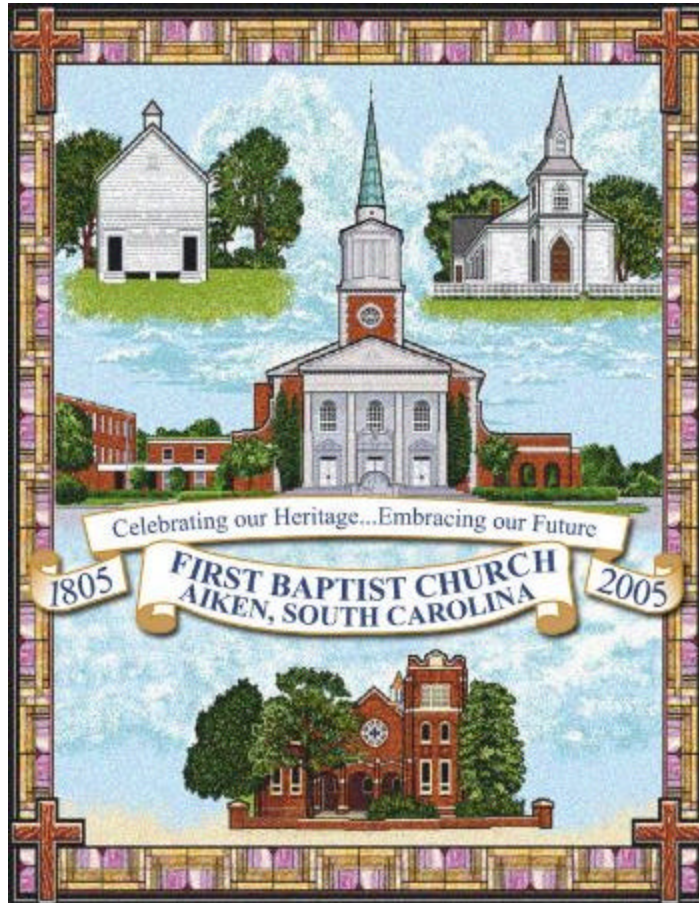


Onward and Upward:
Raising the Roof at
Aiken's First Baptist Church



Strategic Plan
Presented by the
Long Range Planning Committee
December 2005

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Onward and Upward:
Raising the Roof at Aiken's First Baptist Church
Strategic Plan
Presented by the Long Range Planning Committee

The Long Range Planning Committee presents for your consideration a strategic plan for Aiken's First Baptist Church.

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework that the church can use to plan specific tactics for individual ministries. Whatever an individual's role is in the church, it is requested that you review this plan and identify specific objectives that you can help accomplish by prayerful support and personal involvement.

This plan is the culmination of work undertaken over approximately two years. It began with a survey of the church membership. Through this survey the committee gained valuable insight into what ministries our members felt were important. Feedback was also received as to what ministries might be improved.

Following an analysis of the survey results, a series of focus groups was conducted. These focus groups were designed to include a wide range of church members of all ages. The outcome of the focus groups was that the committee gained valuable insight regarding a vision of the future for Aiken's First Baptist Church. The narrative that accompanies the objectives is a distillation of the feedback received.

During 2005, the Long Range Planning Committee has been working with survey and focus group results to develop this plan. Our first action was to develop a revised mission statement. From the mission statement, the committee worked on critical success factors, strategy statements, and objectives.

In September of 2005 as we approached the completion of the plan, the church was celebrating our bicentennial. Dr. Andrea's message included a dynamic challenge to the church about how we move forward into a new era of our history. The call was made to "raise the roof". Specifically, the call was made to raise the roof "of our SENSE OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION". The following section from Dr. Andrea's message is provided for your consideration:

"The potential of this church, in particular, is considerable. We have resources and opportunities—to do for and to do with—which could significantly advance the cause of Jesus Christ and further the work of God's Kingdom.

But if we are going to become what we can be, by the grace of God, some roofs are going to have to be raised. Some visions are going to have to be seen. Some callings are going to have to be heard. Some pledges are going to have to be made and kept. Some old attitudes are going to have to die. Some new perspectives are going to have to be born.

If we're going to become what we can be under God, caution must give way to dreaming. Keeping must yield to giving. The letter of the law must give way to the life of grace. And the settler spirit of conservation must give way to the pioneer spirit of expansion.

The complete text of Dr. Andrea's message is included with the plan.

As you review the strategic plan, you will find that Dr. Andrea's message is taken to heart. The plan calls for diligent review of many aspects of our church life and prayerful action. Success requires a willingness to change. God has a role for Aiken's First Baptist Church in His Church, and we should be doing our utmost to understand that role and fulfill it here in our community and beyond.

