



**Banner Elk Presbyterian Church**  
**Report of the Mission Study Task Force**  
**March, 2020**

**Preamble**

Appointed by Session and called to serve, the Mission Study Task Force of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church met numerous times to create opportunities to gather information from the congregation as to who we are and what we wish to be in the future.

Background information important to the process of discernment includes a history of the church and its work over the past 127 years (appendix A), and a summary of missions (appendix B).

The Task Force sent both hard copy and electronic surveys to every member, affiliate and friend of the church. It consisted of ten questions with a variety of subjects pertinent to evaluating our current status, needs and goals (appendix C).

Responses were gathered, analyzed and later shared at a congregational meal/meeting, with an excellent explanation and good discussion (appendix D).

**Pastor**

The strength of our church is our friendly, caring, vibrant and growing congregation, and we are looking for a pastor to lead and spiritually guide us in the following areas, based upon survey results:

- Lead us spiritually through sermons and the worship
- Build a strong youth program
- Be community focused and Christ-centered
- Leadership of our church and congregation
- Outreach in the community
- Connect with the college students
- Take care of our pastoral needs

## **Worship**

Our congregation consists of people from varied experiences and different church backgrounds. While our church is not diverse in the traditional sense of the word, our church is certainly diverse in talents, interests and abilities. Many congregants are retired professionals, but we also have many members who are actively working in the community. Our church building is on the campus of Lees-McRae College, a small liberal arts college with a strong Presbyterian heritage. Our congregation is loving and caring, lifting each other up and supporting the local community through a wide variety of opportunities to serve. Our members seek Biblically sound sermons and music that inspire us through their teachings.

Our current worship services follow a traditional format with a music program that supports the message of the service. In the summer months, our 8:30 service is a bit shorter and less formal with the men's gospel choir leading the music. Our 11:00 service is traditional and enhanced by the chancel choir. Time for Children is always a favorite component of worship not only for our children, but for everyone in the congregation who enjoy the message it brings. Our youth program has grown significantly in recent years, creating the need for additional worship opportunities and experiences.

Our church is blessed with a strong church history. Special services include the Kirkin' O' the Tartans, a tribute to the Scottish founders of our community while recognizing our diversity as Christians of various heritages. While our church has old roots, it also offers a welcoming invitation to newcomers and long-timers alike to join our ministry. Our active and talented congregation provides an abundance of volunteers who contribute in many mission opportunities both in the church and in our community. It is apparent to anyone in attendance that the presence of God is in this place.

## **Church Membership**

We are a well-educated, relatively diverse, growing congregation made up of families, retirees and people from all walks of life. We have many affiliate members who worship with us during the summer, including those who come from other denominations. We are a very warm, caring, friendly congregation that goes out of its way to make all feel welcome. We enjoy fellowship with each other and with people in the community. We have a strong relationship with the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, as well as with Lees-McRae College. Many of our members are active in community ministry and missions, as well as in numerous service programs in our church.

## **Missions**

Missions are vital to the ministry of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church. Our mission field is broad, starting with our pre-school program in our church and expands to local, national and international missions and ministries. Our efforts at home in our local community are as important to our church as our mission in Guatemala. The survey respondents say community outreach is the most important thing we do as a church. While our missions can cover great distances in miles, the goal is the same. We want to share God's word, love and compassion for people all over the world. Our congregation is always willing to step up to the challenge of providing financial and material resources, as well as volunteers to address the needs of God's people. In survey results, it is clear that our congregation places high importance on meeting immediate needs in our local community. Working with local organizations such as Yellow Mountain Enterprises, Habitat for Humanity, Feeding Avery Families, Reaching Avery Ministries and many others, our church strives to address the primary needs in our community. We strive to provide 15% of our church budget towards missions, and usually exceed our annual goal. Please see Appendix B for a complete list of our missions.

## **Spiritual Development**

Presently, our church has one adult Church School class (Faith Seekers), one middle/high school class, and one young children's class (3-8-year-olds). These opportunities are supplemented by the Presbyterian Women's Bible study and Men's Saturday breakfast Bible study, monthly Kid Zone (lunch and Bible lesson after worship for younger kids), and regular offerings for middle and senior high youth. The pastor teaches a Lenten Bible study. Women are planning to launch small prayer and study groups called "One Anothering".

The Educational Leadership committee is actively meeting to define our needs, evaluate current efforts, develop new goals, and devise appropriate means to reach more folks with different formats and varied opportunities for study and fellowship.

## **Children and Youth**

Although we are perceived by the community as an older congregation, our members feel a strong urgency to build a successful children and youth program, and to connect with families and younger generations. We have a great desire and obligation to improve the children's ministry as well as expand the variety of activities we offer. The preschool program is one of our unique strengths, serving children of the community and our congregation in one of our most vibrant missions. We move forward with our goal of providing strong, lasting spiritual foundations for our youth and young families.

