

# *Report to Congregation from Vision Team*

Resurrection Sunday, 2016



*Inclusive, Inquisitive, Community Minded*

**University**  
Baptist Church

University Baptist Church  
3200 Arlington Loop  
Hattiesburg, MS 39401  
March 27, 2016

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### Next Steps

Wednesday, April 6: Congregational Discussion of Report

Sunday, April 10: Vote on Report in Morning Worship  
Celebration Dinner on the Grounds following Worship

## **Background**

Visioning for the future began for University Baptist Church with its birth as a new congregation near the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg in 1959. Its early mission was to reach out to students, staff and faculty of the university as well as its neighborhood. From the beginning its DNA has included an openness to diversity, alternative styles of worship, study and learning, and forward-thinking approaches to ministry and mission in its context and beyond.

In Spring of 2015 the pastor and deacons became engaged in conversation about the need for deep, forward thinking and planning by the congregation based on congregational participation in an open planning process. This was initially in response to analyses of the church's demographics and finances and spurred by the departure of numerous members concerned about changes in the direction of the congregation and accepting homosexual persons seeking membership in the church. Dr. Rusty Edwards, pastor, contacted Dr. William Wilson, president of the Center for Healthy Churches (CHC), in April 2015, about a consultation process led by a consultant from the Center.

A grant was secured from the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to assist the church with costs of exploration of a planning process. Dr. Larry L. McSwain was enlisted by Dr. Wilson to meet with the church and present the resources of the CHC to the congregation on June 4, 2015. A formal proposal was requested by the church's leadership and the proposal was accepted July 13, 2015.

## **Process**

A Vision Team (VT) was nominated to the congregation by the Nominating Committee to collect pertinent data, keep careful records of the input received from the congregation, filter suggestions received in a clear form for maximum communication, formulate draft suggestions, and develop a final report for presentation to the congregation. Larry McSwain met with the team for orientation on September 19, 2015. Members were Robin Wentworth, chair; John D. Alcorn; Wendy Carson; Clark Hicks; Joyce Holley; Sherry Laughlin; Shirley McCraw; Bethany Rigney; Rosemary Woullard; Rusty Edwards (ex officio) and Kathryn Spangler (ex officio).

A series of five congregational work sessions were conducted focused on the future and direction of the church. All findings were placed in a Sunday School room and website for members to review and add to at their leisure.

## Session One: The Identify of UBC

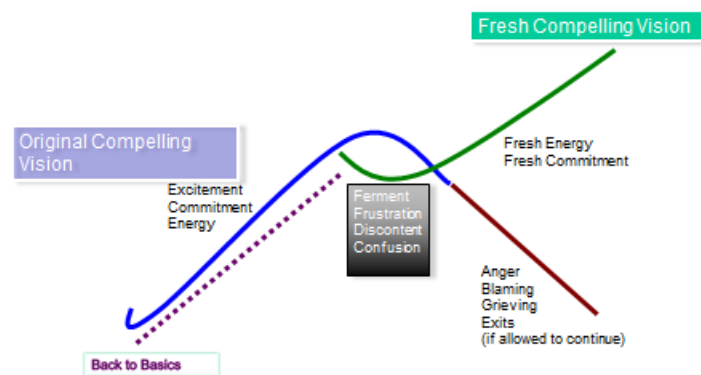
The first session addressed the heritage of the church. Each session followed a luncheon and small groups were formed around table groupings to ensure maximum discussion and input. An artistic timeline was created by the Vision Team (VT) and individuals identified the year in which they join UBC and summarized the most meaningful attraction of the church in the past and present.

Eleven tables provided the opportunity for a collective identification of the core values of UBC. Seventy seven values were identified by the table groups from which the VT summarized the most common suggestions into the following Core Values.

- **Inclusive, Welcoming, Open to All**
- **Community Minded, Missional, Service Oriented**
- **Inquisitive, Deep Thinking, Questioning**
- **Supportive and Loving**

Dr. McSwain presented a life cycle discussion typical of all congregations and organizations as they age. Each participant was asked to identify where UBC is on an S-Curve diagram.

### S-Curve of Progress



Approximately one-third of respondents chose the intersection of ferment, frustration, discontent, and confusion; one-third chose a point on the upward slope toward a fresh compelling vision, and one-third on the downward slope of anger, blaming, grieving and exits. *The challenge of this process was for a consensus to emerge that the congregation can move toward a fresh compelling vision!*

## Session Two: The Context for UBC

Dr. McSwain presented a rationale for the church to focus its energies on the five Biblical functions of the Church and suggested the first four were primary with the fifth providing the support for each of them to thrive. His categories were:

WORSHIP—the doxological function

LEARNING—the didactic function

HOSPITALITY—the relational quality of fellowship within the church

CONNECTING—the apostolic function of outreach to the world through evangelism, service to the neighbor and seeking justice for all.

