

FORWARD IN FAITH
A REPORT OF THE TRANSITION TEAM TO THE SESSION OF
BRUNSWICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FEBRUARY 9, 2016

In the third and fourth quarter of 2014, major changes and events affected the entire congregation. The senior pastor had resigned, and staffing was drastically reduced due to the additional loss of a full time Music Director, Children's Ministry Director, and Youth Director.

In December of 2014, an Interim Senior Pastor was called and was charged with the tasks of processing the events of the past year with the current staff and congregation, and forming a Transition Team. The responsibilities of the Transition Team were identified as follows:

The Transition Team has an opportunity to guide the congregation toward renewal and transformation. With the help of the Specialized Interim Minister, the team will guide the process that will enable the congregation to take ownership of the search for a new pastor, and initiate a time of preparation for the affirmation and renewal of the mission and future of the church. The information gathered by this team and their ensuing recommendations should assist the Pastoral Nominating Committee to intelligently and effectively seek God's will in determining the next pastor who can fulfill the identified needs of the church.

The purpose of the team is to:

- help members of the congregation as they go through the grief process after the loss of their pastor and also help them to gain a new perspective on the chapter of their lives that has just ended
- gather feelings and ideas of both members and non-members of the congregation about their church in a time of change
- provide a forum for the sharing and focusing of hopes and aspirations
- help the congregation move from preoccupation with the past toward a state of readiness for a new chapter of its life under the leadership of a new pastor
- begin the process of involving the Session, congregation, and Pastoral Nominating Committee in the developmental tasks of the interim period
- make recommendations to Session for the necessary ministry and mission changes that will build community in the interim period

The interim period is:

- a time of challenge
- a time for self-assessment and
- a time for seeking a new vision and re-commitment to mission and ministry.

It is of *utmost importance* that effective lines of communication exist between all committees, Session, congregation, and the Interim Pastor. When people feel that they are being included in the interim process, they feel safe and are more eager to be involved in accomplishing the necessary tasks.

The members of the Transition Team

- should value each other's contributions and take suggestions and ideas seriously
- they must be able and willing to listen
- they should be people who are trusted by the congregation

The Interim Pastor

- will introduce the resources for the purpose of gathering the information to create a congregational vision and establish goals

The Transition Team

- will be responsible for planning the manner in which the information is gathered. This information and the team's recommendations will become a crucial guide for the Pastoral Nominating Committee as it interviews potential candidates for the position of new pastor

The Transition Team has 12 members and is an agent of, and reportable to, the Session. It commenced in May of 2015, and met twice a month. The Transition Team's tasks will conclude by early February of 2016.

After suggestions for members were solicited from staff and session, the following people agreed to serve on the team:

Marty Hoyt
 Greg Croll
 Joanne Snover
 Jenn Jubrey
 Larry Broderick (Elder)
 Vic Spairana (Deacon)
 Dave Borland
 Rachel Abate
 Ashley Herrmann
 Janice Hinds
 Lisa Jeschke
 Noah Boland
 Scott DeBlock (Facilitator)
 Carra McFadden (Clerk)

PROCESS

The Transition Team began meeting on May 13, 2015, and met bi-weekly thereafter. They also met with many Parish and Affinity Groups through the summer and led a congregational workshop on October 3. In addition, they met once with the staff and once with the Staff Development Team.

The Elder rep to the Transition Team reported monthly to the Session on the Transition Team's work. In addition, a Transitional Prayer Ministry team met each Sunday and every time the Transition Team met to offer prayer support.

The book *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process For Making Disciples*, by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, was read by the Transition Team and was a key component of its work, as the rest of this report will indicate. The book was also incorporated into worship and study by the wider congregation. The key learning from *Simple Church* is that there be clarity, alignment, movement, and focus in all aspects of congregational life.

TASKS

Congregational Assessment Tool

The Transition Team did a thorough review of the CAT (Congregational Assessment Tool) and used it as a springboard for conversation with the Parish and Affinity Groups throughout the summer. Over 150 people participated in these meetings. The following was shared at each meeting.

SUMMARY OF THE CAT (Church Assessment Tool) –

As part of this transitional period in the life of our congregation, the Church Assessment Tool (CAT) was administered in March. We were pleased that 250 people were invited to participate, and 218 persons responded, which is wonderful! The Session met on April 18 with Keli Rugenstein from the Samaritan Counseling Center, who went over the full report in great detail. The purpose of this letter is to give you a brief summary of what was learned from the CAT, and the next steps that will be taken.

