

Rolla Bible Church

1968-2023

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Printed in the United States of America

This short history of Rolla Bible Church is dedicated to all of you who gave of your time and entrusted your precious memories to me. Without you this project would not have been possible.

- Jessica Richardson





When asked what people should know about Rolla Bible Church, the overwhelming answer from its members is that Rolla Bible Church is committed to teaching God's Word. In fact, the church's beginnings were through a Bible study started in 1968.

Rolla is a small city of 21,000 people, located on Interstate 44 in South Central Missouri. It is well known as the home of Missouri University of Science and Technology, formally known as the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy and the University of Missouri, Rolla. Back in the beginnings of Rolla Bible Church, things looked a bit different. Just 20 years before, Route 66 had been expanded from a two-lane highway to the four-lane interstate, opening opportunities for

commerce and tourism. The surrounding area, made up of lush hills and valleys, was home to hardworking loggers, farmers, and cattlemen.

Early Church History: The Kammerer Years

Sometime before 1971, Dr. Paul Tinnin and Dan Dickman held Bible studies in their homes and over time that became the nucleus of Rolla Bible Church. This Bible study was made up of believers from various churches in the area. After a while, they were able to rent the previous home of Immanuel Lutheran Church, which was on the corner of 12th Street and Spring Avenue in Rolla. Rolla Bible Church was officially established there in 1971. The old church building is still in use today as housing for local university students.



This new body of believers had requested help from the IFCA (Independent Fundamental Churches of America) to first send guest speakers to minister to their little flock and then eventually to help Rolla Bible Church find a pastor who could minister to and lead them. The IFCA is now a world-wide group of like-minded churches who are focused on equipping the local church and partnering together to accomplish the Great Commission. They were put in contact with Jacob Carl Kammerer (known as J.C. or Brother Kammerer) and his wife Edna. By the time Brother Kammerer and his wife got involved in Rolla Bible Church, they were already past retirement age, however, they pushed on with zeal and passion for those to whom they ministered.

There was a very strong German influence in the area, as in much of the Midwest. In fact, Brother Kammerer was the son of German farmers in Illinois. He had a farm just outside of

Salem, MO where he raised hogs to help supplement what he made in ministry. Brother Kammerer had attended Moody Bible Institute and had a burning heart for the Lord and sharing God's word with others. He and Edna could not have their own biological children, but through their ministry they had many spiritual ones.

For years, Brother Kammerer and Edna were part of Rural Bible Crusade, now known as Bible Impact Ministries. This was a ministry which encouraged young people who lived in rural areas to memorize Scripture to earn scholarships so they could go to camp. Back then the youth weren't allowed to pay for camp; the only way to go was to memorize Scripture. As part of this ministry, Brother Kammerer and his wife traveled to public schools and Edna told Bible stories using flannel graphs. She would play a small fold-up organ that they carried around and he would teach the Bible. When it became illegal to teach the Bible in schools, the ministry moved into people's homes and, eventually, into rural churches.

Brother Kammerer was known as a man of God. For instance, someone wanted to buy a strip of land he owned, but he refused to sell. Finally, after being pestered for a long time, he said, "I don't make big decisions like that without talking to my Father." He was 80 years old and the guy he was talking to was confused because he couldn't imagine how old Brother Kammerer's father had to have been. The man was thinking "earthly father" while Brother Kammerer was referring to his heavenly Father.

Strong biblical teaching has always been a focal point for Rolla Bible Church, and this was and still is accomplished through expository preaching. That means going through the Bible book by book or verse by verse, rather than topic by topic. This provides a strong foundation for biblical understanding and clear interpretation of the Scriptures. A later pastor, Ray Vanderwall, summed it up nicely when asked about his favorite subject in school. He said, “The best course I took in school was geometry because you can’t put something down without backing it up.” Pastor Vanderwall had used this example to help demonstrate that the Bible is the foundation and authority for our lives.

Those early days were marked not only with an excitement for God’s Word but also with an enthusiasm for fellowship. The congregation had frequent potlucks and felt like they were one big family. Of course, bringing so many crockpots and plugging them in at the old building had its drawbacks, as they would regularly blow the fuses.

