

Forward Focus at Berea Friendship UMC

Report to the Church

March, 2020

The consensus of survey responses from church members, comments shared in congregational meetings and in conversations among members, and information and data gathered as directed by the *Forward Focus* process all provided invaluable insight as Berea Friendship looked at its history, assessed its current status, and considered its future.

Spiritual Mapping of Berea Friendship UMC

Two primary resources were of great importance in creating a “spiritual map” for BFUMC – constructing a timeline of our history and conducting a survey of its members.

The *timeline* charted programs and ministries from the establishment of the church in 1953 to the present. *Forward Focus* team members and other members of the congregation added specific items to the timeline; the timeline has been displayed in the fellowship hall throughout this process.

The purpose of the *survey questions* was shared in the church newsletter; the questions themselves were included in the article so all members would have the opportunity to respond. Hard copies of the questions were distributed to Sunday School classes, to choir members, and to other small groups. Responses were reviewed; summaries of responses were shared at the second congregational meeting.

Key observations and trends gained from creation and review of the timeline and from responses to the survey include:

Strengths of BFUMC

- Loving, caring congregation
- Dedicated pastor with vision for the church
- Ministries to Armstrong, Northwest Crisis Center, etc.
- Location and facilities suggest great potential.
- Rich heritage of ministry
- CDC great asset.
- Belief in great potential.
- Effective smaller groups: UMW, UMM, Quilters
- Church not in debt
- Facilities handicapped accessible

Challenges & Opportunities for BFUMC

- Aging membership; many on fixed incomes; health issues restrict participation.
- Financial issues; consistent gap between income and expenses
- Need to build on and expand tradition of ministries for children and youth
- Maintain/strengthen commitment of present members; reach out to inactive members and to growing population in our community
- Maintain facilities; keep up with needed repairs to ensure positive impression
- Increase percentage of apportionments paid
- Work in ministry with other churches and organizations in the community

- ***Berea Friendship clearly faces significant challenges as a church. However, we are also greatly blessed with many strengths, most notably our rich heritage and tradition of ministry, a committed congregation, a dedicated pastor, new ministries to the community, a strong CDC, and beautiful facilities that are debt-free. Perhaps most importantly, there is a sense of urgency and a renewed commitment to help our church reach its full potential for ministry.***

Ministry and Identity of BFUMC

Research into the ministry and identity of BFUMC revealed significant changes in recent years. Several trends in ministry emerged from our work.

- Some ministries and programs began in the earliest years of BF and have continued to be vital and active in the church today; these include emphasis on worship, music ministry, UMM, UMW, and reaching out to the community in specific ministries.
- Other ministries that were once strong have declined. Among these were children and youth programs, including a strong UMYF, church basketball, puppet ministry, confirmation classes, and Salkehatchie. This decline began approximately in 2000 as youth grew up and moved away.
- As some ministries are no longer in place, new ministries and programs have begun in recent years; most notably are support for North Greenville Crisis Center and Armstrong Elementary, trunk or treat for community children, fun day for CDC and community families, and reaching out to members unable to attend.

A review of statistics since 2000 show a steady decline in membership and a corresponding decline in attendance.

Church membership reached a peak of 500 in 2000 but has seen a steady decline in the two decades since that time. Membership, for example, had dropped to 278 by 2010, then to 243 in 2015, and, most recently, to 214 in 2019.

Attendance at worship on Sunday mornings during this time has also declined. Average attendance for 2019 was 59.

A review of the past decade revealed several factors contributing both to this decline in membership and in attendance - the number of transfers, few individuals joining the church, the number of active members who passed away, and an aging membership resulting in some members physically unable to attend

- ***As we consider our “ministry and our identity” as a church, we realize we cannot ignore the negative trends noted above. We must focus on those positive elements that remain and build upon them. And we recognize a crucial first step is for BF to have a clear, compelling vision that can guide us as we move forward with concrete plans to strengthen our ministry. We believe such positive action can go a long way toward reversing the decline in membership and attendance and creating more effective ministries.***

Area of Influence and Potential for Ministry

Many churches are within a five-mile radius of BFUMC. Six of these are United Methodist congregations. In addition, several dozen churches of other denominations are in the area. These range from large churches to relatively small ones. With so many options, a critical question as individuals and families look for a church is *“how can Berea Friendship stand out?”*

Organizations and institutions in the area suggest great potential for ministry. These include established ones such as the Berea Lions Club and recent ones such as the Berea Community Center, opened in the fall of 2019. North Greenville Crisis Ministry, The White Horse Academy Treatment Center, The Woodlands Retirement Community, Heartland Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Northwest Crescent Center, and local food and clothing ministries could become avenues of outreach for BFUMC.

The close proximity of educational institutions – from area public schools to Greenville Tech Northwest Campus and Furman University – also offer opportunities for ministry such as tutoring, programs for youth, senior care, single parents, community food banks, and ministry to CDC parents and children.

