

CHAPTER 4

[E]mpirical research through quantitative methods has its limitations. Researchers have to restrict themselves to data that are quantifiable and can be expressed in statistics [. . .] If one wants to penetrate to deeper levels of consciousness . . . assistance is needed from qualitative methods. (Heitink 1999: 232)

INTRODUCTION

With the necessary matters of background to, location of, and methodology employed in engaging the study dealt with in chapters two and three, this chapter begins the process of answering the first of the questions posed in chapter one (see page 10), viz.: “What are the key individual and collective characteristics of members of holistic congregations?”

Two strategies were employed to answer this question: a quantitative process comprising statistical analysis of surveys, the results of which are contained in chapter five, and a qualitative process comprising interviews with both randomly selected and invited representatives of the various church families, as well as with their pastoral leadership, the subject of this chapter.

The interviews followed a common set of questions (see Appendix 3) intended to elicit from interviewees their individual and collective understanding of the general character of their church, the nature and extent of any community ministry they or their church engaged, their individual motivations vis-à-vis their faith and ministry, their thoughts and opinions about the nature of “being” and “doing” church and so forth. To obtain as broad a picture as possible the interviewer often followed responsive leads that seemed to offer greater insight to the church’s overall character and as a result, interview responses were often wide ranging.

The results of these interviews are set forth below, and the ethos of each church, as understood by the interviewer, is encapsulated in summary form at the end of each section.

Before continuing it is essential to note that the community ministry requirement for a church to be identified as “holistic” requires more than mere financial support of ministry programs. Such support is, of course, important, but also tends to a church that operates “at a distance” – either real or metaphorical – from the community it serves. Thus its congregation is protected from whatever joys and pains personal involvement in ministry may bring. In contrast, a holistic ministry church is a church whose congregation is not afraid to live where Jesus lived – that is, on the margins of society – and do what Jesus did – that is, minister directly to those in need. A holistic church is, to use an expression offered by one interviewed pastor, the “hands and feet” of the Spirit in society, and all the churches in this study were ranked by the number of community ministries their congregation “engaged,” rather than the number they financially supported.

While there is no particular order within the following sections, sections 4.1 through 4.5 of this chapter describe the congregations interviewed as a result of being identified as “holistic,” and sections 4.6 through 4.10 interviews with those congregations identified as “non-holistic” according to the criteria developed and explained in the preceding chapter (3.2.2).

4.1 CHURCH BACKGROUNDS AND INTERVIEWS

4.1.1 The Church That Stayed: Central Presbyterian Church.

Ethnicity: White

Denomination: Presbyterian (PCUSA)

Active membership: about 625

Attendance: about 400

Location: Urban Atlanta.

Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 20

Operating budget 2004: ± \$1.5 million.

4.1.1.1 History and Background

Officially established February 14, 1858 and derived from the split of Atlanta First, Atlanta's oldest Presbyterian church, Central Presbyterian Church has, like many long established churches, a fascinating history of rise and fall and rise again; of accord and discord; of success and failure; of strong and weak leadership; and of crisis and resolution. Significant in this history was an early engagement with the community.

Church biographer John Robert Smith (1978: 39) writes:

[In the mid 1880's] the congregation at Central became a more caring congregation. To a degree not previously characteristic of them, the people were ministers to each other – and to others. Outreach was fast becoming the image that came to mind when people thought of Central church. Missionary outreach, especially in the Atlanta area itself, became a consuming passion of the people of Central.

It was a passion that in some respects was easy to follow, for most of the members lived within a few miles of the church. But the city of Atlanta grew, as cities do and homes in the more desirable sections of the city were sold and demolished to make room for office and industrial buildings. The church population, once local, began to move further out from the city. By 1931 there was a clear movement of congregants to the north east environs and the question of re-locating the church in the same direction

became increasingly pressing. At the same time the low-wage job opportunities Atlanta offered were attracting more and more people to the city, where they occupied boarding houses and other inexpensive accommodations in areas ignored by development, slept in makeshift dwellings, or simply lived and slept “rough.” As the welfare needs of these people became evident, an increasing majority of the congregation were in favor of keeping the church in its downtown location. Rev. Dr. Oglesby, then pastor of Central (1930-1958), articulated the concern of the congregation when he preached:

There are more people living in the community served by Central than ever before [and] the poorer people [being] left behind, and those who have come in have a greater need for Christian ministry than ever before. The program of this church has been projected to meet the needs of this community. These needs cannot be met, and often are not even known or understood by, prosperous churches located a great distance away. I believe in the downtown church because it offers to its members so many satisfying, Christ-like opportunities for service. There are many Christians who seem not to be able to see human needs unless it is a great distance away. The downtown ministry does not neglect its ministry to those far away, as our benevolences show each year, but it concentrates on the needs of its own neighbors (Smith 1979: 81).

Oglesby continued by acknowledging the inconvenience of a downtown church to its members, but added that “convenience is a small sacrifice we can make for the ministries of Central church” (ibid.). Evidently the congregation agreed with him and rallied to his cause for in 1937 they became “the church that stayed,” dropping plans for the church to leave the city and instead engaging their community with increased passion.

That passion for ministry outreach continues to this day. Despite the fact that the vast majority of congregants live ten miles or more from the church, at any given time Central has upwards of twenty ministries to the larger, in-town secular community requiring substantial human resource support from the congregation. Such ministries include a foot care ministry for the indigent, a variety of AIDS programs, prison

visitation ministries, ministries for sheltering and feeding the homeless and ministries that provide homebuilding aid to Habitat for Humanity, a parachurch organization that builds affordable housing. Nor has this focus on domestic ministry reduced Central's attention on global ministries: it has mission representation and/or support in such geographically disparate countries as Kenya, Palestine, and the Honduras.

But it is the home ministries and congregational ethos that lies behind them in the various churches studied that are the focus of this study and at Central, outreach ministry comes in two guises: ministries that are entirely funded by the congregation – for example, prison and other visitation ministries – and which therefore remain entirely within the purview of the church, and ministries that, under the right conditions, can get additional funding from State and Federal Government sources. Recognizing that certain of its community ministries could be enhanced by the infusion of state and federal government funds and grants intended to support non-governmental social services programs, and recognizing further that under current “separation of church and state” legislation, churches and organizations that promote a particular religion cannot directly receive state or federal funds or grants, Central took the steps necessary to comply with the legislation, and thereby advance its wider ministries, by setting up a non-profit corporation known as the Outreach and Advocacy Center. In addition to being eligible for government funding, the Outreach and Advocacy Center, as an entity separate from the church, is entitled to be politically active. In the past, Central Presbyterian has enjoyed a “special” relationship with the Georgia legislature and Atlanta city government, the seats of both being, literally, across the road from the church. The nearness of both bodies allowed certain friendships to develop and since at one time space in the church building

was used by the legislature on a regular basis for meetings of one kind or another, the church leadership enjoyed a unique access to city and state policymakers. Recent years however have seen changes both in the racial makeup of government leadership and in the complexity of “doing business” with the city and state. The purpose of the “Advocacy” part of the Outreach and Advocacy Center is two-fold: to make public issues relating to the poor and indigent, with special regard to matters of healthcare, education, and social and criminal justice; and to lobby city and county government on their behalf.

The mere fact that a church would go to the lengths described in order to increase outreach and advocacy ministry efficiency says much about the congregation that supports such ministries – especially considering that the ministries (services) derived from this arrangement still depend heavily on volunteer help, which help in many instances (though by no means all) derives almost entirely from Central.

To give further insight to the congregational motivation that lies behind the community ministry focus of Central Presbyterian, the “Mission Statement” of its Outreach/Advocacy center is reproduced here.

Compelled by faith in Jesus Christ and God’s call to “do justice,” the Central Presbyterian Church Outreach and Advocacy center stands with our neighbors in the heart of the city to respond to basic human needs of the poor and to advocate for public and corporate policies that reflect our human understanding of God’s vision of a just society.

Guided by our mission, and in accordance with Central Presbyterian Church’s historical commitment to the ministries of offering hospitality to strangers, feeding, healing, and teaching, we affirm our conviction that:

- *All people should have access to safe, clean and adequate housing;*
- *All people are entitled to have their basic nutritional needs met in a way that is consistent with their human dignity;*
- *All people should have readily available access to quality, comprehensive health care and health education and the opportunity to live in a healthy environment;*
- *All people should have access to quality, equitable education that meets their lifelong development needs.*

It has already been shown that Central's community outreach ministry has a long history and that it is as dynamic – perhaps more so – as it has ever been. A review of Smith's (1979) documentation of the church's history, with particular reference to the pastoral leadership in terms of ministry, suggests that since the time Rev. Givens Brown Strickler led the church (1883-1896) it has had a consistent focus on the welfare of its immediate community, a focus that it has often shared and continues to share ecumenically with other churches in the downtown area (e.g. the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Trinity United Methodist, and Druid Hills Presbyterian).

4.1.1.2 Interviews

In interviews, the congregation similarly asserts a history of community ministry and maintains that the community focus of the congregation is, and has long been, consistently reinforced from the pulpit. Indeed, the pastoral leadership was repeatedly cited as a fundamental motivator for converting the theory of community ministry into constant practice, not just by highlighting scriptural exhortations to ministry, but by giving frequent prominence to the church's ongoing ministries and the financial and human resource needs of those ministries.

The Central family answers the call to community ministry for various reasons. Although responses to the scriptural commands to "love your neighbor" (Matt 19:19; 22:39), or to "Go into the world" (Matt 28:19), to be "Good Samaritans" (Luke 10:29-37), or to vicariously minister to the Lord Himself; "As you do to others, you have done to me" (Luke 25:25-40) were frequently cited as significant motivating forces, many interviewees frequently pointed out that it was not just the fulfillment of biblical commands to care for others that drove them but that, for these respondents at least, in

doing ministry they in some sense encountered the Holy. Some agreed that the very act of reaching out put them in the presence of the Holy. One interviewee, who came into the focus group interview after some hours on the street corner outside the church quietly protesting the war in Iraq, said that during her protest she felt she was in the presence of the Holy; that doing what she believed was right and doing it the name of God put her on Holy ground. Similarly, a long-term volunteer in Central's foot clinic (part of the Church's Night Shelter ministry to the homeless) is on record as saying,

It is a gratifying experience for me to talk to a man about his day, to hear him speak of it as a good day full of hope and the belief that he will soon find work. As each man expresses his thanks for our work in the clinic, I have discovered that his gratitude is a gift to me. And who knows? perhaps, in our brief and simple encounter, I have seen something of the face of God.

Another reason cited for doing outreach ministry was that of a sense of Christian "wholeness," or "completeness," derived from the experience; that one was not wholly Christian if not engaged with the world in some missional way.

For some members of the Central family, exposure to outreach ministry occurs early. Children's Sunday school classes also often take on an "outreach ministry" focus, as children are asked to make Valentines cards or make packages of hygiene products in the knowledge that these gifts are to be given to homeless people. One parent suggested that including her children in the church's ministries brought the words of scripture to life, gave those children a more balanced view of what life was all about and impressed upon them early in life the importance of caring for the less fortunate folk in a community.

Central has a very active youth group. About fifty young people ranging in age from twelve to eighteen are engaged in a wide variety of activities. Youth are involved in

outreach throughout their Sunday School curriculum including evening projects for youth which involve work in the outreach center, for example taking inventory, stocking the church's food pantry, creating art for intake spaces, and preparing lunch and snack bags for the needy. Older youth participate in Central's night shelter, providing set up when needed and serving dinner and providing companionship to shelter guests several times a year. Also, the youth group prepares a Christmas Party and Worship service for the shelter guests. Outside of the church, many in the group are involved in local, national and international missions throughout the year. On MLK (Martin Luther King) weekend, the high school students visit a city to study how urban ministry works there and attend special MLK celebrations and worship services. In addition, each summer the group alternates between a national and international mission trip. As part of the church's internal ministries, youth serve as elders, ushers, lectors, and often provide opportunities for the rest of the congregation to participate in mission and service activities. For example, the youth developed a program to create "kits" needed by Tsunami victims and sponsored a drive for canned goods. The youth have helped at Atlanta Food Bank, project Open Hand (a food service for the sick and homebound), Atlanta Children's Shelter, and the international aid organization Open Doors and they also participate annually in the AIDS and HUNGER walks.

Although there is no separate service for them on Sunday mornings, the youth do have their own worship service Sunday evenings, when they also meet to participate in ongoing youth programs, choir practice, prayer groups and the like.

While not everyone at Central is engaged in community outreach ministry, it was generally agreed among interviewees that it would be very hard, if not impossible, to be

either a young or mature member of Central Presbyterian and not be aware both of its community programs and the necessity of being personally involved, in some form, in supporting them. New members attend a six week orientation class which, in addition to addressing issues of Presbyterian history and polity, speaks to Central's own history, emphasizes its missional nature and makes new members aware that for Central at least, Christian spiritual wholeness is connected in some way with active participation in the life of the church. This does not mean, of course, that all newcomers participate in community ministry. Indeed, only about 15% of Central's congregation is thus engaged. Rather, during a new member's early days at the church they are encouraged to find a ministry in which they feel both gifted and able and then to participate wholeheartedly in that ministry.

Many people moving in to the Atlanta area from other cities and regions and who have a heart for outreach are drawn to Central because of its reputation for community ministry. One interviewee said that during her family's church search when they moved to Atlanta, all the other churches they visited promoted a "look what we can do for you" approach, highlighting adult and youth ministries oriented to the care and welfare of the family. The attraction of Central was that it promoted a "look what you can do for us and for the community" approach, which this family felt to be both more biblical and, in many respects, more intellectually satisfying vis-à-vis their understanding of what it means to be "Christian." Other respondents said such things as, "Christ's love is alive here," and "[Central] makes it easy to be a Christian." (Not to be misunderstood, this respondent added, "I mean, the opportunities offered here and the structures of the various ministries take away any excuse for any inactivity.")

In addition to attracting people, Central's reputation attracts new ministries. Local social service and political organizations as well as other churches in the area, well aware of Central's community ministry expertise, bring outreach possibilities and community needs to the attention of the church, so the church never runs out of outreach prospects. Not that such a situation is likely. During the interviews, new ideas for outreach ministry were constantly being articulated: build or buy more transitional housing to get people off the streets and toward a new life of self-sufficiency; explore more deeply the advocacy possibilities of the Outreach and Advocacy Center; and explore re-education possibilities for the homeless unemployed, are just three of the many mentioned, all limited only by the necessary human and financial resources to back them.

A major and often mentioned frustration for the church is the limited parking in the downtown area. What parking is available is expensive and so those who would do ministry in the church environs must not only drive what can, during the week, average 60 minutes or more into and through city traffic to do it, but must also pay a parking premium. That so many of them do so is testimony to their commitment to the church and its outreach programs.

In a society beset by high-speed technological change, knotty social issues of human sexuality and the ethical and moral dilemmas created by modern medicine (genetics and cloning; transplants; abortion), the congregation at Central keeps itself well informed. Guest speakers – experts in their own fields – are, from time to time, invited to the church to render complex issues into comprehensible terms, allowing folk to make informed decisions about the positions they may want to take, actions they might want to

consider and decisions they might want to make. This is not to say that the general membership at Central is in any way ignorant. To the contrary, it presents as a generally very intelligent, Bible literate, well-educated group that has a more than passing familiarity with Presbyterian history and polity. Further, while the impact of the information is not clear, it is worth noting that forty-two members of the congregation are listed as clergy and some portion of the faculty of Columbia Theological (Presbyterian) Seminary are also on the membership rolls. (It should also be noted that there were no representatives from either group at the interviews.)

Worship at Central is modestly liturgical, participatory (with responsive readings), dynamic, and spiritual. The music and hymns are largely traditional, the organist is a professional and the choir is accomplished. The pastor and assistant pastor are both highly educated and their preaching is engaging, contemporary, and relevant. Despite the relatively conventional approach to worship, some respondents suggested that while there were other possibilities (i.e. churches) for outreach ministry in downtown Atlanta, the “space” created at Central for experiencing the spiritual – in terms of renewal, uplift, and a sense of the holy – throughout the worship service was in some way unique, though none could identify any particular reason this might be so.

4.1.1.3 Summary

Central Presbyterian Church is a historic church whose congregation has inherited and sustains a Spiritually-driven culture of care for and about its community. It gets excited about community issues, especially as related to matters affecting the marginalized in society; enjoys dynamic and spiritual worship; and is not afraid to speak up for what it believes is right and against what it sees as unjust, unfair, or just plain

wrong. The leadership of Jesus at Central is, as far as the congregation is concerned, a given. All of the church's outreach ministries, both historical and current, were unequivocally located in an interpretation of Jesus not just as Lord or Savior, but as an exemplar of what it means to Central's family to be Christian – a life dedicated to the emotional and physical health and welfare of all within reach and a voice for social justice. The congregation exudes an aura of confidence that it is following the will of God as exemplified in the words and works of Jesus and is thus, to use Newbigin's (1989: 118, 119) words, a "community through whom and in whom the Spirit speaks and acts."

People old and young are attracted to Central specifically because it makes demands upon them; demands of time, of money, of commitment, and of faith. And, while a relatively small percentage of the people are "hands-on" engaged in outreach ministry, such ministries are well-funded by the congregation and are additionally spiritually and prayerfully supported by the church family. The character and ethos of Central is one of obedient adherence to the precepts of Jesus' life, an obedience not guided by slavish submission but rather a willful acknowledgement that through voluntary actions of love and grace the presence of the holy may be made manifest to all who participate in the process.

4.1.2 A Call to Community: Christian Fellowship Baptist Church

Ethnicity: largely African American
Denomination: Baptist (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship).
Active membership: about 1,300
Attendance: about 700
Location: Atlanta South side.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 20
Operating budget 2004: ± \$1.09 million.

4.1.2.1 History and Background

Christian Fellowship Baptist Church is unique among the surveyed churches for several reasons. First, it was founded by folks who had been members of a church that, as a result of certain actions, attitudes, and behaviors of its pastoral leadership, was “fracturing.” Second, as a large group of the disenfranchised members began to realize their numbers constituted a significant congregation, they sought leadership from among their own, rather than seeking “career professional” pastoral leadership. Third, from the very beginning the new church had a “local” mission focus.

Emmanuel McCall, pastor of Christian Fellowship, is a graduate of Southern seminary. Prior to 1991, he was a member of a congregation that was “splintering” as a result of some critical issues related to the pastoral leadership. Though he was not a pastor at the time, many members of the church were aware of McCall’s seminary training and his then-current role as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board. Because of his training and experience, a number of these folk pressed McCall into the role of pastor of a new church, which became Christian Fellowship Baptist Church. There were 219 folk at Christian Fellowship’s first service, held at a chapel in a local private school.

Thirteen years later, church membership has soared to over 1,300 and the church is a significant force in its local community.

4.1.2.2 Interviews

Christian Fellowship is highly reflective of McCall's personal call to mission. He observes:

We have a few who are 'along for the ride,' those folks who are more interested in a narrower definition of what it means to be 'church' than that exercised by us, but generally they don't ride for very long. The pressure from other members to be involved in some ministry is too great and they either participate, or they leave to find another church that's a better fit. Outside of these, I would say that almost everyone in the church is directly, hands-on involved in some ministry practice outside of the church, or else financially supports such ministries as the need arises.

McCall is set to retire – which is one reason he was enthusiastic about involving Christian Fellowship in the study. "I want whomever the new pastor is to have as good a picture as such a survey will give," he said, adding that under new leadership the church would undoubtedly want to develop plans for the future and the survey would be a useful tool for the church and its leadership. "A church needs to understand itself – where it is, what it's doing," he said, "before it can understand how to get where what it wants, or needs, to be."

