

A Gift Too Good to Keep: The First Baptist Church of Christ

Stewardship Sunday School Lessons
October 1-29, 2006

Stewardship Committee

Beth Hagerman
Dennis Hagerman
Mary Jane Johnson, vice chair
Caroline Kicklighter
Robert Richardson
Walter B. Shurden, chair

General Editor

Walter B. Shurden

Editor

Darrell Pursiful

Lesson Writers

Rollin Armour
Frank Broome
Angie Davis
Sande Day
Connie Jones
Bill McLees
Craig McMahan
Robert Richardson
Jackie Riley
Doris Williams

Photographers

Gloria Payne
Bambi Setzer



First Baptist Church of Christ
311 High Place
Macon, GA 31201
478-742-6485

Robert B. Setzer Jr., Pastor

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From the Stewardship Committee

Dear Stewards of the Gospel at the Top of Poplar,

“A Gift Too Good To Keep: The First Baptist Church of Christ of Macon!” Your Stewardship Committee agrees! This church really is “A Gift Too Good to Keep.”

The five Stewardship Sunday School lessons in this little booklet will remind you of five incredible gifts we have at FBC. :

The marvelous gift of *worship!*
The inspiring gifts of *outreach and missions!*
The challenging gift of *Christian education!*
The indispensable gift of *administration!*
The beautiful gift of our *sacred space!*

This is the second year that we are relying entirely on our own members to challenge the rest of us regarding the ministry of our money. They have written to inform and to inspire but also to let us see how our church budget supports these gifts of our church.

Darrell Pursiful, another church member, has done the hard work of editing these lessons and guiding the writers. Many thanks to Darrell and to each of the writers! Each of these people is certainly a huge gift to our church.

While we hope that each of the adult Sunday school departments will study these lessons during the month of October, we impose these on no group. We believe, however, that if we will read and reflect on these lessons, we will better appreciate and understand our church budget for next year. We certainly hope that these lessons will motivate each of us to give generously to support these “gifts too good to keep.” Our sole purpose in these lessons is to grow a generous church by growing generous Christians.

Thanks for your faithful stewardship in supporting the ministry of The First Baptist Church of Christ of Macon.

Your Stewardship Committee

From the Editor

I hope you enjoy this year’s stewardship lessons. Ten talented and passionate writers have worked hard to open our eyes to some of the gifts God has given to the First Baptist Church of Christ. As this year’s stewardship theme proclaims, these are gifts “too good to keep.”

As you explore these gifts, of which we are all the recipients, please take time to thank the people through whom these gifts come—and the God who gave them in the first place! Then, prayerfully consider what your role will be in passing these gifts along in the year to come. I think you’ll find that doing so will enrich your life, support your church, transform your community, and glorify God.

Darrell Pursiful

THE MINISTRY OF REACHING UP:

THE GIFT OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Craig McMahan and Jackie Riley

A son asked his dying father to share what his life was truly about, what he valued. The father responded by asking his son to get his checkbook. When the son questioned this instruction, the father explained: "If you want to know what is important to a person, look in their checkbook. It will tell you what the person truly values."

The gift of worship and music is important at First Baptist Church. It inspires, challenges, shapes, and comforts us. But while worship is a gift to us, it is also our response to the incredible love and mercy of God. It is a good gift that demands our best effort and skill as individuals as well as our support of those who lead us in corporate worship.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The Importance of Worship and Worship Leaders

"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."
—*Westminster Shorter Catechism* of 1647

We are most alive, most complete, and most fully human when we are glorifying and enjoying God. Sunday worship is the context in which we can cultivate these impulses most easily. There, we become part of a worshiping community where we can live into our best selves. Unfortunately, the demands of daily living make it hard for us to live up to the ultimate values of glorifying and enjoying God on our own. Therefore, we need worship leaders.

Worship leaders have the spiritual clarity to see through the deceptiveness of our consumer culture and call us to our higher purpose in compelling ways. They spend much time planning and preparing to create a climate in which we can meet with God and be transformed. Our worship leaders address us in our language. They give voice to our fears, failures, emptiness, hopes, and purpose. Yet, they also speak for God, offering God's answers to our questions and God's comfort for our hurts.



Not everyone has the ability or inclination to lead others into the presence of God. Our worship leaders have accepted that role and have been ordained to that purpose. They are to our soul what physicians are to our bodies. Therefore, they deserve our financial commitment so that they can focus their gifts on guiding us to our chief end.

In his classic, *The Purity of the Heart*, theologian Søren Kierkegaard contrasts worship with going to the theater. He notes how the roles in the theater of worship are different than in the secular theater. In Kierkegaard's model, the worship leaders correspond to the prompters and the worshiping congregation corresponds to the actors on the stage. Finally, God—not the congregation—is the audience. The congregation members are the actors on stage. The "speakers" are the prompters who feed the actors their lines. The prompters enable and empower the members of the congregation to play their parts before God. The secular model, decried by Kierkegaard, has the ministers playing the role of the actors and the congregation being the audience. In this arrangement, the congregation judges the competence of the ministers by their ability to speak their parts, leaving God to the balcony and the congregation in the role of critical theatergoers.

Kierkegaard's model illustrates the importance of the clergy and their proper

We may be truly said to worship God, though we lack perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity.
— Stephen Charnock

role in worship. Our stewardship provides the resources for our church to have skilled prompters who help us in the speaking of our lines before God. Through the call to worship and invocation, the ministers lead us in speaking our welcome to God and invite us to invoke God's presence as soon as the curtain rises on the weekly worship drama. Their sermons and prayers initiate a conversation in which our hearts and minds speak back in

response to what we hear. The musical offerings prompt our voices to sing of our faith in wonderful ways and to let our souls sing along even when our lips are silent.

Apart from the stewardship of our resources, these exceptional prompters—Bob, Julie, Jody, Stanley, and Anne—would not be available to us. We need their spiritual fluency and Christian maturity to guide us in worship, which is the act of glorifying and enjoying God.

Biblical Texts

Psalm 84 begins by expressing the psalmist's longing for worship in the temple. Notice the passionate imagery in verses 1-2: "lovely dwelling place ... My soul longs, faints ... My heart and my flesh sing."

In worship, the psalmist encounters the living God. This is a transformative experience that enflames the psalmist with longing to be in God's presence. The psalmist is overjoyed because God is the "living" God. This God is the author of life, not only the Creator, but also the Sustainer. The worshiper comes alive in the presence of God in the temple.

The psalmist is jealous of the birds that make their home above the altar, whose young nest near the physical manifestation of God's glory in the sacrificial liturgy. How blessed are those whose calling is to serve in the house of the Lord, worshipping (vv. 3-4)! Verse 4 is the first of three beatitudes in this psalm (the others are in vv. 5 and 12)

suggesting that the blessed life is centered in the worship and trust of God. The psalmist recognizes the value of worship.

Verses 5-7 extol the virtue of the arduous journey up to Jerusalem with stunning imagery. “In whose heart are the highways to Zion” imagines a pilgrimage of the spirit. While the worshiper is far away from the temple, he or she daily is making the way to worship. Even the desolate and arid valley of Baca, a milestone on the journey, becomes a place of sweet springs and luscious pools because the worshipers are heading toward God and the temple. Instead of being fatigued, “they go from strength to strength.” The closer the pilgrims come to the temple, the more they are invigorated. They gain strength rather than losing it. Such is the power of worship.

Lives nourished on worship can endure the desolate and dry places, knowing that in the end our journey will bring us to God. Worship inspires us through all of the mundane and dreary moments of life.

Verses 10-12 bring the psalm to a climactic conclusion. The centrality and life-giving potency of worship is expressed in verse 10. Two contrasts are set up. First, one day in the Temple is better than a thousand elsewhere. Second, it is better to be a doorkeeper (that is, a slave) in God’s house than to live in the tents of wickedness. Verses 11-12 express why the psalmist desires to worship of God. The sun makes life possible and a shield protects life when threatened. God gives favor and honor, withholding nothing good from the righteous and giving happiness to those who trust.

