



BRIDGES TASK FORCE REPORT

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF EL PASO
MAY 8, 2019

The Bridges Task Force was charged with providing direction to First Baptist Church of El Paso to enable us to fulfill the vision of “connecting people with the love and life of Jesus Christ.” This vision defines who we are and what we want to be.

As a Task Force, our key tasks were to:

- Work from a firm understanding of who we are—our DNA.
- Establish a working knowledge of our community, including demographic data, forecasts for population gains/losses, etc.
- Identify areas into which we might focus our resources in building bridges.
- Recommend a course of action that is limited in scope but strategic in focus.
- Recommend strategies for internal structural adjustments, as necessary to ensure maximum effectiveness and long-term resourcing.
- Provide opportunities for the church members to provide input and to be heard throughout the process.
- Communicate regularly with the church regarding the process and progress of the Task Force.

This Report reflects the culmination of our work. It is laid out in three sections. The first section addresses who we are as a church and the community we have been called to serve—we refer to this as our “current state.” The next section sets forth our mission statement or what we want to do—we refer to this as our “end state.” The final section identifies four areas—or what we have referred to as “lines of effort”—that deserve attention to move us from our current state to our desired state. The identified lines of effort are education/discipleship, people focus, communication, and church structure.

The Task Force believes this Report is in line with God’s will and there is sound scriptural basis for all our recommendations. It is important to note the Task Force has not concluded that FBC is failing in any area where change is recommended. Instead, we believe the information and feedback we received during the churchwide survey and town hall meeting clearly indicate our members believe there is room for improvement in the four identified lines of effort.

CURRENT STATE

Our Church

FBC is a healthy congregation, particularly in comparison to many downtown churches. From 2009 to 2018, average worship service attendance increased 32.9 percent, from 552 to 734. During that same period, average Sunday School attendance increased 22 percent, from 465 to 569. While there has been growth over that nine year period, the last three years tell a slightly different story, with average worship service attendance being down nine percent from its 2015 high and Sunday School attendance remaining flat.

The Task Force believes the short-term contraction in worship service attendance from 2015 to 2018 is attributable to three factors. First, the departure of David Lowrie and ensuing interim period. Second, a growing portion of our membership being made up of transitory El Paso residents, such as military families. Third, many of our long-time members have either passed away or have relocated to other cities to be closer to their children.

Financially, FBC is healthy. Collections have increased on average 2.2 percent per year over the past five years, almost reaching three million dollars in 2018. Missions participation, both at home and abroad, is likewise strong, averaging almost 1,500 days of participation per year over the last three years. This is the highest level of missions participation in more than 15 years.

FBC attracts members from across the region, with 44 percent residing in west El Paso, 20 percent residing in northeast El Paso, 18 percent residing in central El Paso, 15 percent residing in east El Paso, and four percent residing in New Mexico.

In addition to our regional diversity, FBC is becoming younger. The average membership age at FBC is 53, down from 57 just ten years ago. During the last three years, FBC has gained 195 new members, 43 percent of whom are under 40 and 58 percent of whom are under 50.

Doctrinally speaking, FBC is also healthy. In 2016, the Pastor Search Committee conducted a survey. Results revealed over 97 percent of the congregation affirmed the Bible is God's inerrant word, and over 98 percent proclaimed that Jesus lived a perfect life and provides the only means of salvation. Our congregation also affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, church leaders and staff believe we should take steps to move FBC to a higher level of ministry—particularly in the area of discipleship and evangelism.

Our World

Today, those who identify as Christians represent 31.4 percent of the world's population (or 2.2 billion Christians), Muslims represent 23.2 percent of that population (or 1.6 billion Muslims), and those who are unaffiliated with any religion (sometimes referred to as "unchurched") represent 16 percent of the world's population (or 0.6 billion unchurched). There is, however, a concerning trend: Islam is growing currently at twice

the rate of Christianity. If the current growth trends continue, researchers project that by 2050 there will be 2.9 billion Christians, 2.8 billion Muslims, and 0.7 billion unchurched.

Our Nation

While Christianity is growing slowly worldwide, the picture is different in the U.S., as we now live in what many refer to as a post-Christian society. In fact, between 2007 and 2014, the number of Americans who professed to be Christians dropped five percent. Perhaps the most significant trend, however, is the rapid growth in unchurched. From 2007 to 2014, the number of unchurched—those professing no religious faith—increased by 52 percent. While this news is troubling, evangelical Christian churches—of which, Baptists comprise the largest portion—defied the trend by increasing their membership four percent during that time period.