As the "Pastoral Epistle" reproduced below indicates, Christian Fellowship Baptist Church is a church that was founded on holistic principles. Pastor McCall's vision of the church was that of an organization that addressed the community and individual needs of the congregation by creating a deep sense of family and impressing on that family the importance of mutual responsibility for the spiritual and human welfare of its members. Believing that a church must have an inner strength based on these principals before it can take on issues in the secular community, McCall adds that the key

to ministry in the secular community is that it is properly balanced by the congregation's ministry to itself. He further asserts that individual acts of ministry tend, in the long haul and unless reinvigorated in some way, to lead to "burnout." Responding to the suggestion that in the individual act of ministry to others, one ministers to one's self and is therefore restored, McCall uses a dietary analogy; he points out that a diet of one food, while it may sustain an individual for a while, is inherently defective in that it does not supply all the necessary vitamins and minerals for long term health. So, while an individual or group may feel even a deep sense of spiritual completeness or fulfillment through acts of ministry, it is still important to be ministered to – through, for example, participation in worship and the sacraments, prayer support groups, and recreational activities within the congregational community.

According to many members interviewed, McCall lives his vision: "The pastor is not just visionary and well educated. He . . . reaches out and brings back to us at the church opportunities to grow. He leads by example;" "I have no expectations of rewards (for doing ministry). I think that part of that at least comes from the example our pastor has modeled." "He is a very humble man; he picks up trash around the church, drives a cheap car. We don't do like some other churches and have 'pastor appreciation' days, [and] buy him a new car or whatever. He won't hear of it;" "We kind of need to force him to let us honor him."

McCall, for his part, believes the church honors him through its faithfulness to Matt 25:35-40 and 28:19, 20. "That is what a church *is*," he emphasizes, "it's the message of the Gospel lived out in the wider community."

Pastor McCall's leadership style is strongly credited for the church's successful ministry. "The congregation looks to its pastor to be the spiritual leader and also, in some ways, the CEO;" "He knows how to surround himself with good people who are able to take care of the various responsibilities in the church. I think the pastor models integrity. He is what he says he is. He does what he says he will do;" "He's not the kind of person to tell you 'go do this.' Instead, you go do things because you know that's what he wants you to do. There is something about him that just makes you want to do right. And, he doesn't want to be singled out for recognition for doing stuff."

Interviewees agreed that Pastor McCall led by encouraging people to share in the leadership of the church. Rather than finding leaders, he gives leaders room to find themselves. Though he has established the direction of the church and holds the church fast to its course, he lets others manage the journey.

When asked about their motivation to conduct ministry in the secular community, interviewees advanced several reasons, ranging from the pastor's teaching, through the leadership he models, to the way he conceives and presents his vision for the church. As a result, individual members "have that understanding that you know without a doubt that this is what you should be doing." The location of the church, too, was seen to be significant in its call to ministry. There was agreement that the church arrived at its present location through the leadership of the Spirit. While there were many churches already in the neighborhood, there were none that practiced any consistent form of community outreach; "There was a need for this kind of church in this community at the time we started." One interviewee explained:

We are in a minority neighborhood right now and in minority neighborhoods you see needs of all kinds every day. Our pastor is

constantly reminding us that many of us weren't always where we are now, in terms of some sort of middle class; that we have come from subsistent situations – situations of need and desperation.

Indeed, there is a common sentiment among many in the congregation, especially the older folk, that their younger days were often marked not only by times of need, but by acts of sharing; “So as we grew up and had more to share, the more we shared. And the church has become a kind of vehicle for us to continue what we learned as children.” This “been there” sentiment came through in other ways, too, as members revealed their engagement with the darker side of the human experience. One person noted that he was now involved with the drug rehabilitation program, but adds:

Fifty two years ago I was a [drug] user. This means I can relate to the people who live under bridges and eat out of dumpsters. I don't see failures; I see bankers and calibration engineers and artists who have fallen on hard times. I remember it was the grace of God that brought me out of the same situation and maybe now the grace of God can act through me to help bring others out.

Other respondents shared previous personal experiences of, for example, teen pregnancy and its associated problems (teen mothers tend to “drop out” of school, depriving themselves of an education and, thus, employment other than at the lowest end of the social spectrum). This experience led some members to found one of Christian Fellowship's early ministries, “Back to School,” a day care center for teen mothers who wanted to go back to school. Over the years this ministry has grown out of its original parameters of day care to one that provides school supplies – new book bags, pens, notepads, and clothing – at a “back to school” day for financially strapped families in the local community. All the items are free to needy families and are provided in a “party” atmosphere that includes hot dogs and soft drinks for the children.

The idea of one ministry leading to another was seized upon by several members as explaining the broad range of ministries the church now conducts. They shared how, as they practiced one ministry, they became “attuned” to the need for an additional ministry or ministries:

I think we had a sense of ministry from the beginning [of Christian Fellowship church]. One of our first tasks was thinking about working outside the church. We asked people what tasks they wanted to take on. Some said “nursing home,” some said “children’s home,” others said “women’s shelter,” and so on. Once we got going, ministries continued to multiply and helped us find other things we wanted to do. Like, we just started taking some hygiene products to a local nursing home and found out that some residents didn’t have family, so we just set up a system for church members to “adopt” these folk and commit to visiting them regularly and supplying some of their personal needs.

One member amplified this response, noting that new ministries were identified because the church did not merely plan but acted, and further that the church had six WMU (Women’s Missionary Union) groups, with at least twenty members (or more) in each of those groups. With each group doing at least three mission projects, there is a constant inflow of ideas for new ministry.

Expanding ministries require human resources. Getting new members involved in ministry happens through a combination of the preached message of community engagement and factors of “peer pressure” already described, simple invitation to people not currently engaged in some form of ministry, and through new Member Orientation classes. New member orientation happens over a period of weeks and representatives of the various ministries come in to the orientation classes and talk about their ministry as a way of encouraging newcomers to be involved.

That the church engages in multiple ministries is emphasized in a number of ways. For example, the New Member Handbook lists all active ministries, and all active

ministries get mention, from time to time, from the pulpit. Some emphases are more subtle. For example, the church is designed in such a way that the entryway leads to a roofed and enclosed two-storey atrium, from which access to the various church offices, fellowship hall, meeting rooms and the sanctuary may be gained. All around the upper-level balcony in the atrium are banners, hand made by church members, representing the multiple ministries that engage the congregation, a subtle reinforcement of the church's ministry orientation. On an individual level, new members are also allocated a Deacon, who not only acts as a knowledge source for the various aspects of the church, but actively promotes the church's various internal and external ministries and suggests ministry involvement opportunities to newcomers. Not all newcomers need to be persuaded, however:

Before we attended this church we attended another for thirteen years. And it's hard to leave a church family after that many years. The reason we came here was that we had some friends who were members and who were telling us about this church and how great it was and we were like . . . well, to give up where you have been worshipping was a major decision. But we came here – we prayed about it – and it was a long drive and we had two young children, but we came here and just fell in love with it. And, we went to work as soon as we came here. I mean it was just that; when you say you're coming to Christian Fellowship, you are going to work when you come here, because you meet the right people [and that's how the church will grow and how its ministries will expand]. I came – and many others here came – to Christian Fellowship because we knew we were going to be put to work. It's what we want to do. Too many other churches just don't offer the opportunity [to engage in ministry].”

The consensus of interviewees was that the whole idea of ministry is so ingrained it is expected:

Community ministry is an intrinsic part of our church's culture. While a visitor to the church – someone who's considering membership – doesn't have to get involved in ministry, the reality is, if they don't get involved, they'll feel uncomfortable. Then, they'll either get motivated by the Spirit to *be* involved, or find a less demanding church family.

On the issue of whether the drive toward community engagement came from humanitarian motives, or if the Holy Spirit could be seen or felt as the motivating force interviewees consistently credited the latter. When asked to how the two forces could be differentiated, the consensus was that humanitarian motives were generally short-term, undemanding in terms of their consumption of time and financial resources, and somewhat cyclical. As examples, some major national and international humanitarian organizations were named, with the observation that donations were often made to these organizations annually, or when they wrote letters citing a special need in some location of the world as a result of natural disaster. Requests from such organizations are infrequent, the demands are not onerous, and the time taken to write a check is minimal. Some interviewees added that the knowledge that the same letter is going to many people – perhaps millions – and the sense of “disassociation” from distant disasters, reduced the sense of obligation. In contrast, ministries driven by the Holy Spirit were largely local, often lengthy (in terms of the duration of the ministry), frequently time consuming, and sometimes costly. In the words of one respondent, “It’s not just that [community ministry] is driven by the Holy Spirit; it’s the Holy Spirit that maintains the ministry through the congregation’s support.”

There was a strong consensus that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain high levels of ministry unless the congregation spiritually upheld that ministry and further that the spirituality of the congregation derived from its understanding and interpretation of biblically based ministry mandates.

Tracking how the Holy Spirit was manifested in the congregation proved to be harder for folk to articulate:

Whenever we are doing anything we always pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us and to lead us and that we would be obedient to it . . . we know that when things fall into place the Holy Spirit had to be involved. [In my personal life] if there's something on my mind, and I don't know what to do about it, I pray about it and there's a feeling of a lifting of a burden and I know that I just have to sit back and trust.

One member suggested that the presence of the Spirit was manifested in a sense of peace; another, that she felt the presence of the Spirit when listening to and participating in the praise and worship services:

I think in addition it comes out of the relationship we have developed with our Maker and knowing that our trust is in Him and our confidence is in Him and we are told to seek His guidance, rather than trying to do things ourselves . . . so if we have a choice of things or are trying to solve a problem, asking God for guidance [is the right thing to do]. Then you can feel [as though] something is pushing you to go one way, though you had in mind to go the other. And if you still try to go the other way, you don't have this sense of peace about it. You know you are doing the right thing when you get a sense of peace.

The feeling of peacefulness as apparent endorsement of a course of action, or a decision, was echoed by many interviewees.

For most, if not all, of the folk interviewed at Christian Fellowship, the door to experiencing this sense of peace was the acceptance of Jesus, an acceptance that was often preceded by a life crisis of some kind, of which many examples were offered ranging from serious injury to dangerous diagnoses, from job losses to financial crises, from family breakdowns to the deaths of family and close friends. In many instances where the Holy Spirit was credited with bringing a sense of peace, the respondent could trace back to a crisis that they believed the Holy Spirit helped them resolve. This, they felt, led to an increasing dependency on the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In this regard, many interviewees cited experiences reflective of William James' (1902) "twice born" believers, those who had an early, "easy" faith that was subsequently lost because

of its inability to withstand humanistic rationalism, only to be regained when the concept of it was transformed from its former perception as a matter of sunshine, sweetness, and light, to one that is less cheerful, less confident, but also more realistic and substantially more supportive. For these folks it was a situation where, as Kushner (1989: 36) writes, “God is no longer the parent who keeps them safe and dry; He is the power that enables them to keep going in a dark and stormy world.” For these people the Holy Spirit is not a presence periodically invoked to give guidance and support but a kind of permanently in-built compass and source of inspiration.

Not everyone’s openness to, or experience of, the Holy Spirit was crisis-driven, however. Many interviewees affirmed that they had simply grown up in the church and that as they had matured in their faith, so they felt the increasing presence of – and a developing relationship with – the Holy Spirit:

My relationship [with the Holy Spirit] began early on, when I was growing up. My parents were always in church, Mother was a missionary in her church for more than fifty years, including when I was growing up. My dad is a trustee in the Methodist church. We always went to church [twice on] Sunday; We experienced the deaths of people related to us . . . [I] had a sister that died when I was real young and we had her body in the house; we often went to other people’s homes where there had been a death and the body was in a casket in the living room; we went to funerals . . . [but] we also went to births, too. We saw babies being born and we saw people die. And it was those spiritual experiences early on in my life, through adolescence and growing up, witnessing the work of God in other people, that have helped me deal with the crises in my life.

Another view was that the Holy Spirit manifested itself in the congregation through “the sound biblical teaching that undergirds this church. The teachings of Jesus and the instructions he left for us are pretty much embedded in the congregation and that means it’s easier for the Holy Spirit to get us moving.”

The multiple ministries of Christian Fellowship – both internal and external – place a significant financial burden on the congregation. While not all ministries require money – for many of them it’s just the allocation of personal time to do it – some ministries do need money to function. In this regard, any and all financial matters of the church – and the ministries too – are subject to some form of oversight. Any ministry that might place the church under a financial burden is considered by the church council for approval. When, however, the church council denies funds for a particular ministry, the ministry might still go forward; the interested parties often go ahead and raise the funds themselves, from Sunday school groups, for example, or from the community of men in the church known as the Brotherhood. Such funds, deposited with the church as reserved funds, are then used to make that particular ministry happen. Interviewees maintained that this approach did not contradict the church’s mission strategy, rather:

It affirms it. People know what needs to be done and what’s expected of them. Sometimes the church has the funds, sometimes it doesn’t. Not having the resources doesn’t mean it’s not a worthy ministry; it just means we must find the resources elsewhere to get the job done. Either way, the church still has oversight [of the ministry].

It was pointed out that such situations are not common, however; rather, most new ministries are merely extensions of those already in existence.

The idea of ministries constantly expanding to meet newly identified needs raised the issue of limitation. When asked how the congregation saw the boundaries of their ministries, the agreed response was that they were not bounded; rather, they were limitless. Pointing to their track record of engagement and expansion, all agreed that to consider limits was to limit the Holy Spirit: “With the Spirit, we can do anything.”

In terms of raising general funds for the church, one offering is taken up at each worship service on Sunday and it's a general offering – no 'Sunday school offering,' no 'mission offering,' and so on. Every year, the congregation votes on a budget. Each quarter, every family gets a copy of the previous quarter's financial statement, so that they know what came in and what went out. Ministry or other one-off financial needs that arise after the budget are announced from the pulpit. For example, one young man in the congregation had the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C., to work as a page in the Senate. Neither he nor his family had the funds to take advantage of this opportunity, an opportunity that was an especially significant one in the marginalized community he came from. When this special need came to the attention of Pastor McCall, he announced the need from the pulpit.

The young man went to D.C.

4.1.2.3 Summary

That the success of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church at engaging its community is due, first, to the vision and passion of its pastor seems self evident, at least as represented by the various groups interviewed. It has been the capacity of the pastor both to attract congregants similarly inclined and for both pastor and congregants to imprint this passion first on early members of the church and then on other folk who have swelled the congregation over the years that has created the sensitivity to mission that the church demonstrates. Second, the ability of the church to engage its community flows in no small part from the ability of the pastor to not merely encourage but to nurture ministry leadership and individual self-motivation. Although one interviewee described the role of pastor as CEO, individuals in the church feel liberated, rather than constrained,

by the necessary organizational and administrative structures that accrue to large organizations, viewing such structures as designed to facilitate, rather than obstruct, ministry. Third, that the church is actively engaged in community ministry is an attraction to many Christians because it gives a structured and useful response to a drive (thought to emanate from the Holy Spirit) to engage humanity in scriptural terms (e.g. Matt 25:35-40 and 28:19, 20). The ethnicity of the congregation and the church's physical location cannot be overlooked. Although the church has striven over the years to be inclusive it remains a largely African American congregation in a largely African American community. This shared identity, coupled with a shared history of the old (and not so old) challenges of repression and disenfranchisement, has led in some ways to a feeling that African American society must 'pull itself up by its own boot straps,' and while not eschewing assistance from outside is itself mainly responsible for addressing the multiple contemporary challenges that face it. Thus, lack of education, poverty, drug addiction, crime, teen pregnancy and a pervading sense of hopelessness are all seen as challenges to the Church, and Christian Fellowship rises to the challenge. To do so often requires sacrificial giving of both time and money, but the ordinary people of the church seem to take pride in their ability to stand the test; they share in many ways a sense of engaging in community ministry *precisely because it is a hard thing to do.*

A PASTORAL EPISTLE

September 8, 1992

BELOVED:

Occasionally it is necessary for us to review our pilgrimage, to look at our current state, and to have a vision for the future. These reflections are put in print for clarity and review.

The Lord has blessed us abundantly. We are filled with awe when we look at what God has done with this people in the 17 months of our existence. Our membership is now 725. A large number of prospective persons visit with us each Sunday so that our worship attendance often exceeds 800. In our first year (Oct. 1, 1991 - Sept. 30, 1992) we developed a budget of \$350,000. We have already exceeded that budget, not including the money set aside for the purchase of this property. God has blessed us with a facility that will allow us to be the people of God on mission. TO HIM BE THE GLORY IN HIS CHURCH.

A LOOK AT WHERE WE ARE

The Christian Fellowship Baptist Church (CFBC) came into being as a fully grown church. We did not have the luxury of normal steady development. Like Adam in Genesis, we didn't know childhood and youth before becoming adult. Consequently, some things that normally take place in healthy church growth must be carefully put in place.

An Illustration

When a house is built, careful methods are observed. A foundation is laid, the framework is built, the structure is added; the electricity, water and air conditioning systems are installed. When the structure is completed, then the decoration begins. If this process is not carefully observed, there cannot be a house, and whatever structure will not stand. The future occupants may be anxious to enjoy their house. They may have purchased the furniture and furnishings, but patience is required while the preparation is being completed. No one puts carpeting down when the roof is not finished. No one hangs pictures on wall studs. The house must be completed before it can become a home.

We are attempting to build CFBC according to biblical and spiritual blueprints. It must have a solid foundation. This is why I have been preaching through Acts since January. To this end we have required extensive training of our staff of Deacons. This is why we are requesting all persons in leadership positions, as well as members, to engage in Sunday morning Bible study. In addition, our WMU and Brotherhood units do Bible study and theological reflection in their sessions. This is required. We must know who we are under God and what His will is for us. We cannot afford to "do our own thing" according to our desires and imaginations. Additional training programs for our leadership and membership is planned for immediate implementation.

OUR PILGRIMAGE could be likened to the Children of Israel. First, they were an Exodus people coming out of Egyptian bondage. Then they were a Wilderness people for 40 years. They were to become a mission people when they entered the Promised Land. As a nation they never became the Mission People God had intended.

During our first 2 or 3 months we were an Exodus People. We celebrated our freedom, the dawn and hope of a new day. This bound us together into a loving, caring fellowship. After we moved to Mays high school, we became a Wilderness People. We "feasted on Manna dropped from Heaven" and "drank water from the rocks", but we wandered while seeking the promised land.

On March 29th we entered the Promised land, this facility. We will not possess it until December 15th, but our days of wandering and wondering are over.

A NEEDED FOCUS

Much attention must be given to building the relational aspects of love, trust, mutual respect and care. We are not the same people of the Exodus or Wilderness. Some few who were with us then, have found the travel to the Promised land more than they were able to make and have left us. The Lord has added to His Church those being saved and already saved. Many of these are young adults who are single or building families. Some are single parent families. All are buying and/or furnishing homes, cars, and have limited finances.

We must continue to use every opportunity to become an inclusive congregation. The work of our greeters on Sunday morning and our fellowship period in the worship is not enough to sustain the inclusiveness we must have. EVERY PERSON WHO COMES INTO THE CFBC MUST FEEL THAT THIS IS HIS OR HER CHURCH TOO. We will do our best to include as many people in as many ways as we possibly can.

Some of our new members may come from churches where things were done differently. We must carefully help them understand why we do what we do the way we do it. This is also true for some of the Exodus. Even though they were part of the Exodus, they may not have understood the processes put together in the Wilderness.

TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITIES ARE BEFORE US

Our Church Council is working on **VISION 2000**, a statement of our goals, objectives and strategies through the year 2000 A.D. You will have a chance to read, adjust and approve this document as our working agenda. It contains the corporate vision, organizational framework and the systematic progress that is planned. Our mission as a church, our relationship to this community, our commitment to the uplift of people are all spelled out.

What more is needed?

- * Patience while we develop orderly processes.
- * Your commitment to help develop and support the processes.
- * A focus of attention on CFBC as the Body of Christ, not our own ego satisfactions or personal agenda.
- * Committed and sacrificial financial support to enable us to realize our goals.
- * The linkage of the wisdom of age with the energy of youth.
- * More humility as we yield ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul concluded his letter to the Church at Galatia (Galatians 6:11) by saying, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand"!

The length of this letter reflects my love for this congregation. I **THANK GOD ALWAYS** for having placed me here and having given me this opportunity of service. My greeting was "**Beloved**". I do not say this carelessly or routinely. You are first, loved by God, who also has loved me, and has caused our love in Him to be complete. **SO MAY IT EVER BE.**

Pastor McCall

4.1.3 A Crisis of Community Identity: Druid Hills Baptist Church.

Ethnicity: Mostly White
Denomination: Baptist (Multiple affiliations)
Active membership: about 350
Attendance: about 140
Location: Urban Atlanta.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 15
Operating budget 2004: ± \$540,000.

4.1.3.1 History and Background

Druid Hills Baptist is an in-town church in one of the inner suburbs of Atlanta. The church building sits in close proximity to the Atlanta communities of Virginia-Highlands, Inman Park, Candler Park, Midtown, and Little Five Points. The church was founded in 1914 and the current building was completed in 1929.

While Central Presbyterian Church (q.v.) may, because of its location in a non-residential neighborhood, be considered a “magnet” church, attracting its congregants from the environs of Atlanta, Druid Hills Baptist stands within a largely residential area, surrounded by single family homes, condominiums, apartments, and shops, and most of its congregation lives locally. The neighborhood of Druid Hills, one of Atlanta’s earliest suburbs, was designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, who also designed New York’s Central park and the landscaping around the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Olmsted expressed his philosophy of suburban living as one where “The homeowner, returning hot and tired from the city [will pass through a] park to homes well shaded by handsome, umbrageous, permanently thrifty trees [in a neighborhood with] a pleasing rural, or, at least, semi-rural, character of scenery . . . to be permanently enjoyed”¹.

¹ www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/~druidhills/

While the pleasing semi-rural character of Druid Hills described above to some extent remains, its population is changing. In the first three decades after the church was founded, its congregation grew steadily, to peak at 3637 in 1947 (Shaw 1987: 95). In 1952, the church still boasted some 3,447 members (ibid.) but then came the 60's and with them much change. The 1960's:

[S]wept away many prevailing attitudes and traditions. It was an age of rebellion against establishments of home, church, school, and government. Supreme Court decrees brought many long-lasting changes in philosophies and lives, some [of] which led to reform, some to controversy. The Vietnam conflict brought warring emotions to many who watched the body count each day . . . There were peace marches, sit-ins, boycotts [. . .] drugs came into popular use [and] strange forms of worship and a so-called “new morality” filled the vacuum where sometimes belief had been swept away (Shaw 1987: 95).

The dramatic change in social structure and outlook developed during the 60's was reflected in the congregation at DHBC which, by the end of the decade, had seen an equally dramatic decline in its membership. In more recent years changes within the Druid Hills community itself have been felt in the church. Homes once considered inexpensive became, because of the close proximity of the neighborhood to Atlanta, highly desirable and this desirability had and continues to have an effect on many levels.

Competition for Druid Hills homes has driven up prices, attracting wealthier residents. The increased value of such homes has increased the par value of similar homes in the neighborhood driving up the property taxes of those homes. Many of these homes are occupied by fixed-income retirees who, unable to pay the assessments, sell their homes and move further away from the city. Some of these homes are sold as single family homes, others are converted to apartments and some are utterly demolished to make room for low-rise condominium and apartment buildings. Smaller businesses, too, such as restaurants and shops, have located in the neighborhood. The net result is a

change in the demographic of Druid Hills. Once comprised largely of folks in middle-age and retirement – some of whom remain – the neighborhood is seeing an increasing influx of an eclectic mix of people: young couples – many without children – and professional singles, both male and female, of various racial and ethnic backgrounds and professing a wide variety of sexual orientation – straight, gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgendered.

It is the complex nature of this demographic that gave rise to the section title above – Druid Hills Baptist, like the community in which it resides, is indeed a community undergoing a crisis of identity. The membership of the church, always to some degree reflective of its neighborhood demographic and thus once home to a largely ageing, traditional, white congregation, has seen its congregational makeup change toward the more complex population described above – although the church is still not completely reflective of the wider Druid Hills community. Having historically had a conservative, if not somewhat fundamentalist leaning in the past, the new congregational demographic demands a more liberal approach – a shift that, for some members, has been hard to make. It is therefore all the more surprising that Druid Hills Baptist maintains a relatively high level of community outreach.

4.1.3.2 Interviews

Jon Spencer, senior pastor at DHBC since May of 1998, began his time at the church in February 1997 as minister of outreach and discipleship. In that role, which continued a long tradition of community ministry by the church, he was responsible for adding to the existing outreach ministries by “connecting” with the community, becoming aware of community needs, conveying those needs to the congregation, and

developing ministries to take care of those needs. Pastor Spencer readily acknowledges the difficulty he had of conveying the needs of, for example, the Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community to what was then a conservative congregation, or persuading that same congregation that it should fund and support an AIDS outreach ministry, or provide English language classes for speakers of other languages. When he became senior pastor, Jon began expanding the church's ministry activities to include various events that would increase its visibility in the wider community, for example entering into partnership ministries with other local churches by serving meals at a homeless shelter two Tuesdays a month and beginning a regular "Movie Night" event for the homeless, held in the church's basement theater with popcorn and lemonade provided. The church also has a "refugee" home, a place for a refugee family to live while it integrates into Atlantan – and American – society.

Some incremental changes were also wrought inside the church. A twice-a-month "alternative" worship experience called "Common Ground" offers a postmodern experiential form of worship; the church provides space for various Christian and non-Christian organizations to meet – several "12-step" ministries convene at the church – and a Performing Arts class meets there most Saturdays. Pastor Spencer consistently preaches, teaches, and writes about community engagement and it is because he does so – and because the church "follows through" – that many folk are, by their own testimony, attracted to the church. "Druid Hills Baptist," asserts one interviewee "has a reputation for genuinely caring about its community." Spencer further believes that many Christians today are looking for an active, rather than a passive faith. A passive faith, he claims, is one where people simply attend church to get their spiritual needs met. An

active faith, on the other hand, is one where such attendance only supplies part of a spiritual need; the other part is met by meeting the spiritual needs of others. (This dualism is articulated and reinforced in the church's mission, vision and values statement developed in 2002 and reproduced below.) Further, many of the people in the church who agree with this assertion believe that participating in community ministry is in some way "spiritual," puts them on "holy ground," and "authenticates" their faith. "Jesus is the Lord of this church and an authentic faith is one in which doing what Jesus did – to the extent we can – is the only way to be true to him."

Although Pastor Spencer maintains a passion for community ministry, his responsibilities as senior pastor have reduced the time available to him to pursue those ends. In order both to sustain its existing outreach programs and to find other ways of doing community ministry, in September of 2001, DHBC hired a "Minister of Outreach and Administration," Gerry Hutchinson. Pastor Hutchinson's primary role is to help identify fresh and innovative ways to perform community ministry and also to find ways of effectively utilizing some of the unused office and classroom space in the church building. As a result, new ministry opportunities have indeed been identified and, with minimal bureaucratic intervention (where financial and human resources are reviewed) are frequently undertaken. One such new ministry is "Servant Evangelism," where church members literally take to the streets of the neighborhood to some form of ministry and use the opportunity to speak about the church. For example, the press often reports cases where people have died in fires because the battery in their home fire alarm was depleted. Congregants from DHBC now go throughout the church's immediate

neighborhood on the date of time change to and from Daylight Savings and hand out free smoke-detector batteries to help alleviate this problem.

Lest it be thought that all new ministries come from the pastorate, it must be emphasized that members are strongly encouraged to identify new ministries and interviewees agreed that if anyone felt led or called to start or open a new ministry, the pastoral leadership has stressed that members should not feel the need to “seek consent.” “You do not need to ask permission to do the work of Jesus Christ,” one person quoted pastor Jon Spencer as saying, adding that the church stood willing to help and cooperate, to the extent it could, in any ministry identified by its members. For many of the newer members of the church who are engaged in its outreach ministries it was this attitude that attracted them. Others were attracted by the church’s willingness to adopt to the changing demographic, to be diverse, and to be a part of the community in which it exists. It must be said too that while the decades of the 80’s and 90’s saw a decline in outreach ministry in line with the ageing of the congregation, the introduction of younger folk to the membership of DHBC and the presence of a newer, dynamic leadership has not only reinvigorated the church’s outreach ministries but has to some degree energized the older membership which, while not necessarily physically able to participate, largely enthusiastically supports such ministries both morally and financially.

Druid Hills Baptist Church operates as one large, extended family. Like all families, not everyone gets along with everyone else all the time. But, interviewees agreed, “people are always getting together to pray for one another, or for people in need;” people are “concerned for the welfare of others;” food is brought to members who are sick and “there is a ‘buzz’ that goes around the church when someone is sick, or

injured, or something else happens to them,” and the church rapidly responds to their needs.

Returning to the external ministries of the church, interviewees were asked to explain how they understood the difference between a humanitarian and a spiritually-driven motivation to help others. One interviewee responded that “the difference is that in humanitarianism, one wants to do something [to help], does it, and that’s the end of it. When it’s spirit-driven, one does it; not as a one-time event, but as a long-term commitment.” Another interviewee suggested the difference was the same as the adage “give a man a fish and he eats for a day; that’s humanitarian. Teach a man to fish and he eats for life, that’s ministry.” “It’s a realization that people are always in need,” said a third, “and responding to a spirit-driven, scriptural call to do it.” There was consensus in the group that spirituality picks up where mere humanitarian motives end. Humanitarians give what they are able without impacting their lives; spiritually-driven Christians feel impelled to give – time, money, intellect, experience – perhaps not exactly until it hurts, but often certainly to the point where such actions impact their lives in some enduring way, because they feel that this is what Christ wants them to do. “It’s a sacrificial act rather than one driven by humanitarian motives. It’s doing the will of the Father.”

4.1.3.3 Summary

During the course of this study, many stories were presented regarding congregations that had split or fragmented because of differing views of how the rapid social and demographic changes in the wider community should be addressed by the church. As the social and cultural matrix in which church lives has evolved, Druid Hills Baptist too has been no stranger to dissent as it has faced the difficult issue of evolving

with its community, without compromising what it has historically seen as its *raison d'être*: an uncompromising adherence to Gospel principles and the application of those principles in the daily life of its congregation.

That it has been able to do so is due in no small measure to the centrality of Jesus in the life of the congregation. For the most part of the church's history the centrality of Jesus and the activity of the Holy Spirit were seen in traditional terms, as properties intrinsic to the church family and only capable of complete enjoyment within the walls of the church. In this view, although Jesus and the Spirit might be made evident to the wider community by occasional acts of benevolence, to really enjoy Jesus and to sense the presence of the Spirit one had to be "in" the church.

While the high membership numbers of Druid Hills Baptist demonstrated the effects of this spiritual centripetality in past decades the significant decline in membership in recent years, directly attributable to dramatic social change and cultural shifts in worldview, was clear evidence of a need for new ways for people to "know" Jesus and feel the presence of the Spirit. One of the ways pastor Jon Spencer has gone about this is by asking the congregation to reconsider many of the customary roadblocks to fellowship in the congregation that have developed from conventional approaches to the Gospel. For example, while smoking and alcohol use are still considered generally unhealthy practices, the congregation determined that neither is specifically precluded in the Gospels and that making their use a bar to membership was more traditional than biblical. Perhaps more significantly, from a long history of total opposition to any form of non-traditional sexual expression, the church has shifted to, if not acceptance, then at least a more open tolerance of the Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community.

Such openness was determined by a consideration of the “judgment” of others, which is biblically proscribed (e.g. Luke 6:37), as opposed to living the characteristics of Jesus (forgiveness, love, tolerance) considered to be more in keeping with Christian life. Arriving at these new social and religious understandings has often required pastor Spencer to walk a fine line between a new understanding of the Gospel and deep sensitivity to the traditions of the Christian church as understood by the congregation. His tactical leadership has not only led the congregation to discover the need to open its doors to the previously disenfranchised, but has increased its understanding that if the people will not come to the church, then the church must go to the people. As a result, the church has become not only more inclusive in its outreach programs, but also in the kinds of community ministries it provides.

The re-evaluations described came from persistent and prayerful provoked consideration of the question, “what would Jesus want us to do.” Out of this came the idea that the church should do what Jesus did – consistently undertake acts of mercy, tolerance, love, and forgiveness – and actively seek and engage those folk living on the margins of society. The centrality of Jesus in the life of the congregation is credited by most of the older, long-term members of the church that have remained in the congregation for helping to avoid partisanship as they have adapted to both the changing social demographic in the wider community and the reflection of that demographic in the church family. Similarly, the Spirit has been able to act at DHBC because the church, under the leadership of Jesus, has not been afraid to identify and address community needs as they have arisen.

Druid Hills Baptist Church

Vision Statement

Because we believe that God works through His people, the church, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and because we believe that each local fellowship of believers has a unique mission relevant to their context, we the members of Druid Hills Baptist Church, see a day when our church will be known as a vibrant Intown community of Christians, committed to ministering to and serving others with compassion and integrity in the name of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we will strive to be a church whose ministries reflect our commitment to sharing the life-changing message of Jesus Christ, whose worship is dynamic and meaningful, whose membership is representative of the diversity of our surrounding neighborhoods, whose teaching leads people into a continuously-deepening relationship with God, and whose leadership demonstrates our belief that all Christians are called to be ministers.

Value Statements

- We emphasize the lordship of Christ. We seek to be completely subject to Jesus, who is the head of the church.
- We place worship at the center of the life of our community. It is our conviction that human beings were created to glorify God and enjoy His presence. Through traditional and innovative forms of worship we seek to honor God and strengthen the church for mission.
- We take the Bible seriously. It is our guide for belief and the living out of our faith. We seek to read, study and thoughtfully interpret scripture as led by the Holy Spirit. We strive to faithfully apply the teachings of scripture to our lives as individual Christians and as a congregation.
- We believe that the Christian life is meant to be lived in close relationship with other believers. We seek to deepen our community by relating to and caring for each other through small groups, Sunday School classes and other opportunities for fellowship.
- We seek to follow Jesus' example by making prayer central to our lives. We believe prayer and its related practices, such as meditation, solitude and devotional reading are vital for Christian growth.
- We seek to freely share the Christian faith with those who are not believers and to invite them to become Christ-followers. Through relational faith sharing we seek to lead those who haven't yet experienced the love of God found in Christ into a relationship with Him and the community of faith.
- We believe that Christians are called to reach out to the poor and work for justice in society. Through a variety of ministry initiatives we seek to live out the teaching that Jesus came to "bring good news to the poor."
- We affirm that all Christians, whether ordained or laypersons are called to ministry. We believe that all Christians have been given gifts by the Holy Spirit and are called into service. We desire to see each member equipped for his/her ministry within the church and in the community.
- We seek to be involved with the community surrounding our church building. We will work to create partnerships with other Christians and people of good will who are working towards the betterment of the community. By doing so, we will "build bridges" into the community.
- We recognize that the God whom we serve is marvelously creative. We understand that while the gospel message never changes, we must be innovative in our way of doing things. One expression of creativity is using the arts as means of communicating the gospel and helping believers grow in their faith.
- We believe that there should be no division within the community of faith based on race, class or gender. We claim the scripture that teaches that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ." (Gal. 3:28) All Christians are gifted for ministry and all offices within the church are open to those who are called.
- We are a Baptist church and hold to such historic Baptist principles as the priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church, religious liberty and the separation of church and state, and believers' baptism by immersion.

Mission Statement

Love God, Share Christ, Serve People, Grow in Faith

4.1.4 Engaging Suburbia: East Cobb United Methodist Church

Ethnicity: largely White
Denomination: United Methodist
Active Membership: about 425
Attendance: about 315
Location: Suburban Atlanta North side.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 20
Operating budget 2004: ± \$516,000

4.1.4.1 History and background

The Methodist Church became the United Methodist Church on April 23, 1968, when the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church joined hands at the constituting General Conference in Dallas, Texas.

Methodism itself was founded by John and Charles Wesley, Church of England priests who had transforming religious experiences in May 1738. In the years following, the Wesleys succeeded in leading a movement in the Church of England that ultimately led to Methodism. Methodism soon crossed the Atlantic as some Methodists made the often long and frequently hazardous voyage to America, where they were met with such enthusiasm that Methodism became, until the turn of the 19th C., the largest denomination in the U.S.

The history of ECUMC dates back to 1837 with the founding of the “Marietta Campground.” In the early history of Methodist churches there was only one preacher, known as the “Circuit Rider,” to serve many churches. Preaching services were few, travel was difficult and often dangerous (the Cherokee Indians were not removed until 1838) and wild animals still roamed the woods. The early settlers in Georgia were loyal to their God and were not willing for their children to grow up without the blessing of their church about them. Thus in 1837 a location was established – the Marietta Camp

Ground – where all might gather together to refresh the souls of the saints and call sinners to repentance. In 1869 a regular Sunday school for children was begun which led, in 1879, to the chartering of a church. This was soon followed by the establishment of a church building on some acres adjacent to the campground, where the church has remained ever since.

East Cobb UMC began its life as a rural church, part of a community that largely relied on cotton and other farm products for its livelihood. It remained that way until 1942, when the construction of a bomber plant (to support the WWII effort), as well as the required runways and ancillary industry drew the church and its wider community into the larger sphere of Atlanta's suburbia. Further continued industrial and commercial development meant that the East Cobb area became a fully urban area 1970's.

Since it began as a rural church East Cobb UMC, unlike urban churches such as Central Presbyterian and Druid Hills Baptist (q.v.), did not have a large, local community from which to draw its membership. Thus it meandered through the years with only very modest growth but a growth that, again in contrast to the urban churches just mentioned, did not suffer a dramatic decline as a result of urban flight or changing social outlook. The church's official history (Young & Allgood, 1997) reports 149 folk on the roll in 1922; 198 in 1950; 243 in 1953; 233 in 1960, and 548 in 1980. The church records an "active" membership of 425 today.²

² Young & Allgood (1997) sometimes report numbers as "membership," sometimes as "active membership," and sometimes without qualifying the number provided. The number given for today's active membership is a "best guess" by the senior pastor. The church has some 800 members on the roll.

4.1.4.2 Interviews

The interviews at East Cobb began with a focus group that was almost entirely comprised of folk engaged in community ministry – some for thirty and forty years – and who were anxious to talk about their reasons for doing so when asked. “We do outreach because Jesus tells us to,” began one respondent. “That’s the main starting point.” “We simply want to help people in our community,” said another. “It makes us feel good,” added a third, a sentiment to which all were in agreement. Asked to identify whether the outreach was driven by spiritual or humanitarian motives, interviewees first discussed among themselves what they thought their various motivations were: “I think it’s driven by humanitarian motives at first. It’s a response to human need.” “I feel like it’s more *quid pro quo*, a sense that if I’m ever in the same situation, I’d want people to do the same for me.” “It’s common sense,” said a third, “it makes sense to take care of others;” and finally, “We do ministry because, as Christians, it’s just what we do.”

