



READINESS 360

Multiply your impact.

Readiness 360 Executive Report

For Congregational Church of Birmingham, UCC

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Overview

Congratulations for being willing to engage in a serious conversation about your readiness to reach new people in new ways! The Christian movement in North America was strong for so many generations because churches planted new churches that planted new churches. Untold thousands of churches, decade after decade, state after state! Only a small percentage of today's churches still have multiplication of ministry on their radar. Your church does - and that sets you apart!

Congregational Church of Birmingham, UCC asked several of its leaders and participants to participate in the *Readiness 360* process. The survey many of you took assesses your church's spiritual and practical readiness for faithful and effective ministry in the 21st century. **51 persons** took the *Readiness 360*, a mix of staff, key leaders and active ministry participants.

Readiness 360 assesses four critical capacities for multiplying thriving ministries. In the rating system below, your church's level of multiplication energy is indicated by the number of rabbits (God's most adorable multipliers). The more multiplication energy your church has, the more ready you will be to start something new. CCB is strongest in terms of **Dynamic Relationships** and is most challenged in terms of **Cultural Openness**.

Key:

 In Crisis  Not Ready  Ready In Many Respects  More Than Ready

Spiritual Intensity

There is some fire in people's hearts at CCB, but it isn't burning as brightly as it should. CCB has some work to do in strengthening the personal connection between your people and God and God's mission for you in the world. It would be wise to spend some time reconnecting with God through renewing spiritual practices both personally and as a church body.

Dynamic Relationships

In some respects, your church has seen some amazing relationships and friendships across the years. However, the DNA of these relationships is not currently indicative of the church as a whole. You have some work to do in terms of cultivating trust within the church and relating effectively to folks who are different from the majority of the members.

Missional Alignment

Many folks at your church have a good sense of where God is calling you to go, but others are not aligned with this point of view. There is seldom enough personnel or financial resources to run in many directions at once. Now is a time for serious conversation about CCB's priorities.

Cultural Openness

CCB finds itself in a defensive posture with regard to the surrounding community and culture. This makes it difficult to build healthy relationships with the community. Baby steps are in order. It would be good for a group in the church to find one cultural boundary that it is prepared to cross for the sake of the Gospel, and to cross it.

Spiritual Intensity - 73%

All great Christian movements are intense spiritually, marked by a deep love for God and a surrendering to what God is seeking to do through human beings. It is critical that a spiritual fire burns within the hearts and souls of those leading and participating in the life of the church. Without personal passion for Christ and robust imagination as to what is possible as we follow Christ, a church will lack an adequate source of spiritual energy for vital and multiplying ministry.

There is some fire in people's hearts at CCB, but it isn't burning as brightly as it should. CCB has some work to do in strengthening the personal connection between your people and God and God's mission for you in the world. It would be wise to spend some time reconnecting with God through renewing spiritual practices both personally and as a church body.

In your church:

- Many people have an expectation of encountering the living Christ personally and/or in the congregation.
- Practicing spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible study, fasting, Christian works, etc.) is not a major part of life together.
- People are a bit risk-averse and hesitant to take bold steps of faith.
- Leaders - paid and unpaid - demonstrate spiritual vitality.

Areas of Relative Strength	Score	Areas of Potential Improvement	Score
1. Your church moves with a sense that it is sent to share something of eternal value with the world.	84%	1. People rely on Holy Scripture to inform and inspire them in making life decisions.	53%
2. People have found that hard work and financial sacrifice pays off richly in spiritual fruit.	84%	2. People practice good routines and habits in order to grow spiritually.	59%
3. People sense the presence of God's Spirit in worship.	80%	3. People put faith into their own words and relate it to their own life experience.	63%

Dynamic Relationships - 74%

Helping people to grow spiritually as disciples of Jesus depends in large part on our relational skills - our relationship with God and with others. A church's people must develop good habits for leading others into a transformative relationship with God through Christ.

In some respects, your church has seen some amazing relationships and friendships across the years. However, the DNA of these relationships is not currently indicative of the church as a whole. You have some work to do in terms of cultivating trust within the church and relating effectively to folks who are different from the majority of the members.

Your ability to form relationships with new people is colored by:

- A lack of welcoming behaviors.
- A struggle to incorporate new people into the life of your church.
- Positive experience partnering with other leaders and groups.
- A dependency on a few people to do a lot of the work. There is a need for greater teamwork and leader development.
- Leaders - paid and unpaid - who may be struggling to work together.

