

The following is a text copy of the presentation that Pastor Bill gave at the Annual Council meeting on Wednesday, January 25th. This report was called...

“Looking Ahead”

5-year Plan

Short Term

Mid Term

Long Term

Spiritual Growth

Numerical Growth

There are *a lot* of **good things** happening here at Five Forks.

We were blessed with **excess funds** once again in 2016...some of which we will be able to use to bless others in their work for the Lord.

Our **children’s ministries and youth ministries** are quite active, there always seems to be a lot of excitement and just in the past few weeks I have heard stories of kids – who never read the Bible - getting into and memorizing God’s Word.

Our **Outreach ministries** are providing significant help for many people in the community...our Deacons, those who serve at our Food Pantry and Clothes Closet...we continue to be active in our community in various ways.

At the same time, there are areas of concern here at the church. And I’d like to begin by talking about two in particular...**two concerns** that I think many of us share.

One is the **declining attendance** that we have been experiencing on Sunday mornings. For the 4th consecutive year our Sunday morning attendance has gone down and this is concerning to us.

The second one is just this sense that our focus, our purpose, our vision has become somewhat **muddled**.

So this would seem to be a good time to address these two concerns.

In regards to our muddled vision, this is not something that the staff and board is unaware of. There is a recognition both on a staff level and board level that we need to sharpen our focus, increase our level of accountability to each other (staff and board) and begin working together to establish a defined course of action for the future.

Towards that end, throughout the month of December with input from the rest of the pastoral staff, I began putting in writing **A 5-Year Plan** to present to the board.

I just wanted to take all of the things that we as a staff have talked about in the past and some new things we've just started talking about, and get them down in writing.

The plan was presented to the board back in the first week of January, and I think we're feeling good about the direction we're headed.

The document is just a starting point, in other words, it's A plan...it's not THE plan, but a plan that the board will take and develop and hopefully help us to stay focused on what's important.

What's In It? *(The 5-year plan document)*

In the short term, it defines specific areas that each of the staff will be responsible for. This has more or less been true in the past, but the responsibility and the accountability was pretty loose, with nothing in place to hold each other accountable.

So what we've done is **identified 9 primary areas of ministry here at FF**. Some are obvious, such as Youth Ministry, and Children's Ministry. Some will break down into categories along the lines of whether the ministry is involved in outreach, community service, etc...or whether the ministry is involved in the life of the church here at Five Forks. *All* of the ministries that are in place here at FF can be placed under one of these 9 areas.

Each of the staff will be responsible for 1, in some cases 2 of these primary areas and the expectation is that **each of us will come up with our own short-term and long-term plan for the 5-10 ministries that fall under our area of responsibility.**

For instance just yesterday Ray shared with me some things he is putting together in the area of community involvement/outreach/service. Ray is passionate about the role that our church plays here in Waynesboro and beyond. And all of us understand we need to raise our game and become more actively involved in the ministries of this church, specifically the ones each of us provide leadership for.

You see, there are lots of good things happening in this ministry and that ministry...but **most of our ministries are operating independently of each other**...on an island almost. We would – as a staff – like to bring together the ministries that we are responsible for and create a sense of a “team”. Perhaps some form of monthly correspondence, encouraging and reminding our volunteers that they are a very important part of a bigger picture.

I think as a church we've lost our sense of purpose, we've lost our excitement, again, in part because we don't see the overall importance of our role. We want everybody who serves here – many of you here tonight – to feel that you matter, because you do.

And as the staff increases our involvement in the areas of ministry we are responsible for overseeing, we'll be looking for information to come back in to us. Maybe something good has happened this month over here in this ministry, and something good has happened this month over there in that ministry. We want to hear what's happening, and we'll want to share it among the rest of the ministries involved in "Community Service" or "Congregational Life" or whichever of the 9 primary areas it falls under.

And then we'll want to share some of these stories with the church as a whole. We've talked about this in the past, but to my knowledge we've never put it down in writing and fully committed to it and committed to the accountability it will require.

So in the short term: Developing and changing our structure....identifying these 9 primary areas, matching up the staff person with the areas that best suit their gifts...and going to work on providing real leadership to these ministries.

