

The vision for establishing a Christian and Missionary Alliance church plant in Watertown, Wisconsin, was born in the heart of Rev. Ron Julian and many people of the Alliance Bible Church in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

The first discussion regarding the founding of a Watertown Church took place on March 8, 1988. This was followed by another meeting in April with Rev. John Fogal (District Superintendent) and Les Conklin of the Midwest District office in Illinois. At a congregational meeting on May 1st the decision was made to proceed to the next step.

On May 15, 1988, a meeting of Watertown attendees of the Oconomowoc church was held at the Welcome Inn Hotel in Watertown with 60 parents and children attending. Adults were asked to sign commitment forms to support the new church for at least one year. It was decided to begin Sunday evening services on June 12, 1988.

An advisory committee was formed with 4 members: John Gustafson, chairman, Ron Julian, co-chair, Joe Detzner, secretary, and John Leischer, treasurer. For some time, financial assistance was provided by Alliance Bible Church of Oconomowoc (NKA Crosspoint Community Church). A rental agreement with The Seventh Day Adventist Church of Watertown began on June 19, 1988, with monthly rent set at \$175/month. Services were held on Sunday evenings. A rotation of pastors for these services included: Ron Julian, Bob Biggs, Don Dillavou, and Phil Shrank.

On September 6, 1988, some 60 Watertown people gathered in front of the Alliance Bible Church in Oconomowoc for commissioning and a prayer of dedication. Services were set for Sundays for both mornings and evenings. Sunday School also began at this time and the Advisory Committee agreed on the name River Valley Alliance Church. 1988 ended with a Christmas pageant with 117 attending.

On January 19, 1989, Rev. August (Gus) Hacker was installed as River Valley's first pastor. On June 4, 1989, a formal dedication-organization service was held wherein 86 original members were received.

In the summer of 1991, after an extensive search, a groundbreaking was held at River Valley's current 12.5 acre campus on Welsh Road. Construction began that same month and continued for nearly a year with much volunteer help from the congregation. A service of dedication for the new building was held on August 30, 1992, with District Superintendent John Fogal participating. Rev. Phil and Melissa Arndt served at River Valley as Assistant Pastor and Youth Pastor. They served from September 1992 until November 1993.

In 1995, Rev. Gerald Palmquist became our new pastor. Under Pastor Jerry's steady and faithful leadership, River Valley continued to grow and spread the Gospel in Watertown. Pastor Jerry and Inez lived in an apartment for the first year of their ministry in Watertown. It was at that time the church voted to purchase a lot and build a parsonage on Sweetbriar Lane. Randy Gray with many volunteers constructed a lovely two-story home in the Mary Knoll subdivision near Watertown High School.

Two key ministries of River Valley began at this time: around 1995 River Valley began the Awana Club program under the organization of Kevin Schafer; and in the summer of 1997, Dave and Nancy Zimmermann and Ken and Holly Sina organized River Valley's first Music Camp. The camp annually attracts around 150 students for four mornings of contemporary music and movement, arts and crafts and a clear presentation of the Gospel.

The Awana program, Music Camp and other activities produced an urgent need for more space so the congregation took a major step of building an addition. The addition was dedicated in December 2003 with national C&MA representative, Peter Nanfelt, officiating.

Because attendance regularly exceeded 200 souls, Missionary Candidates Brian and Rebekah Kirk were called to assist the Palmquists. When the Kirks left to pursue missionary work, Missionary Candidates Micah and Julia Irvin assisted, Micah working with the youth and occasional preaching.

In 2006, Pastor Jerry Palmquist retired after his wife, Inez, suddenly passed away. Although deeply saddened by the loss of its longtime pastor, River Valley began another pastoral search and in December 2006 Pastor Larry and Leslie Thorson accepted the call. Under Pastor Larry's leadership a second service was added offering a blended, classic worship style at 8:15 and contemporary worship at 10:45.

In 2009, Pastor Tyler Amburgy came on board as the Pastor of Student Ministries. In 2012, after completing a master's in ministry degree, David Zimmermann resigned from directing Watertown High School's Choir Department and was hired as River Valley's Pastor of Adult Ministries.

With Sunday attendance reaching over 300, in November 2012, Pastor Thorson surprised the congregation and announced that he had accepted a call to begin ministry in Cottage Grove, MN. In June 2013 River Valley celebrated its 25th anniversary without a Senior Pastor. Thankfully the church was under the capable leadership of Paul Brummund (Elder) and David Zimmermann (Associate Pastor).

On July 31, 2013, Pastor Tyler Amburgy left to take a position closer to family.

On August 1, 2013, Rev. David (with Nancy) Zimbelman became the 4th Senior Pastor at River Valley. In preparation for their arrival, extensive re-decorating and refurbishing was done at the parsonage by many volunteers.

Pastor Zimbelman's initial focus was on the "attractational" and "missional" aspects of River Valley. Consequently, the entire church building was redecorated, and new carpeting was installed on both levels. New LED lighting was installed in the sanctuary and new chairs were purchased.

With continued strong attendance, beginning in 2014, a part-time bookkeeping position was added to the office staff and in June 2014, Caleb and Liz Atkins joined the pastoral staff as Pastor of Student Ministries.

Beginning in the fall of 2014, the church leadership began a program to reemphasize fellowship and discipleship called Discipleship is Growing (DIG). Worship times were adjusted to 9 am and 10:30 am to allow for better fellowship opportunities between service times while Sunday School/Discipleship classes ran concurrently during both worship services.