Psalm 84 is a powerful statement about the place and value of worship in the life of the people of God. If worship occupies such a place of honor, then we should value and support those who enhance our worship. Therefore, stewardship that supports our worship is a worthwhile investment.

Romans 12:1-2 is sprinkled with allusions to worship: “present ... sacrifice ... holy ... worship.” All of these are derived from Paul’s understanding of the mercies of God, described in the preceding chapters of Romans. Specifically, God demonstrates righteousness by not abandoning humanity to the consequences of our fallen state, by providing redemption through the gift of Christ Jesus, and by enabling us through the Spirit to live fully and faithfully

After describing God’s mercy and gifts, Paul urges a response. We are to make a present of ourselves in the form of a “sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” We are to leave nothing of ourselves “un-offered” to God. This includes our financial resources.

Whatever was set aside exclusively for God was called “holy.” For example, implements used for Temple worship were not to be used for any other purpose. They belonged totally and exclusively to God. In the same way our lives are to belong “wholly” to God. There is no room for serving two masters.

“Acceptable” connotes being pleasing to God. God delights in the offering of our whole selves for God’s exclusive use. This offering of ourselves is our logical response to God’s mercy, our worship or service to God. Of course, Paul is thinking of more than what happens on Sunday morning, but it is fair to say he is not thinking of less than that. In fact, the following verse relates well to the role of Sunday worship in the life of the believer.

Worship is about God, and that God is worthy of the very best we have to offer.

Worship is important in renewing our minds. The songs we sing, the prayers we pray, the scriptures we read, and the sermons we hear all shape us. They are our defense against being squeezed into the mold of the world around us. Worship is what we do to re-orient ourselves to life in God’s kingdom.

Minister and writer Will Willimon once described worship as being like the sacred dance native warriors do on the night before the great hunt. With spears and clubs, they practice the stalking of their prey, the capture, and the kill. This dance prepares them to go out and do the same thing in the field the next day. In worship we are practicing who we are to be and how we are to live. Worship is a rehearsal for our living through the week. Our worship leaders assist us in “doing the dance” on Sunday morning so that we can repeat it on Monday afternoon. We are shaped by our worship. We are transformed and renewed.

First Timothy 5:17-18 extols the value of virtuous spiritual leaders, “especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” As this passage suggests, preaching is hard work. It demands well-honed biblical skills that produce a faithful interpretation of the message. It demands perceptive understanding of the human condition and knowledge of what “itch” currently needs to be “scratched.” Preaching also demands creativity to deliver a biblically faithful and personally relevant message in a compelling way.

The preparation and delivery of sermons are both exhilarating and exhausting.



Those who give their lives to the weekly discipline of preaching and teaching deserve to be supported by the congregation so that they can do their work without fear of financial disaster.

Of course, at First Baptist Church of Christ at Macon, our worship is much more than the sermon. Each member of our staff contributes to the planning of the entire worship experience so that the different elements fit together into a meaningful whole. The music gives us an immediate experience of inspiration and delight, communicating in ways simple discourse cannot. It takes the truth of the gospel and wraps it in beauty and power that evokes our deepest response. The prayers, the children’s message, and the responsive readings all create a spiritual synergism that makes the worship experience a transformative event.

All who lead us in worship deserve our full support. They pour pure water on our parched souls. Imagine how barren our lives would be apart from the weekly worship experiences they provide.

THE MINISTRY OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC AT FBC

A Theology of Worship and Music

Each of our ministers, including the music minister, has a vision for ministry through worship that is based on sound theology. Stanley Roberts has developed his theology of worship and music as follows.

Worship must always have a component of the song of the people. Worship and music can evoke memories from past worship experiences, causing participants to relate their own story to *the* story. The song has cultural connections, causing certain

songs to resonate with different people and even simple songs to have theological meaning. The song also involves history and the need for people to understand or sing in a language they understand. While the song and worship preferences change through the years, there is a certain body of music common to all. Stanley seeks to apply this theology of the song in music selection and worship planning at First Baptist Church.

Theology Applied to Worship

Worship music is balanced between the subjective and objective elements. Solos, instrumentals, and anthems reflect subjectivity while congregational music leans toward objectivity. A typical worship service combines familiar hymns with new or unfamiliar ones. Similarly, over time the anthem selections run the gamut from well known to unknown. As Stanley has said on several occasions, we manage to offend *and* please everyone at some point! Or, as a couple of other musicians have expressed it, church worship is like a Thanksgiving feast – not everyone likes everything, but everyone likes something.

Sunday morning congregational hymns follow an intentional order and direction, with most tying in to the Scripture passages on which the sermon is based. The first hymn is one of praise to God (with more focus on Christ during Lent), the second centers on the offering of oneself (with a theme of stewardship, creation, or communion), and the closing hymn is a reaffirmation of the theme of the sermon or our response to it.

A Unique Gift

Worship and music at First Baptist Church is both inspirational and educational. Through the spoken word, Christian symbols, and music, our worship experiences tell the story of the Christian year. Note, for example, the intentional hymn selections during Advent. “Joy to the World” does not fit the theme of the first three Sundays in Advent; it is an announcement of the Christ child’s birth! Such instructional elements, both subtle and intentional, combine with stirring chords and challenging words to create an authentic and unique gift we offer to our community and future generations.

Where else in Middle Georgia can you find such theologically sound and traditionally creative worship and music? Just ask those who attend our church strictly because of the type of worship we offer. Many of them drive thirty minutes one way to participate in our music program or to give their children opportunities for theologically sound and



participatory worship.

Where else but at First Baptist will you find several generations within a family, widows and widowers all alone, community persons with no church relationship all reveling together on Christmas Eve in the sounds of young children, original stories, and beautiful music?

Where else but at a First Baptist Maundy Thursday service would you find Protestants and non-Protestants walking together to the Communion table to receive the elements, listening to Stanley Roberts' moving a cappella solos, and singing as one the repentant refrains of "Just As I Am" and "Lord, I'm Coming Home"?

Where else but at First Baptist can you hear the lofty sounds of world-class musicians such as Dianne Bish, Angela Brown, Leah Partridge, and the Mercer Singers, *and* the jubilant voices of faithful volunteers in the chancel choir and the "jubilate!" youth choir rendering their offerings of everything from classics to spirituals to contemporary pieces?

Where else but at First Baptist can children be such active participants in worship? As three-, four-, and five-year-olds they sing the "Gloria Patri" and hear their own sermon in "big church" before retiring to their version of church complete with miniature pews and the singing of the "Doxology." In Vacation Bible School, preschoolers and children experience organized worship—some for the first time—and exciting music led by the Robertses. And, during special seasons of the Christian year, children serve as acolytes.

Where else but at First Baptist Church would children be invited to join the adult Ash Wednesday service and apply ashes to their forehead, read Scripture from the pulpit during Sunday morning worship, play handbells with the adult bell choir, or serve as ushers alongside adults?

Where else but at First Baptist would you find professional musicians like Ruth Rowell, Marie Roberts, and Janet Jarriel (not to mention the many other leaders and accompanists) volunteering their services to teach proper breath control, diction, and other basics to the children's choirs? Where else but at First Baptist would you find a youth choir so well trained that the members share both a repertoire and a choir loft with their adult counterparts?

Where else but at First Baptist would you find an organist whose rendition of Widor's *Toccata* rivals that of Dianne Bish and whose accompanying skills are unsurpassed?

Where else but at First Baptist could you get a gifted minister of music dedicated to full-time Christian service at part-time pay? Where else but at First Baptist would you find all three full-time ministers to be able preachers and worship leaders?

Where else but at First Baptist Church could you spend such a small percentage of the church budget on worship and music and reap such large benefits both now and in the future?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

How do you use your gifts, talents, and resources in the worship and music ministry of our church?

Describe a meaningful worship experience you have had at FBC.

How is our worship different from that of other congregations?

How do our worship and music inspire personal spiritual growth?

How does our church highlight the talents and/or provide service opportunities in worship for youth and children?