This plan is prayerfully presented in the hope that it can be an effective tool in RAISING THE ROOF at Aiken's First Baptist Church, launching us into a new era of ministry.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to carry out Jesus' great command by glorifying God through worshipping, nurturing people in Christian faith, fellowship and service; ministering to the spiritual and physical needs in the church and community; and effectively witnessing to God's saving love for all people, in an inclusive environment.

Critical Success Factors

1. A clear Church identity is established, including core beliefs, practices, and expectations of members. This identity is effectively communicated in all Church ministries.
2. Available resources are effectively and efficiently utilized. Appropriate committees review resource utilization, challenging current practices so that appropriate changes are made. Resource review should be broad in scope including financial resources, staff resources, lay resources, and facility resources.
3. Members (and regular attendees/congregants) are inspired to be meaningfully engaged in ministry.
4. Members are fulfilled and energized by the Spirit, as demonstrated by a spiritual growth orientation and increased attendance/participation/missional involvement.
5. The Church body demonstrates a willingness to change--to stop what is not working and try something new.

Strategy Statement

Aiken's First Baptist Church is challenged to embark on a period of growth. In order to achieve the desired growth, we must be open to adding new initiatives and approaches. Aspects of our ministry that are not growing in a meaningful way should be subject to either

CHANGE...so that current needs are being met

or

ELIMINATION...so that resources can be reallocated to growing ministries

There are multiple aspects to our growth initiative.

GROWTH IN SPIRIT as reflected in

- Reverent, relevant, dynamic worship
- Dynamic Bible study and Christian education opportunities
- Targeted small group ministries

GROWTH IN SERVICE as reflected in

- Members engaged in missions and ministry
- High priority on local missions
- Involvement with state/national/global missions through appropriate partnerships

GROWTH IN COMMUNITY AWARENESS as reflected in

- Joint ventures with other churches
- Alliances with other agencies that serve the common good
- Consistent media presence

GROWTH IN NUMBERS as reflected in

- High retention of current members by building on success
- Effective outreach to unchurched households and unsaved individuals
- Success in reducing median age of congregation

I. Glorifying God Through *Worshipping*

The primary purpose of worship at Aiken's First Baptist Church is to glorify God. Within that context, the worship services are perhaps the single most important element to long-term health of the FBC. The Sunday worship service can also be a critical element in reaching the unsaved.

Worship should support the objectives of the strategic plan, and all elements of the worship service should be subject to regular review.

Aiken's First Baptist Church is proud of our Baptist heritage, and it is critical that the worship experience reflect that heritage. This heritage should not, however, become a barrier to making changes in our worship that enable it to be more relevant to today's congregation/community. In a world of USA Today, Headline News, and the internet, adjustments in worship that are consistent with our heritage but reflect the more rapid pace of our culture could be beneficial to our overall ministry.

Aiken's First Baptist Church also has a unique role among Baptist churches in our community because of our location. Fulfilling our mission as a "downtown" church requires that we constantly reassess who we serve and how best to reach them. As the neighborhood changes, we should be responsive to it.

Since the Sunday worship service is a primary "public" face of FBC, it is important that this time be used to assure that both congregation and community understand the vision/identity/direction of FBC. Incorporating elements into the worship experience that provide clear insight into what we believe as a church body is critical to our long-term health. This should reflect a focus on what we are, not about what we are not. Since reaching "unchurched" households is the focus of the plan, denominational issues are likely to be less important in their consideration of a church home.

As with current practice, the worship experience should be of high quality in both content and programming. Appropriate focus on prayer and evangelism should continue.

Sunday worship service is usually how prospects first experience a church. This means that the worship service should be conducted in a fashion that results in reaching our target audience. This plan identifies a specific goal of reducing the median age of the congregation. In the absence of specific demographic data, judgment indicates that the most likely growth target includes households aged 30 plus. Embracing this target audience and implementing worship approaches that are consistent with their needs is critical to our long-term health.

We should not seek to “compete” with other area churches. God has a role for Aiken’s First Baptist Church in the community and our focus should be on fulfilling that role, not trying to copy successful ministries in other area churches.

The TV ministry is considered a positive community outreach. Incorporating this outreach into future planning is recommended.

In addition to corporate worship, church members should be encouraged to engage in personal devotion and small group worship.

The outcome desired is for worship at Aiken’s First Baptist to glorify God while energizing the congregation. Focus group feedback received during the preparation of this plan consistently included terms like “energy” and “excitement”. Worship approaches that are consistent with our heritage but reflect this desire for minor adjustments in our practices should receive due diligence. This energy will be contagious in the community, attracting new prospects to come learn who we are and what our unique role is in God’s Church.

