

THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

**A Brief Explanation about what's going on at
First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia
by
Dr. Ron Higdon, Intentional Interim Minister**

This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
- 2. What is the Transition Team and what does it do?**
- 3. Why can't we just establish the Pastor Search Committee now?**
- 4. Why are we waiting until August to begin the self-study?**
- 5. How is this self-study different from other self-studies?**
- 6. How will our study sessions be structured?**
- 7. What are some of the topics for our sessions?**
- 8. What areas will the self-study include?**
- 9. What do I expect from the congregation during this interim?**

1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

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What I am really describing is what church should be like anyway! We are talking about a sense of real community and caring. A part of what is attempted during the interim is to remind a congregation of what we know we are like at our best and to help this to become what we are like most of the time.

What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

2. WHAT IS THE TRANSITION TEAM AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

The first business of the team is to become a team. Before the self-study begins, we will be sharing our stories with one another, discussing the principles on which we will operate, establishing boundaries, and, most important, establishing an environment of trust.

We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

You need to know that the Transition Team will keep information flowing to the congregation and will make reports on a regular basis.

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By the time the Transition Team is selected and training sessions are completed, we will be at the beginning of summer. Summer schedules do not lend themselves to the kind of regular attendance required for a truly representative self-study.

We do plan to have some special events during the summer months and expanded opportunities for Sunday School studies. It will not be a time for "business as usual" but a period of preparation to get us ready for the challenge of our five developmental tasks (explained later in this brochure).

5. HOW IS THIS SELF-STUDY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SELF-STUDIES?

Many people have been through self-studies in a university or business setting. This is a different kind of self-study. Two words you will hear repeatedly are these: relationships and process. When asked what kind of a theology I have, my response is always the same: "I have a relational theology." I believe Jesus' ministry had everything to do with bringing people into a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with other people. When asked about

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Biblically, faith is ALWAYS about relationships: my relationship with God and my relationship with other people. These two cannot be separated. The self-study is based on “family systems,” a concept familiar to many of you. Many congregations fail to understand themselves and what is going on because they want to quickly find out what the “problem” is and then decide who is to blame and how to “fix” it. In systems thinking (as with relational theology), we look at the situation as a whole, we do not look at isolated parts.

Many people are totally unaware of how much baggage they carry around that influences their feelings and responses to current situations. All too often, past frustrations, disappointments, hurt, etc. play a major role in what is currently happening at church.

Psychologist Edgar Jackson says, “We are dealing with process, not substance.” And to quote Peter Steinke: “In a systems approach, we look at the health of a congregation as a process. Health is not a state or a thing. Health is a manifestation of processes, many hidden yet real.” (We will be using Steinke’s book *Healthy Congregations* as a part of our self-study.)

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8. WHAT AREAS WILL THE SELF-STUDY INCLUDE?

The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

Coming to Terms With History:

The congregation takes an objective look at the church’s history and allows that review to become a platform on which to move forward into the future.

Major issues include: exploring in an open manner the total history of the congregation; learning from previous “watershed” events (both highs and lows) in the life of the church (admitting what has not worked and honoring and celebrating what the church has accomplished); deciding what is important from the past that needs to be carried into the future and what “excess baggage” should be left behind; encouraging an appropriate expression of feelings about the past that allows for grieving, accepting, and moving on.

Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns:

In this task there is an open discussion about how things are done in the life of the congregation (both written and unwritten “rules”).

Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

Looking at Denominational and External Relationships:

This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

Clarifying the Congregation's Identity:

The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

A Commitment to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future:

All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Major issues include: developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future; finalizing the narrative for the church profile; developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor); advising the church that it is time to establish the Pastor Search Committee; assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans.

9. WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM THE CONGREGATION DURING THIS INTERIM?

This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

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This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

Clarifying the Congregation's Identity:

The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

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All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Major issues include: developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future; finalizing the narrative for the church profile; developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor); advising the church that it is time to establish the Pastor Search Committee; assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans.

