

A White Paper for First Baptist Church of Marionville

Situation

It has been my privilege to serve FBC Marionville since late April of 2019 when the Deacons (on authority of the Church Body) hired me to serve as a Transitional Pastor and guide the church through the Lifeway Transitional Process. We took our time to get to know one another and move deliberately toward the formation of a Task Force, but just as we began the formal process the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. Without vaccine gatherings were discouraged, and our faith and community practices were significantly disrupted. Together we held a baseline of worship services and ministry for over a year.

In assessing the impact of the pandemic upon the Transitional process, the obvious conclusion is that we cannot return to the moment from which we started. While there is something to be gained in all self-evaluation, the process as designed is not relevant for the church at this time. Thus, decisions about future leadership of the church are upon us.

I am honored that the Deacons have asked me to consider assuming the Pastoral role on a permanent basis. This is a change from our original understanding and agreement since I viewed my role as more of a consultant and desired to be free to pursue multiple ministry opportunities. But serving here is a great blessing and I see many potential opportunities before us.

And so, it is important to communicate clearly and allow time for prayer and direction for both the church and the Gilmores. This paper is an attempt to outline some essential conditions and opportunities for service that could make this relationship a win/win. And if, in the Lord's grace, things can come together that would be wonderful. But if not, there is nothing but my greatest desire for the Lord's richest blessings upon our church and its new leadership!

With time for the church membership to review and discuss these thoughts and ideas, we will work toward a recommendation from the Deacons to the Church Body and, from there, make an official request to be considered in view of a call as pastor (or not). Again, there is no predetermined agenda or outcome at this point as we ALL pray and seek guidance from the Lord.

Bro. Gary's Personal Priorities

1. Full Transition into Healthcare and Retirement.

I've reached the "age and stage" of transition into "full retirement" including healthcare and estate management. I'm new at this and taking it slowly... but setting things up right for the future is my most important priority until all facets of these issues are completed. Specifically, I need to get my life in order: money and property/estate for the future.

2. Family.

There are times when being a grandpa or taking care of my Mother and Susan's Dad will take precedence over everything else... and I'll be there for them as needed. This is both privilege and responsibility.

3. FBC Marionville.

Being your shepherd is a tremendous honor and privilege, and I lead a team of staff members who care deeply for you as well. By using technology and planning carefully, we can do the important things and not be lost in "busy-work." I want to be effective in serving the Lord through our church. FBC occupies a large portion of my time and energy, no matter my location or other activities, and it is very fulfilling (and fun!).

4. Veteran Ministry.

The Chaplaincy role is ministry, too. I am the new Commander of VFW Post in 4541 in Mount Vernon (but our Post influences all of Lawrence County!), I serve on the Board of "Wellness for Warriors" in the Cox Health System, and I have my own not-for-profit corporation called "Missouri Chaplain Services" that serves veterans and disaster response ministries.

5. SEMA Chaplaincy /Missouri Chaplain Services

I am the lead Chaplain for the fledging State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) Volunteer Chaplaincy. This exciting new program is being developed to coordinate pastoral care in times of disaster response-- it's a privilege to shape this new effort. Most days it is a communication role, but if a disaster should come our way, I will need to go and support this work!

Some of the things I think we did well in the last two years:

- Brought some stability during a time of transition-- discovered the "solid ground" of attendance and giving. (Attendance growing slowly; giving declining slowly)
- Brought increased staff flexibility to leadership roles.
- Power Church Software uniting membership, contributions, and accounting.
- Technology platforms (Power Church/ Faithlife/Website/ Facebook).
- Mission Offerings to be proud of!
- Some evaluation processes implemented for finances and event planning.
- Learning to see that "Events are part of a process that reflects our strategy."
- Process management that includes mission, planning, preparation, execution, recovery, & evaluation, and reset.
- Prayer Group- Weekday Morning Coffee prayer call.
- Flexibility—FBC members are a moving target and a diverse group, but also my constant priority. We give each other grace, and I am free to "shoot, move and communicate."
- COVID-19—many adjustments; online capabilities; created one another network.
- Facilities Management- worked with committee to improve some things and handled a couple crises.
- You changed me... I see the good hearts and actions.

My Commitment to FBC

In leading the church, you can expect that I will seek to grow our church and to utilize FBC Marionville as a priority baseline for a larger personal ministry. I intend to grow personally and professionally while

conducting worthwhile projects in congregational and chaplaincy ministry. Perhaps this could be the most productive portion of my entire ministry.

