

FORWARD Vision Report

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Planning Process Overview	Pages 1-2
Purpose and Core Values	Pages 3-4
Strengths	Page 5
Looking Forward	Pages 6-7
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiatives Grounded in the Fullness of God• A God of Relationships<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Strategic Initiative #1: Growing in Relationship with God through Discipling Ministries○ Strategic Initiative #2: Growing in Relationship with those in their 20s and 30s○ Strategic Initiative #3: Extending Relationships through Multi-Site Ministry	

FORWARD Vision Report

Introduction

The FORWARD planning process was initiated by Compass in the winter of 2017. The FORWARD planning team was recruited by Compass in the spring of 2017 and given the task of determining how Birmingham First and Berkley First United Methodist Church might best plan for future ministries and the development of the congregation. Birmingham First and Berkley First is a strong, vibrant congregation and our planning approach appreciates and builds on the strengths and faith of this congregation.

Our approach is grounded in scripture's vision of God's mission for us:

- Mark 16:15 - *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."*
- Acts 1:8 - *"...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*
- Acts 2: 39 - *The promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls.*
- Proverbs 16: 3 - *Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established.*

The FORWARD team has prayed, studied, and worked diligently with the Staff and Congregation to discern God's will for the future of Birmingham First and Berkley First. What follows is the result of this work and discernment.

Planning Process

The last time a strategic planning process was implemented was with the Next Generation Report in 2009. Recognizing the need to commit anew to a direction for our life together, Compass determined that a new strategic planning initiative would benefit our congregation. After reading, careful study, conversation, prayer and reflection, Compass decided to use the services of Susan Beaumont to facilitate a new planning process. The Rev. Beaumont is a nationally recognized consultant with expertise in the leadership dynamics of large churches. With funding from our Endowment Committee, Susan began work with the Compass committee in April 2017.

The first task of the Compass team was to recruit a small group to provide leadership for the process. The FORWARD planning team has provided leadership for a four-phase planning process to determine the future ministry and development of the congregation. Three of the four phases are complete.

Phase 1 - Getting Ready: In June 2017, we began gathering data about the church and community. Additionally, month-to-month leadership development sessions were

conducted by Susan Beaumont in the areas of Appreciative Inquiry (a congregational inquiry tool), orientation to long range planning, and training of Listening Circle leaders for gathering input from the congregation.

Phase 2 - Data Gathering: Several sources and methods of data gathering were employed to ensure a full view of church history, including financial and census data as well as input from the congregation. The following data were used by the FORWARD team for their discernment:

- Congregational and Financial Historical Data
- Congregational Survey results
- Congregational Listening Circle Output
- Mission Insite/External Demographic Data
- Results of interviews with community leaders

A Leadership Summit was held in January 2018 to review the above outputs, capture input, and begin to discern God's will for Birmingham First and Berkley First. Eighty-one faithful and engaged church members and staff appreciated the history of Birmingham First and Berkley First and claimed the strengths and values of this faithful congregation. Through song, prayer and discernment, the group generated potential areas for strategic initiatives. The Summit output was the key input used by the FORWARD team for final discernment in developing the Strategic Initiatives.

Phase 3 - Shaping the Future: Following the retreat and over the Spring of 2018, the FORWARD team studied the information gathered and entered an intense period of prayer and discernment. The group was aided by advisory support from Susan Beaumont. From this effort, the group developed the Strategic Initiatives and prepared a report for review with Compass. Based on Compass's input and guidance, the final report was developed for review and approval by the Administrative Council.

Phase 4 - Implementation: Upon Administrative Council approval, Innovation Teams will be established to develop the three-to-five-year plan to implement each Strategic Initiative. This work will be consolidated into an overall Strategic Plan for Birmingham and Berkley First United Methodist Church. The development of Innovation Teams will be done in a manner that includes consideration of how existing committees and ministry areas will function to implement the strategic initiatives. The Administrative Council will have responsibility for monitoring and supporting the plan's implementation.

Purpose and Core Values

In the fall of 2015, Birmingham and Berkley First articulated core values. The congregation's purpose statement and core values are the foundation out of which the church does ministry. In our prayer, data review and research, and overall discernment process, our purpose and core values guided the FORWARD leadership team. Recognizing these statements as both descriptive and aspirational, we seek to build on them in an ever-improving process of review and development.

Through our process, we heard a need to add points of emphasis to our purpose. This need is addressed below.



OUR PURPOSE: To gather, nurture and equip disciples of Jesus Christ for ministry and mission in the world.

New points of emphasis:

- Gathering disciples of Jesus Christ involves intentional evangelism. We recognize that we live in a post-Christendom society (one attribute of such a society is that church attendance and membership is no longer a societal expectation) and that gathering disciples through intentional invitation and outreach is a ministry that belongs to us all.
- Nurturing and equipping disciples require intentional paths of discipleship (see below, Strategic Initiative 1A)

CORE VALUES:

Welcome All

- We have an invitational spirit. We open our hearts, minds and doors to all with warmth and sincerity. We seek diversity, respect variety in experience, and promote independence of thought.
- *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28*
- *Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:7*

Put Love Into Action

- We are deeply committed to helping those in need locally, nationally and globally. We serve others in the name of Christ through generous sharing of who we are and what we have.
- *For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* Galatians 5:14
- *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.* Matthew 25:35