## **Fellowship**

Our church currently has numerous regular fellowship activities. These include monthly potluck brunches, weekly men's luncheons and monthly women's luncheons at nearby restaurants, an annual picnic, and an annual retreat. Our Prayer Shawl ministry and Comfort Makers group also offer fellowship opportunities for those who can knit and those who make comforters for good causes. Our chancel and hand bell choirs often organize fellowship activities for their members. In addition, there are frequent celebrations held for special occasions. We have an informal fellowship before services begin as many of our members arrive early to meet and greet fellow members, and we have punch on the lawn in the summer.

In response to our survey, those responding rated fellowship and the congregation as the things that excite them most about our church and is our most important strength.

## **HISTORY OF BANNER ELK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Since its earliest beginnings, Banner Elk Presbyterian Church has had an interesting history, rich in service and ministry. The church dates its beginning as 1893 when 22 people made their professions of faith in response to the preaching mission of a Presbyterian evangelist, the Rev. Dr. R. P. Pell. For the next few summers, a young seminary student, Edgar Tufts, assisted in mission activities in a wide mountain area which included Banner Elk. With his encouragement and supervision, the first Presbyterian Church building in Banner Elk, said to be one of the prettiest little churches of its kind ever seen, was completed and dedicated in 1896.

When he graduated from seminary, the Rev. Mr. Tufts returned to the area full-time and was called to be pastor of Banner Elk Church as well as four other small churches. As church membership grew, Tufts shared his dream of building a church of native stone in Banner Elk. Many of the local mountain men were skilled in stone-craft, but rockwork previously had been used only for chimneys and foundations. Nowhere in the immediate area had the beautiful and plentiful native stone been used for an entire building. The congregation was said to be small in number and material wealth, but great in faith and dedication. Offers for materials and labor came from many sources, and much work went into raising funds to purchase property and begin construction in 1912.

Stories are still told of the community spirit which developed as local residents of all denominations assisted in the church construction, coming together each Saturday to help with the “new” idea of using native stone, instead of wood, to construct the building. Men and older boys would haul loads of big rocks in their wagons, which were often pulled by oxen. Children, including those who lived at Grandfather Home, carried water and collected piles of small rocks to be used in the cement. The children, knowing they were assisting in important work, also found creative ways to earn and save pennies for purchasing two small stained glass windows which were built into the front wall of the sanctuary. Each week women brought brimming picnic baskets of food and generously contributed their energy and talents to help with the many tasks required. Building the church became quite a community event as everyone eagerly assisted.

There are several versions of how the stone pulpit was discovered by a logger in the deep woods on Beech Mountain. Stories agree that the stone was “meant to be” part of the new church which was being constructed in Banner Elk. Local men, with the help of a logging sled drawn by oxen, hauled the mighty stone eight miles through rugged mountain terrain down to the site of the church. The stone pulpit, completely in its natural state, was firmly set in concrete on the ground under the new building and the floor of the sanctuary was built around it. Later, a smooth rock slab was set on top to hold the Bible. The pulpit continues to be an inspirational symbol of dedication and strength.

The native-stone building was finished in 1915, complete with beautiful stained glass windows, the first that many people had ever seen. The bell in the tower was installed the following year. A copper cross was placed atop the bell tower in 2018.

Under the direction of Banner Elk Presbyterian Church and with the tireless leadership of its pastor, Edgar Tufts, Lees-McRae Institute (now Lees-McRae College), Grandfather Orphanage (Grandfather Home for Children) and Grace Hospital (now Cannon Memorial Hospital) were

established; to this day each still serves others to God's glory. Early on, the church sought to minister to the varied needs of the people in this area as well as to provide for rich Christian nurture and spiritual growth.

As soon as the church was established, its work extended to include several nearby outreach locations, including Beech Mountain, Pigeon Roost, Hanging Rock Chapel, and an active Sunday school at the foot of Bald Mountain which was later to become Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church.

Throughout the years, the original stone church building has been enlarged and renovated many times as the congregation has sought to meet ever-changing needs. The sanctuary was extensively remodeled during the 1940s, the educational building added in the 1950s; a major expansion and renovation of classrooms and office areas were completed in 2003; the fellowship hall and kitchen were remodeled and refurbished in 2013.

The congregation continues to grow, consisting of both full-time and affiliate members, who are actively engaged in fulfilling the mission and ministry of the church. Increasingly, this lovely area of the Blue Ridge Mountains attracts numerous seasonal residents and vacationers whose attendance and support greatly enhance the church family and its service to others. Long-time residents and newcomers from diverse faith traditions unite in spirit and dedicated commitment to Banner Elk Presbyterian Church's mission which is "to know Christ and to make Christ known".