OBJECTIVES

Objective #1 - Conduct a complete review of Sunday worship approach and implement changes that support achieving the objectives of the long-range plan.

This review should include but is not limited to:

- a. Schedule of services
- b. Music and other elements of the worship service
- c. Order of service
- d. Evaluation of current practices

It is recommended that this objective be accomplished through the creation of a special advisory group that reflects overall church body. The pastoral staff, Deacons, and lay leadership should be included in advisory panel.

An annual review of worship should be conducted to evaluate what is working and what is not.

While this objective is found here, it is acknowledged that worship plays a role in all aspects of our mission.

Leadership Responsibility: Associate Minister of Music/Long Range Planning Committee

Support Responsibility: Pastor

Objective #2 - Through the Sunday worship service, communicate a clear vision/identity for Aiken's First Baptist Church.

Leadership Responsibility: Pastoral staff

Objective #3 - Develop and implement a process that promotes small group worship experiences within the congregation. The process should be sustainable in order that groups can build relationships over time.

Leadership Responsibility: Discipleship Committee

SUCCESS MEASURES

1. Total attendance
2. Increased participation by target audience (30-50 year olds)
3. Community feedback (positive "buzz")

II. *Nurturing* People in Christian Faith

Nurturing is all about discovering, developing, growing, and in some cases, rediscovering an individual's spiritual center. As that spiritual center develops in various stages, it will lead to a spiritual maturity in various degrees. In most cases, spiritual immaturity exists among the unchurched and non-members, but in a surprising number of cases, it also exists in various degrees among members of the congregation, some of whom have been members for many years.

How does a church "nurture" members of the congregation so that they reach "spiritual maturity?" According to Rick Warren's "A Purpose Driven Church", instead of trying to grow a church with programs, the focus should be on growing people with a process and that process begins with the worship service.

The worship service can be the primary place where nurturing takes place because it is central to the life of the church. Most people have their first association with the church through the worship service and we as a church must offer them something they cannot get anywhere else. Existing members of the congregation are nourished and enriched, or not, in that one hour service. It has been said that the service must be "transparent," that is, people should be able to look through the words and symbols to the divine. There should be instances where silence or music invite the worshiper's own prayerful pondering. There should be moments when the worshiper can take in the words and "try them on". The service, through preaching the positive, life-changing Good News of Christ, the music, the singing, the prayers, and every aspect should be empowering or "nurturing."

Nurturing takes place through Christian fellowship. Baptism is a symbol of Christian fellowship because it visualizes a person's incorporation into the body of Christ. Socials, both on a Sunday School level and church-wide, are great opportunities for nurturing members and should be utilized as often as possible. Coffee hours after both services for guests are wonderful opportunities to meet and begin to know prospective new members. Luncheon engagements with prospects enlarge their opportunity to know members and learn answers to questions about the church. Small groups engaging in Bible study, prayer, testimonies, and discussions should be encouraged as a means of not only learning the Bible but also learning about each other and the concerns that others have.

Diversity can be a nurturing experience in that it provides the wholeness that is missed if members associate only with people "like us." It can be exciting and adds to life's beauty because it comes from love. God is revealed through the diverse community gathered.

Services of prayer and healing are a nurturing experience as our church discovered after the shootings at the Phelon plant, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and serious

individual illness. Such services bring the community together and demonstrate a caring attitude on behalf of First Baptist.

Care giving is one of the most important nurturing experiences. Cards signed by members of the congregation and sent to the hospitalized, home-bound and nursing home patients; hospital visitation, the deacon-family ministry; and support for the divorced and grieving are all examples of the care that members of the family of Christ should be giving to one another. I Peter 1:3: “He has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God’s own family.” Ephesians 2:19: “You are members of God’s very own family . . . and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian.”

We are nourished by prayer- whether in praying or learning more about prayer. It would be very useful for our members to have a structured class on prayer. It would be beneficial if there were instruction on the various elements of prayer, its use in the Bible and prayer services for particular events and people.

It is nurturing when we are using our God-given talents in service and ministry. We should continue and improve on the program of instruction on how members of the congregation identify gifts and how they can welcome and embrace them and put them to use for the glory of God. “First Gifts” was a very helpful exercise in our church in helping people to identify their gifts, but it was not used to its fullest advantage. The identification should be computerized so that the Nominating Committee may use the information obtained.

We are nurtured when we learn why we exist as a church and what is our purpose. There may be some who think that all it takes to grow a strong, vibrant, and growing church is organization, management, and marketing. There may be others who may think that we can become such a church by prayer alone. It would be important if new members (and existing members as well) take a class explaining the purpose of the church and the value and benefits of commitment. Additionally, church leaders (officers, Sunday School teachers, and staff) should have an annual “basic training” conference reenergizing their vision and sharpening their skills.