This in and of itself isn't vision. What it does is make us accountable to begin thinking. Thinking about what we're doing and why we're doing it. Praying and talking with others about where God might be taking us. It lays the groundwork for vision to take shape. It's surely not the only thing that needs done in the short term, but I think it's a good and workable starting point.

Short to mid-term goals in the 5 year plan?

Certainly carrying out and fulfilling the vision that the staff, board and congregation come up with here in 2017... But also setting **some staffing goals**, not on the scale of a full time pastor or director, but identifying some areas where we may or will eventually need to address.

Maintenance...Finances....Counseling to name just a few possibilities.

The most significant thing in regards to **Long Term** revolves around **Phase II of the LBFJ project.**

Some of you, but not all of you are aware that when this addition was designed, it was designed in such a way that if we were inclined to expand again, that it would be workable and not leave us wondering where to go or how to do it.

We call this Phase I, and now that it's paid off we turn our attention to Phase II. Obviously it is years away, and whether we ever do anything depends upon whether or not we are seeking, hearing and responding to God's direction for us as a church.

If we're willing to take the concern that we have over declining attendance, and have that concern move us to the point where we are willing to identify and discuss and embrace the changes that

need to be made in order to reverse this trend, then I believe we can anticipate a day when we will not only want to move ahead with Phase II, but feel as if we *need* to move ahead with Phase II.

When you enter the Auditorium via the covered drop off entrance, the wall on the right (where the chairs and sofas are located) would come down and you would be able to walk right over on the same level into another area. Down below would be the first floor - on the same level as the Children's Wing - going out into what we call the "backyard."

That's where it would go. **What would we use it for?**

We have for years envisioned having a place that the youth can call home; a Youth Center of sorts. And we could see that down on the lower level...first floor, same floor as the Children's Wing.

Out here, on this second level: possibly a multi-purpose room area that could be used by many ministries for all kinds of events. Tables and chairs that could be set up and taken down....where a casual worship service could take place...used for receptions after weddings and funerals....on Sunday mornings the Café could be moved to this room rather than down in the gym...allowing the gym to be used as a play area for our kids after the morning services.

It would mean putting in a small-scale kitchen. Why not? It could serve as a gathering place for our senior citizens between 8 and 10 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for instance...where they could come and get a cup of coffee and an egg sandwich. The local restaurants are packed most mornings, why not find a way to get them here?

This is just the beginning of the conversation. From time to time I come across documents from 10-15 years ago when we were talking about Phase I, and the things we were talking about back then - what it would look like and where it would be - turned out nothing like we thought

That's how things go...but you've got to begin somewhere and so let's begin to dream.

Let's take a couple of minutes to talk about that other area of concern: **Declining Sunday Morning Attendance.**

In my report I alluded to the importance of growth in two areas, and if we are committed to doing what I'm suggesting, then the Sunday morning numbers will take care of themselves.

First, a church-wide commitment to spiritual growth. There are all kinds of ways that God works in our lives to take us from "here" to "here." He brings people into our lives, circumstances into our lives, we read His word at home, listen to it in our vehicles.

But don't you think that arguably the most likely opportunity for spiritual growth to occur is when His people gather together for corporate worship and for the preaching and teaching of His Word?

For all of the flaws and brokenness that exist in His Church, it's what He has left us. And while there are surely alternative ways for God to work in our lives, the church gathering together – flaws and all – provide perhaps the most likely opportunity for growth to occur.

But here's the thing: There is **a troubling trend** going on across this nation and I'm afraid our church here at Five Forks has gotten caught up in it. It used to be that if you were a follower of Jesus, one of the highest priorities of your week was gathering together for corporate worship. In our culture this has taken place on Sunday mornings. To miss this weekly gathering, something important was going on...you were out of town, or sick.

This **level of commitment has been trending down** and continues to do so not just here, but across the country.

But not everywhere. There are some churches where the level of commitment to the weekly gathering remains strong.

I'd like for us to be one of those churches that bucks the trend. For the Pastors to commit to putting in the time to bring messages that are challenging and encouraging. Messages that are Spirit led, practical and can be applied to our day to day lives.

For all of us to commit that we will not give in to the temptation to stay home just because we don't feel like going...because after a busy week it is so very tempting just to stay home.

It's not about bucking the trend so that our Sunday morning numbers can go back up...it's because **we understand the importance of this weekly gathering, and even when we don't feel like going**, we'll go anyway.