Areas of Relative Strength	Score	Areas of Potential Improvement	Score
1. People have a healthy, trusting relationship with your church's denomination or network.	93%	1. Your church seems committed to doing things in a way that is oriented to guests and visitors.	47%
2. People are okay with the idea that your church could grow.	89%	2. People have the experience of inviting friends and neighbors who, in turn, become active participants in the church's life.	49%
3. People are happy to open the church's facilities for community use.	88%	3. Your church is committed to team-based ministry.	55%

Missional Alignment - 72%

Highly fruitful churches consistently prioritize the investment of their resources (time, talent, treasure) according to their biblical vision and mission. Plans and major initiatives must stem clearly from biblical mandates and a quest for fruitfulness, in sync with a church's distinctive callings that have unfolded across the years. There is a willingness to let go of strategies that aren't bearing as much fruit. The more churches do this the better they are aligned.

Many folks at your church have a good sense of where God is calling you to go, but others are not aligned with this point of view. There is seldom enough personnel or financial resources to run in many directions at once. Now is a time for serious conversation about CCB's priorities.

To this end, your church has:

- A low priority for reaching new people.
- Alignment to a clear direction.
- The ability to make decisions about resources based on priority as opposed to pleasing people or maintaining status quo.
- Uncertainty about the church's ability to start new ministries that thrive.
- Clarity about the core principles of the church's faith.
- Passionate support for the church's direction.

Areas of Relative Strength	Score	Areas of Potential Improvement	Score
1. People think in terms of the church's mission more than "what's in it for them" personally.	91%	1. People believe that following correct procedure is sometimes more important than mission advancement.	50%
2. Your church's mission helps connect people's compassion to others who are suffering or spiritually estranged from God.	87%	2. People accept the fact that expanding ministry makes it impossible to know everyone.	52%
3. People are persistent about difficult ministry initiatives when they believe they are on the right path or are waiting for momentum to build.	83%	3. People in your church are clear about who makes what decisions.	65%

Cultural Openness - 69%

Since the first century, effective churches have been reaching across cultural boundaries to share the Christian good news with diverse people, who begin with different experiences, perspectives, and stories. Churches that exhibit fortress behaviors or who spend excessive time mourning social change often have difficulty sharing life with new kinds of people.

CBB finds itself in a defensive posture with regard to the surrounding community and culture. This makes it difficult to build healthy relationships with the community. Baby steps are in order. It would be good for a group in the church to find one cultural boundary that it is prepared to cross for the sake of the Gospel, and to cross it.

Your congregation's capacity for embracing new cultures (e.g. socio-economic, racial/ethnic, generational, etc.) is marked by:

- Attitudes and behaviors that indicate some difficulties in crossing cultural boundaries, especially with your neighbors.
- Some perplexity about how to form relationships with populations whose habits and lifestyles offend you.
- Some anxiety about increasing diversity in your church.
- Energy for working with different kinds of people.
- Difficulty in sharing power with new people.
- Mixed experiences that may make it difficult to reach people in different socio-economic groups.
- Mixed experiences that may make it difficult to reach different racial/ethnic groups.
- Mixed experiences that may make it difficult to reach young people.

Areas of Relative Strength	Score	Areas of Potential Improvement	Score
1. People feel that they value the ideas of young people.	92%	1. People report they have someone in their inner circle that is homeless.	27%
2. People commonly credit persons of other races for having taught them things.	87%	2. People seem to have valuable experiences that will help you reach those of a different socio-economic group.	44%
3. People report experiencing a sense of common humanity with people who are different than themselves.	85%	3. People believe that your church is building relationships with young people (ages 18-30).	45%

Leader Tips

These tips were generated for leaders - paid and unpaid - at CCB given specific patterns of response throughout the survey. After you have read through each tip discuss their priority as a team and implement one at a time. If you experience any difficulty in the prioritization process or if you have more than 3-5 tips, we recommend engaging an experienced facilitator or coach.

Leaders at CCB display some readiness for leading the church on a robust ministry journey in the days ahead. There are also significant areas where leader growth is needed. The leader team that the church needs to multiply ministry is not yet fully in place. A good ministry coach could prove extremely helpful.

Tip 1: Invite the Holy Spirit to move you beyond your fears. Within the most dynamic movements of God, it has long been known that you can't "out-give God" not as individuals and not as faith communities. Churches and people who take financial risks to orient their lives toward God's work in the world invariably report that their needs are met, very often in ways that inspire awe and wonder. If there is push back in your congregation over ideas that would result in a financial risk it might let you know that a stewardship alignment check is needed. There are many resources available for prayer and study, including *The Heart That Gives: Seven Traits of Joyful Stewardship* by Fr. Thomas J. Connery. To think about moving beyond fear in a broader sense, see *Weird Church: Welcome to the 21st Century* by Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon.

