



Toward Bold Faithfulness



**Report On
Findings of the
Discovery Phase**

Report On Findings of the Discovery Phase of Toward Bold Faithfulness

Last September, our Fellowship began what will be a one-year journey Toward Bold Faithfulness. We are seeking first to discover and then to respond to God's call for our Fellowship as we begin our fourth decade of ministry. This report is not the final report in Toward Bold Faithfulness. It is the report on the first phase. The purpose of the Discovery Phase is to identify the most powerful gifts God has given our congregations and our Fellowship and also the most urgent needs we face in congregations, in communities and in our Fellowship, believing that we hear God's call in the places where our gifts most enable us to respond to needs. So you will not see a final strategic plan in our report. After the presentation of the discovery, and opportunities are provided for the Fellowship to interact with its findings, the Response Phase will begin. We are only at the midpoint of our process.

The biblical story of Acts 15:36-16:11 and following, has been our foundation. By that point in Acts, the early church had experienced a significant theological controversy regarding gentile inclusion, endured leadership changes, and Paul and his companions were struggling over where and how they should focus their ministry energies. Finally, in Acts 16:10, there came a vision in the night. Paul saw a man from Macedonia and heard him pleading; that was the beginning of a call to Europe. This became the boldest expansion of the ministry of the early church. Paul did not know what or who was on the other side of that call. This is where we find ourselves now. We have heard the call; that is this discovery report. May the Lord show us how we should act upon it.

A Guide to this Document

Terms Defined

- o **Aspirational** - That which is characterized by joyful hope for a future achievement. There are references to gifts and needs of the Fellowship that, while they are not actualized at the present time, are an “aspiration” at the present. Throughout this process, our Discovery Team has taken an aspirational posture, believing that God will do something good through this report and in our Fellowship.
- o **Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)** - Refers to the congregations, partners, field personnel, chaplains and pastoral counselors, individuals, state and regional staff, and CBF Global staff (located in Decatur, Ga.). When we refer to CBF, it is in the broadest sense.
- o **Congregation** - Your local church or worshiping body. When you see this word, think of the congregation where you are a member, where you affiliate, or that you know well.
- o **Community** - The social and geographic group with which your congregation interacts beyond the church walls. For some, this may be a particular area of a city; for others, it may be a wider swath of rural landscape.
- o **The Fellowship** - This is shorthand for the people who affiliate with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. That means you!
- o **Diversity** - You will see the word “diversity” as a response in nearly every category of gifts and needs. In fact, the words “diversity” and “inclusion” came up in all areas of the discovery process. We recognize that different people mean different things when they use those words. For some, they meant racial and ethnic, others LGBTQ, others age, others gender and still others diversity in thought. While this was sometimes specified in the data, at other times the terms were not defined. It is also of note that the diversity experienced in our Fellowship includes: geographic, political, social, economic and worship styles.
- o **Urgent** - Characterizes the intensity and/or immediacy of the needs in our communities, congregations and CBF.

Prioritization of Gifts and Needs

- o In regard to prioritization, the Discovery Team chose to list the gifts by bullet point and the needs by the numerical order revealed by the data. We recognize, as Paul states, that there are many gifts but the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4). There is no one gift more important than the other. One may be more prevalent in your congregation, and that may be the very gift needed to meet an urgent need. Similarly, not all of our congregations will experience the same needs. However, the prioritization of needs accurately reflects the discovery data and should aid in the response phase of this process. In the case of both needs and gifts, many more were expressed in our data. However, those listed were reported most prevalently.

