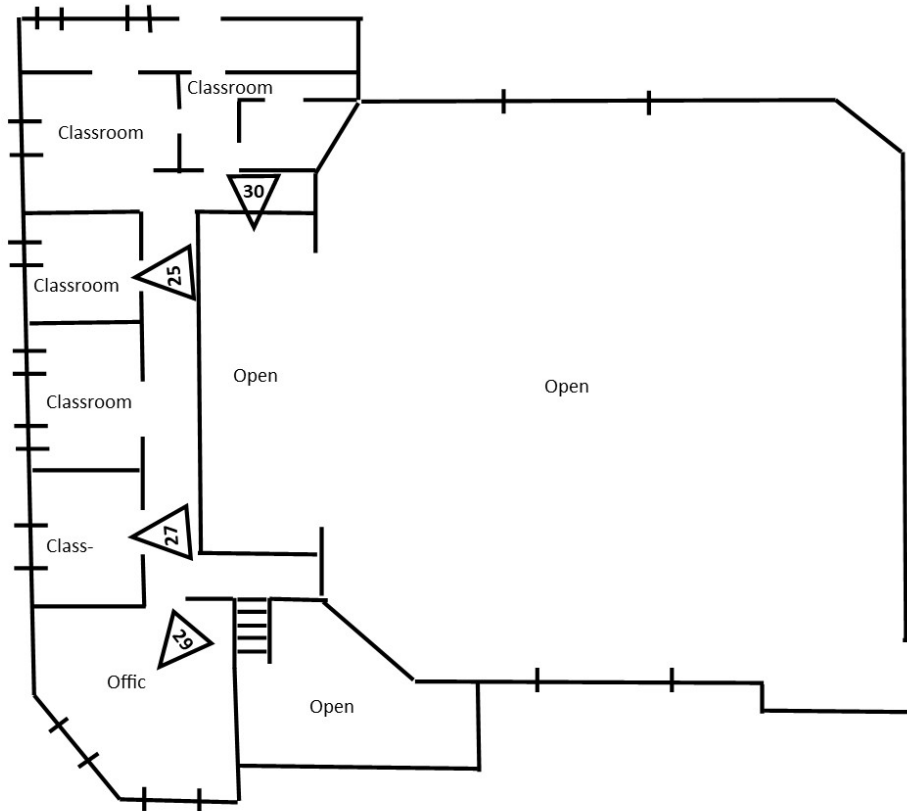


**Key**  
△ = photo point

↓  
North

First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

Figure 6  
Second Story Floor Plan  
Not to Scale



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 1 of 33 Exterior, bell tower, northeast elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 2 of 33 Exterior, bell tower from Mercer Street, east elevation*





First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 3 of 33 Exterior, bell tower buttresses, south elevation*



*Photo 4 of 33 Exterior, entry door from Duhring Street, south elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 5 of 33 Exterior, northeast corner of building, southwest elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 6 of 33 Exterior, buttresses, Tudor arch at entry door, southwest elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 7 of 33 Exterior, brick corbeling, from Mercer Street, east elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 8 of 33 Exterior, buttresses, Tudor window arch, northwest elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 9 of 33 Exterior, buttress at northeast corner, southeast elevation.*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 10 of 33 Exterior, sanctuary entrance at corner of Mercer and Duhring streets, south elevation*



*Photo 11 of 33 Exterior, southeast corner at rear, northwest elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 12 of 33 Exterior, east side of building, west elevation*



*Photo 139 of 33 Exterior, west side of building, east elevation*





First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 14 of 33 Exterior, rear of building, north elevation*



*Photo 15 of 33 Interior, choir loft in sanctuary with baptistry below, southeast elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 16 of 33 Interior, original light with red bulb above choir loft, southeast elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 17 of 33 Interior, staircase to choir loft, west elevation*



