

IDEA GUIDE



VISITLEX

Lexington Visitors Center
215 West Main Street
Lexington, KY 40507
(859) 233-7299 or (800) 845-3959
www.visitlex.com

A HERITAGE OF WORSHIP

*Historic Sites, Diversity of Denominations
and Special Events Reflect Importance of
Religion in the Bluegrass*

A pioneer minister is attributed with saying that “Heaven must be a Kentucky kind of place.” Such rhetoric aside, Bluegrass Kentuckians have always had their sights firmly set on the real thing.

Religion has played a central and cherished role in Bluegrass life beginning with the arrival of the first settlers in the late 1700s. Some scholars contend that, except for the Mormon expansion into Utah, no other region in America was settled with the level of religious fervor of early Kentucky.

In fact, what has been called “the most important religious gathering in all of American history” — the Great Revival of 1801, which led to the formation of the Christian Church and Church of Christ denominations — took place at Cane Ridge, a short drive north of downtown Lexington. Thousands of Christians visit the Cane Ridge Shrine each year.

Another Lexington-area attraction important in American religious history is Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. Pleasant Hill is the nation’s largest collection of restored Shaker buildings.

Lexington’s present-day churches include congregations whose histories go back to the region’s earliest settlement days, as well as some of the largest congregations in Kentucky. Today, fast-growing Lexington combines longstanding religious traditions with a growing religious diversity.

More than 50 denominations and religious groups are represented in the hundreds of churches in the Lexington area. As you might expect in the Southern “Bible Belt,” Baptists are the largest group. But there also are Catholic and Hindu, Methodist and Mormon, Mennonite and Chinese Christian congregations.

Religion plays an important role in the region’s educational heritage. The area is home to top-ranked Christian liberal arts colleges and seminaries, including Georgetown College, Asbury Seminary, and Lexington Theological Seminary.

Whether you are looking for a welcoming place at which to worship; are planning a religious convention or meeting; are interested in religious history; or

simply enjoy admiring the architecture of churches old and new, you’ll find plenty of points of inspiration in Lexington and the Bluegrass.

A Shrine to Christian History

Each year, more than 15,000 visitors from around the world come to see **Cane Ridge Shrine**, probably the most famous “frontier church” in America, and the birthplace of religious denominations that today have more than five million followers in the United States. The large log meeting house, located on Ky 537 in Bourbon County, north of Lexington, was built in 1791 to serve a Presbyterian congregation. At 30-by-50 feet, it is thought to be the largest one-room log structure in

Bluegrass Note: Lexington’s central location, flexible meeting facilities, affordable accommodations and family atmosphere make it a popular place for religious meetings, conferences and conventions. Rupp Arena and the adjacent convention center in downtown Lexington have hosted many religious groups including The Worldwide Church of God, the International Conference on Missions, the Evangelical Free Church of America, the interdenominational Time Out for Women Conference, and The Franklin Graham Festival.

the nation. But the most important reason for Cane Ridge's attraction is what happened there in 1801.

The Great Revival of 1801 at Cane Ridge attracted an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 people. For a week, 25 to 30 Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist ministers preached from wagon beds and tree stumps, inspiring thousands to emotional professions of faith. The event established the tradition of camp-meeting revivals in America. Even more importantly, it led to a new denomination at Cane Ridge under Rev. Barton Stone.

In 1832, in Lexington, Stone's "Christian" movement merged with the Disciples of Christ, creating what is now the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Modern-day Christians come to Cane Ridge to learn about and celebrate church history. In 1954, the meeting house was enshrined in a building of local limestone. Medallions in the windows depict some of the important events in the Christian Church. Inside is the restored meeting house along with a museum of church and pioneer history.

For Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations, a service, reunion or other event at the shrine has special meaning, and many groups plan activities at Cane Ridge, especially during summer months.

Independent and group visitors also are welcome. Cane Ridge is open for tours April through October, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. Groups larger than a carload should call first. Admission is free, with donations encouraged.

Reservations for group meetings, services, weddings or other events

are taken on a first-come, first-serve basis after January 1 of the event year. Every year the shrine hosts Cane Ridge Day with picnics, music

and guest preachers. For more information or to schedule a visit or event at Cane Ridge call (859) 987-5350.

Bluegrass Note: Only two pioneer log meeting houses survive in the Bluegrass, Cane Ridge in Bourbon County, and Old Mud Meeting House near Harrodsburg in Mercer County. The first Dutch Reformed Church west of the Alleghenies, Old Mud was built in 1800. Its name reflects its construction: framing of sturdy oaken timbers and walls filled with mud mixed with straw and sticks. Old Mud is located on Dry Branch Road off US 68 south of Harrodsburg; arrange a guided tour through the Harrodsburg Historical Society (859-734-5985).

Bluegrass Note: Bishop Francis Asbury was among those attending the first Methodist Conference west of the Alleghenies, held in Lexington in 1790 at Masterson's Station, the home of Richard Masterson, a Methodist settler from Virginia. A historic marker notes the site along what is now Leestown Pike.