*Compiled by Claire Fortune August, 2006; revised 2020*

**BANNER ELK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MISSIONS**

Reaching Avery Ministries (RAM)	Feeding Avery Families
Grandfather Home for Children	Avery County Habitat for Humanity
Yellow Mountain Enterprises	Oasis Local Mission
Volunteer Avery County	Blue Ridge Partnership for Children
New Opportunity School for Women	SCOTTIE Bus
Time for a Change	PCUSA Water Purification Project
PCUSA Disaster Assistance	Guatemala
English Language Institute-China	Mayland Fellowship
Hill School	Local Scholarships
Rob Clemmer Benevolent Fund	Mission Discretionary Fund
The Presbytery of Western NC	Travel money for members performing mission work
Men's Prayer Breakfast	Shepherd Program
Spaghetti Supper for LMC Students	Comfort Makers
Prayer Shawl Group	Thanksgiving Turkey Day Dinner Boxes
Women's Bible Study Group	Seasonal classes (Advent, Lent, etc.)
BEPC Preschool	Avery Project Christmas

## Appendix C

### Survey Questions:

1. What excites you about our church?
2. What is the most important thing we do as a church?
3. What are our unique strengths and resources?
4. What is our most important mission field?
5. Is there a new area of ministry BEPC should be considering for the future; if so, what?
6. How would you describe our church in one or two sentences?  
  
Do you like the description you just described? If not, explain.
7. What could we do better as a church?
8. Please rank the following from 1-11, each number may only be used once.
9. What is most important to you in pastoral leadership?
10. What would you like to tell the Session?