What elements in our worship are “generation-specific?” What elements provide an intergenerational context?

What hymns and anthems have meaning for all generations in our congregation?

What are the unique strengths of our worship? How can these be enhanced to become more meaningful to more people?

What worship practices would not be fitting in our church?

What are the significant events/seasons in the life of our congregation’s worship? Are there special songs associated with those times?

How does our congregation maintain its authentic voice in worship?

Assignment: Pay close attention to the order of worship today and in the coming weeks. How do the various elements connect/relate? What is the theme? What other elements/songs/etc. would you add to carry out the theme?

For the current year, our music budget is as follows:

Youth Choir Tour/Retreat	\$4,750
Anthem Literature	\$2,500
Promotion/Recreation	\$1,000
Robes, Piano, Organ Upkeep	\$1,650
Supply Musicians	\$1,700
Leadership Training	\$ 500
Music Scholarships	\$1,000
Great Evenings of Music	\$2,400
Music Camp	\$1,400
Children’s Choirs	\$1,100
 Total Music Ministry	 \$18,000

This represents less than 2.5% of our church’s total budget.

THE MINISTRY OF REACHING OUT:

THE GIFT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Frank Broome and Sande Day

Perhaps it is difficult to think of outreach as a gift. However, having been on the receiving end of outreach most of my life I can tell you it is indeed a gift. Like other gifts, churches must learn to share its outreach wisely. We must develop models of outreach that are rooted in sound Biblical teaching and effective contemporary practice.

Not long ago I was involved in interviewing a prospective leader for our national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. When asked what he would do if a potential missionary stated that all he wanted to do was to “lead people to Jesus.” His response was wonderful. He said, “I would tell him to go at it.” Then he added, “But do it in a culturally relevant way.” Outreach is the way a church gives God’s gift of grace in a culturally relevant way. It includes service and evangelistic ministries of the church to the community that lives and works within its sphere of influence.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

A multitude of biblical passages lend support to the idea that a fundamental responsibility of the church is to reach out to the community in the name of Jesus.

The Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19-20** has been the primary mission text for evangelical Christians during the last hundred years:



And Jesus came and said to them. All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. 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. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age (NRSV).

The church is called to mission by moving from the local area ever outward until it reaches the uttermost parts of the world. The command to go is followed by the command to make disciples. Disciples are made by teaching people to observe the things Jesus commanded.

It is not difficult to understand why that passage was so important to those of us who grew up in the second half of the twentieth century. Coming out of World War II, the American church felt it could do no wrong. Thousands of college students gathered in Atlanta in 1969 at the invitation of the Home Mission Board for an event called *Mission '70*. There we were challenged by the likes John Chancellor of NBC News to change the world. Ten years later, the Southern Baptist Convention launched “Bold Mission Thrust” with the goal of reaching the world for Christ by the year 2000. It was missions in overdrive. We were out to change the world.

The year 2000 came and went, however, and “Bold Mission Thrust” became “Bold Mission Bust.” It did not happen. If anything the Christian church lost ground in many parts of the world, including the United States. Arrogant leadership, secularization, pluralism, institutional skepticism, and denominational fragmentation were among many reasons for the failure. In some ways, the American church captured the Great Commission and used it like a club. We focused on the verbs—“go,” “teach,” and “make disciples”—in a way that made us look and even act superior to the world around us. The results were not always pretty. The past thirty years have been years of decline and disappointment for most denominational missions programs.

“Evangelism is the spontaneous overflow of a glad and free heart in Jesus Christ.” —Robert Munger

Several contemporary missiologists have raised this issue and are calling for a change in the way we think and act about outreach and evangelism. Rob Nash, the new Global Missions Coordinator for the CBF, is one of them. In an article in the summer 2004 issue of the *Review and Expositor*, Dr. Nash, following the lead of John Stott and Samuel Escobar, suggests we put alongside the traditional Great Commission an equally important call of Jesus found in **John 20:21**. He writes,

John 20:21-23 is set in the context of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples after his resurrection. His followers have gathered behind locked doors, filled with great fear. Jesus appears in the room with them and says, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me so I send you (NRSV). Here he echoes his own prayer at the conclusion of the Supper in John 17:18, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” This particular calling is a calling to model one’s engagement with the world after the pattern of Christ.

In the pattern of Christ words and deeds come together. The community is not just to talk about what Jesus said but it is also to reflect on what he did. Furthermore, the community is challenged to model the life of Christ to the world in both word and deed. We are not only to preach what Jesus preached; we are also to practice what he practiced.

In *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Gail R. O’Day writes of this passage:

Perhaps the most difficult part of this Easter/Pentecost story concerns precisely what Jesus commissions the faith community to do. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, so also he sends the community (v.21), but the content of the church’s work is only alluded to. The combination of vv. 22-23 suggest that the faith community is to be a people shaped by Jesus’ gift of the Spirit and that the mark of that gift will be the power to forgive or retain sins.... However, forgiving sins does not involve forgiving moral transgressions (nor does retaining sins involve retaining moral transgressions), but it involves bearing witness to the identity of God as revealed in

Jesus.... By loving one another as Jesus loves, the faith community reveals God to the world: by revealing God to the world, the church makes it possible for the world to choose to enter into relationship with this God of limitless love. It is in choosing or rejecting this relationship with God that sins are forgiven or retained. The faith community's mission therefore is not being the arbiter of right or wrong, but to bear unceasing witness to the love of God in Jesus.

The resurrection story of John 20:19-23 thus provides a fresh vantage point from which the church can preach and teach the story of its own beginnings. The beginning of the community's life is not separated from the story of Easter; indeed, in John, the gift of the Spirit and the commissioning of the church occur on Easter Sunday evening. The Johannine Easter narratives are a reminder that the church's life is intimately bound to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. To celebrate the resurrection, the Fourth Gospel suggests, is also to celebrate the beginnings of the church's mission in the world. Jesus lives, not because he can walk through locked doors and show his wounds to frightened disciples, but because he breathes new life into those disciples through the gift of the Spirit and commissions them to continue his work.

As O'Day describes, we begin with Jesus breathing new life into us and then sending us out to continue his work. We are called to do outreach and evangelism by being the presence of Christ in the world and by sharing the amazing gift of God's love. It is not our job to sit in judgment. It is our calling to announce, embody, and demonstrate the gift which is simply too good for anyone to keep. Such an understanding of Christian mission should shape the approaches to outreach we use in our faith community. We must pay as much attention to the pattern of Jesus' relationships with people as we do to the words that Jesus speaks. It calls the church to reflection upon both its words and its deeds. It demands that the church pay attention to both doctrine and practice.

THE MINISTRY OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM AT FBC

Models of Outreach

Successful churches have used a variety of outreach models over the years. It is fair to say that most churches do not even think about the model they are using. It is also fair to say that most churches use a variety of approaches to reach out, even if they do not

*"We will win the world when we realize that fellowship, not evangelism, must be our primary emphasis. When we demonstrate the Big Miracle of Love, it won't be necessary for us to go out -- they will come in."
—Jess Moody*

completely understand what they are doing. Here are some examples of models of outreach that can be found in contemporary American churches.

The teaching model. This model emphasizes teaching the Bible. The teaching model assumes the layperson is obligated to develop a thorough knowledge of the Scripture. It casts the pastor primarily in the role of teacher. The pastor is to be the expert; it is his or her job to teach others.

In this model, outreach is the process of getting people to come to church so they can study the Bible and to learn sound doctrine. Every Sunday, Pastor Joel Osteen

of Lakewood Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, begins the service by lifting his Bible in the air and having the congregation repeat: "This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do."

This model requires a leader with charisma and above average speaking skills. What is taught are often simple rules for living in an up beat manner. This model often appeals to the unchurched because it presents the gospel in simple terms with little or no ambiguity. It is also fair to say that this model works well through the medium of television.

