

Covenant of Commitment

First Christian Church and Blanton Elementary

Believing that we are called to serve the community in which we are planted, we establish this covenant with the Blanton Elementary family. We extend this commitment in service and love.

Over the next three years, we commit to:

Lift up in prayer Blanton's students, teachers, administrators, families, and staff.

Four times a year (twice each semester) provide at least 30 volunteers per event for experiential learning events. The exact nature of these experiential learning events will be coordinated with school's staff, specifically Family Representative, the Counselor and the Principal. We understand that all First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) volunteers will submit a volunteer application that will involve a criminal background check through AISD as is similar to our policy concerning all who work with children and youth.

We will support the uniform needs of the students by providing mutually agreed upon set of uniform items each year. The goal for our uniform collection will be determined annually in consultation with the Blanton's Family Representative.

We will provide school supplies during both August and January to supply the discretionary supplies closet—from which students who have needs may obtain necessary supplies.

We in no way want to limit ourselves to these commitments. Rather, we see this as a starting point with hopes that additional opportunities for cooperation will emerge—mentoring, other forms of interaction, support and encouragement.

Signed:

Steve Paulsen
Principal

Robert Raith
Church Moderator

Brenda Mathiews
Counselor

Andy Mangum
Sr. Minister

Annette Gomez-Leon
Title 1 Family Representative

December 9, 2007

Background to the Covenant

Presentation to the Elders
Long Range Planning Committee
September 2007

Introduction

The Long Range planning committee began its work in August 2006. We started by discussing the nature of the church and used the “Frames of the Church” language that the Elders and Church staff developed earlier this decade (see Appendix A). We also read some literature about church values and visions casting. Finally, we developed a method of investigating our goals in terms of understanding the “Narratives” that people tell about their experiences here. Out of this model, we developed a plan to hold community conversations where people shared their stories in small groups. We had conversations about our own experiences in community forming. We also shared our stories about our entrance into the church and involvement in the church.

In January 2007, the church leadership came back from the annual planning retreat with a great deal of energy and excitement around the issue of shared mission in outreach. We heard from them a strong desire to see the church undertake an inter-generational, shared mission project that would provide multiple ways of connecting to the ministry. In response to this growing energy, the members of the Long Range Planning Committee and Leadership Retreat Attendees met and discussed observations and thoughts. As a consequence, we decided that the community conversations should focus primarily in the “World Serving” quadrant.

Method

We tried to follow a narrative approach to understanding the values of the church’s membership. This meant that we worked to illicit storytelling from people and then listened to the values being expressed within the stories they told. We did this through small group conversations.

We met initially as a committee with a few additional participants and held an initial meeting. We created a list of the outreach ministries First Christian Church had undertaken in the 1950s-1960, 1970s-1980s, and 1990s-2000s (see Appendix B). In each two decade block, the known outreach ministries were introduced. Time was given for people to further explain the ministry and also add outreach ministries that the committee may have overlooked. Then, each participant was asked to identify the one outreach ministry that resonated most with their own personal values or narratives. This was a “forced choice” exercise in which we asked people to identify the one and explicitly one ministry per time period. This model of conversation was followed in three sets of small group meetings.

In all, over 100 participants came to small group conversations which were held alongside a meal. Tables of participants were led through the discussion by Long Range Planning team members. The results of people's forced choices were placed on flip charts.