OBJECTIVES

Objective #1– Conduct a complete review of small group programs with a high priority focus on Sunday School. This review should include but is not limited to:

- a. Schedule of offerings
- b. Curriculum
- c. New opportunities

Determine the appropriate committee or committees to establish and coordinate activities that promote Christian fellowship on the Sunday School and church-wide levels. Activities should not be confined to the existing structure, but consideration should be given to the establishment of new groups for Bible study, prayer, testimonies, discussions, and fellowship.

Leadership Responsibility: Sunday School Council, Associate Minister of Education

Objective #2 - Evaluate current methods of care giving and determine new approaches and additional ways to make them more effective. Particular attention should be given to evaluating and improving the Deacon Family Ministry Program.

Leadership Responsibility: Deacon Chair and/or assignee, Pastor

Objective #3 - Continue and expand on methods to identify members' spiritual gifts and use this information in utilizing people for service.

Leadership Responsibility: Discipleship Committee, Associate Minister of Education
Support Responsibility: Nominating Committee

Objective #4 - Establish ongoing programs for all members to emphasize why we exist as a church and what is our purpose. Establish an annual seminar for church leaders and staff for the purpose of updating their Christian education and sharpening their skills.

Leadership Responsibility: Discipleship Committee, Associate Minister of Education

SUCCESS MEASURES

1. Increased number of small groups engaged in active Bible study and fellowship. High priority assessment on groups reaching target demographic (Households age 30-50)
2. New people in our congregation easily find a small group for nurturing and fellowship.
3. Multiple opportunities for fellowship, study, and prayer exist, both within and beyond the campus of the church. Prospective members are provided means of fellowship and inquiry.
4. Care giving at all levels is effective and those confined to the hospitals, nursing homes, and homes are cared for by appropriate means. All members are made to feel that they are a vital part of the congregation.
5. Ongoing programs are conducted to identify the talents of all members, and that information is computerized and made available to the Nominating Committee and others for use in calling on members for service, resulting in more effective service in various areas of responsibility.
6. Members attend ongoing programs that emphasize why we exist as a church and what is our purpose. Church leaders and staff receive annual training on recent developments in Christian education and methods of improving skills.

III. *Ministering* to the Spiritual and Physical Needs in the Church and Community

As a ministering church, First Baptist Church of Aiken should have an active membership that is involved and visible in missions in our community. Through outreach and service, we minister to the needs of people in our community. We want to minister in ways that fit with current trends so that we continue to attract youth and young families with children.

Just as Jesus Christ came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister..." the members of First Baptist Church should accept our responsibility to reach out in service to others and to each other. This applies both within the church family and outside our fellowship in our community and the world. It should be our goal to deepen authentic community within our church family and reach out to the local community outside the church. To this end, we should extend our influence in the local community and beyond through individual and group outreach projects.

First Baptist Church is currently involved in missions through the Hispanic Mission, Habitat for Humanity, Christian Womens Job Corps, Christ Central Missions, Community Care and Counseling Center, Operation Christmas Child, Salvation Army Soup Kitchen, Free Medical Clinic of Aiken County, ACTS, Toole Hill project, and Brothers and Sisters of Aiken County. Groups and individual members of the church have also traveled to the Wherry Project in Smyrna, Tennessee and to Nicaragua. A variety of mission groups (WMU, RA, GA, Mission Friends) also help to emphasize missions education, prayer support, and activity.

To represent Christ in our community, it is vital that our congregation be involved in ministry to one another and beyond the walls of the church. In addition to personal involvement by church members in community organizations, we recognize the importance of direct ministry and of continuing to get our congregation involved at all age levels and groupings - families, or Sunday School groups for instance.

OBJECTIVES

Objective #1 - Develop a plan to encourage each Sunday School class to undertake at least one mission project each year as a class. Resources and support for helping the class determine the best project for their class and the variety of projects available should be provided. Provide the Sunday School classes with different levels at which they should be involved with a goal of moving them up to a higher level of actual involvement over a 3-5 year period. For example, Level I could be committing as a class to pray for local and other mission effort. Level II could be financially supporting mission efforts by raising/collecting money as a class. Level III could be actually doing a hands-on mission project.

Leadership Responsibility: Missions Council
Support Responsibility: Sunday School Council, Missions Committee

Objective #2 - Continue to emphasize the importance and value of involvement in the variety of mission organizations within our church.

Leadership Responsibility: Pastoral staff, Missions Committee, Missions Council

Objective #3 - Continue to build upon the success of the Operation Christmas Child each fall as a church-wide, family-oriented mission project.

