

Deacon Recommendation

Summary Transcript

Bonnie: This past Sunday, we announced the recommendation of our deacon body for our Sunday morning worship schedule. We feel that it is important for you to understand the process we took to arrive at this recommendation. It was certainly not an arbitrary decision or a decision that we arrived at lightly. I've asked Steven to give us a little background history.

Steven: In the summer of 2019, Bill Hardee knew that retirement was on the horizon. He was looking at the trends present in our church at that time. As a result, he asked the ministerial staff to look at our current Sunday schedule to see whether we could possibly function without replacing his position.

The five associate ministers met multiple times to brainstorm, evaluate, narrow down, and ultimately land on four possible options: staggering morning services (one Sunday school or multiple Sunday schools); using technology to broadcast the sermon to another location or service (either live or prerecorded); altering the order of worship with a sermon at the beginning of one service and at the end of the other); or combining all services into one and splitting the preaching responsibilities among our existing staff.

We narrowed those ideas down to four possibilities that we felt were consistent with our understanding of the church values and the calling of our current staff. Bill shared these suggestions with our incoming deacon chair, Bonnie Brown, when he retired in January of 2020.

March 13, 2020 flipped everything on its head when we had to move to a combined (blended), broadcast service as a result of COVID.

When we returned to in-person worship on July 5, 2020, we held worship services at 9:30 am and 11:00 am based on feedback from the congregation. The majority

of individuals did not like a combined service. Instead, they wanted to retain the unique character of their respective services: traditional and contemporary.

At that time, holding a Chapel service was not feasible as we remained committed to following the CDC guidelines for physical distancing. The Chapel would not accommodate a physically-distanced service.

The proposed schedule allowed us to function with our existing staff for that time. Then, the Search Committee met with the ministerial staff to talk about needs and to give the ministers a chance to discuss their sense of calling. This led the committee to the conclusion that we could not function with only our existing staff.

We needed to be looking for an additional minister at First Baptist Griffin. In order to begin that process, the Associate Pastor Search Committee needed more information. They released a survey in November/December 2020. From that survey, we learned a lot of things: one of the most commented-on areas was the desire for the senior pastor to present in all services. The survey also highlighted current strengths and weaknesses in our church. Our named strengths included:

- relationships/family/and a sense of belonging;
- options for worship, meaning our traditional and contemporary services;
- our leadership, particularly the ministers and deacons; and
- our online presence during the pandemic.

The survey revealed our growth areas to be as follows:

- building relationships as we come back together for worship, small groups, and service opportunities;
- building our children's, youth, young adult and small group ministries as many of these were suspended during the pandemic;
- doing better in-reach through pastoral care and outreach through missions; and finally,
- questions were raised concerning the need for an additional minister. If a minister were hired, would that role need to be focused on preaching, pastoral care, and small group discipleship?

The Search Committee realized that the implications of the survey reached beyond the scope of their committee. They reached out to church leadership for help. Their request launched more focused conversations on the Sunday worship schedule to help the search committee with direction for filling this new position.

These conversations took the form of listening sessions. In the first Listening Session in February of 2021, the committee focused on clarifying values of the congregation. We talked about the importance of answering “Why we do the things we do” as much as “What do we do?” This effort was an attempt to understand the motivations, priorities, and values that led to where we were.

For the second Listening Session, we used the feedback we received from the first Listening Session to propose a set of Values, which we introduced to the congregation. In addition to the values, we introduced three possible solutions to our Sunday schedule that we felt were consistent with the values the congregation had expressed. Following this session, the feedback we received indicated that the church was not ready to make a decision—there were too many unknowns.

We had a couple of guiding priorities:

1. We needed to get back to Sunday school.
2. We knew that we would be displaced from our sanctuary over the summer for repairs.
3. We needed time to hear from the congregation.

In March, the church voted on an interim plan that would last six months, from April through September. During that time, the church would hold worship services at 9:00 am for Celebration; 10:15 am for Sunday school; and 11:15 am for Connexion.

Bonnie and Steven offered to meet with any small group or Sunday school class to hear feedback, which happened on a couple of occasions. Steven met with a small group for informal discussion around issues related to lessons we had learned from

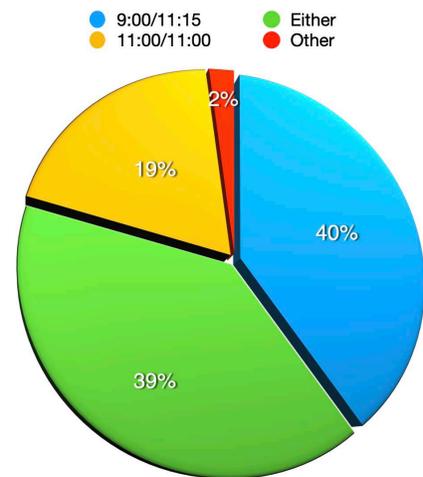
a year of pandemic. The deacons devoted much of their meetings for May, July, and August to these questions, and then reported on feedback they received from the congregation. The Search Committee’s work was officially “on hold” during this time.

All of this intentional effort led us to the belief that, although we differed in our scheduling preferences, the vast majority of our congregation was committed to similar goals and values. There was a sense of unity in all of the feedback about where we were headed and, at least, a consensus about what was important to us as a church.

Therefore, we formulated a method to get formal feedback that would give EVERY member a voice during the August 29, 2021 church conference. We tabulated the results so that no one got more than one vote—meaning everyone’s input counted once. The deacons analyzed this data in their September 13th meeting and came up with the recommendation that has been presented to the congregation.

Bonnie: Let me summarize the feedback we received from the church conference.

- 40% of the responders voted for the current model, which is 9:00 am Celebration and 11:15 am Connexion.
- 39% of the responders said they would be fine either way.
- 19% of the responders voted for the pre-Covid model, which is two 11:00 am services.
- 2% of the responders indicated a different “write-in” vote.



The top two priorities that led people to those decisions were identified as: (1) a strong desire to have the Senior Pastor to preach in both services, and (2) to focus on the unity of our congregation.

The open-ended comments we received largely reinforced the votes, focusing mainly on the desire to have the Senior pastor preach in both services and a need for flexibility in order to focus on unity in the congregation.

Taking all of this information into consideration, the deacons voted to recommend that we continue the current model of two, staggered services— the Celebration service at 9:00 am and the Connexion service at 11:15 am. We believe that one Sunday school at 10:15 am is a better option for our church as well.

First Baptist will have a called Church Conference on October 3 at the end of each service for the purpose of voting to affirm the deacons' recommendation. Thank you so much for your participation, prayers, and support as we have sought to navigate this difficult time in the life of our church.