

***Ben Hill United Methodist Church's Vision in Motion"***

**Church Council Report**

**By**

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To the Chair, esteemed members of the Ben Hill United Methodist Church Council, congregation, dedicated clergy, and staff,

"With deep humility, I present to you the Senior Pastor's Church Council Report, brimming with gratitude as we navigate our collective journey. Our unity and unwavering commitment to our faith have led us to achieve significant spiritual milestones and have been a beacon of service to our community. Within this report, we will delve into our triumphs, confront our challenges, and chart our vision for the upcoming year. Together, armed with faith and resilience, we are poised not just to survive but to thrive, guided by a shared purpose in Christ.

Your unwavering presence, faith, and boundless love for our church are cherished and valued. I extend our heartfelt thanks.

Allow me to spotlight some aspects that illustrate Ben Hill's vision in action and others that will propel us forward in our significant journey:

1. **Church of Excellence in Outreach (2021 and 2022):** We're over the moon to share that Ben Hill United Methodist Church has been crowned with the prestigious title of a 'Church of Excellence in Outreach' for both 2021 and 2022, and we're praying and keeping our fingers crossed to continue this streak into 2023. This accolade is a true feather in our cap, a testament to our steadfast dedication to community service. It's a source of immense pride, as we're only the third African American church in the annals of the North Georgia Conference to bask in this honor.
2. **Global Ministry Missionary Covenant Relationship:** We have forged a lasting relationship with a United Methodist Missionary as part of the Global Ministry Missionary Covenant Relationship program, allowing us to extend our reach far beyond our local community.
3. **Special Offerings and Financial Assistance:** Our tradition of giving back to the community has continued with the collection of special offerings and financial assistance to support various causes, including housing and homeless support, One Great Hour of Sharing, Wesley Woods, Bishop's Annual Conference Mission Appeal, and Wellroot (formerly the United Methodist Children's Home).
4. **Advance Projects:** Our commitment to advance projects has impacted four different areas, including UMCOR material resource support, North Georgia Conference Advance, and District Advance. We also participated in building a Habitat House.
5. **Timely Payment of Apportionments:** It has been our consistent goal to pay our apportionments in full by the 1st of December each year, ensuring our support for the broader mission of the United Methodist Church.
6. **Wesley Woods Recognition:** Our church has been recognized by Wesley Woods for outstanding giving and most improved, a testament to our generosity.
7. **Community Outreach:** During the challenging times of the pandemic, we extended our outreach efforts through initiatives like our Covid Clinic, assisting numerous families and individuals through the Ben Hill Food Bank and Urban Responsibilities.

8. **Facility Enhancement:** We have invested in the improvement of our church facilities, renovating and upgrading various areas, enhancing property, addressing maintenance issues, improving accessibility and safety, and installing state-of-the-art equipment.
9. **Property Improvements:** We have taken steps to enhance our church property by removing trees near the playground, hiring a new lawn care service, bringing the bus back to the campus, and purchasing a garage for bus storage.
10. **Personnel and Leadership:** Significant hires have been made, such as Director of Operations (DOO), Administrative Assistant to clergy and staff members, Controller, Communications Director, Christian Education Director, Office Manager, Children's Coordinator, Security officer, and Security Company strengthening our leadership team to better serve our congregation.
11. **Website and Communication:** Our website has been revised to encourage more engagement by our membership, and our online presence has been rejuvenated, fostering better communication with our members and the community.
12. **Worship and Education:** We successfully transitioned from online worship to a hybrid model, upgraded our equipment, and introduced online and in-person Sunday School.
13. **Church Growth:** We've wholeheartedly welcomed new members into our fold, placing special emphasis on engaging our youth and young adults. Moreover, we've spiced up our worship services by adding Children's Sermons and bringing back the Children's Church, all while giving a fresh lease of life to the Children's Choir.
14. **College Initiative with Clark AU:** We have established a partnership with Clark Atlanta University to develop a program aimed at involving college students and integrating them into our church community.  
 Before Minister Rhodes departed to become a Senior Pastor, I asked him to visit Clark AU to talk to Dr. Tonya Lawrence Miles about how we could help the college students. As a result of that conversation, we have begun to build a relationship with Clark AU. Rev. Singleton picked up the ball, since Rev. Rhodes' appointment to his own local church, to continue to build on the relationship with Clark. The members who have joined this young adult effort are Patrick White, Petra White, Jaheem Swaizey, and Paul Vaughn. Dr. Miles has launched a program called "**Discerning Together: College Students and Congregations in Community.**" This initiative aims to identify the needs of young adults and college students and determine how Ben Hill can cater to those needs and integrate them into our church. While three other churches were invited to join this new initiative, they have yet to respond. We eagerly anticipate the positive outcomes and rewards that will come from this endeavor.
15. **Circles of Commitment.** In the near future, we will be implementing a strategic approach known as "Circles of Commitment" to help us purposefully execute the vision statement of Ben Hill.