The relationship model. This model leans heavily on the pattern of Jesus' ministry. The idea is to get to know the individual on a personal level whether it at work, at play, or in some other social setting. By contacting people during the course of daily life, barriers to outreach can be overcome and greater opportunities to witness are created. Bringing up the topics of faith and church are much easier in the context of friendly conversation.

Some churches take this approach a step further with what is called "hospitality evangelism." The emphasis falls on being accepting and inviting as a congregation. Newcomers to the community are given fresh baked loaves of bread or sent cards of greeting. Both neighbors and strangers are invited into the home or to community events.

The ministry model. The ministry model seeks to reach the unchurched by reaching out to them at a point of felt need. This can be the basic human needs for food, shelter, or medical care. It can also include emotional, psychological, and mental needs. Ministry can be directed to the "up and in" or the "down and out."

Often such ministries are done in partnership with other congregations, social organizations, or even government agencies. By providing food, counseling, shelter, and or financial assistance the church seeks to get the attention of someone who would otherwise not be touched by the community of faith. While large churches have the resources to staff such ministries, medium-sized and smaller churches generally use volunteers. The pastor and staff function in an equipping role with laypeople doing the majority of the ministry. The ministry model is not primarily directed at church members, who are usually connected to the church through care groups such as Sunday school classes or deacon family ministry groups. Outreach in the form of compassionate ministry is directed at individuals who may or may not become a part of the church.



What about Us?

Some churches focus exclusively on one approach to outreach, but most use several approaches. First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon is one of those. Our teaching ministry is rooted in solid academic scholarship with a healthy dose of practical application. This is evident in class called "Christianity for Beginners" occasionally taught by our pastor. We also have specialized classes from time to time emphasizing serious biblical scholarship. Our music, worship, and preaching ministries have a strong teaching component. The great hymns of the church, relevant worship, and sound preaching are wonderful tools for teaching.



For the past several decades, our major approach to outreach has been relational in nature. We understand that the majority of people visit a church service because a friend, family member, or neighbor has invited them. Thus we rely on the total membership—and not just the staff—to spread the word about who we are and what we do as a congregation. This takes place in Sunday school classes, choir, family night suppers, Keenagers, and special youth and adult events.

First Baptist Church has not had a dominant singular ministry that has defined its approach to missions. However, we offer a multitude of outreach efforts both big and small. The God's Apprentices (GAs) program is a good example. This group for girls earns charms to wear on bracelets when they engage in ministry activities, which might include raising money for

the Global Missions Offering with our Fat Tuesday events, stuffing stockings for the Salvation Army's relief effort, collecting school supplies for Kid's Heart, a low income ministry in Texas, or supporting an Alzheimer's walk in Macon. All of these activities allow these young girls to show the community that First Baptist is a church on mission.

Several of our adults have given renewed energy to reopen and staff our church's crisis closet, a ministry to distribute food and clothing to needy people in our community. Youth and adults have also been very involved in building Habitat Houses in Macon. This has been virtually an annual event in our congregation.

Our Keenagers are a large part of our outreach efforts. They have a monthly meeting with people attending from inside and outside our church. This monthly meeting, combined with special ministry projects, Bible study, and occasional trips, makes for a strong outreach effort. We also do outreach by connecting to the larger Christian community through such organizations as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Through our state and national CBF organizations, we can respond to disaster around the world and special needs in our own state. The youth participate in March Mission Madness by rehabbing houses for the elderly or they learn about missions at Passport Camp. The money we send to state and national CBF helps to start new congregations, especially among ethnic groups in our state. This past year we had

the privilege of joining with the CBF of Georgia in giving a refurbished van to a small African American congregation here in Macon.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Contemporary church leaders are doing a great deal of creative thinking around the idea of *the missional church*. Rather than the church “doing missions,” the emerging concept is that the church should “missional.” Missions is more about what we are as a body of believers than about the activities we schedule on our calendars. In this line of thinking, the church sees itself at its core as a mission outpost in the world. Its responsibility is to “discern, announce and participate in God’s never-ending mission of creation and redemption, reconciliation and renewal” (*Missional Journey Guide*, C, 1-2). The focus is less on institutions and programs and more on being the presence of Christ in daily life.

Missional churches come in all shapes and sizes. What they hold in common is a sincere desire to engage the world in word and deed with the good news of God’s love. Perhaps this is the direction we are moving. Rather than emphasizing big programs or events, we are calling our membership to be missional. We are asking each member to find his or her place in God’s continuing plan to reach out to a broken world.

- Have you considered your evangelistic “style”? Some are best suited for performing practical acts of kindness that demonstrate God’s love. Others revel in exploring intellectual answers to the questions skeptics ask. Still others show hospitality and make newcomers feel welcome and included. How could God use who you are to share the gospel?
- What ministries or outreach opportunities at our church need the gifts and passions you bring to the table? Every group in the church can be an outreach to others, and every group in the church needs a mix of leaders, organizers, caregivers, “frontline” ministers, and “behind the scenes” servants. Which of these ministries fires your passion?
- How can you financially contribute to the outreach efforts of others? You don’t have the time or ability to do everything in the church, but you can help get the job done with your faithful giving!

Seeing outreach as a gift involves a high degree of intentionality. The good things done in and through our congregation don’t just happen. They happen because someone or some group decides to take the lead. It begins deep within our own commitment to Christ and it manifests itself in giving our time, energy, and money. Our budget is a small but nonetheless important reflection of that commitment. If we want our church to give the gift we have been given, the gift of God’s grace, we must be willing to give ourselves. We must hold dear the words of Jesus found in John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

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THE MINISTRY OF REACHING IN:

THE GIFT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Angie Davis and Robert Richardson

In the Mammoth Cave region of Kentucky in the 1950s, one would often hear ministers preach about the sin of “dipping ‘em and drapping ‘em.” In this local slang, “dipping ‘em” meant baptism and “drapping ‘em” meant dropping interest in the spiritual and educational development of those who were baptized. The sin, according to the preachers, was in the “drapping ‘em” part.

Unfortunately, “drapping ‘em” is a large part of Baptist history. To some extent, it can be attributed to an exclusive emphasis on evangelism and outreach. Hosting



revival meetings, promoting home and foreign missions, and winning the lost were basic staples in the life of the church. Much less emphasis was placed on the development of new believers.

Another part of this lack of emphasis on “reaching in” was doctrinal. “Once saved, always saved,” is a hallmark of traditional Baptist thinking. Therefore, Baptists often embraced an attitude of “first things first.” To lead someone to Christ was primary. Spiritual and educational development, though

heralded as important, was ultimately considered secondary. Unfortunately, many did not see this aspect of development as the other side of the coin of commitment to Christ.

The focus of this lesson is on a very important “reaching in” ministry of this church: Christian education. This “reaching in” includes the development of knowledge, skills, abilities, and character through training, study, and experience. It is an effort toward Christian enlightenment, which emphasizes insight, understanding, and practical application of the truth of the Gospel

The last part of this lesson consists of a challenge to all members of First Baptist to renew their commitment of stewardship to being a disciple (“learner”) of Christ. It is our hope that this renewed commitment translates into a more active participation in the Christian education ministry of this church.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

While it is difficult to find specific schools or separate institutions for formal religious instruction recorded in the Old and New Testaments, it is rather easy to find teachers

and the practice of teaching. From Moses to Christ, from the wisdom of Solomon to the writings of the Apostle Paul, teaching and learning are fundamental emphases of the Bible.

Clearly, the first institution of learning in both the Old and New Testaments was the home. However, as the people of Israel returned from Babylonian exile, the synagogue became increasingly influential in education. As the Christian faith developed in the first century, the church became a primary center for instruction in the faith.

Old Testament Foundations

According to the Old Testament, the purpose of education was to transmit the historical heritage of Israel and instruction in the ethical conduct of life. It began with a study of the law. These learning experiences first took place in the home. The people also learned at the feet of prominent priests and learned sages, in the temple, in the synagogues, and occasionally among the masses in public gatherings where the law was read and explained.