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This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

**A Brief Explanation about what's going on at
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by
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This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
- 2. What is the Transition Team and what does it do?**
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1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

A major problem in most congregations is that the real discussion of major issues most often occurs in the parking lot after a business meeting, in telephone conversations, or in small informal gatherings away from the church. These discussions usually begin with the phrase, “What I really wanted to say.....” It takes time and trust and a lot of examples to create a place in which people are no longer afraid to enter into honest and open dialogue.

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What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

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The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

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We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

You need to know that the Transition Team will keep information flowing to the congregation and will make reports on a regular basis.

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Many people have been through self-studies in a university or business setting. This is a different kind of self-study. Two words you will hear repeatedly are these: relationships and process. When asked what kind of a theology I have, my response is always the same: "I have a relational theology." I believe Jesus' ministry had everything to do with bringing people into a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with other people. When asked about

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Many people are totally unaware of how much baggage they carry around that influences their feelings and responses to current situations. All too often, past frustrations, disappointments, hurt, etc. play a major role in what is currently happening at church.

Psychologist Edgar Jackson says, “We are dealing with process, not substance.” And to quote Peter Steinke: “In a systems approach, we look at the health of a congregation as a process. Health is not a state or a thing. Health is a manifestation of processes, many hidden yet real.” (We will be using Steinke’s book *Healthy Congregations* as a part of our self-study.)

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5. A workshop on listening. Note: If you have the gift of listening you have a priceless gift. Point to ponder: we can all learn how to be better listeners.
6. A workshop on the core rules of dialogue. I can think of many radio and TV personalities I would like to invite to this session, however....
7. A discussion of the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy congregations. (With much that applies to healthy and unhealthy “spiritual” lives.)
8. Ten actions that keep a church on the side of growth.
9. A workshop on forgiveness. Forgiveness both of others and ourselves (and, maybe, even God).
10. Congregational mega trends. (Some of these will surprise you).
11. A workshop on how your church family works.
12. Generational trends and differences.
13. Handling conflict with maturity – or at least making progress in that direction.
14. Our Baptist tradition – with an emphasis on things worth preserving and of which to be proud.
15. Ten perils in pastoral ministry. (You’re surprised I can limit it to 10!)
16. My suggestions of some things to keep in mind as a new pastor begins his ministry at First Baptist.
17. Other workshops and special sessions as the need arises and requests are made.

8. WHAT AREAS WILL THE SELF-STUDY INCLUDE?

The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

Coming to Terms With History:

The congregation takes an objective look at the church’s history and allows that review to become a platform on which to move forward into the future.

Major issues include: exploring in an open manner the total history of the congregation; learning from previous “watershed” events (both highs and lows) in the life of the church (admitting what has not worked and honoring and celebrating what the church has accomplished); deciding what is important from the past that needs to be carried into the future and what “excess baggage” should be left behind; encouraging an appropriate expression of feelings about the past that allows for grieving, accepting, and moving on.

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The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

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The congregation takes an objective look at the church’s history and allows that review to become a platform on which to move forward into the future.

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In this task there is an open discussion about how things are done in the life of the congregation (both written and unwritten “rules”).

Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

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This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

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The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

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All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

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This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

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This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this "information age," there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
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What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

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The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

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We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

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My basic philosophy about ministry has always been that I needed to be in a place that was a good "fit." There have been times when a committee decided and times when I decided that it just wouldn't "work"; I just wasn't going to be the right person for that situation. I often remind people that if you are single and your goal is simply to get married, you can do that almost immediately. On the other hand, if you are seeking someone who can be a true soul-mate, someone with whom you want to spend the rest of your life that is another matter.

Calling a new pastor is an awesome responsibility—if you mean having the person who is uniquely suited to a particular congregation and willing to make a full investment with knowledge, understanding, compassion and commitment to the uniqueness of a place and people. The big plus of an intentional interim is that the new pastor will know that this congregation has done its homework and will have a notebook of material that gives the results of the self-study. This will certainly provide a much better understanding of the congregation, the opportunities, and the challenges that are to be faced. There will be far fewer surprises in the early months of ministry.