A survey of the surrounding area revealed a large increase in housing with many homes and apartments having recently been built and others currently under construction. Locations of this expansion include Farr’s Bridge, Cedar Lane, and Watkins Bridge Roads and near University Square.

An ethnic breakdown of the Berea community revealed White – 65%, Black – 22%, Hispanic – 13%. The relative size of these groups is anticipated to remain unchanged for the next five years.

Several groups within our population area have been identified as being “well above the state average” in terms of relative size. Four of these groups are:

- ☐ Economically challenged mix of singles, divorced, and widowed adults looking to make ends meet
- ☐ Lower-income singles and single parents aspiring to make a better life
- ☐ Younger, working-class families earning moderate incomes
- ☐ Established and mature couples living comfortable lifestyles in older home

Such groups within the community can provide important data as we consider means of outreach and ministry.

- ***A close look at the area surrounding BF and a review of the wealth of statistical data made available to us suggest, first, tremendous opportunities for ministry working with nearby organizations and educational institutions and, second, a rapidly growing community with specific groups and individuals to whom we can reach out in ministry.***

Evaluation of Finances and Facilities

The church’s finance chairperson provided much helpful information to the *Forward Focus* team. A review of contributions received per week by those in attendance for the past three years showed the following: 2017 - \$47.28 2018 - \$46.15 2019 - \$47.28

The church's current budget is \$228,250.07; Berea Friendship is able to meet its budget with contributions, funds transferred from the Child Development Center (\$2000 per month), and rental of the parsonage (\$1100 per month). Each month there is a difference of \$1000 between giving and expenses. Our facilities are a huge asset; they are attractive, functional, and completely paid for.

- ***Our church has a financial shortfall each month. At its current rate, BFUMC will not be able to meet its budget in the next 2-5 years. The pastor and the financial committee have instituted an emphasis on increased giving by those who support the church. Relatively small increases in weekly contributions to our budget from regular givers can have a significant impact on the monthly deficit. As we renew efforts to bring more people into our church family, we should also see greater support for ministry both financially and in terms of active participation from those joining our fellowship.***

Potential for Ministry at Berea Friendship UMC

The *Forward Focus* process at Berea Friendship has been a sobering yet encouraging experience for the team and for the congregation. A careful review of trends in membership, finances, and programs and a candid assessment of those **resources essential** for effective ministry have brought us to a pivotal point in the church's history.

It is clear Berea Friendship is at critical juncture; when considering the "life cycles" of churches, members see BF in "decline" and could in the foreseeable future be forced to close its doors. The next two to four years will be critical in determining either renewal and growth **or** continuing decline and ultimate "death." Many remain hopeful that "renewal and growth" will come, that our church can build on its rich heritage and once again be a force for good in this community and beyond

But we know hope alone is not enough; we must also have in place the resources essential for ministry. We acknowledge the need for strong leadership and for a sound financial foundation, and we are committed to enhancing both those resources essential to effective ministry. We are blessed with beautiful facilities and accept the responsibility of maintaining them as a vital part of our stewardship. We are encouraged by the strong leadership of our pastor and the powerful inspiration of our "prayer warriors" as they seek God's guidance throughout this process.

Most importantly, our hope must be accompanied by *intentional* planning for ministry. Such an effort begins with a compelling vision, one that reflects our values and points us to what our church can be. With such a vision, we can then move forward to create ministries of nurture and outreach that will enable us to serve not only our own members but also to "spiral outward" and reach those beyond our church.

- ***Berea Friendship stands at a critical time in its history. Many are convinced there is a way forward and that the current period of decline can be reversed. It is imperative that we develop a vital, compelling vision of what BF can be and a mission that expresses our purpose and why we exist. As we develop such a vision and mission, we can, with God's guidance, begin a new, exciting chapter in the history of our church.***

Recommendations/Priorities for Ministry

The Forward Focus process has enabled the team and the congregation to take a careful look at our past, to assess the current state of the church, and to consider the possibilities and challenges of the years ahead.

As a result of this process, the following recommendations are offered as *initial steps* toward renewal and growth in ministry not only to our own members but also to those in our community.

1. *Form a core planning team, including members from the Administrative Council, Forward Focus team members, and other volunteers from the congregation. The date selected as a workday for this planning team is April 25.*
2.
 - a. *Develop a clear and compelling vision that expresses what Berea Friendship United Methodist Church can be and a mission that defines our purpose and why we exist as a church..*
 - b. *Formulate a plan of action with specific programs and initiatives that will hold us accountable to our vision and mission as we continue and expand our ministry beyond the walls of the church.*
3. *Develop a plan under the leadership of the pastor and finance committee to provide financial stability for the church.*

We believe these recommendations will be important first steps in helping Berea Friendship respond to the call to discipleship and honor the God whom we serve in this time and place.