Because as we have discovered on many occasions in the past....

It's often on these days where we expect the least that God does the most.

We drive home thankful that we fought through the urge to just stay home and relax...and drive home glad that we came.

God can grow us spiritually in so many different ways, but gathering together is important for us individually, and important to us corporately. You matter, not just to God, but to everybody else who comes here.

I am aware that down the road what it looks like for the church to gather together will look very different than it does today. Where the church will meet, how the church will meet...in so many years it will look nothing like it does today. Our services today would be totally unrecognizable to those who gathered even 50 years ago, certainly 100 years ago.

Even now changes are taking place, settings are becoming less formal...times to gather have moved from Sunday mornings to Saturday evenings in some cases. But the fact remains that for now, in our culture, it's still primarily in buildings like this one on Sunday mornings where and when the church gathers together.

And so if we believe that spiritual growth is important - one thing that we want to define us as a church - are all of us willing to commit to make the Sunday morning gathering the top priority in our week? And not just attending, but participating because again, this is what God has intended.

Let's take a minute or so to talk about **numerical growth**. Which is going to be a little more challenging than talking about spiritual growth. When it comes to spiritual growth, who can argue? When it comes to numerical growth however, there is this ongoing tension that you can never quite get away from.

Let's begin by identifying the **two extremes**.

Over here on one side you have those who for them, **numbers and thus growth have achieved a "god-like status"** here at Five Forks.

To the point where the success or failure of any event is measured by the turnout. Where the first question asked is: **"How many were there?" "How many did you have?"** And if the turnout was good, whether it was a concert or a youth event or a Sunday morning service...if the turnout was strong, then the event was a success, and if the turnout was low, then it was not.

So one extreme is where the numbers are *the* determining factor in regards to whether something was successful or not. You can sense that mentality to some degree here in the church.

Over here on the other extreme you have those who would say, **"Numbers don't matter."** I might be wrong, but these words will often come from those who are more or less content with how things are.

But here's the thing...**Growth means change and change means risk.**

Trying things that you don't know will work...doing things that take us out of our comfort zone...inviting our unchurched family and friends a first time, and later on a second time, and still later a third time. There are those attending FF today who did not come on the first, second or third invitation.

So over here on this extreme we can say numbers don't matter and just play it safe. But the numbers will begin to matter as they continue to decline.

The absolute worst thing that any of us could say is that our declining attendance concerns us...but then not be willing to assume that risks that come with doing something about it. We can't have it both ways.

I want our church to experience spiritual growth, and yes, numerical growth as well. But not because they make me feel more successful if our numbers are up and less successful if our numbers are down.

But because there are a lot of people that we know who do not know Jesus.

Again, there are all kinds of ways that people come to know Jesus.... but in our culture, one clear option is in inviting your friends to join you here....coming and observing what it is that you're so committed to. Bringing your friends to church presents opportunities for them to see and hear things they likely won't see or hear anywhere else.

Jesus can work anywhere. But you can be certain He's working in here.

And so this year we're going to try to consistently encourage and challenge all of us to be continually looking for opportunities to invite our friends to join us here where we come to worship God. **Can each of us ask God to help us identify 1, 2 or 10 individuals or families that we can invite to join us here at Five Forks?**

If we can commit to doing this, think about the numerical growth that would follow. And we'll rejoice not because our numbers are up, but because new people are coming every week, some whose lives will be changed forever.

Are there reasons to be concerned? Sure there are.

But if you stop and think about it, how many churches would love to be in the position we find ourselves in today?

We have just paid off a 1.3 million dollar loan...a 20 year loan paid off in 6 years. Now we can begin to talk seriously about "What's Next?"

The Lord guided us through this expansion from start to finish. What's next on His agenda?

We have the incredible opportunity over the course of the next few months to bring two individuals on staff who we trust will have a love for Jesus and a love for worship or youth...and they will be

coming into a church filled with people who love Jesus and are truly supportive and encouraging...and it's going to be great for us and it's going to be great for them.

2017 has the potential to be a very exciting year for us, and by exciting, I mean where we look for God to work in our midst in ways above and beyond anything He's ever done before.

He is always moving forward...He is about creating and flourishing and thriving...and we want to move with Him.

Will you pray with me?