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We do plan to have some special events during the summer months and expanded opportunities for Sunday School studies. It will not be a time for "business as usual" but a period of preparation to get us ready for the challenge of our five developmental tasks (explained later in this brochure).

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Many people have been through self-studies in a university or business setting. This is a different kind of self-study. Two words you will hear repeatedly are these: relationships and process. When asked what kind of a theology I have, my response is always the same: "I have a relational theology." I believe Jesus' ministry had everything to do with bringing people into a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with other people. When asked about

the most important commandment, he was the first to join together two portions of Hebrew scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18): “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

Biblically, faith is ALWAYS about relationships: my relationship with God and my relationship with other people. These two cannot be separated. The self-study is based on “family systems,” a concept familiar to many of you. Many congregations fail to understand themselves and what is going on because they want to quickly find out what the “problem” is and then decide who is to blame and how to “fix” it. In systems thinking (as with relational theology), we look at the situation as a whole, we do not look at isolated parts.

Many people are totally unaware of how much baggage they carry around that influences their feelings and responses to current situations. All too often, past frustrations, disappointments, hurt, etc. play a major role in what is currently happening at church.

Psychologist Edgar Jackson says, “We are dealing with process, not substance.” And to quote Peter Steinke: “In a systems approach, we look at the health of a congregation as a process. Health is not a state or a thing. Health is a manifestation of processes, many hidden yet real.” (We will be using Steinke’s book *Healthy Congregations* as a part of our self-study.)

What all this basically means is that we will be talking about issues, models, and processes that apply to ALL relationships that apply to all of life, that apply to our Christian pilgrimage, our spiritual journeys. We will not simply be talking about “churchly” concerns.

6. HOW WILL OUR STUDY SESSIONS BE STRUCTURED?

Almost all of our sessions will be held in Fellowship Hall with eight persons at each table. I will make a basic presentation and then each table will be asked to discuss questions based on the presentation. A reporter from each table will give an oral report of discussion highlights and these reports will be assimilated into printed copies and made available the next week (not only to the participants but to any members of the congregation who want one).

These sessions will be informal and this is the one setting in which I never feel I have to hold back! This is the time and place to bring “parking lot dialogue” and “telephone whispers” out into a safe place for open discussion. Note: No one will ever be called on or asked to respond to any question or issue. All responses are totally voluntary.

7. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TOPICS FOR OUR SESSIONS?

Since the Transition Team has not yet been formed, I can give you only a few of the things I’m certain will be a part of the study. (Except for the first two, these are not necessarily listed in order of presentation.).

1. Our first session will be an introduction to all we will be doing during the course of our self-study and will provide a unique opportunity for an “open forum” with questions freely received and mostly answered!
2. Our second session will be a presentation of “The Role Renegotiation Model.” This is one of the best models I have ever seen for establishing and maintaining healthy relationships of all kinds—whether in marriage, friendship, school, work, or church. My only regret is that I didn’t have this model fifty years ago.
3. A workshop on anger. This is not about how to stifle or deny anger, but how to see it as a normal part of life and relationships. What to do with it. How to profit from it.

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The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

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Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

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The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

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All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

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This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

**A Brief Explanation about what's going on at
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by
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This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
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1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

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What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

2. WHAT IS THE TRANSITION TEAM AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

The first business of the team is to become a team. Before the self-study begins, we will be sharing our stories with one another, discussing the principles on which we will operate, establishing boundaries, and, most important, establishing an environment of trust.

We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

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I hardly know how to answer this question without saying some things that are going to sound rather shocking to most people in the congregation. But, here we go.

The basic assumption of most people is that whatever problems there are in the church (and most people usually contend there are none) will be solved by the new pastor (who is usually totally unaware of the REAL problems until the moving van has been unloaded). I always remind congregations that the reason obvious problems need to be dealt with before the new pastor comes is that the new pastor's arrival will help create NEW problems.

Another assumption made by many in a congregation is that the new minister will bring a "vision" for the church; I contend it must be a shared vision. I don't know about you, but it has always been difficult for me to buy into someone else's vision, program, etc. in which I had little or no investment. A real problem with this approach is: how can a pastor bring a vision to a congregation and community with limited understanding of either one? When a church has a basic understanding of what they believe God has called them to do and what they believe God has called them to be, THEN they can call a minister who will help them achieve their vision. There will certainly be new developments and approaches, but at least some basic things will have been settled BEFORE a new minister is called.

