



From Your “Choosing Growth” Pastor...

Where to Next?

“There is significant research that says that not every church that intends to grow will grow. But is it also true that churches that don’t intend to grow won’t. Its hard work making room for more people...and if we feel that in our community there is a need for the religious values that the church represents, and that the tradition has something of real value to offer to those who are ready at any given moment to say ‘yes,’ it means that we must have a vocation to make room for more people.”

Alice Mann, The Alban Institute

Alice Mann was the trainer at the first Nehemiah Leadership Network annual conference I attended, held in 2003. As I anticipate attending my “graduation” conference January 31-February 2 (with a week of vacation tacked on, I’ll be back on February 10), I’m giving thanks for the wisdom of thoughtful folks like Alice Mann and I’m thinking ahead. Now that Nehemiah is coming to an end, where to next for First Baptist Church?

“The purpose of the First Baptist Church is to inspire trust in God and to develop disciples of Jesus Christ.” We say this together in our Covenant renewal each time we have Communion together. The inspiration for this purpose is Matthew 28:19-20a, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Our future is found in this Great Commission and Alice Mann’s admonition that we, as a Christian church, have “a vocation to make room for more people.”

Currently, our worship attendance ranges from 105 – 145, an average of 125 (except, of course, in the summer). Our total, “local” congregation is approximately 260 folks (I’m including non-members who consider us their spiritual home). So, roughly half of our active core is in worship on a given Sunday. We support a budget of nearly \$400,000, a remarkable achievement. In the last five years the ministry “sense” of this congregation has grown immensely; our record of accomplishments is long.

But, we are at a point of decision – enjoy who we have become for a time and then begin diminishing again or move to the next level. It feels safer and more comfortable to stay put; after all, things are going so well! But, we are compelled by the Great Commission and the age of our most financially able core to move to the next level.

You have selected me, and I have chosen you in a process we believe to be ordained by God. I expect to be with you for the bulk of the next decade, if you’ll have me. I see my job as preparing the church for two significant milestones, the selection of

my successor and the congregation's bicentennial in the year 2018 (I will be well into my retirement by then, but maybe you'll invite me back for one of the parties!)

So, I'm setting my sights on a 40% increase in worship attendance in the next five to seven years, to an average of 175 (which means total growth to approximately 350 local members). This is not an arbitrary number. It represents the "comfortable maximum" for our sanctuary; any larger on a regular basis and we begin to face the choice of adding worship services. This number also represents the "comfortable maximum" for our parking area. Beyond this number the wisdom of Yogi Berra comes in: "Nobody goes there anymore; it's too crowded."

In the next issue of The Messenger, I'll write a bit about the practical challenges and the changes in attitude that will be necessary for this goal to be reached in a meaningful way.

Pastor Ken