The Discovery

We believe that through the Triune God, the Church is gifted with unique qualities to meet the dynamic needs of our world. In the midst of the COVID-19 global health pandemic, the gifts and needs our team discovered prior to that event have shown tremendous resonance. We see evidence of that in your work and ministry. This Fellowship desires to be a place where the existence of another is not merely tolerated, but where the value of each human being, each sister or brother in Christ, is valued.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is being spread, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to reveal the loving God who created us. All of the gifts and needs discovered were revealed because of the love of God working in CBF churches and people so that the Discovery Team could have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The work of the Discovery Team was made possible by data and input supplied by you, the Fellowship, through survey results, small-group discovery sessions with governance bodies, field personnel, partner representatives and CBF staff, and one-on-one Zoom interviews with individuals suggested from CBF Networks. From that information, the Team discerned the most powerful gifts of congregations, most powerful gifts of CBF, most urgent needs of churches, most urgent needs of community, and most urgent needs of CBF.

The discovery is the product of more than 1,800 hours of data collection and coding including 930 volunteer hours invested by members of the Discovery Team. The Discovery Team is pleased to present these findings revealed through the data that highlight those things Cooperative Baptists and their churches are called to do and gifts they possess to meet the urgent needs of our communities, congregations and CBF.

Most Powerful Gifts of Congregations

- Deep, Loving, Interpersonal Relationships & Community
- Missions
- Worship
- Aspirational Diversity
- Spiritual Formation

Digging Deeper | Congregational Gifts: God's transforming work is clearly seen through our local congregations. Our people are passionate about their congregations and explicit about how they have been transformed, their communities have been moved, and the congregations themselves have followed the calling of the Holy Spirit. Many of us can point to an experience in our own congregations where at least one of these gifts have altered our spiritual journey for the better.

Digging Deeper | The Power of Missions: Many have experienced spiritual transformation through missional partnerships. The term "missions" used here includes local missions, community outreach, global missions, domestic based missions and bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Wherever a congregation is reaching beyond itself, God's mission is being accomplished.

Digging Deeper | Worship: Among survey respondents, when asked to select up to three types of ministry their church did best, the overwhelming answer was worship (66.8%). This is the area of ministry in which the greatest number of people participate. In worship, we have some of our most transformative spiritual experiences as well. Note that not everyone in CBF worships in the same way. This is one aspect of our diversity. Types of worship identified from survey respondents included: non-English, multi-lingual, blended, praise and worship, liturgical, children's, traditional and multi-service.

Digging Deeper | Aspirational Diversity: Our congregations desire to be more diverse, a gift rooted in the Gospel hope. This aspiration shows opportunity for growth and strength in welcoming difference. This is perhaps connected to the transforming gift of deep, loving, interpersonal relationships within the community of faith. The term "aspirational" was used because many congregations indicated that their desired diversity did not reflect the reality of the current membership.

Most Powerful Gifts of CBF

- Sustained Engagement in Global Missions & Rural Poverty Commitment
- Presence & Cultivation of Young Baptist Leaders
- Networks & Partnerships
- Place of Belonging
- Desire for Diversity
- Women in Leadership

Digging Deeper | Global Missions: The Global Missions efforts of CBF are intended to exist as long-term, sustainable partnerships. Global Missions includes field personnel in the U.S. and around the world. While separate from the Global Missions umbrella, the “Together for Hope” rural development coalition represents for many in our Fellowship a vital part of our combined missions efforts.

Digging Deeper | Young Baptist Leaders: Presence and cultivation of Young Baptist Leaders certainly includes our partnerships with theological schools and investment in young Baptist clergy through initiatives such as CBF Fellows and the Young Baptist Ecosystem. However, we also see young Baptist laypersons lead in their workplaces and local congregations. The development of lay leaders is of vital importance to the health of our Fellowship. The data affirms that this is a priority investment among respondents.

Digging Deeper | Networks & Partnerships: CBF has more than a dozen recognized networks including: CBF Youth Ministry Network, CBF Children’s Ministry Network, Collegiate Ministry Network, Peer Learning Group Conveners, Affirming Network, La Familia, Pan African Koinonia (PAK), Advocacy Network, Mission Leaders Network and CBF Environmental Stewardship Network. These networks form a place of encouragement along lines of affinity and identity. To be a part of an official network signifies an important place within CBF life. CBF also values multiple partnerships including theological schools, media outlets, advocacy groups and more. For more information on the most active CBF networks, visit www.cbf.net/networks.