Spiritual Vitality

The study indicated that there is a high level of spiritual vitality here, and that is correlated with the fact that self-reported giving levels of the congregation are much higher than the national average. An overwhelming majority of respondents said that during the transition period they intended to maintain or increase their level of involvement at Brunswick Church. People are highly committed to worship attendance; and it is the desire of an overwhelming majority of respondents to connect their faith to other aspects of their life.

Yet energy levels and morale indicators were low; the congregation is in a low energy, low satisfaction energy state. This is quite unsurprising given the events of the 2014. There is also a

call for improvement in preparing members for ministry and mission by helping them discern their gifts.

Theological Perspective

The theology of the members of the congregation is more diverse across the theological spectrum where it pertains to holding conservative or progressive views as they relate to the nature of scripture, the role of conversion in social change, and their relationship to the historic declaration of the church. When calling a new Pastor, we should then look for someone with an ability to connect and communicate with a theologically diverse congregation.

Governance

Overall, the CAT expressed a congregational desire for greater openness and transparency in decision making and strategic planning. Over 80% of the respondents at least somewhat agreed that the same small group of people seem to make most of the important decisions in the church. While the events of the past year required the Session to make important decisions in this fashion, we also recognize that we must strive to find more ways for every person to be heard and to understand how to respond better and more transparently when a decision results in some people's ideas being prayerfully considered, but not ultimately implemented.

People who took the CAT expressed some concern regarding the amount of conflict in the congregation, but a majority of people were not concerned. In general, the CAT results indicated that our members have a fairly high opinion of our tolerance for diverse views and our ability to work out conflict. However, we must also be cognizant of the fact that a majority of respondents feel there is a small number who people who oppose what the majority want to do.

Worship

In regards to music and worship, responses indicated that people generally agree that music at the church is outstanding in worship and appropriate in style. The response regarding the worship service overall is more spread out in terms of agreement to its quality and spiritual content.

A slight majority of the respondents indicated that they found it difficult to connect with other members who attend different worship services, and another slight majority (55%) generally agrees that we should consider changes to the current Sunday morning worship schedule. In consultation with the Session, staff, and those in worship, music, and nurture leadership, Pastor DeBlock will offer recommendations to Session in this area for implementation prior to the beginning of our church program year in September of 2015.

Next Steps

A 12-member Transition Team was formed, and they met twice a month from May 15 until January. Its membership was a well-rounded representation of our membership, and they were charged by the Session to make recommendations necessary for the wellbeing of the life of our congregation in this interim period. They met with the congregation through our parish groups to gather the feelings and ideas of the congregation for the future. This CAT process was one piece in the toolbox for this Transition Team to utilize as it seeks to accomplish its work.

In addition, there was a retreat in the fall where over 50 people in the congregation were invited to further delve into the 45-page CAT Vital Signs Report. This retreat was led by Scott DeBlock and members of the Transition Team; it was a key part of our self-study process before the formation of a Pastor Nominating Committee.

After a good period of work and self-study a Pastor Nominating Committee was appointed by the Nominating Committee elected by the congregation in early 2016. We need to provide a good sense of balance in allowing the congregation to engage in a process of reflection and healing while at the same time moving forward with a sense of “deliberate urgency” in seeking future pastoral leadership so that the congregation can move forward in faith.

FOUR PRIORITIES:

The CAT was most beneficial in that respondents pointed toward four clear priorities for the future of our congregation:

- 1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.*
- 2. Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc.).*
- 3. Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.*
- 4. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.*

Any actions taken in this transitional period will be undertaken with the true purpose of promoting and building a sense of community in the congregation while equipping it for ministry and mission. These priorities will also speak to the search process of the future Pastor Nominating Committee.

FIVE QUESTIONS:

1. In this congregation, in what ways are we becoming more faithful to the life and teachings of Christ?
2. How well are we making disciples out of our members?
3. In what ways are we good stewards of the gifts and resources available to this congregation?
4. How is what we are about as a congregation related to Kingdom issues, rather than keeping an institution or program alive?

5. In what ways do we make room for the Spirit continually to revitalize and refocus our congregation?

*(These questions are from “Discerning Your Congregation’s Future,”
by Roy Oswald and Robert Friedrich, Jr., page 3.)*

SUMMARY OF MEETINGS WITH CONGREGATION

At its July 15, 2015 meeting, the Transition Team reflected upon the notes and feedback of the congregation in the six meetings held in June and July. There were some common themes that we will now explore.

