

Congregational Life Initiative Follow Up Report

First Baptist Church
2241 Victoria Ave.
Regina, SK S4P 0S4

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Sam Breakey
CBWC Church Health Strategist
212, 9333 50 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6B 2L5
800-474-6018
sbreakey@cbwc.ca



Initiation

Thank you for the opportunity to walk alongside your church family during this significant period in your corporate life. It has been a privilege to participate in reflection and discernment with you in pursuing God's unique call within your community and wider world.

Conversations about being involved in the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada Congregational Life Initiative began with Pastor Joel Russell-MacLean in May 2017. Joel arranged further conversations with Rosemary Ward and Collin Carbno, past and present chairs of the Deaconate. In November 2017, the Deaconate committed to participating in a congregation-wide consultation based upon the following understanding: '[We are looking for] outside help in order to achieve healthy consensus on our identity as a church, and on a right focus, so that we can design an action plan together and stick to it.'

The following outcomes were proposed:

1. Create and implement an anonymous survey to measure vital ministry influences, including demographic and unique local questions. Congregants will have the option to complete the survey online or on paper.
2. Convene a Discovery Weekend with a 2.5-hour survey feedback conversation for the wider congregation on Friday evening, followed by a 4-hour in-depth Saturday session with church leaders.
3. Preach Sunday from assigned lectionary texts, while addressing themes relevant to congregational health.
4. Prepare an extensive follow up report with recommendations for Pastor Russell-MacLean, Rosemary Ward, Collin Carbno, Mark Doerksen (CBWC Heartland Regional Minister), and Rob Ogilvie (CBWC Executive Minister) for eventual distribution to the wider congregation.

Process

The customised survey, hosted by MinCARE Leadership Group, was available to the congregation from January 14 through 22, 2018. This information gathering process produced 106 pages of data with comments for further study. Our team was responsible to review the material, come to an understanding of the prevailing congregational strengths and weaknesses, discern underlying influences, and make recommendations for moving forward.

The findings were presented to 58 people at a congregational session on Friday, February 9, 2018. The following day, a core leadership team comprised of the Deaconate and Pastors Joel Russell-MacLean and John Nelson, met with Canadian Baptist representatives to examine the results in more detail and began the process of imagining a pathway for moving forward. Pastor Sam Breakey (CBWC Church Health Strategist) led the sessions, with assistance from Pastor Mark Doerksen (CBWC Heartland Region Regional Minister).

Participation

It is commonly believed that survey data is reliable when 25-35% of a particular group participate. Our goal was to have 50% of average adult weekly worship service attendees contribute. It was reported that 165 attend First Baptist on an average Sunday morning. 116 people completed the survey, leading to a participation rate of 70% of average weekly attendance.

The following figures reflect the opinions of those who completed the survey. It was noted that 82% were members. 65% have been part of the church for more than 10 years. 66% over age of 55, but there is a reasonable balance of ages, including 10 youth from 13-24 years of age. 86% were born in Canada. 57% were part of a small group or Bible Study associated with the church. 95% of the respondents have been following Jesus for 10+ years, and 78% attend services 'three to four Sundays per month.' Average attendance has been decreasing at a steady rate in the past two decades.

Findings

General Observations

1. The CBWC Congregational Life Initiative encourages participants to consider the strengths and challenges of their specific congregation. Ten characteristics, including heartfelt worship, Biblical preaching, administrative capacity, relational authenticity, leadership development, and spiritual hunger are reviewed. Generally speaking, I found noticeable encouragement and some concerns for each theme.
2. As a result of this consultation process with First Baptist Church, we would suggest that the respondents believe their congregation primarily exists to: A. Share the Good News and love of Jesus, while B. Facilitating corporate worship, solid Biblical teaching, trustworthy community, and personal spiritual growth.
3. Responding to the call of Jesus Christ, as found in Scripture, is of primary importance to your membership. God's Word anchors your services of worship and is central to sermon delivery. "*Learning for Life*," or the Adult Sunday School class, provides opportunity for those familiar with Scripture to deepen their understanding. However, it was suggested by more than a few that the church must be more attentive to the needs of those who have little familiarity with the Bible.
4. The congregation is currently comprised of a generous core group of volunteers and staff. The longevity of present pastoral team members and the evidence that 95% of attendees have been part of the church for a decade or more, are but two confirmations of your corporate dedication. In addition, your elected leaders are keenly committed to help the church refine its mission for the days to come.
5. In the past two years, following a season of tension, the congregation has experienced a more positive relational environment. Evidence of stability has returned. The use of volunteer and contract administrative assistance is working well for a congregation this size. You recognise that the congregation will be required to add staff and realign present roles to widen ministry effectiveness. I also recommend stewarding the gifting and endurance of the present team. When asked about the priority for future hires, children, youth, and young families were selected by more than 50% of respondents, with the majority of the remaining respondents wanting expanded coverage in all areas.
6. There is a high degree of willingness to invest further in, and personally commit to, care for the poor and refugee ministries. Hopefully, interest and capacity will be of equal value. Creative ways of engaging the nearby apartment and business community must also be explored to truly serve your neighbours with the love and words of Jesus, as delineated in your priorities listed in point two. One or two 'projects' will not be enough; intentional ongoing commitment, however, will bear true fruit.