This old building had lots of personality, just like the church members. In the winter, plastic was placed over the high windows to help keep out the cold air. It didn’t help that the windows were the old kind that opened and closed by a set of weights and pulleys, attached to a rope that went up into the frame which made them difficult to close. In times of rain, the congregation found out why the road they were on was called Spring Avenue as water seeped into the basement. The heat of

summer brought its own set of problems as it was hard to keep the old building cooled down.

Brother Kammerer was aging right along with the building and for years had told the church board that they needed to find someone younger to take his place. He still lived in Salem and had to drive to Rolla for each service. It was getting to be too much. The elders had a hard time imagining him doing something other than being a pastor because he had such a heart for the ministry, and because everyone loved him.

The Vanderwall Years

Finally, the church put their feelers out for a new pastor and contacted Dallas Theological Seminary. They were given Ray Vanderwall's name. The church invited him to "come candidate."

Ray had studied the Bible as a youth and knew it well enough to win at Bible trivia. However, he had not known the God of the Bible until later. After receiving assurance of Jesus as his Savior, he had a great thirst for God's Word and wanted to learn the Bible all over again.

He never imagined he would become a pastor himself. In fact, Ray remembered that as a kid he would be picked out of his class to read the Bible in front of the congregation. He stood up there in his suit and tie and knew that he looked and sounded good. People told him he would be a pastor someday.

He was rebellious and said it was never going to happen. God has a wild sense of humor sometimes.

Ray met and married an outgoing young woman named Ellen and together they made plans to move from Allentown, Pennsylvania to the Chicago area. His pastor in Allentown told him to make sure he found a church with an expository preacher. After arriving in Chicago, they started searching for a church to attend and could not find one that preached in this way. One day Ray was driving down the road and listening to the radio ministry of Bruce Dunn. The teaching was about when God called Abraham to follow Him. Suddenly it clicked. Ray made the connection and had to pull over to the side of the road because he realized God was calling him as well.

God continued to work in Ray's life, and he thought that maybe he could go to seminary, learn how to preach in an expository way, and then return and teach this method to people in the Chicago area. Ray approached his wife Ellen about the idea of going to seminary and she said, "No" right away. He had a great job, and they were settled. Why upset that now? However, God continued to work on them, and they eventually came to understand that he indeed should go to seminary. Ray took a few classes at Moody and really found his passion when he started a correspondence course of Basic Greek. Eventually, they moved to Texas with their three kids so Ray could study full time at Dallas Theological Seminary.

After his first two years in seminary, God had made it clear to Ray that he was to be a preacher. From his experience in

various churches, he had seen a clear divide between whether a pastor would be a teacher or a shepherd. He thought he would be more prone to be a teacher than shepherd, so he asked the Lord to work in him to allow him to be both.

Ray finished seminary around the same time Rolla Bible Church was looking for a new pastor. After coming to Rolla to meet with the leadership committee the church extended an official invitation to him and his family to come and pastor the church. Ray and his family accepted the invitation and Ray took a second trip to Rolla from Texas to find a place for his family to live. The church had sent Jeff Shaub in a small, single-engine Cessna 172 provided by Dickman Aviation to pick him up just east of Dallas. Dickman Aviation was owned by Dan and Maxine Dickman who ran the Rolla downtown airport and who were charter members of Rolla Bible Church. Before departing Texas to head up to Rolla with Ray, Jeff looked up and said, "Look at those thunderheads up there." Ellen was nervous as she looked at the sky and thought that Jeff looked a bit young to be flying her husband through thunderstorms even though at 17 Jeff did have his pilot's license.

The Vanderwall family arrived in Rolla at the end of August as Ray was to officially start as pastor of Rolla Bible Church on September 1, 1978. They wanted to be in Rolla a few days early to close on a house they had bought as well as to get their kids in school.

The Vanderwalls were excited to begin this new chapter in their lives and were unaware that their faith and calling were about to be tested in a big way. They arrived in town on a Friday and stayed at Dave and Marion Shaub's house. On the Saturday after they arrived, they were heading to someone's place for dinner, and it started to hail while they were driving. Ray pulled under a tree to avoid hail damage, and a branch fell on the car, putting a large dent in it.