Our Region

FBC is in the heart of a binational metropolitan area of almost three million people. With a median age of 32.7 years, El Paso is a younger community than Texas (median age of 34.9 years) and the nation (median age of 38.4 years). Moreover, 32.2 percent of the El Paso population is under the age of 21, compared to Texas (30.2%) and the nation (26.8%). In addition to being younger, El Paso is growing faster than the nation. Since 2000, the El Paso population has increased by 25 percent compared to a 16 percent growth rate for the nation. This same trend is expected to continue.

Spiritually, we have challenges before us. While more than 61 percent of our region's population (for this purpose, our region includes the El Paso-Las Cruces combined statistical area) believes the Bible contains accurate principles, 50 percent of our residents believe Jesus committed sins and 54 percent of our residents believe salvation is by works.

Spiritual trends in the region are also concerning. Three years ago, the Barna Group determined that 25 percent of the El Paso-Las Cruces residents held an unorthodox view of God. Today, that number stands at 33.7 percent. This compares to Barna's finding that 30 percent of Americans hold an unorthodox view of God. Moreover, the number of persons professing to be Christians in our region has declined four percent in the last three years, while those who identify as unchurched grew slightly.

The data also suggests our real challenge lies with El Paso's younger population. Specifically, Millennials (those persons who are between 18 and 32) comprise only seven percent of practicing Christians compared to 14 percent nationally. When Millennials and Generation X (those persons who are between 33 and 51) are combined, they comprise 70 percent of our unchurched population compared to 56 percent nationally.

Our Neighborhood

Since 2000, the neighborhood within a one-mile radius of FBC has experienced a precipitous drop in population, falling by 16 percent. Our neighborhood tends to have a higher median age, lower family income, and lower educational attainment than El Paso

as a whole. In addition, our neighborhood includes almost 1,200 widows and a higher concentration of single-parent households than local, state, and national norms. There are also an estimated 1,361 families living below the poverty level, 62 percent of which have children under the age of 18.

Call to Action

FBC is strategically located with roughly 830,000 people living within a 30-minute commute of our doors. Remarkably, by being located at 805 Montana we have more people who reside within a 30-minute commute to our building than any other major evangelical church in our region. Furthermore, FBC lies in the heart of a large, young and rapidly growing metro area that is confronted with significant spiritual challenges. Evangelical churches such as FBC must actively engage in the trenches—directly confronting those challenges.

END STATE PROPOSED MISSION

We are in the center of a mission field charged with building bridges to the lost and broken and with transforming lives by growing disciples who reach out and connect people to the love and life of Jesus by:

- being a house of prayer for all nations (Prayer);¹
- equipping disciples who engage in discipling others (Discipleship);²
- confidently sharing Christ at home and abroad (Evangelism/Missions);³
- intentionally connecting members from all walks of life (Relationships);⁴
- effectively teaching, preaching, and applying the Bible in a post-Christian era (Education);⁵
- organizing, promoting, and coordinating all activities, training, and ministry opportunities (Communication/Coordination); and⁶
- doing all to the glory of God (Excellence).⁷

¹ Isa. 56:7. ...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

² 2 Tim. 2:2. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

³ 2 Cor. 5:19b-20. ...He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

⁴ Gal. 3:28. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

⁵ Jos. 1:8. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 2 Tim. 3:16-17. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

⁶ Matt. 9:37-38. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

⁷ 1 Cor. 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

LINES OF EFFORT

The Task Force recommends that FBC pursue four lines of effort to achieve our desired end state. It is expected these efforts will be undertaken with prayerful consideration.

1. Education/Discipleship

The most critical mission of a New Testament church is the development of disciples who make disciples—that is, growing Christians to be like Jesus. Without trained disciples, we will not be able to evangelize—that is, share the love and hope of Jesus to lost and broken people. If we are not disciple making and evangelizing, we cease being an effective New Testament church.

The churchwide survey and town hall meeting affirmed that disciple making is valued by our membership, but it appears that only one-third of our body is putting disciple making into practice.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations with the view that all our members should be challenged to exhibit characteristics of a disciple. This requires every ministry and program within FBC to have a clear and unified vision as to what is necessary to develop disciples of Christ.

a. Define the desired characteristics of a mature disciple of Christ

The Task Force recommends that FBC develop a formal definition of what a mature disciple of Christ looks like by identifying specific traits we strive to instill in each member. The Task Force has identified core traits of a disciple. Specifically, FBC should seek to develop disciples who:

- engage in daily Bible study and prayer;
- apply biblical principles in every facet of their personal lives;
- exercise transparency with discretion and humility;
- demonstrate extraordinary love and care for others;
- possess a clear understanding of their unique talents and gifts;
- commit to be discipled and to disciple others;
- graciously share their faith with nonbelievers; and
- demonstrate integrity in all dealings with family, friends, neighbors, business associates, and enemies.