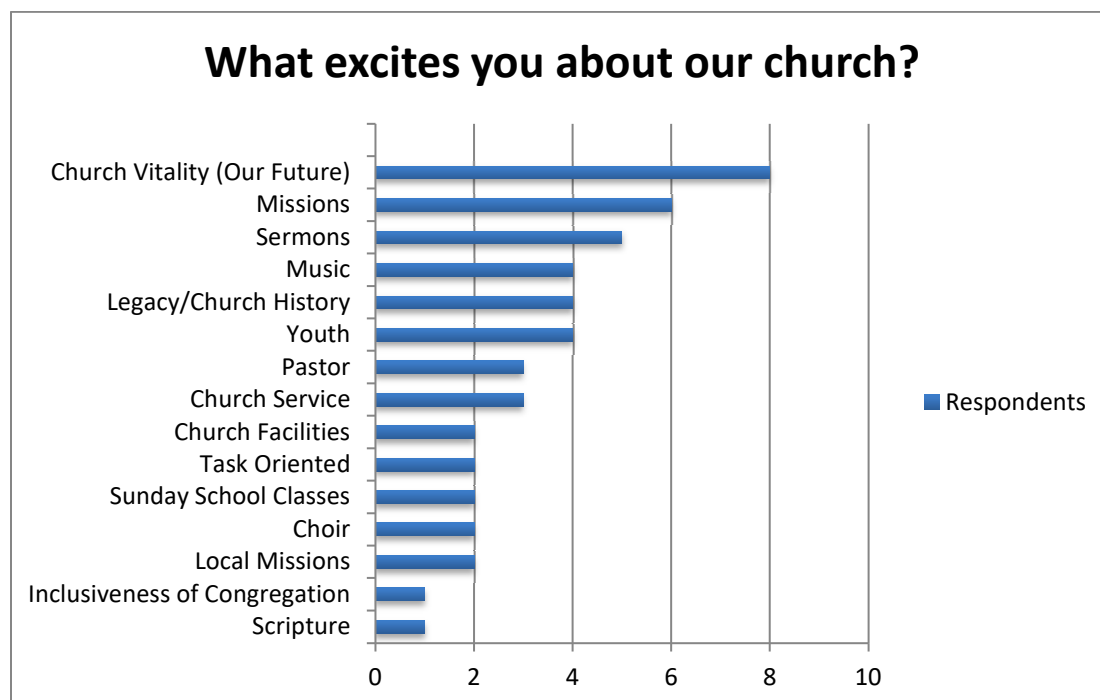




**Banner Elk Presbyterian Church**  
**Mission Study Survey Results**  
 January 17, 2020

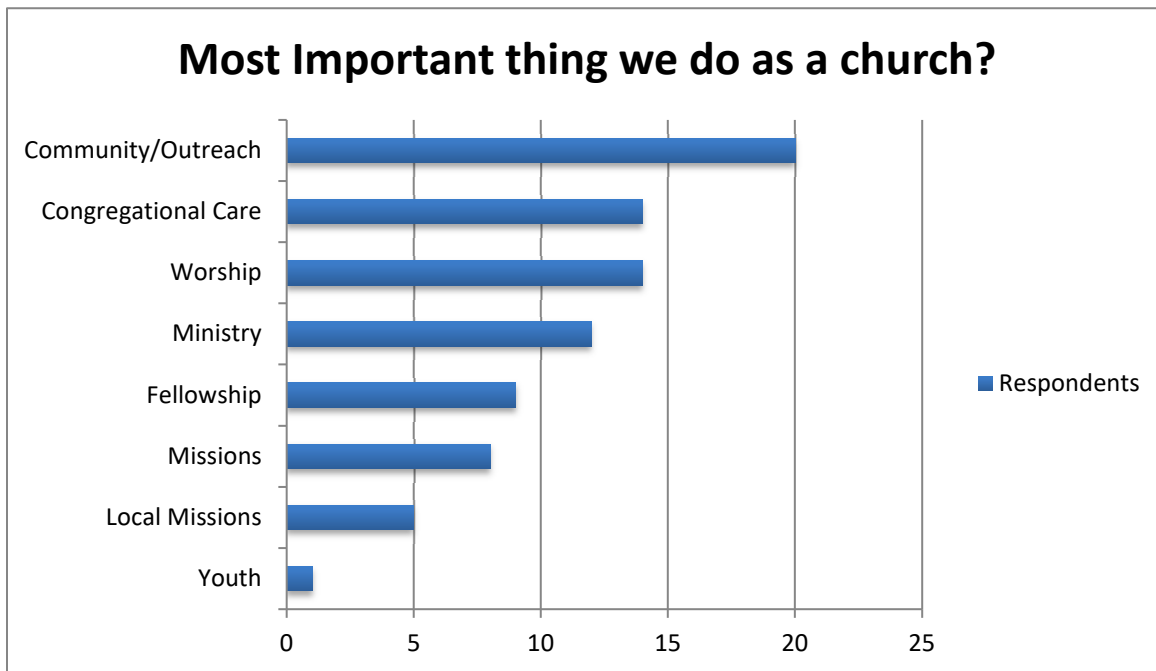
**Question 1: What excites you about our church?**

Category	Number	Percentage
People/Fellowship	21	35%
Scripture	1	1.6%
Inclusiveness of Congregation	1	1.6%
Sunday School Classes	2	3.3%
Task Oriented	2	3.3%
Church Facilities	2	3.3%
Local Missions	2	3.3%
Choir	2	3.3%
Church Service	3	5%
Pastor	3	5%
Youth	4	6.6%
Legacy/Church History	4	6.6%
Music	4	6.6%
Sermons	5	8.3%
Missions	6	10%
Church Vitality (Our Future)	8	13.3%



**Question 2: What is the most important thing we do as a church?**

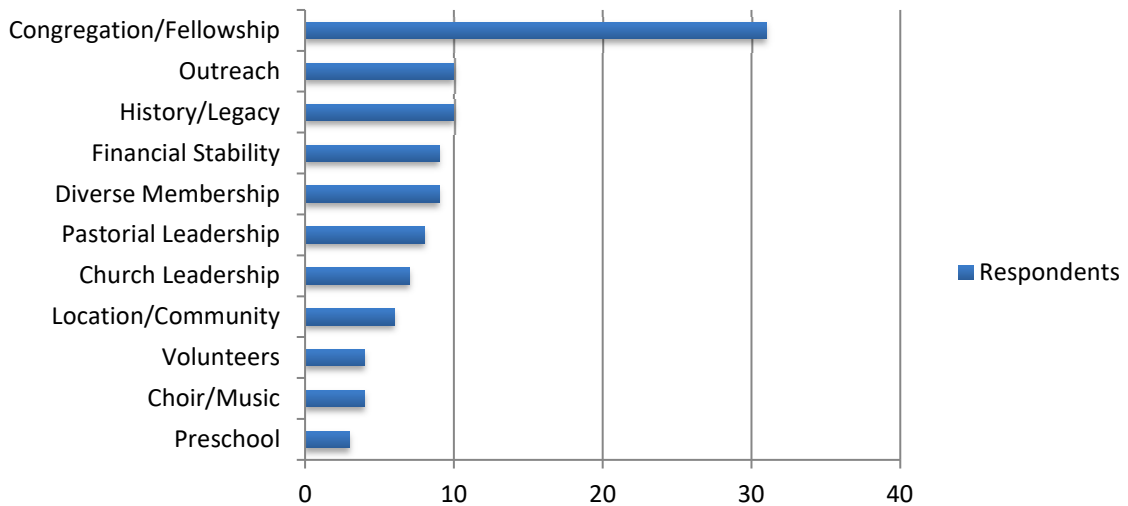
Youth	1	0.8%
Local Missions	5	4.2%
Missions	8	6.6%
Fellowship	9	7.5%
Ministry	12	10%
Worship	14	11.6%
Congregational Care	14	11.6%
Community/Outreach	20	23%