The next Monday, while they were closing on the house they had bought, the Shaub's house, where they were staying and had their possessions stored, was struck by lightning, and burned to the ground. It was raining so hard that none of the neighbors even knew about the fire, and before long, the house and everything in it was destroyed. Thankfully, everyone escaped, and no one was injured in the blaze.

Though the accident and the fire took everyone else by surprise, none of it took God by surprise. Those first few days after the Vanderwall's arrival could have caused them to question God and His calling on their lives. But they stood firm in what He had previously shown them, and God blessed them and the church body for it.



Ray recalls that after his first visit to the church as a prospective pastor, the church contacted him and said, “We want you to come but we can’t afford to pay you. Would your wife be willing to work?” Ray had seen how God provided for their family financially through his time in seminary, so he wondered why Ellen would start working now. She had her hands full taking care of the kids. He got a job instead and became a draftsman inspector with Missouri Engineering.

After a couple of years, a member of Rolla Bible Church who also happened to work for Missouri Engineering stood up in a congregational meeting and said it wasn’t right for the church not to fully support Ray as pastor. The Vanderwalls were

against full support, knowing it was a burden on the church. However, eventually the church was able to cover a significant amount of what the Vanderwalls needed, so Ray told his boss that he would finish out each of the projects he was currently working on but didn't want any new ones. It took several more years to finish his projects at the engineering company and phase out of his job there before being supported full-time by the church. In all, he worked at the engineering firm for eight years.

Ray's academic background allowed him to connect with college students. A number of students began to attend regularly and even began a puppet outreach ministry to the younger kids in the area. Ellen also became the director of Birthright of Rolla, a crisis pregnancy center.

Pastor Vanderwall's new full-time pastoral schedule allowed him to get more involved in other ministries like participating in the Ozark region of the IFCA. Other ministries Ray and Ellen were involved with included Fellowship Ranch, Officer's Christian Fellowship, Missouri Right to Life, Missouri Broadcasting, Rolla Ministerial Alliance, and Rolla United Way. Ray also worked as chaplain at Phelps County Regional Medical Center.

Ray and Ellen were also involved in local politics, and at one point many of the local Republican committee members came out of Rolla Bible Church with one member able to make it onto Senate District and State Republican committees. This political involvement from Rolla Bible Church led directly to a

fundamental shift toward a more Biblical perspective in Phelps County, MO politics as well as the Missouri State Republican party. God was working through this body of believers to reach out to the community and beyond.

During the mid-1990's Rolla Bible Church began the Bible-In-Me program for children on Wednesday evenings. Bible-In-Me is the Bible memorization and teaching program of Bible Impact Ministries (and Whispering Winds Bible Camp) which grew out of Rural Bible Crusade. Bible-In-Me has been in place on Wednesday nights along with prayer meeting and youth group continuously for the past 27 years.

Fellowship and encouragement among church members continued to be important values and happened through potlucks which occurred anytime there was a good excuse to have one, the annual Fall Picnic and hayride, the Bible-In-Me year-end parties and more.

In 2002, after nearly twenty-five years of ministry with Rolla Bible Church, the Vanderwalls felt it was time to move on due to medical needs of their extended family in the Seattle area. God had blessed them and the church with rich and lasting friendships.

The Stickler Years

Robert Stickler was on the board at Whispering Winds Bible Camp and had come to Rolla several times, so he was known by many members of Rolla Bible Church. Marion Shaub had let him know the church was looking for a pastor. At the time, there were a lot of pre-teen boys in the church and Robert and Susanne Stickler had boys of the same age. The Sticklers also had a heart for working with young people. After all, it was as a young person that Robert was called to serve the Lord.

Robert was twelve years old when he was giving a devotion in church one day. His pastor walked by and said, “He’s going to be a preacher someday.” Prophetic words... but young Robert rebelled against them until he was in college where he struggled with classes and felt defeated in everything he attempted to do. He finally realized he was pushing against what God wanted him to do. Responding to God’s will, Robert dropped out of college and later enrolled at Calvary Bible College, which is now Calvary University. God richly blessed him by not only helping him succeed in class but also by allowing him to meet his lovely wife, Susanne.

