

Strategic Ministry Plan Imagining and Pursuing God's Future



Aiken's First Baptist Church

Aiken, SC

**"Our mission is to carry out Jesus' great command through worshiping, nurturing, ministering, and witnessing in an inclusive environment."
-Mission Statement,
Aiken's First Baptist
Church**

There are those times in the life of a congregation wherein a long look at the trajectory of the church is needed. These are times when we collectively step back, reflecting on God's movement among us and in our community. These are times when we ask God for direction and guidance for the next season of life and ministry together. These are the times when a robust visioning and discernment process is needed.

In 2013, the Strategic Planning Committee of AFBC identified this time in the life of AFBC as such a time as this. After collaborating with Dr. Andrea and the church staff, a recommendation was proposed to the church for a visioning and discernment process. The church collectively endorsed this concept, entering into a season of discernment and visioning. Rev. Mark Tidsworth of Pinnacle Leadership Associates partnered with AFBC to facilitate this work. The following are the major activities AFBC engaged in during its visioning process.

Visioning Process

Vision Coordination Team Selection and Retreat – January 25, 2014

The church received input from the consultant on persons to invite to serve on the Vision Coordination Team, followed by inviting them to serve. This group gathered with the consultant for a retreat to begin the process. Orientation, role identification, prayer, team agreements, and learning the overall process were activities of this retreat. This team enjoyed a strong start as a result of this retreat.

Vision Coordination Team Members:

Diane Addis, Fred Andrea, Milledge Austin III, Jerry Beck, Amanda Crooks, Matt Epps, Sam Jordan, Rose Anne Pistole, Amy Stertz, and Victor Tice



Commissioning Service – Sunday Morning, February 2, 2014

On Sunday morning, February 2, 2014, the church was commissioned to enter a season of discernment and prayer. This commissioning was done in worship in order to dedicate the process to God. In doing so, the entire congregation was commissioned to open itself to God, collectively seeking God's guidance. The Vision Coordination Team, selected by the church, was also commissioned to carry out its role. Consultant Rev. Mark Tidsworth greeted the congregation during worship, inviting all to participate in the process, along with the Forty Days of Prayer.

Congregational Gathering – Sunday Afternoon, February 2, 2014

After worship, the congregation gathered for a meal, followed by an orientation to the visioning process. In addition, everyone was invited to engage in Forty Days of Prayer. Then people were placed in small groups in

order to respond to questions about the identity and character of AFBC. This gathering was a momentum building experience for participants, encouraging participation in the process.

Forty Days of Prayer – February 10 – March 21, 2014

Everyone who is a part of AFBC was invited and encouraged to participate in a focused season of prayer, using the Forty Days of Prayer Guide provided by Pinnacle Leadership Associates. Some people used the hard copy booklets, while others used the electronic versions provided by the church office. A scripture, devotional thought, and prayer suggestion were included for each day. The purpose of this praying was to prepare the church for spiritual discernment and visioning.

Learning Experience on Cultural Trends – Wednesday, February 26, 2014

Not only did the church prepare for visioning through concerted and focused praying, but also through learning. Consultant Mark Tidsworth facilitated a learning experience for the church, describing large-scale cultural trends influencing the way churches do church in the 21st century. Participants on a Wednesday evening engaged this learning and dialogue, raising their awareness about our ministry context.

Listening Groups – March 21-30, 2014

After intentionally praying for guidance and learning about our ministry context, the church engaged in Listening Groups. Everyone was invited to participate in a small group with the consultant, who asked for input on one's sense of God's calling. Nineteen groups were conducted, with 139 participants during this time period in March. Afterwards, the consultant provided a feedback session to the congregation, sharing the input from participants.

The discernment generated from the Listening Groups was extremely helpful in identifying God's calling for the church. We want to capture this input here, so that the church can continue to use it as it moves ahead.