My basic philosophy about ministry has always been that I needed to be in a place that was a good "fit." There have been times when a committee decided and times when I decided that it just wouldn't "work"; I just wasn't going to be the right person for that situation. I often remind people that if you are single and your goal is simply to get married, you can do that almost immediately. On the other hand, if you are seeking someone who can be a true soul-mate, someone with whom you want to spend the rest of your life that is another matter.

Calling a new pastor is an awesome responsibility—if you mean having the person who is uniquely suited to a particular congregation and willing to make a full investment with knowledge, understanding, compassion and commitment to the uniqueness of a place and people. The big plus of an intentional interim is that the new pastor will know that this congregation has done its homework and will have a notebook of material that gives the results of the self-study. This will certainly provide a much better understanding of the congregation, the opportunities, and the challenges that are to be faced. There will be far fewer surprises in the early months of ministry.

4. WHY ARE WE WAITING UNTIL AUGUST TO BEGIN THE SELF-STUDY?

By the time the Transition Team is selected and training sessions are completed, we will be at the beginning of summer. Summer schedules do not lend themselves to the kind of regular attendance required for a truly representative self-study.

We do plan to have some special events during the summer months and expanded opportunities for Sunday School studies. It will not be a time for "business as usual" but a period of preparation to get us ready for the challenge of our five developmental tasks (explained later in this brochure).

5. HOW IS THIS SELF-STUDY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SELF-STUDIES?

Many people have been through self-studies in a university or business setting. This is a different kind of self-study. Two words you will hear repeatedly are these: relationships and process. When asked what kind of a theology I have, my response is always the same: "I have a relational theology." I believe Jesus' ministry had everything to do with bringing people into a healthy relationship with God and a healthy relationship with other people. When asked about

the most important commandment, he was the first to join together two portions of Hebrew scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18): “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

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The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

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Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

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The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

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All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Major issues include: developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future; finalizing the narrative for the church profile; developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor); advising the church that it is time to establish the Pastor Search Committee; assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans.

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This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

A Brief Explanation about what's going on at First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia by Dr. Ron Higdon, Intentional Interim Minister

This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
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1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

A major problem in most congregations is that the real discussion of major issues most often occurs in the parking lot after a business meeting, in telephone conversations, or in small informal gatherings away from the church. These discussions usually begin with the phrase, “What I really wanted to say.....” It takes time and trust and a lot of examples to create a place in which people are no longer afraid to enter into honest and open dialogue.

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What I am really describing is what church should be like anyway! We are talking about a sense of real community and caring. A part of what is attempted during the interim is to remind a congregation of what we know we are like at our best and to help this to become what we are like most of the time.

What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

2. WHAT IS THE TRANSITION TEAM AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

The first business of the team is to become a team. Before the self-study begins, we will be sharing our stories with one another, discussing the principles on which we will operate, establishing boundaries, and, most important, establishing an environment of trust.

We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

You need to know that the Transition Team will keep information flowing to the congregation and will make reports on a regular basis.

3. WHY CAN'T WE JUST ESTABLISH THE PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE NOW?

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The self-study deals with five Developmental Tasks: (1) Coming to Terms With History; (2) Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns; (3) Looking at Denominational and External Relationships; (4) Clarifying the Congregation’s Identity; and (5) Committing to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future.

The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

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The congregation takes an objective look at the church’s history and allows that review to become a platform on which to move forward into the future.

Major issues include: exploring in an open manner the total history of the congregation; learning from previous “watershed” events (both highs and lows) in the life of the church (admitting what has not worked and honoring and celebrating what the church has accomplished); deciding what is important from the past that needs to be carried into the future and what “excess baggage” should be left behind; encouraging an appropriate expression of feelings about the past that allows for grieving, accepting, and moving on.

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In this task there is an open discussion about how things are done in the life of the congregation (both written and unwritten “rules”).

Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

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This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

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The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

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This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

Ron Higdon

THE INTENTIONAL INTERIM, THE TRANSITION TEAM, THE SELF-STUDY

A Brief Explanation about what's going on at First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia by Dr. Ron Higdon, Intentional Interim Minister

This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

Here are some questions we will be exploring in this brochure:

- 1. What are we attempting to create?**
- 2. What is the Transition Team and what does it do?**
- 3. Why can't we just establish the Pastor Search Committee now?**
- 4. Why are we waiting until August to begin the self-study?**
- 5. How is this self-study different from other self-studies?**
- 6. How will our study sessions be structured?**
- 7. What are some of the topics for our sessions?**
- 8. What areas will the self-study include?**
- 9. What do I expect from the congregation during this interim?**

1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

A major problem in most congregations is that the real discussion of major issues most often occurs in the parking lot after a business meeting, in telephone conversations, or in small informal gatherings away from the church. These discussions usually begin with the phrase, “What I really wanted to say.....” It takes time and trust and a lot of examples to create a place in which people are no longer afraid to enter into honest and open dialogue.

How is this achieved? A part of the reason this can be accomplished is that if I need to act as referee in order to keep the discussion on target, I can do it. We don't chase rabbits

unrelated to our subject for the hour. If I ever need to remind us of our ground rules and boundaries, I can do it. We accept as a legitimate feeling whatever is expressed; we listen to points of view other than our own; no one is ever allowed a “put down” rebuttal; everyone is given respect (no one will ever feel like Rodney Dangerfield with his famous line, “I get no respect!”). in telephone conversations, or in small informal gatherings away from the church. These discussions usually begin with the phrase, “What I really wanted to say....” It takes time and trust and a lot of examples to create a place in which people are no longer afraid to enter into honest and open dialogue.

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We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

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**A Brief Explanation about what's going on at
First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia
by
Dr. Ron Higdon, Intentional Interim Minister**

This is my fourth intentional interim position and one of the many things I have learned is that there can never be too much information given about the intentional interim. As with everything in this “information age,” there always is a great deal of misunderstanding. With all our ways to communicate we seem to be less effective than ever in making ourselves clearly understood. This brochure is an attempt to outline the basic philosophy and procedures we will follow and the basic justifications for doing so. If you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to call me. Note: In this brochure, IIM is the abbreviation for Intentional Interim Minister.

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- 2. What is the Transition Team and what does it do?**
- 3. Why can't we just establish the Pastor Search Committee now?**
- 4. Why are we waiting until August to begin the self-study?**
- 5. How is this self-study different from other self-studies?**
- 6. How will our study sessions be structured?**
- 7. What are some of the topics for our sessions?**
- 8. What areas will the self-study include?**
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1. WHAT ARE WE ATTEMPTING TO CREATE?

One of our goals is to create an atmosphere in which people are able to express freely what they think and how they feel. We want all of our sessions to be “safe” places for the exchange of ideas. A key to the achievement of this goal is the role of the IIM as a “non-anxious presence.” An interim is able to be far less anxious than an installed pastor because there is so much less at stake. (This probably doesn't need any further explanation!)

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What surprises most people about our self-study sessions is how much they enjoy them. I think in large measure this is because people are assured they do not have to leave their real selves, real feelings, or their minds at home.

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The Transition Team is a group of twelve persons, representative of the congregation, who work with the IIM and assist in guiding the process of the self-study. The serious business of this team and the level of commitment required are indicated by the brief Commissioning Service and the public signing of a covenant agreement that will be a part of our worship service on April 27.

The first business of the team is to become a team. Before the self-study begins, we will be sharing our stories with one another, discussing the principles on which we will operate, establishing boundaries, and, most important, establishing an environment of trust.

We work together to decide the schedule and content for the self-study. It is the team that recommends to the church when it is time to begin forming the Pastor Search Committee. (More about this later.)