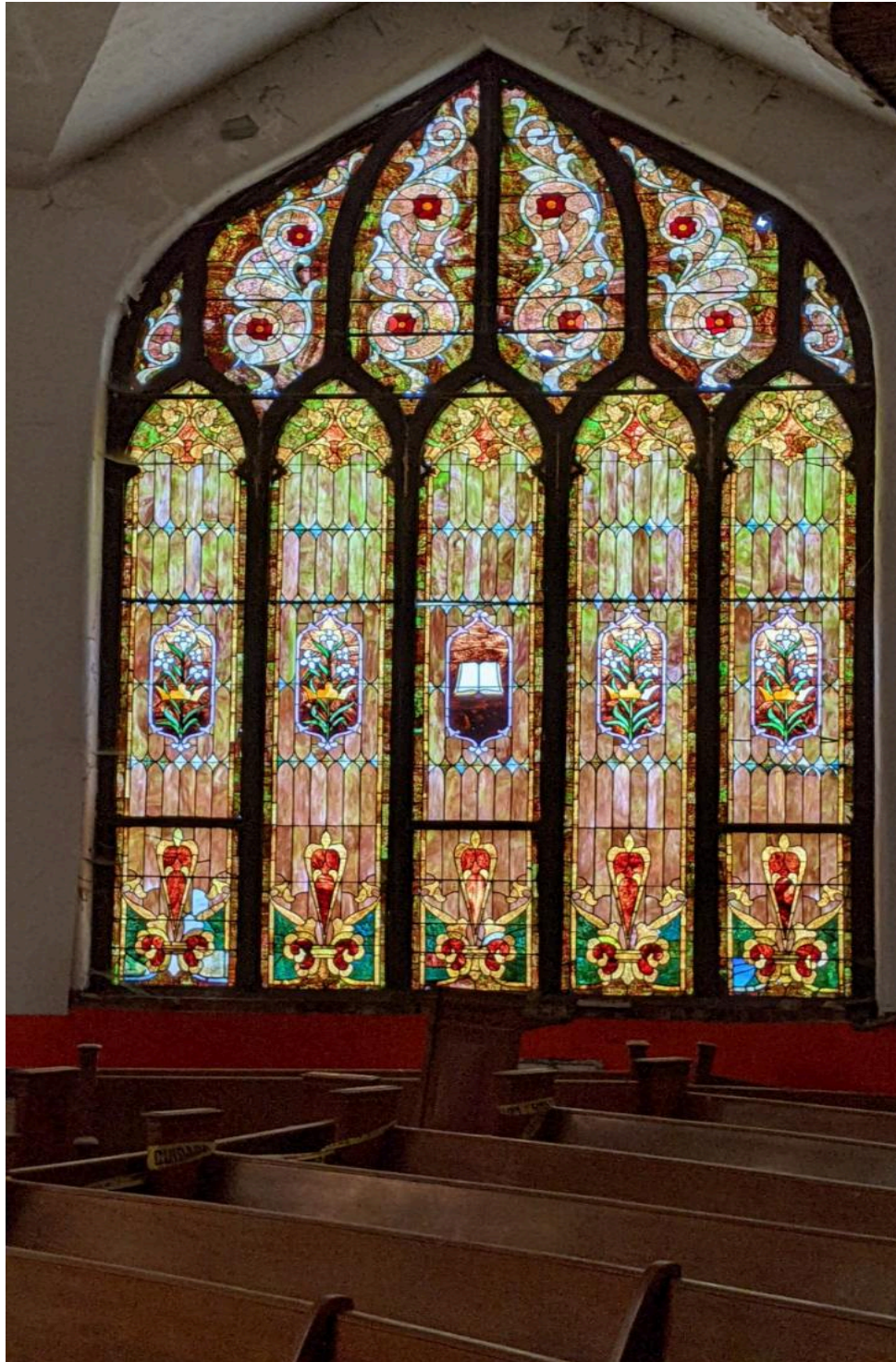
First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 18 of 33 Interior, light fixture in center of ceiling in sanctuary, point at which eight walls meet*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 19 of 33 Interior, pointed arched stained glass windows in sanctuary, west elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 20 of 33 Interior, inner door to sanctuary from corner of Duhring and Mercer streets, northwest elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 2110 of 33 - Interior, front of sanctuary facing Duhring Street, north elevation*



*Photo 22 of 33 Interior, stained glass on south side of sanctuary, south elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 23 of 33 Interior, inner door to sanctuary from entrance on Duhring Street, northeast elevation*





First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 24 of 33 Interior, outer door with Tudor arch, entrance at center of building on  
Duhring Street, northeast elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 2511 of 33 Interior, classroom on second floor, east elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 26 of 33 Interior, entrance to restrooms at rear of building, south elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 2712 of 33 Interior, classroom on second floor, east elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 28 of 33 Interior, wall (not original) separating sanctuary from Sunday School, east elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 29 of 33 Interior, classroom or office at northeast corner of building on second floor, northeast elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 30 of 33 Interior, view from second floor across Sunday School, north elevation*



First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 31 of 33 Interior, view from first floor Sunday School of second floor walkway and railing, southeast elevation*



*Photo 32 of 33 Exterior, stone foundation at front of church, south elevation*





First Baptist Church, Mercer County, WV  
Name of Property

*Photo 33 of 33 Exterior, cornerstone from 1907, south elevation*



**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.