

Charting the Future of Fairburn Baptist Association

“My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.”
- Charles Kettering

You can never plan the future by the past. - Edmond Burke

What does it mean to chart the future?

It means taking control of your life and working toward a desired outcome. It is being proactive in planning, predicting, and guiding the course of events. It is shaping it rather than waiting passively for something to happen.

Howard Marks said, “We can’t predict the future, but we can influence it.”

It means assessing our current situation, knowing our destination, and then mapping out a path to the desired outcome.

This is charting the future.

To do this successfully, there are certain things we need for the journey:

We’ll need the right supplies.

We’ll need the right people to go with us.

We’ll need a map to chart the journey.

We’ll need a compass to tell us the direction to head.

We’ll need a sextant to show us our progress.

It really is a voyage into the future. A future to us that is yet unknown. Like a ship sailing to undiscovered lands.

300 years ago, sailing was a very dangerous prospect. Adventurers sailed on ships to places they had never been. They went to find riches. They went to start over. They went to find a better life. Trying to navigate the future of Fairburn Baptist Association for the next 10, 15 and 20 years may be as risky as sailing to an unknown land on an uncharted sea. There are so many variables; so many things can happen that we wouldn’t expect. Yet, like it or not, we are all in the same boat, pun intended. We are all sailing one way or another into the future.

We want you to catch a glimpse of three possible futures for our association. These futures come from a discipline called Strategic Foresight thinking.

The best way for us to pass on what we have been doing with Strategic Foresight thinking is to describe the Fairburn Baptist Association as a 17th century ship going on a journey. You will see our allegorical USS Fairburn travel on not one, but three journeys. These journeys mirror the

three possible futures of our association, whose outcomes will be greatly influenced by the wisdom, faith and actions of the captain, crew, and ship.

Before we look at each of these journeys, we want you to at least become familiar with some of the things we relied on for charting our course into the future.

One might compare some of our tools for Strategic Foresight to the tools used on a 17th Century ship.

- ❖ **The Compass** - The compass points north, providing a fixed direction. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ provides a spiritual direction and purpose. He is our North Star. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- ❖ **The Map** - A map provides a visual representation of a journey, including landmarks, routes, and potential obstacles. For us, our map is the Bible, the Word of God. From it, we know the direction we are to go. Proverbs 30:5 says, "Every word of God proves true." We are people of the way. Many churches have veered a degree or two off course. It is not noticeable at first but over time they can move off course enough to never find their true destination.
- ❖ **The Sextant** - A sextant is used to measure the altitude of celestial bodies, providing precise navigation. It shows us where we are in relation to our destination. While the compass provides direction, the sextant gives us information to determine our context. It helps us to answer questions like: Where are we now? How far do we have to go?

Foresight tools help us to determine our current context and where the waves of cultural change are going. A sextant for us was using the STEEPLES tool. This tool gives us eight categories of our society and the issues confronting us. **STEEPLES** is an acronym standing for: Social, Technology, Economic, Education, Political, Legal, Environment, and Spiritual. From these categories we discovered cultural drivers of change that affect our churches now and into the next twenty plus years. What follows are four important categories containing 10 cultural drivers of change affecting our churches.

➤ **Demographic shifts:**

- Increasing diversity: The region's demographics are projected to become more diverse, with growing Hispanic, Asian, and non-Christian populations. Churches will need to adapt to reach these new communities or risk declining membership.
- Generational changes: Younger generations tend to be less religiously affiliated and hold different values than older generations. Churches will need to find ways to attract and retain younger members without alienating older ones.
- Urbanization and suburbanization: Continued urbanization in Atlanta and suburbanization in Fayette and Coweta counties could impact church

attendance and community involvement. Churches may need to adjust their locations and outreach strategies accordingly.

➤ **Cultural and societal changes:**

- Secularization: The overall trend towards secularization in the United States could continue, impacting church membership and societal attitudes towards religion.
- Political polarization: The increasing political polarization in the US could spill over into religious communities, creating divisions within and between churches.
- Changes in social norms: Shifts in attitudes towards issues like LGBTQ+ rights and abortion could challenge traditional stances of many churches, leading to internal conflicts and potential membership losses. It is important for churches to teach on biblical sexuality and the creation of male and female by God, while engaging and dialoguing with opposing views in a truthful but loving way.

➤ **Technological advancements:**

- Rise of online communities: The growing popularity of online communities and virtual religious experiences could challenge the traditional role of brick-and-mortar churches.
- Use of technology for outreach and engagement: Churches that effectively utilize technology for outreach, communication, and worship could gain an advantage in reaching new audiences.