Leadership Responsibility: Missions Committee, Missions Council

Objective #4 - Expand involvement of church members in projects such as Habitat for Humanity, Christian Womens Job Corps, Salvation Army Soup Kitchen, Free Medical Clinic of Aiken County, ACTS, Toole Hill project, and Brothers and Sisters of Aiken County.

Leadership Responsibility: Missions Committee, Missions Council

Objective #5 - Continue to develop and expand on ministry to each other through the deacon ministry efforts, care groups within Sunday School, etc. to respond to the joys and difficulties that arise in life (marriage, new baby, illness, bereavement, divorce, etc.)

Leadership Responsibility: Deacons, Sunday School Council

Objective #6 - Explore ways to make church facilities available to meet local community needs in the area of missions and outreach.

Leadership Responsibility: Properties Committee
Support Responsibility-Pastoral Staff

SUCCESS MEASURES

1. Number of Sunday School classes actively involved in at least one mission project each year at various levels
2. Overall involvement of church members in church-sponsored mission projects such as Operation Christmas Child, Habitat, Toole Hill, etc.
3. Attendance and involvement in First Baptist Church Aiken mission organizations
4. Retention of current members through ministry efforts to meet their needs and through their more active involvement in ministry outside of the church walls
5. Community feedback

IV. Witnessing Effectively To God's Saving Love For All People

The disciples responded to the call of Jesus by following in his footsteps. We should also be responsive to that call by actively seeking out God's will in our lives and effectively witnessing to others.

Aiken's First Baptist Church has enjoyed a longstanding history and has responded to Jesus' call regarding the need to witness as described in the Acts of the Apostles where the risen Lord declares, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Members are encouraged to embrace this philosophy and tell others about their faith journey.

When we begin to focus on witnessing, we may have a perception that this is an activity involving door-to-door witnessing for Christ. From the moment we profess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we have the opportunity to bear out this call and live more fully for Christ. Witnessing is a lifelong commitment, a lifestyle, and an opportunity to tell others about Christ.

Although this section deals with witnessing effectively to God's saving love for all people, other sections of the Strategic Plan and mission statement are intricately interwoven and part of witnessing.

Witnessing includes, but is not limited to,

Internal opportunities such as:

- Parents Day Out
- Kindergarten
- Sunday School leadership
- Music ministry
- Committee member
- Sunday School outreach
- Deacon ministry

It also involves external opportunities such as:

- Working on a community project
- Witnessing to college students
- Wherry Project
- Inner city Day Camps (Chicago & Atlanta)
- Missions activities (Christ Central, Toole Project, Habitat for Humanity)
- Youth mission projects
- Operation Christmas Child

Global opportunities such as:

- Denominational funding
- Missionary funding
- Theological educational funding
- Funding special offerings
- State Mission Projects
- International mission trips

Aiken's First Baptist Church members are more inclined to be supportive of specific Mission opportunities. Developing a more personal and bolder approach to evangelism could represent a significant growth opportunity for our congregation.

OBJECTIVES

Objective # 1 - Create a sense of urgency among members of Aiken's First Baptist Church to witness effectively to God's saving love for all people, which includes unsaved individuals.

- a. Provide opportunities for members
- b. Raise awareness of church members
- c. Continue appropriate focus on reaching the lost and un-churched through Sunday worship.
- d. Encourage each Sunday School class and mission organization to undertake at least one mission project each year to help members develop their personal witness as well as the witness of the church.
- e. Provide programs on witnessing to help members develop their verbal and non-verbal witness.
- f. Provide tools for members to share their witness and the witness of the church via home visit, phone, email, neighborhood canvassing, etc.

Leadership Responsibility: Discipleship Committee

Support Responsibility: Sunday School Council, Missions Committee

Objective # 2 – Establish a “Witnessing Team” with the goal of creating a strategic plan that defines how First Baptist Church Aiken witnesses to the greater Aiken community, state, nation and world.

Leadership Responsibility: Associate Minister of Education

Objective # 3 - Encourage congregation members to deepen their Christian faith by being an effective witness and being able to share their faith through:

- a. strengthening evangelism activities in Aiken's First Baptist Church
- b. learning to share the gospel of Christ more boldly
- c. witnessing in the community, e.g., speaking up for Christ

- d. participating in church ministry activities
- e. actively witnessing through outreach involvement
- f. being an involved member of Aiken's First Baptist Church
- g. supporting missions activities
- h. finding and developing individuals' niches to be an effective witness for Christ
- i. become a role model as a lay person in the witnessing arena
- j. supporting ministry activities for individuals who cannot come to church
- k. providing daily Bible study literature

Leadership Responsibility: Witnessing Team

Support Responsibility: Outreach Leaders, Pastoral Staff, Discipleship Committee

Objective # 4 - Conduct a congregational survey following approval of the Strategic Plan, approximately 18 to 24 months after implementation of this plan. Evaluate the effectiveness of our witnessing elements of our church and develop priority action items that enhance our witnessing program.