b. Establish a leadership structure for development of disciples within FBC

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees establish a leadership structure, such as a committee or team (the “**disciple leadership**”

group”), charged with the task of developing disciples. The Task Force also recommends that the disciple leadership group identify ministerial staff, volunteer leaders, or some combination of the two, who are uniquely gifted to make disciples. The Task Force further recommends we look beyond traditional approaches to staff organization, Sunday School, church training, and discipleship development. We believe this recommendation deserves supreme focus.

c. Develop a multi-faceted curriculum plan that seeks to establish core traits of discipleship within the membership of FBC

The Task Force recommends that once the disciple leadership group is in place, it formally define the core traits of an FBC disciple and begin developing a Bible-centric curriculum designed to grow disciples. In developing the curriculum, the disciple leadership group should avoid creating a one-size-fits-all approach. The plan should recognize the varying maturity levels, multicultural, multigenerational, and multilingual makeup of our congregation and develop curriculum that is appropriate for each identified group. The plan should address how we approach Sunday School and church training and the development or acquisition of tools that assist members with effectively mentoring other believers in a one-on-one setting. The Task Force affirms that a one-on-one approach was established by Christ, affirmed by the apostle Paul, and will be a necessary component of developing disciples within our congregation.

d. Communicate the discipleship plan.

The Task Force recommends that the discipleship leadership team use all means necessary to communicate and coordinate discipleship training opportunities to all church members in order to achieve maximum participation.

e. Assess and course correct

The Task Force recommends that the disciple leadership group regularly assess the discipleship plan and make course corrections as needed. The Task Force believes this will likely require the development of both quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure how effective we are at disciple making.

2. People Focus

The Task Force affirms that a core value of FBC is all people matter. Jesus first established this value in the way he dealt with non-believers, such as the Samaritan woman at the well, the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, as well as the way he invested in the lives of His own disciples. FBC must strive to exhibit the same love and concern for people that Christ exhibited.

We affirm that the model established by Christ continues to be valid today. We also affirm that the commandment to “witness and make disciples” is given to every believer. We understand involvement in people’s lives can be “messy”, but such involvement is essential for each of us to be considered a disciple of Christ.

The Task Force makes the following recommendations to connect our members.

a. Reach out to people from all walks of life, with the understanding that special attention must be placed on Millennials and post-Millennials

The Task Force affirms the importance of FBC continuing to reach out to and disciple persons of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, marital status, socioeconomic status, and other demographic characteristics. The Task Force believes, however, FBC must increase its efforts to reach Millennials and post-Millennials—that is, people 32 years of age and younger.

Research indicates Millennials and post-Millennials share the following characteristics:

- They tend to reject traditional notions of church and religion, and therefore do not see church membership or corporate worship as desirable or necessary.
- They have a greater tendency to adopt unorthodox views of God, as opposed to one God who is the designer and creator of the universe.
- They display a greater tendency towards believing that all religions have equal validity.
- They are more likely to see the Bible as no longer relevant.

El Paso is a comparatively young city. There are almost 218,000 Millennials (those persons who are between 18 and 32). In addition, there are 234,000 post-Millennials (those persons who are younger than 18), of which 102,000 are ten to 17 years old and 132,000 are nine or younger.

FBC must be adept at reaching these groups with clear messaging and the creation of community, providing a safe, nurturing, relational yet challenging environment that in no way waters down the truth of the Gospel. To effectively reach these groups, both inside and outside the church, we must also be adept at leveraging all forms of social media. Research indicates these groups respond well to older mentors in one-on-one relationships; therefore, the Task Force recommends that FBC add this type of mentorship arrangement to reach these young people.

b. Promote strong relationships among all demographic groups within the church

The churchwide survey revealed that members who have attended FBC for more than 20 years tend to have the deepest personal friendships within the church. The Task Force recommends we be intentional about promoting relationships within the church that span age groups, ethnic backgrounds, primary language, and other identifiers. We believe there are at least two potential approaches which merit consideration. Both of the following approaches were recommended by church members during the Task Force’s information gathering phase:

i. Small Groups

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees establish a leadership structure, such as a committee or team (the “**small group leadership team**”), charged with the task of developing, coordinating, implementing, and monitoring small groups that meet on a regular basis with the principal goals of (1) achieving greater integration and unity among church members, and (2) developing disciples.