DISCIPLESHIP

There is a call for greater clarity of what it means to be a disciple, and a follower of Jesus Christ. Ways to achieve that included more discernment of spiritual gift opportunities, reinforcing the good habits of remembering and reciting our mission statement, promoting the vision of mission as both local and global, and setting clear expectations on what it means to be a part of this congregation. There is a call for clarity in the process of getting people here, getting them connected and engaged in smaller group relationships, and getting them out into the world active in mission and service.

COMMUNICATION

It became quite clear that there is an overall desire for improved communication in all aspects of congregational life. One possible action item will be the formation of a group that will be charged with assessing and improving how ministry and mission is communicated to the congregation through all forms of media. While most of the congregation has access to the internet, there still needs to be mechanisms like letters and posted minutes and announcements in the Commons and other areas.

STEWARDSHIP

There is a call for openness and transparency in the budget making process of the church. In addition, there is a desire for including all people to participate and lead in church projects and programs so that it is not “the same people doing them.” We should strive to balance leadership with a combination of experienced, seasoned leaders along with new people with fresh ideas.

We endeavor to help all who give of their time and talents to do so at commitment levels that allow them to fulfill the calling they have felt while providing for sustainable service levels. We also value everyone’s contributions and strive to utilize all of our gifts and talents for the building up of the church leaving no one behind.

SMALL GROUP CONNECTIONS

-There was a lot of feedback and conversation regarding small group formation, utilization of the Parish Groups, and better communication of the activities of all of them. Again there was a need for transparency in small group formation, an awareness of opportunities, and a desire for shorter term commitments to allow for flexibility and more opportunities to form relationships. One possibility to explore is to have a brochure of all the small group activities available to the congregation in the weeks prior to the annual Ministry Fair in September.

There was also a hope expressed for more reflection group opportunities regarding the events of 2014.

Again, the importance of small groups in regards to getting people together and getting people engaged in meaningful relationships through group connections cannot be over-emphasized. It represents a powerful pathway for people to grow spiritually while affording them opportunities to participate in mission and ministry opportunities. Hence the need for all of our connection opportunities to be clearly and concisely communicated with regularity through multiple communication channels.

ASSET MAPPING

The Transition Team performed an Asset Mapping Exercise based on *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* by Luther K. Snow. The Team was asked to list and organize all of the gifts, and all of the assets of Brunswick Church. This exercise was also done with the wider congregation at its one day retreat on October 3, 2015. The assets of Brunswick Church offered by the Transition Team are as follows:

PHYSICAL

Large church campus
Good use of building/spaces
Child Care room sizes
Baptistry (2)
2 large paved parking lots
Beautiful space to worship/gather
AC
Pastoral setting
Modern Worship Center/AV System
Rural Setting
Commons Area
Large worship Center (5)
2 Sanctuaries
Space/Facilities
Use of large outdoor spaces
Ball field
Adequate parking for crowds
Kitchen
Regular giving

PEOPLE

Dedicated Church Staff (2)
Strong child/Youth/Teen Programs
Families and multiple generations
Good # of children
Variety of viewpoints/Broad political spectrum (2)
Friendly people (ex. of Len)
Leaders and those with leadership skills
Strong faith
Musical Talent
Lay preachers
Committed Session
Gifted Musicians (2)
Choir and kid's choir
Colleen (2)
Niki
Dave Borland
Willing Volunteers (2)
Strong representation of all ages
Presbytery
Mentors
Pastors—Scott, Elizabeth, Niki, Lynn, Carra
People who step up to leadership
Nick Fredette
Smart people with talents
Diversity
Caring people
Artists/visual arts (3)
Scott
Above average education
Caring and nurturing congregation
Above average spiritual maturity
Generous congregation (3)
High spirit of volunteerism (2)
Stable Membership
Gifted and creative music people (3)
Wealthy (relatively speaking)
Quiet behind the scenes serving people
Strong leadership---pastors and congregation
Allowing/encouraging youth participation
Staff desire to keep learning
High rate of stewardship
Sharing of Gifts—musical/teaching/writing/reading groups
Good Working relationship with Presbytery
Committed Congregation