You can expect:

- Ministry based upon the comprehensive approaches of the “9Marks of a Healthy Church” and “Experiencing God” models.
- Continuation of the “outcome-based transition” described previously (database, governance, leadership, strategic plan). It’s not about time at the office, but getting the work done.
- Staff development and leadership in ministry (for all) with a collaborative leadership style
- Doctor of Ministry level research into “ministry-model” development.
- Community focus and discovery of ministry needs.
- Growth in pastoral care ministry across all age groups during the attrition and decline of one generation and the cultivation and emergence of another.
- Intergenerational respect and encouragement of everyone towards personal ministry—focused on what we CAN do.
- Continued emphasis on Mission giving through the Cooperative Program and Mission Offerings.
- Growth into new ministry areas (see below).
- Development of focused public relations with a variety of audiences and stakeholders.
- Cultivation of “what right looks like.”

Ministry Opportunities

It is a natural thing that leaders tend to get their groups involved in the leaders’ own priorities. I expect that would occur over time if I should become the permanent leader! (See how the priorities list above meshes with ministry ideas listed below!)

I am not concerned about the church we “have been” nearly as much as I am concerned about the church we “can be!” I see us as an intergenerational congregation that honors our families and serves the larger community. As we move into a time of generational change, we will have to be wise, flexible, and forward-focused with our resources.

A key objective will be to observe, define, write down, and implement the specific ministry-strategy of the church. We need a clear “process-map” taking us from idea to manning, to budgeting, to follow-up, to measured results according to the steps of the strategy. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing well. Every ministry endeavor is worth our best efforts, and a small event done well (from prayer & planning, through preparation, execution, recovery, follow-up, and evaluation) is more effective than a large event that wastes opportunity and resources that makes us feel good. This process, however, is not a popular approach in contemporary ministry anywhere.

Currently we seem to be at the natural redefinition (or, perhaps, an ending point) of a strategy focused on Children and Food. There is nothing at all wrong with this approach, but there have been incremental changes over time that seem to have diminished its effectiveness. Transitional ministry was to have looked at this from a consultant’s perspective; permanent ministry must look at this from a leadership and implementation perspective.

Children- VBS, School Supplies, Children's programs, large-group activities, and high-energy recreation.

- Previous weekly programs wore workers out... a treadmill of burnout when I arrived. There was widespread frustration that we were child-care for parents who will not get involved and/or do not care. There was no connection or carry over into other programs like Sunday School.
- There are few young families attending with children... not yet enough "critical mass" to feel that the children benefit from the group activity... because there is no group!
- High visibility events (VBS, School Supplies, Upward Basketball, 'all-hands-on-deck') have great energy but unfocused follow through and minimal lasting results *FOR US*. [They are GREAT... but almost a community event that benefits *other* organizations more than ours. They are truly our "gift of service" to a broader community... but do not seem to be a building block for FBC.]
- Previous generations of children and youth (and families with children/youth) that participated in stellar programs have graduated and/or moved on with their parents to other churches (I hope).

Food- the Wednesday meals, Big Breakfast, and Thanksgiving banquet "type" events no longer draw the groups or funds they once did as purposes and audiences have changed. Food distribution is no longer effective ministry other than "serving the poor." (I am not saying that is not important, but we are no longer effective in this. See below.)

- The Wednesday weekly efforts depended on one person, whose life has changed personally and vocationally, and we have no current leadership here. (Many are willing to help, but there is no overall church-approved leader). Much food was thrown away because it passed its expiration date. A freezer and small appliances have passed their usefulness through age and lack of maintenance and been removed. Also, there is a liability concern in feeding the public, but we have been conscientious (and fortunate) in this endeavor overall. But the payoff was not worth the effort, and we no longer have the crew to make it happen.
- The Big Breakfast costs more in food than it raises in funds. The need to bring the church together in fellowship changed when we came back to one service.
- Thanksgiving banquet is a service and gift of the Deacons, and a wonderful event. The concern is that our Deacons are not able to do what they once did, forcing more cost and responsibility on fewer people. Perhaps the church budget should bear more of the cost. But preparation remains an issue.
- Food distribution has dwindled to two people a month who desire a handout but no ministry. I am discouraging further emphasis on a food pantry and channeling resources to the Ministerial Alliance (that we have increased our support for). We have initiated a voucher system for food and gasoline as needed. Convoy of Hope, Ozarks Food Harvest, and the FDA surplus food distribution have taken over these types of events during the pandemic. We CARE about these needs, but they are "incidental" to our ministry today, not "fundamental."