First, participants were asked about the strengths of this church or the ongoing themes which seem to be signature themes for this church. The most frequent responses given, in descending order, were:

- Ministerial and lay leadership
- Strong caring community of faith
- Missions participation and education
- Music ministry
- Christian formation ministry
- Children's ministry
- Student ministry

Second, participants were asked about their discernment and visioning from recent months. They were asked this in several ways with the use of two different questions. The most frequent hopes, dreams, and visions included:

- Reaching young families, adults, teens, and children, as well as other unchurched persons
- Strengthening worship
- Increasing missions involvement, especially locally
- Invigorating spirituality
- Developing greater openness to change
- Strengthening the focus on making disciples of ourselves and others

Third, participants also gave input on what could get in the way and what could hold AFBC back from living out its mission more fully. Responses included:

- Remaining the same in the church's approach to worship
- Not shifting leadership roles, including more participants in leadership, or being unwilling to change
- The secular trends of our larger culture
- Resistance to change and unwillingness to become involved

Lastly, participants were invited to identify what their personal contribution to the church's progress might be. The diversity of answers prevents listing them here, but the salient theme of these responses was a desire to contribute at a higher level, according to one's gifts and graces.

Vision Coordination Team Discernment – May – December 2014

During this period, the Vision Coordination Team gathered fifteen times to further the discernment of the church. Much prayer, discussion, debate, and work contributed to a draft of the Strategic Ministry Plan. The church staff was regularly informed of the team's work, with opportunity for input.

Presentations to the Deacons and Strategic Planning Committee – November 16 and December 14

An update on the process and progress of the VCT and an outline of the Strategic Ministry Plan were presented to the Deacons and Strategic Planning Committee, inviting their input and feedback.

A draft of the Strategic Ministry Plan was shared with the Deacons and Strategic Planning Committee, inviting their input and feedback and approval.

Presentation to the Congregation – January 11, 2015

After affirmation by the Vision Coordination Team, Strategic Planning Committee and Deacons, and the church staff, the Strategic Ministry Plan will be presented to the congregation. The setting for this presentation is over lunch, after worship that Sunday.

Affirmation and Commitment by the Congregation in the Context of Worship – January 25, 2015

Identity Clarification

Through the activities of this Visioning Process, much dialogue and discussion about the identity of AFBC took place. These included the congregational gatherings, listening groups, Vision Coordination Team activities, and much informal conversation. From this, the values of AFBC have grown more clear. In fact, these appear to be major values of this faith community. Identifying these values is valuable as AFBC defines itself more clearly for itself and its community.

Aiken's FBC values:

- Tradition – Conserving and strengthening what is best from our heritage as it relates to worship, Christian formation, and our communal life together.
- Christian Formation – Engaging in activities focused on advancing the spiritual journeys of people at all stages and ages in life. We value and encourage corporate small group experiences,

alongside individual spiritual growth opportunities.

- Theological Exploration – Pursuing a Christian faith worth having, full of intellectual integrity combined with spiritual sustenance – lived out in a Christian community worth belonging to.
- Welcoming/Inviting Community of Faith – Practicing intentional hospitality; welcoming seekers in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Missional Spirit – Practicing our faith by serving to meet real needs in this community and around the world.
- Caring Community of Faith – Caring for one another as Christ cares for each of us; building Christian community for all.
- Faithful and Free Baptists – Practicing the four Baptist freedoms of: Bible, Soul, Church, and Religious Freedom; and relating to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as our primary partner.

This list of values is not exhaustive, recognizing there are additional values in operation at AFBC. Simultaneously, these values are guiding the mission and ministry of FBC. The following initiatives are ways in which the Spirit appears to be leading AFBC to live out its identity.