### 3. What are our unique strengths and resources?

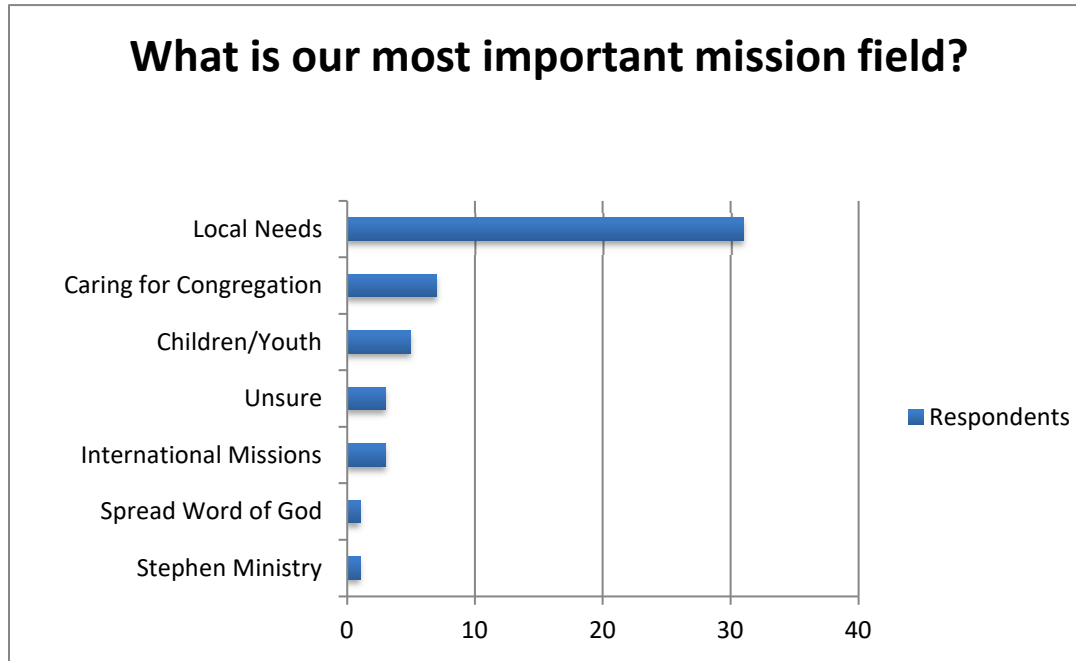
Category	Respondents	Percentage
Preschool	3	4.8%
Choir/Music	4	6.4%
Volunteers	4	6.4%
Location/Community	6	9.67%
Church Leadership	7	11.2%
Pastoral Leadership	8	12.9%
Diverse Membership	9	14.5%
Financial Stability	9	14.50%
History/Legacy	10	16.01%
Outreach	10	16.01%
Congregation/Fellowship	31	50%

### What are our unique strengths and resources?



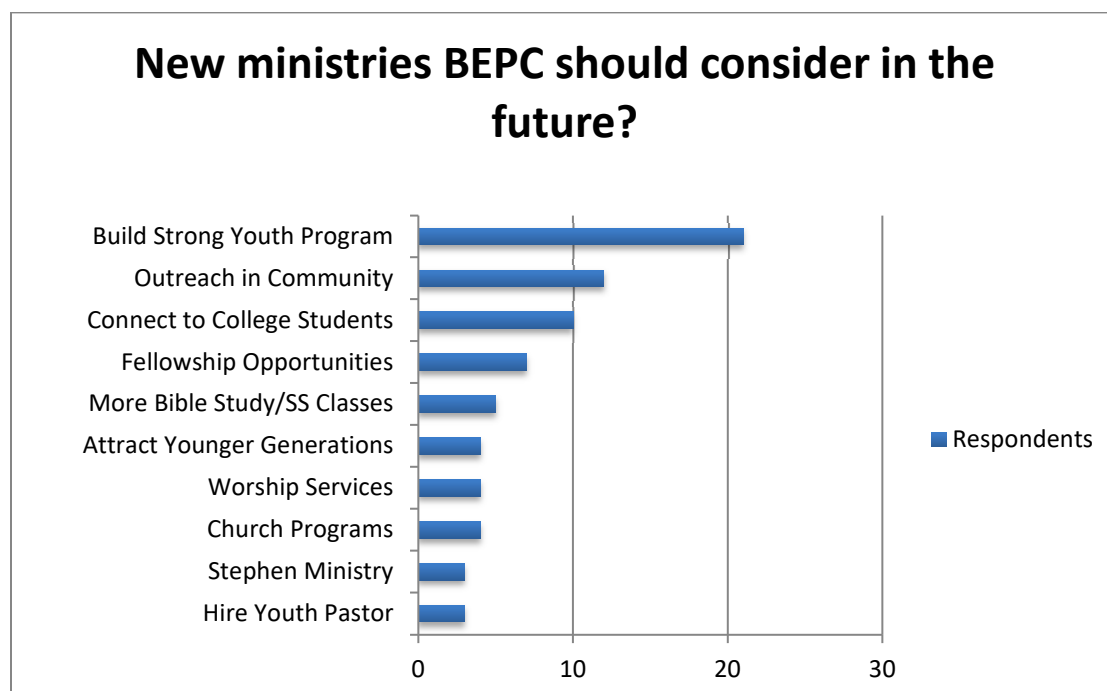
#### 4. What is our most important mission field?