It was interesting to listen to the conversation as these energized folk, discussing the variance between humanitarian and spiritual motivations, tried to come to a consensus – which gradually emerged and was articulated as follows:

We think that humanitarian motives are reactive. Humanitarians wait for things to happen, or, if they are happening, to be made aware of them and then they react to them. There is also a sense of distance and even anonymity to humanitarian aid. Spiritual motives are pro-active; people driven by the Spirit are always looking for what’s already happening and Spiritually-driven ministries are often, though not always, very personal, hands on ministries, where you may look into the eyes of those ministered to. And, Spiritual ministries come out of the culture of the Church – we are driven by our sense of being a nurturing community. In a nutshell, to be Christian is to care deeply and persistently. What that means ultimately [in response to the question] is that whether our initial motivation is humanitarian or spiritual, we are *maintained* in ministry purely by the Spirit.

Beyond this community statement, several participants added personal riders, such as, “Outreach ministry makes me more like Jesus;” “It’s how I was brought up – scripturally focused, doing what scripture says I should do;” “it’s a part of my relationship with Jesus Christ;” “I’m spiritually inclined to do it;” and, “I want to go to heaven!” Some participants said further that while they might be motivated to begin ministering to others for humanitarian reasons, their faith made them do more than they otherwise would; “I am accountable to my congregational family and to the wider Church for following Jesus – a commitment to minister to others is a large part of that accountability.” Interviewees were firm in their assertion that the life of Jesus is so extensively written about in the Bible because it was important. This observation may sound somewhat trite, but the underlying principle is that many churches, denominations, and congregations seem to leap from Jesus’ miraculous birth to his death and miraculous resurrection. “It often seems as though his intervening life as recorded in the synoptic gospels is just a narrative to get from ‘a’ to ‘b’, from birth to passion.” As Christians, respondents agreed that the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus are indeed fundamental to their faith, but add that his life was important too, not only as a necessary interlude between the two events, but as an example to all who believe in how they should live their lives. Following Jesus – variously described as “accepting” him, acknowledging His “Lordship” or “leadership,” “being like” Jesus, and being a “true disciple” – was almost uniformly given as a fundamental reason for doing ministry, which ministry was then accomplished in some way under the “leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

With regard to the continuity of outreach ministry, note that the United Methodist church practices Itinerancy, a Clergy Appointment System that moves and places pastors

(and others in church leadership) for longer or shorter periods depending on, among other things, the individual's gifts and the church's needs. As a result churches get to experience a number of pastoral leaders over the years, a factor that could (and does) impact a church's outreach programs. In the case of ECUMC, members of the first focus group have noticed over the years that when a pastor is a "micromanager," and attempts to be involved in all aspects of the church, fewer ministries seem to come about. On the other hand, when the church is led by pastors who concern themselves more with the spiritual and theological matters of the church and are less involved in the practical aspects, the congregation seems to develop more ministries. This observation only extends however to new ministries. Existing ministries, once started, gain a life of their own and tend to continue regardless of the kind of pastoral leadership.

East Cobb's current pastor is Rev. Charles Thomas, who came to the church in mid 2003. Rev. Thomas believes himself to be a "hands off" pastor, an observation supported by congregational survey results from the church. Speaking for himself and his colleague, associate pastor Jim Powell, Rev. Thomas said, "We constantly encourage people to exploit their spiritual gifts through some form of ministry involvement." Ministry needs are communicated at the church through a variety of means, such as "skits" during worship service. Once such skit, called the "Good News Brothers," involves two lay ministry leaders dressed up in a manner similar to the "Blues Brothers" (from the 1980 movie of the same name), presenting specific ministry accomplishments, as well as current and future needs, as part of a worship service. Other forms of communication include various church meetings, when the current list of outreach ministries, along with that ministry's status and needs, is read to the assembly; and

making ministry activities visible to the greater congregation. An example of the latter is the so-called “shoe box” ministry,³ where shoe boxes are filled with personal care materials and small items of clothing needed by folk who have suffered some form of natural disaster somewhere in the world. (The most recent Shoe Box ministry was for children in tsunami-struck areas of Indonesia.) These boxes are brought forward during a worship service, and are then prayed over and blessed before being sent on to their various recipients. “Through these and other strategies we hope to emphasize that church membership is not a passive activity.” As part of his promotion of ministry in general and outreach ministry in particular, Pastor Thomas stresses that such activities are good ways to experience the Spiritual.

In terms of describing the spiritual aspect that drove them to participate in outreach (or indeed any) ministry, most respondents spoke in terms of *affect*, or emotion: “It feels right.” “I get a sense of comfort and completeness.” “I experience a feeling of uplift.” But, not all respondents felt that way – at least, not every time they engaged in ministry. Several participants agreed with the statement by one that:

Sometimes [ministry] hurts, but in a good way that I can hardly describe. Its like if you could have dental work, or major surgery, in behalf of someone else. For you it’s painful, but you do it because you know that other person will feel better afterwards. You go through the pain for the good that can come to others afterward.

Emotional or affective language was also used by many participants to describe their reasons for coming to church. The words support, restoration, encouragement, community, family, relationship, holy, and spiritual were frequently used. Other reasons

³ The “Shoe Box Ministry” is a part of Samaritan’s Purse, “a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization providing spiritual and physical aid to hurting people around the world.” (www.samaritanspurse.org).

for church participation included Bible study (“This is a Bible-centered church”), to attend discipleship classes, to lead or participate in the church’s internal ministries (Sunday school, choir, Elder’s meetings, committee meetings), for simple fellowship, and to learn more about Methodism.

With regard to this last point, a number of folk in the first focus group disclosed that they had come from a conservative Baptist background. They had left because in their experience at least the Baptist church, while it did a great deal in terms of overseas or “foreign” missions, did not do much in terms of local community ministry. After joining East Cobb UMC they discovered Methodist polity to be more to their liking anyway and have become staunchly supportive of United Methodism and very active in the church’s outreach programs.

Further discussion of Methodism elicited the information that about fifty percent in the focus group were “very familiar” with Methodist theology, the balance claiming “some familiarity.” Participants agreed that this result was likely reflective of the larger congregation. Similarly, the affirmation of membership being less on account of the theology and more because of the sense of family, the ministry opportunities, the fellowship, and an active Youth Group, was also thought to be shared by the larger membership of the church.

New ministries at East Cobb are identified in a number of ways – out of existing ministries, for example, or through the insight of an individual who discovers an unmet need in the community that he or she believes the church can address. Newly-identified outreach ministries are brought before a “called missions” committee, where the needs – and the human and financial resources required – are outlined. In cases where financial

support is required, all information concerning the ministry is forwarded to an administrative council that determines whether church will financially support ministry. Human resource support for ministries is usually pursued through Sunday school announcements.

East Cobb UMC has a fairly active and dynamic assembly of young persons and one focus group was comprised of young people (aged sixteen to twenty years) and Youth Ministry leaders (aged twenty-five to thirty-two years). As opposed to the traditional 8:30 worship service, attended mostly by seniors and the 11.00 a.m. worship services attended mostly by families, the youth group largely attends a Contemporary worship program which has an average attendance of 40-45. The attraction of the contemporary service is multivarious. Some youth find the presentation of the sermon in the form of a skit, or play, more meaningful than the spoken word alone. For others the contextualization of scripture is found to be more expressive than the simple quotation of ancient text. Most participants preferred praise songs over old, traditional hymns and everyone enjoyed the more casual style – in dress, demeanor, and approach – that the contemporary service offered. There is also a greater sense of participation, of being involved, in the worship service than is usually experienced in the more traditional worship services, because almost the entire contemporary service requires some response, or contribution, from the congregation

Somewhere between forty and fifty percent of the youth are involved in some form of outside ministry, such as helping in the support of persons in assisted care facilities, participating in blood drives, or supporting a “coats for the cold” initiative, intended to promote the donation of coats for distribution by the youth to the poor and

indigent of the community. These ministries and others are identified through regular planning sessions held with the youth. During such sessions, all identified ministry input is welcomed. This approach is intended to encourage a constant awareness and sensitivity on the part of the youth to community needs even though not all the identified needs can be serviced by the youth, or even the church. The constant presentation of community need, a structure for sifting, categorizing, and validating such needs and an established strategy for implementing the necessary ministries has resulted in a very active and dynamic youth outreach ministry program. One key to the success of the youth ministry was identified by a youth leader as the generally short-term nature of the ministries undertaken: “Kids these days are easily bored; they want to find [an outreach ministry], do it, and move on.” This observation, a tacit recognition of the transient nature of interest that exists in the youth of the postmodern world, led to discussion about the motivation of youth leaders in the church and the strategies they employ among the young people of the church. Responses relating to motivation included the following:

I “give,” with all the subtexts that word has – time, interest, knowledge, experience, a listening ear and all that – because in doing so I receive. I get a sense of doing what’s right, of fulfilling my spiritual purpose, of answering my calling. I came out of a chaotic teenage environment; I needed support, encouragement, clarity, guidance – and the church gave me that. This is how I give back. I can connect with [the youth]. Plus, I have fun!

I’m involved in youth ministry now as a leader because I was involved as a youth. I participated in community ministry because that’s one of the things Jesus did and I’m trying to be like Him. He said “as you do to the least of these, you do to me” That’s my motivation. I want to try to be a role model for the youth – it helps them and it helps to keep me accountable.

There’s a sense in which a voice outside a teenager’s family has more substance. Kids will often listen more to someone other than their parents. We try to be that someone. Plus, we try to instill a sensitivity to the

spiritual side of our humanity, to say that it's O.K. to be compassionate and sympathetic and to have, and show, feelings.

It was universally agreed within the focus group that keeping the interest of young persons in the church was not easy. What young people responded to was well known: variety in worship, involvement and participation in the life of the church; constant change; contemporary music; a “modern” approach to church; and contemporized theology were just a few of the “must haves” mentioned. The problem was in finding new and innovative ways to meet these needs while remaining within the financial and human resources available to the church and at the same time holding true to the Gospel message and the strictures of the United Methodist church. There was common agreement in the group that they tried hard to present Jesus in ways that are contemporary, dynamic, and responsive to the young people and yet do not compromise his fundamental message of love, tolerance, grace, mercy, justice, and compassion.

“Spirituality” among the youth was also a difficult concept for the youth leaders to pinpoint. “Teenagers, especially males, have a hard time acknowledging a sense of spirituality because it's equated with being something less than a masculine trait.” It was pointed out further that in a society where success is in some ways equated with masculinity and where girls have become more competitive against boys, the girls tend to repress outward shows of emotion that they feel may undermine their efforts. To address these adolescent characteristics, the youth leaders bring their young people together often in an atmosphere of shared faith. During these times the leaders try to impress upon the youth that among people of faith, such defenses are not only unnecessary, but they impede the action of the Holy Spirit. “We encourage them to let down their guard, to become transparent to each other and to be open to the Spirit.”

4.1.4.3 Summary

There is a certain sense of complacency at East Cobb UMC with regard to its outreach mission activities. Although the congregation is rightfully pleased with its activities in the larger community, no-one at the church is able to provide a history of the church's community engagement except to say that "it has always been there," and the church's official history is equally unhelpful in this regard. It might at first be presumed from this that outreach ministry is so much a part of the church's daily life that engaging in it is not considered exceptional behavior by either the leadership or the congregation and to a certain extent this appears to be the case. Certainly anecdotal accounts of the numbers of folk involved in ministry – 90% overall and 50% in practical outreach – tend also to support this supposition.⁴ Further analysis of the interview responses suggest a different perspective, however – that East Cobb is not so much complacent regarding its community ministry activity, but rather, as the following paragraph explains, is naively unaware of the fact that it is an example of a holistic congregation.

Where the ethos of some churches in this study may be described for example as "pragmatic" (St. Andrews Presbyterian), "introspective" (South Gwinnett Baptist), "fractured" (Norton Park Baptist), or "exuberant" (Christian Fellowship Baptist), analysis of the various responses, attitudes, and motivations described above suggest that the character of the congregation of ECUMC is "affective," being formed out of a set of what might best be called "emotional principles." Individuals, nuclear families and the wider church community share in a complex, biblically-based emotional and spiritual

⁴ Pastor's Thomas and Perry agree on a more conservative 60% overall and 30% in practical outreach – still a high number when compared to other holistic churches.

relationship with each other and with each aspect of the Trinity. The interviewed groups:

- gave a strong impression of the centrality in the life of the church of the person and work of Jesus, conceived of not only as an object of worship but also as example of a life of faithfulness,
- sustained the study of scripture as an essential part of Christian faith,
- shared a communal attitude of mutual support and encouragement,
- shared an interest in the spiritual restoration of the downhearted, and
- Shared an individual and collective spiritual relationship with the Holy.

Already important in and of themselves, when catalyzed by the Holy Spirit these characteristics appear to bring about a synergism so great the congregation is necessarily driven from the confines of the church into the wider community. Thus outreach mission activity at ECUMC is, as Newbigin predicted, clearly more the result of the centrality of the Trinity – and specifically Jesus – in the life of the church than of a conscious outreach effort by the church. This observation then explains the congregation's naïveté regarding its history of outreach and to its successes in that form of ministry, for in the hermeneutical church it is not the people, but the Spirit in the people, that speaks and acts.

The Spirit is speaking and acting through the youth of ECUMC too. Under inspired leadership, the young people of the church have learned, or are learning, to open themselves up to the Spirit, which works through them as and when it can in ways compliant with their postmodern worldview – their way of thinking, their attitudes, attention span, motivators and the like. Thus the youth are as involved, in their own way, in outreach ministry as are the older constituents of the East Cobb church family. The result appears to be holistic congregation in the truest sense of the word.

4.1.5 The Phoenix: Trinity Baptist Church.

Ethnicity: largely White
Denomination: Baptist (Multiple affiliations)
Active Membership: about 180
Attendance: about 110
Location: Rural East Atlanta.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 10
Operating budget 2004: ± \$176,000.

4.1.5.1 History and background

Trinity Baptist Church began with the attendance and participation of twelve people at a Bible study and prayer meeting, held on May 25, 1983. The meeting was precipitated by an idea previously shared among these twelve and supported by a group of churches known as the Stone Mountain Baptist Association,⁵ that there was a need for a Moderate Baptist presence in this largely rural but developing area. Two of the twelve members of the founding group were on the staff of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and were “national professionals” with regard to knowing the human and financial resources available to new church starts, and were a resource of no little help in the church’s early days.

The initial group of twelve grew rapidly and on October 2, 1983 the first worship service was held in the assembly hall of a local school, with some seventy five people in attendance. Since the church did not yet have a pastor, services were led by lay persons. With the young church showing great promise, supporting funds were willingly donated by other local churches as well as denominational organizations including the Baptist Home Mission Board, which alone gave \$12,000. Toward the end of 1983, the Georgia

⁵ Stone Mountain is the name given to a natural stone outcrop on the East side of Atlanta, and is the center point of a state park. The name is often extended to organizations and groups whose activities are to some extent located in the region contiguous to the park.

Baptist Convention provided a \$25,000 grant toward a property fund for a future church building.

1984 was a busy year for the fledgling church. In January it called its first pastor, Rev. Benny Clark. In April, the church voted to purchase 10 acres of land for a building, in June the congregation officially incorporated as Trinity Baptist Church, in August architectural plans for the land and buildings were approved and in November the first of a set of temporary buildings was installed on the property. November 1986 saw completion of the permanent structure of the church, containing a Sanctuary, classrooms, and offices. With its issues of physical plant and internal organization in place, Trinity Baptist began to turn its attention more towards its community.

By all accounts, Trinity's first pastor, Benny Clark, was a charismatic dynamo. A person with a history and record of successful church starts, Benny, although a Graduate of Southern Seminary, did not fit the typical mold of a "boxed" seminary alumnus. On the contrary, he was uninhibited by tradition and extremely innovative, a natural and strong leader, energetic, and empowering in that he drew the best out of people and encouraged them to be all they could be.

Under Benny's leadership the church continued to grow quickly and soon had as many as 250 in worship, in two services. It was not Rev. Clark's charisma alone, however, that drew people to the church. There was a certain attraction for some folks of a church that offered an escape from what they considered the "fuddy-duddy" traditional, narrow approaches to worship and ministry practiced in surrounding churches. Trinity offered these folks a chance to have a voice in the constitution of a fresh, contemporary congregation that, being new, seemed open to innovation and also offered more

opportunities for folk who had a calling to community ministry. One of the aspects of Pastor Clark's ministry was that he encouraged people not only to identify community ministries but to engage them, and the church soon had a variety of outreach activities in the local community. By 1990 the church had a membership upwards of 300 and was a powerful presence in the surrounding community.

In 1991, Pastor Clark accepted the call to start another church, in another state.

Within a very short period after Benny's leaving, it became evident that the church had relied too heavily on its pastor's charisma to keep membership levels and financial contributions high. Many folk had come to the church because of his personal magnetism and charm rather than for any sense of family and community and when he left, so did they. Thirty to forty percent of the congregation left within the first few months of his departure, taking their supporting funds with them.

Despite the sudden drop in numbers the remaining members at Trinity continued their church activities and community outreach as best as financial and human resources would permit. Although several quite competent pastors came and went over the years, none brought the same charismatic leadership as the church had seen in Pastor Clark. Also, the development boom that had largely initiated the church and been a source of many new members had ended. Unable, it seems, to attract more folk, the church had fallen into the position of being unable to meet its debt and had had to let its pastor go. As a result of these and other factors church membership continued to decline, reaching a low point of forty-three in worship the Sunday after Easter, 1998.

Proverbs 29:18 reads "Without a vision, the people perish." It seemed that Trinity had indeed lost its vision. The makeup of that small group of forty-three was, however,

significant. Some twelve or fourteen of them were part of the group that had founded the church fourteen years earlier and another score had joined the church in its formative years. All of them felt they had a vested interest in the church and in its future as a successful enterprise. Trinity, they believed, simply needed to re-invent itself and rediscover its purpose. This it did largely through the efforts of this small group, led by one Preston Sanders.

Preston was a businessman – a financial consultant – and a long time member of the church. He was also an ordained minister. Though he had no formal theological training, Preston was, as one interviewee said, “the most theologically trained financial consultant I ever knew.” After graduating from Mercer in the 1960’s, Preston had entered the ministry for a short while. Family circumstances however dictated a career in the financial consulting world. At the end of that career and after seeing the decline in membership at Trinity culminating in the nadir in attendance described above Preston, and others of the small remnant, organized a resurrection of the church. At a “Vision Banquet” in the fall of 1998 he read a series of goals for the church to achieve (see the excerpts at the end of this section). Recognizing that the only way to grow the church was to make the community more aware of its presence, principal among these goals these was a concerted effort at outreach ministry.

Since the church was without a pastor, Preston was called at this time, by congregational acclaim, to be pastor of the church, a position he accepted, initially without compensation. Over the next two years and largely as a result of its consistent community outreach Trinity saw steady growth and by the end of 2000 the church claimed a membership of some 140, with an average 95 in regular attendance at worship.

At this time, pastor Sanders declared his intention to resign, citing “burnout.” The search committee established to find his replacement however advised him that again, by almost universal acclaim, the congregation wanted him to stay. He agreed to continuing serving until 2002, at which time the search committee again sought a replacement for him.

