



On September 26-29, 2019, 13 listening groups gathered for facilitated conversation about the future of Central Baptist Church. One group was specifically for the youth of the church and another was for church leadership which included staff and key leadership.

Staff and key leadership also participated in an email questionnaire before this visit and four staff were interviewed individually during the visit.

This report follows the questions that were asked during the listening sessions. Specific responses from questions and summaries of responses to questions are included, followed by specific recommendations of the consultant based on the congregational response.

### **1. What words would you use to describe Central Baptist right now?**

There was approximately an even mixture of folks that believe the church is on the verge of great possibility and those who said they felt the church was dying. There is some fear and anxiety, but also hope about what the future holds for the church. As one person described, the church has “so much potential underground but we are nervous of what that potential is going to be. There are strong visions of the church that make some people nervous, nervous about which sprout is going to grow.”

There were individuals who felt the church was very welcoming and loving, comparing it to home and family. There were also individuals who had a very different view, saying there were cliques within the church that made it difficult to feel included.

One person explained the history and current state of the church as “a place where people can come and be healed and then move on. But there is a core group that has stuck around to help with the brokenness.”

Another person said, “I see the church doing a lot of brave, hard things, a lot of good caring people that have love and have passion for the church, and I see a church struggling to make sure it continues to move forward.”

### ***Summary of Words to Describe Central Baptist***

The words used to describe Central Baptist often cancelled each other out and do not give just one picture of the church. This is very common in any organization, especially a church. It is important to remember that while these words do not feel conclusive, they do conclude that there is not one way to describe or see the church. It is very common for church members to associate with others that think the same as they do. It is important to remember that your perspective, and that of those you associate with, is not the only perspective.

However, overall I heard an overwhelming love for the church, a pride for its history and a hope that Central Baptist would continue.

### **2. If you were to talk about the history of the church as a story, what would you title the three most significant chapters?**

When looking at the past of the church there was overwhelming consensus between the groups that the first chapter involved the church split from First Baptist Church and the tenure of Hal Marchman as pastor. Some of the creative titles that encapsulated this chapter were “The March of Marchman,” “The Reign of Hal,” and “Everything Came Easy” because of the natural growth that was related to the work and relationships of Hal Marchman. People talked

about the work he was able to do in the community and in politics and were proud of those that he brought into the church from those connections. People talked of the welcoming nature and the hard work of those early members. Many talked about the large number of people and the way there was always a crowd that gathered for worship and other events of the church. One person titled this chapter as “Renegade Revolution” because they felt there was a spirit that they were doing something very different from First Baptist Church that they had left, Central Baptist at that time was leading into places that many other churches were not.

The second chapters varied. Some saw the next chapters as a time of confusion as the church split and with the tenures of various pastors that were not as successful. One titled this, “The Ghost of Marchman Past” and said that the church was in turmoil because it compared everything to the past and that in some ways this is still the chapter the church is in. Another titled this, “MidLife Crisis” saying, “we’ve lived life, we’ve experienced some things, what now?” Most groups mentioned the conflicts and resulting splits of the church and the transitional leadership during this time and talked of how that shaped the way the church saw itself and functioned in the community. One actually called this season, “Splitting Headaches” because it was a season of breakups and splits in the congregation that led to some really difficult days.

Many talked about the ministries of the church in the second chapter, especially the camp which was mentioned in almost every group in some way. Somewhere in the middle of the story of the church, the life and work of the camp property reached a peak of ministry and outreach. One said that selling of the camp property was like “losing a limb” but most groups overwhelmingly said that while they were sad about having to sell, they knew that it was necessary and critical for the future of the church.

Some said of the middle chapters that Central Baptist became the “Church Alone and Inside the Walls” because the church was/is welcoming when people come in, but “we are not in the community as well as we were.” One person spoke of the history of the church saying, “we basked in Hal’s reputation too much” and church members did not move forward with the work of the church in the community. There was some discussion in multiple groups about whether the work in the community in those early years had been done mostly by Hal and how much church members were involved.