Category	Respondents	Percentage
Stephen Ministry	1	1.6%
Spread Word of God	1	1.6%
International Missions	3	4.8%
Unsure	3	4.8%
Children/Youth	5	8%
Caring for Congregation	7	11.29%
Local Needs	31	50%



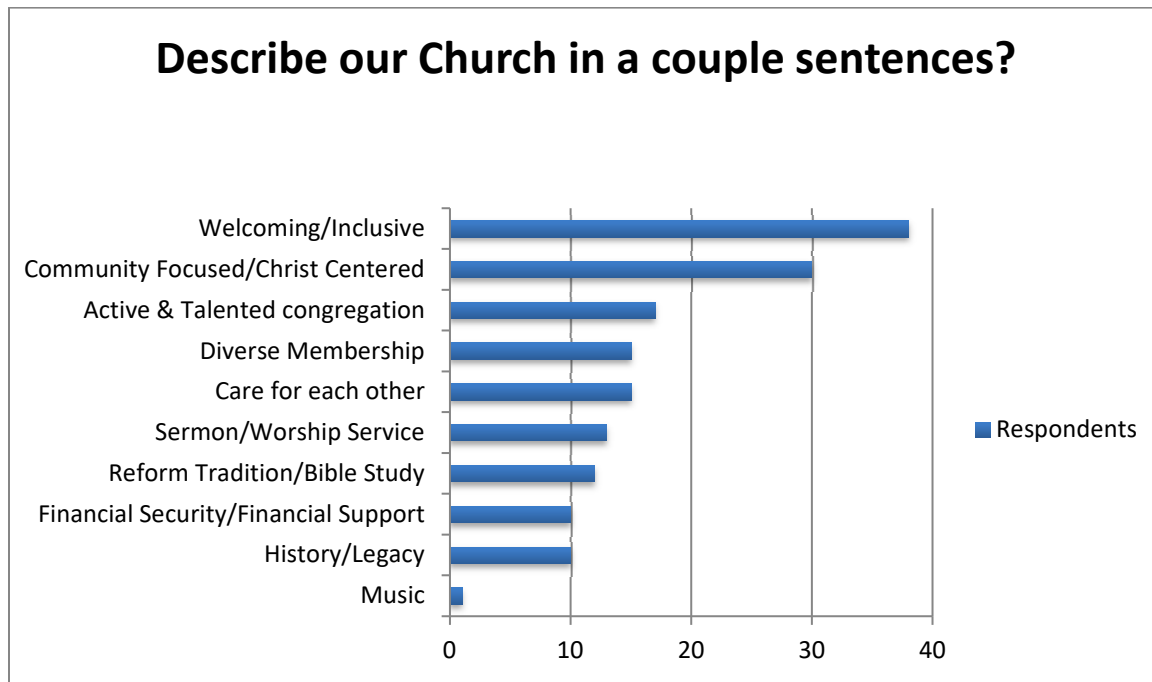
#### 5. Is there a new area of ministry BEPC should be considering for the future; if so, what is it?

Category	Number	Percentage
Hire Youth Pastor	3	6.25%
Stephen Ministry	3	6.25%
Church Programs	4	8.33%
Worship Services	4	8.33%
Attract Younger Generations	4	8.33%
More Bible Study/SS Classes	5	10.41%
Fellowship Opportunities	7	14.58%
Connect to College Students	10	20.83%
Outreach in Community	12	25%
Build Strong Youth Program	21	43.75%