Tip 2: As leaders, commit to your own personal spiritual journey and living out God's call personally. In order to lead, we have to get in front of the parade. If we are not prayerful personally, it will be impossible for us to competently lead a prayerful church. If we are not robust givers to support the church's mission on the lead team, our church will almost certainly have a lack of robust giving across the ranks. Your leaders would help your church immensely by covenanting together to a short list of core discipleship behaviors, and then holding yourselves accountable to this covenant on a regular basis. Spend a part of your leadership gathering time tending to this covenant and to your lives as a community of faith, first and foremost. When nominating persons for leadership, begin to insist on certain key indicators in their lives. Are they obviously and passionately committed to living out God's call on their life? Are they actively engaged in practices that deepen their faith journey? Are they giving? Are they engaged in a small group or a ministry team? Whatever you find non-negotiable in terms of the life of faith, make it non-negotiable for your leaders. Also, in churches with high spiritual intensity, it is normal and natural for the senior leader to take work time to go on prayer retreats, where she/he does no work other than to listen and talk to God. Encourage your pastor to take the time to stay spiritually fresh and sharp. A good read for leaders would be *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* by Reggie McNeal and Ken Blanchard. We also recommend (both for leaders and for the whole church) Phil Maynard's resources *Membership to Discipleship* and *Discipler*, two books that get folks thinking about intentional, relational, and accountable discipleship.

Tip 3: Rid your church of lone ranger ministry mentality (where a few people try to do too much of the work). When a particular project or ministry depends upon only one or two people, we fail to position the church or its people for growth. It is often difficult to break this habit! One of the first steps is for leaders to agree that they will let a particular project or initiative rest until a team can be rallied to lead it. A good rule of thumb is to wait to start (or stop) any ministry project until at least five passionate, committed people have enlisted to share in leadership. Those five should then recruit others from the margins of church life and from beyond! A helpful book on this subject is *Hero Maker* by Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird, showing how each leader and ministry team member can intentionally mentor at least one other person, so that the church's total ministry capacity is always expanding.

Tip 4: Focus on improving how staff and other key leaders team together to advance the church's ministry. In some churches the teaming is stellar within specific ministry systems (such as youth ministry, social justice ministry or music/worship ministry), and yet the staff/leaders of these systems do not function as a team beyond their departments. There are multiple reasons why leaders may have difficulty working together as a team and dynamics are notoriously fluid. Team retreats and or pilgrimages together to a teaching church or other multi-day seminar is helpful so long as space is allowed for the team to respond to the learning or the challenges posed and to get some work done together in response. Too often, these opportunities are mostly

presentational time with too little time for the team to process the ideas together. Two resources worthy of group study are: *Sticky Teams* by Larry Osborne and *Multi* by Paul Nixon. For staff and senior leadership team development (paid and unpaid), consider: *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches* by Bill Easum and Bill Tenny-Brittian, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni, and (for large congregations) *When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont. For pastors and laity joining forces early in a new pastoral call/appointment, we recommend *The Surprise Factor: Gospel Strategies for Changing the Game at Your Church* by Kim Shockley and Paul Nixon.

Tip 5: Invest time and energy in developing your teamwork skills. Great teaming is essential at multiple levels in a church: within the staff group, between pastor/staff and unpaid leadership, and among unpaid people in the church who come together to accomplish ministry tasks. Pastors may wish to identify aspects of their work where they can reflect and plan with others (other staff, laity, a coach/mentor or ministry peers in other churches) in order to a. model teaming, b. offer high quality experiences and c. to make really smart decisions. Some teaming possibilities include: Bible reflection in preparation for sermons, planning special events that offer a "wow" factor for participants, community listening projects and group discernment about new ministry priorities. It is very important that we always include persons in our planning who represent the community that a ministry is being designed for. Non-members and young persons are often left outside the critical team conversations from which we design ministry. (And then we wonder why we fail to engage young people and community people in those ministries!) Some team-focused resources worthy of group study are: *Multi* by Paul Nixon and *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni.