Leadership Responsibility: Long Range Planning Committee, Associate Minister of Education

Success Measures

1. An observable increased involvement in ministry activities of our church by congregation.
2. A deeper sense of purpose for church members.
3. Members will be actively involved in outreach — identifying and contacting prospects.
4. Increase in membership attendance in Sunday School and Sunday morning worship services.

V. In an *Inclusive* Environment

With a strong emphasis in the belief that all people are children of God, First Baptist Church Aiken welcomes and encourages all people, to join fully with the members of the church in the worship of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

One of the defining features of Aiken's First Baptist Church is its commitment to welcoming and including individuals who wish to begin or continue their Christian journey. Inclusiveness means that all committed Christians will find opportunities for nurture, service, or leadership. Highlighting and promoting this value of our congregation is important given that too often the public perception of Baptist churches is formed by media reports surrounding peripheral issues.

Including or creating an inclusive environment for individuals is critical, and is currently successfully incorporated in many activities of the church. It is perhaps most visible in the Sunday morning worship service, where youth, women, and men of all ages have prominent roles.

Additional opportunities contributing to the creation of an inclusive environment are also reflected throughout other areas of the church:

- Leadership opportunities are available on councils, committees, the Deacon body, the pastoral staff
- Missions and community service projects in Aiken, other areas of South Carolina, out of state, and abroad
- Educational opportunities, including kindergarten, ministry internship program, conferences, workshops, and retreats

In addition to these opportunities for members, many individuals from other congregations and denominations have become active participants in the First Baptist family without officially joining. We have taken them under our wing and cared for their needs as well.

While it is critically important to nurture from within, we should also take a broader look and help create this same type of environment within the Aiken community.

OBJECTIVES

Objective #1 - Continue to promote and support Christian Education, Christian educational opportunities, missions and community service projects, and worship activities appropriate for all ages and genders.

Leadership Responsibility: Pastoral Staff

Support Responsibility: Sunday School Council

Objective #2 - Partner with local African American and Hispanic churches in creating stronger bonds between congregations, and to be able to become more aware of the needs of the unchurched and unsaved individuals within the downtown area, so we can collectively reach them.

Leadership Responsibility: Witnessing Team
Support Responsibility: Pastoral Staff

Objective #3 - Contact every member of the church to educate them about the opportunities (worship, education, missions, nurturing, community service, church service) and determine where they may be included in the coming year(s).

Leadership Responsibility: Deacons
Support Responsibility: Nominating Committee, Sunday School teachers/outreach directors

Objective #4 – Create and disseminate a brochure (or refine a current publication), which tells guests and current members who we are. It should highlight opportunities for involvement and provide an easy way to request (tear off sheet) additional information.

Leadership Responsibility: Communication Committee
Support Responsibility: Outreach directors, pastoral staff

Objective #5 – Determine the feasibility of establishing a formal “Watchcare” program for individuals who are active participants in our church life but will not leave their previous church and/or denominations. This should include consideration of how the gifts of these individuals may be used to a larger degree in our church. For example, under what conditions, if at all, should a “watchcare” member be a committee member and/or Sunday School teacher.

Leadership Responsibility: Deacons
Support Responsibility: Constitution and By-Laws Committee

Success Measures

1. Increased number of participants and/or quality of educational, mission, and worship activities as it relates to gender and age opportunities.
2. Increased interaction and participation with local African American and Hispanic churches in the downtown area.
3. Increased numbers of current members and others involved in church life.
4. Members and visitors have a better understanding of the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church Aiken.
5. Increased opportunities for congregants to contribute to the life of the church.

General Objectives

As a result of plan development, objectives were identified that did not align to a specific section of the plan. These objectives are included here.

Objective #1 - Review and revise church organizational structure to assure alignment with mission statement. The process should include review of committee structure. Where appropriate, objectives included in this plan should be incorporated into performance measures for staff members.

Leadership Responsibility: Personnel Committee/Constitution and By-Laws Committee

Objective #2 – Put resources in place to provide a specific focus on how to best utilize available technology in our ministries. First step is to establish a “Technology Team” with the objective of reviewing current technology and providing a long-range technology plan. While the “team” is working, establish a “Technology Committee” to be responsible for the ongoing leadership of technology needs for our church.

Leadership Responsibility: Communications Committee (Establish “team”)

Leadership Responsibility: Constitution and By-Laws Committee (Establish standing committee)

Objective #3 - Conduct a community survey in order to better define and reach the target audience.

