

REPORT OF THE VISION TEAM OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ELON

Luke 4:17b-19, 21

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ... Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

Acts 2:40-47

And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

THE CHARGE

The congregation has been on a consistent journey over the last 8-10 years. Beginning with Mission/Vision/Values conversations during its last intentional interim, next in meeting with Eddie Hammett approximately five years ago, and now during this Visioning Process. At each step along the journey the congregation has identified a need to focus more on external ministry. There has been less clarity on *how* to do that.

The following is taken from the minutes of the August 31, 2008 Roundtable meeting.

Larry Durham, representing Church Council (joint proposal from the Human Resources Committee and the Stewardship Committee) presented a recommendation that the church form a Visioning Team in order to facilitate the church in developing a capital stewardship campaign with the goal being the retirement of the church's building loan debt. The team, made up of 10-13 individuals, would be formed by the Deacons as required by the By-laws. This team would meet with Don Durham, President of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation around the end of October to develop a plan for leading the church through a visioning process that would result in long-range ministry goals for the church prior to the implementation of any capital campaign. The motion was seconded by N.R. Franks. After a period of discussion, the motion passed.

Following the adoption of this motion by the church, the Deacon Fellowship asked John Russell, Garland Tickle, and Wayne Hughes to be responsible for forming the committee. In order to better understand

the task which the Vision Team was being asked to accept, these three met with Rev. Mark Mofield, Cathy Johnson (from Human Resources) and Larry Durham (from Stewardship) for a conference call with Don Durham. Out of that conversation, the following three outcomes were identified as the goals to which the Vision Team would be working.

- 1) For the congregation to develop a clear, widely shared understanding of its current identity (values), resources, and challenges.
- 2) For the Visioning Team to lead the congregation through a spiritual discernment process with the purpose of reaching a congregational consensus on the kind of Church God is calling FBC Elon to be, and the kinds of ministries God is calling FBC Elon to do.
- 3) For the congregation to reach consensus on it's next strategic steps toward fulfilling God's vision and mission for FBC Elon.

THE PROCESS

The following individuals accepted the invitation to serve on the Vision Team: Rev. David Durham, Mike Harrington, Delrees Hughes, David King, Walt Lehman, Hazel Lewis, Earline Mann, Angie Miller, Margaret Miller, Rev. Mark Mofield, Deb Spivey, & Norris Stowe. During this process, Delrees Hughes and Norris Stowe have resigned their positions due to other circumstances and obligations.

On Sunday, November 2, 2008 the Vision Team met for the first time with Don Durham. In this session, Don introduced the Vision Team to a process for accomplishing the tasks with which the Vision Team had been charged to carry out. At this time, it was determined that there would be a need for 2 congregational meetings in which the Vision Team could collect necessary data and input from the congregation to help identify our vision (who we are going to be), our mission (what we are going to do to make the vision come true) and our values (the identifying and commonly shared marks of our church).

It was determined by the first congregational meeting would be held on Sunday, March 15, 2009. The Vision Team met on 2 other occasions between November 2, 2008 and March 15, 2009 (January 31, 2009 & March 5, 2009) to make plans and preparation for this first congregational meeting. It was determined that the congregational meeting would incorporate times for fellowship-wide discussion and opportunities for small group discussion facilitated by members of the Vision Team.

The first congregational meeting began at 9 AM on Sunday, March 15 and concluded about 1:30 PM. The meeting incorporated both a joint Sunday School time, corporate worship, and lunch. During this meeting, the church shared high points and low points from the church's history, reflected on Romans 15 and the ways our church models the biblical truths about God stated there, completed SWOT forms (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), and concluded the day by identifying seven values that mark the identity of our church.

Following this first congregational meeting, the Vision Team met to process through the information that was received from the congregation and to begin preparation for the second congregational meeting, which was scheduled for Sunday night, May 3, 2009. It was determined that the format of the

second meeting should resemble the first meeting, with opportunities for large and small group discussion about Scripture as well as programmatic issues.