These current strategies can be modified and/or expanded to include many other ministry ideas and efforts. Specific ministry possibilities/opportunities I see for us currently include:

Potential Ministry Strategies to be Explored, Chosen, and Developed

1. Focused and Continued Children's Ministry

We must provide a quality experience for those that WILL come, building a foundation of Biblical knowledge and peer group support for genuine faith and growth in a Christian lifestyle. We can improve training for children's workers and the quality of our programming.

Ideas: United Curriculum/Regular and Required Training for Workers/Connect with School Calendar and Holiday Emphases/Bus routes as necessary/Promote LIFE Groups for young families with quality Childcare so every time a child is on our campus there is Biblical input into their life.

2. Food Events

We need a "scaled back" idea of food service. We should utilize food events in support of "all-church" activities and special events AND some regularly scheduled fellowships for our own good and enjoyment! Unless and until we have a Kitchen-Coordinator who can give time and attention to all the dimensions of food service, we are better off with "special events" as needed. Note: Funeral meals will be exceptions (see below).

Ideas: Kitchen Coordinator/Menu Development based on events/Kitchen organization and policies that are easy to understand and use!

3. Pastoral Care for our Members and Community

Grief and Faith- we are likely to lose key members from our midst in the next three years. They are super-saints among us who are faithful attenders, givers, witnesses, and matriarch/patriarchs of their families. This will force us to adjust our budget, our perceived identity, and our expectations. Grief and faith will be a key theme of our ministry as we journey through this valley as a faith-family. Preaching/Teaching/Funeral Ministry/Stewardship training will be a necessity.

Ideas: Funeral Meal Team and Plan/Frequent Program adjustments/Deepen Relationship with Funeral Homes/Blue Christmas Observance/Memorial Day Remembrance/Endowment Fund/ Hospice Support/ Grief Support Groups/Changing-Family and Care Options Support Group/Finishing Well

4. Community Involvement

We need to regain visibility as a supporter and friend of the community in a supportive role. Our facilities are a resource we can share freely with Marionville and the surrounding area without endorsing or imposing a political position or agenda.

Ideas: Interactions with community government, the School System, Applefest, sponsorship of a sport(s), Ministerial Alliance, and reasonable use of the Family Life Center and Pavilion. Continue to be an election site; revive Blood Drives.

5. Small Group Ministry

We need to cultivate and grow fellowship and need-meeting small groups "outside the box" of our traditional thinking. A Life-group can count as a Sunday School class. A veteran support group or a Dave

Ramsey money management group can, too! Our software easily works with new ideas, but we must be willing to provide some child-care and food support and make it EASY and COMFORTABLE for new people to join us (signs, directions, website information, etc.)

Ideas: Life Groups/ One Another Groups/ Special Interest Groups (Veterans, Pet Show, Parents with Special Needs Children/Dave Ramsey Money Management/ Marriage Enrichment (C-PREP) .

6. Veteran Ministry

Veterans need activities and a place to decompress afterwards. Note: they are not all church-folk and will bring tattoos, harsh language, strong beverages, and motorcycles to our location... but they may also reduce their fear or stereotypes of Christians and hear the Gospel through the relationships and familiarity we establish. I hope the church would accept and support this dual role of leadership and feel they are "participating with me" in these endeavors (and be proud of them), and not feel that my energies are devoted away from ministry in doing them.

Idea: A Marionville Veteran Support Group. A shared banner with VFW and FBC- Organize a monthly activity (e.g., paintball or axe-throwing event) and then come to pavilion, firepit, or FLC to talk and let family play). This model could be replicated across Lawrence County over time.

Idea: Wellness 4 Warriors (Cox South) notes that we are between Springfield and Monett... proposing use of our FLC for Expo Day this fall (October 23rd) to include Chaplain Gary as speaker on suicide and veteran care combined with Job Fair or Expo of Veteran resources in our FLC. Intent is to draw a live crowd to the building from the SWMO-Hwy 60 corridor between Springfield and Monett, and then broadcast on Facebook Live and save recording for future use. This is moment of opportunity for us and could establish us as a veteran-friendly church.