Digging Deeper | Belonging: CBF Global is able to connect and expand the work of our local congregations. While these are listed as gifts, we recognize that each gift may not be fully utilized at this time. For example, CBF is a place of belonging for those who have experienced a warm embrace. However, there are ways in which belonging can grow.

Digging Deeper | Desire for Diversity: Similar to the congregational gift of “Aspirational Diversity,” there is a hope for more diversity within CBF. The hope here is to move from the homogenous so that we may embrace those who are not like what the majority is now. Later in the report you will see “growth” as a stated need for CBF, this type of growth will involve an embrace of diversity.

Digging Deeper | Women in Leadership: Access for women to lead is in CBF’s heritage. There were several survey questions directed at the ways in which congregations support women in lay and clergy leadership. Of the survey respondents, 83.5% reported a woman has served on ministerial staff at their church, and 14.7% reported that a woman has served as Senior Pastor at their church.

Most Urgent Needs of Churches

1. Financial Strain
2. Navigating Change
3. Engaging Diversity
4. Vision & Identity
5. Difficult Conversations

Digging Deeper | You Are Not Alone: Your congregation may be experiencing some or all of these needs. The data show that many congregations are struggling with the same things and that these needs can be connected to one another. A congregation may need to have difficult conversations about vision and identity because the makeup of the church is changing. Another congregation may need to navigate the change of their surrounding neighborhood through engaging diversity. Yet another will cast a new vision because financial strain dictates that ministry must be done differently. You are not the only church questioning finances, or who you are as the world changes, or how to engage difficult conversations about social issues.

Digging Deeper | Financial Strain: Listed alongside financial strain was the added stress of shrinking numbers. For some congregations, this is two sides of the same coin. In the data, financial strain appeared in regard to facilities, shrinking and aging membership, stewardship and financial sustainability.

Digging Deeper | Navigating Change: In the prioritization of needs, “Navigating Change” was only incrementally behind “Financial Strain.” In the survey data, 33.9% of respondents reported that “Changing Culture” was one of the three greatest barriers to ministry in their church. This was only superseded by “Aging Membership” (53.7%). Congregations recognize that the world is changing, and they desire to know how to minister in this new place.

Digging Deeper | Engaging Diversity Within our Churches: How do we engage the diversity outside and inside of our congregations? In the survey, “Managing political and theological diversity” was listed as the second greatest challenge that ministers face, only behind “stress.” The widening culture gap is ever-present in our world and in our churches. We may be experiencing social rifts within our congregations, as congregants have differing political, social and theological views. Part of engaging diversity is having difficult but healthy conversations (also a listed need) with the very ones with whom we worship.

Most Urgent Needs of Communities

1. Connection
2. Poverty
3. Racial Reconciliation & Justice
4. Migration & Immigration
5. Hunger

Digging Deeper | Tied Together: Our community needs are connected to one another. During the season of COVID-19, we have witnessed the urgent need of connection. We have also seen disparities in regard to racial injustice, poverty, hunger and immigration. There are intersections amid all of these needs (and others) that we witness in our own communities.

Digging Deeper | Connection: Connection came up in every method of listening employed from participants all over the world. Along with connection was the desire to combat personal isolation. We recognize this need even more critically with the onset of COVID-19. It should also be noted that one of the most powerful gifts of congregations is deep, loving interpersonal relationships. There is great opportunity for congregations in all places and of all types to connect this powerful gift with this urgent need.

Digging Deeper | Racial Reconciliation & Justice: There needs to be more clarity about the distinctions between racial reconciliation and racial justice. We recognized this phrasing was used in the survey, but reconciliation and justice can mean very different things. However, both kinds of work garnered much energy in the data. When survey participants were asked what kinds of work their church is doing versus what their church should be doing, Racial Reconciliation & Justice moved up from number four to number one.