The turnout for the second congregational meeting was smaller than the first meeting. At this meeting, small groups reflected on 3 different Scripture passages: Luke 4:18-19, Acts 2:40-47, & Ephesians 4. Following these discussions, the groups came together to engage in an asset mapping activity in which attendees were invited to list all the assets they had that they would be willing to put to work for the church. Individuals then worked in groups to see how their assets could be combined to create a ministry. Possible new ministries were put on the Fellowship Hall wall and members were invited to go and stand next to the ministry that they would be most interested in participating in.

The Vision Team met again on May 31 and June 21 to discuss the results of the second congregational meeting and understand what the next steps of the process would be. Don Durham advised the Vision Team that there were 2 tasks that should be approached next:

- 1) A thorough analysis of existing ministries including cost, benefit, connections to expressed values and ministry passions of the church, and opportunities presented to engage with community outside of the church.
- 2) Identifying local community leaders and engaging in conversation with them about the greatest needs of Elon.

The Vision Team decided to first engage in the analysis of existing ministries. Members of the Vision Team brainstormed existing ministries of our church. At a July 19, 2009 meeting, these brainstormed lists were combined and each member of the Vision Team was assigned the task of meeting with one or more Ministry Teams or Committees to gather information about our existing ministries. This information was collected and combined into a spreadsheet, which was reviewed and discussed at a meeting of the Vision Team on September 15, 2009. Out of this conversation, several key questions and issues were identified that, in combination with input from congregational meetings, led to the raising of several of the themes that would come to be spelled out in this report.

On October 4, 2009, the Vision Team met to identify the community leaders to approach and who would approach them. It was determined that conversations would be held with Mayor Jerry Tolley, the Elon Police Department, Rev. Phil Smith of Elon University, and representatives of Elon Elementary, Highland Elementary, and Western Alamance High School. These conversations would be guided by the following question: "For you and your organization, what are the most important needs in our community that are not being met?" We initially set our next meeting for November 15, 2009 to discuss these conversations. However, several of these conversations took longer to organize than originally anticipated. Therefore, our next meeting did not take place until January 10, 2010. At this meeting, we took the inventory of existing ministries, the conversations with local leaders, and the identified values and passions of the church and sought out connections.

The Vision Team met February 23 and March 9 of 2010 to begin to organize all the information that we had collected throughout this process and discern what observations/revelations/and recommendations were emerging. We sent these thoughts to Don Durham, who then generated his report to the Vision

Team with observations and recommendations. This report was received on April 15, 2010. The Vision Team met on April 17, 2010 to look over and discuss Don's report. It was determined at that meeting that Don's report would become the foundation of the Vision Team's report to the church because this report reflected much of what the Vision Team was seeing and hearing through our own process of discernment. The report would be reformatted and additional ideas and recommendations would be included by the Vision Team based on their discussions and reflections. It was also determined by the Vision Team at this meeting that they would invite the Deacons to meet with them on Sunday, May 16 after worship to receive the report and that the Vision Team would make their report to the church on Sunday morning June 13 during a joint Sunday School gathering. It was also decided that the Vision Team's report would consist of this written document and an oral/visual presentation that would touch on the key ideas and images that emerged from this process.

The Vision Team is met again on Sunday, April 25, 2010 to continue working on this report. At this meeting, further revisions were made to the document. This version of the document is what would be presented to the Deacons on May 16.

On Sunday, May 16, 2010, the Vision Team met with the Deacons following the Morning Worship service to discuss this report. At that meeting, the Deacons voted unanimously to support the Vision Team moving forward in presenting their report to the church on June 13, 2010 and having a special called business meeting to vote on the adoption of the report following the worship service on June 20, 2010.

On Tuesday, May 25, 2010, the Vision Team met to prepare their presentation to the church fellowship.

The remainder of this report represents the combined voices of Don Durham and the Vision Team.

OBSERVATIONS

"The First Baptist Church of Elon is an amazing congregation full of gifted and hard working saints. It has been my privilege to walk alongside the Vision Team as they have listened to the congregation and reflected on what they have heard. The Vision Team has worked hard on behalf of the church and is to be commended for their dedication and commitment to helping build an even better congregation."

Don Durham

1. Our Values - Caring, Serving, Integrity, Loving, Friendly & Accepting, Respectful, Faithful.

These are the markers that identify who we have been and who we desire to be as a church. These values were identified by the congregation based on past and present experiences at the first congregational meeting on March 15, 2009.