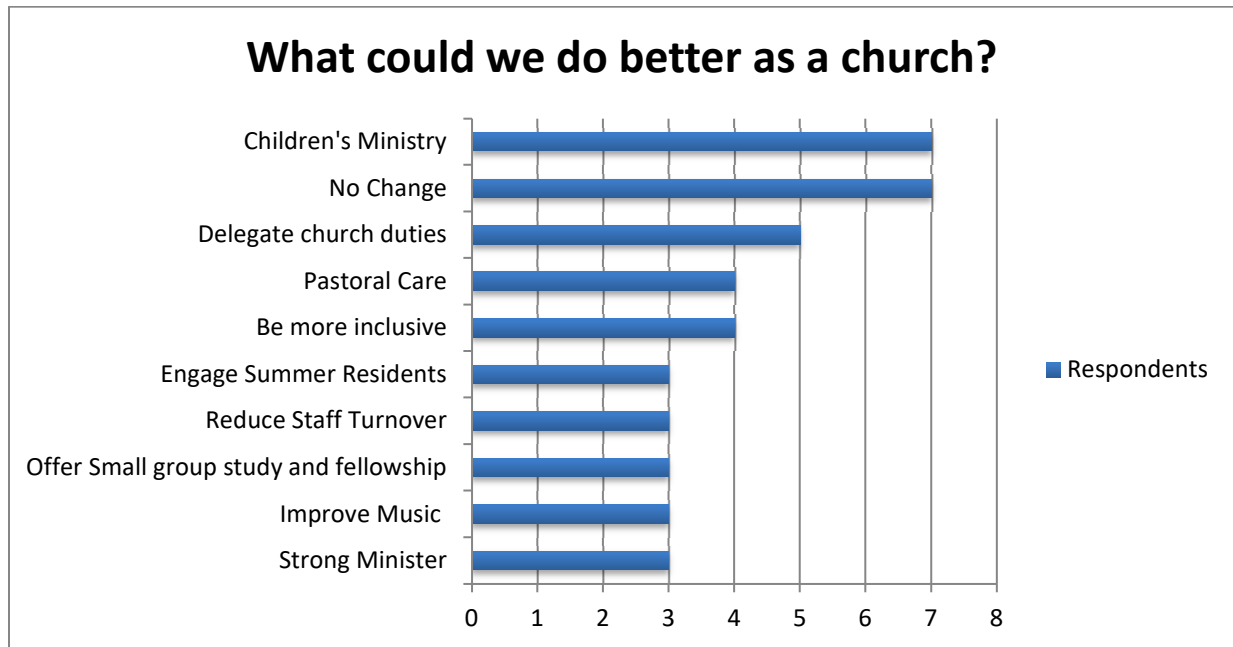
**6. How would you describe our church in one or two sentences? Do you like the description you just described? If not, explain.**

Music	1	1.6%
History/Legacy	10	16.66%
Financial Security/Financial Support	10	16.66%
Reform Tradition/Bible Study	12	20%
Sermon/Worship Service	13	21.66%
Care for each other	15	25%
Diverse Membership	15	25%
Active Congregation/Talented	17	28.33%
Community Focused/Christ Centered	30	50%
Welcoming/Inclusive	38	63%



**Question 7: What could we do better as a church?**

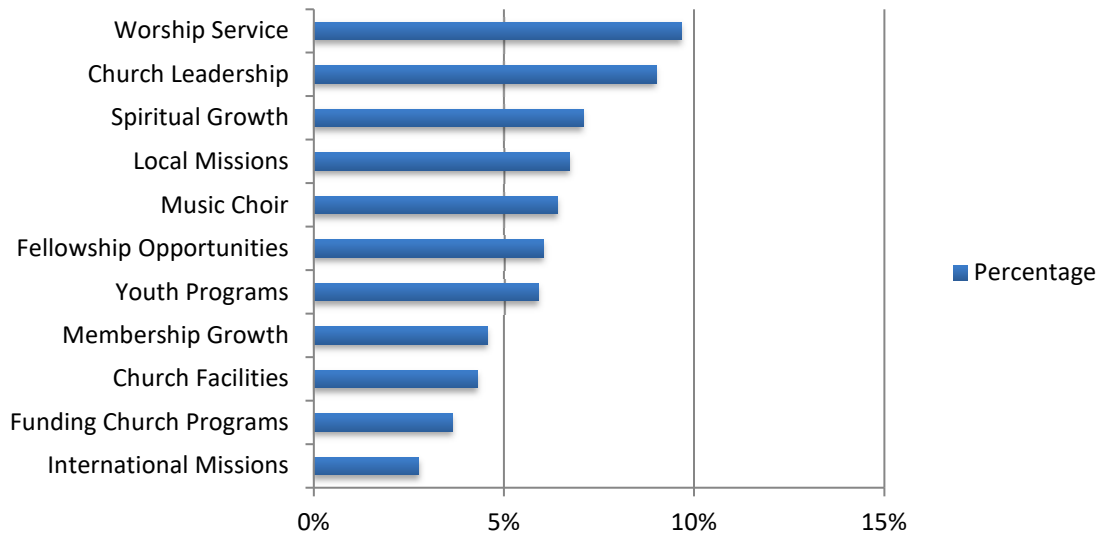
Strong Minister	3	6%
Improve Music	3	6%
Offer Small group study and fellowship	3	6%
Reduce Staff Turnover	3	6%
Engage Summer Residents	3	6%
Be more inclusive	4	8%
Pastoral Care	4	8%
Delegate church duties	5	10%
No Change	7	14%
Children's Ministry	7	14%



**Question 8: Please rank the order of importance to you (1-11)**

Church Facilities	4.31%
International Missions	2.76%
Funding Church Programs	3.65%
Membership Growth	4.57%
Youth Programs	5.90%
Fellowship Opportunities	6.03%
Music Choir	6.42%
Local Missions	6.72%
Spiritual Development/Education	7.08%
Church Leadership	9%
Worship Service	9.67%