By the time Susanne went to Calvary Bible College she knew she was going to be involved in ministry somehow. She either wanted to be a pastor’s wife or a missionary. When Robert took on the full-time pastorate at Rolla Bible Church in 2003, family and missions were a large part of their ministry, especially as they worked with the youth in the church.



They remember fondly the times in Vacation Bible School (VBS) when the kids were challenged to raise money for missions by bringing in coins, which would be weighed and the group with the heaviest amount by the end of VBS would win. This, of course, meant there were a lot of pennies given, earning it the name of “Penny Contests”. It was all done in a spirit of teasing and great fun where the only reward for the kids was bragging rights.

The Sticklers opened their doors to their kid’s friends after local football games so they could get to know them and have an outreach to others even outside of church. They felt it was important to reach others through their family. In fact, family was so important that Susanne said, “You can work your tail off in the church but if you lose your family, you have really

messed up. We wanted the kids to see how much fun it was to fellowship and worship.”

This attitude was also evident in the church as Youth Group and Bible-In-Me ministries grew and expanded into the community. Over the years, as the church continued to experience God’s blessings, they experienced a new problem. The problem was they had outgrown the old church. They helped ease the crowding by temporarily renting the gray house next door to the church and using it for additional classrooms. But this was a temporary solution. In the end, the leadership and the congregation decided it was necessary to buy a piece of land and build a larger building.

After buying a plot of land in front of Rolla’s Mark Twain Elementary School in hopes of constructing a new church building there, the church kept running into one roadblock after another. One of the biggest hurdles was the cost of building in town. Eventually, building committee members connected with someone who agreed to take the old church building at 12th and Spring and the new plot of land in front of Rolla’s Mark Twain Elementary School in exchange for the building and the land at 1801 East 10th Street. Through God’s incredible provision they were able to renovate and create a new church building debt free!

The current church building and its property was first TI Hardware and Lumber Store and then the 10th Street Diner, now known as Matt’s Steakhouse. When the restaurant moved, its old building sat vacant for many years. Several families

questioned the plans to remodel the restaurant into a facility for church use because they felt strongly that a church building should be made of brick and mortar complete with a steeple on top. But, as Pastor Ray Vanderwall had reminded them earlier, “The church is not a building. It is people.”



Many volunteers and church members worked hard to turn a dingy, smelly old restaurant into a bright, spacious, and functional church building. On March 1, 2009, the day finally arrived for the congregation to move to the new building. God had worked in incredible ways and had provided abundantly. The church had a dedication ceremony to remember all that God had done to bring them to this point.



In 2010, the Sticklers believed God was leading them to other ministry so they moved on. After they left, many wonderful people filled the pulpit on Sundays until the Busenitz family arrived in 2011.

The Busenitz Years (Current Years)

Through the years, the size of the church body ebbed and flowed, much as seasons do. By the time the Busenitz family arrived there were fewer than 60 people attending Rolla Bible Church regularly (and very few children). The church had always been like a close family and the family had experienced

growing pains and the pains of loss. Through it all, God's faithfulness and his provision continued, and the church body was strengthened and grew in the Word and in maturity.

The unity and love that the church body showed one another was one of the things Alex Busenitz noticed and was impressed with when he came as a new pastoral candidate at the end of 2010. Another thing that impressed Alex was when Scott Alford picked him up from the airport and the car broke down. The hour and a half wait for the tow truck (plus more time for the trip back to Rolla) gave the two men lots of time to talk about the Lord and what He had been doing at Rolla Bible Church. At the end of that trip, Alex knew he wanted to serve God as pastor here.

Many pastoral candidates like to start out in a small church to gain experience and then work their way up to larger churches. It was with this in mind that the elder board called Alex up and asked how long he anticipated being in a small church like this one. Alex's response was something like, "How about the first 40 years to find out if I'm going to stay on or not?"

One of Alex's greatest strengths is his love for God's Word. The Word is living and has the power to change lives. Alex knew early on that he wanted to serve the Lord and preach God's Word. He grew up as a missionary kid in Germany where his parents ministered as church planters. Alex eventually made his way to Calvary Bible College in Kansas City where he met Becca. He proposed to her on her birthday in August of 2000 and they got married a year later. After a

couple of years, they moved to California so Alex could attend The Master's Seminary.