In 2003, Trinity hired its current senior pastor, Rev. Rawdon L. (Sonny) Gallman III, the church’s former youth pastor and a recent graduate of the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University’s Atlanta campus.

Today the active membership of Trinity numbers about 180 and is continuing to grow. The church has broken ground on a major expansion, has revitalized many of its former ministries, and has identified and engaged in some newer ones.

4.1.5.2 Interviews

As the history of the church outlined above was reviewed with interviewees many agreed that in retrospect, the failure to find new charismatic leadership after the first pastor left was a good thing, for it allowed the church to find stability, focus, and purpose in its congregation, rather than in its pastor. “It’s important for the pastor to lead,” said one interviewee, “but that leadership has to be balanced and shared with the congregation. If a church collapses when the pastor leaves, as ours did, then that church had far too much vested in its pastoral leadership.” “Less power in the pulpit means more power among the people,” said another interviewee, adding that “shared responsibility gives a stronger basis and greater stability for doing ministry.” In Rev. Gallman, the church appears to have just what it was looking for. Sonny’s strength lies not in a single characteristic of charisma but in the broad qualities of sound theological education and Bible literacy, compassion and empathy, and good organizational skills.

And, rather than holding the reins close, he leads by delegation, sharing responsibility with others while maintaining ultimate accountability and responsibility for the welfare of the church. Interestingly, interviewees did not perceive Pastor Gallman as placing a heavy emphasis on outreach ministry. “I think it’s there [when he preaches], but he doesn’t really stress it.” “I think he knows it’s going on, so maybe he doesn’t feel the need to accentuate it that much.”

Pastor Gallman responds that he probably has not put too much effort recently promoting community ministry, noting that at the present, his attention lies very much on the church’s building program. “I think most [congregants] are aware of the community ministries this church is engaged in and that I wholeheartedly support them. I don’t think you can be a member and not know this. Also, one of the main reasons we’re [adding on a] building is to be able to do more [outreach ministry].”

With or without pastor Gallman’s overt backing, Trinity’s outreach ministry, along with the church’s stability and relatively liberal theology were the most cited reasons for bringing about its new growth. The persistence of the congregation in maintaining over the years the outreach ministry re-initiated during pastor Sanders’ leadership has, it was asserted, given the wider community a sense of confidence in the stability of Trinity Baptist as a member of the community: “People know who we are, where we are and that we can be relied on in time of need,” said a respondent. “When Benny left, we fell a long way and we fell hard,” said another, “but we survived. Many people around and about saw that and respected it, and I think some people saw [the church’s resilience] as a reason to join.” Others joined because they “had a heart” for outreach ministry and were looking for a place to put that heart to work.

Turning to congregational motivation to do outreach, although none could really respond with any certainty when asked if their desire to do ministry was rooted in their pre-Christian past, some thought it might be their upbringing (for example witnessing frequent acts of kindness and charity) and some thought they may have been the beneficiary of such acts in their formative years. Most however responded that beyond the occasional, purely humanitarian response to some urgent need – earthquake or flood, for example – the desire to undertake community ministry did not come about until after the individual had fully embraced the Christian faith. That is, community ministry developed for these folks as a by-product *of* their faith. But even then, several people remarked that their involvement in outreach ministries might not have come about if the church had not presented a structure through which such ministry might be exercised; “You *want* to do stuff,” respondents agreed, “but sometimes someone needs to show you *how*, to give you the tools.”

The congregation at Trinity shares its ministry motivations with other holistic churches involved in the study (e.g. “It’s biblical,” “It helps us to get closer to God,” “It shows God’s love and compassion”); and shares the same results (e.g. “We ourselves get blessed in the process;” “Sometimes we can see the face of God;” “it feels good,” “When we do ministry, we stand on holy ground”). New ministries are similarly discovered, i.e. as expansions of current programs, identified by members, highlighted by the activities of other churches visited or contacted, and through denominational communications.

Outreach ministry, while to some degree initiated by the church’s first pastor, seems much more a legacy of pastor Sanders. When asked if the church would have been as engaged in community ministries today had pastor Sanders not emphasized it the

consensus was that he helped the congregation break out of its “narrow view” of possibilities and embrace its potential, and this not just in what the church could do, but who should be doing it. Current members credit this philosophy for the fact that as many as fifty per cent of the congregation is in some way involved in one the of ten to twelve community ministries currently in place.

In addition to its current program, outreach ministries envisioned for the expanded facility mentioned earlier include a large kitchen to prepare meals for the needy (a possible ministry to the homeless is under consideration), a health (and possibly dental) clinic for the indigent, an expansion to the current children’s daycare facility, and making meeting space available for various 12-step and self-help programs to address issues of alcoholism, substance abuse, parenting, and to address other community concerns such as job training and work placement assistance.

Although Trinity does not have a large youth group (there are about ten to fifteen youth ranging in age between twelve and seventeen years), these young people are already being exposed to the church’s commitment to community ministry by being offered positions on the various outreach committees. The rationale behind this practice is that by giving them a voice in the praxis of the church’s outreach ministry, the young people will not only bring a youthful perspective to the program but may be encouraged to actively continue outreach into their adult years.

In a region of the country known for its conservative, if not outright fundamentalist, approach to scripture and tradition, the perennial willingness of Trinity’s leadership – pastors and deacons alike – to critically engage these matters and take a more moderate approach to them has attracted a generally well-educated congregation,

with teachers, lawyers, doctors, accountants, statisticians, business managers and other professionals well represented. Pastor Gallman asserts that people come to Trinity because they discover they are valued there for who they are and because the church family is open to and un-condemning of theological differences. He adds that both he and the other leadership in the church are consistently looking for ways to allow those holding theologically conservative and those holding theologically liberal views to live together by, he says, “concentrating on areas of agreement rather than difference,” and by promoting a common focus on outreach ministry that is “intentional, purposive, substantial, and planned.”

In addition to outreach ministry, Trinity conducts many activities intended to provide fellowship opportunities for its members intended to sustain its familial coherence; various groups with different foci meet during the week both at the church and in people’s homes for choir practice, Bible studies, church planning activities, and for purely social purposes such as golf and bowling. Even so, it is outreach that seems to be the heart of Trinity. Pastor Gallman sums up: “Outreach challenges our faith. Are we who we say we are? If so, we are the hands and feet of the Kingdom. The main point [of outreach ministry] is not to grow the congregation of Trinity Baptist, nor even the family of the Church Universal, but simply to be the love of God in the world.”

4.1.5.3 Summary

Trinity presents as a signal example of what can be accomplished by one person with vision and faith: a vision of what a church could be, and the faith to carry it through. In some respects what happened to Trinity when its first pastor left was a disaster for its founding members. For example, since it was a church that had subsumed its original

vision – a voice of theological moderation in the community – to the allure of rapid growth and membership respectively initiated and sustained by the personality and charisma of a single individual, when that individual, the central support of the structure, left, the church essentially collapsed. Further, since the tenure of the first pastor exceeded the period of population growth and property development in the immediate area, the influx of people to the area that had fueled the church's initial growth had largely ceased. In the end, though, this was not all bad. It meant that people had to be attracted to the church as an organism, valuing it for its total, spiritual character, rather than as an organization valued for its leadership alone. Once the necessity of a spiritual ethos was recognized it was necessary to determine the particular qualities that would form Trinity's ethos and these were well articulated by Preston Sanders in the "Vision Banquet" of 1998.

Indeed, it is clearly pastor Sanders' groundwork that undergirds Trinity Baptist's congregational ethos today. It is a church that cares both for its congregation and its community, but whose leadership and membership recognize it must care for its congregation if that congregation is to be properly equipped – spiritually, emotionally, financially, to take care of its community.

Excerpts from

TRINITY VISION STATEMENT

Sunday, November 22, 1998

After spending about six months with you as your pastor, or preaching to you, visiting with you, praying with you, or watching and listening to you, I am convinced I know how we go about claiming God's promise for our own. We do it by literally making our mission of "affirming God's love" our very literal reason for being. If we will dedicate every single thing that Trinity does, every single service, every single mission, every single class, every single dollar to that end, God can use Trinity Baptist Church to reach people that no one else is reaching. . .

Our first job is to create the right environment [which means]

1. Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. He is an accurate revelation of the true nature of God . . .
2. We will interpret the Bible through the Holy Spirit . . .
3. All of our emotions, all of our concern, all of our deliberations need to be expressed in terms of faith, hope, and love . . .
4. Every person is affirmed as a child of God . . .
5. Trinity will be a safe place to look for God. Everyone at Trinity will be encouraged to ponder, wonder, doubt, and search.
6. Trinity welcomes diversity; all are welcome here
7. Evangelism and Missions are primary activities of life at Trinity; this will be the

4.1.6 Congregation in Conflict: Norton Park Baptist

Ethnicity: White

Denomination: Baptist (Southern Baptist Convention)

Active Membership: about 200.

Attendance: about 70

Location: Suburban West Atlanta.

Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 2

Operating budget 2004: ± \$207,000.

4.1.6.1 History and Background

Norton Park Baptist was founded in the middle years of the 1960's. At that time Norton Park and the area around was a growth district for Atlanta. Freeways and major arterial road access made the location appealing to young adults working in Atlanta who found the property prices closer to Atlanta beyond their financial abilities. As a result, a large numbers of what were then considered "starter homes" were built in Norton Park and its environs. It was not long before business and industry too took advantage of the combination of lower land costs of suburbia and the ready availability of a growing work force in the area. As may be considered typical of such growth patterns, congregations often develop before church buildings. Such was the case of Norton Park Baptist. Beginning with small fellowship and Bible study groups in 1965, the gathering soon grew to comprise several dozen people and the congregation was chartered in 1967. Efforts immediately began to raise money for a church building, which was completed in 1968.

As the section heading above has already suggested and as will be shown below, Norton Park Baptist church is a Congregation in Conflict. Becker (1999: 37) describes such a congregation:

The definition of conflict encompasses several elements. First, conflict is an intense form of sociation, or interaction. The opposite of conflict is not harmony but indifference or anonymity. To engage in conflict assumes a degree of connectedness between the parties. Second, conflict involves

two or more parties who perceive their interests to be incompatible and engage in action oriented to the defense of their interests.

Norton Park's pastor, Tony Powers, first arrived at the church as interim in 1997.

After serving almost one year, the church called him to the full-time position.

Pastor Powers characterizes his congregation as reluctant to look for ministries outside the church. The reluctance stems from a desire not to be involved in “those kinds” of ministries – a situation that the pastor believes to be a direct outcome of the average age of the congregation coupled with resentment related to a change in the community demographic from Caucasian to a mix of Caucasian, Hispanic, and African-American people (situations further discussed below). But, he adds, this reluctance to be involved in outreach ministry does not impact the overall generosity of the congregation which has on a number of occasions quickly raised what are, for the size of the church, significant sums over and above the regular offerings, either to support particular ministries brought to its attention or to offer relief or assistance for local needs, such as rent assistance, and global needs, such as the collection of upwards of \$1000 for the Southern Baptist Convention tsunami relief fund.

4.1.6.2 Interviews

As the introduction above notes, Norton Park Baptist church grew out of a largely new “bedroom” community that served the City of Atlanta. As the community grew, so did the church, although there was some disagreement about the nature of the growth:

Bob: The reason we grew so much [at the beginning] was word of mouth. This person would tell his friend, that friend would tell another. We didn't really do any canvassing.

Alice: Well, we did do some census work, surveys and stuff.

Bob: Well, I can't say certainly for sure, but the majority of the censuses and stuff we did, I never saw any results of it. Most people came by word of mouth.

Whatever strategy was employed, it seemed to work. The church grew incrementally until by the mid 70's it had more than 400 members on the rolls with a regular attendance of 200 in Sunday school and worship, a situation that continued well into the 1980's and early 1990's. But then the church began a long decline. When pastor Powers came to the church attendance at Sunday school and worship was still in the 120's, but currently Sunday school attendance runs 40 – 50 and worship is down to about 70.

Three main reasons seem to lie behind this decline: the preponderance of senior adults in the church's membership; the absence of a solid group of young to middle aged members; and a certain resistance in the church to adapt to local demographic changes.

More than 70% of the Norton Park Baptist church family is over 60 years of age and many within that group are either charter members or claim involvement with the church since its early years. Explaining this preponderance of "senior adult" church members requires some understanding of the development of the Norton Park community and its neighbors.

In some senses, the Norton Park area of Atlanta is rather unique. Although it began as something of a "dormitory" for the city of Atlanta – a place some distance from their work location for folk employed in the city – the movement of diversified business and industry into Norton Park and its environs meant that people could take jobs that promised greater opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment without the often necessary requirement of leaving the area. Thus many folk who purchased "starter" homes in the area in the 60's and 70's have remained in them because a wide variety of employment opportunities frequently became available in the immediate vicinity. After

thirty or forty years of residence and with roots deeply set in the community, many of these long-term residents stay in their homes even after leaving the workforce, only moving out – to retirement or nursing homes – when illness or infirmity demands it. In the meantime, the growth area of greater Atlanta and the availability of inexpensive homes has extended far beyond the vicinity of Norton Park and the once “starter” homes of Norton Park have, because of their proximity to Atlanta, become desirable commuter homes. This desirability has driven up prices, which to some extent exempts younger folk from this market – and from Norton Park Baptist church. The people who are buying these homes either already have membership in a local church or, because of the ease of travel afforded by the local matrix of freeways and arterial roads, are able to maintain their memberships in the churches of their former communities. Thus, the numbers of members who do leave Norton Park are not being replaced by newcomers to the neighborhood.

Responding to the need for local inexpensive accommodation, many apartment buildings have been constructed in the area. These apartments, combined with local opportunities for low to moderate income jobs are attracting Black and Hispanic population groups in increasing numbers. Once in the neighborhood, it is often these folk, as their incomes rise, that are buying or renting the local homes. Although the change has been incremental the last ten to fifteen years has seen the Norton Park community shift from being an almost 100% White neighborhood to about 60% White, and about 20% each Black and Hispanic.

These numbers in themselves however do not tell the whole story. While the majority of the local population is still White the measurement is in fact reflecting an

ageing White population whose children have “grown and flown,” that is, they have reached maturity and moved away from the neighborhood to make their own lives. The Black and Hispanic population, on the other hand, is generally much younger and has children in the local schools. Rightly or wrongly the high percentage of non-White students in the local schools is a major deterrent to White families with school-age children moving into the neighborhood.

The high proportion of senior adult membership, the correspondingly low numbers of younger (aged twenty-five to fifty) folk in the church and the changing local demographic can individually and collectively be directly associated with several significant outcomes in Norton Park Baptist church.

1. Long-term membership and the aging demographic it represents has given rise to an increasing resistance to any change to the formal and informal structures of the church. There is a powerful presence of an idea, stemming from the senior members, that “we formed the church, nurtured it and sustained it,” and further that this forming, nurturing and sustaining engaged in over the years endows the senior membership of the church with a sense of ownership of the church.
2. Absent any meaningful numbers of younger adult members, senior members still hold many of the executive positions (deacon, chairman, supervisor etc.). Also, Norton Park Baptist adheres to a congregational polity. Thus, any programs or ministries that may infringe upon or destabilize that sense of ownership of the church by its senior members are frequently vetoed by those members. This situation has led to an undercurrent of conflict in the church between those who

seek necessary changes and those – currently more powerfully placed by both position and numbers – who see almost any form of change as a threat.

3. The limited numbers of younger folk in the congregation also means that many of the church's ministries are rotated among the senior membership. But many of those folk are now declining to serve, citing age, infirmity, or simple disinterest. This has led to fewer and fewer congregants taking on more and more responsibility – several members reported that they “wore two or three hats,” for example by being deacons, Sunday school teachers, and sitting on church boards; or being in the choir, on the building committee, and in charge of children's church, or some other combination.⁶

4. The limited presence of young to middle-age folk in the church also has a negative effect on those people of a similar age demographic who do visit the church. Such persons are often looking for Sunday school classes and church activities related to their age group. These same folk often have children whom they would like to get involved in church events. Since there is a very small age-representative core group in the church (two young families, both divorced, and no young couples) and similarly limited opportunities for children and young adults, these visitors leave to find churches with more representative, dynamic, and age related ministries.

5. While some members have attempted to make inroads to the developing Black and Hispanic communities, there has been a certain reluctance on the part of some of the older membership to embrace the idea of racial diversity in the church. The

⁶ One interviewee said there were 70 jobs, or positions, at the church, being shared by 12 people.

consensus is that Norton Park Baptist has been a “White” church from the beginning and that there are plenty of “unsaved” White folk in the community who could be evangelized, rather than reaching into Black and Hispanic communities “we are not familiar with,” and who “have their own places and styles of worship.”

When asked about the future possibilities of the church (what must the church do to survive the next five to ten years), the first and generally shared response was an amused observation that the church was unlikely to survive that long. When the question was pressed, there was division over whether the church should reflect its community and therefore entertain ideas of a shared Black and Hispanic ministry, or whether the church should attempt to continue its historical focus on the White community. The younger members of the church were in favor of the former strategy of change and engagement, although the problems associated with it – “We’d have to learn to worship differently, or let them have their own worship services;” “We’d have to learn Spanish” – were articulated in somewhat negative tones. The older members preferred the status quo, stating that they liked the church the way it was, even though the evidence strongly suggests that not adapting to change will lead inevitably to the death of the church.

This dichotomy in outlook between the older and younger members of the congregation is not a new development. In 1998, the church had the opportunity to purchase seven acres of adjacent property. Both the former pastor and the younger members of the congregation were in favor of the purchase, but the older members were opposed. Many of these older members cited the reason mentioned earlier; they liked the little church the way it was; purchasing the land might lead to new buildings and other

changes – changes they didn't want. In the event, the land purchase was made, but the action not only made concrete the division between younger and older members, it also resulted in the pianist/organist and her family leaving the church, the ouster of the former pastor and the exodus of many of the younger members, who have not been replaced.

On the question of evangelism, interviewees were united. They believed it meant “taking God's word into the world, in any form you can.” Speaking to co-workers, knocking on doors, giving to foreign or local missions and inviting people to the church were all cited as examples of Evangelism. To the comment, “any way in the world in which you go out and tell people about God” another respondent added, “Not just tell them, but show them!”

When pressed further on the matter of evangelism, particularly as community outreach, it was interesting to note that with the exception of the “meals-on-wheels” program which is supported by as many as sixteen or seventeen members of the church, and a fairly dynamic children's and youth ministry during the church's middle years (cited as a “community ministry” in the understanding that if younger people were involved, then it might draw their parents into the church too), no interviewee was able to articulate a single outreach ministry to the secular community that the church had consistently engaged in at any time in its history. Rather, outreach ministries were articulated in terms of holding events at the church – open houses, seasonal festivals, block parties, Easter-egg hunts, Halloween parties and the like, intended to draw people in. There was also a sense that the church had never had to work at attracting members in the past, so why should it have to now? In an attempt to identify why congregants were not more pro-active in outreach, the question of the sense of freedom congregants had to

identify, organize and manage ministries was raised. Interviewees representing the older membership responded by suggesting they had “done everything, but nothing really worked,” and that “if new ideas don’t come from the pastor, they don’t get done.” Representatives of younger members of the church said that while they could identify ministries, they felt that they might be ridiculed in some ways by the senior members. One member said – and other attendees agreed – that they questioned the commitment of a large percentage of the church to a faith in Jesus Christ and that that lack of commitment was reflected in a limited commitment to the church. When this response was clarified it became evident that, at least for this group, the reason outreach ministry was not pursued was because the weight of responsibility for such ministry would fall on those members of the church already overburdened with other church related tasks.