Leadership Responsibility: Long Range Planning Committee

Onward and Upward

I Samuel 3:1-11

Out of a poverty-stricken environment in Philadelphia came a black woman who achieved the distinction of becoming the world's greatest contralto. Toscanini said a voice like that of Marian Anderson comes along once in a century.

When she visited in the home of composer Jean Sibelius one day, after much pleading, Marian Anderson agreed to sing for him. She sang and sang until Sibelius, profoundly moved by her music, exclaimed, "The roof of my home is too low for your voice."

The phrase "raising the roof" is one I have associated since childhood with boisterous enthusiasm or some other extreme emotional display. I remember a schoolteacher once telling our class that if we didn't settle down, she was going to call our parents to pay roof damages!

I learned then, and I have learned since, that children are especially adept at "raising roofs." But some adults are, too. I've been at basketball games where we all seemed to revert back to childhood, and the mass tantrums caused the rafters of the coliseum to quiver.

In the famous episode of God's call to Samuel (a story many of you have known since childhood), we have a beautiful expression of how dramatically the roof of life can be raised. In this experience, Samuel's perception of God, his perception of himself, and his perception of his world were drastically changed and were never again the same. God was indeed "to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle."

Of all the roofs that may need raising in our lives, I want to mention three because I believe these are at the heart of God's concern for us.

First of all, I believe that the roof of our KNOWLEDGE OF GOD needs to be raised.

One of the greatest sins of Christians, ironically, one to which we are most blind and one from which we feel most free, is the subtle sin of idolatry. Idolatry? But we don't have any idols! This simply and elegant Sanctuary is an almost barren room. We don't have graven images here. No idols in our lives, no golden calves here.

But we do have graven images. We have images engraved on our hearts and minds that do an injustice to God. You see, idolatry is making the infinite reality of God synonymous with some human, finite thing; and words and ideas are finite things.

If we come to the place where we equate the vast reality of God with some expression of God, or some concept of God, we're committing a kind of idolatry. This is easy for us to do. When we think we have God contained in some idea, or some doctrine, or some practice of the church, then we have put a low ceiling on life at a very critical point.

A part of what it means to be Christian is to understand that God simply cannot be expressed, fully expressed, in any human thought or words. While we do our best to understand, God is always beyond what we say or think or know. This is an important point! No matter how worthy my understanding may be, it does not begin to exhaust the reality of God.

As a child I had an understanding of God very appropriate to my life at the time. But I reached the place where my little head began to band against the low ceiling of my life at this point. I had to exchange that understanding of God for one that was more appropriate for me as I was growing older.

This happened time and time again for me. Sometimes it has happened painfully. There have been times when I saw some roof about to collapse over me, and I feared I could no longer even believe in God. But I discovered that it was merely some inadequate understanding of God in which I could not believe.

Most of us when we go through traumatic doubt are not really having a struggle believing in the God of biblical revelation. It is usually a struggle believing in some conception of God that is not adequate anyway. Your God is too small!

A part of worship is the recognition that God is wholly beyond any expression that we can make of God's reality. God is both within and beyond our boundaries. I discovered that when the roof of my knowledge of God became shaky, or fell, or was raised, it was usually in order that some loftier concept of God might be mine.

This needs to happen in life over and over again. This is part of what it means to grow. Paul says: "We see through a glass darkly...." This is true of us throughout all the pilgrimage in time. Only then do we see "face to face." I say to you today, to the wisest and most profound among you, the roof of our knowledge of God needs to be raised.

The roof of our SELF-CONCEPTS needs to be raised.

The fact is: most of us are miserable failures in seeing ourselves in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of us, though we profess faith in this Christ, still, at the practical level, do not see ourselves in the light of the Gospel.

This is important, because what you actually become depends to a large degree on how you see yourself. What you actually become is dependent upon the image that you have of yourself. The fact that most of us secretly believe that we have little or no worth keeps us from hearing the truth.

The truth is (despite how you feel) you have enormous worth. And the proof of your worth is the love of God for you. The prime evidence of that love is the extent of the Father's love for you, for "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...."

Most of us will not fulfill anything like the potential that is ours because we persist in living under some low ceiling with regard to our self-concept. The Word of God really has not made us free, no roof has been raised, and no ceiling has fallen to be replaced by another.

Even though we have come here often, we have not heard what I believe the God of the Gospel and the Father of Jesus Christ is trying to say to us. Namely: "Your estimate of yourself is a lie. Your estimate of yourself is the work of evil. You have worth because you are mine. You are my child, and in that relationship is your worth. Because you are my child you may begin to live a life of rejoicing; live life to the fullest; begin to become all that you can be. You can be more than you are, and you can be more than you think you can be.

