

Dear Friends,

In the interest of consolidating the information about the consultant's report from the various discussions and Q&A sessions, here are some frequently asked questions and answers. Please note any opinions are my own, but I did ask staff to review to ensure I'm not steering anyone wrong with incorrect information. If you want to talk about any of these, call me at 770-920-7858 or email me at mgibbs30135@yahoo.com. I'm sure other session members would welcome your call, as well.

Blessings,

Melanie Gibbs

## FAQs

### **Q. Why are we considering such a major change during this pandemic?**

**A.** This does feel like bad timing; however, the session committed to take part in the consulting process back in the fall. The pastors began meeting in January with a learning cohort that runs parallel to the congregational process. Throughout the spring, we compiled large amounts of data that were submitted to Dr. Borden. The consultation weekend was supposed to occur in April, though that visit had to be postponed due to travel restrictions. We didn't know the world would be in the midst of this unprecedented season when those plans were made, but none of it is a surprise to God.

### **Q. Why the rush to vote on a decision? Why can't we wait until the pandemic is over and we can all be back together, and/or why can't we wait until plans can be fully developed to vote?**

**A.** Having the congregation vote within a few weeks of the report is part of the consultant's process. Now, in the middle of global pandemic, racial tensions, economic upheaval and deep political divide, the last thing any of us wants to do is change one of the few places in our lives that feels stable and secure – the church we love. Many of us feel overwhelmed and anxious, and we yearn for normalcy.

If we say we need to wait until the pandemic is over and we can all be together in the church building again to vote, who knows for certain how long will it be before a vaccine is available to make all of our members safe to be together in person? Or if we feel the need to wait until all the details are in place to our liking, how long will that take?

The urgency (in my personal opinion) is that in the midst of the current anxiety-producing atmosphere, we FPC members can find some comfort in our church family. We know that this chaotic world is ruled by a sovereign God who loves us and listens to us when we cry out to him, and we have the hope that through Jesus' sacrifice, whatever happens to us in this life is not the end of the story – we cling to the promise of eternal life bought by his blood. But many neighbors in our community are trying to navigate this confusing and even frightening time without that same comfort. We have a precious gift of hope to share in a very dark time. Are we willing to wait another six months or more to decide if we want to commit to shift our focus to them? Or, to borrow from Corrie ten Boom, can we trust an unknown future outlined by the consultants' report to a known God who has been faithful to FPC Douglasville in the past?

## **Q. How quickly will the prescriptions need to be acted upon?**

**A.** The report feels overwhelming, but not everything is prescribed to happen at once, and it doesn't all have to be done by one group of people. The session is planning to meet July 27 to discuss the results of the congregation's vote. If the session decides to adopt the report, here is the timing of events for each of the prescriptions.

Prescription 1: **By August 15**, the session would begin studying the book prescribed and identify people not currently disciples of Christ to "BLESS". This fall there would be a worship service asking for forgiveness and repentance, followed by a prayer drive. **By January 2021**, the congregation would read the book prescribed and members would be expected to begin "BLESSING" someone who is not a disciple. **Beginning in January and continuing through the end of 2021**, a Mission/Ministry audit would begin to determine how each ministry will fulfill the Great Commission.

Prescription 2: **Beginning late this summer and continuing through the end of 2020**, a team will meet and pray with James regularly and work to discern God's specific vision for FPC Douglasville in Douglas County.

Prescription 3: **In Fall 2021**, a new children's ministry would begin during 10:45/11:00 worship. Presumably, CE building reconfiguration would begin in advance of the new program so the children's program could meet upstairs. The FPC Kids ministry already uses the prescribed curriculum. **By the beginning of 2021**, a half-time person would need to be in place to help new people connect with the congregation, and they would need a team of ushers and greeters trained to welcome guests.

Prescription 4: **Beginning immediately**, every staff and session meeting will include prayers to God asking for wisdom and favor in making the goal of having the congregation reflect the community in the life of the congregation. Leaders will act intentionally to expand the base of qualified applicants to include people of color for volunteer roles as well as applicants for staff positions, **when there are openings**. James and leaders will visit with other congregations and with African American leaders to learn how we might become a multi-racial congregation. The staff will try various strategies to find a way to include other races and ethnicities "on the platform" each week. This process will require developing new relationships and nurturing leadership. I expect it will take considerable time before we see the fruit of this work.

Prescription 5: **This fall**, the session will read a book that describes the leadership structure ECO is recommending congregations adopt. **Before the next class of elders is elected** (January 2021), a new leadership structure will be adopted.

## **Q. What metrics will be used to evaluate programs during the Mission/Ministry Audit?**

**A.** That is to be determined, but decisions like that will be made in keeping with FPC's Reformed tradition and our context. The Holy Spirit brings non-believers to faith, but we do have a role to play in sharing the Gospel message. We'll have to determine what that looks like in terms of the audit, but no one will come in and tell us a ministry is responsible for a certain number of conversions or else it will be cancelled. That is not FPC's model. The goal will be to devote FPC resources in ministries that support the Great Commission. If a ministry doesn't already support that, it will be asked to find ways to expand or enhanced their work to include the Great Commission.