Lots of awesome volunteers for everything

MISSIONS

Food Pantry (4)
Backpack ministry/outreach
Responsive to community needs
Parish Groups
Youth For Christ
Programs that really help community (backpack, food, baby shower, etc.)
Fertile Ground for evangelism (85% in region unsaved)
Food/supplies for local schools
TLC
Partnerships with diverse congregations
Special services/transportation for Eddy
Shut-in/hospital outreach
Emergency responses
Operation Christmas Child
Christian Camp Associations/relationships

MINISTRY

Awesome artistic talents
Choice of service times
Small Groups (3)
Deacons Ministry
Partnerships with Churches/Mission to local community
Partnership/influences with Brittonkill/Averill Park Schools
Web page
College Ministry
Military Care packages
TLC (2)
Ministry involvement---global/local
Linked to several towns/communities
Youth Group/Teen Ministry (2)
Girls night
Men's breakfast
AWANA
Music ministry
Very dedicated Session
Ministry Teams
Potlucks/Suppers
Excel
Christmas Tree Gifts
Game Night
VBS

Associations with local colleges/International picnic
Prayer
Visitations to shut-ins/hospitals
Building and grounds team
Confirmation
Soulfest
Pentecost
Multiple services
Variety of ways to worship
Prayer Shawl ministry
Welcoming/support Team

This exercise was very helpful in that it helped the Transition Team to see that even in this time of great change and upheaval that God was at work in the life of the congregation, and that our greatest assets, notwithstanding the beautiful grounds and facilities that we have, were the members of the congregation that came forward to share their gifts and continue the mission and ministry of Brunswick Church.

VISION STATEMENT

The Transition Team reviewed all of their previous work and began the task of formulating a new vision statement for Brunswick Church. It reviewed past mission and vision statements and a recent 10 Core Values Statement. After much prayer and discussion, the following is offered as ***Recommendation 1: That Session adopt the following vision statement:***

Our Vision is to grow as disciples who ADORE God, BELONG together in Christ, and COMMIT to serving others.

***As we seek to grow as disciples (Matthew 28:19), we define a disciple as someone who:
Adores God - by worshipping God and enjoying a growing relationship with Jesus Christ
(Matthew 22:37, Psalm 95:6-7, Acts 2:42)***

***Belongs - by living in Biblical community with others
(Hebrews 10:25, Acts 2:46)***

***Commits - by engaging in ministry and service, locally and globally
(1 Peter 4:10, Acts 2:37).***

Every process we undertake, every mission and ministry we pursue, how we are structured, and how we are staffed is to be a reflection of this Vision.

[Recommendation 1 Passed by Session]

ADORE GOD

Worshipping God and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ is the first key connecting point of congregational life and the chief purpose of the church. And review of the CAT and

discussion in group meetings have indicated that people want worship that is of high quality, and creates opportunities for all of the membership to participate.

And given the many changes of 2014, there has been some disjointedness and lack of communication in all of the areas of our worship life. Therefore:

Recommendation 2: That Session Re-form a Worship Team.

This worship team would consist of interested church members, the visual arts group, music coordinator and pastoral staff in regards to sermon series and liturgy planning. The key purpose of this group is to oversee all of the activities related to the ***ADORATION OF GOD*** in the worship life of BC. In addition, this Worship Team would explore and recommend to Session any changes in music, style, scheduling, etc. that will foster better growth and outreach to our community, as well as building stronger relationships as a church community.

[Recommendation 2 Passed by Session]

To that end:

Recommendation 3: That there be up to four unified worship services per year.