### Rank the order of importance to you.

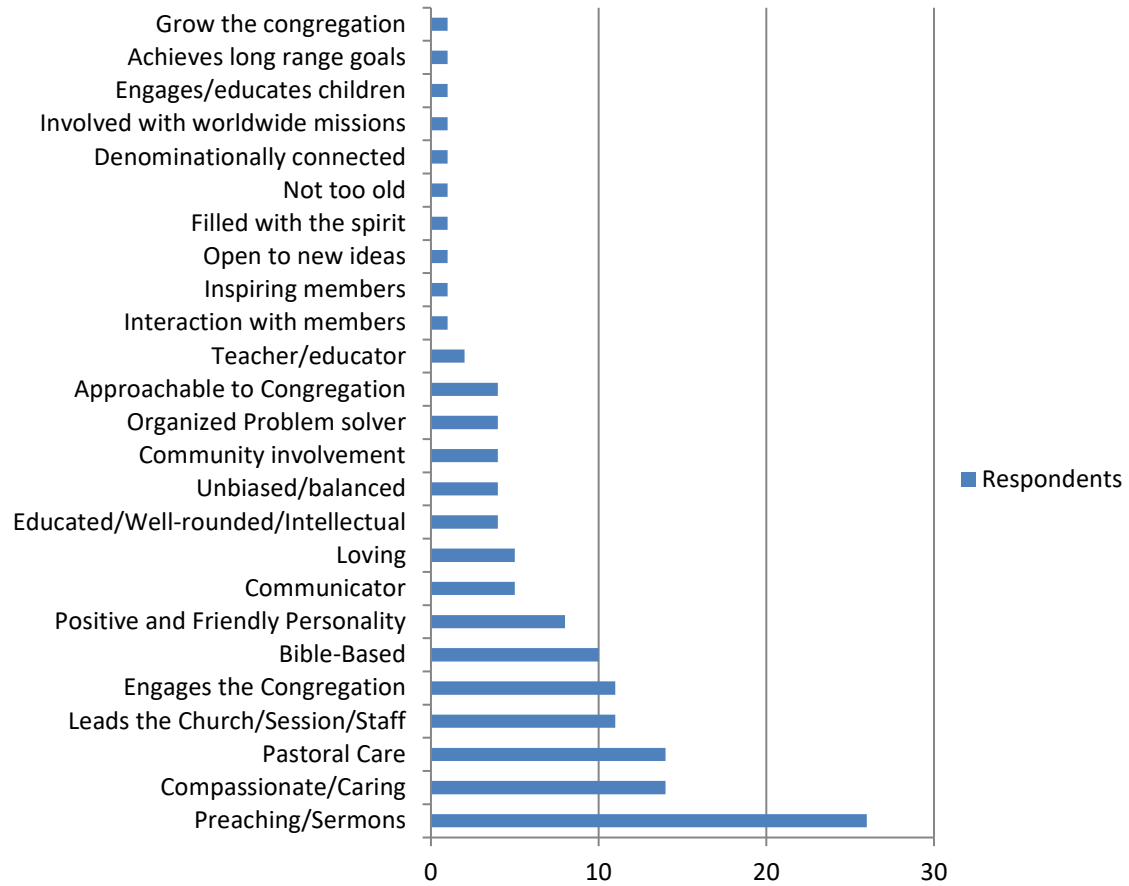




**9. What is most important to you in pastoral leadership?**

Category	Respondents	Percentage
Preaching/Sermons	26	41%
Compassionate/Caring	14	22%
Pastoral Care	14	22%
Leads the Church/Session/Staff	11	17%
Engages the Congregation	11	17%
Bible-Based	10	15%
Positive and Friendly Personality	8	11%
Communicator	5	8%
Loving	5	8%
Educated/Well-rounded/Intellectual	4	6%
Unbiased/balanced	4	6%
Community involvement	4	6%
Organized Problem solver	4	6%
Approachable to Congregation	4	6%
Teacher/educator	2	3%
Interaction with members	1	2%
Inspiring members	1	2%
Open to new ideas	1	2%
Filled with the spirit	1	2%
Not too old	1	2%
Denominationally connected	1	2%
Involved with worldwide missions	1	2%
Engages/educates children	1	2%
Achieves long range goals	1	2%
Grow the congregation	1	2%

## What is most important in pastoral leadership?



#### 10. What would you like to tell the Session?

Category	Number	Percentage
Move Swiftly/Purposefully	4	7.4%
Hold Fast Biblical Instructions	7	12.96%
Focus on Reaching Youth and Families	7	12.96%
Impressed with many volunteers/opportunities	9	16.66%
Prayerful/Seek God's Guidance	10	18.52%
Collaboration/Vital Communication	10	18.52%
Avoid Splitting Congregation	15	27.77%
Thank you for serving	31	57.4%

#### What would you like to tell the Session?