**Q. Will children's Sunday School be eliminated during the 9:30 Vine hour?**

**A.** No, Tabitha says she has a plan to continue children's Sunday School. The consultant originally said we should eliminate it to be mindful of the additional volunteers that will be needed, but this discipleship time for FPC's children is important to us, and the prescription was revised.

**Q. Will more volunteers be needed to add a new, big children's program on Sunday mornings?**

**A.** Yes, definitely! If enough people do not agree to help when the time comes a year or so from now, it will be a sign that FPC has not turned the corner to commit to being more outward facing, and the program won't happen as planned. If members **do** vote to adopt the prescriptions, they need to be prepared to pitch in and help out as they are able.

**Q. Does this mean children will no longer be welcome in worship?**

**A.** No, children will always be welcome in worship at FPC. Parents/grandparents will have the choice whether their children attend worship with them or take part in the new children's program when it begins. We can hope that eventually new families will find value in having their children worship with them, and we will work to build disciples toward that end.

**Q. Why should we want to become a multi-racial church? Won't it be seen as pandering if we actively recruit people of color to be on the platform during worship?**

**A.** Douglas County is changing. Currently 60% of the population is a minority. An issue identified by the session and validated by the consultant is that FPC does not reflect the make-up of the community around us. If we hope to grow in the current culture, that means we'll need to work harder to include people of other races and ethnicities. If 60% of the county were French speakers, wouldn't we naturally find a way to bring qualified people into leadership who could speak French? If we hope to have the opportunity to share the Good News with people of other races, we need to find ways to help them see themselves in our midst. This does not mean our theology will change. We are not being asked to hire or make leadership decisions based solely on race or ethnicity, but we are being asked to be more intentional about widening the circle for those decisions within our existing standards for leadership.

Notice that prayer is a large part of these prescriptions. If this prescription is God's plan, he's going to raise up the right people to make it happen. The prescription also involves seeking input from churches that have been successful at this then trying a variety of strategies to see what works for us. While Paul Borden told us a number of stories about other churches, we'll determine for ourselves what this looks like within the boundaries of FPC's Reformed tradition and our context.

**Q. Will we have to meet a quota or certain percentage of minority members? And does this mean we are not interested in attracting new believers who are white?**

**A.** No, and no. It is God who calls non-believers to himself. We do have work to do to fulfill the Great Commission, but it is not up to us who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. If we are doing our part as laid out in the prescriptions, we could expect our congregation to grow our numbers to better reflect the make-up of our county. There is no specific ratio we must hit or expectation of when that would happen. At the same time, if nothing changes, then we should wonder why. These prescriptions are about intentionality, not quotas.

While this prescription is framed as a way to grow our church, we really need to have an eye to help people who don't know Jesus enter into a relationship with him. That is true whether they become part of the FPC family or join a church on the other side of the country.

**Q. How would we reduce the number of elders on session?**

**A.** That has yet to be determined. One possibility is that the number of new elders elected would be reduced beginning with the next class. In that way, the total number could be reduced as prescribed in three years. Note that the new leadership structure needs to be adopted before the new class of elders is elected in January, but the reduction in session numbers doesn't need to be completed by that time.

**Q. Why are congregation members being asked to vote if the session ultimately will make the decision?**

**A.** The congregational vote will advise the session. This plan to shift from inward focus to outward focus will need great congregational support to be successful, and session members will want to know whether that exists. We want to see specific concerns, so please be sure to write them on your ballot. You may also use email or mail.

**Q. What happens if the session decides not to adopt this report? Will we be in trouble with ECO?**

**A.** No, we would not be in trouble with ECO (our Presbyterian denomination) if we decide not to pursue this. The mission of ECO is to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ. The denomination is underwriting this consultation process in an effort to help churches like ours – that have been losing members and seen shrinking numbers in worship - flourish, but we are not being forced to do it. The session could decide to take other actions in response to the report. If we don't adopt the entire report, then, we would not have an ECO coach to walk through it with us.

**Q. What would the coach do, and why would we want one?**

**A.** ECO's Synod Executive Dana Allin has indicated he would be FPC's coach if we adopt this report. Dana would work with us for the next 18 months to help us figure out how to make the prescriptions work in our context. He would NOT force us to adopt models that are out of line with FPC's Reformed tradition. He might recommend resources for us. Overall, the coach takes what we tell him we want to do, and then encourages us and holds us accountable to do what we say we're going to do. You can read more about Dana at <https://eco-pres.org/staff/>

**Q. If we cannot meet the prescribed timelines, what happens?**

**A.** We would work with our coach to determine new dates.

**Q. Why were no other areas of the church addressed in the report.**

**A.** Dr. Borden identified what he considered the top five areas of the church that if improved would significantly enhance our ministry. There are other areas that he didn't address that we will continue to work on through our normal leadership processes.