7. A couple of congregational descriptive statements were found on the website. *“A Place to Belong,”* and *“Historically Evangelical,”* however, do not fully align with the priorities listed above or have the ongoing support of current leadership. Going forward, it may be worth considering a statement that would more accurately declare the intention of the congregation for the next decade.
8. Finally, the people of First Baptist primarily see their future through the church’s identity (worship style etc.) rather than through its mission. Theologically speaking, mission surpasses identity.

Self-Described Congregational Strengths

Your customised Congregational Life Survey revealed the following characteristics. The percentages given represent your collective level of agreement with the particular statement; they are not be interpreted as passing or failing grades.

1. **We Genuinely Worship God through Prayer, Music, and Preaching – 77% of respondents**
 - Gathering together for worship is the focal point of congregational life
 - Three categories of specific appreciation surfaced
 - The rooted and predictable nature of liturgical worship
 - The anchoring of the choir and organ
 - The Biblically sourced and meaningful sermons
 - ‘The quality of the worship service is fantastic which I believe is a way that we honour God.’
 - ‘[The] order of worship attracts more people to the church than any other single thing.’
2. **We Truly Care For and Love One Another – 70%**
 - Attendees, for the most part, feel welcomed when attending your services and events.
 - People genuinely care about how others are doing.
 - ‘There are many people in the church that have been there for a very long time and have formed very strong relationships with others in the church. They feel a part of a family.’
 - ‘I have found some of our members are very caring, and take time to give a call.’
 - ‘I am impressed with the growth and caring of the Africans in our church.’
3. **We Support Facilities and Staff Well – 33%**
We Hunger for God’s Power and Presence – 31%
We Generously Support Christ’s Work – 30%
 - ‘I believe we have a very generous congregation.’
 - ‘Small groups appear to form at a sort of "grass roots" level, rather than being mandated; therefore groups are stronger and more intentional, although few in number. Adult education classes, the quality and attendance to these, illustrates the “hunger for God”’.

Highest Scored Questions

Respondents were asked to rate various statements from 1 to 5; 1 being low agreement and 5 being high agreement. The highest scored questions related to the following themes:

- 69% scored 4 – 5 > Communication open and genuine

- 68% scored 4 – 5 > Feel cared for and accepted.
- 66% scored 4 – 5 > Church is dependent on pastor of the day.
- 62% scored 4 – 5 > Messages inspire and challenge.
- 56% scored 3 – 5 > Seek God in prayer for guidance and strength to fulfill our mission.

Your Self-Described Areas for Renewed Congregational Focus

This set of questions received as many responses as the previous set, but the input was more evenly spread across all ten categories. The three themes receiving the greatest percentage of responses are below. Representative comments are provided. One person insightfully wrote – ‘These “congregational weaknesses” are weaknesses in me.’

1. We Find It Difficult to Draw Others into Leadership – 38%

- ‘The church is always looking for volunteers. The people who do volunteer run the risk of being overworked.’
- ‘We keep calling on the same core group of people to provide leadership in the church.’
- 35.6% of respondents volunteer 1-4 hours per week for organisations beyond the church.
- ‘Leadership responsibilities need to be better defined.’
- ‘Often it is the older generation that is in leadership...we need the younger ones involved.’