Major Initiatives

Initiatives Summary

- ★ The Invigorating Worship Initiative
- ★ The Christian Journey Initiative
- ★ The Missions Challenge Initiative
- ★ The Reaching Out Initiative
- ★ The Communication Initiative
- ★ The Adaptive Church Initiative

Supporting Recommendations

- ★ Facilities
- ★ Stewardship

Initiatives Timeline

The Invigorating Worship Initiative

Jan 2015 – Dec 2015, Jan 2016 – Ongoing: Evaluation, Revision, Implementation

The Christian Journey Initiative

Jan 2015 – Dec 2015: Spiritual Gifts Initiative

Jan 2016-Dec 2016: Bible Study Small Groups

Jan 2015 – Ongoing: Coordinated Bible Study Curriculum for Small Groups

Jan 2015 – Ongoing: Newcomers Class Development and Implementation

The Missions Challenge

Jan 2015 – Dec 2015: Small Group Missional Challenge

Jan 2016 – Dec 2016: Personal Missional Challenge

Jan 2015 – Dec 2016: Celebrating and Advancing the Missions Challenge

The Reaching Out Initiative

Jan 2015 – Dec 2018: Actions 1-4 with annual evaluation points

The Communication Initiative

Jan 2015 – July 2015: Strategy Development

Aug 2015 – Dec 2015: Staffing and Implementation Planning, Including Budgeting

Jan 2016 – Dec 2018: Implementation and Evaluation

The Adaptive Church Initiative

Jan 2015 – Dec 2018

The Invigorating Worship Initiative

Purpose – To integrate AFBC’s worship heritage, along with newer creative worship elements, into enriching worship experiences

Leadership – A collaborative team of clergy and laity

Timing – One year (2015), followed by evaluation to continue movement and progress. Toward the end of this first year, the evaluation of progress will lead to what’s needed in the following year’s worship focus.

At Aiken’s First Baptist Church, tradition and Baptist heritage are important to us. This church is part of Aiken’s history. As we, the congregation, journey together as followers of Christ, we recognize that the time of worshipping together, as community, is essential to our identity and to our future. Our worship together must be meaningful, energetic, and relevant to all stages

of the Christian journey, combining our heritage with relevance.

Given the centrality of worship to our communal faith life, along with a call for worship invigoration from the Listening Groups, we recommend that AFBC engages in this **Invigorating Worship Initiative**.

- I. A team, comprised of clergy and laity, will be formed for the purpose of leading this Initiative for a one year period.
- II. This team's purpose will be to creatively implement the recommendations to follow, while also discovering additional ways to invigorate worship as the year progresses.
- III. Evaluation will occur periodically over one year, by clergy and lay leaders, with input from the congregation through various means (eg., direct feedback to this team, surveys, listening groups, etc.)

Recommendations for the team which leads this **Worship Initiative** are:

1. Music – using music of various styles, musical refrains as a part of prayer, a cappella verses of hymns, frequent use of children and youth, and sung call to worship to name a few innovations.
2. Visual Arts – using visuals, drama, liturgical movement.
3. Faith Story Sharing - lay leaders to share “why I am here” about life and the church.
4. Form - less formal language and occasional clear explanations of rituals, i.e., Communion, choice of hymns, and order of worship.

5. Relevance - mention of current events during sermon and prayer, i.e., serious concerns in daily life and the world.
6. Challenge - a clear charge for renewal and servanthood; inviting outward response by standing, coming forward, or otherwise making specific commitments.
7. Connecting – people after worship readily available to connect others with opportunities for mission and serving.
8. Thematic - an ongoing theme, with something to take home to exemplify and remind people/families of their relationship with God.
9. Worship Connectors – Using electronic and print media to preview, amplify, extend, and integrate worship themes, questions, concepts, and practices.
10. Using available designated funds to enrich music and worship.

The Christian Journey Initiative

Purpose – The Christian Journey Initiative is designed to engage the Christian disciples of AFBC in spiritual growth experiences, resulting in us living out our faith more fully and deeply in our daily lives.

Leadership – Discipleship Committee, Christian Education Council

Timing – January 2015 – December 2016

The Journey 2015 – Spiritual Gifts

What if? What if each of us could discover our gifts from God, resulting in an ability to clearly describe them to

ourselves? To that end, this Christian Journey Initiative is calling every AFBC disciple to engage a journey of discovery regarding one's spiritual gifts. We believe God gifts every disciple with abilities, talents, and qualities for contributing to God's kingdom. AFBC will provide opportunities for discovering one's spiritual gifts (classes, resources, etc.) while disciples actively pursue discovery of one's gifts. As our community of faith, we will need input from one another as one way our gifts are confirmed. During this year we will look for ways to share our discoveries, knowing this will serve as encouragement for one another.