When speaking of the final chapter, most focused on the present status of the church and the years immediately preceding this time. Some talk of this time with titles like, “Struggling to Exist,” “Struggling to Find the Right Solution,” and “Concerned about the Future.” A few groups spoke of the changing culture regarding church in our society in general that Central is navigating. The church collective is not central to the community, nor is it a priority in the family schedule. The times have changed quickly and the church has not kept up. One thing that was mentioned more than once was that in the past, plans have been made but nothing has changed, nothing has been done.

One group did title this season as “Really Pregnant with Potential” saying, “It is the time before you know what you are gonna get. We are afraid of giving that new birth because we don’t know what that is going to look like. We are in a transition chapter.”

### ***Consultant Summary of the History of the Church***

As people discussed the ministry of Hal Marchman it was clear that he continues to loom large. The stories of his ministry have almost reached a god-like status for some. I heard about how he was in the community all the time, and that was something the current ministers need to be doing more. I heard that he would “work an eleven/twelve hour day and then would get a call

about a church member in need and head right back out." However, others gave a different view saying that while he was very active in the community, working hard for the people, he told the church that he would not attend any church meetings; told the other church staff they were to take care of those.

Every church struggles with stories of the glory days, Central Baptist also has a key figure from the glory days that every other leader gets compared to. And it seems the shadow of Hal and of these early glory days have taken on a life of their own and have been shaped into a somewhat fictional narrative that is unrealistic for anyone, especially in a different era of the community and era in the life of the church. The past should be celebrated but if the church is going to move forward, there needs to be trust that something new can be born. Hal had that trust. Without people trusting him to do something new, the early glory days would never have happened. The current leadership, primarily your pastor Sonny Gallman, needs that level of trust and support to do something new in the community and church.

Many said that the church was dying. The old way of doing church is dying and we can celebrate what was, grieve it and let it go. But you also have the gift of a lot of people in the pews and in your leadership that see that while the old will change, something new can be born in its place. In order for that to happen, the church will need to examine the old programs, mindsets and leadership structures in order to allow things to fall away so that the new can be born. It is impossible to be everything you were in the past while trying to do something new.

### **3. What is possible now that was not possible before?**

Central Baptist has strong assets currently. The ministries of LifeTree, MOPS, Boy Scouts, bridge club, crafting club, book club and the arts programs that meet in the building and partner with the church all provide financial resources, allow the church to reach out to different people in the community, meet different needs, and allow for partners in ministry. Many mentioned the recent help of MOPS attendees with the playground that benefits them but also benefits the church.

The immediate community around the church is changing. Most groups mentioned the new office buildings being built by Brown and Brown, along with the new building developments going up in the area. These will bring new people and a new opportunity for partnerships and new ministry possibilities as you seek to learn the needs of these people.

Many people mentioned the facilities as creating new possibilities. With the work being done on the new buildings, it opens new possibilities for ministry. And while some said the property needs updating, this much property is an asset because it would be too expensive to buy such a big piece of property today. The facilities allow for the different ministry partners that use the building, Wednesday night meals and other social events allow for creative ideas for the future that include partnering with other businesses and nonprofits in the area, and the facilities create opportunities for income as you rent the space to others.

Almost every group mentioned the closing of First Baptist Church as an opportunity. The hope is that there will be people that are looking for a new church in the same community and that they would not want to drive to the new location. One person also mentioned that with the closing of First Baptist, there would be new needs in the community. "What ministries and services was First Baptist providing in the neighborhood?"

Other miscellaneous assets mentioned were the technology that is available today, the money from the sale of the camp and the possibilities that opens up if you utilize the money wisely in investing in the future of the church.

Many mentioned the people of the church as an asset. One younger adult mentioned that an asset of the church is that the older people of the congregation were willing to pass the new mission statement. The commitment and openness of the people are an asset as is the way the mission statement will open up opportunities to reach out to new people by clearly stating that this is a different kind of church. They believed there are new people that are looking for a church that is welcoming and affirming, and with the new statement you have the opportunity to more clearly communicate who you are to those people.