I believe our Father God does not want us to be worms all of our lives. I believe that it is not God's desire that we live under a ceiling so low that life becomes cramped and sore. I believe God wants to raise the roof of our own understanding of who we are. I believe that, by the grace of God, the roof on your image of yourself can be raised, and you can grow in the likeness of Christ our Lord.

Not only does the roof of our knowledge of God need raising; not only does the roof of our self-concepts need raising; but the roof of our SENSE OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION needs raising.

Have you ever seriously considered the staggering magnitude of the Great Commission? Have you ever clearly seen how radical are Jesus' Great Commandment instructions to serve and love? What he wills for us and what he calls us to do is literally "out of sight!" When I consider seriously the magnitude of his commission and calling, it overwhelms me. Jesus thought in such giant terms!

There are times when I'm convinced that we are like would-be survivors huddled together on a raft, holding our ears against the noises about us, hoping against hope that we might survive. The Church has only begun to understand what it is God wants us to be and to do. We see ourselves as so high-minded, when in fact we live under low, low ceilings.

Some of the strongest and most secure church roofs of Europe have become lids and coverings over empty buildings. Some of those high, beautiful ceiling in the cathedrals of the old country simply were not high enough. Whenever a church puts a lid over her sense of mission, she smothers her own life. A church that begins to

live for itself will die the same premature death of all sedentary creatures: soft, still, fat, dead.

The potential of this church, in particular, is considerable. We have resources and opportunities -- to do for and to do with -- which could significantly advance the cause of Jesus Christ and further the work of God's Kingdom.

But if we are going to become what we can be, by the grace of God, some roofs are going to have to be raised. Some visions are going to have to be seen. Some callings are going to have to be heard. Some pledges are going to have to be made and kept. Some old attitudes are going to have to die. Some new perspectives are going to have to be born.

If we're going to become what we can be under God, caution must give way to dreaming. Keeping must yield to giving. The letter of the law must give way to the life of grace. And the settler spirit of conservation must give way to the pioneer spirit of expansion.

We cannot be all God calls us to be, individually, or as a church, as long as we see the present roof that covers us as the absolute limit and ceiling of existence. It is not so, and we serve a God who wishes to raise our roofs!

Henry Van Loon, in his prologue to his book, *Tolerance*, tells about a small Indian tribe. This small tribe lived its meager life with two great restrictions: one geographical and the other spiritual. The geographical restriction was an awesome and rugged mountain range which stood like a wall at the edge of the village. The spiritual restriction was an attitude among the leaders of the tribe, a revered group called "The Old Ones Who Know."

One thing the ones wise with age "knew" was that to venture up the mysterious mountains was forbidden. One day a young brave challenged the patterns of existence and began to tell unbelievable stories about a new kind of life just over the mountains. He told of greener grass and purer streams of water and more plentiful game.

They told him to be silent, but he would not. Finally, "The Old Ones Who Know" decided that he must be stoned because of his persistent blasphemy.

Years passed and a serious ecological crisis brought about a time when that location simply could no longer serve the needs of the tribe. A revolution erupted against "The Old Ones Who Know", and the little tribe began to make its perilous way up the mountains.

They discovered to their amazement that all that the young martyred brave had said was true. Here were pure streams of water and greener fields and plentiful game. They discovered over the mountains a beautiful valley that might have been prepared just for them. They took up life there, and life was good.

As the years passed, the tribe increased and the resources of that place became meager once more. Finally, they reached a place where their needs could no longer be met there; but they refused systematically to move one step further up the mountain because the young revolutionaries and pioneers of a previous day had become "The Old Ones Who Know."

This is the kind of idolatry I'm talking about. It is idolatry for any of us, young or old, to think that the structures of our own perception or our past fully encompass the reality of God or God's creation. It is idolatry for us to think that our ceiling is

God's ceiling. It is idolatry for us to think that the ceiling of life has been raised as far it can be raised. It is not so!

Though we have been unable to hear, or have refused to hear, I believe God's voice calls us as it beckoned a young temple assistant beneath the low ceiling of Shiloh. I believe God calls us because God wishes to raise the roof of our knowledge of who God is, of who we are, and who we can be as the Church of Jesus Christ.

I say to you today, wherever you are on the mountain ranges of life; somewhere higher up than you are, there has been prepared for you a fuller and richer life. And God calls you by name. Speak, Lord, Your servants hear.

Father God, we hear You call us to be Your people and to do Your work. Help us, as we hear, to respond to Your call -- in saving faith -- in renewed faith -- in growing faith. You do speak, Lord; we hear, and now we respond.