Results

1950's and 1960's

Global Outreach	21
Vacation Bible School	41
Beloveds	31
Pastor's Discretionary Fund	2
Campus Ministry	7
Parents Day Out	7
Boy Scouts	3
Arlington Ministerial Association	5

1970s-1980s

Carter Jr. High	32
Arlington Charities	24
Television Ministry	11
Blood Drives	9
Serendipties	4
Athletics	8
Adopt-A-Grandparent	5
Kevin Curnutt Team	1
Habitat for Humanity	3

1990s-2000s

Annual Youth Mission Projects	39
English Classes	9
Adult Mission Trips	3
Feed Arlington	4
Neighborhood Meals	10
Dolls for Cook Children Medical	6
East Arlington Renewal	1
Ulster Project	2
Adopt a School	2
Salvation Army	2

Committee members reflecting upon these conversations in letters addressed to the congregation (see Appendix C) In reflecting upon what people said, the stories they told, and the values that lay beneath those stories, we saw a church vision even more dispersed than the numbers reflect. We have functioned for the past fifty years as an unleashed church which means that we call people to serve generally and we have developed some

opportunities for people to serve. The ministries we have engaged in have largely been driven by a handful of people who have a passion or sense of obligation to carry that ministry forward. People are drawn into opportunities to serve the world through a variety of motivations. Further, what people experience and find rewarding is also diverse. We had hoped that the community conversations would identify for us some underlying shared values around which we could form a single, unifying mission.

At this point, the Long Range Committee deliberated the question of whether we should advocate for the church to continue in its unleashed pattern or seek a way to focus people's energy around a single mission. This clearly was a rock and hard place question for us. The unleashed pattern of world serving describes our history and status quo. It is a model that we have fairly well lived with and lived into for as long as anyone can remember. There is nothing wrong with this pattern. However, it seemed undesirable to us to continue this pattern for the following reasons:

- ❖ As people serve in unleashed ways, they become isolated from the support of the church.
- ❖ Unleashed ministries often “fade into the woodwork.” We do not lift them up often enough.
- ❖ The spiritual dynamic often gets lost in unleashed ministry as people get bogged down in doing the work in a sort of checklist manner rather than really feeling fulfilled in their work.
- ❖ When the people with the initial passion for the unleashed ministry decide to let it go there is dissonance. They feel as though letting it go means “failure.” Similarly, the church membership feels some obligation to perpetuate a ministry for the sake of those who had the initial passion rather than ought of an internal sense of call toward that mission.
- ❖ Unleashed ministries work for those who are already motivated to serve. It is difficult for:
 - Those who are not accustomed to service.
 - Those who cannot take on long-term responsibilities
 - Those who are not “self-starters.”
- ❖ Unleashed ministries create myriad options. It becomes difficult for the church to know where its true priorities lie.

As a result of this discussion, the Long Range Planning moved in the direction of looking outside our experiences and the narratives that were shared to consider what might be needs beyond our church to which we could recommend a church-wide commitment. We decided to hold an additional set of conversations with people in service to the community beyond the walls of the church.

We met with:

Dale Aterbury, East Arlington Review. Dale is a conservative political watchdog. He asserted the value of programs and ministries that enabled people to solve their own problems rather than “hand-out” programs. He recommended cooperatives with the Police as well as HOPE tutoring.

Annette Williams, H.O.P.E. Tutoring. H.O.P.E. Tutoring is a tutoring program for young people between the 4th and 8th grade. Participant churches agree to supply all the volunteers for a site (two days a week) for the first year. They also contribute \$5000 annually to the program.

Brenda Matthews, counselor Blanton Elementary. Blanton is a Title 1 school. When we asked Brenda what the students at Blanton needed, she identified: experiences, help purchasing uniforms, school supplies and general involvement.

Jim Walther, Arlington Alliance for Youth. Jim spoke to us about the possibility of joining with a Kiwanis club initiative to create a Family Volunteer Club. This club would involve a youth and parent gathering once or twice a month for meetings and various service projects—helping elderly with yard work, planting trees, visiting nursing homes, etc. The goal of this club would be to get lower income families in the neighborhood engaged in volunteer work. The church would be the locus of the organization. Jim cited the value that volunteering has *for* the self-esteem, modeling, family dynamics and development of poorer families.

Diana Kunde, director of the English as a Second Language Ministry at Northwest Christian Church. Diana spoke to us about her experience creating the ESL ministry and her needs for partners to provide funding, volunteers and resource support—like snacks once a month.