The Journey 2016 – Bible Study Small Groups

What if? What if each of us participated in a Bible Study group focused on strengthening us as disciples of Jesus Christ? To that end, this Christian Journey Initiative is calling all AFBC disciples to participate in a Bible Study group or class during 2016. Currently existing classes, plus new groups, will focus their study on equipping, empowering, and strengthening Christian disciples for living out their faith in our community and world. We believe this will serve to develop disciples, strengthen our faith, raise up leaders, and increase involvement in the life of the church as well as service in God's kingdom.

Additional Components of the Christian Journey Initiative

- ★ AFBC will implement a coordinated Bible Study curriculum on Sunday mornings which uses the same scriptures and/or topics in each class. We believe this approach will provide opportunity for families, couples, and groups to continue the learning and Christian formation throughout their week. These same scriptures may be used

in worship, Wednesday evening Bible Studies, and other events and activities beyond Sunday morning Bible Study.

- ★ AFBC will implement a new Class for those who may be interested in AFBC and newcomers to AFBC. This short-term class is for the purpose of learning about the church, along with avenues for connection, participation, and service.

The Missions Challenge Initiative

Purpose – To extend our service to God through hands-on and supportive missional ministries.

Leadership – Missions Committee, Missions Council, Christian Education Council

Timing – January 2015 – December 2016

Serving God through missional ministries is part of the DNA of Aiken's FBC. A missions theme runs through the life of this church. Recognizing this strength, along with a desire to continue growth, we are recommending a new approach to doing missions through AFBC. This initiative involves two primary actions, challenging the church to step up its missional ministries, and, along the way, a third part that involves sharing stories of God's good work among and through AFBC.

The Missions Challenge 2015

We are challenging every small group in FBC to engage in a new ongoing hands-on missional ministry during the coming year. Bible Study classes, women's groups, men's groups, youth groups – all of these are small groups within the larger church. Though each already serves in various ways, we are challenging each to engage in an additional hands-on kind of missional ministry this

coming year. Again, imagine what God might do with a church who makes itself available to God in this way.

The Missions Challenge 2016

We are challenging every disciple at AFBC to engage in at least one personal missional ministry during the coming year. We recognize that many disciples from this congregation are already serving in various ways in our community. Now we are imagining the impact to the kingdom of God when all AFBC disciples engage in a personal ministry in our community. To that end, we are challenging each of us to step up and engage in an action, activity, or endeavor which meets needs and contributes to God's kingdom in our community. This is a call to a personal missional ministry of some kind which we do as individuals, rather than a ministry organized by the church. This ministry may take place in one's workplace, family, neighborhood, extended family, or anywhere else to where one is led. Some will simply continue serving in the name of Christ as he/she is already doing, yet with a greater sense of connection between one's faith and this service. Others will recognize God's call in this challenge, identifying a new way to serve. We are excited about how God's Spirit may move among us to inspire loving actions by the disciples of AFBC.

Celebrating And Advancing The Missions Challenge

We are inviting disciples to share their stories as they serve. Through short descriptions during worship, newsletters, emails, Wednesday evening sharing, and many other ways, we will learn how God is moving this church to be on mission in the world. We believe sharing our stories will encourage and inspire each of us to engage our missional challenges more robustly. The leadership team which will coordinate this initiative will provide support, identify some opportunities, and help disciples share how God moves in their lives as a result of these missional engagements.

The Reaching Out Initiative

Purpose – To minister to the needs of persons in the age ranges of 18-40, cultivating community and involving them in this faith community.