Sonny Gallman was also listed in multiple groups as an asset for the future of Central. We had people in some of the groups that are only involved in the life of the church through his Bible studies and I heard multiple groups talk about what an excellent Bible teacher he is. One person mentioned that it takes years for a pastor to have history with a community and trust from the congregation. The tenure of Sonny was an asset because as the community is changing, “if we can keep him, we will be well positioned for the new growth in the community.”

### ***Consultant Summary of What is Possible Now***

Central Baptist has a core of willing volunteers that are currently leading in the children’s ministry, doing event planning for the church and leading the senior adult ministry. While Central has a population that is aging, there are still a number of older adults that are young enough to have the capability to lead and the expertise to lead in these and other areas. Leveraging your volunteer leadership will be important for the future of Central Baptist. It will also be important to evaluate what leadership roles you are working to fill. Many churches have leadership structures that no longer serve the church well and need to be evaluated. Leadership structures were often created when there were many more people active in the congregation and removing positions does not devalue their importance in the past. However, clinging to them could limit what is possible for the future.

Central Baptist has a substantial financial reserve it could choose to invest in the future of the church. Many commented that they worried the church may not survive until the changes in the neighborhood had reached their full potential. The church leadership will have to make the important decision to use its financial resources to build and invest in the future of the church while the neighborhood is changing. The church can change and adapt while the neighborhood is changing. You have the opportunity to build now for a future.

With the description of each incredible ministry and non profit that meets in your building, I heard about the challenge to get them to church on Sunday morning. The old way of measuring church involvement was to look at the number of people in pews on Sunday mornings but that no longer is an accurate measure of who is involved in your church. Those ministries and nonprofits need to be seen as part of the church, not as tangential or just something you do to try to coax people into Sunday morning worship. Are their ways that you could involve these people in the life of the church other than Sundays or the events they already come to? Are there ways they could support the buildings and other ministries of the church? Each of these groups is already another congregation that is meeting in your church and they are going strong and healthy!

In my listening session with the youth, they had ideas for ways to get to know other members of the church, specifically the other generations. Some remembered former intergenerational mission trips that were foundational for them. They recalled times where everyone was sharing about their experiences and what they had learned during the day. They generated ideas for an intergenerational game night, a night where they help older adults learn how to use technology,

and wanted to revisit times where folks from the church would gather in each other's homes for potlucks. Some had a clear vision of getting out and participating in events in the community. They are an asset, part of your present and future and need to be integrated into the life of the church.

#### **4. With who you want to be as a church here and in the community, what staff do you need?**

There was not a clear consensus throughout the groups about what you needed in regards to future staff. Here are the raw notes of these conversations. Similar qualities or position titles have been combined. The numbers in parentheses represent how many times those items were mentioned.

##### Qualities, Traits, Experience of Future Staff

- Someone with an open mind that knows how to reach out to the community. They need to be able to understand today's families and connect with them.
- Someone with a background of growing a church in today's world.
- A lot of energy, a go getter. Charismatic.
- Someone who shares Sonny's vision and could work well with him.
- Someone not looking for a stepping stone church but someone with experience.
- Someone willing to stand up to individuals
- Someone organized at carrying out ideas. Someone with a plan and a direction that people can follow.
- Someone who loves, interacts and gets to know the whole congregation. Personable, pastoral type (6)
- Get out to know politicians, people who have some influence. Know about the key players in the community.
- Organizer and leader. Someone who comes in and takes charge, organizes things. Motivating other leaders within the church to follow. Someone who can think about our appearance in the neighborhood. Follows through when they start something.
- Leadership that can focus on the church and not other responsibilities.
- Aware of what is happening in the community. With a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.
- Optimist. Someone who sees opportunities and figures out how to make the most of them. (2)
- We need someone who will measure the success of the church based on our unique place. See the uniqueness of this church, not someone who will try to turn us into something we are not.
- Someone good at thinking outside of the box.
- Someone who is connected to the community before they come on staff.
- Someone who visits.
- Someone who has boundaries with their time and does not micromanage. Is clear about what is their work and is able to trust others.

