

Summer 2017 Final FTF Report

“UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN...” Psalm 127

Dear Congregation,

This will be my final Fanning the Flame Servant Team Report. That’s because the Team has completed its assignment to lay the groundwork for the Embers to a Flame church restoration project. Our in-person coaching sessions with Joe Weatherly have come to a close and the Team is now officially decommissioned and the remainder of the work is in the hands of the Session and the congregation.

Although our monthly Team meetings with Coach Joe are finished, we are assured by Joe that he is available to assist us for as long as his services are needed. We’ve been strongly encouraged to take him up on this offer!

Some history: About 2 years ago, the congregation was invited to view “Embers to a Flame”, a video series based on Rev 2: 1-5 where we were challenged by Dr. Harry Reeder to “Remember, Repent, & Restore” lest our church disappear. Then, in March of 2016, the congregation voted to take up that challenge as we agreed to spend a substantial amount of money to enter the FTF coaching process recommended by the Session.

As the Westminster members entered into a contract to begin a revitalization process over a year ago, we were reminded that our commitment was similar to a building project: The Session would serve as “General Contractor” with the FTF Team volunteering to serve as the “ground crew” -- all under the guidance of Embers to A Flame Coach Joe Weatherly. The Team was tasked with envisioning the final structure, surveying, assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, & threats. A lot of groundwork had to be undertaken before any “visible results” would begin to emerge.

Just as earthwork crews finish their work and leave the building site before the superstructure begins to rise, so has your FTF Servant Team completed their work.

MILESTONES THUS FAR:

Congregational Survey - Results Reveal “State of the Church”
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis & Assessment Completed
Vision Statement Completed
Strategic Planning Document Completed
Communications Policy Manual Created
Crisis Planning Manual Created
Spiritual Gifts Assessment Established
On-Going Prayer Ministry Begun
Trial Short Term Small Prayer Cell Monthly Groups Established
Completion of Small Group Ministry Planning Manual
Small Group Discipleship Ministry Charter Completed
Preliminary Small Group Facilitator Training Program Established

Over the last year the Team has prayerfully studied Westminster’s needs and established guidelines for correction & growth. The Session (aka “General Contractor”) is now undertaking the next step of bringing together the “framing crews” to begin raising the superstructure in our renovation project. As

mentioned in earlier reports, this is also where the Congregation begins to take part in the re-building of our Church.

As with any renovation project, some things need to be torn down, others replaced or re-enforced, while still new structural parts need to be put in place.

Let's start with the "tearing down" that needs to be done and get it out of the way so we can move on with a clean "building site" (remember the sermons on Nehemiah 4?). Earlier reports have alluded to the fact that Westminster appears to be a "consumer congregation"; that is, we like what we have and see no reason to change anything since we're happy and as long as our needs are met-- even though our outreach has suffered.

At their final FTF Team meeting the Team was given the sobering news that Westminster is desperately ingrown. We know all the right things to say (i.e., we have "church speak" down very well!) but then tend to keep those words and actions to ourselves. The evidence is that our love & obedience to the Lord & others has taken a back seat to taking care of our own personal concerns. If this aspect of our church culture doesn't change dramatically we're in very real danger of having our lampstand removed (Rev 2). The old maxim about deferred maintenance being a robber can apply to the church as well as to buildings. It appears we've "let ourselves go" in a spiritually active sense.

So...now that we're aware of the decay that can set in from that deferred maintenance, it's time to clear away the current clutter that keeps us from fulfilling our calling and REMEMBER the bright light of the fullness of God's work in our lives and our early love for Him & His kingdom--and what joy it once was to be busy about the Lord's work! We must remember who our Heavenly Father truly is.

REPENTANCE, both personally and corporately, is called for next. The importance of this middle "R" in the Remember-Repent-Restore chain can't be overstated. Thus far, we await the final version of Westminster's official History. When that document is made available, areas where repentance needs to take place may become evident.

In clearing out the debris of neglect in order to begin the restoration of this building project, we have been challenged in our materials to personally & corporately examine our hearts, attitudes, & actions and turn from every sin lest we allow anything to destroy our church. We need to ask ourselves hard questions about our relationship to the Lord, His church, and to one another.

Attached you will find a letter from Donna Arrington to the prayer team that has been praying at Briarwood PCA for Westminster over the last 14 months. You may find it useful in learning how repentance was used to restore one church in particular. Please read it carefully.

Next comes the fun part: RESTORE that which has been lost! As we look to the future, foundations are being laid in this re-building project, beginning with the introduction of Small Group ministries. Scripture gives many examples of the early church (& even allusions in the OT) meeting together in homes and it was in these early meetings that the church began to blossom. The Word was taught, prayers offered, hymns, psalms, & spiritual songs sung, food shared, and love permeated the whole. Leaders emerged and the weak were strengthened; and God's truth was spread abroad as folks invited family & friends to join in places where they could learn the good news of Christ's saving grace.

Other steps that are being taken include policies being put in place. A year ago, your FTF Team met to determine best strategies to restore & re-build Westminster. A vision was set in place that will take

years to come to fruition. Do you remember “The Diary of Lamont Beasley”? The purpose of this narrative is to give the vision for our church in near-term & future years. The things mentioned there are based on Team members’ prayers for the Lord’s direction as each one prayerfully searched the Scriptures and asked the Lord to guide our desires. The things in that Diary might be likened to a “building plan” for the future of our church & the next generation as they reflect the Team’s understanding of how we should proceed. If you haven’t read it or would simply like to refresh your memory, please check it out on the WPC website—you’ll find it under the Visitors/Fanning the Flame tab.

