

Consultation Summary



Mark Clifton – North American Mission Board – Senior Director Replant

Introduction

First Baptist Springfield, Missouri contacted Mark Clifton in July 2020 to request a one-day consultation with the pastor and key leaders. The purpose of this consultation was discovery and dialogue about the past, present and future of First Baptist Church. On Saturday, August 29, 2020, Mark Clifton met with the selected leadership. The summary report provides some preliminary discovery about First Baptist's condition and future possible options.

Trends and Patterns

Based on data from 2000 and 2010 ACP

Worship Attendance in 2000 – 700

Worship Attendance 2010 – 375

Sunday School 2000 – 623

Sunday School 2020 – 324

Youth (ages 12-17) 2000 – 144

Youth (ages 12-17) 2010- 25

The Annual Church Profile from each of the past 20 years reflects a steady and, at times, a rapid decline in all key leading indicators. The two selected here are a sample of two of the most significant indicators of church vitality.

In the midst of this decline, FBC has also experienced a major shift in the overall evangelical church culture of the Springfield region. While the population of the area continues to grow, the rapidly increasing number of new churches located closer to the new neighborhoods and focused on youth, children and young families has made an impact on the environment in which FBC finds itself.

In the midst of this decline and changing environment, FBC has maintained a strong commitment to missions, evangelism and ministry. The commitment of the membership and the leadership is stellar. The challenge comes in how to understand and embrace the new reality in which FBC finds itself.

The New Reality

Southern Baptists have realized the closure of up to 900 churches each year for the past decade. Over 70% of these churches were located in cities of over 100,000 people. Churches that never dreamed they would cease to exist have in fact experienced the sad reality of a final service. While First Baptist is nowhere near this reality at this time, I must be frank and share my opinion that unless measures are taken soon, First Baptist may be on a track that could, in a number of years, lead to decisions that no church would like to have to make. To be simple and direct, the community and culture in which FBC thrived for so many decades has changed and will not return. The good news is that Jesus has a plan for every church. And Jesus has a plan for First Baptist. The challenge for the membership may be that Jesus' plan looks very little like what they might envision.

Summary

First Baptist has been in a prolonged significant decline for several years. This cycle of downturn has impacted Worship and Sunday School attendance, finances and ministry. As the congregation grows older and few in number, the building becomes a greater drain upon the resources of the church. The facility you now occupy was never intended for a church your current size.

The community that immediately surrounds the church continues to evolve and change, and has already been stated, the rapidly growing number of new churches located in the city's growth patterns will continue in the years to come.

Without strategic and significant changes, the long term future of First Baptist and its viability to maintain such a large campus will come into serious question.

The willingness of current leadership to engage in change is apparent. The key to success will be the degree to which the remaining church body also understands the true nature of the situation and comes to the place where they are willing and eager to seek the leadership of the Holy Spirit to understand the future of this church.

Whatever that future will be, one can be certain it will likely not resemble much of the past. To continue on the same path as the church is now engaged would bring comfort to some but eventual demise of the church they so dearly love and have served for so long.

Recommendations

1. Revisit the *Experiencing God* study by Henry Blackaby and perhaps have an Experiencing God Weekend event. This can be provided by Blackaby Ministry. The church should also consider going through the *Flickering Lamps* study and video series also by Richard and Henry Blackaby. The *Flickering Lamps* study was created to move churches toward the reality that this is after all Jesus' church and we must follow his will and not our own.
2. Engage your local Association and State Convention to help you navigate the options of sharing space, merge with a new church or utilizing your campus as a ministry focus hub for the region.
3. Engage the Missouri Baptist Convention Revitalization Team to conduct a full and detailed analysis and report to help you further understand and embrace your options. The MBC has a new and very effective team designed just for this purpose
4. Consider asking the writer of this report to speak to the entire church on the topic at hand in a format and timeframe that suits your needs. This would include making the book *Reclaiming Glory* available to the church body. The writer of this report would make those books available at no cost.

The above are definite immediate recommendations. These will assist the church in determining which of the potential choices listed below should be taken.

5. **Consider** inviting a new church with strong vision and a base of young leadership to explore a marriage of your two churches.
6. **Consider** inviting a new church to fully utilize your campus. There will be two churches in one building with First Baptist being open to the possibility that the new church will grow to occupy the "prime" space.
7. **Consider** using your current campus as an incubator for many new churches and ministries, again being willing to release some of the prime space for ministry that may not be your own.
8. **Consider** being adopted by a larger and healthier church with a vision to fully utilize your campus as a ministry and outreach center.