Recommendation

The committee began to form criteria by which to evaluate the possibilities. We indicated our preference for:

- ❖ A local ministry—this drawn from conversations.
- ❖ A ministry where we can serve together—drawn from the 2007 leadership retreat
- ❖ A ministry where we serve children—drawn from our own conversations.

Ultimately, we were drawn to a partnership with Blanton elementary. This decision was not overwhelming. We recognized that many of the ministries described fulfilled the criteria. However, a couple of the ministries either seemed unworkable or redundant. For instance, First Presbyterian Church currently operates a H.O.P.E. Tutoring site. It didn't seem like good stewardship to duplicate the work they are already doing.

At least one committee member thought that we had set our sites too low and felt that we could take on a larger, more ambitious mission.

Nonetheless, the majority of the Long Range Planning Committee affirmed the decision to pursue a relationship with Blanton Elementary. Before the start of school, Andy Mangum and Adam Fambrough met with Steve Paulsen (principal), Brenda Matthews (counselor), and Mrs. Gomez (parent outreach coordinator). We discussed there the possibilities of a covenant relationship between First Christian Church and Blanton Elementary.

We recommend a covenant involving:

1. Prayer for Blanton's students, teachers, administrators, families, and staff.
2. Providing 30 volunteers per night for four experiential events at Blanton Elementary. At least two of these experiential events would be a Career Day

where the church would recruit professionals to come and discussion/demonstrate their careers for the students and a Math/Science night (maybe two separate evenings) where the members would engage students and families in games designed to improve their math and science abilities. Other possibilities might be Art experiences, literacy/literary experiences, historical/social scientific experiences.

3. Providing Uniform assistance. According to Ms. Mattheiws, 15% of Blanton's 606 students need assistance purchasing the necessary uniforms. That's about 90 uniforms. Pricing uniform items through JC Penney's website, we estimate that a school uniform would cost at most \$42 (\$26 for slacks and \$16 for shirt). A commitment of one uniform for each child in need would be \$3780.
4. Providing School Supplies Assistance. The plan that Ms. Matthews seems to support most is the idea of providing supplies to a school supply closet from which parents, students or teachers could make requests.

We asked about the possibility of making low cost (church subsidized) school uniforms and school supply sets available to any student at Blanton recognizing that while not all the students maybe in dire need, the challenges of purchasing necessary items for school create burdens for moderately low income families also. The PTA currently sells school supply packs and they wish to continue this. Ms. Matthews did not respond to my suggestion about make low cost uniforms available to anyone who wanted it.