Idea: Support Veterans and First Responders through Recognition Services on Memorial Day, 4th of July, Veterans Day, and Appreciation Banquets (Aurora/Marionville PD used our FLC for their awards banquet). We can offer our facilities and grounds as training sites for CERT, Fire, LE, EMS, etc. (Blood Drives, CPR Classes, Community Interest Forums, etc.). We should support those who serve us all.

Idea: Suicide Awareness Training. Brother Gary is a member of the Veterans Suicide Prevention Team-- trained and supported by the Missouri Department of Mental Health. This is a veteran issue-- really, a crisis-- as well as a community issue. By offering this training to veterans' groups (at their location and ours) we can address this important topic. But the training is also appropriate for community groups and schools... we can take a stand regarding suicide and offer support and referrals to care

7. Disaster Response Ministry

a. The Missouri Baptist Convention Disaster Response (supported by our Missouri Mission Offering and Cooperative Program giving) utilizes trained volunteers to help people impacted by Disasters across the nation. They offer training for a variety of ways we impact disaster recovery: Showers, Laundry, Feeding Kitchens, Mud-Out, Chainsaw teams to remove trees, limbs, and brush. Retirees can participate on these teams, or we can do fundraisers for these efforts. A new initiative is to fill sandbags for flood zones and have them pre-palletized at our location awaiting a truck to come

through our area for loading and delivery where needed. Also, 5-gallon buckets of food and sanitary supplies can be prepared for shipment. We have people and space to do this.

b. SEMA Chaplaincy. Setting up the fledgling SEMA Volunteer Chaplaincy is a “Brother-Gary-personal-ministry” begun years ago and just now coming to fruition. Currently it involves writing policies and procedures, recruiting other Chaplains from around the state, and training events. The greatest potential downside is a Statewide disaster (with, by definition, no notice!) that will require Bro. Gary to go to SEMA or the disaster site and serve as a Chaplain. I hope the church would accept the disruption that may come as the price of sending me as your ambassador to serve in a specialized capacity.

Ideas: Attend training events/deploy as needed and available/Host training/sandbags or buckets/promote disaster readiness in our church and community/ host training events/ consider becoming a Red Cross Shelter, etc.

8. Missouri Chaplain Services. This is my personal ministry “umbrella” that can be extended to support a variety of other ministries by serving as an information and donation website and 510(c)3 covering over their ongoing work. This has been the lowest priority but must be given some time for development and utilization.

Ideas: Medical supplies to Honduras/ PET vehicles to overseas recipients/Chaplain training/Military graveside services/etc.

How to make this happen?

- Team Approach to Staffing—Bro Gary is the leader of a versatile and flexible team.
- Focus on objectives and not punching the clock. Live by priorities. I make and keep appointments.
- Effectiveness. Non-geographical but focused and committed to effective service and mutual goals. Results oriented, not time or location or stereotypical expectations. Show me!
- Efficiency. Good plans make less work overall and produce better results. Pay the price up front and THEN adapt and improvise.
- We will Utilize and leverage electronics and technology for in-house communication. We will respect everyone’s comfort-level and communicate in many ways (redundancy!)
- Deliberate and Detailed Public Relations plan for Community awareness.
- Bring Gary’s salary DOWN to level of expectation/ bring all other staff salaries UP to the level of expectation.
- Use of a few key committees—less administrative overhead. We need to push through the administration to the ministry results. Staff led processes utilizing Finance Committee, Building and Grounds Committee, and a “Leadership Committee” for administrative and coordination decisions (like Church Council but perhaps a bit more like Elders)
- Preaching schedule—Terry, Trevor and Guest Speakers at the ready... allows for freshness and variety.

- Metamorphosis (CHANGE!!) -- sometimes, we must shed some skin to achieve new growth.
That's a big ask.

This document outlines some current thoughts and ideas for future ministry... but the arrangements and expectations are the key to success. This is not the traditional pastor-church relationship. It is an attempt to respond to the changing world around us while sustaining a deep commitment to worship, ministry, and service. Because it is new and untried, there WILL be challenges and conflicts that inevitably arise. If you think this approach is not workable, it is better to just say "no deal" up front and then work together towards other viable options.

Thank you for reading through this document and seeking to make a wise choice for our church family. I welcome your thoughts and feedback.

In Christ,

Bro. 

Rev. Gary D. Gilmore