"Circles of Commitment" is a concept used to describe the process of moving individuals from various levels of engagement and involvement within a church or organization. It represents a journey that starts with people in the broader community and gradually leads them toward becoming committed and core members of the congregation. Here's a breakdown of each stage:

- A. Community:** At the outermost circle, you have the "community." These are individuals who may have some awareness of the church's existence but are not actively involved. They may attend occasional events, such as community outreach programs or special services, but have not yet made a deeper connection.
- B. Crowd:** The next stage is the "crowd." People in this circle are more engaged than those in the community. They attend regular services, events, and activities. They might come to church out of curiosity, to meet friends, or for other reasons, but they are not yet fully committed members.
- C. Congregation:** Moving further inward, you reach the "congregation" circle. These individuals are regular attendees and participants in church activities. They have likely made a commitment to being part of the church community, attending services, and possibly joining specific ministries or groups.
- D. Commitment:** The "commitment" circle represents those who have taken a more significant step in their involvement. They are committed members of the church, actively serving in various roles, contributing their time and resources, and playing an integral part in the church's mission and activities.
- E. Core:** The innermost circle is the "core." These are the most dedicated and deeply engaged members of the church. They often serve in leadership roles, provide strong financial support, and are highly committed to the church's vision and values. They play a crucial role in shaping the direction and growth of the congregation.

Moving people from the "community" to the "crowd," "congregation," "commitment," and ultimately to the "core" involves a deliberate and strategic process.

- 16. After-School Program:** Establishing an After-School Program will significantly contribute to our church's growth for these compelling reasons:
- A. Community Engagement:** By opening our doors to the broader community, we allow local families to discover and potentially join our church, ultimately increasing our membership.
  - B. Family-Centric Approach:** Families seeking comprehensive support, including educational opportunities for their children, are drawn to churches offering After-School Programs. This commitment showcases our dedication to serving families, attracting new members who value such services.

- C. **Enhanced Sense of Belonging:** Enrolling children in our program fosters a stronger connection to the church community among parents, leading to active participation in church events and eventual formal church membership.

Despite questions about the rationale behind our after-school program, especially with public schools offering their own, our church-based program would fulfill several meaningful objectives:

- 1. **Spiritual and Moral Development:** Providing a unique environment for children to grow spiritually, our would program imparts guidance, moral teachings, and values aligned with our church's beliefs, complementing the academic and social development offered by public schools.
- 2. **Community and Belonging:** Church-based after-school programs create a sense of belonging and community not as prominent in public school offerings. Children and families form relationships with those who share their faith and values, building a robust support system.

Our vision of establishing an After-School Program perfectly aligns with our vision of connecting people to God and one another. While public schools primarily focus on academic and secular education, they may not address the spiritual needs of children and their families.

- 17. **Restarting Ministries:** One of our primary objectives has been to revive ministries that experienced a decline during the pandemic, including Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Boys Rise, our connection with local schools, Sunday school, and the van ministry, among others. We need to rejuvenate and assess these ministries to determine which ones should be retained, enhanced, or discontinued.

While our commitment to expanding our ministry offerings is admirable, we must exercise caution to avoid overwhelming ourselves with too many new initiatives. The reasons underlying the importance of this endeavor are as follows:

- A. **Community Engagement:** Restarting these ministries demonstrates our commitment to actively engage with our community, providing opportunities for families and individuals to connect with our church. This engagement can lead to new members joining our congregation as they witness our dedication to serving their needs.
- B. **Youth and Family Involvement:** Programs like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Sunday School are particularly appealing to families with children and teenagers. Offering these programs encourages families to become active participants in our church, ultimately leading to increased church membership.
- C. **Spiritual Growth:** Ministries like Sunday school play a vital role in nurturing the spiritual development of our congregation, especially the youth. Restarting these programs allows our members to deepen their faith and biblical knowledge, encouraging their active participation in church activities.

Reviving and revitalizing these ministries at Ben Hill is crucial for fostering church growth, engaging our community, youth, and families, and providing opportunities for

spiritual growth and leadership development. We are committed to meeting the diverse needs of our congregation and maintaining a vibrant and welcoming church community.

- 18. Church of Excellence in New Faith Initiatives:** We have been nominated for the Annual Church of Excellence Award for New Faith Communities, highlighting our commitment to innovative faith initiatives.
- 19. Youth Coordinator:** It is important to note that while we celebrate these achievements, we also face challenges, such as a higher number of deaths compared to new members. Nevertheless, we find hope in the influx of youth and young adults joining our church, thanks to the dedicated efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Peters, Rev. Singleton, and our Youth Ministry team.

To further nurture the growth of our youth ministry, we propose the timely appointment of a dedicated, full-time youth coordinator, who can provide essential guidance, mentorship, and program development, ultimately ensuring the future growth and sustainability of our church.

Rev. Singleton was initially tasked with leading the youth ministry until we hired a permanent youth minister. With a significant influx of youth attending and joining Ben Hill, it's crucial to prioritize hiring a dedicated, full-time youth coordinator for the following reasons:

- A. **Engagement and Connection:** A Youth Coordinator can effectively engage and connect with our youth, building trust and rapport due to their understanding of the challenges and aspirations of young members.
- B. **Spiritual Guidance:** Youth often have questions and challenges related to faith and identity. A Youth Coordinator can provide tailored spiritual guidance, mentorship, and counseling.
- C. **Program Development:** A dedicated Youth Coordinator can create and lead youth-focused programs, such as Bible studies, events, retreats, and community outreach initiatives.

In addition, our elevator project is complete, pending inspections, and we are thrilled to see the return of Family and Friends Day and the Jazz Concert.

Lastly, I encourage you all to stay tuned for more exciting initiatives that will be unveiled in the days to come, including the implementation of the Circle of Commitments. As we reflect on our achievements and look to the future, let us march forward with unwavering hope, faith, and compassion, guided by Ben Hill's vision to connect people to God and one another across generations. May God's blessings continue to shine upon Ben Hill United Methodist Church.

In profound gratitude for your steadfast support and the indelible mark you've left on our beloved church, community, and world, I thank you.