A Community Built on Faith

One of the best known attractions in the Lexington area reflects a fascinating chapter of Kentucky and American religious history. **Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill**, southwest of Lexington, is the largest restored Shaker village in the United States, and is a monument to the 19th-century members of the Society of Believers who strived to create a heaven on earth. It stands on a fertile rise overlooking the Kentucky River.

As followers of a charismatic woman named Ann Lee, whom they believed to be the Second

Coming of Christ in female form, Shakers were committed to celibacy, pacifism, equality, shared labor and common property. Everyday endeavors were viewed as acts of devotion, and, consequently, the name Shaker came to mean quality in everything they produced — furniture to cattle.

At its zenith around 1830, when the population reached 500, Pleasant Hill was the third largest of 18 Shaker communities in the United States. Although no Shakers have lived at Pleasant Hill since the early 1920s, today visitors can experience aspects of Shaker life, work, music and worship through interpretive exhibits and events. There are 34 restored buildings on 2,800 acres. Shaker Village is open year-round, with riverboat excursions offered spring through fall. Admission charged. Meeting facilities available. For information call (859) 734-5411 or toll free, (800) 734-5611.

Faith and Education

Visit college campuses in the Bluegrass, and you'll discover not only historic buildings and scenic campuses, but strong religious traditions.

• **Georgetown College**, north of Lexington in Georgetown, was the first Baptist college west of the Alleghenies, and the sixth Baptist college organized in the United States. Officially chartered in 1829, its heritage goes back to 1787 when Elijah Craig, a Baptist minister and businessman from Virginia, opened a classical academy in Georgetown.

• **Transylvania University** in Lexington, the oldest college west of the Allegheny mountains, is a liberal arts school consistently ranked among the top private colleges in the South and is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Famous alumni include Jefferson Davis, Cassius Clay and Stephen Austin. Also

affiliated with the Christian Church is **Midway College**, a private liberal arts college for women about 15 miles west of Lexington.

- **Centre College** in Danville, south of Lexington, is another highly acclaimed liberal arts institution (it's Kentucky's leading producer of Rhodes Scholars). Centre was founded in 1819 by Presbyterian pioneers and maintains a covenant relationship with the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

- **Asbury University** in Wilmore, south of Lexington, was founded in 1890 by Methodist evangelist John Wesley Hughes. Its library includes papers of notable alumni including Ford Philpot. Asbury was the site of a famous revival of modern times. During "the spontaneous revival of 1970," a campus prayer meeting erupted into a weeklong worship that inspired student evangelical revivals across America. Asbury is also the only school approved by The Salvation Army for its leaders' education.

- Originally affiliated with Asbury University but a separate institution since 1931 is **Asbury Theological Seminary**, also located in Wilmore. Alumni of this interdenominational graduate school of theology serve in more than 80 denominations in over 57 countries, but its firmly Methodist roots are reflected in the statue of Methodist founder John Wesley that stands at the center of its lovely campus.

- **Lexington Theological Seminary**, 230 Lexington Green Circle, is the oldest ministerial school of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The school was founded in 1865 as the College of the Bible. (It was originally part of Kentucky University, the forerunner of the University of Kentucky.)

Sanctuaries Old and New, Large and Small

Gothic to contemporary, historic to modern - Lexingtonians' enthusiasm for religion takes many beautiful forms. To see for yourself, stroll or drive along almost any road in Lexington. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

In downtown Lexington:

- **Historic Pleasant Green Missionary Baptist Church**, 540 W. Maxwell St., is the fourth oldest

African-American Baptist church in America. Founded in 1790, the church has been at its present location since 1822. Today there are more than 1,800 members. Sunday worship is at 10 a.m. (859) 254-7387.

- A bronze plaque marks the pew of 19th-century statesman and Senator Henry Clay at **Christ Church Episcopal Cathedral**, 166 Market St. The church's congregation dates to 1796; parts of the building date to the 1840s. Today, membership is more than 1,600. The church's well-known choir program follows English tradition in affiliation with the Royal School of Church Music. Sunday services are at 7:45 a.m., 8:45 a.m., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. (859) 254-4497.

- **First Presbyterian Church** at 174 Mill St., is another historic Lexington congregation which met at various locations beginning in 1784. The Gothic-style nucleus of its present building was built in 1872, designed by popular 19th-century Lexington architect Cincinnatus Shryock, who was a church member. Today the church has more than 700 members. Sunday service is at 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m. (859) 252-

1919.

- **Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**, 205 E. Short St., is a descendant of the Cane Ridge Church, and of the Hill Street Christian Church in which the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination was unified in 1832. The Romanesque-style church was built in 1894 and serves a congregation of some 2,000 members. Sunday services are at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. (859) 233-1551.

- Founded in 1789, the congregation of **First United Methodist Church** enjoys a proud heritage as the oldest Methodist church in Lexington. They have worshiped at 200 West High Street since 1840, and in the current building with its impressive facade since 1909. Sunday services are at 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. (859) 233-0545.