Leadership – A new team of laity and staff, including the Outreach Director

Timing – The next four years, beginning January 2015

Through this visioning process, the disciples of AFBC expressed much concern for the spiritual lives and well-being of those in this age range. We recognize the challenges of contemporary living, along with the stressors therein. At the same time, AFBC wants to reach out to people in this age range with the good news, cultivating a community and way of life which is life-giving. To that end, this initiative involves the following actions:

1. Begin a series of spiritual initiatives for post-college, singles, couples, and young families.
 - a. Continue the Sunday morning Bible Study class for post-college singles, couples, and young families.
 - b. Form a supper club for this group, which includes fellowship and worship.
 - c. Initiate a parents' night out, providing a fellowship opportunity for this group.
 - d. Identify and initiate missional ministries in our community which this group engages.
2. Form a team to explore initiating a college-focused event once a week or month.

- a. From this experience, move toward establishing a Bible Study class or common spiritual reading group for the college age group. With progress, missional ministries, fellowship events, and retreats can be developed.
3. A mentoring ministry be explored, which partners younger people with more mature disciples for the purpose of support, encouragement, and sharing. AFBC includes many persons beyond this age group who are mature in their discipleship and life experience. We recognize this is a great gift to God's church and want to create connectional opportunities and relationships between age groups.
4. We realize this recommendation describes next steps for AFBC in its ministry with these age groups. This visioning process is limited by its scope when it comes to identifying additional steps. Thus, we recommend that the leadership team for this initiative take on the challenge of creatively following the Spirit's leadership in this ministry. In other words, we believe that as the team begins its work, it will discover many ways in which to invest in this age group. We recommend that this team serves in an ongoing way, advancing this ministry as it unfolds from one step to the next.

The Communication Initiative

Purpose – To clearly and more effectively communicate with our community the identity, mission, and nature of First Baptist as a church.

Leadership – Establishing a Task Force, including representatives from the Communications Committee

Timing – January 2015 – December 2018

Aiken's First Baptist Church is distinct in many ways. Through this visioning process, we have grown more aware of the assets and gifts God has given to AFBC over time and our uniqueness as a Baptist Church in this community. The spirit of the Christian disciples who are this church, along with the values identified above, make for a fulfilling community of faith experience. We want to communicate this more effectively with our community, inviting others for whom this kind of church would strengthen their faith, to become involved.

To that end, the Communication Initiative recommendation is that:

1. A comprehensive publicity strategy involving multiple forms of communication be developed
2. Staffing for implementation identified (lay persons and staff persons)
3. This strategy involves a multi-year time period, with regular evaluation and refinement

The Adaptive Church Initiative

Purpose – Helping Aiken's FBC continue adapting to its changing context, becoming an even more faithful and effective church in this 21st century context

Leadership – Strategic Planning Committee, along with sub-groups as needed

Timing – Beginning January 2015; ongoing

Through the many activities of this visioning process, the Vision Coordination Team recognized the swiftly changing culture in which we find ourselves. Many changes have occurred in our culture in recent years.

Among them are

- Americans work many more hours each week than they did 30 years ago
- Americans sleep far less each night than they did 30 years ago
- Americans have far less “discretionary” time than in the recent past
- Americans have many more recreational activities available to individuals and families than they did in the past
- The place of church in society is shifting to a peripheral position, rather than a central position, in the life of many American communities (secularization)

These changes present significant challenges to us as a church in that

- The Church in North America is in a time of great transition and change, seeking to adjust to its changing 21st century context
- Many of our church structures and activities developed during a time when a previous cultural understanding of our community was in place
- We want to remain faithful to the gospel, while also being relevant to and interactive with our cultural context

What does this mean for Aiken’s FBC?

The recognition of such a shifting cultural landscape presents adaptive challenges to churches, ours included. Though the pace of change may be less swift in our area than some urban areas, we recognize major changes in our community context. While this visioning process is

resulting in initiatives which will help us live out the Gospel in our community context more fully, we also recognize the adaptive process continues. Given this, we are recommending that AFBC continue its adaptive process through this initiative.

Recommendation – That AFBC commission the Strategic Planning Committee to assist AFBC in its adaptation process for the purpose of living out its mission more fully as a 21st century church.