OVERSEEING—the episcopal function of shepherding the church through workable finances, staff, facilities and organizations structures that encourage the implementation of the four primary ones.

Respondents were asked to rank these five functions in terms of importance to UBC:

- 1) Worship
- 2) Learning, Hospitality, and Connecting (these three being roughly equal)
- 3) Overseeing

The Vision Team presented an extensive collection of information on opportunities for mission within the Hattiesburg community. Presentations were made on the Arts, MidTown Development, reactions of visitors to UBC, Retirement Community, and Community Partnerships with Other Churches in proximity to UBC.

Each table engaged in a brainstorming conversation of ways the church might engage the local community more fully. Some forty discrete ideas were generated including strengthening current mission projects, initiating more cooperative relationships with community groups, beginning new outreach ministry (daycare, mother's day out, preschool, etc.), and seeking efforts to maintain a multi-generational approach.

Finally, a visual of How Our Church Grows was presented:

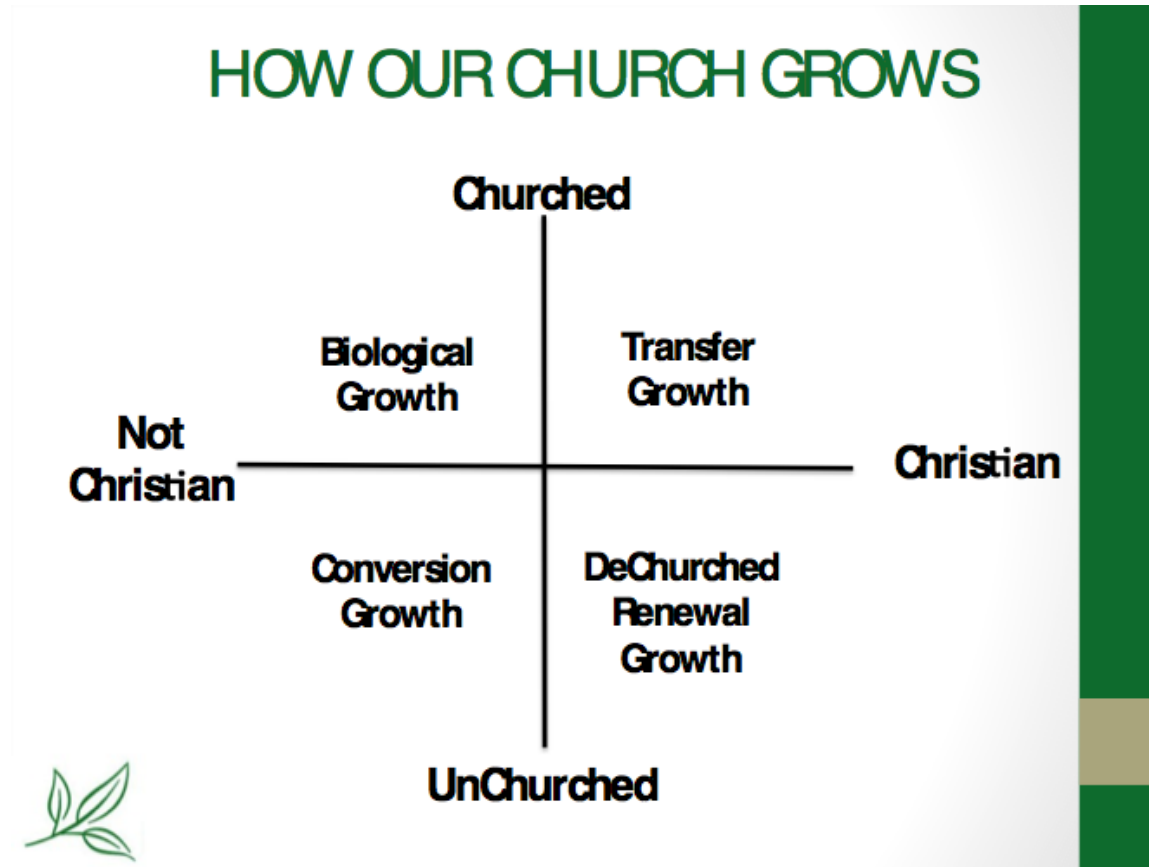


Table conversations addressed the strategy most appropriate for UBC. Renewal efforts for the DeChurched with creative learning opportunity and advertising; seeking transfer growth by attracting community newcomers and retirees; recognizing the need to attract young families for biological growth; and the challenges of conversion growth were the order in which responses were given.