➤ **Internal factors:**

- Focus on biblical justice and outreach: Churches that actively engage in biblical justice issues while comparing and contrasting social justice issues along with community outreach could attract new members and strengthen their ties to the community and retain biblical integrity.
- Leadership and theological adaptation: The ability of church leadership to adapt to changing demographics, cultural norms, and theological landscapes will be crucial for their survival and growth. Churches that actively engage in developing strong biblical leadership will be able to handle the changing tides of culture and make adaptations in the church with integrity more effectively.

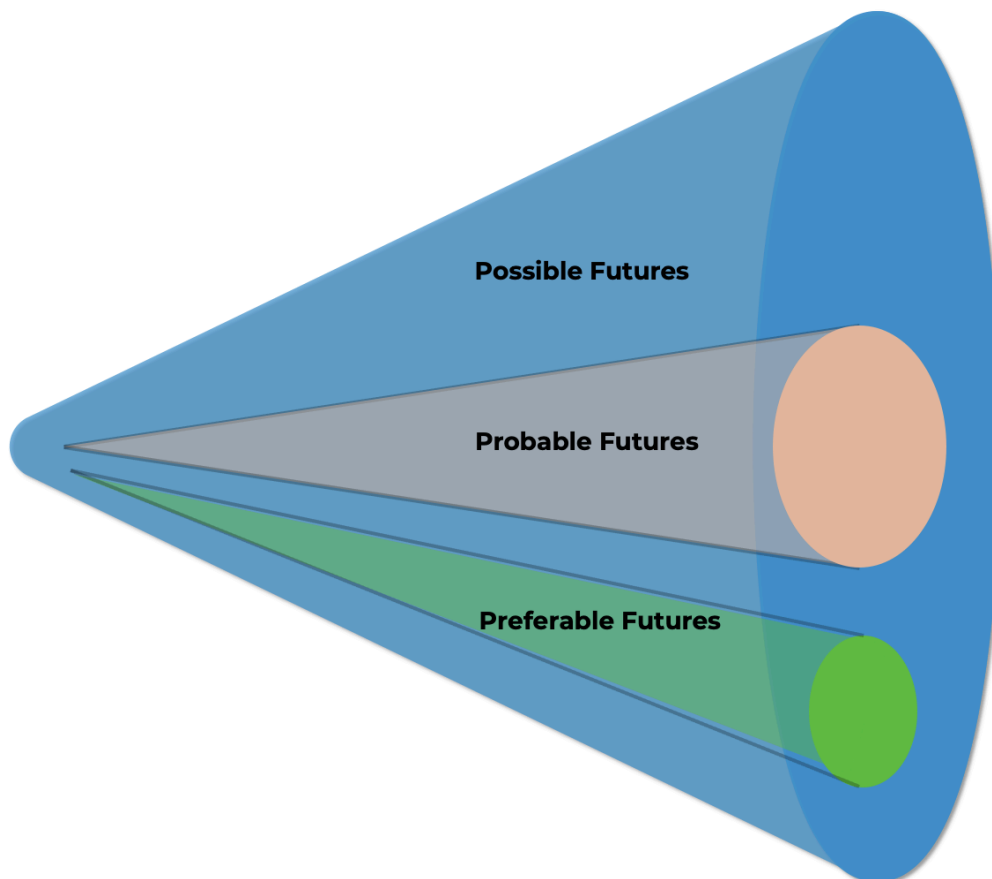
- ❖ **The Galley** - This is the heart of the ship. This is the source of strength and renewal of the crew. It is vital for a ship to have nutritious food for the crew to stay healthy and avoid sickness, scurvy, and poor morale. In using the foresight tool of a **Causal Layered Analysis** we discovered that our association's supplies are not as healthy as they could be.

In examining the association we discovered that while most of the congregations of FBA support the association financially, there is a significant ministry isolation among the churches. There is a lack of engagement and personal involvement in the association by its church leaders. There is also a history of decline and insufficient engagement by the churches for a unified effort in sharing the gospel of Christ in the area.

The solution would be to develop and implement a strategy for joint ministry engagement across the association in areas of discipleship, church leader multiplication, community impact and church multiplication.

Only the Lord himself truly knows the actual future of the Fairburn Baptist Association. However God has given us a hand in shaping that future. As we seek to chart the future, with the best information we have, we share what our 17 member task force saw as three potential futures. Whether or not these futures will be realized or not will be influenced by how the association responds to the challenges of this season and setting of its journey.

Of the three potential futures, one of these will likely become a reality. Again, as Howard Marks said, "We can't predict the future, but we can influence it." The three futures are labeled as: The Possible Future, The Probable Future, and the Preferable Future. Let's look at these more in depth.