##### Specific Titles/Roles of Future Staff

- Childrens Minister (4)
- Youth Minister (4)
- Senior Adult Minister (3)
- Youth, children and young families (5)
- Associate Administrative Pastor/Church coordinator/Administrative assistant - someone to help others know how to navigate the church, plug people into volunteering and someone to help organize Sonny's work (7)
- Communications/Marketing and Branding (6)

- Missions and Community Minister (6)
- Counseling minister
- Music Minister

### ***My Recommendations for Future Staff***

While Linda's name was mentioned, and pieces of her former work were suggested, most seemed to understand that this new hire presents an opportunity for the church to move in some new directions.

The next hire should be someone who understands the life of Central Baptist, celebrates it but also wants to help move it into the future with new ideas and energy. I think more important than anything else, new staff needs to love and get to know the church. I would also suggest that the church throw their support completely behind new staff and show love and respect to them.

As you may have noticed in the description, there are conflicting desires to have someone who is busy visiting and caring for the people in the church, someone who is not too busy with what happens outside the church and others who want someone who is out in the community, meeting with movers and shakers and wanting the church to be the beacon in the community. While my staff suggestions address some of these issues, church members will need to reconcile that staff cannot do everything and be everything to all people.

Multiple groups mentioned that they wanted someone with experience, someone that would stay longer and who was looking for a church to invest in for a longer period of time. You will need to use your financial resources as an investment to create a higher paid position to make this a reality.

#### Possible Configurations for Future Staff:

- A. Hire Two Full Time Ministerial Staff - While this would be a larger financial investment, it would allow all of the areas of concern to be addressed, including focusing on ministries in the community while addressing needs inside the church.
  1. Associate Pastor for Youth and Community Outreach
    - Responsibilities in missions, ministries and relationships with the community and neighborhood. They would help the church know what the needs are and connect those within the community back to the church.
    - Responsibilities leading the youth ministry.
    - Join other associate staff person in connecting with young families in the church and community.
  2. Associate Pastor for Communications, Technology and Administration
    - Provide organization and structure to the ministry and work of the church and other ministers.
    - Provide support and direction for the volunteers in the children's and senior adult ministry. There are already effective leaders in these areas that could benefit from support and organization.
    - Develop a communication strategy, utilizing technology, within the church and to reach out to the community.
    - Develop partnerships for using the facilities with businesses and non profits and manage those relationships and their use of the building.
- B. Hire a Full Time Minister and One Part Time Administrative Assistant - The work of this administrative/pastoral assistant would be to specifically help organize and prioritize the work

of the ministers. It would help to free up your current pastor to do more work in the community and provide infrastructure for that work.

1. Full Time Associate Pastor for Outreach

- Lead the youth ministry
- Provide direction for children's and senior adult ministry volunteers
- Work with the pastor to lead outreach into the community.

2. Part Time Administrative Assistant

- Work specifically with organizing the work of the pastor and associate pastor.
- Take on specific tasks from other secretary/administrative staff to provide organization and structure for the work of the church.

C. Hire a Part Time Senior Adult Minister -

Multiple people also made this suggestion and it could be done in tandem with either of the first two proposed ideas. Some suggested just embracing that this was a "senior adult church" and hire and plan for that. I do think this is a strong older adult church that can have a vibrant outreach and programming for older adults but do not think the church has to only be that. It can be a both/and church. There are strong volunteers already leading this ministry that could continue doing a wonderful job with staff support. This could be a part time position filled by an older adult, even one who had connections in the community, maybe even someone from First Baptist. They could plan events, coordinate ministries with older adults in the community and help with visiting.

I know there have been discussions for starting multiple worship services. If you hired one or two associates, and/or a senior adult minister, each one could be assigned to be the "minister" of each worship service. Multi-site congregations have campus pastors that meet the primary needs, outreach and care of the people at the individual sites, while the main pastor provides overall direction and guidance. This would be a similar model where the pastor would still preach, provide overall oversight to the worship planning and the ministries of the church, but each minister would have responsibilities of knowing and caring for the people in each worship service. You could also assign some of the retired ministers in your congregation to take on this task.

