



# Expanding Horizons

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH • MADISON, WI  
www.firstbaptistmadison.org

Presentation to FBC Leadership Council

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## Why We're Here

The Expanding Horizons Task Force grew out of the 2006-07 Leadership Council effort to identify significant issues and opportunities facing First Baptist. It has sought to address the following key issue/opportunity:

**What might First Baptist do to attract more young adults and families (roughly the 25–40 age group) to participate in the worship, life, and ministries of this congregation?**

## How We Worked

In the spring of 2007, the Leadership Council sponsored a series of well-attended Sunday morning discussion sessions focused on this question. A number of ideas were discussed and a group of individuals responded to moderator Loree Davies' invitation to continue to explore this subject. Thus began the Expanding Horizons Task Force.

The task force met five times during the summer and fall of 2007. We began with an information gathering phase in which some of us visited a number of area churches that have been experiencing growth in this age group. We also invited several individuals to attend First Baptist Sunday morning worship and provide their impressions. Other task force members explored studies and written materials on church growth.

In subsequent sessions task force members considered various aspects of the life and ministry of First Baptist to try to identify how we might attract more young adults and families.

## What We Learned from Studies of Growing Churches

Key points from *Facts on Growth*, a survey in 2005 of 884 congregations by Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research. This study offers many interesting insights into factors present in growing congregations and missing from those that are declining or have stagnant growth. A summary of this survey was previously sent to the Leadership Council and shared with the congregation through a Visitor article.

- Congregations in newer suburbs are most likely to grow; however, downtown and central city locations are the second best area for growth.
- Congregations with a healthy mix of ages are more likely to grow. Those with more than 40% of participants over 60 are very unlikely to grow.
- Congregations with more racial diversity (defined in the report as “two or more racial/ethnic groups”) are more likely to grow.
- Congregations with many men are more likely to grow. A higher proportion of women congregants is associated with decline.
- Congregations with a clear sense of purpose are more likely to grow.
- Congregations that say they are willing to change to meet new challenges tend to grow. Congregations that are ambivalent about change are unlikely to grow.
- Congregations that have experienced major conflict are likely to decline. (This was the single strongest correlate of congregation growth!)
- The more worship services a congregation holds, the more likely they are to have grown, though it's unclear which comes first – more services or growth.
- Congregations that describe their worship as “joyful” are more likely to experience substantial growth. The same does not hold true for those that describe their worship as “exciting.”
- Music matters. Most congregations that frequently use drums and/or electric guitars experienced substantial growth from 2000 to 2005.
- Congregations that involve children in worship are more likely to grow.
- Congregations that change the format or style of one of their worship services are more likely to grow.
- Having the desire to grow is not the same as having a plan to recruit new members. Congregations with a recruitment plan are far more likely to grow.
- Congregations with a strong website are more likely to grow.
- Congregations that sponsor an event or events to attract visitors are more likely to grow, particularly those that follow up with visitors through mail, phone calls, emails, personal visits, mailed materials, etc.
- Congregations with support groups are more likely to grow.

## What Generations X and Y May Be Seeking

Task force members were asked to consider what young families and adults are looking for that they might find in the life and ministries of First Baptist. Here are some points made in our discussions, observations, and readings on this question:

- A place where they can find spiritual growth and answers to their spiritual and faith questions
- A community of friends who share common interests and with whom they will enjoy socializing
- A place where they can find help in times of need
- Young families are looking for a place where their children will be valued and spiritually and socially nurtured
- Opportunities to participate in significant activities and ministries of the church
- A place where they can learn about and discuss spiritual issues without feeling shame about their lack of “knowledge” or expressions of doubt
- Recognition that persons in this age group are not homogeneous but have varied interests and motivations

## How We Can Better Market Ourselves

Task force members were asked to consider how could we most effectively reach members of the community who might find a church home at First Baptist. Here are our suggestions for your consideration:

- Our website is probably the most effective device for introducing First Baptist to younger adults. It needs to be well maintained with input from young adults and our youth on what information and message it should be conveying to young adults and families.
- We question whether the Yellow Pages ads are the best use of our limited advertising dollars. We suggest increased emphasis on advertising in neighborhood newsletters and other media that young adults are likely to read, listen to (radio), or watch (television).
- The word “Baptist” in the name of our church probably turns off many persons who have a very different image of Baptists than is the reality at First Baptist. We are aware that changing the name of our church would be controversial. However, we should explore options that would enable us to reflect our American Baptist heritage other than in our name.
- Our most powerful advertising instrument is our own members telling their work associates, friends, and neighbors about First Baptist and inviting them

to attend its functions. We can do more to encourage our members to do this and also provide events at First Baptist that are visitor friendly (e.g., concerts, social events, fun activities).

- Use exterior banners to attract attention and inform about what is happening inside First Baptist. Install glass doors on the Franklin Street entrance.
- Consider a more informative signboard (e.g., an electronic signboard that can be updated with FBC events and words of hope and wisdom from our pastors).
- Hire a marketing/advertising firm with experience helping churches to advise us on how we can best deliver the message we want to send to the community.
- Schedule activities with special appeal to young adults (concerts, social events, community picnics, Badger game day parking and tail gate party, alternative New Years Party) recognizing that many young adults may first respond in this way rather than to an invitation to attend worship services.
- Increased use of press releases to tell the community about events at FBC that will have appeal to visitors.

### How We Can Better Welcome Visitors

It has been observed that a visitor's first impressions will have a powerful influence on whether they will return to First Baptist. How can we make that first impression a positive one? Here are ideas and suggestions we feel are important:

- Provide an informal time of refreshments and socializing both before and after the Sunday morning service in which a special effort is made to identify and welcome visitors.
- Expand the Ramirez lounge so that it will be a more welcoming and effective gathering space.
- At least one of our pastors should be present in the gathering space following services to meet and welcome visitors.
- Have friendly "hosts" at each service who make a point of welcoming and introducing visitors. (They would need to be sensitive to the fact that some visitors do not wish to "stand out," while others are looking for expressions of welcome.)
- Include a special welcome to visitors and guests at the beginning of each service. Invite those who are comfortable doing so to introduce themselves. Encourage the congregation to greet visitors around them during "passing of the peace."
- Provide "gift packs" to our visitors (*a la* Door Creek Church) with information about the life of FBC as well as "neat stuff" (eg. Michaels custard coupons)

- Provide permanent nametags for members of the congregation (who wish to wear them) so that visitors and new members will be able to put names with faces. Offer paper nametags for visitors who wish to be thus identified. (Some will. Some won't.)
- Find a way to provide more parking spaces (purchase adjoining properties?). Provide several Sunday morning spaces near the church reserved for visitors.

### *How We Can Better Follow up with Our Visitors*

As we talked about how we can better reach out to visitors, we also realized we should be conscientious about ways to make sure they are heard, recognizing how we can learn from them. Here are ideas and suggestions we feel are important:

- Identify members who would make a follow up contact – perhaps inviting the visitor to lunch or coffee to get better acquainted and demonstrate that we care about them.
- Use follow-up contacts and questionnaires to obtain feedback information on how visitors learned about FBC, their first impressions of FBC, and what they are looking for in a church relationship. This feedback information should be systematically gathered and reviewed by pastors, the Board of Deacons, and the Leadership Council.

### *How We Can Make the Worship Experience More Appealing to this Group*

One of our unresolved issues is whether our existing Sunday morning worship service can and should be modified sufficiently to meet the expectations and needs of the young adult age group without causing significant negative reaction among other age groups. Concern has also been expressed that a separate, contemporary service might result in diminished Sunday morning attendance as well as affect the multi-generational character of our current service. However, we understand that some churches that provide “contemporary” worship find that some older members choose to attend these services.