The Possible Future is the one future no one wants. This represents the range of “possible futures” which encompasses the possible outcomes. Usually these are not what we want to happen. It is broad, like the broad road which leads to destruction. There are many who find it. It is the way of the mundane. This is what happens when forward thinking and vision are mis-directed. It is misdirected when vision is focused in the rear view mirror. It is trying to recreate the past by doing the same things over and over again, but with less results.

One of the traps this kind of thinking sets is this: Because the association has been around a long time, it will continue to be around a long time. History is littered with casualties of this kind of thinking. It causes us to believe we are riding high when in reality we are taking on water and beginning to sink.

The force of change and the storm of culture have made it evident that there must be a different adjustment in our trajectory. We need different ministries that will address the needs of people today while staying faithful to the historic mission and message of the Gospel of Christ.

This is the essence of the possible future. Things may go bad in so many directions. Because of this many become paralyzed and do not alter course but keep the same heading moving ever closer to their demise.

To sum it up: This possible future is characterized by decline and fragmentation. FBA is experiencing declining membership, financial instability, and a loss of influence.

All this has happened because the association failed to address the underlying challenges identified by the Strategic Foresight Workgroup and Task force. This will lead to increased isolation, competition, and irrelevance. While several of its churches struggle to survive, the association's capacity to support its members diminishes.

A second future is the **Probable Future**. It is a mixed bag of good and bad. Some course corrections in our association were tried and worked and others were tried and didn't work. Perhaps there was some growth in one area but a decline in another. Not everyone was on board. Some were and some weren't. In the end, the associational ministry will not move forward. The leaders, when considering doing something else, will come to the conclusion that nothing makes a difference. Why try anymore?

Out of this malaise, the leaders have stayed busy doing what they can do and what they can control. We may be a busy association. We do many things. But are we doing the right things that will move us ahead? Resources are reallocated to ineffective but controllable activities. A staleness has descended over Fairburn Baptist Association.

Where is the faith? When the people of Israel were about to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land, it was not until the priests stepped into the river that the waters departed. We may say we are waiting on God, but what if God is waiting on us? If we don't, He won't. It is true that Jesus

said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). It is also true that if we do nothing it will be without Him as well.

The overriding characteristic in this Probable Future of The Fairburn Baptist Association is stagnation and control. It has a mix of thriving and struggling churches. It does have a floating presence in the community, but faces challenges in reaching new demographics.

The last future is called a **Preferable Future**. It is a future that we hope all of us want to see more clearly as we journey on toward the horizon. It is one that gets better and brighter because of God’s grace and our labor in His name.

Instead of churches doing their own thing, we begin to partner for a greater impact for God’s greater kingdom. We identify the things that will move us ahead. We make it a priority to focus our resources, time and effort on these. We become unified and the whole organization has bought into the vision.

There will be challenges, issues and threats to our focus and priorities. Setting sail toward a preferable future will cause us to enter uncharted waters. There will be unknown hazards. The storms of life and ministry will rage. Yet, nothing worth doing is ever easy.

This preferable future will mean that everyone needs to do their part. We will encourage one another. We will work together for a purpose greater than our own. It is true, we will not enter Jesus’ restful harbor without challenges and trials. Change for progress will be hard fought and won. Personal sacrifices will be made.

This Preferable Future brings about a thriving, mission-focused Baptist association. It is characterized by a vibrant, interconnected network of churches effectively addressing community needs and demonstrating a strong Christian witness.

Through following the eight priorities, the association becomes a catalyst for transformation, fostering collaboration, resource sharing, and shared leadership. Churches adopt a missional focus, engaging with their communities and demonstrating the love of Christ. The association leverages technology to enhance communication and ministry effectiveness.

Not Predicting but Influencing the Future

In order to provide structure and momentum for the preferable future, the Foresight Task Force, the FBA Administrative Committee and the FBA Executive Committee recommend the following:

Eight small but active teams are formed with individuals from the association who have competency and passion in the assigned topic of the team. These teams would meet with the AMS quarterly (more meetings as well as check-ins among a team may be warranted) with an additional meeting, all the teams together, once a year for feedback, review and celebration.

Suggested Makeup of these Eight Teams:

There should be a team of 3 persons from the association for each of the items of focus, contacting above suggestions of team leaders/members. The nominating committee in conjunction with the Admin Committee will issue invitations to selected individuals for the teams. The AMS will be on all teams and will be considered a 4th member. If a GBMB, NAMB representative or other consultant is invited on the team, due to the nature and need of the team, that person will be an Ex Officio member without voting privileges. The Rebrand Team will be considered a taskforce that will dissolve when the rebrand is complete.

Term on teams is one year with an option to continue for a second year.