2. Few Activities Focus on Those Not Yet Part of Our Church Family – 34%

- ‘We seem to be most interested in “in-reach” rather than outreach. We give, as a congregation, to other agencies for outreach but do almost none ourselves. Certainly not as an organized effort or very rarely. That isn't to say that congregants don't do it in their own time because they do but it's not something our church does.’
- ‘We are a church living to support ourselves and our friends and followers. Our support of missions’ projects, [and] discipleship is mostly monetary, not active.’
- ‘Although we claim to be an evangelical church, I don't see us evangelising. We are happier to send our money to others to do the work. We tend to be inner directed.’

3. Our Care for Others Is Limited to Those Closest to Us – 33%

- ‘[Our] love and care may be focused more on our own peer/social/small groups than the congregation as a whole.’
- ‘We genuinely care... for our inner circle! But we are not very successful in going beyond inner-circles. Not more than a handful are intentional about this.’
- ‘Those “on the fringes” could be missed both in terms of their occasional presence and in terms of their needs. There isn't at present a strong congregational culture of “noticing people,” especially new-Canadians.’

Lowest Scored Questions

Respondents were asked to rate various statements from 1 to 5, 1 being low agreement and 5 being high agreement. The lowest scored questions related to the following themes:

- 80% scored 1 – 3 > We have a clear and written plan for how we develop disciples.
- 62% scored 1 – 3 > We have healed from past conflict within the congregation.

- 51% scored 1 – 2 > Attendees know and accept their part in our church’s mission.

The Big Picture

Telephone and video conversations with your leaders, your responses from the congregational survey, and your many insightful comments during the discovery weekend, led me to deeper observations and recommendations. Please prayerfully consider the following themes in both small and large group settings.

Mission Rather Than Identity

You perceive First Baptist Church to be a congregation where one can come to know and grow in their relationship with Christ, primarily through rooted worship and valued teaching. Presently, considerable energy and resources are focused on activities that reinforce this worthwhile identity. The majority of the congregation is comprised of long term attendees who have a strong appreciation for the historic practices of worship and interpretation of Scripture. One person wrote: ‘We have a heart for tradition that reflects deep spiritual thinking and sound philosophy.’ While you are engaged in this significant congregational endeavour, it appears that you may be confusing your identity with your reason for being. Going forward, the comprehensive call of Jesus Christ must energise your ministry; doing Sunday well must be secondary.

Jesus’ familiar marching orders to his followers as he ascended into heaven, are as follows: *‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’*

By the standard in Matthew 28:18-20, Christ’s Church is commissioned to make disciples; a noticeable step beyond being disciples. Secondly, his disciples are made by going. We grow in faith when we step beyond what is comfortable and familiar so that we can be in relationship with those who do not yet know Christ. In such a way, Christ is revealed in both truth and action. The Great Commission, at its heart, is an outward movement.

Your collected comments confirm that, at the present time, few of your activities are focused on those who do not yet know Christ. In addition, your care for others is limited to those to whom you have most in common. Your comments suggest this is true both within and outside the congregation. As you prepare for the next season of ministry, you have opportunity to refine your identity through a growing commitment to your mission. In the future, seek to be known as a faith-filled, outward-focused church, which happens to be renewed through a traditional model of worship.

A Congregation of the Nations

One of the signs of renewal in contemporary congregational life is how well the cultures of the world come together when they worship and serve Christ. Most major cities in Canada reflect the diversity of nations that live and work in close proximity. Regina is no different. 2016 Census data reports that approximately 20% of the residents are considered a “visible minority.” First Nations comprise an additional 9%.

God is bringing diverse cultural groups in growing numbers to First Baptist – people from central Africa (participating in the morning service) and those of Karen and other Burmese origins (gathering for their own service in the day) are among them. Observations have been made about how ‘they care for one another,’ which is an affirming but possibly distant observation. Seek to be a congregation of nations in which attendees from all

backgrounds partner together and serve each other in pursuit of your common mission. Aim to be unified ministry. Strive to become a “Galatians 3:28 congregation” where *‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’*

Field of Influence

Inner-city congregations encounter a challenge that many suburban churches do not face. Those in the core are more prone to being ‘commuter churches.’ Their attendees come from all over the city. FBC is no exception; 32% come from central Regina, another 28% from the south east, and about 17% from the south west. In such cases, it is difficult to focus your collective outreach on a specific geographic region and truly be neighbours among your inner city neighbours. This limits your capacity to be recognised by your neighbours as a people that genuinely love their community, an important prelude to intentional ministry. The fact remains: focused congregational ministry yields richer fruit and a more visible reputation.