- **Calvary Baptist Church**, 150 E. High St., is a Southern Baptist Church founded in 1875. The church has some 2,300 members and seven ministers, with a large college ministry and exceptional music program. Its Sanctuary Choir has performed throughout the South. Sunday services are at 8:30 and 11 a.m. with a college service at 10:50 a.m. (859) 254-3491.

If you are looking for a Latin Mass in Lexington, go to **St. Peters Catholic Church** at 135 Barr Street., Sunday 4:00 p.m. (859) 252-7551.

Bluegrass Note: Lexingtonians enjoy celebrating Easter at sunrise services amid the floral gardens at Lexington Cemetery. In 2008, four churches (Main Street Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church and The Salvation Army) held Easter services there. Since 1992, the drive-through Nativity at South Elkhorn Christian Church, 4343 Harrodsburg Rd., has been a Christmas season traffic-stopper. More than 200 church members participate in the program's 11 scenes set along a candlelit route.

Beyond downtown:

- The **Cathedral of Christ the King**, 299 Colony Blvd., is the central church of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington. Built in 1945, the contemporary architecture features polished white Bedford stone in the shape of a Latin cross, with breathtaking stained glass windows. The church was designated a cathedral when the Lexington diocese was formally established in 1988. Daily Mass is at 8:00 a.m. or 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call for weekend service times. (859) 268-2861. Tours of the building by appointment.

- With facilities encompassing more than 22 acres and membership of more than 4,000, “church” hardly describes **Immanuel Baptist Church**, 3100 Tates Creek Road. Founded in 1909, with nine members, the church now serves more than 4,000, with services in Japanese as well as English, an acclaimed choir and their Recreational Outreach Center. There are Sunday services at 9:00 a.m. and 11 a.m. (The late morning service is shown on WLEX-TV.) There is also a Sunday service at 5:30 p.m. (859) 685-3200.

- **Porter Memorial Baptist Church**, 4300 Nicholasville Road, is another large church (2,800 plus members) with humble beginnings. It began in the early 1900s when a Lexington woman and her daughter began conducting Sunday School in their home. Later, J.W. Porter, pastor of First Baptist, assisted the church in formally organizing. Sunday services are 10:45 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. (859) 272-3441.

- The oldest Jewish synagogue in Lexington, **Temple Adath Israel**, 124 N. Ashland Ave., was established in 1904. Serving more than 350 families, Adath Israel is affiliated with the reform branch of Judaism and focuses on social justice and community programs. Friday services are at 7 p.m. (859) 269-2979.

- Since its founding in 1956, **Southland Christian Church**, 5001 Harrodsburg Road, has become one of the largest churches in Central Kentucky - around 11,000 people usually attend the six Sunday services at the Harrodsburg and Richmond Road campuses. Call for more information: (859) 224-1600.

- A large semicircular sanctuary is a distinguishing feature of **Southern Hills United Methodist Church**,

2356 Harrodsburg Road. This 2,500-plus member church, built in 1960, includes a gymnasium complex and sponsors many leisure ministry activities. Sunday services are at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. (859) 277-6176.


In the countryside:

- **Walnut Hill Church**, in Lexington/Fayette County, is the oldest standing Presbyterian Church in Kentucky.

It now operates as an ecumenical church. This 40 by 50 foot stone structure was built in 1801 on land donated by Mary Todd Lincoln’s grandfather. Sunday services at 11 a.m. (859) 263-5304.

- Just a few miles west of Lexington, off US 60, is **Pisgah Presbyterian Church**. The Pisgah congregation, organized in 1784, was the first Presbyterian church west of the Alleghenies. The stone building dates to 1812, with pioneers and Revolutionary War vets buried in the adjacent cemetery. Sunday services at 11 a.m. (859) 873-4161.

- **Old Stone Meeting House** in rural Clark County, east of

Lexington, is the oldest constituted Baptist Church in Kentucky. Old Stone was founded in 1792 by one of the “traveling Baptist churches” from Virginia. Daniel Boone and his family are thought to have attended services here. Today the church is home to Providence Baptist. (859) 745-2663. 

Bluegrass Note: Religious musical traditions in the Bluegrass range from spirituals to contemporary rock. The Jimtown Male Choir from Jimtown Baptist Church, 2231 Jimtown Lane (859-299-1944), has performed spirituals throughout the region for more than 40 years. The longest running Christian music festival in the U.S., ICHTUS began as a Christian alternative to Woodstock in 1970. This three-day outdoor festival attracts top Christian performers — and some 15,000 fans each year. Asbury University recently entered into an agreement to obtain the rights to the ICHTHUS name and legacy. Stay tuned for information on the next festival: www.ichthusfestival.com.

For more information contact VisitLEX, Lexington’s convention and visitors bureau, at (800) 845-3959

By Teresa Day, a freelance travel writer based in Lexington, KY

Updated: April 2018

Copyright: Lexington Convention and Visitors Bureau