From the beginning of the Jewish faith, the central and most important institution for the education of children was the home. The father of the household had responsibility to train the children to walk in the ways of the Lord (Ps 78:5-7), and the writer of Proverbs urged his audience, “do not reject your mother’s teaching” (Prov 1:8). Parents taught their children through example, conversation, and the effectively use of key religious holidays and festive rituals.

“To bring up a child in the way he should go, travel that way yourself once in a while.”
—Josh Billings

While all instruction was religiously oriented, the primary subject was the law of Moses and its interpretation. Reading, writing, and the most basic elements of arithmetic were taught as well. Children with special commitments to God were taught in the temple by the high priest, such as when Eli taught Samuel (1 Sam 1–3).

Samuel instituted a school of the prophets at Ramah (I Samuel 19:19-20). Other schools of the prophets flourished at Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal, and on the banks of the Jordan River. Members of these schools of the prophets lived together in a colony, had a designated leader, formed a religious training center, and specifically studied the law and its interpretation. Even so, these organized schools had no specific buildings or classrooms. Instruction was held either in a residence, outdoors, or in or near a designated place for worship.

Other key teachers in the Jewish community were the priests and Levites. Some taught adult men in the synagogues. Others focused on additional instruction to older children, and still others were responsible for teaching the masses by reading the law in public and exhorting the people to follow it. Every seventh year, at the time of the Feast of the Tabernacles, there was a public reading of the law to the assembled people.

Because of a corrupt and ineffective priesthood, King Jehoshaphat (871 BC) instituted a reform in which the nation of Israel was once again taught the Law. With the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity, there was a renewed emphasis on religious instruction, especially in the local synagogue. As a result, the study of the law became a matter of scholastic learning. This produced a class of men known as scribes or lawyers, who interpreted the law for every day living.

Though the primary recipients of religious education were men and boys, some Israelite women and girls had opportunities not only to learn but to develop into teachers and leaders as well. Deborah (Jdg 4:5; 5) and the prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20) each had a good religious education and developed impressive leadership skills to do God's work. In Proverbs, the mother was of equal importance with the father in teaching children (Prov 1:8; 6:20). King Lemuel received words of wisdom from his mother (Prov 31).

New Testament Foundations

Christianity was born of the Jewish religion. Therefore, education in New Testament times was quite similar to education in the Old Testament. The home remained the center for religious instruction and the first classroom for children. However, by the first century there was a developed role for synagogues and priests in the instruction of older children and young adults.

Out of this educational matrix came a new and radical Jewish teacher. Jesus' education took place first in the home, but also in the synagogue. In addition, he was a student-apprentice in Joseph's carpentry shop.

From his early years, Jesus showed an unusual interest in listening, learning, and discussing issues related to the Jewish faith. On one occasion, when he was twelve, Jesus was found "in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Lk 2:46-47).

Perhaps this was a clue to his primary ministry. Jesus was first of all a teacher. When he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus "sat down ... and taught them." After reading from the book of Isaiah at the synagogue in Nazareth, Luke records that he "sat down ... and began to say..." (Luke 4:21). After his resurrection, when Mary Magdalene recognized Jesus she called him "Rabboni," which means "Teacher" (Jn 20:16)

This new Teacher selected twelve disciples and commissioned them to be both preachers and teachers. When sending them out, Jesus said, "Go and preach" (see Mt 10:7). When warning them that they might be persecuted for their preaching, Jesus

You may teach what you know, but you can only reproduce what you are.

reminded them, "no pupil is greater than his teacher ... so a pupil should be satisfied to become [persecuted] like his teacher" (Mt 10:24-25). Finally, in the Great Commission, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them" (Mt 28:19).

Jesus had a markedly new concept about using the mind. It was absolutely central to loving God and loving one another. He said that "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ... your soul ... your mind ... and your strength" (Mk 12:30). This, Jesus said, is "the greatest and most important commandment" (Mt 22:38).

Loving God with the mind shifts one's thinking from passively yielding to authority to searching for the truth. Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples [i.e., learners], and you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32)

The Apostle Paul continued in the tradition of Jesus by emphasizing this theme when he wrote to the Philippians, "Let his mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus"

(Phil 2:5). To the Romans, he wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (Rom 12: 2).

Paul’s missionary journeys involved both preaching and teaching. People became believers, churches were founded, and Paul and his companions instructed them in the ways of the Lord.

We might even say that the first seminary was formed in Ephesus when Priscilla and Aquila heard a promising young preacher by the name of Apollos. They “took him home with them and explained to him more correctly the Way of God” (Acts 18:26). Upon graduation, believers in Ephesus wrote letters of recommendation, and Apollos took a preaching position in Corinth.

According to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, teaching is a gift of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit gives one man a message of wisdom, while to another man the same Spirit gives a message of knowledge” (1 Cor 12:8). In the same letter, Paul offers a warning about the gifts of teaching apart from a heart of compassion, “I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets ... but if I have not love, I am nothing.” (1 Cor 13:2)

The author of Hebrews identifies Christian maturity as a prerequisite for teaching. He writes, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God’s word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Heb 5:12-14).

By the end of the first century, the educational work of the church was well under way. Education had become the chief handmaid of the church.

THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT FBC

I stood to one side in the hall of First Baptist Church as excited first- and second-graders of the Children’s One class were shepherded by John Hall and Jo Ellen McLees toward the church office in search of a “treasure map” that would lead them to an answer they were seeking. On this treasure hunt, the children were actively working toward solving the puzzle and their adult leaders were motivating, guiding, and teaching every step of the journey.

At the end of the treasure hunt, that answer may have had to do with prayer, commitment, devotion, or any number of other concepts that are a part of our Christian education at First Baptist. From the day a baby enters the nursery, he or she is surrounded by love—and by stories of Jesus—as they are held in the arms of our nursery workers. As the babies grow, exploring their surroundings, they are fed the



“milk” they need to sustain themselves and to begin to discover themselves as followers of Christ (Heb 5:12-14).

Why do we teach our children? Why do we continue to study as adults? What do we get out of it? First of all, as I look around during the Sunday school hour, I see children learning about their Christian heritage, teen-agers sorting through issues and testing their faith, and adults continuing to explore the Scriptures in ways that make sense for them. If we want to be able to answer the big questions of life—Who am I? What am I meant to do today, tomorrow, and forever?—we have to continue to be fed spiritually in ways that are appropriate to our individual stages of life. Are we ever through being “fed” on the word? Not if we follow in Jesus’ footsteps.

Every time we open our Bible, close our eyes in prayer, or enter the church building for a service or a meeting, we are saying, “Here am I, Lord. Teach me now.” At what point do we begin to share our faith with others and nurture the growth of other Christians? God opens our eyes to opportunities to teach others. Some of us teach in Mission Friends, some in adult Sunday school classes, others in Joy Shops, and still



others in book studies. These are the people we traditionally think of as teachers, but we also have teachers among us who teach by example.

When the Saturday crew prunes, mows, and cleans, they are teaching multiple lessons to those around them who see what they have done. When the “holy rollers” work day after day to turn a less than attractive or workable room into a place we can all be proud of, they too are teaching multiple lessons to those who see what they have done. The list could go on and on of people in our church who teach by example.

All of our teachers are following in Jesus’ footsteps. By so doing, they are taking on the mind of Christ.

Although we have a structure in place for Sunday school, Wednesday evening services, missions studies for all age groups, and book studies with the Parchment Club and Roundtable, Christian education can’t be contained totally within any structure. We each have a role in Christian education. At one time it may well be to teach a class but at another time, it may be to teach through actions and commitment. However we are teaching, we are taking care of each other, nurturing with the “milk” and the “solid food”, helping each other grow as Christians.

We may each never know all that we have taught through our daily walk, but it is our responsibility to be sure that we are walking in Jesus’ footsteps and that his mind is in us (see Phil 2:5).