Everything we do will be evaluated. I never cease to be amazed at how little evaluation there is in the life and ministry of the average church. This may be because most evaluation is seen as “criticism” and no one wants to be critical (at least not publicly!). Evaluation will be one of our most valuable tools. We will be asking the basic questions: What did we learn? What did we like best about what we did? What would we do differently next time?

Will there be any “mistakes” or “failures”? (These words always need to be taken out of the box.) Yes! If there are not, it means we’re not doing our job. It means we’re being too safe and not asking enough of the right questions. Big sidebar: whenever someone whispers in my ear, “This is something we just can’t discuss,” I immediately know it’s something we have to discuss. (Of course, it must be done in a safe context with all the homework done and security guidelines in place.)

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8. WHAT AREAS WILL THE SELF-STUDY INCLUDE?

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The Transition Team will determine which activities will best help FBC obtain the greatest benefits from each of these tasks. They will also determine how much time to allot to each one. I want to briefly describe each of these tasks:

Coming to Terms With History:

The congregation takes an objective look at the church’s history and allows that review to become a platform on which to move forward into the future.

Major issues include: exploring in an open manner the total history of the congregation; learning from previous “watershed” events (both highs and lows) in the life of the church (admitting what has not worked and honoring and celebrating what the church has accomplished); deciding what is important from the past that needs to be carried into the future and what “excess baggage” should be left behind; encouraging an appropriate expression of feelings about the past that allows for grieving, accepting, and moving on.

Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns:

In this task there is an open discussion about how things are done in the life of the congregation (both written and unwritten “rules”).

Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

Looking at Denominational and External Relationships:

This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

Clarifying the Congregation's Identity:

The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

A Commitment to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future:

All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Major issues include: developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future; finalizing the narrative for the church profile; developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor); advising the church that it is time to establish the Pastor Search Committee; assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans.

9. WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM THE CONGREGATION DURING THIS INTERIM?

This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

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Examining Leadership and Decision-Making Concerns:

In this task there is an open discussion about how things are done in the life of the congregation (both written and unwritten “rules”).

Major issues include: learning about healthy, realistic, and open decision-making processes and structures; considering expanding the methods by which the congregation makes decisions; creating an atmosphere that honors and maximizes the opportunities of diversity in the congregation; updating governing church documents; recognizing power and control of decisions and directions of the congregation; looking at professional staffing needs; managing conflicts in productive ways.

Looking at Denominational and External Relationships:

This is the opportunity for the church to examine the various relationships that the church has nurtured in its history. It is too often assumed that everyone fully understands these relationships.

Major issues include: clarifying the church's theological position; assessing commitments and involvement; becoming acquainted with external entities with which the congregation has ties.

Clarifying the Congregation's Identity:

The identity of a congregation refers to the special way in which this particular people live with their faith heritage. The interim provides an ideal opportunity for a congregation to take a fresh look at reality and ask the question, "Who are we?" versus "Who do we think we are?"

Major issues include: determining whether or not the congregation's image of itself is realistic; developing a new vision for the congregation; seeing the interim period as an opportunity for renewal and growth; helping the congregation see itself as an entity without a pastor, thus separating the church's identity from a pastor's personality and style.

A Commitment to New Pastoral Leadership and the Future:

All of the work done in the transition helps the congregation select a person who fits the pastoral needs for the next stage of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Major issues include: developing wide ownership of, and excitement about, the shared vision for the future; finalizing the narrative for the church profile; developing and finalizing the pastoral profile (setting clear expectations about the desired personal, professional, and leadership traits and skills of the new pastor); advising the church that it is time to establish the Pastor Search Committee; assuring meaningful installation and start-up plans.

9. WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM THE CONGREGATION DURING THIS INTERIM?

This will certainly sound very basic but it is absolutely essential to the success of our time together. I ask that you pray daily for all of us who are involved in leadership roles. I ask that you support by your attendance and financial contributions the life and ministry of FBC. I ask that you invite those you know who are looking for a church home to visit with us.

I am already extremely grateful that God led me to be a part of FBC. There is no doubt that my gratitude will only increase as we work creatively and productively in the months ahead. In advance, I thank you for all you will do to make this interim a time of new vision and hope in the life of FBC.

Ron Higdon