In spite of the lack of a coordinated effort to reach into the community and to attract people to the church, new members do join from time to time. In place of a “New Members Class,” these folk are given a “New Member’s Packet” (containing the church constitution and by-laws, the Mission Statement, offering envelopes and the church directory) and are assigned a Deacon, whose responsibility it is to ensure that, at least once in their first six months of membership, the new member is visited at their home.

The most vocalized expectation that the church had of its new members was that they would “do the jobs nobody else wants.” While this response must be understood in the context of the senior members’ of the congregation collective desire to give up some of their responsibilities, it nevertheless puts a heavy – and sometimes undesired – load on the new members, who are given no time to integrate into the church’s culture. It is

unsurprising that such folks often leave the church to find another, less demanding Christian family.

4.1.6.3 Summary

The purpose of this part of the research is to describe the “ethos” of the churches studied, and the ethos of Norton Park Baptist church is perhaps best described as one of crisis and dissent.

For some years, Norton Park Baptist has been engaged in an increasingly desperate struggle for survival and almost all its efforts have been focused on that struggle. That is the crisis. Somewhere in that struggle the church seems to have come under the leadership of folk following various kinds of personal agendas, leading to a lack of focus on a particular purpose. That is the dissent. In these processes the congregation has reduced its focus on the Lordship and Leadership of Jesus Christ. Since this Lordship and Leadership is, as has been shown in the conclusion to chapter two above, a necessary requirement for a church wherein the Spirit speaks and acts, it is not surprising that Norton Park’s outreach ministry is so limited.

Beyond all this is the air of resignation and dejection in the congregation. The church lacks any creative spark or enthusiasm to do anything more than just survive the next few years and hopes that something will happen to reverse its fortunes.

4.1.7 Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors: St. Mark United Methodist.

Ethnicity: largely White
Denomination: United Methodist
Active Membership: about 800
Attendance: about 625
Location: Urban Atlanta.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 4
Operating budget 2004: ± \$1.25 million.

4.1.7.1 History/Background

The history of urban Atlanta having been largely discussed in the exposition of Central Presbyterian church, and the history and polity of Methodism in the United States similarly reviewed in the section relating to East Cobb UMC (at 4.1.1 and 4.1.4 respectively), this section will focus more or less strictly on the on the development of the church and congregation now known as St. Mark UMC.

This Christian family began life in 1872 as Peachtree Street Mission, just outside the then-city limits of Atlanta, at Peachtree and Sixth streets. It was a mission church of the city's First Methodist Church, itself located at Walton and Forsyth streets. Sometime in the following three years – neither church nor city records are certain exactly when, but 1875 looks most likely – the church moved inside the city limits to a location on Merritts avenue, at which time it became known as “Sixth Methodist Church.” Over the ensuing twenty seven years the church moved and renamed itself twice more, finally settling, in 1902, as ‘St. Mark’s Methodist Episcopal Church, South,’ in a brand new granite building at the corner of 5th Street and Piedmont Avenue.

Under various pastors the church grew rapidly, particularly after World War I. In 1922, when it became clear that larger facilities were needed for the growing Sunday school program the congregation raised funds to acquire the adjacent property. The next

two decades saw further growth and the 1940's were the era of the church's highest membership, 3,116 persons being on the rolls in 1946. From then on, however, there was a gentle decline. In 1953, the membership stood at 2,618. In 1957, it had fallen further, to 2,415. This decline, which continued until 1963, had more to do with demographic movement and sociological changes than any shortcomings or failures on the part of the church. More and more area homes were being replaced by office buildings and businesses and folk were beginning a movement out of the city that would continue for two or three decades.

By the late 1960's the world was changing so much and so rapidly that the United Methodist Church issued a statement entitled, "A New Church for a New World", which reads in part:

[I]t is apparent that we are living in a new world characterized by accelerated technology, increased urbanization, an ever-enlarging gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" and by crisis on every hand. In the United States the dehumanizing aspects of long-continued racial and economic injustice are seen in agonizing systems related to housing, education and employment which lock millions of Americans in ghettos – both urban and rural – from which there is no prospect of immediate and complete escape . . . This crucial situation calls for a far more decisive and constructive response from the church than has as yet been provoked (Wiggins 1987: 189).

Under the leadership of Rev. William Tyson, pastor of St. Mark UMC from 1967 to 1969, the church rose to the challenge of a "decisive and constructive response" to and within its urban context by both emphasizing the need for urban ministry and by establishing and executing a wide variety of such ministries to the church's immediate social context. Although church membership declined during Dr. Tyson's tenure (mostly, again, through "urban flight"), the church's focus on its community did not. No

longer one of the city's "big" congregations, the church transitioned into "The Church with a Heart in the Heart of the City" (Wiggins 1987: 195).

Dr. Tyson's replacement, Rev. Melton McNeil, continued the outreach ministry programs begun by his predecessor and added to them. One significant addition was a children's daycare center.

Opened in 1972, the St. Mark daycare center was offered initially as a community service and was thus open to children of parents of any – or no – religious orientation. It was soon realized that St. Mark could do more than offer daycare and its program and philosophy were expanded beyond the mere "care and welfare" of children of working parents to include a comprehensive pre-school program.

Subsequent senior pastors at St. Mark helped maintain a high level of community outreach programs, often teaming St. Mark with other urban churches in an effort to meet increasing social needs. For example, in the middle years of the 1970's, local and federal governments reduced funding for the institutionalization of non-violent mental patients. These folk, unable to find or keep gainful employment to provide for themselves added to the large numbers of homeless and indigent already on the streets of the city and being cared for – to the extent possible – by city churches.

Even though St. Mark was truly committed to its community, its membership decline – which had seen a slight reversal in 1967 – had returned to a situation of persistent loss and by October 1975 was down to 1,054. Older members retired and moved out of the city; younger folk, attracted by the bucolic nature of country living similarly relocated to suburbia and found local churches to attend, reducing their city commute. As suggested earlier such changes in the church are not unusual, but where in

the past new members came into the church in similar numbers to those leaving, changes in social, political, and particularly theological outlook turned people away from the church, often to seek less traditional, more individualized iterations of “spirituality.”

Nevertheless, the church continued its outreach ministries and, under Rev. J.B. McNeil (1976), further expanded them. Rev. McNeil “believed that the minister’s job was to inspire and to lead and the layperson’s job was to actually perform the work and ministry of the church” (Wiggins 1987: 213). This belief extended to the continuous promotion of a kind of community outreach ministry that was “hands on,” where the congregation, rather than supporting ministry “at a distance” actually looked into the eyes of those they ministered to. One further ministry St. Mark added to its already long list of community outreach programs was a food program. Initially, St. Mark teamed with another church to provide a daily soup kitchen. Not content with this however the church soon established its own food program, setting hours during which men and women could come to the church door and be given a sack of food – fruit, cheese, canned goods, bread, chocolate, and similar items. Soon, a community ministry planning commission was set up by St. Mark to explore further the ways in which the church could serve its community. Several additional ministries developed from this effort.

The background and history of St. Mark UMC reported thus far was derived from the church’s written history, which covers the period between the church’s founding (in 1872) and 1987. Space has permitted only a brief summary, which has necessarily barely scratched the surface of the community ministries this church engaged in the 115 year span reported. Clearly this is a church that has made a difference in its urban

community. Why, then, is it among the churches reporting a low level of outreach ministries? What has happened between 1987 and these early years of the 21st century?

When these questions were posed to interviewees, the agreed response was directly linked to the church's recent history of shrinking membership. The decline begun in the late 1940's continued, with the brief interruption in 1963 – 7 as noted above, to the point that by the end of the 1980's, with the level of membership hovering around two hundred souls, the church's very existence came into question. The situation was not helped by the re-assignment in 1989 of the church's senior pastor and the appointment of an interim. Barely able to pay for facilities maintenance the church essentially abandoned all its external ministries programs and concentrated on holding on to its members.

In 1990 Rev. Mike Cordle was assigned to the church. According to interviewees who were at the church at the time Rev. Cordle's weaknesses – not immediately evident – were poor leadership skills and an inability, or reluctance, to establish a consistent institutional organization. His strengths, immediately evident, were his charisma and an engaging personality.

Although not himself Gay, Mike had nevertheless developed an increasing sensitivity to the spiritual needs of the Gay community – a community of some substance in urban Atlanta, but a community that no congregation had yet had the courage to openly embrace. At the same time, the deep need for a non-judgmental acceptance by Christians of Gays had become a topic of increasing interest – even angst – for the congregation at St. Mark, caused by the increasing presence of such persons not only in the wider, secular community but within the St. Mark family itself. This pervading presence ultimately

pressured the congregation to review its understanding of biblical texts. As a result of this review, many within the congregation came to a new understanding. Where it had previously understood Christianity in general – and St. Mark UMC in particular – as a somewhat selective, or exclusive, community (judgments about sexual morality, alcohol use, entertainment, lifestyle and the like were used to determine membership) some folk re-read the gospels and, abandoning their traditional conservatism, embraced the idea of church as family, an institution that contained people regardless of, sometimes in spite of, their perceived dysfunctions:

We acknowledged that ‘grace’ was a gift of God, not of ourselves and that all people were loved by God. It was not our place to ‘fellowship’ or ‘disfellowship’ someone. Rather, our job was, and is, to be a non-judgmental community – open, welcoming – a place for all people to come and share in a common relationship of worship and spirituality.

This new perspective challenged the congregation to look for opportunities to show its character of open-ness, welcome, and non-judgment, to “intentionally” look for those folk who have in some way been historically disenfranchised or disbarred, from Christian community. One respondent explains:

By “intentionality” we mean “to purposely seek out those generally ignored at best, rejected at worst by most churches and to empower those people to fully become children of God.” When the trappings of social judgment are stripped away, each individual becomes free to explore the nature and purpose of their relationship with their maker.

The initiating motive for “intentionality” – the Gay community in St. Mark’s neighborhood – naturally became the first major beneficiary of it. Recognizing pastor Mike’s sympathetic leanings towards the Gay community, some church members suggested to him that it was time for the Church universal to become intentional toward Gays by accepting them as children of God – and what better place to set an example of

acceptance as St. Mark? With the pastor's agreement, the congregation began a campaign of intentionality to the Gay community, under the banner "Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors."

The campaign had impressive results and the church saw spectacular growth, leaping from 100 in worship in 1992 to over 1,000 in 1998, a rise largely attributable to an inflow of Gay people desperate for acceptance into the Christian community and for an opportunity to engage in authentic worship and ministry. Sadly but predictably, while most members of the church were happy to have Gay folk in their community, many were not particularly enthralled at the prospect of the church becoming known as a "Gay" church and left to find another church family.

A return to high membership numbers at St. Mark was not however accompanied by a return to high levels of community ministry. One explanation offered was that the ministry to Gays and the integration of Gays into the life of the church was the pervasive feature of the church's ministry, largely to the exclusion of all else. Another was the lack of proper institutional organization and leadership from Pastor Cordle.

In fact, one of the church's largest ministries, the day care center, was closed in 1998, the year membership peaked. The center had been initiated by the increase in two-working-parent families and the concomitant demand for reliable child care and had thus been a useful resource to the working community. Over the years, however, corporate America had recognized the benefits of having day care facilities within their respective office buildings, effectively abridging the external need for this service. In the face of reduced demand, the pastoral leadership of St. Mark saw no reason to continue with its day care program.

If the significant factor of the first two thirds of Mike Cordle's pastorship of the church was a return of the church to growth and vitality, that of the last third was of internal conflict and dissent. The effects of pastor Cordle's administrative shortcomings were beginning to be felt and questions of morality, leadership, and management and mis-management increasingly dogged his footsteps. Many in the congregation, upset by the dissent or dissatisfied with the leadership of the church and/or the congregation's response to it, began leaving the church. In 2002, Mike resigned.

Within a short time of Rev. Cordle's departure many of those folk who had been attracted to the church by his charisma and congeniality also left and St. Mark saw a further decline in its membership, to around 600.

For about six months, the church was managed by its associate pastors and lay leaders. Pastor Jimmy Moor came to the church as interim in May 2003 and became senior pastor in October the same year.

What Pastor Moor found was a church that had reduced to a core of folk that fully embraced a "familial" sense of Christian community, took the gospel seriously in terms of its practice of "intentionality," as described above, and experienced spirituality both in its internal relationships as the "family of God" and in aspects of its worship experience. In the two years of his pastoral leadership, Pastor Moor has worked with his staff to strengthen the "usual Methodist institutional structures," a process, as will be seen, that is not yet quite complete. In the meantime, St. Mark's active membership has climbed back to about 800 persons, with about 650 attending any given weekly worship service.

4.1.7.2 Interviews

St. Mark currently has several modest direct outreach programs to its immediate community. Frequent ministries include two “step” programs, comprising three CMA (Crystal Methamphetamine Abuse) seminars (which grew out of one class begun by a church member seeking help for this addiction) and an Alcoholics Anonymous program. Also, members of the church cook and serve a breakfast to between fifty and seventy-five needy folk every Saturday and a dinner for a similar number every Tuesday, and cooks and serves a meal every third Thursday at a homeless shelter sponsored by a sister church, Trinity UMC. Periodic ministries include a twice yearly (spring and fall) ministry to the neighborhood elderly, doing yard work, lawn maintenance and the like and annual participation in an ecumenical “Atlanta Tool Bank” ministry that undertakes light home repairs and maintenance for the elderly and disabled of the wider Atlanta community. Planned ministries include a resource center to supply clothing and toiletries and over-the-counter medications (e.g. First Aid supplies, Aspirin, ointments, salves and the like) to the homeless and indigent and supply them with information about shelters, employment, and vocational training.

“Hoped for” ministries include converting an existing building to a homeless shelter, and/or to a vocational training center and development of other “long term” opportunities to respond to the practical, as well as the spiritual and emotional needs of the homeless.

Pastor Moor, who was present at the first of two focus groups held at St. Mark, was the first to say that the church could be doing more in its immediate community and other participants agreed, voicing an anxiety to do so. Challenged to try and identify the

roadblocks to community ministry, three factors emerged. The first was that St. Mark was not a “conventional” congregation. Somewhere between seventy and eighty percent of the church family comes from a Gay, Lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered background. Most had lived, to some degree, “in the closet,” if not in their secular world, then almost certainly in their Christian community. Although through its openness St. Mark had encouraged these folk to move “from the darkness into the light,” many had been deeply traumatized by their life experience. So much so that while many are beginning to seek active roles in ministry, a large proportion of them did not yet feel sufficiently recovered to do so. (One person remarked, “Because Gay people have been outsiders for so long, they have more empathy and compassion for the less fortunate, so that when they *have* recovered they will do great things for the church and community.”)

The second reason relates to what pastor Moor calls “the great wounding” that occurred when his predecessor left the church. Under Rev. Cordle the church had grown and become a dynamic entity, full of hope and promise for the future. His departure created a deep and intense emotional turmoil in the church, from which it is still, to some degree, recovering.

The third reason has already been alluded to and relates to the institutional structure of the church. Although Pastor Moor and his associates have largely addressed the issues of general administration, one place that has yet to be directly tackled is the development of an ongoing internal structure for the identification, authentication, and administration of community ministry. Currently, such matters are dealt with on an informal basis.

Turning to motivation, a wide range of reasons for engaging in community ministry were voiced by participants. For some, it was a response to biblical commands to do so. Others said that the transformation they had felt in becoming both a Christian and a member of the church was too wonderful not to share. Another said it was the sense of spirituality they felt in sharing the gospel by “doing” the gospel, “not preaching it in words, but in acts.” One respondent, identifying herself as Lesbian, said that she had been able to become “all I could be: true to myself, true to my faith. I was and am validated here. I want to share that with others.” All agreed that St. Mark offered an “authentic spirituality of openness – we are who we say we are, open to all, judging none, a caring family that wants to share its love of God with all people however, whenever and wherever we can.”

Most respondents agreed that while there were a variety of reasons to come to St. Mark – its various inreach and outreach ministries, the sense of family and of spirituality, the worship services and the like – these are more likely to be reasons for staying, whereas the principal reason for coming to the church in the first place was its “Open Doors, Open Hearts, Open Minds” philosophy, its acceptance of people who were considered by mainstream society as being “out of the norm.”

Questions about Jesus and the Spirit elicited fairly standard responses – “Jesus is the center of this church,” “the Spirit is active in this church” – however, with regard to the centrality of Jesus, respondents found it hard to articulate any substance behind the comment, even when pressed. For example, when asked *how* or *in what way* was Jesus perceived as leader, the agreed response was “because without Jesus there would be no church.” With regard to the presence of the Spirit, folk were only a little more

forthcoming. Beyond earlier remarks related to Spirituality – “feeling the presence of the Spirit while doing ministry,” and “in our openness to all people” – the presence of the Spirit was in some way assumed to be an integral part of Christian community; “when two or three are gathered together” (Matt. 18:20) and only one respondent could speak to a particular manifestation of this particular quality of the Trinity:

It has sometimes happened that, say, when I have read a particular scripture passage and have decided to take some action based on it, that same passage will come up in Sunday school, or in worship and I feel it's kind of like a Spiritual affirmation of the course of action I'm going to take.

Worship services at St. Mark are a mix of contemporary and traditional. The choir is accomplished, talented musicians are brought in from time to time to provide special music and on occasion special music is accompanied by interpretive dance. Children are summoned to the front of the church for an age-appropriate message before being dismissed to “children’s church” and Signers translate the service for the hearing impaired. Most people appear to enthusiastically participate in congregational responses, hymn singing, and community prayers and the sanctuary is slow to clear after worship services, as people fellowship with one another in lively one-on-one and group conversations.

Membership at St. Mark is relatively open: a person may transfer by letter from another church, join by re-affirmation of faith, or by baptism. Transferees from another denomination do not have to be re-baptized. The notice of intention to join may be made in several ways – by completing a short form and placing it in the offering plate; by going forward at the end of Sunday worship; or by arranging a meeting with one of the church’s pastors. A new member is expected to “fully participate in the ministries of the church”

through regular prayer and presence in worship, through financial support of the church and through active participation in the church's internal and external ministries. New member classes are held twice a year, but are not compulsory.

4.1.7.3 Summary

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of St. Mark in terms of its community ministry is that, unlike the other apparently “disengaged” churches studied which seem never to have had a systematic program of neighborhood ministry, St. Mark has an extremely vibrant history of local outreach. While the church's return to growth in the period 1990 to 1998 appears tied to its charismatic leadership, its decline in community ministry seems equally tied. This result of charismatic leadership is repeated elsewhere in this study (see 4.2.5, above). The reasons for St. Mark's current relative retreat from bold community ministry are described above. It is instructive to note the way in which the lack of stability in the church and a deficiency in the area of appropriate structures impacts a church's ability to fully engage its community.

In conclusion it is important to note that St. Mark, identified in this study as a “non-holistic” church, would be better described as a congregation holistic in its larger ethos, but one that has temporarily reduced its outreach in order to recover from trauma and consolidate its resources before returning again to a more engaged ministry to its immediate community.