The recommendations will affect the alignment of the FBA budget and time resources of the association staff.

The current task force which developed these recommendations agreed to meet quarterly over the next year or until all teams are in place and functioning. They will meet to discuss any changes and updates on progress made. We will schedule our next meeting in September/October 2024.

Throughout the process, the task force has kept in mind the level of urgency and importance for each of these items. Therefore, these items of focus are listed in priority from 1-8. All of them are important but not all of them are of equal urgency.

The Eight Priorities

1. Communication Between Association and Churches

It is recognized by the task force that there needs to be more and better communication between the association and pastors, staff, church leaders and members of churches. This recognition also understands that communication is two-way. In order to enhance communication between the churches and the association, the task force has identified several challenges to address.

2. Pastor & Wife Wellness

The demanding nature of ministry life can put a strain on pastors' marriages. Balancing the demands of ministry with personal and family life can be overwhelming. High expectations from congregants, coupled with the weight of spiritual leadership, often lead to burnout and stress. Financial instability, particularly in smaller churches, can add to the pressure. Additionally, navigating complex social and cultural issues, while maintaining a strong spiritual and personal witness, presents significant hurdles. The constant availability required of pastors can erode family time and create tension within

the home. Here are some ways that FBA could help the pastor, spouse and their children navigate biblical health.

3. A Technology Team to Equip Churches and the Association

By offering as an equipping ministry the use of technology for our churches, FBA can enhance a church's ability to reach and engage with contemporary audiences. Through resources and training, the association may help churches overcome technological barriers, create compelling content, leverage social media platforms effectively, and present a visually appealing and welcoming environment. This support empowers churches to communicate the Gospel more effectively, connect with their communities, and ultimately fulfill their mission in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

4. Church Strengthening Assessment

Assessing church wellness identifies areas of strength and weakness within its member congregations. By conducting comprehensive assessments, the association can offer targeted support, resources, and guidance to churches experiencing challenges. This proactive approach helps prevent church decline, fosters a healthier overall association, and ensures that churches are equipped to fulfill their mission effectively. Additionally, by analyzing assessment data, the association can identify broader trends and develop strategic initiatives to address common challenges faced by the member churches.

5. Missional Data for Churches

Missional Data for Churches has two parts. The first part is demographic, psychographic and situational population data. The second part is data that will bring awareness of other ministries in our association.

Churches having access to demographic, psychographic, and situational data will enhance their missional effectiveness. By providing insights into the community's population, values, lifestyles, and current events, the association empowers churches to tailor their ministries to meet specific needs and preferences. Armed with this information, churches can develop targeted outreach strategies, identify potential ministry gaps, and allocate resources efficiently. Ultimately, this data-driven approach enables churches to better understand their communities and fulfill their mission more effectively.

6. Lay-Pastor Training (men's training)

By developing a lay-pastor training process FBA will seek to cultivate a deeper bench of ministry leaders within its churches. By equipping men with theological knowledge, practical ministry skills, and leadership development, the churches of our association will

be empowered to become more self-sufficient and resilient. This initiative also addresses the growing shortage of pastors, allowing churches to identify and develop potential pastoral candidates from within their own congregations. Furthermore, a lay-pastor training process fosters a culture of servant leadership, encouraging more members to actively participate in ministry and contribute to the overall health of the church.

7. Rebrand the Association

There are several reasons why the Fairburn Baptist Association (FBA) should consider rebranding. First is the name. Our current name limits the perception of our ministry area and of our demographic. In reality, Fairburn Baptist Association is not only in Fairburn but in many other cities and counties around the southwest of Atlanta. We are a diverse association and need to be more diverse in the future.

Second, our association's current image is perceived as outdated or irrelevant. A rebrand can help revitalize the association's internal and external perception.

Third, a name change can better align with the association's recommended new focus. This will entail developing not only a new name but a new mission and vision statement that will clearly communicate its purpose and values for today and tomorrow.

Fourth, a rebrand may go a long way to foster a sense of unity and shared purpose among our member churches. They will know with relevance who we are and what we are about in a fresh new way.

Fifth, there are some negative perceptions or stereotypes associated with our current name, which hinders our ability to reach new audiences and stifles building partnerships.

8. Church Multiplication

The churches of our association believe in mission. Many are involved in mission work outside of Georgia. Many are also involved in mission work with ministry organizations that focus on different human needs in order to share the Gospel of Christ, such as hunger, crisis pregnancy, first responders, mental health, ministry to our schools. These are all important and all of them need more resources to operate. Yet, an area of mission endeavor that has been neglected in the FBA geographic area for several years is the starting of new churches. With the demographic changes, we need new churches for each growing and changing people group in our associational area.