Life was tough for the Busenitz family in California with the high cost of living and Alex needing to work full-time while attending seminary part-time. He was used to big city living which made the small town of Rolla all the more appealing when Scott Alford first rolled into town with Alex and showed him the intersection at Bishop Avenue and Kingshighway and casually remarked that it was "the busiest intersection in town and as bad as traffic got" as the few cars on the road waited their turn at the light.

The area was a pleasant relief from the busyness the Busenitz family had been accustomed to. Even more so since they lived on a farm in the countryside with Tom Alford for several years before moving into town. Over time, God continued to provide, and the church had grown and was able to pay Alex a full-time salary, so he didn't have to get another job when they moved to town.



It is natural to think that tough times will cause the church to shrink, but in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the whole country, and even the world, seemingly shut down overnight, God continued to bless and bring success. Suddenly, people had to learn new technology to be able to coordinate and meet online each Sunday. Though the church body still met together whenever possible, several times Pastor Alex went to the empty church building and preached to an empty auditorium on Sunday, as many church leaders around the nation did also. It was a surreal time and when churches were able to meet in person again a few months later, the congregation at Rolla Bible Church came together with great joy.

The pandemic hit the Rolla area again later in 2021. It spread through the local population and eventually found its way to the Busenitz family. The whole family got sick, but Pastor Alex suffered the most, spending much of the month of October in the hospital. Becca remembers the time as one where God showed his strength and sovereignty amid difficult circumstances. The church body rallied around them, showering them with prayer, love, gifts, and of course, lots of food.

While many churches around the nation saw their attendance and church participation drop, God used the pandemic and the church's focus on God's word to increase the number of those in the church body and to bless it financially. Rather than shrinking in size, the church, as of 2023, has begun investigating how to expand the current building to accommodate the growing needs of the congregation.

It is not only the congregation that is growing but also its influence and reach around the world. When Pastor Alex first started at Rolla Bible Church in 2011, he was encouraged by the outward focus the church had in missions. This focus continues to today as the church financially supports 14 missionaries on a monthly basis and prays for another 15 as well. Thirty percent of the church budget goes to missions as Rolla Bible Church is committed to the same vision it had at its very beginnings over 55 years ago of going and preaching the gospel to all the world.



“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 4:20-21 ESV

Bonus Section:
Potluck Recipes of RBC



Cranberry Chicken- Mary Alford

Ingredients

1 ½ lbs boneless chicken breast, cut into small chunks

16 oz whole berry cranberry sauce

1 small bottle Catelina salad dressing

1 envelop Lipton Onion Soup mix

Directions

Mix the dressing with cranberry sauce in a bowl. Sift soup mix to separate the onions from the powder. Stir the powder into the sauce mixture. Save the onion pieces. Place chicken in an ungreased pan. Pour sauce mixture over chicken and sprinkle onion pieces over the top. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Serve over rice. This can also be made in a crockpot if you prepare as above but cook on high in the crockpot for 3-4 hours.

Southwest Lasagna- Becca Busenitz

Ingredients

2 cups browned ground beef, drained (or diced chicken)

1 can black beans, drained

1 16oz bag of frozen corn

1 jar of salsa

1 can diced tomatoes

2 cups shredded cheese

Tortillas

Directions

Mix everything except cheese and tortillas. Place $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of mixture in a 9x13 inch pan or in a crockpot. Layer tortillas, cheese and mixture. This usually equals three layers. Top with cheese. Bake in oven for 45 minutes at 350 degrees or in the crockpot on low for 6 hours.

Chicken Casserole- Debbie Hickle (submitted by Ellen Vanderwall)

Ingredients

8oz flat noodles

1 cup chopped celery

2 cups cubed or shredded chicken

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped onion

1 can cream of mushroom soup

2 cups milk

Directions

Mix together and place in a 9x13 greased baking pan. Top with breadcrumbs. Bake one hour at 350 degrees.