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

What the members of First Baptist Church can do in the ministry of education is virtually limitless. The possibilities range from personal commitment, to individual

participation in activities, to the development of programs and classes that address the interests and needs of the congregation. Here are some concrete suggestions:

- Renew your commitment to be a disciple of Christ. The word “disciple” means “learner.” Rededicate yourself to learning. Embrace the value of lifelong learning toward continuing spiritual development.
- Join up! Attend a Sunday school class. Participate in a book study. Get involved in missions education. Attend a study series at First Baptist or in another church. Sit in on a lecture, study, or conference series at Mercer University or another college, seminary, or university.
- Volunteer to teach or assist in teaching a Sunday school class. Take an educational leadership position in a Sunday school class, or other educational programs or activities. If hesitant, find out about your skills for teaching and leadership in a spiritual gifts workshop. Insist that the church offer opportunities for the development of teaching and leadership skills.
- As a participant, ask that the educational activity address the hard and tough questions of life. The writer of Proverbs put it this way: “Cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding” (Prov 2:3). If that does not work, join another class or educational activity. Or, join with others in creating a class or activity that addresses the group’s needs for information and understanding.
- Insist that the educational activities in which you participate focus on helping you understand the basic teachings of Scripture as you struggle with the reality of living. Ask that the approach include both a devotional perspective and an exploratory discipline to understanding the Bible.
- Keep the educational ministry of the church informed of your educational interests, preferences, and needs. Speak to the Sunday school director, church staff, or member of the Adult Education Committee. And don’t hesitate to follow-up occasionally to see what has happened to your idea, suggestion, or recommendation.

CONCLUSION

Christian education had its beginnings in Jewish history. However, this educational perspective had its fulfillment in the life, ministry and teachings of Christ. To teach and learn is a part of what Jesus considered the “greatest commandment.”

Thus, out of the church came the earliest commitments to education. First the home, then organized instruction in the church, followed by the first elementary and secondary schools and the earliest of college and university education. The church gave birth to all of these.

The history of First Baptist Church includes strong and enduring educational ministries. That heritage continues to this day. Christian education, including our continuing efforts to make it better, is “a gift too good to keep.” So let’s be good stewards of this gift. Let’s share it with one another and with the community.

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THE MINISTRY OF REACHING DOWN:

THE GIFT OF ADMINISTRATION AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Connie Jones and Bill McLees

Congregations tend to have a love-hate relationship with the ministry of administration. Some see committees and meetings as boring, cumbersome, and a waste of time. They are dismissed as something that discourages “real ministry.” We have all heard horror stories about—or lived through personally—churches where there was so much bureaucracy no one could get anything done. Some Christians prefer to talk about “vision.” The important thing is to discern what God is calling us to do and do it. Administrative trivia is seen as something that gets in the way of the church fulfilling its vision.

On the other hand, other Christians love the order and reliability of a time-tested organizational structure with by-laws, committees, and parliamentary procedure. Some are intrigued by the process of pulling the right “levers” and pushing the right “buttons” to make the church function efficiently. They may prefer to address the practical needs of implementing the “vision.” There overriding question is, How do we get from Point A to Point B?



Both of these perspectives are partly right. Sometimes churches get mired in bureaucracy and need dreamers and visionaries refocus on the big picture. By the same token, sometimes churches assume that dotting all the administrative i's and crossing all the t's is a fruitless exercise that “quenches the Spirit.” They need to remember that structure can provide support from which to accomplish God's will.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

So, what does the Bible teach us about the importance of administration? In **Mark 6:35-44**, we read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish:

(35) And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late; (36) send them away, to go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat.” (37) But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” (38) And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” (39) Then he

commanded them all to sit down by companies upon the green grass. (40) So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. (41) And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. (42) And they all ate and were satisfied. (43) And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. (44) And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

This is one of the most familiar of Jesus' miracles in the New Testament. It is, in fact, one of only two miracles reported in all four Gospels. With each re-telling, we are reminded that whatever we give him, Jesus will bless and enlarge. It will be enough.

This is, of course, a valid interpretation of the story, but a closer look helps us to see that, although the provision of food was miraculous, it did not "just happen" as if by magic. For starters, Jesus challenged the disciples' assumption that the hungry crowd must fend for themselves. The disciples were overwhelmed by the size of the crowd and the meagerness of their provisions. Jesus asked them to assess their resources. "How many loaves have you?" he asked, "Go and see." Muttering and grumbling to be sure, the skeptical disciples dutifully carried out their assignment and returned with the gloomy report: "Only five, and two fish."

Jesus then divided the crowd into smaller groups of fifties and hundreds. Why did he do this? Was he trying to create order in a restless crowd? Was he preparing the people for more personal fellowship together? Was he organizing people so they would

Questions for Reflection

- (1) What parallels do you see between Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and the ministry of our church?
- (2) In what ways do you identify with the disciples in this story?

be ready to receive the miracle he was preparing to do? Certainly the task of Jesus and his disciples was bigger than "we've got to get organized." In feeding the hungry crowd, Jesus demonstrated practical, material care for the people around him. In this way he taught his disciples about faith, ministry, and administration. He teaches us as well.

In **Exodus 18:13-27**, Moses' father-in-law Jethro offers an Old Testament lesson in administration. Here is how that story is told in Eugene Peterson's *The Message*:

"The next day Moses took his place to judge the people. People were standing before him all day long, from morning to night. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said "What's going on here? Why are you doing all this, and all by yourself, letting everybody line up before you from morning to night?"

Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me with questions about God. When something comes up, they come to me. I judge between a man and his neighbor and teach them God's laws and instructions".

Moses' father-in-law said, "This is no way to go about it. You'll burn out, and the people right along with you. This is way too much for you—you can't do this alone. Now listen to me. Let me tell you how to do this so that God will be in this with you. Be there for the people before God, but let the matters of concern be presented to God. Your job is to teach them the rules and instructions, to show them how to live, what to do. And then you need to keep a sharp eye out for competent men—men who fear God, men of integrity, men who are incorruptible – and appoint them as leaders over groups organized by the thousand, by the hundred, by fifty, and by ten. They'll be responsible for the everyday work of judging

among the people. They'll bring the hard cases to you, but in the routine cases they'll be the judges. They will share your load and that will make it easier for you. If you handle the work this way, you'll have the strength to carry out whatever God commands you, and the people in their settings will flourish also."

Moses listened to the counsel of his father-in-law and did everything he said. Moses picked competent men from all Israel and set them as leaders over the people who were organized by the thousand, by the hundred, by fifty, and by ten. They took over the everyday work of judging among the people. They brought the hard cases to Moses, but in the routine cases they were the judges. Then Moses said good-bye to his father-in-law who went home to his own country."

Moses' straight-talking father-in-law pointed out that Moses' leadership style would surely result in burnout, not only for himself but for the people as well. He then went on to coach Moses about organizing the people into groups, recruiting good leaders to handle the routine, everyday matters, and bringing the most difficult cases to Moses. When Moses followed this advice, the political organization of Israel was born.

Questions for Reflection

(1) To what extent are you encumbered, as Moses was, with the idea that you must be all things to all people?

(2) What contribution are you making to the ministry of First Baptist Church? What contribution could you make?

THE MINISTRY OF ADMINISTRATION AT FBC

How do these biblical stories relate to administration at First Baptist Church? Larry Rasmussen points out in *Practicing Our Faith*, "Christian congregations require governance, as Paul knew so well Communities, in order to be communities, must be ordered, cared for, led.... Coordinating a community's practices through good governance helps to make its way of life clear, visible, and viable."

As a Baptist church, we believe that authority for church governance resides with the congregation. At First Baptist Church, committee chairs and organizational leaders meet as a church council to consider proposals and recommendations that are then brought to church conference, our regular monthly business meeting, for consideration. Once the church makes a decision in conference, church officers and committees are authorized to implement those decisions.

You might say, and rightfully so, that the need for administration is a "no-brainer," a necessary chore that somebody has got to do. But how often do we stop to consider administration from a spiritual perspective? How often do we think of reports, deliberation, and voting as offerings to God? How often do we perceive of our budget preparation as a response to Jesus'



instruction to the disciples: “How many loves do you have? Go and see”? Even something like our weekly preparation for Wednesday night supper can be a way of “organizing the people” so they might receive the miracles of fellowship and community.