**5. Is there anything you need to share with me that you haven't?**

- We have a lot of division in the church over music. Resolving that could be key for moving forward.
- What could we offer to the people of the community. Showers, clothing, etc. Need to be reaching all of the people, not just the glamorous.
- There have been a lot of ideas we have not been able to follow through on. Ideas like providing transportation, a community garden, helping ministry, etc.
- There is concern from those who have visited or that we have invited about the appearance of the church, especially the outside, and the safety of the area the church is in.
- The church had a purpose in the past with its work with alcoholics anonymous. We don't have a central purpose we rally around.
- As a church we need to support the minister that we hired. We have a spirit of critique that can be hurtful.

***Other Items to Address by Consultant***

Central Baptist was built on a bold community that left First Baptist Church. Through the earliest leadership of the first pastors, their charismatic and bold ministry in the community, the church thrived. This church openly welcomed those struggling with addiction in a time where most would not talk about it. Boldness is in the original DNA of your church and has drawn people to your church through the years.

Along the way, the loss of people that came from the church splits along with the fact that church is not the center of the community the way it once was, not just Central Baptist but all churches, seems to have paralyzed the church in moving forward with that same level of boldness. There is a small percentage of your church that does not agree with moving forward with the mission statement and embracing your identity within the community. This group was vocal in some sessions. Overall though more people are just nervous. This is a politically 8 divisive time and it is easy for that divisive spirit to enter the church. While I believe the shadow of Hal has been around too long, I think it might be helpful to take on his feisty spirit in stepping into new possibilities.

I heard many times that Central was a dying church and unsure of where to go next. I believe you have strong voices that are telling you where to go next and people that deeply love each other, you just have to rest in the love and choose to trust the voices of your leaders that have vision for what an effective, growing church can look like today. You are uniquely positioned now, with a unique history and if you embrace who you are, anything is possible.

I did hear concern about the performance or use of time for some of the current staff and those have been shared personally.

I would also recommend further consulting in the future around the polity and lay leadership structure of the church. I heard in multiple groups about the difficulty in filling all of the leadership roles and heard challenges around communication with new leadership positions that have been created. Many churches that hire new staff whose roles are intended to mobilize the church and use their gifts in more effective ways, find their current structure and constitution do not permit them to make the changes they would like. As you seek to be nimble in the future, create new possibilities and position yourself for growth, it would be helpful to walk through your current lay leadership and evaluate roles, committees, structures, etc. for the future.

**6. Go around the room—what is a word or phrase that expresses your hope for Central**

Deliverance, embraces the present and present needs, will be here twenty years from now as an active church, moving forward

Mission trips, more advertising/communication, thinking strategically about what we are inviting people to, being willing to let things go

The people and the staff that are here have so much to offer that makes life better. I wish we could make that more available to other people. Church provides something meaningful that spreads out into other areas of peoples lives, would like more people to have that.

revitalized, honor the past but move out from under the shadow of the past, adapting to change, younger voices in helping to shape the future

Young families and children, growth

survival, growth, community beacon, relevant, stability, cohesion, everyone getting behind it and pulling together for a purpose, kindness, no putting people down or leaving them out, being open to new people coming in and making them really part of the community

excitement, survival, potential



hope, acceptance, that we come together, growing and blossoming and becoming, because God is alive we have hope, comfort for people that come here, community advocates for Christ, actions speak louder than words, we show kindness and appreciation for people in the community

God's presence among us is something we have to hang on to even through our current discouraging times. Our core group is our family. We are here. You have to trust in God. God is still working....just look at the playground. All do as much as we can to spread positivity and not focus on how it was or how we think it should be. Reaching out to people we don't know as well.

Come alive, fill the well, don't worry about the politics, growing disciples, pass the word the younger generations, let's get reckless