In such a scenario, you have two choices: prayerfully pursue a demographic or postal code that you will invest in together. Consider where you may have the greatest influence and build relationships with those who already have a heart for that community. Bring faith to the opportunities God gives you.

Spring Follows Frost, with Purpose

It is comforting in these cold winter months to recognise that spring is on the horizon. The tulips, crocuses, and hyacinths, soon will break ground. Few gardeners, however, simply nurture beauty in one species or season. S/he will seek to foster a continuous display of variety and splendour throughout the year, producing colour even through the leafless red branches of a dogwood in winter.

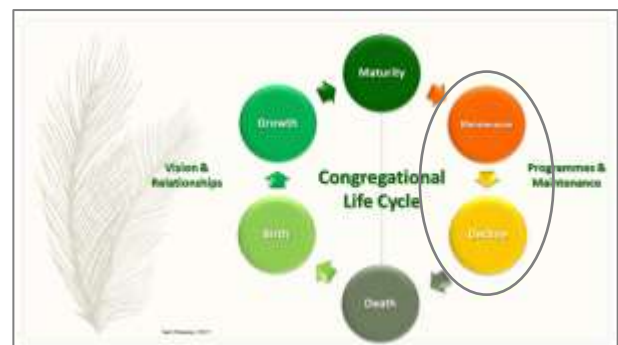
Similarly, a fruitful congregation will aim for more than excellence in distinct activities. Its members will pursue an all encompassing vision that impacts every undertaking. The value of a youth or music programme, for instance, must be determined by how well it pursues a clearly defined and overarching congregational vision. Evaluating those programmes according to how much people like them is not satisfactory.

Next Steps

Gather the Congregation to Respond to This Report

After distributing this document widely, set aside a dedicated time to engage the congregation in conversation and prayer about its contents and your next steps.

Your self-study suggests that 78% of respondents believe that First Baptist Church is focusing primarily on **Programme and Ministry Management** (ministries, finances, and facilities in that order). You lack a primary congregational **Vision** or calling that will challenge you to reinvest in congregational and community **Relationships**.



Discover and pursue a compelling unified **Vision (Calling)** through which you will prioritise and evaluate all of your activities. Then develop deeper **Relationships** among attendees, within the community, and with Christ Jesus. Invest in present **Programmes** and **Management** that align with your newly focused vision and revise or let go of

those that do not. Pray and consider together how you can pay equal attention to all four elements, how you will reveal your purpose in all your ministries, develop intentionality, and foster genuine unity.

Journey in Prayer for a Clear and Widely Engaged Vision

The essential contributor to congregational renewal is prayer, not planning, nor persuasion. A number of models for congregational prayer can be considered.

A good number of our CBWC churches have recently participated in 77 Days of Prayer. I understand that FBC also participated, seeking the Lord's guidance for our work together as an association of churches. I would encourage you as a church to use a similar format to root your renewal discussions in prayer, on a regular periodic basis, so that you will be given clarity on how to respond with courage and faith to the mission the Lord will reveal to you.

Release from The Past

As mentioned earlier, a number of your people feel the impact of previous seasons of congregational conflict. A significant percentage may be related to our natural fear that the past will repeat itself. A smaller number may have wounds that have not yet been acknowledged or addressed. To address both scenarios, invite the congregation to gather to prayerfully commit the influence of the past to Lord, and let it rest with him. Invite members to share what may have been hard for them and respond with openness and compassion. The goal is to lay the past at the cross together so that it no longer holds the power it once did. I have created a liturgy that may be resourceful for FBC.

Focus Your Ministry

During the course of the Discovery Weekend, several themes surfaced that may help shape your next steps. First, the congregation as a whole desires to be united, to make disciples, and to reach out. This was confirmed in the Saturday session when the leaders reflected on Will Mancini's 12 templates for ministry.¹ Second, your core leadership team imagines the congregation being like A. A key that unlocks the door for others as you together enter a room full of the abundance of Christ. B. A banquet table that offers hospitality and abundance to those who feel lost and spiritually impoverished. C. A wellspring or steadily flowing creek that provides refreshment and sanctuary to an ever growing group of Christ's disciples. D. A spiritual retreat center for the downtown business community that clearly articulates the value of Christ for modern business people.