Carol Crawford Holcomb highlights this perspective in the Baptist Heritage Society’s brochure *Doing Church Baptist Style: Congregationalism*.

“One problem many churches face is a false distinction between “business” matters and “spiritual” matters, as though the governance of the church is somehow unconnected to the work of the kingdom of God. In truth, the everyday matters of the church – from choosing deacons and pastors, to organizing the budget—are profoundly spiritual issues that will shape how well the church functions as the body of Christ.”

You may have heard the old story, probably apocryphal, about a man who passed three workers on a construction site. “What are you doing?” he asked the first man. “I am breaking rocks” he replied. Approaching the second man, he asked “What are *you* doing?” “I am earning living”, the man replied. The third man, when asked the same question, replied “I’m building a cathedral”!

Questions for Reflection

- (1) In what ways do you identify with each of the stonecutters?
- (2) On what church committee do you serve? What would be a “spiritual” understanding of this committee’s contribution to the overall life of our church?

All three of these perspectives are important. No one can build anything if the raw materials have not been provided. Laboring to provide for ourselves and our families is certainly a task that God blesses. And periodically, we all need to look up from our work and understand the larger meaning of what we are doing. Breaking rocks, feeding our families, and building cathedrals are all valid perspectives, but we lose something important if we limit ourselves to any one of them.

Just as the three stonecutters reflected different perspectives on what they were doing, the task of administration can be viewed on multiple levels. First, we can understand administration as the exercise of a *spiritual gift*. Some people are blessed with an ability to get things done. They can motivate and inspire God’s people in such

a way that they work together to do the church’s work effectively. Whether serving as a money counter or Sunday school superintendent, coordinating a reception, or organizing a Family Fun Night, you are using the gift of administration.

Second, administration can be seen as a *ministry*. While Christ gave his ministry to the whole church, it is often preferable to share ministry responsibilities. In Acts 6, the apostles realized early on that micro-managing all of the church’s ministries would burn them out and distract them from their chief priorities of prayer and “serving the word” (Acts 6:4). Therefore, they called for the church to appoint trustworthy lay Christians who would minister to the widows. This freed the apostles to preach and teach. In this way, Christians could serve in ways that made the best use of their spiritual gifts.

We are blessed with a team of ministers at First Baptist Church who are both called and gifted. Much like the apostles of the early church, they serve as “representative ministers,” acting and ministering on behalf of all of us. Walter Shurden expresses it well in one of last year’s Stewardship Lessons:

“Not a day goes by that Bob Setzer, our pastor, does not “answer the phone for us”. Almost EVERY day, including Saturday and Sunday, our ministerial staff answers the phone on behalf of our partnership here at the top of Poplar. Every time one of our ministers hears a troubled or grieving or distraught or complaining voice on the other end of the line, they have just “answered the phone in my name” and in the name of the partnership.”

What this means in stewardship language is that the money you and I pledge to the budget of our church makes it possible for ministry to happen on our behalf. The Personnel line item in our annual budget makes it possible for called and gifted ministers and staff to lead us in visioning and implementing the ministry God is calling us to as a congregation.

The Greek word usually translated word *administration* is likened to piloting a ship. This suggests providing direction and oversight rather than micro-management of superfluous details. The Organizational Manual of our church reflects this view when it states, “The church staff is not to replace the work of the church membership, but to facilitate and guide its work.”

“Dancing atop the pyramids” is an ancient metaphor that captures an important aspect of Bob Setzer’s role as Senior Pastor. His blessing and imprint are needed for countless ministry activities. Yet, if he gets too involved in the details of any of them, the other activities will suffer and his overall ministry will not be as effective. On any given day, all of our ministers are juggling a long list of projects, meetings, personal visits, follow-up activities, planning, writing, trouble-shooting, and phone calls.



The passage about Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18 also argues strongly for collaboration between lay leaders and the ministerial staff. Laypeople can’t do everything, and ministers can’t either! What is needed is both capable professional leadership and able, active lay participation. In practical terms, we must then address the question of what needs to be lay-driven and what would most benefit from the expertise and training of staff ministers?

At First Baptist Church, we are blessed with many lay leaders who are able to organize people and get things done. It is one of the strengths of our church that lay members partner with ministerial staff in doing the work and building the fellowship.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Administration is also a means for implementing the congregation’s vision for ministry. A congregation has been described as “a diverse group of people heading in the same direction.” It is not enough for a community of faith to have a vision of what God is calling them to do. They must have a plan for implementing that vision and breathing life into it. In that sense, the nuts and bolts of participation in the work the kingdom of God is administration. Therefore, all of our varied contributions are equally important.

Those who prepare our Communion table for the Lord's Supper make a contribution no less important than the deacons who serve or the ministers who lead us. Those who organize our Tender Loving Care ministry to homebound members are following Jesus' example of reaching out with love and practical care.

In order for our church to carry out its purpose, we must plan, organize, and equip our members. We must generate and apply resources. No one person can do the job single-handedly, but when each member contributes his or her gifts—whether balancing the budget or setting up tables—and everyone does his or her share, we become the body of Christ and accomplish the vision God has given us.

When you sign your commitment card, you are offering your personal "loaves and fish" toward the ministry of this congregation. You are making it possible for ministry to happen on your behalf, through the ministers who represent us. You are helping to provide facilities, maintenance, and supplies that are needed to implement the vision of our congregation. And when, along with the commitment of your financial gifts, you also commit yourself and your spiritual gifts, you are helping to breathe life into our collective vision of God's plan for First Baptist Church. That, my friends, is an exceptional cathedral!

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THE MINISTRY OF SACRED SPACE: OUR BUILDINGS AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Rollin Armour and Doris Williams

Buildings dedicated for Christian worship—church buildings per se—came into being only with the legalization of the Christian movement by the Emperor Constantine in the early 300s. After that, Christians were permitted to own property dedicated to worship. We know, for instance, of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, built at the order of Helen, the mother of Constantine. Even today there is a church by that name on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. As the centuries passed, more and more church buildings were constructed, later reaching a high point in the impressive cathedrals of medieval Europe.

Churches in the New World were sometimes modeled after those in Europe, but from early on Christians, especially Puritans and Quakers, usually built plain “meeting houses.” Thus, a rather new style developed in America of much less grand and more practical churches designed principally for preaching services (and later for education as Sunday schools were developed). These were often lovely but simple buildings. They were generally constructed of wood and had little more than a steeple, or occasionally stained glass windows, to mark them as church buildings. Something of the old, even European, style can be seen in the stained glass windows and the marvelous beams and visible roof structure in the sanctuary of our great old church. The rest of the building, however, is built to be practical, with rooms of various sizes for offices, meetings, and classes.



BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The first building for the worship of God reported in the Scriptures is the Jerusalem temple constructed at the command of King Solomon in the early 900s BC. Built on the hill of Zion in Jerusalem by Canaanite craftsmen from Phoenicia, its main room was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. This was a sacred area entered only once a year by the high priest who offered the great sacrifice for sins on the Day of Atonement. For some four hundred years, the temple served as a place for offering sacrifices as commanded by the Torah, but it was destroyed by the Babylonians when they conquered the city in 587 BC.

In the Babylonian Exile, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of a grand and glorious reconstructed temple, well described in his book of prophecy, but the temple the exiles actually built when they returned to Jerusalem fell short Ezekiel's splendid vision. King Herod rectified that, however, when he ordered the temple enlarged and improved in the late first century BC. Great courtyards were added, for Gentiles, the women, and the men, as well as a magnificent entrance. Something of the grandeur can be seen even today in the great Western Wall, sometimes called the "Wailing Wall," with its enormous stones, one of them forty-six feet in length. Herod's temple was still a place for priests and their sacrifices, but the new courtyards provided space for prayer by faithful Jews and even by the early Christians, as we are told in the book of Acts (see Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12). That temple was also destroyed, this time by the Romans in AD 70 by troops commanded by the Roman general Titus, who would later become emperor. That event ended the life of the temple and the sacrificial system for which it was designed.

