

A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF Bethany Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Arapahoe, North Carolina

This study is a starting place to help us together as a congregation to discern what God is calling us to be and do in the years ahead. This is a “living document” because it is still open to change, correction and refinement as the process of discernment unfolds.

It is ultimately the congregation and its leadership that must embrace the analysis, correctly discerns God’s desires for this congregation, and takes responsibility for the various recommendations and actions that will grow out of the process.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.”

Jeremiah 29:11-13

Introduction

The leadership of Bethany Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) believes that the time is right to undertake a process of self-examination and discernment that will help the congregation build on its strengths and move into the future with renewed purpose and vision.

To assist in this, Dr. Richard L. Hamm helped start us off with workshops about the re-visioning process. The process follows five basic steps:

- 1) A time of discernment in which the entire congregation will be invited to join in a program of prayerful dialogue about what God is calling us to become. This period of “discernment,” which is seeking to understand the will of God, is different from mere “democracy,” which seeks only to understand the will of the people. Eventually, the congregation will be asked to make a democratic decision regarding the resulting vision, but we want to make certain that God is a partner in the process of discerning a vision.
- 2) Development of a “contextual analysis” that will help us understand who we are as a congregation and the community in which we are located.
- 3) The development and affirmation (by the congregation) of a vision coming out of the time of dialogue and discernment.
- 4) The development and affirmation (by the congregation) of a strategic plan designed to help the congregation implement the vision which we have discerned and affirmed.

We began by going into a time of discernment. This step, which might be called “holy conversations,” involved the formation of small groups of three members each that met 10 times for 100 minutes each time over the course of 100 days. These groups were provided an agenda for each of their ten sessions and the insights and discernments discovered in these small groups of three were gathered by the Vision Team for use in the next steps.

The congregational meeting that has been called to discuss this document is part of the second step: the development of a contextual analysis of the congregation and community. The Vision Team gathered information about our history and our community and that has been drawn together in this document. The Vision Team believes this is a reasonably accurate account of where we stand today and how we got here. However, this document may still be altered as relevant information is developed or discovered by the committee and from the feedback of our church members.

Once the small Vision Team completes the contextual analysis, we will move to the third step: the writing of a vision that reflects what was discerned in the small groups. This work will be done by the Vision Team and brought back to the congregation for critique and affirmation.

After the Vision is approved by the congregation, the Vision Team will lead in the development of a strategic plan to assist in the implementation of the vision. The congregation will be involved in the development of this plan and it, too, will ultimately require the affirmation of the congregation.

The Vision Team is pleased to present the following “contextual analysis” of our congregation and community.

General Background

Bethany has enjoyed many very fine ministers and excellent lay leadership through the decades.

Ministers of the last 100 years:

John Waters	1912-1959	with Gaps
Worden Allen	1960-1961	
Roland Jones	1961-1964	
Robert Delt	1965	Interim
Billy Adams	1965-1966	
Jerry Burton	1966-1978	
Raymon Alexander	1978-1979	Interim
Pat Parvin	1979-1984	
Harold Deitch	1984-1985	Interim
Merritt Watson	1985-2000	
Maurice Ankrom	2000-2001	Interim
Gary Edge	2001-2007	
Merritt Watson/Roger Bennett	2007-2008	Co-Pastors
Merritt Watson	2008-present	

Organist – Naomi Cahoon – 52 years

Pianist – Shirley Ensley-

Pamlico County Demographics

Note: The demographic information provided below for Pamlico County was obtained from Pellucid Demographic Analysis.

Total Population

<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2011 Estimate</u>	<u>2016 Projection</u>
11,373	12,937	13,451	14,675

Estimated Population by Age

2016 Projected Median Age	50
2011 Projected Median Age	48
2000 Census Median Age	43

Ages:

<19	2,605	19.8%
20-29	1,304	9.9%
30-39	1,326	10.1%
40-49	1,672	12.7%
50-59	2,186	16.6%
60+	4,083	31.0%

Note: The information in the next category was provided from the Pamlico County US Census 2012 Race Ethnicity Report.

Race & Ethnicity (Total Population 13,144)

American Indian/AK Nat	77	0.06%
Asian	50	0.40%
Black	2,632	20.00%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	11	0.10%
Other	163	1.20%
Multiple Race	179	1.40%
White	10,032	76.30%
Hispanic Ethnicity	412	3.10%
Not Hispanic or Latini	12,732	96.90%

Religious Affiliation Preference

Baptist	2,050
Assemblies of God	37
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	492
Pentecostal Holiness Churches	66
Episcopal Church	187
United Church of Christ	454
United Methodist Church	1,410
96.90%	

Bethany Christian Church Demographics
(based on questionnaires returned)