Honor God Through Excellence

- We proclaim the presence and power of God through worship, music and programs that inspire, enlighten and transform. Our wealth of resources, talents and skills are given humbly in God's service.
- *From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.* Luke 12:48
- *Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce.* Proverbs 3:9

Embrace Bold Vision

- We have the courage to act on God's leading. We welcome new challenges which cause us to stretch and grow.
- *Where there is no vision, the people perish.* Proverbs 29:18
- *Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.* I Corinthians 16:13

Encourage Lifelong Spiritual Growth

- We provide many avenues for spiritual formation for all ages through practical application of scripture and wisdom for daily living. We invest in our children and youth, as they are our future.
- *Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.* Proverbs 22:6
- *Get wisdom; get insight: do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.* Proverbs 4:5

Support One Another

- We nurture genuine, caring relationships within our faith community. We respond with love to one another's needs.
- *...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...* Ephesians 4:2
- *So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.* Galatians 6:10

Strengths

The Strategic Initiatives fall within the broader context of our church life and ministry. To that end, we acknowledge our strengths and commit to preserving and further strengthening these areas. Birmingham and Berkley First is a church of many strengths and talents; those highlighted here are the result of input received via the Survey, Listening Circles, and Leadership Workshops with Staff and Members.

Children and Youth Programs

Our programming for children and youth is viewed as a strength of our congregation and provides a strong foundation that arises from our core value to “Encourage Lifelong Spiritual Growth.” We will continue to support these programs and encourage the expansion of programs to serve more children and families. Consistent with our core value of welcoming all, we will strive to develop programs that meet the needs of all children (including those with special needs) and all types of families and will look to ways in which children’s programming might support new initiatives around expanded adult ministries.

Missions

We are deeply committed to helping those in need locally, nationally and globally. Our commitment to missions is firmly grounded in our core value to “Put Love into Action.” We serve others in the name of Christ through a generous sharing of who we are and what we have. We will continue to build on the strength of our mission programs, including developing strong partnerships locally and internationally. We will also look at how we can increase points of entry for mission participation, recognizing that younger generations (20 and 30 year olds) tend to be more interested in engaging in tasks than organizing events.

Music Programs

Our music programs bear witness to our core value to “Honor God through Excellence.” We are committed to providing high quality music opportunities for children, youth and adults. We will continue to explore how to develop our worship music to meet the needs of our existing worshipping community as well as persons who may be new to worship and worship settings.

Looking Forward

“God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Genesis 1:31

Initiatives Grounded in the Fullness of God

As a congregation, we come from many places. Together, we affirm the goodness of God’s creation. Together, we seek to be a community living into the fullness of God and fully living out who God has called us to be in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, *“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34-35). Striving to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, together we seek to love and understand each other.

We open our hearts, our minds, and our doors to all with warmth and sincerity. We seek diversity, respect variety in experience, and promote independence of thought in our shared journey. We are committed to challenging in love all that divides and to offering to all people God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ.

In this time for us as a United Methodist congregation, we pray for the unity of the larger Church and express openness to diverse perspectives in matters of sexual and gender identity and expression. We affirm a way forward that strengthens and expands Christ’s mission in ways that value and enable the Church at large and our congregation to reach more people with the good news of Jesus Christ in a variety of contexts with faithfulness, humility, creativity, and generosity.

We celebrate the breadth of our diversity as a gift from God that empowers us to more accurately reflect the image of God in whom all human beings have been created. When we reflect the image of God, others discover their intrinsic worth as beloved children of God, created in God’s image.

This understanding of who God is, who we are, and who we are called to be, are all foundational to our strategic objectives. A commitment to love and understand each other in our similarities and differences flows from our experience of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. This commitment crosses generations and ages; it suggests that we have much to learn from each other in cross-generational programming and leadership development. Moreover, this commitment crosses and informs the more specific objectives we now articulate.

A God of Relationships

God is a God of relationships, as demonstrated in the relationship of the Holy Trinity. In the Trinity we see a harmonious set of relationships. The relationships are distinct and yet one; God is love and love is lived out in relationship.

Strategic Initiative #1: Growing in Relationship with God through Discipling Ministries

We affirm the importance of defining and developing paths for discipleship, particularly as we reach out to those new to the Christian faith. Regardless of where people are on their journey with Christ, we will offer a variety of discipling opportunities that support spiritual growth, faith development, and fellowship. Regularly occurring points of entry into such experiences will be a part of a comprehensive and transparent plan for adult discipling ministries; opportunities will be varied in site, location and setting as well as in format and content.

Strategic Initiative #2: Building Relationships with those in their 20s and 30s

As we seek to include all in our celebration of God's fullness, we recognize that the inclusion of persons in their 20s and 30s requires a specific focus. We will create opportunities that allow persons in their 20s and 30s to develop authentic relationships with God and each other. We will reduce and remove barriers and create new pathways for worship, discipleship, and fellowship specifically focused on the needs and preferences of those in their 20s and 30s.

Strategic Initiative #3: Extending Relationships through Multi-Site Ministry

As we seek to grow in relationship with God and to grow in relationship with each other in ways that celebrate the fullness of God, we continue to affirm multi-site ministry as a strategy towards these ends. We recognize that multi-site ministry may take on many different forms and that a third site (or fourth site, or...) may be very different than our first or second site. Multi-site ministry is a strategy for growing in relationship with God and with each other beyond the limits of our immediate geography and demographics. Multi-site ministry as an initiative reflects our commitment to a fuller embrace of the image of God that the world may be transformed.