2. The Congregation Embraces Mission – this congregation's history is dominated by the very constructive theme of active mission. When you have been at your best, you have been thoroughly consumed in a mission larger than your own needs. Perhaps a better way to say it is, when you have been consumed by a mission larger than your own needs, you have come to be at your best.

In the March/April 2010 issue of *The Gathering*, Larry Hovis, Executive Coordinator of CBFNC, shared a quote from a leader in the Church of England as found in The Missional Church and Denominations: “It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission that has a church in the world. ... God is on the move and the church is always catching up with him. We join his mission.” Larry Hovis goes on to observe, “We don’t have a mission – God has a mission!” This idea is critical to understanding why we have come to be at our best when we are consumed by a mission larger than our own needs.

- 3. Hard working – The congregation is BUSY.** A conservative estimate of the raw number of volunteer jobs involved in the various ministries listed by the Vision Team in its inventory of church ministries is approximately **1043**. This is only a rough estimate because there are several ministries listed with no volunteer worker count, and the number does not reflect that some ministries happen multiple times. Compared to a staff estimate of average worship attendance of 175 **each man, woman, and child in the church would be responsible for nearly 6 jobs each just to keep all of the congregation’s ministries in operation. If one subtracts 50 from the average attendance to account for those who are perhaps too young or old to be active workers, each adult and older youth member in regular attendance would have to be responsible for at least 8 volunteer jobs in the church – not counting Deacon or other committee service – just to keep things going.** While this is truly a testament to the congregation’s willingness to do hard work, as well as its sheer stamina for hard work, *there has been a clear and consistent theme throughout this process that many of the congregation’s core volunteers are feeling stretched, and may even be nearing burnout.*
- 4. Already a significant correlation between Words and Deeds.** When the church voted with its feet at the end of the second congregational gathering, the items selected as ministries the congregation wanted to invest in were: 1. *Childrens ministries* (sports camp), 2. *Senior adult ministries*, 3. *Mentoring with youth*, 4. *BSU cookout*, and 5. *Helping Hands*. Of the 69 ministries listed on the Vision Team’s inventory of ministries in the congregation, 45 to 50 of them already relate to one of these areas directly, or provides an opportunity for one of the emphasized ministries. **The congregation is already significantly invested in the areas identified as “new” areas where it wants to be invested.**
- 5. Capable, but not confident.** Perception is reality. While I look at the congregation from the outside and see a very capable, busy congregation, the Vision Team is in unison that the congregation needs to focus some energy on better discipleship/equipping. The stated goal I’m hearing is to help congregation members know how to share their faith in the Good News of Jesus more naturally and confidently, and how to be more confident as a whole congregation that ministries are as effective as possible inside the church and out. I hear a similar message from the congregation in the form of the observation that the congregation is already doing many of the things it says it wants to *start* doing. **This suggests a need for greater confidence that the ministries already in place are actually producing the desired outcomes at an acceptable level.**

In our busy-ness, we must also ask the question: we are serving, but are we speaking? We are not taking advantage of the opportunities service presents to invite people to church. We perceive that we are not preparing people to share the gospel and be missionaries inviting people to Christ and to church.