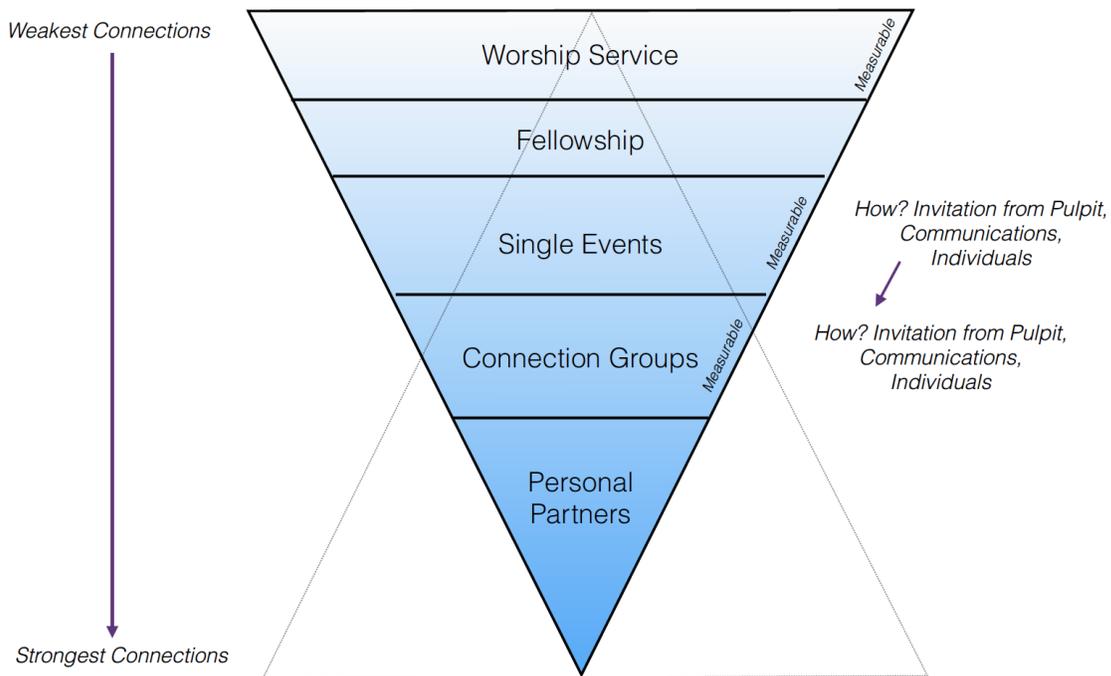
After much positive feedback after Pentecost and the recent Consecration Sunday Service, the Transition Team would like to see at least four opportunities for a unified worship service scheduled throughout the course of the year to increase opportunities for fellowship and strengthen relationships of the congregation.

[Recommendation 3 Passed by Session]

BELONG TOGETHER

Belonging is growing together in faith, relationship, and service. The Transition Team spent a great amount of time reviewing this area of our congregation, realizing the importance of caring, sharing, and holding each other accountable to growing in Christ. And as we move forward, we know that greater connections and communication will be absolutely necessary in order for us to move into God's preferred future for us. And all of us have a role to play in caring, sharing, and holding each other accountable to growing in Christ.

Belonging



Belonging is growing with one another in faith, relationship and service.

So as we move forward, there needs to be clarity, alignment, movement and focus in the areas of building and strengthening relationships and growing disciples as described in ***Simple Church***. In all of our meetings with staff and congregation, there has been some ambiguity in regards to structures, purpose, and membership of the parish groups and many small groups within the church.

This doubtfulness or uncertainty of intention needs to change.

In addition, while we see the need for and value of small groups, there is often a reticence to join these groups because of perceptions of them being closed groups, and a lack of assimilation of people new to the BC community. And there has been confusion as to the role and function of Parish Groups based on geographical location and what their purpose is. Therefore:

Recommendation 4: That Session re-form and re-define and coordinate small groups and parish groups and explore the implementation of Brunswick Connections (BCs) and Neighborhood Connections (NCs).

A ***Brunswick Connection*** would be any small group Bible Study or organically formed affinity group that brings people together to grow in discipleship, serve the community, and strengthen

relationships of the congregation. Church staff would be charged with the training, coordinating and communicating responsibilities of the various “BCs”.

Neighborhood Connections would be the re-defined and re-branded Parish Groups. Their main purpose would be care for, communication with, and coming together of the various geographically based groups. The work of assigning Elders and Deacons to each of these Neighborhood Connections is a key identifier of their purpose: offering care, communication, and a sense of connection. There can be visits, meals, rides, and routine check-ins and fellowship gatherings so that elders can shepherd and deacons can care for the membership.

Training of and coordination of BC and NC leaders will be an important component of offering an inviting atmosphere to new seekers and inquirers into the church community. Much work is needed to overcome a seeming culture of closeness in this regard.

[Recommendation 4 Passed by Session with addition of underlined word explore. In addition, a meeting was held on May 4 by Staff and some Session and Transition Team members to explore this area to bring clarification to it. Further work will continue through the summer in preparation for the beginning of the program year in September, 2016].