California Cheese Vegetables-

Lena Rutledge (submitted by Susanne Stickler)

Ingredients

1 package California Mixed Frozen Vegetables

1 can cream of mushroom soup

1-8oz jar cheese whiz French fried onions

Directions

Pour boiling water over frozen vegetables. Let stand two minutes. Drain. Mix in soup and cheese whiz. Bake for 30-40 minutes at 350 degrees. Top with onions the last 5 minutes of baking.

Winter Fruit Salad with Lemon Poppyseed Dressing- Becca Busenitz

Ingredients

½ cup white sugar

½ cup lemon juice

2 teaspoons diced onion

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

½ teaspoon salt

2/3 cup vegetable oil

1 Tablespoon poppyseeds

1 head of romaine lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces

4 oz shredded Swiss cheese

1 cup cashews

¼ cup dried cranberries

1 apple- peeled, cored and diced

1 pear- peeled, cored and diced

Directions

In a blender or food processor, combine sugar, lemon juice, onion, mustard and salt and process until well blended. Add oil in a slow steady stream while machine is still running. It will become thick and smooth. Add poppy seeds and process just a few seconds more. In a large serving bowl, toss together lettuce, cheese, cashews, cranberries, apple, and pear. Pour dressing over salad just before serving and toss to coat.

Crunchy Cabbage Salad- Melissa Kornbau

Ingredients

5 cups finely sliced cabbage

4-5 finely sliced green onions

1 package chicken flavored ramen noodles

½ cup slivered almonds

3 teaspoons sesame seeds

Directions

Mix the cabbage and onions. Set aside in the fridge. Brown the almonds/ sesame seeds/ crunched up ramen noodles (I put the noodles in a plastic bag and use the rolling pin) on high until it

starts to snap- stirring constantly. Set aside.

Dressing: 4 Tablespoons sugar/ ½ tsp pepper/ ½ cup vegetable oil/ 3 Tablespoons vinegar/ ramen noodle seasoning packet- Mix well and add to the cabbage shortly before serving.

Add the almonds/ sesame seed/ ramen noodles immediately before serving.

Triple Chocolate Cake -Megan Woolley (submitted by Becca Busenitz)

Ingredients

1 package dark chocolate cake mix

1 small package instant chocolate pudding

½ cup vegetable oil

½ cup water

1 cup sour cream

3 eggs

12 oz chocolate chips or mint chips

Directions

Combine all the ingredients, except the chocolate chips, and blend for 4 minutes. Add chocolate chips. Turn into a greased Bundt pan. Bake for 45 minutes at 350 degrees. Dust with powdered sugar.

Enlarge Cake- Marion Shaub (submitted by Mary Alford)

Ingredients

For the pudding filling:

2 packages instant vanilla pudding mixed with 4 cups of milk.
Then mix in 16 oz of Cool Whip.

Graham crackers

1 16 oz tub of chocolate frosting

Directions

Prepare pudding mix as directed above. Place one layer of graham crackers in your serving dish then top with $\frac{1}{2}$ of the pudding mixture. Lay down another layer of graham crackers and top with the remaining pudding mixture. Top with one more layer of graham crackers. Warm the chocolate frosting

until it becomes pourable. Spread over the top of the cake.
Chill at least 12 hours.

***Choco Truffle- Dorothy Heywood (submitted by
Susanne Stickler)***

Ingredients

- 1 chocolate cake mix made as directed
- 3 boxes of chocolate instant pudding
- 4 ½ cups of milk
- 1 tsp. almond flavor
- 16 oz Cool Whip, thawed
- 4-6 Heath or Skor Candy bars, crushed.

Directions

Mix the pudding, milk, and almond flavor for two minutes.
Layer the cake, pudding, Cool Whip, and candy in a serving
dish.

Pearl Gertler's Sour Cream Cookies-
Ellen Vanderwall

Ingredients

½ cup shortening

2 cups sugar

2 eggs

1 tsp. vanilla

4 cups flour

½ tsp. salt

1 tsp. baking soda

1 cup sour cream

Directions

Cream together the shortening and sugar. Then add eggs and vanilla. In another bowl, sift together the flour, salt, and baking soda. Add to the other mixture and mix until blended. Add in the sour cream and beat until fluffy. Drop by teaspoons onto a greased cookie sheet two inches apart. Bake at 375 degrees for 12 minutes.