Unresolved Issues in the Recommendation

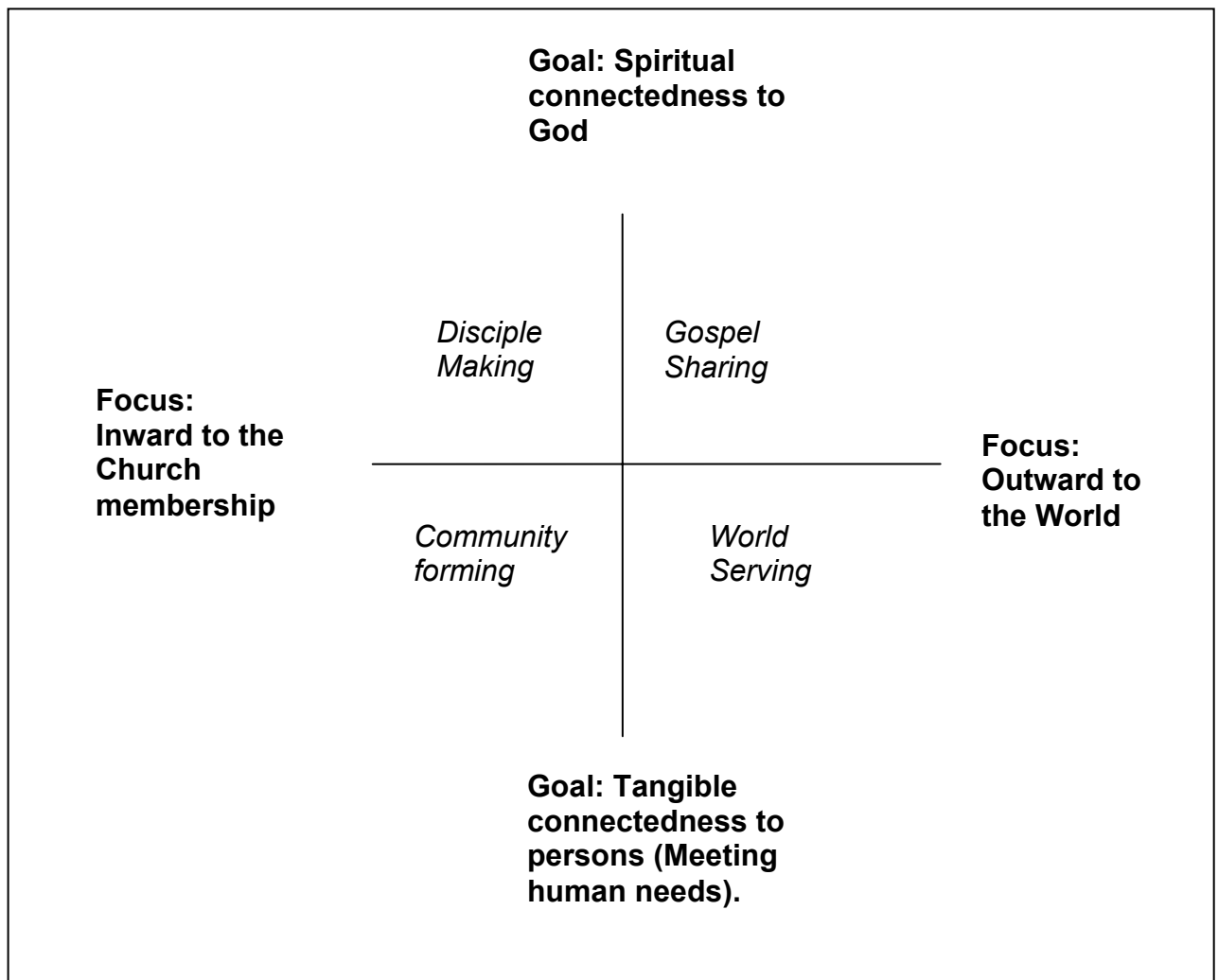
- ❖ Part of our "unleashed" mentality means that we have multiple opportunities for people to contribute money to special interest projects—the most recent Youth Abraham fund is a good example, Christmas Alternative Market is another good example. A few on the committee have hopes that this sort of shared project could push us to consider together how our monies are spent to serve the world. That it would be a mechanism for collective financial decision making rather than individualized fundraising.
- ❖ Similarly, several on the Long Range Planning Committee feel that our current approach to serving the world is fragmented. We had hoped that some of the ministries for which we seem to have lost passion could be reassessed in light of a shared commitment. That is that the focusing work would also be a narrowing opportunity. However, when the scepter of "doing away with" a particular ministry appeared in the discussion, it was a clear source of anxiety. We don't know how to help people voluntarily narrow the focus.
- ❖ Finally, it is the Sr. Minister's recommendation that a definite time limit be placed on this covenant. The church has a habit of launching new ministries with no clear ending point. This creates the situation wherein ministries die eventually leaving everyone feeling sad about the final chapter of a ministry's life rather than rejoicing in the total impact of the

ministry. The PDO experience is a good example. Objections to the recommendation are that if a ministry fills a need for a particular time it is irresponsible to withdraw support without any clear plan for who those needs continue to be met. Furthermore, it seems counterintuitive to discontinue a ministry when if it is still supported by the membership.