Specific parts of this recommendation are:

1. Identifying the Strategic Planning Committee as the team which will give leadership to the Adaptive Church Initiative. Rather than occasional planning, we recommend this Committee raise its activity level so that it can regularly and consistently engage the church in adaptation.
2. This Committee is tasked with helping the church remain faithful to the Gospel, while growing more relevant in its approach to ministry.
3. This Committee will lead (or facilitate others leading) the church in learning, exploration, and dialogue which results in spiritual discernment about its next adaptive steps.
4. This Committee will regularly interact with other church groups, the deacons, church staff, and congregation, continuing the momentum of this visioning process, resulting in ongoing adaptation to our community context.

Supporting Recommendations

Facilities

During the course of this Visioning Process, AFBC disciples described their location and facilities as assets for ministry. While already used at a high level, the church indicated a desire to use the facilities even more as a ministry tool in this community. During this process, the congregation, with leadership from the Properties Committee, Finance Committee, Music Council, and Audio Visual Work Team, voted to initiate several projects designed to upgrade and improve the facilities of AFBC. In particular, these facilities upgrades are focusing on the areas of the campus used for ministry to children and young families, as well as AFBC's worship space. These are areas for strengthening which were identified during the Listening Groups part of this visioning process.

We recognize that many of the initiatives in this Strategic Ministry Plan assume the availability of working and useful facilities. Therefore, we are not recommending a new initiative regarding facilities. Instead we are encouraging the church to support in every way the facilities upgrading which is underway. In addition, it's clear that a regular and ongoing part of ministry is maintaining and improving our church campus. May we partner together to fund, manage, and use these facilities to extend God's kingdom in our community.

Stewardship

Through this visioning process, the need for ongoing growth in stewardship and giving practices of AFBC disciples became clear. Simultaneously, we realized that an initiative is underway to strengthen stewardship

growth in AFBC. Thus, we recommend that the church wholeheartedly support the work of the Generosity Group, who is leading this initiative. In order to fund the initiatives in this report and to do the ongoing work of the church, a strong financial base is necessary. May the church respond with gracious giving, reflecting God's gracious giving to us.

Continuing The Discernment

During this discerning and visioning time, there were additional areas of interest, which did not result in Major Initiatives. At the same time, we believe the learning and insights regarding these areas are important, deserving further exploration. So, we want to identify them here, suggesting that the church take note of these and address them as they are pertinent to forward movement.

The Listening Groups and other conversations highlighted the importance of how the pastoral and church staff function through AFBC. The following are some insights gained, which may need further exploration.

- AFBC enjoys sufficient and competent staff persons for a church its size to function effectively
- AFBC tends toward relying on staff persons to coordinate and manage many aspects of church life
- Laity at AFBC express an interest in the opportunity to lead and coordinate at a higher level
- Staff at AFBC express an interest in more freedom to engage persons and organizations beyond the walls of the church

Stewarding The Vision

Now that the church has applied itself prayerfully and diligently to the work of visioning, identifying hopes and dreams for the next season of its life...it is time to implement this Strategic Ministry Plan with its Major Initiatives.

Implementation of the vision is the work of the church in the foreseeable future. Like most activities and initiatives in church life, we need a group of people who are committed to making something happen.

Now is the opportunity to identify the “Stewards of the Vision,” those individuals and teams which will keep the vision before the church, encouraging its implementation. To this end, we recommend that the following teams in AFBC be responsible for publicizing the vision regularly, as well as providing implementation, support, and accountability for the church.

- Strategic Planning Committee
- Deacons
- Pastor and Church Staff

We encourage these teams to identify clear actions and processes for implementation and keeping the vision fresh, visible, and actionable.

Summary And Commission

AFBC has applied itself to the work of discernment through visioning. Major Initiatives are identified and affirmed. Now comes the implementation of this vision.

We believe God has been involved in this process. We believe God has gifted AFBC with great opportunities and gifts for ministry. We believe AFBC is ready to move

ahead in faith, endeavoring to live out its mission statement ever more fully.

May we be God's people for this time. May we be faithful and effective in living out God's call. May we implement and advance this Strategic Ministry Plan, turning dreams into action, by God's grace and power.

Respectfully Submitted,

Vision Coordination Team

Aiken's First Baptist Church

January 11, 2015