4.1.8 Incognito: South Gwinnett Baptist Church.

Ethnicity: largely White
Denomination: Baptist (Southern Baptist Convention)
Active Membership: about 150.
Attendance: about 80
Location: Suburban East Atlanta.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 2
Operating budget 2004: ± \$137,000

4.1.8.1 History/Background

While the area of Norton Park Baptist church on the west side of Atlanta was the major growth focus of the metropolitan area in the 1960's (see above), in the 1980's development moved to the east side, with new housing developments attracting new residents and creating demand for more churches to meet the spiritual needs of the growing community. South Gwinnett Baptist Church was begun in 1986 to meet some of those community needs. The church began as a "mission" church of Chestnut Grove Baptist, which is located just about three miles away in Grayson, and was sustained financially and through human resource support by this and other area Baptist churches in its early years. Starting with Bible study groups in individual homes, the congregation began meeting early in 1987 in a warehouse facility, under the guidance of Rev. Mickey Mayfield, a "new church starter" under joint appointment by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Georgia Baptist Convention. Leadership passed to Rev. Paul Hugger in May 1988 and under his supervision the church soon grew to the point where a permanent facility became a requirement. Using the resources of various local churches, mission boards, and the Georgia Baptist Convention, a plot of land was secured located just a mile from the warehouse the congregation was using and on May 7, 1989 construction of the present church building began. With volunteer labor

from the congregation and with additional volunteer support supplied by churches as far away as Mississippi and Alabama, the church was completed in early 1990 and was dedicated January 21st of that year with 130 members and guests in attendance.

In the early fall of 1990 the church began its missions and outreach with such programs as Mission Friends, Girls in Action, Royal Ambassadors, Baptist Young Women, and Women's Missionary Union. Soon the church was supporting missions both nationally and internationally. Sometime in the period 1990 – 1991, however, an increasing degree of dissension and difference began to emerge in the congregation over issues that are not clear, but may have had to do with the church's rapid development. The result was that about half the membership left the church. This was quite a severe blow, not only spiritually and emotionally, but also financially for the remaining congregants, because among other financial obligations the church had an outstanding mortgage that had to be serviced to the tune of some \$3,000 per month. At about the same time the church's first full-time pastor, Rev. Hugger, left the church to undergo training in Clinical Pastoral Education.

The financial requirement of servicing the church's mortgage and the loss of substantial membership required that the congregation re-evaluate its priorities in every area. This it did under the aegis of Rev. Dr. David Phillips, who took the helm at SGBC in August of 1992. At the time Dr. Phillips was (and remains) a professor of Old Testament at Luther Rice seminary in Atlanta.

On April 26, 1996 the church adopted a constitution under which it shifted from being a "mission" church of Chestnut Grove Baptist to being a free-standing entity in its own right. The church family steadily grew and in 1999 several families left SGBC to

join with some members of another church to form a new congregation, Antioch Baptist, a mission church of SGBC. Once again South Gwinnett Baptist saw a decline in its membership and once again it recovered, returning to a period of growth, which continues to the present day.

4.1.8.2 Interviews

Although South Gwinnett Baptist Church, as with the other churches in this study, received and returned a preliminary survey and was subsequently randomly selected for further research, such participation almost did not happen. The church is not staffed during the week and messages left with the church's voicemail system were not responded to. Contact was finally made through the expedient of visiting the church on a Sunday, seeking out the pastor, referring to the completed and returned preliminary survey and explaining the motivation and intent of the next phase of the research. Once the pastor had determined that the process – distribution and collection of survey instruments and individual and focus group interviews with members of the church family – was not likely to be too disruptive of church life, he brought the proposal before the Deacons of the church, who gave permission to proceed. Even so, completing work at the church was not easy. The pastor had much to preoccupy him being, as has been mentioned, in full-time employment at Luther Rice. Thus, the research was understandably not the focus of his agenda. As a result, where the pastoral and administrative leadership at all the other churches in the study helped in the research process, for example inviting congregants to focus groups and one-on-one interviews, arranging interview locations, setting up contacts and the like, at South Gwinnett Baptist Church the researcher was largely left to his own devices regarding finding folk to

interview. Thus the interview processes for determining the ethos of this church were rather different than that followed in the other churches studied. For example, on one Sunday, folk leaving worship were asked if they would mind answering some questions about the church. On another occasion people were asked to stay behind after a Wednesday prayer meeting to respond to similar questions. Other information about South Gwinnett was largely gleaned from folk during conversations held in corridors and hallways, through telephone follow-up and from an internally circulated history of the church.

Even though the method of interviewing members of the church family at South Gwinnett was rather less formal than that practiced in the other churches in the study, the results are thought to be compatible with those other churches in terms of the quality, nature and extent of the information collected.

The history of South Gwinnett Baptist presented above follows the usual pattern of growth and decline, agreement and dissent, found in most churches. And, like many churches, South Gwinnett has weathered the various storms that have come its way and that have contributed to a certain inner strength and resilience and to a strong sense of “family.” Indeed, it is the impression of being part of an extended family that many respondents gave as reason for joining the church. The congregation of SGBC is a mix of people of all ages, representing all stages of life from young married couples, some with young children, to single and married folk in their middle years and includes a number of older, retired individuals. There are, however, few young people between the ages of 12 and 17. Although attempts are ongoing to involve more youth, some of them quite successful, the church, which has had a youth pastor in the past, currently has a

young couple who have been designated “youth directors” to coordinate and develop such endeavors.

Members speak fondly of the church and refer to the sense of spirituality they get from a variety of activities associated with the diverse proceedings within it: worship, Bible study, fellowship activities and the like. Spirituality was articulated as, for example, a “warm sense of family;” “knowing you’re in the presence of people who care;” and “a feeling of belonging.” Being in the presence of the holy was expressed as “studying the Word;” “praying in community;” “taking communion;” and sometimes hearing the choir sing a particular anthem, or singing an old favorite hymn during worship. Members also speak of a desire for the church to grow and expressed some frustration that growth was not happening as fast as they would like. Several folk said that they would like to see a more focused effort from the church leadership, creating activities that utilized the church facility and available members of the congregation during the week, as well as at weekends.

Folk cited a variety of reasons for joining the church, among which, as has been mentioned, the sense of “family” was prominent. Other reasons included “having a relative or friend in the church;” “the personality of the pastor;” and “the location of the church.” Absent from any interview response was an attraction to the church because of the possibility of being involved in any “engaged” outreach ministries. The greatest expectation the church had of its new members was that they “fit in” to the family by attending regularly and participating in the life of the church.

Although the church has had involvement with outreach ministries in previous years, almost all such involvement has been and continues to be either through the

modest financial support of ministries administered by denominational or institutional organizations (e.g. Disaster Relief, Co-operative Food bank, Georgia Baptist Children's Homes) or through "on site" activities such as maintaining a food pantry and clothes closet and through Fall, Halloween, Christmas and Easter festivals and similar activities held on the church grounds.

According to many respondents the importance of outreach ministry is often promoted from the pulpit and most of the people interviewed said they were very aware of the importance of such ministry as part of the life of the church. Why, then, is the church not more engaged with its community? Some respondents countered that in view of the programs mentioned in the previous paragraph, the church was indeed engaged with its community. When an "engaged" ministry was described – that is, one that requires the active, physical involvement of church members – many respondents suggested that such ministry was not necessary, that the church was already doing "all it could." Others, however, expressed interest and said that the "engaged" form of ministry simply was not routinely promoted or considered. Still others suggested that while they thought more could be done, the church lacked the funds to support them, the church's existing financial obligations largely absorbing its income. Regardless of the availability of funding, however, a number of respondents seemed anxious to be more involved in outreach ministry, although they often could not articulate the shape or form of any such ministry they would like to undertake. Such responses highlighted the fact that the church has no formal structure for the identification and authorization of engaged outreach programs. Thus, any person feeling a call to such ministry has no way to authenticate that call or to put it into practice. Further, while many folk recognized that

in theory they did not need the church's permission to do God's work in the world it was unanimously asserted that in practice, community ministry was an activity derived from the fellowship in the church. Indeed, for some of the folk at SGBC the differentiation between purely humanitarian motives as opposed to those believed to be Spiritually-driven was that the former were activities periodically engaged by individuals who may or may not be under the leadership of the spirit, whereas the latter was the consistent consequence of a faith developed by Christians *in* community and enacted *by* that community *as* community, under the direct control of the spirit.

When asked if the church had a Mission Statement of any kind, many respondents said they did not know. The pastor said that he thought it had one, but was sure that even if asked he would not be able to lay his hands on a copy, or even say what it contained.

Worship at SGBC may best be described as "Baptist Traditional," a style that is informal (and thus avoids formal liturgy), emphasizes extemporaneous prayer, delights in spontaneous preaching, enjoys singing traditional hymns and ends with an altar call to those who wish to make a "decision for Christ," an "affirmation of faith," or a "desire for baptism." In the years between 1988 and 2004, 444 folks have come forward at the conclusion of a worship service for one or another of these reasons.

4.1.8.3 Summary

The character of South Gwinnett Baptist Church is like the two faces of a coin. On the one side is a group that may be described as largely extrovert: it presents as a spiritually alive congregation, concerned for the welfare of all people but with particular interest in its immediate community, anxious to engage that community, but frustrated by a lack of structure and organization to put its faith into practice. On the other side of the

coin however is a group that is largely introvert: it presents as spiritually reclusive, engages the larger community in a manner that rather distances the congregation from those its outreach ministry serves, is content with slow, steady growth and is generally satisfied with its existing organizational and administrative structures. While both groups believe they are following biblical principles relating to the internal and external function of “church,” there is clearly a dichotomy in the way it is thought that function should be exercised. Because these two faces of the church represent two interpretations of Jesus, one might expect such discord to rend the church. Perhaps if it were insisted upon that Jesus be the *sine-qua-non* of the church, that might indeed happen. Although Jesus however is indeed presented as the glue that coheres this church the reality is, in a perhaps subconscious effort to avoid conflict between the two understandings of church function, the congregation has developed a different community focus: a shared sense of “family.”

In an earlier section (1.2) it was asserted that it is the centrality of Jesus in the life of the church that creates the environment for Spiritual action. It follows from this assertion that any displacement of Jesus from the center of the church’s life – even to avoid conflict within the church – will impact the ability of the community to be the voice and action of the Spirit. This impact is evident at SGBC in the internal functioning of the church which is in a situation of “stalemate,” with some members of the church wanting for example to be more engaged in community ministry and some believing the current state of ministry is sufficient. Rather than address this divisive issue, it has been sidelined in favor of “family harmony.” Such glossing however has not made the problem go away. The frequent and rapid emergence of the differences in the church

over the subject of the interpretation of biblical principles vis-à-vis community engagement during conversations with members of the church family suggests that the issue thrives in the collective subconscious of the congregation, a situation likely to continue impeding the speech and action of the Spirit until it is resolved.

Interviews with congregants also indicated that in addition to not actively engaging its immediate community, the church had even in some ways adopted a posture that may be best described as passively defensive. The informally produced account of the church, the South Gwinnett Baptist History (2004) notes:

The large influx of new residents [into the wider community in which SGBC is placed] brought new religious beliefs or, in many cases, no religious beliefs. The plurality of faiths resulted in a mixture of morals and values. *Baptists needed to develop defensive training . . . to hold on to their people* (emphasis added).

The defensive posture the church adopted was the cautious and “distanced” approach to community ministry described. The idea of Baptists “holding on to [the church’s] people” seems to have been interpreted as an extreme caution in developing and implementing any direct outreach programs as well as an implied vigilance to avoid inviting anyone into the midst of the congregation who might in some way cause members to question the church’s conservative views or, worse, cause members to lose their faith as a result of making theological inquiries outside of the church’s traditional, conformist study practices. The ethos of SGBC is then one, if not of a closed community of believers, certainly one of only a superficial commitment to an active engagement with its community. Perhaps the best demonstration of the current ethos of the church is the way it currently presents itself to the outside world: the church is un-staffed during the week days, the parking lot bare, there are no signs of activity during the day, the

telephone redirects to a voicemail system (which is not consistently followed up on, a problem, as one member said, that “needed to be looked at”) and there is no engaged ministry to the immediate community. In sum, this is a church that exists, but does not live, in its community.

4.1.9 Almost There: St. Andrews Presbyterian Church.

Ethnicity: largely White

Denomination: Presbyterian (PCUSA)

Active Membership: about 590

Attendance: about 250

Location: Atlanta East side.

Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 5

Operating budget 2004: ± \$600,000

4.1.9.1 History/Background

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has a structure for New Church Development which includes initial administration and oversight from the local governing board, known as the Presbytery. In the case of St. Andrews, a group of Presbyterian women, having determined that there was a need for a “Presbyterian” presence in the city of Tucker, a suburban community on the east side of Atlanta, presented a request to the Presbytery that it consider establishing such a church. After due consideration and with the necessary preliminary steps accomplished St. Andrews was incorporated as a New Church Development project of the Greater Atlanta presbytery in 1960.

In terms of current community ministries St. Andrews operates a before- and after-school program for children from the wider community (age six months and up), several “step” programs for alcohol and substance abuse, and a “meals on wheels” program (limited to church members). Outreach ministries currently engaged by St.

Andrews – in partnership with several other churches – include funding a refugee ministry (with Druid Hills Baptist Church, q.v. above) and supporting a seasonally-operated (September through May) Night Shelter for the homeless. Besides financial backing, members of the St. Andrews family – Sunday school classes, worship groups and occasionally individual families – also support the night shelter by taking turns to cook and deliver food to shelter guests one or two days a week throughout the season and by supplying those guests with “day packs” of food. Additionally, the youth of the church regularly serve at Ronald McDonald house⁷ preparing meals for guests. One ministry previously engaged by St. Andrews, but now “spun off” as an organization financially supported by St. Andrews and other local churches, is the “Initiative for Affordable Housing.” Where Habitat for Humanity builds single family homes, the IAH deals with multiple housing and renovation projects.

There are also some plans for future ministries. Since the Tucker community is seeing an increase in the presence of Hispanics, an “English as a Second Language” class for local Hispanics and a Spanish language class for those members of the church interested in developing their linguistic ability in this area have been talked about but not yet actioned. Other future outreach plans include developing a ministry to Hispanics – not as a separate ministry within the church (“we do not want a ‘landlord/tenant’ relationship”) but as a shared ministry. The Hispanic ministry will start as a small group within the church, but is expected to grow as the community demographic continues to change.

⁷ An organization that provides temporary accommodation for families of seriously ill children who have traveled from their homes to receive specialized treatment at nearby hospitals.

4.1.9.2 Interviews

The governing body within any Presbyterian Church (USA) is the Session. The Session, which usually meets once a month, is comprised of elders: women and men elected and ordained by the congregation who exercise leadership, government, and discipline on behalf of their particular church. The number of members in a Session varies from congregation to congregation and session meetings are open to all church members. The interviews from which this section of this study is derived were conducted at a specially extended Session meeting attended by some thirty participants. Most of these participants were already members of the church – some for less than a year, some for thirty or more years – and at least one family and several other folk attended the meeting to discuss their potential membership in the church with the Session. All were invited to join in the conversation.

St Andrews participates in enough ministries to fill a brochure (some 36 are listed in the church's "Missions Ministry" guide). With the exception of those mentioned earlier most of these ministries are network ministries with other churches and/or programs financially supported by the church. Asked to consider ministries requiring the direct, physical involvement of congregants, most interviewees agreed that such fully-engaged ministries were mandated by the Gospels – specifically, by the words and actions of Jesus, who was, as one respondent said, a "hands on kind of guy." When members of the Session involved in these kinds of ministries were asked to reflect on the reasons they did so, however, the Gospel mandate, while important, was not the only motivating factor. Rather, some respondents suggested that outreach ministry was an attempt to correct "things that you've grown up knowing, or believing, to be wrong."

Some said it came out of the culture of care promoted within the church family, a “ministry of caring that begins in the church, but then flows into the larger community.” For others, there is a sense of being fulfilled through ministry. Few, however, volunteered that they obtained any form of spiritual satisfaction or a sense of the holy in doing ministry until that particular issue was mentioned. When asked why this was the case, most respondents agreed that it was because the ministries they undertake are not driven by spirituality or a sense of engaging the holy, but rather by a sense of being drawn to the bad news with a view to fixing it: “The holy comes, certainly, but as a result of being a part of the good news, rather than as a motivating factor.”

Although the pastor, Dr. Dave Kivett, had suggested in an earlier interview that conversations about the spiritual in Presbyterian circles were likely to be brief, “because Presbyterians are put off by too much talk of spiritual matters,” the interview with the Session proved this not to be the case. One respondent clarified,

Yes, perhaps outside of the church, or our Christian groups, we are rather reluctant to speak of spirit, or spirituality, or the Holy Spirit; and even here in the wider church community we may be cautious about such talk. But in our Sunday school, or in the Session – in, I suppose, our tighter knit family – we do it all the time.

Part of the reason “Holy Spirit talk” outside the tight knit family context is avoided is, as one respondent said, because, “The Spirit is ethereal and Presbyterians are pragmatists. Our image is one of practical, earthly people – rationalists, if you will.” The Holy Spirit does not fit too well into a rationalist worldview and it is therefore not surprising that respondents had a hard time determining the boundary between humanitarian and Spiritually-driven motives for outreach, the consensus being that they were “pretty much the same thing.”

A number of interview respondents were surprised to hear from other, longer-term members, that the church now has less engagement with its immediate community than in former years and were equally surprised to discover that the church has a relatively low level of direct community engagement. “We thought we were doing more” (in terms of hands-on ministries) was a fairly uniform observation, which led to some discussion regarding how community ministry ideas were identified at St. Andrews and to whom those ideas should be communicated.

Many respondents were again surprised to hear from others in the meeting that there was a process, or structure, established in St. Andrews to authenticate outreach ideas, determine the Human Resource and financial needs of proposed outreach ministries, and oversee the administration of approved ministries. This structure is called “Mission Ministry” and members are invited and encouraged to bring their ministry ideas to the Mission Ministry, which will take appropriate action. Interviewees suggested that their ignorance of the presence and responsibility of the Mission Ministry probably came, at least to some degree, from their own complacency. “I guess we figure the church is already doing something,” one respondent said, “because it is a church. We just don’t stop to think that *we* are the church and that if *we* are not engaged, perhaps the church, too, is not engaged.” This remark was particularly interesting because both the pastor (in a separate interview) and the Session participants agreed that community ministry is frequently promoted from the pulpit. Also, a “Monthly moment for Mission” meets monthly to promote missions. Nevertheless, it became clear as the conversation progressed that for the most part, folk not on the mission ministry team are largely unaware of all that is going on.

With fewer than twenty percent of the congregation involved in outreach ministry of any kind, a number of folk thought that the church could be doing more in terms of such ministries. The pastor felt that a good beginning would be to make the exterior of the church more invitational – that the church could reach out by being inviting. He also thought the church could “do more physical stuff that appeals to testosterone,” building, hammering, repairing, constructing. “But,” he added, “there is only so much I can push. The initiative for evangelizing, whatever its form, must come from the congregation.”

Asked about their understanding of “evangelism” most agreed with evangelism conceptually, but objected to using the term to describe any form of community ministry because of the way in which it has been appropriated by the conservative/fundamentalist factions of Christianity and because of the subsequent perception of “evangelism” by the secular community: “[Conservatives and Fundamentalists] have caused the word “evangelism” to be synonymous with Bible-thumping, hell-and-damnation Christian thugs and demands for money” remarked one respondent, “rather than as a ministry of the Good News of Jesus, enacted by people of faith.”

One respondent, for several years a civic leader of the City of Tucker, where St. Andrews is located, said that he and others on the city council and in other local government offices had long hoped that St. Andrews would become more involved with its immediate, secular community. He added that although he was aware of the Mission Ministry group he felt that the church was often unable to take ministry ideas from the manifestation of the idea to its implementation. Sometimes this failure was due to lack of courage to undertake community ministry, sometimes it was because those responsible

for implementing ministry strategies had no idea how to go about it – a sentiment that several in the Session agreed with.