Where We Go From Here

The next step that we recommend is that the church create a covenant with Blanton Elementary that clearly spells out our commitments over a specified period of time. This covenant would commit our prayers, our number of volunteers for experiential events, our financial contribution to uniform and supply support. We believe this covenant ought to be presented both to the board and ultimately to the congregation. The idea is that we have looked for a mission in much the same way as we look for a minister—seeking the right fit and to do the most good. We know ask that the congregation consider a collective commitment to this ministry.

Frames of the Church



The horizontal plane illustrates the tension between inward focus (inside the church) and outward focus. Some people focus primarily on the existing membership of the church (in the language of the New Testament—one another). At the other end of the continuum, people feel compelled to focus on the world beyond the membership of the church (we often say “beyond these four walls” OR in the language of the New Testament “the Nations”). On the vertical plane is the tension between two goals. The first goal being that the goal of the Christian life is to relate spiritually to God. The goal in tension with this goal is the goal of meeting tangible human needs. The intersection of these focuses and goals creates four responses to the question: What is the purpose of the church?

Community forming: The purpose of the church is to provide a context for interpersonal relatedness. The focus is inward on the membership with the goal of

meeting tangible human needs—particularly in this church the need for companionship and support, and also the needs for day to day assistance. Church members, for instance, help each other get to and from the hospital or the doctor, take meals to each other when needed, assist one another in necessary home repairs or automobile maintenance.

Disciple making: The purpose of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The focus is inward on the membership with the goal of strengthening their relationship to God. Church members are encouraged to devote time to prayer and Bible reading. Opportunities for Bible study and Christian education are offered.

World Serving: The purpose of the church is to make a positive impact on the surrounding society (the community of Arlington, the state and nation, and the world). The focus is outward on the world beyond the church's members with the goal of meeting tangible human needs. Church members invest themselves in outreach ministries—programs for the homeless, hungry, those in need of shelter. They see the church as providing a meeting ground for community groups and feel like it's appropriate to lift up events beyond the church's program (everything from High School productions to global events) within the discourse of the church.

Gospel Sharing: The purpose of the church is to bring people to a point of confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Lord and Savior. The focus is outward on the world beyond the church's membership with the goal of moving people toward a relationship and connectedness to God. Church members see the need for inviting others to church. They wish they could witness or communicate the gospel in one-to-one conversations with non-believers.

Mission and Outreach Work of First Christian Church

This list is not comprehensive. It is suggestive of the kinds of work we have done over the years. The dating has been approximate. The goal is to identify the core values (hopes) behind these ministries (forms).

*Indicates a Ministry that continues into today.

1950's and 1960's

- *Global Outreach Giving
- *Beloveds Outreach
- *Arlington Ministerial Association
- Parents Day Out
- *Boy Scouts
- UTA Campus Ministry
- *Vacation Bible School
- *Pastor's Discretionary Fund

1970's and 1980's

- Contact Ministries
- Meals on Wheels
- *Arlington Charities
- *Blood Drive
- Carter Jr. High
- *Arlington School Supplies
- *Serendipity
- First Fruits (*periodic food drives)
- Kevin Curnutt Team
- Professional Pastoral Counseling
- Arlington Korean Church
- After School Day Care
- *TV Ministry
- *Arlington Life Shelter
- Athletics Ministry
- Adopt a Grandparent
- *Habitat for Humanity

1990's and 2000's

- *Salvation Army
- Miracle Day/TBA
- Spanish Language Class
- *Feed Arlington
- *`Periodic Adult Mission Trips (Oklahoma City, Bethany College, Jarvis College)
- *Ulster Project
- *Annual Youth Mission Trips
- East Arlington Renewal
- *Neighborhood Meal
- Costa Rica
- *Heifer Project
- Acts 2
- Katrina/Rita Response
- *Dolls/Cooks Medical Center
- Spring Community Fair
- Trunk or Treat
- Spring Community Fair
- Marketplace VBS
- *English Language Classes