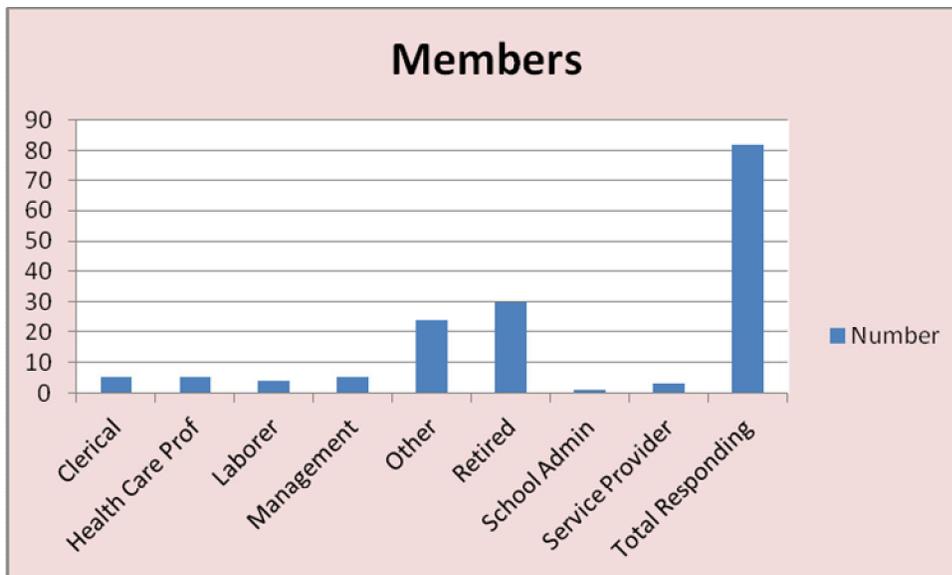
	Individuals	Percentage
Male	43	47%
Female	48	53%

Education

High School	15
Some College	26
BA	27
Post Graduate	7

Occupation

	<u>Number</u>
Clerical	5
Health Care Prof	5
Laborer	4
Management	5
Other	24
Retired	30
School Admin	1
Service Provider	3
Total Responding	82



The occupations shown on the preceding page in the table and in the chart show the church congregation is mainly retired.

Year	Total Members	Baptisms	Worship Attend	Sunday School Attend
1999		2	94.8	59.4
2000		2	89.75	56
2001		3	87.9	56
2002		2	91.9	60
2003		1	84.6	52.4
2004		0	83	43
2005		5	78.6	43
2006		0	78.3	41.75
2007		0	78.5	N/A
2008		1	69.6	N/A
2009		10	78.2	N/A
2010		4	66.9	N/A
2011		0	68.8	N/A
2012		0	68.8	N/A

The most reliable figures in the Yearbook are those for average worship attendance, and baptisms.

Based upon average worship attendance, the participation at BCC has been steadily decreasing over the past years. The number of people being baptized or transferring their membership into BCC fell off and remains low.

Membership Changes

Year	Death	Transfers	Additions
2002	2	1	5
2003	4	1	4
2004	3	1	6
2005	5	3	1
2006	4	0	3
2007	6	2	0
2008	0	0	5
2009	4	1	15
2010	5	2	10
2011	4	6	3
2012	3	4	1
Totals	40	21	55

Adult Small Groups in Which Participation Is Emotionally Significant

Adult Small Groups	Participants
<i>Sunday School Classes:</i>	
The Good Shepherd	
The Seekers	
Faith Cafe	
<i>Music Department:</i>	
Adult Choir	14
Southern Gospel Choir	10
Bell Choir	12
<i>Women's Groups:</i>	
CWF	
Group 4	
Group 5	
CMF	

Youth/Children Groups in Which Participation Is Emotionally Significant

Youth/Children Groups	
Youth Group	11
High School	3
5-8	7
K-4	4
Nursery	1

Vision Team Descriptions of Bethany Christian Church

The following represent the Vision Team’s perceptions of the congregation – its strengths, weaknesses, etc.

Reasons why members participate in Bethany Christian Church, in order:

- To see other church members/have a sense of community
- Music
- Sunday School – to learn about the Bible in-depth
- Sermon
- Spiritual Fulfillment
- Convenient location
- Friendliness of the congregation
- Church events
- Communion every Sunday
- Non-judgmental congregation
- Faithfulness
- Outreach Projects
- Church leaders
- Family ties to the church

Have there been serious conflicts in the life of the congregation during the past 25 years?

- There have been no major conflicts – defining “major” to mean a conflict to splinter the congregation.
- Small misunderstandings have occurred

Signs of renewal (as named by the Vision Team) include:

- More visitors
- Thriving music program
- Working on this Transformation process
- Renewed interest in attending from families who usually attend other churches but were originally members of our church

Six things the congregation does well and does not do well

What we do well	What we don’t do well
Outreach	Evangelism
Fundraising	Church promotion
Ministering to the congregation	Not varied in ethnicity
Congregation friendly, welcoming, believes in fellowship	Few young members and children
Worship quality-especially music program	Communication skills
Youth program	Social media presence

Signs of decline identified

- Low attendance – not only in worship but at almost all church functions
- Many member deaths
- Deacons/deaconesses don't attend unless they're serving at the communion table
- Very few children in attendance

Describe the Self-Image of the congregation

- Friendly
- Welcoming
- Faithful
- Warm
- Caring
- Older
- Traditional
- Combination of a family and pastor-centered church