Scripture teaches that God blesses us with gifts and a calling for the benefit of the wider community; they are entrusted to us so that others will come to know that God is God. It will be tempting to begin new initiatives or fill a void, but these alone will not be the answer. Multifaceted programmes and additional pastors are no longer enough; today, the community of Christ needs to be intentionally and relationally present within the local community to draw others to Christ.

During our Discovery Weekend Saturday session, our team introduced the church leaders to a process that can help you find and focus on your specific congregational future. It begins by seeking clarity from God for your long range vision. Will Mancini² writes, 'From Genesis to Revelation God speaks and reveals. And when he does, he is often painting a picture, solving a problem, stirring a heart and showing off how big he really is.' We see this when God called Abram – God told him to look at the stars (number of descendants) and the horizon in all directions

¹ Will Mancini and Warren Bird. God Dreams. (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing, 2016)

² Mancini, *ibid.* page 151.

(vastness of territory) to help him imagine what his future would look like if he trusted God. That vision was well beyond Abram's power and imagination, but he was challenged to believe.

We read in Hebrew's 11:8-12: *'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.'* Numerous other examples can be found in the faith journeys of Joseph, David, the prophets, Paul, and Peter. The Book of Revelation similarly paints a picture that draws us to God's ultimate victory.

Your leaders were introduced to this exercise to help them engage the wider congregation in a process that begins with the following questions: What vision is God calling you to as a congregation that is beyond your horizon in the next 5-10 years? What is he inviting you to long for that is well beyond your capacity to fulfill?

My pathway process, called *Finding and Focusing Your Congregational Future*, has been distributed separately to Pastor Joel and your Deaconate Chair. I encourage you to use it to discover and invest in a fresh congregational vision to serve those you do not yet know. New beginnings have their challenges, but they build faith, excitement, and invite partnership.

Staff and Volunteer Assignments

It will not be possible for you to advance the work of the congregation if your staff team is not expanded. Your comments indicate renewed focus on child, youth, and family ministry. Guide your pastors to commit to primary tasks through which they can advance the overarching mission of the church. Guard them from being either too widely engaged or too narrowly focused. Give volunteers responsibility for larger single focused rather than piecemeal tasks.

Encourage 'Three-Deep' Mentorship

A common challenge faced in Canadian Baptist congregations is that of cultivating leaders. As mentioned earlier, First Baptist has encountered the same. One beneficial practice is 'three deep' mentorship. Accordingly, rather than looking for people to fill roles, every leader seeks out someone to invest in spiritually. Through prayer, companionship, and opportunity, spiritual leadership widens. This three deep model suggests that the mentor will encourage their mentee to foster the same kind of relationship with their own mentee. When mentorship in one's walk with Christ is the focus, people and tasks come together.

Evaluate Your Current and Future Programmes Through Three Filters

Your survey comments and personal conversations suggest that it would be helpful to evaluate activities through to the following screening questions.

- To what degree does this programme or activity bring people into deeper personal relationships that honour Christ? (connecting people to Christ)
- To what degree does this programme or activity connect us with those whose needs are not addressed by other groups in our community? (encouraging partnership rather than competition)

- To what degree does this idea fit within our specific long-term goals, the limits of our resources, and our Godly calling? (promoting focus to prevent burnout and encourage ministry in God's strength)

Additional Vision Development Resources

Tony Morgan has released a book called *The Unstuck Church*,³ which will help you further interpret your congregation's life stage and take steps towards increased health. I have found it to be an insightful resource.

Stephen Maachia, in another book, *Becoming a Healthy Church*,⁴ addresses the ten characteristics referenced in the congregational survey. Each chapter further defines a specific characteristic and provides numerous examples of how churches reinvested in those areas to ensure ministry balance.

Will Mancini, mentioned earlier, has written two resource-full books on the process of congregational renewal: *God Dreams* (referenced previously) and *Church Unique*.⁵

Last Words

I hope this Congregational Life Initiative has stirred your desire to be a vibrant congregation. I have intended to try to capture, from a high level perspective, what I see to be the strengths and areas for renewed focus within your congregational life and offer recommendations for moving forward. Most importantly, as I said when I was among you, Christ loves his Church and wants to equip you to flourish as you serve and seek him.

What happens next? Pray with and for your leaders as they seek to respond to what you are learning together. Mark Doerksen and I are available to offer our assistance, as requested.

³ Tony Morgan. *The Unstuck Church*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017)

⁴ Stephen A. Macchia. *Becoming a Healthy Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999)

⁵ Will Mancini. *Church Unique*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008)