The Task Force further recommends that the small group leadership team identify ministerial staff, volunteer leaders, or some combination of the two, who are uniquely gifted in this area. The small group setting should be centered around fellowship, building strong bonds, praying, offering support and encouragement, and Bible study. The small group leadership team should also consider such things as meeting frequency (weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.) and group composition, ensuring diversity across ages, backgrounds, and demographic characteristics. The Task Force recognizes that relationships develop organically and cannot be contrived.

ii. Occasionally combine Sunday School classes

The Task Force recommends that FBC plan specific dates throughout the year (perhaps bimonthly or quarterly) in which Sunday School classes are combined from distinct ages and/or demographic groups. We believe this can help spark the creation of intergenerational and intercultural relationships that will benefit the church. This recommendation will require close coordination between staff and volunteers in order to achieve successful implementation.

c. More integrated events

The Task Force recommends the planning of occasional combined services and fellowship events between all groups (English, Spanish, Chinese, and CWJC) that comprise or once comprised FBC.

d. Assess and course correct

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees, either itself or through its delegee, regularly assess the effectiveness of bringing the body together and make course corrections as needed. The Task Force believes this will likely require the development of both quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure how effective we are at connecting our members.

3. Communication

Effective communication is foundational to achieving our desired mission. The churchwide survey revealed that many of our members are unaware of the range of ministry opportunities and events within our church. An effective, integrated

communication plan should increase the number of volunteers who serve in missions, ministries, and other service opportunities. In addition, if we are going to be intentional about reaching younger members of our community, we must leverage up-to-date communication platforms and social media. Towards that end, the Task Force makes the following recommendations.

a. Establish a leadership structure to coordinate communications within FBC

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees establish a leadership structure, such as a committee or team (the “**communication leadership team**”), charged with the task of developing, coordinating, implementing, and monitoring a comprehensive communication platform and strategy for the sharing of information within the church. The Task Force further recommends that the communication leadership team identify ministerial staff, volunteer leaders, or some combination of the two, who are uniquely gifted in this area.

b. Develop a multi-faceted communication plan

FBC has a diverse mixture of technology awareness and utilization among its current membership. Accordingly, the communication leadership team must develop a multifaceted communication plan that leverages all available communication methodologies, including mail, social media, SMS/text messaging, email, and other platforms that may emerge from time to time.

f. Assess and course correct

The Task Force recommends that the communication leadership team regularly assess the effectiveness of its communication platform and strategy and make course corrections as needed. The Task Force believes this will likely require the development of both quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure how effective we are at keeping our members informed.

4. Church Structure

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees and the Personnel Committee jointly review and assess the committee and team structure and current staff organizational chart to determine whether they are organized to give us the best opportunity to achieve the desired mission. At present, we see one potential deficiency in the staff organizational chart, the absence of a full-time minister focused on discipleship development and education.

As we contemplate the future, the Task Force urges the church not be constrained by what we see in the current committee structure or staffing organizational chart. In the process of reviewing, assessing and, possibly, restructuring, however, the Task Force is unyielding in its view that FBC remain a church led by committees in concert with staff.

Against this background, the Task Force makes the following recommendations.

a. Consider changes to the staff organizational structure

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees and the Personnel Committee not be constrained by the current staff organization chart. The Task Force strongly believes that a modified staff organizational structure will likely be required in order to achieve the desired mission for our church. To effectively implement the Task Force's recommendations, the church may need to create new staff positions, modify existing job descriptions, and/or eliminate current staff positions.

b. Consider changes to the committee and team structure

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees and the Personnel Committee not be constrained by the current committee and team structure. The Task Force strongly believes a modified committee and team organizational structure will likely be required to achieve the desired mission for our church. To effectively implement the Task Force's recommendations, the church may need to create new committees or teams, modify existing committees or teams, and/or eliminate current committees or teams. Any such modifications should be closely aligned with any changes made to the staff organizational structure.

c. Consider changes to the budget and budget process

FBC has traditionally taken a very conservative approach to budgeting, which has most certainly contributed to the strong financial position that we enjoy today. Nevertheless, the Task Force recommends the Finance and Stewardship Committee and the Personnel Committee consider changes to the church budget and budgeting process required to effectively achieve the desired mission. Average worship attendance has slightly declined over the past five years—down about two percent—while average annual giving has been increasing two percent per year. From this, the Task Force urges FBC to invest in strategic areas that can lead to overall church growth and ultimately a commensurate increase in giving.

d. Consider schedule modifications

The Task Force recommends that the Committee on Committees establish a committee charged with reviewing, assessing, and, if appropriate, recommending changes to the Sunday morning schedule and general church calendaring. The review, assessment and contemplated changes, if any, must be coordinated closely with the ministerial staff.

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BRIDGES TASK FORCE**

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