### Session Three: Shaping Our Future Visions

Clarity of purpose is the first pre-requisite for a congregational dream. Dr. McSwain presented a copy of the current statement of purpose and affirmed it as reflective of the congregation's philosophy and practices.

*The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.*

Participants were organized into groups of three, tables of six, and clusters of sixteen. Each triplet was asked to develop a summary purpose statement of no more than nine words, and arrive at a consensus with each table and cluster. Four excellent summary statements were developed, all similar in language, each of which emphasized love, worship and ministry to all.

Understanding the metrics of measuring congregational effectiveness was a second focus of session three. The following key metrics of the congregation were presented by Dr. McSwain:

- Levels of Participation
- Facilities and Participation
- Staffing
- Finances

After considerable discussion around the tables the general consensus was the church needed to grow modestly in total participation to fully utilize its current facilities, staff, and enlarge its financial resources to accomplish new visions.

A presentation was also made of the religious ethos of Hattiesburg with a focus on statistical information of the composition of the religious groups in Forrest County. Following the third session, a congregant suggested that the county alone was limited in portraying the full picture of community. A revision was made to these data to match the helpful work of the VT in collecting population information for the Hattiesburg MSA, including Lamar and Perry County.

### Hattiesburg Population Growth: Projected at 5%

Year	Lamar Co.	Forrest Co.	Perry Co.	Hattiesburg MSA
2020*	60,909	79,747	12,253	152,909
2015	57,492	77,259	12,245	146,996
2010	55,658	74,934	12,250	142,842

\*Projected at current growth rates by ESRI

<http://www.theadp.com/economic-development/population-and-income>

Population (US Census Bureau, ESRI, 2015)

### Hattiesburg Religious Adherents

Year	Lamar Co.	Forrest Co.	Perry Co.	Hattiesburg MSA
2010	30,009	51,184	6,465	87,658
2000	17,156	54,247	7,377	78,780
SBC Change	+14,664	-8,772	+12	+5,904
Total Change	+12,853	-3063	-912	+8,878

Note: African American church data are under-represented in these samples due to inadequate records.

[http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/28/rcms2010\\_28035\\_county\\_name\\_2000\\_ON.asp](http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/28/rcms2010_28035_county_name_2000_ON.asp)

The final exercise of session three was an imaginative conversation about visions of the congregation for the year 2024. Each table in a cluster of four tables identified up to two visions in one of the following functional areas of the church: worship, learning, hospitality, and connecting to the community.

Following the third session, the VT concluded any successful movement toward plans that were specific and realistic for the resources of the church required depending on more discussion within the existing committee structures of the church. The leadership decided to add an additional congregational meeting to the process to be led by the VT to present a draft of vision statements and proposed delegating to existing or new committees and teams the development of specific, achievable and measurable initiatives for the future.



## Session Four: UBC Visioning Process

A fourth congregational meeting was conducted January 10, 2016. The following visions were presented by the Vision Team:

**The Vision of UBC** is to be a diverse congregation enhancing the participation of members and enlarging the participation of the university community, religiously unaffiliated, retirees and others who share its core values.

**The Worship Vision** of UBC is to broaden and expand our concept of worship while continuing our heritage of worship.

**The Learning Vision** of UBC is to offer diverse opportunities for study with innovative use of technology and small study groups focusing on thought provoking topics.

**The Hospitality Vision** of UBC is to welcome both visitors and members, to build relationships, and to love, support and care for one another.

**The Connection Vision** of UBC is to be neighbors to the Hattiesburg community and especially the religiously unaffiliated, retirees, and the university community and to bridge those communities through our core values.

The VT led the conversation to address a process for developing detailed recommendations that involved delegating individual suggestions to existing committees and teams who would follow their normal annual planning process to develop specific recommendations for action. A clear consensus emerged to leverage the regular church planning and budgeting for the remainder of January and February to develop specific recommendations.

Nine distinct teams of groups met to develop plans for implementing new or refined initiatives for the next 1-5 years. Each meeting was open to any interested church member and a total of some 140 participants were involved collectively in these gatherings. Multiple drafts of the proposals that emerged were drafted and shared with the congregation in preparation for a final congregational session. (See Appendix A for a copy of Action Team Ideas/Proposals)

## Session Five: Implementing a Visionary Plan

The final congregational meeting led by Center for Healthy Churches personnel was conducted March 6, 2016. Dr. McSwain, assisted by Rev. Jay Lynn, reviewed the progress of the congregation to date and guided discussion of each of the Action Team Ideas/Proposals.