Digging Deeper | Migration & Immigration: The terminology used here is intended to describe both the immigration of people to the United States and the global migration phenomenon. This category includes ministry with immigrants and refugees, advocacy work on the U.S.-Mexico border, and support of CBF field personnel with this area of focus.

Most Urgent Needs of CBF

1. Identity Clarity
2. Communication, Connection & Networking
3. Finances & Funding
4. Diversity
5. Prophetic Voice & Advocacy
6. Growth
7. Resources: Development, Networking, Blessing

Digging Deeper | Identity Clarity: We received comments around the question, “Who is CBF?” across all forms of listening and data gathering. Laypersons and clergy are looking for meaningful resources to communicate CBF’s values to others within their own communities. Folks are hungry for a positive definition of CBF and what we are called to do. There are places within the needs listed here, such as diversity and prophetic voice & advocacy, which are hoped to be part of CBF’s identity but may not yet be realized. The discovery process has revealed more identity markers that will need to be addressed in the response phase.

Digging Deeper | Getting Connected: You will notice that there is a correlation among “Communication, Connection & Networking” here as a need of CBF and “Networks & Partnerships” as a strength of CBF. While there are opportunities to connect in place, a need arose for more effective communication among the networks and partnerships, and clear steps for involvement. A desire for increased connection and communication of state and regional CBF organizations with other states and regions was also identified.

Digging Deeper | Growth and Diversity: Growth relates to vision for the future in welcoming other congregations into the Fellowship. There are more congregations who would find a home within CBF, including new church starts and existing congregations looking for a denominational home. Growth strategy ought to pursue the stated need of diversity. Particular areas for growth would include areas of racial and ethnic diversity and welcoming congregations and individuals of color fully into CBF, as 91.31% of survey respondents identified themselves as white/Caucasian. The survey portion of the data has shown us that the aspiration for diversity among predominately white/Caucasian congregations and individuals is widespread. Increased diversity in CBF leadership and churches was also the most frequently expressed “Urgent Need of CBF” in Zoom interviews.

Digging Deeper | Prophetic Voice & Advocacy: When asked “Should churches be active in publicly raising a faith perspective to important social concerns?” 84.34% of respondents reported “Agree or Strongly Agree.” Based on this data alone, prophetic voice & advocacy is of great concern to the Fellowship.

Digging Deeper | Resources: Resources are defined as the tools congregations need to live out their God-given mission in their communities. This may involve trainings, curriculum, events, grants and other publications. We identified three areas of need related to resources. They are: 1) Resource development. Where there is no intersection between the need and the universe of existing resources, CBF must develop new resources. 2) Resource networking. This is a stewardship of existing resources which encourages CBF to partner with developers of existing resources that share our values. 3) Blessing churches to embrace specific resources that meet their needs and/or embody CBF’s values. To accomplish this, we must first address the need of clarifying identity. When asked “How can CBF help your church thrive?” 16% of respondents mentioned some kind of resourcing in the open response form.

Reflection

This Discovery process represents the faithful contributions of thousands of believers who are committed to the work of God in our world. Reflect on this list, pray over this list, until it becomes more than just a list. What surprises you? What connections do you see? How do some of these things manifest in your community and congregation?

With Gratitude

Thank you to the 4,618 people from 762 congregations who filled out the survey. Thank you to leadership bodies, field personnel and networks who participated in the discovery sessions. Thank you to the lay people and clergy who gave time to be interviewed. Without the overwhelming response from lay and clergy folks who took the time to believe that God was still at work through CBF, our project would be moot. Through this Discovery Process, we can testify that God is still working to share the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in our churches, communities and CBF.

Next Steps

You are valued in this Fellowship. Your voice has been heard, but the work is not complete. Your continued input will be needed in the response phase and beyond. You will receive information from the Discovery Team through a video series, blog and more published data. We invite you to continue in this interactive process by signing up for a small-group conversation via Zoom between June 8-17. Please pray for and follow the work of the Response Team as we seek to be faithful to the call of the Body of Christ.

The Discovery Team

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