In June 2015, Pastor David Zimmermann was ordained at a special service held in Appleton Alliance Church. River Valley also held an ordination service in July 2015. Rev. Larry Thorson, former pastor at River Valley, delivered the ordination message.

The beginning of 2016 was marked by the resignation of Pastor Zimbelman on January 24, 2016. On February 19, 2016, Pastor Dave Zimmermann was called and accepted the position as the fifth Senior Pastor of River Valley Alliance Church.

Following God's leading, River Valley hired Robin Walker as part-time Director of Children's Ministry. While Pastor Atkins took on the new role of Pastor of Discipleship Ministries, River Valley employed Pastor Michael Golemi as Youth Pastor Intern.

River Valley changed service times to 8:00 and 10:45, with Discipleship hour being at 9:30. A new vision statement was introduced to the congregation: "Followers of Jesus: Transformed. Empowered".

At the Annual Meeting in January of 2017, a new Constitution and Bylaws were approved by the membership. Michael Golemi was hired permanently as Pastor of Student Ministries in March. With continued strong attendance, on October 8, River Valley moved to three Sunday Services at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00, with Sunday School during the 9:30 and 11:00 services. Extensive remodeling was done to the kitchen.

In April 2018, the River Valley Governing Board established the Acts 1:8 Commission and charged them with seeking the Lord's guidance on how River Valley should reach out locally. After prayerfully seeking the Lord for 3 months, the committee established a process for approving new outreach ministries. As a result, River Valley began participating in the local ministries of Haus of Peace, Safe Families, and Shared Mission Group.

The first stage of a new security system was installed, beginning with the Fob entry system. A Leadership Cohort was established to train new leaders.

The word that defined the year 2020 was "COVID-19". New words and phrases became familiar: "livestreaming", "virtual" and "Zoom" became part of our everyday language. March 15 was the last Sunday that River Valley worshipped indoors. River Valley held a "Zoom" prayer meeting 5 days a week for several weeks. Worship services were conducted "virtually" from March 15 through May 31. From June 1 through September 13 worship was held outdoors under tents. God blessed River Valley with great weather on Sundays for 13 out of 14 Sundays! Indoor worship services (with precautions) began again on September 20. Church committee meetings were either not held or

were held via “Zoom”. There were over 40 individuals in the River Valley family who contracted Covid-19. Sadly, four people went home to be with our Lord.

Security cameras were approved and installed throughout the building. Livestreaming equipment was purchased, which allows indoor Sunday services to be livestreamed on YouTube. Pastor Atkins and Pastor Golemi were ordained in October at Plymouth Alliance Church. Pastor Golemi resigned effective November 20.

River Valley Alliance Church is so grateful for God’s continued blessing and prays for grace and guidance for the future.

The theme for 2021 has been to re-engage. While streaming of services will continue to be offered into the future, many returned to in-person worship and ministry. From May to September, Pastor Caleb Atkins was on a health leave due to the effects of long Covid. Logan Esposito was hired as Pastor of Student Ministries in June and Elliot Filipiak was hired as Director of Worship and Technology in December. Investments were made in a new phone system, filming, video, and sound equipment. The parking lot was stabilized and repaved with money from the Build the Future Fund. The staff and leadership teams completed the Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) through the district office and will continue using this tool for leadership training throughout 2022.

2022 started out with Pastor Caleb Atkins’ resignation. He and his wife Liz answered a call to pastor the New Beginnings Alliance Church in Madison, WI. God blessed the church with strong finances for the year. Pastor Dave presented his vision for 2022 on Confidence, Community and Capacity. Parking lot lights became a regular topic of discussion (new lights would be added in early 2023). After returning from the Covid lockdown, RV appeared to be “bursting at the seams” especially in the area of children’s ministry. Consequently, a Charrette committee was formed and building plans were sought and developed to investigate an expansion of the current River Valley campus. However, as the year progressed, numbers stabilized, and the Governing Board agreed that an expansion would put an unnecessary burden on the congregation. Pastor Zimmermann led a team of 4 others on a mission trip to Thailand. Pastor Zimmermann took a sabbatical from July 18, 2022-September 25, 2022 with Joel Arndt serving as interim Senior Pastor. Investments were made in improving streaming capability and stability.

The early months of 2023 saw some changes in the office staff. Long time church secretary, Teresa Vogt retired and Jen Roberts was hired by the church to continue her bookkeeping responsibilities as an independent contractor. Colleen Kluber was hired as the Office Administrator/Executive Secretary. Then in early summer Robin Walker stepped down and Nicole Fine was hired to replace her as the Children’s Ministry Director. In June, River Valley was the first church to host “Share the Love” at Watertown’s new Town Square. This included a time of worship, a short Gospel presentation by Pastor Dave, free popcorn and soda, and activities for kids and students. During July and August, the 11am service was discontinued. While the 9:30 service was quite full, it gave the volunteers a bit of a reprieve. The fall saw the move of the complete children’s ministry program to the west wing upstairs and the shifting of the adults and youth to the lower level providing a single check in location for kids and a much safer environment. A chairlift was installed to the lower level to assist

those with mobility issues. A new faith-based scouting ministry began: Heritage Girls and Trail Life for boys. Work began on updating the parsonage deck and mud jacking took place at various entrances to the church. After some unexpected budget changes, the position of Worship and IT Director was eliminated which resulted in saying goodbye to Elliot (Abby) Filipiak.

Originated by John Leischer

Updated by Pastor David Zimmermann