

SITE NAME	Pullen Memorial Baptist Church
LOCATION	1801 Hillsborough St.
BUILT/ALTERED	1935, 1942, 1983, 1989, 2023
LGBTQIA+ ASSOCIATED YEARS	1980s-1990s
EVALUATION DATE & EVALUATOR	November 4, 2024 Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, Durham



Location of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough St.

LGBTQIA+ Historic Significance: Pullen Memorial Baptist Church is one of a few church congregations in Raleigh that was very supportive—and very publicly so—to the LGBTQIA+ communities in the 1980s and 1990s. The church hosted educational conferences in the 1980s and its pastor officiated at the blessing of a same-sex union in 1993.



Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough St., view SW.

Physical Description: The sanctuary is brick-clad with stained-glass windows in metal sash with round arches. A Romanesque Revival-style addition to the original 1935 church dominates the southwest corner of Cox Ave. with Hillsborough St. The addition was designed by Raleigh architect F. Carter Williams and built in 1951. Other architectural features include a rose window and clay roof tiles. The older building is at the back and featured double-hung wood sash in round-arched window openings. A square tower stands taller than the building or its additions. The new entrance is at the Cox Ave. elevation, and broad concrete steps lead to a concrete patio in front of the round-arched entryway. A 2008 rear addition includes a metal-clad chapel to the east of the entry, at Cox Ave., and a flat-roofed, brick-clad office and education wing with large window bays in extruded aluminum frames. The building fronts a parking lot to the south, accessed from Cox Ave.

Brief Historical Sketch: The congregation of today's Pullen Memorial Baptist Church dates to 1884 as Fayetteville Street Baptist Church. The congregation renamed the church Pullen Memorial upon the death of John T. Pullen, an influential lay leader. The congregation relocated to the corner of Cox Ave. and Hillsborough St. in 1923 and made substantial additions in 1951 and 2008.

M. Mahan Siler became pastor in 1983. He was involved with the formation of the Raleigh Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality (RRNGLE), a coalition of clergy who supported and advocated for the guarantee of civil rights for gay men and lesbians. RRNGLE also participated in community efforts to support the LGBTQIA+ communities, particularly in crisis situations. In the 1980s and 1990s, Pullen hosted RRNGLE conferences for Raleigh clergy to learn more about the issues of the queer communities.

In 1990, the church presented a year-long education program for its own congregation. In 1992, the congregation endorsed Siler's officiation at the blessing of a same-sex union at the church. The Raleigh Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Convention both removed Pullen from their memberships for doing so.

Historic Integrity Evaluation: Pullen Memorial Baptist Church retains all seven aspects of historic integrity in connection with its association with Raleigh's LGBTQIA+ history, as indicated by the check marks and explanations below.

- ✓ **Location:** The church remains in its original location.
- ✓ **Design:** While the church has had a significant addition since the period of significance, it is located at the side and back and does not substantially alter the view of the building from Hillsborough St. The front of the building remains substantially the same as it appeared in the 1980s and 1990s.
- ✓ **Setting:** The church is situated between a commercial corridor on Hillsborough St. to the east, the campus of North Carolina State University to the west, and the Forest Park neighborhood to the north. This setting is generally the same, although a number of buildings on Hillsborough St. to the east have been replaced with larger commercial structures.
- ✓ **Materials:** Original materials are intact, including brick cladding, glass and stained-glass windows, and concrete hardscaping.
- ✓ **Workmanship:** Workmanship is expressed in the brickwork of the exterior cladding and the stained-glass windows.
- ✓ **Feeling:** The building remains a church with additional spaces for church-related programming.
- ✓ **Association:** This is the building that hosted RRNGLE conferences and the same-sex union that resulted in the congregation being removed from membership of local and regional Baptist organizations.

RHL Eligibility Evaluation: Pullen Memorial Baptist Church was an early and vocal ally of LGBTQIA+ communities in the 1980s and 1990s, furthering education of the wider Raleigh community, providing support for LGBT people in need, and blessing a same-sex union in the church in 1992. The latter had major repercussions for the church within Baptist membership organizations.

Sources:

Hartman, Keith. *Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.

"Gay union gets Pullen's blessing," *News & Observer*, March 2, 1992.