Invited to offer suggestions for possible evangelistic ministries, many broad ideas were offered by respondents: “do more for the elderly,” “some form of ministry to the disabled,” “more engagement with the youth of the community,” but none could articulate a specific, or well-defined defined, program. “We’ve never really thought about it,” or, “We think about it, but don’t act on it; and then we forget it” were typical responses. One respondent indicated that American society has become reclusive and has forgotten how to engage people outside the immediate family or church. (In this regard, a quick poll showed that only about twelve percent of interviewees agreed that they knew any of their immediate neighbors on a more than a casual basis.) Even though none of the interview group could identify a specific ministry they thought the church should be involved in, almost every person present agreed that the church should and could do more and that if the church identified a ministry, they would want to be invited to participate in it. “We are the hands and feet of the Gospel,” said one respondent, “and I want to be able to say ‘here I am; send me’” (Is. 6:8).

St. Andrews has a small but active youth group comprising about twelve high school and twelve middle school students, with about three in each group not being members of the church. The group meets on Wednesday evenings for a program called “logos” which includes recreation, Bible study, a “family” dinner, and worship skills development. Parents pay an annual fee to support this program.

The youth participate in the church’s outreach by helping at the night shelter during its seasonal operations, by sharing responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of

the church's "food pantry" operation, by participation in the Ronald McDonald house mentioned earlier and by the participation of at least a few in an annual mission trip which follows a three year cycle: In the first year, the mission will be to a place near enough to drive to. The second year, the mission will still be in the contiguous U.S., but far enough away to require air travel. Year three is an overseas mission trip that might go anywhere in the world.

In terms of activities within the church community, as often as possible one or more members of the youth take an active role in the worship service and at least one young person is invited to serve on the Session for one year.

Although the actual numbers of young people involved in the life of the church is relatively small given the size of the congregation, their presence in both outreach and inreach ministries is sufficient to belie their actual numbers. Young people are somewhat ubiquitous at St. Andrews, which enhances the sense of being in an extended family.

"Family," meaning "a community that is genuine in the way it represents itself and in the way that it cares for each of its members" was the most common noun the congregation used to describe itself. The sense of family is maintained by the congregation through attendance at worship services and Sunday school, Wednesday evening services, involvement with various committees, participation in special church and community celebrations (church anniversaries, annual "cookouts," church picnics etc.) and involvement in the "kitchen teams" that support the church's various food-related ministries. Indeed, the idea of "family" was the most cited reason for joining the church, outweighing denominational motivations by a ratio of four to one among the Session. Other folk said they were looking for a smaller church family, or a more

liberal/less conservative church and some cited simply a “sense of welcome” in the congregation. Another significant source of new members has been through the pre- and after-school programs of the church.

Notably absent as a motive for joining the church was its ministry activity. Although several people in the interviewed group were currently involved in at least one of the church’s community ministries, no person gave any form of the church’s current ministries as a primary reason for their union with St. Andrews, although one person did remark that hearing about the church’s various ministries during her new member classes helped reinforce her decision to join the church.

About twenty five persons joined the church in 2004 and attended the new member classes. In addition to advising folk about the church’s ministries, other topics discussed in these classes, which are four weeks long and held about twice a year, are the church’s Mission Statement, Presbyterian polity, basic Calvinist theology, Sunday school options, church organization, and membership roles and responsibilities. These last are succinctly stated by the pastor as, “Worship regularly, serve eagerly, give generously, grow spiritually, live worthily.”

Regular worship attendance is strongly encouraged, and the sanctuary is cited as the place most people have an encounter with the sacred. Other places mentioned include the kitchen (particularly when preparing meals for the homeless shelter) and, on occasion, in Sunday school classes. Two worship services are offered each Sunday and these are generally traditional, usually with some form of special music (by the choir or from an individual), time-honored congregational hymns sung from an established hymnal, community prayers, an offering, and a sermon that usually has a contemporary issue (or

issues) as its focus. Although the youth have expressed an interest in having more praise songs in the worship service, there are currently no plans to move in this direction.

4.1.9.3 Summary

The case of St. Andrews is interesting and in many respects hard to describe. Its adherence to denominational policies of governance and administration makes it an excellent example of a “corporate model” church, with a Chief Executive Officer (the pastor), several vice-presidents (associate pastors), a board of directors (the Session) and the necessary administrative support. That this form of organization works is demonstrated in the large numbers of Presbyterian congregations in the United States and, at first glance, St. Andrews is almost everything one might expect in and from a church. As with Central Presbyterian church (q.v.), the congregation is warm and inviting, Christian education is organized and focused, worship is spiritual and uplifting, the youth are involved in the life of the church, and the church offers abundant opportunity for participation in a wide variety of ministries. Unlike Central, however, St. Andrews, despite appearing to have all the appropriate structures, is not a “holistic” church as that term is used in this study. The difference between the two churches seems to lie in the fundamental communication ethos each employs. Interview responses from the Session at St. Andrews suggest a prevailing congregational sense, or understanding, that the institutional structures of Presbyterian polity include both provision for the identification of all kinds of ministry and the establishment of organizational infrastructures of, for example, authentication and management, attendant upon suggested ministries. The thinking that seems to follow from this is the idea that having an outreach ministry blueprint is *prima facie* evidence that such ministries exist. Contrast this passive

approach with the active strategy of Central Presbyterian. Here is a community whose leadership acknowledges the institutional structures but recognizes that simply having such structures is not enough; their presence – and the ministries they support – need not only to be constantly and routinely communicated to the congregation, but be accompanied by an invitation to participate. All things considered, however, St. Andrews is a church that, with very little additional effort, could become fully holistic.

4.1.10 Introspective: Chestnut Grove Baptist Church

Ethnicity: largely White
Denomination: Baptist (SBC)
Active Membership: about 500
Attendance: about 400
Location: Suburban East Atlanta.
Number of Engaged Community Ministries: About 2
Operating budget 2004: ± \$ 480,000

4.1.10.1 History⁸/Background

Founded in 1850, Chestnut Grove Baptist Church is the eldest of the congregations in this study. Nine men (their names are not recorded) who had been meeting in a brush arbor decided to begin a church in the Grayson community and named it Chestnut Grove Baptist Church. Their first purchase was two acres for \$5 on which was constructed a log building that was used for both church and school. After some twenty - three years, the church had outgrown its building, which was sold and moved and another built in its place. Although the congregation met only monthly, it wanted to make sure the children and adults could learn more about the Bible, so in 1886 the church organized its first Sunday school, called Evergreen. The congregation grew steadily, though slowly and through the years more land adjacent to the church building was acquired. Baptisms

in those early years were performed in a nearby stream on the church property. In early 1911, amid some skepticism from those who wondered why a church that met just once a month would need it, a new building measuring 60' by 60' was begun and was completed August 26th of that year. It was thought to have been the largest church building in the county at that time. In spite of its size, it was not until 1948 that the church began to have weekly services. As the congregation subsequently expanded, so did the number of buildings and facilities necessary to accommodate it. In the 1980's, increasing local development saw Gwinnett county grow from a sleepy farming community to a significant suburb of Atlanta and Grayson itself once, according to the city motto, "Gwinnett's best kept secret," has itself been no stranger to housing development through the 1990's and into the new century. The increase in population brought about by such development has been reflected in the size of the congregation, which in 2001 moved into its new sanctuary, built adjacent to the older buildings, all of which – including the 1911 sanctuary, now the youth center – are still in use. It should also be noted that as the church has grown, it has "spun off" several "mission" congregations which have later become autonomous churches. One such church, South Gwinnett Baptist, is included in this study (see 4.1.8).

Although there are already several Day Care centers in Grayson and its immediate area, the leadership at Chestnut Grove has undertaken to open such a center at the church. The reason for this move is that while the church has been somewhat sheltered from the population growth in the area – new-home building has been in locations away from the church – several scores of acres immediately adjacent to the church are now slated for

⁸ Adapted from the church's web site, <http://www.chestnutgrove.org/History.htm>

development. The Child Care/pre-school center plan then is to open the facility for the use of the children of congregants initially with the idea of later opening it up to the wider, immediate community as it develops, as part of an outreach ministry. Longer term plans include an after-school care facility.

In 1981 Pastor Tommy Jordan was called by Chestnut Grove Baptist from an eleven year pastorate in Griffin, a town about thirty miles southeast of Atlanta. Prior to his coming, the church seems to have rotated through pastors on a fairly steady basis – one or two did not even stay for a full year, though two years seems to have been the rule. Thus Pastor Jordan's longevity – twenty-four years – is a record at the church. A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Tommy Jordan is theologically conservative, as is his largely white collar/professional congregation.

4.1.10.2 Interviews

Although Chestnut Grove has a long history, it presents more as a relatively new church. This has come about because of the rapid population growth in the neighborhood in the last five to ten years. Indeed, one interviewee remarked that church membership just six years ago was only about 200 and leaned 80/20 in favor of "very old, senior membership." As Atlanta's population expansion has saturated the favored northern corridor (interstate 75, GA 400, interstate 85), attention has increasingly turned to Georgia 78, an arterial road leading east into Gwinnett and on to the university city of Athens/Clarke county, GA. Christian people moving in to the neighborhood looked for a new church to call home and many chose Chestnut Grove. The active membership of perhaps 200 in 1998 has thus grown to something in the order of some 500 today and the

continued influx of refugees from the inner metropolitan area guarantees a degree of sustained growth for the immediately foreseeable future.

Chestnut Grove Baptist church meets for food, fellowship and Bible study on Wednesdays and for Sunday school, fellowship and worship on Sundays. On Sundays there are two worship services; an early, traditional service, which attracts a generally older demographic and a later service that takes a more contemporary approach and which attracts a younger demographic. In a nod to modern technology, in both services hymns, praise songs and sermon texts are projected on a board, although with regard to the latter there remains an insistence on individuals bringing their Bibles to worship and Sunday school.

The pastor reported that in his early days at the church, his preaching was extemporaneous and anecdotal, but that while anecdotes work for a while, there comes a point where longer term members have “heard it all before.” Thus his preaching is now often a “series study.” To prepare, the pastor reads one or two books a week in addition to magazines and newspapers and tries to interpret and preach biblical texts in light of contemporary issues. As will be further discussed below, outreach ministry is not a topic that receives much attention from the pulpit.

With further regard to worship, since there is no separate service for youth young persons tend to favor the second, contemporary service. Indeed, the lack of a dedicated service for youth has become a slight bone of contention for them. “Many of us came to this church and some of us persuaded our parents to come to this church, because we felt a sense of good friendship in the youth. We’re good pals and we want to worship together in our own service.” Young people in the church number about sixty, with about

thirty active. The declared feeling among the youth is that if they had a worship service of their own, there would “probably” be more participation from the inactive youth. The situation is not likely to be resolved soon, however, since the pastor believes that Sunday church attendance has inadvertently become a time of family segregation as families are broken up by sending members off to various Sunday schools, or activities such as choir practice. If particular worship groups are also set up, he claims, it could become possible for a family not to be with each other in the period between arriving and departing the church on any given Sunday. “We need to not let that happen. Families must at least worship together, even if other church activities keep them apart the rest of the time.”

Where the major attraction of the church for youth polarizes around friendship, for the adult membership across the age demographic the main reason is Chestnut Grove’s conservative theology. Subscribers to the “2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” the distinguishing document of the fundamentalist and conservative Southern Baptist Convention (S.B.C.),⁹ congregants maintain that it is a focus on the “blood of Jesus” that should be the major activity of the church. “All we are and everything we do come down to a belief that we are saved in the blood of Jesus. The S.B.C. promotes it, our pastor preaches it and we believe it.” The centrality of Jesus extends through the congregation’s understanding of the difference between humanitarian and spiritual motives to aid those in need: “It’s only spiritual if it’s driven by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus.” In this regard and, indeed, in every respect Chestnut Grove is a church of the “Christendom” model identified by Bayer (2001, see above p.2) and to a very large extent finds its identity in resisting pressure to contemporize its theology. There are, for example, no

⁹ www.sbc.net

women deacons, nor any plans to ordain women to that ministry “in the foreseeable future.” Within the same conservative theme, the church again points to the 2000

“Baptist Faith and Message” regarding the Bible:

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

That there is a demand for a church that exercises a conservative theology and sociology is evident in its steady growth, which is sustained at least in part by an aggressive visitor follow-up policy. Folk who do visit Chestnut Grove and make their visit known through visitor cards placed in the offering plate are, as often as possible, visited the same evening as their first visit to the church, and certainly within a few days. The purpose of these visits, usually made by the pastor, sometimes by a deacon, is to thank people for coming, to find out a little more about them, to answer questions they may have about the church and to invite them to visit the church again.

Folk who express an interest in joining the church first attend a two hour “orientation” session intended to provide an overview of the church’s history, theology, and religious affiliations and the expectations the church has of its members in terms of participation in the life of the church and in its financial support. Those who subsequently join then attend a “New Member’s Class” which lasts five or six weeks, before moving on to a Sunday school class appropriate to their ages and interests. The

consensus of expectations for existing members was that they would welcome new people into the church and support the church's programs.

In response to the church's recent rapid growth it was determined by the church leadership that a new, comprehensive articulation of the church's *raison d'être* was required and a "Mission Statement development" committee was set up to draft a new statement of purpose. The statement was brought up for a congregational vote some twelve to eighteen months ago and was unanimously adopted. "Adopting" however is not the same as "owning;" the statement is not published as part of the weekly bulletin, is not posted on the church's internet site and while most of the interviewees had an idea of its content, none were confident in their articulation of it. It reads, in fact, "into All the World, Sharing God's Love."

The congregation as represented by interviewees looks very much to its pastoral leadership for guidance in a broad range of matters – the nature, purpose, and interpretation of scripture, the church's theological position, the attitude to be taken toward other religious traditions and beliefs and toward the secular community, the character and form of Christian behavior, and the like. Lessons in these matters are taught from the pulpit which is, according to the pastor, the locus of strong biblical preaching and life guidance. Questioned about leadership and authority, interviewees agreed that while much power was vested in the pastor, and while the congregation usually deferred to him, the church enjoyed a congregational polity. There was common agreement that, despite having made him "back down" over certain issues, the pastor was called by God and generally acts under God's guidance.

The altar is the central point for prayer needs and concerns. During worship, folk needing prayer for themselves or wanting to pray in behalf of others go forward to the altar, where they are joined by others who pray with and over them. Several respondents said that for them this was the most spiritual part of their Christian fellowship, although others highlighted music, moments of silence, or the singing of certain hymns. Several of the youth declared that they felt a strong sense of spirituality during the last annual mission trip, which was to children of a poor neighborhood in a distant city.

A strong emphasis on “the blood,” i.e., the atoning death of Jesus, as the central focus of church life is evidenced in a reduced focus on community ministry. The church does engage in outreach ministry, some of it quite extensive, such as contributing in the support of a local pregnancy counseling center and sending a “truckload” of food each week to support the downtown homeless shelters, but such ministries are managed almost entirely through the church’s local Southern Baptist Association. One worship service a year heavily promotes this ministry and invites a special offering toward Association support. Outside the Association, the only community ministry away from the church is the annual summer camp/mission program enthusiastically engaged in by the youth. Other than these activities and promotions, outreach ministry in any form away from the immediate vicinity of the church grounds is not an emphasis and very little in this regard happens. Indeed, the numbers of folk consistently engaged in weekly or monthly hands-on ministry in the secular community is negligible.

One reason interviewees offered for being so disengaged from community ministry is the commuter-nature of the congregation. Folk spend much of their week-day either going to or coming from work, which leaves little time for direct engagement in

community outreach. Further, the pastor maintained – and congregational interviews supported – that the main reason for supporting association ministry efforts, which diverted ministry funds and human resources from the immediate community, was the perception that Grayson and its adjacent area is a “wealthy” neighborhood and thus does not supply the same ministry opportunities as an urban church.

Community outreach ministry outside of those managed by the Association is also impacted in the way such ministries are identified and funded by the church. As a rule if a new, local outreach ministry possibility is seen by a congregant, it is brought first to the pastor and then, subject to his approval, to the board of deacons. If the deacons subsequently support the concept in principle, the individual is empowered/authorized to do further research, such as evaluating the financial and human resources required. The idea is then brought before the deacons again. If approved, any necessary funding toward support of the ministry must be raised within the congregational community. The belief is that if the particular outreach ministry identified is intended to be engaged by Chestnut Grove, then the Spirit will make available the funds and human resources necessary. Indeed, this is the strategy by which the new church day-care center was instituted.

By and large, local outreach ministries are limited to activities at the church intended to draw people in, such as Easter egg hunts and seasonal festivals. Since the church abuts the local athletic fields and supports Grayson Athletic Association, as an outreach effort the church has located two mailboxes at the grounds, one supplying church information, another to receive community prayer requests. Even when interviewees were asked if they would like the church to be more active in the local community, the strongly affirmative answer was given in terms of strategies intended to

attract people to the church, such as “Movie Nights,” where a film such as “The Passion of the Christ” would get free screening in the fellowship hall, or an “Everything you wanted to know about the Church but were afraid to ask” community information forum would be held in the same location; no strategies were voiced that would require congregants to go into the community.

Activities and events that energize the congregation are particularly those outside the range of usual or routine endeavors of the church. Four years ago, raising funds for the new sanctuary energized the church family. Today, raising funds for a balcony in the sanctuary to raise seating capacity in view of future growth is a major energizer. Other examples given were “helping out folk – especially church members – who are sick, or bereaved, or in some other way need congregational support in the form of food, fellowship, and comfort.” The seasonal activities outlined above too are cause for heightened enthusiasm. Indeed “any activities that involve food and fellowship” get congregants excited and motivated and draw high levels of congregational participation.

4.1.10.3 Summary

Chestnut Grove Baptist church is passionate about its faith and its faith community. Almost everything it does goes toward building up the congregation in the terms of biblical principals as previously determined by the S.B.C. Its interest in the wider community is not to be doubted – it cares about the plight of humanity and gives generously to its outreach ministry arm, the local Association. The prevailing attitude however is that such giving largely fulfills any ministry obligation the church may have. Thus, there is no serious attempt, nor any strategy or established organizational process (other than as described above) to identify or engage ministry in the immediate

community. Instead, the church's efforts focus more on further educating or edifying the congregation in terms of faith, not works. Works (community ministry) are seen as an expression of faith, but are not to be confused in any way with salvation "in the blood of Jesus." The focus of worship and Sunday school is on building up the body of faith through (correctly) understanding scripture, with an emphasis on works *within* the community of faith, rather than to the larger, secular community. Perhaps because ministry to the wider community on the community's grounds is perceived to be fraught with danger – danger of being "led astray," or put in a situation where one's faith was questioned – the church prefers to establish ministries intended to draw outsiders in to the "safe" ground of the church and to minister to them in an environment that can be better controlled for error or potential apostasy.

In a world laden with stress and anxiety, the certainty and conviction with which unquestioned and unquestionable salvation is advanced at Chestnut Grove offers a welcome option for those who prefer not to intellectualize their faith. Thus the scriptures are not questioned and the vicarious execution of the exemplary ministries of Jesus displaces any pressing urgency to "Go into all the world . . ." (Mark 16:15). The result is a church whose ethos is essentially introspective, a church that exists more for its members rather than for the larger, immediate community in which it resides.