6. **Internal Comfort Zone.** I sense that the Vision Team, and perhaps the whole congregation, is still a bit hesitant to move outside of the comfort zone of existing ministries with existing members. The team readily tackled all of the internal tasks (congregational listening sessions and ministry inventory), but balked in various ways and gave much less overall energy to the external tasks of engaging community members in conversations about how the church might serve. Some very helpful progress was made in this direction, but this is still a habit which needs practice.
7. **Who is being missed?** There are two demographics whose spiritual needs we are concerned about whether or not we are adequately meeting: those in the 18-60 age group and college students in particular. There has been an expressed need by those within the church for programming for those in the 18-60 age range. However, we do not feel we know what those needs are. The church noted as a high point the relationships formed between college students and our church. The most frequently stated opportunity for ministry was reaching out to college students. In our community conversations, our church was invited to connect with Elon students. While we have certainly done this over the years, there has been nothing formal or organized about it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **We recommend that the Stewardship Committee and Deacons create a 12 month plan for how the church will communicate with members about financial resources and needs to accomplish its priorities. We recommend that this plan include recommendations for paying off the remaining church debt. We recommend that this plan be ready to propose to the church by January 1, 2011.**
2. We recommend that the Formations Team consider extending the theme of “Journey” as a way to introduce a focused period of disciple equipping. We recommend four areas of community study for the congregation to work into its Sunday School, Wednesday night schedules, and other educational opportunities over the next 6 to 18 months.
 - a. **Missional Journey.** Consider CBF’s Missional Church resources, *It’s Time: A Journey Toward Missional Faithfulness* (8 week church wide study). Incidentally this would be an excellent step to follow the congregation’s recent You’ve Got The Time season of listening to scripture. While the church is in the larger study, the Visioning Team may want to look at *The Missional Journey Guide*. This is a planning resource meant to follow the congregation wide study of the *It’s Time* material. To use academic language, the conversations we have had as a group, and with the congregation, have served as a 101 level of work for charting next steps in the life and focus of the congregation. The *It’s Time* study and the *Missional Journey Guide* can serve as the 201 and 301 level extensions of this initial work in figuring out how to engage the community beyond the church. The congregation clearly has energy for community ministry and is already engaged substantially. These curricular guides can help enhance the congregation’s level of confidence that the ministry engagements in the community are related to the congregation’s values and larger purpose, and can result in increasing the vitality of the congregation.

- b. **Evangelism.** There are multiple models for evangelism. Undoubtedly your staff will have their various favorite resources or models – that’s fine!
 - i. Also consider CBF’s resource, *Christianity for Beginners*. Other churches have used this different ways. Some use it as a regularly repeated Sunday School class for new members or visitors considering joining the church. Others use it as a training course for church members on simple ways to share with others what is important to them about their faith.
 - ii. Also consider training and reminding members that the various outreach ministry efforts of the church (at least 23 of the 69 inventoried ministries) are existing opportunities to invite a new potential member to become involved. More and more people who have no affiliation with, or history with, church are more likely to participate in a “helping” activity as a first interaction with a church rather than attending worship as a first interaction. These ministries are among your best points of entry for potential new members. In addition to being an outreach strategy, an added benefit of this approach is that by inviting non-members to help with various ministries you can change the pattern of trying to do more and more of the church’s work by claiming more and more of the time of existing members.

- c. **Stewardship.** While there is some general awareness in the congregation of strained resources over recent months, I believe the Vision Team and congregation have done well to focus on more basic issues of Values and Missional Priorities than on fund raising campaigns at the present time. However, there will be a need for a new creative focus on how to communicate regularly about opportunities to serve, resources available, and resources needed to accomplish the congregation’s priorities.
 - i. Consider engaging in a study of Henry Nouwen’s book, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*. We would recommend that at least the Deacons, Staff and Finance Committee members participate in a 2-4 week study of the book. Those groups may decide to invite the whole congregation to participate as well.

- d. **Lay Pastoral Care.** One of the most remarkable characteristics of this congregation is the amount of care giving you do. Many of the ministries you already conduct, as well as the ministries in which you expressed additional interest, involve high degrees of providing comfort and offering attentive pastoral presence; ministries with seniors, with prisoners, and with young people. One of the markers of Baptists throughout our history has been our emphasis on our roles together as priests to one another. This congregation also has a history with, and is instinctively good at, pulling together to support one another through difficult times. Good reminders are always helpful though. **Consider a season of prayer gatherings/retreats over the next 12-18 months.** Through a course of prayer, education, and reflection times, the congregation can refine its already good instincts in lay pastoral care. The staff can suggest resources for, and provide this training.

We recommend that the Formations Team be authorized to take these suggestions under consideration and develop an education plan for our church that would touch upon all 4 of these areas. We recommend that the Formations Team present this plan to the church for informational and promotional purposes by January 1, 2011.

In developing this plan, we recommend that the Formations Team consider new approaches for discipleship training to introduce to our church, including, but not limited to, a small group ministry that would exist parallel to our existing Sunday School ministry.