Three proposals were identified for implementation in the Fall 2016, and each required the formation of an implementation group for success. Each of the remaining proposals will be implemented by existing church committees/councils on a timetable chosen by the respective group. More extensive discussion was provided for the three “Big Steps Needed” proposals.

### Proposal i.A. & ii.B. Form an Arts Academy

Participants in the Outreach & Communications Committee, Music Committee and College Committee proposed, “Form an Arts Academy utilizing relationships with USM arts students, particularly international music students, discovering ways we can support and encourage them” as well as “Publicize Arts Academy to Thames students as one aspect of a comprehensive publicity campaign about the Academy.

Chris Carson presented the proposal to the congregation with the recommendation of the formation of a children’s choir program with assistance from a USM student and potential for a community children’s choir as the first step, hopefully by Fall 2016.

### Proposal iv.A. Begin a Monthly Contemplative Worship Service

Participants in the Worship Committee proposed development of a plan for monthly Sunday evening worship services with a variety of formats to begin in Fall 2016.

Obra Quave presented a variety of options for a contemplative service and distinguished it from certain styles of contemporary music.

### Proposal iv.B. & v.A. Re-Develop Wednesday Evenings

Participants in the Worship Committee and Education Council proposed a revised format with increased variety of activities for Wednesday evening. Virginia Butler summarized an extensive list of options for consideration in accomplishing change, including plans for a meal each week.

Each table discussed each of these proposals separately addressing three questions:

What additional information do you need to decide about moving forward with this proposal?

What do you consider the key opportunities this proposal will provide for our church?

What problems do you anticipate in implementing this proposal?

Following discussion, each individual was given an opportunity to provide written feedback for the VT by completing a feedback form for each proposal. As the discussion continued, Jay Lynn tabulated the responses in graph form for presentation to the congregation.

The last exercise was a brief table discussion of each of the remaining 19 proposals from existing committees for future planning and implementation. A simple feedback form was completed by each willing participant and later tabulated into graphic form.

Once completed, Jay Lynn provided a helpful overview of the details in graph form of the feedback on the first three proposals. His presentation stimulated several comments from the group given the variety of responses (Appendix B is a Powerpoint presentation of the graphs for all proposals)

At the conclusion of the meeting there was an opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of the process with notes taken on tear sheets and provided to the VT. The general summary was the unifying outcome of the multiple conversations experienced during the consultation process far exceeded the significance of the good ideas and specific proposals for change that were identified. The warmth and openness of the congregation in addressing such a volume of significant ideas were testimony to that sentiment.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations From the Vision Team to the Congregation**

A. That UBC affirms the core values as summed up on page 2 of this report. Further, that the church body asks the Communications and Outreach Committee to incorporate these core values into our communications with the larger community.

B. That UBC affirms the vision statements found on page 6 of this report. Further, that committees, councils, and staff are encouraged to regularly refer to our vision statements as they go about their work.

C. That a working group be formed to begin work on a three-five year plan for an arts academy at UBC. Such a plan should allow UBC to take incremental steps as resources are available and begin by focusing on a children's choir program for the Fall of 2016. Plans for Fall 2016 and beginning steps toward the development of long term plans should be presented to the church on or before the regular July 2016 business meeting for discussion and approval.

Further, a sign-up to join a working group for the arts academy will be available, pending congregational approval of this proposal. Parents and others interested in offering leadership are encouraged to join the working group.

D. That the Worship Committee continue planning for a monthly contemplative service, beginning September 11, 2016. The Worship Committee is encouraged to recruit additional lay leadership as needed.

E. That a working group be formed to begin work on the development of Wednesday evening plans for Fall 2016 to include small group options alongside a more traditional prayer meeting.

Further, a sign-up to join a working group for Wednesday nights will be available, pending congregational approval of this proposal. Those interested in the development of new Wednesday night plans are encouraged to join the working group.

F. That the Building & Grounds Committee and Capital Improvements Committee continue work on plans to make our facilities accessible and welcoming to all people. Further, that these committees provide an information session about the proposal to develop a master plan at a called business meeting and allow for congregational discussion and approval before moving forward on this proposal.

G. That the remaining proposals be sent to committee chairs as outlined in the proposals (Appendix A) to continue the study and implementation of these proposals with the understanding that those proposals costing money outside regular budget expenses will need to be presented to the church for discussion and approval.

Further, that each committee provide an update on proposals by the July 2016 business meeting and at least quarterly thereafter until the proposal has been fully implemented.

H. That the deacons develop a plan for semi-annual church conferences structured in the format of our meetings with the CHC—lunch and discussion of important church business in small and large group formats. Such conferences will not replace business meetings, but will allow regular opportunity for discussion of important work the church is engaging, for updates on the implementation of proposals, and for dreaming about the future work of the congregation.