The initiation of Small Group ministries in the church might be likened to the “sub floor” for establishing many of the ministries discussed in that Diary. Earlier this year, test groups & training were started for facilitators and continues with the expectation that a full fledged Small Group Ministry will begin in August.

Key to the re-building process is the matter of following the right strategies. There is now a “Strategic Planning Document” available for you. The Session is going to be continually assessing which strategy to implement as the resources fall into place. Included in this will be the on-going discovery of the spiritual gifts of each member with a database established to make sure that the “right people for the right job” are selected. Please talk with RE Fred Schreiber to learn where the Lord wants to put your gifts to use!

Saving the most important part for last is the requirement for earnest personal & corporate prayer. There is no way this can be stressed too much. At the beginning of this report, you saw the words from Psalm 127: “UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE, THEY LABOR IN VAIN...” At the closing meeting of the Fanning the Flame Coaching segment of the restoration process, our Coach Joe Weatherly stressed that **prayer is vital if we are to succeed**. Without it, Westminster may very well see its “lampstand” removed (Rev. 2:5) In fact, Joe’s parting words to us included this: “Give the Lord no rest” quoting Isaiah 62:1-7.

While our personal prayers for the church are of huge value, corporate prayer is going to be key to our success in this restoration process. We are a body and it is therefore incumbent upon us to be joined and rightly fitted together before the body can function according to the Lord’s design for His church. (1 Cor 12 makes the case pretty well but there are many others that apply)

“REMEMBER...” Fifteen or so years ago, Westminster’s mid-week prayer meeting was well attended with at least the back third of the sanctuary full; today it’s common for around 10 people, sometimes only 5 to be in attendance. We do well in supporting one another through the e-prayer chain but have lost the intimacy & encouragement of physical one-anothering.

“REPENT...” Again, Scripture shows the requirement for the congregation of God’s people to come together. In the Pastor’s sermon series on Nehemiah, the examples given there make it clear that the people were “all together” whether it was in rejoicing before the Lord or in corporate confession.

“RESTORE...” Won’t you join your brothers & sisters in committing to pleading with the Lord for His mercy & blessing on our efforts? Your presence means more than words can say!

Finally, since we’re all in this together, please be aware that everything the FTF Servant Team has done is available to you. Nothing is hidden and there are no secrets. The books and resources that have been reviewed are in the church library, along with the CD messages (which are also available on

the church website); the Strategic Plan document along with all the other policy materials are also available. Please take time to talk with your Session to learn even more. Now that the Fanning the Flame Servant Team has completed their assignment it's time for an "All Hands On Deck" effort to bring the restoration process to successful completion. Let it not be said of us that we started but didn't finish.

The Cost of Discipleship

Now great crowds accompanied [Jesus] and he turned and said to them,

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'***

*"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. **He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**"*

Luke 14: 25-30, 34-35 (ESV)

ADDENDUM: Letter from Donna Arrington, Embers to a Flame Prayer Coordinator, Briarwood PCA

Dear Prayer Team Members,

As our time with Pastor Lynn Downing draws close to an end, we rejoice in the new position he is starting in French Camp, Mississippi. We are blessed that he will stay around for a time to orient our new pastor, Joe Franks, and pray for a smooth transition for the churches considering or just making commitments from the Huntersville Conference.

In March, John Spencer wrote a Prayer Piece taken from Blackaby's, Flickering Lamp, book that details the beginning of the Canadian Revival. As we are learning about revival this year from Pastor Reeder's sermon series, and several of you have volunteered to pray for Revival during Harry's sermons each Sunday (God bless you richly for that!!), this month we have another installment from Flickering Flame to encourage us as we pray for our churches in revitalization.

In his book entitled, Flickering Lamp, Henry Blackaby speaks of committing matters to prayer and seeking God's direction, even when it goes against conventional wisdom and invites criticism from fellow Christians and other Christian leaders. One of the other themes of the book is the part that unconfessed sin and unresolved conflict in relationships can play in hindering the work of God in a church. Some churches harbored serious sins such as adultery and financial fraud. At other times the sin involved Christian brothers and sisters or even family members who had offended each other and were estranged.

When Henry Blackaby was pastor of First Baptist Church in Saskatoon he would often pray with a fellow pastor from another denomination named Bill McLeod. Bill McLeod was deeply burdened for his church and prayed regularly for revival. However there seemed to be something obstructing the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. He became aware of two brothers who were estranged from one another due to harsh and unkind words. For two years they had not spoken to each other and sat on opposite sides of the church, a fact noticed by others in the church. One evening before a revival meeting Bill McLeod met with the two brothers in the basement of the church and challenged their unloving attitudes. The Holy Spirit broke through, the two men embraced and wept so loudly that the people in the sanctuary above them could hear. They confessed their sin to the congregation before the service began and revival broke out. People came from all over to attend the services and the church had to change venues several times to accommodate the larger crowds. The revival continued for 7 weeks attracting people from outside the community and spreading to other cities. This mighty moving of God became known as the Canadian revival.

When you pray for churches in Fanning the Flame coaching pray that they would confess and turn from any sin they have not acknowledged. Pray in particular that individuals in these churches would repent of any unresolved conflict and be reconciled to their fellow believers. Pray that all would be clothed with humility as exhorted by Peter; "*Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*" I Peter 5:5. Too often pride is our garment which is opposed by God and hinders the free work of the Holy Spirit.

John Spencer

Resources:

Embers to a Flame (Book) by Harry Reeder, DVD Series, & CD messages