Tip 6: Connect people to their place in the mission. People in a church need to feel a sense of belonging. A big part of this belonging relates to knowing what role they play in the larger cast of characters that enable great ministry to happen. People need to understand their gifts. They need to be invited onto competent teams, and often apprenticed in a particular job and understand how that role fits in with the bigger picture. Expectations need to be lifted that everyone in the church will find their way onto the ministry playing field according to how they are wired. No benchwarmers! It may take 3-5 years of constant work cultivating high mission/ministry participation before you reach the tipping point. Church leaders can create systems for helping people discern their spiritual gifts and for connecting them to ministry teams as fast as possible. There is good evidence to suggest that the faster a church can connect new people to teams, the higher the chances that those people will become and remain regular participants in the life of the church. An excellent resource is *Connect: How to Double Your Number of Volunteers* by Nelson Searcy. And, by all means, protect your newest volunteers from those who would be critical and complain about their creative endeavors! See also *Hero Maker* by Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird, which focuses on the task of helping everyone find a way toward a high sense of personal impact and meaning.

Tip 7: Simplify and concentrate on reaching people in your mission zone. You have the resources to do the most important things you need to do. Do you have the will? All over the world, many of the most rapidly multiplying church movements share this in common: the people are poor and the churches have very little money. In the west, we tend to create ministry with very high overhead, along with the illusion that we can't afford to do what it takes to grow ministry. In reality, churches always have the resources to do what they most need to do. Your church may need to seriously re-assess its facility and staffing strategies in order to be nimble and effective in the 21st century. A competent ministry consultant may save you several years in sorting through these issues wisely. Printed resources that might assist in the conversation would include Phil Maynard's book, *Connect!: Creating a Culture of Relationships That Matter*. Get a copy of the Barna Organization's book *Making Space for Millennials* and plan to pass it around among your leaders (its a bit pricey, so sharing is in order!). *Multiply Your Impact* by Paul Nixon and Christie Latona is a Readiness 360 resource that could help your lead team start thinking like a ministry-multiplying church.

Tip 8: Increase confidence in your leadership team's ability to accomplish vision-based goals. This is a two-fold issue: clarity of vision-based goals and trust. Pull together a variety of stakeholders and ask if the vision-based goals are clear. If the answer is "yes, trust-building is needed. In order for a church to make decisive, bold moves into mission, there must be a stable, trusting relationship between key leaders and the lead pastor. Moreover, the people need to experience the hand of God working through the lead pastor. Where this trust is flagging, for any reason, it should become first priority to strengthen it. It may be necessary to postpone major decisions or actions until a series of conversations can occur that re-establish such trust and solidarity. A leader retreat may be a good setting for this kind of work. Making big moves without such trust solidly in place can be disastrous. *Ultimately Responsible: When You're in Charge of Igniting a Ministry* by Sue Nilson Kibbey provides a roadmap for increasing leadership effectiveness. To learn more about strategies for forming a solid leadership consensus, see *The Surprise Factor: Gospel Strategies for Changing the Game at Your Church*

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by Kim Shockley and Paul Nixon and *Dare to Lead* by Brene Brown.

Tip 9: Empower and educate people to simplify decision-making. It may be that many groups in your church seek to function as gatekeepers. A mission group ideally exists to do good in the world, and to encourage others to do likewise. We get into trouble when one group becomes the clearinghouse that tells other groups what they can and cannot do. It is good for a church to have a clear mission statement and clear boundaries and values on what we do and what we don't do. Beyond that, we want to cultivate a community of trusting permission for any group that wishes to take positive initiative in line with our church's mission and values. Accountability systems must exist, but they should be minimal and simple. If the issue is empowering leaders and their teams to take initiative and make decisions without constantly waiting for approval from above, consider the book *A Team of Leaders* by Paul Gustavson. If your church is wrestling with structural issues, we recommend *Mission Possible: Structuring Your Church for Missional Effectiveness* by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan.

Tip 10: Let your church know it is time for an alignment. A church will seldom function in a way that is aligned with its stated mission and purpose unless leaders walk the talk, are willing to lift up that mission and ask how each activity helps us to live out that mission. The mission must be rooted in the Gospel of Jesus, framed in ways that are relevant to the community, restated regularly and used consistently. If folks don't hear about it for a month, many will forget it! Be sure you have a simple mission that is easy for folks to understand and remember. If a church's mission doesn't fit on a t-shirt, it isn't simple enough. Regularly point people back to your collective purpose in the preached moment. Ask each group, each program and ministry area to frame their work in terms of the church's core mission. Some great reads related to realigning churches to the mission of Jesus in the world would be *Shift 2.0* by Phil Maynard, *Discernment* by Beth Estock, *The Permanent Revolution* by Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *Missional Renaissance* by Reggie McNeal and *God Unbound: Wisdom from Galatians for an Anxious Church* by Elaine Heath.