Women's and Men's Groups

- Christian Women's Fellowship
 1. 2 Circles – Group 4 & 5
 2. CWF – Combination of the two women's groups (4 & 5)
 3. Groups fundraise for the church
 4. Groups send cards; help families at Christmas (by paying bills, etc.); donate camp scholarships for children who want to attend; donate to local charities like Hospice, Hope Clinic, schools and Salvation Army among others; provide transportation to and from the doctor for the elderly and take food to the homes of the elderly for service and mission work.
 5. Hold group meetings; a Christmas party; buy Christmas trees and "pretty much run everything" as part of their fellowship time together.
- Christian Men's Fellowship
 1. Help with clean-up and upkeep of Camp Caroline
 2. Hold church clean-up days
 3. Do projects around the church-the current one is to create a columbarium to house the ashes of church members who wish to be put there
 4. Sponsor Hanging of the Greens to decorate the church for Christmas
 5. Give money to their projects and programs sponsored by the women's groups.
 6. Interact with members of and sometimes host the District CMF

Youth Group

- CYF – Divided into older (4th grade and up) and younger (3rd grade and below):
 1. Group meets once a month
 2. Members are involved in a music program (playing chimes)
 3. Members help with Harvest Dinner (the main fundraiser for the CWF). Members helped with a spaghetti dinner fundraiser to help pay for medical treatment for a member of the congregation.
 4. Members study the Bible in small groups
 5. Members have lock-ins
 6. Members clean yards
 7. Members have outings to see movies
 8. Members participate in Trunk or Treat
- Youth from 2003 no longer active
 - Had young group, but also had group for high school age students (FROG – Fully Rely on God)
 - Did in-depth study of the Bible
 - Took a trip to Florida to visit the Holy Land Experience

Evangelism/Local Outreach – Geographical Target Area of the Congregation

- Evangelism
 1. Locally
 2. Within Pamlico County
- Local Outreach
 1. Locally
 2. Mainly Pamlico County, with some outreach efforts branching into the surrounding counties like Craven.

Local/global Outreach projects/programs undertaken within the past 10 years

Active

- Fishes and Loaves – a local charity that feeds needy families
- Operation Christmas Child
- Military boxes
- Christmas families
- Church bell choir plays at nursing homes
- Donations to global Christian Church DOC through special offerings for disaster relief
- Thanksgiving food donations
- Helping the homeless
- Card ministry – sending cards to shut-in or ailing members of the congregation
- Fundraising for Camp Caroline – a local DOC camp
- 8 Days of Hope for disaster relief from Hurricane Irene

- Collecting money to purchase mattresses for people’s homes
- Sending money to Haiti earthquake victims
- Sending relief to the Philippines
- Church members traveled to help rebuild Hurricane Katrina victims’ homes

Arapahoe and Pamlico County are very rural. Economically, we have mainly middle class families; however, there are several wealthy families and several poverty stricken families in the town as well. Socially, the community is welcoming but cautious, tending towards being insular.

The rural nature of our town, which does include a lot of farmland, and the fact that most of our citizens are born and bred Southerners means that the political climate of the town is conservative to moderate (though mainly conservative). For that same reason, most of the members of the community are Christian – though of many differing denominations. Despite the caution towards newcomers described in the first paragraph, overall the community would mainly be friendly if looking at it from an attitudinal standpoint.

Governance

Board/Committee:	# Members	Meetings
General Board	44	Monthly
Ministry Teams:		
Communications	7	As necessary
Property	3	As necessary
Budget & Stewardship	9	As necessary
Outreach Ministry	4	Quarterly
Worship	3	As necessary
Memorial	2	As necessary

Board/Committee Member Meeting Attendance

- Board, 35% - 40%
- Committees – 90%

Committees/departments functioning/non-functioning

Functioning:

- Budget/Stewardship Committee
- Worship Committee
- Communications Committee
- Scholarship Committee
- Housekeeping Committee
- Insurance Committee
- Property Committee
- Activities Committee

Non-functioning:

- Pastoral Relations Committee – never really did anything even when first formed

Elders and Deacons

What our Elders do

- Prepare church members hearts and minds for communion -they “serve at the table”
- Act as extensions of the minister in reaching out to members of the church and community.
- Act as church leaders and as representatives of the church in meetings and in the community
- Take communion to shut-ins
- Act as spiritual leaders
- Act as church board members
- Be active church members
- Have a purpose of service

What our Deacons do

- Welcome the congregation and visitors to the church
- Prepare communion for the table
- Serve communion to the congregation
- Take up the offering
- Serve as ushers
- Act as voting members of the church board
- Lay their hands on those in need of prayer

Capital Needs and Repair List

We have no real capital needs at this time as the church is a relatively new building that is completely paid for. If minor repairs are needed, members of the congregation report it to the chairman of the property committee, who is a general contractor, and he either repairs it himself or brings bids of local entities before the church board for them to vote on if/when they want the item to be repaired and who they want to repair it.