We recommend that the Formations Team and Family Ministry Team, during this process, listen for the expressed needs of those in the 18-60 age range to determine what kind of ministry would be most helpful to them in their spiritual development. These teams could then bring recommendations and programs to the church based on this information.

We recommend that the Family Ministry Team form a new ministry team whose sole purpose is to develop an organized approach to ministering to our specific community, the campus of Elon University.

- 3. We need to recognize and celebrate that we are a congregation on the “Missional Journey”. We are not yet what we believe God is calling us to become, but we are steadily on the way to discovering more fully our part of God’s mission. Be encouraged that the periodic use of groups like the Visioning Team to help the congregation assess and affirm our direction and missional focus is a sign of health, progress, and our continued attentiveness to God’s call and not a sign of stagnation or losing our way.**

We recommend that the Church Council of First Baptist Elon center its agenda and purpose on reminding the ministry teams, committees and the congregation of the church’s values and priorities which guide our journey.

- 4. Experiment with counting. In church life we focus on what we count – so, start counting the additional outcomes you want people to focus on. Most of the standard measures of church health are measurements of the church when it gathers (usually in various forms of attendance or giving). While these are important and need not be abandoned, consider additional ways to count and measure the evidence of the health of the congregation when it is scattered into the community (members at home in neighborhoods, or at work, or involved in any of the various ministries inventoried). Count the results, outcomes, and impacts of ministry efforts (boxes of food delivered, #'s of seniors served, #'s of children/youth/families served, #'s of volunteers from beyond the congregation invited/involved in community missions and ministry efforts). **Work with staff and lay leadership of each major ministry area to define and quantify the hoped for outcomes of each ministry area.** These benchmarks and goals can be used to fuel future celebrations of success, the ongoing allocation of resources, and can help focus attention on areas of needed improvement. All of the staff and church members I’ve met have demonstrated more than enough sensitivity to insure that this type of counting would help the church focus on progress and mission rather than mere self congratulation.**

We recommend that a meeting be held on August 22, 2010. At this meeting, the members of the Vision Team would meet with all current and incoming members of our ministry teams and committees to highlight the values and expressed ministry interests of the congregation and to help all of our ministry teams and committees consider how their ministry and service helps the church be who God is calling us to be. This meeting would also help ministry teams think about what they need to count and how to define hoped for outcomes.

5. Institute a regular process to review how well each ministry effort is accomplishing the hoped for outcomes. Celebrate the successes and evaluate the efforts that did not go as hoped. Begin with initial committee level evaluations of all existing programs and then repeat regularly. The Vision Team has begun to develop a new stewardship perspective of evaluating ministries in terms of *outcomes achieved* as a result of *time and dollars invested*. It is important to spread this new perspective to the rest of the church.

We recommend that a member of the Vision Team meet with each ministry team and committee to review existing ministries using a form developed by the Vision Team and reflecting the process used by the Vision Team.

We recommend that all ministry teams and committees annually bring a report of these reviews to the Church Council. Adoption of this recommendation makes attendance and participation in Church Council critical for EVERY ministry team and committee.

We recommend that a representative of Church Council bring an annual report to the church about this review process as well as any recommendations that arise from these reviews.

6. Continue listening to the whole congregation quarterly (or at least semi-annually) through combined Sunday School gathering times, or through creative use of time together on Wednesday nights. This will be a way of listening to the congregation while simultaneously teaching the congregation the art of mutual encouragement and teaching that growth, progress, and visioning are ongoing processes rather than one time events. The topics of these conversations could/should be related to the various Missional priorities of the church. These are also regular opportunities to remind the congregation of shared Values (from 1st congregational session) and Missional Focus (ministry interests from 2nd congregational session).

We recommend that the agenda of our Elon Roundtable meetings include reminders of our values and expressed ministry interests and allow for discussion about accomplishments and needs related to these expressed values and interests.

“Let me say again to the Vision Team that it has been a privilege to work alongside you as you have led the church through a time of self reflection and focus. As a group you have offered excellent leadership and have taken significant ownership of the congregation’s visioning journey. The congregation owes this group a debt of gratitude – they have served you very well. I also encourage the congregation to offer them a keen and generous ear when they report back to you with their own observations and recommendations about your next steps together on the Missional Journey.”

Don Durham