By then, however, Jews had developed synagogues as local places of worship. Even with the destruction of the temple, Jewish life continued virtually unbroken, but centered on these new places of worship. Unlike the temple, synagogues were not for sacrifices, but rather were places for the reading of Scripture, sermons, and prayer. These were buildings for worship by the people, not sacrifices by the priests. We recall from the Gospels that Jesus visited the synagogues regularly (Mt 4:23; Mk 1:21; Lk 4:16).

The Scriptures have no mention of Christian church buildings, though they do speak of "a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (Col 2:11) and "our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor 5:2). In the first years of the Christian movement, believers in Jerusalem used the temple as a place of worship, though they also they met in homes. The home of John Mark's mother seems to have been one of those used in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), and the congregations established by Paul also commonly used homes, as was the case with Philemon's home in Colosse (Philem 2). We find references to other "house churches" in Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and Colossians 4:15. According to Acts 19:9, Paul also taught in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus. He later recalled how he instructed the Ephesians both "publicly and from house to house" (Ac 20:20).

OUR BUILDINGS AT FBC

Our first church building was at the corner of Second and Mulberry Streets, where the County Courthouse is now. A historical marker, placed there in 1951 on the Second Street side of the Courthouse, marks the spot. A brick building, it was ready for use in 1831. Until then, the congregation had met in various places including the courthouse,

*"When once thy foot enters the church,
be bare.
God is more there than thou: for thou
art there
Only by his permission. Then beware,
That leads from earth to heaven."
— George Herbert*

the Presbyterian Church, the Masonic Hall, and the Macon Academy. In his history of our church, Dr. Lewis Batts notes that "a letter in the *Telegraph* of May 14, 1831, referred to 'three neat and beautiful temples of Christian devotion' standing in the city at that time." The three would have been the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and our Baptist church.

But the church soon accumulated more debt than it could handle. After two years of use, the congregation sold the property. A second building was erected on the northeast corner of the intersection of Cherry and Sixth Streets. The congregation was worshipping there by August 1834. The structure faced Sixth Street and was directly across from the city's first cemetery. (Thomas M. Ellis, a druggist, banker, and important early leader of our congregation is buried in that cemetery. We had the grave restored and placed an appropriate marker on it in 2003.) During the congregation's tenure at this site the anti-mission controversy erupted and our church stayed with the pro-mission and pro-education wing.

After only five years at the Cherry Street location, the congregation moved once again, this time to a large wooden building at the intersection of First and Plum Streets, facing First. In 1855, the congregation moved yet again to a site on the east side of Second, between Cherry and Poplar Streets. Batts writes: "Praise for the new building was unlimited. The editor of the *Georgia Citizen* declared it 'an ornament to the city ... the finest church edifice in Macon ... second to none in the State, in point of architectural design and beauty.'" In a historical note, Bridges Smith, a sometime mayor of the city and newspaper columnist, later wrote in the *Telegraph* that "it was a big, white church, of Gothic style, covered almost with ivy, and surrounded by tall trees. It was selected because of its size for the last speech of Jefferson Davis to Macon people before the war ended." Just as the congregation would later do with our present building, they first met in the basement because the full church building was not yet completed.



Almost 109 years ago our present building was completed. The story begins in 1883 with a fire in the Gothic structure on Second Street. One Saturday morning, an office worker in the building next door looked out and saw smoke and fire from the church. Our church was on fire! The exterior of the structure survived fairly well, but before the fire was out the inside was completely destroyed. The members had already been talking about moving, and now they had a new reason to relocate. And so they settled on the property at the top of Poplar Street where we are now and committed themselves to building anew.

While the new building was being erected, the church met in the dining room of the European Hotel on First Street. Finances were difficult for their new project, but within two years they had their building almost complete. Then tragedy struck again. A house next to the new building caught fire, and the fire spread to the new structure. For the second time in less than three years the members had lost their church building to fire. The distress and disappointment of the members must have been overwhelming. But instead of retreating, they decided to "proceed at once" to rebuild.

Meanwhile, the church held services first at the Courthouse and then at the Masonic Hall on Mulberry Street. Two years later, in 1887, they moved into the new building. The move took place in stages. First they used the basement, the "Lecture Room" as they called it. Worship services were held there, and Mercer even had a commencement in the room. Meanwhile, the chairman of the committee, C. B.



Willingham, felt that they should not move into the new church building until it was completely paid for.

That was a grand hope, but things did not quite work out that way—though they did come close. They paid off their mortgage by the means of personal notes signed by church members, and those notes plus cash contributions equaled the amount of the mortgage. And so, on May 15, 1897, the congregation moved into their new building with a service of dedication. In 2002, as part of the 175th anniversary celebration, a historical marker was installed at the front of the church indicating the date of the founding of the church as well as the

dates of the present building and the establishment of several local churches including the Mabel White Memorial Baptist Church, as well as the construction of the Warren Memorial Hospital in China.

The account of the construction our present sanctuary building is a striking story. To have two buildings burn within only a few months, and then determine that they would “proceed at once” to rebuild is quite a testimony to the church members of that day. That is a great heritage to have behind us!

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

And so, over one hundred years later, we have this same building, now well renovated. The lesson is clear, of course. We have received here what we did not build. The building has come down to us as a gift, a gift too good to keep to ourselves. Because we use it regularly and invite others to join in its use, one might say we are actually keeping the building, but that would not be correct. The renovation we have just completed is for the future, for those who come after us. And so this is a gift that will keep on giving, and, to use the words of our current motto, in that sense this building is “a gift that is too good to keep.”

Over the years, the 1887 building has been added to and enlarged: first, the Sunday School Building (1913-14), then the Baraca Building (1932), the Washington Avenue Educational Building (1951), and the High Street Educational Building (1962), all to provide space for the church’s educational classes and programs and office space for church staff.

We have now completed a thorough renovation project: the steeple has been

*“Every spirit makes its house, and we can give a shrewd guess from the house to the inhabitant.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

cleaned and made sanitary, the bricks have been pointed with fresh mortar, the leaking roof has been renewed, new carpet has been laid, walls have been painted, the kitchen has been overhauled, modernized, and brought up to code, and on and on. As a result, we have a renewed building dedicated to worship and instruction and to the greater

glory of God. Even King Solomon would be proud, and perhaps even the builders of the European cathedrals. We certainly can be proud, and more than proud, we can be grateful for the sacrificial contributions that have made all this possible, and for the success of the project.

The construction work and almost all of the renovation has been done. From time to time new projects have been added: the overhaul of the kitchen, the renewal of the Great Room, reworking the air conditioning and heating system (King Solomon would really be impressed, wouldn't he?). We also have renovated the Fellowship Hall and brought it up to a standard we can well be happy about. The major task remaining is to finish paying for the work. The total cost has been \$1,800,000, of which we still owe only around \$350,000. As you think about your pledge for the coming year, do remember the renovation project. Do not be misled by the completion of the work into thinking our debts are all paid. They are not. What remains, however, is a small portion of the total, and members have been faithful and generous since the church committed itself to the renewal of the buildings. We can continue that record, and as we do be glad for what we have done.

In addition, our church has wisely established a Legacy Fund, an endowment if you will, to assist in keeping the repairs on the building up to date. The reason we had such large project to undertake in our recent renovation is that we had let much of the structure deteriorate. The goal is a fund of \$250,000 from which interest could be drawn from time to time to make needed repairs. With such a fund behind us, maintenance would not be the problem we faced this time. Some things had been done. The steeple was repaired in 1979 and the High Street building given a new roof. The E. Y. Mallory, Sr., organ was renewed and the sanctuary refurbished at a cost of some \$400,000 in 1986 and 1987, just in time for the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the building. But it became clear a few years ago that the time was upon us for a complete renovation. And we have done it!

As you make out your pledge for the next year, do remember this renovation project and the Legacy Fund as well. Both are worthy and needed projects for the life and ministry of our church.