- Consider an alternative, contemporary worship service that is designed by and for people in this age group. Hold it at a time that will be most attractive to this group (Friday or Saturday evening? Wednesday evening with a meal?)
- Continue to introduce more contemporary elements to our Sunday morning worship. For example, Taize worship elements such as the lighting of candles.
- Sermons that focus on spiritual and other issues that young adults and families are facing in their lives. (Recognizing that many of this age group are estranged from or have never had a significant church relationship and may not be very “church literate”.)

- Assure that children and youth have a significant role in every worship service.
- Use a permanent screen and high quality projection equipment to project words to songs, visual images, sermon points and other visual methods of enhancing and reinforcing elements of the service
- Open up the front of the sanctuary to enable more flexibility for worship activities

### How Our Music Ministry Matters

The task force recognized that the role of music in worship is of great significant in reaching young adults. Here are our suggestions:

- Incorporate more contemporary music into our current Sunday morning worship or special contemporary worship service
- Involve young adults more in the planning of music to be used in our worship services.
- Provide additional funding to enable FBC to provide more contemporary music and musicians in worship. More percussion and other instruments.
- Sponsor a series of contemporary musical events at FBC. Publicize these “concerts” to the community. Hold them on weekend nights with refreshments ---an evening-out atmosphere.
- Use a “music leader” with more emphasis on congregational singing and especially teaching new hymns. Use screen to project words to hymns.
- Less emphasis on selecting hymns that tie to sermon topic; more emphasis on hymns that are sing-able. Use piano more for hymns. Pitch songs so that they are easier to sing.

### How Our Youth Programming Matters

Our programming for children and youth is critical to attracting young families who want to feel that their children are enjoying their participation in the life of FBC and are growing in their spiritual life and understanding.

- Nursery age children: Parents need to feel that their children are receiving high quality nursery care by adequate numbers of experienced care staff. They also need to be satisfied that they will be contacted if their presence is needed in the nursery. Feedback we receive suggests this area needs to be improved.
- Church School/ Christian Education: High quality classes and teachers/leaders are of great importance in attracting young families. Parents should be involved in planning and evaluating our Christian education activities.

Recruiting, preparing, and supporting our teaching staff is a challenging issue for which we wish we had better suggestions

- Children and Youth programming: Activities that youth find enjoyable and rewarding require staff/volunteers who relate well with youth and have sufficient time to devote to working with our children and youth. Some growing churches employ a part-time youth pastor/director. Should First Baptist consider such an investment?

### *How FBC Can Appeal in Other Ways to Young Adults and Families*

- Provide at least one adult education class each period that is oriented to the issues that Generation X and Y folks are seeking answers to, facilitated by people who can effectively relate to this age group. Publicize them to the community.
- Provide “basics of faith” classes or groups where people who lack knowledge of Christian faith and history can share their questions and doubts.
- Provide once a month social activities focused on families and young adults (may need to focus differently for families with children versus singles). Make it a “date night” atmosphere (child care, food, etc.).
- Provide special support groups that relate to issues faced by young adults (for example: a young singles group, young parents/mothers, single parents, gay and lesbian, divorced and facing divorce, alcohol and drug problems)
- Provide counseling services or linkage to counselors who have a Christian focus. Provide financial assistance when needed to obtain such counseling.
- Provide opportunities for service projects that incorporate fun/social elements (e.g., gathering afterwards for pizza)
- Provide intergenerational linkages for young adults and families who may be separated from their parents and grandparents.

### *Facility Implications of Task Force Recommendations*

- We need a more adequate gathering space adjacent to the sanctuary.
- More parking space is needed.
- Consider changing our address to Shepard Terrace to avoid the Franklin Avenue/Street confusion for visitors.
- Install a permanent screen and high quality projection equipment so that visuals can be used more extensively in the worship service.

## Staffing Implications of Task Force Recommendations

- Consider funding an additional pastoral staff position to enable more focused attention to attracting young adults and families to First Baptist. For example, we might allocate funding for a three-year period with the objective of significantly increasing the number of young adults and families. If successful, the increased membership would support continuing the position