And one way to overcome that dynamic is through enhanced and improved ***communication***. The Transition Team spent a great amount of time exploring this area and the need for improved communication to the congregation of all that is going on in congregational life. And there is a need for the membership to assist and come alongside church staff and help in the sometimes daunting task of communication of the various missions and ministries of the church not only to the congregation but to the surrounding community and world. Simply, enhanced communication builds community. Therefore:

Recommendation 5: That Session forms a permanent standing Communications Team charged with overseeing and coordinating all communication vehicles of the congregation.

From worship guides to bulletin boards to website and social media to marketing and advertising to directory enhancement to better utilization of our ACS church database system, a Communications Team needs to come together and formulate a clear and concise communications plan that is in alignment with ***Adore, Belong, and Commit*** structure. And this will take the expertise of several members of our church community to assist staff in this area.

[Recommendation 5 Passed by Session]

COMMIT TO SERVE

We are a congregation that commits to serve Christ in mission and ministry both locally and globally. We grow as disciples as we serve together to build up the life of the congregation and create opportunities for all of us to serve in mission locally and support our global mission partners.

And we grow as disciples as we create more opportunities to come together and serve in mission. The Food Pantry is a clear example of this reality. Therefore:

Recommendation 6: That Session modify and enhance the current Missions Team and charge them with coordinating and developing more locally based mission opportunities.

Connections and relationships are enhanced and opportunities for inclusion of seekers and new people are strengthened as people get together to pound nails or work in the City Mission or head off on a mission trip. It also helps us as a congregation to look out beyond ourselves and offer glimpses of the Kingdom of God in the world.

[Recommendation 6 Passed by Session]

The Transition Team also explored the need for a better sharing of the many ministry and mission needs of the congregation and better communication to the congregation of ways to give and to serve in Time, Talent, and Tithes and how to be more faithful stewards of the physical and material resources that have been entrusted to us. Therefore:

Recommendation 7: That Session spin off a new Stewardship Team from the Resource Management Team that will be charged with communicating financial, ministerial and missional needs to the congregation.

Much work has been accomplished by the RMT over this past year in implementing financial best practices and that continues. And there also is a perceived need of greater communication of the financial and spiritual needs of this congregation that fosters growth as disciples. The recent Consecrating Stewards process is evidence of this. Therefore a Stewardship Team will offer the congregation clear direction and opportunities to commit to serve the world in our living and our giving.

[Recommendation 7 Passed by Session]

The Transition Team also met with current church staff and affirmed their commitment to serve God here at Brunswick church. And just as there is to be clarity, alignment, movement, and focus in all of the ways that the congregation adores God, belongs to each other, and commits to serve, so should the roles and responsibilities of staff have that clarity and alignment and movement and focus. Therefore:

Recommendation 8: That Session through its Staff Development Team revise all current position descriptions to be in alignment with our Vision Statement.

This provides for greater continuity and harmony of the purpose of staff with the purpose of the congregation while strengthening the relationships of each. The events of the past year have shown that greater responsibility can and should be placed upon the members of the congregation in the implementation of ministry and mission, and that staff take on more of a training, coordinating, and guidance role. This will also affect the attributes of any new pastor called to serve here.

[Recommendation 8 Passed by Session]

The Transition Team stepped back and looked at all of the recommendations it is offering and feels that we should seek a pastor who:

- Is an excellent and compelling preacher
- Is a humble servant leader
- Is able to connect to and communicate with a theologically diverse congregation
- Can communicate and convey the vision of the Session to the congregation
- Is open to explore multiple expressions of worship
- Is open to new ideas, not solely self-generated ones
- Will encourage the congregation to move forward and out of our comfort zones
- Will promote God's love to all
- Is driven to walk hand and hand with the congregation
- Has familiarity or past experience with *Simple Church* concepts to help us to continue to implement the process
- Is comfortable working with all generations
- Will empower the congregation and staff to further grow and serve.

Therefore:

Recommendation 9: That the position description and attributes of the new Pastor reflect and embody the Vision Statement and direction of the congregation.

[Recommendation 9 Passed by Session]

CONCLUSIONS

As the Transition Team finished its conversation and its work, it came to that “now what” time. How would all of its hopefully approved recommendations be implemented, and who would measure and evaluate effectiveness? Therefore:

Recommendation 10: That Session form a Coordinating and Implementation Team charged with reviewing and evaluating the clarity, movement, alignment, and focus of the congregation in its mission and ministry.

This Team would meet quarterly and may be comprised of staff, Session and members of the various Teams.

[Recommendation 10 passed by Session]

Respectfully Submitted,

The Transition Team of Brunswick Church

